



**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE
GREAT KING ZEN MASTER TRẦN NHÂN TÔNG IN PROPAGATING
ZEN BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM**

Truong Thu Thanh

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
the Requirements for The Degree Of
Master of Arts
(Buddhist Studies)

Graduate School
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The Graduate School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University has approved this thesis entitled “An Analytical Study of The Role and Influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông in Propagating Zen Buddhism in Vietnam” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of the Master of Art in Buddhist Studies.

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative research which includes three main objectives (1) To study the life of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông, (2) To analyze the role and influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông, (3) To propose the propagation process of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam by The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông.

From the study, it found that firstly, the research offers a general knowledge about King Trần Nhân Tông's life since he was born and became a Crown Prince, then a King, and a monk and eventually an Enlightened King of Vietnam as well as a religious leader responsible for the founding of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect - Vietnamese Buddhism. Secondly, through better understanding of his life, readers and younger generations are supposed to obtain a more comprehensive view about the King's outstanding deeds towards the country of Vietnam and a wider view on how the Buddha's Teaching can apply not only in the monastic life or life in the forest, but also in the secular life, as long as real Dhamma is practiced. Last but not least, the King's lifelong propagation of Buddha's Teaching until his own demise is a testimony of what is considered as mainstream

Buddhism in Vietnam. In addition to his devotion to Zen practices as a way to propose “Engaged Buddhism”, the King demonstrated that Buddha’s Teaching can be widely applied in secular life. By his own practices, the Enlightened King showed that everything in daily life is Dhamma, which encourages and engages us to the practice to reflect our mind. Based upon the King’s teaching and proposal, Zen or “Thiền” has been discovered and continually propagated by Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ in the modern era, which results in the application and practice of younger generations in their respective life. By the Enlightened King’s teaching, ‘Buddha nature’, or ‘true mind’, has proven to be the most important tool to liberate the *samsāra*. Thus, we can witness how Zen Buddhism was and has been propagated in Vietnam and become an official Vietnamese Buddhism of the current age.

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Truong Thu Thanh

21 May 2021

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List of Abbreviation

D	:	Dīgha Nikāya
M	:	Majjhima Nikāya
S	:	Samyutta Nikāya
A	:	Anguttara Nikāya
Kp	:	Khuddakapāṭha
Dhp	:	Dhammapada
Mhv	:	Mahāvārṇsa
Skt	:	Sanskrit
Ja	:	Jātaka
PTS	:	Pali Text Society
eds.	:	edited, edited by
Ibid	:	(ibidem) at the same place
no.	:	number
p., pp.	:	page, pages
trans.,	:	translated by
vol.	:	volume
rev.	:	revised, revised by
fig.	:	figure
C	:	Century
HCMC	:	Ho Chi Minh City
USA	:	United State of America

All Pāli quotations in this research are from the Pali Text Society (PTS) editions. In quoting the Pāli literature my references are to volume and page. For example: Vin III 237 refers to Vinaya-Pitaka, volume III, page 234; M III 253 refers to Majjhima Nikāya, volume III, page 253.

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Problems

Trần Dynasty is the most flourishing period of Vietnamese Buddhism which arguably originated from The Great King Zen Master Trần Thái Tông (陳太宗), The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông (陳聖宗) and The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông (陳仁宗), all of whom governing the country and achieving significant milestones in politics, society, culture, as well as and resulting in the long period of historical Vietnamese Buddhism. The entire royal families of Trần Dynasty were interested in Zen (Classical Chinese: 禪, Vietnamese: Thiền).¹ Also, this period creates the strongest foundation and the manifestation of contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism as the result of its past growth. “It is said that Buddhism was widely promulgated in Vietnam during the Tran dynasty.”²

Among them, King Trần Nhân Tông is known as the one who influences Vietnamese Buddhism the most.³ One should not only look at the King’s daily life, but also regard to his preserved works such as “Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú” (居塵樂道賦 - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way),⁴ or his twenty-two political letters sent to Yuan Dynasty

¹ George E. Dutton, Jayne S. Werner, and John K. Whitmore (eds.), *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition: Introduction to Asian Civilizations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 30.

² Bui Phuong Loan, “Impact of Buddhism through Thien Tradition in Brilliant Dynasties in the Vietnamese History,” *International Journal of Science and Research*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (January 2019): 2319-7064.

³ Nguyễn Tài Thư, “Religion and Nation: Tendency to Enter Buddhism into Life of Trần Nhân Tông’s Perspective,” *Institute for Religious Studies*, No. 11 (2009), p. 14.

⁴ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (The King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, trans. Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh, (TW and USA, 2015), p. 11.

of Mongols and his own thirty-one poems, all of which prove that he is undeniably the most influential King to Vietnamese Buddhism. According to “Records of the Sainthood of the Five Trần Kings”,⁵ King Trần Nhân Tông is not only an Enlightened King of Trần Dynasty, but he is also a Universal King and an *Ariya* at the same time. The way the King practices and creates brings both success and garners support from Vietnamese people. For instance, The Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ⁶ is supported by the Vietnamese Government and people because he is the one reviving the Zen Sect from King Trần Nhân Tông in the 20th Century, or The Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh responsible for ‘Engaged Buddhism’ is also supported by many people. Based on the works of these two Zen Masters, Vietnamese Buddhism clearly demonstrates the influences by King Trần Nhân Tông. Buddhism is a national religion Dynasty.

Thanks to King Trần Nhân Tông, Vietnamese people can realize mainstream Buddhism which was previously and prone to misinterpreting. People think that as the disciples of The Buddha, monks and nuns are doing nothing but receiving money from people, or Buddhism teaches people to remain pessimistic across almost all circumstances, or Buddhism is fanaticism. Also, King Trần Nhân Tông for the first time in history created a variety of Buddhism independent from Buddhism from India or China of before.⁷ This is the improvement and the base for the Vietnamese Buddhism today. This turning-point shows how the King’s ideology and understanding of Buddhism which in turn engendered

⁵ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. i.

⁶ Thích Thanh Từ (Trần Hữu Phước, born July 24, 1924 in Cần Thơ) is a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk. He has been most influential of increasing traditional Vietnamese Buddhism practices in Vietnam. He began his life in a well-educated family that followed Cao Đài, a Vietnamese religion. He was determined to become a Buddhist monk after noticing the suffering of his people during wartime and after 3 months of Buddhist duties and at the age of 25 was given his Buddhist name which he is now known by, Thích Thanh Từ. After 3 years of servicing as an expression of gratitude towards his master he finally decided to leave so he could find his true self, which resulted in secluding himself in a meditation chamber that he built in 1966. This led him to discover the concept of Nothingness after many of attempts at other meditation practices. He is having the most influence on today's view on Buddhism and what it means to be a Buddhist monk through the implementation of the revived religion referred to as Trúc Lâm.

⁷ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, “Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông,” *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 155 (2016): 36-45.

national pride as well as a significant progress in politics, society, and independent Buddhism. This is the protectorate from a King to his people, and therefore having a strong influence on the people.

Another of the period's significance can be influencing the people and Vietnamese Buddhism is the 'Engaged Buddhism'⁸ or 'Nationalistic Buddhism.'⁹ This is the time Bodhicitta (菩薩道) enters in Vietnamese Buddhism as looking at "Living in The World, Joyful in The Way", Buddhism is not about living only in monasteries, nor for monks and nuns and the upper classes in the society to follow, but Buddhism is widely applied to secular life.¹⁰ According to Professor Zen Master Lê Mạnh Thát, Dhamma is not a way to look for, but Dhamma is the Universal Truth, and that is all about living in the normal daily life.¹¹ Life and religion are much connected in almost every aspect. King Trần Nhân Tông is a prolific reader and perspicacious practicing Zen Master while living a normal life in the palace and running the country at the same time. 'Engaged Buddhism' is proven by not living in the monastery, but still practicing the Buddha's Teachings in daily life. For instance, the King practices Dhamma whenever he is free from duties bound to the country.¹² However, when wars happened, the King would stop practicing Dhamma to resume his protection towards the country and people as the sacred responsibility and duty of a King focus on the peace of the country.¹³ As a result in Vietnam's history, King Trần

⁸ "Hòa Quang Đồng Trần" in Vietnamese.

⁹ Loan Thuy Nguyen, "New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam", (Doctor's Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 62.

¹⁰ Nguyễn Thị Toan, "Trần Nhân Tông's Idea about Engaged Buddhism - Tinh thần nhập thế trong tư tưởng phật giáo của Trần Nhân Tông," *Journals of Vietnamese Technology and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 94 (2015), p. 86.

¹¹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông - Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 123.

¹² Thích Thanh Từ, *Tam Tổ Trúc Lâm – Three Patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1997), p. 2.

¹³ Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam - Vietnamese Zen Masters*, (Hanoi: Religion Publication, 1999), p. 175.

Nhân Tông led the county win Mongol¹⁴ Invasions of Vietnam (蒙越戰爭) two times (20/5/1285¹⁵ and 8/3/1988).¹⁶

During the Buddha's time, there existed widely regarded Kings such as King Bimbisāra of Magadha who declares himself as a lay-follower (*Upāsaka*¹⁷),¹⁸ attains "stream-entered" (*sotāpanna*),¹⁹ or King Ajātasattu (King Bimbisāra's son) of Magadha who practices Buddha's Teaching after killing his father is described as an *Upāsaka*,²⁰ ²¹ supported to hold the First Buddhist Council,²² or King Pasenadi of Kosala follows Buddha and practices the Buddha's Teaching (while there existed many Suttas mentioning of The Buddha's the teaching to the King called Kosala Saṃyuta in Sūtaṅga Nikāya) or King Ashoka the Great, King of Maurya Empire who supports the Third Buddhist Council in Pāṭaliputra.²³ However, these Great Kings are still *Upāsaka*, who were practicing the Buddha's Teaching and applying them in running the countries, and supporting Buddhism

¹⁴ The **Mongol Empire** of the 13th and 14th centuries was the largest contiguous land empire in history. Originating in Mongolia in East Asia, the Mongol Empire eventually stretched from Eastern Europe and parts of Central Europe to the Sea of Japan, extending northward into parts of the Arctic; eastward and southward into the Indian subcontinent, Mainland Southeast Asia and the Iranian Plateau; and westward as far as the Levant and the Carpathian Mountains.

¹⁵ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, 大越史記全書 [*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet*], trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), pp. 194 - 198.

¹⁶ Kathlene Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia*, (England: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 27.

¹⁷ This is the title of followers of Buddhism who are not monks, nuns, or novice monastics in a Buddhist order, and who undertake certain vows. In modern times they have a connotation of dedicated piety that is best suggested by terms such as "lay devotee" or "devout lay follower."

¹⁸ Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhist*, (India, New Dehli: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996), p. 141.

¹⁹ Venerable Nārada Mahāthera, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998), p. 143.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²¹ Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhist*, (India, New Dehli: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996), p. 139.

²² Wilhelm Geiger (trans), *The Mahāvamsa [The Great Chronicle of Ceylon]*, (London: PTS., 1912), p. 16.

²³ Wilhelm Geiger (trans), *The Mahāvamsa [The Great Chronicle of Ceylon]*, (London: PTS., 1912), p. 50.

during the Buddha's time and after The Buddha's Great Demise. However, in Vietnam, The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông is a model of King and a disciple of Buddha who supports Buddhism, practices the Dhamma and becomes an Enlightened Zen Master. Therefore, during his reign, the people, the politics and society were influenced by Buddhism, which is a special event in Vietnam and worldwide because there has not been any documented case wherein a King becomes an Enlightened Zen Master at the same time.²⁴ His daily life is also a role model being followed by the followers until now. Vietnamese people until now worship him as a “Giác Hoàng Điều Ngự” (覺皇調御 – An Enlightened King of Vietnam).

Talking about The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông, people will always admire his contributions not only to Vietnam's periodic peace but also the teachings which considerably influence to the social, cultural, and spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Had the Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ not revived Zen Buddhism, later generations would not have known about the great culture which was created, contributed and transferred by predecessors and the Vietnamese Buddhism might not have been as developed as of now. As a duty and responsibility of a generation of late to preserve the country and Buddhism, this thesis will study the role and the influence of the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông. As the result of which being the country as a whole and Vietnamese Buddhism progressed successfully.

What is done under The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông's reign in history opens a great contribution for Vietnamese Buddhism to great admiration, appreciation, as well as studies. This great contribution in this modern life is once again proved by the restoration of Vietnamese Buddhism to former prosperity even though it is faced with a lot of difficulties through centuries. However, this is understood and supported quietly by the Government and people to become an official Zen Sect of Vietnamese Buddhism in modern time. Therefore, the researcher will choose to entitle for this research:

²⁴ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 167.

“An Analytical Study of The Role and Influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông in Propagating Zen Buddhism in Vietnam.”

1.2 Statement of the Problems Desired to Know

- 1.2.1 How is the life of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông?
- 1.2.2 What are the role and influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông?
- 1.2.3 How do the role and influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông propagate Zen Buddhism in Vietnam?

1.3 Objectives of the Research

- 1.3.1 To study the life of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông
- 1.3.2 To analyze the role and influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông
- 1.3.3 To propose the propagation process of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam by The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông

1.4 Scope of the Research

1.4.1 Scope of Sources of Data

The researcher focuses on studying the primitive teachings on *Zen* that appeared in the primary source of English translations of Mahāyāna scriptures, Commentaries and Sub-commentaries. As well as the secondary source of Buddhist textbooks, research works, historical researchers and journals respectively, together with the later explanation of Mahāyāna scriptures, Commentaries and Sub-commentaries in English, Classical Chinese, and Vietnamese.

1.4.2 Scope of Content

Firstly, this research will be worked on the teaching of the Buddha in Suttanta to figure out how those teachings influent to the perceptions of the The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông which creates the whole system manages the country and practice

Buddha teachings at the same time. Later, this research will be focused on the literatures from the ancient documents written by King Trần Nhân Tông which are still preserved until now about all the nature of the concepts in Zen Buddhism according to the King. Also, the research will be worked out on the Zen Masters such as The Great King Zen Master Trần Thái Tông, The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông and Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (慧中上士) who influenced those perception on Zen Buddhism to The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông afterward.

Secondly, the research focuses on studying and analyzing the role and his influence that applied by The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông which is the original practical way called Trúc Lâm Zen Sect²⁵ (竹林安子- Bamboo Grove) today.

Lastly, the research will propose how those roles and influences of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông to the fellow disciples based on the remaining teaching methods on poems, Dhamma talks and literature writings. Last but not least, from the teaching, the research will analyze how Vietnamese today can apply and practice on the daily life to reach a happy life by Zen.

1.5 Definition of the Terms Used in Research

1.5.1 Role

The duty that someone or something usually has or is expected, or the position or purpose that someone or something has in a situation, organization, society.²⁶

1.5.2 Influence

The power, the ability of a person to have an effect on people or things, or a person or thing that is able to do something.²⁷

²⁵ Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, (US: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2008), p. 125.

²⁶ “Cambridge Dictionary: Make Your Words Meaningful”, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/role> (accessed July 23, 2020).

²⁷ “Cambridge Dictionary: Make Your Words Meaningful,” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/influence> (accessed July 23, 2020).

1.5.3 Zen

The major indigenous schools of East Asian Buddhism in turn are a transcription of the Sanskrit term *Dhyāna*,²⁸ or translated as “meditation” in English.²⁹ Indian monk Bodhidharma (菩提達磨) was a first patriarch who first brought and spread Zen in China. In early 10th century, Vietnamese Thiền (Zen Buddhism) is introduced by Cao Tang, Lin Ji and Cao Dong schools.

1.5.4 Trúc Lâm Chan – Trúc Lâm Zen Sect– Thiền Trúc Lâm

竹林 - Bamboo Grove is the first indigenous Vietnamese school of Thiền founded by Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông (1258–1308).

1.5.5 The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông

The third King of Trần Dynasty (1278 – 1293). He is also called “Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ” (竹林大士), or “Trúc Lâm Đại Đầu Đà” (竹林大頭陀). Nowadays, Vietnamese people still worship him called “Giác Hoàng Điều Ngự Trần Nhân Tông” (Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông).

1.5.6 Đại Việt

Đại Việt (大越) literally means Great Viet, is the name of Vietnam for the periods from 1054 to 1400 and from 1428 to 1804. The area belongs to Đại Việt before and under King Trần Nhân Tông was from the north bordering with China, to the south bordering with Ô and Lý District (now are known as Quảng Trị City and Huế City) of Champa.

²⁸ Japanese: Zen, Chinese: *Chan*, Korean: *Sŏn*, and Vietnamese: *Thiền*.

²⁹ Robert E.B Jr and Donald S.L Jr, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, (UK: Princeton University Press, 2014), “chan”: definition and explanation.

1.6 Review of Related Literature and Research Works

1.6.1 Lê Mạnh Thát, “Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông” (Vietnamese version)³⁰

Trần Nhân Tông is a king who makes two meaningful contributions for the Vietnamese. Firstly, King Trần Nhân Tông engenders the official use of “pure Vietnamese” called “Nôm” language together with “Classical Chinese” in royal proclamations, commands, petitions for the understanding of all Vietnamese people at that time instead of writing only in Classical Chinese previously. This is the very first time in history, Vietnam has its own language structures.

Secondly, Trần Nhân Tông is the King first time in history who creates the Zen Sect called Trúc Lâm Zen Sect (竹林安子). This Zen Sect is created by the upheavals in politics and wars between countries. Those upheavals are the foundation leading to the establishment and development of Buddhism in Vietnam until now. And, Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was based on the perception of the King’s poem about Zen called *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú* (居塵樂道賦 - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way). This poem shows his understanding in Zen and this also is the main teaching influencing his followers until now. Therefore, this book mentions all about the thoughts, perceptions and practice through his life and events from a young age to the time he gets enlightened.

1.6.2 Thích Thông Phương, “Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect” (Vietnamese version)³¹

In this book, the writer shows how The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông’s ideas of Zen Buddhism which he is influential since the young age and how he applies his understanding of the Buddha’s Teaching to run the country, which consolidates his reputation as all Vietnamese call now “The Great King Zen Master” or “The

³⁰ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông - Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010).

³¹ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông Với Thiền Phái Trúc Lâm - Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006).

Enlightened King”. In this book, it was recorded that since his birth, his body’s golden as the Buddha. Lately, he is lucky to be a disciple and influence by Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ – a popular Zen Master at his age.

1.6.3 The Most Venerable Thích Thanh Từ, “The Two Periods of Life of Truc Lam First Patriarch” (Vietnamese version)³²

This book mentions clearly about The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông – a transcendent King and Zen Master of Vietnam through his works (Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - 居塵樂道賦) about Zen through his enlightenment. The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông, despite being a King occupied with running the country and people, still spends his precious time studying, practicing and propagating Zen Buddhism to Vietnamese people from the early of Kinghood to the entire-Kinghood. The first part discusses his young age when he is a layperson and describes how Buddhism affects him by his teacher. The second part narrates the time he retires from being a King (retired-King) and becomes a monk in Yên Tử mountain to propagate Trúc Lâm Zen Sect.

1.6.4 Zen Master Chân Nguyên, “Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh - The Record of Truc Lam Zen School” (Vietnamese version)³³

Buddhism under the Trần Dynasty is described as a bright torch which enlightens the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. Thanks to Buddhism under Trần Dynasty (the merit of teaching and transferring of The Five Great Kings), ancient Vietnamese culture in the past is still preserved and transferred until now. Therefore, the Zen Master Chân Nguyên composed in “Nôm” language, translated by Hoàng Xuân Hãn mainly based on “Thánh Đăng Lục” (聖登錄 - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings) to praise the wisdom, merit of practicing and teaching of the Great Five Trần Kings. This book also mentions how these Five Kings get enlightened by practicing Zen.

³² Thích Thanh Từ, *Hai Quãng Đời Của Sơ Tổ Trúc Lâm - The Two Periods of Life of Truc Lam First Patriarch*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 1997).

³³ Zen Master Chân Nguyên, *Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh - The Record of Truc Lam Zen School*, expounded Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1998).

1.6.5 Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, “The History of Buddhism in Vietnam”³⁴

This book works on the history of Vietnamese Buddhism starting from the 20th century which has been supplied with much trusted evidence from Western Buddhologists. Also, this book provides the data and information from different sources to show how Vietnamese Buddhism has developed until now, especially under numerous dynasties. Besides, the authors give various and trusted accounts to demonstrate the origin of Buddhism in Vietnam and the influences of Buddhism in creating a Vietnamese Buddhism today. Especially, “chapter IX: Buddhism under the Tran Dynasty” in “Part Two: Buddhism from the Ngo to the Tran Dynasties (10th -14th Centuries A.D.)” will describe a major shift of perspective of Trần Kings and how these may have influenced Vietnamese Buddhism later, as well as this chapter provides the translations of Buddhist works of Trần Kings and scholars.

1.6.6 Thích Thanh Từ, “Vietnamese Zen at the end of the 20th Century”³⁵

The book shows how he re-established the original Trúc Lâm Zen Sect from 13th C. However, the approach adopted by the 20th C of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect called ‘Thiền Trúc Lâm’ is important and deserves a mention. Later, the book mentions several aspects of Zen namely "Zen Essentials". The Most Venerable Zen Master shows how important and superb of Zen for followers to apply in daily life in this era and also how ‘Thiền’ is working inside and outside our mind.

1.6.7 Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”³⁶

³⁴ Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, (US: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2008).

³⁵ Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen at the end of the 20th Century*, Toàn Kiến (trans.), (Vietnam: Trúc Lâm Zen Monastery, 2002).

³⁶ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at University of the West, 2019).

In this dissertation, the researcher studied the first patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect also known as Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông. Also, the researcher provided the history of how Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was founded in the 13th century and how it flourished under subsequent patriarchs until now. Moreover, the research managed to demonstrate how Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was revitalized in 20th by the Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ. This is the point which led to the movement of Vietnamese Buddhism today.

1.6.8 Thích Phước Sơn (trans), “Tam Tổ Thực Lục - True Records of the three Patriarchs” (Vietnamese version)³⁷

This book was mentioned about the great contribution of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect which was found by the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông. This is a sect that is considered the specific Buddhism bringing the independence and uniqueness to Vietnamese Buddhism. As a founder of this Trúc Lâm Zen Sect, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông is the first patriarch, the second and third are Venerable Pháp Loa and Venerable Huyền Quang. The life of these three patriarchs since childhood, becoming a monk and as successive disciples was noticed clearly in this book. Also, this book is clearly showing the history of Vietnamese Buddhism and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect.

1.6.9 Nguyễn Lang, “Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận – Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism” (Vietnamese version)³⁸

This book was researched and written by the author Nguyễn Lang, who was also well-known under another name the Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh – the Father of Mindfulness in the West. The author mentioned and studied from many sources from the history of Vietnam to come up with this book for the deep understanding on how Buddhism has developed in Vietnam. However, even this book did not show any special or significant features for the Vietnamese Buddhism but the author gathers various sources

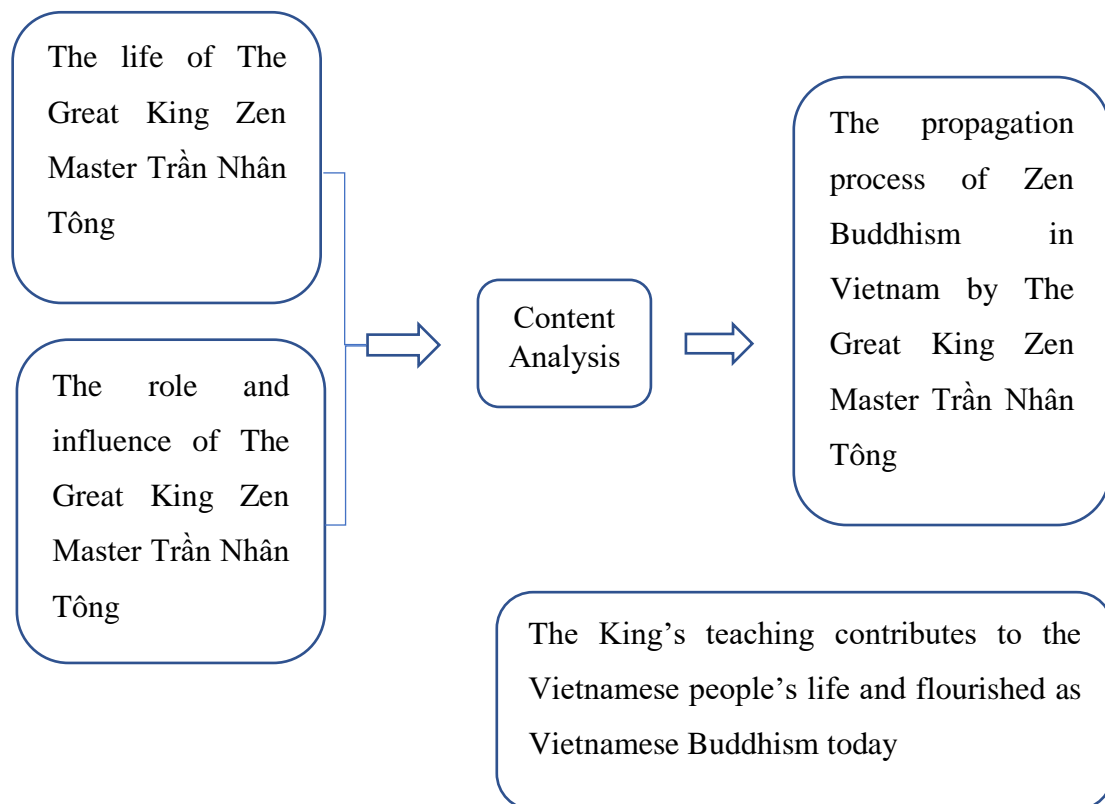
³⁷ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995).

³⁸ Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận – Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008).

from Classical Chinese commentaries and Vietnamese documents to prove and enliven the history of Vietnamese Buddhism developments. Besides, the documents showed the connection between the national characters together with the development of Buddhism, this is why it is easy to understand.

From the literary research, it is evident that the corpus specifically focusing on the Buddha's Teaching as propagated and adopted to followers by the Enlightened King and Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông as well as the impacts it has exerted upon Vietnamese people along the way becoming the official Buddhism in Vietnam. Therefore, this research aims to study the basic Buddha's Teaching, Zen by the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông as well as their practical adoption in modern time.

1.7 Conceptual Framework



1.8 Research Methodology

This qualitative research work is a documentary research. The methodology of the research can be divided into six parts as the following ways:

1.8.1 Data Collection

Collecting data from the primary source of English translations of Mahāyāna scriptures to express the knowledge of Zen Buddhism in order to be more understandable. Data is also collected from secondary sources such as Commentaries, Sub-commentaries, The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông's works, textbooks, research works, history research, historical journals and Buddhist journals in English, Classical Chinese and Vietnamese, together with the new comprehension from modern historical scholars respectively. Those are to examine carefully the observation point from recent literature in detailed explanation for clearer comprehension.

1.8.2 Analysis and Synthesis

Analyzing and synthesizing the various documents from books, historical books and journals to have a clearer picture of the true ideas on the perception of Zen Buddhism of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông.

In other hands, analyzing and synthesizing the original data as well as systematizing the collected data in order to give a clear picture of the perspective practice of s and how it influences the people and Vietnamese Buddhism today.

1.8.3 Outline Construction

Constructing the overall outline of the work in all related dimensions corresponding to the objectives.

1.8.4 Problem Discussion

Discussing the nature of problems encountered according to the significance of the research.

1.8.5 Conclusion and Suggestion

To formulate the conclusions, to identify the significant research results, and to suggest more useful information and knowledge for further researches.

1.9 Advantages Expected to Obtain the Research

After this research paper, it might show the following positive contributions to the people in the society:

1.9.1 Gaining greater knowledge about the life, roles and influences of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông in order to understand how The Enlightened King run the country at that time.

1.9.2 Having more knowledge how Zen Buddhism from Trúc Lâm Zen Sect apply in daily life by the influence of the The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông.

1.9.3 Understand the importance of the role and influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông which contributes to the normal life of Vietnamese people and how his teaching method can be flourished as a main Buddhism in Vietnam today.

1.9.4 Understand the way of teaching Trúc Lâm Zen Sect or Thiền Trúc Lâm from The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông by the Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ in 20th C.

Chapter II

The Life of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông (1258 – 1308)

In this chapter, the research will chiefly study the life of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông (陳仁宗) since he was born, became a King of a country, a monk and a founder of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect in 13th Century. His life could be said to be familiar with the Buddha Gautama's life. He was predicted to be a Great King. He also tried to escape the palace to follow the Buddha's way like his grandfather did before but was unsuccessful on the first attempt. Later, as a King, he led the whole country to win the two invasions of the Yuan Dynasty respectively in 1285 and 1288 which were recorded the most memorable victories of Đại Việt. After that, he performed very well to rebuild the country after war to become one of the strongest dynasties in Vietnam history.

However, when talking about The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông, there are three important people by whom The King was influenced and who should be studied. Among these, Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (慧中上士) was the master who influenced the most to The King by his teaching and practicing since The King was a prince. Thus, Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ's life, Zen's perception and his teaching are also needed to be discussed in this chapter. The other major influencers, The King's grandfather The Great King Zen Master Trần Thái Tông (陳太宗) and The King's father The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông (陳聖宗) should also be studied on through their poems and works because these Two Great Kings are the one who influenced and supported The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông on Buddhism since he was born.

2.1 Life of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông

2.1.1 Early Time of Life

The King Trần Nhân Tông (陳仁宗 - 11th November 1258 in Lunar Year), given name is Trần Khâm (陳吟), was the third emperor of the Trần Dynasty. The King was the oldest prince of The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông (陳聖宗) and Empress Thiên Cảm Trần Thị Thiệu (元聖天感皇后陳韶). Since birth, the King had a very special appearance according to “*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*”¹ (Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet), “bestowed with saintlike and stately essence, golden texture, impure physique, outstanding vigor.” He was also called “*Kim Tiên Đông Tử*” as he had a golden complexion.

However, according to “*Tam Tổ Thực Lục*” (True Records of The Patriarchs),² because the prince had a golden skin, the King father Trần Thánh Tông named him “Kim Phật” (金佛 – Golden Buddha). On his left shoulder was a black birthmark, meaning the bearer may be able to perform great deeds for the country.

According to “*Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings*”,³ one night, Empress Thiên Cảm Trần Thị Thiệu (元聖天感皇后陳韶) dreamed of a saint descending to give her two choices to choose from, a short sword, and a longsword. Without much thought, she chose the short one, and on that occasion, she was pregnant and King Trần Nhân Tông was born. This was also mentioned by Zen Master Chân Nguyên in his work called “*Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh*” (The Records of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect).⁴

¹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 185.

² Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 2.

³ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. 68.

⁴ Zen Master Chân Nguyên, *Thiền Tông Bản Hạnh – The Records of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, expounded by Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1998), p. 123.

Prince Trần Khâm was designated as Crown Prince of Trần Dynasty in December 1274 at the age of sixteen.⁵ As always concerned with Crown Prince's education, in 1274, King Trần Thánh Tông chose the prominent mandarin and general Lê Phụ Trần⁶ to act as his son's professor with two famous scholars Nguyễn Sĩ Có and Nguyễn Thánh Huân,⁷ the King himself also composed poems and a literary work named “*Di Hậu Lục*” (Records for the Posterity) to educate prince Trần Khâm. Also, as admiring the knowledge and conducts of Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (慧中上士), the King's father sent the Crown Prince to be trained by him.

However, while learning Confucianism and Buddhism to become a king, the Crown King Trần Khâm wanted to withdraw the title and cede to his brother⁸ because he wanted to become a monk to practice the Buddha's Teaching and Zen.⁹ The decision of going away from the palace was criticized by Ngô Sĩ Liên (吳士連), a Vietnamese historian of the Lê Dynasty who was deeply influenced by Confucianism. He said: “Nhân Tông worships his Mother Queen as fulfilling his filial piety, managing talented people, and founding profound achievements. How can he be who he is without such great four personalities? The only wrongdoing of his is becoming a monk, a mistake made by a great man.”¹⁰

No matter how hard he tried, based on the great ability he demonstrated, the King's father denied him of his expectation. The King was well-known as a talented man

⁵ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 182.

⁶ 黎輔陳 (1250 – 1278). He is a famous the prominent mandarin and general under Trần Thái Tông, Trần Thánh Tông and Trần Nhân Tông, his wife is Princess Chiêu Thánh.

⁷ The two famous poets and mandarins under the Trần Dynasty.

⁸ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. 68.

⁹ Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận – Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 233.

¹⁰ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 182.

and for his wisdom because he tried to learn from many books and for whatever books he learned, he obtained all the deepest meanings within.¹¹ As a result, The King father and the Empress mother gave him a title called “Điều Ngự Vương”¹² (調御王 - Supreme Master). This title was normally understood in the ten honorific titles of the Buddha - Supreme Master of Disciplines and described by the Buddha in many suttas^{13,14} (*Puruṣadamyasārathi*)¹⁵ in which *puruṣa* means man, *damyā* means to be converted and *sārathi* means the leader of a caravan. The expression thus meant ‘Leader of the caravan of men to be converted’.

Trần Thánh Tông titled himself Retired-King on November 5th, 1278 and ceded the throne to Crown Prince Trần Khâm, to be the third King of Trần Dynasty titled Trần Nhân Tông at the age of twenty with era named as Thiệu Bảo (紹寶, 1278–1285) and later was changed to Trùng Hưng (重興, 1285–1293). Despite becoming a King, Trần Nhân Tông lived a very simple life. As one day while taking a nap in Tư Phúc Temple inside the palace, he dreamed of a big lotus like a wheel growing out from his umbilicus, there was one Golden Buddha standing above. Then, one person asked the King whether he knew this Buddha. This was the Maha-Vairocana Buddha (Mahāvairocana),¹⁶ the King answered. Since then, the King became a vegetarian.

¹¹ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. 65.

¹² Zen Master Chân Nguyên, *The Record of Truc Lam Zen School*, expounded by Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1998), p. 33.

¹³ John R. McRae (trans. from Taishō), *維摩詰所說 [The Vimalakīrti Sutra]*, Vol. 14 No. 475, (USA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2004), p. 172.

¹⁴ Tao-tsi Shih (trans. from Tripitaka), Frank G.F (eds.), *地藏菩薩本願經 [The Sutra of Bodhisattva: Kṣitigarbha’s Fundamental Vow Sutra]*, 2nd Edition., (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2012), p. 23.

¹⁵ Nāgārjuna, *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra [The Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom of Nāgārjuna]*, trans. and com. by Étienne Lamotte, trans. from the French by Gelongma Karma Migme Chodron. Vol. 1, (France: Foundation Universitaire, 2001), p. 122.

¹⁶ Mahāvairocana is a celestial Buddha who is often interpreted, in texts like the Avatamsaka Sutra, as the *dharmakāya* of the historical Gautama Buddha. In Mahayana Buddhism, Mahāvairocana is also seen as the embodiment of the Buddhist concept of Sūnyatā. In the conception of the Five Tathagatas of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, Mahāvairocana is at the center and is considered a Primordial Buddha.

2.1.2 The Time Running the Country

a. Second Mongol Invasions of Đại Việt 1285

At this time, the army of Mongol already totally took possession of Song Dynasty (宋朝) by Mongol Empire - Kublai Khan (忽必烈) and officially merged the China to Mongol, establishing an empire called Yuan Dynasty or The Great Yuan (元朝 or 大元). They aimed to invade Vietnam (called Đại Việt) and Champa (later became the south of Vietnam) to extend Mongol Empire southward. For this reason, Kublai Khan challenged King Trần Nhân Tông to attend the Mongol Empire's audience as King Trần Nhân Tông was recently proclaimed as the King of Đại Việt.

Due to his request, King Trần Nhân Tông sent an emissary to pay annual tribute and pay a compliment to Mongol Empire. This action raised a reason for Mongol Empire to punish Đại Việt for not respecting the bigger country. Moreover, Kublai Khan wanted to invade Champa because it was a small country and if Champa belonged to Mongol, this would be a better way to harass Đại Việt¹⁷ one side from the North and the other from the South.¹⁸

As mentioned by Stephen Turnbull,¹⁹ Kublai Khan responded by sending Sodu, one of his leading officials, on a punitive expedition by sea. Sodu, commanding a force of 100 ships and 5,000 men, landed on the Champa coast. However, this invasion was halted due to the geographical difficulty of the sea route from Mongolia to Champa. As a result, in 1281, Kublai Khan decided to promote his son Toghon (脫歡) as a commander-in-chief to commence the invasion of Đại Việt with several eminent army generals who were

¹⁷ Lê Tấn, *安南志略 [Abbreviated Records of An Nam]*, trans. Historical Translation Committee Vietnam, (Hue: Hue University, 1960), p. 115.

¹⁸ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 189.

¹⁹ Stephen Turnbull, *Genghis Khan & the Mongol Conquests 1190-1400*, (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2003), p. 82.

experts in Đại Việt's geography such as Omar (烏馬兒),²⁰ Sodu (唆都), Ariq Qaya (阿里海牙) and many other excellent on fighting in the Mongolian army. The number of soldiers and warships was measured at approximately 500,000 in total, and the main forces were Mongols' cavalymen. This Mongol's troops would harass by land from the North of Đại Việt's border.²¹

On the side of Đại Việt, the Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Nhân Tông directly led many eminent commanders such as the Supreme Commander Hưng Đạo Đại Vương Trần Quốc Tuấn,²² Hưng Ninh Vương Trần Tung,²³ Prime Minister Chiêu Minh Vương Trần Quang Khải,²⁴ Chiêu Văn Vương Trần Nhật Duật,²⁵ Bảo Nghĩa Vương Trần

²⁰ This commander is well-known as an excellent commander both on land and sea of Mongol's force.

²¹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 189.

²² 興道大王陳國峻: is well-known by the name Trần Hưng Đạo (陳興道), the author of the tactical masterpiece - Bạch Đằng Battles (陣白藤) which was followed the fight against China on 938 of Ngô Quyền, the last confrontation between Vietnam and Mongol in 1288, and greatest victories in the Vietnamese military history. He is one of fourteen symbolize commander in Vietnam. He is a brother of Trần Thánh Tông. His mother later becomes a nun. For his military brilliance in defending Đại Việt during his lifetime, The Emperor posthumously bestowed Trần Hưng Đạo the title of "Hưng Đạo Đại Vương" (興道大王 - Grand Prince Hưng Đạo). He wrote Vạn Kiếp Tông Bí Truyền Thư (萬劫宗秘傳書), mainly teaching about the strategy of protracted fighting which was the foundation of military strategy of Vietnam since Trần Dynasty until now.

²³ 興寧王陳嵩: is well-known later Tuệ Trung Thượng sĩ - 慧中上士 - a famous lay Zen Master, also the teacher of King Trần Nhân Tông, the brother of Trần Hưng Đạo (陳興道) and the brother-in-law of King Trần Thánh Tông. He will be mentioned more detail in this chapter as he is the one who most influent in King Trần Nhân Tông and Zen Buddhism.

²⁴ 宰相昭明王陳光啓: is the 3rd Prince of King Trần Thái Tông, He held the position of prime minister of the Trần Dynasty for many years. Besides military and administrative activities, he was also a famous poet. Today, Trần Quang Khải is still considered as one of the most famous historical figures of the Trần Dynasty and is worshiped in several temples in Vietnam.

²⁵ 昭文王陳日燾: is the 6th prince of King Trần Thái Tông, royal uncle of King Trần Nhân Tông. He is well-known by the knowledge of numerous foreign languages and cultures, so he helped the Emperor of Trần Dynasty to maintain good relations with several ethnic groups. As he said to be born after his mother dreamed of a star falling on her bed and she got pregnancy. And in his hand appears the word "*Chiêu Văn đồng tử*" (昭文童子) – meaning the call of beauty.

Bình Trọng,²⁶ Phạm Ngũ Lão,²⁷ Hoài Văn Hầu Trần Quốc Toản²⁸ and many other commanders across the country. In this combat, the army of Đại Việt was much less than Mongol's, only 300,000 soldiers gathered in both ground and naval forces.

Starting from 27th January in 1285, the Mongol troop first landed the border of Đại Việt. Some important battles took place in the areas abundant of obstacles and difficult to access such as Nội Bàng Battle, Chi Lăng Battle, Gia Lâm Battle, battles around Hồng River (Red River - 紅河), Thăng Long Battle,²⁹ Đà Mạc Battle to extend the time and wear down the strength of Mongol's forces.

After suffering from losses in places across the country, by late of May in 1285, Đại Việt took a final counter-attack to Mongol's force taking place in Tây Kết, Hàm Tử, Chương Dương, and the most important ones were Vạn Kiếp Battle and Chương Dương

²⁶ 保義王陳平仲: is a son-in-law of King Trần Thái Tông, and grandfather (in mother side) of King Trần Minh Tông later. He was captured Toghan in a battle to protect the two Kings, he refused to be promoted as a minister's post in China if he talked about the situation of the Trần Dynasty to Mongol and sacrificed right after that. As of his brave, He is promoted as royal title Bảo Nghĩa Vương (保義王). Today, he is widely known as an example of patriotism of Vietnam, story about Marquis Bảo Nghĩa is taught in Vietnamese schoolbooks and many places in Vietnam are named in honor of this national hero.

²⁷ Phạm Ngũ Lão (范五老 - 1255–1320) was a general of the Trần Dynasty. His talent was noticed by Trần Quốc Tuấn who married his adopted daughter to Phạm Ngũ Lão and recommended him for the royal court. Renowned as a prominent general in battlefield, Phạm Ngũ Lão was one of the few commanders of the Vietnamese army during the second and third Mongol invasion who did not come from the Trần clan. After the war of resistance against the Yuan dynasty, Phạm Ngũ Lão continued to participate in numerous military campaigns of the Trần Dynasty in which he often succeeded. Today, Phạm Ngũ Lão is still considered one of the most capable military commanders of both the Trần Dynasty and history of Vietnam.

²⁸ 懷文侯陳國瓚: is widely known as an example of patriotism in Vietnam while he ultimately sacrificed himself for the country at the age of eighteen. Today, story about Trần Quốc Toản is taught in Vietnamese schoolbooks as he himself was able to form an army of over one thousand soldiers and he created a flag with six characters: “*Phá cường địch, báo hoàng ân*” (破強敵報皇恩 - Defeat the strong enemy to repay the emperor's grace).

²⁹ 昇龍皇城 – the capital of Vietnam in earlier time - was first built during the Lý dynasty (1010) and subsequently expanded by the Trần, Lê and finally the Nguyễn Dynasty until 1810 when the Nguyễn Dynasty chose to move the capital to Huế. The ruins roughly coincide with the Hanoi Citadel today. The imperial citadel was listed in UNESCO's World Heritage Site on July 31, 2010 at its session in Brazil, as "The Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long – Hanoi".

Battle, directly under the excellent commanding from the Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Nhân Tông five months consecutively.

In the summer, 24th June, 1285, the second Mongol Invasion in Đại Việt was completely ended by Đại Việt's victory. Mongol's force was defeated at the decisive Tây Kết Battle along Hồng River where Sodu was killed³⁰ and 5,000 Mongol's soldiers were captured alive. Toghon and his warriors rushed back to the Yuan Dynasty. This failure in fighting a small country as Đại Việt by a great empire as Yuan Dynasty made Kublai Khan felt unsatisfied and hateful, therefore he decided to prepare a stronger fleet with all new soldiers replacing the previous forces right after one month to harass Đại Việt once again.

b. Third Mongol Invasions of Đại Việt in 1288

Currently, Mongol Empire - Kublai Khan was attacking Japan as an intention to merge Japan to Mongol as Song Dynasty (宋朝) and extend Mongol's border throughout Asia. However, because of the failure in the war of Đại Việt, Mongol Empire decided to end the war in Japan to focus on the invasion of Đại Việt. He gathered all the forces both naval, infantry and cavalryman who were knowledgeable of Đại Việt's geography and already joined the war in 1285 such as Omar (烏馬兒), Ariq Qaya (阿里海牙), Ayuruychi and Abaci together with his son – Toghon again to invade Đại Việt. The number is measured approximately 500,000 soldiers with 300 warships mainly commanded by Omar in his army.³¹

The early of 1286, after Mongol's emissary left the menace from Mongol Empire to Đại Việt, King Trần Nhân Tông decided to release 5,000 Mongol's prisoners of

³⁰ Lê Tắc, *安南志略* [Abbreviated Records of An Nam], trans. Historical Translation Committee Vietnam, (Hue: Hue University, 1960), p. 38.

³¹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書* [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet], trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 195.

war from 1285 back to Mongol³² to deliver a peace-pledging message to Mongol Empire. However, this message was not strong enough to satisfy the hatred and greed of Mongol Empire. Understanding the situation, the Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Nhân Tông promptly prepared the army to be ready for the coming inevitable war by asking about soldiers and people. The total number was measured at about 320.000 soldiers. Supreme Commander Hưng Đạo Vương Trần Quốc Tuấn was confident to say that the situation was now under control when he was asked whether the forces were ready for the fight. This time, Đại Việt's army was carefully prepared in Vân Đồn Harbor by Nhân Huệ Vương Trần Khánh Dư (仁惠王陳慶餘)³³ to fight against the warships from Mongol and eliminate the supply convoys of Mongol brought for their force.³⁴

In 29th December 1287, the whole country was captured and this time Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Nhân Tông fled to the South, gathered forces to prepare for the final counter-attack in Bạch Đằng River off Hải Phòng.³⁵

The naval victory of Vân Đồn Battle commanded by Nhân Huệ Vương Trần Khánh Dư near Hạ Long Bay in the early of February 1288 helped a lot for the side of Đại Việt as all the logistics convoys brought along by 70 warships of Mongol's force was sunk into water.

³² Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992) p. 195.

³³ He was the adopted prince of the Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông and a general of Đại Việt force in royal court of four successive emperors of the Trần Dynasty. Although notoriously known by his greedy character in peace, Trần Khánh Dư was a prominent general during the war of resistance by the Trần Dynasty against Invasions of Đại Việt. Especially, he was considered as one of the most skilled commander of Trần navy who was credited with the victory of Đại Việt in Vân Đồn Battle (1287).

³⁴ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992) p. 197.

³⁵ Stephen Turnbull, *Genghis Khan & the Mongol Conquests 1190-1400*, (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2003), p. 83.

In late March 1288 – three months into the war, Mongol troops became exhausted from shortage of food and detrimental health conditions as supplies were destroyed in Hạ Long Bay in February and there was a pandemic within the barracks. Consequently, all the generals consulted Toghon to withdraw the troop before the situation became worse as what happened in 1285.³⁶

However, acknowledging the inevitable conquest, King Trần Nhân Tông and all the generals decided to counter-attack Mongol's army for the last time to demonstrate the combined strength of Kings and Đại Việt people. Therefore, Bạch Đằng River was chosen to be the main battlefield to deploy all Mongol's troops, eventually exterminating 300,000 soldiers of Yuan Dynasty³⁷ – this was known “The Great Bạch Đằng Battle.”³⁸ In this

³⁶ Lê Tắc, *安南志略* [*Abbreviated Records of An Nam*], trans. Historical Translation Committee Vietnam, (Hue: Hue University, 1960), p. 39.

³⁷ Ronald J.C (eds.), *Vietnam: A Country Study*, (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987), p. 16.

³⁸ Trần Hưng Đạo, aware of the Yuan retreat, prepared an attack. This was where the earlier well-known battle of Ngô Quyền against the Southern Han (Nanhan) had taken place in 938. Early of March, Trần Hưng Đạo began preparing the battlefield. He used the same tactic that Ngô Quyền had against the Chinese in 938. He studied the tidal lore, and ordered beds of stakes to be planted under the water and arranged ambushes in a unified plan of campaign. Trần Hưng Đạo ordered his soldiers to nail the iron-headed poles under the waters of the Chanh, Kênh and Rút rivers. All three rivers are the northern distributaries of the Bach Dang River.

In early April the supply fleet led by Omar, and escorted by infantry, fled home along the Bạch Đằng river. As bridges and roads were destroyed and attacks were launched by Đại Việt's troops, the Mongols reached Bạch Đằng. Đại Việt's small flotilla provoked and harassed the Yuan formation to wait for the tide to recede. The Mongols cautiously engaged their opponent, fearing an ambush while missing their chance to escape the arranged trap. Soon they found their movement restricted by iron-tipped stakes protruding out of the low tide while the escape routes had been blocked by Đại Việt's large warships. Đại Việt's troops took to boarding and hand-to-hand actions with the aid of fast fire ships and missile weapons, fiercely launched the attack and broke the combat formation of the enemy. Inflicted with a sudden and strong attack, the Mongols tried to withdraw to the sea in panic. Frightened, the Mongolian troops jumped down to get to the banks where they were dealt a heavy blow by a large army led by the Trần king and Trần Hưng Đạo. The supply fleet of the Yuan dynasty was destroyed, and Omar was captured and executed by the Vietnamese.

battle, Mongol Commander - Omar was captured by Đại Việt, and destroyed sixty thousand Mongol soldiers and sank 200 warships.³⁹

11th April 1288, Toghon tried to escape from another side of Bạch Đằng River but he was attacked by multiple small ambushes along the way. Finally, he escaped from the Đại Việt's border but most of his excellent commanders were killed along the way. The third Mongol Invasion of Đại Việt completely ended with the victory of Đại Việt.

Omar was captured by Đại Việt, was taken back to Mongol by the King Trần Nhân Tông as a great compassion and compromise of Đại Việt. However, nearly reaching the border of Mongol, the ship taking Omar back was wrecked and he died at sea.⁴⁰ Toghon after that also was expelled to the border by his father - Mongol Empire for the two failures in Đại Việt.⁴¹

c. After the War

After returning Thăng Long Imperial City, Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Nhân Tông decided to rebuild the policy about politics and society as fast as possible to make sure the people and the country were ready for another foreign invasion.⁴² Firstly, the Kings announced the wise general amnesty and gave immunity from taxation for locations suffering from the war, and other places be deducted in accordance with the destruction scale.⁴³ According to Professor Lê Mạnh Thát,⁴⁴ such policies were

³⁹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 198.

⁴⁰ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 199.

⁴¹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông - Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 55.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 198.

⁴⁴ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 55.

fundamental for the country to rebuild for what the Mongol had destroyed and tax reduction should be considered as the most important for those who experienced the war.

Only after four months of amnesty and reducing tax, the Kings started to concentrate on the reward and punishment from the war. For the commanders, government and soldiers who served well in the battles would be promoted in the court or urban district of Trần Dynasty, and some were written in the historical writings of Đại Việt. However, the important part was punishment for those who surrendered to Mongols during war.

One thing that needed to be cleared here, after assaulting the Mongol's barrack, Đại Việt assembled the list of people surrendered to the Mongols. Therefore, as mentioned in "Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet", the Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông asked to burn all those documents.⁴⁵ As he said, now Mongol already fled, if the royal court announced this surrender list, those committed would find it hard to survive afterwards.⁴⁶ As a result, those surrenders should be confiscated all the possession, banished from serving for the royal court. This punishment would be adequate, they would not repeat the action. His conception was meant to build a good reputation and compassion in the people below. According to professor Lê Mạnh Thát, the act showed how tolerant the Kings of Trần Dynasty was to the people who committed mistakes.⁴⁷ Besides, King Trần Nhân Tông followed closely the mandarins to offer appropriate rewards and punishments, making sure the country grew back quickly after war.

In addition, the mandarin promotion was limited from the King's perspective as "the more mandarins are promoted, the worse the life of citizens will be."⁴⁸ Which could be understood that the King wanted to see the better life of citizens. Government is a server for citizens.

⁴⁵ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 200.

⁴⁶ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 139.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

About diplomatic relations with Mongol, after the war, King Trần Nhân Tông returned about 8,000 prisoners to the Yuan Dynasty in the war as stated in “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet”. Also, King Trần Nhân Tông continued to show respect and compliance to the big empire by paying annual tribute in 1291 as mentioned in “Abbreviated Records of An Nam”.⁴⁹

2.1.3 Life After Becoming a Retired-King Until Nibbāna

a. Becoming A Retired-King and a Monk

Spending fourteen years on throne through two Mongol Invasions as well as the post-war restorative period, King Trần Nhân Tông recognized his duty to the ancestors and the people was working and it was high time his son was mature enough to continue this duty to the country. In addition, despite running the country with massive responsibilities, the King Trần Nhân Tông never forgot his own aspirant to become a monk and practice Buddha’s Teachings. Thereupon, on 9th March 1293, he officially ceded the throne to his son – King Trần Anh Tông and became Retired-King and he was called by a respected name “Hiển Nghiêu Quang Thánh Thái Thượng Hoàng Đế” (憲堯光聖太上皇帝).

And after one year, July 1294, Retired-King Trần Nhân Tông went forth in Vũ Lâm (Ninh Bình Province).⁵⁰ However, there were quite many accounts say that the Retired-King Trần Nhân Tông officially went forth after six years becoming a retired-king in October 1299 in Yên Tử Mountain.⁵¹ During six years after ceding the throne, he helped his son in running the country.⁵²

⁴⁹ Lê Tắc, *安南志略 [Abbreviated Records of An Nam]*, trans. Historical Translation Committee Vietnam, (Hue: Hue University, 1960), p. 116.

⁵⁰ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), pp. 203-206.

⁵¹ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 19.

⁵² Thích Thanh Từ, *Tam Tổ Trúc Lâm – Three Patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Vietnam: General Publisher, 1997), p. 2.

b. The Start of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect

The Retired-King Trần Nhân Tông became a monk with the name Hương Vân Đại Đầu Đà (香雲大頭陀). He practiced as an ascetic,⁵³ and therefore later his name was changed to Trúc Lâm Đại Đầu Đà⁵⁴ (竹林大頭陀 – the Great Trúc Lâm Ascetic), or Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ (竹林大士 – The Trúc Lâm Great Man (*Mahapurisa*))⁵⁵ and people called him Giác Hoàng Điều Ngự (覺皇調御 – The Enlightened King). After being ordained, The Retired-King Trần Nhân Tông became the sixth patriarch of Yên Tử Sect⁵⁶ and the first patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect^{57,58} which is also known as Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Sect.⁵⁹

Before officially going forth, the Retired-King Trần Nhân Tông built a small and simple hut in Yên Tử Mountain called “Ngự Dược Hut”. Although the Retired-King Trần Nhân Tông prepared quite long for the important day but it was a pity that there was little information regarding his ordination. Due to the importance of his ordained day, the whole country was issued a book named “Official Buddhist Ceremonial Method” (*Phật*

⁵³ Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa. *Visuddhimagga [The Path of Purification]*, trans. Bhikkhu Namamoli, (Srilanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011), p. 55. “Thirteen kinds of ascetic practices have been allowed by the Blessed One to clansmen who have given up the things of the flesh and, regardless of body and life, are desirous of undertaking a practice in conformity [with their aim]. They are: 1. the refuse-rag-wearer’s practice, 2. the triple-robe-wearer’s practice, 3. the alms-food-eater’s practice, 4. the house-to-house-seeker’s practice, 5. the one-sessioner’s practice, 6. the bowl-food-eater’s practice, 7. the later-food-refuser’s practice, 8. the forest-dweller’s practice, 9. the tree-root-dweller’s practice, 10. the open-air-dweller’s practice, 11. the charnel-ground-dweller’s practice, 12. the any-bed-user’s pra, xiii. the sitter’s practice.”

⁵⁴ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông Với Thiền Phái Trúc Lâm - Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 7.

⁵⁵ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. 60.

⁵⁶ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 88.

⁵⁷ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 232.

⁵⁸ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 88.

Giáo Pháp Sư Đạo Tràng Công Văn Cách Thức) showing the people about the right way to hold all kinds of ritual ceremony in Buddhism.⁶⁰

In 1304, “True Records of The Patriarchs” acknowledged that the Enlightened King, in addition to staying in huts on the top of mountains or in temples for the rainy season retreats, traveled around the country to teach Dhamma and admonish people to keep “five precepts” as a Buddhist lay and practice the “ten good deeds”.⁶¹ Furthermore, he came back to Thăng Long Imperial city to hold a ceremony of Bodhisattva precepts for King Trần Anh Tông and some Trần Dynasty royal and court members.

This was also the year the Enlightened King first time met and ordained for Venerable Pháp Loa (法螺)⁶² who later was announced to be the Dhamma successive disciple - the second patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect.⁶³ The ceremony of Transmission of the Buddha Seal of mind to Venerable Pháp Loa was held at Báo Ân Temple, in Siêu Loại.⁶⁴ And later Venerable Huyền Quang is a successive disciple of Venerable Pháp Loa

⁶⁰ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), pp. 234-235.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁶² His given name is Đồng Kiên Cương, was born in 7th May in 1284. His mother one day dreamed of a man gave her a deity sword and since then she was pregnant. Because she already had seven daughters, therefore this time she tried to abort but unsuccessful. Since he was born, he did not eat meat or fish and animals at all. He always did the good deeds. At the age of 21, he asked the Enlightened King to ordain for him as a *sāmaṇera* named Thiện Lai. One day at the midnight, when focus on seeing an ash of the fire, he sudden enlightened and reported to the Enlightened King. From that day forward, he started to practice as an ascetic (*dhutaṅga*). In 1305, he was ordained as a bhikkhu by the Enlightened King and was given the name Pháp Loa. After the Enlightened King’s Nibbana, Pháp Loa on behalf of the second patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect traveled many places to preach Dhamma and ordained for thousands of monks. In 1317 – under King Trần Minh Tông (Grandson of the Enlightened King), Pháp Loa got a serious sick, therefore, he transferred alms and robes for his successive disciple Huyền Quang as a third patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect. Pháp Loa totally preaching Dhamma for 26 years and enter Nibbana at the age of 47 in 1330.

⁶³ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 112.

⁶⁴ In Thuận Thành, near Đuống River, in Dương Quang Commune, Gia Lâm Sub-district, about 20km from Hanoi Capital. This is the Temple that connected closely to the three patriarchs of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect (Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang).

– the third patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect as showed in the diagram in “The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si” below.

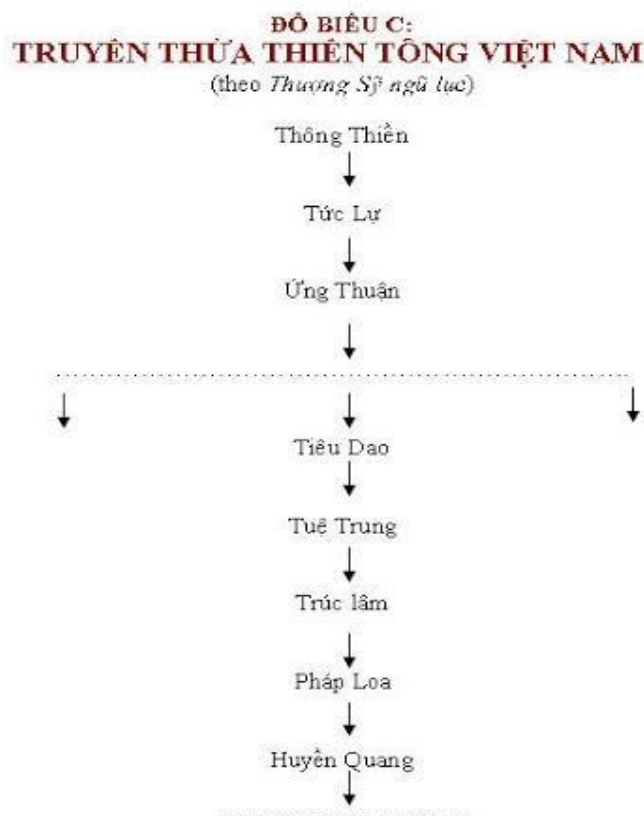


Figure 1: the diagram of Zen Buddhism’s patriarch in Vietnam

c. The Enlightened King’s Nibbāna

In early 1308, the Enlightened King asked Venerable Pháp Loa – his disciple to come to Báo Ân Temple, Siêu Loại to give Dhamma talk to laics. In May – the period of rainy season retreat, the Enlightened King came to Vĩnh Nghiêm Temple, Lạng Giang Province, also asked Venerable Pháp Loa come to give a Dhamma talk.⁶⁵ After rainy season retreat, he decided to come to Yên Tử Mountain with only two assistants along. At

⁶⁵ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 30.

this time, the Enlightened King explained “Truyền Đăng Lục” (Records of The Zen Teaching) for Venerable Pháp Loa, and only left Venerable Bảo Sát stay with him.⁶⁶

5th October, Princess Thiên Thụy (天瑞公主)⁶⁷ wanted to meet the Enlightened King before she died. Therefore, he went down the mountain to come to meet his sister. On the way back to Yên Tử Mountain, while staying overnight in a small temple in Cổ Châu Village, the Enlightened King made a poem on the temple’s wall:⁶⁸

“Life is just in a breath
 Still less than the human massive greed
 Recognizing the three poisons
 The Buddha land is always here”

One day he stayed at Sùng Nghiêm Temple in Linh Sơn Mountain, the Empress Dowager Tuyên Từ (宣慈皇太后) invited him for a making offering (*pūjā*) and according to “*Thánh Đăng Lục*,”⁶⁹ this is the last meal the Enlightened King Zen Master would receive.

After that, he walked to Tú Lâm Temple on Anh Sinh Kỳ Đặc Mountain but he felt headache, therefore he asked his two disciples to help him climb to Ngọa Vân Mountain and stay there until the last day of his life. Then, the two disciples were asked to leave the

⁶⁶ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 271.

⁶⁷ A princess of Trần Dynasty. She is the daughter of King Trần Thánh Tông, and older sister of King Trần Nhân Tông. 1284, she becomes a bhikkhuni, she chose an isolate land to build a hut named Nghi Dương, later became a temple. After having a hut, she focused on extend the land to help people around to cultivate and trade to develop life. Later, she becomes a well-known The Most Venerable Thiền Đức.

⁶⁸ *Đề Cổ Châu Hương Thôn Tự*
 “Số đời hoàn toàn mờ mịt
 Tình người đổi thay qua đôi mắt
 Khi cung ma bị quản chặt
 Thì cõi Phật tràn ngập màu xuân.”

⁶⁹ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. 65.

mountain with a last reminder: “descending from the mountain for practice, not to undermine mortality”. One day, the Enlightened King’s assistant monk Bảo Sát saw a dark mass of clouds fly through Ngọa Vân and dreamed of a bad omen. The following morning, the Enlightened King said to his assistance that he was about to go. Perhaps he held certain doubt or uncertainty regarding the teaching, or the practice.

Venerable Bảo Sát asked right away: “It is similar when Mazu Daoyi⁷⁰ became sick, one Venerable visited and asked: “How have you been these days, Most Venerable?”

Mazu Daoyi answered: “Seeing the Buddha in day time, seeing the Buddha in night time”, what is the main theme?

From that moment, there were strong winds, rains and snow covering all the trees, and animals cried surrounding during many days.

About 1 AM on 1st November, the Enlightened King opened the window and said: “It’s time for me to go”. Venerable Bảo Sát asked: “Where do you go?” the Enlightened King answered:

“Nothing born

Nothing died

Understanding this

Seeing all Buddhas

There is no coming, there is no going”⁷¹

Venerable Bảo Sát replied: “How about not being born and not being dead?”

⁷⁰ Mã Tổ (馬祖道一 - 709–788) was an influential abbot of Chan (Zen Buddhism) during the Tang Dynasty. The earliest recorded use of the term "Chan school" is from his *Extensive Records*. Master Ma's teaching style of "strange words and extraordinary actions" became paradigmatic Zen lore.

⁷¹ “*Tất cả pháp chẳng sanh
Tất cả pháp chẳng diệt
Nếu hay hiểu như thế
Chư Phật thường hiện tiền
Nào có đến đi ấy vậy*”

The Enlightened King slapped him, said: “dream thou shalt not.”

Right after finishing his words, Enlightened King laid down in the lion’s posture—on the right side, placing one foot on top of the other and entered Nibbāna (S: Nirvāṇa). In the second day of his Nibbāna, his assistance – Venerable Bảo Sát cremated his remains at the “Ngọa Vân Hut” (*kuti*)⁷² where he lived towards the final stage of his life until he passed as following his testament. After that, his disciples collected his ashes with many relics.

About the Enlightened King exact date of Nibbāna, “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet” noted on 3rd December 1308 (Chinese calendar),⁷³ as in 16th December 1308 (Western calendar),⁷⁴ but in the “Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings” recorded on 1st November 1308 (Chinese calendar) which was on 14th December 1308 (Western calendar).

After his Nibbāna, the Enlightened King was called by a respected name “*Đại Thánh Trần Triều Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà Tĩnh Tuệ Giác Hoàng Điều Ngự Tổ Phật*”⁷⁵ (the Great Saint (*Ariya*) Trần Dynasty Asceticism (*dhutaṅga*) Static Wisdom Supreme Enlightened King Buddha) by his son - King Trần Anh Tông.⁷⁶ His relics are preserved and worshiped in two monuments. Also, King Trần Anh Tông asked to construct two golden big statues of Enlightened King one located in Vân Yên Temple in Yên Tử Mountain and one located in Báo Ân Temple in Siêu Loại.

⁷² Kuti: In Thai, “monk’s residence,” a small, simple, hut-like building, made of wood and/or bamboo, used as living quarters for a monk or at some monasteries for lay meditators in Thailand.

⁷³ Chinese calendar (officially known as the Agricultural Calendar 農曆; or 'farming calendar', Former Calendar 舊曆, Traditional Calendar 老曆 or Lunar Calendar 陰曆), is a lunisolar calendar which reckons years, months and days according to astronomical phenomena. In modern days, it is defined in China, "Calculation and promulgation of the Chinese calendar", issued by the Standardization Administration of China on 12 May 2017.

⁷⁴ The Gregorian calendar is the calendar used in most of the world. It is named after Pope Gregory XIII, who introduced it in October 1582.

⁷⁵ 大聖陳朝竹林頭陀靜慧覺皇調御祖佛

⁷⁶ Thích Thanh Từ (expounded), *聖登錄 [Thánh Đăng Lục - Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings]*, (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 1999), p. 74.

The Enlightened King hold three ordination ceremonies in Chân Giáo inside Thăng Long Imperial city, Báo Ân Temple in Siêu Loại and Phổ Minh Temple (普明寺) in Thiên Trường Province.⁷⁷

2.1.4. The King's Literature Work

The Enlightened King created massive literary works including poems and proses. Besides, there were twenty-two letters he wrote to send to the other countries expressing the détente of Đại Việt as mentioned by professor Lê Mạnh Thát are those need to be considered as his perspective of Buddhism. Almost all the daily dialogs between The Enlightened King to his royal family, court members and his disciples should be taken for studying the teachings he grafted within.

His works of note are:⁷⁸

- *Thiền Lâm Thiét Chủy Ngữ Lục* - The Collection of Aphorisms in the Forest.
- *Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca* – A Song of Being Enlightened
- *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú* - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way
- *Tăng Già Toái Sự* - The Trivia of Monks
- *Thạch Thất Mỹ Ngữ* - The Talk in Sleep in The Cave
- *Đại Hương Hải Ấn Thi Tập* – The Great Records of Hương Hải
- *Trần Nhân Tông Thi Tập* - The Records of Trần Nhân Tông
- *Trung Hưng Thực Lục* (two books): these books recorded the way of drill of force in Mongol Invasions of Đại Việt (1285-1288).
- *Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ Ngữ Lục* - The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si

⁷⁷ Located in Tức Mạc – the homeland of King Trầns. The temple is restored 1262 and displayed the essence in Trần Dynasty's structures.

⁷⁸ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 311.

However, above works were mislaid, only remaining 32 poems and some verses of dialogs recorded in “Records of The Sainthood of The Five Trần Kings”, “The Record of Truc Lam Zen School”, “Abbreviated Records of An Nam”, “The Records of Poetry of Vietnam” and “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet”. The poems of The Enlightened King displayed a wise point of view in life, philosophy and the optimism and compassion of a great personality.⁷⁹ Furthermore, according to the research of professor Lê Mạnh Thát, there remain two precious Dhamma talks of The Enlightened King in “Sùng Nghiêm Temple” in 1304 and “Kỳ Lâm Temple” in 1306. Also, there are twenty-two letters written by King Trần Nhân Tông to the Yuan Dynasty (Mongol Emperor - Kublai Khan) to propose the peace for both countries, which should be considered and studied to understand his compassion and Buddhism perspective of the King.⁸⁰

2.2 The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông and His Influence to His Son

2.2.1 The Life of The King

Trần Thánh Tông, given name Trần Hoảng (陳晃) (12 October 1240 – 3 July 1290). He was the first son of The Great King Zen Master Trần Thái Tông and Empress Consort Thuận Thiên (顯慈順天皇后). In 1257, Crown Prince Trần Hoảng joined the first Mongol invasion in Vietnam with this King father and after the war, he was ceded to become the second King of Trần Dynasty from 1258 to 1278. Although ceding the throne for the Crown Prince, Trần Thái Tông became a Retired-King (太上皇) from 1259 to his death in 1277.

During the second and the third Mongol invasions of Đại Việt, the Retired-King Thánh Tông and the King Nhân Tông were credited as the supreme commanders who led

⁷⁹ Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Đỗ Văn Hy, Trần Thị Băng Thanh and Phạm Tú Châu, *Thơ-Văn Lý Trần – Lý Trần Dynasty’s Poems and Literatures*, Vol. 2, (Hanoi: Science and Society Publisher, 1988), p. 452.

⁸⁰ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), pp. 148-149.

the nation to the final victories and as a result established a long period of peace and prosperity over the country. With his successful ruling in both military and civil matters, Trần Thánh Tông was considered as one of the greatest emperors of not only the Trần Dynasty but also the entire dynastic era in the History of Vietnam.

Even though the King was not mentioned as much as his King father and son, he was an influential symbol of Zen Master in Trần Dynasty with his bequeath works in poems or Zen verses such as “*Di Hậu Lục*” (Records for the Posterity), “*Thiền Tông Liễu Ngộ*” (The Enlightenment of Zen), “*Trần Thánh Tông Thi Tập*” (The Records of Trần Thánh Tông) ... Among those, only six poems were recorded in “*Việt Âm Thi Tập*” (越音詩集 - The Records of Poetry of Vietnam)⁸¹ and “*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*” (大越史記全書 - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet).

2.2.2 The King’s Influence to His Son

As mentioned in “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet”, in the court of promoting and punishing for those took part in the third Mongol Invasion of Đại Việt 1288, Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông was asking King Trần Nhân Tông to burn all the list of people surrendered the Mongol. By the compassion of a great King, he was asking for a chance to life of those people although they did wrong in the war.

By this action, King Trần Nhân Tông realized his royal father’s heart as a son of Buddha. Always loving the people as loving himself. Punishment is not the only way to conquer people’s hearts, but rather to forgive their fault and give them a chance to pay penance for their mistakes.

Also, when Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông was about to pass away, he needed only his son to stay side by side at his last breath. However, King Trần Nhân Tông did not cry, instead he reminded a verse to his royal father:

“Absolutely, there is not a thing

⁸¹ Phan Phu Tiên (eds.), *越音詩集* [*Việt Âm Thi Tập - The Records of Poetry of Vietnam*], (National Library of Vietnam, 1729).

Neither a person, nor the Buddha
 Everything in this world is just like a sponge
 Or even Saints are like lightning”⁸²

Through this dialog, King Trần Nhân Tông just was reminded his royal father what he realized through his understanding of Dhamma. His whole life was practicing Dhamma non-stop, and this was how he understood and applied it at the very last breath. No worry, no fear, only thinking and practicing Dhamma. Moreover, Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông was the one who sent King Trần Nhân Tông to study with Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ, which laid a foundation for King Trần Nhân Tông’s progress to Zen later.

2.3 The Great King Zen Master Trần Thái Tông and His Influence to His Grandson

2.3.1 The Life of The King

Trần Thái Tông’s birth name is Trần Cảnh (陳煚) (17 July 1218 – 5 May 1277) is the first emperor of the Trần Dynasty. He seated on the throne for 33 years (1226 – 1258) before ceding his throne to the second King – his son Trần Thánh Tông in 1258 to become a Retired-King (太上皇) for 19 years.

Trần Thái Tông was born in 1218 during the last years of the Lý Dynasty. Trần Thủ Độ (陳守度), his father’s brother, arranged for him to marry the last King of Lý Dynasty - Queen Lý Chiêu Hoàng (李昭皇), who later ceded the throne to her husband -

⁸² “rành rành thấy không một vật,
 cũng không người chừ cũng không Phật,
 côi côi đại thiên bọt nổi trôi,
 tất cả thánh hiền như điện chớp,”

Trần Thái Tông to make him the founder of the Trần Dynasty⁸³ in 1226 – is mentioned as one of the most illustrious dynasties in Vietnamese history.⁸⁴

At the early years while running the country, he tried to escape to “Yên Tử Mountain” to become a monk and practice Dhamma⁸⁵ because he realized the “suffering” (苦 – *dukkha*) after many occurrences during his life in the royal family.⁸⁶ But unfortunately, he was requested to return to continue his duty with the country just right after he reached the mountain and had a short conversation to be admonished with Zen master – teacher of the prince Phù Vân (國師浮雲).⁸⁷

Through this meaningful talk to the Zen master, the King realized “the Buddha always exists within your mind and body, it is not about looking outside.”⁸⁸ After coming back from the mountain, whenever he was free daily, he always studied Zen and Dhamma from popular Zen masters at that time in order to gain a deep knowledge on Buddhism and to complete “*Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam*”⁸⁹ in 10 years.⁹⁰ Based on his deep knowledge on Buddhism and Zen, he gave people lessons through daily dialogue which are wood-engraved and preserved until now.

Not only having a great knowledge of Buddhism, but also in Confucianism, the King ran the country successfully but the way he applied was based on the profound

⁸³ Also known as the **House of Trần**, was a Vietnamese medieval royal clan that ruled over the Kingdom of Đại Việt from 1225 to 1400.

⁸⁴ Robert E.B Jr and Donald S.L Jr, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, (UK: Princeton University Press, 2014), “Trần Thái Tông”: explanation.

⁸⁵ Trần Thái Tông, *課虛錄 [Khóa Hư Lục - Instructions on Emptiness]*, trans. Nguyễn Đăng Thục, (Vietnam: Khuông Việt Publisher, 1972), p. 15.

⁸⁶ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, “Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông”, *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 155 (2016): 36-45, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Trần Thái Tông, *課虛錄 [Khóa Hư Lục - Instructions on Emptiness]*, trans. Nguyễn Đăng Thục, (Vietnam: Khuông Việt Publisher, 1972), p. 21.

⁸⁸ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, “Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông”, *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 155 (2016): 36-45, p. 40.

⁸⁹ *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam* was King Trần Thái Tông's earliest work on Buddhism.

⁹⁰ Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, (US: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2008), p. 131.

understanding of Buddhism.⁹¹ He also wrote the most famous works called “*Khóa Hư Lục*” (課虛錄- Instructions on Emptiness), a Zen manual which mentioned the first prose work on Buddhism ever written,⁹² in which the chapter “*Bàn Rộng Về Sắc Thân*” (Commentary on the Form (*rūpa*))⁹³ explained a very profound meaning to his understanding of Zen teaching. A prodigious writer, he left behind a substantial number of works, of which only a small number have survived until now.

2.3.2 The King’s Influence in Buddhism to His Grandson

King Trần Thái Tông was an important key who created a momentous turning-point of Vietnam’s history and Vietnamese Buddhism.⁹⁴ It brought the very first premise for Trúc Lâm Zen Sect now. Being the first great king of Trần Dynasty, King Trần Thái Tông was not only the first king who resigned from the throne to the mountain to become a monk, but he was also a king practicing Dhamma while running the country. Firstly, the history in Trần King Dynasty repeated when Grand Prince Trần Khâm followed his royal grandfather King Trần Thái Tông to cede the throne to a brother but it was unsuccessful.⁹⁵

Secondly, to be a King but King Trần Thái Tông always practiced Dhamma when he had free time. Being busy as a King with a heavy workload, the King still paid the penance six times per day continuously until he became a monk.⁹⁶ King Trần Thái Tông’s penance schedule was recorded and followed in “*Lục Thời Sám Hối Khóa Nghi*,” a book presenting the repentance rites according to six moments of the day.⁹⁷ Becoming a King of

⁹¹ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, “Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông”, *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 155 (2016): 36-45, p. 38.

⁹² Robert E.B Jr and Donald S.L Jr, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, , (UK: Princeton University Press, 2014), “*Khóa Hư Lục*”: explanation.

⁹³ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, “Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông”, *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 155 (2016): 36-45, p. 41.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹⁵ Trần Thái Tông, *課虛錄 [Khóa Hư Lục - Instructions on Emptiness]*, trans. Nguyễn Đăng Thục, (Vietnam: Khuông Việt Publisher, 1972), p. 15.

⁹⁶ Trần Thái Tông, *課虛錄 [Khóa Hư Lục - Instructions on Emptiness]*, trans. Nguyễn Đăng Thục, (Vietnam: Khuông Việt Publisher, 1972), p. 21.

⁹⁷ Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, (US: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2008), p. 131.

a country, also practicing and applying Buddha's Teaching at the same time, was also called "Engaged Buddhism".⁹⁸ King Trần Nhân Tông followed the same pathway. When the country was in peace, he practiced Dhamma everyday while running the country. But when the enemy invaded, he still stood up to fight for the people and country as a responsibility of a King.

2.4 Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ and His influence to His King Disciple

2.4.1 The Life of Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ

Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (慧中上士) (1230–1291) was an influential Vietnamese Buddhist master of Thiền (Zen Buddhism) tradition during the Trần Dynasty (14th C) with many wonderful poems about Zen Buddhism. He is the author of treatises on Pure Land and Zen teachings.

Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ's clan name is Trần Tung (陳嵩); he was an elder brother of the Empress Thiên Cảm Trần Thị Thiệu (元聖天感皇后陳) (the mother of King Trần Nhân Tông and wife of King Trần Thánh Tông), and of the famous general-saint Trần Hưng Đạo (Grand Prince Hưng Đạo⁹⁹ - was an imperial prince, statesman and military commander of Đại Việt military forces during the Trần Dynasty). Tuệ Trung was well-known as intelligent and hero-making since he was young. Therefore, at the time of the second and third Mongol Invasions in Vietnam (1258 – 1288), he contributed greatly to the country's victory.¹⁰⁰ As a result, he was promoted to a high position in the Trần Dynasty's Court.

⁹⁸ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, "Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông", *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 155 (2016): 36-45, p. 42.

⁹⁹ Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, (US: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2008), p. 140.

¹⁰⁰ Trần Nhân Tông, *The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si*, expounded by Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: HCMC General Publication, 1996), p. 25.

However, not long after being promoted, he resigned to live in seclusion to focus on study Dhamma and practice Zen with Zen Master Tiêu Dao (逍遙)¹⁰¹ at Phước Đường Monastery¹⁰² and becomes the greatest disciple of Zen Master Tiêu Dao.¹⁰³ This Zen Master was recorded playing an important role “in the molding of the ideology of the Truc Lam Sect.”¹⁰⁴

“*Tuệ Trung*” (慧中) means the Great Wisdom. Meanwhile “*Thượng Sĩ*” (上士) is given by The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông¹⁰⁵ due to the admiration of the King towards him, literally meaning Bodhisattva (菩薩) or in another way is called The Great Person which described a person who is enlightened but carries the great compassion and wisdom, that is why that person can self-benefit and benefit others.^{106,107} Because the great wisdom and deep understanding in Zen, The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông was given to Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ to teach Dhamma and Zen by The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông.¹⁰⁸

At the time Tuệ Trung became seriously sick, he stayed at a very simple place with only a wooden bed in the center of an empty house. On 1st August 1291 under King Trần Nhân Tông’s reign, when he was about the release his last breath, his family members wailed besides, he suddenly got up and said: “living and dying is the ordinary matter, you

¹⁰¹ Also called Tiêu Diêu or Master Phúc Đường, fourth patriarch of Yên Tử Sect or Vietnamese Zen.

¹⁰² Lý Việt Dũng, *Collection of Famous Saying by The Great Tue Trung*, (Vietnam/Camau: Camau Publisher House, 2008), p. 43.

¹⁰³ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 181.

¹⁰⁴ Chi. D, Hoa. L, Minh. H, Tan. H and Thu. N, *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, (US: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2008), p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 211.

¹⁰⁶ Lý Việt Dũng, *Collection of Famous Saying by The Great Tue Trung*, (Vietnam/Camau: Camau Publisher House, 2008), p. 30.

¹⁰⁷ Thích Thanh Từ, *The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si*, expounded by Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: HCMC General Publication, 1996), p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

all should not longingly remember, this mixed ‘Buddha nature’ in me”. Right after finishing these words, he closed his eyes and passed away.¹⁰⁹

Tuệ Trung's magnum opus, “The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si” (慧忠上士語錄), was a Buddhist text written by King Trần Nhân Tông in form of conversation and poems, preserved until now. This text concerns everything about the teaching of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam. According to The Most Venerable Thích Thanh Từ, this text is an excellent work with profound philosophy and elegant literature, which brings a lot of value in literature and Buddhist perspective to the later generations and Buddhism.¹¹⁰

His most famous teaching and influent the The Great King Trần Nhân Tông is “*phản quan tự kỷ bốn phận sự, bất tùng tha đắc*”¹¹¹ (Reflect inwardly to see the essence of you. Do not follow other ways).¹¹² King Trần Nhân Tông was sealed of approval to be enlightened (Mind-to-mind Transmission)¹¹³ based on this teaching and dialog from Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ to King in 1287 in the occasion of the King’s mother’s obsequies.¹¹⁴ Tuệ Trung is one of the most well-known Zen Masters in Vietnam at that time and until today who is the evolution of the characteristics of the Vietnamese Trần Buddhist thought influence a lot in the origin and development of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam.

2.4.2 Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ’s Perspective in Buddhism

Although Tuệ Trung had a lot of poems to show his understanding about the Dhamma and Zen, the essence of his perspective is the teaching to the King Trần Nhân Tông: “*phản quan tự kỷ bốn phận sự, bất tùng tha đắc*” (Reflect inwardly to see the essence of you. Do not follow other ways” when the King Trần Nhân Tông asked Tuệ Trung about

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., preface of the book.

¹¹¹ 反觀自己本分事，不從他得.

¹¹² Võ Thị Nga, “The Buddha’s Teaching As Applied By Tue Trung Thuong Si And His Influence On Vietnamese Buddhism,” *The Journal Of The International Buddhist Studies College*, Vol 3 No. 1 (2017): 71-84.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 167.

the essence of Zen. Everyone should be their own refuge, not on others refuge (*attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā*)¹¹⁵ if looking at the teaching of the Buddha right before his Nibbāna in Mahāparinibbānasutta,¹¹⁶

“Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourself, being your own refuge, with no oneself as your refuge, with Dhamma as an island, with Dhamma as your refuge with no other refuge. And how does a monk live as an island unto himself...with no other refuge? Here, Ānanda, a monk abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, clearly aware, mindful and having put away all hankering and fretting for the world, and likewise with regards to feelings, mind and mind-objects. That, Ānanda, is how a monk lives as an island unto himself,...with no other refuge. And those who now in my time or afterwards live thus, they will become the highest, if they are desirous of leaning.”

Meaning that, as a human being, do not try to find someone or something to rely on, even do not rely on the Buddha, instead reflect your own mind inward to see the essence is what needs to be done.¹¹⁷

What to be refuge on? How to refuge on oneself. To answer this, look at Satipaṭṭhānasutta in Majjhima Nikāya, when the Buddha teaches there are four foundations that can help to purify sentient beings, to get past sorrow and crying, to make an end of pain and sadness, to end the cycle of suffering, and to realize extinguishment:¹¹⁸

“What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the

¹¹⁵ D II 100.

¹¹⁶ D II 102, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta [The Great Passing: The Buddha’s Last Day], *Dīgha Nikāya [The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya]*, trans. Maurice W, Vol. 2, (Oxford: PTS., 1987), p. 245.

¹¹⁷ Classical Chinese – Nôm Institue (漢喃), *Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ With Vietnamese Zen Buddhism – Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ Với Thiền Tông Việt Nam*, (Vietnam: Danang Publisher, 2011), p. 24.

¹¹⁸ D II 290.

“*Ekāyano ayaṃ, bhikkhave, maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā, sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya ñāyassa adhigamāya nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya, yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā.*”

world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind as mind, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world”¹¹⁹

And, in all the suttas that the Buddha taught about mindfulness, He mentioned practicing on contemplation upon body, feeling, mind and Dhamma. That was also how to reflect inwardly to see the essence in you. The words can be different but the meaning and practicing are but one. This teaching from Tuệ Trung was the main practice of the King and later influential to the rest of the King’s life and practice.

2.4.3 The Teaching to His King Disciple

It happened on an occasion when Tuệ Trung was invited for the royal ceremony by his sister (also King Trần Nhân Tông’s mother).¹²⁰ In that case as mentioned in “The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si”, the food being served to everyone was non-vegetable while he was well-known as a vegetarian. Starting his meal, Tuệ Trung was not hesitated to pick up the chicken with his chopsticks, that made his sister wondered and asked: “Being practicing as a monk, you cannot consume meat, otherwise you cannot attain Buddhahood?”

Tuệ Trung smiled and moderately answered: “Buddha is Buddha, me is me, I don’t need to be the Buddha and the Buddha doesn’t need to be me. Don’t you hear that Mañjuśrī¹²¹ is Mañjuśrī, liberation is liberation?”

¹¹⁹ M I 57, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta [The Foundations of Mindfulness] - Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.), *Majjhima Nikāya [The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1995), p. 145.

¹²⁰ Trần Nhân Tông, *The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si*, expounded by Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: HCMC General Publication, 1996), p. 25.

¹²¹ Mañjuśrī is a *bodhisattva* associated with *prajñā* (insight) in Mahāyāna Buddhism. His name means "Gentle Glory" in Sanskrit. Mañjuśrī is also known by the fuller name of Mañjuśrīkumārabhūta, literally "Mañjuśrī, Still a Youth" or, less literally, "Prince Mañjuśrī". Another deity by the name of Mañjuśrī is Mañjughoṣa.

Through this dialog, King Trần Nhân Tông who was still a Grand Prince at that time, was really impressed and curious about Tuệ Trung.

There was another case when King Trần Nhân Tông's grandmother passed away, the King Trần Thánh Tông invited Tuệ Trung and many of the most virtuous Venerable and Masters throughout the country to come to the palace to offer meals. King Trần Thánh Tông invited each Master to write a verse to show their understanding in Buddhist practice. But the King realized their understanding was not the essence of the Dhamma, so he decided to give a notebook to Tuệ Trung to offer his own. Following, Tuệ Trung wrote a poem:

“Seeing and understanding...

Now I show my seeing and understanding,
just like rubbing the eyes to make monster.

After the rubbing is done and the monster gone, all things shine bright unrestrictedly.”¹²²

King Trần Nhân Tông answered:

“All things, shining bright unrestrictedly,
also do the rubbing to make monster.
When you see monster, and don't cling to it as monster,
that monster will vanish itself.”¹²³

Tuệ Trung read and quietly accepted.

¹²² *Kiến giải trình kiến giải
Tợ ấn mắt làm quái
Ấn mắt làm quái rồi
Rõ ràng thường tự tại*

¹²³ *“Rõ ràng thường tự tại
Cũng ấn mắt làm quái
Thấy quái chẳng thấy quái
Quái ấy ắt tự hoại”*

Under the teaching of Tuệ Trung, before the funeral of The King's mother's, his decision to become a monk, Tuệ Trung met and gave King Trần Nhân Tông two analects named "Tuyệt Đâu"¹²⁴ and "Dã Hiên"¹²⁵ which according to Nguyễn Lang were the combination between Buddhism and Confucianism and therefore had a strong influence in Buddhism under Trần Dynasty.¹²⁶

Also, King Trần Nhân Tông noticed the way of Tuệ Trung's life was so different from a monastic life then asked:

"Human being's karma is dominated by the sin of eating animals' meat; how can they be liberated from the *cause-and-effect law*?"

Master Tuệ Trung teaches him carefully:

"Now if a somebody, without knowing, turns his back and throws an object and it hits the passing King, should he be afraid of persecution? Would the King be offended? Apparently, these two incidents bear no relation with each other."

Master Tuệ Trung right away said the verses to clarify:

"Everything is appeared by Dhamma

If doubt about the truth, then sin is created

There has not been a thing.

Neither a seed nor a bud

...

Everyday face the outside world

But outside world is created by mind

¹²⁴ Were written by Chinese Zen Masters.

¹²⁵ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 166.

¹²⁶ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 150.

Outside world and mind are not two things

You will see the enlightenment.¹²⁷

King Trần Nhân Tông understood the meaning of the master but still wondering about the sin or merit, then the master said the serves to clearly explained:

“Eat vegetables and meat

Both still create *kamma*

Because they are still born

Where is *kamma* or sin”¹²⁸

King Trần Nhân Tông asked: “like keeping the precepts clean, never a moment disturbed, how does that feel?” The master smiled and he read the verses to teach:

“Keeping precepts and practicing *khanti*

Those create sin but not merit

If wanting to know beyond sin and merit

Then just live beyond both keeping precepts and practicing *khanti*.

...

Just like a person climbing to the tree

Same looking for the unsafe

Or just like a person not climbing the tree

¹²⁷ “*Vô thường các pháp hạnh, tâm nghi tội liền sanh,
xưa nay không một vật, chẳng giống cũng chẳng mầm,*

...
*Ngày ngày khi đối cảnh, cảnh cảnh từ tâm sanh,
tâm cảnh xưa nay không, chón chón balamat.”*

¹²⁸ “*Ăn rau cùng ăn thịt, chúng sanh mỗi sở thuộc,
xuân về trăm cỏ sanh, chỗ nào thấy tội phước”*

Then how the wind and moon will disturb.”¹²⁹

For this verse, he reminded the King not to teach those who were not serious enough in practicing. One day, King Trần Nhân Tông asked master Tuệ Trung about the essence of Zen? Master Tuệ Trung replied: “*phản quan tự kỷ bốn phận sự, bất tùng tha đắc*” (Reflect inwardly to see the essence of you. Do not follow other ways”. After getting the essence, King Trần Nhân Tông was sealed of approval to be enlightened (Mind-to-mind Transmission) and worshiped Tuệ Trung as his master since then.¹³⁰ This is a conversation between King Trần Nhân Tông and Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ which was narrated by the King while he wrote “The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si.”¹³¹

The most important perspective of Buddhism influencing King Trần Nhân Tông’s perspective is about “Mind and Buddha”¹³² which was expressed clearly through the poem in “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*”¹³³ (Living in The World, Joyful in The Way) made by the King¹³⁴

“So, we know

Buddha is in the house, no need to search afar

Short of roots, we look for Buddha

¹²⁹ “*Giữ giới cùng nhân nhục, chuốc tội chẳng chuốc phước,
muốn biết không tội phước, chẳng giữ giới nhân nhục,*

...
*Như khi người leo cây, trong an tự cầu nguy,
như người không leo cây, trăng gió có làm gì”*

¹³⁰ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 19.

¹³¹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 165.

¹³² Võ Thị Nga, “The Buddha’s Teaching As Applied By Tue Trung Thuong Si And His Influence On Vietnamese Buddhism,” *The Journal Of The International Buddhist Studies College*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (2017): 71-84.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Ánh Chinh, “How Zen Perspective of Trung Thượng Sĩ influent to Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”, The Government Committee for Religious Affairs, http://btgcp.gov.vn/Plus.aspx/vi/News/38/0/240/0/1351/Tu_tuong_Thien_cua_Tue_Trung_Thuong_Sy_anh_huong_toi_Thien_Phai_Truc_lam_Viet_Nam (accessed September 18, 2020).

Having understood, we are Buddha...”¹³⁵

2.5 Concluding Remarks

The life of King Trần Nhân Tông could be said to be not only of a great King of the country but also that of an excellent student and practitioner of the Buddha’s Teaching. Throughout most of his life since he was born, became a King, he spent for the country and his people; however, he had never forgotten the noble purpose as a disciple of the Buddha – learning, practicing and spreading Dhamma to other sentient beings for the wider benefits. This is a noble and beautiful ideal as a King to transcend himself and teach his people. However, it should be thankful to his royal father The Great King Zen Master Trần Thánh Tông, his grandfather The Great King Zen Master Trần Thái Tông and the important is his Zen Master Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ as they were the foundations for the King to follow since he was born. All the Buddhist knowledge he gained not only from the scriptures but also from the daily teaching and conversations with his ancestors and masters throughout the country. This should be a very practical way of learning the Buddha’s Teaching under the Trần Dynasty and Zen practice.

¹³⁵ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, trans. Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh. (Taiwan and US, 2015), p. 42.

Chapter III

Analyzing the Role and Influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông (1258 – 1308)

Trần Nhân Tông was not merely a King; he was also worshiped as an Enlightened Zen Master in Vietnam from the 13th century. During his running of the country, the King studied various religions, Buddhism included, in order to practice and apply such findings to managing the country. Additionally, such became the foundation for Zen Sect in Vietnam. It is arguably said that under the Trần Dynasty, Buddhism flourished and prospered, making positive and active contributions to the country as a whole and the Vietnamese Buddhism in particular.¹ So, regarding King Trần Nhân Tông's contributions, it is fundamental to mention his roles and influences as a King with his royal family and country in military, economics, politics, and society. Furthermore, it is a mistake when talking about the King's roles and influences without mentioning his contributions in starting Vietnamese literature writing and creating "Trúc Lâm Zen Sect" which specializes for Vietnamese. As stated, "not a single language out there can suddenly take the center stage and become a supreme, global representative of worldwide literature." These roles can be said to have originated from King Trần Nhân Tông's practice of the Buddha's Teaching to run the country. Remaining equally important are his roles and influences with the Zen Sect to later generations and Vietnamese Buddhism, particularly as a writer who greatly influenced the writing of later authors. Finally, based upon such analyzed roles and influences, the King's contributions to the country in general and Zen Sect in Vietnam in

¹ Bui Phuong Loan, "Impact of Buddhism through Thien Tradition in Brilliant Dynasties in the Vietnamese History", *International Journal of Science and Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2019): 2319-7064.

particular are cemented and proving of His significance during the 13th C and towards generations that follow, especially nowadays.

3.1 The Role of The King

3.1.1 As a King to The Country

a. In Politics and Society

The important role of the King in politics and society was clearly evident after the war: to strengthen the court system, the King promoted reliable and capable officials to undertake the primary court positions.² As the Buddha taught, *dhammādhipeyyo*,³ the King depended on Dhamma to guard and protect the people, and cherished the Dhamma as the basis to rule the country and people without favoritism. Also, the King applied a flexible way of punishment to those who did not complete the works properly to remind them of their mistakes and encourage them to remain honest to continue servicing the country and people. For example, “Appointing Phú Mạnh as county head of Dien Chau, however before long he was notorious for embezzlement, thus was summoned and punished by spanking, then re-appointed to a market. Phú Mạnh was later known as fair and incorruptible.”⁴ Generally, Đại Việt’s economy under Trần Nhân Tông’s reign prospered significantly in 1293, despite the numerous issues faced by the entire country such as wars, starvations and drought. Through these developments, King Trần Nhân Tông had proven this outstanding capability to manage the country, owing largely to his wisdom and policies.⁵

Additionally, the great role of the King was his service for the extension of the Đại Việt’s border by the adding of ‘Ô’ and ‘Lý’ Districts (now known as Quảng Trị City

² Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông - Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), pp. 140-141.

³ D III 61.

⁴ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 202.

⁵ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 145.

and Huế City nowadays) of Champa in 1306.⁶ This was historically known as the royal wedding gift from Champa King - Jaya Simhavarman III (制旻).⁷ As a result, the border of Đại Việt has since then extended to Hải Vân Pass, which created a foundation for the southward expansion of Vietnam today.⁸

Furthermore, the King Trần Nhân Tông constructed the court law systems which have only recently been clearly stated, but the remaining writing in “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet” proved the important role of the King is his contribution to Trần Dynasty’s law system through his royal proclamations, commands, petitions, and royal diplomas. Those contributions therefore were the foundation of the system in penal law, administrative and humanity management. Those laws were general amnesty and tax-attempt, or the way he chastised dishonest officials but still left them a chance to atone for their sins.⁹ This is the third important role of King Trần Nhân Tông to the politics and society of the country.

An outstanding mark further proving the important role of the King was the development of the language system. Under his reign, Vietnamese was used as the primary language for greater comprehension from various social classes besides classical Chinese.¹⁰ “The social significance of the use of Vietnamese language in the King’s proclamations

⁶ Bui Van Hung, “The Process of Establishing the Administrative System from Ngang Pass to The Southwestern Region (Xi - Xvii Century)”, *Dalat University Science Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (2020): 70-81.

⁷ Jaya Simhavarman III (Chế Mân - 制旻, 1288 - 1307), or Prince Harijit, was a king of Champa during a time when the threat of the Mongols was imminent. The mutual struggle against the Mongols brought Đại Việt and Champa closer together. Thus, the Đại Việt emperor Trần Nhân Tông married off his daughter, Princess Huyền Trân, to Chế Mân in exchange for the provinces of Ô and Lý. His other "first rank wife", or "first queen", was Princess Bhaskaradevi, though he also married a princess from Java, Queen Tapasi.

⁸ Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi, “Notice about the Economy Under Trần Nhân Tông’s Reign”, *Research of the History*, Vol. 5 (2005), p. 24.

⁹ People’s Court Online Magazine, “Trần Nhân Tông – a Visionary King”, <https://tapchitoaan.vn/bai-viet/nhan-vat-su-kien/tran-nhan-tong-vi-vua-anh-minh> (accessed September 16, 2020). (Vietnamese version)

¹⁰ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 199.

remains considerable.”¹¹ Moreover, Vietnamese language was employed in the two most famous works of the King (*Cư Trần Lạc Phú* and *Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca*) which were the oldest surviving literatures.

b. In Economy

In 1289, the weather within the country was not good as “sunny season lasts from June to October”¹² and in April 1290, stream of ‘Tô Lịch River’¹³ back flew¹⁴ and, in the middle of 1290 and 1291, starvation occurred across the country.¹⁵ “Decree the distribution of food to poor subjects and temporarily levy military enlistment.”¹⁶ As a result, only after two years, Đại Việt attained a developing agriculture, prosperous trade, and remarkable industry.

Under the King’s reign, Đại Việt was also counted as the most prosperous dynasty in Vietnamese history. Especially, after the winning in several naval battles such as “Vân Đồn”, “Vạn Kiếp,” “Bạch Đằng,” the shipbuilding industry developed quickly and became a main industry of Đại Việt. As stated, “the boats were both slender and long, with very thin planks, whose tail resembled that of a bird, with two high hulls, employing over 30 soldiers to row at least, sometimes up to hundreds, therefore they run very fast.”¹⁷ Also,

¹¹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 136.

¹² Ibid., p. 142.

¹³ Vietnamese: Sông Tô Lịch (蘇瀝江) is a small river, flowing in the territory of the Hanoi capital. Mainstream Tô Lịch river flows through the districts Cầu Giấy, Thanh Xuân, Hoàng Mai and Thanh Trì today. This river was believed to take an important part as one of the four main streams which contributing to the building process of ancient cities such as Cổ Loa, Hoa Lư, Thăng Long, Huế...It is also known as Đại Kim Giang (Đại Kim River).

¹⁴ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 201.

¹⁵ Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi, “Notice about the Economy Under Trần Nhân Tông’s Reign”, *Research of the History*, Vol. 5 (2005), p. 26.

¹⁶ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992) p. 202.

¹⁷ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 144.

naval transportation greatly facilitated trade and business for people.¹⁸ The King understood the main reason to develop a country with “no crime prevails in the country and to those who are in need, give property.”¹⁹

The living standards of the people were considerably good due to the trade and goods as mentioned, “the village market was gathered once in two months, hundreds of goods were mustered there all, there was a big house without a wall surrounding as a place of market in each five miles.”²⁰

Besides, other industries such as textile manufacturing enjoyed abundance “silk, fabric, garment, raw, papers, of various colors such as blue, yellow, purple, red... however the people primarily favored over black cloth.”²¹ This industry reached a high growth as was described in the King Trần Nhân Tông’s poem – “Moon”:²²

“Light half-lit the windows, books bundled up by bedside
Leaves falling upon autumnal yard, late night’s fresh air
Awakened, unsure where the pestle stamping comes from
Perched upon the Osmanthus blossom rose the new moon.”

¹⁸ Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi, “Notice about the Economy Under Trần Nhân Tông’s Reign”, *Research of the History*, Vol. 5 (2005), p. 29.

¹⁹ D III 62, Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta [The Lion’s Roar on the Turning of the Wheel] - Maurice Walshe (trans.), *Dīgha Nikāya [The Long Discourse of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1987), p. 397.

²⁰ Trần Quốc Vượng and Hà Văn Tấn, *The History of Vietnamese Feudal Regime*, Vol. 1, 2nd Edition., (Hanoi: Science and Society Publisher, 1963), p. 290.

²¹ Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi, “Notice about the Economy Under Trần Nhân Tông’s Reign”, *Research of the History*, Vol. 5 (2005), p. 28.

²² Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Đỗ Văn Hỷ, Trần Thị Băng Thanh and Phạm Tú Châu, *Thơ-Văn Lý Trần – Lý Trần Dynasty’s Poems and Literatures*, Vol. 2, (Hanoi: Science and Society Publisher, 1988), p. 465.

Nguyệt

“Bóng đèn soi nửa cửa sổ, sách đầy giường,

Móc rơi trên sân thu, hơi đêm thoáng mát.

Tỉnh giấc không biết tiếng chày nện vải ở nơi nào.

Trên chùm hoa quế trắng vừa mọc.”

Even the weapon making industry deserved a mention. During two invasions of Mongols, poison artillery fire was recognized to be the main cause of largest casualties amongst Mongolian invading soldiers. Another poison which killed many enemies was “water-arbalest”, a weapon “using compressed air can shoot up to 30 feet. When hit, the affected area will leave a pink shape and requires surgery to remove when itchiness occurs. Otherwise, the inflicted pain will remain until their death.”²³

c. In Education

The education system under Trần Nhân Tông in general was not much changing from Lý Dynasty, King Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Thái Tông. There was a national university in Thăng Long Imperial City recruiting only royal members called “Quốc Tử Giám” (Imperial Academy - 國子監).²⁴ However, in 1281, King Trần Nhân Tông for the first time in history built other national universities in Thiên Trường District²⁵.²⁶ Moreover, there were numerous private universities opened by the royal Prince and invited teachers from Imperial Academy including the famed Chu Văn An.²⁷ This was considered as a development in his vision of “education is the first prioritized national policy”.

²³ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 145.

²⁴ Also called **Văn Miếu** (文廟) is a temple dedicated to Confucius in Hanoi, northern Vietnam. The temple also hosts the Imperial Academy, Vietnam's first national university. The temple was built in 1070 at the time of Emperor Lý Thánh Tông. It is one of several temples in Vietnam which is dedicated to Confucius, sages and scholars. The temple is located to the south of the Thăng Long Imperial. The various pavilions, halls, statues and stelae of doctors are places where offering ceremonies, study sessions and the strict exams of the Đại Việt took place. The temple is featured on the back of the 100,000 Vietnamese đồng banknote.

²⁵ The original fatherland of Trần Kings, was one of a district of Nam Định City now.

²⁶ Lê Văn Nam, “The Education System and Former Examinations of Đại Việt under Trần Dynasty (1226-1400)”, (An Essay Presented to the Faculty of Education – Psychology of Danang University, 2014), p.10.

²⁷ Chu Văn An (1292–1370) was a Confucian, teacher, physician and high-ranking mandarin of the Trần Dynasty. He was famous as a straightforward man who passed the doctoral examination (Thái Học Sinh / 太學生) but refused to become a mandarin. Instead, he opened a school and began his career as a Confucian teacher in Huỳnh Cung village in Thanh Tri.

Besides, the main content of the examinations was all about “Three traditional religions in Vietnam (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism)”²⁸ which was still remained under King Trần Nhân Tông since Lý Dynasty. However, Buddhism under Trần Dynasty was developed strongly that lead to the first published Buddhist textbooks in 1299 to teach widely.²⁹

The most prominent role of King Trần Nhân Tông is for first time in history, the national language, widely known as ‘Nôm’³⁰ in poems and literary works,³¹ was recognized as a part of “nationalistic Buddhism with unique Vietnamese characteristics”.³² According to professor Lê Mạnh Thát, King Trần Nhân Tông’s role in Vietnamese language was not coincidentally considered the most remarkable, through his civil and military prowess.³³ Across the history of Vietnamese language, believed to have appeared since the time of Hùng King³⁴ with thousands of written texts discovered, only “*Cu Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*” and “*Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca*” remained being preserved until today.³⁵ For instance, in 1282, when a crocodile appeared on Lô River,³⁶ “The King assigned his Minister of Justice Nguyen Thuyen to write a poem and throw it into the river, thus chasing

²⁸ Lê Văn Nam, “The Education System and Former Examinations of Đại Việt under Trần Dynasty (1226-1400)”, (An Essay Presented to the Faculty of Education – Psychology of Danang University, 2014), p. 11.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁰ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 85.

³¹ Quan Hoang Vuong, “Vietnam's Economic History: The Feudalism System,” *Stratfor World View*, (2011), p. 3.

³² Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at University of the West, 2019), p. 64.

³³ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 233.

³⁴ **Hùng King** (c. 2524 BC - Chinese: 雄王; Vietnamese: *Hùng Vương* (雄王) or *Vua Hùng* (禡雄)); is the title given to the ancient Vietnamese rulers of the Hồng Bàng period.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 234-235.

³⁶ Lô River: a main estuary of Hồng River which flows from China to Phú Thọ, Vietnam.

away a crocodile. For which the King likened with Han Du's³⁷ deed in historical account, thus decided to name him Hàn Thuyên."³⁸

d. In Military

King Trần Nhân Tông's key military role was being a "brave hero against the aggressors". Under his reign, the Yuan Dynasty invaded Đại Việt two times. Regarding both internal and external affairs, the King applied the flexible policy.

In 1282, the King held a meeting in Bình Than Harbor³⁹ to gather most of the commanders and court members from across the country to inquire for their ideas whether the whole country needed to stand up against the invaders or to yield. The meeting was considered the first time ever in history a Trần King asked ideas from his people before reaching a final decision. Which means King Trần Nhân Tông was righteous to bring a better belief for the people (*samaye rājāno dhammikā honti, rājāyuttāpi tasmim samaya dhammikā honti*).⁴⁰ Furthermore, in this meeting the Trần Kings promoted Hưng Đạo Đại Vương Trần Quốc Tuấn (興道大王陳國峻) to become the Supreme Commander of the country's military.

In November, 1284, as a wise man, predicted the ambition of Mongol Empire - Kublai Khan (忽必烈), the King requested an emissary to Yuan Dynasty to ask putting off the fighting. Also, right before the time Mongols second invaded Đại Việt, the King held another meeting called Diên Hồng where the Kings Trần offered a banquet for all the elders

³⁷ Hàn Dũ (韓愈, 768 – 25/12/824) in China. Legend has it that while he was an official in Guangzhou, China, there are many crocodiles, he composed a funeral oration to throw on the water, all the crocodiles went away.

³⁸ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 188.

³⁹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 188.

⁴⁰ A II 74.

"When rājāhs are righteous, the ministers of rājāhs also are righteous."

of the court and the ethics of the country to consult the decision of fighting the Mongols.⁴¹ This key was practiced as the teaching of the Buddha about the “seven things that cause not declined of a country”,⁴² if King and the people usually gather and discuss problems in concord, the agreements will be a successful result. The result was a fight against the Mongols by the wholeheartedly of everybody.⁴³ This event was said to be a great opportunity for the whole people in the country to show that they are determined to the peace of the country. Nevertheless, the King’s position was once again strengthened by the support of the whole country. This was one kind of the great factor a King should have as taught by The Buddha in Adhammika Sutta:

“...when *rājahs* are righteous, the ministers of *rājahs* also are righteous. When ministers are righteous, householders are righteous, thus, townfolk and villagers are righteous. This being so, moon and sun go right in their courses.”⁴⁴

As a result, the winning against Yuan Dynasty in 1288 would be expected.

In Mongols’ third invasion, once again, the King consulted the Supreme Commander regarding the soldiers’ conditions, whether they could be strong enough to fight against the Mongols after the second invasion.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Trí Bửu, Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, “Trần Nhân Tông – the King, the Foundation of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect (a statement from Nguyễn Minh Triết – a Prime Minister of Vietnam at the Opening Ceremony of Vesak 2008),” viewed September 18, 2020, < <https://phatgiaoviet.org.vn/tran-nhan-tong--duc-vua-nguoi-sang-lap-dong-thien-truc-lam-d29105.html> >.

⁴² A IV 8, Macchhariya Sutta [Grounds for Praise] - E. M Hare (trans.), *Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings]*, Vol. 4, (Oxford: PTS., 1978), p. 10.

⁴³ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 189.

⁴⁴ A II 74, Adhammika Sutta [Unrighteous] - Woodward, F. L. (trans.), *Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings]*, Vol. 2, (Oxford: PTS., 2008), p. 85.

⁴⁵ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 195.

The role of the King Trần Nhân Tông to the country was highlighted by using talented people in circumstances. This was claimed by Ngô Sĩ Liên:⁴⁶ “Once I observed the proclaimed Trần’s generals showcasing their intellect as in Hịch Tướng Sĩ⁴⁷ (諭諸裨將檄文 – Proclamation for The Soldiers), whereas with Phạm Điện Súy (Phạm Ngũ Lão) his intellect was evident in the poem, beyond his martial prowess; it is evident that Trần royals knew how to use their people, basing upon their talent to assign respective duties.”⁴⁸

With his great wisdom, the King Trần Nhân Tông brought two victories to Đại Việt. For instance, the King Trần Nhân Tông gave the chief commander for Hưng Đạo Vương Trần Quốc Tuấn as the King knew his great ability in deploying troops as well as in commanding. This was a major cause resulting in the great victory of the Battle of Bạch Đằng in 11th April 1288.⁴⁹ Moreover, the fight between Nhân Huệ Vương Trần Khánh Dư dealt great damage to Mongols’ warships⁵⁰ near Hạ Long Bay early of February, destroying all the logistics carried by 70 Mongol warships, one of the keys behind Đại Việt’s

⁴⁶ Ngô Sĩ Liên (吳士連) (1400 – 1499) was a Vietnamese historian of the Lê Dynasty. He is best known for being the principal compiler of the “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet,” and the oldest official historical record of a Vietnamese dynasty that remains today. In “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet,” Ngô Sĩ Liên is appreciated not only for the precision of his records but also for the innovative method of compilation, he was the first Vietnamese writer who extracted information for historical book from collections of myths and legends. Ngô Sĩ Liên is still now always considered one of the most important figures of the historiography of Vietnam.

⁴⁷ It was a proclamation written in the 13th Century to motivate the soldiers of Đại Việt before the second Mongol Invasion by Kublai Khan.

⁴⁸ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 231.

⁴⁹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 188.

⁵⁰ Nguyễn Dynasty National History Institute, History Institute (trans.), *欽定越史通鑑綱目 [Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục - Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, Vol. 8, (Hanoi: Education – Hanoi Publisher, 1998), p. 235.

triumph.⁵¹ This was largely due to the King's ability in human management, with which he knew how and whom to arrange particular positions.

After the war, there was a meeting announcing awards for those who achieved gloriously in Mongol Resistance. In this event, Đỗ Hành⁵² was not awarded as highly as people thought, despite his deed in capturing Omar alive. As mentioned in “Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet”, after taking Omar, Đỗ Hành reported directly to Retired-King Trần Thánh Tông instead of King Trần Nhân Tông who is the direct commander of Đại Việt.⁵³ This story again reaffirmed the role of the King in the resistance. He kept the main role at that time⁵⁴ with the consultation of the Retired-King and Supreme General.⁵⁵

Additionally, Hưng Trí Vương Trần Quốc Hiên⁵⁶ was not awarded despite his great contribution to Đại Việt in both Invasions 1285-1288. This happened when the King Trần Nhân Tông instructed him with his troops to step away for Mongol's troops escaping, but he did not follow. The incident clearly showed that the King did follow closely to the happening of each battle during the war.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 197.

⁵² Đỗ Hành (杜行) is a popular commander under Trần Dynasty and was well-known with his achievement by taking alive Omar of Mongols in Invasion of Dai Viet. In the third Invasion, besides the Supreme Commander Trần Hưng Đạo led the troops to fight against Mongols in Bạch Đằng Battle, Đỗ Hành was assigned to stay beside and protect Retired-king Trần Thánh Tông and King Trần Nhân Tông while beating the Mongols.

⁵³ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 198.

⁵⁴ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 138.

⁵⁵ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 199.

⁵⁶ He is a son of Supreme Commander Trần Quốc Tuấn, together with his three other brothers, he contributed a lot in the winning of Bạch Đằng Battle and some other battles.

⁵⁷ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 138.

Another important role of the King was his contribution to the peace relationship between Đại Việt and Champa. In 1301, on behalf of a country as a monk⁵⁸ to visit Champa and to observe Champa's Buddhist situation for six months.⁵⁹ While visiting Champa, King Trần Nhân Tông was treated as a great monk and also as a great influential person of Đại Việt.⁶⁰ As a result of this, the relationship of Đại Việt and Champa remained in peace until after King Trần Nhân Tông passed away.⁶¹

All the events above showed that the role of King Trần Nhân Tông in the military was the main reason behind the victory for the country of Đại Việt in its resistance against the Yuan Dynasty.⁶² However, being a great King was not about “look[ing] for a glory in this life but creates the bad *kamma* for many lives by killing unlimited beings”.⁶³ Therefore, even the King had many chances to expand the country and punish those disturbing the peace between countries, however the King practiced the Buddha's Teaching to keep peace between neighboring countries.⁶⁴

3.1.2 As a Member in Royal Family

Through the event of King Trần Nhân Tông becoming a monk, it demonstrated he played a key role for his royal family by using the potential of Buddhism to serve the policy and society. Owing to his activities within the country and with other neighboring countries such as Ai Lao (known as Laos) and Champa under the role of a monk, he made

⁵⁸ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 174.

⁵⁹ Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên, *大越史記全書 [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư - Complete Chronicles of Dai Viet]*, trans. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, (Social Sciences - Hanoi Publisher, 1985-1992), p. 215.

⁶⁰ Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận - Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 235.

⁶¹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 39.

⁶² Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 152.

⁶³ Thích Đức Thắng and Thích Tuệ Sĩ (trans.), *增壹阿含經 [Kinh Tăng Nhất A-hàm - Ekottarāgama]*, (Vietnam: Phương Đông Publisher, 2011), p. 469.

⁶⁴ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 157.

“Trúc Lâm Zen Sect” to become a strong Buddhist Sect to support the royal family and politics.⁶⁵

Following his way, his son – King Trần Anh Tông⁶⁶ decided to become a monk after ceding his throne for King Trần Minh Tông, but unfortunately, he passed away before his wish was fulfilled.⁶⁷ These are five factors that are taught in Dirgāgama as a good parent to children needs to do which were taught by the Buddha and applied since the King Trần Thái Tông, Trần Thánh Tông and Trần Nhân Tông for teaching children.⁶⁸ As a consequence, all the later generations have been learned and applied to become a good parents as what the ancestors did.

Later, because of King Trần Nhân Tông's role, the Trần Kings and princes were exceptionally well educated, and not only in Confucian classics. They were also trained in Buddhism, and they were great builders of temples and stupas.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 175.

⁶⁶ Trần Minh Tông (4 September 1300 – 10 March 1357), real name Trần Mạnh (陳勳), known the fifth king of the Trần Dynasty, ruled Đại Việt from 1314 to 1329. After ceding the throne to his son Trần Hiến Tông, Minh Tông title himself Retired-king for 29 years. As the last king in the prosperous period of Trần dynasty, Minh Tông was known for his successful reign of Đại Việt with the assistance of many talented mandarins. Trần Minh Tông is also was recorded as an important key in Trần Buddhism and was mentioned in “*Thánh Đẳng Lục*” (聖燈錄 - Records of the Sainthood of the Five Trần Kings). His death marked a significant turning point in the history of the Trần Dynasty, as the country began to decline and soon fell into troubled times.

⁶⁷ Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận – Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 330.

⁶⁸ Thích Tuệ Sỹ (trans.), *長阿舍經 [Kinh Trường A-hàm - Dirgāgama]*, (Vietnam: Phương Đông Publisher, 2000), p. 485.

What are five?

1. prevent the child doing bad deeds
2. teach the good deeds
3. love the child to the marrow
4. chose a propriate marriage
5. provide appropriate needs

⁶⁹ Keith T, *A History of the Vietnamese*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.

3.1.3 As a Monk and a Founder of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect

Mentioning King Trần Nhân Tông is never completed without mentioning his “double-role”. Besides the role of a King, Trần Nhân Tông was mentioned as a Buddhism leader of Vietnam who is the founder of a unique Zen Sect which created the foundation for a Vietnamese Buddhism today. The King has been considered as the most excellent example for the later generation to see, follow and worship. At the highest-virtuous person as a human being – a King of a country, Trần Nhân Tông decided to cede his throne to his son to start his harbor thoughts in Buddhism in Yên Tử Mountain.⁷⁰ Trần Nhân Tông was later announced as the sixth successive disciple of Yên Tử Sect⁷¹ (the fifth being Zen Master Huệ Tuệ).⁷²

This served to lay the first important foundation for the Vietnamese Buddhism.⁷³ Led by the King, Buddhism under the Trần Dynasty was remarkable.⁷⁴ As a monk, Trần Nhân Tông traveled around the country to encourage people to practice “*Thập thiện* - the tenfold wholesome course of actions” (*kusala-kamma-patha*)⁷⁵ which was the basic teaching for the beginner and also taught them to refrain from using bad verbal

⁷⁰ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 86.

⁷¹ Nguyễn Lang *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 232.

⁷² According to *Tue Trung Thuong Sy Ngu Luc - The Analects of Tue Trung Thuong Si*. We have a religion transmitting order from the generations under the Lý reign up to the Three Ancestors of the Trúc Lâm Zen Sect as follows: 1. Hien Quang; 2. Vien Chung; 3. Dai Dang; 4. Tieu Dao; 5. Hue Tue; 6. Truc Lam; 7. Phap Loa; 8. Huyen Quang.

⁷³ Hoàng Thị Thơ and Hoàng Văn Hùng, Vietnam Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences, “Engaged Buddhism of Buddha King Trần Nhân Tông – a Unique Success of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect Under Trần Dynasty,” viewed September 18, 2020 < <http://tnti.vnu.edu.vn/dao-doi-vien-dung-o-vua-phat-tran-nhan-tong-mot-thanh-cong-dac-sac-cua-thien-truc-lam-doi-tran/>>.

⁷⁴ Loan Thuy Nguyen, *New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam*, (A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at University of the West, 2019), p. 59.

⁷⁵ (十善, sa. *dasakuśalakarmāṇi*):

- 3 bodily actions: avoidance of killing, stealing, unlawful sexual intercourse.
- 4 verbal actions: avoidance of lying, slandering, rude speech, foolish babble.
- 3 mental actions: unselfishness, good-will, right views.

communication.⁷⁶ “It was clear that Trần Nhân Tông wanted to adopt “*Thập thiện*” as the foundation of social virtues.”⁷⁷ And also practice abandoning the thought inside whenever it arises as in *Vitakkasaṅṭhānasutta*:⁷⁸

“Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is giving attention to some signs, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then when he gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, any such evil unwholesome thoughts are abandoned in him and subside, and with abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. When he examines the danger in those thoughts...When he tries to forget those thoughts and does not give attention to them...When he gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts.”

Besides joining the raining retreat, King Trần Nhân Tông stated that he encouraged people to eliminate following superstitions.⁷⁹ By teaching the good deeds practices as a monk and a Retired-King, Trần Nhân Tông instilled a strong sense of Buddhism in each person he met as those were one of the “monuments to the Dhamma; are beneficial and they belong to the fundamentals of the holy life.”⁸⁰

This could be seen as a first step to do good deeds in Buddhism for people, and to reinforce his dynasty under Buddhist point of view and action.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 237.

⁷⁷ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 108.

⁷⁸ M I 122, *Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta* [The Removal of Distracting Thoughts] - Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.), *Majjhima Nikāya [The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1995), p. 213.

⁷⁹ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 20.

⁸⁰ M II 125, *Dhammacetiya Sutta* [Monuments to the Dhamma] - Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu; Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.), *Majjhima Nikāya [The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1995), p. 733.

⁸¹ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 237.

King Trần Nhân Tông played an important role as a founder of “Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”, recorded as the unification of Buddhism brotherhood⁸² and a leader of brotherhood in Buddhism in Vietnam.⁸³

3.1.4 As a Writer

According to Lê Mạnh Thát, there are two works written by the King still preserved until now. Also, by the count of other collected poetic works, there remain thirty poems. Moreover, twenty-two letters which were written to the Yuan Dynasty are preserved until today.⁸⁴ Additionally, there were the two “Dhamma talks” in Sùng Nghiêm and Kỳ Lân Pagoda right before his demise, also recopied for the later studies. However, all his works were written in Classical Chinese and later were translated into Vietnamese.

Furthermore, the King’s works “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*” and “*Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca*” were the foundations of using Vietnamese as a language to express flexibly and comprehensively the abstract issues. According to Professor Lê Mạnh Thát, this is the premise for the official usage of Vietnamese as the main language to describe life’s various aspects.⁸⁵ Also, the shift to use the traditional language of Vietnam was readied and supported by the royal court and Trần family members.⁸⁶ And “as for Trần Nhân Tông, to set himself as an example of such language mandate.”⁸⁷ As a result, Vietnamese has since become a literature language itself. Such two poems are the biggest contributions for the Vietnamese literature.

⁸² Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 92.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁸⁴ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 311.

⁸⁵ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 107.

⁸⁶ K. W. Taylor, *A History of Vietnamese*, (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 120.

⁸⁷ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 62.

On top of these, the literary corpus of King Trần Nhân Tông was a key in helping to connect all people to fight against the Yuan Dynasty as the works genuinely reflected the morale in love, light and following of Buddhism.⁸⁸

3.2 The Influence of The King

3.2.1 As a King to The Country

Not only under his time, but also much later he remained one of the most influential people in Vietnam. In the celebration of 700 years of The Enlightened King's Nibbāna, Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyễn Phú Trọng said: "in an innumerable number of efforts and influences of our predecessor, the King - Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông is the most influential person with greatest contribution in our history."⁸⁹ His influence in politics, society and religion has been mentioned as the number of people whose influence can last in direct proportion to the history timeline.⁹⁰ This is the teaching of the Buddha for the leader of an organization of a country in Janasandha Jātaka of Khuddaka Nikāya:⁹¹

"Great King," quoth he, "not meet is it to neglect such as I am, who can give admonition, Supreme Buddhas, dwelling too in a monastery in front. A king ought to rule vigilant in all kingly duties, to his subjects like mother or father, forsaking all evil courses, never omitting the ten virtues of a king. When a king is righteous, those who surround him are righteous also."

King Trần Nhân Tông and his ancestors led to patriotism as a strong element behind the Trần Dynasty's victories against the Mongols because it helped unite people

⁸⁸ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 326.

⁸⁹ Anh. N, Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông in the role as a Head of a Country and the Development of Vietnamese Society," <https://phatgiao.org.vn/phat-hoang-tran-nhan-tong-trong-lanh-dao-va-phat-trien-xa-hoi-viet-nam-d41571.html> (accessed 14th January 2020).

⁹⁰ Nguyễn Kim Sơn, *Trần Nhân Tông – Way of Zen and Poem*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publisher, 2017), p. 210.

⁹¹ Janasandha-Jātaka (No. 468) - W.H.D. Rouse and M.A Litt D (trans.). E.B. Cowell (eds.), *The Jātaka [Stories of the Buddha's Former Births]*, Vol. 4, (Oxford: PTS., 2016), p. 109.

fighting for the common cause.⁹² Such Buddhist applications led King Trần Nhân Tông to apply simple and democratic policy to the people and gain victory in two wars.⁹³ It showed how important the King's influence was to his people and his country.

As a teaching in the Khuddaka Nikāya Jātaka,⁹⁴ there is “tenfold virtue of the ruler” (*Dasavidha-rājadhamma*) which a leader (king) of a country or an organization can practice to be a virtue king.⁹⁵

Nguyễn Lang said that: “the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông influenced the whole royal family, court family and all people in the country by strengthening the country's foundation and life management using his encouragement in Buddhist teaching and application.”⁹⁶ By giving a basic foundation for living conditions to the people and teaching them how to practice the precepts “refrain from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from lying speech, from slander, from harsh speech, from idle chatter, from covetousness, from ill-will, from wrong view.”⁹⁷ This can be viewed as one of the

⁹² Nguyen Hoang, “Short Discussion on Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”, *Magazine of Buddhism Research*, No. 3 (1998): 16-17.

⁹³ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 238.

⁹⁴ Mahāhamsa-Jātaka (No. 534) - W.H.D. Rouse, E.B. Cowell and H.T Francis (trans.), *The Jātaka [Stories of the Buddha's Former Births]*, Vol. 5&6, (Oxford: PTS., 2015), pp. 199 - 200.

⁹⁵ What are ten: 1. *Dāna (charity)*: sacrifice one's own pleasure for the well-being of the public, such as giving away knowledge and serving public. 2. *Sīla (morality)*: practicing physical and mental morals, being a good example of others. 3. *Pariccāga (altruism)*: being generous and avoiding selfishness, practicing altruism. 4. *Ājjava (honesty)*: being honest and sincere towards others, performing one's duties with loyalty and sincerity to others. 5. *Maddava (gentleness)*: having gentle temperament, avoiding arrogance and never defaming others. 6. *Tapa (self-controlling)*: destroying passion and performing duties without indolence. 7. *Akkodha (non-anger)*: being free from hatred and remaining calm in the midst of confusion. 8. *Avihimsa (non-violence)*: exercising non-violence, not being vengeful. 9. *Khanti (forbearance)*: practicing patience, and trembling to serve public interests. 10. *Avirodhana (uprightness)*: respecting opinions of other persons, avoiding prejudice and promoting public peace and order.

⁹⁶ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 237.

⁹⁷ D III 76, Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta [The Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel] - Walshe, Maurice (trans.), *Digha Nikāya [The Long Discourse of the Buddha]*, Vol. 2, (London: Wisdom Publication, 1987), p. 403.

most significant influences of King Trần Nhân Tông to the country's development, by his application of Buddha's Teaching to render and adjust social behaviors.⁹⁸ As taught by the Buddha, the King exerted a strong influence to the people and strengthened the country. Thanks to these teachings and applications, the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông greatly influenced the people as they could practice the Buddha's Teaching to improve "good deeds actions" throughout the country.⁹⁹ It can be concluded that "Trần Nhân Tông's Buddhist thought was imbrued with life."¹⁰⁰

Also, started in 2012, an award named after "The Tran Nhan Tong Reconciliation Prize", in Trần Nhân Tông Academy was created by Professor Thomas E. Patterson¹⁰¹ in Harvard University, Boston, USA. The award is granted for those who excellently contribute to the reconciliation, loving kindness and inclination towards the good throughout the world. Notably, this prize is offered to those who have devoted themselves for the friendship between nations, countries and religions with aims to bring an end to the conflicts and spread loving kindness to all beings, stop the violence and speed up the actions of reconciliation, peace, and compassion. Every year, there are two people chosen by the committee to be rewarded.

According to the founder - Prof. Patterson: one of the two elements which made "The Tran Nhan Tong Reconciliation Prize" unique from others rewards is "the King led

⁹⁸ Nguyễn Thị Toan, "Trần Nhân Tông's Idea about Engaged Buddhism - Tinh thần nhập thế trong tư tưởng phật giáo của Trần Nhân Tông," *Journals of Vietnamese Technology and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 94 (2015), p. 92.

⁹⁹ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 111.

¹⁰¹ Thomas E. Patterson is Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press in the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and is also President of the Open Minds Foundation. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Out of Order*, which received national attention when President Bill Clinton said every political leader and journalist should be required to read it. *Out of Order* was later named as best book of the decade in political communication by the American Political Science Association. His research has been funded by the Ford, Markle, Smith-Richardson, Pew, Knight, Carnegie, and National Science foundations. Patterson received his PhD from the University of Minnesota in 1971. He as an American soldier in Vietnam and came to love the country, its people, and its history.

a truly heroic and virtuous life.¹⁰² “In the whole of human history, there are only a few leaders who have given up worldly power and riches in order to provide an example of simplicity and virtue for future generations.”

3.2.2 As a Member in Royal Family

Becoming a monk and an Enlightened King, Trần Nhân Tông influenced his son’s point of view regarding Buddhism, 1304, he was invited by King Trần Anh Tông to the imperial city to be ordained as a Bodhisattva Precepts¹⁰³ for lay people. In this event, The Enlightened King was welcomed as the most important and influential person in the country.¹⁰⁴ Subsequently, all the members of the royal family and royal court followed to practice the Bodhisattva Precepts and to become Buddhists.¹⁰⁵ This how the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông became a monk and remained the most influential person to his royal family.

¹⁰² *VietNamNet Bridge*, “Tran Nhan Tong Reconciliation Award to be launched in the US”, <https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/23461/tran-nhan-tong-reconciliation-award-to-be-launched-in-the-us.html> (accessed 15th September, 2020).

¹⁰³ Also known as Brahma Net Precepts (菩薩戒) was mentioned in **Brahmajāla Sūtra** (梵網經) which are:

1. Not to kill or encourage others to kill.
 2. Not to steal or encourage others to steal.
 3. Not to engage in licentious acts or encourage others to do so. A monk is expected to abstain from sexual conduct entirely.
 4. Not to use false words and speech, or encourage others to do so.
 5. Not to trade or sell alcoholic beverages or encourage others to do so.
 6. Not to broadcast the misdeeds or faults of the Buddhist assembly, nor encourage others to do so.
 7. Not to praise oneself and speak ill of others, or encourage others to do so.
 8. Not to be stingy, or encourage others to do so.
 9. Not to harbor anger or encourage others to be angry.
- Not to speak ill of the Triple Jewel or encourage others to do so.

¹⁰⁴ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 238.

3.2.3 As a Monk and a Founder of “Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”

Since aged sixteen, the Enlightened King had studied in-depth not only Buddhism but also other religions¹⁰⁶ in the “Three traditional religions in Vietnam.”¹⁰⁷ The religions were the three dominants in Vietnam at that time. However, Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was referred to as the most influential religion in Vietnam which held the special important role in bringing the unique Vietnamese cultures into Buddhism.¹⁰⁸ And, “Buddhism under the Trần Dynasty thus developed in harmony with Confucianism.”¹⁰⁹ Nguyễn Lang also agreed that Buddhism under the Trần Dynasty never opposed and censured the other two religions.¹¹⁰ The ultimate goals of the both religions may vary, their important and common features are the reflection on the self to transform and mature in order to lead to better living.¹¹¹ Therefore, the King’s decision to become a monk was an application of the Buddha’s Teaching to develop the country and the people in a noble way, with compassion and loving kindness. As a result, through the years living as a monk while still serving the country as a Retired-King, Trần Nhân Tông established a Zen Sect to provide spiritual support towards the country of Vietnam and its people.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ The triple religion (Vietnamese: *tam giáo*), referring to the syncretic combination of Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, and Vietnamese folk religion (often assimilated), remain a strong influence on the beliefs and practices of the Vietnamese, even if the levels of formal membership in these religious communities may not reflect that influence. One of the most notable and universal spiritual practices common to Vietnamese is ancestor veneration, a practice shared with Chinese and most other Asian cultures.

¹⁰⁸ Nguyễn Kim Sơn, *Trần Nhân Tông – Way of Zen and Poem*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publisher, 2017), p. 210.

¹⁰⁹ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 86.

¹¹⁰ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 325 – 326.

¹¹¹ Nguyễn Thị Toan, “Trần Nhân Tông’s Idea about Engaged Buddhism - Tinh thần nhập thế trong tư tưởng phật giáo của Trần Nhân Tông,” *Journals of Vietnamese Technology and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 94 (2015), p. 89.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Thenceforth, the “Yên Tử Sect” became more widely followed and quickly among members of the court as well as the people. Trần Nhân Tông then changed the sect name to “Trúc Lâm Yên Tử” (“Trúc Lâm”, for short)¹¹³ which was called “One Buddhist sect era,” or the era of a single Buddhist Sect,¹¹⁴ or the era of “A unified sect of Buddhism”.¹¹⁵ As recorded in “Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”¹¹⁶ and other documents, because Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông was considered the sixth patriarch of “Yên Tử Sect” which was combined from three main Zen Sects: “Vinītaruci”, “Thảo Đường Sect” and “Vô Ngôn Thông Sect,”¹¹⁷ as well as the second patriarch of “Yên Tử Sect” is Đại Đăng Zen Master¹¹⁸ from “Lâm Tế Sect” as shown in the figure below.

¹¹³ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 61.

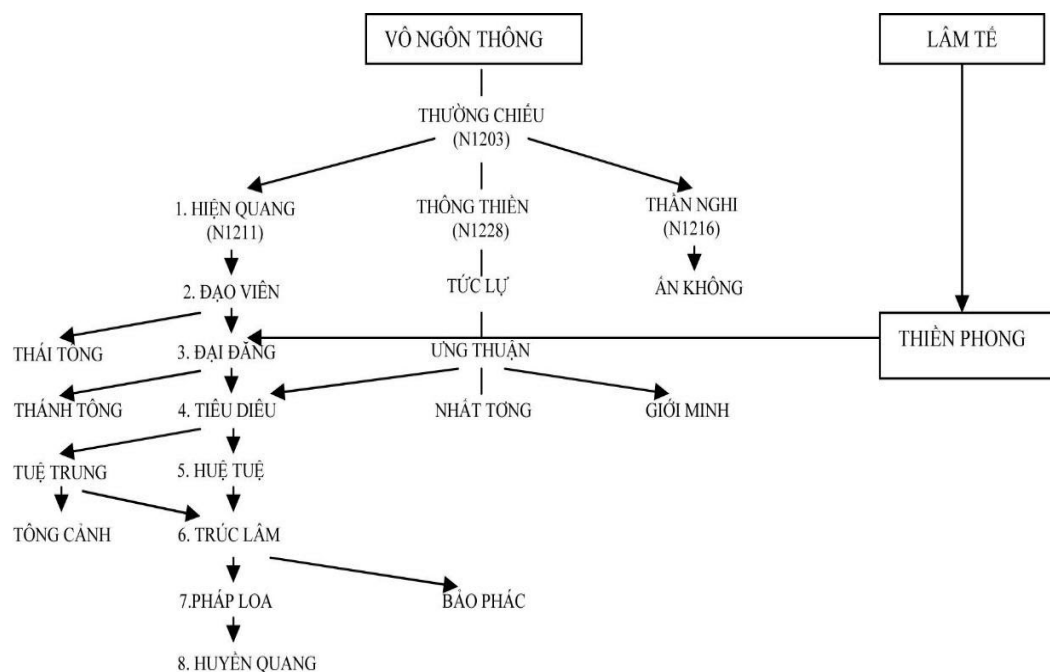
¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹¹⁵ Nguyễn Tựu, “A Study of The Origin and Development of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam”, *The Journal of The International Buddhist Studies College*.

¹¹⁶ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Nguyễn Tựu, “A Study of The Origin and Development of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam”, *The Journal of The International Buddhist Studies College*.

¹¹⁸ He is the Zen master of King Trần Thánh Tông.



BẢNG LƯỢC DẪN THIỀN PHÁI ĐỒ
[Lý Việt Dũng, trang 80]

Figure 2: the diagram of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam¹¹⁹

Therefore, Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was considered as “a mixture of the teachings from three existing, foreign-exported, early Thiền schools”¹²⁰ and transmission of “Yên Tử

¹¹⁹ Lý Việt Dũng, *Collection of Famous Saying by The Great Tue Trung*, (Vietnam/Camau: Camau Publisher House, 2008), p. 80.

¹²⁰ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, *Doctor’s Dissertation*, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 59.

Zen Sect”, “Vô Ngôn Thông Zen Sect,”¹²¹ “Thảo Đường Zen Sect”¹²² and “Lâm Tế Zen Sect” (Línjì School)¹²³ which were originally transferred from Indian¹²⁴ and Chinese Buddhism^{125,126} but was pointedly different from Indian and Chinese Buddhism.¹²⁷ With the combination of these Zen Sects, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông, set up Trúc Lâm Zen Sect on behalf of a King of a country, as he “speaks up for the Vietnamese culture, identity and traditions that later generations have been protecting, glorifying and nurturing to make them more beautiful and meaningful.”¹²⁸ The start of a Vietnamese Buddhism has run since

¹²¹ Wu Yantong (無言通) was a Chinese Buddhist monk influential in the propagation of Buddhism in Vietnam. He was born into a wealthy family, upon coming of age he renounced that lifestyle for a monastic life and eventually realized satori or enlightenment. Around 820 C.E., he crossed the border of southern China and arrived at Phù Đổng village to reside in the Kiến Sơ Pagoda in Bắc Ninh, Northern Vietnam. There he founded the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen Sect utilizing bích quán or wall-contemplation to realize the ultimate reality of the nature of mind as practiced by the founder of Zen or Chan Buddhism, Bodhidharma, an Indian monk who introduced this form of Buddhism to China around 520 C.E.

¹²² In the 11th century, Vân Môn Zen sect was brought into Vietnam by the Zen Master Thảo Đường, a student of Tuyết Đậu Trùng Hiên (Xuedou Chongxian). Thảo Đường, who had traveled from China to Chiêm Thành (Champa) to introduce Zen, was captured as a prisoner of war by Vietnamese soldiers in the war between Vietnam and Champa, only being released after the war. After establishing the Thảo Đường Zen school in Trần Quốc Temple, Thảo Đường was consecrated by King Lý Thánh Tông as the Kingdom's Supreme Master. Arguing that Buddhism should cherish Confucianism, literature, and academic achievement, the Thảo Đường Zen School became fondly acquainted with the era's scholars and nobility. Ultimately, the Thảo Đường Zen School greatly influenced the Buddhist landscape in the Trần Dynasty.

¹²³ The Línjì school (臨濟宗) is a school of Chan Buddhism named after Linji Yixuan (d.866). It took prominence in Song China (960–1279), spread to Japan as the Rinzai school and influenced the nine mountain schools of Korean Seon. In Vietnam since the 17th century, under the leadership of Nguyễn Thiều, a new school, the Lâm Tế (Ling or Linji School) formed and flourished.

¹²⁴ Khương Tăng Hội (Kang-seng-hui) first brought Buddhism in Vietnam and included the original Mahāyāna meditation, called *Dhyāna* in India.

¹²⁵ From the 6th century on, three Chinese Zen schools (Vinītaruci, Vô Ngôn Thông and Thảo Đường) were established in Vietnam, flourished, and developed to the 12th.

¹²⁶ Bui Thi Thu Thuy, “Truc Lam Zen School in Vietnam: An Analytical Study of the Way of Practice”, *The Journal of International Association of Buddhist Universities*, Vol. 11, No.1 (January – June 2018): 45-57.

¹²⁷ Nguyen Hoang, “Short Discussion on Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”, *Magazine of Buddhism Research*, No. 3 (1998): 16-17.

¹²⁸ Bui Thi Thu Thuy, “Truc Lam Zen School in Vietnam: An Analytical Study of the Way of Practice”, *The Journal of International Association of Buddhist Universities*, Vol. 11, No.1 (January – June 2018): 45-57.

then and become increasingly more popular nowadays. The King stood as a bright mirror for later generations to follow and be grateful for.¹²⁹ Under Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông guidance, Buddhism Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was begun and built as a unified clergy, bearing a fully Vietnamese character, getting rid of ancient Buddhist traditions imported from abroad while demonstrating the progressive side of ‘national consciousness’ accordingly.

Moreover, in the event of transferring alms and bowl for Pháp Loa at “Báo Ân Temple” in front of the court members and witness of current King Trần Anh Tông,¹³⁰ Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was officially transferred to a successive disciple. This event became a commencement for an official Vietnamese Buddhism by the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông and the root of “Engaged Buddhism”¹³¹ being applied strongly and widely in society until now.¹³² Where we are living, be it in a monastery or secularly, does not matter, as we all can practice Dhamma to reflect ourselves and improve our behaviors to attain liberation.

By his own application of the Buddha’s Teaching in daily life, the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông clearly demonstrates the importance of Buddhism as the combination of compassion and wisdom. Unlike many other Zen masters, the Enlightened King, even after becoming a monk, never chose a reclusive life, rather remained supporting the country through his teachings and demonstrated responsibilities.¹³³

¹²⁹ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 15.

¹³⁰ Thích Phước Sơn (trans.), *三祖寔錄 [Tam Tổ Thực Lục – True Records of The Patriarchs]*, (Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1995), p. 30.

¹³¹ Nguyễn Lang, *Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 326.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹³³ Nguyễn Tài Thư, “Religion and Nation: Tendency to Enter Buddhism into Life of Trần Nhân Tông’s Perspective,” *Institute for Religious Studies*, No. 11 (2009), p. 19.

In general, the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông – as an outstanding Zen master, established the true Vietnamese Zen Sect, Trúc Lâm, and made a great contribution in development of Buddhism in that area.¹³⁴

3.2.4 As a Writer

“King Trần Nhân Tông is a king, a hero of the country, a leader of Buddhism in Vietnam, a great thinker, and a special writer even though his literature works are not left much but he is an influence for the writing in Vietnamese since then.”¹³⁵

Buddhism was the formal national religion under the Trần Dynasty, the key reason expressed in many works of Trần’s literature, most notably the works of the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông and other masters of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect.¹³⁶ According to Lê Mạnh Thát, the literary works, poems and political letters originally written by King Trần Nhân Tông were a massive treasure. These remaining works not only influenced the political and social life of the people but also influenced the style of composition for other successive authors. The use of Vietnamese language in both literary texts and daily conversations was an effective way in explaining Buddhist perspectives to all the country’s people, as stated in “Vietnamize the Buddha’s Teaching.”¹³⁷

The works “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*” and “*Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca*” were the most influential ones written in Vietnamese language, the “essential basis for the development of this language in the subsequent literature of Vietnam.”¹³⁸ And two works

¹³⁴ Nguyen Ngoc Minh, *The Contributions of Salient Vietnamese Zen Masters to The Development of Buddhism During Ly and Tran Dynasties*, (A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of The Requirements for The Degree of Master of Arts (Buddhist Studies), (Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2017), p. 43.

¹³⁵ Nguyễn Kim Sơn, *Trần Nhân Tông – Way of Zen and Poem*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publisher, 2017), p. preface of the book.

¹³⁶ Bui Phuong Loan, “Impact of Buddhism through Thien Tradition in Brilliant Dynasties in the Vietnamese History”, *International Journal of Science and Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2019): 2319-7064.

¹³⁷ Nguyễn Thị Toan, “Trần Nhân Tông’s Idea about Engaged Buddhism - Tinh thần nhập thế trong tư tưởng phật giáo của Trần Nhân Tông,” *Journals of Vietnamese Technology and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 94 (2015), p. 92.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

must be written based on the philosophy foundation of King Trần Nhân Tông.¹³⁹ Furthermore, these two works opened the first door into the use of Vietnamese language in later literary works of many authors. “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*” and “*Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca*” were agglomerates from phenomenal efforts through a long arduous period of fighting for the protection and independence of the country.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the value of these works was remarkable and profound in terms of literature as they significantly influenced the perspective of later writers. These two works from the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông were recorded not only because of their value in language and society, but also with their own inner value as a way of religious life declaration which Vietnamese Buddhism proposed and dominate people life under King Trần Nhân Tông’s reign and later generations.¹⁴¹

With poems, the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông composed across his life, and yet he composed to answer the question from his disciples. However, those poems could be seen as a form of teaching, related to the Zen teaching for disciples and later generations. All of his poems talked about how he has a deep understanding in Zen, through which, the disciples can practice and apply in daily life. This was not so far from the practice of people. The way of teaching Dhamma is not only in scriptures, but in the way of life influential to the followers as those poems speak straightforwardly the truths to be careful and practiced.

For political letters. These letters were not researched much because not many people can have a chance to access them. Those are kept and recorded in the Chinese historical record when the letters were sent during King Trần Nhân Tông reign to the Yuan Emperor. These letters were written based on peaceful proposition between the two countries despite the fact that the Yuan Dynasty kept attempting to invade Đại Việt.

¹³⁹ Bui Thi Thu Thuy, “Analytical Study of the Way of The Practice of Truc Lam Zen School in Vietnam”, (Master’s thesis, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2017), p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 239.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

Therefore, “the [twenty] poems eventuated the King’s strong will as well as that of the entire people in sovereignty protection, determined not to concede under any manner.”¹⁴² “The consistent viewpoint of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông: never surrender, never trade of the country’s sovereignty.”¹⁴³ As a result, these letters had their own value in a literary sense.

3.3 Concluding remarks

Undergoing his entire life across two fierce wars with the then greatest empire - the Yuan Dynasty - with profound wisdom and compassion together with the application of Buddha’s Teaching in daily life, the Enlightened King demonstrates a sublime personality of a King and a monk, thus becoming one of the greatest Kings of Vietnam. Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông was a role model for all Vietnamese people and Vietnamese Buddhist followers. In these roles, he did for the country through economics, politics, education, society and especially for the Vietnamese Buddhism which influenced a lot to the development of the country after the war times. With wide knowledge and affected application from what he learned from Buddhism; the country of Đại Việt back then could successfully rebuild under his reign with influences until today. With a King who loves his people as his own children, for a Zen Master who loves beings as his own family, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông clearly embodied the strong and beautiful teaching with loving kindness, peace, and respect of Buddha’s Teaching.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 258.

Chapter IV

Proposing the Propagation Process of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam by The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông

In this chapter, the researcher would like study on the teachings of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect, created and propagated by Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông, upon those who are not aware or do not practice this Zen Sect in Vietnam, especially for the new generations of nowadays. Not only a religious following, a Zen Sect, or Vietnamese Buddhism, contained within it is a considerable part of Vietnamese history under Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông's reign and the Trần Dynasty. This is the whole expression and description of Vietnamese people and their most representational characteristics. Therefore, in this chapter, what are considered as core teachings of the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông will be studied first. However, there are various differences between the lifestyles of the time he lived and that of current, modern time, despite the characteristics not changing much. The way of living, the development of technology and the influence of western perspectives can be a barrier for the modern young generations to approach the national, unique practices of Vietnamese Buddhism. Accordingly, the researcher would like to examine popular ways of practicing Zen or 'Thiền' from the Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ, widely known as a Zen Master behind the recovery of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect in 20th C from Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông to nowadays' people. Therefore, later on such differences should be studied in order to offer a way to teach people how to access and apply the Vietnamese Buddhism which is now called 'Thiền Trúc Lâm.'

4.1 King Trần Nhân Tông's Teaching

4.1.1 King Trần Nhân Tông's Perspective in Zen

The Zen motto is established by Bodhidharma¹ say “A special transmission outside the scriptures, not founded upon the words or letters, but pointing directly to one’s mind, it lets one see into one’s own true nature and thus attain Buddhahood”² which is always the most important insight to teach. As stated in Bodhidharma’s treatise, the ‘Buddha nature’ is concealed by the illusory thoughts.³ By this motto, Hui Nang showed and taught people that, all the essence of the Buddha’s Teaching is not on the sutras or in any paper documents, but are found by each person's mind. However, the idea is not only practicing without the scriptures but need to be equally combined between scriptures and real-life practices. Therefore, when teaching and spreading this method, the King has to apply unto himself in order to demonstrate the effects. This perspective is also stated as a strong influence from King Trần Thái Tông to his grandson Trần Khâm (King Trần Nhân Tông) who “followed his deep engagement with Buddhist thought and practice.”⁴ Despite Zen as a way of practicing, it was introduced with the different and creative ways of acquiring to be suitable for each place.⁵

¹ **Bodhidharma** was a semi-legendary Buddhist monk during the 5th or 6th century. He is traditionally credited as the transmitter of Chan Buddhism to China, and regarded as its first Chinese patriarch. According to Chinese legend, he also began the physical training of the monks of Shaolin Monastery that led to the creation of Shaolin kungfu. In Japan, he is known as **Daruma**. His name means “*dharma* of awakening (bodhi)” in Sanskrit.

Bodhidharma's teachings and practice centered on meditation and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. The *Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall* (952) identifies Bodhidharma as the 28th Patriarch of Buddhism in an uninterrupted line that extends all the way back to the Gautama Buddha himself. Bodhidharma also known as “The Wall-Gazing Brahmin”.

² “giáo ngoài biệt truyền, bất lập văn tự, trực chỉ nhân tâm, kiến tánh thành Phật”.

³ John, R.M, *The Northern School and The Formation of Early Ch’an Buddhism*, (USA: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 111.

⁴ K. W. Taylor, *A History of Vietnamese*, (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 117.

⁵ Social Sciences Institute - Han Nom Research Central, *Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ với Thiên Tông Việt Nam – Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ with Vietnamese Zen Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Danang Publisher, 2011), p. 11.

In the sutta, Hui Neng used to teach his disciples that “If you turn your life inwardly, you will find what is esoteric within you.”⁶ when his disciples asked if there were any esoteric teachings apart from all the esoteric transfers from Patriarchs to followers. From this teaching, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông applied and spread with his own understanding to create the Trúc Lâm Zen Sect whose chief focus was the motto “[to] reflect inwardly to see the Buddha nature” of each person. We need to practice to look or reflect our internal mind instead of searching and attaching to the external objects, because when looking at our own mind we have a chance to be aware of its characters. Or in another word it is called “self-exploration” (*phản quan tự kỷ*).⁷

Here, does “reflect inwardly” or “self-exploration” resemble what the Buddha taught? Reflecting inwardly means observing mind and body movements by a peaceful mind with full awareness to see what and when those are arising and when those will be gone. Slowly and slowly observing the breathing in and breathing out as taught in *Ānānāsatisutta* in *Mahāsatiṭṭhānasutta*.⁸

As mentioned in the Zen motto, the main purpose of Buddhism is liberating from craving. And it’s a duty to look inwardly to see and to realize what is the truth and what only happens in a mind-made world. By realizing the illusory or unreal world, the practitioners will have a chance to recognize the ability hidden. This is also taught in the Hui Neng Sutra: “to meditate means to realize inwardly the imperturbability of the Essence of Mind.”⁹

Firstly, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông taught that “reflect inwardly, to see what is the Buddha nature”, The Most Venerable Thích Thanh Từ also used the motto to

⁶ Wei Lang, Ting Fo Po (eds.), *The Sutra of Hui Neng: Sutra Spoken by the 6th Patriarch on the High Seat of “Treasure of the Law”*, (Shanghai, 1929), p. 23.

⁷ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 68.

⁸ M III 79; D II 290.

⁹ Wei Lang, Ting Fo Po (eds.), *The Sutra of Hui Neng: Sutra Spoken by the 6th Patriarch on the High Seat of “Treasure of the Law”*, (Shanghai, 1929), p. 52.

be the main teaching for his disciples until now. But knowledge which is gained from learning or reading is not enough, practitioners need to reflect and finally self-practice (*Văn – Tư - Tu*)¹⁰ to get the deep understanding and realization.¹¹ These are three main methods to achieve the real wisdom.¹² Only by self-practicing, wisdom on nature will be cultivated and lead to the actual realization which is the main factor to get awakened.

Why is it called “reflect inwardly”? ‘Reflect’ means self-observation of the inside to know what is happening to train the mouth speech and body to be equanimity from the outside conditions. In this stage, the mind is in a mindful stage to observe what is now arising and let it go. When the mind can be tied stably to contemplate or observe the arising and the fading away of breaths or anything around. As explained by Bhikkhu Sujato that “mindfulness repeatedly re-collects awareness into the present, remembering oneself so that one’s actions are purposeful and appropriate, grounded in time and place”.¹³ Contemplating is the word used to describe for the mindfulness in meditation. According to Bhikkhu Anālayo, *anupassati* is a Pāli word which is derived from the verb *passati* (to see) and the prefix *anu*, therefore, this word literally means “to closely observe” or “to contemplate”.¹⁴

Only when the mind is mindful, and mindful means the mind is on a stage of full awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations or the surrounding. And, in that stage,

¹⁰ Listening or reading (聞) is the way of gaining knowledge from the theory or other people. Thinking (思) is the second step after learning from theory we must think or analyze about that. Self-cultivating or practicing (修) is the final step. After listening and thinking, we must apply and self-experience by practicing.

¹¹ Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Tông Việt Nam Cuối Thế Kỷ 20 - Vietnamese Zen Sect at the Late 20th C.* (Vietnam: Phuong Dong Publisher, 1998), p. 52.

¹² Thích Thanh Từ, *Keys to Buddhism*, trans. Thuan Tue, Huyen Bach and Thuy Lien Shutt, (Vietnam: Religious Publishing House, 2008), p. 33.

¹³ Bhikkhu Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsted Tranquility in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2005), p. 111.

¹⁴ Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, (Malaysia: Buddhist Wisdom Center, 2006), p. 32.

without any attachment to anything in this world. It is called mindfulness as the Buddha teaches in Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta:¹⁵

“...So he abides contemplating body as body both internally and externally... He abides contemplating both arising and vanishing phenomena in the body. Or else, mindfulness that “there is body” is present to him just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world”.

And the Buddha teaches in Ānāpānasatisutta:

“Bhikkhu, on whatever occasion a bhikkhu trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in contemplating impermanence’; trains thus ‘I shall breathe out contemplating impermanence’; trains thus ‘I shall breathe in contemplating fading away’; trains thus ‘I shall breathe out contemplating fading away’...on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-object as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. Having seen this wisdom, the abandoning of covetousness and grief, he closely looks on the equanimity. Bhikkhu, that is how mindfulness of breathing, developed and cultivated, fulfils the four foundations of mindfulness.”¹⁶

In which the word *āpāṭī* (diligent or ardent) is described and explained with various meanings, but here according to the Buddha teaching, it “described the serious commitment of a monk who retires into seclusion for intensive practice”.¹⁷ And *sampajāna* (clearly knowing) “can range from the basic forms of knowing to deep discriminative

¹⁵ D II 292, Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta [The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness] – *Dīgha Nikāya [The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya]*, trans. Maurice W, Vol. 2, (Oxford: PTS., 1987), p. 336.

¹⁶ M III 85, Ānāpānasati Sutta [Mindfulness of Breathing] - Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.), *Majjhima Nikāya [The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1995), p. 944.

¹⁷ Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, (Malaysia: Buddhist Wisdom Center, 2006), p. 38.

understanding”¹⁸ “*cittānupassī viharati āpātī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā-
domanassam*”¹⁹

Diligent (<i>ātāpī</i>)
Clearly knowing (<i>sampajāna</i>)
Mindful (<i>sati</i>)
Free from desires and discontent (<i>vineyya abhijjhādomanassa</i>)

Figure 3: Key characteristics of *satipaṭṭhāna*²⁰

The teachings of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông or those of the patriarchs are not different from the Buddha’s Teaching. If any, they are about explaining and applying in various areas with different lifestyles and national characteristics. The main teaching or the main point of these teachings is practicing with sincerity, awareness, mindfulness and free from attachments.

Moreover, according to Professor Nguyễn Kim Sơn (President of Trần Nhân Tông Institute and Hanoi National University), the Buddha taught Dhamma to everyone, not limiting at monks and nuns living in monastic life but extending to the people living in the secular world, because all of the Buddha’s Teachings are to help all beings to liberate from the *samsāra* of secular life. That is how “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*” intertwined with the life of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông and therefore had a strong effect on people

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁹ D II 290.

“...he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world.”

²⁰ Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, (Malaysia: Buddhist Wisdom Center, 2006), p. 34.

in Vietnam.²¹ This perspective does not imply some special Buddhism; rather it is a general perspective of Vietnamese Buddhism as a Bodhicitta way of practice, and especially for the Buddhism under the Trần Dynasty – for example as practiced by King Trần Thái Tông and Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ.²² Also, realizing the “Buddha-nature inside everyone” and “non-dualistic of Reality” are two main philosophy perspectives of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông.²³ Meanwhile, Nguyễn Hoàng said that, “dualistic” according to Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông is “delusion” or “ignorance”.²⁴

4.1.2 The Teaching to Propose Zen Buddhism in Vietnam by Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông

Because of the lack of understanding what real Buddhism was, Vietnamese people at that time deified the Buddha as a most powerful saint or one with an extraordinary ability to grant the best to them if only they worshipped and prayed to him. When the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông explained and proved the real meanings of practicing Dhamma, the Buddha was widely acknowledged as the most virtuous teaching and leader.

The unique purpose of creating Trúc Lâm Zen Sect by Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông is to integrate the whole national characteristics and the ‘Engaged Buddhism’ to daily life. Being a King who joined and led the country’s important wars, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông understood clearly the importance of the connection between society and politics, as they are interconnected in many aspects of life. In the Buddha’s time, monks were encouraged to travel around to teach people for the bigger benefits of everyone. And, under Trần Nhân Tông, individuals were empathized “the individuals in Buddhism were the source of the community in Dien Hong, where individuals came out to combat the

²¹ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Nguyễn Kim Sơn), *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Buddhism: The Unique of The Perspective and Culture*, (Hanoi: Hanoi National University, 2018), p. 15.

²² Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 62.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Nguyen Hoang, “Short Discussion on Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen Sect”, *Magazine of Buddhism Research*, No. 3 (1998): 16-17.

enemies.”²⁵ However, ‘Engaged Buddhism’ was not started under Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông. This term appeared early under the Lý Dynasty practiced by many popular monks and remained until the King Trần Thái Tông as a practitioner.²⁶ This was the most well-known teaching by Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông because he spent all his life as a king but practiced as living in monastic life and applied the Buddha’s Teaching to run the country and teach his people.

As a result, Trúc Lâm Zen Sect is the special Zen Sect for Vietnamese, an agreement to unite Buddhism with the society. This is also the foundation for the ‘United Buddhism’ in the following years after the decline of this Sect in 13th C and was later recovered in the 20th C.

The main teachings of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect are still based on the main teachings of the Buddha, but the Enlightened King based also on the special characteristics of Vietnamese people.²⁷ His feature was highlighted by Nguyễn Lang as he said that Buddhism has been becoming a religious factor that has a strong connection among the people in Vietnam for the purpose of building and protecting the country.²⁸ It is also agreed by Professor Lê Mạnh Thát when he said that Vietnamese Buddhist lays are solemn Bodhisattva who are loyal and supportive for the country.²⁹ Enlightened King stated in ‘part 6’ of “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*”, we do not have to do anything big but a genuine and righteous man’s foundation is filial respect and duty to the King, father and mother:

“Cleaning heart precepts, cleansing form precepts,

²⁵ Tran Thi Kim Hoa, “Zen Buddhism in Vietnam”, *International Journal of Science and Research*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (September 2019): 2319-7064.

²⁶ Nguyễn Ngọc Phương, “Engaged Buddhism Perspective in Buddhist Philosophy of King Trần Thái Tông”, *Research on Religions Journal*, Vol 5. No. 155 (2016): 36-45.

²⁷ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 64.

²⁸ Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận – Commentary on The History of Vietnam Buddhism*, (Vietnam: Hanoi – Literature Publisher, 2008), p. 232.

²⁹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông - Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 216.

both inside and outside, Bodhisattva is thus adorned,
 The righteous revere their king, the filial revere their parents,
 That's the attitude of the loyal pious.”³⁰

Whatever taught by the Buddha and all other religions was started from the filial revere and a gratitude to the ancestors, especially parents. Besides, a righteous and honest person needs to be so inside out in order to become a Bodhisattva and a ‘loyal pious.’³¹ As mentioned in chapter 2, most of the general commanders of Đại Việt to fight against with Mongols were Buddhist lays who were ‘cleaning heart precepts, cleansing form precepts, inside and outside.’ They were also the Bodhisattva who protected the people and the country. And they were righteous and revered to the Kings. Those are the characteristics of Vietnamese which Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông observed and understood. Therefore, the Enlightened King taught Zen based on the characteristics of Vietnamese people and can be applied for both monastic life and secular life as lays. As the Buddha’s Teaching doesn’t distinguish monks or lay but for anyone, and can be applied widely based on ability of each individual. Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông used to say “people can come from the South or the North, but the Buddha nature does not”. To find the way of to get rid of the *samsāra* is to find out what is the ‘Buddha nature’ of each person.

The Sanskrit word *ahimsā*³² was probably first clearly articulated as a religious ideal by Vardhamāna Mahāvīra (599–527 B.C.E.?), the great Jain teacher and older

³⁰ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, trans. Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh, (Taiwan and US, 2015), p. 52.

“sạch tâm giới giữ tướng giới, trong lẫn ngoài nên Bồ Tát trang nghiêm,
 Người ngay thờ Chúa, kẻ thảo thờ cha, thái độ đó là trượng phu trung hiếu.”

³¹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 217.

³² Pali: *Ahimsa* has many possible translations. *ahimsā* consists of two parts, ‘a’ and ‘himsa’ while ‘a’ is a negative prefix means ‘no’ or ‘not’, and ‘himsa’ is a derivation from the root ‘han’ meaning ‘to kill’ and ‘to injure’. Hence, *ahimsā* literally means ‘not to kill’ and ‘not to injure’ can be translated as “non-harm” or “non-violence”.

contemporary of the historical Buddha.³³ The term ‘*ahimsa*’ is an important concept, the first precept of Buddhism is to avoid doing harm to other living beings.³⁴ One of the most famous examples of being non-violence teaching from the Buddha in the ancient time in Buddhist scriptures is Angulimālasutta when the Buddha converts a criminal named Angulimāla who kills 999 people and the Buddha will be his 1000th:

“Angulimāla, I have stopped forever,

I abstain from violence towards living beings;

But you have no restraint towards things that live:

That is why I have stopped and you have not.”³⁵

By the Buddha's great compassion and non-harm teaching, the most dangerous killer – Angulimāla or another name is “*Ahimsaka*” (non-violent one) at that time took refuge to the Triple Gems to become a monk and an *arahant*.³⁶ This was the manner adopted by the Trần Dynasty to run the country and to treat its people around as well as neighboring countries. *Ahimsa* was applied not only under King Trần Nhân Tông; it was previously adopted by his grandfather in all situations. Once mentioned during King Trần

³³ Martin T.A, “Nonviolence and Emptiness: Buddha, Gandhi, and the “Essence of Religion””, *University of Victoria*, p. 2.

³⁴ Lee Clarke, “The Importance of Ahimsa Non-violence in Buddhism”, *Buddha Weekly*, <https://buddhawebly.com/the-importance-of-ahimsa-non-violence-in-buddhism-buddha-gandi-and-dr-king-showed-us-nonviolence-is-the-weapon-of-the-strong/> (accessed April 27, 2021).

³⁵ M II 100, Angulimāla Sutta [On Angulimāla] - Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.), *Majjhima Nikāya [The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1995), p. 711.

“*Thito ahaṃ aṅgulimāla sabbadā,
Sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ;
Tuvaṅca pāṇesu asaṅṅatosi,
Tasmā thitohaṃ tuvamaṅṅhitosī*”*ti.*

³⁶ **Arhat** (Sanskrit) in Buddhism, is the one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved Nibbāna. Mahāyana Buddhist traditions have used the term for people far advanced along the path of Enlightenment and liberated the samsara, but not fully attained the Buddhahood.

Thái Tông's lifetime, even when he was forced to return the palace to continue running the country, all he did was respond non-violently to the lower royal members.

This was proved in history when Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông ruled the whole country to win against the Yuan Dynasty two times with many non-violent strategies and highlight the tolerance to stop the war and after the war.³⁷ The teaching of the Buddha was best applied under the Trần Dynasty. In the manner of keeping peace, *ahimsa* develops and extends the country, the King has his own great contribution during his reign.³⁸

However, the most outstanding feature of the Enlightened King is the creation and teaching of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect which is now known as the Vietnamese Zen Buddhism. When analyzing the political letters, he sent to the Yuan Dynasty during his reign, several manners could be carefully considered as the Enlightened King applied the very basic teaching of the Buddha *ahimsa* to communicate and deal with neighbor adversaries. For example, during the war 1285, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông tried to negotiate for peace with the Yuan Dynasty by offering his own daughter – princess An Tư - to their chief commander – Toghon. By a matrimonial union, he hoped the Yuan Dynasty would stop the invasion immediately.

In this story, there shows how the King treasured the peace and his people's life. If the war continues, many more will lose their lives, while by sacrificing his own daughter to be a wife of Yuan Emperor, many of them can be saved. If the *ahimsa* – the teaching of the Buddha didn't influence the King, he will not likely think of sacrificing an individual to save others. Another instance is the time Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông married another daughter – a princess - to the King of Champa to ensure that the marriage relation can save the peace of two countries, while establishing strategy to extend the border of Đại Việt without fighting and killing innocent people from two countries. Hence, *ahimsa* is a

³⁷ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Lại Quốc Khánh), *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Buddhism: The Unique of The Perspective and Culture*, (Hanoi: Hanoi National University, 2018), p. 356.

³⁸ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Thích Bảo Nghiêm), *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Buddhism: The Unique of The Perspective and Culture*, (Hanoi: Hanoi National University, 2018), p. 338.

really basic teaching of the Buddha which Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông applied through his own life. Not only applying, he also taught his people across the country to understand living in harmony and peace with each other.

Furthermore, the Buddha teaches that six actions will worsen humanity in secular life for lay in Sigālakasutta:

“Sleeping late, adultery

Picking quarrels, doing harm,

Evil friends and stinginess,

These six things destroy a man.”³⁹

Buddhist laypeople should avoid doing these six things to gain a better life. Not simply teaching how to get out of *samsāra*, the Buddha teaches and explains the happy life without having debt while encouraging doing good deeds to attain the prosperous life and how poverty brings forth criminality.⁴⁰ But how to avoid these bad actions? Laymen and laywomen should practice the “ten good actions” as the Enlightened King encouraged them, according to the Sutra of Hui Neng, the patriarch said that “if you only put into practice the ten good deeds, there would be no necessity for you to be born there”⁴¹ in the Buddha Land. As the Buddha teaches that “fields have weeds as their defect; this people have hatred as its defect. Therefore indeed something given to those without hatred is very fruitful.”⁴²

³⁹ D III 184, Sigālaka Sutta [To Sigālaka: Advice to Lay People] – *Dīgha Nikāya* [*The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*], trans. Maurice W, Vol. 2, (Oxford: PTS., 1987), p. 463.

⁴⁰ Hà Văn Minh, ““Thập Vương Pháp” và Giá Trị Đạo Đức Cốt Lõi Của Tư Tưởng và Phương Pháp Chính Trị Theo Tinh Thần Phật Giáo”, *Lãnh Đạo Chính Niệm và Hòa Bình*, 153-166.

⁴¹ Wei Lang, Ting Fo Po (eds.), *The Sutra of Hui Neng: Sutra Spoken by the 6th Patriarch on the High Seat of “Treasure of the Law”*, (Shanghai, 1929), p. 42.

⁴² Dh 357, K.R. Norman (trans.), *Dhammapada* [*The Word of the Doctrine*], No. 46, (Oxford: PTS., 1997), p. 51.

Or, “Do not say anything harsh to everyone. Those spoken to would answer you back. For arrogant talk is painful. Retaliations would assail you.”⁴³

And why do we need to apply all the “ten good deeds” in daily life as taught by the Buddha, the first being *sīla* (precept), anytime we keep and practice the pure *sīla* we keep our mind free from all the bad things and detachments from the external environment, and when all from the outer world can no longer bother us with observing the pure *sīla*, it means that time we no longer follow anger, lust, hatred, love or troubles. Therefore, mentioned in the Dvedhāvitakkasutta:⁴⁴

“Just as in the last month of the hot season, when all the crops have been brought inside the villages, a cowherd would guard his cows while staying at the root of a tree or out in the open, since he needs only to be mindful that the cows are there; so too, there was need for me only to be mindful that those states were there.”

*Satikaraṇīyameva hoti ete gāvo ’ti*⁴⁵ means observing without any reaction or judgment. There are no other ways around. The remaining task is how much, how fast and how strongly we recognize it. When the gatekeeper is very alerted, he instantly recognizes.⁴⁶ With purely observing the *sīla*, the Buddha guided monks and nuns not to do anything but just be aware and observe all what would happen, with heightened alert, and thus easily recognize what was good and what was bad.

In the same meaning, when the people live a secular life but yet can practice the “ten good deeds”, they can refrain from doing bad things, which will create purity in their mind. And therefore, they can practice with greater ease right in their mind. In the same

⁴³ Dhṛ 133, K.R. Norman (trans.), *Dhammapada [The Word of the Doctrine]*, No. 46, (Oxford: PTS., 1997), p. 21.

⁴⁴ M I 117, Dvedhāvitakka Sutta [Two Kinds of Thoughts] - Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.), *Majjhima Nikāya [The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha]*, (Oxford: PTS., 1995), p. 209.

⁴⁵ M I 117

⁴⁶ S 35, 204, Kiṃsukopama Sutta [The Simile of the Parrot Tree] – Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), *Saṃyutta Nikāya [The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya]*, Vol. 2, No. 47, (Oxford: PTS., 2000), p. 1252.

sense, when we want to make a phone call to anyone, if we can hear an answer from the other side, it means we know on that side, the person is available to answer the call. It means whatever that person does, their knowing of the ear nature is there always, it's easy to know there is a ringing and answer, otherwise we cannot hear anything to answer. It means that the nature of the ear knowing is always there, but are we realize it or not. "When we are awake, the organs work and our knowing nature is bright. When we are asleep, the organs are closed and our knowing nature is vague."⁴⁷

In the verse himself, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông said:

"Living in the work, happy with the Way

You should let all things take their courses.

When hungry, just eat; when tired, just sleep.

The treasure is in your house; don't search anymore.

Face the scenes, and have no thoughts then you don't need to ask for Zen"⁴⁸

Moreover, in addition to "Engaged Buddhism" in a secular life, after becoming a monk and encouraging lay people to practice "ten good deeds", the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông in "*Đắc Thú Lâm Tuyền Thành Đạo Ca*" (A Song of Being Enlightened), Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông reminded monks and nuns living in their monastic life not to forget the main practice in Buddhism, that is both meditating and combining with study and chanting from the scriptures:⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Zen Master Thích Thanh Tu, *Keys to Buddhism*, trans. Thuan Tue, Huyen Bach and Thuy Lien Shutt, (Vietnam: Religious Publishing House, 2008), p. 28.

⁴⁸ Nguyen Giac, *The Way of Zen in Vietnam*, (US: Ananda Viet Foundation, 2020), p. 28.

"Sống đời vui đạo hãy tùy duyên
Hễ đói thì ăn, mệt ngủ liền,
Trong nhà có báu, thôi đừng tìm,
Nhìn cảnh vô tâm, đừng hỏi thiền."

⁴⁹ "Sống yên giữa cảnh lặng lòng không,
Gió mát hiu hiu lọt bóng thông.
Dưới góc, giường thiền, kinh một quyển,
Thanh nhàn hai chữ đáng muôn đồng."

“Living amidst utter peacefulness inside and outside
 Soft breeze gently going through the pines' shades
 Beneath them, meditation bed and a scripture
 Leisure is more precious than ever”

Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was called a “Vietnamese-born Buddhist branch which carrying a lineage that left a significant mark on Vietnamese history.”⁵⁰ This sect was created just for Vietnamese and based on the King’s understanding of Vietnamese characteristics. Therefore, Trúc Lâm Zen Sect contains three main norms:

1. Enlightened wisdom achieved via self-practice and self-realization being a main objective.

2. Molten and mix the essence of the three current Zen Sects in Vietnam at that time together with the Enlightened King’s wisdom.

3. And therefore, appropriate with the Vietnamese characteristics. Expected to become a Trúc Lâm Yên Tử, which is officially considered the Zen of Vietnam.

Being a King of Đại Việt for more than 15 years, Trần Nhân Tông understood the core main problem and the capabilities of Vietnamese people. As mentioned in Diên Hồng Conference in preparation for the second Invasion of Mongols, the King showed how he respected the value of all the people in country.⁵¹ He tried to understand more about the general characteristics of the people. Comparing his position as a King with other people, he overwhelmed all but, being a wise King with a noble attitude to the political and social events,⁵² that is why he understood the importance of the strength of all people. He understood the importance of the collective, nationwide strength as the best way to catalyze

⁵⁰ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 59.

⁵¹ Hoang Thi Tuyet Mai, “King Tran Nhan Tong and Nom Scripts: A Feudal Attitude and Policies Towards the National Language”, *Khuong Viet Journal*, no. 24 (2013).

⁵² Ibid.

the patriotism amongst all the people “*jayam veram pasavati dukkham seti parajito, upasanto sukham seti hitva jayaparajayam.*”⁵³

This is the Buddha’s Teaching about the war while he was residing at the Jetavana monastery, to the King of Kosala who was defeated in three battles by Ajatasattu, his own nephew “*sabbe tasanti danḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno, attānam upamaṁ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye.*”⁵⁴ After ceding the throne to his son King Trần Anh Tông, he lived his monkish life in Yên Tử Mountain and still travelled around the country to support and suggest to his people to live with “ten meritorious actions” or “ten good deeds” as base. It can be said that during the long history of Vietnamese Buddhism, there were many misunderstandings in the main streams and teachings of Buddhism. As a result, the understanding from the Buddha’s Teachings always went awry.

As mentioned in the background of the problems in the first chapter, no one it seemed was capable of restoring Buddhism to teach people in Vietnam, and with the role towards the country and with his influences, Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông wanted to use his own understanding and knowledge to apply as an example first to people, and he wanted to prove the noble aim of Buddhism is to liberating *samsāra*. Nevertheless, he achieved his noble aim, despite not living in a forest or a built temple.⁵⁵

Now, this is the time to demonstrate how efficiently it works to everyone in “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*”.⁵⁶

Part 3

“Keep the light, don’t go astray to the evil way

⁵³ Dhp 201.

⁵⁴ Dhp 129.

⁵⁵ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 67.

⁵⁶ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, trans. Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh, (Taiwan and US, 2015), p. 24.

“Giữ mình sáng, chớ lạc tà đạo,
Sửa mình học, cho phải chính tông.”

Correct yourself, in accordance with the right path”

As disciples of the Buddha, many people only yearn for the supernatural power instead of cultivating and practicing to stay with our ‘true nature’.⁵⁷ They forgot the main aim of the Buddha’s Teaching is to liberate of *akusala-mūla*⁵⁸ and therefore liberate the *samsāra*. However, the main aim to practice now perceived by many was to gain more, which was totally wrong and astray from the Buddha’s original way. The Buddha here, the ‘true nature’ or the ‘Buddha nature’, is always existent within each person but we always try to look outside for the Buddha, to see the Buddha.⁵⁹

Part 5

“So we know, Buddha in the house, no need to search afar

Short of roots, we look for Buddha

Having understood, we are Buddha”⁶⁰

So, the Buddha has always existed here but because of our attachment to the external objects, we cannot realize Him. But, upon understanding that, by looking introspectively, we can realize our Buddha inside. One of the important teachings of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông is mentioned in his poem “Xuân Vãn – Belated Spring”:

“Reflect to the early time without realizing ‘*rūpa*’ and ‘*sunyata*’

⁵⁷ Thích Thanh Từ, *Hai Quãng Đời Của Sơ Tổ Trúc Lâm - The Two Periods of Life of Truc Lam First Patriarch*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 1997), p. 12.

⁵⁸ Three poisons or three unwholesome roots in Buddhism, refer to the three root *kleshas*: *Moha* (delusion, confusion), *Lobha* (greed, sensual attachment), and *Dosa* (aversion, hate). These three poisons are considered to be three afflictions or character flaws innate in a being, the root of *Taṇhā* (craving), and thus in part the cause of *Dukkha* (suffering, pain) and rebirths

⁵⁹ Thích Thanh Từ, *The Two Periods of Life of Truc Lam First Patriarch*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 1997), p. 20.

⁶⁰ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, trans. Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh, (Taiwan and US, 2015), p. 42.

“Vây mới hay, Bụt ở trong nhà, chẳng phải tìm xa
Vì thiếu gốc nên ta tìm Bụt,
Hiểu tới rồi, Bụt chính là ta.”

Still bustling with the spring
 Since realize what is the reality of spring goddess
 Sitting on the grass in temple see the falling petals.”⁶¹

Through this poem, the King explained his understanding in Zen. The moment he self-reflected, awakened and analyzed what was real and unreal, right or wrong instead of ending up with adjustments in form or formless in both verbal and actions.⁶² When he didn't realize the ultimate truth, he still admitted the outside world was real, then let his own feelings respond to that. He forgot that his own 'Buddha nature' within is the real face which is always existing. And, due to pursuing the unreal, he could not tame his mind. But the moment he already realized his 'true nature', then whatever happened externally would not bother him as in Thiên our 'true mind'.⁶³ This is to say that the philosophy of Thiên is about “reflect the spirit *tự lực* (self-reliance) and *tùy duyên* (pratyaya or direct cause)”⁶⁴, meaning that the 'Buddha nature' is the gem contained within each human being.

Motto of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect has been recovered since 13th C and spread in 20th C until now by The Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ: realizing the external-sense objects,⁶⁵ are just contemporary because “all things which are created from

⁶¹ Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Đỗ Văn Hỷ, Trần Thị Băng Thanh and Phạm Tú Châu, *Thơ-Văn Lý Trần – Lý Trần Dynasty's Poems and Literatures*, Vol. 2, (Hanoi: Science and Society Publisher, 1988), p. 463.

“Thuở trẻ chưa từng hiểu rõ “sắc” với “không”
 Mỗi lần xuân đến vẫn gửi lòng trong trăm hoa,
 Ngày nay đã khám phá được bộ mặt chúa xuân,
 Ngồi trên nệm cỏ giữa tám phần nhà chùa ngắm cánh hoa rụng.”

⁶² Hồ Tấn Nguyễn Minh, “Con Người Trí Tuệ Trong Thơ Trần Nhân Tông – a Wise Man in Trần Nhân Tông's Poem”, *Journal of Science HCMC National University of Education*, No. 49 (2013): 87-94.

⁶³ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông Với Thiền Phái Trúc Lâm - Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 6.

⁶⁴ Bui Thi Thu Thuy, “Analytical Study of the Way of The Practice of Truc Lam Zen School in Vietnam”, (Master's thesis, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2017), p. 70.

⁶⁵ form or formless.

conditions do not have solid or real nature”, they are empty or conditioned associated.⁶⁶ When all conditions merge, it is called “born” and when those conditions are ununited, it is called “die”. Those “born” and die” has no real nature. When practicing with a wisdom, we can realize those are unreal or the illusions like bubbles on the water. This is also the answer of Zen Master Tsung-mi: “Knowing illusions is practicing” once he was asked how to practice Zen.⁶⁷

4.2 The Process of Propagating Zen Buddhism in Modern Time

In this part, the most important thing is to distinguish the difference lifestyle of the past with that of modern life. According to Lê Xuân Khải, this century is one during which humans need to confront the huge changes in economies, politics, society and religions. Those huge changes are the main causes for us to change the perspective, behavior and living style.⁶⁸ As the lifestyle keeps changing, the perspective to receive or to approach the Zen Buddhism accordingly changes. However, Thiền is not about the name associated with it, rather is about the enlightened ‘Buddha nature’. Consequently, the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông created this Zen Sect based upon not the organization or the languages but on his very own enlightened mind and own practice. That is why Thiền is a living style, a vitality and the source to develop Thiền⁶⁹ through centuries.

4.2.1 Buddhism in Modern Living Style

Although Buddhism in Vietnam spent most of its time under the difficulties from war and other religions in Vietnam, the religion “Buddhism still resurrected as a squall that could carry it all the way because Buddhism is already practiced in the hearts of the

⁶⁶ Thích Thanh Từ, *Keys to Buddhism*, trans. Thuan Tue, Huyen Bach and Thuy Lien Shutt, (Vietnam: Religious Publishing House, 2008), p. 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶⁸ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Lê Xuân Khải), *Phật Giáo Nhập Thế và Các Vấn Đề Xã Hội Đương Đại - Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 365.

⁶⁹ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 12.

people.”⁷⁰ Also, in this modern life, the term “non-harm” or *ahimsa* and its main purpose remain consistent and widely applied. This is how world peace should be based on and developed. The notion that Buddhism is passive is based on misinformation. According to a Thai scholar: “Many people, particularly in the West, think that Buddhism is only for deep meditation and personal transformation, that it has nothing to do with society. This is not true. Particularly in South and Southeast Asia, for many centuries Buddhism has been a great strength for society.”⁷¹

Sentient beings, or humans keep on seeking both material and physical life in accordance to their belief and this is considered a need.⁷² And two main keys of Buddhism need to be clearly stated in this modern life according to “釋覺培法師,”⁷³ first matter being making sure that even in modern life, people will not misinterpret Buddha’s Teachings, and secondly the need to apply the teachings appropriately and timely.⁷⁴ Moreover, Buddhism is not only a political and social thought, but in this modern time Buddhism is a philosophical and cultural perspective which is a spiritual and cultural resource to develop individuals for a better development of the society.⁷⁵ The main purpose of the Buddha’s Teachings for all sentient beings is to liberate the *samsāra*. *Samsāra* discussed here is not a faraway place that we need to search for, *samsāra* exists ever inside our mind enabling us to feel peaceful, mindful and calm. When our mind is peaceful and calm, we have no thinking and worrying, and thus we will be mindful. And when we are mindful, we know what are the good things to do and avoid doing bad things. Whatever bad things are avoided, you will always feel calm and peaceful, and *samsāra* is always there.

⁷⁰ Tran Thi Kim Hoa, “Zen Buddhism in Vietnam”, *International Journal of Science and Research*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (September 2019): 2319-7064.

⁷¹ Karma Lekshe Tsomo (eds.), *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, (USA: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 81.

⁷² Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: A Blueprint for Life*, trans. John Balcom, (USA: Buddha’s Light Publications, 2003), p. 75.

⁷³ Thích Giác Bôi: secretary-general of China Engaged Buddhism Association.

⁷⁴ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (釋覺培法師), *Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 32.

⁷⁵ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Nguyễn Phạm Hùng), *Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 328.

Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh⁷⁶ agrees the same meaning of happiness is to introduce to the people in the West technical manners by applying vipassana practice in their daily life in order to be happy additionally to their financial and educational issues. “Mindfulness is at the same time a mean and an end, the seed and fruit.”⁷⁷ Happiness is not so far away but happiness is right here and right now when we are mindful.

As mentioned in “*Khóa Hư Lục*” (Instructions on Emptiness) written by King Trần Thái Tông, once he escaped the palace to Yên Tử Mountain to become a monk to search for freedom from suffering and happiness, he was taught by Yên Tử Sect Patriarch that: “there is no Buddha in the mountain, the Buddha is right here inside your mind. If you can realize whenever your mind is calm, that is called ‘Buddha mind’ or ‘true mind’. If you can realize that mind, the Buddha exists, you don’t have to search any places far away.”⁷⁸ Whenever we can recognize our calmness in mind, we are liberated from suffering. That’s how Buddhism explains and teaches us to search for real happiness since ancient times until now.

4.2.2 The Propagating Process

According to Professor Lê Mạnh Thát, Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was originated from Thảo Đường Zen Sect, but to qualify as being founded, Trúc Lâm had to admit the essence from the past, and summarized the new contributions at the current time.⁷⁹ It means that, to form a unique Zen technique for his people, the King had to collect, analyze and practice

⁷⁶ He was a monk in 1942 at the age of sixteen. In 1950s, he joined actively in engagement to renew the Vietnamese Buddhist which is called “Engaged Buddhism”. He is nominated the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967 for a peace activist. Because of this, he was not allowed to come back to Vietnam, beginning his 39 years exiled. In 1983, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh established Plum Village which is developed strongly in teaching and guiding people how to be mindful in daily life activities applied by the teaching of the Buddha in Mahātipaṭṭhānasutta. He is well-known as ‘*the father of mindfulness in the West.*’

⁷⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practise of Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho, (USA: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, 1995-1996), p. 14.

⁷⁸ Trần Thái Tông, *Khóa Hư Lục – Instruction on Emptiness*, expounded. Thích Thanh Từ, (Vietnam: Thường Chiếu Monastery, 1996), p. 5.

⁷⁹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 206.

all the various techniques of Zen to come up with the best practice. The most appropriate teaching was “Engaged Buddhism” from Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông and “he himself an ideological element.”⁸⁰ The word “Engaged Buddhism” appeared in the early 20th century was also called “Humanistic Buddhism”. By this meaning, Buddhism is considered a spiritual belief leading people in this world for a better beneficial life.⁸¹ Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh states that, “Engaged Buddhism” means to apply the Buddha’s Teachings in life according to the suitable practical ways to lead people for a better life. This is also the main purpose of “Engaged Buddhism.”⁸²

The practicing and propagating “Engagement in the world while Embracing the Dharma’ in Buddhism⁸³ by the King evidentiates that he was not only a Bodhisatva way of the religious world but a very respected person in secular life. Looking at the ways Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông propagated Zen, we could understand the connotations associated to him such as “*hòa quang đồng trần*” or can be said “Buddha stays in the secular world”. And “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*” demonstrates the basic idea of “Engaged Buddhism”⁸⁴ of the King:

Part 1

“Sitting in the city, living the mountain way.

All movements settling down, True Nature is at rest;

meditating half a day, body and mind are tranquil.

⁸⁰ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 65.

⁸¹ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Lại Quốc Khánh), *Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 349.

⁸² Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Đạo Phật Đi Vào Cuộc Đời - Engaged Buddhism*, (Saigon: La Boi Publisher 1964), p. 41.

⁸³ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiền Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, (Doctor’s Dissertation, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 86.

⁸⁴ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Lại Quốc Khánh), *Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 356.

Greed sources stop, no more desire for previous jewelry Quarreling voices quiet down,
I freely listen to the birds...”⁸⁵

The King lives in the palace, and yet his mind behaves as if living in the forest. Simple and not attached to the secular world.⁸⁶ The King’s perspective can be seen as an influence from his teacher Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ because he “became religious without entering a pagoda but had a vast knowledge of Buddhism.”⁸⁷ Based on the history and literature works, “Engaged Buddhism” of King Trần Nhân Tông is the manifestation of love of a Buddhist follower to the country and the people.⁸⁸

Furthermore, Professor Lê Mạnh Thát stated that, Buddhist devotees under King Trần Nhân Tông did not leave behind the main aim of their life, that is to find a way to liberate through their own secular life.⁸⁹ As a King of a country, with lots of work dealing with people, anytime Trần Nhân Tông stayed inside the forest to practice, he fully understood the importance of the connection between individuals and communities or society. Without society, the individuals cannot be alive and develop, and vice versa, without individuals the society cannot be formed and developed. As a consequence, the inter-connection and cooperation between these factors become the most important for the King to write “*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú*”, a way of living in the society while following the Buddha way to realize the ‘Buddha nature’ with “Living in the work, happy with the Way.”

⁸⁵ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh (trans.), p. 11.

“*Mình ngồi thành thị, nét dựng sơn lâm,
Muôn nghiệp lặng im nhân thể tính, nửa ngày thiền tự tại thân tâm.
Nguồn tham ái ngừng, chẳng còn nhớ châu yêu ngọc quý,
Tiếng thị phi lặng, tha hồ nghe yến hót oanh ngâm.*”

⁸⁶ Thích Thanh Từ, *The Two Periods of Life of Truc Lam First Patriarch*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 1997), p. 8.

⁸⁷ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 102.

⁸⁸ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Lại Quốc Khánh), *Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 356.

⁸⁹ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 221.

From what that had been established under the Trần Dynasty, Thiền Trúc Lâm set up a start for a new and real Vietnamese Buddhism, one which enhances the important role and influence of Buddhism in Vietnamese.⁹⁰ This is a way to prove that Thiền can be applied widely both in lay life and in monastic life. Thiền is said not to be found in the suttas, any paper documents or languages, rather practicing Thiền means enlightening the mind.⁹¹ All the necessary practice is about realizing ‘Buddha nature’, not about where you live. Once we realize that the ‘Buddha nature’ has always existed and been considered the only truth, external factors are only something unreal.

Moreover, according to the King, Thiền became new anytime it was mentioned. Buddhism and Thiền need to keep changing in order to be relevant with each era’s developments.⁹² The newness does not rest upon the way of teaching, rather on how the teaching is applied. When saying new, it does mean that it can be applied in each of our actions, even when we are working, when we are eating and even when we are doing personal activities. Thiền does not exclusivize itself to monks and nuns who can realize the “Buddha nature” but lay Buddhists can as King Trần Thái Tông⁹³ and Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ are the very samples.⁹⁴ In the very last verse, King Trần Nhân Tông said:

Part 10

“Living in the world, joyful in the way,
let’s go with the causation flow.

⁹⁰ Trần Nhân Tông Institute (Thích Thiện Nhơn), *Humanistic Buddhism and Contemporary Social Issues*, (Vietnam: Hanoi National University Publication, 2018), p. 22.

⁹¹ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹³ He is the husband of Lý Chiêu Hoàng (Lý dynasty’s Queen) in a marriage arranged by his uncle Trần Thủ Độ and received the crown from his wife. He led the victorious war of 1258 against Yuan-Mongol invaders, then abdicated in favor of his son Trần Thánh Tông and became a monk as a Zen Master and well-known for realizing his “Buddha nature”. Author of *Khóa Hư Lục* (Treatise on Nothingness).

⁹⁴ Thích Thanh Từ, *Ba Vấn Đề Trọng Đại Trong Đời Tu Của Tôi – The Most Three Important Matters in My Monk Life*, (Vietnam: Hanoi Publisher, 1998).

When hungry, eat. When sleepy, sleep;

Jewels in the home, search no more.

Facing things, no mind why asks for Zen.”⁹⁵

The ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘true nature’ manifest all in the daily activities, do not search far away. Wherever we are living, whatever we are doing, they are *pratyaya* (indirect cause – *tùy duyên*). Feeling hungry, just eat and feeling sleepy, just sleep without thinking or looking for an excuse to postpone.⁹⁶ When we follow the Dhamma without judgement, we finally find our brightest pearl in our mind – the ‘true nature’ always existing. All the activities such as eating or sleeping without attachment and dominating by the external objects, that is Thiên.⁹⁷ y saying this verse, King Trần Nhân Tông tried to encourage monks, nuns and lay people that with a strong heart to practice, even staying in forest, monastery or in the city, everyone can achieve enlightenment.⁹⁸

A second point as taught by King Trần Nhân Tông is the contribution of each individual to the country and the “ten meritorious actions” in daily life, ones which were considered the “foundation of social virtue”⁹⁹ in which building a temple is highlighted as the contribution to the country. Since the whole country had to stand up to fight for freedom from the Mongol Invasion in 1285 and 1288, King Trần Nhân Tông understood the characteristics of his people. The people were willing to sacrifice themselves for the country. Therefore, teaching them to build the temple around the country is said to be the most suitable deed as a Buddhist as well because at that time religion was important as the

⁹⁵ Trúc Lâm Đầu Đà (King Trần Nhân Tông), *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú - Living in The World, Joyful in The Way*, Nguyen Huu Vinh and Tran Dinh Hoanh (trans.), p. 94.

⁹⁶ Thích Thanh Từ, *The Two Periods of Life of Truc Lam First Patriarch*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 1997), p. 84.

⁹⁷ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 15.

⁹⁸ Loan Thuy Nguyen, “New Buddhist Movements, and the Construction of Mythos: The Trúc Lâm Thiên Sect in Late 20th Century Vietnam”, *Doctor’s Dissertation*, Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, 2019), p. 67.

⁹⁹ Minh Chi, Hà Văn Tấn and Nguyễn Tài Thư, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: World Publisher, 1999), p. 108.

moral support for the country.¹⁰⁰ As a result, building temples and doing good deeds can be applied widely in this modern time as this is also mentioned as a strong foundation for a religion in Vietnam.

4.2.3 Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ's Application

Trúc Lâm Zen Sect was strongly developed and flourished under the Trần Dynasty until the decline in 1400 caused partly by Hồ Quý Ly.¹⁰¹ This time it was the time of the 3rd patriarch of Trúc Lâm Zen Sect – Huyền Quang and his's Demise, Zen was slowly taken place by Confucianism until the 20th Century recovery by The Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ and now flourished as the official Buddhism in Vietnam.

The Most Venerable Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ mentioned in his book “The Most Three Important Matters in My Monk Life” that the best from the patriarchs would be best studied and applied but at the same time needed to be flexible to suitably uphold in this modern time.¹⁰² Therefore, Thiền's teaching now from Trúc Lâm Zen Sect can be called “new-normal Thiền”. The expression “modern Thiền” or “new-normal Thiền” refers to the ways of applying and techniques because “Thiền mainly focuses on the ‘true nature’ or ‘Buddha nature’ or called ‘Dharmakaya’ – the priceless gem”.¹⁰³ And the ‘true mind’ is always ‘true mind’ without old or new form.

Thiền has been passed down for more than 710 years since Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông and was known as a combination of the previous teachings of three

¹⁰⁰ Lê Mạnh Thát, *Complete Works of Trần Nhân Tông*, 3rd Edition., (Vietnam: HCMC Publisher, 2010), p. 220.

¹⁰¹ 胡季犛 (1336 - ?) ruled Đại Ngu (Vietnam) from 1400 to 1401 as the founder of the short-lived Hồ Dynasty. Hồ Quý Ly was an official in the court and a military general under the Trần Dynasty to fight against Cham (1367-1390). After his military defeat in the Ming Conquest of Đại Ngu (1406–1407), he and his son were captured as prisoners and were exiled to China, while the Đại Việt kingdom became the 13th province of Ming Empire.

¹⁰² Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen Sect at the Late 20th C.*, (Vietnam: Phuong Dong Publisher, 1998), p. 59.

¹⁰³ Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen at the End of the 20th Century*, trans. Toàn Kiến, (Vietnam: Trúc Lâm Zen Monastery, 2002), p. 14.

patriarchs Hui Ke,¹⁰⁴ Hui Neng¹⁰⁵ and Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông.¹⁰⁶ These are all the Zen Buddhism's essence, then selected and refined after a long history of teaching Zen around China and Vietnam. After realizing and practicing, Zen Master insisted the main practice be now applied in all monasteries in Vietnam of which consists of four main features:¹⁰⁷

1. Recognize the wandering thoughts and let them go.
2. Realize the external six-sense objects are just temporary.
3. Don't be stuck in the dualism because it is unreal.
4. Face the reality, but don't follow the unreal things because the unreal world is *samsāra*, and the real is Nibbāna.

Among them, the first way of practicing is the basic way to teach the beginners. Because our mind always manifests something which distracts us to see our 'Buddha nature', all those wandering thoughts are just illusory thoughts and unreal. And, when our minds are distracted with thoughts during practicing meditation, the minds cannot be at peace and always considers those thoughts are real.¹⁰⁸ "When understanding clearly what

¹⁰⁴ **Dazu Huike** (487–593), Chinese: 大祖慧可, Chinese Chán and the twenty-ninth since Gautama Buddha. The successor to Bodhidharma.

¹⁰⁵ **Dajian Huineng** (traditional Chinese: 大鑿惠能; February 27, 638 – August 28, 713), also commonly known as the Sixth Patriarch or Sixth Ancestor of Chan. According to tradition he was an uneducated layman who suddenly attained awakening upon hearing the Diamond Sutra. Despite his lack of formal training, he demonstrated his understanding to the fifth patriarch, Daman Hongren, who then supposedly chose Hui Neng as his true successor instead of his publicly known selection of Yuquan Shenxiu.

Hui Neng is regarded as the founder of the "Sudden Enlightenment" Southern Chan school of Buddhism, which focuses on an immediate and direct attainment of Buddhist enlightenment. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (六祖壇經), which is said to be a record of his teachings, is a highly influential text in the East Asian Buddhist tradition.

¹⁰⁶ Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen Sect at the Late 20th C.* (Vietnam: Phuong Dong Publisher, 1998), pp. 46 – 61.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60 – 61.

¹⁰⁸ Thích Thanh Từ, *Keys to Buddhism*, trans. Thuan Tue, Huyen Bach and Thuy Lien Shutt, (Vietnam: Religious Publishing House, 2008), p. 52.

is false, we can realize what is true and right”.¹⁰⁹ This is a practical way to tame the “monkey mind”. Therefore, practicing recognizing the wandering thoughts and letting them go immediately without interfering on those are to clear the clouds of illusory to realize the real ‘Buddha nature’ then “no longer be attracted to the false.”¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ stated that “mistaking the false for the true and forgetting the eternal absolute truth is ignorance.”¹¹¹ The ‘true nature’ or ‘Buddha nature’ is congenital existing in each sentient being, which is only to realize but “not created nor achieved through practicing.”¹¹² To practice Thiền, “we must be aware that our thoughts and emotions are not real.”¹¹³ Yet, the above features were mentioned to lead the people to apply in their daily life which are not so far away or too high to understand. It must also depend on the capability of each practitioner to apply in various ways.

Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông’s way of teaching is now applied and renewed in a practical way by Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ in the 20th century. Zen or Thiền is known to be applied not only in the monastic life but also all life activities. The teaching of mediation is about practicing “Precept (*sīla*), Concentration (*samādhi*) and Wisdom (*paññā*)”, and Thiền is one method of practicing to “maintain both wisdom and concentration at the same time.”¹¹⁴ For example, while cutting vegetables, while doing exercise or doing anything in our daily life we can practice Thiền.

There are many ways to practice but what is important is to focus on realizing the ‘true mind’ or ‘Buddha nature’ as real and ultimate. And, through eating, sleeping,

¹⁰⁹ Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen at the End of the 20th Century*, trans. Toàn Kiến, (Vietnam: Trúc Lâm Zen Monastery, 2002), p. 14.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Thích Thanh Từ, *Keys to Buddhism*, trans. Thuan Tue, Huyen Bach and Thuy Lien Shutt, (Vietnam: Religious Publishing House, 2008), p. 51.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen at the End of the 20th Century*, trans. Toàn Kiến, (Vietnam: Trúc Lâm Zen Monastery, 2002), p. 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

working and all activities without greed and discrimination from the external objects,¹¹⁵ this is *Thiền* or ‘true mind.’¹¹⁶ And, if our mind was trained well, we are able to see things outside “without discrimination, evaluation, deluded thinking or thoughts. And after acquiring ‘primary knowledge’¹¹⁷ we don’t acquire more and more knowledge, we will attain the ‘Bodhi mind’ or *Nibbāna*.”¹¹⁸ The *Nibbāna* is achieved when we are able to realize the ‘Buddha nature’ which is unchanging and cannot be harmed or extinguished from anything.¹¹⁹ The Buddha’s Teaching is not about living in a monastery but also about “Engaged Buddhism” and with the true mind of practicing, everyone can achieve the ultimate reality which is existing within each human being.

4.3 Concluding remarks

To conclude this chapter, the researcher would like to express the respect to a Great King and an Enlightened Zen Master *Trần Nhân Tông* for what he did for the country and Vietnamese people. His teaching cannot be measured by the languages but need to practice sincerely to understand our ‘Buddha nature’.¹²⁰ However, as for the benefits of the practitioners, many Zen Masters and Buddhist scholars in Vietnam searched and studied the King’s life and teaching. Originally from the Buddha’s Teaching, passed through Indian patriarchs, Chinese patriarchs to Vietnam by the Enlightened King through 710 years and ongoing, Zen is still alive and extended to all the Vietnamese people to practice according to the Vietnamese characteristics. Even though the methods can be taught in

¹¹⁵ The discrimination after chasing the sense objects is the root of deluded mind.

¹¹⁶ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 15.

¹¹⁷ Primary knowledge contents differentiation without discrimination. Differentiation means perceives the different objects in various phenomena. For example, the house is different with the dog, or the tree is different with the rock. differentiate means seeing the objects as they are without any attachments or judgements.

¹¹⁸ Thích Thanh Từ, *Vietnamese Zen Sect at the Late 20th C*, (Vietnam: Phuong Dong Publisher, 1998), p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Thích Thanh Từ, *Keys to Buddhism*, trans. Thuan Tue, Huyen Bach and Thuy Lien Shutt, (Vietnam: Religious Publishing House, 2008), p. 55.

¹²⁰ Thích Thông Phương, *Trần Nhân Tông and Trúc Lâm Zen Sect*, (Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2006), p. 18.

various ways which are appropriate in this era, the basic and main practice is realizing the 'Buddha nature' or 'true mind' in each person. The 'Buddha nature' is not any places far away to look for, but it exists always in our mind if we sincerely practice enough to realize. With a deep respect to the Buddha, Buddhism, Patriarchs and the King, Vietnamese people are now gaining the teaching and practicing Dhamma to get a better life, considered to be a contribution for the development of a country individually and the human realm as a whole.

Chapter V

Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Conclusion on the Problems

After researching the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông's life, the researcher, like many in the young generation they belong to, acknowledges as much as becomes grateful for the maturity and clarity earned from the King. Furthermore, based upon the King's teachings and the studies conducted on his legacy until now, Vietnamese people could gain a better understanding of what Buddha's Teaching really is. In place of believing in the impossibly magic or unreal saints, they can learn from their own practice and recognize the real and unreal phenomena occurring in and outside of the mind.

5.1.2 The Importance of The Role and Influence of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông

Not only Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông, but also King Trần Thái Tông and King Trần Thánh Tông can essentially be the role models of all Vietnamese people and Vietnamese Buddhist followers, most especially the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông for his post-bellum legacy spanning across multiple aspects including economics, education, society and spiritual practices. Owing to the King's deep understanding and Dhamma practice across his own life, the country was successfully rebuilt under his reign before and after warfare's with the Mongols. With his love, in pursuance of the Buddha's Teaching, towards his own people as his own children, and as a Zen Master embracing sentient beings as his own family members, the Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông is the epitome of powerful and beautiful teaching of loving kindness, peace and respect paid to Buddha's Teaching.

5.1.3 The Practical Way of Learning and Teaching of Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông

Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông's life and career can be said to be those of not only a great King but also an excellent Zen Master. Throughout his life, despite the majority of his time being spent for the country and the people, he had never forgotten the noble purpose as a disciple of the Buddha – learning and practicing Dhamma to follow the Buddha's path. Furthermore, the Enlightened King's purpose did not stop at self-liberation but for all the people to practice and liberate themselves. As a result, “Engaged Buddhism” is widely applied as a way of life, “sitting in the city, living in the mountain way”. However, the roles and influences of both his royal grandfather and father – King Trần Thái Tông and King Trần Thánh Tông and his master - Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ should be greatly acknowledged as they offered the King the first steps to understand Buddhism since his childhood, from the scriptures as well as from the daily teaching and their conversations.

Through all of these, we come to understand that the main practice is about “reflect inwardly to see your own essence of you, do not follow other ways”, showing the importance of realizing ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘true nature’. If we can realize our ‘Buddha nature’, the external objects cannot distract our mind. This approach seemed to have considerably affected the King's life and practice. Therefore, his teaching is applied as a learning technique and Zen practice under the Trần Dynasty.

5.1.4 Process of Propagating Zen Buddhism in Modern Time

Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông's teaching should be best experienced and evaluated beyond the linguistic constraints, and thus through sheer commitment and honesty in the practice in order to better comprehend our ‘Buddha nature’. However, to be easier to be adopted and explained to followers and practitioners, many Zen masters and Buddhist scholars edited and expounded based on the Enlightened King's life and career. The Enlightened King's teaching 710 years ago originated from the Buddha's Teaching, was passed through Indian patriarchs, Chinese patriarchs to Vietnam in order to be taught, applied and expanded now in observance of the Vietnamese characteristics. Even though

the methods apply in various ways, the basic and main practice is to realize the ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘true mind’ in each person. With a deep respect to the Buddha, Buddhism, the Patriarchs and the Enlightened King, Vietnamese people are now gaining the teaching and practicing Dhamma to get a better life, which is considered to be contributory for the development of a country in particular and the human race as a whole.

5.1.5 Application of ‘Thiền Trúc Lâm’ by Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ

Through many years of self-practice and recognition the motto of Thiền, Zen Master Thích Thanh Từ recovered and renounced Trúc Lâm Zen Sect – Enlightened King Trần Nhân Tông’s way of teaching - in a practical way to apply in all monasteries in Vietnam and his disciples’ arounds the world in modern time since 20th C. He mentioned four main features to practice:

1. Recognize the wandering thoughts and let them go.
2. Realize the external six-sense objects are just temporary.
3. Don’t be stuck in dualism, because it is unreal.
4. Face the reality, but don’t follow the unreal things because the unreal world is *samsāra*, and the real is Nibbāna.

These four ways of practicing Thiền are mentioned and taught by different ways, but the ‘Buddha nature’ or the ‘true mind’ is what the practitioners need to recognize as the Enlightened King’s teaching. Besides, to recognize the difference between the host and the guest will lead the practitioners to clear all the illustrious minds which always distract the ‘true mind’. Zen or Thiền is known to be applied not only in the monastic life but also all secular life’s daily activities. And, through eating, sleeping, working and all other activities without greed and discrimination from the external objects, it is ‘Thiền’ or ‘Zen’. The Buddha’s Teaching is not about living in a monastery: it is about “Engaged Buddhism” and with a genuine mind dedicated to practice, everyone can achieve the ultimate reality which is existing within each human being.

5.2 Suggestion

5.2.1 Suggestion for Application to Daily Life

One of the encouragements to practice from the Enlightened King in his current time is about “ten good deeds – *thập thiện*”. As mentioned, Zen Buddhism or ‘Thiền’ teaching is about realizing the ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘true nature’ existing right inside each human without the need to look for it elsewhere. It is also about “Engaged Buddhism”, the recognition that every human being is equal in the society and in this world, in order to be able to heal all the conflicts and to create a peaceful world. Also, “ten good deeds” practice is taught and the application from the Enlightened King himself about the great compassion, loving kindness should be practiced to bring a peaceful, respectful and better life to everyone. This practice is for everyone everywhere. Therefore, if everyone can practice loving kindness and do the good deeds, the social issues such as human trafficking, domestic violence and wealth gap would no longer exist.

Furthermore, recently, most of “Trúc Lâm” monasteries and nunneries across Vietnam organize at least one-day or five-day retreat once a month for lay people who would like to practice ‘Thiền’. These retreats are organized for both elders and young children and the youth alike to join. Practicing ‘Thiền’ here is a first step to practice how to return to our mind and reflect what is good and bad based on the five precepts (*pañca sīla*) as the Buddha’s Teaching. As long as we can realize the bad and good deeds, we can avoid harming people and other sentient beings, which leads to a peaceful and happy life for all. Consequently, when the “five precepts” can be practiced effectively, our mind will be strong enough to find the ‘Buddha nature’ and pave us the way to liberation from attachments and *samsāra*.

Nevertheless, practicing ‘Thiền’ needs to focus on mind cultivation. Through the study of the Enlightened King’s life, he was running the country and practicing at the same time. We can apply it in our own daily activities, not restricting to sitting meditation. Everything happening outside our ‘true mind’ is unreal. For example, when seeing someone walking, we know that someone is walking, do not let your mind judge or guess

where that person is going. In this example, walking is the real, the seeing is the real but all the judgements created from the illusory mind, and therefore are unreal. The very instance we recognize that our mind is judging and guessing, we stop and come back to our ‘true mind’. So, we can slowly practice realizing only the “seeing” when we can see anything, or the “hearing” when we can hear anything or the “knowing” without judging or attaching to the “seen objects” and “heard objects”. Because only the “seeing” or “hearing” or the “knowing” is real and it always exists in our ‘true nature’. Therefore, in daily life, when we hear anyone say any bad things toward us, we try to practice to know that the “hearing” is there but not “what we heard” without attaching on those heard. By this practice, we can apply and practice whatever we are doing, studying or working. Day by day cultivating and realizing the ‘Buddha nature’, we can avoid attaching to the unreal external objects. That is how ‘Thiền’ can help to keep our mind peaceful.

5.2.2 Suggestion for Further Research

Even though the researcher has been relatively satisfied with the study on this research entitled: “An Analytical Study of The Role and Influence of The Great King Zen Master Trần Nhân Tông in Propagating Zen Buddhism in Vietnam,” there should be more improvements:

1) Spreading the boundary of the study over the country and outside Vietnam. This research is based largely on the Vietnamese people who are living across Vietnam only and is demonstrative of the characteristics and the life of the country of Vietnam from 710 years ago until now.

2) Increase the scope of the resource. The resources of this research are mainly the Mahayana Buddhist scriptures in Classical Chinese and Vietnamese texts and books. These are the limitations for those who are not living in Vietnam and foreigners who are searching and knowledgeable about practicing Zen Buddhism. This is also a limitation to spread out the teaching to the non-Vietnamese speaking people.

3) Applying more methods of analysis. The analysis method used in this research is done most on document analysis. There is a difference in time and therefore there is a difference in the living style of people, so if there are more methods used it would make this research more reliable and more appropriate. These methods should include the interview by both “face to face” or “cold calling”, surveys conducted both online and offline, questionnaires given to random samples to the ones who are masters in this teaching in modern life.

This research has been done with certain limitations which perhaps further research can remove in order to improve the findings’ reliability. Therefore, the researcher would like to list the issues for those who would like to conduct further study in this field:

1. A study of the importance and influence of Zen Buddhism in the Vietnamese society to improve the spirituality of Vietnamese in the new era.
2. A study on the background and development of Vietnamese Buddhism.
3. A study on how Zen Buddhism or ‘Thiền Trúc Lâm’ can be adopted and applied by Western practitioners.

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