

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIFT

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 DUƠNG THỊ THU HÀ. *Zen culture in
 social life in Vietnam today*

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Zen in Vietnam was associated with Tran dynasty. When Tran dynasty gradually lost its political role, Zen also faded. However, Zen has recently tended to resurrect with local and international influences. Zen has become a bridge connecting Vietnam culture to the world.

Zen is a school of Buddhism, which consists of a system of material and spiritual culture elements expressing the thoughts of Zen which are accumulated and passed on in the formation and development history of this school. Zen culture arises as a symbol of Vietnam's Buddhist culture, which enriches Vietnamese identity. Apart from contributions in ideology, Zen also has impact on literature, arts, architecture, and Vietnamese lifestyle. Therefore, researching Zen from the view of culture is a need in the course of developing an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity. For those reasons, the dissertation on *Zen culture in current social life in Vietnam* by doctoral candidate Dương Thị Thu Hà is significantly practical.

In addition to Introduction, Conclusion, References and Chapter 1 which provides an overview of research background and theological basis, the main content of the dissertation is presented in 3 chapters (from Chapter 2 to Chapter 4).

Chapter 2. Vietnamese Zen and Vietnamese Zen culture

There were three main Zen sects which appeared earlier than Trúc Lâm - Yên Tử zen sect, a predecessor of Vietnamese Zen, including: Vinītaruci zen sect (introduced to Vietnam in the late 6th century), and Wu Yantong Zen sect (introduced to Vietnam in the early 9th century), and Thảo Đường Zen sect (introduced to Vietnam in the 11th century). Although they were introduced to Vietnam at different time, all the three Zen sects lasted for long term and influenced one another. Later on, Trần Nhân Tông (the First Patriarch of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam) founded Trúc Lâm Yên Tử from the quintessence of the three Zen sects. The birth of Trúc Lâm Yên Tử marked a particularly important milestone, creating a great turning point for the development of Buddhism in Vietnam in general and Zen Buddhism in particular, which is moving from the Zen Buddhism in Vietnam, i.e. Zen introduced into Vietnam, to Zen Buddhism of Vietnam, i.e. Zen founded by the Vietnamese. After the First Patriarch, Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa could be considered as the Second Patriarch of Trúc Lâm Yên Tử. The Third Patriarch of the Trúc Lâm sect is Huyền Quang. In the 7th century, Zen Master Hương Hải had a major influence on Vietnamese Zen Buddhism; in the 18th century, it was Ngô Thì Nhậm. Currently, Vietnamese Zen Buddhism has inherited and promoted good philosophy by the three Patriarchs of Trúc Lâm. Among many Zen masters who followed the spirit of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism,

the most notably are Thích Thanh Từ and Thích Nhất Hạnh.

Vietnamese Zen Buddhism is the result of cultural exchanges and acculturation among Vietnam - India - China. Vietnamese Zen Buddhism carried the ideology of Indian and Chinese Buddhism, at the same time, inherited indigenous culture, which then acculturated and developed its own. This formed a Buddhism sect of the Vietnamese which went in line with national traditions on one hand, and was "suitable" for the era on the other hand.

The ideology of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism reflects both the spirit of Zen Buddhism and the specific characteristics of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam. Vietnamese Zen Buddhism both carries the thought of Zen Buddhism as "good will as Buddha are in your heart" and "changing attitude to become Buddha" and its own characteristics, i.e. national features and incarnation spirit. Besides the consistency, Vietnamese Zen culture also expresses the diversity in terms of space, subjects of creativity and cultural beneficiaries, and forms of expressions.

In the history, Zen culture played the role of establishing ideology associated with the awareness of national independence; contributing to the maintenance of political stability, promoting the value of religious ethics to govern the country. Zen culture also contributed to the formation of national identity, mainly through ideology, literature, and pagodas associated with Trúc Lâm Yên Tử. Zen culture has become a focal point, contributing to strengthening and raising awareness of community links.

The value of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism contributes to the life form which is

necessary for the civilized society that we aim for. In many manifestation forms of Vietnamese Zen culture, Vietnamese Zen literature seems to be the most expressive form. Meditation-driven compositions make people to face themselves, the reality, and to overcome all forms of dogma to realize the truth of life. That literature school is still flowing from the past to the present with divers forms and styles.

Chapter 3: Influences of Zen culture in current social life in Vietnam

Zen culture contributes to the sense of self-reliance; promotes the spirit of democracy, equality, charity. The idea of "good will as Buddha are in your heart" and "changing attitude to become Buddha" and the spirit of incarnation create equality for all people, in the spirit of cooperation, looking towards the peaceful humanity.

Zen culture contributes to the preservation of national cultural identity. Meditation activities at the Trúc Lâm Zen Monasteries help the national Zen sect and its values to be maintained and promoted in the society. Morality and lifestyle of Zen are characterized by practicality, simplicity, flexibility, optimism, kindness, peace in accordance with traditions, morals, the thought and behavior of the Vietnamese people. This creates a special appearance for Buddhist culture in particular and national culture in general.

Zen culture also contributes to the enrichment of the national arts. In the past, cultural elements of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam were expressed through ideology, literature, and pagodas. At the present, there are new forms of expressions such as sculpture, photography, arts, arrangement of meditation space, music, theatre arts, poem

recitation... These contribute to the colorful picture of Vietnamese culture and arts.

Meditation, festivals, relics, monasteries, etc. associated with Zen Buddhism Vietnam are “sacred space”, where people have spiritual senses, and live in the atmosphere of spiritual culture.

Chapter 4: The Development Trend of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism Today and Emergent Issues

Vietnamese Zen culture is developing in the direction of promoting national consciousness.

Folk Buddhism is also a development trend of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism, expressed in four main aspects: the sermon wording of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism, changes in the method of propagation, forms of conveying the ideological values of Zen in accordance with the development trend of society. The values of Zen Buddhism today are recognized by society, which helps it to achieve a position in part of the Vietnamese. In the trend of integration and globalization, Zen culture are gradually enriched in terms of forms of expression to match the era, contributing to diversifying the traditional values of the Vietnamese. Vietnamese Zen thought is gradually being adapted to the

development of modern society. Meditation practice of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism guides people to achieve true happiness, starting from changing themselves. Thanks to this, Zen Buddhism Vietnam has conquered Westerners who have rational thinking. Many Vietnamese Zen literary works have been translated into foreign languages. Vietnam twice has the honor to organize the UN Day of Vesak Celebration, which is an opportunity for Vietnamese Buddhism in general and Zen Buddhism in particular to integrate in the trend of globalization.

Zen Buddhism is a Zen school of wisdom. In the new context, for the creators of Vietnamese Zen culture, it is necessary to equip more knowledge of arts and culture and meditation theory by providing professional development training course in order to make Vietnamese Zen culture increasingly assert its position and role in social life.

The dissertation is successfully defended at the dissertation defense committee at the university level, hold at the Hanoi University of Culture in 2016.

*Introduced by
HOÀI PHÚC*