

# Contribute to understanding Huyen Quang's thoughts: “The third patriarch of the Truc Lam Zen sect”

Nguyen Van Hanh

The University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Abstract:** - In the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, Huyen Quang (1254 - 1334) is one of the famous figures of the Ly-Tran period. He lived a life of virtuous meditation, mastering the Buddhadharma, devotedly serving the Dharma. He was ordained as the third patriarch of the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect.

**Keywords:** Huyen Quang, “real Buddha”, “true likeness”, “self-nature”, “self-nature”, meditation practice, enlightenment, attainment of the way, serenity, leisure, freedom.

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the history of Vietnamese Buddhism during the Tran Dynasty, along with Tran Thai Tong, Tue Trung thuong si, Tran Nhan Tong, Phap Loa, Huyen Quang is one of the famous Zen masters. On the basis of research on Huyen Quang's life and career, in order to better understand him, the article focuses on studying the content of Huyen Quang's thought through the following issues: 1) Huyen Quang's life and career; 2) Huyen Quang's meditative thought, focused on ontological issues through the views of "impermanence", "no-self", "emptiness", "real Buddha", "suchness", "self-nature", "self-nature"; on matters of cultivation, realization, attainment of the Dao and about human life are very special.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is possible to generalize the researches on the thought of Huyen Quang in the following main topics: Firstly, it is the research on conditions and premise for the formation on the content of Huyen Quang's thought, including: *Dai Viet chronicles of full letters*, Publishing House. Social Science, Hanoi, 1998; Phan Huy Chu, *Lich dynasty constitutional chapter*, t.1, t.2, publishing House. Education, Hanoi, 2006, Truong Huu Quynh - Dinh Xuan Lam - Le Mau Han, *Outline of Vietnamese History*, Complete Works, Publishing House Education, Hanoi, 2002; Ha Van Tan - Pham Thi Tam, *The 13th century resistance war against Nguyen - Mong invaders*. People's Army, Hanoi, 2003, Institute of History, *Social Research Vietnam in the Ly - Tran period*, of, Hanoi Science Publishing House, 1980; ...

Secondly, it is the research works on the content of the content of Huyen Quang's thought, including: Institute of Literature, *Poetry Ly - Tran*, Publishing House. Social Science, Hanoi, 1989; Nguyen Lang, *Vietnam's Buddhist history*, Publisher. Literature, Hanoi, 2000, Truong Van Chung, Doan Chinh, *Vietnamese Thought in the Ly - Tran period*, Publisher. National Politics, Hanoi, 2008; *History of Vietnamese philosophical ideas from the nation-building period to the early twentieth century* by Doan Chinh (editor); *Philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Zen sect of Tran dynasty* by Truong Van Chung, Publishing House National Politics, Hanoi, 1998; *Vietnamese Zen Studies*, Publisher La Boi, Saigon, 1966.

Thirdly, the researches, assessments and comments on historical value and significance on the content of Huyen Quang's thought, including: *History of Vietnamese Education before the August 1945 Revolution* by Nguyen Dang Tien (editor), Publisher. Education, Hanoi, 1996; Tran Van Giau, *The development of Vietnamese thought from the nineteenth century to the August Revolution* (3 volumes), Publishing House National Politics, Hanoi, 1996; Institute of History, *Social Research Vietnam in the Ly - Tran period*, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1980.

### III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

*Purpose:* To better understand him, the article focuses on clarifying: Huyen Quang's meditative thought, focused on ontological issues through the views of "impermanence", "no-self", "emptiness", "real Buddha", "suchness", "self-nature", "self-nature"; on matters of cultivation, realization, attainment of the Way and about human life are very special.

*Methodology:* The paper's approach is based on the worldview and the methodology of Marxist philosophy, and at the same time uses specific research methods such as analysis and synthesis, logic and history, inductive and interpretation, abstraction, generalization, comparison, comparison and especially literary methods.

*Main Findings:* The article focuses on studying the content of Huyen Quang's thought through the following issues: 1) Huyen Quang's life and career; 2) Huyen Quang's meditative thought, focused on ontological issues through the views of "impermanence", "no-self", "emptiness", "real Buddha", "suchness", "self-nature", "self-nature"; on matters of cultivation, realization, and about human life are very special.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### About the life and career of Zen master Huyen Quang

Huyen Quang 玄光, colloquial name is Ly Dao Tai Huyên, nickname is Huyen Quang, Van Tai, Nam Sach, Lang Giang 浪江, born in Giap Dan year (1254), died in Giap Tuat year (1334), is the third ancestor of the famous Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect of the Ly - Tran dynasties.

The book "*Tam to thuc luc*" 三祖實錄, "To gia thuc luc" 祖家實錄 states: "The patriarch was in the southeast of Ngoc Hoang Pagoda, at Lang Am, Van Tai village, downstream of Bac Giang river (about the year Hong Duc 1470-1497) changed to Gia Dinh district, Van Tu commune, and renamed Van Yen pagoda to Hoa Yen pagoda). The ancestor of the Patriarch was Ly On Hoa, who served as an executive officer during the reign of King Ly Than Tong (1128-1138). Wen Hoa gave birth to Luong, Luong gave birth to Nhuong, Nhuong gave birth to Minh Doan, Minh Doan gave birth to Kham, Kham gave birth to Quang Du (as a transport mandarin during the Tran Dynasty), Quang Du gave birth to four sons; The eldest is named Trang, the next is named Tuong, the third is named Thanh and the youngest is named Tue To. Tue To is the patriarch of the Patriarch. When he was still a student, when Chiem Thanh went to loot, he fought the enemy with merit (49b), but did not work as a mandarin, just had fun in the fields, wandered through the days, liked to read books and strange stories. Ancestor's mother was Le Thi, who was a virtuous woman who cared for her husband and children, and respected her husband's parents. When she was 30 years old, she did not have a son to inherit, so she often went to the bridge at Ngoc Hoang Pagoda. This temple prays often inspired. During the reign of King Thanh Tong (1258 - 1278), the country lost its crop and the people suffered from diseases. One day, Le Thi went to Chu Son mountain to pick medicine. When she arrived at Ma Co Tien pagoda, when it was hot in the summer, she went to rest under the temple's shadow. The east wind was

blowing, the sun was guarding the west, she had a dreamy nap, she suddenly saw a big monkey, wearing a crown hat, wearing a royal robe (50a), hugging the pink sun and throwing it into her lap. Le Thi woke up in horror, felt her heart flutter, returned to report to a monk. This one said: "In that mountain there is Than Duong cave, which has made the other monkeys' elites not disappear, so there is such a dream, don't be surprised." On that occasion, he speculated: throwing the sun into her belly was a sign that Le Thi would get pregnant. The following year, belonging to the year of Giap gradually on the first day of the year, the abbot of Ngoc Hoang Pagoda, Zen master Tue Nghia, after going up to the temple to chant sutras and returning to his sitting room, he suddenly dreamed of the pagodas in the pagoda shining brightly, the Buddhas are dignified, the vajra dragons and gods are crowded. The Buddha pointed to the venerable Anan and said: "You should be reborn as a Dharma tool in the East, and you must remember the old conditions". Suddenly, the young lady knocked on the door from outside. Tue Nghia suddenly woke up, then recited the verse:

“Why do people learn about religion so far away?

My mind is Buddha, Buddha is my mind

Good wisdom makes an impact

In this life, you will definitely meet a good friend, soulmate and soulmate.”

Then the Zen master wrote that verse on the wall. That year (1254) Ancestor was born. At birth, there is a faint ray of light, a fragrant scent. It is called the child virtue with a pure scent. Le Thi was pregnant for twelve months, but she did not move, she suspected that she had an illness, so she took a lot of abortion pills but the pregnancy did not damage. When To was born, he was a strong boy. When he was a child, his body was abnormal (51a), he had the will of a great man, his parents loved him and taught him a job. The patriarch listened to one and understood ten, as talented as Nhan Hoi A saint, so it was called Tai Dao. At the age of 20, the team took the Huong exam and passed. Because the court selected people using the university level, so the team had to wait until the next year's big exam, the results of which they passed were valedictorian.

Talking about the time of the Patriarch's youth, although his parents discussed marriage, but had not yet decided to marry, at that time the king was about to marry Ms. Lieu, grandson of An Sinh Vuong, but To refused. Appointed to the position of the Academy, the service team was assigned to receive the North's fake country, write back and forth, quote scriptures, and respond fluently. Literary language than China and neighboring countries. When the Patriarch followed the king to Vinh Nghiem pagoda, Phung Nhan district, saw National Master Phap Loa practicing his religion, he immediately remembered his old charm and lamented: "Being a mandarin in Bong Dao, attaining enlightenment to Puta (Pho da), in the human realm. is a fairy, the Western realm is Buddha. No other riches and glory than autumn yellow leaves, white clouds in summer, should you be attached forever!" On that occasion, he submitted three requests to resign to become a monk... Then the patriarch served the king's orders, the abbot of Van Yen pagoda, Yen Tu mountain. The group read a lot, studied widely, mastered the Buddhadharma; there are thousands of monks and nuns studying there. Since then, Dieu Ngu Giac Hoang, Phap Loa, Huyen Quang, and three Zen masters went around the famous pagodas in the country. Article Ngu gave the monk agarwood shaman to lecture on the sutras to his followers, ordered him to compose the Chu Chapters and Dispatches, etc., and wrote a review of Thich Khoa's teachings: "Fantastic books have passed through Huyen Quang has edited it, no one can add or remove a single word.”...

On January 23, 1334, the monk passed away at Con Son Pagoda. On the 24th, new news arrived in Van Tai village, so the villagers took this day as the anniversary of the ancestors. King Minh Tong offered ten

taels of gold, told monks and nuns and disciples to build a tower (60a) on the left behind the temple; and provided 150 acres of fields including many places to take care of the death anniversary. At the same time, the posthumous name is Truc Lam, the third great Zen master, specializing in the dharma of the venerable Huyen Quang."(*Tam to thuc luc*, 1995, p. 77-79).

Huyen Quang was a famous Zen master, thinker and poet in the Tran dynasty. Previous critics such as Le Quy Don and Phan Huy Chu all praised his poetry for "subtle and sublime meaning", "flying words, liberal", but very lyrical. His work left 24 poems, including *Xuan nhat tuc su*, which was recently verified as a Zen poem of the Tong Dynasty, and a Nom poem. According to *To gia thuc luc* in the *Tam to thuc luc*, Huyen Quang's works are also the works *Chu pham kinh* 諸品經: A collection of essential and practical scriptures, *Cong Van tap*: A collection of essays messages used in Buddhist rituals, *Thich khoa giao*: A textbook on Buddhism and a collection of correspondence, along with *Ngoc Tien tap* 玉仙集, but are now lost.

### About Zen Master Huyen Quang's thoughts

Regarding Huyen Quang's philosophical thought, unfortunately because most of his writings have been lost, we cannot know fully about his thought. But it can be said that Huyen Quang's meditative thought highlights issues of ontology, practice, meditation, enlightenment, attainment of the Way, and human issues.

Regarding ontology, according to Huyen Quang, all things in this universe, though rich and diverse, all originate from one being, a single, absolute, true reality, regardless of matter. - me, tha - fall, good - bad, life - death, disease - not sick... like thousands of waves, big and small, different high and low, all shapes and sizes, but they are all manifestations of one being, a single, true reality, which is water. That essence in human is the self-nature, "self-nature", "real Buddha", "true likeness", "Buddha nature". If one "early night" "tomorrow" concentrates on practicing and meditating, "taking the place of meditation forest as the door of the house", "the mind of meditation is restless", getting rid of all the lights of prosperity, washing away all anger and delusion, overcoming on all markets, afflictions, regardless of public fame and wealth of the world, aware of self-nature, Buddha-nature, that is, aware of the "real Buddha" which is inherent in oneself and because of oneself, that is also the realize the so-called "self-nature", you will no longer see the path of cultivation in front of you as high mountains, deep and treacherous rivers, as deep waterfalls, (Nguyen, 2000, p. 349-350) and enlightenment, liberation, Buddha nature or Nirvana manifests itself in your own mind. In the article "*Phu vinh Van Yen tu* (pagoda)" (詠雲煙寺賦), he wrote:

“Shake off all the glitter of the mundane

Spread the meditation place to make your home

From late night to early morning always light up the temple of wisdom

From the evening show to the morning wash off the ma ha's place (ma ha's country)

The heart of meditation is like the moon that always shines on the door

Everything in life is like a passing wind

Understanding one's nature will truly be a buddha

don't mind the scenery of the long road, rivers and mountains." (Literature Institute, 1989, p. 712).

In terms of practice, meditation, enlightenment, and attainment of the Way, according to Huyen Quang, in order to attain the Way, "precepts and "concentration" are the walls to prevent lust from being pulled, afflictions infiltrating, and ignorance cover up. In which, the precepts are strictly observing the precepts, keeping the mind and body clean, no longer covetousness, anger, delusion; pure soul, annihilation, without worry, the eye can see far and wide; Concentration is still, one-pointed, undisturbed, concentrated in meditation to remove ignorance, destroy desires, achieve true likeness, self-nature by intuitive wisdom, and

overcome all distinctions between market and non-, tha and ego, delusion, and enlightenment... those that are false appearances, which are all of the same relative nature, the "dual view" will no longer exist, then there will be no longer the opposing distinction between ghosts and Buddhas, and every scene is a Buddha scene, so the demon palace becomes a Buddha country (Nguyen, 2000, p. 349). Huyen Quang expressed this point of view in his poem *Dien Huu tu* (延祐寺 - Dien Huu Pagoda) that:

“Abell has died in the autumn night on the temple  
The moon shines like water waves, red maple trees  
The shadow of the poker tree is still sleeping under the lake like a cold square mirror.  
The two temples on the tower stand parallel to each other like frozen jade fingers  
Countless predestined conditions do not entangle themselves as a wall to block the world  
Not a bit worried so my eyes widen  
Understand the meaning of the theory that right and left are the same  
Then consider the bow of the devil as the country of Buddha!

上方秋夜一鍾闌，  
月色如波楓樹丹，  
鷗吻倒眠方鏡冷，  
塔光双峙玉尖寒。  
萬緣不擾城遮俗，  
半點無憂眼放寬。  
參透是非平等相，

魔宮佛國好生觀。” (Literature Institute, 1989, p.704)

Huyen Quang's point of view on cultivation and enlightenment is also clearly shown in the content of the dialogues between Huyen Quang and Phap Loa by Phap Loa's hospital bed as follows:

Huyen Quang asked:

“Is sleep and wake the same?”

The master replied, "Sleep and wakefulness are one, that he is not sick."

Huyen Quang asked: "Is sickness and not disease the same thing?"

The Master replied, "Illness has nothing to do with him, and illness has nothing to do with him."

Huyen Quang asked: "Then why is there a voice coming out?"

The master replied, "No matter what the wind blows through the trees."

Huyen Quang asked: "The sound of the wind blowing through the trees is not mistaken, but when sleeping, talking can be misleading."

The master said, "The ignorant can also be greatly deceived by the sound of the wind blowing through the trees."

Huyen Quang said: "There is only one disease that cannot be cured even to death". (*Tam to thuc luc*, 1995, p. 54-55)

That, according to Huyen Quang, means: 1. Life and death are just two aspects of the same reality, what Zen master Lam Te called tasteless (real people have no place in space and time. space). This reality is not

because of birth that is not lost because of death; 2. If anyone realizes the absolute reality, birth and death in himself, he will attain the Way and be free from all distinctions and treatment: such as tha - self, birth - death, and - loss. , and will be completely free; 3. If people have not realized that absolute essence, or have not realized the so-called self-nature and Buddha-nature in themselves, then statements about reality only have the effect of making people lose their lives (Nguyen, 2000, p. 350).

Regarding human life, Huyen Quang soon saw the truth and the false, the good and the bad of life; he also saw clearly the blackness of the mistress world, people were born with only money, fame, and passion to pursue it, but forgot about gratitude and lost their humanity. Huyen Quang, through his life experience, made a bitter comment:

“Difficulty is not seen by anyone,

Until the status of a hundred thousand brothers.” (Literature Institute, 1989, p. 681)

According to Huyen Quang, the world of things as well as the years and even the wealth, riches or poverty of life..., all according to the law of cause and effect, are transformed into "impermanent" and "non-self" like clouds. Floating, flowing water, like "golden leaves in autumn, white clouds in summer", all are "no", nothing is permanent, there is no self, no self lasts forever, so there is no such thing. There is nothing to cling to, to rely on, and so there is nothing to be attached to.

Since then, he intends to practice meditation, live a reclusive, pure life in the green mountains and blue water from early on. In the article Donate to the disciples (Giving to the children on the road of martyrdom) Huyen Quang clearly stated his mood and life perspective:

“Wealth is like floating clouds

Time and years pass like fast flowing water

There's nothing like staying hidden in the mountains and streams

A bamboo cot, a pine forest breeze with a full cup of tea”.

富貴浮雲遲未道,

光陰流水急相摧.

何如小隱林泉下,

一榻松風茶一杯.”(Literature Institute, 1989, p. 697)

Even after becoming the third ancestor of Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect, along with promoting and strictly practicing cultivation and meditation, Huyen Quang still considered himself a talented and virtuous person successor to the Buddha's lamp. He said that it is best to be a Zen master living a leisurely, free, and peaceful life where the mountains cover the silence, so as not to be ashamed of the Ancestor lamp, nor to make Han Son, Thap Winning two high rise anger; and he clearly expressed his meditative view in the poem "Human resources to save Lan Tu" (Human has a job at Cuu Lan temple) that:

“Fragile morals, ashamed to follow the lamp of the Buddha

Making Han and Thap angry

There's nothing like following us back to the mountains

The mountains are built, the mountains are covered by layers.

德薄常慚繼祖燈,

空教寒拾起冤憎.

爭如逐伴歸山去，

疊嶂重山萬萬層。” (Literature Institute, 1989, p. 688-689)

## V. CONCLUSION

It can be said that, along with Tran Nhan Tong and Phap Loa, Huyen Quang is one of the special characters of the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen school as well as of Vietnamese Buddhism. He was not only a Zen master, a thinker but also a great poet of Dai Viet in the 13th - 14th centuries.

As a Zen master, he lived a pure, pure life, freed from all desires and desires, "a life of form, emptiness, like water without waves, like a mirror without dust" devote themselves to practice, meditate, and serve the Dharma. As a thinker, he read a lot, understood widely, mastered the Buddhadharma; His thoughts are expressed very simply, in general, but in literature, language, deep meaning, "reciprocal correspondence, scripture quotations, fluent converse" (*Tam to thuc luc*. 1995: 80). As a poet, his poetry is full of lyricism, "subtle and sublime thought", "flying words, liberal", famous in the Tran dynasty (*Literature Institute*, 1989, p. 688-680). Huyen Quang deserves to be honored as "Tru Lam Third Patriarch Huyen Quang" (竹林第三祖玄光尊者).

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Ha, V. T., & Pham, T. T. (2003). The 13th century resistance war against Nguyen - Mong invaders. Hanoi: People's Army.
- [2]. Institute of History. (1978). Xa hoi Viet Nam thoi Ly – Tran. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.
- [3]. Literature Institute. Poetry of Ly - Tran, volume 2, upper book. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.
- [4]. Nguyen, D. T. (editor, 1996). History of Vietnamese Education before the August 1945 Revolution. Hanoi: Publisher. Education,
- [5]. Nguyen, L. (2000). Vietnam's Buddhist history. Hanoi: Publisher. Literature.
- [6]. Phan, H. C. (2006). Lich dynasty constitutional chapter, episode 1, 2. Hanoi: Publishing House. Education.
- [7]. Tam to thuc luc. (1995). Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute.
- [8]. Tran, V. G. (1996). The development of Vietnamese thought from the nineteenth century to the August Revolution (3 volumes). Hanoi: Publishing House National Politics.
- [9]. Truong, H. Q., Dinh, X. L., Le, M. H. (2002). Outline of Vietnamese History. Hanoi: Publishing House Education.
- [10]. Tran, T. T. (1974). Khoa hu luc. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.
- [11]. Truong, V. C., Doan, C. (2008). Vietnamese Thought in the Ly - Tran period. Hanoi: Publisher. National Politics.
- [12]. Truong, V. C. (1998). Philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Zen sect of Tran dynasty. Hanoi: Publishing House National Politics.
- [13]. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. (1978). Dai Viet su ky toan thur, volume 2, Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.