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## Cultural exchanges and Zen Buddhism in Sino poetries of Vietnamese envoys to China from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century

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### ABSTRACT

*In this report, we present the cultural relationship between Vietnam and China through poems of Vietnamese envoy written on the topic of Buddhist and zenon their journeys of diplomatic missions at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century in three main aspects: The description of Buddhist sites and spaces; The envoys' expression of their personal emotions; and the expression of close relationships with the Zen masters, and the courtiers of the Host country. From there, we hope to contribute a more perspective on the Vietnamese people's mentality - the same mentality, in the cultural exchange between Vietnam and China.*

**Keywords:** cultural relations, envoys poetry, envoys, Vietnam - China, Zen - Buddhism

### 1. Introduction

Buddhism has been introduced into Vietnam for about 2000 years. During those 2000 years, Buddhism has had a profound influence on the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. This has been studied by Nguyen Pham Hung (1995), Doan Thu Van (1996) Le Manh That (2006), Nguyen Lang (2014) Nguyen Cong Ly (2016). Those are confirmed.

In the cultural exchanges and ties between Vietnam and China, Buddhism is not only an object of exchange, but also a means of cultural exchange between Vietnam and China. In *Kiến văn lục*, chapter *Thiền dật*, (Le Quy Don, 2013, 202-7), pointed out the relationship between Northern writers and Confucian officials and Vietnamese monks by recalling the farewell ceremonies by Poetry.

Tham Thuyen Ky [Shen Thuyen Ky, pen name Van Khanh, from Noi Hoang commune, obtained her doctorate around the date of Trang An (701 - 704) of Vo Tac Thien's reign, worked as an official of Tu Van Quan scholar, who is a famous poet in Middle Tang Dynasty] wrote a poem give its to Vo Ngai, the abbot of Son Tinh pagoda, Cuu Chan district [in present-day Thanh Hoa province], with the verse:

*Đệ tử ai vô thức,*

*Y vương tích vị đàm.* (Le Quy Don, 2013: 204)

[Practitioner is not enough the talent, Regret never studied Y Vuong] (Y Vuong who lives in the land of the western region, is very knowledgeable about Buddhist scriptures).

Or like Duong Cu Nguyen (Duong Cu Nguyen, pen name Canh Son, a native of Bo Chau of the Tang Dynasty, got his doctorate around the date of Trinh Nguyen (785 - 803) during his life as an official of Quoc Tu Private Prince, who is a famous poetry) wrote a poem to farewell the shaman Phung Dinh to An Nam, with the verse:

*Tâm đảo Trường An mạch,*

*Giao Châu hậu dạ chung.* (Le Quy Don, 2013: 205)

[Truong An remembers that so far,

Giao Chau is at quiet night just know knocking the bell.]

Gia Dao (whose self - name is Lang Tien, was a man from Pham Duong land in the Tang Dynasty, the youth was a monk and then took the doctoral exam, but did not pass) wrote a poem to farewell the shaman Phung Dinh to An Nam, with the verse:

*Nam hải, kỷ hồi quá,*

*Cửu sơn, lâm lão quy.* (Le Quy Don, 2013: 205)

[Passing the Southern sea in a while,

To return to the old mountain and forest in old age.]

And Truong Tich (whoes pen name Van Xuong, from the land of O Giang Phu of the Tang Dynasty, obtained a doctorate, worked as an official of Quoc Tu's private business) wrote a poem to the monk Nhat Nam:

*Thời phùng Nam Hải khách,*

*Man ngữ vấn thủy gia?* (Le Quy Don, 2013: 207)

[When meeting Southern Sea guests,

A barbarian tongue inquires on your native house

In the *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* [Dai Viet History of the Complete Book] wrote: In 987, the Song Dynasty sent Ly Giac to; when Ly Giac coming to Sach Pagoda (Sach Giang - the river in Nam Sach, that is, a section of the Thuong River downstream, VietNam), the King sent a shaman named Thuan to meet him. Ly Giac as the opportunity seen two geese wading on the water, Giac latent joked that:

*Nga nga lưỡng nga nga,*

*Ngưỡng diện hướng thiên nha.* (Cao Huy Giu, trans, 2022: 173)

[Goose goose two geese,  
Looking up at the horizon].

The shaman is holding the oar, still continue to do two verses given to Giac:

*Bạch mao phô lục thủy,  
Hồng chạo bãi thanh ba.* (Cao Huy Giu, trans, 2022: 173)  
[White feathers mirrored under green water,  
Pink paddle wow under blue waves].

Ly Giac was even more surprised. When he returned to the embassy residence, he sent a letter to Thuan with the verse:

*Đông Đô lưỡng biệt tâm lưu luyến,  
Nam Việt thiên trùng vọng vị hưu.* (Cao Huy Giu, trans, 2022: 173)  
[Dong Do is farewell twice with nostalgia,  
Vietnam is far away, but still remembers forever].

Thuan brought this poem to the King. The King ordered monk Ngo Khuong Viet to read. Khuong Viet said: “This poem has the same intention of respecting his Majesty as King Song”. The king praised the poetry and bestowed Lý Giác with many gifts. When Giac Farewell, the King ordered Khuong Viet to make a *Từ*<sup>1</sup> works to goodbye, with the sentence:

*Vạn trùng sơn thủy thiệp thương lang,  
Cửu thiên quy lộ trường.*  
*Tình thâm thiết, đối li thương.* (Cao Huy Giu, trans, 2022: 174)  
[Thousands of times crosses the mountain,  
The way home is far away;  
Facing farewell glasses with heavy emotions.].

From this, it can be affirmed that Buddhism is often associated with the diplomatic events between Vietnam and China.

In the diplomatic history, Vietnamese dynasties often ordered envoys to the North to show their friendship and strengthen bilateral relations. For example, during the Nguyen Dynasty (Hoàng Phương Mai, 2012): During the Minh Menh period there were 7 missions, during the Thieu Tri period there were 3, in the Tu Duc period there were 9... During those trips, the emissaries often composed poetry and literature to describe scenes and events on their journeys to the North. Thereby, they expressed their personal views on the outside life along the way. For example, Lê Quý Đôn (envoy in 1760) had *Bắc sứ thông lục*, Nguyễn Đề (an envoy in 1789, and 1795) had *Hoa trình thi tập*, Phan Huy Ich (envoy in 1790) had *Tình sa kỹ hành*; Vũ Huy Tấn (envoy in 1790) had *Hoa trình tùy bộ tập*, Ngô Thì Nhậm (envoy in 1793) had *Hoàng hoa đồ phả*; Trịnh Hoài Đức (an envoy in 1802) had *Cán Trai quan quang tập*; Lê Quang Định (an envoy in 1802), had *Hoa nguyên thi thảo*, Nguyễn Du (an envoy in 1813) had *Bắc hành tạp lục*... According to a survey

by Nguyen Cong Ly (Nguyen Cong Ly, 2021: 3-18), the content of envoy poetry focused on the following topics: expressing pride in national cultural traditions, showing the desire to fulfill the mission of the ambassador, expressing nostalgia for the homeland, showing kindness, and complex feeling when looking at the northern landscape. Along with that, Vietnam's relationship with China is reflected in poetry in particular, and in the activities of the envoys in general, which has also been clarified by researchers in Nguyen Thi Kim Loan, 2011; Tran Thi The, 2016; Pham Quang Ai, 2017; Le Quy Don, 2018; Le Thi Hoai Thanh, 2020; Pham Thi Gai, 2020 & 2021; Le Quang Truong (2021).

The survey of poems written by the envoys to the North has revealed many poems written about the scenes of temples and landscapes. These poems are at once artistic, cultural and political in nature. Therefore, it is not only a mere work of art, but also an indicator of the relationship between Vietnam and China in terms of cultural influence.

## 2. Methods

From the above base, we have implemented the following methods:

- a) Survey method: we consider the content of Buddhism and zen in the poetry of Vietnamese envoy to China in the last 18th to the early 19th centuries.
- b) Analytical method: we divide the content of the poems into topics such as: The feelings of the emissaries, the representation of the Buddhist space, the relationship with the Zen masters, and the courtiers of the Host country.
- c) Synthetic method: We draw general ideas to prove the relationship between Vietnam - China through literature.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The description of Buddhist sites and spaces by the Confucianists envoys on their Northbound missions

From the poetry collections of the Confucianists in the late 18th century and early 19th century, we searched 39 poems written about the pagoda scene. For example, Lê Quý Đôn (1726-1784) had *Đề Tương sơn tự phi Lai Thạch* [Inscribe Tuong Son pagoda Phi Lai thạch], *Du Báo Ân tự* (Visit Bao An pagoda), *Du Vĩnh Tế thiền viện* (Visit Vinh Te Zen Monastery); Ngô Thì Nhậm (1746-1803) had *Tương Sơn tự thắng ký* (Record scenic of Tuong Son pagoda), *Hưng Long tự tặng Liên lão thiền sư* (Give to the Zen Master Lien at Hung Long pagoda); Vũ Huy Tấn (1749-1800) had *Trùng quá Hưng Long tự tiễn biệt Liên Thành thiền sư* (Return to Hung Long Pagoda to bid farewell to Zen Master Lien Thanh), *Đăng Hương Lâm tự hữu cảm* (Huong Lam pagoda climbing to have feeling); Nguyễn Đề (1761 - 1805) has *Đề Tương Sơn tự* (Inscribe Tuong Son pagoda), *Đề Phi Lai tự khắc thạch* (Inscribe on stone Phi Lai pagoda); Đoàn Nguyễn Tuấn (1750-?) had *Quá Tương Sơn tự* (Come Tuong Son pagoda); Phan Huy Ích (1751-1822) had *Du Quan Âm*

*nham* (Visit Quam Am cave), *Đề Phi Lai tự* (Inscribe Phi Lai pagoda); Lê Quang Định (1759-1813) had *Du Thê Hà Sơn tự* (Visit The Ha Son padoda), *Đề Tuong Sơn tự* (Inscribe Tuong Son pagoda), *Đề Hưng Long tự* (Inscribe Hưng Long pagoda), *Du Từ Hàng tự* (Visit Tu Hang pagoda); Ngô Nhân Tĩnh (1761-1813) had *Du Từ Hàng tự* (Visit Hai Chang pagoda), *Trực Lộ đạo trung ngẫu nhập Từ Hàng tự* (On road Truc Le randomly go to the Tu Hang pagoda); Nguyễn Du (1765-1820) had *Vọng Tuong Sơn tự* (Contemplate Tuong son pagoda), *Vọng Quan Âm miếu* (Contemplate Quan Am temple), *Lương Chiêu Minh thái tử phân kinh thạch đài* (Prince Chieu Minh of the Liang Dynasty divided the sutras at the stone pedestal); Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765-1825) had *Tặng Hưng Long tự Dưỡng Tuyền lão hòa thượng* (Give to the uppermonk Duong Tuyen at Hung Long Pagoda), *Du Hải Chàng tự tặng Tuệ Chân thượng nhân* (Visit Hai Chang pagoda give to uppermonk Tue Chan), *Đăng Thê Hà Sơn tự* (Climb The Ha Son pagoda), *Thư tặng Thiên Đô am Minh Viễn lão thiền sư* (Give to letter the uppermonk Minh Vien at Thien Do temple).... Surveying the content in these poems, the Buddhist cultural space is clearly shown in the description of the temple scene, or recording of stories related to the history of the temples in the Northern land.

Regarding the pagoda scene, we see that the Confucianists rarely describe directly, but put the image of the temple in relation to the vast natural space, with their own feelings. The same description of Phi Lai<sup>2</sup> pagoda, but Nguyen De and Phan Huy Ich have different perspectives. Nguyen De describes the scene of the pagoda with a feeling of praising the image of the temple in relation to the images of green mountains, good clouds, clear rivers, and bright moon. And with these comes space:

*Tẩy trần tuyền tự nham yêu lạc,*

*Tảo tục phong tông động khẩu lại.* (Đề Phi lai tự khắc thạch). (Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019: 247)

[The waterfall washes away the dust of life from the back of the cliff,

The cool wind blows away the vulgarity from the cave entrance.].

And Phan Huy Ich wrote about Phi Lai pagoda with the association of the “flying pagoda”, evoking a fanciful space with the sound of bells in the attic, the light around the Buddha statue, and the waterfall like the Milky Way:

*Sơn các sơ chung lạc thủy ôi,*

*Tường quang liểu niểu Phạm Vương.*

*Bộc tuyền nghi xuất tinh hà thủy,*

*Phi tự truyền văn bán dạ lô.* (Đề Phi Lai tự) (Sino - Nom Department, 1978a: 84)

[The morning bell sound slowly fell from the mountain attic into the creek,

Auspicious light surrounds the statue of Pham Vuong.

Water pours down like the Milky Way,

“Flying pagoda” was brought by midnight thunder]. All of these have shown the blending of reality images with the fantasized space of the temple.

Another temple mentioned a lot in the poems of the envoys is Tuong Son<sup>3</sup> Pagoda, in 39 poems written about the pagoda scene in the north by the envoys who went there during the second half of 18th to the first half of 19th century, there are 16 works that written about Tuong Son Pagoda by six authors (if counting 5 other works by Truong Cong Tan in the 17th century, the total would be 21 works). This shows that Tuong Son Pagoda is a special place in the sense of receive Buddhist cultural spaces in the Northern region of the Confucianists.

In Ngo Thi Nham's poetry, Tuong Son Pagoda is a beautiful scene associated with the awakening and dissemination of the truth of Buddhism. He pointed out that Tuong Son Pagoda is a destination for monks:

*Thiền quả sắc không vân nhiều tự,  
Tuế hoa kim cổ thạch lâm lưu.* (Tuong Son tự thắng ký) (Sino Nom Research Institute, 2005: 120)

[The meditation of non-existence, cloud surrounds the mountains,  
A thousand years, stone next to the river].

For Le Quy Don, the space of Tuong Son pagoda is associated with the image of “Phi Lai stone” as the charming miraculous of Buddhism. From the image of “Phi Lai stone” that considers the relationship between “quiet” and “movement”, between “lost” and “exist”, between “gain” and “non” will see the mysterious of Buddhism when looking at the movement of the world. From that feeling, he wrote:

*Động dư hoàn tĩnh chân siêu ngộ,  
An xít nãng thường xảo hoá tài.* (Đề Tuong Son tự Phi Lai thạch) (Le Quy Don, 2020b: 734)

[After movement that is returning too quiet is super enlightened,  
A peaceful place always makes a magical change?].

And in the poem Nguyen Du's *Vọng Truong Son tự*, the scene of Tuong Son pagoda is like a proof of the realistic picture about immerse oneself in the sea of pains and sorrows, about the hard life of human beings:

*Chân thân nhất dạ tận viêm hoả,  
Cổ tự thiên nhiên không mộ vân.  
Ngũ Lĩnh phong loan đa khí sắc,  
Toàn Châu thành quách tại phong trần.* (Nguyen Thach Giang, Truong Chinh, ed, 2000: 755)

[A night, the true body were completely burned,  
The thousand-year ancient temple is covered with clouds in the afternoon.  
Ngu Linh mountain pass has many looks,  
Toan Chau wall is flooded with dust and wind.].

Or with Nguyen De, Tuong Son Pagoda has a strange beauty. The beauty of the scene pagoda is indescribable. Because that is the beauty that is made up of the “Hoa ưu đàm -

Udambara flower”, “Lá bôỉ -Tālapatra leaf” - crystallized from the process of receive thorough knowledge the Buddhist scriptures:

*Giang sơn áo xứ ừng thiên cung,  
Vạn tú thiên kỳ cố miện trung.  
Bôỉ diệp phát yên hương phiêu diểu,  
Đàm hoa ánh thủy ngọc linh lung.* (Đề Tương Sơn tự) [Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019]  
[Elegant mountains and rivers protect the temple,  
Thousands of strange beauties appear in sight.  
The Tālapatra leafs touch the clouds, the fragrance vaguely,  
The udambara flowers shine on the river like shimmering jade.].

In addition, the image of Hai Hang pagoda in *Du Hải Chàng tự* by Ngo Nhan Tinh; image of The Ha Son Pagoda in the *Du Thê Hà Sơn tự* by Le Quang Dinh, in the *Đặng Thê Hà Sơn tự* by Trinh Hoai Duc; or the image of Hung Long pagoda in the poetry of Vu Huy Tan, Ngo Thi Nham, Trinh Hoai Duc also clearly shows the offhanded reception of Buddhist space by the envoy.

*In besides, when writing about the cultural space of Zen - Buddhism, the Confucianists have receiving the history of pagodas as a way to do of documenting Buddhist culture in the Northern land.*

In the original notes of the poem *De Tuong Son tu Phi Lai thạch*, Le Quy Don wrote:

“*Quảng Châu hữu di tự tháp lai, sơn tăng viết: “Kỉ năng phi lai, bất năng phi khứ không trung”. Ngữ viết: Nhất động bất như nhất tĩnh”.* (Le Quy Don, 2020a: 733) [Guangzhou has a pagoda moved to. The monk said: “You can re-fly; you can't fly away in the air.” The proverb says: A movement is not equal to an idleness]; provided a perspective on the concept of “move” and “quiet” in the comprehension of monks, as well as in the proverb in the Northern land when looking at the “Phi Lai stone” phenomenon.

And when Nguyen De wrote *De Phi Lai tu khắc thạch*, he quoted: “*Tự quán lâm lưu, đối ngạn quán sơn liệt thúy, tự bạng hữu phi bộc tuyền cập cổ động, thậm u nhã. Thị Tôn Sinh ngộ Bạch Viên cổ tích, vì Việt Đông nhất thắng khái.*” (Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019: 247) [The pagoda faces the river, the other side of the mountain is green, next to the temple there is a waterfall and an ancient cave, the scenery is so elegant. It is the relic where Ton Sinh met Bach Vien in the past, is one of the scenic spots in Guangdong.]. Here, the author, in addition to giving the reader an image of the pagoda's appearance, also evokes the past story Ton Sinh meeting Bach Vien. This original story is from the Vien thi story by Co Cung, the Tang Dynasty. And from the content of this story, the Vietnamese author wrote the Nom story *Truyen Ky Ngo*<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in a poem with *Bạch Viên - Tôn Khắc* story, Nguyen De showed the reader that the reception of Northern culture by Vietnamese Confucianists is always creative. Specifically, From *Viên thị truyện* (China), when coming to Vietnam, was expressed in a different art form (Nom poem- story) purely Vietnamese, and associated with the Vietnamese people's thought of the same three religions. In the last two lines of this poem, Nguyen De writes:

*Thập cấp nghĩ tầm Viên tích cổ,*

*Du du bích thụ hựu thương dài.* (Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019: 248)

[Stepping up to find the old traces of Bach Vien,

Only trees and moss covered.] as an emphasis to query the source of the Bach Vien story that was transmitted to Vietnam.

In another work, *Tào Khê khẩu ngẫu chiêm*, Nguyen De also recorded Buddhist documents associated with Cao Khe ravine. Content includes: the first is to clearly state the reason why the Sixth Patriarch Hue Neng chose Cao Khe as the place to set up the temple; the second is to recount the transmission of Zen Buddhism into China; Finally, the orally transmitted decisions of Zen Buddhism comes from the verse of Hue Nang. Detail: Tao Khe belongs to Khuc Giang, Thieu Chau. Consider: During the Luong dynasty, there was a national monk Thien Truc (Dat Ma) who came by boat to park at the ravine gate, smell a strange scent, said: “Up there must be good land”, so he went to the mountain cave and build pagoda. One hundred and seventy years later, there was a shaman Vo Thuong practicing here, that is The sixth patriarch (Hue Nang) in Nam Hoa Temple. Again: Dat Ma master from Thien Truc brought Buddha's robes into China, when he saw someone practicing and attaining enlightenment, then he gave them the seal. When the Fifth Patriarch Hoang Nhan wanted to impart the cassock and alms bowl, he asked the monks to each make a verse. The verse of the monk Than Tu said: “The body is like Bodhi tree; heart is like a bright mirror. Everyday must be swept. There is no dust left.” When the Sixth Patriarch Hue Nang saw this, he said, “Good is good, but enlightenment is not”. That followed by words: “Bodhi nature did not have a tree, the bright mirror also has no mirror. In the past, there was nothing at all. What do you wipe the dust?”. The Fifth Patriarch chose to take (monk Hui Neng) to carry on the transmission of the Dharma. By the time when the Sixth Patriarch (Hue Nang) preached the Dharma in Tao Khe, he stopped transmitting the cassock and alms bowl. Now at Nam Hoa pagoda, there is still the body of the Luc Pa (sixth ancestors), along with the cassock and alms bowl, and the stone corpse (Le Quang Truong, 2019).

As for Doan Nguyen Tuan, he borrowed the words of the monk to recount the history of the temple:

*Vấn tăng: tự hà danh?*

*Tăng vấn: danh Phi Lai.*

*Sở tổ hiển thần hóa,*

*Nhất dạ sinh phong lôi.*

*Uyển nhiên thành chiêu đề.* (Đặng giáp Tây Phi Lai tự, tẩu bút thư vũ bích). (Sino Nom Institute, 1982: 225).

[Ask the monk: What is the name of the temple?

The monk said: His name is Phi Lai

The first patriarch turned miracles,



One night there was a sudden storm,  
Suddenly there had this temple].

With poetic expression but bold narrative and dialogue, Doan Nguyen Tuan provided authentic information about the origin of Phi Lai pagoda.

As the introductions of the poem *Đề Phi Lai tự*, Phan Huy Ich clearly shows the cultural exchange in the initiative of the Northern Confucianism officer. The Phan family wrote: “Phi Lai pagoda in Ngung canyon mountain in Thanh Vien district, Guangdong province”. There is a waterfall falling from the steep cliff, the high tower reflects the water. Legend has it that during the Luong dynasty, a stormy night, thunder and lightning arose violently, and then the temple appeared, thereby naming the pagoda “Phi Lai”. There is a story about King Ngung and the white ape. Now, in the middle, there is a king worshiping place, with a sign saying “Van Tue”. Some Qing Dynasty scholars brought the envoy to visit the temple. They kept asking the envoy to write poems. After I finished writing the poem, I gave it to the Governor of Guangdong, and poem was to engrave the poem on the cliff of Phi Lai Pagoda (Sino - Nom Departments, 1978b).

It can be seen that, when going to the pagodas on the way to the envoy, the Confucianists have absorbed the information and documents about the pagodas mentioned in the poetry, this information as a fact verification of what has been learned, read in books. At the same time, they also left their own poems (engraved on the temple walls) to express the exchange of culture and ideas.

### ***3.2. The envoys' expression of their personal emotions with a sense of Buddhism and Zen***

It must be affirmed that going to the envoy was a journey full of difficulties for the Confucianists. Partly because of the very long distance through the remote areas, partly because of the rudimentary means of transport. So most of the delegations go to the envoy to take about a year to complete. It is because of such a journey, that in the poems of the emissaries, they often express the hardships and homesickness on the way to the envoy. Of course, they don't always express that directly in poetry. Because, being sent as a missionary is a great honor, an opportunity to show the spirit of “loyalty and patriotism”, moreover, the mission of the envoy is to maintain the image of the country. Therefore, personal feelings are rarely expressed. However, in the poems written on the subject of Buddhist meditation, we see that the Confucianists often directly express their inner feelings, as well as the desire to have a peaceful and free life, get off from the burdens of responsibilities of life responsibilities. We think that the expression of this content is due to the influence of Buddhist meditation thought. This influence is first reflected in the reception and discussion of Buddhist scriptures.

In *Vạn Niên am “Nhất Thủy Vũ” công bộ chi tác*, Ngo Thi Nham talked about the last purpose, and the true principle with concepts such as “form”, “non-form”, “the three vehicles”, “the four elements” of the Buddha:

*Tịnh thổ sắc phi sắc,*

*Trần tâm phiên bất phiên.*

*Tam thừa đắc thường trú,*

*Tứ đại chân tâm ân.* (Sino Nom Research Institute, 2005: 762)

[The Buddha's land<sup>5</sup> here of the form<sup>6</sup> is non-form;

The material world heart that of moves<sup>7</sup> is non-move.

The three vehicles<sup>8</sup> are usually abbot;

The body of the four great elements<sup>9</sup> also has many meritorious]. So Buddhism is nothing but helping people to get rid of erroneous thinking; and Buddhism does that because the essence of Buddhism is non-duality.

In *Kinh Toàn Châu đặng Trương Sơn tự, lễ Vô Lượng Thọ Phật, phỏng cổ kệ, duyệt đồ chí, hữu bản quốc sứ thần Lễ bộ Thượng thư Trương Công Tấn ngũ chương, cận lai Tôn Trai Lê tiên sinh thứ vận, cần tái canh họa* [Passing through Toan Chau, go to Tuong Son Pagoda to worship the Vo Luong Tho Buddha, visit ancient steles, see drawings and records, see the five chapters of poetry of our country's envoy, namely the Ceremony of the Minister Trương Công Tấn and the poetry of Le Ton Trai, respectfully continue writing re-rhyme], Le Quy Don wrote re-rhyme 5 poems of Trương Công Tấn and Ton Trai Le Huu Kieu. In these poems, Le Quy Don, after seeing the drawings and reading notes at Tuong Son Pagoda, did not hesitate to express his understanding of the Buddhist human and worldview. Specifically, in the poem number 1, the poet points out the origin of Buddhism, and states the truth about saving all the living of Buddhism:

*Diệu để dao dao trong phó thụ,*

*Huyền tôn liễu liễu đắc duyên nhân.* (Le Quy Don, 2020a: 719)

[Bringing the Noble Truths<sup>10</sup> to explain to living beings,

Understand the abstruse being knowledge of primary and secondary cause].

In the above two verses, two basic concepts of Buddhism are raised by the author: “noble truths” and “primary - secondary”. The concept of “noble truth” refers to the four truths of “suffering”. This is the basic of Buddhism on the path to enlightenment. And “primary - secondary” is the content of the basic teachings about the binding relationship of all things and phenomena. This content determines the perspective of human life, and the worldview of Buddhism.

And in the poem no.2, Le Quy Don mentioned the concepts of “being”, “non-existent” and “form dharma”, “physical body”, and then following statement:

*Cầu Phật khởi ứng tiên sắc tướng,*

*Chỉ ư thân thí nhận nguyên chân.* (Le Quy Don, 2020a: 721)

When praying the Buddha, at first one favors the form and characteristics.

Once ceasing the selfness, could one receive the original truth.

With the meaning of these two verses, Le Quy Don shows a deep understanding of

Buddhist thought. That is the thought “non-dual”: “form is emptiness, emptiness is form”. This is also emphasized by him in the poem 3:

*Tướng cầu phi hữu phi vô hữu,  
Thiên thượng nhân gian xứ xứ gia.* (Le Quy Don, 2020a: 721)  
[Understand the truth non-existent and existent,  
Everywhere is home].

Also expressing his understanding of Buddhist scriptures directly in his poetry, Nguyen De, in addition to mentioning the concepts of “the real”, “formal”, also emphasized the mental state when realizing the aim of Buddhism:

*Từ vân kết tụ chân như ngọc,  
Kiếp hỏa thiêu tàn sắc tướng không.* (Đề Tương sơn tự) (Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019: 129)  
[Good clouds gather like the real jewel,  
The kalpa fire burns form and characteristics to emptiness!]

Very specifically, Nguyen De used the concept of “Kalpa fire” to say that all that the five skandhas are not real, and when all people know that, they will understand the truth in life: everything is unreal.

As for Nguyen Du, when he wrote *Lương Chiêu Minh thái tử phân kinh thạch đài*, he did not hesitate to explain the “nothingness” content of Buddhism:

*Phật bản thị không bất trước vật,  
Hà hữu hồ kinh an dụng phân.  
Linh văn bất tại ngôn ngữ khoa,  
Thục vi Kim Cương vi Pháp Hoa.  
Sắc không cảnh giới mang bất ngộ,  
Si tâm quy Phật sinh ma.* (Nguyen Thach Giang, Truong Chinh, ed, 2000: 874)  
[Buddha is inherently empty, not attached to anything  
What depends on the sutra that divides with separate?  
Buddha’s words are not due to exaggeration  
What is the Diamond Sutra and is the Lotus Sutra?  
The realm of “non-form” is vague and incomprehensible.  
If you are confused the Buddha, then the Buddha will be a ghost].

When people do not fully understand the wisdom that the Buddha put in the scriptures, it is just unfounded beliefs. Just like human life, not seeing the truth of life only has to suffering.

From the above analysis, it is shown that the Confucianists show their reception of the Buddhist language not only in coming up with the concept, but also explaining that concept by their own understanding. Also from the same reception, in the envoy poems written on the topic of Buddhist meditation, in the closing sentence, there is often content

to show of enlightenment with the inspiration freedom. Here are a few examples that demonstrate this:

Ngo Nhan Tinh, when he came to Tu Hang Pagoda, directly expressed his reception of Buddhist scriptures, and its impact on the author's behavior with secular matters:

*Tĩnh đắc vắng lai hành lộ khách,*

*Kỷ hồi giảm khước thị phi trường.* (Trục lệ đạo trung ngẫu nhập Từ Hàng tự) (Trinh Hoai Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & annotated, 2006: 386)

[Make the passersby on the road awakening,

How much to reduce the compete in the life]. This is the way to behave peacefully, not attached to the form of things.

Trinh Hoai Duc wrote the last two sentences in *Túc Bạch Vân Sơn tự*:

*Vĩnh dạ hồi toàn thiền nhất nguyệt,*

*Phân minh như chiếu vắng lai tâm.* (Trinh Hoai Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & enoted, 2006: 232)

[All night think about the only meditation moon,

Moonlight illuminating the guest's hearts]. Moonlight - Zen mind, as a metaphor for the empty state of the spirit of enlightenment

And Le Quang Dinh, when standing in front of the scene of Tu Hang Pagoda, with the images of the pine wind, bamboo rain, old scent, sleeping cranes, and bell sound, did not hesitate to confess:

*Kim triêu nhược liễu bình sinh sự,*

*Ứng giả từ hàng hoán ngọc miên.* (Du Từ Hàng tự) (Trinh Hoai Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & annotated, 2006: 640)

[This morning if I can finish the responsibilities

Should borrow a compassion raft to exchange jade whips]. Of course, in this poetic idea, the author still shows the sense of an envoy to complete the task first and then go to the meditation door later. In another poem, Le Quang Dinh also affirmed the bond of responsibility:

*Phật giáo nguyên lai hà dị đế,*

*Diệc tương trung hiếu độ mê tân.* (Đề Tương Sơn tự) (Trinh Hoai Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & annotated, 2006: 586).

[Buddhism is a non-duality,

Pray to bring filial-loyalty to save the ford of delusion]. However, considering the poems that Le Quang Dinh wrote about Zen Buddhism, the content of overcome mundane life is still main:

*Sái lạc vô ky hồ thử chí,*

*Thử sơn hà tất hận thiên nhai (nha).* (Du Thê Hà Sơn tự) (Trinh Hoai Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & enoted, 2006: 569)

[Having fun with no attached is a hobby of traveling

This mountain doesn't hate because to stay in the horizon corner].

In the same trend, Nguyen De with his two poems *Toàn Châu bát cảnh*, and *Đề Tương Sơn tự* express his desire to let go of the worldliness to find nirvana:

*Văn đạo viện trung thiền tích cổ,*

*Tá thù nhất khẩu nhận chân thân?* (*Toàn Châu Bát cảnh*) (Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019: 61)

[It is said that Zen Monastery had meditation traces  
know who to ask to wake me up for enlightenment.].

And:

*Cổ điệp đặng lâm tâm đốn ngộ,*

*Dục phi tích trượng trực thừa phong.* (*Đề Tương sơn tự*) (Le Quang Truong, ed, 2019: 129)

[Come to old citadel, heart is attained enlightenment  
Want to ride Khakkhara fly up].

This is also expressed by Phan Huy Ich in *Tương Than dạ bạc*:

*Văn thuyết Tương Sơn Vô lượng Phật,*

*Chinh tiên na đắc phỏng thiền du.* (Sino - Nom Department, 1978a: 37)

[It is said that Tương Sơn mountain worships the Buddha Vô Lượng  
Come from far, wish to visit the meditation scene].

At this point, we can affirm that, from the presentation of concepts in Buddhist scriptures, as well as the inspiration in poems about pagoda, the Confucianists have shown their proactive psychosphere of the natural beauty of cultural space in the Northern land. There, the lyrical figure - the Confucianists, has escaped from the envoy's duty - the guest, to show his free spirit. This is a very important instruction show that when envoys are coming to the northern, is non-deprecating, is non-weakness but they showed confidence and bravery.

### ***3.3. The expression of close relationships with the Zen masters, and the courtiers of the host country***

Another remarkable thing is that the Confucianists on the way to the envoy did not forget the opportunity to make friends with the monks and writers of the indigenous country. That process of friendship had just both significant political and personal sentiments. The following are examples of these relationships expressed in poetry written on the subject of Buddhism.

Vu Huy Tan, when he came to Hung Long Pagoda, clearly showed his friendship with Zen Master Lien Thanh. The poet talking about the position and role of Hung Long pagoda in welcoming Vietnamese envoys, as the opportunity to go to Hung Long pagoda is just a short moment in a long journey, has emphasized emotion for each other. Specifically, the poet's affection to Zen master Lien Thanh. See in the meaning of the poem, Zen master Lien Thanh must have been very scrupulous to welcome the envoys, and make special impressions on Vu Huy Tan, then Vu Huy Tan himself would respond with such a deep love. So then did he write:

*Khách tung hảo tự phi hồng quá,  
Hương tử tranh như quyện điều hoàn.  
Tối thị ngô nhân tình độc trọng,  
Hội thời bất dị biệt thời nan.* (Nguyen Loc, ed, 2000: 170)  
[Remnants of foreign lands are like flamingo flying over,  
The homesickness is like a tired bird returning to its nest.  
Only the human love between us is the heaviest,  
Meeting each other is not easy, but farewell is even more difficulty].

And Ngo Thi Nham, before writing poetry compliment the old Zen master Lien, wrote a rather long paragraph to express his joy when he met and talked with Zen master Lien at Hung Long pagoda:

*“Hung Long tự tặng Liên lão thiền sư  
Cổ ngữ vân:  
“Ngẫu qua trúc viện phùng tăng thoại,  
Hựu đắc phù sinh bán nhật nhân.”  
Cái đắc nhân cố nan, nhi trúc viện phùng tăng chi cánh nan, hữu như thị phù?  
Lão pháp sư trác tích danh lam, nãi tại thúy hoa ngự hạnh chi sở. Thiền viện huy  
hoàng, nhi nhất chân tự, như tri trần bất nhiễm, dữ thâm sơn tĩnh viện bình bát khổ  
hạnh nhất ban, kỳ u trí canh khả thượng dĩ!  
Chuyết phương tại mang trung, đắc phùng nhất tự, tưởng như đấng bảo sơn nhi  
chiêm tuệ nguyệt, trần lự đốn giác khoát nhiên, thậm dục dữ lão pháp sư cánh nhật  
đàm huyền, nhi công vụ thông thông, nãi tri trúc viện chi lạc. Như Lai Thế Tôn bất  
dĩ khinh hứa nhân dã. Nhiên tắc đảo thử bất khả vô nhất tán, ức diệc vong kỳ lậu  
dã.”* (Sino Nom Research Institute, 2005: 227)  
[Visit Hung Long<sup>11</sup> pagoda give to old Zen master Lien:  
An old poem has a saying:  
A chance visit to a bamboo institute (pagoda) leads to a talk with the monk.  
What an achievement for half a day in this ephemeral life<sup>12</sup>.  
Perhaps, having leisure is already difficult, but meeting a monk in a bamboo  
monastery is even more difficult, isn't it?

The old shaman cultivate in this famous place, which was from frequented by king palanquin. The monastery is splendid, but the Zen master persists in the “Great vehicle” religion, not infect with the dust, no different from ascetic practice in a remote mountain. What a place worth living to practice!

I was in a busy time, meeting the old monk talking, thinking that I went to the treasure mountain to look at the wisdom moon, my heart suddenly seemed to expand, I really wanted to talk with the master all day about the undecipherable of Buddhism, but too much work. Only then did I know the joy of the monastery, the Tathagata is not easy for people. but coming here, can't be without praise, so I also forgot that I was a clumsy person] (Sino Nom Research Institute, 2005).

In the content of this short paragraph, there are three things worth noting: The first, it is said that meeting a monk is a precious thing; the second is praising the monk's virtue; The third is to talk with the monk about meditation. Since then, the author emphasizes the relationship between the Northerners and the envoys.

And especially, during the 1760 envoy, Le Quy Don made friends, made rejoinder poems with minister Duong Cong Kiet, and Ho Trai (Le Quy Don, 2020a). For example, in the relationship between Ho Trai and Le Quy Don, the two have get over politics diplomacy to come to the intimate relationship of intellectuals who want to learn and exchange cultures between the two countries. In addition to the evidence recorded in the *Bắc sứ thông lục*, Le Quy Don also copied in the *Quế Đường thi tập* of poems given by Ho Trai (Cao Huy Giu, trans, 2022: 352-4). Along with that, Le Quy Don while indwelling in Vinh Chau also wrote a number of poems to see off Ho Trai. For example, the poem *Trú Vĩnh Châu tống Hồ Trai* (poem no.2) by Le Quy Don:

*Trần tâm cửu hướng khách trung thu,  
Tĩnh diệc sơn tăng, đạm diệc âu.  
Độc hữu hoài quân tình bất dĩ,  
Miên miên khước tự thử giang lưu.* (Le Quy Don, 2020a: 351)  
[In a foreign land, the human life heart has cool down,  
Quiet as a monk on the mountain, faint as an albatross shadow.  
Only the love for you remains unchanged,  
Be like this river forever].

And the re-rhyme poem (poem 2) by Ho Trai with the above Le Quy Don's poem:

*Bản vô tha phóng diệc vô thu,  
Hải khách hà tâm hiệp hải âu.  
Độc hữu ái tài vô hạn ý,  
Bất tùy Trương thủy hướng đông lưu.* (Le Quy Don, 2020a: 354)  
[The mind neither give up nor keep it,  
how cause do you want to be friend with the albatross,  
just only that admires talent is limitless,  
Do not follow the Tuong river flow east].

Separately, Trinh Hoai Duc has three giving poems to Zen masters when visiting temples in the north land.

In the poem *Tặng Hưng Long tự Dưỡng Tuyền lão hòa thượng*, Trinh Hoai Duc depicted the life of a Zen master living impermanently, enjoying the recitation of Buddha's sutras:

*Thần khẩu hồng chung tỉnh thế mộng,  
Đạ huyền bối diệp khán thiên hoa.* (Trinh Hoai Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & enoted, 2006: 320)  
[In the morning, knock the bell to wake up to worldly life,  
At the night, intone sutras and watching star in the sky].

In the poem *Du Hải Chàng tự tặng Tuệ Chân thượng nhân* as a thank you for the help of the superior monk Tue Chan when delegation the indwell at this pagoda:

*Trung dịch Nam châu hiến bặc thâm,  
Can mao trạm trú nhập thiền lâm.* (Trinh Hoài Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & enoted, 2006: 232)  
[Envoyers from the South come to offer with sincerity,  
The envoy flag halt in the meditate forest].

Or, *Thư tặng Thiên Đô am Minh Viễn lão thiền sư* emphasizes the meritorious of Zen Master Minh Vien:

*Già sa y tập tam sinh chứng,  
Thế giới hôi thiêu nhất túc tàng.* (Trinh Hoài Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & enoted, 2006: 319)  
[The Cassock is gifted for having realized three kalpas,  
The world of ashes is contained in a grain of rice].

Thus, based on some of the above examples, when going to envoy the Vietnamese envoys left good images in the North. These images are built by behavior, and talent in Buddhist dialogues, and are condensed in re-rhyme poem, and gifts poem of Vietnamese envoys for the Northern Zen master and officers.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, from the above survey results, we see that the envoy process of the envoys is not only a political task, but also a reception, and cultural exchange. In terms of cultural exchange, the Confucianists, when writing poems on Buddhist topics, description of Buddhist sites and spaces by the Confucianists envoys on their Northbound missions. These for show, in addition to absorbing northern culture from books, they also absorb it from the actual survey process. In terms of diplomatic missions, the envoy's poetry expression of relationships with the Zen masters, and the courtiers of the host country. This is clearly demonstrated in respect and esteem for each other. Finally, the Confucianists also expression of their personal emotions in poem with a sense of Buddhism and Zen. Their poems written about the pagoda being saved in the North is an important sign affirming the reception cultural exchange is reciprocate. This proves that the Northern people also very much want to receive the ideas and culture of the South. All these are expressing in the cultural exchange relations between Vietnam and China in medieval poetry. At this point, we would like to conclude the sign of Vietnam-China cultural exchange through an envoy poem about Buddhism with the last two verses in *Đề Ngô Khê tự* by Lê Quang Định:

*Kính thạch khả quang thiên cổ tích,  
Việt Nam tông thứ nhận bồ đề.* (Trinh Hoài Duc, Ngo Nhan Tinh & Le Quang Dinh, trans & enoted, 2006: 159)



[Mirror stone can illuminate traces of thousands of years,  
Vietnam has since received Bodhi].

Note:

1. A literary genre “Tù”
2. According to Sino Nom Department (1978b), Belonging to Thanh Vien, Guangdong Province, China: 83
3. According to Le Quy Don (2020a): Tuong Son Pagoda: on the top of Tuong Son, lush trees, dark caves. The pagoda was built in the second Ham Thong year of the Tang Dynasty (861), but it was also dilapidated. In front of the pagoda, there are birds, animals, fish, and worms carved in stone; behind the pagoda, there is a tower of Buddha of Infinite Life, 7 floors high; On the top there is a bronze gourd, soaring to the clouds. On the top of the mountain, there is Phi Lai stone, which is said to have flown from La Phu; In the east, there are the relics of Xa Bat Nham (Bach Wash Cave), Chuyen Than nham (Chuyen Than Cave). On the top of Tuong Son, you can see the whole view of Toan Chau: 720
4. See Multiple Authors (2004), 811-2: This work has not yet identified the author. Regarding the chronology, based on the language, and the two Phi Lai works written by Nguyen Dang and Nguyen Dinh Chat (mission in 1613), it is possible that the story was written around the 17th century.
5. Land of Nirvāṇa.
6. Outward appearance, form, colour, matter, thing; the desirable, especially the feminine attraction. It is defined as that which has resistance; or which changes and disappears, the phenomenal.
7. Movement arises from the nature of wind which is the cause of motion.
8. The three vehicles, or conveyances which carry living beings across samsāra, or mortality (birth and death) to the shore of nirvāna. The three are styled: 1) Hīnayāna, lesser vehicle; 2) Madhyamayāna, medium vehicle; 3) Mahayāna, greater vehicle.
9. The four elements of which all things are made: 1) prithin, earth; 2) apas, water; 3) tjas, fire; 4) vayu, wind.
10. The Four Noble Truths, the primary and fundamental doctrines of Sakyamuni. The four are: 1) Dukkha-ārya-satya, The Noble Truth of Suffering; 2) Dukkha-samudaya-ārya-satya, The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering; 3) Dukkha-nirodha-ārya-satya, The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering; 4) Dukkha-nirodha-mārga-ārya-satya, The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.
11. Hung Long Pagoda: Located at the down of Hung Long mountain in Ha Bac province, China.
12. These two sentences are taken from Ly Thiep's poem "Dang Son" at the end of the Tang Dynasty, China

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