

# INSIGHTS INTO THE CONTENT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAN NHAN TONG'S PHILOSOPHY

## INFORMAÇÕES SOBRE O CONTEÚDO E AS CARACTERÍSTICAS DA FILOSOFIA DE TRAN NHAN TONG

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particularmente em pontos de vista ontológicos; no que diz respeito à moralidade humana e ao cultivo da sabedoria e da conduta ética; em relação à vida e à morte humanas, destacando notavelmente o conceito de "mente tranquila", que significa a característica de herança integrada, a praticidade e o profundo espírito humanístico incorporado na meditação engajada positiva do Dai Viet durante os séculos XIII a XIV.

**Palavras-chave:** Tran Nhan Tong. Pensamento filosófico. Ontologia. Filosofia de vida. Ética. "Mente tranquila". "Vida meditativa". Espírito de atenção plena engajado. Herança integrada. Praticidade. Éthos humano.

**Abstract:** This article delves into Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical perspectives, particularly focusing on ontological viewpoints; concerning human morality and the cultivation of wisdom and ethical conduct; regarding human life and death, notably highlighting the concept of a "quiet mind", which signifies the integrated inheritance characteristic, practicality, and profound humanistic spirit embodied in the positive engaged meditation of Dai Viet during the 13th - 14th centuries.

**Keywords:** Tran Nhan Tong. Philosophical thought. Ontology. Philosophy of life. Ethics. "Quiet mind". "Meditative living". Engaged mindfulness spirit. Integrated inheritance. Practicality. Humane ethos.

**Resumo:** Este artigo investiga as perspectivas filosóficas de Tran Nhan Tong, concentrando-se

## 1. Introduction

*Tran Nhan Tong* (陳仁宗, December 7, 1258 - December 16, 1308), also known as Tran Kham (陳吟), with the courtesy name Thanh Phuc, served as the third emperor of the Tran Dynasty of Dai Viet. His reign lasted from November 8, 1278, to April 16, 1293, after which he assumed the role of Emperor Emeritus until his passing. Tran Nhan Tong was not only renowned as “compassionate and gentle, able to unite the people and successful in his cause of furthering his predecessors”, but also distinguished himself as an eminent Zen master under the title *Huong Van Dai Dau Da* (香雲大頭陀) (The Great Ascetic Monk) and *Truc Lam Dai Dau Da* (竹林大頭陀). His thoughts are captured in various works, such as *Thien Lam Thiet Thuy Luc* (recorded sayings about poisonous Insects in Zen Forest), *Tang gia toai su* (Trivia of monks), and *Thach That My Ngu* (Raving words in the Stone Chamber), which were later copied into the Tripitaka by King Tran Anh Tong for circulation. *Dai Huong Hai An Thi Tap* (Seal of approval collection of poems of the great ocean and fragrant water). *Tran Nhan Tong thi tap* (Tran Nhan Tong poetry collection). *Trung Hung Thuc Luc* (2 volumes): records the Yuan invasion.. While most of these texts are lost, some fragments, including 32 poems and verses, are preserved in various sources, such as *Thanh Dang Ngu Luc*, *Thien Tong Ban Hanh*, *An Nam Chi Luoc*, *Nam Ong Mong Luc*, *Viet Am Thi Tap*, *Toan Viet Thi Luc*, plus 3 fragments in *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* and *An Nam Chi Luoc*. Prominent among his philosophical contributions are his reflections on various aspects of existence, including perspectives on the world, perception, human morality, the role and attitude of individuals in life, and contemplations on life and death. Additionally, his insights into cultivating morality and wisdom to attain enlightenment and liberation are noteworthy. These ideas are articulated through a system of concepts and categories such as: “essence”, “Bodhi”, “brightness”, “mirror nature”, “treasure”, “Suchness”, “mind”, “quiet mind”, “existence - emptiness”, “right-wrong”, “mortal - saint”, “purity of heart”, “meditative living”, “Reading the scriptures, studying the teachings, learning the way, paying homage to the teacher”, “putting an end to false thoughts”, “training the mind to become a Buddha, cleaning heart precepts, cleansing form precepts”, and “eating vegetables and fruits, and dressing in burlap or rough cloth (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 505), “homeland”. His philosophical thought possesses outstanding characteristics: inheritance and integration, practicality, dynamic engaged meditation, and a profound humanistic ethos.

## 2. Literature Review

Firstly, there exist several research works on Tran Nhan Tong in historical form, notably including: *The Complete Annals of Dai Viet* volume 2, published by the Hanoi Social Sciences Publishing House in 1998; *Introduction to the History of Vietnam* edited by Truong Huu Quynh, Dinh Xuan Lam, and Le Mau Han, published by the Hanoi National Political Publishing House in 2005; *Vietnamese Society in the Ly - Tran Dynasties*, published by the Institute of History, Hanoi Social Sciences Publishing House in 1980; and *The Development of Vietnamese Thought from the 19th Century to the August Revolution* (in 3 volumes) by Tran Van Giau, published by the National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, in 1996, etc. These scholarly works offer comprehensive analyses and discussions on the economic, political, and social status, as well as the life, career, and ideology of Tran Nhan Tong within the context of 13th to 14th-century Vietnamese history, helping readers gain a broader perspective on Tran Nhan Tong's life and contributions.

Secondly, there exist research works examining Tran Nhan Tong from the perspective of cultural and religious ideology. These include *Poetry of Ly - Tran*, compiled by the Institute of Literature and published by the Hanoi Social Sciences Publishing House in 1989; *Vietnamese Buddhist History* by Nguyen Lang, published by the Hanoi Literature Publishing House in 2000; *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, edited by Nguyen Tai Thu and published by the Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi in 1993; *Collection of Vietnamese Buddhist Literature* by Le Manh That, published by the Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House in 2006; and *History of Vietnamese Buddhism* by Thich Minh Tue, published by the Ho Chi Minh City Buddhist Association in 1993. These scholarly works are comprehensive, offering detailed introductions, evaluations, and the most thorough and reliable texts on Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and philosophy. Furthermore, they delve into Tran Nhan Tong's role and position within the broader context of Vietnamese Buddhist thought, particularly his significance within Vietnamese Zen Buddhism.

Thirdly, there are research works examining Tran Nhan Tong from the perspective of philosophical thought. These include *Philosophical Ideas From The Nation-Building Period To The Early Twentieth Century* edited by Doan Chinh, published by Hanoi National Politics Publishing House in 2013; *Outline of Vietnamese Buddhist Philosophy - from the beginning to the 14th Century* by Nguyen Hung Hau, published by Hanoi Social Sciences Publishers in 2002;

*Philosophical Thought of the Truc Lam Zen Sect of the Tran Dynasty* by Truong Van Chung, published by National Politics Publishers in Hanoi in 1998; *Vietnamese Thought in the Ly - Tran Dynasty* edited by Doan Chinh and Truong Van Chung, published by Hanoi National Politics Publishing House in 2008; *History of Vietnamese Thought*, volume 1, published by Hanoi Social Sciences Publishing House in 2006; and *Three patriarchs of Truc Lam Zen sect: An explanation* by Thich Thanh Tu, published by Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House in 1995, etc.

### **3. Research Methods**

*Purpose:* The aim is to present and analyze the fundamental philosophical concepts of Tran Nhan Tong, focusing on ontological and ethical issues. Through this exploration, the objective is to delineate the distinctive characteristics and historical significance of Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought.

*Methodology:* The article's approach is based on the worldview and dialectical materialist methodology, and uses specific research methods such as analysis and synthesis, logic and history, induction and deduction. interpretation, abstraction, generalization, comparison, comparison and literary methods. to research and present the article.

*Main Findings:* Firstly, the article systematically presents Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought by analyzing his philosophical and Zen concepts and categories on issues of ontology, human outlook, and moral philosophy. It delves into the role, position, and attitude towards human life, as well as the contemplation of life and death, and the cultivation of morality and intuitive wisdom to attain enlightenment and achieve liberation. Secondly, the article presents, analyzes, evaluates, and delineates the primary characteristics of Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought. These include inheritance, integration, the spirit of positive engaged meditation, and profound humanistic ethos. Additionally, the article underscores the historical significance of Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought. His philosophy not only contributed to the development of a distinct Vietnamese Zen philosophical system but also served as the spiritual foundation for building an independent and unified Dai Viet nation, promoting a pro-people politic.

### **4. Results And Discussion**

#### **4.1. Basic Contents of Tran Nhan Tong's Philosophical Thought:**

**Regarding the Issue of Ontology:** In his perspective on ontology, Tran Nhan Tong employs a conceptual framework that includes notions such as "*essence*", "*mind*", "*Bodhi*", "*brightness*", "*mirror nature*", "*treasure*", "*Suchness*", "*purity of heart*", and "*homeland*", etc. to elucidate the essence of all dharmas. Primarily, Tran Nhan Tong's conception of the term "essence" seeks to encapsulate the root and fundamental essence of the universe. "So we know, Buddha is in the house, no need to search afar Short of roots, we look for Buddha; having understood, we are Buddha" (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 506). However, within Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical framework, the concept of "mind", which is deemed the origin and true essence of all entities and sentient beings, remains central and paramount, governing all other aspects of his philosophy.

Tran Nhan Tong viewed the "*mind*" as inherently tranquil, expansive, and boundless, beyond the grasp of language and thought, and innate in every human being, which he termed as the "*Quiet Mind*." According to Tran Nhan Tong, this Quiet Mind transcends all notions and concepts. The stirring of even the slightest thought disrupts the tranquility and clarity of stillness, veiling it within the realm of worldly phenomena. This essence mirrors the moon reflected in still water. When the surface is undisturbed, the moon appears clear and whole, but when disturbed, it fragments and disperses. Tran Nhan Tong's concept of the Quiet Mind aligns with Tran Thai Tong's notion of the "Empty Mind". Because the concept of "no-mind" and "no-thought" within the "empty" mind aims to attain a state of tranquil equanimity. While Tran Thai Tong focused on the attributes of the mind, Tue Trung Thuong Si delved into its inherent nature, Tran Nhan Tong, however, concentrated more on the condition and manifestation of the mind. Through this, we see that Tran Nhan Tong's idea of "*essence*" or "*origin*" is about the purity of heart, the clarity of awareness (enlightenment), and the mirror nature is nature, essence. This essence is inherent in every human being, perpetually pure, transcending notions of good and evil, birth and destruction, and coming and going. However, human tendencies such as *greed*, hatred, delusion, and ignorance often obscure or dilute this innate purity, leading individuals to deviate from their original state of pure and tranquil mind (short of root).

According to the fundamental philosophy of Zen, concepts such as self-nature or Dharma, mind or Buddha, mortal or saint, same or different, are all determined by the human mind. With a "quiet mind", everything becomes unified and natural, while a restless mind perceives a world of phenomena as diverse and contradictory. It is this understanding that shapes Tran Nhan Tong's perspective on life. Through reaching the highest state of

attainment, individuals can transcend the Three Poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion) and realize the Three Bodies of the Buddha (Dharma-kaya (Truth body), Sambhoga-kaya (Enjoyment body), and Nirmana-kaya (Manifestation body)). Tran Nhan Tong believes that to attaining the "quiet mind", the innate true nature within each person, does not begin with awareness, conceptualization, or seeking ideas, but rather through direct confirmation in one's own lived experience. On this path of spiritual progress, the content and ultimate goal of cultivation and meditation is singular—to achieve the "*quiet mind*." However, the methods and practices to attain this state are diverse and plentiful, defying simple categorization into common forms or specific means.

To denote the essence, Tran Nhan Tong refrained from using the concept of "Buddha nature" but instead employed terms like "Bodhi", "Suchness", "brightness", "mirror nature", and "true aspect". He also referred to it as a "treasure" present within every individual. This "essence" pervades all, yet few take notice of its presence. It cannot be comprehended through thought, discussion, or language, nor can it be expressed through colors or sounds. Merely pondering or speaking about it is erroneous; even attempting to seek it out proves futile. In another sense, it serves as the foundation that people either forget, lose, or become ensnared by greed, hatred, delusion, and ignorance without awareness, causing them to drift endlessly in the river of delusion and the sea of suffering. This perspective resonates with that of Vinītaruci, who perceives Buddha nature as a pearl, an inherent treasure within each individual. However, due to ignorance, people remain unaware of its existence within themselves, mistakenly seeking it externally.

Thus, to denote the essence or "quiet mind", Tran Nhan Tong has articulated it through various names such as Bodhi, awareness, brightness, nature, pure and tranquil heart, Buddha, Suchness, true aspect, true emptiness, Truth body, and more. It is perceived as a treasure within every individual and serves as the origin, source, and essence of the entire universe. This essence is eternal, unborn, and immortal, transcending all dualistic dualities and contradictions. However, due to the experiences of life, individuals become entrapped by greed, hatred, and delusion, causing them to forget and stray from their inherent Buddha nature inherent inside their mind. Thus, the focus lies in returning to the roots, to what Tran Nhan Tong referred to as homeland (homeland).

*Regarding the concepts of "mind", "nature", "Dharma", and "Buddha",* Tran Nhan Tong believes that they are closely interconnected and nearly identical, akin to "shadow and shape." He questions, "What nature are those voices laughing, raising eyebrows, squinting eyes,

holding hands and walking feet? Which mind does that nature belong to? Mind and character are also clear, what is right and what is not? Dharma is nature, Buddha is mind, so which nature is not dharma, which mind is not Buddha?" The mind is Buddha, and the mind is also the Dharma. However, because Dharma is not truly Dharma, stating that Dharma is mind is akin to saying that mind is not truly mind, yet mind is Buddha, implying that Buddha is not truly Buddha. This complex interrelation underscores the profound interconnectedness of these concepts in Tran Nhan Tong's philosophy. (Source: Tran Trieu Dat Phat Dien Luc, 1943, 38a-38b)

*Regarding the relationship between essence and the phenomenal world:* in Tran Nhan Tong's philosophy, *this* is characterized by the interplay between "existence" and "nothingness". Similar to the perspectives of Tran Thai Tong and Thuong Si, Tran Nhan Tong perceives the phenomenal world as arising from a continuous stream of perceptions characterized by discrimination and choice. Consequently, all phenomena are intricately intertwined, akin to the complex intertwining of manioc and bushes of grass. All things undergo birth, transformation, and impermanent change. Due to causes and effect, phenomena are merely illusory, existing but not inherently real, much like a dream with its various names and forms. To apprehend the genuine nature or true self-nature and attain a pristine, unadulterated mind, individuals must engage in practice, meditation, and cultivate their intellect and moral character. This enables them to transcend the manipulation and delusion inherent in the realm of phenomena and appearances. The divergence between Tran Nhan Tong and Tran Thai Tong and Thuong Si lies in their conceptualization of the origin of the sensory world's appearance, its manifestations, and the nature of existence itself. Tran Nhan Tong seldom delved into discussions about essence – being – emptiness, or the origin of the appearance of the phenomenal world. Instead, he expressed, "Behold, the path is vast, lofty, and expansive, devoid of constraints, devoid of bondage; Its essence is lucid and condensed, devoid of evil or good. Over time, due to deliberate choices, many shortcuts have been made" (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 660). According to Tran Nhan Tong, the origin of distinctions in this phenomenal world arises from discrimination and selection, from distinguishing between this and that. However, upon deeper analysis, *discrimination and selectivity are indeed manifestations of dualistic views, dualistic views entail making selective and discriminatory choices, letting go of dualistic views entails transcending considerations of right and wrong, above and below, before and after, good and bad, and good and evil, then, there is no longer discrimination and selectivity.* Concerning this aspect, he directly learned from his teacher, Thuong si, yet

ultimately, dualistic views, false thoughts, and being selective are also manifestations of ignorance within Buddhist philosophy.

In Tran Nhan Tong's view, the world is inherently natural and unified, interconnected with a quiet mind, devoid of distinctions such as "existence-nothingness", "right-wrong", or "mortal-saint". However, when being objectified, differentiated, and divided by consciousness, they give rise to a distinct reality. No matter how strenuously one endeavors to establish foundations or pursue worldly pursuits, it proves futile. Tran Nhan Tong's conception of the phenomenal world aligns with the "impermanence" doctrine of Buddhist philosophy. He posits that while this world exists, it is ultimately unreal, a mere illusion created by false causes and effects akin to a fleeting dream. Its manifestation stems from discrimination and selectivity and, ultimately, ignorance. With the eradication of ignorance, the myriad illusions and delusions dissipate.

***Regarding the matter of human life and morality:*** If Tran Nhan Tong's worldview primarily aligns with Buddhism, his outlook on life also integrates elements of Confucianism and Taoism, blending perspectives from Zen and the concept of Buddha fields.

It can be asserted that Tran Nhan Tong's entire philosophical framework, akin to Zen Buddhism, originates from the "mind" and ends with the "mind". *The focal point is the "mind", and the objective of Nhan Tong's philosophy is to attain the innate "mind", characterized by purity, tranquility, and clarity. This essence is considered the quintessence of "meditation". While others may refer to it as the "mind seal" (Vinitaruci), "mindset" (Vo Ngon Thong), "empty mind" (Tran Thai Tong), or "mind body" (Tue Trung Thuong Si), Tran Nhan Tong terms it the "quiet mind".* Thus, it can be argued that Tran Nhan Tong's Zen philosophy extensively addresses the issue of human life through the lens of the "quiet mind" with utmost comprehensiveness and coherence. Tran Nhan Tong regards these as the paramount concerns of Zen existence, acknowledging the brevity and impermanence of life. Hence, he actively engages with the world, channeling all his energy towards the pursuit of both worldly endeavors and spiritual endeavors.

***Regarding human life and the role of people in life:*** Tran Nhan Tong believes that living without helping the world is a disgrace for a man ("To live in vain is a shameful man" 生無補世丈夫慙 - Hoa Kieu Nguyen Lang Van, 和喬元朗韻). That's why *Tran Nhan Tong always emphasizes the role and responsibility of people in life, connecting each person's life with the interests of the nation.* He affirmed that as a man, you must be determined to pay off your country's debts, what must you leave behind for the mountains and rivers, what must you do to help the world? To alleviate the concern of "national worry" that constantly burdens our hearts.



(Institute of Literature, Poetry of Ly - Tran, volume 2, 1989, p. 479). So wherever he went, he opened sermon classes to teach people everywhere to practice the Ten Virtues, destroy evil and bring virtue to the world; that is: 1. *To refrain from killing any living being*; 2. *To refrain from stealing*; 3. *To refrain from sexual misconduct* (Three Acts of Goodness); 4. *To refrain from lying*; 5. *To refrain from making defamatory statements about others*; 6. *To refrain from using harsh words*; 7. *To refrain from doing worthless chatter* (four aspects of right speech); 8. *To refrain from greed*; 9. *To refrain from desiring to harm others*; 10. *To refrain from having wrong views* (three good thoughts).

***In the pursuit of moral cultivation, awareness training, and wisdom development for enlightenment and liberation***

According to Tran Nhan Tong, the ultimate aim of human life is to nurture morality and wisdom, leading to the realization of true nature, enlightenment, liberation, and Nirvana with a pure mind, cessation, and perfection. This state transcends discrimination, conflict between self and others, and quarrels among individuals, embodying what is referred to as the "*Quiet mind*". To achieve the state of "*quiet mind*", Tran Nhan Tong suggested a systematic approach to cultivate human intelligence and morality. *This involved practicing meditation in stages, incorporating ascetic disciplines to eliminate false thoughts, and embracing the moral teachings from Confucianism and Taoism such as "Reading the scriptures, studying the teachings, learning the Way, paying homage to the teacher", "training the mind to become a Buddha, cleaning heart precepts, cleansing form precepts, keeping the heart mirror clean"* (Institute of Literature, Poetry of Ly - Tran, volume 2, 1989, p. 507), *"eating vegetables and fruits, and dressing in burlap or rough cloth"* (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 505). He embodied *meditative living* through his simple, pure, and virtuous lifestyle. With boundless love for all sentient beings, Tran Nhan Tong illuminated the inherent root within every individual, revealing the reasons behind their straying from the path and guiding them to reconnect with their true essence. He not only adhered to ethical principles himself but also urged and instructed people everywhere to live by the "Ten Virtues", which vividly embodied the teachings of Buddhism.

Tran Nhan Tong aimed to establish a Vietnamese society grounded in Buddhist ethics, instructing people to engage in virtuous deeds, abstain from wrongdoing, and transcend the cycle of karma and reincarnation. He recognized the positive elements within Buddhism capable of fostering unity among people and bolstering social morality. By founding the Truc Lam Zen sect, he sought to revitalize and elevate Buddhist philosophy's influence in Dai Viet's spiritual and social spheres, while fostering a cohesive and inclusive

religious organization to serve as a societal focal point. His vision held not only religious significance but also profound social implications, aiming to transcend the limitations of Buddhism during the Ly and early Tran dynasties and establish an independent and unified ideological framework for Dai Viet society.

*Regarding the matter of life and death and the human life:* Tran Nhan Tong echoed the sentiments of Lao Tzu, acknowledging that "to be human is to have a body, and to have a body is to have calamity". He expressed:

*"Ordinary beings are born with this body,*

*Which is a great calamity.*

*Who truly knows this*

*Is a person of profound insight"* (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 532)

Tran Nhan Tong possessed a deep understanding of the impermanent nature of human existence, likening it to "breathing through the lungs." Can humans transcend the constraints of life and death? According to him, humans cannot evade the cycle of birth and death and the law of cause and effect to attain Nirvana. Instead, they must confront birth and death directly to comprehend their essence fully. In doing so, they realize that birth and death are neither purely birth nor death. Therefore, the matter of life and death is not trivial but a significant concern that shapes the practitioner's approach to life. Tran Nhan Tong advocated for an active engagement with the transient nature of life, integrating religious practice with the lived experience.

#### **4.2. Key Characteristics of Tran Nhan Tong's Philosophical Thought**

##### ***Inheritance and integration in the philosophical thought of Tran Nhan Tong***

The philosophical thought of Tran Nhan Tong emerges from the internal evolution of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism, deeply rooted in the historical and social context of Vietnam during the Tran and Dynasty dynasties. It embodies the inheritance, fusion, and advancement of elements from earlier Zen sects like the Vinītaruci sect, Vo Ngon Thong Zen sect, and Thao Duong Zen sect of the Ly Dynasty. However, its most distinctive influence stems from the Zen philosophy of Tran Thai Tong and Tue Trung Thuong Si. This is the amalgamation of Zen, Purity, Confucianism, and Taoism reflects the spirit of Vietnamese tradition, heralding a new phase of development in Vietnamese Zen learning.

Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought creatively fuses various elements, particularly evident in his worldview and moral philosophy. Central to Zen philosophy is the

concept of the mind, which Tran Nhan Tong regarded as inherently tranquil, natural, boundless, and beyond description by conventional means such as words, colors, or sounds. Additionally, it is unbound by thought and considered the essence of all existence, present in every individual, referred to as the "*Quiet Mind*". Tran Nhan Tong's conception of the "*Quiet Mind*" aligns with Vinītaruci's "*Mind Seal*", Vo Ngon Thong's "*Mindset*", Tran Thai Tong's "*empty mind*", and Tue Trung Thuong si's "*Mind Body*." Tran Nhan Tong inherited, amalgamated, and enriched these philosophical concepts with new insights and expressions.

*The integration in Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought manifests as a fusion of Zen and Buddha field ideologies, alongside the incorporation of moral and ethical principles from Confucianism and Taoism into the sphere of human life.* In pursuit of the "*Quiet Mind*", he advocated meditation practices in stages, incorporating ascetic disciplines to eliminate false thoughts, and a return to one's roots through precepts, concentration, and wisdom, as well as chanting, repentance, and complete enlightenment. Additionally, he emphasized the combination with Buddha field practices to attain clarity and purity of heart, ultimately leading to the Land of Bliss and Nirvana, "Fame holds no importance, and wealth holds no importance either" (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 533).

### ***The spirit of active, positive, and engaged meditation in the philosophical thought of Tran Nhan Tong***

Active meditation and worldly engagement are crucial in Vietnamese Zen Buddhism, as reflected in the teachings of the Vinītaruci, Vo Ngon Thong, and Thao Duong Zen sects, particularly in the concepts of the "living Buddha," "meditative living," and "meditation practice" put forth by Tran Thai Tong and Tue Trung Thuong Si. The spirit of positive worldly engagement in Tran Nhan Tong's meditation is summarized in two main points. *Firstly*, Tran Nhan Tong was determined to restore and promote the leading role of Buddhist thought in the spiritual life of Dai Viet society, ensuring that Buddhist moral philosophy deeply permeated and became the foundation of the morality of the Dai Viet people. *Secondly*, it involves integrating Buddhist philosophy into social life, demonstrated through proactive engagement and positive living rather than solely focusing on religious activities and adherence to daily religious precepts and rituals like chanting sutras and reciting the Buddha's name, as well as not only focus on everyday actions, but also encompasses actions with much greater meaning and purpose such as caring for the people and the country, engaging in endeavors like defending against enemies to protect the populace and safeguarding the

nation, and propagating the moral philosophy of human life to emulate Buddhism, using meditation to serve life, connecting religion with daily life, in the spirit of integrating Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and the spiritual foundation of national culture, and considering it as a guiding characteristic for Vietnamese meditation.

### ***The Humanity in the Philosophical thought of Tran Nhan Tong***

A philosophical doctrine embodies humanity when it is centered on humans, prioritizing their well-being and development. Tran Nhan Tong's Buddhist thought exemplifies this principle.

First of all, within his philosophical reflections, Tran Nhan Tong consistently asserted and upheld the innate goodness of humanity, regarding the Buddha nature, enlightenment, and bodhi as inherently pure qualities accessible within the heart of every individual. The humanity within Tran Nhan Tong's philosophy is further evident in his earnest desire and commitment to safeguarding the well-being of the populace, fostering moral education, and embracing a spirit of tolerance and virtue to attract individuals of talent. Through these endeavors, tranquility was maintained within the territory, fostering trust and fostering a sense of love among its inhabitants.

Additionally, the humanity inherent in Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought is evident in his commitment to defending the country and its people against external threats, as well as in his efforts to establish a pro-people politics aimed at fostering a peaceful and prosperous society. He adeptly "strengthening the people's power", relying on the strength of the people to devise optimal strategies for safeguarding the nation, thereby laying a solid foundation for the longevity of the Tran Dynasty monarchy.

The emergence of Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought addressed the necessity to revive and elevate the prominence of Buddhist ideology within the spiritual landscape of Dai Viet society, establishing Buddhist moral philosophy as a foundational ethical framework for the entire societal structure, while concurrently establishing a unified religious institution to serve as the centralized hub for the entire society. Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical ideology held significant political and social significance, as it transcended the constraints faced by Buddhism during the Ly and early Tran dynasties. These earlier periods witnessed Buddhism's fragmented nature and reliance on foreign ideological influences, without fully asserting its independence in terms of philosophical content and religious identity. Tran Nhan Tong's philosophical thought contributed significantly to establishing an independent

and unified ideology for the entire society, breaking free from excessive reliance on external ideologies.

## 5. Conclusion

Tran Nhan Tong was not merely a wise emperor but also a remarkable thinker and Zen master during the Tran Dynasty, earning the illustrious title "Buddha Emperor." Among his notable contributions is his philosophical ideology, characterized by a systematic framework of concepts and categories that articulate his perspectives on existence, the interplay between existence and phenomena, the role and outlook on life of individuals, and the cultivation of morality and wisdom toward enlightenment and liberation. This doesn't begin with theoretical awareness, linguistic naming, or the pursuit of ideas, nor does it involve clutching onto language, engaging in selective judgment, and distinctions between existence and emptiness, distinguish between right and wrong with One-sided standpoint, and must be personally realized in one's own life by engaging in the process of cultivating morality and meditation, from ascetic practices to void of dual views, stop clinging to the idea of self and others, stop greed, anger, and ignorance, forge the awakening ability, keep the precepts (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 505), Fame holds no importance, and wealth holds no importance either, Elegant, frugal, with clear awareness, fostering a happy body and mind, shedding all worldly conditions, no discrimination, undisturbed mind, transcending the void of dual views and breaking attachment, achieving speechlessness, thoughtlessness, or a "quiet mind" – these are indeed profoundly unique.

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