



Article

Ti Ni Da Luu Chi and the Foundations of Vietnamese Zen: A Historical-Philosophical Study

Bui Huy Du

Mekong University, Vietnam

Correspondence: buihuydu2018@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the philosophical thought of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi (Vinītaruci), widely recognized as the first patriarch who laid the foundation for the organized Zen tradition in Vietnam. Drawing on core Mahayana doctrines, Prajnaparamita, Tam Luan, and elements of Tantric Buddhism, the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen sect developed a distinctive philosophical system addressing ontology, epistemology, and ethics. This study employs the Marxist philosophical worldview combined with historical-textual analysis to elucidate the sect's conceptual frameworks, including notions of true mind, true body, tathata, mind seal, karma, and the illusory nature of phenomenal existence. The findings reveal that Ti Ni Da Luu Chi's philosophy emphasizes the interdependence of essence and phenomena, the importance of non-attachment, ascetic practice, and the pursuit of enlightenment through meditation and moral cultivation. These insights not only enriched Vietnamese Buddhist thought during the Ly–Tran dynasties but also continue to offer valuable perspectives for addressing contemporary social and ethical challenges in Vietnam. The study contributes to the broader field of Buddhist studies by situating early Vietnamese Zen in its historical context while highlighting its enduring relevance for modern philosophical and cultural discourse.

Keywords: *Ti Ni Da Luu Chi; Vietnamese Zen Buddhism; Buddhist Philosophy; Vietnamese Intellectual History; Ethical Thought*

Suggested citation:

Hu, B.H. (2025). Ti Ni Da Luu Chi and the Foundations of Vietnamese Zen: A Historical-Philosophical Study. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI2), 968-982. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.436>



Introduction

The philosophy of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi is profoundly anchored in the doctrines of Prajñāpāramitā, Tam Luan (Three Commentaries), and Hoa Nghiem (Avatamsaka), while simultaneously exhibiting distinct Tantric influences. Although it emphasizes direct, experiential practice over literary scholasticism, it nonetheless upholds the rigorous study of scriptures. It affirms the view that ultimate reality transcends the duality of existence and non-existence. Central to this tradition is the transmission of the mind seal (tâm ấn), which embodies its unique metaphysical and ethical vision.

Ontologically, Ti Ni Da Luu Chi's thought explores key concepts such as true mind (chân tâm), true body (chân thân), tathatā (suchness), bodhi (awakening), the miraculous body, illusory manifestations, and the notion of emptiness or nihilism (śūnyatā). Epistemologically, it investigates the nature of human existence through the interplay of karma and the cycle of birth and death (samsāra), offering insights into the processes that bind beings to worldly suffering. Ethically, the tradition advocates for virtues such as purity of mind, detachment, non-desire, ascetic discipline, and the cultivation of enlightenment and liberation. This integrated framework uniting ontology, epistemology, and ethics enriches Vietnam's broader Buddhist philosophical discourse. It provides profound insights into the nature of being, knowledge, and moral cultivation, offering a distinctive perspective on the path to spiritual realization and the transformation of human consciousness.

Literature Review

The philosophical thought of the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen sect has been studied primarily within the broader context of medieval Vietnamese Buddhism. Foundational historical works such as *Dai Viet Chronicles of Full Letters* (Institute of History, 1998) and Phan Huy Chu's *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí* [Classified Records of Successive Dynasties] (Phan, 2006) provide crucial insights into the socio-political backdrop that shaped early Vietnamese Zen schools. General historical syntheses, including Truong Huu Quynh, Dinh Xuan Lam, and Le Mau Han's *Outline of Vietnamese History* (Truong et al., 2002) and *Social Research on Vietnam in the Ly-Tran Period* (Institute of Social Sciences, 1980), further contextualize how cultural and political developments enabled Buddhist sects to flourish.

Specific scholarly contributions address the philosophical aspects of Vietnamese Zen. Notable among these are Nguyen Lang's *Vietnamese Buddhist History* (Nguyen, 2000), Truong Van Chung and Doan Chinh's *Vietnamese Thought in the Ly-Tran Period* (Truong & Doan, 2008), and the edited volume *History of*

Vietnamese Philosophical Ideas from the Nation-Building Period to the Early Twentieth Century (Doan, 1998). These works analyze doctrinal evolution, key figures, and the transmission of Zen lineages such as Ti Ni Da Luu Chi. Early studies like Vietnamese Zen Studies (Nguyen, 1966) and Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden (Nguyen, 1993) also provide essential biographical and doctrinal perspectives.

More recent research has expanded the scope of Vietnamese Zen studies through comparative and transregional approaches. For example, Nguyen Cong Tu's Zen Buddhism in Medieval Vietnam: A Comparative Perspective (Nguyen, 2015) highlights the interplay between Chinese Chan and indigenous Vietnamese adaptations. Similarly, Tran Thi Thu's Mind-Seal Transmission in Vietnamese Zen (Tran, 2018) explores how mind-seal (*tâm ấn*) practice distinguishes the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi tradition from other Zen schools. Internationally, scholars like John McRae (2003) and Steven Heine (2008) have contributed frameworks for studying East Asian Zen transmission, yet few comparative studies directly engage the Vietnamese context in depth.

While the historical and general philosophical characteristics of the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen sect have been documented, there remains a significant gap regarding its systematic philosophical system, particularly how its ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions interrelate within the unique socio-political milieu of the Ly-Tran period. Existing literature broadly treats Vietnamese Zen or focuses primarily on historical transmission and monastic biographies. Detailed analytical studies that situate Ti Ni Da Luu Chi's core metaphysical categories (*tathatā*, *bodhi*, *sūnyatā*) alongside its practical ethics and meditative practice are still limited. This paper addresses this gap by providing a focused philosophical analysis that integrates doctrinal, historical, and social perspectives.

Materials and Methods

Purpose

This study seeks to elucidate the philosophical thought of the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen sect, with particular emphasis on its ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions, as well as its views on human life and the defilements (*kleshas*) that are intrinsically linked to meditative practice.

Methodology

The research is grounded in the worldview and methodological principles of Marxist philosophy. It employs a combination of established philosophical research methods, including analysis and synthesis, logical-historical interpretation, induction

and hermeneutic analysis, abstraction, generalization, comparison, and critical textual examination of primary and secondary sources.

Main Results

The study delineates the fundamental elements of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen thought. Ontologically, it investigates core concepts such as true mind (chân tâm), actual body (chân thân), tathatā (suchness), bodhi (awakening), the miraculous body, illusory manifestations, and śūnyatā (emptiness or nihilism). Epistemologically, it addresses questions concerning human existence through karma, life, and death (samsāra). Ethically, it highlights the cultivation of virtues such as purity of mind, non-desire, non-attachment, ascetic discipline, enlightenment, and ultimate liberation.

Results & Discussions

Basic Contents Philosophical Thoughts of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi

Ti Ni Da Luu Chi (毘尼多流支, Vinītaruci; - 594), also known as Dieu Hi (滅喜), was an Indian Zen master from Oḍḍiyāna, traditionally identified as a place in the Swat valley. Who went to China to study and was a Dharma disciple of Tang Can; He is the founder of the Zen sect of Ti Da Luu Chi at Phap Van Tu (法雲寺), the first Zen sect in Vietnam.

The monk is from Southern Thien Truc (India), of the Brahmin lineage. As a child, he had an unusual will and went everywhere to study Buddhadharma. In 574, he went to China and took this opportunity to meet the Three Patriarchs of Tang San at Tu Khong Mountain. Seeing the majestic gesture of the Patriarch, the Master suddenly fell in love with the grave and stood in front of his arms respectfully. The group still sat quietly with eyes closed and did not speak. The monk stood still and thought for a moment, suddenly enlightened, and immediately knelt and bowed three times. Seeing this, the group only nodded three times. The Master wanted to follow the Patriarch, but the Patriarch advised him to go to the South to teach. He went to Vietnam around the end of the 6th century (about 580 AD), and resided at Phap Van Pagoda (ie, Dau Pagoda, Bac Ninh today). Here, the Master translated the Dai thua Phuong Quang tong tri, after having finished translating the Tuuong dau tinh xa 象頭精舍 in China.

Before his death, the Master called his disciple Phap Hien to come and entrust him with: “The Buddha’s seal of mind is deceptive, round as the state of vanity, has neither lack nor excess, neither going nor returning, neither gain nor loss, neither one nor one other, which is neither permanent nor cut off, inherently has no place of birth, no place to cease, nor is it parting from, nor is it not forsaken. Because of hope, that name only simulates that name... When he proved this mind, Ancestor Tang San told us to return

to the South to teach quickly. Having traveled through many places, I believe that coming here to meet you is in keeping with the legend. So be careful, my time has come" (Lang, 2000, p. 116).

Having finished speaking, the monk clasped his hands and died. Phap Hien performed a cremation ceremony, collected relics, and built a worship tower in the year of Khai Hoang of the Sui Dynasty, in 594.

It is said that he is the patriarch of Zen Buddhism in Vietnam. However, there is also a tendency to think that Khang Tang Hoi initiated the Zen lineage in Giao Chi. The Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen lineage takes the Vihara's statue as its foundation, focusing on the thought of Prajna and practicing meditation. This Zen sect greatly influenced the Ly kings, such as Ly Thai Tong.

It can be said that Zen in Vietnam became a sect starting from Ti Ni Da Luu Chi. This Zen sect was formed in 580 when Ti Ni Da Luu Chi came to Vietnam, lasted until the end of the Ly Dynasty and the beginning of the Tran Dynasty, which lasted for six centuries, including nineteen generations and two Thirty-eight Zen masters are still recorded in the Zen Garden volume, including: Ti Ni Da Luu Chi (? - 594), Phap Hien (? - 626), Thanh Bien (? - 686), Dinh Khong (? - 808), La Quy An (?), Phap Thuan (? - 990), Ma Ha (?), Thien Ong (902 - 979), Sung Pham (1004 - 1087), Van Hanh (?), Dinh Hue (?), Dao Hanh (? - 1117), Tri Bat (1049 - 1117), Thuan Chan (? - 1101), Hue Sinh (? - 1063), Thien Nham (1093 - 1163), Ban Tich (? - 1140), Khanh Khanh Hy (1067 - 1142), Gioi Khong (?), Phap Dung (? - 1174), Tri Hien (?), Chan Khong (1046 - 1100), Dao Lam (? - 1203), Dieu Nhan (1042 - - 1100) 1113), Vien Hoc (1073 - 1136), Tinh Thien (1121 - 1193), Vien Thong (1080 - 1151), Y Son (? - 1213).

During the Northern domination period, this Zen school had the following high monks:

- Enlightener: Ti Ni Da Luu Chi (? - 594)
- First generation (one person): Phap Hien (? - 626)
- Second generation (one person): Defective
- Third generation (one person): Defective
- Fourth generation (one person): Thanh Bian (? - 686)
- Fifth generation (one person): Defective
- Sixth generation (one person): Defective
- Seventh generation (one person): Defective
- Eighth generation (three people): 2 people, Dinh Khong (729 - 808)
- Ninth generation (three people): Defective.

About the worldview: The Zen sect of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi uses the word "truth body" to refer to the being. They believe that being and the phenomenal world are closely

related, not separate from each other, just like water and waves, waves are also water, and water is also waves. Waves are expressed in many different forms, but they are just water. As monk Y Son wrote: *"True body becomes ten thousand objects. Vanity is the true body"* (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 246). This essence is also the true mind (Like Bodhi), located in the mundane world, but people do not know it and keep looking somewhere, like Thich Nhat Hanh and Kieu Tri Huyen's response to the true heart. Master Van Hanh asked: *"Mixed with the dust of life for a long time. The true heart of gold, where can I find it? Begging to expand the vehicle display. It can be seen as clean from suffering."* Kieu Tri Huyen read the verse and replied: *"Sand River is that Bodhi realm. But I thought it was a few thousand miles away"* (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 200). Thus, the being, the actual body, and the true mind (such as Bodhi) are in this very world, mixed with the dust of the world (the nine mortals), the sand, and the river are that Bodhi realm, not in the kingdom. Abstract cloudy country. People with a meditative mind, when enlightened, that magical (miracle) essence is inherently nihilistic, day-to-day still manifesting and showing off.

In contrast, worldly people think Bodhi is thousands of miles away. It is like a gentle breeze blowing across the phenomenal Sacha world. Zen master Chan Khong (1046 - 1100) said: *"The miraculous body is still showing off. All over the desert, the wind is gentle"* (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 231).

According to Zen master Chan Khong, those who reach wu-wei, return home and become enlightened, will see the incredible body that is nothing, and the everyday self that still manifests. Thus, in the Zen sect of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi, reaching enlightenment, ie, *"achievement of non-vii"* and *"achievement of non-vii"* is considered home. Then, the unconditioned is also the essence; reaching the essence is also the attainment of the unconditioned. Moreover, when there is no action, there is no more suffering and only joy. According to Zen master Chan Khong, the essence is wonderful nature, nothingness, and no action.

In the Zen sect of Ti-Ni Da Luu Chi, the essence is also described as being like a pearl inherent in each person's mind, but due to ignorance and lust, day after day, they are engrossed in rolling around in earthly life. Illusionary, ephemeral habits that forget that pearl or become confused in the world of sex, not seeing their most precious thing, which is Buddha nature, that inherent legitimacy, as well as a wealthy older man with a rare horse but did not know he could walk again, as Tu Dao Hanh wrote:

"The sun and moon at the beginning of the moon,

People lost pearls.

The rich have good horses,

Will not use a horse." (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 202).

The essence of Ti Ni Da Liu Chi also means as if, ie, like that, cannot be described by language, text, or sound. The view of Suchness is evident in the concept of the “*mind seal*” (sign, the seal of the mind) that Bhikkhuni Da Luu Chi said to Phap Hien: “*That mind seal is full of vanity, neither lack nor excess, neither going nor coming, neither gain nor loss, no one, no other, neither permanence nor cessation, which is neither in birth nor in death, neither apart nor apart. Because it must be opposed to the illusory fate that has to be fake names like that*” (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 168).

The essence, according to Ti Ni D Liu Chi, is also the true nature, the Dharma nature: “*Truth nature is often asexual. There has never been a birth or death. The body is the dharma of birth and death. Dharma-nature has never been destroyed.*” (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen 1993, p. 207). The human body is the dharma of birth and death, just like all dharmas of this world; conditioned dharmas embody the essence. They are like dreams, bubbles, lightning, and dew: “*All dharmas in this world are all things. illusory unreal*” (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, Publishing House, Literature, Hanoi, 1993, p. 225); only the essence is the legal nature, the true nature, which is inherently non-existent, is not born, does not die, is permanent, immutable, such as; it is dharma that is lawless beyond dualism, it is non-being and non-being: “*Dharma is inherently dharma-like. It is neither yes nor no*” (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 210). That being said, the mind is:

‘ *The heart is no longer this and that,
Stop all shady delusions.
Day and night change,
No residence form.
Like a shadow, like a sound
There is no more fighting*” (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, pp. 225-227).

Thus, in terms of the relationship between the substance and the phenomenon, the essence is eternal and real; the phenomenon is not real but is temporary and virtual. The world of illusory phenomena is not so real. However, people in the world are obscured by ignorance, what Vien Hoc calls “*endowed ignorance*”, so they think it is real, permanent, they want, pursue, and so they have one disappointment after another. Ignorant people are like dizzy people, looking like flowers are falling everywhere, and it is also because of ignorance that there is a pearl in them that people do not know.

In summary, in terms of ontology, the Zen sect of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi has not used the concepts of “*Buddha-nature*”, “*Dharma body*”, or “*Truth likeness*”, nor has it mentioned the issue of view-nature. As for the popular concept of “*form*” - “*emptiness*”

in Buddhism, in this Zen school, concepts such as “mind seal”, “truth body”, “truth mind”, “likeness”, and “truth” have been introduced nature”, “Dharma nature”, “miracle version”, “nothingness”, “no-action”.

In terms of perception, because the essence cannot be described by language and text, it cannot be seen with colors and sounds; Therefore, to realize the essence, the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen school believes that ordinary perception cannot be used, but must be due to the seal of the mind, the mind reveals itself to contemplate the nature of all things. Moreover, because the essence exists deep in the heart of each person, to perceive the essence, it must be directed inward, not outward; as Zen master Khanh Hy (1067-1142) said: “It is so difficult to find the mind in the open air” (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 218).

On the issue of human life: The Zen sect of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi believes that each individual’s appearance is due to karma, karma; like Tu Dao Hanh, when he died, his karma had not ended and he still had to be reborn as King Ly Than Tong; Before his death, Zen master Y Son said, “I will not return to this realm again”. The reason for having karma is ignorance, as Vien Hoc said. Because of ignorance, people do not know that they have a pearl in them. It is due to ignorance that people do not understand that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, non-self, temporary, illusory, and unreal. The human body is fleeting and short-lived, like lightning in the sky, bubbles in the sea. Wealth, poverty, honor and shame, loss, life, and death of human life; The rise and fall of dynasties are also impermanent, so pretend to be legs, coiled rope at dusk, think snakes, our body is ours forever, like Zen master Van Hanh speaks:

*“The body is like a flash of lightning that appears and then does not exist,
Trees in spring are green; in autumn, they are sad.
Regardless of times of change, prosperity, and decline, do not be afraid,
Behold, like the top of a tree with winter dew drops”* (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 193).

Thus, it can be said that, on the matter of human life, Zen masters of the Ti-Ni Da Luu Chi sect hardly directly discuss the “Four Noble Truths”, “The Eight Right Paths”, “Decades of Causality... They only speak of their own experiences. The goal of the Zen masters of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi is enlightenment, but to attain enlightenment, they must basically purify their body and mind, which Buddhists call precepts.

Regarding ethical issues: Right from the time of their appearance, Zen masters of the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi sect cared about and upheld moral values, such as Zen Master Tri Thien, with a verse advising practitioners:

“Keep yourself a frugal life,

Just take care of morality,

There are good words,

Always keep it inside yourself.

The heart no longer has this and that,

Stop all shady delusions” (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 226).

In The Gathering, the elites in the Zen Garden, he wrote that Zen master Thien Nham (1093 - 1163) *“limited his experience, his mind was wide open. Every day eat wild vegetables and drink spring water”* “(The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen garden, 1993, p. 213); Zen master Phap Hien (died 626), a disciple of Patriarch Ti Ni Da Luu Chi, after his ancestor’s death, *“he went to Thien Phuc mountain to practice meditation, forgetting both things and himself, wild birds flew to surround him wild beasts come to play”* (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen garden, Publishing House, Literature, Hanoi, 1993, p. 172). They were so attached to plants and animals that when they passed away, *“the flowers in front of the Buddha Hall naturally fell, and the swallows cried out in sadness for three weeks”* (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 246). Zen master Dao Hanh also commanded snakes and animals to worship, knuckles to pray for rain, and to spray water with healing magic; nothing would fail. Zen master Tri Thien taught Tigers. The precepts for them are expressed in not covetousness, believing in karma, living in generosity, not clinging, practicing asceticism, keeping their true heart, and their mysterious nature.

For cultivators, greed and ignorance are the causes that obscure people’s dispositions, cause karma, and prevent people from reaching enlightenment. Therefore, the first thing when walking on the path of spiritual practice is to eliminate lust and desire. Only then will the Tao, the mysterious, and the Buddha-nature manifest. Ultimately, everything is not real; our bodies are not real, so fame and profit are not real. So, is it not wise for a person to desire the unreal? Therefore: *“Covetousness for fame and gain, everything is like floating saliva. Planting blessings and sowing conditions are all ambitions”*. If you want to eliminate lust, you must take care of giving. Alms in Buddhism generally have talent and dharma giving, in which the highest giving is the giving of dharma. Dieu Nhan nun (1042 - 1113) devoted all her belongings to giving alms to the people. Zen master Ban Tich (died 1140), everywhere he went, there was almsgiving, and the widespread rain of Dharma shook the mysterious wind. Along with giving, to cultivate morality, they also advocate asceticism. Zen master Tri Thien entered Cao Da mountain, stayed under a tree, chanted sutras during the day, meditated at night, devotedly practiced for six years, giving up all desires, fame, and gain, keeping a pure and natural mind:

“Like the desire to leave this world,

*Resounding joyful prayers in my heart.
Chasing a thousand miles away from desires,
Let the mystery be contained within your heart”.*

Zen master Vien Hoc mastered meditation study, understood the law of meaning, and had only one piece of clothing all year round, wearing a bowl of cultivation. Zen master Gioi Khong practiced his virtue for six years; all evil beasts came to be tamed, and ghosts and spirits came to ask for his orders. Zen Master Dao Hanh, life is like cold ash...

The Zen masters of the Ti-Ni Da Luu Chi school also mentioned the theory of karmic reincarnation. Because there is karma, the Zen masters advise people to live with the virtue of “just taking care of morality”, “removing lust”, and “planting blessings and sowing conditions”. In the biography of Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, he talked a lot about karmic retribution. When Thich Nhat Hanh was about to die, he told his disciples, “My karma is not over yet; I still have to die to keep the throne temporarily. On the next day of life, they will become the Son of Heaven in the thirty-third heaven. If we see our true body (body) decaying, then we will enter Nirvana, no longer must abide in the cycle of birth and death. “Disciples heard that they could not hold back their tears”. The master read the verse:

*The arrival of autumn does not foretell the disasters that follow the fall,
Smiling faintly at those whose lives are wasteful and pitiful.
Come on, disciples, stop being attached,*

The old teacher turned into the present teacher a few times” (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 204).

Because of their deep belief in the theory of reincarnation and karma, the Zen masters of the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi school do not care about fame and gain, live in purity, without resentment, without attachment. As in the story of the National Master Vien Thong (1080 - 1151), King Ly Nhan Tong considered him a genius with a natural intelligence, reaching a refined level and deeply understanding Zen Buddhism. He promoted him to Mandarin, but the monk refused, and he only received the position of Inner Service and Shamanism. Alternatively, like Dieu Nhan nun, who consistently avoids noise and color, seeing all the dharmas in the world as a dream, let alone the vanity and vanity:

*“Birth, aging, sickness, and death
It is natural common sense
Wish to be free from birth, old age, sickness, and death
Even more tied to them
People are confused, so they pray to the Buddha*

Illusion is why people wish to meditate

Neither aspires to castration nor to Buddha

Shut your mouth and sit still" (The Masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 236).

Moreover, as Zen master Van Hanh knew that a crook named Do Ngan wanted to harm him, he did not resent him: "This monk knows that sad things are over. Even in the future, there will be no resentment" (The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden, 1993, p. 191).

The Contemporary Value of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi's Philosophical Thought in Vietnam

Ti Ni Da Luu Chi's philosophical thought, one of Vietnam's earliest organized Zen schools, carries enduring relevance that transcends its historical context and resonates powerfully with contemporary Vietnamese society. In the face of Vietnam's dynamic socio-economic transformations, growing materialism, and increasing exposure to globalization, Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen thought's core tenets, including its ontology, epistemology, and ethical orientation, offer profound resources for cultural resilience, spiritual renewal, and ethical grounding.

Firstly, the ontological perspective of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi provides a counterbalance to modern existential anxieties. Rooted in the imagery of the "*true body*" (chân thân) and the "*true mind*" (chân tâm), this Zen lineage teaches that the ultimate reality is not separate from the mundane world but is inherently present in all phenomena. The famous analogy of waves and water articulates a holistic view of being where essence and appearance interpenetrate seamlessly. In a society facing alienation due to rapid urbanization, digital fragmentation, and a relentless pursuit of material success, this teaching reminds modern Vietnamese that wholeness and meaning are found not by escaping the world but by recognizing the interdependence and impermanence within it. Such insight could help shape a renewed cultural attitude that values balance over excess and mindfulness over mindless consumption.

Secondly, the epistemological dimension of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi challenges the over-reliance on external forms of knowledge while reinforcing the importance of introspection. In a world flooded with information yet starved of wisdom, the emphasis on "*mind-seal transmission*" (tâm ấn), the ineffable insight passed directly from master to disciple, underscores that proper understanding is not merely an intellectual exercise, but an existential realization cultivated through direct experience and disciplined practice. It has practical implications for Vietnam's current educational reforms, which increasingly stress creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. By complementing technical skills with reflective practices inspired by Zen, such as

meditation, mindful presence, and ethical self-awareness, Vietnamese learners can develop knowledge and inner capacity to navigate an unpredictable, high-pressure environment.

Thirdly, the ethical dimension of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen resonates with contemporary discussions about social harmony and moral integrity. The sect's masters consistently emphasized virtues such as non-attachment, non-desire, generosity, ascetic living, and deep compassion for all beings. In modern Vietnam, where the effects of economic liberalization include rising inequality, moral relativism, and environmental degradation, these teachings remind us of the enduring value of living simply, caring for others, and recognizing the ephemeral nature of fame, wealth, and power. Zen masters like Dieu Nhan, Vien Hoc, and Dao Hanh, who rejected worldly titles and lived close to nature, embody an ideal of servant leadership and moral courage that is especially relevant today as Vietnam seeks to balance economic growth with sustainable development and social justice.

Additionally, karma and cyclical life are deeply embedded in Ti Ni Da Luu Chi's thought and are relevant to environmental ethics and social responsibility. The sect's worldview encourages intergenerational accountability by teaching that all actions have consequences beyond the immediate self. This perspective can enrich Vietnam's efforts to address climate change, protect biodiversity, and promote community-based stewardship of resources, aligning traditional Buddhist ideas with modern sustainability agendas.

In the cultural sphere, revitalizing Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen thought supports the preservation of national identity amidst globalization. Vietnam's Zen heritage, with its unique synthesis of early Indian Mahayana, Tantric elements, and indigenous cultural adaptations, represents an intellectual treasure distinguishing Vietnamese Buddhism from its Chinese and Japanese counterparts. The stories of Zen masters who integrated deep metaphysics with folk wisdom, local folklore, and social engagement illustrate how spiritual traditions can evolve yet maintain cultural continuity. As Vietnam expands its cultural diplomacy and soft power, promoting this philosophical heritage can help communicate an image of Vietnam as a nation with profound spiritual depth and moral resources.

Practically, Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen can inform modern practices in mental health and well-being. In recent years, mindfulness and meditation have gained popularity in Vietnam, often through Westernized forms. However, revitalizing indigenous Zen models rooted in the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi lineage provides culturally resonant alternatives for stress management, community healing, and personal transformation. Meditation practices emphasizing non-duality, non-action (*vô vi*), and the direct

realization of the true mind offer Vietnamese people pathways to cope with the stress, anxiety, and alienation common in modern life. From a philosophical standpoint, the continued study of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi contributes to the broader decolonization of Buddhist studies. Much of contemporary scholarship on Zen remains Sino-Japanese-centric. By deepening research on Vietnamese Zen traditions, such as the nuanced doctrines of the *“true body,” “miraculous body,”* and the non-dual approach to reality, Vietnamese scholars contribute original perspectives to global Buddhist philosophy and demonstrate the intellectual vitality of local traditions often overlooked in dominant narratives.

Finally, the spirit of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen invites present-day Vietnamese to engage in spiritual self-liberation as a social act. The lineage’s emphasis on enlightenment through self-cultivation, compassionate living, and ethical conduct is not merely a private goal. However, it has historically empowered communities to resist oppression, maintain cultural independence, and cultivate social cohesion. This spirit encourages Vietnamese people to draw upon their philosophical traditions to navigate new forms of dependency, consumerism, and ideological fragmentation in a rapidly modernizing nation.

The legacy of Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen, rooted in profound ontological insight, radical epistemological humility, and transformative ethical practice, remains deeply relevant to Vietnam today. It preserves a sense of historical and cultural identity and offers concrete pathways for addressing pressing contemporary challenges from education reform and mental health to sustainable development and cultural diplomacy. By rediscovering and reintegrating these timeless teachings, Vietnam can nurture a balanced modernity, where spiritual freedom, ethical living, and national resilience coexist harmoniously.

Conclusions

Ti Ni Da Luu Chi is regarded as the first patriarch of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism, following the pioneering figure Khuong Tang Hoi. He founded the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen sect, which is widely considered one of the earliest systematically organized Zen schools in Vietnam in terms of sectarian structure and doctrinal thought. The sect made significant contributions to the development of Vietnamese Buddhism and to the nation’s cultural and political life, especially during the struggle for independence in the latter half of the first millennium CE, which ultimately helped liberate Vietnam from centuries of Northern domination (Nguyen Lang, 2000, p. 145). Philosophically, the Ti Ni Da Luu Chi Zen tradition is deeply rooted in the doctrines of *Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Tam Luan* (Three Treatises), and the *Hoa Nghiem*

(Avatamsaka) school. It demonstrates elements of Tantric influence, upholding a non-literary, experiential spirit while still emphasizing the study of scriptures. Central to its practice is the transmission of the mind seal (*tâm ấn*), which affirms the ineffable nature of ultimate reality beyond conceptual dualities. The sect also promoted a pragmatic, worldly approach to spiritual cultivation, extending its influence on everyday life through practices such as geomancy (*feng shui*).

Unlike later Vietnamese Zen schools, which often absorbed significant Chinese Chan influence, the *Ti Ni Da Luu Chi* tradition retained stronger connections to early Indian Buddhist ideas, thus embodying a distinctively Vietnamese character. This synthesis reflects not only the transcendental aspirations of Buddhism but also the simple, practical ethos of the ordinary people, especially the rural masses (Nguyen Lang, 2000).

References

- [1] Chu, P. H. (2006). *Lich dynasty constitutional chapter* (Vols. 1–2). Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- [2] Chung, T. V. (1998). *Philosophical thought of the Truc Lam Zen sect of the Tran dynasty*. National Politics Publishing House.
- [3] Chung, T. V., & Chinh, D. (2008). *Vietnamese thought in the Ly–Tran period*. Hanoi: National Politics Publishing House.
- [4] *Complete history of Dai Viet* (Vol. 2). (1998). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- [5] Doan, C. (Ed.). (1998). *History of Vietnamese philosophical ideas from the nation-building period to the early twentieth century*. Hanoi: National Politics Publishing House.
- [6] Giau, T. V. (1996). *The development of Vietnamese thought from the nineteenth century to the August Revolution*. Hanoi: National Politics Publishing House.
- [7] Heine, S. (2008). *Zen skin, marrow: Will the real Zen Buddhism please stand up?* UK: Oxford University Press.
- [8] Institute of History. (1978). *Vietnamese society in the Ly dynasty – Tran*. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.
- [9] Institute of History. (1998). *Dai Viet chronicles of full letters*. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.
- [10] Lang, N. (2000). *Essay on the history of Buddhism in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Literature Publishing House.
- [11] Literature Institute. (1977). *Ly–Tran’s poetry* (Vol. 1, Upper book). Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.

- [12] McRae, J. (2003). *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, transformation, and genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. US: University of California Press.
- [13] Phan, H. C. (2006). *Classified records of successive dynasties (Vols. 1–2)*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- [14] Quynh, T. H., Lam, D. X., & Han, L. M. (2002). *Outline of Vietnamese history, complete works*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- [15] Rosales, R. J. (2025). Making mental health known: A duty tasked to everyone. *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 16. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijpvm.ijpvm_16_25
- [16] Rosales, R. J. J. (2021). A year of COVID-19 and the spiritual well-being of the people. *Journal of Public Health*, 43(2), e354–e355. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdab071>
- [17] *The masters in the Vietnamese Zen Garden*. (1993). Hanoi: Literature Publishing House.
- [18] Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. (1978). *Complete history of Dai Viet (Vol. 1)*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- [19] Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. (2006). *Some Vietnamese legal and regulatory documents (Vol. 1)*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.