



## Research Article

# THE HARMONIOUS AGGREGATE OF BUDDHISM AND CONFUCIANISM OF ZEN MASTER HƯƠNG HẢI IN THE EAST ASIAN CONTEXT

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## ABSTRACT

*From the phenomena of “Three Teachings emerge from one source” in the history of Vietnamese thought, the article is the first step to explore within the scope of “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate” in the verses of Zen master Hương Hải. The Zen master contributed to the direction of thought of his time, specifically the “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate.” Zen master Hương Hải had few poetic works. However, his poem sufficiently help readers understand the idea of “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate” in the relationship of the Three Teachings from a multi-dimensional aspects of education, culture, religion, social politics, and self-cultivation. His poems also affirm the compatibility between the ideologies in the Three Teachings. The most prominent is the Buddha - Confucian relationship. The compatibility was an inevitable phenomenon in Vietnam in particular and East Asia in general.*

**Keywords:** “Buddhist-Confucian aggregate”; “Three Teachings emerge from one source”; thought; Zen Master Hương Hải

## 1. Introduction

In the Middle Ages, the theory of the Three Teachings, specifically the Buddhist-Confucian relationship, was a common ideological phenomenon in East Asian countries (Vietnam, China, Japan, and Korea). With the premise of taking similarities as the basis for “fusion and unanimity,” the article will examine a specific case that is the thought “Buddhist-Confucian aggregate” of Zen master Hương Hải who lived in the 17th century in Vietnam, in order to contribute a part in deciphering the common issue of the region.

Applying interdisciplinary research methods such as literary-historical, cultural and historical positivist methods, combined with historical theory through the context of the era, the paper will show the “similarity” leading to the “unanimity” in some aspects between Buddhism and Confucianism. Typical example is the compatibility and agreement on epistemological and

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ontological concepts from the perspective of human life. The Three Teachings is historical and in Zen master Huong Hai's time with the tendency to merge the Three Teachings was a prominent idea. This article focuses on *the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism* expressed in Zen master's verses which had socio-political context and trend of this time, as well as Zen master's background and more interest in Buddhist - Confucian thought.

## **2. The content of the research**

### **2.1. Zen master Huong Hai: brief life, career, and thought**

Regarding his brief life, Zen master Huong Hai (1628-1715), originally came from Confucianism, but worshiped the Buddha and had ordained to become a monk, so he perceived both Confucianist and Buddhist. He had many outstanding activities to spread the Dharma. He passed away on the morning of May 13, 1715, when his responsibility was fulfilled. Regarding his literature career, Zen master explained and translated 20 sets of scriptures into Nom script. This was a massive undertaking, and now most of the works lost. This article examines Zen master's poetry and literature based on Lê Mạnh Thát's Complete Collection of Minh Châu Huong Hai (Le, 2000), which is a collection of existing works.

Regarding ideology, in the context of social crisis, a civil war between political corporations for a long time, and the starving and misery of ordinary people, he had a vision and aspiration to rebuild the "spirit of incarnation" of the Trần Dynasty. In addition to wholeheartedly promoting the thought of "harmony," in general, the integration of major ideologies of Buddhism-Confucianism-Taoism. The significance in Zen master's poetry is the thought of the "Three Teachings harmony," in which the most characteristic is the thought of "Buddhist-Confucian aggregate" with the wish to build a prosperous country, progressive society, and wealth people.

### **2.2. The thought of the Three Teachings emerges from one source and the idea of "Buddhist - Confucian unanimity" through the historical view in the context of East Asia, especially in China and Vietnam**

In the section on the historical theory of this issue, first of all, the general nature of the phenomenon of the Three Teachings and give a brief overview of the Three Teachings emerged outstanding as the "Buddhist-Confucian unanimity" thought in China and Vietnam. Because this counterbalancing relationship is historical in each period, Vietnam's feudal system is most apparent.

#### **2.2.1. Medieval China**

The Three Teachings were a common problem in medieval East Asian countries, including Vietnam. The origin of this phenomenon was set up as India's Buddhism "meeting" with Confucianism, Lao-Trang (later Taoism) of China with many layers of cultural interactions created the "spiritual ecology" of the typical Three Teachings's cultural regions such as China, Japan, Vietnam, and Korea. The political factor and geographically nearby areas allow the exchange and interactions in all aspects. Moreover, in fact, the need to establish culture is part of the biological nature of human beings. Thus, Buddhism-Confucianism-Taoism gradually became the core ideologies in these countries.

Researchers agreed that the presence of the Three ideologies was very complex, with exchange, acculturation, harmony, and competition. With China's case, it was a two-way contact. On the one hand, when it was introduced in China, Buddhism adapted to the local culture to make suitable adaptations and then gradually left a special mark on the spiritual life of the people there. On the other hand, this "reunion" also hit hard on the shortcomings of Confucianism and Taoism in terms of philosophy (human and cosmological views), while Buddhism also has its shortcomings. In other words, when needed, monks were willing to use Confucianism and Taoism concepts and terms similar to Buddhist ideas or use both Confucian and Taoist ideas to explain Buddhism to followers. That shows the point of "meeting" the content of ideologies with similar meanings. This similarity in thought inadvertently reveals the "unanimity" between Buddhism and Confucianism. Thus, gradually the Three Teachings form a system of thought "Three Teachings emerge from the one source," which had the idea of "Buddhist-Confucian are of unanimity." The next section presents the history of the Three Teachings from one source "passing across" through the periods in China.

This thought appeared in the Wei-Jin-Southern North Dynasties, especially prevalent in the two Dynasties of Yuan and Ming, and gradually declined in the Qing Dynasties. Taoist Gé Hóng 葛洪 (284-364) of the Wei-Jin Dynasties advocated taking the Three Teachings of the same source as the guiding principle based on orthodox Taoism. Táo Hóngjing 陶弘景 (456-536) in the Qi Dynasty continued to inherit and develop (Thich Hanh Tue, 2018, p.157). In the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-489), there was a man named Mr. Deputy with his head wearing a Confucian hat, his body wearing a Monk's robe, and his feet wearing Taoist sandals (Nguyen, 2016, p. 398). Another case is Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502-547), which illustrated a way of relating each to the others. "In my youth I studied the Duke of Zhou and Confucius... In my middle years I turned my mind to Taoist books... Late in life I unrolled Buddhist scrolls to find the moon shining among the stars" (Timothy Brook, 2013). Each teaching has its *particular character suited to a particular stage in life*. The policy of religious harmony of the dynasties was a good recipe for *multiple religions* in China to *coexist harmoniously*. Ambassador Zhang Zou believed that, "All the central governments of the dynasties paid attention to the administrative management of religious organizations and activities, in which relevant legal systems and institutions played a great role" (Zhang Zou, 2020). For an instant, the first religious law in Chinese history was established, which formed the legal norm for the management of Buddhism in the Sui Dynasty (581AD-618AD).

Later, the Zen masters of Huáyán 華嚴 (Avatamsaka skt.) sect, Línjì Yìxuan 臨濟義玄 sect and Cáo-dòng 曹洞 sect in the Six Dynasties, Sui Dynasty (581-619), Tang Dynasty (618-907) in China were influenced by this concept. For example, Zōngmì 宗密 (780-841), the fifth patriarch of Huáyán 華嚴 sect, expressed the concept of Zen-Tao unity and Confucianism-Buddhism of one family in the book named 華嚴原因論 (Flower Oment's occasionalism).

This concept was adopted by Confucian scholars, most notably during the Song Dynasty (Northern Song 960-1127) with Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073), who laid the foundation for

Li studies, although outwardly criticized Buddha-Lao, inside, he absorbed the inheritance of Buddha - Lao thought to develop his doctrine, more and more attention that he advocated the Three Teachings' integration. Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a Southern Song thinker, learned about Buddhist ontology and epistemology to create a coherent new worldview that concentrated as much on the spiritual cultivation of the self as on the perfection of moral duty. In Ming Dynasty, Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and his follower Wang Ji (1498-1583), Xue Dachun (1540-1620), Li Zhi (1527-1602) admitted the Three Teachings are of a family, but they accorded Neo-Confucianism the higher place. However, only the eminent monk Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623) advocated Buddhism when he set one creed above the others and said that, "Buddhism is the one highest vehicle."

The history of thought in China and especially Vietnam shows the Buddhist-Confucian relationship is always the central point of the feudal dynasties compared to the other two relationships. Based on the survey of existing documents, this article summarizes some examples of the "Buddhist-Confucian unanimity" thought that has been interesting in the history of Chinese and Vietnamese thought. The reason why we choose to quote only a few Teachings of these two religions is (a) because of the limited scope of an article and (b) of our belief that "every word is directed to the purpose of teaching and to do goodness. All of their Teachings are aimed at "reforming" people to be better, this is the basis for leading to the "aggregate" among the three ideologies, including Buddhism and Confucianism.

#### 2.2.2. To Vietnam

Our approach is always consistent with the local internal needs (culture, customs, habits, thinking) to create its own unique identity, distinguishing it from other countries in the region. In Vietnam during during the Lý-Trần Dynasties, with the equality and openness of Buddhism created diversified groups of intellectuals (Confucians, Zen masters, Taoists) were the premise for there is a fusion of the Three Teachings, especially the idea of "Buddhist-Confucian aggregate". This tendency was encountered through the poetic reply of Zen master Viên Chiếu (999-1091): During the day, the sun shines. At night the shadow of everything is illuminated (Trú tắc kim ô chiếu/Dạ lai ngọc thố minh) (Literature Institute, 1977, p.274-281). From the light of the sun-Buddha and the moon-Confucius can serve different purposes. However, in the end, they are all "unanimous" to bring a beautiful light to life.

This "aggregate" could be seen through Lý Nhân Tông's words to Mãn Giác. "A person who has shown great compassion must work to help sentient beings. No virtue is not needed. There is nothing that does not need to be taken care...Not only the strength of concentration but also the merits of helping should be reverent." (Ngo Duc Tho and Nguyen Thuy Nga translated notes, 1990, p.93). This is a view of "aggregate" between the worldly renunciation thought of the Buddhism and Lao-Trang combined with the incarnation spirit of Confucianism. Within the limitation of the article, we only mention a typical case. In addition, this concept also influenced many other intellectuals in the Lý Dynasty's Zen master, such as Khuông Việt, Pháp Thuận, Chân Không, Ngô Ân; King Đinh Tiên Hoàng, Lý Thánh Tông, and Lý Huệ Tông.

During the Trần Dynasty, Trần Thái Tông expressed this thought very clearly in the preface of *Thiền tông chỉ nam*. The Sixth Patriarch said: “The great sage and the great master of the previous life are not different from each other. Thus, the great teaching of the Buddha must be passed on to the world through immortal saints.” (Institute of Literature, 1988, p.26). The words of king Trần Thái Tông provided similar “foundations” between Buddhism and Confucianism. That was, the “meeting” between the “great saint” and “great master” the common root of “one mind”. Thereby indirectly showing that the king advocated the “aggregate” of Buddhism and Confucianism. In addition, other famous people who support this concept, such as Trần Thánh Tông, Trần Nhân Tông, Trần Anh Tông, Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ, and Huyền Quang.

In the Lê-Nguyễn Dynasties, we found that, if in the North of former Việt Nam (Đàng Ngoài), the issue of the Three Teachings because of political consciousness still focused on Confucianism despite the corruption of the government by actively integrating the Three Teachings, in the South of former Việt Nam (Đàng Trong), this issue was recognized by the Nguyễn Lords’s view. Like the Lý-Trần Dynasties, the Nguyễn Lords, on the one hand, used Confucianism to operate and manage society, and on the other hand, used Buddhism as the main ideology to unite the people and lay the foundation for all development orientations and to build new land. In particular, in terms of religious culture, the Nguyễn lords advocated the idea of “abode Confucianism admire Buddhism” which further demonstrated the harmony of Buddhist-Confucian-Taoist ideologies. This was an important acculturation event in this period.

In my opinion, the trend of the Three Teachings in “Đàng Trong” was like a “return to the source” of the Lý-Trần Dynasties, when it was the spirit of integrating value systems on the basis of taking Buddhism as the mainstay between the social institution following the Confucian monarchy model. It should be seen that, in the Lý - Trần Dynasties, the Three Teachings were used as the foundation for effective construction and establishment in all fields, while in the Lê Nguyễn Dynasties, they were aimed to reconcile all conflicts and balance life, correcting humanity and pacifying society.

In Đàng Ngoài (the North of former Việt Nam), many intellectuals of this time expressed the idea of “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate” to further contribute to the reconciliation of conflicting conceptions and fierce disagreements of the era on the issue of the Three Teachings. For example, Ngô Thì Nhậm and his friends agreed when saying that Confucianism and Zen are of the same origin. They differ only in their use. However, it is noted that “because most of them came from Confucianism, they still considered Confucian doctrine as the mainstay, stood on the stance of Confucianism to absorb, penetrate, integrate Zen, consider Lao - Trang thought as secondary [...]” (Thích Hạnh Tue, 2018, p.166-167). It is typically to see the purpose of revival of Confucianism, along with the human needs, the needs of the individual, and the spirituality of the scholar for a while. There are also many thinkers expressing this view, such as Lê Quý Đôn, Ngô Thì Sĩ, Trịnh Tuệ, and Phan Huy Ích.

In Đàng Trong (the South of former Việt Nam), in the restoration stele of Thien Mu Pagoda, written by Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu in 1715, there is a passage that clearly states the

positive harmony between Confucianism and Buddhism. “Living in line with Confucianism, loving Buddhism for politics is not the reason, believe in Teachings respect teacher, take cause and effect, and think about what to do. Thanks to that, the border is peaceful, body, and mind are safe”. Zen master Toàn Nhật expressed the concept of the Three Teachings having a common root: the one source and the one family in *Húa sử truyện văn*. Thereby increasing the evidence of the thought “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate”. He had been supporting the policy of “abode Confucianism and admire Buddhism” proposed by Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu.

Zen master Hương Hải used to live in both territories: Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài. The social context at that time was precarious and degraded in all aspects, including the contradictions of ideologies. Zen master felt that the most important thing was to combine these Three Teachings to form a complete ideology to resolve and defuse all current social conflicts and human problems. But through his poetry, we still see that *the Zen master emphasized the Buddhist-Confucian relationship* more in this trio of ideas. Therefore, studying Zen master's thought of “Buddhist-Confucian aggregate” is a meaningful work that helps to understand his way of thinking, lifestyle as well as his behavior ahead of time. Thereby affirming his stance, view, and thought.

### **2.3. The idea of the “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate” of Zen master Hương Hải**

Before going into understanding the content of “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate” in the verses of Zen master Hương Hải, we would like to outline the purpose of clarifying the Buddhist - Confucian relationship in his verse. While he mentioned the issue of Three Teachings, except Buddhism and Confucianism, there is Taoism - which we did not discuss in the multidimensional relationship among the Three Ideologies in Zen master's poetry. Indeed, it is clear that Hương Hải's interest in Buddhism and Confucianism more than other parts which have evidence by the following reasons:

*Firstly*, about his family situation, the Zen master, who came from Confucianism and lived in civil wars of the Lê - Mạc and Trịnh - Nguyễn, passed the exam and became a Mandarin for Lord Nguyễn, then became a Buddhist monk. From that predestined occasion with the prevailing thought of the Three Teachings, which were inherited and developed over many generations, the Zen master comprehend all these Three. Buddhism and Confucianism were still two familiar ideologies and imprinted marks in the thoughts of the Zen master. Therefore, applying knowledge of the Three Teachings, especially the idea of “*Buddhist - Confucian aggregate*” in life to reconcile all problems and conflicts at the time, was also indispensable.

*Secondly*, in terms of politics, the Three Teachings were originally from the three ideologies, but in the dynasties in our country in the medieval period, Taoism was less important than Buddhism and Confucianism. In fact, politics and religion are two core elements that are dialectically present in life. On the one hand, the government relies on religion to pacify people, balance life, and govern the country; as well as people rely on religion to relieve suffering and to send their wishes for the future. On the other hand, religion also needs the support of the political ruler to propagate morality, expand opportunities for development and strengthen

religion, as well as through religious activities, the values of morality are operated and maximum applied.

Regarding the relationship among Buddhism - Confucianism - Taoism in the history of thought in our country, it can be seen that, due to the contradictory ideas or disagreements of Taoism with Confucianism on political factors, strengthening the kingship, hierarchical order, and managed the country, so it was not supported by the feudal system. In addition, Taoism is somewhat similar to Buddhism in terms of educating the human mind, especially the spiritual side of liberation, so it creates a disparity in status between them. Besides the spiritual aspect, Taoism partly combined with Buddhism had become a Buddhist-Taoist combination that created a counterweight to Confucianism. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the thought of Buddhist - Confucian aggregate was more interested in Zen master's poetry than other relationships.

Zen master Hương Hải left a minimal number of poems, only five poems in Chinese and a poem *Sự lý dung thông* in Nom script - contemporary Vietnamese language, which was considered by Lê Mạnh Thát, in the complete work of Minh Châu Hương Hải, as his works. However, when reading those verses, the thought of “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate” was shown. Examined in *Sự lý dung thông* (Fusion and Penetration in Physical and Spiritual), *the Zen master has clarified and reaffirmed human enlightenment*. No matter who comes from the Confucian school or enters the stream in the Buddha nature, that enlightenment is still there, forever perceiving and forever enlightening:

“Mây càn khôn một bầu thể giới/ Vốn chưa từng thành hoại hư không,  
Rừng Nho bể Thích dung thông/ Linh đài vàng vạc, vừng hồng sáng thanh”  
(Heaven and earth law of the world/ The Universe has never been ruined  
The Confucian “forest” and the Sakya “sea” are in fusion and penetration/  
The spiritual state is bright, the pink sunshine is bright) (Le, 2000, p.401-402)

Indeed, facing a time of instability, social degradation of everything, and human morality being corrupted, the Zen master wanted to bring the Buddha’s teachings to awaken people and help them reshape their positive lifestyle and restore the inherent moral qualities so that the community and society can be more peaceful and live a happier life. Therefore, the Zen master reaffirmed the value of Buddhist and Confucian values and also showed the importance of these two ideologies. Therefore, in the work of preaching the Dharma, the Zen master converted all classes from kings, mandarins, intellectuals, and commoners by combining Buddhist Confucian thought. Le Manh That also stated that, “It is clear that the Buddhist-Confucian relationship was once again confirmed by Minh Chau Huong Hai not only as a Zen master but also as a successful person in the Confucian class” (Le, 2000, p. 65).

The issue of the Three Teachings, including the Buddhist-Confucian relationship, was repeatedly mentioned in his poems. *This parallel Confucian Buddhism thought was promoted throughout his life*. Although sometimes the Zen master mentioned and advocated the Three Teachings, such as *Ba giáo xưa nay cùng một thể/ Theo thời sao lẽ có nghiêng bên* (From the past until now, Three Teachings are the same essence. According to the time, how just only lean on one.) (unit 14) (Lê Mạnh Thát, 2000, p.64). Even at some time, the Zen master emphasized

the role and duty of each Teaching in order to assert their disparate value and importance, ultimately leading to integrating the Three Teachings of his predecessors from the early until the time he lived to build and defend the country:

Trong nơi danh giáo có ba/ Nho hay giúp nước sửa nhà trị dân/ Đạo thì dưỡng khí an thần/  
Thuốc trừ tà bệnh chuyên cần luyện đan/ Thích độ nhân miễn tam đồ khổ/ Thoát cửu huyền  
thất tổ siêu phương/ Nho dùng tam cương ngũ thường/ Đạo gìn ngũ khí, giữ gìn ba nguyên/  
Thích giáo nhân tam quy ngũ giới/ Thể một đường, xe phải dùng ba.

(In a place of famous religion, there are three/ Confucianism often helps the country instruct the family and govern the people/ Tao is a tranquilizer/ Anti-evil medicine diligently practicing alchemy/ Buddhism saves humanity free from three suffering fields/ Get out of the nine generations and seven ancestral liberated direction/ Confucianism uses Three Cardinal Relations and the Five Permanent Virtues/ Tao preserves the five qi, keeps the three treasures/ Buddhism educates people three Refugees and five precepts/ In a one-way, the vehicle must uses three). (Le, 2000, p.391-392)

From this point of view, the Zen master met with king Trần Thái Tông's "one mind." Or it is a "communication" of ideas with Toàn Nhật's "three-legged cauldron/ three light/ three cardinal relations":

"Cũng như vạc có ba chân/ Trên trời thời có tam quang tỏ tường/  
Trong đời thì có tam cương/ Nếu mà khuyết một ghê đường gian nguy/  
Nói cho thầy rõ kéo nghi/ Đàng tuy ba ngã cùng về một nơi".

(Just like a cauldron with three legs/ In the sky, there are three bright lights. In life, there are three cardinal relations/ If there is a lack of a teaching it is perilous/for no doubt tell you clearly/ the way are though three which in the end lead to the same place). (*Hỉa sử truyện văn* sentence, p.137-140).

From practice, if there was no such historical tradition, or he did not live in such social conditions, the Zen master certainly would not have asserted the role of each Teaching in *Sự lí dung thông*. However, in these Three thoughts, the Zen master still emphasized Buddhism and Confucianism more. This came from the fact that he was close to the two Teachings as described above. Alternatively, further, it is clear that *one side is the teaching of ruling the world associated with the idea of "kindness" and the other side is the penetration of the "liberation" path*, both of which are complement each other: *Nho nguyên đàng đàng đàng di khoáng/ Pháp hải trùng trùng nhập chuyển thâm* (Nguồn Nho bát ngát lên càng rộng/Biển Phật mênh mông xuống sâu lền - The immense source of Confucianism is widely expanded/The immense sea of Buddhism descends and deepens (Unit 15) (Le, 2000, p.64).

The poem asserts that, from an ontological point of view, the Confucian doctrine or the Buddha's Teachings are clear. The philosophy of each house is different, and the means of application are not the same, but the ultimate goal is to serve humanity and bring happiness to the majority, the community, and society. Not limited in this aspect, from the perspective of "Three Teachings from one source," the Zen master brought the reader to a broader worldview, reinforcing what he emphasized about the "Buddhist - Confucian aggregate" with references and



examples of Confucian scholars *who know and admire Buddhism*, except Confucianism, it also *incorporated Buddhism* to meet and harmonize aspects of life in China's history:

*Thượng sĩ du lai bát nhã lâm/ Trần cư bất nhiễm liễu thiên tâm/*

*Liêm Khê, Trình thị minh cao thức/ Tô tử, Hàn văn khế diệu âm*

(Bát nhã rừng thường thượng sĩ thăm/ Ở đời chẳng nhuộm rõ thiên tâm/Liêm Khê/ Trình thị thông cao kiến/Tô tử, Hàn văn rõ diệu âm - Sages's came and gone Prajñā (wisdom) forest/ In life who's uninfected to enlighten meditation mind/ Liêm Khê, Mrs. Trình's bright with high knowledge/ Tô Tử, Hàn Văn comprehend magic sound (Le, 2000, p. 64)

Originally from the Confucian basis, the Zen Master knew Confucianism, *so standing on Confucian knowledge, he knew that Confucianism complemented Buddhism in terms of world governance*. But in return, the cultivation of people's character to “enlightenmen,” only Buddhism will gradually enable them to “save self” and “save others”: *Nhân thiên đạo nhãn lòng nào dưỡng dưỡng/ phải phiền chung đức người thượng sĩ/ phương tiện dùng lợi kỉ lợi tha*. (Dharma eye of heaven and man which heart doesn't mind?/ Have to trouble to the intellectual/ Means of using self-interest and other interest (Le, 2017, p. 391). With the motto of saving others and the vow to transform all sufferings of sentient beings, the concept of human education is a synthesis of Buddhist and Confucian ethics to create an ideal person based on the Confucian concept of being faithful and benevolent and based on Buddhism of selflessness, altruism, tolerance, equality, fearlessness, and freedom.

*Finally*, when their work of cultivation is completed, they *reach the highest realization, liberated from birth and death, which leads to the state of Buddhahood*. Therefore, Zen master Cú Chi in the Lý Dynasty affirmed that, “Confucius and Mò 墨 are attached to the becoming, Lao and Trang are absorbed in the emptiness, secular books are not the method of liberation. Only Buddhism, regardless of whether it is becoming or emptiness, can be freed from birth and death [...]” (Thich Thanh Tu, 2015, p.101).

Hương Hải would like to have a balanced, profound view of the harmony in life, then once he expressed it through his poetic voice and fresh love life: *Ba dương mở thái chuyển đất trời/ Chín chục thiều quang sắc sắc tươi. [...] Chốn chốn nghênh lành ca vạn thọ/ Người người vui sướng vịnh xuân đời* (In the three months of spring (Three Teachings)/ 90 bright days of spring in fresh colors [...] Every place welcomes a good spring/ Everyone is happy and recites a thousand springs) (Le, 2000, p.116).

Zen master Hương Hải also did not accept the skewed view of some conservative Confucianists. In *Kiến văn tiểu lục*, book IX, Thiên Dật chapter, we encounter Lê Quý Đôn's sympathy: “The religion of the Buddha’s family and the Lao’s family is quiet and empty, sublime and extinct, not related to things, it is also the religion of the wise used to cultivate themselves; to the extensive discussions about morality, about idolatry, nothing is without mystical significance. We Confucianists, holding onto other prejudices, often retort, shouldn't that be?” (Le, 2013, p.174).

Therefore, once it is understood, although Buddhism and Confucianism are not on the same path, philosophies and methods of practice are different, the ultimate goal is to serve people's peace and happiness, good lives, and beautiful religion:

*Kinh luân đức hạnh tài dùng đủ/ Lễ nghĩa văn chương khó đáp đền*

*Ngoài trừ đạo tặc quân dân thích/ Trong dưỡng trình liêm sĩ tốt bền.*

(Talents and virtues are full, in terms of race, they both know politeness and appreciate literature. Outside fight for ending thieves, people do love soldiers/ inside, keep an honest heart, strong soldiers.) (Le, 2000, p.115-116).

This happened in real life when Zen Master witnessed the civil war between Lê - Mạc and Trịnh - Nguyễn that made all peoples miserable and put society in crisis and the country in danger. *He was brave to leave Confucianism and to follow Buddhism, but that is not a rejection of Confucianism, but only inheriting and expanding from Confucian wisdom to Buddhist wisdom, a "rebirth" of the Three Teachings thought of the Lý - Trần time.* This was the period when the main ideology was oriented towards Buddhism Zen according to the social management mechanism of Confucianism. Regarding the aggregate of the Three Teachings, a researcher said: "Intellectuals hoped on the basis of Vietnamese culture to combine those three great theories to become a complete and sufficient philosophical system to explain and solve social and human problems of that time. Zen master Hương Hải was one of those advocates" (Nguyen, 2013). It is about rebuilding and learning the core values that our ancestors lived, applied, and succeeded in before.

In terms of "human perspective," Zen master once again understood the combined value of three philosophies, each contributing a unique "field" from which to lead to "unanimity" in the service of human beings, for the happiness and well-being of mankind. More specifically, it is the "unanimous" consensus in *terms of education* - "instructing the family and ruling the people," *physical and mental aspects* - "preserve qi ease spirit," *spiritual aspect* - "save humanity free from three suffering fields" to help people live their lives with modification, optimism, tolerance, generosity, altruism and always uphold the values of truth, goodness, and beauty. To do so, we must first self-regulate and control ourselves from all our actions, words, and thoughts. Happiness is the goal of life, but if you want to do that, you must be at peace to bring peace to others.

But is happiness ever easy? It requires *self-cultivation*. Confucianism's way of cultivating is based on "Three Cardinal Relations and the Five Permanent Virtues," Buddha's "Three Refugees and five precepts" and Tao's "The five qi, keeping the three elements," so he said "by one way car must use three." Through the Teachings of the truth of the enlightened beings, all in all, the truth is the same root, the only difference is that there is a "division" of responsibility: between one side, taking care of the spiritual part - religion, the other part, taking care of socio-political stability. From that, it can be seen that the aggregate thought of the Three Teachings, specifically "Buddhist - Confucian aggregate" in our view is a life motto imbued with flexible nature, democracy, openness, and equality of the millennial national tradition. Moreover, it is an

art of living for many generations of our forefathers, who have succeeded in building a strong country and an equal and peaceful society.

### 3. Conclusion

In short, generations of Confucianists and Zen masters, especially Zen master Minh Châu Hương Hải, really understood and harmonized the philosophy of Confucianism and Buddhism. This tradition of thought has been passed down through the generations because of its rational, compassionate, and practical ideology. The Zen master himself is a brilliant pioneering example for demonstrating the spirit of “Buddhist - Confucian aggregate.” This consensus is the point of intersection of “the same essence” between Buddhism and Confucianism. Whether it is the “source of Confucianism” or “the ocean of Buddhism,” they all answer life's requirements. The Zen master Hương Hải left a beautiful image of wisdom, compassion, and tolerance in behavior and was a pedagogical step for the next generations.

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**TƯ TƯỞNG “PHẬT – NHO NHẤT TRÍ”  
CỦA THIỀN SƯ HƯƠNG HẢI NHÌN TRONG BỐI CẢNH ĐÔNG Á**

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**TÓM TẮT**

*Từ hiện tượng “Tam giáo đồng nguyên” trong lịch sử tư tưởng Việt Nam, bài viết là bước đầu tìm hiểu trong phạm vi “Phật-Nho nhất trí” trong thơ kệ của Thiền sư Hương Hải. Nội dung đáng chú ý nhất trong những tác phẩm của Thiền sư là tư tưởng “Phật-Nho nhất trí”. Thiền sư Hương Hải sáng tác không nhiều, tuy nhiên, những tác phẩm của ông thể hiện rõ tư tưởng “Phật-Nho nhất trí” trong mối quan hệ Tam giáo từ cái nhìn đa chiều trong khía cạnh giáo dục, văn hóa, tôn giáo, chính trị xã hội, tu tập tự thân. Qua đó, cho thấy sự tương hợp giữa các hệ tư tưởng trong Tam giáo, nổi bật là mối quan hệ Phật - Nho, một hiện tượng tất yếu của Việt Nam nói riêng và Đông Á nói chung trong thời đại đó.*

**Từ khóa:** “Phật-Nho nhất trí”; “Tam giáo đồng nguyên”; tư tưởng; Thiền sư Hương Hải