

MANUSCRIPT HERITAGE

AN ASPECT OF THE THREE-TEACHINGS IN THE TRÚC LÂM BUDDHIST OF THE TRẦN DYNASTY IN VIETNAM: THE UNIQUE TAM PHỦ SYSTEM IN THE *BẢO ĐỈNH HÀNH TRÌ* ASSOCIATED WITH MASTER HUYỀN QUANG (1254-1334)

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Abstract

This article presents a discovery about the unique Tam Phủ system in a textbook on Buddhist rituals compiled by Master Huyền Quang during the Trần Dynasty, titled *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*. The Tam Phủ system in this book is an aspect of the three-teachings syncretism in Trúc Lâm Buddhism during the Trần Dynasty in particular and East Asian Buddhism in general. The unique features of the Tam Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, focusing on the triad of Black - Yellow - White colors and the three emissaries Đoàn Tử Du - Triệu Công Minh - Liễu Nghị, form the basis for our hypothesis that *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* has been almost entirely preserved from the Trần Dynasty to the early 20th century and continues to this day. This triad of emissaries is not found in the Buddhist and Taoist scriptures of China, nor in later Vietnamese literature. Could this be an innovation of Trúc Lâm Buddhism during the Trần Dynasty? Interestingly, the characters as Triệu Công Minh and Liễu Nghị appear in Chinese legendary literature, while the origin of Đoàn Tử Du remains unclear. Furthermore, by placing the Tam Phủ của *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* alongside a relief depicting King Trần Nhân Tông on a stone stele at Giàu Pagoda dating in 1336 in Hà Nam, we interpret the Tam Phủ symbol on the artifacts (suggesting that it might not be the character "Vương 王" as previously interpreted, but rather the Tam Phủ symbol).

Keywords: Trúc Lâm, Huyền Quang, Tam Phủ, Tam Tứ Phủ system, three-teachings syncretism, legendary tale

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I. INTRODUCTION

The three-teachings syncretism of Trúc Lâm during the Trần Dynasty in particular and the tradition of Northern Buddhism in Vietnam in general fits into the larger picture of *the unified three teachings or the syncretism of the three teachings* in China (beginning from the Wei-Jin period to the Northern and Southern Dynasties, i.e., late 2nd century to late 6th century) and throughout East Asia, which has long been discussed among researchers (Nguyễn Tài Thư 1999, Onishi 2009, Nguyễn Tuấn Cường 2022). We are delving into one aspect of this ideology in Vietnam, namely the *Tam Phủ - Tứ Phủ system* (Three palaces - Four palaces), or collectively referred to as the *Tam Tứ Phủ system*, as identified in manuscript and in the religious practices of the Kinh people and some northern mountainous ethnic groups (Chu Xuân Giao 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Chu Xuân Giao & Onishi Kazuhiko 2020). The reason why the *Tam Tứ Phủ system* is considered an aspect of the three-teachings syncretism is that within the internal structure of the *Phủ* (palace), there are deities, Buddhas, and saints. We refer to the *Phủ* as *the unification of deities, Buddhas, and saints*, or shorter as the unification of deities and Buddhas.

The Hán Nôm manuscripts play a crucial role among the textual

resources for identifying the Tam Tứ Phủ system in Vietnam. Due to the need to verify the precise dates of the materials used, our previous research only went back to around 1600 (specifically, the widely known stele *Đế Thích điện kí* carved in 1605). Recently, while expanding our study on the book collection *Thủy lục chư khoa* (woodblock version in 1797 Tây Sơn and printed editions in Nguyễn Dynasty), we paid special attention to the books traditionally attributed to the Trúc Lâm masters, Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang, particularly *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* and *Chư phẩm kinh*. We found that there is indeed a *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* book edited by Huyền Quang (1254-1334) that has been preserved relatively intact from the Trần Dynasty to the early 20th century. This book was engraved in various locations by different temples and groups, but its content has remained unchanged, truly embodying the “hành trì” (practice) of “bảo đỉnh” (precious summit) of Trúc Lâm.

Most importantly, through studying *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, we realized that the *Tam Phủ system* (Heavenly Phủ - Earthly Phủ - Water Phủ) was creatively shaped during the Trần Dynasty (13th-14th centuries) with the personal contribution of Huyền Quang. This system was innovated by Huyền Quang, who passed the three-stage confucian court examination (Tam

trường) at the age of 19¹, from his perspective as both a Buddhist and a Taoist, but with a stronger inclination towards Taoism. The trio of Heavenly Phủ - Earthly Phủ - Water Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* has remained intact through many centuries of transmission, never incorporating a fourth Phủ. The fourth Phủ, often Nhạc Phủ ở Dương Gian Phủ/Nhân Phủ, according to our research, officially appeared in the 19th century, with the precursor of Nhạc Phủ being Sơn Phủ and Ngũ Nhạc appearing in the 18th century (Chu Xuân Giao & Onishi 2020). All the deities and Buddhas in the Phủ within *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* are collectively referred to *Tam Phủ thánh hiền* (the sages of Tam Phủ), which can be simplified as "Deities = Buddhas = Saints," or the unification of deities, Buddhas, and saints. Notably, the trio of emissaries of the Tam Phủ, comprising Đoàn Tử Du (emissary of the Heavenly Phủ), Triệu Công Minh (emissary of the Earthly Phủ), and Liễu Nghị (emissary of the Water Phủ), is only appeared in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* and has been preserved through many centuries of transmission. This trio does not appear in the Tam Phủ system of *Chư phẩm kinh* or in any Vietnamese Buddhist ritual texts of next generations, nor is found in the scriptures of Chinese Buddhism and Taoism.

II. ANALYSIS

1. The *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* associated with master Huyền Quang of Trúc Lâm during the Trần dynasty

Bảo đỉnh hành trì (寶鼎行持) is an abbreviation, with the full title being *Bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương* (寶鼎行持秘旨全章). Some printed versions of this book have the title *Thích thị Bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương* (釋氏寶鼎行持秘旨全章) on the cover (the content inside remains *Bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương*). Recently, introducing this book, the group of authors Trịnh Khắc Mạnh wrote: "*Bảo đỉnh hành trì* is a work collected, edited, and compiled by Zen Master Huyền Quang. The work uses Classical Chinese and Nôm script, recording Buddhist rituals, ceremonial texts, and talismans used during vegetarian feasts, exorcisms, prison-breaking, etc. *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* was widely circulated in Vietnamese Buddhist temples, private libraries, local libraries, central libraries, and among priests. The Institute of Hán Nôm Studies currently holds 6 different versions of this work, including 4 printed and 2 handwritten versions" (Trịnh Khắc Mạnh & Nguyễn Văn Thanh 2022: 69). Among the 4 printed versions, according to the authors' summary, one is clearly dated to the 3rd year of Khải Định (1918),

¹ Regarding Huyền Quang's participation in the examination and his attainment of the title of Trạng Nguyên (first laureate), this is recorded in the *Đăng*

khoa lục (see Thích Thanh Từ 1995: 323-326; also see Ngô Đức Thọ 2006: 51). However, Lê Quý Đôn argued that there is no evidence for this claim (see Trần Văn Giáp 1990: 60).

while others do not specify the printing year. The interest of the group of authors Trịnh Khắc Mạnh lies in the textual or linguistic aspects (variant characters) of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

The reason *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* is said to be a work compiled by Huyền Quang (meaning he collected, revised, and edited it into a definitive version) is that the printed versions often state on the first page (after the cover) that: Trúc Lâm đệ tam tổ tự Huyền Quang tôn giả định bản (竹林第三祖嗣玄光尊者定本).

Regarding the works of Huyền Quang, in the late 1980s, the editors compiling *the Lý-Trần Literature* stated: "Old documents indicate that he had works such as *Chư phẩm kinh*, *Công văn tập*, ambassador letters, and the poetry collection *Ngọc tiên tập*, but they are now lost" and "Currently, the Social Sciences Library still has the book *Thích thị bảo đỉnh hành trì quốc ngữ văn*, clearly marked as compiled by Huyền Quang, but upon reading, we found it was not" (Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al. 1988: 680, 682). With recent collection and research results, it is clear that the late 1980s argument by Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al. (1988) is no longer accurate. The book title *Thích thị bảo đỉnh hành*

trì quốc ngữ văn mentioned by Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al. (1988) is incorrect, as no such title exists. Only *Thích thị bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương* or *Bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương* exist. Moreover, a valuable printed version of *Chư phẩm kinh* has also been found recently (see Phạm Văn Tuấn 2019, Trịnh Khắc Mạnh & Nguyễn Văn Thanh 2022).

Trịnh Khắc Mạnh and his colleagues introduced the recently discovered printed version of *Chư phẩm kinh* as follows: "*Chư phẩm kinh* is a book that compiles valuable sections (phẩm) of Buddhist scriptures, used in Buddhist ceremonies. According to *Tựa* (preface) in the book, it was collected, revised and edited (compiled) by Zen Master Pháp Loa (1284 - 1330) and further refined and transmitted for posterity by Zen Master Huyền Quang (1254 - 1334). The book is preserved in Già Lam Pagode, Gò Vấp District, Hồ Chí Minh City. It is a woodblock print edition, currently in a severely damaged condition ¹ " (Trịnh Khắc Mạnh & Nguyễn Văn Thanh 2022: 71). Regarding *Chư phẩm kinh*, although the research was conducted using only photographs of the book, Trịnh Khắc Mạnh & Nguyễn Văn Thanh (2022) hypothesized three engraving periods

¹ The photographed copy of *Chư phẩm kinh* used in the article by Trịnh Khắc Mạnh's group and in Phạm Văn Tuấn's article (see Phạm Văn Tuấn

2019) both indicate that the photos were provided by Monk Thích Đồng Dưỡng. We are currently verifying the original book with Già Lam Pagoda.

(Trần, Mạc, and Late Lê) as follows: "*Chư phẩm kinh* is believed to have been engraved in the late 13th century, as recorded in *Tam tổ thực lục*. It was re-engraved in the 1st year of Đoan Thái (1586) and again in the 9th year of Vĩnh Thịnh (1713) (as described above). The 1713 re-engraving references the 1586 re-engraving, noting the historical transmission" (Trịnh Khắc Mạnh & Nguyễn Văn Thanh 2022: 71). Thus, the woodblock-printed version of *Chư phẩm kinh* currently seen at Già Lam Pagoda is considered to be from 1713, likely reprinted from the 1586 edition, which originated from the Trần Dynasty print. Compared to *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* (which still exists), *Chư phẩm kinh* (which also still exists) was printed much earlier (1710s versus 1910s or 1790s). Based on the engraving dates, Phạm Văn Tuấn (2019) and Trịnh Khắc Mạnh & Nguyễn Văn Thanh (2022) suggests that *Chư phẩm kinh* retains more of the Trần Dynasty's original content than *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*. In general, current scholars tend to regard the existing *Chư phẩm kinh* as older than the existing *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

We classify *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* (including *Thích thị Bảo đỉnh hành trì* and *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*) and *Chư phẩm kinh* into one group, and refer to it as the "*Bảo đỉnh hành trì* group associated

with Master Huyền Quang of Trúc Lâm during the Trần Dynasty." On another occasion, we will present a detailed comparison of the contents of these two books, as well as the textual characteristics of each existing *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* edition (and also hope to find additional *Chư phẩm kinh* editions). Here, we only provide the following general assessment.

Based on the structure of the Tam Phủ systems in the two books, we believe that *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* more faithfully preserves the Trần Dynasty edition associated with Huyền Quang. *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* has maintained the unique Tam Phủ system from the time of Huyền Quang until the early 20th century. In contrast, *Chư phẩm kinh* has undergone later revisions to its Tam Phủ system. With this general perspective, let's explore the text of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, here selecting two printed versions associated with Hàm Long Pagoda on Mount Lãm (Bắc Ninh).

2. Introducing two woodblock-printed versions of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* associated with Hàm Long Pagoda in Bắc Ninh

Among the existing printed versions of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, there are two associated with Hàm Long Pagoda. Although both are related to Hàm Long, there are some differences between the two versions. Details are as follow.

An aspect of the three-teachings in the Trúc lâm Buddhist of the Trần dynasty in Vietnam: the unique Tam phủ system in the “Bảo đỉnh hành trì” associated with Master Huyền Quang (1254-1334)

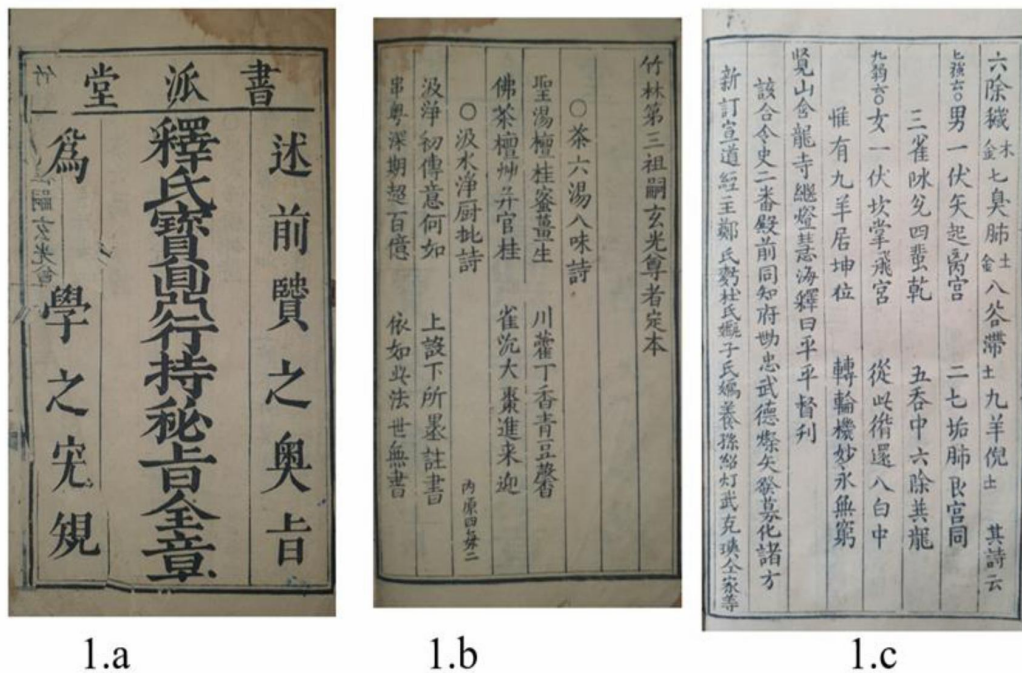
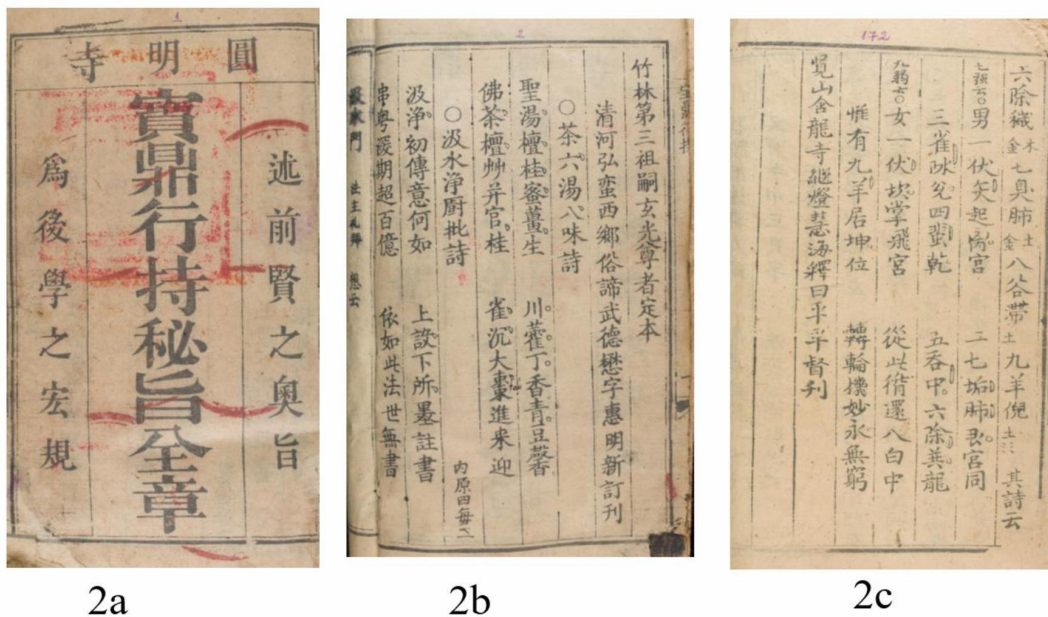


Photo 1: Thích thị Bảo đỉnh hành trì from Thư Phái Đường¹

The first version has the following characteristics: 1) The cover writes *Thích thị Bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương* (釋氏寶鼎行持秘旨全章), and at the top (above the book title) it writes *Thư Phái Đường* (書派堂) (see Photo 1a); 2) The first line on page 1 clearly states: *Trúc Lâm đệ tam tổ tự Huyền Quang tôn giả định bản* (竹林第三祖嗣玄光尊者定本 - third Trúc Lâm Master Huyền Quang compiled). After this line, it directly proceeds to the book content without any

additional text (see Photo 1b); 3) Near the end of the book, a page states: *Lãm sơn Hàm Long tự kế đấng Tuệ Hải Thích viết Bình Bình đốc san* (覽山含龍寺繼燈慧海釋曰平平督刊) (Thích Bình Bình - Tuệ Hải - is the monk of Hàm Long Pagoda on Mount Lãm being in charge of the printing). Following this line, the names of individuals and families who contributed funds for the printing are also listed (see Photo 1c). This book was collected from the community

¹This book was collected by Thầy Thích Tâm Hiệp. The complete set of photos of this book was provided by Thầy Thích Tâm Hiệp. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Thầy Thích Tâm Hiệp.



2a

2b

2c

Photo 2: Bảo đỉnh hành trì from Viên Minh tự

The second version has following characteristics: 1) The cover writes *Bảo đỉnh hành trì bí chỉ toàn chương* 寶鼎行持秘旨全章, at the top (above the book title) it writes *Viên Minh tự* 圓明寺 (see Photo 2a); 2) The first line of the first page writes clearly: *Trúc Lâm đệ tam tổ tự Huyền Quang tôn giả định bản* 竹林第三祖嗣玄光尊者定本. After this line, it writes *Thanh Hà Hoàng Man Tây Hương Tục Đế Vũ Đức Mậu tự Huệ Minh tân đính san* 清河弘蜜西鄉俗諦武德懋字惠明新訂刊. And then it is the content of the book (see Photo 2b); 3). Near to the end of the book, it writes: *Lãm sơn Hàm Long*

tự kế đấng Tuệ Hải Thích viết Bình Bình đốc san 覽山含龍寺繼燈慧海釈曰平平督刊 (Thích Bình Bình - Tuệ Hải - is the monk of Hàm Long Pagoda on Mount Lãm being in charge of the printing). After this line, the page is completely blank (see Photo 2c). This copy is currently stored at Phổ Nhân Pagoda (普仁禪寺)¹.

There are several differences between the two versions. One version is titled *Thích thị Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, while the other is titled *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*. One mentions *Thư Phái Đường*, while the other mentions *Viên Minh Tự*. In the section about Hàm Long Pagoda, one version lists the

¹ We used the publicly available photographs from the Nôm Na Foundation's website, at the

following address:
<https://lib.nomfoundation.org/collection/3/volume/1432/>

names of contributors for the printing costs, while the other does not mention any contributors. To explain these differences, which relate to the transmission process of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* in community, more extensive and in-depth research is needed in the future. Some parts of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* in these two versions (the *Thư Phái Đường* version and the *Viên Minh Tự* version) can be found in similar woodblock prints from the 1710s or even earlier. In upcoming studies, we will delve deeper into this aspect. However, it is noteworthy that the content of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* in both versions is identical (with no differences). Next, we will explore the specific content of the Tam Phủ system in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

3. The unique Tam Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*

In the early 20th-century woodblock prints of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, we only see the presence of the Tam Phủ, and the fourth Phủ has not yet appeared, so the Tứ Phủ had not been formed. It can be interpreted that the Tam Phủ system and the content of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* have been preserved from the Trần Dynasty to the early 20th century.

We used the two versions of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* introduced above to list the sages within the Tam Phủ, known

as Tam Phủ thánh hiền, as referred to in the book. Specifically, each Phủ is described as follows:

First is the Heavenly Phủ. *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* associates the Heavenly Phủ with the Jin Dynasty (晋国) in China (which existed from the 11th century BC to 376 AD). The book uses the term "Jin Yang Kingdom" (晋陽国), meaning the Jin Dynasty on earth. The head of the Heavenly Phủ is the "chư thiên chủ" (king of the heavens), sometimes expanded to include "tam giới nhị thập bát thiên" (28 heavens in the three realms). The Heavenly Phủ as a whole is referred to as "Thiên Phủ nhất thiết thánh chúng" (all the sages of the Heavenly Phủ) or "chư thiên Bồ Tát, tam giới thánh hiền, chư thiên tiên chúng" (Bodhisattvas of the heavens, sages of the three realms, heavenly immortals). Interestingly, the Heavenly Phủ is represented by an emissary named Đoàn Tử Du (段子). Đoàn Tử Du is the intermediary between the Heavenly Phủ, including the "chư thiên chủ," and humans (the ritual leader, the worship leader). The emissary Đoàn Tử Du is characterized by holding an iron staff, wearing black clothes, and donning a pink headscarf. The subordinates of the Heavenly Phủ are the Four Heavenly Kings (Tứ Đại Thiên Vương). A specific excerpt about the Heavenly Phủ is as follows (see Photo 3):

- Heavenly Phủ at Jin Yang Kingdom, Lý Văn Minh, and also called Đoàn Tử Du,
- The subordinates of the Heavenly Phủ are called the Tứ thiên (Four Heavens).
- The emissary Đoàn Tử Du has the ability to communicate, coming from the Southeast, standing to the left and right, holding an iron staff, wearing black clothes, and a pink headscarf, riding a cloud.

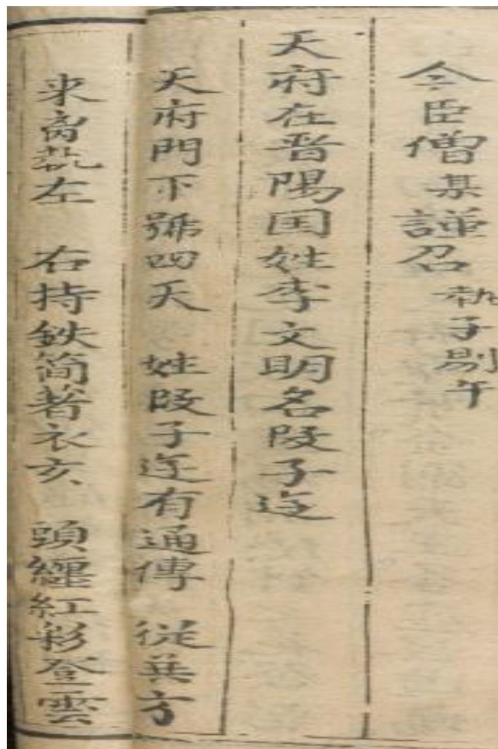


Photo 3: An excerpt about the Heavenly Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*

Next, to the Earthly Phủ, *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* associates the Earthly Phủ with the Han Dynasty in China (which existed from 206 BC to 220 AD). The book uses the term "Hán dương quốc" (汉阳国), meaning the Han Dynasty on earth. The head of the Earthly Phủ

is "Diêm La thiên tử" (Yama). The Earthly Phủ as a whole is referred to as "Địa Phủ nhất thiết thánh chúng" (all the sages of the Earthly Phủ). The Earthly Phủ is represented by an emissary named Triệu Công Minh (趙公萌), characterized by wearing yellow clothes, riding a yellow horse, and holding many iron spikes in both hands. A specific excerpt about the Earthly Phủ is as follows (see Photo 4):

- Earthly Phủ at Han Yang Kingdom, Linh Lan, and the name Triệu Công Minh.
- The Earthly Phủ emissary Yama, named Triệu Công Minh, comes from the southwest, wearing yellow clothes and riding a yellow horse, holding iron spikes in both hands.

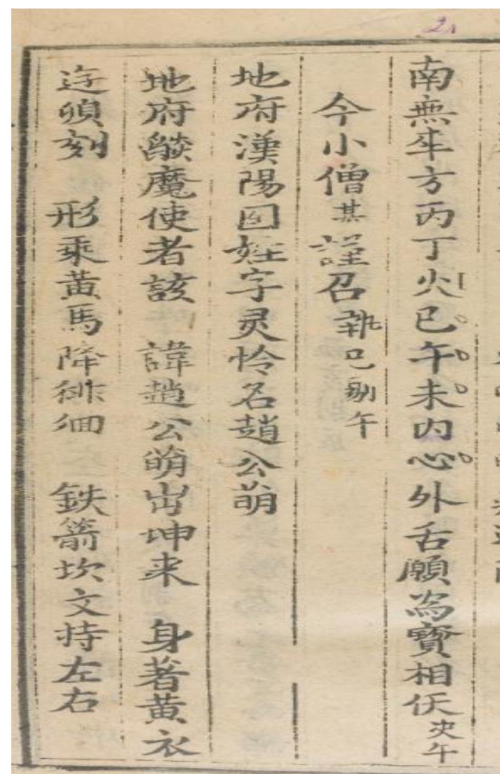


Photo 4: An excerpt about Earthly Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

An aspect of the three-teachings in the Trúc lâm Buddhist of the Trần dynasty in Vietnam: the unique Tam phủ system in the “Bảo đỉnh hành trì” associated with Master Huyền Quang (1254-1334)

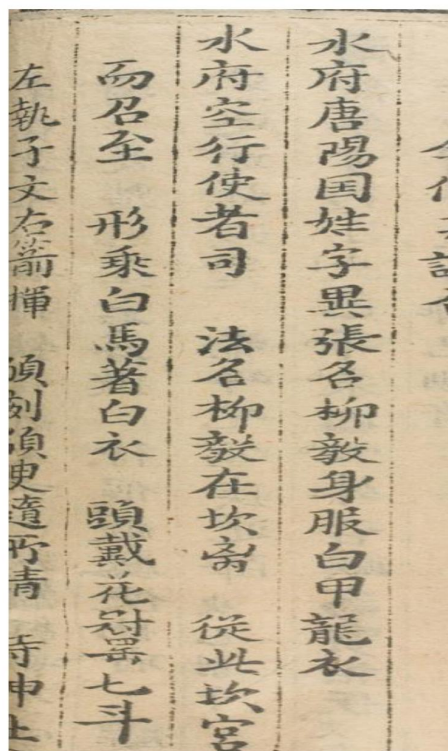


Photo 5: An excerpt about Water Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

Here, we can provide an overview of the characteristics (head, emissary, color, associated country) of each Phủ in the Tam Phủ system within *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Overview of characteristics of each Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*

Phủ	Head	Emissary	Color	Associated Country
Heavenly	Chư thiên chủ	Đoàn Tử Du	Black	Jin
Earthly	Diêm La thiên tử	Triệu Công Minh	Yellow	Han
Water	Phù Tang đại đế	Liễu Nghị	White	Tang

All Phủs each have their corresponding emissaries. When referring to all three Phủs collectively, *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* uses the terms "Tam Phủ thánh hiền" (sages of the three

Phủs) (三府聖賢) or "Tam Phủ vạn linh" (all spirits of the three Phủs) (三府萬靈). These collective terms appear frequently throughout *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*. For example, "Tam Phủ

thánh hiền" appears in phrases such as "nhất thiết Bồ Tát, Tam Phủ thánh hiền" (all Bodhisattvas, sages of the three Phủ) or "thập phương tam bảo, Tam Phủ thánh hiền" (ten directions, three jewels, sages of the three Phủ). Meanwhile, "Tam Phủ vạn linh" appears in phrases like "Tam Phủ vạn linh giáng uy quang" (all spirits of the three Phủ descend with majestic light).

In *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, there is a poem for inviting Buddhas (Thỉnh Phật thi), which begins with the following four lines (see Photo 6):

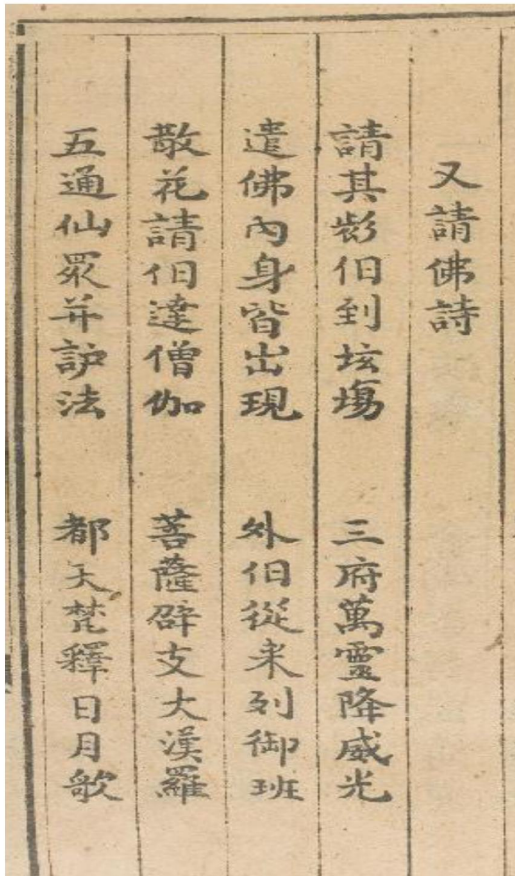


Photo 6: *Thỉnh Phật thi* in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

Thỉnh kì chư Phật đáo đàn tràng

*Tam Phủ vạn linh giáng uy quang
Khiển Phật nội thân giai xuất hiện
Ngoại Phật tông lai liệt ngự ban...*

A tentative translation is:

*Invite the Buddhas to the altar,
All spirits of the Tam Phủ descend
with majestic light,
Make the Buddhas within appear,
The Buddhas from outside will come
to their positions...*

As previously mentioned, the most unique aspect of the Tam Phủ system in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* is its trio of emissaries: Đoàn Tử Du 段子遊 (Heavenly Phủ), Triệu Công Minh 趙公萌 (Earthly Phủ), and Liễu Nghị 柳毅 (Water Phủ). This trio has been preserved in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* through a long transmission process from Trúc Lâm during the Trần Dynasty to the early 20th century. This process involved contributions from many localities (printing, circulating *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, and practicing rituals according to *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*). A detailed analysis reveals interesting characteristics of these three emissaries representing the Tam Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*.

Firstly, regarding associated Countries, each emissary is linked to a real historical country:

- Đoàn Tử Du is associated with the Jin Dynasty.
- Triệu Công Minh is associated with the Han Dynasty.
- Liễu Nghị is associated with the Tang Dynasty.

Three dynasties appeared one after another in Chinese history, following the historical order of Jin, Han, and Tang, corresponding to Heavenly Phủ, Earthly Phủ, and Water Phủ. The Heavenly Phủ is considered the oldest, hence linked to Jin, followed by the Earthly Phủ linked to Han, and the Water Phủ, being the most recent, linked to Tang. All three dynasties precede the Trần Dynasty of the three Trúc Lâm patriarchs (Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa, Huyền Quang).

Secondly, regarding representative colors, Heavenly Phủ is represented by black, Earthly Phủ is represented by yellow, and Water Phủ is represented by white. This color scheme of Black - Yellow - White for the Tam Phủ during the Trần period is different from the later Red - Yellow - White scheme.

Thirdly, Liễu Nghị (Water Phủ) and Triệu Công Minh (Earthly Phủ) are relatively well-known. Liễu Nghị is a famous person in Tang Dynasty legends, associated with stories of the Water Phủ and Thoải Phủ (see Nguyễn Thanh Tùng 2013). Triệu Công Minh is a versatile deity who later became the god of wealth in Taoism and folk beliefs. The most enigmatic figure is Đoàn Tử Du of the Heavenly Phủ. Currently, we do not know which legend Đoàn Tử Du is

associated with in the Heavenly Phủ or why he is linked to it. It is possible that he is the figure Đoàn Văn Tường 段文詳 found in Chinese Taoist texts. We aim to provide an explanation for Đoàn Tử Du in future research.

4. Note and expansion of comparative materials

A necessary note to better understand the Tam Phủ system in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* is: the Tam Phủ always accompanies guardian spirit of the local land (đương cảnh thổ địa linh quan - 当境土地靈官). This deity is not categorized under the Earthly Phủ within the Tam Phủ but is instead placed separately, not belonging to the Tam Phủ and often appearing right after the Tam Phủ. *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* instructs the order of inviting the Buddhas and Saints as follows: 1) Heavenly Phủ; 2) Earthly Phủ; 3) Water Phủ; 4) Guardian spirit of the local land

Specifically, guardian spirit of the local land as introduced by *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, includes:

1. Đương cảnh thành hoàng (Tutelary god of a village/region)
2. Thổ địa linh quan (The god of the soil) (see Photo 7).

This gives the impression that the Tam Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* is always accompanied by Linh Quan, suggesting a "3+1" arrangement, hinting at the idea of an additional Phủ alongside the Tam Phủ to form a Tứ Phủ. One might think that during the Trần Dynasty, there was only the Tam Phủ, not yet a Tứ Phủ, but the idea of the emergence of another Phủ in the future had already begun.

In fact, as our published research results show (Chu Xuân Giao 2019, Chu Xuân Giao & Onishi 2020), later, Sơn Phủ or Ngũ Nhạc appeared, gradually being replaced by Nhạc Phủ. The establishment of Nhạc Phủ turned the Tam Phủ into the Tứ Phủ.

Finally, after this note, we want to place the Tam Phủ in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* alongside a recent scholarly discovery of a stone-carved portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông from 1336, reflecting the three-teachings syncretism of the Trần Dynasty. More specifically, we want to place the Tam Phủ (established before 1334, the year Huyền Quang passed away) next to the stone-carved portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông from 1336. The reason for this juxtaposition is that both clearly and understandably express the three-teaching syncretism of Trúc Lâm Buddhism during the Trần Dynasty.

Regarding the stone stele portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông, on January 30, 2023, it was officially recognized by the government as a national

treasure. The basic information about the stele featuring the king's portrait, as stated in the government's decision, is as follows: "Giàu Pagoda Stele (Ngô gia thị bi), dated the Year Bính Ngọ (1366), Đại Trị 9th year; currently preserved at Giàu Pagoda, Đình Xá commune, Phủ Lý city, Hà Nam province" (Thiên Điều 2023).

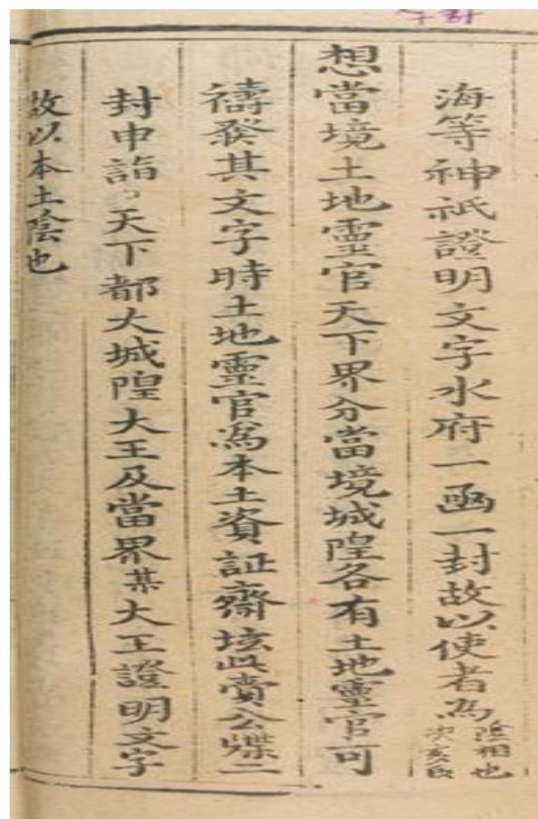


Photo 7: An excerpt mentioned *Dương cảnh thổ địa linh quan*

This stele from Giàu Pagoda, also known as Khánh Long Tự (Phủ Lý, Hà Nam), has been widely known in academic community for many years. The stele is associated with the contributions and research of numerous scholars (Dương Văn Vượng, Hồ Đức Thọ, Tống Trung Tín, Phạm Văn Thắm, Chu Quang Trứ, ...).

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The Giàu Pagoda stele has one side inscribed with text and the other side featuring a bas-relief of a middle-aged man sitting on a dragon throne, wearing a *bình thiên* crown, holding a tablet in both hands, dressed in an imperial robe, with two halos radiating from behind his head (see Photo 8). Many scholars have identified this as the image of King Trần Nhân Tông.



Photo 8: The bas-relief portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông on the stone stele at Giàu Pagoda¹

Regarding this bas-relief, in 2001, scholar Chu Quang Trứ made an important assessment consisting of two points: 1) The date of the stele (including both the text and the carving) is 1366 during the Trần Dynasty. This is a highly valuable document, of significant importance to Hán Nôm studies and art history research. 2) The carving is indeed the portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông. He wrote: "This is the earliest known image of a Vietnamese king, serving as a model for statues of kings and the Jade Emperor (Ngọc Hoàng), with the earliest known images dating to the late 16th and early 17th centuries" (Chu Quang Trứ 2001: 664).

Regarding the portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông, scholar Đào Xuân Ngọc suggested that it could represent the Jade Emperor, stating: "The process of creating the image of the Jade Emperor on this bas-relief likely involved the contemporary artist drawing inspiration from the portrait of a king who embodied the three ideologies of 'King - Buddha - Tao' and had a profound influence on the religious life of the Trần period (previously, Chu Quang Trứ 2001) suggested that the bas-relief might be associated with the image of King

¹ Photo is on the Vietlandmarks website, accessed on January 30, 2023:

<http://vietlandmarks.com/module/groups/action/view/id/1753>

Trần Nhân Tông)." ¹ Notably, Đào Xuân Ngọc highlighted the point of "a king who embodied the three ideologies of King - Buddha - Tao." In other words, the portrait reflects the syncretism of the three teachings in the character himself.

In the bas-relief, in the character's attire, there are two patterns that could be interpreted as the character "Vương" (王) or a stylized version of the character (see Photo 9).



Photo 9: Two decorative patterns on the attire of the portrait of Trần Nhân Tông²

Later, during the Mạc Dynasty (1527-1683), similar patterns appeared on stone statues (at temples and pagodas in the Hải Phòng and Thái Bình areas) and were consistently read as the character "Vương" (王). This led to the inference

that the statues depicted a "Vương" (a person granted the title of Vương) from the royal court of the Mạc Dynasty during the Thăng Long - Dương Kinh period.

However, the bas-relief dated 1336 mentioned above contains more than one pattern resembling the character "Vương." If it indeed represented a specific Vương from historical dynasties, only one character would suffice. Therefore, we believe it is necessary to reconsider the established view that these patterns are Chinese characters and specifically the character "Vương."

Based on our research on the Tam Phủ system in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì*, we believe that the pattern may not represent the character "Vương" but rather the symbol of Tam Phủ (Heaven - Earth - Water) or Tam Tài (Heaven - Earth - Human). On the stone-carved portrait of King Trần Nhân Tông from 1336 or on the stone statues from the Mạc Dynasty, we propose that these patterns could symbolize Tam Phủ or Tam Tài. Three parallel lines could represent Heavenly Phủ, Earthly Phủ, and Water Phủ, or Heaven, Earth, and Human, with an additional line connecting them, symbolizing the unity of Tam Phủ or Tam Tài.

¹ The argument posted on the Facebook group "Thiền uyển tập anh," at the following address (accessed and copied on January 30, 2023):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thienuyentapanh/posts/911085589887603/>

² Photo is cropped from Photo 8.

III. CONCLUSION

We believe that we possess a version of *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* that has been preserved intact in content from the time of Huyền Quang to the early 20th century. The crucial basis for this assertion is the unique Tam Phủ system within it. The Tam Phủ system in *Bảo đỉnh hành trì* clearly exemplifies the three-teachings syncretism of Trúc Lâm Buddhism during the Trần Dynasty in particular and Northern Buddhism in Vietnam in general.

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