

History of Research on Dâu Pagoda

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ABSTRACT: The story of studies on Dâu Pagoda is the processing of recordings and the study of periods in Vietnam. The author divides studies on this famous pagoda into three long time periods: The feudal period, the modern period 1901-1954 and the contemporary period (1954-today). Taking advantage of studies discussed, the author would like to suggest that researchers and other people pay attention to the Dâu pagoda and those other pagodas in the Four-Dharma System – with what we can see now in these pagodas.

Dâu pagoda was the center of National Buddhism in our country at the start of the Common Era. It was built at the Luy Lâu at that time Chinese government headquarters of Giao Chỉ, so it gained the attention of many people. The story of studies on Dâu Pagoda is the processing of recordings and the study of periods in our country. Deepening this study, we can divide it into three long time periods.

I. The Feudal Period

There are several ways of periodizing the feudal times. We can say that the first century of the Common Era with the victory of the Trưng Sisters' revolt, was the opening of the feudal dynasties in Vietnam and the Nguyễn dynasty's failure to fight off French colonialists at the end of the 19th century was nearing the closure of that one thousand-year feudal system. During those 19 centuries very few documents, not even Chinese ones, were written dealing with Dâu pagoda. Only in the 13th century and after, do we find in a few historical books some events concerning Dâu pagoda.

In the Giáp Tuất year the seventh of Thiên Thanh reign year of Lý Thái Tông or Phật Ma) the senior monk in the Pháp Vân Pagoda at Cổ Châu reported to the king that "light rays were emitted in the pagoda where a stone box had been excavated. Inside that box was a silver box. Inside the latter was a gold box and inside the that was is a crystal jar that contained Buddha's relics (fossilized bones)."¹

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Or, “The Buddha statue was carried in a procession from Pháp Vân pagoda to the royal capital to pray for the cessation of rain.”² That was the report made by the annals. In addition, some books like *A Collection of Outstanding figures of the Zen Community (Thiền Uyển Tập Anh)*³ tell about well-known monks in our country who served as priests at Dâu Pagoda, like Vinitaruci, (considered the Supreme Patriarch of Zen school in our country in the sixth century).

Besides the official Buddhist records, we also noted some Buddhist masterpieces like *Strange Stories from Lĩnh Nam (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái)*⁴ and *Collected Stories of the Vietnamese Potent Spirits (Việt Điện U Linh Tập)*⁵ about the strange spirits in our country. These works wrote about the history of Man Nương or the meeting of the priest Kaudra and Man Nương in order to form the Four Dharma system. In the middle of the 19th century, there was an encyclopedic work entitled *Encyclopedic Geography of Đại Nam (Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí)* compiled by the Nguyễn dynasty National Institute of History dealing with different fields. Concerning the stories in Bắc Ninh province, that book wrote:

“Diên Ứng pagoda at Khương Tự village, Siêu Loại district has Four Buddhas: Pháp Vân, Pháp Vũ, Pháp Điện, and Pháp Lôi. Usually those show supernatural powers. During the Trần dynasty, First Ranking Doctorate Mạc Đĩnh Chi built up a one-hundred-compartment pagoda (Trăm Gian pagoda), a nine-storied tower, and a nine-span bridge. The old foundations still remain. Concerning the Pháp Vân Buddha, while Sĩ Nhiếp worked as governor with his headquarters in Luy Lâu citadel, the priest Kaudra rendered Buddhist service on Thanh Sơn Mountain, west of the citadel. At that time, the girl named A Man contacted the priest and she became pregnant and gave birth to a girl. The monk brought that baby into a big tree growing in a remote mountain. Afterward, one day it rained heavily; strong winds blew and the big tree was uprooted and was driven by the water out to the riverbank, near Luy Lâu citadel. People were astonished at this strange event and tried to pull that tree up onto the bank. They then had a sculptor make four Buddha statues and built a pagoda called the Thiền Định (Zen Meditation) pagoda now known as Diên Ứng pagoda. They installed the Buddha statues for worshipping. They prayed for rain and their prayers were satisfied effectively. So these four statues were named: Pháp Vân (the Rain dharma), Pháp Vũ (the Cloud dharma), Pháp Điện (the Lightning dharma), and Pháp Lôi (the Thunder Dharma). According to the Lý Tế Xuyên’s records, the Cổ Châu villagers assembled every year at the Thiền Định pagoda to celebrated Buddha’s birth. Later King Trần Nghệ Tông (reign 1370-1372) gave them elegant honorary names.

According to historical records, in the 4th Thái Hòa reign year (1448) King Lê Nhân Tông sent Commanding General Lê Kha to Cổ Châu village to bring the statue of Pháp Vân in a procession to the Bảo Thiên Pagoda in the royal capital to pray for rain”⁶.

Today Dâu pagoda still retains two ancient manuscripts. One entitled *Cổ Châu Buddha's Sayings* (or *Cổ Châu Phật Bản Hạnh*).⁷ The other one is entitled *Recorded Sayings of the Pháp Vân Buddha at Cổ Châu* (or *Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật Bản Hạnh Ngữ Lục*)⁸ both were translated into Vietnamese dealing with the story of the pagoda. Some pagodas in the Four Dharma system still preserve the book entitled *Buddhist Records in Pháp Vũ pagoda* (*Pháp Vũ Phật Lục*). These works give us additional information on the Four Dharma system.

In general, compared to other scientific subjects, the subject of Dâu pagoda-Four Dharma consists of several very detailed records. Those are valuable documents that the feudal historians and Confucians left to us today. However, those documents include only folktales and were not systemized into a larger picture. Additionally, the documents telling about each pagoda, or those on the Four Dharma system do not agree with each other, even in the names and the facts. This results in many inconsistencies, so it is hard to study the matter thoroughly.

II. The Modern Period 1901-1954

There will be several historical landmarks for this period. In this section we can use as the basis of our study and introduction the date of the founding of the BEFEO in 1901 and the date of the Điện Biên Phủ Victory in 1954 ending the French Rule in Northern Vietnam.

During these 54 years, researchers were not only French scholars, but also included Vietnamese scholars who studied the historical vestiges by modern methods. Those who studied them in this period used research methods of different disciplines. They paid attention to the study of the history of Indochina in general and the history of Vietnam in particular. French archeologists and Vietnamese students of history had made on-the-spot survey excavations in different sites and thereby gained noteworthy results.⁹ However, art researchers conducted the study of Vietnamese pagodas. When they consider relevant documents, they focus only on their own field. We can see that French researchers paid little attention to Dâu Pagoda.

A search of the index of 1920 BEFEO Review found no indexed document on Dâu pagoda, not even on Luy Lâu. Tracing the location index in the previous volumes of BEFEO for names like Liên Châu, Long Biên...¹⁰, we hoped to find some documents concerning Dâu Pagoda. However, nothing was found there. According to C. I. Madrolle's introduction in his essay *Ancient Bac Ky* written in 1938,¹¹ French attention to these headquarters was made public in 1935. In Madrolle's essay, Mr. H. Wintrebert, who was at that time the French Resident of Bắc Ninh province, introduced Dâu or Luy Lâu only through a letter.

In the introduction to Luy Lâu prefecture, Madrolle pointed out a series of names: Luy Lâu, Liên Lâu, Dinh Lâu, and also pointed out the error of historians in neglecting this locality.

Madrolle wrote as follows:

“One of the exact translations in Sino-Vietnamese, we have known is that in the book titled *Bắc Kỳ Tạp Lục* (*Varietes Indochinoises*). Dinh Lâu is located in Lũng Khê village in Bắc Ninh.¹² Around the end of 1905, we recorded this information and suggested that the provincial *resident* find that locality, but that was not an appropriate time to make such an on-the-spot survey, so no field survey could take place.”

Later Madrolle continued writing:

“As we have written Mr. H. Wintrebert is the only man who found out and described this locality in 1933. At the same time he advised us that the local village officials did not call it Luy Lâu nor even Dinh Lâu, but Liên Lâu.”

When researching Lũy Lâu-Liên Lâu we noted that this locality had even another name, Liên Châu. This concerned the researcher H. Maspero in the above text written in 1918.¹³

No matter what Madrolle had written, as a matter of fact French researchers only found out about Luy Lâu in 1933. And the relevant documents regarding this locality, as well as the study about Dâu Pagoda, were made public in 1938. In fact, it is a shame that Dâu Pagoda was made public so late.

In a BEFEO Review in 1926, the list of Indochinese historical vestiges in the Tonkin province of Bắc Ninh, this pagoda had been listed as #37 as follows:

“Diên Ứng pagoda worships the Buddha at the Khương Tự pagoda, in Khương Tự village, Thuận Thành district. The year of its construction has not been

confirmed. It was rebuilt in the 13th century, again in the Lê dynasty and in the 19th century and for the last time in 1911.”¹⁴

Later, Dâu was mentioned in the research book, *Buddhism in Vietnam (Đạo Phật ở Việt Nam)* by Trần Văn Giáp.¹⁵ It also was recorded in The Far East Yearbook 1935 (*Viễn Đông Niên Giám năm 1935*). In 1938 in his study on Luy Lâu, Madrolle again dealt with Dâu pagoda. After Madrolle, we also read some books concerning Dâu pagoda like the *Phật Lục Buddhist Records* of Trần Trọng Kim in 1944¹⁶ and those of Nguyễn Bá Lăng and L. Bezacier. But there are not many.¹⁷

In a word, finally both French and Vietnamese writers during this period had used modern methodologies, including that of Archeology to study Vietnam's history.

Dealing with Dâu and Luy Lâu, besides some field surveys conducted by Wintrebert or Madrolle, not many research studies were conducted. As I have written at the beginning, archeologists have not made the studies on Vietnamese pagodas, including Dâu pagoda. Architects and fine art specialists made them, so they have been of limited scope. The documents on Dâu have not yet been systematized and their stories have not been completely understood or objectively evaluated.

III. Contemporary Period (1954-Today)

After having won the peace in 1954, Vietnam advanced to build up a socialist society. Several scientific departments were formed and developed. At that time the archeological department was still young. However, it inherited achievements of previous researchers, which allowed it a jump-start into development. By 1960, the local archeologists paid attention to the study of Dâu–Luy Lâu. The results of excavations in 1969-1970 at Luy Lâu permitted us to confirm that there existed a Vietnamese headquarters there at the beginning of the Common Era. In addition to that administrative center, Dâu pagoda at that time was also the Buddhist center of our country.¹⁸

During the 1970s, the book *The Two Thousand Year Old Culture of Ha Bac Province* was published dealing with Luy Lâu and Dâu pagoda from the point of view and the methods of archeological description.¹⁹ We must add that beginning with the end of 1968 with the existence of archeologists, the communal house (*dinh*) and pagodas in Vietnam became the subject of their study. Also beginning in 1970 and up to the present, Dâu pagoda and Luy Lâu has undergone more systematic research and excavations. Especially during these recent years, Vietnamese

archeological research made continuous investigations through excavations in this area. Excavations made by the collaboration of Hanoi University, the Institute of Archeology, and the Hanoi Culture College in 1986 set up a new plan for study of Luy Lâu.²⁰

During those years in addition to Luy Lâu excavations, Dâu pagoda was also studied in detail. This had been made public in the graduate thesis of the Lao student Lò Phan Xay. The title of the thesis was “*Some Questions about Dâu pagoda and the Four Dharma system in Thuận Thành District, Hà Bắc Province.*”²¹ In the preface author wrote that:

“I took meals and slept at the *Ashram* of Dâu pagoda along with my teacher every night. I wondered asking my teachers, ‘Why in the same Buddhist religion, do Lao priests and monks wear saffron robes while in Vietnam, they wear dark brown robes?’ Learning of Man Nương and the Four Dharma system, then of the ceremonial cleansing of the Buddha statues, of the praying for rain, I thought of several more questions like the customs concerning my country, Laos. For example, colored threads tied around the wrist and the *Lâm Vông* singing and water splashing, etc.

Professors Trần Quốc Vượng and Hoàng Văn Khoán grasped what was in the depth of my heart and suggested to me the subject of study in my graduation thesis: ‘Dâu Pagoda and the Four Dharma Systems’.

After mentioning the reason for his subject, the author of this thesis self-evaluates his thesis, “The pages of my thesis remain the first fruits of my work. I have no desire to make it perfect and complete because the subject matter is beyond our limitations. It requires a long period of time to go to the different vestiges and contact many historical remains in Vietnam and even in Laos and in some other Southeast Asian countries.”²²

In Chapter One of this thesis the author point out the status of studies on Dâu pagoda and Luy Lâu during the previous time period mentioning the works of the following researchers: Phan Huy Lê, Hà Văn Tấn, Trần Quốc Vượng, and other researchers like Nguyễn Phi Hoàng, Chu Quang Trứ, Trần Lâm Biền, Nguyen Du Chi, Nguyễn Duy Hình, Đỗ Văn Ninh, who have studied the history and development of Dâu pagoda–Luy Lâu center.

Especially we note Nguyễn Văn Mỹ, a student of the History Department who previously made his thesis on Dâu pagoda. Unfortunately his thesis has been out of print. The author wrote: “We contacted the guiding professor and we were told that

the thesis dealt with the Four Dharma system from the point of view of notes and from a folkloric point of view.”²³

We fully agree with Lò Phan Xay maintaining that the History of Vietnam Vol 1 written by Phan Huy Lê, Hà Văn Tấn, Trần Quốc Vượng, and Lương Ninh and published in 1983²⁴ when dealing with Dâu and the Four Dharma system is of great value for argumentation and orientation for the study of this scientific subject. Considering the thesis subject of Lò Phan Xay concerning Dâu pagoda and the Four Dharma system in Thuận Thành district, although there are several limitations, we must recognize that until 1986 his thesis is a relatively complete study of Dâu pagoda and it has systematized all the previous published documents and rather objectively evaluated the previous studies on Dâu pagoda. Also, Nguyễn Duy Hinh launched a fairly important text on Dâu and Vietnamese Buddhism at the beginning of the Common Era.²⁵ Nguyễn Duy Hinh was right when he mentioned that in Dâu area a new Buddhist school appeared called the Sơn Môn Dâu (Dâu School). Because this school places a high value on women, we call it Sơn Môn Ni or School for Nuns. (*Ni* means woman).

Studies on Dâu pagoda and Luy Lâu began in 1986 and continue until the present time. Besides the above-mentioned authors, there are researchers like Phan Đại Doãn, and Đặng Văn Lung. Most recently, the theme of Trần Đình Luyện's Master of Art History thesis deals with Luy Lâu-Dâu pagoda,²⁶ and Tống Trung Tín and his collaborators' report in an article on the excavations in Luy Lâu.²⁷ Each, from their own discipline's point of view, gave a panoramic picture of Luy Lâu and Dâu Buddhist center. Among the books concerning Dâu-Luy Lâu especially the book “Vietnam's Pagodas” with the participation of Hà Văn Tấn. Dealing with the beginnings of Buddhism the same professor wrote:

“It is hard to visualize the form of the first pagoda. The *Recorded Sayings of the Pháp Vân Buddha at Cổ Châu* wrote that Kaudra established his small bamboo shrine (*am*) under a banyan tree. Even several centuries later, many pagodas originally were small shrines made of bamboo poles. They might have been old shrines worshipping traditional spirits with a Buddha altar added later. The people did not install the Four Dharma statues in a Buddhist pagoda but they installed a Buddha altar into an existing Four Dharma shrine. These shrines had been built to worship agricultural deities. In their turn the Dharma Ladies became the Buddha or Lady Buddha.”²⁸

Professor Hà Văn Tấn established a right direction for studies on pagodas worshipping Buddha, as well as the Four Dharma and their relationship at the beginning of the Common Era.

Before presenting my views, it would be a mistake if I forgot to deal with another stack of documents made by South Vietnamese scholars during 1954-1975.

When studying Buddhism we must mention authors like Nguyễn Bá Lăng, Nguyễn Đăng Thực²⁹ and Lê Mạnh Thát.³⁰ These authors take their sources from French studies and documents in Chinese still remaining in Saigon. They dealt with Buddhism's entrance into Vietnam at the beginning of the Common Era.

Surely with these subjects these authors were dealing with the documents on Dâu pagoda and the Four Dharma systems. Their suggestions, however, were based chiefly on outdated documents with heavy reliance on deductions.

Architect Nguyễn Bá Lăng made his study on Dâu area from the point of view of an architect. During the early 1970s, he published two books titled *Architectural Nuances during the Chinese Domination* or *Sắc thái Kiến trúc thời Bắc thuộc*³¹ and *Buddhist Architecture in Vietnam Vol I* or *Kiến trúc Phật giáo Vietnam*.³²

In fact, these two books are really only one. In his *Buddhist Architecture in Vietnam Vol I*, architect Nguyễn Bá Lăng deals with some Buddhist buildings during the Lý and Trần dynasty. Additionally, Dâu Pagoda and Hòa Phong Tower receive a similar presentation.

Documents on Dâu pagoda described in these books were based chiefly on ancient in 1988 Nguyễn Bá Lăng published the book: Old Pagodas and Vestiges and their Stories also dealing with this subject.³³

In the Lò Phan Xay thesis there are some remarks on Nguyễn Bá Lăng's book:

“Nguyễn Bá Lăng depicted in detail the Hòa Phong tower, the layout of the pagoda's architecture suggesting the Four Dharma system. Despite his efforts to collect documents to publish, there is a lack of on-the-spot survey records. For this reason the author stopped at generalizations.”³⁴

We do not fully agree with Lò Phan Xay's view on the architect Nguyễn Bá Lăng's work because, firstly, he is an architect, and he naturally depicts the Dâu pagoda from his professional viewpoint. In fact, he is not an archeologist. Furthermore, the depictions of Dâu pagoda are architectural in particular and all Buddhist buildings in general have a close connection so they lend themselves to study from architectural history, but not the view of a Buddhist pagoda of present-

day archeologists like us.³⁵ For these reasons, for a researcher of the history of old building architecture in Vietnam, his book constitutes a large contribution. As for the archeologist's viewpoint, his book has several shortcomings.

When researching Dâu pagoda and the Four Dharma in Vietnam we naturally had many advantages, but we also encountered many difficulties. At first sight local and foreign authors have studied Dâu and Luy Lâu attentively. Despite its historical, folkloric, ethnological, social, geo-historical or archeological view, each newspaper article, journal article or book that focuses on Luy Lâu–Dâu pagoda for careful and detailed studies helps to work out a panoramic picture on the history of Dâu pagoda and the Four Dharma system.

Secondly, according to on-the-spot survey records, besides the Dâu pagoda, other Buddhist pagodas were heavily damaged. This does not permit us to have complete records on the installations of the Buddha statues on the altars in these pagodas. Tướng pagoda has been in ruins and the statue of Lady Tướng had been transported temporarily to an altar in the Dâu pagoda.³⁶ This is another problem, like the one encountered in the above-cited first case. As we have recently written, these statues were transported from other pagodas to assemble in Dâu pagoda. But these transferred statues no longer remain there. Accidental occurrences of this type are always problems for researchers. Besides above-mentioned problems when studying Dâu pagoda at the beginning of 1990s, we had the following advantages:

The author has already paid attention to this study subject for years during which on-the-spot records collected in several steps have permitted us to make a comparison of the system of this pagoda with the system of many other pagodas in the Four Dharma systems in Hanoi, Hà Tây and Hưng Yên. With these documents, the author can separate the development of two Four Dharma systems into different time periods.

The collection of records published on Dâu pagoda and the Four Dharma system led the author in a new direction of study, which interested only a few people. That is, the transformation of the Four Dharma system into the one-legged god or *Độc Cước* and the transformation of a Buddhist pagoda into a temple shrine or a duplex-combination in the late period.³⁷

Taking advantage of the above, the author would like to suggest that researchers and other people pay attention to the Dâu pagoda and those other pagodas in the Four Dharma System – with what we can see now in these pagodas.

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