Key Philosophical Teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh

A Dissertation for a

Master of Arts
in Buddhist Studies

University of Sunderland, England

Advisor: Professor Peter Harvey
Student: Mihaela Andronic

Submitted: Sept, 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of several people.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Prof. Peter Harvey for his compassionate, clear, and competent guidance not only with this paper but throughout my three years of study at Sunderland University.

I am thankful to my classmates, for their feedback and words of encouragement on an early version of this paper, to Chân Niệm Hỷ (True Joy), the Order of Interbeing e-librarian, for his assistance in obtaining research material from Plum Village, and to many others from the fourfold Sangha and the Order's on-line forum.

Lastly, I am indebted to my family, particularly Laura for her never ending patience and help, and my husband and daughter who had to cope with my dereliction of duty that occurred this year, while stacks of Buddhist books and papers took over our house.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines key philosophical teachings of the Vietnamese Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh as expounded in one of his less known works, *Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness*. In doing so it addresses several questions such as: what approach does Nhất Hạnh take in his rendering of the Yogācāra doctrine of Consciousness-Only which inspired his text?; what are the commonalities with his main sources and the points of departure?; does Nhất Hạnh's interpretation of the Consciousness-Only doctrine bring a 'completely Mahāyāna' perspective, as he asserted?; how does this new perspective fit with the tradition he belongs to?; what factors inspired his re-interpretation of the Yogācāra doctrine?; and finally, does Nhat Hanh's philosophical text reconcile with his 'practical teachings' and socially engaged Buddhism?

ABBREVIATIONS

CWSL	*Ch'eng wei-shih lun,* by Hsüan-tsang
TK	*Vijñaptimātrāta-triṃśikā-kārikā*, by Vasubandhu
VK	*Vijñaptimātrāta-viṃśatikā-kārikā*, by Vasubandhu
V	verse

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Introduction

The Vietnamese Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh is an important figure in contemporary Buddhism. He traces his lineage as the 42nd generation of the Chinese Lin-chi school of Ch'an (V. Lâm-Tế), and the 8th generation of Liễu-Quán, a Vietnamese branch of Lâm-Tế.

Nhất Hạnh is mostly known for his peace activism – which led Dr. Luther King Jr. to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1967[1] - for his unique socially engaged Buddhism, which he pioneered, and for his writings of striking simplicity in which he advocates the practice of mindfulness as an antidote to many of the anguishes and dilemmas of modern life.

Nhất Hạnh is an accomplished scholar, yet his teaching style is characteristically simple and direct. In opening teaching retreats Nhất Hạnh often 'admits' that he doesn't teach much at all; just mindfulness and breathing. This joke always elicits a good laugh from the audience. Yet this is hardly a joke. Practicing mindfulness in every activity of life, following one's breath, and awareness of the present moment *are* the core of Nhất Hạnh's teachings. This focus on simple practices, along with his teaching style, has earned him the reputation of being a 'great practical teacher'. His books on peace making, on achieving happiness, dealing with anger, understanding global warming, and other matters of immediate practical applicability, are easy to read, with a few titles having been reprinted several times due to their popularity.

In 2001, however, he published a book that was strikingly different from the others. It contained a philosophical text, *Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness* which, Nhất Hạnh explained, he wrote with the intention of expanding upon the 'Consciousness-Only' doctrine of the Yogācāra school, while adding a new, 'completely Mahāyāna' perspective[2]. He cited as main sources of inspiration for his text two important treatises written in the fourth century by the school's founder, the Indian philosopher Vasubandhu[3], and a seventh century work by Hsüan-tsang[4], the founder of the Fa-hsiang school, in essence a Chinese Yogācāra. Ever since the fourth century, there have been numerous commentaries on the main Yogācāra texts, which present different and even opposing interpretations, the most traditional of which sees its doctrine as a statement of universal idealism[5] (e.g. that perceptions of the mind have no basis in external reality).

In this paper we will examine this less known work of Nhất Hạnh and seek to answer a few questions that, quite naturally, arise: a) what approach does he take in his rendering of the Yogācāra doctrine, what is his view on the nature of reality and consciousness, and how does this reconcile with his engaged Buddhism and peace activism? (e.g. an idealistic interpretation that sees beings as part of an illusory world would be at odds with a lifetime of tireless effort dedicated to helping them); b) what may Nhất Hạnh have meant by a 'completely Mahāyāna' perspective, given that most scholars would consider Vasubandhu's and particularly Hsüan-tsang's writings as already being Mahāyāna? There must have been, therefore, other schools and doctrines that inspired his re-interpretation of the main Yogācāra texts. What are these, and how do they relate to the teachings of the tradition he belongs to?; and c) is there really a dichotomy between Nhất Hạnh's simple, accessible writings and teaching methods and his philosophical work, or is there an underlying commonality between his philosophy of thought and his philosophy of action?

2. Method

In preparing this paper I started by researching Vietnamese Buddhism, in order to gain an understanding of where Nhất Hạnh's tradition fits within the landscape of Vietnamese Zen and how the doctrinal and practice environment may have led to the development of his philosophical stand and teaching style. This included researching Nhất Hạnh's biography, e.g. where he studied, as well as key aspects of his peacemaking activism, etc. The bulk of my research consisted of reading Nhất Hạnh's *Fifty Verses* and his

[1] No Nobel Peace prize was awarded that year.
[2] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 4
[3] *Vijñaptimātratā-viṃśatikā-kārikā* (VK), and *Vijñaptimātratā-triṃśikā-kārikā* (TK)
[4] *Ch'eng wei-shih lun* (CWSL), which is a basically a commentary on TK, is the foundation text of the Fa-hsiang school.
[5] Young, 2007

commentaries on them; also, in order to understand the commonalities and point of departure with the texts he cites as main inspirations for his work, I examined three different translations and commentaries on these. Finally I selected and read a few titles by Nhất Hạnh that span different styles (e.g. children's books, poetry, books on Buddhism and Zen, monastic practice manuals, etc.) in order to see if they reflect his philosophy as summarized in the *Fifty Verses*.

3. Structure

Corresponding to the methodology outlined above, the dissertation has VI parts.

Part I is an overview of Vietnamese Buddhism, including key Zen schools, figures, lineages and biographical notes on Thích Nhất Hạnh. From this part we will gain an understanding of the unique characteristics of Vietnamese Zen, particularly the Liễu-Quán lineage, which sets Liễu-Quán Zen apart from Zen as practiced in the West and explains Nhất Hạnh's tendency to reach across doctrinal lines. Additionally, this section sheds light on his life as a young monk, and how what he learned influenced his teaching methods and philosophical stand. It also unveils the historical context and some doctrinal influences that led to Nhất Hạnh's activism.

Part II is a brief overview of Nhất Hạnh's key teachings and an explanation of the concept of *interbeing*, a philosophical term that he coined and which essentially reflects his theory of reality.

Part III is dedicated to analysing the *Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness* and how the theory of mind and reality expounded in this work translates into the practice methods taught by Nhất Hạnh. The section starts with a brief overview of the works that inspired it, followed by a presentation of Nhất Hạnh's rendering of the doctrine. It stresses the central role which the concept of *interbeing* plays in understanding the *Fifty Verses* and highlights key similarities with the main sources, as well as points of departure. The section ends with a commentary on Nhất Hạnh's assertion that in the *Fifty Verses* he added a 'completely Mahāyāna' perspective to the Yogācāra doctrine of Consciousness-Only.

Part IV presents an overall conclusion and a few final comments.

The biography surveyed for this paper is listed in Part V.

Finally, Part VI comprises a number of appendixes which contain: e.g. compilations of different translations of the VK and TK treatises, a lineage document, compilations of texts and simple practices from the monastic centres founded by Nhất Hạnh, etc.

I. Overview of Vietnamese Buddhism

A. Brief History

The history of Buddhism in Vietnam spans two thousand years – nearly as long as the existence of Buddhism itself. Due to Vietnam's geographical location between India and China, its culture and religion were enriched by both of these cultures. In Nhất Hạnh's words, Vietnam was 'the fertile soil for a unique form of Buddhism synthesized from the teachings of both the early Buddhist Theravādin tradition and the later Mahāyāna'[6].

Buddhism was first introduced in Vietnam via the sea route, from Sri Lanka, as early as the first century CE. By some accounts, at the end of the second century there was already a flourishing Buddhist community in Vietnam, whose practices were consistent with those of the Theravāda school (e.g. 'monks shaved their head, wore saffron-colored robes, ate once a day, and guarded their senses'[7]). Over the next eighteen centuries the school saw a significant decline. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, at a time when a number of movements advocated for the revival and modernization of Buddhism in Vietnam, interest in Theravāda practice began to grow. As of 1997, there were sixty-four Theravāda temples throughout the country, many of these located in Central and South Vietnam[8].

The earliest known Buddhist meditation master of Vietnam, Tang Hôi, was born in the third century, three hundred years before Bodhidharma went to China[9]. Bodhidharma, the semi-legendary Indian meditation master, is generally considered to be the first patriarch of the Chinese school of Ch'an (J. Zen, V. Thiệt)[10]. While meditation was practiced in other schools, Ch'an specialized it and emphasized it as *the* method for attaining enlightenment. Tang Hôi's teachings emphasized mindfulness of breathing. His works include translations and commentaries on the *Ānāpānanusmṛti Sūtra*, and an essay on The Way of Realizing Meditation – which is part of his 'Collection on the Six Pāramitās'[11]. This shows that meditation was an established practice in Vietnamese Buddhism even before the first introduction of Zen, which occurred in the latter part of the sixth century.

Zen was brought to Vietnam from China, around the year 580, by the Indian monk Vinītarucci (V. Tỳ-Ni-Đa-Lu'u-Chi). That first transmission eventually died out, though the school's lineage can be traced to the mid-thirteenth century, through nineteen successive generations of patriarchs. One of the school's most famous figures is the illustrious monk Vạn Hạnh (d. 1018), an accomplished scholar who was proficient in the doctrines of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, and who was often consulted by the monarchy on matters of important government affairs[12].

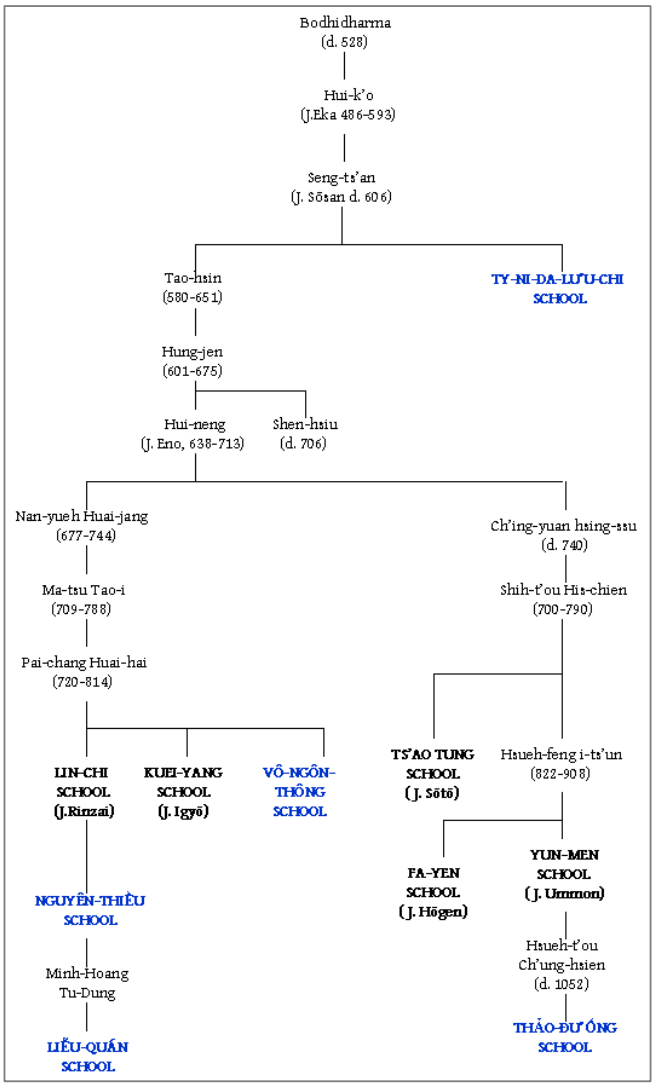
In the seventeenth century, central Vietnam (Huế) saw a resurgence of the Zen schools, primarily stimulated by an influx of Chinese monks of the Lin-chi lineage who were seeking asylum from the Manchu invaders of China[13]. The Lin-chi school emphasized the use of the *kung-an* (J. *kōan*) and abrupt methods such as shouting at students or hitting them in order to shock them into awareness of their true nature[14]. Its first patriarch in Vietnam was the Chinese monk Nguyên-Thiều. Today the Lin-chi (V. Lâm-Tế) school is the largest Buddhist monastic order in the country[15].

Figure 1 below shows the timeline and lineage of Chinese and Vietnamese Zen schools. Five Vietnamese

[6] Nhat Hanh, 2001 b), p. ix
[7] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 22
[8] Anson, web, 5)
[9] Nhat Hanh, 2001 b), p. ix – by some accounts, Bodhidharma lived between 470 and 543 CE and traveled to China around 516-526 CE.
[10] Harvey, 1990, p.153 - Ch'an is a transliteration of the Sanskrit *dhyāna,* a state of deep meditation.
[11] Nhat Hanh, 2001 b), p. ix
[12] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 22, 38, 50
[13] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 148
[14] Powers, 2000, p.129
[15] Powers, 2000, p. 238

schools can be distinguished, though they do not map one for one to the famous five Chinese houses of Ch'an founded in the eighth century.

Figure 1. Timeline and Lineage of Chinese and Vietnamese Zen Schools[16]



Despite the fact that, generally, the Zen tradition rejects study as a path to awakening, there is evidence that, in addition to practicing meditation, Nguyên-Thiều had studied doctrinal texts extensively. His teachings have been influenced by the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* with commentaries by Fa-tsang, the third patriarch of the Hua-yen school, and by the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* [17]. This is just one of many examples that illustrate the varied sources from which Vietnamese Zen draws. This is not so different from Chinese Ch'an, although Japanese Zen tends to be more clearly delineated along sectarian lines[18].

Another example is the Thảo-Đường School, which emerged in the eleventh century and traces its roots to

[16] Reconstituted from Thiền-an, 1975, p. 291. Chinese schools are shown in bold black capital letters, Vietnamese in blue font.
[17] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 150
[18] Harvey, 2011, F)

the Chinese Yun-Men School. The latter was particularly famous for its founder's use of abrupt and confrontational methods, such as hitting, shouting, and apparently unintelligible one word *kōans*. Thảo-Đường, on the other hand, put emphasis on compassion (S. *karuṇā*), wisdom (S. *prajñā*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*), and advocated the unified practice of Zen and Pure Land methods for attaining enlightenment. It is to be noted that the Pure Land School (C. Ch'ing-t'u Tsung /V. Đạo Trang) was well established in Vietnam at the time, and had been 'influential at the popular level from the ninth century'[19]. It continues to be a main practice today.

The combined teachings proposed by Thảo-Đường, known as the doctrine of *Ch'an-ching I-chi*[20], illustrate a tendency not uncommon in Vietnamese Buddhism, to harmoniously blend various practices and doctrines, and to blur traditional sectarian boundaries. This form of syncretism is manifest even in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism, as practiced within Vietnam and also abroad. Nhất Hạnh for example endorses a prostration to ancestors practice in which, aside from his direct spiritual ancestors (e.g. Lin-chi, Liễu-Quán, etc.), the ancient patriarchs Ānanda, Śāriputra, Mahākāśyapa, as well as masters Vinītarucci, Tang Hôi, Vô-Ngôn-Thông, Thảo-Đường, and others are being venerated[21]. According to Thiền-An, 'most Buddhist monks and laymen in Vietnam traditionally obey the disciplines of the Hīnayāna, recite *mantra*, learn *mudrā*, practice meditation, and chant the Buddha's name (J. *Nembutsu*) without any conflict between the practices'[22]. As a side note, while the union of Zen meditation and Pure Land invocation may seem surprising in light of the basic differences between the two schools, there are also a few similarities. De Bary points out that the two together may 'be taken to represent a general reaction against the scriptural and doctrinal approach to the religion'[23]. Other authors see similarities between the rhythmic repetitions of the Pure Land School and the intensive practice of the *kōan*[24].

A figure of great importance for Vietnamese Buddhism is the monk Liễu-Quán, of the thirty-fifth generation of the Lâm-Tế school. Liễu-Quán, a monk who was much loved and respected for his work in both the community and monastery[25], modified and adapted the teachings of Lin-chi to better fit with the Vietnamese practice and tradition[26], thus establishing the school that bears his name[27]. Besides the adapted teachings, Liễu-Quán instituted a method of tracing lineage by means of a name poem (*gāthā*), which was inspired from a similar Chinese practice that served to institutionalize a sect and structure generations of masters and disciples in an ordered manner. According to Thiền-An, this system, which introduced a clear methodology of establishing membership in a Sangha, gave great freedom to the masters as to the teachings they imparted, without much worry about dogmatic boundaries. It also gave great choice to monks and laymen alike as to the teachings and practices they wanted to pursue[28]. Thiền-An sees this flexibility and adaptability of the teachings as a feature that greatly strengthened Buddhism in Vietnam, and goes as far as to say that 'the role of the Liễu-Quán school has been of paramount importance in enabling Vietnamese Buddhism to stand firm during periods of submersion by foreign religious and political systems'[29].

The name *gāthā* composed by Liễu-Quán is a poem written in Chinese, which starts with the Chinese character for his family name of **Thiệt** and continues with forty-seven other characters/words. The poem is depicted in **Figure 2** below. An English translation, by Nhất Hạnh, can be read in Appendix F.

The system is designed such that each generation must include the next character from the *gāthā* in their

[19] Harvey, 1990, p. 159
[20] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 75
[21] Nhat Hanh & al, 2007, p. 217-220
[22] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 24
[23] de Bary, p. 196
[24] Thiền-an, p. 76
[25] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 166
[26] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 156
[27] In Chinese Lin-chi records Liễu-Quán is recorded as the thirty-fifth generation, succeeding Nguyên-Thiều and Tu-Dong (see Figure 1), but Vietnamese generally consider that his school is in fact a new branch of Lin-chi.
[28] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 156
[29] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 157

lineage name, in an ordered manner (e.g. the first master who succeeded Liễu-Quán, Lưu Quáng, had the lineage name **Tế**_Ân, the next generation was Chiếu Nhiên, lineage name **Đại** Tuệ, and so on). Plum Village[30] records show Nhất Hạnh, whose lineage name is **Trừng** Quáng, as belonging to the 8th generation of the Liễu-Quán school and the 42nd generation of the Lâm-Tế school[31].

Figure 2. The Liễu-Quán lineage name *gāthā* in forty eight characters[32]

寔際大道	*Thiệt tế đại đạo*
性海清澄	*Tánh hải thạnh **trừng***
心源廣潤	*Tâm nguyên quảng nhuận*
德本慈風	*Đức bổn từ phong*
戒定福慧	*Giới định phúc tuệ*
體用圓通	*Thể dụng viên thông*
永超智果	*Vĩnh siêu trí quả*
密契成功	*Mật khế thành công*
傳持妙理	*Truyền trì diệu lý*
演暢正宗	*Diễn xướng chánh tông*
行解相應	*Hành giải tương ứng*
達悟真空	*Đạt ngộ chân không.*

The poem provides enough characters for forty eight generations in this lineage. As to its significance in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism, the Liễu-Quán *gāthā* appears on all certificates of Buddhist membership issued by the Thuyền-Tôn temple in Huế, where the majority of monks and laymen belong to the present generations of the sect – the generations of Trừng, Tâm, Nguyên, Quản, and Nhuận[33]. It is also printed on all ordination certificates issued by Plum Village. The poem, translated into English by Nhất Hạnh can be read in Appendix F:

The canonical literature of Vietnamese Buddhism comes mostly from China. Although many texts have been translated into Vietnamese, they contain numerous technical terms in Chinese, which renders them unintelligible to most lay people, as well as to many monks. Nhất Hạnh recounts that, as a young novice at his root temple, he studied texts that were written mostly in classical Chinese or Sanskrit[34]. The difficulty in understanding the meaning of the texts may be at least one of the reasons why chanting rather than studying the sutras is the most widespread religious practice in contemporary Vietnam. The most popular chants include the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* (*Lotus*) *Sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrti nirdeśa Sūtra*, the *Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sūtra*, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. I have heard Nhất Hạnh commenting occasionally on this matter in his talks and wondered if his teaching style also reflects an attempt to make accessible to the wider public texts whose meanings would have otherwise been accessible only to a selected few.

The main Zen Vinaya rules derive from texts compiled by the Chinese master Yunqi who lived during the Ming Dynasty[35]. The Bodhisattva precepts derive from the T'ien-t'ai, whose main scriptural source is the *Lotus Sūtra*[36].

By the middle of the last century there were a plethora of different Buddhist sects in Vietnam. A four day Buddhist congress held in 1964 resulted in the creation of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) which combined elements of eleven different sects from both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. Many sects however, especially those from South Vietnam did not join the UBCV[37], which was estimated to

[30] Plum Village is a monastic community and retreat center in southern France founded by Thích Nhất Hạnh in 1982.
[31] Appendix F
[32] Re-arranged from Appendix F
[33] Thiền-An, 1975, p. 169
[34] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a), p. 2,3
[35] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 39
[36] Powers, 2000, p. 240
[37] e.g. Khmer Theravāda and Hòa Hảo Buddhists (per Chapman, 2007, p. 306).

have constituted only about one million of the sixteen million Buddhists practicing in the South.

This wide variety of doctrines and practices that make up the fabric of Vietnamese Buddhism is also reflected, in part, in the collection of texts published in the Plum Village book of practices, and which are studied by both lay and monastic students of Nhất Hạnh. Appendix D presents a complete list of these texts.

Summary on Vietnamese Buddhism

In conclusion: a) the history of Buddhism in Vietnam spans two thousand years – Theravāda being the first doctrine introduced – and still influential today in the south; b) the Lin-chi (V. Lâm-Tế) Zen school is the largest Buddhist monastic order in the country today; c) unlike some of its root Chinese Ch'an schools or other Zen schools better known in the west (e.g. Rinzai, Sōtō, etc.) which emphasize almost exclusively the practice of meditation and *kōan* study, Vietnamese Zen is a syncretic combination of a variety of doctrines and practices; d) Liễu-Quán, an important ancestor in Nhất Hạnh's lineage, was a key figure in Vietnamese Buddhism. His innovations further contributed to propagating a freedom of doctrine and methods in a landscape that was already very diverse; e) this variety and syncretism are reflected in the collection of texts that are studied at Plum Village, as well as in its practices, and are likely to have influenced Nhất Hạnh's philosophical thought.

B. Biography of Thích Nhất Hạnh

Thích Nhất Hạnh (lay name Nguyễn Xuân Bảo) was born in 1926 in Vietnam, at a time when the country was under French colonial rule. He recounts that, at the age of nine, he saw an image of the Buddha sitting peacefully on the cover of a magazine and knew right away that he wanted to be happy and peaceful like that too[38].

In 1942, at the age of 16, he entered Từ Hiếu temple in Huế as a practicing aspirant (*dieu*)[39]. His teacher was Zen master Chân Thật ('Real Truth', 1884-1968, lineage name Thạnh Quí) of the 41st generation of the Lâm-Tế school, and the 7th generation of the Liễu-Quán school. When Chân Thật passed away, his Will gave instructions for Nhất Hạnh to be appointed Abbot of Từ Hiếu temple, a position which he still holds[40].

The years of training at Từ Hiếu (Nhất Hạnh's 'root' temple) were to have a great influence on his life and work. Life at the temple was divided between work, study, chanting, meditation and listening to Chân Thật's teachings. The master told his young students that 'meditation was a door to understanding, and the career of monks and nuns'[41].

But sitting meditation was not the only practice at the Từ Hiếu temple, which followed the Zen principle of 'no work, no food', and everyone, from the highest monk to the newest member, had to abide by it. Upon entering the temple, the young aspirants had to agree to take care of the cows, carry water, pound rice, or whatever else was needed for the functioning of the monastic community. Nhất Hạnh recalls that every time his mother came to visit from their far away village, she would regard these menial chores as being 'the challenges of the first stage of practice'[42]. But for him, he understood even at that young age that these were not challenges – they were themselves the practice[43].

Aside from work, study was an important part of the daily routine. Before being allowed to take the novice vows, aspirants were expected to memorize all the daily liturgies, and several volumes on monastic discipline (*Vinaya*)[44]. Aside from the *Vinaya* books they also had to study a mix of *sūtras* and philosophical texts: e.g. the *Ānāpānasati* (*S. Ānāpānusmṛti*) *Sūtra*, Vasubandhu's TK and VK treatises, which they had to memorize[45], texts on Conditioned Arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and other doctrines[46]. Most texts were

[38] Nhat Hanh, 2002, b) p. viii
[39] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a) p. 4
[40] Appendix F
[41] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a) p. 10
[42] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a) p. 11
[43] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a) p. 11
[44] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a) p. 2, 3
[45] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a) p. 4

written in classical Chinese and some in Sanskrit.

While memorizing these was not an easy task, deciphering their meaning seemed even more complicated. Nhất Hạnh recalls how he struggled with some texts whose meanings remained obscured to him at the time: 'As a novice I was required to read Buddhist philosophy. I was only sixteen and unable to grasp concepts like Interdependent Co-Arising, and Oneness of Subject and Object'[47].

But one text that was different from all the rest and had a great impact on Nhất Hạnh's teaching style was *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use*, a thin booklet of no more than forty pages, written by the teacher monk Thầy Doc The. It contained a collection of simple *gāthās* written with the goal 'to help the beginning practitioner take hold of his own consciousness'[48]. Novices were handed this booklet when entering the temple and instructed to keep it close at hand at all times, even to use it as a pillow at night. It seems that this monk's practice of awakening consisted of observing himself mindfully throughout all ordinary actions of daily life: eating, drinking, walking, working, etc. The verses in the book were simple records of his thoughts as he was carrying through the day. Here's a rare glimpse at one of these *gāthās*:

> Washing my hands in clear water;
> I pray that all people have pure hands
> To receive and care for the truth[49].

Nhất Hạnh refers to this book as a true 'warrior's manual on strategies' and recalls how the use of those *gāthās* encouraged 'clarity and mindfulness, making even the most ordinary tasks sacred '[50]. This simple method was effective in teaching the young novices to stay present with the mind and to observe themselves in every action – which was, as Nhất Hạnh recalls 'as difficult as trying to find a stray water buffalo by following its zigzagging tracks'[51]. He credits this method of practice with a breakthrough in understanding and experiencing directly certain Buddhist teachings whose meaning may have remained obscured if explored by intellectual means alone[52]. He never forgot the value of this experiential learning, a method he incorporated into his teaching style. Inspired by the *gāthās* he memorized and practiced as a novice, he wrote a collection of verses for novices wishing to take monastic vows at Plum Village. Below are a few excerpts. More examples can be read in Appendix E.

> Feelings come and go
> like clouds in a windy sky.
> Conscious breathing
> is my anchor.
>
> In this food
> I see clearly
> the entire universe
> supporting my existence.
>
> The bowl of Tathāgata
> Is in my two hands.
> Giver, receiver, and gift

---

[46] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) p. 120
[47] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) p. 120
[48] Nhat Hanh, 1975, p. 6
[49] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) p. 130 – this *gāthā* was likely the inspiration for a version adapted by Nhất Hạnh for contemporary practice (per Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 5) :

> Water flows over these hands.
> May I use them skillfully,
> To preserve our precious planet.

[50] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) p. 130
[51] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) p. 130
[52] Nhat Hanh, 1975, p. 6

Held in perfect oneness.

Turning on the computer
My mind gets in touch with the store[53].
I vow to transform habit energies
To help love and understanding grow.[54]

Some of these *gāthās* reflect elements from Nhất Hạnh's *Fifty Verses*, such as ideas that the universe is reflected in all *dharmas*, that there is no duality between perceived and perceiver, and that transforming habit energies from store consciousness will bring about understanding and loving kindness.

Chanting was another important part of the daily routine. Some of the chants were mainly devotional. These included: 'Bowing deeply before the Buddha', 'Going for Refuge', 'The Mantra of Great Compassion' (*Nīlakantha dhāraṇī*) - one of the most widely used of all Mahāyāna mantras, representing a dharma taught by the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and, interestingly, even a Pure Land chant. Others, such as the *Śūraṅgama dhāraṇī,* contained deep philosophical teachings[55].

The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (translated roughly as 'indestructible'[56]) is a Mahāyāna Buddhist text influential especially in Chinese Ch'an Buddhism, and has been connected with the enlightenment of well-known Ch'an masters (e.g. Han-shan Te-ch'ing). It contains teachings inspired by Yogācāra, Tathāgata-garbha, and Vajrayāna. The text discusses the distinction between the mind, as characterized by discriminating consciousness, and 'true mind', which underlies all *dharmas.* One of the main themes is that, in itself, knowledge of the Dharma (e.g. the teachings of the Buddha) is 'worthless' unless accompanied by the ability to meditate. The *sūtra* also stresses the importance of moral precepts as a foundation for the Path[57] and makes extended use of Buddhist logic, with its methods of syllogism and the fourfold negation first popularized by Nāgārjuna.

As for the use of *kōans*, there is no evidence that this was part of the temple's teaching methods, per se. Nhất Hạnh makes occasional references to discussions he had with another novice about stories from *The Gateless Gate*[58], but he never implies that disciples were given either single *kōans* to meditate on, or successively more difficult ones - a key practice associated with many other Zen schools, and even mentioned in stories about master Liễu-Quán[59].

After his novitiate, Nhất Hạnh began attending the Buddhist Institute at the Báo Quốc temple in Huế, where in 1949 he received full ordination[60]. While the resources consulted do not provide specific details, we know that between his time at the Từ Hiếu temple and the Báo Quốc Institute, his studies included both Theravāda and Mahāyāna (especially Pure Land and Zen) traditions[61]. While studying at Báo Quốc, Nhất Hạnh tried to convince the teaching staff to enrich the curriculum by including courses with more emphasis on Western philosophy, literature and foreign languages. In 1950, when his attempts failed, he left the Institute and enrolled at Saigon University, from which he graduated first in four subjects[62]. While studying in Saigon he supported himself by writing novels and poetry[63]. He lived at a small temple which he co-founded, and which was to become the An-Quáng Buddhist Institute, the foremost center of Buddhist studies in South Vietnam[64].

[53] 'store' refers to 'store consciousness' (*ālaya-vijñāna*).
[54] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 6, 10, 19, 20
[55] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a), p. 31
[56] alternatively translated as 'heroic march', based on a different analysis of the word (per Harvey, 2011, F))
[57] Epstein, web, 2)
[58] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a), p. 38; The Gateless Gate is a collection of 48 *kōans* compiled in the 13th century by the Chinese master Wu-men Hui-k'ai (J. Mumon Ekai).
[59] Appendix F
[60] King, 1996, p. 322
[61] Chapman, 2007, p. 299
[62] King, 1996, p. 322
[63] Chapman, 2007, p. 300
[64] King, 1996, p. 322

Despite the sense of peacefulness and joy that we get from reading Nhất Hạnh's memoirs about his years as a young novice, outside the protection of the temples' walls the country was hurting. Vietnam had been subjected to war after war, and was devastated. It was, as he would later describe it, like a 'lotus in a sea of fire'[65]. During World War II the French occupation of Vietnam gave way to an invasion by the Japanese. The country declared independence after the war but it was short lived, as the French, backed by the US, tried to reinstate their rule. A peace accord signed in Geneva in 1954, intended to provide a temporary demarcation north and south of the seventeenth parallel, eventually led to the creation of two very antagonistic regimes. South Vietnam had president Diệm, a Catholic who regarded the Buddhists as a threat to his government, and instituted a series of repressive measures against them. His regime was supported by the Americans. The communist regime in North Vietnam was supported by USSR and China. By November 1955 the two parties and their allies were to engage in a ravaging war that lasted almost twenty years[66]. Sadly, the Buddhist congregation, although strong in numbers, had also become greatly divided along geographical and political lines and also in the goal, means and level of their involvement in the Buddhist Struggle Movement[67].

Reflecting on his generation, Nhất Hạnh said that it had been 'invaded by society and times'[68]. However, he saw it as their role to 'keep Buddhism alive' and 'engage Buddhism with everyday life, like it used to be during the Ly and Tran dynasties'[69]. This meant reforming and reorganizing the entire Buddhist congregation.

In 1955 the elders in Huế invited Nhất Hạnh to return. When he did so, he was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the *Vietnamese Buddhism* magazine, the official voice of the Association of All Buddhists in Vietnam[70]. But Nhất Hạnh's articles, which expressed his proposal for a more humanistic, unified Buddhism as well as other 'radical' ideas, were disliked by the leadership of the different congregations, and within two years the journal publication got suspended. Back in Saigon, in a somewhat extreme expression of disapproval for his writings, someone at An Quáng temple erased Nhất Hạnh's name from the temple's records, which in effect 'expelled' him from that *sangha*[71].

These reactions had a big impact on Nhất Hạnh and his group. 'We felt lost' – he recalls. 'Our opportunity to influence the direction of Buddhism had slipped away. What chance did we – young people without position or a center of our own – have to realize our dreams? I became so sick I almost died ...'[72]. In search for some peace he retreated to the countryside, where he co-founded Phuong Boi monastery[73]. During this time he continued to write articles, publish books, edit magazines and teach courses on Buddhism to high school and university students. Eventually, the increasing disapproval for his ideas and writings by both the Diệm regime and Buddhist leaders, led him to accept a fellowship at Princeton University and in 1961

[65] *Lotus in a Sea of Fire – a Buddhist Proposal for Peace* is the first title published by Nhat Hanh in English (the preface is written by Thomas Merton).
[66] Chapman, 2007, p. 299; the American troops finally withdrew in 1973, the North defeated the South and the country became unified under communist rule in 1975
[67] King, 1996, p. 325-326,335. The Buddhist Struggle Movement is a term used to describe a loose association of organisations that were active in Vietnam in the mid-sixties and whose original goal was to protect the practice of Buddhism, which had became severely oppressed during the Diệm regime (Diệm had a strong Catholic identity, and was pro-USA). The goal of the movement steadily widened to a struggle against political oppression and for peace, although the movement was not monolithic and at least three distinct factions with different views can be identified. The most politically active group were the monks from the An-Quáng Pagoda. They were able to stage massive street demonstrations and had enough power to shore up or bring down the government. Towards the end of the war they became progressively angrier, more anti-Saigon and anti-USA. The second group was comprised of the SYSS and some Vạn Hạnh University people. This was Thích Nhất Hạnh's group; it was deeply invested in a spiritually based pacifism, based in love and compassion, and was averse to being involved in any political machinations. The third group was a pro-NFL faction.
[68] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a), p. 19
[69] Nhat Hanh, 2002, a), p. 19
[70] King, 1996, p. 322
[71] Chapman, 2007, p. 300
[72] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) p. 7
[73] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b) Introduction

he traveled for the first time to the United States[74]. At Princeton he studied and taught Comparative Religion[75]. In 1962 he was invited to teach Contemporary Buddhism at Columbia University[76]. While there, he befriended Prof. Anton Cerbu with whom he began to make plans about starting a Department of Vietnamese Studies at Columbia[77]. Back home, a defining moment in the struggle against the repressive Diệm regime took place in June 1963, with the self-immolation of the 73-year-old monk Thích Quáng Duc, an act that precipitated the fall of the regime[78]. Shortly after this event Nhất Hạnh answered an urgent appeal from the Buddhist leadership in Huế to return to his homeland and help rebuild the congregation[79]. The following years were a whirl of creative activity for Nhất Hạnh. He established an influential publishing house; he was editor of the *Sound of the Rising Tide*, the official publication of the UBCV, and of another weekly magazine; he co-founded Vạn Hạnh University, which was to incorporate his ideal of reformed Buddhist higher education[80]; he worked as a director[81] and a professor at Vạn Hạnh, where he taught the Consciousness-Only doctrine re-interpreted in light of the teachings of Conditioned Arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*), the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the *Diamond Sūtra,* and the treatises of the San-lun School[82].

In 1965 he founded the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS). SYSS initially started as an undergraduate program at Vạn Hạnh University, under the auspices of the UBCV[83] and was based on Nhất Hạnh's ideas of applied, socially engaged Buddhism. In commenting about this, he explains that, at a time when so many villages were devastated by bombardments, it was necessary to decide whether to continue to practice in monasteries, or to leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering. Nhất Hạnh and his disciples decided to do both – to go out and help people, all people, irrespective of which side of the conflict they were on – and to do so in mindfulness[84]. 'It does not make sense for students of the Buddha to isolate themselves inside a temple, or they are not his true students' – he wrote. 'We are already, in our own way, bringing about a revolution in Buddhist teaching. Young people...are leading the way into new streams of Buddhist thought and action. They are giving birth to engaged Buddhism'[85]. Nhất Hạnh explains that this 'revolution' was based on the insight that every person involved in a conflict is a victim, that conflict is caused by ignorance and clinging to ideologies, and that those who appear to be on opposing sides are ultimately two aspects of the same reality. It was also inspired by verses from the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, a popular Mahāyāna text set up as a dialogue based on perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*) teachings, which describes how a bodhisattva enters 'the dharma-door of non-duality'[86]:

> In the time of war
> Raise in yourself the mind of compassion
> Help living beings
> Abandon the will to fight
> Wherever there is furious battle
> Use all your might
> To keep both sides' strength equal

[74] Chapman, 2007, p. 300
[75] Willis, 2003, p. 1
[76] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b), p. 72
[77] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b), p. 153
[78] Chapman, 2007, p. 301
[79] Chapman, 2007, p. 301
[80] King, 1996, p. 323
[81] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b), p. 160
[82] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 161 – the San-lun School is derived from the Indian Mādhyamika (Middle Way) School. It is also known as the *Three Śāstras* School because it was based upon three texts: the *Mādhyamika -śāstra* and the *Śāstra in One hundred Verses* by Nāgārjuna, and the *Twelve Doors' Śāstra* by Deva.
[83] Chan Khong, 2007, p. 71
[84] Chapman, 2007, p. 306
[85] Nhat Hanh, 1998, b), p. 197
[86] Powers, 2000, p. 241

> And then step into the conflict to reconcile[87].

SYSS grew into a huge and effective volunteer organization of over ten thousand people and was the primary vehicle of engaged Buddhism during the Vietnam War[88]. Amidst all this Nhất Hạnh managed to write a steady stream of books, poems and articles calling for peace and reconciliation[89].

On February 5th, 1966, at the time when the Vietnam War was escalating, and the suffering caused by devastation was growing, Nhất Hạnh brought another form of institutional expression to his concept of engaged Buddhism by founding the Tiếp-Hiện Order, a new branch of the Lâm-Tế school. The meaning of the expression *tiếp-hiện* is similar to that of *interbeing*, a philosophical term coined by Thích Nhất Hạnh, which is primarily inspired from the teachings of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*[90]. The first ordained members were six leaders of the SYSS, three women and three men, who were committed to seeking to end the war, and to working for social justice without taking sides[91]. While Nhất Hạnh envisioned that the Order be composed of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, he gave the members the freedom to choose whether to ordain as monastics or to live and practice as laypersons. The women all chose celibate lives, though not to formally ordain as nuns, while the three men chose to marry and practice as lay Buddhists. Sr. Chân Không, now a senior nun at Plum Village, recalls that the ordination was a wonderful celebration and that each of the six members where presented with a lamp with handmade lampshades on which Thích Nhất Hạnh had calligraphed, in Chinese characters: 'Lamp of Wisdom', 'Lamp of the World', etc.[92]. 'Forged in the crucible of war and devastation', the order's charter and fourteen precepts (called 'mindfulness trainings'), were a blend of traditional Buddhist ethics and contemporary social concerns[93]. Nhất Hạnh was acutely aware of the need to overcome ideological divisiveness, and, accordingly, the theme of the first three precepts is the rejection of any political or religious fanaticism.

The paragraph below, an excerpt from the seventh precept, already shows elements of Nhất Hạnh's philosophy, e.g. the idea that the simple practice of mindful breathing and awareness nourishes innate wholesome seeds in our consciousness, which leads to a transformation of consciousness and healing:

> Aware that life is available only in the present moment and that it is possible to live happily in the here and now, we are committed to training ourselves to live deeply each moment of daily life. We will try not to lose ourselves in dispersion or be carried away by regrets about the past, worries about the future, or craving, anger, or jealousy in the present. We will practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. We are determined to learn the art of mindful living by touching the wondrous, refreshing, and healing elements that are inside and around us, and by nourishing seeds of joy, peace, love, and understanding in ourselves, thus facilitating the work of transformation and healing in our consciousness[94].

No new members were ordained until 1981. Today the Order includes members from the fourfold Sangha; upon ordination, today, as in the past, one takes a vow to observe a minimum of sixty 'days of mindfulness' each year, and to study, practice and recite the fourteen trainings regularly[95].

On May 1st, 1966 Nhất Hạnh received the lamp transmission from his old teacher, in a ceremony held at his root temple in Huế. In accordance with Zen tradition, master Thích Chân Thật gave Nhất Hạnh a transmission *gāthā*. In the *gāthā* (originally in Vietnamese) we can identify his dharma name, Phùng Xuân, which means 'meeting the spring', and his dharma title, Nhất Hạnh, which means 'one action'.

> When we are determined to go just in one direction, we will meet the spring, and our march will be

[87] Nhat Hanh, 1975, p. 95
[88] Powers, 2000, p. 239
[89] King, 1996, p. 323
[90] Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. 6
[91] Chapman, 2007, p. 302
[92] Chan Khong, 2007, p. 77 - among the three women was Nhất Chi Mai, who immolated herself for peace a year later.
[93] Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. vii
[94] Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. 79
[95] Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. viii – even during the war, amidst helping war victims, running social projects, etc., the members renewed themselves with a 'day of mindfulness' each weekend.

> a heroic one. Our actions should be free from speculation or competition. If the lamp of our mind shines light on its own nature, then the wonderful transmission of the Dharma will be realized in both East and West[96].

Nhất Hạnh's dharma title is evocative of the monk Vạn Hạnh, of the Vinītarucci lineage, whose name means 'ten thousand actions'. Commenting on his transmission *gāthā* 'Nhất Hạnh declared that, unlike his eminent predecessor, he needed to concentrate only on one thing[97].

Only a few days after receiving the dharma transmission, Nhất Hạnh left for the United States where he began a speaking tour arranged by the pacifist group The Fellowship for Reconciliation. Eventually his peace tour grew to include nineteen countries. He was also invited by Cornell University Prof. Dr. G. Kahin, who was also a member of the Advisory Committee to the US Government, to participate in a forum on the policy of the US Government towards Vietnam. After the forum Nhất Hạnh presented his influential 'Five Point proposal to End the War' at a press conference[98]. Back in Vietnam the government viewed his press release dangerous and he was denounced as a traitor on radio Saigon and in newspapers[99]. Several SYSS workers were seriously wounded by grenades thrown at the campus temple as well as in Nhất Hạnh's room by a group of unknown people[100]. Given the circumstances, friends and colleagues feared for his life and safety, and strongly advised him not to return home, but rather to continue to serve the movement as an expat[101]. Thus began his life of exile[102].

He moved to Paris where he established an office for the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation, which he led. In 1969, in order to support the group financially, he briefly took a position at the Sorbonne where he taught Buddhist History [103].

After the signing of the Vietnam Peace Accord in 1973 the office was closed, and for several years Nhất Hạnh lived a life of relative retreat from the public eye, during which he continued to write and to focus primarily on the type of engaged social work which he pioneered. He also began to share his mindfulness practice with friends and small groups of people.

As the number of people wishing to learn the practice of mindfulness kept increasing, in 1982 he established Upper Hamlet on a wooded farmland near Bordeaux, France. The center continued to expand and by 1998 became a monastic training and lay practice center of five hamlets located in three different villages. The entire community was given the name Plum Village. By 1998 more than 5,000 lay people worldwide had received the five mindfulness trainings[104] in a formal ceremony, the Order of Interbeing had grown to some 500 monastic and lay members, approximately seventy-five monastic and lay teachers had been ordained by Nhất Hạnh, and about 300 local *sanghas* had developed worldwide[105].

In 1997 and 2000, two more monasteries were founded, in Vermont[106] and California[107]. By 2005 Thích Nhất Hạnh had ordained over 200 monks and nuns from different parts of the world and approximately one thousand Vietnamese youth expressed the intent to joined Bát Nhã, a monastery he co-founded in Vietnam

[96] Appendix F
[97] King, 1996, p. 322
[98] Chapman, 2007, p. 303
[99] Chan Kong, 2007, p. 85
[100] Chan Kong, 2007, p. 89
[101] King, 1996, p. 324
[102] Despite decades of repeated requests he was not allowed back in Vietnam until 2005, when the government invited Nhất Hạnh to return to the country for a three-month teaching tour. Some commentators have said that the likely reason for this invitation was the government's attempt to portray to the international community the existence of religious freedoms in Vietnam, hoping to straighten its legitimacy and to facilitate integration into the world economic system (see Chapman, 2007, p. 298).
[103] King, 1996, p. 322
[104] The five Buddhist precepts reformulated by Nhất Hạnh to emphasize an ethic based on the awareness of every thought and action.
[105] Chapman, 2007, p. 305
[106] Green Mountain Dharma Center, which had to be relocated, and it re-opened as Blue Cliff Monastery in upstate NY.
[107] Deer Park Monastery

after his first visit there, in 2005. In accordance with Liễu-Quán tradition, all the monastics and lay people ordained by Nhất Hạnh were given lineage names which include the 9th character from the name *gāthā* system (V. *tâm*), meaning 'of the heart'.

Summary of Biography

a) Nhất Hạnh, dharma heir to Zen master Thích Chân Thật, belongs to the 42nd generation of the Lâm-Tế school, and to the 8th generation of the Liễu-Quán school; b) his studies included a variety of texts and doctrines from several schools (including Yogācāra), a mix as varied as Vietnamese Buddhism itself; c) over the span of approximately a decade, up until the late sixties, Nhất Hạnh taught Buddhist history, comparative religion, and his particular interpretation of the Consciousness-Only doctrine at several reputed academic establishments both in Vietnam and abroad. However, outside the academic world, his teachings are centred around the experiential practice of mindfulness based on the simple *gāthās* he wrote - some of which reflect elements from his *Fifty Verses*; d) he pioneered the idea of engaged Buddhism, and founded the SYSS and the Tiếp-Hiện order, whose philosophy of action, based on the bodhisattva ideal and a deep understanding of non-duality and *interbeing* show early elements of his philosophy.

II. Key Teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh

A. General overview of teachings

The brief overview of Thích Nhất Hạnh's biography offered a few insights into his remarkable personality. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who first met Nhất Hạnh on his peace and reconciliation speaking tour during the Vietnam war, described him as 'a holy man,...humble and devout,...a scholar of immense intellectual capacity'[108]. Indeed, as we will recall, Nhất Hạnh taught the *vijñapti-mātra* doctrine at Vạn Hạnh University, and various courses on Buddhism at Princeton, Columbia and the Sorbonne. Remarkably, although he is an accomplished scholar, Nhất Hạnh's teachings are of striking simplicity. As Robert Thurman once said, he 'reaches from the heights of insight down to the deepest places of the absolute ordinary'[109]. Nhất Hạnh does not teach 'Buddhism' per se, something that has been known to occasionally raise a few eyebrows amongst purists; what he teaches instead is mindfulness and *interbeing*, a philosophical term which he coined.

In essence, for Nhất Hạnh, mindfulness in every action is the most important meditative practice and the key to awakening, to putting an end to suffering. 'There is no enlightenment outside of daily life', he says. 'Many Zen masters have come to enlightenment during their daily work. It is essential that a Zen practitioner be able to live mindfully in each moment of the day'[110]. The idea that meditation is the only path to awakening is, of course, very much in alignment with Ch'an doctrines, but Nhất Hạnh's emphasis on meditative mindfulness in every action clearly shows the strong influence of the methods he learned at his root temple, particularly the use of simple verses to mark his awareness of the present moment.

But what should one strive to become awakened to? The answer is: the true nature of reality, its suchness (*tathatā*), which the ordinary person's mind, trapped in the prison of its own conceptualizing and representations of reality, does not have access to. The belief that knowledge (e.g. intellectual study, conceptualizing, attachment to views, etc.) can be a great obstacle to awakening is also a staple of Ch'an doctrines. Here is how Nhất Hạnh expresses it:

> If we are trapped by our knowledge, we will not have the possibility of going beyond it and realizing awakening... Zen master Lin Chi once said: "If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha. If you meet the Patriarch, kill the Patriarch."...Truth is not a concept. If we cling to our concepts, we lose reality. This is why it is necessary to "kill" our concepts so that reality can reveal itself[111].

Perhaps in order to discourage searching for the true nature of reality by means of intellectual inquiry, or because *kōan* practice does not appear to have been a key part of his monastic training, Nhất Hạnh's teaching methods do not include the use of *kōans*. Interestingly, though, he sees *kōans* not as philosophical enigmas, but, quite the contrary, as invitations to return to the concrete, immediate reality of human experience and the ordinariness of the present moment, which is where enlightenment happens. Here is what he has to say on this, in a passage that gives us great insight into his teaching style:

> A Zen master who has attained awakening...is someone who, after being lost in the world of concepts, has returned home to see the cypress in the courtyard[112] of her own nature. Hence, she cannot allow her disciple to continue to wander in the world of concepts, and waste his life, his own awakening. This is why the master feels compassion every time her disciple asks a question about some Buddhist principles, such as *dharma-kāya, tathatā,* etc. "This young man", she thinks, "still wishes to engage in the search for reality through concepts." And she does her best to extricate the student from the world of ideas and put him in the world of living reality. Look at the

[108] Quote from Dr. King's letter in which he nominated Thích Nhất Hạnh for the Nobel Peace prize in 1967. On the back cover of *Peace is Every Breath – A Practice for Our Busy Lives*, 2011, Harper Collins, NY.
[109] Robert Thurman, Prof of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist studies, Columbia, on back cover of Nhat Hanh, 1998, b)
[110] Nhat Hanh, 1974, p. 148
[111] Nhat Hanh, 1974, p. 53-54
[112] 'The Cypress in the Garden' is the thirty-eighth of the forty-eight *kōans* in the *Gateless Gate* collection.

> cypress in the courtyard! *Look at the cypress in the courtyard!* One day a monk asked Chao-Chou to speak to him about Zen. Chao-Chou asked "Have you finished your breakfast?" "Yes, master, I have eaten my breakfast". "Then go and wash your bowl"...This is the same as saying, "Go and live a realized life". Instead of giving the student some explanation about Zen, the master opened the door and invited the young man to enter the world of reality...These words contain no secret meaning to explore or explain. They are a simple, direct, and clear declaration. There is no enigma here, nor is this a symbol. It refers to a very concrete fact[113].

But why can knowledge become an obstacle to awakening, why does the mind become entangled in its own mental constructs, and how can we overcome that state? All these questions are addressed in detail in the *Fifty Verses*. But before we proceed to analyze this text, we must stop and discuss briefly Nhất Hạnh's concept of *interbeing*, which is present throughout his works.

B. Interbeing

As discussed earlier, in 1966 Nhất Hạnh founded the Tiếp-Hiện order as a branch of the Lâm-Tế school. The order's name has been loosely translated as the Order of Interbeing because of similarities in meaning between the two expressions.

In fact, *tiếp* means 'being in touch with' and 'to continue', while *hiện* means 'realizing' and 'making it here and now'. Nhất Hạnh explains that to him, *tiếp* refers to being aware of our feelings, mental formations and how they might affect our false perceptions of reality. *Hiện*, 'realizing', means not to dwell in the world of doctrines, but to realize, to bring forth, to express in practice our insights. As he explains it, 'ideas about understanding and compassion are not understanding and compassion'[114]. What is to be 'realized' is that there is no inner world of the mind and a world outside; both are aspects of the same reality. Everything is interconnected; there is no making peace in the world without first making peace in ourselves, etc. The last expression, 'making it here, and now' relates to the importance Nhất Hạnh places on the practice of awareness of the present moment.

In the preface to the order's charter Nhất Hạnh comments that *interbeing* is a word he invented in order to 'translate' a Chinese term found in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*[115] - a vast Indian Mahāyāna text on which the Hua-yen school is based. But if we look at the way Nhất Hạnh has been using and explaining the term *interbeing* in other writings, we see that it is not simply an unusual translation of a Hua-yen term.

The *Avataṃsaka* is a complex weaving of visions and magic, of doctrine and fantasy. Its universe is called the *dharma-dhātu.* This is not the universe as seen by us, but as seen by the Buddhas, a universe of radiance and pure luminosity. At various places in this *sūtra* it is said or implied that the Buddha himself is this universe[116]. One particular feature of this universe, for which the *Avataṃsaka* is famous, is that all things in it infinitely interpenetrate. Inside everything is everything else: '...the fields full of assemblies, the beings and aeons,...are all present in every particle of dust...[and they]...are all reflected in each particle of dust'[117].

The main tenet of the Hua-yen school, inspired primarily by the *Avataṃsaka,* is the mutual identity and mutual interpenetration of all phenomena. This has been summarized in a rather obscure, and much commentated upon text, the *Treatise on the Golden Lion* written by Fa-tsang, one of the school's most important figures[118]. The Hua-yen doctrine is also expressed metaphorically in the image of Indra's net, in which each gem, situated at every interstice of the net, reflects all the others, while simultaneously being reflected in them[119]. This concept is similar to the T'ien-t'ai idea of 'all three thousand realms immanent in an instant of thought', and often the teachings of the two schools are indistinguishable[120].

[113] Nhat Hanh, 1974, p. 54-55
[114] Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. 4
[115] Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. 6
[116] Williams, 2009, p. 135
[117] Williams, 2009, p. 136
[118] Harvey, 2009, Session 25 and Williams, 2009, p. 140-141
[119] Harvey, 1990, p. 119
[120] de Bary, 1969, p. 167

Nhất Hạnh's rendering of the Hua-yen doctrine of interdependence loses the metaphorical and the imaginary and instead draws heavily on interpretations of *pratītya-samutpāda* (a term which he translates as 'Interdependent Co-arising') that are present in the traditional Theravāda Abhidharma, and on the notions of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and nonself (*anātman*). In fact, Nhất Hạnh sees the principle of *pratītya-samutpāda* as being the base of all Buddhist teachings and goes as far as to say that any teaching that is not in accord with it is not an authentic teaching of the Buddha[121].

As some authors point out, *pratītya-samutpāda* is not to be understood simply as a linear chain of causation. Buddhaghosa, the Theravādin commentator and scholar, analyses in quite some detail the ways in which a phenomenon can be a condition for another phenomenon, by applying a scheme of twenty-four possible types of conditional relations (*paccaya*) to each of the twelve links (*nidānas*) of the conditioned arising chain[122]. A single cause may be a significant, but not a sufficient condition for the arising of each further link. The fundamental axiom is that 'a single cause does not give rise to either a single result or several results...; but rather several causes give rise to several results'[123]. But for Buddhaghosa this web of conditions, however complex is not infinite, as in Hua-yen. He only discusses how specific *dharmas* condition specific *dharmas*, rather than saying that everything conditions everything else[124].

The interpretation of conditioned arising as an interdependent web of causes and conditions is evident in Nhất Hạnh's teachings. Additionally, he quotes a verse from Nāgārjuna that links the principle with the concept of emptiness: 'All phenomena that arise interdependently, I say that they are empty'[125]. He also interprets the concept of nonself as an interdependence of conditions:

> When we look deeply into nonself, we see that every single thing is possible because of the existence of everything else. We see that everything else is the cause and condition for its existence. We see that everything else is in it. From the point of view of time, we say "impermanence", and from the point of view of space we say "nonself"'[126].

As in the case of other Buddhist terms, Nhất Hạnh points out that this view about nonself is not a doctrine or philosophy, but rather an insight[127].

In closing this doctrinal circle, Nhất Hạnh affirms that 'Emptiness does not mean nonexistence. It means Interdependent Co-arising, impermanence and nonself'[128]. He also affirms that 'in early Buddhism we speak of Interdependent Co-arising. In later Buddhism, we use the words interbeing and interpenetration. The terminology is different, but the meaning is the same'[129]. Furthermore, in a lesser known practice poem, titled *Fourteen Verses on Meditation*, he writes:

> Impermanence is nonself.
> Nonself is interdependence,
> Is emptiness, is conventional designation,
> Is the Middle Way, is interbeing.[130]

Once defined as being practically synonymous with conditioned arising, emptiness, impermanence, nonself, and the Indra's net, *interbeing* becomes the lens through which Nhất Hạnh re-examines all Buddhist doctrines. The five aggregates, the Four Noble Truths, the twelve links, the five precepts, cause and effect, subject and object, perceiver and perceived, they all inter-are. His *interbeing* is not the metaphor of Indra's net, but rather a description of reality; that is, if we look deeply we see that things are empty, impermanent and without a separate self, and instead are what they are because of a web of

[121] Nhat Hanh, 1998, a), p. 226
[122] Gethin, 1998, p. 153, - referring to *Visuddhimagga* xvii. 66-100.
[123] Gethin, 1998, p. 153, - referring to *Visuddhimagga* xvii. 105-7 and *Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā* 147-8.
[124] Harvey, 2011, F)
[125] Nhat Hanh, 1998, a), p. 226, quoting from *Mahaprajñaparamitra-śāstra.*
[126] Nhat Hanh, 1998, a), p. 132
[127] Nhat Hanh, 1998, a), p. 135
[128] Nhat Hanh, 1998, a), p. 146
[129] Nhat Hanh, 1998, a), p. 225
[130] Nhat Hanh & al, 2007, p. 43

interdependent relationships with other things. As Nhất Hạnh often says, 'to be is to *inter-be*'[131]. All things *inter-are*, we are not separate from anything in the entire universe. We are the universe. Even the title of his book '*The Sun, my heart'* is not intended as poetic imagery, but as an expression of this insight. So is, for example, the following excerpt from his poem '*Interbeing*':

> The sun has entered me together with the cloud and the river
> And I have entered the sun
> With the cloud and the river...
> But before the sun entered me,
> The sun was in me –
> There has not been a moment
> When we have not *inter-been*[132].

To sum up, it can be said that *interbeing,* a term in which the teachings of conditioned arising, nonself, emptiness and Hua-yen coalesce, is an attempt to describe a complex theory of the nature of reality in one single word.

[131] e.g. see also the calligraphy by Nhất Hạnh on the title page of this paper.
[132] Nhat Hanh, 1999, p. 150

III. TEACHINGS ON MIND AND THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Overview of *Transformation at the Base*

The *Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness* can be considered to be Nhất Hạnh's main philosophical work. As mentioned in the introduction, he wrote them in 1990, with the intention to continue Vasubandhu's and Hsüan-tsang's treatises on consciousness, while adding a new, 'purely Mahāyāna perspective'. It is interesting to point out that Nhất Hạnh sees them as a work of Buddhist psychology, which he hopes will lead to an understanding of how our mind works, rather than a philosophical text. While the verses are not a summary of a much larger body of work (as is, for example Hsüan-tsang's *Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses* a summary of his monumental CWSL[133]), they do represent a summary of Nhất Hạnh's philosophical thought.

The verses have been first published in 2001 under the title *Transformation at the Base.* The book consists of a brief introduction written by Nhất Hạnh, a chapter containing the *Fifty Verses*, followed by a series of chapters which are a verse by verse commentary of the former, and a Vietnamese translation of them in an Appendix. It is implied in the introduction that the verses were written originally in English, with the intent to make accessible to westerners important elements of Buddhist psychology.

The verses are simple, in typical Nhất Hạnh style, but their meaning is not easily understood without extensive doctrinal knowledge. The commentaries often offer useful keys for deciphering their meaning and cover great philosophical ground, however it must be noted that these were not written as a unified body of work as such, but are rather a compilation of talks given by Nhất Hạnh between 1989 and 1998 – selected by the book's editor, Arnold Kotler[134].

The *Fifty Verses* themselves are grouped in six sections: i) Store Consciousness, ii) *Manas*, iii) Mind Consciousness, iv) Sense Consciousnesses, v) The Nature of Reality, and vi) The Path of Practice. A full transcript of the text can be read in Appendix A.

In the following pages I will proceed to: a) present a brief overview of Nhất Hạnh's main sources; b) summarize the doctrine of the *Fifty Verses*; c) analyze Nhất Hạnh's text while highlighting commonalities with his main sources and points of departure; and d) draw some conclusions about Nhất Hạnh's interpretation of the *vijñapti-mātra* doctrine.

A. Review of key sources that inspired the Fifty Verses

In his commentaries on the *Fifty Verses* Nhất Hạnh makes frequent references to the teachings of the Yogācāra (Yogic Practice) School which, along with the Mādhyamika, is one of the two main braches of Indian Mahāyāna philosophy. Because of its emphasis on consciousness, an alternative later name for the school was *Vijñāna-vāda* or 'Consciousness Teaching'[135]. The school was founded on several treatises written by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. It specialized in the theory of how the human perception of phenomena becomes distorted by conceptualization, false imagination, and discriminative thinking. Its central doctrine is that of 'representation-only' (*vijñapti-mātra*), or 'thought- only' (*citta-mātra*). As a very broad statement, the school's main tenet is that all of the phenomena of experience are merely products of mind[136].

Ever since the school was initially founded, there have been numerous commentaries on its main texts, which present different and even opposing interpretations as to what *vijñapti-mātra* really means. Modern scholars are still divided over whether it is a statement of idealism, (i.e. that perceptions of the mind have no basis in external reality), or a phenomenological doctrine of how knowledge operates, how experience

[133] Epstein, web, 1)
[134] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), note on the inside front cover: six talks were in English, one translated from Vietnamese.
[135] Harvey, 1990, p. 106
[136] Harvey, 1990, p. 106

is interpreted by the mind[137].

Throughout his commentaries Nhất Hạnh prefers to refer to the school not by its name, but rather by its doctrine (*vijñapti-mātra*), which he translates as 'Manifestation-Only'. This appears to be an attempt to distance himself clearly from those interpretations that consider the school's doctrine as a statement of universal idealism. As discussed earlier, Nhất Hạnh is well versed in the school's teachings, having extensively studied the texts and later taught the doctrine at Vạn Hạnh University.

1. *Triṃśikā* (TK)

Vijñaptimātrāta-triṃśikā-kārikā (TK) – *Thirty Verses on Representation Only*, is an important work by Vasubandhu. The text is an analysis of how the mind works, a treatise on Buddhist psychology written in verse form. There have been several translations of the text in English. Of these, translations by Anacker, Cook and Kochumuttom can be consulted in Appendix B. Cook's translation is from Hsüan-tsang's Chinese rendering of the TK, the others are translations of the original Sanskrit text[138].

In this text, Vasubandhu systematically discusses an eightfold schema of consciousness. Traditional Abhidharma already included six consciousnesses, plus *mano* (S. *manas*) [139]. The eighth consciousness is described as a base, or root, consciousness (*āśraya-vijñāna*). He also presents the theory of 'seeds' (S. *bījas* - a Sautrāntika influence)[140] stored in the base consciousness, and discusses the nature of delusion and enlightenment, the process of eliminating false imagination and discrimination, and other aspects of Yogācāra thought. The main point of the *Thirty Verses* is that the object of perception believed to be a real thing outside of the perceiving consciousness 'is nothing but a mental construct (*vijñapti*) projected by consciousness itself...' [141].

Of course, interpreted in a radical manner, this can be considered idealism, and indeed this has been the traditional interpretation of this work. However, Cook is of the opinion that what Vasubandhu is proposing is not that nothing exists in a world external to the mind, but rather that any cognitive experience is distorted even while it occurs, through the superimposition of mentally constructed labels. This process of interpretation of reality reinforces a subsequent tendency to interpret similar cognitive experiences in the same manner, which results in the mind mistaking its habitual interpretations of the events for the actual events. Therefore, the world as experienced by the unenlightened individual is an exclusively mental world, filled with stereotypes and conceptual discriminations[142]. Kochumuttom proposes a similar interpretation.

2. *Viṃśatikā* (VK)

Vijñaptimātrāta-viṃśatikā-kārikā (VK) – *Twenty Verses on Representation Only*, along with an explanatory work on it called *Vṛtti*, is, for the most part, a '...presentation of Vasubandhu's theory of knowledge'[143]. The treatise is written as a dialogue in which the author defends the 'mind-only' ideas presented in his TK against possible counterarguments by his opponents. As with TK, three different translations of this text can be consulted in Appendix C.

The questions and critical arguments VK addresses are: a) should we still be held karmically responsible for our deeds if perceived events don't exist apart from our own consciousness?; b) if external events are only mental fabrications – and therefore likely to be shaped by our diverse karmic histories, why do we all see the same things at the same time?; and c) if other beings are only mental constructs, how could we speak of

[137] Young, 2007
[138] The version referenced by Nhất Hạnh is Anacker's.
[139] Harvey, 2009, Session 23 and Harvey, 2011, F) - e.g. in the Theravādin Abhidhamma, the seven forms of *citta* are the six forms of *viññāna,* related to the six senses, including the mental sense (P. *mano*, S. *manas*), and the mental sense itself.
[140] Harvey, 2011, F)
[141] Cook, 1999, p. 374
[142] Cook, 1999, p. 374
[143] Kochumuttom, 1982, p. xx

knowing another's mind?[144]

3. *Ch'eng wei-shih lun* (CWSL)

CWSL is presented by Hsüan-tsang simply as a translation of Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* and the prose commentaries on this text by ten Indian masters. It seems however that Hsüan-tsang favoured only Dharmapāla's interpretation; consequently the others' have been significantly edited out, such that CWSL consists in fact of Hsüan-tsang's translation of the TK, the interpretation by Dharmapāla, seen as the correct view, and two or three divergent interpretations interspersed occasionally in the text[145].

CWSL has been translated in English by S. Cook, who also translated Vasubandhu's TK from the Chinese. In his opinion, Hsüan-tsang's translation from Sanskrit of the TK and its commentaries effectively 'manipulates' the treatise in ways that 'evoke a very radical interpretation not found in the original text'[146].

Similar to the TK, Hsüan-tsang's text is an attempt to demonstrate that seemingly real external objects of perception (*dharmas*) and the also seemingly real self (*ātman*) who perceives them are nothing but mental fabrications. His theory is that basic consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*) appears spontaneously in the form of a seeing part (*darśana-bhāga*) and a seen part (*nimitta-bhāga*). A third part of consciousness, *manas*, interprets the two parts as a self and an external world, when in fact, both the grasper, or knowing self (*grāhaka*) and the grasped (*grāhya*), are nothing but internal images, mere mental constructs.

The source of these images is explained by the metaphor of seeds. These are potentialities that can become, under certain circumstances, the images of consciousness. All seeds are stored in the root consciousness which comes to be referred to as 'store consciousness' (*ālaya-vijñāna*). Enlightenment is portrayed as a purification process in which a drastic change takes place in the root consciousness, whereby the seeds of impurity and unwholesomeness are destroyed and the seeds of purity and wholesomeness are increased. This process is referred to as the 'transmutation of support' (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*)[147].

In the course of describing this 'transmutation of support', Hsüan-tsang analyzes in detail the nature and functions of the eight kinds of consciousness, with a particular emphasis on the *ālaya-vijñāna*, and the nature and functions of mental activities (*caitta*), which he meticulously classifies in categories such as good, bad, and so on.

CWSL also contains a presentation of the 'three natures' (*tri-svabhāva*), important for its threefold clarification of the nature of enlightenment as: a) the revelation of the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*), b) true suchness (*tathatā*), and c) the perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*).

Final sections of the text are a detailed description of the bodhisattva's traversing of all the stages (*bhūmis*), from taking the vows, through the ten obstacles, and all the way to the state of Buddhahood, which makes the text 'a rich source of knowledge of Mahāyāna doctrine and practice'[148].

B. Summary of the doctrine of the *Fifty Verses*

The doctrine expounded in the *Fifty Verses* draws on ideas from the above three works, while adding a completely new perspective, primarily influenced by Nhất Hạnh's concept of *interbeing*.

Similarly to TK and CWSL, the basic doctrine is that all phenomena are in reality mere manifestations of consciousness (*vijñapti-mātra*). Nhất Hạnh does not use the terms 'consciousness-only' (*vijñāna-mātra*) or 'mind-only' (*citta-mātra*) because he does not want to lead the reader to think that this is a teaching on idealism. He does not deny the existence of 'real' objects of perception outside the mind; he just proposes that the unenlightened mind does not perceive things as they truly are, but only as distorted images. In his own words:

> *Vijñapti-mātra* means that there is only the manifestation of perception and cognition in which the

[144] Cook, 1999, p. 388
[145] Cook, 1999, p. 2
[146] Cook, 1999, p. 374
[147] Cook, 1999, p. 4
[148] Cook, 1999, p. 4

> subject and object of perception mutually support each other in order to make subject, object, and the manifestation of consciousness itself possible – just as three reeds lean on and support each other[149].

The theory that 'all the seeds' are stored in the store (*ālaya*) consciousness, the characteristics of the eight consciousnesses, and the theory of the three self-natures (*tri-svabhāva*) are used to explain how cognition of 'the true nature of reality' becomes distorted. But because *ālaya* contains the seed of enlightenment, the tendencies to conceptualize, imagine and discriminate can be transformed; the mind can be restored to its innate clarity, capable of seeing the true reality, or the suchness of things. Like in CWSL, this process is described as a profound transformation (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) which must occur at the level of the base consciousness. The key to this transformation, says Nhất Hạnh, is the practice of mindfulness.

C. Analysis of Nhất Hạnh's schema of the eight consciousnesses

1. Store Consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*)

Like Hsüan-tsang, Nhất Hạnh engages in a lengthy presentation of the base or root consciousness and the theory of seeds. Fifteen verses are dedicated to defining it and analysing its characteristics. By comparison, Vasubandhu covers it in three verses.

The primary function of root consciousness is to store 'all the seeds', which is why it is called 'store' (*ālaya*). The seeds metaphor describes an infinite number of potentialities which, depending on conditions, can manifest as one of the images of consciousness, or remain dormant. *Ālaya* contains seeds of delusion, but also seeds of enlightenment, or Buddha-nature[150], an inherent quality which, according to *Tathāgata-garbha* schools, all beings possess.

The sources of many of the seeds are all the experiences and perceptions that come to us through our senses. This is called 'impregnation' (*vāsanā*)[151] of store consciousness. Seeds are either innate, (e.g. transmitted by parents and ancestors), or received from friends, society and education. They are said to be 'by nature, both individual and collective'[152]. These are original ideas, not found in either TK or CWSL[153]. The implication is not that *ālaya-vijñāna* is some universal entity, an all-encompassing reality (as in the idealist interpretation of Chinese Mind-Only doctrine); rather, Nhất Hạnh introduces elements of genetics and sociology as seen through the prism of emptiness and *interbeing*. We have received a 'transmission' of seeds from our parents, he comments, a genetic blueprint for physical and psychological characteristics. But this transmission is 'empty', as the object transmitted and the transmitter are not separate entities; our parents have transmitted themselves in us; they are in us, as we are in them. He also discusses the mutual influence and interdependence of the collective consciousness of a society and an individual, and how some ideas may start as creations of individual consciousness, but then become part of the collective consciousness (e.g. fashion, democracy and other political structures). This, he points out, is not philosophy or metaphysics, but simply the insight of interbeing[154].

Another source of the seeds is our *karma*, which, in turn, is influenced by our seeds. Commenting on this idea, Nhất Hạnh references traditional Buddhist teachings, but also quotes from the French philosopher J.P. Sartre, who said: 'Man is the sum of his acts'[155]. In Buddhist terms, each of us is a collection of our actions, and our actions are both the cause (*karma-hetu*) and the result (*karma-phala*) of the seeds in our store consciousness.

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[149] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 170
[150] Appendix A, V1-3
[151] Also translated as to permeate, to impregnate, to perfume, habit energy, etc. – it is a technical term extensively used in the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna,* a text which ponders the question of original purity or taint of the *ālaya.*
[152] Appendix A, V5
[153] Though one translation of the VK, V18 reads 'the representations of consciousness are determined by mutual influence of one [individual] on another' – see Appendix C.
[154] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 31-40
[155] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 42

Nhất Hạnh does not mention past rebirths as a source for the seeds in store consciousness (in fact he rarely discusses rebirth in his talks or writings - other than to refer metaphorically to the transformation of a phenomenon from one moment, or form, to another); however in his comments on his sixth verse on *ālaya-vijñāna* he says:

> When we die and transform from one form of being to another...only the seeds of our actions will go with us. Consciousness does not hold on only to mind actions. The seeds of our speech and bodily actions also travel with our store consciousness from this world to another[156].

This idea is reminiscent of the TK in which Vasubandhu describes how *ālaya-vijñāna* continues from birth to birth[157].

Each seed carries within it habit energies (*vāsanā*), which affect our patterns of seeing, feeling, and behaving and hinder our ability to perceive the undistorted reality. All the seeds contained in the *ālaya* are un-matured and un-manifested. Only when the seeds mature /ripen (*vipāka*) and manifest do we become aware of them[158].

Vijñapti is an important term, used frequently in this section. While it is generally translated as 'representation', Nhất Hạnh translates it as manifestation, and uses it to describe a potentiality that has developed (i.e. matured) and expressed itself. What is manifested is a function of consciousness and is also perceived by consciousness[159]. Manifestations from *ālaya* can be perceived directly (*pratyakṣa pramāṇa*) or indirectly, by inference (*anumāna pramāṇa*)[160]; in this we see some elements from TK (e.g. verses 9, 16, and 17). The first mode of perceiving is perception of the thing-in-itself (*yathā-bhūta*)[161]. This way of perceiving is in the realm of noumena, or suchness (*tathatā*). Suchness, says Nhất Hạnh, 'is the ground of being, just as water is the ground of being a wave'[162]. While we are capable of perceiving reality-in-itself, we usually perceive things indirectly, as representations or mere images. All representations and mere images are false (*abhāva pramāṇa*). The mode of perception in *ālaya* is always direct, meaning that store consciousness does not engage in thinking, comparing, or imagining. This suggests an unconscious awareness. *Ālaya-vijñāna*, as described in TK, has been in fact called by Kochumuttom 'the individual unconscious'[163]. Hsüan-tsang referred to it as 'the natural state'[164]. Nhất Hạnh sees it as 'in some way' corresponding to Freud's idea of the unconscious, but comments that this aspect is just a small part of the store consciousness[165].

An important part of this section describes characteristics of *ālaya-vijñāna* that differentiate it from the other seven consciousnesses. Store consciousness is said to be unobstructed (i.e. having the capacity of attaining absolute clarity); indeterminate (i.e. store consciousness itself is neither wholesome nor unwholesome, though it contains both wholesome and unwholesome seeds); it manifests the five universal (*sarvatraga*) mental formations (*citta-saṃskāra*): contact (*sparśa*), attention, (*manaskāra*) feeling (*vedanā*), perception or conceptualization (*saṃjñā*), and volition (*cetanā*); it is continuously flowing (e.g. changing, etc.) and never ceases to operate[166]. All these characteristics are enumerated briefly in TK verses 3 and 4. The five universals (and all the other mental formations), comments Nhất Hạnh, take on the characteristics

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[156] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 42
[157] Kochumuttom, 1982, p. 149 – commenting on TK V19
[158] Appendix A, V7
[159] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 54
[160] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 49
[161] Web resource 3) referencing *Dictionary of Buddhism* – 2004, Damien Keown (Oxford University Press)
yathā-bhūta (Skt.) = the way things are in actuality; a term used to designate the true nature of phenomena or direct experience unmediated by the superimposition of false concepts such as the idea of an inherent and permanent identity or self (*ātman*). As such, the term is used in Mahāyāna synonymously with emptiness (*śūnyatā*), actuality (*tattva*), suchness (*tathatā*), etc.
[162] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 49
[163] Kochumuttom, 1982, p. 135, 149
[164] Hsüan-tsang is referring to the direct mode of perception, undistorted by any attachments and unconditioned by mental causation – see Epstein, web, 2), p. 6.
[165] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 39
[166] Appendix A, V10

of the consciousness with which they function. Because the mode of perception in *ālaya* is always direct, the mode of the *sarvatragas* as they function with the *ālaya* is also always direct. This however changes in the other seven consciousnesses[167].

Other characteristics of the seeds and of *ālaya* which are discussed in this section are not found either in Vasubandhu's or Hsüan-tsang's texts. The heavy influence of Hua-yen and the concept of *interbeing* is noticeable throughout many of these new ideas[168]: 'Store consciousness contains all phenomena in the cosmos'[169]; 'Seeds and formations both have the nature of interbeing and interpenetration[170]'; or 'Same and different inter-are, Collective and individual give rise to each other[171]'. Although any of these verses read alone may be interpreted in metaphysical terms, Nhất Hạnh's comments on these tell a different story. What the verses are intended to convey is that the cosmos (*dharma-dhātu*), the realm where all *dharmas* manifest, literally includes everything. A flower, which is a conditioned phenomenon, contains sunshine, clouds, space, and even our consciousness, therefore the whole cosmos. In Nhất Hạnh's speech, flower and cosmos inter-are. The same is true of our consciousness. Our individual store consciousness is influenced by others', the one contains the all and the all contains the one[172].

I have tried to present in **Figure 3** below a summary of key characteristics of *ālaya* and the other seven consciousnesses in a table format. The table is a compilation of attributes extracted from both Nhất Hạnh's *Fifty Verses* and his commentaries on them.

Figure 3. Summary Characteristics of the Eight Consciousnesses

	The Three Realms of Perception			The Three Modes of Perception			The fifty-one Mental Formations that operate in each consciousness					Other characteristics of functioning of the eight consciousnesses						
	Things-in-Themselves	Representations	Mere Images	Direct	By Inference	False	Five Universals	Five Particulars	Eleven Wholesome	Twenty-Six Unwholesome	Four Indeterminate	Wholesome	Unwholesome	Indeterminate	Obstructed	Unobstructed	Continuos	Not-continuous
Store Consciousness	√			√			√							√		√	√	
Manas		√				√	√	√		√				√	√		√	
Mind Consciousness	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√
Eye Consciousness	√			√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√
Ear Consciousness	√			√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√
Nose Consciousness	√			√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√
Tongue Consciousness	√			√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√
Body Consciousness	√			√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√

The Three Realms of Perception are: i) the realm of things-in-themselves – this is reality undistorted, before ideation, before the mind begins to construct; ii) the realm of representation - a mental construct built by our patterns of thinking; and iii) the realm of mere images – e.g. dreams, visualizations, etc.[173].

[167] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 65
[168] In addition to the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Nhất Hạnh also traces his inspiration for these ideas to the teachings of the *Three Śāstras* (San-lun) School.
[169] Appendix A, V11
[170] Appendix A, V13
[171] Appendix A, V14
[172] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 69-71
[173] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 126

The Three Modes of Perception in Figure 3 are: i) direct perception (*pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*), ii) inference (*anumāna- pramāṇa*), and wrong direct perception or inference resulting in iii) wrong or false perception (*abhāva- pramāṇa*)[174].

The qualities of the store consciousness that make it unique are the same qualities that allow for its transformation. When afflictions (*kleśas*) are overcome, 'transformation at the base' occurs and *ālaya* becomes a purified consciousness (*vimala-vijñāna*), also known as the 'Great Mirror Wisdom'[175].

2. *Manas*

Some ideas in the verses that discuss *Manas* can be traced to *Triṃśikā* (e.g. TK V5, 6, 7) as well as Hsüan-tsang's CWSL.

Manas is called an evolving consciousness (*parāvṛtti-vijñāna*) because it is based on root consciousness[176]. At the same time, it, in turn, is a base for mind consciousness. Its activity is reasoning, grasping, and clinging. Nhất Hạnh describes *Manas* as a sense base for mind consciousness in the same way the eyes are a sense base for eye consciousness, etc. He comments however, that unlike objects of form, sound, taste, and tactile sensations, which arise from the external world, the objects of mind (e.g. thoughts, cognition) arise from within our consciousness[177]. This comment is another strong indicator that, despite some verses that seem to have metaphysical tones, Nhất Hạnh does not deny the existence of objects of perception external to the mind.

Manas is said to be obstructed, because it is associated with many afflictions (*kleśas*). Of these, a strongly held false perception, *mati*, and the four major *kleśas* of attachment to self are its most defining characteristics[178]. *Manas* interprets the seeing aspect of root consciousness, (*darśana-bhāga*) and the seen part (*nimitta-bhāga*), as a self and an external world[179]. In clinging to this idea, it continuously discriminates between self and other (root consciousness is also known as the 'store for the attachment to self'[180]).

Like *ālaya*, *manas* is also indeterminate (neither wholesome nor unwholesome) and continuously functioning. It operates with some, but not all of the fifty-one mental formations: the five universals, *mati* of the five particulars, and with twelve of the twenty six unwholesome[181]. As mental formations take on the characteristics of the consciousness with which they are associated (e.g. the *sarvatragas* function with the *ālaya* in terms of receiving, accepting, holding, maintaining and storing the seeds, and with *manas,* in terms of always being in contact, thinking, perceiving, intending, etc.), in operating with *manas*, they are also indeterminate.

And because they are indeterminate, they can be transformed[182]. When *manas* has been transformed, it is called the 'Wisdom of Equality'[183], which according to Nhất Hạnh means 'the ability to see the one in the all and the all in the one'[184].

But before *manas* can become the Wisdom of Equality, the obstacles of knowledge (*jñeya-āvaraṇa*) and of afflictions (*kleśa- āvaraṇa)* must be transformed[185]. This process is said to begin at the first stage (*bhūmi*) of the bodhisattva path; at the eighth *bhūmi* the belief in a separate self is completely transformed. This stage

[174] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 123
[175] Appendix A, V15
[176] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 94, also see Appendix B, TK V5, Cook's translation ('*manas*...evolves supported by that [store consciousness]...').
[177] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 94
[178] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 110. These are: self-ignorance (*ātma-moha*) – a wrong idea about the self; self-view (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*) – a false view that the self is an independent and eternal entity; self-pride (*ātma-māna*); and self-love (*ātma-sneha*).
[179] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 91
[180] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 91
[181] Appendix A, V20
[182] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 110-11
[183] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 117
[184] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 112
[185] Appendix A, V22

is called the Realm of the Immovable (*acala-bhūmi*). It is when store consciousness, released from the grip of *manas* becomes the Great Mirror Wisdom[186]. Before this, even though we may have been able to obtain some intellectual knowledge of nonself, our belief in a self was still deeply rooted in *manas*. But at this stage, says Nhất Hạnh, there is no longer discrimination between self and nonself and 'we realize our nature of interbeing and the nature of interbeing of all phenomena'[187].

Ideas in this verse are traceable to Hsüan-tsang, as Vasubandhu describes *manas* as ceasing to manifest at the stage of arhatship[188]. Nhất Hạnh also comments that the knowledge-obstacles occur more in the realm of intellect, while the affliction-obstacles occur in the realm of emotions, and that the former are easier to overcome than the latter. Our ignorance, or inability to see the truth, belongs to the knowledge-obstacle. The way we see things is not the way things are. Just like the *mati* of *manas*, our understanding or convictions may be false. The practice that leads to overcoming the knowledge-obstacles is the Zen technique of releasing, of letting go of what we have just learned. 'Never believe that what you know is absolute truth'[189], he says. This idea is also reflected in the First Mindfulness Training of the Order of Interbeing.

3. Mind Consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*)

The next consciousness discussed by Nhất Hạnh is *mano-vijñāna*. This is a departure from TK, which, after *manas,* discusses the sense consciousnesses. However, as far as characteristics of mind consciousness, the ideas are very similar:

> Nhất Hạnh:
> Mind consciousness is always functioning
> Except in states of non-perception,
> The two attainments,
> Deep sleep, and fainting or coma[190].
>
> Vasubandhu:
> The co-arising of a mental consciousness takes place always
> Except in a non-cognitional state,
> Or in the two attainments,
> or in torpor, or fainting, or in a state without *citta*[191].

Even though mind consciousness is said to have *manas* as its base, its cause-as-condition (*hetu-pratyaya*) for manifesting any phenomena is a seed in store consciousness. *Manas* is likened to a conduit that distorts the signal carrying information from store to mind consciousness[192].

Mind consciousness has the widest range of contact with objects of perception. It can manifest all mental formations; it has the capacity to perceive in all three modes of perception, and has access to all three realms of perception (see Fig. 3 and the explanatory notes on these). When the mind is able to touch the seeds in store consciousness directly, without the distortion of *manas*, it is capable of touching the realm of suchness[193].

Mind consciousness is described as the root of all actions, including body and speech. As these lead to the maturation of seeds in *ālaya*, it becomes important to be mindful of every action, such that only the wholesome seeds in the root consciousness will grow to manifest[194]. This is why Nhất Hạnh places so much

[186] There is an apparent discrepancy between V22, which speaks about the tenth *bhūmi*, and Nhất Hạnh's commentary on V22, where the eighth *bhūmi* is described.
[187] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 117
[188] Only a Buddha has overcome the *jñeya-āvaraṇa*, an Arhat has overcome the *kleśa-āvaraṇa* (per Harvey, 2001, F)).
[189] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 114-115
[190] Appendix A, V26
[191] Appendix B, V16
[192] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 121
[193] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 122
[194] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 133

emphasis on the practice of mindfulness in every act.

Mind consciousness can operate in cooperation with the five sense consciousnesses or independent of them (e.g. looking at a flower and being aware of this perception, versus 'seeing' a flower in a dream, when sense consciousness is not directly involved). It can be dispersed, concentrated or unstable[195].

4. Sense Consciousness

Similarly to verse twenty-six on mind consciousness, Nhất Hạnh's verse twenty-eight, which describes sense consciousness, looks almost like a translation from *Triṃśikā* verse fifteen. But while TK sees the *ālaya* as the base for the manifestation of the five sense consciousnesses, in the *Fifty Verses* this role is played by *mano-vijñāna*.

> Nhất Hạnh:
> Based on mind consciousness,
> The five sense consciousnesses,
> Separately or together with mind consciousness,
> Manifest like waves on water[196].
>
> Vasubandhu:
> Depending on the conditions available
> The five sense-consciousness,
> Together or separately,
> Originate on the root-consciousness,
> Just as waves originate on water[197].

When the five sense consciousnesses first make contact with objects of perception, without the intervention of the mind consciousness, the world of suchness can reveal itself. The kind of object presented in this case is called *sva-lakṣaṇa*, the self-mark of the thing-in-itself. However, when mind consciousness intervenes, it generalizes everything and the self-mark of an object is transformed into a universal mark or sign (*saṃjña-lakṣaṇa*)[198]. All the objects of sensations we perceive are transformed into representations, conditioned by the seeds in our store consciousness.

The last two verses in this section discuss characteristics of the sense consciousnesses, which I have summarized in **Figure 3.** They also introduce the idea that the sense consciousnesses operate 'on the sense organs and the sensation center inside the brain'[199] – a reference which, as Prof. Harvey pointed out, is uncommon in Buddhist texts.

5. The Nature of Reality

This section introduces the teaching of the three self-natures (*tri-svabhāva*), the way in which our consciousness apprehends reality, and discusses the concepts that we use to understand and describe the world we see and experience: self and other, birth and death, etc. Some of these ideas are traceable to Vasubandhu (e.g. TK verses 20 and 21), and the presentation on *tri-svabhāva* is inspired mainly from CWSL, but Nhất Hạnh's commentaries reveal a number of other influences as well. There are direct or implied references to *pratītya-samutpāda* and the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* again, but also to the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the *Three Śāstras*, and the *Diamond Sūtra*, key texts that examine the concepts of self, human being, lifespan, coming and going, inside and outside, etc.[200].

The three self-natures are: the nature of imaginary construction and discrimination (*parikalpita-svabhāva*); the nature of interdependence (*paratantra-svabhāva*); and the fulfilled nature, or nature of ultimate reality

[195] Appendix A, V27
[196] Appendix A, V28
[197] Appendix B, V15
[198] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 147 - literal translation of this term is 'perception-mark' (per Harvey, 2011, F))
[199] Nhất Hạnh expanded on this idea at a special seven day retreat he gave in 2006 for 'scientists in the field of consciousness' but, to my knowledge, transcripts from those talks have not been published.
[200] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p.161

(*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*). Most of the time we are operating within the realm of imaginary construction, where reality is cut up in separate parts. We discriminate between self and other, inside and out, birth and death. Reality takes the shape it does because of our lack of understanding. But the true nature of reality is free of these notions[201]. All phenomena – physical, physiological and psychological - are evolving and changing in each moment. When causes and conditions are sufficient, they manifest for an instant. This is not an occult process. Nhất Hạnh does not infer that phenomena 'materialize'; rather what he describes by the term 'manifest' is the point at which all the necessary causes and conditions, including our consciousness, have come together in such a way that a phenomenon takes a perceptible expression. The continuity of causes and conditions gives the illusion of permanence of the 'resultant' phenomena. Birth and death are just two aspects of a flow of manifestations based on conditions. Nothing is ending (i.e. disappearing, ceasing to exist) and nothing is beginning (i.e. spontaneously materializing); these are just conventional designations.

> There is only manifestation and non-manifestation. The notions of being and nonbeing cannot be applied to you or any other reality. To be or not to be, that is *not* the question. The moment of dying is not really a moment of cessation but a moment of continuation[202].

Before a phenomenon manifests, it is already there (i.e. as a potentiality), in the conditions. If only one cause or condition is lacking, that which is to manifest will remain latent. This is true of everyone and everything, says Nhất Hạnh: e.g. the potentiality of a flower is already in its seed, the compost, the sun, etc.; in the same way mental formations and consciousness manifest based on conditions. When a sense base and a sense object come together, consciousness comes to be. This is only a momentary manifestation, but the continuity of (similar) causes and conditions from one instant to another would result in continuity of consciousness[203].

To truly understand this and other manifestations of phenomena, such as space, time, or the 'four great elements', we have to look at things in a new way, in which our notions are not based on ideas of self, permanence and pairs of opposites. This way of looking is *paratantra-svabhāva*. Changing our way of looking, learning to see the interdependent nature of reality is, according to Nhất Hạnh, the basic practice, which he proceeds to describe in the last section of his text[204].

6. The Path of Practice

This section, which is second in size after the one on *ālaya*, does not have an equivalent in either the TK or CWSL. The 'path of practice', described in detail here, is also discussed in every chapter that contains Nhất Hạnh's commentaries.

The goal of this section is to show us the way in which we can abandon the world of imaginary construction and enter nirvana - the world of suchness. Not surprisingly, Nhất Hạnh proposes that the way to do this is by meditating on the nature of interdependence, impermanence, and nonself. However, these teachings should not be seen as doctrines or subjects for philosophical discussion, he says, but rather as instruments for meditation, as keys to unlocking the door of reality. As to how one can do that in concrete terms, he points, also not surprisingly, to the practices of conscious breathing and mindfulness.

Nhất Hạnh sees conscious breathing as a 'complete method of practice to water the seeds of enlightenment that we all have within us'[205], as well as the basis for the practice of being present. For twenty-six hundred years, he comments, generations of Buddhist practitioners have used these methods.

With mindfulness we can observe every occurrence in our body and mind; we can begin to recognize our internal knots or fetters (*saṃyojana*), and our latent tendencies (*anuśaya*). The bases for our internal knots are our habit energies (*vāsanā*). Any action of body, speech, or mind can be the result of habit energies. Some have taken thousands of years to form, while others are being formed by our actions in the present

[201] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 155
[202] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 183
[203] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 158-159
[204] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 193-194
[205] Appendix A, V44

moment. There are two kinds of habit energy: the first is 'action-perfuming' (*karma-vāsanā*), a habit formed by an action; the second is the habit energy of 'grasping duality' (*grāha-dvaya-vāsanā*). When both kinds of habit energies are transformed, the fruit of practice, the world of suchness, nirvana, reveals itself. This is called transformation at the base (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) and it occurs in the depths of our store consciousness. When we are 'able to see the nature of interbeing in the object of our perception', we will 'touch the nature of nirvana within ourselves'[206]. This is possible through the practice of looking deeply.

'The secret of transformation at the base lies in our handling of this very moment with mindfulness'[207], says Nhất Hạnh. The present moment contains the past and the future. 'If we know how to touch deeply the present moment, we can touch and even change the past...If the present can be joyful, the future can also be joyful'[208]. According to Nhất Hạnh the 'discourse on dwelling happily in the present moment'[209] is the most ancient teaching on this subject and the Sanskrit phrase *dṛṣṭa-dharma-sukha-viharin* sums this up: 'touching the present moment, we abide in happiness'[210].

The practice is simple: we should practice the meditative techniques of stopping (P. *samatha* /S. *śamatha*) and looking deeply (P. *vipassanā* /S. *vipaśyanā*). Whatever we see, hear, or have contact with, we practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness itself is one of the wholesome mental formations. In the light of *interbeing*, it is seen as 'containing' every other mental formation. It is also 'the energy that is able to transform all other mental formations'. It is important to be able 'to shine the light of mindfulness on the field of our mind consciousness, so that when unwholesome mental formations, such as anger, appear...they are met with the energy of mindfulness'[211].

Mind consciousness is likened to a gardener who only has to water the seeds in store consciousness and have confidence in *ālaya*, as a gardener trusts in the earth. 'No other effort is needed', says Nhất Hạnh. 'Your only task is to practice mindfulness. Store consciousness does the rest'[212].

This section also contains references to the 'Heart' *Prajñā-Pāramitā Sūtra,* which describes how the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, by looking deeply into the nature of the five *skandhas,* discovered their nature, that of emptiness, and was able to overcome the notions of birth and death.

D. Closing Comments about the *Fifty Verses*

From the overview of the *Fifty Verses* and selected commentaries it can be concluded that the text is primarily based on Vasubandhu's theory of mind as expounded in the TK and VK verse treatises, enhanced and re-interpreted by Nhất Hạnh through the prism of *interbeing.* As discussed *interbeing* is a philosophical term that he coined, in which he incorporates elements of Hua-yen, emptiness, nonself, and conditioned arising. It can in fact be said that this term summarizes in just one word Nhất Hạnh's philosophical thought on the nature of reality. Aside from his unique interpretation, the whole new section on the path of practice makes Nhất Hạnh's work stand out from Vasubandhu's even more. The *Fifty Verses* also include elements from Hsüan-tsang's CWSL treatise, but do not reflect his idealistic, 'mind-only' interpretation of *vijñapti-mātra*, according to which external objects do not exist at all and all phenomena of experience are simply mental projections, or his views of *ālaya-vijñāna* as a universal entity.

In summary, the doctrine of the *Fifty Verses* states that all phenomena are just a flow of manifestations depending on an interconnected web of conditions. What is manifested is a function of consciousness and is also perceived by consciousness. However, our perception of reality is distorted, primarily because of the characteristics and functioning of the second consciousness, *manas*. But by cultivating the practice of

[206] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 199, 204
[207] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 230
[208] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 230
[209] *Bhaddekaratta Sutta*, Majjhima Nikāya 131.
[210] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 231
[211] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 214 - belonging to the group of five particulars that also include zeal, determination, concentration and assertion.
[212] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 212

awareness, we begin to experience 'the nature of interbeing of all phenomena' and our habit energies of grasping duality and obstacles of knowledge can be overcome. This is possible because we all carry within our store consciousness the seed of awakening. The process is called 'transformation at the base' and the key to initiate and sustain it lies in the practice of mindfulness.

Aside from the three main sources which are recognizable in varying degrees in Nhất Hạnh's text, the verses are occasionally interspersed with ideas from a much wider Buddhist doctrinal landscape; in fact Nhất Hạnh expressed the hope that the *Fifty Verses* will offer the reader ' the whole of the Abhidharma teachings "in a nutshell"'[213].

While it would be impractical to attempt to uncover all the angles and all the sources that may be reflected in Nhất Hạnh's verses, we should stop and explore briefly what he may have meant by his stated intention of presenting the manifestation-only teachings in a completely Mahāyāna way.

On the one hand, it is interesting that Nhất Hạnh did not see Vasubandhu's or Hsüan-tsang's works, for that matter, as fully Mahāyāna - although it is true that 'one can read Vasubandhu's works [e.g. TK and VK] without needing to refer to any explicitly Mahāyāna ideas'[214]. But what Nhất Hạnh seems to imply is that TK, VK and even CWSL are not 'purely' Mahāyāna. He points out that there are deep Sarvāstivāda influences in Vasubandhu's writings, including the TK and VK which he wrote after his 'conversion' to Mahāyāna. He goes as far as to say that his writings 'served the "Great Vehicle" deeply and effectively, but they never became one hundred percent Mahāyāna'[215]. Furthermore he refers to the Yogācāra School as an 'interim vehicle' and seems to agree with scholars who view it as 'semi' or 'quasi-Mahayanistic'[216].

On the other hand, another possible explanation for Nhất Hạnh's assertion could be the influence of the 'classification of teachings' (*p'an chiao*), a Chinese practice of classifying Buddhist schools and doctrines hierarchically. One of the most influential classification schemas was that of Fa-tsang, the third Hua-yen patriarch, and its most influential systematizer. Given that Hua-yen teachings, though significantly re-formulated by Nhất Hạnh, nevertheless had a deep influence on his philosophy, it is likely that he might have accepted Fa-tsang's schema as a reasonable classification. This divided Buddhist teachings into five categories: (1) the teachings of Śrāvakas (e.g. doctrines associated with the *Āgamas*); (2) basic Mahāyāna teachings – referring to schools that assert emptiness (*śūnyatā*), such as San-lun (Chinese Mādhyamika) and Fa-hsiang (Chinese Yogācāra); (3) definitive Mahāyāna teachings - such as the 'threefold truth' of the T'ien-t'ai School[217] which synthesized the vision of the Lotus Sūtra and the dialectics of the Middle Way philosophy; (4) the abrupt teachings of Mahāyāna – these include the sudden awakening doctrines of Ch'an and other texts such as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*; and (5) the round or complete teachings of Mahāyāna – which is represented by Hua-yen[218].

If we accept this premise, than the 'whole of the Abhidharma in a nutshell' can be interpreted as being only partly a figure of speech, the reasoning being as follows: the starting point of the *Fifty Verses* is a Yogācāra treatise, Vasubandhu's TK, in which Nhất Hạnh sees influences from the Sarvāstivāda School, and his earlier work *Abhidharma-kośa*; we already noted the Fa-hsiang (CWSL) influence; finally, Nhất Hạnh's innovative way of interpreting *vijñapti-mātra* through the prism of *interbeing*, a concept inspired from a wide array of doctrines, from the traditional Theravāda Abhidharma, to emptiness and culminating with Hua-yen, closes this doctrinal circle. Additionally, perhaps Nhất Hạnh sees his work as fully Mahāyāna as it emphasizes compassionate practice, which Vasubandhu's philosophical works says little on[219].

[213] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 4
[214] Harvey, 2011, F)
[215] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 2-3
[216] Nhat Hanh, 2001, a), p. 6, footnote 12 – references the Japanese Buddhist scholar Takakusu, in *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy.*
[217] De Bary, p. 156
[218] Powers, p. 160
[219] Harvey, 2011, F)

IV. CONCLUSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

Nhất Hạnh is mostly known in the west for his peace activism, his socially engaged brand of Buddhism, and his accessible, popular writings on simple Buddhist practices, such as the mindfulness of breathing.

In this paper we examined a different and less known work of Nhất Hạnh's, *Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness*, which along with the term *interbeing*, represents the essence of his philosophy. We discussed how this text builds upon the Yogācāra doctrine of 'manifestation-only', which Nhất Hạnh studied and later taught. In teaching *vijñapti-mātra* in the sixties at Vạn Hạnh University, Nhất Hanh made extensive use of the principle of universal causality of phenomena and notions of emptiness and nonself. These were to later crystallize in the concept of *interbeing* which can be considered a one word summary of Nhất Hạnh's theory of reality. We saw that this re-interpretation of *vijñapti-mātra* through the prism of *interbeing,* which is described by Nhất Hanh as a purely Mahayanistic approach, is at the core of the *Fifty Verses.*

We showed that the main tenet of this text is that all phenomena are manifestations based on a web of interrelated conditions. This is not a statement of universal idealism, but an expression of the 'insight of interbeing' (in fact we saw that Nhất Hanh distances himself from interpretations of *vijñapti-mātra* that see reality as a mind projected illusion). The text also shows the reasons why the unenlightened mind perceives reality as being distorted, and the way to restore our innate ability to see its true nature.

We discussed that aside from the Yogācāra influence, Nhất Hạnh's teachings have been informed by a wide variety of doctrines, and commented that this tendency to harmoniously blend teachings and practices is not uncommon in Vietnamese Buddhism and even more so in the Liễu-Quán tradition. A key figure in Vietnamese Buddhism, Liễu-Quán, who is the root ancestor in Nhất Hạnh's lineage, is credited to have opened the path to a great freedom of expression which allowed masters to combine Buddhist teachings without concern for dogmatic divides. This is clearly reflected in Nhất Hạnh's early ideas for a reformed Buddhist higher education, as well as in the nonchalant way in which he makes use of texts and doctrines ranging from the Theravāda Abhidharma to the Hua-yen school (and occasionally referencing ideas from Western psychology, sociology and science).

In closing I would like to propose that his engaged Buddhism and the simple teachings on the practice of mindfulness and awareness of breathing are both based on the philosophy summarized in the *Fifty Verses.* Indeed if this text were a statement of universal idealism, it would have been very difficult to reconcile this with Nhất Hạnh's tireless dedication to alleviate people's suffering, essentially a lifetime of peace and social activism. But there is no dichotomy between Nhất Hạnh's philosophy of thought and his philosophy of action. The *Fifty Verses* were not meant to be analyzed intellectually and then shelved, but used as a tool that helps us transform. They provide a psychological underpinning for explaining why we perceive reality distorted and why we act the way we do. When we develop sufficient awareness of our mind, through the practice of mindfulness, we will begin to experience the interdependent, empty and impermanent nature of reality. In cultivating this awareness, the habit energies of ignorance and attachment to self, are replaced by understanding, and a sense of generosity, tranquility, and loving kindness. Our consciousness is transformed. This internal transformation comes to affect external and social realities, as we naturally and inherently begin to extend positive energy and qualities to friends, family and society. And through this act of extension, social and political structures can be transformed. That is why Nhất Hạnh's commentary on the five Buddhist precepts, which he reformulated to reflect a focus on mindfulness and the reality of *interbeing*, has the title *For a Future to be Possible – Buddhist Ethics for Everyday Life*[220]. It is through the extension of positive qualities and energies into the world that Thích Nhất Hạnh teaches we might generate social change and address the ills of the modern world, such as war, violence, or environmental destruction[221].

[220] Nhất Hạnh's *Five Mindfulness Trainings* also inspired the *Manifesto 2000*, a six point pamphlet on the practice of peace distributed by UNESCO for the inauguration of the 'International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence'.
[221] Noy, web, 4)

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VI. LIST OF APPENDIXES

There are six items in the Appendix section.

- Appendix A presents Nhất Hạnh's *Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness.*
- Appendix B is a comparative compilation of three different translations of Vasubandhu's TK, by Anacker, Cook, and Kochumuttom (see Bibliography).
- Appendix C is a comparative compilation of three different translations of Vasubandhu's VK, by Anacker, Cook, and Kochumuttom (see Bibliography).
- Appendix D is a table that contains a list of texts that are included in the Plum Village book of practices. The table shows the canon of origin (e.g. Nikāyas or Āgamas), and which of the texts have been translated/commentated by Nhất Hạnh.
- Appendix E contains examples of *gāthās* compiled from books of practices in Thích Nhất Hạnh's tradition.
- Appendix F is a document showing the lineage of the Liễu Quán School, in accordance with Plum Village records.

APPENDIX A - Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness

PART I. STORE CONSCIOUSNESS

One
Mind is a field
In which every kind of seed is sown.
This mind-field can also be called
"All the seeds".

Two
In us are infinite varieties of seeds –
Seeds of samsara, nirvana, delusion, and enlightenment,
Seeds of suffering and happiness,
Seeds of perceptions, names, and words.

Three
Seeds that manifest as body and mind,
As realms of beings, stages, and worlds,
Are all stored in our consciousness.
That is why it is called "store".

Four
Some seeds are innate,
Handed down by our ancestors.
Some were sown while we were still in the womb,
Others were sown when we were children.

Five
Whether transmitted by family, friends,
Society, or education,
All our seeds are, by nature,
Both individual and collective.

Six
The quality of our life
Depends on the quality
Of the seeds
That lie deep in our consciousness.

Seven
The function of store consciousness
Is to receive and maintain
Seeds, and their habit energies,
So they can manifest in the world, or remain dormant.

Eight
Manifestations from store consciousness
Can be perceived directly in the mode of things-in-themselves,
As representations, or as mere images.
All are included in the eighteen elements of being.

Nine
All manifestations bear the marks
Of both the individual and the collective.
The maturation of store consciousness functions in the same way
In its participation in the different stages and realms of being.

Ten
Unobstructed and indeterminate,
Store consciousness is continuously flowing and changing.
At the same time, it is endowed
With all five universal mental formations.

Eleven
Although impermanent and without a separate self,
Store consciousness contains all phenomena in the cosmos,
Both conditioned and unconditioned,
In the form of seeds.

Twelve
Seeds can produce seeds.
Seeds can produce formations.
Formations can produce seeds.
Formations can produce formations.

Thirteen
Seeds and formations
Both have the nature of interbeing and interpenetration.
The one is produced by the all.
The all is dependent on the one.

Fourteen
Store consciousness is neither the same nor different,
Individual nor collective.
Same and different inter-are.
Collective and individual give rise to each other.

Fifteen
When delusion is overcome, understanding is there,
And store consciousness is no longer subject to afflictions.
Store consciousness becomes Great Mirror Wisdom,
Reflecting the cosmos in all directions. Its name is now Pure Consciousness.

PART II. MANAS

Sixteen
Seeds of delusion give rise
To the internal formations of craving and afflictions.
These forces animate our consciousness
As mind and body manifest themselves.

Seventeen
With store consciousness as its support,
Manas arises.
Its function is mentation,
Grasping the seeds it considers to be a “self”.

Eighteen
The object of manas is the mark of a self
Found in the field of representations
At the point where manas
And store consciousness touch.

Nineteen
As the ground of wholesome and unwholesome
Of the other six manifesting consciousnesses,
Manas continues discriminating.
Its nature is both indeterminate and obscured.

Twenty
Manas goes with the five universals,
With mati of the five particulars,
And with the four major and eight secondary afflictions.
All are indeterminate and obscured.

Twenty-One
As shadow follows form,
Manas always follows store.
It is a misguided attempt to survive,
Craving for continuation and blind satisfaction.

Twenty-Two
When the first stage of the bodhisattva path is attained,
The obstacles of knowledge and afflictions are transformed.
At the tenth stage, the yogi transforms the belief in a separate self,
And store consciousness is released from manas.

PART III. MIND CONSCIOUSNESS

Twenty-Three
With manas as its base
And phenomena as its objects,
Mind consciousness manifests itself.
Its sphere of cognition is the broadest.

Twenty-Four
Mind consciousness has three modes of perception.
It has access to the three fields of perception and is capable of having three natures.
All mental formations manifest in it –
Universal, particular, wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate.

Twenty-Five
Mind consciousness is the root of all actions of body and speech.
Its nature is to manifest mental formations, but its existence is not continuous.
Mind consciousness gives rise to actions that lead to ripening.
It plays the role of the gardener, sowing all the seeds.

Twenty-Six
Mind consciousness is always functioning
Except in states of non-perception,
The two attainments,
Deep sleep, and fainting or coma.

Twenty-Seven
Mind consciousness operates in five ways –
In cooperation with the five sense consciousnesses
And independent of them,
Dispersed, concentrated, or unstably.

PART IV. SENSE CONSCIOUSNESS

Twenty-Eight
Based on mind consciousness,
The five sense consciousnesses,
Separately or together with mind consciousness,
Manifest like waves on water.

Twenty-Nine
The field of perception is things-in-themselves.
Their mode of perception is direct.
Their nature can be wholesome, unwholesome or neutral.
They operate on the sense organs and the sensation center of the brain.

Thirty
They arise with the
Universal, particular and wholesome,
The basic and secondary unwholesome,
And the indeterminate mental formations.

PART V. THE NATURE OF REALITY

Thirty-One
Consciousness always includes
Subject and object.
Self and other, inside and outside
Are all creations of the conceptual mind.

Thirty-Two
Consciousness has three parts –
Perceiver, perceived, and wholeness.
All seeds and mental formations
Are the same.

Thirty-Three
Birth and death depend on conditions.
Consciousness is by nature a discriminatory manifestation.
Perceiver and perceived depend on each other
As subject and object of perception.

Thirty-Four
In individual and collective manifestations,
Self and nonself are not two.
The cycle of birth and death is achieved in every moment.
Consciousness evolves in the ocean of birth and death.

Thirty-Five
Space and time and the four great elements
Are all manifestations of consciousness.
In the process of interbeing and interpenetrations,
Our store consciousness ripens in every moment.

Thirty-Six
Beings manifest when conditions are sufficient.
When conditions lack, they no longer appear.
Still, there is no coming, no going,
No being, and no nonbeing.

Thirty-Seven
When a seed gives rise to a formation,
It is the primary cause.
The subject of perception depends on the object of perception.
This is an object as cause.

Thirty-Eight
Conditions that are favorable or non-obstructing
Are supporting causes.
The fourth type of condition
Is the immediacy of continuity.

Thirty-Nine
Interdependent manifestation has two aspects –
Deluded mind and true mind.
Deluded mind is imaginary construction.
True mind is fulfilled nature.

Forty
Construction impregnates the mind with seeds of delusion,
Bringing about the misery of samsara.
The fulfilled opens the door of wisdom
To the realm of suchness.

PART VI. THE PATH OF PRACTICE

Forty-One
Meditating on the nature of interdependence
Can transform delusion into enlightenment.
Samsara and suchness are not two.
They are one and the same.

Forty-Two
Even while blooming, the flower is already in the compost,
And the compost is already in the flower.
Flower and compost are not two.
Delusion and enlightenment inter-are.

Forty-Three
Don't run away from birth and death.
Just look deeply into your mental formations.
When the true nature of interdependence is seen,
The truth of interbeing is realized.

Forty-Four
Practice conscious breathing
To water the seeds of awakening.
Right View is a flower
Blooming in the field of mind consciousness.

Forty-Five
When sunlight shines,
It helps all vegetation grow.
When mindfulness shines,
It transforms all mental formations.

Forty-Six
We recognize internal knots and latent tendencies
So we can transform them.
When our habit energies dissipate,
Transformation at the base is there.

Forty-Seven
The present moment
Contains past and future.
The secret of transformation
Is in the way we handle this very moment.

Forty-Eight
Transformation takes place
In our daily life.
To make the work of transformation easy,
Practice with a Sangha.

Forty-Nine
Nothing is born, nothing dies.
Nothing to hold on to, nothing to release.
Samsara is nirvana.
There is nothing to attain.

Fifty
When we realize that afflictions are no other than enlightenment,
We can ride the waves of birth and death in peace,
Traveling in the boat of compassion on the ocean of delusion,
Smiling the smile of non-fear.

APPENDIX B - Comparative Table of Three Translations of *Triṃśikā-kārikā*

	Thomas A. Kochumuttom	**Stefan Anacker**	**Thomas Cook**
1	Various indeed are the usages Of the term *atman* and *dharma* They [all] refer To the transformation of consciousness; Threefold is such transformation:	The metaphors of 'self' and 'events' which develop in so many different ways Take place in the transformation of consciousness: and this transformation is of three kinds:	The metaphor of self and dharmas Evolves in various ways Upon the transformation of consciousness. The transforming consciousness is threefold:
2	They are, namely, Maturing, thinking, and representation of Consciousness of object There the maturing [consciousness] Is otherwise called store-consciousness, Which carries the seeds of all [past experiences].	Maturation, that called 'always reflecting', and the perception of sense-objects. Among these, 'maturation' is that called 'the store-consciousness' which has all the seeds.	Retribution, thought, And perception of the external realm. First the *ālaya* [store] consciousness is [also] retribution and holder of all seeds.
3	It has [within itself] The representations of consciousness Of unknown objects and places; It is always associated with Touch, attentiveness, knowledge, Conception and volition.	Its appropriations, states, and perception are not fully conscious, Yet it is always endowed with contacts, mental attentions, feelings, cognitions, and volitions.	That which it grasps and holds, its location, and its perceptions are imperceptible. It is always associated with mental contact, Attention, feeling, conceptualization, and volition. In it, the only feeling is one of indifference.
4	The feeling therein is that of indifference; It [i.e. the store-consciousness] is unobscured and undefined; Similarly indifferent are touch, etc., And it [i.e. the store-consciousness] is like a torrent of water;	Its feelings are equaniminous: it is unobstructed and indeterminate. The same for its contacts, etc. It develops like currents in a stream.	It is undefiled and morally neutral, And the same is true of mental contact, etc. It always evolves like a flowing stream, And is abandoned in the state of arahat.
5	And it ceases to exist at the attainment of *arhattva.* The consciousness called *manas* Has the store-consciousness for its support and object. It is essentially an act of thinking.	Its de-volvement takes place in a saintly state: dependent on it there develops A consciousness called 'manas', having it* [the store-consciousness] as its object-of- consciousness, And having the nature of always reflecting;	Next, the second transforming consciousness; This consciousness is called *manas* (thought). It evolves supported by that [store consciousness] and with it as its object, And has the nature and character of thinking.
6	It is always associated with four defilements, Which are themselves obscured and undefined; Those four defilements are, namely, Belief in self, ignorance about self, Pride in self, and love of self.	It is always conjoined with four afflictions, obstructed-but-indeterminate, Known as view of self, confusion of self, pride of self, and love of self.	It is always associated with four passions: Delusion about self, view of self, Self-conceit, and love of self, Along with others such as contact.

7	It [i.e. *mano-nāma-vijñāna*] is associated Also with others like touch, etc., Which are all of the same nature As the region in which one is born. It does not belong to one in the state of arhatship; Nor does it operate In the state of suppressed consciousness, Nor in the supra-mundane path.	And wherever it arises, so do contact and the others. But it doesn't exist in a saintly state, Or in the attainment of cessation, or even in a supermundane path.	It is defiled and morally neutral, And bound to the place of birth. In the arhat, the *samādhi* of cessation, And the supramundane path, it does not exist.
8	It is the second transformation [of consciousness]. The third transformation of consciousness Is the same as the perception of the sixfold object; It could be good or bad or indifferent in character.	This is the second transformation. The third is the apprehension Of sense-objects of six kinds: it is either beneficial, Or unbeneficial, or both.	Next, the third transforming consciousness With its sixfold distinction. Its nature and character are that of perception of the object, And it is good, bad, or neither.
9	It is associated with three kinds of mental factors Universal, specific and good; It is associated, similarly, With primary as well as secondary defilements; It is subject to the three kinds of feelings, too.	It is always connected with sarvatragas, and sometimes with factors that arise specifically, With beneficial events associated with citta, afflictions, and secondary afflictions: its feelings are of three kinds.	They are associated with universal mental activities, Those [mental activities] with specific objects, the good, the passions, Secondary passions, the nondetermined, And all three feelings.
10	Of those associates the first, [namely the universal] ones Are touch, etc., [the second, namely] the specific ones, Are desire, resolve and memory. Together with concentration and knowledge. Faith, sense of shame, fear of censure,	The first [of the sarvatragas] are contact, etc; those arising specifically are zest, confidence, memory, concentration, and insight;	First, the universal mental activities, [such as] contact, etc. Next, those with specific objects: that is, desire, Resolve, memory, *samādhi*, and discernment [*prajñā*], Whose objects are not the same.
11	The triad of non-covetousness etc., courage, Composure, equanimity along with alertness, And harmlessness are [the third, namely] the good ones. The defilements are passionate attachment, Grudge, stupidity,	The beneficial are faith, inner shame, dread of blame. The three starting with lack of greed [lack of greed, lack of hostility, lack of confusion] vigour, tranquility, carefulness, and non-harming; The afflictions are attachment, aversion, and confusion,	Faith, conscience, sense of shame, The three roots [of good], [such as] noncraving, etc., Vigor, serenity, vigilance, Indifference and harmlessness are the good [mental activities].
12	Pride, [false] views, and doubt. Anger, hatred, Hypocrisy, envy, jealousy, spite along with deceit,	Pride, views and doubts. The secondary afflictions are anger, malice, hypocrisy, maliciousness, envy, selfishness, deceitfulness,	The passions [*kleśa*] are craving, hatred, Delusion, pride, doubt, and wrong views. The secondary passions [*upakleśa*] are anger, Hostility, dissimulation, vexation, envy, avarice,

13	Dishonesty, arrogance, Harmfulness, shamelessness, defiance of censure, Sluggishness, conceit, unbelief, indolence, Carelessness, bad memory,	Guile, mischievous exuberance, desire to harm, lack of shame, lack of dread of blame, mental fogginess, excitedness, lack of faith, sloth, carelessness, loss of mindfulness,	Deceit, hypocrisy, with harmfulness and vanity, Lack of conscience and shamelessness, Agitation and torpor, Unbelief and indolence,
14	Distraction of mind, Thoughtlessness, remorse, sleepiness, Reasoning and deliberation, Are the secondary defilements. The latter two couples, [namely Remorse and sleepiness, reasoning and deliberation], Can be of two kinds, [namely defiled and undefiled].	Distractedness, lack of recognition, regret, and torpor, Initial mental application, and subsequent discursive thought: the last two pairs are of two kinds.	Negligence and forgetfulness, Distraction and incorrect knowing. The nondetermined [states] mean remorse and sloth, Applied thought and sustained thought, two pairs in two ways.
15	Depending on the conditions available The five sense-consciousness, Together or separately, Originate on the root-consciousness, Just as waves originate on water.	In the root-consciousness, the arising of the other five takes place according to conditions, Either all together or not, just like waves in the water.	Supported on the fundamental consciousness, The [first] five consciousnesses appear according to conditions, Either together or not, Like waves supported by the water.
16	The thought-consciousness, however, Manifests itself at all times, Except for those [i] who are born Into the region where the beings are in a state of unconsciousness. [ii] Who have entered either of the two trances, In which there is no operation of consciousness, [iii] Who are unconscious by reason Of sleepiness or faint.	The co-arising of a mental consciousness takes place always Except in a non-cognitional state, Or in the two attainments, or in torpor, or fainting, or in a state without citta.	Mental consciousness [the sixth consciousness] perpetually appears, Except in those born among the unconscious celestials And in the two mindless *samādhi*s, And in those who are [in states of] sloth and stupefaction.
17	This [threefold] transformation of consciousness Is just the distinction [between subject and object]; What is thus distinguished, Does not exist as [subject and object]. Therefore this is all mere representation of consciousness.	This transformation of consciousness is a discrimination, and as it is discriminated, it does not exist, and so everything is perception-only.	The various consciousnesses transform As imagination and the imagined. As a result of this, all these are nonexistent. Therefore, all are consciousness only.
18	The consciousness contains all seeds; Its such and such transformations Proceed by mutual influence, On account of which such and such [subject-object] discrimination arise.	Consciousness is only all the seeds, and transformation takes place in such and such a way, According to a reciprocal influence, by which such and such a type of discrimination may arise.	From the consciousness that is all seeds Transformation [occurs] in such-and-such ways. Due to the power of mutual influence, That-and-that imagination is born.

19	Once the previous stage of maturation Has been exhausted, The impressions of deeds Along with those of the two-fold grasping Engender the next stage of maturation.	The residual impressions of actions, along with the residual impressions of a 'dual' apprehension, Cause another maturation (of seeds) to occur, Where the former maturation has been Exhausted.	The habit energy of various actions Together with the habit energy of the two graspings, When prior retribution is exhausted, Subsequently produce other retribution.
20	The subject-matter that is liable To subject-object distinction By whatsoever sort of subject-object discrimination, Is all just imagined nature; It does not exist.	Whatever range of events is discriminated by whatever discrimination Is just the constructed own-being, and it isn't really to be found.-	Because of whatever imagination, Such-and-such a thing is imagined. This imagined nature [*parikalpita-svabhāva*] Does not exist.
21	The other-dependent nature, however, Is the act of graspable-grasper discrimination; It depends for its origin on conditions. The absolutely accomplished nature Is the latter's [i.e. the other-dependent nature's] Perpetual devoidness of the former [i.e. the imagined nature].	The interdependent own-being, on the other hand, is the discrimination which arises from conditions, And the fulfilled is its [the interdependent's] state of being separated always from the former. [the constructed]	The nature that is dependent on others [*paratantra-svabhāva*] Is discrimination born of conditions. The perfected [nature, *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*] is the eternal privation Of the former nature from that [dependent nature].
22	For that reason, indeed, It is said to be neither different, Nor non-different From the other-dependent nature. It is like impermanence etc. As long as this absolutely accomplished nature It is not seen, That other-dependent nature, too, Is not seen.	So it is to be spoken of as neither exactly different nor non-different from the interdependent, Just like impermanence, etc., for when one isn't seen, the other is.	Therefore, this [perfected nature] and the dependent on others Are neither different nor nondifferent, Like the nature of impermanence, etc. One not perceived, the other is not perceived.
23	Corresponding to the three-fold nature There is also a three-fold naturelessness; Referring to this fact it has been said That there is the naturelessness of all elements.	The absence of own-being in all events has been taught with a view towards The three different kinds of absence of own-being in the three different kinds of own-being.	On the basis of these three natures The threefold naturelessness is established. Therefore, the Buddha taught with a hidden intention That all dharmas are natureless.
24	The first nature is natureless by its very definition, The second nature, again, does not come into being by itself, And this constitutes the second kind of naturelessness.	The first is without own-being through its character itself, but the second Because of its non-independence, and the third *is* absence of own-being.	The first is naturelessness of characteristics [*lakṣaṇa*]; The next is naturelessness of self-existence; The last is the nature that results from the privation of the former Self and dharmas that are grasped.

25	That from which all elements have their ultimate reality, Is the third naturelessness, It is also called suchness, Because it remains always as such; That is itself the state in which one realizes the meaning Of mere representation of consciousness, too.	It is the ultimate truth of all events, and so it is 'Suchness', too, Since it is just so all the time, and it's just perception-only.	This is the ultimate truth of all dharmas And is also the same as true suchness, Because it is eternally so in its nature. It is the true nature of consciousness only.
26	As long as consciousness does not abide In the realization [that the subject-object designations] Are mere representations of consciousness, The attachment to the twofold grasping Will not cease to operate.	As long as consciousness is not situated within perception-only, The residues of a 'dual' apprehension will not come to an end.	As long as one does not generate consciousness That seeks to abide in the nature of consciousness only, One is still unable to destroy The propensities of the twofold grasping.
27	One does not abide in the realization Of mere representations of consciousness Just on the account of the [theoretical] perception That all this is mere representation of consciousness, If one places [= sees] something before oneself.	And so even with the consciousness: 'All this is perception only', Because this also involves an apprehension, For whatever makes something stop in front of it isn't situated in 'this-only'.	Setting the least thing before one, Saying, it is of the nature of consciousness only, One does not really abide in consciousness only, Because there is something obtained.
28	One does not abide in the realization Of mere [representation of] consciousness When one does not perceive also a supporting consciousness, For, the graspable objects being absent, There cannot either be the grasping of that, [namely, the grasping of the supporting consciousness].	When consciousness doesn't apprehend any object-of-consciousness, It's situated in 'consciousness-only', For with the non-being of an object apprehended, there is no apprehension of it.	Whenever, regarding the objective realm, Knowledge is completely devoid of something obtained, Then it dwells in consciousness only, Because it is divorced from characteristics of the twofold grasping.
29	That indeed is the supramundane knowledge When one has no mind that knows, And no object for its support; It follows the revulsion of basis Through the twofold removal of wickedness;	It is without citta, without apprehension, and it is super-mundane knowledge; It is revolution at the basis, the ending of two kinds of susceptibility to harm.	Devoid of anything obtained, inconceivable, This is supermundane knowledge. Because of abandoning the twofold coarseness, One realizes the transmutation of support [*āśraya-parāvṛtti*].
30	That itself is the pure source-reality, Incomprehensible, auspicious, and unchangeable; Being delightful, it is the emancipated body, Which is also called the truth [-body] of the great sage.	It is the inconceivable, beneficial, constant Ground, not liable to affliction, Bliss, and the liberation-body called the Dharma-body of the Sage.	It is the pure realm, Inconceivable, good, eternal, Blissful, and the body of liberation, Which in the great *muni* is named Dharma [body].

APPENDIX C - Comparative Table of Three Translations of *Viṃśatikā-kārikā*

Thomas A. Kochumuttom	**Stefan Anacker**	**Thomas Cook**
1. It is all mere representation of consciousness, Because there is the appearance of non-existent objects. Just as a man with a cataract Sees hairs, moons, etc., Which do not exist in reality.	All this is perception-only, because of the appearance of non-existent objects, Just as there may be the seeing of non-existent nets of hair by someone afflicted with an optical disorder.	If consciousness is without real objects of perception, The restriction (*niyama*) of place and time, The nonrestriction of mental continuity (*saṃtāna*), And function would not be established.
2. If the representations of consciousness Are without [extra-mental] objects, Then there would be no determination [of experience] with regard to space and time, Nor would there be indeterminacy of it with regard to streams [i.e. individuals] Nor would there be determination of actions prompted [by a particular experience].	"If perception occurs without an object, Any restriction as to place and time becomes illogical, As does non-restriction as to moment-series And any activity which has been performed".	Time and place are restricted as in dreams. The body is not restricted, just as [hungry] ghosts (*preta*) All alike see pus rivers, etc., And just as in dreams loss [of semen] has a function.
3. Determination of space etc., is obtained Just as [in] the case of a dream; Again, indeterminacy [of experience] with regards to streams [i.e. individuals] is obtained Just as [in] the case [of the experience] of ghosts: All of them [i.e. the ghosts] have the same vision of pus-river, etc.	No, they are not illogical, because Restrictions as to place, etc. is demonstrated as in a dream. [3a] And non-restriction as to moment-series is like with the *pretas*. [3b] In the seeing of pus rivers, etc. by all of them [3c]	All [four concepts] are like [beings in] hell Who alike see infernal guardians, etc., And are made to be injured. Therefore the four concepts are all demonstrated.
4. Determined actions [resulting from experience] Are obtained as those [obtained] by a dreamer. Again, all those [four factors are obtained] As in the case of hells; There all [its inhabitants without exception] Behold the infernal guards etc., And experience the torments by them.	And activity which has been performed is just like being affected in a dream. [4a] And as in a hell-state, all of these [4b] In the seeing of hell-guardians, etc. and in the being tormented by them. [4c]	What is true of animals in the celestial realm Is not true for those [beings in the] hells, Because the animals and ghosts you assert Do not experience that suffering.
5. Animals are born in heaven, However, they are not similarly born in hell, Nor are the infernal guards born in hell, For, they do not experience the sufferings of hell.	There is no arising of animals in hell-states, As there is in heaven-states, Nor is there any arising of *pretas*, Since they don't experience the sufferings that are engendered there.	If you admit that as a result of the power of action Unusual great elements are born And they produce such changes, Why not admit [that they occur] in consciousness?

6. If the birth of [special] beings in hell Can be traced to the deeds of the hell-inhabitants, Why not say that they are transformations of the latter's consciousness.	If the arising and transformation of material elements due to the actions of those is accepted, Why isn't [such arising and transformation] of a consciousness accepted?	Perfuming (*vāsanā*) of action is in one place, And you assert that the result exists elsewhere. That the result exists in the perfumed consciousness You do not admit; why is that?
7. The impression of deed is imagined to be in one place, And its fruit in another place: Why not instead recognize the fruit In the same place as the impression? The impression of deeds Along with those of the twofold grasping Engender the next stage of maturation.	It's being constructed that the process of impressions from actions takes place elsewhere than does its effect, And it is not being accepted that it exists there where the impressions take place: Now what is your reason for this?	For those beings to be instructed (*vineya*) The World-Honored One, with a hidden motive, Spoke of the existence of the sense bases (*āyatana*) of form, etc. In the same way [he spoke of] beings born spontaneously (*upapāduka*)
8. It was with a hidden meaning That he [the Buddha] spoke to his disciples, About the existence of the bases like colour etc., Just as he spoke about things that are [apparently] born by metamorphosis.	This is no reason, because speaking of sense-fields of visibles, etc. was intended for those to be introduced to Dharma, just as in the case of spontaneously-generated beings.	Consciousness is born from its own seeds And transforms to resemble characteristics of objects of perception. In order to establish internal and external sense bases, The Buddha spoke of them as being ten.
9. What the sage spoke of as the two bases [of knowledge] Are (i) the own-seed From which a representation of consciousness [develops], And (ii) the form in which [that representation] appears.	Because their appearances continue as perceptions, Because of [consciousnesses'] own seeds, The Sage spoke in terms of states of two-fold sense-fileds.	On the basis of this teaching one can enter The [teaching of the] absence of self (*anātman*) of the person (*pugdala*). Later, through other teachings, one enters The [teaching of the] absence of self of the dharmas that are asserted.
10. By this one is definitely initiated Into the theory of the non-substantiality of self (*pudgala*) Again, on the other hand, By this instruction one is initiated Into the non-substantiality of objects (*dharma*): [The self and the objects are non-substantial] With regards to their imagined nature.	What is the advantage of teaching with such an intention? In this way, there is entry into the selflessness of personality. [10a] And in yet another way, this teaching is entry into the selflessness of events. [10b] In regard to a constructed self. [10]c	That object of perception is not one thing, Nor is it many atoms. Also, it is not a compound, etc., Because atoms are not demonstrated [as real].
11. The object is [experienced] Neither as a single entity, Nor as many discrete atoms, Nor as an aggregate of them, Because not a single atom is obtained [in experience at all].	A sense-object is nether a single thing, Nor several things, From the atomic point of view, Nor can it be an aggregate [of atoms], So atoms can't be demonstrated.	If an atom is united with six [other atoms], The one must consist of six parts. If it is in the same place as the six, Then the combination must be like [a single] atom.

12. One atom joined at once to six other atoms Must have six parts. On the other hand, if they are said To occupy the same place, Then their aggregate would mean Nothing more than a single atom.	How is it that it can't be demonstrated? Because Through the simultaneous conjunction of six elements, The atom has six parts. [12a] If there were a common locus for the six, The agglomeration would only be one atom. [12b]	Since atoms do not unite, To what does the union of [larger] combinations belong? Or else, the uniting [of atoms] is not demonstrated; It is not because they are devoid of parts.
13. As there is no joining of atoms, Whose joining can be attributed on their aggregates. There can be no joining of atoms, Not because they have no parts.	When there is no conjunction of atoms, How can there be one of their aggregations? Their conjunction is not demonstrated, For they also have no parts.	If an atom has parts, It logically would not form a unity. Without [parts], there would be no shadow or concealment, And a combination not being different [from atoms,] it is devoid of the two.
14. That which has different parts Cannot make a unity, [On the contrary, if it has no parts,] How come it is subject to shadow and concealment? It cannot be argued that they [i.e. shadow and concealment] Belong to the aggregate of atoms, Unless the aggregate is admitted to be Different from the atoms.	[To assume] the singleness of that which has divisions As to directional dimensions, is illogical. [14a] Or else, how could there be shade and blockage? [14b] If the agglomeration isn't something other, Then they can't refer to it. [14]c	In the case of unity, there would be no piecemeal going; One could arrive and not yet arrive at all times. [Nor] would there be intervals between many [things], [Or] tiny things that are difficult to see.
15. [If it is assumed that the earth is] a single unit Then there would be no progressive movement, Nor simultaneous grasping and non-grasping, Nor would there be discrete states of many [beings], Nor would there be subtle and invisible [beings].	If their unity existed, one couldn't arrive at anything gradually, There couldn't be apprehension and non- apprehension simultaneously, There couldn't be separate, several, developments, And there would be no reason for the non-seeing of the very subtle.	Direct awareness is like in dreams, etc., At the time direct awareness has occurred, The seeing and the object of perception are already nonexistent. How can you admit the existence of direct perception?
16. Perception [can occur without extra-mental objects], Just as it happens in a dream, etc. At the time when that [perception occurs], The [corresponding external] object is not found; How can then one speak of its perception?	Cognizing by direct perception is like in a dream, etc, [16a] And when it occurs, the object is already not seen, So how can it be considered a state of direct perception? [16b]	As we have said, there is consciousness that resembles an external object of perception, And from this is born a memory. [16a,b] When not awake, one cannot know That what is seen in a dream does not exist. [16c,d]
17. It has [already] been said That there is a representation of consciousness, Which appears as that, [namely the respective object];	It has been stated how perception occurs with its appearance. [17a] And remembering takes place from that. [17b] Somebody who isn't awake doesn't understand the non-	By means of interchange of dominant power, Two [individual] consciousnesses achieve restriction (*niyama*). [17a,b] The mind is weakened by sleep,

From it [i.e. from a representation of consciousness] Does the memory arise. Those who are not awake Do not realize that the objects they see in a dream Do not exist.	being of the visual sense-objects in a dream. [17c]	So the result [of acts] in sleep and wakefulness are not the same. [17c,d]
18. The representations of consciousness Are determined by mutual influence Of one [individual] on another. In a dream mind is overpowered by sleepiness, And, therefore, fruits [of the actions done in a dream] Are not on a par with [fruits of the actions done in a waking state].	The certainty of perceptions takes place mutually, By the state of their sovereign effect on one another. [18a] Citta is affected by torpor in a dream, So their results are different. [18b]	As a result of the transformation of another's consciousness, There are acts of injury and killing, Just as the mental power of anger of sage-immortals (*āraṇyaka*), Causes others to lose their memory, etc.
19. Death is a change of course caused by A particular mental representation of another being, Just as the loss of memory etc. of other beings Are caused by the thought-power of demons etc.	Dying may be a modification resulting from a special perception by another, Just like losses of memory, etc. may take place through the mental control of spirits, etc.	The emptiness of the Daṇḍaka [Forest], etc.- How could it result from the anger of the sage-immortals? Mental harm is a great offense; How, again, can this be demonstrated?
20. Otherwise how can it be said that The Daṇḍaka-forest was destroyed by the anger of the sages? Or, how could mental torture be considered To be a great punishment?	Or else, how was it that the Daṇḍaka Forest became empty because of the anger of the seers? [20a] If not, how could it be demonstrated that mental harm constitutes a great offense? [20b]	How does knowledge of others' minds Not know the object of perception according to reality? In the same way that knowledge in knowing one's own mind Does not know it in accordance with the object of perception of a Buddha.
21. Knowledge of those, [Who claim] to know other minds, Is unreal, Just as one's knowledge of one's own mind [Is unreal]. For, in the manner in which [the mind] is known To the enlightened ones, It is unknown [to ordinary men].	The knowledge of those who understand others' citta is not like an object. And how is this? As in the case of a knowledge of one's own citta. [21a] Because of non-knowledge, as in the case of the scope of the Buddhas. [21b]	According to my ability, I Have briefly demonstrated the principles of consciousness only, Of these, the entirety (*sarvathā*) Is difficult to consider and is reached [only] by Buddhas.
22. This treatise on the theory Of mere representations of consciousness Has been composed by me According to my ability; It is not possible, however, to discuss This [theory] in all its aspects; It is known [only] to an enlightened one.	I have written this demonstration of perception-only According to my abilities, But in its entirety it is beyond the scope of citta. [22a] [It is said to be] the scope of Buddhas. [22b]	

APPENDIX D – List of Texts in the Plum Village Practice Book

Title in Plum Village Book	Pāli Reference[222]	Āgama Reference
Discourse On Love[223]	*Mettā Sutta* Sutta-nipāta 1.8	
Discourse on Happiness[224]	*Mahā-maṅgala Sutta* Sutta-nipāta 2.4	
Elder Discourse[225]	*Theranamo Sutta* Saṃyutta Nikāya 21.10	Saṃyukta Āgama 1071
Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone[226]	*Bhaddekaratta Sutta* Majjhima Nikāya 131	
Discourse on the Four Kinds of Nutriments[227]	*Puttamansa Sutta* (The Discourse on Son's Flesh) Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.63	Saṃyukta Āgama 373
Discourse on the Middle Way	*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion) Saṃyutta Nikāya 56.11	Saṃyukta Āgama 301
Anuradha Discourse	*Anuradha Sutta* Saṃyutta Nikāya 22.86	
Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing[228]	*Ānāpānasati Sutta* Majjhima Nikāya 118	
Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness[229]	*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* Majjhima Nikāya 10	
Discourse on the Five Ways of Putting an End to Anger	*Aghata Vināya Sutta* Anguttara Nikāya 5.162	Madhyama Āgama 25
Discourse on the White-Clad Disciple[230]		*Upāsaka Sutra* Madhyama Āgama 128

[222] The *Saṃyukta Āgama* corresponds to *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, *Madhyama Āgama* to *Majjhima Nikāya* and *Ekottara Āgama* to *Anguttara Nikāya*. The *Sutta-nipāta* is the fifth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (the "collection of little texts")

[223] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1998, *Teachings on Love*, Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[224] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 2007, *Two Treasures: Buddhist teachings on awakening and true happiness,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[225] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1990, *Our Appointment with Life: the Buddha's Teaching on living in the present Moment,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[226] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1990, *Our Appointment with Life: the Buddha's Teaching on living in the present Moment,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[227] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 2000, *The Path of Emancipation,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[228] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1995, *Breathe! You are Alive* and 2000, *The Path of Emancipation*, Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[229] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1990, *Transformation and Healing: Sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

[230] Referenced in Nhat Hanh, 1998, *For a Future to be Possible,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

Discourse on Measuring and Reflecting	*Anumāna Sutta* Majjhima Nikāya 15	
Discourse on the Teachings to be Given to the Sick	In consultation with *Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta* (Advise to Anāthapiṇḍika) Majjhima Nikāya 143	Ekottara Āgama 51.8 In consultation with Madhyama Āgama 26
Discourse on Taking Refuge in Oneself		Saṃyukta Āgama 639, Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 99
Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake[231]	*Alagaddupama Sutta* (The Water-Snake simile) Majjhima Nikāya 22	*Aritha Sūtra* Madhyama Āgama 220
Discourse on Youth and Happiness	*Samiddhi Sutta* Saṃyutta Nikāya 1.20	*Samiddhi Sutta*, Saṃyukta Āgama 1078
Discourse on the Dharma Seal[232]		Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 104
Discourse on the Eight Realizations of Great Beings		Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 779
Flower Garland Discourse: The Ten Aspirations of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva		*Avataṃsaka Sūtra* 36 Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 279
Discourse on the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma: Universal Door Chapter		*Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, Ch.25 Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 262
Store of the Precious Virtues Discourse: Practice of the Highest Understanding		*Prajñā-pāramitā ratna-guṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā* Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 229
The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion[233]		*Vajracchedikā-prajñā-pāramitā- sūtra* Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 335
Discourse on the Land of Great Happiness[234]		*Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra* Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka 366
The Discourse on Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word		Saṃyukta Āgama 335
Discourse on the Absolute Truth	*Paramatthaka Sutta* Sutta-nipāta 4.5	

[231] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1993, *Thundering Silence,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA
[232] Referenced in Nhat Hanh, 1998, *The heart of the Buddha's Teachings,* Broadway Books
[233] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 1992, *The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion,* Parallax Press, Berkley, CA
[234] Full commentary in Nhat Hanh, 2003, *Finding Our True Home*, Parallax Press, Berkley, CA

APPENDIX E - Examples of Practice *Gāthās* in Thích Nhat Hanh's tradition

Waking up [235]

Waking up this morning, I smile;
Twenty-four brand new hours are ahead of me.
I vow to live fully in every moment
And to look upon all beings with the eyes of compassion.

Drinking tea [236]

This cup of tea in my two hands,
Mindfulness held perfectly.
My mind and body dwell in the very here and now.

Washing Your Feet [237]

The peace and joy
Of one toe
Is the peace and joy
For my whole body.

Using the toilet [238]

Defiled or immaculate,
Increasing or decreasing –
These concepts exist only in our mind.
The reality of interbeing is unsurpassed.

Repentance Gāthā [239]

All wrongdoing arises from the mind.
When the mind is purified, what trace of wrong is left?
After repentance, my heart is light like the white clouds
That have always floated over the ancient forest in freedom.

Entering the meditation hall [240]

Entering the meditation hall,
I see my true self.
As I sit down,
I vow to cut off all disturbances.

Calming the breath (i) [241]

Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.

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[235] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 4
[236] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 418
[237] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 7
[238] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 7
[239] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 141
[240] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 418
[241] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 39

Calming the breath (ii) [242]

I have arrived, I am home
In the here and in the now.
I am solid, I am free,
In the ultimate I dwell...
The door to no-birth, no-death has opened
Free and unshakeable I dwell.

Adjusting the meditation posture [243]

Feelings come and go
Like clouds in a windy sky.
Conscious breathing is my anchor.

Sitting down [244]

Sitting here
Is like sitting under a Bodhi tree.
My body is mindfulness itself,
Free from all distraction.

Inviting the bell [245]

Body, speech, and mind held in perfect oneness,
I send my heart along with the sound of the bell.
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness,
Transcending anxiety and sorrow.
[alternate ending]
May it penetrate deeply the universe,
Awakening beings to life.

Listening to the bell [246]

Hearing the bell,
I let go of my afflictions,
My heart is calm, my sorrows ended.
No longer bound to anything.
I earn to listen to my suffering
And the suffering of others.
When understanding is born in me,
Compassion is also born.

Gāthā on Impermanence [247]

Te day is now ended. Our lives are shorter.
Let us look carefully. What have we done?
Noble Sangha, with all our heart,
Let us be diligent, engaging in practice.
Let us live deeply, free from all afflictions,

[242] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 18
[243] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 41
[244] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 39
[245] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 420
[246] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 421
[247] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 419

Aware of impermanence,
So that life doesn't drift away
without meaning.

Looking at the Buddha Image before Touching the Earth [248]

In the realm of suchness,
The one who bows and the one who is bowed to
Are equally empty of a separate self.
With deep respect I bow to the Buddha in this spirit,
And the communication is perfect.
Buddhas manifest in all directions.
In the Interbeing Cosmos, as in every jewel of Indra's net,
There are countless me's bowing to countless Buddhas.

Verses for Beginning Anew Ceremony [249] (excerpts)

With great respect, we turn towards the conqueror of afflictions,
Offering heartfelt words of repentance.
We have lived in forgetfulness for a long time....
Our habit energies have led us into suffering....
We have been blinded by our wrong perceptions....
[bell]
...
We have stored up afflictions and ignorance,
Which have brought about much aversion and sorrow...
[bell]

We know so well that in our consciousness
Are buried all the wholesome seeds –
Seeds of love and understanding and seeds of peace and joy....
[but] Our mind is occupied with the past,
Or worrying about this or that in the future...
So now in the precious presence of the Buddha,
We recognize our errors and begin anew.
[bell]
....
We vow to live an awakened life,
To practice smiling and conscious breathing,
And to study the teachings, authentically transmitted.
Diligently, we shall live in mindfulness.
[bell]

We come back to live in the wonderful present,
To plant our heart's garden with good seeds,
And to make strong foundations of understanding and love.
We vow to train ourselves in mindfulness and concentration,
Practicing to to look and understand deeply
To be able to see the nature of all that is,
And so to be free of the bonds of birth and death...
[bell]

[248] Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 19
[249] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 261

Gāthās for a formal Meal Ceremony [250]

Taking the lid off the bowl
The bowl of the Tathāgata
Is in my two hands.
Giver, receiver, and gift
Held in perfect oneness.

Holding this bowl which is full
In this food,
I clearly see the entire universe
Supporting my existence.

Making the offering
We offer this food to:
The Buddha Vairocana, the pure Dharma body,
The Buddha Locana, the perfect retribution body,
The Buddha Śākyamuni, the transformation body,
Which is always and everywhere,
The Buddha Maitreya yet to be born,
The Buddha Amitābha of the land of Great happiness,
All the Buddhas in the Ten Directions and the Three Times,

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī of Great Wisdom,
Bodhisattva Samantabhadra of Great Action,
Bodhisattva Avalokita of Great Compassion,
Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta of Great Strength,
All Bodhisattva Mahāsattvas.

All beings in all the Dharma realms
Want to make this offering
Of the Three Virtues and the Six Tastes
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.
As we eat this food we want all beings
To realize perfectly
The wisdom of awakening.

Offering to the hungry (recited by MC while making the *mudrā* of peace over a bowl of water containing seven grains of rice)

The way of the Buddhas is extraordinary.
Seven grains of rice fill the Ten Directions.
It is offered everywhere in the Dharma realms
As the nectar of compassion which has no limit.

Mantra to make food universally available
Namo sarvatathagata'valokite.
Om sambhara sambhara hung.

Great Garuda bird,

[250] Nhat Hanh & al., 2007, p. 181

Hungry spirits in the great desert,
Yaksa mother who ceases to eat children's flesh,
May all be satisfied by the Bodhisattva's nectar.

The Five Contemplations - (read aloud by one member of community)
This food is the gift of [the whole Universe], the Earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.
May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.
May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed.
May we take only foods that nourish us and keep us healthy.
We accept this food so that we may nurture our sisterhood and brotherhood, build our Sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving living beings.

The first four mouthfuls
With the first mouthful I practice the love which brings joy.
With the second mouthful I practice the love which relieves pain.
With the first mouthful I practice the happiness of being alive.
With the first mouthful I practice equal love for all beings.

Rinsing the bowl with clean water
The water which rinses this bowl
Is the nectar of the gods.
I offer it to hungry ghosts,
That they all may drink their fill.

When the meal is finished
The meal is finished
And I am satisfied.
The four gratitudes: to parents,
Teachers, friends, and all dharmas
I bear deeply in mind.

The Great Chunda Mantra [251](recited by all together)
Namo Saptanam Samyak Sambuddha
Kuthinam Tadyatha
Om cale cule Cunde svaha.

Offering the merit
To practice generosity
Gives rise to much happiness.
The one who offers joy
Also experiences joy.
By the merit of this mindful meal
We aspire that all beings
May wholly realize complete awakening.

[251] *Namaḥ saptānāṃ samyak-sambuddha*
Koṭināṃ. tad-yathā
Oṃ cale cule cundi svāhā
Roughly meaning ' reverence to the seven *koṭis* [billions] of perfect Buddhas, like this: *oṃ cale cule cundi* [*Cundi* is one of the names of *Avalokiteśvara*] *svāhā*' – diacritical text and translation courtesy of Prof. Peter Harvey

APPENDIX F – The Liễu-Quán lineage in accordance with Plum Village records

A Letter to Friends
About Our Lineage
By Thầy Pháp Dụng

Plum Village, 25-3-2006

Dear friends,

There was a letter sent to me by a friend from Holland who asked about our spiritual roots. She wanted to know about the transmission gāthā Thầy received from his teacher. This information is available to read in Vietnamese and classical Chinese on our website (www.langmai.org). On our website one can also get in touch with more than one hundred gāthās relating to the transmissions of many generations up to our present one.

It is wonderful that despite many years of war in Vietnam, we still have access to this information. I myself was very moved when I learned about these gāthās. But my friend cannot read Vietnamese or classical Chinese. I feel therefore responsible for providing reasonable translations for her and especially for those who have received a mindfulness training transmission from Thầy of either the 14 mindfulness trainings of the Order of Interbeing (OI) or the 5 mindfulness trainings. Beside these gāthās, there is a lot to discover about our lineage.

I am looking forward to sharing with you, in future letters, some of this history. When we study the lives of our ancestral teachers we can learn so much. Thầy's life is also his message.

In this letter, along with the gāthā given to Thầy, I offer a translation+ of transmission gāthās representing five generations. In addition to this is a list of the teachers dating back to Zen Master Liễu Quán (1670-1742), one of our main root teachers.

Let me begin to explain to you the differences between a lineage name, a Dharma name, and a Dharma title. Each of us, upon receiving the five mindfulness trainings, is given a lineage name (pháp danh, 法 名). When one is ordained as a monastic member or an OI-member, one receives a Dharma name (pháp tự, 法 字). Some monastic members also have a Dharma title (pháp hiệu, 法 號).

Thầy, our teacher, has the lineage name Trừng Quang (澄 光), the Dharma name Phùng Xuân (逢 春) and the Dharma title Nhất Hạnh (一 行). We call him Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh. Thích (釋) is Vietnamese for Sakya, which is the Buddha's family name. Every monastic member in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition has a name which begins with Thích.

Thầy was born in the year 1926 in Vietnam. He entered Từ Hiếu root temple (慈孝 寺) in Huế at the age of 16. On May 1st, 1966, ten days before he left Vietnam calling for peace abroad, he received the lamp-transmission in Từ Hiếu root temple.

His teacher, our Grand-Father Teacher, had the lineage name Thanh Quí (倩季), the Dharma name Cứu Cánh (究 竟), and the Dharma title Chân Thật (真寔, 1884-1968).

When he passed away in 1968, his Will gave instructions for Thầy to be appointed Abbot of Từ Hiếu root temple, a position which Thầy still holds. In the lamp transmission ceremony, our Grand-Father Teacher gave to Thầy the following gāthā :

> Nhất hướng phùng xuân đắc kiện hành
> Hành đương vô niệm diệc vô tranh
> Tâm đăng nhược chiếu kỳ nguyên thể
> Diệu pháp đông tây khả tự thành
>
> 一向逢春得健行
> 行當無念亦無諍

心燈若照其原体
妙法東西可自成

In this gāthā, we can read Thầy's Dharma name (Phùng Xuân), which means 'meeting the spring' , and his Dharma title (Nhất Hạnh). Nhất means 'one' and Hạnh means 'action'. These are the two first words in the first two lines. We translate the gāthā like this:

When we are determined to go just in one direction, we will meet the
spring, and our march will be a heroic one.
Our actions should be free from speculation or competition.
If the lamp of our mind shines light on its own nature,
Then the wonderful transmission of the Dharma will be realized in both
East and West.

Zen Master Chân Thật (1884-1968)

Our Grand-Father teacher Zen Master Chân Thật received the lamp transmission from his elder brother in the Dharma, whose lineage name was Thanh Thái (清泰), Dharma name Chính Sắc (正色), and Dharma title Tuệ Minh (1861-1939, 慧明). Zen Master Tuệ Minh gave to his younger brother in the Dharma this gāthā:

Chân thật duy tùng thể tính không
Thâm cùng vọng thức bản lai không
Thỉ tri thị vật nguyên phi vật
Diệu dụng vô khuy chỉ tự công

真寔惟從体性中
深窮妄識本來空,
始知是物原非物
妙用無虧只自功.

Again, we see our Grand-Father Teacher's name (Chân Thật, Real Truth) in the first line of the gāthā:

Real truth can only be found in the nature of emptiness.
From the beginning until now, our wrong perceptions are empty.
That is why we know that things are unreal.
The wonderful Dharma is always there, it depends on our practice if we
can get in touch with it.

Zen Master Tuệ Minh (1861-1939)

Our Grand-Father Teacher was the youngest disciple of the Zen Master, whose lineage name was Hải Thiệu (海 紹) and whose Dharma name was Cương Kỷ (綱 紀). Zen Master Cương Kỷ (1810-1899) transmitted this gāthā to Zen Master Tuệ Minh:

Chính sắc thể viên minh
Tâm pháp bổn tự nhiên
Hư không thu nhất điểm
Kế tổ vĩnh lưu truyền.

正 色 体 圓 明
心 法 本 自 然
虛 空 收 一 點
繼 祖 永 留 傳.

In the first line one can read Chính Sắc (Color of Righteousness), which is Zen Master Tuệ Minh's Dharma name.

The color of righteousness is clear and complete in its nature,
The Dharma of the heart is basically natural.
The immense space can be compressed into a tiny dot.
Let us continue the work of our ancestors and transmit the Dharma to
the future generations.

Zen Master Cương Kỷ (1810-1899)

Zen Master Cương Kỷ received the lamp transmission from his teacher, Zen Master Nhất Định (1784-1847), who was the founder of Từ Hiếu root temple. This was the transmission gāthā:

Cương kỷ kinh quyền bất chấp phương
Tùy cơ ứng dụng thiện tư lương
Triêu triêu tương thức nan tầm tích
Nhật nhật xuyên y khiết phạn thường

綱紀經權不執方
隨機應用善思量,
朝朝相識難尋跡
日日穿衣契飯常.

Cương Kỷ means 'discipline' or 'law'. This is the translation of the gāthā:

To apply the law, flexibility should be there and we are not caught in our means.
In each situation we should make good use of our right thinking.
Every morning we recognize the faces of each other and yet it is difficult
to grasp each others' true nature.
We should apply the practice in our daily life like putting on our robe and eating our meals.

Zen Master Nhất Định (1784-1847)

His teacher, whose lineage name was Tánh Thiên (性 天) and whose Dharma name was Nhất Định (一定, Concentration on Oneness), received the lamp transmission in the year 1814 when he was 30 years old. He left many wonderful stories about his life, such as taking care of his old mother in a small hut, which later became Từ Hiếu root temple. Từ (慈) means 'loving kindness' and Hiếu (孝) means 'piety'. This was the gāthā he received:

Nhất Định chiếu quang minh
Hư không mãn nguyệt viên
Tổ tổ truyền phó chúc
Đạo Minh kế Tánh Thiên

一定照光明
虛空滿月圓
祖祖傳付祝
道明繼性天

The concentration on Oneness is radiating light,
Like a full moon in the immense space.
Generations after generations, our ancestors continue each other.
Therefore, it is Tánh Thiên who will continue Đạo Minh.

In the last line, one can read Zen Master Nhất Định's lineage name (Tánh Thiên) and his teacher's lineage name (Đạo Minh , 道明) whose Dharma name was Phổ Tịnh (普淨). Zen Master Phổ Tịnh was the Abbot of Báo Quốc temple (報國寺). He passed away in 1816.

Zen Master Phổ Tịnh (?- 1816)

Zen Master Đạo Minh's teacher had the lineage name Đại Tuệ (大慧), and the Dharma name Chiếu Nhiên (照然), who was the Abbot of both Báo Quốc temple (報國寺) and Thuyền Tôn temple (禪宗寺).
Zen Master Chiếu Nhiên's teacher had the lineage name Tế Ân (濟恩), and the Dharma name Lưu Quang (流光). He was the abbot of Báo Quốc temple.
Zen Master Lưu Quang's teacher had the lineage name Thiệt Diệu (寔妙), and the Dharma name Liễu Quán (了觀). Zen master Liễu Quán (1670-1742) was the author of the gāthā you see on your Certificate of Ordination, with the lines'... belongs to the 43rd generation of the Lâm Tế School and the 9th generation of the Liễu Quán Dharma Line.' As a disciple of Thầy, your lineage name is e.g., Compassion of the Heart. Heart (Tâm, 心) is the 9th classical Chinese character of Zen Master Liễu Quán's gāthā:

Thiệt tế đại đạo
Tánh hải thanh trừng
Tâm nguyên quảng nhuận
Đức bổn từ phong
Giới định phúc tuệ
Thể dụng viên thông
Vĩnh siêu trí quả
Mật khế thành công
Truyền trì diệu lý
Diễn xướng chánh tông
Hành giải tương ứng
Đạt ngộ chân không.

寔際大道, 性海清澄
心源廣潤, 德本慈風
戒定福慧, 體用圓通
永超智果, 密契成功
傳持妙理, 演暢正宗
行解相應, 達悟真空

Zen Master Liễu Quán (1670-1742)

This is Thầy's translation of the gāthā:

> The great way of Reality,
> Is our true nature's pure ocean.
> The source of Mind penetrates everywhere.
> From the roots of virtue springs the practice of compassion.
> Precepts, concentration and insight -
> The nature and function of all three are one.
> The fruit of transcendent wisdom,
> Can be realized by being wonderfully together.
> Maintain and transmit the wonderful principle,
> In order to reveal the true teaching!
> For the realization of True Emptiness to be possible,
> Wisdom and Action must go together.

If you are a Dharma teacher, having received the lamp transmission by Thầy, then your disciple, who receives the 5 mindfulness trainings from you, belongs to the 44th generation of the Lâm Tế School and the 10th generation of the Liễu Quán Dharma Line. He or she bears the lineage name which contains the 10th character of the gāthā in it (the 10th character is 'nguyên' (源), the source), e.g., Clarity of the Source.

Zen master Liễu Quán's teacher had the lineage name Minh Hoằng (明 弘), and the Dharma title Tử Dung (子 融). Zen Master Tử Dung belonged to the 34th generation of the Lâm Tế (Linji) school.

Zen Master Tử Dung

To end this letter, I would like to tell a story about the encounters between Zen Master Tử Dung and his disciple Liễu Quán.

It was during the year 1702, that the young Liễu Quán met his teacher in Ấn Tôn Temple (印宗寺) at Long Sơn Mountain in Thuận Hóa, Vietnam. Zen Master Tử Dung taught him to contemplate on the kōan: "All phenomena rely on Oneness, what does Oneness rely on?" (萬法歸一, 一歸何處). Liễu Quán practiced sincerely but could not make the breakthrough. One day, while reading Truyền Đăng Lục (Transmission of the Lamp Records, 傳燈錄), and seeing the sentence "Pointing to an object is to transmit the heart of the Dharma. People have difficulty understanding this" (指物傳心, 人不會處), he suddenly understood the koan. In 1708, he went back to Long Sơn Mountain and told his teacher about his understanding. His master replied:

"Arriving at a deep hole, yet being able to let go of your self,
It is only you who can bear it.
After your death, you are reborn again,
Who is the one who dares to criticize you?"

Liễu Quán laughed and clapped his hands, but his teacher said:

"You are not yet there!"

Liễu Quán replied:

"The weight is made from iron."

Zen Master Tử Dung was not satisfied with this answer. The next morning, his teacher told him:

"The conversation from yesterday is not over yet, please continue."

On this request, Liễu Quán said:

"If I would have known that the lamp contains its light, Then the rice would have been cooked a long time ago."

This time, Zen Master Tử Dung was pleased and gave his approval. In 1712, they met each other for the third time in Quảng Nam. He presented his "Bathing the Buddha" gāthā. Zen Master Tử Dung asked:

"The patriarch transmits to the patriarch.
The Buddha transmits to the Buddha.
What do they transmit to each other?"

Zen Master Liễu Quán replied immediately:

"On rocks the bamboo shoots grow longer than ten meters.
The weight of a turtle hair broom is three kilos."
石筍抽條長一丈
龜毛撫拂重三斤

Zen Master Tử Dung said:

"Row a boat on the high mountain.
Ride a horse at the bottom of the ocean."
高高山上行船
深深海底走馬

Zen Master Liễu Quán replied:

"Playing on a sitar without strings for hours,
Breaking a clay ox's horns makes him cry the whole night."
折角泥牛徹夜吼
沒絃琴死盡日彈

Zen Master Tử Dung was very happy with this answer. At this time Zen Master Liễu Quán was 42 years old.

Yours sincerely,
Pháp Dụng

University of
Sunderland