

Abstract

This work deals with poetry spoken by Vietnamese Buddhist monks shortly before their death during the reign of the Lý and Trần dynasties. The work analyzes the assumption that Vietnamese death poetry constitutes a complex unity and sets it in a certain social and historical background. It proves that the circumstances under which the poems were created are possibly their most distinguishing characteristics.

All the authors belonged to the two Zen schools founded by Wúyántng and Vinitaruci. The work is divided into two parts. The first part attempts to define this kind of poetry and describes the context associated with it. Old Vietnamese literature written in Chinese is still quite unknown area.

Furthermore, it is still not clear whether it should be considered to be “Vietnamese” or “foreign.” The interest in this literary production has started quite recently. It is based on the work of French school of the Far East (EFEO). In present-day Vietnam, the research on the subject of Vietnamese literature written in Chinese cumulates in the Institute of Chinese and Nôm studies (Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm).

Buddhism in South- East Asia has a long tradition. In Vietnam, between 10

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and 13

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century it was widely spread and enjoyed a special status. It was favored by government circles and popular among citizens. Buddhist monks, authors of the “death poems” originally came from different social classes; they entered the orders and in the times of the first independent dynasties (Ngô 939-945, Đinh 968-980, Lê 980-1009 and Lý 1009-1225) some of them reached important posts and practiced considerable influence on political