An Introduction to
the Study of Phạm Công Thiền

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Phạm Công Thiền (1941-) has read a vast amount of books since he was a child. And he became to consider when he was in his mid-twenty, that the root of the Vietnam War was the Western metaphysics, representative thinking under the influence of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). And also he challenged the destruction of all representative discourses under the influence of Nāgārjuna (150?-250?). His knowledge and his life are directly connected. By reading Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870-1966) and Henry Miller (1891-1980), he learned self-release by reaching the end of agony, realized to live freely not sticking to ideas that languages have made, and he has lived as he is. Thiền has noticed the essence of what is language for human being. "Human being is a slave of language", the last words in his writing Never the Sun Exist tell us intensively the essence of what is language for human being.

Man has a language world in addition to a bare world. Language makes a language world such as history, law, religion and philosophy. The Western world that consists of human-made rational logic had sought a well-ordered ideal world and it made a modern world that prevailed a whole world. But Thiền knew that the modern world where reason and logic are everything was the result of the history of Forgetfulness of Being by reading Heidegger. But in the Western metaphysics the original meaning of λόγος and φύσις had been forgotten that early Greek philosophers thought and said
about, and that Heidegger called the Truth of Being. There man view beings and being is viewed. This thinking way of truth is supported by the correspondence between the linguistic intelligence and things, and a man-centered modern world had made. Though man felt that he made a convenient world, oppositely he was bounded by it. In the twentieth century science technology enabled us to have mass slaughter weapons and at last atomic bombs that would bring about the risk of the suicide of mankind, a Cold War had begun when we avoid the risk by possessing nuclear weapons, and irrational destructive slaughter that represented the collision between Eastern and Western ideologies finally broke out in Vietnam where Thiền was born.

For Thiền each of liberalism, capitalism and communism is ideology of the Western metaphysics that forget what Heidegger called Truth of Being. Ideology is, the idea that the ratio, which forgets the very beginning experience of λόγος, supports. About the idea of Hegel's dialectic, Thiền put it in the face of Nāgārjuna's dialectic. Nāgārjuna's dialectic proves that human's language can't catch the real world, and denies the linguistic basis that is considered as the basis of the realization of human's idea. By Nāgārjuna's dialectic Thiền tried to reach the real changing world in the "silence of abyss" through making the Western metaphysics to say nothing that tries to rule the human linguistic world practically.

Henry Miller was his model that lived in a way of Zen. He had no money, no resources and no hopes. When he finally had nothing, that is, when he was free from linguistic delusions that disturbed his free life, he suddenly shouted "I am". It was not a realization of ego that the Western modern world thought as a certain thing, but the very beginning of Being that linguistically non-articulated chaotic world was suddenly torn apart. Miller might call it a birth from a chaotic womb that Nothingness with split turns to Be, Thiền called it Cunt that symbolizes Miller radically and he saw it equal with an event of Heidegger's Sein. Heidegger's Sein means the event that linguistically non-articulated darkness has come to have a very first linguistic articulation that early Greek philosophers expressed using the words such as λόγος, φύσις, ἀλήθεια. When we are apart from all the linguistic delusions, such an event will emerge suddenly and in a flash. It doesn't stick to all the linguistic delusions, it is the originally pure emergence, and the Self feels joy in being alive and shouts its first realized Being. Thiền calls the instant event "Poetry" that hidden chaotic world linguistically non-articulated emerges, and he found the emergence of "Poetry" in a scream Vietnamese Zen monk Không Lô (1119) made. He paid attention to the fact that the Vietnamese word "Cái" originally means "mother", he expressed and thought the first original emergence with words "Cái" (mother) and "Con" (child), the most familiar words for Vietnamese, and he connected it with Prajñā, the Wisdom of all the Tathāgatas.

The sudden and bordering event is equal to a plenty of chaotic nothingness that is linguistically non-articulated, and a flow without any disturbance. It is the Miller's fluent life, "transparent source"(source diaphane) that Hàn Mặc Tử (1912-1940) had found, the world of Emptiness in
Mahāyāna, "The body is lightning: it's there and then it's not" of Zen Master Văn Hạnh (?-1025), and "The wondrous nature of Emptiness is inconceivable" of Zen Master Ngô Ân (1020-1088). Or like Nguyễn Du (1765-1820) he read Vājrachedikā-prajñā-pāramitā-sūtra thousand times and suddenly realized that "No word" IS "Truth". In Vietnam before there were Văn Hạnh, Ngô Ân, Không Lô,(389,720),(498,750) and Nguyễn Du that they could Be and lived in the real world, bhūta-koṭi. Their real world is not a place where human sees things as things, but a place where fluid fulfilled nothingness and Being with split coexist. Thiền looked up the Buddhism words bhūta-koṭi and bhāva, found the derivation of the words ्वभू in Sanskrit. He pointed out that they have the same origin of the words with Heidegger's Sein (bin, bist) and φύσις in Greek. And he showed the etymological basis to translate Heidegger's Sein into "性", "性体" and "体性", and he opened the possibility of a conversation on the basis of ्वभू between a wisdom of Mahāyāna that is popular in Vietnam and a wisdom of the original Western world that is different from the Western metaphysics where Being is forgotten.

We once have to remove a linguistic world where Life as it is is restricted customarily and fixedly. But on the other hand, a language gives human a world. Heidegger says, "In the word, in the speech, the thing firstly emerge and is." And Thiền cites the words, too. Non-articulated flow of Life is articulated by the mother tongue. Human is born in its linguistic system, and lives in its world. For Thiền non-articulated flow of Life begins from "the transparent source" in Tibetan high mountains, and reached Cửu Long river (Mekong river) where Asian "abyss" is. Then the non-articulated flow of Life is articulated by Vietnamese that is his old home’s words Mỹ Tho like plants growing on the riverside of Cửu Long river. He emerges firstly in a world of Vietnamese, and is. For him “the Vietnamese people” is in a world of Vietnamese. But now whole places of Vietnam are covered with the Western metaphysics and its words forgetting Being, and have a risk of losing the root of his maternal home Vietnam and Vietnamese language. Exiling himself and losing his homeland, Thiền listens to Vietnamese language and tries to find his homeland in Vietnamese language again. But it’s not enough to speak and write in it. Human can’t run away from the linguistic world while he is there as human. But he can create a new world using a language that is different from the linguistic world we have already had. Living as a free poet, he is not restricted by the normal Vietnamese expression and syntax, finds sacred brightness in ordinary Vietnamese, seeks possibilities of new ways of expression in it, creates fresh Vietnam by writing poet, and tries to go back home as words again.