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# A Comparative Perspective on Zen Poetry: *The Song of Enlightenment* and *Madman's Chant* in Mahāyāna Philosophy

*Le Thi Quynh (Sīlaṭṭhitā)*

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University  
Email: [tnhanhthuong@gmail.com](mailto:tnhanhthuong@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores meditative insights through the lens of two exemplary poems: *The Song of Enlightenment* by Zen Master Yongjia Xuanjue and *Madman's Chant* by Tuệ Trung Thước Sĩ. It compares their perspectives with the core teachings of Mahayana scriptures, including the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Lotus Sutra), *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (Diamond Sutra), *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Flower Adornment Sutra), *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (Discourse of the Descent into Laṅkā), and the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*.

*The Song of Enlightenment* emphasizes sudden enlightenment (satori), the non-dual nature of reality, and the immediacy of insight, aligning with teachings in the *Diamond Sutra* and *Avatamsaka Sūtra* on the transient nature of phenomena and the interconnectedness of all existence. Conversely, *Madman's Chant* embodies a liberated, iconoclastic spirit that transcends conventional norms, echoing the unconventional wisdom of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, where enlightenment integrates with everyday life.

The paper identifies shared Zen principles across these texts: the rejection of attachment, emphasis on direct experience, and intrinsic Buddha nature. Despite differing styles and emphases, both poems embody Zen's core philosophy of liberation through insight beyond dualities. This synthesis illustrates Zen thought's richness and poetic articulation, demonstrating a seamless unity with Mahāyāna philosophy.

Through this comparative study, the paper underlines Zen's relevance in conveying profound spiritual truths while enriching Buddhism's cultural and philosophical heritage. Integrating these poetic expressions with Buddha's teachings offers a deeper appreciation of Zen's transformative power and enduring significance.

### I. Introduction

Zen Buddhism, a major school of thought in Mahāyāna Buddhism, is not merely a path of realization but also a distinctive spiritual and cultural foundation of the East. Unlike doctrinal systems that rely on theory and language, Zen emphasizes direct experience and the ability to attain liberation in each moment of daily life. This philosophy is richly and vividly expressed in numerous Zen poetic works, among which two outstanding compositions are *The Song of Enlightenment* (Zhèngdào gē, 證道歌) by Master Xuánjué (Huyền Giác) and *The Madman's Chant* (Fàng kuáng yín, 放狂吟) by Tuệ Trung Thước Sĩ.

These two works are not only the crystallization of personal meditative experiences but also vividly reflect the core principles of Zen Buddhism. At the same time, they are closely related to Mahāyāna thought as expounded in canonical texts such as the *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*), the *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), the *Flower Ornament Sutra* (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*), the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, and the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*.

*The Song of Enlightenment* is regarded as a manifesto of sudden awakening, embodying the spirit of non-duality, non-attachment, and direct realization of truth. It aligns with the idea of "the Dharma is without fixed Dharma" in the *Diamond Sutra* and the non-dual liberation described in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*. In contrast, *The Madman's Chant* stands out with its free-spirited and unconventional tone, advocating the breaking of attachments, engaging with the world while remaining unattached, resonating with the "neither Buddhist nor Zen" spirit of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*.

This paper aims to deeply analyze Zen meditative thought as expressed in these two works while comparing them with Mahāyāna scriptures. Through this examination, it highlights both the consistency and diversity of Zen spirit in poetry. Such a study not only allows readers to grasp the profound dimensions of Zen thought but also sheds light on the cultural, philosophical, and artistic values within the stream of Vietnamese and broader Eastern Buddhism.

## II. The Meditative Insight in *The Song of Enlightenment*

### 1. Context and Overview

*The Song of Enlightenment* (Zhèngdào gē, 證道歌) is a renowned poem by the Chan master Xuánjué (665–713). It serves as a testament to his personal experience of enlightenment, not merely as an autobiographical record but also as a powerful declaration of the spirit of “sudden awakening” (*dìnwù*, 頓悟) in the Chan tradition, especially following the era of the Sixth Patriarch Huinóng (Huineng). Over time, the poem has become an essential reference for Chan practitioners, inspiring them to trust in their own capacity for direct awakening. Furthermore, “*The Song of Enlightenment* played a crucial role in propagating the doctrine of sudden enlightenment and solidifying the position of Southern Chan Buddhism”<sup>1</sup>.

The poem emphasizes that truth is not confined to scriptures or formal rituals but is instead realized through direct experience. Xuánjué employs vivid language to affirm the immediacy of awakening. As such, his poem uniquely blends deep spiritual realization with refined poetic artistry, exerting a lasting influence on generations of meditators<sup>2</sup>.

The poem’s language is accessible and free from rigid scholasticism, avoiding excessive references to Buddhist terminologies or scriptural citations. This simplicity embodies the Chan principle of *bùlì wénzì* (不立文字) - “not relying on words and letters.” The poem’s direct expression of enlightenment reveals Xuánjué’s confidence in the truth he had realized.

*The scholar of the way is at ease, beyond learning and action.*

*Why remove delusions? Why seek the truth?”*

*The true nature of ignorance is none other than Buddha-nature.*

*The illusory body of emptiness is none other than the Dharma body.*

The opening lines exemplify Chan insight that transcends language and conceptual thought, affirming the realization of truth in the immediacy of lived experience. Xuánjué begins with the phrase “The scholar of the way is at ease, beyond learning and action”, portraying an awakened individual who has surpassed the need for intellectual pursuit. Such a person lives freely, unburdened by conceptual distinctions. This serene stance is not the outcome of theoretical refinement but arises naturally from a mind free of clinging.

The pivotal line follows: “Why remove delusions? Why seek the truth?” Unlike other Buddhist traditions that emphasize gradual purification of the mind, Chan does not advocate struggling to eliminate delusions or chasing after truth. From the ultimate perspective of Chan, delusions and truth are non-dual. The moment one ceases striving to eliminate illusions or grasp truth, the mind abides effortlessly in reality as it is. This teaching directly aligns with the Chan principle of *bùlì wénzì* - truth is not found in words but is revealed in immediate experience.

The last two lines – “The true nature of ignorance is none other than Buddha-nature. The illusory body of emptiness is none other than the Dharma body” - further clarify this non-dual insight. Ignorance is not a separate entity opposed to enlightenment; when seen correctly, its true nature is Buddha-nature. Similarly, the ephemeral body, arising due to conditions, is not apart from the Dharma body (*Dharmakāya*). This stanza thus serves as a proclamation of non-discriminative wisdom, revealing the essential non-duality of all things, and resonates deeply with the core teachings of the *Diamond Sutra*, *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, and *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

### 2. Non-Duality

Xuánjué masterfully conveys the spirit of *advaya* (non-duality) in his poem by dismantling numerous pairs of binary opposites that typically shape dualistic human perception.

First, regarding life and death, he affirms the unborn and undying nature of the true mind, transcending the fear of cyclic existence. The verse “*The true nature of ignorance is none other than Buddha-nature. The illusory body of emptiness is none other than the Dharma body*”, asserts the unity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Ignorance and enlightenment are not separate opposites; rather, Buddha-nature exists within ignorance itself. This view aligns with the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, where the Buddha describes the four qualities (*nitya, sukha, ātman, śuddha*) of the Buddha-nature as ever-present in all beings.

Additionally, the distinction between ordinary beings and sages is dismantled. Xuánjué states: “*The ordinary person is Buddha; birth and death are nirvāṇa*”. This declaration reflects the *Lotus Sutra*’s teaching of *ekayāna* (One Buddha Vehicle), where the Buddha proclaims that all beings, regardless of their present condition, inherently possess the seed of enlightenment.

The opposition between motion and stillness is also nullified through a comprehensive view of the true mind. The verse “*Motion and stillness are one; nothing is fixed*”. reveals that Chan does not advocate escaping from movement or clinging to stillness. Instead, awakening means maintaining a stable mind amid the flow of existence, remaining undisturbed by external circumstances. This is the essence of meditative insight, realizing the unshakable nature of awareness even in the midst of change.

<sup>1</sup> Yampolsky, Philip B., 1967, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, p. 155

<sup>2</sup> Watson, Burton, 1993, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi: A Translation of the Lin-chi lu*, p. 32

Similarly, Xuánjué negates the duality of existence and non-existence through an understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). The line “*Abandoning both being and non-being - this is true practice*” instructs that genuine practice does not involve attachment to concepts of existence (*sat*) or non-existence (*asat*), as all phenomena arise dependently and lack inherent nature. This insight harmonizes with the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and the *Diamond Sutra*, in which the Buddha declares: “*All that has form is illusory*”. Emptiness is not nihilism but the boundless potential from which all phenomena arise.

Most notably, the famous line “*Words are not two; meaning is unborn*” encapsulates the entire spirit of Chan. Xuánjué asserts that all language and conceptualization are provisional tools that cannot capture ultimate reality. Truth is not found in conceptual distinctions but is directly realized beyond words and birth-death. This view aligns with the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*’s teaching that “*Mind alone manifests, speech ceases*”. It also parallels postmodern philosophical critiques regarding the limitations of language in conveying absolute truth. Thus, through dissolving all oppositional constructs, *The Song of Enlightenment* affirms the non-duality of the true mind and invites the reader to experience reality beyond concepts.

### 3. Sudden Awakening

Sudden awakening is the central theme of *The Song of Enlightenment*, depicted through vivid and concise poetic imagery. A striking metaphor appears in the verse:

“*Awakening is like the moon reflected in a drop of dew in empty space*”.

Here, “a drop of dew” symbolizes the inherently pure mind, unstained by worldly defilements. “Empty space” represents the unobstructed and boundless nature of awakening. The moment one realizes enlightenment, the mind becomes free, luminous, and unbound—like a dew drop floating effortlessly in the sky. This image encapsulates the lightness and spontaneity of realization.

Conversely, Xuánjué contrasts this state with ignorance:

“*Without awakening, worldly dust always clings*.”<sup>3</sup>

The term “worldly dust” (*trần lao*) is an allegory for afflictions that obscure the mind. Those who remain unenlightened are entangled in suffering, delaying their liberation due to attachment and delusion. By juxtaposing these two states, the poem vividly highlights the immediacy of awakening: with a single moment of insight, all defilements vanish.

This doctrine of sudden awakening closely parallels the teachings of Huìnéng in the *Platform Sutra*, where he declares:

“*There is no realization apart from seeing one’s own nature*.”<sup>4</sup>

Whereas gradual cultivation (*jian xiu*) emphasizes accumulating merit and wisdom over lifetimes, sudden awakening (*dun wu*) directly cuts through delusions, likened to a lightning bolt piercing the darkness. However, sudden enlightenment does not negate gradual practice; rather, it affirms that liberation lies in directly realizing the mind’s innate purity.

Thus, *The Song of Enlightenment* invites all beings to turn inward, abandon external seeking, and recognize their inherent Buddha-nature - here and now.

## III. The Meditative Perspective in *Madman’s Chant* (*Phóng Cuồng Ngâm*)

### 1. The Independent Mind Entering the World

The poem *Madman’s Chant* (*Phóng Cuồng Ngâm*) by Zen Master Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ stands out with the perspective of *Tâm độc nhập thế gian* (“the independent mind entering the world”). This thought reflects both a unique depth of Zen realization and a distinctive expression compared to other Zen works of the time, such as *Chứng Đạo Ca* by Master Huyền Giác.

#### The Profound Meaning of “Tâm độc nhập thế gian”

The term *độc* (“independent”) in *Tâm độc nhập thế gian* does not imply loneliness or detachment from the world, but rather the absolute autonomy of the mind. According to Tuệ Trung, the true mind is inherently pure and free, untainted and unrestricted by worldly conventions and attachments. It exists and operates within the world without being influenced by it, like a lotus blooming in mud yet remaining unstained. This *independence* is not a forced separation but an inherent nature, a self-sustaining freedom that transcends dualities such as praise and blame, gain and loss.

### 2. Differences in Expression Compared to *Chứng Đạo Ca*

The expressive style of *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm* is marked by spontaneity, freedom, and even a certain ‘*ngông*’ (reckless boldness), which sharply contrasts with the solemn and didactic tone of *Chứng Đạo Ca*. This difference may reflect the personalities and spiritual stages of the two authors.

Huyền Giác, in *Chứng Đạo Ca*, seems to be at the stage of affirming realization - delivering direct and forceful proclamations of truth. In contrast, Tuệ Trung appears to embody a state of effortless spontaneity, having surpassed all concern for formality, freely expressing his profound insights in an uninhibited and natural manner:

<sup>3</sup> The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, translated by Philip B. Yampolsky, 1967, pp. 135-140

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 145-150

*“Heaven and earth glance around - so vast and boundless!*

*With staff in hand, I wander - beyond every direction.*

*Sometimes soaring high - like clouds atop the peaks,*

*Sometimes sinking deep - like waves in the endless sea.”*

Scholars have noted that *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm* represents a later, more advanced stage of Zen understanding- one that breaks free from conventional frameworks<sup>5</sup>. Thích Nhất Hạnh also observed the contrast between Huyền Giác’s assertive tone and Tuệ Trung’s relaxed, self-assured manner.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Connection to the *Mahāyāna* Concept of Mind (*Citta*)

Tuệ Trung’s idea of ‘*independent mind*’ (*Tâm độc nhập thế gian*) resonates deeply with *Mahāyāna* concepts of *citta* (mind). The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* speaks of *ekacitta* (one mind) as the source of all phenomena, yet its nature remains tranquil and untainted:

*“The Tathāgata-garbha, in its own nature, is originally pure”<sup>7</sup>.*

Similarly, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* presents the doctrine of *Buddhadhātu* (Buddha-nature), affirming that all beings possess the potential for enlightenment, an essence untouched by afflictions:

*“All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature”<sup>8</sup>.*

Viewed through this lens, ‘*independent mind*’ (*Tâm độc nhập thế gian*) can be seen as an expression of Buddha-nature in the world - an intrinsic capacity within each person to live freely, unbound by worldly suffering. Like these *Mahāyāna* concepts, Tuệ Trung’s independent mind is both untainted by worldly defilements and the latent foundation for awakening, always present and capable of unfolding within each being.

### 4. Manifestation of “*Tâm độc nhập thế gian*” in *Madman’s Chant* (*Phóng Cuồng Ngâm*)

This concept is vividly illustrated in the poem’s imagery and liberated language. The lines depict a mind that moves freely, untouched by worldly concerns:

*“Dust from the world does not cling to my feet,*

*White clouds drift carefreely across the sky.”*

Here, the poet conveys an unburdened spirit, unaffected by worldly entanglements - like dust that cannot stick to the feet of one who walks freely or clouds that move effortlessly through the sky. Similarly: *“The bustling marketplace laughs in uproar; sit still, watching in silence.”*

This verse portrays an individual who remains undisturbed by the commotion of the world, observing without being drawn into its turbulence.

Thus, *Tâm độc nhập thế gian* in *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm* embodies a profound Zen realization - an independent, liberated mind unstained by worldly influences. The poem’s free-spirited style, distinct from the solemnity of *Chứng Đạo Ca*, highlights Tuệ Trung’s unique spiritual stage. Its connection to *Mahāyāna* texts and the vivid imagery further illuminates the depth and originality of this insight.

### 5. Breaking Attachments and Non-Abiding

Beyond the autonomy of *Tâm độc nhập thế gian*, *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm* also manifests a radical spirit of *breaking attachments* and the principle of *non-abiding*, both central themes in Zen realization. The poem transcends all forms of attachment, whether to self, doctrines, or dualistic concepts, reflecting a mind that abides in *no-thought* (*wu-nian*), *no-form* (*wu-xiang*), and *non-abiding* (*wu-zhu*), as taught by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng.

### 6. Transcending All Attachments

Tuệ Trung strongly expresses this freedom from attachments in several ways:

a. Non-attachment to Self (*ātman*): The poem negates the idea of an enduring, independent self, aligning with the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* (non-self). For example:

*“The body like water’s foam, the mind - like a fleeting reflection”.*

This verse highlights impermanence and insubstantiality, rejecting any fixed identity. It echoes the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, which emphasize the emptiness of all phenomena, including the self.

<sup>5</sup> Nguyễn Lang. *Việt Nam Phật giáo sử luận*. NXB Đông Phương, 2019, Tập 2, tr. 315-318.

<sup>6</sup> Thích Thanh Từ. *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*. NXB Phật Giáo TP. HCM, 1992, tr. 56-58

<sup>7</sup> Kinh Lăng già, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki Anh dịch từ bản Sanskrit, Thích Chơn Thiện và Trần Tuấn Mẫn Việt dịch, Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005, trang 42.

<sup>8</sup> Kinh Đại Bát Niết Bàn, Phẩm Sư Tử Hống, Phần 1, quyển 25.

<https://thienphatgiao.org/kinh-dai-bat-niet-ban-q27>

b. Non-attachment to Doctrines (*dharma*): Tuệ Trung suggests that doctrines are mere expedient means, not ultimate truths. He illustrates this idea through metaphor:

“*Sūtras and verses like fingers pointing to the moon*”.

This image parallels the *Diamond Sūtra*’s teaching:

“*Even the Dharma must be abandoned, how much more so that which is not Dharma?*”<sup>9</sup>

Any attachment, even to the Buddha’s teachings, becomes an obstacle to liberation.

c. Non-attachment to Dualities: *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm* transcends binary opposites such as right and wrong, success and failure, praise and blame:

“*Let others speak of right and wrong, Praise and blame - I leave them be*”.

These lines reveal a mind beyond all distinctions, free from the fluctuations of external judgment.

## 7. Deep connection to Huineng’s teachings on non-thought, no-form, non-abiding

The poem naturally embodies the *non-abiding mind* taught by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng.

Non-thought (*wu-nian*): A mind free from conceptual fixation, reflecting reality as it is:

“*If in the mind there is straightness, wisdom will always shine. To cease evil and cultivate good is to awaken Buddha’s knowledge*”<sup>10</sup>.

The mind is like a mirror - reflecting yet retaining nothing.

No-form (*wu-xiang*): Seeing beyond external appearances, realizing truth beyond forms:

“*Buddha resides in the mind, seek not outside*”<sup>11</sup>.

This emphasizes that Buddha-nature is within, not found in external rituals.

Non-abiding (*wu-zhu*): A mind unrestricted, moving freely:

“*Walking, standing, sitting, lying - All are Zen*”.

This echoes Huineng’s *Platform Sūtra*:

“*Its nature neither increases in the wise nor decreases in the ignorant; Neither defiled in affliction nor purified in meditation.*”<sup>12</sup>

In summary, *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm* is not only an expression of *Tâm độc nhập thế gian* but also a direct embodiment of *breaking attachments* and *non-abiding* fundamental Zen insights that transcend all conceptual limitations.

## IV. Comparative Analysis of Meditative Insight in Both Poems and Their Intersection with Mahāyāna Scriptures

### 1. General Comparison of the Two Poems

“*Song of Enlightenment*” (*Chứng Đạo Ca*) is a powerful, didactic hymn affirming the path and state of enlightenment. In contrast, “*Song of Unrestrained Freedom*” (*Phóng Cuồng Ngâm*) expresses a free-spirited voice, exuding the ease and spontaneity of a mind that has transcended all constraints. These two poems reflect different stages and styles of meditative realization and expression, yet both are precious jewels in Vietnamese Buddhist literature.

This difference can be explained by the personalities and spiritual progress of the two authors - while Master Xuánjié (Huyền Giác) seems to be asserting his enlightenment, Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ appears to have reached a state of complete freedom, unconstrained by formalities.

Comparison Criteria	Song of Enlightenment ( <i>Huyền Giác</i> )	Song of Unrestrained Freedom ( <i>Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ</i> )
Purpose & Tone	Asserts enlightenment, proclaiming the attained truth. Strong, decisive, confident, and didactic tone, aiming to transmit experience and the path of practice.	Expresses the freedom and ease of one who has attained liberation. The tone is unrestrained, natural, somewhat “reckless”, unconstrained by conventions, emphasizing transcendence rather than instruction.

<sup>9</sup> Kinh Kim Cang, Hòa thượng Thích Trí Tịnh dịch, *Kinh Kim Cang Bát Nhã Ba La Mật*, NXB Tôn Giáo, 2001, tr. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Kinh Pháp Bảo Đàn, Thích Duy Lực dịch, Nhà xuất bản Tôn Giáo, 2017, tr. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., tr. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., tr.71

<b>Core Philosophical Content</b>	Describes the stages and states of enlightenment, emphasizing the unity of mind and Buddha, and the nonduality of all phenomena. Advocates abandoning delusions to realize the inherently pure mind.	Highlights the independence of the mind ("The mind alone enters the world"), radical deconstruction of attachments (no-self, no-law, no-abode), and the authenticity of inner experience. Expresses absolute freedom beyond all constraints and conventions.
<b>Linguistic Style &amp; Imagery</b>	Uses direct, powerful language with many assertive statements. The imagery is highly symbolic and philosophical.	Uses natural, vivid language, sometimes simple and worldly yet deeply insightful. The imagery is unrestrained and spontaneous, reflecting ease within the world.
<b>Formality &amp; Structure</b>	Maintains a solemn tone, adhering to certain traditional Buddhist poetic forms.	Free-spirited, breaking conventional structures, embodying the "madness" in expression.
<b>View on Practice</b>	Emphasizes diligence, renunciation, and practice to attain enlightenment.	Emphasizes freedom in practice, not constrained by rituals or external forms, advocating direct realization of the mind.
<b>Stage of Realization</b>	Likely represents a stage of affirming and transmitting initial enlightenment experiences.	Likely represents a stage of effortless ease after having attained liberation, unbound by any framework.
<b>Illustrative Example</b>	"The true nature is present - no need to search far away". (Direct assertion of truth)	"Dust does not cling to my feet; white clouds drift freely". (Expression of freedom and detachment) "Seeing the Buddha, I do not bow; meeting the Patriarch, I do not salute." (Radical deconstruction of attachments, pure authenticity)

Both *Song of Enlightenment* and *Song of Unrestrained Freedom* emphasize nonduality and freedom in practice. They reject attachment to forms and stress the importance of direct experience and self-realization: "Truth is not far away; just look within yourself".

This spirit aligns with *Mahāyāna* scriptures, where enlightenment is not an external attainment but a direct realization within one's own mind. However, while *Song of Enlightenment* focuses on sudden awakening and the consistency of the meditative path, *Song of Unrestrained Freedom* embodies a more radical deconstruction of attachments, sometimes even expressing paradoxes of reality.

## V. Correlation with *Mahāyāna* scriptures

From the perspective of meditative insight, reading *Song of Enlightenment* by Master Xuánjié and *Song of Unrestrained Freedom* by Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ reveals a common theme: truth is not external but inherently present within the self. Enlightenment is not about attaining something new but awakening to what has always been.

Master Xuánjié affirms this in *Song of Enlightenment*:

"Buddha-nature is a perfect jewel, imprinted in the mind's ground; Like robes of mist and cloud enveloping the body"<sup>13</sup>.

This echoes the doctrine of Buddha-nature in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*:

"Buddha-nature neither arises nor ceases, neither increases nor decreases"<sup>14</sup>.

The intrinsic nature of enlightenment has never been absent - only obscured by delusion.

Similarly, in *Song of Unrestrained Freedom*, Tuệ Trung declares:

"The mind alone enters the world"<sup>15</sup>.

This is not merely a proclamation of detachment but also a deep confidence in the inherent purity of the mind. He further emphasizes:

"All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature - so why search elsewhere?"<sup>16</sup>

This resonates with the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*:

"The three realms are mere fabrications of the mind"<sup>17</sup>.

The mind, in its essence, is pure, untainted by worldly defilements.

The *Lotus Sūtra* reiterates:

<sup>13</sup> *Chứng Đạo Ca*, Thiền sư Huyền Giác, Cư sĩ Thiên Trúc dịch, NXB Lá Bối, 1970, tr.64

<sup>14</sup> *Kinh Đại Bát Niết Bàn*, Thích Trí Tịnh dịch, NXB Tôn Giáo, 2001, tr.506

<sup>15</sup> *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm*, Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ, Lê Mạnh Thát biên dịch, NXB TP. HCM, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Kinh Lăng Già*, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki dịch Anh từ bản Sanskrit, Thích Chơn Thiện & Trần Tuấn Mẫn dịch Việt, NXB Tôn Giáo, 2005, tr. 144

"Buddha-nature is the intrinsic potential for awakening in all beings"<sup>18</sup>.

Both Xuánjié and Tuệ Trung demonstrate that enlightenment is not about seeking something external but realizing the inherent source within.

Even in the *Diamond Sūtra*, we find:

"All conditioned appearances are illusions. If one sees that appearances are not real, one sees the Tathāgata"<sup>19</sup>.

This underscores that true nature is beyond all forms, inherently still and unchanging - precisely the realization that Xuánjié and Tuệ Trung consistently point to.

While both poems affirm that self-nature is already complete and lacking nothing, they differ in expression: Xuánjié is direct, resolute, and doctrinal, whereas Tuệ Trung is spontaneous, unrestrained, using everyday imagery to deconstruct attachments and embrace absolute freedom.

In verses such as:

"Pointing directly to the mind is Buddha - what need for so many arguments?"<sup>20</sup>

And:

"Amidst a world of no concerns, I am a carefree wanderer;<sup>21</sup> Seeking neither fame nor fortune, I have no fears or worries"<sup>21</sup>.

The essence is clear - one only needs to return to the mind. There is no need to seek externally, for the dharma body is inherently full and complete in every breath and every present moment.

## VI. Conclusion

This paper has explored the unique meditative perspectives expressed in two seminal Buddhist poetic works: *Song of Enlightenment* by Master Xuánjié and *Song of Unrestrained Freedom* by Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ. These works exemplify the shared emphasis on the nonduality of reality and sudden awakening - core characteristics of Chan (Zen) Buddhism. Both poems point directly to the mind, revealing the ever-present truth without reliance on form or scripture, much like the teachings in the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*.

However, they also exhibit distinct nuances. *Song of Enlightenment* maintains a solemn, definitive tone, firmly asserting realization, while *Song of Unrestrained Freedom* embodies a radical freedom, dismantling conventions with a spirit of non-attachment. Despite stylistic differences, both remain consistent with the Mahāyāna doctrine that intrinsic nature is already complete - an idea illuminated in scriptures such as the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, *Lotus Sūtra*, *Lankavatāra Sūtra*, and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.

A crucial point is the Mahāyāna spirit of transcendence without detachment from the world. Even while seeking liberation from cyclic existence, the enlightened beings do not abandon the world. The Bodhisattva ideal embodies an unbound engagement with the world, aiding sentient beings while remaining free from attachments - unlike the individualistic liberation goal of Theravāda Buddhism. The Bodhisattvas practice non-abiding, unattached to even the forms of practice or salvation, as articulated in the *Diamond Sūtra*.

Throughout history, Buddhism has always been a guiding force for nations, advocating ethics, compassion, and wisdom to foster peace and well-being. Buddhist teachings, emphasizing mindfulness and responsibility, continue to be a vital spiritual resource for a harmonious society.

Ultimately, *Song of Enlightenment* and *Song of Unrestrained Freedom* are not just remarkable poetic works but vivid expressions of profound Buddhist insight. They beautifully bridge personal realization with the deep principles of the scriptures, while embodying an engaged, compassionate, and liberated Buddhist life for the benefit of all beings.

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<sup>18</sup> *Kinh Pháp Hoa*, Thích Trí Tịnh dịch, NXB Tôn Giáo, 2002, tr.28

<sup>19</sup> *Kinh Kim Cang*, Hòa thượng Thích Trí Tịnh dịch, NXB Tôn Giáo, 2001, tr. 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Chứng Đạo Ca*, ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Phóng Cuồng Ngâm*, ibid.

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