



## FROM THE VIEWPOINT “WU-WEI” OF TAOISM TO THE VIEWPOINT “NHÀN” (LEISURE) OF NGUYEN BINH KHIEM

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### Abstract:

Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491 - 1585), a great thinker of Vietnam in the sixteenth century, contributed to the history of Vietnamese thought with many valuable ideas, including the “Nhàn” (leisure) viewpoint. The thought “Nhàn” (leisure) was originated from Vietnamese social characteristics in the sixteenth century and inherited values in the traditions of national culture and the quintessence of human culture, especially under the profound and clear influence of ideology on human life of Taoism and Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu argued that human beings could not interfere with the evolution of all things and they had to be “wu-wei” in accordance to the rule – “Tao” (faith) to adapt to the objective development of nature and society. Through the method of historical and logical research, analysis and synthesis, the authors found that, from the viewpoint of “wu-wei” of Taoism, Nguyen Binh Khiem proposed a very profound and idyllic “Nhàn” (leisure) viewpoint to deal with the fluctuations of social history at that time through two issues, namely the thought on the category “Nhàn” (leisure) and the content of the category “Nhàn” (leisure) through human beings’ relations with nature and dealing with themselves. His “Nhàn” (leisure) viewpoint, due to objective and subjective circumstances, could not overcome the limitations of the times. However, in the current historical and social conditions, if we know how to inherit the values and overcome limitations, the “Nhàn” (leisure) viewpoint still has modern meanings.

**Keywords:** Taoism, Nguyen Binh Khiem

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## 1. Introduction

Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585) was not only a writer, poet, educator, and politician, but also a typical Vietnamese thinker in the sixteenth century, historically recognized as a person "*studying widely the books, understanding deeply the meaning of the Book of Changes and the words of the Qing emissary*"; Chu Xan praised him: "*Linh Nam people know doctrine, there is only Mr. Trinh Tuyen*"<sup>ii</sup>. In the field of thought, Nguyen Binh Khiem contributed to the history treasure of Vietnamese national ideology with many valuable ideas. One of the most important and persistent ideas in his system of thought is the viewpoint "Nhàn" (leisure).

Nguyen Binh Khiem's idea of "Nhàn" (leisure) is a prominent issue throughout his thought, because it is a reflection of Vietnamese socio-historical characteristics and requirements of the sixteenth century, with many political and social upheaval, full of injustice and moral decline in society. Nguyen Binh Khiem lived during the crisis period of feudalism; the chaos happening everywhere made Confucian scholars see that the philosophy of Confucius was not enough to explain some natural and social phenomena. Therefore, Confucian scholars must find other philosophical systems to explain. This was the philosophy of Lao Tzu, because the views of this doctrine could not only explain the phenomena taking place in social life but also provided solutions to help people solve problems that real life posed at the time. Nguyen Binh Khiem with his moral, intellectual and politically sensitive vision inherited the values in the national cultural tradition, combined with the values of human ethics of Confucianism, the idea of compassion, the joy of Buddhism and especially influenced by the deep moral values of Taoism, to give his solution about the times.

According to Lao Tzu, the natural world and human activities take place according to a certain rule called "religion". In the course of evolution, everything inevitably opposes itself to turn out to be new. Humans cannot interfere with this process. Therefore, for nature as well as for society, Lao Tzu advised people to be "wu-wei"; and only "wu-wei" is to adapt to the objective development, to the religion.

The "wu-wei" attitude of Lao Tzu is the negative attitude of people against social events as well as natural phenomena. Nguyen Binh Khiem selectively inherited to harmonize Lao Tzu philosophy with Confucius philosophy to explain the natural and social issues at that time, especially showing his attitude and actions in that time in a soft and flexible way. He wrote:

*"Ai là kẻ sĩ cao khiết trong thiên hạ? Sống an nhàn, ta là bậc tiên trên thế gian"*<sup>iii</sup>

*(Who is the noble scholar in the world? Living at ease, I am the fairy in the world).*

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<sup>ii</sup> *Dynasty charter*, Volume 1, (Translation of the Institute of History), History publishing House, Hanoi, 1960, p.298-300.

<sup>iii</sup> Office of Ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1404.

Nguyen Binh Khiem's views on "Nhàn" (*leisure*) are reflected in two main issues.

## 2. The concept of "Nhàn" (*leisure*) of Nguyen Binh Khiem

If Taoism believes that people need to be "wu-wei" against the objective laws of nature and society, Nguyen Binh Khiem's attitude was manifested through leisure. His leisure was to follow the religion of nature and society. Because he knew that, in the constant movement of "religion", people even against it are useless, only to plague themselves. In the period before and during the Mac Dynasty's mandarin period, Nguyen Binh Khiem had the opportunity to see clearly that ups and downs were natural, no one could change, so he retreated to Trung Am's hometown to relax with nature. He followed Lao Tzu's philosophy, living leisurely in Bach Van hermitage until the end of his life:

*"Sống cảnh nhàn, ta chiếm riêng một vùng nhỏ đất trời,  
Quán Trung Tân, am Bạch Vân thuộc xóm ở ngoài con ngòi nhỏ.  
Gió mát từ sông thổi qua chỗ chiếu gối,  
Ánh trăng từ trên núi chiếu vào đàn và chén.  
Thong dong trên đời đã có sẵn thú vui điền viên,  
Già ốm, thẹn với sự tôn trọng tuổi cao, đức lớn của người đời"<sup>iv</sup>.*

*(Living in leisure, I owned a small area of land and sky  
Trung Tan Inn, Bach Van hermitage in the neighborhood outside the little canal.  
Cool breeze from the river blowing through the resting place,  
Moonlight from the mountains shined on the herd and the cup.  
Leisure life was available with the pleasure of country life,  
Old, sick, ashamed with respect for the elderly, great virtue of the people)*

Nguyen Binh Khiem explained that the law of change and rotation of the universe and society was due to the laws of nature:

*"Số chẵn, số lẻ cùng ứng với hiện tượng đầy và vơi, Khí âm khí dương khi mất đi, khi dừng lại, nghiệm ra theo luật thừa trừ"<sup>v</sup>*

*(Even and odd numbers correspond to the phenomenon of fullness and relief, Yin air and Yang air sometimes lost, sometimes stop, tested under the law of redundancy).*

He borrowed the term of Lao Tzu: "Ỗ phục ư vô cùng" that means relying on each other, hiding in each other is truly infinity. He said:

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<sup>iv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.176.

<sup>v</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.439.

*"Từ đâu sắc đã là không, Vốn không có một cái gì cả"<sup>vi</sup>*

*(From the beginning identity was nothing, there is nothing).*

Besides, he also said that the fluctuations and changes of the times were an urgent, prescribed by heaven:

*"Giàu chĩnh chện, khó lai thai,  
Vận chuyển lưu thông, há của ai.  
Vũng nọ ghê khi làm bãi cát,  
Đoi kia có thuở lụt hòn thai.  
Khôn ngoan mới biết thăng thì giáng,  
Đại đột nào hay tiểu có đài.  
Đã khuất bao nhiêu thì lại duỗi,  
Đạo trời lồng lộng chẳng hề sai"<sup>vii</sup>.*

*(Rich is happy, poor is miserable  
Transformation circulation of nobody  
This puddle looked horrible when becoming the sand,  
That headland, there was a time the sea flooded islet.  
Wise to know up then down,  
Foolish to not know there is the big in the small  
How much is hidden, then it stretches out  
The religion of the magnificent heaven is never wrong.)*

It can be affirmed that Nguyen Binh Khiem studied deeply the Book of Changes and influenced the natural philosophy. The universe is always back and forth, circulation, so he found joy and hope in a society in which he had once been pessimistic. Nguyen Binh Khiem's poetry reflects quite clearly the bittersweet color in his optimistic life, expressing the principle of development, transformation and optimistic spirit:

*"Chín mươi thì kể xuân đà muộn, Xuân ấy qua thì xuân khác còn"<sup>viii</sup>*

*(Ninety, this is a late spring. This spring is over; another spring is still left).*

Thus, the "Nhàn" (leisure) in the mind of Nguyen Binh Khiem is the category used to refer to his views on principles, ways of thinking, soft and flexible behavior towards life. That viewpoint is formed on the basis of inheriting the national cultural tradition,

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<sup>vi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.713.

<sup>vii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1473 - 1774.

<sup>viii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1496.

Confucian and Buddhist views, and on the basis of "wu-wei", harmony with nature, adhering to the natural laws of Taoism to solve the demands of social practices.

### 3. Nguyen Binh Khiem's views on the content of the category "Nhàn" (leisure)

According to Nguyen Binh Khiem, the category of "Nhàn" (*leisure*) is expressed very richly and deeply through many different aspects, but it can be accessed in two main angles, as follows:

#### 3.1 "Nhàn" (leisure) manifests itself in relation to nature

Nguyen Binh Khiem identified himself as "the fairy in the world", that world was his hometown, Trung Am village. He likes life between water moon, grass flower, bird, village:

*"Nép mình qua trước chốn xô xao,  
Mấy sự bên tai, gió thổi phào.  
Cửa trúc vỗ tay cười khúc khích,  
Hiên mai vắt cẳng hát nghêu ngao"<sup>ix</sup>.*

*(Nestling against a tumultuous place  
Incident around the ear, as the wind blows  
Bamboo doors clapped like a giggle  
On the porch, with the legs crossed, singing to oneself*

with a pure life in the countryside:

*"Thu ăn măng trúc, đông ăn giá, Xuân tắm hồ sen, hạ tắm ao"<sup>x</sup>.*

*(In the autumn, eating bamboo shoot; in the winter, eating bean sprouts. In the spring, bathing in a lotus lake; in the summer, bathing in a pond)*

In the Preface of *Bach Van hermitage poetry collection*, Nguyen Binh Khiem wrote:

*"Thiên hạ ai là kẻ sĩ cao khiết; An nhàn, ta là tiên trên trời"<sup>xi</sup>*

*(Who is the noble scholar in the world; leisurely, I am the heavenly fairy).*

This is quite concentrated in both Nom and Chinese poems. In these two collections of poetry, Nguyen Binh Khiem is a "leisure man" and a moralist. He felt fed

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<sup>ix</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1433 - 1434.

<sup>x</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1527.

<sup>xi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.117.

up with the fact that people were only interested in money and benefits, but he could not completely escape the world, turning his back on life, so in order to balance himself, he had to find the "Nhàn" (leisure) philosophy. to relax. His "Nhàn" (leisure) word is not to escape from the world, but to express a conception of human life that is free from fame and good to keep the soul pure. "Leisure body" means a person of high quality. *Leisure* is in mind, not doing nothing. "Nhàn" (*leisure*) is not to be known, benefited, but not to avoid being responsible for life:

*"Được thua thấy đã ắt nhiều phen, Để rẻ công danh đổi lấy nhàn"<sup>xii</sup>*

*(Win and lose have been seen many times, for cheap fame in exchange for leisure).*

He was disgusted, disdainful, terrified of the situation, but he did not despise the life, so he always pained about life, the pain of the people and of the country. This is the morality of the old-minded intellectuals who want to keep themselves, to respect themselves when they had to accept the inability to improve the situation. Since then, he had been at peace in his heart, considering nature as an abundant source of inspiration for his poetry writing becoming more and more diverse. Nguyen Binh Khiem preferred to live among the water moon, grass, flowers, birds, and villages. That hobby is expressed through beautiful, image-rich verses that uniquely write about harmony, satisfaction innocently and happily between the thinker and the nature of his homeland:

*"Cày mây, cuốc nguyệt, gánh yên hà,  
Nào của nào, chẳng phải của ta,  
Đêm, ánh bóng, xem bóng trúc,  
Ngày, chờ gió thổi tin hoa"<sup>xiii</sup>.*

*(Plowing clouds, hoeing moon, carrying smog and dusk  
Which of which, not mine  
Night, shadow, watching the shadow of bamboo  
Daytime, waiting for the wind blowing good news)*

Facing complicated scenes, competing for fame and benefit, Nguyen Binh Khiem had left his fame and profit, alienated secularity, distanced himself from friends, only made friends with nature, and with the poetic green landscape. Nature becomes a true friend, a soulmate who understands the poet's feelings:

*"Muôn dặm gió đông từng đã quen mặt, Một dòng sông nước chảy là bạn tri âm"<sup>xiv</sup>*

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<sup>xii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1481.

<sup>xiii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1486.

<sup>xiv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.357.

*(A mile of east wind used to be a familiar face, a flowing river is the soul mate.*

Nature is a soul mate, he found in nature an endless source of inspiration and often took nature as the theme of recitation. His feelings were embedded in poetry, describing scenes was to convey feelings. He lived leisurely by the water, close to the immature green, luxuriant flowers, birds chirping, with clouds floating, with light full of poetic and romantic.:

*"Trở về vườn cũ lối không xa,  
Dựng riêng một ngôi đình mới bên dòng nước.  
Hoa rợp bóng khắp viện giữ chân chim đến ngủ,  
Một lầu ngập ánh sáng như treo ráng chiều trong trẻo.  
Mặt trời hồng rọi vào song cửa sổ (thấy) chân trời gần,  
Mở cánh cửa chính, sau cơn mưa (thấy) thêm nhiều núi xanh"<sup>xv</sup>.*

*(Back to the old garden not far away,  
Building a new communal house privately by the water.  
Flowers were shady throughout the institute to keep the birds sleeping,  
A floor was flooded with light like hanging the clear afternoon.  
The pink sun shone into the windows (seeing) the horizon is near,  
Opening the main door, after the rain (seeing) more green mountains*

Nature surrounds, merges with every step, blends into objects, penetrates into people's daily life:

*"Gậy trúc, hài cỏ, vài quyển sách...  
Thú sinh nhai, ngoài thú đó ra không có gì khác.  
Hằng ngày khi nấu ấm trà, xem chim hạc bay qua làn khói,  
Lúc rửa nghiên xem cá đớp nước mực.  
Thả thuyền trên suối trăng, cất lời ca êm ả,  
Tựa gối gốc tùng gió thổi, nằm trong cảnh thanh thoát"<sup>xvi</sup>.  
(Bamboo sticks, grass shoes, some books ...*

*Living pleasures, other than that there is nothing else.  
When cooking a teapot every day, watching the cranes fly through the smoke,  
When washing the ink, watching the fish bite ink.  
Sailing on the moon stream, singing peaceful songs,  
Putting a knee on the side of the root of the confiner, as the wind blew, laying down in the serene scene.)*

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<sup>xv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.322.

<sup>xvi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.273.

Nature is the soulmate, so nature brings him many elegant pleasures, helping him always be optimistic and happy, not to be lonely in a messy, deceiving society. Nature is very close to him, friendly, inseparable from human life. Nature through his eyes, his feeling is no longer an inanimate object, separate from the subject but a reality with a soul:

*"Gió mát trăng thanh là bạn của ta, Nước biếc non xanh vui với riêng mình"<sup>xvii</sup>  
(The cool breeze and the moon are my friends, green mountains blue waters are happy with me).*

Or:

*"Vô tâm bay khỏi hang núi, mây càng lười nhác, Có ý chảy về đông, con nước tuôn dài"<sup>xviii</sup>  
(Heartlessly flying out of the mountain cave, the lazier the cloud, The more it flowed to the east, the water streamed out).*

Nature is the friend of Nguyen Binh Khiem, so it has to be similar in temperament and virtue. He selected a number of plants as a symbol of his temperament and virtue. They were chrysanthemum, apricot, pine and bamboo.

For chrysanthemum - a flower of pure purity, overlooking the traditional scene as images of the recluse:

*"Trong loài hoa, hoa cúc làm bạn với phòng trai u tịch,  
Ý hướng về gió đông, mượn sắc đẹp để phô màu.  
Xa lánh nơi cõi tục, lưu giữ lâu dài khí tiết cứng rắn,  
Vươn lên trong giá rét, riêng mình mang nắng sớm xuân đến.  
Chốn phần hoa chịu đổi lấy ba luống vườn thu,  
Thú thường ngoạn góp mùi hương nơi chén rượu.  
Ai biết chỗ trong đẹp của loại hoa này,  
Bông hoa đơn côi từ buổi đầu đã không bị vẩn bụi trần ai"<sup>xix</sup>*

*(In flowers, chrysanthemum befriends with secluded and quiet library,  
Intention towards east wind, using beauty to show off the colors.  
Away from the secular world, for a long time keeping the tough temperament,  
Rising up in the cold, bringing the early sunshine of the spring by oneself.  
Prosperous place in exchange for three garden beds,  
Pleasure gather with the aroma in the cup of wine.  
Who knows the beauty of this flower?*

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<sup>xvii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.209.

<sup>xviii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.192.

<sup>xix</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1188-1189.



*The lonely flower from the beginning has not been exposed to anyone.)*

He took the image of apricot trees that could tolerate the cold snow, know the distinction of contempt and choose the place of pure air to make fellowship.:

*"Tiết trời đông tiêu điều khắc nghiệt, chỉ sức một mình cây mai chịu đựng nổi, Báo trước gió xuân, mới nhú một nhánh phía nam.... Trong các loài, ai là bạn tri âm, Cây trúc là em, cây tùng là anh, kết làm ba người bạn"<sup>xx</sup>*

*(The weather in winter was harsh, only the apricot tree alone could stand, The spring breeze was just ahead, it just sprouted a branch at the south .... Among the species, who is the soulmate, the bamboo is the younger one, the pinecone is the brother, making three friends).*

He also likened himself to the image of soaring pine trees, when winter comes to stand idly in the midst of the thousands of moonlit mountains, later if it will be strong enough to make a pillar to support the temple:

*"Há phải nhờ đến vua đắp của đất màu phân bón, Mà tự hấp thu được cái tâm hóa sinh của đất trời. Chất tốt ắt sẽ được dùng vào việc lớn nơi lăng miếu, Năm rét sẽ cùng cây bách già làm bạn tri âm"<sup>xxi</sup>*

*(no need thanks to the nourishment of the fertile soil, it is able to absorb the biochemical mind of heaven and earth. Good quality one will surely be used in the big place of the shrine, Year of the cold will with old cypress as a friend).*

The image of the bamboo weathered, the strength to go straight forward, symbolizing the honorable Confucians, who refused to change according to the custom, their heart wiped out all thoughts so they were sympathetic to the creature:

*"Truyền rằng trúc mang phẩm chất rồng, là một thứ kì lạ nhất trên đời,  
Sừng sững cao với lá ngọc, cành vàng.  
Chải gió gội mưa, cứng cõi tựa ngàn vàng,  
Người lười nhác có thể nhờ đó biết lập chí, người ương gàn biết nhờ đó mà trở nên liêm trực, là bậc thầy của muôn đời"<sup>xxii</sup>.*

*(It is said that bamboo has dragon quality, which is the strangest thing in the world,  
Imposing height with jade leaves, golden branches.  
Weathered by rain and wind, as tough as thousands of gold,*

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<sup>xx</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.866-867.

<sup>xxi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.880 - 881.

<sup>xxii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.887.

*Lazy people can become strong-minded, tough-hearted people thank for that to be integrity, they are masters of eternity.)*

Due to the same temperament and virtue, Nguyen Binh Khiem had a very close relationship with nature. He sympathized with nature to be *leisure*. He lived according to the naturalism as the Taoist once said. One autumn morning, standing upstairs by the river looking far away, the soul of the people merged with the immense landscape made the human soul feel extraordinarily peaceful and calm:

*"Tâm và cảnh dung hòa nhau, Tự thấy thích hợp nên vui quên cả đói"<sup>xxiii</sup>*

*(The mind and the scene reconcile, seeing itself is suitable to forget hunger).*

In harmony with nature, he found joy and deep consolation. Nature is the source of a cool shower and wash away the impurities of the soul, the place to purify soul and nurse personality. The mind-nature merges into the ego of heaven and earth to distance itself from the hustle and bustle of life. The leisure of Nguyen Binh Khiem was to cover the unsatisfying mood that was stirring in the soul of the sensitive thinker, rich in compassion and the sense of responsibility "to be happy after the world, to worry before people do". This is the ideal and ambition of a true intellectual scholar. He refused the scene of bullying people of rascally greedy mandarins. Therefore, he chose to help the country, his courage to discourage the King of the Mac Dynasty from obeying flattery, or he resigned from office for teaching, writing poems ... as a sign of his impotence against the time, he wanted to withdraw from politics to preserve our dignity in the face of ongoing adversity:

*"Tròn là để tượng trưng cho trời,  
Vuông là để tượng trưng cho đất.  
Bóng trăng hiện ra ở không trung,  
Lòng trời tồn tại trong lúc tĩnh"<sup>xxiv</sup>.*

*(Round is to symbolize the heaven,  
Square is to symbolize the land.  
The moon appears in the air,  
The heaven exists in silence)*

In the Chinese poem, he spoke of his joy and love while living in the middle of nature. Thereby, we can also see the national style in his poetry, creating a characteristic of Vietnamese culture:

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.151.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.320.

*"Tìm được một miếng đất ở cạnh con khe trong làng,  
Khi thanh nhàn, ta cũng vui với tính tự nhiên của ta.  
Buổi sáng đến vườn rau, sương dính vào dép,  
Ban đêm thả thuyền nơi ghềnh cầu, trăng đầy thuyền"<sup>xxv</sup>.*  
(Found a piece of land next to the slot in the village,

*When free, I was also happy with my nature.  
In the morning to the vegetable garden, dew sticks to the slippers,  
At night, releasing a boat in a whirlpool, full of moon.)*

Nguyen Binh Khiem's life is expressed through his writings on nature to talk about "Nhàn" (leisure), but also shows a different angle. It is human pain, "Nhàn" (leisure) but really no "Nhàn" (leisure). He always concerned about the times. In his leisure always contains no "Nhàn" (leisure). He described the change of nature is to talk about the change of black and white of love in life. He pointed out the laws of nature but feeling pain in his heart. Smoke spreads in the village, and water flows in the crevice sometimes dark and then light, moon on the river and clouds cover hills and mountains, sometimes exist and then not. That natural image is like a change of heart and a change of life:

*"Làn khói thôn, dòng nước suối đậm rồi lại nhạt,  
Trăng sông, mây núi mơ hồ như có lại như không.  
Sự việc ở đời và tình người cũng như thế,  
Trên đường đời, đừng ngạc nhiên vì có lúc cùng, lúc thông"<sup>xxvi</sup>.*

*(The village smoke, the stream water was dark and then pale,  
Moon, river, clouds, mountain were vague, exist and then not.  
Human life and love were the same  
On the road of life, don't be surprised when meeting dead end or clear one)*

According to him, the taste of life was so tragic as the cold autumn river, with physical weakness after a sickness.:

*"Mùi vị đời lạnh nhạt hơn nước mùa thu, Vai nhà thơ gầy nhọn như đỉnh núi lúc chiều tối"<sup>xxvii</sup>*

*(The taste of life was colder than the autumn water, the poet's shoulders were as sharp as a mountain peak in the evening).*

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<sup>xxv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.344.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.333.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.634.

He looked at the ruined palace, the scenery and the people changed, the bustle was no longer there, only the fishermen in a river on a boat and the swallow flew in front of the stairs. Feeling that scene, he said that when people wanted ten things, all nine things were not as satisfactory, things that people wished they could not achieve:

*"Nhà cửa, thành quách cũ đã thành đồng lúa nối tiếp nhau,  
Nhìn phong cảnh, nhân dân, một phần nửa đã khác trước.  
Ông chài bên khúc sông mặc ý đậu thuyền các nơi,  
Cái én trên lầu đã bay sang nhà ai bên cạnh.  
Đất Kim Lăng xưa cỏ thu rậm rạp,  
Đài Đồng Tước cũng trống không, bao phen nắng chiều soi bóng.  
Chớ lấy làm lạ rằng các bậc thánh hiền không cố ý, cố chấp,  
Trong cuộc sống con người mười điều mong muốn thì chín điều đã không được như ý"<sup>xxviii</sup>.*

*(Houses and citadel become rice fields one after another,  
Looking at the scenery, the people, half of them are different from before.  
The fishermen on the river arbitrarily parks a boat everywhere,  
The upstairs swallow flew to the house next door.  
The old Kim Lang land was dense with grass.  
Dong Tuoc estrade is also empty, so many times sunshine in the afternoon.  
Do not wonder that sages are not intentional, obstinate,  
In human life ten wishes, nine things were not as satisfactory)*

Therefore, when following the Mac's army to conquer the West, setting foot in the old scene, and seeing the citadel and the people were different from the old days, the pagoda was deserted, the hamlets were gloomy, his soul surged again and again:

*"Từng lấy làm thẹn vì mình vụng về, chưa hiểu việc dụng binh,  
Hãy làm theo phụ tá giúp phần nào việc đánh dẹp phương xa.  
Cờ quạt bay rợp bóng mặt trời bày hàng trong rừng cây,  
Trống, tù và truyền đi trong gió cùng tiếng thác nước đổ"<sup>xxix</sup>.*

*(Used to be ashamed of oneself because of the clumsy, not understanding the use of soldiers,  
Please follow aides to help somewhat of pacifying in the distance  
Fluttering flags are shady, lined in a forest  
Drumbeats and horn sounds are transmitted by the wind with the sound of a waterfall falling)*

When he went to Tay Giang, he was touched too:

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.631-632.

<sup>xxix</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.594.

*"Màu non, sắc nước vốn không đổi khác,  
Các cụ già và con trẻ trong làng một nửa đã khác xưa.  
Mưa xuống hoa bên khe, màu hồng thành nhạt nhạt,  
Mây vắt tháp chùa, rêu xanh vẫn màu xanh như thế<sup>xxx</sup>"*

*(The color of mountain and water does not change  
The old people and the children in the village, half of them are different.  
Rain falls down flowers by the side of the slit, pink to pale,  
Clouds over the pagoda tower, green moss still like that.)*

Natural scenes also revealed people's mood. The change of natural scenery in four seasons made the hearts of people reveal many different emotions and feelings. A year starts from spring. Spring is the season of resurrection of all things, spring gives people a joy, a new hope. Although having experienced many spring and hair more than before, Nguyen Binh Khiem was always optimistic and confident:

*"Xuân này ắt hẳn đẹp hơn xuân trước; Hàng năm lại thêm xuân, tóc chưa đến nỗi trụi  
như tóc con trẻ"<sup>xxxi</sup>*

*(This spring must be more beautiful than last spring; Every year more spring, the hair is  
not as naked as a child's hair).*

Spring was over. In the cold, clear skies, amidst the charming scenery, he sat by the window listening to the birds or used a stick to walk on the deserted road to pick up fallen flowers. Seeing the end of spring, the wilted flowers that reminded him of a short life, but he thought that it was common sense to let the time went by because he could do nothing:

*"Đôi bờ mưa tạnh, núi phô sắc,  
Một dòng sông lặng gió, mặt nước sông gợn sóng.  
Ngồi trên ghế trước cửa sổ hướng nam nghe chim hót,  
Chống gậy ra lối vắng nhặt hoa rơi.  
Xưa qua nay lại, cuộc sống tựa như sóng gửi,  
Đừng bàn đến chuyện quang cảnh cứ ruổi qua đi"<sup>xxxii</sup>.*

*(On the banks, the rain stopped, the mountain showed off colors  
A calm river, there were ripples on the river surface  
Sitting in a chair in the south window listening to the birds singing,  
Using a stick to the empty path to pick up fallen flowers.*

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<sup>xxx</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.600.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.496.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.714.

*Time passes, the life is like temporary living.  
Don't talk about the scenery going on)*

In summary, the view of "Nhàn" (*leisure*) through Nguyen Binh Khiem's relationship to nature shows a vibe, a harmony, close relationship between human life and nature. Nature becomes the soulmate of man. The movement changes according to the laws of nature to help people soothe the events of life, find peace of mind when alienating from the mandarin with stifling disputes and dust of fame. The greenery, the cool breeze is the scene of life for people to find the peace and relief of the soul in order to cultivate the righteous mind. It is "Nhàn" (*leisure*) considered in the relationship between man and nature.

### 3.2 The "Nhàn" (leisure) viewpoint is expressed from an angle of conduct

Vietnamese society in the time of Nguyen Binh, human life became precarious, chaotic, morally decadent, crazy mind. From the court to the market, the scramble for taking advantage of and cheating took place. Precious nobility was lewd and lustful, showing off wealth, being indifferent to the hunger of the poor, without helping even a single coin or a handful of straw:

*"Chìm chìm đắm đắm/ Tất tưởi bon chen.  
Bừa bãi, xiên vạy/ Nào biết mình sai.  
Sang thì dẫn đến kiêu ngạo/ Giàu có thì xa xỉ.  
Trang hoàng rèm, nhà/ Nạm ngọc vẽ màu.  
Bếp núc xa xỉ/ Đốt sáp thay củi, đồ ăn ngon ngậy.  
Say rượu nồng, no đồ tươi/ Mặc áo nhẹ, cười ngựa béo.  
Thấy người chết đói lăn xuống rãnh/ Một đồng cũng xén tiếc không cho.  
Thấy người đi đường ngủ đêm ngoài sương móc/ Một bát gạo cũng chẳng bố thí.  
Duy lợi là thấy/ Như cuồng như si.  
Đầu môi đức thiện/ Ai nói rộng mà rút ra?  
Quán lấy tên là Trung Tân/ Nghĩa ở chỗ này.  
Trung tức là thiện/ Tân tức là về.  
Biết dựng thì yên định/ Lúc vội vã cũng không lừa điều thiện.  
Thung dung bước trên đường chính/ Không nghĩ hoặc bởi ngã rẽ khác"<sup>xxxiii</sup>.*

*(Submerge / hurriedly scramble.  
Indiscriminate, trick / don't know wrong  
Wealth leads to arrogant / rich leads to luxury spending  
Decorating curtain, house / jewel encrusted, colored drawing.  
Luxurious kitchen / burning by wax instead of firewood, delicious food.  
Drunken wine, full of fresh meals / wearing light clothes, riding a fat horse.  
Seeing the starving man roll down the ditch / too stingy to give a single coin*

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.125-126.

*Seeing people on the road sleeping in the night dew / a bowl of rice was not given.  
The only benefit is to see / like crazy like mad.  
Clues of virtue / who do extends to draws out?  
The inn was named Trung Tan / the meaning was there.  
Trung means good / Tan means back.  
Knowing how to stand still / being in a hurry does not leave good.  
Leisurely to walk on the main road/ no rest or by another turn*

Worrying about that tragic situation of the humanitarian world, with the religious responsibility of a Confucian scholar, Nguyen Binh Khiem advised people to do good things and to avoid evil, even do a small good thing, do not do just a small evil:

*"Chớ nói rằng việc thiện nhỏ mà không làm/ Đức thành chính là khuôn mẫu của ta, Chớ  
rằng việc ác nhỏ mà làm/ Ất phải cẩn trọng việc mình làm"<sup>xxxiv</sup>*

*(Do not say that do not do even a small good thing/ the virtue is our model/ do not say that  
do just a small evil/ must be careful what will be done)*

According to Nguyen Binh Khiem, a person who inherits the spiritual virtue which is endowed by nature, called "lucid virtue" is natural and has the duty to lighten that natural virtue so that people together with heaven and earth can be preserved and harmonized. Being like that is leisurely. This is similar to the immaculate nature "wu-wei" of Taoism, according to the rules - religion. Nguyen Binh Khiem said that the human nature was inherently good, because the natural temperament was biased and lust obscured, that the availability did not preserve the integrity as in the beginning and turned into tension then could do everything. According to him, if someone wants to correct himself, he must keep the faith. The faith is in the middle, not biased, neither outrageous nor inadequate; this is loyal to the king, filial to his parents, close to his brothers, peaceful between wife and husband, faithful to friends; this is no greed when seeing wealth, no conflict when seeing benefits, happily being good at teaching people, treating things by sincere heart. In short, the meaning of the faith is in a good position, which is the main port for people to return.

In order for each person to be *leisurely*, Nguyen Binh Khiem also advises people to maintain the mind. According to him, people often let their minds loose their greed and their lust, so the purpose of the study was to find the "distraction", that was, the mind was free. The way to "Nhàn" (*leisure*) was to nourish the mind, which means less desire because the less greed, the less lust, the less busy of the soul. Satisfied with the simple and homely life, for a light and serene soul. In order to live well, prosperous and uproarious life scenes might be stayed away but back to natural solitude to find peace for the soul. It means returning to "Nhàn" (*leisure*). When people live in the midst of nature, their hearts will be deposited and thus a new mind will be born:

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.126.

*"Gió mát phần phật thổi xua tan những nỗi niềm trần tục. Trăng sáng ngời ngời, khiến  
lĩnh hội được đạo tâm"<sup>xxxv</sup>*

*(A flapping cool wind blew to dispel worldly feelings. The moon shined brightly, making  
the mind comprehend).*

Nature is the stillness, creating the *leisure* in the immense cave of heaven and earth so that the soul can expand and sympathize with the great harmony of the vast universe, as well as the calm water surface to reflect clearly and rawly the moon. Nothing is more tranquil than the sight of a moon shining on a cold river, but it is a dynamic scene, because the moon is full and waning, waning then full in a circular manner and the water flows endlessly:

*"Muốn nhận thức chỗ "nhất chân" do trời định sẵn, Thì vào lúc trăng sáng rọi nước thu  
ở sông Hàn"<sup>xxxvi</sup>*

*(Want to realize where the "most beauty" is set by heaven, then when the moon is shining  
in the Han River in the autumn).*

Nguyễn Bình Khiêm was influenced by the cultivation practice of Tống Nho, so he often sat in deep thought and lounging:

*"Mọi lý lẽ đều quy tụ vào một cõi lòng được soi sáng"<sup>xxxvii</sup>*

*(All arguments are gathered in an enlightened heart).*

According to him, the times when people were still calm was the time for people to find the righteous mind, to reflect on the past, to experience the heavens and the earth and to realize that nothing was more dangerous than the path of life and the heart. Therefore, he said that everyone might take care of himself until perfection:

*"Ta vụng mọi người đều khéo,  
Biết đâu kẻ khéo lại là giặc.  
Lẽ trời đất, hiểu được từ trong yên lặng,  
Từ xưa đến nay, cảnh nhàn là điều sở đắc.  
Không gì hiểm hóc bằng đường đời,  
Nếu không cất dọn thì thành gai góc.  
Không gì chênh vênh bằng lòng người,*

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.470.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.348.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.1156.



*Vua buông thả thành ngay ố quý*<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

*(I am clumsy everyone is smart,  
Maybe a smart guy is an invader.  
Heaven and earth, understanding from the silence,  
From past to present, leisurely scenery is the privilege.  
Nothing is more dangerous than the path of life,  
If not cut, then thorny.  
Nothing is more precarious than people's hearts,  
A king loses lifestyle turning into demon lair immediately)*

The "wu-wei" nature of the Taoist about life is not to compete, with the policy of stopping the prejudice and abandoning wisdom, stopping humanity abandoning righteousness to return to the simplicity and the rusticity. Zhuang Zi also advised people to return to their own true nature. This was also the attitude of Nguyen Binh Khiem when he hid:

*"Ở Bạch Vân am nuôi dưỡng sự vụng về của mình, Nhao nhao chuyện được mất, cái đó ở ngoài thân mình"*<sup>xxxix</sup>

*(In Bach Van hermitage, I nourish my clumsy, kicking up a racket for gain or lost, that is beyond my life).*

Or:

*"Lão phu vẫn vững, giữ nguyên tấm lòng son cũ, Tuổi về già suy yếu, tóc bạc mọc nhiều"*<sup>xl</sup>

*(The old man still firmly, keeping the old unshakably loyal heart, Old age is weakened, gray hair grows more).*

Living in the chaotic war, crazy humanity, while everyone used cunning, deceit to win, compete smartly, then he was still clumsy, that kept the virtue of the honest man:

*"Mọi người đều khéo, riêng ta thì vụng, Ai hay kẻ vụng thì có đức"*<sup>xli</sup>

*(Everybody is clever, I am clumsy, who know the clumsy guy is virtuous).*

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<sup>xxxviii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.287.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.173.

<sup>xl</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.188.

<sup>xli</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, *Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection)*, p.287.

According to him, those who prefer cunning but no benefit would only add mental suffering. A man who used a clever tactic to hope for victory over other people also someone would know how to devise ways and tried to win, so that cunning would never end:

*"Cùng chuộng mưu mẹo trí xảo, làm nhọc nhằn tinh thần"<sup>xlii</sup>*

*(Prefer cunning tactics, more mental torment).*

Because the body and mind are one, so when all the tricks have been removed to cultivate the true nature, the mind will not be wavered, the spirit will not be hurt, the body will be naturally cured, without the need for medicine. That is the art of nursing from the mind convalescence:

*"Gạt bỏ cho hết ồn ào, nhàn chính là dứt lợi danh, Hãy gửi thân vào cảnh nhàn khắc nuôi dưỡng được sự nhàn"<sup>xliii</sup>*

*(Get rid of all the noisy, leisure advantage is no fame, please send yourself into the scene of leisure nourishing leisure).*

Like the Taoist concept of life, Nguyen Binh Khiem had a similar view of life as illusion, impermanence. Human life was short, the loss in the world was due to fate and circulatory reason that rotated, so people should not be pessimistic or hastily enjoy the pleasures of life. He was a philosopher, so he judged the truth of human life in order not to cling to those that could not be attached, to not take the similarities to the absolute and to remain calm and free about the changes of life. According to him, that was leisure. Nguyen Binh Khiem saw the contradiction: life - death, yes - no, gain - lose, end - through, win - lose, full - less, fresh - dry, blooming - withered, prosperous - impaired ... He said that, the transformation of these contradictory aspects was the rule, the cycle, the destiny, people could not change. In the autumn and the winter, grasses and trees might wither but when the spring came, it would sprout again.:

*"Ai biết sau cảnh tiêu sơ như mùa thu mùa đông, Lại là ánh dương xuân, một thời thái hòa"<sup>xliv</sup>*

*(Who knows after the desolate scene in the autumn and the winter, then it is a spring sunshine, a peaceful time).*

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<sup>xlii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection), p.423.

<sup>xliii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection), p.186.

<sup>xliv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection), p.629.

He considered life, death, gain and loss to be an inescapable rule of nature so that things not as expected were normal.:

*"Cùng hay thông đều đã có số mệnh; Chớ lạ rằng trong đời nhiều việc trái ngang"<sup>xlv</sup>*

*(Through or end both have fate; It is not strange that in life many things are contrary).*

According to him, people should believe in heaven, should have a carefree attitude, be a regular, be happy to accept a simple life, be not tired of mind, neither hardship, nor resent because of poverty:

*"Được hay mất, xem ra đều có số mệnh cả; Các bậc thánh hiền theo phận mình, há lo nghèo khó?"<sup>xlvi</sup>*

*(Gain or lose, it seems that they all have destiny; The saints are sage according to their destiny, and are worried about poverty).*

He despised everything about win or lose than lost in life:

*"Thôi đừng bàn chuyện được hay mất đối với những việc trước mắt, Hãy sống an nhàn như ông tiên giữa cõi trần"<sup>xlvii</sup>*

*(Well, let's not talk about gain or lose for things ahead, living peacefully like a fairy in the world).*

Therefore, he advised people not to worry but to be generous and calmly let go fishing on board to immerse themselves into nature. Such was leisure. That is not to say completely negative, but Nguyen Binh Khiem's view of leisure is manifested in the perspective of his behavior is a philosophical attitude. Because according to him, the nation was sometimes prosperous sometimes impaired, the life sometimes met a dead end or through way. The gentleman might know by nature that to act, depending on the time that helps the country or retreat, relying on confidence to resist the natural reason, it would only work hard then lose efforts in vain.

In summary, from the viewpoint "wu-wei" of Taoism, Nguyen Binh Khiem combined with the values of national traditions along with Confucianism and Buddhism in a flexible way to create a very deep, but idyllic view of himself about leisure, to deal with the fluctuations of social history at that time. His leisurely viewpoint was due to certain objective and subjective circumstances, so there were also internal contradictions and could not overcome the limitations of the times. However, in the current history of

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<sup>xlv</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection), p.151.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection), p.683.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Office of ancient Vietnamese literature, 2014, Poetry by Nguyen Binh Khiem (Total collection), p.373.

society - if we know the inheritance of values, overcome limitations, the ideological views of his thoughts still have the meaning of the times.

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Ha Trong Tha, Cao Xuan Long  
FROM THE VIEWPOINT “WU-WEI” OF TAOISM  
TO THE VIEWPOINT “NHÀN” (LEISURE) OF NGUYEN BINH KHIEM

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