



Thesis for the level of Hồng Đại Nhị Cấp



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LEARNING AND TEACHING

THE WAY OF TRAINING

Before to train I need to learn a technique. The way of teaching are different each teacher you find, and impossible to have one method, as everyone are different, by the previous experience each teacher use the method that feel much better to transmit the right technique, but the way of training should be the same if we want to keep the real essence of Vovinam, and this, without changing anything from the native technique.

Sometimes we make confusion with the basic technical teaching with the real application of each technique we teach.

Vovinam is a martial art, and in Europe, the meaning of martial art is the ART OF WAR, so everything we train must be something that we can use for real and not only some movement to repeat, and review to go to examination for the next belt.

Many students think about the program as a target to have the new belt, but this is a wrong way to understand the meaning of belt and especially the meaning about what we are learning. Most of time the mistake is not from the students, but it arrives from who taught them. If we teach with the goal of examination, our athletes will grow up only with this goal too, and they will lose all the principles and essence of Vovinam.

I think that in the teaching the first thing is to keep the essence of our martial art before to teach any techniques. It means that before to teach every techniques of Vovinam program, all the athletes need to know what Vovinam is, the principles of Vovinam and how these techniques should be trained.

For my point of view, in the last years the competition is taking a lot of part of the practice of Vovinam, and this, if not well managed, could be not a good develop of a martial art.

Competition is a test of our ability, our mind and it is the best way to promote and share the martial art. Vovinam cannot stay without the competition, but the competition cannot take the most of part of the training time. A good competitor should be the athletes who before trained well his program, who really know the technique and the meaning of work that he/she doing, but to prepare the competitors to a competition we are losing most of the Vovinam principles that we need a lot to continue to have a real martial art.

This mistake is also a my mistake, because if I have a strong athlete who wants to compete, of course, I teach him the competition program only, and this athlete will focus only on this part, but what kind of athletes will be in the future?

For program requirements are forced to skip some basic lessons. Now we have many students who know Tinh Hoa Luong Nghi Kiem Phap of Song Luyen Kiem, but they never trained the single technique of Kiem. We have athletes for Song Luyen 3, but they never trained the Phan Don from level 3 and upper.

This is absolutely don't correct for many reason;

- We lose one of best principles of Vovinam, “3 become 1”
- The athletes do the techniques without knowing what they are really doing, but they only repeat a sequence
- What we see in competition is without “soul”, because we only see a sequence of movement and not what these techniques represent for real.
- Everything we teach must arrive from the roots, we cannot think to develop Vovinam having the leaves but without trunk and roots.

I can consider myself one of the “old School” of Vovinam, and with me, many masters and practitioners. We trained the martial art in the totally different way.

The first thing was the application and train the body. The body had to be ready to endure the training. Then, when you were ready with body, we learnt the techniques, but we learnt step by step, and we never jumped the program only to participate in a competition, and I never learnt a Quyen without knowing what there was before.

For the Song Luyen was the same. The Song Luyen had to be the representation of what we already trained with the single techniques like Phan Don, Vat, Chien Luoc, not just a sequence of fake movements. Of course, they were not so beautiful as today, but we are doing a martial art, something should need to defend and make our body and mind strong.

I don’t want to denigrate what we are doing now because it is a great job, a great develop, and I love to see the technical level of many athletes and nations, but it is only a point of view to understand how to don’t lose anything of our martial art.

I would like to give an example watching the video on youtube at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vll4bIAo1j4>



This video is upload on the channel “Vothuatchanhtong” and has the name of “Ecole Vovinam Việt Võ Đạo”

I don’t know when they recorded this video, I can suppose around the years 80’s or 90’s. This video, for my point of view, represent exactly what Vovinam is.

Quyên, Song Luyen, Don Chan... many techniques and all of them REAL.

If we compare the demonstration of today and this one maybe we will like more the new one, because everything is perfect, each movement is studied maybe for days and months, so the athletes don't make any mistake, but in the comparison between the past and now you can see that in both they do the techniques well, but in the old one the techniques looks real, and this is because the way of training was totally different, because the train Vovinam for real.

HOW TO TEACH TO UNDERSTAND VOVINAM TECHNIQUES

I do not pretend to say how we should teach Vovinam. I am sure that most of teachers already know it, but maybe I can suppose that they forget, as sometime it happens even to me.

I think that the way of training can be only one, begin from the basic.

Each athlete must know how to move, understand each movement they do and know the meaning of movement.

It is important to explain since the beginning the main principle of Vovinam of "Cuong-Nhu", the "Hard and Soft". Vovinam techniques are based on this principle, and if you understand this, you can apply everywhere when you practice Vovinam.

When I begin to teach something to a beginner, the first things are "Tan", "Dam", "Chem", "Gat".

With these four things has the basic to begin to learn.

Tan are the roots. Without TAN the vo sinh cannot move, cannot understand the balance, cannot give a punch or kick, everything start from our foot.

Dam and Chem are the first two movement of attack, easy to learn, but they need indeed a lot of work to be understood.

Gat are important, as if we taught how to attack, we need to teach how to defend.

After these four basic techniques we can begin with DA, the kicks and then even CHO, the elbow attack.

One step back to talk about the TAN, because is one of the most important part if we want athletes who can manage well their balance and movements. Learn the basic movement by using the basic stances of Vovinam is the best way to understand all the other movements. Without the right balance we cannot do anything.

After I learn how to keep the balance I can begin to learn the techniques with the arms and then kicks, and they need a lot of work on the stances.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE "TAN" IN THE TECHNIQUES, HOW TO USE THEM.

When we begin to teach the TAN we want that all use them in a low position, and this is a good training for the legs, a good training to learn how to move legs and foot during the movements, and it is the best way to work Quyen, with a low positions, as cannot be too much low, but they must be with right balance between the height of the person and type of stance.

Once the position taught, it must be made a difference in their use. I exclude the positions too low, they are not useful, make excessively slow movements, and do not bring any advantage in the execution of the technique, both aesthetic and practical level. The positions should be of two types, medium and high. The use of medium position is during the basic teaching of the technique, during the application of movements such as punches, blocks, or any technique performed with the arms and in the practice of Quyen.

Even during the training of Chien Luoc and Song Luyen we can use a medium position, as they give us more balance, but we lose flexibility and speed, so it could be better to find an average height for the position during the performance of Song Luyen and Chien Luoc.

TRAINING OF APPLICATION, Vovinam must be useful

Everything we work must be useful.

I begin from the teaching and training of the Chien Luoc. We can obtain for two kinds of training, as we can train them alone or during the application in a couple workouts.

The risk of high positions can be the wrong technique of the position itself. An example can arrive from the bad use of DINH TAN. If we use Dinh Tan in low or medium height, we usually see people do the right techniques, but when Dinh Tan become an high position, can happen the mistake to extend both legs, and this way we are training bad, and also dangerous.

I think that CHIEN LUOC should be train every time in both way, single and with partner, and by the kind of way chosen, we must change the way of training.

Single Chien Luoc:

Use all the basic techniques like medium positions, all the hands work with one technique and one at the belt, as basic teaching. The students must keep the line of working to use in the future CHIEN LUOC in the Quyen. We cannot have the “dirty” technique in the single workout of Chien Luoc, especially in the beginners students, as then they cannot learn well the use of Chien Luoc inside the Quyen.

Chien Luoc with partner:

In Vovinam I saw many times training the Chien Luoc with a partner exactly in the same way of the single workout. This kind of work doesn't improve the skill of the athlete for the application of Chien Luoc. We don't need to repeat the same techniques with someone in front of us, but the meaning of the couple training is to understand the application of the technique we are learning.

Two ways of training the Chien Luoc with the partner; without any protections but with real attack, with protections like in fighting, trying to use most of the techniques like to be real.

When we train without the protections it is a work for improve our speed of attack and in the same way, for our partner, a good training to look the attacks and try to protect himself/herself. The training of chien luoc in couple is not only a training of one, but training for both, one train the chien luoc, one train how to defend and protect himself/herself. In the same time the training it helps to improve our strength on arms and legs when we receive attacks and when we attack.

This kind or training of Chien Luoc I think should not miss even inside an examination. During the exam, athletes should do both kind of Chien Luoc, single, showing the right techniques, the movement, how the punch, the kick and their balance, then, with the partner, they must show how the Chien Luoc can be apply in the reality.

When we train Chien Luoc for reality we will lose some basic techniques not useful to move fast and effective, so we can keep high position, the right position for our best performance and close to the real situation, then we cannot and don't care to keep hand near the belt, but we must keep the had in the guard to protect our head and to be faster with the attacks. Everything must be much real. Reality is impossible to create, but we can try to work with realism.

In this kind of training we have to move like in a fight, without knowing when the opponent attack to be ready to defend and both athletes can attack, only the faster will conclude the technique.

Chien Luoc with protection:



Chien Luoc 1 with protection

Now we train the Chien Luoc exactly like a fight. Some techniques of Chien Luoc cannot be used in the fight rules, but we can train the same, as we need to know them and how to use them in reality. Some of them cannot be used with fight gloves, so we will replace some of those techniques, like all the CHEM, with punches in an easy way, like “Chem Mot” can be “Dam Phat Ngang”, instead of “Chem Hai” of CL 6 we can use “Dam Thang”.



Chien Luoc 1 with protection



The training must be exactly like a fight with the limit to use only Chien Luoc, maybe only 1 or 2 techniques, then with more choice or only with 1 technique if we want to improve this one. A clear example of useful Chien Luoc is the number 2, as normally used in fight, and only this kind of training permit to the athletes to learn how to use these techniques in the real contest.

I normally use this kind of way of

training; learn the basic Chien Luoc, after students understand the techniques, I ask them to do the exactly technique with a partner, but the basic. Only after they really know all the movement I teach them how to train without protection but with reality, and then, last step, use protections.



The guard to train Phan Don in the basic way



The guard to train Phan Don with realism



The application the PHAN DON Dam Thang Phai level 1 by the basic technique

This kind of training can be apply even for other kind of program of Vovinam following the same principles, as I am used to do.

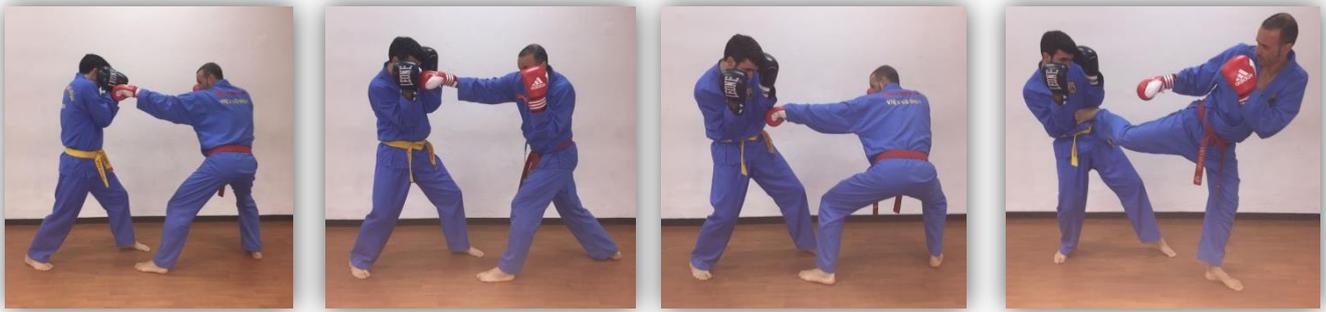
(CHIEN LUOC with protection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10XQ5sPkG-4>)

Application of this method with Phan Don.

The training of Phan Don can be exactly the same, the basic training and then application training without and with protection. An important thing to use during the real training and teaching of application of Phan Don is how to attack. Often we forget that the training of Phan Don begin by the right attack of the opponent, if our partner doesn't attack correctly, for us it will be a wrong training, so it is important how attack to learn correctly the defense. Distance, it is one of the mistake often used by the athletes, because many times they attack very far. All the attack must be close to the opponent in a distance that can permit to hit the target. Without this option we cannot think to learn a Phan Don. Phan Don begin when I don't receive the punch or kick, if the opponent doesn't hit me, I don't need a Phan Don, if the opponent attack me in the correct distance to hit me the first thing I need is dodge the attack and begin my Phan Don.

Training of PHAN DON Dam Thang phai in the realistic method





Applicatin of Chien Luoc 6 with protections

Speed of attack. Attack must be fast, as anybody attacks us slowly. When I talk about a fast attack I don't mean only how must fast must be the movement to arrive to the target, but even the speed we need to recall the hand (or kick) to be ready to punch (or kick) again.



Training of Phan Don (dam thang phai) with protections

Anybody attack with only one movement, and anybody attack and leave the attack on the target, so our Phan Don must be faster than the attack, before the opponent try to attack again, this is a Phan Don.



Basic training of Phan Don Dam Muc

Of course, we must do the difference when we begin to teach the basic techniques and when we want to see the real application.

In all kinds of workout, the use of protections permits the athletes to increase their skill to apply the techniques. We cannot forget that the Chien Luoc



Realistic application of Phan Don Dam Muc

and Phan Don, before to think about the fight and sport competitions, should be techniques for self-defense. To improve self-defense only the realism training can help us, and it is difficult to think to train realism with any protections.

If we keep Phan Don or Chien Luoc without the use of protections we continue to have only fake techniques, nice to see, with a very clean techniques and movement, but with any realistic application, and in this way we lose one of the main principles of Vovinam, create a strong man and strong body to be useful, because to be useful, we need to be strong, but strong trained.

(Phan Don with protection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dhsoj5SZ6JE>)

When we talk about “SELF-DEFENSE” we should talk about the KHOA GO. Vovinam has a big program with many interesting and useful techniques of defense. These techniques are only for our personal defense, anything else. Of course, some of them are inside some Song Luyen, but just in a few cases, as the techniques are more than 30, and only about 10 are inside the Song Luyen.

The argument is the same. We cannot consider a training of Khoa Go without realism, but many times it happens to see it.

The way of teaching must be the same; basic, then applications.

When we teach the basic we need to be clean and use all the basic movements we know, as they are really important even in this kind of techniques, as we cannot think to learn well how to throw someone if we don't know the balance and right positions, but them, immediately we need application.

What does it mean “application” when we talk about KHOA GO? It means that who attack must be realistic.

Attack in these techniques means be strong and fast, use the surprise to our opponent, and especially, never be static. Everything must be on the move, and my example go to some easy and simple techniques, the BOP CO, all of them, from behind or in front, we cannot never consider to train these techniques in a

static way, as anybody will attack us without pushing us, but few time I can see this kind of application and training, and this it permits to receive critics from outside because people think that Vovinam is not enough realistic. The problem is not Vovinam, the problem is how we train, how we teach.

One my point about the KHOA GO is especially with one technique. Bop Co sau loi 2: this technique is with a Don Chan 14. Personally I refuse this kind of technique. I don't think we can put a Don Chan in a self-defense, this is ridiculous, as we know exactly that the best way to do a Don Chan like the number 14 we need a lot of collaboration of our partner. We can consider to do it with his help, of course, as the technique is real, but we cannot think that is situation of defense of mine I use a Don Chan. The risk is too high for me to try to use a technique like this. I don't know if this technique was like this since its origin, but I remember in the past a different way of teaching, and I kept this one, but then I saw many masters teach with the Don Chan, like a demonstration, but cannot be a Self Defense techniques.

I am not saying to change, I cannot. I do not have the pretension and conceit to say what should be changed, I just want to give an overview of my experience, and especially to separate what in Vovinam must be from show and competition and what needs to be real that can really be a martial art as we are.

APPLICATION in the EXAMINATION

I think that in all the examination from blue belt till all the level of yellow, all the athletes must to demonstrate their skill to use martial art.

Never can miss our basic techniques, they are our roots, but as the trunk and leaves cannot live without the roots, even roots without a trunk and leaves are not useful, and that means that students and future teachers and master must show how to apply what learnt till their level.

Chien Luoc should be in both ways, single and technical, and real application

Phan Don must show every time like reality.

In my personal experience, I prefer to see someone who defend himself/herself immediately with a few mistake in the techniques, instead a Phan Don with low position, clean techniques but without reality.

SONG LUYEN AND APPLICATION

I consider the Song Luyen one of the best way to learn to move, coordinate our body and manage even the partner. I think that the Song Luyen represent that a student can adapt himself/herself with the training of the other.

Song Luyen doesn't represent exactly the application of techniques, but a way of training them. Anyway, even the Song Luyen cannot lose the main goal of martial art, the applicability of the techniques.

Song Luyen didn't born for competitions, as all the other program, the competitions arrived later, and we decided what put inside, but the first target is the training, and we need to keep this principle, even when we train a Song Luyen for a competition. Song Luyen cannot be changed to be much beautiful, if we want it beautiful we need to do it well, not different.

The Song Luyen is half a Quyen and half an application, so we should keep medium positions during the training and the real execution. This help the athlete to continue to use the basic movement, manage well the balance and the distance, but without doing a Song Luyen only like a fight, so without any position and nice movements.

Jump or roll cannot be the main problem of a Song Luyen. In all the points where we have a jump, for real al rolls techniques or throwing, so the at the beginning the training must be with the original technique, then we can decide to improve the skill of athletes giving them the possibility to put some jump, but without changing anything inside the Song Luyen, so they must be able to jump with the same execution of a roll or a throwing technique.

The way of teaching Song Luyen must be the same of the other program of Vovinam. It means we cannot teach a Song Luyen if we still haven't teach Chien Luoc and Phan Don. Without the teaching of these basic techniques, the students cannot understand what they are doing and why. The cannot live and practice a Song Luyen just like a sequence, they need to find inside the main techniques like phan don level 1 in Song Luyen 1, and the phan don level 2 in Song Luyen 2, and must be the same for all the Song Luyen.

A clear example of losing the application of basic techniques sometimes is the Song Luyen Vat 1.

Vat are really effective and useful techniques inside our program. They need to be trained very strong and for long time to understand them well, and only after a good training of the single techniques we can begin to learn the Song Luyen Vat. Song Luyen Vat many time is a repeat of 10 techniques without any application, where the two athletes know what the other will do, they don't try to lock on the ground for real, so they don't need to try to escape from the locking for real.

I think that for Song Luyen Vat, a good way of training, after learnt the single techniques, it is train the single techniques with the part of Song Luyen where we escape from the locking. If we learn how to escape for real, then in the Song Luyen will be much easy to use it and these techniques won't look fake and useless

DAO GAM TECHNIQUES

In this part I would like to show a problem I found in my gym during the teaching of Dao Gam techniques with some of my students, and their request was absolutely intelligent and useful: what can happen if in the real life someone attack us with the left hand with a knife?

For few seconds I didn't know what to say, as I never trained these techniques with a left-handed person, but my experience it helped me, so I found out the solution, that was: "do like it is a right-handed and adapt you to him, this is the principle of martial art".

My explication was correct but not enough for a student who was there to learn, so I had to be honest and say that Vovinam has not this kind of teaching, and for one moment I thought "it is not possible that Vovinam, with some many effective techniques didn't think about it".

Actually in Vovinam maybe we will have serious problems, because anybody think to teach us this kind of option.



Technique against left-handed knife attack

Even in “Phan Don chan” we have not the left part, but it is easy to do it and understand how to apply for the left, the same for many Khoa Go, it is easy to switch to left or to right, but in this case the problem is big, as the knife is dangerous and the approach to this kind of weapon is not like a punch or kick.

We are not considering to learn the defense technique with both our hands, but we must consider that our opponent is left-handed.

How many people thought about this? We cannot have DAO GAM techniques if we don’t think about them as Self Defense. Dao Gam are not only for Song Luyen Dao, are not only for Song Dao Phap and aren’t

show. We need these techniques become real, much more close to reality.

In the world of martial arts now there are many choice, and especially in the western countries people looks for self-defense, something practical and where they believe to learn the self-defense in a few lessons. We cannot give this, we believe in the real practice of martial arts, we know that we need time to learn well something, and only when the techniques are inside us we can use them well, but as all the other my topic, if we have something that can be real and effective we need to improve, not changing, but giving something to show outside that Vovinam is not for show only, Vovinam is a martial art, Vovinam protect yourself.

This is not a proposal of new technique or a request to put this program inside the Vovinam teaching program, but it is a way to open our mind and think that it is a problem if we don’t consider to teach these techniques in both side.

It is easy when we decide to use left or right hand, it is our choice, but when the choice arrives from our opponent we cannot ask him/her to change the attack because we don’t know in this side, the options are only two, learn the other side and be ready, or not be ready and the end won’t be nice.

Here I will show my studies about the attack by left-handed opponent with a knife based on the official program of Vovinam, without putting new techniques but only using the same that we already know.

DAO GAM 1, here the first problem thinking about a left-handed attack, because we cannot think to use exactly the same movement of the right-handed, but we cannot also think to have more techniques, so we need to adapt. We can use the same block like Gat 3, and then use the Cho but with the left and not with right.



Dao Gam number 1

DAO GAM 2 is more difficult, as we must change the movement and do the opposite of the right. The block must be with the right hand, then the left work behind the arm and make the lever to continue, but turning in the opposite side with the CHO 2 right.



Dao Gam number 2

DAO GAM 3 and **DAO GAM 7** as the number 2, we need to learn how to move in the opposite side and reverse the movements, anything will change, only the directions.

Dao Gam number 3



Dao Gam number 7

DAO GAM 4 can be exactly the same. It is a straight attack, we don't care from which hand, we can move exactly in the same way of the right-handed opponent.



Dao Gam number 4

DAO GAM 5 can be exactly the same, or use the same technique of **DAO GAM 9**, as we move in the side of the arm attack. In this case we need to do it the number 9 but in the other side.



Dao Gam number 5



Dao Gam number 5 with the option like the number 9

DAO GAM 6 as the number 2 needs to work in the opposite side with the arm and work the throwing techniques from left shoulder.



Dao Gam number 6

DAO GAM 8 can be the same but in the other side kicking with left leg, or an easy way, doing like the DAM THAP left first level.



Dao Gam number 8

DAO GAM 9 must become like the number 5 in the right-handed attack



Dao Gam number 9

DAO GAM 10 can be the same exactly, because moving on the other side could be dangerous and slow. We must consider that we don't change or guard, we keep the left guard as always, so we need to adapt our movements to the attack that we receive.



Dao Gam number 10

DAO GAM 11 like the other two with same attack, we need to reverse blocking under the left arm and then make the throwing on the ground in the other side.



Dao Gam number 11

DAO GAM 12 is maybe one of the most difficult to change, as we can keep the same technique but reversed, and is not so easy to work on this kind of levers in both side, but is the best solution.



Dao Gam number 12

As we see, many techniques can be the same and reversed, some of them need some little changing, and a few can be exactly the same.

What I mean is that we need to be prepared on it. If we ask to most of practitioners to work with the left-handed opponent, they don't know what to do, especially in this kind of techniques. I consider it very serious, especially if the practitioner is a teacher.

I know, we already have many techniques in Vovinam and we don't need anymore, but we need to improve them and make them effective. This should be the target of each teacher, because Vovinam give us all the means necessary to have the best martial art, then we are who can do the difference.

Everything in Vovinam is not just movement, each movement has a meaning, this meaning we need to find by ourselves, but we also need someone who show us the right way to find the meaning of each technique.

We need to grow up a much effective Vovinam keeping what we have achieved till now. We don't need to sacrifice anything of our martial art, we can continue to work for competition, demonstration, great show, but keeping the real essence itself.

CONCLUSION

Everyone has the right to live VOVINAM how they prefer, anyone can tell us how our Vovinam must be. We only know what we need and want by our martial art, but if there is this right, we need to remember that as a teacher of Vovinam, as a master with a red belt, when the RED represents the right guide to the way of martial art because we are the nucleus of Vovinam, we have the duty to give all the options and show all the kinds of ways to live Vovinam. Our students must have in front of them all the choices, and all of them must be right and useful for their future purpose, only after this they will do the right choices.

We cannot think to change Vovinam but we can consider an evolution of it. We can try to participate to this evolution and give our support for the best development of our beloved martial art.

Anyone should decide to change, put a program out of our history without an official permission but we can consider to help our Vovinam school to become much bigger, and only with an inside support we can reach this target.

I hope to give all my support to Vovinam, as I am sure that Vovinam will support me for the rest of my life.

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Cover photo with Grandmaster Nguyen Van Chieu taken by Florin Macovei

Photos of the thesis taken by Federico Melzi

Partner in photos: Daniele Marinig