Selections from: The Gardens of Tranquil Wisdom: Tuệ Tịnh 慧靖, Vietnamese Buddhism, and Health Care in Trấn Dynasty Vietnam

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Within Vietnam, the Vietnamese monk physician Tuệ Tịnh 慧靖 (c. 1308? 1311? 1330? 1331?-c.1400) is reasonably well known for having been sent, probably in 1885, as a living present to the Ming Dynasty from the Trấn royal court. He is also well known as having created a multitude, the usual number given is twenty four, of medical gardens in the territory ruled by the Trấn. Among health care professionals in Vietnam Tuệ Tịnh is even more well known for having written, probably co-authored, two of the foundational texts of Vietnamese Traditional Medicine. The most famous of these, Nam Ðược Thần Hiếu 南薬神效 (Miraculous Drugs of the South), is said to have been composed while Tuệ Tịnh resided at the Ming court in Nanjing. However, in terms of popular memory, as evidenced by local festivals, street names, and other activities, Tuệ Tịnh is most cherished, and commemorated, for something he did not do. He never returned from China, even though he wanted to so badly that he requested that the epitaph on his tomb consist of a request for his remains to be returned. It is almost unheard of for scholars to know anything about the personal feelings of a non-royal, non-aristocratic, fourteenth-century Vietnamese man. But, as surely as we can know anything about such a person, we know that Tuệ Tịnh wanted to go home.

This presentation will explore the resonances of Tuệ Tịnh as an archetype of a Vietnamese Thiền Trúc Lâm Buddhist monk and will also present the author's thoughts on the twenty-first century reverberations of his example for Buddhist communities, especially those involved in health care, in Vietnam today.

Wednesday, October 9
12:00 Noon
Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue