

Influence of Taoism on Vietnamese Ancient Novels

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Abstract: *Taoism is an ancient religion, long-lasting in Chinese history, it has overcome many challenges of space and time to survive today. Right after its birth, Taoism had a certain influence from Sichuan, Ha Dong and spread to the Changjiang basin and spread throughout the vast Chinese country. Historically, Taoism has also interacted with many different cultures and left its mark in many East Asian countries. We can see its influence in the beliefs, religions and rituals of many classes of people, in many countries, over the centuries. During the first propagation into Vietnam, Taoism found similar long - standing beliefs available. The cult of magic, witchcraft, talisman ... of the ancient Vietnamese, has become a fertile ground for sowing Taoist seeds. Taoism has a great influence on the spiritual life of Vietnamese people, including literature. On the basis of researching the documents and articles going on to study the influence of Taoism on Vietnam's ancient novels, thereby contributing to understanding the process of exchange and acculturation of Vietnamese people in history.*

Keywords: *Influence, Taoism, ancient novels, Vietnamese.*

I. Introduction

The Vietnamese people have been available in the spirit of art since the past. With funny naive imaginations, with a rudimentary level of knowledge, they know how to put lyrics and stories as well as set stories. Without words, they circulated works by mouth. It was not until later, although the writing appeared and changed many times, but because most people in general were less able to study the old stories, new stories were mostly from mouth to mouth another but left.

Like other ethnic groups, the ancient Vietnamese also had mythical art. The Vietnamese myths are simple but interesting and interesting. This is a national literary tradition, a document about the oldest period of Vietnamese life. It is the source of our history and story later. Following the myth, Vietnamese people still keep writing. From colorful mythical myths, proceed to build athletic heroes, stories of humanity, but have been sanctified. What is especially in Vietnam, polytheism has existed since ancient times still remains ruins until later. Thanks to that, we can easily learn the origin of some legends and legends.

In the Northern domination period, there were the colonists who recorded some ancient stories of Vietnamese people, such as the book GiauChau signed by Trieu Cong and Tang Sang, Luu Tuan's book of Manneral expressions in the Tang Dynasty. They recorded a few stories, due to curiosity rather than intention to collect. But it also proves that our ancestors' old stories have been noticed by foreigners while learning about Vietnamese and Vietnamese soil.

In the Ly and Tran dynasties, feudal writers began collecting myths, myths and fairy tales of the nation. It should be noted that all types of ancient stories, whether oral or recorded, of folk or of the dominant ruling class, are not included in the literary class by the majority of the feudal class. Although they did not consider it bullshit, they did not show any serious expression. In education and in the faculty, people speak only of the poet without teaching to the "story" whether it is a novel or a fairy. The scholar who writes for the sake of collecting fairy tales and national myths is for the purpose of finding additional documents for the national history rather than for preserving folklore.

In the process of communicating with the ideologies in the world that have been spread into Vietnam, Vietnamese people have been selectively acquired and modified to suit Vietnamese people's minds. One of the ideologies spread into Vietnam very early (about the 2nd century) is Taoism.

"Taoism is an important constituent of the traditional Chinese culture and has a great influence on every social aspect and ancient cultural and artistic thoughts in China"¹.

In Vietnam in particular and in East Asia in general, Taoism has a great impact on all fields of life, especially in spiritual activities. In traditional point of view, Taoism was introduced in Vietnam very

early²without any obstacles. It developed freely, dominated people's spiritual activities and developed from a low level to a high level.

Taoism also greatly affected Vietnamese ancient novels, especially novels written in Chinese. It is easy to see the imprint of Taoism through many novels written in Chinese, namely:

Viet Dien U Linh(Collection of Stories on the Shady and Spiritual World of the Viet Realm) with the stories: *Uyminh dung liethientrungta thanhPhuHuudaivuong* (Ly Hoang), *Thai uytrungtue Vu Luong Cong* (Muc Than), *UngthienhoaducnguyentrunghauthodiaKy Nguyen Quan*, *QuangLoithanhhuuuytePhuUngdaivuong* (Than Long Do), *MinhchulinhungchieucamBaoHuudaivuong*(Mountain God of DongCo),*Tan VienhuuthanhkhuongquocHienUngdaivrong* (Son Tinh), *ThienholinhungChuong Vuquoccong*, *Loitelinhthong Hue Tin daivuong* (Nam Hai Long VuongQuan), etc.

Linh Nam Chich Quai(Selection of Strange Tales in Linh Nam) with the stories: *Ngutinhtuyen* (The Tale ofNgutin), *Ho tinhhtuyen* (The Tale of Ho tinh), *Moc tinhhtuyen* (The Tale ofMoc tinh), *Nhat Da Trachhtuyen* (The Tale of Nhat Da Trach), *Dong ThienVuonghtuyen* (The Tale of Dong ThienVuong), *Ly OngTronghtuyen* (The Tale of Ly OngTrong), *Tan VienTruyen* (The tale of Tan Vien),*Man Nuonghtuyen* (The tale of Man Nuong), etc.

Thanh Tong Di Thao(Thanh Tong's Posthumous Manuscript) with two volumes: the upper volume and the lower volume. The upper volume included: *ChauMaiyeunu htuyen* (The story of ogress Chau Mai), *Thiemthumieudue ky* (The article of a toad descent), *LuongPhatDauThuyetKy*(The article of two Buddhists arguing), *Phucaitruyen* (The story of a rich beggar), *Nhithan nu htuyen* (The Story of two goddesses), *Son quanpha* (The genealogy of the mountain god), *Giaothuluc* (The letter of a mosquito), *Hoquockyduyen* (A strange Fate in China), *Vu montungmieu*(The laughter at Vu Mon mountain), *Ngugiachi di* (The strange story of afisherman's family);

The lower volume included: *Duong phutruyen* (The story of the goat husband), *Tran nhancuthuyphu* (Earthly People in the palace of the River God), *Lang Bacphungtien* (Meeting a god at Lang Bac Lake), *MongKy* (The story about a dream), *Thu tinhhtuyen* (The story of a ghost mouse), *Nhatthuthuthan nu*(Getting married to a goddess thanks to an inscription).

TruyenKy Man Luc (Collection of Strange Tales)with the stories: *Tra Dong giangdanluc* (The story of a mandarin reborn), *Long Dinhdoitung* (Argument in Long Dinh), *TuThuctienhonluc* (TuThuc married afairy), *Pham Tu Hu du thientaoluc* (The story of Pham Tu Hu going to heaven), *Na Sinhtieudoiluc* (The talk of the woodcutter at Na Mountain), etc.

TruyenKy Tan Pha (New genealogy of fantasy short stories)with the stories: *Van Cat than nu* (Goddess Van Cat), *An Apletnu* (The Heroine in An Ap), *BichCaukyngo* (A strange meeting in BichCau), *Hoanh Son tiencuc* (A fairygame of chess on Hoanh Son Mountain), etc.

Through these ancient literary works, it can be seen that not only in China but even in Vietnam "... many fairy images and legends in Taoism were the sourcesfor ancient literaryworks"³.

II. Contents

It can be said that Taoism affected the imagination of writers who were on their ways to find new values in human life, making peoplebecome more and more perfect and enjoy more literarysense of beauty. Taoism contributed to leading ancient novels of our countryfrom *But ky*, *Chichquai*, *Truyenky* and to some other genres such as *diem tinh*, *cong an*. The influence of Taoism on Vietnamese ancient novels can be determined on the following basic issues:

In terms of environment (context) and time: According toTaoism, the activities of humans, fairies and ghosts were divided into three different spaces: The upperspace was for fairies; the middle space was for humans; and the lower space was for ghosts. "All things in heaven and earth cannot be determined,just follow the heart to think.In life and death, there are three parts related to each other:fairies above, humans in the middle, and devils below. Good people becomefairies. Fairies are degradedto become humans. Wicked people become devils.Devils do good thingsand become people again. Devils imitate people;people imitate fairies - around and around. That is a small difference between the death and life"⁴. In *TruyenKy Man Luc*, there was a similar idea. "Now I tell you: in the transmigration of heaven and earth, there are only two species of good and evil. For people who regularly do good things, their names will have been recorded in heaven even when they are still alive. For people who do evil things, their names have been recorded in hell even when theyhave not died"⁵.

According to Taoism, thefairyland consisted of thirty-six floors of heaven, ten continents and three islands. In which, there were ten large fairy caves, thirty-six small fairy caves and seventy-two lands of happiness. The fairy caves were on the mainland and the fairy islands were in the sea. Although thesewerethe products of the Taoists' imagination, which were not true, but they provided Vietnamese authors with

materialsto write novels, especially *truyenky*, *trichquai*. Many novels praised the beauty as well as the leisurely and comfortable lives of the fairyland. For example, in *TuThuctienhonluc* (TuThuc married a fairy), the author praised the fairy scene: "Trying to climb up, the cave became wider and wider. When he was at the top of the mountain, the sky was bright. Looking around, he saw magnificent castles with green and red clouds on the rails and strange flowers blooming in front of the doors. He thought if it was not a place for worship, it must be an area for people who stayed away from the world, like Thu mountain and Dao spring⁶, for example"⁷. In addition to praising the beauty of the fairyland, in *TuThuctienhonluc*, TuThuc met GiangHuong, whose amazing beauty made him infatuated. In the splendid scenery of the fairyland, everything seemed to completely vanish, leaving only the extreme happiness between TuThuc and GiangHuong.

The time in Vietnamese ancient novels was sometimes unreal and was only the time in the each person's mind. In terms of this, Vietnamese ancient novels were also greatly influenced by Taoism. In Taoism's point of view, one year in heaven equaled 100 years on earth. This viewpoint can be seen in *TuThuctienhonluc* (TuThuc married a fairy): TuThuc lived in heaven for a year, but when he returned to the earth, he realized that everything had changed and he no longer recognized his old acquaintances. He used his name to ask the elders in the village and someone said: "When I was young, I was told that my great-grandfather, with the same name as yours, went to the mountains for over 80 years now. This year was the 5th year under the reign of DienNinh, the third generation of Le dynasty, but he had not returned"⁸. Thus, in the conception of Vietnamese ancient novels, one year in heaven equaled about 100 years on earth. However, this was only the time that humans estimated and interpreted to be in accordance with the heaven and earth.

In Vietnamese ancient novels, the space and time were sometimes ignored. This can be shown in *BichCaukyngo (Truyenky tan pha)*: "That afternoon, there was a wine party in the yard with all kinds of fruit. GiangKieu got dressed neatly and watched the moon with TuUyen. Suddenly, through the partition, they saw that the castle was like pearls with bright red almonds. The scenery was different from any other places on earth. There were yellow apricot blossoms and purple plums; everything was beautiful like in heaven. After a while, Princess Tien Dung and GiangHuong came down from the clouds. Other fairies came down later - more than a hundred fairies in total"⁹. In Vietnamese legends, Princess Tien Dung was in the Hung Vuong dynasty; GiangHuong was in the Tran dynasty and GiangKieu - TuUyen were in the Le dynasty, but they could overcome space and time to be able to meet one another. This was really a new creation, creating a thrill for Vietnamese ancient novels.

For the construction of characters in ancient novels in Chinese, we also recognized the influence of Taoism. One of the main directions of Taoism was to practise to become gods and seek for immortality. Taoism formed a system of practising methods in order to prolong the life-span and prevent diseases and accidents so that people could live long whereas their bodies remained young forever. The Taoist gods could call for wind and rain and could travel like clouds and smoke. They could ride a cloud or a dragon to heaven and fly over famous mountains. They didn't eat cereals and just breathed the air to live. Some people could make themselves invisible so that nobody could see them. Thus, the Taoist gods had two basic characteristics: First, they were immortal. Secondly, they had magical powers. These two characteristics were demonstrated through two types of images: deifying earthly humans and making gods become earthly humans.

In Vietnamese ancient novels, gods becoming earthly humans included GiangHuong in *TuThuctienhonluc*, Nu Than in *Nhatthuthu than nu*, QuynhNuong in *Van Cat than nu*, GiangKieu in *BichCaukyngo in Truyenky tan pha* of Doan Thi Diem, etc. All of them had fairy origins, had supernatural magic and could ride clouds, cross the sea, and transform into many other people. They sometimes transformed into beautiful girls teasing earthly people; they sometimes turned into an old ladies or old beggars standing on the sidewalk. GiangKieu hid herself a painting and prepared meals for TuUyen every day. Due to various reasons, they came down to earth to become secular people. They also got married, gave birth to children and had enough "seven human feelings - six human passions" like normal people. All those characters "from GiangKieu, Princess Lieu - Hanh, Lady Dinh to TuUyen were all mysterious. The images of Princess LieuHanh, GiangKieu transforming themselves, Tu - Uyen riding cranes to heaven showed the profound manner of Taoism"¹⁰.

In terms of humans becoming gods, there were a Taoist surnamed La in *Nam OngMong Luc*, Chu Dong Tu and Tien Dung in *Linh Nam Chich Quai-Nhat Da Trach*, TuThuc in *Truyenky man luc - TuThucTienhonluc*, Chu Sinh in *Thanh Tong di thao - Hoa Quockyduyen*, the girl in ThanhKhe village in *Thanh Tong di thao - Duong phutruyen*, and so on. Each of these specific characters had earthly origins, experiencing many difficulties and challenges and becoming gods or goddesses thanks to their honesty and contribution to life.

Some characters in Vietnamese ancient novels also expressed the conception of birth and death in Taoism. For example, the God playing the flute that Le Thanh Tong met at Lang Bac Lake in *Thanh Tong di thao, Lang Bacphungtien* (Meeting a God at Lang Bac Lake) or the practising woman at VongNguyet communal temple, Tam Dao Mountain in *Dao hoamongky* overcame the birth and death of their bodies and souls. They lived thousands of years, often riding clouds and wind and suddenly disappearing or appearing.

*** Some reviews**

Through the stories in ancient Vietnamese novels, it can be seen that these stories were often fabulous. "Reading *Truyenkytan pha* (New genealogy of fantasy short stories), everyone can easily see that the four stories that we translated and introduced were all fabulous and strange"¹. However, behind those stories were the social problems that were arising and were unable to be practically solved, so they (a part of Vietnamese people) wanted to find a nonworldly solution in the life of troubles and disasters.

The works revealed humans' desire to escape from the real world to find an ideal society on earth. This cynical point of view more or less showed the criticism of the authors in the context of a chaotic country full of uncertainties.

Through the legendary stories that were collected and recorded, we can see our ancestors' conception of national history, customs and habits, human behaviors, etc. and their selective reception of cultural values from other countries in the world (especially a large country like China).

III. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be said that Taoism contributed to stimulating the imagination of writers on their way to find the true, the good and the beautiful of life, making people become more and more perfect and enjoy more literacy sense of beauty. For the development of our country's literature, Taoism contributed to leading novels from *Butky* to *Chichquai*, *Truyenky* and some other genres like *diem tinh*, *cong an*, etc.

Receiving Taoism in its most positive aspects, Vietnamese authors in history created a leisurely tradition with the peaceful life in the countryside. In addition, for the national literature, they created a comfortable space in the strict, hasty and unfair society.

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Enote

¹*Tung thu tam bach de* (History of Chinese Culture) (Tran Ngoc Thuan, Dao Duy Dat & Dao Phuong Chi, Trans.), Vietnam Culture and Information Publishing House, 1999, p. 924.

²Currently, there has not been any confirmation of the time when Taoism was introduced into Vietnam. But according to some historical data, some remnants of history and some stories in Vietnam, it is possible that Taoism was spread into Vietnam around the end of the 2nd century.

³*Tung thu tam bach de* (History of Chinese Culture) (Tran Ngoc Thuan, Dao Duy Dat & Dao Phuong Chi, Trans.), Vietnam Culture and Information Publishing House, 1999, p. 927

⁴Hanoi National University of Education, Center for Chinese Studies (2000), *Dao giaova van hoa*, Vietnam Culture and Information Publishing House, p. 314.

⁵Hanoi National University of Education, Center for Chinese Studies (2000), *Dao giaova van hoa*, Vietnam Culture and Information Publishing House, p. 314.

⁶Thuumountain: In the past, the Western region had the ThuuLinh mountain, because the mountain of the Thuu bird should be named. Source of Dao: According to Dao Nguyen's original flower, Dao has a fisherman in Vu Lang who goes to the forest to get lost. There the fishermen met a very peaceful hamlet, asking if they were refugees of the Qin Dynasty, they did not know anything about the present time. Some fishermen have left for several days. The story came to the county official, he wanted the fisherman to take it, but when he returned, the fisherman could not find any trace. From then on, the words of Vu Lang, source Dao, and Dao village just pointed to a secluded place and also a fairyland.

⁷Nguyen Du (TrucKhe, Trans., 1943), *Truyenky man luc*, Ho Chi Minh City Culture–Literature and Arts Publishing House, Literature Teaching Association of Ho Chi Minh City, 1988, p. 98 – 99.

⁸Nguyen Du (TrucKhe, Trans., 1943), *Truyenky man luc*, Ho Chi Minh City Culture–Literature and Arts Publishing House, Literature Teaching Association of Ho Chi Minh City, 1988, p. 107.

⁹Diem, D. T. (1962). *Truyenky tan pha* (Chi, N. L. &Giap, T. V., Trans.) Education Publishing House, p.118.

¹⁰Diem, D. T. (1962). *Truyenky tan pha* (Chi, N. L. &Giap, T. V., Trans.) Education Publishing House, p. 12.

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