



**THE THOUGHT OF "INNER SAGE, OUTER KING"
IN LE THANH TONG'S POEM *PHONG NIEN* IN
VIETNAMESE MEDIEVAL LITERATURE**

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Abstract:

Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam very early and its influence on Vietnamese society is relatively comprehensive. In Confucian philosophy, "inner sage, outer king" are considered an important ideological core, and are also the highest goal of self-cultivation for each Confucian scholar. Le Thanh Tong was a king who promoted Confucianism. He brought Confucianism to a unique position in Vietnamese feudal society during the Quang Thuan and Hong Duc periods. When absorbing the influence of Confucian ideology, Le Thanh Tong also thoroughly understood the content of "inner sage, outer king", thereby reflecting it through his compositions. *Quy nh Uyen Cuu Ca* is known as a collection of poems including 9 excellent Chinese poems by Le Thanh Tong, and is also a very valuable poetic heritage of the author. In it, each poem expresses his views on the times, literature, and art. The thought of "inner sage, outer king" is expressed quite clearly by the author in this collection of poems. Although it does not cover all 9 poems, every time it is mentioned, the author emphasizes and boldly depicts it. The first poem and also typical for this thought is the poem *Phong Nien*.

Keywords: Confucianism, "Inner sage, outer king", Le Thanh Tong, literature, Confucian ideology

1. Introduction

Le Thanh Tong was a famous emperor in the history of Vietnamese feudal dynasties. He was not only famous for his ability to rule the country, bringing the country of Dai Viet during the early Le dynasty into the most prosperous period of its time, but also famous for his literature. As a monarch who worshiped Confucianism, Le Thanh Tong brought this doctrine to a unique position in society, and at the same time almost completely applying the core of Confucian doctrine to the work of governing the country and

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protecting the people as well as literary works. In Le Thanh Tong's creative career, *Quynh Uyen Cuu Ca* is perhaps the best collection of poems and the most comprehensive expression of the influence of Confucian thought on him. For Le Thanh Tong, "inner sage, outer king" is one of the important ideas that govern and influence his life and career. The first poem in the collection is *Phong Nien* to express relatively completely Le Thanh Tong's view of "inner sage, outer king".

2. Research content

2.1. "Inner sage, outer king" - an important core in Confucian philosophical ideology

2.1.1. Origin of "Inner sage, outer king"

Initially investigating, the origin of the phrase "*Inner sage, outer king*" is from the Lao-Zhuang classic, but why does it say "Inner sage, outer king" is an important nucleus in Confucianist doctrine? In the Confucian classic, the Analects, Confucius once mentioned concepts such as "*sage*" 圣者 or 圣人 to refer to the highest moral standards of humans, or "immortal king" 先王 or "royalty" 王者 are the highest standards of kings, and those are the kings who use "human rule" 仁治. From then on, Confucianism aimed for the ultimate goal in the personal cultivation of each monarch: to have the perfect morality of a saint on the inside, and to implement the policy of "humanity" on the outside. that is, "*cultivate yourself to calm the mind of all people*" (cultivate yourself to calm the mind of all people).

2.1.2. "Inner sage, outer king" is the standard of Confucian philosophy

"Inner sage, outer king" is the consistent moral standards of Confucianism. Every time we talk about "inner sage", we must mention "outer king". Every time we mention "outer king" we must mention "self-cultivation". "Inner sage" represents the pursuit of ideal personality. "Outer king" shows the desire to achieve an ideal political system. This is very consistent with the Confucian motto "*cultivate yourself, cultivate the family, rule the country, and put peace in the world*". Confucianists believe that "inner sage" is the premise of "outer king", "outer king" is the inherent meaning of "inner sage". Just like Chu Hy once said, "Cultivate yourself to be respectful, cultivate to protect people, cultivate to protect the common people", that is, you must first correct yourself (tri ki 治己), then you can change for the people (tri nhan 治人) to ensure peace and security in the country and people.

According to the Confucian point of view, a king only needs to be virtuous, fold his arms, and the world will be peaceful and prosperous. The ideal personality model of the Confucian emperor is "Inner sage, outer king", which was initially outlined by Confucius in the Analects, and gradually built up throughout history. Vi Chinh Thong believes that this is the starting point of the internal sage doctrine, and also the final stop of the internal sage doctrine. As for the aspect of promoting the social and literary influence of the Zhou dynasty, it was Confucius' doctrine of external kingship. Confucius and Mencius believed that when the internal sacred aspect is completed, the external

aspect will naturally be completed. Xun Zi took a step forward, distinguishing between inner sage, outer king. He believed that saints are those who carry out exemplary moral relationships, it is good orders that are carried out, and if those two things are done to the fullest, then it is enough to do justice to the world. That's why scholars consider the holy king to be a teacher. These two aspects complete the ideal personality model of the holy king. If the internal sage requires moral qualities, the outer king requires socio-political qualities.

Thus, it can be affirmed that "inner sage, outer king", although originating from Taoist classics, is still an important core in Confucian philosophical ideology.

2.2. The idea of "Inner sage, outer king" in the poem *Phong Nien*

Le Thanh Tong loved literature and was good at composing, he was proficient in both Chinese and Nom. Each collection of poems he wrote expressed the literary style and verbal art of a top poet of that time. When mentioning Le Thanh Tong's poetry, the first poetry collection that needs to be mentioned is *Quynh Uyen Cuu Ca*. These nine songs of Quynh garden represent his 9 points of view on history, culture, literature and art.

The central image in Le Thanh Tong's work is the image of the lyrical ego. The author has built the image of an emperor according to Confucian standards. This is a king who is extremely eager to learn, "*Diligently reading books in front of the lamp for ten years / Still haven't read all the books of saints and sages*". Diligence and eagerness to learn is an outstanding quality of Le Thanh Tong, making him close to the image of a traditional Confucian. Besides diligently studying, he also worked hard at court affairs.

It is the same heart concerned about people's worries as Nguyen Trai in the past, but Le Thanh Tong shows the ability to realize those worries. He shows the model of a wise man who considers being king a responsibility and duty, not an enjoyment. Le Thanh Tong provides proof that the holy monarch in Nguyen Trai's dream has come true, at least in terms of literary image. This dream was expressed by Nguyen Trai when he wrote self-education on behalf of Le Loi *Hau tu huan* to teach the Crown Prince about the necessary qualities of an emperor. Certainly, Le Thanh Tong also tried very hard to become such a role model, but no real "king" could fulfill even a part of such imaginary demands. Thus, he also had dark moments in his life and career as king that even the historian of the Le Dynasty, Ngo Si Lien, had to comment on: "*But the work of land and wood is too old for the old regime, brotherhood lacks compassion, that is a weakness*". However, from a literary perspective, the image of a lyrical character in Le Thanh Tong's poetry is an extremely ideal model of a Confucian emperor. He himself is also proud of that.

When it comes to the idea of "inner sage, outer king", *Quynh Uyen Cuu Ca* can be said to be the collection of poems that best expresses this idea. The first poem in this collection is the poem *Ngu che Suu, Dan nhi tue bach coc phong dang hiep vu ca vinh di ky ki thuy* 御製丑寅二歲百穀豐登協于歌詠以紀其瑞, called *Phong Nien* 豐年 for short.

Quynh Uyen Cuu Ca begins with a poem that both expresses the view of "rule by virtue", "outer king" and shows pride in the regime that Le Thanh Tong and his predecessors built:

*"Bo duc thi nhan tin vi nang,
Hoang thien tich phuc lu phong dang.
Duong duong doan si tram anh quy,
Toa toa ngoan phu phap lenh thang.
Ha huan Thang Hinh thoi giam gioi,
Van mo Vu liet nhat khoi hoang.
Le nguyen bao noan huu trung ung,
Tuc da can can lu chien cang."*

Translation:

*"Promoting kindness and practicing righteousness, we have not really been able to do it.
Having consecutive harvests is due to God's blessing.
A virtuous man of noble should be respected.
There are strict punishments for those who are obedient and stubborn.
Instructing the Xia Dynasty, the Shang Dynasty constantly admonished them.
The book of King Van's book and the chapter of King Vu's daily promotion.
The people lived prosperously, and good omens appeared.
But we still work hard at work late at night, worried."*

The poet begins with humility when he admits that he has not been able to do important things like "virtuous father" or "poet" and he admits that the harvest is due to the blessing of the emperor. Thus, in the two introductory verses, Le Thanh Tong partly demonstrated the success of the idea of "outer king". However, with a certain humility, he considered that achievement a blessing from "royal heaven". Heaven represents the supreme divine force. When blessed by heaven, it means that people's actions are in accordance with heaven's teachings. In these two verses, the author implicitly expressed the spirit of "inner sage". When a Confucian student cultivates himself, if he is in accordance with the way of heaven, he will achieve results and be protected and supported by the supreme deity. Furthermore, that Confucian student was in the position of an Emperor, so the prosperity of the people was the truest proof of the harmony between Heaven and Human.

In particular, the two concluding sentences clearly demonstrate the "inner sage" nature. The poem shows his eagerness to learn, regardless of whether he is late or early. The last sentence is quoted from the sentence "*War is tense / Like a deep forest / Like silver and ice*" in the *Book of Poetry*. It means "*to be filled with fear as if walking on thin ice, as if falling into a deep abyss.*" The author cited this ancient verse to express his thoughts of serving the people and the country, regardless of day or night, no rest, just wanting to build a peaceful and prosperous Dai Viet country. This wish is truly extremely precious and worthy of respect from a wise man.

Re-evaluating the two pairs of introductory sentences (first two sentences) and ending (last two sentences), we can see the close connection of the thought "Inner sage, outer king". If the first two sentences clearly express the way of heaven (for the world to establish the mind) and the way of governance (for all worlds to create peace), the concluding sentence is the most authentic reflection of humanity (for the people to establish the way) in Le Thanh Tong's ideas.

Phong Nien can be considered the best poem in *Quynh Uyen Cuu Ca*, combining both the categories of "inner saint" and "outer king" and fully expressing the four characteristics that Truong Tai mentioned in *Hoanh Cu Tu Cu*. Perhaps it is not too much to say that *Phong Nien* is the first fragrant flower to bloom in Le Thanh Tong's Quynh garden.

Researcher Bui Van Nguyen evaluates this poem by commenting on each pair of verses. He said the opening two sentences showing humility; The four sentences of truth and argument express the choice of good people, excluding dishonest people. The two concluding sentences do not show complacency and constant thinking about making the country better. And he generally evaluated the entire poem as having clear meaning, poetic lyrics, deep and interesting poetic ideas.

Le Thanh Tong's poetry is skillful in language and clear in meaning. This is a special point that creates a unique style in his compositions. The categories of Confucian thought were applied flexibly by Le Thanh Tong in his Chinese poems to serve his literary and political views, using virtue to rule the people. He wanted to make the country prosperous and hundreds of families rich and strong. And to realize that ambition, he always tried to cultivate himself, improve his education, and worked hard early and late to do the best things for the people. Although the literary society he wanted to build was somewhat ideal, in reality he contributed a lot to the work of building the dynasty, the clearest evidence being that the post-Le dynasty under Hong Duc was considered a during the most glorious periods of Vietnamese feudal history.

3. Conclusion

Applying Confucianism, Buddhism or Lao-Zhuang doctrine to governing the country is not the essential issue, but the most important thing is that the monarchs must demonstrate the value of the doctrines they are applying, as well as like selecting the quintessence of those doctrines to aim for the highest goal of building a peaceful and prosperous society. Le Thanh Tong successfully applied Confucian thought to build a glorious period of the early Le dynasty in particular and the feudal period in the history of the Vietnamese nation in general. He always tried to cultivate himself to follow the model of "inner sage", and from those personal values, he tried to implement them to govern the people and secure the country, following the model of the concept of "outer king". "Inner sage" and "outer king" in Le Thanh Tong blend into one, forming the general concept "Inner sage, outer king". To affirm the success of applying a typical model of

Confucian doctrine in governing the country, Le Thanh Tong created the poem *Phong Nien* like an early flower blooming in a fragrant garden.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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