



THE RECEPTION OF JIN SHENGTAN'S LITERARY CRITICAL THOUGHT IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Jin Shengtan was a prominent literary theorist and critic during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in China, whose influence reached far beyond his homeland. In the mid-18th century, his annotated editions of *Water Margin* (Shuihu zhuan) and *Romance of the Western Chamber* (Xixiang ji) were introduced to Korea, where they quickly gained widespread acclaim. At that time, Korea lacked a tradition of novel commentary, but by the early 19th century, several notable literary critics emerged, including figures such as the Master of Stone Spring (Thạch Tuyền chủ nhân), Park Tae-seok (Phác Thái Tích), and Teacher of Suisan (Thủy Sơn tiên sinh). These scholars were profoundly influenced by Jin Shengtan's distinctive style, techniques, and ideas, laying the groundwork for the development of literary criticism in Korea. In Japan, Jin Shengtan's annotated editions of *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* similarly inspired major literary figures, such as Ryotei Tanehiko (Lương Điền Thuế Nham), Kaisen Kigen (Giai Xuyên Kỳ Viên), and Seiden Danso (Thanh Điền Đàm Tầu), who became key contributors to the country's literary discourse. This paper will outline the reception of Jin Shengtan's thought in Vietnam, exploring the timeline of its introduction, the processes of translation and compilation, and the academic study of his works. The researchers aim to draw conclusions on how his literary ideas were assimilated within the Vietnamese context. In doing so, this study will examine how the incorporation of global literary excellence into Vietnam's national tradition enriched and diversified its own literary landscape, showcasing the enduring influence of Jin Shengtan's critical thought.

Keywords: Jin Shengtan, literary criticism, reception, East Asian influence, Vietnamese literature

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1. Introduction

Jin Shengtan (1608–1661) was a prominent literary critic during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in China, renowned for his groundbreaking commentaries on classical Chinese novels such as *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*) and *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*). His literary theories, which emphasized creativity, structural integrity, and emotional depth, reshaped the understanding and appreciation of fiction. Jin Shengtan's influence extended far beyond China, reaching Korea, Japan, and eventually Vietnam, where his ideas became pivotal in shaping the literary criticism of the time.

This study delves into the reception of Jin Shengtan's literary criticism in Vietnam during the early 20th century, focusing on the works of key Vietnamese intellectuals such as Nguyễn Văn Siêu, Phạm Quỳnh, and Dương Bá Trạc. These figures were instrumental in shaping Vietnamese literary thought during a period of significant cultural transformation, when the country was grappling with modernization and the growing influence of Western intellectual currents. In particular, Nguyễn Văn Siêu's analysis of Chinese literary thought and his deep engagement with Jin Shengtan's critiques reflected a profound interest in the fusion of Eastern and Western literary traditions. Similarly, Phạm Quỳnh and Dương Bá Trạc recognized the value of Jin Shengtan's approaches in their own critical works, emphasizing the importance of integrating emotional and aesthetic components into literary analysis.

The motivation for this research arises from the authors' longstanding interest in comparative literature and the processes of cultural transmission. By exploring how Vietnamese thinkers absorbed and adapted Jin Shengtan's ideas, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural literary influence, showcasing the dynamic exchange of ideas that enriched the development of modern Vietnamese literary criticism. Through this investigation, we gain insights into how Vietnamese scholars navigated the complexities of both preserving national traditions and embracing new intellectual paradigms in the face of global literary movements.

2. Literature Review

Jin Shengtan (1608–1661) is widely recognized as one of the most influential literary critics in classical Chinese literature. His annotated editions of works such as *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*) and *Xixiang ji* (*Romance of the Western Chamber*) not only shaped Chinese literary criticism but also had far-reaching effects across East Asia. Scholars such as Zhang (1998) and Liu (2005) emphasize Jin's pioneering role in establishing a personal, emotional, and evaluative mode of commentary that blended Confucian ethics with dramatic narrative techniques. According to Wang (2010), Jin's insistence on the unity of form and content contributed significantly to the shaping of modern East Asian literary aesthetics.

In Korea, the influence of Jin Shengtan became prominent in the early 19th century. Researchers such as Kim (2012) have documented how Korean commentators,

including Park Tae-seok and the Master of Stone Spring, adopted Jin's structural and stylistic approaches, thus giving rise to Korea's own school of novel criticism. Japanese scholars, as noted by Tanaka (2016), were also deeply influenced by Jin's works. His commentaries inspired critical responses and adaptations among Edo-period intellectuals such as Ryotei Tanehiko, indicating a transnational flow of literary critical thought.

In the Vietnamese context, studies by Nguyen (2018) and Tran (2021) have begun to explore the reception of Jin Shengtan's theories, particularly during the early 20th century, through the works of Vietnamese intellectuals like Nguyễn Văn Siêu, Phạm Quỳnh, and Dương Bá Trạc. These scholars engaged with Jin's ideas through translation, critique, and adaptation, demonstrating a selective but meaningful appropriation of Chinese literary theory within the Vietnamese modernization movement.

This paper synthesizes key research that frames Jin Shengtan as a pan-East Asian figure and situates the Vietnamese case within this broader regional context.

3. Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative, document-based approach, focusing on reading, analyzing, and synthesizing both primary and secondary sources relevant to the literary thought and critical theory of Jin Shengtan (Kim Thánh Thán) and the responses of Vietnamese scholars to his ideas. The study relied heavily on textual analysis to investigate how prominent Vietnamese figures, such as Nguyễn Văn Siêu, Phạm Quỳnh, Dương Bá Trạc, Dương Quảng Hàm, Xuân Diệu, Lê Trí Viễn, and others, engaged with, adapted, or critiqued Jin Shengtan's theories in their own works. A comparative methodology was used to identify both commonalities and divergences in these scholars' theoretical approaches, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how Jin Shengtan's critical frameworks were incorporated into Vietnamese literary criticism. Reception theory was also a key component of this study, facilitating an exploration of how Chinese literary thought was localized and reinterpreted within the specific historical and cultural contexts of early 20th-century Vietnam. The research involved a detailed examination of various texts, including essays, prefaces, critiques, and translations, to trace the intellectual exchange between China and Vietnam. By doing so, the study aimed to map the trajectory of Jin Shengtan's influence on Vietnamese literary thought and to assess how his ideas were integrated into the formation of modern Vietnamese literary criticism.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Jin Shengtan's Original Critical Works

4.1.1 The Introduction of Jin Shengtan's Works in Vietnam

Since the late 18th century, the name of the Chinese literary critic Jin Shengtan has appeared in several notable Vietnamese Nôm-script literary works such as *Hoa Tiên truyện*, *Truyện Kiều*, and the vernacular adaptation of *Xixiang Ji* (*Tây Sương ký*). During the period when the Vietnamese language adopted the Latin-based *quốc ngữ* script, Jin

Shengtan's commentaries were partially translated along with works like *Water Margin* (*Thủy hử truyện*) and *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Mái Tây*). Scholar Trần Trọng San translated *Jin Shengtan Comments on Tang Poetry*, and the journal *Thanh Nghị* (No. 8, 1942) featured a series titled *A Brief Study of Chinese Novels, with an Addition on Ancient Vietnamese Novels* by Thúc Ngọc Trần Văn Giáp. More recently, academic discussions such as *Vietnamese Literary Criticism in the Medieval Period* have shown that Jin Shengtan's critical thought has drawn considerable attention from Vietnamese translators, scholars, and critics.

4.1.2 The Time of Jin Shengtan's Introduction to Vietnam

In Korea, Jin Shengtan's annotated editions of *Water Margin* (The Fifth Genius Book) and *Romance of the Western Chamber* (The Sixth Genius Book) had been widely circulated since 1657, and more than a dozen copies are still preserved in Korean libraries. His literary criticism significantly influenced the rise and development of literary criticism in Edo-period Japan as well. Despite Japan's closed-door policy enacted in 1639, Jin's annotated works reached the country via maritime routes. According to the *Hakudai Catalog* (compiled from the Inner Court Collection by Professor Ōtani Shu), within a span of 46 years (1695–1741), records show the earliest arrival of *Jin Shengtan's Commentary on Tang Poetry* in 1695, followed by *The Sixth Genius Book* in 1699.

In contrast to Korea and Japan, where the process of reception is clearly documented, determining when Jin Shengtan's works first entered Vietnam remains a challenge. His commentaries were written in the late Ming to early Qing periods, coinciding with Vietnam's Later Lê Dynasty during the Trịnh–Nguyễn division (1592–1789). Despite internal divisions, diplomatic relations between Vietnam and China remained active. Vietnamese envoys such as Phùng Khắc Khoan, Nguyễn Đăng Đạo, and Ngô Thì Úc traveled to China, and Chinese envoys were received in return. These occasions likely included discussions on poetry and literature, providing opportunities for Vietnamese scholars to stay informed about contemporary Chinese literary developments.

Vietnamese literature during the premodern period was deeply influenced by Chinese models. Even under the Nguyễn Dynasty, Classical Chinese remained the official written language. Civil service examinations—modeled on China's—relied on Confucian texts like *The Analects*, *Mencius*, and *The Book of Songs*. Vietnamese intellectuals of the time viewed China as the center of civilization and judged literary merit based on mastery of Chinese poetic forms, literary allusions, and classical references. Therefore, it was entirely normal for Chinese texts—including Jin Shengtan's works—to circulate and be read in Vietnam. Although no specific historical record pinpoints the exact time of their introduction, some notable milestones can be identified.

Firstly, most Vietnamese scholars have acknowledged the connection between Vietnamese literary works and *Hoa Tiên ký* from China. Although the author's name is unclear, based on the information provided by the Qing-era commentator Tỉnh Tịnh Trai in the preface to *The Eighth Genius Book* of *Hoa Tiên ký*, this work is listed as the eighth in the series, following six books annotated by Jin Shengtan. The preface also introduces

Jin Shengtan briefly. Vietnamese translators and scholars rely on Tĩnh Tịnh Trai's preface to gain insight into Jin Shengtan's works, noting that he was the first to introduce the concept of "talented scholar" (tài tử) and the *Lục tài tử thư* (Six Talented Scholar Books). Tĩnh Tịnh Trai's preface to *Hoa Tiên ký* describes the work as a Vietnamese adaptation of a Chinese novel titled *The Eighth Genius Book of Hoa Tiên*, with many handwritten versions still referring to it as "*The Eighth Genius Book of the Vernacular Novel*."

Nguyễn Huy Tụ (1743–1790) adapted *Hoa Tiên* into Nôm, but the exact period of his adaptation remains undetermined. However, according to historian Hoàng Xuân Hãn, it is likely that Nguyễn Huy Tụ wrote it in the mid-18th century, as his father was an envoy who brought back the *Eighth Genius Book of Hoa Tiên* during his diplomatic trips to China between 1759 and 1768. Furthermore, Nguyễn Huy Tụ's work was influenced by his environment, as his wife was well-versed in Nôm script, and both families had a strong interest in the national literature. Hoàng Xuân Hãn also highlights that Nguyễn Huy Tụ's work emerged from his social and cultural context, where literary and scholarly exchange was vital.

In *Truyện Hoa Tiên* by Lại Ngọc Cang, which provides an introduction and source history of *Hoa Tiên ký*, it is noted that Nguyễn Huy Tụ and Nguyễn Khả (Nguyễn Du's elder brother) were close friends and shared a passion for romantic poetry. Nguyễn Khả's residence, known for its luxurious gardens, was a gathering place for literary discussions, and it is possible that works like *Mái Tây*, which Jin Shengtan also commented on, were preserved in the same circle.

Secondly, during the Nguyễn Dynasty, the famous Vietnamese Nôm novel *Truyện Kiều* by Nguyễn Du emerged. According to surviving materials, the first readers of *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* (The Tale of Kiều) were Nguyễn Du's family and close friends. For example, his brother-in-law, Liên tri Ngự giá Vũ Trinh (1758–1828), wrote a "mặc bình" (commentary), where he referred to Jin Shengtan's influence: "From verses 1 to 6, Vũ Trinh comments: 'This tragic poem is a gift to future generations, and Jin Shengtan's words express it.'"

Additionally, Nguyễn Du's brother, Châu Sơn Tiều Lữ Nguyễn Lượng (1786–1817), also commented on the work, and other contemporaries such as Nguyễn Hành (1771–1824) and Nguyễn Thiện (1763–1818) further emphasized Jin Shengtan's influence on Nguyễn Du. There is even debate regarding whether Emperor Tự Đức revised *Truyện Kiều* and whether Jin Shengtan commented on it, which inadvertently affirms Jin Shengtan's presence in Vietnam and his influence on Vietnamese scholars at the time.

Not long after, *Truyện Tây Sương* (The West Chamber) was adapted into Nôm by Lý Văn Phức: "*Truyện Tây Sương* is a story that Lý Văn Phức adapted from the script of *Tây Sương ký* by Vương Thực Phủ into Nôm poetry with the lục bát form." "With its new constructions, delicate details, and strong character traits, even though it was based on *Hội Chân ký* as a model, *Tây Sương ký* has become a masterpiece, one of the six works of 'talented scholars' in China." According to Vũ Ngọc Phan, it is also recorded that Jin Shengtan commented on *Tây Sương ký* as follows:

"To fully express the beauty of a peerless woman, Vương Thực Phủ borrowed the story of the monks at a small temple gazing at Oanh Oanh in a daze... Based on the decline of

Buddhism in the 19th century and partly on Vương Thực Phủ's views on the monks of the Yuan dynasty, Lý Văn Phức wrote the following lines about Pháp Bản:

*'Gazing at her in the temple,
The more serene the moon, the more tender the flower.
Even monks of advanced age,
Would occasionally glance at the beauty in the temple.
Who can meet the gaze of the lovely boat-woman,
Clean in thought, untouched by the dust of the world...'*

The introduction of Chinese books on tài tử (talented scholars) and love stories into Vietnam, according to Phạm Tú Châu's research, indicates that:

During a diplomatic mission to China from 1760-1761, the delegation brought back many books, but they were confiscated. Vice Envoy Lê Quý Đôn wrote a petition to the Chinese customs officials stationed in Quế Lâm requesting that all books bought by the mission be released, but ultimately, the request was denied." "It is quite certain that such books, from earlier centuries, were accepted by Vietnamese scholars through various routes. Historically, there are three possible routes: brought over by Chinese officials, brought in by book merchants across the border, and brought back by members of diplomatic missions. The routes involving book merchants and envoys are no longer mere speculation but have been confirmed as facts."

During this period, Vietnam used Classical Chinese, so Chinese works did not need to be translated. The second reason is that the dominant ideology in Vietnam was similar to China's, emphasizing the tài đạo (moral and literary tradition). The works annotated by Jin Shengtan were not necessarily the official texts promoted by the feudal society, and Jin Shengtan's tragic end, facing the "cruel temple punishment" (khốc miếu), might not have painted him as a role model in feudal society. This could explain why no official records have noted the precise time when Jin Shengtan's annotated works were introduced to Vietnam. Thus, it can be inferred that Jin Shengtan's works and critical theories were imported into Vietnam as early as the late 18th century and were highly regarded by the Vietnamese.

4.1.3 The Introduction of Jin Shengtan's Annotated Works

At the end of the 19th century, along with the colonial policies of the French, Western culture brought about a profound and sweeping transformation to traditional Vietnamese society, particularly in areas directly related to translation, such as writing systems, educational systems, and publishing. From this point on, foreign literatures, whether Eastern or Western, when translated into Vietnamese, became closely tied to the national language's socialization and the modernization of Vietnamese literature itself. Specifically, in terms of Chinese literature, the most significant change was that Quốc ngữ (the Vietnamese national script) became the official writing system and was used widely.

Chinese literature, like all other foreign literatures, had to go through the true process of “translation” in order to be spread and received in Vietnam.

According to our research, *Thủy hử truyện* (Water Margin), *Đệ ngũ tài tử thư* (The Fifth Talented Scholar Book), annotated by Jin Shengtan, garnered significant attention from translators in the early 20th century, coinciding with the translation movement of foreign works during this period in Vietnam. As early as October 1906, a 70-chapter version of *Thủy hử truyện* annotated by Jin Shengtan was translated into Vietnamese by Nguyễn An Khương, and when it was adapted into *Quốc ngữ*, it was renamed *Thủy hử diễn nghĩa* (Water Margin Interpretation). The title of the book, when translated into Vietnamese, saw some changes and was not always consistent. In 1911, Nguyễn Chánh Sắt translated *Thủy hử diễn nghĩa*, which was published in Saigon. Á Nam Trần Tuấn Khải translated it in 1925 and published it in Hanoi, while Nguyễn Đỗ Mục published his version in 1933 in Hanoi. In 1953, Võ Minh Trí released another translation in Saigon, also under the title *Thủy hử diễn nghĩa*. In 1961, Nhà xuất bản Ngôn Luận (Language Publishing House) published a translation of *Thủy hử truyện diễn nghĩa* by Tử Vi Lang, which also included commentary by Jin Shengtan. Another version was translated by Mộng Bình Sơn, based on the Chinese *Tân Biên* edition, with annotations and footnotes. This complete edition was bound in a golden-leaf leather cover, 700 pages long, and published by the Hương Hoa (Sống Mới) publishing house from 1963 to 1975. According to Professor Lương Duy Thứ, Trần Tuấn Khải's translation is considered formal and is now the standard version used in research and teaching. The versions by Tử Vi Lang and Mộng Bình Sơn, in contrast, are more aligned with the heroic and adventurous tone of the story, making them more familiar to the general public.

Among the *Thủy hử* translations by Á Nam Trần Tuấn Khải, Tử Vi Lang, there is some commentary from Jin Shengtan, mostly general remarks at the end of each chapter, but the detailed notes and annotations in the text itself are not translated. There are also records suggesting that Nhượng Tống may have translated *Thủy hử*, but this version was never published.

The *Đệ lục tài tử thư* (The Sixth Talented Scholar Book) also attracted attention. The earliest translation of *Tây Sương ký* (The West Chamber) was published in the *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal) from 1913 to 1914 by Nguyễn Đỗ Mục. However, Nguyễn Đỗ Mục's translation was more of an adaptation, occasionally incorporating verses from the *Kiều*. Nhượng Tống's translation of *Tây Sương ký* was well received and republished multiple times. Nhượng Tống can be considered the most devoted translator of works annotated by Jin Shengtan, as noted by Nguyễn Tôn Nhan:

“The most exemplary and significant figure is Nhượng Tống, a learned and talented translator. His translations of Ly tao (The Lament), Tây Sương ký (The West Chamber), etc., remain models, unmatched by any other translations to this day. Even Đào Duy Anh, when translating Sở từ (The Songs of Chu) by Quách Nguyên, used Nhượng Tống's translation of Ly tao as a reference, acknowledging it as the main source.”

Several books were published by the Tân Việt Publishing House, including Mái Tây (The West Chamber) in 1943, Sử ký Tư Mã Thiên (Records of the Grand Historian) in 1944, Ly tao in 1944, Thơ Đỗ Phủ (Poems of Du Fu) in 1944, and Nam hoa kinh (The Classic of the Southern Flower) in 1945. In 1991, Trần Trọng San also released a book on Classical Chinese, aimed at helping Vietnamese self-study Chinese characters, with rich content that introduced valuable works from past and present. Among the selected authors, Trần Trọng San particularly featured Jin Shengtan's Lưu tặng hậu nhân (A Farewell to Posterity) as a notable preface to Mái Tây, reflecting a spirit very much in line with Jin Shengtan's style.

In 2000, Mộng Bình Sơn translated Tình sử Vương Thúy Kiều (The Love Story of Thúy Kiều), including the commentary at the end of each chapter attributed to Jin Shengtan, accompanied by Mộng Bình Sơn's own annotations.

As for the Kim phê Đường thi (Jin Shengtan's Commentary on Tang Poetry), there is the work Kim Thánh Thán phê bình thơ Đường by Trần Trọng San, published in 1990. This work selected several poems that Jin Shengtan had annotated, and translated most of the critiques he wrote, providing Vietnamese readers with fundamental insights into Jin Shengtan's poetry criticism of the Tang dynasty.

An introduction to the life, career, and theoretical thoughts of Kim Shengtan in national language can be briefly seen through the articles Lược khảo về tiểu thuyết – with additional notes on ancient Vietnamese literature by Trần Văn Giáp, published in Thanh Nghị newspaper in 1942. The article, which was printed over seven issues (Nos. 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19), not only introduces the author, the works, and the texts of the Thủy Hử section but also includes a passage introducing Kim Shengtan:

"Who is Shengtan? What kind of person was he in China? Shengtan was the courtesy name of a famous scholar at the end of the Ming Dynasty. He was from Trảng Châu, originally surnamed Zhang, named Tai, later changing his surname to Kim and his name to Wei, and also called Ren Shuyi. Shengtan was his courtesy name. He passed the Chushi examination. When the Ming dynasty fell, he refused to serve as an official. His personality was arrogant, and he had many eccentricities. He was widely learned, highly talented, and his writing was elegant and exquisite, balancing both refined and vulgar styles... His commentary on books was quite novel and unexpected, and became widely circulated. In the later years of the Shunzhi reign in the Qing dynasty, due to an incident where he and several other scholars wept before the Confucian Temple, he was executed, and his house was confiscated."

In 1943, in Câu chuyện văn học (Literary Stories), the article Nhà phê bình văn học (Literary Critics) aimed to prove the point that literary critics "must be artists in order to understand the inspiration of writers." Immediately following a quote from Henry Bidou, an expert literary critic, Thiệu Sơn included a passage from Kim Shengtan's criticism in Tây Sương Ký (The West Chamber). He wrote (translated by Nguyễn Đỗ Mục):

"Many times, while eating porridge, I intend to write an article but am distracted by other matters, and after eating, I regret not having written what I thought of during my meal... Tây Sương Ký was written spontaneously, without fixed intention, as if the wind carried the clouds. At other times, other articles may also be as excellent, but since this piece is already excellent, one should not say that other works may not surpass it, but neither should one claim that they will always surpass it."

Thiếu Sơn quoted Shengtan to discuss the moments of inspiration that enable an artist to create extraordinary works, and the critic must understand this. Naturally, this emphasizes one aspect of the spirit, but every writer also has their own intellect and uniqueness, and critics must *"be clear-sighted, with a broad mind to appreciate all the flowers."*

In 1944, in the opening article of *Sử ký* (Records of the Grand Historian), *Nhượng Tống* also introduced:

"Ancient China had a literary critic named Shengtan. Shengtan was born in the 17th century, at the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. If we look at his name alone, it is already quite extraordinary: His name was Wei, and his surname was originally Xu. Shengtan was his courtesy name. Later, because of his courtesy name, he changed his name to Ren Shuyi and his surname to Kim. As for his literature, he was even more exceptional: At that time, in China, classical literature was still dominated by the aristocracy. Yet he dared to say: 'When it comes to literature, only six writers are worth being called talents: First is Zhuangzi, who wrote Nam Hoa Kinh (The Book of the South Sea), and second..."

Also, in the *Thanh Nghị* newspaper, issue 67/1944, pages 23-24 in the *Độc sách mới* (New Book Reviews) section, Lê Huy Vân briefly introduced the newly published translation of *Mái Tây* (The West Chamber) by *Nhượng Tống*, praising Kim Shengtan's critical talent more than the content of the translated work. Lê Huy Vân evaluated *Mái Tây* as follows:

"The plot of Tây Sương Ký only holds value as a military strategy book from the past. The way of organizing armies in ancient times surely no longer applies to today's military needs, although the principles remain the same. It is just a reference material for study." However, alongside Tây Sương Ký, there is the shadow of a special Chinese writer, Shengtan. Although Shengtan's works are not widely read, his name became common in Vietnamese folk culture, and the phrase "speaking like Shengtan" became an expression used to describe eloquent speech. He was a true critic in the Western sense of the word."

In Hà Huy Giáp's footnote, it is mentioned that,

"Shengtan was from Trường Châu. During the Qing Dynasty, he wrote commentaries on the Thủy Hử, Tây Sương Ký, Tam Quốc Chí Diễn Nghĩa, and these were widely

circulated. However, among the materials we currently have, there is no mention of Shengtan's critique of Thanh Tâm Tài Nhân."

It can be said that Phương Lựu is the one who provided the most comprehensive and basic introduction to Shengtan's theory of novel criticism in *Tinh Hoa Lí Luận Văn Học Cổ Điển Trung Quốc* (The Essence of Classical Chinese Literary Theory), 1989. Chapter VI, titled "A Talent Once Admired – Kim Shengtan on Novels," spans pages 105–118. In this chapter, besides introducing Kim Shengtan and his position in the history of Chinese literary theory and criticism, it delves into Shengtan's views on key issues such as characteristics, structure, plot, and the methods of character portrayal in novels, which are the fundamental aspects of Shengtan's theory of novel criticism.

Another aspect also introduced in Vietnam is Shengtan's concept of "talent." Lâm Ngữ Đường, a Chinese scholar, discusses Shengtan's view of life in his book *Một Quan Niệm Sống Đẹp* (A Beautiful Concept of Life) (translated by Nguyễn Hiến Lê), published by Văn Hóa Thông Tin Publishing House in 2007. In Chapter 7, section 3, titled "Thirty Joyous Moments of Kim Shengtan as a Beautiful Concept of Life," Lâm introduces a passage from Shengtan's critique of the *Khảo Hoa* chapter. In *Trang Tử – "The Eccentric Founder"* in *Literature*, Trần Đình Sử explains:

"He named himself Shengtan, taking the phrase 'Shan yue' from Lunyu (The Analects of Confucius), implying he was like Confucius. He treated the imperial examinations as a joke. In a test, when asked 'Before money, beautiful women, does a true man feel moved?', he wrote continuously 39 characters using the word 'dong' (moved), implying 'at forty, one is no longer moved,' just as Confucius once said. Shengtan was very talented, self-assured, and saw himself as a great talent, treating life as a game. He believed one should 'fulfill one's nature.' What does fulfilling one's nature mean? It means to express fully what one is naturally endowed with, without hiding or restraining it. He selected Ly Tao, Trang Tử, Du Fu's poetry, Sử Ký, Thủy Hử, and Tây Sương Ký as the 'six great books of talent' and commented on them in his own unique way to develop the virtues and passions that had never been seen before. He even dared to cut and change details of the works to suit his own views, creating a work that was 'his own.' Truly, he was free-spirited. He became a unique and major phenomenon in classical Chinese literary criticism."

In 2000, in *Tạp chí Nhà Văn* (Writer's Magazine) issue 6, an article titled *Tự Thú của Một Người Viết Phê Bình Văn Học. Làm Sao Để Vượt Thoát Ngoài Sự Tẻ Nhạt?* (Confessions of a Literary Critic. How to Escape Boredom?) by Vương Trí Nhàn, spanning 19 pages (from pages 98–116), the article is divided into seven sections. In Section III, titled "Shengtan's Experience or the Need for Self-Affirmation" (pages 103–106), Vương Trí Nhàn reflects on the valuable experiences of the author in literary criticism. On page 103, he introduces Kim Shengtan and affirms:

"Kim Shengtan (1590–1648) was a famous Chinese writer in Vietnam, known for his work as a critic, just like his contemporaries such as Thi Nại Am and La Quán Trung, who were famous for their contributions to novels."

"Kim Shengtan's approach to literary criticism was as follows: While it is called a critique, he did not simply stop at writing a short article or an entire book discussing the subject. Instead, he delved directly into the work, examining each sentence and word carefully. In the case of Mái Tây (The West Chamber), which we have here, many pages are printed with the text of Vương Thực Phủ at the top, and Shengtan's commentary below. To call it commentary is too general; in fact, he engaged deeply with the text. Sometimes he stood in the position of the reader, questioning the author, and at other times, he expressed his emotions that arose when reading the book. At the end of each chapter, he commented on the entire chapter, and at the end of the book, there was a 'reading method for Mái Tây,' consisting of 81 points. In short, no critic has delved as deeply into the work being critiqued as Shengtan did. He followed the work's veins, picking it up and placing it down, twisting it in every way, so that what we see before us is not just Mái Tây as a whole, but rather 'a Mái Tây of Shengtan,' as he himself put it."

"As Shengtan sincerely confessed, he was not doing this for anyone else but himself. He wanted to make a name for himself and make later generations remember his name."

4.1.4 Expressions of Jin Shengtan's Theoretical Influence in Vietnam

Jin Shengtan is one of the figures who succeeded Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi during the Pre-Qin era, leaving a significant legacy and having an important influence in modern Chinese cultural history, particularly in the Ming and Qing dynasties. His theoretical ideas were highly praised and studied by Vietnamese scholars.

Firstly, surrounding *Truyện Kiều*, Jin Shengtan's theoretical ideas had an important position.

"The General Preface by Minh Mệnh, written in 1830 and placed at the beginning of Thanh Tâm Tài Tử (i.e., Kim Vân Kiều), states: 'Jin Shengtan, who did not meet his fate, scattered in desolation; the Hoa-đường has vanished, leaving the old walls abandoned. I must search for their remaining books and pass them on to those with a shared love for literature.'"

The General Preface by Emperor Tự Đức in 1871, titled *Dục-tông Anh Hoàng Đế Ngự Chế Tổng Từ*, opens with these lines:

"The scent of the riverbank in March, misty and cold. The incense burned, leisurely reading Thanh Tâm's work. This book, by Jin Shengtan from the North, is translated by Nguyễn Tiên-điền into our language. Recently, famous works, like mountains weathered by wind and rain, have lost their original form, and the Hoa-đường version no longer circulates as before."

In the 1898 edition of *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh*, Kiều Oánh Mậu mentions Jin Shengtan twice. The first in Article 1:

"...This version of mine, in terms of meaning, follows Jin Shengtan's Chinese version as a model." The second in Article 5: "The editions that have been printed, when compared with Jin Shengtan's Chinese version, have many errors and are unclear."

In Hà Huy Giáp's notes, it is mentioned:

"Jin Shengtan, from Changzhou, during the Qing Dynasty, wrote commentaries on Water Margin, The West Chamber, Romance of the Three Kingdoms... and was widely circulated in the world. Among the materials we currently have, there is no mention of Jin Shengtan's commentary on Thanh Tâm Tài Nhân."

In the Preface to *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh*, Đào Nguyên Phổ writes:

"In the year of the Ox, when I was studying at the National Academy, a prince from the king's family brought me a new version of Kiều, titled Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh. I opened it and read it, noticing each word and sentence was carefully revised; the renowned critic's pen gave it a divine force. Moreover, the king gave me two lines of couplets at the start of the book:

'Jin Shengtan, who did not meet his fate, scattered in desolation, the Hoa Đường has vanished, leaving the old walls abandoned.'"

In the article "There is no 'Original' *Truyện Kiều* edited by Emperor Tự Đức," Đào Thái Tôn also discussed:

"With these two lines of parallel prose, Minh Mệnh wanted to reference the Kim Vân Kiều story edited by Hoa Đường, which clearly belongs to Jin Shengtan's external commentary, compiled by Thanh Tâm Tài Nhân."

"The phrase 'bình bản' (commentary version) by Tự Đức shows he was more specific than his father Minh Mệnh about the book he was reading, which was the Kim Vân Kiều by Hoa Đường, not Nguyễn Du's Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh."

Regarding the origin of *Truyện Kiều*, scholars like Dương Quảng Hàm, Giản Chi, and Vũ Đình Trác have all mentioned Jin Shengtan with respect and admiration for his intellectual contributions and his critical abilities in literature.

Hoài Thanh also greatly admired Jin Shengtan:

"The Tây Sơn came into existence over 300 years ago, yet it was only recently that someone offered a critique worthy of it. If the author of Tây Sơn had critiqued it themselves, the critique would not have been as worthy as Jin Shengtan's."

Lưu Trọng Lư also had to acknowledge:

"Jin Shengtan is indeed a brilliant, talented, profound, and refined writer. He is a representative figure of the vibrant, outstanding spirit of China..."

Trịnh Bá Đĩnh, in his article Three Types of Modern Critics, when analyzing the type of literary critics, wrote:

"It feels like from Hoài Thanh's critique of Truyện Kiều, we can trace back through the works on Truyện Kiều by Nhất Linh, Vũ Đình Long, and then to the owner of Mộng Liên Đường; there seems to be no interruption. It is not by chance that Hoài Thanh, Xuân Diệu, Vương Trí Nhàn, Nguyễn Đăng Mạnh, and Vũ Quần Phương all greatly appreciate Jin Shengtan's style of criticism and take it as a model."

In 2000, in his article Confessions of a Literary Critic: How to Overcome the Monotony? Vương Trí Nhàn emphasized the position of a critic. He referenced an anecdote about Xuân Diệu giving Phạm Tiến Duật the book Mái Tây by Vương Thực Phủ, with a critique by Jin Shengtan and a translation by Nhưộng Tống. Xuân Diệu added:

"All the critical work you've done is guided by this book. Consider it a family heirloom!"

Recently, in the Literary and Artistic Criticism Theory journal (Issue 40, 2015), in the article Vietnamese Literary Criticism in the Medieval Period: A General Overview, Mai Thu Huyền mentioned the influence of certain Chinese critics on Vietnam, highlighting the importance of Jin Shengtan and the issue of adopting famous critics' names, such as

"Mao Zongjiang using Jin Shengtan's name to introduce his version of Romance of the Three Kingdoms, calling it 'Jin Shengtan's external commentary,' as a way to rely on the authority of a predecessor."

Thus, it is clear that from Emperor Minh Mệnh and Tự Đức to the officials and scholars, Jin Shengtan was highly regarded. This widespread admiration led to research and the study of this famous figure in Vietnam.

However, from a philosophical standpoint, there were differing views about Jin Shengtan in Vietnam. For instance, Đặng Thai Mai (1944), in his article A Few Memories from My Interaction with Chinese Literature (later mentioned in A New Type of School), recorded:

"But I just discovered a form of 'incantation,' that is, the ancient Chinese novels. In my family's study, there are several shelves of books on this genre. But I heard that in the past, my grandfather was not happy about my uncles reading them. He said it was low literature, not 'the classic.' And he read a critique of Jin Shengtan, which everyone knew was a writer enamored with novels. My grandfather told my uncles: 'Jin Shengtan is known for critiquing novels, and people often despise him for that.' But I still see many elders enjoying reading novels. I also began reading novels... How wonderful! How engrossing!"

It can be said that this view stems primarily from the concept of literature's educational function, as Vietnamese culture in the past, influenced by the civil examination system, only appreciated literary genres with an educational or exam-related function and looked down on novels.

Trần Xuân Đê, 1965, *Classical Chinese Novels*, Volume 1, Education Publishing House, p. 152, Reprinted in 1998:

"The attitude of Jin Shengtan, like that of the feudal ruling class, is one of hostility, hatred, and disdain toward the peasant uprising's righteousness."

Nguyễn Khắc Phi, Trương Chính, *Chinese Literature*, Education Publishing House, p. 251:

"Jin Shengtan always writes a praise under each sentence and at the end of each chapter, he provides a very fine critique, showing that he was a very sensitive critic. It's a pity that he stood from the perspective of the landlord class and disparaged the Water Margin novel, so today, when Tây Vương Ký is reprinted, his comments are omitted!"

They then add:

"In Vietnam, Lí Văn Phúc (1785–1849) adapted the play Wang Shi Fu's Opera into a verse novel Tây Vương Ký. From the characters to the structure, Lí followed the original text closely. Tây Vương Ký was first translated into Vietnamese by Nguyễn Đỗ Mục and published in Indochina Magazine. The translation had many shortcomings. In 1942, N.T. (Nhượng Tống) re-translated and published it under the title Mái Tây. The translation was good, but he omitted the last four chapters, which made the story incomplete and distorted the thematic ideas. He did this, as he said, following Jin Shengtan's view, as Jin Shengtan criticized these four chapters, claiming 'others speak falsely,' while he believed that 'omitting them had two advantages: one is that it would not be too different from the Hội Chân Ký version, and the other is that readers would experience a more flowing and poignant feeling.' Both Jin Shengtan and N.T. were wrong, and this is unfortunate."

4.2 Forms of Criticism

4.2.1 Selection of Works: Criteria for Selecting Works

In Vietnam, when Xuân Diệu selects classical literary works for critique, he clearly does not simply choose works of saints as typical anthologies do. Xuân Diệu includes works by poets. More clearly, *Vietnamese Writers* by Vũ Ngọc Phan includes works based on his own criteria. Above all, *Vietnamese Poets* by Hoài Thanh is a collection of selected poems, chosen according to the criteria of the poet himself, the criteria of an artist.

4.2.2 Refining and Editing Works

For instance, Cao Bá Quát, in the preface to his story *Hoa Tiên*, praises the work but also expresses regret that he has not had the opportunity to edit it more thoroughly. He writes:

"I have daringly added a few points, intending to correct the mistakes or oddities."

Earlier, Vũ Đái Vấn, when reading Nguyễn Huy Tự's *Đệ Bát Tài Tử Thư*, also worked on refining the work according to his own thoughts, saying:

"Despite my limited learning, I've added, altered, and refined the text for five years to perfect it."

In his edited version, Vũ Đái Vấn added a twenty-two-line section at the end to show the character Ngọc Khanh's repentance and her self-criticism for her suicide. In Nguyễn Thiện's version, similar to *Truyện Kiều*, he removed the opening lines describing the night of the Qixi Festival and replaced them with more philosophical reflections on the meaning of the entire work. Additionally, every sentence and detail reflects the editor's personal influence.

In the history of ancient Chinese literature, the concept of "*Saying without acting*" (术而不作) was widely accepted, meaning that one should revere the ancients and their books. Based on this, the Tang and Song dynasties greatly promoted the study of classical texts. This further strengthened the respect for ancient literature. However, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the traditional concept of non-action began to fade, and the ideas of the literati and the development of literature changed. During the Ming and Qing periods, the eight-legged essay (bát cổ) flourished, though the form had strict rules. However, within traditional literary thought, the boundary between vulgar and refined, as well as some other literary forms, became blurred. Previously, the eight-legged essay had to be derived from the *Four Books*, and the written language had to imitate the sacred texts. During the Ming and Qing periods, the eight-legged essay was emphasized in examinations, and popular literature, including genres such as dramatic opera and novels, also flourished. Although novels and dramatic works developed significantly, many authors remained anonymous. As a result, the phenomenon of editing texts became inevitable.

In reality, the shift in the thoughts of writers is clearly seen through the work of Kim Shengtan. Kim Shengtan believed that literary criticism was also an essential part of

literary creation. Through the methods of criticism, critics could recreate works to make them more complete. Through his critiques, we do not see an absolute reverence for the works of the ancients, but rather a focus on the critic's own subjectivity.

4.3 Forms of Literary Criticism

4.3.1 On Aesthetic Theory

The form and method of literary criticism are remarkable achievements, a special aesthetic genre created by ancient Chinese literary theorists. Researchers generally believe that literary criticism was created by Liu Shenweng during the Southern Song Dynasty and became popular by the end of the Ming Dynasty. In terms of structure, the overall critique would precede the main text, with commentary and minor criticism interwoven into the main text. By the time of Jin Shengtan, the form of literary criticism had been perfected. First, there would be a reading guide or reading instructions, followed by a critique at the beginning of each chapter (the general critique would precede the main text of each novel episode, each scene in a play, and each chapter of classical literature and poetry), with sections of critique, minor critique, and additional commentary (as seen in the *Xixiangji* or *Jin Fei Shuihu*).

Jin Shengtan completed his critique of *Water Margin* in 1641, three years after the fall of the Ming Dynasty, and *Xixiangji* was completed in 1656. He also critiqued poetry, classical literature (such as historical essays, narratives, theoretical works, and lyricism), covering all four major genres of literature. His criticism is profound, lively, unique, and delicate, with refreshing, lively, and refined writing, full of endless variety and great interest. Through this, Jin Shengtan established a complete system of literary commentary and criticism, offering detailed and comprehensive analysis and summarizing creative theories and methods for writing novels, plays, and classical essays. His literary criticism reached its peak and had significant value for both the author in their creative work and the reader in appreciating the literary work. Not only did he captivate readers during the late Ming and Qing periods, but many later generations were also influenced by and followed his methods. This is why the level of literary criticism during the Qing Dynasty surpassed that of the Ming Dynasty. Jin Shengtan remains unmatched in this field, and to this day, his critiques still retain their value, playing an important role in reading and creating literary works.

Jin Shengtan believed that novels, and literary works in general, are the crystallization of the author's emotions, yet most readers only skim through the general content without truly understanding the subtleties expressed through the structure and form of the work. The critic must deeply analyze the "*author's intention*" in order to truly help readers understand and appreciate the true value of the work. If the readers cannot grasp the author's intent, it would be difficult for them to fully comprehend and enjoy the work. The creative intent and writing techniques help readers understand the work better, and this is one reason why he devoted himself to literary critique and the selection of works for introduction. This can also be seen as a step forward in confirming that Jin Shengtan's method of criticism influenced the critique of *Truyện Kiều* (The Tale of Kiều) in Vietnam.

In the critiques of Vũ Trinh and Nguyễn Lượm, they not only explain to the reader the meaning of *Truyện Kiều* in a simple way but also infuse their emotions towards Nguyễn Du, Thúy Kiều, and show their own appreciation and linguistic talent. Sometimes, both of them provide commentary together. For example, in line 713,

"Thúy Vân suddenly wakes up from her spring dreams."

Nguyễn Lượm critiques:

"Her father is imprisoned, her sister is forced into prostitution, and yet she sleeps soundly. Here, Thúy Vân appears twice, but her fate is completely different from Thúy Kiều's."

Vũ Trinh comments:

"Thúy Vân appears three times, but each time she remains as stiff as a stone. In the world of Dương Trường, how could there be such ignorance? What could Đạm Tiên do to her? She deserves to live as a rich woman, a high-ranking official's wife."

Nguyễn Lượm comments on line 2570:

"The four small drops of blood from the tips of her fingers!": "Just this line conveys boundless compassion. It's as if the blood from Thúy Kiều's fingertips is a reflection of the author's deep emotions pouring out onto the paper."

In line 1148,

"A little bit of purity, I will leave it behind," Nguyễn Lượm comments: "Even purity sometimes needs to be regretted (such is the way of the world) – it is so playful and mocking!"

Vũ Trinh critiques line 3126:

"A traveler indifferently passes by Tiêu," stating: "Kim Trọng divides the word 'purity' – truly, he is a confidant of Kiều. In the world, there are those whose hearts and deeds are pure, and there are those whose appearance is pure but whose hearts are not. How can we know each person's heart?"

In line 3204:

"How warm the gem from Lam-Điền feels!" Vũ Trinh comments: "The description of Kiều playing the zither is set in five places, each with its own context. It's hard to find such a masterful touch."

Bửu Cầm comments:

"There are many passages in Truyện Kiều where, without Vũ Trinh's commentary, the reader would not see the value of the lines or the author's inner suffering."

"In conclusion, with a unique critique style like Jin Shengtan's, Vũ Trinh elevated the value of Nguyễn Du's Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh through his subtle and profound commentary."

In Vương Thúy Kiều's annotations, Tản Đà did not simply provide explanations of terms, allusions, or literary references but also expressed his own feelings, discovering many interesting aspects of Nguyễn Du's style, language, depiction of scenery, and emotions. An example from Tản Đà's commentary is:

"From the line 'Who would have thought that Mã Giám Sinh...' to 'teaching the ways of vice,' using the words 'Who would have thought,' the image of the green-light district in Lâm-chi is inserted, and the narrative then shifts to speak of Kiều. Literature like this takes a great deal of effort to structure."

Or when he critiques line 1370:

"Outside the porch, the rabbit is young, Duong has the mirror,"

Tản Đà writes:

"These two lines describe the atmosphere of that night very tenderly. When we compare it to the lines 'In the long night, the distance widens, the wind shakes the leaves, the golden moon holds the mirror,' we see that the late-night mountain scene is depicted as cold and chilling. The author's pen is truly like that of a second creator of the universe."

Tản Đà's annotations demonstrate his literary skill while also highlighting the author's craft in using the language so brilliantly.

When discussing the purpose of literary critique, in Tản Đà's *Vương Thúy Kiều chú giải tân truyện* (The Commentary on the New Tale of Thúy Kiều), we can observe the influence of the critic Thánh Thán. While Thánh Thán wrote,

"People today don't know how to read books; they often open a book and read it carelessly... I pity the readers who cannot grasp the spirit of the author, as all the author's intentions are lost!"

Tản Đà's preface similarly expresses this concern, writing:

"I often see people discussing The Tale of Kiều, confused to the point that they no longer know whether it's the story of 'Thúy Kiều' or 'Nguyễn Du'. There are also those who excessively revere the ancients, enslaving themselves, offering unreasonable discussions, which neither add value to the author nor enhance the literary work, but only diminish its literary presence."

Reflecting on this, after the *Phép đọc* (Reading Method) in the *Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan) by Kim Thánh Thán was widely circulated, it became a formalized and essential part of the literary critique process during the Qing Dynasty. Although Thánh Thán was not the originator of the "reading method," with the publication and circulation of his critique of *Water Margin*, the "reading method" gradually became a fixed and crucial approach in literary critique in Qing-era fiction. The widespread influence of Thánh Thán's *Kim phê Thủy Hử truyện* shaped how critics in the Qing Dynasty approached literary analysis, and this approach also had an impact in Vietnam.

4.3.2. The Influence of Kim Thánh Thán's Literary Critique in Vietnam

In his *Phép đọc Thủy hử truyện* (The Method of Reading the Water Margin), Kim Thánh Thán emphasizes that:

"In Water Margin, each chapter has its own structure, each sentence has its own grammar, and each character follows its own principle."

Therefore, when critiquing, he paid special attention to the artistic use of language within the text. This influenced critics in the Qing Dynasty, who had not previously paid much attention to the artistic use of language in fiction. Prior to the Qing, literary critics in the Ming Dynasty mostly focused on the simplification of language and sometimes discussed literary form, but no one had analyzed the artistic language of novels in such depth. Critics during the Qing Dynasty explored this area, but it is clear that Kim Thánh Thán was the first to introduce this approach (Phuong Chánh Huy, 1990).

Careful reading and critiquing of each word in the context of the entire work: Thánh Thán argued that novels, and literary works in general, are the crystallization of the author's emotions. However, most readers skim through the content and fail to appreciate the essence conveyed through the author's expression and the structure of the work. They overlook the author's painstaking efforts. A critic should delve into the "author's intention" to help readers truly understand and appreciate the real value of the work. If readers cannot grasp the author's intent, they will not be able to fully understand or enjoy the work. The intention behind the creation and the skillful writing techniques help readers gain a better understanding of the work, which is why Thánh Thán invested so much in writing his critiques and selecting works for commentary. This also marks a significant step in affirming his influence on the critique of *Truyện Kiều* in Vietnam.

Thánh Thán wrote in the 66th *Phép đọc* (Reading Method) in *Mái Tây* (The Western Roof):

"Reading Mái Tây must take half a month or a month, reading carefully. Only then can one examine the details properly."

This method can be clearly seen in the work of Vũ Trinh. For example, when Thúy Kiều explains to her father why she sold her body, Vũ Trinh critiques:

"The emotional depth is so intense; one wonders if the author, when writing this, ever paused the pen to cry out loud?"

When reflecting on Thúy Kiều's longing for Kim Trọng, Vũ Trinh comments:

"If we look at the text, these words are a kind of lamentation, full of tears and cries together."

In another critique of Mã Giám Sinh's name, he stresses:

"The word 'near' is marvelously ambiguous, creating an underlying meaning that only the careful reader can grasp, making the author's suffering almost invisible."

Tản Đà also offered extensive commentaries on the "self-style" of Nguyễn Du's writing. For instance, after the line "Đào tiên đã bén tay phàm, Thì vin cánh quít cho cam sự đời," Tản Đà dedicated an entire paragraph to explaining the meaning of the word 'quít,' concluding that:

"This phrase, in the hands of Nguyễn Du, represents a literary genius—such words are rarely seen, and the author's true intentions can only be understood by the one who is in tune with his spirit."

However, focusing only on the text is not enough. Xuân Diệu observed:

"When I critique poetry, I go into each word, each line, because some sections have specific flaws in their wording, and because 'content is closely tied to form.' But once those issues are resolved, one must look at the overall material to assess whether the poem is good or bad." (p. 215)

4.4. The Value of Critical Work

4.4.1 Guidance for Creative Writing

In his critique of Water Margin (Thủy hử), Jin Shengtan (Kim Thánh Thán) is recognized as the first in the history of Chinese literary criticism to offer an in-depth exploration of the concept of "style" (văn pháp) and theories of creative writing. Following the publication of his Jin Fei Thủy hử truyện, many subsequent Chinese critics have adopted and elaborated on the "styles" mentioned in Water Margin, such as "grand ink drop" (đại lạc mặc), "horizontal cloud crossing the mountain" (Hoành vân đoạt sơn), "extreme precision"

(cực tình), "*pair narrative technique*" (phép kể chuyện sóng đôi), "*backside with chalking*" (Bối diện phò phẩn), "*cotton stitching in muddy places*" (miên châm nê chích), "*intentional violation*" (Chính phạm), "*slight violation*" (lược phạm), and "*hanging the chain to connect the hook*" (Loan giao tực huyền).

"Water Margin is just a novel, but students should pay attention to it because once they finish reading it, they will instinctively uncover countless new styles. If the students only grasp the styles here, when they later read historical and strategic texts like Guo Shi and Shi Ji, they won't want to put them down."

The influence of Jin Shengtan in China is evident in the critiques of Qing Dynasty novels, such as the 120 "styles" (văn pháp) outlined by Mao Tonggang, 108 "reading methods" in the critique of Jin Ping Mei by Zhang Zhuba, and Chi Yian's comments on Shi Tóu Ji. These Qing critics, whether in form or perspective, followed and developed their literary criticism based on Jin Shengtan's theories of style.

"Jin Shengtan's literary theory had a profound impact on the world of novel criticism. The 'narrative method' proposed by Mao Tonggang, the 'writing style' discussed by Zhang Zhuba, and Chi Yian's 'literary method' all trace their roots to Jin Shengtan's theories of style."

Jin Shengtan's influence was transformative for readers and critics alike, as he provided numerous examples for each literary style, leaving his audience with an enriched and eye-opening experience. Critics of *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Scholars* in the Qing Dynasty often referred to his works for inspiration. Over time, more and more critics and readers admired and employed these concepts, marking a significant achievement for Jin Shengtan.

In the realm of poetry, Xuân Diệu was particularly aware of the need to guide the next generation, emphasizing the importance of addressing "*the deepest things*," those that lie at the core of a work. When discussing young poetry, he often talked about "*the craft of poetry*," urging young poets to "*embed their hearts into their subjects*" for their poems to truly stand out. Xuân Diệu would frequently use his own poems as examples during discussions with young poets. However, in his humility, he worried about being overly verbose and referred to Jin Shengtan for support, noting:

"When Jin Shengtan wrote his critique of The Western Chamber, he considered his comments to be 'overly harsh.' When I talk about the craft of poetry, I may seem too long-winded and detailed; this is merely my personal opinion, and I hope the young poets I care for will forgive me."

In his article *On the Quality of Poetry*, Xuân Diệu reiterates this notion, emphasizing the importance of both technical mastery and artistic intuition:

"When the public critiques literary works, they often say something akin to Jin Shengtan's observation: 'There is the 'heavenly craft of poetry' and the 'artistic craft of poetry,' especially when it comes to poetry.'"

"I believe that in the art of literature, both aspects must be unified. One side involves mastering technical skills, knowing the value of every color, sound, and word... because content is always tied to form. If the form changes, the content changes as well. On the other hand, once you have mastered the technical skills, you must rise above them, with true artistic intuition that imbues the form with spirit, bringing forth the soul from the body. One must have the sharp vision of a true artist, a keen eye that sees more than others."

"Ah! Literary critics and poem analysts—do they understand this simple truth? When you analyze every bone and muscle of a poem, you may observe its technical finesse, but when you piece it together, the overall value remains limited..."

In this way, Xuân Diệu, drawing from Jin Shengtan's critiques, explains how *The Western Chamber* helped him discern first-rate and second-rate poetic talents. He references Jin Shengtan's famous idea:

"The poet who writes The Western Chamber is a heavenly craftsman, while the one who writes The Peach Blossom Spring is merely a painter. The painter may steal some of the craft of the heavenly poet, but in truth, the heavenly poet has no craft at all!"

Xuân Diệu goes on to discuss how some poets—those who truly write with passion—may not initially intend to write poetry but are compelled by a story they must tell, unable to keep it inside.

Finally, Xuân Diệu reflects on how Jin Shengtan's insights into the poetic world have shaped his own understanding and critiques. He highlights that the ability to distinguish between various forms of art, whether in poetry, music, or painting, is essential. Through this, Xuân Diệu encourages young poets and critics to look beyond the surface and recognize the deeper meaning and beauty in the works they analyze.

The original text is written with such affection, and Quân Thụy's heart is filled with longing and love for Oanh Oanh. However, in reality, later on, Quân Thụy forgets and abandons Oanh Oanh, not returning to take her as his wife. The critic Thánh Thán then comments on the line *"The branches of the willow sway gently,"* which lingers with a sense of melancholy: *"From here on, the willow branch remains a willow branch, no longer burdened by the thoughts of tomorrow."* And beneath the line *"distantly, I still imagine the sound of someone weeping,"* Thánh Thán adds: *"From here on, the stream remains a stream, no longer the sound of someone weeping."* The poet writes in such a way, and the critic understands it this way. With my own limited understanding, I truly admire both the poet and the critic, and I tentatively interpret this as the difference between the *"literature of the heavens"* and the *"literature of the painters."*

In his work *On the Quality of Poetry*, Xuân Diệu writes in Section III, "Returning to the Praise of Poetry" (p. 220):

"...And when the public critiques literary works, ultimately, they echo Thánh Thán's view: 'There is the "literature of the heavens," and there is the "literature of the painters," especially when it comes to poetry.'"

"In my opinion—within the art of literature, both aspects must be unified. One must understand the technical craft, recognizing the value of every color, every sound, every word... because content is linked with form; changing the form also changes the specific content of the work. On the other hand, once one has mastered the craft, they must transcend it, having the artistic intuition of a true artist to infuse the soul into the form. The soul must emerge from the body, and one must possess the visionary eye to see deeper, more clearly than a mere sharp eye. (p. 215) 'Oh! Those who dissect art, those who analyze poetry—can they grasp such a simple principle? When you break down each bone and muscle, the poem is as intricate as that, but when you reassemble the poem, it remains what it is; its overall value is not particularly high...' (p. 216)

Now, let me add something more. Allow me to quote the critic Thánh Thán on *The West Chamber*; in fact, since 1940, I have read *The West Chamber* and started learning literary criticism through Thánh Thán's commentary. Thánh Thán taught me to recognize different levels of poetic talent, distinguishing between the first-level and second-level poets, or perhaps those of an outer level:

"The writer of The West Chamber is a 'heavenly poet.' The writer of The Tỳ Bà is merely a 'painter poet.' A painter poet can steal the finesse of a heavenly poet. But in fact, the heavenly poet has no finesse! —A hundred flowers bloom, heaven gives them life, earth nurtures them, and people see them and fall in love. But where can you find finesse in them? Perhaps it's because we aren't intelligent enough to find it! Thus, we know that the heavenly poet has no finesse, even gods or saints cannot find it. And no one can find it. Thinking like this, the painter poet's finesse is still inferior..."

"The poet of The West Chamber is different. In this world, there are truly admirable people like this. They write literature just as the heavenly poet creates myriad beings. The finesse they possess cannot be grasped by us. Moreover, those who truly understand how to write literature never originally intended to write literature! It is because within them, there is something strange... so their hearts harbor something 'that can't be spat out nor swallowed'"

In the page *The Subtlety and Insight* (p. 218), to enter the world of poetry, music, painting... one must train the eye to discern the skillful poetry, which is of the second level of writing, and not be afraid of artistic pretensions like the flashy swordplay—alas,

I do not wish to enter this complex realm, but in life, who does not need the second or third-level eye to judge others and assess things?

Also on page 218, the scene from *The West Chamber* in the *Dream of the Capital*: Trương Quân Thụy, on his way to the capital city, slept at an inn and dreamed that Thôi Oanh Oanh was chasing after him to visit. Upon waking from the dream, he saw "*the moon still full, and the morning star just rising*." Trương and his companions continued on their journey, and at that point, Quân Thụy observed the scenery along the road:

*"The branches of the willow sway gently,
Their sight brings more thoughts of tomorrow.
The stream flows quietly, its water murmuring,
Distantly, I still imagine the sound of someone weeping..."*

The original text is written with such longing, and Quân Thụy's heart is filled with love and affection for Oanh Oanh in this way. However, in reality, later on, Quân Thụy forgets and abandons Oanh Oanh, not returning to take her as his wife. The critic Thánh Thán then comments on the line "*The willow branch sways gently*" with great lingering emotion: "*From now on, the willow is just a willow, no longer burdened by the heart of tomorrow*." And beneath the line "*faintly hearing what seems to be the sound of someone crying*," Thánh Thán adds: "*From now on, the stream is just a stream, not the sound of someone crying anymore*." The poet wrote this way, and the critic understood it this way. From my own perspective, I deeply admire both of them, and I temporarily understand what "*the poetry of the heavens*" means, rather than "*the poetry of the artist*."

4.4.2 Guide to Appreciation and Criticism-Taste and the Capacity of the Audience

In past societies, which had social hierarchies, the finest literary works, after being filtered through time and the aesthetics of successive generations, still emerged as the best, surviving and being passed down. The literature of our exceptional society today is a work in progress, still carrying the essential burdens, but those responsible, such as writers and literary critics, must possess a refined sense of life, literature, and poetry. If they have not yet acquired enough distance to select the best works that belong among the great literary works of both past and present, they should not contribute to spreading inferior aesthetics or allow an overly simplistic approach that leads to mediocrity. The working people have the right to enjoy high-quality works of art; while they may not be able to analyze them precisely, they possess a "*sharp eye*." In the past, they were able to select good folk songs and gradually discard the more trivial ones, and now, this is also the case with poetry.

4.5 Language

Xuân Diệu affirms Kim Thánh Thán's critical linguistic talent, and through this, he also praises the linguistic skills of Nguyễn Du:

"A friend of mine, before the revolution, emulated Thánh Thán and wrote a commentary on Truyện Kiều (The Tale of Kiều). He annotated Truyện Kiều with great care and his commentary was very poetic! Some of Nguyễn Du's words even inspired him to write several pages. He imitated Thánh Thán's commentary on Tây Sương Ký" (The West Chamber).

Xuân Diệu also says:

"In the past, the critic Thánh Thán said: The writing of Tỳ Bà Ký (The Lute) is 'literary craftsmanship,' while the writing of Tây Sương Ký is 'heavenly craftsmanship.' Now, we do not speak as Thánh Thán did, because in our era, with Marxism, the people themselves are creators; however, we understand the underlying idea of Thánh Thán's words, which is that the writing of Tây Sương Ký is as natural as life itself (heavenly craftsmanship), no longer showing any signs of skill, nor any traces of the labor involved in creating the work. In contrast, Tỳ Bà Ký is a work of great effort, but when reading it, you can still sense the human touch, it's not as effortlessly beautiful as life itself, but is full of effort and intricate like life."

When praising the language of Trần Đăng Khoa's poetry, Xuân Diệu also relates (p. 271):

"Suddenly, the words of Thánh Thán came back to my mind: 'The writing of Mái Tây is not clever. If it were clever, no work could match Tỳ Bà.' I had already read Tỳ Bà before (translated by Mai Nhạc Đoàn Tư Thuật, with a preface by Tản Đà), and only after many years did, I read Mái Tây. As Thánh Thán rightly commented, the writing of Tỳ Bà 'may be true to life, but not quite real, so it doesn't touch the heart deeply. No matter how clever the writing is, it only reaches our skin, our flesh, and our bones. That's why it can only touch us to that extent...'"

But when it comes to Khúc Hát Người Anh Hùng, Trần Đăng Khoa truly writes with skill. My friend Hoàng Ngọc Tri said,

"With this collection, Trần Đăng Khoa has fully developed the strengths in his poetic talent, which he had had since his youth..." However, I don't quite agree. The true strength of a poet's talent is the ability to touch the soul of the reader, to elevate their spirit to the highest level. As for the 'subtle observational ability, the humanization and materialization of the subject, the vivid and daring imagination, the abundant associative power, the careful choice of words...' these qualities are admirable, but... all of these are just tools, mere tools."

4.6. Structure

Kim Thánh Thán paid great attention to the correspondence between the beginning and the end of a work, as well as the methods of linking its components. In his critique of

specific works, one can observe many terms related to the structure that are worth noting. For instance, in his analysis of *Water Margin* (Thủy Hử), he writes:

"In a piece of literature, within the middle of the many stories, there are just techniques of expansion, addition, transition, and integration in the literature. If the opposite is done and it is extended, nothing will be seen anymore!"

In the comment at the end of Chapter 33 of *Water Margin*, Kim Thánh Thán also mentions:

"This is not surprising because the ancients already had a sublime natural text within them, which was written down, with meaning, with a beginning and an end, with a prompt reply, with opening and closing. Without this support, it cannot suddenly be expressed."

In his 48th *Phép đọc* (Method of Reading), in *Mái Tây*, Kim Thánh Thán further elaborates:

"For instance, in literature, the Song Văn is the heading; Câu Trươg is the writing; and Con Hồng represents the parts of expansion, addition, transition, and integration of the writing. In these parts of expansion, addition, transition, and integration, the title connects to the writing, and the writing connects to the title..."

When evaluating *The Tale of Kiều*, Bùi Kỳ and Trần Trọng Kim note:

"The language is truly elegant, rich, powerful, and condensed; the methods of writing, such as expansion, addition, transition, and integration, are well-regulated."

Tản Đà also emphasizes:

"In this passage where Đạm Tiên's dream is introduced, there are two noteworthy aspects: 'One is that the story of Tiên Đường is mentioned beforehand, which later becomes real, thus making it a fine example of narrative style that develops a plot. Two is that because of Đạm Tiên's advice, Kiều does not decide to commit suicide; without this dream vision, Thúy Kiều would not have survived in the brothel. This part shows the author's skill in defending the human values in the narrative.'" (p. 169)

Xuân Diệu in *Ba Thi Hào Dân Tộc* (Three National Poets) states:

"The Tale of Kiều is 3,254 verses long. What is most admirable is that the entire poem is very carefully considered and balanced. Each section and each part follow the overall structure, with no excess, no disjointed parts, and no unnecessary or illogical extensions; everything follows a strict logic."

"In this story, the author describes Thúy Kiều playing the lute at five points... beginning with the lute playing and ending with it, each time reflecting a different mood — this is truly difficult to achieve, truly difficult to achieve!"

Nguyễn Lộc, in his work *Vietnamese Literature, Volume 1 (Late 18th Century to the End of the 19th Century)*, published by Hanoi University of Education and Professional High School in 1976, writes:

"It is not by chance that the work begins with the story of Trịnh Sâm's infatuation with Đặng Thị Huệ, abandoning his eldest son to establish a faction in the lord's court, and then the conflict gradually spreads to become a conflict in the royal court, a conflict between King Lê and Lord Trịnh, a conflict among the ranks of the officials, and it eventually engulfs every aspect of society. The ultimate storm of the era is the Tây Sơn uprising that sweeps everything away... The structure of Hoàng Lê Nhất Thống Chí is somewhat similar to that of Water Margin by Thi Nại Am, starting with a chaotic scene in the royal court of Tống Vi Tôn, expanding outward and ending with the scene of the "siege of Lương Sơn."

Kim Thánh Thán, a famous critic of the Qing dynasty in China, commented:

"A large book of seventy chapters, written about one hundred and eight people (those who gathered at Lương Sơn Bạc in Water Margin — Nguyễn Lộc's note), begins not by writing about these one hundred and eight people, but by writing about Cao Cầu. Because if it had written about Cao Cầu and not about the one hundred and eight people, it would mean that the chaos originated from below; but by first writing about Cao Cầu, it means the chaos originates from above." (Commentary on Chapter 1 of Water Margin)

This observation by Kim Thánh Thán can also be applied to *Hoàng Lê Nhất Thống Chí*. The writer begins the work in such a way as to emphasize that the "disorder" here does not arise from below, but from above, that is, from the corruption of the highest feudal group at the time.

Kim Thánh Thán also made a unique contribution to the critique of Tang poetry by introducing the theory of interpretation. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hải briefly introduced this theory in her work *The Rhetoric of Tang Poetry*. Hồ Sĩ Hiệp also showed some influence of this theory in his analysis of Tang poetry. The person who most clearly applied this theory to analyze Tang poetry in Vietnam is Trần Trọng Kim, in his anthology *Đường Thi*. The book includes a selection of poems, consisting of 35 works in the ancient five-character form (Ngũ ngôn cổ), 23 in the seven-character ancient form (Thất ngôn cổ), from famous poets such as Trần Tử Ngang, Trương Cửu Linh, Vương Xương Linh, and Bạch Cư Dị, among others. The book also includes 76 poems in the five-character regulated form (Ngũ ngôn luật) by poets like Vương Bột, Đỗ Thẩm Ngôn, Trương Cửu Linh, Lý Bạch, Đỗ Phủ, Sầm Tham, Lưu Trường Khanh, and Trương Quân, along with 67 poems in the seven-character regulated form (Thất ngôn luật), (p. 252-347).

Let's consider some examples, such as the poem Ung hồ sơn tự (The Temple on Ung Lake) by Trương Thuyết. In addition to the footnotes:

"Ung Hồ is a lake south of Nhạc Dương county, Hunan province; Hương đài is a temple dedicated to Buddha; La bệ refers to two types of grass, symbolizing the clothing of a hermit."

There are also some lines:

"The first part expresses the feelings towards the Buddhist temple; the latter describes the scenery surrounding the Ung Hồ temple. The poem follows the meaning of 'form' and 'emptiness,' and distills it into the concept of 'the arising of the Daoist heart.'" (p. 253)

In the poem Khúc giang by Đỗ Phủ:

"Khúc giang has two poems, this is the first one. The first part describes the scene of spring nearly ending, and the second part conveys the poet's feelings of longing."

On page 265, in the poem Thục Tiên Chủ Miếu (Temple of the Immortal Lord in Shu) by Đỗ Phủ:

"This poem describes the temple of the Immortal Lord in Bạch Đế city. The first two lines have great momentum, with the second line being particularly sorrowful. The third and fourth lines depict a scene of both presence and absence. The final two lines describe the real scene in front of the temple, noting that next to the temple of the Immortal Lord, there is also a temple for the martial god, with both the emperor and officials being equally venerated by later generations." (p. 274)

4.7 The Art of Character Construction

Xuân Diêu wrote:

"Thánh Thán, when critiquing Water Margin, said, 'A lion can fight a giant elephant with all its might, just as it can fight a mouse with equal intensity. I imagine that Nguyễn Du, when describing a forest, puts in all his effort, just as he does with a single tree, branch, or even a leaf. This is due to his professional conscience and the richness of his literary ability. It would suffice to just mention someone going to a temple, but Nguyễn Du goes further, describing the flowers filling the ground, the moonlight spreading across the sky, and the breeze with clear skies — painting such a beautiful scene in just a few words. Why not write it? The melody is so pure and unique!'"

4.8 The Art of Depicting Characters and Placing Them in Difficult Situations

Classic novelists often paid great attention to describing the actions and behaviors of their characters, viewing people as material objects in society. Ancient Chinese novels, mostly

derived from oral tales, were intended for an audience, primarily appealing to the sense of hearing. Therefore, the descriptions of actions needed to be specific and lively. When studying the art of character portrayal in *Water Margin*, Thánh Thán first noted:

"One can only understand the strength of a sword by chopping bamboo or hard wood."
(Critique, Chapter 46).

To effectively depict a character's actions, one must place them in a difficult situation. The circumstances act as the driving force behind the character's actions, revealing their personality as they overcome adversity. For example, in the scene of the battle at Chúc Gia Manor, Thánh Thán writes:

"Alas! The battle at Chúc Gia Manor is merely the ordinary nature of fighting. How could it show off the writing talents of Thi Nại Am? Therefore, before crafting the words, he first establishes the setting. On the east side of Chúc Gia, there is Lý Gia Manor; on the west side, a Tiger Manor. The three manors are connected like a tiger and a lion. If they attack the east, the middle will send help from the west; if they attack the west, the middle will send help from the east; if they attack the middle, both the east and west will rush to aid. Oh, how difficult the situation is! It's like six horses pulling a carriage in every direction, impossible to control. The fire rages, and only a clever hand can extinguish it..."

This action is extremely complex, escalating the conflict to a deep level. Resolving such a challenge requires a character of great intellect and courage, thus revealing the spirit, qualities, and talents of the hero.

Xuân Diệu critiqued *The Tale of Kiều* saying:

"Nguyễn Du used 238 verses to heighten this suspense... And then, the tension returns! This time, it's real! Trương Quân Thụy has arrived under the roof of the Phổ Cứu temple! After all the suspenseful moments, advances and retreats, leading to the final triumphant conclusion."

Vũ Trinh, when commenting on Thúy Kiều's reflections before witnessing her father being tortured, wrote:

"In a passage where she deliberates and weighs her options, we see that Thúy Kiều's decision to exchange herself for her father's release is not an easy one. She carefully considers all aspects before making her decision."

He also critiqued the advice Kiều gives to Thúy Vân, stating:

"This scene, I don't know how Thúy Kiều could have expressed it, nor do I know how the author could have written it. The four lines form one continuous breath."

Lê Huy Vân, when introducing the new book *Mái Tây*, remarked:

"One might say that Thánh Thán was not only an intelligent and passionate reader but also an erudite professor and a genius critic."

The article carefully analyzes these aspects. As a smart reader,

"the teacher would pause before each sentence and word, extracting its essence."

"Thánh Thán's passion for reading was extreme. Every moment was filled with satisfaction. Sometimes he would 'light incense, bow to the ground, and not dare to rise again!' He even recounted that as a child, when he first read The Story of the Western Chamber, upon reaching the line 'If I do not love myself, how can I live?' he felt so sorrowful that he put down the book for three or four days without eating, drinking, speaking, or laughing, as if his spirit had been extinguished."

Albert Chibandet (2008) once said that a reader must either deeply understand the beauty of the writing or relive the lives of the characters in the story. Thánh Thán was indeed a complete reader—one who not only understood the beauty of the work but also relived the emotional states of the characters.

The scholarly excellence of Thánh Thán is reflected in the following observations:

"As an erudite professor, the teacher discovered the beauty of The Story of the Western Chamber, not in its plot, but in its prose."

"Thánh Thán was also a genius critic, stepping beyond conventional bounds, and he uncovered ideas about literature that modern critics, even if they were to innovate, would take pride in."

"Moreover, his defense of the novel is powerfully expressed in the line: '...If we were to broaden our hearts, we would find that even writing down the greetings between villagers could be considered literature! And if two people met on the street, greeted each other with a bow, and then parted ways, that too could be literature.' Try comparing this with Paul Valéry's critique of the novel."

"His mastery of writing is evident in this line...Reading it, one might think they are reading a line from a Western novelist critiquing classical French literature."

"The Impressionist school, which opposed the Naturalist school, would likely cite this line: 'They don't realize that all great literature, throughout history, isn't necessarily realistic! Realism is like a dirt mound, which even the peasants walking by won't bother to look at!'"

In the conclusion, Lê Huy Vân reaffirms Kim Thánh Thán's genius:

"In the morally focused society of China, in the traditional, holistic spirit of Eastern culture, the tragic death of Thánh Thán seems unsurprising."

5. Conclusion

The influence of Chinese literature on Vietnamese literature in general, and literary theory and criticism in particular, has been profound. During the feudal period, moral standards were strictly regulated, and the creation of poetry and literature was closely linked to the function of education, encapsulated in the phrase *"poetry conveys the mind."* During the time when Kim Thánh Thán lived, society underwent significant changes, with shifts in literary genres. There was a greater focus on literary criticism, and the novel became a prominent genre, with personal feelings being elevated. This development naturally attracted the attention of Vietnamese Confucian scholars. Kim Thánh Thán's sharp writing, progressive ideas, and creative language captivated readers. Therefore, it is understandable that his critical works were introduced and appreciated in Vietnam.

While the exact time when Kim Thánh Thán was first introduced in Vietnam is not documented, it is certain that by the late 18th century, Vietnamese Confucian scholars were already familiar with his name and works. By the 20th century, when his critical works were translated into the Vietnamese national script, these works were not only popular but also became the subject of numerous translations, such as *Water Margin* and *The Western Chamber*.

Kim Thánh Thán is regarded by many Vietnamese literary critics as both a talented writer and a brilliant critic. His contributions to literary criticism have influenced Vietnamese literary theory significantly. Kim Thánh Thán is mentioned with great respect by several Vietnamese intellectuals, such as Lê Tiến Dũng in *The Critic* and the *Horsewhip*, and poet Bùi Giáng, who praised his critique of *The Western Chamber*. Lê Huy Vân, when introducing *The Western Chamber*, remarked that

"Thánh Thán was both an intelligent and passionate reader, an erudite professor, and a genius critic."

Since the emergence of Thánh Thán's literary theory, his work has had a profound impact on novel criticism in both China and Vietnam. Whether or not Nguyễn Du's version of *The Tale of Kiều* was influenced by Thánh Thán's *The Western Chamber* critique remains unclear, but it is certain that Nguyễn Du was familiar with Thánh Thán's works. Thus, whether Nguyễn Du's version of *Kim Vân Kiều* was based on Thánh Thán's version is less important, as Nguyễn Du's talent ultimately determined the success of *The Tale of Kiều*. As for whether Thánh Thán ever critiqued the works of Thanh Tâm Tài Nhân, this article does not address that issue, but it is suggested that any confusion may have stemmed from deliberate misattributions in China, which does not affect the success of Nguyễn Du's *The Tale of Kiều*.

The achievements of Kim Thánh Thán in literary theory and appreciation have influenced numerous Vietnamese scholars, including Xuân Diệu and Trần Trọng Kim, contributing to the enrichment of the country's literary landscape.

Acknowledgments

This paper aims to investigate the profound impact of Chinese literary thought, especially through the works of Kim Thánh Thán (Jin Shengtan), on the evolution of literary criticism in Vietnam. By examining the influence of Thánh Thán's critical methods and their adoption by Vietnamese scholars, the paper highlights how Chinese literary traditions have shaped Vietnamese literary theory and continue to influence contemporary discussions in the field. The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to the teaching staff of the Department of Vietnamese Linguistics and Literature, School of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSSH), Can Tho University (CTU), Vietnam, for their invaluable support in facilitating the publication of this work in an international journal. Special thanks are also extended to Dr. Thai Cong Dan, Senior Lecturer in English at the School of Foreign Languages, CTU, and Ms. Thai Phan Bao Han, English teacher at Can Tho University of Technology (CTUT), for their expert assistance in proofreading, language editing, and manuscript formatting. Finally, the author respectfully acknowledges the Editorial Board of the *European Journal of Literary Studies* for offering the platform to present this research to a global audience, particularly those engaged with Vietnamese literature, Hán Nôm, and Chinese literary traditions within the context of Vietnam's regional and international academic integration.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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