



RECEIVING INFLUENCE FROM CHINESE
LITERATURE IN THE COMPOSITION OF *TRUYEN KY MAN LUC*
(*CASUAL RECORDS OF TRANSMITTED STRANGE TALES*) BY
NGUYEN DU (VIETNAM) AND THE VALUE OF THE WORK

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Abstract:

Truyen Ky Man Luc (Casual Records of Transmitted Strange Tales) by Nguyen Du, born in the 16th century, is considered an ancient fairy tale of Vietnamese medieval literature. The work laid the foundation for the birth and flourishing of the folktale genre in Vietnam. Understanding the source factors affecting the creation of works and explaining why *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is so appreciated in Vietnamese literature is a matter of theoretical and practical significance. In particular, our research would like to introduce to international scholars one of the classic works of the Vietnamese people in comparison with Chinese literature, which is a useful document for in-depth research on ancient literature of Vietnam in particular and ancient literature of East Asian countries in general.

Keywords: influence, Chinese literature, *Truyen Ky Man Luc (Casual Records of Transmitted Strange Tales)*, Medieval Vietnamese literature, the value of content

1. Introduction

Truyen Ky Man Luc is a work written in Chinese characters by Nguyen Du, which is considered as an ancient epic with rich artistic and content value, having an important influence on Vietnam's medieval literature. The work is estimated to have been born around the sixteenth century. Currently, researchers still do not have authentic data to specify Nguyen Du's birth and death year. The time of the birth of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* so far is still controversial among domestic and international scholars. Vietnamese scholars today continue to diligently survey and analyze historical and literary documents in order to accurately determine the birth time of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*. The investigation of elements received in *Truyen Ky Man Luc* from the national tradition, especially the

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influence of Chinese literary culture, and at the same time explaining the contributions and values of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* to the history of Vietnamese literature is practical and meaningful work.

2. Research content

2.1. The issue of the birth time of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*

In the comparative study between Vietnam's *Truyen Ky Man Luc* and China's *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, Tran Ich Nguyen hypothesized that *Truyen Ky Man Luc* could have been born in the 30s of the 16th century. Based on historical data determining that Nguyen Du lived in the 16th century, the work *Truyen Ky Man Luc* was born during this time period is indisputable. It is still unable to confirm the exact year of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, but the values that the work brings have been clearly confirmed. It reflects the era and the reality of contemporary Vietnamese society. At the end of the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century, from the time Le Thanh Tong died in 1447 and the Mac dynasty replaced the Le in 1527, Vietnamese society had experienced 30 years of darkness and decline. The history of Vietnam has clearly shown that the Le court was debauched, neglected the main court, and looted raging among the people. According to history books, the king likes to drink, kill people, filial piety, people in the world call him ghost king. The Ming messenger when conferring the ordination to Tuong Duc had to say: The King of Annam has a beautiful face, but his body is deviated, his love for sex, he is the king of pigs. In the period of 1511-1520, many uprisings broke out, the gods fought and killed each other, the outside enemy was still not calm, and finally, the fact that the god Mac Dang Duy prevailed to usurp the throne. Nguyen Du passed the exam to become a Mandarin under the Le dynasty. But after a year, he returned to his hometown to hide in the land of Thanh Hoa. In the foreword of Ha Thien Han, it is written: "After passing the exam, and was appointed as a trio of Thanh Tuyen district, he retired from the government to raise his mother to fulfill his filial piety. He didn't set foot in the city for a few years, so he wrote this index to imply it." Ha Thien Han composed this preface in 1547, which can be considered as the earliest date of the work. We can also only cite the objective observation that during the period (1509-1547) under the severe crisis of Vietnamese society, Nguyen Du composed his work, putting into it the Confidential words, considering literature as his soul mate. This is also one of the similarities in historical and social circumstances, which makes great minds like Cu Huu and Nguyen Du encounter each other at a high ideological level. Based on the book *The History of Chinese Literature* issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, with references to *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, the plot is philosophical, and has a certain artistic appeal, the main purpose of the author is to promote good and eliminate evil. So up to three-quarters of the works are written in fairy tales and ghosts, with mythical colors, retribution, and works born during the prosperous Ming Dynasty, but literature is tight and limited. The author has expressed his own melancholy. However, by referring to some Chinese historical documents, we also know that Cu Huu lived in the transitional period from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty, it was corruption, economic

decline, and hundreds of people living in poverty. *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* also reflects the author's heartache, disgust with the painful reality, and dream of reaching a good society.

2.2. The influence of *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* (China) on *Truyen Ky Man Luc* (Vietnam)

Evaluation of the origin affecting the construction of the character image, plot, content, and art of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* cannot deny the role of Cu Huu's novel *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* (China). Therefore, when Ha Thien Han wrote the foreword for *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, he said that the words in *Truyen Ky Man Luc* did not come out of Tong Cat's style. In order to explain the influence of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, we must first clarify the issue of the time when *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* came to Vietnam. And why is Cu Huu's new version of *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* completely lost in Vietnam?

First of all, literary researchers have confirmed that *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* is the work of Cu Huu (1327-1433), born in the Ming Dynasty. Currently, the work is being studied by many Chinese and international scholars to redefine the position and role of the work in Chinese literature and its influence on co-literate countries in the region. The work *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* has now been evaluated as a milestone, foundation, and creative inspiration for the birth of the legendary story genre in many East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, North Korea, and Vietnam. Based on the evidence collected from historical documents and literature, researchers believe that *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* was introduced to Vietnam after the Ming Dynasty established a dominion on the land of Vietnam. When entering Vietnam, the book *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* was classified with the Confucian classics, thus before the time when the book was banned from being circulated in China in 1442. Later under the influence of *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, Nguyen Du had an important source of material, inspired creative emotions, and successfully penned his work *Truyen Ky Man Luc*. Ha Thien Han must have been imbued with the spirit of both *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* and *Truyen Ky Man Luc* to be able to write a preface to Nguyen Du's *Truyen Ky Man Luc* and come to a conclusion that the words in *Truyen Ky Man Luc* did not come out of Tong Cat's style. The fact that Nguyen Du relies on the material of *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* to create his works, proves that *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* has been widely circulated in Vietnam since the late 15th century. So why is there no circulation of good copies or copies of *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* in Vietnam until now? We can explain this through the following arguments. Firstly, Vietnam is one of the countries under the influence of Confucianism, using Confucianism to build a government apparatus in the early years of independence from the North. Confucianism in Vietnam especially emphasizes the Five Classics, Analects, and Mencius, thus often demeaning the existence of the novel. One of the famous Vietnamese scholars, Le Quy Don, strongly criticized *Thuy Hu* (*The Water Margin*) and *Tam Quoc Dien Nghia* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) when these two novels circulated in Vietnam at that time. Le Quy Don said that *Thuy Hu* is a book that corrupts the human mind, and *Tam Quoc Dien Nghia* means a novel containing content that is false, baseless, and unreal. Due to the influence of Confucianism, the orthodox Vietnamese Confucianists did not pay much attention or attach importance to the preservation of Chinese novels in the country. Thuc Ngoc Tran

Van Giap briefly wrote about the influence of Chinese novels on Vietnam as follows: "Our ancestors studied Confucianism in the past, and then switched to science. When going to school, besides the Four Books, the Five Classics, and the History of the Book, other books are considered foreign letters and are forbidden to be viewed. But the old people banned it, so the students had to follow the right standards anyway, and they themselves thought it was bullshit, it was all about heresies and riots that were harmful to morality. Except for a few people who are not very strict and academically rude, they dare to watch it." Chinese novels were given little respect and no interest in mainstream Confucian circles, so *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* suffered the same fate. Is it possible that Nguyen Du is passionate about *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, he realized that the work brought a lot of meaning to express his views and thoughts. *Truyen Ky Man Luc* was born, originally written in Chinese characters, then there were authors dedicated to interpreting, analyzing, and enhancing the sound of the work. Cu Huu's new story is written in Chinese characters, the work uses many classics, so it is only handed down among a number of Vietnamese intellectuals who are knowledgeable and familiar with Chinese characters. When there was a Vietnamese work called *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, although the influence was born from *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, it is common sense that the works of Vietnamese people should be warmly received. Being studied by scholars dedicated to deciphering mantras, *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is therefore widely circulated. The original Chinese characters are still present, and the dictionary sentences are difficult to understand, but there are no explanations, translations create limitations and obstacles for many Vietnamese readers, gradually forgotten and lost. We cannot deny that *Truyen Ky Man Luc* was influenced by and received from many sources, especially Cu Huu's *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, but the work is Nguyen Du's own creation, marking a milestone in the beginning of the genre of legend in Vietnam. In the comparison between *Truyen Ky Man Luc* and *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, Taiwanese author Tran Ich Nguyen has investigated and clarified some aspects that we will not discuss in this article so we mainly add other insights.

If we compare mechanically, we find that *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is a collection of stories consisting of 20 works, divided into 4 volumes, each with 5 stories. This is also one of the similarities with the composition of the number of works in *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*. In terms of literary form, *Truyen Ky Man Luc* and *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* both belong to the genre of legendary novels, using literature and classics to tell stories and interspersed with many other literary genres. The difference in the literary structure of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* compared to *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* is that at the end of each story in *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, there are often comments by author Nguyen Du. Moreover, *Truyen Ky Man Luc* changed more about the subject of creation, the stories following the motif of demon eradication or political satire were higher than in *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* because Nguyen Du's creative purpose was that through his artistic image, he wanted to condemn and criticize the contemporary social system.

2.3. The influence of Chinese literature on *Truyen Ky Man Luc* (Vietnam)

Although *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is clearly influenced by *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*, a thorough study shows that *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is also influenced by the whole Chinese literary culture in general, not only *Tien Dang Tan Thoai*. Typically from the legendary stories of the Tang Dynasty, the stories of missing the old homeland, of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* were talked about in the posthumous collection of *Suu than hau ky* by Tao Yuanming. There are many legends in *Truyen Ky Man Luc* that have been mentioned in various bibliographies, such as the story of Chu Mu Vuong meeting Tay Vuong Mau at Dao Tri in the story of *Muc Thien Tu*, the meeting between Emperor Wu and Tay Vuong in *Han Vu Co Su* by Ban Gu of the Han Dynasty, the story of Tieu Su and Long Ngoc in *Liet tien truyen* by Luu Huong, the story of Giang Phi taking off the jade - a woman's jewelry, symbolizing intimacy is also in *Liet tien truyen*. In addition, in *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, the author included the motif of boredom, titles, and powers, returning to enjoy the fields of the mountains like the character Tu Thuc in the story Tu Thi fairy marriage, which is the understanding of the Dao Tiem in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, hung the seal of the word mandarin with the famous saying of a gentleman who did not care about fame and profit: I cannot bend my back for five rice bowls against the small people in the village (*Tong Thu, Dao Tiem story*). From the above evidence, it can be seen that Nguyen Du not only absorbed the quintessence of a particular work, *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* by Cu Huu, but the author was also a scholar who knew a lot and had a thorough understanding of the novels of Chinese mythological theory, the events in the work are the acquisition of many dictionaries from Chinese bibliography. Therefore, the work *Truyen Ky Man Luc* also shows the clear influence of the two classical literatures of Vietnam and China. However, Nguyen Du never copied the exact same form, but always clearly demonstrated the absorption of cultural and literary quintessence in the spirit of building a work with new, unique, and complete colors. That is the approach to a plot in *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* that magically transforms into many Vietnamese stories as detailed in the application form in *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* to become *Moc mien thu truyen, Tay vien ki ngo ki, Dao thi nghiep oan ky, Xuong Giang yeu quai luc* in *Truyen Ky Man Luc*. At the same time, he absorbed the details of many stories in *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* to create a work that was detailed in *Lenh Ho sinh minh mong luc, Vinh Chau da mieu ky, Tu van xa nhan truyen* in *Tien Dang Tan Thoai* into *Tan Vien tu phan su luc* in *Truyen Ky Man Luc*. That is the reason why *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is not an original and passive acquisition but always shows the movement, creativity, and independence of Nguyen Du.

One of the outstanding features of the plot of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is that it is built on the basis of reflecting the history of Vietnamese people, influenced by the colors of folklore and traditions of the Vietnamese people. In *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, the author built the story with the names of the characters, and the names of the places that are clear, specifically in the Vietnamese territory, with Vietnamese flavor. The author also mentioned many myths that were recorded in two sets of ancient Vietnamese books, *Linh Nam Chich Quai* and *Viet Dien u Linh Tap*. For example, stories related to historical figures are the sisters Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, which are clearly recorded in ancient books.

Linh Nam Chic Quai wrote about *the Kim Quy Story* about the character My Nuong when she turned into a jade when she died. The image of Confucian scholars who have talent and will but do not submit to themselves in the midst of a polluted life is typical for the qualities of the Confucians at that time, so the character was built by Nguyen Du in the color of mythical, mysterious legend is still very real, every day and has a strong attraction. Vietnamese history clearly shows these typical names such as Chu Van An, who offered to cut off the heads of his courtiers who could not, so he left the mandarin to hide in Phuong Hoang mountain; when Tran Nguyen Dan saw that the Tran Dynasty was in turmoil, he also returned to Thanh Hu cave, Con Son. Even Nguyen Du himself became a mandarin and retired after only a short time of one year in office. The above proofs show that the image of the fictional and bizarre character in *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is actually a real-life, mundane character. Is it possible that the author built this character class to entrust his feelings, which is also the heart of a class of Confucianists who dreamed of social reform but failed.

2.4. The value of content in *Truyen Ky Man Luc*

Receiving influence from Chinese culture, literature, and folklore is not the author merely recording and reflecting on existing stories, but Nguyen Du's work has changed completely. He has brought his own breath, style of composition into each story, creating a personal style. Nguyen Du's stories are influenced by the culture and folklore of the Vietnamese people, which have brought *Truyen Ky Man Luc* bold national character, expressing the Vietnamese soul, and are easily accepted by Vietnamese readers. It is the use of materials of traditional folklore, along with the construction of characters similar to contemporary social reality, that makes Nguyen Du's stories both attractive by strange, and illusory stories. It is a very remarkable achievement of the author because he knows how to combine harmoniously and moderately between the pompous and surreal of the legendary genre with the truthfulness and simplicity of folklore, historical traditions, social reality, and the works of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* are full of fascination and attraction, but readers always thoroughly feel the value of the content, the deep aesthetic feelings hidden under the profound and scholarly words of Nguyen Du. Nguyen Du is hidden but always a trendy person, he never ignores the times, before the painful dramas of society unfold before his eyes, and he sends his wishes and aspirations into each page of the story. This is the endogenous cause contributing to Vietnamese literature being able to conceive and achieve much success in the genre of legends and at the same time make a difference between *Truyen Ky Man Luc* compared to other works that have not been published before. The literary researchers of the twentieth century consider *Truyen Ky Man Luc* as the exemplary opening of the legendary compositions in medieval Vietnamese literature. The birth of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* had a significant influence and impact on the birth of later legendary novels such as *Truyen Ky Tan Pha* by Doan Thi Diem, *Lan Tri Kiet Van Tieu Luc* by Vu Trinh. Some of the details of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* born in the 16th century can be found in Bo Tung Linh's *Lieu trai chi di (Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio)* by the end of the 17th century, one of China's most prized legendary

novels. (For example, Bo Tung Linh's *Huong Ngoc story* is similar to Nguyen Du's *Cuoc ki ngo o trai Tay*.)

The value of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* does not stop in the past, but today, when looking at and evaluating this classic work, Nguyen Du has always received praise and favor. First of all, it is reflected in the number of works in *Truyen Ky Man Luc* that have been taught at many levels from school to university. This has confirmed the aesthetic value and literary significance of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* for the educational cause of Vietnamese people. We conducted a survey and compiled a list of the works of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* taught in the Vietnamese educational program as follows: *Nam Xuong Nu Tu Luc* was taught in 9th grade, *Tan Vien Tu Phan Su Luc* in 10th grade, all 20 fairy tales are introduced in the university and college curriculum (related to Vietnamese culture and literature majors). So what is the outstanding value of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*? Why is the work so appreciated? In our opinion, first, *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is a picture reflecting the evil and corrupt contemporary society, showing bravery and the mark of the critical lens of reality. Secondly, the profound humanitarian value of the work is especially appreciated, expressed in sympathy and love for human fate, especially that of women. When reading *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, we clearly see the author's condemnation and criticism through the construction of his character's image. In *Tan Vien Tu Phan Su Luc*, Tan Vien Temple was burned, Ngo Tu Van asked the old temple god why he didn't go to the King of Hell or pretend to be God, but had to give up his position. He frankly answered, the lawsuit has many obstacles, many temples of bribery and corruption. Can't get through to the top: "Wow! In the devil's place, there are also grievances like the world, there is also injustice, there is bribery, there is cover-up, and change of white instead of black. Are these strange stories, say no!" This was the reality of society at that time, did the author borrow the thrill and fantasy of the legendary genre to denounce and expose the evils of contemporary society. Through the ghostly fairy characters, the element of myth and fantasy, Nguyen Du has condemned the chaos, a society that is no longer disciplined, rules, and hierarchical order of the era of kings and queens, depravity, subordinates plunder, plunder the people's land and property, the treacherous people flatter their courtiers, even the wife appropriates and persecutes the husband. All the evils and evils of society are honestly reflected by bizarre stories that are extremely real and attractive. The author's fairness, courage, bravery, frank stance in criticism and denunciations expressed in sharp, sharp words are direct blows to the corrupt contemporary society: "Lying in lust, using all the people's power to build Kim Au, draining the warehouse to open Hoa Nhai's treasury, floating gold brocade, scattering pearls, using gold like trash, spending money like mud, punishment can The bribe is done, the official has the money to buy it, the one who gives the word right away must be killed, the one who flatters is rewarded, the people's hearts are shaken...". We see now that it is no longer the voice of indifference, indifference to the times, but like the breath, the author's resentment choked in each word. Nguyen Du represented the voice of the masses to expose the reality, the hatred of intellectuals is shown through pages of fierce protest against social evils such as superstition, statue worship, and worship, Nguyen Du also openly attacked and condemned, as in Dong Trieu Van's autobiography, the author

openly criticized: Buddha theory listens to words of compassion and generosity, people respect and believe that some people go bankrupt to worship temples.

Humanitarian values expressing sympathy and love for the fate and plight of the people in turmoil and pain are important factors contributing to the success of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*. In Khoai Chau Nghia sub-story, the author sketched contemporary society. Accordingly, at that time, the army was confused, the road was dangerous, and it had to be difficult to get to Nghe An. Thus, here Nguyen Du had clearly expressed his creative point of view, which is to borrow stories from the past to talk about today, stories of heaven, hell, and aquarium to portray mundane pictures, and ghost stories to reflect the lives of contemporary people. Therefore, we can see that in Nguyen Du's work, there is also political inspiration, the inspiration of a Confucianist, of a servant with the dream of King Nghieu Thuan, the people of Nghieu Thuan but unsuccessful. He couldn't help but speak up for the injustices of the current society, when the moral situation was degraded and the situation was wobbly. A new point in the composition that shows the noble humanitarian value of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is the author's point of view towards women. At that time, with orthodox Confucian thought, as a Confucian intellectual, the influence of the Confucian court in Nguyen Du was similar to that of other Confucian classes, they often did little or avoided the issue of protecting women. The fate or life image of women is rarely mentioned in poetry. However, in the collection of stories of *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, the most obvious image is the fate of unfortunate women, the attitude of social criticism, and the voice defending and defending the right to life and the right to happiness. of low-income people in contemporary society. Under his pen, Nguyen Du has successfully portrayed the image of beautiful young women who are diligent, hard-working, rich in altruism, but often suffer bitter and miserable endings. The typical work is Nam Xuong female death with the character Vu Nuong, her husband goes to war, she stays at home to take care of her elderly mother and small children, because she misses her father every night, she still points to her shadow on the wall for the child to misunderstand that it is his father so that he will be less embarrassed and miss his father. But because of blind jealousy, the patriarch refused to listen to his wife's judgement, that Truong pushed his wife into the path of suicide in the cold, unjust well. The author always shows his merciful and selfless attitude towards the woman's character. Returning to the history of medieval literature in the 16th century and before the Nguyen Du era, very few writers clearly showed their sympathetic attitude towards the status of women. The fact that the fate of women appears densely in the pages of Nguyen Du's writings along with a sympathetic and loving pen is a praise for the sustainable and enduring humanitarian value of the work. To the images of villains such as Han Than in the work *Dao Thi Nghiep Oan Ki*, Nhi Khanh in *Moc Mien Thu Story*, to the flower spirits in the West Vien Ky Ngoi all build images of the woman because of wrong karma should become the devil. The author's pen still clearly shows compassion and respect for their fate, because they are pressured, because they are not respected and loved, but become bad guys. Behind all the condemnation, accusations, and defense of the fate of the lowly, especially the woman's

fate, is still Nguyen Du's noble aspiration. He dreamed of a just and ideal society, a society without war, oppression, and harassment.

3. Conclusion

The success of the work is the creation on the basis of the available plots, as many studies have confirmed, however, the author does not imitate or copy the original works. On the contrary, traditional acquisition and personal creativity have always been Nguyen Du's top priority, as the American scholar J. T. Shaw once affirmed: "A writer with unique creativity is not necessarily an inventor of something completely new, but someone who knows how to add new ideas to what is borrowed from others and succeeds in creating a work of art that is entirely his own." Therefore, the history of Vietnamese literary research up to the present time has always recognized and appreciated the position of *Truyen Ky Man Luc* and the role of Nguyen Du, as a pioneering work, as a leading bright torch for the legendary genre, creating the premise and basis for the birth of works of the same genre in the future. At the same time, in terms of content, *Truyen Ky Man Luc* has profound meaning and value, reflects the point of view of an intellectual, has a complete mind, is sensitive to the times, and is a strong protester against the paintings. confusion and injustice of contemporary reality. Therefore, *Truyen Ky Man Luc* is always loved and received by readers of all ages.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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