

THINKING ABOUT CONFUCIANISM OF VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Confucianism was formed and developed in China, later it spread to other countries in the region, especially East Asian cultural countries including Vietnam where it has influenced on the cultural and spiritual life of the peoples profoundly. Nguyen Ngoc Tho has discussed the Confucian influences on Vietnamese culture. According to Tho, "Confucianism is the most important source helping to shape the national traditional identity. I demonstrate that the interaction between the traditional culture of Vietnam and Chinese Confucianism has shown the strong refraction of Confucianism, and, at the same time, it has contributed greatly in shaping the characteristics of the modern culture of Vietnam." (Nguyen Ngoc Tho 2016, 645-646). However, we think that Vietnamese people did not receive Confucianism from the Chinese passively but rather we adopted, reformed, and more or less transformed it in order to make it fit into our traditions, practices, and customs. Confucian factors, i.e. the external factors and Vietnamese characteristics, the indigenous elements could co-exist so that they mutually integrate. In addition, as K.W.Taylor argued in his paper 'The Myth of Vietnamese Resistance to Chinese Domination' based on his books *The birth of Vietnam* (1983) and *A history of Vietnamese* (2013) published on VVFH Magazine, Volume 1, Issue 3 that Vietnam previously was established at the time of the Five Dynasties, which resulted in the ten kingdoms parceling out among themselves central and southern China; consequently Vietnam was the eleventh kingdom that had emerged when the Tang dynasty collapsed at the beginning of the 10th CE. He further stated that Vietnam used to be the southernmost province of the nine successive dynasties: Han, Wu, Jin, Liu-Song, Qi, Liang, Chen, Siu, and Tang, but it separated from China due to the lack of these dynasties' military prowess. Vietnamese spiritual culture is more likely the same as the version of Sinosphere than that of non-Sinitic Southeast Asian countries. According to Taylor, the Sino-Vietnamese relationship was a peaceful cultural contact as there was no cultural oppression. The Sino-Vietnamese acculturation was natural and self-willed. This was because Vietnamese leaders were wise and willing to adopt Chinese cultural and political patterns so that they could live in peace with their relatively giant but much more powerful neighbor. However, despite such circumstances, Vietnamese people have their own customs, traditions, and religion i.e. the worship of their ancestral spirits long before adopting Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism from China. On the other hand, when looking at apparent Confucian moments in precolonial Vietnam, Keith Taylor imposed a question: "Was there something in Vietnam called Confucianism?". He further added that Vietnamese absorbed Han rhetoric and terminology then modified them phonetically and semantically. Based on the historical-cultural background, this question should be revisited. This essay will argue that Vietnamese people have their own intellectual life and thoughts which we call "Viet Nho" or Vietnamese Confucianism. We will address the three constituents of Viet Nho: Independence Declaration of Vietnamese king, Humanity in Vietnamese Literature and

Patriotism of Vietnamese intellectuals.

KEYWORDS: *Confucianism, Vietnamese, Confucianism, Independence, Humanity, Patriotism*

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INTRODUCTION

What is Vietnamese Confucianism or “Viet Nho”? This is a complicated issue as so far this issue has still been debated among researchers. It involves many different related fields including geopolitics, geoculture, cultural studies, cultural history, ethnology, anthropology, etc. “Viet Nho” is supposed to have existed and it was an invention of the Viet or Kinh. The Viet belonging to the Bach Viet clan was originally the oldest ancient inhabitants to reside in the five ranges (五岭/ wǔ líng) and Huánán (华南) today, i.e. in the south of Yangtze River and Dongting Lake, extending to northern Vietnam.

Many scholars have acknowledged that the Viet clan is the owner of Ha Chart, Lac letter, in other words, it is the owner of the Yi Jing, with the philosophy of yin and yang. From number 2, it developed into number 3, number 5, and this symbolic number system frequently appears in Vietnamese proverbs, folk songs, and idioms but not in Han ones.

The Chinese mentioned the Tri-kings (三皇) and the Five Emperors (五帝) in ancient times as their mythological rulers. However, besides these Chinese cultural heroes, god-kings or demigods, what should be taken into account is Shennong God (神農氏).

According to the Chinese ancient letter, Shennong was a king in ancient mythology, born in Khuong Thuy, so his last name was Khuong. He invented the plow and taught the people how to do farming. Shennong was also known as King Viem (meaning king of hot weather region). However, according to our legend (Vietnamese legend), Kinh Duong Vuong (Loc Tuc) was a fourth-generation grandson of King Viem (Shennong). This is reinforced by archaeological, anthropological and cultural findings that Viet tribe was the first to domesticate rice and knew how to cultivate wet rice in the world. Therefore, the Viet was called Miêu one (miêu 苗: rice). Since the early times, these tribal people have known how to build houses for their inhabiting that the Chinese considered them Huu Sao family (Sao: 巢: bird nest) i.e. Vietnamese ancestors already knew how to settle their life organically, meanwhile the Han inhabiting in the central highlands, Huá Xià region (华夏), a cold-weather country, was a nomadic people without cultivating rice, if so why did they worship Shennong? Thus, this leads us to claim that Shennong was an ancestor of the Viet belonging to ancient Bach Viet. However, it is questioned why Han myths and legends include Shennong?

Another problem is of the name of Emperor *Nghiêu* (帝堯) and Emperor *Thuấn* (帝舜), two of the five kings. However, why were they called *Nghiêu* Emperor and *Thuấn* Emperor?. According to the structure of word order, speaking and writing as "*Emperor Nghiêu*" and "*Emperor Thuấn*" is in accordance with the structure of Vietnamese language, whereas "*Nghiêu Emperor*", "*Thuấn Emperor*" is written according to the word order of the Han language. We can find these words in many Chinese texts. Therefore, with the Vietnamese names, we can infer the origin of these two ancient noble kings that they were not Han, but Vietnamese. In addition, Emperor *Nghiêu* and Emperor *Thuấn* were adopted into Han Chinese myths and legends to become *Nghiêu Emperor* and *Thuấn Emperor*.

One more evidence for Emperor *Nghiêu* (帝堯) and Emperor *Thuần* (帝舜) to belong to the Viet is the story about bamboo trees in Cheng (楚國: Zheng) having the shape of Jiaojiang and Xiangjiang, which shows the origin of Emperor *Nghiêu* and Emperor *Thuần*. According to Vietnamese legend, the body of the bamboo tree had the pattern made up by tears of Ladies Nga Hoang and Nu Anh, wives of Emperor *Thuần* and daughters of Emperor *Nghiêu*; similarly, the Jiaojiang and Xiangjiang were formed by their tears. Previous Cheng and the two rivers Jiaojiang and Xiangjiang were in the territory of Hunan province, located in the south of Dongting Lake, which before the Qin dynasty and Han Dynasty was the land of Bach Viet residents, later the Qin then Han occupied it and Bach Viet residents living here were gradually acculturated into Han. In addition, the two words of “jiang” and “Hé” mean river. We can see that the rivers in the north of the five ranges (五嶺) are called hé such as Huáng Hé (黃河); but those in the south of Dongting Lake and wǔ líng (五嶺) are called jiang like Cháng Jiāng (長江), Jiaojiang and Xiangjiang. Moreover, jiang has a structure of “江”. According to linguists, “工” in Han language originates from Southeast Asian language “krông” meaning “river”, and the origin of the Viet is relative to Southeast Asian peoples. “Krong” still exists in the languages of Ede, Raglai, etc., through places such as Krong Buk, Krong Ana, Krong Bong, and the like in Vietnam. Hence, “jiang” was borrowed from the Southeast Asian language by the Han. This leads us to affirm that the south of China i.e. Huánán region used to belong to the Viet tribe. According to K.W.Taylor, Chinese emperors valued this region as it was not only the fertile agricultural land but also the strategic frontier outpost. It situated on southern maritime trade routes that brought in the economic and demographic developments in the region.

Regardingly, it can be seen that the law of exchange and acculturation of ideological culture, on the one hand, takes place in one direction in such a way that the more dominant culture penetrates into the dependent cultures; or from a dominant culture to cultures of inferior countries; and on the other hand, some times there is a reciprocal impact, representing a positive reflection in the process of cultural exchange and acculturation. This means that the law of acculturation takes place in both directions and in a mutual way. In this case, it is considered a reciprocal assimilation phenomenon, which is obtained on the basis of endogenous power, and in a case of integration, without this power, the culture is easy to dissolve, assimilate, even to lose its identity and roots. It is true in case of “Viet Nho” or Vietnamese Confucianism.

Here, we approach the concept of “Viet Nho” differently from that of Luong Kim Dinh, although his thoughts on Vietnamese Confucianism have a scientific foundation. This issue was discussed carefully in his works like Viet material physics, Signs of the Zodiac and Feng Shui, Feng Shui philosophy, etc. published before 1975 in the South of Vietnam and many other works published later abroad. At the same time in the North of Vietnam, Bui Van Nguyen discussed it in his various research papers critically, especially in the works on folk culture and literature published after 1975. According to Kim Dinh and Bui Van Nguyen, “Viet Nho” is the ideological product of the Vietnamese people, the source of Confucian thought is of Viet ethnicity, not of Han one. In addition, the philosophy of Yin and Yang shows the parallels in such a way that in the yin, there is the positive and in the yang, there is the negative, which has its origin from the Viet belonging to the ancient Bach Viet people. Later, the Vietnamese Zodiac signs and Feng shui were adopted by the Han and then they adjusted it to become theirs. Kim Dinh also proved that Shī Jīng (詩經) is not of the Han, but of the Viet

Prof. Dr. Kim Dinh’s “Viet Nho” thought with the An Vi philosophy was popularized in many Western countries by his disciples who were in Saigon before 1975 or later abroad. Among the disciples, it was Vu Khanh Thanh to initiate his philosophy. Mr. Vu Khanh Thanh was founder and chairman of An Viet Society in the United Kingdom. The Society

also has many headquarters in other countries. Recently Vu Khanh Thanh (An Viet Society) established Institute for the Vietnamese Confucianism and Southeast Asia in order to continue and promote the An Vi philosophy of Prof. Dr. Kim Dinh.

In Vietnam, the above-mentioned issue was continued to be studied by the Quoc Tu Giam philosophical Association, and it was the main topic of the scientific conference held at Hanoi's Temple of Literature on July 14, 2012, in order to commemorate the philosopher Prof. Luong Kim Dinh. Thoughtfully, this issue is so interesting that it should be revisited.

We completely disagree with the viewpoints of Nguyen Gia Kieng on Viet Nho in his book "The Nation Penitent" published in the U.S. when he rejected the idea of Kim Dinh. Moreover, Nguyen Gia Kieng refused the existence of "Viet Nho" by claiming that Vietnamese Confucianism was at a lower level than Chinese Confucianism, which was belatedly adopted by Vietnamese people and worshiped without any contribution to it¹.

Viet Nho issue and its ideology expressed in some Vietnamese medieval literary works a few years ago were discussed by Bui Duy Tan in an article on a Han Nom Magazine. According to Tan, the concept of "Viet Nho" needs to be understood in two criteria: "First, the work must have the quality of Confucianism from the time of Confucius (孔子) and Mencius (孟子) through the Han Confucianism and the *Sòng* Confucianism, i.e. the Confucianism in medieval time of China, so it is called Confucianism or Han Confucianism. Second, the work must be Vietnamese in nature, i.e. it includes Vietnamese ideology developed from prehistoric times to the time of the North rule and expressed in the folk culture and literature of the medieval times. The two Sino-Vietnamese components distinguish, integrate, combine, transform with each other, some times they are noticeable, but at other time they are indistinguishable. Moreover, the work must be imbued with Viet Nho spirits². From the above criteria, Bui Duy Tan analyzed and proved "Viet Nho" ideology through a few works such as *Nam Quoc Son Ha* (南國山河), *Binh Ngo Dai Cao* (平吳大誥) and *Bao Kinh Canh Gioi No. 56*³ of Nguyen Trai, poem of Tran Quoc Tuan in *Viet epic episodes* by Thoát Hiên Đăng Minh Khiêm. He claimed that the poem *Nam Quoc Son Ha* "enlightened the Viet Nho ideology"; he gave the title "Using pen to write letters" to *Bao Kinh Canh Gioi No. 56* to express Viet Nho spirit of Vietnamese literature; the poem of Tran Quoc Tuan expresses the loyalty, piety ideal, and patriotism of Vietnamese Confucians⁴.

We think that Confucianism is a product of China but when spreading to the East Asian countries, it has changed itself following the law of "acculturation" in accordance with the psychology and cultural traditions of indigenous peoples. When entering Vietnam, Confucianism also follows this law. Vietnam had received Chinese Confucianism (Confucius - Mencius, Han, *Táng*, Song and Ming Confucianism, but most profoundly from Song Confucianism), then transformed it to suit Vietnamese cultural ideology, since then Viet Nho has been formed.

¹ Kieng, N.G, The Nation Penitent, Volumn 3, Why is it so? Section: Viet Nho. Paris, 2000.

² Bui Duy Tan, Viet Nho through the literary works of Medieval Vietnam, Han Nom Magazine, No. 1 (68)-2005, p.18-26.

³ The article on Han Nom Magazine No. 1-2005, Prof. Bui Duy Tan noted as *Bao Kinh Canh Gioi No.57*

⁴ ibid

When addressing Viet Nho, it refers to the cultural and ideological products created by Vietnamese Confucians who are more or less influenced by the Confucius-Mencius or Confucian ideology; however, their ideology is Vietnamese in nature. Viet Nho spirits must be in the Vietnamese way, expressing Vietnamese souls and thoughts, and reflecting the Vietnamese life.

From this criterion, the Viet Nho concept we use here should be understood in the Confucian sense of Vietnamese people. In terms of origin and ideology, Viet Nho is still influenced by Chinese Confucianism, but it has been reformed in accordance with the Vietnamese spirit, carrying Vietnamese ideological cultural identity following the law of acculturation. Therefore, in Viet Nho, there are some categories, the concept of Confucius-Mencius Confucianism adopted by Vietnamese ancestors, but they were adjusted and reformed to fit in with the Vietnamese way of life.

Evidence of Vietnamese Confucianism may be found in the works of the medieval Vietnamese culture and literature. This essay will contribute to explaining and demonstrating the idea of Viet Nho addressing its four typical elements.

Evidence for Viet Nho found in Independence Declaration of Vietnamese King

Given the name King Trieu Vu or Vietnam King Trieu Da in the 2nd century B.C., King Lý Nam (李南帝) in the 6th century and king of the South State (南帝) in the God Poem in the 10th and 11th centuries together with the patriotic expressions in *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo* (平吳大誥) of Nguyen Trai in the 15th century, they all represent Vietnamese ideology with a sense of independence and equality with the North. Because according to Han Confucianism with the huá xià (華夏) ideology, Han land is the center of all (漢地中心之天下), while peoples surrounding neighbor countries are barbarians; all the directions from the North to the South, from the East to the West of China are backward and countrified. Only the King of China had the right to declare Emperor and the first person to declare this title was king Qin A Chinh after he conquered the warring states, he then proclaimed himself Qin Shi Emperor 秦始皇帝 (the first emperor of the Qin Kingdom). Since then, the vassal states were subjected to submission and tribute to the Qin Dynasty. Only the Heavenly Prince (Son of Heaven) was entitled to declare Emperor (帝), while vassals were only allowed to claim King (王) or Gong (公). Later, the kings of the Han, Qin, and Song dynasties were all called themselves emperors, while neighbors, the vassals were only Subjugated Kings to be the highest, but only Heavenly Prince had the right to preach peoples (代天行化).

That having won over king An Duong Vuong in 179 ca. B.C., Triệu Đà 趙佗 (239-137 ca. B.C.) proclaimed Emperor, he annexed Âu Lạc's territory of king Thục Phán An Dương Vương (蜀泮安陽王) into his territory, founding Vietnam State (南越), taking the name king Trieu Vu (趙武帝) or King of Vietnam State was an event of great significance in Vietnamese history, considering Vietnam State equal to the Han dynasty, declaring secession from Han Dynasty, using the emperor's rituals such as golden palace and library for the elite. This action caused king Han Van (202-157 ca. B.C.) to scold Trieu Da for professing the title, using the rituals of the emperor, so Trieu Da gave a letter to instruct to leave out those emperor's rituals of the Han dynasty. Meanwhile, he formed a Southern royal institution: "I thought: two strong people cannot stand together, two gentle people cannot together with set up for a while. The emperor of the Han Dynasty was the righteous god. From now on [I] leave out the emperor's rituals like 'golden palace' and 'library for the

elite. (朕聞:兩雄不俱立,兩賢不並世,漢皇帝賢天子. 自今去帝制皇屋左毒).¹

When hero Ly Bi 李贲 (also known as Ly Bon 503-448) in 541, after defeating Thu Su Tieu Tu, a mandarine of Liang dynasty who ruled Vietnam at the time, defeated the Liang dynasty's invasions led by king Lương Vũ 梁武帝 (464-549) in the time of North-South (China) in 542, Ly Bi came to the throne in 543, so early in 544, he took the title of King Ly Nam 李南帝 (King Nam Viet 南越帝), naming the country Van Xuan (萬春), building his palace in O Dien (Ha Mo commune, Dan Phuong district, Hanoi today). This historical event was also an expression of our ancestors' thought of not losing to China.

The God Poem (often referred to as the South State 南國 山河) with the name "South State 南國", "king of the South State 南帝" clearly expresses Vietnamese sense of independence, autonomy, and equality with our neighboring country, giant China. It should be noted that according to Chinese hegemony, the Emperor (帝) could rule, govern a Nation, while king (王) only rules a territory i.e. the territory of vassals. However, according to the God lineage "Truong ton God legend", the two gods Truong Hong and Truong Hat, who were sons of the Dragon God, appeared to help Trieu Quang Phuc fight against Liang invasions. The gods had read this poem twice (with a variation of texts) that helped Lê Đại Hành and Lý Thường Kiệt fight the invasion of the Song army in 980-981 and 1076-1077. Therefore, since the early time, all Vietnamese people keep it in their mind that the poem to be the first Declaration of Independence of the nation. It is true that the God poem is a document that affirms the sovereignty and territory of Vietnam and shows the spirit of equality with our northern neighbor, because at that time we did not lose, but were fighting against the Northern invaders to protect our country. Uc Trai's Binh Ngo Dai Cao is really the Declaration of Independence of all times. From the twentieth century up to now, in school textbooks and university reference textbooks, in many research projects, poetry and literature collection consider Ly Thuong Kiet (1019-1105) as the writer of the poem, but in the God lineage "Truong ton Than su tich" and the Dai Viet History, the poem was copied but the so-called writer Ly Thuong Kiet was not given. While the poetry collection of Bui Huy Bich Hoang Viet was composed in the late 18th century and printed in the early 19th century (1826) did not mention this poem. Based on the legend of Truong ton than su tich and Dai Viet history, we come to know that Ly Thuong Kiet whose real name was Ngo Tuan was not the author of the poem, he was only the person who used it as a combat weapon in the great national defense war. In the poem, our ancestors raised the national independence flag and equality with China, placing the South State on par with the North (China), as a result, king of the South State was on par, equal to the king of the North State. The law of righteousness wins the non-righteousness, evils; a Vietnamese-infused thought, bearing Vietnamese ideological cultural identity is clearly expressed in the poem. We have our own realm, which has been clearly defined in Heavenly Book: the Southern land belongs to the zodiac of Duc Star, Chan Star, while the Northern land belongs to Quy star, and the Heavenly Book is similar to the Human book, which is in accordance with people's will. The fact that the Northern people unjustly brought their troops to invade our country was not in line with God's will, neither with the human beings' one, of course, according to the law, they would definitely get defeated, "取 敗 虛". So Bui Duy Tan affirmed that the poem manifests "Viet Nho" spirit:

¹ Letter of Trieu Da was written in 179 ca. B.C. Extracted from Nguyen Dong Chi, *Historical Literature of ancient Vietnam*, Minister Palace in charge of Culture, SaiGon, Edition, 1970

南國山河

南國山河南帝居，

截然定分在天書。

如何逆虜來侵犯，

汝等行看取敗虛。

Nam quốc sơn hà Nam đế cư, Tiệt nhiên định phận tại thiên thư. Như hà nghịch lỗ lai xâm phạm, Nhữ đẳng hành khan thủ bại hư. (From *Dại Việt History*).

The South State, king of the South State is

Heavenly Book clearly divides the territories

Why do invaders come?

You will definitely be defeated.

In addition, in the two words “逆虜”, the word 虜 (hole) in the poem has long been understood as the enemy, as a result, “逆虜” means enemy. But the word 虜 (hole) also refers to the enemy captured at the battle (i.e. prisoner of war) and thus “逆虜” can be understood as prisoners of war. With this understanding, the meaning of the verse is deeper more heroic, expressing the atmosphere and power of the Dai Viet righteous army (如何逆虜來侵範). Moreover, even in the Ly - Tran Dynasty, there was a poet who used the word 虜 (hole) with the meaning of the enemy who was captured as a prisoner of war, for example, Ven. Huyen Quang in the poem 哀俘虜 (Loving the enemy who was captured as a prisoner of war).

The thought of "king of the South State" equal to "the North Emperor" later was confirmed by Uc Trai in *Binh Ngo Dai Cao*: 趙丁李陳之肇造我國，與漢唐宋元而各帝方 (From Trieu, Dinh, Ly to Tran started to build our country; together with Han, Qin and Song, Nguyen each declared as emperor their own). Once again, this thought was full of Viet Nho spirit, expressing our self-respect and pride of Vietnamese people.

Evidence for Viet Nho in Humanity Concept

It can be seen that Viet Nho thoughts clearly reflect in the literature of Nguyen Trai (1380-1442). In terms of humane thought, Uc Trai was a person to mention it a lot, wrote a lot about this concept in the official texts like *Quan trung tu menh*, *Binh Ngo Dai Cao*, verses and love poems such as Uc Trai poem, *Quốc âm* poem, *Chí Linh Sơn phu*. At the beginning of *Binh Ngo Dai Cao*, Uc Trai wrote: 仁義之舉，要在安民；弔伐之師，莫先去暴 (Humanity means bringing peace to the people; the king should defeat the enemy and evils. This is a great principle of the times. The concept of "humanity" is of Confucianism appearing from the Spring and Autumn Period (*Chūnqiū Shídài*) (722-481 B.C.) and Warring States (*Zhànguó Shídài*) (403-221 B.C.). The concept of humanity together with the concepts of virtue, morality, respectability, reasonable conducts, fate, etc. that Confucius (551-479 BC) used to form a conceptual term system of Confucian doctrine, and humanity plays a leading role in his entire doctrinal thought. According to Confucius, humanity is the supreme virtue, the root of morality as a human being, the virtue from which it arises or implies other virtues, the

lodestar in the process of self-training and behavior. Humanity (仁) is composed of the [human] and second 二 [two] meaning that humanity is the main morality in the relationship between people and people, basically the compassion for people. Therefore, sometimes Confucius identified the virtue of humanity with humane, and hence in the book 征用 (Zhēngyòng), he said: “仁者人也” (The humanity manifests the human character/ the virtue of humanity is a human being.) in order to express that assimilation and homogeneity. Goodwill 義 is the righteousness, the right thing, altruism, and benevolence. The word 義 is composed of positive [goat] and fall 我, a long-armed weapon with three sharp teeth, i.e. a three-pronged weapon; but in the 甲骨文 literature borrowed this image to refer to a pronoun of the first person "I"; The word image put the head of the goat on the three-pronged weapon to denote a kind of exemplary majesty, because the word 義 is the original word of 儀 (exemplary virtue). The concept of humanity that Confucius - Mencius used also distinguishes among social classes. Meanwhile, in addition to the aforementioned connotation, Nguyen Trai used this concept to refer to another meaning: "to bring peace to the people" and "to defeat violence". For the people to live peacefully, the king should defeat violence and evils. Thus, Nguyen Trai's thought of humanity is of people by nature and for the people. This is a form of cultural transformation, a kind of "old jar but new wine", Nguyen Trai only borrowed the concept of Confucianism and then transformed it to match with Vietnamese identity and as a result, it became "Viet Nho". This humanist thought, together with the mind-set strategy and tactics of conducting guerrilla warfare "few fights against many", "the weak against the strong" is a whole system of consistent strategic thinking of Nguyen Trai. Nguyen Trai mentioned this idea in the Binh Ngo book and then presented it to leader Lam Son in Loi Giang in 1421 to be implemented, applied in diplomatic letters to Ming's generals. They were later collected, named as *Quan Trung Tu Menh Tap*, and summed up in *Binh Ngo Dai Cao*. They were mentioned in *Chi Linh Son phu* and *Lam Son thuc luc*, too.

The concept of humanity is used by well-known Vietnamese Confucian and patriotic poet Nguyen Dinh Chieu (1822-1888). According to the poet, literary writing is to show the righteous function, to show morality i.e. mirroring the good and the bad to praise and to teach. That is why in his work, the two main characters of the good and the bad are built with clear praising and determining inspirations and critics. According to him, people living in life must have humanity in order to create a lifestyle: "Men should be loyal to their country in the first place / Women should keep their virginity as good conduct"; meaning men must follow the principle of loyalty, piety and respect humanity, meanwhile women must cultivate their moral virtues in order to build a stance: "Follow our Confucianism / Keep good virtues to live peacefully." All of them are closely linked to the Southern culture style, there is more or less acculturation, not exactly the same as Chinese Confucianism. In many of his works, he often referred to the word "humanity": "見義不為無備也", representing the frank lifestyle of the Southern people, seeing evils one can't help interfering with. As a result, on the way seeing Phong Lai bandits kidnap people and rob them, Van Tien was ready to stop by the road / Break trees to make sticks to defeat the bandits" and shouted to the bandits: "Tien that: you are gangsters / Do not be used to doing bad things to the people", then tell the people: "I shall try my best / Save you from this hardship." After defeating the bandits, he refused the thanks from the people. This is a beautiful action, expressing heroism closely associated with the ideal of the humanity of the Southern style. This ideal of humanity was also manifested by the image of hero Truong Dinh:

Một số Lãnh binh lờ mắt giặc/ Bàng sơn ứng nghĩa thăm lòng dân.

Giúp đời dóc tron on nam tử/ Ngày chúa nào lo tiếng nghịch thần.

(The decree of Tu Duc court to endow general position to Truong Dinh in An Giang province is to blur the

French enemy/ The motto calling for the people to stand up against the French is absorbed among the people/Truong Dinh spent his whole life doing good things to the people/And he was not worried about being considered a flattering mandarin).

And:

Bởi lòng chúng chẳng nghe Thiên tử chiếu, đón ngăn mấy dặm mã tiền;

Theo bụng dân phải chịu tướng quân phù, gánh vác một vai khôn ngoạ.

(Upon hearing that Truong Dinh received the court's decree to An Giang to work as the Consul, the people of Dinh Tuong stormed into the street for several kilometers to welcome him and asked him to stay in Go Cong to fight against the enemy. Truong Dinh listened to the wishes of the people, he stayed there as a military to lead them to fight the French. So he was criticized as being against the king.)

Truong Dinh was a kind of Vietnamese Confucian, with the patriotism and love for the people, he fought against the French to bring peace to the people.

Evidence for Viet Nho found in Concept of Loyalty, Piety, and Patriotism

Loyalty/piety (忠) is one of the Confucian virtues of the gentlemen. According to Confucius, in order to practice "humanity", there must be loyalty. As a result, the Confucianism is "know-it-all" (一以貫之) (Only one principle can know all). It was Confucius's outstanding disciple, Tang Tu, who affirmed: 夫子之道忠恕而已矣 (Master's Confucianism consists of only two words 忠恕). Chu Hy (朱熹) (1130-1200) explained that devoting all yourself means loyalty, piety (忠), from your heart you know others' ideas 恕 (盡己之心為忠, 推己及人為恕). Particularly for the word "loyalty", in common sense, people often understand it as sincerity, an inferior's devotion to their superior. For the Confucians, "loyalty" is often associated with "being loyal to the king" (wholehearted devotion of one to their king). On the contrary, in Nguyễn Trãi, three concepts: "being loyal to the king", "patriotism", and the "love for the people" were united to become one. Being loyal to the king is patriotism, but patriotism is to love the people. This, more or less, shows the spirit of Viet Nho, unlike Song Confucianism that advocated being loyal to only one king (忠臣不事二君 烈女不嫁二夫 (王濁)). In the medieval history of Vietnam, many of the great Confucian scholars worked for this dynasty then another as a result of this open concept of Vietnamese thought. Nguyen Trai was a typical example. He was a grandson of Tran family and worked for the Ho dynasty which overthrew the reign of Tran dynasty. When the Ho dynasty collapsed, he did not follow the rebellion of the two kings of the post-Tran dynasty, but went to Lam Son to advocate Le Loi and became the outstanding founding mandarin of Post-Le dynasty. So did Phan Huy Ich and Ngo Thi Nham. They were the high-ranking mandarins of Le Trung Hung dynasty, then helped Tay Son and became the most important mandarins of Quang Trung dynasty. And many other Confucians at that time did the same¹.

¹ As in case of Bui Duong Lich, he was a mandarin of three dynasties: Le Trung Hung, Tay Son and Nguyen. Therefore, the people at that time (Nguyen dynasty) made a poem to tease him 景興舉進士, 西偽入翰林, 本朝為督學, 與世共浮沉. Given this example, we can see the flexibility of Vietnamese confucians in adopting and applying the concept of loyalty.

Further, it is about the concept "loyalty, piety" and the behavioring attitude of Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585). What we want to emphasize here is his behavior, the attitude of choosing between "working" and "retiring" of Nguyen Binh Khiem. As a Confucian, everyone dreamed of having a good king to devote to, help the king to rule the people, to apply their studies in practice. Nguyen Binh Khiem understood deeply the changing life, surely he knew very well when to "work", and when to "retreat". This is the "dependence" that Confucius taught. When a Confucius sees a change, they act accordingly. Confucians often thought if they were employed they would devote themselves to working; if they were not employed, they would retire. We can see that Nguyen Binh Khiem worked as a mandarin for Mac dynasty just like the case of Khong Tu who wanted to devote to Cong Son Phat Nhieu, but he could not, because the life was not as he expected, he had to retreat to keep his morality, which Vu Kham Lan used to compare with the case of Truong Luong following Xich Tung Tu¹. The fact that Nguyen Binh Khiem became a mandarin was controversial. However, when he retreated, there was no comment, except the compliments. The retreat of Nguyen Binh Khiem was a drastic act, which was similar to that of Tieu An Chu An in the past. Both were helpless facing the situation, they did not want to get involved in the evils. They could not allow themselves to ignore the bad things taking place, but it was more difficult to condemn, so there was only one option for them to withdraw to preserve their conduct and virtue. Nonetheless, while Van Trinh Chu An left for Phuong Hoang mountain with a mood full of melancholy sadness as he wanted to forget the troubles in the court of falling Tran dynasty after advising the king to behead his seven toadying mandarins, and the king did not listen to him, which was mentioned in Han poems such as Xuan Dan poem, Nguyen Binh Khiem was different when he retreated. Coming back his hometown, Nguyen Binh Khiem still led a peaceful and optimistic life, closely related to his poor villagers in there, especially he was still interested in life: teaching, making medicines to help the people in need, building bridges. In this case, we can see that the word "idle", "retreat", and "early retirement" of Nguyen Binh Khiem were different from those of earlier venerable masters, i.e. although he retreated, he concerned himself with life and people. Especially he opened a school, training talents for the country, insinuating his students to go to the South and support Le Trung Hung. He was a former official of Mac dynasty, favored by the Mac family, but taught his students to help the Le! In terms of loyalty, piety Nguyen Binh Khiem had a flexible behavior, not rigid and conservative like other Confucians. The retreat of Nguyen Binh Khiem gave him three things: first, not having to witness the "unethical" things going on in the court; second, going home but he could still help the people, and preach them towards the goodness by his knowledge, talents, and wisdom; third, visiting Tuyet Giang stream, Bach Van temple and contemplating Trung Tan to consider the life, the law of the universe, and also to fulfill his desire to bathe in Nghi river, to visit Vu Vu palace that Confucius could not do².

During the times teaching in the countryside, the religion of Nguyen Binh Khiem was clearer day by day as in the old days, venerable Confucius taught in the country of Lo (魯國), venerable Mencius taught in the country of Trau (邾). However, Nguyen Binh Khiem was not born at the same time with Confucius and Mencius, which was not as peaceful as the time of Tang dynasty, 帝舜, therefore, he had to preserve his conduct and virtue, he kept his morals despite being poor. He was considered a "big forest", and "Thai Son mountain".

¹ Lan, V.K, *Bach Van Temple layman Nguyen Cong Van Dat Family Annals*, written in Winter 1743.

² 論語 Book: Confucius asked his disciple about their will, Tang Diem answered him that he wanted to have a bath in Nghi river daily, then go for a walk at Vu Vu palace; Confucius responded "so do I".

Evidence for Viet Nho found in Concept of Literary

Normally, Confucians expressed their literary viewpoints through Tu, Bat literature. However, Uc Trai expressed his literary thoughts through Han as well as Nom poems, in which he mentioned a close relationship between arts and life, the bond between a writer and a soldier. In Nom poem "Self-criticism No. 2", Nguyễn Trãi wrote:

*Non hoang tranh vẽ, chập hai ngàn,
Nước mây dòng thanh, ngọc mấy hòn.
Niềm cũ sinh linh đeo ắt nặng,
Cật chung hồ hải đặt chưa an.
Những vì thánh chúa âu đời trị,
Há kể thân nhàn tiếc tuổi tàn.
Thừa chỉ ai rằng thì (thời) khó ngắt,
Túi thơ chứa chất mọi giang san.*

This poem can be translated as under:

*The mountainous landscape is picturesque,
The water is pure and the rocks are as precious stones.
The concerns for the people are with the writer,
The poet never feels relaxed and enjoyable.
Despite old age, the writer works to serve the king.
Who said chief Mandarin does not have time contemplating the scenery and composing poems.*

The poet was proud of the poem containing the beautiful scenery of the National River and Mountain, the poetic soul was concerned for life. From the poem, it can be said that in Nguyen Trai always manifested two kinds of people: patriotic people who act and true artists who compose linking together and supporting each other. Uc Trai was a typical figure in terms of combining between a writer and a soldier fighting for the Fatherland, for the people and human beings. Nguyen Trai's poetry was the scientific evidence of the intimate relationship between arts and life. The poet never enjoyed his life peacefully, but rather concerned himself with the people embracing a great desire, lofty ideal to make the country peaceful and prosperous and the people optimistic.

Nguyen Trai also showed great pride in the responsibility of a writer, so he wrote in Bao Kinh canh gioi number 5 as:

*Văn chương chép lấy đời câu thánh,
Sự nghiệp tua gìn phải đạo trung.
Trừ độc, trừ tham, trừ bạo ngược,
Có nhân, có trí, có anh hùng.*

*“Literature should write holy words,
A career should keep loyal conduct,
Defeat evils, defeat greed, defeat violence,
Have humanity, have wisdom, and have heroism”.*

The poem was actually a literary declaration by nature, Nguyen Trai attached literature to his career, linked the task of writing with the duty of a human being. Literature was associated with an act of "defeat evils, defeat greed, defeat violence"; Literature was associated with virtues of "humanity, intellectuality, and heroism". In our country, if we want to do so, to protect life and affirm human values, we must first protect our Fatherland and affirm the nation, which Nguyen Trai's poetry most profoundly experienced.

Nguyen Trai was aware of using literature as a weapon to fight against foreign aggression, to eradicate violence, for the independence of the country, for the happiness of the people. He wrote in the Nom poem Bao kinh canh gioi number 56 as below:

*Đao bút phải dùng tài đã vẹn,
Chỉ thư nấy chép việc càng chuyên.
Vệ Nam mãi mãi ra tay thước,
Điện Bắc đã đã yên phận tiên.
“The swording pen must utilize the complete talent,
The more writing literature the more skillful will be,
We are always ready to defend the South State,
The North Palace peacefully enjoys its fairy status”.*

In the past, when there was no paper and fountain pen, the ancients used a knife to engrave letters on bamboo and wood. In the time of Nguyen Trai, although there was the availability of pen and paper, he used a knife like a pen. It is also possible to understand that the pen was a powerful and effective combat weapon. In fact, during the years of fighting against Ming invasions, Nguyen Trai used his pen to write poems and orders, which were later collected and combined under the title *Trung Quan Tu Minh Tap*.

In that episodic literature, Nguyen Trai used the power of righteous literature to gather our forces and attack the enemy forces. He constantly used all of the talents to fight against the enemy in order to defend the South State. If you want to do that, you have to defeat the North enemy, you can build a prosperous life, the people live and settle in peace, lead a peaceful life, just like life in heaven. Obviously, according to Nguyen Trai, a pen must be a weapon to fight for the country, for the people and for the nation.

Previously, the reader could encounter this ideal in talented General Lý Thường Kiệt who was conscious of using the God poem to encourage patriotism, the fighting spirit of Dai Viet army in the defense war as mentioned above or it was the case of king Hung Dao Tran Quoc Tuan writing a similar poem *Dụ chư tỳ tướng hịch*. Even in the preface of a book with the content of Buddhist philosophy - Meditation: *Khoa hu luc*, Tran Thai Tong wrote: “literature is like the battle

sweeping out thousands of troops; the strategy is as tactics attacking the enemy” to highlight an extremely modern literary concept. Although using literature as a weapon in war happened in China before as in a case of Ly Bach's poetry, in Vietnam we have imported this idea and changed it to suit the reality of fighting against foreign invasion to protect the sovereignty of the nation.

Nguyen Trai's poetry also expresses the thought of the people, the love for the people, the sense of caring for the rights and happiness of the people. People followed the concept of the poet. This is a new view, demonstrating a very progressive conception of the people that no other authors previously mentioned and discussed as much as Nguyen Trai expressed in his poetry (according to Prof. Dinh Gia Khanh's statistics, the noun “people” was used up to 155 times in Nguyen Trai's poetry) such as in Binh Ngo Dai Cao.

Humane conduct is to help the people live in peace,

In order to love the people, the gentlemen must fight against the enemy,

First of all, we must defeat violence.

The people were burnt on a fierce fire, children were put in a disastrous house.

All the people, farmers, servants everywhere gathered under the humane flag of General Le Loi.

The thought of pro-people, the love for the people, the sense of caring for the rights and happiness of the people is also evident in the artistic perspective of Nguyen Trai. The art must be linked with the reality of the life of the masses. His advice to King Le Thai Tong about building true music imbued with national identity clearly expressed this concept:

"It was told that the warlike time uses martial arts, and the peaceful time uses literature. Today, it's high time we celebrated musical festivals. However, there is no root a tree cannot stand firmly, no writing literature it cannot be circulated. Peace is the root of music, the sound is its text. I am willing to compose music, devote myself to it wholeheartedly, but because of the lack of knowledge about music, I am afraid that it is difficult to harmonize melodies. Please spread Majesty's love and breed all the people, make the villages and hamlets without grumbling resentments that means not losing the root of the music"¹.

After that, "The King complimented and accepted it, then instructed the stone workers in Giap Son district to get good stones at Kinh Chumountain to make it"². Discussing the music, Nguyen Trai reminded the king to implement a policy of people tolerance and pro-people, to show his cultural and artistic view i.e. the relationship between "root" and "literature". According to Nguyen Trai, "root" is the content of basic thought of music; "Literature" is a form of expression of art. "Root" and "Literature", or content and form have an organic relationship, where the content determines the form. Building music not only is interested in "literature", which focuses on forms, techniques, and sounds, but it must be of primary concern mainly in the "root", i.e. the content. That content is "peace" indicating peace, the harmony of the soul and life.

¹ *Đại Việt History, Version kỹ thực lục*, Book XI, paper 35 a, 35 b – Translation version of Institute for History, Volumn 3, Social Science Publisher, Hanoi, 1972, p.113; *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, Book 17, paper 3 a.

² *Ibid*, p. 113

According to Nguyen Trai, writers and poets need to find topics and inspirations from life. The work *Self-criticism number 3* writes: "*Qua đời cảnh chép câu đời cảnh; Nhân một ngày nên quyển một ngày.*" That means any landscape or life is the object of descriptions and reflections of the artist. Writers need to pool their resources to write works; need to be dynamic, have a mighty spirit, a spirit of inspiration, and need the ability to be sensitive when perceiving and reflecting the reality of life as it is expressed in the *Self-criticism number 19*:

*Tài tuy chẳng ngộ, trí chẳng cao,
Quyển đến trong tay chí mới hào.
Miệng khiến tửu binh phá lũy khúc,
Mình làm thi tướng đứng Đàn Tao.
Cầm khoa hết ngựa, cờ khoa tượng,
Chim bắt trong rừng, cá bắt ao.
Còn có anh hùng bao nả nữa,
Đòi thì vậy, dễ hơn nào.
“Despite little talent and wisdom,
One can compose poems, their will is strong.
Poet is like a drinker,
Like a general standing on the poetic stage,
Like a pianist playing all his ten fingers,
Like a chess player playing into the end.
Composing poems is as easy as catching birds in the forest
As catching fish in the pond
And if it is so, who else is better than the poet?”*

The poem seems satirical but expresses Nguyen Trai's conception of literature. According to him, true writers need to be dynamic, have abundant inspirations, their souls rich in vitality and mighty spirit. Readers can find the above idea in the Chinese poem “Hy de”: water, mountains, flowers, birds under the eyes of a layman are often normal, but under the eyes of a poet they are a very rich source of material for inspiration as in the two conclusive sentences:

Nhân để nhất thì thi liệu phú / Ngâm ông thùy dữ thế nhân da?

(Seeing life, in a moment, the material is so plentiful/

So no one could be compared with the poet?).

In *Self-criticism number 6*, he wrote:

Hàng chim ngủ khi thuyền đỗ,

Vàng nguyệt lên thuở nước cường,
 Mua được thú màu trong thuở ấy,
 Thế gian hay một khách văn chương.
 “Birds sleeping while boats anchoring,
 The moon brights when the tide is high,
 The scenery is splendid,
 There is a poet enjoying.”

This worldly life needs to have writing guests i.e. writers and poets in order to buy or draw, capture those colorful things, beautiful scenes for readers and people.

The work *Man Thuat number 13* has the following sentence:

“Khách đến, vườn còn hoa lác / Thơ nên, cửa thấy nguyệt vào.”
 “Guests coming, there are *Cyperus tegetiformis* flowers in the garden/
 The moon at the door, poems become.”

The poem had just been finished, the moon came in the house. The poet invited the moon into the house or has the moon inspired the poet? The external scenery stimulated the poet. In some other poems, Nguyễn Trãi also expressed this idea, for example: *Húng buổi chiều hôm lôi kéo mình (Vọng doanh) (The late afternoon inspired the poet (Vong Doanh)); Ngoài cửa ngăn, núi sông vẫn giục già ngâm thơ (Hà nhật mạn thành) (Outside the door, rivers and mountains stimulated the poet to recite poetically).*

Nguyen Trai also emphasized the effect of music. The *Chu trung ngẫu thành*, number 2 contains following sentences:

“Ngư ca tam xứống, yên hồ khoát
 Mục địch nhất thanh, thiên nguyệt cao”.
 “A fisherman sings on the lake,
 A herdsman blows a flute,
 The higher the moon, the higher the sky is.”

A folk song, a piece of folk music has impacted on nature, or does the poet imagine, feel like that when listening to a fisherman’s song, a herdsman’s flute? The folk song spread out on the water surface, extending out boundlessly, and the author felt like the lake surface was wider. The sound of the flute rose up in the moonlit night sky that the poet thought the moon was higher in the high sky.

This is a very accurate and profound conception of the effect of literature, in which there is poetry, and through the real life, combat reality and extremely diverse composition, Nguyen Trai recognized the meaning and effect of art on the life of the nation, the people, and the human soul.

In short, Nguyen Trai was not only a great and typical poet of Vietnamese literature - who marked the development of Han Nom literature, started and enlightened the classical Vietnamese poetry but also an outstanding literary theorist with a right and progressive literary conception imbued with the spirit of Viet Nho of the nation.

Furthermore, this is a literary concept of poet Do Chieu. In *Than Dao*, he wrote:

“Chở bao nhiêu đạo thuyền không khẳm/ Đâm mấy thằng gian bút chẳng tà”

“How much religion the loading boat does not sink

Criticizing evil men, the pen does not become blunt.”

In the Medieval times in the East, in particular, China and other countries with Chinese cultural influences such as Japan, Korea – South Korea including Vietnam, had a concept of *văn dĩ tải đạo* (a literature is to load religion). This is the concept of Confucianism in the Song Dynasty with the meaning that literature was loaded with morality, but the moral here was the religion of the gentle sage, recorded in the scriptures of sages. When this concept came to our country, the Vietnamese Confucians had learned and understood with different meanings, some times it was the religion of the saints, and other time it was the virtue of the people, carrying the thought of pro-people; therefore, the poetry of poets Nguyen Trai, Nguyen Dinh Chieu, etc. is a clear-cut testament. The verse of Nguyen Dinh Chieu, just quoted above, needs to be understood according to the second meaning, which bears the spirit of Viet Nho.

In addition to the concept of literature carrying the patriotism of the people, the poet also required literature be artistic with beautiful words: “*Văn chương ai chẳng muốn nghe / Phun châu nhả ngọc báu khoe tinh thần*”. (Everyone would like to listen to literature / Beautiful words show off the spirit).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our research and literary evidence, we can claim that Vietnam has her own Confucianism, i.e. the Confucian ideology bears Vietnamese cultural identity. Although in the beginning, Vietnam had borrowed this thought from China, later Vietnam reformed and transformed it in order to fit in with Vietnamese culture. This is a case of acculturation when an extrinsic cultural element imported into a culture, it is transformed to suit with the existing one. During the course of history, Vietnamese intellectuals were aware of being independent of China, but they want to enrich their ideology. They had to choose the thought of Confucius unifying the social ideology. However, Vietnamese progressive thinkers were always conscious of nation dependence, so they wanted to get free from China. One typical evidence for this was the case of Nom letter that was created by Vietnamese intellectuals based on Han letter. Many national and cultural thoughts have been expressed with Nom letter. Since we had Nom letter, intellectual activities took place lively and it became a weapon to fight against Chinese invasions. By Nom letter, we declared our national independence from China. As a result, we have formed our Viet Nho.

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