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Folklore and Fantasy Short Stories in Medieval Literature of Vietnam: Otherworld Journeys

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To a very large extent, like the evolutionary development of the organism, once a certain literary genre is lost, some of its new factors will be introduced into the new genre of literature. *Truyền kỳ*, the first form of fantasy short stories of Vietnamese written literature during the medieval period from 10th to 19th centuries, also had all these characteristics when its formation came from the influence of literature and culture—general and specific creed in Sino-Culture and especially from the folk narrative of Vietnam. My purpose in this essay focuses on learning about the effect of written folk literature through literary acculturation on the theme of journeys to otherworlds from folktales to the fantasy short stories.

Literature Review

The inheritance of folklore elements in Vietnam's medieval short stories included the evolutionary characteristics which bore universal features during the period of transition from oral to written narrative art. As Derek Brewer put it:

> The difference between medieval literary narrative and folklore narrative was one only of degree, with many qualities shared. Oral delivery was still an influence on Chaucer's highly intellectual poetry, just as it still is in that folklore narrative observed by scholars in modern times, in Ireland, Yugoslavia, and Russia. (Davidson, 1975, p.75)

In the East, in general, and in Vietnam in particular, the role of folklore to the formation of traditional written literature has been recognized. Despite being formed relatively late, medieval Vietnamese literature still bears a striking resemblance to the world's written literature that it begins with the collection of folklore. This is the earliest form of medieval literature during the period of post-antiquity or early medieval. It seems that for *truyền kỳ*, folklore is also a form of "literary allusion", through which literary artists can practice their creative perspective of "simplicity is the origin of all evolution." Folktales can be considered as a genre of the first intertextuality formed to serve the intentions of *Ý tại ngôn ngoại* [metaphor thought or read between the lines].

Folklorists also assumed that the inheritance of medieval Vietnamese narrative from folklore has taken place in two trends: "documentalization" and "literaturization". Documentalization is the process of recording existing folktales following the author's writing style without any embellishment. In this approach, medieval prose writers often take both plot and motifs to organize and write the same

stories. Therefore, it is not strange that this literary section has been the theme of both written literature and folklore. It corresponded to the early period of medieval literature, in Vietnam, from the 10th to the 14th century. Literaturization is to take an element of folklore (i.e. plot, motifs, themes, and characters) to create an entirely new story in two stages of medieval literature: 15th–17th and 18th–19th centuries. In this essay, I would like to focus on the second trend in *truyền kỳ*.

Truyền kỳ is defined as a genre of short stories that originated from China, which was conceived from traditional myths, fairytales, legends of ancient time, and chronicles under Early Qin (221–206 BC); and inherited the traditional strange tales from the reign of Wei Jin (265–420) as well as the period of Western Han (265–316) and Eastern Han (317–420). For content, *truyền kỳ* borrowed the story from the folklore, exploring the motifs, themes, plot available from the folk. For narrative art, it uses unusual things and *phi kỳ bất truyền* [non-fantasy, not pass by tradition] as the creative method to describe the profound content issues related to social life.

Truyền kỳ also harbored a lot of features of many genre as the interspersion between prose and poetry, expressing a combination of history telling and poetic talent. The structure of *truyền kỳ* usually begins with introduction of the characters, their names, hometowns, and character's morality. Then, there are stories about miraculous meetings considered as the central parts of the story. Their epilogues often hypothesizes the cause of storytelling and comments implying Confucian virtue.

Stylistically, *truyền kỳ* has used prose to tell stories, parallel structure to describe scenes and people, and poetry to express characters' feelings. *Truyền kỳ* is sometimes difficult to distinguish from strange tales under six Chinese reigns (III–VI centuries; including Three Kingdoms, Jin Western Han, and Eastern Han). However, unlike authors of strange tales who utilized strange facts into real ones, and rustic and primitive narrative, *truyền kỳ* have reached to the complete form and structure of short fictions that express florid style, charming lyrics, implied connotation, and romantic details.

The genre of fantasy short stories developed and marked the maturity of folk narrative through three different stages: strange tales in the period of six Chinese reigns, fantasy stories under Song Dynasty (from the year of 618), and the novel of horror tales in Ming-Qing Dynasty (between 1340–1715). Each stage had its own characteristics due to the domination of social changes, history, culture, and beliefs. Lu Xun (1959) had some remarks:

On this genre that the genre of truyền kỳ originated from strange tales, only had difference in literary spread that led to special achievements or borrowed from allegory to describe the melancholy, quoted happiness and unhappiness to tell commandments, but its end was still standard literature, along with stories about spirits, which prove that cause and effect have never changed for long time, really exciting. (p. 93)

Considered as the central literature and having important impact on other peripheral literatures in Han-culture, Chinese literature has had a great influence on neighboring countries in which the impact of Chinese fantasy stories towards Vietnamese literature is a typical instance. For this reason, *truyền kỳ* in Vietnam have been quite complete in terms of content as well as form since it appeared. Most importantly, the appearance and sudden rise to the top of *truyền kỳ* in Vietnam was considered as the work of endogenous growth of the strange tales that contained nationalistic features and were associated with oral narrative genres and historical prose.

The Role of Folktales in Forming of *Truyền Kỳ* in the Medieval Vietnamese Literature

According to Paul L. Bennett (1952):

A historical examination of what passes under the general name 'literature' reveals three distinct relationships of folklore to it: (i) the use of directly as literature, (ii) the use of folklore in a modified form as literature, and (iii) the use of folklore as a plane of reference in the production. (p. 23)

In Vietnam, when reviewing the history of medieval literature, it can be seen that the connection between folklore and written literature often exists in the same ways: of three ways of connection above, the first one is the clearest. *Chí quái, chí dị* [strange tales and horror tales], including some typical works like *Việt điện u linh* [collection of Vietnamese stories about the country's spiritual underworld] by Lý Tế Xuyên and *Lĩnh nam chích quái* [selection of the miraculous story in the land of Lĩnh Nam] by Trần Thế Pháp, are considered as the first medieval literary genre which is recognized as the earliest approach of the writers with the folktales.

In the third phase, the most complex approach, modern and postmodern writers often use folklore as a reference source, a combination form of "intertextuality", in which the folk material reproduced not at the level of plot, character, or plot change but by the mythical logic, archetype, symbols, and other cultural memories such as the case of Nguyễn Huy Thiệp with various works including *Kiếm sắc* [sharp sword], *Vàng lửa* [gold in fire], *Phẩm tiết* [elevation], and *Trương Chi* [Trương Chi story]. Especially in using folklore in a modified form as literature, learning about all aspects of folklore, knowledge of the illiterate, grammar of narration, or by a combination of several sources of folklife provided an excellent stuff for writers to create. The specific values, along with materials that folklore has provided like models of plot, have special allurement. The authors have accepted experimental plots from folklore and reconstructed these plots into short fantasy stories by adding characters and new forms from their own experience and their new socio-cultural environment.

In addition, apart from inheriting art materials, folklore foundation in *truyền kỳ* is also reflected in the extent and cultural outlook that this genre was influenced by folklore. *Truyền kỳ* have backed the virtue of sustainable values formed from folktales and use them to converse the Confucian and social contents to be included in the plots. Folk ideology now acts as a cultural appraisal system and mirror with power up on the literary works. It tacitly expressed that in the integration of folklore elements into prose exists an implicit connection with the defiant attitudes of the authors towards the feudal dynasty in war and

chaos context during the 16th and 17th centuries. The context in which writers created fantasy short stories is the time of many wars taking place among various feudal corporations against the invaders.

In several studies (Liên, Hưu, & Tiên, 2009; Quýnh, Lâm, & Hãn, 1998), after the radiant aureole of the reign of Lê Thánh Tông King, from 1504 to 1527, the Lê dynasty fell into confusion when the six successive kings were either killed, deposed, and/or was incompetent to rule. During the 16th–17th centuries, the feudal factions tried to scramble for their interests, which caused internal conflict among the ruling class. Moreover, the conflict between the ruling class and the people intensified.

Thus, political disorder, wars among feudal groups, and the situation of internal enemies and external invaders became a part of Vietnam's history in medieval age. All of these events led to a marked crisis on the spiritual life of society. Faced with such reality, Confucianism, a theory to rule in peace, exposed its impotence and was no longer attractive. The Confucians, who have the sense of uprightness, on the one hand have broken their faith, on the other hand confronted with a couple of selection issue—*hành-tàng, xuất-xử* [become a Mandarin or not]—that the ancients have arranged in the absolute totalitarian.

According to this view, *Xuất xử*, at that time, is not only simply to "leave" or "stay", *hành* [practice], or *tàng* [hidden, to seclude oneself and lead a leisurely life] but also is the expression of political attitudes as well as virtuous qualities of man. In the context of losing unique position, social status is broken-down and excluded from the center of discourse. Most Confucians who wrote *truyền kỳ* proved that on the surface, they are fleeing from life, taking away from world affairs. However, they are in fact discreetly feeling and expressing uncooperative thoughts and resisting the social practice. The circumstance of being at once rebelling and being suppressed by the theory of "Political legitimacy," by ideological counter-insurgency, and anti-majesty that Confucianism "frame", literature became a tool for liberating the conflicting "intense inner life." Personal ego, regarded to be gripped and limited by Confucian perspectives, has taken this opportunity to rise up strongly. Therefore, a part of intellectuals and writers who

disregard the position and fame, seriously esteem the personal preference, *độc thiện kỳ nhân* [live the life of a recluse to self-improve], demand liberation, even drive to enjoy sexual passion. As a result, fantasy short stories have become a discourse of "liberation" for the contradictory situation of Confucians.

Among those who wrote fantasy short stories, Nguyễn Dữ is the most representative author for this "discourse". Resigning as mandarin and choosing the life of a recluse with the reason of caring for elderly mother, Nguyễn Dữ conjectured to write *Truyền kỳ mạn lục* [Notes scattered fantasy short stories] in the years 1509–1547 and this work is often described as "based on indignation to write the book." *Lan trì kiến văn lục* (Nghĩa, 1997), a collection of Lan Trì's fantasy short stories, written by Vũ Trinh is considered as the consequence of "hiding in thatched cottage without any discussion on world affairs" (p. 825). Similarly, Đoàn Thị Điểm, the author of *Truyền kỳ tân phả* [New genealogy of fantasy short stories], illustrated the aspirations of liberation and competitive success of women in male-dominated society through many of her story characters. Despite "going to hiding" and seeming to choose the peaceful life in the villages, all the authors of fantasy short stories were not willing to give up their voices, the voice for self-conscious expression, for "wisdom of oneself," and different colors of Confucian intellectuals in mainstream history.

Therefore, the tradition of *truyền kỳ* genre at the beginning is a sign of resistance. The writers of fantasy short stories collected unusual and strange folk stories to re-create them as a way of challenging the power at the center. They told about the strange stories in this world to expose the fact that literature has opposed or challenged the specific historical events. From that point, it has created a written literature consisting of political consciousness with unorthodox texts used both to express with communities and cover/camouflage the idea of an awareness and other sensitive issues.

Thus, fantasy short stories, from appearing in written literature to even on its top, have never been recognized as a central genre but only a sub-discourse, a small flow of literature. The main reason is that fantasy short stories have provided the first bricks on a platform of other peripheral ones, a genre with "coequal" position, the folktales—the area that

Khổng Tử (Confucius) tried to exhort his disciples to stand aloof. The transmission period of the first brick placed on a platform other peripheral ones, a place category with "peer" is another folk tales—the area that Confucius tried to exhort school alienated his game.

Such attraction of folklore materials in *truyền kỳ* has been close to the way that Rabelais used laughter from folklore to meet the needs of human liberation—"folk humor existed and developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature, but precisely because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 72). This is an effective method to rebuild the concept of the world, against the bound worldview of Confucian and silently realize a "rebellion" of thought.

A Case Study: Otherworld Journeys From Folktales to *Truyền Kỳ*

The models, the prototype nature of space implied in creation of myths, fairytales, and epics, were completely unrestricted in ancient times or folklore. They have also been found in the works of medieval elite writers and even in modern novels or adventure fictions as well as science fictions later. All forms of space repeatedly revealed somewhat the themes and mindset inherently archetypical of folklore; concurrently, by some way they indicated that the writers have adapted from the traditional narrative and harmonized it with the values and aspirations of their own culture.

Others have contradicted this view "human memory quickly forgets purely historical fact and must be reinforced by faith. Faith alone leaves an indelible imprint on tradition . . . that makes possible its survival, even when the faith itself has long since disappeared" (Taylor, 1964, p. 115). This has been clearly reflected in the existence of folklore materials in *truyền kỳ* of Vietnamese written literature in which spatial models and theme of journey to other worlds in folklore are still used in diversified way whereas nature of ancient faith on this issue has been changed, even disappeared.

Otherworld journeys showed the adventure of characters to variously fantastic and illusory worlds in folktales. This theme includes a lot of motifs which are

closely associated with the rituals and beliefs related to the life after death of ancient people. The inheritance of this theme illustrated the transformation from the so-called "marvelous" into the so-called "fantasy" in the flow of literature from primitively ancient to medieval. In addition, the marvelous from the realm of folktales has obviously become one of the basic energy to reshape the aspect of fantastic tales in the medieval period. It can be seen that the folk materials seem to be a good factor that makes us easily recognize the writers (Nghĩa, 1997), in the 16th century, or as a signal that we can use to decrypt some horror tales or strange tales, that is, *Việt điện u linh* (Xuyên, 1972) or *Lĩnh nam chích quái* (Pháp, 1960). *Truyền kỳ mạn lục*, a work of Nguyễn Dữ in Trần dynastic—the day of publication is inapplicable—is an obvious evidence of utilizing, continuously developing, and creating the materials from folklore as well as the dialogue of two literary styles.

Thiên cổ kỳ bút [the rare literary work from past to present] is considered as an excellent combination and reached the pinnacle of mixture between the oral narrative genres and historical prose. According to Bùi Duy Tân (Khánh, Tân, & Chương, 2001), *Truyền kỳ mạn lục* is the only writing of Nguyễn Dữ. His works, including 20 stories divided into four books, were written following the style of fantasy short stories. The plot is primarily taken from the stories handed down in folklore in which many cases come from the legend of gods whose temples still exist today (temple of Vũ Thị Thiết in Ha Nam province, Nhị Khanh temple in Hung Yen province, and temple of Văn Dĩ Thành and Goi village in Hanoi).

It is quite easy to realize the intimate relationship between *Truyền kỳ tân phả* (Điểm, 1982) and other stories orally handed down in illiterate communities as well as indigenous worship. *Truyền kỳ tân phả* consisted of six stories, five of which were found to be associated with literature and folk festivals. The story *Cuộc gặp gỡ kỳ lạ ở Bích Câu* [a strange meeting in Bich Cau] had relation to the fairy tale about a man named Tú Uyên who married a fairy, but the issue behind is Taoism (a Chinese philosophy based on the writings of Lao-tzu in 6th century B.C.), the way to fairy life Taoist and the development of this faith in Vietnam during the 18th century.

The story Cây tùng và cây *bách* [the pine and the cypress] seemed to be adapted from ancient folktale named *Lưu Bình Dương Lễ*. Other stories like *Chuyện người liệt nữ ở An Ấp* [story about the heroine in An village], *Chuyện thần nữ Vân Cát* [story about Van Cat nymph]*, Đền thiêng ở cửa bể* [the holy temple in the outfall were related to the temples and worship of the gods. Another posed issue is that why has written literature, *truyền kỳ*, used so much folklore since it appeared?

People often naturally admit the situation but have no explanation why the authors repeated this phenomenon in a lot of places around the world. Like the romantic literature of Western Europe in which medieval folktales and folksongs were supposed to be particularly important source of novels. In the East, typically China, on the other hand, the popular origins of "novel" is that scholars have less doubt. They have noted that storytellers are those who created novels on the street or in small villages and bequeathed them to the next generation.

In fact, *truyền kỳ* have used a huge source of materials from folklore. In particular, the inheritance of the theme of voyage to other worlds with varied motifs is a typical example. Other worlds have been established including: "Upper worlds" which are attached to the light, the eternity spirits, love, and the mood of peace and contentment—the eternal aspiration of people about the prospects of world that just has fun and truth. Such world is clearly portrayed in Phạm Tử Hư's trip to the heaven to enjoy all of sceneries, splendid buildings, and everlasting life in the otherworld. It is mentioned as the final destination of undying love (*Lấy chồng dê* [Married with a goat]) in which the husband who had supernatural power brought his lost wife with him to the heaven.

"Terrestrial otherworlds" are the existing worlds associated with all the joy and anger, love, and hate of the people and society. These worlds are abundant of famine and disease outbreakg (*Dốc đầu sấm* [the slope of thunder]), the plaintive love due to wars (*Truyện Lệ Nương* [the tragedy of Le Nuong]) or the pain that led to the suicide of a wife who was given as a payment of her husband's gambling debt (*Truyện người nghĩa phụ ở Khoái Châu* [the story of faithful woman in Khoai Chau]).

The "lower worlds" are the negatives of the earth where there are a lot of blackness, prisons, death, and fear. This world always has demons who are ready to avenge those who burned and destroyed their temple (*Chức phán sự ở đền Tản Viên* [story about the god of justice in Tan Vien temple]), the mysterious, and spine-chilling punishments for wicked people *(Truyện mụ ác* [story about cruel women]).

The symbols act as intermediary elements to connect various spaces from folklore, which continued to maintain their existence in *truyền kỳ*, for example:

- "*Thu Tinh* mountain" is the door to hell (*Thành Tử Đạo* [story about Thanh Tu Dao]);
- the "road" is both real and mysterious that leads the mandarin through the mountain to another world to speak with old woodsman (*Truyện người tiều phu núi Nưa* [story of the woodsman in Nua mountain]) ;
- The "rowing man" has responsibility for coming to *Đồng Luẫn* abyss to send a letter to the god at lower world (*Thần vực Đồng Luẫn* [the God of Dong Luan abyss]);
- The "river" with the boatman transferring people at dawn to the market of the underworld (*Bài ký chơi núi Phật Tích* [the poem of walking around Phat Tich Mountain]); or
- at wistful and foggy place in the early morning, the man realizes his friend who passed way has now become a god in the high world (*Chuyện chức phán sự đền Tản Viên* [story about the god of justice in Tan Vien temple]).
- In those three worlds, the humans liberally free themselves without any obstacle or difficulties like in these stories:
- the character of *truyền kỳ* follows up his teacher to visit the fairyland (*Phạm Tử Hư lên chơi thiên tào* [Pham Tu Hu visit the fairyland]);
- joining the conversation in the cemetery of the deceased (*Cuộc nói chuyện thơ ở Kim Thoa* [a recital of verses in Kim Thoa]);
- meeting with the immortals and fairies to discuss life and being told about their fortune and destiny (*Gặp tiên ở hồ Lãng bạc* [meeting with the immortals and fairies at Lang bac Lake]);

- they can drift to the palace under the sea and be saved again (*Truyện người con gái Nam Xương* [the story about young woman in Nam Xuong]); or
- come to paradise and never turn back or go to the hell to witness the judge accusing his/ her father (*Truyện Lý Tướng Quân* [story of Ly General]).

Like the model of three worlds of folklore, the reciprocation among different heterogeneous worlds in *truyền kỳ* is existing and make up the attraction for this genre. *Truyền kỳ*, thus, inherited the spatial structure from folklore and otherworld journeys are the favorite theme that *truyền kỳ* has borrowed and modified to create an intentional art world.

The "borrowing" of *truyền kỳ* based on elements of folklore can be also easily confirmed through the popular motifs for both types of oral stories and fantasy ones. In the item of Otherworld Journeys: Motifs F0-F199 (Thompson, 1958), there are motifs such as: (F1) Journey to otherworld as dream or vision, (F3) Journey to otherworld as invasion, (F10) Journey to upper world, (F80-F109) Journey to lower world, (F110) Journey to terrestrial otherworlds, (F121) Journey to world of spirits (F81.1) Orpheus: Journey to land of dead to bring back person from the dead, (F105) Dead oppose return of living from land of the dead, (F160.0.2) Fairy otherworld confused with land of the dead, and so forth.

This can be similarly found in *truyền kỳ,* such as stories of *"Two Gods who are dutiful to their parents"* in *Thánh Tông Di Thảo* (Nghĩa, 1997) with these striking motifs:(F132.1) Earthly paradise on mountain and (F7) Journey to otherworld with angel. The story about a meeting in an unusual way in the Tây farm in *Truyền kỳ mạn lục* has these motifs: (F162.1) Garden in otherworld, (F162) Landscape of otherworld, (E280) Ghosts haunt buildings, (F181) Lovemaking in otherworld, and (F173.3) Perpetual feasts in otherworld. The story named *Đền thiêng ở cửa bể* [The holy temple in the outfall] in *Truyền kỳ tân phả* contain these motifs: (D1810.8.2) Information received through dream, (D1813.1.3) Dream warns king of danger to kingdom, (F163.1) Castle in otherworld, (F171.0.1) Enigmatic happenings in otherworld,

which are later explained or the story *Nhớ kiếp trước* [Remembering the past life]. In *Lan trì kiến văn lục* by Vũ Trinh, the typical motifs are (F80) Journey to lower world, (E600) Reincarnation: Back from the dead in another form, and so forth.

All mentioned above are just small examples in popular motif-index which are generally used for both *truyền kỳ* and traditional narrative. The motifs, along with proverbs, folksongs, and other same stuff, become the source as well as the original base to build other real things of the second world in *truyền kỳ* through which the reader have connected with this fantasy world. The authors of *truyền kỳ*, thereby, have proven their ability in literary acculturation to inherit the folk materials and make them reach to the highest artistic level as possible—the ability to use an endless amount of energy of fantasy that belonged to the folklore motifs, absorbing, transforming and re-creating it into "the high level of literature and ideology and fertilize it" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 72). Simultaneously, fantastic stories at this time try to provide a complex system of details in which the contexts have been granted with higher rationalization aiming at explaining some events that cannot be explained in folklore.

The risen causes for borrowing these motifs from folklore to *truyền kỳ* may be judged from a couple of aspects. In terms of the author, an important aspect is that most writers lived "closely" with people living in villages and growing up with traditional materials. These writers, whose educational background are based on mythical, legendary, and historical materials, finally put into their works the "familiar" feeling. By absorbing much more folklore values and collecting nonofficial plots, as well as practicing writing strange stories, to some extent, these writers have created a particular method to resist the social crisis.

Therefore, it is quite obvious that the writers have lived with two simultaneous lives. The first is the life of educated and elite individuals abiding by the rules and regulations of Confucian traditions, while the second life is of rebellious spirit affected by the perennial values of folk—freedom and abiding by the mysterious regulations of nature as well as exposing all magical forces of the spiritual world. From that point, it shows that the conflict has grown between the metaphysical senses of the world with rational perceptions about the life in the process of creative works. The evidence for issue stated above is that the presence of tacit voices of negotiations between folklore ideas existed in memories of the literary artists and Confucian ideology—the theory that they were trained.

Absorbing folk materials has made up a clash with the popular view of the *truyền kỳ* authors, thus forming the acoustic of a fragmentized symphony in their works. Like the multi-colored glass pieces, folk beliefs and the traditional motifs of otherworld journeys have offered a kaleidoscope of ideas so as to create diverse views about the color of "the world"—and the readers, therefore, depending on their familiarity with such ideas, would find themselves with other perspectives. Hence, these competitive voices have made that voyage to otherworld in *truyền kỳ* colorful and dynamic.

In terms of genre aesthetics, Propp (1968) and Melentinsky (2000), through their historic-structural studies on fairy tales, believed that the long journeys to otherworld have originated from pre-class period and borne the traces of sacrificial rites and primitive religious practices from the ancient, for example, there have been sacrificial rituals attached to Thạch Sanh's trip into the forest to kill python; or the story of a girl named Tấm who has gone through her stepmother's mill to tend the folk festival and married a prince, which closely linked to Adult Ceremony; or the notion of old people about the afterlife symbolized by the journey to unknown regions, such as the trips to discover the life after the death of mandarin *Thủ Huồn*.

Then, the journeys to the otherworld in *truyền kỳ* have brought a different color. Adventure to otherworld in *truyền kỳ* has entirely lost every traces related to the rites of ancient people while continuously inheriting the motifs from folklore (like the motif of journey to the heaven, down to the hell, journey to the undersea palace, to the other worlds on the earth) as well as acquire the plots in which the characters have gone to a different world. Written literature in this time used an infinite amount of energy in symbols, antique patterns, and the journeys of folklore to absorb, transform, and re-create them into a higher level of symbols in which the nature of folk beliefs has been fully revoked. *Truyền kỳ*, thus, is a conscious creation in which the authors have explicitly rejected the initial purpose—the ritual nature of the traditional folktales. Since then, a fantastic

motif used to express the logical characteristics of folklore has turned into a true literary device**.**

The authors of *truyền kỳ*, however, have profusely depended not only on the motifs to create a mythical world to combine and link with the readers but also on couples of similar larger structures like a whole story to restore, rewrite, or entirely renew their works. In some cases, myths, legends, and folktales are fantastic stories which were narrated, expanded by Lê Thánh Tông, Nguyễn Dữ, Đoàn Thị Điểm and Vũ Trinh, that produced some results as we have seen. As Sullivan (2001) demonstrated, "the traditional tale provides something like the skeletal structure of the plot, and the author fleshes that structure out to present a theme that may or may not have been implicit in the original" (p. 284).

> Although ancient folk prose in the pure form has not been maintained these days, its effects can be probably felt through the writings belonged to various genres, in which plots and characters are often repeated and its wisdom is still quoted. The historians, philosophers, literary researchers and their characters usually absorb from the treasure of collective wisdom, enhance such "story" having meaning of teaching up to the level of "case study" and they are often talked about as things that everyone knows (Lisevich, 1978, p. 249).

Most importantly, the phenomenon of motifs borrowing and theme of otherworld journeys in *truyền kỳ* have come from the traditions of medieval literature, deeply influenced by the view of Confucian in which the cult of the ancient elements, the loyalty to traditional affairs, and the admiration towards the prestige of "sages" were highlighted before. The word "classic" for medieval human always carries a positive meaning. For Khổng Tử (Confucius), what belonged to ancient time has impossibly reached. The main purpose of human and society is not to better themselves, but to capture the values crystallized in the old time, and to imitate the epitome of perfect creation shaped over time that make up the spirit of old restoration typical. *Ôn cố nhi tri tân, khả dĩ vi sư dã* [To revise the old in order to know the new, which makes you become a teacher] is not only a motto in the behavior but

also the creating method of the writers. Thus, *thuật nhi bất tác, tín nhi hiếu cổ* [I just narrate, not create at all, I believe and love the old things] is one of the important principles of creation in medieval literature, including *truyền kỳ*, which leads to appreciate better the innovative simulation (as using classic references and literary allusion, plots borrowing, etc.). In addition, Confucian is a theory of moral creativity disseminated in spectrum of various fields. Confucian, therefore, lacks a metaphysical system of worldview. Khổng Tử has not discussed about *quái, lực, loạn, thần* [the strange, violence, rebellion and, spirit]; *kính quỷ thần nhi viễn chi* [the attitude towards the spirit gods is respectfulness but have no comment on]. Hence, Vietnamese medieval writers often find out how to offset this shortcoming from other sources of religions like Buddhism or Taoism, and especially from the folklore. The phenomenon of such amalgams has become the characteristics of Vietnam medieval literature. Borrowing the theme of otherworld journeys and plots from the system of mythology, fairytales, as well as local legends has probably not been out of literary prosody in this era.

Thus, by borrowing the theme of otherworld journeys in a creative way, *truyền kỳ* have contributed to indicate that in the context of social crisis, the writers seem to have much more demand on using folklore, which is considered as the instinctive reaction. Perhaps, the traditions and stableness established over thousands of years of history in folklore would make writers easily absorb and create an escape from contemporary society with a better sense of security in a new literary form, which has caused the process of the voyage to become an unique expression of the fantasy aimed to externalize the inner reality of the characters. This is the phenomenon of the complex in contents and writing arts that folklore cannot be achieved.

Conclusion

Folktales, with binary logical thinking affected from mythology, have inherited the model of dichotomy world, the three-world, and the unique theme of otherworld journeys, from which the occult, fantastic, and strange art-space has been formed. The voyages

to otherworld in these folktales then have continued to survive and thrive in *truyền kỳ*—the genre of Vietnam medieval literature as proof for an art theme which has the eternity and universalistic feature from folklore moved into the literature. However, due to the affection of socio-cultural elements and religions in medieval times, otherworld journeys of *truyền kỳ* have had a lot of changes, accompanied by the change in the process of literary acculturating in folktales. The motifs of the forms have continued to be reserved in this genre of written literature; however, couples of ritual features and ancient beliefs gradually disappeared, instead, journeys to otherworlds from being a logical characteristics of folklore ame the means of art to express ideas and themes in *truyền kỳ*.

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