Hue University Journal of Science: Social Sciences and Humanities
ISSN 2588-1213
Vol. 132, No. 6B, 2023, p.p. 149–167, **DOI**: 10.26459/hueunijssh.v132i6B.7085

INTERTEXTUAL IN FOLK TALES: THE INTERWEAVING OF THREE RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES IN VIETNAMESE LEGEND OF DRAGONS AND KINGS

Hoang Huu Phuoc*

University of Education, Hue University, 34 Le Loi St., Hue, Vietnam

* Correspondence to **Hoang Huu Phuoc** < hhphuoc@hueuni.edu.vn>

(*Received: January 29, 2022; Accepted: October 23, 2023*)

Abstract. This paper provides an overview of intertextuality in folk tales and applies it to study the influence of religious texts on Vietnamese legends. Specifically, relying on examining collections of folklore, medieval literature, religious myths, official and unofficial history in Vietnam, and then collecting stories about dragons and kings, in this study, the researcher demonstrates manifestations of Three Religious principles (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) and the way these principles are harmoniously woven into these stories. This research also reveals texts from these religions which were used in these stories to serve political purposes in the ideal form.

Keywords: Intertextual, dragons, kings, Vietnamese legend, religious texts

1. Intertextual in Folk Tales: An overview

Intertextuality is the shaping of a text's meaning by another text, either through deliberate compositional strategies such as quotation, allusion, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche or parody, or by interconnections between similar or related works perceived by an audience or reader of the text (Hallo, 2010). Folk tales are often intertextual, as they are based on stories that have been told and retold over the centuries. Intertextuality is an important tool for folklore, as it allows the stories to connect on a deeper level, it can provide a way for the stories to reflect the experiences of the readers, and it also helps to create a sense of community.

One of the most common ways intertextuality is used in folklore is through the use of references to other texts. This can be done intentionally. For example, one story might be the reference to another text by name or using the elements from that text to illustrate its own. This

sometimes makes it difficult for readers to determine which story is being referenced, as the stories are often intertwined.

Intertextual between religion and folk tales describes the way in which religious texts are used and referenced in folk tales and vice versa. This is due to the fact that religion often provides a framework for understanding and organizing folklife, and folklife can often be seen as a way of fulfilling religious obligations. This can be seen in folk tales, in which religious symbols and stories are often used to illustrate moral lessons, foreshadow future events, or warn the audience about the consequences of certain actions. The intertextual relationship between religion and folklore is often difficult to understand without a knowledge of other texts and stories.

2. Legend of Dragons and Kings in Vietnamese Context

In the distant past, the Baiyue (百越, lit. "Hundred Yue/ Viet") people combined snakes, crocodiles, and several other animals to create their first dragon symbol, also known as "Giao long"[1]. This symbol was not only reserved for leaders but also used by all strata of society. Until 1118, when King Lý Nhân Tông (1072 -1128) banned the use of dragon images among the commoners (Ngô et al., 2010), this custom ended. To quote:

The Việt tattoo their bodies for religious reasons, as a talismanic protection against evil water spirits. Their colorful bodies, in resembling the dragon – which may have been thought of as a lord of the water – protected them, and so the practice is rationalized and justified in utilitarian, religious terms. (Brindley 2015, p.166)

No later than the 2nd century CE, Chinese Mahayana Buddhism came to Vietnam. Because China and Vietnam also shared many common features of cultural, philosophical, and religious heritage as a result of geographical proximity, ”Vietnamese Buddhism is thus related to Chinese Buddhism in general, and to some extent reflects the formation of Chinese Buddhism after the Song dynasty” (Prebish & Tanaka, 1998, p. 194). In the Lý (1009–1225) and the Trần (1225–1400) dynasties, Buddhism in Vietnam reached a state of extreme prosperity. However, “At the early time of the Lê dynasty (1428–1789), Buddhism entered the recession period, giving way to the influence and comprehensive domination of Confucianism in the 15th century” (Nguyễn et al., 2021, p.3). The core beliefs and teachings of Buddhism as they are

[1] Giao Long (蛟龙) is a compound referring to one type of dragon, not two. Hugh Clark has pointed out that the reference to Giao (蛟) was usually associated with the far South. At least by later times (Tang and Song), the Giao is used in conjunction with the crocodile, so that it may actually have referred to the crocodile in early times as well. (Brindley 2015, p.150)

known and practiced in Vietnam also revolve around these concepts: The Four Noble Truths, the Eight-fold Path, Karma, and Reincarnations" (Hoàng et al., 2018). Among the core ideas of Buddhism that permeated the aforementioned legends, reincarnation (轮迴, samsara) is the most ubiquitous. This concept refers to the transfer of the soul from one body to another after death and it was applied to illustrate that Vietnamese leaders were reincarnated by divine dragons.

During the Chinese Domination period (北属, lit. "belonging to the north", 111 B.C. – 938), Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam due to the policy of assimilation (H. N. Nguyễn, 1998), which means "the Han Chinese forced vassal countries to follow Han culture (also known as Sinocentrism, 中国中心主义)" (P. H. Hoàng, 2020, p.38), including following the teachings of Confucianism. In 938, the Vietnamese regained their independence from the Han Chinese and then began to build "a model of totalitarian monarchy and centralized government from the Chinese pattern" (Nguyễn et al., 2021, p. 3). In the first monarchy dynasties, Confucianism still did not have a significant role in the political and spiritual life of the Vietnamese. In 1070, the Lý dynasty built Khổng miếu (孔庙, lit. Temple of Confucius), this is an important historical milestone showing the influence of Confucianism at the national level. Consider this:

At the time of the Later Lê Dynasty (1427-1789), Confucianism became the "monolatry" in the royal culture, making Buddhism and Taoism become the folk culture. In the pinnacle of power, Confucianism developed its power to the maximum, leading to a period of chaos and stagnation that lasted until the late 19th century, when the country was invaded by the French colonialists (1884). (Lý, 2015)

Confucians chose the dragon symbol to be a representative of absolute royal power because it met the ideal conditions to bolster "the supremacy and legitimacy of an emperor, and by extension the whole monarchical system: (1) the emperor's divine origin granted by spiritual powers, (2) his status as a moral authority, and paragon" (Loewe, 1987, p.93). Therefore, the viewpoints of Confucians greatly influenced the meaning of Chinese dragon, including the concept of "(the emperor is) the True Dragon, Son of Heaven" (真龙天子) proposed by Emperor Han Gaozu (汉高祖, r. 206 – 202 BC), the theory of "the Interaction between Heaven and Humanity" (天人感应), the theory of "the Divine Rights of King" (君权神授), and theory of Auspiciousness and Disasters (瑞祥灾异) developed by Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179- 104 B.C.).

Regarding the emperor's divine origin, the three Han Confucian conceptions, including the belief of "The True Dragon, Son of Heaven", the theory of "the Interaction between Heaven and Humanity", and the theory of "the Divine Rights of King", led people to believe that "The emperor is a divine dragon, a living god or a son of heaven, chosen by the gods and goddesses

of heaven, therefore, the emperor is the only one who represents the gods to the ruler of the whole world" (T. N. Nguyễn, 2016, p.131). This belief helped the emperor gain the respect and support of the commoners and created a difference in status between royalty and others.

As for the status of moral authority, the perception was that if the emperor lived up to this role, auspicious omens would appear accordingly; otherwise, calamities and inauspicious omens would come instead (Lu, 2019). This perception is also known as Theory of Auspiciousness and Disasters (瑞祥灾异说), one of the most important Han political theories "systemized by Dong Zhongshu from the early Han Confucian ideas with regard to moral cosmology and omen discourse" (Xun, 2016, p.102). From the perspective of Confucians, omens, both auspicious and ominous, are the messages from Heaven as the supreme moral authority to the ruler, as the sole agent of Heaven in the mundane world. Because of dragons' popularity and holiness, the Confucians believed that the dragon was the most appropriate messenger.

Due to the aforementioned Confucian theories and conceptions, Confucianists in China and later in Vietnam recognized the advantages of associating celestial dragons in mythology with emperors. As follows:

Dragons and Confucianism are closely related. Confucianists took advantage of the influence of dragons in folk beliefs to increase the influence of Confucian political theories in society. On the contrary, the dragon symbol, thanks to Confucianism, easily penetrated into the royal culture and became the emperor's personal representative. (T. N. Nguyễn, 2016, p.148)

"The earliest appearance of Taoism in Vietnam dated back to the second century when some Taoist monks from China sought to spread their ideas to the area that is now northern Vietnam" (Xu, 2002). Unlike in China, "religious Taoism in Vietnam does not have a core system of specific teachings" (Q. A. Trần, 2017, p.13). Vietnamese people were introduced to Taoism philosophy through fundamental concepts such as Dao (道), the Yin and Yang (阴阳), the Five Elements (五行), etc. In addition, Vietnamese Taoist practitioners, mostly from the Fulu sect (符箓派), focused "on the search for longevity and immortality, spiritual healing, magic, geomancy, and divinations, which blended in with Vietnamese popular religious beliefs" (Q. A. Trần, 2017, p.13). Taoism in Vietnam is intertwined with folk beliefs that there are no boundaries. In this manner, "despite not having as prominent a presence as the other two major religions of Vietnam, Taoism is in a favorable position to spread as a popular religion" (Hoàng et al., 2018). In the course of the centuries, Taoism had a profound influence on Vietnamese legends about kings and dragons in two aspects: Yin and Yang philosophy, and Feng Shui principles.

From the Đinh to the Trần Dynasty (968 - 1400), Buddhism was the national religion, therefore, the legends of dragons and kings of this period were strongly influenced by this religion. From the Hậu Lê to the Nguyễn Dynasty (1428-1945), Confucianism became the controlling ideology of the Vietnamese people, so these stories were colored by the ideas of Confucianists. Meanwhile, "while Buddhism and Confucianism took turns taking important positions in the political arena at the time of the independent feudal state, Taoism quietly entered into Vietnamese life, becoming the spiritual choice of the popular people" (N. T. K. Nguyễn, 2020). The influences of Taoism are not prominent but have always existed since it was introduced to Vietnam. According to Trần Đình Hượu:

"For a long time, estimated from the 2nd century AD to the beginning of this century, Vietnam had the parallel existence of three religions imported from China. Depending on the times of prosperity or decline, these foreign religions have taken turns taking the leading role and strongly influencing the universe, the worldview, the cultural practices in life, and the essential thinking of Vietnamese people." (H. Đ. Trần, 2007, p.184)

The interweaving of Three Religions' teachings in Vietnam created relative religious pluralism, which is "widely understood as the co-existence, convergence, and even unification of the three religions in Vietnam" (L. T. Lê, 2016, p.16) and "sprouted from the Chinese concept of Three Religions with the same root (三教同源) and Three Teachings Harmonious as One (三教合一)" (Đ. T. Nguyễn, 2013, p.318). The three imported religions in the overlapping and complex relationship with the indigenous culture have really shaped and comprehensively impacted the spiritual structure and social life of Vietnam in many different ways including the literature (N. T. K. Nguyễn, 2020).

In this study, we have reviewed a wide array of sources, encompassing folklore, medieval literature, and both official and unofficial historical documents, all of which were compiled by various Research Institutes. These sources include 'The General Collection of Vietnamese Folklore' by the Vietnam Institute of Cultural Studies (2006), 'Anonymous Legend Treasures for Demotic Script of Vietnamese' by the Vietnam Institute of Literature (2000), 'General Collection of Vietnamese Novels - Written in Classical Chinese' by the Vietnam Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies (1997), 'Collection of Vietnamese History' by the Vietnam Institute of History (2017), and 'The Treasure of Vietnamese Unofficial History' compiled by Vũ and Phạm (2019). From there, we collected 31 Vietnamese legends (with codes from S01 to S31) that mentioned the relationship between Vietnamese dragons and kings/leaders, as listed in Table 1:

Table 1. 31 Stories about dragon and kings in Vietnam

Names of	The content	Code

kings/leaders		
Lạc Long Quân (r. 2792 BC - 2525 BC)	Lạc Long Quân (lit. Lạc Dragon Lord), a divine dragon, married the fairy Âu Co, who gave birth to 100 children (the ancestors of the Hundred Viet people). (Ngô et al., 2010)	S01
Triệu Việt Vương (r.554 - 571)	Triệu, while being chased by the enemy, was given a claw of the dragon. Since then, Triệu defeated the enemy and became king. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S02
Lý Nam Đế (r. 544 – 548)	Lý's mother dreamed a yellow dragon appeared. Then she became pregnant and gave birth to Lý. (Vietnam Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies, 1993)	S03
Hậu Lý Nam Đế (r.571 – 602)	Lý then tricked Triệu into giving him the claw of a dragon. As a result, he defeated King Triệu and proclaimed himself king. (S. T. Ngô, 1991)	S04
Đinh Tiên Hoàng (r. 968 - 979)	Đinh, when he was a child, dived into the river and saw a dragon opening its mouth, so he buried his father's ashes there. This helped him to become king later. (C. Đ. Nguyễn, 2019)	S05
	As Đinh fled over a bridge, it collapsed and he fell into the mud. His uncle arrived and wanted to stab him, but was astonished to see two yellow dragons appear and hover over Đinh to protect him. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S06
Đinh Phế Đế (r. 979–980)	A concubine had a dream that a yellow dragon flew into her room. After that, she gave birth to her son, who later became king named Đinh. (Vũ and Phạm, 2019)	S07
Lê Đại Hành (r. 980 – 1005)	In his childhood, when it turned cold, a yellow dragon appeared and used its halo to help Lê sleep. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S08

Lê Trung Tông (r.1005)	A queen dreamed of two dragons fighting to win the sun. Later, the queen gave birth to her son named Long Việt (i.e. King Lê Trung Tông). The following year, the queen gave birth to another son named Long Đĩnh (i.e. King Lê Long Đĩnh). (Vũ and Phạm, 2019)	S09
Lê Long Đĩnh (r. 105 – 1009)		
Lý Thái Tổ (r. 1009 – 1028)	Zen master Đinh La Quý (852 – 936) saw a dragon image at the base of an old tree. Thus, he predicted that Lý would replace Đinh dynasty with Lý dynasty (L. Nguyễn, 2019)	S10
	While Lý was on a ship, he saw a yellow dragon flying into the sky. Therefore, he changed the capital and named the new capital Thăng Long (lit. Flying Dragon) (Ngô et al., 2010)	S11
Lý Thái Tông (r. 1028 – 1054)	In 1020, Lý Thái Tông saw a yellow dragon, heralding a good omen. Then, his army defeated Champa's army and captured the general. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S12
	In 1029, a dragon appeared. The king considered it a good omen, so he commanded his troops to build the Thiên An palace. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S13
Lý Nhân Tông (r. 1072 – 1128)	King Lý had "a prominent forehead bone" (Anonymous, 1993, p.53). The court described him as having a "big forehead, which is similar to that of a dragon". He, therefore, was supported by the gods and followed by the people. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S14
Lý Thần Tông (r. 1128 – 1138)	Zen master Từ Đạo Hạnh transformed himself into a yellow dragon and then crawled into the body of Lý's mother. After that, she gave birth to her son, who later ascended the throne by the name of Lý Thần Tông. (S. T. Ngô, 1991)	S15
Trần Nhân Tông	When the king passed away, two dragons descended from the sky to usher him into heaven. (Thích, 1995)	S16

(r. 1278 – 1293)		
Trần Thái Tông (r. 1226 - 1258)	At Địa Cận mountain, King Trần Thái Tông saw a dragon. He believed it was a good omen, so he built a palace there. (T. Lê, 2001)	S17
Giản Định Đế (r. 1407 – 1409)	While King Giản Định was in danger, a yellow dragon appeared to protect him. Thus, the enemy army spared the king. (S. T. Ngô, 1991)	S18
Hồ Quý Ly (r. 1400 – 1401)	After Hồ Quý Ly took over Trần's throne, he found a land that had a dragon vein. The land was "as a flat slab of stone with a coiling dragon and a coiling snake", which was suitable for him to reside for 60 years (石蟠龙蛇,六个十年). However, because his kingship was not in agreement with the gods' decision, he lost the word "ten" (十). Hence, the Hồ Dynasty only existed for six years. (Lê and Nguyễn, 2018)	S19
Lê Thái Tổ (r.1428 – 1433)	A monk showed Lê where the dragon vein was so that Lê could bury graves for his ancestors there. Since then, the lineage of Lê dynasty was destined for kingship for nearly five hundred years. (T. Nguyễn, 1956)	S20
	Lê, while still the leader of the Lam Sơn uprising, was hunted by the Ming army. A divine dragon appeared and lent Lê a magic sword to defeat the enemy. (Đ. Q. Lê, 2007)	S21
	To help Lê's insurgents guard against the enemy, a dragon leaves one of its eyes on a mountain to warn the insurgents of danger, so the mountain was called Mục Sơn (lit. Eye Mountain). (Vũ and Phạm, 2019)	S22
Lê Hiến Tông (r. 1497 - 1504)	A queen dreamed that a yellow dragon, later she gave birth to her son, who later became a lord named Lê Hiến Tông. (Ngô et al., 2010)	S23

Lê Trang Tông (r. 1533 - 1548)	General Nguyễn Kim wanted to find descendants of the Lê dynasty to appoint them to the king. A god told him to go to the west of the citadel until he saw a black dragon coiling itself around a pole. Nguyễn Kim then found a man holding a pole and brought him back to appoint him to the king by the name Lê Trang Tông (Nguyễn C. D., 2019)	S24
Lê Hiển Tông (r. 1740 – 1786)	When Lê was still a prince, he was imprisoned by Lord Trịnh Doanh. Lê then let the servants sprinkle fragrant rice on the roof. By doing so, he deceived the Lord into believing that it was the dragon drool all over the roof under which there was a king. Consequently, Lê ascended the throne king. (S. T. Ngô, 1991)	S25
Minh Khang Thái Vương (r. 1545 – 1570)	Trịnh in his childhood often stole chickens in his neighborhood, so his neighbors pushed Trịnh's mother off a cliff. The cliff turned out to be a dragon vein, so Trịnh later was destined to be a Lord. (Phan, 1999)	S26
Tĩnh Đô Vương (r. 1767 – 1782)	In 1774, after Lord Trịnh dismissed the early meeting between him and his mandarins, a white dragon appeared. This was considered a warning after a war started later (Phạm, 2010).	S27
Đoan Nam Vương (r.1782 – 1786)	Concubine Ngọc Khoan dreamed that a god gave her a piece of silk with a dragon head pattern. She then gave birth to her son, who later became a lord named Trịnh Tông (Ngô Gia Văn Phái, 2021)	S28
Quang Trung (r. 1788 – 1792)	When King Quang Trung was young, he had to go through a forest to receive formal schooling. Two dragons appeared to protect him from wild animals. (Vietnamese Culture Research Institute, 2009)	S29
Thái Đức (r.1778 – 1788	King Thái Đức saw a yellow dragon flying up. He considered it a good omen of his fortunate destiny, so he proclaimed himself king. (Đ. G. Ngô, 1993)	S30

Tĩnh Vương (r.1533-1545)	Lord Nguyễn Kim was buried at Triệu Tường mountain whose mouth was considered to be similar to a dragon's mouth. Thanks to that blessing, descendants of the Nguyễn dynasty were crowned kings. (Nguyễn Dynasty Institute of History, 2002)	S31

3. The Interweaving of Three Religious Principles in the Vietnamese Legend of Dragons and Kings

The texts of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism all appear in the legends of dragons and kings, as follows:

In terms of Buddhist texts, the most typical evidence of the influence of Buddhism on the legends of dragons and kings in Vietnam is the appearance of the reincarnation motif. In these stories, the motif that kings transmigrated from divine dragons or supernatural objects was created and repeated to serve political purposes: using the influence of Buddhism to expand the power of leaders.

During this period, Buddhism played a dominant role, reincarnation motifs showed that the kings' past lives were supernatural beings related to Buddhism such as the lotus flower (story S08), or Zen master (story S15). When Confucianism became the central ideology, dragons became the previous lives of kings, like story S23 (Lê Hiển Tông).

An obvious example shows the influence of Buddhism on the reincarnation motif is the story about King Lê Đại Hành (S08). To quote:

'Lê's mother, when she was pregnant, had a dream in which a lotus flower bloomed in her stomach, and then gave birth to Lê. [...] A few years later, Lê's parents died [..]. In his village, an officer realized that "Lê's qualities are not comparable to ordinary people" so he adopted him and took care of him as his own son. On a cold winter night, when Lê fell asleep, a beautiful light filled the house. The officer came to see it, and then he saw a yellow dragon covering Lê's body, so he respected Lê even more. [When growing up, Le made many great achievements] Lê became a king.' (Ngô et al., 2010, p.65)

In this story, the main symbol that represents the past life of the king is the "lotus flower", one of Buddhism's most recognizable symbols. Meanwhile, the "dragon", a symbol of kingship from the Confucian perspective, only plays a supporting role in protecting the king from the cold weather. This clearly shows two facts: First, King Lê and his courtiers, who assisted him in the

creation and dissemination of this story, were devoted to Buddhism. Second, the choice of a Buddhist symbol also implied political purposes as the rulers wanted to gain more support from the populace, who were mostly Buddhists in this period.

Note that one of the essential doctrines of Buddhism is impermanence (anicca), which asserts that all of conditioned existence, without exception, is "transient, evanescent, inconstant" (Davids & Stede, 1921, p.136). The Buddha taught that "because no physical or mental object is permanent, desires for or attachments to either causes suffering (dukkha)" (Whalen, 2011). Therefore, Buddhism shows the way to help believers reach nirvana, "the ultimate state of soteriological release and the liberation from dukkha and samsara" (Meister, 2009, p.13). Meanwhile, the motif of reincarnation as a king was composed with the main purpose of bringing political benefits to the kings themselves. This motif represents the desire and attachment to the world or worldly matters (moha), and the greed for political powers (raga), which cause suffering (dukkha). In addition, this motif only describes a process of death and rebirth in the never-ending repetitive cycle of existence (samsara). Therefore, it can be said that the motif of reincarnation as a king in traditional Vietnamese stories does not necessarily match the nature of Buddhism. Vietnamese rulers, thanks to this motif, took advantage of the Buddhist concept of reincarnation to achieve their political goals.

Regarding Confucian texts, Confucianists used the dragon symbol in legends to encourage two main ideas: the emperor's divine origin and the status of moral authority.

The emperor's divine origin, according to Confucians, is an important belief that must be spread and strengthened among the people. One of the effective ways to do this is that they attempted to create stories showing the emperor is a son of a god dragon. These stories can be divided into two kinds of motifs, based on the purposes of composing.

The first kind of motif was composed to sanctify emperors, who came from the leaders of rebellions and from lowly backgrounds. It was created by the leaders themselves or their courtiers, who said that the leader's mother was conceived by a divine dragon and then gave birth to a son who later became the emperor. One of the first and foremost stories illustrating the idea of the emperor's divine origin is "The Legend of Emperor Gaozu's Abnormal Conception and Birth". As the story goes:

Emperor Gaozu's mother, Dame Liu, was napping [...]. Dame Liu's husband, [...] was said to have seen a red-scaled dragon, later identified as the "Red Emperor," leaving the scene. Not long after this draconic encounter, Dame Liu became pregnant. (Sima, 1993)

Obviously, the political purpose behind this story was that the Han Confucianists wanted to sanctify Han Gaozu's background. "They tried to distract attention from his low

position in society - a peasant, and drove people to focus on the mythical legends that he is of supernatural origin: a son of a god dragon, which makes him have the support of the superstitious populace." (Haochun, 1999)

Learning in this way, the Vietnamese rulers introduced the aforementioned motifs into their own stories. The story of Lý Nam Đế (S3) is a typical example. Given that the backgrounds of Han Gaozu and Lý Nam Đế have similarities (both of them came from peasants, led the uprising successfully, and later became emperors), it is not surprising that the story of Lý Nam Đế, which also mentions Lý was conceived after his mother encountered a dragon, is considered a variant of "Emperor Gaozu's Abnormal Conception and Birth" legend. Therefore, it can be asserted that whoever wrote story of Lý Nam Đế was obviously aware of the political purpose behind the story of Han Gaozu, and then applied it to the Vietnamese context.

The second kind of motif was created to sanctify princes, who came from royal families and wanted to gain an advantage over other princes to become emperors. It was mostly created by princes' mothers, who said that they dreamed of dragons and then giving birth to princes. This kind of motif was repeated in many legends of Vietnam, accounting for more than one-sixth of the total stories (5/31), including S07 (Đinh Phế Đế), S09 (Lê Trung Tông và Lê Long Đĩnh), S15 (Lý Thần Tông), S23 (Lê Hiến Tông), S28 (Đoan Nam Vương). One example is S28 about Đoan Nam Vương in Hoàng Lê Nhất Thống Chí (皇黎一统志, Unification Records of the Imperial Le). To quote:

One night, Lord Tĩnh Đô (Trịnh Sâm, 靖都王) commands his close eunuch to invite concubine Ngọc Hoan (玉欢) in to cater for him. The eunuch deliberately pretends to mishear and immediately invites concubine Ngọc Khoan (玉宽) in, who, after entering the palace, has been always feeling desperately lonely. Although the Lord seems not to think highly of her, he does not have the heart to ask her to leave but scolds the eunuch. The eunuch (who has been bribed by concubine Ngọc Khoan) then tells the Lord of her dream in which a god gave the concubine Ngọc Khoan a piece of silk with a dragon head pattern. This story discourages the Lord from admonishing him. After that, concubine Ngọc Khoan gives birth to a son and names him Trịnh Tông, who then becomes the next Lord (i.e. Đoan Nam Vương, 端南王). (Ngô Gia Văn Phái, 2021, p.5).

The most likely explanation for the appearance of this motif is that the authors, mostly mothers of princes, as well as queens and concubines of emperors, observed the concept of "The True Dragon, Son of Heaven". Therefore, they realized that informing about their dream of a dragon should be effective in implying that their sons, rather than other princes, must be next in line to the throne and in helping to raise their royal status. This seemed to motivate them to embroider their dreams, those which could not be checked for authenticity then.

In terms of *the status of moral authority*, the dragon, in traditional Vietnamese stories, is a supernatural force bringing both auspicious and ominous omens to inform the emperor about his morality. For example, the stories S11 (Lý Thái Tổ), S12 and S13 (Lý Thái Tông), S17 (Trần Thái Tông), S20 (Lê Thái Tổ) illustrate the notion that if the emperors lived a benevolent and virtuous life, the dragon god appeared as a sign of good omens. On the contrary, dragons in story S28 (Trịnh Thánh Tổ) are bad omens warning the ruler that there will be war or natural disaster if he does not follow the way of morality.

The Taoist texts in the legends of dragons and kings are mainly represented by the principles of Yin and Yang and the art of Feng Shui.

Regarding the philosophy of Yin and Yang, in these stories, Vietnamese dragons, like Chinese ones, carry the characteristics of the Yang element. It represents men (Yin: women), light (Yin: dark), and heaven (Yin: earth) demonstrated with the following information:

Dragon has always been the representative of man. This can be seen in "the dragon-related birth" motif: if a queen consort dreams of dragons, she must give birth to a son, as in the stories: S7 (Đinh Phế Đế), S9 (Lê Trung Tông và Lê Long Đĩnh), S23 (Lê Hiển Tông), S28 (Đoan Nam Vương)

Dragons are always accompanied by a bright aura, such as story S7 tells about the halo that warmed King Lê Đại Hành in cold weather from a yellow dragon, or the plot of story S8 revolves around a queen consort, who had a dream about two dragons flying toward the blazing sun, and then gave birth to two princes.

Dragons often stay in heaven or fly to the sky. For instance, story S10 tells about Lý Thái Tổ saw a yellow dragon flying into the sky, so he moved the capital and named it Thăng Long (昇龙, lit. Flying Dragon, this is present-day Hanoi); or story S29, Emperor Thái Đức saw an omen of a yellow dragon flying into the sky, and then proclaimed himself king.

From the Harmonizing Yin and Yang philosophy, Vietnamese authors created a Fairy Bird image with the Yin characteristic to correspond to the Divine Dragon symbol with the Yang element. This pair of supernatural beings symbolizes the Taoist harmony of opposites. In Vietnamese traditional stories, the most typical example is story S1 (Lạc Long Quân), which tells that Lord Lạc Long (a sacred dragon) married Lady Âu Cơ (a fairy bird) and, from that harmony of Yin and Yang, Âu Cơ gave birth to the ancestors of the Vietnamese people (Ngô et al., 2010).

In addition, the pair of Dragon and Tiger symbols together is considered a manifestation of Yang and Yin power[2], so ″working together as a pair the Dragon and Tiger have jurisdiction over the spiritual spectrum″ (Garofalo, 2010), which creates invincible power to effectively support the kings. Story S20 Lê Thái Tổ, for example, also known as "The Legend of Hoàn Kiếm Lake", tells of King Lê finding a sword with a hilt engraved with a dragon and a tiger, which gave him the magical power to defeat the Ming army (Đ. Q. Lê, 2007).

In terms of Feng Shui principles, the Vietnamese legends often incorporate motifs of 'seeking dragon's veins (龙脉)' to either facilitate or prevent someone from becoming an emperor. Taylor (1991) elaborates, explaining that 'The dragon symbolized power, immortality, and imperial sovereignty. The philosophical outlook encompassing "dragon's veins" and auspicious burial sites is essentially Taoist... The geomancer believed he had found a burial site befitting the ancestors of an emperor' (p. 231).

For example, a series of stories about Gao Pian (高骈, 821 - 887), a Tang provincial governor (节度使) and also an excellent geomancer (风水士), shows that he used Feng Shui rules to destroy dragon veins in Vietnam, aiming to prevent the birth of Vietnamese kings (Vietnamese Culture Research Institute, 2009), or the story S22 involves Chinese soldiers destroying a dragon vein to hinder King Lê Thái Tổ's uprising. Conversely, the story S05 (Đinh Tiên Hoàng), S19 (Hồ Quý Ly), S20 (Lê Thái Tổ), S26 (Minh Khang Thái Vương Trịnh Kiểm), S31 (Tĩnh Vương Nguyễn Kim) share the same motifs of how they relied on Taoist Feng Shui to move their ancestors' graves to dragon-vein places, and then they or their descendants became emperors.

With the relative religious pluralism in Vietnam, it is not surprising that Vietnamese legends about dragons and kings emerged as an interweaving of texts from all three religions. Story S02 (Triệu Việt Vương), recorded in Đại Việt Sử Kí Toàn Thư (Complete Annals of Đại Việt), is one of the stories that demonstrate this characteristic. To quote:

In 549, Triệu was stuck in the marsh and saw that Liang (梁) army did not retreat. He raised an altar in the marsh, lit incense, and prayed to the spirits; then a good omen appeared: a God-man (神人) named Chử Đồng Tử descending from heaven astride a yellow dragon. The God-man took a claw from the dragon and presented it to Triệu, then told him: "Place this on your helmet battle helmet (兜鍪) and your path will lead to success". The apparition

[2] From the viewpoint of the Taoists, the equivalent of the dragon is the tiger. There are many traces of the relationship between these two animals in Taoism. For example, the first sect of Chinese Taoism is Longhuzong (龙虎宗); most of the important scriptures of Taoism bear the names of dragons and tigers, such as Scripture of the Dragon and the Tiger (龙虎经), the Song of Five Golden Dragons and Tigers (五金龙虎歌), Secret Directives on the Dragon and the Tiger (龙虎通元诀), etc.

disappeared into the clouds, and Triệu went on to proclaim himself king of Việt. (Ngô et al., 2010, p.38)

The legend of Triệu Việt Vương is the first story in which the dragon acts as a supernatural being to support the king. This is a characteristic sign of the Han Confucian texts, including "the Interaction between Heaven and Humanity" theory and "The True Dragon, Son of Heaven" concept. The influence of Buddhism and Taoism texts is reflected in the God-man named Chử Đồng Tử - a Buddhist[3], but he is also an ancient religious leader of Vietnamese Taoism[4].

It is also noted that the ideologies of the Three Religions have similarities, so some conceptions and teachings of these religions are intertwined and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish which religion the actions or characters described in the legends belongs to. For example, the detail that the king was helped by the god dragon because of his virtue (德) both represents the Confucian conception of Auspiciousness and Disasters, and the Buddhist concept of karmic retribution. In another case, some Buddhist monks were also Taoists, so Zen masters Từ Đạo Hạnh (story S15) could use Taoist magical transformation skills or Buddhism monk Trịnh (story S20) applied the principles of Feng Shui to find dragon veins.

5. Conclusion

The Three Religions have a strong influence on all aspects of life in Vietnam, therefore, legends about dragons and kings, without exception, also express the texts of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism clearly. In some cases, these stories also show the complex interweaving of texts among three religions and the intricate intertwining of religious and political texts.

The manifestation of these complex political and religious texts in the legends of dragons and kings leads us to the conclusion that this kind of story, despite works of folklore ostensibly, can not be composed by Vietnamese folk authors, mostly illiterate peasants. They could only be compiled by the Sinicized Vietnamese elite, who were also mostly Confucianists and courtiers of kings, with a deep understanding of Chinese religion, philosophy, and

[3] A story called "Nhất Dạ Trạch" in the "Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái Liệt Truyện" (岭南摭怪列传, lit. the Arrayed Tales of Selected Oddities from South of the Passes) told how Chử Đồng Tử (渚童子), son-in-law of King Hùng Duệ Vương (雄睿王, r.? – 258 BC), learned Buddhism from a monk named Phật Quang (佛光) and then propagated to the public.

[4] By the fifteenth century, Chử Đồng Tử had become an important figure in the spirit pantheon of popular Vietnamese Taoism. (Taylor, 1991)

character[5]. These adherents weaved folktale motifs with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism ideas to create a fake folklore account aiming to serve political purposes that benefit their owners. This argument will confirm a new hypothesis about "medieval invented tradition", which proves that some collected Vietnamese folklore works are in fact the invention accounts of the Confucians (Hobsbawm, 1992; Kelley, 2012).

As a common cultural symbol that appears in the folklore of many cultures worldwide, and as a symbol attached to kingship for a long time, dragons are a subject that researchers have been passionate about exploring throughout historical periods. From the relationship between dragons and kings from the religious-political perspective within the scope of Vietnamese stories, academics and researchers are encouraged to conduct more comparative research projects at interdisciplinary, intercultural, and transnational levels.

Acknowledgement:

This research was funded by Hue University under grant number DHH2022-03-168. The author also acknowledges partial support from Hue University under the strong research group program, with code NCM.DHH.2022.10. Furthermore, this paper is derived from the author's thesis, which is intended for submission to Hue University.

REFERENCES

1. Anonymous. (1993). *Đại Việt Sử Lược (大越史略, Great Việt Historical Annals)*. T. G. Nguyễn (Trans.). Ho Chi Minh City: The Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House.
2. Brindley, E. (2015). *Ancient China and the Yue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Davids, W. T. R., & Stede, W. (1921). *Pali-English Dictionary*. Motilal Banarsidass.
4. Garofalo, M. P. (2010). Dragons and Tigers: Daoist Inner Alchemy of Water and Fire. Retrieved April 01, 2022, from https://www.egreenway.com/dragonsrealms/DT4.htm
5. Hallo, W. W. (2010). *The World's Oldest Literature: Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres*. Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill.

[5] Chinese character was used to write the Vietnamese language until 1869 (Taylor, 1991)

6. Haochun. (1999). *Dragon and Phoenix Bring Good Luck (龙凤呈祥)*. Jinan: Shandong Educational Publishing House.
7. Hoàng, P. H. (2020). Annals of the Hồng Bàng Clan: From Ancient Legend to Modern Molecular Biology Evidence. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 20(2), 32–41.
8. Hoàng, Q. V., Bùi, Q. K., La, V. P., Vương, T. T., Nguyễn, M. T., Nguyễn, H. T., & Nguyễn, H. M. (2018). Cultural Additivity: Behavioural Insights from the Interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Folktales. *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0189-2.
9. Hobsbawm, E. (1992). *Introduction: Inventing Traditions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Kelley, L. C. (2012). The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan as a Medieval Vietnamese Invented Tradition. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 2, 87-130. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/vs.2012.7.2.87
11. Lê, Đ. Q. (2007). *Đại Việt Thông Sử* [General History of Dai Viet]. Translated by N. Thế Long. Hanoi: Văn Hoá - Thông Tin.
12. Lê, L. T. (2016). Common Root of Three Religions in History of Vietnamese thoughts. *Stud Confucianism: J Confucianism*, 535–561.
13. Lê, T. (2001). *An Nam Chí Lược* [Abbreviated Records of An Nam]. Hue: Hue University Publishing House.
14. Lê, T. T., & Nguyễn, L. V. (2018). Hồ Dynasty Citadel - Legend, Architecture and Art. *Journal Cultural Heritage*, 3(64).
15. Loewe, M. (1987). The Concept of Sovereignty. In *The Cambridge History of China* (Vol. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
16. Lu, Z. (2019). *In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.
17. Lý, H. T. (2015). Confucian Influences on Vietnamese Culture. *Vietnam Social Sciences*, 72.
18. Meister, C. (2009). *Introducing Philosophy of Religion*. London: Routledge.
19. Ngô Gia Văn Phái. (2021). *Hoàng Lê Nhất Thống Chí* [Unification Records of the Imperial Le]. Hanoi: Vietnam Writers' Association Publishing House.

20. Ngô, Đ. G. (1993). *Hoàng Việt Hưng Long Chí* [Annals of Vietnam Emperor]. Hanoi: Literature Publishing House.

21. Ngô, L. S., Trần, P. T., & Lê, H. V. (2010). *Đại Việt Sử Kí Toàn Thư* [Complete Annals of Đại Việt]. Hanoi: Literature Publishing House.

22. Ngô, S. T. (1991). *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* [Documents of Vietnamese History]. Hanoi: Literature - History Publishing House.

23. Nguyễn Dynasty Institute of History. (2002). *Đại Nam Thực Lục* [Factual Record of Đại Nam]. Vol. I. Hanoi: Vietnam Education Publishing House.

24. Nguyễn, C. Đ. (2019). *Kho Tàng Truyện Cổ Tích Việt Nam* [The General Collection of Vietnamese Folklore]. Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House.

25. Nguyễn, Đ. T. (2013). *Tam Giáo Đồng Nguyên Và Tính Đa Nguyên Trong Truyền Thống Văn Hóa Việt Nam* [Three Religions and Pluralism in Vietnamese Traditional Culture]. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.

26. Nguyễn, H. N. (1998). The Confucian incursion into Vietnam. In *Confucianism and the Family: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (pp. 91-104). New York: State University of New York Press.

27. Nguyễn, L. (2019). *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận* [History of Vietnamese Buddhism]. Hồ Chí Minh City: Hồng Đức Publishing House.

28. Nguyễn, N. K. T., Nguyễn, H. T., & Lê, T. V. (2021). Identity of the Vietnamese Narrative Culture: Archetypal Journeys from Folk Narratives to Fantasy Short Stories. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00697-3

29. Nguyễn, N. T. K. (2020). Vietnamese Religion, Folklore and Literature: Archetypal Journeys from Folktales to Medieval Fantasy Short Stories. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1847769

30. Nguyễn, T. (1956). *Lam Sơn Thực Lục* [Record of Lam Sơn Uprising]. Hanoi: Tân Việt Publishing House.

31. Nguyễn, T. N. (2016). *Hình Tượng Rồng Trong Văn Hoá Phương Đông* [Dragon Symbol in Sinosphere]. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

32. Prebish, C. S., & Tanaka, K. K. (1998). *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

33. Phạm, H. Đ. (2010). *Vũ Trung Tuỳ Bút* [Essays Penned Randomly in the Rain]. Ho Chi Minh City: Arts Publishing House.

34. Phan, B. K. (1999). *Nam Hải Dị Nhân Liệt Truyện* [Biographies of Talented Individuals in Nam Hải]. Hanoi: Thanh Nien Publishing House.

35. Sima, Qian. (1993). *Records of the Grand Historian (Shi ji)*. Translated by B. Watson. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

36. Taylor, K. W. (1991). *The Birth of Vietnam*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

37. Thích, P. S. (1995). *Tam Tổ Thực Lực* [Factual Record of Three Founders]. Hanoi: Vietnam Buddhist Institute.

38. Trần, H. Đ. (2007). *Lectures on Eastern Thought*. Hanoi: National University Publishing House.

39. Trần, Q. A. (2017). *Gods, Heroes, and Ancestors: An Interreligious Encounter in Eighteenth-century Vietnam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

40. Vietnam Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies. (1993). *Việt Thường Thị Tiền Lý Nam Đế Ngọc Phả Cổ Truyền* [Precious Genealogy of the Ancient Vietnamese before the Reign of King Ly Nam De]. In *Di Sản Hán Nôm Việt Nam Thư Mục Đề Yếu* [Catalog of books in Hán-Nôm], by N. Trần. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.

41. Vietnamese Culture Research Institute. (2009). *Truyền Thuyết Dân Gian Người Việt* [Vietnamese Folk Legends]. Vol. 4. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.

42. Vũ, K. N., & Phạm, T. M. (2019). *Kho Tàng Dã Sử Việt Nam* [Treasure of Vietnamese Unofficial History]. Hanoi: Culture & Information Publisher.

43. Whalen, J. B. (2011). *Writing as Enlightenment: Buddhist American Literature into the Twenty-first Century*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

44. Xu, Y. Z. (2002). "A Thesis on the Spreading and Influence of Taoism in Vietnam." *Journal of Historical*, 7, 15.

45. Xun, Y. (2016). The Principle of Dong Zhongshu's Omen Discourse and Wang Chong's Criticism of Heaven's Reprimand in the Chapter "Qian Gao". Graduate Theses and Dissertations. University of Arkansas. Accessed 2022. https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/1544.