

STUDYING MEDIEVAL CHINESE POETRY WRITTEN ABOUT VIETNAM'S SEAS AND ISLANDS

Ngo Thi Thu Trang and Nguyen Thuy Nhan
University of Education, Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This article initially studies medieval Chinese poems written about Vietnam's seas and islands to see the importance and value of this literary body. We use interdisciplinary methods, survey methods, statistics, analysis, and synthesis to serve the research. The seas and islands were of early interest to the feudal state of Vietnam. The leaders of the country such as emperors and mandarins of the court clearly recognized the role of the seas and islands in the economic, cultural, and security development of the country and attached importance to the defense and development of the seas and islands. The seas and islands are an important subject in the thoughts of the Vietnamese people from ancient times to the present. Vietnamese Chinese poems written about the seas and islands often clearly express patriotism, national pride, and awareness of protecting territorial sovereignty.

Keywords: Poetry, Chinese Characters, Vietnam, Medieval, Seas And Islands.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sea and islands play a very important role in the existence and development of our country. Many researchers in fields such as history, cultural studies, ethnology, philology, etc. have been interested in studying the sea and islands and coastal areas. Many research works on the sea and islands have been published. Many modern poets and writers have written works about the sea and islands of Vietnam. However, research works on the sea and islands literature, especially medieval literature, are still very few and not systematic. Some works can be mentioned such as *"The sea and islands of my Fatherland - Anthology of poems and literature about the sea and islands of Vietnam"* (Various authors, Literature Publishing House, 2015); *"The Sea Calls – A Thousand Years of Vietnamese Sea Poetry"* (Various authors, Literature Publishing House, 2015) ... In 2021, researcher Tran Trong Duong published a very elaborate and valuable book *"Hai Quoc Tu Chuong – A Collection of Vietnamese Sea and Island Literature"* (Social Sciences Publishing House).

Researcher Vu Thanh commented: *"The sea and islands are the flesh and blood of the Fatherland, so from the very beginning of the history of national literature, this issue has become an important part of the content reflected in literature."* [2; p.76]. The sea and islands have become the subject and source of inspiration in many literary works from the past to the present. The sea brings economic benefits, develops tourism, trade, helps people have a prosperous and good life. And when there are invaders, the sea, estuaries, and river mouths become favorable terrains to help people defend and fight against the enemy. There are many works written about the sea and islands, from folk poetry to medieval literature (poetry in Chinese characters, Nom characters...) and continuing to modern literature. Through works written about the theme of the sea and islands, poets have left diverse perspectives on nature, culture as well as human life.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

We use the interdisciplinary approach to approach the problem and exploit information from the perspective of many scientific fields such as literature, history, cultural studies, ... to clarify issues related to island literature. Survey and statistical operations are important techniques in research and analysis, which we use to collect, organize and analyze data related to the Chinese poetry written about islands. The analysis and synthesis method is the process of quickly analyzing the issues raised and briefly summarizing the main contents. This method helps us to delve deeper and more specifically into the nature of island literature with the content and artistic characteristics of the works.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially studying nearly 200 Chinese poems by Vietnamese medieval authors that we have collected, we can make some general observations.

The authors belong to many classes: kings, royal family, mandarins, scientists, famous scholars, Confucian scholars, ... throughout history through the Ly - Tran, Le, Nguyen dynasties. Kings and lords are Tran Thanh Tong, Tran Nhan Tong, Tran Anh Tong, Tran Minh Tong, Le Thanh Tong, Le Hien Tong, Nguyen Phuc Chu, Trinh Sam, Trinh Cuong, Minh Mang, Thieu Tri,... Royal family members, mandarins, scientists of dynasties are Tran Quang Trieu, Nguyen Suong, Pham Su Manh, Truong Han Sieu, Nguyen Trung Ngan, Tran Nguyen Dan, Nguyen Phi Khanh, Nguyen Trai, Luong The Vinh, Nguyen Bao, Sai Thuan, Nguyen Binh Khiem, Pham Cong Tru, Nguyen Quy Duc, Le Quy Don, Mac Thien Tich, Nguyen Cu Trinh, Nguyen Trong Hop, Pham Nguyen Du, Ngo Thi Nham, Nguyen De, Bui Huy Bich, Phan Huy Ich, Ha Tong Quyen, Truong Dang Que, Nguyen Phuc Mien Tham, Ly Van Phuc, Phan Thanh Gian, Pham Phu Thu, Dao Tan,... Zen masters, famous scholars, Confucian scholars are Huyen Quang, Bui Duong Lich, Hoang Nguyen Thu, Pham Quy Thich, Nguyen Van Ly, Vu Tong Phan, Nguyen Du, Nguyen Thong, Cao Ba Quat, Nguyen Khuyen, La Xuan Oai, Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh,...

Of the 296 medieval Chinese poems about Vietnam's seas and islands that we have collected, 71 (24%) were composed by Dai Viet kings. The rest were composed by high-ranking mandarins and officials holding important positions in the country. The first poem written about the seas and islands was "Tuan Thu Phu An Bang" (An Bang Phu - Quang Ninh today) also by a king of the Tran Dynasty - King Tran Thanh Tong. Through that, we can see that the seas and islands were of interest to the Vietnamese feudal state very early. The trend and thinking towards the seas and islands of the Vietnamese people also existed very early. The leaders of the country were clearly aware of the role of the seas and islands in the economic, political, cultural, social, and national security development of the country and attached importance to the defense and development of the seas and islands.

The leaders of the country and those who have great responsibilities to the country such as kings and mandarins are always aware of the sea and islands, considering them an inseparable part of the country's territory. In particular, with more than 50 poems in Chinese about the sea and islands, King Le Thanh Tong is considered "the greatest author of sea literature in the history of Vietnamese literature" and "the sea and islands have become an indispensable theme in the cultural creation activities of Le Thanh Tong" [1; p. 38-39].

The main content of medieval Chinese poems about Vietnam's seas and islands is to praise the beauty of the sea, islands, estuaries, straits, bays, and ports. The works praise the beauty and

majesty of the sea and islands. The beauty of the sea lies in the general beauty of the sky, clouds, rivers, and coastal mountain ranges. Sometimes the tidal waves are white as snow, spraying like garlands, surging, roaring like thunder, sometimes the sky and water are gentle, the sky and water are a deep blue, the sea is as calm as a bright mirror, flocks of birds fly over the sea. Along the coast, mountains rise one after another, each piece like a crocodile being chopped into pieces. An Bang Prefecture (present-day Quang Ninh) has many mountains rising above the sea. When King Tran Thanh Tong went to inspect the situation in places far from the capital, he passed An Bang Prefecture and was happy and proud of the beautiful mountain scenery. The king - the poet - leisurely climbed to the top of the cloud-covered mountain in the morning. In the afternoon, he returned to sleep in the bay. When King Tran Anh Tong stopped at Phuc Thanh port (Ninh Binh), he had feelings when looking at the scenery and people from the sea... Kings and mandarins always showed special interest in the sea and coastal areas. They saw mountains and seas as always connected to each other, creating a rugged terrain, favorable for the defense of the country (the sea is considered an important pass). The seaports along the length of the country such as Bach Dang, Vong Doanh, Huc, Giap, Thai Vien, Dai Thai, Nam Gioi, Ha Hoa, Ky La, Dan Nhai, Dien Du, Lach Truong, Kinh Lu, Than Phu, Hai Van, Tu Dung, Nhat Le, Bo Chanh, Di Luan, Xich Lo, Nha Trang, Dai An, Tram Hao, Kim Hai, Can Hai...; Seaports such as Phuc Thanh, Than Phu, Lam Cang, Van Don, Tram Hao, Dung Cang, Kinh Ma, Thiet Son, Hoa Cai, Sa Tac, Thien Uy... and islands such as Con Lon (Con Dao), Song Ngu, Kim Du... are all written by authors with pride in the sea and islands bestowed by nature.

The equally important content of medieval Chinese poems about Vietnam's sea and islands is the reproduction of the life of coastal people. Many poems are like vivid, realistic pictures of the lives of fishermen at sea and in coastal villages. That is the scene of Than Phu market with the sound of waves echoing with the bustling voices of people, fresh fish from the sea in the early morning, peaceful shops, floating fishing villages in the dawn light. That is the life at Phuc Thanh port with a fishing village at the head of the tidal waves, with the songs of the fishing villagers. That is the laughter and jokes of boys and girls at Van Don port, many salt fields at Giap estuary. There are many fish and salt so the people there live by fishing and salt making instead of growing rice. Those are realistic scenes of coastal areas with fertile land but sparse population; deserted villages with the moon setting, occasionally hearing the sound of roosters crowing; scattered on the shore are the drying nets of fishing villages and merchants' boats; the coastal market meets on the beach full of shrimp and fish; Boats and rafts are close together to form a fishing village; the houses in the coastal villages are thatched. The images of fishermen wearing conical hats and raincoats; fishing villages near the sandbank, making friends with seagulls... are described by the authors with respect and affection.

Chinese poems about the sea and islands also praise the glorious feats of arms at sea of historical heroes (such as the feats of Ngo Quyen, Le Dai Hanh, Tran Hung Dao). The authors' thoughts and feelings about history and world affairs; expressing the authors' love for their homeland. In particular, kings and mandarins all emphasized the role of the sea and islands in national defense. Behind the pictures of the sea and islands, the lives of the people, and their feelings about history, we can clearly see the authors' deep love for their homeland and sense of responsibility for their country. Most of the authors are kings, lords, mandarins, scholars, etc., who hold important positions in the country, so their love and sense of responsibility for their country are all the more precious and meaningful. It can be affirmed as author Tran Khanh Thanh in the article *"Love for the Fatherland and the sense of sovereignty in Vietnamese poetry about the sea*

and islands" (Journal of Literary and Artistic Theory and Criticism, No. 4, 2024): "From legends and myths of ancient times to poetic works in the Middle Ages, love for the Fatherland and the sense of sovereignty over the sea and islands have always been the main sources in Vietnamese national literature" [3; p.20].

Medieval poems about Vietnam's seas and islands mainly follow familiar poetic forms such as Tang Dynasty poetry (seven-word eight-line verse, seven-word quatrain, five-word verse); the open, spacious space is suitable for the vast space of the sea and islands. The authors are often kings, mandarins, and Confucian scholars, so their poetic language is also very refined, concise, saying little but suggesting much, using many allusions... The authors use many words indicating specific place names such as names of coastal localities (An Bang, Dong Trieu, Van Don, An Lao, Nha Trang, Thuan Hoa, Loc Tri, Lu Khe, Quang Binh, Nghe An, Binh Dinh, Binh Thuan, Ha Tien...); mountain names (such as Duc Thuy mountain, Long Dai mountain, Van Loi mountain, Thach Mon mountain, Truyen Dang mountain, Diep mountain, Chich Tro mountain, Than Phu mountain, Yen Tu mountain, Chau Nham mountain, Mo Da mountain...); river names (such as Bach Dang river, Cam river, Giao Thuy river, Hoang Giang river, Linh Giang river,...). The poems combine worldly and historical inspiration with the thoughts of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. There are verses that realistically describe the mountains, rivers, seas, and islands with natural, poetic, and magnificent beauty. In particular, An Bang (present-day Quang Ninh) is a beautiful island area that was described very specifically by kings such as Tran Thanh Tong and Le Thanh Tong with images of mountains rising on the sea like jade, with mountains and rivers on all four sides, surrounded by islands, the green of the mountains blending with the green of the sea... The mountains near the sea and the rivers and estuaries are also described realistically and vividly. Behind the beautiful sea and island paintings, the author discreetly expresses his thoughts on history, national pride, and love for the country.

With nearly 300 Chinese poems spanning thousands of years, this body of literature has shown us that the sea and islands are an important subject in the thoughts of Vietnamese people from the past to the present. Especially in modern times, the sea and islands are increasingly receiving more widespread attention. Literature written about the sea and islands is an important part of Vietnamese literature.

5. CONCLUSION

Vietnam's seas and islands are an important part of the nation's territory and culture, and are also an endless source of inspiration for medieval poets. The Chinese poems of poets during this period not only praised the majestic and poetic beauty of the sea and islands, but also expressed patriotism, awareness of protecting sovereignty, and profound thoughts about the ocean. These poems still resonate today, as a reminder of the cultural traditions and responsibility to protect the country's sea and islands.

Medieval Vietnamese literature about the sea and islands often bears the imprint of patriotism, national pride, and the consciousness of protecting territorial sovereignty. These works reflect the natural beauty of the sea and islands, and at the same time affirm Vietnam's sovereignty over the seas. Chinese poems also contribute to clearly affirming Vietnam's sovereignty over the seas and islands such as Hoang Sa, Truong Sa and other important seas. Moreover, the sea and islands are described through the lens of poets with majestic, poetic and vibrant beauty. This shows the love of nature and the attachment to the sea of the Vietnamese people.

The sea and islands, as cultural and natural symbols, are portrayed as an inseparable part of Vietnamese nature. Images of the sea and islands are often used to express the romantic inspiration, love of nature and national pride of medieval authors. At the same time, medieval Chinese poetry not only praised the beauty of the sea and islands but also strongly expressed the sense of territorial sovereignty. These works are historical evidence of the attachment and responsibility of the Vietnamese people towards their sea and islands. Through poetry, the authors affirmed clear political views, emphasizing the role of the sea and islands in protecting territorial integrity.

In general, Chinese poems about the sea and islands are an important part of the Vietnamese literary heritage, contributing to preserving cultural and historical values and affirming national identity. These works not only enrich the medieval literary treasure but also serve as a valuable source of information, conveying profound lessons about patriotism and the responsibility to protect the territorial sovereignty of generations of Vietnamese people.

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