

NGUYEN CONG TRU IN HIS LITERATURE: FROM AN AMATEURISH CONFUCIAN FIGURE TO A PLAYFUL HUMAN BEING

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Abstract: Studying Nguyen Cong Tru's literature has brought certain achievements. Yet, focusing on the aspect of pleasure, considering it as a play of his works, is what has not yet been dealt with. To approach this, firstly, we need to put Nguyen Cong Tru into the Confucian intellectual context of the late medieval age in Vietnam; secondly, it is important to pile up his poetic texts and to examine them from the perspective of play theory. In this way, pleasure, play in this amateurish human being is a philosophical manner; it is an obviously conscious behaviour in the face of the time and the life. More profoundly, play itself is creativity by which, conceptions of elegance in his pleasures were transformed into mundane characters. Life and creativity, thus, had their meaning expanded. This is also important contributions made by this most amateurish Confucian in the history of Vietnamese literature.

Key words: pleasure; play; Nguyen Cong Tru's literature; amateurish confucian; violating rules.

1. Introduction

When a person drops in the play, the activity of retrospection in the brain takes place. It separates itself from reality being swept outward to look at it as an object; it criticizes itself. At this time, individual elements and personalities arise. Oneself look at oneself, considering oneself as a real subject, who is mastering oneself. This is different from a person who obeys only his commands and duties. Between them there is a clear distinction between personality and sociality, whose elements are stronger or more dominant. Under such conditions, cultural works are produced. Emphasizing the play means drawing attention to forms of activity that are not directly related to the need for survival but to the order of

nature of artistic creation in relation to the play, then he is the most special face. In terms of attitude, if viewed from the play, Nguyen's literature created a different view of people and the world compared to the literature of his previous and contemporary Confucian generations.

2. Content

2.1. Features in the life and the literature of Nguyen Cong Tru

Nguyen Cong Tru's life was most interested in under the Nguyen dynasty. According to statistics by Tran Ngoc Vuong in *Chronicle of Greater Vietnam* (2010, pp. 443-444), Nguyen Cong Tru appears with 329 positions, just below Truong Dang Que (424 positions), and the interest ranges from work to retirement, from important affairs to everyday details. Many researchers agreed that both in life and in literature, he was a diverse, unique and complex person (some people think that Nguyen Cong Tru carried a large contradiction). He once held the post of Minister (Infantry) but was also occasionally detained to animal soldiers in Quang Ngai; he helped the two districts of Kim Son, Tien Hai reclaim wild fields but he also suppressed farmers uprisings;¹ he willingly offered his

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mental factors such as relaxation, amusement, entertainment, dissolving sorrow, etc. Looking at the picture of Vietnamese literature in the medieval age, for the figure of Nguyen Cong Tru, if we consider the

intellect because of his maxim “*help the king to become enlightened, protect and preserve people*”, but at the same time he went out for a way to enjoy, in which he was both a ruling man and an extravagant man; there was also in himself the individual person and the dutiful person that did not intermingle together, the face of the spiritual person and the face of the functional person did not integrate.

Literature of Nguyen Cong Tru also expresses the varied qualities of a poetic style through four major sounds: 1/ will of male, 2/ poverty, 3/ leisure, and 4/ pleasure. Each aspect, expressed in Nguyen Cong Tru’s poetry, has been elevated to philosophy, to thought. It is both four main sounds and the large pieces of the different stages of life, and it has a throughout underground structure.

Nguyen Bach Khoa (2003, p. 283) regarded Nguyen Cong Tru as a representative of exuberant high-spirit of the elder confucian class in the late nineteenth century. Tran Ngoc Vuong (2010, pp. 453-462) considered him as the light of the turbulent hero remained in the disorderly history of the nation to establish a model of amateurs.

The image of Nguyen Cong Tru in poetry can be described in three general figures: the bodily dude, the bulky hero and the verbose person. These three images are bold and light but they are pervasive in most of his poetry. However, perhaps the image of a “ verbose person” and an “amateurish face” shows the most personal characteristics of Nguyen Cong Tru. For, firstly,

¹With Confucians, Confucian services, Confucian intellectuals, the people rebel against the imperial court is chaos, is the enemy. People (in the “take the people if root”, in the four people) is another category.

if in the face of “bodily dude - the glory of the bodily dude”, everything is waiting ahead, there is no chance to reveal, but he wants to “talk about right”, he then must be the “true name” already. Secondly, in the position of a “bulky hero”, Nguyen Cong Tru has to be more “social” in the sense of the “pseudo”. Only in the pleasure, in the amusements, Nguyen Cong Tru

described himself as characterization of all the “extravagance”, the “personality”, the talent was attached to him.

In quantity, poetry does not directly express the thought of pleasure very much, i.e., they occupy a small position, but this has decisive significance for the quality. If you make a comparison, when writing about the status of mudanity, Nguyen Binh Khiem previously deepened it with more philosophy. If the theme shows the mood of compassion, Cao Ba Quat showed more melancholy, being choking and more torment. For the parody, there was Ho Xuan Huong. If, for the expression of ways of life, Nguyen Khuyen and Tu Xuong occupied a higher position, for the subject of personal tragedy, humanity has the neatness of Nguyen Du. So, affirming the demand of human enjoyment, raising it to philosophy belonged only to Nguyen Cong Tru. This is also a strength, his own unique point, he even was not afraid to talk about “floating a boat / a girl, a mandarin.” Also in this field, later we also see cases of Duong Lam, Duong Khue, Tan Da, etc.

If considered in the East Asian Confucian tradition, individuals are self-asserted by self-expression, this is expressed in poetry by something like pleasure, which is a new point.

2.2. Nguyen Cong Tru’s thought of pleasure

Nguyen Cong Tru lived and experienced life in a social space in which urban life and urban space appeared. With it, the element of the amateurish personality showed two typical traits: the talent and the multi-love, which were the manifestation of individualism when the individual had no strong and solid urban background. This was present as an influential field found in major writers of this period, such as Nguyen Du, Ho Xuan Huong, Cao Ba Quat, etc.

Nguyen Cong Tru was still, first of all, an amateurish Confucian. Fascinating amateurs is the philosophical Tao - Chang. Tao - Chang prefers nature, against all things called “human action.”² Politics, ethics, social institutions, public paths,... are in the “human action”. But the world, for Dich and Tao - Chang, is a constant change, infinitely and limitlessly, one and the other transforming, and whatever is within limits, humans can not intervene. That is also “destiny”. Intelligent people know where they are limited and do

not work in vain to change the heaven, to control the heaven, against the heaven (nature). The lesson that the amateurish Confucian learned from here is that they enjoy pleasure in the limits: humans are born to get years... to get limits of age to play.

The pleasure is self-assertion not in ethic but in talent; according to the Nguyen it is where “most talented”.

In broader terms, in addition to the nomenclature “wisdom animal - homo sapiens”, “productive animal - homo faber” is also a playful animal – “homo ludens” (also translated as a player)³. The player in this case has to be involved in the tradition and to destroy it, to create its own source. While he has enjoyed the tradition of literati, he emphasizes sexuality, lust, and *love for pink canaries*, and is associated with a better way of capturing the population, meaning that he goes out of his way.

²Human action is the works of the human, but doing that in the look of Tao-Chang is a spoof, no matter how much effort is also impotent, disguised. The *human* (人) associated with action (爲) will form the pseudo (偽 - false, contrary to nature).

³In *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan Huizinga came from the anthropological study of the importance of play and game in human civilization. Johan Huizinga’s findings, insights, and elaborations have prompted many to think about the nature of the literary game. He argues that it (play) is attached to the existential impulse: human beings play to be themselves, so as not to be reduced to a rational entity because “playing is non-rational.” Humans play to liberate oneself through the inevitability of reality, to discover the possibilities of ourselves and the world itself. (Referring to Tran Ngoc Hieu - Approaching the nature of the play of literature (Suggestions from Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*), *Journal of Literary Studies*, 11-2011, pp. 16-27).

Nguyen Cong Tru as well as many other Confucians, envisioned life and people in the dominion of destiny. For Nguyen Cong Tru, life was a funny house (brought into the funny house), the child of heaven is “the excuse”, the “multi-funny” - setting many laughing games with humans. So, life for him

was a game, he wanted to “draw that play”. It is noteworthy that not in pleasure did he play, but in his glory it was not heavy. The symbol of the “ verbose person” is to live life without being subservient, is to seek freedom of the size.

His philosophy is: *Life without pleasure/ [as] There lived a thousand years as a child died prematurely.* Pleasure is to be satisfied (the pleasure goes to an area for the distraction). Enjoyment, for Nguyen Cong Tru, also means the same with pleasure. The pleasure (行樂) consists of two main spirits: 1 / eating, having fun and 2 / having sex. The expression of them is reflected in the poetry of Nguyen Cong Tru in treatment with nature: *The three little children in a confused state / pleasure wherein poor mountains... See the same moon and wind with a few sentences (Preference for wandering)*; with playing music, drinking poetry: the way of playfulness in each aspect is good (**Playing music, drinking poetry**); with a draw-and-discard card game: *What to play more than the shrimp nest / A bag of drama in vertical and horizontal rotation / Jokes control troops to fight (A draw-and-discard card game)*; with singers: *The play of dissolving sorrow by doing poetry / There are pink canaries then the play becomes enjoyment / When the eyes go back to you / Enduring the heavenly moment more intensely. (Fine)*

Poetry and pleasure, amusement in the East Asian tradition, especially in China has a long history. Those who enjoy the song, the joke of the singing have appeared since the century V - VI BC, with the name “privileged”. Pleasure, first and foremost, in its connotation, is probably derived from the enjoyment of the voice, the dance, the jargon in storytelling (good, the good laughing, the good, the good of laughing name⁴ - the good is the name of the joke). As a result,

⁴*Narrative story of Xuan Thu*, part of the story, Tuong cong similar edition, referred by Dam Pham (Cao Tu Thanh translation) (2004), *History of an artistic singer*, General Publishing House Ho Chi Minh City, p.15.

the artistry of professionalism and talent of the song is important. The poet is attached to the singer, with the most songs, in terms of “joint” with each other, “unity” with each other. Besides, the cultural aspect of such a joke is unmistakable⁵. The story of Tay Luong (400-421) about the man Cung Hai Phong one day invited guests

to see something, four boys also wanted to see that, he asked “good reading or good watching,” the youngest son opened his mouth: watching, Cung got him out. The big child said, of course, good reading, Cung laughed, that is the mediocrity of the old students. The second child weighed his opinion and he said the book also needed to be read, singing also needed to be seen. Cung disgruntled, saying that was eclectic, very much like the human in the second son. The third child replied that reading books mean watching the song, watching the song means reading books⁶.

Before Nguyen Cong Tru, the Confucians often referred to the habit of pleasure, in the sense of playing the delicate arts to nourish the character such as playing music - playing chess - writing poetry - drawing picture (or drinking). This is not a mass-media game, but only a talented and artful person, not a realm of the pagan patriarch, but the place of the trinity, on the transcendental side.

Nguyen Cong Tru was one of the most fascinating persons for playing music, playing chess, writing poetry, drinking, wind-cloud-snow-moon, singers,... and the significance in his pleasure is a sexual element “pink canaries”, “his eyes glanced back and forth” but not “short enjoyment,” that is to say, to make a provocative to the tradition: *The play of dissolving sorrow by doing poetry / There are pink canaries then the play becomes enjoyment / When the eyes go back to you / Enduring the heavenly moment more intensely (Fine)*. He sees himself a guest “ten odours” seeking to “beautiful flower”: *The guest drinking colour of beautiful flower / face-to-face flower, to play music, chess, drink and to do poetry (Love flower)*.

⁵Chuc Doan Minh in the Thanh dynasty, when watching a piece of music Funny, he was aware of “do not complain about the small drama, the mood is like my teacher”, it conveyed elegant information to the Confucians of high class, to the level of the intellect.

⁶According to Dam Pham, *ibid.*, tr.214.

Listening to singing ca tru/ hat a dao playing in the XVIII, XIX centuries in Vietnam was a common fact in both the place and the people from the aristocratic door to the village. But according to Tran Nho Thin, Nguyen Cong Tru was the first who expressed enthusiasm

concentratedly, intensely and fully, in his own way, when it came to play with poetry.

Being eager to express his will before life, Nguyen Cong Tru also did not separate his play outside the secular realm. He wanted to secularize the traditional leisure space of the poetry of the Confucian by introducing mundane human beings mixed with high things into their pockets: *Poetry, wine, trite, musical instrument, / Willingful stuff in a bag*. More specifically, he brought a leisurely space to send the city (in comparison with a person near him, Hai Thuong Le Huu Trac, just to regret for leaving the leisure place - Huong Son - where the streams of cliffs were so high, that is, the leisure space must be in the place of high mountains, which can be as far away as possible from the city): *The leisure put in the city/ Remembering Dong Ba, Gia Hoi has two bridges / When the wind is cool, when the moon is clear/ Crowded to amateurish Confucians (Leisured and elegant)*.

With the play, there are always rules in the game. Nguyen Cong Tru was no exception. He set his own criteria: *Play for elegance is to play / Play for fineness to know everyone*. As a man, for him, there are two big debts, glorious and playful debts, both have to be paid fairly. The glorious debt is an obligation of the scholar, to practice the ideal of “*help the king to become enlightened, protect and preserve people*”, for social policies. Pleasure, play is the right of the individual, the right of the wise, the player. It was a play which, for Nguyen Cong Tru, also needed to be nurtured and to be polished in practice: *Life without pleasure/ [as] There lived a thousand years as a child died prematurely*. He made himself a “pleasure person”.

Entertainment, for Nguyen Cong Tru, includes: playing music, playing chess, writing poetry, drinking, wind-cloud-snow-moon: *Players of poetry, drinking, music, and chess/ In a heaven of wind-cloud-snow-moon/ Fine face at the adult/ The pleasure goes to satisfying willingness/ Poetry in a bag spoken Do, Ly/ Drinking with a Luu Linh cup*. In this aspect, for him, living means enjoying the beauty, the pleasure, orienting towards the art. If you do not know how to enjoy them artfully, with a way of fine arts, then even living up to thousand years as well as the younger dead

(there lived a thousand years as a child died prematurely).

The most favourite of them is the *hat a dao*. For him, it was the most interesting pleasure, because in addition to playing music, chess and drinking, also “his eyes glanced back and forth”, there was a multi-love. It is the art of stimulating the senses “craving for life.” Also here, the feelings that “*the head of the Tuong River at the end of the Tuong River / the way how far removed a few ways*” was revealed.

He confessed himself that he had fallen into the “net of multi-love”: “*so far multi-lovers/ the Tran is one with himself is two*”, he was bound to it as a volunteer, because he was a trench flower. Here, his play was also “going out” to the problem of the puzzlement: *The more amateurs the more multi-love/ The other sadness that the love that comes out / Sexual into sorrow, practicing with drinking/ Drinking is oneself, only sorrow*⁷. But the more you get lost, the more you immersed. Because of his multi-love, he always made a fuss: *When he comes in and speaks in laughter,/ One day is also a triathlete./ Why one is enjoying, but the other is sorrowing/ The love, only to one aspect*. He was not only drunk singing, but he also remembered taking a singer to the temple well in a pair of aunts⁸. And so he fell into the scene “the excuse”⁹: *The child of creature is very confused / elder moon excuse to tease each other*. To him, teasing is a confucian behavior, because he is responsible for what is present in others.

⁷Meaning ancient advice: *It is hard to cross the alleyway, and use it as a horse/ It's hard to break the sorrow, so get the alcohol*. “Use a horse” here in the sense that there is money, when in danger, lack of what makes horses for themselves overcome hard situations.

⁸See more *Anecdote of Nguyen Cong Tru*, Nguyen Viet Ngoan (2002) selected, introduced to Nguyen Cong Tru, Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House, pp. 395-435.

3. Appraisal

Nguyen Cong Tru, in terms of the typology of the author, was a Confucian, but through poetry, through

the expressions of life, was a kind of anti-confucian. His poetry often expressed the state of breaking tradition, decentering to construct new insights. That was a person in poetry, in the spiritual world of creativity, whereas a person in the individual angle often violate norms. He spoke like a joke, he called himself *bulky confucian, bodily dude, lengthy person*. These behaviours have established his own position in the history of Vietnamese literature.

4. Conclusion

The recognition and evaluation of Nguyen Cong Tru's poetry is tilted from the perspective of the play, the pleasure, in our opinion, is the striking feature that formed his most distinctive point. This is also the aspect for us to emphasize the contributions of the Nguyen with the history of Vietnamese medieval literature in particular and the history of ethnic literature in general. The play in this case, therefore, is a stand, a glamorous presence. This is especially true in the context of the writings of the Confucian, who focuses on the norms and duties of puritanist colours.

⁹If you look to India, there are Galib, Surdas Mizza; Persia there is Hai, Greek there are Anacréon, Virgile, Horace... In general, in their poetry, the theme of pleasure, the source of inspiration flows in endless wine, love, music, dance. That's the way to make a beautiful life. In particular, Anacréon, in his poetry, is portrayed as a silver-haired old man seduced by immature girls who are constantly betrayed by the young men. Anacréon became Anacréontique - the epicurism, passionateing beauty, to counteract the heavy, ephemeral of life. This line of poetry later met in Épicure's philosophy, that man does not deny life, living affairs, even nationality, enjoy the pleasures, including the love, but put it on the stillness of the soul.

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THƠ VĂN NGUYỄN CÔNG TRỨ NHÌN TỪ GƯƠNG MẶT NHÀ NHO TÀI TỬ ĐẾN CON NGƯỜI CỦA SỰ CHƠI

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu thơ văn Nguyễn Công đã có những thành tựu nhất định. Tuy vậy, tập trung vào khía cạnh hành lạc, nhìn nó như một sự chơi đối với những sáng tác của họ Nguyễn là điều chưa được đề cập đến. Hướng đến điều này, thứ nhất, cần đặt Nguyễn Công Trứ trong bối cảnh tri thức nho giáo Việt Nam hậu kì trung đại; thứ hai, xếp chồng các văn bản thơ của ông và nhìn từ hướng lí thuyết trò chơi. Từ đây, hành lạc, sự chơi, trong con người tài tử này là một triết lí, một ứng xử có ý thức rõ ràng trước thời đại và cuộc sống. Sâu xa hơn, sự chơi chính là sáng tạo. Bằng cách này, các ý niệm về sự tao nhã trong các thú vui của nhà nho dịch chuyển sang hướng cá tính thế tục. Cuộc sống và sự sáng tạo, do đó mở rộng nghĩa. Đây cũng là những đóng góp quan trọng của nhà nho tài tử bậc nhất này trong lịch sử văn học Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: hành lạc; sự chơi; thơ văn Nguyễn Công Trứ; nhà nho tài tử; vi phạm quy tắc.