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Research Article

The Influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Nguyen Dynasty Court Poetry

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on studying the imprint of three religions in the royal poetry of the Nguyen dynasty from the perspective of content. The research is conducted by surveying the characteristics of three ideological streams reflected through the thematic system and main content of 90 poems belonging to the royal poetry group of the Nguyen dynasty. From there, it clarifies features such as: the dynasty's ideals and the cultivation issues of the royal family (influenced by Confucianism); themes of landscape appreciation and liberation tendencies (influenced by Buddhism); as well as aspirations for harmony with nature and transcendence tendencies (influenced by Taoism) in the royal poetry of this period. By combining systematic methods and structural analysis of works from a cultural – historical viewpoint, the article establishes that the three ideological currents of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism profoundly influenced the content of Nguyen dynasty court poetry, expressed through dynastic ideals, liberation tendencies, and harmony with nature, thereby illuminating the value of court literature within the historical-cultural context of medieval Vietnam and opening new research directions for a previously understudied literary domain. The research results may contribute to studies on a topic that has not received due attention relative to its value, such as royal literature in general, serving as a complementary piece and a part of the overall picture of medieval Vietnamese literary studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the study of Vietnamese literary history, medieval literature with nearly a thousand years of formation and development is an important cultural heritage of the nation. Among them, royal court literature was once the central, mainstream current influencing both the creative forces and the content and artistic expression. However, most previous studies have tended to analyze individual authors separately, such as Thieu Tri, Mien Tham, Mai Am. Placing royal court poetry within a unified system for observation and analysis is still a very new approach. Researching the royal poetry of the Nguyen dynasty aims to address many questions about the specialized characteristics of content and art in the works of royal poets. From a historical perspective, the Nguyen dynasty ended less than a hundred years ago. This dynasty was famous for its policy of Confucian exclusivity, using Confucian principles as the orthodox ideology governing politics, education, rituals, and cultural conduct, centralizing power in the emperor's hands. However, many royal poets of the Nguyen dynasty were people with the spirit of "Confucian outwardly, Buddhist inwardly," passionately devoted to Buddhist philosophy. Additionally, Taoist thought also helped shape the hermit lifestyle, the desire to integrate with nature, and transcendence tendencies in certain specific royal authors.

In the current context of globalization, the three streams of thought from the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) still play an important role in the development of national culture and literature, shaping the distinct identity of Vietnam within the region. Moreover, studying the influence of these three thought systems in the royal poetry of the Nguyen dynasty also helps to dispel the dust of time and prejudice surrounding this body of poetry in general.

The objective of this article is to analyze the manifestations and meanings of the three streams of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist thought in the royal poetry of the Nguyen dynasty from the perspective of content, thereby identifying the position of these works within the flow of Vietnamese literary history.

The research subject is the influence of the three streams of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist thought on the royal poetry of the Nguyen dynasty – influences that are widespread and play a core role in creating content value, inspiring creativity, and shaping the compositional tendencies of the royal authors.

Based on the above objectives and content, we delimit the scope of the study to Classical Chinese poetry by Nguyen dynasty royal poets such as emperors, princes, and princesses during the first four reigns, from Gia Long to Tu Duc (1802–1883). However, the imperial poetry of the three emperors Minh Mang, Thieu Tri, and Tu Duc alone amounts to more than 15,000 poems, and the creative works of princes like Mien Tham and Mien Trinh also approach 4,000 poems each. Due to limitations in printed texts, translations, and the scope of a single study, we selected and surveyed the content of 90 poems based on their popularity from three groups of authors: imperial poets, royal princes, and princesses, as a representative and comprehensive subset of Nguyen dynasty royal poetry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Between 1945 and 1975, the Vietnamese nation faced fierce wars

and the mission of national liberation. Thus, when looking back at the Nguyen dynasty in history, many opinions regarded it as a reactionary feudal regime, denying many cultural, historical, and literary values left by this dynasty. However, since the renewal policy of 1985, research and translation of Classical Chinese poetry by Nguyen dynasty royal poets have markedly improved.

The term "court literature" first appeared in the work of researcher Thin (2010) regarding Thang Long literature. He argued that court literature consists of works by kings and Confucian intellectuals appearing within the palace space and closely linked to the political, economic, and cultural activities of the court. By Hoang (2018) concluded that court literature is the body of literary works by kings, aristocrats, and officials appearing in the royal court space, deeply imbued with the worldview of the contemporary dynasty. These two core studies classify court literature based on the space and content of creation. However, there are exceptions that cannot be classified as court literature, such as Nguyen Du's *Truyen Kieu* (The Tale of Kieu), although its author was an official of the Nguyen dynasty.

Starting from statistical and classification steps, we limit the origin of the authors and use the concept of Nguyen dynasty court poetry to refer specifically to the body of Chinese-character poetry composed by authors from the royal family such as emperors, princes, and princesses of the Nguyen dynasty (from 1802 to 1945, covering 13 emperors). These works are rich in moral and idealistic content, and no less humane, viewed through the lens of the contemporary royal class's worldview and philosophy of life.

More than half a century ago, during the study of the poetry of Prince Tung Thien Vuong, author Chuong (1973) mentioned in his monograph the influence of Confucianism on the poetry of this famous royal figure, Mien Tham. The author argued that, with the profound and comprehensive Confucian education and the royal upbringing, Mien Tham's character was shaped by virtue, skillful social conduct, and an erudite knowledge base. Numerous studies on the poetry of Nguyen dynasty emperors and princesses have raised a common question regarding this literary segment: how did Confucianism influence the Chinese poetry of royal poets? From this, the research hypothesis (H1) was formed: Confucianism directly governed the most important content issue in the early Nguyen royal poetry—faith in the dynasty's ideals and the cultivation of Confucian morality.

Although the Nguyen dynasty upheld Confucianism as the dominant doctrine, royal poets were also known as ardent admirers of Buddhist philosophy. Early Nguyen emperors were interested in building pagodas, enjoyed visiting pagoda scenery, and incorporated many beautiful pagoda scenes into their works, as in the case of Emperor Thieu Tri. Particularly, the twelfth prince of Emperor Minh Mang, Prince Tuong An, was notably mentioned by scholar Nguyen Khue in his work *The Mentality of Prince Tuong An through His Poetry* (1970) as a royal figure strongly influenced by Buddhist teachings. Recognizing the impermanence of life and the inexpressible human sufferings, Mien Buu relied on Buddhist philosophy for spiritual support and devoted a significant portion of his works



to expressing this. The question arises: how were Buddhist ideas similarly or differently reflected in Nguyen court poetry among various author groups? The research hypothesis (H2) is as follows: the Buddhist imprint in Nguyen court poetry is manifested through pagoda-visiting content, relationships with the monastic community, and tendencies toward liberation according to Buddhist philosophy.

Compared to Buddhism, Taoist thought, with its lifestyle close to nature and the principle of “non-action” (wu wei) – resonates closely with Vietnamese culture. Many royals and princesses of this dynasty favored hermit life and composed poetry praising natural scenery, aspiring to harmonize with nature, which holds a very important place in their poetry collections. Therefore, the research hypothesis (H3) was established: Taoism influenced Nguyen court poetry, expressed through writings about nature, aspirations for closeness and harmony with nature, and the escapist tendencies of some royal poets.

3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the stated research objectives, the first method we employed was the systematic method. This method allows Nguyen court poems to be placed side by side to highlight their overall appearance and common characteristics from a content perspective. The 90 poems were selected based on a combination of content and form criteria from well-known poetry collections by Nguyen dynasty poets, published and widely circulated in Vietnam today. Initially, these poems were filtered based on formal criteria using keywords such as Buddha, temple, Tao, and nothingness, followed by an examination of their content in terms of the concepts and ideologies of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Next, aiming for deeper analysis, we applied the method of literary work analysis from a cultural – historical perspective. Each literary work needs to be properly and fully understood within the cultural and social context in which it was produced. Nguyen court poetry belongs to the final stage of Vietnamese medieval literature. Under the impetus of cultural and artistic development policies, poetry in this period reached its peak in both content and form. Royal poets, as social leaders at that time, had the conditions and capacity to polish their works meticulously. The method of structural analysis from a cultural – historical viewpoint allows for a deeper and broader exploration to understand the value of works in their proper creative context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Influence of Confucian Thought in Nguyen Court Poetry

In the metaphysical section of Confucianism, the theory of the “Mandate of Heaven” is the core content, profoundly influencing the creative works of court poets. According to Confucius, “Heaven” is the sovereign ruler of the entire universe, the supreme will that governs and determines all changes in the world. This will is called the “Mandate of Heaven.” The philosophy of the “Mandate of Heaven,” with the power of “heaven and earth” and “yin and yang,” is mentioned in the poetry of imperial poets as an undeniable principle: ““Observing rites strictly inside and outside the court / Yin and yang determine the years without error / Harmonizing

the five directions and all realms / Heaven and earth protect eternally” (“Trung ngoai phung hanh than huu chuan / Am duong phan dinh tue vo si / Dieu quan ngu nhuoc hoan doanh lai/ Phu tai chieu lam vinh bat tu.” (Written on the first day of the year during Gia Binh reign - Minh Mang) (Trung, 2022).

Not only impacting the construction of socio-political institutions, the important classics in Confucian rituals have also been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for court poets. The Ban Soc (calendar granting) ceremony, held annually in the twelfth lunar month, provided abundant poetic inspiration for the early Nguyen dynasty kings to compose many poems expressing their reverence and awe of Heaven and their faith in the dynasty’s ideals: “The high throne harmonizes with auspicious omens, / The regime follows Nghieu’s model continuously, / Heaven and Earth, yin and yang, clearly determine fate, / The emperor’s laws and rules eternally proclaim virtue” (“Trinh nguyen hoi hop huu tuong ung / Dan phuc dan he chinh the Nghieu / Thien dia am duong ham dinh phan / De vuong thong ky vinh tuyen chieu”. (from *Gia binh Ban soc toc* – Thieu Tri) (Trung, 2022). Ban Soc, the ceremony of granting the calendar, was regularly held at the end of each lunar year and was highly valued by the Nguyen emperors. It was not merely a ritual praying for favorable weather like other annual ceremonies but also symbolized the affirmation of national sovereignty under a new dynasty. Dai Nam had its own calendar, adapted to the climate and life of the people, blessed by the heavens: “In good times, the sky shines brightly, / The seasons turn harmoniously in four directions, / Every year Thieu Tri grants the precious calendar, / All regions respectfully receive the Dai Nam dynasty’s calendar.” (“Thoi dinh gia cat tam quang lang / Van te ung hy tu tu dieu / Thieu tri nien nien tang buu lich / Quan phuon phung soc Dai Nam trieu”. (from *Gia binh Ban soc toc* – Thieu Tri) (Trung, 2022).

The compositions of the royal poets frequently mention “yin and yang” and “heaven and earth” to affirm the legitimacy of the king’s throne, win the hearts of the people, and express faith in the dynasty’s ideals. The “Mandate of Heaven” doctrine holds that the king is the “Son of Heaven,” entrusted by Heaven to govern the land and society. In medieval society, rooted in wet-rice civilization and dependent on natural weather patterns, people revered Heaven and Earth as omnipotent forces governing all. The true king was Heaven’s chosen one, ruling on its behalf. On the occasion of casting the Nine Tripod Cauldrons, “to demonstrate the rightful throne and gathered mandate” (National History Museum of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007), Emperor Minh Mang composed a seven-word eight-line poem expressing his aspirations: “Following the Xia emperor, increasing greatness, / Where the Song ruler labored to dig foundations, / Magnificently erecting the peaceful altar, / Descendants forever respectfully preserve the legacy” (“Ki phap Ha hoang tang thuc khoach / Khoi phuon Tong chu phi dao chan / Nguy nga khat lap an ban thai / Tu tu ton ton vinh bao truyen” (from *Phong co chu thanh Cuu Dinh an thiet vu The Mieu dinh tien, cung nghe te cao, le thanh thi di chi su* – Minh Mang) (Trung, 2022).

Faith in the dynasty’s ideals was a foremost theme in the poetry of royal poets. After over a century of turmoil, in 1802, King Gia Long ascended the throne, unified the country, and



founded a new dynasty. In 1842, during Emperor Thieu Tri's northern tour, when arriving at Thanh Hoa – the Nguyen royal ancestral land – Mien Buu composed a poem praising the merits of the ancestors: “The good district honors the high ancestral virtue, / The southern heavens fixed the sacred merits [...] Wholeheartedly remembering the ancestors, / Reverently visiting the grand mausoleum” Blessed by the country and receiving the king's grace, royal poets and princesses – noble women confined within the old society's walls – shared the joy of military victory and respectfully expressed gratitude to their sovereign: “Reports flood in of the enemy's defeat, / The red flag shines over the spring river [...] After three years of hardship, the throne rests, / Peace returns with a single spirit” (“Phong chuong lien bao tuyet Ho tran / Nhat chieu hong ki tu mach xuan [...] Tru bien tieu can lao tam tai / Tap vu thanh linh lai nhat nhan” (from *Tuc su chi Quang Nam lo thoi su, hoa van nghi ung che the* – Mai Am) (Luong An, 2004).

The Son of Heaven rules on behalf of Heaven, but Heaven's mandate is not eternal; if the ruler lacks virtue, Heaven will reclaim the throne. Therefore, moral cultivation of both the Son of Heaven and the royal family is a recurring theme in their writings. The king's way is a constant concern for royal poets: “The king's way must heed words, / Always distinguish right from wrong, / Trust honest words and reject deceit, / Beware traitors within one's family, / Loyal to the state's righteous cause, / Even a slight error is grave, / Day and night keep a clear heart” (“Quan dao quy nap ngon / Nhung phan biet ta chinh / Chinh ngon tat mien tong / Ta ngon vat kha thinh / Gian quy vi than gia / Trung thanh muu quoc chinh / Hao li thien li sai / Nhat da trung tam kinh” (from *Tu huan* – Minh Mang) (Trung, 2022). As social leaders, the royal family served as exemplary models for the people. The king must be a paragon father, caring and teaching his children; siblings should be close, loving, and accommodating. On a cool early summer day in the imperial garden Thieu Phuong, with flourishing fruit trees, Emperor Minh Mang summoned princes and officials to share the ripe fruit, reflecting: “Great grace makes father and son harmonious, / Affection binds ruler and ministers together” (“An hiep gia dinh don phu tu / Tinh lien thuong ha trong quan than” (from *Thua ha tuyen chung tu than quan nhap Thieu Phuong vien trich le chi chuoc tra di tu ki su* – Minh Mang) (Hai, 2009). Overall, among the three groups of royal poets, the king's poems often drew inspiration from ritual classics and the country's fortunes, expressing reverence for Heaven. Meanwhile, princes and princesses expressed faith in the dynasty's ideals, loyalty to the sovereign, and filial love within the royal family.

4.2. Influence of Buddhist Thought in Nguyen Dynasty Court Poetry

Although the Nguyen emperors strictly applied Confucian doctrines in political institutions, they still paid attention to maintaining and building pagodas. The spiritual aspect held an important place in social life. During leisure moments, royal poet – emperors enjoyed admiring pagoda scenery, leaving behind many beautiful poems: “The deep blue sky, unknown since when / Dragons and serpents hiding in the depths / The wind carries the bell's sound through the dense forest / The scent of flowers from the empty cave drifts to the shore” (“Tich

thuy toan ngoan bat ke xuan / Dau long an phuc liet lan tuan / Hue phong chung do u lam huong / Khong coc huong la phap hai tan” (*Van Son thang tich* – Thieu Tri) (Mau, 2002). Though holding the mandate of Heaven and wielding supreme power, emperors were still mortal before Buddha's gate, often visiting pagodas to dispel worldly dust. At such times, Thieu Tri seemed to shed worldly burdens and opened his senses to perceive the surroundings, gazing into the infinite dimensions of space and time – the vast blue sky, gentle clouds drifting with the fragrance from the empty valley. Only two sounds interwove in this transcendental space: the wooden clogs of monks and the pagoda bell echoing from the dark forest, etc.

From these pagoda visits, witnessing the ascetic lives of monks and hearing sutras, the royal poets' souls were drawn toward seeking purity. Though living in a Confucian – dominated era, Prince Tuong An Mien Buu was a lifelong devotee of Buddhism. His faith was strong; he often visited pagodas to offer incense, converse with senior monks, compose poems inspired by the scenery, and sometimes stayed overnight at pagodas, embracing a life immersed in Zen. Among the hundreds of pagodas in the capital, Linh Huu Pagoda was Mien Buu's favorite. He praised its pure, serene atmosphere and revered the abbot, Elder Nguyen Nhat Dinh. When visiting, he often discussed the concept of Goodness and how to nurture it in human life: “Remove evil thoughts, do good deeds / Dust of the world gone, that is the Western Pure Land” (“Tru khuoc ac tam, hanh thien niem / Tran ai chi ngoai tuc Tay phuong” (from *Du tru tri Nguyen Nhat Dinh thoi* – Mien Buu) (Khue, 2023). Prince Tuong An's devotion stemmed partly from Buddhism's miraculous appeal to his soul and partly from admiration for the ascetic life of monks like Elder Nguyen Nhat Dinh. He composed many poems praising the abbot's merits: “Chanting the Lotus Sutra at night / The true mind cultivates purity / The room free of worldly dust / The wall adorned with a green lamp” (“Da tung Phap hoa kinh / Chan tam bach luyen tinh / Phong vo phien tran nhap / Bich quai diem dang minh” (from *Tang cao tang Nguyen Nhat Dinh* – Mien Buu) (Khue, 2023). It is remarkable and beautiful that, in a class-divided era, people of noble status still longed for the Zen realm – where one lets go of desires and only goodness and righteousness endure, etc.

While life revolves around material needs and burdens, people yearn for a prosperous life. Yet even in splendor, the sufferings of samsara do not cease. As the twenty-fifth princess of Emperor Minh Mang, Mai Am enjoyed royal privileges and was close to the virtues of her mother and elder siblings. She showed talent early and was admired by contemporary literati. However, her life was marked more by sorrow than joy. At age 38, she gave birth to her first and only son, Than Trong Mau, a handsome, intelligent, and filial boy. Joy was short-lived; four years later, she painfully erected his tombstone, mourning the “laughter around her knees” and nights “waking at midnight to recite poetry with her nursemaid” (adapted from Mai Am's Lament for the Child) (Luong An, 2004). When the princess was ill, her child tenderly stayed by her bedside, urging her to eat more: “Babbling first words, where is the person now? / Alone, feeling sorrow, crying in the cold evening” (“Nha nha hoc ngu nhan ha tai? / Doc phu thuong tam khoc mo han” (Lament for the Child – Mai Am) (Luong An, 2004).



From youth, Prince Tung Thien Mien Tham often visited pagodas, not for ritual worship but for “harmonizing with the monks’ simple lifestyle and conduct.” His youthful zeal for helping others led him to admire Monk Tuong Van, who understood worldly affairs without fleeing them. Whether Confucian scholar or monk, they shared concern for the times: “The heart does not think of many changes / The soul follows life’s transformations / The doctrine and the monk seek enlightenment / Are all outcomes right or wrong? (“Bien khoi phi tam tuong / Uu lien xuat the nhan / Du su ung ngo dao / Chu tuong canh thuy chan” (from *Du Tuong Van tang thoai cuu* – Mien Tham) (Trinh & Duong, 1970). Yet the more he experienced life’s impermanence, the more he realized life’s falseness and deeply absorbed profound Buddhist philosophy: “Keeping purity leads to Zen insight / Buddha’s light illuminates the guest’s heart / How to cast off worldly worries / And dwell on this mountain?” (“Thanh tinh ngo thien vi / Khong minh khai khach tam / Ha duong xa tran lu / Ket oc thu son sam” (from *Giang thu van chung* – Mien Tham) (Don, 2000).

4.3. The Influence of Taoist Thought in the Court Poetry of the Nguyen Dynasty

Besides the influence of Confucianism and Buddhism, in the souls of our royal poets one can also find the rich color of Laozi – Zhuangzi thought. This is the spirit of explaining the complex human life by simplifying body and mind, choosing to live in peaceful non – action (wu wei), freely following nature, and limiting the use of intellect in action. Nature is a precious place to nurture the human spirit. After court sessions, the king often took advantage of rare moments to nurture his spirit in the royal garden within the capital. One summer night, strolling to the royal garden and looking at the broad view of the Tranquil Heart Lake, with its water reflecting the sparkling Milky Way, poet Thieu Tri saw this as a fairyland scene: “By the lake stands a pavilion, trees, and flowers like an eternal life scene / Heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, and the four seas are home” (“Lau dai hoa thu truong sinh canh / Thien dia son ha tu hai gia” (*Tranquil Lake Summer Mood* – Thieu Tri) (Mau, 2002); with the wish “Together with grass and trees, all things joyfully communicate” (“Dong lac giao phu thao vat gia” (*Tranquil Lake Summer Mood* – Thieu Tri) (Mau, 2002).

Life in harmony with nature seems easier for royalty and princesses. The residence of Tung Thien Vuong was not adorned with luxurious red – painted pavilions but was filled with the lush green of grass and trees. Compared to the crowded and bustling capital, the prince preferred the tranquil and secluded mountains and forests: “The pavilion’s pine wind sounds faintly clear / The forest light colors are bright and pure / The recluse creates a misty curtain / Listening to the mountain, the flute sounds the clearest” (“Ban thap tung phong hieu mong thanh / Lam quang thu sac vi phan minh / U nhan tao khoi hoan cam toa / Thinh dac son cam de nhat thanh” (from “*Mountain Mist and Pine Wind*” – Miên Tham) (Đon, 2000). At this time, the prince was only seventeen, yet the spirit of a recluse and the dream of harmony with nature already subtly appeared in his poetry. When powerless before the chaotic upheavals of the times, the prince grew weary and wished only to retreat into a

simple grass hut built on the mountain: “A grass hut high above escapes the mortal world / Alone, I still cherish the pine and bamboo” (“Mao oc co cao xuat the tran / Tu vi van hac doi tung quan” (from “*Passing by the Tu Lam Pagoda*” – Miên Tham) (Đon, 2000).

After a youthful period full of passion, having experienced many vicissitudes and tasted the warmth and coldness of human relationships, one’s body and soul increasingly seek spiritual support for balance and solace. The female poet Mai Am once wrote: “Addicted to spring, dreaming Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream / Who can bear Du Mu’s wild passion?” (“Tham xuan moi he Trang Chu mong / Ai sac thuy cam Do Muc cuong” (from “*Picking Flowers*” – Mai Am) (Luong An, 2004). Facing illness, old age, and the ever-approaching departure that seemed inevitable, the poet’s withered soul no longer saw colors in the scenery but perceived through it the sorrow and finitude of human life:

“How can one’s heart calculate and solve a hundred worries / Only Master Zhuangzi sympathizes with my limited life) “How to count a hundred worries in the heart? / Only Zhuangzi understands my mortal fate” (“Phuong thon ha kham dinh bach lu / Mong Trang chi hop ai ngo sinh” (from “*Flower Offering to the Moon*” – Mai Am) (Luong An, 2004). Near the end of her life, Mai Am seemed to deeply grasp the view on the ambiguity of reality and dreams in Zhuangzi’s dream. Illusions and reality are relative; what seems to exist may vanish, and what seems nonexistent may appear.

While other royal poets stopped at seeing life as an illusory dream, entrusting their hearts to the wish for eternal truth in a finite world, Mien Buu’s poetry went further. The prince not only loved living in nature but immersed himself so deeply in it that he did not distinguish between self and things, “all things and I are one” (van vat di nga vi nhat). From early on, he showed interest in reflections on the nature of things and the self in Zhuangzi’s works, expressing in his poem Fishing Joy: “Laughing at others, how can one know / That I do not know the fish are happy?” “Smiling at others, how do they know / That I do not know the fish’s joy?” (“Tieu tu nguyen lai phi thi nga / An tri u nga bat tri ngu” (from *Fishing Scene* – Mien Buu) (Khue, 2023). He believed that all worldly troubles stemmed from the desire to outsmart and show off, to win or lose. Therefore, he first advised himself to keep the quality of “ignorance” so his heart would be free of worries. Here, “ignorance” does not mean foolishness but is a virtue of the gentleman: “To nurture life, keep simple innocence” (“Duong sinh tieu chuyet tu hon ngoan” (from *Sick in Bed, Thinking* – Mien Buu) (Khue, 2023).

From the turmoil of the times and the complexity of human hearts, Mien Buu cast a pessimistic gaze on human life in general. He saw life as a mere illusion, a dizzying dance arranged beforehand. At thirty, an age when most are in their prime, he fell seriously ill. In his pessimism and even despair, thinking about his “temporary life,” he calmly accepted life and death as natural changes. Especially after the family tragedy between his two nephews, Hong Bao and Hong Nham (Emperor Tu Duc), witnessing the bloody conflict, Mien Buu lost all desire to continue living in this chaotic world. He wished to leave this meaningless drama and ascend to the immortal realm: “Who



wakes easily from a great dream? / Mortal traces vanish fast / Long to be Prince Tan / Riding cranes to heavenly realms” (“Dai mong thuy nang giac / Phu sinh tich di tieu / Kham xung Vuong tu tan / Ki hac gia thanh tieu” (from *Ascending the Pavilion* – Mien Buu) (Khue, 2023).

4.4. Discussion

The influence of the three ideological factors-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism – examined through 90 poems as a microcosm of Nguyen dynasty court poetry is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Research Model

Research Hypothesis	H1. Confucianism influences poetic content regarding faith in the dynasty’s ideals and the cultivation of royal ethics.	H2. Buddhism influences content about visiting pagodas, relationships with monks, and the tendency toward liberation according to Buddhist philosophy.	H3. Taoism influences the aspiration to live close to and harmonize with nature and the tendency toward transcendence.
Research Method	Systematic analysis of works from historical and cultural perspectives.	Systematic analysis of works from historical and cultural perspectives.	Systematic analysis of works from historical and cultural perspectives.
Characteristics of Subjects	Confucian thought predominates, with 48 out of 90 poems. Faith and affirmation of legitimacy.	18 out of 90 poems relate to Buddhism. Princes and princesses were devoted to Buddhist philosophy and frequently visited pagodas.	12 out of 90 poems relate to Taoism. Mainly characterized by closeness to nature and transcendence in some cases.
Aspect of Study	Themes and content.	Themes and content.	Themes and content.
Significance of Study	Confucianism is strongly present in the king’s poetry.	Poems by princes and princesses show a harmonious balance of the three factors.	Taoist elements are the least represented among the three factors.

After situating court poetry within a system for observation, we find that the three ideological streams-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism – all hold important places in the content of Nguyen royal poets’ works. However, they exhibit both similarities and differences, as well as inevitable limitations within this literary subset.

Confucianism deeply influences writings about the dynasty’s ideals and is the common meeting point of the three groups of court poets. The emperor wrote extensively about the country’s fortunes, reverence for Heaven and Earth, and self-reminders to cultivate personal virtue. Princes and princesses followed this example, extending pride in ancestors and family, and emphasizing the Three Bonds and Five Constants. Buddhist and Taoist elements are relatively faint in the king’s poetry, mainly appearing in themes of pagoda visits and closeness to nature, but they are richer and more balanced in the poetry of princes and princesses. This can be explained from a historical-social perspective: princes and princesses, born into noble status with comfortable lives and ample leisure, did not participate in court governance but had the education to study and contemplate these philosophies. The survey results clarify the “Confucian exclusivity” characteristic originating from the Nguyen court. Consequently, many court literary works fall into rigid, doctrinal, and heavy formalistic praise, which is a limitation in approaching and appreciating court poetry in general.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Systematic study of court literature, especially Nguyen dynasty court poetry, has only recently been addressed, while contemporaries like Nguyen Du and Cao Ba Quat have been

studied extensively, with hundreds of theses and articles annually. This work provides an overview of the influence of the three ideological streams-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism – on the formation and development of Nguyen court poetry content, a previously neglected area.

The combination of systematic methods and historical-cultural analysis offers a rich, multidimensional perspective on the works of royal poets in the late medieval period – a time of historical upheaval but literary flourishing in both quantity and quality, with prominent figures such as Thieu Tri, Mien Tham, and Mai Am. This article promises to open research directions into a literary corpus long overlooked in historical currents.

Due to limitations in scope and research time, this study is incomplete, restricting Nguyen court poetry to nearly 100 poems by three groups of authors. The concept of court literature, especially Nguyen dynasty court poetry, remains a topic requiring extensive scholarly attention, promising the most comprehensive and profound portrait possible of medieval Vietnamese literature. To deepen the study of Nguyen dynasty court poetry, future research directions could compare the influence of Confucianism in Nguyen poetry with that of the Qing dynasty (China) or the Heian period (Japan), focusing on the adoption and localization of dynastic ideals and personal ethics; simultaneously, examine the interplay of Buddhism in Nguyen poetry compared to Thai Zen poetry or Burmese literature to clarify how liberation philosophy and pagoda imagery are expressed within the local cultural context; finally, analyze Taoist thought in Nguyen poetry in comparison with the works of Li Bai or Wang Wei (China), emphasizing harmony with nature and transcendental tendencies, thereby



highlighting the distinct ways Nguyen royal poets integrated these ideas with their local political and cultural context.

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