

THE INFLUENCE OF THREE RELIGIONS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HUMAN BEINGS IN VIETNAMESE CONCEPTION

Đỗ Lan Hiền¹

Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are three great religions. They arrived early in Vietnam by different routes almost two thousand years ago. Many their theories more or least have become cultural elements of Vietnamese people. These theories have taken root in and influenced the lifestyle and thinking of Vietnamese people .

Doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism would like to educate human beings by morality so human beings achieve perfect and harmonious values in the relation between human beings and human beings and the relation between human beings and nature. Taoism advocates *asamskrta* (it is a Taoist term has the literal meaning of “non- doing” or “non striving” or “non making”. It does not imply inaction or mere idling). *Asamskrta* is called the Tao of Heaven (according to the Taoism, natural law or cosmic energy is the origin and law of all living) The Tao of Heaven is contrary to Human action. For example, horse or buffalo has 4 legs when he was born . It is natural law. When man controls horse or buffalo but yoke. This action is human action. In general, there are some limitations in the theory of *Asamskrta* of Lao Zi. Because this theory is not suitable to civilized society. However, *Asamskrta theory* influences deeply the hearts of Oriental people in general and Vietnamese people in particular. This theory was applied in political and diplomatic methods, in social relation, and in behavior to nature. However, *Asamskrta theory* of Lao Zi and

¹ Dr. Teacher of Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration (HCMA)

Zhuang Zi does not mean that we do nothing but it advises us not to do anything contrary to nature.

Confucianism (in Confucius- Man Zi period) thought that, Heaven and Human beings had a mutual relation. It meant that natural phenomena influenced on human morality; on the contrary, human morality impacted on natural environment. Heaven and human beings can combine with each other. Heaven controls Human actions. Confucius advocated that human beings should be educated to respect nature and live in harmony with the natural world so that human beings would enjoy favorable conditions and they have prosperous life. That was why rulers have to perfect themselves so they could convert Heaven by their righteousness and generosity and heaven helped and supported them so their causes were strong and people's life was happy.

Confucianism (in Xu Zin) period advocated that Heaven was not related to human beings. Xu Zin thought that human beings decide their success or defeat. According to Xu Zin, human beings should control nature to live. Human beings should take charge of their life and not hope the help of Heaven. Human beings could not but base themselves on buffaloes and horses to cultivate but human beings had to control buffaloes and horses by yokes. It was natural law. Because people control nature so they have productions of various regions. In order to control nature people have to unite. People would like to live together in perfect union, people have to respect standard of culture. In general, Tao and morality, which Taoism deals with, are not abstract and unattainable. They exist in each man. Taoism call them by a common name - humanity or human ethnics

Asamskrta theory of Lao Zi is supplemented by *Smaskrita* theory of Xu Zin (in the period of Xu Zin) (it is not easy to give an English equivalent

for *Samskrita*. *Samskrita* means anything does something and productive of some effect) in the relation between human beings and nature (Heaven). According to *Smaskirta* theory, honorable men can do legal things. They do not do illegal things. On this point, *Smaskirta* theory of Confucianism and *Asamskrta* theory of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi are closeness. According to the time, we can apply *Asamskrta* theory or *Smaskirta* theory.

Buddhist doctrines think that man is small universe, so man has characters of universe. These characters control the development of human beings. Both small universe and great universe revolve four circles: birth, existence, extraordinary and death (birth, old age, sickness and death). Man is a small universe. If you want to understand universe you must understand man. That is why one of many themes of ancient thought of India in general and Buddhist thought in particular is to analyze structure of human beings (from material structure to spiritual structure) so that in Buddhist doctrines there are following categories: *hrdaya*, *vedanta*, *vitakla*, *casevati*, *rupa*, *silā* (heart, feeling, think, action, mind, appearance, rule, the six entrances). The final aim of analysis of human beings is to find path that can liberate human beings from the principles of born, old age, sickness and death to arrive Nirvana.

Although classical Buddhist works focus on teachings of liberalization that human beings escape from human life, we find many Buddhist standpoints make mention of the relation between human beings and nature. According to Buddhism, this relation is *hetu-pratyaya*. (dependent origination) The most important significance of *hetu-pratyaya* is that all actions can bring about consequences and these consequences will return to impact on subjects of actions. The law of causation is not only right for human beings but also for physical world. Buddhist dogmas advise

human beings to do charitable works because who sows the wind will reap the whirlwind. Buddhism dogmas advise human beings to pay attention to the law of causation.

In short, the doctrines of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism advise human beings to harmonize with nature. Because of tendency to natural world the word “Heaven/ troi” is present in the Oriental philosophical and religious theories of Orient people. In this case, the word “Heaven/ troi” is used to denote the natural world in the relation between human beings and the natural world but is not to denote the supernatural world or the world of deities and saints which are in the Western philosophical and religious theories. The Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist philosophies on the relation between human beings and the natural world have influenced Vietnamese people’s thought. For Vietnamese people, “Heaven/Ong troi” is identified with the natural world. They understand the concept “ong troi” as follows:

1- “Ong troi” is the natural world. Many Vietnamese proverbs and folk verses think highly of the good relation between human beings and the natural world. For example, *the stones had been won smoothly by the constant flow of water*

2-“Ong troi” is considered as charitable force to protect human being and punish wrongdoers. “Ong troi” is worshipped by Vietnamese people

3-The relation between Human beings and “Ong troi” has been generalized in theory on Heaven, Earth and Human beings. Moreover, Human beings play an intermediary role to connect Heaven with Earth.

Heaven/ troi is familiar category in Vietnamese outlook. Thanks to Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist thoughts on the relation between human beings and the natural world, Vietnamese people understand the natural world and have actions which conformity with their lives. Vietnamese

people have applied knowledge of the natural world to control natural world.

Almost Vietnamese people know the legend of Son Tinh – Thuy Tinh. Son Tinh won Thuy Tinh because he built a dike to prevent flood. He has been a symbol of traditional force of Vietnamese people in controlling flood. The teachings of three religions that advise human beings should be in harmony with the natural world influence life style of Vietnamese people. Vietnamese people have known to respect nature. Their lives have connected closely with nature. Vietnamese people are harmony with nature so they are favored by nature. Therefore, they rely on nature. They do not know how to exploit resources sensibly. They think simply that *Troi who creates elephants also creates grass* (Troi sinh voi, troi sinh co).

Unintentionally, in their life, Vietnamese people seem to turn their backs on natural environment. They chop down trees, kill wild beast... Their actions damage their living environment.

At that time, standards and principles in thought of three religions on the relation between human beings and the natural world seem not to be suitable for present life. When population is increasing more and more and human beings more and more exploit nature so that natural environment is more and more damaged.

At present, we try our best to establish the harmonious relation between Human beings and Heaven in order to overcome limitations in applying ancient theories on relation between Human beings and Heaven and defend natural environment and human life.