

NOM POEMS OF TRỊNH LORDS IN TERMS OF FORM AND GENRE

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In the flourishing period of Nom poem during Lê Trung Hưng Dynasty, poets with family name “Trịnh” left their imprint indelibly such as Trịnh Căn with *Khâm định thắng bình bách vịnh* (欽定昇平百詠) - *Emperor's 100 poems of peace*, Trịnh Cương with *Lê triều ngự chế quốc âm thi* (黎朝御制國音詩 - *Emperor's national language poems in Lê Dynasty*), Trịnh Doanh with *Càn nguyên ngự chế thi tập* (乾元御制詩集 - *Càn nguyên emperor's poem collection*), Trịnh Sâm with *Tâm thanh tồn duy tập* (心青存肄集 - *Collection of sound of heart to preserve and maintain*)^(*) ... On many landscapes

in Vietnam today, there are still imprints of Trịnh Lords' poems.

During our study of the art of Trịnh Lords' Nom poetry, we have found remarkable points in forms, languages and penmanship etc. In this article, we are going to survey and analyze some characteristics in terms of forms and genres of Trịnh Lords' Nom poetry, then try to indentify certain characteristics in Trịnh Lords' poetry.

Tang prosody Nom poetry (i.e. poetry written in Nom with techniques of Tang's prosody and its variations) dominates in Trịnh Lords' compositions. According to statistics of Trịnh Lords' Nom poems in *Collection of Vietnamese Nom literature* (vol. 2), we have found that the number of Tang prosody Nom poems accounts for approximately 99% (367/371 poems). That suggests, Trịnh

^(*) *Tâm thanh tồn duy tập* currently cannot be found in Library of Institute of Han-Nom Studies. According to, “*Tâm thanh tồn duy tập* was written by Lord Trịnh Sâm since he was the crown prince. Until 18th year of Cảnh Hưng's reign (1757), it was reworked and divided into 4 categories: 1- Thù phụng; 2- Ban tứ; 3- Cảm hứng; 4- Đề vịnh. The two handwritten copies of Social Sciences Library (A.197 and AB. 376) have mostly Nom poems, both have written preface of Phan Lê Phiên” (Trần Văn Giáp, 1990). However, Nguyễn Văn Tố seems to be the first person mentioning about this composition (Nguyễn Văn Tố, 1934). Perhaps at that time, Nguyễn Văn Tố was able to read original *Tâm thanh tồn duy tập* and cited some poems

which other books also cited from him. Trịnh Sâm's Nom poems also appear scatteredly in *Minh Đô thi tuyển* (*Collection of Minh Đô's Poems*), engraved poems on cliffs in relics and landscapes. A full investigation on Trịnh Sâm's Nom poems is still very necessary.

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Lords preferred to use this form of poetry to compose. It is also consistent with the trend of Nom poems of Medieval literary authors (the upper class, especially courtiers or emperors, lords) from 15th century to the mid-18th century. Composing Tang prosody Nom poems was their forte as well as taste. There is a number of specific characteristics emerged in Trinh Lords' Tang prosody Nom poems as following.

1. Regarding to the number of words in a sentence (one poetic line)

According to statistics in *Collection of Vietnamese Nom literature* (vol. 2) and *Tứ bình thực lục (Four sets of Chronicle)*, we have found that almost Trinh Lords' Tang prosody Nom poems are seven-word poems (or seven-word lines mix with six- or five-word lines), there are only 04 completely six-word poems and there is no five word poem. The trend of seven-word poetry was also the general trend of Tang prosody Nom poetry in 15th to 18th century and even in 19th century. What researchers often pay attention to is the appearance of "seven-word mixed six-word" poems or there are even completely six word poems.

Specifically as following: *Khâm định thắng bình bách vịnh* has 88 Tang prosody Nom poems, in which 10 of them are seven-word mixed six-word poems, accounting for 11.4%. *Lê triều ngự chế quốc âm thi* has 46 Tang prosody Nom poems, in which 4 of them are completely six-word verse and 11 of them are seven-word mixed six- word verse, accounting for 32.6%. *Cần*

Nguyên ngự chế thi tập has 228 Tang prosody Nom poems, in which 12 of them are seven-word mix six-word verse, accounting for 5.3%, 1 poem is seven-word mixed five-word verse. *Trịnh Sâm* has 10 Tang prosody Nom poems, in which 1 is seven-word mixed five-word, accounting for 10% (there are not so many people agree on this figure currently).

Comparing with other books of poetry (according to statistics of Nguyễn Phạm Hùng): *Quốc âm thi tập - National language poem collection* (has 186 seven word poems in total of 254 poems, accounting for 73.2%); *Hồng Đức quốc âm thi tập - Hồng Đức national language poem collection* (135 six-word poems in the total of 328 poems, accounting for 41.2%); *Bạch Vân quốc ngữ thi tập - National language poem collection of Bach Van* (97 six-word poems in the total of 161 poems, accounting for 60.2%); *Ngôn ẩn thi tập - Collection of no name poems* (5 six-word poems) etc. (Nguyễn Phạm Hùng, 2006). The statistical results and comparisons show that Nom poetry of Trinh Lords was in the period when the number of six-word lines in Tang prosody Nom poetry was decreasing but still in favor and composed quite a lot; there were even poems with entirely six-word lines (it happens more often in Trinh Lords' Nom poems than others).

2. Regarding to position of six word line in seven word poem

Six-word line can appear in any position in Tang prosody Nom poems of Trinh Lords (like other collection of poems of

other authors). Overall, we can find the phenomenon of mixing seven-word line and six-word line in composing poems of Trịnh Lords was still popular (especially, 4 poems in *Lê triều ngự chế quốc âm thi* of Trịnh Cương have completely six-word line poems which are: *Bồ Đề thắng cảnh thi* - Poem inspired by the sight of Bồ Đề, *Cốc Có thi* - Poem about Cốc Có, *Phúc Long tự thi* - Poem about Phúc Long temple, *Hựu Phả Lại tự thi* - Poem about Hựu Phả Lại temple), however, it was a decreasing trend. In Nom poetry of Trịnh Sâm, seven-word poetry was very rare (1 out of 10 poems). This also reflects the development of Tang prosody Nom poetry from 15th century to 19th century generally was returning to traditional prosody of Tang prosody poetry.

The alternation of seven-word and six-word lines in composing Tang prosody Nom poems is considered to be an attempt to “Vietnamize” Tang prosody poetry to build “Vietnamese style of poetry” (Phạm Luận, 1991; Nguyễn Huệ Chi, 1977; Nguyễn Phạm Hùng, 1997), or an “unconventional” form to affirm national identity in a visible manner (Lã Nhân Thìn, 1997; Nguyễn Hữu Sơn, 1998...). It is argued that this change was purely due to history of Vietnamese phonetic in 15th to 17th century (Trần Trọng Dương, 2003) or influence of Chinese ancient poetry (three-word poetry) (Nguyễn Đăng Na, 2010) etc.

Although there are many different opinions, this can be recognized as a unique phenomenon which creates

identity of Tang prosody Nom poetry from 15th to 18th century specifically. In terms of aesthetic effect, the presence of six-word line in seven-word poem has certain meaning. It creates more solid, powerful, steady tone and rhythm for poetic lines (with rhythm 2/2/2 or 3/3), creates “conversational” impression and therefore we can find the specific tone which author wants to emphasize, especially when it is the first or last line of the poem. For example:

*Nhất Ninh Sơn/ nhị Phượng Sơn,
Trà khoái lạc/ hản còn hơn.*

*Bảo Khánh lại đành trồng thượng phẩm,
Chín cam mùi ấy thuở nao sờn.*

*Bình trà phẩm (Comment on the
qualities of tea) - Trịnh Doanh*

The first six-word couplet of the poem creates a balanced, definitive list of teas and its qualities. And the first and the last six-word line of the following poem create a solid, unruly, consistent claim:

*Mặc chiều/ mặc sáng/ mà nghe,
Mỗi tốt ngòi câu vện mọi bề.
Cười kẻ dỗi mỗi nhà thiếu mẫu,
Sao bằng/ lộc nước/ đầy khe.*

(Tá điều ngụ cảnh từ - Trịnh Doanh)

Especially, poems with completely six-word lines deliver impression of being compact, balanced rhythm, light-headed feeling like taking off and flying over beautiful scenery or becoming emotionally attached to the beautiful nature:

*Tịnh càn khôn/ ghề một bầu,
Bao hình thế/ bốn bề râu.*

Phong lưu hậu/ xây nền hậu,
 Thú vị mẫu/ ngụ ý mẫu.
 Quán nguyệt/ trông in/ đáy nước,
 Chày kinh/ vang nện/ bên lầu.
 Yên vui bởi/ dân thuần cổ,
 Ý xưa sau/ sở thích cầu.

Bồ Đề thắng cảnh thi - Trịnh Cương

Poems such as *Phúc Long tự thi* - Poem about Phúc Long temple, *Lại thơ chùa Phả Lại* - Poem about Phả Lại temple (completely six-word lines) also create a unique impression with interwoven rhythm 2/2/2 and 3/3. Regarding to Tang prosody Nom poems with completely six-word lines like these, there may be just one similar poem (*Chùa non nước* - Non Nước pagoda in *Hồng Đức quốc âm thi tập*); there are more six-word poems in Tang prosody Vietnamese Hán poetry (about 30 poems) but still rare compared with Hán five-word or seven-word poems. That makes these poems to become more unique and unusual.

In some cases, there is a combination of seven-word and five-word lines in Tang prosody seven-word and eight-line poem. It is the case of *Vịnh Dục Thúy sơn phong cảnh* - Poem inspired by landscape of Dục Thúy mountain of Trịnh Doanh:

Trần an thế đất vững bên trời,
 Nhân trí nơi nơi triếp mọi nơi.
 Trâm kết biên xanh gài trước đỉnh,
 Là giếng đai ngọc dẫn ngoài nhũn.
 Một bầu thế giới còn dường vẽ,
 Tám bức phong quang đã khác vờ.
 Điểm được Nam thiên danh đệ nhất,
 Tạo thành chĩnh nhiệm bài.

Actually, the alternation of seven-word line and five-word line in poem was not in the poetry history of Vietnam. If this was indeed Trịnh Doanh's intention then it had created unusual effect when it was placed as the last line of the poem. Together with some similar poems in *Quốc âm thi tập* of Nguyễn Trãi, this is also a unique phenomenon which creates a distinctive imprint in terms of unconventional Nom poems of Trịnh Doanh.

3. Regarding to the number of line (poetic line) in a poem

The number of eight-line poems accounts for an overwhelming proportion of 76.3% (only in *Collection of Vietnamese Nom literature* vol. 2). Four-line poems are only concentrated in Trịnh Doanh's compositions with *Cần Nguyên ngữ chế thi tập* (228 Tang prosody Nom poems, in which 87 four-line poems, accounting for 38.16%). According to the statistics of *Collection of Vietnamese Nom literature* (vol. 2) and *Tứ bình thực lục* - Four sets of chronicle, Trịnh Lords' Tang prosody Nom poetry is only eight line poetry: *Khâm định thắng bình bách vịnh* (88 Tang prosody Nom poems are all eight-line poems), *Lê triều ngữ chế quốc âm thi* (46 Tang prosody Nom poems are also all eight-line poems), Trịnh Sâm's Nom poetry (10 Nom poems, all are eight line poems).

This shows the trend of eight line poem is still the dominant trend. It is suitable with the general situation of Tang prosody poetry in Vietnam: eight line

poetry accounts for greater proportion compared with others (four-line, five-line, six-line, forever-lasting,...). Perhaps the length of four-line poem is not enough to convey much content; forever-lasting poem is too long for a poetic thought, a message, a philosophy or a natural picture; other forms create an asymmetrical picture. Hence, eight-line poetry seems to have the most moderate, neutral, symmetrical, suitable “framework”. This was also the most used “genuine” genre in both writing and examination in medieval.

4. Regarding to rhyming and euphonizing method

Overall, Trữ Lords’ Nom poetry comply with the traditional rhyming and euphonizing method of Tang prosody poetry in general and Tang prosody Nom poetry in particular. Besides, it is worth noting that there are many poems which have sharp rhyme or rhymes are not close with each other, there are many poems which break the rules, does not follow the standard. When reading those poems, they do not sound rhythmically, melodiously and musically like the feature of this verse and create the problem of being “difficult to read”. It may not be due to authors being inexperienced, incompetent but it was their intention. Maybe it was due to their positions, their personalities which allowed them to compose freely, unruly and not being uptight about meter or poetic rules (these poems have the interference between Tang prosody and ancient poetry). However, the most obvious impression when reading these

poems is the effect of turning poem into “prose” or conversation. Hence, the philosophical and narrative features of these poems are enhanced.

Example of a poem with sharp rhyme:

*Trải qua ngoạn vị trong phong thái,
Cảnh trí xem đây đường khả chí.
Uyển nguyệt giăng la nước hiển châu,
Cài chõm dất ngọc non trình thụ.
Đùn đùn trùng tập kể thiên hình.
Lẻo lẻo oanh hòa kiêm vạn thế.
Có lâm tuyền có thị triền,
Luận danh ắt xưng danh vô ngã.*
(Trú Tử Dương thi - Trịnh Cương)

Example of a poem which breaks poetic rules:

*Gây nên ngao cực chống trời đông,
Giá ấy cân xứng vẫn lọt vòng.
Thức ánh minh chu lồng viễn phố,
Tầng xây hoa cái lửa kì phong.
Đan thanh sẵn dạm đồ bông đảo,
Sắt đá bền **luyện** bạn trúc thông.
Trong thuở đắng lâm mây nổi gót,
Thước gang đường đã tiện vằng hồng.*
(Non Đông tự thi - Trịnh Cương)

There is poem which breaks both meter and poetic rules and leads to being “khô độc”:

*Nhất bực rành rành lại thập **thành**,
ở cho thực mặc ấy là ngoạn.
Đầy vơi chớ chớ chiều lòng thế,
Thì mới nên danh giá **tao** đàn.*

(Ban Cung nhân, bài 7, Trịnh Doanh)

Especially, there are some eight-line poem which have flat tone by repeating

exactly one word five times (2 poems: *Luận tài đức - Comment on talent and virtue* of Trịnh Doanh, bài *Nhãn tiền cảnh trí thi* of Trịnh Cương). The 2 poems are as following:

Áng nhân sơn nguồn trí **thủy**,
 Trùng trùng thanh tú gồm sơn **thủy**.
 Thủy tuyền muôn phái dẫn quần sơn,
 Sơn nhiều ngàn hàng bao chúng **thủy**.
 Thủy ánh vàng hồng dải hiều sơn,
 Sơn in bóng quế lông thu **thủy**.
 Sơn sơn thủy thủy khéo khoe đòi,
 Thu lại một đồ sơn hợp **thủy**.

(Nhãn tiền cảnh trí thi tứ thủ -
 Trịnh Cương)

Đức thời là ngọn cội là **tài**,
 Tài đức gồm hai mới đáng **tài**.
 Đức thắng hãy gìn quân tử đức,
 Tài ưu bao sá tiểu nhân **tài**.
 Tài là hoa gấm phô nền đức,
 Đức có thơm danh tổ chữ **tài**.
 Ướm nhắc cân xưng tài miễn đức,
 Trọn tài vẹn đức thánh nhân **tài**.
 (Luận tài đức, 1 - Trịnh Doanh)

The common point of the two poems is the repeat of the rhyme “thủy” – “water”, “tài” – “talent” (next to the word “sơn” – “mountain”, “đức” – “virtue” in the poems) to emphasize the close relationship between these two pairs of concept/object. This unique is difficult to categorize in poetic rules; it may have been a unique way to “play” with poem by royal poetry club at that time. However, as previously mentioned, it is not merely a game of form, the intention to emphasize is very clear in such poems.

In detailed research on prosody of *Ngự đề Thiên Hòa doanh bách vịnh - 100 poems in Thiên Hòa court hall*, Ngô Đức Thọ has pointed out the differences between euphony in Trịnh Căn’s poems and Tang prosody poems (especially in 3rd and 5th words of poetic line) and said this creates the characteristic of “Han Thuyen’s prosody” poetry (Refer to: Ngô Đức Thọ, 1996). However, this opinion has been rejected convincingly by Phạm Luận (Refer to: Phạm Luận, 1996). And according to our thought, it is not really convincing when our understanding of Tang prosody Han poetry and Tang prosody Nom poetry is not really solid and profound. However, Ngô Đức Thọ’s research has opened the possibility that when composing Tang prosody poetry, Trịnh Lords had certain creativity and alternation to make Tang prosody poetry more suitable with Vietnamese phonetics and grammar or to create a slightly difference style of poetry compared with traditional style of Tang prosody poetry. We can see clearly that the rhythms, euphony of Trịnh Lords’ Nom poems are “simpler” than standard Tang prosody poems.

5. Regarding to rhythmic punctuation

Most seven-word Tang prosody Nom poems of Trịnh Lords comply with punctuation of Tang poetry (basic rhythm is 4/3 or rhythm variations are 2/2/3; 2/2/2/1). However, we can find unique punctuation in Tang prosody Nom poems of Nguyễn Trãi – a literati in Hồng Đức’s reign, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm. For example:

*Gẫm nghĩ chi ai dám bén bề,
 Có cơ có mực có ngoan ngày.
 Thênh vai phượng hình dung đẹp,
 Đặt tiếng thiều cách điệu xuy.
 Trai chính bấy/ đà nên đáng lịch,
 Nở nang thay/ đích đáng con nghề.
 Tài năng ấy/ sánh vinh hoa ấy,
 Lòng lấy xa gần ắt chĩn ghê.
 (Kim các tứ siêu - Trịnh Căn)
 Xem ý trời/ đà ấy dực tình,
 Ngại vì mưa lớn mới thanh minh.
 Sương nghiêm và có chiều êm tĩnh,
 Ai quyết nên/ thì mới kể rành.
 (Dữ cung nhân đồ tình vũ - Trịnh Doanh)
 Thú thanh nhàn/ đã đòi ngày trái,
 Nghĩa dẫu yêu/ chi mỗ khắc quên
 (Ban Luân công chí sĩ, 3
 - Trịnh Doanh)*

This punctuation can be considered as an attempt to “Vietnamize” Tang prosody poetry to build “Vietnamese style of poetry” or “Vietnamese prosody”, as rhythm 3/4 is more popular in Vietnamese rhyme poetries (proverb, double-seven-six-eight verse, poem for speaking and singing,...). This probably needs more research as rhythm 3/4 also appears in Chinese poetry (even though it is not common). Nonetheless, we can see that this rhythm 3/4 gives verse the feeling of prose, makes it sound more like narration and have more oral than writing characteristics. Hence, it enhances philosophies and propositional calculus of the verse and brings alertness (not melodiousness or smoothness) to readers when reading. When it comes to

Trịnh Sâm’s Nom poems, this rhythm does not appear anymore. Instead, it is the traditional rhythm 4/3. This is also the common trend of Tang prosody Nom poetry from 15th to 19th century. This suggests that, study on Tang prosody Nom poetry should not ignore Trịnh Lords’ Tang prosody Nom poems.

Besides, the presence of six-word line with balanced, single punctuation (2/2/2; 3/3) also brings rhythm diversity to Trịnh Lords’ Nom poetry which readers could not ignore. It seems to be a deliberate “balanced” rhythm with certain suitable purposes to reflect the contents.

6. Regarding to the use of Sinological classics and poetic data

Trịnh Lords’ Nom poems use quite many Sinological classics and poetic data with rich expression in terms of politics, society, human, nature, philosophy, literature, arts etc. The Sinological classics and poetic data used in Trịnh Lords’ Nom poems can make up a small dictionary^(*).

The purpose of using Sinological classics and poetic data is to show author’s wisdom and elegance; to express the ideology succinctly,

^(*)Vietnamese classics rarely appear in Trịnh Lords’ poems (not to mentioned poems inspired by landmarks which associate with old stories). There are some classics, typically stories related to the Golden Turtle God (in *Lĩnh Nam chích quái liệt truyện - The wonderful tales of Lĩnh Nam*) in *Vịnh nở* and *Lục nhân long* poems of Trịnh Doanh. However, these are poems inspired by “object”, not normal poems. Nonetheless, the presence of Vietnamese classics is the good sign and notable because it shows the tendency of authors to return to national facts, rather than immersing in Sinology.

concisely and in a standard manner. With emperor's "character" playing the key role, Sinological classics and poetic data in Trinh Lords' Nom poems are used for the following purposes: 1) To praise peaceful and prosperous "Nghieu Thuần" society, dynasty; 2) To clearly express emperors' characters in management works; 3) To teach human morality and ethics as well as functions of officials and people in the kingdom; 4) To express artistic soul; 5) To placate, teach servants and concubines.

With those mentioned purposes, Sinological classics and poetic data used in Trinh Lords' Nom poems mainly origin from the classics of Confucianism: *Tứ thư*, *Ngũ kinh* (especially *Kinh thi*), books of scholars, books of Chinese history, Tang poetry, Tong poetry,... For example, in terms of peaceful, prosperous society, there are: Đường Ngu, Thuần phong, Nam huân, Cửu ca, Cát Thiên, Thái cổ phong, Cầm Thuần, Thọ tinh, Cưu ê, Đường cù, hội Long Vân, Chu Tụng, Thuần dã, Chu điền, nội Thang, khúc Lộc minh etc. In terms of faithful servants, there are: Cơ Tử, Gia Cát, Lý Tổ, Tô Vũ, Bùi Độ, Kỳ Anh Hội, Đồng Trọng Thư etc.

The use of classics can be to use the full clause (for example: "chỉ ư chí thiện - *Cẩn phong hóa*, Trinh Doanh), but the most popular use is to use partly: either mention the character's name, title of work involved (such as mentioning historical characters, names of poems in *Kinh thi - The Classic of Poetry* such as *Chung tư*, *Quyển a*, *Đào yêu*,...) with

explanation, or mention the typical words in the clause (for example: "Human's intelligence" is suggestive of the phrase "nhân giả nhạo sơn, trí giả nhạo thủy"; "học hỏi" sums up the phrase "học nhi bất yếm, hỏi nhi bất quệ", etc...); there are also some Sinological classics or poetic data which have been Vietnamized. Researchers often highly appreciate Vietnamization of such classics as it makes them to become closer to readers, and also "confirms the simplicity, master and elegance of national language and literature in assimilation of Sinological materials" (Đinh Gia Khánh, 1978).

Overall, the use of classics, poetic data in Trinh Lords' poems is not different from other Medieval authors. However, when going into more details in terms of diachronic dimension, especially historical development of Tang prosody Nom poetry, we can find different features. For example, Trinh Lords' Nom poems were in the period when Tang prosody Nom poetry used many Sinological classics and poetic data. Furthermore, in consideration of Lã Nhâm Thìn, Trinh Lords' Nom poems also tend to use many tricky classics, poetic data which "are difficult to understand and cause heavy feelings" (Lã Nhâm Thìn, 1997). However, we have to agree that Trinh Lords were highly educated politicians, profound Sinologists. It may be one of the reasons why Confucian intellectuals followed and aided them. And so, the use of Sinological classics and poetic data was for quite practical purposes.

In terms of form and genre, we can see that, Trịnh Lords' Nom poems were quite skilled, diverse and contributed significantly to the development of the art of Nom poetry in Lê Trung Hưng dynasty. This also confirms high literary talent, education level of these politicians cum literary authors □

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