

PROFESSOR DINH GIA KHANH AND THE NATIONAL CLASSICAL LITERATURE

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Professor Dinh Gia Khanh was born on December 25th, 1924 and passed away on May 7th, 2003. This article was written just over 100 days after he left this world.

He is a veteran teacher, a full professor - whose life and cause has been known through a lot of scientific research works which show that he was actually a profound scholar. When he passed away, his friends, colleagues and disciples wrote a lot of essays and articles in his memory to assert the achievements he had made in his research and teaching on culture and literature, with their great sincerity and boundless regret. Being one of his disciples and a colleague of his who had lived and worked with him in the same chair of Classical, Late-Modern and Popular Literature and then in the Faculty of Philology (Language and Literature) at Hanoi University (since 1951), and later, when the late Professor moved to the Institute of Folklore Culture (1983) and ever during his last days of existence, I would like to delve upon his milestone significant contributions via his research and

lectures on our national classical literature which is now called Vietnam's Middle - Ages Literature.

1. His Research Works on Classical Literature

Like almost all the experts of the same generation, Professor Dinh Gia Khanh was fluent in French and English. He could use of Sino-Nom script, and due to his language ability he could enrich his own profound knowledge of foreign and western ancient and modern culture and literature. His whole life was devoted to the three inter-related disciplines of literature: written literature (i.e. Sino-Nom literature) of the ancient, folklore literature and culture. To each of these fields, Professor Dinh Gia Khanh has made important contributions. As far as classical literature is concerned, together with Professor Nguyen Luong Ngoc, he initiated in deciphering, justifying and introducing *Thiên Nam Ngữ Lục* the longest work of history of Vietnam in verses (among the Nom literature) with 8,136 verses in, 1956. After that, dozens of research works specialized in investigating and translating other

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works on literature were published, the culmination of which seemed to be a comprehensive synthetic *Article* entitled *Selected Vietnamese Literature* (1979 - 1980). After he moved to the Vietnam National Institute (then Committee) of Social Sciences, he had administrative work and devoted himself to research into folk culture and literature; moreover he attached importance to the editing of 17 volumes of classical literature (among 40 volumes of the selected work of Vietnamese Literature) in the role of Chairman of the Editorial Council, up till the time the publication of the whole set was completed (in 1997) and was republished for the first time (in 2000).

Professor Dinh Gia Khanh's collection of research works on classical literature includes first *the course-books* to serve the teaching and researching purposes. There are two major sets of which he was the editor-in-chief. The first set is entitled *Vietnamese Classical Literature from the X to the XVII Century* (Education Publisher - Hanoi 1964, 430 pages) [17] co-authored with Bui Duy Tan and Mai Cao Chuong. The quality of the second set, entitled *History of Literature Volume I* (Social Science Publisher - Hanoi 1980) [6], was improved to a new level. Out of the 23 chapters of the second set, he wrote 10. Apart from the chapter entitled *Generalities of Vietnam History of Literature* which was written anew, the other chapters had been extracted truthfully and flexibly

from what he and his collaborators had written earlier.

Secondly, his research papers and articles generalized and introduced a number of problems of literary history and those of classical literary works. Among these are research papers of great stature such as *Eight Centuries of Literary Progression* (in *Collected Works of Vietnamese Prose and Poetry from the X to the XVII Centuries - Culture Publisher - Hanoi 1962, revised in 1976*)[4], *Generalities of the Selected Works of Vietnamese Literature* (in *Selected Works of Vietnamese Literature - Vol 1 - Social Science Publisher, Hanoi 1980, revised in 2000*)[13]; *Nguyen Trai's Ideology of Human Righteousness: An Embodiment of Vietnam's Cultural Mentalist* (in the book *Nguyen Trai - The Nation's Mettle and Quintessence, Social Science Publisher, Hanoi 1980*) [8]. Belonging to this series of research works are the articles on the features of classical literature such as *Towards a Full Understanding of Ancient Vietnamese Literature* (report delivered at the Hanoi University Conference in 1970)[15], *A New Perspective on Ancient Authors and Ancient Literary Works* (*Journal of Literature* No. 3, 1971)[10]. And a number of essays on the lexis of Nom script: *From "cai nghiệt" to "cay nghiệt" (severe) or From Author to Popularity* (*Journal of Language* No. 1, 1971) [11]; *An Investigation into the Semantic of the Word "Nghĩ" in Ancient*

(*Nom*) Vietnamese (Journal of Language No. 4, 1978 and No. 1, 1979) [12]. Here also includes a series of articles introducing the translated works from Nom script of Han script. These can be considered as research articles of great depth on classical texts and their values such as An Introduction to *Thiên Nam Ngũ Lục* [16], to *Lâm Truyền Kỳ Ngộ* (Literature Publisher - Hanoi 1994)[5], Forewords to *Việt Điện U Linh* (Literature Publisher - Hanoi 1960, revised 1972) [12], Forewords to *Linh Nam Chích Quái* (Ghost Stories - Culture Publisher, Hanoi 1960, revised in 1990) [7], Forewords *Quân Trung từ mệnh tập* (History Publisher, Hanoi 1961) [9], An Introduction to *Nguyen Binh Khiem's Prose and Poetry* (Literature Publishing, Hanoi 1983, revised in 1997) [14]. Besides Professor Dinh Gia Khanh also wrote many articles for other journals and newspapers on the nature and value, the scientific significance of the legacies of cultural figures in the cause of national salvation, national construction and defense.

Apart from the above-mentioned research works, Professor Dinh Gia Khanh also deciphered Nom scripts and translated a number of ancient Chinese versions as well as modern Chinese literary works and achieved steady and reliable results. He was the editor-in-chief of the book *Điện cố văn học* (Literary Classical Events - Literature Publisher, Hanoi 1975, re-edited

2001)[2]. This is a rather large volume of high quality, extracted from the deciphered language materials from Nom scripts. This is a comprehensive work which he co-authored with famous scholars such as Chu Thien, Bui Nguyen, Kieu Thu Hoach, Nguyen Thach Giang, Hoang Huu Yen, Vuong Loc, Đàng Đức Siêu. Together with Professor Nguyen Luong Ngoc he deciphered, justified and introduced *Thiên Nam Ngũ Lục*, and together with Professor Nguyen Ngoc San he introduced *Lâm Truyền Kỳ Ngộ* (A Surprised Meeting in the Deep Forest). He translated, with careful and cautious notes some ancient Chinese prose and poetry, and introduced them in the collected works. Together with his colleagues he translated stories and essays in literary works such as *Việt Điện U Linh*, *Linh Nam Chích Quái*, *Ghost Stories of Vietnam*. (Information Publisher Hanoi-1988) [19]. The Resource Center of the Faculty of Literature still stores some translated versions of the Chinese Legendaries, and the noteworthy ones including: *Nhạc Phủ* (Musical Covery), *Hịch Di* (Movement Appeal), *Luận Thuyết* (Commentaries), *Văn Tâm Điều Long* (Dragon Literary Heart) by Luu Hiep¹⁷. These works were translated painstakingly and lucidly

¹⁷ During the prior to and after the 1970s, Professor Phan Ngoc and Professor Dinh Gia Khanh translated *Văn Tâm Điều Long* for archival materials for the Department of Literature and Linguistics. The version by Professor Phan Ngoc was published (Literature Publisher, Hanoi-1907). The 4 translation masterpieces by Professor Khanh, much profoundly elaborated than the original have yet to be published.

noted which used Sino-Nom scripts proficiently and actively. More than anyone else I understand this when working with him till the days he was caught ill at the hospital. These works reveal Professor Dinh Gia Khanh's great contributions to the teaching and study of classical literature.

2. His Important Contributions

Reviewing his aforesaid research works we may see that Professor Dinh Gia Khanh made great achievements in compiling textbooks on the history literature and in introducing and translating classical literary works.

These achievements paved the way and laid the foundation for the development of the whole science. I may recall the facts that at the time we became lecturers (Professor Dinh in 1956 and myself in 1959), there were no course-books on classical literature. Some manuals of history of literature before and after the August Revolution, among them some volumes had been written based on a new point of view, were only reference materials for students of literature. Up till the early 1960s, there were guidelines for writing course books for all the disciplines of the Faculty of Literature at Hanoi University the course-book entitled "*Văn học cổ Việt Nam - Thế kỷ X đến thế kỷ XVII*" (Vietnam's Classical Literature - from the tenth Century to the seventeenth Century) was written by

Professor Dinh Gia Khanh and myself during the period of 1960 - 1963 and it was not until 1964 that the book was published by Education Publisher. The book of over 400 pages (two volumes), was then considered to be rather comprehensive and the first textbook of history of literature to study Sino-Nom scripts in a systematic way. (Nguyen Van Hoan, Journal of Literature N05, 1965) [1]. It was used to train a lot of students of literature of different batches during the anti-American war for national salvation. The foreword runs: "This volume introduces the history of classic literature of our country from the tenth Century to the seventeenth Century... with the requirements of a course-book on the history of literature; we are only concerned with the general process of development of our national literature in the first eight centuries". Thus, with this volume Professor Dinh Gia Khanh was the initiator in compiling the course-book of classical literature of the former Hanoi University currently Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Ten years later this course-book was re-edited and improved with the renovated appearance, qualities, materials and justifications. As a result, the book Vietnamese Literature from the Tenth Century to the First Half of the Seventeenth Century was compiled and published with Professor Dinh Gia Khanh as the editor-in-chief (1978 -

1979). After being republished and revised many times, up till now this book is the most popular contemporary textbook used in Vietnam.⁽⁷⁾

The status of initiating, in the final analysis, was established from the very academic qualities of the research work compiled. According to Professor Ha Minh Duc, this book focuses on the culmination of Dinh Gia Khanh's research capabilities, with the top-ranking investigation pages about the Literature of Middle Ages.

The scientific qualities of these course books on the history of literature and some research works of literary history of Professor Dinh Gia Khanh have been as specific as pointed out by many social scientists, particularly in the series of articles published when he passed away. By the way, I would like to provide some more feelings nourished during the years I was working with him. Professor Dinh Gia Khanh used to attach importance and refer to the following problems:

1. Highlighting the guideline for writing the history of literature in a new outlook, a new point of view: being dialectical, scientific and up dated in conformity with the requirements of training and doing research work at the same time.

2. Placing literature within culture, culture in the whole national community, culture through the long periods of developmental history and at the points of prosperity. Studying the procession of constructing our national culture and literature in connection with the components of national culture and literature and the ancient Chinese culture and literature, Professor Dinh highlighted the features and nature of Vietnamese culture and literature throughout the historical periods, first and foremost those of feudalism. He also succeeded in sketching the formation and development of patriotism, heroism and humanism in our classic literature.

3. For the first time touching upon a number of characteristic features of classical literature (literature composed of morality; the quality of ancient cult and direction; the quality of conventional symbolization, making full use classical typical events, etc.). We may consider this as the early application (during 1963 - 1964) of the viewpoint of studying in the manner of Middle Ages Literature poetic approach.

4. Writing the history of literature should be based on, first and foremost, extensive reading to clearly interpret the discourses of the works. We need to read, also, the materials and investigating different works. We should take great interest, great caution, thorough care and steady grasp of the works

⁽⁷⁾ In both times Professor Dinh Gia Khanh compiled and got printed the course book of Folk Literature before the Sourcebook of classic literature.

themselves and their values. From these we may restrict our misinterpretation and inappropriate evaluation of these works, thus creating confidence in the readers of the book.

5. Being in a firm and abundantly convincing writing style. Professor Dinh Gia Khanh often made precise generalization, well-cohered and reasonable argumentation, with wide and profound thinking, taking into full consideration different hypotheses and offering scientific justifications in his research works. When analyzing a literary work, he often harmonized his profound and lucid knowledge with his sensible cognition and feelings, making vivid and delicate inspirations among the readers giving typical and sufficient evidence. It is possible to say Professor Dinh Gia Khanh's penmanship of literary analysis was concise, delicate, sensible and coherent, lucid and simple, which could be rarely found in the other scholars of his generations.

Another important contribution made by Professor Dinh Gia Khanh was his great achievement in the works of compiling, introducing, deciphering, translating and justifying a lot of literary works. Throughout these activities, he framed up, in a precisely conventional way, an approach, a system of different activities, for the disciplinal work which badly needs this Chinese Nom profound knowledge, and an appropriate research method. Just take

for example his investigation into the authors and the times of appearance of *Thiên Nam Ngũ Lục* (Lingual Reservation of Nam Sky), his initial steps in fixing the data and evaluating *Quân Trung Từ Mệnh Tập* (Registering while in the Army) making survey of the literary copies of *Việt Điện U Linh*, *Linh Nam Chích Quỷ* (Stories of Ghosts), the compiling of the collected works of prose and poetry of Nguyen Binh Khiem etc, as well as the evaluation of literary development of eight centuries (X- XVII) and also through many periods of times (Middle Ages, Late Modern - the X century up till 1945). Through these we can see that Professor Dinh had a well-defined and specialized manner of study for the science of making survey, introduction to and comments on the works of traditional literature. Typical of this type of research works was *the set of collected works of Vietnamese Literature*. This was the series of books initiated by himself in his role as the chairman of the compiling council. Starting in 1978, the finishing touch of the whole set of books couldn't be made until 1997 when the printing was completed. The series were re-edited and improved in 2000 in 42 volumes with the participation of hundreds of scholars, thousands of authors and dozens of thousands of works of various kinds had been selected. And tens of thousands of large-size pages were printed. This huge set of books, which hold records in many respects, supply the panorama of the ten

centuries of our national literary development, initiated by the angelic poem *Nam Quốc Sơn Hà* (The Nam Nation's Territory) (of the X century) and terminated in the *Declaration of Independence* by Ho Chi Minh (on September 2nd, 1945). The literature of the Middle Ages in particular was contained in 17 volumes, making up some 40% of the total. The essay entitled *Generalities of the Collected Works of Vietnamese Literature*, which covers nearly 200 large-size pages is, in essence, a research work which is affluent and, abundant in academicism, and has been painstakingly compiled. This part "generalities" generalizes the formation and development of literature in the cradle of our national culture. It highlights patriotism, heroism and humanism of literature originating from the great resources of patriotic literature, revolutionary literature and the literature rich in humanitarian values. It links the development of the trends, literary inspirations and the ever more abundant and varied acceleration of the reflection modes, genres and literary language. It pays homage to creativity, originality of literary masterpieces and the salient status, quintessence of the outstanding gifted great authors of our ten century literature. Although the part dealing with late modern literature is not profound and wide enough as compared to the previous part, the *Generalities* is actually a research work of high stature

of wisdom and style symbolizing the different research steps of Professor Dinh Gia Khanh's.

Finally I would like to add that during the years of lecturing at Hanoi University and after moving to the Research Institute, Professor Dinh took great interest in unifying, organizing, directing and training the body of researchers, lecturers and compilers of Sino-Nom literature. If we observe carefully a number of research works, particularly the set of Collected Works, we may notice that almost all the famous scholars of social sciences of the nation and later on it has gathered a large body of editors, researchers, teachers and translations of Sino-Nom literary works of the last decade of the twentieth Century were involved in them.

Making his presence on the flow of discipline of researching and lecturing on classic literature, with his profound knowledge, broad outlook, directed by the ideal of progressive, national and modern characters, Professor Dinh Gia Khanh has left us many invaluable works, among which there are a number of research works on Vietnamese Middle Ages Literature. These works are of the great value, laying the foundation, summarizing and setting the directions for further research and for compiling and teaching classic literature during the last half of the twentieth century.

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