

IMPROVING CULTURAL BEHAVING CAPACITY OF STUDENTS WITH ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH TEACHING TRAN NHAN TONG'S POETRY AND FU

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Abstract. Tran Nhan Tong king, the great man in the Vietnamese history, is a convergence of a politician, thinker, and poet. He was also the creator of Truc Lam Zen School (Vietnam). By viewpoint in ecological criticism, studying the Tran Nhan Tong's heritage about the poetry and fu is the wonderful combinational between *ecophilosophy* and *ecoculture*. In this paper, we focus to study the ecological values in poetry and fu of Nhan Tong king. The ideology and religion of Tran Nhan Tong were *Hòa quang đồng trần* (Blend the light with the dust) and *Cư trần lạc đạo* (Living in the world, joyful in the Way). His ecoculture was *natural ecology* and *spiritual ecology* within the harmony between humans and nature. With the determination values of national identity in ecological literature, teaching and studying Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and fu in high school have important missions. The research results are also applied to teach some works of this emperor - poet, such as: *Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon, Early spring morning...* The first role is the connecting medieval literature with the real life. Another role supports students to develop the capacity of behaving with ecological environment. The students will know that how to read the ecological literature and how to manipulate the way of reading ecological literature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, ecoliterature, ecophilosophy, natural ecological environment, spiritual ecological environment.

1. Introduction

The research issues related to the topic and the content of this paper are to study the theory of ecological criticism and research on Tran Nhan Tong.

In theory of ecological criticism Ecological criticism, we were study at the ecological critique of Cheryll Glotfelty [1], the concept of ecological culture, ecological philosophy, ecological literature, and relationships between ecological culture and ecological literature, between ecological culture and ecological environmental education of Xuyen Nhac Vuong [2], Oriental ecology with unified natural thoughts of Luu Phuong [3], human ecology in the time great 4.0 of Le Huy Bac [4]...

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Researchs on Tran Nhan Tong had been Vietnamese Literature in the 10th century and the first half of the eighteenth century (Dinh Gia Khanh and Bui Duy Tan, Mai Cao Chuong) [5], *Vietnamese medieval literature syllabus* (La Nham Thin editor) [6]. Nguyen Kim Son studied Tran Nhan Tong's Zen thought more or less indirectly related to ecological criticism. In general, there are no articles studying Tran Nhan Tong's poems from the perspective of ecological criticism and ecological environment education [7].

This article has two new. Firstly, the study Tran Nhan Tong's heritage and poetry from an ecological critical is the combination of ecological philosophy and culture ecology, people and nature. Secondly, teaching Tran Nhan Tong's poetry to develop cultural behavior with ecological environment for students. This is a necessary of developing the quality and capacity of students in current stage.

2. Content

We can use ecological criticism to study Vietnamese medieval literature and Tran Nhan Tong's works because there are two things: firstly, from the concept of ecological criticism, ecological literature; secondly, and secondly, from the content of writing, *the objective meaning* from the works of Tran Nhan Tong.

2.1. Conceptions

2.1.1. Concept of ecocriticism

Among various definitions of ecological criticism (hereinafter referred to as ecocriticism), the most popular definition is from the American ecological critic - Cheryll Glotfelty (1996): *Ecological criticism is the critique of relationship between literature and nature* [1]. Thus, it is possible to apply ecological criticism to study the medieval literary and Tran Nhan Tong's poetry, fu because they raise *the relationship between literature and nature*, in which literature shows the relationship between human and nature.

Ecocriticism follows two basic trends: *the first trend* is based on deep ecological theory towards the centered ecological approach and natural preservation (topics of nature, human in relations with the nature in terms of psychology, biology...). *Deep ecocriticism* means based on the intention of renouncing the notion of human superiority to nature, which sets human on a higher level than the nature; affirming the concept "equal coexistence" between human and other organisms. The second trend is centered social approach which relates to social issues such as industrialization, ethnicity, post-colonialism, etc. Social Ecocriticism is a global trend reflecting many critical issues of human life not only in a nation but also in all over the world [8]. In Vietnamese medieval literature and Tran Nhan Tong's works, it is possible to study towards two above trends, especially *the first trend: deep ecocriticism*.

2.1.2. Concept of ecoliterature

Ecological literature (ecoliterature) is understood in broad and narrow meanings. By broad meaning, the ecoliterature is "traditional literary works with ecocultural awareness". These works do not directly refer to the term "ecology", but they contain the awareness of harmony between human and nature, the deep criticism about the opposition and separation of people from the nature. By the narrow meaning, the work of ecoliterature is "where the writer takes a clear ecological cultural position, pioneers to

criticize the relationship between human and nature, directly reflects the threat of modern ecology and send out the critical message” [2]. According to the broad meaning in ecoliterature, the medieval literary world has a line of ecoliterature, Tran Nhan Tong's works contains the features of ecoliterature although the author from seven centuries ago did not aware of environmental and ecological issues.

Although the specific feature of ecological literature is reflection of nature, ecoliterature is not simply a depiction of nature and people in the natural landscape, literary works were about to find the solutions for the people to return harmoniously to the world, towards the equality in the development of human and nature. In terms of *the objective meaning* of the works (not the subjective consciousness of the author), many of Vietnamese medieval writings and Tran Nhan Tong's literary works contain this particular feature of ecoliterature.

2.2. Poetry and Fu of Tran Nhan Tong from ecocriticism perspective

First of all, Tran Nhan Tong is the great man as an emperor, a creator of Truc Lam Zen School, a great poet of Tran dynasty.

2.2.1. Ecophilosophy

According to Wang Yuchuan, “ecophilosophy is the starting point of the argument and the basis of ecocriticism” and what ecocriticism absorbs is ecophilosophy [2]. Karl Kroeber also states: “The ecocriticism does not take ecology, biology, chemistry, mathematics, or research methods of any other natural sciences into literary analysis. It only introduces the most basic concept of ecophilosophy into literary criticism” (quoted from Wang Yuchuan) [2]. Accordingly, the ecological literary works express the ecoculture, pioneers to criticize the relationship between human and nature, the awareness of harmony between human and nature, and criticize the opposition and separation of people from the nature.

2.2.1.1. From the perspective of ecophilosophy, the poetry and Fu of Tran Nhan Tong reflect the Buddhist cosmology with theory of Four Elements, the notion “unity of all things” leading to the harmony between man and nature.

According to Buddhism theory of Four Elements, the world is made of four great elements: earth, water, wind, and fire. The universe is a great block called the Great Soul (Brahman). The Great Soul consists of various Small Souls (Atman). The Great Soul is permanent, not alive, not die. The Small Souls after being released from the Great soul have relatively independent lives and life transformation. Human as well as all other objects are small souls born from the great soul with the same origin [9]. Accordingly, “everything has the soul”, people do not perceive that the things around them (grass, wood, lightning, rain...) are different from them. All the things have souls and there are communication processes between them and human being.

According to the theory unity of all things, how the Macrocosm (nature) is structured will be same as how the microcosm (human) is structured like [9]. Everything is not created by the God but by the movement of itself. Such as a law of motion is the law of causing and affecting. Everything can be created and die in the impermanence. Only when the impermanent is enlightened, eternal realms, nirvana, unborn undying can be achieved.

From a philosophical perspective, Tran Nhan Tong had thought and interpreted most of the issues raised by Buddhism philosophy such as tangible, intangible, mind, budda, life, and death, etc [10]. About the relationship between human and nature, Tran Nhan Tong has shown the beauty of nature in harmony with human life. Human harmonized with the nature, considered nature and human as “unity of all things” and the natural world as whole without division and separation. Nature in Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu sometimes is a way to express the content of philosophy or sense of Zen. Sometimes, nature becomes a real aesthetic object. However, nature is usually the feeling of the poet expressing the sense of Zen.

The life of nature is with various shapes, all the things multiply: flowers bloom, birds sing, rain falls, fresh grass which is extremely pure, free, noble, and different from the ordinary life. The author perceives the nature with a calm and peaceful mind by assuming that the essence of the universe is *ruupa-emptiness* (“sắc-không”) when the mind reaches a level of absolutely calm, the transparent and silent mind can be integrated into the essence of universe. The author finds that the nature is a place to nourish his spirit and the desire to integrate eternally with nature. The author opens his mind with the high mountains, moonlight, looking at the storks flying down to the field in the late afternoon, and watching the butterfly in the spring on the fresh flowers with strong flavor and color.

We can find these special Zen observation and Zen feel in the poetry: *Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon: Front and back of the village is smoky - In the shadow of sunset, the scene is half there, half-not* [11]. The Han verse expresses the Oriental aesthetic sense: using the tangible thing to show the reality, the existing thing arises from the empty thing.

Tran Nhan Tong has left many beautiful poems which are masterpieces in classical Vietnamese poetry. There are the sentiments with the desire to integrate into the nature and life. It is a humanist-centered dimension in Tran Nhan Tong's works and also in Vietnamese medieval literature from ecocriticism perspective.

2.2.1.2. *From ecophilosophy perspective, Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and fu reflects the Buddhism worldview with the concept of Blend the light with the dust and living in the world, joyful in the way* (in the mundane world, joyful in the way - attach to nature and earthly life).

Living in the world, joyful in the Way is a Fu written in Chữ Nôm express the ideology of Zen: in the mundane world feel happy in Zen world. It can be said that this work is a declaration of the way of life set out by Dai Viet Buddhism and governed the thought and life of the people at that time. In this poem, Tran Nhan Tong states that the enlightenment is available in everyone and mentions the principle of self-enlightenment by not running to catch (it means that running to find the way will never help to find it out). At the end of fu, he mentioned the notion of “not running to catch”: *Living in the world, joyful in the way, let's go with the causation flow - When hungry, eat - when sleepy, sleep - Jewels in the home, search no more - Facing things, no mind, why ask for Zen?* [11]. The poem expresses a sense of the impermanence of life and the desire to be liberated and achieve the virtue.

The secret of Truc Lam Zen School is to keep the soul free. Free mind means no influence from success, fail, gain and loss. Reaching such a free mood is achieving the real security in which the mind cannot be affected by greed and hatred. Thus, Pure Land is not far away but the self-purification. Zennist does not need to find Buddha in the Western Paradise, he can find the Buddha in the soul.

From ecophilosophy perspective, with Buddhism viewpoints of “*Blend the light with the dust*”, it is possible to see that Tran Nhan Tong’s mind is always towards the life, towards the people and his mind is always sobbing for human suffering. This makes the writings of Tran Nhan Tong be immersed in humanity, humanitarian spirit, and was created a strong attraction to the heart of readers.

2.2.2. Cultural ecology

Ecocriticism leads to the perception of ecological culture with *natural ecology* and *spiritual ecology* in Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu.

2.2.2.1. Natural ecology in Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu

According to Buddhism, the essence and the phenomenal world are not separated, they are like water and waves; the waves are from water then come back to the water; waves are water, on the surface water are waves. Essence is transformed into a visible phenomenon just like water turns into waves.

The second issue in ontology is the phenomenal world is presented by Zen masters from the origin of *ruupa- emptiness*. The things, phenomena appearing and perceived by senses (shape, color...) are ruupa; the thing which go away and cannot be perceived is emptiness. There is emptiness in ruupa because the thing which appear with shape and can be perceived (ruupa) is only a temporary phenomenon. There is ruupa in emptiness because the phenomena and things disappear, their shapes cannot be seen but they do not go away but returning to its eternal essence where it is not created and does not die [12].

These perceptions have led to the concept of living in harmony with nature and the universe. The poet can be inspired by all natural scenes in everyday life. It is the spring landscape in a small and empty temple where willow flowers fully bloom, the birds sing slowly; the clouds are flying softly in the sky in the poem *Spring Scene: In the dense willow flowers, birds singing slowly - The house is painted by the shade, clouds is flying – The guest comes not to raise concern - Standing in front of the handrail watching the translucent blue sky at the horizon* (translated from Han poetry) [11]. In such a quiet scene, the guest is drawn into the natural landscape and does not inquire about humanity, do not consult on Zen, but with the Zen master standing in front of the handrail with many flower and overlook the blue sky in the horizon. The real scene in the sunset has turned into a mind-scene. The guests and hosts are silent. The scenes and human mind are harmonized.

2.2.2.2. Spiritual ecology in Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu

The harmonious combination between Emperor and Zen master - poet has created a rich and diverse spiritual ecological environment in Tran Nhan Tong. Specially, the prominence is the attachment to the country, the people, the attachment with life and the feelings with beauty. By reviewing the historical pages of Tran dynasty, the spirit Tran Dynasty with determination to win with self-reliance, self-confidence have shown. So, living in the magnanimous ecological environment of the radiant era, Tran Nhan Tong

had rhetoric poem. In the poetry *Visit Chieu Lang in a spring* (Chieu Lang is Tran Thai Tong's tomb), Tran Nhan Tong recorded the image of the old soldier who was passionate about telling the story of Nguyen Phong – a victory over the Nguyen troops during the First Resistance: “The old soldiers with white hair until now - Often tells the story of Nguyen Phong” (Tran Thai Tong has the name of Nguyen Phong)” (translated from Han poetry) [11].

In the spiritual ecology of that dynasty, Tran Nhan Tong's poetry also expressed both the beauty in his spiritual life and the spiritual beauty of Vietnamese. There is the harmony between the soft and hard power, aggressive and calm, strong action and deep thinking. These were partly reflected in the poems, which Tran Nhan Tong wrote to welcome the ambassadors of Nguyen (China), such as *welcome Northern ambassador Ly Tu Dien, see off Northern ambassadors Ly Trong Tan, Tieu Phuong Nhai, see off Northern ambassadors Ma Hop and Kieu Nguyen Lang...* In these poems, the words and literal expressions are humble and soft, but the tongue expresses the spirit of equality in the relationship, holding the national independence spirit of Dai Viet.

As Truc Lam founder, with the idea of “Blend the light with the dust”, Tran Nhan Tong's poetry expresses a spirit of earnest attachment to the life. *Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon* contains full of Zen meaning, Zen scene but still brings to readers an afternoon painting of Thien Truong, a soulful countryside of Vietnam: *Front and back of the village is smoky - In the shadow of sunset, the scene is half there, half-not - In the flute of herd, buffalos come back home - Each pair of white stork landing in the field* [11].

With the view of Zen School, Thien Truong scene appears from the sense of ruupa-emptiness of the Buddha: the afternoon looks half there, half-not, both real and virtual. The scenes of front and behind the village blurred as covered by the smoke shows both the reality of the scene with the sunset and the mist, and the virtual illusions of Buddhism. The image of “buffalos come back home” is the real scene of the village in the afternoon and brings the deep philosophy of Buddhism. The Buddha says, “It is like herding buffalo, holding a stick and watch, not let it freely come into the rice pads of people”. The image of the buffalo in the Buddhism scriptures has become the symbol of the process of “taming the mind”.

In the Zen sense, *Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon* still expresses a spiritual life towards life, moreover, towards earthly life with love of nature, love of simple life, wild life [13]. The image of familiar village appearing lively comes from the consciousness of the existence of life. The only sound (flute) dispels the silence. The only motion (the stork landing in the field) brings the vigorous movement to the scene. From the sound to the motion, all of them are active and transform Thien Truong scene from the illusion of Zen to the real life.

2.3. Tran Nhan Tong's poetry, fu and teaching cultural behavior towards ecological environment for students

Donald Worster (1993) has pointed to the need for ecological research in literature. He said that “Today, the global ecological risk was not in the system itself but were in our cultural system. To overcome this danger, we must strive to explain the effect of our culture with the nature. So, the historians, literary critics, anthropologists, and the

philosophers need to study relationship between the culture and ecology. They cannot directly promote the cultural revolution, but can help us to explain some problems which was precisely the premise of the cultural revolution” [13].

In the current context of renovation of curriculum, textbooks and teaching methods, developing cultural behavior with ecological environment through teaching Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu is necessary for high school students.

2.3.1. Building teaching method for ecoliterature

The concept of the universe and humanity of Buddhism in Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu is expressed through the images of nature, rustic life; it is not simply using the philosophical terms and propositions. By studying Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu, from ecocriticism perspective, we propose a process of reading ecoliterature as follow:

- *Identify the relationship between people and the environment expressed in literary works (equality or inequality - human is center or nature is center).*

- *Identify, analyze the environmental symbols - language in the works (words, artistic images).*

- *Build aesthetic attitudes and feelings towards the ecological environment.*

Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon is a typical example of poetry written about nature in Tran dynasty. The poetry with Zen color was composed in the light of introspective thought which links and attaches to real life. *The students need to recognize the relationship between human and environment expressed in the poetry.* This is the relationship between the lyrical characters (the author) and the nature and village landscape, a close relationship described as “Love in the scene, the scene in the love”.

Reading ecoliterature, students need to identify and analyze the environmental symbols - language in the works through words, artistic image

Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon, if the first two verses express the quiet of the scene, bearing the stamp of religious feelings; the next two verses with the image of buffalo coming back to the village, each pair of storks landing in the field express the motion showing the existence of life, the dominance of ruupa to emptiness and the motion to the quiet. The flute breaks the quiet of the scene, makes it more alive. These are the vivid sounds and familiar images of life.

The sound of the flute, which is considered as the call of life, helps the Zen master awake after the minutes of Zen; the image of white storks, each pair landing in the field is a vivid expression of an active incarnation. The words: “pairs” and “each pair” are a manifestation of the proliferation, the beauty of life that the Zen master wants readers to be drunk into. Along with the transformation of the scene, the Zen master also wants to express the transformation of his own consciousness from the *virtual* to the *real*, from the *invisible* to *visible*, thereby affirms the existence of the world.

2.3.2. Building the cultural behavior with the environment

2.3.2.1. The students listen to the sound of nature: plants, animals have their own voice, people need to listen and understand them.

The poetry *Early spring morning* by Tran Nhan Tong is an example: *Wake up and open the window - Unbelievably the spring has come - A pair of white butterfly – The flapping wings fly to flowers.* Natural language is represented by the spring image, such

as white butterflies fly to the flowers. All the things are cheerful, full of vitality in the spring: blossoming flowers, paired butterflies are engaged to welcome the spring. The image of a pair of white butterflies flying to the flower is the love language of animals in the natural world. The poet listens, understands and then his soul is filled with spring color and spring love.

Respecting the eternal law of nature is a way for people to live harmoniously with the world. The concept of living in harmony with the nature has changed the belief of human dominion over the nature. Therefore, this concept will bring the value of the enlightenment and perceptive meaning, which can change human behavior with the nature at the present and in the future.

2.3.2.2. Improving cultural behaving capacity of students with ecological environment is to create in the “safe” and “unsafe” mind-set in the natural environment.

One of the central factor in ecoliterature is evaluation the ideals, cultures and social development models of human being that affect to the nature. Human is the product of nature, when faced the power of nature, human have the survival instinct which reminds about the position of human in the natural order [14, 15]. From this view point, teaching Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry and fu can contribute to protest the thought of human dominance over the nature, the thought that people live peacefully in the nature and will be unsafe when the nature is destroyed.

From the peaceful countryside scene with the buffalo and village, the image of the storks landing in the field in *Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon*, the students with a safe mind-set can drop their souls into the nature, peaceful environment existing for thousands of years with the image of white stork in the fork song: “*The storks fly and fly - Fly from the door to the field*”, and the image of buffalo plowing the field, storks in the poetry of Thai Thuan, Hong Duc Dynasty in the later half of the fifteenth century: *The tide flooded the land- The farmer wakes up early to plow the field - Listen to some voice pushing the buffalo - White storks are startled to fly* [11].

From the image of the storks from peaceful life in Tran Nhan Tong’s poetry, in the fork song and Thai Thuan’s poetry, the students realize the panic storks in the war from the poetry *The other side of Duong River* by Hoang Cam: “*There is a white stork fly rapidly – Surf across Duong river to nowhere*”.

From “safe” or “unsafe” mind-set, the students can be anxious when the natural and social environment were destroyed, through which will criticize someone who destroyed natural environment.

Through the above analysis, it is possible to teach lesson *Contemplate Thien Truong in the afternoon* to form a culture environmental for high school students in the following steps: 1. Feel the beauty of the image of your village with your neighbors, fields, buffaloes, storks... close and familiar; 2. The harmony between man and nature; 3. Cherish and appreciate the beauty of nature; 4. Preserve the natural beauty of nature and life.

2.3.2.3. Improving cultural behaving capacity of students with ecological environment is to help the students to become the protectors of ecological environment

Although the works was written in the period when ecological crisis was not a hot issue, Tran Nhan Tong's works have mentioned many issues of relationship between

human and nature. The harmonious relationship between human and nature in Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and fu evokes the students with their thoughts and comparisons about the conflict between industrial civilization and nature. The underlying ecological implications in Tran Nhan Tong's works have great value to awake people, educate students become the environment protectors to save this planet.

3. Conclusions

Improving cultural behaving capacity of students with ecological environment for students through teaching Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and fu will help the learners to discover the values of national identity. They can play the role as a bridge to connect medieval literature and the realities of life. It not only diversifies the learning forms, but also helps to acquire knowledge more effectively. Thereby, the concepts of ecological environment, cultural behavior and ecological environment are not limited to the subject Citizen Education, Biology but also in Literature, increasing the awareness of the student to preserve the natural environment, living space, cultural space for human development, raising living standard, human personality.

Teaching in the cultural behaving capacity of students with the ecological environment through Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and fu were a new viewpoint, that can reveals new values with practical meaning. It can increase the position of Tran Nhan Tong to a new level in history, in the literature, and our lives.

However, the subject of Literature in the high school, ecological criticism is still a new issue, so, the application of ecological criticism theory in the study of teaching Tran Nhan Tong's poetry and fu are the right way for raising awareness and actions of students to protect the environment.

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