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**Conceptualizing Religions (Confucianism and
Buddhism): From Poetic-Stories to Reality in
Indochina**

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Abstract

Influenced by being situated between China and India, two historical giants, the people of the three nations of Viet, Lao and Khome exhibit strong histories of imported cultures. The religions of these regions, which closely connect to people's lives, offer strong symbolisms of lifeworlds and enculturations. People in Indochina assign great significance to living and to interpersonal relationships, more so than toward deities and spiritual agents, as well as to the creation of the cosmos. Here, folk stories frequently include the 'first man,' the messages from which serve to educate society.

This study aims to present that Indochinese poetic stories exhibit imported theories, the moral messages within which have reached levels of mastery in the literary genre, that is, the poetic story. These moral lessons emerge in texts such as Luc Van Tien (Vietnam), Thao Hung Thao Chuong (Lao) and Tum Tieu (Cambodia). Based on historical facts, these texts expose people's attention to humanity's opinions of Confucianism (China) and Buddhism (India). The stories also present differences and similarities, the descriptions of which can offer pathways to explaining social dynamics in modernity. As such, locating markers within figurative talk in this literary genre may inform theories in larger narratives and philosophical texts.

Keywords: Concepts of religions, Confucianism, Buddhism, Poetic stories, Indochina

Introduction

As a result of being between China and India, two large mainstays of civilization, the people of the three nations Viet, Lao and Khome have heritages and religions predicated on imported ideologies. These imported ideologies have significantly moved societal structure in Indochina, thus developing heritage values evident in folk literature.

Buddhism ultimately replaced Hinduism, thus reinvigorating opinions of death and life, as did Confucianism. Buddhism arrived in Indochina prior to Confucianism, and hence had greater popularity. Similarly, Buddhist concepts remain highly influential toward life values, brought to significant prominence in nineteenth century texts.

Lao's Poetic Stories

From the 15th to the 19th centuries, the Lao people were divided into two parts. As the older part, the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang conveyed innovations in music, and in art in general. Musicians were assigned the role of singing praise of the king's victory and the beauty of the palace. As such, the music was divided into two in

Laos: folklore and royal music. Dramatic texts were based on the Indian epics from royal musicians,³ thus giving life to poetic-stories in Lao folklore in the 19th century. Musicians were required to travel far from their places of origin ('muong'), thus inspiring the creation of songs describing homesickness. These were a new genre of song, but now not songs of happiness, rather, about Lao culture. Analyzing the lyrics to these songs substantiates knowledge of sadness in slavery life. Symbols well appeared in the poetic stories. For example, the evil bird in poetic stories symbolized the Thai king. The spirit of forgiving *Xin Xay*, emanated from descriptions of the Buddha's spirit. Here, Confucian concepts appeared as a standard for the leaders of revolutions in Laos, inspiring the development of stories and myths of heroes, represented through music.

Cambodian Poetic Stories

In Cambodia, the Kh'mer ethnicity was the central group in its development of civilization. Building temples, history, and recounts of heroes and Indian epics (*Mahabharata*¹, *Ramayana*) were the daily passions of society, thus contributing to the creation of theatrical productions, but reflexively connected these to Buddhist and Confucianist philosophies. This emerged in poetic stories such as *Tum Tieu*, which was applied to life in many respects. Standards of Chinese heritage and Confucianism were adopted by the folklore tales of Kh'mer. The plot within *Tum Tieu* was similar to that of the "novel" of Ming-Thanh dynasty in China. This was also the case with Diem Vuong in the famous poet-story, *Pham Tai- Ngoc Hoa*, in Vietnam.

Vietnamese Poetic Stories

The influence of Chinese culture to Vietnam was longer than that of Cambodia. As such, both Confucianism and Buddhism were influential. Concepts such as 'the loan' became increasingly popular for leaders. In fact, the Hindu and Buddhist concept of 'dharma,' and the Confucian concept of 'duc' have parallel characters, reflexively moving to larger society and in leadership. As a result, when Vietnamese literature passed the period of Chinese influence, modern authors began to again draw from ancient literature, that is, from Indian literature. *Sita* by Luu Quang Vu in the 1980s and *Rama* by Nguyen Ba⁴ in 1991 are the result of that mixture. These then became moral lessons in works such as *Luc Van Tien* (Vietnam), *Thao Hung Thao Chuong* (Lao) and *Tum Tieu* (Cambodia).

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