



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Seclusive culture of Confucianist Nguyen Trai, Viet Nam**Le Van Tan<sup>1\*</sup>, Nguyen Thi Huong<sup>2</sup>, Hoang Thi Them<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Tourism, Vietnam Trade Union University, Hanoi City, Viet Nam<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Labor Relations and Trade Union, Vietnam Trade Union University, Hanoi City, Viet Nam<sup>3</sup> Institute of Lexicography and Encyclopedia, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi City, Viet Nam

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: May 7, 2024 Accepted: Jul 30, 2024	Nguyen Trai is a great cultural personality. Through his life of political activities as well as the rest of his poetry and literature, Nguyen Trai appeared as a lively and eager Confucian Scholar. That's why his retreat is due to the forced situation, is a temporary solution, to wait for the right time, then re-enter the world As far as circumstances allowed. But the special thing about Confucianist Nguyen Trai is that he expressed his desire to return to the mountain time after time when he felt physically tired in Ức Trai's poetry book. And in Poetry book written in National language, Nguyen Trai had portrayed himself as a true reclusive writer, he committed to the life on the mountain, praised in fascination and refreshing the reclusive life. The article explains and describes the expression of his secluded culture through these two poetry collections.
<b>Keywords</b>	
Nguyen Trai	
Ức Trai	
Confucian	
Reclusive	
Culture	
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**INTRODUCTION**

In the history of Vietnamese national culture, Nguyen Trai is a great poet and writer. In the same time, he was also considered a brilliant politician and diplomat, a great national hero of the Vietnamese people. As a Confucianist, Nguyen Trai left behind a very massive writing career, which spreaded on a broad range of genres and in both languages of the Middle Ages, Chinese and Nôm. Having such an outstanding and culminating Confucianist like Nguyen Trai, it was an honor and pride of any culture in general, the general literature of any nations or countries in the world. Nguyen Trai was recognized by UNESCO as a "World Cultural Celebrity" in 1980 on the 600th anniversary of his date of birth. Up to now, there have been many research Study on author Nguyen Trai from many aspects: from the approach to the history of ideals; from the political - diplomatic approach; from the approach to the aspects of content and the art value of poetry and literature too,... Particularly, in the field of ideal, there have been a number of researchers who was interested in the ideal of seclusion in Vietnam and China according to our observations (also called *nhàn dật*, *nhàn ẩn*, and *nhàn tản* ...)

of Nguyen Trai, especially the expression of that thought through his poetries and poems compositions (mainly through *Poetry book written in National language*).

However, most of the articles and research Study only mentioned Nguyen Trai's reclusive ideal as a way of retreating, otherwise to be a philosophy, a reason of his life in a special situation that he could stay inside to avoid the difficulty, so that he could "temporarily walked away", "temporarily withdrew" and also let him move to nourish and preserve the purity of his soul's ideals in the context of the turbulent time, a social background did not allow him the opportunity to manifest his great ideals. Such results of study are very valuable for us to have the change to refer our thoughts. From here, we would like to form and create a belief that that reclusive ideals of Nguyen Trai Confucianist was raised to a new high level by him, the level of cultural ideals. For a Confucianist like Nguyen Trai, although the choice of the seclusion path was considered as to be ultimately "reluctance", it was clear that he raised that ideal to the stature of a extremely special culture for the scholar those days. Seclusive culture dated back to ancient times in Chinese culture and literature, spanned thousands of years, it has influenced East Asian Sino spheres (Korea, Japan, Vietnam) and in each country, the ideological and reclusive culture absorption of the scholar reached a variety of special creations. Among them, the Confucianist Nguyen Trai in Vietnam was one of the few cases that reached the level of master. Therefore, through the topic of Confucianist Nguyen Trai's Seclusive Culture (surveyed through "*Ũc Trai's poetry book*" and "*Poetry book written in National language*") will help us to understand more clearly, more deeply, more meticulously about the process of acquire and create this very interesting cultural ideal of Nguyen Trai in the history of Vietnamese Confucian literature in the Middle Ages.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, we combined use the following research methods:

### **Interdisciplinary approach to Vietnamese studies, regional studies**

This is a specific method of the branch/specialization of Vietnamese studies and regional studies. Characterized by clarifying, identifying and re-identifying all the valuable aspects of the nation and ethnic people, the interdisciplinary approach mobilizes knowledge of specialized sciences to support the implementation of related research topics. Put the research issues in the context of space - culture - history in order to achieve suggestions which appropriate with the Reality Ages, on that basis, aspects of Vietnamese values, nation and human, national culture and history values are clarified.

### **Method of approaching works of literature from a view**

Literature is a part of a perfect whole of the national culture in general. Therefore, method of approaching to works of literature from a cultural view will help us gain a deeper and more multi-dimensional insight of the expression of the reclusive culture as a beauty of the Confucianist Nguyen Trai's personality in particular, Confucianist's personality in general in the Middle Ages.

### **The method of typology of authors and literary works**

This type of geometry aims to find out the common characteristics of a group of objects which have a sustainable similarities. For this study, we consider the Nguyen Trai Confucianism as a typical character of a kind of Confucian recluse authors in general and as a further one of a subtype of the hermit Confucianist in particular. Nguyen Trai had the common characteristics of the Confucian recluse author type, which was a kind of the reclusive author and have his own interesting expressions. From that, we approach the composition of Chinese poetry and Nom poetry of Confucianist Nguyen Trai in order to clarify the expression, characteristics and values of his reclusive culture.

## Methods of comparative research

The comparative research method is mainly used to discuss how the reclusive writer, especially the Confucianist Nguyen Trai absorbed type of Chinese reclusive writer in the Middle Ages; how the appearance of incidents, example from the old days, and images of Chinese reclusive writer in his Chinese and Nom writings was; At the same time, this method also helps us to have some comparisons among the expressions of reclusive culture of Confucianism Nguyen Trai, *Ức Trai's poetry book to Poetry book written in National language*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction of seclusion concept and seclusive culture

#### The concept of seclusion

“Ẩn” was to know but hide, avoid or not reveal. “Dật” meant happy, also satisfied, mentally and ideologically comfortable. Thus, seclusion can be understood that hiding oneself for self-satisfaction and satisfaction with the individual's life choices. In the history of Vietnamese medieval literature, some typical Confucian recluse authors include Chu Van An, Tran Nguyen Dan, Nguyen Trai, Nguyen Huc, Nguyen Du, Nguyen Binh Khiem, Ngo The Lan, Nguyen Thiep, Le Huu Trac, Nguyen Hang, Chu Doan Tri, Nguyen Huy Vinh, Nguyen Khuyen,...

#### The concept of seclusive culture

At first, if seclusion was known as a situational choice of the confucianists in certain contexts of those days they lived in (however, there were also some Confucianists who chose to live in seclusion from the beginning without ever participating in the mandarin path, like Nguyen Huc or Nguyen Hang), thus, that lifestyle gradually became quite popular with Confucianists. From the expression of resistance to a regime and the unsatisfactory state affair, the Confucianists looked into and accepted seclusion more naturally and flexibly. Seclusion in such a way, the Confucians granted it, not only formal principles (choice of space, living environment, living conditions, clothing, food, hobbies, etc.) but it is also the depth of a ideological philosophy (avoiding turbulence, moving to nourish and preserving true nature, purity of soul, satisfied and neutral attitude of the individual's lifestyle in the face of interference and obscenity). Therefore, seclusion has become a specific type of culture, a spiritual goods, probably only in the Middle Ages of Vietnam in particular, East Asian nations in general.

### Formation basis of the seclusive culture of Vietnamese Confucians and Confucianist Nguyen Trai's choice of hermit lifestyle

The reclusive culture of Vietnamese Confucianists in the Middle Ages was formed on the basis of three main sources: one is from historical - social and ideological - cultural conditions in Vietnam in the Middle Ages in general and particular greatness of that reclusive writer in particular; the second is originating from the fact that Vietnamese Confucianists have flexibly absorbed the ideals of socio-political theories; The third is the creative absorption of the dignitty model of the Chinese reclusive writer in ancient and medieval times. From these sources, Vietnamese Confucianists have made a progress and only absorbed the points that are possible, which meant that they only absorbed what was suitable for the specific conditions of the socio-political context as well as the own conditions of themselves. From that the Confucianists' common choice, Nguyen Trai had his own path- a choice of life and career as to when he played in any role, he also left an indelible mark.

### Formation basic of the Vietnamese Confucianists' reclusive culture

*Historical - social and ideological - cultural conditions of Vietnam in the Middle Ages*

In fact, when forming the behavioral potential of the Confucian recluse author, one of the most important reasons is the “collision” among them with Vietnamese specific historical-social and ideological and cultural conditions. throughout the Middle Ages. It can be said that from this view to consider, it is a common conflict between the regime and contemporary intellectuals. The beginning can be counted at the end of the Tran dynasty, when the feudal society began to decline, the class of kings, mandarins and aristocrats showed negative aspects. In 1341, Tran Du Tong ascended the throne. At that time, the king was too young, only 6 years old. Father of Emperor Tran Minh Tong was old and weak, so he could not manage all the political situations. In the court, sycophantic courtiers appeared around the young king (such as the physician Trau Canh, the chief manager Bui Khoan - a drinking companion of Du Tong).

The king turned to debauchery with insignificant games, such as digging large lakes, transporting salt water to raise seafood... Therefore, the government's work was increasingly delayed. The mandarins also took that opportunity to force the army and citizens to build mansions, temples, raise children to sing for entertainment...). It could be said that by the end of the 14th century, the Tran Dynasty had completely shown its unchanged recession, which made the comporatory elite figures of dissatisfied, disappointed, and depressed. Therefore, they did not have the opportunity to show their desire. This is the most important reason why some Confucianists find a way to retreat and live in seclusion. If not far before, we have encountered a somewhat frustrating thought towards the contemporary political system through the life and poetry of Tran Quoc Tang or Tran Quang Trieu, we can see it more clearly through the cases of Chu Van An and Tran Nguyen Dan. The situation of “collision”, the dissatisfaction among the elite figures of society and the government in the following centuries led to the retreat choice of Nguyen Trai in the 15th century as well as that of a series of other Confucianists, the first half of the nineteenth century in medieval history in Vietnam was quite similar to that.

### **The ideological acquisition of socio-political theories**

It can be affirmed that one of the important conditions to form the kinds of Vietnamese Confucian recluse authors in the Middle Ages is the fact that they have absorbed the roots of the humanity conception of Eastern people from the process of improve their spirit and flexible behavior of Confucianism; Lao - Trang's passive, spontaneous, and free thought, and partly the Buddhist thought of escaping from the mundane and living closely to nature. These streams of thoughts have complemented each other, more and less, which helped Confucianists find a stable foundation of thought when they chose the path of becoming a reclusive writer. Of course, the influence and intensity of these ideals are different for each reclusive Confucianists. For instance, among Chu Van An, Tran Nguyen Dan... there is a rather strong combination between Confucianism and Buddha; Nguyen Huy Vinh, Nguyen Khuyen... the Buddhist mark seems to be faint; Nguyen Trai, Nguyen Binh Khiem... are clearly influenced by ideals.

### **Acquiring the hermit personality model in ancient- medieval Chinese culture and literature**

Seclusion became a tradition in the culture of ancient and medieval China in general and literature of one in particular. In his book *The Chinese reclusive writer*, Chinese researcher Han Zhaoqi (Han Trieu Ky, 2003) provided an overview of some of the basic aspects of seclusion type in this country. According to Han Zhaoqi, the reclusive writer is also known as a human being, a recluse, a scholar... The way to identify reclusive writer is to oppose the mandarin. The earliest names of reclusive writers in Chinese history were Sao Phu, Hua Do, Vuong Nghe, Thien Quyen; nextly Ba Di, Thuc Te, Gioi Tu Thoi, Doan Can Moc... The Nguy Tan period of the North and South dynasties was the period that the most reclusive writers appeared, but the most appreciated hermits were those who appeared in the Duong and Tong Dynasty. The group of Chinese reclusive writers is very plentiful and diversified with many people who composed or not at all. Among them, there are some people having high temperament (Ba Di, Thuc Te, Vuong Chuc of the Tien Tan period); virtuous people (Chu Xung,

Luu Lan Chi in Tan Thu; Khong Man, Thich Dong Van in Song history...); scholarly personalities (Sach Tap in *Tan Thu*, Do Ba, Ha Trung in the Nguyen Dynasty...); those who belong to the type of monks and nuns (Luu Cu in *Nam Te Thu*, Tran Doan in the *Tong Su*, Tu Bach Tran in the Tong Dynasty...); talented people (Truong Chi Hoa in the *Tan Duong Thu*, Lam Bo in the *Tong Su*, Tham Chu, Tran Ke Nho in the *Minh Su*...); lazy people (Nguyen Tich, Luu Linh...); temporary reclusive writers (Khuong Thai Cong, Gia Cat Luong, Luu Ba On...)... The greatest success in literary composition of Chinese reclusive writers in the direction of praising the life, seclusive thoughts as an important expression and shows the depth of the reclusive writer's cultural personality including the literary composition in the subject of *traveling in the mountains* and *the hobby of farming*. In the topic of *traveling to the mountains*, we will see a big difference between the Chinese reclusive writers and the Vietnamese ones. It's easy to realize the Chinese reclusive writer traveling more and farther... it was understandable because the geographical conditions of this country allows the reclusive writer to make trips. On the way traveling to the mountains, they have left very valuable literary works. The greatest contribution in this field is the reclusive writers of the Nguy Tan period of the North and South dynasties, with the two typical authors, Ta Linh Van and Ta Dieu. The two authors rooted from a love for nature and mountains, so they have wander to many places to learn and enjoy the nature. During the Duong Dynasty, many hermits also went to lots of places, but the purpose was to learn about society, path, and the way to be a mandarin. Notable authors included Ly Bach, Manh Hao Nhien, Ly Doan, Ly Thiep, Vuong Mien, Tu Ha Kha, Diem Nhi Mai, Trinh Du Kieu, Ly Truong Thuong, Bang Chi Can, and Ly The Hung, ...

### **Confucianist Nguyen Trai's choice of the seclusive lifestyle**

Nguyen Trai (1380-1442), alias Uc Trai, born in Chi Ngai commune, Lang Giang highway (now in Chi Linh district, Hai Duong province); later moved to Ngoc Oi village, Son Nam Thuong land, Thuong Tin district (now in Nhi Khe commune, Thuong Tin district, Hanoi city). He came from a family with a Confucianism tradition. The great-grandfather was born as Nguyen Ung Long, ie Nguyen Phi Khanh (1356-1429); Grandfather was the mandarin Tran Nguyen Dan (1325-1390).

As a disciple of the Confucian court, he soon chose the path of a scholar following Confucianism: in 1400, with a rather advanced awareness of the new dynasty, Nguyen Trai applied for and passed the Thai student under the Ho dynasty in 1400 and he was assigned the position of Staff of Chief at the age of twenty. The beginning of such his mandarin path could be said to be a blessing. However, Ho Dynasty existed too shortly under the invasion of the Minh Dynasty. From about 1407 until Nguyen Trai found his way to Lam Son to meet Le Loi, it was a period of time that helped him research the history to plan a big picture for the country. History books do not record specifically where Nguyen Trai was at this time, but it can be inferred that he used to visit Con Son and some other places in order to prepare for his new "entering". Around the years 1416-1420, Nguyen Trai offered *Binh Ngo Books* to Le Loi and was immediately used. He was awarded the title of Head doctor of Hanlin Academy, participating in military affairs all day and all night.

The Lam Son uprising was successful, Le Loi ascended the throne and conferred national identity on Nguyen Trai, stripped of *Quan Phuc Hau*, continued to hold the position of *Nhap Noi hanh Khien* (*Highranking mandarin*) as before. His name was engraved on the sign of *Khai Quoc Cong Than*. However, the situation changed, Nguyen Trai had no real power, many of his great aspirations and ideals had not had a chance to materialize. Even around in 1428-1429, he was falsely accused and imprisoned. Fortunately, after that, Le Thai To give Nguyen Trai freedom but deprived him of his national identity and was almost never assigned a major responsibility in the court. After many up - and-down years, in 1439 Nguyen Trai retired from Con Son (Chi Linh - Hai Duong). But the fact that Le Thai Tong went to examine martial arts in Pha Lai - Chi Linh and visited, invited him to return to Thang Long led to the Le Chi Vien tragedy and he had to wait until 1464, he was exonerated. Le Thanh

Tong give a command for Tran Khac Kiem to collect the remains of Nguyen Trai's poetry and literature.

Thus, from an official view, although it had a good start, Nguyen Trai's mandarin path had too many ups and downs, it can be said that he was more sad than happy. His great aspirations for a *national land* with a perfect political model had been permanently were just a pain. All of this has been deeply and touchingly entrusted through his poetry later. For Nguyen Trai, the aspiration towards a seclusive life has existed since he was still in the court (through *Uc Trai's poetry book*) and until he was immersed in the seclusive space (Con Son space), he lived the real life of a reclusive writer with very vivid expressions (through *Poetry book written in National language*).

### **The manifestations of the reclusive culture of Confucianist Nguyen Trai through the “*Úc Trai's poetry book*”**

According to the results of previous researchers, most of the Chinese compositions of Confucianist Nguyen Trai collected in the *Úc Trai's poetry book* were composed by him during his time in the court. There were so many aspirations of a boiling scholar towards the government, the court, the society and to be a dream of a peaceful and prosperous society. But the interesting thing was that even though it was the time when the Confucianist Nguyen Trai was the most heroic, there were also a variety of moments of concern and tenderness of the state of mind. The bitter aftertaste, a bit of sadness and anxiety, and the desire to “stop” have made *Úc Trai's poetry book* a source (though not really much) towards the mountain, forest, and crane... That's why we do research on the expression of the seclusive culture of Confucianist Nguyen Trai, we would like to dedicate a chapter to discuss it in the *Úc Trai's poetry book* And if it was correct, when *Úc Trai's poetry book* was mainly done while Nguyen Trai was in the court, his seclusive culture was the aspiration and dream when it had not yet come true as in the later *Nom Poetry book written in National language*.

The text which was used to investigate the expression of reclusive culture in Nguyen Trai's *Úc Trai's poetry book* and *Poetry book written in National language* was *Nguyen Trai total collected poems* by scholar Dao Duy Anh, Social - scientific Publisher in Hanoi in 1976. Chinese *Úc Trai's poetry book* in this book includes all 199 articles from page 205 to page 392. 199 poetries are divided into many sections: A - Poetries were made while he has not yet been successful; B - Poetries were made after being successful and serving as a mandarin at court; C - Poetries expressed the boredom and wanted to have a rest; D - Poetries were made during the period at Con Son and E - Poetries were made during the days he was supposed to be in China, but according to our survey, a reticent spirit was evident in his compositions from the very first few poems. In total, there are 62/99 articles showing the aspects of the seclusive culture in the Confucianist Nguyen Trai, the rate accounted for 62.62%. This is a high rate when in *Úc Trai's poetry book*, seclusion is still an aspiration and the number of articles was said that Nguyen Trai had done in Con Son, they were fewer. With his own performances, which added an affirmation that characteristics of a scholar in himself mainly focused on the work he undertook and in the literature called “bien ngau” (means a kind of ancient poems from China era) such as Binh Ngo Dai Cao, in Quan Trung Tu Menh Lap...when composing poetry where he could save, convey the peaceful moments in his soul and reconcile unfinished aspirations, it was also a place of love scenes and improvisation,... This will be the best methods to help poet nurture their personality, preserve their good features in the face of obscenity and dust of life. A large part of *Úc Trai's poetry book* was composed while Nguyen Trai was still in the court. However, it was interesting that he has many poems expressing his desire to “quy son”, meant returning to the mountain at that time. That aspiration was like an entrance helping him relieve his sorrows about his unsatisfactory human life. And he has a very special and deep impression on “Gia Son” (old mountain), where he always wished to return. That wishes even entered his dream:

*Tảo tuyết chữ trà hiện trúc hạ,*

*Phần hương đối án ổ mai biên.  
Cố sơn tạc dạ triền thanh mộng,  
Nguyệt mãn Bình Than tửu mãn thuyền.*

**(Mạn hứng, I)**

(Sweeping the snow, cooking tea under the bamboo on the eaves/ Burning incense, sitting in front of the court next to the apricot tree in the yard/ The old mountain lingered in a light sleep last night/ The moon shines on the Binh Than River, the wine was full of boats.) **(Inspiration, No.1)** (Dao Duy Anh, 1976, p.333-334)<sup>1</sup>

The old mountain that Nguyen Trai refer must be Con Son - where he used to follow his grandfather when he was a child. Con Son's peaceful, natural surroundings have left beautiful memories in Nguyen Trai's mind so that whenever he was tired of both physic and mental, he looked forward to returning. Sometimes when he woke up, the image of Con Son appeared again.

*Mộng giác kính viên tam kính cúc,  
Tam thanh hoạt thủy nhất âu trà.  
Hồi đầu lục thập niên tiền sự,  
Song mấn tinh tinh lưỡng nhãn hoa.*

**(Mạn hứng, III)**

(Waking up from a dream of the old garden, with three bunches of bamboos  
Washing the heart clean, with a running water stream and a bowl of tea.  
Turning back and remembering sixty years ago,  
Fading hair, blurred eyes.)

**(Inspiration, No.3)**

The artistic space of *Ức Trai's poetry book* has bold colors of leisure, escapism from obscenity, both reflecting the dream space of Con Son of the ideal and conventional characteristics. It's the space in which the poet wants to neutralize the torments of the world. Nguyen Trai always finds a way to separate himself from the mundane space with aim to preserve the noble temperament of the scholar beyond fame and philistinism. On such a path, it's time the poet seemed to shrink himself in a small personal space to think, to prevent the walk-in visitors. One side is the noise, rivalry and the other side is silence and peace. The image of "bế thư trai" (closing the door of a study room) appeared in lots of poems with this meaning. Eg:

*Nhàn trung tận nhật bế thư trai,  
Môn ngoại toàn vô tục khách lai.  
Đỗ vũ thanh trung xuân hướng lão,  
Nhất đình sơ vũ luyện hoa khai.*

**(Mộ xuân tức sự)**

(Relaxing all day closing the study room,

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations in this article are taken from this book.

There were no customers outside the door.  
 In the sound of rhododendrons calling for late spring,  
 The whole yard is blooming under the drizzle.)

***(Late spring inspired landscape)***

Nguyen Trai wants to separate himself from the world around him, to establish a calm and free attitude. He created for himself such a living space that the poet could hide anywhere, as long as he felt quiet and secure. Some of the places he refer also implied a quiet space: Van Oa, Thanh Hu,... Having dropped his soul into it, the poet felt relaxed and released the hidden gloom in his heart:

*Thanh hư động lý trúc thiên can,  
 Phi bộc phi phi lạc kính hàn.  
 Tạc dạ nguyệt minh thiên tự thủy,  
 Mộng kỳ hoàng hạc thượng tiên đàn.*

***(Mộng sơn trung)***

(Thanh Hu is full of thousands of bamboos,  
 Floating in the stream with a crystal glass.  
 The moon was bright last night, the sky was like water,  
 Dreaming of riding a crane to the fairy palace.)

***(Dream in the mountains)***

Having absorbed the flexible behavior of Confucianism, the spirit of harmony with nature and nature of Lao - Trang and Buddhism, reclusive Confucianists like Nguyen Trai always have an own way of self-satisfaction in his present life. They blended in with nature, lived naturally, as pristine as nature, sought out lots of kinds of entertainment to spend nobly such as reading books (6 times), drinking tea (4 times), fishing (3 times), enjoy natural scenes,...:

*Dao giai hạc lệ song tà nguyệt,  
 Điếu chủ ngư hàn trạo các sa.  
 Đồ giác hồ trung phong nguyệt hảo,  
 Niên niên bất dụng nhất tiền xa.*

***(Mạn thành, II)***

(On the threshold of the jade crane, the moon shined into the grid,  
 Cold fishing wharf, oars guarded the sand.  
 Though I know that was a beautiful wind and moon,  
 It didn't cost a dime year after year to buy it.)

***(Improvisation, No.2)***

Eating and drinking of Confucian scholars at this time was just to maintain life. Appearing in the poems that Nguyen Trai made while he was on vacation in Con Son was very frugal and simple with material available in nature, which the poetic image follows, sometimes the poet exaggerated, but at last there was his own conception of matter that seemed to be absent. Sometimes he didn't care about



it all the long day, but if they are hungry, they will eat pine roots, chew sunlight... All were available, it does not take a dime to buy:

*Tiền thư sổ quyển cựu sinh nha (nhai),  
Cơ thực từng căn tước nhật hoa.*

**(Mạn hứng, II)**

(A few fairy books are old (my) livelihood,  
If you're hungry, eat pine roots and take in the light.)

**(Improvisation, No.2)**

Poetry created for himself the image of a person who hid the world, escaped the world, relaxed in the midst of thousands of domestic cranes, in the midst of tides, dropping his soul into leisurely hobbies. He mentioned himself as a fisherman, his heart was relaxed, all worries about the world were temporarily put aside, his fame and fortune were frivolous. All of this has helped Nguyen Trai cultivate a pure soul, without the slightest life dust:

*Độ đầu xuân thảo lục như yên,  
Xuân vũ thêm lai thủy phách thiên.  
Dã kính hoang lương hoành khách thiếu,  
Cô châu trấn nhật các sa miên.*

**(Trại xuân đầu độ)**

(At the beginning of the wharf, the spring grass is green like smoke (like clouds),  
Another spring rain, the water splashed across the sky.  
The streets outside are deserted, few people went out.  
The orphaned boat rested its head on the beach all day and slept.)

**(Spring ferry at the head of the riverbank)**

### **Confucianist Nguyen Trai's manifestations of reclusive culture through "Poetry book written in National language"**

As mentioned above, Nguyen Trai's collection of Nom poems was said to have been composed mainly during his stay in the mountains of Con Son (now in Chi Linh district, Hai Duong province). The collection of poems consists of 254 poems in Nom, divided and numbered according to various topics and with many different contents. With our approach, *Poetry book written in National language* is a vivid, realistic and moving expression of the seclusive life in both the physical and mental aspects of the reclusive writer Nguyen Trai as well as representing the life of the medieval Vietnamese reclusive writers in general. Two aspects of such life, which were thought to have been raised to a new level, called the seclusive culture/regression culture of the reclusive writer. *Poetry book written in National language* in Nom includes 254 articles, from page 395 to page 476. *Poetry book written in National language* was determined to be done by the researchers during the time when the Confucianist Nguyen Trai was hiding in the mountainous space of Con Son. Therefore, the entire collection of poems shows the dimensions of the reclusive culture about Confucian Nguyen Trai.

Nguyen Trai held a very special affection towards Con Son. The attachment to Con Son was obtained from his childhood following his grandfather and then Nguyen Trai's period as an intellectual here. From a very early age, even when his religious practice was still boiling and eager, he repeatedly mentioned Con Son as a place to return to and relieve his worries about the world issues. He called

Con Son “*Gia Son*”, “*Co Son*”, meant his big house. In the collection of poems in Chinese named *Ức Trai’s poetry book*, there were more than 10 times he expressed his aspiration to return to Con Son, such as: *Quy Con Son chu trung tac*, *Loan hau dau Con Son cam tac*, *Khat nhan Con Son do*, *De Trinh xu si Van Oa do*, *Tong tang Dao Khiem quy son*,... His appointment with Con Son was like an appointment with a “faithful lover”; an appointment with trees, rivers, streams, gibbons, cranes like an appointment with his own soul. The poem that was written at this moment have been read in full of tenderness and anxiety:

*Nhất biệt gia sơn khắp thập niên,  
 Qui lai tùng cúc bán tiêu nhiên.  
 Lâm tuyền hữu ước na kham phụ,  
 Trần thổ đề đầu chỉ tự liên.  
 Hương lý tài quan như mộng ảo,  
 Can qua vị tức hạnh thân tuyền.  
 Hà thì kết ốc vân phong hạ?  
 Cấp giản phanh trà chấm thạch miên.*

***(Loạn hậu đảo Côn Sơn cảm tác)***

(Since leaving home just ten years ago,  
 When he returned, the coniferous chrysanthemums were half-wild.  
 Having an appointment with the forest and stream, why should we betray?  
 Bowing to the dust space, only self-pity.  
 The village has just passed, like a dream coming,  
 The body is not over yet, fortunately the whole body is intact.  
 When can I build a house under the mountain of clouds,  
 To draw water from the slot to cook tea and pillow on the stone to sleep?)

***(After the chaos, he came to Con Son with aim to feel and compose)***

It can be affirmed that after all, the refusal of fame in general is a nice expression of the noble scholars of all the times. *Loi* is material, *danh* is spiritual. In the *danh* (fame), there is *hu danh* (a false fame) and *thuc danh* (a real fame). Generally, once permits have chosen the seclusion path, it means that they refuse to receive benefits from material because at that time, for them, material life no longer has any meaning. As for *danh* (fame), for any Confucianists, this was always a problem that made them worry and torment. There was the notion that a man born in the middle of heaven and earth must have a good career in order to glorify his clan and hometown, most Confucianists tried to study classics and history with aim to have the opportunity to pass the exam and work as a mandarin, or at least could be listed in honor sheet, otherwise make his dream of dedication to the dynasty and society come true. Thus, in *Poetry book written in national language*, in spite of standing from the point of view of the reclusive writer, Nguyen Trai still mentioned fame and fortune as his great concern:

*Mấy phen lần bước dẫm thanh vân,  
 Đeo lợi làm chi hướng nhọc thân.  
 Nhớ chúa lòng còn đơn một tấc,*

*Âu thì tóc đã bạc mười phân.*

***(Bảo kính cảnh giới, 38)***

(Several times step by step to the high position,  
Bringing benefits but making you tired.  
Remember God, heart is far only an inch,  
Anyway the hair is already getting gray ten centimeters.)

***(The precious sword to reflect on oneself, No.38)***

However, this concern of Nguyen Trai was not longer. From the position of a noble Confucianist, he considered fame and glory to be only the suffering and shame, and gaining fame and glory was full of thorns:

*Dưới công danh đeo khổ nhục,  
Trong đại đột có phong lưu.*

***(Ngôn chí, số 2)***

(Under the fame of bringing humiliation,  
In foolishness, it was elegant.)

***(Language contains intention, No.2)***

*Bể học trường văn hằng nhật bới,  
Đường danh lối lợi hiếm khôn tìm.*

***(Bảo kính cảnh giới, số 23)***

(The school of literature was being constantly scavenged,  
The path of gaining benefits was still difficult.)

***(The precious sword to reflect on oneself, No.23)***

Having denied the fame and gain from its philosophical roots, Nguyen Trai, like many other reclusive Confucianists, considered the fame and gain just like a drifting cloud, like dew hanging on a blade of grass, like a dream:

*Danh thom một áng mây nổi,  
Bạn cũ ba thu lá tàn.*

***(Thuật hứng, số 18)***

(Good reputation like a floating cloud,  
Old friends gradually drifted apart after three autumn seasons.)

***(Inspiration, No.18)***

*Phú quý treo sương ngọn cỏ,  
Công danh gửi kiến cành hòe.*

***(Tự thán, số 3)***

(Wealth hanged dew on the grass,

Path of glory sent ant branches.)

**(Self-pity, No.3)**

Denying such fame and gain, Nguyen Trai has found a way to return to the clouds of domestic cranes, so that he could cultivate and preserve his noble temperament in the face of obscurity. In the contemporary socio-historical context, Nguyen Trai's choice and rejection attitude has great value and significance, not only for himself but also as an example for temporary reclusive writers these days. Denying and refusing the fame and fortune showed not only a position but also a choice that not everyone could make, especially when that person was in a position of high authority. As far as we are concerned, what the Confucianist Nguyen Trai showed more than half a millennium ago still remains its topicality.

Establishing for himself a separate lifestyle, Nguyen Trai opened his heart to Con Son space, considering Con Son as his big home. His stay here has helped the poet to become peaceful and cavalier from obscurity. Nguyen Trai himself was very aware of his personality and noble temperament to stand higher than the world and look at it with the eyes of an experienced reclusive writer when all the vanity was no longer attractive to him. In *Poetry book written in National language*, readers will see the image of a poet who had a frugal and simple material life, but his spirit was always satisfied, self-satisfied, comfortable and tried to seek to integrate into the mountainous life. Here are the verses he expressed about his material life:

*Bữa ăn dầu có dưa muối,*

*Áo mặc nài chi gấm là.*

**(Ngôn chí, số 3)**

(Though meal with pickles,

No need for good clothes.)

**(Language contains intention, No.3)**

*Cơm ăn miễn có dầu xoa bạc,*

*Áo mặc âu chi cũ quần đen.*

**(Bảo kính cảnh giới, số 13)**

(Provided that meals had medicated oil,

Even the shirt wearing has got old or black.)

**(The precious sword to reflect on oneself, No.13)**

Particularly, Nguyen Trai has expressed very plentifully in a collection of poems about the elegant pleasure of the reclusive writer. For instance, drinking tea, drinking wine, reciting poetry, walking in spring, fishing, playing the guitar, playing chess, ...

*Cởi tục chè thường pha nước tuyết,*

*Tìm thanh trong vắt tận chè mai.*

**(Ngôn chí, số 1)**

(Uninformed tea is often mixed with snow water,

Find the pure in the tea.)

***(Language contains intention, No.1)***

*Cày chống tuyết ngâm đòi cảnh,  
Cuốc chơi xuân khắp mọi đồi.*

***(Ngôn chí, số 12)***

(Plow against the snow soaked in the scene,  
Hang out in spring on every hill.)

***(Language contains intention, No.12)***

*Ngày nhàn mở quyển xem Chu Dịch,  
Đêm vắng tìm mai bạn Lão Bô.*

***(Ngôn chí, số 19)***

(On a leisurely day, open a book to read Chu Dich.  
An empty night to find friend Lao Bo.)

***(Language contains intention, No.19)***

*Say mình nguyệt, chè ba chén,  
Thú thanh phong, lều một gian.*

***(Mạn thuật, số 5)***

(Drunk in the moon, three cups of tea,  
Hobbies in the cool wind, one-room tent.)

***(Describe the rambling, No.5)***

*Đạp áng mây, ôm bó củi,  
Ngồi bên suối, gác cần câu.*

***(Trần tình, số 5)***

(Stepping on clouds, hugging bundles of firewood,  
Sitting by the stream, hanging the fishing rod.)

***(Owning up, No.5)***

Not only for reclusive writer, but for most poets, nature was always the most ideal environment for them to show their affection. For those who practiced religion, it was free from mandarin or when they have retired, but for the reclusive Confucianists, as soon as they found a way to retreat, they would find a living space, a hidden space of their own, which helped them hide themselves from the mundane. Nature contained itself the true originality, nobility. The pure and quiet nature would be a space opposite to contemporary social life. Nguyen Trai has chosen Con Son as a desirable destination that we mentioned above. Con Son was a mountainous area quite far from the city, with pine, bamboo, mountains, and streams flowing day and night, all of which has become an ideal environment and space for poets to seclude. The artistic point of view of most of his writings at this time needed to be seen from the Con Son space for that reason. Encountered in *Poetry book written in National language*, the image of a poet who was always in harmony with nature; in many places, nature and human have merged mutually. The poet turned his heart to nature, listened to nature, took nature as his companion:

*Núi láng giềng, chim bầu bạn,  
Mây khách khứa, nguyệt anh tam.*

***(Thuật hứng, số 19)***

(Neighboring mountains, birds like a companion,  
Make friend with clouds and birds.)

***(Inspiration, No.19)***

*Lánh trần náu thú sơn lâm,  
Lá thông còn, tiếng trúc cầm.*

***(Thuật hứng, số 25)***

(Hide from the wild animals,  
The pine leaves were still there, the sound of bamboo was held.)

***(Inspiration, No.25)***

*Nước biếc non xanh thuyền gởi bãi,  
Đêm thanh nguyệt bạc khách lên lầu.*

***(Bảo kính cảnh giới, số 26)***

(The water was blue, the boat was on the beach,  
On the night of the silver moon, guests went.)

***(The precious sword to reflect on oneself, No.26)***

Hiding into nature, blending into the mountainous space as a matter of fact, that reclusive writers rarely interacted with social life. In Chinese poetries if we encountered the image of a poet “*be thu trai*” (close the door of study room), then in Nom poetry, it was mainly the image of the poet with himself. There are activities, communications but it was often directed at the main subject:

*Ít nhiều tiêu sái lòng ngoài thế,  
Năng một ông này, đẹp thú này.*

***(Ngôn chí, số 10)***

(More or less wasteful it was not important,  
This man was a handsome man.)

***(Language contains intention, No.10)***

*Rượu đối cầm đàn thơ một thủ,  
Ta cùng bóng liễn nguyệt ba người.*

***(Tự thán, số 6)***

(Sometimes he was alone but he encourage himself that,  
He was with the three “people”: him, his shadow and wind.)

**(Self-pity, No.6)**

*Thong thả dẫu ta ngoài thế giới,*

*La ngàn non nước một thằng hề.*

(Let us loose in the world like a clown,

Many mountains and water and a cheerful person.)

**(Self-pity, No.39)**

Accordingly, Nguyen Trai mainly described his relationship with nature, universe,... And what was very unique about the poet was that he considered nature as a friend, as an old friend, as a soulmate, like a member of their family: birds and animals were friends, daisies were too, clouds were guests, moon...:

*Núi láng giềng, chim bầu bạn,*

*Mây khách khứa, nguyệt anh tam.*

**(Thuật hứng, số 19)**

(Mountains like a neighbor, birds like a companion,

Cloud and moon like a guest,...)

**(Inspiration, No.19)**

Nature gave him a feeling of warmth. Therefore, having been in harmony with nature, the poet felt like he was integrated into the life of a big family. That nature protected and shared the joys and sorrows of the world with him, a variety of desires that had not or never had the opportunity to fulfill.

**CONCLUSION**

In the various situations of each era, the Confucianist Nguyen Trai was forced to have their own “turns” in order to “reconcile” the conflicts inside him, “reconcile” the aspirations and dreams which have been lost forever never had a chance to materialize. The turn towards seclusion has made Confucianist Nguyen Trai’s reputation be forever mentioned as the pinnacle of the reclusive personality model in Vietnamese culture and national literature in the Middle Ages. The vivid and moving expression of the reclusive culture of Confucianist Nguyen Trai through poetic composition is the basic content of this study. In Chinese poetries, the reclusive culture of Nguyen Trai was expressed mainly from the aspect of aspirations: aspiration for seclusive space (Con Son space) and aspiration for life and a feeling of mandarin when everything has never satisfied the Confucianist. Next, The poems in Chinese, which were read from the point of that reclusive culture, made us more sympathetic to Nguyen Trai's painful feelings at that time. In the collection of Nom poems - *Poetry book written in National language*, the reclusive culture was recognized and analyzed when it came true. Therefore, our approach to this section is different from the approach in the kanji poems. *Poetry book written in National language* is a moving, vivid, detailed expression of the Confucianist Nguyen Trai’s reclusive/retreat culture in two main aspects, *material life and metal life*. In the relationship of these two dimensions, the material culture was less referred and the mental culture of the hermit was mentioned more, with more deeply and touchedly.

Through this study, we find that from do research on the seclusive culture of Confucianist Nguyen Trai, it will be a good suggestion for similar topics and comparisons with other hermits of medieval period in Vietnam such as Nguyen Binh Khiem, Nguyen Du, Ngo The Lan, Nguyen Thiep, Le Huu Trac, Chu Doan Tri, Nguyen Huy Vinh or Nguyen Khuyen,... Or There may be also suggestions for choosing a topic, comparing more deeply between the similarities and differences in the hermit culture of ancient - medieval China with the medieval hermits of Vietnam through one or several typical cases.

Ours topic will also be a suggestion for the Japanese and Korean when they had a way to study and research culture, literature, Vietnamese studies in Vietnam to choose topics that compare retreat cultures between their own reclusive writer and ones in Vietnam; and from another topical point of view: whether the knowledge and experiences learned about the hermit culture of the medieval Confucianism is any suggestion nowadays so that the beauty of the hermit's retreat culture is not "lost permanently". Of course, manifestations of that culture, in each era, each cultural-historical space, will have many different points. Our research is just the initial research, we hope to have the chance to come back to discuss more deeply from the above plans of expansion and in-depth.

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