A VISIT TO PARADISE

TRANSLATORS
CHRISTOPHER HARTNEY
TỪ CHƠN

TAI LIEU SUU TAM 2019
hai•không•một•chín
Ebook được làm theo tài liệu do Hiền-Huynh Từ Chơn sưu tầm và phiên dịch. Mọi góp ý, đề nghị bổ túc, sửa đổi những sơ sót do sự trình bày, có thể có, xin vui lòng gửi điện thư vào địa chỉ: tamnguyen351@live.com

Thành thật tri ơn Hiền-Huynh Từ Chơn và Christopher Hartney đã bỏ nhiều tâm huyết và công sức trong việc sưu tập, phiên dịch, biên khảo, đánh máy, in ấn hay phổ biến trên Website ngỏ hậu Giáo Lý Đại Đạo được phổ truyền rộng rãi, lưu lại di sản tinh thần vô giá cho thế hệ hiện tại và nhiều thế hệ tiếp nối mai sau.

California, 23/05/2019
Tầm Nguyên
Website: tusachCAODAI.wordpress.com
A VISIT TO PARADISE

HỘ-PHÁP PHẠM CÔNG TÁC

THIÊN THAI KIÊN DIỄN

Translators

CHRISTOPHER HARTNEY

TỪ CHỌN
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Tòa-Thánh Tây-Ninh
Tây-Ninh Temple
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I would like to express my very great appreciation to Dr Christopher Hartney, Dept. of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney for his valuable cooperation. Thanks to his hard work despite his busy schedule at the university, my translation has been changed into the truly fantastic English verses.

Từ Chơn
LỜI MỞ ĐẦU

Thiên Thái Kiến Diện (Nhìn tận mặt cõi trời) là một tập thơ làm theo luật thơ đời Đường bên Tàu. Tất cả là 77 bài, mỗi bài có 8 câu, mỗi câu 7 chữ, được trình bày theo thể thơ Ô Thước Kiều[1]. Đức Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc tả lại những điều Ngài nhìn thấy khi xuất chơn thần về cõi Thiêng Liệt Hằng Sông.

Nội dung hơi khác với những bài thuyết đạo về Con Đường Thiêng Liệt Hằng Sông. Trong Thiên Thái Kiến Diện, Ngài miêu tả ít nơi đến hơn, nhưng những cảnh Ngài nhìn thấy lại là những tiên tri cho quả địa cầu và nước Việt Nam của chúng ta. Tuy nhiên, những tiên tri này có dạng “sấm” cực kỳ khó hiểu. Điều này là phù hợp với nguyên tắc nội tiều “thiên cơ bất khả lậu”[2] trong các tôn giáo. Dù không được phép nói ra rõ ràng những điều sắp xảy ra, nhưng những bậc đắc đạo vẫn kể lại cho thế gian ở dạng “sấm”. Muốn hiểu những bài “sấm” này, chúng ta phải tìm hiểu rất cẩn thận và còn phải nhờ chút may mắn mà Phật Giáo gọi là có “cần phần” nữa thì mới hy vọng hiểu được.

Còn thêm vài khó khăn nữa cho người đọc ngày nay. Có thể kể ra như sau: Một là, từ ngữ trong tập thơ là tiếng Việt cổ cách đây gần một thế kỷ không còn thông dụng nữa, thí dụ như “sống rốn”, “đi hơi”, “dậy hồn rạo”... Hai là, những điển tích Tàu cũng gây khó cho giới trẻ trong thời đại Internet bây giờ, thí dụ như “cầu Lam”, “Đánh Giáp”... Ba là, lỗi đánh máy khá nhiều, thí dụ “lọng tàn” đánh sai

[1] hai chữ cuối bài thơ trước sẽ là hai chữ đầu bài thơ kế tiếp.
thành “lộng tàn”, “vỗ cảnh” đánh sai thành “vỗ cảnh”...

Vì vậy, chúng tôi đã tra cứu bằng các loại Từ Điển Việt Nam và Từ Điển Hán Việt uy tín, có sẵn ở Việt Nam để sửa lỗi đánh máy và chú thích mọi từ ngữ cổ. Chúng tôi cố gắng trình bày lại để người đọc có thể tiếp cận tác phẩm ở dạng nguyên gốc, còn phần “sấm” thì xin để người đọc tự hiểu bởi vì, nói thật, bản thân chúng tôi cũng hiểu hú hoa mà thôi.

Hy vọng đóng góp nhỏ bé này giúp cho các bạn trong cùng như ngoài Đạo phân nào trên con đường học đạo.

Từ Chơn
Saigon 1/1/2018
THIÊN THÀI KIẾN DIỄN (A VISIT TO PARADISE) contains 77 VIETNAMESE POEMS IN THE STYLE of Tang Poems[1] called Ô THƯỚC KIều[2]. In this anthology, His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc described what he saw while visiting paradise during his astral travels.

The story is a little different from what he described in the sermons on Con Đường Thiêng Liêng Hằng Sống[3]. The Thiên Thái Kiến Diển dealt with fewer places, but what he saw is also the prophecy about Vietnam and the earth. The prophecy, however, is extremely difficult to comprehend. This is easy to understand because the famous principle “thiên cơ bất khả lậu”[4] is always respected by religions. Although religious founders never gave details about what would happen, they still told us the main points through “coded messages”. To decode them, you need a hard investigation and some luck, which is called good karma by Buddhism.

There are some more challenges for contemporary readers. First, most terms are 100-year old Vietnamese unused presently. Second, the Chinese classical references also challenge the present youngsters in the time of the Internet. Third, there are lots of typos in the original book.

Therefore, I have consulted the authoritative dictionaries available in Vietnam to fix the errors and make all necessary

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[2] Magpie bridge, that is the last word of the first poem will be the first word of the next poem.
[4] “The divine plan is not allowed to share.”
footnotes. I try to make a new version for readers to get the exact literal meanings. Readers, however, have to decode the information for themselves because I myself, frankly, still cannot understand the real figurative meanings of the terms.

I hope this small contribution will help both Caodaist believers and other readers with their research.

Từ Chơn
Sài Gòn 1/1/2018
TRONG ÁNG ĐAO NGUYỄN SÁN BUỘC VÀO, THIÊN TH chiar Tien dân trước cao cao.
Mây lành phủ động ra khuôn cửa,
Tống rậm bao cung giống mặt rào.
Hạc Ðạo đón đưa bay xạo xự,
Nai Tăng tiếp rước chạy lao xao.
Lừng Trời lừng thùng[1] ngàn muôn kẻ,[2]
Cuối nói mừng vui đến miệng chào.

Overwhelmed, I entered this astounding realm.
The view of it shook me to my core – it was all so fine.
Gorgeous clouds obscured its entrance, but then
Mighty pines, I now see, surrounding immortal gardens.
Sacred cranes were flying and sacred deer roaming content
As people began to gather, so many people
Waiting, it seems for some great reception.
They greeted each other with true warmth and laughed in amazement.

Miệng chào lại như mặc Tiên Y,
Mỏi đến Rừng Tre hội cuộc kỳ.
Bảy Lão nhắc tình già dẹo cẳng,
Ba Bà hỏi việc mụ ham thi.

[2] Bản gốc in sai là lừng thùng
Đài trăng chị Nguyệt đem cho Ngọc,
Cửa gió chàng Liêm dạy khảy Tỳ.\(^1\)
Cúc, Trúc, Mai, Lan hầu thiết đãi,
Tiếu thiếu nhã trỗi trà khách nâng ly.

Divine robes I was given, and invited with kindness
To sit in the Bamboo Grove\(^2\), to play some chess with
The Seven Sages\(^3\) who, in their worldliness,
Said we'd already met. The Third Female Buddha\(^4\)
Recited poetry, Heng'e\(^5\) offered me a gem stone,
Whilst Master Liêm\(^6\) showed me how he plucks his strings.\(^7\)
We lay back amongst that celestial scenery, and
Listened to such music, sipped truly delicious wine.

When I'd drained my cup, a sacred crane descended

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\(^{1}\) Bản gốc in sai là khải
\(^{2}\) the site where the seven Chinese sages had meetings.
\(^{3}\) A group of Chinese scholars, writers, and musicians of the 3rd century CE.
\(^{4}\) one of the Nine Female Buddhas, who assist God the Mother.
\(^{5}\) the Chinese Goddess of the moon.
\(^{6}\) Can’t find the source. Maybe a famous Chinese musician.
\(^{7}\) a Chinese four-stringed lute.
It bid me report to the Palace of Gold\(^8\)
But all I wanted, alas, was to linger here. . .
Regretfully, at last, I left that party.
My friends wished me Godspeed and told me,
Sincerely, to watch my step as suddenly,
New horizons cracked open at my feet
Great rivers ran, mountains reared their mighty manes.

Giang san in vẻ đẹp như thêu,
Ngảnh lại trung ương thấy chẳng đều.
U ám mịt mờ màu thảm đạm,
Thúi hôi nhơ nhớp cảnh đìu hiu.
Một làn ác khí bao ràng rịt,
Muôn xác tinh ma nhảy dập dìu.
Nghĩ sợ hỏi đon còn ngợ giọng,
Nơi nầy phép Phật gọi danh kêu.

This world was stunning, but at its centre
A foul valley made me so anxious.
A hard-to-see, a melancholy place,
Unclean in both image and smell. In fact
As I got closer, evil pervaded it.
And here I met ghosts dancing in agony
Unsure of where I was, I asked for directions
This, they said, was where incarnation began.

\(^8\) Maybe an important palace in heaven.
Danh kèu là Tục cuộc Tuần hoàn, 
Ác khí làm giềng buộc trái oan. 
Ma thịt quỉ hồn chôn* xác chết, (* ăn?) 
Tà thần tinh quái nuốt xương tan. 
Bờ sông chín ngọn còn in bước, 
Cửa ngục mười đình khó đặt an. 
Chờ bóng Thái Dương lên chính giữa, 
Soi vào địa nghiệt mới tiêu tàn.

The Buddha calls this the circle of life. 
Bad karma sucks souls back into its maw 
It’s where the evil ones live on corpses and where 
Demons feast on human bones evermore. 
Thugs wander the nine-streamed river here 
This ten-celled hell is crammed with sinners. 
They wait with anxiousness for a promised dawn. 
For if the sun comes at last, this evil will be destroyed.

Tiêu tận tận thế át đời rồi, 
Nghe sợ hãi hùng phải nín hơi. 
Mờ mệt nửa say nửa tỉnh,[1] 
Ngẩn ngơ hòa đứng lại hòa ngồi. 
Thương người nghĩ bạn lòng chua xót, 
Tưởng vợ vì con dạ ngậm ngùi. 
Nài nỉ xin đình ngày tận diệt, 
Hầu lo độ rỗi phi tinh tôi.

[1] Bản gốc in sai là nữa
On the Last Day\textsuperscript{[2]} we shall all be destroyed.
This stark realization could stop your breathing.
A fear enveloped me — as if I were drunk
How could I continue my life as before?
For my family, for the whole world I felt
Such pity... “please Lord, delay this
Inevitable day — so that I can plan
And save as many souls as I possibly can.”

Sadness enveloped me, I burst into tears
While I was watching all these terrible things...
A boy armed with a simple fly-whisk
And two spirits carrying an incense burner
Approached in a carriage drawn by five fine
White horses and amidst the clinking of their harness
A booming voice called out to me: “Get in!”
It said I must leave that place, avoid its sin.

\textsuperscript{[2]} Caodaists call it Long Hoa Hội (the Dragon and Flower Competition)
Xăm xăm năm ngựa gió mây đưa,
Ba bực vừa lên có kẻ ngừa.
Con gậy tay cầm, râu tóc bạc,
Cái nhà lá lợp, cửa song thưa.
Cờ vàng quấn mũ mang y đạo,
Nai trắng nương lưng gót võ lừa.
Rằng chiếu Ngọc Hư sai mở ngõ,
Địa thần hầu chực tiếp người xưa.

That heavenly vehicle continued to soar
And when we arrived there waited a man
With a long white beard, bearing a walking stick
Mounted on a white deer and with a yellow flag.
Behind him was a modest thatched house.
Commanded by Ngọc Hu, he waited in his robes
He was Tudi, and he waited for an old friend...
Thú cảm mập mạp bầy thong thả,
Non nước trong veo trái dẫy đầy.
Người có vợ chồng con cháu đủ,
Rần rần rộ rộ góc trời Tây.

I felt like I’d come home, I gazed about,
This landscape was something I’d known before
The thatched houses in the village were the same
Green mulberry trees surrounding them all
Well-nourished cattle wandered around
Fresh water flowed and the orchard trees were bent low
By succulent fruits, children and grandchildren
Blessed each family, prosperous in the West.

Trời Tây mãn nhãn ngó qua Đông.
Nhà ít người thưa bỏ rộng đồng.
Gái lịch, trai thanh, nén đạo cổ,
Mụ thơ, lão trẻ, rất tiên phong.
Thanh thao nhạc phụng trên dương liễu,
Chát chưa kèn nai dưới ba tòng.
Vật thực đủ mùi không khí hứng,
Có ăn có mặc rất thô thäßng đồng.

From gazing at the West, I turned to the East.
A sparsely populated realm with beautiful girls
And handsome sons, the elderly all
Look like sprites and phoenixes dance
To music on the willow trees whilst deer
Wander at large under the pines
Food was in abundance and everyone
Looked affluent, looked perfectly content.

Then I turned my eyes to the South and the people there
Looked so absolutely like fairies that it seemed
They did not even need to pray, their climate was fair.
They worked very little and were very rich.
Whatever they wanted, it was theirs.
In peace they lived, and they had not heard of greed.
Following the Phướn Tiêu Diêu,\(^1\) evil had ceased,
And they fully possessed that land that they called home.

Cam dấy hướng Bắc xét cho cùng,
Thấy lửa lẫy lừng trận khói hunftext
Cảnh vật bể khua hoài lợp cợp,
Thành dải hư nổ tiếng dùng dùng.

\(^1\) the Banner of the Sixth Female Buddha.
\(^2\) bản gốc in sai là ứng
Tâm thấp lucr thiên kỳ Bút—A Narrative of the Journey Through 36 Heavens

Trên hầu chúa quỉ người ba mặt,
Duổi quỏ âm hồn tướng bốn lưng.
Cây, cỏ, thú, người đều trở ngược,
Gươm đâm, tên bắn chết trùng trùng.

But then I chanced to look to the North and saw
A great fire there billowing smoke
With great clamor, all was being smashed
Forts and temples collapsed, explosions resounded
A three-faced devil ruled that place and
A general with four backs scolded the spirits there.
Nature was in ruins, animals slaughtered, and humans
Were all hanged, or had been stabbed, or shot to death.

Hộ Pháp:

Hỏi rằng: bạn đến trước hồi nao?

Evil spirits were in command of that place.
The suffering was everywhere manifest and
My heart weighed low — can the Earthly world be
As miserable as this? Yet Heaven was, strangely,
Equally unhappy. I yearned for some

[bản gốc in sai là xóm]
Familiar face and heard a lady’s voice,
It seemed to ring a bell clearly sounded.

HỔ PHÁP[^1]:
I asked her from whence she’d come.

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Hội nao chàng hỏi chị bên kia,

BẠCH Y TIÊN NỮ:
Sảng sốt dấy qua, ưu la là!
Thật quá tri âm cuối chằm chằm,
Vội nhìn cố hữu hỏi lia lia.
Rằng nơi trần thế chàng không đoái,
Noi bước non Tiên thiếp chẳng lìa.
Ba lượt Thiên Thai cầu mở lối,
Từ đây thảm sớt với buồn chia.

Hearing my question, the lady turned to me.

BẠCH Y TIÊN NỮ[^2]:
“Look! What a surprise! I’m so happy now
To see you, my friend. We need to catch up
On each other’s news, even though you
Ignored me down on earth, But here in heaven
You shall have to accompany me – well you have prayed,
Three times in fact, for a heavenly tour. This is it!.
Let us share the joys and sorrows as we go.”

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Buồn chia thảm sớt chẳng nên hỏi,

[^1]: Dharma Defender, the leader of the Caodaist Judicial Body.
[^2]: the Fairy in White.
Vinh hiển nay mình đã đặng ngôi.
Bồ lúc nhớ thương quên nhắc đến,
Gặp khi hội hiệp với khuyen ngôi.
Mây bay rửa mặt mưa tuôn đổ,
Ngựa chạy vùng mình nước cuộn trôi.
Áo lạnh trầm hương hơ ấm áp,
Thân dầm phất chủ quạt khô rồi.

“From now we’ll share joy and sorrow alike.
Here in these realms with our heavenly status,
We can leave the miserable past behind.
So sit down, please, let us talk.
After your long return through such
Miserable weather, those flying horses must have
Wearied you. Dry your coat, your fly-whisk – make use
Of the incense burner – warm yourself a bit.”

Khô rồi xe thoát đến Trời vàng[1],
Bên mặt nghiêng mình mới hỏi han.

HỘ PHÁP:
Phong cảnh hỏi qua xin khá tổ,[2]
Căn do hiểu thấu nói cho tàng.

BẠCH Y TIÊN NỮ:
Rằng ngôi địa chủ lo sanh hoạt,
 Ấy phẩm Thần Hoàng định loạn an.
Lành dữ thưởng răn coi quả báo,
Rời đây ta rõ máy hành tàng.

[1] Huỳnh Thiên – the Yellow Heaven, the fourth level on the way back to God.
[2] Bản gốc in sai là tổ
After that, we took the divine vehicle and turned towards the Yellow Heaven. I turned and asked her.

HỘ PHÁP:
“I want you to tell me about the scenery I see. Please explain everything you can to me.”

BẠCH Y TIÊN NỮ:
“Of course! There is a Deity, he takes care of Human activities. He’s called the Town God. Through him, moral people are rewarded, and sinners – They are punished. You shall see how it all works.”


After a long time staring into the distance
I saw a cloud and then, a series of buildings on that cloud! At the very edge stood an old man leaning on his stick Beside him another old gent with a very long beard. They showed me the statue of Âm and Dương – of Yin and Yang And suddenly the whole place was brilliant.
If a person can chance to learn how it is that Heaven operates
Then let him have the title of Nhơn Thần\(^1\) or “Human Divinity.”

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Đầu dâu Thiên Địa cùng đồng khai,
Rào bước xuống xe đến Dịch đài.
Đài vạn tự bề ngạn đủ chín,
Thấp cao ba bực nóc chia hai.
Đưa lên một phép thâu Đài thấp,
Thấy trước nhiều ông bận áo dài.
Binh khí quanh mình khua rổn rộn,
Mỗi viên hầu hạ một vài trai.

Every door lay open to welcome the guests
So I got down off the carriage, walked to the Dịch Đài\(^2\)
This Tower of Changes had, in all, nine sections,
With a double roof and a three-step foundation.
It was tall, but with a special magic, I shortened the tower a bit.
Then started up. Some men wearing robes
And carrying weapons that clanked as they strode
Appeared with young servants trailing behind.

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Vài trai đến gọi nói chi chi,
Vội ruốc ai ai đến tức thì.
Biết mặt tánh danh chưa nhớ chắc,
Tưởng mình quen thuộc cũng e khi.
Mấy người nhắm dạng đều oanh liệt,

\(^{1}\) Human Divinity. According to Caodaism, there are three levels: Earthly Divinity, Human Divinity and Heavenly Divinity.

\(^{2}\) Tower of Change.
These youths talked amongst themselves for a time
Then led their masters over to me.
Their faces seemed so familiar and I
Stepped up to them like old friends (yet I’d forgotten their names).
Each one of this party looked so perfectly stately,
That my companions and I were about to kneel. But they cried
“Oh, no, get up, get up. Rise! — The higher position we have around here,”
They said as one “the more humble we need to be.”

Following their gracious lead, we entered the tower.
We were like Mandarins\(^3\) coming to see the king.
On top of that brilliant tower we could see all things and
The shining stars — especially Nam Tào that records all human births,
And Bắc Đầu\(^4\) that tallies all our deaths, and under them

\(^3\) The Officials in ancient China.
\(^4\) also the names of two Deities, who are said to manage the Human Birth and Death Records.
Countless soldiers waiting for orders — and a Great General
His sword held aloft, waiting to give the signal. They rushed about
Easterners all of them, Chinese-looking.

Lots of Westerners were seen in those Chinese lines.
They had as many as four strategists — but only one intent.
The soldiers dropped their spears and shields, started
Giving up the fight, as they began to loose their General
Began to go insane. Then everywhere people were crying out
For food and water, searching for their wives and children
Throughout that bloody carnage, but then, a boy with perfect teeth,
And perfectly white came forth, and all that fighting stopped.

Đu đủ tài bay liệng giữa thinh không,
Nam hướng xôn xao lướt mấy rồng.
Phụng sáng hào quang mây trổ trắng,
Chiếu vàng diệu thể đất nên hồng.

[1] Bản gốc in sai là xuôi
[2] Bản gốc in sai là khiêng và đỗ
Lọng tàn vui rước người ba miệng,
Nghi trượng hoan nghinh mắt một tròng.
Vùn vụt câu tiên quo mỗi hướng,
Nhơn sanh khâm phục khắp Tây Đông.

*Up in the skies, suddenly dragons*
*Plunged and soared in playful flight. Phoenixes*
*Basked in their bright auras, the clouds turned white.*
*Streams of gold covered the land and the earth turned red.*
*With great umbrellas the Three-Mouthed Man*
*Was ceremonially welcomed in. Majestic rites were held*
*For the one-eyed symbol, and by raising his Great Staff*
*In each direction, the peoples of the world were subdued.*

Tây Đông đến học chữ thanh nhàn,
Nắm đặng oai quyền chiếm một phạng.
Đạp đất thành vàng làm của báu,
Thổi tro cất lũy sửa nhà an.
Thảnh thơi biển rộng ngư mừng nước,
Thanh tịnh rừng sâu thú lập làng.
Người hưởng thái bình cơm cứng miệng,
Nam mô xúm tụng tiếng nghe vang.

*Throughout the whole world, people came to learn how*
*To built their nations independent and strong.*
*The soil was a gold that each country could bank.*
*And the carnage was cleared and now houses were built.*
*Merrily did fish through vast oceans swim. Wild beasts ensured*

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[Bản gốc in sai là lồng]

[3] The câu tiên – an ancient weapon which is a staff with a hook at one end.
The forests were at peace, and from the chains of war
Men found themselves released. Prayers of deep gratitude
Resounded across the globe.

Nghe vang tiếng sấm nổ phương Tây,
Đi điều bay lên liễng cả bầy.
Mỏ ngậm lửa hồng, lôi diện nhoảng,
Duối lửa thủy quái, võ phong gây.
Chọn vòng xé đất yếu gái rọ,
Lần bàn ngăn sông quỉ đọng chài.
Túng tíu lại cầu người chẳng tiếp,[1]
Giao long chín miệng cân nhai thây.

But then came thunder rumbling in the West.
Huge flocks of birds circled in the sky and with
Fire in their beaks! They rained down lightening.
Sea beasts stirred their tails whipping up wild storms.
And evil spirits possessed the land laying out harsh traps,
Damming up rivers, laying out their nets, and those caught -
They screamed for help, but no one heard, no one cared
As the teeth of Giao Long[2], and his nine mouths crushed them dead.

Nhai thây còn sót cũng nhiều người,
Bị trận Mê hồn chết ngộp hơi.
Lềnh nghễnh thây phơi nằm chật đất,
Loi nhoi hồn chạy khóc lòng* Trời. (* long?)

[1] bản gốc in sai là tiếu
[2] A river monster in Chinese mythology that is believed to look like a giant crocodile.
Có người đầu khỉ mang đai sắt,
Hóa phép Thiên lung chiếu bóng ngôi.
Che bớt nạn tai người sống rốn,[3]
Dem vào Nam gọi để an nơi.

Those who survived that horrid river monster
Choked and died on the fumes that rose up and off
A great Battle of Illusions — with corpses strewn to the horizons.
The remaining souls cried themselves to death.
But with his broad iron belt a monkey-headed man appeared.
He wove through the world a magic so divine that
He saved from those fumes the last of all men and
Sent them to the south — knowing there they’d be safe.

An nơi Tây lại trở xem Đông,
Cửa nát nhà tan đã chập chồng.
Biển loạn bốn phương thành nhốt cá,
Nuốc tran khắp hương núi doanh rồng.
Thuyền trôi lố xố người trần lổ,
Tuyết bủa giăng giăng thú lạnh lùng.
Sấm nổ động trời xoi đất lủng,
Tiêu tàn cảnh vật ngó không không.

Then I turned and kept my eyes on the East.
Here the houses had been completely destroyed.
Sea water flooded the forts and the fish
Swam, confused, through city streets. The floods drove
Those dragons deep into the mountains.
And people, half-naked, in boats, drifted about.
Animals did their best to suffer the cold and the snow.
With nothing around, lightening struck endlessly that ground.

A General bearing a great bow, appeared from the South
He glistened in that light like a hero of old.
He unfurled wings and flew right across the East —
And so strong, resilient and powerful was he!
He shot a single arrow at the sea
All of humanity was his, they knew he was their leader.
He took the Zodiacal seal, shining as bright as the sun
And handed it to a little man — and was suddenly gone.

Bản gốc in sai là cảnh
With the general gone, the dwarf held onto that seal,
And all I could see was a sad, quiet evening.
The air filled with the scent of a much-wafting incense,
And a cool breeze began to quietly stir.
Being curious at all this I was so full of questions…
And it was then I heard a small, sweet voice calling.
Looking about all I could see now were my three beautiful companions.
Every other divine being had just disappeared.

Together we went downstairs and left the Tower.
We got back in our carriage once again.
It took off and the white clouds floated around us.
The horses now were galloping fast.
Our vehicle turned red because of the dust…
I looked at my companion whose cheeks also reddened.
And desperate to learn, asked her my question:
“If you become divine, how can you help the world?”

My question caused a heavy silence between us
Until this divine maiden made gentle answer:

“My question caused a heavy silence between us
Until this divine maiden made gentle answer:

“Thưa rằng: quen thói e hứ rì net,
Đọa böm làm nghiêm số chàn đói.
Nghĩ cõi Bồng Lai xưa mấy mặt,
Còn tôi bao nã đàm làm hoi.

“I apologize divine one, but it is my habit to ask,
I don’t want to be too profound for any relationship here
I’m surrounded by beings far superior to me,
And being so junior, I’d hate to show off.”

Làm hoi hà mày mặt Hồng nhan,

[1] the Fairy in Blue
[2] Bản gốc in sai là liếng
[3] Bản gốc in sai là nữa
Ghéo kẻ riêng thương đặng phụ phằng.
Duối bóng trăng thanh dầu lánh tội,
Trước gương “Minh cảnh” có liên can.
Sông Mê tính rửa bao hàng lệ,
Biển Ái bỏ trôi mấy đoạn tràng.
Thánh chất ví không trên đỗ vủng,
Bên mình deo duôi mấy hồn oan.

If I am too eloquent, I worry, some woman here
Might find me just too much! And unrequited love – well – it hurts.
On earth such things don’t bring us everlasting guilt.
But in front of the Minh Cảnh[^4] I would surely be condemned.
The tears spilt for love down there could fill a river,
And that river feed a sea of sorrows!
If you dare to break somebody’s heart
Why wouldn’t their ghosts pursue you long after death?

[^4]: “Sin Mirror” which sits in heaven and permits you to reflect upon your activities on earth and then pass judgment on yourself.
“Like so many others” she began “I expected a prosperous life. But in the end, I took my religious vows, became a nun. Was poor and kind and by these means attained that sword That cuts the chain of birth and rebirth and leads one here. And knowing now how life on earth is nothing but a karmic debt I wonder bitterly about how long down there I was stuck.”

BẠCH Y TIÊN NỮ:


BẠCH Y TIÊN NỮ[³]:

“Your story is so different from mine – quite strange Was my previous life, awash in sadness as it was... I was lifted straight to paradise and that might seem grand But I lived through suffering married to a tyrant of a man. I had a truly disastrous marriage. He tormented me Both physically and mentally – a dictator in my own home. And even the story by Tô Huệ[⁴] who wrote of Hồi Văn

[¹] Non thế lăn hat?
[²] băn gốc in sai là chuỗi
[³] the Fairy in White.
[⁴] a Chinese woman, who made a beautiful piece of embroidery called Chức Cẩm Hồi Văn to express her love to her husband. Reading the poem on this, the King was so moved that he allowed her husband, a soldier deployed very far from home, to unite with her.
Couldn’t be as moving as the drama of my life of love.”

HỘ PHÁP:

Tình sỉ hai chỉ đổi bao sầu,
Trở trách anh chừa thói bọc dâu,
Mộng điệp tâm phương xây túy giấc,
Cầu Lam đổi nghiệp sửa Ngân cầu.
Sông Tương đổ ngọc làm Cam lộ,
Đánh Giáp trao châu cất Phụng lầu.
Chia miếng muối dưa chưa đủ Ðạo,
Thà dâng thế giải đứng chung bầu.

Notes: the expressions in this poem are used figuratively. They all refer to Chinese legends. So it is advised to have a look at these notes before reading the English version below, which is not literally translated because that would make no sense at all.

- Thời bọc dâu: short for trên bọc trong dâu, referring to adultery or sex without marriage.
- Mộng điệp: butterfly dream. Zhuang Zi, an ancient Chinese philosopher, dreamed he was a butterfly. Waking up he wondered whether he had been a butterfly or a man. This story is now used to say that life is only a delusion.
- Giấc túy: a sound sleep without any dreams.
- Cầu Lam: (Cầu – bridge. Lam – a name) an ancient bridge in China, where a man found his fiancé and they had a happy marriage.
- Ngân kiều: (Ngân – Milky Way. Kiều – bridge) a legendary bridge in heaven for two lovers, who were separated, to unite once a year.
Sông Tương: a river in China, which is said to have separated two lovers.
Cam lộ: holy water (Buddhism)
Đảnh Giáp: Mount Vu Giáp in China, where a King had sex with a deity. Now the expression is used to refer to a love affair.

HỘ PHÁP:

“When you’re head over heels in love, but it’s not marriage
Well then that is its own kind of pain – blame your lover!
From a Butterfly Dream to a deep dreamless sleep, you move
From the Lam bridge to the bridge of Ngân and your tears
Now flow like holy water. When the monastic life
Is barely enough you gaze up at Mount Vu Giáp but nevertheless
At last you are here with all the immortals
And you’d better now forge a harmonious world.”

THANH Y TIÊN NỮ:

“So wonderful it is that we’re travelling together.
But don’t hide your truths in such allusive verse.
I want to see what this Nhơn Thần can do,” I said.
“I’m not interested in some hearth spirit’s lot.”

THANH Y TIÊN NỮ:

“Well, a Nhơn Thần has at his command all the human resources: Strength in family, and livelihood, and the deep well of friendship, There’s the power of kings, of political parties, And the clear thinking of writers, of intellectuals.”

We were interrupted by the marching of a vast divine army. They saluted us as they passed our carriage. Their suits of armor made them seem invincible. Their weapons were frightening and their bodies were white and brilliant like jade — and skilled they were in deep magic and martial strategy. They marched as one in perfect unison, with elephants and horses in lines that stretched for ever.

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[1] the Kitchen God.
[3] Bản gốc in sai là mảo
[4] Bản gốc in sai là phúng
Several hours travelling and at last I got to see
More palaces and the more I saw the more I admired
All that God had made. And now another tower, so high
I could barely guess. Then a booming voice laughed outrageously:

“Ah, despite my ripe of age I’m still as strong
As men less than half my age, ha, ha!
I am the one who wrote Canonisation of the Deities
They call me the Old Man with the stick and the deer.”

HỘ PHÁP:

Nai vừa vụt nhảy giữa thinh không,[3]
Bát Quái Đồ xây đủ chín vòng.
Tứ hướng trung ương hầu Ngũ nhạc.
Thiên binh thần tướng đến ngàn trùng.
Sáng lòa sấm nổ hào quang chiếu,
Luân chuyển khí dồi trận gió giông.
Bát Quái Đài xây đầy hữu pháp,
Dứng trên điều khiển có Lôi Công.

HỘ PHÁP:

While his deer jumped upon the air, The Bát Quái Đồ,\(^4\)
The great spinning tower, produced countless magical arms.
Its Eight Trigrams spun about nine times
Its five central floors housed the headquarters
That commanded the countless troops, the divine generals,
Everything. As the domain of Lôi Công the thunder god
Thunder, lightening, and auras abounded in that space
Then strong winds came and blew everything to their place.

Lôi Công trở ngoắt ngựa xe bay,
Đem bốn đứa tôi đến chót đài,
Rằng trước cho coi quyền giúp phước,
Rồi sau tỏ rõ phép giao tài.
Kim Quang hiền hữu tua ra sức,
Điện Mẫu muội nương khá trổ tài.\(^5\)
Phút chốc Càn Khôn nên sáng suốt,
Máy linh cơ tạo thảy đều khai.

Lôi Công turned around and waved at our flying vehicle.
He led the four of us to the top of the Bát Quái tower.
He said, “First up, you can see what we are able to do, and later on,
You can discover how talented we are.” Then he addressed his friend: “Kim Quang do for us your very best!” And then to his wife He said: “Điện Mẫu, please also show us what you too can do.” Immediately the sky turned bright and clear. And all the divine apparatuses moved into gear.

Next, Lôi Công maneuvered his twin sacred staffs And forked lightning flickered across the sky. Three thousand worlds came consecutively into view. Then the seventy two planets passed us steadily by. The four great continents of each and their people they sustained Were also clearly seen, as was the nine-storey Jade palace - Full of saints it was. I asked first if I may look at the south Then the look at the other directions in turn.

Lần lần thế giới xệt kim quang, Bát Quái Đài xây giống địa bàn.

[1] According to Chinese mythology, Kim Quang Điện Mẫu is the Goddess of Lightning. She is Lôi Công’s wife.
Vừa đứng lại ham mầu cảnh vật,
Thoạt trông qua mừng* vẻ giang san.[2]
Cảnh vui thú đẹp người hiền hậu.[3]
Nghiệp khéo nghề hay nước lạc nhân.
Một mối thương tâm còn buộc dạ,
Vi nhiều kẻ khó rách lang thang.

Suddenly, a yellow light flashed across the sky
And the Bát Quái Đài[4] became a scale model of the South.
It stopped spinning, and showed the gorgeous scenery there.
Look! There were the things that I was so glad to see
Such adorable animals and such friendly people!
Most were working to build prosperous communities.
I, however, felt some sorrow for everything I saw
There were still a few people struggling hard with poverty.

Lang thang lưỡi thủy bất đầu lòng,
Kêu Dáng Phước Thần hồi bố Ông!
Ông nắm quyền ban, ban chẳng khắp,
Ông cầm phép thưởng, thưởng không đồng.
Để qua các hướng xem ba chỗ,
Gây lộn hai ta tính một sòng.
Cười nói Phước nầy thường ghét Lộc,
Cho hay Lộc Phước chẳng đồng công.

Oh, poor homeless wanderers, where do you wander?

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[2] "Thoạt trông mừng thấy?"
[3] Bản gốc in sai là vẽ
[4] the Ba Gua Tower, the Eight Trigrams Tower.
I wanted to ask the God of Prosperity why, precisely, it was that he forgot those poor people there — and why it was that Not everyone received equal treatment? Not having finished examining the place, I angrily demanded an answer. But laughingly he replied “Poverty is often against the idea of Status. We’ve never gotten along that well...”

Đồng công khó hiệp Đạo cùng Đời, Nho xác tinh thần hết tốt tươi. Vĩ tình cảm quyền toàn trái đất, Đừng lo nâng phận một phương trời. Nghĩ nghiệp nghệ đối lỗ trao cơ thể, Lợi lộc phương Nam hưởng cấp thời. Như tưởng lời khuyên còn hẹp bụng, Đạo đem đổi Lộc dễ như chơi. (Cười)

“It’s hard for riches and morality to unite. Beyond poverty, you can still develop a spiritual life. As a world leader, you should consider these issues on a larger scale, But you shouldn’t be concerned about a few who might fail. For many it may take time to get a job, But for those in the South — they can earn a living whenever they want. And if you still dislike what I’ve said, Then you’d rather have money than morality!” (He laughed).

[1] the three Chinese Deities: Prosperity, Status and Longevity, representing the three attributes of a good life.
[2] You have “prosperity” here — but I am wondering if it should be “poverty”? This would make more sense in relation to the next poem.
Như chơi lời nói rất kỳ khôi,
Đèm Lộc mua Tiên thấy mấy hồi.
Vùn vụt tiếng roi quơ nhấp nhoáng,
Mờ mờ cảnh vật thụt thùi lui.
Vỗ tay tiếng biểu còn suy nghĩ,
Gây gổ trí quên hết nhớ hồi.
Thấy cảnh đẹp xinh điền đất rộng,
Trải nằm ngửa mặt giống tranh bồi.

What he said seemed a bit strange to me:
That money that could help get a heavenly status
Still, Lôi Công’s twin staffs moved swiftly on.
And all that I could see suddenly dimmed.
I forgot the quarrel that had just happened
And thought of what was coming next.
It was then that I saw a beautiful land stretching out,
So gorgeous that it seemed more painting than reality.

Tranh bồi trước cửa kẻ kỳ hình,
Bị đoạt lại rồi tính muốn xin.
Hung bạo ngoài gian lo lấy trộm,
Nhân từ trong sải cứ làm thinh.
Giữa tờ sơn thủy vừa xôm cẳng,
Sa chiếc long châu đánh nát mình.
Cổi Bắc ô ào nghe tiếng ré,
Ghe phun tên lửa bán tiêu binh.
But this amazing painting of a landscape was a stolen thing.
A deformed man kept it at his door and said
We must pay a good price to get it back, while even viler thieves
Planned to steal it from him, and the priests inside
Keep quiet and a precious jewel of the king
Smashed them back as they made to take it.
Loud screams resounded from the north at last
As troops were killed by a naval barrage.

Tiêu bình cảnh vật hiện chơn hình,
Thiên hạ thái bình dứt chiến chinh.
Thầy sải ngồi ca kinh cứu khổ,
Học trò xúm tụng kệ Huỳnh đình.[1]
Trên đầu rực rỡ vô vi khí,[2]
Trước ngực sáng ngời huệ nhãn tinh.
Tà quái sau lưng đeo mắt vẽ,[3]
Đánh thoi bổn Đạo cũng làm thinh.

With these troops gone, the real scenery was revealed.
The war was concluded and people lived in peace.
Priests sat chanting Prayers for Salvation,
And disciples gathered to recite the Huỳnh Đình[4].
Above their heads “vô vi khí”[5] shined on brightly.
On their chests the Divine Eye appeared resplendent.
Wicked men were marked with painted eyes on their back.
The crowds kicked at them, but the faithful left them alone.

[1] Bản gốc in sai là Quỳnh
[2] Bản gốc in sai là rở
[3] Bản gốc in sai là vẻ
[4] the major scripture of Taoism.
[5] wu wei qi – the air of non action (lit.)
Thình không tiếng sấm nổ đùng đùng,
Tà quái té nhào nhảy tứ tung.
Sốt một yêu lồi nằm sấp cặp, (cật)
Thêm hai tiểu quỉ đứng bên hông.
Dưa cầm dùi đục, thằng nghiên mực,
Cậu bận áo nâu, chú khố hồng.
Thấy mắt lưng yêu toan đến gỡ,
Bút linh chiếu phép hóa côn trùng.

In the sky thunder began to boom.
These wicked men fell to the ground or hobbled about.
Another wicked man lay on his stomach.
With other two teenagers laying beside him.
One held a chisel, the other an ink stone.
One wore a pink loincloth, the other a brown shirt.
They tried to remove the painted eyes on their backs,
But were changed into insects by the spell of a sacred pen.

Côn trùng còn đoạt được nhơn duyên,
Ngũ bộ Lôi công định sát liền.
Sét đánh nát thây ra đất cát,
Đời mừng dứt giống kết oan khiên.

NGŨ LÔI[8]:
Xưa người chẳng sợ điều nghe bóng,
Nay Phật cho xem cuộc nhân tiến.

[7] Bản gốc in sai là gở
[8] or Lôi Công – the God of Thunder.
Vì biết vạn căn thường quả báo,
Chưa vào Phật vị cũng Thần Tiên.

But these insects could now cause karmic debts.
So the God of Thunder set out to kill them all.
Struck by sudden lightning, their bodies were dirt.
And everyone was happy to see them dead at last.

NGỮ LỜI:

“People thought it this was a legendary, tale — so they’re not scared.
But now they can see these real events with their naked eyes.
If they could only believe in the law of causality,
They might become an Immortal, or even a Buddha.”

Thần Tiên từ trước độ loài người,
Ô trước nay gần sơ hồ người.
Nam Nhạc cho xem hình trị thế,
U minh hiểu phỏng luật răn đời.
Dứt lời vội giục đôi roi phép,
Hiện tượng liền sanh một cảnh trời.
Trông núi xa xa nhà lố xố,
Tòa mây Nam Nhạc ở trên khơi.

“Once it was the case that deities were very close
To saving all humans, but now because of our impurities
They keep their distance. I’ll let you see
Some punishments from Nam Nhạc[^1] — a vision of Hell.”

Having said so, he maneuvered his twin staffs again.
Another realm appeared at once, and in the distance
Houses rose in the mountains there and a palace,

[^1]: one of the five sacred mountains in China.
The court of Nam Nhạc was suspended in that air.

Both laughter and shouts of agony were heard. Some people there were beautiful, but some were so ugly! Those following the evil spirits to Hell were crying so loudly. Those following the angels to Heaven were cheering with delight. The sinners’ bodies were wrapped in darkness. While the other bodies shone so bright. Husbands jealously bit their tongues, seeing wives ascend. Wives were crying, watching their husbands become divine beings.
So difficult it is to join the immortals in heaven.
First, you need to wash in the Ngân River[1] your sorrows away.
Then a divine flame comes, burns up the pollution in your soul.
Next, the Cảnh Minh[2] purifies your astral body.
After that, Nam Tào[3] teaches you how to formally behave.
Finally, Bắc Đẩu will decide if you’re given a permit to enter.
From Ngọc Hư[4] you must proceed to the Bạch Ngọc[5],
And it is there you get the heavenly title that is yours.

It was a good time for me to witness all of this.
So I requested to see, what was up in the West.
Vibrating a bit, the tower turned to its left.

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[2] Or Minh Cảnh Đài (the Sin Mirror)
[3] Nam Tào and Bắc Đẩu, the two Deities who are responsible for human birth and death.
[4] the Palace in heaven, where God reigns the universe.
[5] the City in heaven, considered the capital of the universe.
[6] Bản gốc in sai là Lổ
And we turned to watch that direction as well.
Kim Quang Điện Mẫu[^7] was coming, carrying out a patrol.
Văn Khúc Long Vương[^8] was ready for duty there.
Lỗ Ban[^9] with his famous hammer was directing so many
On how to build the most beautiful of cities.

Lots of Deities descended to this realm,
Teaching people the mysteries of Địa Tiên[^10] at last.
The minds of the people flew onto tall mountains
While their physical bodies languished on the ground.
They seem suddenly as powerful as gods.
Because now they’ve attained supernatural powers.
The country here was beautiful and people were affluent,
But few of them really knew of morality.

[^7]: the Goddess of Lightning.
[^8]: Dragon King, the God of Water and Weather.
[^9]: Lu Ban, who is revered as the Chinese god of builders and contractors.
[^10]: i.e. modern science and technology.
Người hiền trước có đức thương sanh,  
Nay đến cháu con ở chẳng lành.  
Vinh hiển hưởng thừa dư chút sột,  
Tội tình chất để đã nên thành.  
Chờ xem Thiên luật không tư kỷ,  
Mới rõ Thần minh chẳng vị tình.  
Vừa chỉ roi thần ra trước mắt,  
Cảnh vui đổi thảm thấy mà kinh.

Their ancestors had lived so ethically…
But these new generations lacked all sorts of morals.
Their prosperous life was thanks to past karma,  
But now they committed a great many of sins.
The divine law, however, is absolutely fair,  
So soon their punishment will be quite clear.
Then Lôi Công pointed his staff at their direction.  
And their happy situation changed almost at once.

Mà kinh vi thấy cửa nhà tan,  
Thành lũy trở ra đống bụi tàn.  
Duôi đất trở lên thằng Quỉ chúa,  
Trên Trời khóc dậy lũ hồn oan.  
Đoạt gươm Điện Mẫu làm binh khí,  
Múa búa Lỗ Ban lập chiến tràng.  
Bảo cọp thành chiến đời tận diệt,  
Đội non đội biển hại nhơn gian.
Their houses collapsed
Their forts fell into ruin.
And from the ground rose up the Devil
In the sky dead spirits wailed bitterly.
Diễn Mẫu’s sword was stolen to forge human weapons.
Lỗ Ban’s hammer was used in those battles.
Tigers were converted into sheep.
And everything geared to deep destruction.

Nhơn gian đang chịu khổ đao binh,
Thấy một nàng ra nói cứu mình.
Áo kết trăm hoa thân thể đẹp,
Mào thừa muôn ngọc mặt mày xinh.
Diệu dàng tay mất lần xâu chuỗi,
Yểu diệu tay kia nắm tấm hình.
Đưa tượng Bạch My ra hiển hiện,
Chúng sanh xúm lại gọi Chơn linh.

While the greatly destructive war was going on,
And while this vast destruction was taking place,
A young woman came forth amidst all that war and she said
She’d save the world from all of its pain.
She was gorgeous. She wore and elegant floral dress.
Her hat was studded with huge and precious gems.
A rosary was in her right hands and a photo in the other.
She showed the statue of Bạch My,

[1] the Goddess of Lightning.
[2] Lu Ban, who is revered as the Chinese god of builders and contractors.
But everyone called her Chơn Linh. 

Chơn linh gảm cùng thật linh thay!  
Cái sắc tà tinh phép quá tài.  
Lũ quỉ đến nhìn thần trí loạn,  
Loài ma xem thấy tánh tâm say.  
Để chョン trên đất đen ra trắng,  
Ngó mắt đến người gái hóa trai.  
Tuồng hát giọng đờn làm kể sám,  
Phồn hoa xây lập khắp trong ngoài.

Chョン Linh became really quite powerful!  
She possessed magic beauty that drove evil insane  
As badness stared into her it melted away.  
The ghosts that lived there held passion for her too.  
But wherever she trod changed from white to black.  
The girls she looked at would turn into boys.  
Scripture was replaced by Broadway shows.  
And wealthy states grew row after row.

Trong ngoài đã mạn tôi đến thò,  
Ngôle cùng không tự dể bước nhỏ.  
Uốm hôi Thánh linh đầu vàng đăng,  
Mở lời miệng ngời nói u o.  
Nam phương bay tới ngần đầu cảnh,  
Tây thọ truong lên một lá cờ.

[1] the True God.
Chính giữa linh quang xem thấy Phật,  
Việc nàng đuổi quỉ sửa thiên cơ.

Once she’s completely transformed the secular life,  
She started polluting the holiest temples.  
With religious buildings stripped of their glory  
No one could find the answer to life.  
From the South thousands of flying machines came  
And in Tây Thổ a flag was boldly flown.  
In the center the Buddha could see how she  
Expelled all the evils ones but changed heaven’s plan.

Thiên cơ chưa rõ máy huyền vi,  
Muốn hiểu việc sau sự tức thì.

Rằng nếu tỏ tường cơ bí mật,  
Phương nào rõ thấu phép tiên tri.  
Cửa quyền Tây Nhạc kia xem thử,  
Mặt luật Phong Ðô nọ phải tùy.  
Phú Quí Lợi Danh đời gọi phước,  
Nào dè là cội của ai bi.

But that divine plan was yet to be revealed

HỘ PHÁP:  
“Ị want to know what will happen next!”

NGÚ LƠI:  
“If the secret were revealed too easily,  
There would be no need for the existence of prophecy.

[2] the Western Territory, usually referring to Cambodia.
It would be unnecessary to have the Tây Nhạc[^1]. Phong Đô[^2] with its punishments would be eliminated. On earth, fortune and fame are considered happiness, But they’re actually the root cause of all suffering.”

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Ai bi giọng thảm kể vang vầy, Hồn kê bể đầu, kê quẹo tay. Xúm kiện Long Vương rằng ác nghiêm, Đều thưa Lôi Chấn ở không ngay. Thằng hờn đá đánh ông Quan Võ, Đứa giận ném quăng miếng chiến bài. Oan quỉ không mình la hét o, Chữ “Công” hiện sáng ngó nhăn mày.

“Look! So many lost souls bitterly complain, drenched in tears Because they have died of such vicious wounds. They want to sue Long Vương[^3] for his wickedness. And shout out that Lôi Chấn[^4] is mendacious. Some angrily attack Quan Vô[^5] instead, whilst others Furiously throw away their army command. Then others yell because they’ve lost their bodies. All of them killed because as they chased victory.”

[^1]: one of the five sacred mountains in China.
[^2]: Hell.
[^3]: Dragon King, the God of Water and Weather.
[^4]: another name for Lôi Công or Ngũ Lôi – the Thunder God.
[^5]: Guan Yu, a general serving under the warlord Liu Bei in the late Eastern Han dynasty.
Nhăn mày lứ khác, khóc rù rù,
Trong đó có vài lão Sai tu.
Mổ bụng đón vàng, quăng phổi ruột,
Xẻ đầu net sách, ốm hình thù.
Xương tàn sọ thúi gần người trí,
Thuốc độc gươm trường, cận đứa ngu.
Giành giữ trước sau tranh giỏi dở,
Chữ “Danh” ngo thấy mắt đui mù.

“When concern written on their brows, others complain
Including some monks who suffered agonising surgeries
To make themselves more beautiful. And then there are these
Who crammed their whole life, damning their health
For academic titles, desperate in each moment to join
Ever-more dizzying intellectual circles for fear
That they’d be killed by idiots, and surpassing their peers
Is all the care for, their desire for fame blinds them unto death.”

Dui mủ hiêm kẻ cẳng dò đường,
Mò cát kiếm vàng thấy thảm thương.
Cắt xẻ thịt người đem đổi bán,
Sớt sang máu chúng dựng cân lương.
Cần cù dấu của trong khuôn sọ,
Lẩn bẩn tô nhà với bột xương.
Nghĩ nhớ gia tài xưa khóc mãi,
Trên đầu chữ “Phú” chiếu như gương.
“Blind also are another kind of lost soul.  
Pitifully searching the sand dunes for gold.  
They cut off human meat, sell it in the market, and calculate  
The prices of the blood that the bottle  
They hide their possessions inside human skulls  
Adorn their houses with a powder made from human bone  
But now they cry for all the property they’ve lost  
And can’t see how they die chasing such wealth.”

Như gương nhiều kẻ đẹp xinh thay,  
Cùng đội mão cao cùng áo dài.  
Oan quỉ chạy theo đời trả mạng,  
Cô hồn níu lại hỏi xin thây.  
Trong đài các thấy đầy xương chất,  
Ngoài áo mão xem máu dẫy đầy.  
Xẻ thịt quỉ ma làm tiệc lớn,  
Ánh lòa chữ “Quí” đồi vào ngay.

“The others were beautiful people. Look at their clothes!  
Draped in the finest materials they don’t see  
How they owe their lives to so many other souls  
So why wouldn’t ghosts stop them and ask where their bodies are?  
Their castles store up human bones.  
And blood soaks through those elegant clothes  
They sup on demonic meat at all of their feasts  
And spent their whole lives chasing sumptuousness.”
HỘ PHÁP:

Ngay gian hai lẽ biết sao thông,
Hình luật Thiêng liêng mới giữ phòng.
Một khuyết, một đầy, không đủ đủ,
Một lui, một tới, khó cân đồng.
Sang nhờ có khó sang nên mặt,
Khó chịu nương sang khó bận lòng.
Đời tỷ sợi dây đôi trẻ kéo,
Một đàng thâu đặng, một đàng buông.

HỘ PHÁP:

“It’s hard to say what is good and what is bad,
So how can you avoid breaking the Divine Law?
Both good and bad are so confusing in this world,
It’s so hard to keep yourself moral all the time.
Both good and bad are not mutually exclusive,
But depend on each other in the reality that we have.
Living is like playing at a tug of war,
As one team wins, the other team must lose.”

Buông là tại dở yếu cam đành,
Đã phải tội gì: giỏi, mạnh, lanh.
Ai cũng thủ thân nơi hỗn độn,\(^{[1]}\)
Đời là chiến trận lúc đua tranh.
Đò hay nào để chờ thân chết,
Buồn chải toan gìn ven kiếp sanh.

\(^{[1]}\) Bản gốc in sai là hổn
Đã gọi trần hoàn là biển khổ,
Nếu không lội lặn tội trầm mình.

“In life, our inabilities surely result in failure. If we are
Better, stronger, cleverer, the winner goes unconvicted.
And everyone has to act in self-defense because
In the rat race it is very much a constant battle.
You have to struggle hard to make ends meet,
Or you lose everything and simply die.
The world is often called a vast sea of sorrow.
So try to swim, or be damned for suicide.”

T.T. TIÊN ÔNG:
Trầm mình giải lý rất buồn cười,
Nói ngược sao người chẳng hổ người.
Thiên ý nếu không cho sống thác,
Địa hoàn hà đứt lập nên đời.
“Bối thương sanh” cây chừa vững sức,
“Vì ai chúng” xin chẳng thuận lời.
Nhơn mạng là Trời mình để chết,
Để Trời phải chết hà là chơi.

T.T. TIÊN ÔNG[1]:
“Your argument sounds ridiculous! And you should be
Ashamed of yourself for that. If there were neither birth nor death,
Life would be impossible on earth.
Because of Love, God forgives his people,
The deities do not strictly enforce the Divine Law so that

[1] Thoàn Trưởng Tiên Ông or Thiền Trưởng Tiên Ông – thiền trưởng, a long walking stick of a Buddhist monk. Tiên Ông, an Immortal.
“Man has free will and can decide for himself but
If you terminate a human life, which is like terminating God,
You commit the most serious of crimes.”

Like children who are not taught proper behaviour
People often fight for their favorite cake.
But food is not everything you need.
There are other necessary things that are granted by God.
There is the Divine Law and it’s against even killing insects.
So how dare you people kill each other like this?
To attain Buddhahood, one first must help people live,
Thinking about others comes before thinking about yourself.”

Nên mình khá chọn kế chỉ nên,
Cái kiếp nhơn sanh chỗ tướng bèn.
Thần tục luy gây hoàn xa lởi,[3]
Của phù du đổi bửu thiêng liêng.
Đòa căn lắm kẻ chê điều hậu,
Đắc quả ít trang gớm sự tiên.
Chưa để đeo lưng trăm mối nợ,
Mà vào cho lọt cửa Thần Tiên.

So it’s important to have a good plan for your years.
Don’t think your life will go on forever.
Try to convert your physical body into the Gem of Xá Lợi[1]
And exchange earthly mortality for the sacred dharma.
Countless souls are exiled throughout this earthly world,
But very, very few ever attain Buddhahood.
Because few people pay off their karmic debts
And enter the paradise after death.

HỘ PHÁP:

Thần Tiên đã hiểu chán đời rồi,
Có biết cho người khổ vậy ôi!
Chẳng khác mắt mù đi cảnh tối,
Cũng như mũi nghẹt hửi mùi hôi.[2]
Hơn thua lưỡi giáo chưa an đứng,
Giả thiệt đầu chông khó dễ ngồi.[3]
Ba vạn sáu ngàn ngày ví sống,
Chung qui nào tưởng “phép luân hồi”.

HỘ PHÁP:
“Dear Deities, you know how terrible life is!
So please sympathize with us humans. Please!

[2] Bản gốc in sai là hữi
[3] Bản gốc in sai là dể
Like the blind we have only the dark and we walk
Through life full of beautiful scents but with a blocked nose.
Or we fight incessantly and with no break
Struggle hard, between right and wrong, to choose.
Though we may live to be a hundred or more,
Where is the time to think about our next life?"

So many Scriptures are given to teach reincarnation
But people neither believe in them nor fear them now.
Five religions were established to warn humanity.
Nine heavens work constantly for the world’s salvation.
And you may avoid listening to sermons,
But be scared of the harsh punishments in Hell — we should all be
Determined to do right. It’s better to be stupid
But morally so, than wickedly intelligent as we go.

Hiển lượng thường đang tác Tâm linh.\[^5\]

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\[^4\] Bản gốc in sai là kiên
\[^5\] Bản gốc in sai là tắt
Mildness will bring you spiritual values.
Generosity will fit you to the features of the universe.
Your own minor errors should be considered serious,
But others’ wrongdoings are nothing but forgivable.
Forgive and support others.
Love and protect all the holy men.
Follow the examples set by the Saints and the Immortals.
Be determined to sacrifice your life for salvation.

Khẳng thịnh nhắc thế lại cho căng.[2]
Hòa giọt đau thương tần khách trần.
Nẻo đạo trầm lận do chắc thuốc,
Luật hình Ngọc điện sửa vừa phân.
Giấc mê thức tỉnh hồn căn cước,
Cảnh tịnh diu an kẻ số phận.
Hễ thấy nhân sinh còn thảm khổ,
Liều thân nào nại phận gian truân.

Remind people of the personal qualities they should have.
Purify their minds with the holy water.

[1] Bản gốc in sai là khăn
[2] Bản gốc in sai là khăn
Remember that despite how good or evil you are in this life
Will be judged by the Divine Law that sits up in heaven.
The suffering you’ve borne will come to wake you.
Religion will save all those with good karma.
And yet if the people still seem to suffer,
Be willing to risk your life for salvation.

Gian tranh thay cho phận làm người,
Oằn oai cuộc đời gánh hết hoi!
Mình biết lấy mình tuy chẳng thẹn,
Miệng chê nhớp miệng cũng ghê lời.
Hình ma bóng quỉ trêu cay mắt,
Cổ quái tử tà bẹo xồn người.
Bụm miệng máu rơi dầu nuốt giận,
Tâm tu ghét tục thoát xa vời.

Hardship in life is what humans must suffer.
And they are predestined to suffer throughout.
It’s important to focus on knowing thyself
And care not about what rumors are spread about.
Though you may see lots of tempting images that distract you
Or see evil-doers commit crimes everywhere,
Don’t let them fuel your anger too easily.
A religious person should be removed from such things.

Dời qua Bắc hướng đặng xem qua,
Mời rõ Chánh kia chẳng nặng Tà.
Tà Chánh thế gian không đặc biệt,
Chánh Tà tâm nội có dầu xa.
Khử Tà thân Chánh, Tà kiên Chánh,
Phụ Chánh cận Tà, Chánh biến Tà.
Người có chơn hồn, hồn ấy mất,
Muốn xem hí mắt, ngó sao xa?

Then, I turned to glance at the North
And understand that good never eliminates evil.
They are never separated in our earthly world.
It’s your mind that decides if its good or its evil.
Diminish the evil and run with the good.
But if you abandon that good, you foster that evil.
If you want to understand a spiritual matter,
Stand back from the world and now be impartial.

Xa trông cảnh vật đã xây tròn,
Bát hướng Đài ngừng thấy nước non.
Đồng cự Thần Tiên còn để dấu,
Chùa xưa Phật tích nát hư mòn.
Chấp kinh Khổng sĩ nho phong giỏi,
Nắm nghiệp Đào quân mãi mại khôn.
Nếu Thánh tuy quên tay giẫy cỏ,[1]
Nền Văn miếu thấy khói hương còn.[2]

Looking at the distant scenery, I watched it spinning about.
Then it stopped and showed another view.
There was a holy cave, where the Deities had been,

[1] bản gốc in sai là Năm
[2] bản gốc in sai là dẩy
As well as an ancient pagoda now in ruins.
Confucianism developed a world of morality.
Following Master Đào,[3] the economy was expanded.
Very Few people took care of the churches,
But the Temple of Literature[4] was still carefully run.

While the scent of incense was permeating Nam Giao,[7]
A gust of wind blew everything away.
The Tower of the Nine Dragons was completely destroyed.
And beyond the boarder, thousands of devils there gathered.
On the blue peak fires started erupting throughout
And the black river suddenly stopped flowing, was dry.
Flapping their wings, the three demons embraced the world,
Holding a cluster of stars in their hands.

[5] bản gốc in sai là xát
[6] bản gốc in sai là gào
[7] the site, where the Kings of the Nguyễn dynasty used to hold annual ceremonies of prayer to Heaven.
Chùm sao khi tỏ lại khi mờ,
Thấy ngọn cờ hồng gió phất phơ.
Cỏi ngoại reo vang quân vị quốc,
Trong thành ông ống tiếng con thơ.
Ruộng dâu, giáo đóng dầy hon rào,
Biển hoạn, nước xao dẫy quá bờ.
Chộn rộn khó phân người với quỉ,
[1] Ðền vàng người ngựa bóng u á...

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HỘ-PHẤP PHẨM CÔNG TẶC

THIÊN THẢI KIẾN DIỄN
A VISIT TO PARADISE

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