

## KUBERA - THE ORIGIN AND CHANGES IN THE CULTURE OF VIETNAM

**Abstract:** *In the context of the economy in Vietnam at present, the material life of people is improving. However, many people are possibly poorer or they totally lose their wealth. A group of people is rapidly richer caused by the opportunity given by the God. These people think that they are receiving the help of the Lower world and the secular world. To thank for the invisible forces that lead to the luck, people need to find out the Divine who supports them. The name of the Divine is Kubera or the God of Wealth or the Lord of Wealth. There are the riches or the poors who are praying for wealth, they immediately pick up Kubera's statues for worshipping. Therefore, the cult of Kubera extends. Although the cult of Kubera has existed in Vietnamese culture, the actual extension of this cult is a new social phenomenon. Everyone thinks that the cult of Kubera for praying the wealth but the origin of this Divine is obscure. Thus, it needs to indicate the antecedents and the cult of Kubera.*

**Keywords:** *Kubera, culture, China, India, Vietnam, worship.*

### 1. The name of Kubera

Kubera in Vietnamese is Thần Tài and it was originated from the word “Tài”<sup>1</sup> (simplification: 财, ancient Sino: 財) and it means that the God has brought the wealth for people<sup>2</sup>. According to the *Chinese - Vietnamese Dictionary* (Hán - Việt từ điển trích dẫn), “Tài” (财) was composed of two words such as “Bối” (贝, “bèi” means clamshell which was used to exchange like a kind of money in Chinese ancient culture) and “Tài” (才, “cai” means talent, wisdom). The word “Tài” also has meaning riches, wealth, or something related to money as finance (财政), property (财产), fortune (发财), etc. The word “Thần” (神) has meaning as follows: Firstly, the sky and the earth, which created creatures, the

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Lord of the mountain (山神/ thần núi), the Lord of Sea (海神/ thần biển); Secondly, the saints; thirdly, the national heroes. Thus, the Kubera (Thần Tài) is the name of the God who brings wealth and fortune for people, especially, for businessmen.

It is easy to find out the name of the God who brings wealth and fortune while it is much more difficult to reveal the origin of the God. Why the Kubera wears a hat and has a beard, mustache in this case or has a skinhead and has not got a beard, mustache; is well dressed or braves chest and opens abdomen in the other case? Why there is only one statue, but it is called the Kubera or the Maitreya (Đi Lặc)? There are many questions related to the origin of the Kubera. However, in Vietnamese libraries, there are many documents that mentioned the Chinese origin of the Kubera. These documents showed superficial views and it is difficult to answer those questions.

It needs to have cultural comparative perspective on researching the cult of Kubera and it helps to identify the cultural layers which were overlaid in the process of cultural acculturation in Vietnam<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the cult of Kubera was examined in comparing the Chinese and Indian culture. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine the transformation of this cult in Vietnam. The cult of Kubera has been popularized in China, India and Vietnam with the belief that the God brings wealth and fortune for people. What is the difference among the Kubera cult in Vietnam and two great civilizations?

## **2. The cult of Kubera in Chinese culture**

Kubera is not only the unique God, but it also is a common name or a form of worshiping. Thus, this God has many names according to each culture and each period of China, India, Vietnam and others countries.

There are many Kuberas with many roles, status and formed through cultural periods. Thus there are many differences in explaining the origin and merit of each Kubera. Determination and classification the symbols of Kubera in this article are only an overview of this cult such as the name, role and status.

So far, we can't determine exactly the time of the Kubera's appearance. There were many legends which mentioned the introduction of Kubera in China from the Chu to the Qing dynasty. The first Kubera

was known in the legend of Bỷ Can (Bi Gan) or Tỷ Can (Bi Can) in the Shang dynasty of ancient China (1075 - 1046 BC).

There are many types of Chinese Kubera according to each legend or time. In order to determine the role and status of this God, we can divided into three groups such as the popular Kubera, the arranged - direction Kubera, and the arranged - character Kubera. However, this clarification is relative.

### ***2.1. The popular Kubera in China***

The most popular Kubera in Chinese culture included Bỷ Can (Bi Gan), Tài Bạch Tinh Quân (Cai Bo Xing Jun), Triệu Công Minh (Zhao Gong Ming) và Quan Vũ (Guan Yu/ Guan Gong). Those are the Gods who are worshiped in many places in China and in Chinese communities oversea. In Vietnam, Triệu Công Minh và Quan Vũ are not only worshipped in Chinese communities, but they also are worshiped by Vietnamese. In the following classification tables, we can see the name of Triệu Công Minh, Bỷ Can or Quan Vũ was repeated and it showed the degree of popularity of these Gods.

*Table 1: The popular Kubera in China*

Order	Name	Character	Transcribe	Sino	Other name
1	Bỷ Can	Bỷ Can/ Tỷ Can	Bi Gan/ Bi Can	比干	Lâm Bỷ Can (林比干), Văn Khúc Tinh Quân (文曲星君)
2	Tài Bạch Tinh Quân	Tài Bạch Tinh Quân	Cai Bo Xing Jun	財帛星君	Lý Quỷ Tổ (李诡祖), Tăng Phúc Tướng Công (增福相公), Tăng Phúc Tài Thần (增福财神), Phúc Thiện Bình Di Công (福善平施公)
3	Triệu Công Minh	Triệu Công Minh	Zhao Gong Ming	赵公明	Triệu Huyền Đán (趙玄壇), Triệu Nguyên soái (趙元帥), Thần Tiêu Phó Nguyên Soái (神霄副元帥)

4	Quan Vũ/ Quan Công	Quan Vũ/ Quan Công	Guan Yu/ Guan Gong	關羽/ 關公	Vân Trường (雲長), Trường Sinh (長生)
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## 2.2. The arranged - direction Kubera

Although this kind of Kubera has been not popular, the arranged - direction Kubera which created a system of Gods with coherent and logical layout of the structure.

Table2: The arranged - direction Kubera

Order	Name	Character	Transcribe	Sino	Role
1	Thần Tài Trung ương (Center) 正一玄壇真君	Triệu Công Minh	Zhao Gong Ming	赵公明	Thần chủ về tài binh (God of war)
2	Thần Tài phía Đông (East) 東路財神	Tiêu Thăng	Xiao Sheng	蕭升	Thần chủ về châu báu (Treasures)
3	Thần Tài phía Tây (West) 西路財神	Tào Bảo	Cao Bao	曹宝	Thần chủ về trang sức (Jewelry)
4	Thần Tài phía Nam (South) 南路財神	Trần Cửu Công	Chen Jiu Gong	陈九公	Thần chủ về hấp tài (Finance)
5	Thần Tài phía Bắc (North) 北路財神	Diêu Thiệu Tư	Yao Shao Si	姚少司	Thần chủ về sinh lợi (Profitability)
6	Thần Tài phía Đông Nam (Southeast) 東南路財神	Hàn Tín Gia	Han Xin Ye	韩信爷	Thần chủ về cờ bạc (Gambling)
7	Thần Tài phía Tây Nam (Southwest) 西南路財神	Lưu Hải	Liu Hai	刘海	Thần chủ về may mắn (Lucky)
8	Thần Tài phía Đông Bắc (Northeast) 東北路財神	Thẩm Mặc Sơn	Shen Wan Shan	沈万山	Thần chủ về vàng bạc (Gold and silver)
9	Thần Tài phía Tây	Đào Chu	Dao Zhu Gong	陶朱公	Thần chủ về văn chương

	Bắc (Northwest) 西北路财神	Công			(Literature)
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We can arrange the arranged - direction Kubera as this diagram of the table 2:



### 2.3. The arranged - character Kubera

The Kubera in Chinese culture has been worshiped according to each region, the role and purpose of worshiping, etc. The synthesis of the Kubera's Cult has created a complexity and it has existed in the contemporary society.

Table 3: The arranged - character Kubera<sup>4</sup>

Order	Name	Character	Transcribe	Sino	Characteristic
1	Thần Tài Nhị Địa Ngục	Hắc Bạch Vô Thường	Hei Bai Wu Chang	黑白無常	Cai quản Địa Ngục (rule the Hell)
2	Thần Tài chính trực	Quan Vũ	Guan Yu	關羽	Vị võ thần công minh, chính trực (military mandarin)
3	Thần Tài điên	Tể Công	Ji Gong	濟公	Vị thần tính tình cuồng phóng nhưng tốt bụng (Kind God)
4	Thần Tài Địa Tài	Phúc Đức Chính Thần	Fu Zheng Shen	福德正神	Sự giao thoa giữa Thần Đất và Thần Tài (Acculturation between the Kubera and the God of the land)
5	Thần Tài	Nã Đốc	Datok Gong	拿督公	Vị thần hình

	Trung Mã - Công				thành từ giao thoa văn hóa (the God formed by the cultural acculturation)
6	Hộ dân Thần Tài	Bỷ Can, Tỷ Can	Bỉ Gan, Bi Can	比干	Vị thần mang tài lộc, an lành cho dân chúng (God brings Wealth and Peace)
7	Thần Tài trẻ em/ Âu tài thần	Thiện Tài Đồng Tử	Shan Chai Tong Zi	善財童子	Vị thần gốc Ấn Độ (The God has the origin from India) ( <i>Sudhanakumâra</i> ), trong <i>Phẩm Nhập Pháp giới của Kinh Hoa Nghiêm</i>
8	Thần Tài Phạm Lãi	Thiếu Bá Đào Chu Công	Fan Li	范蠡	Bậc thầy kinh doanh, hảo tâm từ thiện, cũng được coi là văn tài thần (The God good at business)

The statistic table above showed that the Kubera has been a popular cult in the Chinese culture and the other culture since thousand years ago. In the Chinese culture, the Kubera's Cult was historicized through many dynasties that created a system of Kubera with the different functions and characteristics. Throughout history the cult of Kubera has extensively textualized. While the cult of Kubera in the ethnic minority culture in China and the Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese culture has been affected by the written culture, so it has been homogeneous with the cult of Kubera in China. However, if we dissect the cultural layers that created by acculturation we will reveal many non-Chinese factors through Kubera's symbol in indigenous culture as Vietnam. Hereby, we can examine the effect of Indian culture on Chinese culture in the past through the symbol of Indian Kubera.

### 3. Kubera in Indian culture

Many Vietnamese has never heard about the name Indian Kubera, so it would be surprised to know that there has been a Kubera in the Indian culture and the symbol of Indian Kubera has presented in the Vietnamese culture<sup>5</sup>. Thus who is Indian Kubera? When was the God introduced?

How was this God expressed in Chinese culture and whether the God has had a Chinese origin or not, all of which are questions to be answered in this study. Firstly, we examine the Indian Kubera where this God was originated. There is also complexity in revealing the Indian Kubera's origin as the Chinese Kubera; however, it is easier to find out the clue to approach the Indian Kubera's origin because the system of Gods in Indian culture is often placed on the relationships of Hinduism culture. Thus, we can find this God in the genealogy of the Hinduism's gods. According to Lama Gyaltzen Sogdzin Rinpoche, Jambhala was the Kubera in Tantrism and this God was known as Dzambhala, Dzambala, and Zambala. "Dzam" was the God of the convergence, "bha" was gold, silver - treasure - money, and "la" was the honor. In the genealogy of the Hinduism, this God was Kubera (Kuvera in Bali)<sup>6</sup>.

We could determine the Lord of Wealth in the Indian culture was Kubera. According to *The Mythology Dictionary*, Kubera in Buddhism was the God of Wealth who was one of the eight Gods of Dharmapalas. Kubera was the son of the God Vishravas and the God Idavida; was the God who was included in the Buddha Hall as the role of the guardian deity of Hinduism. Kubera was the king of Alaka, the brother of Ravana, the husband of Rambha, Riddhi or Yakshi and the father of Minakshi; was the God who ruled the North of the cosmos, always rode a flying-horse named Pushpaka; was the God who dethroned Ravana and helped Rama (or Indra) won the throne. Thus, Rama assigned to the Kubera governed pearl, ivory, jewels. In the art, Kubera was described as a short, fat God, three legs and one eye on his forehead<sup>7</sup>. In fact, Kubera statue was found from excavations underground in India who has not had the features such as three legs, one eye.

#### **4. The transformation of the Kubera in Indian culture**

In Indian culture, there was a large dissemination of the Kubera's Cult, so almost of religions, which established in Indian culture, have had the symbol of Kubera. In the *Encyclopedia of Jainism*, Nagendra Kumar Singh stated that "Every Indian religion has had Kubera according to the prototype of the Hinduism"<sup>8</sup>. When Buddhism was propagated out of India, the symbol of Kubera has affected to the Buddhist countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, etc. Hence the Indian Kubera did not only become *Ngũ Tính Tài Thần* (五姓财神) in

Tantrism, but this God also became *Vaisravana*/ *Đa Văn Thiên* (多聞天) or *Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương* (毘沙門天王) in *Tứ Thiên Vương* (四天王), the guardian deity of Buddhism.

The symbol of Ngũ Tinh Tài Thần was influenced by Buddhism, but the features such as shirtless, pot - belly, holding amace or a pomegranate, a bag of money and gold or mongoose were remained. When this God became *Đa Văn Thiên Vương*, a guardian deity of Buddhism in Vietnam and China, the Indian characteristics of Kubera has been changed such as from a fat and kind guardian became a glaring, strong, and ferocious guardian. This change made the character of the Indian Kubera becoming increasingly blurred. The bold depictions of the guardian in China made the Kubera origins gradually forgotten.

Table 4: Statue of Kubera in *Tứ Thiên Vương*

Sanskrit	वैश्रवण(कुबेर)	विरूढक	धृतराष्ट्र	विरूपाक्ष
	Vaiśravaṇa (Kubera)	Virūḍhaka	Dhṛtarāṣṭra	Virūpākṣa

When Kubera was fixed in indigenous culture, the symbol of Kubera was no longer remained the prototype in the homeland. This symbol gradually amalgamated with the indigenous culture which created new cultural symbols with many differences in form and name. The statistical table below shows the degree of immense popularity of this symbol in some Asian countries where it presented.

Table 5: The popularity of Kubera symbol in some Asian countries

Nation	Name, transcribe	Indigenous languages
India	Vaisravana (Kubera)	वैश्रवण(कुबेर)
China	Duō Wén Tiān	多聞天
Tibet	Namthose	ཀུ་ཤེས་པལ་
Korea	Damuncheon	다문천
Japan	Tamonten	多聞天
Vietnam	Da Van Thien	Đa Văn Thiên
Philippines	Bathala	Bathala
Tamil	Vaicciravanan	Vaicciravanan
Thailand	Thao Kuwen/ Thao Vessuwan	ท้าวกุเวร/ ท้าวเวสสุวรรณ
Mongolia	Bayan/Namsrai	Баян/ Намсрай

Thus the symbol of Đa Văn Thiên/ Đa Văn Thiên Vương/ Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương in Vietnamese and Chinese culture, Damuncheon in Korean culture, Tamonten in Japanese culture, etc. was originated from Kubera in Indian culture. Even, the arranged - direction Kubera has been done by Indian (in the period of forming the Ramayana and Mahabharata Epics in Hindu culture). Many cultural factors related to Buddhism and Hinduism as Kubera was introduced into the Chinese culture. Therefore, many cultural symbols of Vietnam Buddhism included Đa Văn Thiên Vương were considered Chinese origin (because they were introduced from China, however, in reality, they had Indian origin, crossed Himalayan, shaped in Khotan, then they integrated with China and came Vietnam, or through Cham and Khmer culture and then they were introduced into the Đại Việt (Vietnam) culture<sup>9</sup>.

### 5. Hindu genealogy in Asian culture

There were not only Kubera or Buddhist symbols, but there were many other Gods such as Yama/ Diêm Vương, Indra/ Phạm Thiên, ect. in the Hindu genealogy of Indian culture which strongly influenced the Asian culture like Vietnam, China, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, etc. These Gods became indigenous symbols of Buddhism with new names but remained merits of Hindu Gods with Indian characteristics. These Indian characteristics were important data that helped to distinguish the non-Chinese cultural layers in each cultural symbol of Vietnam, which was affected by both Chinese and Indian cultures. The table below is a collection of the Gods of direction or protective orientation (Dikpala) according to the Hindu genealogy which strongly influenced many countries in Asia.

*Table 6: Gods of direction in Hindu culture*

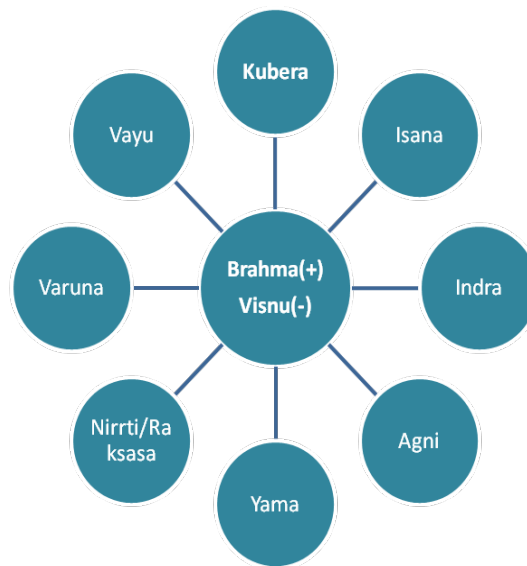
Order	Name	Direction	Symbol Object	Spouses	Hành chủ
1	Kubera	North	Gada/chùy	Kuberayaja	Budha/ the Mercury
2	Yama	South	Danda/quyền n trượng	Yami	Mangala/ the Mar
3	Indra	East	Vajra/ tầm sét	Saci	Surya/ the Sun
4	Varuna	West	Pasa/ knot of a rope	Nalani	Sani/ the Saturn
5	Isana	North-East	Trisula/ trident	Pravati	Brhaspati/ the Jupiter
6	Agni	South-East	Sakti/ spear	Svaha	Sukra/ the Venus

7	Vayu	North-West	Ankusa/ stick (gậy quản tượng)	Bharati	Candra/ the Moon
8	Nirrti/ Raksasa	South- West	Khadga/ Sword	Khadgi	Rahu/ North node of the Moon's orbit
9	Brahma	Zenith	Padma/ Lotus	Sarasvati	Ketu/ South node of the Moon's orbit
10	Visnu	Nadir	Cakra/ Plate	Laksmi	Lagna/ the zenith

The table above showed that Kubera, in Indian culture, had a crucial role among the Gods of protective direction, was named the God of Wealth (Dhanadhipati) and the God of granting fortune (Dhanada). The Kubera symbol didnot only clearly presented in Buddhist countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and soforth, but it also played the role of protecting the direction in Cham or Khmer culture in Southeast Asia for a thousand years according to Hindu prototype.

It is similar to the Gods of direction in China; the Gods of protective direction in the India are arranged in the system according to a diagram of eight directions as follows:

*Diagram table 6:*



However, in this diagram, Indians did not arrange their Gods in a flat surface of eightdirections; but there was a three-dimensional space with the four directions, eight orientations along with two poles which created

a cosmology space. This placement of the Gods in Hindu mythology was not only the arrangement of genealogy, but it was also arranged according to the ancient astronomy of India.

This is an interesting scientific issue, but it gets over the goal of this study. Hopefully, this problem will be researched by geographers, astronomers in the future.

Therefore, Indian Kubera was formed from Hindu genealogy on the basis of *Veda*<sup>10</sup> in Indian culture for thousands of years ago. The Indian Kubera was fat, short, pot - belly and shirtless. This God was not influenced by Chinese culture; in contrast, the Kubera's cult strongly influenced Chinese culture in forming many different symbols in Chinese Buddhism<sup>11</sup>. This symbol is also strongly influenced the culture of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, etc. Even, it has reached out to the Europe and the America through the propagation of Buddhism, especially, Tantrism and Hinduism. The symbol of Indian Kubera did not clearly disclosed and did not have a large number as the Chinese Kubera, however, it played an important role in shaping the symbols of Buddhism and Hinduism in general and the symbol of Kubera in the culture which it was introduced in particular. It can be seen more clearly through the case of Vietnamese Kubera.

#### **6. Kubera in Vietnamese culture**

Where did the Kubera's cult come from? And when did it arrive in Vietnam? These were the crucial questions but they were not adequately answered. The previous researchers, who researched the Vietnamese Kubera, have just mentioned the forms of worship of the Chinese from Fujian (Phúc Kiến), Guangdong (Quảng Đông) provinces that have brought to Vietnam since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, as mentioned, the worship of Kubera has been popular in Vietnam as well as many other cultures, not only in China. This study gradually examined the cult of the God of Wealth in Vietnam in connecting with the two greatest civilizations (China and India) which have strongly influenced the Vietnamese culture. Thereby, it helped to dissect the cultural layers through the symbol of Kubera in order to classify the factors originated from China and India which were contained in each symbol of Vietnamese culture.

### 6.1. *Thánh Gióng - the first Kubera of Vietnam*

Most of us probably feel surprised to know that St. Gióng (Thánh Gióng) had origin of a God of Wealth. Because almost of Vietnamese has known this God was a national hero who fought the Ân enemy to defend the country; Gióng Festival is one of the biggest festival in Vietnam that was recognized as a World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2011; Gióng statue on the Sóc Sơn mountain was one of the highest, the largest and the most expensive copper statues in Vietnam, etc.

This information overwhelmed what related to the origin of St. Gióng. Skipping the “collective unconscious” phenomenon a term of Carl Jung<sup>12</sup> with the postulate of the legend of St. Gióng (a three years old boy in the Phù Đổng village after eating “seven panniers of rice, three panniers of cà”; He suddenly turned into a giant, rode an iron horse, etc.)<sup>13</sup>. This study examined the specific evidence and the cultural symbols of their transformation process to find out the origin of St. Gióng.

There were many written documents which mentioned St. Gióng, but there was a small number of data that wrote the origin of St. Gióng. Excluding the fictitious legends of St. Gióng which has created in recent years, the origin of St. Gióng was written in the oldest documents such as *Việt điện u linh*, *Thiên uyển tập anh* and *Lĩnh Nam chí quái*. The written evidence of the origin of St. Gióng related to Đa Văn Thiên or Kubera with the following information: *Việt điện u linh* mentioned that Lý Thái Tổ king granted the title of Xung Thiên Thần Vương for the God at Kiến Sơ Buddhist temple, Vũ Ninh (Phù Đổng village, Hà Nội).

*Thiên uyển tập anh* wrote the words of a god (St. Gióng) with Khuông Việt monk that: “I am Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương (Vaiśravaṇa), who follow me are Dạ Xoa (Yaksa). Thiên Đế (Heaven) has sent me to this country to protect the border, to make Buddhism prevail. I have an affinity with you, so I come here to announce”.

In *Lĩnh Nam chí quái*: “After granting the title of Xung Thiên Thần Vương by the King Lý Thái Tổ, a shrine was set up in Phù Đổng”. In addition, *Đại Nam nhất thống chí* and many historical works at present wrote about St. Gióng according to the ancient documents which have mentioned or the legends were composed later.

Thus the God Tỳ Sa Môn/ Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương/ Xung Thiên Thần Vương was mentioned in the oldest documents proved the origin of Súc Thiên Vương/ Phù Đổng Thiên Vương or Thánh Gióng.

“From a God of Hinduism, Tỳ Sa Môn became the guardian (Dharmapala) in Indian Buddhism; the God protected cities and monasteries in Chinese religion. Finally, in Vietnam, Tỳ Sa Môn became guardian to help Vietnamese expel the Chinese troops. This data authenticated the principle of popular religion that the divine must be changed to match the wishes of believers. And if lack of motivation or creativity or not enough elements to promote the change, the divine will not be worshiped anymore”<sup>14</sup>.

Obviously, the symbol Tỳ Sa Môn was changed in the Vietnamese culture<sup>15</sup> to become Thánh Gióng, a protective deity Dharma and guard the border of the Ly dynasty. Thus, it can be confirmed that the symbol of Thánh Gióng or Phù Đổng Thiên Vương was a version of Súc Thiên Vương, Xung Thiên Thần Vương, Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương, Đa Văn Thiên Vương that originated from Vaisravana or Kubera, the God of Wealth had Indian origin.

### ***6.2. The expression of Kubera in Vietnamese culture***

It is easy to realize that the worship the God of Wealth and the demand of praying for fortune is one of the universal needs of human society. Fortune obviously is one of the most important objectives of human life. In several cultures in Asia, there are many forms of worshipping the God of Fortune. Sometimes, this cult is the symbol of the independence as Kubera in Indian culture, Tamonten in Japanese culture, Thần Tài in Vietnamese culture or Damuncheon in Korean culture, but it is occasionally inserted in the other forms of worship through the symbol of Tam Đa (Happiness, Fortune, Longevity) in Vietnamese culture or Shichifukujin (the seven lucky gods/ the seven gods of fortune) in Japanese culture, ect. Until the symbol of the God of Wealth was formalized the name, then, we have a specific deity with its own name is Thần Tài (Kubera).

In Vietnam, the worship of the God of Fortune existed vaguely in many different forms (the notion of the God that brings good luck in the culture of Vietnamese ethnic groups such as Muong, Tay, Thai,...). The concept of wealth was mixed with the worship of the mountain god, the

god of water, the god of rice, the god of earth, the god of forest and tree. Perhaps, in the rudimentary period, trade was not prevailing in the ethnic groups lived in the Vietnam so it should not need a specific deity. When the scholarly culture from India and China was introduced, the indigenous culture in Vietnam received immediately the essence of the civilization. Besides, the absorbing of academic culture like literature, art, ect. The natives of Vietnam as well as acquired a new cultural element (in the circumstance at the time) it was trading culture.

The foreign God of wealth like Kubera, Bửu Can, Phạm Lãi were received easily by Vietnamese indigenous culture and there was not any conflict (the case of China, there was conflict between Buddhism and Taoism when Buddhism was introduced in the Chinese culture). It showed that Vietnamese acquired the trading culture of the Chinese and Indian, both in the medieval and modern period. Ignoring the role of a Buddhist guardian, Kubera (under cover Đa Văn Thiên Vương or Vaiśravaṇa of Buddhism) was the first imported God of Wealth in Vietnamese culture. However, as a result of the expansion and domination of Confucianism after the Tran dynasty, the role of Kubera or vaiśravaṇa in Buddhism was gradually eclipsed and it was replaced by a new version with Confucian identify Súc Thiên Vương, Phù Đổng Thiên Vương or Thánh Gióng. Since then the trace of Kubera in Thánh Gióng has been shrunk while the symbol of national hero has been prominent. Until the symbol of the national hero was historicalized (by Thần phả, Sắc phong ordained by Confucian feudal States), then it officially became a symbol of a national hero of the independent country<sup>16</sup>.

Along with the development of an independent nation, the Đại Việt rapidly developed the technology, military, literature, academic art and trade. So far, no one has found the first traces of the symbol Thần Tài or Kubera according to the Chinese prototype in the period of feudalism Đại Việt. The written documents mentioned Bửu Can or Phạm Lãi (good at trading) or Triệu Công Minh, Quan Vũ were military mandarins in Chinese culture that strongly influenced Vietnamese culture. In the modern period, in the South of Vietnam, there was the prevalence of the Chinese Kubera's cult of Chinese from Fujian, Guangdong provinces. Since then, the Kubera's Cult has increasingly developed in the South

and it has become one of the most popular forms of worship in this area. Since 1986, the cult of Kubera has expanded in the North. At present, it is a popular worship almost all provinces from the North to the South and it is not only in the trading community, but it is also a common cult in many different social classes which creates a new development trend of worshipping the God of Fortune in Vietnam.

### ***6.3. The transformation of the symbol of Kubera in Vietnamese culture***

The change of the Kubera's symbol in Vietnamese culture was the cause of the acculturation process of the history of the establishment and development the Nation (Vietnam). Vietnam had a complex acculturation even though the researchers called "Crossroads". According to Trần Quốc Vượng, Vietnam was "Crossroads" of inhabitants and civilizations. Fukui Hayao, University of Kyoto, arrived Hà Nội in 1998 stated that "The culture of Hanoi, Vietnam and the other culture should be considered as a process of interaction between endogenous and exogenous factors". The transformation (to exist) of the Vietnamese culture before the spread/expansion/invasion of the great civilizations was a process of calculating adaptation. This adaptation showed the active absorbing the new cultural elements that were introduced from outside and the simultaneous dissemination the endogenous/indigenous cultural elements in order to co-exist and develop beside the invading culture as Chinese culture<sup>17</sup>.

This acculturation created the changes in Vietnamese culture, thereby, Vietnamese culture was not assimilated by Chinese culture as the other countries of Hung Nô, Khiết Đan, Mãn in the past. The transformation features of the Vietnamese culture have imported and reconstructed many cultural symbol of China and India such as Tam Đa, Bát tiên, Ngũ phúc, Garuda, Rahu, etc. The change of Kubera and Maitreya formed a new Kubera in the contemporary period in Vietnam and it clearly shows the characteristic of transformation.

According to the chronological arrangement from the Kubera to Thánh Gióng, we have the following diagram: Kubera - Jambhala - Vaisravana - Duō Wén Tiān - Đa Văn Thiên - Đa Văn Thiên Vương - Tỳ Sa Môn - Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương - Xung Thiên Thần Vương - Sóc Thiên Vương - Phù Đổng Thiên Vương - Thánh Gióng. However, from Kubera to Thánh Gióng is a long distance to be able to find the

connection data of these symbols. Therefore, this study only temporarily gives some remarks as follows:

Kubera from Indian culture has crossed over the Himalaya mountain, then it has penetrated the Chinese culture through the symbol of Đa Văn Thiên since thousands of years ago. This symbol has also affected to the Vietnamese culture through symbols of Xung Thiên Thần Vương or Thánh Gióng since Lý and Trần dynasties approximately 1,000 years ago<sup>18</sup>. While Kubera according to the Chinese prototype which has influenced Vietnamese culture much more late (it arrived in Vietnam along with Chinese political refugees at the period of Ming and Qing dynasties) since approximately three centuries. Despite the late introduction, Kubera of the Chinese prototype has quickly developed in Vietnam. Until now, the symbol of this God has been popularized throughout the North - the Centre - the South. It has not remained the prototype of China or India, the Kubera's cult has had a sudden change since 1986 that caused by the economic development. This process added a new Kubera which was the symbol of Maitreya in the Vietnamese contemporary culture. This social and cultural phenomenon is a combination of the Maitreya worship and the cult of the God of Fortune in Vietnam.

Coming back to the questions of this research as: Why the Kubera wears a hat and has a beard, mustache in this case or has a skinhead and hasn't got a beard, mustache; is well dressed or brakes chest and opens abdomen in the other case? Why there is only one statue, but it is called the Kubera or the Maitreya (Đi Lặc)? We can answer as follows: the Kubera is well dressed, wears a hat and has a beard, mustache that is the Chinese Kubera origin, was introduced in the South then it expanded throughout the country. And the Kubera has a skinhead and hasnot got a beard, mustache; brakes chest and opens abdomen is a new Kubera. This Kubera has been formed in recent years, it has been a combination the Kubera's features and the Maitreya. It has been a large change of the cult of Kubera in Vietnamese culture. It hasnot not been a symbol change, but it has also been a specific social phenomenon in the contemporary period of Vietnam.

The new Kubera should be examined under the social, economic perspectives in the contemporary society of Vietnam, as well as its transformation in the history of Chinese Buddhism from Kubera to Maitreya<sup>19</sup>.

## 7. Conclusion

Through research on the origin and process of changing of Kubera in the Vietnamese culture, we would have some initial conclusions as follows:

The worship of the God of Wealth has been a human need that has been created since thousand of years ago in some culture such as China, India and Vietnam. The symbol of the God of Wealth in the Indian culture is Kubera, the deity of wealth in Hinduism genealogy. When penetrating into Buddhism, Kubera became the guardian such as Jambhala/Zambala and Vaisravana.

When Buddhism was propagated in China and Vietnam at the period of the Northern domination, the symbol of Kubera was Sinicized (Hán hóa) and became Đa Văn Thiên. After having the independence of Đại Việt, this symbol gradually Vietnamised as Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên vương/ Xung Thiên Thần Vương/ Phù Đổng Thiên Vương/Thánh Gióng, a national symbol of heroism in Vietnam culture.

The cult of the God of Fortune in China was formed for centuries ago in many different periods (did not determine the exact date of this symbol) with many symbols as Bửu Can, Phạm Lãi, Triệu Công Minh, Quan Vũ, etc. This cult was introduced in Vietnam in Ming dynasty along with Chinese political refugees, then it largely influenced in the South, finally it expanded to the North and the whole country.

In the context of the economic development at present, there is the emergence of a new Kubera that is Maitreya - Thần Tài, a combination of the Kubera's cult and the worship of Maitreya. In addition, the Kubera in Vietnamese culture was combined with T'u-ti (the God of the Land) that created a new cult Thần Tài - Ông Địa. Researching on the God of the Land's cult in Vietnamese culture will help to explain the issue that people have confusion in arranging the statues of the God of Wealth in the contemporary period./.

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### NOTES:

- 1 Along with the word *Tài*, the word *Lộc* means *Fortune*. The word *Lộc* in Chinese means the social promotion that leads to have fortune. In the Sino, "*Bổng lộc*" is money and possessions that mandarins received every year, "*Tài lộc*" is the interest from trading and business.
- 2 According to the *Hán - Việt Dictionary* the word *Tài* has some meaning such as money, possessions, property, etc.

- 3 Trần Lê Bảo (2013), *Khu vực học và nhập môn Việt Nam học*, [Regional Study and the initial research on Vietnam], Nxb. Đại học Sư phạm (Publisher. Pedagogical University), Hà Nội; Iwona Sagan (2005), "Contemporary Regional Studies: Theory, Methodology and Practice", *Regional and Local Studies*, special issue.
- 4 We can see the other Gods were arranged in the group of the military mandarins such as Quan Công, Triệu Công Minh, etc., and the literature mandarins such as Tả Tuyền/ Tả Bạch Tinh Quân, Bý Can, Đào Chu Công Phạm Lãi, etc. However, every type of the Kubera's God was arranged in the three tables up above so we do not add the fourth table for the Kubera's God belong the group *the military mandarins and the literature mandarins*.
- 5 In Vietnam, beside the symbols of Kubera became the Buddhist symbols such as Đa Văn Thiên, Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương, etc. There were the symbols of Kubera according to the Indian prototype as the Statue of Kubera; sign BTHA 24/Đ.5 (Hội An Museum) found in 1989, at Lăng Bà Lỗi area, Village N<sup>o</sup>. 6, Commune Cẩm Thanh, managed by Ban Quản lý Di tích và Dịch vụ Du lịch Hội An [The Committee of Relics management and Hoi An Tourism], dated the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.
- 6 Dẫn theo <http://www.rinpoche.ca>. This cult has created Ngũ Tinh Tài Thần (the Tài Shen, Gifted Spirit, Van Tai Shen, Chuan Tai Shen, Shen talent) in the Chinese Buddhism when it was introduced in China. In reality, the Chinese culture also imported this cult and symbols from the Tibet culture.
- 7 <http://www.mythologydictionary.com>. The Gods were characters in the two Indian famous epics *Ramayana* và *Mahabharata*. We can find out the origin of the Gods according to the Hindu genealogy. This research will mention the Hindu genealogy.
- 8 Nagendra Kumar Singh ed. (2001), *Encyclopedia of Jainism 1*, Anmol Publication PVT. Ltd.: 7280.
- 9 At present, the symbols of Đa Văn Thiên/ Đa Văn Thiên Vương/ Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương were found in many Buddhist temples in the North of Vietnam. While the symbols of Vaijavana/ Kubera according to the Indian prototype were found in Cham and Khmer culture in the South or some artifacts of Đại Việt related to Cham và Khmer culture. *Thiền uyển tập anh* and *Việt điện u linh* were the oldest written documents that mentioned this symbol through the legend of Thánh Gióng. In recent years, there has been some research on this question, especially, a research of a Vietnamese - American Nguyễn Tự Cường, George Marson University, USA. However, this author mainly examined the background of Thánh Gióng but he did not researched on the Kubera and the origin of Kubera in Việt Nam.
- 10 *Vedic Scriptures* was considered as a basis of the Indian culture; it means intellectual, and it mentioned the deities in the Indian cosmology.
- 11 Beside the establishment the symbols of Đa Văn Thiên Vương or Ngũ Tinh Tài Thần in Chinese culture, the symbol of Kubera can be the model of forming the Maitrey a symbol (Di Lặc - Bồ Đại Hòa thượng) in China. This question will be answered in this study.
- 12 According to Carl G. Jung, collective unconscious was a part of the unconscious mind in combination with the models such as memory, instinct, and experience of human being. These models were inherited, could be arranged into prototypes and could be observed through their impact to dream and activities, etc. Thus,

this research considered “giấc mơ Phù Đổng” (the dream of Phù Đổng) was a collective unconscious.

- 13 The fictional process of character Thánh Gióng from anecdotes of Vietnamese culture and it happened through the long history of legends. The author Như Hạnh concluded that “Legend was one of the main elements in the creation the national spirit, especially the religious nationalism. The dream of Khuông Việt can be seen as an effort in creating this legend...”. Như Hạnh (2003), “Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương (Vaisravana), Sóc Thiên Vương and Phù Đổng Thiên Vương in the religions of Vietnam at the medieval period”, in: Trung tâm Nghiên cứu Quốc học, *Hồn Việt*, Nxb. Văn học: 36. (Publisher: Literature)
- 14 Như Hạnh (2003), “Tỳ Sa Môn Thiên Vương (Vaisravana), Sóc Thiên Vương and Phù Đổng Thiên Vương in the religions of Vietnam at the medieval period”, *ibid*: 47.
- 15 The combination between the exogenous symbols with the legends about a national hero (indigenous) was written by Cao Huy Đình, Nguyễn Đồng Chi so this research will not mention it.
- 16 It was called a new version with Confucianism identify because, at that time, mandarins of the Lê dynasty (a Confucius dynasty) tried to write a good background of the Gods. For instance, sắc phong, thần phả were written by Đông các Đại học sĩ Nguyễn Bỉnh that changed a lot of information in comparing with the legends obviously existed. It showed the Confucius spirit of Thánh Gióng symbol was pushed up at a high level with the spirit of nationalism. Therefore, the spirit of nationalism or nationalism in Đại Việt existed before the Western concept of nationalism was penetrated to Vietnam at the modern period. This question will be mentioned in a specific research.
- 17 Trần Quốc Vượng, *Hà Nội - Việt Nam: 100 năm giao thoa văn hóa Đông - Tây, Nam - Bắc: lý luận và thực tiễn*, (*Hà Nội - Việt Nam: 100 years acculturation North - South, East - West: theory and practice*) <http://khoalichsu.edu.vn>.
- 18 Of course, this symbol was penetrated to Đại Việt since the Northern domination period during 10 centuries.
- 19 To research this new symbol of Kubera, we need to examine the process of transformation of the Maitreya symbol in Indian Buddhism be came Bồ Đại Hòa thượng in China, beside the changes of Kubera in Chinese and Vietnamese culture. Then, it needs to place this symbol in the social, culture and economic context of Vietnam since 1986 in order to find out the origin of the new Kubera. We have researched this symbol and it will be published in the book with the title: *Di Lặc - Thần Tài ở Việt Nam: một biểu hiện của thể tục hóa hay một hiện tượng tôn giáo mới?* (Maitreya-Kubera in Vietnam: an expression of secularization or a new religious phenomenon?)

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