

## Thought of Three Religions' Common Origin through Some Vietnamese Confucians

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**Abstract:** *It is popular the theory of the Three Religions (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) with a common root in China and Vietnam under the feudal regimes. In Vietnam there are several characters, including zen masters, confucians, scholars and even a king, whose works embody the spirit of the Three Religions of the same origin. This article presents some typical figures and their works express the above spirit.*

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From the second century onwards the theory of the common origin of the Three Religions started in Vietnam, then called Giao Chỉ province (since 111 B.C) and later called Giao Châu (since A.D 203). Giao Chỉ under the reign of Governor Shi Xie became the meeting ground for cultural exchanges among Vietnam, India, and China. It was also a place for the fusion of Indochinese currents of thought (i.e. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) and the indigenous culture.

The case of Moubo or Mouzi (c. 165 or 170 - c. 230) is one typical example. Mouzi, whose real name was Mourong, styled Zibo, was a native of Cangwu and very good at both martial arts and literature. Due to great disorder in China after the death of Emperor Han Lingdi (reigned 168-189), he fled China and came to live in Giao Châu (Vietnam) in the second century. He composed a well-known treatise titled *Lihuolun* (Dispelling Doubts Treatise). Its original title was *Zhihuolun*, but then *Zhi* 治 has been changed into *Li* 理 on account of a Tang taboo since the dynasty of King Tang Gaozong (or Li Zhi, reigned 650-633). According to Lê Mạnh Thát, the treatise was written about 198 A.D.

In the preface of *Lihuolun* (Dispelling Doubts Treatise) Mouzi says that after his mother's death, he did not want to hold any official post, but spent all of his time in studying the Three Religions: "Since then, I have devoted myself to Buddhism,

ground away at Laozi's five thousand characters,<sup>(1)</sup> swallowed mystery as good wine, and regarded the Five Classics<sup>(2)</sup> as zithers and flutes.”<sup>(3)</sup>

This fact shows that the Three Religions coexisted in Giao Chỉ in the time of Prefect Shi Xie. That spirit of harmonious unity from the early times was a contributory factor for the theory that the Three Religions are of the same origin to become a traditional cultural identity of the Vietnamese during later centuries, and it has been mentioned by eminent monks, priests, and scholars under many dynasties. Some typical figures are as follows:

### 1. VIÊN CHIẾU (999-1091)

Zen Master Viên Chiếu (999-1090), whose lay name was Mai Trục, lived under the Lý dynasty, a native of Phúc Đường village, Long Đàm district. He was the Zen master of the seventh generation of Quán Bích (Wall-Contemplation) Zen school of Vietnam. His works include *Dược Sư Thập Nhị Nguyên Văn* (The Medicine King Buddha's Twelve Vows), *Tán Viên Giác Kinh* (Eulogy on the Complete Enlightenment Sūtra), *Thập Nhị Bồ Tát Hạnh Tu Chứng Đạo Tràng* (Enlightenment Realized by the Twelve Bodhisattva Practices), *Tham Đồ Hiển Quyết* (Revelation of the Decisive Secret for Students)<sup>(4)</sup>. Once asked about the meaning of Buddha and Confucian Sages, he gave an answer in verse as follows:

*In daytime the brilliant sun shines,*

*Then comes the night*

*Bathed in bright moonlight.*<sup>(5)</sup>

His implication is that Buddha and Confucian Sages have different functions in life, but their ultimate purposes are to shine bright light to the world or, in other

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<sup>1</sup> He refers to Laozi's *Daodejing* (The Way and its Power).

<sup>2</sup> He refers to *Wujing*, the fundamental cannons of Confucianism.

<sup>3</sup> [Lê Mạnh Thát 1982: 133, 508]. This footnote indicates that the above information is from a book by Lê Mạnh Thát, published in 1982, pages 133, 508. For the related source in details, see “Reference” at the end of this article.

<sup>4</sup> [Viện Văn Học 1977: 266].

<sup>5</sup> [Viện Văn Học 1977: 274, 281]. 晝則金烏照, /夜來玉兔明.

words, to help sentient beings to attain enlightenment. To make his idea clear, he gives this example: Sunlight is necessary for day; and similarly, moonlight for night.

## 2. TRẦN THÁI TÔNG (reigned 1226-1258)

King Trần Thái Tông, whose real name was Trần Cảnh, was a native of Tức Mặc village, Thiên Trường prefecture (i.e., modern Mỹ Lộc district, Nam Định province). His works include *Kiến Trung Thường Lễ* (Common Rites during Kiến Trung Era), *Quốc Triều Thông Chế* (General Institutions of National Dynasties), *Khóa Hư Lục* (Instructions on Emptiness), *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam* (A Guide to Zen Buddhism), etc.<sup>(6)</sup>

In his Preface to *Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam* (A Guide to Zen Buddhism), the King implied that there was no difference between Buddhist and Confucian responsibilities for helping the secular world. He writes: “The Sixth Patriarch said that great sages of old did not differ from great monks. It is thus obvious that Buddha’s teachings should be relied on Confucian sages to be handed down to later ages.”<sup>(7)</sup>

In his *Phổ Khuyến Phát Bồ Đề Tâm* (General Exhortation on Devoting the Mind to Bodhi), the King writes:

*In men’s ignorance the Three Religions  
are of different kinds.  
When the origin is known,  
they get the same enlightened mind.*<sup>(8)</sup>

In his *Tọa Thiền Luận* (Essay on Zen Meditation), the King pointed out the similarity of the Three-Teaching self-cultivation methods as follows: “Śākyamuni [Buddha] entered the Himalayas and sat in Zen meditation for six years. Magpies built a nest on his head and grasses grew between his thighs, but his body and mind was still calm and indifferent. When Ziqi [Taoist] sat leaning against a chair, his body resembled a dead tree and his mind resembled dead ashes. When Yanhui

<sup>(6)</sup> [Trần Văn Giáp 1990: 56, 57].

<sup>(7)</sup> 六祖有言云：先大聖人與大師無別。則知我佛之教又假先聖人以傳於世也。 [Viện Văn Học 1989: 26-27].

<sup>(8)</sup> [Viện Văn Học 1989: 60, 62, 65]. 未明人妄分三教，了得底同悟一心。 (普勸發菩提心)

[Confucians] sat and forgot everything, his connection with the body and its parts was dissolved; his perception was discarded. Detaching himself from both stupidity and wisdom, he became one with the Great Way. Thus, those three sages and worthies of old had great achievement owing to Zen meditation.”<sup>(9)</sup>

In his *Giới Sát Sinh Văn* (Essay on Commandment against Killing), the King pointed out the similarities of the Three Religions on doing good deeds: “Confucian texts instruct us to perform benevolence and make virtues. Taoist canons exhort us to love people and animals. Buddhist sūtras advocate the commandment against killing.”<sup>(10)</sup>

### 3. HUƠNG HẢI (1631-1718)

Zen Master Hương Hải (1631-1718), whose real name was Tổ Cầu, was a native of Ấng Độ village, Chân Phúc district (i.e., today Nghi Lộc district, Nghệ An province). He used to be Prefect of Triệu Phong prefecture (i.e., today Quảng Trị province) under the Hậu Lê dynasty, then became a monk, styled Huyền Cơ Thiện Giác, also known by dharma name of Minh Châu Hương Hải, on the islet of Cham in Quảng Nam province. He was a prolific author.<sup>(11)</sup>

In a poem, he wrote that originally the Three Religions were of the same noumenon. (原來三教同一體)<sup>(12)</sup> Thus, in his opinion the Three Religions have the common origin.

Comparing Confucianism with Buddhism, in another poem he concluded:

*Traced back further,*

*Confucian source is more spacious.*

*Penetrated deeper into,*

<sup>(9)</sup> [Viện Văn Học 1989: 86-88]. 釋迦文佛入于雪山，端坐六年，鵲巢于頂上，草穿于髀，身心自若。子糸綦隱几而坐，形如枯木，心似死灰。顏回坐忘，隳肢体，黜聰明，離愚智，同於大道。此古者聖賢，曾以坐定而成就者。

<sup>(10)</sup> [Viện Văn Học 1989: 93]. 儒典施仁布德道經愛物好生佛惟戒殺是持。

<sup>(11)</sup> [Lê Quý Đôn 1977: 402-403].

<sup>(12)</sup> [Lê Quý Đôn 1977: 409].

*Buddhist ocean is more profound.* <sup>(13)</sup>

In a poem titled *Lý Sự Dung Thông* (Principle-phenomena interpenetration), Zen Master Hương Hải used the images of vehicles and boats to compare with the Three Religions' means and functions in life. In his conclusion, the Three Religions are like three vehicles reaching the same destination. Comparing the pairs of Confucian categories (*Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues*), with Daoist ones (*Three Origins and Five Vital Forces*), and with those of Buddhism (*Threefold Refuge and Five Precepts*), he wrote the following beautiful poem:

*Renown doctrines and religions are of three:*

*Confucianism aims at helping nations,*

*ruling people, rectifying families.*

*Daoism focuses on nurturing vital force*

*and spirit serenity,*

*On medicine to heal evil diseases,*

*and hard practice of alchemy.* <sup>(14)</sup>

*Buddhism liberates sentient beings*

*from three-path suffering,* <sup>(15)</sup>

*So their ancestors can attain deliverance too.*

*Confucianism uses Three Bonds*

<sup>(13)</sup> [Lê Quý Đôn 1977: 410]. 儒源蕩蕩登彌闊，法海重重入轉深。

<sup>(14)</sup> Both *chu* 朱 and *đan* (đơn) 丹 refer to scarlet; *sa* 砂 sand. A Daoist sect called *Thần Tiên Đan Đĩnh* (the sect of immortality, alchemy, and talismans) uses *sa thạch* 砂石 (literally, *sand and stone*, a substance which can be squeezed into powder) for external alchemy. It is odorless, tasteless, scarlet, thus is called *chu sa* 朱砂, *thần sa* 神砂, *đan sa* 丹砂 (*cinnabaris*). In Chinese medicine, cinnabaris has many shades of red. The darker, the better. To test, we can squeeze it into powder. If the hand is not smeary, it is the best cinnabaris. Cinnabaris is a compound, 86,2% of which is hydragyum and 13% of which is sulfur. When cinnabaris is boiled, the toxic SO<sub>2</sub> emits; the remaining hydragyum is toxic too. Thus, old medicinal books advise to use raw and unboiled cinnabaris being ground with water. He who abuses cinnabaris can become insane. [Lê Anh Dũng 1995: 82-83].

<sup>(15)</sup> Three-path suffering 三途苦: Suffering of a soul entering three evil paths of punishment as retribution for his/her sins, i.e., *fire path* 火途 (suffering of being burned), *blood path* 血途 (suffering

*and Five Constant Virtues.*

*Daoism preserves Five Vital Forces*

*and Three Origins.*

*Buddhism teaches Threefold Refuge*

*and Five Precepts.*

*They are like three vehicles on the same path.* <sup>(16)</sup>

#### 4. LÊ QUÝ ĐÔN (1726-1784)

He was styled Doãn Hậu with his literary name of Quế Đường, a native of Diên Hà village, Duyên Hà district, Tiên Hưng prefecture, Sơn Nam (now in Thái Bình province). He held many important official posts under the Later Lê dynasty. He was a prolific author, whose works on Confucianism include: *Quần Thư Khảo Biện* (Investigating and Discussing Classics), *Thánh Mô Hiền Phạm Lục* (Recorded Sayings of Sages and Worthies), *Âm Chất Văn Chú* (The Silence Way of Recompense with Annotation), *Vân Đài Loại Ngữ* (A Collection of Sorted Sayings), *Xuân Thu Lược Luận* (A Brief Essay on the Spring-Autumn Period), *Dịch Kinh Phu Thuyết* (Superficial Explanation of the Book of Changes), *Thư Kinh Diễn Nghĩa* (The Book of Documents Expounded), etc.

In *Kiến Văn Tiểu Lục* (Miscellaneous Records of Things Heard and Seen), vol. IX: *Thiền Dật* (Leisure in Zen), Lê Quý Đôn expressed his respect to the equality of the Three Religions and advised some narrow-minded Confucian scholars as follows:

“Buddhist and Taoist teachings are of clarity, stillness and emptiness, ultimate and tranquil extinction, without entanglement in outside world. They are also the teachings wise people use for self-cultivation. In respect to Buddhist and Taoist profound presentations on ethics as well as body and spirit, none of them lacks miraculous meaning. Due to prejudice, we (Confucian scholars) often criticize against them. Should we do so?” <sup>(17)</sup>

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of bleeding), and *saber path* 刀途 (suffering of being chopped or stabbed with sabers or swords).

<sup>(16)</sup> [Nguyễn Đăng Thục 1971c: 26].

<sup>(17)</sup> [Lê Quý Đôn 1977: 363].

## 5. NGÔ THÌ SĨ (1726-1780)

Ngô Thì Sĩ, styled Thế Lộc with literary name of Ngô Phong Tiên Sinh, and Taoist name of Nhị Thanh Cư Sĩ (A Retired Scholar in Cavern of Nhị Thanh), was Ngô Thì Nhậm's father and Phan Huy Ích's father-in-law. He held official posts under the Hậu Lê dynasty and was a prolific author with such works as *Ngô Phong Văn Tập* (Ngô Phong's Collected Writings), *Bảo Chương Hoàn Hảo Mô* (Protected Obstacles and Improved Plots), *Anh Ngôn Thi Tập* (Collected Poems on Parrot's Words), *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* (Vietnamese History with Comments), *Quan Lan Thập Vịnh* (Ten Poems Created When Viewing Waves), *Nhị Thanh Động Tập* (Collected Works on Cavern of Nhị Thanh), etc. Together with his children, he formed Ngô Gia Văn Phái (the Literary School of the Ngô) <sup>(18)</sup>.

When Tam Giáo (Three Religions) Pagoda in Kim Bảng village was restored in 1760, Ngô Thì Sĩ composed a stele-inscribed text conveying his opinion on the Three Religions as follows:

“Buddhist advice on Pure Land, Taoist view of immortal realm, and Confucian theory of moral retribution are completely correct. Buddhism advocates compassion and mercy, Taoism maintains serenity, Confucianism uses the theory of benevolence, righteousness, faithfulness, and uprightness to open Heaven's Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues to set up an order for human beings. It is essential to fuse myriads of beings of the visible world with metaphysical realm, and interfuse myriads of differences into One. Being engaged in worldly activities and quitting them have different functions but are of one essence. I think all teachings are one. We should be free and wise, and should avoid religious discrimination. Enlightenment needs only Nature, whose maintenance requires only Mind. Śākyamuni's extinction of distress, Laozi's emptiness, and Confucius's non-speech basically refer to Mind rectification.”<sup>(19)</sup>

Ngô Thì Sĩ's tendency to uphold the theory of the common origin of the Three

<sup>(18)</sup> [Trần Văn Giáp 1984: 324].

<sup>(19)</sup> 釋家淨土之勸，道家仙都之談，儒家積善餘康之說，皆是也。釋慈悲，道清淨，儒定以仁義，中正以開天常而立仁紀。要其合萬有于一虛，會萬殊于一貫，涇世出世，用異而體同。余惟道一而已，活潑潑惺惺，無彼此也。晤無非性，默守無非心。如來之寂滅，老君之虛無，夫子之欲無言也，歸正其心耳矣。(BEFEO microfilm, A.364, No. 569, cited by Nguyễn Đăng Thục)

Religions is shown not only in the above stele-inscribed text but also in such texts as *Ký Động Nhị Thanh* (Record at Nhị Thanh Cavern), *Sớ Hợp Tam Giáo* (Remarks on the Combination of the Three Religions), etc.<sup>(20)</sup>

## 6. NGÔ THÌ NHẬM (1746-1803)

As a son of Ngô Thì Sĩ (1726-1780), Ngô Thì Nhậm, styled Hi Doãn with his literary name of Đạt Hiên and dharma name of Hải Lượng Thiền Sư (Zen Master Hải Lượng), was a native of Thanh Oai village, Thanh Trì district, Hà Đông province. He held many important official posts under the Later Lê and the Tây Sơn dynasties. Also advocating the theory of the common origin of the Three Religions, he expressed his opinions in *Thiên Quân Thái Nhiên*, and *Ký Đình Thủy Nhất* (*Records at Thủy Nhất Pavilion*), etc.<sup>(21)</sup>

## 7. PHAN HUY ÍCH (1750-1822)

Phan Huy Ích was Ngô Thì Sĩ's son-in-law and Ngô Thì Nhậm's younger brother-in-law. He was styled Chi Hòa with literary names of Dụ Am and Đức Hiên. He held some official posts such as *Hàn Lâm Thừa Chi* (Academician Recipient of Edicts) and *Đốc Đồng* (Supervisor) of Thanh Hóa province, etc. Under the Tây Sơn dynasty, he was *Hộ Bộ Tả Thị Lang* (Left Attendant Gentleman of the Finance Ministry) with title *Thụy Nham Hầu* (Auspicious Cliff Marquis). After being an envoy to China, he was promoted to *Thị Trung Ngự Sử* (Censor of the Palace Attendants). In 1796, he built Bảo Chân Quán (Preserving Trueness Temple) for self-cultivation in the imperial city, calling himself Bảo Chân Đạo Nhân (Preserving Trueness Taoist). He was a prolific author.

Phan Huy Ích also upheld the theory of the common origin of the Three Religions. In 1796, in the preface to Ngô Thì Nhậm's works titled *Trúc Lâm Đại Chân Viên Giác Thanh* (Complete Enlightenment Voice of Great Trueness in Bamboo Grove), he expressed his viewpoint on the Three Religions as follows:

“Although Śākyamuni Buddha's doctrine aims at immateriality (śūnyatā), its chief purpose is to get rid of all hindrances in order to attain true suchness (bhūtatathatā).

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<sup>(20)</sup> [Ngô Thì Nhậm 1978: 31].



It is said that to enlighten mind and behold the Buddha-nature is the most important thing. If compared with Confucian doctrine of sincere thoughts and perfect knowledge, there is no contradiction indeed.”

Sharing Ngô Thì Nhậm’s viewpoint, in the above-mentioned Preface Phan Huy Ích exalted Ngô Thì Nhậm as follows:

“Getting into the essence of the Heaven Nature, understanding clearly the Principle, and inserting Buddhism into Confucianism, he (i.e., Ngô Thì Nhậm) let Buddhist sūtras not transgress the boundaries of the Throneless King (i.e., Confucius).” <sup>(22)</sup>

### 8. TRỊNH TUỆ (in the 18th century)

Having passed *Trạng Nguyên* (the First Degree of the Three-Degree Exam), Trịnh Tuệ became *Tể Tướng* (Grand Councilor) during the period of Lê kings and Trịnh lords. He called himself *Trúc Lâm Cư Sĩ* (Lay Buddhist in Bamboo Grove). In his essay titled *Tam Giáo Nhất Nguyên Thuyết* (The Theory of the Common Origin of the Three Religions), he writes:

“Confucianism has the theory of Tam Tài (the Three Powers), Buddhism that of Tam Thế (the Three Worlds), and Taoism that of Tam Thanh (the Three Purities). Like the sun, the moon, and stars in the sky, or the three legs of a cauldron, the Three Religions are inseparable.

To make the point clear, it is obvious that Confucian rites, music, punishment, and politics are designed to restrain human desires and cause people to trend towards the good, forbid the bad, keep away from the evil, and improve the beautiful.

Buddhism teaches serenity, compassion and mercy, extermination of karma, salvation of living beings, as well as attainment of enlightenment. That is profound mystery over profound mystery.

Confucianism advocates rectifying morality and maintaining edification so that people can transform their manners from ungratefulness into gratitude, give up

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<sup>(21)</sup> [Ngô Thì Nhậm 1978: 32].

<sup>(22)</sup> [Ngô Thì Nhậm 1978: 47-50].

brutality, and diligently perform benevolence. Those matters are straightforward.

Daoism maintains cleansing worldly entanglement, getting rid of desires, transgressing secular world and entering holy one, enjoying absolute happiness. That is marvel over marvel.

The Great Learning [a Confucian book] says about 'Illustrating illustrious virtue, renovating the people, and resting in the highest excellence'. Buddhist sūtras mention 'prajñā-pāramitā', 'bodhisattva', and 'Mahāsattva'. In terms of meaning, both the Great Learning and Buddhist sūtras are not contradictory...

Therefore, the Three Religions are the same. These three currents are of one principle. They do not contrast each other like water and fire, black and white, sweetness and bitterness... So, it is known that Confucianism is Buddhism and Buddhism is also Confucianism, Taoism is Confucianism and Confucianism is also Taoism.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Finally, Trịnh Tuệ concludes:

*He who thinks the Three Religions are divergent,*

*Doesn't know that Śākyamuni, Laozi,*

*and Confucius are of the same current.*<sup>(24)</sup>

## **9. TOÀN NHẬT (1750? -1832?)**

Zen Master Toàn Nhật lived under the Tây Sơn dynasty. In his opinion, despite their different functions in the world, the Three Religions are of only one entity and can help each other to cultivate, deliver, and pacify the people.

He regarded the Three Religions as three paths leading to the only ultimate point.

According to him, any of the Three Religions cannot be without one another. Otherwise, it will be very dangerous.

Their inseparability is like a caldron that must have three legs, and there must be the sun, the moon, and stars in the sky (*the Three Lights*). Similarly, the society must

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<sup>(23)</sup> The quotation is paragraphed by Huệ Khải.

have *the Three Bonds* (of ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife).

Writing a fiction in verse titled *Hứa Sứ Truyện Văn* (The Story of Monk Hứa Sứ), Zen Master Toàn Nhật expresses his opinion towards the Three Religions in the Hell King's words to monk Hứa Sứ:

*Ancient teachings were set up  
and handed down to us.  
The advent of Confucianism is to pacify the world.  
That of Buddhism is to save the living  
and deliver the dead.  
That of Taoism is to destroy evil and kill demons.  
In separation, Sages' teachings are three.  
In collation, the Three Religions are  
of one family.  
They help each other to cultivate  
and benefit all human beings in this world.  
They are inseparable like three legs of a caldron,  
like the Three Lights in the sky,  
like the Three Bonds of a man.<sup>(25)</sup>  
If lacking one, man will be in danger.  
Undoubtedly, they take three directions  
but lead to the same destination.<sup>(26)</sup>*

Zen Master Toàn Nhật's *Tam Giáo Nguyên Lưu Ký* (Records on the Origin of the

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<sup>(24)</sup> [Ủy Ban Khoa Học Xã Hội Việt Nam 1984: 145].

<sup>(25)</sup> *The Three Lights*: the sun, the moon, and stars; *the Three Bonds of a man*: a person's duties towards his country, parents and spouse.

<sup>(26)</sup> [Lê Mạnh Thát 1979a: 189-190].

Three Religions) reads:

*Thus, the Sages of the Three Religions  
situationally have sermons and  
body-transformations for man's salvation.  
Like the sky brightened by the Three Lights,  
this world is enlightened by the Three Religions.  
A three-legged caldron will lose balance  
and overturn if one leg is removed; likewise,  
the Three Religions must be inseparable.  
Confucianism is as brilliant as a constellation.  
Daoism is like a full moon shining everywhere.  
Buddhism is compared to the sun  
shedding light on earth forever.* <sup>(27)</sup>

#### **10. GIÁC LÂM (in the 19th century)**

Bhikkhu Giác Lâm lived at Hồng Phúc temple, in Hoài Đức prefecture, Hà Đông province, under the reign of king Minh Mệnh (reigned 1820-1841). His *Hồng Môn Tạo Hóa Chư Lục Bản Hạnh* (Records of Chaos Creator's Own Deeds), or *Hồng Môn Hạnh* (*Chaos Creator's Deeds*) for short, conveys his opinion on the Three Religions as follows:

*The Three Religions are like trees of the same  
root with innumerable branches, and leaves.  
Those who have superficial knowledge mistakenly  
think that the Three Religions are of  
different origins.* <sup>(28)</sup>

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<sup>(27)</sup> [Lê Mạnh Thát 1979b: 22].

## 11. NGUYỄN ĐÌNH CHIỂU (1822-1888)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu was styled Mạnh Trạch with his literary names of Trọng Phủ and Hối Trai, a native of Tân Khánh village, Bình Dương district, Gia Định province. Due to the loss of sight, he taught at home, thus was also called Đồ Chiểu (Teacher Chiểu). Later he moved to Ba Tri district of Bến Tre province to teach and prescribe herbal medicines. His main works in verse comprise *Lục Vân Tiên*, *Dương Từ Hà Mậu*, and *Ngư Tiều Ván Đáp Y Thuật* (Questions and Answers between a Woodcutter and a Fisherman on Medical Skills), etc.

In his fiction in verse titled *Lục Vân Tiên*, the main character named Lục Vân Tiên is a Confucian scholar aged twenty-eight. After losing the sense of seeing, he found shelter at a Buddhist temple and then his blindness was cured by a Taoist immortal:

*Now speaking about Vân Tiên,*

*who was living at a Buddhist temple.*

*At midnight he dreamt of an immortal*

*whose bowl of medicine cured his blindness. (Lines 1665-1668)*

Thus, though Nguyễn Đình Chiểu did not explicitly express that the Three Religions were of the same origin, his fiction in verse revealed equalitarianism towards the Three Religions.

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Summing up, after nineteen centuries, despite a great loss of books and historical records, the above quotations from a number of typical authors indicate that the Vietnamese formed early and have for long maintained some noble viewpoints towards the Three Religions as follows:

- *Tam Giáo đồng nguyên* (the Three Religions are of the same origin),
- *Tam Giáo nhất nguyên* (the Three Religions are of one origin),
- *Tam Giáo đồng tông* (the Three Religions are of the same ancestor),

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<sup>(28)</sup> [Nguyễn Văn Thọ 1979].

- *Tam Giáo nhất gia* (the Three Religions are of the same home),
- *Tam Giáo đồng quy* (the Three Religions return to their common origin).

The above literary quotations also show that since ancient times the Vietnamese has known how to compare the Three Religions to achieve the underlying unity.<sup>(29)</sup>

In other words, since ancient times Vietnam has formed the idea that the Three Religions are of the same origin. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of Caodaism, the corollary of the above-mentioned idea is that all religions share one common principle because they all are offspring of Đại Đạo (the Great Way). /.

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<sup>(29)</sup> In Europe, the science of comparative religions started at Oxford University, England, in 1939.

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