

# Tracing Origin of Phrase “đòi một” in Nguyen Du’s Tale of Kieu

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**Abstract:** The phrase “đòi một” makes it difficult for those who study and compile the *Truyện Kiều* (the *Tale of Kieu*), resulting in sometimes a vague and unspecific interpretation. According to the *Truyện kì mạn lục tăng bổ giải âm tập chú* (Collection of Chuanqi Tales Randomly Recorded with Supplementary Annotations and Nôm Transliterations) dated in the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, “đòi một” is translated from the phrase 獨步 (*Dúbù* or *độc bộ* as written in Vietnamese) in Literary Sinitic, of which 獨 (*dú*) is translated as “một” (alone) and 步 (*bù*) as “đôi” (i.e. “to step”, “to go”, or “to accompany” as per its meaning in the compound “theo đôi”). At that time, “đòi một” means “to go alone” in the literal sense, but it has also a derivative sense, which is “nobody can catch up with” or “nobody can be compared with”. The phrase “đòi một” started to be used in Vietnamese language not later than in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century and was used again by Nguyen Du in the *Tale of Kieu*. Furthermore, “đôi” means the same as “đuổi”, as they share a common etymon, which is 追 (*zhui/truy*; i.e. to pursue or to chase) in Literary Sinitic.

**Keywords:** Nguyen Du, *Truyện Kiều* (*Tale of Kieu*), đòi một, etymon, etymology.

**Subject classification:** Linguistics

## 1. Introduction

Nguyen Du’s *Truyện Kiều*, or *the Tale of Kieu*, is recognised as a masterpiece in Vietnamese literature. It has achieved the pinnacle in various aspects, such as the use of Vietnamese language, the charitable content, and the poetic art, etc. In spite of being imbued deeply with the Vietnamese native characteristics, the masterpiece is undeniably influenced by “*Kim Vân Kiều truyện*”

(金雲翹傳, *the Tale of Jin, Yun and Qiao*) by Qingxin Cairen (青心才人, literally “Talented Scholar of Green Heart”) in terms of plot. As regards the language, *Tale of Kieu* is also influenced, to a certain extent, by the Chinese language used by Qingxin Cairen as well as the Chinese language used in East Asia during the medieval period in general. Based on the identification of the language-using origin, we can get the orientation in studying the meaning

of some hardly-explanatory words in *Tale of Kieu*. One of the effective tools for the explication of ancient words is the etymology. It is one of the linguistic branches studying separately the origin and history of words and their meanings. The function of etymology is to study and explain “etymons”<sup>2</sup>; i.e. the forms and original meanings of words, especially those of which the use has faded away in the contemporary language. To grasp the etymons, it is necessary to pay attention to the cognate linkage among the languages, the rules for phonetic and semantic changes, the language historical issues and life of ethnic groups in history<sup>3</sup>. This paper focuses on studying the etymon of the phrase “*đôi một*” used by Nguyen Du in the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> lines of verse in *Tale of Kieu* to depict Thuy Kieu’s particular beauty and talent as below: “*Một đôi<sup>4</sup> nghiêng nước nghiêng thành/Sắc đành đôi một, tài đành họa hai*” (lit. A man can lose his city by her first glance, and even lose his whole country by the second/ Such beauty is the only, while there might be at most two of such talent).

## 2. Popular viewpoints of “*đôi một*”

### 2.1. Graphs of *Nôm* script

The phrase “*đôi một*” is found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> places of the 28<sup>th</sup> line of verse in *Tale of Kieu*. It is written by three different ways in the *Nôm* versions, as described below:

(1) “*隊沒*” (*đôi một*). Herein, 隊 (i.e. “a group”, as per the meaning in Chinese) is pronounced euphemistically as “*đôi*” in *Nôm*, which is very common for the formation of *Nôm* words. This way of writing is recorded in a majority of *Nôm* versions available at present,

especially the ancient ones classified into “the group of *Phuong* (Vietnamese: *phường*) documents”; i.e. the *Nôm* versions woodblock-printed in Hanoi, such as the editions compiled by Lieu Van Duong in 1866 and 1871.

(2) “*喙沒*” (*đôi một*). Herein, 喙 is written by combining 隊 with 口 (kẩu - mouth) on the left. Compared with the first way, the text is different, but the pronunciation is the same “*đôi*”. It is found in the edition compiled by Kieu Oanh Mau in 1902.

(3) “*固沒*” (*có một*). It is found in the versions written by Nguyen Huu Lap (in 1870) and Tang Huu Ung (in 1874). The manuscripts made by the two authors are classified into “the group of *Kinh* versions”; i.e. the group of *Nôm* versions polished freely by literati in Hue. It shows the revision made by feudal scholars in Hue Imperial Citadel under the Nguyen dynasty.

Thus, all versions are unanimous in writing the word “*沒*” (*một*), but they are different in the preceding word. “*隊*” (*đôi*) was rewritten afterwards as “*喙*” (pronounced the same as *đôi*). Perhaps, some people did not understand clearly the meaning of “*đôi*”, so they changed it to “*固*” (*có*).

### 2.2. Explication of “*đôi một*”

Generally, all the editions of *Tale of Kieu* in the Romanised script (chữ Quốc ngữ) are unanimous in writing “*đôi một*”, except for some research works on particular *Nôm* versions. How is the word “*đôi*” in the phrase “*đôi một*” explicated in the editions of *Tale of Kieu*? There are four hypotheses available:

(1) In the edition of the *Nôm* version woodblock-printed in 1902, Kieu Oanh Mau

explicated the words “*đòi*” and “*hoạ*” in *Nôm* language as below: “*喙和罗喙歷事*” (*Đòi* and *hoạ* are used as a polite way of expression)<sup>5</sup>. In spite of pronouncing it as “*hòa*”, Ho Dac Ham [1929] noted: “*Đòi* and *Hoà* are used to say with a smooth tongue, showing the same meaning as there is only one in terms of beauty and there are two in terms of talent”<sup>6</sup>.

(2) According to Le Van Hoe: “*Đòi* means ‘many’. *Sắc đành đòi một* means ‘in terms of beauty, she is the unique’. *Tài đành hoạ hai* means ‘in terms of talent, there are two such talents at most’; implicating that no one can be compared with her perfect beauty, but someone of the same talent may be found” [12, p.20]. At the same time, Tran Nho Thin and Nguyen Tuan Cuong argue that “*đòi*” mean “many” in the sentence [19].

(3) According to Dao Duy Anh, “*đòi*” in the phrase “*đòi một*” means “to require; to ask”; thus, “*sắc đành đòi một* means that she is the unique as regards the beauty” [1, p.132].

(4) In the edition printed by the Literature Publishing House, “*đòi một*” means “there is only one” and “*hoạ hai*” means that there may be two at most”. “*Đòi*” is understood by the authors as “only” [16, p.178].

Other versions in the Romanised script give no annotation about the sentence “*Sắc đành đòi một, tài đành hoạ hai*” [14] or just provide the general meaning instead of explicating specifically difficult words. As explained by Bui Ki and Tran Trong Kim, “it implies that there may be at most one more person having the same talent as Ms. Kieu, but nobody can be compared with her beauty” [14, p.14]. In the meanwhile, Tan Da argued: “This sentence just says there is only one person of such perfect beauty, but there are perhaps two of

such talent. Yet, the words are neither clear nor rhythmic” [11]. As supposed by Nguyen Van Hoan and colleagues, “this sentence means that Kieu is the only one who has the top beauty, but there is maybe another person who has the same talent” [13, p.13]. Nguyen Thach Giang also gave a rough explanation: “The idea of the whole sentence is that Kieu is the only in regards to the beauty, but there is possibly one more person of the same talent” [15, p.345]. The newest edition published in 2015 by the Association for Kieu Studies does not include any further annotations. As explained in the edition, “*Sắc đành đòi một* means that her beauty is the only; nobody can be compared with hers; and, *tài đành hoạ hai* means that there is at most one more person whose talent can be compared with hers” [21, p.21]. Remarkably, it is completely similar to the annotation made by Nguyen Khac Bao, a member of the Association for Kieu Studies, also one of the authors of the 2015 edition. Although he wrote “*trội một*” in the edition in 2009 [20, p.366] and they wrote “*đòi một*” in the edition in 2015, the annotation remains completely the same.

### 3. Recent opinions on the phrase “*đòi một*”

#### 3.1. Hoang Xuan Han's opinion

In an interview by Thuy Khue which was published in France in 1996 and one year later in Vietnam<sup>7</sup>, Hoang Xuan Han raised a new opinion to interpret the 28<sup>th</sup> line of verse in *Tale of Kieu*:

“Only in the *Tale of Kieu* can I find such a word “*đòi*”. In *Nôm* script, 隊 (*đội*) is often pronounced as “*đòi*”. In both ancient and

contemporary Vietnamese vocabularies, the word pronounced as “đòi” has various meanings; for example, “đòi phen” means “many times” or repeatedly”; “sự sùi đòi con” means “many fits” or “by fit” [of crying]. In the meanwhile, “tôi đòi” means “a servant”, “người đòi” is also a servant; herein, “đòi” means “to follow”. Since the word “đòi” has so many senses, which one should be applied here? It cannot be understood as “theo” (to follow) or “nhiều” (many). It surely has another sense. Reading more carefully *Tale of Kieu*, we can find a line of verse describing Ma Giam Sinh with the phrase “Mày râu nhẵn”, followed immediately by “đội” and then “áo quần bánh bao...” Herein, “đội” means “trụi” instead of “nhụi”. “Trụi” means “bare” or “bald”; i.e. there is no hair at all. Why was “đội” pronounced as “trụi”? The reason is that the word “đội” has two phonetic sounds, of which one is pronounced as “trụy”; 墜 (trụy) means “to fall down” or “to be debauched” (trụy lạc). “Đội” is always used to write the word “trụy lạc”. It is usually combined with the character “土” (thổ) to mean “to fall down to the earth”. Yet, when standing alone (隊), it also means “trụy”. The word “trụy” is mispronounced as “trụi” or sometimes “trội”; for example, “đầu trọc trụi” or “đầu trọc trội” (a bald head). Now, coming back to the above-mentioned sentence, we can realise obviously why it was said that “Mày râu nhẵn nhụi” (Clean-shaven face); people got used to pronouncing it as “nhẵn nhụi” instead of “nhẵn trụi” as pronounced commonly in Nghe Tinh region. As regards the line of verse that “Sắc đành trội một, tài đành hoạ hai”, “trội một” means the unique [獨一]. The word “trội” is the very “độc”. When I was at school, I was taught that “độc” meant “trội”. [The sentence means that] in terms of beauty, she is the unique; in terms of

talent, there is maybe one more person compared with her. Thus, the word is clearly understood now” [23, pp.3-15].

According to Hoang Xuan Han, in the ancient Chinese language, “đội” (隊 or duì) can be interchangeably used for “trụy” (墜 or zhùi); i.e. people can write “隊 đội”, but they read it as “墜 trụy”. The phonetic borrowing (made by borrowing or combining sounds) called “tônggiả” (通假 or thông giả as in Vietnamese) was recorded by Xu Weijian (許偉建 or Hứa Vĩ Kiến) in the *A Dictionary of Ancient Chinese Phonetic Borrowing Characters* (上古漢語通假字字典 or *Thượng cổ Hán ngữ thông giả tự tự điển*): “隊 duì: 讀為墜 (zhùi)” (“duì/đội” is pronounced as “zhùi /trụy”) [28, p.29]. Since it is pronounced as “trụy” in Sino-Vietnamese reading, it can be pronounced as “trội” or “trụi” in *Nôm* reading. This is completely suitable with the rule of *Nôm* reading. Thus, Hoang Xuan Han argued that the above-mentioned phrase must be read as “trội một”, corresponding to the phrase “độc nhất” (or “獨一” with the meaning as “the only”), in which “độc” means “trội” and “nhất” (first) means “một” (one).

This new hypothesis helped to shed light on the meaning of the 28<sup>th</sup> line of verse in *Tale of Kieu*. It was recognised and considered afterwards to be an additional option by some scholars studying the *Tale of Kieu*. Nguyen Tai Can accepted both “trội” and “đội” [3, p.433]; whereas, Nguyen Khac Bao used only the phrase “trội một” [20, p.53]. On the contrary, An Chi did not approve of the hypothesis. He assumed that the compounds of “trội” (such as trội lông, trội lá, hết trội, ráo trội, trơ trội) give no pleasurable impression about the fact; thus, if the phrase is “sắc đành trội một”, it will

cause the repugnance (“phản cảm”) and cannot be seen as a sincere praise for the beauty of Thuy Kieu [5, pp.548-549].

In addition to the reason that it will lead to the “repugnance” as analysed by An Chi, we can find another weakness of this hypothesis that it provides no convincing evidence; i.e. it does not indicate any specific antecedents in Sino-Nom documents, in which the phrase “獨一” (*độc nhất*) is translated into *Nôm* as “trội một”. Consequently, the hypothesis about the origin of “trội một” still remains merely reasoning.

### 3.2. Dinh Van Tuan’s opinion

Dinh Van Tuan negated the hypothesis raised by Hoang Xuan Han. In his opinion, the combination of “trội một” is not found in any previous dictionaries of *Nôm* or Romanised script of the Vietnamese language [32, pp.52-53]. Referring to Huynh Tinh Cua’s work titled *Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị* (A Dictionary of Vietnamese National Language, 1895-1896); therefore, Dinh Van Tuan assumed that “trội một” should be pronounced as “trối một”, because “trối” was the very beginning form of “trội” in the modern Vietnamese language. He wrote: “In the Vietnamese language in the past, “trối” was defined by Paulus Cua as “Lớn hơn, giỏi hơn, cao hơn” (to be greater, better or higher) such as in the following compounds: “trối hơn”, “trối xa” and “trối chúng”. Thus, the pronunciation of “trối” is more suitable to the word “隊” with the sense of being better, as shown in the first clause of the 28<sup>th</sup> line of verse: in terms of beauty, Miss Kieu is the only (the best, the unique). “Trối” was pronounced as “trội” afterwards and till the present”.

The hypothesis raised by Dinh Van Tuan is somewhat reasonable. Criticising Hoang Xuan Han’s opinion, he argued: “Studying the word “trội” in the previous dictionaries and graphemes of *Nôm* and Romanised script of the Vietnamese language, we have realised that the phrase “trội một” has never been recorded” [32, p.52]. However, we fail to find the phrase “trối một” in any ancient dictionaries or linguistic documents as well. As a result, the weakness of both the hypotheses raised by Hoang Xuan Han and Dinh Van Tuan is that the compounds “trội một” and “trối một” have not been recorded in any previous documents in practice.

## 4. Tracing the origin of “đòi một”

### 4.1. “Đòi một” is translated from “獨步” (*Dùbù* or *độc bộ*) in Literary Sinitic

The *Collection of Chuanqi Tales Randomly Recorded with Supplementary Annotations and Nôm Transliterations* (*Truyền kì mạn lục tăng bổ giải âm tập chú* or *Truyền kì mạn lục giải âm* as named commonly in Vietnamese by researchers) is a *Nôm* version translated from the original Chinese one written by Nguyen Du (Nguyễn Dữ) in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It remains unknown who translated it. Some people think it was Nguyen The Nghi, who lived almost at the same time with the author of the original Literary Sinitic version in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The *Nôm* version was transliterated and annotated by Nguyen Quang Hong, based on the documents coded HN.257 and HN.258, which are currently kept at the Library of the Institute of Literature and date back to the 35<sup>th</sup> year of Canh Hung King’s rule under the Le dynasty (i.e. 1774). According to Nguyen

Quang Hong, however, the *Nôm* transliterated version might date back to the earlier time, from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century [26, p.11]. It means that the language written in the *Nôm* version reflects Vietnamese language used during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Truyện kì mạn lục giải âm* consists of 20 tales, the fifth of which is titled “*Tây viên kì ngộ kí*” (The Story of the Strange Meeting in the West Camp) that tells about the love between Ha Nhan Gia, a junior Confucian scholar, and two girls named Dao (‘Peach’) and Lieu (‘Willow’), who were eventually recognised to be the spirits of flowers in the West Camp, the former estate of the Grand Preceptor under the Tran dynasty, that was left abandoned for a long time. A paragraph of the story was transliterated by Nguyen Quang Hong as below: “At that time, Nhan Gia used the sleeves to cuddle Ms. Lieu. He teased: “Ms. Lieu has the only beauty (“*vẻ đẹp vừa nay đòi một*”) with a good-natured countenance at the present; whereas, Ms. Dao is as beautiful as a flower”. Ms. Dao therefore lowered her head and looked sullen, showing her shyness. For several days afterwards, consequently, she did not come at all.” (*Người Nhân Giả bèn lấy tay áo áp con Liễu. Nhân trêu đấy rằng: “Nàng Liễu vẻ đẹp vừa nay đòi một, khá<sup>8</sup> rằng mặt mũi tốt lành. Nàng Đào bằng hoa ấy vậy”. Con Đào bèn xịu mặt cúi đầu, bằng chừng hình cừu then, sau vài ngày chẳng đến*)” [26, p.141].

In the above paragraph, the phrase “*đòi một*” is present in the sentence “*Nàng Liễu vẻ đẹp vừa nay đòi một, khá rằng mặt mũi tốt lành*” (Ms. Lieu has the only beauty with a good-natured countenance at the present). As annotated by Nguyen Quang Hong, “*bằng nay đòi một*” means “the only at the present” (“*hiện thời chỉ có một*”) [26, p.128]. It is a *Nôm* version translated from the Sinographic one, or

more precisely, it was translated from Literary Sinitic into Vietnamese written in *Nôm* script. Looking at the *Nôm* version and the original one in Literary Sinitic, we can see that it is written in the Sinographic version as “柳嬌艷態當今獨步可謂美顏色” (*Liǔ jiāoyàn tài dāngjīn dúbù, kě wèi měi yánsè* or *Liễu kiều diễm thái đương kim độc bộ, khả vị mỹ nhan sắc*); meanwhile, it was written in the *Nôm* version as “娘柳騷艷皮尼隊蔑可浪額齣峯簪” (*Nàng Liễu vẻ đẹp vừa nay đòi một, khá rằng mặt mũi tốt lành*)<sup>9</sup>.

Comparing the characters in the text, we see that the phrase “*vừa nay đòi một*” in the *Nôm* version was translated from the phrase “*當今獨步*” (*dāngjīn dúbù* or *đương kim độc bộ*) in the Literary Sinitic one. 當今 or “*đương kim*” is translated as “*vừa nay*” in the *Nôm* version. Herein, the word “*đòi*” is written as the same as “*隊*” (*đội*). In the meanwhile, the word “*một*” is written as “*蔑*”, which is pronounced as “*miệt*” in the Sino-Vietnamese language; this is one of the ways to write the word “*một*”, which is older than the way to write it as “*沒*”. Both of the two ways (“*蔑*” and “*沒*”) are quite popular in *Nôm* documents. Thus, it is reasonable to transliterate the phrase “*đòi một*” for “*隊蔑*” in *Nôm* script; at the same time, the meaning is also the same as the phrase “*đòi một*” written in the *Nôm* version of *Tale of Kieu* as 隊沒 or 喙沒, as mentioned above. Consequently, we can confirm that the phrase “*đòi một*” is a transliterated version in *Nôm* from the phrase 獨步 (*dúbù* or *độc bộ*) in Literary Sinitic.

According to the *Comprehensive Dictionary of Chinese Language* (漢語大辭典 or *Hán ngữ đại từ điển* as named in Vietnamese), “*獨步*” has two meanings, including: (1) “*独自漫步* ; *独自步行*” (to go alone; to walk alone); and,

(2) “谓独一无二；无与伦比” (to be the only one that nothing/nobody can be compared with) [30, p.116]. The latter meaning is completely appropriate to the context in the *Truyện kì mạn lục giải âm* and the *Tale of Kieu* as well.

Since “獨” (*dú* or *độc*) has been defined to be translated as “một” in *Nôm* language, how is “步” (*bù* or *bộ*) related to “đòi” in Vietnamese? As defined in the *Comprehensive Dictionary of Chinese Language*, “步” has 14 meanings in total, the fifth of which is “追前人的步子走; 跟随” (to follow the footsteps of those going ahead; to go after) [30, p.332]. It is appropriate to one of the meanings of the word “đòi” in the ancient Vietnamese language (i.e. “theo” – to follow, “đi theo” – to go after, “đôi theo” – to track), which is rejected by Hoang Xuan Han in the above-mentioned quotation. In *Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị* (1895-1896, p.312) by Huynh Tinh Cua, it is recognised: “隊 is Đòi: đòi hỏi (to require); thôi thúc (to urge); kêu gọi (to appeal); and đôi theo (to track, to follow)”. As written in *Việt Nam tự điển* (*Vietnamese Dictionary*) by Association of Khai Trí Tiến Đức: “đòi” has five meanings, including: (1) to ask or beg for something; (2) to ask or invite somebody to come; (3) many; (4) to compete; to follow; (5) a female servant [25, p.186]. According to *Từ điển từ cổ* (*Dictionary of Vietnamese Archaic Words*) compiled by Vuong Loc, “đòi” has two archaic meanings, including: “theo, tùy theo” (to follow, to depend) and “nhiều” (many) [29, pp.60-61]. The dictionary explicates “đòi một” as “độc nhất, chỉ có một” (the only, the unique) by quoting many linguistic materials from the literary Vietnamese in the past, such as: “Tài so đòi một, họa là chẳng hai”; “Đương thời đòi một, họa thì có hai”; “Lừa đòi đòi một chẳng hai”; “Dưới trời đòi một chẳng hai” (in

*Thiên Nam ngữ lục – Records of Sayings from the South of the Sky*; lines number 4856, 4974, 7163, and 7844); “Nàng Liễu vẽ đẹp vừa nay đòi một” (*Truyện kì mạn lục giải âm*), “Sắc đành đòi một, tài đành họa hai” (*Tale of Kieu*). Thus, Vuong Loc already mentioned the evidence relating to the phrase “đòi một” in *Truyện kì mạn lục giải âm*. Dinh Van Tuan also mentioned the same literary work<sup>10</sup>. However, both the scholars did not go further in the Sino-Nom translation between “獨步” (*độc bộ*) and “đòi một”.

In the sense that “nobody can catch up with”, the phrase 獨步 (*độc bộ*) was used early in the classical Chinese literature. In the book titled *Master Shen* (慎子) written by Shendao (慎到) in circa 395-315 BC., there is a sentence of “先生天下之獨步也” (He is the best that nobody in the world can catch up with). In the *Book of the Later Han* (後漢書) compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398 - 445), he wrote: “獨步天下，誰與為偶” (Nobody under the sky can catch up with or can be compared with). In the novel titled *Water Margin* (水滸傳), written by Shi Nai’a 施耐庵 (1296 - 1370), Xu Ning’s (徐寧) martial art in using the hooked lance is described as below: “端的是天下獨步” (Actually, no one in the world can catch up with him). In the book titled *Records in the Break of Ploughing* (輟耕錄) by Tao Zongyi (陶宗儀, 1329-1410), the songstress named Zhu Lianxiu (珠簾秀) is depicted as “雜劇為當今獨步” (in the field of vaudeville, nobody can catch up with her at present). Mentioning those quotations, we can see that the phrase “đương kim độc bộ” (當今獨步; i.e. at present, nobody can catch up with) written in *Truyện kì mạn lục giải âm* is similar to the phrase “đương thời đòi một” quoted by Vuong Loc in *Thiên Nam ngữ lục*. As regards the origin, perhaps both of them

came from the classical Chinese literary work such as *Records in the Break of Ploughing*. The phrase “*dưới trời đòi một*” in *Thiên Nam ngữ lục* is also similar to the phrase “天下獨步” (*thiên hạ độc bộ*) in *Master Shen, the Book of the Later Han* and the *Water Margin*. These evidences demonstrate the use of the phrase “*đòi một*”, which was quite popular in the classical Vietnamese literature, originated in the Chinese literature.

#### 4.2. Etymon of “*đòi*” in Vietnamese language

I suppose that in the sense of “to follow”, “*đòi*” and its doublet “*đuổi*” in Vietnamese language, are both Chinese-originated words pronounced according to the pre-Sino-Vietnamese reading (“*âm Tiền Hán Việt*” or “*âm cổ Hán Việt*”) of the character “追” (*zhuī*) in Chinese language, which is popularly pronounced as “*truy*” in Sino-Vietnamese reading, with the meaning of “to follow, to chase”<sup>11</sup>.

In the *Dictionary of the Origin and Development of Sinographs* (漢字源流字典 or *Hán tự nguyên lưu tự điển*) by Gu Yankui (谷衍奎), “追” is analysed as a semantic-compound character (會意字) in the era of Oracle Bone Script, including “止” (foot) below and “弓” (bow) above, showing the sense of “to hold a bow to chase and fight against the enemy” (持弓追擊敵人). From the era of the Bronze Script onwards, it was combined with radical “辵” (*chuò*) indicating “a road”, to strengthen the sense of “to chase”.

As regards the phonetic reading, the initial consonant “đ” is the ancient sound of the consonant “tr” in Sino-Vietnamese reading; for example, *đuà - trạ* (箸), *đục - trọc* (濁), *đỡ - trợ* (助), *đĩa - trì* (池), *đúng - trúng* (中). Thus, *đuổi/đòi* and *truy* (追) are surely related to each

other in their initial consonants. The rhymes “uy” in “*truy*” and “oi” in “*đòi*”, “uôi” in “*đuổi*” and are relatively close in terms of phonetic relation. As shown in the *Kangxi Dictionary* (康熙字典, or *Khang Hi tự điển* as in Vietnamese), furthermore, “追” is not only read commonly as “*truy*” (陟佳切 *trắc chuy thiết* = *truy*), but also as “*đôi*” (都雷切, 音堆 = *đô lô thiết*, *âm đôi* = *đôi*; 多雷反 *đa lô phản* = *đôi*) [31, p.1184]. It is phonetically reasonable that the pronunciation of “*đôi*” evolved into “*đuổi*” and “*đòi*”. As acknowledged in the *Grammata Serica* (漢文典) by Bernhard Karlgren, “*truy*” can be borrowed to record the following sounds: twə r/tuăi/duī, of which the second and the third ones are very close to “*đuổi*” and “*đòi*” in the Vietnamese language [27, p.232].

In the contemporary Vietnamese language, “*đòi*” with the sense of “to follow” is no longer used separately, but its trace can be found in the compound “*theo đòi*”, in which “*đòi*” means “to follow”.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the in-depth analysis of Sino-Nôm translated linguistic data, I suppose that the two words in the 28<sup>th</sup> line of verse in *Truyện Kiều* should be read as “*đòi một*”. It is translated from the phrase “獨步” (*dúbù* or *độc bộ*) in Literary Sinitic, of which 獨 (*dú* or *độc*) is translated as “*một*” (alone, one) and 步 (*bù* or *bộ*) as “*đòi*” with the sense of “to go, to follow” like its meaning in the compound “*theo đòi*” (to try to keep up with). At that time, “*đòi một*” means “to go alone” in the literal sense, but it has also a derivative sense, which is “nobody can catch up with” or “nobody can be compared with”. The phrase “*đòi một*” started to be used in Vietnamese



language not later than in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century and was used again by Nguyen Du in *Tale of Kieu*. Furthermore, “đôi” and “đuổi” share a common etymon, which is “追” (*zhui* or *truy*; i.e. to chase) in Literary Sinitic.

## Notes

<sup>2</sup> The term “etymon” is translated into Vietnamese in three ways as below: (1) Cao Xuan Hao and Hoang Dung [24, pp.87,395] translated it as “nguyên từ” or “từ gốc” (An Chi usually used only the word “nguyên từ” in his research works); (2) Nguyen Nhu Y [33, p.388] and Nguyen Thien Giap [22, pp.456-457] translated it as “từ nguyên” (maybe to be unanimous with the phrase “từ nguyên học”); (3) Diep Quang Ban [2, pp.509,547] translated it as “từ từ nguyên”.

<sup>3</sup> For the concept of etymology and etymon, see: [22, pp.456-457].

<sup>4</sup> In the past, “một đôi” was often written as “một hai”. It is based on the *Nôm* version by Kieu Oanh Mau (1902). Based on the text, this version is classified into “the group of Kinh versions”. The most typical version in this group is of Nguyen Huu Lap (1870). According to the recent findings related to the *Nôm* versions of *Tale of Kieu* dating back to earlier time (1866, 1871) in the group of Phuong version, we can identify that the origin of the phase “một hai” is “một đôi” (沒堆 as in *Nôm* script), translated from the word “一” (“one”) and “再” (“again”). It was mentioned in a poem by Li Yannian (李延年): “一顧傾人城，再顧傾人國” (Turning the head once makes the citadel lost; turning it again makes the country lost). Note: “hai” corresponds to “二” (*nhị*) but not “再” (*tái*).

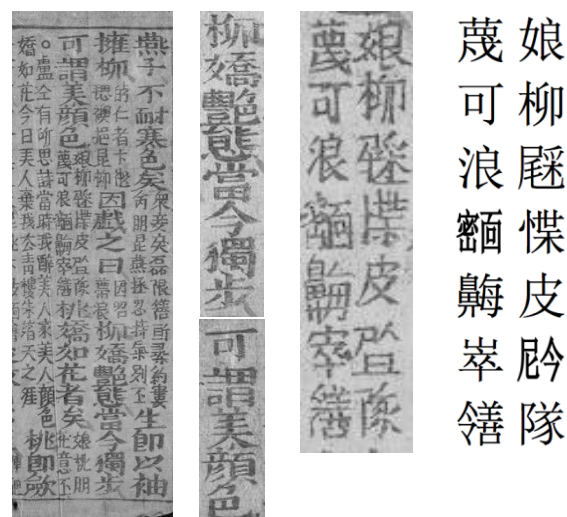
<sup>5</sup> See the document and annotations by Kieu Oanh Mau in the book of The Anh [10, pp.50-51].

<sup>6</sup> In regard to the version by Ho Dac Dam, based on the notes of the Tran Van Chanh's team [4, p.53], it is transliterated as “hoà hai” instead of “hoạ hai”.

<sup>7</sup> The paper was published in the *Journal of Literature* (Vol.3, 1997, pp.3-15) with some revision and a new title as “Scholar Hoang Xuan Han talks about *Tale of Kieu*” (“Học giả Hoàng Xuân Hãn nói về *Truyện Kiều*”).

<sup>8</sup> In *Nôm* script, it is written as 可 and transliterated by Nguyen Quang Hong as “khả”.

<sup>9</sup> The above-mentioned sentence is cited from the page No. 61b in *Tân biên truyền kì mạn lục* (*New Collection of Strange Tales*). See the picture below:



Page 61b

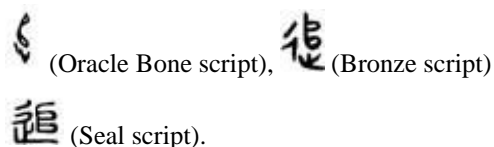
Sino-graphs

*Nôm* script

*Tân biên Truyền kì mạn lục*, R.109 (Vietnam National Library), Vol. 1, p.61b

<sup>10</sup> Dinh Van Tuan [32, p.53] assumes that the word “隊” (*một*) is not only used in *Tale of Kieu* but also in other *Nôm* documents; for example, in *Truyện kì mạn lục*, “隊 *một*” is recognised to be transcribed from “獨步” (*độc bộ*). In Chinese language, “獨步” (*dúbù* or *độc bộ*) means “the super-ordinary and outstanding; the first under heaven”. The word “隊” (*một*) is also found in the 7843<sup>th</sup> sentence in *Thiên Nam ngữ lục* [31]: “Dưới trời (隊) *một* chẳng hai”, which also means the sense of “độc nhất” (the only).

<sup>11</sup> The pictures of the ancient literary documents are cited from <http://www.chineseetymology.org>, where many original morphemes of “追” (*Truy*) are provided. Herein, I just introduce three ones used in the periods of Oracle Bone script, Bronze script, and Seal script:



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