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Research Article

THAN DAO INSCRIPTIONS AND THE THAN DAO INSCRIPTION ON HOANG DINH AI IN XVI CENTURY IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Sino *Than dao* inscriptions were original from China, usually on stelae built in front of imperial, royal, or high-ranking official tombs. The inscriptions were often created by scholars, with standard script, literary style and plentiful historical information. The paper reviews some prominent characters of Vietnamese *Than dao* inscriptions in Le (Li) Dynastic time in XV-XVI centuries, as well as specifically introduces the *Than dao* inscription written on Hoang Dinh Ai, a Le Dynastic meritorious official which was concerned to historic events related to the conflict between Le Dynasty and Mac Dynasty in XVI century in Vietnam.

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INTRODUCTION

Some overview on *than dao* stelae and Inscriptions in Vietnam

The *Than dao* inscriptions take a modest quantity in extant Sino script inscriptional treasure in Vietnam, but they have high value on historical and cultural studies.

Ancient gravestones were usually parted in two sorts: buried in the ground and built on the ground. The underground-buried were tombstones, and the ground-built were tomb stelae, imperial mausoleum stelae or *Than dao* stelae.

It is named "*Than dao*" stele because the ancient feng shui thought that the tomb's southeast direction had been "*Than dao*", building in such the direction would be "*Than dao*" stelae. In the beginning, "*Than dao*" stelae were only used for the sovereign families, later for as well the high-ranking mandarins. The "*Than dao*" stelae in Early Le Dynasty in XV century, reproduced Minh (Ming) dynastic regulations, according to it, for the Three-Lords and higher-rank mandarins, then it was used for lower-rank as well.

The inscription on *Than dao* stele was made carefully, not only a record of late person's years of birth and decease, but also a eulogy for their dedication to particular historic events. It was definitely a popular kind of inscriptions in Ly-Tran Dynastic times, but due to long time, they were lost and damaged, therefore at the present there only the existent inscription

*Phung Duong Cong Chua Than Dao Bi*¹ (Date 1293) was on the *Than dao* stele of Princess Phung Duong – The Tran Dynastic Highest-ranking mandarin of the Court Tran Quang Khai's wife. From Early Le Dynasty in XV century and later, *than dao* fairly increased.

Structurally, in comparison with inscriptions on tomb stelae, *than dao* inscriptions were not specific differences. *Than dao* inscriptions in particular, tomb inscriptions in general, all have structures of a Memoir (or Reminiscence) above, and below was a Eulogy. The Memoir was mainly presented in parallel constructions, recording the life of the late person and expressed the memory or praises of such person. The Eulogy was a virtual summary of the Memoir in praising style in a four-word-line poem.

The ancient gravestone inscriptions possibly preserved much precious historical material on celebrities, so they were great historic value. From literary perspective, they were rich in literature, with many good texts, especially valuable in recording late people's biographies, the authors usually described the characters by using specific details, to stand out their personalities as realistic as lifelike. They were really the interesting character reminiscence texts.

In fact, most of extant *Than dao* inscriptions in Early Le Dynastic in XV century in Vietnam on stelea at mausoleums of Le Dynastic emperors, royalties and famous mandarins were written by well-known authors, such as *Lam Son Vinh Lang Bi* - The inscription on Emperor Le Loi was written by Nguyen

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Trai in 6th Dynastic year of Thuan Thien title (1443), *Khon Nguyen Chi Duc Chi Lang* - The inscription on the queen mother Quang Thuc written by Nguyen Bao in 1st Dynastic year of Canh Thong title (1498), *Lam Son Du Lang Bi* - The inscription on Emperor Le Hien Tong written by Grand Secretary Nguyen Than Nhiep in 7th Dynastic year of Canh Thong (1498), *Dai Viet Thuy Hoa Cong Chua Than Dao Bi* - The inscription on Princess Thuy Hoa, the King Le Thanh Tong's daughter written by Nguyen Xung Xac in 25th Dynastic year of Hong Duc title (1494) ² *To Quan Cong Than Dao Bi Minh* - The inscription on biography of Le Quang Bi written by Do Uong in 2nd Dynastic year of Dien Thanh title (1579) ³, etc. Generally, these were specific and lively texts on lives of kings and queens, civil officials, military officials and celebrities. Structure of the texts was obvious and coherent, with compact writing style and standard, authentic historical allusions, fully emotional and literary.

As *Lam Son Vinh Lang Bi* inscription on the stele at the Dynastic Founder Le Loi mausoleum, but it chiefly recorded his career of founding legacy. According to assessment by people in ancient time, the inscription was an excellent text in parallel constructions. Pham Dinh Ho used to evaluate "The manner and courage could follow predecessors (implied well-known authors in Han - Tang dynastic times)" ⁴. The text was mainly narrative, but depicting method was enthusiastic. In ordering ideas, it purposefully focused on the King personality in his martial skill, not spinning a long yarn, to make an image of a strongly decisive and attractive Emperor. Such lively writing style definitely avoided the inflexible narrative modality often seen in the inscriptions.

"*Dai Viet Lam Son Du Lang Bi*" was also an excellent inscription on Emperor Le Hien Tong's life. The text praised for the achievements in the life of the King, standing out the King's intelligence in agricultural, military, diplomatic policies and custom re-organization, and reviewed his morality, literary ability, as well as made his lively personality, to raise the admiration from readers to the King. The King's attitude to people: "Since for a long time, soldiers in guards have not been sending in communes. For logicity, the Court spent many times to reorganize it, but the Councilors confirmed it was impossible. The Emperor determined to decide, now orders: Soldiers in and out the capital join in native-land units to examine and affectionate together..." or: "...The royal feast in Mid-Autumn, the chief made turtle doves to royal dish, a dozen ones in a plate. The King felt anguish and unpleasant, strictly censured the chief and abolished the feast" ⁵, etc. The specially structural text as telling chronologically every story in memory, driving readers experience the reality, close, full of native life, and sentimentality. The whole text was in melodious, trilling parallel constructions, with clear, plain but luxurious. Inscription on mausoleum as a character story makes the readers deeply interested.

The Than dao inscription on Hoang Dinh Ai

Hoang Dinh Ai (1527-1607) from Bien Thuong commune, Vinh Phuc district, now as Vinh Hung commune, Vinh Loc district, Thanh Hoa province, the originally-rose-up place of Le Dynasty. Hoang Dinh Ai was good at knowledge, art of war, and literature. When being alive, he was a famous general to

pacify Mac Trung Hung under Le Dynasty in XVI century. In decease, he was conferred Thai te post, title Vinh Quoc Cong. His *Than dao* inscription named "Than Dao Bi Minh", used to place at his mausoleum in his native land. The inscription was copied in the book "Vinh Loc Huyen Chi", edited by district chief Luu Cong Dao in Dynastic 15th year of Gia Long (1816), the book in code VHv.1371/AB at the Institute of Han Nom Studies.

The *Than dao* inscription on Hoang Dinh Ai was engraved in 7th Dynastic year of Hoang Dinh title (1607), written by Ngo Tri Hoa ⁶, the doctor in Nham Thin (1592) examination; the textual substance mentioned historic events related to Mac and Le Dynasties' conflict in XVI century in Vietnam.

In the inscription, there is a quotation

"He joined the army of Minh Khang Thai Vuong Trinh Kiem, under Le Dynasty Warlord, to prevent the West land. In the beginning of the matter, all things were as advantaged as forecast Khon (Earth) in the Book of Changes. He had great mind to train the soldiers, good ability to raise army power.

In Dynastic years of Thuan Binh (1548-1556) under Le Trung Tong reign, when discussion on posts, he was offered the title *Quang Tay Hau*. Inside, he made plan, and outside, he led troop to conquest enemy. The battles in Than Phu, Dan Nhai, he gratefully achieved. The battles in Hoang Ha, Xuong Giang rivers he made total success. The ambush in Bien river, spurious general Tho Thanh (under Mac Dynasty) was captured. The battles in Nam Giang, Phu Luong, spurious general Khanh (under Mac Dynasty) was disgracefully defeated. The fights of Giao Thuy, left Thanh Tri were victories; the fights of Van La, Phu Liet captured all enemy boats. The power was as a whale swimming in the sea, heroic spirit was all over every place; the Phuong Nhan battle was a flood of enemy bodies, to be unused all rivers and streams. In 2nd Dynastic year of Chinh Tri title (1559), obeyed Tiet Che order, he led the best troop to head to the front. The humanity given from the Lord, human beings in Kinh Bac, Hai Duong peacefully lived and worked. Moral flags were higher and higher, important providence enemy bases (under Mac Dynasty) in Lang Son, Thai Nguyen were destroyed.

His troops were very powerful, as bears and tigers, when start was as thunders and lightning, chasing spurious general (under Mac Dynasty) in Lo Son, defeated Mac's troop in Cam Thuy-Kim Son battle. The power inside was in accord with providence, leading the troop in Co Moc, authority as tiger, surrounded enemy in Bon Tri so hard, that spurious general Thach (under Mac Dynasty) ran away. Surrounding in Lo Nang so very strictly, and that spurious general Tran Phu (under Mac Dynasty) was beheaded, killing the cruelties, firing enemy food stores.

On lunar calendar 27th 12th month in 14th Dynastic year of Quang Hung (1591), imperial army attacked remnant of the defeated spurious soldiers (under Mac Dynasty) to their nest, in Thach That flags streamed in the wind, with innumerable weapons. His Excellency led the troop, decapitating spurious general Khuong (under Mac Dynasty), killing spurious general Tan (under Mac Dynasty) on horse saddle.

On 6th 1st month in 15th Dynastic year of Quang Hung title (1592), he pacified Dong Quan citadel, captured spurious general Thuong Quoc in Mac Kieu, defeated Mac troop in Lo Thuy. On 9th this month, he admitted surrendered general Bui Van Khue in Gia Vien. He placed floating bridge for the troop getting over the river. When passing districts of Son Nam, he remonstrated officials and the commons, received surrendered soldiers. He managed district officials secretly to transport food supplies, swearing that he would retake Than Chau. On 14th of 11th month he controlled the troop to attack in Khat river, the spurious soldiers (under Mac Dynasty) suffered a bitter defeat, and he received lot of vessels, weapons, then he returned to the imperial capital; officials and soldiers were comforted, families were happy.

On lunar calendar 9th of 1st month Quy Ty year (16th Dynastic year of Quang Hung title), he led the great army to Kinh Su, captured two spurious generals Phu and Khang An (under Mac Dynasty) in Dong Trieu, revoked spurious seals in Yen Quang zone⁷.

This part of the inscription mentions many specific events and place-names during the conflict between Mac Dynastic and Le Dynastic armed forces. The place names of Than Phu, Dan Nhai, Bien river...in Thanh Hoa province, which belonged to the restorative land of Le Trinh Lords, where was often raided by Mac Dynastic army force from the north.

All place names of Giao Thuy, Thanh Tri, Van La are in the boundary of Thang Long imperial capital, and nearby places as Nam Giang, Phu Luong, Hai Duong, Yen Quang...are the areas in the east and north-east from the capital, where violent battles occurred between the Mac and Le army forces. The final great battle of Le army was the great attack in the entrance to Thang Long in 1591.

On such topic, *Dai Viet Thong Su* by Le Quy Don recorded: "In 14th Dynastic year of Quang Hung title (1591), in 12th month in lunar calendar, the Tiet Che Truong Quoc Cong ordered to send the army force altogether in 60,000 men to attack Mau Hop's troops. Nguyen Huu Lieu controlled the first troop, Hoang Dinh Ai was in charge of the second troop, Trinh Do managed the third troop, and Ha Tho Loc was the fourth, to start from Tay Do, over Thien Quan, and arrived to Mang Mong mountainous area in Thanh Chau county, quelled An Son, Thach That, Phuc Loc and Tan Phong districts.

Mau Hop learnt the imperial army attack, being determined to fight to the finish. He sent men in 4 towns, 4 regions and 5 districts⁸, in total of 100 thousand, to the battle. He ordered that on 16th in the month, the soldiers had to gather in Hiep Thuong, Hiep Ha to counter-attack. He sent general Mac Ngoc Lien to be in charge of Western troop, Nguyen Quyen was in Southern, Dukes Ngan and Thuy were in Eastern, Dukes Khuong and Tan to manage four troops. The King Mac Mau Hop himself commanded the headquarters, the other royal members mastered rear troops. All of them parted directions to march forward together. On 27th Mac Mau Hop arrived in Phan Thuong, deployed the troops, and commended a battle.

The imperial commander issued attack order, soldiers ardently rushed into the fight, beheaded Dukes Khuong and Tan. Taking advantage of the victory, imperial army force made a huge

assault on the enemy. Mac Mau Hop's troops were disordered, ran away violently..."⁹

Because of suffering this bitter defeat, in the following year, when Trinh dynastic military attacked Thang Long, Mac Dynasty was deficient in forces to resist, had to retreat from Thang Long.

The Than dao inscription wrote: "The next year in 1592, Le dynastic force attacked and occupied Thang Long citadel, made Mac dynastic move to Quang Yen area near the north border". Finally, Mac Dynasty was suppressed, and in lunar year of Quy Ty (1593), Le Trinh Dynasties gained the complete victory, receiving with consideration Le Emperor to Thang Long capital, ending a nearly century conflict between Mac and Le Dynasties.

After regaining the throne for Le Dynasty, Le Trinh Court immediately established diplomatic relations to Qing Dynasty. Hoang Dinh Ai was in charge of administration in the important bordering post of Lang Son, to pave a direction for the envoy to China.

The inscription recorded: "In 7th Dynastic year of Hoang Dinh title (1607), he conducted the ambassador to offer tribute at Nam Quan border gate, the ambassador received the national seal respectfully, the diplomatic way was advantageous, the two countries were in friendly relations, the Providence was bright after the Restoration, country was in peace, fortune was stably consolidated. It was really from assistance of national forbears, to lengthen the great career to thousands of years"¹.

The inscription not only wrote on Hoang Dinh Ai's achievements, but also complemented historical and specific events to official history, such as the battles occurred between the military forces of Mac and Le Trinh Dynasties in XVI century in Vietnam. It was also the main value of Than dao inscriptions.

In conclusion, on study the documentary values reflected in inscriptions, although Than dao inscriptions were in headstone genre, they were much concerned with cultural and social lives, reflecting well the outlook on life and world view in particular time of history. In the contents that appeared in the inscriptions, it would bring clearer understanding on the temporary cultural and social lives.

Notes

1. Vietnam Sino-Nom Inscriptions, Tran Dynastic time, The Institute of Han-Nom Studies, 2002, p.87-93
2. The Inscriptions in Early Le Dynastic time in Thanh Hoa Province, Thanh Hoa Publishing House, 2013, p.89-110
3. Dinh Khac Thuan, The Inscriptions in Mac Dynastic time, Hai Phong Publishing House, 2010, p.178
4. Pham Dinh Ho (1768-1839), Vu Trung Tuy But, The Translation, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003, p.190.
5. Original Sino Script "...", The Inscriptions in Early Le Dynastic time in Thanh Hoa Province, Thanh Hoa Publishing House, 2013, p. 187.
6. Ngo Tri Hoa was from Ly Trai commune, now is Dien Chau district, Nghe An province. At the age of 28, he

succeeded in Doctor title in Nham Thin (1592) examination, was in charge of Le Dynastic mandarin, ambassador to Ming Dynasty (China)

7. Original Sino scripts: "...” Than dao Inscription on Hoang Dinh Ai.
8. towns were: Son Tay, Son Nam, Hai Dong, Kinh Bac. 4 regions were: Kim Ngo Ve, Cam Y Ve, Hung Quoc Ve and Chieu Vu Ve. 5 districts were: Bac Phu, Nam Phu, Dong Phu, Tay Phu and Trung Do Phu.
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