



RISING ASIA
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Special Issue
Plucked-up Tales
Ancient Vietnamese Narratives

ALL STORIES TRANSLATED BY ERIC HENRY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY VAN NGUYEN

BOOK TWO HISTORICAL LEGENDS



The Việt Thờng Emissary comes to the Zhōu Court. This image relates to Story Number 1 below.



This section contains five tales that purport to relate historical events. The first three, set very far back in time, are of a wildly improbable nature, whereas the last two, set in later eras, have some relationship to real events. – Eric Henry.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

1. Story of the White Pheasant (*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 10, “*Truyện Bạch Trĩ 白雉傳*, Story of the White Pheasant”)

This tells of the tribute mission of Việt Emissaries to the faraway Court of the Chinese King Chéng of Zhōu, with the Duke of Zhōu presiding. The event, if it occurred, would have been early in the Đông Sơn Era. A concluding notation states that Kǒngzǐ (Confucius) chose not to include any of the affairs of Văn Lang 文郎 when he compiled the Spring and Autumn Annals, because the Land was insufficiently civilized. – Eric Henry.

In the time of King Chéng of the Zhōu Dynasty, the Hùng Vương King sent Emissaries arrayed in Yuè dress to offer a white pheasant as a tribute offering to the Zhōu King, but there was a language barrier, so the Duke of Zhōu had a team of people make a series of translations of the Emissaries’ words before understanding became possible.

The Duke of Zhōu posed a question,

“Why is it that the people of Giaočí cut their hair short, tattoo themselves, leave their heads uncovered, and have curled toes?”

The Emissary, gave this answer,

“We cut our hair to make it more convenient to enter the forests. We tattoo ourselves so that we may be covered with images of dragons. These cause serpents and dragons to be reluctant to do us injury when we submerge ourselves in water. Our toes are curved to make it easier to

climb trees, break the earth with implements, put out fires, and sow rice-plant seeds. We leave our heads uncovered to better resist the heat. And we eat areca nuts and betel vines to suppress bad odours and to blacken our teeth.”

“Why have you come here?” asked the Duke of Zhōu.

“The Emissary spoke as follows,

“We have been free for three years from strong winds and drenching rains, and the oceans have been free of mighty waves, so we have come here thinking that a sage must now exist in China.”

The Duke of Zhōu sighed and spoke as follows,

“Without a formal order from the government, a proper man refrains from entering another’s service. If no benefit has been conferred, a proper man does not lay claim to a reward.”

On remembering an oath sworn by the Yellow Emperor, he said, “Giaochí lies outside of our domain; we must not invade that land.” The Duke of Zhōu conferred a handsome gift upon the Emissaries and instructed them to commence their return journey. The Emissaries forgot where the return route lay. The Duke of Zhōu ordered that they be given a chariot with a team of horses, and that the way South be pointed out to them, so as to send them on their way.

Later on, when Kǒngzǐ (Confucius) compiled *the Spring and Autumn Annals*, he felt that the Land of Vǎn Lang 文郎 was a remote place where the elements of culture were not yet complete, so he put their affairs aside and made no record of them.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

2. The Story of Lý Ông Trọng (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 11, “Truyện Lý Ông Trọng 李翁, The Story of Lý Ông Trọng”)



The fearsome Lý Ông Trọng.

This is the Tale of Lý Thân 李身, who is said to have served Tần Thủy Hoàng (Qín Shǐ Huáng) of China as a General. After retiring and returning to his own land, he avoids being resummoned by hiding and making a false claim of indisposition (diarrhea). Later, hard-pressed by demands that he return to Qín, he commits suicide. The King of Qín directs that a statue of him be made and placed by the by the Sīmǎ 司馬 Gate in Xiányáng 咸陽 City. Men hidden in the belly of the statue make it move about. Item 2.2 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one, but has fewer fantastic details. – Eric Henry.

At the end of the reign of Hùng Vương, in Từ Liêm District in Giao Chỉ Commandery, there was a person surnamed Lý 李 whose given name was Thân 身. He was of large stature, two yards and three feet tall. Rough and violent by nature, he on one occasion killed a person. The crime merited the death penalty, but Hùng Vương could not bring himself to carry it out.

In the time of An Dương Vương, Qín Shǐ Huáng wanted to send troops to attack our land. An Dương Vương at once sent Thân to the Qín King as a tribute gift. Qín Shǐ Huáng was very pleased to obtain him, and made him the Ty Lê 司隸 Commandant. When Qín Shǐ Huáng conquered and united the realm, Thân was sent with troops to safeguard the City of Lâm Thao 臨洮. Upon this, the Xiōngnú dared not draw near to that outpost, so Thân was honored with the title “Marquis of Vạn Tín” 萬信 (the Myriad Fulfillments), and allowed to return to his own land.

Later, when the Xiōngnú invaded the Chinese border, Qín Shǐ Huáng remembered Lý Thân and sent an Emissary to summon him back. Thân was unwilling to go, and so went into hiding in the forest. When the Qín King complained of Thân’s failure to appear, An Dương Vương had a search conducted but could not find him, so he lied to the Qín King, saying that Thân had died. The Qín King asked what Thân had died of. An Dương Vương said that he had died of dysentery. Qín Shǐ Huáng sent an Emissary to see if this was true or not, and An Dương Vương had a soup made and poured into a pond to serve as evidence. Qín Shǐ Huáng demanded that An Dương Vương have the corpse delivered to him, so Lý Thân had no choice but to commit suicide to satisfy the command.

People rubbed mercury on Lý Thân’s body and had it delivered to the Qín King. Qín Shǐ Huáng mourned his death, and ordered that a bronze statue of him be made, and bestowed upon it the name Lý Ông Trọng. The statue was placed by the Sīmǎ Gate in Xiányáng. The lower



abdomen of the statue was spacious enough to hold more than a dozen people. Every time an Emissary from another land came to Qín, Qín Shǐ Huáng would have people conceal themselves inside and make the statue move, so the Xiōngnú Emissaries thought that the Commandant was still alive, and dared not draw near to his domain.

Later, in the Táng Dynasty, when Zhào Chāng 趙昌 came down to be the Commissioner of Giāochōu, he had a dream at night in which he saw Lý Thân expounding the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Zuǒ* [the *Zuǒzhuàn*], and in consequence asked where Lý Thân's former home was, and established a temple there for his worship.

Later still, in the period when Cao Biền put down the Nánzhāo Rebellion, the spirit of Lý Thân often made appearances, so Cao Biền had the Temple to Lý Thân restored, and caused a wooden statue of him to be made there. He called it the Temple of Commandant Lý. It is in Tư Liên 慈廉 District, Th́ Hiệ̣n 市現 Village (now called Thụy Hương 瑞香), about fifty miles west of the capital. Sacrifices are held there every year.

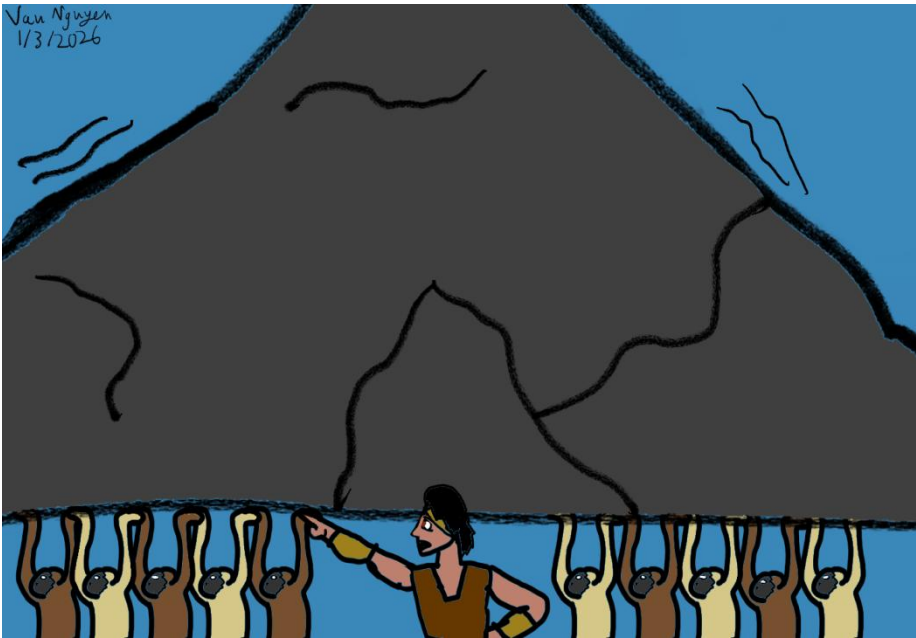
Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

3. The Story of Dạ Xoa Vương (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 22, “Truyện Dạ Xoa Vương 夜傳, The Story of Dạ Xoa Vương”)

This item reflects the contact between early Viet people and members of adjacent Indianized civilizations, in particular the Champa people. It is basically a summary retelling of the central situation in the Sanskrit epic Ramayana, in which Sita, the wife of Rama, is kidnapped by Ravana, the King of Lanka, but in the end is rescued and makes a triumphal return to Ayodhya with her husband.

The story tells how, in the time of the Kingdom of Âu Lạc, the Kingdom of Hồ Tôn Tinh 胡猻精 destroys the Kingdom of Diệ̣u Nghiệm 妙巖. The conflict is precipitated when King Dạ Xoa 夜叉 of Diệ̣u Nghiệm

kidnaps Bạch Tĩnh Hậu Nương 白靜后娘, the beautiful wife of Vi Tư 微姿, the Prince of Hồ Tôn Tinh (the King's name is Thập Xa 十). Leading troops of gibbons, Vi Tư uproots a mountain and hurls it into the sea, making flat land, then defeats Diệu Nghiê, kills Dạ Xoa, and returns with Bạch Tĩnh Hậu Nương. The narrator observes that the Kingdom of Hồ Tôn Tinh later became the Kingdom of Chiêm Thành 占城 (Champa). – Eric Henry.



The revenge of Prince Vi Tư.

Formerly, in high antiquity, beyond the land of Âu Lạc 甌貉, which was part of Nam Việt, there was a Land called Diệu Nghiê 妙岩, the Ruler of which was Dạ Xoa Vương 夜叉王, called Trường Minh Vương 長明王 by some, and the Ten-headed King (Thập Đầu Vương 十頭王) by others. In the North, Diệu Nghiê bordered upon the Land of Hồ Tôn Tinh 胡獠精, who was known as the Ten Chariot King (Thập Xa Vương 十車王). His Crown Prince was named Vy Tư 微姿.



Vy Tư's wife bore the name Bạch-Tĩnh Hậu-Nương 白靜后娘. Her features were of rare beauty, such as few possessed. When King Dạ Xoa heard of this, he wanted to obtain her, so he once brought a force composed of his own people to attack Hồ Tôn Vinh and by this means captured the Lady Bạch-Tĩnh Hậu-Nương.

Angered at this, the Prince Vy Tư 微姿 led a crowd of his descendants to flatten a mountain and fill up the sea, so that it all became level land. He destroyed Diệu Nghiêm, killed King Dạ Xoa, and took Lady Tĩnh Hậu back with him.

The Land of Hồ Tôn Vinh was a land of monkey spirits. Today it is the place called Chiêm Thành 占城 (Champa).

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

4. The Story of Sĩ Vương Tiên (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 23, “Truyện Sĩ Vương Tiên 士傳, The Story of Sĩ Vương Tiên”)

This recounts the story of the Chinese Governor and Vietnamese culture hero Sĩ Vương or Sĩ Nhiếp (Chinese: Shì Xié). Though the accounts concerning him here and elsewhere contain fantastic details, he was indubitably a historical figure and is greatly celebrated in Vietnamese legend for his wisdom, beneficence, and contributions to the regional culture of the forebears of the Vietnamese. In this Tale, when his body is exhumed 140 years after his death, it shows no sign of putrefaction. Item 1.1 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one but differs widely in detail.

– Eric Henry.

The work *Tam Quốc Chí* (History of the Three Kingdoms) relates that this personage had the surname Sĩ 士 (Shì) and the given name Nhiếp 夔 (Xié). He came from Quảng Đức 廣德 Village in Thương Ngô 蒼梧 Commandery. His ancestors were people of Văn Dương 汶陽 in the State

of Lữ. During the disorders arising from the Wáng Mǎng usurpation, they fled to this region, and until the time of Huándì 桓帝 held the position of Prefect (thái thú) in the Commandery of Nhật Nam.

While still a child, Vương studied abroad in the Hán capital where he specialized in the study of the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Zuǒ* [i.e. *Zuǒzhuàn*]. After taking and passing the Hiếu Liêm (xiào lián 孝廉, “filial and honest”) Examination, he was appointed a “Gentleman of Writing” (shàngshū 上書) but then was stripped of that position for official reasons. After achieving success in the Hiễn Lương Mậu Tài 賢良茂才 Examination, he was appointed Commandant of Vu Dương 巫陽. During the reign of Xiàndì 獻帝 he was reassigned as the Administrator (thái thú 太守) of Giao Châu 交州. At the end of the Hàn and the emergence of the Three Kingdoms, Sĩ Vương built the City of Lăng Thành 陵城 (now the City of Long Biên 龍編). Hearing of this, Xiàndì had an Imperial Edict conveyed to him that put him in charge of the Seven Commanderies of Giao Châu, and confirmed him in his position as Prefect of Giao Châu. Sĩ Vương sent his Officer Lại, called Trương Mân 張旻, to the Hàn Capital to present tribute to the Throne. The Hàn Emperor issued an Edict proclaiming Vương to be An Viễn Tướng Quân 安遠將軍 (“the General who Pacifies Far Lands”) with the rank of Đình Hầu 亭侯 Long Độ 龍度. During the reign of Ngô Tôn Quyền 吳孫權 of the Kingdom of Wú he was elevated to the rank of General of the Right (Hữu Tướng Quân 右將軍), and all three of his sons were given the rank of Lang Trung 郎中. When Sĩ Vương sent the Wú King local produce as tribute, the King conferred further honors on him and made Sĩ Vương’s younger brother, whose name was Nhất, the Prefect of Hợp Phố 合浦, while Lý 鮪 became the Prefect of Cửu Chân 九真, and Vũ 武 the Prefect of Nam Hải 南海.



Vương had broad and generous facial features and received all visitors to his court in an unassuming manner. Celebrated scholars of the Hàn who fled the age's disorders relied much on his hospitality. Our people revered him as a King. Wáng Huī of the Hàn wrote a letter to Secretary Tuân Úc, the gist of which was, “Magistrate Sĩ of Giao Châu is greatly learned, and has a thorough understanding of Administration. In the midst of great disorders he has safeguarded an entire area on our borders that for more than thirty years has been free of troubles, and in which the people have lost no harvests. The Đậ 寶 who held the Xihé 西河 region achieved nothing greater than this. Not only that, Vương's younger brothers have all proved to be great leaders and meritorious commanders. When they go out, their horses and carriages fill the roads, the people of our time all revere them, and their sway keeps all the Southern Tribes in order. Rulers such as Commisioner Đà (Ủy Đà 尉陀, a reference to Triệu Đà) achieved no more.”

Vương lived to the age of ninety, and held his position for almost forty years. He was good at the regulation of vital energy, and good at cultivating talent.

When Vương died, he was buried in the ground. One hundred and sixty years later, at the end of the Jin Dynasty, men of Lâm Ấp 林邑 invaded and plundered the region. On opening Vương's grave they saw that his body had suffered not the slightest decay. His face looked just as it did when he was alive. Terrified at this, they hurriedly reburied him. It was said that Vương had mastered the arts of immortality, and a temple was established to perform sacrifices to him.

In the eighth year of the Hàm Thông 鹹通 reign period of the Táng Dynasty, Cao Biền 高駢 (Chinese: Gāo Pián) was dispatched South to campaign against Nam Chiếu 南詔 and, on passing through that region, was met on the road by a distinctive-looking person with refined

features who was dressed in severely correct attire. Cao Biền was strongly attracted to him, and invited him into his tent. There, they conversed with each other about events of the Three Kingdoms Era. When Cao Biền went out with him to see him off, he suddenly disappeared. Taken aback by this, Cao Biền questioned those in his entourage who were close to him. In answer, they pointed to the grave of Sĩ Vương Tiên.

Cao Biền sighed long and intoned the following poem:

Since Hoàng Sơ 皇初 of the House of Wei 魏,
 Till now it has been fifty years.
 In year eight of Táng Hàm Thông.
 Through luck I've met with Sĩ Vương Tiên.

When people of the area have troubles and come to the pagoda to offer prayers, they always obtain an effective magical response. In the Trần Dynasty, the place was named Thiện Úy Linh Ứng Vũ Đại Vương 善威靈應武大王, and it is to this day called Phúc Thần 福神. The pagoda is now in Siêu Loại 超類 District, Thanh Tung Ward 青湘社, Lũng Triền 隴塵 Village, and also in Gia Định 嘉定 District, Sân Cí 三祠 Ward (part of Saigon in later times). These two pagodas are both of the highest rank.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

5. The Story of Nam Chiếu (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 18, “Truyện Nam Chiếu 南詔傳, The Story of Nam Chiếu”)

Nam Chiếu (Chinese: Nánzhào) was a dynastic, militarily aggressive kingdom that arose in the eighth and ninth centuries CE in what is now southwestern China and northern Southeast Asia. This Tale recounts how descendants of Triệu Đà maintained various Kingdoms in the South for centuries, fending off Northern conquerors through guerilla warfare,



alliances, and changes of location. The details in this account are somewhat difficult to follow, and it seems far-fetched to claim that the Rulers of Nam Chiếu were descendants of Triệu Đà, who lived a thousand years earlier, but it is possible to see from the details that, as a political entity, Nam Chiếu was an evolving amalgam of different peoples. The Tale ends with an account of the attempts of Cao Biền 高駢 (Chinese: Gāo Pián) and other Chinese Generals to destroy Nam Chiếu. – Eric Henry.

The Land of Nam Chiếu is inhabited by the descendants of Triệu Võ Đế Đà 趙武帝佗 (Triệu Đà). Formerly, during the reign of Hàn Vũđì, the Commandant of the Land of Triệu was Lữ Gia 呂嘉. Lữ Gia was not obedient to the Hàn, and killed the Hàn Emissary Wáng Lǐ. Hàn Vũđì ordered Lù Bóđé 路博德 and Yáng Pú 楊僕 to go with troops and attack Triệu. They seized Vệ Dương Vương Kiến Đức 衛陽王建德 and Lữ Gia, after which they subdued the entire land, making it an Occupied State.

The Triệu Line had already ceased to exist, and its sons and grandsons were scattered over the earth, but they gathered again in Thần Phù 神符 and Hoàng Sơ 橫山, two uninhabited places, moored seagoing vessels there, killed the Hàn Commandant, and assumed the name “Nam Việt,” mistakenly transmitted as “Nam Chiếu.” Later, in the Three Kingdoms Era, Sūn Quán the King Wú sent Đái Lương and Lữ Đại to again make the place a Conquered District.

Nam Chiếu was formed from a number of places such as Thiên Cầm Sơn 天擒山, Hà Hoa 河華, Cao Hoàng 高望, Hoàng Sơn 橫山, Ô Thị 烏蹄, Hải Ngạn 海岸, Đại Bộ 吏部, Trường Sa 長沙, Chú Đổ, and Cáp Lợi 磊雷 with high mountains and deep seas, and forbidding waves and winds, with no trace of human habitation. The people of Nam Chiếu occupied those areas, dwelt there, gradually swelled in number, and came to trade their possessions, pearls, and jade to develop relations with the people of Tây



Bà Dạ 西婆夜 with whom they sought to unite, so they could help each other grow strong.

At the end of the Jìn Dynasty, when the realm was in great turmoil, there was a regional chieftain named Triệu Ông Lý 趙翁李 descended from the Triệu Vũ 趙武帝 Ruler. His brothers were numerous, and possessed more-than-human courage and strength. The people, full of respect and admiration for him, followed back with more than twenty thousand people from Nam Chiếu, brought precious items and pearls to communicate with Bà Dạ, and begged for an unpopulated place by the sea in which to dwell. Bà Dạ now sent forces to seize half the territory extending from the sea to the river's source, dividing it into two routes, the upper extending from Guìzhōu to Yǎnzhōu, which was the Nhứ Hoàn route, and the lower extending from Camzhōu to Lín An, a stretch ruled by Ông Lý 翁李.

When Ông Lý of Nam Chiếu built his city in Cao Xá, Diển Châu Prefecture, his land extended on the East to the ocean, on the West to Bà Dạ, on the South to Mount Hoàn Sơn, and he established himself there as King. In response, the Eastern Jìn Regime sent the General Tào Khoả with troops to attack him. Ông Lý, who was in a mountainous, easily-defended position, met the attacking army with an ambush, and led troops out to Mount Liên Mạt to avoid the attack. The enemy soldiers assembled and dispersed and, after dispersing, assembled again, going away in the morning and reattacking in the evening. This went on for four years with no major encounter. The Jìn soldiers were unaccustomed to the tropical conditions there, and lost more than half their number to disease, and after Jìn withdrew its troops, Nam Chiếu began to invade all the urban centers in Tràng An. The Chinese Military Governor was unable to prevent it, and by the time of the Táng Dynasty, Nam Chiếu was even stronger.



The Emperor Yìzōng Nam Chiếu was formed from a number of places such as Thiên Cầm Sơn 天擒山, Hà Hoa 河華, Cao Hoàng 高望, Hoàn Sơn 橫山, Ô Thị 烏蹄, Hải Ngạn 海岸, Đại Bộ 吏部, Trường Sa 長沙, Chú Đổ, and Cáp Lợi 磊雷 with high mountains and deep seas, and fearsome waves and winds. It had no trace of human habitation. The people of Nam Chiếu occupied those areas, dwelt there, gradually swelled in number, and came to trade their possessions, pearls, and jade to develop relations with the people of Tây Bà Dạ 西婆夜 with whom they sought to unite, so they could help each other grow strong.

At the end of the Jìn Dynasty, when the realm was in great turmoil, there was a Regional Chieftain named Triệu Ông Lý 趙翁李 descended from Đà, the Triệu Vũ Ruler (Triệu Vũ Đế Đà 趙武帝佗, a reference to Triệu Đà). His brothers were numerous, and possessed more-than-human courage and strength. The people, full of respect and admiration, followed him back with more than twenty thousand people from Nam Chiếu, brought precious items and pearls to communicate with the Land of Bà Dạ 婆夜, and sent Cao Biền [Gāo Pián] to attack Nam Chiếu (in 865 CE), but he returned, unable to prevail. In the time of the Five Dynasties, Thạch Kinh Đường 石敬瑭 of the Latter Jìn sent General Lý Tiến 李進 with a hundred thousand troops to attack them at Đồ Sơn 塗山. Nam Chiếu retreated and at once formed an alliance with Ngô Đồ Mô 吳頭模, next to Ai Lao 哀牢. It is said that the Land of Bồn Mau 盆蠻 was formed in this way.

In the sixth year of the Hàm Thông reign period, emperor Yìzōng of the Táng Dynasty sent Cao Biền south to take charge of the region and attack Nam Chiếu with troops, and at the same time created the military district of Thịnh Hải in An Nam city, making Cao Biền its commandant.