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Plucked-up Tales
Ancient Vietnamese Narratives

ALL STORIES TRANSLATED BY ERIC HENRY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY VAN NGUYEN

BOOK SEVEN

SUPERNATURAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE



The Generals Long Nhân and Như Nguyệt. This illustration relates to the first tale below.

Throughout the two thousand years of Vietnamese history, local Generals managed to win encounters in which the odds seemed heavily weighted against them. Vietnamese storytellers have long been inclined to attribute these successes to the assistance provided by powerful spirits, often the still-active souls of heroes who lived in preceding centuries. These figures typically appear in dreams to the Commanders, and make promises of loyal assistance. — Eric Henry.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

1. The Story of the Spirit-Generals Long Nhân and Như Nguyệt

(*Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái*, Narrative 16, “Truyện Hai Vị Thần Long Nhân Và Như Nguyệt 龍眼如月二神傳, Story of Long Nhân and Như Nguyệt”)

This tells how the Spirits of Trương Hống 張吼 and Trương Hát 張喝, two Generals of Triệu Việt Vương 趙越王, follow him in death when Lý Nam Đế 李南帝 usurps the Throne. They raise Ghost Armies that help the Ruler Đại Hành 大行 of the former Lê 黎 Dynasty turn back an invading Army sent by Sòng Tàizōng. Item 2.8 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one. — Eric Henry.

In the Thiên Phúc 天福 Reign Era of the King Đại Hành 大行 of the former Lê 黎, the Tân Tỵ Year to be exact, the Emperor Tàizōng of the Sòng Dynasty sent the Generals Hầu Nhân Bửu 侯仁寶 and Tôn Toàn Hưng 孫全興 to invade the South with troops. When they reached the Đại Than 大灘 River, King Đại Hành and his General Phạm Cự Lượng 范巨倆 stationed troops at Đồ Lỗ 屠虜 River to resist the attack, and established an encampment there.

King Đại Hành had a dream in which he saw Two Spirits who approached from the river, prostrated themselves, and addressed him,

“We two Brother-Spirits are Trương Hôu 張吼 and Trương Hát 張喝. We originally served Triệu Việt Vương 趙越王, with whom we did battle with rebel bandits in order to seize all the realm. After hearing that King Lý Nam Đế 李南帝 had seized the Throne, we called on our men to come from afar, but due to principle they were unable to do so, so the two of us drank poison and died. The Supreme Being looked favorably on those with merit and, praising our loyalty and integrity, made us Generals in Command of the Spirit Army. Seeing now that Sòng Troops have entered this region, making the people of the land miserable, we Two Spirits have come to help Your Worship fight the bandits and save them.”

Startled at this, King Đại Hàng awoke and spoke to his attendants, saying,

“This means that Spirits are giving us aid.”

Then, at the front of the boat, he burned incense and uttered a prayer,

“If you, the Forces of the Spirit World, can help us accomplish this enterprise, then you shall be offered blood sacrifices without end.”

Then he, at once, slew some buffalo and cattle as offerings, and burned some Generals' headdresses, spirit money, and paper horses and elephants as well. That night, he again saw the two Generals wearing the raiment he had given them the previous day coming before him and prostrating themselves in gratitude. The next night he saw a Spirit in white clothing leading a Ghost Army from South of the Bình Giang 平江 River approaching, and another Spirit leading a Ghost Army down the Như Nguyệt 如月 River. Both had come to strike the bandits.



On the twenty-first of the tenth month, during the third night-watch, the scene was dark, the wind was strong, and rain poured in torrents. The Sòng Troops were terrified when they saw Spirits standing dimly in the air loudly intoning the following,

The streams and mountains of the South the Southern King keeps safe,

The boundaries firmly fixed in edicts fixed above.

How can rebel hordes perversely violate this land?

Their forces face inexorable defeat.

Hearing this, the Sòng Troops stumbled over each other in flight, and more were captured than can be numbered. The Sòng Army returned, having suffered a shattering loss. King Đại Hanh withdrew his forces and carried out a victory celebration in which he conferred noble status on the Two Spirits. He named the elder Uy Địch Đại Vương 威敵大王, “Enemy-Intimidating Great King,” and established a Temple to him by the Long Nhân 龍眼 (“Dragon’s Eye”) River, and had the people of Long Nhân and the River Bình conduct sacrifices to him there. He named the younger Khước Địch Đại Vương 卻敵大王, “Enemy-Dispelling Great King,” and established a Temple to him by the Như Nguyệt 如月 (“Moonlike”) River, and had the people in that area sacrifice to him. These practices have continued till the present day.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

2. The Story of Sóc Thiên Vương

(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 24, “Truyện Sóc Thiên Vương 朔天王傳, Story of Sóc Thiên Vương”)

This tells how a Sòng invasion is driven back through the supernatural assistance of a spirit near Mount Vệ Linh. It contains a concluding reference to the story of Đổng Thiên Vương (see Section 2, Tale 2).—Eric Henry.



On examining the book, *Thuyền Uyển Tập* 禪苑集 (Zen Garden Anthology), we see the following recorded: Long ago, during the Reign of Lê Đại Hành 黎大行, there was a great Officer named Khuông Việt 匡越 bearing the surname Ngô 吳, who often went on excursions to Bình Lỗ 平虜 Village by Mount Vệ Linh 衛靈. Fond of the splendid scenery there, he made a Hermitage in that vicinity and resided there. On one occasion, at around the third watch in the night, he had a dream in which he saw a Spirit arrayed in golden armor holding a stupa in his right hand. He was followed by more than ten people of fearsome appearance. Approaching Khương Việt, he said, “I am the great King of Tỷ Sa Môn 麓沙門天王. God has sent me to this Southern Land to protect the people. Because I have a pre-ordained affinity with you, I have come to you to announce myself.”

Khương Việt woke up in alarm, and was further gripped with fear when he heard the sound of singing coming from the mountain. When morning came, he saw that there was a great tree on the mountain with thick and handsome green leaves, surrounded with dense fragrance. He directed workers to fell the tree, after which he carved the wood so as to create an image that looked exactly like the Spirit he had seen in the dream. Then he had a Temple constructed for its worship.

In the first year of the Thiên Phúc 天福 Reign Period, Sòng Troops invaded and went about plundering and destroying all that lay in their path. When the King heard of this, he sent an Officer to the Temple to pray for aid. At that time the Sòng Troops were stationed at Tây Kết 西結 Village, and the two sides had not yet begun to fight. The Sòng Troops suddenly saw a figure more than ten yards tall floating upon the waves, with hair standing straight up. The figure glared down at them, and the brightness of his form was like a fire.



Seeing this, the Sòng Troops were terrified, and retreated to a junction point in the river, where they met with roaring waves and exploding thunder. Serpents and dragons rose up from the water, making fierce gestures. A panic set in among the troops and they dispersed, running in all directions. The Sòng General Quách Tiến 郭進 took the troops back to Sòng. Our King praised the Spirit for its efficacious response and established more Temples to make offerings to it.

There was a person who held that after Đổng Thiên Vương 董天王 quelled the Ân bandits, he rode his horse to the place where the tree was located on Mount Vê Linh, removed his armor and flew off to Heaven. It has been called a miraculous victory of the ages, so, to the present time, whenever sacrifices are performed there, only tea, cakes, and vegetarian items are used.

During the Lý Dynasty, an Emissary was dispatched there to pray and make offerings there. And he established a Temple that lay to the East of West Lake, for the worship of Phúc Tồn Đại Vương 福神大王, a matter that is noted in Court Records.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

3. The Story of the Ruling Spirit of Bronze Drum Mountain (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 2, “Truyện Thân Minh Chủ Núi Đồng Cổ 盟主銅鼓山神傳, Story of the Master Spirit of Bronze Drum Mountain”)

This recounts how the Spirit of Bronze Drum Mountain appears to Lý Thái Tông when he is still just a Prince and helps him defeat a Champa Army, and later, after he assumes the Throne, warns him of a rebellion being mounted by the three Princes, Vũ Đức, Dục Thánh, and Đông Chinh. The story then tells of the merit achieved by his Officer, Lê Phụng Hiểu, in putting down the rebellion, and of the honors accorded him in

consequence. Items 2.6 and 3.2 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* are both related to this one. — Eric Henry.

Upon examining the text of *Báo Cực* 保極 (Preserving the Ultimate) we see that Minh Chủ Chiêu Ứng Linh Đại Vương 盟主昭島靈大王 was originally the Spirit of Bronze Drum Mountain (Tóng Gũ Shān 銅鼓山).

Bronze Drum Mountain is in An Định District, Upper Đan Đạ 丹陀 Village. In former days when Lý Thái Tông 李太宗 was still a Crown Prince, he brought troops to attack Champa and, coming to the Trang Sa 長沙 Plain, halted his forces and slept. At around the third watch [i.e, midnight], he dreamed that a Spirit in military attire came to him and said, “I am the spirit of Bronze Drum Mountain. I have heard that you are conducting an expedition to the South, so I beg permission to follow you and win engagements for you on the battlefield.

The Prince and the Spirit conversed with perfect clarity in the dream. After putting down Champa, the Prince returned to the Capital with his troops and ordered his Officers to establish a military place of worship in the City on the right bank next to the Tư Liêm 慈廉 Pagoda. Upon the death of the King Thái Tổ, Thái Tông came to the Throne in accordance with the former King’s dying injunctions.

That night, the Spirit spoke to him again, saying, “The three Princes Vũ Đức 武德, Dực Thánh 翊聖, and Đông Chinh 東征 are plotting rebellion.”

When morning came, the three Princes, who had prepared concealed soldiers in the City, suddenly attacked the City Gates. Thái Tông ordered his Army Officer, Lê Phụng Hiếu 黎奉曉, to take troops to repel the attack. In a great voice, Phụng Hiếu spoke as follows to Đông Chinh and Vũ Đức,

“You three Princes, spying on what is sacred and disdainful our troops, why are you so faithless and unprincipled? I, Phụng Hiếu ask leave to bring my sword and make an offering.”

Then he came straight forward and beheaded Prince Vũ Đức, while the two other Princes, Đông Chinh and Dực Thánh, fled elsewhere. The ruffians dispersed and the uprising was quelled, just as the Spirit in the dream had urged. Phụng Hiếu, aided by the Spirit, won the day, and the King directed that he be honored with the title Thiên Hạ Minh Chủ 天下明主 [“Bright Ruler of the Realm”], and every year until the present day, on the fourth day of the fourth month, the King has had the Officers of the Court gather in the Temple to offer sacrifice. The words of the oath sworn on this occasion were, “When a son fails to honor his parent, and when a servant of the Throne is disloyal, the Spirits will kill him.” All present would then do solemn sacrifice.

When Phụng Hiếu quelled the rebellion, word of the victory was carried to the Throne. Thái Tông promulgated words of commendation, saying that Phụng Hiếu was a man whose loyalty and patriotism far surpassed that of Kinh Đức 敬德 of the Tang Dynasty. After assisting the King on his Southern Expedition in which he vanquished the forces of Champa, Phụng Hiếu’s great merit and glorious achievements were known to all, both near and far. The people established a Temple dedicated to the worship of his Spirit, which was always powerfully responsive to the people’s entreaties. This has lasted through several dynasties, during which he has always been honored as a King.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

4. The Story of the Mighty Sage King Đại Hồng Vương (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 33, “Truyện Hồng Thánh Đại Thần Vương 洪聖大神王傳, The Story of the Great Spirit King Hồng Thánh”)

This concerns measures taken by Lý Thái Tông, shaken by a recent rebellion, to determine the guilt or innocence of various people whom he is holding prisoner. He has a dream in which a Spirit appears who recommends the Spirits of past heroes who gave aid to the early dynastic founders Ngô Vương, Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Lê Hoàn (Lê Đại Hành) of the former Lê (981–1005). — Eric Henry.

Upon examining the *Records of the Historian*, we see an item concerning a personage surnamed Phạm 范 with the given name of Cự Lượng 巨倆. In the time of Lý Thái Tông 李太宗, the King had many suspects detained in prison under his jurisdiction. His Officer, Sĩ Sư 士師, could not readily come to a decision regarding them, so he had the idea of establishing a Temple in the prison and relying on Spirit manifestations to deter the actions of those plotting against him. He accordingly bathed himself and burned incense to announce his intention to the Lord on High (thượng đế 上帝).

That night, the King had a dream in which he saw an Emissary in a red blouse who said that the Lord on High had issued an urgent directive to Cự Lượng that a clear-minded Overseer (minh chủ 盟主) be made the Director of Prisons.

The King questioned the Heavenly Emissary, saying, “To whom are you referring, and what position does he currently hold?”

The Emissary said, “King Lê Đại Hành 黎大行 had in his retinue of Officers a man named Phạm Thái Ủy 范太尉, an utterly loyal servant of his. When he departed from the world, the Lord on High in consideration of



his great merit assigned him to the position of Nam Đài Trung Ty Lục 南臺中司錄 so that he might resume his former Office and examine the cases of suspect detainees among the people.”

With these words he went away to some unknown place.

The King awoke and summoned two men in his retinue, one of whom, Tế Chấp 宰執, said, “The one he spoke of was a totally honest man. He was Phạm Chiêm 范占, grandson of the Officer, Vũ An Châu Mục 武安州牧, and son of the Officer, Tham Chính Phạm Man 參政范蔓, and younger brother of the Officer, Đồ Úy Phạm Dật 都尉范溢. Phạm Chiêm helped the King of Ngô 吳 found his country, and was raised to the position of Đồng Giáp 銅甲 [Army General]. Phạm Man helped the Ruler of the Southern Jìn 晉, and was raised to the position of Tham Chính 參政 [Chief of Staff], Phạm Dật 范溢 helped Đinh Tiên Hoàng 丁先皇, and Phạm Cự Lượng helped King Lê Đại Hành 黎大行 achieve his goals, and was raised to the position of Thái Úy 太尉 [Grand Commissioner]. These were all very distinguished positions.”

The King felt that all of this was true and elevated him [Phạm Chiêm] to the position of Hồng Thánh Đại Vương 洪聖大王 [Supreme Sage-King]

The King then had another dream in which he saw a Spirit wearing Official Attire and Headdress. The Spirit came before him and prostrated himself, just as a living servant might do. The King thought this remarkable and had an account inscribed on a stone monument so that there might be a record of the Spirit’s appearance.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

5. The Story of the Spirit of Minh Ứng An Sở (*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 34, “Truyện Minh Ứng An Sở Thần Từ 明應安所神祠傳, The Story of Minh Ứng An Sở”)

This tells of a Spirit in Cổ Sở Village who appears in a dream to King Lý Thái Tổ, who establishes a Temple dedicated to him. Centuries later, in the Trần Dynasty, the Spirit helps the people in the region of the Temple to repel Mongol marauders. — Eric Henry.

On examining the writings of Đỗ Thiện 杜善, we see there was a Princely man with the surname Lý 李 and the given name Phục Man 服蠻. He was a native of Cổ Sở 古所.

Lý Thái Tổ 李太祖 once went on a boating excursion to the pier in Cổ Sở Village, and on seeing the refined and lovely appearance of the mountains and rivers there, was overcome with admiration and poured some wine into the river, saying, “I have heard that the mountains here are splendid, and the rivers refined. If there be any outstanding men or notable Spirits here, then please accept my offering.”

Then he had a dream in the night in which he saw a tall and beautiful person with distinctive features who inclined his head and introduced himself, saying, “I am a person of this place with the surname Lý 李 and the given name Phục Man 服蠻. I gave assistance to King Lý Nam Đế 李南帝, serving as his General-of-the-Left, became known for loyalty and glorious achievement and was given Đỗ Động 杜洞, a tract of rivers and mountains among local dwellings. When I died, the Lord of Heaven praised my loyalty and rectitude, and confirmed me in the position I already held. For many years here I led Ghost Troops in order to quell rebellions. And now I have met Your Majesty and feel your solicitude for my position here.”



Then he sighed and intoned the following,

The realm is plunged in gloom,
And loyal servants hide their names.
The sun and moon ascend the sky,
All see their forms with clarity.

With this, he flew off and disappeared.

Thái Tổ was startled awake by this dream and spoke of it to others. His great Officer, Vương Nhậm Chi 王任之, spoke to him, saying, “This means that he wants you to establish a Temple here and restore the Statue that portrays him.”

The King sent his followers out to find the Statue, which they in fact obtained, and had workmen construct the Temple, carving the Spirit’s image so that it was just like the figure in the dream, and named it a Spirit Protector for the region.

Later, during the Nguyên Phong 元封 Reign Period of the Trần, Mongol savages invaded and went marauding through the region. Their horses grew lame and could not advance. They came brandishing their weapons into the village. Relying on the mighty name of the Spirit, the people of the village came out to resist the attack and defeated the bandits, after which the Mongols no longer dared to think of renewing their attack.

In the early years of the Trần, in the first year of the Trùng Hưng 重興 Reign Period, the Northern marauders invaded our land again seizing everything that came to hand in every place they entered, but when they came to the Sở Pagoda 祠所, it was as if the place was protected—they dared not disturb a single hair.

When the bandits were at length pacified, the King bestowed a four-word honorific epithet on the Spirit: Diên An Minh Ứng 延安明應

[Peace Maintaining Divinity], and he continues to this day to be powerful.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

6. The Story of the Divine Powers of the Spirit of Bạch Hạc Pagoda

(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 38, “Truyện Uy Linh Bạch Hạc Thân Từ 威靈白鶴神祠傳, Story of the Divine Powers of the White Crane Pagoda”)

This tells of a Spirit who gains a position as a Gate Guardian through a demonstration of martial skill and who later gives supernatural aid to Generals leading military campaigns. Item 3.08 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one. — Eric Henry.

On consulting the *Giao Châu Record* (Giao Châu Ký 交州記), we can see that the original name of this Spirit is recorded in it as Thổ Lệnh Trưởng 土令長. Around the time of the Yǒng Huī 永徽 Reign Period under Gāozōng 高宗 of the Táng Dynasty, Lý Thường Minh 李常明 came here to be the Governor of Phong Châu 秦州.

When Thường Min arrived to take up his appointment, he found that the place was very wide, extending a thousand miles, and surrounded by mountains and rivers, and so established his official quarters in Bạch Hạc 白鶴 (Thousand Cranes) Village, and worshipped the Statue of Tripitaka there, so as to act in accord with the grandeur of his surroundings. He also had two low buildings erected in front and in the back of the place, as he wished to set up statues of Gate Guardians there, but he didn't yet know which Spirits would be most powerful, so he burned incense and offered a prayer, saying, “Oh Spirits of this place, please reveal yourselves, so that I can have statues made.”

That night he had a dream in which he saw two uncommon-looking figures with pacific, refined expressions, followed by disciples



who, making some stir, approached the low building before the courtyard.

“What are your names, gentlemen?” asked Thường Minh.

One man was called Thổ Lệnh 土令, and the other Thạch Khanh 石卿. They asked that their martial abilities be compared; the one who was better would assume the position at the entrance. In accordance with the proposal, Thạch Khanh leapt to the other side of the river, but saw that Thổ Lệnh was already standing there. Upon this, Thổ Lệnh was given the position at the entrance. His statue was of impressive majesty, and the people of the Prefecture were all in awe of it, served it with incense and flowers, and called it the Beneficent Spirit (Phúc Thần 福神) of the Three Rivers (Tam Giang 三江).

During the Trần Dynasty, when the academician Nguyễn Cố Hồ 阮固扈 accompanied the King on an expedition against the Land of Āi Lao 哀牢, he visited the Shrine and left the following poem,

Turtles, dragons, amulets and signs lie crosswise here;
 For this campaign we beg the General’s assistance.
 Weak and cowardly, we scholars are without support
 And come beseeching you to keep us safe.

Then later, when the scholar Vương Thành Đức 王成德 accompanied the Army on a Westward military campaign, he was ordered by the King to compose the following in praise of the Spirit,

The twenty thousand corpses show your power;
 Your might lays waste the ramparts of the South.
 This Southern Land is paltry, nothing to revere,
 The howling winds and crane-calls stun the tyrant’s troops.