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Plucked-up Tales
Ancient Vietnamese Narratives

ALL STORIES TRANSLATED BY ERIC HENRY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY VAN NGUYEN

BOOK NINE

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF TEMPLES

The establishment of a Temple, and the supplications and rewards associated with that Temple, is a motif that appears in many of the tales in this collection, and is a prominent element in each of the tales presented here.—Eric Henry.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

1. The Story of the Three Ladies of Kiên Hải
(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 25, “*Truyện Ba Vi Phu Nhân Kiên Hải 乾海三位夫人傳*, Story of the three Ladies of Kiên Hải”)

This recounts the story of three ladies, a mother and two daughters, who, as refugees from the Yuán Conquest of the Sòng, are washed up to the shore by a Pagoda clinging to a rafter. The Monk in the Pagoda saves them from starvation, but later, after the youngest daughter rejects his

sexual advances, kills himself in shame by jumping into the sea. The three ladies commit suicide in despair by jumping into the sea. Later their uncorrupted corpses are carried to a shore by another Pagoda, where the people erect a Temple to them. They, then, become Divine Protectresses of sea-going folk. Item 4.3 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one. — Eric Henry.



The Suicides of the three ladies of Kiên Hải and the Cham Queen Mỹ Ê, leading to the foundation of temples.

According to an old edition of this tale, the Lady was of the Lineage of Triệu 趙 and was a Princess of the Southern Sòng. With her mother and sister, she was one of three, and was the youngest.

The first year of the Thiện Bảo 紹寶 Reign Period under Trần Nhân Tông 陳仁宗 was the first in the Reign of Đuan Tông 端宗 of Sòng, who had expelled a group of bandits from an island in the sea and then passed away due to an illness. His Generals Lục Tú Phu 陸秀夫 and Trương Thế



Kiệt 張世傑 established Đoan Tông's younger brother, Đê Duế 帝昺 to take his place. Before long, Văn Thiên Tường 文天祥 was defeated in battle and taken to the North as a prisoner, and Thế Kiệt 世傑 moved his boats past Mount Nhật Sơn 廬山. The Yuán General Trương Hoàng Phạm 張弘範 surrounded his forces and seized him, whereupon Tú Phó 秀夫 embraced Đê Duế and jumped into the sea. Thê Kiệt also jumped into the sea and died. The Sòng Army lost more than a hundred thousand of their troops. The mother and her two daughters clung to a small plank and were carried by the water to the edge of a Pagoda. Hungry and thirsty, they did not know upon whom to rely. Seeing this, the Master of the Pagoda took pity on them and had them eat and drink.

After several months, the Lady's flesh returned to normal, and her features grew refined and beautiful. The Resident Monk's admiration for her gave way to lust, and he came at night seeking to have intimate relations with her. The Lady preserved her chastity and refused him, after which the Monk regretted his action and, overwhelmed with shame, went out to sea and killed himself by jumping into the water.

The mother wept and said to her daughter, "My daughters, you and I owe our lives to this Monk, and now he has drowned himself because of us. Upon whom can we now rely to live?"

The mother jumped into the sea and was followed by her two daughters, who died with her. Their bodies, impelled by the wind, drifted to the Kiến Hải 乾海 Sea by Diển Châu 滇州 in our Land, and arrived at the shore. The people who lived there by the sea were not moved to pity when they saw the corpses, but said to each other, "Those bodies came to our shore from who knows how many thousands of miles away, but their clothing and their appearance is just as if they were alive." They were all



very startled at this and, believing that the bodies were those of Spirits, buried them, and established a Temple there in order to worship them.

When seafarers passing by that place met with stormy winds and waves and offered up sincere prayers, they always were able, in short order, to enjoy safety. To this the people living in sea outlets throughout the region have established Temples to worship the three as saviors, and their protection is very effective all over the Southern Seas.

According to an old custom, the origin of which nobody knows, the Spirit, Dục Hý 淫戲, was truly filthy, so he has been raised to the status of a genuine Spirit of salvation.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

2. The Story of the Spirit of the Earth Queen

Ứng Thiên Hóa Dục (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 28,

“Truyện Thân Ứng Thiên Hóa Dục Hậu Thổ 應天化育后土神傳, Story of the Earth Queen Spirit, Ứng Thiên Hóa Dục”)



The Earth Queen Spirit.

This tells how the Great Spirit of the Southern Land in the form of an attractive young woman appears to Lý Thái Tông in a dream, and offers to help him gain a victory over Champa forces. He sends Officers out to find the Spirit. They come across a great wooden statue bearing a perfect resemblance to the Spirit, which is placed in the Royal Vessel. The Vessel, at once, sails more smoothly. A Temple to the Spirit is later established near the Capital and, later still, in the Trần Dynasty, the Spirit ends a drought in response to an intercession. — Eric Henry.

Upon consulting *Bảo Cực* 保極, we see it recorded that this was the Great Spirit that presided over the Southern Land. In former times, when Lý Thái Tông led his Expedition against Champa, he came to an ocean estuary and saw a great wind and rain storm with roaring waves, and in the distance he espied a stone mountain. The Royal Ship, and those that followed in its wake, were unable to advance further, and had to moor where they were, by the shore. That night, the King had a dream in which he saw a girl dressed in a white blouse and red trousers with an attractive mien, who boarded the Royal Vessel, and said to him, “I am the Spirit of the Southern Land (Nánguó Dàdì zhī Shén 南國大地之神). I have sheltered myself in a tree for many years. Now, seeing that Your Lordship is leading an Expedition to this Land, I wish to follow you and win engagements on the Land for you.”

Having spoken thus, she suddenly disappeared. The King, amazed, woke up and only then realized that he had been dreaming. He had his Officers and Wise Men summoned and conversed with them about what he had seen.

The Monk Tống Huệ Sinh 宗惠生 addressed the King, saying, “If, as you dreamed, the Spirit has been taking refuge in a tree, perhaps we can try looking for the spot.”



The King sent out his most trusted servants to explore all the mountains on the shore, and they found a piece of wood in the form of a human figure with an exact resemblance to the person the King had seen in his dream. The King ordered that this object be placed on the Royal Boat, then burnt incense before it and prayed, addressing the figure as “Madam Earth Spirit.” The wind at once subsided, the waves grew still, and the boat glided smoothly forward with no disturbance. After vanquishing the Champa enemy, he commenced a triumphal return and, on passing the place where he had seen the Spirit, he ordered that a Temple be erected there, upon which a storm arose, as had happened previously.

Addressing the King, the Monk, Huệ Sinh, said, “This means that the Spirit does not wish to reside on this far-away shore. Let us instead welcome her back to the Capital.”

At that moment, the wind and waves grew peaceful, and when they got back to the Capital, they at once established a Temple in An Lăng 安朗 Village that proved to be most efficacious. If any person showed it disrespect, he would suffer disaster.

Later, during the Reign of Trần Anh Tông 陳英宗, a year of drought occurred, and the King had an altar erected so that prayers could be carried out.

The Spirit appeared to the King in a dream and said, “Only because the Spirit, Cầu Mang 勾芒, resides in the Temple can wind and rain arise.”

When the King awoke, he sent the Official, Hữu Ty 有司, out to conduct a sacrifice, and a great drenching downpour in fact occurred. The Spirit was thereupon honored with the title Hậu Thổ Phu Nhân 后土夫人 [“Madam Earth Spirit”], and that usage has continued for many generations because the Spirit has been of service to the people.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

3. The Story of the Chaste Martyr, Lady My Ê (*Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái*, Narrative 32, “Truyện My Ê Trinh Liệt Phu Nhân 媚醢貞烈夫人傳, The Story of the Chaste Martyr Lady My Ê”)

This recounts the story of My Ê, the wife of the Champa King, Sạ Đầu, who in the time of Lý Thái Tông is taken prisoner by Lý Troops after her husband is killed in battle. Carried off in a boat, she wraps herself in a white sheet and leaps into the water rather than submit to indignities perpetrated by Lý Troops. A Temple is dedicated to her by the local people. Lý Thái Tông later sees her in a dream, orders that a sacrifice be made to her, and confers an honorary title on her. Three additions to the honorary title are made in the course of the Trần Dynasty. Item 1.6 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one.

The motif that forms the basis of this item—a woman seeking death by jumping into a river so as to avoid dishonor—appears also as a climactic event in Vietnam’s two most celebrated narrative poems, *The Tale of Kiều* and *Lục Vân Tiên*, but in those two cases the women concerned are rescued from the river before death can occur.

A colleague informs me that a Temple dedicated to My Ê still exists in Hanoi, and that, though not well kept-up, it was recently used as a meeting place for a government committee. The members of the committee decided, however, that they must move their activities elsewhere because the lady’s spirit was still too powerful.—Eric Henry.

This person was a Champa woman and, as such, had no surname. My Ê 媚醢 was her given name, and she was the wife of the Champa King, Sạ Đầu.

In the time of King Lý Thái Tông 李太宗, the Ruler Sạ Đầu was remiss in making the offerings required of a Dependant State, so the



King personally took charge of a Southern Campaign to call him to account for this. Sạ Đầu took his forces to the river Bố Chính 布政 and awaited the attack there. In the battle that ensued, Sạ Đầu was killed and his Queen My Ê was captured. When the boat she was on reached the River Hoàng 黃江, she overheard a Lý Sub-commander ordering that she be taken to perform services on the Royal Vessel. Endlessly embittered and enraged, she wrapped herself in white battle raiment and killed herself by leaping into the river. Every time fog spread over the river in the morning, or the moon shone upon it at night, sounds of embittered weeping could be heard there. In response to this, the people along the river built a Temple so as to conduct sacrifices to her Spirit.

After making an excursion to the Lý Nhân 蒞仁 River, the King, seated in his Royal Vessel, saw the Temple on the shore. Thinking it strange, he questioned the men in his entourage about it.

“That is the Temple to the Lady My Ê,” the men replied.

Moved by that answer, the King said, “If she was indeed so heroically chaste, you must by all means tell me about it.”

That night, around midnight, he had a dream in which he saw a Lady dressed in Champa raiment who made two prostrations before him and, with tears, said the following,

“I have heard that the Way of a woman is to follow her husband in all things, to share his bed in life, and share his grave in death, and to preserve chastity, remaining free of shame, a principle that applies with particular strength to Sạ Đầu who, though not able to surpass Your Majesty, had a manly spirit that met the wishes of the people in the region he ruled, and toward whom I am still obliged for the favor he bestowed on me. Because Sạ Đầu departed from the Way, the Lord on High blamed him for his misdeeds, and borrowed Your Majesty’s hand to bring about the present ruin of his Land and destruction of his person.

My heart is night and day set upon repaying the debt I owe him, and feel that it is fortunate that Your Majesty one morning sent a Sub-commander to lead me to the nether regions. I am grateful for all this and have no skills that could be deemed miraculous. To say anything further would simply tire you to hear.”

Having said this, she all at once flew up and disappeared.

Awed at this, the King awoke, and told his closest servants to take wine and kill animal victims to perform a sacrificial ceremony to her, bestowing on her the title *Thân Chính Phu Nhân* 慎正夫人 (“Lady of Correct Deportment”).

Later, in the first year of the *Trần Trùng Hưng* 重興 Reign Period, the *Trần* Ruling House honored her with the Title *Tá Lý Phu Nhân* 佐理夫人 (“Lady Benefactor of the Lý”), and in the fourth year of that Reign Period, added the expression “*Trinh Liệt*” 貞烈 (“Heroically Chaste”) to her epithet, and in the twenty-first year of the *Hưng Long* 興隆 Reign Period added the expression *Trực Mãnh* 直猛 (“Upright Force”) to her epithet in order to blazen forth the womanly virtue of propriety.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

4. The Story of the Spirit King Xung Thiên Chiêu Ứng (Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái, Narrative 36, “Truyện Xung Thiên Chiêu Ứng Thần Vương 冲天昭應神王傳, Story of the Spirit King Sung Thiên Chiêu Ứng”)

This tells of an Earth God of Kiến Sơ Pagoda, and relates how Lý Thái Tổ, the Founder of the Lý Dynasty, sees a poem there that foreshadows the demise of the Lý under its eighth Ruler, Lý Huệ Tông. —Eric Henry.

Upon examining the *Record of Cổ Pháp* (*Cổ Pháp Ký* 古法記), we see that this Spirit was originally an Earth God at the Kiến Sơ 建初

Pagoda. In former days Phù Đổng 扶董 Village established a Shrine to the Earth God to the right of its Pagoda to make a place where prayers could be chanted, but later the Monks and Acolytes there disappeared. Nevertheless, as the months and years went by, the people of the village, through long habit, continued intoning prayers there. Later, when the Buddhist Master restored the Pagoda's premises, the teacher, Trữ Trì Truyền Đổng 住持傳燈, felt that the place was profane and wanted to move the Pagoda elsewhere.

One day, a Spirit appeared and left a poem at the base of a tree in the Temple grounds that went as follows,

That miracles of Buddha still survive,
Is due to our protecting Monks.
If it were not for what we did,
He would have moved it to another spot.
Don't bother to record the Diamond sutra;
Just hide and guard the Na La Diên 那羅延.

A few days later an eight-line gatha was seen there as well,

Vast is the pity of the Buddha;
It shines throughout the skies,
And all the Spirits are transformed.
The three worlds keep it safe;
Our Teacher is the one in charge
No demons dare to come before,
Oh, hearken to our Teacher's words,
All beings great and small learn here.

Having understood this, the Monks established an altar for the Spirits to receive offerings, and adopted vegetarian diets.

In former times, when Lý Thái Tổ 李太祖 still lived in obscurity, he knew that the Monk, Đa Bảo 多寶, was a person of high and severe

principles, and often went with him on excursions and, after Đa Bảo became a Zen Master, traveled in person to his Pagoda. The Monk welcomed the Royal Entourage as it went beside the Pagoda and, raising his voice, addressed the Spirit as follows,

“Oh Buddha, you have had the ability to cast aside all earthly things; are you able also to congratulate the new Son of Heaven?”

The Spirit at once inscribed a four-line verse in response,
 Vast as all creation is His goodness;
 His power stirs all the eight-fold realm.
 His understanding comes from love;
 Pervading all the over-arching sky.

When the King heard these lines, he grasped the Spirit’s intent, and, at once, conferred on him the title “Spirit King Xung Thiên 冲天,” upon which the poem suddenly disappeared. The King thought this remarkable, and at once had craftsmen make a Statue of the Spirit with majestic features and a crowd of followers, and had an inaugural ceremony performed. Upon this, the Spirit suddenly left another four-line verse at the base of a column that went as follows,

A bowl fulfilled with virtue great
 That changes with the world’s change.
 The glory of it downward shines,
 But fades as sun ascends themount.

The Monk took the verse and presented it to the King Lý Thái Tổ. Thái Tổ didn’t understand what it meant. Later, Lý Huệ Tông 李惠宗, the Eighth Lý Ruler was also the last on the throne. It was a reflection of the expression “bát công đức” [Eight Successful Virtues]. That Ruler’s tabooed personal name Săn [昷] was written with a character showing the image of the sun rising over a mountain, presaging the loss of the land. The Spirit’s gatha was indeed worthy of credence!

The sacrifices in that place were performed through a succession of reigns, their beauty reflecting the divine support of the Spirit.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

5. The Story of The Good-Fortune God Khai Thiên Trấn Quốc at Đàng Châu

(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 37, “Truyện Khai Thiên Trấn Quốc Đàng Châu Phúc Thần 開天鎮國滕州福神, Story of the Đàng Châu Good Fortune God”)

This tells of a Spirit who was originally an Earth God residing in a Pagoda of Đàng Châu. The Spirit has an encounter with the future Lý Thái Tổ. A magical relocation of the Temple brought about by Spirit Workmen. Item 3.07 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one.

The Chinese text of this item states that the protagonist of this story was in life one of the “twelve sứ quân. These were regional warlords who became prominent in Việt politics and fought with each other in the years 945 to 967 CE. This was after the short-lived Ngô Dynasty and prior to the Đinh Dynasty, which was also short-lived. The notation adds that the temple dedicated to his figure was located in Kim Động District, Đàng Châu Village.” — Eric Henry.

On examining the *Writings of Đỗ Thiện* 杜善, we see the datum that this Spirit was originally an Earth God in the Old Temple of Đàng Châu 滕州. In former days, near the end of the Reign of Lê Ngoại Triều 黎卧朝,¹ when Lý Thái Tổ 李太祖 had not yet assumed the Throne, he still kept bodyguards and lodged them in Đàng Châu. He sometimes took

¹This was Lê Long Đĩnh 黎龍鋌, born in 986, the third and last Ruler of the former Lê, who was on the Throne from 1005 to 1009. Originally named Lê Trí Trung 黎至忠, he was the fifth son of the Dynastic Founder, Lê Đại Hành 黎大行. He seized the Throne after attacking and killing an elder brother, Lê Long Việt 黎龍鉞. He was later reputed to be a cruel and dissolute Ruler.

excursions to see the Temple in his native place. Once, as his boat was advancing along the river, he suddenly encountered strong winds and heavy rain. Turning his head around, the King asked, “What Spirit-worshiping Temple is that on the bank? Is it efficacious?”

“That is the Temple dedicated to the Đàng Châu Earth God,” was the reply. The people often go there to pray for rain that will overcome the hot sun. They believe it is efficacious.”

Speaking loudly, the King said, “Only if it can repel a wind and rain storm, making half the river clear, can it be considered efficacious.”

In a moment, half the river grew clear while the other half continued rainy. The King thought this miraculous and ordered that the Temple be refurbished so that sacrifices could be carried out there. The people made a poem that went as follows,

How greatly does his Kingly might descend upon the realm,
The Earth God of Đàng Châu reveals his mighty strength.
He makes the rain descend but not disturb,
Half pelting rain, and half clear sun.

On hearing this poem, the King felt secret pride. When the time arrived when the dissolute and violent Ngôai Triều 卧朝 was in power, the King, devising ways to overthrow him, came to the Spirit’s Temple and prayed that he be granted a dream. That night, a dream came to him, and he heard the Spirit say the following,

The wish to win will seal a win;
Your aim to rise will make you rise
The Thousand Streams will be at peace.
In three years, gladness will descend,
And peace will fall upon the Seven Shrines.

Having heard this, the King awoke. Not understanding what the Spirit meant, he cast stalks to make a divination. The results indicated that the dream had been auspicious.

After ascending the Throne, Thái Tổ changed the name of Đằng Châu to Thái Bình (Great Peace) Prefecture and bestowed upon the Spirit the title “Great King Khai Thiên Thành Hoàng” 開天城隍大王.

In the first year of the reign-period Trùng Quang 重光, the honorific designation was changed to four words: Khai Thiên Trấn Quốc 開天鎮國. The Spirit’s Temple, being next to the river dike, was often inundated with water. The people of the village near the river bank sometimes saw horses and carriages with parasol flags and crowds of servants, that appeared to be protecting the place against flooding water. Due to this, the water could do no damage, though the dike was low and flat. This was due to the defensive precautions taken by the Spirit.

After many years, the river began encroaching on the Temple, and in the year Bình Tuất 丙戌 of the Tống Nguyên 統元 Reign Period, the Temple began to be built anew on the large dike. One day, when the district functionaries and boat laborers were sleeping in the shed by the foot of the dike, they heard sounds of people who had come to borrow shovels and pick-axes, and the sounds of the shovels echoed from afar as if laborers were at work. When they came out in the morning to observe the scene, they saw that a stone pillar had been shifted more than three yards to the left, so it was even more apparent that Spirits were involved.

When it came time to welcome the Spirit into the Temple, the Prefectural Magistrate of Khoái Châu 快州, whose name was Hoàng Nam Kim 黃南金, inscribed a poem in the Temple, as follows,

The shore and ground laid out, all plain to see.

The Mighty Spirit spied it from afar.

And feet came by the Temple Wall;

That night the Spirits moved it to one side.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

**6. The Story of the Magic Pearl Dragon King
(*Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái*, Narrative 39, “*Truyện Thần Châu Long Vương 神珠龍王傳*, Story of the Dragon King and Magic Pearls ”)**

This story tells of a Spirit first encountered in the time of the Hùng Vương Kings as a floating piece of wood, the offspring, apparently, of an illicit union between the Consort of the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea and a Demon-King named Viêm. The Spirit, in response to sacrificial offerings, helps people find and collect pearls for a period extending through several reigns, but then is made ineffective by some resentful person who causes the treasures to be hidden. — Eric Henry.

Among the people the following account is passed along: This Spirit King was the Demon called Dragon King Viêm 炎龍王. Long ago in the Hồng Lạc 洪絡 Era, there were two people in Hãn Kiều 捍橋 Village who bore the surname Đặng 鄧. One of them was named Quyết 决 and one Thiện Xạ 善射. They once went down to the ocean to catch fish. On that occasion, they encountered something strange; it looked like a piece of wood three yards long and had the hue of a bird’s egg. It rose up as it was borne along by the current. The two were able to withdraw it from the water. Later, at night, they heard what sounded like two conversing voices coming from the piece of wood. Frightened at this, the two threw it back into the river and poled their boat to a different place, but on going to sleep, they had a dream in which a person came to them and said the following,

“Because the Dragon Consort of the Eastern Sea had intimate relations with Dragon King Viêm, and feared that the Dragon King of the

Eastern Sea might find out, she sent the child to our band to keep and guard, without letting any outsider interfere. When the child matures in intellect, it will confer blessings on all. There is no need to fear it.”

Startled awake, the two men in the boat were discussing the matter when they suddenly saw a jet-black piece of wood come up by the side of the boat. Finding this strange, the two men fished it up and brought it back. When they came to Bồ Bái 部拜 village, they burned the wood on the boat and hastily jumped ashore. Feeling that the Spirit wished to remain in that place, they established a Temple there and hired craftsmen to carve a Wooden Statue that could be worshipped with offerings. The Statue was endowed with supernatural power and was called “Long Quân,” the Dragon Lord.

People had been sent to the ocean under former Dynasties to search for pearls, but had found very few. Only one person, a descendant of the Đặng 鄧 clan, found a lot. When Emissaries were sent to ask him the reason for this, Đặng recounted the history related above. In accordance with a Royal Decree, the Emissaries made preparations to conduct a sacrifice there, and in consequence found many pearls. The King conferred the title “Dragon King of the Magic Pearls (Thần Châu)” on the Spirit and, for a number of reigns, further honorific designations were conferred on the Spirit with miraculous results, but later on, some resentful person hid the harvests, and thus brought misfortune on the people. This was most regrettable.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

**7. The Story of Phạm Tử Hư’s Service to his Teacher
(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 41, “Truyện Phạm Tử Hư Sứ Sư 范子虚事师傅, The Story of Phạm Tử Hư’s Service to his Teacher”)**

This tells of the devotion of a student to his master, and is the only

examination story in the work.

It begins by telling of the relationship between the young man, Phạm Tử Hư, and his Teacher, Công Trục. Phạm Tử Hư lives alone in poverty with his mother, his father having died. When his teacher Công Trục passes away, the latter's children are too young and too poor to carry out proper mourning rituals for him, so Phạm Tử Hư, though poor himself, resolves to help them do this. He persuades his mother to sell a piece of their property so that he can give them some money. The rituals are performed, and he lives for three years in a hut by the burial site so as to mourn his teacher.

Some twelve years later, he travels to the Capital to take an examination. On entering a Pagoda, he is shocked to see, seated inside, his old teacher Công Trục, who has become a Spirit. A year later, the Spirit of Công Trục takes him to a place beyond the world where he witnesses a group of Divine Beings discussing the literary skills and personal rectitude of a long series of recent examination candidates. They produce a list of forty successful candidates to which his own name is finally added. The tale ends by listing the official appointments to which Phạm Tử Hư was raised in the course of a long and illustrious career. – Eric Henry.

In the time of Lý Huệ Tông 李惠宗 [1194–1226], there was a man named Phạm Tử Hư 范子虛 of Nghĩa Lư 義閣 Village in Cẩm Giang 錦江 District. His family was poor. He came at length to Hoa Phong 華封. In his younger days he lived alone, but nevertheless took delight in the Way, and was fond of study. He was a follower of the teacher Công Trạm 公湛, (whose real name was Công Trục 公直), and acted in accordance with his instructions, studied his views, and wrote essays. When his teacher died, his children were still very young, and had no means to do honor to his



Spirit. Tử Hư returned home and said to his mother, “The family of my teacher is poor, and his children are still little. How many hectares of land do we possess?” Weeping, Tử Hư said to his mother, “Please sell two poles-worth to get money that can help my teacher’s family.” His mother wept also and sold two poles-worth of fields, for which she received thirty strings of cash. Tử Hư at once took the money to the family to help provide them with the wherewithal for the funeral observances. He also erected a tent next to the burial spot and lived in it for three years, burning incense night and day before returning home.

When the examinations for government service were carried out in the Year Giáp Tý 甲子, he achieved success in the third round, and in the examinations of the year Đinh Mão 丁卯, he came out first in the fourth round. In the twelfth month of that year, Tử Hư traveled from his home to the Capital and came to the Trần Võ 真武 Pagoda in a time of great heat and drought. On entering the Pagoda to rest, he suddenly met Công Trục, who was seated inside. Shocked at this, he fell on his face and said, weeping, “Master, you departed this earth seven or eight years ago. I do not understand why I have now met you in this place.”

The Master said, “Tử Hư, you have performed a great service for me, so I have come to meet with you.”

Weeping, Tử Hư said, “The day you left us, my family too was poor, and I had nothing to offer up to you. And today, having met you, I am still as poor as ever. So, what service can I have performed for you?”

The Master said, “Look here, Tử Hư, when I was alive my condition never changed from month to month but, after my death, the Lord on High conferred on me the Office of Retinue Director in the Underworld, and also the Office of Examination Director.”

“Do you know, Master, what my fate will be?” asked Tử Hư.

“I do not yet know the answer,” was the reply. “You may return. If you come to this Pagoda on the twenty-eighth day of the twelfth month of this coming year, I will answer your question.”

Tử Hư prostrated himself and took his leave. As he pondered night and day on what had happened, it seemed to him that all that the Spirit had spoken was true.

Next year, when the day arrived, Tử Hư said to his mother, “I must travel to the Capital on pressing business.”

He, then, prepared wine and meat offerings and set off. On coming to the Pagoda he met his Master Công Trục together with a band of disciples seated in the Pagoda. Tử Hư bowed deeply in greeting and spread out his offerings, inviting his Master to partake, and then ate and drank with Công Trục and the disciples.

“Remove your upper garment for me and my disciples to wear,” urged the Master, “and put on my own garment.”

He, then, dreamed that he rose to the Upper World. On reaching the place where Nam Tào 南曹 and Bắc Đẩu 北斗 did their work, he saw a person in purple raiment, on either side of whom Nam Tào and Bắc Đẩu were seated. The Master came and sat down also, below the man in purple, and began to discuss with them the scholarship and personal behavior of different examination candidates, so that they could decide whether or not to inscribe their names on the Golden List of successful examinees. When they began to discuss the literary abilities of Trần Thái 陳泰 in Quế Dương 桂陽, Nam Tào said, “Trần Thái has literary talent, but neither he nor his parents are distinguished in their behavior, so we should not allow them to pass.” And when they passed to discussion of the literary accomplishments of Tây Lão 西姥, Nam Tào said, “This man has literary gifts, but he is vainglorious, and his wife is moreover not a good person. So he must not be allowed to pass.” As for Phạm Công Bằng

范公平 of An Lạc 安樂, his Ancestors had a history of unobtrusive virtue, and his parents were good people, so he was to be given first place among the candidates. Nguyễn Viết Chất 阮日質 of Phương Sơn 鳳山 had only passable literary abilities, but since his behavior was good he was to be granted a second place. A person in Thượng Hiền 上賢 named Vương Văn Hiệu 王文校 who was a little lacking in talent, but as his behavior was not bad, he was given a third place. So, in this way, the candidates to be placed in the highest three positions were decided upon. As for Dương Chánh 楊政, a person of Thương Phúc 上福 Village, his literary ability was not very good, but since his mother and wife were both virtuous people who, though poor, performed their filial duties, he was given fourth place. So, in this way, forty people were considered to have passed, and had their names entered on the Golden List.

Then, the Retinue Director [Công Trục] brought forward a person of Hoa Phong 華封 named Tử Hư 子虛, saying that he was a person of talent who should be considered. Nam Tào, however, said, “Tử Hư is good, but he is proud, so he cannot be allowed to pass.” The Retinue Director said, “Though he was a bit proud when he was little, he has never harmed anyone. The person dressed in purple said, “Tử Hư lost his father when he was little, and his mother is a person of good character who performed a service for the Retinue Director, so he can be forgiven that fault.” And so Tử Hư’s name was added to the list beneath the previous forty names, and the list was hung on the Capital City Wall. Bắc Đẩu said, “Putting Tử Hư’s name on the list beneath the other forty disturbs their order.” But the man in purple said, “I have recorded two words at the beginning of the list. Nothing has disturbed the order.”

In the third month of the Year Mậu Thìn 戊辰, he entered the first round of examinations and spent a rather long time writing his essay. The Examination Supervisor kept the essays for three or four days. When



night came, the Master appeared in a dream to the Spirit Overseeing the Examinations, and said, “The essay of the winning candidate has appeared.” The next morning, the Examination Director saw that an essay had been delivered to his supervisory office. He brought it in and at once graded it, finding that it was finest of all the submitted essays. During the fourth round of examinations, he came to Tử Hư’s examination cubicle and told him that he had scored highly, but because two characters in his essay were incorrectly written, his name could not be included in those of the forty who had passed. When the Examination Director presented the list to the Throne, the King said, “In each examination year, fifty people must be selected. This list has only forty names. This will not do.” After this, the Examination Director resolved to seek out all essays that were well-written, without deciding against those in which a couple of characters were incorrect. He examined Tử Hư’s essay and placed his name beneath those of the other forty. This was in truth the intent of Heaven.

Tử Hư’s official career took him through many major appointments, culminating in such positions as Vice Governor of the Founding Spirit of Dục Vân, for which he was named the Great Officer of Kim Tử Vinh Lộc, and the Chief of Staff in the Jade Goldfish Tower in the Government Board of Officials, and was given the rank of Trinh Quốc Công, and was raised to the rank of Chief Celebrant, and was enfeoffed as the Great King Trung Trinh, and the Thương Đẳng Spirit in Hoa Phong. He was the paternal Grandfather of Phạm Văn Tuấn and the great grandfather of Phạm Văn Hoán. His descendants were very numerous, and continued in official positions for countless generations.

Who has not heard the saying in the *Changes* that goes, “Whoever performs charitable actions will have many occasions of joy.” This story is recorded here so that it may be transmitted to later generations, and



so that every person who sees it with his eyes, hears it with his ears, and feels it in his Spirit, may strive to the best of his ability to attain a fair name lasting for a thousand generations.