



A Comparative Study of Friendship in The Poetry of Du Fu (China) and Tu Xuong (Vietnam)

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ABSTRACT: Du Fu is one of the greatest poets of Chinese literature, while Tu Xuong is one of the representative poets of Vietnamese literature. Besides the similarities, the lives and literary careers of the two authors still have differences that create distinctive characteristics in the writing style of each poet. Researching the influence of Du Fu on Tu Xuong not only opens up a view of the cultural exchange between the two literary traditions but also reflects the process of absorbing and creating Vietnamese poetry from the cultural and artistic values of China. Our research focuses on comparing the content of friendship in the poems of Du Fu and Tu Xuong to see the exchange and difference in content in the writings of the two poets.

KEY WORDS: Vietnamese poetry, Chinese literature, friendship, Du Fu, Tu Xuong

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tang poetry has created the peak of prosperity of a poetic era in China. During the development of Vietnamese literature, Tang poetry was introduced to our country, then it was formed, existed and developed in Vietnam for nearly ten centuries since the birth of written literature. Du Fu (712-770) is one of the greatest poets of Tang poetry, outstanding with works reflecting social reality and human pain. Du Fu's influence on Tu Xuong's poetry is not only in the artistic aspect of creation but also expressed through thoughts, themes and writing style, thereby enriching Vietnamese literature. Both Du Fu and Tu Xuong are people who highly value feelings, especially friendship. The friendship in the poems of the two poets has both similarities and differences, in general, it is a sacred feeling which is very worthy of respect and praise.

2. CONTENT

Ancient literature has a saying “*Getting a soulmate is enough to have no regrets*” (having a soulmate in life means having nothing to regret). Indeed, “*A soulmate is hard to find in a hundred years, a soulmate is hard to meet, a good friend is hard to get to know*”. The theme of friendship, especially soulmate friendship, is always an endless source of inspiration for poets, including Du Fu and Tu Xuong.

Du Fu has a friend who is considered his soulmate, Li Bai. Although Du Fu considers himself Li Bai's junior, the two still consider each other as friends to confide in, to express their feelings. With a sensitive soul and a sincere, emotional heart, he wrote 14 poems for Li Bai, such as *Tang Li Bai*, *Mong Li Bai I*, *Mong Li Bai II*, *Thien mat hoai Li Bai*, *Xuan nhac Li Bai*, *Dong nhac huu hoai Li Bai*,... to express his feelings for his friend in any situation, even in a dream. *Mong Li Bai* by Du Fu has two poems, in poem *I*, it is the confusion between dream and reality, the author begins to fall into a dreamy, unclear state. The whole poem has 16 sentences, 10 sentences talk about dreams and the remaining 6 sentences are almost virtualized through the spiritual world, to express the author's worries without any answers. The interweaving of realistic images and surreal details makes the boundary between dream and reality become blurred. This creates a vague, haunting space. For Du Fu, the dream of Li Bai was a place where he could meet his close friend again, share his feelings and find peace. But the dream of Li Bai was not simply an image that appeared in his sleep, but also a deep reflection of Du Fu's worries and concerns. Through the dreams, we can see the author's deep friendship, sincere concern and pain of separation. Du Fu sent many messages to Li Bai, wrote more than a dozen poems for Li, missed Li, loved Li. Not only that, the poet Du Fu always carried within himself a torment of worry, he always followed every step of his close friend's ups and downs.

When writing about Li Bai, Du Fu not only expressed his longing, worry, and concern for his friend, but he also expressed his admiration and respect for Li Bai's talent and personality. He once wrote: “*Bach da thi vo dich / Phieu nhien tu bat quan*” (*Li Bai's poetry is unmatched / His poems are as light and airy as anyone else's*) (*Xuan nhac hoai Li Bai*). He believed that Li Bai's



poetry had a light and airy soul that no one could compete with, no one could compare to. In the poem *Tang Li Bai*, Du Fu also brought out his friend's arrogant and daring personality: "*Thong am cuong ca khong do nhat / Phi duong bat ho vi thuy hung?*" (*Drunk and sang all day long / Stubborn and arrogant, for whom would I be a hero*), thereby vividly revealing Li Bai's personality and temperament to praise his heroic spirit. As a failure in life, Li Bai's thoughts, feelings, and deep sorrows were all conveyed in his poems. That is why Li Bai's poetry always has arrogance and freedom. Just one verse of Du Fu can summarize Li Bai's tragedy "Literature often hates a smooth fate" and perhaps Du Fu truly understood deeply, realized that it was his literary talent that made it impossible for Li Bai to integrate into contemporary society, and even became an obstacle on his path to fame. The poem *Bat Kien* not only expresses his deep longing but also reveals Du Fu's anxiety and worry for Li Bai. He worries about his friend who is facing many difficulties and whether he can overcome the storms of life:

Transliteration:

*Bat kien Li sinh cuu,
Duong cuong chan kha ai,
The nhan giai duc sat,
Ngo y doc lien tai.
Man tiep thi thien thu,
Phieu linh tuu nhat boi.
Khuong son doc thu xu,
Dau bach hao quy lai.*

Poetry translation:

*Da lau khong gap chang Li,
Ban phai gia do dien cuong, thuc dang thuong xot.
Trong luc nguoi doi deu muon ban phai chet,
Chi rieng toi co y muon tiec tai.
Ban lam tho rat mau le, co le den ngan bai,
Bay gio dang phai noi troi, luu lac voi mot chen ruou.
Nui Khuong Lu la noi ban tung doc sach khi xua,
Dau bac roi, ban hay tro ve noi do.*

English translation:

*Long time no see, Li,
You must pretend to be crazy, truly pitiful.
While everyone wants you dead,
Only I have the intention to regret your talent.*



You write poems very quickly, perhaps thousands of poems,

Now you are drifting, wandering with a cup of wine.

Kuong Lu Mountain is where you used to read books in the past,

When your hair is gray, you should return there.

The friendship between Du Fu and Li Bai is a friendship of attachment, understanding, sympathy and appreciation for the talent of his friend. Du Fu is one of the few people who truly understands Li Bai. Du Fu understands the feelings, aspirations and pains of his talented friend. He also appreciates Li Bai's talent and considers it a precious gift, whether it is an advantage or a disadvantage. Both Du Fu and Li Bai are talented people but have encountered many difficulties in life. Therefore, they can deeply sympathize with each other, they are truly soul mates and confidants of each other.

The friendship in Tu Xiong's poetry is also very rich and attractive, full of sincerity and nobility. Like Du Fu, Tu Xiong always has feelings of utmost respect and admiration for his friend. Tu Xiong had a close friend named Pham Tuan Phu - a devoted Confucian scholar, he often looked for his friend in his dreams, and while sleeping he was restless (*"Last night I tossed and turned, / Without someone to write with, how can I bear it?"*), to this friend while he was still alive, he wrote in the poem *Visiting a Friend*:

*"Di dau mot buoc mot cho
Vang nhau mot khac mot gio khon khuay"*

English translation:

*Wherever you go, there is someone waiting
Being apart for a moment is inconsolable"*

When this friend died, Tu Xiong wrote:

*"Dau rang vui thu Phung Tri,
Khi vui ma vang co tri them sau"*

English translation:

*"Although enjoying Phung Tri,
But the absence of old friends adds to sadness"*

Through those lines of poetry, it is not only the sadness of the passing of a friend that is expressed, but also their precious and close relationship. The friendship in Tu Xiong's poetry is imbued with intellectualism, sincerity and nobility, with the bond through hours of research, learning and sharing artistic aspirations *"Remember when drafting books and writing lessons"*. In addition, with friends whom Tu Xiong did not consider soul mates or confidants such as Cu Thang, Huan Mi, Tu Tay Ho, he often used jokes, humor, and comedy to entertain each other to enjoy life for a moment, in the poem *De anh*, Tu Xiong wrote:

*"Cu Thang, huan Mi, tu Tay Ho,
Ba bac chung nhau mot cai do.
Moi biet troi cho sum hop mat,
Thoi dung che nho voi cuoi to!"*

English translation:

*"Cu Thang, Huan My, Tu Tay Ho,
Three uncles share one thing.
Just know that heaven has brought us together,
Stop laughing at the small!"*

In this poem, Tu Xiong humorously listed the names of his three friends, Cu Thang, Huan My, and Tu Tay Ho, to create a sense of closeness and familiarity. Tu Xiong also cleverly used the image of *"Three of us sharing one thing"* to talk about the happy bond between the three friends. Although this relationship may not have reached the level of "soulmates", it is still very intimate and close. This verse is the highlight of the poem, creating a unique and impressive image. The image of "one thing" symbolizes the common things, interests, and views on life that the three friends share. It shows the bond and harmony between



them, evoking a simple, uncomplicated life. The friendship between Tu Xuong and his friends is also simple, sincere, and not bound by formalities or social rules.

The poem *Missing you far away* is also one of the typical works expressing deep friendship and the deep longing when apart. Through simple but touching verses, the author painted a vivid picture of friendship and beautiful memories. Tu Xuong wrote:

*"Ta nhớ người xa cách núi sông,
Người xa, xa lắm, nhớ ta không?
Sao đang vui vẻ ra buồn bã,
Vua mới quen nhau đã lạ lùng."*

English translation:

*"I miss you, far away from the mountains and rivers,
You are far, very far, do you miss me?
Why are you sad now from being happy,
We have just met and it is already strange."*

Tu Xuong wrote this poem about Phan Boi Chau after hearing that Phan Boi Chau had gone to China. Tu Xuong and Phan Boi Chau were two patriotic Confucian scholars who shared the same ideal of fighting for national independence. Their friendship was not just a normal friendship but also a sympathy and sharing of noble ideals. Phan Boi Chau's going to China to participate in revolutionary activities made Tu Xuong feel lonely and miss his close friend. A lonely feeling in the face of the times, not knowing who to share with, only knowing how to miss a person far away in the mountains and rivers. That sadness was not personal but pervaded everything, as Tu Xuong himself wrote. He lived in joy and sadness without anyone knowing, because he lacked like-minded friends, people who understood and sympathized with him. He could only quietly watch the moon, sit in front of a lonely lamp, alone with his thoughts. That was the mood of a patriotic Confucian scholar who was bored, angry and indignant at the nonsense of mandarins and of those who were half-witted. This boredom increased the loneliness in his soul with a lonely, uncertain sadness, not knowing who to share it with. Through the poem, Tu Xuong wanted to send Phan Boi Chau words of encouragement and motivation so that he could continue on the arduous path of revolution.

However, unlike Du Fu, when writing about friendship, Tu Xuong often joked with his close friends, especially Tu Tay Ho and Do Xuan Duc. Tu Xuong called his friends "*phuong tham cuong*" and "*duoc nhan tron*" which means people with evil hearts, always looking for ways to take advantage of others. This sentence shows a bit of satire, criticizing people with bad personalities, Tu Xuong wrote:

*"Tu kiet, do keo, cung một mon,
Phải ai tại này, thật kinh hồn.
Người sao rât nhưng phương tham mong,
Trời để chơi khăm dua nhân tron."*

English translation:

*"The talented and the stingy, all the same,
Each one has his own ear, and it's terrifying.
Why are you all so full of sly people,
Heaven lets you play a trick on the smooth-skinned one."*

Tu Kiet is Tu Tay Ho, Do Keo is Do Xuan Duc, these are two teasing, half-joking ways of calling, showing the closeness between friends. The words "Kiet" and "Keo" both refer to stinginess, meanness and these are two famous characters in Nam Dinh to the point that people have created a verse: "*Tu Tay Ho, Do Xuan Duc, any family with bad luck will meet these two brothers*".

Although the friendship in the poems of Du Phu and Tu Xuong has similarities, which also bears the mark of each poet. Both promote the value of sincere friendship, considering friends as spiritual support in life. However, if Du Phu's poems often carry nostalgic sadness, concern about the world and the changes of friends over the course of time, Tu Xuong's poems have a satirical, ironic color, expressing a humorous but also bitter view of friendship in contemporary society. This difference reflects the writing style and living context of each poet. Accordingly, Du Fu is associated with the pain of chaotic times, while Tu Xuong is imbued with the spirit of satire in the decadent feudal society. Regardless of how they express themselves, both poets convey deep feelings about friendship, leaving a special mark in the literary treasure.



3. CONCLUSION

Studying the poetry of Du Fu and Tu Xuong, we can see that both authors are excellent poets and represent the literature of each country. Although they did not live at the same time and in the same nation, we can see the common point of the two poets who wrote about topics and issues related to the fate of the country and the fate of the nation. Their poetry is a mirror that truly reflects social life, especially the hidden corners and unfortunate lives.

Through studying the content of friendship, we also see the humanity and artistic talent of both poets Du Fu and Tu Xuong.

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