How Did Folklore Reflect Religion?

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Folklore was born at the first stage of human society. In Vietnam, folklore is considered as nutrients fostering the human soul during 4000 years of history. When being small, most Vietnamese people were told a folktale by parents or grandparents before sleeping. "Son Tinh Thủy Tinh," "Tấm Cám," "Thánh Gióng," or "Bó đũa" are classic folktales that have gone into the subconscious mind of Vietnamese people.

Belief and religion are two important parts constituting folklore. Belief can be understood roughly as the admiration for a certain supernatural object that influences daily life. It also appeared at the first stage of human society. Therefore the folklore in the first stage has contained many belief elements. The folktales about "Mẫu Thiên phủ" (the Sky Goddess), Mẫu "Nhạc phủ" (the Forest Goddess), Mẫu Thoải phủ (the Water Goddess), Mẫu Địa phủ (the Land Goddess) are the clearest examples of the belief of mother respect of Vietnamese primitive men [1].

Religion entered Vietnam quite late. At the peak development period of folklore, there were only three religions in Vietnam called Three Teaching, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (See Table 1).

Table 1: The presence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in Vietnam [2].

	Confucianism	Taoism	Buddhism
Earliest presence in Vietnam	From 111 B.C. until A.D. 938 under Chinese domination	2nd century AD from China	1st or 2nd century AD from India
Peak development	Neo-Confucianism grew from the 15th century to its peak in the 19th century during the Nguyen dynasty	From the 11th to 15th centuries, during the Ly and Tran dynasties (1010–1400)	11th century during the Ly dynasty

Religious elements appeared in folktales much later than the appearance of religion in social life. When religion went deeply into the spiritual life of the community and became a part of human life, it would be reflected in folktales [3,4]. Therefore, the peak development period of the religion in folklore was from the 11th to the 19th centuries (associated with medieval literature). The folktales which influenced by Buddhism are very diverse, consist of "Tám Cầm" (with the image of Bụt, metempsychosis, and the dogma "Good always triumphs over evil"), "Quan âm Thị Kính" (with the image of "Phật bà Quan âm" - the goddess in Buddhism) [5]. From the 15th century, with the peak development of Confucianism, the dogma of "Ruler and subject," "Husband and wife," "Brotherhood," "Father and son" appeared densely in folktales. For example, in the folktale "Truyền thuyết Hồ Gươm" (roughly translated: Legend of Sword Lake), the action of "Golden Turtle brought the miraculous sword to Lê Lợi in order to support him defeat the enemy" was evident that the God has entrusted the mission of protecting and building the country to Lê Lợi. It is in accordance with the concept of "King is the son of God" Confucianism.

In conclusion, folktale has not only been a myth or a fantasy; but it has also reflected the social life of Vietnamese people in ancient and medieval times, including beliefs and religions. Folklore, especially folktale, is a valuable resource for historical and religious researchers.

References

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