

ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF “RECORD OF PINE PAVILION”

松軒記 BY NGUYỄN ĐĂNG THẠNH 阮登盛 (1694-1755)

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Abstract: This paper provides a punctuated transcription and annotated translation of the essay “Record of Pine Pavilion” 松軒記 by the eighteenth-century Cochinchinese classicist statesman Nguyễn Đăng Thanh 阮登盛 (1694-1755). By tracing Nguyễn Đăng Thanh’s literary allusions and borrowings from authors such as Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi, the annotated translation lays a foundation for future research on Cochinchinese intellectual and literary history. It is offered as an annotated translation and philological source study rather than as an interpretive research article.

Keywords: Nguyễn Đăng Thanh, *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên*, Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi

1. Introduction

Nguyễn Hương 阮香 (1694-1755), styled Đăng Thanh 登盛, was a scion of the Nguyễn 阮 of An Hòa 安和, arguably the most influential classicist clan of eighteenth-century Cochinchina. The son of Nguyễn Đăng Trị 阮登治, Nguyễn Đăng Thanh (the name by which he is most commonly known in later historical writing) was the elder brother of Nguyễn Mẫn 阮敏, styled Đăng Tấn 登進, and the cousin of Nguyễn Nghi 阮儀, styled Cư Trinh 居貞. Nguyễn Đăng Thanh and his clansmen were all prominent statesmen, and their official biographers in the nineteenth-century dynastic histories described all three as experts in political rhetoric (từ lệnh 辭令): Nguyễn Đăng Thanh and Nguyễn Cư Trinh, in particular, were credited as the intellectual architects of the 1744 reform of the Cochinchinese administration (*Đại Nam liệt truyện tiền biên*, 1961, 5:3b-5b).

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Although Nguyễn Cư Trinh has drawn the attention of modern historians more than his cousins, it was Nguyễn Đăng Thanh who occupied a more elevated position in the political hierarchy of mid-eighteenth-century Cochinchina during the age of Nguyễn-Phước Khoát 阮福濶 (1714-1765; r. 1738-1765).

Despite his importance for our understanding of the intellectual history of early modern Cochinchina, especially the state-building dimensions of its institutional history, Nguyễn Đăng Thanh remains relatively obscure in modern scholarship. According to his nineteenth-century biographers, Nguyễn Đăng Thanh's literary corpus included three anthologies: *Hiệu tân thi tập* 效顰詩集, *Chuyết Trai văn tập* 拙齋文集, and *Chuyết Trai vịnh sử tập* 拙齋詠史集 (*Đại Nam liệt truyện tiền biên*, 1961, 5:4b-5a). Unfortunately, none of them survives. Hence, beyond brief excerpts preserved in the *Đại Nam thực lục* 大南實錄 of Nguyễn Đăng Thanh's memorial recommending that Nguyễn-Phước Khoát assume a princely title (khuyến tấn biểu 勸進表), the only primary sources written by Nguyễn Đăng Thanh available to scholars for many decades were four regulated-verse poems that Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 (1726-1784) anthologized in *Phủ biên tạp lục* 撫邊雜錄. Although these odes on history (vịnh sử thi 詠史詩) were praised by Lê Quý Đôn as “forceful and somber” (khắc tiểu ám đạm 刻峭暗淡), in isolation they have offered scholars of early modern Cochinchina little to work with (Lê Quý Đôn, n.d., 5:26b-27b).

The largest collection of Nguyễn Đăng Thanh's extant compositions is preserved in the nineteenth-century compendium *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên* 大南文苑統編. Despite its official pedigree, impressive volume, and inclusion of unique primary sources not found in other anthologies, *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên* is not widely known, much less utilized, by scholars of the Nguyễn period, including those of pre-imperial Cochinchina. Within modern scholarship, the “discovery” of Nguyễn Đăng Thanh's compositions in this

anthology should be credited to the independent scholar Cao Tự Thanh¹. However, apart from Cao Tự Thanh’s introductory survey of these sources, no significant scholarly work has followed.

For readers seeking to situate this text within a broader scholarly context, the intellectual and institutional history of eighteenth-century Cochinchina (Đàng Trong) has been treated by Li Tana (1998), while Cooke (1994, 1998) has examined the character of Nguyễn rule and the longer trajectory of Vietnamese Confucianization. On the literary culture of the Sinitic elite and its engagement with Chinese models, Kelley’s work (2005, 2006) remains foundational. Within Vietnamese-language scholarship, Cao Tự Thanh’s survey of *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên* first drew attention to the sources translated here. The present study does not attempt a comprehensive review of this literature; rather, it makes one primary source available for the further research that such scholarship invites.

The present translation of Nguyễn Đăng Thạnh’s essay “Record of Pine Pavilion” 松軒記 is based on the text found in *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên*. Because the anthology was never printed, discrepancies arise among its various manuscript copies. I have transcribed and punctuated the essay’s Sinitic text from the version preserved in Vhv.205, the only complete manuscript of *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên* held by the Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies. On the evidence of this manuscript, the editors appear to have intended this essay as an addendum (bổ di 補遺) to fascicle seventy, which is devoted to miscellaneous records (ký 記), whereas fascicle seventy-one turns to the genre of solemn hymns and eulogies (tụng 頌). Since there has been no modern collation or critical edition of *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên*, I provisionally cite the essay as it appears in Vhv.205/21 under the reference 70b:1b-2a.

I have chosen to translate this essay because of the insight it offers into the literary practice of this eighteenth-century paragon of Cochinchinese intellectual culture. Although not without some charm of its own, Nguyễn Đăng Thạnh’s “Record of Pine Pavilion” is essentially a belletristic pastiche, plainly modeled

¹ Cao Tự Thanh published at least two short notices in the now-discontinued scholarly publication *Thông báo Hán Nôm* on Nguyễn Đăng Thạnh’s works in *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên*. Full bibliographic details remain to be verified; this note acknowledges his prior contribution.

on celebrated pieces by the Northern Song masters Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101). Nguyễn Đăng Thanh draws heavily from Ouyang Xiu's "Rhapsody on the Sound of Autumn" (Thu thanh phú 秋聲賦) and Su Shi's "Former and Latter Rhapsodies on Red Cliff" (Tiền hậu Xích Bích phú 前後赤壁賦), transposing them from the rhymed and metrical genre of the rhapsody (phú 賦) into a largely free prose essay sprinkled with well-wrought antithetical couplets. Apart from Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi, he also draws on other canonical works such as the *Shiji* 史記, the *Analects* 論語, and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. Through rhetorical imitation, he further pays homage to the Northern Song philosopher Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073), though without naming him. The annotations that follow are limited to identifying these allusions and imitations; I have kept interpretation to a minimum.

2. Note on the Text and Translation

The translation adopts Vhv.205 as its base text because it is the only complete manuscript of *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên* held by the Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies. The anthology survives in several partial manuscript copies that differ in arrangement and in particular readings, but a full collation of all witnesses remains a task for future scholarship. As no punctuated edition exists, I have transcribed and punctuated the Sinitic text according to its sense units and parallel prose constructions; I have not emended it against the partial manuscripts. In translating, I have aimed at fidelity to the literal sense while preserving, insofar as English allows, the antithetical couplet structure of the original. Discussion of allusive and technical terms is reserved for the notes, consistent with the aims of an annotated translation rather than an interpretive essay.

Brief though it is, the "Record of Pine Pavilion" repays attention on several counts. Its dense reworking of Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi shows an eighteenth-century Cochinchinese official self-consciously writing himself into the lineage of Northern Song belletrism, while its pivot on the pine sets a personal literary conceit within a recognizably classical repertoire of self-cultivation. As one of the few extant compositions of Nguyễn Đăng Thanh, the essay affords a rare

window onto the literary practice and self-fashioning of a leading figure of pre-imperial Cochinchina. A fuller account of its place within Nguyễn-period anthological culture and the circulation of Song literary models in Cochinchina must await both a critical edition of *Đại Nam văn uyển thống biên* and further study of the Nguyễn of An Hòa as a literary and intellectual clan. The present translation is offered as a foundation for that work.

3. Text and Translation

松軒，前守臣鄭侯之所遺也。軒之名者誰？余自名也。公事之暇，蓋嘗心于斯，目于斯，筆墨于斯焉。

客有梅軒來者，與余對榻，撫軒前之松，叩余曰：「此松之植，星霜幾何，既茁乃爾？」曰：「伊始鄭侯植也。余不知其何年。始余也來，松也纔三尺有咫。今甫四歲，而松凌軒矣。余朝夕于斯軒，而不知松之長。松又安知吾之長乎？吾與松之長，兩不相知而相娛焉。獨不知吾之娛松乎？松之娛吾乎？」

客曰：「子之軒以松，吾之軒以梅。梅與松也，孰勝？」曰：「子之愛梅也，以梅勝。吾之愛松也，以松勝。」客曰：「子之愛，得非以其大夫歟？」曰：「吾愛其質也，愛其風也。以堂堂參天之質，祖龍何人，奚足辱哉？時而明月在東，則弄影乎軒之前。月落西山，則復轉影乎軒之側。風之微，其聲沸以清，鏗錚乎，如金玉之方鳴。風之急，其聲激以壯，澎湃乎，如波濤之乍驚。是吾軒之有松，而風月豈不怡吾之情哉？使斯軒而無松，則鄰乎俗。使松而不在斯軒，與錯薪何別乎？方松之移植于斯土也，以見知于鄭侯，終而與余。松乎！松乎！豈不為吾儕知己哉？松則不言，知我與不知，吾不得而知也。我則知松矣。奚托余之愛為？」

客曰：「松，植物也。松之不知子，亦猶子之不知松也。」曰：「子不知我，而我知松。非我所知，其聖者歟！不曰歲寒然後知乎？」客惟惟而退。

時半庭斜暉，余于松下憑几假寐，夢一老人，其體癯而長，其貌古而怪，鬢髯蒼蒼然。前揖余曰：「吾知君久矣。」余問為誰。曰：「吾夏后之遺臣也。」余曰：「唏！得非君與風月為三友者耶？風月與君，君與吾，為

四者。」其人嗑然而笑。余驚覺，聞若有聲在松間。呼童子捉筆，於是乎記之。時乙卯年二月二十六日夜，書于松軒。

Pine Pavilion was left behind by the former administrator, Marquis Trịnh.² Who gave the pavilion its name? I named it myself. In the intervals of leisure between official duties, here have I given my heart, here my eyes, here my brush and ink.

A visitor, the master of Plum Pavilion, came and sat with me, sharing a couch. Stroking the pine before the pavilion, he pressed me: “How many years has this pine been planted, that it has grown so vigorously?” I replied: “It was initially planted by Marquis Trịnh. I do not know in what year. When I first arrived, the pine stood barely three feet and a span. Now four years have passed, and it overtops the pavilion. Morning and evening, I spent my time in this pavilion without noticing the pine’s growth. And how should the pine know of my growth? The pine and I have grown, each unaware of the other, and yet each delighting in the other. I alone cannot determine: is it I who delight the pine, or the pine that delights me?”

The visitor said: “Your pavilion takes the pine for its name; mine takes the plum. Which is superior, plum or pine?” I said: “You love the plum, and so for you the plum is superior. I love the pine, and so for me the pine is superior.” The visitor said: “Can your love be on account of the pine’s rank as Grand Officer?”³

I said: “What I love is its substance; what I love is its bearing.⁴ With its dignified, heaven-reaching substance, what manner of man was the Primal Dragon, that the pine should suffer such indignity at his hands?⁵ When the bright moon rises in the east, the pine plays with its shadow before the pavilion. When

² The term *thủ thần* 守臣, here rendered as “administrator,” is nonspecific. It is possible that the Marquis Trịnh mentioned here was one of Nguyễn Đăng Thạnh’s forebears, all eight generations of whom, up to his father’s generation, bore the surname Trịnh. The term *marquis* (hầu 侯) could also be an honorific.

³ This refers to an episode recorded in the *Shiji* concerning the twenty-eighth year of Qin Shihuang’s reign. During his descent from Mount Tai, the Qin emperor encountered torrential rain and took shelter under a tree, which he subsequently honored with the rank of Grand Officer. The tree was popularly identified as a pine (Wu, 2018, 6:6a).

⁴ This and the preceding references to “love” (ái 愛), which can also imply partiality, allude to Zhou Dunyi’s widely celebrated essay “An Explication on Love for Lotus” 愛蓮說 (Zhou, 2014, p. 53).

⁵ Primal Dragon (Tổ Long 祖龍) refers to Qin Shihuang. The verbal use of *nhục* 辱 can also imply the bestowal of favor or grace by a superior upon an inferior. Under that reading, the overall sense remains relatively unchanged: “What sort of man was the Primal Dragon that he could presume to endue the pine with honor?”

the moon sets behind the western hills, the pine’s shadow shifts to the side of the pavilion. When the wind is gentle, its sound wells up, clear and pure, ringing like metal and jade newly struck.⁶ When the wind is fierce, its sound rises, impassioned and strong, rushing and crashing like waves suddenly surging into tumult.⁷ Thus my pavilion has its pine, and do not wind and moon together gladden my spirit? Were this pavilion without a pine, it would be a neighbor to vulgarity. Were the pine not in this pavilion, how would it differ from tangled brushwood? When the pine was transplanted to this soil, it came to be known by Marquis Trịnh and was ultimately left to me. O pine! O pine! Are you not indeed a kindred spirit to our kind? The pine does not speak; whether it knows me or not, I cannot know. But I know the pine. What need has it of my love?”

The visitor said: “The pine is a plant. That the pine does not know you is no different from your not knowing the pine.” I said: “You do not know me, yet I know the pine.⁸ Is what I know not also what the sage knew? Is it not said, ‘Only after the year turns cold does one know [the pine and cypress]’?”⁹ The visitor assented and withdrew.

At that moment, the slanting afternoon light lay halfway across the courtyard. I leaned on my desk beneath the pine and dozed. I dreamed of an old man: his frame was gaunt and tall, his countenance ancient and strange, and his whiskers and beard white as hoarfrost. He came forward, bowed to me, and said: “I have known you for a long while.” I asked who he was. He replied: “I am a surviving minister of the Xia.”¹⁰ I said: “Ah! Might you not be the very one who, together

⁶ The expression “ringing” (thung tranh 鏜鐃) is borrowed from Ouyang Xiu’s “Rhapsody on the Sound of Autumn,” as is the verbal use of *minh* 鳴 (Zeng, 2013, p. 188).

⁷ The expressions “rushing and crashing” (bình bá 澎湃) and “the sudden startling of the waves” are similarly derived from “Rhapsody on the Sound of Autumn.” The phrase *ba đào chi sạ kinh* 波濤之乍驚 differs from Ouyang Xiu’s line by only one character, replacing the adjectival “nocturnal” (dạ 夜) with “suddenly” (sạ 乍). Nguyễn Đăng Thạnh’s minor alteration creates a more tightly wrought parallel structure in his own essay (Zeng, 2013, p. 188).

⁸ This exchange clearly echoes the famous conversation between Zhuang Zhou 莊周 and Hui Shi 惠施 in the Zhuangzi concerning Zhuang Zhou’s understanding of fish and their delight (Zeng, 2013, p. 30).

⁹ This is an elided reference to Analects 9:28, in which Confucius remarks that only in the depths of winter does one realize that the pine and cypress are the last trees to lose their leaves. According to Zhu Xi’s commentary, the pine and cypress allegorically represent the superior man (*quân tử* 君子) in adversity or in an age of chaos (Zhu, 2012, p. 116).

¹⁰ This detail is perhaps the most innovative departure from Su Shi’s “Latter Rhapsody on Red Cliff.” In Su Shi’s rhapsody, the mysterious interlocutor is described as a Daoist adept (*đạo sĩ* 道士) and is implied to have taken the form of a crane that flew past Su Shi’s boat at midnight before appearing in his dream. By extension,

with wind and moon, makes three friends? Wind, moon, and you make three; you and I make four.”¹¹ The man laughed heartily.¹² I woke with a start, hearing what seemed to be a sound somewhere among the pine branches.¹³ I called a servant boy to bring a brush, and here I set it all down.¹⁴

Written on the night of the twenty-sixth day of the second month of the Ất Mão year [1735], at Pine Pavilion.

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Nguyễn Đăng Thanh may have intended his mysterious interlocutor to represent the pine tree; the narrative, however, does not establish this connection as clearly as Su Shi's rhapsody does (Zeng, 2013, p. 190).

¹¹ This is an elided reference to Su Shi's "Former Rhapsody on Red Cliff": "Only the fresh wind over the river and the bright moon amidst the peaks: when our ears obtain them, they become sound; when our eyes meet them, they become form. Nothing hinders our taking from them, and their use is inexhaustible. This is the limitless treasury of the Fashioner of Things, and that which satisfies both you and me." 惟江上之清風，與山間之明月，耳得之而為聲，目得之而為色，取之無禁，用之不歇。是造物者之無盡藏也，而吾與子之所共適 (Zeng, 2013, p. 190).

¹² The mysterious interlocutor's laughter in response to Nguyễn Đăng Thanh's excited realization mirrors Su Shi's rhapsody (Zeng, 2013, p. 190).

¹³ The wording "hearing what seemed to be a sound somewhere among the pine branches" (văn nhược hữu thanh tại tùng gian 聞若有聲在松間) is clearly borrowed from Ouyang Xiu's "Rhapsody on the Sound of Autumn": "In all four directions there was no human sound; only a sound from somewhere among the trees" (tứ vô nhân thanh, thanh tại thụ gian 四無人聲，聲在樹間). In Ouyang Xiu's rhapsody, this description appears at the end of the opening stanza and provides the transition into the main body (Zeng, 2013, p. 189).

¹⁴ The summoning of a servant boy (đồng tử 童子) echoes Ouyang Xiu's "Rhapsody on the Sound of Autumn." In Ouyang Xiu's rhapsody, however, the servant boy serves as an interlocutor. At the conclusion, he is revealed to have fallen asleep and is therefore unable to answer Ouyang Xiu's litany of rhetorical questions (Zeng, 2013, p. 189).

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