

EXCERPTS FROM NGUYỄN BÌNH KHIÊM'S INSCRIPTION FOR "THREE BELIEF" TEMPLE

Introduction

The new form of government in Đại Việt lasted only forty years before being torn apart by competition among aristocratic families and rebellion in the early sixteenth century. A new power, the Mạc, this time from the eastern Red River delta, rose to displace the ineffectual Lê, while restoring the old Lê model of administration, based on examinations and the literati-officials. These scholar-officials, when not serving in the government, lived in their home villages, not in the cities and towns, and provided literati skills for the local community. These scholars, while Confucian, served other belief systems as well (Buddhist, etc.), in the villages. Here the master Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (1491-1585) composed an inscription in stone for a "Three Belief" temple.

Document Excerpt with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

From "Some Methodological Issues in the Study of Vietnamese Confucianism," by Nguyễn Quang Điển in *Confucianism in Vietnam* (Vietnam National University and Hồ Chí Minh City Publishing House, 2002), 143-145.

Excerpts from Nguyễn Bình Khiêm's Inscription for "Three Belief" Temple

What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature,
To follow our nature is called the Way.
It is rooted in the Mind and lodged in the Teachings
The forms through which it has been bequeathed to us are full of dignity
Eternal and ageless as Heaven

Questions:

1. What Chinese ideology did this inscription reflect?
2. How did Heaven and humans related to each other?
3. Where did this knowledge exist?

Longer Selection

From "Some Methodological Issues in the Study of Vietnamese Confucianism," by Nguyễn Quang Điển in *Confucianism in Vietnam* (Vietnam National University and Hồ Chí Minh City Publishing House, 2002), 143-145.

Excerpts from Nguyễn Bình Khiêm's Inscription for "Three Belief" Temple

The ancient temple Thụy Anh at Cao Dương has been renowned for its spiritual efficacy. The Buddhist hall is so dignified that it makes one look up to with reverence. The bell tower is

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
EXCERPTS FROM NGUYỄN BÌNH KHIÊM'S INSCRIPTION FOR "THREE BELIEF" TEMPLE**

so lofty that it makes people all hear. All who pray there have their prayers answered. It is the luckiest spot of Thái Bình. This village has enlightened gentlemen and benevolent ladies who, in the years of Thuận Thiên reign, offered their seven *mau* of cultivated land to be the property of the Three Jewels.¹ All people extol their attitude of taking joy in virtue. Now, the village literati Bùi Tử Trang, Nguyễn Lễ, Tống Mộc, Nguyễn Lãm, together with monks and nuns contributed money, and directed craftsmen to cast the precious statues of the Three Teachings and Miao Shan (Diệu Thiện).

After finishing the work, they asked me to compose the inscriptions to record the event. I also have a mind and heart fond of doing good, and dare not refuse. However, I am a Confucian. Although I am not well versed in Buddhism and Daoism, I have read broadly and dispelled my doubts and learned something of their theories. Generally speaking, the Buddhist teaching is rooted in illuminating physical forms and the mind, and analyzing cause and effect. Daoism is based on concentrating on the vital energy *Khi [qi]*² to make it supple,³ preserving oneness⁴ and keeping to genuineness. The sage Confucius rooted his teaching in morality, benevolence and righteousness, literature, life's realities, loyalty, and good faith. Aren't all of them the teachings that follow human nature in order to cultivate the Way?

Miao Shan got her reputation because of her goodness, which is nothing but the dwelling place of the mind/heart and human nature. All these virtuous ones were indeed able to spread the light of this Path of goodness, follow and preserve this teaching of goodness, establish themselves to be good examples for people, so that happiness and blessings would flow forever; their merits are inconceivable.

Accordingly I have inscribed this on a solid piece of stone so that the transmission of their teaching shall endure through ages. The inscription reads as follows,

What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature,
To follow our nature is called the Way.
It is rooted in the Mind and lodged in the Teachings
The forms through which it has been bequeathed to us are full of dignity
Eternal and ageless as Heaven

¹ The "Three Jewels" are the three most precious things in Buddhism: the buddha, the dharma, and sangha.

² In the Daoist view, *qi* is the vital energy, the life force, the cosmic spirit that pervades and enlivens all things and is therefore synonymous with primordial energy.

³ Chapter 10 of the *Daodejing* reads: "In concentrating your breath to attain softness — Can you be like an infant? "; "Breathing softly and possessing the power of life in the fullest degree the infant is harmed by nothing."

⁴ Also in Chapter 10 of the *Daodejing*, there is a sentence that reads, "In bringing your spiritual and bodily souls to embrace the One — Can you never depart from it?"

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
*EXCERPTS FROM NGUYỄN BÌNH KHIÊM'S INSCRIPTION FOR "THREE BELIEF" TEMPLE***

Questions:

1. Where did Vietnamese Confucian scholars tend to live?
2. How did these scholars try to get along with their neighbors? Were they successful?
3. What differences existed among the different patterns of thought?