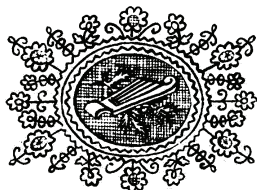


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**Study of the birth of the Kalevala  
and the creation of the vietnamese epic**

By the last decades of the twentieth century, based on the way of creation and preservation of epics, the world's comparative studied branch of epic has brought in use of a new term: *A tradition-oriented epic*, in accordance with commonly use terms: *oral epic* (folk epic) and *literary epic* (scholarly epic). A tradition-oriented epic is a literature work which is classified between literary and oral literature, since this type of epics is created from oral poetry material but it has a stable written form.

«The place of birth and the form in which *the oral epic* exists is the living song, the epic discourse proceeding according to the rules of tradition stored in the memory and language. It has no fixed, permanent form. During its lifetime it is unwritten literature. *Literary epic* exists as a text that is created once by a poet and cannot thereafter be touched. *Tradition-oriented epics* exist somewhere in between written and unwritten literature, since they draw on material from the oral tradition but have acquired a fixed literary form.

The difference between oral and a tradition-oriented epic is the editing process involving the givers, takers and moulders of the material. We may, in a broader sense, speak of the textualisation of epic. As a result of this, epic that is liberally varied in the oral tradition is in a way frozen as a text which the editor and publisher consider representative and that places it among world epic literature. Whether the published product is regarded as oral or tradition-oriented depends on how it was edited, and above all on whether or not the final text keeps faithfully to the original oral discourse. Since oral epic is difficult to edit as a book, and since this easily involves objectives that

are alien to oral culture, the result is often a collection of solutions and compromises, the worst of which almost destroy the oral discourse».

«...The clearest difference of principle between a tradition-oriented and a literary epic is that traditional narratives are, for the poet of a literary epic, material for him to shape as he wishes. These materials are no problem for the epic poet: they can bend to his interpretation. The writer is master of the plot and imagery. The situation is completely different for the compiler such as Elias Lönnrot of a tradition-oriented epic. Flowing from his pen is a constant stream of text the meaning of which is not always entirely clear to him. The force of the oral discourse, the imagery and concepts of the folk poetry, the myths and rites retain their secrets even when committed to paper. And because the compiler is loath to subject them to endless tampering and the dictates of common sense, the epic (in this case the Kalevala) becomes an enigma even to its author» [Honko 2003: 15].

Nowadays, oral epics are still preserved in many ethnicities in South East Asia and Africa. Some well-known literary epics are *Aeneid* by Vergilius, *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. The epics such as *Gilgameš* (Sumer), *Ilias* and *Odysseia* (Greek), *Edda* (Iceland), *Nibelungenlied* (Germany), *La Chanson de Roland* (France), *El Cid* (Spain), *Mahābhārata* (India) and *Kalevala* (Finland) are classified tradition-oriented, or traditional epics.

Kalevala was created by **Elias Lönnrot** based on Finnish and Karelia folk poetry. During nearly thirty years Lönnrot brought to public five different versions of Kalevala:

- A collection of Kalevala poem completed in 1833. It consists three long verses: *Vaynemuönen* with 1867 lines, *Leminkäinen* with 825 lines and *Wedding poems* with 499 lines

- *A Poetry gathering about Väinämöinen* with 16 poems, 5052 lines, was completed in 1833. This work is also called *Early Kalevala*.

- *Kalevala, or poems of old Karelian from the ancient times of the Finns* with 32 poems, 12 078 lines was published in 1835. This work is called *The Old Kalevala*.

- *Kalevala, second version* with 50 poems, 22 795 lines was published in 1849, and it is called *The New Kalevala*.

- *Kalevala, shorten version* with 50 poems, 9 732 lines was published in 1862.

[Kuusi–Anttonen 1985: 86–97].

The five performances of the Kalevala process described the changes in Lönnrot's mind of connecting, composing the folk poetry and their topic from his thought, which is the best according to him. At first Lönnrot regarded himself as a collector and compiling the work. Latterly, he had to

work as a singer and narrator. The *New Kalevala* – the most widely known nowadays was not recreated from «broken pieces» or traces of an original epic, which was disappeared but was created from Finnish and Karelia folk poetry material (epic, lyric poetry, charms, laments, proverbs) by «rune-singer» Lönnrot.

In Vietnam the discovery of epics goes back to French colonisation. First L. Sabatier published *Dam San*, a Rhade epic story (1927/1933). He was followed twenty years later by D. Antormarchi with another Rhade epic story, *Dam Yi* (1955). Vietnamese research in the South started in 1959 with the translation into Vietnamese of *Dam san*. Around the same time, in the 1960s, Thai ja Muong epics were discovered in the North. The existence of these latter raised the question of the «lost» epic of the Viet people, a driving force behind epic studies up to the present day [Bui 2003: 90–94].

From the beginning of the 1990s the Central Highland's epics zone has been discovered with the numerals epic of the Bahnar, M'ngong, X'dang, Rhade, Jarai ja Raglai. Some epics are only about a-hundred-pages long, while the others can be up to 400 pages [Phan 1999: 5] Nowadays eight-hundreds and one oral epics are collected, of which seventy-five are translated into Vietnamese, edited and published until 2006 [Nguyen 2008: 15].

If the most important themes of M'ngong, Muong and Thai epics are the creation of the world, the creation of humankind and the deeds of cultural heroes; the Central Highland epics like Bahnar's, X'dang's, Jarai's and Raglai's has three main themes: getting married, earning a living and fighting. Most of the heroes in these heroic epics get married by force: seizing a woman to be his wife or fighting to get his seized wife back. The labour activities in daily life like cuttings trees, hunting, growing rice on terraced fields, etc... are described clearly. The most central activity in the Central Highland epics is war. This includes several different forms of fighting, such as fighting to reclaim borrowed property, fighting for vengeance, fighting for wife... [Bui 2003: 109–118; Phan 1999: 6].

The Vietnamese epic *The Descendant of Mon Man* is composed and created by using the methods of Elias Lönnrot. Besides the tradition-oriented and oral epics and the other epic material of the Vietnamese minorities, the author/creator also used motifs from legends, myths, fairy tales, narrative poetics, folk songs...of ethnics living in Vietnam in case they were available. Some motifs which were only referred in research works were also considered to use. Cultural differences are resolved by having

different peoples' main characters see the events from their own perspective. The epic's main plot is formed from the concept «the same root» and motifs «a box of eggs», and «Gourd» in the myths of main ethics. The epic starts with formation of earth and heaven, then the first human being was born. Then children of Mon Man – siblings of Human and Fairy – defeated natural enemies, built Đồi (Hill), Biển (Sea), Rú Đá (Stone Mountain) regions where their ancestor arrived after the mighty flood. And they also cooperate with each others to fight and defeat human enemies.

*The Descendant of Mon Man* is divided into two complete sections with forty-seven runes, over 16 000 lines. It includes a mythical part, which tells of the world's origins and the origins of certain things important to the Vietnamese, such as rice and water buffalo. The second section is a heroic epic, which tells of the descendants of mythical ancestors and relates their adventures. It also describes how the heroes, with the help of wondrous instruments, defeat the enemy that threatens their land and how they then found a common nation.

At the beginning of the mythical part we meet the first gods Mon and Man, from whom are descended human beings. The mythical section describes the birth of the world, the birth of the human being from an egg, the flood, the mythical squash, the world-tree myth, and the creative deeds of mythical heroes. These sections describe the natural phenomena of Vietnam and the peoples' ways of life, as well as how these things came to be. This part also includes the start of rice cultivation, the hunting of elephants, the taming of water buffalo, and the gift of fire from the gods, along with many other mythical origins and events. The gods are continually present in the mythical part. They influence the fates of human beings either deliberately or by forgetting that humans exist.

In the heroic part of the epic, the gods have faded into the background, and it is humans who are the subjects. In truth they are sometimes obliged to seek protection from the gods. The heroic part tells about three different peoples and their interactions through the adventures of the main characters. Much mythical material is also found in the heroic section, as are wedding and lyric songs. The characters do not shrink from war or from plotting and scheming. At the end of the epic, all three peoples fight a common battle against an outside enemy and afterwards live together in harmony.

Both parts of the epic feature themes found the world over: birth, death, love, and the battle between good and evil. The main characters of *The Descendant of Mon Man* are men; women only have side roles and they often end up suffering. The epic has no strong female characters, but

nevertheless women exert a strong influence on the epic's plot [Juminkeko 2009].

The oral epics of ethnics in Vietnam are performed and narrated in the folk circumstances. Once they were translated into Vietnamese language and appeared in Vietnamese language texts, the rhyme and meter of some epics are not remained as their origins. Moreover, some epics were translated into Vietnamese language in forms of prose text or free verses. In creation of *The Descendant of Mon Man*, we couldn't find any poetry rhyme which can be used as mainstream rhyme of the epic as Elias Lönnrot used the traditional folk rhyme of Karelia and Finland as the rhyme of Kalevala. We used the rhyme of seven lines style (seven-syllable), one of the main style of poetry in traditional Vietnamese verse as the mainstream rhyme in *The Descendant of Mon Man* since this style can describe the narrative of prose and express the lyric in poet as well. For that purpose, we have to change or modify texts and rhymes from the sources when it is necessary. Of all the lines in the Vietnamese epic, about 20–30% are the writer's own.

*The Descendant of Mon Man* is the result of the project *Study of the process of The Kalevala's creation and applying it to create a Vietnamese epic* supervised by Juminkeko (Finland). It was published in Vietnam in October 2008. The epic was illustrated by Vietnamese painter Dang Thu Huong.

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