

# A Rare Colorful Illustrated Album of Vietnam in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳' (the Legend of *Lu Yunxian*)

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**Abstract:** In 1851, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷焯 (1822-1888) wrote the poem *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* (The Legend of Lục Vân Tiên-陸雲僊傳), then in 1895, French officer Eugene Gibert asked the court painter Lê Đức Trạch 黎德澤 to paint it. In 2016, Vietnam and France edited and published the manuscript in photocopies. This rare version named *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* (Lục Vân Tiên Fairy Tale-雲僊古跡傳) is full of picture illustrations. It was an outstanding colorful illustrated autobiographical narrative poem, which Nguyễn Đình Chiểu recounted his life in the first person by a rhyme style. The narrative outline is full of lyrical elements, which can be linked to the earliest source of "poetic autobiography" in China: Qu Yuan's "Li Sao"(屈原的"離騷"). Furthermore, the tone of this narrative poem version is to celebrate traditional, classical and moral values, and to spread the core Confucian beliefs of loyalty, filial piety, and human nature. This autobiographical poem text, with extensive illustrations, full of the vigor and vitality of pre-modern culture, provides a rich discussion on the poetry and art of Vietnam within the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and are the integration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, material civilization, and aesthetic insights.

**Keywords:** *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷焯, Eugene Gibert, Lê Đức Trạch 黎德澤, colorful illustrated album and manuscript.

**Subject classification:** Sino-Nom Studies.

## 1. Introduction

At present, few Vietnamese image documents of Lục Vân Tiên are public, and the general situation of the collection of images related to portraits is unknown. Recently, the author was lucky to know that there are two precious illustrated albums of Vietnam in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both of which are masterpieces of visual representation of Vietnam in modern times. One is the "Techniques of the Annam People 安南人的技術" compiled by French

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Henri Oger (700 pages and more than 4,000 hand-drawn pictures)<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1); The second one is a rare album. In 2017, the author was fortunate enough to obtain from PhD Nguyễn Tuấn Cường阮俊强 of Institute of Sino-Nom Studies – Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences a very precious gift which is a newly published set of *Vân Tiên cổ tích tân truyện* (the Legend of Lục Vân Tiên - 雲僊古跡傳) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: The Annam People 安南人的技術



Source: Compiled by French Henri Oger.

Figure 2: Cover of New Album and Original Edition from *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện*



a. The cover of new album



b. The cover of original edition

Source: *Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* published in 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Please see more: "Horizon of Illustrated Books and Views Between the East and the West: Issues Related to Henri Oger's 'Techniques of the Annam people' in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century", a paper published in the Second International Symposium on "Research on Chinese from Outside the Territory" (1-2 July 2017, China: Nanjing, hosted by the Institute of Foreign Chinese Studies of Nanjing University and the Collaborative Innovation Center of Chinese Literature and East Asian Civilizations of Nanjing University) (cooperative research by PhD Candidate Pan Qinghuang (潘青皇)).

The Legend of Lục Vân Tiên has several names, such as *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* (陸雲僊傳), also known as *Vân Tiên truyện* (雲仙傳), or *Vân Tiên cổ tích tân truyện* (雲僊古跡新傳). It can be compared with *Kim Vân Kiều Truyện* (the Story of Jin Yunqiao - 金雲翹傳) written by Nguyễn Du 阮攸 (1766-1820), and considered to be the most watched and influential long-form narrative poem in Vietnam. The author of *Lục Vân Tiên truyện* was Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷炤 (1822-1888) known as a famous blind poet of Nguyễn Dynasty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His representative work was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, telling the story of the protagonist Lục Vân Tiên about his learning and patriotism. Lục Vân Tiên was betrothed to Võ Thê Loan 武彩鸞 – Võ Công's daughter when he was young, and later went to capital city to take the imperial examination. He rescued Kiều Nguyệt Nga 喬月娥 on the way, and Nguyệt Nga fell in love with him. When taking the imperial exam, Vân Tiên received the news of her mother's death, and withdrew from the exam to go home to keep filial piety for her mother. On the way home, he was blinded due to mourning and went to the house of Võ Công, but was pushed into the cave by the Võ's family. Vân Tiên was rescued by an immortal in a stone cave and healed his eyes. On the other side, Kiều Nguyệt Nga was arrested and sent to barbarian state, where she attempted to suicide by jumping into a river. Fortunately, she was rescued by the Buddha. After leaving the stone cave, Vân Tiên won the champion 狀元 of the imperial examination, and then, he led his troops to defeat the barbarian enemies and got married with Nguyệt Nga.

While Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷炤 wrote this great epic, Vietnam was gradually being invaded by French colonists, and Chiểu's hometown in Gia Định 嘉定 had become a colony. Chiểu described his personal imperial exam experience, carried forward the traditional virtues of Vietnam, and expressed his strong anti-colonial expectation. There have been several manuscripts of *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* unearthed, many versions are well known to the public, and educational institutions have regularly reprinted them for primary school students across the country. In recent decades, they have even been featured into TV dramas and movie theaters, making this novel a myth of a national hero in modern Vietnam<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Main research methods

There are two main research approaches adopted by the author in this article. *First*, from the perspective of literature browsing and comparison with traditional novels, the rare value of this illustrated volume in the history of modern Vietnamese literature is elucidated and analysis; *second*, due to this volume is a unique in color illustrated book history, the author will give practical examples of comparison between plates and texts for analysis, in order to highlight the significant academic value of this large-scale

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to express the gratitude to PhD Candidate Pan Qinghuang for providing assistance in examining relevant research, and the results are as above. Also some viewpoints are adapted from the article of Pascal Bourdeaux: "A brief history of a previously unpublished illuminated manuscript", included in the album.

visual text. The author will try his best to elaborate in detail. This article will begin with a literature review and discussion of this book and its rarity as below.

### 3. Literature review

The author was so fortunate to receive an awesome gift. At the end of April 2017, PhD Nguyễn Tuấn Cường presented the author a set of *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* which is a treasure for the author who pays attention to East Asian portraits. This is the latest rare book published in Vietnam in three languages as Vietnamese, French and English. The narrative epic was written by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, and was made by French military officer Eugene Gibert who entrusted the Huế 順化 court painter Lê Đức Trạch 黎德澤, and Gibert wrote lots of notes in French. The volume is different from the previous versions without pictures. This may be the only surviving manuscript of *Lục Vân Tiên* with color pictures and a large number of annotations. After returning to France, Gibert donated the manuscript to the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (hereinafter referred to as AIBL).

#### 3.1. Discovery of a rare manuscript

In September 2011, Prof. Phan Huy Lê, Chairman of the Vietnam Association of Historical Sciences, discovered a piece of historic document for more than 100 years in the library of the Institut de France. This color drawing manuscript have attracted great attention from the Vietnamese sinology community<sup>3</sup>. Major Eugene Gibert of the French Naval Artillery autographed himself in the memorial ceremony on 26 May 1899, donating the manuscript to the "Inscription and Bayless College" (AIBL).

According to Michel Zink, the permanent secretary of AIBL, Prof. Phan Huy Lê was an expert in Vietnamese history and philology, under his supervision, the Vietnam Association of Historical Sciences focused on rural, cultural and military about extensive Vietnam history topics. This rare document, which has been dormant for 120 years, was recognized by this expert in 2011. The manuscript has also been on the shelf of the college library with a collection number for 112 years. The original size of each page is 30cm×21cm. The École Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO) requested the French Academy to authorize the implementation and publication of related research, which led to publish the precious manuscript in 2016.

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the "Foreword" written by Prof. Phan Huy Lê, on the eve of publication, 2015. In the end of this essay noted: *Hanoi, August 2015/ Prof. Phan Huy Lê/ Chairman of the Vietnam Association of Historical Sciences.*

### 3.2. Four related persons

According to Pascal Bourdeaux, the manuscript brought together the efforts of four key figures: the Vietnamese literati Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷焯 (1822-1888), the French teacher and translator Abel des Michels (unknown), the learned French naval officer Eugene Gibert (1857-1908) and Lê Đức Trạch 黎德澤 (1851-1917), a transcriber and painter at the Huế 順化 court. Among the four related people, the most crucial was Eugene Gibert known as a flight engineer, orientalist and humanist. Born in Paris in 1857, Gibert won a scholarship from the Ecole Polytechnique, and then attended the naval artillery at the age of 20, and was promoted to captain in 1883. He served in a naval gunboat design foundry in southwestern France before joining the Paris Armed Forces.

Eugene Gibert was first posted to Tonkin 同慶 in Vietnam as a commander of the artillery (1890-1892). The second time he went to Vietnam, the artillery division in charge of Huế (1895-1897) was awarded the Knights Medal of the Legion of Honor. He died around 1908 at the age of 52. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu completed this popular poem around 1851. Thirty years later, Abel des Michels translated *Lục Vân Tiên truyện* into French and circulated it in Paris. At that time, Eugene Gibert was attracted by the Paris translation while stationing in Huế located in central Vietnam in 1895. Out of his creative thinking, Gibert entrusted Huế court painter Lê Đức Trạch with his remarkable ingenuity transcribed the words and hand-painted color pictures to achieve this great work. In 1897, Gibert brought this treasure document back to France and donated it to AIBL.

### 3.3. Form

*Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* published in 2016 is an autobiographical poem with rich color illustrations. The cover bears a title in Chinese characters: "雲僊古跡傳" (the legend of Lục Vân Tiên), and below it in small characters "成泰九年六月十八日監守書吏黎德澤製畫圖式" (Paintings drawn by Lê Đức Trạch, the guard scribe, on June 18, the ninth year of Thành Thái Emperor (1897))<sup>4</sup> (Figure 2). It is a work of the Vietnamese Nguyen Dynasty Emperor Cheng Thai (Vua Thành Thái, 1879-1954). There are two volumes in this series: the main album and the attached appendix album.

In the main album, there are a few Gibert's handwritings in front of the album with an autograph dated May 1899: "Eugene Gibert, Artillery Major in the Navy, at Brest, Finistere.". The central square on each page is transcribed in ancient Vietnam Chinese characters named Nôm script (喃字) regularly (Figure 3). The text is arranged according to the traditional Chinese reading habit from right to left and top to bottom.

<sup>4</sup> *Lục Vân Tiên truyện* was painted under Thành Thái Emperor of Nguyễn Dynasty (Thành Thái Emperor, 1879-1954). There are two volumes in this series: the main album and the attached appendix album.

Figure 3: Gibert's Handwritings in the Main Ablum

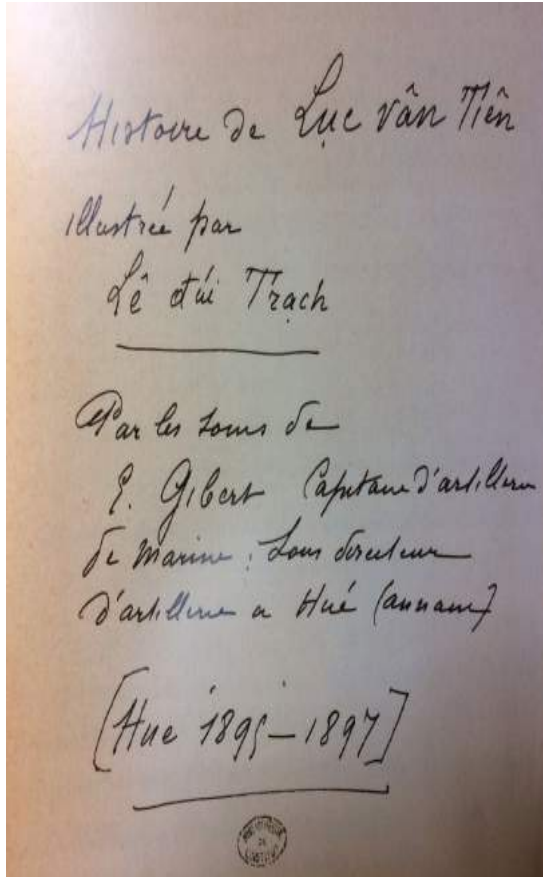


Figure 4: An Example Page of Text Layout in the Main Ablum

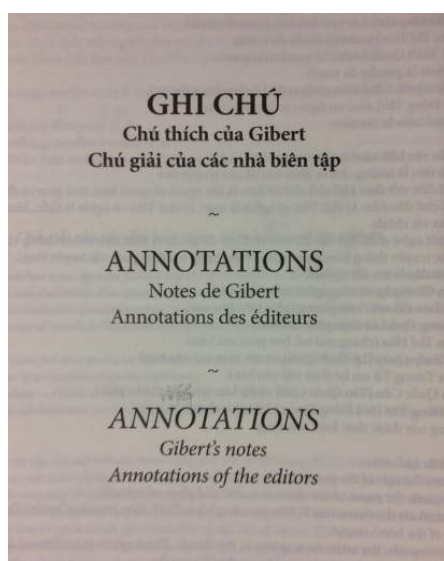


There are roughly six till eight straight columns in each square, and each column has 14 characters, with 6-character sentence plus 8-character sentence combined as a standard unit, and the 6<sup>th</sup> character rhymes. That is so called the unique six-eight-body poem in Vietnam. In addition, there are plenty of color pictures outside the central square on each page (Figure 4). They are painted by the Vietnamese court painter Lê Đức Trạch under the request of E. Gibert. The opposite facing page of each color page is black and white, with the French translation of Abel des Michels as the foundation is placed above the page, followed by Vietnamese and English translations, forming a three-language comparing order (Figure 5). If the pictures and texts are counted separately, this book has a total of 282 pages. However, if the page counting method uses one-picture and one-text to form a page unit, there will be 134 pages, and other 4 pages after that. Because Gibert worried about that the progress of the painter Lê Đức Trạch could probably delay, he asked another painter to draw 5 pages additionally.

Figure 5: Text Layout of the Poem and Its Translations



Figure 6: The Editor's “Annotations” of New Edition in 2016



In the appendix album, there are two important prefaces, namely Prof. Phan Huy Lê mentioned above, and Michel Zink who was the permanent secretary of AIBL. Next is a long article following titled: "A brief history of a previously unpublished illuminated manuscript", written by Pascal Bourdeaux who worked in the library of the Collège de France, provides an in-depth introduction and supplement to this manuscript. After the three introductory essays are Gibert's Notes on the entire poem, and the editor's “Annotations” for the 2016 edition (Figure 6). The form of the two volumes of this series is the same, all the texts are translated into three languages: first-Vietnamese, sub-French, and sub-English.

Between the manuscript was discovered in 2011 and printed in 2016 (first English translation), about the size, paper, color, arrangement, binding, preservation method, handwritten notes and other relevant matters of this manuscript, and after 2011, from manuscript to print, the involved matters such as the transcription, arrangement, and multilingual translation, revision, allusions footnotes, numbering system and other processes etc., are including described in detail in the article Bourdeaux as above, the author will not repeat more here.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to the paper titled "A brief history of a previously unpublished illuminated manuscript". It was written by Pascal Bourdeaux who served for the library of the Collège de France. The essay published in the appendix album.

### 3.4. *The characteristics of literature*

*Lục Vân Tiên truyện* is an autobiographical epic written by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu in Nôm script喃字. It was a creation in a specific context. Chiểu was blind in 1849 at the age of 27. How did he finish this work in 1851? According to Prof. Penn Wheeler, he couldn't be probably finish the work on his own, but spread it orally among his disciples, friends and family members in a wider circle. As it circulated, listeners drawn to the narrative epic inevitably transcribed fragments of the story in manuscript form, or made additions and changes to the text. This masterpiece is a work passed down by Chiểu's folk oral literature. The whole poem has around a total of 2088 sentences, it is a kind of unique six-eight poetry. The number of verses on each page varies, for example, 10 sentences are recorded on page 2, and only 4 sentences are recorded on page 3. The whole album has a total of 134 pages with the cover. There are more 4 pages based on the poems of page 85 till 88 are painted by another painter.

The poems in Nôm script喃字 created by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu are classified as Vietnamese classical literature. His creations include thematic elements and aesthetic forms of 19<sup>th</sup>-century folk plays. This epic with a total of 2,088 sentences is a first-person account of life tracks and takes dozens of stories. This small-unit narrative mode with different plots, in addition to the facts, is woven into a passionate call with its rhythmic six-eight, and spreads a rich lyrical and poetic tone. Although the protagonist is literati, the author is good at using the local vocabulary to translate the dialect expressions into southern vernacular, and the language form is the phonogram. This lyrical melody poem is loaded with rich literary, historical and moral allusions, and exudes a unique literary charm in a way that is close to the people's psychology. The epic uses many well-known moral values and everyday terms, such as sarcasm between doctors and patients, chivalrous spirit, Buddhist compassion, Taoist supernatural, humanitarianism, etc. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu is a loyal scholar who adheres to Confucianism, and is also a representative of southern intellectuals who successfully integrated Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The biography of *Lục Vân Tiên* clearly integrates the two inner tensions of Confucianism, one is the orthodox school and the other is the popular school. He carried out the fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in the form of southern culture and language, and expounded it to the general public, which had a certain educational power at that time.

Political changes in Vietnam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century brought this epic written orally into a form of modernity. Translating this epic's Nôm version into the modern Vietnamese national language of Roman phonetics, and then, making the French translation at the beginning of its publication in 1864, through those transformation and conformity, this special literary text, an autobiographical epic has accordingly well become a precious rare work of people graphic biography in East Asian.



## 4. Multi characteristics of the illustrations

### 4.1. The narrative structure of the image

Many editions of *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* 陸雲僊傳 have always been without pictures. The manuscript document discovered in 2011 was made by Gibert instructing Lê Đức Trạch to draw a color precious edition. Gibert asked the painter to faithfully portray all the gods, spirits, animals, plants, inanimate creatures, mythical figures, historical heroes mentioned in the poem, and to provide as much as possible the rituals and traditions of private or public life, as well as extended situations. There is a square in the center of each page of this album, in which the six-eight-body 六八體 narrative poems are transcribed in Nôm script 喃字. The colorful illustrations around the square are distinctive. The artist assigns each illustration space an outer frame, which is painted in watercolor. There are usually 4 illustrations per page, located in the upper, lower, left and right sides of the central square in text. They are not always arranged in a fixed order, but the narrative seems to be regular: the upper and lower plates often take panoramic and long-range viewpoints, and give in-depth realistic depiction, especially the scenery. The objects located on the left and right sides are divided into scenes, close-up viewpoints, and describe places, people or actions in detail (Figure 7). Each illustration is constructed in a limited space. Sometimes, for linear description, many objects are inevitably repeated, and sometimes events are decomposed and continuously occupy several spaces. The painter may explain the content of poetry and prose in a mechanical way, but he also strives to make the image narrative flow as smoothly as possible, with bright colors and realistic brushwork.

Figure 7: Example Pages on How to Tell a Story with Pictures



### 4.2. Gibert's reading notes

In the process of interacting with this classical text and the painter Lê Đức Trạch, Gibert happily learned the ingenuity of orientalists. He used the translation of Abel des Michels and linked the illustrations of the Hué painter to take reading notes on the whole poem, and

carried out the fusion of different cultures between French and Vietnam. The pages are made up of hundreds of strong, vibrant shades, and the epic is beautifully rendered by hundreds of colorful drawings, complete with trilingual translations, and handwritten annotations by Gibert, revealing the beautiful calligraphy both Chinese and Vietnamese. This one-of-a-kind, annotated, illustrated manuscript quietly waited to meet the people all over the world during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A major feature of illustration representation is the Chinese-character-title 榜書. Here are a few examples. As shown in the picture below on page 18, (Figure 8) are listed next to Vân Tiên 雲仙 and Nguyệt Nga 月娥 respectively with two Chinese-character-titles: one is 緣 (yuan - good deed), the other one is 情 (Qing - affection). The gist of this page translated in English says:

*Vân Tiên turns his head away, he does not look [at the pin]. Nguyệt Nga steals a peek at him, and her modest reserve increases.*

*“This is but a trifle!” She says.*

*Your humble servant hasn’t finished expressing her thought, and already you turn away!*

*It is true, this pin is quite insignificant!*

*You are right to disdain it, but why turn your eyes away from it? Vân Tiên is hard put to remain silent.*

*Already bound to her by his good deed, he now feels bound by love!*

*How adept you are at arousing passion in my heart! He says with a sigh.*

*The service I have done you is a trifle, and your gift is superb!*

*In such an encounter, in mid-journey,*

*a word from you is welcome, worth more than a thousand pieces of gold.*

*I recall the passage that says: “Treasure duty, despise riches.*

*So could I then ever accept a thing?” (Album one on page 18)*

Figure 18: Chinese-character-title 緣 and 情 on Page 18



Gilbert made a long note on the 200<sup>th</sup> Nôm script sentence of the poem in the picture below on this page. His notes attempted to interpret the meanings as follows:

*The illustration refers to a variant of line 200. The text from Hué reads: .....the “good deed” character is the ramie, the “affection” character is the tie. The ramie (Boehmerianivea or “China grass”, a flowering plant in the Urticaceae nettle family), a natural textile widespread in Indo-China, is pictured at Tiên’s foot. The tie woven out of ramie lies at Nguyệt Nga’s feet. Nguyệt Nga’s affection is born of Tiên’s good deed, just as the tie is born of the ramie. Moreover, there is a more complete analogy between the two concepts: good deeds are sown and are productive, affection is a tie. The Hué variant is better and more in line with the Annamese spirit than the text used by Abel des Michels, barring inaccuracy or flawed prosody (l.200) (album 2 on page 96).*

In the picture, the Chinese-character-title 緣 (yuan - good deed) is marked on the end of Vân Tiên, and the other one 情 (Qing - affection) is marked on the other side of Nguyệt Nga. In spite of a little bit different comprehension for two Chinese-character-titles with Gibert, the editor of this album also further similar comments: "the 'recompense' (報答) character has not yet been given back and already the 'love' character is in me. The annotation for 緣 (yuan) says: the 'kindness' character is tied, that of 'affection' twists this tie. Already attached to each other by a valorous act, the two protagonists now feel the following of their love.

That is, acts of courage, the word "kindness" and the word "affection" are tied together, and the two combined protagonists who already belong to each other have felt the upcoming love. The annotation for the word 情 (Qing) indicates: "Abel des Michels mistranslated the word “loyalty” as affection”. That is, Abel des Michels mistakenly translated the word “loyalty” as “affection.” It is meaningful that Gibert provided an in-depth explanation of the abstract thoughts in 200<sup>th</sup> sentence as above quotes, while the editor added the notes as the supplementary explanation, and tried to revise this related sentence for the French translation by Abel des Michels.

Similar to 緣 (yuan) and 情 (Qing), there are many metaphors have been used, such as 名 (Ming - fame) and 利 (Li - fortune) on page 67. The painter refers to 名 (Ming) with the official hat and belt respectively, and points the firewood to 利 (Li) Gibert gives the pic a note (Figure 9).

Figure 9: The Picture with 名 and 利 on Page 67



Continuation of the conversation: The old man is selfless, (l. 967) he cares neither for glory, represented by the Mandarin attributes of the hat and the belt, nor for lucre, represented by strings of coins and bars of gold. (l. 970) (album 2 on page 67).

Gibert's charming notes not only indicate his creative comprehension on both the autobiographical epic of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷焯 and the color illustrations by Lê Đức Trạch 黎德澤, but also represent the European perception and understanding of Vietnam linked to East Asian Chinese culture.

As another example on page 8, there is a Chinese-character-title 科期 (Ke qi) in the upper left corner, indicating that Lục Vân Tiên's fate depends on the success of the imperial examination. There are four pictures of each other on this page. The above picture shows the auspicious Big Dipper seven stars 北斗七星 in the sky. Among them, the four bucket-shaped stars are 魁星 (Kuixing) named 文曲魁星 (Wenqu Kuixing) is the auspicious star who dominates the world's transportation, and is reincarnated by a super figure who is talented, intelligent, and has good conduct. The picture on the right depicts the immortal stepping on the clouds, holding the official seal, that is the star personified 魁星 (Kuixing), who should be honored by scholars and in charge of student lucky future. In addition, the page also draws a horse on the left, and a hare, a rooster and a rat on the bottom respectively (Figure 10). According to the English translation of poems text, it says:

Figure 10: The Picture on Page 8



*But alas! The Horse is still far away!  
The Hare has hardly emerged from the shadows, the  
Rooster has crowed the coming of the day.  
When, upon arriving in the northern region, you see a  
Rat on your path, you will then be able to obtain glory.*  
(album 1 on page 8)

According Gibert's note to the picture above, it means that the teacher gave Vân Tiên the Chinese-character-title 科期 (Ke ji), and the constellation 魁星 (Kuixing) appears in the sky on the right. The left picture is a horse. The below picture says that Vân Tiên left the hare and rooster behind. Arriving in the north, he encounters a rat in the sky, wins an official hat, and becomes an outstanding man. The editor makes a further comment: This is a sort of Vietnamese astrology. The four animals: horse, hare, rooster and rat, are the names of the four years related to Vân Tiên attending imperial examination. He was born in Horse Year, after the examination held in Hare Year, before Rat Year, he will

face many crises and challenges in Rooster Year. While in Rat Year, he would be located in the north, in other words, the star would be pointing to the top of the Big Dipper constellation and the Eight Trigrams. The pattern of astrology predicts the success of Vân Tiên passing through the imperial examination.

Another example is on page 33, where the Nan zi poem begins, "How skillful whoever can predict the fortunes and misfortunes of life?" Vân Tiên was returning to his hometown for mourning due to the death of his mother, the pic draws a scene on the way while he picked up his backpack and left the exam room. The illustrations on the right and below each have some Chinese-character-titles 榜書. In the picture, there is an old man named 朱買臣 (Zhu Maichen) sitting on the ground, with an open book in front of him, and two load of firewood beside him (Figure 11a). There are two literati in the right picture. One is sitting with his feet crossed with the inscription 莊子 (Zhuangzi), and the other one is sitting next to the table inscripted 王儼 (Wang Yi) (Figure 11b). the Nan Zi poem says:

Figure 11: The Picture on Page 33



a. Old man named Zhu Maichen



b. With the inscription "Zhuangzi" and "Wang Yi"

.....Think about what Mãi Thần 買臣 did!.....I wish to be chaste and faithful my whole life long. Cut off from the world like Trang Tư 莊子, I shall wait for you, withdrawn, like Vương Nghi 王儀, in solitude. (album 1 on page 33)

Gibert's notes on these two pictures are very brief. The below picture notes on page 33 says: On the left, Tiên and his fiancée concluding their farewell (up to line 419); on the right, Mãi Thần 買臣, a legendary figure.

.....The picture on the right says:

Trang Tư 莊子 and Vương Nghi 王儀, solitary philosophers. (l. 418)

While the editor's notes refer to the allusions of Zhuangzi 莊子 drumming and singing for his wife's death 鼓盆而歌, and to Zhu Maichen 朱買臣, it refers to the allusions of carrying a load of firewood to study and divorced his wife. (see album 2 on page 33/116).

#### 4.3. A large number of Chinese-character-titles

Browsing the whole book, the author find the proportion of Chinese-character titles is extremely high, which becomes the highlight of the illustrated pages, indicating the meaning and reading direction of the pictures. Some of the Chinese-character-titles cite the names of historical legends such as: 孫臏 (Sun Bin) (p.36), 龐涓 (Pang Juan) (p.36), 紂紂(Zhou Jie) (p.37), 董子 (Dong Zi), 許由 (Xu You), 巢父 (Chao Fu) (p.38), 齊桓公 (Duke Qi Huan), 唐世民 (Tang Shimin) (p.83), 彫嬋(Diao Chan) (p.84), 昭君 (Zhao Jun) (p.92), 西施 (Xi Shi) (p.20), 織女(Weaver Girl) (p.21), 牛郎 (Cowherd) (p.21), etc. A few titles mark with place names such as: 西川郡 (Xichuan County) (p.15), 河溪府(Hexi Fu) (p.16), 東城郡 (Dongcheng County) (p.17). Or related to the system, such as: 科期 (Ke Qi) (p.8), 小科場 (Small Exam Field) (p.29), 後堂 (Back Hall) (p.31), 漢子入場會試 (Hanzi Admission Test) (p.32), etc. Some ones show social customs such as: 月老絲紅 (Yue Lao Si Hong) (p.21), 烏鵲橋迎 (Wu Que Qiao Ying) (p.89), and 義僕之位 (the Tablet of Loyal Servant) (p.129), etc. Or some ones present religious beliefs such as: 彌陀 (Amitabha), 大聖 (the Great Sage), 征西元帥 (Marshal Zhengxi) (p.56), (Figure 12) 地獄鐵門 (the Iron Gate of Hell), and 鬼率(the commander of ghosts) (p.133). Myths and legends: 道教八仙 (Taoist Eight Immortals), 公主五龜 (Princess Five-Turtle) (p.57), 三府洞庭赤鱗 (Sanfu Dongting Red Scales) (p.57), etc. A few titles show material life such as: 三代世傳醫院 (Three-Generation Hospital) (p.48, p.51), medical books (醫書), prescriptions (藥方), medicinal materials (藥材) (p.48) (Figure 13), Book of Changes (易經), Eight Hexagrams (八卦), and exorcism (驅魔) (p.52), etc. Sometimes, they mark the names of objects in *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* directly such as: 楚王(King Chu), 烏弋蕃國(Wu Yi Kingdom), 隘銅關(Aitongguan), 太師(Taishi), 降護(Jiang Hu), 媒容 (Matchmaker) (p.90, p.91), 引魂月娥(Yinhun Yuee), 觀音(Guan Yin), 裴公(Pei Gung) (p.100), etc.

Figure 12: Some Picture Present Religious Beliefs on Page 56



Figure 13: About Material Culture on Page 48



As for the painter, he occasionally draws couplets in Chinese characters, such as: "Do not idle during the daytime, and youth no longer comes" 「白日莫閒過、青春不再來」 (p.106); [figure 15] "Although the sun and the moon can shine, it is difficult to be bright under the inverted basin" 「日月雖明，難照覆盆之下」 (p.123). On the last page, the couplet on the wall says: 「不技(按:度)不求」 (Do not beseech, do not beg), 「能安能慮」 (Be at ease, be concerned), next to the painter writes the Chinese-character titles: 「人死流名」 (People die gloriously, would leave the reputation) (p.134) , [Figure 15] this page not only forms the intertextuality inside and outside the picture, but also draws a moral conclusion for this great epic. The content of the Chinese-character titles is diverse, involving laws and regulations, historical figures, state names, social life, religious beliefs, historical legends, famous stories, material life, moral persuasion, etc. On the illustrated pages of this manuscript, the Chinese-character titles own the important guiding function, provides readers to quickly grasp the connotations of the poems and pictures, and play the function of referring to the facts, metaphors and symbols.

Figure 14: Couplets in Chinese-character-titles on Page 106



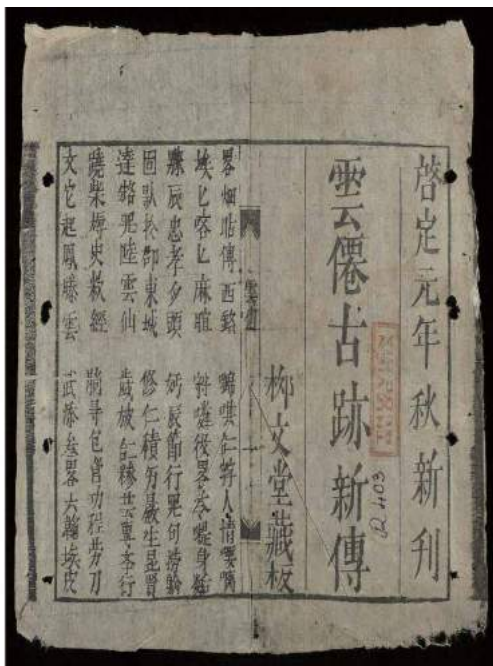
Figure 15: Couplets in Chinese-character-titles on Page 134



### 5. Asian-European spread of *Lục Vân Tiên truyện*

There are two versions of *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện*, one is the Nôm script喃字 version engraved in the form of Chinese book style. The second is a translation from Vietnamese (Romanization) or imported into French. The Nôm script was first organized and engraved by Duy Minh Thị and printed in Guangzhou廣州, China in 1864. The following year, The Quang Thạch Nam Bookstore in Vietnam reprinted it based on the Guangzhou Nôm script. According to the "Summary of the Bibliography of Sino-Nôm漢喃書目提要", there are eight type of block-printed Nôm script editions, four of them in Hanoi, one titled *Vân Tiên* (雲僊), 98 pages, 18cm high, 14cm wide, missing the first page and two at the end of the book. The other three editions are all titled *Vân Tiên cổ tích tân truyện* (雲僊古跡新傳) with 106 pages, 18cm high and 12 or 14cm wide. The one was printed by Ju Wen Tang (聚文堂) Bookstore in the ninth year of Thành Thái成泰 Emperor (1897), and the other two were printed by Liu Wen Tang (柳文堂) Bookstore in the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of Tự Đức嗣德 Emperor (1880) and the first year of Khải Định啟定 Emperor (1916), each of them without attached drawings (Figure 16).

Figure 16: One Type of the Block-printed Nôm Script Editions of *Lục Vân Tiên truyện*



As soon as the book was published, it immediately attracted the attention of the French. In the same year (1864) that it was published in Guangzhou, Gabriel Aubaret published a translation in *Asia News*, but did not elaborate on the source of the edition. In 1864, Gabriel Aubaret translated *Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* in French in "Asia News" magazine, while France began to occupy Indochina. It was necessary to understand the ideological tradition and operation mode of Vietnam, and it was necessary to train civilian administrators, especially interpreters and translators. Find a good corpus to study Vietnamese administration, law, history and culture. Some northern Vietnamese literature was so popular that it was translated into France in 1884.

*Lục Vân Tiên Truyện* was first published in Saigon City in Vietnamese (Romanization) in 1867 by Gustave Janneau and reprinted in Paris in 1873, becoming a standard reading for schoolchildren and the general public. Abel des Michels saw this translation, which can be used not only as a poetry teaching for Vietnamese people, but also as a good medium for foreigners to learn Vietnamese. Under his guidance, the earliest Vietnamese language teaching in Paris was established in the 1870s. At the same time, Abel des Michels regarded this as the best reference model, and paved the way for his trilingual translation in 1883. The



edition was republished by Michels in three languages (Nôm script, Vietnamese and French) with annotations, and regarded as the most complete and successful authoritative text. Thus, it became the base script of Gibert's great work: *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳. The drawing and compilation by Eugene Gibert in 1887, as well as various subsequent editions, are based on this edition. Seven different French translations have been identified so far: the oldest in 1864 and the newest in 1997. This epic has been edited and published several times in Hanoi, Saigon or Paris, regardless of whether it is in Nôm script, Vietnamese or French<sup>6</sup>. The manuscripts donated by Eugene Gibert will undoubtedly add a significant piece to the version and circulation history of this epic, and provide important documents for related research.

Gibert donated this treasure in 1899 to an institution best suited to its preservation, that is "Institute of Inscriptions and Baylor" (AIBL). It was born out of interest in the study of Asian civilizations and which had just held the 11<sup>th</sup> Orientalist Conference in September 1897, considering how to prepare a research case to protect the cultural relics of the Far East. Gibert donated the manuscript to the academy, representing the intellectual connection between him and the institution's academics who garrisoned Huế for two years. In 1887, Gibert returned to France for the first time from Vietnam. It seemed that he had no connection with the famous orientalist Paul Pelliot 伯希和<sup>7</sup> was invited to study in Southeast Asia after graduation, and then moved to China. How did Gibert connect with the French Orientalism boom? Was he in close contact with French Orientalists? It remains to be concerned. Through the promotion of many orientalists, a long-term archaeological organization was formally established in Saigon City in 1900, that is, the École Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO), which marked the growing interest of Europe in Southeast Asia.

## 6. A graphic-textual classic under the colonial perspective

According to Pascal Bourdeaux, the research on *Lục Vân Tiên truyện* is far less than that of *Kim Vân Kiều truyện*. From the 1950s to the 1970s, while Vietnam suffered from military divisions, it began to appear in-depth discussions on *Lục Vân Tiên truyện*, including its manuscripts, prints, translations and other ancient characters, linguistics and literary analysis. On the occasion of literary criticism, it is emphasized that Nguyễn Đình Chiểu owns the patriotism of South Vietnam.

*Lục Vân Tiên truyện* reinforces a moral model with good conduct leading to good death, and lyrical expressions, echoing the graphic creations of East Asian countries during the same period, trying to use visual media to write the trivial details focus on the narrative image, showing the pleasing nature of the image without forgetting to place symbolic elements

<sup>6</sup> Please refer to the footnote No.5, the same from Pascal Bourdeaux's article.

<sup>7</sup> 伯希和, French name: Paul Pelliot (May 28, 1878~October 26, 1945), French linguist, sinologist, and explorer. In 1908, he went to China to explore the Dunhuang Grottoes(敦煌石窟), purchased a large number of related cultural relics and shipped them to France. With extraordinary talents, Pelliot was proficient in many languages: English, German, Russian, Chinese, Persian, Tibetan, Arabic, Vietnamese, Mongolian, Turkish, Tocharian, etc.

(Figure 17). Ming and Qing Dynasties and Joseon Dynasty followed traditional painting mediums, either used scroll, album and screens with light color ink brush, or used book-bound style with illustration line drawing and arrangement, from them, to present the cultural commonality. However, *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳 is rather special in Vietnam of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The straight-line written in Nôm script originated from Chinese traditional form, yet the text style of the four-panel watercolor illustration is inevitably influenced by France. It shows the interactive viewing between Asia and Europe during the colonial period, and displays the complex impact of consciousness and cultural fusion.

Figure 17: The Color Images with Placing Symbolic Elements



Ironically, the colonial regime indirectly contributed to the creation of this outstanding product. Beginning in the 1880s, this work first attracted interest in bilingualism and became one of the means of eliminate illiteracy in Vietnam, and then, it became an excellent reading corpus for people traveling to Vietnam, including Eugene Gibert. The book surely is an artistic crystallization with the original creation, connecting cultural values and humanistic spirits of both sides. It is a visual cultural product with Vietnam's uniqueness in the perspective of East Asia. It lays out the French (Europe)'s view of seeing Vietnamese (even East Asia), it thus well became a graphic-textual classic from the colonial perspective.

## 7. Conclusion

It is a pity that the author has not been able to study this book comprehensively due to the difficulty in finding related research recourses, as well as the constraints of language and academic ability. However, I still try my best to explore the construction of knowledge and the spirit of the times through this album. *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳 is an illustrated autobiographical narrative epic, which the author regards as a pictorial autobiographical document showing the deeds of a Vietnamese literati. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu 阮廷昭 recounted his life in first-person, and wrote his autobiography in rhyme style. The narrative text is full of lyrical elements, which can be linked to the earliest source of "poetic autobiography" in China: Qu Yuan's "Li Sao" 屈原的"離騷". Nonetheless, the tone of

this narrative poem is to celebrate traditional, classical and moral values, and to spread the core Confucian beliefs of loyalty, filial piety, and human nature. This poetry and painting text, full of the vigor and vitality of modern culture, provides a rich discussion on the poetry and art of Vietnam within the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, includes the integration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, the belief in the coexistence of gods, material civilization, and aesthetic insights. Although this text of poetry and painting cannot help but make people immersed in the atmosphere of classical Chinese culture a little uneasy, the multi-language and illustrations exude a sense of modernity, bringing Vietnamese literature into the process of modernization. This sense of modernity is strongly manifested in the mixed character of *Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳. It contains both the mainstream tradition of literati and the narrative poem-painting of popular taste, from which readers can experience the familiar Confucian virtues and sense of mission, which makes this epic full of Chinese cultural characteristics. At the same time, it is full of popular flavors such as heroism, magical narrative, picturesque scenery, folk imagery, romance and love, etc.

*Lục Vân Tiên cổ tích truyện* 雲僊古跡傳 is a literary classic expressing the unique historical thinking of Vietnam, and this illustrated manuscript album reflects the friendship and exchange of ideas between French and Vietnamese intellectuals and artists. The case provides an ideal example of a European/Asian, colonial government/colonized sensibility correspondence. It is another ethnography that Eugene Gibert brings to the colonial perspective with respect, and Henri Oger's "Techniques of the Annam People 安南人的技術" forms the double gems of modern Vietnamese visual culture.

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