

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

DOI: 10.54631/VS.2022.61-100487

THE SOVEREIGN OF THE JUNGLES, OR THE TIGER IMAGE IN FOLKLORE OF VIETNAM

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*Vous êtes né dans la profondeur des forêts; vous êtes le roi des animaux.
Quand la nuit est obscure, vos yeux brillent comme des étoiles. Votre rugissement produit la
tempête.*

*Votre force est sans égale et vous entendez distinctement tout ce que se passe au loin.
Quand vous traversez la forêt, tous les autres animaux s'agenouillent devant vous.*

*You were born in the depths of the forests; you are the king of animals.
When the night is dark, your eyes shine like stars. Your roar produces the storm.
Your strength is unparalleled and you distinctly hear everything that happens in the distance.
When you cross the forest, all the other animals kneel before you.*
[Giran 1912: 102]

Abstract. The tiger image has become an integral part of world art and literature. No artists and poets could remain indifferent to its regal appearance and gracious movements, deceptive calmness and sudden transformation into a vicious predator; and they devoted their works to this animal.

Using rare matters connected with superstitions and folklore of Vietnam, the author observes the relations of the tiger and the human and determines its place in spiritual life and oral tradition of the Vietnamese.

Key-words: tiger image, beliefs, totemism, superstitions, symbols, folklore.

For citation: Legostaeva A.S. (2022). The Sovereign of the Jungles, or the Tiger Image in Folklore of Vietnam. *Russian Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 6 (1): 5–16.

Received: February 10, 2022

Received in revised form: February 22, 2022

Accepted: March 3, 2022

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Introduction

The tiger's cult was widespread in countries of South, East and Southeast Asia, in mountain forest areas, where these mighty felines used to be found. Numerous peoples dwelling there revered and worshipped this majestic animal and endowed it with sacral features. Researchers find a lot of common traits in the tiger images by various ethnic groups². "The one who never lived in Himalayas does not imagine how great the power of superstitions in this incomparable area. But the various kinds of beliefs, who are confessed by the residents of the valleys and footiggers, are not much different from the superstitions of simple illiterate horses. Essentially, the difference is so small that it is difficult to decide where beliefs end and superstitions begin" [Corbett 1964: 3].

It is mostly true as far as Vietnam is concerned. There the tiger is an integral part of the country's life. Its image has had a long evolution since the Dong Son culture (a Bronze Age culture of ancient Vietnam), when its images had much more decent place in bestiaries (beasts' descriptions) of ancient Viet compared with other animal species, till the status of the key image of mythology, art, and folklore.

"In those distant times humans and animals spoke the same language and lived in peace and concord. Even the tiger, when passing by a rice field in harvest time and seeing the hard work of people, stopped and helped them, and after the work they had meals together" [Skazki i predaniya 2021: 113]. Such was the idyllic picture of human life in the environment created by story-tellers of the bygone past.

As a matter of fact, the existing firm opinion of tigers' extraordinary ferocity and bloodlust has been formed not so long ago, which is confirmed with the history of "relationship" between the animal and the humans. Virtually, tigers were a serious threat and caused fear, but people who existed in the severe environment for centuries, could "include" them in their traditional way of life and build somewhat "friendly" relations with them. Jungle animals, tigers had enough food, and they needed not to go out into the open, create chaos and "terrorize" villages. Besides, their neighborhood was somewhat useful to the communities' dwellers, as the predators used to reduce the quantity of herbivores, who destroyed crops and damaged people. Also, a tiger hunt was seldom due to beliefs and superstitions of the local population, who believed that the spirit of a killed tiger could come back and revenge. Thus, precautionary measures, both domestic and ritual ones (bamboo hedges around villages, various rituals etc.), allowed to collect mushrooms and berries in the forest, to hunt game, as well as to plough and cut wood.

The situation was radically changed by Europeans. When there appeared missionaries and travelers in the country, when there emerged big trading stations and developed colonial expansion, the hunt became widespread. Numerous photos of the late 19th – early 20th centuries show either men in safari-style suits pleased with themselves, posing with guns in their hands and with a foot stepping on a killed tiger's carcass or "natives" with loincloths, who were carrying the killed striped predator hanged to a pole by its paws. The desire to get a hunting trophy for a study of one's house, as well as trapping

² For more details, see [Maretina 2009, 2012; Strelcova 2014; Choi 2017], etc.

of exotic animals for numerous botanical gardens and private menageries³ in Europe and colonies resulted in serious reduction of the Indochinese tiger population. Besides, the destruction of the environment, deforestation and animals' displacing disturbed "the peace balance": in search of food tigers had to contest people for a place under the sun and actively attack domestic cattle and humans⁴. Such actions provoked more mass killing of animals. The colonial administration announced a reward for every killed tiger's "head" which resulted nearly in the annihilation of this species in the wild nature. Currently, poachers' activity and the growing "black market" trade in wild animals listed in the Red Book, as well as illegal raising of animals in private nurseries to get components for "miraculous" medicines⁵, capable according to Vietnamese superstitions to prolongate youth, improve health and bring good luck in business, love etc., are the logical outcome of human economy and human ill-conceived intervention in natural environment. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) data show that in 2016 there were no more as five tigers in the forests of Vietnam, though five years earlier they had been thirty [Denisovich: 21.04.2016]. It is to be hoped that new generations will not be forced to study tigers only in the works of art, literature, and cinema, which left the image of this beautiful animal.

³ In the opinion of some authors, mass passion for big predators and the mode to raise rare "domestic pets" continued to the end of the colonial rule. Thus, in 1875 municipal decree of Saigon forbade to walk in the streets of Cochinchine with a tiger, even on the lead [Taboulet 1978: 12; Guérin 2010: 212].

⁴ The analysis of memoirs by travelers and tiger hunters, both Europeans and residents [Guérin, Seveau 2009, Corbett 1964, Singh 1972, etc.] shows that hunters' failures mostly were causes for the emergence of man-eating tigers: the wounded tiger is more aggressive to humans, its body not strong enough (or its age) forces it to search "a light" prey, particularly, domestic cattle and humans. Besides, reports of the colonial administration of Indochina give the statistics of the attacks at humans and the sums of rewards per year.

⁵ The traditional medicine uses various parts of the tiger's body, from the scalp, bones and teeth to claws, skin and whiskers. Thus, fangs and claws are used as good-luck charms, for making keychains, necklaces etc. Teeth are used to cure dogs' bites [Pouchat 1910: 604].

The Tiger's Place in Culture of Vietnam



Fig. 1. Relief "Tiger" in the temple of the Tryng sisters, Hanoi.
Photo by the author, November 2016



Fig. 2. Tiger (one of the paired statues) in the courtyard of the Temple of Emperor Le Thai To near Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi. *Photo by the author*

Not occasionally, the tiger is called the sovereign of jungles in the title of this article, though this status is oftener ascribed to the lion in literature. However, the latter, being not present in the rich fauna of Vietnam, was essentially a kind of “model” for works of art. In particular, in monumental stone sculpture it was represented as fantastic or somewhat realistic figures *sư tử đá* (Chin. *shǐ-jì*) either in the bottom of the altar “Buddha throne” base or as two statues guarding entrances to emperors’ tombs and Buddhist temples, and later to secular buildings. This (borrowed from China) tradition of guarding sacred sites from penetration of evil spirits had been taken by the tiger upon itself as a guardian at the gate. Its images, more often as high-relief sculptures (fig. 1), rarely like a sculpture in the round (fig. 2)⁶, show themselves on the protective screens at the entrances to temples or in their small patios.

⁶ The tiger statues are more typical for the religious tradition of the South, where the name of the animal is widely reflected in the toponymic map. In a number of provinces in the south of the country there are many temples and community houses, dedicated to the tiger, where its statues are put in the patios or at the entrance to temples and *dinh*, for instance, in community houses Tân Thới Nhì, Tân Thới Tam, Tân Thới Tứ, Thới Tam Thôn [Nguyễn Thanh Lợi 2010: 7].



Fig. 3. Cave sculpture in the Marble Mountains.
Photo by the author, November 2008

The tiger image is multifaceted and many-sided. In Vietnamese beliefs it appears in various guises: it is a totem ancestor “of the first kin formations Lon, Luong ư Quang of Thai people” [Stratanovich 1978: 18], living in North Vietnam and Laos; it is a spirit-patron of mountains, it is “the war deity, who helps armies’ leaders”. In the sphere of the magic the tiger is the mortal enemy of evil demons, who threaten both the living and the dead” [Duran 2007: 330]: it is a true servant of Buddhist deities, part of *Thánh Mẫu* (Holy Mothers) cult (fig. 3). The tiger is one of eight sacred animals *bát vật*, more detailed version *tứ linh* or *tứ thánh thú* (Dragon, Phoenix, Tortoise, Unicorn or Horse-Dragon), added with exclusively realistic living creatures, such as the tiger, the fish (carp), the crane and the bat. Unlike most *tu linh* they belong to the category of real animals “mythologized in popular consciousness” [Nguyen Phi Hoanh 1982: 119], celebrated in legends and endowed with some supernatural abilities.

Superstitions

The folk belief in these abilities celebrated the tiger image emphasizing its natural qualities, such as his strength and ferocity, his camouflage color and his ability to steal up imperceptibly. Not in vain the most dangerous adversaries of the human are mentioned in the proverb-warning: “The crocodile in the river, the tiger in the forest”. Other proverbs use the knowledge of jungles and their inhabitants. Thus, a folk omen “When the crows’ flock flies with cries, the tiger is nearby” had been turned into the proverb “The owl’s cry points to the devil’s presence, and the crows’ cry to the tiger’s den” [Pouchat 1910: 604]. Also, the stability of the superstitions linked with the tiger is reflected in the current fiction, for example, in a bedtime story for children: “If this bird cries, the tiger is about to appear. These are birds-ghosts. They seize the souls of the humans eaten up by tigers, and they show the tigers the way to other humans. They want other souls to replace them. Then they will be born again” [Doan Gioi 1972: 102].

The fright of the mighty animal engenders numerous names of respect⁷, which the Vietnamese use to avoid mentioning its real name. The taboo was connected with the superstition that when the tiger hears its name, it can come. They believe that the tiger has a sensitive ear and can hear a human speaking at a great distance. But if something falls near and frightens it, while it is listening, it will forget

⁷ “Master”, “host”, “Lord of mountains” “sovereign” or the variants of these words (more in Vietnamese: “Son quân chi thần”, “Son quân chúa xứ”, “Son quân mãnh hổ”, “Son lâm chúa tể”, “Son lâm chúa xứ”, “Son lâm đại tướng quân”, “Son quân chúa động”, “Chúa xứ sơn lâm”, “Mãnh Hổ”, “thần Hổ”, “Ông”, “ông Thầy”, “ông Cả”, “Ngài”, “ông Ba Mươi”, “Hương quân” [Nguyễn Thanh Lợi 2010: 5].

everything it has heard [Pouchat 1910: 603]. Before going to the forest people took a number of measures for security. Thus, one can “avert the tiger’s eyes” by means of a small bone *vây khái*, *vây cọc* from the tiger’s left shoulder or from the tigress’ right one. Moreover, they can change their place depending on a season; sometimes they are on its shoulder, sometimes on its breast. It is important not to mix them up; otherwise, they will be inefficient. But if one manages to get such a bone, one can go to the forest fearlessly. [Cadière 1901: 134–135].

When the beast is trapped, they offer it a sacrifice before killing it [Giran 1912: 52] and render honors and respect to it. A number of rituals are performed after the predator has been killed. Folk beliefs are that the tiger’s whiskers can give birth to a very poisonous creature. One should just put some hairs of whiskers in the split young bamboo spring, and in time there will appear numerous worms, a mouse or a snake (there are variants). Also, small poisonous caterpillars are born from the tiger’s saliva, dropping to the earth [Giran 1912: 16; Cadière 1901: 132–134]. Therefore, first of all, after having killed the tiger hunters pulled out its whiskers and burnt them in order nobody could make the mortal poison. In her diaries Gabrielle Vassal⁸, who participated in hunting, describes how all the Annamites surrounded the killed tiger and struggled for its intestines hoping that they would make them invulnerable. The tiger’s eyes were of a special value. A local cook prepared unusual broth of them for his son and said: “Now you will see the tiger before it sees you” [Vassal 1911: 288].

Also, the tiger’s choice of its victim was treated differently. They believed that the tiger attacks only those who were doomed to be eaten up by this predator. It was such a bad sign both for the victim’s family and for the village that sometimes all the dwellers left it after the animal’s attacks [Pouchat 1910: 604]. In Cochinchine the son of the man who had been eaten up by the tiger was to await the same fate and make offerings to avoid it [Pouchat 1910: 87]. It was connected with the belief that the wandering soul of the victim (*ma*) remains in the real world and moves on the tiger’s back. It shows the way to the tiger forcing it to the house where it lived and where it hopes to find sacrificial gifts. This is how the Annamites explain repeated abductions by the tiger of several persons who lived in the same house. Besides the altar sacrifices it was necessary to find at least some remains, which were added with paper images of the human and the tiger. They were burnt and thoroughly buried to let the soul move to the tomb, and the family live quietly [Cadière 1901: 135–136]. Besides, it was allowed to sacrifice a cock, a symbolic substitution of the corps [Giran 1912: 19].

They believe that the sure way to catch the tiger is first to get rid of the souls *ma* on its back. Thus, when they make a pitfall trap, they put roast ears of corn round it. The souls attracted with their tasty smell will jump down to get them, and the tiger deprived of celestial defense will get into the trap [Cadière 1901: 136].

Leopold Cadière tells the story about the soul *ma*, which appeared to its friend in his dream, and about its misfortune. As there were several souls on the tiger’s back and it was short of room, it felt uncomfortable being too close to the tiger’s tail. The friend promised to save the soul, if it helped him

⁸ Gabrielle Maud Vassal, a British subject and the wife of a French military doctor, was a famous naturalist. She published her memoirs of her sojourn in Vietnam in 1907–1910. They throw light on many aspects of mountain men’s life in Central Vietnam.

to trap the tiger. Following the soul's advice, he made an offering in the temple of the tiger and put two sticks on the altar of the "Noble master's" soul (fig. 4), which meant the invitation for the soul to the feast. After that the man made a pitfall trap and caught the tiger [Cadière 1901: 136].

They believed that it was possible to count the tiger's victims by its ear. Every victim was marked with a notch on the ear [Cadière 1901: 135; Giran 1912: 604]. When the tiger had eaten up hundred humans, it could be transformed into a man or a woman and began to speak [Giran 1912: 604]. On the other hand, mountain men of South Vietnam believed that the *ma lai* (a man possessed by a spirit) had a potion to transform the appearance; it helped him get various forms, also, the form of the tiger [Shinkarev 2002: 82].



Fig. 4. A modern version of the *ha ban* – tiger altar at *chua Sùng Hưng Cổ Tự*. Vietnam, prov. Kien Giang, Duong Dong.
Photo by the author, December 2018

In some forest areas, before cutting a tree, people humbly sought the tiger's permission [Giran 1912: 51], who, when appropriately respected, was equable and left harmlessly. Such is the effect of polite requests and low bows.

Curiously, the Vietnamese have a legend of the transformation of the tiger into other representatives of the felines. Thus, the tigress leads her cubs to a steep bank of a stream. There she jumps to the other side, the cubs after her. The one who could do it in a jump, becomes a real tiger; the one who falls into the water, gets the appearance of *chồn cáo mèo* (a wild cat), and the one who is afraid to jump is transformed into a cowardly panther [Giran 1912: 14; Cadière 1901: 13]⁹.

The Tiger in Vietnamese Folklore

Despite the above-said, as if in contrast to its reputation of a mighty and cunning animal, in folklore the tiger is usually the anti-hero, i.e., a silly, too credulous and even humble creature, who can be deceived by any small and weak character. In tales this strong and brave predator is the image far from comely. In one of the Viets' tales ("Strong, but Silly") it is killed being deceived by a peasant; in another ("The Black Toad, the Tiger, and the Monkey") he was deceived by a monkey [Chuyên doi xua 1888: 6–8; 47–51]. In the tale "The Hare and the Tiger" he was four times fooled by the Hare, who did not only manage to get away with him, but every time he also managed to harm the tiger, using

⁹ Curiously, "The Family", a story from "Stories and Legends of Annam" told by Clotilde Chivas-Baron the same version of the tiger's transformation is given in the context of human relations, attitudes and groundless accusations brought to the family due to negative traits of some of its members. Mentioning antagonistic qualities of the children born by the same parents is concluded with the morale: "Don't tell the man, who behaves wrong, that he is from the Trans or the Macs. It is unjust. If my brother is a thief, but I am a poor honest man, I deserve your respect" [Chivas-Baron 1920: 87–89].

everything “at hand”. The tiger, this “powerful sovereign”, is either bitten by bees, or loses its tail, or even his skin, when hunters had killed him [Skazki narodov V'etnama 1970: 31–35] (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Tiger fight. Reproduction of the relief of the XVII century from Chai Community House, Vietnam, prov. Ha Nam Ninh. Mid 20th century. *From the collection of the State Museum of the East (Moscow)*

The Hare is often the offender of the Tiger and the defender of other victims. Thus, in a Ba Na tale of “The Tiger, the Hunter, and the Hare” he saves the Hunter from the death, and in a Jarai story of “The Hare, the Elephant, and the Tiger” he rescues the Elephant being clever and shrewd [Skazki narodov V'etnama 1970: 216–220; 247–248]. In “The Tiger the Elephant and the Bunting” tale a small bird having deceived the Tiger helps the Elephant [Cadière 1901: 138–139]. Perhaps, the only subject matter with no bloody details is “The Horse and the Tiger”, a meo tale about an unsuccessful attempt of the Tiger and the boastful Horse to make friends [Skazki narodov V'etnama 1970: 280–282], and among the severest ones is “The Opium Smoker and the Tiger” [Dumoutier 1890: 172–173]. This story tells how the protagonist went to a distant rice field every day to indulge in his fatal habit of smoking. One evening the Tiger wandering nearby saw him and ask for smoking. The Man prepared three opium pipes for him. The Tiger smoked them in turn. He liked the drug, and the next day the whole thing happened again. Then the Smoker, who began being tired of his visitor, came with the loaded gun and told the Tiger that it was a new kind of a pipe, the best one. The Tiger obediently lied and took the barrel into his mouth to inhale the smoke. But when the Man brought the flame to the gun, the gun shot and broke the Tiger’s head.

In “The Old Tiger”, a Xo Dang (Sedang) tale, the Tiger itself decided to turn to a ruse, but the Fox had discovered His snare and saved not only himself, but also other animals, and the Old Tiger died of hunger [Skazki narodov V'etnama 1970: 183–184]¹⁰. Comparison of the oral tradition of ethnic minorities suggests that the priority in the Tiger’s image is not the fright of it, but the desire to deride and deceive the strong enemy, having gained a victory over it¹¹. The mightier the defeated enemy is, the higher the merits of the victor. Thus, in the story “Cau Khai” of the Tai people the protagonist’s deed is visibly embellished. His glory is disseminated worldwide, when he “pulled several bamboo trunks out of the earth, followed the Tiger and beat him to death. The tiger was so large that four men could not raise him, but Cau Khai took it under his arm and ran like nothing had happened” [Ibid.: 335–336].

¹⁰ This is one of wide-spread vagrant plots. There is a Tai tale with the same title, literally repeating this story [Serebryanj klyuch 1961: 141–142]

¹¹ It is strengthened with their satirical understatement, and the opposition of haughty rich men and clever common people etc.

In a number of cases the Tiger asked the Human for help. Thus, in the story “The Tiger and the Midwife” it brings the Midwife to his mate in labor and later brings the Midwife a stolen pig as a reward for her work¹². The same reward serves for the gratitude of the Tiger in “The Tiger’s Gratitude” [Landes 1886: 126–127; 293–295], a story telling how a peasant saved the Tiger of death, delivering a fish bone from his throat. However, in the latter case the Tiger is the embodiment of a kind spirit, because it looked after the family of the man, who soon died, during several centuries, under his protection the peasant’s descendants took high places and glorified themselves.

Vietnamese folklore reflected Vietnamese totemistic beliefs. G.G. Stratanovich wrote that the belief in the kinship with the Tiger itself, the ability to communicate with him and even to accept his appearance and then to return to one’s own human appearance can be found by many mountain peoples of Indo-China¹³. In his opinion, approximately at the same time (the early period) there emerge the plots on mysterious animals-assistants in mythology and legends [Stratanovich 1978: 21; 25], linked with the human idea of supernatural strength of the animals-totems. Hence, perhaps, the origin and the motif of the marriage of the Man and the Tigress (the Tiger and the Woman). Usually, the initiator of such an association is the animal in “the totem pair”, which steals the human or forces the human to make a family. Thua in “The Drum of the Tiger Skin”, a meo tale, the Tigress-leader chose a youth to be her husband. The youth must surrender to save the dwellers of his village [Skazki narodov V'etnama 1970: 318–320]. In “The History of the Human-Tiger” the protagonist was born by a woman who had been stolen, when working in the field. In time, having become a werewolf, partially transformed into a beast (the tiger’s head, the human body) he possessed unusual abilities. Due to them he did a service to the emperor and got the title of a Great General with Tiger’s Force. Later he became a spirit *than phu* by the name of a mountain in Ninh Binh province. He lived in a cave of that mountain [Landes 1886: 31–33].

In the Xo Dang tale “One kindness deserves another” the merciful Youth saved a White Tigress of the trap¹⁴. In return she helped the Youth to marry the girl he loved, whose parents were against their marriage. And on the contrary, the Tiger appears in the role of the evil spirit’s envoy and its will’s performer in “How the Spirit, who Puts to Death, was Put to Shame”, a sre tale [Skazki narodov V'etnama 1970: 186–187; 272–273]. The topic of werewolves and the Tiger-Spirit image are often found in folklore, mythology and in Buddhist subject matters, life stories with folklore tale and mythological foundation (according to N.I. Nikulin), where a mythological and legendary archetype is seen through a Buddhist subject matter. The desire to show the place and time in early short stories originated in the historical prose [Nikulin 1977: 124–125]. Thus, in many pagodas of North Vietnam, for example in Keo Pagoda (Thai Binh province), Co Le (Nam Ha province), Quan Su (Hanoi) they worship monk Nguyen

¹² The more detailed version of this *truyen* is given in the article of Nguyen Thanh Loi [Nguyễn Thanh Lợi 2010: 9], but the author analyses the legend rather as a real event of the past, linking the action to concrete names and geography and throwing light on history of functioning temple Ba Mu Troi in Dong Nai, in the village Ben Go. Also, there are other variants of the temple’s locations connected (so local residents tell) with the similar story, for example, in Phu Yen [Phan Văn Lương: 02.08.2016].

¹³ The like subject matters can be found in mythology of East and South Asia.

¹⁴ The White Tigress is a patron spirit in far eastern culture, particularly worshipped in China and Vietnam.

Minh Khong. The legend tells that he was the most skilled shaman and possessed magic powers of transformation [Hà Văn Tấn 1993: 25]. Nguyen Minh Khong is believed to be the man who cured the hereditary son from the Ly Dynasty, future emperor Ly Than Tong, after he had suddenly transformed into a tiger in 1138. The ruling family gave the pagoda a statue of the Tiger in commemoration of that event [Dumoutier 1888: 45].

The opening of “True Story [about Revolt] in Lam Son” gives “facts” of Le Loi, another ruler’s, reincarnation. Before his birth in the bushes nearby there lived a black tiger who did no harm to anybody. After Le Loi’s birth nobody saw the tiger. However, in his childhood Le Loi had sparkling eyes, a wide mouth, a high nose, a dragon’s face, and seven birth-marks on his left shoulder, he walked like a dragon, stepped like a tiger, was hairy, his voice sounded like a big bell, and he sat like a tiger [Knorozova 2020: 122–123].

Thus, in Vietnamese mythology and folklore it is possible to find several main Tiger’s images having different functions paradigm. He is a victim and a deceived character in everyday fairy tales, but in the magic ones he has special abilities which help him to get what he will or to help others. At any rate, the Tiger’s employ is wider. Being a werewolf or a spirit, he knows the art of transformation and can reincarnate, embodying the traits both of the animal, and the human.

Conclusion

The popularity and many-sidedness of the Tiger in Vietnamese culture consist of several factors. In the country where a complicated syncretic system of religious views had been formed, with animist cults and other folk beliefs as an important component, from times immemorial people believed in the existence of numerous invisible creatures living in a parallel world. Endowing them with supernatural abilities of animals, plants, strengths and phenomena of nature, deifying them, they, naturally, tried to get their defense and patronage. The Tiger as the embodiment of strength and power inspired justified fear. People using it in their favor transformed the fear into respect and delight in front of the beast. Having recognized the Tiger their spirit-patron, they performed rituals and made offerings to it. The cult practice being extended, a number of the predator’s qualities were “humanized”, which was mirrored in complimentary comparisons of historical persons and national heroes with it (“strong as a tiger”, “valiant as a tiger”, etc.). The Tiger’s image had a long evolution from a totem ancestor of some clans to its inclusion into systems of religious doctrines (Buddhism, Daoism) like a bearer of a number of qualities, rooted in a set of notions of the Vietnamese at different levels.

The transfer of superstitions and ancient beliefs into the sphere of oral poetical tradition contributes to the popularity of the image also in folklore of the country, reflecting the world-outlook of its people. The image ambivalence mentioned in the article shows its glorification, emphasizing its authority as a powerful spirit-patron, who can guard against evil forces. On the other hand, the same qualities and dignities of the tiger are the background for glorification of other characters, often small and weak, oppressed and poor. In the second case, the Tiger’s image, bearing a totality of senses, a number of symbolic images and meanings in it, serves to strengthen the effect of superiority of other characters, suggesting social links, revealing satirical concealed meanings, hidden, but easily understood by everybody.

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