

The Illusionary Jade Body from an Intertextual Perspective: Dialogue with The Folk Narrative of Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or The Tale of The Magic Crossbow

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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	
Citation: Nguyen Thi Viet Hang & Le Thi Thanh Hien. (2026). The illusionary jade body from an intertextual perspective: Dialogue with the folk narrative of Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the tale of the magic crossbow. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(10), 94-102.	<i>The Illusionary Jade Body (Ngoc than huyen hoa) is a truyen ki (legendary fiction) work dating from the Nguyen dynasty or later, recounting the afterlife journey of Mi Chau with various miraculous and fantastical details. From an intertextual perspective, this paper places the work in a dialogue with the folk narrative Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow to clarify how a familiar narrative memory is received, transposed, and recreated in a new text. Based on intertextual theory, combined with interdisciplinary, comparative, and poetics methods, along with analytical, contrastive, and demonstrative operations, the paper focuses on examining the dialogue between the two texts across two dimensions: content and form. The research results indicate that The Illusionary Jade Body not only continues the story after Mi Chau's tragic death but also reconstructs the character image, shifts the right of speech, re-signifies the "jade" symbol, and reorganizes the narrative model. Consequently, the new text absorbs the old memory while opening up a new field of meaning, calling for a different reading of Mi Chau and her destiny.</i> Keywords: Intertextuality, dialogue, Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow, The Illusionary Jade Body.

1. Introduction

From ancient times, the story of An Duong Vuong building Co Loa citadel, being bestowed with the claw to forge the magic crossbow to fight invaders and defend the country, together with the tragic love affair of Mi Chau and Trong Thuy, has become a familiar layer of memory in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people, leaving a profound imprint on national culture and literature. With the special vitality of a story containing multiple layers of meaning, through long-term transmission, it has been continuously enriched, "transposed/transformed," and recreated in new texts. *The Illusionary Jade Body* is a typical case. Here, the story of Mi Chau and Trong Thuy is not only recalled as a memory of the past but also becomes the object of a meaningful intertextual dialogue. On the foundation of a familiar plot, the new text continues to expand the character's life, reorganizing relationships previously thought to be closed, thereby creating new layers of meaning for the old story. In particular, the reconstruction

of Mi Chau's image and the opening of her afterlife journey demonstrate that the author of *The Illusionary Jade Body* did not merely inherit folk materials in a simple manner, but executed an intentional dialogue and "transposition/transformation": from an unfortunate fate judged in the folk narrative, Mi Chau steps into another life where she has the opportunity to proactively voice her thoughts on her destiny, reclaim her love, and clear the injustices suffered from her past life.

2. Research Overview

Reviewing the materials, we find that studies on the folk narratives of An Duong Vuong, the love story of Mi Chau - Trong Thuy, and the magic crossbow vastly outnumber those on *The Illusionary Jade Body*. Regarding research directions close to intertextuality in folk narratives, in 2014, Tran Thi An published the book *Genre Characteristics and the Textualization of Vietnamese Folk Legends* (developed

from her 2000 doctoral dissertation), which touched upon intertextual issues in legends and the *Story of the Golden Turtle* in *Linh Nam Chich Quai* when concerning the continuing life of the story. The author reviewed the debate in the *Literary Review* during the early 1960s, arguing that researchers in that debate viewed the legend "as a static text" while it is actually a constantly moving entity, and emphasized: "the detail of the pearl-well is a late addition to a legend that had already been pieced together and permeated from many other legends." In 2009, Nguyen Hoang Thi, although conducting an in-depth study of the *Story of the Golden Turtle* in *Linh Nam Chich Quai*, also relied on Tran Thi An's 2000 doctoral dissertation opinions regarding the "static text" and affirmed the existence of numerous variants of this work. The author pointed out that differences between versions can lead to different evaluations of Mi Chau, Trong Thuy, and the pearl-well symbol. Although this research direction is not based on intertextual theory, it shows that legends should not be viewed as monolithic texts; rather, attention must be paid to the dialogue across different texts with varying layers of interpretation.

Compared to folk legends, *The Illusionary Jade Body* has received modest attention. In 2009, in the introduction to the text *Viet Nam ki phung su luc*, scholars briefly described the collection and noted: "it can be guessed that the book was composed around the Nguyen dynasty or later. The work consists of two stories, of which *Ngoc than huyen hoa* (*The Illusionary Jade Body*) is recorded as an appendix." This is an important observation regarding textual aspects, yet it stops at material introduction without suggesting how *The Illusionary Jade Body* engages in dialogue with the memory of Mi Chau - Trong Thuy. Recognizing this as a quite engaging text, we embarked on research and in 2026 published the article *Narrative Art in Viet Nam ki phung su luc*. This article examines both stories of the text as a whole, focusing on "narrative organization" across two dimensions: "narrative voice and narrative perspective," and "narrative structure," thereby initially recognizing the flexibility in the organization of the storytelling and narrative structure of the work. However, we had not yet illuminated *The Illusionary Jade Body* and the folk narrative *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow* from the perspective of intertextual theory.

Thus, based on Tran Thi An's descriptions and previous works, there exists a rich research history on the Mi Chau - Trong Thuy legend regarding text, theme, characters, historical lessons, cultural significance, etc. Meanwhile, *The Illusionary Jade Body* has only received brief attention regarding text, genre, and narrative art. These two separate research lines indicate that the work has not received adequate attention, especially in terms of intertextual

dialogue with the folk narrative *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow*. This gap motivated our approach, wherein intertextuality is understood primarily as a principle of dialogue. We do not aim to verify the source text or direct connections between the two texts, but rather to clarify how *The Illusionary Jade Body* continues and recreates the folk memory of Mi Chau in terms of content and restructures the narrative of Mi Chau in terms of form. Through this, we demonstrate that the relationship between *truyen ki* (legendary fiction) and folk tales is not merely one of material reception, but an intriguing process of dialogue.

3. Research Methods

We simultaneously employ the following research methods:

Interdisciplinary method: We rely on data from other specialized fields such as history, culture, religion, etc., to illuminate and clarify the intertextual dialogue between *The Illusionary Jade Body* and *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow*.

Comparative method: Used to support the clearer identification of dialogues in content and form between *The Illusionary Jade Body* and *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow*.

Poetics method: Employed to study the two works from the perspective of genre poetics to illuminate their intertextual dialogic nature.

Additionally, we utilize analytical, contrastive, and demonstrative operations to clarify the issues raised in the article.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Intertextuality as a Dialogic Principle

Intertextuality possesses a complex and diverse connotation, yet it constitutes a widely influential theoretical system in contemporary literary studies. The basis of this theory stems from Mikhail Bakhtin's research on dialogism, introduced into academic discourse by Julia Kristeva in a 1966 paper, and subsequently published in the article titled *Word, Dialogue and Novel*. According to Kristeva, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of other texts" (cited in [8], p. 8). Instead of viewing intertextuality as the study of origins or influence, Kristeva views text as a process of transformation and permutation of sign systems. Here, intertextual theory enacts a shift from the category of "work" to "text" / "intertext." While a "work" is understood as a static, closed, self-contained product passively consumed by the reader in bondage to the author's intent, a "text" is viewed as an open, dynamic, continuous process of meaning production, containing traces and quotations

from countless other texts. Nguyen Van Thuan defines intertextuality as: "the interactive, symbiotic relationship between texts, realized in the author's text production and the reader's text consumption" (cited in [8], p. 8). Although intertextuality can be suggested by texts with specific relationships, it should not be simply or arbitrarily understood as requiring an original text from which to find influence, borrowing, similarity-difference, or close connections between "prior and posterior" texts. Therefore, Kristeva proposed the term "transposition" to avoid restricting intertextuality to the familiar understanding of source and target texts, focusing instead on absorption and transposition/transformation in the productive capacity of the text. Transposition or transformation here means: "a journey from one sign system to another, a process of converting and mediating texts in order to deconstruct the old prescriptive status and manifest a new prescriptive status" (cited in [8], p. ix). Accordingly, intertextuality is first and foremost a dialogic principle, in which texts communicate, absorb, respond, transform, re-signify, etc., in an open and dynamic manner. Within a dialogic structure, memories created in a certain cultural context have the opportunity to appear with a new life; they not only carry memory but can also dialogue with memory and generate other possibilities of meaning. Intertextuality thus does not require tracing textual origins or pointing out similarities and differences but serves as a reading principle for the dialogic relationship between two texts to reveal absorption and transformation within the intertextual network. For *The Illusionary Jade Body*, the imprint of memory existing in the folk narrative is undeniable, yet the intertextual relationship here is inherently dialogic—memory is received, but there is also transposition and creation from what already exists.

4.2. *The Illusionary Jade Body* in Dialogue with *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy* or *the Tale of the Magic Crossbow*

4.2.1. Dialogue on Content: *Mi Chau's* Journey to Vindicate Her Injustice

As a *truyen ki* work emerging in the 18th–19th centuries—a period when many researchers note that the fantastical elements of the genre were somewhat restrained to make way for worldly realism—*The Illusionary Jade Body* nevertheless retains a rich fantastical coloration. This aligns with the author's objective of vindicating *Mi Chau*, as emphasized throughout the work and hinted at in the title *Ngoc than huyen hoa* (*The Illusionary Jade Body*). In terms of content, the author does not simply adhere to the old story but constructs a new plot operating at the intersection of the fantastical and the realistic, the past and the present, the past life and the current life of *Mi Chau*. The ending of the folk narrative is extended in *The Illusionary Jade Body*: from an injustice denied the chance of expression to being

voiced and reconsidered; from the pearl symbol to the "jade body" symbol; from a fate closed in judgment to a journey of absolving grievances deeply marked by Buddhist imprints. These three layers of meaning blend to create a profound dialogue with familiar folk narrative memory, opening up a new dimension of meaning for *Mi Chau's* image.

First, both *The Illusionary Jade Body* and *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy* or *the Tale of the Magic Crossbow* organize narrative information from a story deeply rooted in Vietnamese cultural and literary tradition. The folk narrative intertwines two story layers: the story of An Duong Vuong building and defending the country before losing it due to subjectivity, nested within which is the tragic love story of *Mi Chau* and *Trong Thuy*. These two layers intertwine tightly, entangling national tragedy with an inseparable love tragedy. Therein, *Mi Chau* appears first in relation to the master of Au Lac's destiny, and subsequently in personal affection. Because of love—and the seemingly natural trust of a wife toward her husband—she commits an error whose consequences transcend the personal scope, collapsing a once-strong nation. Against this intertextual memory background, *The Illusionary Jade Body* chooses not to exploit the nation-building and nation-losing plotline but focuses instead on *Mi Chau's* destiny. Loa Thanh, her father, the Thanh Giang envoy, etc., are only occasionally mentioned as old traces and memories, while the story's focus shifts entirely to *Mi Chau's* subsequent life—a woman who loved, was deceived, still carries lingering grievances, and harbors a constant, pressing desire to express herself, vindicate herself, and achieve resolution. In other words, while the folk narrative moves from affairs of state to personal fate, from nation-building to nation-loss, and from love to death, *The Illusionary Jade Body* directs its focus primarily toward *Mi Chau's* personal individuality on her journey of "jade body transmutation" (resurrecting and transforming the jade body) to vindicate and clear her own name.

Compared to *Mi Chau* in *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy* or *the Tale of the Magic Crossbow*, *Mi Chau* in *The Illusionary Jade Body* is no longer an innocent, sincere princess in love and passive in the upheavals of life; rather, she is experienced and proactive in all her thoughts and actions to achieve self-vindication for her past life. In reality, *The Illusionary Jade Body* is a sequel that completes *Mi Chau's* fate and partially redeems and rehabilitates her past life. *Mi Chau* in the folk narrative bears a grave crime against the nation yet remains deeply pitiable. Everything stems solely from her genuine love; loving deeply, she harbored no suspicion toward her pillow-mate; loving truly until the final moments of her life. From beginning to start, she is painfully naive and trusting. Initially, when *Trong Thuy* probes into Au Lac's secrets, she merely "smiled without answering"; later, seeing that

"her husband truly loved her, and thinking that the two countries had become one family, she no longer suspected anything," she gradually tells him all the secrets. This action does not originate from any treasonous intent, but from the genuine heart of a woman who placed the marital bond above political vigilance. Consequently, she suffers a bitterly unjust death executed by her father following the Golden Turtle's verdict. Mi Chau has no opportunity to question or utter a word in defense, rendering her death agonizing and unjust. Perhaps for this reason, *The Illusionary Jade Body* sets out to write a sequel beginning after that tragedy, granting Mi Chau the right to seek redress, speak out, act, and resolve her past-life grievances.

The Illusionary Jade Body begins with the tale of malevolent vapors rising from the mountain to the right of Loa Thanh. A monk sets up an altar to root out the source of the demon, after which a beautiful woman with a mysterious background appears. Refusing to reveal her name, she speaks vaguely of a sorrowful past: "I am a person of Da Son, Dong Thanh, formerly married as a concubine... my father-in-law did not love me and my husband abandoned me, flowers buried and jade covered..." Leaving behind a petition (so), she departs. Recognizing her as a demon, the monk instructs a novice to store the petition "to see how it manifests later." She then travels everywhere, frequently leaving mysterious poems. Even upon meeting Prince Vuong, she only states: "I am from Co Loa, formerly abandoned by my husband, forsaken by the world, wandering alone." Even while living with him, she never reveals her true identity. Not until near the end of the story does she confirm to Dao Trac: "I am Mi Chau, daughter of An Duong Vuong of former times; melancholic, wronged, and harboring unvanquished resentment," recounting that "I was deceived by a man," emphasizing that her former husband "possessed a crafty nature," and judging the Thanh Giang envoy: "because of a hasty word unclear of right and wrong, he made an innocent person suffer injustice." This is how *The Illusionary Jade Body* constructs Mi Chau in the role of a subject speaking for herself. She actively affirms her injustice, explicitly points out the culprits who drove her to a grave crime and judged her to death. The faults of the ancients are placed within a new dialogic system where the perpetrators are examined and sentenced: her former husband "has been repeatedly demoted to the mortal realm by the August Heaven, enduring a rather arduous path," while the Thanh Giang envoy suffers: "the Creator caused his physical form to dissolve, gathering him into Kim Long Mountain to be trampled by people. Three thousand years later, when the sea turns into mulberry fields, can he return to his original form." Clearly, the subsequent text speaks more directly of what the old narrative did not touch upon; this is how *The Illusionary Jade Body* shifts the story's center of gravity

from national calamity to personal destiny. In the folk narrative, Mi Chau's tragedy coexists with national loss, leading her to be judged within the historical consequences of her oversight. *The Illusionary Jade Body* does not deny this, but focuses more on her fate after the catastrophe. From here, Mi Chau's role transforms from a character in a historical lesson to a character of personal tragedy, shifting from passively accepting an outcome to actively reclaiming justice for herself. Consequently, the dialogue between the two texts is tightly linked on one hand, and strikingly responsive on the other.

It can be said that Mi Chau's injustice in the folk narrative generated the demand for a sequel, not only in *The Illusionary Jade Body* but in numerous other medieval and modern texts. Here, *The Illusionary Jade Body* does not merely converse through Mi Chau's grievance, but also pays immense attention to the pearl symbol at the end of the folk narrative, inheriting and expanding its semantic field to transform it into a core element imbued with symbolic qualities, enabling the work to form a new voice. According to Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant in *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*: "The pearl is a lunar symbol, associated with water and the feminine... Born from water or the moon, found within the oyster shell, the pearl expresses the Yin principle as a primary symbol of generative femininity." In the folk narrative, the pearl was formed in an associative chain very close to that symbolic field: Mi Chau (female) → blood/water → oyster/clam → pearl. The pearl does not appear spontaneously; it is born from the blood on a female body, passing through water, and crystallizing within an aquatic organism. This metamorphosis into a pearl represents the transition of a destroyed body into a new, luminous form belonging to water, deeply marked by femininity, symbolizing purity and Mi Chau's injustice. The pearl clearly possesses a "generative" nature, containing the capacity for symbolic rebirth so that Mi Chau, though dead, continues to exist in another form. From being an object born after her death in the folk narrative, the jade returns to her very body in another life; it is no longer merely a trace but has become an attribute of Mi Chau. This suggestion provided the pretext for *The Illusionary Jade Body* to continue the story from the void left by the folk narrative and construct the "jade body" as a pervasive symbol.

From her very appearance, the mysterious woman is described through imagery: "flesh and skin like jade, dazzlingly white and smooth"; when Prince Vuong probes her background, she hints: "Wishing to offer jade in a strange land, I fear casting it into water; wishing to return the jewel to the old village, I dread spilling water upon the courtyard"; when composing a song for Prince Vuong, she alludes: "The jade tower has buried its fragrance for years"

(*Toa ngọc mai hương lịch kỉ niên*); throughout their cohabitation, she preserves her body like jade, strictly refusing marital relations; when recounting her past to Dao Trac, Mi Chau reveals she was "temporarily entrusted with the management of pearls to manifest purity"; particularly when Prince Vuong laments his poverty, she leads him to Co Loa to dig up a night-shining pearl. Upon returning with the jade, she passes away. The prince temporarily lays her coffin outside Quynh Loi village, unable to bear selling the pearl. Later, returning to reinter her, he discovers that "the coffin remains intact, but inside there is not a scrap of remaining bone," only a Dipper-shaped wooden plank inscribed with four poems, the final two lines of which are: "Who can comprehend the Jade Maiden before her body? / Separations and unions at Quynh Chi are all in vain." Later, when Dao Trac is captured by Ming invaders to dive for pearls, he meets her and carries her letter back to Prince Vuong. Only then does the prince understand that the poem denoted her previous incarnation named Mi Chau (the character *Chau* containing the "jade" radical, *Mi* containing the "female" radical) and that the gatherings and partings at Quynh Chi were not her actual body but mere transformations. This is a crucial detail pinpointing Mi Chau's previous incarnation, explaining why digging up the jade caused her death and why exhuming her grave yielded no skeletal remains. Therefore, "jade" is not merely a symbolic object, but blends into her name, body, and post-mortem life. Thus, the "jade body" becomes a symbol of femininity, evoking a beautiful, pure, fragile body that nonetheless continues to transform, exist, and assert dignity—a dignity preserved not only within jade but transformed into the jade symbol within the new narrative life. This proves that the title *Ngoc than huyen hoa* (*The Illusionary Jade Body*) was chosen with deliberate intent; it is not merely a story about a transforming "jade body" but also a symbol of purity and immortality. Mi Chau passes through death without being destroyed; she is reborn into another life through the transformation of fate: from an innocent girl driven to commit a grave crime, judged, killed, and perpetually silenced in the old story, she transforms into a resilient, autonomous woman capable of self-vindication, self-absolving of grievances, and voicing her own demand for justice in the new story. It is no exaggeration to say that the "jade" symbol becomes the most beautiful element of the intertextual dialogue. In the folk narrative, Mi Chau perishes to produce jade, whereas in *The Illusionary Jade Body*, the movement reverses: jade → rebirth → Mi Chau.

What elevates the value of the intertextual dialogue in *The Illusionary Jade Body* is that rewriting is neither simple copying nor complete novelty; the author not only lets Mi Chau be reborn and vindicate herself, not only elevates the jade symbol, but also clothes the story in a Buddhist

garment imbued with the concepts of reincarnation, salvation, and liberation. The final stretch of Mi Chau's path in her past life ended in profound injustice, yet entering this life, she is supported and sheltered by compassion and salvation. The opening lines of the story extol the power of Buddhism, recounting how ancient Viet Thuong's Loa Thanh—once a renowned structure but also a repository of unquiet wandering souls—was purified of demons after a high monk "set up the four-fold meditation bed, preaching the dharma chants to guide all sunken ghosts to ascension." From that space, a beautiful, mysterious woman appears to seek audience with the monk, stating: "I humbly pray the majestic Buddha to open wide the gates of salvation. Though the past life has passed and cannot be recalled, I ask to aid the drifting soul to repent in the next life." The poem she inscribes on the triple gate also embodies the Buddhist spirit:

Do not say there is no person, persons still remain,

Coming and going, coming and going, this very self;

The principle of reincarnation is soon awakened,

Let the present life pass, do not knit your brows.

Mi Chau's return after death is no longer a mere magical marvel but is placed within a systematic Buddhist spiritual logic. She herself explains to Dao Trac that due to "melancholic grievance and unvanquished resentment of vital energy," a high monk performed "dispel rites" for her wandering soul to achieve ascension, transforming the "illusionary body into a true body." After hearing Prince Vuong recount the story, the monk explains Mi Chau's journey as stemming from "accumulated injustice and grievance" that failed to dissipate, accumulating over the years into a demonic entity. Although Mi Chau was "an innocent girl", an oath on the beach deepened her grievance. Though her vital essence turned into a pearl, her soul remained buried in the grave," only through prayers at the altar could her "wandering soul" "achieve ascension." Consequently, Buddhist thought not only enhances the mystical color of the legendary fiction but directly participates in affirming the logic of cause and effect. Thus, not only is Mi Chau redeemed, but those who perpetrated crimes in past lives must also pay under the principle of cause and effect / karma and retribution. Of course, *The Illusionary Jade Body* still exhibits the fusion of religions and beliefs characteristic of most medieval Vietnamese literary works, as the story references the era of Emperor Yao, the Heavenly Court, the Thanh Giang envoy, celestial beings, yin-yang concepts, the gathering and dispersing of vital energy, altar rituals, Amitabha spells, Buddhist scriptures, reincarnation, and ascension. However, when viewed through the resolution of injustice, the role of Buddhist thought is most prominent. While the folk

narrative lacks any salvation—featuring only a one-sided verdict following the Golden Turtle's decree—*The Illusionary Jade Body* introduces numerous other voices: Mi Chau's voice regarding her injustice, the Heavenly Court's verdict, poems, petitions, Prince Vuong's decoding, the monk's explanations, etc. All exist along the axis of Buddhist salvation. Therefore, while it does not entirely erase the verdict from the folk narrative, it prevents the old judgment from remaining the sole interpretive possibility. Consequently, *The Illusionary Jade Body* does not merely "retrial" Mi Chau but transforms her fate into a subject open to rereading, pulling elements previously marginalized in the old story—such as injustice, personal voice, and post-mortem life—into the center of a new narrative. The story ceases to be merely a cautionary lesson or a love tragedy, becoming instead an elevation of self-consciousness, the proactive navigation of human life and destiny—especially concerning women, who were relegated to dependent, weak, and pitiable status under the feudal system.

Thus, *The Illusionary Jade Body* begins where the folk narrative ends, seeking the subsequent life after Mi Chau's death, shifting from the plane of events to the plane of destiny, from judgment to understanding, from death to incarnation, and from injustice to the possibility of liberation and salvation. Mi Chau's fate entering the new text becomes transformed—less harsh, multifaceted, and more humane. The expansion of the plot in *The Illusionary Jade Body* demonstrates the vitality of legend within the evolution of literature, where the new text neither denies nor replaces the source text, but dialogues with it, restructures it, and endows familiar materials with new meanings.

4.2.2. Dialogue on Form: Restructuring the Narrative Method of Mi Chau

The dialogue between *The Illusionary Jade Body* and *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow* lies not only in the story told, but also in how the author tells it. If the folk narrative is objective, concise, and linear in chronological event order, *The Illusionary Jade Body* is a more complex artistic organization. Therein, narrative form becomes an important dimension of intertextual dialogue—a connective link renewing content so that the story of Mi Chau's afterlife is no longer recounted as a completed historical tragedy, but becomes a continuous process of decoding, reenacting, and interpreting through multiple artistic facets.

First, regarding plot structure, the folk narrative is relatively short, with events arranged in linear order. The story begins by introducing: "In ancient times ruling the realm of Au Lac was a king named An Duong Vuong. The king had a princess named Mi Chau." This is followed by a chain of events: the king builds Loa Thanh, but "in a single night it

collapses spontaneously," until aided by the Golden Turtle envoy of the Thanh Giang god to complete the citadel; the Turtle bestows upon the king a claw, which the king gives to general Cao Lo to forge a crossbow crossbow trigger where "each shot fires thousands of arrows... no matter how numerous the enemy, survival is difficult." Trieu Da repeatedly fails in warfare and harbors hatred, "plotting to conquer Au Lac to satisfy his heart," thus sending his son Trong Thuy to propose to Mi Chau and stay as a son-in-law to feign reconciliation; winning Mi Chau, Trong Thuy subtly probes, Mi Chau initially keeps secrets but later reveals them out of love; Trong Thuy steals the magic crossbow and visits his parents, "coaxing" Mi Chau to agree to scatter goose feathers for him to track; Trieu Da seizes the crossbow and invades, An Duong Vuong acts subjectively and loses the battle, fleeing with his daughter; reaching Mo Da mountain, An Duong Vuong calls upon the Golden Turtle and, heeding the turtle's advice, draws his sword to kill his daughter before following the turtle into the sea; Trong Thuy tracks the goose feathers, finds his wife's corpse, embraces her, weeps for long, and drowns himself in a well; Mi Chau's blood flows into the water, and oysters/clams eating it turn into pearls, which when washed in Trong Thuy's suicide well glow brilliantly. Thus, the chain of events is neatly arranged, succeeding one another rapidly; Mi Chau's psychological transformation is summarized through a few descriptive sentences, and An Duong Vuong killing his daughter lacks any spatial or psychological expansion, fitting the characteristics of a folk narrative whose plot structure is nearly complete alongside the completion of the catastrophe.

The Illusionary Jade Body does not feature a single-line plot. After narrating the episode of the mysterious woman wandering and leaving behind mysterious poems akin to her background, the author appends a line: "The story here splits into two paths," before turning to recount Prince Vuong's story. Simultaneously, the plot structure is neither linear nor intertwined with flashbacks. Essentially, the author still organizes five plot components with events adhering to narrative theory, which is also the standard structural pattern of *truyen ki*: The exposition (introduction): demons haunt Co Loa, a monk sets up an altar to resolve the evil, the mysterious woman appears; The inciting incident (knotting): the woman wanders everywhere, leaving poems of inscrutable meaning; The rising action: Prince Vuong meets the woman, they unite, she helps him in his studies while steadfastly refusing marital relations, she continues to manifest underlying repressions through daily life and inexplicable poems; The climax: Prince Vuong laments poverty, the woman guides him to dig up jade and then passes away; the prince mourns her and carefully preserves the pearl. Time passes, and Dao Trac is captured by invaders to dive for pearls in the sea,

where he meets the woman. Only then does she state she is Mi Chau, asking him to deliver a letter to Prince Vuong; The resolution (un-knotting): Prince Vuong receives the letter, gradually decodes the mysteries, seeks out the monk, and understands everything; he sells the jade, marries, and lives a happy life. Some suspect he is Trong Thuy's reincarnation. Through this non-linear structure, the author creates narrative appeal—the charm of a sequel that parallels a strange love story with the gradual revelation of identity and grievances needing resolution. Additionally, the story-within-a-story structure contributes to dramatic tension, heightening mysteries and compelling readers to read through close interconnections of events, especially with an ending that opens another mysterious dimension regarding Prince Vuong's background linked to Trong Thuy. The reader must return to prior events under the suspicion that Mi Chau stayed by his side, cared for his studies, and willingly let him dig up the jade knowing she must depart—yet persistently refusing physical union—was it due to destiny and resentment from a past life? Clearly, the plot structure no longer operates according to cause-and-effect logic, but shifts continuously between present and past, between the occurring and the past yet incompletely understood. The old is not recounted completely at once, but fragmented, concealed, and revealed in parts within the new story, leaving some mysteries unresolved. Structurally, this represents a deliberate creative effort by the author, rendering the intertextual dialogue with *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow* immensely valuable.

A prominent feature in the structure of *The Illusionary Jade Body* is the interweaving of narrative and lyrical elements. This is a familiar facet of medieval Vietnamese *truyen ki*, typically manifesting in two ways: either poems are included merely to showcase the author's poetic prowess and could be deleted without affecting the content, or poems are embedded within the narrative flow, inseparable and essential to the work's meaning. *The Illusionary Jade Body* belongs to the second category. Throughout the journey, Mi Chau continuously composes poetry—poems inscribed on walls, chanted on boats, and written while passing historical sites. Prince Vuong likewise composes poetry when falling into hardship or expressing longing and sorrow. The poems are both numerous and purposefully integrated to express emotions, preserve information, pace the narrative, heighten character mystery, and serve as decoding functions. The petition written by the mysterious woman at the beginning, kept by the monk and handed to Prince Vuong at the end, exemplifies the role of narrative-lyric interweaving within a predictive and retrospective structure. The petition expresses the character's emotions through the "jade body" symbol ("To whom shall I confide this jade-and-stone sorrow?") and the mystery of injustice

("May the jade branch flourish, cleansed of injustice"), while propelling the plot into a new phase by leading Prince Vuong to recount the whole story to the monk, prompting the latter's explanation of Mi Chau's grievance and reincarnation. Both the petition and most of the poems play structural roles: balancing narrative, encoding information, serving as initial warning signs, and later functioning as retrospective explanation. Prince Vuong reading the poem sent by Mi Chau via Dao Trac clearly demonstrates this. The author writes: "The prince suddenly understood the meaning she embedded in the song chanted on the boat, and in the phrasing of her poems during chanting, most of which aligned with historical records." Thus, the story's meaning is generated through a two-way dynamic: poems and petitions initially cast lingering mysterious echoes before later decoding them. This mechanism grants *The Illusionary Jade Body* a flexible, open-close structure distinct from the folk narrative, compelling readers not only to follow chronological progression but also to repeatedly revisit and connect traces to comprehend the meaning. Notably, within the internal structure, intertextual dialogue manifests through absorption and transformation within poems concerning Vu Nuong, Mi E, Tien Dung, etc., alongside affirmations of "historical records" and "the *Chich Quai* book." Readers receive not merely a sequence of events provided by the narrator but witness a multi-layered intertextual dialogue with diverse signals within *The Illusionary Jade Body* itself.

Regarding narrative art, the folk narrative employs a third-person narrator with an objective, omniscient perspective standing outside the story, possessing boundless narrative capacity—even in explaining motivations or character psychology. For instance, writing about Trieu Da's motives and psychology when defeated and forced to halt warfare while "still harboring fury," or when proposing marriage, the narrator leaves no room for reader guesswork, stating immediately: "His objective was not to tighten friendly ties between the two countries, but to probe the situation of Au Lac." Or describing Mi Chau's psychological shift from disbelief to trust, the narrator directly explains that she "saw her husband truly loved her" and "thought the two countries had become one family," leaving no suspicion. This omniscient power endows the folk narrative with an assertive, decisive tone where meanings are fully externalized, and character dialogue is interpreted without skepticism. When the Golden Turtle states: "The person behind the king is the enemy," the narrator immediately has An Duong Vuong "understand the situation" and execute the act of "drawing his sword to cut off his beloved daughter's head" before following the turtle into the sea. Readers scarcely need to pause for reflection or search for hidden layers of meaning behind words, due to the conciseness of folk narrative where the narrator commands

the story, selects events, and guides meaning swiftly toward the conclusion. The narrator of *The Illusionary Jade Body* also relates in the third person and provides ample information but organizes the perspective much more richly and variably. At times, the reader views through an external omniscient perspective; at other times, through the viewpoints of the monk, Prince Vuong, or Dao Trac. The mysterious woman appears before other characters just as she appears before the reader, and her mystery amidst others' suspicion remains equally inaccessible to the reader. This limited perspective enhances the narrative's appeal, urging readers to explore.

In character construction, the dialogue between the two texts manifests primarily in the absorption and transformation of the character system. The character world of the folk narrative is not entirely carried over into *The Illusionary Jade Body*; instead, characters are selected, omitted, and blurred, alongside newly created characters. In *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow*, characters are organized along a socio-political historical axis, participating jointly in building the citadel, defending the country, losing the crossbow, and losing the nation—including An Duong Vuong, Mi Chau, Trong Thuy, Trieu Da, Kim Quy (Thanh Giang envoy), Cao Lo, etc., wherein Mi Chau serves as a crucial link but not the central character. In *The Illusionary Jade Body*, the character system is narrowed, reorganized, and supplemented with new figures. Alongside the central character Mi Chau, figures such as An Duong Vuong, the Thanh Giang envoy, and the former husband (Trong Thuy) are retained as memories of the old story, while characters tied directly to the socio-political axis—Trieu Da, Cao Lo—are omitted. Instead, the author creates Vuong sinh (Prince Vuong), Dao Trac, the monk, and others to open a completely new narrative space. This shift in the character system demonstrates a process of dialogic, intentional selection and transformation: the old memory characters are not denied, but arranged to generate alternative meanings, while the new character system supports and creates fresh layers of meaning, rendering the rewriting an exceptionally engaging text.

Alongside the transformation in character system construction, the methods of character portrayal further clarify the value of artistic creation. Mi Chau in the folk narrative is constructed quite simply, primarily through action, speech, and minor psychology. In *The Illusionary Jade Body*, she is meticulously crafted as a mysterious character, the embodiment of the jade symbol through appearance, gestures, speech, mood, and emotional life to progressively validate a strong, proactive successor regarding her past life, love, and the resolution of her injustice. These facets are interconnected, collaboratively

forging a new image of Mi Chau. Her appearance is described with jade signals: "flesh and skin like jade, dazzlingly white and smooth, blue eyes sparkling like clear mirrors." This appearance not only highlights beauty but directly prepares for the "jade body" symbol reinforced throughout the story via her background, speech, actions, and conduct. The tavern owner answers Prince Vuong that she "calls herself a jade seller," and later she tells Dao Trac she is "temporarily entrusted with managing pearls to manifest her purity." Prince Vuong initiates acquaintance by asking if she sells jade, to which she replies: "Sell! Sell! For the right price, I sell," and when asked the price, she answers concisely: "Priceless." When he makes a slip of the tongue, she retorts: "The mark of a jade *kue* can be polished away, but the mark of a spoken word cannot be remedied." These exchanges reveal her as a characterful woman of deep self-respect and pride. Her conduct demonstrates that she remains a "jade body" bound to her past life, especially during her acquaintance and cohabitation with Prince Vuong, where she solely focuses on supporting his studies and, despite his flowery romantic words, firmly preserves her chastity, steadfastly refusing physical union. When he presses, "Then what do I keep you for?", she resolutely answers: "I came here originally to rebuild the career for you; if your studies and ambitions are unfulfilled, I will not change my intent. Our karmic affinity will later become clear."

Alongside the image of a proactive, strong woman, Mi Chau is also constructed as a tragic character. From her appearance until the story's end, she constantly withdraws, silently brooding over her pain beneath the guise of a mysterious, pensive "jade body" that no one can comprehend. Through poems and confidences, she exhibits a complex, sorrowful inner life tightly bound to the jade symbol—for instance, lines from the song she taps out on the boat for Prince Vuong:

Red heart turned to sea, river, and sky,

The jade tower has buried its fragrance for years.

If Mi Chau is the center of the absorption and transformation of old characters, Prince Vuong is a unique creation of *The Illusionary Jade Body*. He may be the reincarnation of Trong Thuy, but from the outset is not established as such, functioning instead as an entirely new character positioned as a lover, witness, and decoder of Mi Chau's mystery. This dual ambiguity renders Prince Vuong a crucial link in intertextual dialogue. While Mi Chau's appearance is described, Prince Vuong's physical look is unelaborated; instead, the author focuses on introducing his background, circumstances, and personality: "a student surnamed Vuong, from Quynh Coi district, Thai Binh," born to a wealthy family yet "dissolute in youth," orphaned of both parents, "wandering rivers and lakes until his house is empty like a hanging chime," and failing to

"gain an iota of knowledge" from his studies. These traits indicate he lacks anything idealistic, possessing ordinary worldly flaws—youth, dissipation, and academic negligence. This is further clarified through actions, gestures, and speech as the narrative progresses. Upon seeing the beautiful woman sitting alone under the lamp, he is immediately captivated; during courtship and cohabitation, he utters liberal, flirtatious remarks. Yet he gradually transforms after meeting Mi Chau, becoming contemplative, empathetic, and sharing her pain—especially when she passes away, keeping the pearl without selling it, sighing and mourning day and night:

Swallows cry all day, grief unbearable,

Will the incense and fire of the afterlife await?

When the monk hands him her petition, his reaction is recorded briefly yet evocatively: "Reading the petition, the scholar involuntarily sheds tears," displaying a stark contrast to Prince Vuong at the beginning. He is no longer someone obsessed with beauty and dissipation, but faithful and deeply loving. Concluding with the line: "Some suspect he is Trong Thuy's reincarnation," the author performs a unique transformation. Whether Prince Vuong is Trong Thuy's reincarnation cannot be definitively affirmed, but he clearly possesses a predestined bond affirmed by Mi Chau, and importantly, differs utterly from Trong Thuy. Trong Thuy approached Mi Chau with a premeditated malicious intent—winning her favor, probing secrets, stealing the crossbow, and driving her to become a criminal. Prince Vuong, conversely, knows nothing, loving the mysterious, strange woman simply, entering her life not to probe but to ponder and love. This represents a subtle tactical inversion by the author to vindicate Mi Chau. If he is indeed Trong Thuy reborn, he genuinely amends the past relationship, traversing mystery to understand and love, rather than feigning love to extract secrets as in his past life.

It can be affirmed that intertextual dialogue in character construction is not merely retaining Mi Chau and adding Prince Vuong or Dao Trac, but a transformation in the capacity to create characters. Moving from a system revolving around the grand narrative of national destiny to a system centered on personal fate; from characters identified primarily through action and speech to those possessing physical appearance, speech, and emotion, *The Illusionary Jade Body* absorbs from folk memory while generating a familiar yet novel artistic structure that remains captivating.

5. Conclusion

Through examining *The Illusionary Jade Body* from an intertextual perspective, it is evident that the work results from a profound process of absorption, selection, and transformation based on the folk narrative *Mi Chau - Trong Thuy* or the Tale of the Magic Crossbow. *The Illusionary Jade*

Body requires old memory to write a sequel while enabling the old story to be reread within an intertextual field. The relationship between the two texts is therefore not one-way reception, but a process of interaction and dialogue—the prior text presents within the subsequent text in a transformed form, opening up new interpretive possibilities. From here, one can expand the examination of *The Illusionary Jade Body* into a broader intertextual network within the medieval period or extend it to modern texts. Additionally, one can further exploit the jade symbol, Buddhist thought, and the fusion of religions and beliefs within the text to dialogue with other works. Through these subsequent approaches, it is affirmed that the life of a seemingly familiar text can continue to evolve and be perceived in richer, more captivating layers of meaning under the illumination of intertextual theory.

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