

# Differences in knowledge expression in teaching Vietnamese literature for international students

Thi Thanh Tam Le\*

*Faculty of Vietnamese Studies and Language,  
University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi*

Received 22 August 2022; accepted 15 November 2022

## **Abstract:**

The article focuses on eight differences in the process of academic interpretation of Vietnamese literature for international students as opposed to teaching Vietnamese students. The first is to explain the course outline in detail and with simple vocabulary, the second is to classify students into cultural areas and develop a strategy for softening lectures on culture, third is to quantify Vietnamese vocabulary (literary terms) in a lesson, fourth is to thoroughly apply cultural and literary comparisons in teaching and learning, fifth is to respect the initiative and creative spirit of international students, sixth is to apply the Kaizen philosophy to encourage students to understand the lesson, seventh is to provide detailed material for each lesson with selected references, and eighth is to pay special attention to linguistic and literary practices inside and outside the classroom. Those eight differences directly affect the teaching method and quality of teachers, as well as the learning efficiency and the participation of foreign students when studying Vietnam, its language, and its literature.

**Keywords:** academic interpretation, international students, teaching method, Vietnamese literature.

**Classification number:** 10

## **Introduction**

The learning model of international students has certain boundaries compared to Vietnamese students. It is this model that, together with the differences in culture and value conceptualisation, has redefined interactive teaching methods and the way lecturers communicate with students. This, in turn, contributes to the development and adjustment of teaching practices, especially in subjects related to Vietnamese literature.

The differences in method and implementation of lectures on Vietnamese literature between Vietnamese and international students is an issue that has always existed in classes about Vietnamese studies and Vietnamese language. Especially for undergraduate students and multi-national classes, this difference has been observed

and questioned by the author for more than 10 years. We have had the opportunity to participate in teaching Vietnamese literature to students of many disciplines such as linguistics, literature, sociology, history, anthropology, languages, and East Asian civilization since 2006. Through some discussions with learners from many countries and regions around the world, we hypothesize that there should be a system of thinking tools and methods suitable for teaching Vietnamese literature to students. Foreigners, depending on their requirements and learning purposes and corresponding to their living, studying, and working environments, have different ways of thinking and asking questions. The differences discussed in this paper shall be understood as points that deserve profound attention. These differences are not

\*Email: tamltt.tiengviet@gmail.com

entirely different points, but quite the opposite; they are listed only to emphasise features that will have the most influence on the effectiveness of teaching (regarding the teacher) and learning (regarding the students). The points outlined below remain fundamental pedagogical principles in the Vietnamese university environment and for Vietnamese students. However, asserting those principles is the difference that shall be emphasised in this paper as well as its implementation in practice and its value when thinking about multicultural classroom models.

As our observation, one of the biggest considerations for Vietnamese teachers who are teaching Vietnamese literature and Vietnamese language to international students coming from countries and cultures around the world is the issue of expression. For foreign students, the teacher needs to express complex subject matters in a simple way, and at the same time, do so in great detail by using seemingly familiar and simple knowledge. If the learners remain on the opposite side of understanding the linguistic meaning of a subject, one can only hope they would be able to reach this side of the shore and appreciate and analyse the literary meanings of a given piece [1].

In the Vietnamese study program for the bachelor's program\*, subjects related to Vietnamese literature include *Contemporary Vietnamese literary phenomena*, *Vietnamese literature in the East Asian world*, and *Vietnamese folklore*. The subject that this article deals with is *Vietnamese Literature in the East Asian world*. This is a subject related to medieval literature in Vietnam and other East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea.

The main content of the module *Vietnamese literature in the East Asian world* includes the following basic arguments: An overview of some outstanding features of East Asian literature (China, Japan, Korea), presentation of the present,

---

\*Case study: Faculty of Vietnamese Studies and Language, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

descriptions and suggestions of the appearance of Vietnamese literature in the context of East Asia through issues of language system (Chinese culture), cultural symbols, aesthetic conceptions, and human life. This context has given rise to the process of exchange, influence, as well as the formation of the system of Vietnamese classical literary genres: Zen literary phenomenon, Confucian literature, non-Confucian literature, and the disintegration of classical values in the late nineteenth century. Since the twentieth century, Vietnamese literature has had different exchanges and influences compared to the previous periods. This module provides knowledge about the concept of national studies, patriotic literature, promotion of good and punishment of evil, and modern East Asian literary trends and its influence on the creative achievements of Vietnamese people. The theme also creates an open perspective on the influence of some contemporary literary phenomena of East Asia on modern Vietnamese literature.

After completing the module, learners can achieve the following levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes:

a) Regarding knowledge: Students will understand the position and process of Vietnamese literature from the perspective of comparison with East Asian literature (Vietnam, China, Japan, Korea); they will remember, analyse, and explain some special phenomena in the process of literary exchanges between Vietnam and East Asia.

b) About skills: After finishing the module, students will be able to read deeply, read quickly, and summarize Vietnamese literary knowledge in exchange with East Asian literature; have skills in teamwork, and have proficiency in giving short explanations on a Vietnamese literary phenomenon compared with one/several East Asian literary phenomena.

c) In terms of qualities and attitudes: Students will appreciate Vietnamese literature and be conscious of protecting the national literary heritage in the context of East Asia in general; as well as develop the spirit of self-study on the basis of Vietnamese learning from a literary perspective.

From the above program building principles, the ultimate goal of Vietnamese literature lectures for international students is to provide the most basic outlines of the Vietnamese literary picture throughout the historical context and to provide linguistic and literary information for learners through Vietnamese so they can understand and analyse several Vietnamese literature phenomena based on their own values and experiences.

The impression that international students receive from Vietnamese literature is a very meaningful fulcrum, which allows the lecturer to use this golden opportunity to explain and renew their own thoughts on national literature. Lectures teaching Vietnamese literature should also aim for a common voice and a cultural connection through literature for foreign students - no matter what literature and historical period about which they are talking. Thus, within this scenario, the main goal is not to train professional philologists, literature researchers, or teachers.

Therefore, the first and foremost goal for foreign students is to understand the language used in literature directly and vividly; only afterwards they should gain specific knowledge about the piece of Vietnamese literature they are currently working on. But that knowledge will not last long if they merely listen and try to save it in their memory. They will not remember many important details in that case, and thus will need a coherent systematisation of the discussed context.

They may not need to memorise every sentence or verse of literature work, but they need to understand *why* an author has become a national symbol. They also need to question how a work can create its own culture around it (like with *The Tale of Kieu*) [2] and need to feel and emotionally understand why a certain folk song can make people cry when they are away from home. This shows, in terms of pedagogy, we cannot fail to notice at least the eight following distinct differences that are discussed in this article.

## Research methods

An important theory that we choose in this article is John Dewey's theory [3] of practical and democratic education and some modern Japanese teaching methods [4] (reflection, dialogue). This methodological foundation has helped us create a way of teaching that is relevant to international students by identifying differences.

This research is completed by a system of methods related to language teaching and cultural simulation. We have analysed the courses teaching Vietnamese language and Vietnamese culture to foreigners (the main audience here is Japanese and Korean students) and surveyed the process of students learning and experiencing Vietnamese from literary works.

The method of systematizing and concretizing Vietnamese teaching tools is applied to clarify the particular direction of this paper. We also use the method of psychoanalysis of learners and evaluate the effectiveness of project-based teaching to design research ideas.

Our studies are conducted in multi-national classrooms and at many different training institutions. At the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, we have selected three undergraduate classes of students from different countries: Korea, China, and Cuba in 2015, 2016, and 2018. At the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, we selected the case study of 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students (in 2010, 2016, and 2017) of the Vietnamese Faculty.

## Results and discussion

### *The first difference: Explaining the course outline in detail and with simple vocabulary*

Usually, the syllabus of a course is sent to the students before or at the first session. The purpose of the outline is to help students visualise their learning process and estimate the amount of knowledge that they must access, analyse, and transform. Reading this outline and listening to a quick introduction by the lecturer is usually no big

deal for Vietnamese students. Meanwhile, for a class of international students, the outline makes up the core of a lesson, including its vocabulary, knowledge scale, and cultural terminology that learners will need to remember to follow the course, as well as understand and accumulate knowledge. While for Vietnamese students, the outline is simply the beginning of the course, foreign students can maximise the efficiency of their studies within the time of the course - and not just at its beginning - if they manage to remember and understand the outline's logic.

The following is an excerpt of the outline for the course Modern Vietnamese Literature:

1. Basic concepts: Western literary trends (Trào lưu văn học phương Tây); The process of literary modernisation (Tiến trình hiện đại hóa văn học); The national language script of Vietnam (chữ Quốc Ngữ); Transitional period/transitional literature (giai đoạn giao thời, văn học giao thời); Romanticism/Romantic literary schools (Chủ nghĩa lãng mạn/Trường phái văn học lãng mạn); Critical Realism (Chủ nghĩa hiện thực phê phán); and Patriotic literature (văn học yêu nước).

2. Social, political, and cultural premises affecting modern Vietnamese literature: French colonial invasion (Cuộc xâm lược của thực dân Pháp); Semi-feudal colonial social system (hệ thống xã hội thuộc địa nửa phong kiến); Revolutionary movements (phong trào Cách mạng); and the increasingly important role of the national script (chữ Quốc Ngữ) as Chinese and Nôm characters gradually lose their advantages.

3. The stages of modern Vietnamese literature:

*The period from 1900 to 1930: The transitional period (Giai đoạn giao thời)*

Society moved from feudalism to modernity. Vietnam converted from a French colony. Western-influenced writers and literary careers define their place in society, cultural life, and the arts. This is also the period when the press shows its great role in laying the foundation for the modernization of national literature.

*The period from 1930 to 1945: The pinnacle of modern literature (Đỉnh cao văn học hiện đại)*

The 15 years of this literary period represent important changes in literary history, literary conceptions, and specific literary lines of the era such as: New poetry (formation, characteristics, and roles); the Self-Reliant Literary Association (formation, characteristics, role); and Critical realist fiction (characteristics, achievements). In addition, during this period, literary debate becomes a prominent type of literary activity and thinking dialogue.

*The period from 1945 to 1975: War literature (Văn học chiến tranh)*

There are two important trends of Vietnamese literature during the war: Northern revolutionary literature and contemporary literature against urban warfare in the South. Of these, northern revolutionary literature is considered as a literary line associated with politics and valuable contributions to the cause of national liberation.

*Period from 1975 to 1990: Innovation literature (Văn học Đổi mới)*

The Sixth Party Congress changed the overall picture of Vietnamese society in terms of politics, culture, and life of all classes, especially intellectuals and artists. The Spirit of Innovation created new conceptions of literary creation and reception towards creative freedom.

*Period from 1990 to present: Contemporary literature (Văn học đương đại)*

Social life develops towards globalization; in Vietnam, the creative and perceptive trend of postmodernism and some other international trends of Vietnamese writers and poets has appeared.

Because the outline is compiled for foreigners, the phrases and terms used here are expressed in a minimalist way. The specific explanations of these phrases and terms for students are an inviting way to help foreign students become accustomed to the modern Vietnamese literary context and avoid any fear before the immensity of a new literature

culture that they may not have known until they were studying in Vietnam. The outline also helps them imagine that literature follows a historical process and is thus closely related to historical and modern political issues. In addition, the simplified outline, once explained, can help international students gain a natural sense of comparison with their native literary knowledge.

***The second difference: Classifying students into cultural areas and developing a strategy for “softening” lectures on culture***

The classification of students can be based on many different criteria for each class and year. It can be based on the geographical area, history, as well as cultural and geopolitical factors, language, and foreign relations. There are no definite boundaries for this classification, and there is no need to elaborate on it, but the classification within the teacher’s mind will help them gain the tolerance, understanding, and objectivity they require as humanities scientists in accessing and spreading the literature of their own country. A class that includes students from South Korea, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Cambodia, and Cuba will have a different perspective on debating and interpreting knowledge from a class that is mostly Chinese, or from one with students from Russia, Romania, Laos, or other nations. In all these classes, the most important principle is to avoid suggesting issues that cause cognitive conflicts, especially in politics, history, culture, and religion. On the contrary, it is recommended to build an always-connected space; a class-study network so that each student can enjoy more diverse knowledge in the lesson and outside of practice.

Literature classes for foreigners need to become a period and space for learning and sharing the respective subtle differences in the creative journeys of Vietnamese and foreign authors. With that internal categorisation, a strategy of “making soft” element of culture in the lecture is geared towards providing typical knowledge rather than expounding on too broad knowledge, and towards

a lively question-and-answer process of emerging issues when learners listen to lectures or read books rather than one-way instructions on how to think. It is better not to teach them to accept knowledge of other countries’ literature (here, Vietnamese literature), but to teach them to be concerned about the differences, comparisons, and correlations between literary values in the culmination of each region. They should also not be asked to remember knowledge to simply repronounce or repeat it (because that serves no purpose) but to suggest they master the questions they need to ask.

The way of teaching that concerned is an opportunity for teachers and students to have a common voice, open new understandings, and respond to each other in harmony. The teacher-student relationship is not simply one of a guide and transmitter of knowledge on one side, and a receiver of knowledge on the other, but one broad relationship between the various readings of literature and their conceptions of meanings through colourful meetings of representatives of many countries. What they do not know and cannot understand (when approaching Vietnamese literary works) is also valuable material for us to think and understand more about the differences as well as the insurmountable limits of Vietnamese literature towards the interpretations of the world.

***The third difference: Quantifying Vietnamese vocabulary in a lesson***

It is crucial that teachers “measure” the number of new and difficult vocabulary words with abstract meanings in a literature class for foreign students. Of course, this is not a problem while teaching Vietnamese students. However, quantifying the words in a lecture or lesson is the criterion and limitation for the lecturer to lead the lesson, because a too great number of words exceeding the allowable threshold would have a significant influence on pedagogical efficiency. If learners must process hundreds of new words in both scientific and art-related terms within three lessons, it is very well possible that they are confused and overloaded, and that is not what

the instructor wants. The interactive process of translating terms, such as by providing English names for typical Vietnamese literary works, is an example of how to quantify vocabulary, which is shown in the following example:

Model 1: Literature terminology (Lesson 1 of the module Modern Vietnamese Literature for foreign students)

Hiện đại: modern  
 Hiện đại hóa: modernise  
 Văn học hiện đại: modern literature  
 Văn xuôi: prose  
 Thơ tự do: free verse/poetry  
 Thơ: poetry  
 Truyện ngắn: short story  
 Tiểu thuyết: novel  
 Chủ nghĩa Lãng mạn: Romanticism  
 Chủ nghĩa Hiện thực phê phán: Criticism - Realism  
 Giai đoạn văn học: literature period  
 Trào lưu sáng tác: trend of creation  
 Tác giả: writer  
 Tác gia: author  
 Nhà văn: writer  
 Nhà thơ: poet  
 Nhà tiểu thuyết: novelist  
 Tác phẩm: work  
 Thực dân Pháp: French colonialism  
 Đảng Lao động Việt Nam: Vietnamese Labour Party  
 Văn học chính trị: political literature  
 Văn học chữ Hán: Sino literature  
 Văn học quốc ngữ: National-language literature  
 Chữ quốc ngữ: National language  
 Quan niệm văn học: view of literature

Ngôn ngữ nghệ thuật: artistic language  
 Chủ đề: theme of work  
 Thuộc địa: colony  
 Bắc bộ: North Vietnam  
 Nam bộ: South Vietnam  
 Trung bộ: Central Vietnam  
 Văn học công khai: public literature  
 Văn học bí mật: secret literature  
 Văn học cách mạng: revolutionary literature  
 Văn học yêu nước: patriotic literature  
 Văn học trung đại: medieval literature  
 Giai đoạn giao thời: transitional period  
 Văn học xã hội chủ nghĩa: Socialism literature  
 Văn học Đổi mới: Innovation literature  
 Chủ nghĩa nhân đạo: humanism  
 Tranh luận văn học/bút chiến: literary debate  
 Phê bình văn học: literary critic  
 Tư tưởng cách tân: innovative thought  
 Tiến trình văn học: process of literature  
 Báo chí: press  
 Phóng sự: reportage  
 Chủ bút: editor-in-chief

Model 2: Literature terminology (Lesson 1 of the module Vietnamese Medieval Literature for foreign students)

Chế độ phong kiến (Feudal regime)  
 Văn học trung đại (Medieval Literature)  
 Thời trung cổ/trung đại (Medieval/Middle Ages)  
 Hoàng đế, Vua, Thiên tử (King/Emperor)  
 Phật giáo (Buddhism)  
 Nho giáo (Confucianism)  
 Đạo giáo (Taoism)  
 Lão tử (Lao-tzu)

Thiền tông (Chan sect, Zen school)  
 Xâm lược (invade)  
 Giai đoạn văn học/thời kỳ văn học (Literary period)  
 Thi sĩ/nhà thơ (Poet)  
 Nho sĩ/nho gia (Confucianist)  
 Đạo sĩ/đạo gia (Taoist hermit)  
 Phật tử (Buddhist)  
 Thiền sư (Zen master)  
 Giác ngộ (enlightenment)  
 Tu hành (lead a religious life)  
 Hành trạng (religious action)  
 Vô ngã (no-self)  
 Tác phẩm (work)  
 Tác giả (author)  
 Xuất xứ (origin of)  
 Tuyển tập (Collection of)  
 Bài thơ (the poem)  
 Câu thơ (line of verse)  
 Thơ thiền (Zen poetry)  
 Hịch (Proclamation)  
 Phú (Ode to)  
 Chiếu (Royal Proclamation)  
 Luận thuyết tôn giáo (Religious treatise)  
 Thể loại văn học (literary style)  
 Tôn giáo (religion)  
 Triết học (philosophy)  
 Văn học dân gian (folklore)  
 Văn học/văn chương (literature)  
 Quy phạm/điển phạm/(model, classical)  
 Ước lệ (metaphor)  
 Cao nhã (refined)  
 Văn học Phật giáo (Buddhist Literature)

Văn học Nho giáo (Confucianist literature)  
 Đặc trưng văn học (specific characteristics of Literature)  
 Kinh (Canon)  
 Điển tích/điển cố (classic reference)  
 Biểu tượng (symbol)  
 Model 3: English names of some Vietnamese literature works  
*Truyện Kiều: The Tale of Kieu or The story of Kieu* by Nguyen Du  
*Thơ Hồ Xuân Hương: The Poetry of Hồ Xuân Hương*  
*Số đờ: Dumb luck* by Vu Trong Phung  
*Nỗi buồn chiến tranh: The Sorrow of War* by Bao Ninh  
*Vừa nhắm mắt vừa mở cửa sổ: Open the window, eyes closed* by Nguyen Ngoc Thuan  
*Trong sương hồng hiện ra: Behind the red mist* by Ho Anh Thai  
*Những ngôi sao, trái đất, dòng sông: The stars, the earth, the river* by Le Minh Khue  
*Đường xa: Distant road* (poem) by Nguyen Duy  
*Ngược dòng nước lũ: Against the flood* by Ma Van Khang  
*Qua sông: Crossing the river* by Nguyen Huy Thiep  
*Thời xa vắng: A time far past* by Le Luu  
*Cây thời gian: The time tree* (poem) by Huu Thinh  
*Gia đình bé mọn: An insignificant family* by Da Ngan  
 In short, the number of scientific and literary terms should not exceed 50 words in a lecture. In addition, a bilingual presentation (in Vietnamese and English) of the names of literary works as well as outstanding literary phenomena of Vietnam should be a requirement for lecturers teaching

Vietnamese literature to international students. This effective technique of the translation will save time and shorten the way to preserve literary memories and awareness of foreign students when approaching Vietnamese literature.

**The fourth difference: Thoroughly applying cultural and literature comparisons in teaching and learning**

Based on the respect for cultural, ethnic, and religious differences as analysed above, the teaching process cannot be separated from classroom democracy, meaning to make the most out of comparisons. It is impossible not to compare if we want international students to speak out their understandings about the readings when receiving a Vietnamese literary work or event.

Below are some examples of how to acquire and develop an understanding of groups of

international students when studying Vietnamese Medieval Literature at the Faculty of Vietnamese Studies and Language, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi (actual data was taken from international student assignments of the Vietnamese Studies and Language, academic year 2013-2014) [1].

The following was a presentation exercise with the topic “Introduce medieval works or authors of your country and compare your country’s medieval literature with Vietnamese medieval literature through some phenomena that interest you”. With this theme, and by comparing *The Tale of Kieu* with the masterpieces of their country, the students developed the following ideas:

Illustrated presentation for South Korean students:

- *Truyện Nàng Xuân Hương* nguyên văn là *Xuân Hương truyện* không có tác giả cụ thể, hay còn gọi là tác phẩm khuyết danh.
- Là một trong số tiểu thuyết cổ đại Hàn Quốc (ra đời khoảng thế kỉ XVII)

- Đầu thời kỳ Chosun xuất hiện dưới hình thức diễn xướng sân khấu “Pansori”.
- Xuân Hương ca được coi là bài hát nổi tiếng nhất về tình yêu.
- *Khi Xuân Hương ca* được nhiều người đón nhận và thêm bớt thì dần phát triển thành tiểu thuyết.

Xuân Hương (ChunHyang) là con gái của Xuân Mai (Walmac) một kỹ nữ đã bỏ nghề ở huyện Nam Nguyên (Namwon). Xuân Hương (ChunHyang) là người con gái tài sắc vẹn toàn.

Một ngày xuân nàng đi chơi du thì gặp công tử Lý Mộng Long (Lee MongRyong) con trai quan tri huyện Nam Nguyên.

Một hôm chàng Mộng Long đi đón tết thì gặp nàng Xuân Hương chơi đu vào ngày Tết Đoan Ngọ liền say đắm vẻ đẹp của nàng. Hai người yêu nhau, ước ao ngày được ở bên nhau và sau này sẽ kết duyên vợ chồng.

- Và đến nay còn được chuyển thể thành phim truyền hình và điện ảnh cũng như kịch.

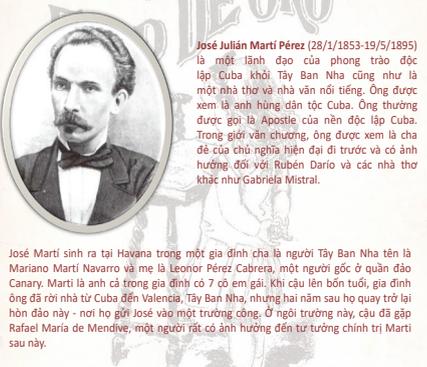
Không bao lâu sau, cha Lý Mộng Long được thăng quan, gia đình chàng phải trở về kinh đô (Hanyang). Lúc đó chàng Lý mới nói với mẹ về chuyện Xuân Hương nhưng không được sự đồng ý của gia đình nên hai người tạm chia tay nhau. Mộng Long trước khi theo cha về kinh thành có hẹn rằng nhất định sẽ quay trở lại tìm nàng.

Illustrated presentation for Cuban students:



**Văn học cổ trung đại  
Việt Nam**

Anliet Scull Ramirez  
Anay Martinez Gonzalez  
Arianna Montes de Oca  
Diana Rosa Montero Ramirez  
Laura Santos Valdes



**José Julián Martí Pérez** (28/1/1853-19/5/1895) là một lãnh đạo của phong trào độc lập Cuba khỏi Tây Ban Nha cũng như là một nhà thơ và nhà văn nổi tiếng. Ông được xem là anh hùng dân tộc Cuba. Ông thường được gọi là Apostol của nền độc lập Cuba. Trong giới văn chương, ông được xem là cha đẻ của chủ nghĩa hiện đại đi trước và có ảnh hưởng đối với Rubén Darío và các nhà thơ khác như Gabriela Mistral.

José Martí sinh ra tại Havana trong một gia đình cha là người Tây Ban Nha tên là Mariano Martí Navarro và mẹ là Leonor Pérez Cabrera, một người gốc ở quần đảo Canary. Martí là anh cả trong gia đình có 7 cô em gái. Khi cậu lên bốn tuổi, gia đình ông đã rời nhà từ Cuba đến Valencia, Tây Ban Nha, nhưng hai năm sau họ quay trở lại hòn đảo này - nơi họ gửi José vào một trường công. Ở ngôi trường này, cậu đã gặp Rafael Maria de Mendive, một người rất có ảnh hưởng đến tư tưởng chính trị Martí sau này.



**“La niña de Guatemala”  
Cô gái của Guatemala  
Jose Martí (Autor cubano del siglo  
XIX)  
Tác giả Cu ba thế kỷ XIX**

Quiero, a la sombra de un ala,  
contar este cuento en flor:  
la niña de Guatemala,  
la que se murió de amor.

Eran de lirios los ramos;  
y las orlas de reseda  
y de jazmín; la enterramos  
en una caja de seda...

Ella dio al desmemoriado  
una almohadilla de olor;  
él volvió, volvió casado;  
ella se murió de amor.

Iban cargandola en andas  
obispos y embajadores;  
detrás iba el pueblo en tandas,  
todo cargado de flores...

Ella, por volverlo a ver,  
salíó a verlo al mirador;  
él volvió con su mujer,  
ella se murió de amor.

Como de bronce candente,  
al beso de despedida,  
era su frente -¡la frente  
que más he amado en mi vida!...

Se entró de tarde en el río,  
la sacó muerta el doctor;  
dicen que murió de frío,  
yo sé que murió de amor.

Allí, en la bóveda helada,  
la pusieron en dos bancos:  
besé su mano afilada,  
besé sus zapatos blancos.

Callado, al oscurecer,  
me llamó el enterrador,  
nunca más he vuelto a ver  
a la que murió de amor.

Đây là bài thơ rất nổi tiếng ở Cu ba. Tác giả của bài thơ này là Jose Martí.

Bài thơ “La Nina de Guatemala” nói về một cô gái đã chết vì tình yêu. Tác giả kể câu chuyện này thông qua thơ của ông. Cô gái của Guatemala đã đem lòng yêu say đắm một người con trai. Họ yêu nhau, nhưng một hôm chàng trai đi làm việc ở nước ngoài và quên tình yêu của mình, cô gái của Guatemala. Khi anh ấy về nước thì đã lấy một người phụ nữ khác làm vợ. Cô ấy thất vọng về tình yêu, cô ấy đã muốn chết vì quá đau khổ. Cô gái của Guatemala nhảy xuống sông vào ban đêm, khi được cứu thì cô ấy đã qua đời. Tất cả mọi người suy nghĩ cô ấy bị chết vì lạnh nhưng sự thật là cô gái của Guatemala chết vì tình yêu.

The comparison of *The Story of Chunhyang* and *The Tale of Kieu* by a group of South Korean students was a good choice. It was a reasonable choice both in terms of practicality and academicism. Regarding the presentation to the group of Cuban students, one can see that the nature of such comparison can be limitless. Nevertheless, within that Vietnamese Medieval Literature course, the Cuban students provided a portrait of the reputation they are proud of, similar to how the Vietnamese are proud of Nguyen Du.

Moreover, by comparing Vietnamese literature with their own, the method can provide a way of learning for those who have never had access to modern Vietnamese literature, let alone classical literature. Thus, there are some clear advantages in comparing literature works that resonate with the meaning of teaching literature and literary knowledge.

#### ***The fifth difference: Respecting the initiative and creative spirit of international students***

While teaching a class with many international students, teachers need to seek out and understand

the teaching methods of universities abroad. This understanding should be considered a prerequisite for teachers to stand in front of a somewhat complex and differentiated audience with mixed academic backgrounds from the countries they come from, especially if these students come from nations with a democratic tradition. In fact, there is a profound reason for teaching with a philosophy that helps provide foreign students with knowledge that interests them, not with what we already have or want them to know.

It is necessary to encourage foreign students to ask questions and thoroughly think about problems and meanings and discover contradictions and paradoxes by native speakers' experiences with foreign literature. In other words, both faculty and students should come to class as debaters and reviewers looking for something new that is worth thinking about.

Beginning with the learners, a student interested in Vietnamese sociology will have a different way of understanding Vietnamese literature than a student who is dedicated to studying Vietnamese

linguistics. Likewise, a student studying Vietnamese history will have a different way of reading and exploiting Vietnamese literature than a student doing comparative studies of classical East Asian literature.

As such, the question of a student relating to Vietnamese history when reading Vietnamese literature could be “Why did Southern urban literature after 1954 - its interesting part - belong to a lot of literature of the Northern people who migrated to the South in 1954?”. Similarly, the question of a student researching Vietnamese sociology could be: “Who is the street-smart vagabond named Red-haired Xuân (out of *Dumb Luck* by Vu Trong Phung)?”

The author has encountered such questions in the past in classes teaching Vietnamese literature to international students as well as graduate students from the United States.

One more point worth mentioning is that classes with international students are not homogeneous in terms of learning goals and their future relationships with the Vietnamese language. It is thus not recommended to set learning outcome requirements on the subject in a principled manner and compare different perceptions with a standard view of remembering facts because this approach would be far too simple and not enough to examine the learners’ inner progress after one semester. On the contrary, a learner’s awareness and renewal of linguistic experiences, together with a deeper sharing and sympathy with a culture, will be a more valuable learning outcome standard for them.

***The sixth difference: Applying Kaizen in encouraging students to understand the lesson***

Kaizen 改善 (the Sino-Japanese word for “improvement”) in Japanese refers to continuous improvement, that is, constantly changing oneself little by little to best correct and overcome difficulties and limitations in work, learning, and speaking. Although first practised in Japanese businesses after the Second World War to improve economic efficiency, Kaizen has become the key to success for many people in many fields. The Kaizen principle does not focus on quick, short-term breakthroughs, but places full emphasis on sustainable development, creating opportunities for everyone to work and train with a long-term approach, valuing the striving for improvement over concrete profits. With these basic concepts and approaches, Kaizen is very suitable for international students in understanding and analysing

literature, particularly Vietnamese literature.

In fact, criticising and commenting on a literary work or a phenomenon at the university level is no longer just a choice of teaching method. More than that, when the recipients of literary knowledge are foreign students, the lecturers must teach them each sentence, each lesson, and each idea; or even mix language and literature teaching or literature and culture teaching, if the pedagogical situation requires this.

The author also believes that it is helpful to spend a lot of time, maybe even an entire lesson, around a few Vietnamese words and phrases that are used in a rhetorical sense or need several explanations about the core of Vietnamese culture, rather than giving lectures according to massive, academic textbooks on literary periods, characteristics, and processes.

When approaching Nguyen Du’s “*Người con gái Nam Xương*” (16<sup>th</sup> century), the details of the child’s voice are something that needs to be explained carefully for foreigners to understand. For example, why does a child raising their voice create a tragedy, is the truth as portrayed in folk wisdom enough to tell all the subtle truths in life? In the story by Nguyen Du, the child gave crucial misinformation, even though it was telling the truth. This shows that written literature contains and approaches truths in a much more complex way than the folklore’s “bag of wisdom” that neatly sums these truths up.

Explaining little by little, or repeatedly discussing the meanings of such verses in different literary contexts, will give international students more opportunities to understand the abstract forms of language that can only unfold their meanings when they live in appropriate cultural contexts. A teaching approach inspired by the Kaizen philosophy supports teachers to be more patient and persistent in calling learners to participate in the contemplations of Vietnamese through bridging the languages.

***The seventh difference: Providing detailed material for each lesson, with selected references***

Unlike Vietnamese students, international students do not easily and directly find necessary materials for the subject when learning about Vietnamese literature. If they cannot rely on selected materials, suitable quotations, and related research, they have almost no opportunity to read, analyse, and understand the literary works provided by the teacher.

Foreign students thus need to be able to read the

selected material directly, with detailed annotations, and they need many “other teachers” besides the one meeting them in every class. Those “other teachers” are a system of selected materials specifically designed to help foreigners understand and interpret Vietnamese literature.

A brief sample of material that puts Vietnamese literature into context for international students can be detailed as follows [5]:

Author	Tan Đa (1889-1939), real name Nguyen Khac Hieu
Literature period	1900-1930: The transition period (also known as pre-modern literature) of Vietnamese literature, representing the shift from medieval literature to modern literature following the Western literary model.
Historical context	The French colonialists officially put the yoke of domination on Vietnam with their colonial exploitation, turning Vietnam into a semi-feudal colony. During this period, there were two literary trends taking place at the same time: the patriotic literary movement and the writing movement in the national language script. In general, this is the period of modernisation of the entire society and culture, especially in literature.
Main works	<i>Giấc mộng con, Khôi tình con, Thề non nước, Vương Thúy Kiều chú giải tân truyện, Tản Đà văn tập, Tản Đà vận văn</i>
Notes on style	Tan Đa wrote, composed, and published as an amateur Confucian. He was a professional writer with some characteristics of contemporary writers and intellectuals with a talent for marketing, extravagance, polyamory, and liberalism. He straddles the two most important literary trends: romanticism and realism.
Main topics	The lost self, the dream of love, sympathy for the fate of the actor-beauty, innovation, and patriotism.

Analysis of *Thề non nước, Vương Thúy Kiều chú giải tân truyện*

Common questions and answers:

(a) *What was the separate section of the Indochina Magazine that was devoted to printing Tan Đa's articles?*

The answer: The section was called *Một lối văn Nôm* and set by Nguyen Van Vinh.

(b) *Since when did Nguyen Khac Hieu begin to use his pen name, Tan Đa, and what does it mean?*

The answer: Nguyen Khac Hieu used the pen name Tan Đa since 1916. The name combines the names of two places in his hometown, Tản Viên mountain and Đà river in Đà Giang.

(c) *What newspaper did Tan Đa publish and in which year? What was the fate of this newspaper?*

The answer: Tan Đa organised the An Nam magazine in 1926, which lasted for 10 issues from 1926 to 1927. In 1930, the An Nam magazine was temporarily republished but only for three issues.

(d) *In which work was the poem Thề non nước (The Vow between Mountain and River) printed, and in what year was it published?*

The answer: The poem was printed in *Tản Đà tùng văn* and published in 1922 when Tan Đa was 34 years old.

(e) *What was the title of a philosophical work that was written by Tan Đa?*

The answer: Tan Đa's philosophical writing was titled *Nhàn tưởng*, and the work was published in 1929 [5].

***The eighth difference: Paying special attention to linguistic and literary practices inside and outside the classroom***

A lecture on Vietnamese literature for international students should never be confined to a specified number of lessons, regular school hours, or provide knowledge without a broad context and a rich teacher-student relationship in creative learning projects [6].

The forms of learning should include most of the

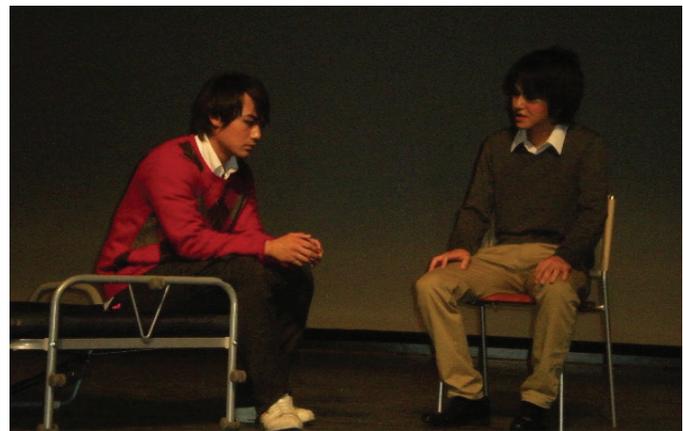
following: writing, organising and participating in plays (as the theatricalisation of literary works), group presentations, translations of poetry from Vietnamese into native languages, singing Vietnamese songs, participating in research seminars organised by Vietnamese educational institutions, reading books in the library, inviting the teacher to participate and share thoughts on these library books, understanding the library and its works, collecting materials, and writing academic papers in Vietnamese, among others.

All these activities are not radically different from teaching Vietnamese literature to native students. Nonetheless, for international students, these activities inside - and especially outside - the classroom should be fostered to create a study environment that motivates them to learn and be more excited about their studies [7].

In his article *Teaching English Through Literature*, M. Hişmanoğlu (2005) [8] analysed and

summarised the usefulness of teaching language through literature. He asserts that students can greatly improve their writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills when approaching literary works vividly. In particular, the author emphasises the great and profound benefits of teaching drama and acting to students: “Using drama in a language classroom is a good resource for language teaching. It is through the use of drama that learners become familiar with grammatical structures in context and also learn about how to use the language to express, control, and inform. The use of drama raises the students’ awareness towards the target language and culture” [8].

Elsewhere, Japan’s Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (東京外国語大学) has the long-standing tradition of holding the language and culture festival known as the Gaigosai Festival. Dating back to 1901, each November, the students of all foreign language classes are asked to perform plays during the festival.



As a rule, second-year students of foreign languages in the school spend six months preparing for a play of 50-80 minutes, with the dialogues entirely studied and performed in the languages taught at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Particularly in Vietnamese Studies, the students performed very difficult plays such as *Hà Nội, tình yêu và cái chết* (adapted from *Tố Tâm* by Hoang Ngoc Phach), *Hồn Trương Ba da hàng thịt*, *Quan Âm Thị Kính*, *Miss Sài Gòn*, *Tấm Cám*, and many more. Most students participating in the dramas within the Gaigosai Festival said that they made unexpected progress after six months of pondering, translating the script, memorising the lines, practising pronunciation, and remembering each detail to perform.

Such plays used to learn, work together, create a study environment outside the classroom, and establish an emotional connection with the cultural values of another population, which are a testament to the value of learning, practising creativity, science, and efficiency. Above are a few pictures of the play *Hà Nội, tình yêu và cái chết* as performed by second-year students majoring in Vietnam Studies at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies on November 21, 2010, with the screenplay written by Prof. Dr. Kawaguchi Kenichi.

“Learners should make use of drama to promote their comprehension of life experiences, reflect on particular circumstances, and make sense of their extralinguistic world in a deeper way” [7].

Likewise, the difference in language and literature practice outside the classroom is one of the fulcrums that support the goal of teaching Vietnamese, and further strengthens the interests of international students regarding their Vietnamese studies.

## Conclusions

This study focuses on describing the characteristics that need attention in the method of teaching Vietnamese language and Vietnamese literature to foreigners. It is certain that teaching Vietnamese literature to international students must be different from teaching Vietnamese literature

to Vietnamese students. The eight principles mentioned above are the honest and effective conclusions of the author during the process of teaching Vietnamese literature to foreign students. Those are the principles that we have followed, implemented, and successfully tested. These factors show that teaching Vietnamese literature to foreigners involves many issues like cultural identity, psychology of reception, cultural space, and the extent and scope of Vietnamese words to approach works, literature, and the reading and understanding of literary works.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

## REFERENCES

- [1] T.T.T. Le (2017), “Differences in interpreting knowledge in teaching methods of Vietnamese literature to international students”, *Researching and Teaching Vietnamese Studies*, International Conference Proceeding, Ho Chi Minh city National University Publishing House, pp.896-911 (in Vietnamese).
- [2] <https://www.nguyendu.com.vn/vi/nhung-ban-dich-truyen-kieu-sang-tieng-anh-D7B82F96C8B05FE6A4DD3621B80381F2.html>.
- [3] J. Dewey (2012), *John Dewey Experience and Education*, Tre Publishing House, 240pp.
- [4] M. Sato, M. Sato (2021), *Learning Community - The School's Comprehensive Innovation Model*, University of Education Publishing House, 171pp.
- [5] Many authors (2000), *Tan Da - About the Author and the Work*, Vietnam Education Publishing House, 520pp (in Vietnamese).
- [6] A. Paran (2006), *Literature in Language Teaching and Learning*, 192pp, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED496783>.
- [7] A. Sariçoban (2004), “Using drama in teaching Turkish as a foreign language”, *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, **14**, pp.13-32.
- [8] M. Hişmanoğlu (2005), “Teaching English through literature”, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, **1(1)**, pp.53-66.