Nguyen Du's Concept of Beauty and Ugly Expressed through *The Tale of Kieu*

Thi Thuy Le

DOI: 10.18355/XL.2025.18.03.13

Abstract
The goal of this paper is to explore the ideas of beauty and ugliness in Nguyen Du's *The Tale of Kieu*. Combining philosophical and literary hermeneutic on one hand and deconstructionist approaches on the other, the author investigates Nguyen Du's aesthetic philosophy and how it interacts with moral standards. Nguyen Du aspires to define aesthetic standards using a unique literary style, namely his subtle presentation of beauty. More significantly, he questions the feudal moral system that determines human fate. Du's *The Tale of Kieu* thus offers an incisive philosophical and cultural mirror of mediaeval Vietnam. It provides a window for readers to grasp the essence of nationalism as well as a strong involvement with personal suffering. My aim is to clarify how beauty and ugliness function as aesthetic and ethical markers by placing Nguyen Du's work inside more general historical, feminist, and cultural-linguistic frames. Moreover, I offer a blend of postcolonial, feminist, and cultural studies points of view, as I expose the ongoing relevance of *The Tale of Kieu* in forming modern Vietnamese identity and literary output.
Key words: the beautiful, the ugly, Nguyen Du, The Tale of Kieu, aesthetics, feudalism, morality

1. Introduction

Nguyen Du occupies a central place in Vietnamese literary and cultural history. He belongs to the top tier of writers, along with figures such as Nguyen Trai and Ho Chi Minh, as one of the most influential thinkers in the nation's intellectual heritage. Nguyen Du's contributions extend beyond poetry. He influenced fields such as aesthetics, ethics, and national identity formation to such an extent that his contributions were recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Celebrity. Among his works, *The Tale of Kieu* (original title: Doan Truong Tan Thanh) is a masterpiece of six-eight poetic form verse spanning 3,254 lines (Nguyen, 2008). The significance of this literary masterpiece cannot easily be overstated. Adapted from the Chinese novel Kim Van Kieu by Thanh Tam Tai Nhan, Nguyen Du's retelling transcends its source material. He managed to embed within the story a rich mix of Vietnamese ethical, aesthetic, and philosophical concerns.

Upon a closer reading of Nguyen Du, the readers may point out that his literary works, including *The Tale of Kieu*, do not explicitly theorize aesthetic categories. Nevertheless, *The Tale of Kieu* is deeply infused with an implicit philosophy of beauty and ugliness, one that is inseparable from moral, social, and existential dimensions. In fact, the work presents a deeply paradoxical vision of aesthetics: beauty is at once an exalted ideal and a curse, a gift and a burden. The message is closely tied to the main character of the story. Thuy Kieu's extraordinary physical and intellectual beauty ends up being a mixed blessing; it serves as both her greatest asset and her ultimate source of suffering. In this sense, Nguyen Du's depiction of Kieu is somewhat prophetic. It aligns with broader (though later) feminist critiques of the objectification and commodification of women, a theme explored by later writers, such as Qui-Ha Hoang Nguyen's study of bodily constraints and resistance in Vietnamese literature (Nguyen, 2019).

Moreover, the conceptualization of beauty in The Tale of Kieu goes beyond the personal dimension; it has a strong national connotation as well. As Liam Kelley's work on Vietnamese national identity suggests, premodern Vietnamese scholars saw their cultural identity as deeply intertwined with Confucian moral philosophy (Kelley, 2016). We have set out to explore this cultural and historical context and its impact on Du's authorship in more detail. Our focus remains on the portrayal of beauty (the ugly) in Nguyen Du's work, especially on how the author uses this category as both an aesthetic and an ethical commentary. We examine Nguyen Du's ability to mirror the nation's struggle with foreign influence, social hierarchy, and the role of individual agency within the confines of fate (as understood in the Confucian culture). Our aim is to present a balanced treatment of how the author processes both the strengths and challenges of traditional Confucian thought through the lens of a distinct vision of beauty and ugliness. Our approach combines the strengths of historical and cultural analysis of Nguyen Du's aesthetic ideas. In doing so, we reaffirm *The Tale of Kieu* as an important literary masterpiece but also a vital philosophical and ethical text that deserves a deeper examination.

Additionally, we incorporate perspectives from feminist, postcolonial, and linguistic studies, which enables us to further uncover the layers of meaning embedded in *The Tale of Kieu*. These layers often remain hidden from a shallow looking observer. We also draw on Phoebe Scott's examination of Vietnamese art in colonial Paris. Scott's work helps us explore how aesthetic ideals were shaped and contested across different cultural and historical contexts (Scott, 2019). Similarly, Le Trung Thanh's research on irony in Vietnamese literature informs our reading of *The Tale of Kieu* as a work that subtly critiques its own era while offering timeless insights into human nature (Le, 2024). Our ambition is to uncover overlooked philosophical aspects of Nguyen Du's primarily aesthetic contribution. We argue that Nguyen Du's concept of beauty is more than an artistic preoccupation. His vision constitutes (and serves as) a means of engaging with broader philosophical and moral questions, even questions that concern us today. Modern readers thus often resonate with Du's vision and allow themselves to be inspired by this 18th century thinker in contemporary discussions on gender, morality, and cultural identity.

2. Nguyen Du's Personal and Professional Profile

Nguyen Du (1765 - 1820) was given the name Nguyen Du and the nickname was Thanh Hien. He was born in Tien Dien village, Nghi Xuan district, Ha Tinh province. His father, Nguyen Nghiem, passed a doctorate and worked as a mandarin. His mother was Mrs. Tran Thi Tan, from Hoa Thieu village, Dong Ngan district, Kinh Bac region (now Bac Ninh province). She was Nguyen Nghiem's third wife, 32 years younger than her husband.

In 1783, Nguyen Du passed the third Huong exam. In 1786, the Tay Son army moved north, overthrowing the Le-Trinh regime, and by 1789 achieved the victory at Dong Da. From 1786 to 1796, Nguyen Du wandered in the North, then lived in hiding in his hometown from 1796 to 1802, adopting the nicknames Hong Son Liep Ho ("hunter in the Hong Mountains") and Nam Hai Dieu Do ("fisherman of the South Sea"). During these lost years, he witnessed and sympathized with the people's suffering. He later served as an official in the Nguyen Dynasty from 1802 until his death in 1820 in Hue.

Nguyen Du received a thorough feudal education, yet the tumultuous political changes, social injustices, and widespread hardship led him to reflect on and test the spiritual values of his time, with aesthetics standing out prominently (Do & Vu, 2011). Over the course of his 55 years, major historical, social, and family events shaped his personality, talent, and perception. He lost his father, Nguyen Nghiem, at age 11 (in 1775), and his mother three years later (1778), leaving him orphaned and without close emotional support—perhaps deepening his reflective nature. While residing with his brother Nguyen Khan, three rapid events changed everything: in 1780 came

the Canh Ti affair, which imprisoned Khan; in 1782, Lord Trinh Sam died, draining Khan's power and resources; and in 1784, discontented soldiers attacked, aiming to kill Khan and burn his palace. Khan fled to Son Tay, seeking refuge with their younger brother Nguyen Dieu, then governor. From that point, Nguyen Du's privileged life drew to a close.

Next, a earth-shattering event occurred for the Nguyen Tien Dien family in general, and for Nguyen Du in particular: Tay Son led by Nguyen Hue under the advice of Nguyen Huu Chinh led troops to destroy Lord Trinh, Re-arranging order in Bac Ha in the year of Binh Ngo 1786 (Nguyen 1985). Before Nguyen Du was shocked, at the end of December of the year Mau Than 1788, Nguyen Hue officially ascended the throne, establishing the Quang Trung dynasty and soon after, in the early spring of 1788. In 1789, Ky Dau defeated the Qing army and expelled King Le Chieu Thong from Thang Long Citadel. But the wall of King Le - Lord Trinh - the seemingly unshakable support of the Nguyen Tien Dien family, has now completely collapsed. The fatal "blow" fell on the head of Nguyen Du as well as other loyal servants of the Le Dynasty. Nguyen Du endured deep pain: he failed to escape or rebel against the Tay Son in Thai Nguyen and even attempted to go to Gia Dinh for help. Nguyen Anh likewise could not defeat Nguyen Hue, and the situation only worsened. Quang Trung's death in 1792, followed by the fall of the Nguyen Tay Son dynasty in 1802, paved the way for the Nguyen Gia Long dynasty, which unified the country from Lang Son to Ha Tien. Nguyen Du then served as an official under this new dynasty.

These events profoundly shaped his outlook. He was moved by the era's aspirations and suffering, as Vietnam at the end of the 18th century was trapped in constant crisis. The long-standing feudal order—built on exclusive land rights and rigid loyalty—was collapsing amid social upheavals that destroyed spiritual certainties. Witnessing the demise of the Le dynasty, the rise and fall of Tay Son, and the establishment of Nguyen Gia Long, Nguyen Du developed unique humanistic and national ideas, including his aesthetic views.

As a romantic, he praised the beauty of landscapes and captured heart-rending emotions—love, sorrow, worry, disappointment, and triumph. But he was not only a romantic; life was far to complicated for that. As a realist, he grounded his aesthetic evaluations in actual life and prevailing norms of the time. *The Tale of Kieu* emerged from his mature reflections on life. It rooted Nguyen Du's perspective on beauty and existence in lived reality, in the everyday life of the Vietnamese people of his time. Keenly aware of what to retain and what to reshape, he struggled to come up with a nuanced vision attuned to his changing times.

Nguyen Du excelled in both Han and Nom scripts, adept at both writing and criticism, yet poetry remained his principal forte (Dang, 1979). In Nom, he composed in six-eight poetic form and seven-seven-six-eight poetic form, most notably The Tale of Kieu (Doan Truong Tan Thanh) and the soul-soothing text (Van te thap loai chung sinh). His Han works comprise three poetry collections, totalling 250 poems, each from a distinct period: Thanh hien thi tap (c. 1784–1805, 78 poems), Nam Trung Tap Ngam (c. 1805–1812, 40 poems), and Bac hanh tap luc (written during his 1813 mission, 132 poems).

Throughout Nguyen Du's oeuvre flows a profound compassion—for others and for himself. The crumbling of the feudal center, the scholar's duty, and the vivid portrayal of a disordered society all emerge in his work, revealing "many contradictions, even indecisive aspects, especially in political attitudes and philosophical thoughts" (Lan, 2007: 74). His approach, though heavily metaphysical, is grounded in perceptive observation; despite occasional subjectivity, the social realities in his writing ring true, possible only through a genius mind. "Nguyen Du's thinking remains essentially that of a feudal Confucian who, through life's vicissitudes, absorbed the humanitarian

currents of his time. In an artist of Nguyen Du's nature, this inclination becomes especially powerful and profound" (Le, 1970: 74).

His contributions are celebrated not only in Vietnam but worldwide. On November 25, 1965, the nation officially observed the 200th anniversary of his birth, and the World Peace Council recognized him among world cultural figures. A memorial house was erected in Tien Dien commune, his hometown, and in 1979 (Ha, 2015: 55-56), a writers' school bearing his name was established to nurture creative potential and professionalism in future generations.

3. A Closer Look at Nguyen Du's "*The Tale of Kieu*"

There is a theory that Nguyen Du wrote *The Tale of Kieu* after being an ambassador to China (1814 - 1820). There is another theory that he wrote it before going on a mission (Benoit, 1981), possibly around the time he served as Cai Ba in Quang Binh (1804 - 1809). The latter theory is more accepted (Phan, 1985). Immediately after its inception, *The Tale of Kieu* was engraved and widely circulated in many places. The two oldest remaining prints are the Lieu Van Duong version (1871) and the Duy Minh Thi version (1872), both from the reign of King Tu Duc.

Nguyen Du's *The Tale of Kieu* follows the life of Thuy Kieu, her siblings Thuy Van and Vuong Quan, children of a middle-class family in Beijing. Both sisters are renowned for their beauty and modesty, with Kieu surpassing everyone in talent. During the Qingming festival, the three siblings visit a grave belonging to Dam Tien, a prostitute, and Kieu feels profound pity. On their outing, Kieu meets Kim Trong—a gifted student and Vuong Quan's classmate—and they quickly form a connection. That night, Kieu dreams of Dam Tien, who warns her that her name appears in the "death book." Meanwhile, Kim Trong, eager to see Kieu again, settles next door. They meet in Thuy's garden, fall in love, pledge themselves to each other, and exchange wedding vows when Kieu's family leaves town for an ancestral death anniversary.

Soon after, Kieu's family is falsely accused, their home ransacked, and her father and brother arrested. Desperate, Kieu sells herself for three hundred taels of gold to bribe the officials and secures her family's release. She also arranges for her younger sister Van to wed Kim Trong in her place. Kieu is taken to Tu Ba's brothel, forced to entertain clients, where she meets Thuc Sinh. Enamored, Thuc Sinh ransoms and marries her as his concubine. When Thuc returns home to settle matters with his wife Hoan Thu, Hoan Thu has Kieu kidnapped, torments her, and forces her to serve as a servant. Kieu escapes, disguises herself as a monk, but soon falls into another brothel run by Bac Ba, Bac Hanh. There she meets Tu Hai, an extraordinary military general who ransoms and marries her, helping her exact gratitude and revenge. But Ho Ton Hien, a powerful official, deceives Tu Hai into surrender. Tu Hai dies in battle, and Kieu, captured by Ho, is forced to serve him wine and marry a low-level mandarin. In utter despair, she attempts suicide by jumping into the Tien Duong River, only to be saved by the monk Giac Duyen.

Meanwhile, after mourning his uncle, Kim Trong returns to find Kieu but learns she has vanished. He marries Thuy Van, yet continues to cherish his memory of Kieu. He passes his exams, becomes an official, and tirelessly searches for her. On hearing she drowned herself in the Tien Duong, he builds an altar to honor her. Giac Duyen suddenly appears, revealing that Kieu still lives. The family joyfully reunites. At the reunion banquet, Thuy Van urges Kieu and Kim Trong to revive their bond. Unable to refuse, Kieu accepts. However, on the wedding night, Kieu proposes they remain platonic companions, and Kim Trong agrees, concluding the story with an unconventional "friendship" in place of marriage.

The Tale of Kieu is the main work by the genius poet Nguyen Du. Its profound realism, pure humanitarian ideals, rich artistic form, and unique national character all shine through this work (Le, 1970). Reading *The Tale of Kieu*, we see a feudal society

brimming with oppression and injustice; we see the power of money; and we recognize Nguyen Du's presence in every line and every thought—a Nguyen Du who is profound, seasoned by life, filled with compassion, self-understanding, and a burning desire for peace. All these elements come together to form the extraordinary ideological and artistic fabric of Doan Truong Tan Thanh.

From *The Tale of Kieu*, we also glean insights into the aesthetic dimensions of life. The poem is infused with a reflective quality, revealing many anxieties and musings. Though it speaks of a particular character, personality, and life, that portrayal stands for an entire class, a social group, and a shared reality. The beauty, tragedy, and humor of one person or one trait become representative and broad in meaning. Nguyen Du's aesthetic principles build upon existing traditions yet also push forward into new territory. For this reason, they merit deeper analysis to reaffirm both the enduring worth of the work and of Nguyen Du himself.

4. Nguyen Du's Concept of Beauty

Nguyen Du devotes much of his energy and passion to talking about beauty. He conveys his ideas through both the content and form of his works. In *The Tale of Kieu*, beauty appears in nature and in humans. This essay concentrates on examining Nguyen Du's view of human beauty.

Firstly, in *The Tale of Kieu*, Nguyen Du depicts people who must endure every humiliation imposed by a feudal society, yet they still radiate both outward and inward beauty. This dual dignity and appearance reflect the noble value of Beauty, as well as Nguyen Du's distinct aesthetic concept.

Nature bestows upon Kieu a beauty surpassing that of others: so captivating that flowers grow envious, willows resentful, and even nature itself becomes jealous. She has literary and artistic talents in poetry, music, and painting, and is especially skilled in music, reaching a "masterful" level. Her "uniquely solemn" allure arises from a full, round face, a smile like a flower, a voice as clear as jade, hair like clouds, and skin as white as snow. Yet the highlight is her "salty sharpness," created by eyes as limpid as autumn water and brows as graceful as spring mountains. When portraying this "sharp and salty" charm, Nguyen Du focuses on the eyes as the key standard, revealing the depths of one's soul. Even in sorrow, her enchantment only increases. Her melancholy is likened to "flower features," bewitching and spellbinding. Nguyen Du calls her tears "châu" (pearls), and compares her sad countenance to daisies and apricot blossoms: "Sad features like daisies, delicate as apricot" (Nguyen, 1983: line 638). The more pensive she is, the more luminous her beauty becomes—especially when shedding tears. It is a gentle yet enthralling beauty, one that reaches perfection in Kieu. Her attractiveness also reveals itself in her talents for playing the "hu harp," taking examinations, and painting. Nguyen Du praises this prowess: "The pentatonic scale of the palace/A unique profession surpasses the zither/A piece of music chosen by hand/A tragic fate that is even more heartbreaking" (Nguyen, 1983: lines 31-34). The sound of her instrument stirs any listener's heart. Not only does she perform others' music, she also composes her own. One of her pieces, "Bạc Mệnh" ("Ill-Fated"), resonates so mournfully that it fills people's hearts with deep sadness.

Along with appearance and talent, Nguyen Du's concept of beauty is intertwined with morality—love, sincerity, and filial piety (Tan, 2016). Kieu's "salty sharpness" reflects her abundant passion for life, her empathy for people's joys and sorrows, and her affection for others, such as Dam Tien, even though they are separated by life and death. She likewise shows boundless love for her father and younger brother; her resolute act of selling herself to save them (Nguyen, 1983: 606) is driven by genuine devotion. Kieu also sacrifices her chance to reunite with Kim Trong to repay her parents' lifelong care: "The fate of reuniting versus the debt of birth… / As children, we must first repay the kindness of being born" (Nguyen, 1983: 601–604). During her

wandering years, she constantly aches for home, always tormented by the sense of failing her filial duties. Even when forced into prostitution, she keeps her dignity: "When I'm sober, it's the end of night; / When startled, I grieve for myself" (Nguyen, 1983: 1233–1234). She lives honestly, longs for a pure life, and seeks to return to her family—ever ready to sacrifice for the sake of others, which is immensely admirable.

Nguyen Du celebrates the happiness of a natural, down-to-earth life. *The Tale of Kieu* is essentially a love song honoring the wondrous beauty of romantic love—an aspect of human beauty. Kieu's heart remains loyal and forgiving. All of this despite her enduring three major love affairs, each marking a different emotional threshold: Kieu and Kim Trong share a pure, innocent first love; Kieu and Thuc Sinh suffer intense bitterness and humiliation; and Kieu and Tu Hai experience a deep, selfless bond. First love, however, often stands out as the most beautiful, difficult to attain, and unforgettable. With Thuc Sinh and Tu Hai, Kieu is bought as a wife, slipping into either servitude or princess-like nobility—both isolating roles. Only with Kim does she truly become a beloved partner who loves and is loved, fulfilling an ideal.

The appeal of Kim and Kieu's love lies in its innocence, purity, freedom, and earnestness—neither excessively demanding nor cold—tinged with shyness yet incredibly bold. By allowing Kieu to go beyond centuries-old Confucian norms, Nguyen Du presents a daring breakthrough in their love. If ancient custom forbade women from openly expressing affection, Kieu instead steals through the garden late at night (Nguyen, 1983: 432), following her heart "because of the flowers."

Kim and Kieu's love surpasses the traditional constraint of "arranged marriage." Interestingly (and, perhaps, a bit surprisingly), it is embraced by both families. Through this, Nguyen Du underscores a progressive awareness in Vietnamese feudal society: not only do Kim and Kieu themselves value love sparked by genuine mutual desire, but their parents also respect and acknowledge it. As we alluded above, this is somewhat unexpected in the original historical context. Finally, even though their tender first love ends in regretful parting, yet its very incompleteness enhances its unforgettable beauty (here comes the main motive again!). In addition, Nguyen Du highlights another culturally revolutionary idea; namely, that fidelity is not solely a woman's virtue but a standard for men as well—evidenced by Kim Trong's unwavering devotion to Kieu.

Like the romances of Romeo and Juliet or Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, the story of Kim and Kieu brims with poetry. However, there is a crucial difference: both Kieu and Kim live honestly and follow the flow of life, marrying others yet remaining connected by their singular vow. Kieu carries that promise through her hard fifteen-year journey—though she marries Thuc Sinh and Tu Hai, she never forgets Kim. Meanwhile, even after marrying Thuy Van, Kim still yearns for Kieu. Modern society might label this "ideological adultery," but in the swirling changes of their era, their emotional fidelity endures. Ultimately, after fifteen years, they conclude as "a couple who are also friends" (Nguyen, 1983: 3226). Kim and Kieu's love thus symbolizes the enduring human quest for happiness.

Nguyen Du also considers a woman's virginity a moral quality that contributes to her beauty, yet he treats the term "Trinh" with flexibility. He allows Kieu to become a prostitute—"The color of the lake has vanished / Oh, my capital is gone, my life is haunted"; "Alas, a camellia bloom / The bee has found its way"; "Like the bright moon in the sky / Vowing two words in harmony"—without stripping her of spiritual purity. He clearly recognizes, "The word *Trinh* ranks first in a woman's virtue" (Nguyen, 1983: 506), but insists that "Trinh" be acknowledged and interpreted spiritually rather than physically. This is evident in Kim Trong's words to Kieu upon finding her:

> "In the old ways of women's morality / 'Virginity' took three or seven paths.
> Sometimes it shifts, sometimes it remains; / Do you truly have to go all

the way to confirm your virtue? / As you were married to Hieu, how could that be 'virgin'/ And what dust could you possibly carve into me?" (Nguyen, 1983: 3115–3120)

Nguyen Du's viewpoint is remarkably progressive. One need not always adhere rigidly to traditional codes; behavior should shift with the circumstances. While praising the freely chosen love between Kim and Kieu, Nguyen Du advocates for women's rights that were otherwise fully denied by feudal society—an idea closely aligned with modern thought. It encourages greater appreciation of women's value, promotes more open-minded judgment, and points toward the concept of "beauty-destroying elements" in a broader moral sense. The only difference is that, in the aforementioned lines, "beauty" focuses primarily on outward appearance; for Nguyen Du, true beauty resides in both appearance and a person's inner thoughts and character.

The noble mission of literature is to honor human beauty (Nguyen, 2001). The more I read Nguyen Du, the more convinced I am of this. Besides Kieu's beauty, he also recognizes an immensely valuable beauty in other characters. Thuy Van, for example, possesses a dignified and luxurious allure. Kim Trong stands out as a "literary man": "He emerges like a lofty willow / Graceful and stylish," (Nguyen, 1983) someone both handsome and poised, an ideal Confucian scholar. Kieu's beloved must be talented, attractive, and well-suited to her. But beyond all, Kim Trong is loyal, empathizing with and caring deeply for Kieu. His thoughts remain filled with her image.

Tu Hai is another admirable male figure—an imposing hero described as "tiger-bearded, swallow-browed, / Broad of shoulder, towering in height," (Nguyen, 1983) yet exceedingly protective and nurturing toward Kieu. Both Kim Trong and Tu Hai appreciate and love beauty; they themselves exemplify it. If Kieu's life overflows with humiliation, she is at least sustained by genuine, passionate devotion. It would be wrong to say Kieu never knows happiness: her loving family, Kim Trong, and Tu Hai—all worthy men—love her wholeheartedly. That is no small joy for any girl.

When depicting men, Nguyen Du locates their beauty chiefly in their hearts, in their unwavering love—a genuine, ideal masculinity. Even Hoan Thu, whom Kieu had to acknowledge as "too clever, speaking the right words" (Nguyen, 1983: 2374), has her own beauty: that of shrewdness. If Kieu shines with her talent, loveliness, and soul, then Hoan Thu radiates sharp intelligence and extraordinary boldness. What is most noteworthy, however, is the noble, humane conduct that ultimately emerges—even between enemies—bestowing a brilliant glow upon the two most exceptional female characters in this immortal tale: Thuy Kieu and Hoan Thu.

In Nguyen Du's works, one always senses a profound sympathy and nurturing attitude toward beauty. Kieu's life is so filled with misfortune, her fate as a beautiful woman so full of sorrow. Why must beauty become a crime, a toy for society? Alongside this, there is another angle: because Kieu is beautiful, something about her must be incomplete. It reflects a law of compensation in life: to gain one thing means losing another; no person or thing can be flawless. Nguyen Du's exquisite descriptions of Thuy Kieu reveal an ominous hint of her tragic destiny, much like the folk saying: "When one side is heavier, the other side is lighter. Heavenly powers grow jealous of too much talent." (Nguyen, 1983). For in reality, what is more or exceptional compared to the ordinary often brings greater trouble and a longer path of hardship. Recognizing this does not imply a lack of sympathy or love for Kieu, but rather arises from practical observation and life's reflections. The question about the fate of beauty, about its uncertainties and ups and downs, continues to stir our sense of fairness and perfection in life.

Nguyen Du's progressive insight lies in recognizing women's latent strengths. He dares to create ideal characters that exceed the conventional norms of Eastern society.

In portraying ill-fated figures like Kieu and Dam Tien, he sees them as pitiable victims—talented and loving, yet shunned by a rigid feudal system. The fate of beauty, so inextricably tied to the notion of "destiny," has long troubled the author and generations of readers devoted to Kieu. Because of beauty, she must endure misfortune and suffering. Nguyen Du's perception of "equal fortunes" and "beautiful fates" in *The Tale of Kieu* emerges from the social realities of his era, yet from those very hardships he arrives at lofty humanitarian ideals.

The protagonists of *The Tale of Kieu* exemplify Nguyen Du's concept of beauty at its most concentrated form. In his view, a girl's beauty involves discipline and adherence to certain standards. Thuy Kieu, in particular, is portrayed as beautiful in both appearance and virtue. Although she surpasses the harsh feudal constraints placed on women, she never loses her values. Nguyen Du's appraisal of a beautiful girl aligns closely with Confucian ideals, yet in a gentler manner. His perspective builds on the reasonable aspects of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist aesthetic thought, as well as the Vietnamese aesthetic worldview of his time. For instance, one criterion of feminine beauty is loyalty and moral uprightness. Nguyen Du thus depicts Kieu as consistently faithful and strong in both soul and personality. It is not a departure from tradition but rather a breakthrough—seeking to rise above society's excessive strictures and liberate beauty to fulfill its true worth.

A woman's beauty, according to traditional Asian notions, lies in her sense of justice, tolerance, refined speech, and proper conduct. But in Nguyen Du's works, the connotations of these qualities evolve. At times, his aesthetic ideals contrast sharply with the rigid austerity of Confucian thought. Even though he uses delicate, somewhat veiled language to illustrate Kieu's physical charms—"Clear as ivory-white jade, / A natural form cast so thick and sure!" (Nguyen, 1983: lines 1311–1312)—he nonetheless sparks in the reader's mind a vivid image of Kieu's loveliness. To Nguyen Du, the body is a gift from the Creator; thus, a beautiful girl must first be physically attractive, and anyone who cherishes beauty should honor the body given to each of us by nature. His aesthetic ideology here is profoundly humane, resisting the stark formality of Confucian ritual. This represents a distinctive hallmark in Nguyen Du's concept of beauty.

Secondly, the second unique point concerns the consideration of beauty within relationships. Regardless of the situation or position, beauty always asserts its bravery and value. Thuy Kieu's relationships with Kim Trong, Thuc Sinh, and Tu Hai differ markedly. Kieu–Kim Trong is a pure and shy first love; Kieu–Thuc Sinh is very real, deeply grounded in everyday life; while Kieu–Tu Hai is a love story shared between kindred spirits, reminiscent of Ba Nha and Tu Ky. In Kim Trong's eyes, Kieu's beauty lies in her innocence and purity. To Thuc Sinh, Kieu is physically attractive. With Tu Hai, Kieu is beautiful for her empathy, shared understanding, and harmony of soul.

> "Kieu got angry but still respected Ho Ton Hien.
> Kieu is both shrewd and perceptive, yet credulous—she sees the hearts of Kim Trong, Thuc Sinh, and Tu Hai, but is misled by So Khanh and Ho Ton Hien.
> She trusts and loves innocently but also knows how to be cautious, calculating, and daring.
> She is fearless and fierce, yet yields to pleas, obeying Tu Ba, and endures patiently when in Hoan Thu's clutches.
> She clings to life but feels sympathy toward religion." (Le, 1970: 221)

Kieu's beauty in those poetic, peaceful moments with Kim Trong is one thing; with Thuc Sinh it takes a different form; and during her days as a close companion to Tu Hai, repaying kindness and enacting vengeance, yet another. In this way, beauty must adapt to widely different circumstances and audiences, while maintaining its initiative.

When evaluating beauty, Nguyen Du consistently places it in specific, concrete contexts.

Thus, in Nguyen Du's opinion, human beauty manifests both in content and form. The absolute or ideal beauty he invested all his heart into creating, dreaming of, and realizing is the image of a human being who is complete, accomplished, and talented—a beauty grounded in one's inner self (the beauty of the heart). When studying Nguyen Du's concept of beauty and its expression throughout his poetry, we are surprised to find these aesthetic notions steeped in humanity and modernity. At the same time, his aesthetic philosophy remains strongly national in character, insisting that ideal beauty must be harmonious, virtuous, and ethical. That is the core feature of Nguyen Du's humanistic aesthetics: the beauty he envisioned is an ideal, perfect beauty. The humanist current in art—responding to the harsh social norms that fettered people—emerged in the late 18th century, continued to expand, and culminated in the literary works of Nguyen Du and Ho Xuan Huong.

Here it is important to remember that Marxist aesthetics rejects "art for art's sake," arguing that concepts of beauty reflect material conditions and class relations (Do, 1997). This was of course true in feudal times and remains so today. In feudal societies (like Nguyễn Du's setting), beauty standards served ruling-class ideology (Do, 2010). Ugliness in Marxist theory, on the other hand, often represents dehumanization under oppressive systems (Do, 2010; 2011). Kiều's suffering (prostitution, displacement) thus could be interpreted as symbolizing the ugliness of feudal patriarchy's treatment of women. So what then is the actual beauty and exemplary character of Kiều as seen through the lens of socialist aesthetics? We can say that socialist aesthetics values characters who embody resilience against oppression (Do et al, 2004). This is of key significance. Kiều's survival despite trauma (in fact, several serious trauma's during her life) thus frames her as a proto-revolutionary figure (Do, 2001; 2002).

5. Nguyen Du's Concept of Evil

The opposite of beauty is ugliness, representing the negative aesthetic value of real objects and phenomena. In art, ugliness is deemed discordant, aesthetically incomplete, and repellent to viewers, impeding human perception, creativity, and the development of aesthetic consciousness. Objectively, ugliness arises from the negative, underdeveloped, or impoverished aspects of natural and social reality. Subjectively, it stems from a limited aesthetic culture that lags behind the humanistic progression of society (Tran, 2003). Ugliness thus violates and damages aesthetic life—making it a form of "non-aesthetics." Yet paradoxically, from ugliness, beauty stands out even more vividly. For Nguyen Du, anything that crushes or destroys beauty is considered ugly. In *The Tale of Kieu*, two major forms of ugliness emerge: the feudal power structure and the money-driven society (Hong, 2007).

First, the world of *The Tale of Kieu*, set during the reign of Ming Emperor Jia Jing, appears outwardly calm but is riddled with hidden turmoil as the feudal superstructure shakes at its core. The so-called "three obediences and four virtues" vanish beneath the surface of romance and personal feeling. This society contains countless ills to which its inhabitants must submit—a realm of unpredictable light and darkness, harsh regulations, and narrow frameworks. It mirrors the transitional period of Vietnamese society under the Late Le and Early Nguyen dynasties.

In Thanh Tam Tai Nhan's original novel, Miss Kieu is a talented beauty, yet her personality is rather ordinary, even crude at times, so her conflict between talent and destiny is not intense enough to illustrate the injustice and inhumanity of the social regime. By contrast, in Nguyen Du's version, Kieu becomes an ideal figure, overflowing with both virtue and ability, maintaining her noble dignity and pure spirit in the most humiliating circumstances (Hoai, 2008). This profound clash between

ideals and reality sharply exposes the ruptures in the decaying feudal order—ruptures that can be resolved only through something like a peasant uprising. Kieu's talent, which could have been her path to greatness, instead attracts predatory rulers who torment and exploit her, turning her into an object of their pleasure. Such an ill-fated destiny is not unique; it is typical in feudal society: "Be an example for guests to try and see" (Nguyen, 1983: 2644). The idea of "comparable fortune" reflects how members of the middle strata, deemed "better than others," are brutally subjugated and taken advantage of by those in power.

Nguyen Du's portrayal of feudal society stems from the reality of the regime he experienced. His compassionate heart, along with his abhorrence of the vile and evil, unites historical fact with a humanitarian spirit to condemn everything that stands against beauty and morality (Dao, 1986).

The feudal society depicted in *The Tale of Kieu* is filled with mansions and brothels—from Tu Ba and Ma Giam Sinh's establishment to Bac Ba and Bac Hanh's. It's a well-organized society with strange rituals: "In the center was the actual incense burner / … / Butterflies and bees whirred in a frenzy" (Nguyen, 1983: lines 929–938), and full of tricksters like So Khanh. We also see ignorant, greedy mandarins. First, there's the judge overseeing Vuong Vien Ngoai's case: no real grounds, no evidence, the defendant never questioned—and once he receives a hundred taels of gold, the matter ends. It sounds absurd, but in truth, it's not surprising. Next comes the judge in Thuc Ong's lawsuit against Thuy Kieu, citing Thuc Sinh's marriage to Kieu. This mandarin, allegedly "fair and upright," gives two choices: family punishment or a regular trial. Kieu picks the first, is dragged out, and beaten; Thuc Sinh weeps outside. The mandarin calls her in, makes her write a poem on shackles, praises it, and acquits her. Then we see Governor Ho Ton Hien, a higher-ranking official, whom one might expect to uphold a better standard—but he proves merely a mandarin "foolish in matters of the heart," later pushing Kieu into someone else's marriage. Thus, the three mandarins in *The Tale of Kieu* are: one who takes bribes, one who prosecutes lawsuits with poetry, and one who breaks promises. Can we really call that a government working for the people?

Besides these mandarins, there are also "lady mandarins"—represented by Hoan Thu's mother, the wife of a Minister. She commands a gang of robbers, Khuy Ung and Khuy Phe, then conspires with her daughter to burn homes, rob others, and inflict extreme suffering. Her son-in-law, Thuc Sinh, comes from a merchant family, loaded with money, and fancies himself a refined artist, dabbling in hurried poetry, chasing marriage into a noble lineage. But he proves cowardly and foolish, with only one real talent: spending money, which leads him into corruption.

If we consider the villains in *The Tale of Kieu* to be thoroughly bad, indeed they outdo anyone else in ugliness. Yet their wrongdoing is also influenced by social circumstances and the system of regulations in which they live. "Ho Ton Hien strove to serve the court as effectively as possible. But precisely because he acted the part of an important mandarin, worthy of a 'special mandate,' Tu Hai had to die and Kieu's life was shattered. The same applies to Hoan Thu. Hoan Thu is someone 'who lives well and eats well' (Nguyen, 1983: 1533), someone 'deeply experienced.' She weighed her options, seeing jealousy as her duty, the action most fitting her station" (Le, 1970: 282). In *The Tale of Kieu*, personal responsibility cannot be separated from the character's social role. That is Nguyen Du's legitimate perspective, reflecting a profound Confucian consciousness.

The evil of society is what Nguyen Du calls "hell on earth." Its fundamental relationships have been overturned, reflecting an internal shaking and weakening. The worse, more unjust it becomes, the more swiftly it heads toward decline and destruction.

Everywhere we see crooked mandarins, bizarre officials, evil bureaucrats, and cowardly merchants—hallmarks of the feudal world in *The Tale of Kieu*. It is truly a

society rotten to its core. The so-called "fate" or "destiny" that Kieu speaks of is precisely this corrupt society. There, neither human life nor human dignity matters; everything is measured by money.

Thus, *the second* great evil that Nguyen Du denounces is a money-driven society. He fiercely condemns it: "They wreak havoc just for money" (Nguyen, 1983: 598), "With three hundred taels, even this can be resolved" (Nguyen, 1983: 612), "When a whiff of copper is seen, a greedy heart stirs" (Nguyen, 1983: 1306). Money in itself can promote economic growth; it isn't inherently harmful. But in the hands of certain people, money becomes tarnished. It directly causes people's suffering and unhappiness. Kieu's family is torn apart over money: "One strange, dark day / Bringing harm, all because of money" (Nguyen, 1983: 597–598). From there, Kieu endures fifteen years of wandering in squalid brothels, "Twice in the Lotus House, twice robed in shame" (Nguyen, 1983: 2668). Because of money, she's pushed from one brothel to another.

But it doesn't end there—money also twists social order and morality. It can flip white into black, warping justice: "With money on hand / You can easily turn white into black" (Nguyen, 1983: 689–690). Money stirs greed and evil. For money, some people will risk everything: "When it sees even a glimpse of copper, a greedy heart stirs" (Nguyen, 1983: 1306), including negotiating a person's price: "The stork chirps back and forth / Gold was four hundred taels long ago" (Nguyen, 1983: 647–648).

Money, for Nguyen Du, is something he condemns wholeheartedly. In the name of loving humanity, he accuses money. Yet in truth, he condemns those who misuse it, turning it into a universal tool of power. In the feudal society of *The Tale of Kieu*, those with much money belong to the same group—lewd and cruel. Whether we speak of the repugnant Ho Ton Hien or the scheming Hoan Thu, or the vile and uneducated Ma Giam Sinh and Tu Ba—when such people possess money, how could it remain humane?

Within *The Tale of Kieu*, money coexists with a kind of feudal society edged by hints of capitalism. Money isn't always wholly evil. Nguyen Du merely intends to denounce money when it tramples on human freedom and dignity. We can see the positive use of money in how Thuc Sinh and Tu Hai use it to ransom Kieu from the brothel. Money also attaches itself to a commodity economy—somewhat developed—and along with this economic growth come demands for freedom and human liberation. Real change compels shifts in awareness as well. Nguyen Du's viewpoint here is notably progressive: even in what we call "evil," certain positive, progressive elements may exist. The crucial point is to identify and foster those positive factors so they can flourish.

Nguyen Du sees evil in two main agents: individuals and society. The individual wrongs contribute to revealing an utterly foul social face. He exposes the ugliness and indicates its root cause. Evil has its own destiny—ultimately paying the price that life exacts. From this, people learn how to behave in their social relationships. That is where the value of Nguyen Du's aesthetic thought lies.

For Nguyen Du, every person has both good and bad sides, more or fewer flaws. Each contains a measure of "Buddha nature" and a measure of "snake nature." A good person is one whose positive side outweighs the negative, and vice versa. Although the characters in *The Tale of Kieu* originate from Thanh Tam Tai Nhan's *Kim Van Kieu*, they also embody Nguyen Du's personal reflections and life experience.

6. Assessing the Value of Modern Interpretations

Colonial and Postcolonial Reinterpretations

Phoebe Scott's study of Vietnamese art in colonial-era Paris will serve as our first example of modern (re)interpretations. It includes *The Tale of Kieu* and offers a revealing lens through which to view the transnational reception of Nguyen Du's

masterpiece (Scott, 2019: 187ff). During the 1930s and 1940s, Vietnamese artworks and cultural expressions traveled to or were produced in Paris. This cosmopolitan town represented a setting where the lines between cultural appropriation and genuine artistic exchange often blurred. Colonial propaganda often twisted the original intent of indigenous masterpieces. For example, the *Exposition Internationale Coloniale* of 1931 stands out as a major instance of colonial propaganda. Yet, in salon exhibitions, critical press coverage, and even state acquisitions of Vietnamese art, Scott uncovers more nuanced "negotiations of display." Scott's work is truly invaluable in this respect. It shows us how classic Vietnamese texts—including *The Tale of Kieu*—were presented to Western audiences. Not surprisingly, they were sometimes presented in ways that reinforced colonial stereotypes, and at other times revealing unexpected forms of Vietnamese cultural agency.

Scott's contribution thus serves as a useful stepping stone for postcolonial reassessments of *The Tale of Kieu*. It helps us examine the intersections between national identity, closely tied to indigenous culture, and external power dynamics. What do we mean by this? During the colonial period, the poem could be celebrated as a symbol of Vietnamese heritage, but at the same time, its presentation risked being filtered through a foreign lens seeking "exotic" allure. As Scott shows, the artists and intellectuals who exhibited or discussed Vietnamese works abroad frequently engaged in a loaded politics of representation. Often they were compelled, other times they may have been rather willing, to contend with categories imposed by colonial authorities while asserting their right to define their own cultural values. This was no easy task and, unsurprisingly, many have failed or ended up artistically depleted under this tension. But in some peculiar ways, this tension parallels the internal conflicts within *The Tale of Kieu*. What we have in mind are the internal conflicts in which oppressive systems collide with characters' yearnings for autonomy. These yearnings, not natural to mature human persons, were unexpressed (or under-expressed) in 18th century Vietnam. Hence, colonial and postcolonial reinterpretations underscore *The Tale of Kieu*'s enduring resonance, including feelings of uneasiness and unfulfilled longing. It continues to invite debate over cultural ownership, authenticity, and the shifting boundaries between oppressor and oppressed.

Historical and Ethical Contexts

For a wider historical/ethical context, let us look at Liam Kelley's (2016) recent work. Kelley's exploration of premodern Vietnamese elite perspectives namely adds valuable insight into the Confucian framework that permeates *The Tale of Kieu* (Kelley, 2016). Kelley echoes other scholars in the field who claim that Vietnamese scholars traditionally viewed their kingdom as morally and geomantically reliant on the empire to the north, which we now refer to as China. This situation was not self-chosen or simply imposed – it emerged, more or less organically, as the Vietnamese culture developed in the region stricken by geopolitical maneuvers of stronger empires nearby. Over time, however, local intellectuals began to construct a more autonomous Vietnamese geo-body, one less dependent on external authority. This subtle shift in national self-conception is rather significant. It strongly resonates with Nguyen Du's critique of feudal ideals, as *The Tale of Kieu* questions both rigid Confucian hierarchies and the fate they impose on individuals. The poem's vivid portrayal of oppression and resilience echoes this broader awakening: a land once outwardly subservient to Northern influence nonetheless contains within it the seeds of ethical and cultural self-determination. Now, we might be doing an injustice to the original intent of Nguyen Du if we tried to read into his works the concerns of later centuries of development, to be sure. Nevertheless, we may see the seeds of this theme in his construal of the world of his characters.

In a similar vein, Le Trung Thanh highlights the power of irony as both a literary device and a survival strategy in modern Vietnamese texts, including *The Tale of Kieu*

(Le, 2024). Le argues that irony has long been deployed by Vietnamese writers to critique social norms while simultaneously forging a distinct "Vietnamese-ness." Again, we may carefully assert, Nguyen Du's portrayal of tragic predicaments in *The Tale of Kieu*, tempered by subtle irony and dark humor, exemplifies this strategy. The story of Kieu and other major characters exhibits the kind of traits and tensions that we find in Le's (2024) analysis. Nguyen Du masterfully weaved moral paradoxes and sharp reversals into the narrative. He made the text literary attractive by doing this but that was not his only aim. First of all, Du's narrative subverts traditional feudal dictates; secondly, it also prefigures the ironic method that later Vietnamese authors would wield as they tackled the complexities of nation-building, belonging, cultural identity, and personal agency (among other things).

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

Next, we move to consider cultural and linguistic aspects. Nguyen Thi Tuyet Hanh's is a recent Vietnamese scholar who applies cultural linguistics to *The Tale of Kieu* (Nguyen, 2024). This is a helpful development which sheds further light on how language and cultural context shape the perception of female characters, particularly that of Thuy Kieu (Nguyen, 2024). The author presented her findings at the 25th Warwick International Conference in Applied Linguistics at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City in 2024. Among other things, she examined morphological, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of the text. Moreover, she included an analysis of the normative conceptual frameworks like cultural schemas and metaphors in Du's works. The resulting analysis brought interesting results. For one thing, it underscored how Thuy Kieu embodied both the ideal of feminine beauty and the tragedy of female destiny in feudal Vietnam. But Nguyen Thi Tuyet Hanh went further and in her work stepped outside of the original cultural context. She ventured into the present as she conducted a study involving one hundred students who selected and compared passages to highlight the most telling representations of Thuy Kieu's plight. The students represented both sexes (male and female). It showed, among other things, how these linguistic choices reflect broader Vietnamese cultural attitudes toward women even in the present. Cultural linguistics can be used in different way but this use was carefully chosen to demonstrate the complexity of Kieu's characterization, both historically and with a bearing for the present. Moreover, Nguyen's cultural linguistics approach added yet another affirmation of Nguyen Du's subtle condemnation of an unjust, patriarchal social order.

Crucially and quite naturally, these findings underscore modern implications. First of all, we observe that the interplay of language, culture, and societal norms were essential back in Du's time and that it still resonates in contemporary discussions of women's rights and equality. This remains a relevant issue for the Vietnamese today. Nguyen's (2024) research is instrumental in more than one way but primarily in demonstrating the fateful ambiguity of beauty: the dual role of "woman as beauty" and "woman as victim of fate." The research highlights how *The Tale of Kieu* both mirrors and critiques societal structures that confine women. Significantly, Nguyen (2024) concludes by calling for empathy, admiration, and respect toward Thuy Kieu, and by extension, toward real Vietnamese women who are experiencing lingering patriarchal constraints. We mention this study especially because it successfully connects literary analysis to an ongoing institutional commitment in Vietnam to improve women's status and promote a more equitable and fulfilling life for all. And, as we clearly implied above, Nguyen Du's original condemnation serves as a ready and potent resource, not only for Nguyen Thi Tuyet Hanh but many other contemporary Vietnamese intellectuals.

6. Conclusion

Nguyen Du does not offer a specific definition of beauty and ugliness, yet for him these two elements run together as a single thread—an ideology about the human condition. He did not follow any particular aesthetic trend, but in the end, he could not place himself entirely outside the aesthetic ideology of the feudal era in which he lived.

He could not help being limited by the thought-system of his time, inevitably imposing certain aesthetic requirements on his central female figure. Born into a noble family imbued with Confucian teachings, he was unable to discard the aesthetic standards deeply embedded in his heritage and lineage. Yet, he was imbued with sensitive soul and his life was a life spent among the people. Overtime, he grew keenly aware of reality's worth, and became mature enough to reject any beauty divorced from real human dreams and tangible happiness. We may consider this his most excellent legacy: beauty not as an abstract category or concept, but as a lived, embodied experience entangled in human life, dreams, aspirations and relationships.

Moreover, our study has shown how Nguyen Du's treatment of beauty and ugliness aligns with broader historical, colonial, and cultural considerations. We consider this part an essential component of our research. Naturally, we draw from other scholars, such as Kelley (2016) and Le (2024). Kelley's research (2016) highlights the shifting concept of national identity in premodern Vietnam, and helpfully echoes Nguyen Du's portrayal of a feudal order in flux. Scott's postcolonial viewpoint (2019) adds to the complex puzzle by offering a solid study of how *The Tale of Kieu* and Vietnamese art engaged colonial-era Paris. Scott has been able to demonstrate how such engagement reflects both foreign appropriation and local agency. This view has the potential to inspire people across cultures. Moreover, Le's work (2024) on ironic critique underscores the enduring capacity of Nguyen Du's poetry to challenge power structures. Nguyen's cultural-linguistic approach (2024), on the other hand, uncovers how Thuy Kieu's dual role as beautiful yet tragic resonates with changing student perceptions in modern Vietnam (as Nguyen's 2024 survey has shown). These are both valuable and relevant approaches.

It is thus important to remember that in Nguyen Du's worldview, beauty and ugliness do not stand completely apart; rather, they share a dialectical relationship. When he speaks of beauty, he simultaneously condemns what is base and cruel; when he calls attention to the ugly, it compels us to cherish the value of beauty all the more. The beautiful and the ugly may appear to us to be two seemingly opposite forces. Yet, as we have demonstrated in this study, they complement and intertwine. They remain united within Nguyen Du's single line of thought and they find their unity in our own experience of life. Nevertheless, their continual clash, then and now, sparks the tragedies and ironies that characterize his works. His aesthetic and ethical intertwining portrayed in his characters represents a potent force for deep deliberation. From *The Tale of Kieu* to its later reinterpretations across historical and cultural contexts, we see how Nguyen Du's aesthetic and ethical vision remains richly layered and ceaselessly relevant. Why? Precisely because it continues to reflect not only the era he inhabited but also the enduring human struggle to reconcile beauty with the injustices of life.

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by Hung Vuong University (Viet Nam) under the project grant No.21/2024/KHCN (HV21.2024).

Bibliographic references

Benoit, C. E. (1981). The evolution of the Wang Cuiqiao tale: From historical event in China to literary masterpiece in Viet Nam. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University.

Dang, T. L. (1979). The Tale of Kieu and the Nom story genre. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.

Dao, D. A. (1986). Dictionary of Kieu Stories. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
Do, H. (2001). Scientific aesthetics of aesthetic relationships. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
Do, H. (2002). Ethics - aesthetics and cultural and artistic life. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
Do, H., Nguyen, V. H., & Nguyen, N. L. (2004). General aesthetics textbook. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
Do, H., & Vu, T. D. (Eds.). (2011). General textbook on basic trends in the history of aesthetics. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
Do, V. K. (1997). General Aesthetics. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
Do, V. K. (Ed.). (2010). Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics Textbook. Hanoi: Vietnam Education Publishing House.
Do, V. K. (Ed.). (2011). Basic Aesthetics Textbook. Hanoi: Vietnam Education Publishing House.
Ha, L. (2015). The Science Conference Titled 'Great Poet Nguyen Du and Masterpiece The Tale of Kieu'. Social Sciences Information Review, 9(3), 55-56.
Hoai, P. (Ed.). (2008). The Tale of Kieu and comments. Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House.
Hong, D. (Ed.). (2007). The Tale of Kieu. Hanoi: University of Education Publishing House.
Kelley, L. C. (2016). From a reliant land to a kingdom in Asia: Premodern geographic knowledge and the emergence of the geo-body in late imperial Vietnam. Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 5(2), 460-496. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ach.2016.0016
Le, D. K. (1970). The Tale of Kieu and the realism of Nguyen Du. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
Le, T. T. (2024). Irony as a critique of nation-building and as a strategy for survival in modern Việt literature. UC San Diego. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/06b2t96j
Nguyen, D. (1983). The Tale of Kieu (H. S. Thông, Trans.). New Haven and London, CT: Yale University Press.
Nguyen, L. (2001). Vietnamese literature curriculum in the second half of the 18th century - early 19th century. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
Nguyen, Q. H. (2019). Between bodily constraints and bodily resistance: Women's disabled physicality in The Way Station by Hồng Ánh. Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia, 3(1), 235-248. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sen.2019.0018
Nguyen, T. T. (1985). Feudal society with the development of Vietnamese people in history. Journal of Philosophy, 4, 111-125.
Nguyen, T. T. H. (2024). Application of cultural linguistics to two female characteristics in "The Tale of Kieu" by Nguyễn Du. 25th Warwick International Conference in Applied Linguistics. Ho Chi Minh City: Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City.
Nguyen, X. L. (Ed.). (2008). Research on the Tale of Kieu in the early 21st century. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
Phan, N. (1985). Understanding Nguyen Du's style in The Tale of Kieu. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
Scott, P. (2019). Colonial or cosmopolitan? Vietnamese art in Paris in the 1930s–40s. Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia, 3(2), 187-240.
Tan, J. Y. (2016). A Daughter's Filiality, A Courtesan's Moral Propriety and a Wife's Conjugal Love: Rethinking Confucian Ethics for women in the Tale of Kieu (Truyện Kiều). In J. T. Ozolins (Ed.), Religion and Culture in Dialogue (pp. 129-151). Sophia

Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 15. Switzerland: Springer.
Tran, N. T. (2003). Talented - a cultural issue of the Nguyen Du era. Literature Magazine, 5(7), 14-29.

Words: 9604
Characters: 60 029 (33 standard pages)

Dr. Thuy Thi Le, PhD.
Hung Vuong University
Nong Trang ward – Viet Tri city – Phu Tho province
Vietnam
thuylellct.hvu@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0006-9356-3620