



## FOREWORD

# VIETNAMESE LITERATURE: DIVERSE READINGS BY THE INSIDE



**Guest Editors** Chi P. Pham\* · Uma Jayaraman\*\*

This special issue explores Vietnamese Literature in relation to non-Vietnamese literary works, some of which are part of the canon in English. Over the years, Vietnamese literature has been interpreted using western perspectives. It has largely been taught in international academia. Research has been mostly published by international scholars, with a handful of Vietnamese scholars writing from the diaspora. In other words, the difference and diversity in political, cultural, and educational backgrounds of these academics shaped popular perspectives and interpretations of Vietnamese literature.

Understandably, these widespread views seldom approximate cultural and political realities of the Vietnamese experience. At

---

\* **Chi P. Pham** is a Literary Studies researcher at the Institute of Literature, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. This project is part of her long-standing intellectual curiosity about the invisibility and marginality of people and associated knowledge in Vietnam and elsewhere that are not normal but politically, socially, and historically associated. [chiphamvvh@gmail.com](mailto:chiphamvvh@gmail.com)

\*\* **Uma Jayaraman** is a diaspora scholar and has published both critical and creative works in her discipline. She currently lives in Singapore where she teaches academic writing at the National University of Singapore. Uma Jayaraman is the writing adviser for the special issue, and gave extensive input to the contributors in this respect, remaining cognizant of the unique flavor that the Vietnamese figures of speech bring to the English usage seen across the articles. [umajay90@gmail.com](mailto:umajay90@gmail.com)

present, scholarship from Vietnam is almost invisible as far as international perception is concerned. Further, both the inability and unwillingness of Vietnamese academics to publish outside Vietnam due to cultural, political, and educational reasons also cause a significant absence of perspectives from insiders. Thus, the current perception of Vietnamese works is limited to social allegories, depictions of the mainstream politics, or illustrations of the exotic.

This special issue includes interpretations of Vietnamese literary works by academics from Vietnam, with the aim of presenting the insider's view of Vietnamese writings. The contributors of this issue are researchers or professors in governmental academic institutions in Vietnam. Though these scholars largely grew up and studied in Vietnam, their experiences as postgraduate trainees and visiting research fellows in other countries exposed them to other languages and cultures such as those of English, French, Russian and the Chinese. The exposure helped them bring both unique and authentic perspectives to works of their homeland. The model that each contributor adopts to study Vietnamese literatures in the global context is based on the "juxtaposition model," (Friedman 2011: 753-762) where they compare a Vietnamese text to a well-known text from a foreign culture and language. This is in order to identify potential cultural, historical, and philosophical dialogues and establish a more diverse perspective of Vietnamese literature that goes beyond the political, historical, and geographical division.

The guest editors advised the contributors on their work and were keen to retain the register of articles in this context. Some of the expressions and idioms unique to Vietnamese speech and writing have been retained to reiterate the purpose of the issue, which is to present an insider's view of local literature.

## **Reference**

Friedman, Susan Stanford. 2011. "Why Not Compare?," *PMLA*, 126(3): 753-762