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## **Analyze Two Main Characteristics of Vietnamese Women through Cultural Language**

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### **Abstract**

Nguyen Du's *The Tale of Kieu*, based on the characteristics of women in famous Vietnamese literature, is Vietnam's most famous story, with three main characters: Kim Trong, Thuy Kieu, and Thuy Van. Thuy Kieu is beautifully educated, but her family needs money, so she sells herself and works as a singer, servant, and concubine. She is a talented woman, but her fate is very bad. Author Nguyen Du portrays Thuy Kieu as the fate of Vietnamese women at the hands of the Vietnamese feudal system under the Le Dynasty. This article uses cultural linguistics, which encompasses language in morph syntax, semantics, pragmatics, culture, and conceptualization in cultural schemata, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors. Academic research is considered a key point in the reform perspective of Vietnamese women in the 20th century. In this article, we will discuss two characteristics of women. A woman who is the embodiment of beauty and a woman who is the embodiment of tragic destiny 100 students read the

text aloud and chose to highlight research objectives based on an analysis of practices related to Vietnamese women's characteristics. Through qualitative research, data was collected from student reflection notes for a five-hour semester course. This topic is about selecting, reading, and choosing sentences in text, comparing them to other sentences, and providing the best sentences to explain the data. Research shows that two characteristics of women, women as embodiment and women as the embodiment of tragic destiny, are evident in the text of *Kew's Story*. Therefore, it is recommended to show sympathy, respect, and admiration to Nguyen Du, who condemns the unjust and brutal feudal society that deprives and tramples on women's right to life. Therefore, Vietnamese women today are believed to be equal to men and promote institutional engagement to enhance women's desire to live a beautiful and happy life.

**Keywords:** Cultural Linguistics, Characteristics of Female, Vietnamese Literature, "*The Tale of Kieu*", Nguyen Du

### **1. Introduction**

Wardhaugh & Fuller (1990: 211) and Yule (2010) <sup>[24]</sup> show "the exact nature of the relationship between language and culture has fascinated, and continues to fascinate, people from a wide variety of backgrounds". As a result, in this study, the term "culture" refers to functioning in a specific society, gaining knowledge, and understanding how being a member of a society is "high culture", requiring only an appreciation of music, literature, and fine arts, as well as a conceptual system of categorizing the world and our experience with it.

Sociolinguistics has highlighted three levels of linguistic and gender relations: sex, biological or "natural" sex, which derives from biological distinctions between male and female. Yule (2010: 84) <sup>[24]</sup> describes the agreement between "Kate" and "her" in the sentence "Kate loves her mother" as a natural gender agreement because "she" or "her" is a word for female entities. Likewise, "he" or "his" denotes male entities where natural gender is unknown or irrelevant, and "it" is used in English as a reference word.

Nguyen Du was born in 1766 into a very learned family. His father was the chancellor of the Le dynasty, and his brother was a high-ranking official of the Le dynasty. To explain his situation, Nguyen Du was inspired by the story of Kim Van Kieu by Chinese author Thanh Tam Tai Than (pseudonym). The story had three main characters: Kim Trong, Thuy Van, and Thuy Kieu. Vietnamese culture is heavily influenced by Chinese culture. However, if you think that Nguyen Du only translated the original Chinese text, you are wrong. Nguyen Du just wanted to borrow this story to convey his concept, situation and memory of a lost dynasty. Also, the story is written in [Vietnamese] verses 6-8. This was a very popular form of poetry, understood by everyone.

This is the story of a young woman named Vuong Thuy Kieu. Kieu was very beautiful and learned as well. Born into a well-educated family, she falls in love with a young man named Kim Trong. Then disaster struck her family. Her father and her brother were detained. To solve her family's problems, she had no choice but to sell herself. Since then, one catastrophe after another has befallen them. She had to follow her own destiny: She is deceived and twice bound to a pleasure house as a singer, concubine and servant. This is a sad story of a talented woman with an unfortunate fate. In this story, Nguyen Du wanted to tell us through the fate of Kieu to expand the fate of people in an evil feudal society full of cruelty and injustice. He wanted to scream out loud. A cry breaks our hearts. Hence the story title DOAN TRUONG TAN THANH, or better known as The Tale of Kieu.

I recognize the similarities between Kieu and the author Nguyen Du.

- Kieu sold herself to pay off his family's debts, and Nguyen Du saw entering the new government as a person selling himself.
- Kieu endured suffering and Nguyen Du suffered greatly from his loyalty to his former king.
- Deep down in her heart, Kieu remains loyal to her Kim Trong and Nguyen Du was truly loyal to the Le dynasty.
- Eventually, Kieu was reunited with Kim Trong and Nguyen Du, who wanted the king back.

## 2. Literature Review

The whole problem of gender disparity in academic achievement at different ages has been confirmed by many studies. Pomerantz, Saxon & Kenney (2001) <sup>[17]</sup> consider some of the proposed explanations in the US context. Differences were thus attributed to different developmental stages, potential biases in how materials were presented; differences in learning preferences between males and females, and the value or lack of co-educational opportunities. While it is possible to change teaching materials to be more gender neutral, there are differences in gender development that cannot be changed, and the choice of gender segregation is often dictated by religious or cultural reasons. The most interesting area that received little attention relates to learner characteristics.

The strong influence of learner characteristics on academic performance has been demonstrated by Hindal & Reid (2013) <sup>[6]</sup> due to the following: (i) genetic development; (ii) experience; (iii) choice. For example, Hindal & Reid (2013) <sup>[6]</sup> mentions differences in learning preferences between males and females, implying an element of choice. However, genetic factors are predetermined and cannot be changed. The real area of interest is experience, and this includes formal educational experiences or any informal learning experiences that are part of life and help us grow. A fundamental question is how these learner characteristics differ for males and females and how these differences are related to test performance. If the development of such learner traits is open to experience in a formal learning environment, this opens the door to ways that may facilitate the development of such traits and concomitant academic performance. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Because it offers curriculum planners, textbook authors, teachers, and examiners a potential tool for improving learning. From a gender perspective, it may

provide numerous opportunities to ensure equal access to high academic achievement.

### 2.1 Females in the Context and Experience

The Sapir-Whorfian Hypothesis puts forward the idea that different people think differently because their language provides them with ways of expressing the world around them, such as *cultural concepts*, *conceptual systems* on context and experience (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 1990; Yule (1998:13 <sup>[23]</sup>). Similarly, Kramersch (1998) <sup>[7]</sup> argues, language is determined by the difference between cultural concepts, and semantic association is not a translatable equivalent to common conceptual systems based on context, experience.

For instance, vocabulary phrases like *Miss. or Mrs.* in English, including information about a woman's social status as a single girl or wife, determining whether she is married. A woman using *Ms.* in address terms suggests that her social identity is not based on her marital status. However, the male version of the term *Mr.* does not include any information about marital status. Or another example is that this process is culturally evidenced by gender and classifies men and women into groups of those in *blue (male) and pink (female)* as the simplest group. Another example is paid work in teaching, nursing, social work, nursing and other occupations considered "*feminine*" and therefore undervalued and underpaid (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, 2003; Yule, 2010: 274) <sup>[5, 24]</sup>.

### 2.2 Females in the Literature

Kramersch (1998: 6-7) <sup>[7]</sup> argues that in the literature, etiquette, expressions of politeness, and what does and doesn't in society shape people's behavior through upbringing, education behavior, attendance, and professional training. Using written language is shaped and socialized through culture, and the use of genres is shaped by culture. Sharing attitudes, beliefs, and values are reflected in the same linguistic codes of discursive communities representing the past, present, and predicting the future. Therefore, language is not a non-cultural norm, distinct from the way humans think and behave, but plays an important role in culture. Thus, the text, *literature is the authentic document* for examining sociological issues such as speech acts, politeness, discourse analysis, regional and social differences, and thus language, culture and gender relationships (Lazar, 1993; Yule, 2010) <sup>[9, 24]</sup>. Especially, Kramersch (1998: 3) <sup>[7]</sup> says that words reflect attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and that language represents cultural realities. The way people use language creates understandable meaning through tone of voice, conversational style, gestures, and facial expressions. Thus, through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, textual literature helps to understand the differences between languages as they provide access to local dialects, stress, or specific vocabulary.

First of all, Kramersch (1998) <sup>[7]</sup> shows female characters have been figured in an assortment of ways, some of which are orientation generalizations and orientation imbalances. She further says that female characters are *depicted as moms* who are restricted to the home; however, dealing with their family and their spouses. The females place is viewed as the kitchen, where they perform other kitchen errands. She likewise stores that many journalists have encoded female characters as specialists of moral debasement and tainting in their public. Kramersch (1998) <sup>[7]</sup> contends that female

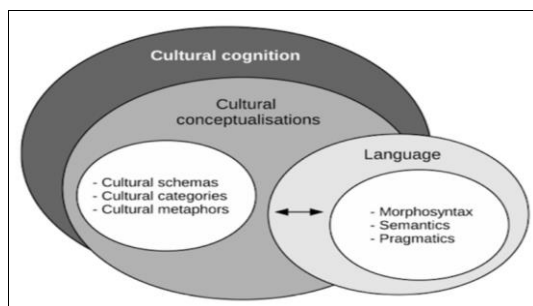
characters are frequently viewed as *goddesses* who have attracted men to their demise. In uncommon occurrences, they are depicted as *self-destructive*. Second, Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:5) <sup>[14]</sup> recognizes the portrayal of female characters in abstract work as the figure of the sweet mother, the all-accepting creature of *fecundity and self-sacrifice* and Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:15) <sup>[14]</sup> argues that often *conflated* with mother Africa, with *eternal and abstract beauty and inspiration*. Next, Adebayo (1996:1-10) <sup>[2]</sup> shows that women's own attempts to *cope with situations* they find themselves in are regarded as a problem by men, and a betrayal of traditions which are often confused with women's roles. Such ideas, which have been identified by Adebayo, limit women's ability and silence them, making them invisible in circles that have been deemed exclusive for men. Next, Achebe (1958:44; 45-122) <sup>[1]</sup> portrays a macho literary work in which female characters are treated as *second-class citizens*. In this work, female characters are treated as minor characters, and their positive actions are overlooked. Next, Kramsch (1998) <sup>[7]</sup> suggests that female protagonists are *silenced in the face of patriarchal persecution*. In this literature, none of the female characters seeks to fight against patriarchal domination, which oppresses females in a variety of ways. Lastly, humanity, according to De Beauvoir (1949:89), is male, and man defines the feminine as one who is *related* to him, not as she is in herself. She is not commonly thought of as a self-sufficient being. She says that the male is the subject; that he is the absolute, and that the female is the other.

### 2.3 Cultural Linguistics

Cultural linguistics studies the interfaces between language, culture, and conceptualization.

This framework draws on multiple disciplines, such as cognitive science and cognitive linguistics, for analytical tools such as cultural schemata, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors.

Consistent with the views of cultural cognition described, these analytical tools are reviewed as existing at the collective or macro level and at the individual or micro-level of cultural cognition (Frank and Gontier, 2011) <sup>[4]</sup>. Cultural conceptualizations and their linguistic anchoring are inherent in cultural cognition. This evaluation of models of cultural cognition, cultural conceptualization and language is summarized schematically in Figure 1 (Palmer, 1999 <sup>[15]</sup>; Sharifian, 2011).



**Fig 1:** Model of cultural cognition, cultural conceptualization and language

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Aim of the Study

This article examines the literacy representation of the famous Vietnamese literary work in the sixteenth to the nineteenth century:

“Truyen Kieu” (The tale of Kieu) by Nguyen Du, which shows gender disparities and stereotypes. According to Ogunyemi (1988:60) <sup>[13]</sup>, female issues have become a very significant component of literature, and the shallow depiction of female characters, without seeking to provide psychological depth or care for female interests, should drive female writers to improve the situation. The preceding paragraphs emphasize the important authors and their contributions to creative works. They emphasize the significant *ladies' standing in literature* as being equal to that of their male counterparts.

### 3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

The qualitative approach is used as an instrument for an in-depth comprehension of this field of research to meet the study's goals and objectives. According to Myers (2009:241-242) <sup>[11]</sup>, the qualitative research method is the best method for researching social and cultural phenomena because it concerns with understanding people and the social and cultural contexts in which they live, as well as why people behave the way they do: their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and fears. According to Taylor & Bogdan (1984:141) <sup>[19]</sup>, employing the qualitative technique is the ideal way to evaluate and analyze primary and secondary materials, since it is the only choice that can support the study in producing quality and correct results. The representation of female characters in chosen drama texts created by male writers prompts investigators to interpret specific characteristics of gender inequality in the selected drama texts. It also helps to deconstruct themes like gender inequality, gender stereotypes, suicidal female characters, and female bias in male works.

### 3.3 Qualitative Research Design

To gather relevant information for this study, qualitative methodologies were used. According to Myers (2009) <sup>[11]</sup>, qualitative research is a general research strategy in social research in which research begins with an insider's viewpoint on social action. This method was chosen for a variety of reasons, including it emphasizes the respondent's perspective; considers people's interpretations; allows for flexibility; is manageable, and does not emphasize issues such as reliability or fairness in its research; and it focuses on processes rather than outcomes. However, one of its shortcomings is that it is subjective; one cannot generalize using this approach.

### 3.4 Research Procedure

The famous Vietnamese literary work in the sixteenth to the nineteenth century: “Truyen Kieu” (The tale of Kieu) by Nguyen Du, a 5-hour lecturer in the semester's course, mixes various works. The major survey of *one hundred college students* employs the point of view of female characters. This study focuses on *reading, chosen drama texts, and other comparable studies* that have been conducted on this subject. The study is built on literary theory. Gender, feminism, and psychoanalysis are among the topics covered. The selected works are examined within the context of existing literary theory. As the most important sources of crucial information, important literature from academic and public libraries has been studied. In evaluating the texts of these male writers, literary theories were used as the primary instrumental equipment. The study is looking at the *positive or negative consequences of patriarchal conceptions of female characters on the positive or negative effects of tradition*. Authors' rejection of female writers' fundamental rights is also being debated. The key part of this study is to conduct a thorough examination of how frequently such character discrepancy leads to gender stereotypes and, as a result, social, economic, and cultural discrimination.

### 3.5 Research Method

Research approach is used in this study because it is an attempt to analyze female characters using relevant theories. The social backdrop and personal behavior of female characters in selected texts are examined using literary theory. The effects of female characters' socialization processes on male works are investigated.

Smith (1981:169) [18] defines narratives as verbal acts comprising someone informing someone else that something happened, although Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber (1998:97) [8] accepts that the term narrative can apply to any spoken or written presentation. In literature, this strategy is used as a mechanism to reveal the anguish felt by women. The research will examine gender stereotypes, gender roles, gender identity, male superiority, inequality in polygamous marriages, sex roles, any sexual division of labor, and forced/arranged marriages. Literary investigates how the names of female characters are related to the subservient and passive roles allocated to them by male-written literary texts.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

All students in my study were *evaluated using a reflective notebook*. After the students concluded, the rankings in each area from the students' reflective journals were to be added together to represent that stage. The validity and reliability, in particular, have been validated prior to this investigation.

## 4. Results, Findings and Discussion

Students are free to choose a famous Vietnamese literary work in the sixteenth to the nineteenth century: "Truyen Kieu" (The tale of Kieu) by Nguyen Du. The two sub-sections collected from the presentations were on women's issues raised by students. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 134) [10] define, the continuous comparison method requires coding the inductive category with the simultaneous comparison of all meaningful units used in the classification and coding of women issues. Categories are drawn from presentations through inductive coding and membership tests (student responses) to understand whether they are described (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Yildirim and Şimşek, 2008) [10, 22].

The topic stands out with two characteristics:

- Women-the embodiment of the beauty
- Women-the embodiment of tragic fate

### 4.1 Women-the Embodiment of the Beauty

#### Physical Beauty

Two sisters, Thuy Kieu and Thuy Van in the work "Thuy Kieu" by the writer Nguyen Du are the stereotypical images for beauty.

*"Vân xem trang trọng khác vời.  
Khuôn trăng đầy đặn, nét ngài nở nang,  
Hoa cười, ngọc thốt đoan trang,  
Mây thua nước tóc tuyết nhường màu da,  
Kiêu càng sắc sảo mặn mà,  
So bề tài sắc lại là phần hơn,  
Làn thu thủy, nét xuân sơn,  
Hoa ghen thua thắm, liễu hờn kém xanh"*  
(Nguyen Du, 1820) [12]

*"Van looked gentle with a decent elegance,  
Her face a full moon, her eyebrows two long arcs.  
Her smile a flower and her voice sounds of jade,  
Clouds yielded her hair and snow ceded her skin.  
Kieu was even more attractive and charming,  
Surpassing her sister in talent and beauty.  
Eyes pure like fall lake, brows bold like spring hill,  
Flowers grudged her fresh and willows craved her green".*  
(Phan Huy MPH, 2013) [16]

#### Talented Beauty

*"Thông minh vốn sẵn tư trời,  
30. Pha nghề thi họa, đủ mùi ca ngâm,  
Cung thương lầu bậc ngũ âm,  
Nghề riêng ăn đứt Hồ cầm một trương"*  
(Nguyen Du, 1820) [12]

*"Endowed with an inherent intelligence,  
She excelled in poetry, chanting, and painting.  
Well versed in pitches and fine tones of music,*

*She was peerless with her art of lute playing".*  
(Phan Huy MPH, 2013) [16]

#### Inner Beauty

*"600. Trong khi ngộ biến tòng quyền biết sao?  
Duyên hội ngộ, đức cù lao,  
Bên tình bên hiếu, bên nào nặng hơn?  
Để lời thệ hải minh sơn  
Làm con trước phải đền ơn sinh thành  
605. Quyết tình nàng mới hạ tình:  
Dễ cho dễ thiếp bán mình chuộc cha"*  
(Nguyen Du, 1820) [12]

*"In emergency, we act accordingly.  
The love for young Kim, the labor of father,  
Love and duty, which one is the heavier?  
I'll put aside the solemn vows of my love,  
A child must first return the parents' favors."  
Thus, resolutely she took the decision:  
"Let me sell myself for dad's ransom money!"*  
(Phan Huy MPH, 2013) [16]

The Vietnamese woman with the character Thuy Kieu in "The Tale of Kieu" is beautiful (from physical beauty, talented beauty, and inner beauty), but unfortunately, they live in a corrupt feudal society. The more beautiful they are, the more they suffer, and the more they have to suffer from oppression and injustice. As a harsh rule of that time, "the beautiful usually have a bad fortune".

### 4.2 Women-the Embodiment of Tragic Fate

The society that Thuy Kieu lives in is the society: mandarins for money but defy justice; wrong for money; torture father and son Vuong, Tu Ba, Ma Giam Sinh for money but human sellers. So Khanh, Khuyen Ung because of money plunges into crime. The whole society runs after money. In that society, feudal mandarins caused the clue to all evil and brutality. Their ugliness is intrinsic. From the humblest silk merchant in society who was for money:

*"595. Mặt trông đau đớn rụng rời,  
Oan này còn một kêu trời, nhưng xa,  
Một ngày lạ thói sai nha,  
Làm cho khốc hại chẳng qua vì tiền"*  
(Nguyen Du, 1820) [12]

*"Watching the scene, Kieu felt a heart-tearing pain,  
This wrong, she could only to Heaven complain.  
Since it was a habit of those cop-villains,  
To wreak dire havoc for the sake of money"*  
(Phan Huy MPH, 2013) [16]

Then, a series of other officials appeared with the right, for money, to be willing to trample on human dignity. The first mandarin aiding the wrongdoers "robbed the day", cruelly interrogated Vuong Ong, Vuong Quan. It was the mandarin who pushed Thuy Kieu, a pure and honest girl, into the brothel.

*"611. Tình bài lót đó luôn đây,  
Có ba trăm lạng việc này mới xuôi,  
Hãy về tạm phó giam ngoài,  
Dặn nàng quy liệu trong đôi ba ngày"*  
(Nguyen Du, 1820) [12]

*“Counting all the likely bribes and offerings,  
Three hundred liangs would satisfy everything.  
He told her, while her kin kept in transient jail,  
To manage for the sum in two or three days.”*  
(Phan Huy MPH, 2013)<sup>[16]</sup>

The second official “black iron face” represents the legal history of the case of Thuc Ong with Thuy Kieu

*“1415. Suy trong tình trạng nguyên đơn,  
Bề nào thì cũng chưa yên bề nào,  
Phép công chiếu án luận vào,  
Có hai đường ấy muốn sao mặc mình,  
Một là cứ phép gia hình,  
Một là lại cứ lâu xanh phó vè”*  
(Nguyen Du, 1820)<sup>[12]</sup>

*“Based on the position of the complainant,  
Nothing’s been satisfactorily settled.  
In pursuance to law we reach the judgment,  
That one of two ways is up to her to choose:  
Either she stays and faces law’s punishment,  
Or she be returned to her green pavilion.”*  
(Phan Huy MPH, 2013)<sup>[16]</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In short, today, when I re-read and analyze Vietnamese medieval literature, I see that the image of women like Kieu stands out as two great features: women embodying beauty and women embodying tragic fate. This is one of the greatest successes of author Nguyen Du, the author of Vietnamese literature in the 16th to 19th centuries. It contributed to the humanitarian movement, contributed to the voice demanding human liberation, especially women's liberation. When building the image of Kieu, I feel sympathy, respect and praise for Nguyen Du when condemning and denouncing the unfair and brutal feudal society that deprives people of the right to life and tramples on people. The author affirms and praises Kieu's beauty and noble qualities: aspirations for love and happiness. The author affirms the desire of women to achieve a happy and prosperous life.

## 6. Acknowledgement

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