

4. (15 points) Tale of Kieu

Vietnamese is now written with a writing system consisting of Roman letters, just like English, but with lots of special markers or “diacritics” to show many distinctions between the sounds of many different vowels and six different tones. That writing system, called **Quốc Ngữ**, was developed by European missionaries, which is why Vietnamese is written with the same letters as European languages.

However, writing first came to Vietnam from China. At first, Vietnamese scholars actually wrote in Chinese, and because of the status of Chinese – as a language of government, literature, and culture – many Chinese words were borrowed into Vietnamese. When Vietnamese scholars started writing their own language, it was easy to see how to write these borrowed words: just use the same character that was used when writing Chinese. The following table gives a number of such characters used to write borrowings from Chinese into Vietnamese, their pronunciations in Vietnamese, and their approximate translation in English:

天 thiên sky; heaven; god	木 mộc tree; lumber; wood; wooden
上 thuông top; highest; go up	見 kiên see, observe, perceive
工 gông labor; work; laborer	告 cáo tell; announce; inform; accuse
南 nam south	弄 lòng do; play or fiddle with; alley
病 bệnh illness; sickness	豆 đâu peas; beans
沖 trong pour; infuse; wash out	沐 múc bathe; cleanse; wash
年 nên year; person’s age	心 tâm heart; mind; intelligence; soul
糸 mịch silk	皮 bì, bê’ skin; hide; fur
人 nhân man; human; mankind	

. In order to write native Vietnamese words, however, these writers had to invent new characters. They did this by using a strategy that was already used, within the Chinese writing system, for creating new characters out of existing characters. In the Chinese writing system, new characters can be made by combining two or more simpler characters. These components provide hints regarding either the meaning of a character or its pronunciation. Components may be stacked on top of one another, place beside one another, or even placed so one surrounds another. While most of the characters given above are simple characters (with only one component) a few are complex characters (with more than one component). The resulting writing system is called **Chữ Nôm**. It was through the spread of this Chữ Nôm that Vietnamese literature finally came into its own. In fact, the Vietnamese national epic, the Tale of Kieu, was composed in Chữ Nôm.

Here is a translation of the first six lines of the Tale of Kieu in English (i-vi). Beneath it, but out of order, are the same lines in Vietnamese, both in Chữ Nôm (a-f) and in Quốc Ngữ.(1-6).

4.1. (11 points) Show on the answer sheet which of the Vietnamese lines corresponds to each line of English; one correspondence is already entered to get you started.

4.2. (4 points) Explain your answer.

English translations

A hundred years—in this life span on earth	(i)
talent and destiny are apt to feud.	(ii)
You must go through a play of ebb and flow	(iii)
and watch such things that make you sick at heart.	(iv)
Is it so strange that losses balance gains?	(v)
Blue Heaven's habit is to strike a rose from spite.	(vi)

Quốc Ngữ

1. Trải qua một cuộc bể dâu,
2. Trăm năm, trong cõi người ta,
3. Trời xanh quen thói má hồng đánh ghen.
4. Những điều trông thấy mà đau đớn lòng;
5. Chử tài, chử mệnh, khéo là ghét nhau.
6. Lạ gì bỉ sắc, tư phong,

Chữ Nôm

- a. 淳才淳命窖羅怙饒
- b. 邏之彼嗇私豐
- c. 歪青慣退 膻紅打慳
- d. 仍調韻覽罵忉疸恣
- e. 駛戈沒局液攪
- f. 募辭醜埃馱嗟

4.1. English	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi	11
Chữ Nôm (a-f)							
Quốc Ngữ (1-6)					6		

4.2	4
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Solutions

4.1. English	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi	11
Chữ Nôm (a-f)	f	a	e	d	b	c	
Quốc Ngữ (1-6)	2	5	1	4	(6)	3	

4.2	4
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