Modern Vietnamese Literature
LITR 245 / 3 Credit Hours
Offered Fall and Spring Semesters
Instructor: Nam Nguyen

Meeting Time & Location
Monday, 10 AM to 12:30 AM
Location: TBA

Course Description

The course offers a unique chance to explore the richness of Vietnam’s long literary journey to students being deeply engaged in socio-cultural aspects of the country during an entire study-abroad semester. Since one must know the past to understand the present, although titled as “Modern Vietnamese Literature”, the course does not limit itself within the “modern” framework, but also provides its students with a brief introduction to Vietnamese history, culture, and pre-modern Vietnamese literature to establish an essential foundation for a better understanding of the targeted subject. On the other hand as the “modern” can continuously expand towards the “contemporary” time, this course also takes a closer look into recent literary works to cover a wide range of stages in the growth of Vietnamese literature. In brief this is an introductory course on Vietnamese literature with an emphasis on its modern period.

Presented in cultural and historical contexts of Vietnamese society, modern Vietnamese literature also reflects socio-political changes of the country. In addition to primary and secondary sources employed as reading assignments, weekly screenings of representative Vietnamese cinematic works, some of which being actually film adaptations of modern Vietnamese novels, present vivid images of Vietnam through ages and help to enrich students’ literary perceptions. Moreover, as indicated in the course’s title, literary works taught in this course are translations, and students should be aware not only of the translational and transcultural nature of their readings, but also of the roles and the choices of the translators situated within their specific contexts.

No prerequisites for this course.

Requirements
Attendance: Regular attendance is crucial; bad attendance will result in a lower grade.

Reading: Students are expected to cover all the assigned readings before attending classes.

Tests:

- Students write one paper of 10 pages.
- The paper is a close reading of one (or two) literary works introduced during the course, or recommended by the instructor. The close reading can be an analysis based on a specific literary theoretical approach, or from a(n) (inter)disciplinary perspective. More importantly, students should incorporate their Vietnam experience into their reading/analysis of the selected works.
- Students are encouraged to browse over the course’s contents and figure out what they are interested the most. Starting from Session 4, students should discuss their potential paper topic(s) with the instructor.

Responses to Reading:

- Students must submit their responses on the assigned readings before class, due on Saturdays by 9:00 PM. The response should be about one page. The first response is due on Saturday of the second week.
- Responses may focus on ONE of the followings:
  - Most interesting issues students find from the selection
  - Discussions of what students have learned from the reading about Vietnamese literature, culture, or history
  - Puzzling problem(s) from the reading, or question(s) to discuss with the class
  - Preliminary interpretation of a selected literary work from the reading
- Students must print out their responses, bring them to class discussion, and keep them in a folder as references to be collected at the end of the course.

Grading

Attendance----------------------15%
Class Participation-------------15%
Responses to Reading---------20%
Final Paper---------------------50%

Class Schedule

Session 1: Course Introduction- Vietnam and the Globalized World
Why is Vietnam your destination this Fall? What have you known about Vietnam? What do you expect to learn from this course? Students are required to record their first impressions of the country.

Session 2: Vietnamese History at a Glance
Readings:
• Trương Bửu Lâm, *A Story of Vietnam*, Honolulu, 2012, Chapters 1, 2, 3. (e-book)

Session 3: Understanding Traditional Vietnamese Literature
Readings
• “Growth of Narrative Verse” in *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature*, pp. 95-98.

Session 4: What is “Modern Vietnamese Literature in Translation”?
Readings
• Công Huyễn Tôn Nữ Nha Trang, “The Emergence of Modern Vietnamese Literature”
  o [http://vietnamlit.org/nhatrang/modlit.html](http://vietnamlit.org/nhatrang/modlit.html), also in course packet

Session 5: Early Vietnamese Novels
Readings
• “The Twentieth Century” in *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature*, pp. 107-130

Session 6: Satires and Social Criticism: Vũ Trọng Phụng
Readings

Session 7: “Socialist Realism” Literature
Readings
• Trương Chinh, “The Stand of Marxist Culture” and “Some Concrete Problems of Our Country’s Present Literature and Art” (Chapters II and II from *Marxism and Vietnamese Culture*) (packet)
• Selected scenes from the movie Cánh đồng hoang (The Abandoned Field, dir. Hồng Sơn, 1979)

Session 8: “Renovation” Literature (1): Bảo Ninh

Readings
• Selected scenes from Heaven and Earth (dir. Oliver Stone, 1993)

Session 8: “Renovation” Literature (1): Nguyễn Huy Thiệp

Readings
• Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, “The General Retires” (short story, packet)

Session 10: “Renovation” Literature (3): Lê Lựu

Readings

Sessions 11 and 12: Students’ presentation of their final papers.