

## Interculturality in Receiving Fiction by W. Shakespeare, E. Hemingway, Y. Kawabata and V.S. Naipaul in Vietnam

By

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### Abstract

Identifying interculturalities has become key issue in contemporary societies and literatures. This article is concerned with four major facets of interculturalities in well-known literary works in Vietnam and worldwide. Firstly, interculturality is defined as the nature of literature, and it is more about finding the “meaning-creativity” in the recipient capacity. Secondly, since literature is a combination of signs sharing some common denominator of culture, interculturality is to bridge human values across the border of time and space. Thirdly, some intercultural symbols include Hamlet, as the type of “tragic hero” sharing the same personality as other earlier “heroes” in Western literature. Hamlet’s timeless tragedy becomes universal, bearing resemblance with the struggle for justice and an ideal life in famous Vietnamese works, or the heroic impulse of Santiago in Hemingway’s novel. Similarly, the ruled people’s tragedies in the quest for self-identity are well-reflected in the works of Conrad, and Naipaul. Last, Vietnamese belief in mother goddesses has created a representational “cultural symbol” throughout the history of Vietnamese literature, such as Kieu in The Tale of Kieu and myriad devoting women in Kawabata’s works. Literary works, therefore, always include multi-intercultural signs, evolving and bonding the cultural values of all times. Interculturality is also the foundation for readers in one culture to understand the values of other cultures.

**Keywords:** Interculturality; Shakespeare; Hemingway; Naipaul; Kawabata

### 1. Introduction

Interculturality is one of the important attributes of literature. Due to the long process of formation and unceasing cultural interaction, each literary symbol/sign has its own interculturalities. Thanks to this characteristic, literature can preserve ancient cultural values, which are the foundation for humanity’s aesthetic communication. As an intercultural sign, literature has contributed to preserving national identity in the context of globalization.

In literature, identifying interculturality is not an easy task. Researchers always place it in the relationships of comparative literature (Bernheimer, 1995), or in comparison with multiculturalism such as in the *Multicultural Voices* (Sickels, 2010) or in the cultural conflicts: “Although the word ‘multiculturalism’ is relatively new, the ideas generally associated with it are not. Multiculturalism emerged out of a tension between cultural diversity and social cohesion that has been a central theme in U.S. political culture since its inception” (Bryson, 2005, pg.27).

International researchers have also used the terms “interculturalism” and “multiculturalism” and pointed out the differences between them. “Interculturalism and multiculturalism represent two very different approaches” (Barrett, 2013, pg.15). Bhikhu Parekh in *Dialogue between Cultures* interpreted multiculturalism “is basically a theory about human freedom and well-being and rests on a distinct conception of the good life” (Máiz and Requejo, 2005, pg.16). Multiculturalism is known as a foundation of interculturalism, which expresses many cultures in a community. From that, people values “intercultural dialogue” in order to “exploit the value of cultural diversity and to reap its ontological, epistemological, moral and other benefits” (Máiz and Requejo, 2005, pg.16).

We can define interculturality as a kind of intentional relationship and interaction between different cultures and subjects which promotes cultural dialogue and the awareness of preserving the cultural identity of each individual and community. UNESCO defines “Intercultural describes what occurs when members of two or more different cultural groups (of whatever size, at whatever level) interact or influence one another in some fashion, whether in person or through various mediated forms” (UNESCO, 2013, pg.11).

In this article we use the terms “interculturality” and “multiculturality” instead of “interculturalism” and “multiculturalism” in order to emphasize their “nature”. We consider interculturality in the literature on the spatial and temporal boundaries, chronologically and synchronically, regarding the similarities and differences of the subject.

## **2. Methods**

The article focuses on the concept of interculturality in Vietnamese literature and the works of W. Shakespeare, E. Hemingway, V.S. Naipaul, Y. Kawabata and so on with reference to the theory of reception. The research method is based on an analysis of notable characters/works of those writers to confirm the hypothesis that reading and understanding are always rooted in interculturalities.

Different works are analyzed in light of interculturalities. In order to collect data for the article, we have focused on the works concerning the notion of “interculturality” followed by a comparative analysis of characters/works of Vietnamese writers and W. Shakespeare, E. Hemingway, Y. Kawabata, V.S. Naipaul etc. with the hope to bring about a new perspective of receiving literature in consideration of interculturality.

## **3. Discussion and Interpretation**

### **3.1. Interculturality and multiculturality**

The necessity of recognizing multiculturality from interculturality should gain significance although these two concepts can be used interchangeably. Anna Mindess in *What Is Culture?* when quoted the definition of culture [“Culture... is that complex whole which

includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1958, pg.1)] of the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor concluded an integration of culture. She proposed, “Tylor’s phrase, ‘a complex whole,’ points up that culture is not a haphazard, arbitrary collection of behaviors but rather consists of parts which together make up an integrated system” (Mindess, 1999, pg.18).

All literary works are both intercultural and multicultural themselves. “Multiculturality” in the works will become “interculturality” when it is “received” by readers. The cultural elements of the book remain in the “static” state, but upon interaction with readers, they would become “dynamic” and “interactive” to generate meanings. In their own inquiry, readers need to accept their cultural and intercultural knowledge and experience, to grasp the profound and nuanced understanding of the author’s meanings. Thus, these two concepts are different only when viewed from the perspective of the writers or readers. During their creative journey, the writer expresses multiculturalism in the work, and upon readers’ reception, multiculturalism is transformed into interculturality. The difference is also reflected in multiculturalism analysis, where the researcher uses his/her knowledge to distinguish a particular cultural expression from a certain class of culture, certain period, or country. Meanwhile, in intercultural research, one considers the cultural factors that lead to a cultural origin or similar culture in order to study the work in greater depth. In short, multiculturalism can be seen as a greater focus on “quantity”, and how many “symbol-meaning” or hierarchy of cultural values are hidden in the work. Interculturality tends to find the “meaning-creativity” of that cultural symbol in the recipient’s capacity.

This should be noted as relative separation, since the writer is an intercultural subject himself, they would create within his experience and imagination. The ambiguity between the two concepts is that if one only counts the number of cultural symbols and the conclusions about multiculturalism, it is easy. However, if the internal symbol of culture is to be considered, how can the “multi” and “inter” be identified because they have merged into one?

The origin of multiculturalism can be traced back to globalization. Global “thinking” is related first to the fields of science and technology, then to politics and literature, when mankind realizes the principles of radical reasoning can result in disasters. In our long history, humanity is always at risk of being obliterated by natural powers, but gradually, thanks to scientific advances, some of the fear subside. Paradoxically, the alternative and unexpected fear is the social power, the man-made power, the foundation of which is laid on race, military strength, and national economic fanaticism. In sum, the overemphasis of a power institution is, at the same time, the downfall of what does not belong to that power frame, with a peerless view of a so-called “superior” and “inferior”. What belongs to “us” is superior, and what belongs to “the others” is pathetic. This notion of self-esteem has separated people, creating gaps for bitter conflicts, leading to the risk of obliterating the human race. As a result, a variety of progressive humans, fully aware of the disaster, have proposed an equality, multifaceted and correlated view.

From an equitable and, multifaceted perspective, no culture is given priority, no longer is there cultural superiority of Western European countries, and people must respect other cultures’ values, which leads to multiculturalism. From an interdependent viewpoint, there will be an intercultural concept where the culture of any community or nation will always exist in a certain relation with the cultural categories of other ethnic groups. This view is to mitigate certain global conflicts, and to raise awareness that the risk of any individual would involve all mankind. More importantly it shortens the distance of the so-called human “knowledge” accumulated in people’s minds with “happiness” as a consequence of these intellectual

achievements. So, interculturality or multiculturalism both provide a point of view towards the same problem but from different angles. Therefore, multiculturalism is useful in decentralization, and interculturality is more helpful in understanding the in-depth meaning and emphasizing the fragile interrelationship.

In terms of the intercultural sign definition, no longer does it simply mean a traffic light, red or yellow, but the implication of this concept extends rather than the “meaning” of the word “locked” in the dictionary. Accordingly, sign is any form of meaning that is used by humans in natural and social communication to interact with experience and knowledge. The sign may be considered either an explicit symbol or a metaphor for something, which can only be recognized primarily through social interaction.

### ***3.2. Identity of literature is the interculturalities***

Literature is, in general, a combination of cultural signs. Literary research is essentially a sign study, a particular type of signs, the signs of cultural aesthetic, multi-tier. Literature is an extensive form of communication in words. Words contain a multitude of signs, through which, they generate another symbolic layer, the image. Each image contains a separate set of “meanings” that supports the main theme. The highest level of arts is to convey meaning. All words and imagery, however creative they are. But if they do not convey a certain idea, then the literary work would fail to attract readers. But to “read” between the lines, a reader must know the “code” of the signs and “decoding”. The principles of decoding always go from the easiest to the hardest. A more experienced and knowledgeable reader would find more “codes” from the cultural meaning layers in the text. The less knowledgeable would gain less accessibility. However, being skilled or knowledgeable, readers may often face “mis-decoding”. “Mis-decoding” can be considered as a wrong interpretation of the writer’s intended meaning and purpose. The causes of this misinterpretation may vary, especially when writers and readers are not from the same religion, gender, people, language, and/or knowledge background. These “misinterpretations”, on the other hand, reflects cultural intersignal layers of literature, which therefore can meet the aesthetic needs of readers of different cultures.

This also indicates that literature always consists of some common denominator of culture. For example, crimes like robbery, corruption, murder and so on are all considered cruel. With such humanist consideration in mind, writers from many cultures have made these criteria for aesthetic values and dignity. It seems that a writer must shoulder responsibilities in fulfilling his mission of moral propagation and reservation. On the one hand, he must grasp the fundamental ethical values of the nation and of literature, and on the other hand, he must find a new way of telling his story, and expressing his emotions. Without these two aspects, all the expressions would become meaningless.

Interculturality is the bridge that connects human values through space and time providing that the work is of artistic and ideological values. It should be noted that literary masterpieces may present challenges to readers to distinguish between art and ideology, both of which integrate and transform into one another. Typically, when researching literary works, readers start with the “word” in the inquiry of hidden thoughts. The artistic form is always content imported. Without that content, the form does not exist. Writers’ tasks would always start with seeking ideas and then finding the appropriate form for their ideas. Only on the foundation of a tone, a form, or a structure that new work can be written. But readers usually start with the form: what is the writer’s writing style here or is it attractive enough? The reversal process shows that readers and writers are not always in the same direction. Writers’ intentions are absorbed “through” the verbal layer and through the hierarchy of signs. So, readers may find unexpected layers of meaning in their own experience thanks to the certain

“independence” of the word signs. So, the “self” or “added” to the text from the reader has reached a greater extent. For example, when Vice President Joe Biden of the United States of America quoted *The Tale of Kieu*: “Heaven grants us this hour: now from our gate / all mists have cleared; on high, clouds roll away. To see the sun through parting fog and clouds” (Nguyen, 1983, pg.161) to welcome General Secretary of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong (on 7/7/2015), never did Nguyen Du at the time of his writing, doubt that the private love story of a girl, bears any relation to the key role of promoting the normalization of US-Vietnam relations.

### ***3.3. Characters in intercultural reception***

Thanks to its feature of intercultural signs, literature can “cross the border” to all the world’s peace-loving people. At such a level, the literary sign of a text may arouse “curiosity” among foreign readers, resulting in a further study of cultural values. From then on, the cultures of a people can interact, creating a global cultural environment where codes of conduct, and civilized elements are emphasized, elevated, popularized and complied with by both men and women, from east to west. On this exchange journey, symbolic signs and literary values play a significant role.

In the story of Hamlet (Shakespeare, 2003), for instance, over four hundred years ago, Hamlet is a secular Renaissance man fighting against evils in his world. With such a humanistic ideal, youthful energy and imperial blood, Hamlet was somehow expected to easily win in that struggle. Though, it is not that simple. The evils are represented among his mother, the court, his friends, and his lover Ophelia. Will he have the courage to kill all the “bad”? Obviously, no. So, Hamlet is lonely and full of contradictions and depression, with frequent thoughts of death and decay, illustrated through the seven soliloquies of the play. These soliloquies record the distress and pain which tear the heart of the young man, creating a chain of tragedies. Hamlet’s tragedy is not for the family or the throne, but for the tragic situation that face people in their life. Hamlet proposes a lesson of positive attitudes, though in the work, this character is always placed in a passive position. All of Hamlet’s actions were “acted upon”. Even in the last scene when Hamlet kills Claudius, the action is only spontaneous since Hamlet had no intention of killing him at that fight. Claudius is also an “evil individual” among the countless ones that Hamlet encounters. So, killing only one evil person cannot erase evil from this world. What Hamlet wants to do is a revolution at a greater scale. He wanted to wipe out all the evil in the world, but it was too much of a mission for him. However, it is praise-worthy for a person’s ideal and bravery. Thus, Hamlet became an ideal model for humanity to follow. His influence is not only in Britain, Europe, and the Renaissance period, but rather in time and space, he becomes a symbol that humanity respects and strives for.

From *Reading the Intercultural: Cultures of Reading*, Antony Tatlow concluded that “Every engagement with a Shakespearean text is necessarily intercultural. The past really is another culture, its remoteness disguised by language that can occasionally appear as familiar as we seem to ourselves, whom we understand so imperfectly” (Tatlow, 2001, pg.5). Hamlet becomes an intercultural symbol, because his thoughts, actions and even his tragic tragedy are models for humanity’s consideration and pursuit (or trying to avoid). This type of character can be classified into many models of our society, such as the type of “tragic hero” who has become an archetype, revealing the personality of many “heroes” earlier in the history of Western literature, for example, Heracles, Achilles, or Ulysses of Greek mythology, well-known for their extraordinary strength and virtue. Hamlet inherits these traits, together with “intelligence”. In their confrontation, the Greek heroes’ muscular strength is appreciated, whereas emotion and intellect, if mentioned, are of secondary importance. In Hamlet’s time, intellectual brilliance is highly appreciated. Shakespeare emphasized this brilliance, but at the

same time pointed out that the more intellectual a person is, the more likely he is to end up in tragedy. This means that the world has become increasingly civilized, more and more people are faced with bad things, the evil is masked in many forms. In this instance, the Vietnamese may also recognize and live in the same situations as Hamlet.

Hamlet's tragedy has become, to some extent, the tragedy of all intellectuals in general, thus, the archetype "Hamlet" remains a model topic, throughout the history of human beings. This topic is well-reflected by a Vietnamese playwright, Luu Quang Vu his prominent play, *Truong Ba Soul in the Butcher's Body* (Luu, 2013). This play is typically a literary parody, based on a Vietnamese folk tale. In traditional tales, when people long for longevity, "life" to them is extremely noble. But then, as society's responsibilities including duty, freedom, and individuality (like Hamlet) have growing significance, "life" is not the only thing that matters, but "lifestyle" is. The meaning of life changes from being "living" to "the quality of living". This question was raised four hundred years ago when Hamlet once said, "To be, or not to be" (Shakespeare, 2003, pg.158). Similarly, Truong Ba is a gracious intellectual, pursuing high-class hobbies such as playing chess, planting trees, being faithful and caring for his wife and children, and so on. After his death, Truong Ba was given the resurrection gift to incarnate into an established butcher's body. Truong Ba needs that body to "live in", but he has to deal with the nuisance when the body often gets him lured into the butcher's wife's bed. The problem here is: when sleeping with the butcher's wife, does Truong Ba violate ethical standards? Obviously, if the soul of Truong Ba ignored that fact, there would be no matter, but his constant concern between "Truong Ba" and "Butcher", two different individuals, tortures him immensely. Meanwhile, his wife, his son, and his grandchildren constantly reprimanded, and regarded him as weird and distant. So, Truong Ba must stand up against the fierce struggle to stay within the boundaries of the mundane world or live the life he aspires. The struggle goes on, and every time, Truong Ba falls into the tragedy of everyday temptations, with which if he compromises, all noble god-like values in his world are gone. So, he finally makes his end-of-life decision to return the body to the butcher as he no longer desires a life of a walk-in soul in another's body.

Truong Ba's tragedy bears some resemblance to Hamlet's to some extent. People aspire to an ideal life, but cannot achieve it however hard they try. The intercultural nature of characters has created interesting intersections. It turns out, the "utopia" or "desirable life" only exists in our imagination and the opinion that pursuing the utopia will lead to tragedies is a weak argument. In the end, the highest significance of human existence is the awareness that one can fail but once dignity and morals really matter, people must follow their way, even if at the cost of their life.

This idea reminds the author of Ernest Hemingway, who is famous for a quote from his hero, Santiago, "But man is not made for defeat [...]. A man can be destroyed but not defeated" (Hemingway, 1965, pg.95). It is still the spirit of the hero who dares to face the challenge, but it seems that Hemingway is aiming to create a modern antihero hero, who is strong, full of willpower and energy featured in a wide range of miserable challenges. Old Man Santiago is the true symbol of this hero type. The old man could not fish for 84 days, but did not stop hoping for the day he would catch a big fish. With that irresistible belief, the old man caught the big fish, but the fish pulled him off to the sea. The greater the aspiration is, the more likely people become enslaved by their own aspirations.

Furthermore, interculturality can be witnessed from another common tragedy portrayed in literature worldwide, the tragedy of those who lost their freedom, in the historical and cultural context of colonial countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Under colonial

rule, they suffered from exploitation and oppression in their own fatherland. A typical case is the miserable living condition of the African people under horrific torture in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. From the stories of two protagonists, Charlie Marlow, and Mr. Kurtz (Conrad, 2007), colonial atrocities such as slave trading, fraud, robberies, arson, and murder in the Belgian Congo are pathetically exposed and criticized. In their mission of bringing civilization into a backward continent, what all the white men in the novel do is immoral and evil exploitation of the land and dehumanization of the native Africans. The oppressed have become victims of enslaving and killing, while their lands are ravaged. The symbolic scene of Grove of Death, a shady spot in the jungle of the diseased and starving people of Congo, has deeply shaken Marlow. They are abused by large corporations and then left to die without being noticed or cared for, and this brutal act has connoted the darkness of imperial exploitation. While the sun never sets on the empires, on other continents, people were evidently living the "medieval night" with whips and, heavy taxes on which the ruling government thrived. The context reminds us of a struggling farmer in absolute poverty, selling her dogs and then her beloved daughter to a wealthy family in one of Vietnamese most popular novels, *When the Light is out* (Ngo, 1983), by the Confucian scholar Ngo Tat To. The colonized society featured in the novel is like an unbreakable cage, full of injustice, leaving behind unbearable painful tragedies, mostly for women and children, a self-evident truth for the argument of Dobie in her book, "Colonizers not only physically conquer territories but also practice cultural colonization by replacing the practices and beliefs of the native culture with their own values, governance, law, and belief" (Dobie, 2002, pg.188). Through interculturality, people all over the world can understand and sympathize with each other. Vietnamese readers could receive post-colonial works by foreign writers in the light of interculturality as they also come from a colonized nation. As every literary sign can evoke cultural values, readers could easily grasp the concept of sufferings, injustice, and struggle.

Upon achieving independence, the postcolonial would expect a brighter future as rightful masters of their own country. But that is not actually the truth since this newly-gained independence led them to another tragedy, the tragedy of post-colonial society. That is the story of Salim, Ferdinand, and Mahesh in an African country, filled with hard-to-heal wounds in *A Bend in the River* by V.S. Naipaul, a poetic prose in the post-colonial literature. In a small town on the banks of a river, the young Salim buys a grocery store from an acquaintance hoping to make a profit. After the invaders have left, when the new president comes to power, Salim witnesses the chaos and turmoil in the presidential policies and the frustration of the townspeople. The ancestral land suddenly became alienated, and Salim and other immigrants living along the coast fell into a crisis of faith. They find themselves as pagans, the exiles without a homeland, pondering over their origins "Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries." But now "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (Naipaul, 1989, pg.9). Salim, as well as Nazruddin, another Indian who belong to the young generation like Ferdinand and Metty, share a sense of loss, loneliness, disappointment and disillusion, in the land that seems to have attached their flesh and blood. In the turmoil of civil war and poverty, Salim faced corrupt officials, followed by rioters attacking and looting. Becoming disorientated and insecure on that frenzy bend of the river, where part of his life is attached, Salim begins to panic because of abandonment and disappointment, realizing that there is no place called home for him, no shelter in the world. At the end of the novel, Salim had to leave the shop, the house, and all his possessions in the darkness of conflict to find a haven for himself. The moment of the day that Salim fled was dusk, then darkness, with the flickering light of the steamer down the river, and the novel ends in the midst of white moths in the white light. This shares the same desolate atmosphere with the waterway into the immense darkness at the end of *In the Heart of Darkness*

by Conrad. It is also the literary and figurative darkness that signals a gloomy future that covers the end of the pitch-black night when Dau (Ngo, 1983), the protagonist in *When the Light* is out trying to escape the ill-intentioned mandarin. It can be inferred from the above-mentioned works, that intercultural signs have always existed and becomes a global phenomenon in the literature. They play a key role in literary reception as Naipaul mentioned “The social comedies I write can be fully appreciated only by someone who knows the region I write about. Without that knowledge it is easy for my books to be dismissed as farces and my characters as eccentrics” (Naipaul, 1958).

Up to now, we can give a question about how someone receives information and feelings from books of foreign writers. It definitely depends on one’s experience. But what is an experience? It is knowledge gained and accumulated in the whole life or all lives, creating a foundation to reach out the meanings of works. That is the way a work can be received. And it is the power of interculturality to help readers in their reception and enrichment.

If, from Salim’s viewpoint, there is an unsettled and turbulent Africa with an uncertain future of new independent nations; from the eyes of Ferdinand, a young, educated man in the new system, readers can grasp the idea of people’s self-esteem and frustration. However hard he tries he is subjected to the cage built by the “Big Man” who was under the control of those Europeans. In the end, it seems everyone wants to run away from the new independence, when the new government, newly-gained independence does bring much pain and insecurity. Salim’s escape, with the help of Ferdinand, marks the shaking faith, the indictment of the authoritarian power of the new regime. Thus, whether in the colonial past or in the independent present, no matter which continent they live on, the cyclic tragedies of the oppressed group never cease. If loneliness and loss is the common feeling of those characters, Salim can be considered a representative model. His tragedy in the quest for self-identity, on a large scale, would represent the common story of the third-world residents, like the story of the innocent Trinidad in the middle of London in Samuel Dickson Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners* or Mustafa Sa’eed’s dark fate in the Sudanese novel, *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salib.

Interculturality is an indispensable attribute of any language of art. The character itself communicates many cultural features, not to mention the “borrowed” characters. A wide variety of characters bear constant interactions with each other based on certain principles. This means that when creating the “new character” in the communication of literature, a certain “culture value” arises and adds to the interculturality, an attribute of verbal symbols.

### ***3.4. “Mother” as a symbol of interculturality***

Last but not least, interculturality does not only mean the single culture of a people, but the interactive multi-faceted one, absorbing the new, the positive for enrichment. Interculturality is most easily seen in religious beliefs and practices. Indigenous spirituality of the Vietnamese people, according to many researchers, has long been inspired by Mother Goddess Worship, or Dao Mau. Mothers have played an important role in spiritual life and been a source of strength in Vietnamese local folklore. Mother goddesses such as Au Co or Lieu Hanh Mau provide the greatest illustration. Vietnamese belief in mother goddesses has created a “cultural symbol” throughout the history of Vietnamese literature through the image of a woman who is hard-working, industrious, caring for her husband and child and the community. This leads to great admiration among the greatest writers. There is no coincidence that Nguyen Du chose Kieu as the main character for his work. Meanwhile, as a man, Nguyen Du can simply choose a male character instead. From the image of Kieu, we see two outstanding virtues associated with the great mother image of the nation: tolerance and optimism, which are also considered two typical characteristics of a saint. Most human beings



cannot bear a burden or calamity for long, and the majority of our race was, born without much optimism. Meanwhile, optimism can be said to mark the beginning of life, regarding the foundation for human existence in the awareness that every form of life will eventually die. “Death” is the end of everything so what is the point of “living”? For this reason, optimism is vital. Mother Au Co, according to Vietnamese folk tales, brought up fifty children to the mountain without her husband. Thus, optimism, in this case, is for survival. This virtue is imprinted in the folklore ca dao, and in national traditions.

In Vietnam, talking about the narrative poem *The Tale of Kieu*, may take forever. Perhaps this is the longest story in the Vietnamese literature despite the limited verses. The endless continuum of the reception is derived from the multiculturalism of signs. The tale originated from a Chinese version, Thanh Tam Tai Nhan’s story. In the view of interculturality, if Nguyen Du had not adopted it, then Tai Nhan’s tale would not travel out of the Chinese border. With his talent of a great poet, Nguyen Du structuralized it from the Chinese to the Vietnamese context, borrowing the original idea of the Han and the Confucius prejudice against women but attaching Vietnamese ideology and sincere empathy to the character. At this point, Nguyen Du’s *Kieu* has become a symbol of interculturality. Before *Kieu*, Nguyen Du used to weep over the fateful death of Xiao Qing, a Chinese talented woman, wondering about talent and destiny, expressing his concerns and empathy. However, one question is why Nguyen Du seeks sympathy for female figures, especially those from China. It is possible that Nguyen Du has adopted a multicultural perspective, a broad understanding of cross-cultural, and cross-national suffering and unhappiness. Human sufferings are universal and on the other hand, when crying for foreigners’ destiny, Nguyen Du expressed Vietnamese caring nature and pity for the surrounding communities.

But that is not the only similarity. Both Xiao Qing and *Kieu* share the common feature of interculturality and universalism. Their story is not only their own but also of Nguyen Du and others that appreciate the beauty and empathize. The affinities associated with other talented artists of all time. Nguyen Du acknowledged that sorrow from the bottom of his heart.

It is often claimed by critics that Nguyen Du speaks for ill-fated women like *Kieu*, but the author actually speaks for himself. *Kieu* is just an excuse for him to share his inner drama and the great thoughts that he pursued in life. Interculturality is acquired through reference to external subjects. Nguyen Du cried for the beauty that was buried and, destroyed by cruelty, greed and power. In this context, the author becomes an external subject. From the pain, to self-pain: Mankind who could cry for To Nhu? To Nhu is Nguyen Du’s penname. He obviously does not expect the future generation to cry after him as a poet or an unsatisfied man, but rather the next generation to know and feel his pain with him, to suffer his sufferings. In short, the following generation should adopt kindheartedness rather than “remember him”. The miracle of interculturality spreads over time from the image of *Kieu* in the way that in every age, in any situation, readers can interact or sympathize with *The Tale of Kieu* in many different aspects. A poet’s mission includes praising beauty, but most are crying for beauty, because the beauty itself is maltreated but always attempts to rise up, in the journey from darkness to enlightenment. That is the source of inspiration for all artists, the anchor of the most sacred cultural values of the world.

In linguistic signs, interculturality has no end, but constantly transforms in its flow. Culture itself, to some extent, always embraces interculturality, since culture, with the exception of some original defaults, originate from “cultural stereotypes.” In that sense, it is always inherited and interactive in time and space, especially in literature, in which all forms of culture preserved are capable of creating endless senses. Culture is a particular form of signs;

one of its most prominent features is its ability to generate and transform itself permanently. When stored in literature, this feature is more likely to multiply the power of “sense creation”. Referring to the concept of “motherhood”, it is easily seen that “mother” is always the origins of countless cultural, cognitive and emotional behaviors. The concept of “Mother - Motherland” therefore gains popularity. Mother and the motherland become invariable.

In the global culture, “mother” may usually be explored at four levels: mother of an individual, mother of the people, mother of humanity and mother of the universe, of all honors. Today, the highest level of the mother symbol has been transferred to the role of “father.” God and God of all nations, in a broad sense, are commonly viewed as “men”. On top of Olympus reigns Zeus rather than Hera. Buddha is man and Jesus is man. Evidence presents that the role of mother cannot reach the universe. However, from the beginning, in the human consciousness, mother would have another place. Mother is the birth of all beings. God, Buddha, or Zeus and so on are born by mothers. Hung, the first King of the Vietnamese is also a son of Mother Au Co. Thus, the position of the mother in primitive times was higher than that of the men worshipped today. However, as society evolves, the state emerges as a substitute for the matriarchal society, and the role of the “mother” is increasingly weakened and crushed by the “father.” However, the power of motherhood, motherly affection, and influence of mothers have always been ingrained in the unconsciousness, becoming the irreplaceable “number one” in any culture when directed to the most sacred values: birthing and parenting.

In Kawabata’s short stories, the readers will encounter many female characters. They are beautiful women. From the Izu dancer (The Izu Dancer) to the woman living with her disabled husband in The Moon on The Water, we can see them not only representing beauty but also representing morality. The beautiful soul women live with gratitude. Their lives are a fulcrum for the men. Without the little Izu dancer, “I” would be alone all the way. Likewise, without a hardworking woman, the unhappy husband will be even more lonely and painful. Kawabata’s female character world is the place to save men. Without them, men wouldn’t know where to go. They are like mothers who protect and support men. In Thousand Cranes, The Sound of the Mountain or The House of the Sleeping Beauties etc., the women also play an important role in social and family relationships. Old men turn to the young girls who were drugged in the inn to regain their youth. Rather, the beauties let them run away from loneliness and age, and find meaning in life again.

In literature, the mother has undoubtedly become a symbol of interculturality. We can meet various images of mothers in famous writers’ works. From Homer, Shakespeare, and Naipaul’s mothers to Kawabata’s ones and so on we can see many resemblances in their characteristics. Maybe it is a good or bad the mothers always artistic signs which help people in all over the world to understand and sympathize mutually. For each period of time, the symbol of mothers adopts specific characteristics such as fighting mothers, working mothers, national mothers and so on. Mother is the source of inspiration for all artists in praise for beauty, nobility, love, and dignity. From the perspective of power, the mother is the creator of the universe, the joy and endless happiness in the “motherland”, however, gradually in the male-dominant society, women become the symbol of pain. Literature is a part of the culture, but it is unique in the way that it brings together the cultural qualities of that period and of all times.

## **4. Conclusion**

All things considered, literature is always an intercultural sign. It ranges from history to politics, painting, music, morals to economics. Literally, it is a “treasure box” to safeguard

all human issues. Interculturality is the foundation for people to perceive and understand human values in literary works of different cultures. In reality, literature has always inspired readers of all space and time in human intercultural existence.

Interculturality and multiculturalism have been prevalent in the great works of famous writers. To some certain extent, human beings can create mutual understanding via those concepts. That means Vietnamese people can read and understand Hamlet, The Old Man and the Sea, A Bend in the River, In the Heart of Darkness, and so on, and the reception can be more meaningful. Interchangeably, “motherhood” is a universal sign which creates a cultural bridge between nations and people when reading The Tale of Kieu or Kawabata’s works. The literary reception and interpretation, thus, have shared human values worldwide.

Interculturality is the basic characteristic of literature and the foundation for all literary communication. It is expressed through intersignality (Hang and Bac, 2019, pg.239). Thanks to interculturality, the writer is able to create his own unique code in the work and in return, the reader will decode to perceive the content and ideas of the work under their own comprehension. Interculturality helps not only people communicate with each other but also each member of the community to cover aesthetic communication. On the other hand, it improves intrapersonal intelligence, the way a person can understand himself. Thanks to that, people can think better and live better. Therefore, literary reception will be impossible without interculturality knowledge.

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