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## Drama Translation in Vietnam: A Review of Shakespeare's Plays

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**Dr. Van Nhan Luong**  
Da Nang Architecture University  
Vietnam

### ABSTRACT

All kinds of art performance in human society are the ways to send messages to the viewers, listeners or audiences. Art performance is also a means of translation to transfer the organisers', the authors', and the products' ideas. This study, in the light of translatability of performance, highlights the features of theatre translation including its theory and discusses the history and development of drama translation on stage performance in Vietnam with a consideration of Shakespeare's plays as a case study. The study has found that while drama translation has been studied widely in the world this area of research has been superficially concerned in Vietnam. Shakespeare's plays have been translated for performance for a long time in neighbourhood countries, such as Japan, China and Thailand, Vietnam has not got itself full translations, but some adaptations.

**Keywords:** Translation, Adaptation, Drama, Stage, Performance, Shakespeare's Plays

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### 1. Introduction

Translation process in general and dramatic text translation process in particular, copes with different kinds of text with their own specific difficulties and problems that are the challenges for the translator to overcome. Treating a play as a literary text in the normal way of transferring from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) in the dialectical relationship together with its linguistic elements required for the performability, are specially needed in translating this theatrical text. Newmark (1988a: 172) discusses that 'the main purpose of translating a play is normally to have it performed successfully'. The following

discussion in the light of historical analysis introduces the development of *stage performance in Vietnam* through the influences of social situation, especially since the French came in 1858. The second part *drama translation in Vietnam* concentrates on analysing the point of views of Vietnamese translation scholars in translating dramatic texts for stage performance. Finally, the discussion ends with the introduction of how Shakespeare's plays, especially *Romeo and Juliet* have been performed on Vietnamese stages.

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1. Theatre Translation Theory

Theatre had not received significant attention in the field of translation studies

until the 1980s. Traditionally, most research tended to focus on literary aspects using the same criteria, for example, equivalence and faithfulness, to analyze a stage play as other types of literary texts. The key problem that has been argued among literary and translation scholars is whether the translation of a dramatic text is actable, speakable, and performable (eg. Corrigan, 1961; Hamberg, 1966). To translate a drama text requires much effort on the part of the translator, Bassnett and Lefevere (1991: 100) state that if a dramatic text still maintains the notion of gestic text 'the task of the translator becomes superhuman—he or she is expected to translate a text that a priori in the source language is incomplete, containing a concealed gestic text'. Bassnett and Lefevere explain that the performers have the responsibility of decoding the gestic text while the translator can assume this responsibility just by sitting and imaging the dimensions of performance. In fact, translating a dramatic text is such a challenge because, as Wechsler (1998) illustrates, a musician can perform a song composed for a specific musical instrument while a written text in a language is not intended to be performed in a different language.

Bassnett and Lefevere (1998: 107) in their research on theatre translation, suggest that 'what is left for the translator to do is to engage specifically with the signs of the text: to wrestle with the linguistic units, the speech rhythms, the pauses and silences, the shifts of tone or of register, the problems of intonation patterns: in short, the linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the written text that are decodable and reencodable'. One of the most important features in drama translation is the *mise en scène* which, according to Demarcy (1973) and Koustas (1988) is the pivotal element functioning as the base for other theatrical

elements such as tone, voice, music, and scenes to be structured. A dramatic text is not only translated by the translator but also by different participants in the theatrical event. Aaltonen (2000) compares a play text as an apartment which is occupied by different tenants and refurbished for periods of time. This plural reading and translating of a play text is unavoidable in getting some levels of acculturation (Heylen, 1993; Aaltonen, 2000).

The generalizability of much published research on this issue is that translation in performance is the negotiation between two trends: the faithfulness to and the freedom of expression of the source text (ST). Moreover, the translator of theatrical works has a battle to choose between effacing the translated text in order to communicate easily with a local audience, or disclosing the translated text in order to interact and exchange the difficulties in terms of language and cultural differences. A longitudinal study of drama translation written by Harley (cited in Mulford, 1925) reports that the communication between a playwright and the audience could be best transferred only by performance. In this context, Baker (1992) explains the advantages of the performance as the clearest translation introduced to its audience, such as the characters' emotion, the conversations between characters, and the stage's effects, for example, light, background, sound, and space. All of these factors bring 'real translation' to the audience (Pavis, 1989: 25).

Within a linguistically-oriented view in which literary translation is still considered as the main approach to syntactic, pragmatic, and stylistic properties of text, Bogatyrev (1971) (when discussing the role of linguistic system in theatrical translation) draws our attention to theatrical linguistic expression which is structuralised



and constituted of signs in terms of discourse. Bassnett and Lefevere (1991: 123) clarify Bogatyrev's idea as follows, 'in trying to formulate any theory of theatre translation, Bogatyrev's description of linguistic expression must be taken into account, and the linguistic element must be translated bearing in mind its function in theatre discourse as a whole'. On a critical viewpoint, Bassnett and Lefevere (1991: 122), in their article about the fundamental problems in translating theatrical text, use examples and cases as evidence to demonstrate that the translator has to deal with alternative extra-linguistic criteria, such as rhythm, intonation patterns, pitch and loudness. Within the same vein, Bassnett continues arguing for her study of significant clues in translation of literature and dramatic texts that 'a play [...] is the combination of language and gesture brought together in a harmonious frame of timing' (Bassnett-McGuire, 1978: 161). She also reminds the translator of dramatic texts about the sensitiveness to linguistic features at level of prosody by showing that, opposed to normal spoken conversation, 'the dialogue will be characterised by rhythm, intonation patterns, pitch and loudness, all elements that may not be immediately apparent from a straightforward reading of the written text in isolation' (Bassnett-McGuire, 1978: 122). Concerning the linguistic characteristics of dramatic text, Wellwarth (1982: 53) adds that 'the dramatic translator [...] must have a sense of the rhythm of speech patterns'. Besides, he also asserts that 'what the dramatic translator must watch out for particularly is an excess of sibilants in a sentence, or awkward consonantal clusters that may make a line hard to pronounce rapidly and thus may cause difficulties in sound projection'.

Dramatic translation should be studied with the context of culture. Snell-Hornby (2007) states that the problems for stage translation are caused by the radical variations when interpreting texts from one culture to another culture and rely on the 'acting styles' as well as 'stage conventions' of the related country or cultural community. For example, as a country with a long tradition in water and rice civilization, one of the most popular theatres in Vietnam – Water Puppet Theatre always maintains its own conventions and acting styles of using music with drums and flutes to create mood, a hanging curtain to conceal the puppeteers, and using a small pool as the stage for the performance; or another kind of Vietnamese theatre *Tuong* rooted in Chinese Cantonese Opera, always uses Vietnamese traditional musical instruments such as *liu*, *nhi* to set the musical background of the performance (Gaboriault, 2009). In her study on the handling of differences in translated drama texts, Aaltonen (1993a: 20) says that 'the translator makes conscious or unconscious choices, which are not accidental by nature, but imposed on her/him by the system to which the completed translation will belong as an element'. She continues by adding that the drama translator could only survive based on her/his willingness following the systematic conventions and the suitability of translational choices that accompany with the system views. Furthermore, Aaltonen (1993b: 27) identifies that 'in translation, foreign drama is transplanted into a new environment and the receiving theatrical system sets the terms on which this is done. A play script must communicate and be intelligible at some level, even if it should deviate from existing norms and conventions'. Also studying the particular problems in drama translation, Moravkova (1993: 35) comments that the

translated dramatic texts will 'fit' its new cultural context if the translator plays as a mediator.

## 2.2. *Translation or Adaptation*

Numerous studies have attempted to explain the target text/target culture (TT/TC) and drama translation's reception oriented-approach (eg. Déprats, 1990; Brissett, 1990; Bassnett and Lefevere, 1991; Lefevere, 1992; Luong, N. 2015a; Luong, N. 2015b; and Laliberté, 1995). Various terms have been used to refer to this approach, such as transplanting, adaptation, naturalizing, rewriting, version, neutralizing, large-scale amendments, integrating foreign works, transposition, recreation, and reappropriate; or in French language: 'traduction ethnocentrique', 'transposer complètement', 'traduction totale', 'traduction-assimilation', 'déraciner de son contexte', 'l'assimilation', and 'déplacement'. The rise of terminology testifies to the on-going process of specialists and scholars in drama translation. The proliferation of terms leads to many arguments on the different semantic features of those terms which may cause imbalance in understanding. For example, within the word 'adaptation', Bassnett (1985: 93) says that 'the distinction between a 'version' of an SL text and an 'adaptation' of that text seems to me to be a complete red herring. It is time the misleading uses of these terms were set aside'. In Ladouceur's point of view, quantitative is the main difference between adaptation and translation. Ladouceur (1995) focuses on the relationship between three things: drama translation, the receiving literary polysystem and the socio-cultural context, and he argues that the translated texts and adapted texts have the same nature in terms of conveying strategies but differ in their frequencies and degrees. Ladouceur emphasises if the

following features in a drama text, such as culture, time, space, style or action are adapted; if all of those figures could be adapted at the same time and by the same strategies, they will cause the same effect on translation proper.

A number of studies (Espasa, 2000; Bassnett, 1980; Gravier, 1973; Luong, N. 2016a; Luong, N. 2016b;) have found that, despite any aspects adapted in the translation of a theatrical work, translators must keep faithful to the writer's ideas and the ST. However, Rey and Rey-Debove (1991) take a different line of approaching what 'adaptation' means by suggesting that a play text would be up to date and rejuvenated if it receives a really free translation. His definition is considered as a pejorative and negative connotation to normal views on this term. Another theoretical conflict between translation scholars is on maintaining the foreign characteristics of a translated play or adapting those aspects into target culture to assimilate them to TC audience. This is still an on-going debate and question for translators of drama texts. On this matter, House (1997) discusses two types of translation: overt and covert, in which she clarifies that covert translation is read fluently with the natural TL so that the audience cannot recognise it as a translation while overt translation, on the other hand, is close to the ST and easily recognised as a translation. Laliberté (1995) wonders if the translation should follow up the speech of the characters in the performance or include slang language as a case to be investigated. Sharing the same opinion, Koustas (1995: 538) writes "traduireou, mais sans traduire" regarding the purpose of bringing more attraction in the adapted translated version to an audience. Koustas (1988) continues that keeping close to the ST or uprooting out of the original all has its own merits.



### 3. Methodology

This research paper is carried out with a considerable concentration on historical analysis because it can cover the origins, growth, personalities, theories, crisis, etc. to apply in all fields of study. Besides, historical approach can combine other research methods, including: qualitative method, quantitative method, descriptive method, and contrastive method. According to Busha and Harter (1980: 91), there are six steps to conduct historical research:

1. the recognition of a historical problem or the identification of a need for certain historical knowledge.
2. the gathering of as much relevant information about the problem or topic as possible.
3. if appropriate, the forming of hypothesis that tentatively explain relationships between historical factors.
4. The rigorous collection and organization of evidence, and the verification of the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources.
5. The selection, organization, and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence, and the drawing of conclusions; and
6. the recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative.

Busha and Harter (1980: 99-100) also list three typical principles to consider when applying historical analysis:

- a. Consider the slant or biases of the information you are working with and the ones possessed by the historians themselves.
  - I. This is particularly true of qualitative research.
  - II. Quantitative facts may also be biased in the types of statistical data collected or in how that information was interpreted by the researcher.

b. There are many factors that can contribute to “historical episodes”.

c. Evidence should not be examined from a singular point of view.

### 4. Analysis and Discussion

#### 4.1. Stage Performance in Vietnam

The development of stage performance and drama translation in Vietnam goes along with the historical changes of the country. Traditionally, drama in Vietnam was only in the form of *singing drama* which has different types namely *Tuong (Hat Boi)*, *Cheo*, and *Cai Luong*. Originating from China and imported to Vietnam from the thirteenth century, *Tuong* often tells the stories in the literary classic writings of China, describes the heroes in wars, and focuses on inculcating moral lessons in people’s behaviour as well as the rules of social decorum (Tuan Giang, 2011). *Tuong* uses stock characters who often wear make-up and clothes of intensely elaborate and extravagant appearance. *Cheo* is a famous type of satirical musical theatre which was popular among peasants in North Vietnam. Being compared to the *comediadell’arte* in Italy, *Cheo* always applies the messages of satirical criticism to the present social problems. Beginning in the early twentieth century *Cai Luong* is often called *renovated theatre* in English to describe a popular kind of theatre in South Vietnam. *Cai Luong* emphasises moral values in Vietnamese tradition. Generally speaking, these three types of theatre have the same motif in their performance and require only a truly basic place for their performance, like a small yard in front of a temple or market. There was no curtain in and out, and no painted background. People enjoyed the performance by focusing on the acting of actors and the content of the story being told.

When the French arrived in Vietnam in 1858, their governance spread to all social aspects. Western styles from language to art gradually became popular in Vietnam. In the field of drama, Vietnamese intellectual elites started to learn the new form of French theatre called *oral drama* which was performed by French theatre travelling groups. This new acting style, with the structure of Act, Chapter, and Scene blew a new wind into the domestic theatrical entertainment. The content of *oral drama* is often about present social life, love, and freedom. The conflicts between characters, between character and society, or inside each character, were really new tastes that stimulated the curiosity of Vietnamese people (Do, 2012). The stage was much improved and decorated with screen background, changes after each scene. All of these things made the French drama style interesting to Vietnamese playwrights and stage directors. Normally, most of the stage performances were in the French language and were Western stories. The arising of patriotism in making Vietnamese-styled *oral drama*, encouraged western-educated elites to translate French plays into Vietnamese. Nguyen Van Vinh (1882–1936) was the first person who introduced his translated French comic plays of Molière (1622-1673), such as *L'Avare (The Miser)*, *Le Bourgeois gentil homme (The Bourgeois Gentleman)*, and *Le Malade Imaginaire (The Imaginary Invalid)*, in which *Le Malade Imaginaire* was the first play performed in the Vietnamese language on 25/04/1920 at the Central Theatre in Ha Noi city.

The fact that the coming of French drama became interesting to Vietnamese people at the beginning of the twentieth century is because it suited the needs of that era in taking the present time and present people as the centre of discussion. It is quite

different from the translation theatre of *Tuong, Cheo*, and *Cai Luong* that always use Chinese classic stories and characters (Anatoly, 2010). These kinds of content are not boring but fairly far from reality. The way of structuring the play in the form of different acts and scenes, plus the conflicts crossing between characters make *oral drama* so attractive. Besides, the ending of Chinese classic stories often involves singing about the moral lessons, the contribution of heroes, while the modern French style of drama's ending varies: tragedy or comedy. It can involve happiness or sadness, comedy or tragedy, united love or separation. Audiences can see themselves reflected in the acting in the performance.

Another indication for the coming of translations of Shakespeare's plays is from the introduction of Tao Ngu's plays. Tao Ngu [曹禺 – Cao Yu, 1910-1996] has the real name Wan Jiabao (萬家寶). He is honoured as the 'Shakespeare of China' because many of his plays have been performed for generations of Chinese theatrical audience. The most famous of his plays is 雷雨 *Leiyu – Thunderstorm* written in 1933. Because of being interested in the writings of Western playwrights such as Aeschylus (525BC-456BC), Shakespeare (baptised 1564-1616), Chekhov (1860-1904), Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), Tao Ngu wrote his plays following the structure of those writers' plays in the form of acts and scenes to describe social reality. Thanks to the great contribution of Vietnamese translators Dang Thai Mai (1902-1984) and Nguyen Kim Than (1927-1995), the plays of Tao Ngu were popularised in Vietnam in the first half of the twentieth century.

#### 4.2. Drama Translation in Vietnam



Vu Dinh Long is also the pioneer in setting the theory of translating French plays to Vietnamese. He suggests the term *Vietnamise* strategy with the meaning that the translator should flexibly apply the communicative approach to produce the same effects on the audience as the ST does (Hoang Dinh, 2011). In fact, Vu Dinh Long chooses the communicative approach in translation instead of using a semantic approach. He cares about the feeling and emotion of the target audience when watching the performance. Another point in his definition of *Vietnamise* strategy is that Vu Dinh Long wants to raise the level of nationalism. He wants to introduce a Vietnamese play to Vietnamese audience and foreign audience at the performance in order to show the talent of Vietnamese writers and directors, as well as to avoid underestimation by the foreign audience.

In terms of translation theory, translator Dang Thai Mai discusses that when translating *Leiyu – Thunderstorm* the translator should follow the rule '*song trùng thân phận*' –parallel of fate which means that the translator has to render the perception of the ST twice. Firstly, the translator should participate in the role of a hidden reader of the writer to find the same resonant frequency of spirit with the writer, and to discover and convey the idealism of the ST into the translation. Secondly, the translator has to predict the level of the audience's perception because choosing a text to translate is not only for personal interest but also for audience's taste (Tran, 2010). The discussion of Dang Thai Mai reflects Nida's equivalent effect (1964: 159) in which 'the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptor and the message'. Luu (2006) comments that the translations of Dang Thai Mai are really

true literary works because they maintain the artistic writing style of Tao Ngu clearly, and they are suitable for both stage performance and reading. In terms of linguistics, translators in this period focus on using the TL that is suitable for use the language written in the ST. For example, Dang Thai Mai used the Vietnamese in North Vietnam because Tao Ngu wrote his *Leiyu – Thunderstorm* in the context of Northern China. Vuong (2013) discusses that in the years of the 1940s and the 1950s, oral drama in particular and literature in general, in Vietnam often focused on the content of the writings while paying less attention to the abstract artistic features. That is the reason why Dang Thai Mai introduced his translation of *Peking Man* (北京人 Beijing ren) late in 1963.

In the years from the 1940s to the 1960s, there were many up and down changes in Vietnamese society, in which the feudalism was erased, Socialism was established for the political orientation of the whole country, the famine of 1945-1946, the coming back of the French (1945-1954), the coming of the Americans (1954-1975), and the separation of Vietnam into two areas the South and the North using the seventeenth latitude as the boundary. French drama which is actually in the seventeenth century style of French classicism was no longer suitable for the present reality in Vietnam (HNM, 2007). French drama always had the following typical motives, such as the victory of national power over the individual, the victory of mind over feeling, and the priority of national responsibility over love, while Vietnamese dramatic directors and translators found that Russian drama could help them express the variety of every corner of life. Russian drama allows the description of the depth of sexual desire, comic facts, tragic fates, and also the

combination of comedy and tragedy in a play. The popularization of Russian drama developed along with the introduction of Marxist Leninist communism. Translation of Russian plays in this period occurred in two ways: direct translation from Russian, and translation through French and Chinese. Vietnamese translators at that time preferred the direct translation from the ST because the translation can obtain the following three requirements: *tín* = *faithfulness*, *đạt* = *closeness*, *nhã* = *beautiffulness* (Tran, 2003). Dramatic translators focused on the unique criteria used in their translation *les mots juste* = *the correct words* in the meaning of how to maintain exactly the original, including the linguistic features as well as the writing style of the writer.

Vietnam at present is developing in the globalization of the world. Translation of drama in particular, and translation of literary works in general, has been changing, especially in translation theory. Modern Vietnamese translators are seriously debating what a good translation is. Translator Le Duc Man (1941-) discusses that if a Vietnamese reader can cry and be in misery when reading poems of French poet Verlaine (1844-1896) as a French person does when he is reading the ST, the translation is good (Ngan Huyen, 2003). Translator Hoang Hung (1942-) suggests that the word *nhã* (beautiffulness) should be deleted because no one wants to make his/her translation ugly. Sharing the same opinion, translator Doan Tu Huyen (1952-) adds that nowadays there is no need to use the three criteria *tín-đạt-nhã* but to keep only the feature *tín* = *faithfulness*. He continues that the most difficult thing to do in translation is how to clarify target readers and translation strategies to fulfill the final purposes of translation, which he divides into two different fields: literary translation

and scientific translation. According to him, literary translation is an open land where how to make readers comfortable when reading the translation is the prior task of the translator. In other words, closeness to the ST word for word, idea for idea is not necessary. In terms of scientific translation, however, he argues that one must be as true as possible to the ST because any adaptations may cause troubles for readers. Translation in this field is exactly a translation, not a version of the original writing in which the translator has borrowed the content of the ST and rewritten it following his imagination and language. The discussions of Doan Tu Huyen reflect the theory of Nida (1964) about *formal* and *dynamic equivalence*, and *overt* and *covert translation* of House (1997). Discussing the present translation in Vietnam, Associate Professor-Doctor Nguyen Van Dan (1950-), head of Literary Translation – Vietnam Union of Literature, suggests that instead of distinguishing literary translation and scientific translation, translators should bring the scientific feature to their literary translations. He reminds that, while at the beginning of literary translation, people often made some cuts from the ST, adaptations and rewriting based on the original content, the present gives enough conditions for translators to translate, not to create a version with additions and omissions to the ST. He gives a hugely interesting example that the image of the handkerchief of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello* was translated into French as the shawl, or the head-ring. It was not until the romanticism in the seventeenth century, the handkerchief got back its original meaning in translations. He suggests the terms *dịch chính xác toàn diện* = *totally exact translation* with the meaning of giving exact equivalents to the ST both in terms of semantic and artistic features.



Differing from the theory of Nida (1964), House (1997) or Newmark (1988b) who distinguish semantic and communicative approaches, Nguyen Van Dan requires the combination of both in a translation.

The critic Lai Nguyen An (1945-) and the writer Nguyen Ngoc (1932-) share the same comment on translation in Vietnam, that in comparison to the development of Translation Studies in the world, translation in Vietnam has been outdated around fifty to one hundred years (My Binh, 2013). For example, it was not until 1921 that the first seventeenth-century-dramatic-classicism-French drama performed in Vietnam. At the same time, when drama translation began its existence in Vietnam, French theatre in particular, and European theatre in general, had an outstanding development. For instance, theatre besides no longer borrowing literary writings for stage performance, treated itself with independent dramatic texts (Bradby, 2011). In addition to the outdatedness of translation in Vietnam, the discussions above of translators Hoang Hung, Dang Thai Mai, Nguyen Van Dan are just a re-emphasis of what Benjamin suggested in his highly influential essay on translation in 1923 titled *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* (The Task of the Translator). While those Vietnamese translators all agree on the *tin = faithfulness* in translation, Benjamin discussed the point that translators should not reproduce the meaning of the ST (Benjamin, 2000 [1923]). Mentioning the *life* and *afterlife* of a translation, Huynh (2010: 188) share the same opinion with Benjamin (2000 [1923]: 15), and treats a translation as to continue the *life* of the ST, as well as to extend the *'afterlife'*:

Khi nhà văn kết thúc trang viết cuối cùng của tác phẩm thì lúc đó tác phẩm mới

bắt đầu vòng đời của nó, như đứa con được cất rón khỏi lòng mẹ.

[When the writer finishes the last page of his writing, it is the time for that work to start its life, like a child was just born].

The problem of translation in Vietnam became serious in translation theory and dramatic translation is still affected by that limitation. While the world has distinguished theatre translation as an independent field, in which some scholars (eg. Johnston, 2000; Rayfield, 2000; Kewes, 2000) have made further comments on how to treat a dramatic text from reading to acting, translation in Vietnam has recently established a group of Literary Translation belonging to Writers' Union. Steiner (2004) has emphasised the differences between translating text for an audience and translating text for readers, because translation in this case 'requires great elasticity of meaning' (Malmkjær and Windle, 2011). To emphasise the important role of theatre translation in contemporary translation theory, Farrell (1996: 54) and Hale (2000: 65) both focus on the 'powerful dynamic of cultural adaptation' and the 'refashioned' characters in translated novels. In Vietnam, dramatic translation is still considered as literary translation which covers all kind of translating foreign literary texts. The concern of how to introduce a good translation of a literary text was raised long ago by Tytler (1791/1978: 208), that 'none but a poet can translate a poet'. This pioneering thought is echoed in the writing of Edmond Cary (cited in Mounin, 1963: 14) that 'Pour traduire les poètes, il faut savoir se montrer poète'. In regard to dramatic translation, Farrell (1996: 54) cites the expression of the British playwright Dusty Hughes that 'the best person to stand in for a playwright is another playwright'.

On a contradictory perception, dramatic translation in Vietnam has not received those theories. Nowadays, while Vietnamese traditional drama is going to ignored because young generations are now interested in action, romantic, thriller films, drama and stage performance is following in the market economics competing with cinema and other modern entertainments. It seems that the high points of drama in Vietnam were in the second half of the twentieth century. Vietnamese translators nowadays follow teenagers' reading needs and best seller books, so dramatic translation has been ignored. Domestic drama itself is lacking transcripts and mainly focuses on describing contemporary historical events and heroes in the wars defending the French and the American. In addition, Vietnamese playwrights nearly do not participate in the translator force.

#### 4.3. *Shakespeare's plays on Vietnamese stage*

Compared to other Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Thailand, in terms of translating and staging Shakespeare, Vietnam seems to have lagged fifty years behind both in quality and quantity aspects. It is believed that Charles Wirgman introduced his singularly first translation of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in Japanese in 1874 (Tungtang, 2011). This version in Chinese was published twenty years later in 1903. Levith (2004) reveals that a full playtext of Shakespeare in Japanese and Chinese was first published in book form in the early the twentieth century. James (cited in Trivedi and Ryuta, 2010) continues investigating the history of Shakespeare's plays in Japan with the interesting information that the Japanese professor and theatre practitioner Tsubouchi Shoyo (1859-1935) is the first person who used *kabuki* – a traditional theatrical form of Japan to translate a

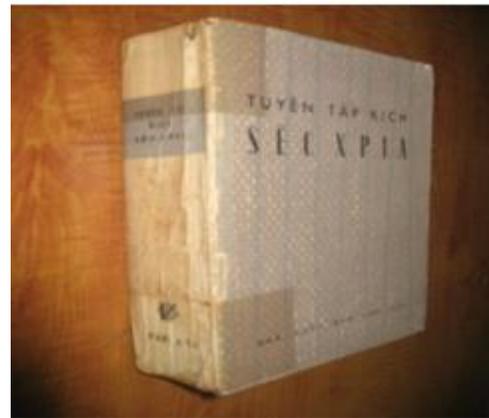
complete play of Shakespeare in 1928. Shoyo's translations were the bedside book for Korean and Chinese translators to translate into their mother tongues instead of choosing the English STs (Gillies et al, 2002). Continuously, the campaign of translating Shakespeare's plays in China and Japan has been developing. For example, the play *Hamlet* received more than ten translations in Japanese, in which the latest translation was published in 2002 by Kawai Shochiro (Trivedi and Ryuta, 2010). On stage, Gerstle (cited in Fujita and Pronko, 1996) discusses that the play *The Merchant of Venice* was first performed in Japan in 1885. From July 1913, there followed more than twenty Shakespearean adaptations over the ensuing decade; the first play of Shakespeare *The Merchant of Venice* under the name *Rou Quan* was performed by a professional theatre in China based on the storyline summaries of Lin Shu (1852-1924). 1922 is the particular year when full translations of Shakespeare in Chinese were introduced, such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* by Tian Han (1898-1968). Some other Chinese, who had studied in England before, introduced direct translations of different works of Shakespeare from the original English. When spoken drama, *huaju*, became popular, some more complete translated writings of Shakespeare were used in performances, such as *The Merchant of Venice* (1930), *Romeo and Juliet* (1937), *Hamlet* (1942), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1944), as well as Huang Zuolin's 1945 adaptation of *Macbeth* entitled *Luanshi Yingxiong (The Hero of the Turmoil)*.

During the years from 1935 to 1944 under the control of Japan, the translations were developed. One the most famous translators at that time was Zhu Shenghao (1912-1944) with his 31 translated



Shakespeare's plays, which were used officially for stage performances, and provided the core for a full Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* in 2000. In Thailand, Shakespeare was introduced popularly to Thai readers in 1916 through the translation *Venit Vanit* of *The Merchant of Venice* by King Vajiravudh (1881-1925) (Tungtang, 2011: 48). This Thai King (reigned from 1910 to 1925) revealed that before his translation, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* had been translated by Prince Narathipprapanpong between 1890-1893, and *The Comedy of Errors* by LuangThammapihan in 1893. In Vietnam, it was not until 1963, that the first translations of Shakespeare's plays were introduced to readers by Culture Publisher. Since then, the translations in this book *Tuyển Tập Kịch Shakespeare – The Collection of Shakespeare's Plays* have become the unique choice of Vietnamese readers because no other translation of Shakespeare's plays has been introduced. On the Vietnamese stage, there is no document referring the history of performed dates of Shakespeare's plays. The unique clue, however, is that on the ceremony of the 25-year establishment of The Youth Theatre of Vietnam, the article *The Youth Theatre – The Milestones Through a Quarter of Century* posted on Vietbao.vn 02/04/2003 revealed that since its inauguration 10/04/1978, besides performing modern plays, the Youth Theatre had performed the classic plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Thunderstorm* (H.P, 2003).

*Figure: 1 Dang TheBinh et al, (1963). The Collection of Shakespeare's Plays. Publisher: Culture*



It is possible to conclude that Shakespeare's plays were first performed on stage in Vietnam after 1978. This evidence is consistent with the national history, because from 1954 to 1975 the whole country was at war with the American. It was not until 2009, that Vietnamese audiences had the first opportunity to watch the play *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Paul Stebbings (1953-) and performed by TNT Theatre Britain on a Vietnamese stage. The play was in English, which made it difficult for Vietnamese audience to understand the whole story, even though most of them had known somehow about this play already (Thoai Ha, 2009). In 2011, the Idecaf Theatre in Ho Chi Minh city introduced the first Vietnamese *Romeo and Juliet* (ThienHuong, 2012). This play named *Romeo and Juliet in Sai Gon* is the first performance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in Vietnamese. However, it is an adaptation using the basic content in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and combining *Tuong (Hat Boi)* with Western oral drama. Vietnamese audiences and theatre need to have a Vietnamese translation of *Romeo and Juliet* for stage performance. Still in the same motif of the ST of Shakespeare about the tragedy of two lovers, *Romeo and Juliet in Sai Gon*, a play of IDECAF staged on 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2011, brought relaxing but

interesting and friendly laughs by adding acutely Vietnamese social features with bicycle, motor, sạp dance, and hò.

This famous love story is combined flexibly between the Western art of physical theatre and Vietnamese opera (hát bội). By mixing the western play's atmosphere and Vietnamese living styles, audience were directed to different surprises besides the conflict between the two families whose the quarrel opens with the music of the songs: *Chuyện nhỏ, Sáu mươi năm cuộc đời*. Romeo and Juliet date on the Y Bridge, and then dance Sạp at their wedding party. On the stage, Romeo rides his bike and Juliet comes on her motorbike in a background of hò and music with traditional Vietnamese clothes and dialogues, which received encouraging long applauses of audience.

In addition, Vietnamese opera was mixed skillfully, demonstrating conventional steps, gestures and the emotion of the characters. The audience really loved the image of the balcony, where Juliet was enjoying the Moon and Romeo was expressing his love, which was replaced by the actress standing on another actor.

Director Cliff Moustache and Doctor of Art Nguyen Nghieu Khai Thu were highly proud of this Vietnamese version of *Romeo and Juliet*, especially the contribution from all participating characters.

Mark Woollett and Candace Clift, the two members of Shakespeare & Company, based in Massachusetts, USA, directed students of Ho Chi Minh College of Stage Performance and Cinematics to perform *Romeo and Juliet* in April of 2006. In the hope of bringing Shakespeare to Vietnam, this couple added many Vietnamese characteristics into the play; for example: Juliet wears Ao Dai; the kungfu is performed with the hand, not the sword;

there is no gun in the play (because using gun is illegal in Vietnam); and especially, at the beginning of play, the quarrel of two families happens outside the front door of the theatre with the audience standing around to enjoy it and then following the characters into the theatre.

Any retelling, even in the same language or in different languages of a written or oral text, is considered as a translation. It is the percentage of adaptation that makes the translation speakable, performable, and readable. Performance, with its changes in acting and productions from culture to culture, shows a complex relationship with the ST. As a translation, a performance faces extraordinary pressures in order to transform the written text to the corporeal, vocal and spatial practices of actors, directors and designers. Theatre products for stage performance are not purely translations that honor the classic and academic features of STs, but are commercialized to be up-to-date for different types of audience. Therefore, that survival need puts pressure on theatres to pick the text but only keep the name of the ST and add what is mostly a new story. It is possible to consider as this is a destruction of the ST. A performance is actually a different mode of expression of a text, while keeping the content and form of the original. Besides, performance should be considered as a special kind of translation – *a multilayer translation* - because it brings a written text to drama level and upgrades it to a theatrical text for the stage. Moreover, to have a successful theatrical product, it has to carry the spirit, historical era, emotion, and hidden metaphors of the ST into spoken and gestural languages. The most important feature that makes a performance become a translation is *communicability*. In fact, a performance



should be the bridge connecting its present audience to the writer of ST and the text itself.

### 5. Conclusion

In general, because drama translation is an ignored field in translation studies in Vietnam, Vietnamese theatres have not got quality transcripts of theatrical translations for their performances. Most of the performances of classical plays on Vietnamese stages are adaptations with many changes. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct a study of translating famous classical plays in Vietnam in order to introduce performable translations to the Vietnamese audience.

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