



Chekhov's Literal and Cultural Legacy in Viet Nam

SIMON AN

19th November, 2025

Special Thanks To



Professor Olga Lyanda-Geller



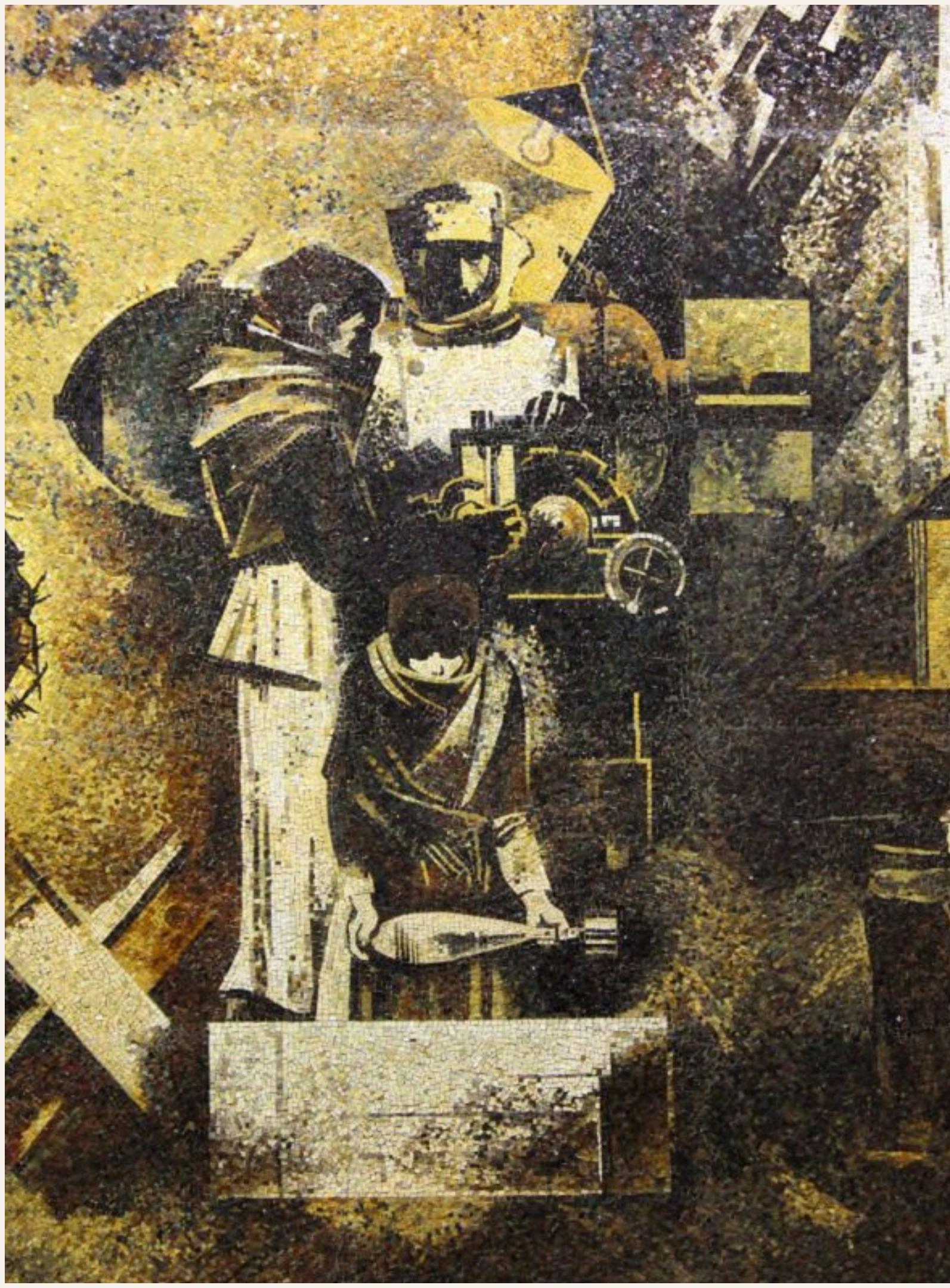
Wilke Undergraduate
Research Program

Introduction

Across Russia and Vietnam, Anton Chekhov, Nam Cao, and Nguyễn Tuân explore how human beings endure social, historical, and moral pressures.

Each writer uses narrative art not only to portray events but to probe consciousness, moral responsibility, and the pressures of changing worlds.





Project Goal

Our aim is to analyze how Chekhov's themes, techniques, and worldview were adapted within Vietnamese literature, and to reveal what these adaptations show about shared emotional experiences, cultural divergence, and social change in twentieth-century Russia and Vietnam.

Historical Context

- Russian literature reached Vietnam late, arriving mainly through French translations in the 1920s due to colonial language policies.
- After the 1945 August Revolution, this transmission continued. French remained the primary gateway to Russian literature for many years, but figures like Nguyễn Tuân began actively interpreting and promoting Chekhov.

By the 1950s, broader translation efforts established Chekhov as a key influence in both North and South Vietnam.



Humanism



The Man in a Case - Chekhov

- Belikov is not portrayed as a monster but as a victim of fear in a spiritually suffocating environment.
- His rigid habits are symptoms of a society that prizes conformity over genuine feeling.

“И этим раскатистым, заливчатым «ха-ха-ха» завершилось все: и сватовство, и земное существование Беликова. Уже он не слышал, что говорила Варенька, и ничего не видел. Вернувшись к себе домой, он прежде всего убрал со стола портрет, а потом лег и уже больше не вставал.” (Чехов, р. 6)

Chí Phèo - Nam Cao

Rather than a villain, he is a man dehumanized by a feudal village system that strips him of dignity, identity, and belonging.

- 01** In *The Man in a Case*, Burkin's ridicule shapes our first impression of Belikov

“когда мы вместе шли в гимназию, был скучен, бледен, и было видно, что многолюдная гимназия, в которую он шел, была страшна, противна всему существу его и что идти рядом со мной ему, человеку по натуре одинокому, было тяжко.” (Чехов, р. 2)

- 02** In *Chí Phèo*, the narrator often speaks with the collective voice of the village - prejudiced, fearful, and unforgiving

“Mặc phải cái thằng liều lĩnh quá, nó lại say rượu, tay nó lại nhăm nhăm cầm một cái vỏ chai, mà nhà lúc ấy toàn đàn bà cả ... Thôi thì cứ đóng cái cổng cho thật chặt, rồi mặc thây cha nó, nó chửi thi tai liền miệng ấy, chửi rồi lại nghe.” (Nam Cao, p. 1)



Narrative Technique

This narrative misalignment requires readers to become active interpreters, reconstructing moral truth from partial views.

Mundane Cruelty

Chekhov reveals how Belikov is crushed not by overt attacks but by the silent complicity of those around him, whose jokes and conformity slowly bury him spiritually.

Similar patterns are seen throughout *Chí Phèo*, lamenting how people are worn down day after day without even realizing it.



The Crisis of the Intellectual

Nam Cao's distinctive contribution lies in his portrayal of intellectuals struggling under colonial rule

Characters like Thú in *Sóng mòn* and Điền in *Đời thừa* are torn between survival and the desire for moral or artistic fulfillment.

“Y gần như quên hẳn được chính y. Trước mắt y, chỉ còn là một cái nhân loại mênh mông, rất bao la, rộng rãi, cái nhâm loại hỗn độn đang bị đau đớn, điên cuồng vì những lối lầm của mọi người, một cái nhân loại đang sống một lối ra tối ưu ích kỉ.” (Nam Cao, p. 45)



Aestheticism and Moral Beauty

In *Chữ người tù* (*The Prisoner's Letter*), Huân Cao embodies a paradoxical moral beauty. Facing death, he remains serene, principled, and artistically uncompromising.

“Khi nói câu mà ông cố ý làm ra khinh bạc đén điêu, ông Huân đã đợi trận lôi đình báo thù và những thủ đoạn tàn bạo của quan ngục bị sỉ nhục. Nhưng đến cái cảnh chết chém, ông còn chẳng sợ nữa là những trò tiểu nhân thị oai này.”

(Nguyễn Tuân, p. 2)





Interior Emotion & Social Transition



Huân Cao represents the final glow of traditional Confucian artistic culture.



Madame Ranevskaya's reverence for the orchard expresses nostalgia for a doomed way of life.

Ethical Engagement in Moments of Rupture

Lopakhin represents modernization. He destroys the orchard not out of cruelty but out of necessity.

Huân Cao, by contrast, resists history through creation rather than destruction. His final act of writing preserves beauty, dignity, and meaning.



Comparative Analysis

- a commitment to portraying human vulnerability
- an interest in moral ambiguity
- focus on interiority rather than external drama
- critique of subtle social oppression.



Anton Chekhov



Nam Cao



Nguyễn Tuân



Timmerman Industries

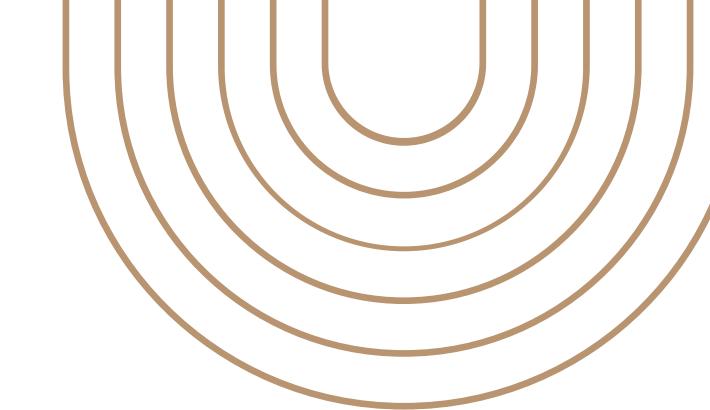
Conclusion

Across their Russian and Vietnamese settings, they center the fragile, ethically struggling individual and reveal how dignity endures even amid upheaval.

Their shared humanism, narrative subtlety, and nuanced portrayals of suffering demonstrate how literary traditions can intersect to generate deeper empathy and understanding across cultures.



Reference



- Phong, L (2025, November 6). Sức sống của nền văn học nga trong Trái Tim Việt Nam. Redsvn.net.
<https://redsvn.net/suc-song-cua-nen-van-hoc-nga-trong-trai-tim-viet-nam2/>
- IVIVI. (2024, December 11). Anton Pavlovich Chekhov: Thiên Tài Truyện ngắn của nền Văn Học Nga. Redsvn.net.
<https://redsvn.net/anton-pavlovich-chekhov-thien-tai-truyen-ngan-cua-nen-van-hoc-nga2/>
- Хуинь Нгуен Тхать. (2017, August 1). АНАЛИЗ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ ЧЕХОВА В ПЕРЕВОДЕ ВЫДАЮЩИХСЯ ВЬЕТНАМСКИХ ЛИНГВИСТОВ НГҮЕН ТУАНА И ФАН ХОНГ ЗАНГА. Филологические науки. Вопросы теории и практики.
<http://www.gramota.net/materials/2/2017/8-2/14.html>
- Võ, L. (2019, April 30). Chekhov với sân khấu cuộc đời. Văn Học & Nghệ Thuật.
<https://www.vanchuongviet.org/index.php?comp=tacpham&action=detail&id=2508>
- Trần, P. (2009, February 13). Đọc Chekhov – SỰ tiếp nhận đa Diện. Khoa Văn Học. <http://khoaavanhoc-ngonngu.edu.vn/nghien-cuu/van-hoc-nuoc-ngoai-va-van-hoc-so-sanh/213-c-chekhov-s-tip-nhn-a-din.html>
- Tuân, N. (n.d.). Chữ Người tử tù - nguyễn tuân ~ Chương 0. Thư viện Online. https://isach.info/story.php?story=chu_nguoitutu_nguyentuan&chapter=0000
- Человек в футляре Антон Чехов. (2024). Strelbytskyy Multimedia Publishing.
- Nam Cao. (2025). Sống mòn. Văn Học.
- Cao, N. (n.d.). Chí Phèo - nam Cao. Thư viện Online. https://isach.info/story.php?story=chi_pheo_nam_cao



Timmerman Industries

THANK YOU

02 May, 2024