

2010 Solutions

(N) Tale of Kieu (1/2)

N1 (11 points). Show which lines from the two Vietnamese versions are translated by each line in the English version. We've given you one correspondence to get you started.

English	Chữ Nôm	Quốc Ngữ
1. A hundred years—in this life span on earth	f	II
2. talent and destiny are apt to feud.	a	V
3. You must go through a play of ebb and flow	e	I
4. and watch such things that make you sick at heart.	d	IV
5. Is it so strange that losses balance gains?	b	VI
6. Blue Heaven's habit is to strike a rose from spite.	c	III

N2 (4 points). Explain your answer.

The key to solving Problem N, “Tale of Kieu” is given in the directions, namely that characters may contain both information about meaning (relating Chữ Nôm to English) and pronunciation (relating Chữ Nôm to Quốc Ngữ). The first step, however, is to hypothesize that the passage given is poetry in regulated verse, with alternating lines having 6 and 8 syllables. This can be inferred from the following information:

The English translation is typeset as verse poetry, with alternate lines indented.

Three Chữ Nôm lines have six characters (b, e, f); three have eight characters (a, c, d).

Three Quốc Ngữ lines have six (one syllable) words (I, II, VI); three have eight words (III, IV, V).

The fact that line 5 matches line VI is given.

This narrows the set of possible solutions greatly. Lines 1, 3, and 4 must be matched with (b), (e), and (f), and I, II, and VI. The same is true of the balance of the lines. It is then possible to see that (a) must match (V) since the first and third characters and words of (a) and (V), respectively, are identical. This leaves five matches to make on semantic grounds and five to make on phonetic grounds.

Evidence for the matches between English and Chữ Nôm comes largely from the characters on the first page:

E	CN			Chữ Nôm	English
1	f	年	year; person's age		year
		人	man, human, humankind		on this earth
2	a	告	tell; announce; inform; accuse	讐	feud
4	d	見	see, observe, perceive		watch
		病	illness; sickness; disease	痘	sick
		心	heart; mind; intelligence; soul		heart
5	d	豆	peas; beans	豐	gains
6	c	天	sky; heaven; god		heaven
		上	top; highest; go up		heaven



2010 Solutions

(N) Tale of Kieu (2/2)

There is one crucial special case. It can be inferred that the shared component of the characters 沐 and 沖 from the first page has a meaning related to water. In line (e), there are two characters with this component, which matches well with “ebb and flow” from line (3).

The evidence for matching Chữ Nôm and Quốc Ngữ comes from two sources. First, there is evidence that is internal to the poem. It is already known that (a) matches (V). The sixth character in (V) is 羅 là. The first character in (b), 邇, shares a component with 羅 là; the first word in VI has a similar pronunciation. Likewise, the third characters of lines (d) and (f) have the related characters 儿 and B and the third words of lines (II) and (IV) have the similar-sounding words trong and trông. Also, the fifth characters of (c) and (d) are i and 罢, corresponding to má in (III) and mà in (IV). This, however, is uninformative since both lines are of equal length and it is already known that the other eight-syllable lines, (a) and (V), belong together. The characters on the first page provide enough evidence to associate the rest of the lines:

CN	QN	Chữ Nôm		Chữ Nôm	
b	VI	皮	bì; bè	彼	bě
c	III	工	gòng	紅	hồng
d	IV	弄	lòng		lòng
e	I	皮	bì; bè		bǐ
f	II	南	nam		nǎm

