

# **The Rise of Chữ Nôm and the Vernacularization of Poetic Forms in Early Modern Vietnam**

**John D. Phan**

Department of Asian Languages and Literatures  
Rutgers University

For most of Vietnamese history, the language of both documentation and imaginative expression was Literary Chinese. Some time after the turn of the 2nd millennium, Vietnamese intellectuals adapted Chinese characters to represent Vietnamese vernacular language, and in following centuries, vernacular writing was stimulated by the proselytization of Buddhism to sectors of society unfamiliar with Literary Chinese. Nôm writing never eclipsed Literary Chinese as the preferred mode of either documentary or imaginative expression. However, in the 17th century, some writers sought to elevate Nôm by arguing that it was in fact, an extension of Chinese writing uniquely suited to Vietnamese culture. The result of this shift in language ethics was a deeply hybridizing, avant garde literary movement that fused Vietnamese vernacular language together with classical forms, structures, literary patterns, and intellectual themes. This lecture examines the rise of Chữ Nôm over the 17th-19th centuries, and both the adoption of classical poetic meters such as "regulated verse," as well as the elevation of native poetic meters such as "six-eight," in the expansion of vernacular literary expression.

**John D. Phan** is a linguistic historian focused on the evolution of languages and the development of writing in Vietnam. Dr. Phan's work pays special attention to the spread of Sinitic languages and writing into Southeast Asia, in comparison with analogous processes in Korea and Japan. Dr. Phan completed his MA in premodern Chinese literature under Professor Shang Wei at Columbia University, before obtaining his Ph.D. at Cornell University under Professor Keith Taylor. After completing his dissertation, Dr. Phan conducted post-doctoral research under the auspices of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, at the National Institute for Japanese Language & Linguistics, under the direction of John B. Whitman. Dr. Phan joined Rutgers University's Department of Asian Languages & Cultures as a Teaching Assistant Professor in the fall of 2014, where he teaches courses on Chinese and Vietnamese linguistics and literature, and is currently completing a book manuscript on the history of Sino-Vietic linguistic contact.

**Wednesday, February 17**

**12:00 Noon**

**Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue**