



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52714/dthu.sch.2951.1817>

## INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE INTEGRATION FROM R. TAGORE'S PERSPECTIVE AND CREATIONS

Nguyen Van Hanh

Saigon University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Email: [nvhanh@sgu.edu.vn](mailto:nvhanh@sgu.edu.vn)

### Article history

Received: 14/11/2025; Received in revised form: 17/12/2025; Accepted: 08/01/2026

### Abstract

*This study evaluates R. Tagore's perspectives and experiences regarding literary integration, aiming to draw lessons and offer recommendations for Vietnamese writers' international integration. Data are based on Tagore's essays on culture and literature, his speeches on East-West integration, and several representative works across genres such as poetry, short stories, novels, and plays. The findings highlight key aspects of Tagore's thought: literary integration broadens and deepens a nation's literary identity and enables writers to discover a more authentic and expansive sense of self. Tagore's creative principles emphasize approaching modernity through tradition, reaching humanity through nationality-as reflected in his use of the Bengali language-exploring the universal through reflections on the Indian human condition, and combining traditional Indian poetics with modern Western techniques. The study suggests that Vietnamese literature, in the process of international integration, should consciously expand and deepen its cultural identity, remain closely connected with real life - especially Vietnamese people's destiny - and inherit as well as renew traditional poetics while embracing modern literary techniques.*

**Keywords:** *India, international integration, literature, R. Tagore, renaissance.*

---

Cite: Nguyen, V. H. (2026). International literature integration from R. Tagore's perspective and creations. *Dong Thap University Journal of Science*, 15(7), 50-58. <https://doi.org/10.52714/dthu.sch.2951.1817>

Copyright © 2026 The author(s). This work is licensed under a CC BY-NC 4.0 License.

## VẤN ĐỀ HỘI NHẬP QUỐC TẾ CỦA VĂN HỌC NHÌN TỪ QUAN ĐIỂM VÀ SÁNG TÁC CỦA R. TAGORE

**Nguyễn Văn Hạnh**

*Trường Đại học Sài Gòn, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*

*Email: nvhanh@sgu.edu.vn*

### **Lịch sử bài báo**

*Ngày nhận: 14/11/2025; Ngày nhận chỉnh sửa: 17/12/2025; Ngày duyệt đăng: 08/01/2026*

### **Tóm tắt**

*Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là phân tích, đánh giá quan điểm và kinh nghiệm hội nhập văn học của R. Tagore. Từ đó, gợi mở một số vấn đề về hội nhập quốc tế cho các nhà văn Việt Nam. Tư liệu nghiên cứu là các tiểu luận bàn về văn hóa văn học, những bài phát biểu của R. Tagore về hội nhập Đông - Tây và một số tác phẩm văn học tiêu biểu của ông ở các thể loại thơ, truyện ngắn, tiểu thuyết, kịch. Kết quả nghiên cứu khái quát được một số vấn đề cơ bản trong quan điểm hội nhập văn học của R. Tagore, như: hội nhập văn học sẽ mở rộng, làm sâu sắc hơn bản sắc dân tộc của văn học; là cơ hội để nhà văn tìm thấy cái tôi của mình lớn hơn, thật hơn. Nguyên tắc sáng tác để hội nhập với văn học thế giới của R. Tagore là đến hiện đại từ truyền thống; đến nhân loại từ dân tộc, được thể hiện qua việc sử dụng tiếng Bengali; hướng tới nhân loại từ những chiêm nghiệm suy tư về con người Ấn Độ; kế thừa, cách tân thi pháp Ấn Độ truyền thống, tiếp nhận kỹ thuật viết hiện đại của phương Tây. Kết quả nghiên cứu định hướng, gợi mở một số vấn đề cho văn học Việt Nam trong quá trình hội nhập: phải có ý thức mở rộng, làm sâu sắc hơn bản sắc văn hóa Việt Nam trong tác phẩm; bám sát hiện thực đời sống, đặc biệt là số phận con người Việt Nam; khai thác cái hay cái đẹp của tiếng Việt; kế thừa, cách tân thi pháp văn học Việt Nam truyền thống và tiếp nhận kỹ thuật viết hiện đại của văn học thế giới.*

**Từ khóa:** *Ấn Độ, hội nhập quốc tế, R. Tagore, thời kỳ phục hưng, văn học.*

## 1. Introduction

Literary life is in constant motion and development. The contribution of literary talents lies in their ability to grasp underlying laws and to propel literature forward along the trajectory of human civilization. R. Tagore - hailed as “the shining star of the Indian Renaissance,” and the first Asian writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature (1913) - was such a figure. With his exceptional intellect and artistic genius, Tagore became a “pathfinder” (J. Nehru), guiding Indian literature toward ever deeper integration with the world during the process of national revival. In India, that era is often referred to as “The epoch of R. Tagore.”

Compared with those of other Asian countries, the achievements of modern Vietnamese literature in international integration remain limited. In 2003, for the first time in history, a large-scale anthology of contemporary Vietnamese prose in English - *Love After War* - was published worldwide by Curbstone Press (USA) via the Internet. Comprising 650 pages, the anthology introduced 50 short stories selected from the works of prominent contemporary Vietnamese prose writers such as To Hoai, Ma Van Khang, Nguyen Minh Chau, Nguyen Huy Thiep, Ho Anh Thai, Nguyen Khai, Bui Ngoc Tan, Nguyen Kien, Bao Ninh, Trung Trung Dinh, Ngo Thi Kim Cuc, Le Minh Khue, Ta Duy Anh, Phan Thi Vang Anh, Phan Trieu Hai, Vo Thi Xuan Ha, Nguyen Ngoc Tu, among others. The book has made a strong impression on readers in many countries, particularly among American literary scholars and critics. *San Francisco Chronicle* selected it as one of the 100 best books of 2003.

Reality shows that international literature integration offers opportunities but also entails pressures and challenges, especially for writers. Why is integration necessary? Does international integration erode the national literature identity? How can Vietnamese literature integrate worldwide? These questions have generated divergent viewpoints among scholars and writers. In this regard, studying R. Tagore’s perspectives and his literary practice is meaningful both theoretically and practically, and it is highly feasible. Such research not only deepens understanding of Tagore’s talent and contributions to India’s cultural and literary renaissance, but also opens up theoretical and practical insights for writers in a context where integration has become an inevitable trend of Vietnamese literature.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Research Issues

As a component of culture, literature does not exist independently or in isolation from culture. The relationship between literature and culture is that between the particular and the general, the part and the whole. From this perspective, studying Tagore’s views on literary integration and his creative experience should adopt an interdisciplinary approach combining cultural studies and literary studies.

As a specialized discipline, interdisciplinary research between culture and literature takes literature as its object of study, essentially approaching literature through culture. This means situating literary issues within their cultural context, examining cultural influences on literature and cultural expressions within literary works. In Vietnam, over the past three decades or so, this approach has been widely applied, with representative studies such as Tran (1999), *Confucianism and Vietnamese Medieval and Early Modern Literature*; Nguyen (2001), *National Identity in Artistic Creation*; Tran (2009), *Vietnamese Medieval Literature from a Cultural Perspective*; Nguyễn (2005), *Vietnamese Identity through Literary Exchange*; Tran (2021), *Cultural Values of Vietnamese Literature*; Do (2018), *From a Cultural Perspective*; Nguyen (2021), *Issues of Culture and Literature* (Research & Application). According to Tran (2021), in the relationship between culture and literature, literature not only reflects and preserves cultural values but also creates culture. This relationship is one between the general and the particular, the whole and the part. Thereby, studying Tagore’s perspectives

on literary integration and his creative practice through an interdisciplinary cultural–literary approach is both reasonable and scientific.

Since Tagore was first introduced in Vietnam in 1924, a full century has passed. His works have been translated and studied, but achievements remain limited. Apart from Nguyen (2006), Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Renaissance, most studies stop the list of introductory articles about his life and works. Tagore’s contributions to the modernization and international integration of Indian literature have not yet been examined comprehensively and systematically, particularly his ideas on East - West synthesis in culture and literature, the relationship between national identity and human universality in integration, and principles of artistic creation in a global context. In the current era of integration and globalization, these issues are especially meaningful for countries sharing similar cultural paradigms with India, such as Vietnam.

This overview indicates that applying a cultural approach to literary research in Vietnam is not new and has yielded many achievements. Therefore, employing this approach to study R. Tagore’s perspectives on literary integration and his creative experience has a solid scientific foundation and strong feasibility. The findings not only deepen understanding of Tagore’s contributions to the global integration of Indian literature, but also offer important theoretical and practical insights for Vietnamese writers in an era when integration has become inevitable.

### **3. Research Materials and Methods**

The materials used for this study include Tagore’s essays on cultural and literary issues and speeches delivered during his visits to Japan, France, and China in the first three decades of the twentieth century, such as *The Religion of Man*, *The Religion of an Artist*, *Modern Poetry*, *What Is Art?*, *The Spirit of Japan*, and *The Message of the East*. In terms of literary works, this study examines representative texts across four genres - poetry, short stories, novels, and drama - that demonstrate Tagore’s consciousness of integration.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, all analyses and evaluations of Tagore’s thought and literary integration experience are considered within the cultural–literary relationship. The theoretical basis and practical significance of absorbing Tagore’s ideas and creative experience are explored through methods of analysis and synthesis, combined with survey, classification, and comparison. On this basis, the study proposes issues for discussion concerning literary integration in contemporary Vietnam.

### **4. Research Findings and Discussion**

As a great artist and thinker of twentieth-century India, Tagore did not often discuss ideology in a direct or systematic manner. His thought permeates naturally and organically into his artistic creations across many genres and is aestheticized through art. In Tagore, thought and action, morality and life, ideology and practice are unified as one.

#### **4.1. International Integration as the Expansion of National Literary Identity and the Development of Writers’ Talent**

*4.1.1. International integration: each national literature “expands its own identity” through both giving and receiving*

By the mid-nineteenth century, the West had entered modernity with remarkable achievements in science and technology and had made rapid strides along the path of modernization. Meanwhile, like many Eastern countries, India remained mired in stagnation and isolated from the rest of the world. This reality called for a revolution, first and foremost

in awareness, to bring Indian culture and literature into the modern world.

As in many Eastern societies, pride in tradition in India was closely associated with fear of losing national identity to external influences. As a result, for many centuries Indian culture and literature tended to isolate themselves, resisting outward engagement. Traditional values were increasingly damaged and faced the risk of erosion. Thus, seeking harmony between Eastern and Western values, between the national and the universal, became especially important. With absolute spiritual and intellectual freedom, Tagore embraced the ideal that “the whole world is my home”. The Indian philosophy of harmony was concretized by him into a fundamental principle of conduct aimed at reconciling past and present, East and West, nation and humanity, toward a cultural and literary world in which each nation both contributes and receives.

In 1916, in his speech *The Spirit of Japan* delivered at the University of Tokyo, Tagore expressed admiration for the brilliant achievements of Japan’s Meiji Restoration (1868). For him, those achievements resulted from the Japanese having “lived by the breath of the age rather than by the mythical glories of the past” (Tagore, 1984, p.121), and from their interactions and engagements with the West. From this, he asserted that the responsibility of every nation is to reveal clearly to the world its own national essence. If a nation contributes nothing to the world, this should be regarded as its guilt—indeed, something worse than death—and it will never be forgiven by human history. Every nation bears the responsibility of making its finest qualities the common property of humankind. Noble spirit is a nation’s treasure, but its true wealth lies in its ability to transcend narrow self-interest and invite the whole world to participate in its spiritual culture (Tagore, 1984, p.124).

From this perspective, the path for a national culture and literature to integrate into the modern world does not lie in either denying or blindly affirming tradition or foreign influences. Differences are only superficial and temporary; unity alone is enduring. Within culture and literature, every nation contains latent universal human values. In *A Vision of India’s History* (1923), Tagore wrote: “We shall learn that we can reach the great world of humanity not by effacing ourselves, but by expanding our own identity” (Tagore, 1955, p.110). The vitality of a culture and literature lies in its capacity to inherit excellence from both tradition and modernity, the national and the universal, harmonizing the eternal with the momentary. While preserving and developing traditional values, it is necessary to expand national identity through proactive integration into the cultural and literary development of human kind.

A nation’s contribution to humanity does not lie in its size or the length of its history, but in its distinctive identity and uniqueness. Only through integration and harmony with the consciousness of humanity can a nation’s culture and literature further enrich and deepen their own identity and uniqueness.

#### *4.1.2. Writers discover a “larger and more authentic self” through integration*

In Tagore’s thought, differences between Eastern and Western cultures and literatures are only relative and superficial. Respecting difference through dialogue and equality is an essential attitude for artists in the process of integration. In *The Religion of Man*, he wrote that “real life lies in the creation of oneself, that is, in representing the infinite in humanity... Man is never fully real in an isolated self; imagination gives the mind a vision larger than its own existence” (Tagore, 2004, pp. 391-392). The artist’s self becomes “larger and more authentic” when it actively and confidently merges into the flow of the world’s literature.

According to Tagore, artists must deeply realize that “in art, we express the joy of unity, by which the world reveals itself and becomes meaningful to us in human terms” (Tagore, 2004, p. 390). Only through deep attachment and integration with the broader world, through

passionate love, can artists discover their creative power and fulfill their noble mission of offering songs and poetry to life: “Life kissed me with pain and demanded that I answer with song” (Tagore, 2004, p. 194). For Tagore, the relationship between artist and life is one of love. Only through love can artists find a self that is “larger and more authentic,” and the immortality of “the human essence that includes all people.”

In 1921, in his lecture in Paris, Tagore delivered *The Message of the East*, calling for solidarity and harmony between East and West toward peace, compassion, democracy, and freedom. He analyzed deeply both the differences and respective strengths of Eastern and Western cultures, as well as the limitations of isolation and separation among nations. According to Tagore, “whoever builds walls to keep others out also builds walls to block his own freedom” (Tagore, 1921). All such “walls” become meaningless when artists integrate with the world, dissolving spiritual and intellectual isolation.

The mission of modern artists is to prepare a vast field for the union of cultures. Artists can fulfill this noble mission only by actively and creatively integrating their works into the cultural and civilizational progress of humankind.

#### **4.2. From Tradition to Modernity, from the National to the Universal: Tagore’s Path of World Literary Integration**

Over more than seventy years of literary creation, Tagore produced 52 poetry collections, 42 plays, 12 novels, over 100 short stories, and dozens of essays - an extraordinarily rare legacy. Despite differences in inspiration, genre, and period, all of Tagore’s works embody a consistent artistic consciousness: reaching modernity through tradition, and humanity through nationality.

##### *4.2.1. Literary creation in the national language*

Modern Indian literature began with the reform of the novel in Bengal initiated by Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-1894). By the late nineteenth century, Indian literature had assumed the form of a modern literature written in English and various indigenous languages. Tagore, however, consistently wrote all his works - poetry, short stories, plays - in Bengali, adhering to the creative principle of moving from tradition to modernity and from the national to the universal.

In Tagore’s view, tradition and modernity, nation and humanity are closely interconnected. Culture and literature can develop only by inheriting and advancing accumulated national traditions while enriching them through the absorption of universal values. Conversely, embracing universal modern values while neglecting tradition leads to the loss of national identity. Thus, the path from tradition to modernity and from nation to humanity is inevitable for any culture and literature seeking integration into the progressive world.

From his earliest works such as the long poem *The Wild Flowers* (1876) to his final poems (1941), Tagore consistently wrote in Bengali. For him, language was not merely artistic material but an embodiment of national thought, soul, and emotion. In *What Is Art?*, Tagore wrote that words are not merely vehicles of information but living entities that enter the heart, unlike academic terms that remain inert (Tagore, 2004, p.384). His works were often later translated by himself into English, as creative re-enactments in another language. *Gitanjali*, originally written in Bengali and translated into English as *Song Offerings* (1912), brought Tagore the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913.

As with poetry and prose, Tagore’s plays were written in Bengali and later translated into English and many other languages. Most are lyrical verse dramas characterized by

emotional conflict, slow rhythm, and rich lyrical digressions. The use of the national language thus reflects Tagore's strong national consciousness and artistic confidence. The capacity of literature to integrate globally is first reflected in the vitality and expressive power of the national language.

#### *4.2.2. Understanding humanity through reflections on Indian life and spirit*

Throughout his long creative life, Tagore traveled widely across Asia, Europe, and America, yet all his works drew inspiration from the land and people of India. He discovered universal human issues in the destinies, souls, and rhythms of Indian life. For Tagore, reaching the deepest point leads to boundless breadth.

Indian culture is characterized by the fusion of religion, philosophy, and poetry, a feature vividly embodied in Tagore's poetry. Timeless questions - life and death, freedom and liberation, happiness and suffering, the finite and the infinite - are expressed through his verses. These reflections emerge from a deeply personal yet universally resonant self, integrating emotion and philosophy, the national and the universal.

Tagore was also the first in Indian literature to place the "ordinary person," especially women, at the center of artistic concern. His portrayal of women from marginalized castes and oppressive social conditions resonated deeply with readers worldwide. Through poetry, prose, and drama, Tagore explored psychological depth and moral conflict, transforming social issues into inner human struggles. Characters such as Binodini and Mahamaya transcend national boundaries, embodying universal human experiences and aspirations for dignity, love, and freedom.

#### *4.2.3. Inheriting and renewing traditional poetics while embracing modern Western techniques*

In *The Religion of an Artist*, Tagore wrote that the artist's task is to convey to the world that human beings grow through the reality they express (Tagore, 2004, p. 381). Tagore constructed his artistic reality by inheriting and renewing traditional Indian aesthetics while assimilating modern Western literary techniques.

Indian literature, with nearly 3,500 years of history, is marked by introspective thinking and the poeticization of nature. Tagore inherited and revitalized these traditions, especially in *Gitanjali*, where natural imagery functions as a profound artistic symbol. At the same time, in prose fiction, he combined traditional narrative motifs and modern techniques such as psychological analysis, interior monologue, and symbolic structure, contributing to the modernization and global integration of Indian prose.

### **4.3. Implications for Vietnamese Writers in the Context of Integration**

After nearly four decades of renovation, Vietnamese literature has achieved encouraging results in international integration. Nevertheless, integration remains asymmetrical, with relatively few Vietnamese works translated and introduced abroad. In this regard, Tagore's perspectives and creative practice offer valuable lessons.

*First*, writers must recognize that integration expands and enriches national literary identity rather than erasing it. Vietnamese literature, like Indian literature, possesses a rich cultural heritage that should be explored deeply to uncover universal human values.

*Second*, national cultural identity is ultimately crystallized in the human being. Writing about national destiny requires penetrating deeply into human suffering and dignity. Several Vietnamese writers whose works have been translated abroad demonstrate this principle.

*Third*, literary talent lies primarily in creative mastery of language. Tagore's consistent use of Bengali underscores the importance of writing in one's mother tongue. Language embodies national thought and sensibility while writing in borrowed languages often limits the depth of expression.

*Fourth*, world literature develops through multiple artistic tendencies. Tagore cannot be confined to a single school; instead, he integrated diverse techniques while remaining rooted in tradition. His works are simultaneously modern and traditional, national and universal as an important orientation for Vietnamese writers pursuing international integration.

## **5. Conclusion**

Situated within the Eastern cultural paradigm, Vietnamese literature shares many affinities with Indian literature. The study and reception of Tagore in Vietnam have attracted growing scholarly interest. Building on analysis of Tagore's perspectives and creative practice, this study highlights several issues of both theoretical and practical significance: international integration as a means of expanding national literary identity; the writer's mission to prepare a fertile field for intercultural dialogue; and the path to integration through tradition toward modernity, and from the national toward the universal. Tagore's experience demonstrates that only by remaining deeply rooted in national life, focusing on the human core, and fully utilizing the expressive power of the national language can literature achieve enduring integration into world literature.

## **References**

- Do, L. T. (2018). *From a cultural perspective*. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House.
- Nguyen, B. T. (2005). *Vietnamese identity through literary exchange*. Hanoi: Vietnam National University Press.
- Nguyen, V. H. (2021). *Selected issues in culture and literature* (Research & Applications). Hanoi: Vietnam National University Press.
- Nguyen, V. H. (2006). *Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Renaissance*. Hanoi: Vietnam National University Press.
- Nguyen, V. H. (2023). The issue of international integration of contemporary Vietnamese literature: Viewed from the case of Ho Anh Thai. *Journal of Literary Theory and Criticism (Literature and Arts)*, 8, 84-93.
- Tagore, R. (1955). *Collected poems and plays*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.
- Tagore, R. (1970). *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings). Bombay; Calcutta; Madras; London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.
- Tagore, R. (1984). *Tagore for You*. Calcutta: Sri Jagadrindra Bhowmick & Visva-Bharati.
- Tagore, R. (2001). *Poetry* (X. Q. Dao, Trans.). Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House.
- Tagore, R. (2004a). *Selected works*, Vol. I (D. T. Luu, Ed.). Hanoi: Labour Publishing House & East-West Language and Culture Center.
- Tagore, R. (2004b). *Selected works*, Vol. II (D. T. Luu, Ed.). Hanoi: Labour Publishing House & East-West Language and Culture Center.
- Tran, D. H. (1999). *Confucianism and Vietnamese medieval and early modern literature*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- Tran, N. T. (2009). *Vietnamese medieval literature from a cultural perspective*. Hanoi: Vietnam Education Publishing House.
- Tran, D. S. (2021). *Cultural values of Vietnamese literature*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.