

# The Master

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*(Translation of the Vietnamese poem “Ong Do”, written by [Vu Dinh Lien](#)  
(1913-1996), published in 1936.)*

## The Master

Peach blossoms bloomed every spring  
There again, the old master came  
With red paper and black ink  
On a street, where the people claimed.

They claimed to buy his writings,  
And all praised him while buying  
“Just a mere move of his hand  
Turns strokes into a phoenix dance!”


But fewer buyers came each year  
Admirers, where did they go?  
Unused ink laid like black tears;  
Red paper dulled in sorrow...

That old master just sat there  
Among those who did not care.  
On the dull red fallen dead leaves;  
There fell soft rain with slight grief.

Another peach blossoms' spring  
Yet the old master is not there.  
Oh, where are they wandering  
Old folks' souls we all forgot?

This English translation of the famous poem “Ong Do” was made by Thu-Trang Vuong (Vuong Thu Trang) in late December 2011, when she was an 8th grader at Giang Vo Secondary School in Hanoi, Vietnam. It was lightly edited by Professor [Nancy K. Napier](#) (Boise State University, ID, USA). Thu-Trang graduated from [Sciences Po Paris](#) in 2021 and has since living and working in Paris, France.

In January 2018, professor Pham Trong Le (1938-2022), the first-ever translator of “Ong Do” in 1972, wrote an article about the Vietnamese Tet Holiday in *The Firmament Literacy Journal* (vol. 10, no. 4) and consulted four nicely done translations of the poem after his first version in 1972. Prof. Le confirmed that Thu-Trang’s translation was one of the best and the newest.

*\*Editorial note:* This article was edited and promoted by  Minh-Hoang Nguyen, a co-author with Thu-Trang Vuong in numerous academic publications.

## References

[1] Wikipedia. (2022). Vu Dinh Lien. [https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C5%A9%C4%90%C3%ACnh\\_Li%C3%AAn](https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C5%A9%C4%90%C3%ACnh_Li%C3%AAn)

[2] Pham Trong Le (2018). The meaning of Tet in Vietnam. *The Firmament Literacy Journal*, 10(4), 8-18.

