

Short Stories in Romanised National Language Script in Southern Vietnam Early in Twentieth Century

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Abstract: Short stories written in *quốc ngữ* (lit. national language script), or Romanised characters to record the Vietnamese language, in *Nam Bộ*, or Cochinchina, were started late in the 19th, then encountered an interruption and were continuously developed afterwards early in the 20th century. The transformation from traditional folk tales to modern short stories of artistic character, they included works inspired with ethics and preaching and those reflecting vividly the real life. The short stories made no small contributions to the modernisation of the genre in particular and Vietnam's national literature in general.

Keywords: Literature in Romanised script of Vietnamese, short stories in Romanised script of Vietnamese, modernisation of literature, Cochinchina.

Subject classification: Literature

1. Introduction

In Southern Vietnam, the literature written in the Romanised script of Vietnamese emerged initially in the late 19th century, but it did not develop continuously until the early 20th (there was an interruption of over a decade in the late 19th century). Later on, from the beginning of the 20th century till the early 1930s, it was developing incessantly with hundreds of works in various genres, such as poetry, drama, short stories, novels, memoirs and chronicles, etc.

In the field of prose, short stories and novels were written at the earliest. It is the central genre of the modern literature. The emergence of the Romanised script short stories particularly and the prose generally in Southern Vietnam was closely attached to the popularisation of the Romanised script and the emergence of the first Vietnamese-language newspaper titled "*Gia Định báo*" (Gia Định Newspaper) (1865). Starting with the news items in the newspaper and the collections of folk tales rewritten in the Romanised script, such as

Chuyện đời xưa (Old Tales) and *Chuyện khôi hài* (Funny Stories) by Truong Vinh Ky, the translated versions of the Chinese literature such as *Chuyện giải buồn* (Stories for Amusement), and self-written literary works such as *Kiếp phong trần* (Dust and Heat of Life) and *Bất cượng chớ cượng làm chi* (Impossible to be Hard, so It Should not be Hard) by Truong Vinh Ky, the first seeds of the Romanised script stories were formed. Later on, Nguyen Trong Quan's work titled "*Thầy Lazaro Phiền*" (Mr. Lazaro Phien), the first novel written in the Romanised script with the modern structure, was published. Due to various causes, however, the novel was not disseminated widely, which led to the oblivion of the prose for a long period in Southern Vietnam. In 1901, the Romanised script "short stories" started to reappear in the newspaper "*Nông cổ mĩn đàm*" (Chatting about Agriculture and Commerce or *Causeries sur l'agriculture et le commerce* as in French), and then developed continuously till the early 1930s.

Basically, development of the Romanised script short stories was uninterrupted during the three first decades of the 20th century, but there were also indicators separating it into different phases. The development of this genre is considered to be started in 1901, because it was the time when the newspaper "*Nông cổ mĩn đàm*" (1901-1921) was launched with Luong Khac Ninh's short story titled "*Truyện mài gươm dạy vợ*" (Story on Sharpening Sword to Educate the Wife). It was the first short story appearing in the issue No. 19 in 1901, after nearly twenty years of interruption. In the middle of the 1930s, the "New Poetry" movement took

place and the weekly "*Phong hóa*" (Manners, 1932-1936) managed by *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-strengthening Literary Group or *Groupe littéraire de ses propres forces* as in French) was launched. It was also the time when the newspaper "*Phụ nữ tân văn*" (Women's News, 1929-1935) was suspended, which was seen as the milestone of the transition to the modern literature in Vietnam. For the literature in Southern Vietnam, it was the very phase when many typical writers such as Dam Phuong, Huynh Thi Bao Hoa, Buu Dinh, Tran Quang Nghiep, Son Vuong, Cam Tam, and Hoang Minh Tu, etc.) gave up their writing. Based on the emergence of short stories and collections of short stories published in form of books², such as "*Ngôi hàng cập sách*" (Bookstore), "*Tôi kén vợ*" (I am Choosing a Wife), "*Mê nhau hết sức*" (Mutually Extremely Infatuated) by Le Mai and "*Mẹ ơi! Con muốn lấy chồng*" (Mom! I Want to Get Married) by Truong Minh Y, which were published by Le Mai Publisher in 1924 in Saigon, marking a new step of the development of the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam, we temporarily divide this period into two phases: the first one was from 1901 to the early 1920s; and, the second one - from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s.

2. The phase of the "re-appearance" (from 1901 to the early 1920s)

Having studied the press in the early 20th century, we find that newspapers and magazines were a very first and fertile place for short stories to be launched and developed in. Owing to the feature of "shortness and flexibility", seemingly,

short stories were considered an effective tool used by writers to reflect issues in life promptly and opportunely. This is the reason why at that time a short story often consisted of from several hundred to several thousand words, making up from half to a couple of columns and being published in several issues of the newspaper. “*Nông cổ minh đàm*” was the first newspaper where “short stories” were introduced, such as *Truyện mài giũa dạy vợ* (No. 19, 1901), *Tự tác nghiệp bất khả huật* (We Cannot Avoid the Disaster We Have Made by Ourselves, No. 22, 1902), *Nghĩa phụ khả phong* (Admirable Adopted Father, No. 25, 1902), *Nhẫn khí tân văn* (New Story on Endurance, No. 31, 1902), *Hoàng thiên bất phụ hảo tâm nhân* (The God Does Not Betray Kind-Hearted People, No. 44, 46, 48, 1902), *Chuyện Hồng Ngọc* (Story of Hong Ngoc, No. 51, 53, 1902), *Chuyện hai anh lái buôn* (Story on Two Merchants, No. 56, 1902), *Chuyện bốn anh điếc* (Tale on Four Deaf Persons, No. 59, 1902), *Chánh khí bất hùý tà mị* (The Righteous Should not be Afraid of the Miscreant, No. 61, 1902), *Kiến ngãi bất vi bi thế sự hề* (The World Where the Good is not Done, No. 66, 67, 69, 1902), *Chuyện mướn đầy tớ* (Story on Employing a Servant, No. 72, 1903), *Chuyện một đứa đầy tớ có nghĩa* (Story on A Good-Hearted Servant, No. 75, 1903), *Chuyện hai anh khùng* (Story on Two Mad Guys, No. 78, 1903), *Chuyện anh hà tiện* (Story on a Stingy Man, No. 80, 1903), and *Chuyện khôi hài* (Funny Stories, No. 110, 1903)... In other newspapers, such as *Lục tỉnh tân văn* (News of Six Provinces) and *Nam Kỳ địa phận* (Cochinchina Region), etc., it was

also possible to find folk stories, short dialogues, novelettes and trifling talks (under the name of “novels” published in *Lục tỉnh tân văn* or “stories for amusement” published in *Nam Kỳ địa phận*). It was the way to create and complete the genre of short stories written in the Romanised script in the following period.

The first characteristic of the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam during the period is that most of them were focused on the moral degradation, and they were somewhat influenced by folk tales; some of them imitated jokes, fables and funny stories, typically the works of Luong Khac Ninh, Nguyen Chanh Sat, Tran Khac Ky, Nguyen Tay Hien, Nguyen Cong Binh, Luu Lac Tieu, Cung Huynh and Ben Go, etc.

The second characteristic is shown in the fact that all the works tended to reflect more and more the real life. In the beginning period, certainly, the reflection was not skilfully and truthfully made. According to some researchers, the Romanised script short stories in this period were, on the one hand, influenced by folk tales and medieval legends [7, pp.628-648]; on the other hand, they were influenced by traditionally miraculous elements and the style of the Western horror stories. This tendency started with the short stories published in *Nông cổ minh đàm* and written by Luong Khac Ninh, Tran Khac Ky, Nguyen Chanh Sat, Le Hoang Muu, Nguyen Phuong Chanh and Tran Phuc Le, etc. They included anecdotes, fable-style stories, satirical stories that criticised and mocked lightly bad habits in life or praised the wit of the poor...

By the early 20th century, the social foundation in Vietnam generally and Southern Vietnam particularly became basically semi-feudal colonial. During and after the First World War, the French government carried out colonial exploitation twice, making indigenous people fall in destitution. To make up for the damage from the world economic crisis which occurred in 1929-1933, the colonial government tried to exploit indigenous people by multiple measures such as: reducing the salary of officials, cutting (dismissing/reducing) the number of workers, suspend, production, aimed at stagnating domestic production and forcing people to use products from France which were not sold well. The Bank of Indochina made changes to the exchange rate, resulting in a drastic reduction in the price of domestic agricultural products that made farmers as well as industrialists and traders go bankrupt. According to statistical data available, 177 traders were declared bankrupt in 1929 and the corresponding figure amounted to 209 in 1933 [2, p.343]. Millions of people fell into a hopeless situation and had to undersell farming land to despotic landowners or French owners of plantations. Some of them had to work as hired labours in the plantations, the land of which had once belonged to them. Others came to cities or mining sites to earn a living. In addition to natural calamities occurring constantly, local people had to suffer from heavy taxation. As a result, their life became more and more miserable; whereas, a small number of people, who were compradors, became wealthier quickly and enjoyed luxurious

living conditions. To implement the policy of obscurantism, the colonial government encouraged the dissolute lifestyle, spoiling the youth of many generations. Brothels, opium dens and casinos sprang up everywhere, resulting in social evils and a wave of moral collapse. The life of peasants was reflected in different aspects: the plight, the human conditions, the backward lifestyles and customs. The destitution of those, who “toiled lonely and tirelessly at earning a living” within an area surrounded by the village bamboo enclosure, was described as an indispensable corollary of the complicated and corruptive social institution. In the medieval literature, they had never been considered key characters or objects, but in this period, they suddenly became central and typical characters, leaving a deep impression on readers. Southern writers were pioneers in creating literary works in the Romanised script. Right from the start, they paid special attention to life of Southern peasants in the transitional period. In 1910, Martin’s short story titled “*Làm ơn bị hại*” (Doing a Favour, but Getting Harmed) was published in *Nam Kỳ địa phận* (No. 92). It is a story about a kind-hearted and good-natured peasant named Tam, who had a strong will to improve life by growing rice. As described in the story: “Unexpectedly, it has been [severely] sunny since then and nearly half of the rice seedlings have died. He hoed land for rice-growing, but it has not rained. There was sometimes light rain, indeed. Yet, it was not enough to make the soil wet. How to grow rice without water! It is really difficult, indeed! Whenever he comes to the field, he feels worried and sad!”

The real life was reflected ceaselessly by the writers. In addition to setting up a ruling system and disseminating the Western culture and civilisation, after the French troops occupied the six provinces of Cochinchina, the most important task of the French colonists was to change the fertile rice fields into a source of supply of rubber, pepper and rice, etc. for the sake of its invasion of the entire Indochina. At that time, a social stratum of local wealthy people, who had abundant properties such as money, land, houses and cars, was formed in Southern Vietnam. A considerable number of those people wanted to “separate completely” from the traditional customs, while aping the Western lifestyle in enjoying the Western material civilisation. However, it is remarkable that they followed the lifestyle in a ridiculous and ludicrous manner, which was described extremely vividly by the writers. In 1910 as well, Cung Huynh’s novelette titled “*Nhà quê hút xì gà uống nước đá*” (The Rustic Smokes Cigars and Drinks Icy Water) was published in *Nam Kỳ địa phận* (No. 60). It reads “two rural men coming to the city to take part in the lawsuit over land ownership. As they won the lawsuit, they happily came to a food-store to have a meal. After eating more than enough, they decided to buy cigars to smoke. Yet, they did not know how to smoke a cigar, so they could not light it. And then, they came to an alcohol store, where they drank a glass of iced wine in the hope of feeling cool. After drinking all the wine in the glass, they found a piece of ice inside. Thus, they stealthily got it and then put it into the haversack for the purpose of showing it to others at home.

On the way home, however, the piece of ice thawed out completely”. Unlike people in Northern Vietnam, people in Southern Vietnam came in contact with the Western civilisation very early. At the beginning, therefore, the writers described the phenomenon of “snobbishness” from the perspective of criticism. For example, a writer wrote: “Based on what we have seen and done, which has harmed people in life many times, it is necessary to make careful consideration before doing something. For what is related to the spiritual aspect especially, it is essential to obtain information and make selection so as not to cause harm to the present and the next generations” (*Vòi rồng - Waterspout - Nam Kỳ địa phận*, No. 99-1910). The short story titled *Chủ nhà phong lưu* (Noble Master - 1911) tells about a person who “contributed every year from forty to fifty thousand bushels of rice; he therefore tried to learn how to show off as a noble man”. He thus hired a servant and warned: “*I am noble and elegant*”, “*so whenever I utter a word, you have to understand fully my intention so as to do it correctly*”. As a result, when he complained: “*Since the morning I have felt uncomfortable in the stomach as if I would vomit. So, I cannot eat anything*”, the servant went out to buy a coffin, funeral offerings and invited a monk home to prepare a funeral. It was because the servant understood “by implication” that the man was going to die soon, that he did the funny things”.

In the period, another difference in the Romanised script short stories between the Southern and the North is related to Catholic stories. Those stories were mainly published in *Nam Kỳ địa phận*, which was

circulated widely among Catholic communities. The newspaper tended to be open in its content. The section on “morality” and “manners” in the newspaper were not limited to the church dogmas, but was also used to disseminate the “three moral bonds and five constant virtues” of Confucianism and praise the traditional lifestyle. Interestingly, the dissemination and praise of the traditional lifestyle was done via short stories and dialogues, like a scene of a play or a poem, making it very easy to go to the hearts of people, instead of dry or rigid articles for indoctrination. In Ai Ngo’s story titled *Tám áng phong* (A Partition - No. 697, 1922), for example, two brothers named Xoai (Mango) and Oi (Guava) loved each other very much, but they could not play together. Whenever they played anything together, the siblings would have a quarrel soon. To make them tolerant towards each other, their mother got a screen to partition their room into two parts. Each boy had to stay in one of the parts, playing freely with his own toys. She warned: “Each of you have to stay in your own part. Either of you comes into the other part, will be beaten to death”. Eventually, the boys felt too bored to stay alone. They therefore asked the mother to get rid of the partition and promised to stay together in harmony without quarrels. Although no teachings were mentioned directly in the story, readers could feel easily and deeply its aim of education.

As regards the authors of the literary works written in *quốc ngữ* in Southern Vietnam generally and those of the short stories particularly, it is really difficult for researchers to build a picture for the two

first decades of the 20th century, due to the loss and the damage of documents. After trying our best to collect documents from multiple sources, we can make a preliminary remark that the works were mainly published in three newspapers, namely: “*Nông cổ mín đàm*”, “*Nam Kỳ địa phận*” and “*Lục tỉnh tân văn*”. The authors of the literary works in *Nông cổ mín đàm*³ had been Confucian scholars, such as Nguyen Chanh Sat, Le Hoang Muu, Luong Khac Ninh and Nguyen Thien Ke, etc. However, they wrote short stories only like amateurs. Most of their works were novels (in the case of Nguyen Chanh Sat and Le Hoang Muu) or poems (Nguyen Thien Ke). Remarkably, “*Nông cổ mín đàm*” is the very newspaper where the Romanised script short stories re-appeared after being interrupted for nearly two decades. As regards “*Nam Kỳ địa phận*”, it was the first Catholic newspaper in Vietnam, and most of the authors were Catholic; perhaps, they all were trained in seminaries or churches. Having surveyed their works, we realise that the inspiration of the Catholic moral standards is quite dominant. Some outstanding authors can be mentioned here, such as Cong Binh, Ben Go, Luu Lac Tieu, Ngo Hao Hoc, Nguyen Huu Hau and Xitevong Do Chi Lan... The authors of short stories published in “*Nam Kỳ địa phận*” showed the continuation in both creative inspiration and expression from the Catholic writers in the late 19th century, including Huynh Tinh Cua, Nguyen Trong Quan, and especially Truong Vinh Ky. Lastly, the literary works published in “*Lục tỉnh tân văn*” were closely associated

with some pen-names, including Toan, P. Hoa, Huynh Cong Phung, Le Ngo Van, Doan Khac Huynh, Do Hoai Chau and Nguyen Van Nhieu, etc. Their short stories were mainly inspired with the traditional moral standards in Southern Vietnam. Although realistic elements were also exploited by the author in the later phase; for example, in *Cảnh đêm khuya* (Late Night Scenery) by Le Ngo Van or *Ai là kẻ bạc tình* (Who is the unfaithful) by Do Hoai Chau, basically, the short stories in *Lục tỉnh tân văn* shared common characteristics of the Romanised script short stories during the first phase.

By now, those who do research on the Romanised script literature in Southern Vietnam have not got more information of the biographies and works of the authors. The situation is the same the later phase as well. The biographies of the writers remain unknown to the Romanised script literary researchers. In our opinion, that stems from two reasons: first, the researchers have difficulty in finding the data; second, the very authors did not have an intention of preserving their own literary works for the next generations, according to the common characteristics of the writers and literature in Southern Vietnam. It is the very factor resulting in orthodox researchers not paying attention to the Cochinchinese Romanised script literature generally and the short stories particularly for a long time. The period was, however, a phase of preparation for the emergence of a large number of writers specialised in short stories in the next period, such as Buu Dinh, Le Mai, Hoang Minh Tu, Cam Tam, Tran Quang Nghiep, Son Vuong and Ellen Anh Hoa...

In terms of the style, including composition, character creation, narration and language, the short stories in the first phase were mainly based on the traditional elements, the telling by explaining in simple words and expression, and imitation, without particular creation or innovation. During the phase, the concept of “short stories” was not realised correctly, as in the modern sense, by the writers. Instead, they still used the term of “*đoản thiên tiểu thuyết*” (lit. novelettes) to refer to the genre.

3. Period of Development and Integration (from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s)

As described above, the later phase in this period is seen to start from the mid-1920s, marked by the emergence of collections of short stories published in the form of a book. That was extremely significant for the development of the genre of the Romanised script short stories in Cochinchina, because helping short stories join the literary market formally, and become one of the fundamental factors speeding up the literary professionalisation in Vietnam in the early 20th century. In this aspect, short stories were nearly 15 years slower than novels. Two well-known Romanised script novels in Southern Vietnam, namely Tran Thien Trung’s novel titled “*Hoàng Tố Anh hàm oan*” (Hoang To Anh Suffers from Injustice, published by Phat Toan Printing House, Saigon) and Truong Duy Toan’s novel titled *Phan Yên ngoại sử tiết phụ gian truân* (Chronicle of Phan Yen, a Faithful Woman Who Faced Hardships, published

by F.H. Schneider Printing House, Saigon) were both launched in 1910.

During the phase, the genres of the Romanised script short stories were initially shaped. In the previous phase, the content of the short stories was inclined to giving teachings and inspired strongly with moral standards. In the later phase, however, the tendency was developed in parallel with the tendency of realism, which was sometimes shown at the same time, by the same author, and in the same work. It was a distinctive feature of the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam, compared to those in the North. Based on our survey, we realise that the quantity and, especially, the quality of the short stories were greater by far than those in the previous phase. In our opinion, some reasons for the change can be enumerated as below:

First, many newspapers paid more attention to literature during this phase. Apart from “*Nam Kỳ địa phận*” (1908-1945), and “*Lục tỉnh tân văn*” (1907-1944) and “*Công luận báo*” (1916-1939), other newspapers were also launched, such as: “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” (East France Times, 1923-1928), “*Trung lập báo*” (Neutrality Newspaper, 1924-1933), “*Thần chung*” (Morning Bell, 1929-1930), “*Phụ nữ tân văn*” (Women’s News, 1929-1935), etc. One can refer to some literary works published in the newspapers and magazines, including: *Cay đắng mùi đời* (Bitterness of Life, published in “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” in 1923) and *Cha con nghĩa nặng* (Father’s and Child’s Great Love, 1929-1930) by Ho Bieu Chanh; *Mảnh trăng thu* (Autumn Moon, published in “*Phụ nữ tân văn*” in 1930) by Buu Dinh; *Chung Kỳ Vinh* (Chung Ky Vinh, published in “*Lục tỉnh tân văn*” in

1924) by Dam Phuong; *Nhi nữ tạo anh hùng* (Women Help to Create Heroes) by Huynh Thi Bao Hoa and *Phụ nghĩa tào khang* (Unfaithful to the Marital Fidelity) by Phan Thi Bach Van, published in “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” in 1928. Especially, almost all the short stories of Tran Quang Nghiep, the most typical writer in the field of short stories in Southern Vietnam during the phase, were published in newspapers, such as “*Đông Pháp thời báo*”, “*Công luận báo*” (Public Opinion Newspaper), “*Trung lập báo*”, “*Thần chung*” and “*Phụ nữ tân văn*”, before being released in the form of a collection (by Duc Luu Phuong Printing House and Nguyen Khac Printing House).

In addition, a particular column for short stories named “*Đoản thiên tiểu thuyết*” (Novelette) appeared in some newspapers and magazines such as “*Lục tỉnh tân văn*”, “*Công luận báo*”, “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” and “*Thần chung*”. In “*Phụ nữ tân văn*”, there were columns titled “Comic Stories”, “Short Stories”, “Bizarre Stories”, “Humour”, “Gossip” and “Novelette”. “*Nam Kỳ địa phận*” had a column titled “Stories for Amusement”... Evaluating the contributions of “*Phụ nữ tân văn*”, Nguyen Van Xuan argued that it had been “the most successful newspaper in Southern Vietnam so far, which gained very high achievements owing to the efforts made by Southern intellectuals for modernisation of the literature and press” [8, p.93].

Another newspaper making contributions to the development of the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam during the phase was “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” (renamed “*Thần chung*” afterwards). As regards the quantity of the short stories, we have collected 129 ones from this

newspaper. Unfortunately, many numbers of the newspaper were too ramshackle, including all those from 1923 to 1926 and from the last three months of 1928 till when the newspaper was suspended. As a result, we cannot collect more short stories from the newspaper. As regards the authors, it was a relatively high number of them, of whom the most outstanding were Tran Quang Nghiep with 12 short stories, T.L and Dang Luong Tai with 5 each, Huynh Thi Bao Hoa, Phan Thi Bach Van (or B.V. as her pen-name), Phan Thi Ngoc Suong, Nguyen Thi Canh, Luu Thi Viet Nga, Cao Thi Phi Yen, Nguyen Thi Cao, Phung So, Luu Van Ba, Le Hai and Tran Van Hai... Since the collected data are limited and many of the writers in Southern Vietnam in the phase were mentioned with “an empty biography”, we have been unable to deal with the issue.

During the development of the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam from the mid-1920s to 1932, the most remarkable writer was Tran Quang Nghiep (1907-1983), who was considered Nguyen Cong Hoan of Cochinchina. Compared with other short stories published in “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” and those of other Southern contemporary writers, Tran Quang Nghiep’s stories were more special and attractive. He started his writing career very early, at the age of 20⁴ in 1927, and his maiden work was published in “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” in 1928. Tran Quang Nghiep had an attractive, flexible, succinct and highly expressive writing style. The situations in his stories were created meticulously with dramatic and unpredictable endings, which were sometimes tragic; for example, in the

stories “*Đêm thứ bảy*” (The Saturday Night) and “*Trời Phật công bình*” (The God and Buddha Show the Justice); sometimes humorous; for example, in the stories “*Lỗi bù lỗi*” (A Mistake is Redeemed by a Mistake), “*Số bạc mười ngàn*” (Gambling with Ten Thousand Vietnamese Dong) and “*Thêm một lá thăm của...*” (One More Lot of... to Be Drawn). His short stories gradually went out of the traditional narrating style, as he used the first person as the story-teller and combined “stories in stories” quite interestingly; for example, in the stories “*Ông tơ các cô*” (Ill-timed Matchmaker), “*Ai đành phụ nghĩa*” (Who Could be Unfaithful) and “*Hồng Hoa*” (Rose). Moreover, the style of expression in his short stories was more refined; the parallel constructions were less used; the language was plain, like the daily language, but it was sometimes very fluent with the southern characteristics. One can conclude that Tran Quang Nghiep did make great contribution towards the short stories published in “*Đông Pháp thời báo*” as well as the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam in the later phase.

Second, the writers were more conscious of introducing their literary works to readers. In addition to the short stories published in the newspapers and magazines, they collaborated with publishers and printers to release collections of high-quality short stories, winning the readers’ affections. Some of them can be enumerated as below: *Ái tình* (Love, 1924) and *Ngôi hàng sách* (Bookstore, 1924) by Le Mai; *Người đàn bà nguy hiểm* (A Dangerous Woman, 1925) by Nguyen Van Kiem; *Duyên phận lỡ làng* (Broken Love-Fate, 1925) by Pham

Minh Kien; *Bí mật phi thường* (Extraordinary Secret, 1925) by Tuan Anh; *Ai sát mưu?* (Who is the Assassin, 1925) by Truong Quang Tien; *Gái chính chuyên hai chồng* (A Virtuous Woman with Two Husbands, 1926) by Tran Cong Gioi; *Ai lỗi lầm* (Whose Mistake?, 1926) by Tuan Anh; *Mộng Hoa* (Dreaming under Flower, 1928) by Nam Dinh; Hoang Minh Tu's short stories (*Oan hồn vì tiết giá* - Ghost of Virtue, *Nghĩa đen tình đỏ* - Unhappy in Marriage, Lucky in Love, *Nợ tình vay trả* - Pay back the Love Debt, *Ông tơ cắt cớ* - Ill-timed Matchmaker, *Trọn đạo chung tình* - Faithfulness, *Hai cô tuyệt sắc ở Sài Gòn* - Two Perfectly Beautiful Girls in Saigon...); Cam Tam's short stories (*Ông còm mi* - A Bent-backed Man, *Phận bạc má đào* - Woman's Fate, *Cô hai văn minh* - Civilised Woman, *Vì một chữ tình* - Because of Love, *Ông chủ bút* - Editor-in-Chief, *Bà sui mười ngàn* - Mom of the Son-in-law); and, Son Vuong's short stories (*Bạc trắng lòng đen* - White Silver⁵, *Black Heart*, *Ép dầu ép mỡ* - Forced Marriage, *Làm ơn được vợ* - Doing a Favour and Getting a Wife, *Ăn năn đã muộn* - Too Late to Regret after the Event, *Chén cơm lạt của người thất nghiệp* - Frugal Meal of an Unemployed Person, *Anh bạc tình* - Unfaithful Man).

A noticeable point about the writers of the Romanised script short stories in Southern Vietnam is that most of them gave up writing stories in the early 1930s, while the short story writers in the North, such as Vu Trong Phung, Nguyen Cong Hoan and Ngo Tat To, still continued releasing their works. Although some of them, such as Ho Bieu Chanh (1885-1958), Nguyen Chanh Sat (1869-1947), Phu Duc (1901-1970) and Tan Dan Tu (1875-1955), kept writing

stories, they no longer made much contribution towards the literary development as before. Of the writers, who gave up writing, some were quite outstanding in the literary circle in Southern Vietnam, such as Le Hoang Muu (1879-1941), Dam Phuong (1881-1947), Huynh Thi Bao Hoa (1896-1982), Buu Dinh (1903-1931), Tran Quang Nghiep (1907-1983) and Son Vuong (1907-1987)...

As known, the literature in Southern Vietnam was more inclined to serving the entertaining and popular market. Most of the readers in Southern Vietnam were "commoners". During the period when the new literature written in the Romanised script was initially created and shaped, such readers were really important for the literary innovation and integration as well as the improvement of the Romanised script of Vietnamese language. By the early 1930s, the system of the Romanised script had been quite fully built; the printing and distribution techniques had been much improved. Although the press still played a certain role in disseminating literary works, it was no longer significant as in the previous phase. The situation required comprehensive renovation in literature towards the modernity. Compared with the literature in Southern Vietnam, the literature in Northern Vietnam started later, but it developed rapidly and came back to the position of the motive force in the national literature by the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, the elements, which used to be "new" in the Southern literature during the previous phase, were not effective enough to help the literature in Southern Vietnam get over the "transitional stage" towards modernity. On the other hand, the readers, who were commoners and had been seen as

the motive for the formation of the Romanised script literature, had now become a factor obstructing the literary development. As indicated unanimously by many researchers, furthermore, a common characteristic of the Southern writers was that they preferred “leading life in the literary word” to “working a literary writer”. Because of some objective factor, therefore, they could give up writing literary works “immediately”. The characteristic was highly respectable, but also regrettable for readers in particular and the Romanised script literature in general. It is, however, possible to say that the Southern writers had accomplished their role in development of the short stories as well as the literature written in the Romanised script. The Northern writers undertook the role since then, making Vietnamese literature develop and integrate further with the regional and the world literature during the 1932-1945 period.

4. Conclusion

It is affirmable that the Romanised script short stories of the writers in Southern Vietnam in company with those of the writers in Northern Vietnam were one of “the main characters” in the literary life in Vietnam for over three first decades of the 20th century. On the way towards modernity, the short stories written in the period did complete perfectly the “dual missions”, including the taking of the advantages of being short, quickly written and easily published in the newspaper, so as to perform the literary functions of education, aestheticism and entertainment;

and, the making of contribution to the development of short stories in the next periods from the perspective of both content and form as well. The achievements gained in the literature generally and the short stories specifically during the 1932-1945 period demonstrated clearly the contribution of the Romanised script short stories.

Notes

² According to the data we have collected so far, these are the first short stories published in the form of books in Southern Vietnam. Meanwhile, in the North, a number of collections of short stories were published in 1920, including: “*Vì nghĩa quên tình*” (Sacrificing Love for Loftiness, Vinh Thanh Printing House, Hanoi, 1921) by Nguyen Manh Bong; “*Bức tranh lòng son*” (Picture of Loyalty, Thuc Nghiep Printing House, Hanoi, 1922) by Nguyen Can Mong; “*Chuyện thế gian*” (Stories of the World, two volumes, published by Tan Da Bookstore, Hanoi, 1922) and “*Kiếp hồng nhân*” (Woman’s Fate, published by Tan Da Bookstore, Hanoi, 1923) by Nguyen Cong Hoan, etc.

³ “*Nông cổ mìn đàm*” (Chatting about Agriculture and Commerce) was released for 21 years. However, the numbers we have collected only range from the number 1 of 1901 to the number 150 of 1904; i.e. all the other numbers published over the other 17 years have not been studied by researchers yet. If all the numbers published over the 24 years were collected, the number of the short story writers mentioned in this paper would not be so limited.

⁴ It was the age at which many writers in Southern Vietnam started their literary career; for example, Buu Dinh was born in 1903 and his first short story titled *Bạn hiền khó kiếm* (Difficult to Get a Good Friend) was published in the newspaper “*Đông Pháp*”

thời báo” in 1923; Son Vuong was born in 1909 and his first literary works were published in 1930 by Duc Luu Phuong Printing House.

⁵ The word “bạc” means “silver”, which also implies coins, that were made of the material, and therefore, money.

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