

THE PERCEPTIONS OF *KÍ* IN SOUTH VIETNAMESE LITERATURE (1954 – 1975)

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Abstract. In Vietnamese literary history, there have been many different opinions on what is *kí* and how many subgenres it embraces. The perceptions of *kí* differ over time and space. For example, in South Vietnamese literature during 1954-1975, the perceptions of *kí* are different from other periods in Vietnamese literature. Among different approaches, the methods of cultural studies can be applied to explain the changes in the theory and performance of *kí* in Vietnamese twentieth-century literature in general and South Vietnamese literature during 1954-1975 in particular. In this article, via seeing genres as socially constructed, I will analyze the act of writing and reading *kí* in the South during the period from historical, social, and ideological contexts.

Keywords: *kí*, reportage literature, South Vietnamese literature, cultural studies.

1. Introduction

Among others, *kí* plays an important and unique role in twentieth-century Vietnamese literature. Firstly, it is one of the genres that had the most to do with the modernization of Vietnamese literature in the first half of the twentieth century (1900–1945). It also fuelled two influential debates among Vietnamese literary circles, which were the pen war over art-for-art's sake or art-for-life's sake (1935–1939) and the debate over the fictional elements in *kí* in the 1960s. Secondly, during 1954-1975, *kí* played an important role in both North and South Vietnamese literature. However, in Vietnamese literary history, there have been many different opinions on what is *kí* and how many subgenres it embraces. The perceptions of *kí* differ over time and space. For example, in South Vietnamese literature during 1954-1975, the perceptions of *kí* are different from other periods in Vietnamese literature.

Some works on Vietnamese literature that have been done have not paid much attention to *kí* literature and the perceptions of Southern writers, critics, and readers about this genre. Tran Trong Dang Dan in *South Vietnamese Culture and Arts 1954-1975* (1989) does not mention the classification of *kí* and artistic concepts of *kí* writers [1]. Vu Hanh and Nguyen Ngoc Phan in *Literature during the period 1945-1975 in Ho Chi Minh City* (2007) briefly describe some types of *kí* in Ho Chi Minh City during this period such as

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memoirs, reportage, and literary essays. In the book, the authors divide into categories such as social memoirs, political memoirs, and war memoirs [2; 360-366]. It can be seen that there are few works on the perceptions of *kí* in South Vietnamese literature. Vo Phien in his work *Twenty Years of Literature in South Vietnam, 1945–1975: Overview* [3], and Nguyen Hien Le in his memoir *My Writing Career* (1996) only briefly describe how Southern writers, when classifying memoirs, used Vu Ngoc Phan's classification (in *Modern Writers*, 1942) but excluded *bút kí/tùy bút* (literary essays) from *kí* due to its lyrical nature [4]. Since the 1930s, critics and writers have tried to form a theory of *kí* using theoretical approaches. Narrator, themes, plot, literary styles, spatial-temporal typology, typicality, and allowances of literary techniques, among others, are of the most interest in *kí* criticism. However, they are not enough to explain the variance in writing and reading *kí* in Vietnamese literature. To understand the reception of *kí* in southern Vietnamese literature during the period 1954-1975, it is necessary to apply the approach of cultural studies: place it in the cultural and historical context of the time. Tran Hoai Anh in his work *Literary Theory and Criticism in South Vietnam 1954–1975* (2009) is the first scholar who initially describes the performance of Southern Vietnamese literature from the context of the relationship between writers and reality [5]. In this article, by seeing genres as socially constructed, I continue Tran Hoai Anh's work to analyze the act of writing and reading *kí* in the South during the period from the historical, social, and ideological contexts.

2. Content

2.1. Definitions of *kí*

Kí is a special genre in Vietnamese literature that embraces many subgenres of nonfiction which are classified in Western literature under such headings as diary, memoir, travelogue, biography, autobiography, and reportage. In Vietnam before 1945 and in South Vietnam from 1945–1975, *kí* normally refers to nonfictional genres which are *phóng sự* (investigative reportage), *kí sự* (historical reportage), *truyện kí* (biography), *du kí* (travelogue), *hồi kí* (memoir), and *nhật kí* (diary). In North Vietnam from 1945–1986, writers and critics tended to broaden the category of *kí* by including *bút kí* (a flexible combination of travelogue, reportage, and literary essays) and *tùy bút* (literary essays) into the genre. Also in this period in North Vietnam, *truyện kí* (biography) turned into a loose combination of autobiography/biography and fiction. However, after the Renovation in 1986, *bút kí*, *tùy bút*, and especially *truyện kí* (biography) have gradually been removed from the category of *kí*, which means that recent *kí* scholars and readers have come back to the definition of *kí* before 1945. In this article, I use the term *kí* to refer to any literary nonfiction text that describes a factual event, person, social phenomenon, or historical period, using literary styles and techniques and written in the form of prose.

2.2. Different perceptions of *kí* in South Vietnamese literature (1954 – 1975)

While northern writers and critics from 1945 until recently considered literary essays, investigative reportage, diaries, memoirs, correspondence and travelogue as subgenres of *kí*, southern writers did not group them into one umbrella term like that but considered them as different literary genres. In *Introduction to South Vietnamese Literature* (1999), Vo Phien shows that writers in the South did not pay much attention to theorizing *kí*.

While northern writers and critics had a long discussion and debate over *kí* in the early 1960s, southern writers merely inherited Vu Ngoc Phan's theory of *kí*, which was visibly influenced by French criticism and genre theory.

In *Modern Writers* (1942), Vu Ngoc Phan considers *bút kí* as equivalent to literary essays (including personal essays and critical essays) in Western literature. *Bút kí* had roots both in Western and Vietnamese literary traditions [6; 454]. He argues that investigative reportage, *lich sử kí sự* (historical reportage), and *truyện kí* (biography) as modes of narrative. These modes are different from the mode of literary essays: while the former focuses on events, the latter puts importance on arguments and feelings. He also distinguishes *lich sử tiểu thuyết* (historical novels) from historical reportage and biography. He emphasizes that investigative reportage, historical reportage, and biography should not contain any fictional detail but facts only [6; 542–3, 552].

Similar to Phan, Phien differentiates the literary essay from investigative reportage, diary, memoir and travelogue. He explains that in literary essays, events are not important but arguments and feelings are. They play an important role in literary reportages [3; 216–217]. However, he also uses *kí* as the umbrella term for the latter.

According to Phan in *Nhà văn hiện đại* (*Modern Writers*), *bút kí* is equivalent to what we call *tùy bút* [literary essays], and *phóng sự* [investigative reportage] is equivalent to what we call *kí*. In *kí*, besides *phóng sự*, we would like to include *kí sự* [historical reportage], *hồi kí* [memoir], *tạp kí* [random reportage/notes], which all focus on recording events. That is why we want to replace Vũ's *bút kí* with the term *tùy bút* to distinguish *bút* and *kí*. If *tùy bút* focuses on feelings, *kí* focuses on recording events; if *tùy bút* focuses on literary techniques, *kí* focuses on reality... [...] According to Pham Văn Sĩ, *kí* embraces subgenres such as “*phóng sự*, *bút kí*, *tùy bút*, *thư*, *truyện kí*”. That is not appropriate [3; 243–4].

Nguyen Hien Le's memoir also reveals that southern writers did distinguish *kí* and *tùy bút*: “I did not compose any poem, but was interested in writing kinds of *kí* (travelogue, memoir) and *luận* [essays], *nghi luận* [critical essays], *cảo luận* [review], *tùy bút* [literary essays]) as well as articles about education and literature” [4].

In summary, during 1954–1975, southern writers were different from Northern ones because they did not put literary essays and biographies into the same group with historical reportage, investigative reportage, memoirs, and travelogues under the umbrella name *kí*. Because of the lack of material, it is not clear whether southern writers used the term *kí* to group historical and investigative reportage, memoirs, and travelogues or not. However, after 1975, in *Introduction to South Vietnamese Literature* (1986) and *My Writing Career* (1996), both Phien and Nguyen Hien Le, two popular writers of southern literature between 1954–1975, used the term *kí* to refer to these genres. The reason for the variety of conceptions of *kí* is in part dependent on local circumstances and in part on literary history, for in Vietnamese medieval literature, *kí* referred to any nonfictional narrative.

Although southern writers' theory of *kí* was different from one of Northern writers, *kí* nevertheless remained a popular genre in southern literature between 1954 and 1975. Similar to northern *kí*, the most popular topic in *kí* in southern literature was the war. Vo Phien asserts the abundance and diversity of *kí* on the war and distinguishes the development of *kí* into two periods: before 1963 (the first republic of the South under

Ngo Dinh Diem's government) and after 1963 (the second republic of the South). He also emphasizes the close relationship between investigative reportage and the seriousness of the situation: "The more serious the political conflicts were, the more memoirs were published; the fiercer the battles were, the more investigative reportages appeared" [3; 246].

Phien even asserted that after 1945, "kí is one of the specialties of southern literature during 1954–1975" [3; 244]. He believes that in the South, writers were free to reveal social evils as well as wrongdoings by politicians. At this point, he seems to be one-sided: in fact, the wrongdoings by politicians were only revealed after they were no longer in power, for example, in Cao Van Luan's *By the Flow of History* (1965), Le Tu Hung's *Four Generals of Da Lat* (1971), and *Secrets of the Coupon 1st November 1963* (1971). Phien also argues that kí in the South was very sincere, and accurate because it was out of the political influence. However, he contradicts himself when claiming that "There was no kí which is against the war or sentimental, utopian. There was no kí which was leftist or coward. There was no secret agent among kí writers" [3; 247-8]. Later, some intellectuals who were also Southern writers between 1954–1975 like Phien, pointed out how Phien's anti-communism influenced the way he selected and criticized works of Southern writers in *Introduction to South Vietnamese Literature*. He left out, for example, writers of the journal *Trình bày* (Presentation Journal) and the literary group *Thái độ* (Attitudes). The works of other leftist intellectuals such as Nguyen Van Trung and Vu Hanh were also not mentioned in the book. In summary, from Phien's book, it can be seen that kí in southern literature during the war was a popular genre. However, it is impossible to say that southern kí during the war was objective and independent from political influence.

2.3. Understanding the perceptions of kí in South Vietnam (1954-1975) from its contexts

2.3.1. Contexts of kí in Vietnam (1900-1945) and in North Vietnam (1954-1975)

To understand the perceptions of kí in South Vietnam, it is necessary to examine the perceptions of kí in Vietnam during 1900-1945 and the perceptions of kí in the North from 1954 to 1975. In Vietnam, the debates between writers who support "art for art's sake" and ones who believe in "art for life's sake" seem to happen in regularly critical times. Before the First Indochina War, in the final years of the French colony in Vietnam, there was such a debate (1935–1939) among Vietnamese writers who supported "art for art's sake" and ones who supported "art for life's sake". Following that, there was the 1960s debate in the North stressed over whether kí could contain fictional techniques or not. Before this debate which was published on the *Literary Studies Journal* during 1966-1967, the term kí had never been used to refer to a lot of subgenres. Vu Ngoc Phan in his 1942 book defines investigative reportage, historical reportage, *bút kí* (a genre which is a combination of reportage and literary essays), *tùy bút* (literary essays), diary, memoir, or travelogue, however, he does not put them under the umbrella term kí. The term kí was used to translate the Soviet genre *očerk* (which means "sketch" or "reportage") which appeared in Leonid I. Timofeev and Natan Vengrov's *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (published in Vietnam in 1955) and Boris Polevoy's *Writing Reportage* (published in Vietnam in 1961). Timofeev defines *očerk* as "a type of narrative prose" which "is different to other genres as novels, medium-length stories, and short stories in the way it accurately describes factual events and people" [3; 93-4]. The definition, although it refers to Soviet reportage, is quite broad, which might have influenced North Vietnamese

critics to use the term *kí* to refer to many types of literary nonfiction. This period is also the time socialist realism was adopted into Vietnamese art and literature and became the orthodox doctrine, influencing both the theory and practice of literature.

The first time that the term *kí* was widely used as an umbrella term for many literary nonfictional genres in Vietnamese literature was in a meeting on the issue of *kí* between writers in the newspaper house of *Literature Studies Journal* in Hanoi in 1966. The meeting fuelled a debate between North Vietnamese socialist writers over the possibility of fictional elements and techniques in *kí*, which attracted much attention and was reported by the journal over the course of the year that followed. Here and there before the meeting, the term *kí* had been used to refer to a few types of literary nonfiction such as literary reportage, memoir, and so on. However, Vu Duc Phuc, one of the writers who attended the meeting, was the first one who provide an overview of all the subgenres of *kí*. In his report “On the Subgenres of *Kí* in Vietnamese Literature since the August Revolution”, Phuc put investigative reportage, historical reportage, *bút kí, tùy bút* (literary essays), diary, memoir, travelogue under the category of *kí* [8]. Since 1965, the Party launched competitions to write about “real people, real events”. In this period, writers and critics started to use the term *truyện kí*, which, at first, was used to refer to the biography by Vu Ngoc Phan in *Modern Writers* (1942) to loosely refer to autobiography, memoir, or even autobiographical fiction, which praise heroes of the war or the socialist transformation. *Truyện kí* was considered as a subgenre of *kí* as well.

Although the writers differed in their attitudes toward the possibility of fictional elements and techniques in *kí*, they all acknowledged *kí* as an important genre in Vietnamese socialist literature. The 1966 debate, whose content was updated in *Literary Studies Journal*, encouraged writers to make use of literary nonfiction to support the resistance war and the socialist transformation. It followed and supported the competitions to write about real people, real events which were started in 1965. During this process, some translations of Chinese articles on *baogao wenzue* (literary reportage) were also published in the *Literary Studies Journal*. Besides, while introducing and explaining the genre *kí*, North Vietnamese writers often cited the definition of Soviet *oçerk* and referred to prominent Soviet *oçerk* writings as examples for young writers of *kí* to follow. These sparked further connections between Vietnamese *kí*, Chinese, and Soviet literary reportage and the doctrine of socialist realism.

Vu Duc Phuc’s categorization of *kí* remained influential for a long time in literary circles, and its influence can be seen in numerous critical and theoretical works on *kí* after 1975, for example, Ha Minh Duc’s *Kí on the National Defence and the Socialist Transformation* (National Army Publishers, 1980); or Nguyen Xuan Nam’s *Dictionary of Literature* (Volume 1, Social Sciences Publishers, 1983) as well as in several university manuals. In these works, the accuracy of the events described in *kí* is considered the most important characteristic of this genre. *Kí* flexibly combines different literary modes which are narrative, lyric, and argument with the scientific method.

2.3.2. Contexts of *kí* in South Vietnam (1954-1975)

In the South, instead of debating over the categorization of *kí* subgenres and their accuracy, the writers and critics focus on the relationship between reality and *kí* as literature. In the South, the debates between writers who supported “art for art’s sake” and ones who believed in “art for life’s sake” came back among literary circles in the

South during the war (1954–1975). Essentially, the debates reflected what Vietnamese writers thought of this relationship.

Nhat Linh, the founder of the magazine *Contemporary Culture*, was a prominent supporter of “art for art’s sake”. He claimed to be devoted to “literature and art which are universal” [cited in 9; 17]. Nhat Linh announced to stay away from political and social issues and focus on purely artistic themes. However, in real life, he was an active revolutionist. Although he kept an unproblematic voice in literature, in 1960 he was involved in an attempted coup against Diem’s dictatorial government. Besides writers who supported “art for art’s sake”, there were two kinds of writers who pursued “art for life’s sake”, in other words, the kind of art which devotes itself to social development through social engagement. The first kind was the writers who supported the government and the war, for example, Mai Thao, Ly Hoang Phong, and Duong Nghiem Mau. Mai Thao showed his support for Diem’s government by appealing to artists and writers to engage in social activities, to “make history”:

An artist is never able to be an objective witness; he always plays a protagonist in the great play of life. He is an insider, with a clear responsibility. He does not merely record historical events for future generations. [...] An artist does not write history, he makes history and risks his life for it [10; 3].

Ly Hoang Phong, in *Literature and Arts Journal*, also criticized Nhat Linh’s “art for art’s sake” and encouraged art and literature to fight for freedom, and revolution and engage in the nation’s life [11; 9]. Duong Nghiem Mau, another writer of *Literature and Arts Journal*, asserted that literature and art have to reflect reality with a revolutionary spirit; and Vien Linh reflected the government’s propaganda, which was against “undeveloped, separation, and communism” by fighting against “a literature which represents undeveloped, separation and communism” [9; 22].

The Nguyen proves that most of the writers who supported “art for art’s sake” and the anti-communist writers who encouraged “art for life’s sake” were funded by either the Americans or the government of the South. According to him, writers were funded for “their complete submission” to the “political system and plans” of the Americans and the government of the South [9; 16]. In other words, they were funded because they either ignored the political and social issues of the country or supported the Americans and the government by criticizing communism praising the current government of the South, and encouraging social reform under the lead of the government. The Nguyen also points out that these writers, for example, Mai Thao, Thanh Tam Tuyen, and Vien Linh, who used to praise “art for life’s sake” and call upon a social revolution under the lead of Diem’s government after 1962, changed into enthusiastic supporters of “art for art’s sake” because from 1962 President Diem “did not mention the word “reform” anymore and imprisoned anyone who spoke it out” [9; 23]. *Văn đê* (*Current Issues Magazine*), the literary magazine that gathered many previous writers of *Sáng tạo* (*Creation Magazine*), published many articles that criticized literature that was heavily philosophical and political and praised new literature that came back to pure art. For them, writing should be “an act of purifying language” and should “have nothing to do with people’s life and death” [9; 25]. The Nguyen criticized Phan Lạc Phúc’s praise of Mai Thao’s works in *Current Issues Magazine*: Phan Lac Phuc appreciated that Mai Thao “turned his back to the present and searched only for the past. There was no objective reality in his works.

Just his soul". Nguyen also shows that Vien Linh, the writer who used to demonstrate Diem's propaganda of "Three Enemies", which was mentioned earlier, turned to favor "a poetry which is out of the influence of history". He argued that "Poetry has no mission. It is anarchist. It is the sorcerer, the fortune teller, and the dictator itself". [cited in 9; 26-27]. In conclusion, Nguyen calls Thao, Tuyen, and Linh "the cheaters" who helped the Americans and the government of the South to "established a system of arbitrary and fraud values to confuse and fail an environment of free speech, which preferred talents and individual efforts to ideological stands" [9; 28]. Their writing, instead of engaging people in social activities, aimed to lull them into accepting the contemporary order and sleep through the harsh reality of the war and the social issues.

The second kind of writer who supported "art for life's sake" was the writers who were against the government of the South and the war. These writers gathered around the journals and magazines *Hành trình* (Journey), *Presentation*, *Dát nước* (My Country), *Đối diện* (Confront), *Đại học* (Great Learning) and the group *Attitudes*. Nguyen Van Trung praised the freedom of writing which emerged individuality with social engagement [12; 164]. Diem Chau, the editor-in-chief of *Presentation* described the attitude of the magazine towards the relationship between writers, artists, and reality as follows:

An artistic work is firstly a historical product. It is proof of how the author perceives the world, the history of his time, and himself. [...] Turning art into commercial products or embellishments to eliminate any danger of changing social order is the act of a minority group in power. [...] For a genuine culture for the future, it is necessary to deny the commercial quality that the current system [of the South] is trying to attach to every artistic work. It is also necessary to refuse to make art become a decoration and cover for the degraded reality [13; 3-4].

The introduction to the group *Attitudes* by the founder The Uyen also reflects these writers' engagement with political and social issues:

In Saigon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a group named *Attitudes*, which used a roneo duplicator to publish writings without permission of the government and distributed them secretly. They also established a publishing house named *Attitudes* which published legally. The members held some meetings on literary and non-literary topics. Their goal was to conduct a non-communist revolution which is similar to the ones in Norway and Switzerland [14].

These different attitudes towards the relationship between reality and writings show that the literature of the South is not entirely free from the influence of political ideologies as Vo Phien claimed. Tran Hoai Anh reveals that Southern writers saw a writer's style and individuality as important. They did not accept any mandatory formula for their works [10; 97]. For example, Minh Duc Hoai Trinh (1966), wrote: "We writers are free to choose what and how to write without asking anyone's permission" [cited in 5; 96].

However, for writers of "art for life's sake", the act of writing cannot be separated from the issue of writers' responsibilities and engagement with their society. Nguyen Van Trung in *Introduction to Vietnamese Literature* (1963) argued that "the objects of literature are the world of human beings, in other words, the universe which is created and perceived by human beings" [12; 101]. For Southern writers, literature can't be an objective representation of reality but rather a subjective one because it is always a reflection through a writer's eyes. In general, many Southern writers admitted that

literature can't be objective or just a photograph of reality. Tam Ich, in *Literature, Arts and Criticism* (1969) claimed that "The act of writing and composing is not just to copy the reality like a camera does" [cited in 10; 96]. Even though he is an undercover communist writer, Vu Hanh admitted the subjectivity of literature: "A writer is unable to be objective and "cold", as somebody said. They are somehow likely to redo the image of reality according to their point of view" [15; 81].

The fact that Southern writers acknowledged subjectivity can be seen in their ideas of sincerity and authenticity. In *My Writing Career* (1996), Nguyen Hien Le, a famous southern writer who was very active and influential during 1952–1975, wrote:

Sincerity has two meanings. Firstly, if there is no inspiration, do not write. All the works that my readers and I liked the best were the ones in which I was honest with myself. I followed my feelings during the writing process. [...] Secondly, when you write something, you have to forget all canons and literary techniques, just follow your personality. [...] I respect simplicity and also my personality" [4].

This means that, for him, sincerity means to be honest to oneself and to respect individuality in any artistic activity.

In addition, the way southern writers perceived reality was also influenced by theories and thoughts that promoted independent thinking such as existentialism, nihilism, and a refreshed Buddhism by the internationally influential monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Existentialism was introduced in South Vietnam in the early 1960s. It was not a coincidence that Tran Thai Dinh's *Introduction to Existentialism* (1967) and the translation of André Maurois's *Great Modern Theories* were two bestsellers during the 1960s and 1970s in South Vietnam [6; 91]. In the book, Đinh explains existentialism clearly and simply. He introduces both the atheistic and theistic branches of this theory as well as its prominent thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Đinh defines existentialism as follows: "Existentialism is a theory which shows the awakening of men: an existentialist is a man who bravely confronts facts and does not follow any abstract theory and believes in such things as that kings are always respectable and masters are always rightful. [...] In short, each of us is a free individual who has the right and responsibility to assess everything and everyone whom we meet". Đinh also introduces how Nietzsche claims the death of God and religions to appreciate Übermensch (often translated as Superman or Overman), a kind of man who is free to exercise his judgment and to decide how he should live:

According to Nietzsche, there is no abstract truth and there is no absolute truth, no "thing-in-itself" (truth without consequences) which is not created or influenced by someone's viewpoint. [...] Therefore, real knowledge should come from experience and be tested in practice, not by any abstract "truths" which lure man from reality [16].

Not only was Đinh's book popular in southern cities: fiction of existentialists such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre attracted a lot of readers. Popular topics of existentialism such as the "human condition", "authenticity", "truth", "idols", the "overman" and the "absurd" were highly popular in South Vietnamese literature in the 1960s and early 1970s. It can be seen that existentialism had a deep influence on intellectual circles in South Vietnam before 1975.

The view that truth is rhetorical and institutional was not only provided in Tran Thai Dinh and other writer's books and articles on existentialism and nihilism but also

presented in Thich Nhat Hanh's book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1967) which explains his Engaged Buddhism. In the book, Hạnh suggests that truth should be looked at in a new way:

Everyone evaluates himself and others by the perceptions and criteria that are created by someone else. [...] The borrowed should never be a truth. We are only able to reach truths through experience. [...] Otherwise, we are all processed into products that are no different from each other by society. Power creates collective resemblances that threaten humanity and individual personality [17].

There are two periods in the development of southern *kí* during the war: before and after 1963. After 1963, *kí* became more frequent. Examining *kí* about the war alone, for example, Phan Nghi's *Crossing Truong Son Mountains* (1967), Thai Lang's *Diary of A Witness* (1967), Kieu My Duyen's *The Brown-Bereted Angels* (1969), Duong Hung Cuong's *City Soldiers* (1969), Phan Nhat Nam's *Traces of War* (1969), *Along Road No. 1* (1970), these works show that southern *kí* during the period varied in terms of point of view. Although Phan Nghi was the government's journalist, and Thai Lang and Phan Nhat Nam were military officers, the ways they saw and presented the opponents, the southern writers, the American and South Korean forces, as well as the ordinary people are different from each other due to the differences in the authors' ideology and artistic concepts.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, writers and critics in the South during the period 1954-1975 did not focus on theorizing *kí*, however, the way they wrote and received *kí* varied a lot, due to the conflicting opinions about the characteristics and mission of literature in the relationship with reality. There were even conflicts between their artistic statements and their writings. Some writers were devoted to "art for art's sake" and preferred writings that were free from contemporary social issues, many agreed that literature has to be rooted in daily life, reflect its time and devote to social development. Many South Vietnamese writers did not consider literature as a simple, casual copy of reality, which led to the extent of reality in southern literature in general and in *kí*, in particular, quite broad. Southern writers during 1954-1975 did not focus on theorizing *kí* but on using it to express their different attitudes towards reality and the regimes.

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