

## **The contradictions of strengthening the aesthetic needs in arts and literature in Vietnam today and recommendations**

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**Abstract:** *Increasing the aesthetic needs in arts and literature is a great policy of the Party and our State towards a higher spiritual living quality for people aiming at comprehensive human development. The article points out 4 main contradictions confronting the process of attaining these targets. They are the contradiction between the tradition and the modern, the self and the ego, the entertainment features and the artistic, between the goal of increasing the aesthetic needs for people and the real situation of art and literature management. For these reasons, some measures are proposed to overcome the contradictions aiming at the realization of the policy for increasing the aesthetic needs of arts and literature in the real life that makes aesthetic culture more endosmotic into all aspects of the social life.*

**Keywords:** Literature, Art, Aesthetic needs

Increasing the aesthetic needs in arts and literature is a great policy of the Party towards a higher spiritual living quality of people and aiming at a new development stage of culture. Being aware of the importance of this issue, Resolution №23-NQ/TW on continuing building up and developing literature, arts in the new era affirmed: ‘Literature, arts are the very important field with

special fine features of culture; are the essential needs expressing the true, the good and the beautiful desires of people, are the one of the great driving forces that directly contribute to build the spiritual foundation for the society and the comprehensive development of Vietnamese people’ (refers to [www.dangcongsan.vn/...](http://www.dangcongsan.vn/...)). In the period of industrialization, modernization and

international integration, the objective of the literature and arts activities is to create works that embody high ideological and aesthetic values, have the function of orienting personality for the young generations, satisfy the higher cultural and spiritual need of people. However, at present, we are coping with contradictions in realizing objectives of strengthening the aesthetic needs in arts and literature for the public.

### ***1. The contradiction between the tradition and the modern in literature and arts***

The traditional literature and arts are cultural values embodied national specific features, special and unique factors of one culture, expressed the 'national characters', 'national personalities', creating spiritual power of national culture, maintaining and upholding the national life. Thus, the traditional values of literature and arts are the key signal to distinguish between the culture of this nation from that nation. According to the rule of development, the traditional values of literature and arts have been passed from history, taken over, maintained and upheld by the later generations in their era what create a continuous stream of cultural history.

The traditional and modern factors in literature and arts always exist in cultural and spiritual life of an society along with the economic, cultural development of a nation. *The tradition* in literature and arts focus on the continuous factor, integrated factor, co-agreed factor. They serve as the

theoretic basis for the argument of mainstreaming of national culture, creating the stability for the country, forming the premise for any creation of human culture. *The modern* in literature and arts is understood as all factors belonging to the current era, associating with the development, creating new values. It isn't a product of a separate historical period nor a product of the Western culture, but the continuance of the traditional national culture. It responds the existing, emerging and may-emerged problems in human life. The modern in literature and arts denote the human desire in looking for the perfection and enrich the traditional literature and arts. The traditional and modern factors in literature and arts can't be separate from each other, but integral serving as a firm basis for the entity of the Vietnamese literature and arts in the new era.

In the development of literature and arts, there is a dialectic relation between the aesthetic needs of traditional arts and the aesthetic needs of modern arts. They have both unity and contrary elements. The unity between the traditional aesthetic needs and the modern aesthetic needs in literature and arts is expressed that the traditional aesthetic needs are modernized in present life and the modern aesthetic needs are inherited from the tradition, and make the tradition better. For example, the incomparably powerful writings like *Nam Quốc Sơn Hà* by Lý Thường Kiệt, *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo* by Nguyễn Trãi,... have awakened patriotism, spirit of revolutionary

struggle of our people through anti-American and anti-French resistance wars. The literature of '*Tự lực văn đoàn*' ('Self-Strengthening literary group') opposed the trite and hollow style, bookishness, the parallel constructions, challenge-and-response phrases producing our speeches obscure and wordy what made us loving Vietnamese, contributed to preserve the purity of Vietnamese language. The tradition in literature and arts awakens the needs of tracing back to the origin, respecting specifics, the beauty of national spirit in modern human. The modern plays role of refreshing and developing the nationality. Owing to the impact from the West, we have the Thơ mới (New Poetry) movement, a pinnacle ever of the Vietnamese poetry.

The contradiction between the traditional aesthetic needs and the modern aesthetic needs in literature and arts emerges when the traditional aesthetic values is getting conservative, in that time 'Protecting tradition at any price will pull the human development back' (refers to UNDP, 2004, tr.88-89). Or the modern aesthetic values wrongly reflect the content of contemporary literature and arts, by that time, the modern will be out of tune, and can't be the tradition for the future (refers to Thái Kim Lan, 2006). To overcome this contradiction, the traditional literature and arts should have the vitality for the present and future, should be modernized and infused a new vital force for its vigor in the modern life. On the other hand, the modern literature and arts should have the traditional

specifics and spirit. However, in practice, this is a difficult issue for the artists-authors and the public, who enjoy and appraise the arts.

However, at present, in the process of strengthening the aesthetic needs in literature and arts, we are coping with contradictions between the modern and the traditional aesthetic needs. Many creations in literature and arts wish to tear away from the long since ties, pattern of tradition to perceive the modern methods, contents of the literature and arts; enjoying and appraising literature and arts also wish to give up the traditional value orientation in order to freely perceive in new manners but are 'bound' by the principle of 'adherence with national identity'.

This contradiction emerges due to the inflexible, mechanical understanding of 'adherence with national identity'. 'Adherence with national identity' isn't to bind the creation in literature and arts with the traditional patterns, but to promote the creation basing on the national cultural soul and spirit. Because the aesthetic needs of the modern literature and arts are hardly accepted by majority if they don't base on the national identity, then, they will become prematurely dead artistic ideas and trends.

Thus, *firstly*, it's necessary to be full aware of the principle of promoting an advanced literature and arts with imbued national identities in the mobility, acculturation in the process of cultural globalization. *The Platform for National Construction in the Period of Transition to Socialism* (supplemented

and developed in 2011) approved by the XI Congress of the Party identified that: 'To build an advanced Vietnamese culture with imbued national identity, comprehensive development, unity in diversity, deep spirit of humanism, democracy and progress; to make culture closely associate and thoroughly incorporate with the entire social life, become a firm spiritual foundation, a major endogenous force for development' (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011: 75-76). *Secondly*, the aesthetic subject should strengthen the awareness of nation, national pride, overcome the feeling of complex of the underdevelopment to open and perceive new factors, surmount the fixed way of thinking for creating the values of literature and arts that are appropriate with the modern the aesthetic requirements.

## ***2. The contradiction between the self and the Self in literature and arts***

In the process of strengthening the aesthetic needs for the public, the contradiction between the self and the Self in literature and arts. This contradiction is expressed with the contrary between the self represented for the new progress and the Self represented for community that is still backward in terms of aesthetic viewpoint.

If the traditional literature and arts activities go around the value system of morality-aesthetics, that is "the impetuous patriotism, the will for national self-strengthening, the spirit of unity, the awareness of community

associating individual-family-village-Fatherland; the compassion, the tolerance, appreciating the affection and gratitude, morality, the virtues of assiduousness, creativeness in working, the delicate behaviour, the simple life..." (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998: 56), the literature and arts activities in renovation period is the process of searching for the true self in association with the creation of new artistic values. The self representing for the new is regarded as a cultural value imbued with humanity. The self is explored in many aspects of everyday life; the spiritual self; the self in relation with other people... The standard of this self is the unique and sole feature, high aesthetic perfection, the opposition of the fixed way, stereotype. The pinnacle of the self-artist is the achievement of the new in arts. The new is expressed in the idea, in the emotion, and in the aesthetic viewpoint of the artists. However, in many cases, the contradiction emerges between the private self representing for the new value with the Self representing for the traditional moral-aesthetic value system of the community.

The contradiction between the self and the Self emerges when the self representing for the extravagant new is separate from the traditional habits and customs. This is the *contradiction between the miscellaneous new and the national aesthetic needs*. For example, regarding the forms, in the past decades now, there were a certain number of poets, who had the significant renovations in the late 1980s. Poems

were composed with the method of surrealism. A line of verse hasn't been a semantic unit any longer, rhyme, word structure, sound effect don't play an important role. A poem is just a kind of sudden fade-in, flare-up, for example, there is a section in poem entitled *Đường phố* (Street) by Hoàng Hưng (cited from collection 'Sudden fade-in': *Bão loạn. Lốc dù. Xanh mí. Cốc ré...váy hề... Tiện nghi lạc xon. Chắt chồng trở trở. Môi ngang. Vô hồn. Khoảng khắc. Mini mộng lông. Cởi quần. Chửi thể. Con gà quay con gà quay. Bão loạn. Múa vàng. Te tua...*).

Some young people also imitated style writing this poem for a while. But now, almost nobody pursue this type. This shows that although it was a renovation and exploration, but if the renovation doesn't meet the Vietnamese the aesthetic needs, doesn't make sense for readers, it won't be accepted. And when the readers feel no need of this type of poetry what means that it loses its position in life.

Mentioning the *Thơ mới* (New Poetry) movement imitated the West, Hoài Thanh concluded: The dim-headed reproduces have immediately been eliminated (Hoài Thanh, Hoài Chân, 2006: 42). The extravagances opposing the spirit of Vietnamese poetry all died (Hoài Thanh, Hoài Chân, 2006: 47). It's true according to the Gustave Le Bon's saying: 'All those that are in opposition with the general beliefs and sentiments of the race are of transient duration, and the diverted stream soon resumes its course' (Gustave Le Bon, 2008: 223, 224).

It could be said that if the need of the new is the product of the extravagant self, it will be like a fish out of water and will be refused. If the new artistic product lacks the necessary social resonance between artist and the public, or focuses just on petty or even intricate, fussy, incomprehensible feelings, lacks great sentiments of the era, it can't satisfy the aesthetic needs of national community. Thus, in short, although art is a free horizon for the ego, each artist should understand that he is first and foremost a social human, a citizen of a nation. The self-artist is a member of the Self-community with conscience and responsibility. His voice represents the aspiration, the aesthetic needs of national community at each historical moment.

To overcome the contradiction of aesthetic viewpoint between the new and the old in literature and arts, it should be considered that the old doesn't act as total obstacle for the development of literature and arts: many of the old imprint the cultural trait of the era, the trait of the past, and the trait of creative personality of the authors. There's no the new in its dialectics without the inheritance from the old, the improvement based on the old. In literature and arts, the new emerges when the old loses its capacity of satisfying the diversified aesthetic needs of the modern people. The new is truly high development of literature and arts, it inherits the positive elements of the tradition, it belongs not only to the present but also to the future of arts. This is the new of all eras, not the

fugitive new with quick dying-out. In order to create the new with such aesthetic value, the artist must have the aesthetic capacity and the need of beauty creation.

Now, the process of globalization, communicativization is severely impacting the activities of literature and arts. Literature and arts in the communicative era is opening the democracy of images, the elite values of literature and arts have been reexamined, the new theories of literature and arts emerge, the classical values of literature and arts are the dynamically reproduced via digital media, the huge aesthetic knowledge of human beings is widely opened... However, this fact also leads to the contradiction in perceiving the achievements of literature and arts when the self isn't fully equipped with favorable conditions for the ready perception. This is *the contradiction between the self with the lack of capacity and the new with full of energy in creating, enjoying the literature and arts.*

The lack of the aesthetic perceiving capacity can lead to immeasurable consequences: *First*, when we can't understand the quintessence of national and the world's literature and arts, we can't develop the quintessence of national literature and arts with its right spirit track and we will have difficulty in perceiving the arts in the road of enriching the domestic literature and arts. *Second*, the lack of capacity in perceiving literature and arts makes people lose their immune system, it

means we lose the resistant competence of cultural distortion that may appear. Such lack of capacity makes people feeble, be critically unaware of the miscellaneous, ludicrous phenomena in literature and arts. *Third*, the lack of perceiving capacity makes people lose the reflecting capacity of truth and also the affection for the human destiny. People appear to be indifferent, heedless with the pain of the surrounding fellow-creatures. Thus, the life reality is distortedly reflected or isn't reflected.

Today, the requirement of the aesthetic value in literature and arts must be *the unity between the individual aesthetic needs (with internal force of the new) and the (improved) aesthetic needs of community.* The over appreciation of the needs of the self in literature and arts broke the structure of the new aesthetic values and made the norm deviation phenomena of the public aesthetic needs to be appeared. On being over exploited, the individual aesthetic needs will be petty, difficult to further develop, difficult to become a system of needs with aesthetic norm value that can orient the artistic activities. It's very difficult to propose a norm system of the aesthetic needs in current society, and also to orient the development of the individual aesthetic needs. The conception of the new must be put in the rational relation between the individual aesthetic needs and the social aesthetic needs towards the human satisfaction of the present life and the brighter future. The social aesthetic needs with the system of

aesthetic values developed from the practical synthesis, analysis, prediction of the individual needs will serve as the orienting basis for the development of the individual aesthetic needs in literature and arts. The right orientation requires the right solutions, the leader circle with the progressive thinking, the communication with an appropriate supportive role and the reasonable response from the community.

### ***3. The contradiction between the entertainment and the artistry in literature and arts***

In Vietnam today, the communication has made the drastical transformation in literature and arts that is from aesthetic culture to the consuming culture. Literature and arts become the product of the consuming society and it functions under the rules of market. The consuming culture aims at the satisfaction of entertaining need other than the the aesthetic needs. In this trend, literature and arts today is becoming the attractive entertainment. The functions of the literature and arts also change, beside the perception, education, aesthetics, they are added with entertainment function. By this way, an artistic work should bring the relaxation, joyfulness, treatment for affliction, stresses resulting from the human subsistent life in the modern society. Thanks to the arts, people can regain the balance in soul, the harmony with the nature, the close interrelation with human life, the sustainable health to continue their lives, works and creations. Bring the joys for human is the mission of the entertainment

function in literature and arts, and then people can achieve the values of the perception and easthetics.

However, when the entertainment is over emphasized or inclines towards the vulgarism, trivialism, it leads to the contradiction between the entertainment and the artistry in literature and arts. For the entertainment need, in the name of arts, they express the dehumanization, the 'being' part in the human beings, make the art become the dirty cheap amusement, refuse the humanitarian values, destroy the national traditional values. There is always hidden animalism in each individual, thus, using artistic technique to make provoking images, shocking utterances will awake the human instincts. Not few artistic works provoke and shock people in literature, cinema, painting... targeting at profits and entertainment only. The works of this kind are off the norm system set by the tradition, are moral turpitudes and violate the aesthetic norms to such extent that can't be accepted. This provocativeness is totally contrary to the incitation with the message signaling, initiating for the new to be emerged in literature and arts.

*The contradiction between the benefit and the artistry of the literature and art work is getting sharper. Practically, very much efforts and money are spent to successfully develop a literature and art work with high value of human civilization, but the return benefit is not much, while the work of entertainment with less investment and time can gain super benefit. In movie industry for*

example, there are entertainment films with not high artistry but its place is on the top of the highest-grossing.

*The contradiction in the public hobbies.* Majority of the public tends to love the entertainment works other than truly artistic ones. When the human cultural spiritual life is getting more and more democratic, the public is free to express their thoughts. The excessive democracy will create majority of the public with the opinion stream of unknown the past, unknown the future. This majority is getting more popular. This leads to the threat of losing the orientation power in literature and arts of the value system of national morality and aesthetics.

To settle this contradiction, *first*, we should avoid the negative impacts of unhealthy entertainment activities by setting a 'safe distance' in choosing the entertainment programs. *Second*, art perceiver should have the healthy taste, and then the right attitude towards the entertainment phenomena, thus, the healthy aesthetic needs will be emerged when participating in literature and art activities. The perceiver should actively receive the aesthetic message from literature and art works and should be oriented in terms of politics, ideology and morality. Besides, the creating artist should be a man of firm stuff in literature and art creation to be capable of making good things for life. *Third*, there should be a circle of leaders that has progressive ideology to orient and successfully create the belief among the public. They must be the inspirations

and create the fostering mechanism for the good things. This is the basis for the development of healthy aesthetic needs in literature and arts.

#### ***4. The contradiction between the goal of increasing the aesthetic needs for people and the real situation of literature and art management***

Being well aware of the important role of satisfying the people's aesthetic needs, our Party advocate to develop, promote an advanced literature and arts with imbued national identities, better satisfying the higher aesthetic needs of the public. However, in the conditions of the market economy, together with the diversity of the means of communication as well as the increasing in the needs of the art production and consumption, the management mechanism for cultural and art activities is inadequate. If in economic environment, a series of models changed to actively experiment, *so the literature and art market will develop very spontaneously.* The managing manner of literature and art activities is still passive. While the market of literature and arts has been significantly developed in the private and joint-venture sectors, the managing authorities are often operated as subsidized bodies with a mass of stereotype, are easy to criticized inadequate activities of the private sector and easy to ignore or don't properly appreciate the cultural values of this creative, dynamic sector.

The mechanism of controlling, licence issuing, revoking, fining in the area of



literature and art activities is still overlapped. There still has been the spread of toxic cultural product out of State control. The Party's resolutions on culture and art haven't been timely realized into specific policies and effective. There has been a common fact that the resolutions and policies are well known at central level, while they are unknown at grassroot level.

It can be seen that, in the transition development of the market economy, the contradictions in literature and arts are unavoidable. This makes the realization of strengthening the cultural and spiritual life, satisfying the diversified aesthetic needs for the public difficult. Coping with this situation, the State should fully utilize the cultural institutions, because the satisfaction of cultural needs is the very quality improvement of cultural activities. At the same time, should overcome the overlapped functioning among state managing authorities in the area of literature and arts.

In addition, leaders, agencies, and managing manner in the area of literature and art activities should have the dynamic thinking in order to perceive and select the advanced achievement of the era but maintain the beauty in national tradition. Besides, should keenly recognize the public aesthetic needs, tastes, should analyze, predict the aesthetic needs, tastes basing on the respect for subjects and human. Then, the strengthening of the public aesthetic needs in arts and literature will be realized effectively

and favorably under the inheriting and selecting spirit □

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