

## DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIFT

DOCTORAL THESES IN LITERATURE  
 NGUYỄN THỊ HẰNG. *Expression of human fate in Vietnamese novels since 1975*

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After the war (30 April 1975), when Vietnam moved from wartime to peacetime with the demands of renovation and democratization of all aspects of social life, the writers are in face of opportunities and challenges in expressing opinion and making efforts to innovate literature and innovate themselves. This renovation is corresponding to objective laws of development. This is the period during which the Vietnamese prose in general and novel in particular actively explore the deep layers of social life, reconsidering many human questions and attaining many achievements, becoming a attractive subject needing to be studied.

To point out the heritage and renovation of Vietnamese novels since 1975 in expression of human fate, seen as an essential aspect of renovation of novel thinking and art, thence having the basis of considering and evaluating the evolution laws of prose in general and of novel in particular of a period in which the literature is needing to be renovated after accomplishing the great mission for history, nation and people, postgraduate Lê Thị Hằng chose the topic: "Expression of human fate in Vietnamese novels since 1975" as her doctoral thesis.

Using various methods such as historicist method, structural-systematic, comparative, interdisciplinary, descriptive, analytic and synthetic methods..., the thesis focuses on

studying the novels, especially the novels appearing after 1975 among which the novels appearing since 1986 up to now are aware of consideration and expression of human fate, and pays attention to those works that won the prize of Vietnam Writers Association and of Ministry of Defence..., to interesting works; further studying the novels appeared before 1975 (in official sector) and the representative novels in the world that are concerned with expression of human fate; on this basis clarifying step by step and confirming the *innovation of Vietnamese novel sine 1975 in the deep dimension that is the aesthetic thinking level on human*; contributing to confirm the *efforts of Vietnamese writers after 1975 in creating new expression ways in order to bring new awarenesses and conceptions, and the comprehensive humanistic view on human fate*.

Besides the introduction, conclusion and list of reference literature, the main contents of the dissertation are presented in 4 chapters. Chapter 1: *Overview of topic study*. In examining the studies on expression of human fate in modern Vietnamese prose in general and in Vietnamese novel since 1975 in particular, the author remarked that, all the studies and dissertations have in principle recognized the objective necessity of the shift of creative inspiration in the novels since 1975 to deepening into human fate, into the tragedy of humans. Previously, the problem of human fate was paid attention only from social view, but now it is concerned from various views such as the views of instinctive life, of spiritual life, of human characters and of personal opinions. The approaches are also diverse: sociological,

psychoanalytic and culturological approaches... These facts brought the new physiognomy to novels in both contents and forms.

Chapter 2: *Social and aesthetic prerequisites of interest in expression of human fate in Vietnamese novels since 1975*

Being a literary genre with very flexible structure, with possibility of wide and lively representation of life without limitation of time and space, the novel has a great power of deeply exploring the human fate. The character of novel is a “starting point and a centre of artistic description”, a “key to decode the problems the writer put in the work”. Promoting highly the capacity of fiction, the novel give to character the magnitude, diversity, complexity, colourfulness... Human in novel is a “synthesis of social relations”, so the character can be exploited both in the width and the depth of space and time, both in macro- and microscale of character life, from appearance to action, from inner feeling to reason... While literature considers the human as subject to explore and express, the novel, as a “main machine” of genres, with advantage of a genre of “present time”, always approaching to the life in close distance, is just a sector rich in most great potential for expression of human fate. Seen from a certain view, it can be said that history of novel is a history of human conceptions, of deep exploration of human fate. From this view, it is not difficult to recognize the difference in the human conceptions, in the view and the expression of human fate between literary periods through the evolution of novel.

At the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the period 1930-1945, there appeared the favourable conditions for individuals to develop, to express

themselves, opening opportunities for literature to explore deeply and exploit diverse fates and painful tragedies of human life. The novels of Tự Lực văn đoàn (Literary Group of Self-Reliance) usually wrote on the fate of beautiful young girls that were educated girls eager for freedom but encountering the tragedies and impediments in marriage, not having the right to decide their love and happiness. The critical realist writers were usually interested in miserable fate of peasants under the severe domination of colonial-feudal regime, in poor and straitened fate of true intellectuals who had many dreams and aspirations to contribute but always being in impasse... In the novels of the period 1945-1975, the human was considered and highly appreciated with his collectiveness, his sacrifice to community, the writings often gave priority to record great historical events, forgetting individual fate of every person. The then individual fate was often attached with common destiny of entire nation, growing and developing together with evolution of revolutionary struggle. In general, the life of characters was described according to a uniform “model”. These men were the fates suffered many pains and losses, deeply hated the invaders. They joined revolution and found the belief in bright future for their life, so they fervently joined the common struggle of people for national liberation. However, due to being constructed by common formula, the characters had a similar fate, not letting to see clearly the features of novel character. According to author, there were some socio-aesthetic prerequisites for renovation of view and expression of human fate in Vietnamese novels since 1975 such as: 1/ *The socio-historical context* after historic

victory of 1975 encountered multiple new difficulties and challenges. The VI<sup>th</sup> Party Congress put forth the programme of renovation, creating a democratic atmosphere to society. Economic, political, cultural and social life were changed strongly and actively (being accompanied by their dark side). The wind of renovation created the vital force for literary and artistic creation. The artists were self-confident in saying openly their personal thoughts and opinions on difficult questions of life, thence freely broke a new way, seeking to create new expressions. The question of role and functions of literature was also reconsidered, corrected and re-expressed. Literature in general and novel in particular actively innovated themselves to be responding to the requirements of epoch and to the tastes of public. Vietnamese literature is no longer closed in a narrow region or former socialist “camp”, but it step by step widened the exchanges, received the influences of various literatures of the world. 2/ *A second prerequisite is cultural-aesthetic*: With above-mentioned socio-historical context, the global humane values have appeared and diffused in Vietnam society such as: the more clear conception of freedom and equality; the conception of happiness; the wide diffusion of love and tolerance; the honest; the questions of individual life being considered and interpreted in relation with culture or cultural problems. These are both lever and favourable environment contributing to promote the development of prose in general and novel on human fate in particular. The influences of modern world novels and those of urban South Vietnam literature of the period 1954-1975 also contributed significantly to create the

new points in expressing the human fate by Vietnamese novels since 1975. These influences manifested in both artistic conceptions and poetics. On the other hand, the writer awareness of limitations of novels before 1975 in expressing the human fate was just one of important motivations for the novels since 1975 to make efforts to seek new expression of human fate.

*In generally evaluating the expression of human fate in novels since 1975*, the author considered that novel has strongly developed in comparison with previous period. It is no longer only an epic of history, nation and epoch, but it is a deep report on human fate in history. The novels have also found the new ways of expression, mobilized all possibilities to discover the depth of human fate, used the modern artistic technics such as stream of consciousness; flexibly organized structure, vision point and narrator... These achievements not only raised the position of novel, but also called and encouraged the readers to equip themselves with new approaches, raising their own horizons of expectation. Thence, the writer and the reader together participate in promoting the novels to further evolve on the renovation way.

Chapter 3: *Essential aspects of human fate in Vietnamese novels since 1975*. The author made a survey of concrete expressions of human fate in Vietnamese novels since 1975 and compared them with those of novels before 1975, especially of the period 1945-1975.

The author affirms that with a new view, a more open democratic spirit, a renovation of reflected contents and interpretation of human fate, the novels since 1975 paid importance to exploitation and expression

of human fate in various aspects, various levels, among the difficult choices of wartime life, the multiple complexities of daily life and in confirming what belong to human nature. The human thinking life is also widened to various spheres, especially the sphere of thought on human existence, on world affairs, history, and human nature. With a more comprehensive vision, the writers have seen human fate in all its possibilities and limitations. The novels since 1975 have been concerned with the expression of human fate, seeing the human as a vital question of literature. Being aware of expression of human fate, the writer went into the very life of human, seeing it as a personality, an independent life. Therefore the human fate in novel is very lively and attractive in the multidimensionality of personality. Discovering the human fate in its own life without any framework or pattern, novel has found its own voice and actually expressed its function: that is a function of awareness and expression of human for the sake of his happiness and dignity.

Chapter 4: *Artistic modes and means associated with expression of human fate in Vietnamese novel since 1975*. In surveying and analysing systematically, the author thinks that as for the topics, the novels since 1975 have accessed to and exploited more deeply the daily reality, the ordinary of individual life and human fate. Seen from genre view, novels since 1975 have made great efforts to innovate, this was manifested in some aspects such as: organization of conflicts, construction of

characters, of vision point system, of tone and language. In surveying the novels since 1975, with attention paid to essential innovations of expression of human fate, the author realizes that the novelists since 1975 have had new idea of conflict organization in novel, taking notice of interchange of various conflicts, especially paying attention to conflict between the components of personality. As for the construction of characters, the writers always paid attention to specify the characters, emphasizing the incompleteness of character fate. Therefore, characters in novels since 1975 are not in closed and fixed fate, but they have the unexpectedness and unforeseeableness of fate. In addition, the writers also manifested the diversity and flexibility in coordination and movement of narrative vision point: the inner vision point and external vision point, vision point of character and vision point of author, objective vision point and subjective vision point...; combined many narrative tones such as: coldness, objectivity and lyricalness, emotion, meditation and philosophic generalization, pessimism, worry and optimism... The diversity of narrative modes and means of discovery and expression of human fate have more evidenced the efforts of renovation and the achievements of Vietnamese novels since 1975.

The thesis has been defended successfully in front of universitarian jury of Vinh University in 2016.

*Introduced by*  
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