

Vietnamese Traditional Mentality And Its Reflection In Vietnamese Prose After 1986

Vu Thi Trang

Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam

Do Lai Thuy

Institute of Cultural Anthropology, Vietnam

Pham Minh Quan

Institute of Cultural Anthropology, Vietnam

Nguyen Thi My Hien

Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam

Do Thi Cam Nhung

Phan Chau Trinh High School, Da Nang, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT:

Vietnamese traditional society has full agricultural ethos: peasant, agriculture, rural areas, therefore we could say in each Vietnamese personality has a small farmer nature. The negativity of small farmer traits are the limitation of individual sense, only developing personality and the representative individual instead of developing rational mind. However, it sustained the stability of the traditional society. But in the modern Vietnam with the emphasis on individuality, rationalism, economic development and socialization, those negative traits become disadvantages. And this Vietnamese mentality found its reflection in Vietnamese prose after 1986. This paper will clarify its manifestation through the assessment of Vietnamese cultural history and the literary works of modern writers.

Keywords: Mentality, Literature, prose, Vietnam, Vietnamese culture

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Introduction

Man, before being an entity independent of nature or even considered the master of nature, depended on nature and first of all on the environment. And the more we go back to antiquity the more its dependence will be. Therefore, people called pre-industrial civilizations (hunting, gathering, cultivating, and breeding) a civilization based on nature. If the people of the universal race were like that, then the Vietnamese people were even more like that. This is determined by the natural environment of Vietnam, and from there, as a consequence, is the Vietnamese people's behavior towards that environment.

Agriculture, Village, State and the Birth of Small Farmers

Vietnam is a country in mainland Southeast Asia. It must be noted that, previously, Southeast Asia was not considered as a region because the criteria for identifying the region was based on civilization, as of today, into the post-industrial age, that centralizing attitude has faded, and the features of the periphery are more and more

visible, not to mention that the periphery of the positive topography today may be the center of a negative topography. This is a strip of land located at the foot of the two largest mountain ranges in the world, the Himalayas - the roof of the world and the Tian Shan range. This is also the place where there are large rivers flowing through such as the Mekong, Huang He, Yangtze,... thus, there are deltas like the Red River Delta, the Mekong River Delta.... At the same time, this is also a region with diverse topography, including mountains, plains and sea. Southeast Asia is a tropical monsoon region, which has hot and humid climate, erratic rain and wind.

With the above geological and climatic conditions, Southeast Asia in general and Vietnam in particular has formed a separate prehistoric ecosystem. In the world, up to now, ecology can be classified into two types: universal ecosystem and specialized ecosystem. The prehistoric ecosystem of Southeast Asia and Vietnam is common. That is, the number of seedling species is more and the number of individuals in each

seedling sub-species is less. In addition, the prehistoric ecosystem of Vietnam (and Southeast Asia as well) has an additional feature that plants outnumber animals. Regarding this feature, can it be explained as follows: hot and humid climate, a lot of sunshine and rain are favorable for the growth of plants and species, but adversely affect the survival of animals, especially the large animals, living in herds, because creature living in this climate is prone to disease.

The two above features of the prehistoric Vietnamese ecosystem, especially the second one: plants outnumber animals, prescribing the ancient Vietnamese way of life as gathering over hunting. Since then, when from the economy of natural appropriation to the production economy, that is, from hunter-gatherers to agriculture, the Vietnamese cultivate more than breeding, especially without big cattle breeding. This greatly affects the Vietnamese lifestyle. More specifically, it makes the structure of Vietnamese meals consists of rice - vegetables - fish lack of milk and meat, while utensils and clothing lacked leather and fur materials. Up to now, the first feature (ie, universal ecosystem) of the prehistoric ecosystem dominates the farming characteristics of Vietnamese agriculture. It is multi-cultivation. We would like to add that the universality of Vietnam is not only in animals and plants but also in minerals. Vietnam has almost all kinds of minerals, but the reserves of each mine are almost negligible, so if exploited, sometimes the revenue does not cover expenses. Even coal and oil are just moderate compared to some countries with these two minerals. Perhaps this universality is one of the constants of Vietnam? Or this constant make Vietnamese thinking small, Vietnamese aesthetic likes small, medium, and beautiful things?

Another noteworthy feature is that Vietnamese agriculture is not dry agriculture (maize, millet) like the Chinese people in the Loess Plateau upstream of the Huang He River, but rather wet rice farming. The cultivation of wet rice of the ancient Vietnamese was due to the regulation of their living environment (Tran Quoc Vuong, 2000, p. 129). In turn, the cultivation of wet rice dominates the Vietnamese way of life and behavior and some of the characteristics of Vietnamese social institutions. Growing wet rice, water is the most important, but water depends on heaven and earth, so people only have expectations. Looking forward to and praying for water like this, so people understand water and then have the patience and flexibility like water? And, from there, can it be generalized that

Vietnamese people, Vietnamese culture is like water (waterness) (Cao Xuan Huy, 1995, p. 363-365)? However, the Vietnamese also saw the duality of water, especially when the Lord of the Waters got angry. Therefore, relying on nature partly, for the other part, people have to rely on their strength, that is to rely on each other, based on community.

The ancient Vietnamese knew how to settle down when they switched to farming. The first is growing vegetables, mainly cucurbits. Some people also call this period a cucurbit civilization (many legends tell humans were born from a gourd). Also in this period, people took starch to eat from the trunk of a type of areca tree called the sugar palm (*Arenga pinnata*)... so it was also called the palm tree civilization. After that, they know how to cultivate wet rice in valleys, foothills in front of mountains. The stable life and adequate food make the population grow. At some point, a population explosion occurred, prompting them to move down the delta. It is worth noting that while the other ethnic groups took over the plain in the Iron Age period and when the delta was fully accreted, the ancient Vietnamese moved down to the plain early, when only bronze tools were in hand and The Red River Delta has not yet completed alluvium, there are still many low-lying areas. Therefore, when going from the foothills of the mountains and valleys to the Northern Delta to cultivate wet rice, the ancient Vietnamese had to live in cluster in the highlands and cultivate rice in lowland areas.

Here, the irrigation factor becomes very important. And more importantly, how to do irrigation. To protect the rice from flooding, they had to build dikes along the riverbank. Later, each generation added new dikes. Just like that, by the beginning of the tenth century, the dike segments were joined together to form a complete dyke system today (Dao Duy Anh, 1992, p. 49). The embankment of dykes to prevent rivers and sea has created on-site irrigation for water intake based on the system of ponds and lakes. And alluvium was drifting out of the sea, making the land quickly fading. The river bed was pushed up more and more due to sedimentation, so it pulled the dyke to be taller. Therefore, the dike construction never ends. Therefore, Vietnam was dubbed the "dyke-building people" by foreigners. To make such a grand effort, Vietnamese people must live in villages.

Villages are a basic unit of community for the Vietnamese people (Tu Chi, 1984, p. 11-12). The Vietnamese village was conceived from the

primitive commune and then the rural commune. Therefore, at first the village was created according to bloodline, the village of one family line (as some villages still have traces such as: *Phạm Xá, Đỗ Xá, Hoàng Xá,...*), only later did the village have multiple family names for exogamy and community life. The village must have a tight organization, a structure that is both closed and open, in order to be able to: on the one hand, easily mobilize the energy of the households in the village, because floods affect the whole village, on the other hand, the village has the same dyke passage, easy to link together to build dikes, fight floods and combat droughts; Inter-villages appeared. Then, along with the need to fight against foreign invaders, to protect the dyke system and other irrigation works, a state was born. It should also be added that the Vietnamese village structure was loose when it was a rural commune. Later, perhaps from the Later Lê period (1428 – 1527), partly due to the stability of the Northern Delta, more private fields, and the other part due to the influence of the Confucian state, the village structure became strict and complete. The village became a small farming village, an autonomous, closed organization, the will of the king yields to the village's customs (Phan Ngoc, 2000, p.367), a pure Northern phenomenon, different from the Southern village, even more different from the village of the West. Therefore, from a village structure perspective, traditional Vietnamese society was either just an expanded, projected village, or a total of villages.

The state or something similar to that of ancient Vietnam, the Văn Lang state, could be built on tribal alliances, headed by the tribe of Hùng King. The shadow of this state can be found in the former Muong society... The early states were in the independent era, built on the basis of inter-village with local leaders. The agricultural monarchs of Buddhism Lý, Trần still retain the silhouette of this kind of state. Later, especially from the Lê Thánh Tông reign (1460 – 1497), the need for national reunification was not only geographically (what was done after the anarchy of 12 warlords from 944 to 968), but also religion, ideology, mode of governance, education,... gave birth to a powerful central government. This state existed in practice until the end of the nineteenth century when the French colonialists finished their conquest, and nominally until 1945, when the country gained independence. The Vietnamese state was traditionally a Confucian monarchic agricultural state. This is a kind of totalitarian state. The king is the owner of all: from the land to

the vegetables, to the subjects themselves. No one has private property, from wealth, status, body, to mind. The state acquires all. All are state-ized. In such a country, socialization and personalization are not possible.

In the world there is often a corresponding development between the type of family and the cultural stages (or wave of civilization as A. Toffler called): in agricultural civilization, the form of extended family is common; in industrial civilization - nuclear family, and in post-industrial civilization - blended family (including husband, wife, and stepchild), the family by choice (only father or mother and children), even now there are same-sex families, with adopted children. Thus, compared to the general map of the world, the form of Vietnamese nuclear family appeared in the civilized and agricultural period is a step early. This, of course, is subject to the main regulations of growing wet rice on small fields of the Northern Delta and Midlands. However, this form of nuclear family arriving early and in a social environment characterized by this community cannot be a premise for each individual - its member become individual person, instead just make him the typical small farmer.

By the way, we also talked about the small farmer as a product of the self-sufficient small farmer and the Confucian doctrine of morality, rituals, and strong hatred for commerce. Therefore, only in the Northern Delta do there are small farmers. In the Southern Vietnam, because the land was plentiful due to the policy of encouraging land reclamation from the Nguyễn Lords era, there were many large landlords and wealthy peasants. As for the tenants, their lives are not very constrained. Because if they are exploited too much, they can leave and survive in the wasteland with just a canoe and sickle. So there is no small farmer in the South. The free-spirited personality, sometimes to the point of recklessness, is also the same product of it. And in the South, once there is an impact of urban commerce, agricultural production can easily become a commodity economy. However, this is not possible in the North.

Thus, villages with autonomous character, with a natural economy, self-sufficiency, persistent public field regime as the consolidating nucleus of community, then the Confucian monarchy, mandarins are small-minded people (Tran Dinh Huou, 2007, p. 65),... all of which are trying to inhibit the development of commerce, especially foreign trade. Because, trade will be a destabilizing factor for this stable society. Vietnamese society does not have a commodity

economy. The countryside market network is just a place to exchange farm scraps and some handicrafts. The riverside market network is also developing very promiscuously, not yet becoming a commercial force capable of affecting agricultural society. The so-called foreign trade of Vietnam is only opening the door for foreign traders to buy goods (this noun is now called on-spot export) and sending the accused person to bring money abroad to buy luxury goods for court (as in the case of Phan Huy Chú, Cao Bá Quát).

The Vietnamese Mentality

Underdeveloped trade leads to underdevelopment of urban areas in Vietnam. True, Vietnam has cities, but the city appears late, and the administrative quality always overwhelms the commercial quality. Therefore, urban is more administrative than commercial. Therefore, the city, throughout Vietnamese history, has always been an island on a small shallow sea, surrounded and dominated by the countryside. Therefore, when there was a time when the city was more or less autonomous, i.e. stronger than the urban quality, the population developed, and initially formed a lifestyle and urban ideology, then New Vietnam culture is more or less different. Such a society is an ideal environment to form and preserve the people of small farmers, the core of the village people. Village people as a cultural model occupies an important position in the cultural history of Vietnam. And because the village has not changed much since its formation, the villagers rarely change in time. And once Vietnamese society is like an extended projection of village, the villagers become universal. And the small farmer also became an identity of the Vietnamese. It exists in both the unconscious and the conscious, governing the entire behavior of the Vietnamese in general and the village people in particular.

The village people, mainly are people in the community. Before forming itself, it must belong to the family, lineage, village, country... In this kind of people there is a very high sense of community. Community spirit is formed from families and villages. Because the family is still an economic unit, a place to nurture, educate, and maintain human race and provide emotional support. And villages are the main social space for farmers. That is not to mention the public land regime that forces people to stick with the village community to obtain a ration of cultivated land... Almost all social institutions are all aimed at reinforcing and enhancing the community in each person.

The community of Vietnamese people is not only formed and consolidated horizontally and vertically of social links, but also vertically of blood relations. That is the family relationship, the family line. Although the Vietnamese family line is not always and everywhere as deep as in China (the vertical nine tribes and the horizontal three clans), it still dominates the human-person relationship in Vietnam, reinforces community by blood, by worshiping the same ancestor, with pride in a tradition, which is sometimes fabricated, and the hope that after death will be immortal through the life of descendants or into the family ancestor. Therefore, the entire lineage depends on one person, and vice versa.

The community character makes people love each other more, to love people as if they love themselves. However, the community of Vietnamese people is not always voluntary, but sometimes it is merciful and compromised to coexist. Between people there are times when they have to endure each other. Furthermore, every thing has its side. Once the community develops, it will imprison the individual's consciousness, prevent the individual from developing; human being is forever an individual member, individual in deficiency. That is, only when it exists as a member of a community that it has a little value (Huyen Giang, 2017, p. 385). People are first of all family, then family line, village,... then it is own. This is shown in the story of Chí Phèo by Nam Cao. Removed from the village structure, only naked individuals remained, Chí Phèo was no longer of any value. This terrible loneliness, inadequacy, made Chí constantly drunk, and voluntarily made him a lackey.

The lack of individual consciousness is also manifested in everyday speech as the embodiment of the unconscious. The word I (*tôi*) that Vietnamese people use to identify and call themselves means servant. This self-depreciation is not an expression of self-humility, an euphemism, a "pretense humility" as we often see today, but a reflection of the actual status of the individual in the community. In addition, through the Vietnamese address, we also see that people cannot identify themselves, but must be through relationships with others. Like, when talking to parents, the "I" is a child, when talking to grandparents the "I" is a grandchild, when talking to children the "I" is a father or mother... That means "I" is not the first-person singular nominative case personal pronoun, an individual has a personal, autonomous value, but "I" is the role that someone play in their relationship with

others. But there are many roles. Therefore, within the diversification of role, the individual cannot develop. Only in the early twentieth century, when Vietnam entered its modernization, did the word I truly mean the first person proclaiming pronoun.

Talking about the underdevelopment of individual consciousness in the villagers does not mean that the village people have no personality. Individuals and personalities are different categories. Everyone has a personality. First of all it is due to the biological difference. Even two twins with the same egg are not completely the same from fingerprints, facial expressions, and physical condition. Then there is the difference due to living conditions, family, education, economy, social class,... Therefore, after all, everyone has a personality, only difference in density. Because, to adapt to life, some people erode their personalities, so that they can easily fit into the surrounding environment. On the contrary, there are people who sharpen themselves to oppose their surroundings. Village life, on the one hand, with standardization and strict hierarchy makes the personality less developed, on the other hand, the nature of small farmers and nuclear families makes farmers, especially middle farmers, to promote their personality, even though that personality is just different variations of the corporate ego, the ego that represents.

Due to the development of the community, the people of the village are sentimental people (Nguyen Hong Phong, 1963, p. 54). For the common interest of the community, in which there is a personal interest, or rather, personal interests can only be obtained through the public interest, because of its cohesion, one must stick together. This solemnity not only takes place in blood-born communities such as family, lineages, but also in neighboring communities: alley, hamlet, village, region,... Therefore, people in the village live together in harmony, a valuable virtue for working together.

However, the sentimental way of life is only promoting positively in a traditional agricultural society, a static society. It will be an obstacle in a dynamic society, that is, a society undergoing structural changes, especially in modern society. Humans, as a creature of duality, are not only sentimental but also rational. People in order to have a harmonious rationality need to go through a stage of reasoning, a period that traditional Vietnamese society has not experienced. The sentimental way of life, along with a few other factors, has prevented the villager from becoming a rational person. Therefore, the people of the

village have imposed the family vocation into social life, without public-private disclosure; legal spirit, thus underdeveloped. In the modern social life, the sentimental lifestyle will make many things ambiguous and difficult to clarify, the light of reason is more or less refracted and twisted.

The community and the sentimental way of life make people in the village prefer fairness. That sense of fairness emerged from the village life that forced everyone into a boat with the same fate, shared joys, suffering, common duties and interests. Moreover, only assurance between everyone can ensure cohesion in the community, the community character is the sentimental way of life. Therefore, there is no fear of lack, only of uneven division. And fairness becomes “a thousand generations of desire” of the farmer. Their ideal republics such as the fairytale, the era of Emperor Yao and Shun in Ancient China, the Peach Blossom land... are all places where fairness, or absolute equalization ruled. This is also the reason why communism found a fertile land in Vietnamese peasants for their ideals to bear fruit.

However, in the village life of small farmers, there is no deep social division and radical occupation division, so it is easy to misinterpret the notion of fairness, or turn justice into equalization, i.e crude egalitarianism. This means that everyone wants to be equal in terms of interests, then equal in appearance, status and together enjoy a uniform aesthetic. They do not understand that it is a requirement that cannot be fulfilled, and moreover, sometimes it is not fair. Therefore, overall bad is better than uniquely good. They will line up horizontally and advance, and will trip those who walk faster with strong legs.

Fairness (or equalization) does not lead to equality, a concept of democracy and civil society. There are also people who believe that Vietnam's traditional agricultural society has equality. However, if it does, it is just the “equality” of people without individuality, a low equality, lower than even those in technocratic Western societies, “standardized” by wearing the same fashion, eating the same food, luxury office bento, watching the same movie, listening to a same song,... This equality is more uniform than homogeneous.

As mentioned above, the village economy is self-sufficient in nature, farmers work all year round but still cannot make enough food, because they have to rely a lot on nature, depending a lot on the invader's situation. Therefore, the villagers are practical, careful, mature people. Gradually this

practicality becomes the behavioral threshold, the cultural threshold of the Vietnamese people. They always equivocate or use doublespeak. People reject the notion of the grass is greener on the other side. It is this cultural threshold that has helped them overcome many difficult circumstances to achieve their goals. This is the implementation of the “way of life,” or rather, “the way of survival” of the Vietnamese people.

However, in many cases, that precious practicality becomes pragmatism and short-sighted, seeing only the near, not seeing the far, only seeking the immediate countermeasure there is without a long-term strategy... The pragmatism of the villagers makes them unable to absorb the high philosophical principles, but also made them when acquiring a certain religion always leaving the philosophical part but only absorbing the ritual, which is the practical part. At the same time, immediately turning the thinkers of religion - philosophy into folk patron gods capable of blessing or creating catastrophe that must be worshiped.

In general, farmers of any country are cautious, afraid of adventure, of uncertainty and luck. But in the mentality of Vietnamese peasants, these characteristics are more concentrated. This is because trading is not yet developed that can cause them to be diluted or washed away. People in the village discriminate against traders. Trading in their eyes is close to fraud. Merchants are always called scornfully. And later, when Confucianism developed in Vietnam, the merchant was just a lowly civilian in the “four occupations” (士農工商), which are gentry scholar, peasant farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and merchants and traders. If we had to withdraw two from this four occupations, only scholars and peasants are left, craftsmen and merchants would not be present in this vicious game.

The underdevelopment of trade, which is also the underdevelopment of adventurousness, as well as the holding of a few yards of public fields in the village, makes the peasants dare not leave the village and live on their own (Pham Bich Hop, 1993, p. 83). The village clings to the field, does not like to move. Living between forests on one side and the sea on the other, but Vietnamese peasants are far away from both forest and sea. Despite the common sayings “Forest is gold, ocean is silver, oceans of money,” forest to them is a dangerous place. Afraid to go to the forest, Vietnamese farmers also turn their backs on the sea. They only encroach on the sea to reclaim land for agricultural use. If they fish, they only fish

around the shore, dare not venture far. In particular, there is no sea trade like the Chinese, the Cham, and the Javanese,...

Turning their backs on the forest and the sea means avoiding active contact with others. On the one hand, people in the village love what is “their own” too much, on the other hand, they hate the singularity, the alien, the other, even consider the other, the new as the enemy. Since then, they have preserved the tribalism, lived a closed life in seclusion and refused communication. Without a comparison through another mirror, they also have no reflection on their own life, that is, they have no sense of their own life. Therefore, Vietnamese people value experience, live by experience, dislike and are therefore poor in theory, poor in judgment, good at perception and generalization, including pre-scientific generalizations. The environment of a small farm village, a small farmer society, therefore, is not a country for great thinkers, theories and religions,...

The Reflection of Vietnamese Mentality in Prose after 1986

Vietnam is currently entering a modern society, however, traditional values, including a small farmer identity - Vietnamese identity, can be changed and must be changed, because this identity, though formed in the past but certainly belongs to the future. This can be clearly seen in Vietnamese prose after 1986. The first characteristic is that many novels appear. Before 1986, in Vietnam mainly short stories and medium stories, with a simple plot structure, the chronology of events. Until after 1986, mainly novels, with complex plot structure, not chronologically but reversed this order according to psychology or artistic thought. It is thanks to the development of the novel or some short stories (Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, Phạm Thị Hoài, Nguyễn Minh Châu) that have the capacity of the novel and have novel thinking that deeply reflect the Vietnamese psychology before the new age, before the turning point of cultural and social life. The novel is no longer a reflection of social life, but creates another life, existing parallel to the real life to illuminate each other to highlight aesthetic intentions.

Historical fiction also develops, becomes less dependent on official historical documents, and breaks the notion that there is only one true history. History is built according to the intentions of art and many history, history is just the historical discourse. This is the neo-historicism concept in Vietnamese historical fictions. Instead of focusing on explaining history, historical fiction

has turned to a tendency to interpret and dialogue with history, to interpret historical and cultural problems, and to fictionalize history. The authors propose hypotheses about life and personality, possible interpretations of history. Therefore, they together with readers ask questions, dialogues with people in history. History is breathed with new life, is no longer a chronological event, but is created, bringing with it the problems that current people are interested in. Even historical fictions are materials to reflect the mentality of the era, the mentality of the Vietnamese people today. These include typical Vietnamese historical fictions such as *Hồ Quý Ly*, *Mother Goddess of Highlands* [*Mẫu Thượng Ngàn*] and *Carrying rice on head to the pagoda* [*Đội gạo lên chùa*] by Nguyễn Xuân Khánh, *The Pyre* [*Giàn thiêu*] by Võ Thị Hảo, *Oath Ceremony* [*Hội thề*] by Nguyễn Quang Thân...

The novel is also against communitarianism and sentimental way of life, highlighting the socialization and personalization in novels: Lê Lựu's *Time Gone By* [*Thời xa vắng*], Nguyễn Khắc Trường's *The Land Filled with Humans and Ghosts* [*Mảnh đất lắm người nhiều ma*], Ma Văn Kháng's *The Autumn Leaves Fall in the Garden* [*Mùa lá rụng trong vườn*].

Nguyễn Huy Thiệp is a phenomenon of Vietnamese literature during the Đổi mới (Renovation) and open policies era. Therefore, we could consider Thiệp as a point of reference, on the one hand, to look at the pre-Thiệp literature, or the literature during his time, and on the other hand, to reflect into the post-Thiệp literature, that is today literature. Thus, immediately, arising a new and different writing movement, including writing in "Nguyễn Huy Thiệp style" in the young authors. At the same time, the influence of "Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's short stories" was strong to such an extent that many veteran authors could not continue their old writing style; and the famous Nguyễn Khải, who was the brightest in his generation, said he was willing to sacrifice his whole body of work for one work like Thiệp's *The General Retires* [*Tướng về hưu*]. Those "confessions" somewhat proves that Vietnamese literature since Nguyễn Huy Thiệp is changing. Therefore, Thiệp is one of the main individuals who contribute to the shift in Vietnamese literature paradigm: from premodernism to modernism. This very revolution open the door for a new era in literature: in poetry, prose works and literary criticism.

The reality in Nguyễn Huy Thiệp works, from family to society, is broken into pieces, without a

king, without a father, without a (water) god. Confused, Thiệp on one hand tries to restore the former supremacy of the (alpha) male/the father/the general in *Jungle Salt* [*Muối của rừng*], *The General Retires*, *Burned Gold* [*Vàng lửa*]; on the other hand, tries to find the new fathers in spiritual dimension in *Crossing the River* [*Chạy đi sông ơ*], *The Water Nymph* [*Con gái thủy thần*], *Mother's Soul* [*Tâm hồn mẹ*]. Towards the postmodern era, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp stopped writing short story, perhaps he do not want to become "a prolonged Nguyễn Huy Thiệp." He started writing novel in postmodern style, as in *Sweet Twenty* [*Tuổi hai mươi yêu dấu*], *Martial Arts Unofficial History* [*Võ lâm ngoại sử*], *Xiaolongnu* [*Tiểu long nữ*]..., essays are the main genres of postmodern literature. While his works are still readable and have considerable readers, he is obviously unsuccessful. Perhaps, in spite of reaching a modern humanity, deep inside his consciousness he is still despising the city, while postmodernism itself is the urban culture. Though he could return to the country, it is not the premodern country as before.

The Renovation and open policies, however, did not change the whole perspective of all authors. They mostly changed based on their old perspective. Hence, it is not by chance somebody called that renovation as reversal (Nguyễn Đình Thi) or turning inside out (Chế Lan Viên). First, the return of critical realism in literature. To criticize the subsidy system, more or less is to touch the subsidy of ideas, and its consequences. Then the penitence literature. Being remorseful for wrongdoing, but the truth is, it is not really that wrong. The return to concurrent reality made the former rigid pens more flexible. Thus, there are breakthroughs in arts. Lê Lựu's *Time Gone By* was successful, because it converges two above literatures in a quite high level. However, to look at the genre aspect, this famous novel is not belong to the modern literature (or modernism). Because its main function is to simply reflect the apparent reality, which exists outside of the author consciousness, despite how artistic or profound it could be.

Tô Hoài published two of his most prominent novels, *Every Afternoon* [*Chiều chiều*] and *Three Others* [*Ba người khác*], respectively, in 1999 and 2006. The system of characters in Tô Hoài's novels after 1986 in their position and identity revealed the "excess" of personality. Through building characters with an "excess" of personality, readers realize the heterogeneity, incompatibility, incongruity between people and

their personalities and identities. At the same time, the reader recognizes the other side of the characters and another person inside each character. The character presentation in the direction of inclination in the negative, limited, revealing “excess” personality is a new perspective of the writer about people. The space for the characters to operate and express their personalities in Tô Hoài’s novels after 1986 is the daily, everyday living space in the countryside in different regions. Placing a character in daily life, Tô Hoài helped readers understand more about life, cultural characteristics of each region as well as thoughts, souls, emotions and personal characteristics of the characters in the works. Tô Hoài placed his character in the living environment in the village, in daily life relationships with family, brothers, relatives, neighbors, friends, lovers... Tô Hoài made a difference in terms of language depicting characters. In his novels after 1986, the language depicts a character that is both idyllic, casual, everyday life, bearing the local color, typical of the countryside: suburban Hanoi, highland mountains, rural areas in the northern delta. Acquiring the spoken words of each dialect into his writing pages both creates vivid text and ensures the objectivity of the words, creating a natural feature for the story while avoiding the forceful touch of the author.

Conclusion

From our study we infer that it is the traditional Vietnamese mentality is reflected evidently in Vietnamese prose after 1986. Through the historical development of Vietnam and the forming of village and state, the small farmer character is born. If Oswald Spengler thinks that Apollinian and Faustian people represent Classical and Western culture (Spengler, p.198-199), respectively, and Ruth Benedict sees the Dionysians as embodiment of the Kwakiutl culture (Benedict, 1934, p.181-182), then we assume the small farmer character is the nucleus of Vietnamese mentality in particular and Vietnamese culture in general. And this mentality found its residue and manifestation in Vietnamese prose, especially in the works of modern writers such as Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, Tô Hoài, Ma Văn Kháng, Lê Lưu.

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