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**NOVELS ON VIETNAMESE COUNTRYSIDE IN
THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY**

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LITERATURE DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

1. Reasons for research project

1.1. Western intellectuals who came to Vietnam, Indochina spent a large amount of time studying village structure, indigenous characteristics, cultural nuances, agricultural models, farmers and rural areas in Vietnam with different works on human geography by Pierre Gourou (*Farmers of the Tonkin Delta*), ethnographic research by G. Condominas (*We have eaten the forest*), and cultural anthropological studies by Olivier (*"Helping" and Mutual Aid in Village Communities in Northern Vietnam: The Relationship Between Solidarity and Dependence*), Oscar Salemink (*Searching for Spiritual Safety in Contemporary Vietnamese Society*), Suenari Michio (*How ancestors are pictured on the altar: A comparative analysis with other East Asian societies*)... The ethnographic, sociological, and anthropological studies of domestic researchers also bring the world to a fuller perception of a multi-colored, and very vividly cultural Vietnam. It seems that, one has to start from the countryside, from the village to understand Vietnam. The footprints of our predecessors have inspired the author to choose the theme of countryside, as a return to understand Vietnam.

1.2. Reviewing the rural theme in modern Vietnamese literature, it can be seen that a large number of famous writers through different literary periods have associated with this theme which has never been exhausted in Vietnamese literature, and considered as a fertile land for different generations of writers to explore and discover. This is also a theme that gives us a lot of interesting inspiration with the desire to learn about rural Vietnam from tradition to modernity.

1.3. Vietnamese literature in the early 21st century has been making strong changes from artistic thinking to expression mode with a way of seeing and approaching people and the reality of life in diverse and complex relationships. The thinking of modern novels quickly responds to the demands of that realistic reflection. The author chooses the novel genre because of its flexibility, the ability to contain and integrate different genres and modes of expression, which is an "advantage" to identify and reflect rural reality in a "realistic" and closest way to each of us. The study of rural novels that are time-referenced at the beginning of the 21st century

and broadened the range of references to present, the author hopes to point out the appearance, characteristics and contributions of novels written about rural areas in this period in the general movement of contemporary Vietnamese literature.

With those theoretical and practical bases, the author chooses *the novels on Vietnamese countryside in the early 21st century* as the research topic of the thesis.

2. Research goals and missions

2.1. Research goals

The research aims to identify and explain the outstanding features of the content and writing style of novels on rural topics in the early 21st century, thereby pointing out the contributions of rural novels of this period in the movement of national literature as well as the limits to be overcome in order for the literature to have more great works on rural topics in the future.

2.2. Research missions

- An overview assessment of the situation of researching novels on rural topics in Vietnamese literature, the movement of novels about Vietnamese countryside and influencing factors on the development of novels on rural topics in the early 21st century.

- Identify, analyze and explain the rural reality presented in Vietnamese novels in the early 21st century from new perspectives (historical, cultural, ecological perspectives...).

- Identify, analyze and explain about farmers in Vietnamese novels in the early 21st century from new perspectives (on the perspectives of social anthropology, culture, ecology...).

- Identify and analyze the writing style of novels about Vietnamese countryside in the early 21st century.

3. Research subjects and scope

3.1. Research subjects

The research subjects of the thesis are novels written on Vietnamese countryside that were published in the early 21st century.

3.2. Research scope

Scope of content: Study the characteristics of content and writing style

of novels on Vietnamese countryside published in the early 21st century.

Scope of material: Novels written on Vietnamese rural topics were published in the first 20 years of the 21st century, in which the thesis selects works that have had certain success and have drawn a lot of interest from readers, scholars, and critics. In particular, the thesis pays more attention to novels written about the countryside in the North. A number of novels written about the southern countryside or mountainous life are mentioned when the thesis analyzes the urban-rural spatial change under the impact of rural urbanization. The list of works is listed in Appendix 1. In order to clarify the contribution of rural novels in the early 21st century, the author further increases the area of comparative research with novels on the same theme at different phases in the previous periods as appropriate. The list of additional reference works is listed in Appendix 2.

4. Research methods

4.1. Approach from novel genre theory

The novel genre is chosen to survey and research; therefore, genre theory is mainly approached. In the theory of novel genres, it is found out that M.Bakhtin's theory is systematic and complete; as a result, the author considers it a tool to analyze and explain the problems posed by the thesis.

4.2. Interdisciplinary research methods

The countryside in Vietnamese literature is determined by cultural, historical and social factors. Therefore, the study of novels on rural topics in the early 21st century must necessarily consider cultural and historical aspects; approach from the perspective of cultology, ecology/ecological criticism and sociology. The focus of the thesis is to use the methodology of cultology, social anthropology, ecology and ecological criticism to investigate the content aspect - rural reality and the character of the farmer in the novels writing about rural topics in the early 21st century.

4.3. Systematic method

Putting novels about the Vietnamese countryside in the early 21st century in the context of contemporary literature, considering the subject as a systematic phenomenon in the movement and development of the rural theme novel from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, the author aims to determine the position and meaning of the

novel about the Vietnamese countryside in the early twenty-first century in the process of modern literature.

4.4. Comparative method

Using the comparative method, the author conducts two angles of chronological comparison and synchronous comparison to clarify similarities and differences, inheritance and creative contributions of novels on rural themes at the beginning of the 21st century with novels on the same theme of previous periods.

4.5. Literary work analysis method

From analyzing the characteristics of the content and writing style of the works, the author synthesizes and generalizes into the general characteristics of the content and writing style of the novel on contemporary Vietnamese countryside.

5. The thesis contributions

- The thesis has systematically and intensively surveyed, analyzed and interpreted novels written about Vietnamese countryside in the early 21st century: from the conditions (subjective and objective) of the development, social life in the countryside, the image of the farmer, the characteristics of expression... Thereby, it is possible to help readers visualize the relatively complete appearance, outstanding achievements, the contribution of early 21st century novels to rural literature as well as contemporary literary.

- The thesis has systematically surveyed the stages of formation and movement of rural novels from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. The research on rural novels associated with the movement of the genre on this topic; especially, there is quite comprehensive statistics of studies on rural novels in the early 21st century. Therefore, the thesis can become a practical reference for further studies on novels and rural topics in Vietnamese literature.

6. Thesis outline

In addition to the *Introduction*, *Conclusion*, *References* and *Appendices*, the main content of the thesis includes 4 chapters:

Chapter 1. *Overview of research problems*

Chapter 2. *New perspectives, new issues in novels on rural topics in the early 21st century*

Chapter 3. *The character of the "familiar but strange" farmer in the novel on rural topics in the early 21st century*

Chapter 4. *Inheritance and efforts to renew writing style in novels on rural topics in the early 21st century*

Chapter 1. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROBLEMS

1.1. The progress of the novel on Vietnamese countryside

1.1.1. Rural novels in the early 20th century to 1945 - from shaping to development

Ever since the appearance of the national language prose, the topic of the farmers has been expressed in the works of different authors, typically Ho Bieu Chanh. The works on the countryside and farmers in the South, published by Ho Bieu Chanh from 1925 to 1930, such as *Cold love, the Interpreter, Deep love between father and son, Cry in silence, Poor children...* have contributed to shaping the genre of Vietnamese novels in general and novels on rural themes in particular. However, only until the period between the 1930s and 1945, was there a period of vigorous development of novels on rural themes in clearly defining the writing styles, approaching and reflecting the reality with many authors such as Vu Trong Phung (*Storm*), Ngo Tat To (*Lights out*), Manh Phu Tu (*Concubine*), To Hoai (*Strange land*), Tran Tieu (*The buffalo*). In addition, the works of *Tu luc van doan* writers have enriched and contributed to the development of novels on rural themes in Vietnam. In general, novels written about the countryside from the beginning of the 20th century to 1945, although only at the beginning of formation and development, have achieved remarkable achievements in terms of both content and art form.

1.1.2. Novels on the countryside from 1945 to 1975 – moving towards revolution, sticking to the common destiny of the nation

In general, novels written on rural themes in the period between 1945 and 1975 have reflected rural reality during the two wars of resistance against the French and against the US with different events such as land reform, agricultural cooperative movement, construction of socialism... A large number of works such as *The brick yard, Off-season rice crop* (Dao Vu), *The sea storm* (Chu Van), *The conflict, The District President* (Nguyen Khai), *The broken shore* (Nguyen Dinh Thi), *Hon Dat* (Anh Duc), *Man and I* (Phan Tu) ... show a comprehensive view of rural reality and farmers, and have built up typical characters for the era. However, due to historical circumstances and the influence of literary trends, novels written about the countryside in this period inevitably have certain limitations in the way of seeing and solving rural reality problems and

building the image of a farmer compared to those of the previous period. A large number of works have reflected reality in an idealized way compared to reality; therefore, it is inevitable to appear the compulsion in the works. Moreover, the fact that the writers focus on reflecting the great events of the nation leads to their dim view of the fate of individuals.

1.1.3. Rural novels from the post - 1975 to the end of the 20th century – important transitions of the genre

Novels on rural themes from the post - 1975 to the end of the 20th century can be divided into two main stages: from 1975 to 1985 and from 1986 to the end of the 20th century.

The period between 1975 and 1985 is considered the "pre-renovation" period, the "hinge" period opening a new period for rural novels. The works *Falling star* (Chu Van), *Father and son and...* (Nguyen Khai), *Looking under the sun* (Nguyen Kien), *District Secretary* (Dao Vu), *Cu Lao Tram* (Nguyen Manh Tuan)... indicate that the change in writing styles creates a premise for innovation for the period after 1986.

From 1986 to the end of the 20th century in the era of innovation and democracy, in the prose in general and novels written on rural themes in particular, there gradually appeared a new and different rural picture. The writer's field of vision has penetrated different corners of life and people, the stagnation inhibiting the process of rural development. Many works have created aftershocks in the search for approaches to realism and innovation in writing styles, creating important shifts in genre. A series of works appeared from 1986 to 1990 such as *The time away* (Le Luu), *The land of love* (Nguyen Minh Chau), *The black and white life* (Nguyen Quang Lap), *The genealogy* (Doan Le) ... resonated in the literature. Especially, from the post-1990 to the end of the 20th century, with the spirit of "looking directly at the truth", "appreciating the truth", exploring reality in many different aspects, the works like *Land of Man and Ghost* (Nguyen Khac Truong), *No-husband port* (Duong Huong), *Lao Kho* (Ta Duy Anh), *Story of Cuoi Village* (Le Luu), *Village Story that day* (Vo Van Truc), *Field assassin* (Nguyen Quang Thieu), ... brought the reader a very different reality in the countryside.

In general, novels on rural themes during the 20th century have had an overview of the reality of each revolutionary period, with great events and

memorable human images in accordance with the requirements of the times. At each stage, the novel has changed in its approach to reality, writing style, artistic conception of people, mode of expression...

1.2. Studies on novels on rural themes in Vietnamese literature

1.2.1. Studies in the 20th century

1.2.1.1. Before the August Revolution 1945

Before the August Revolution of 1945, the countryside and the peasantry were the subject of many writers of both the realist and romantic literary movements reflected directly or indirectly through many works. However, at that time, there was no work dedicated to studying literature on rural themes. The authors writing about the countryside such as Ngo Tat To, Nguyen Cong Hoan, Vu Trong Phung, Nam Cao... are mainly introduced and reviewed in a number of articles published in newspapers or magazines. Among the typical literary research and criticism works before the August Revolution, *Criticism and Essays* and *Modern Writers* are the two works that most mentioned rural novelists; however, these works were only the basic sketches.

1.2.1.2. From the post-the August Revolution 1945 to 1975

At this stage, the research and criticism of novels written about the countryside still focused on the authors and works before 1945. There were also research articles of novels on the countryside from 1945 to 1975 in a number of magazines. In general, from the post-the August Revolution of 1945 to 1975, the studies on novels on rural themes were still not suitable for reality. However, the issues of the countryside and the peasantry have been recognized by researchers and critics as an important theme for novels in particular and the literature in general.

1.2.1.3. From the post-1975 to the end of the 20th century

From the post-1975 to the end of the 20th century was a period of many changes in Vietnamese literature. Novels about the countryside in this period achieved a lot of remarkable achievements. Like the previous period, many researchers in this period still focus their attention on works published from before the August Revolution to 1975. In general, there was a lack of systematic research works about novels on rural themes in this period. Most of them were articles about the movement and development of prose writing about the countryside and reviews of

specific authors and works. In addition, a number of theses began to study novels on rural themes after 1975, especially after 1986. The articles and research works more or less confirmed that novels written on rural themes from the post-1975 to the end of the 20th century have changed and developed in accordance with each historical period of the nation. It is a change in approach and reflection of reality as well as efforts to innovate in the art form. However, compared with the achievements of works, it is necessary for the studies to be more in-depth and worthy.

1.2.2. Studies in the early 21st century

1.2.2.1. Studies reviewing the novels on rural themes in the 20th century

Although entering the 21st century, a large number of works on the countryside from the early 20th century are still attractive to researchers and critics. In general, in these works, the authors have comments and assessments about the achievements of prose in general, and rural novels in particular, through each period or in terms of specific authorship. In addition to published research works, a lot of articles published in journals, websites, theses and dissertations on prose research in general, and rural novels in particular have partly shown the attractiveness of this theme for researchers and critics. The transformation and renewal of novels on rural themes in the last decades of the 20th century have also been indicated in a number of studies.

1.2.2.2. Studies on novels on rural theme published from the beginning of the 21st century to the present

Generally, in the studies on novels on rural themes published in the early 21st century, whether in the general direction or in terms of authorship and specific works, most authors take their milestones from 1975 or from 1986 to the time of the study. As for the beginning of the 21st century, which has not been carefully discussed by researchers so far as an independent period, a "milestone" marking the turn of the century of rural novels. The perspectives of the studies mainly focus on the view of poetics and narration. There are few multidimensional perspectives such as culturology, ecology, social anthropology... This is a suggestion for the author to inherit the achievements of our predecessors so that the author

can fully study the achievements and limitations in terms of content and writing style of rural novels in a period of a new century.

1.3. Novels on rural theme in the early 21st century – objective and subjective influences on development

1.3.1. Objective influences

1.3.1.1. The process of industrialization, modernization and the change of perspective in the creation and reception of literature

In the early years of the 21st century, the industrialization and modernization of the country has become more and more powerful, which has greatly influenced the literature from creation to reception. For writers, the rich reality of life is a condition for them to change their creative vision, to explore, exploit and create. However, it is challenging for the writers to exploit in accordance with the market mechanism and the psychology, needs and tastes of readers as well as meet the requirements of artistic creation. For readers, the market economy with many forms of entertainment has appeared, which has changed aesthetic tastes and has a profound division in terms of qualifications, ages, gender, occupations, even regions according to both positive and negative directions. With all the changes in perspective on both the level of creation and reception in the above-mentioned literature, novels written on rural themes face a variety of opportunities and challenges.

1.3.1.2. The trend of globalization and the introduction and absorption of different foreign cultural and artistic trends and ideas

Globalization and international integration affect literary and artistic life in different aspects, in which the increasingly diverse absorption of philosophical and aesthetic ideas in the world has created a turning point in both theoretical thinking and practice of composing and researching and criticizing Vietnamese literature in general, and rural novels in particular. These trends not only renew thinking and attitude to identify and evaluate reality together with past cultural and artistic heritages, but also bring a dialectical view in the harmonious combination between ethnicity and humanity, between tradition and innovation, creating the premise for the birth of different literary trends, many unique and diverse writing styles.

1.3.2. Subjective influences

1.3.2.1. A lack of writers specializing in rural themes

In the general picture of the creative force of the first 20 years of the 21st century, there are few authors who specialize in writing about the countryside. The number of sharp writers with their own artistic style like the class of writers writing on rural topics of the 20th century are really modest. *The village ghosts* (Trinh Thanh Phong), *River Mia* (Dao Thang), *Three other people* (To Hoai), *the Gods and butterflies* (Do Minh Tuan), *the genealogy of the land* (Hoang Minh Tuong)... are just a handful of works compared to the requirement to reflect contemporary rural reality. The reason why the number of writers of rural novels in the early 21st century is modest should be considered and explained from different perspectives:

The first reason is the change in environment/living space of the majority of writers. In the 20th century, most writers on rural topics were "born from the village" and attached to the countryside. Entering the 21st century, due to the upward movement of the society and the development of urban areas, writers left the village to urban areas, which leads to the lack of writers who still lived in the countryside. The second reason leads to the small number of writers dedicated to writing about the countryside is the pressure of competition from other "hot" themes and the "instant" genres of the market economy. Finally, it is necessary to consider this limitation from the writers' rural perspectives. In other words, the writers faced limitations within themselves. Their bravery, courage, passion and talent as well needed to be strong enough for them to choose rural themes instead of the others.

1.3.2.2. The "shadow" of the compositions on rural themes in the past

Looking back at the 20th century, there were a large number of authors who left unique works on rural topics in Vietnamese literature through each historical period of the country. Those works were the "monuments" that contributed to the construction of the country's literature. From the beginning of the 21st century to the present, there were different generations of writers of rural novels with many typical works. However, in general, the quantity and quality of novels on rural topics at this period were not really commensurate with the available team of writers as well as rich and abundant sources of real life material. Most of the works continued to exploit the realism of rural novels in the previous period such

as war, land reform, and agricultural cooperative while the countryside changed in a more complex and intense way. The writer did not cover all the major issues of society and the era which were affecting the countryside and farmers. The readers could not be brought the feeling of “going to the end” of the contemporary countryside in that period. In other words, novels on rural topics in the early 21st century were being written "under the shadow of legends". The "legendary" nature had "shadowed" the novels on rural topics in the early 21st century in both the subject and inspiration. These "legends" were creating limits in the writing practice of writers about the countryside in the early 21st century.

Chapter 2. NEW PERSPECTIVES, NEW ISSUES IN NOVELS ON RURAL TOPICS IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

2.1. Issues of the past from present perspectives

2.1.1. The countryside in land reform

For novels on rural topics in the early 21st century, land reform is not a new topic, it is just a "rewritten old story". However, the attraction of rural novels in this period is that these old stories happened in the past are shown through the writer's new point of view. Specifically, the stories of childishness, mistakes, misunderstandings, and traumas which are the negative side of the reform have been traced to the truth by previous writers with a humanistic point of view and deeply empathetic attitude. However, in the works of the same topic in the early 21st century, the novelists also showed a strong and decisive warning attitude. It is indicated that the loss, pain, and bleeding of a time still strongly affect the next generation. The "turning over" of the past not only aims to face history but also to frankly self-criticize and criticize. That is the way to find out the lessons from the past as well as the knowledge and the experiences for the development ahead.

2.1.2. The countryside in the agricultural cooperative movement

Entering the first decades of the 21st century, the cooperative movement is still a topic mentioned in rural novels such as: *Under the nine heavens* (Duong Huong), *Summer horizon* (Huu Phuong), *Hurricane* (Nguyen Phan Hach), *Storm in the field* (Cao Nam), *They have not returned* (Nguyen The Hung), *Secretary of the Provincial Party*

Committee (Van Thao), *Village gate* (Nguyen Thanh Cai), *Road to happiness* (Mai Buu Minh).. However, unlike the writers of the previous period who mainly depicted the consequences of the out-of-date business methods of the cooperative movement through images of poverty and stagnation of the countryside, the novelists of the early 21st century focused the sharp contradiction between the old and the new by presenting naked truths for reflections.

2.1.3. The countryside in the post-war period

The instability in policy, economic structure making people struggle with the poverty was reflected in rural novels after 1975, especially from 1986 to the late 1990s. At the beginning of the 21st century, that reality was clearly depicted by serious contradictions and conflicts. They were the conflicts between the old and new business methods, the conflicts in behaviors and the relationships among people and in each person. The works including *River Mia* (Dao Thang), *Storm in the field* (Cao Nam), *They have not returned* (Nguyen The Hung), *Village ghosts* (Trinh Thanh Phong)... all indicate the terrible destructive power of poverty which destroyed human personality.

In addition to the poverty and the backwardness, the sequelae of war are also physical and mental obsessions on farmers. Novels such as *River Mia*, *Three other people*, *Genealogy of the land*, *Under the nine heavens*, *Hurricane*, *Time of Gods*, *the Gods and butterflies*...all depict the tragedy of human alienation and self-alienation of the farmers in the post-war period. Inheriting the familiar themes of poverty and war sequelae in rural novels in earlier periods, the novels of the early 21st century did not focus on describing poverty through meals or the sleazy scene of the village; nor does it go into deep analysis of physical and mental wounds. The writers of this period pushed farmers into different situations where they had to choose between survival and responsibility to their family, clan and to themselves. Those were not easy choices but showed a humanistic point of view with a strong sense of wakefulness and a deeply empathetic attitude about the physical trauma and mental insecurity of the farmers. The picture of Vietnamese countryside is therefore not only placed in a new perception and critical thinking in accordance with the flow of rural novels in the previous period, but also posed the instability in life strongly

affecting the souls of farmers.

2.2. Contemporary countryside and ecological warnings

2.2.1. *Warning about natural ecology*

2.2.1.1. *Destruction of rural natural ecological environment*

The consequences of industrialization and modernization have destroyed the environment when people consider nature to be just an inanimate thing which they are free to exploit and affect it for economic benefits without taking into account the long-term consequences. The writers have changed in the way of expressing the relationship between humans and nature with a new sense - ecological sense. It is a change in the concept of nature, the role of nature - an autonomous nature, existing outside of humans, no longer dependent on humans; a nature affecting people and warning about the dangers that people have created for it and for themselves as well. The destruction and imbalance of the natural ecological environment that has pushed farmers into risky situations for their livelihoods. The works such as *Fisherman* (Hoang Minh Tuong), *They have not returned* (Nguyen The Hung), *River Mia* (Dao Thang), *The awaking land* (Truong Thi Huyen Thuong) ... indicate the "ecological trauma" that people are suffering.

2.2.1.2. *Disruption of typical rural landscape structure*

Industrialization and modernization also led to the appearance of a series of economic projects. Since then, the villages have been directly affected in two forms: industrialization and modernization by the method of transforming communes into wards and industrialization and modernization by the method of land acquisition to build industrial parks and urban areas. The traditional structure of the old village is also gradually broken. The works including *Mist tomorrow*, *Flowing through darkness*, *the Gods and butterflies*, *Ong Manh returned to the village...* show the brutal "invasion" of urban urbanization projects in an unstable way. The problem of rural ecology is posed in the rural novels at the beginning of the 21st century when our country has faced a serious ecological crisis in rural areas. Therefore, it is really a wake-up call for us to be properly aware of the importance of the typical rural landscape as well as the responsibility to preserve the "soul" of the village in modern life.

2.2.2. Warning about socio-ecology

2.2.2.1. Changes in Vietnamese rural families

Influenced by the market economy and integration, the countryside has absorbed the ideas and lifestyle of a different culture, along with changes in the concept of love and marriage. As a result, the families inevitably changed in different aspects in terms of structure, functions, relationships among family members and the role of women. In the works such as *Village ghosts*, *Pallet*, *Genealogy of the land*, *Fisherman*, *the Gods and butterflies*, *River Mia*, *Flowing through darkness...*, the spiritual values and old traditions of the family were seriously violated. A selfish and corruptible lifestyle despite the legal principles of social morality penetrated into each family upset the previous sacred and noble values.

2.2.2.2. The "invasion" of urban culture into rural culture

Urban traces penetrated throughout the rural cultural space from the dressing way to all activities of rural people in order to adapt to modern life. The fast and unselective reception of some cultural achievements from the city has eroded, even destroyed many traditional values while many standards have been reversed, leading to the risk of breaking the cultural foundation of the village. It formed a way of life that is no longer of the country people, but also not of urban people. The works including *Genealogy of the land*, *Village ghosts*, *Ong Manh Returned to the village*, *Road to happiness*, *the Gods and butterflies...* have led to a questioning attitude about the concept of rural urbanization, requiring us to have a better insight into rural society before the "invasion" of the urban areas.

2.2.3. Warning about mental ecology

2.2.3.1. The breaking of traditional village symbols

Before the strong penetration of rural urbanization, the familiar symbols of the traditional village such as architecture (village gate, communal house...); natural symbols (river, banyan tree, bombax ceiba...) are in danger of being broken or destroyed. The works including *The village gate*, *The keeper of the Communal House*, *River Mia*, *The Gods and butterflies...* addressed urgent warnings around the preservation of the "form", the "soul" of the village. Using a unique symbolic system as a method of narrative organization and a type of discourse, rural novels in the early 21st century have created its own cultural and aesthetic space.

Associated with these symbols, there are historical and cultural legends preserved in the memories of farmers, mixed with customs and beliefs to create a rural cultural space. However, before the massive development in the direction of urbanization, rural cultural symbols are broken day by day. The village, which has been a fortress preserving traditional national culture before the assimilation conspiracy of foreigners for thousands of years, is easily transformed by urbanization. This is an alarming tragedy about people's rude behavior with traditional values, showing a serious decline in cultural awareness of people.

2.2.3.2. Changes in the spiritual life of farmers

The spiritual culture of the Vietnamese has been expressed in an extremely rich and diverse way in life. The most common expression is the custom of ancestor worship. Specifically, within the village community, it is the custom of worshiping the village emperor, Gods and heroes with meritorious services to the country, etc, through the symbolism of communal houses and village shrines; and within the family, it is the custom of worshiping ancestors through the symbol of the clan ancestral house, the altar, and the family's incense bowl. Those sacred symbols presented in the works: *the Gods and butterflies*, *River Mia*, *They have not returned...* were discovered by the writers at another level which has a dialectical relationship between the “sacred” and the “desecration”. It was a warning that with the strong development of the market economy, the lack of people’s cultural vision, pragmatic lifestyle, and mediocre materialistic thinking, the identity diversity of the Vietnamese people’s spiritual culture and the spiritual life would be faded away soon.

Chapter 3. THE CHARACTER OF THE "FAMILIAR BUT STRANGE" FARMER IN THE NOVEL ON RURAL TOPICS IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

3.1. Enduring qualities and inherent identities

3.1.1. Enduring qualities

3.1.1.1. The love and attachment for the motherland

The love and attachment for the motherland is the sentiment that covers the psychological life of Vietnamese farmers. The ancestral homeland is a "sacred holy place" of the farmers and they are willing to

exchange their lives to preserve, which is presented in the works including *Summer horizon*, *Hurricane*, *Time of the Gods*, *The keeper of the communal house*, *Under the nine heavens* ... The so-called sacred souls, the national mettle since ancient times, are not general and conventional, but expressed by will, affection, wisdom, sweat, tears, and blood of people who are bound together in the relationship of family, neighbors, clans as well as in the home-village-country community.

3.1.1.2. Respect for affection and community cohesion, respect for morality and honor

It is the love for the country, together with the difficult life of struggling with harsh nature (building dikes, preventing floods, doing irrigation, etc.) and fighting against foreign invaders that have developed the farmers' "community cohesion". The members, small farmer households in the village joined together to form a large family in the village and in the country. Therefore, they attached great importance to the affection. The works such as *The field of fireflies*, *The keeper of the communal house*, *The Gods and the butterflies*... have shown that affection is one of the important "glue" substances that ensure the unity of the Vietnamese village community. Ethical and honorable behavior is reflected in the way to protect oneself in front of public opinion. The works of *River Mia*, *Time of the Gods*, *Village ghosts*, *Color of forest field*, etc., indicated a lifestyle respecting the reputation in both positive and negative aspects, which was very popular in the countryside.

3.1.1.3. Hard work, optimistic spirit

In terms of the farmers' lifestyle and personality, it is necessary to mention their love of labor, their diligence and optimism in life. This is a common characteristic of Vietnamese people that farmers are typical. Despite natural disasters, difficult natural conditions and living environment, farmers are still optimistic with their love for life. The works such as *High sky and thick earth*, *The fisherman*, *Mist tomorrow*... have shown the virtues of hard work and optimism containing a positive "energy" that has been ingrained in the flesh and blood of farmers, creating enduring strength to help them overcome all adversities in life.

3.1.2. Inherent identities

3.1.2.1. Peasant mentality

Besides the above positive aspects, the lifestyle of Vietnamese farmers also reveals certain limitations called the "peasant mentality" personality. The peasant mentality with a narrow, local, conservative lifestyle, based on his experience and ideas of fame and honor, is reflected in the works of *The village ghosts, the Awakening land, the Gods and butterflies...*, thereby leading to conservative behavior, lack of cooperation spirit, inhibiting the farmers' development.

3.1.2.2. Sectarian mentality

For the Vietnamese, villages and clans (surnames) often identify with each other to become a miniature "kingdom" with "their own law" (a treaty) creating a sustainable cohesion (*Imperial power bends to suit rural customs*) and sectarian mentality. The works of *The village ghosts, the Pallet, Time of the Gods, Shadow of the Oak Tree...* have shown the consequences and tragedies for people caused by the blind kinship consciousness associated with the despicable power ambitions of a part of the peasantry. The negative side of the sense of kinship is also the cause of inhibiting the development of rural areas.

3.2. Changes in mentality according to the change of times

3.2.1. The corruption of personality, morality and lifestyle

The process of national renewal, international integration, and the development of modern information technology have brought many favorable conditions to absorb the quintessence of humanity. However, the impact from the negative side of the market economy and urbanization is like a "sugar-coated pill", a "strange scent" that is really hard to resist, causing the corruption of morality. It has brought cultural conflicts in rural areas in Vietnam, creating a mixed and deformed culture. Specifically, it is the degradation of culture, morality and lifestyle of a part of peasants of all backgrounds and ages that the writers in the early 21st century have seriously reflected. The works such as *The village ghosts, Ong Manh returned to the village, Gods and butterflies, Fisherman, Road to happiness...* have urgently warned about the deviant lifestyle of a part of the peasantry. It is more dangerous when the corruption of personality, morality, and lifestyle happened regardless of age or gender. The rapid adoption and lack of selection of new lifestyles have changed and even destroyed many good cultural

values of the village. Social relations and family relationships are also affected by new measures in which the purely agricultural nature of village culture has been faded away.

3.2.2. Reception and formation of a lifestyle of opportunism and pragmatism

Rural novels in the early 21st century also reflect quite clearly rural urbanization, the market mechanism which have created pragmatic and selfish people. The reception of a materialistic lifestyle, valuing money has given rise to evil in a large number of farmers, which is indicated through the works such as *the Village ghosts*, *Ong Manh returned to the village*, *Mist tomorrow*, *Genealogy of the land*, *Under the nine heavens...* Rural novels in the early 21st century have really "penetrated" into the psychological life of farmers to sketch a portrait of a farmer in the new era. All the good and bad, the positive and the negative that arise and change unconsciously in their daily lives are vividly portrayed by the writers. After all, the psychological changes of farmers before the wave of urbanization and industrialization is also an inevitable part of history, a bridge that must be crossed on the road of social development.

3.3. Private aspirations

3.3.1. Narration about the body and sexual aspirations

It can be claimed that rural novels in the early 21st century directly depict sex and the body. It is a hidden desire that smolders in every person's heart like a fire waiting for an opportunity to ignite. Sex is regarded as a part of natural life, an instinctive need of human beings in the following works: *The pallet*, *River Mia*, *One hundred years in a flash*, *The fisherman*, *Time of Gods*, *Flowing through the darkness*, *the Gods and butterflies*, and *Orphaned land...* In addition, "body narrative" was attached to self-awareness and internal body reflection by connecting dreams, wants, and experiences with the body. The authors' rich descriptions of the sexual body imagery transformed the female body into a stand-alone aesthetic object that was visually alluring in the early twenty-first century's rural novels. Narratives about the body and sex turned into a mirror that reflects the farmer's soul's darkest recesses.

3.3.2. Loneliness and psychologically repressed memories

The image of a lonely individual in rural novels in the early 21st

century is expressed in different forms including isolation from oneself, loneliness brought on by disease, obsession with death, harm to the community, or loneliness resulting from a lack of sharing and compassion. The works such as *River Mia*, *Wandering field*, *Fisherman*, *High sky and thick earth*, *Farewell to darkness*, *the Gods and butterflies*, *Flowing through the darkness...* reflected tragedy in terms of psychology, emotions, and unspoken memories of individuals by delving deeply into the farmer's psyche. It demonstrated the precariousness of farmers prior to the transformation of rural civilization across each historical era. It captured the farmer's feelings prior to the unpredictability of societal upheaval, including his uneasiness and fear about finding solace for his soul in the chaotic world. Every farmer has a profound, difficult-to-perceive memory of loneliness, in a way. It is the source of their misery as well as the seldom joy that appears in their life; it is both an obsession and a means of salvation for their souls to overcome the uncertainty of the world.

The development of the character's dialogue discourse is a defining characteristic of rural writers in the early 21st century when creating the picture of a farmer character. The development of the character's dialogue discourse has contributed to creating the portrait of a "familiar but strange" farmer in rural novels in the early 21st century compared to previous periods. The development of the character's dialogue discourse in rural novels in the early 21st century is shown when there is a collision between streams of consciousness or when thoughts and concepts are revealed. Characters are positioned in a variety of complex and intertwining interactions with all polar opposites, including human and inhuman, moral and immoral, intellectual and instinctive, thereby revealing their own thoughts and personalities. The works including *Under the nine heavens*, *Village ghosts*, *Ong Manh returned to the village*, *River Mia*, *Hurricane*, *the time of Gods...* are all quite successful in creating dialogue discourse of the characters. The nature of the content of each dialogue depends on the circumstances, situations, and purposes of the dialogue participants. Dialogue discourses are thus the character's conclusion and contemplation about life. To a certain extent, it explains the causes of the formation of personalities, the change in mentality ahead of the times and the deep hidden memories in the soul of the farmer as well.

Chapter 4. INHERITANCE AND EFFORTS TO RENEW WRITING STYLE IN NOVELS ON RURAL TOPICS IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

4.1. An extension of the conventional writing style

4.1.1. Linear plot texture

The fact that authors frequently employ a linear plot structure is one example of how they are still respectful of the conventional structure of rural novels in the early 21st century. In a story with a linear texture, events and episodes often follow a time transition from the past to the present along the character's fate. Rural novels in the early 21st century still adhere to the conventional texture with a flexible "change" in the traditional framework. This fact explains why the author uses the term "extension" to discuss about the conventional writing style of rural novels in this period. This kind of texture allows the rural social life to be consistently and vividly conveyed while also ensuring that the work's texture is logically and strictly arranged. This kind of texture is often seen in the works including *Early sunshine*, *Village ghosts*, *Ong Manh returned to the village*, *Between the yin and yang*, *One hundred years in a flash*, *Under the nine heavens*, *Moss at the bottom of the pond*, *Bring rice to the temple...*

4.1.2. Development of character lines

In terms of developing the world of characters, characters in rural novels in the early 21st century are often organized according to lines with main character lines including good - evil, good - bad. Although the organization of these characters is conventional, it is not a simple collection, but the result of extremely complex relationships. The writers often gather and line up the characters according to the plot line and then through a main character, the relationships are developed in an increasingly complex way, creating a colorful social picture. This way of organization can be seen in *Village ghosts* (two parts), *Farewell to darkness*, *High sky thick earth*, *Firefly field*, *River Mia*, *Bring rice to the temple...* Despite inheriting the way of organizing characters by lines, the novelty of the writers is to let the character's qualities be expressed in different ways including self-revealing or through the feelings of other

characters, especially especially the duality measure in which the characters are put in opposition, contrast, and complement. Each character has a unique appearance, unique characteristics and can only develop in relation to other characters that create the appeal of the plot. The conventional organization mentioned above is merely a "cover" that allows the writer to freely construct inside.

4.1.3. Narration mainly in the third person

4.1.3.1. Summary of narrators and narrators' viewpoint

The narrator is an important element in a narrative work. It is the person who assumes the storytelling function and plays the role of building and organizing a narrative structure in a literary work. The narrators are mainly in the first and third person.

The narrator's point of view has three common types: internal viewpoint (the viewpoint that comes from within the character, understanding the psychological depth of the character); external viewpoint (the narrator stands outside the story, "tells whatever he knows"); viewpoint from behind (the narrator stands higher than the character, fully understands the story, captures the personalities of the characters, both on the inside and outside).

4.1.3.2. The use of the third person in rural novels in the early 21st century

Traditional literature is mainly narrated in the third person, from an external viewpoint. After examining the writing style of rural novels published in the early 21st century, we discovered that, excluding a number of works narrated in the first person, in which the narrator is also the character who calls himself "I", such as *Three other people*; the works with alternate narratives such as *Farewell to darkness*, *Between the yin and yang* (the narrator sometimes stands outside to narrate, sometimes directly participates in the story); *Flowing through the darkness* ("I" plays the roles of the narrator, not directly participates in the story); *Moss at the bottom of the pond*, *Tears for a while*, *Orphaned land* (the character "I" is both the narrator and the character in the story)... Most of the works are narrated from the third person. The third-person narration is a storytelling technique that gives the writer an "edge" in a number of

ways, including establishing objectivity for the narrative, for the way the characters are perceived, and enhancing the richness of the works' tone.

4.2. Efforts to innovate writing style

4.2.1. Dialogue enhancement

4.2.1.1. Historical and cultural dialogue

The advantages of using the third-person narration that we have analyzed above have increased the poliphonic, multi-pointed nature of rural novels in the early 21st century, thereby aiding the author to express the principle of dialogue. The works of *River Mia*, *Under the nine heavens*, *Hurricane*, *The time of the Gods*, *The genealogy of the land*, *The Gods and butterflies*, *the Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee*, *the village gate*, *The keeper of the communal house...* are implicit dialogues between the writer, the narrator, the characters about the past and the present under the historical perspective; between the traditional and the modern, between the peasants and the townspeople in the cultural perspective. They can be the conceptions and views on life stories, laws of ups and downs, aspirations or ambitions, tricks and schemes, people's choices in the development of history... Voices and concepts can collide, counter, complement or illuminate each other, creating the polyphony for the work.

4.2.1.2. Dialogue on moral values

The polyphony of rural novels in the early 21st century is also reflected in the dialogues about awareness of social and family moral values. The works of *River Mia*, *Under the nine heavens*, *Time of Gods*, *Genealogy of the land*, *the Gods and butterflies...* contain dialogues that bring the readers with many contemplations about good - bad, right - wrong in life. Without setting clear criteria of right and wrong, each writer lets the reader define themselves through the character's dialogue. Thereby, the deviations of the individual's ego in relation to family and social morality are considered as value systems, related to the right to life, the right to happiness and the beautiful aspirations of the individuals.

4.2.2. A variety of texture forms

4.2.2.1. Fragmented and assembled texture

Besides inheriting the conventional texture, rural novels in the early 21st century have constantly put a lot of efforts to innovate plot texture.

The works of *Three other people*, *Farewell to darkness*, *River Mia*, *Hurricane*, *Color of forest field*, *Time of the Gods*, *Genealogy of the land*, *Flowing through the darkness...* are all structured in the style of combining small stories. The use of fragmented and assembled plot texture shows that it is suitable for the multi-thematic structure and the intention to express a complex and intense reality of rural society. This texture is an attempt by the writers to innovate in writing style for rural novels in the early 21st century.

4.2.2.2. *Open texture*

The openness in narrative texture can be understood that the works can be interpreted in different ways, in which the readers can be the co-creators of the works. There are a large number of rural novels published in the early 21st century leaving readers wondering because of the "openness" in this narrative texture. This is seen as one example of the contemporary texture of rural novels. This texture brings the readers a lot of thoughts, inferences and emotions because the story do not turn out as expected when life was always unpredictable. Open texture is the way that the writers create implicit dialogue and encourage the readers' creativity. Open texture has changed the conventional way that the works is perceived. A number of typical works with open texture include *River Mia*, *One hundred years in a flash*, *Under the nine heavens*, *Flowing through the darkness*, *Color of forest field...* The abrupt and unfinished ending in the rural novels of this period partly brings a lot of surprises to the readers when life itself is impermanent.

4.2.3. *Flexible use of multi-layer language*

4.2.3.1. *Colloquialism*

There are more and more vulgar words, slangs, swears, etc. generally recognized in contemporary prose to be "noises" that disturb the purity and clarity of literature. Rural novels in the early 21st century used colloquial and somewhat vulgar languages such as *Village ghosts*, *River Mia*, *Farewell to Darkness*, and *the Gods and butterflies...* What message are the vulgar words intended to convey, according to their authors? Are they deliberately erasing the line separating the artistic and the ordinary, which is a prominent feature in postmodernist prose works? Or is the colloquialism, a part of the instinct, nature, and the dark side of human

beings, which we have been trying to use the moral cloak to cover for so long, now "acknowledged" by the writers? Natural speech, whatever it is defined, is a linguistic phenomena that never gets old since it is constantly present in peoples' everyday speech and linguistic lives. Rural novels are made more appealing and vivid by the use of colloquial words, which also makes it easier for readers to get closer to the reality.

4.2.3.2. *Satiric language*

Early 21st-century novelists dealing about rural subjects have so far deliberately used the parodic method and incorporated the satiric vocabulary into their works. Rural novels in the early 21st century have a distinctive tone which are amusing but insightful, ironic but moving, thanks to the authors' skillful use of parody language. The works of *the Gods and butterflies*, *Farewell to darkness*, *River Mia*... are typical for this kind of language. As a technique to explore the depth of language, improve its ambiguity, and transform it into games, signs, and discourses in novels, colloquialism is often combined with other language channels (from colloquial to satiric, for example). Accordingly, in order for the reader to understand the hidden levels of content, the language changes into coded aesthetic signals.

4.2.3.3. *Presence of sexual body language*

Body language has frequently been appeared in literature. It is, however, interpreted differently in each historical era and literary journey due to the pressure of discourse-building institutions. Contemporary prose has been completely liberated from the old morality by the spirit of democracy and renewal. Therefore, it is clear that there are sex scenes or sexual body language in almost every works. However, while sex scenes were rarely mentioned by writers in rural novels in the past, rural novels in the early 21st century clearly mentioned these things. The presence of sexual body language at this time is considered as a release of the intimate things, the repressionas of individuals. This kind of language is clearly represented in the works such as *Three other people*, *Fisherman*, *Genealogy of the land*, *Flowing through darkness*, *Time of the Gods*... The use of sexual body language in rural novels in the early 21st century indicates the movement in thinking and feeling of individuals and rural society, where the hidden and repressed are gradually revealed. Literature

in general and rural novels in particular have employed this additional layer of linguistic richness to convey a fresher, closer, more real, and vivid reality.

CONCLUSION

Rural novels in the early 21st century are the continuation of a traditional theme in the flow of Vietnamese literature, timely reflecting changes in the real life of rural areas and contemporary farmers. There are a large number of skeptical and alarming opinions about the "old trails" of contemporary novels written about the countryside. It is, however, also undeniable that its breakthrough efforts during the past two decades with many valuable works, resonated in public as well as researchers and critics. The thesis has examined rural novels in the early 21st century in terms of realistic approaches as well as writing style characteristics on the basis of comparison and contrast with rural novels in previous periods and drawn the following conclusions:

1. Rural novels from the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century have undergone significant changes from the realistic approach, the concept of people to the mode of expression... In each period, rural novels always have inheritance and innovation in both content and artistic form. On that basis, the thesis assesses both subjective and objective causes which are opportunities and challenges as well for the development of rural novels in the early 21st century.

Up to now, although there have been many articles and theses... taking rural novels as research objects. However, the period from the beginning of the 21st century up to now has not been focused on discussing as an independent period representing the turn of the century of rural novels. The thesis has conducted a review, commented on novel research works on rural topics in Vietnamese literature in the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century, thereby suggesting a multi-dimensional view such as culturology, ecology, social anthropology... for a more comprehensive and complete study, and pointing out achievements as well as limitations in terms of content and writing style of rural novel in a period in a new century.

2. Rural novels in the early 21st century has continued the movement of prose since the renovation until now. First of all, their

range of rural reality is enlarged. That reality is not only historical events but also the reality of everyday rural life with multi-relationships.

Rural novels in the early 21st century also aim at a more complete and profound conception of man. At the beginning of the renovation period, the people in literature changed strongly from the community person to the individual person while in this period, literature has oriented towards the ontological person. One of the ontological aspects of man that writers are interested in discovering and manifesting is the natural man, the sexual man. In terms of spiritual life, the unconscious is also revealed, bringing more insight into the human being in its complexity and mystery. These efforts have given rural novels in the early 21st century a new vitality, a new look.

3. Rural novels in the early 21st century present new perspectives and new issues on rural life in terms of culture, ecology and sociology. In these novels, rural society is full of uncertainty and insecurity with many ecological warnings from natural ecology, social ecology to spiritual ecology: the destruction of the natural ecological environment and landscape structure; the change in function and structure in the family; the invasion of urban culture into rural culture breaking many traditional values of the village for thousands of years. In addition, it is not only the story of the buffalo and the plow, the relationships among the families, the clans, the villages... but also the story of love, sex, and the relationship between man and nature and himself, the struggle between the old and the new... The rural painting is thereby so colorful and full of sounds, which makes the readers experience different levels of emotions, including happiness and sadness, happiness and suffering, and even sorrows and worries. Rural novels in the early 21st century have allowed readers to enjoy attractive "spiritual food" thanks to the ingenious "variations" of writers.

4. The portrait of a farmer, sketched in rural novels in the early 21st century with industrious, blue-collar, and gentle features, has become an archetype once carved into literature; in addition, there are both bright and dark, good and bad, high and low... sides, which are familiar but strange, even surprising. In addition to analyzing the enduring qualities and inherent identities, the thesis has pointed out changes in mentality, torn by conflicts, and hidden desires in each farmer. To be more

realistic, they were genuinely recognized as complex individuals with good and bad, good and evil, and high and low qualities. This is typical differences between rural novels in the early 21st century and those in previous periods.

5. The aspects of content and artistic form of rural novels written in the early 21st century cannot be separated because the form contains the content and vice versa. Accordingly, the thesis focuses on the characteristics of writing style and then analyzes some movements of rural novels in this period as an extension of the conventional writing style. The linear plot structure, the Development of character lines, and the third-person narrator all indicate the writers' creative inheritance of the conventional writing style. The thesis also points out the efforts to renew and renovate the writing style of rural novels in the early 21st century in the general process of contemporary literature thanks to the acquisition and application of postmodern genre theories. Specifically, the fragmented, assembled, and open textures are used by a number of writers. The language of rural novels is also diversified with colloquial language, satiric language or sexual body language. In particular, the enhancement of dialogues has created multi-voice for rural novels in this period. It is not only a dialogue between characters, between characters and writers, but also the dialogue among characters, writers and readers during their debates and interpretations of the reality. These efforts prove that rural novels published in the early 21st century have caught up with the development trend of contemporary prose, affirming its position in the general flow of national literature.

6. Despite their astonishing popularity, early 21st-century rural books nevertheless have certain limitations. Most of the works of this period have not really had a breakthrough. Readers still have a sense of "not enough" when addressing contemporary hot topics since the author's pen has not reached the conclusion of the narrative. The growth of the novel genre in particular and contemporary national literature in general has, however, been greatly aided by the rural novels written in the early 21st century, each with its distinct voice and approach. For rural novels in the new period, these are merely the first steps on a difficult and protracted path because literature is a never-ending pursuit.

The author hopes that the thesis will give readers a more thorough understanding of rural novels in the early 21st century as a result of the research findings. In addition, despite the author's best efforts, all issues have not been able to cover thoroughly. Future research will focus on the problems of researching rural novels from the perspective of ecology, sociology, especially when adapting literary works for the big screen..., which provide intriguing ideas and a variety of visuals for rural novels.

LIST OF AUTHOR'S THESIS-RELATED PUBLICATIONS

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