

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Reasons for choosing the topic

1. *Ecocriticism*, also known as "green research", is a cultural and literary criticism trend formed in America in the last decades of the last century and is currently emerging as an interdisciplinary critical discourse with the spirit of contemporary social life. Ecocriticism carries the mission of rethinking human culture, through research and evaluation of literary works to awaken human responsibility before the risk of degradation of natural ecology and the crisis of humanistic spiritual ecology. Ecocriticism is considered "a spectacular, adaptive move of a part of literary criticism in the context of the global environmental crisis". The birth of this research direction has been affirming its positive significance in the system of modern literary criticism theory, is constantly expanding and has now become a global research trend.

In Vietnam, the application of Ecocriticism theory to literary research and creation has arisen in recent years and has received increasing attention from both researchers and writers. Many conferences of different stature have been organized as a way to affirm the meaning and role of Ecocriticism in contemporary literary life. Literary researchers in universities are also very excited to approach this research direction. Choosing this approach, we try to go from specific works to have a deeper look at ecocriticism, thereby hoping to contribute to clarifying and establishing the position of ecocriticism in the current critical theory system.

2. The Muong appeared and resided in Vietnam for a long time along with the Vietnamese. This is the ethnic minority community with the third largest population and a wide range of living, second only to the Kinh ethnic group. Although they do not have their own written language, the Muong possess a rich cultural and literary treasure: the *xuong - rang* works are actually ancient

poems, poetic stories, proverbs, folk songs and especially “ritual narratives” (Mo) - a unique cultural product with multifaceted value. *The Birth of the Earth and Water* (*Đẻ đất đẻ nước*) (epics often used in funeral rites) in particular and Muong ethnic literature in general reveal very strong ecological intuition. This also seems to be a common characteristic of ethnic minorities who use mountain and forest nature as a community living space. Born and raised in a harmonious ecological "atmosphere", modern Muong writers have absorbed that precious source of "nutrition", so their ecological sensibility is also clearly revealed in their compositions.

3. *Ritual narratives The Birth of the Earth and Water* is like the treasure of the Muong. Researchers were surprised by the many attractiveness of Muong Ritual narratives (Mo Mường). Contributing to the multifaceted value of Muong Ritual narratives has its root cause from the sense of respect and worship for "nature". The most unique cultural values of the Muong come from and are closely tied to nature. People seek to explain how to live together, rely on, and harmonize with nature, which has created a unique ecological consciousness in the work. That is also the reason why this cultural product is always present in the cultural life of the Muong in a persistent and magical way, becoming a spiritual fulcrum, influencing the formation of thinking, orienting lifestyle, and creating beautiful customs of the Muong ethnic community.

The force of modern Muong literary writers is quite large. Significantly, the outstanding value of their compositions strongly reveals their ecological sensibility, expressed through their love and attachment to the Muong village. That love is expressed through feelings of respect and pride for the nature of the homeland's forests and mountains, respect and admiration for the primitive customs and traditions associated with nature and all things, in a way of thinking rich in local colors that takes nature as a measure and standard, etc.

From the perspective of ecocriticism theory, the thesis will shed light on the uniqueness of Muong literature in terms of

ecological consciousness - the core aspect that creates the lasting vitality of a cultural region, from practice to artistic creation, through Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and modern literary compositions.

4. Continuing to research Muong Ritual narratives - a cultural product originating from the religious rituals of the Muong ethnic people and the compositions of the Muong's typical works, the thesis will contribute to fully assessing the stature, cultural value and significance of Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* in the Muong community's life, at the same time, point out the unique cultural features of the Muong ethnic group in the community of Vietnamese ethnic groups. From the study results, the thesis contributes a scientific voice to the development of strategies to keep, preserve and promote the unique cultural values of ethnic communities in Vietnam.

## **2. Object and scope of the study**

The study subject of the thesis is: "Ecological sensibility in Muong literature (*survey through Ritual narratives The Birth of the Earth and Water and modern literary works*)".

The study scope and survey materials: Based on the perspective of "ecocentrism" - the core ideology of *Ecocriticism* theory, the thesis will study, evaluate, and contribute to affirming the uniqueness and characteristics of the content and expression of *Ritual narratives The Birth of the Earth and Water* and some works of modern Muong authors.

Scope of survey materials: Originally of folk origin, Mo Ritual narratives currently have many different documents. The thesis will choose discourse of *Ritual narratives Muong Epics and Myths*, compiled by Vuong Anh's group, as the main survey material. In addition, the thesis only uses the part of Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* corresponding to the following parts in the Ritual narratives *Muong Epics and Myths: telling stories (Mo trêu)* and *ascending to heaven (Mo lên trời)*.

With modern Muong authors, the thesis will also survey the works of typical Muong writers.

### **3. Aims and Missions of the study**

#### **3.1. Aims**

The thesis will clarify the ecological sensibility in Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and in the works of some typical Muong writers; At the same time, we can see the influence of Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* on the compositions of modern Muong writers in terms of ecological sensibility. Thereby, affirming the contribution of Muong literature to national literature in preserving the core cultural values of our nation.

#### **3.2. Missions**

Firstly, the thesis identifies the theoretical and practical basis for the research problem, such as: Establishing theoretical boundaries of concepts related to "ecological sensibility"; Overview of research works related to the topic;

Second, the thesis will study and clarify the ecological sensibility in Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and in the works of some typical Muong writers.

Third, the thesis will raise the issue of connection and comparison to see the inheritance and influence of Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* on modern literary works in terms of ecological sensibility.

### **4. Methodology of the study**

Folk works analysis method

Fieldwork method

Compare and contrast method

Interdisciplinary research method

### **5. New contributions of the thesis**

The thesis is the first monograph to apply the ecocriticism theory - establishing a new research direction on Ritual narratives

*The Birth of the Earth and Water* and some typical modern literary works of Muong authors. Specifically, the thesis will survey, study and evaluate the following contents:

- + Identify the theoretical and practical basis of ecological sensibility in Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and in the works of typical modern Muong writers;

- + Clarify the ecological sensibility in Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and in the works of some typical Muong writers.

- + Compare and contrast to see the inheritance and influence of Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* on modern literary works in terms of ecological sensibility.

## **6. Structure of the thesis**

In addition to the Introduction, Conclusion and References, the thesis has four chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Literature review

Chapter 2: The Muong and *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic

Chapter 3: Ecological sensibility in *The Birth of the Earth and Water*

Chapter 4: Ecological sensibility in modern Muong literary works

## CONTENTS

### Chapter 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **1.1. Concepts related to ecocriticism theory; Scientific basis of study on Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and modern Muong literary works from an ecocriticism perspective**

##### ***1.1.1. Concepts related to ecocriticism theory***

“Ecological” refers to the natural environment; "Ecocriticism", also known as "Green research" exists as a school, a trend of literary criticism that began in the US in the 70s and expanded to Western countries in the 80s of the last century.

In the spirit of definitions and concepts of *ecological* and *ecocriticism*, the thesis systems the characteristics of ecocriticism as follows: Focusing on works that promote nature and praise nature, especially wild nature; Positive impact of nature on human life and psychology; Associated with the above two emotions is insecurity at the risk of nature being harmed.

"Ecological sensibility" is "ecological intuition", intuitively, people feel the important role and position of the natural world in relationships with their lives.

##### ***1.1.2. Scientific basis of study on Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and modern Muong literary works from ecocriticism theory***

"The Birth of the Earth and Water" - started out as a folk composition revealing the ancient Muong's perception of the world. The feelings of the ancient Muong about the world formation show that they view human as a product of nature, a small part of nature. This is an expression of the bold ecological philosophy of the ancient Muong (although still in intuitive form with rudimentary formal expression).

The works of some modern Muong authors also carry "ecological sensibility" - an intuitive ecology that exists in the soul, flesh and blood of ethnic communities whose lives are closely

connected to nature; That ecological intuition becomes love for the village through love for the natural landscape and love for cultural customs that have been preserved and passed down from generation to generation. In particular, to modern Muong writers, ecological sensibility has also become a perception of the ecological consequences of being harmed and destroyed.

## **1.2. Overview of research issues related to the topic**

### ***1.2.1. Status of research and application of ecocriticism theory to literary research in Viet Nam***

In Viet Nam, Ecocriticism was first introduced in March 2011. Within the framework of the International Conference with the theme "Approach Asian literature from modern Western theory: application, compatibility, challenges and opportunities". Following Karen Thornber's introduction, translation and research works appeared one after another. Conferences are organized, applying ecocriticism theory to research on authors and works that become trends, etc.

### ***1.2.2. Status of research on Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and the works of some modern Muong authors***

*Research directions related to "Muong Ritual narratives" and "The Birth of the Earth and Water": The Birth of the Earth and Water* of the Muong became the official discourse in 1973, collected and translated by a group of authors Vuong Anh and Hoang Anh Nhan. Next is another text. From here, research works and articles on Muong Ritual narratives have a basis for development.

We can mention the scientific articles of Phan Dang Nhat. Phan Dang Nhat has drawn out the basic values of *The Birth of the Earth and Water*, such as: lessons of knowledge, lessons of history, lessons of moral sentiments. Those lessons carry the core of

ecological spirit. Professor Phan Ngoc, in the article "Through *The Birth of the Earth and Water*, we see an entire ancient Viet Muong culture". Studies mainly pay attention to the genre, performance characteristics and "epic" values of *The Birth of the Earth and Water*. Muong Ritual narratives have great appeal and have become an object of study by scientists for decades. However, it cannot be denied that studying *Ritual narratives The Birth of the Earth and Water* is not easy; In addition to passion, it also requires knowledge and indigenous culture. Currently, there are no articles or scientific works published on the application of ecocriticism theory to the study of *Ritual narratives The Birth of the Earth and Water*.

*Research direction on the compositions of modern Muong writers:* Among modern Muong writers, Vuong Anh and Ha Thi Cam Anh are the two most outstanding and typical Muong writers. Their compositions have impressed readers and become the subject of study by experts. Other writers also receive attention from readers.

### ***Sub-conclusion of chapter 1***

Chapter one of the thesis addresses two issues: learning the theoretical and practical basis of the topic. Regarding the theoretical basis, the thesis has generally systematized the theory of "ecocriticism", to realize that the core spirit of green research is "ecocentrism" and the ecocritic is to promote/monitor the use of literature to protect the natural environment and protect the earth.

The thesis identifies that the ancient Muong had ecological intuition when composing *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and that modern Muong writers also have ecological intuition when writing about the cultural space of their homeland. Through practical surveys, the thesis finds that up to now there has been no in-depth and systematic work applying ecocriticism theory to approach and study *Ritual narratives The Birth of the Earth and Water* and works of modern Muong authors.



## **Chapter 2. THE MUONG AND RITUAL NARRATIVES**

### **"THE BIRTH OF THE EARTH AND WATER" (TỔ TẤT TỂ RÁC)**

#### **2.1. The Muong and their ecological cultural practices**

##### **2.1.1. *Muong ethnic community***

The Muong identify themselves as "Source" (Nguồn) and are always proud of the origin of their people, the descendants of Dit Dang who rule the three-level structure of the world: *Muong of the Heaven (Mường Trời)*, *Muong of the Middle (Mường Giữa)* and *Muong of the Earth (Mường Trần Gian)*. So what is "Muong"? There have been three interpretations. The thesis leans towards the combination of two viewpoints: "Muong" both refers to the residential area (Muong Bi, Muong On, Muong Thach, etc.), and also refers to the ethnic community with its own cultural identity (the Muong). The Muong live mainly in Hoa Binh and Thanh Hoa. The Muong like to live in clusters at the head of water sources, under valleys, along the forest canopy. The Muong's living environment and activities blend into nature. The Muong have created for themselves a living space imbued with ecological culture.

##### **2.1.2. *Customs imbued with the Muong's ecological culture***

###### **2.1.2.1. *Customs of respecting and worshiping gods in the natural world***

The Muong's living environment is closely linked to nature, therefore, customs and practices have been formed in this community, following strict rules and regulations to both exploit and protect nature. The ancient Muong's wisdom has formed for their descendants a belief in nature, which is the best way to protect the race and community.

###### **2.1.2.2. *Customs in cultural and social life***

- The custom of "worshiping souls" (including: asking for souls, pulling souls, retrieving souls, calling souls). Muong proverb: *If you want to be rich, grow mulberry trees/ If you want to live long, must pulling souls.*

- The custom of "ritual narratives" (Mo) for the dead (including: *Going back to ancestors (Mo Vía)*, *Telling stories (Mo T'leu)*, *Ascending to heaven (Mo lên trời)*, *instructing and teaching (Mo nhắ́n)*). The steps in the funeral rites both reveal humanistic values and the profound ecological sensibility of the ancient Muong.

The custom of "asking" and "giving": The Muong teach their children: *What you eat will be gone, what you live in will be permanent; Ăn nên ẻ (phân) ẻ (chia) nên ún nên mạng.*

For the Muong, the custom of asking and giving is still a beautiful cultural feature, it contributes to tightening the relationship between villagers, creating a warm, friendly space, an extremely necessary and important foundation for ethnic minorities in scattered living conditions and circumstances, relying on nature and relying on close communities of residents sharing similar habits, customs and beliefs, etc.

## **2.2. “The Birth of the Earth and Water” in the relationship with Muong Ritual narratives (Mo Mườ̀ng)**

### ***2.2.1. The concept of "Mo" and its meaning in the religious life of the Muong***

#### *2.2.1.1. The concept of “Mo”*

What is “Mo”? According to our survey, the word "Mo" can be understood in three ways: as a vow, a prayer before the gods; as a "funeral song" and "Mo" refers to ritual narratives to worship the gods. According to the thesis's point of view, "Mo" is the entire rites in the worshiping rituals, including both the prayer and the narratives.

#### *2.2.1.2. The meaning of "Mo" and "Mo in funerals" in the religious life of the Muong*

“Mo” is a spiritual ritual that is like a spiritual medicine that is extremely necessary and meaningful in the spiritual life of the Muong for many generations. The Mo words (prayer) is not only a wish but also a connection with the gods and with the person involved.

Along with belief in rituals, Mo words help the community strengthen their spiritual life, increase each person's faith and will to live in the face of life's challenges, and help people know how to be good.

Among ritual narratives, "Mo in funerals" is the last ritual in the Muong's life cycle ritual system, and is also the most important ritual. The journey to Muong of Ghosts (Mường Ma) is also a perception journey of the ancient Muong. That is perception of life and death, perception of the universe's three-level structure, perception of the eternal world.

### **2.2.2. Position of "The Birth of the Earth and Water" (Tẻ Tất Tẻ Rác) in Muong Ritual narratives**

"The Birth of the Earth and Water" (Tẻ Tất Tẻ Rác) is not a mandatory "saying that Ritual narratives" (rằng mo) in funeral rituals, so there is relative independence in Ritual narratives. It is only an "addition" in cases where it is necessary to prolong the funeral nights in well-off families, to increase the grandeur and "luxury" of the homeowner, or to be used in rituals to preserve the souls of the elderly. However, it is still a closely unified part of Muong Ritual narratives, with both spiritual significance and profound human values.

### **2.2.3. "The Birth of the Earth and Water" - a majestic ancient epic**

*The Birth of the Earth and Water* is 476 pages long with nearly thousands of sentences, long stories telling the process of forming the natural world and all species including human. Although there is no overlap in the way the chapters are arranged in the collected versions, the published versions all have content that shows the "*The Birth of the Earth and Water*" developments that shape the world and human society. The "epic" nature in *The Birth of the Earth and Water* is shown in the process of creation and construction, which always requires bold, pioneering courage and heroic qualities of self-sacrifice. There are community heroes there, representing

community strength, bringing benefits to the community. That is the measure of an epic hero's quality.

### ***Sub-conclusion of chapter 2***

Along with the Kinh - Viet, the Muong have been present very early in Vietnam and have formed long-standing customs and practices that are summarized in the process of organizing life and activities. These customs and practices are closely linked to the living environment, extracted from life circumstances, so they are both valuable experiences in practical community life and have profound humanistic cultural and ecological values.

*The Birth of the Earth and Water*, the ancient epic was applied to the religious and worship customs of the Muong and is considered evidence of the civilized and cultural lifestyle of the ancient Muong. That epic revealed the perception and dialectical thinking of that community in ancient times about the tight cohesion, reasonableness and harmony in the world of all species. Protecting the sanctity of that tight cohesion is the "God". People fear God precisely to protect order and their own living environment.

## **Chapter 3. ECOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY IN *THE BIRTH OF THE EARTH AND WATER***

### **3.1. Nature and humans share a common origin**

#### ***3.1.1. Concepts of the universe and the formation of the natural world***

The story of "giving birth to the earth" is the story of "giving birth" to all species, phenomena, and events. From the way of explaining the formation of all things on earth, the ancient Muong perceived the universe and the natural world with a profound ecological spirit. That is the original spirit that transforms nature, shares the same origin, the same "natural bloodline".

The story "Giving birth to the water" is perception of the ecological environment's importance. "Water" is a symbol of the ecological environment that sustains life. "Giving birth to the water" gives the message of harmony.

The story of "Giving birth to the human" is perception of the position of humans in the world of things. Through the story of "Giving birth to the human", it shows the entire perception process of the Muong about the universe and the lives of all species in the natural world, about mankind, and at the same time, perception of human society, of the components in human society.

The ancient Muong wanted to find a way to explain the internal structure of the universe, find laws and remember the natural law, "*Division of years and months*". The need to find the laws of nature to adapt to the environment is an essential desire of ancient people.

Thus, in the Muong's perception, the original universe is a unified block, the process of forming the universe and forming life takes place stage by stage, step by step according to the law. All things share a common origin, born from "Mother - Nature", and have a "natural bloodline" connection. That perception sends a message of ecological spirit: respect Mother - Nature, be grateful to Mother – Nature and from here establish and convey the messages about ecological ethics that the thesis will present shortly.

### ***3.1.2. "The Birth of the Earth and Water" conveys the message of ecological ethics***

#### *3.1.2.1. Respecting the natural world order*

Respecting the natural world order is the first message that the perception of the universe carrying the ecological spirit of *The Birth of the Earth and Water* wants to teach to the future. Every species is a part and has a "place" in the natural world. This is the premise of ecological ethics. The ancient Muong taught ecological ethics to the next generation through an orderly explanation of sanctity and hierarchy: what comes first, what comes later; What comes first in the "top" position is brother, what comes later is "younger brother", in the lower position. In the natural world created by Mother - Nature, humans come last. Humans need to be aware of this order, respect and protect it.

### *3.1.2.2. From respecting the natural order to respecting the social order*

Once the universe has formed, it is necessary to maintain order and stability, the same with human society, the most important of which is to find a "leader" - a symbol of talent and virtue to lead the "power and prosperity" (chu chương mừng nước). Establishing order and calling for compliance with that order, the Muong have revealed a profound ecological consciousness. That is also the spirit of dialectical materialism in dealing with nature. This helps the Muong community build and preserve unique cultural values.

## **3.2. Perceiving Nature is a large community**

### *3.2.1. Personification of natural entities*

Entities in the natural world in the *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic have been personified, all gathered into a true community, understanding each other's voices, animals can talk, think, and behave like humans, are sociable, close, and rely on each other to live together. "Talks", inquiries, exchanges, and even bargaining between humans and animals take place regularly in daily life, creating democracy in the community, revealing the peaceful relationship between humans and animals and between animals. Through these "dialogues", we can see the ecological rationality of the ancient Muong in their perception of coexistence between species in the Natural community.

### *3.2.2. The Natural World is always the "teacher" of humans in adapting to survive*

In the *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic, humans were formed last among all species, so their survival experience is very limited. As a latecomer, to approach and learn the wisdom of Nature. In other words, animals in Nature are the "teachers" of humans in the process of adapting to survive and develop, such as building a house, getting fire, getting water, asking for seeds, even finding special resources (Chu tree), etc.

Through the stories about mankind's journey to build a life in the *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic, it is shown that the ancient Muong were early aware of the Nature's position in the journey of human emergence and affirmed that position from the beginning of the world.

### **3.3. Some symbols in *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic**

#### **3.3.1. *The Ancestral Tree - Mother tree symbolizes origin***

The first appearance in the dark chaos in "Giving birth to the earth" is the giant "green tree" with signs of life. The green tree becomes the "Ancestral Tree - Mother Tree" of all species. From the "green tree" in the story of "giving birth to the Earth" to the benjamin ficus tree (Si tree) in the story of "giving birth to the Humans" shows the perception that all species share the same origin, all "transmitted" from the "Mother tree", is it possible that the word "origin" originates from this perception of ecological spirit?

#### **3.3.2. *Chieng Egg/Tieng Egg symbolizes the race***

This "giving birth to the Humans" story is a way to "re-perceive" the story of the formation of the Natural world of the Muong. Although they have the same perception and explanation of the origin of Nature, the nuance of Chieng egg (Trúng Chiếng) symbol is different from the symbol of Si tree. The image of Chieng egg has symbolic meaning for the race and lineage. Humans, although born "from the same egg", are the same human species - the most special of all species in the natural world, but each type of human, class of human has a different "race", "hatched" from different eggs. Perception of races and lineages reveals the increasingly developed thinking of the ancient Muong.

#### **3.3.3. *Chu Dong tree symbolizes the natural resources***

Another image that has become a proud symbol in the culture of the Muong is the Chu tree's image. Chu tree is the gold tree, silver tree - a symbol of rare minerals and resources in the nature. From

"tree - resources" to "tree - wealth, power". The gold Chu tree is the magic tree, the "luxurious and wealthy Chu tree", bringing wealth and whatever you wish to its owner. Since ancient times, the Muong have wisely perceived the ecological environment. Forest, for the Muong community, is "Chu tree with its bronze trunk, iron branches, brass flowers and tin fruits". The Chu tree's story is like a painful but profound lesson about how to deal with the environment that older generations want to pass on to their descendant.

### ***Sub-conclusion of chapter 3***

*The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic can be considered one of the great human epics born from an ethnic community without its own written language. However, like other famous epics of mankind, they all appeared when people had not yet had time to think of characters to immortalize their minds and souls.

The ecological sensibility in *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic is revealed through the perception of the universe with the original thinking of nature. From the depths of their perception, the Muong perceive Nature as a community and have personified nature to create a world of equality and democracy among species. Despite being the "smartest" and "strongest" species, humans still cannot separate from the natural world and still receive great support from all species, which is why humans must always give all species great "respect" in their behavior. The democratic spirit in perception of the world of all species has created the foundation for spiritual ecology in human life in *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic.

*The Birth of the Earth and Water* also sets out ethics and principles of ecological spirit. Please respect nature, respect the laws of creation. That was born by Mother - Great Nature. Humans are the last born species in the world of all species, so respecting nature is the most intelligent and reasonable way to preserve this rich and beautiful natural world.



## **Chapter 4. ECOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY IN THE WORKS OF MODERN MUONG WRITERS**

Born and raised in a cultural space imbued with ecological spirit, nature is always dominant in the soul of the Muong community. It is easy to understand why in the world of verbal art of modern Muong authors, the "main character", the main emotional object is always the integration between humans and nature shown through ecological sensibility. In particular, that ecological sensibility is also passed down from the cultural treasure of our ancestors, the epic treasure of "*The Birth of the Earth and Water*".

### **4.1. Nature is a special aesthetic object**

#### ***4.1.1. Nature in works is always beautiful and rich in emotion***

The homeland nature is always present in the author's thoughts and feelings, which is something often encountered in the works of ethnic minority writers. For Muong ethnic writers, it is easy to see that nature always has an indispensable position in their works, a special object of creative inspiration. Beautiful and dreamy, nature appears with love and pride. It is an ecological consciousness that comes from the subconscious, the authors have "mixed" the love of nature with the love of the homeland village, so that love is always passionate and intense.

#### ***4.1.2. Nature is human's soulmate and confidant***

For many generations, life has always been attached to nature and protected by nature, so the Muong have always considered nature as their friend; during funerals, every time they hear "*The Birth of the Earth and Water*", from the old to the young, they are always reminded of this; Since then, every Muong soul has engraved it. Nature in the works of Muong authors is not only an aesthetic object, but also a soulmate and confidant of humans. The vast, dark forests can frighten unfamiliar peoples, but they are very familiar, close, becoming the soulmate of the people here. In the Muong's life, when they are happy or sad, nature always accompanies them.

### ***4.1.3. Nature contributes to forming human personality and soul***

The Muong always want to compare their own beauty with the beauty of nature, with the perfection of creation. Nature not only creates physical beauty, but also creates spiritual beauty and personality. The women are as diligent as hard-working bees, the Muong men are strong and brave in building family and village life. It is difficult to separate what is the nature beauty and what is human beauty when those two objects are merged together. The expression of writers often merges two into one, or takes one object to express another. Human beauty, from appearance to soul and personality, has deep roots in the geocultural environment. This geocultural value is also the basis for the community's sustainability.

## **4.2. Nature with cultural practices and expressions**

### ***4.2.1. Nature in cultural practices***

The laws of nature were discovered and then applied into the community's behavioral rules, thereby creating customs and practices of the Muong in daily life, such as: weddings, funerals, worshipping souls, making farming, hunting, socializing, etc. The beauty of the forest culture area always harmonizes people with nature. It can be said that the authors wrote about the cultural values of their homeland with the thorough understanding of a child who was raised and grew up from those values. Values are drawn from a living environment that is close to and blends with nature. Through cultural customs, we can see more clearly the ecological sensibility of the Muong, an ethnic community with a very respectable ancient culture.

### ***4.2.2. Nature in expressive thinking***

*Personifying nature, considering nature as a "member" in community life:* This thinking has been preserved since ancient times, dating back to the time of "The Birth of the Earth and Water". The participation and influence of nature in human life over many generations creates a very innocent and warm way of thinking and behavior between people and everything around them. People ask

each other whether the newly born child is "male or female" (đực/cái). Calling the woman as "gal" (ả mái). The Muong will recognize each other very quickly if they say to each other like this: "Poor families offer whatever they have. Just a few chickens that haven't had their tail feathers yet"; "Father and mother counted the months and years by each time the old bamboo tree at the watershed of Chieng Va village began to lose its leaves."

*In the comparative - metaphor technique, nature is always the object being compared:* In the rich visual expressions of Muong writers, the most used technique is comparison - metaphor, and the objects considered the standard for comparison are natural entities surrounding the living environment. Personifying nature and always taking nature as an object of comparison creates a familiar visual expression of "forest people". That is a lively, close, and affectionate way of expressing. It closes the conversational distance, like private symbols that only people in the community can understand because those "symbols" come from their own living environment and this is the unique cultural nuance of this community.

### **4.3. Agonizing over ecological pain *Anguish***

#### **4.3.1. *Pain at the destruction of nature***

The more attached they are to their homeland, the more the authors express their painful feelings when the scenery of their homeland is no longer the same as before. As mentioned above, nature has merged into the flesh and blood of the soul, so every time they see nature being destroyed, their hearts tremble with sadness.

Writers are the most sensitive people to their social and living environment. Since when have Muong writers become "eco" writers because they are attached to the cultural identity of the community formed and nurtured by the natural living environment, so they always leave deep feelings and will follow people throughout their lives.

### ***4.3.2. Agonizing over the risk of "spiritual ecology"***

Not only is the risk already present, however, it has only occurred in a few, partial cases. Many Muong authors have poems about "the soul", "calling the soul", for the Muong it is the soul, conscience, and emotions. "Losing soul" means losing perception, good feelings and being carried away by deviances and sins. The Muong believe that anyone who is corrupted or goes against traditional customs is also a form of losing their "soul". The person who has "lost his soul" only has a body without a soul, dies, will become a "lonely ghost", "evil ghost" wandering around, unable to return to the world of Muong of the Heaven (Mường Trời). The authors have also pointed out that one of the reasons why the Muong region is changing, why the profound cultural identity of a community created from the time of "the birth of the earth and water" is at risk of being invaded and eroded, is due to the unwillingness to make a living.

The feeling of seeing the cultural values and identities of their community at risk of being eroded and destroyed creates a voice of pain and anguish in the compositions of modern Muong writers. The more they love and be proud of their homeland, the more passionate and anxious their voice becomes.

Culture is like that, it cannot be mixed, it cannot be eroded, but it is forever sustainable. A community that builds its own cultural values has the right to be proud of the values it brings to mankind.

### ***Sub-conclusion of chapter 4***

It can be seen that Muong writers, from the depths of their souls and hearts, always belong to the mountains, forests, valleys, and fields of their homeland. This is also a very special thing. It shows that culture, once it has penetrated into the soul and become flesh and blood, will be able to create its own cultural identity and maintain it durably and firmly.

The core point that makes up the Muong cultural identity revealed in their works is the love and pride of the homeland

associated with the mountain and forest space, the fields, associated with customs and practices, with long-standing cultural symbols. Therefore, ecological sensibility from intuition to self-perception has been available to them ever since.

Study on ecological sensibility in the works of modern Muong writers shows that the ecological literary potential of Muong writers is still very rich.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between humans and nature is an "ancient" topic of world literature as well as Vietnamese literature. However, ecological literature as a trend with a spirit of reflection, a consequence of the inevitable reaction when the environment is increasingly deteriorating due to the impact of "industrialization and modernization", is only just really started.

Literature has been "on the way" to actively accompany the goal of preventing ecological risks. Ecocriticism, through research and evaluation of literary works, contributes to awakening human responsibility in the face of ecological risks, becoming "an intellectual trend" that has been affirming its positive significance in the system of modern literary criticism theory, becoming a global research trend.

Inspired by a practical and attractive theory, the thesis has chosen the following research object: "Ecological sensibility in Muong literature (survey through the Ritual narratives *The Birth of the Earth and Water* and in the works of some typical Muong writers)" to learn and explain ecological consciousness - the consciousness of respecting and protecting the natural environment, which is also the living environment organized and protected by the ancient Muong. This consciousness has created the way of life, way of thinking, and cultural identity of the Muong community and has been preserved and passed on to future generations and reproduced in the pages of writing by modern writers.

This scientific idea is structured in four chapters, the first two chapters, the thesis builds the theoretical and practical foundation of the topic, concepts related to the research problem, such as: Ecology, ecocriticism, and ecological sensibility have been compiled, compared, and explained clearly. Practical basis of the topic, such as: Scientific gap of the research problem; About the Muong ethnic community with their belief in nature worship; The role and position of *The Birth of the Earth and Water* epic in the tradition of ritual narratives with strong ecological sensibility, etc.

Chapter three of the thesis analyzes and proves that the ancient Muong had an ecological sensibility when composing "The Birth of the Earth and Water". The explanation for the formation of all species, all share the same "origin" as "Mother Nature - Mother Universe", humans are a "late-born" species, but they are the most special and formidable species. Through this ancient epic, the perception and dialectical thinking of that community in ancient times are revealed about the tight cohesion, rationality and harmony in the world of all species. Protecting the sanctity of that tight cohesion is the "God", the wise people know how to exploit nature, take advantage of all species to "benefit" themselves, but also know how to fear "Gods", because, fear of "Gods" is to protect their own living's order and environment. The way to explain the formation of the world and the principles of behavior that carry the intuition of ecological philosophy in *The Birth of the Earth and Water* demonstrates the intelligent behavior of early humans with their living environment and the ancients wanted to pass on this experiential knowledge to posterity through customs of Ritual narratives - a form of the Muong's sacred belief.

Folk knowledge is not only deeply ingrained in the subconscious and soul but is also proven by real life. Modern writers receive both sources of nutrition. From the cradle, through the lullabies of their mother and grandmother, they have lived in the world of *The Birth of the Earth and Water*. When Muong children grow up, they

have formed in their hearts love and pride for their homeland and gratitude for the forests, mountains, streams, and ravines: "Love much, love passionately, love captivatingly, my dear". The words in the Xuong and Rang songs, similar to the folk songs of the Kinh in the lowlands, are lyrical expressions that express people's deep emotional attachment to the space of mountains, forests, and fields. That is why when writing about anything, whether it is a happy or sad reality, Muong writers always think of nature. Nature is a friend, nature is a shelter, nature is a source of life, nature forms culture, and above all, nature is identical with its origin. In their representation, modern Muong writers always take nature as the standard for both formal and spiritual values, from language to symbolic images, etc. From ecological intuition to ecological consciousness when writers express ecological pain when their homeland's nature is destroyed, when Mrs. Da Dan's descendants could not protect their living space, some were even taken the soul away by hill and mountain ghosts, destroying their villages and hamlets, and destroying the customs and practices passed down from their ancestors for generations. Chapter four of the thesis sheds light on the continuity of ecological sensibility leading to ecological consciousness in recreating the lives of modern Muong writers. It can be said that, from the bottom of their blood, Muong writers have always belonged to ecological literature, the natural world is now, for them, not just a living environment, but a sacred, legendary environment that gives wings to creative literary ideas. They write about their homeland, for them, it is not just about the place of their birth, but about a cultural and literary space. They are joining hands and speaking out to preserve and preserve that cultural space by preserving the core foundation: protecting nature and protecting the ecological environment of that community.

## **LIST OF AUTHOR'S RESEARCH WORKS RELATED TO THE THESIS**

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2. **Cao Thi Mai** (2021). "Ecological consciousness of the Muong seen from cultural practices", *Viet Nam Literature and Arts Forum*, Journal of Viet Nam Union of Literature and Arts Associations, No. 318-319, July-August 2021.
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4. **Cao Thi Mai** (2017), "Specialties in Ritual naratives The Birth of the Earth and Water, of the Muong", *Arts and Culture* Journal, No. 394, April 2017.
5. **Cao Thi Mai** (2017), "The Muong of Thanh region and the uniqueness of Muong Ritual naratives", *Thanh Hoa Science and Technology* Journal, No. 1/2017