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## Studies on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western and Vietnamese Theories of Literary Criticism

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### ABSTRACT

The modernization of Vietnamese culture and arts cannot be separated from the exposure, exchange, and learning from modern Western schools of theories. The relationship of Western-Vietnamese theories of literary criticism started quite early and have made enormous contributions to Vietnamese culture and arts. In this article, the researcher conducted a series of surveys on two main issues: the relationship between Western and Vietnamese theories of literary criticism as well as the reception and application of modern Western theories in Vietnam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; thence, the researcher sketches the overall picture of the reception of literary theories in Vietnam over a century, and also analyzes its typical characteristics.

### 摘要

越南文化包括文艺，特别是文艺理论在内的现代转型进程离不开与西方现当代文论的交流与借鉴。西方文论与越南文论的关系起始较早，并为二十世纪越南文学、文论发展历程做出了重大贡献。本文对二十世纪越南与西方的文论关系以及现当代西方文论在越南的译介与传播的主要内容和特点进行了系统化地梳理，从而概括出越南文论与西方文论在二十世纪不同时间段的的不平等关系，同时也描绘出西方文论在越南接受的典型特征及其基本情况，由此为研究越南文学史以及越南和外国文学关系提供具有科学性和实践性的理论依据。

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Vietnamese literature, as a form of social conscience, is a thorough combination of the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual values of Vietnam. Along with the ups and downs in the history of establishing and protecting our nation, Vietnamese literature has witnessed dramatic changes in both artistic thinking and creative activities. These changes are related to not only conditions of life in Vietnam through the periods, but also to the role of Vietnamese literary criticism in pioneering the trends of literary sensation and aesthetics for readers and the orientation of authors' creativity. Therefore, besides subjective factors such as inborn talent, sensitivity to life, times, and experiences, or

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other objective factors relating to the changes and fluctuations of society, the production of masterpieces is strongly connected to the role of literary criticism.

Literary staging research is the basic operation of the discipline of literary history. Experts in the field of Vietnamese literary history generally try several methods of literary staging: **(1) Divergence between dynasties and modern times:** For example, Duong Quang Ham in *Vietnam Literature History* divides Vietnamese literature into phases such as LY-TRAN Literature (11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), LE-MAC Literature (15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), North-South Dispute Literature (17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), Modern Literature and New Literature. Nguyen, Dong Chi in *Vietnam Ancient Literature History* divided the classical literature of Vietnam into the main stages as follows: the era from Sy Nhiep to Ngo Quyen Literature, the NGO- DINH-LE Era Literature, LY era literature, the TRAN Era Literature, the HO Era literature: **(2) Dividing over time, based on historical milestones, important historical events:** for example, in *The History of Vietnamese Literature* the Le Quy Don group divides Vietnamese literature into phases. Main sections include 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Literature, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Literature, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Literature, 19<sup>th</sup> century Literature, 1858-1930 Literature, 1930-1945 Literature; with the *Preliminary History of Vietnamese Literature*, the Department of Literary History of Vietnam literature into the period: Literature from the beginning to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Literature from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 18<sup>th</sup> century Literature, Literature in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1930-1945 Literature: **(3) Diversify according to the development path of the literature itself:** for example, Pham Van Dieu in *Vietnamese Literature* divides Vietnamese literature into periods from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the construction period (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Prosperous Period (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century). Pham The Ngu in *A New Compilation of the History of Vietnamese Literature* divides Vietnamese literature into the following periods: Early Period (TRAN-LE Dynasty), Period of Development (MAC to Tay Son Dynasty) Period of Prosperity (NGUYEN Dynasty), Modern Literature (1962-1945). Modern Literature is divided into smaller periods, such as the period 1862-1907, the period 1907-1932, the period 1932-1945. **(4) Different periods related to social patterns in national history:** this is the viewpoint of Vietnamese literature history in the national works compiled by Vietnamese Social Science Commission during the anti-American period on proving that Vietnam has a history of 4000 years, so Vietnamese literature has a history of 4000 years too. Therefore, we combine the two major parts of Folk literature and Writing literature, and divide Vietnamese literature history into four stages of development, including Vietnamese literature in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic (before the tenth century); Vietnamese Literature in the Construction of Dai Viet Literature; Vietnamese literature in the period of Vietnamese colonialism and Vietnamese literature since the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

From the standpoint of the subject of literary history, no matter what method researchers use to stage national literature, they all abide by two basic principles: (1) The Impact of Society and History on the Development of Literature and its Historical Characteristics, (2) The Movement of Literature and Its Historical Form. Based on the views of experts in Vietnamese history and literary history, and on the basis of the development of Vietnamese literature itself, this paper divides the history of Vietnamese literature into five stages. This stage will explore the development of Vietnamese literature more objectively, especially the development of South Vietnamese literature,

which will be conducive to the study of the translation and dissemination of Western literary theory in Vietnam.

Vietnamese literary criticism has been mapped out in accordance with the history of Vietnamese society, including **the early period**: the strong development of genres and paradigms from folk literature in which its ideas and philosophy originated from the diversity of Vietnamese culture; **the second period**: under the influence of Chinese culture and literature, especially Confucian moral philosophy. General concepts of Vietnamese literary criticism in this period were gentle, elegant, and simple, characterized by an extensive vocabulary and historical analogy; **the third period**: this was the beginning of a lot of changes in society and literature. The colonization and invasion by the French for over 100 years, and then the invasion of the Japanese in the North and of Americans in the South—it took three-quarters of a century of almost continuous war for Northern and Southern Vietnam to be unified, making the nation suffer many disasters. However, it was through these disputes and conflicts that Vietnamese society had a chance to interact and learn from the West. A drastic change in the theory of literary criticism occurred in Vietnam in which the literary language of traditional Chinese literature was replaced by vibrant new paradigms from Western theory. A wide range of movements in Western philosophies and ideologies surged into Vietnam and were accepted with great enthusiasm by scholars. Western concepts such as content, form, structure, types of characters, genre, poetics, discourse, and discourse right quickly replaced traditional literary criticism focusing on literal explanations. As Hoai Thanh demonstrated in *Thi nhân Việt Nam* (roughly translated as *Poets of Vietnam*): “A society in which there were no changes in thousands of years [...] ‘Suddenly’ (Ngo Viet Hoan (NVH)), was touched by a strong wind from a faraway land. The whole foundation tumbled. The exposure to the West is one of the most significant changes in Vietnam history for centuries.” (Hoai, Thanh and Hoai, Chan 17) **The fourth period**: this is the period of the Communist Party rule over Vietnam in the North, the Republic of Vietnam ruling in the South, made the country be influenced by two political systems for a long time (1945–1975). In the North of Vietnam, the Communist Party adopted Marx-Leninism as its guiding ideology. Vietnamese theory of literary criticism was led under Marxism. Meanwhile, the South of Vietnam with the backing of US imperialism at that time was an advocate of pluralism and had direct contact with the economy and politics of contemporary Western society, especially that of the US. The literary criticism in the South of Vietnam could be described as “the blooming of literature.” Western theory of literary criticism was introduced, obtained and applied in various ways. It was contrasted with the tense atmosphere of literary criticism in the North. **The fifth period**: in 1975, the Vietnam Communist Party led the people to win the war against the US, unified the country and became the only ruling party in Vietnam. The period of 1975–1986 focused on building the foundation for socialism, to heal the wounds and pain caused by war. Decisions and policies of the ruling party were not too different from the previous period in the North, Marx-Leninism as the ideological touchstone of leadership, literary criticism and Marxist sociology retained its exclusive position in the art and culture forum of Vietnam. It was not until 1986, with the reformation in social economy, that Vietnamese literature, including theory and literary criticism, had a chance to “exit” the “restricted band” to open the door and receive modern Western literature. It can be said that most of the major schools of thought and

critics of Western literature were then introduced and entered Vietnam. However, the reception took place without systematic selection, sometimes relying on the efforts of a few scholars. Literary criticism, despite being more diverse and fresher, still underlined a lot of taboos.

In this article, the researcher will focus on two issues: one, the relationship between Western-Vietnamese theory of literary criticism throughout different periods; two, reception characteristics and applications of Western literary theory in Vietnam.

## **1. The relationship between Western-Vietnamese literary theory throughout different periods**

Putting the art and cultural life and literary criticism of Vietnam in the context of the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can see that Western and Vietnam literary theory is closely connected with their social context throughout history. Faced with the diverse, vibrant life of Western literary criticism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese art and culture sometimes actively received and hoped that research methods of the Western academic movements would refresh and modernize their own; sometimes acquired in a conservative manner, even refused to receive; or received not objectively or to serve different purposes in the struggles of differing ideologies. After the war, people expected an innovation, which could bring diversity and vibrance to art and culture, but once again, the ideology with a lot of taboos pushed Vietnamese theory of art and culture in the position of passivity and almost refused to accept criticism of Western literature. 1986 was a landmark of reformation and innovation in the history of modern Vietnam that brought many expectations for the literary criticism of Vietnam that were “at risk.” Like the early years of the 20th century, once again, the contemporary scholars in Vietnam were eager to take the essence of literary theory from the other hemisphere, and this time operated in an active reception, which was not affected by outside pressures. Through thirty years of innovation, reminiscing about the past and pointing out the new direction for the future, people found that during the three decades of reception, by the efforts of many scholars, theoretical life, art and culture criticism in Vietnam has become fresher and more diverse. However, due to limitations of subjective and objective reasons, this reception is still scattered, separated, and inconsistent. The relationship between literary criticism in Vietnam in its relations with the West still remained passive; the reasons come from the state ideology of Vietnam in choosing and receiving ideological paradigms, foreign theories; the systematic characteristics of the academic groundwork, as well as research capacity, language skills of researchers, etc.

### **1.1. The active role of reception in relation to Western literary criticism and modernization of art and culture theory of Vietnam**

In August 1858, the French and the Spanish landed on the Son Tra Peninsula, Da Nang, which was a prelude to the invasion that lasted nearly 100 years in An Nam. The presence of French Indochina with the education system of French language and culture made the culture of these three Indochinese countries, especially Vietnam; enter a new period of significant changes. It was the moment of the transition between

the old and the new. A traditional Confucian culture of thousands of years was in danger of being obliterated and replaced by modern Western culture. At that time, critics of literary criticism were divided into two sides: the critics following traditional criticism with conservative critiques and some modern critics—those who wanted to break the paradigm of Confucian ideology and took advantage of new methods of reasoning, Western literary criticism to innovate the national culture and literature.

In that modernization process, Tan Da appeared as a new star who paved the way for the renewal of Vietnamese literature. Just as the opening theme of *Poets of Vietnam*—“To invoke Tan Da spirit,” Hoai Thanh, Hoai Chan said: Tan Da “has played the opening of a new area of innovation.” Tan Da gave a bright outlook in literary criticism: “As the words above, although his works are also poetry, they have different forms and characteristics.” Inspired by such conceptions of poetry, he kept on looking to the unique characteristics of Vietnamese poets: “Nguyen Khuyen’s poems’ strength lies in their debauchery, Tu Xuong’s in their depth, Ba Huyen Thanh Quan’s in their order, Ho Xuan Huong’s in their romance...” (N. V. Tran 421) Although the criticisms were very sketchy and general, yet they opened a new direction for literary criticism, which is quite asymptotic compared with the methods of modern Western literary criticism—the style that focuses on identifying creative personality and the writing style of the writer.

On Tan Da’s foundation, the prior and later researchers of Vietnam expanded and enriched the literary criticism methods. Short stories by Nguyen Ba Hoc, Pham Duy Ton, [...] plays of Vu Dinh Long, Vy Huyen Dac, [...] especially the novel *To Tam* (1925) by Hoang Ngoc Phach opened up and transformed the culture and literature of Vietnam in a comprehensive and thorough way. It was not until the late 30’s and early 40’s of the 20th century that almost all genres of contemporary literature in the world appeared in Vietnam, some of which were closely connected with the modernization of capitalism. Literary criticism also achieved many significant accomplishments. It was the first time there appeared specialized critics such as *Criticism and Opinion* (1933) by Thieu Son, *Poets of Vietnam* (1942) by Hoai Thanh, Hoai Chan, *The Modern Writers* by Vu Ngoc Phan, etc.

In this period, the Western theory of literary criticism, especially the French theory, was acquired actively and immediately. For example, at that time, Maryanne Wolf opened an investigation into major French literary criticism about the valuable qualities of a critic; as well as the challenges and difficulties they had to overcome. Shortly thereafter, in an article in the newspaper *Today* (No. 152, 153 published on March 11 and 18, 1939), Thach Lam cited many insightful comments such as the opinion of Edmond Jaloux or Andre Therive.

*Poets of Vietnam* is considered the greatest and most notable achievement of Vietnamese literary criticism in this period. It was the first time in the history of Vietnam that specialized literary criticism appeared investigating and commenting on forty-four authors and their works. Modern critiques such as: “Never before witnessed at the same time a poetic soul as open as The Lu, dreamy as Luu Trong Lu, majestic as Huy Thong, innocent as Nguyen Nhuoc Phap, gloomy as Huy Can, rustic as Nguyen Binh, passionate as Che Lan Vien [...] and earnest as Xuan Dieu” were applied in a flexible, innovative and unique manner in the whole criticism.

Discussing the reception of Western literary criticism in this period, it is worth while to mention a wide range of opinions of Xuan Dieu: “An Nam literature needs to be expressed in an An Nam way [...] We have to preserve the characters of AnNam. That is right. But protecting the nation is not necessary to keep the border closed, all traffic sealed, the whole country stopped! [...] In literature, there is also a natural law of elimination; such writing going against the spirit of the national language is to be destroyed [...]” (Thanh 575) Therefore, it can be easily seen that writers and literary critics of Vietnam had a deep sense of national spirit in literature and independence in the creativity and criticism of literature.

### ***1.2. The exclusiveness of Marxist criticism in the North and the vitality of Western literary criticism in the South during 1945–1975***

Dated 02.15.1943, the Resolution of the Central Standing Committee, the Communist Party of Vietnam pointed out: “The party needs to send professional officials of cultural activities that can ignite a cultural movement, the culture of national salvation [...] build the cultural institutions of national salvation.” The cultural outline of 1943 of the Communist Party of Vietnam created a profound change in paradigms and ideologies for literary culture and literature of Vietnam at that time. The objectives of this Cultural Revolution are: Vietnam culture is now the socialist culture or Soviet culture, national and democratic. “Nationalization,” “publication,” “scientification” became three basic principles of this revolution. As a consequence, this Cultural Revolution turned Vietnamese literary life from a free and vital one to a monotonous closed one. A Marxist tendency toward socialist realism was a significant feature of Vietnam literary criticism during 1945–1975.

Along with cultural proposals in 1943, the system of theories of foreign literary criticism that Vietnam chose to accept and learn from in this period almost all came from the Soviet Union. Even some Vietnamese literary critics who over-worshipped Russian literary critic V. Bielinxki stated that: “The public is willing to forgive a writer for a badly-written book, but never forgave a harmful book.” (N. A. Nguyen 3) Such concepts as “strength,” “partisanship,” “revolution” [...] became familiar in works of literary criticism at this stage. In contrast, personal egos, romanticism, a sadness of war [...] were forbidden in both writing and literary criticism. An uncompromising struggle against the Humanity group’s written work after 1954 was also an extreme expression of devotion to Marx-Leninism and critique of Marxist sociology.

Different from the North, it may be said that Southern society during the period of 1954–1975 was a multi-cultural society, in which the influence of Western culture, especially American culture, is an important component. The government of South Vietnam, which was backed by the United States of America, advocated cultural pluralism. Therefore, the Southern culture and literature during this time were quite free with all schools of philosophy, aesthetics and various literary theories. Western literary criticism became a familiar and indispensable part in the literary life of Southern Vietnam at that time. The schools of Western literary criticism such as psychoanalysis, existentialism, reception aesthetics, structuralism, and phenomenology [...] were translated, introduced and adopted in various ways. This showed the



multiplicity of literary criticism in the South, with the discovery of the literary subject from multiple perspectives.

As Nguyen Sa commented: “Looking at the extensive literature throughout the century, we can see that the contact with Western literature and art promote the shift from one thing to another. We are like being influenced by a voiceless urge: to change quickly, to transform quickly, so who has just finished a classic, cannot wait for the 18th and 19th centuries to pass, others may advance to surrealism, even the same author can jump from realism to surrealism and then to the existentialism. And what made it change so quickly, look at the flip side it’s sad because it’s not us, because it also bears traces, but look on the right, it says the desire to change. And when they change to catch up with the literature and art in the world, this desire will motivate greater creativity.” (S. Nguyen 93–94)

The authors and works of literary criticism in Southern Vietnam during this period included: Nguyen Van Trung with “The summary of literature,” “Outlook,” “The construction of fictional works,” “The language and the body” [...] Thanh Lang with “Short summary of Vietnamese literature,” “Literary Criticism during 1932,” “Vietnam literature; two generations engaged with love,” [...] Le Tuyen with “Chinh phũ ngâm and Romantic Mind of the Exile,” “Time in Doan Trung Tan Thanh,” Do Long Van with “Hidden Water Sources of Xuan Huong Lake,” “WU Ji among us or phenomenon of JIN Yong,” Dang Phung Quan with “Philosophy and Literature,” Nguyen Sa with “A Rose for the Arts,” “Views of literature and philosophy” [...] It could be seen that compared to the literary criticism in Northern Vietnam during the same period, the literary criticism in Southern Vietnam was not only more vivid and diverse but also more developed, keeping pace with the literary criticism of the contemporary world. On the other hand, it also could be said that this cultural pluralism of the South contributed to detracting the monotony of historical literary criticism in Vietnam during 1945–1975.

### ***1.3. From 1986 until 2005: cultural pluralism within restriction and reception of Western literary criticism in an inconsistent manner***

In 1986, after eleven years of reunification, Vietnam officially entered the Reformation. Changes in the economy and society have entailed changes in life and culture. From the imitation of Soviet culture in which the working classes were set as the core of society, Vietnam society and culture have transformed, by opening its door for selective reception of culture around the world, including the West. Such a concept as “the restricted band” in ideology may be removed or at least lessened a lot compared to the previous period. The fact is that the culture and thinking of Vietnamese people are still dominated in many aspects by communist ideology. The consequence is that, while the policy of freedom of thought and speech are enacted, there has been a lot of “restricted zones” or limited “decoding.” This has led to the fact that in the early years of the 20th century, Vietnamese scholars, despite their excitement in receiving the movement, modern Western theories, including the theory of literary criticism, the reception took place in a relatively single and unsystematic way. Le Huy Bac said: “Unfortunately, so far, Vietnam has not had any literary school of indigenous studies yet. We hardly have contributed much to the world literature in both fields of research

and innovation. All we do is mainly to introduce the school of literary criticism in Vietnam. To be fair, except for criticism of Marxist sociology, the majority of our schools are like ‘the way it works like the way we think it is’ [...] the acceptance of foreign literary theory in our country almost has no strategy or a specific long-term plan yet.” (Le, Huy Bac)

However, the achievements gained through a renovation cannot be denied. In terms of literature, there were changes in literary criticism paradigms according to the trend of diversifying theoretical criticism; as well as the translation, introduction and application of Western literary criticism theories in the study of Vietnamese literary phenomena. Typical literary criticism works in this period include: *From Text to Literary Work* (1988) by Truong Dang Dung (Truong, Dang Dung), *Literary Research, Theories and Applications* (1988) by Nguyen Van Dan, *From Semiotics to Poetics* (1992) by Hoang Trinh, *Exploring Modern Western Literary Theories* (1995) by Phuong Luu, *French Literary Criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1995) by Loc Phuong Thuy, *Modern Prosody* (2000) by Do Duc Hieu, *Western Literary Criticism Theories in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (2001) by Phuong Luu, *Structuralism and Existentialism* (2001) by Tran Thien Dao, *British-American Literary Theoretical Criticism* (2002) by Le Huy Bac, *Structuralism and Literature* (2002) by Trinh Ba Dinh, *Comparative Literature, Research and Translation* (2003) by Department of Literature and Journalism, Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Science and Humanities, *Psychoanalysis and Spiritual Culture* (2002) by Do Lai Thuy, *Narratology, Some Historic and Theoretical Issues* (2004) by Tran Dinh Su, and *Postmodern Literature – Theory and Reception* (2012) by Le Huy Bac. Through such research on theories of literary criticism, we can partially understand the theories of Vietnamese contemporary literary criticism. They seem diverse and coherent but lack subjectivity. The introduction and reception of theories of Western literary criticism are mainly carried out by some individuals’ effort. As a result, the reception failed to be comprehensive and systematic. Also, Vietnamese literature has not formed schools or groups of research as at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or in Southern Vietnam during 1954–1975.

Thus, in each historical phase, Vietnamese literary criticism and theory take on different roles in relation to Western literary criticism and theory. It can be confirmed that the exposure to Western schools of philosophy, aesthetics and theories has encouraged the modernization of culture and literature in Vietnam. However, due to many subjective and objective reasons, the literary criticism and theories of Vietnam seem outdated compared to that of the world. In their relation to Western theories of literary criticism, Vietnamese ones still remain a little passive.

## 2. Characteristics of the reception and application of western literary theory in Vietnam

Since the research on the relationship between Vietnamese and Western theories of literary criticism has been discussed, this part of the article takes a closer look at the reception of theoretical content of Western literary criticism as well as its characteristics. Scholar La Khac Hoa once claimed in his article, “The Reception of Western Modern Theories,” that: “It can be confirmed that, in the last three decades, we have translated and introduced to the Vietnamese people almost all of the most Western



modern theoretical systems of arts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” He also stated: “Although dozens of Western contemporary art theories have been promoted, not all promotion can become significant in Vietnam’s reception of foreign arts ideology” (La, Khac Hoa). The question is: which theory of Western schools of literary criticism is more likely to be received by Vietnamese scholars and critics and become most influential? According to Doan Anh Duong, a young researcher, three main groups of theories that have been translated and applied in Vietnam include: research on subjectivity with theories of psychology of creativity, psychology of reception, psychoanalysis, [...]; research on documents with theories of poetics (Russian forms and US-UK New Criticism), structuralism, narratology; and research on society and culture with theories of post-modernism, post-colonialism, sociology, and culturalism [...]. (Doan 37–53) According to the writer, Psychoanalysis, Reception Aesthetics, Poetics, and Postmodernism are Western theories of literary criticism that have the strongest influence in Vietnam, especially since 1986.

### 2.1. Psychoanalysis

It can be said that among various Western theories of literary criticism and theoretical schools, psychoanalysis was received relatively soon in Vietnam in the 1930s and 1940s. Regarding creative sectors, traits of this theory are easily found in literary works by such writers as Vu Trong Phung, Thach Lam, and Nam Cao. In terms of criticism, Truong Tuu and Nguyen Van Hanh made use of this theory regularly and proficiently in literary research and criticism. In 1945, after President Ho Chi Minh read the “Proclamation of Independence,” announcing the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam), all systems of Vietnamese philosophy and ideology were based on the paradigm of Marxism. Philosophy, aesthetics and Western theories in general, including psychoanalysis, were all rejected. However, they were significantly popular in Southern Vietnam between 1954 and 1975. Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, existential phenomenology of Jean Paul Sartre and hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger were received and spread by a large number of Southern Vietnamese researchers and scholars. Typical outcomes of this include a range of treatises by Tran Thai Dinh, such as “Existential Philosophy,” “What is Phenomenology,” and articles about “Husserl’s Phenomenology,” or “Phenomenology in Vietnam” by Trinh Nu. Since 1986, after Vietnam entered the open-door and renovation period, psychoanalysis received special attention and was translated, introduced and promoted by many researchers, including Vietnamese versions of S. Freud’s, C. Jung’s, E. Fromm’s work such as *The Origin of Culture and Religion (Totems and Taboos)*, (Freud) *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, (2002a) *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, (2002) *Psychoanalysis and Spiritual Culture*, (Freud, Sigmund) *The Forgotten Language*, (Erich) and *Psychoanalysis and Love*. (Erich, Fromm 185–237)

Psychoanalysis was not only translated and introduced comprehensively but also explained and applied creatively by Vietnamese researchers and literary critics. Their products include “Sigmund Freud: Theory and Psychology” (M. H. Pham) by Pham Minh Hac, “Freud and Psychoanalysis” (M. L. Pham) by Pham Minh Lang, “Freud and his Arguments about Culture” (Mai) by Mai Ngoc Diep, “Unconscious Psychoanalysis and the Structural Analysis of Literary Works” (Nguyen, Van Dan 26–31) by Nguyen

Van Dan, “Chi Pheo under Psychoanalytic Perspectives” (Le, Huy Bac 123–127) by Le Huy Bac, “Sexual Aesthetics and the Adventure of Liberating Divine Feminine in Literature and Art” (Phan 23–29) by Phan Tuan Anh, and “Psychoanalysis in Southern Urban Novels, a Case of Thanh Tam Tuyen” (Nguyen, Thi Binh and Doan, Anh Duong 54–75) by Nguyen Thi Binh, Doan Anh Duong. Particularly, Do Lai Thuy has made substantial contributions to Vietnamese literary criticism following research on psychoanalysis. His compilations, such as *Psychoanalysis and Literature and Arts* (Do, Lai Thuy), *Psychoanalysis and Love* (Do, Lai Thuy, Ed), *Psychoanalysis and National Characteristics*, (Do, Lai Thuy, Ed) or treatises such as *Ho Xuan Huong, Fertility Nostalgia* (Do, Lai Thuy), and *Style of Eros (Psychoanalytic Criticism)* (Do, Lai Thuy, Ed,) have played an important role in Vietnamese contemporary literary criticism as well as contributed to making psychoanalysis more familiar to Vietnamese spiritual culture.

## 2.2. Reception aesthetics

Reception aesthetics was imported to Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s through translations and research studies of Southern Vietnamese scholars, including Nguyen Van Xung, Tam Ich, Lu Phuong, Nguyen Hien Le, Nguyen Sa, Dang Tien, Huynh Phan Anh or through critical essays by Nguyen Van Hanh in the North of the country. The emergence of a series of essays and treatises related to different aspects of reception aesthetics has proved the academic importance of the theory in Vietnamese literary criticism. Such studies like “How to Adopt Reception Aesthetics?” (Nguyen, Van Dan 7–8); or “Literary Reception—A Pressing Issue” (L. Nguyen 27) by Nguyen Lai; “More Discussions on Literary Reception” (T. H. Nguyen 42) by Nguyen Thanh Hung, as well as treatises including “Reception – A New Aspect of Literary Theory” (Tran, Dinh Su) by Tran Dinh Su, and *From Text to Literary Works* and *Literary Works as a Process* (Tran, Dinh Su), have confirmed this theory as a hot topic in Vietnamese literature.

In particular, the emergence of reception aesthetics in official university curricula of literature nationwide since 1986 up to now has proved the status and influence of this Western theory in Vietnamese literary criticism paradigms. Additionally, reception aesthetics is also successfully applied in the adoption, research and explanation of many cases of Vietnamese literature; as well as becoming a theoretical basis for many theses and dissertations conducted by students and researchers from universities across the country.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, it can be said that apart from psychoanalysis, reception aesthetics, a foreign theory, was successfully imported to Vietnam. Moreover, it was also localized to become part of the national heritage of literary criticism and theory; helping many Vietnamese have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of their national literature.

## 2.3. Poetics

Poetics is one of the Western theories of literary criticism that were adopted early and applied successfully in both Northern and Southern Vietnam, before and after reunification (1975). Tran Dinh Su stated in “The Overview of Poetics” of *On the Edge of*

*Literary Theory* that “Vietnamese poetics originated from the world contemporary poetics. It has tendencies of language stylism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, social poetics, historic and cultural poetics [...] From 1960 to 1975, in Northern Vietnam, research on literature was mainly affected by social poetics, reflected in realism and categories representing the literary relationship with ideological reality [...] whereas, in the South of the country, notions about literary criticism and research had just been introduced and received [...] After 1975, the study of literature nationwide underwent a period of stagnation, dogmatism. It was not until the 1980s that renovations were carried out. Poetics was imported with tendencies of linguistics, semiotics, structuralism, stylism, historic poetics, narratology [...]”<sup>2</sup> He also pointed out some main representatives of Vietnamese poetics, including Phan Ngoc, Nguyen Phan Canh, Do Duc Hieu, Nguyen Xuan Kinh, and Do Lai Thuy.

Regarding poetics in Vietnam, Doan Anh Duong claimed that: “The revolution in literary science of Vietnam since Renovation imprinted the role of poetics and sustained effort of Tran Dinh Su.”<sup>3</sup> In his essays, such as “Artistic Time in The Tale of Kieu and Nguyen Du’s Sensation of Reality,” (D. S. Tran 390–391) “Nguyen Du’s Artistic Vision in The Tale of Kieu,” (Doan 37–53) as well as treatises, such as *To Huu Poetics*, (1987) *Current Issues in Contemporary Poetics*, (1993) *Introduction to Poetics*, (1999) *Poetics in The Tale of Kieu*, (2002) and *Narratology: Historic and Theoretical Issues* (2006, 2009) [...] Tran Dinh Su has left his outstanding personal imprint upon maintaining and developing Vietnamese poetics paradigms in recent decades. The wide application of “Tran Dinh Su poetics model” in educational institutions, particularly in theses and dissertations has demonstrated the powerful influence of Tran Dinh Su and poetics in Vietnamese literary criticism and theoretical paradigms.

#### 2.4. Post-modernism

Within the last decade, representatives of world post-modernism such as J. Derrida, J. Lacan, J. Deleuze, M. Foucault, Paul Michael de Man, Geoffrey H. Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Hillis Joseph Miller have become familiar to literature researchers in Vietnam. Despite its late reception, post-modernist theory has achieved considerable results. Its first milestone was set in 2000 with the article titled “Post-Modernism Exploration” written by Phuong Luu (Phuong), published in “The Writers” journal. Then, after the publication of “World Postmodern Literature,” this theory was welcomed, translated and applied widely by Vietnamese scholars. In *Theory of Literary Criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Loc), it is easily recognized that research conducted by world famous postmodern scholars, including J.F. Lyotard, D. Martin Fields, Hans Bertens, W. Grassie, Fredric Jameson, and Chen Xiaoming were also collected and translated for introduction to Vietnamese literature. Along with the translation and promotion of post-modernism from theoretical perspectives, researchers and translators also paid much attention to novels written by postmodern writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez or Haruki Murakami.

Vietnamese postmodern literature has acknowledged the restless effort and personal imprint of Le Huy Bac upon not only translating literary works, but also introducing the theories and also applying them in the study of particular literary phenomena.

*Postmodern Literature-Theory and Reception* (2012) can be considered his greatest dedication to the introduction and development of postmodern theories in Vietnam, particularly at the tertiary level. Besides, we must also mention Phuong Luu with *Postmodern Literature Theory* and two proceedings in two major conferences about postmodernism held in Hue and Hanoi in 2011 and 2013, namely *Postmodern literature – Explanation and Reception* and *Postmodern Literature – Theory and Practice*. (Phuong)

The existence of this theory in Vietnam was also shown in a series of recent dissertations using postmodernism as a theoretical basis to solve research problems, such as “Signs of Postmodernism in Vietnamese Prose after 1975” by Phung Gia The (Hanoi National University of Education – 2011), “Postmodern Arts in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s Novels” by Phan Tuan Anh (Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences – 2014), “Postmodern Elements in Haruki Murakami’s Novels” by Le Thi Diem Hang (Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences – 2014), and “Postmodern Elements in Vietnamese Short Stories after 1986” (Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences-2014).

Thus, it can be seen that postmodernism, a foreign theory, was received and applied widely in Vietnam. Postmodernism along with Psychoanalysis, Reception aesthetics, Poetics,...have enriched Vietnamese theories of literary criticism and bring them closer to the world theories. Besides, Narratology and discourse theory, French Post-structuralism, American Deconstructionism, New historicism, Feminist criticism, Postcolonial criticism, Cultural studies,...are also Western popular theories that have been introduced and applied in Vietnam. However, the critical reception of Western contemporary theories of literary criticism, as Doan Anh Duong commented, “can easily put Vietnamese literary science into two conditions: first, Vietnamese literature becomes an illustration of the accuracy of the theories; second, it only makes use of some aspects of the theories and adjusts them to Vietnamese condition, in other words, change them into a theory having ‘Vietnamese identity.’ These result in a third situation—the insufficient and inconsistent adoption of literary theory. Theories may be chosen based only on their attractiveness, compatibility with Vietnamese condition, or an incident in the literature learning and studying process [...]” (Doan).

### 3. Conclusion

To conclude, through conducting a series of surveys on “Western and Vietnamese theories of literary criticism,” the writer has pointed out the core issues in the history of Vietnamese literary criticism and in its relationship with Western theories of literary criticism. It can be said that literary criticism and theories of Vietnam are closely connected to and greatly affected by its politics. Incessant wars and political differentiation between the North and South of the country formed different contrasting elements in its literature. However, it can be assured that in any historical phases and periods, the exposure to Western schools has strongly encouraged literary composition and criticism in Vietnam. Western theories of literary criticism play a vital role in promoting the modernization of Vietnamese literature and culture in all aspects from aesthetics and composition to research and criticism. Over the last decade, Vietnamese literature and

art, with national consciousness and a spirit of internal modernization, as well as the support of tenets from Western modern schools, have undergone two changes of ideology in literature: the first change was at the beginning of the 1920s, with transition from traditional art patterns (considerably affected by the Confucian tradition “文以載道” using literature for the purpose of conveying moral principle) to modern art patterns (the most visible manifestation is the replacement of traditional literary genres, including episodic novels or traditional criticism, with such modern literary genres as free verse, short stories, novels and modern criticism); the second change has occurred since 1986, with the transition from Marxist-based art to new, diverse, open art with more freedom in creativity. However, the inequality in the reception process (Marxist criticism remains dominant) has posed obstacles for the comprehensive “import” of Western schools of theories; there still existed some “restricted areas” in the reception and application process. This forced Vietnamese literature and arts, despite having removed the old dogma right from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to merely accept a more sophisticated dogma.

It is meaningful to review and assess the relationship between Western and Vietnamese theories of literary criticism, as well as their reception features and application, particularly in determining the “modern” level of Vietnamese literature from the perspectives of research and criticism. Thence, proper measures can be carried out to supplement and develop the national literature as well as to make new, more useful contributions to world literature. Obviously, in order to achieve this goal, learning from and applying foreign theories or Western traditional literary criticism remains insufficient. Vietnamese translators and arts researchers also need to put forth more effort in introducing and promoting outstanding Vietnamese literary works to the world, as well as participating more in global literary research and criticism.

## Notes

1. “World postmodern literature” includes two volumes: volume 1–“Theoretical issues,” volume 2–“World postmodern short stories” compiled by East West Cultural Language Center and numerous creditable translators and researchers. In volume 1, Phuong Luu, Nguyen Van Dan, Nguyen, Minh Quan, Hoang Ngoc Tuan, Le Huy Bac, Huu Uoc chose and translated into Vietnamese ten essays written by foreign scholars about postmodernism theories, such as “What is postmodernism?” by Charles Jencks, “Postmodern condition: A report on knowledge” by J.F. Lyotard, “Postmodernism in China” by Huang Weizong, (NGO, Viet Hoan).
2. In 1986, for the first time reception aesthetics was applied in literary theory curricula of universities and colleges, through “Readers and Literary Reception,” a part of the course book *Literary theory*, Vol 1, Education Publishing House, 1986, compiled by Tran, Dinh Su, Nguyen Xuan Nam, Le Ngoc Tra, La Khac Hoa, Thanh The Thai Binh, edited by Phuong Luu. In 1997, Phuong Luu wrote a course book named *Literary Reception* for the distance learning center of Hue University, published by Education Publishing House. Most of the later course books about mainstream literary theories have one chapter on literary reception, including Huynh Nhu Phuong, *Literary Theory*. Ho Chi Minh National University Publishing House, 2010; Tran Dinh Su (chief editor), Phan Huy Dung, La Khac Hoa, Le Luu Oanh. *Literary theory course book*. Hanoi: University of Pedagogy Publishing House, 2004; PHUONG, Luu (chief editor), Nguyen Nghia Trong, La Khac Hoa, Le Luu Oanh. *Literary theory*. Hanoi: University of Pedagogy Publishing House, 2002; (NGO, Viet Hoan).

3. Hoang Van Thinh. “The reception of Lev Tolstoy in Southern Vietnam during 1945–1975.” Ho Chi Minh University of Pedagogy: Graduation paper, 2005; Hoang Kim Oanh. “The reception of Edgar Allan Poe in Vietnam,” Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences: Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, 2011; Ta Hoang Minh. “The reception of M. Solokhov in Vietnam.” Hanoi University of Pedagogy: Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, 2014; Le Van Hy. “The reception history of Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s works.” Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences: Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, 2014; (NGO, Viet Hoan).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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