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A Short Story as a Special Genre of Vietnamese National Literature

There is still a gap between prosperous foundation of national literary heritage, its genre diversity and real practical understanding of its value for society development and national identification. The article is deals with the study of the short Vietnamese story as a genre of Vietnamese literature, its history, specifics, and the current stage of development. The purpose of the research is to study the short Vietnamese story as a national genre of Vietnamese literature, periodization, identification of its features. In this study, several methods of scientific research were used. Historical and comparative analysis, with the help of which it is possible to identify the features of the genre under study by establishing similarities and differences with other genres, to identify the stages of its development in the historical context; and empirical analysis to summarize, classify and describe the results obtained. The contribution of the study is to present the history of the Vietnamese short story as a genre of Vietnamese literature, reveal its specifics, features due to the cultural and religious basis, the historical heritage of the country and socio-economic development. The periodization of the genre evolution is carried out. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the current stage short story development. The author shows the transformation of the genre, reveals new features inherent in the genre of the modern short Vietnamese story, related to the socio-economic development of Vietnam and the echoes of the military events of the mid-XX century. Namely, the approach to realism and showing the true emotions of the hero. We show that it is the analysis of literary works of this genre that can become an important element, which can help to preserve the depth and beauty of literature, to maintain the continuity of generations. This is especially important in the context of globalization and the erosion of traditional cultural values in Vietnamese society.

Keywords: genre, short stories, peculiarities, periodization, Vietnam

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Короткий рассказ как особенный жанр вьетнамской национальной литературы

Во Вьетнаме в настоящее время сохраняется разрыв между имеющимся богатым национальным литературным наследием, его жанровым разнообразием и реальным практическим пониманием всей ценности для развития общества и национальной идентификации. Статья посвящена изучению жанра короткого вьетнамского рассказа как формата национальной идентификации вьетнамской литературы, его истории развития, специфики, современного этапа формирования. В работе использованы следующие методы научного исследования: исторический и сравнительный, с помощью которых выявлены особенности исследуемого жанра посредством установления сходства и различия с другими жанрами, этапы его развития в историческом контексте; эмпирический анализ позволил обобщить, классифицировать и описать полученные результаты. В ходе данного исследования представлена история вьетнамского короткого рассказа как жанра вьетнамской литературы, выявлены его специфика, особенности, обусловленные культурно-религиозной основой, историческим наследием страны и социально-экономическим развитием. Проведена периодизация развития жанра короткого вьетнамского рассказа. Особое внимание уделено анализу современного этапа развития данного жанра. Показана трансформация жанра, выявлены новые черты, присущие особенностям жанра современного короткого вьетнамского рассказа, связанные с социально-экономическим развитием Вьетнама и отголосками военных событий середины XX в., – приближение к реализму и проявление истинных эмоций героя. Показано, что произведения именно данного жанра могут стать неотъемлемым элементом, помогающим сохранить традиции национальной литературы во Вьетнаме, показать глубину и красоту короткого рассказа, сохранить преемственность поколений.

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В современном мире в условиях глобализации важно сохранить традиционные ценности культуры во вьетнамском обществе.

Ключевые слова: жанр, короткие рассказы, особенности, периодизация, Вьетнам

Introduction. A literary genre is a form, an abstract pattern, according to which the text of a literary work is constructed. The stability of the genre is linked to its historical heritage. In essence, the literary genre reflects the trends of literary development that have developed in the society [1]. A genre always retains certain fundamental elements of its inherent structure. Literary genres do not stand still. They are constantly evolving, changing. The formation or change of literary genres has been influenced by the real historical reality, in the halo of which literary works are created. These elements are saved only through regular updates, or in other words, through modernization.

Each literary genre is characterized by its own linguistic patterns, its own specific stylistic set, and its own patterns of cultural orientation [2]. In novels and short stories, for example, narrative descriptions to expand new degrees of realism are used mainly [3]. The plays, by contrast, mostly show the characters in their interactions.

The short story genre is a special genre of a short narrative in prose that is shorter than the novel and usually features a limited number of characters. A short story usually involves a single effect conveyed only in one or more significant episodes or scenes. This form of literary genre implies the brevity of the narrative and the absence of a complex plot. The nature of principal characters is revealed in action or a dramatic encounter. But not much attention is paid to the detailed description or a long development of the plot¹.

The short story genre is common among small ethnic groups [4]. For example, the Japanese short story genre, which originates as well as in other countries from oral traditions exhibits a number of special features [5]. Plot development and action often are of a secondary interest in the comparison to emotional issues. It is the emotional background that is the heart of the story in Japanese fiction. Buddhist ideas about the importance of self-understanding and the piercing impermanence of things have formed the sharp social criticism of material age. The artistic organization of the short story of the Finno-Ugric population in Komi Region

(Russia) is also rather difficult and diverse [6]. Its distinctive feature is that it is purely individual. Indeed, a short story is a reflection of the subjective vision of the author's outside world and a special artistic phenomenon in literature.

The Vietnamese literary science, which for a long time was under the influence of Marxist theories [7] is still at the initial stage of its development [8]. But current challenges of globalization, national traditions and customs erosion, westernization of future generation encourage to pay more attention to the preservation of national Vietnamese literature. One of the options for further development, in our opinion, is the study of short literary works of national literature, taking into account its special genre features [9].

The study of literary works in the aspect of their genre specificity is thoroughly studied in different countries, while in Vietnam, these studies are not enough. Research works are devoted mainly to narrow topics. For example, M. Janette [10] explores the reflection in literary genres of the Vietnam War, C. P. Pham explores the genre of the short story, but only from the perspective of changing literature in the Vietnamese language in the context of economic liberalization policies [11]. Using the example of the short story genre, the author shows that historically Vietnamese literature built on anti-colonial, anti-Imperial terms has changed under the influence of modern trends. N. T. K. Ngan explores medieval Vietnamese short stories and analyzes them only from the perspective of fabulousness and folklore [12].

The purpose of the research and method used. The necessity and relevance of the topic – the study of short stories in the context of the traditional values in the Vietnamese society is determined by the threats of the national Vietnamese short stories genre erosion under the influence of globalization and westernization of the society.

Therefore, the *purpose of this research* is to study Vietnamese short stories as a special national genre of Vietnamese literature and to reveal the features of Vietnamese short stories through the periodization and identification of its development. While analyzing short stories we used the following methods: historical analyses, comparative and empirical analyses.

¹ Short-story. – URL: <https://www.britannica.com/art/short-story> (дата обращения: 18.05.2021). – Текст: электронный.



The results of the study and their discussion. Vietnam has its own long and distinctive history of development [13]. For more than 4 thousand years, Vietnam had been a country with deep agricultural roots, in fact, an agricultural civilization for rice cultivation [2]. The dependence of the farmers' harvest on natural factors was reflected, first of all, in the folk art of the Vietnamese people. Above-mentioned was reflected in the evolution of the short story genre, which was developing along with the development of the Vietnamese people.

Based on the analysis of scientific publications and literary texts, we have identified five main periods of the short story genre evolution.

Period 1. Fairy tales and legends.

The animism and polytheism inherent in such civilizations as Vietnamese civilization exert a great influence on the life perception of Vietnamese communities, including the belief in the power of "sacred mountains" and mountain gods living on the tops of the "host" mountains. The belief and worship of the mountain gods were most pronounced in the Red River Delta and spread to the neighboring plains in northern Vietnam, where the inhabitants suffered from the devastating effects of floods for many thousands of years. All this is reflected in the genre of the short story, which was represented by mostly fairy tales and legends at that time.

The belief in the forces of nature partly reflected the desire of people engaged in the cultivation of wet rice to overcome and tame floods, to be sure of a good harvest and the ability to feed their families. Therefore, in the minds of the Vietnamese people, images of the mountain Deities together with sacred territories on high mountains are vividly present in traditional short stories, such as the *Tan Vien Son Thanh* series (tản Viên Sơn Thánh or Sơn Tinh – one of the Four Immortal Deities in traditional Vietnamese mythology. He is the god of the Ba Vi mountain range), or Chu Dong Tu (Chu Dong Tu is the name of a famous Vietnamese divine being (one of the "Four Immortals") in traditional Vietnamese mythology. In legend, Chu Dong Tu appeared on a yellow or Golden Dragon, triệu Quang phục, a sixth-century popular resistance leader), and had a strong presence in ritual practices in the temples of the mountain gods around the sacred mountains in such regions

of Vietnam as Ba Vi¹, Tam Diep², and Hoanh Son³. As shown in the monograph *Wanderings in the Infinite*, Vietnamese traditional prose of small forms, the origins of the beliefs of the Vietnamese became the basis of a common type of Vietnamese traditional prose literature [18] – the short story genre in Vietnam [14; 15].

In the process of movement and development, the genre of the story, although it underwent changes in the mode of narration, remained unchanged in terms of the factors that form it, which made up the quality of the story and the general characteristics of the genre form.

Period 2. Pre-Chinese period: XX–XIV centuries.

The next stage in the development of the short story genre was the glorification of the model of an ideal person who should correspond to his social position.

The ideal human model: a holy man; a monarchist that always "corresponds to his social position" [16]. The ideal person corresponds to such features as the complexity and mystery of the image, unpredictability and restraint. The development of medieval Vietnamese short stories was primarily associated with a shift in the concept of composition. Human being had become at the center of the artistic concept of the story. During the Xth – XIVth centuries, Li Te Xuyen (Vi đN điện u linh tập), Tran Phap (LĩNh Nam chích quái lục) and many other anonymous authors achieved the goal of "promoting good against evil" and apotheosized a real man as a fighter for justice and good.

During that period, famous authors and many other anonymous Vietnamese authors in their stories tried to achieve the goal of "promoting the idea of Good against Evil" and apotheosized a man as a fighter for justice and good. The most striking example was *Collection of records about the supernatural forces of the Viet kingdom* (Việt điện u linh tập,) by Li Te Suyin. The Collection included tales and legends about the spirits of real people and about the spirits living in various subjects.

3. The period of Chinese influence. XV–XVIII centuries.

At that time feudal Vietnam was strongly influenced by Chinese cultural traditions, which

¹ Ba Vi is the northwest district of Hanoi. It has a large part of Ba Vi mountain range.

² Tam Điệp is a city of Ninh Bình Province in the Red River Delta region of Vietnam.

³ Hoàng Sơn Range is a mountain range in the North Central Coast region of Vietnam.



were also reflected in the short story genre. All Vietnamese traditions and customs were replaced by Chinese culture [17]. Literature was divided into official and unofficial or folk. One of the famous Vietnamese writers of the XVth century Nguyen Van Xieu wrote: "Literature and ethics are called differently, but in fact the former is generated by the latter. The philosopher and writer of that time Kieu Fu in the preface to the collection of short stories "Incredible stories that happened on the mountains of Lin Nam" noted, "Oh! All true realistic stories are recorded in official literature in order to preserve and teach future generations, and incredible, magical stories – in novels, essays in order to enrich the national literary heritage. These amazing stories are about nature and people, despite their absence in the official literature, are still not just empty fiction... They are collected, processed by compilers-scientists, becoming perfect works. Behind such amazing, incredible stories, maybe there is something true, probable."

In the XVI century, Vietnamese fantastic stories of the middle ages, also known as the "truyen ky" stories emerged from the genre of short Chinese stories "chuanqi" [18]. Truyen kỳ mạn lục (Collection of Strange Tales) by Nguyễn Dữ borrowed plots from folk narratives, used already existing motifs, both from the world of traditional storytelling, and fantasy plots as an artistic means to convey problems with deep content related to modern socio-cultural life. One of the other key artistic features of the Chinese influence period short stories was the allegorical nature, ambiguity, and the author's own ethical comments at the end of the story [13]. Those stories (the only work of the famous follower of Confucius – Nguyen Du) are considered the brilliant culmination of Vietnamese fantasy stories. Le Qui Dong, a well-known scholar of the 17th century, wrote in Kien Van Tieu Luc: "Nguyen Du was famous from young age for learning a lot, remembering a lot, and being able to use literature to make a great career".

Period 4. The period of upheavals of the XVIII–XIX centuries.

Almost the entire XVIIIth century, the North and the South parts of Vietnam existed separately. The Northerners dealt with internal problems, the Southerners expanded southward, seized Khmer lands in the Mekong Valley, and actively interfered in the internal affairs of Cambodia. From the XVIIIth century until the end of the XIXth century, the short story did not find its

place in literature due to the period of upheaval that engulfed the country. It was a watershed period when an active cultural exchange with Western civilization started. That period shaped new modern cultural values of Vietnam.

Period 5. The modern times.

The dramatic history of Vietnam in the XXth century strongly reformatted genre of short Vietnamese stories. Despite the presence of the same genre characteristics inherent in a short story, the semantic line of the narrative has changed. The stories have come closer to modern social relations and become more honest in reflecting historical reality. The unification of contradictions in the genre itself – between fixation, immutability and flexibility, promotion; between traditional and modern elements – there is a law of movement and the inevitable development of the genre of short stories in general and the poetry of modern Vietnamese stories in particular [2]. As a short form of narrative, short stories do not seek to dominate life in its fullness and completeness, but often they seek to portray a phenomenon, to discover the most essential feature in human relationships, and to hold the moment that reveals the most intimate. There were several trends in short story genre developing during the period from the beginning of the 1930s to the 1970s. On the one hand, the glorification of a moral person with high moral values, the dialogue of the hero with the past, on the other hand, the display of the main character as a victim of external circumstances and ways of dealing with overcoming these circumstances.

For example, a famous Vietnamese short story *Dream in the Lotus Flowers* by Nguyen Ahn Vu is a short story that gives readers an insight into Vietnamese culture, history, and literature. So, it could be used as an excellent example of short story genre for integration into the teaching process. In this story, there are two central characters, Thoai and Thoan, who were "wounded" by the war. Thoai only had half of one leg and one arm left after his body was crippled by an explosion when he was a soldier. Thoan was deafened by an explosion that occurred when she was a small child. When they are reunited, Thoan visits the temple of Chu Ku (CàU quả) to burn incense to bless the reunion. In this story, along with the courage and perseverance of a soldier and the bitter consequences of the Vietnam War, deep cultural and religious roots are revealed: the temple as an element of enlightenment and the highest prin-



ciple. The lotus flowers in the title of the story is a reference to the famous Buddhist parable of achieving transcendence in the mundane world: even a lotus can grow out of mud [19]. There is a deep moral of the senselessness of wars that bring suffering to innocent people in this story.

This story shows that the stability of genre is not conservative, but is associated with innovation, because, analyzing the genre from a historical point of view, we can imagine that the genre is constantly evolving, changing and always in motion, because “The vitality of a genre lies in its ability to renew itself” (M. Bakhtin) [16].

Under present-day conditions, short stories are rather suitable for literature lessons: they correspond to the modern perception of information by young people – brevity, quick changeability of the plot. Students also should be interested in literature lessons through the use of information and communication technologies. The peculiarity of the genre of a short story, first of all, is its brevity. The teacher can listen to the text of the story together with the students in the audiobook mode, so that they can discuss the emotions and thoughts that have appeared in the lesson. The teacher can head students in the right direction and highlight certain elements of the narrative.

One more example is anthology of short stories *Wild Mustard* [20]. Contemporary Vietnamese authors (based on the anthology of short stories by Vietnamese contemporary authors *Wild Mustard*) show the difficult period of the country's transition to a market economy. In just three decades, since the 1986 policy (known as the “Doi Moi” – Renewal Policy)¹ ended the country's closeness and integrated Vietnam into the global economy. The country has gone from being one of the poorest and most isolated on the earth to a dynamic country. The nineteen stories in the *Wild Mustard* collection reflect the diverse new experiences of Vietnamese youth since the country's transformation began. They are moving between home and new expanded horizons as they seek new opportunities through migration, education, and integration, not only in their own country

¹ Doi Moi (vietn. D ƆI M ƆI). “Policy of Renewal” is a comprehensive program of reforms in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam. Officially adopted at the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in December 1986. These economic reforms are taking place in parallel with the “renewal” of such areas as politics, education, culture, etc., in connection with which the concept of Doi Moi takes on a broader meaning.

but also in the world. But at the same time, they remember their history, their roots, honor their ancestors and cherish their national identity.

Modern Vietnamese short stories are a traditional inheritance to preserve the “genetic code” of the genre form. During the development of the genre, Vietnamese short stories have undergone significant innovations in the way they reflect reality and artistic thinking, but most of the works have not left the traditional form.

The Vietnamese short story genre is on its way to an update. Increasing fragmentation techniques in the narrative of modern Vietnamese authors is a way to break the traditional structure of Vietnamese stories. While in medieval stories, the presence of a synthetic style in the same work is a manifestation of the unity of literature, history and philosophy, and the combination of vignettes, poems and couplets with the author's opinion at the end of the story not only increases the quality of the story, contributing to a restrained disclosure equally intensely expressing personal aspirations but also makes the medieval story inherently unchangeable, flexible and attractive. In modern novels, the combination of different styles creates polyphony in the tone of the work. In a sense, this is an innovation in storytelling techniques, like a dialogue with a monosyllabic tone in a traditional story. Modern short stories are a kind of symbiosis of many genres: stories have the prose nature of the novel, the lyrical nature of poetry, the dialogic nature of drama, the journalistic nature of news. Intertextuality (prose, poetry, journalism, etc.) or fragmentation is a specific manifestation of the interaction of genres in the process of development.

Conclusion. The genre of the short Vietnamese story is unique for the country in terms of the development of its culture. It developed along with its history, absorbed all the complexities of interpreting modernity. The article presents the periodization of the development of the short story in Vietnam. There are five periods of its development: the oldest, Fairy Tales and legends, the second period of Pre-Chinese (XX–XIV centuries), the third Period of Chinese influence (XV–XVIII centuries), the fourth period – the Period of upheavals of the XVIII–XIX centuries and the fifth – the modern stage of the development of the short story. Each of the periods is characterized by its own peculiarities, but at the same time the most important goal of



the story is preserved – to convey the moral ideal of a person and love for his Homeland.

Understanding of the history of the development of the short story genre in the genre aspect will help to understand the depth and beauty of Vietnamese literature. This is particularly important in the current context of globalization and the erosion of traditional Vietnamese values in society.

Nowadays people are well acquainted with the history of Vietnam, so an important process in preserving the true history of the short stories and their understanding is to instill in a new

generation a careful attitude to the original literature, to the genre of the short story. It is this genre that helps readers to focus on the main problem of the story. It allows you to cover a “single view” of a small number of characters in the story and does not distract from the main idea of the author, at the same time showing the main line of the story. This approach also requires a special method of understanding forming the ability to perceive certain worldview concepts in their own way, to transform the information extracted from the text into knowledge.

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