

THE VIETNAMESE NEW POETRY IN THE EAST ASIAN MODERNIZING POETRY MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Vietnamese New Poetry is one of the outstanding achievements of the modernization of Vietnamese literature in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the New Poetry movement has contributed to bringing Vietnamese literature out of regional influence and to catching up with world literature trends. This paper mainly discusses and analyzes the characteristics and nature of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement in the context of modernizing East Asian poetry.

Keywords: East Asian poetry; Modernizing context; Vietnamese New Poetry.

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1. INTRODUCTION

East Asian cultural region is the name used to refer to the community of countries in East Asia that were (or are) using Chinese characters as a script. The East Asian cultural region is characterized by the profound influence of Confucianism and Buddhism. This cultural region includes the countries and territories of China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan (R.O.C), and Vietnam (and also some outlying areas like Tibet and Mongolia). The literature of China, Japan, Korea (including North and South Korea today), and Vietnam have similarities as well as mutual influences in the process of formation and development. Therefore, East Asian literature includes China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

For about ten centuries, East Asia was influenced by India and China in terms of culture, thought, writing systems, and literature. After its defeat by British colonialism in the Opium War of 1840, China's position weakened politically and culturally. However, until the nineteenth century, East Asian countries were still in the dominant sphere of Chinese ideology and literature. Until the end of the nineteenth century, East Asian countries fell into stagnation and were deadlocked in all aspects of politics, economy, and culture, especially literature. At that time, the issues of national renewal and literary modernization became the guideline as well as the vital path of each East Asian nation. The only orientation in East Asian countries was to look to the world and take the West as a model. Whether an independent country or a colonial country, the need for national innovation to modernize literature was the common trend of East Asian countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It can be said that the need to modernize literature in East Asian countries stemmed from the need for national renewal. In the article "Meeting East-West and the Progressive Predestined Relationship of Literature of East Asian Countries (Through the Practice of Chinese and Vietnamese literature)," Tran Dinh Su made the following remarks:

The gunshots from Western developed capitalist countries to the backward old feudal countries of East Asia is the paradox of history. This opened the colonial regime that has awakened the intellectuals of those countries, brought Western culture and literature to those countries, and aroused a profound cultural revolution which never has before in the traditions of those countries and lasts to this day. (Trần, 2011, p. 27)

The New Poetry movement in Vietnam and other countries in the East Asian literary region is the direct product of the process of acquiring and learning Western literary models. In the East Asian countries, the poetry innovation movement (with different names) also took place strongly in the first half of the twentieth century. It can be said that the Vietnamese New Poetry was not only influenced by Western literary ideology but was also the result of an exchange process with East Asian literature in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement also contributed to modernizing East Asian poetry in the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the study of Vietnamese New Poetry deserves attention as a piece of the puzzle in the context of East Asian poetry modernization in the first half of the twentieth century.

Most previous research has mainly aimed to examine the influence of Western literature on the formation and development of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement or to make comparisons between it and literary movements in Japan, China, and Korea. Recently, research on Vietnamese New Poetry has focused on the relationships and made comparisons with other countries in the region. Research has considered the Vietnamese New Poetry movement not only as a product of its own need to innovate and the consequences of exposure to Western culture but also as the result of literary exchanges in the East Asia regional context. Therefore, many studies, as well as international workshops, focus on this issue. There are also a number of research papers with this focus, such as “New Poetry—A Regional Historical Phenomenon” (Phan Trong Thuong), “The Road Modernization of Literature Countries in the Region of Chinese Characters Culture (Through Vietnamese and Japanese Literary Documents)” (Doan Le Giang), “The Meeting of East and West and the Predestined Opportunity of Literature of East Asian Countries (Through the Practice of Chinese and Vietnamese Literature)” (Tran Dinh Su), “Tân thư and Innovation Movement in Japan, China and Vietnam” (Phan Trong Thuong), “Literary Modernization of the Early Twentieth Century, Comparative Study of Korea and Vietnam” (Nguyen Thi Thanh Xuan), “Vietnamese Literature and the Journey of Regional and International Cultural Exchange” (Dang Thanh Le), among others. These studies have a new orientation on the Vietnamese New Poetry movement. Thereby, it can be seen that the research on Vietnamese New Poetry has had a more multidimensional and multifaceted view.

Research on the Vietnamese New Poetry movement has provided a lot of knowledge and much literature. However, up to now, these research studies are still few compared to those of other countries in the East Asian literary region. Meanwhile, at the end of the twentieth and in the early twenty-first century, the world is forming political and economic alliances, such as the EU, G8, APEC, ASEAN, WTO, AFTA, and NAFTA, to join in solving global issues related to natural resources and the environment, ethnicity, religion, and epidemics. However, as Phan Trong Thuong said, “But, it is also in the process that there are potential the risk of blurring cultural boundaries, disturbing the pure spiritual values of each nation. The need for dialogue between cultures is on the rise. That means that the process of international exchange and integration both creates opportunities and challenges for each culture and literature of ethnic groups” (Phan, 2006, p. 6). Therefore, studying the Vietnamese New Poetry movement in the context of East Asian literature not only looks back at the formation and development process of a modern cultural trend but also draws valuable practical lessons in the current context.

2. THE VIETNAMESE NEW POETRY AND EAST ASIA POETRY MODERNIZATION MOVEMENTS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

2.1. The East Asia poetry modernization movement

Beginning the process of modernization of literature in the East Asian countries is the movement calling for modernization of Chinese poetry. In the early stages, the East Asia poetry modernization movement did not officially appear, but its origins had positive

signs and signaled the innovation in literature in East Asian countries. The East Asia poetry modernization movement not only called for reform in terms of form but also renewal in thinking and concepts. At the same time, this movement continued to absorb Western literary movements rapidly. This may be explained as East Asian literature has much potential in the poetic genre. Therefore, poetry is a pioneering genre in modernization as well as poets being very active in studying and absorbing Western literary models. Another common feature of the modern East Asian poetry movements is that they began by absorbing romanticism. Although romanticism was an ideological movement around the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, it reappeared in the modernization movement of East Asian poetry. Dinh Phan Cam Van explained this phenomenon in the article “Some Similarities Between New Moon Poetry Group and the Vietnamese New Poetry Movement,” stating “If the ideological–social premise arises romanticism in Europe is the disappointment of bourgeois civilization, in Asia (East Asia) it is a response to the heavy constraints of feudal society in a new class of people” (Dinh, 2011, p. 65).

In poetry, Japan is known for its diversity and vividness with Western literary trends such as romanticism, symbolism, and surrealism, etc. The first poetry volume for the New Japanese Poetry is *Selection of Poems in New Style (Shintaishi-shò)*, written in 1882 by three professors from Tokyo Imperial University, sociologist Toyama Chuzan (1848-1900), botanist Yatabe Shòkon (1851-1899), and philosopher Inoue Tetsujiro (1855-1944). Following it was a collection of romantic poetry, *Young Leaves (Wakanashu)*, consisting of 51 poems and 1 title poem, composed by the poet Shimazaki Toson in 1897, about one hundred years after romanticism appeared in the Western world. According to Phan Trong Thuong in “New Poetry–A Regional Historical Phenomenon,” this collection “can be considered as the first new poem volume composed by the Japanese, opening the romanticism Meiji movement” (Phan, 2012, p. 3). In China, the representative of the New Poetry movement in the early period was the romantic poet Guo-Moruo, who was the founder of the Creation poetry group. With a collection of 56 poems, *The Goddesses*, mainly composed in 1920, Guo-Moruo focused on expressing the great enlightening spirit of the May Fourth Movement. In the case of Korea, the New Poetry movement appeared later than in Japan and China. Phan Thu Hien in her article “Intrinsic and Exogenous Factors in the Formation and Development of ‘New Literature’ (*Sin Munhak*) Korea from Research Perspectives” wrote, “Korean romanticism literature, like that of Vietnam, appeared late, so it interacted complicatedly with realism, naturalism, and modernism” (Phan, 2011, p. 423). However, there was also a school of romantic poetry in Korea, the White Tide group (*Paekcho*). Similar to Vietnam, Korean romantic poetry also focused on the main theme of personal consciousness, with typical authors such as Park Chong-hwa, Yi Sang-hwa, and Hwang So-gu, among others.

The East Asian literary region's next modernization trend was symbolism. Around 1905, the volume *The Tidal Sound (Kaichò-on)* was translated by Ueda Bin from Italian, German, and especially French poems of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine. This collection of poems blew the symbolism winds of the West into Japanese poetry. In 1913, Nagai Kafu's collection of poems *The Coral (Sangoshù)* included the translated poems of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Henri de Régnier, and Countess de Noailles. By 1925, there was a

book of poems *Gekka no ichigun* by Horiguchi Daigaku (1892-1981), translated from the poems of French poets such as Jean Cocteau, Raymond Radiguet, Paul Verlaine, and Guillaume Apollinaire. It can be said that symbolism was introduced and developed quite strongly in the Japanese New Poetry movement. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, symbolist poetry began to be of interest to Chinese poets. Lai Jin-bo is considered the first to consciously incorporate French symbolism into writing. With the three volumes of *The Dance*, *Child's Happy Taste*, and *The Enterprising Diners*, Lai Jin-bo is truly a person of great merit in laying the foundation of symbolist poetry in China. Under the influence of French symbolist poetry, Dai-Wangshu was known to everyone later. In August 1928, Lunar Novels published a collection of poems titled *The Dance Class*, and Dai-Wangshu became known in Chinese literature.

Ai Qing is also a poet influenced by symbolists such as Rimbaud, Verhaeren, Blok, Esenin, and Apollinaire. Researcher Phan Trong Thuong in the article "Bich Khe's Contributions to Modern Vietnamese Poetry" explained why symbolism attracted Chinese poets:

The basis of that combination is the certain closeness between symbolism, surrealism Western, and the traditional composition, style, and poetry of classical Chinese and Vietnamese poetry: the closeness of the way of expressing things, on the one hand, is the symbolism images and on the other the metaphors, parables, of the superiority of intuition in perceiving the world; about the appreciation of music in poetry; about elaborate and meticulous art labor. (Lê, 2006, p. 54)

Korean poets of this period (Chu Yo-han, Hong Say-ong, Pak Chong-hwa, and Yi Sang-hwa) also attempted to combine French symbolism with romanticism. This shows the efforts to absorb and update the trendy poetic currents of Korean modernism. In the Korean New Poetry movement, Chu Yo-han was the prelude to prose poetry. This is a form of poetry influenced by French symbolism and Japanese New Poetry. Nguyen Thi Thanh Xuan, in the article "Modernization of Literature in the Early Twentieth Century: A Comparison Study of Korea and Vietnam," writes, "Since 1926, Korea's iconic movement wanted to liberate poetry out of 'emotional romantic tide,' to increase awareness, intelligence, in order to 'express the complex realities of modern civilization'" (Nguyễn, 2011, p. 569).

In the early twentieth century, symbolism spread and gradually shifted to surrealism in the West. Japan not only modernized poetry but also determined to catch up with Western countries, so surrealism was also welcomed and received actively. However, Japan not only applied passively but also created an East-West dialogue in the process of receiving. According to the surveys and synthesis by researcher Le Thuy Tuong Vy, surrealism attracted a large number of artists and writers in Japan, "From a trend that only entered here in the 20s of the last century, just 10 years later, Japan had more than 500 artists following the surrealism trend and by the 21st century, there were nearly 3,000 people in the fields of literature, painting, cinema" (Lê, 2019, p. 164). Kitasono Katue (1902-1978), the first surrealist author associated with two important events, was the curator of the first surrealist magazine in Japan (*Rose. Magic. Theory*

[*Shobi. Majutsu. Gakusetsu*]) and signed the manifesto of Japanese surrealism. In the article, “The Context of the Introduction of Surrealism in Japan,” Le Thuy Tuong Vy also writes about the attraction of surrealism in Japan:

At that time, the number of Japanese authors who identified themselves as surrealist was in the hundreds. When Breton and Éluard themselves submitted articles for this magazine, the voice of Japan was heard by the West. It is no exaggeration to say that Japan very consciously determined its position on the world map by constantly talking with Europe, resisting the loss of voice of the foreign region. In this East-West dialogue, we see that Japan not only uses Western surrealism but also integrates it into its cultural heritage. (Lê, 2019, p. 171)

The movement to modernize Chinese poetry also continuously received and updated Western ideological currents. After Lai Jin-bo, poets in the postproduction period of the Creation poetry group, such as Mu Mu-tian, Feng Nai-xiu, and Miao Feng-tu, began to turn to the surrealism movement. In Korea, Yi Sang (1910-1937) is one of the poets following surrealism and Dadaism with the use of unconsciousness, dreams, and illusions, as influenced by Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Lacan.

Compared with symbolist poetry, surrealist poetry is somewhat less bold (except for Japan) because the modernization time in East Asia was quite short compared to the West due to objective conditions. However, the imprint of surrealist poetry on East Asian literature demonstrates the updating as well as the effort to accept Western ideological currents. In addition, symbolism and surrealism were two popular trends in the West at that time, so East Asian poetry was not a repeat of the past but an update to catch up with Western literary trends. In the context of both social and literary modernization, this is a remarkable effort of the East Asian poetry movement in the early twentieth century. Symbolism and surrealism, on the other hand, although originating in the West, have similarities with the East Asian poetry tradition. As can be seen, the symbolism and surrealism movement has been cultivated on the land of poetry with suitable nutrients. Therefore, the movement to modernize East Asian poetry, although in a short time and with many unfavorable objective conditions, gained many achievements and gradually approached world literary trends.

2.2. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement

Basically, the development process of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement is divided into three phases in terms of time. Since 1928, Nguyen Van Vinh's translation of “The Tick and the Ant” (“La cigale et la fourmi”) has broken the rhymes, sealed rules, number of lines, and words of the old poetry model. This is a poetry translation meant to lay the foundation for the Vietnamese New Poetry movement. The first stage, from 1932 to 1936, is marked by Phan Khoi's poem “The Love of Elderly” on March 10, 1932, with an introduction in *A Poem Style Presented in the Middle of the Poem Village*. At this stage, there is still a struggle between the New Poetry movement and Old Poetry. Despite the fierce debate, the victory favored the New Poetry movement with the works of The Lu, Vu Dinh Lien, and Luu Trong Lu. Next, in the second stage, from 1936 to 1940, the

period segment developed brilliantly, took place actively, and accomplished many achievements of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement. This period recorded a large number of authors and writings with the absolute victory of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement. Until now, these authors are still the unique talents of modern Vietnamese poetry. They include Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Che Lan Vien, Han Mac Tu, and Bich Khe. Finally, in the third stage, from 1940 until 1945, there was a differentiation in the writing tendencies with groups of poems such as the Dạ Đài group, the Trường Loạn poetry group, and the Xuân Thu Nhã Tập group with declarations, poetic system, and an aesthetic conception with individual colors. However, the above development stages are divided based on the progress of a literary phenomenon. Therefore, Do Lai Thuy in “The New Poetry—Success and Failure of Success” proposed another development process of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement:

The Vietnamese New Poetry indeed started with a line of romanticism poetry. It not only spread horizontally to expand that romance but also developed vertically; i.e., going from romance with The Lu, Huy Thong, Nguyen Binh budding to symbolism with Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Vu Hoang Chuong to symbolism with Dinh Hung, Bich Khe, and finally put into surrealism with Nguyen Xuan Sanh, Han Mac Tu. The path to school is small, but it is the way of the future because it will lead to an enormous change: from modern time/pre-modernism to modernism poetry. (L. Đỗ, 2012, pp. 36-37)

Like other countries in the East Asian literary region, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement also began strongly and eagerly followed the romanticism trend. It is difficult to fully enumerate the authors and works composed following the romanticism trend in the New Poetry movement. The critic Hoai Thanh in *The Vietnamese Poets* also noted these achievements of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement:

In the past, there may be talents today that cannot match. Don't get one person versus one person to compare the era with the era. I decided that in the history of Vietnamese poetry, there has never been such a rich era. Never before has anyone seen an open poetic soul like The Lu, dreamlike like Luu Trong Lu, as majestic as Huy Thong, as pure as Nguyen Nhuoc Phap, an illusion like Huy Can, a country like Nguyen Binh, weird like Che Lan Vien, ... and earnestly, excited, and confused like Xuan Dieu. (Hoài & Hoài, 1999, p.29)

According to Do Lai Thuy (T. Đỗ, 2012), the trend of romantic poetry is associated with the Meaning–Word composing model, that is, the poet forms ideas and structures and then finds sentences and words to express them. Therefore, poetry following the romantic trend is an inspirational poem and forms the habit of reading poetry to find confession. Most poets belonging to the New Poetry movement wrote poems according to this model, including Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Han Mac Tu, Luu Trong Lu, Nguyen Binh, Nguyen Nhuoc Phap, Tham Tam, Anh Tho, Doan Van Cu, Te Hanh, Yen Lan, Quach Tan, Thanh Tinh, Dong Ho, and Vu Dinh Lien. Even so, symbolism influenced many poets of the New Poetry movement, as commented by Hoài Thanh in *The Vietnamese Poets*, “From Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Vietnamese poetry has the character

of French symbolic poetry, but they still are cautious. Bich Khe and a few others like Xuan Sanh wanted to go to the place that is often thought to be the highest in symbolic poetry: Mallarmé, Valéry” (Hoài & Hoài, 1999, p. 32). According to Do Lai Thuy's research in *The Poetic Eyes*, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement still fully embraces Western currents, from romanticism of centuries ago to symbolism of decades ago and to surrealism of the present day:

In fact, the Vietnamese New Poetry is a movement of Vietnamese poetic thought from Romanticism (with groups leading poets such as The Lu, Luu Trong Lu, Pham Huy Thong, ...) to the half of Symbolism (the middle generation consist of Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Vu Hoang Chuong, ...) and to Symbolism (Dinh Hung, Bich Khe), then moved to Surrealism (Han Mac Tu). Thus, within only 13 years (1932-1945), the Vietnamese New Poetry went the whole way over a century of French poetry. With such a sprint, the Vietnamese New Poetry could not have a radical differentiation into poetry movements like in the West. The elements (romantic, symbolic, surrealistic) are bold, but theism (Romanticism, Symbolism, Surrealism) is pale, sometimes it's just the direction but it's not yet formed. (Đỗ, 2000, p. 239)

These poems with the symbolic poetic appearance of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement, such as “Miracle” (“Huyền diệu”) (Xuan Dieu), “Desolate” (“Cô liêu”) (Han Mac Tu), and “Naked Painting” (“Tranh lỏa thể”) (Bich Khe) can be mentioned. Modern symbolic Vietnamese poetry really only begins with the Xuân Thu Nhã Tập group with “The Old Sadness” (“Buồn xưa”) of Nguyen Xuan Sanh and “The Color of Time” (“Màu thời gian”) of Doan Phu Tu. In particular, the groups of Dinh Hung, Tran Dan, Tran Mai Chau, Vu Hoang Dich, and Vuong Thanh established the symbolism poetic group and published Dạ Đài at the end of 1945 with poems such as “The Mesmerizing Song” (“Mê hồn ca”) (Dinh Hung), “The Strayed Soul Song” (“Lạc hồn ca”) (Tran Dan).

Quỳnh hoa chiều động nhạc trầm mi

Hồn xanh ngát chở dẫu xiêm y

Rượu hát bầu vàng cung ướp hương

Ngón hường say tóc nhạc trầm mi

Lãng xuân

Bờ giũ trái xuân sa

Đáy đĩa mùa đi nhịp hải hà

Nhái đàn rót nguyệt vủ đôi thơm

Tỳ bà sương cũ dựng rìng xa

(“The Old Sadness,” Nguyen Xuan Sanh)
(T. Đỗ, 2012, p. 113)

With the trend of symbolic poetry, the New Vietnamese poets gradually shifted to the Word–Meaning writing model. This is the writing model according to the modernist trend of the West at that time. According to Do Lai Thuy (T. Đỗ, 2012), with this model, the poet gives up on writing poetry with ideas, but instead moves to writing poetry with words, and uses the words to design a poem. This way of writing poetry will break the continuity as well as the emotional circuit of the reader. For example, in Nguyen Xuan Sanh's poem “The Old Sadness,” the images of *quỳnh hoa*, *xiêm y*, *ngón hường*, *trâm mi*, *vú đôi thom*, and *tỳ bà* remind one of the image of a woman in the olden days. It can be said that the pictures in poetry, according to this writing model, evoke associations with readers depending on the reception. This promotes the creativity and personality of both the writer and the reader.

By the 1940s, the Xuân Thu Nhã Tập group, including Nguyen Xuan Sanh and Han Mac Tu, put surreal images into poetry. Therefore, at the same time, many critics and poets were often afraid of the Xuân Thu Nhã Tập poetry group. However, looking back, compared to contemporary poets, along with Xuân Thu Nhã Tập, Han Mac Tu went even further in the art of poetry. Le Luu Oanh in the article “The Conception of Symbolic Art of the Xuân Thu and Dạ Đài Groups” also said, “Xuân Thu group, the creators of the poetic system and symbolism writers of Vietnam, passionately overcoming romanticism poetry towards a new kind of poetic composing. That enthusiasm is manifested in statements and the unique compositions with a sublime system of concepts, a new world of picturesque images and words”. (Lê, 2015, p. 104)

In the case of Vietnamese New Poetry, the romanticism trend left a bolder impression than symbolism and surrealism. It can be said that symbolism and surrealism just sprung up in the Vietnamese New Poetry movement with a few compositions by Nguyen Xuan Sanh, Doan Phu Tu, Bich Khe, Han Mac Tu, and the Dạ Đài group. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement also made an effort to build a dialogue between Western literary movements and national poetry traditions. However, symbolist and surrealist poetry in Vietnam have not yet developed as strongly and have not attracted literary artists as is the case in Japan. This is a pity because the modernization time of poetry was too short (only about 15 years) with the unfavorable conditions of history. However, the achievements of the symbolist and surrealist poets of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement are still respected and being continued and developed by poets of the next generation such as Vi Thuy Linh and Mai Van Phan.

3. CHARACTERISTICS AND PROPERTIES OF THE POETRY MODERNIZATION PROCESS IN VIETNAM IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

3.1. Exchange and absorption of Western literary patterns

From the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, the East Asian literary region stepped out of the Chinese literary sphere and absorbed Western models. It can be said that this was a large and comprehensive integration of the East Asian literary region. Although this process of exchange and contact was sometimes

forced, sometimes self-conscious, remarkable results were achieved in the modernization of literary culture in the East Asian literary region. Moreover, the East Asian literary region also integrated and caught up with the trends of modern world literature after a long period of medieval literature.

Not long before that, in the 1889 poem “The Ballad of East and West” by R. Kipling, who was awarded the 1907 Nobel Prize in literature, there was a saying “East is East, West is West” (Phan, 2006, p. 5). By the early twentieth century, the exchange and absorption of Western literary models in the East Asian literary arena proved the opposite. The process of interaction resulted in the gradual erasing of boundaries between the East and West, between the European cultural center and the periphery of Asia. Researcher Phan Trong Thuong in “Towards Scientific Explanations of Vietnamese Literature in the Context of International Exchange and Integration,” affirms the positive effects of this exchange and learning process, “Through exchanges, contact, national literature and cultures have opportunities to promote their influence, absorb, and enrich their spiritual inheritance; just have the opportunity to join and accompany the general process of world literature” (Phan, 2006, p. 5).

For Vietnam, the exchange and absorption of Western literary models was a great turning point both historically and culturally. Vietnamese literature completely broke off from the Chinese literature model that dominated and influenced it for nearly ten centuries. Vietnam is also the only East Asian country that uses a Latin-derived script instead of using or improving the system of Chinese ideograms as in China, Japan, and Korea. In the first stage of modernization, this also caused many difficulties for both the writer and the reader. However, with the advantages of being easy to learn, read, and write, the Vietnamese script is one of the important factors contributing to the success of Vietnam's literary modernization in the first half of the twentieth century. However, Vietnamese literature still faced many obstacles in the modernization process. In the article “Looking Back on the History of Exchanges with Modern Western Literature from the Innovation,” Phong Le summarized the difficulties of Vietnamese literature in the first stage of modernization:

The reception of Western influences on the basis of backward feudal society sealed for thousands of years, subject to the imposition of colonialism cannot be an active reception to become trends, literary school stems from the very inner, endogenous needs of development. In the early period of the transfer of historical role from the generation of clerical scholars in the Cần Vương movement to the innovation Confucian, all contact with the West had to cross China's Tân Thu bridge. It is not until a generation of intellectuals with Western education is formed, or combining Confucianism with Western studies, the contact has a direct path. (Phong, 2007, p. 53)

The path of modernization of Vietnamese literature began with poetry around the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century with revolutionary Confucians, such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, and then Tan Da. These Confucians began and encouraged the composition of poetry in Vietnamese script, a solid building block for the

Vietnamese New Poetry movement later on. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement is not only one of the outstanding literary phenomena but also a historical phenomenon. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement began with poems by Phan Khoi, Nguyen Thi Manh Manh, and then The Lu, followed by a large force of young, dynamic, and enthusiastic poets. The young Western-oriented intellectuals studied with open minds, eager to accept all theories and ideological trends from the West. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement absorbed quite quickly and fully Western intellectual movements from classicism and romanticism to symbolism and trendy surrealism. Generations of poets relied on each other on the way to absorb and adopt modern Western literary trends.

After all, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement was the result of the exchange and study of Western literary models. The new script used Latin characters, although unfamiliar, the New Poetry poets built up a vocabulary system about individuals with levels of emotions and feelings, as well as contemporary confessions. Along with that, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement was influenced by such Western poetry movements as romanticism, symbolism, and surrealism. Basically, romanticism left the deepest mark on the Vietnamese New Poetry movement. It was romanticism that took on the mission of launching as well as guiding the main flow of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement. Most New Poetry poets were influenced by the trend of romanticism from the beginning to the end. They include The Lu, Luu Trong Lu, Vu Dinh Lien, Lan Son, Thanh Tinh, Thuc Te, Huy Thong to Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Han Mac Tu, Te Hanh, Yen Lan, Doan Van Cu, Anh Tho, Che Lan Vien, Bich Khe, and finally Nguyen Binh, Nguyen Nhuoc Phap, Vu Hoang Chuong, Nguyen Dinh Thu, Dong Ho, Mong Tuyet, and others.

Besides, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement also adopted the later trends of Western literature, such as symbolism and surrealism. The New Poetry poets made every effort to transform old poems and build a new system of poems in addition trying to update new thought trends. With the French capital of the Western intellectual force, the adoption of Western intellectual movements happened very quickly and vigorously. Moreover, the New Poetry poets were quite active and quick in the process of exchanging and receiving these new ideological currents. Although the symbolism and surrealism movements only sprung up in the Vietnamese New Poetry movement, it also left a clear mark on the poems of poets such as Han Mac Tu, Doan Phu Tu, Nguyen Xuan Sanh, and Bich Khe. These are not only the achievements of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement but also the foundation for the poetry of the later stages, especially after 1986.

The Vietnamese New Poetry movement in particular, as well as Vietnamese literature in general, faced many difficulties and obstacles in the first half of the twentieth century, but it also knew how to take advantage of opportunities and favorable conditions to exchange and receive literary models from the West. Dang Thanh Le in his article on "Vietnamese Literature and the Journey of Regional and International Cultural Exchange," said that accomplishing that achievement was largely due to the historical sense of the nation:

Cultural exchange in political unequal relations when the country becomes a colony of big countries, or faces long-standing cultures with international stature,

advanced science, it is not a simple thing. The reception of cultural values of all humanity, including cultures of major countries, can only achieve good results when the nation has a deep historical sense, an open and tolerant spirit, a developed intellectual stature, a tradition prone to creativity. (Đặng, 2006, p. 80)

With the open and creative spirit of the composing force, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement received the seeds of thought from the West and nurtured the nutrient-rich land of poetic tradition. The great achievements of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement are not only significant in the historical process of literature but were also a phenomenon that influenced Vietnamese culture and society in the first half of the twentieth century. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement marked the severance as well as the emergence from the sphere of Chinese literature and the catching up with the world literary trend.

3.2. Exchange with the East Asian literary region

Unlike Japan, both Vietnam and China started the modern era with the opening gunshots of Western colonial warfare. The similarity among East Asian countries is that during the modern era there were reform campaigns with an innovation movement to protect and reform the country. One of the chosen ways to innovate society as well as modernize culture is exchanging and absorbing foreign ideological trends. In the article “Literary Translation–The Dialogue Between Cultures,” Nguyen Dinh Vinh said that countries must perform two tasks at the same time, “The cultures, during in their development process, must always be the implementation of two tasks, that is to maintain the traditional features and absorb external elements to innovate” (Nguyễn, 2005, p. 97). In the process of modernization, in addition to the parallel implementation of these two tasks, Vietnamese literature also exchanged with and learned from the East Asian literary region. Because of the influence of the West on Vietnam in two ways: directly from the French–Vietnamese educational system through French literature, and indirectly from the Tân Thư to the Chinese literature. The direct path from the French literature helped the intellectual generation to get in touch with the archetypes of Western culture and to quickly catch up with the world's trends. The indirect path for the scholars was from the Confucians trained in the feudal department. The indirect path, although receiving influence through the Japanese or Chinese cultural environment, also brought positive effects. The Confucian class, who understood Chinese characters, could also come into contact with Western ideological currents. Moreover, as modernization began, the Confucian class played a very important role in initiating and fostering the national spirit in the absorption of Western culture. The Confucians, who were familiar with Chinese culture, now turned to the Vietnamese script (Latin characters) with modern vocabulary classes as well as renewing ideas and concepts. This had a great significance as well as a strong impact on the process of social innovation and cultural modernization in Vietnam in the first half of the twentieth century. It can be said that Vietnamese literature in the first half of the twentieth century not only focused on receiving ideological trends from the West but also understood the importance of regional exchanges.

Previously, medieval Vietnamese literature was influenced by Chinese literature and was considered to be on the periphery of Chinese literature. However, by the first half of the twentieth century, modern Vietnamese literature had stepped out of the periphery and entered a parallel relationship with Chinese literature. Moreover, Vietnamese literature also changed as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean literature changed in literary form due to the influence of Western literature. Although modernization began at different times in each country, Vietnam's modern literature escaped the literary pattern of Chinese characters. It can be seen that, through the New Poetry movement, Vietnamese literature also received most of the Western trends from romanticism, symbolism, and surrealism, like other countries in East Asia. In comparing the Vietnamese New Poetry movement with that of Korea, Le Dang Hoan said, "Although new Vietnamese poetry was born more than twenty years later than Korea, it was influenced by foreign new poetry and more, that was the time when the poets of the two countries felt they had to go beyond the binding framework of traditional poetry in terms of form as well as the assertion of the individual role, the ego in poetry" (Lê, 2014, p. 129).

The Vietnamese New Poetry movement also accomplished many outstanding achievements that can be compared with the modernization movements of poetry in East Asia. Evidence is that many researchers have pointed out similarities between the Vietnamese New Poetry movement and China's New Moon poetry group, poets Nguyễn Bính and Kim So-wol, Han Mac Tu and Han Yong-un of Korea, and the New Poetry movement of Japan and the New Poetry movement of Vietnam. This proves the parallel relationship between modern Vietnamese literature and other literatures in East Asia. When comparing with the case of Chinese culture, Dinh Phan Cam Van, in his article "Some Similarities Between New Moon Group Poetry and the Vietnamese New Poetry Movement," stated that Vietnamese literature has gone beyond the regional relationship:

In the middle ages, Vietnam was located in the diffusion field of Chinese civilization. Borrowing and receiving Vietnamese literature from Chinese literature has created meetings and similarities. Entering the modern period, the similar phenomenon of literature of the two countries was concurrent, within the rule of the literature from the middle ages to the modern period. The unique common point of the two countries' literature is to go beyond regional relations and enter the trajectory of international literature. (Đinh, 2011, p. 65)

Although the Vietnamese New Poetry movement did not have enough conditions and time to thrive like Japanese surrealism poetry with its unique indigenous nuances, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement approached the world literary trend with the agility, creativity, and the relentless efforts of many generations of poets. On the basis of exchanging and receiving Western thought, modern Vietnamese literature has stepped out of the periphery and moved to a parallel position with other countries in East Asia. The Vietnamese New Poetry movement can be compared with other modernization movements of East Asian poetry, such as the New Poetic form of Japan, the New Moon group of China, and the Korean New Poetry. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement started later and ended early due to historical conditions. However, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement made efforts and accomplished respected

achievements in the modern literary process. Moreover, with the companion position with other countries in the region, Vietnam's modern literature has the conditions to step away from regional influences.

3.3. Dialogue and localization

Up to the first half of the twentieth century, Vietnamese literature had undergone two major cultural integrations. The first was a cultural exchange and acculturation with two major Asian civilizations, India and China. Vietnamese literature achieved many remarkable achievements during nearly ten centuries of medieval literature. However, in this period Vietnamese literature was peripheral around the center of Chinese literature. Basically, Vietnamese literature mostly absorbed the pattern of Chinese literature from poetry to prose. However, medieval Vietnamese literature also recognized the creation and incorporation of national traditions into poetry, such as six- and eight-word poetic forms, and using folk literature. The second cultural integration was to receive and study the Western literary model through France. At this time, Vietnamese literature stepped away from East Asian literature and gradually approached world literature. Vietnamese literature in the first half of the twentieth century had to get rid of the old, update the new, and build a system of poetics and aesthetic concepts. Vietnamese literature not only absorbed Western ideological currents but also promoted traditional internal strengths through localization and nationalization tendencies. This proves the ability of the composing force and proves the strength of the internal force of Vietnamese literature.

Although the Vietnamese New Poetry produced the process of learning and absorbing the model of Western thought, it is still localized and nationalized. In the Vietnamese New Poetry, there are two lines of poetry influenced by the Tang poetic style and Vietnamese poetry keeping the national literary identity. Nguyen Thanh Tam in “The New Poetry—An Interpretation from ‘History—Growth Process Studies’” also said that the New Poetry movement still retains the source of the national tradition:

There are also two underground circuits that always persistently flow in the blood of Vietnamese people, which are the traditional folklore and “spiritual memory” during the exchange with China. All are converged in the spirit of New Poetry, making a difference in the direction of modernization but not “wasted” with traditional values that have become the essence. In a comprehensive view of the birth history of a new art form, the internal force is an important source of energy. (Nguyễn, 2012, p. 105)

In the atmosphere of Western literature, many new poets still come back to the Tang poetic style even though they are young westernized intellectuals. Tang poetic style was still a smoldering, but powerful source of Vietnamese poetry in the context of modernization in the first half of the twentieth century. The first was poet J. Leiba in 1934 with the poem “Last year” (“Năm qua”) in a renaissance of the Tang poetic style, but expressing the heart of the individual person of the era:

Hôm qua em đến mái đông lân,

*Cô gái khâu thêu về ngại ngần.
Tơ lụa bộn bề quần áo cưới,
Vội vàng cho khách kịp ngày xuân.
Duyên mình hờ hững hộ duyên ai
Cô gái đông lân đáng ngậm ngùi
Ngán nỗi năm năm đưa chi thắm,
Phòng không may áo cưới cho người!...*

(“Last year” J. Leiba)
(Hoài & Hoài, 1999, p. 234)

After Leiba, there were quite a few poets who tried to compete with the Tang poetic style, for example Thái Can (“Scene is Here, Where You Are,” “Cảnh đó người đâu”), Do Huy Nhiem (“Solitary,” “Đìu hiu”), Van Dai (“The Night Sound,” “Tiếng đêm”), Luu Ky Linh (“Waiting,” “Đợi chờ”), Phan Khắc Khoan (“Far-out,” “Xa xa”), Tham Tam (“The Farewell Song,” “Tống biệt hành”), and Dong Ho (“The Spring Girl,” “Cô gái xuân”). The most successful with this style of poetry was Quach Tan with volumes of poems from *One Heart* (1939) to *The Classic Season* (1941).

*Giác thắm tình duyên non gói nước,
Màn sương để lọt ánh sao băng.
Hồn hoa chợ mộng thom hồn gió;
Tóc liễu dùng thơ đón tóc trắng.
Muôn điệu tơ lòng run sẽ sẽ,
Nửa vời sóng nhạc dọn láng lâng.
Phòng hương thương kẻ ngời nương triện,
Tình gửi mây xa lệ ngập ngừng.*

(“The Love Night,” tập “Mùa cổ điển,”
Quach Tan) (Hoài & Hoài, 1999)

The Vietnamese New Poetry not only modernized poetry in a stereotypical way of Western literature, but also attempted to localize, or more specifically, to Vietnamese-ize. Besides the branch of poetry influenced by the Tang poetry style and the branch of poetry influenced by the West, localized Vietnamese poetry also attracted many poets.

Led by Luu Trong Lu, a separate direction for the New Poetry movement was created under the influence of Western literature. Luu Trong Lu's poetry easily expressed the sad mood of the young generation of Vietnamese intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century.

*Mỗi lần nắng mới hắt bên song,
Xao xác, gà trưa gáy náo nùng,
Lòng rười buồn theo thời dĩ vãng,
Chập chờn sống lại những ngày không.*

(“The New Sunshine,” Luu Trong Lu)
(Hoài & Hoài, 1999, p. 288)

This localized Vietnamese poetry often has idyllic and closeness poems, according to Hoài Thanh in “The Vietnamese Poets”, “They have little influence on each other and also have little influence on modern poetry. Their poems are eternal, not short-term. And they are less dependent on Western prestige” (Hoài & Hoài, 1999, p. 35). However, there were only a few poets following this trend, such as Phan Van Dat (“Farewell,” “Tiễn đưa”), Nguyen Nhuoc Phap (“Hương Pagoda,” “Chùa Hương”), Nguyen Binh (“Falling in Love,” “Tương tư”), Nguyen Dinh Thu (“To Afternoon,” “Đến chiều”), and Vu Hoang Chuong (“Get Drunk, Honey,” “Say đi em”). In addition, localized Vietnamese poetry can also be found in the poems of Dong Ho, Nguyen Xuan Huy, Thuc Te, Nguyen Vy, T. T. Kh, Hang Phuong, Mong Huyen, and Tran Huyen Tran.

*Nhà em cách bốn quả đồi,
Cách ba ngọn suối, cách đôi cánh rừng;
Nhà em xa cách quá chừng,
Em van anh đấy, anh đừng thương em*

(“Far-off,” Nguyen Binh)
(Hoài & Hoài, 1999, p. 349)

With the branch of poetry influenced by the West, the poets advocated accepting the symbolism and surrealism trends, the two trends having many similarities with East Asian literature. The Vietnamese New Poets also made an effort to use poetic images, and indigenous and ethnic languages as well as the emotions of the young generation of Vietnam in the first half of the twentieth century. Poets such as Han Mac Tu, Bich Khe, Nguyen Xuan Sanh, Doan Phu Tu, the Xuân Thu Nhã Tập group, and the Dạ Đài group were also aiming for this purpose when they adopted the symbolism and surrealism movements. For example, the poet Bich Khe is one of the few poets influenced by symbolism and surrealism. However, Le Hoai Nam said that Bich Khe tried to nationalize

this poetic style, “However, while moving strongly towards the West, Bich Khe still maintains closeness and durable relationships with traditional cultural and literary traditions of the East and the nation” (Lê, 2006, p. 54).

Besides the styles of poetry influenced by the West, the two styles of poetry influenced by the Tang poetry style and Vietnamization contributed to modernize and nationalize modern Vietnamese poetry in the first half of the twentieth century. Critic Thanh (Hoài & Hoài, 1999) said that the Vietnamese New Poetry movement was a daring experiment to re-evaluate traditional values as the seven- and five-word poetic forms were reformed and became popular, Ca trù was transformed into an eight-word poetic form, the six- and eight-word poetic forms are still respected, and the four- and six-word poetic forms are also much used.

It can be said that the Vietnamese New Poetry movement pioneered the mission of modernization of culture and society. In addition, the Vietnamese literature in the first half of the twentieth century is also placed in the context of receiving the trend of foreign ideas but not losing indigenous nuances. Although, the Vietnamese New Poetry was the product of foreign ideological movements, the reality shows that it took a great effort to acquire enough Western knowledge to be able to modernize and preserve identity. In the article “The New Poetry—An Interpretation From ‘History—Growth Process Studies,’” Nguyen Thanh Tam analyzed modernized poetry in early twentieth century Vietnam as a result of a process with the participation of many external causes as well as internal movements:

However, in our opinion, to move towards modernization, close to the West and the world, Vietnam's modern literature (and many other countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia) need there must be an external irritation. This division actually expresses the mechanization of thinking, in fact, the external and internal force have merged into each other in a marriage that is both brutally painful but also very wonderful and necessary. Since then, the modern era appeared as an “indispensable” product of history. New literary form is an expression of it. (Nguyễn, 2012, p. 105)

In the process of modernizing poetry as well as literature in general, Vietnam has made many remarkable achievements as well as accumulated a lot of experience when exchanging, absorbing, and studying foreign literary models. From the periphery of Chinese literature, Vietnamese literature has promoted a comprehensive modernization. Despite a short period of time, Vietnamese literature has had a landmark change. Vietnamese literature in the process of modernization was able to both absorb and select the seeds suitable for nutrients to accomplish great achievements as well as to have a long-term and sustainable development. Phan Trong Thuong has summarized the following:

Looking back at the history of Vietnamese literature and culture, we can see that the process of contact and exchange has brought about great changes and transformations in the structure and quality of the literature. Due to the refusing

ability, we keep the national culture in the long and fierce conflict of history; however, there is a time that we did not deny, we acquire preeminent values and essences from the object to practice in the spirit of tolerance and peace. After thousands of years of exposure to the North, hundreds of years of exposure to the West, Vietnamese culture and literature have demonstrated the ability to purify and adapt: the ability to remain constant (static) and the ability to self-transform (dynamic) to survive and grow. With that quality, Vietnamese culture and literature are both deeply rooted in the national land, and constantly expanding under new sources of light and nutrients to constantly flourish and multiply. (Phan, 2006, p. 5)

4. CONCLUSIONS

The process of modernization of culture as well as the New Poetry movement in Vietnam is a journey full of challenges. Despite the unfavorable conditions of the historical and political context, Vietnamese literature took advantage of the direct absorption of Western culture through French colonialism as well as remaining closely attached to the East Asian literature region. Therefore, Vietnamese New Poetry, as a poetry innovation movement, formed and developed quickly at that time. Moreover, Vietnamese New Poetry, along with East Asia poetry, was to join with the world to complete the appearance of a number of literary trends such as symbolism and surrealism. Therefore, the role of the East Asian literary region in the process of forming and developing the Vietnamese New Poetry movement cannot be denied. In addition to directly receiving the Western literary model through France, Vietnamese literature also indirectly received influence through the East Asian literary environment. This contributed to the formation of the unique identity of the New Poetry movement in the Vietnamese literary environment by reconciling both Western modernity and Eastern traditions. It can be seen that Vietnamese New Poetry had the advantage of a close connection with the East Asian literary area in the process of modernizing according to Western models in the first half of the twentieth century.

Firstly, by the first half of the twentieth century, Vietnamese literature had gotten rid of the domination of Chinese literature. In particular, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement was deeply influenced by the Western literary model from romanticism to symbolism and surrealism. The New Vietnamese poetry also gradually shifted from conveying emotions to an inspiring model, updating along with the world's literary trends. Unlike China and Korea, Vietnam adopted the Western literary model directly through the motherland of French colonialism and indirectly through Japan. Therefore, it can be said that the Vietnamese New Poetry movement is the result of an acquisition process from the West and the literary exchange in East Asia.

Secondly, although the Vietnamese New Poetry movement developed later than those of other regional countries, it also adopted most Western literary trends, such as romanticism, symbolism, and surrealism. Moreover, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement also achieved remarkable accomplishments and played an important role in the literary process of Vietnam in the first half of the twentieth century. It can be said that,

with these achievements, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement also contributed to the modernization of poetry in the first half of the twentieth century along with other countries in East Asian literature. In addition, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement, together with the poetry innovation movement in other countries in the East Asian literary region, was shaped by Western literary trends at that time, such as symbolism and surrealism.

Thirdly, it can be said that the Vietnamese New Poetry can be seen as a piece of the East Asian poetry movement in the first half of the twentieth century. However, the Vietnamese New Poetry movement was also the result of the process of regional exchange, acquiring Western models and combining the internal force of traditional national literature. The evidence is that the Vietnamese New Poetry movement had three main styles of poetry, including the nationalization of poetry. Through this, it is possible to draw lessons learned. In the process of literary development, it is always necessary to perform two tasks simultaneously: one is to maintain traditional features, and the other is to absorb external elements to innovate.

In the current globalization context, Vietnamese literature needs more effort to approach the world trend. However, Vietnamese literature still needs to pay attention and have a close connection with the East Asian literary region. Not only absorbing artistic thoughts, but also Vietnamese literature should exchange experiences in composing as well as literary research. Especially, at present, countries in East Asia, such as China, Japan, and Korea, have a very strong influence on Vietnam through literature, cinema, and other cultural forms. Therefore, to update world literature trends, Vietnamese literature also needs to pay attention to closely related East Asian literature. Currently, Vietnamese literature has received many new trends in composition, criticism, and research from the East Asia region and the world, such as feminism, gender criticism, ecological criticism, etc. Based on the experiences of modernization of culture in general and the Vietnamese New Poetry movement in the first half of the twentieth century, Vietnamese literature should first use traditional internal forces, then promote learning and gaining experience from countries in the East Asia region and the world.

From the relationship of the Vietnamese New Poetry movement to East Asian poetry, it can be seen that learning and absorbing foreign ideas should be considered in many aspects, such as the foreign context (the impact of Western thought), the traditional internal force (the literary potential of each country), and the regional perspective (the exchange of learning between countries in the region).

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