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TRAN MINH HAU

**CULTURAL IMPRINTS OF SOUTHERN VIETNAM
IN THE PROSE OF BINH NGUYEN LOC**

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**SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION IN
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INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for the Study

Vietnamese culture is a unified whole in diversity, formed through a long historical process with contributions from various cultural regions, among which Southern Vietnam occupies a distinctive position. This region emerged relatively late through the southward expansion and land reclamation process from the seventeenth century onward. It is characterized by the convergence and interaction of various cultural traditions, including Vietnamese, Khmer, Chinese, and Cham cultures, which have shaped distinctive regional values such as openness, generosity, solidarity, and adaptability to the natural environment.

In modern literary studies, cultural approaches have increasingly attracted scholarly attention because literature is not merely an artistic product but also an important medium for reflecting and preserving the cultural values of a community. As creative subjects, writers are profoundly influenced by the cultural environment in which they were born and with which they have long been associated.

Within the development of Southern Vietnamese literature, Binh Nguyen Loc is recognized as one of the most representative writers, with an extensive and valuable literary legacy. His prose not only portrays the lives of Southern Vietnamese people but also vividly reconstructs various aspects of regional culture, including customs, beliefs, language, and everyday life. Consequently, his works constitute an important source for the study of Southern Vietnamese culture.

However, despite considerable research on Binh Nguyen Loc, there has not yet been a comprehensive and systematic study devoted to the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam throughout his prose. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to fill this research gap while further affirming the literary and cultural values embodied in his works.

2. Research Subjects and Scope

2.1. Research Subject

The dissertation investigates the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam in the prose of Binh Nguyen Loc from two perspectives: thematic content and artistic representation. It aims to clarify how the writer reconstructs and expresses the cultural identity of Southern Vietnam through his literary works.

2.2. Research Scope

The dissertation examines forty-three representative works by Binh Nguyen Loc, including thirty-five short stories, three essays, and five novels collected in *The Collected Works of Binh Nguyen Loc* (four volumes), compiled and introduced by Nguyen Q. Thang (Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002). These selected works vividly represent various aspects of Southern Vietnamese culture, including ecological space, customs, beliefs, regional language, and the material and spiritual life of Southern inhabitants.

In addition, the dissertation consults other literary works, previous studies, and related reference materials to support comparative analysis and further clarify the research issues.

3. Research Objectives

3.1. General Objective

The dissertation aims to clarify the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam in the prose of Binh Nguyen Loc from both thematic and artistic perspectives. It thereby identifies the cultural, ideological, and artistic values of his works while affirming the role of literature in preserving and promoting the cultural identity of Southern Vietnam within the development of modern Vietnamese literature.

3.2. Specific Objectives

- To identify and systematize the manifestations of Southern Vietnamese culture in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose in terms of material

culture, spiritual culture, and artistic representation.

- To analyze the roles of Southern Vietnamese cultural elements in shaping the ideological content and artistic style of the author.

- To clarify the artistic representation of Southern Vietnamese cultural identity through systems of symbols, language, and narrative tone.

- To evaluate Binh Nguyen Loc's contributions to the representation, preservation, and promotion of Southern Vietnamese cultural identity, thereby affirming his position in modern Vietnamese literature.

4. Research Methods

The dissertation employs the following principal research methods:

- *Historical - social method*: situating Binh Nguyen Loc's prose within the historical, social, and cultural context of Southern Vietnam in order to explain the formation and representation of cultural values in his works.

- *Comparative method*: comparing his works with those of selected Southern Vietnamese writers to highlight the distinctive characteristics of his representation of Southern Vietnamese culture.

- *Analytical-synthetic method*: analyzing cultural manifestations in terms of both content and artistic expression, then synthesizing and systematizing the findings to identify the major characteristics and values of Southern Vietnamese cultural imprints in his prose.

- *Typological method*: examining the representation of Southern Vietnamese culture across different prose genres, including short stories, novels, and essays.

- *Biographical criticism*: interpreting the author's works in relation to his life, living environment, and creative career.

In addition, the dissertation adopts cultural studies,

interdisciplinary studies, and poetics as its major theoretical approaches. Regional culture serves as the principal theoretical framework, while geo-cultural studies function as a complementary approach to interpreting the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose.

5. Contributions of the Dissertation

To provide a comprehensive cultural portrait of Binh Nguyen Loc, highlighting his role in representing and preserving Southern Vietnamese cultural identity.

To propose an interdisciplinary approach combining cultural studies and literary studies, thereby contributing to the methodology of modern Vietnamese literary research.

To systematically identify the manifestations of Southern Vietnamese culture in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose, enriching both research materials and approaches to regional literary studies.

To provide valuable reference materials for the research and teaching of Southern Vietnamese literature as well as modern Vietnamese literature in general.

6. Structure of the Dissertation

Besides the Introduction and Conclusion, the dissertation consists of four chapters:

- *Chapter 1*: Overview of Theoretical Foundations and Research History

- *Chapter 2*: Binh Nguyen Loc in the Context of Southern Vietnamese Literature and Culture

- *Chapter 3*: Cultural Imprints of Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose from the Perspective of Content

- *Chapter 4*: Cultural Imprints of Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose from the Perspective of Artistic Representation

CONTENT

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Overview of the Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Conceptual Framework

The dissertation establishes several fundamental concepts, including culture, regional culture, and cultural region. Drawing upon the theories of E.B. Tylor, UNESCO, Ho Chi Minh, Tran Ngoc Them, Tran Quoc Vuong, Ngo Duc Thinh, and other scholars, culture is approached as a system of material and spiritual values created, accumulated, and transmitted by human beings through their interaction with nature and society. This concept serves as the theoretical foundation for identifying cultural values reflected in literary works.

The dissertation also clarifies the concepts of regional culture and cultural region, considering them essential theoretical bases for investigating the cultural identity of Southern Vietnam. Based on these concepts, Binh Nguyen Loc's prose is examined as a literary space that preserves and represents the distinctive cultural values of Southern Vietnam. In addition, geo-cultural studies are employed as a supplementary approach to explain the relationship between geographical space, historical conditions, social life, and the formation of regional cultural identity in the writer's works.

1.1.2. Theoretical Foundations for Identifying Cultural Identity

The dissertation applies several theoretical approaches, including geo-cultural studies, cultural anthropology, cultural exchange and acculturation, and cultural coordinates, to interpret the manifestations of Southern Vietnamese culture in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose.

Geo-cultural studies are employed to explain the relationship between the natural environment and cultural life; cultural anthropology is used

to identify both the material and spiritual values of Southern Vietnamese communities; the theory of cultural exchange and acculturation helps explain the formation and transformation of Southern Vietnamese cultural identity; while cultural coordinates provide a framework for identifying the spatial, temporal, and cultural contexts of the research subject.

Accordingly, the dissertation primarily approaches Binh Nguyen Loc's prose from the perspective of regional culture, while employing the above theoretical approaches as complementary analytical tools to clarify the formation, development, and representation of Southern Vietnamese cultural identity in his literary works.

1.2. Literary Studies from a Cultural Perspective

1.2.1. The Relationship between Culture and Literature

Culture and literature share a dialectical relationship. Culture provides the value system and creative resources for literature, whereas literature reflects, preserves, and disseminates cultural values.

Elements such as beliefs, customs, language, and ways of life represented in literary works are manifestations of culture. Therefore, a cultural approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of literary texts.

1.2.2. Literary Studies from a Cultural Perspective

The cultural approach to literary studies has increasingly attracted scholarly attention through the integration of cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and poetics.

This approach extends literary analysis beyond the text itself to its broader cultural and social contexts, while emphasizing the writer's role as a cultural subject. It is particularly appropriate for the study of regional literature, where cultural characteristics are prominently expressed.

1.2.3. The Cultural and Literary Context of Southern Vietnam

Southern Vietnam is a relatively new cultural region formed through the historical process of land reclamation and settlement. It is characterized by cultural diversity resulting from the interaction of different ethnic communities. Southern Vietnamese culture is distinguished by openness, generosity, solidarity, and a close relationship with the riverine environment.

Within this context, Southern Vietnamese literature developed its own distinctive characteristics, vividly reflecting the life and mentality of the people in this newly established region. Binh Nguyen Loc is one of the representative writers who made significant contributions to preserving and representing the cultural identity of Southern Vietnam.

1.3. Literature Review

1.3.1. Literary Studies from a Cultural Perspective

Numerous studies have confirmed the close relationship between literature and culture, regarding literature as a form of cultural expression. This research orientation has enriched literary methodology and broadened perspectives on literary interpretation.

1.3.2. Studies on Binh Nguyen Loc

Previous studies on Binh Nguyen Loc have mainly focused on his life, literary career, and artistic style. Although some scholars have discussed cultural aspects in his works, no comprehensive and systematic investigation has yet been conducted.

1.3.3. Studies on Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose

Several studies have examined aspects such as ecological culture, customs, beliefs, and the Southern Vietnamese language in Binh Nguyen Loc's writings. However, these studies remain fragmented and lack a comprehensive cultural approach.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical framework and reviews

previous studies relevant to the dissertation. Based on this foundation, the dissertation confirms the necessity of approaching Binh Nguyen Loc's prose from a cultural perspective while identifying the existing research gap concerning the Southern Vietnamese cultural imprints throughout his prose. These theoretical and practical foundations provide the basis for the analyses presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2: BINH NGUYEN LOC IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTHERN VIETNAMESE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

2.1. Binh Nguyen Loc: Life, Literary Career, and Artistic Conception

2.1.1. *Life*

Binh Nguyen Loc developed as a writer within the distinctive historical and social context of twentieth-century Southern Vietnam, a period marked by profound political, cultural, and social transformations. Born and raised in Southern Vietnam, he had direct access to the everyday life, customs, traditions, and cultural environment of the local people.

His rich life experiences and deep attachment to his homeland fostered a strong cultural consciousness, which became the foundation of his literary creation. His life and living environment not only provided the background for his works but also served as the primary source of inspiration for the artistic world depicted in his prose.

2.1.2. *Literary Career*

Binh Nguyen Loc produced an extensive literary oeuvre encompassing various genres, including short stories, novels, essays, and memoirs, reflecting diverse aspects of Southern Vietnamese life.

His writings go beyond depicting social reality to reconstruct cultural values such as customs, beliefs, spiritual life, everyday practices, and regional language.

The distinctive features of his literary career include:

- Realistic representation of everyday life;
- Profound regional cultural consciousness;
- Rich documentary value concerning Southern Vietnamese folk culture.

Consequently, his prose possesses not only significant artistic value but also serves as a valuable repository of Southern Vietnamese

culture.

2.1.3. Artistic Conception

Binh Nguyen Loc's artistic conception is closely associated with his awareness of regional cultural identity. He regarded literature not only as a means of reflecting life but also as an effective medium for preserving and transmitting cultural values.

His literary practice emphasizes:

- Portraying human beings in relation to their natural and social environments;
- Reconstructing cultural life through ordinary details of everyday existence;
- Employing simple, natural language enriched with regional characteristics.

This artistic conception reflects a cultural approach to literature and contributes significantly to his distinctive position in Southern Vietnamese prose.

2.2. Binh Nguyen Loc and Modern Southern Vietnamese Literature

2.2.1. An Overview of the Development of Modern Southern Vietnamese Literature

Modern Southern Vietnamese literature emerged in the early twentieth century under the influence of East–West cultural exchange, the development of the Vietnamese national script (Quoc Ngu), and the rapid expansion of journalism. It gradually established its own identity through the contributions of writers such as Truong Vinh Ky, Nguyen Chanh Sat, Ho Bieu Chanh, Binh Nguyen Loc, Son Nam, Ly Van Sam, and Doan Gioi.

Throughout its development - from urban literature and revolutionary literature to the post-Renovation period - Southern Vietnamese literature has vividly reflected the social and historical

realities as well as the distinctive cultural values of Southern Vietnam.

Within this literary tradition, Binh Nguyen Loc stands out as one of the representative writers distinguished by his profound awareness of regional culture. His prose not only depicts social reality but also preserves, reconstructs, and shapes Southern Vietnamese cultural values through ecological settings, customs, beliefs, language, and human images. This provides the foundation for the dissertation's investigation of Southern Vietnamese cultural imprints in his prose.

2.2.2. Southern Vietnamese Prose in Modern Vietnamese Literature

Southern Vietnamese prose occupies an important position in modern Vietnamese literature with several distinctive characteristics:

- Authentic representation of social life and human experience;
- Strong regional identity;
- Simple, natural language with prominent colloquial features;
- Vivid portrayal of the psychology and personality of Southern Vietnamese people.

Southern Vietnamese prose has enriched the diversity of modern Vietnamese literature while affirming the significance of regional literature in expressing cultural identity.

2.2.3. Binh Nguyen Loc in the Development of Modern Southern Vietnamese Prose

Within the tradition of Southern Vietnamese prose, Binh Nguyen Loc occupies a distinctive position through his harmonious integration of literary tradition and modernity.

While inheriting the realist spirit of earlier Southern writers, he developed his own artistic approach by incorporating cultural elements into the very structure of his literary works. His prose goes beyond representing everyday life to explore the deeper dimensions of regional culture and collective consciousness.

These contributions have established Binh Nguyen Loc as one of

the most significant figures in the development of modern Southern Vietnamese prose.

2.3. Southern Vietnamese Culture from a Geo-cultural Perspective

2.3.1. An Overview of Southern Vietnam

Southern Vietnam was formed through the historical process of territorial expansion and settlement. It is characterized by a dense network of rivers and canals together with a rich ecological environment.

This natural setting has profoundly influenced not only the modes of livelihood but also the ways of thinking, lifestyles, and cultural values of Southern Vietnamese communities.

2.3.2. Characteristics of Southern Vietnamese Culture

Southern Vietnamese culture is distinguished by its diversity and flexibility resulting from the interaction of various cultural traditions.

Its principal **characteristics include:**

- Openness, generosity, and adaptability;
- Strong communal spirit and solidarity;
- A lifestyle closely connected with rivers and the natural environment;
- Regional language characterized by rich colloquial expressions;
- Harmonious integration of indigenous traditions and external cultural influences.

These characteristics collectively constitute the distinctive cultural identity of Southern Vietnam within the broader context of Vietnamese culture.

2.3.3. Binh Nguyen Loc within Southern Vietnamese Culture

Binh Nguyen Loc not only reflected Southern Vietnamese culture but also contributed significantly to its preservation and representation through his literary works.

His prose portrays Southern Vietnamese culture through various dimensions, including ecological settings, customs and traditions, spiritual life, language, and human images.

His literary works may therefore be regarded as a cultural discourse, through which the cultural values of Southern Vietnam are preserved, transformed, and disseminated in artistic form.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 examines the relationship between Binh Nguyen Loc and the literary and cultural context of Southern Vietnam. Through an analysis of his life, literary career, and artistic conception, the chapter demonstrates his profound attachment to the culture of Southern Vietnam.

Situating the writer within the historical development of Southern Vietnamese literature and culture not only clarifies his literary position but also provides the theoretical and contextual foundation for identifying and analyzing the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam in his prose in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL IMPRINTS OF SOUTHERN VIETNAM IN BINH NGUYEN LOC'S PROSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONTENT

3.1. Spiritual Cultural Imprints in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose

3.1.1. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Beliefs and Religions

Beliefs and religions are vividly represented in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose, reflecting the spiritual consciousness of Southern Vietnamese communities. Folk beliefs, including ancestor worship, the worship of deities, beliefs in the afterlife, spirits, ghosts, reincarnation, and karmic retribution, appear frequently throughout his works, demonstrating the enduring faith of local people in the supernatural world and traditional spiritual values.

These belief systems not only portray the spiritual life of Southern Vietnamese people but also reveal their ways of interpreting the world and adapting to the natural environment during the process of land reclamation. Faith in the spiritual realm, ancestral presence, and sacred forces contributes to shaping a worldview deeply rooted in folk culture.

Besides folk beliefs, Binh Nguyen Loc also depicts the presence of Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Cao Dai, as well as the interaction with Khmer and Chinese cultural traditions. This reflects the diversity, integration, and cultural acculturation characteristic of Southern Vietnamese religious life.

Beliefs and religions in his prose therefore function not merely as subjects of representation but also as important cultural codes that contribute to constructing his artistic world while expressing the moral values, lifestyles, and cultural identity of Southern Vietnamese communities.

3.1.2. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Customs and Traditions

Customs and traditions are richly portrayed in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose, vividly reflecting the cultural life and traditional practices of Southern Vietnamese people. Customs relating to marriage, funerals, ancestor worship, housewarming ceremonies, agricultural production, communal activities, and naming practices are naturally integrated into the narrative, contributing to the representation of Southern Vietnamese cultural identity.

These customs reveal not only everyday life but also the Southern Vietnamese perception of family, kinship, community, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Through life-cycle rituals, ancestral worship, settlement traditions, and productive activities, the author illustrates the formation of enduring cultural values in Southern Vietnam.

Furthermore, Binh Nguyen Loc vividly depicts popular culture through patterns of behavior, daily lifestyles, and social organization. Naming conventions, forms of address, and regional customs further highlight the generosity, solidarity, and strong communal spirit characteristic of Southern Vietnamese people.

Thus, customs and traditions become important cultural codes that preserve collective memory, affirm Southern Vietnamese cultural identity, and enrich the artistic world of the writer.

3.1.3. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Festivals

Festivals are portrayed as communal cultural spaces that reflect the spiritual life, beliefs, and identity of Southern Vietnamese communities. Traditional festivals such as the Ky Yen Festival, folk religious ceremonies, river worship rituals, the Ngo Boat Racing Festival of the Khmer people, and festive activities of the Chinese community are represented with their distinctive cultural

characteristics, creating a diverse panorama of Southern Vietnamese festival culture.

These festivals express people's faith in deities, ancestors, and nature while strengthening social bonds and preserving traditional cultural values. Through ritual practices, folk performances, and communal celebrations, Binh Nguyen Loc demonstrates the close relationship between cultural life, the riverine environment, and the historical process of settlement.

By portraying not only Vietnamese festivals but also those of the Khmer and Chinese communities, the writer highlights the cultural diversity and integration that characterize Southern Vietnam. Festivals therefore function as important cultural codes that affirm regional identity and enrich his artistic world.

3.2. Material Cultural Imprints in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose

3.2.1. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Culinary Culture

Culinary culture occupies an important place in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose, reflecting the formation, adaptation, and development of Southern Vietnamese communities. Local dishes, beverages, ingredients, cooking methods, eating customs, and family dining practices are vividly portrayed, contributing to the reconstruction of both the material and spiritual life of Southern Vietnamese people.

Food is associated not only with everyday life but also with festivals, Lunar New Year celebrations, ancestor worship, and important communal events. Family meals, banh tet, rustic dishes, and regional specialties symbolize reunion, hospitality, family affection, and attachment to one's homeland. At the same time, the incorporation of culinary traditions from different ethnic communities reflects the openness and cultural adaptability of Southern Vietnam.

Unlike many other Southern Vietnamese writers, Binh Nguyen

Loc explores not only the physical aspects of food but also the cultural meanings embedded in culinary practices. Culinary culture therefore becomes an important cultural code expressing Southern Vietnamese identity.

3.2.2. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Costume Culture

Costume culture is represented as an essential component of Southern Vietnamese material culture, reflecting natural conditions, working environments, lifestyles, and cultural interaction.

The ao ba ba appears prominently throughout his works as a symbol of simplicity, diligence, adaptability, and close attachment to the riverine environment. Meanwhile, the appearance of Western-style and urban clothing reflects the process of modernization and cultural exchange in Southern Vietnam during the mid-twentieth century. The contrast between traditional and modern costumes reveals changes in lifestyle, aesthetic values, and social consciousness.

Costumes function not merely as descriptions of physical appearance but also as cultural signs expressing social status, occupation, personality, and living environment. From a cultural perspective, they become important cultural codes that embody Southern Vietnamese identity.

3.2.3. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Transportation and Dwelling Culture

Transportation and dwelling culture vividly reflect the process of settlement and adaptation to the riverine environment of Southern Vietnam. Living spaces and means of transportation not only satisfy practical needs but also become distinctive cultural symbols contributing to regional identity.

Various forms of housing - including thatched cottages, floating houses, garden houses, urban residences, and villas illustrate both

environmental diversity and the transformation from newly reclaimed land to modern urban society. They demonstrate the adaptability of Southern Vietnamese people and their close relationship with nature and community.

Likewise, waterways, boats, ferries, riverside wharves, canals, roads, and modern transportation systems represent the social transformation associated with modernization. Transportation functions not merely as a means of mobility but also as a symbol of territorial expansion, cultural exchange, and regional development.

Viewed from a cultural perspective, transportation and dwelling constitute important cultural codes that reconstruct the identity of Southern Vietnam within the artistic world of Binh Nguyen Loc.

3.3. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Human Images

3.3.1. Southern Vietnamese Farmers: The Pioneers of New Lands

Farmers are portrayed as representative cultural figures closely associated with land reclamation, settlement, and the establishment of new communities in Southern Vietnam. They are characterized by their attachment to the land, diligence, perseverance, resilience in confronting harsh natural conditions, and remarkable adaptability to the riverine environment.

Beyond their industriousness, Southern Vietnamese farmers embody traditional moral values such as solidarity, compassion, generosity, and communal responsibility. At the same time, Binh Nguyen Loc realistically portrays their hardships caused by nature, war, poverty, and social upheaval, thereby emphasizing their resilience and aspirations.

From a cultural perspective, the Southern Vietnamese farmer becomes not merely a literary character but a symbol of regional cultural identity, representing the formation of the personality, lifestyle,

and collective consciousness of pioneer communities.

3.3.2. Intellectuals: The Harmony between Tradition and Modernity

Intellectuals in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose represent another significant cultural type, reflecting the transformation of Southern Vietnamese society through the interaction between tradition and modernity. They are portrayed as individuals who embrace modern knowledge while remaining committed to preserving both national and regional cultural identity.

These intellectuals appear in various forms: individuals deeply attached to their homeland and cultural traditions; reform-minded figures advocating science, rationality, and social renewal; and characters struggling with conflicts between tradition and modernity, ideals and reality, national identity and Western civilization.

While recognizing the positive contributions of intellectuals to society, Binh Nguyen Loc also portrays phenomena such as cultural alienation, detachment from reality, and crises of values within a rapidly changing society.

From a cultural perspective, intellectuals in his prose symbolize the evolution of Southern Vietnamese cultural consciousness in the modern era. Through them, the writer affirms the important role of intellectuals in both absorbing universal cultural achievements and preserving the traditional values of Southern Vietnam.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 examines the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose from the perspective of content, including spiritual culture, material culture, and human images.

These cultural elements function not merely as realistic materials but also as essential structural components that shape an artistic world deeply imbued with Southern Vietnamese cultural identity.

The chapter therefore confirms that Binh Nguyen Loc's prose

serves as a repository of cultural memory, vividly reflecting the life, mentality, and cultural identity of Southern Vietnamese communities.

CHAPTER 4: CULTURAL IMPRINTS OF SOUTHERN VIETNAM IN BINH NGUYEN LOC'S PROSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION

4.1. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Cultural Symbols in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose

4.1.1. Ecological Symbols of Southern Vietnamese Culture

The system of ecological symbols constitutes one of the most significant artistic features in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose, contributing to the construction of Southern Vietnamese cultural space. Symbols such as rivers, forests, rice fields, and land not only represent the distinctive ecological environment of Southern Vietnam but also embody the historical experiences, cultural values, and collective consciousness formed through the processes of land reclamation, settlement, and regional development.

Among these symbols, rivers represent territorial expansion, migration, and cultural exchange; forests symbolize the primitive natural environment, the hardships of pioneering life, and the resilience of Southern Vietnamese people; rice fields reflect the achievements of conquering nature and the close relationship between humans and agricultural life; while land becomes a symbol of origin, collective memory, and cultural identity, expressing people's attachment to their homeland and ancestral roots.

These ecological symbols function not merely as realistic representations but also as artistic devices expressing human destiny, collective memory, and the cultural depth of Southern Vietnam. By transforming natural elements into artistic symbols, Binh Nguyen Loc creates an artistic world rich in regional identity, thereby affirming Southern Vietnamese culture as one of the defining characteristics of his prose.

4.1.2. The Village as a Cultural Symbol in Southern Vietnam

The Southern Vietnamese village is constructed as a distinctive cultural symbol representing the historical processes of settlement, community formation, and cultural identity. It is not merely a residential space but also a repository of both material and spiritual values closely associated with rivers, agriculture, folk beliefs, customs, and communal life.

This symbolic space is expressed through gardens, rivers, rural markets, communal houses, traditional dwellings, religious practices, and community relationships. These images reflect the deep attachment of Southern Vietnamese people to their homeland while embodying such qualities as diligence, generosity, solidarity, and a strong communal spirit. At the same time, Binh Nguyen Loc depicts the transformation of rural spaces under the influence of war, urbanization, and modernization, expressing his concern over the gradual erosion of traditional cultural values.

The Southern Vietnamese village thus becomes not only the setting for artistic events but also a meaningful cultural symbol that preserves collective memory and affirms the enduring values of Southern Vietnamese culture in modern Vietnamese literature.

4.1.3. Urban Space as a Cultural Symbol in Southern Vietnam

Urban space is portrayed as a cultural symbol reflecting the processes of urbanization and the interaction between tradition and modernity. Markets, shops, cafés, cinemas, streets, and commercial activities become places where profound transformations in lifestyles, social relationships, and cultural values take place.

Through vivid depictions of urban life, Binh Nguyen Loc illustrates both the dynamism of Southern Vietnamese cities and the influence of Western civilization on indigenous culture. Urban space offers opportunities for development, communication, and integration while simultaneously generating challenges such as social stratification,

conflicts between tradition and modernity, moral decline, and crises of values. Nevertheless, the writer also demonstrates the adaptability and vitality of Southern Vietnamese culture, as traditional values continue to survive within an ever-changing urban environment.

Urban space therefore becomes an important cultural symbol through which Binh Nguyen Loc reflects both the modernization of Southern Vietnam and the continuity of its regional identity.

4.2. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Language in Binh Nguyen Loc's Prose

4.2.1. Southern Vietnamese Dialect

The Southern Vietnamese dialect is one of the most distinctive linguistic features contributing to the cultural identity of Binh Nguyen Loc's prose. Through regional vocabulary, forms of address, idioms, and colloquial expressions, he authentically recreates the daily life, psychology, and communication styles of Southern Vietnamese people. Expressions such as má, tía, bầu, hồng, mần, nhen, and tụi bây not only produce a natural colloquial tone but also reflect the openness, generosity, and communal spirit characteristic of Southern Vietnam.

Beyond representing everyday life, the dialect preserves numerous archaic words and regional expressions associated with the history of Southern settlement. By skillfully integrating dialect into both narration and dialogue, the writer conveys regional cultural values while vividly portraying the personalities, emotions, and living environments of his characters.

From a cultural perspective, the Southern dialect functions not only as a linguistic medium but also as an important cultural code that preserves linguistic memory, reinforces regional identity, and contributes to the distinctive artistic style of Binh Nguyen Loc's prose.

4.2.2. The Use of Folk Literary Language

Folk literary materials constitute another important artistic

element in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose. He creatively incorporates folk songs, proverbs, idioms, chants, folk tales, and traditional narrative motifs to reconstruct the lives, emotions, and spiritual world of Southern Vietnamese communities.

These elements are naturally integrated into narration, dialogue, titles, and character construction. They enrich the artistic language while expressing local philosophies of life, moral values, and accumulated communal experiences. The combination of folk materials with modern narrative techniques creates an artistic style that is both realistic and deeply rooted in regional culture.

Viewed from the perspective of cultural studies, folk literary language functions as an important cultural code that preserves collective memory, reflects Southern Vietnamese identity, and demonstrates the writer's profound attachment to national cultural traditions.

4.2.3. Multilingual Expressions

Binh Nguyen Loc's prose also reflects the multicultural character of Southern Vietnam through the incorporation of Chinese, French, English, Khmer, and Cham linguistic elements. The presence of these languages authentically recreates the multilingual and multiethnic communication environment of Southern Vietnam while illustrating the historical processes of cultural interaction and acculturation.

The flexible use of foreign languages contributes to character portrayal, historical atmosphere, and social context, while highlighting the openness, dynamism, and adaptability of Southern Vietnamese culture. Language therefore functions not merely as a means of artistic expression but also as a cultural code reflecting regional identity, collective memory, and intercultural exchange.

The integration of the Southern dialect with multilingual expressions creates the distinctive linguistic style of Binh Nguyen Loc

and confirms his prose as a valuable repository of Southern Vietnamese cultural heritage.

4.3. Southern Vietnamese Cultural Imprints through Narrative Voice

4.3.1. Satirical and Humorous Narrative Voice

Satirical and humorous narration is one of the most distinctive features of Binh Nguyen Loc's narrative art. Through this narrative voice, he creates lively and entertaining stories while critically exposing social shortcomings, moral deviations, and cultural changes in Southern Vietnamese society. His humor is gentle, compassionate, and deeply humanistic rather than harsh or aggressive.

This humorous tone is expressed through the construction of situations, characterization, physical descriptions, and witty narration. It targets such phenomena as superficial lifestyles, blind admiration for modern civilization, social prejudice, hypocrisy, and the contradictions accompanying urbanization. Behind the laughter, however, always lies sympathy, tolerance, and confidence in the positive qualities of Southern Vietnamese people.

From a cultural perspective, this satirical voice reflects the folk mentality, optimism, sense of humor, and adaptability characteristic of Southern Vietnamese communities, thereby becoming an essential component of Binh Nguyen Loc's artistic style.

4.3.2. Philosophical Narrative with Folk Characteristics

Another remarkable feature of Binh Nguyen Loc's narrative style is its philosophical tone, which contributes significantly to the intellectual depth and cultural richness of his prose. Unlike abstract philosophical discourse, his reflections emerge naturally from everyday experience, folk wisdom, and the traditional worldview of Southern Vietnamese people.

His philosophical narration explores themes such as homeland,

land, human beings, nature, cultural traditions, and social transformation through narration, dialogue, and symbolic artistic details. It emphasizes the intimate relationship between people and their homeland, portraying nature not merely as a living environment but also as a repository of memory, identity, and spiritual values. Many works also contemplate the tensions between tradition and modernity, preservation and change, and national identity in the context of modernization.

From a cultural perspective, this philosophical narrative voice conveys the worldview and philosophy of life characteristic of Southern Vietnamese people. The harmonious combination of folk wisdom, humanistic thought, and profound reflection creates a unique narrative style that firmly establishes Binh Nguyen Loc's position in modern Southern Vietnamese prose.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 analyzes the cultural imprints of Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose from the perspective of artistic expression, focusing on cultural symbols, language, and narrative voice.

These artistic elements not only define the writer's unique literary style but also serve as important vehicles for preserving and expressing Southern Vietnamese cultural values.

The chapter confirms that Binh Nguyen Loc successfully integrates artistic creativity with regional cultural identity, thereby making a significant contribution to the richness and diversity of modern Vietnamese literature.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Binh Nguyen Loc's prose not only reflects the distinctive cultural and artistic values of one of Southern Vietnam's most representative writers but also contributes significantly to clarifying the role of regional culture in the development of modern Vietnamese literature.

First, Binh Nguyen Loc is one of the most distinctive representatives of modern Southern Vietnamese literature. With an extensive literary career spanning short stories, novels, essays, and other prose genres, he not only achieved remarkable artistic accomplishments but also emerged as a cultural writer whose works preserve the collective memory of Southern Vietnam. Through his prose, he vividly reconstructs both the material and spiritual life of Southern Vietnamese people, creating a rich artistic world deeply rooted in regional culture.

Applying an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary studies, cultural studies, and poetics, this dissertation demonstrates that Binh Nguyen Loc's prose should be understood not merely as a realistic reflection of Southern Vietnam but also as a cultural discourse deeply embedded in regional identity. Folk beliefs, customs, cuisine, transportation, dwellings, ecological environments, Southern dialects, cultural symbols, and distinctive narrative voices are transformed into artistic elements that shape the unique aesthetic identity of his works. Compared with other Southern Vietnamese writers, Binh Nguyen Loc displays a distinctive creative orientation. While Ho Bieu Chanh preserves Southern culture through traditional narrative structures and moral concerns, and Son Nam reconstructs Southern culture from an ethnographic perspective, Binh Nguyen Loc artistically transforms cultural materials into aesthetic principles, making literature itself a space for preserving and recreating regional cultural identity.

Second, the greatest contribution of Binh Nguyen Loc's prose lies in its ability to transform Southern Vietnamese culture into a creative artistic force. His works demonstrate that regional culture is not static but constantly evolving through historical interaction and cultural exchange. Consequently, his prose has become both an artistic achievement and a valuable cultural archive documenting the historical development of Southern Vietnam.

From both thematic and artistic perspectives, Binh Nguyen Loc systematically incorporates Southern Vietnamese culture into the structure of his literary works. Folk beliefs, customs, material culture, ecological space, human figures, regional language, symbols, and narrative techniques are organized into an integrated artistic system. Through characters, narrative space, and storytelling, he vividly reconstructs the mentality of Southern Vietnamese communities, particularly the pioneering settlers who reclaimed and inhabited the southern frontier. At the same time, his works portray the transformation of traditional culture under the impact of modernization, illustrating both cultural continuity and adaptation. These achievements firmly establish Binh Nguyen Loc as one of the foremost cultural writers in modern Vietnamese literature.

Third, this dissertation confirms that Binh Nguyen Loc was not only an outstanding Southern Vietnamese writer but also an author deeply committed to preserving, reconstructing, and recreating Southern Vietnamese cultural identity through literature. The dissertation primarily approaches his prose from the perspective of regional culture while selectively employing geocultural perspectives as supporting analytical tools to explain the relationship between natural environment, settlement history, and regional cultural identity. Rather than emphasizing postmodern spatial theories, the study focuses on demonstrating how regional cultural values are reflected and

artistically transformed within his literary world. This approach contributes to expanding the study of Southern Vietnamese literature from the perspective of regional culture and highlights literature as a repository of cultural memory and collective identity.

Fourth, this dissertation represents one of the first systematic and comprehensive studies devoted specifically to the Southern Vietnamese cultural imprints in Binh Nguyen Loc's prose. By integrating cultural studies with poetics, it establishes an appropriate theoretical framework for interpreting his works while systematically identifying the major dimensions through which Southern Vietnamese culture is expressed, including ecological environment, material and spiritual culture, artistic structure, language, symbols, and narrative voice. These findings provide new perspectives on Binh Nguyen Loc's artistic style and literary thinking, thereby enriching scholarship on his contribution to modern Vietnamese prose and to the cultural discourse of regional literature.

Despite these achievements, certain limitations remain. Because of the enormous volume of Binh Nguyen Loc's writings and the limited accessibility of some early publications and unpublished materials, the dissertation focuses primarily on representative works rather than the complete corpus. Issues such as intercultural reception, translation, overseas publication, and comparative studies with writers from other Vietnamese regions have only been addressed preliminarily and deserve further investigation.

Building upon the present research, future studies may expand comparative analyses between Binh Nguyen Loc and other Southern Vietnamese writers such as Son Nam, Trang The Hy, and Nguyen Ngoc Tu, as well as with writers from other regions of Vietnam. Further research should also examine unpublished manuscripts, correspondence, diaries, overseas publications, and archival materials

to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of his literary career. Other promising directions include ecological symbolism, urban discourse, migration, cultural identity, and translation studies. Finally, translating Binh Nguyen Loc's works into foreign languages would contribute to introducing his literary heritage to international readers and affirming the enduring value of Southern Vietnamese culture within the broader context of world literature.

LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

No.	Article Title	Journal	Publication Approval Date
1.	<i>Southern Culinary Cultural Imprints in Binh Nguyên Lộc's Prose</i>	Văn Hiến University Journal (Issue 10 (1), 2025), pISSN 1859-2961	December 12, 2024
2.	<i>Cultural Intersections of Vietnamese – Chinese – Khmer Elements in Binh Nguyên Lộc's Prose</i>	Văn Hiến University Journal (Issue 10 (2), 2025), pISSN 1859-2961, eISSN 3093-3935	May 10, 2025
3.	<i>Religious and Belief Consciousness in Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyên Lộc's Prose</i>	Hanoi Metropolitan University Journal (Issue 101), ISSN 2354-1512	October 27, 2025
4.	<i>Eco-cultural Symbols of Southern Vietnam in Binh Nguyên Lộc's Prose</i>	Journal of Literary and Artistic Theory and Criticism	October 2025