

Local Literature of Thai Nguyen on The Theme of History

Hoang Thi Huong Giang¹

Abstract: It can be argued that Thai Nguyen is a sacred land, a province with a rich tradition of patriotism and revolutionary struggle throughout the long historical process of national construction and defense. This land has witnessed numerous significant historical events, as well as the emergence of heroic figures and historical personalities who sacrificed their lives to protect the nation and their homeland. Drawing upon historical sources related to significant events and heroic figures, writers in Thai Nguyen have continuously explored and created literary works that reconstruct the glorious and tragic historical periods of this land with a rich revolutionary tradition. The representation of historical themes, important milestones, and heroic historical figures through literary works provides a new and creative perspective on the relationship between literature and history. The subtle integration of historical narratives into literary works creates a balance between the “dryness” often associated with history and the “imaginative and romantic” qualities of literary language. History in Thai Nguyen’s local literature has become a prominent topic that has attracted the attention of scholars and researchers from various perspectives. However, in-depth studies on historical themes in Thai Nguyen literature remain limited, as local literature has primarily been approached from cultural perspectives. Therefore, researching historical themes in local literature in Thai Nguyen is an important activity that contributes to preserving local historical values while exploring the innovative thinking and creative approaches of writers in skillfully combining the disciplines of literature and history.

Keywords: local literature, historical themes, *Prime Minister Luu Nhan Chu; Thai Nguyen 1917; Those Who Pioneered the Way*; the novel *Minister Do Can; The Diary of a Female Clerk; The Legend of Thuong Temple on Duom Mountain; The Legend of Cong River and Coc Mountain*.

I. Introduction

Thai Nguyen is known as a fertile land with a long-standing and rich historical tradition. These historical values contain abundant sources of

inspiration and represent a valuable treasure of materials for literary creation. The struggles for national foundation and defense, the preservation and promotion of national historical values, as well as the lives and achievements of historical figures, have become important themes explored by many writers.

Local literature is a form of literary production associated with a particular locality, in which each region possesses its own distinctive characteristics and local identity. Regarding Thai Nguyen local literature, there are two different perspectives.

The first perspective suggests that Thai Nguyen local literature consists only of literary works created by writers who live in Thai Nguyen. The second argues that local literature may also include works written by authors from other regions, as long as these works focus on themes related to the people, culture, and history of Thai Nguyen.

From my perspective, Thai Nguyen local literature includes literary works created by both writers residing in Thai Nguyen and writers from other places. However, these works share a common feature: they all portray aspects related to the land, people, nature, culture, and history of Thai Nguyen. This “fertile land” has become an abundant source of materials and inspiration for writers in the province.

Thai Nguyen literature has undergone a process of formation and development through various historical periods, closely associated with the fluctuations of national history. The first period, from 1945 to 1960, began after the success of the August Revolution, followed by the resistance war against French colonialism, which opened a new literary period for Viet Bac.

The next period, from 1960 to 1975, was shaped by the resistance war against the United States for national salvation, bringing literature into a new stage of development. During this period, the entire Party and the people focused on two major tasks: resisting foreign invaders and building and developing the country.

The final stage in the development of Thai Nguyen local literature is from the 1990s to the present. Alongside the transformation of the nation,

¹ FPT University, Hanoi, Vietnam; Tel.: 0987 927 980; Email: Giangth7@fpt.edu.vn

Thai Nguyen literature has achieved new developments and made significant progress.

More than half a century in the literary development of a locality is not a very long period. Moreover, Thai Nguyen is inherently a land with rich historical and revolutionary traditions, a place where many ethnic groups and regions converge, possessing diverse characteristics in terms of economy, culture, customs, traditions, and language. Therefore, literature cannot fully and comprehensively reflect all aspects of social life.

Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that Thai Nguyen literature today has become sufficiently developed to integrate into the broader process of contemporary Vietnamese literature.

Within the endless flow of thousands of years of national construction and defense, Thai Nguyen has emerged as a remarkable landmark throughout the formation and development of the country. Based on preserved historical documents and living testimonies from historical wars, Thai Nguyen writers have continuously explored and created literary works with historical themes, reconstructing heroic and tragic spaces and events that embody the distinctive cultural and historical identity of Thai Nguyen.

Through these works, writers convey profound humanistic messages with significant political meanings, above all awakening patriotism and gratitude toward those who have contributed to the homeland and the nation.

Tôi tiếp tục dịch theo phong cách **academic English** dành cho bài báo quốc tế thuộc lĩnh vực **Literary Studies / Cultural Studies / Local Literature Research**. Tôi giữ nguyên cấu trúc, nội dung nghiên cứu, đồng thời điều chỉnh cách diễn đạt để phù hợp với chuẩn văn phong học thuật tiếng Anh.

II. Local Literature and Historical Imprints of Thai Nguyen Province

Local literature with historical themes serves as a source of knowledge, creating new and innovative approaches to learning and research for readers. Through local literary works, readers can recognize the close relationship between literature and historical events. From this perspective, literature conveys a meaningful message: “Always cherish, preserve, and promote the long-standing historical values of the homeland and the nation.”

Alongside the traditional values of the country, Thai Nguyen possesses both shared and distinctive cultural values. These are the core historical and cultural values of the ethnic communities in Thai Nguyen, creating a unique identity that distinguishes the province from other regions of Vietnam. Thai Nguyen literature reflects

these historical and cultural traditions, expressing admiration, gratitude, and remembrance toward heroic figures who sacrificed their lives for the nation.

Thai Nguyen — a heroic land — has undergone a historical journey marked by glorious victories and the courageous sacrifices of generations of people. To write historical novels and stories about national historical figures and events, contemporary writers have relied on historical databases as a foundation for fictionalization and creative reconstruction. Through storytelling techniques, they narrate the past in order to illuminate the present.

Among Thai Nguyen writers, **Ho Thuy Giang** is considered one of the authors with the greatest number of successful historical novels. His representative works include *Prime Minister Luu Nhan Chu*, *Thai Nguyen 1917*, and *Those Who Pioneered the Way*. This trilogy brought Ho Thuy Giang considerable achievements in his literary career, particularly through his use of historical elements as the foundation for literary plots.

In these works, Ho Thuy Giang incorporates historical figures, significant events, and geographical landmarks associated with historical achievements, including heroic figures such as Luu Nhan Chu, Luong Ngoc Quyen, Doi Can, and the 60 young volunteer soldiers, as well as historical events such as the Thai Nguyen Uprising of 1917 and the American bombing of Luu Xa Station at the end of 1972. These elements contribute to the creation of historical novels that combine historical authenticity with the unlimited creativity of literature.

All these elements are carefully selected and incorporated into literary works with the hope of reconstructing the heroic and glorious atmosphere of a significant historical period of the nation. The patriotism and national pride associated with Thai Nguyen's land and people in the fifteenth century are conveyed through the author's portrayal and reconstruction of historical elements, as well as through his respectful and admiring attitude toward heroic figures who sacrificed their lives for the nation and their people.

Although these novels focus on historical themes, they remain deeply romantic. This is demonstrated through the depiction of the tragic and romantic deaths of soldiers. Such romantic elements function as an emotional catalyst, inspiring stronger patriotism and hatred toward enemies among readers. The artistic value of these historical novels lies in their ability to realistically reconstruct historical elements while simultaneously portraying the psychology, inner emotions, and attitudes of historical characters.

This combination may initially appear difficult to reconcile; however, it becomes the creative foundation that contributes to the success of literary works on historical themes.

Writer **Ngoc Thi Keo**, through her work *The Diary of a Female Clerk*, presents a distinctive perspective compared with other works on the same theme. Written in the form of a diary, the work places strong emphasis on truth and ongoing realities, aiming to revive readers' memories of the brutality of the Vietnam War against the United States.

Ngoc Thi Keo was herself a former anti-American resistance youth volunteer belonging to Team 91. Drawing from her own profound experiences, she vividly reconstructs the lives and struggles of her comrades. Through the perspective of a "living historical witness," the optimistic spirit and vitality of young people during the resistance war against the United States are portrayed throughout the work.

The novel *Minister Do Can* by writer Phan Thuc is the first literary work focusing deeply on exploring and interpreting the life and career of Do Can — a distinguished historical figure of Thai Nguyen, a successful scholar, minister, and high-ranking official during the reign of King Le Thanh Tong.

Besides works depicting national construction and defense struggles, Thai Nguyen literature also contains historical and cultural values associated with landscapes and cultural sites, including *The Legend of Thuong Temple on Duom Mountain* and *The Legend of Cong River and Coc Mountain*.

These two works are closely connected with historical-cultural relics and famous landmarks of Thai Nguyen Province. The first is Duom Temple, located at the foot of Diem Son Mountain in Phu Luong District, approximately 24 kilometers northwest of Thai Nguyen City. Built during the Ly Dynasty, the temple worships Prince Consort Duong Tu Minh and his two wives.

This place is associated with the later life of Duong Tu Minh, who was revered by local people and gradually became mythologized in many literary works such as *The Invisible Cloak*, *The Legend of the Doi Well*, and *The Legend of Thuong Temple on Duom Mountain*, the latter being included in the Grade 6 local literature curriculum.

The Legend of Thuong Temple on Duom Mountain portrays the hero of Dong Dat village as a beautiful symbol of Vietnamese people who dedicate themselves to life, struggle, and victory without seeking personal fame or wealth, but wholeheartedly serving the people.

When discussing Thai Nguyen's famous landscapes, it is impossible not to mention Nui Coc Lake. Nui Coc Mountain and Cong River have become iconic landscapes of Thai Nguyen and have entered local legends. The mountain and river have appeared in literary works and become deeply engraved in the hearts of Thai Nguyen people.

The Legend of Cong River and Coc Mountain is a folk legend created, preserved, and transmitted by Thai Nguyen residents and is included in the Grade 6 Thai Nguyen local literature curriculum. Over time, the legend has become a precious gem in the province's folk literary heritage.

Through this legend, local people express their aspirations for happiness, praise free love, and criticize social inequalities, class discrimination, and feudal customs that prevented couples from achieving happiness.

III. General Evaluation of Thai Nguyen Local Literature with Historical Themes

When exploring historical subjects, events, and heroic figures, writers must respect the objective realities created by historical characters. Authors may employ personal creativity based on historical contexts to add fictional details, thereby clarifying character images and artistic intentions. Historical literature should possess literary qualities rather than merely reconstructing the past as historians do.

Works on historical themes also represent a distinctive form of discourse. Literary works using historical truths must include certain historical elements such as events, characters, customs, and social practices. These requirements require writers to ensure the accuracy of "what has existed" (historical truth), while simultaneously expressing "what could exist" (artistic imagination) regarding history within their works.

Through several Thai Nguyen local literary works with historical themes, it can generally be observed that authors respect historical values, utilize official historical documents, and employ recorded historical events and figures while highlighting these historical materials within literary narratives without losing their historical significance.

Beyond authenticity, writers have explored additional external factors related to historical events and figures, combining them with creative imagination to enrich and make the narrative more engaging. Stories surrounding historical characters are reconstructed in ordinary, simple, and realistic ways while remaining attractive and vivid.

The use of language bearing strong historical characteristics and reflecting the spirit of specific eras creates distinctive features that are

unique to literary works with historical themes. Most of these works adopt an admiring tone because such a tone expresses respect and pride toward national heroes. In addition, reflective and philosophical tones are also employed to convey deeper thoughts about human beings.

Thai Nguyen is a heroic land with a long-standing history, containing numerous historical relics that preserve important events of the nation and the appearances of outstanding individuals, heroes, and historical figures throughout the process of national construction and independence defense.

Several representative historical events and figures of Thai Nguyen can be summarized as follows: the land that preserves the victories and border protection achievements of the heroic general Duong Tu Minh; the homeland of Prime Minister Luu Nhan Chu — a talented military commander with remarkable achievements; and, during the resistance wars against French colonialism and American invasion, Thai Nguyen continued to be a sacred land producing outstanding heroes such as Doi Can and Luong Ngoc Quyen, exceptional leaders who contributed to successful uprisings.

It was also the place where many American aircraft were defeated, particularly the heroic sacrifice of 60 young volunteer soldiers while carrying out cargo unloading missions.

In addition, Thai Nguyen's cultural history is equally rich and diverse, with ancient historical-cultural relics such as Duom Temple dedicated to General Duong Tu Minh, along with long-standing scenic landscapes such as Nui Coc Lake.

IV. Conclusion

Overall, literary works on historical themes have respected official historical data while incorporating fictional elements to highlight historical figures and events. With its rich revolutionary historical tradition, Thai Nguyen is expected to attract more writers interested in historical subjects.

These historical values will continue to inspire creativity and literary imagination, encouraging writers to produce increasingly valuable and outstanding historical works. Such literary creations play an important role in awakening national pride and love for the homeland among Thai Nguyen residents, particularly younger generations — students currently studying in schools.

It is also hoped that more literary works on historical themes will be incorporated into current local literature curricula, allowing students to access and appreciate these valuable works more easily.

References

- [1]. Tran, D. S. (Ed.). (2001). *Ly luan va phe binh van hoc* [Literary theory and criticism]. Education Publishing House.
- [2]. Ho, T. G. (2016). *Te tuong Luu Nhan Chu* [Prime Minister Luu Nhan Chu]. Thai Nguyen University Publishing House.
- [3]. Ho, T. G. (2017). *Thai Nguyen 1917*. Thai Nguyen University Publishing House.
- [4]. Ngoc Thi Keo. (2017). *Nhat ki co van thu* [Diary of a female clerk]. Literature Publishing House.
- [5]. Thai Nguyen Department of Education and Training. (2021). *Tai lieu giao duc dia phuong tinh Thai Nguyen – Lop 6* [Local education materials of Thai Nguyen Province – Grade 6].