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**CHANGES IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT
IN POST-1975 VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN
FILMS ON THE VIETNAM WAR**

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The dissertation can be found at:

- *Vietnam National Library.*
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INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

All forms of art, including filmmaking, draw its root from events happened in real life. The Vietnam War was a long and drawn out war that occurred in the twentieth century. The war has been portrayed through multiple perspectives through films.

It started with the first feature film, *Chung Một Dòng Sông (Sharing the River)*, directed by Nguyen Hong Nghi and Pham Hieu Dan (1959), where the subject of war started to become a major theme in the revolution of the Vietnamese film making industry. The art of studying war films, also became the standout aspect of the film industry, was baptised in the smouldering flame and ashes of war. This dissertation study does not limit its scope to only Vietnamese cinema, it also includes American war movies within the same settings. Feature films on the Vietnam War in the two countries has historically gone through two different development periods during and after the war (after 1975). Due to different political views as well as different cultural and artistic traditions, films of this type in Vietnam and the USA has greatly diverged in both the content and artistic presentation. However, as they both reflect the same real event (Vietnam War), which leads to the question of whether they have similarities in character creation, or a multi-faceted views on this war?

Characters are, obviously, an extremely important and indispensable element of any cinematic art works. The study of characters, their development, and subsequent transformations helps clarify ideological and artistic values in cinematographic works relating to the subject of the Vietnam War, which contributes to the development of the form of art.

The assessment of the characters as well as the development of, including the transformation of social history in general as well as in the development of the same topic, genre, and art form in particular is very important. This shows the close relationship between life, culture - society and art, affecting the character - the basic elements constituting the work of art; it also show the gradual changes in the thought-process, and suitable artistic methods created by the content creators. In alongside, the study of characters in American films on the Vietnam War helps us understand how American filmmakers approached the topic of the Vietnam War. As such, the study provides us with an objective and deeper view and is the driving motivation to create better cinematography works on the subject of the Vietnam War. Not only that, the study can also shows the position and role of characters in

artworks in general and in feature films in particular can be shown, which makes the scientific significance of the dissertation topic.

The war concluded leaving both sides with lasting memories, moreso sorrowful memories for all parties involved. History needs to be studied as the foundation for a nation's development as said by Vietnam President Ho Chi Minh: "Our people must know our history". The study of Vietnam War films is a reminder to our citizens of the heroic history, reminding us to be grateful to our past, and to live to the best of our abilities so that we are deserving of what was bestowed upon us.

Currently, the studies on Vietnamese and American films on the Vietnam War are currently limited. There are no system setup to do a comparative study, even if it is in its infancy stage. Moreover, relating to the study on changes in character development in the Vietnam War-themed feature films of the two countries, which would help to understand the development, to give us a multi-directional view, or having a phenomenally produced Vietnam War movie – are non-existent.

For the above reasons, I am writing a dissertation centralized on the subject of *Changes in character development in post-1975 Vietnamese and American Films on the Vietnam War*.

2. Purpose and aim of the Research

2.1. Purpose of Research

Identify and analyze the changes in character development in post-1975 Vietnamese and American films on the Vietnam War in the following aspects: Character creation, central character, selection of aspect for depiction in film, the art of character building. Based on the research results, a comparative view is initially made. Aside from the differences are are points of similarity.

2.2. Mission of Research

- On the basis of the theorization of characters, analyzing the changes in character development in Vietnamese and American films on the Vietnam War produced after 1975, compared with those produced during the war time.

- Making initial, general conclusions and explaining causes of the changes in character development in post-1975 Vietnamese and American films on the Vietnam War.

- From the changes in character development in the war films, identifying the difference and common denominators of the two countries' cinema related to the Vietnam War.

3. Research subject

The dissertation is focused on studying changes in character development in post-1975 Vietnamese and American films on the Vietnam War. The changes reflected in the selection of characters, key characters, the aspect focused in depicting, the art of character building before and after 1975 in both cinemas of Vietnam and the US, concentrating on changes after 1975.

4. Scope of the Research

Research on the issues related to characters in feature films.

There are a numerous selection of movies regarding the subject of the Vietnam War produced during and after the war. The author of this dissertation only selected a few movies, which can be used to show the changes for the purpose of the research.

On the basis of specific historical conditions, national ideology, wartime and post-war ideology, and artistic traditions of the two countries, the author explains the character selection, changes in character development in the films on the Vietnam War after 1975 in both countries.

The film industry in America is at its peak in term of production value. The research of changes in characterization in filmography dealing with the Vietnam War in America is a big issue. The writer's research the changes in characters in films produced in America from a Vietnam point of view akin to how we view movies from Vietnam. These findings are expected to help Vietnamese counterparts to have better war films in the time to come.

5. Research questions and hypothesis

5.1. Research questions

- In the feature films on the Vietnam War, on the basis of artistic traditions and harsh realities of the war, how did Vietnamese cinema and American cinema choose and describe the characters?

- From the generalized characterization established in many of the war films made during the war, how have the characters in Vietnamese War films changed after 1975? What caused those changes?

- How have the characters in the American films on the Vietnam War changed after 1975 in Vietnamese general view? What caused those changes?

- From the changes in characterization between the two countries with regards to films about Vietnam War, aside from the differences, what are the similarities that would help understand more deeply reality of the war, and produce more significant films about the past war?

5.2. Research hypothesis

Characters in the Vietnamese War films can only accompany the citizens of the nation when there is a transformation containing the revelation of the changes in the character, brought out during the harshes of time, to a more realistic reality.

The transformation of characters in the American films on the Vietnam War after 1975 is associated with the perception of the harsh reality, the absurdity, and the meaninglessness of the war that the US waged in Vietnam and the strong desire to protect American values.

The description of the war and the people in the war may be different between Vietnamese and American film producers, but both sides share one common thing in character development: war is a tragedy that should not be permitted in human society.

6. The Theory of the Research

- *Theory of Cinematography*, helps to provide the research with a general overview of cinematography, scene creation, director's art, choice of cameras, lighting and set location, montage art and features of cinematic language.
- *Narrative theory*, providing a sharp set of tools for working on research methods, storytelling techniques of cinema, narrative text structure, narrative art characteristics. In this theory there is a different between "what to tell?" and "how to tell?" highlighting the role of the narrator; this not only shows the narrative technique of cinematographic works with the imprints of the authors, but also reveals the traditions and cultural imprints with negation, inheritance, transformation for development.
- *Theories of characters, classification of characters* in literature and art in general and cinema in particular.
- *Theory of the relationship between reality and art.*

7. Research methods

- An *interdisciplinary* approach is used thoroughly as cinema has inherited the quintessence of art and theory of other art forms. In addition, art forms converge at a number of issues: realism, artistic function, and relationship with reality.
- *Methods of selecting and analyzing works*: Within the framework of a dissertation, it is not possible to study all films on the Vietnam War, leading to the need to select films suitable for the research purposes. When researching, the writer is interested in the concept of the character, the character choice, the character's connection with reality.

- In particular, the writer uses the *comparative* method - chronologically, comparing the internal development of each cinema, assessment the difference between the levels based on the main character classification according to positive - negative relationship between character and ideal (with protagonist and antagonist), classifying characters according to their roles in the structure of the work (with focus on the system of key characters), which is suitable for study war films...

- *Systematic and synthetic* methods through the process of development and changes are used to identify the differences and commonalities in character development in Vietnamese and American war films.

8. Scientific and practical significance of the dissertation

- This dissertation is a studies of the issue of changing characters in the Vietnam War-themed feature films in Vietnam and the America. It also provides a multi-faceted view in addition to the historically and culturally significant outcome of the well-known and deadly war.

- The dissertation helps to provide an understanding to an extent not only the meaningful development of Vietnamese and American cinemas, but also to provide an alternate view of the war from the perspective of the opposing country so that a deeper insight into the reality of the war can be provided.

- The dissertation makes a contribution to the film theory on the issue of film "characters", of the interconnected relationship between real life, artistic traditions and artistic reality.

- The dissertation contributes to the herald the history and art of the country's cinema and promoting peace and international integration.

Literature review

The literature is divided into 2 groups:

Information related to the concept and terminology of the research issue. This has two subgroups.

The first subgroup consists of information on character theory in literature and art:

These theoretical books specialized in literature provide a diverse knowledge and understandings of characters (concepts, roles, characteristics, classifications, the issue of typical character, etc.); including *150 literary terms* (edited by Lai Nguyen An); *Dictionary of literary terms* (by Le Ba Han

- Tran Dinh Su - Nguyen Khac Phi); *Literary theory* (edited by Tran Dinh Su and Phuong Luu); *Narrative learning, theory and application* (edited by Tran Dinh Su).

Another books are on theatrical art including *History of the World Theater* (Culture Publishing House), *Dramatic Art* (Stage Institute), *Drama Theory* (by Tat Thang, Theater Publishing House)...provide an overview of the character theory system, the role of the character in a theatrical play.

There is a litany of films that were made from literature, the subject of many researches regarding the adaptation of literature to film, also focused on the issue of characters: some of which are *Literature versus cinema* (co-authors), *Folklore and cinematographic art* (by Nguyen Manh Lan, Tran Duy Hinh, Tran Trung Nhan), *Traditional Arts and Literature with films* (by Phan Bich Ha), *Film and Literature* (by Timothy Corigan), *From literary works to cinematic works* (by Phan Bich Thuy), *Literary and cinematic adaptation* (by Le Thi Duong).

The second subgroup consists of information on character theory in feature films:

The basic understanding of movie characters given in the dissertation comes from such fundamental research works as: *History of World Cinema* (by Georges Sadoul), *History of world cinema* (by Iecgi Teplx), *Film History* (by Kristin Thompson - David Bordwell), *History of Vietnam Cinema* (Vietnam Cinema Department); *Fundamentals of Cinematography; Cinematic aesthetics* (by V. Giedan), *Cinematic language* (by Macsen Mactan; Cinema Department); *The language of cinema and television* (by Bruno Toussaint), *Semiotics for Theater and Cinema* (by Erika Fischer – Lichte), *Film Introduction* (by Graham Robert - Heathr Wallis), *Theoretical issues of film script* (by Doan Minh Tuan).

Cinema is a synergy form of art, attracting many artists of various professional backgrounds to join together and produce a film project. The studies on the combinations of professionals to mesh together and produce a film was initiated with the goal of creating a lively character on screen, with the ability to convince the audience: *Film and Television Screenwriting Techniques* by R. Walter; *The art of screenwriting* by John W. Bloch - William Fadiman - Lois Peyser; *How to compose a good screenplay* by Linda Seger; *To write a screenplay* by Michel Chion; *Screenwriters' Guide to Solving Problems* by Syd Field; *The art of film directing* by Richard L. Bare;

The cinematic visual language of Ngo Tao Kim; Creating the art design of feature films by Do Lenh Hung Tu, etc.

With all aspects of a film combined to bring the characters to the forefront and depicts the essence of the film. Among works that help highlight the character and the ideological theme for the films are *Tra Giang - People's Artist, movie actor* (edited by Tran Luan Kim), *Director Hong Sen - People and works*, *Cinema - imprints of time, Vietnamese cinema on the world roads* (by Hai Ninh), *Cinematography - Theory and practice* (by Vu Ngoc Thanh), the B.A. and M.A. theses entitled *Sound in feature films* (Nguyen Manh Lam), *Role of events in film plot* (Luu Duy Hung), *Attractiveness of feature film scripts* (Nguyen Thu Dung)...

Information related to the topic of the Vietnam War and changes of character development in feature films after 1975

First, Vietnamese documents:

Considering characters in feature films on the Vietnam War as the object of research, this dissertation uses historical documents, documents on culture, national psychology (*Vietnamese Culture, General Ethnology, Ethnographic Psychology...*) and on philosophy, aesthetics, etc. as the key to discovering character psychology.

War is a special situation that governs artistic creation in general and character image in particular. The information related to this issue include those on theory of art written by political - revolutionary leaders such as *The Vietnamese People's Democratic Revolution* (by Truong Chinh), *Culture and art as a front* - a collection of articles and speeches of President Ho Chi Minh.

Attention is also paid to a number of collection of articles on film and film character analysis including *A collection of film reviews from Chung một dòng sông* (*Sharing the River*, by co-authors), *Half Century of Vietnam Revolutionary Cinema* (co-authors), *Creative Reality* (by Tran Luan Kim), *101 best Vietnamese films* (by Le Hong Lam), etc.

Second, foreign information:

The Vietnam War is also subjected to many foreign research projects, mainly American. However, studies which focuses on characters are limited in few and far in between. Among them are *The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film* (by Mark Taylor), *Anthology America Rediscovered: Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War – Finding America* a collection of essays on literary work and filmography about the Viet Nam

War (Owen W. Gilman, Jr. and Lorrie Smith editor), *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television* (compiled by Anderegg, Michael), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American films* (by Linda Dittmar and Gene), *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full metal Jackets* (by Gilbert Adair), *Ideological, Dystopic and Antimythopoeic Formations of Masculinity in the Việt Nam war film* (by Elliot Scot Stegal), *Embodiments of difference: Representations of Vietnamese women in U. S. Cultural Imaginary* (by Bui Thi Diem My), *Lament's of Warrior's Wife: Re-gendering the War in Vietnamese Film* (by Dana Healy).

The dissertation also takes into consideration different aspects of American war films such as racism, violence, ideology, Vietnam syndrome among American soldiers, and the social and cultural influence of American society on the Vietnam War films, etc., through Hollywood films. The issue of the character- soldier in the Vietnam War films to some extent can be found in many of the above articles and publications. In alongside, similar information is available in news paper, periodicals and on the Internet.

Comments and reviews about the literature review

In general, research works on films and characters in the Vietnam War films are fairly diverse – locally and internationally - but it is limited to research done on films from another country or from another perspective or with different reasoning behind the development. There has been no systematic study of characters and changes in character development in films on the Vietnam War produced after 1975 addressing differences, similarities, common human values and saying "no" to war. This is a new issue because it is a novel research which requires systematic and comprehensive coverage. The above-mentioned reference resources serve as the basic foundation for the dissertation author to complete her research on the changes in the characterization of the characters portrayed in war films between Vietnam and America.

9. Structure of the dissertation

Other than the *Introduction, Conclusion, there is a list of published work related to the dissertation, References and Appendices, and the Findings and discussion.*

Chapter 1

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE DISSERTATION

1.1. Theories about the characters

1.1.1. *Characters in art*

"Character" is familiar concept in literature and art in general. Literary character, a matter of common theoretical foundation of many art disciplines, is defined as "the artistic image of an individual, one of the signs of the complete existence of man in art words. Besides humans, characters can also include animals, plants, and mythical creatures that are attributed with human-like characteristics" [3; p. 303]. Character, "is an artistic method aimed at exploiting the features of human characteristics, and the characters have meaning first of all in narrative literature and drama, in theatre, cinema, sculpture, painting, etc. graphics" [3; p.303]. The elements that make up the character "include: the individual's thoughts, beliefs, life interests, emotions, will, forms of consciousness and action" [3; p.303].

General features of the issue of characters in literary art, includes: First, characters are individuals created in a literary work, with distinctive features of name, age, personality, destiny... Characters doesn't have to be human, but it can also be animals, plants, animals... but they are given "human characteristics" to support the simulation and expression of life and thought of a human. Second, character is an artistic unit in the work, does not necessitate that it is a real person. Character is a means for the author to express the ideological content and artistic intentions of the author. Third, there are many ways to create characters with different criterias. Fourth, the character is attached with related issues (central character, construction art, depiction aspect, etc.) with historical affixation, association with the characteristics of the era and the typical aesthetic of the time.

1.1.2. *Character in cinema*

There are certain ideology that can be ascertained about a character in a film. First, the character in cinema is an artistic unit. Although cinema is a form of art that is very close to human life, characters in cinema are still artistic images and have certain conventions. Second, characters in cinema, similar to characters in literature, through everyday's life, possesses distinctive features of: name, appearance, personality, destiny... However, unlike literature, movie characters are built for direct viewers. There is a heavier emphasis on picking the property actor so that the actor can deliver a manifestation of the character. Personality of the actors are taken into consideration. Viewers see the

character through the plot, through the conflict, through the personality, through the role acting, the actor's ability to slip into the mindset of the character, through the director's staging, through the lense of the camera, through the landscape and background, scenes, props. It is the character's personality, thoughts, and ideas that will let the character “appears” on the screen. Characters in cinema are always portrayed as the discovery of people, reflecting the filmmaker's artistic points of view. Film-makers focuses on building characters with deep, multi-faceted personalities related to different aspects of their physiological, psychological and social life. Third, based on the transformation of cinematic art around the world over the years in general and in each country in particular, cinematic characters are said to have historical identity. The character in a literary work is always a human, with the accurate representation of a human, so that the way that the character is built and appears through films, changes with the invention in filmography. Movie characters are always associated with the concept of artistic development and the requirement and reception of viewers in a certain period.

1.2. Theories applied in the research

Cinematography. Cinematography is a research subject that studies cinema as a form of art and also as a method to conduct media to the general public. Cinematography examines cinematographic work in a specific social, economic, and political context, in the context of cultural influences and relationships with other art forms.

Cinema transforms with historical reality. In the book *The Golden Cross of Cinema* by X. Frei Lich (Moscow Art Publishing House, 1986) the author thinks that cinema is a living phenomenon. Cinema transforms with historical reality. The development of cinema can be thought of as a multi-act drama. Each part, each episode in the drama has a beginning, a climax and an ending [94; p. 6]. The history of cinema must be taken into consideration as an objective historical process.

Film study is about understanding the structure and general form of a film. According to Warren Buckland in *Film Research* (Nha Nam and Tri Thuc Publishing House, 2011) in the process of researching about films, scholars and film critics often choose descriptive or analytical methods. This involves understanding the overall structure and form of a film, or in other words, designing a film. [93; p. 9]. Approaching cinematic work from the inside according to Warren Buckland will open up an approach to the nature and help study the internal structure of cinematic works. In addition to approaching the cinematic work from the inside, there is also an approach to the work from the

outside. This type of approach places the film in historical and social context. Genre research includes both the internal study of the film work as well as the study of cinema in relation to external factors.

Narrative theory. Narrative study is a branch of modern poetics that studies the structure of narrative texts and the characteristics of narrative art. According to Prof. Tran Dinh Su, narration today is no longer simply a story-telling but an indispensable method to explain and interpret the past, with its own principles.

Comparative theory. Comparative literature, at birth, is considered a science that studies the direct relationships between different literatures. This is the common view of early 20th-century comparators. In Cinema, there is no comparative literature unlike the Literature field, but the language being portrayed in cinema can be considered as an international language. With the same historical reality of the Vietnam War it is possible to initially compare the character transformation of Vietnamese cinema and American one.

1.3. The relationship between reality and art – The Vietnam War

As a domain of superstructure, art is strongly influenced by infrastructure and other superstructure forms - philosophy, politics, ethics... This domination is profound and wide in various aspects: theme, topic, expressionist art, inspiration... Sometimes art is more advanced than the ongoing reality.

The Vietnam War is a special event. For Vietnamese people, the Vietnam War is a comprehensive, long-term resistance war of justice in which all the people working together to liberate the South and reunify the country; meanwhile, for the United States, it is not only meaningless but also a war with many consequences, the internal division of the United States, the creation of anti-war sentiment within the United States and the post-war Vietnam syndrome. The war has become a popular theme in American mass culture: books, films and even games.

1.4. Cultural traditions govern the selection and character building of the two countries' cinema

Humanity and patriotism are traditionally prominent in Vietnamese culture and art. The artist is as a soldier in the cultural and artistic fight who creates works highlighting the power of justice, the strength of solidarity and community as a guidance.

The United States is a country with a brief history of over 200 years, it is a melting pot of cultures, in which it prides itself on individual freedom.

The United States is also at the forefront of the Filmography revolution along with the success that came along with being the pioneer in the industry. It is those strengths that affected the characterization of the Vietnam War by the United States.

Summary of Chapter 1

Like literary characters, film characters have names, appearances, faces, personalities, and destiny, which play a particularly important role in the existence of a work. A character in a cinema is an artistic, conventional unit built in the cinematic language. When it comes to movie characters, it should not be forgotten that cinema with its language characteristics has created a "Visual reality" (Yu. Lotman). The personality factor through the actor's acting, through the director's staging, through the camera's angles, along with the lighting and the background, the sound... makes the character's depth and acts as the foundation for a good movie plot. Cinematic characters characterize the action and theme of a movie. Although the language of cinema is undeniably international in nature, cinematic characters are always the by-product of a particular culture. Movie characters are historical - driven by the ever-changing reality of life.

The studying of a character, character's transformation through structure and form, narrative character is not just to tell a story but the way to explore the story, people and events.

War is a special reality. The approach to the war topic, what is chosen, the way the characters are built always depends on the way how war is viewed and the artist's attitude towards that war.

In an agricultural country coping with foreign invaders for generations, Vietnamese literary and artistic characters often promote collective strength, solidarity with patriotism and humanity. The tradition is not a path but is vividly and convincingly shown in the characters carrying the tragic breath of reality.

Americans pride itself on individual freedom and a tradition that highlights the beauty and strength of individual heroes, which can be seen throughout Hollywood films. The harsh reality of the Vietnam War, its happenings as well as its bitter ending is a challenge forces American cinema, on the basis of truth, to create character transformations in the Vietnam War-themed films. History lessons are always valuable for the present and the future.

Chapter 2

CHANGES IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN POST-1975 VIETNAMESE FILMS ON THE VIETNAM WAR

2. 1. Characters in feature films on the Vietnam War before 1975

2.1.1. The “esssential character” of a nation forced to stand up to the resistance

It is not a coincidence that Vietnamese historians believe that *Chung một dòng sông* (Sharing the River), the first film of the Vietnamese Revolutionary cinema, is based on such ideology. In the character world of *Chung một dòng sông*, we encounter individual people who shows strong attachment to the *community* as they tied their happiness, life mottos closely associated with the nation’s destiny. The character always shows a strong bond of friendship and solidarity, even when being held in federal prison. Ms. Van, Ms. Diu, Mr. Nguyen Van Troi, the engineer soldier Nui, Ba Do... they all have the quintessential qualities needed in the struggle for national liberation. Enemy characters – imperialists and their servants are always vile, cruel, with a depraved and inhuman lifestyle. The world of that character is shown vividly and diversely.

2.1.2. The common characteristics of the characters in Vietnamese War films before 1975

Through the character system of the feature films *Chung một dòng sông* (Sharing the River), *Nổi gió* (Wind Rising), *Nguyễn Văn Trỗi* (Nguyen Van Troi), *Đường về quê mẹ* (Way to Motherland), *Vĩ tuyến 17 ngày và đêm* (the 17th Latitude, Day and Night), etc. depicts the resistance war against the Americans is a journey to save the country in a comprehensive, long-term battle. People from all different walks of life are engaged in the war. All the characters representing different people all have the spirit of a soldier, acting as a soldier on the frontline against the enemy. The contradictions and problems faced by the characters are all common and of importance for the whole nation.

The character world is built on *protagonist* and *antagonist*, *good versus evil*. The *central character* in the film is typical. The main character, the central character and the hero in the films are never separated from the general public. The collective portrait serves not only as a background but also as an important factor in order to promote plot development, creating a new

relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist, giving strength to the main character. The overall inspiration for building characters, key and supporting, as well as the mass collective is full of praise.

The antagonists, American soldiers, their advisers, and their Vietnamese servants are built to expose the true face of the enemy characterized by evil nature, crimes, etc. Method of "objectification" is mainly used.

2.2. Characters in some feature films on the Vietnam War after 1975

On April 30, 1975 the war ended. The country is unified. The course of healing the wounds caused by the war, restoring the economy and rebuilding the country was plotted. In context, the war theme in Vietnamese cinema, though still a continuous flow, was undergoing to some extent changes in character development in feature films about the war.

2.2.1. Characters in war films after 1975

The main characters in the films still have good qualities: being ready to sacrifice for the country, willing to sacrifice for the greater good; but the difference is in the way that the character is more grounded to reality. The hero can be seen closer to life, the community and shows strong characteristics that leave a lasting impression. This can be seen in *Mùa gió chướng* (*Windy Season*), *Cánh đồng hoang* (*Wild Fields*), *Mùi cỏ cháy* (*Smell of Burning Grass*), etc.

The system of antagonists are not simple, it is not unilateral but is built to reflect real life in which there are full of deceit and manipulation but they can also have a personal life which paints a normality for these characters.

The diverse aspects of the character-soldier's mental life are expressed with human characteristics. The film *Không có đường chân trời* (*No Horizon*) is an example - the character is created with not just the hero-builtout as before but is infused with personality through his daily activities: he always has to face himself, struggling to fulfill his duty as a soldier.

2.2.2. Characters enhancement after the war

Post-war issues affect viewers in a way that forces them to rethink of the reality of the war, including the psyche of individuals that lived through the war. *Cô gái trên sông* (*Girl on River*) gives a warning of a society waking up to a new normal and are facing changes in their daily life. The film, despite

its tragic elements, managed to instill faith to people. *Đời cát* (*Life in Sand*), *Sống trong sợ hãi* (*Living in Fear*) address multidimensional consequences of war, not only does it affect one's body, but also have a lasting impact on the mind of the person. *Bến không chồng* (*Wharf for Ladies without Husbands*) show not only physical but also mental war consequences. In *Đừng đốt* (*Do not Burn*), the inner world of characters of both sides is connected by humanity.

2.2.3. Similarities in changes in character development of the Vietnamese War films after 1975

*The character is placed in the inspiration of the world, facing all the chaos of everyday life: the old way of life, the limitations of the village and in each person in *Bến không chồng*; the skewed view to each other among opposing side even after the end of the war in *Sống trong sợ hãi*; faith, grace, promise, faith in wartime and the new peaceful situation in *Cô gái trên sông*.*

Attention is paid to building character's psychology, expressed especially in the hidden corners of human life. Humanity dominates every element in the film, including characters with a deeply sympathetic look. It is the interest in building the character's psychology that makes the character's depth, and leaving a lasting impression on the viewers.

Characters are no longer one-sided, but are closer to everyday life. The post-war films provide a more "real" and more thoughtful view on the soldiers' life and how they proceed after post-war status.

Antagonists are depicted from both from the vantage point of the battlefield as well as from a perspective of private life. This is regarded as a transition to a more humanlike straying away from "objectifying" the enemy characters to a more persuasive, closer to functional reality with persuading power.

Before 1975, characters romanticized in their creation as opposed to after 1975 in which the character are more grounded and are more accurately portrayed as to their livelihood and social status.

2.3. Causes of changes in character development of Vietnamese films and films after 1975

2.3.1. Changes in historical, cultural, and social contexts

Changes in historical, cultural and social context lead to changes in the arts, including cinema, tasked with keeping up with the changes. Before 1975, during the war for liberation, against the world's most powerful enemy, the

country had to bring into play all possible resources of the country, including the entire citizen population. Therefore, arts, including cinema, voluntarily take on the task of propagating to encourage the entire nation to stand up to take victory over the enemy. The conclusion of the war enables filmmakers to absorb the losses from both sides of the war and have a deeper understanding of the cost of the victory, and that helped the filmmakers to understand the price of victory, a differing view of the enemy and opposing forces that is no longer lopsided but is rather grounded to real life. Even the daily life of the opposing side are being brought forward, including the good natured and understanding of the antagonist's role.

*Currently, during the opening period, the Vietnam War-themed films such as *Đừng đốt*, *Mùi cỏ cháy* still evoke and promote a heroic generation of the country, helping to strengthen the spirit of the Vietnamese people to sacrifice for the country.*

2.3.2. Internal development of cinema

A mature local filmmaking team was formed during the war. The subject of war, the result of the work depicting the war is treated by the actors as a "spiritual debt" owed to the nation and to the fallen.

After 1975, the country's soldiers who were heroes in the war had to face with many difficulties in daily life. Soldiers whom were once valued in the battlefield, now are placed in a new setting, living a new life. All forms of arts immitiate the new life, understand new problems, and provide encouragement as well as warnings (Tran Thanh Hiep, *Cinema of cultural development needs*, Literature Publishing House).

It is obvious that the vitality of the art lies in the ideological and artistic values for the sake of people. This requires humanistic works to express the psychological depth of characters as symbols.

The theme of war is perceived and exploited by cinematographers at a new level of reality. Viewers of the war films are not only soldiers but also includes the younger generation, which are studying, building and protecting the nation. Telling a war story to the younger generation always poses as a challenge to the filmmakers.

Summary of Chapter 2

Regarding the characters in films on the Vietnam War before 1975, there is a clear and uncompromising division between the protagonists of the right and the antagonists. Through the character's appearance (shape, hairstyle,

clothes, etc.) viewers would immediately recognize him as the protagonist or antagonist. There is a major influence of the nation's traditional theater and of folk tales on cinema can be seen in the way that the protagonist always has the best qualities as the nation's representative who is in a close tie with the mass. All characters are built with "protagonist-antagonist axis" but some are shown rich in identities. Hyperbole is widely used.

Regarding the characters in films on the Vietnam War after 1975, changes in character development and aspect of portrayal are recorded in the cinema of this period. Reality is exploited in a new depth. In addition to the characters engaged in the war other characters are depicted as well that shows diverse perspectives of the war and the post-war reality. Success in building these characters helps evoke traditional heroism of the nation in the past and understand the cost of the victory and the in present days. The character system in this period is psychologically shown as people with both inspiration and problems.

Thus, films on the Vietnam War produced before and after 1975 show changes in terms of the central character, inspiration, and vision as well as construction methods. The changes are due to *the change in historical, cultural and social contexts, leading to an overall change in the arts, including cinema and the internal development of cinema itself in expressing life and people.*

Chapter 3

CHANGES IN CHARACTERS DEVELOPMENT IN POST-1975 VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN FILMS ON THE VIETNAM WAR

3.1. An overview of the development of American films on the Vietnam War

Hollywood cinema has achieved many successes with the theme of the Vietnam War through a straightforward approach based on historical and real events. A series of films on the Vietnam War won awards from the American Academy of Arts such as *The Deer Hunter* directed by Cimino, *Coming Home* directed by Hal Ashby, *Apocalypse Now* directed by Francis Coppola and especially the trilogy *Platoon*, *Born on the 4th of July* and *Heaven and Earth* by the famous director Oliver Stone.

During the war, the filmmakers' perspective on the perception of the war changed dramatically. As a small number of films about the war were made, "coming out of the belligerent ideology and highlighting the war" [102]. Films of this period were made mainly as propaganda, promoting, even

glorifying the war. Films related to the war still appeared and achieved much success following the end of the war in 1975.

American films on the Vietnam War in the post-war period follow different trends, one of which reflects the reality of the war, the cruelty, the immorality of the war and the Vietnam syndrome among American veterans many years later. Another trend is to depict the reality of the war with the cruel barbarism of humans, the physical and mental destruction of American soldiers, the most prominent example of which is "*Platoon*" directed by Oliver Stone. In the 1980s, there was a reverse trend, more entertaining, praising the heroic American soldier and outstanding talent.

Thus, it can be seen that American films on the Vietnam War are basically of good quality in terms of technique and art, but **there is no unity in the view on the Vietnam War**. This makes a difference from Vietnamese cinema.

3.2. Characters in American films on the Vietnam War before 1975

In the early period (before 1975) very few American films were produced on the subject of the Vietnam War with only a few propaganda films for the war ("*Green Beret*") and a few heroic films such as "*Rambo*", "*First Blood*".

The roles of *protagonists* and *antagonists* are clearly defined. The main faction is the American soldiers with knowledge and strength (intellectual, physical) and weapons full of humanistic, taking over a mission to save humanity. The villains are communists portrayed as looters, shooters, barbarians, inhumane. Good intention, humanistic qualities, justice are always in opposition to the evil force that wantonly destroys human life and hold humanity in little regard.

The hero in the films of this period is shown to be both wise and affectionate. They carry the ideal of sacrificing themselves to save the people in a strange land and country that are being massacred and harmed. The heroic character of this period is reflected in the image of the character in *Green Berets*.

The method of romanticization and poeticization is thoroughly used in character building, especially in building heroic characters in the tradition of American cinema. Romantic details, poetic scenes, rich in sensuality and association are fully utilized.

American traditional cinematographers pay great attention to building individual characters - the hero character. The hero is somewhat epic in nature. This becomes lame when the senseless nature of war is erased.

The opposing character the Viet Cong was built in the style of a "functional character". It is a collective character that is not allowed to be depicted with his personal life and personality, but is expressed with his nature through barbaric and brutal actions... with meaningless functions.

3.3. Characters in American films on the Vietnam War after 1975

3.3.1. Character of pointless war

Many Hollywood-produced feature films on the Vietnam War have more realistically reflected this fierce and pointless war. The characters-soldiers realize the meaninglessness of the war as they do not save anyone's life but they themselves massacre poor, innocent people in a village of a faraway nation.

Their own sufferings are evident in their eyes: injury, death... Even their own teammates shoot and kill each other because of personality clash, ethnic or internal conflicts and even personal enmities. "*Platoon*" is a good example of this.

The character-soldier is fully displayed in all aspects: combat and personal life, heroism, tragedy, romance, ordinariness... With many heroic traits they are expressed in many aspects: intelligence, behavior with themselves, with their family and teammates...

Characters of women and children are emphasized. In general, they are relatives, wives and children, friends, acquaintances, lovers...of the characters who suffer from consequences of the war when it is going on or is over.

Films on the Vietnam War produced after 1975 successfully describe the image of the soldier directly opposing the war. The soldier realizes the truths of the difference between dreams, beautiful fantasies and reality, of the harsh and pointless war, of the reality of unnecessary sacrifices and losses, of way the government treat them. An example of the character can be seen in "*Born on the Fourth of July*".

3.3.2. Post-war character-soldier and Vietnam syndrome.

The period after 1975 records a boom in postwar Oscar-winning films about human fates in the war and post-war as well as the Vietnam syndrome.

War is full of pain and loss is depicted in countless American films on the Vietnam War such as *“Taxi Driver”*, *“Return”*, *“Born on the Fourth of July”*, *“Heaven and Earth”*, *“Forest Gump”*, *“Deer Hunter”*. The character-soldier suffer heavy losses after the battle, both physical and mental. The hero is placed in a fairly realistic, tragic context of the senseless war that the hero himself realizes and experiences.

3.3.3. The return of character-hero

A reverse trend of films appears at the end of the 1980s that expresses the view of conservatives in the society who want to restore the beautiful image of the USA by rewriting history, turning the actions of the country in the Vietnam War into glorious and patriotic actions. A series of films of this kind are shown including *“Uncommon Valor”* (1983), *“Rambo, first bloodshed II”* (1985), *“We Are Soldiers”* (2002) with *“Rambo”* (1985) as the most obvious examples.

3.3.4. Villains in American war films after 1975

Villains in American films on the Vietnam War after 1975 are called "faceless" by many American critics, described as cruel and inhuman. That view comes from filmmakers' goal to justify the mistake of the senseless war. The description clearly shows filmmakers' racism, confusion and helplessness in depicting reality.

Character development in American post-war films has following characteristics: gradual shifting the focus away from main character, promoting flashback and developing a story within a story, describing American characteristics, focusing on hero type, taking advantage of narrative film genre to increase persuasiveness...

3.4. Some causes of changes in character development in the Vietnam War films of American cinema after 1975

3.4.1. Reality, the end of the war, and the delay

The Vietnam War left heavy consequences for American society with the so called Vietnam syndrome haunting generations of Americans. This shows that humans cannot avoid the truth and there is always a need for the knowledge of the past. Many American participants of the Vietnam War become writers and filmmakers.

3.4.2. Tradition of promoting individuality and Hollywood tradition

The individualism in American culture and the tradition of promoting individuality strongly influence character variation. “Hero” can be understood as a specialty of Hollywood films. The hero-character is romanticized and poeticized at first, but failing and suffering afterwards.

3.4.3. The film industry capable of looking directly at the truth and seeing the fairness

Despite its conservative trend, the American film industry is still capable of looking at the truth and recognizing fairness. Both achievements and limitations in building characters in American films on the Vietnam War will give us a deeper understanding of people and war from the other side, as well as valuable experience on the subject of war and character building in war films.

3.5. Some similarities and differences between Vietnamese and American cinemas in films on the Vietnam War

The view from the reality of the Vietnam War shows how the filmmakers handle the subject.

- The war of the Vietnamese nation is, in its nature, a justification; that is always the consistent perception of Vietnamese cinematographers. The period from before to after 1975 is associated with American filmmakers’ capability of realizing the meaninglessness of the war that the US ignited and waged. With the right perception, American cinema produces films of real value on the subject.

- During the wartime: the USA makes few war films with less than convincing main characters and taking the context far from reality. Vietnam's war films are, in contrast, in a large number, bearing the nation’s spirit of all for the victory with a collective of heroes as main characters. Films of both the two countries serve propaganda with clear distinction between protagonists and antagonists and hyperbole promoted.

- After the war: The war theme in Vietnamese feature films is thoroughly exploited in connection with reality through characters depicted in their everyday life, showing a deep understanding of the consequences of war. The war theme in American feature films is associated with the process of realizing the nature of the Vietnam War with the hero placed in the brutal context of the reality. The common point of successful films on the Vietnam War theme of the two countries' cinema is that they are all directed towards the value of

"truth - goodness - beauty", affirming that war is an unwanted reality, even a tragedy, supporting aspiration for peace.

Summary of Chapter 3

Before 1975, American cinema makes few films on the Vietnam War of which the only and most famous is "*Green Beret*" - a film supporting the American war of aggression in Vietnam. After the war, there are different trends in exploring the theme: reflecting the bare reality of the brutal war, to ease the wounds, to revive the American legendary hero. The American filmmakers does not shift the entirety of the focus on one main character - contrary to Hollywood's cinematic tradition. The type of hero character is still depicted without beautiful, realistic hero image.

Changes in character development in American feature films on the Vietnam War in American cinema after 1975 occurred because of a combination of the fierce consequences of the war and the fact that many Vietnam War veterans become writers and filmmakers, recounting their actual experiences. Other factors are the American cultural tradition to promote the individuality, the Hollywood tradition, and ability to self-regulate so that the traditional hero on the screen retains the breath of the reality, the potential power of a great cinema whose artists dare to look straight at truth and justice.

The achievements and limitations of American cinema in building characters in films on the Vietnam War left us with deep insights into the war in the view of the other side as well as valuable experience in handling war themes and characters.

CONCLUSION

Look at the problem from different angles, filmmakers can make films on the same theme with many differences, even opposing ones, in topic, ideas, plots, and character images. With the nature of the fight to protect the homeland and unification of the country, Vietnamese feature films function as weapons and turned the artists into soldiers. Certain changes are made after 1975 (when Vietnam won the war): the war theme is expanded; life inspiration is added to the epic inspiration; the art of building characters is more profound, focusing on the character's personality; the antagonist character is initially depicted in many aspects; the hero collective is always focused.

American films on the Vietnam War before 1975 are not many in number and are criticized for distorting the truth. The heroic motif cannot find the land to live on in the reality of the senseless war. After 1975, there are two

main trends: the trend of realism, anti-war and the trend of rediscovering lost values and legends, praising American soldiers in order to revise the Vietnam War-related history. Many American feature films on the Vietnam War following a realistic trend are highly appreciated for changes in character development: the heroes-soldiers are also depicted as victims of the meaningless war.

In general, because of the developing political views, economic and cultural contexts, the outcome of the war, the time lag, and the development and self-regulation of the two cinemas Vietnamese and American films on the Vietnam War both have had a positive transformation on character development since 1975. Despite obvious differences in development, in terms of scale and potential, in cultural traditions and in the way to exploit the topic, the two cinema still have one thing in common: War is always a terrible tragedy of human society and everyone should raise a voice against war.

Through changes in character development of the two countries' cinema as presented in the research, it is clearly seen that the true art is always in step with the real life, performing great functions of education, anticipation and that justice is always the foundation of noble values.

Research on achievements limitations of American cinema in the process of development provides a deeper understanding of the reality of the Vietnam War from the other side which acts as valuable experience for Vietnamese to make good feature films on the Vietnam War.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

1. The world of child characters in “Khi mẹ vắng nhà” (When Mom is away from home) Journal of Art and Culture, No. 423, September 2019 [p.63-p.65]
2. Poetic elements in “Ngã ba Đồng Lộ” (Dong Loc Crossroads) Journal of Theater and Film Studies, No. 21, 2019 [p.53-p.57]
3. “Giờ tận thế” (End of the world point) - a reflection on the Vietnam War Journal of Art and Culture, No. 425, September 2019 [p.67-p.70]