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HOÀNG DẠ VŨ

THE STYLES OF THREE WOMEN FILM DIRECTORS BACH DIEP, VIET LINH, AND SIU PHAM

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Academic Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Tran Thanh Hiep
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hoang Cam Giang

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INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for the Study

Style is a central concept in film studies, reflecting the relationship between the creative subject and cinematic language. In auteur theory, style serves as a basis for identifying a director's distinctive signature and explaining the coherence between artistic ideas and form in their work. From the perspective of film poetics, style is understood as a way of organizing formal elements to generate meaning and aesthetic effects. The study of style therefore seeks not only to identify the distinctive creative characteristics of individual directors but also to explain the relationship between artistic vision, cinematic language, and the contexts in which films are produced.

Throughout film history, women directors have contributed to expanding the range of creative subjects and approaches, establishing distinctive signatures through their choice of themes, character construction, and organization of cinematic form. The study of their styles therefore needs to consider their historical and cultural contexts, creative conditions, and gender experiences. This approach has also been informed by the development of feminist theory and feminist film criticism. While auteur theory emphasizes the director's individual signature, feminist film criticism raises questions concerning gender experience, gender discourse, and the female gaze in the construction of meaning. Combining these approaches makes it possible to examine style as the outcome of interactions among the creative subject, artistic worldview, gender experience, and choices in the organization of cinematic language.

In Vietnam, research on authorship, directorial style, and gender in cinema has achieved certain results. However, within the body of literature consulted for this dissertation, these two areas of inquiry have not yet substantially converged. Studies of style have generally focused on identifying auteur signatures and artistic characteristics, while research on gender has primarily examined character representations, themes, or discourses concerning women. With regard to women directors, studies have addressed individual careers and certain aspects of their creative practices. Nevertheless, the examination of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham within a comparative analytical framework, focusing on the relationship among artistic worldview, gender experience, and film poetics, remains an avenue for further investigation. In particular, alongside asking what views on gender are expressed in their films, it is important to consider how these views and experiences are translated into choices concerning narration, imagery, sound, and other modes of formal organization. This provides the basis for bringing auteur theory, film poetics, and feminist film criticism together within a unified analytical framework.

On this basis, the dissertation selects three case studies: Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham. Each director's creative career is associated with distinct

historical and cultural contexts and filmmaking environments. Bach Diep's career is closely connected with revolutionary cinema and the postwar period; Viet Linh's development as a filmmaker spans the transition from filmmaking in the revolutionary base to the Đổi Mới period; and Siu Pham is a Vietnamese-origin director whose creative practice brings together filmmaking environments in Vietnam and internationally. These differences provide an opportunity to examine how creative subjects transform their contexts, worldviews, and gender experiences into distinctive modes of cinematic organization. The selection of these three cases is not intended to present them as representative of all women directors, nor is it based on an assumption that a universal "women's style" exists. Each director is approached as an individual case, with her own body of work and distinctive creative characteristics, while also being considered in relation to the others in order to identify points of convergence and difference.

For these reasons, the dissertation is entitled **"The Styles of Three Women Film Directors: Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham."** It aims to clarify the factors contributing to the formation of each director's style, the ways in which that style is manifested through film poetics, and the relationship between formal choices, artistic worldview, and each director's gender experience. In doing so, the dissertation seeks to develop an approach to directorial style that connects auteur studies, the analysis of cinematic form, and gender perspectives.

2. Research Aims

This study aims to identify and explain the styles of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham through an integrated approach combining auteur theory, film poetics, and feminist film criticism. It also seeks to clarify the relationships among historical and cultural contexts, artistic worldviews, gender discourse, and systems of formal choices in cinema.

3. Research Subject

The direct subject of this study is the styles of three women film directors: Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham. Their styles are identified through systematic and relatively stable characteristics that recur across their works and establish distinctive signatures in the organization of cinematic language.

4. Scope of the Study

The dissertation examines the feature films of the three directors.

The films by Bach Diep selected for analysis comprise nine works: *Ngay Le Thanh* (1976), *Cau Chuyen Lang Dua* (1977), *Nguoi Chua Biet Noi* (1979), *Ai Gian Ai Thuong* (1982), *Y H'Nua* (1985), *Cuoc Chia Tay Khong Hen Truoc* (1986), *Huyen Thoai Ve Nguoi Me* (1987), *Ngo Hep* (1988), and *Hoa Ban Do* (1994).

The films by Viet Linh selected for analysis are *Noi Binh Yen Chim Hot* (1986), *Phien Toa Can Chanh An* (1987), *Ganh Xiec Rong* (1988), *Dau An Cua Quy* (1992), *Chung Cu* (1999), and *Me Thao – Thoi Vang Bong* (2002).

For director Siu Pham, four feature films are selected: *Do Hay Day?* (*Here… or There?*, 2011), *Can Phong Cua Me* (*Homostratus*, 2014), *Con Duong Tren Nui* (*On the Endless Road*, 2017), and *Vao Doi* (*We Come into Life*, 2021). Siu Pham is approached as a Vietnamese-origin director whose creative practice is transcultural, situated within a filmmaking context that includes Vietnam.

In terms of the temporal scope, the study focuses on materials from 1975 to the present, covering the postwar period, Đổi Mới (Renovation), and international integration. In terms of source materials, in addition to the films themselves, the study draws on screenplays, scholarly studies, books, articles, interviews, memoirs, and other sources related to the directors' creative processes.

5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

5.1. Research Questions

(1) What factors interact in the formation of the artistic worldviews and gender discourses in the works of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham?

(2) Which aspects of film poetics does each woman director select and organize to express her style, and how do these poetic choices reflect the director's gender experiences and understanding of gender?

(3) What insights into the styles of women film directors can be drawn from these three case studies?

5.2. Research Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** The artistic worldviews and gender discourses in the works of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham are shaped by the interaction among historical and cultural contexts, gender experiences, and each director's creative individuality. The degree and manner in which these factors exert their influence differ across the three case studies.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Each director selects and organizes the various aspects of film poetics according to relatively stable principles, thereby forming a coherent aesthetic system that reflects her individual vision and gender experience.
- **Hypothesis 3:** The stylistic differences among Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham demonstrate that women directors can develop diverse styles that cannot be reduced to a single, unified model of "women's style". Nevertheless, gender experience remains a factor in the formation and expression of each director's style.

6. Research Tasks

The research tasks comprise: systematizing the theoretical foundations; examining the factors contributing to the formation of artistic worldviews and gender discourse; analyzing five aspects of film poetics, namely narration and point of view, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound; identifying recurring and relatively stable characteristics; and comparing the three case studies in order to establish stylistic features supported by evidence.

7. Research Methodology

7.1. Theoretical Framework

The dissertation integrates auteur theory, film poetics, and feminist film theory and criticism. This approach does not regard biological sex as a direct cause of style. Instead, gender experience, gender consciousness, and gender discourse are treated as analytical dimensions whose relevance must be examined and substantiated through the films themselves.

7.2. Research Methods

The principal research methods include film analysis, poetics analysis, an interdisciplinary approach, case study research, cross-case analysis, historical and cultural analysis, and comparative analysis. The multiple-case study design makes it possible to preserve the distinctiveness of each director while identifying similarities and differences in the mechanisms through which their styles are formed and manifested.

8. Originality of the Study

The dissertation focuses on three specific directors rather than attempting to generalize about women directors as a whole. It combines three theoretical approaches to examine artistic worldview, gender discourse, and film poetics in an integrated manner. The originality of the study lies in examining style in relation to context, the creative subject, and systems of formal choices, while substantiating stylistic characteristics through the analysis of the selected body of films.

9. Scientific and Practical Significance of the Study

9.1. Scientific Significance

The dissertation contributes an approach to the study of women directors' styles that draws on film studies, poetics, and gender studies. It clarifies the distinctions among factors contributing to style formation, its modes of manifestation, and its defining characteristics.

9.2. Practical Significance

The study provides research materials and a systematic framework for interpreting the works of the three directors. It may contribute to research and teaching in film history and theory, film criticism, and gender studies in cinema.

10. Structure of the Dissertation

In addition to the Introduction, Literature Review, Conclusion, List of Published Works, List of Films Examined, and References, the dissertation comprises three chapters:

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Chapter 2 – Artistic Worldviews and the Construction of Gender Discourse in the Works of Three Women Directors

Chapter 3 – Film Poetics and the Manifestation of Style in the Works of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Overview of the Research Literature

The research literature is divided into four main groups:

1.1. Auteur Theory and Directorial Style

Auteur theory is one of the important foundations for the study of film style. From Alexandre Astruc's concept of the *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen), through François Truffaut's auteurist position, to Andrew Sarris's criteria for identifying auteurs, the director has increasingly been regarded as a creative subject capable of establishing coherence between subject matter and form across their works. The studies of John Caughie, Victor Perkins, David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Warren Buckland, and Robert Stam have further expanded this approach, understanding style as a system of formal choices bearing an individual signature while also being shaped by specific historical and cultural conditions.

In Vietnam, works such as *World Cinema Directors*, *Vietnamese Feature Film Directors*, *A Research Journey through Vietnamese Cinema*, and *The History of Vietnamese Cinema* have provided materials on the careers, works, and artistic characteristics of many directors. However, the interpretation of style as an integrated whole formed through the interaction of the creative subject, artistic worldview, historical and cultural contexts, and formal choices requires further investigation, particularly in the case of women film directors.

1.2. Poetics and Film Poetics

Poetics provides tools for studying artworks as integrated wholes organized through systems of expressive means. From the tradition of poetics established by Aristotle, through the Russian Formalists, to Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, this approach has increasingly focused on the relationship between artistic form, history, and culture. In film studies, David Bordwell, in *Poetics of Cinema* and *On the History of Film Style*, has developed the approach of historical poetics, emphasizing the analysis of formal choices within specific historical conditions. In addition, *Film Art: An Introduction* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film*, and the works of Marcel Martin, Béla Balázs, and Warren Buckland provide a conceptual and methodological framework for analyzing narration, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound.

In Vietnam, the works of Vu Ngoc Thanh, Tran Luan Kim, and Ngo Phuong Lan have contributed to the introduction and application of film theory and methods for analyzing cinematic language. These studies provide an important foundation for the dissertation's examination of formal elements and for situating them in relation to each director's artistic worldview and creative conditions.

1.3. Feminist Theory and Feminist Film Criticism

The works of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, bell hooks, and Judith Butler provide important concepts for understanding women's social positions,

power, identity, and the construction of gender. In film studies, Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" raises questions about the male gaze and the ways in which cinema positions female characters as objects of visual pleasure. Subsequent studies have expanded the scope of feminist film criticism to include female spectatorship, race, class, sexuality, the body, and ecology.

In Vietnam, research on gender and feminism has developed across literary studies, cultural studies, and the social sciences. In film studies, a number of works and articles by Hoang Cam Giang, Ho Khanh Van, Nguyen Thi Minh, Nguyen Hoang Thi Tho, and others have begun to apply feminist perspectives to the analysis of representations of women, sexuality, and gender discourse. Tran Luan Kim has also introduced feminist criticism as an approach to film studies. These studies provide a basis for the dissertation's further application of gender theory to film analysis, while drawing greater attention to how gender experiences and discourses are translated into formal choices, thereby contributing to the identification of directorial style.

1.4. Studies on Women Film Directors' Styles and the Three Case Studies

Internationally, the works of Lucy Fischer, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, Melanie Bell, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Judith Mayne, and Geetha Ramanathan have contributed to establishing the position of women directors in film history while raising questions about the relationship between individual style, cultural structures, and gender discourse. More recently, *Cinema Her Way* (Marya E. Gates, 2025) has added material on the artistic perspectives and creative experiences of women directors working in diverse cinematic environments. These studies point to the need to identify women film directors' styles through the analysis of specific formal choices, while avoiding the reduction of style to a fixed gender essence.

In Vietnam, research on women film directors has begun to emerge through works such as *Women Directors of Vietnamese Cinema* by Nguyen Do Cong, Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang's thesis on feminist discourse in Vietnamese films, and Le Thi Tuan's studies of sexuality and auteur style, among others. Regarding the individual case studies, Bach Diep has been discussed in *Vietnamese Feature Film Directors*, *The History of Vietnamese Cinema*, and various critical articles and introductions to her films. Viet Linh was the subject of the thesis *The Creative Characteristics of Director Viet Linh* (Hoang Da Vu, 2008), as well as articles by Tran Luan Kim, Carrie Tarr, and Pham Thuy Nhan. With regard to Siu Pham, Earl Jackson's article "Serial and Palimpsest: Landscape in Vietnamese Cinema" (2023) is a notable study that approaches landscape in her films through the theory of *fūkeiron*, relating it to memory, history, and transcultural experience across borders. In addition, newspaper articles and interviews have documented the

experimental qualities and explorations of cinematic language in the director's work.

2. Assessment of the Research Landscape and the Dissertation's Orientation

Overall, domestic and international studies have provided important theoretical foundations, methodological approaches, and research materials for the study of authorship, style, film poetics, and gender. Research on Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham has also made distinct contributions, ranging from accounts of their careers and analyses of their films to the identification of certain artistic characteristics in each director's work. The dissertation builds on these findings. It does not regard the independent study of each director as a limitation; instead, it seeks to examine the three cases within a common analytical framework in order to identify their similarities and differences.

By combining auteur theory, historical poetics, film poetics, and feminist film criticism, the dissertation examines gender discourse in the films while analyzing how that discourse is expressed through narration, point of view, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. Through this approach, the study seeks to identify recurring and relatively stable stylistic characteristics in each case, rather than presupposing the existence of a universal women's style.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.1. Theoretical Foundations and Basic Concepts

1.1.1. Auteur Theory and Directorial Style

1.1.1.1. Auteur Theory

From the propositions advanced by André Bazin, François Truffaut, and Alexandre Astruc to Andrew Sarris's systematization of the approach, auteur theory regards the director as the central creative subject who establishes an individual signature through a system of choices concerning cinematic form and language. However, this dissertation does not absolutize the director's individual role. Instead, it understands style as the outcome of interactions between creative individuality, historical and cultural contexts, and film production institutions. In the Vietnamese context, the concept of the "auteur" also needs to be adapted to the specific historical characteristics and operational mechanisms of Vietnamese cinema.

1.1.1.2. The Concept of Style

Style is understood as a system of stable and recurring characteristics that establishes the distinctive identity of an artist or artwork. In cinema, directorial style is manifested through the coherence between an artistic worldview and choices in cinematic language. Drawing on Bordwell and Thompson's approach, this dissertation regards style as a system of formal organization comprising mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. It also draws on the perspectives of Victor Perkins, Andrew Sarris, and Warren Buckland to affirm that an auteur's

signature is expressed through consistency in subject matter, narrative structure, and artistic techniques.

1.1.2. Film Studies Theory and Film Poetics

Film studies is understood as the field that examines cinema as an artistic, cultural, and social phenomenon. Within this field, film narratology and feminist narratology play important roles in approaches to questions of gender. Film poetics is understood as the study of the artistic structure and meaning-making processes of a film through point of view and systems of audiovisual signs, including framing, camera angles, lighting, editing, music, and cinematic rhythm. The dissertation also considers devices such as metaphor, metonymy, intertextuality, and symbolism in order to identify modes of expression associated with women's experiences, thereby opening up the possibility of the concept of "women's poetics" in Vietnamese cinema.

1.1.3. Feminist Theory and the Styles of Women Film Directors

1.1.3.1. Feminist Theory

Feminism is understood as an intellectual and social movement that advocates gender equality while criticizing patriarchal power structures in social and cultural life. Drawing on the perspectives of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and contemporary feminist theorists, this dissertation maintains that gender is not an immutable natural essence but a social construct shaped through discourse and cultural practices. Feminist theorists have also emphasized the need to develop an aesthetics and a set of criteria for the appreciation and evaluation of artistic phenomena from a gender perspective.

1.1.3.2. Feminist Film Criticism and Basic Concepts

This section examines the emergence of feminist film criticism and the principal approaches to film studies from a gender perspective, including films by women, women's spectatorship, women's filmmaking, and women's narratives. Particular attention is given to Laura Mulvey's contribution through the concept of the "male gaze," which demonstrates how classical cinema organizes visual pleasure from a male point of view, frequently positioning women as objects of the gaze. In response, the concept of the "female gaze" is considered as an alternative mode of expression that foregrounds women's experiences, emotions, and subjectivity. The dissertation emphasizes that the "female gaze" does not simply refer to films directed by women; it also entails changes in the organization of point of view, visual rhythm, emotional structure, and the capacity to construct empathy in cinema. At the same time, the application of feminist theory to Vietnamese cinema must take into account the specific historical and cultural context of Vietnamese society.

1.1.3.3. The Styles of Women Film Directors

On the basis of combining auteur theory and feminist film criticism, this dissertation understands the styles of women film directors as systems of stable

and recurring characteristics in their artistic thinking, organization of images, and use of cinematic language. Such styles are not determined solely by the biological sex of the director, but also by the ways in which the world is perceived and expressed through a particular gender consciousness.

1.2. Conceptual Framework and Analytical Framework

The dissertation develops its conceptual and analytical frameworks by combining auteur theory, film poetics, and feminist film criticism, within an approach that considers the interactions among creative individuality, historical and social contexts, gender discourse, and the cinematic aesthetics of different periods. The analytical framework comprises two levels. The first examines historical and cultural contexts, artistic worldviews, and the construction of gender discourse. The second investigates film poetics and the manifestation of style. The multiple-case study design makes it possible to analyze each director independently before conducting cross-case comparisons.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical foundations, conceptual system, and analytical framework for the entire study. A key point is the distinction among style, the factors contributing to its formation, and the dimensions through which it is manifested. The chapter also situates gender in relation to style through the analysis of the films themselves.

CHAPTER 2: ARTISTIC WORLDVIEWS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER DISCOURSE BY THREE WOMEN FILM DIRECTORS

2.1. Artistic Worldview and Gender Discourse in the Films of Bach Diep

2.1.1. Historical and Cultural Contexts and the Formation of Artistic Worldview

Bach Diep's artistic worldview took shape within the context of revolutionary cinema, from the period of resistance to the early years following national reunification. Her creative environment was shaped by political imperatives, limited production resources, and the prevailing values of community and nation. Throughout her career, from directing assigned screenplays to taking a more active role in selecting and developing screenplays, Bach Diep gradually established her own artistic vision. Her concerns focused on human destinies, inner life, and social transformations, particularly the circumstances of women. This worldview brought together the epic inspiration of revolutionary cinema and an emerging interest in exploring individual lives and concrete human experiences.

2.1.2. The Construction of Gender Discourse

2.1.2.1. Women in the Discourse of War

In Bach Diep's films, women remain associated with revolutionary ideals and responsibilities to the community, but are also portrayed through their personal experiences, suffering, and inner lives. In *Ngay Le Thanh*, Nhan undergoes a transformation in awareness as she negotiates between religious faith

and responsibility towards social life. In *Cau Chuyen Lang Dua*, Ba Hon embodies the steadfast qualities of a revolutionary woman, while also enduring personal losses and suspicion from the community. In *Y H'Nua*, the heroic female figure is portrayed through her natural beauty, love, and sacrifice in protecting her village. Through these portrayals, Bach Diep expands the image of the female hero beyond idealized qualities to encompass emotional depth and individual destiny.

2.1.2.2. Reconstructing the Image of the Mother

Bach Diep approaches motherhood through love, care, and responsibility, rather than defining it solely through blood ties or biological functions. In *Huyen Thoai Ve Nguoi Me*, Huong takes in orphaned children after their mothers have sacrificed their lives, becoming a mother through acts of protection and nurturing. In *Nguoi Chua Biet Noi*, motherhood is considered in relation to the responsibilities of family and community towards children. Meanwhile, *Ai Gian Ai Thuong* portrays Thao, a woman who gives birth outside marriage and faces social prejudice, yet chooses to keep her child and live responsibly. These films demonstrate how Bach Diep broadens the meaning of motherhood, emphasizing the ethical and humanistic value of care and nurturing.

2.1.2.3. Women in the Face of Social Change

In films exploring postwar life and periods of social transition, Bach Diep focuses on women's choices, mistakes, and capacity for self-awareness. In *Ngo Hep*, Loan chooses marriage for material gain, only to face tragedy and loneliness. In *Cuoc Chia Tay Khong Hen Truoc*, Huong gradually recognizes her dependence on her father's status and seeks to move beyond his shadow in order to make her own life decisions. The female characters thus emerge with limitations and vulnerabilities, as well as the capacity for change. Bach Diep's gender discourse gradually shifts from representations of women associated with collective ideals towards portrayals of individuals with inner lives and the capacity to make their own choices.

2.2. Artistic Worldview and Gender Discourse in the Films of Viet Linh

2.2.1. Historical and Cultural Contexts and the Formation of Artistic Worldview

Viet Linh came of age during the war, was active in a resistance base, and worked within the environment of revolutionary cinema. After 1975, she received formal training in film directing at VGIK in the Soviet Union before developing her filmmaking career in the postwar and Đổi Mới periods. Her wartime experiences gave her a profound awareness of loss, survival, and the human condition, while her education and exposure to international cinema broadened her understanding of cinematic language and form. In response to the social transformations of the Đổi Mới period, Viet Linh turned her attention to conflicts among memory, individual aspirations, and shifting systems of values. Her artistic worldview places human beings at its center, approaching history through individual destinies and emphasizing understanding, compassion, and the right to

self-awareness. Her aesthetic conception also reflects the influence of modernist aesthetics.

2.2.2. The Construction of Gender Discourse

2.2.2.1. Postwar Tragedies and the Disintegration of Personal Life

Viet Linh approaches war through its prolonged consequences for individual and family life, particularly the suffering experienced by women. In *Phien Toa Can Chanh An*, Quynh Mai suffers from the effects of Agent Orange, has lost the ability to bear children, and falls into despair when she receives no support from those close to her. Through the film's concluding statement, "No! None of us is innocent!", the film raises questions about the community's moral responsibility towards postwar victims. In *Chung Cu*, Minh Ly and Co Sau represent different experiences of social upheaval: one loses her sense of security after her family is evacuated, while the other becomes disillusioned when the values she once believed in come into conflict with the realities of a market economy. The postwar discourse thus extends from family tragedy to ruptures in communal relationships.

2.2.2.2. Marginalized Women and the Aspiration to Be Understood

Viet Linh pays particular attention to women in exceptional circumstances, including those marked by physical differences, personal vulnerabilities, or feelings of inferiority, and those positioned outside prevailing social norms. In her films, the female body is presented as a living entity bearing the marks, imperfections, wounds, and transformations of lived experience, rather than as an idealized, immutable, and eternal image. In *Dau An Cua Quy*, the birthmark on the young woman's chest becomes a sign through which the community labels her as different. Yet, through the character's point of view and emotional expressions, her body emerges first and foremost as a site that holds her longing to be loved, accepted, and able to lead an ordinary life. These representations can be considered alongside Quynh Mai in *Phien Toa Can Chanh An*, whose body bears the consequences of war, and Cam in *Me Thao – Thoi Vang Bong*, whose capacity to express emotion is conveyed through her gaze, gestures, and quiet acts of care. In Viet Linh's artistic vision, beauty is no longer confined to physical perfection or fixed standards. Instead, it becomes more fragile and is associated with human dignity, emotion, and vitality in the face of the transformations of life and society. These characters demonstrate how Viet Linh shifts the point of view towards lives that are rarely heard, emphasizing women's dignity, inner lives, and need to be understood.

2.3. Artistic Worldview and Gender Discourse in the Films of Siu Pham

2.3.1. Historical and Cultural Contexts and the Formation of Artistic Worldview

Siu Pham's artistic worldview took shape within a context of international integration and cross-cultural exchange. As a Vietnamese-origin director who left her homeland at an early age and grew up in a multicultural environment, she

understands identity as a process of movement, dialogue, and negotiation between homeland and adopted country, tradition and modernity. Her experience of migration, background in visual arts, and exposure to independent cinema, installation art, and performance have contributed to the formation of a creative approach characterized by a strong visual, symbolic, and experimental dimension. Her artistic collaboration with Jean-Luc Mello has also been a factor in her creative practice. Her films *Do Hay Day?* (*Here… or There?*), *Can Phong Cua Me* (*Homostratus*), *Con Duong Tren Nui* (*On the Endless Road*), and *Vao Doi* (*We Come into Life*) reveal her sustained interest in memory, the sense of belonging, and the search for self-identity within diverse cultural environments.

2.3.2. The Construction of Gender Discourse

2.3.2.1. The Female Subject in East–West Cultural Dialogue

In Siu Pham's films, female characters often exist at the intersection of multiple cultural value systems. Their identities take shape through processes of dialogue and adaptation rather than being defined by a fixed sense of belonging. In *Do Hay Day?*, a Vietnamese-origin wife and her foreign husband experience cultural differences upon returning to Vietnam; the woman's return journey also becomes a process of confronting memory and reassessing her sense of self. In *Vao Doi*, the encounter between Mai and a foreign man opens up new experiences through which the character gradually becomes more aware of her personal choices. Meanwhile, *Con Duong Tren Nui* depicts an encounter between a foreign man and a Thai grandmother and her granddaughter in the mountainous region of Northwest Vietnam, emphasizing the possibility of connection through everyday activities. In this way, Siu Pham's gender discourse is associated with women's agency in making choices and shaping their identities within contexts of cultural exchange.

2.3.2.2. Women's Search for Selfhood and Freedom

Siu Pham frequently places female characters on journeys of self-questioning concerning identity, memory, belonging, and the meaning of existence. In *Can Phong Cua Me*, the image of a lonely mother in an old house evokes ruptures in family relationships and a sense of alienation in the face of social change. In *Vao Doi*, Mai's journey towards adulthood is bound up with choices concerning love, the body, emotions, and the future. The director does not subject the character to moral judgment; instead, she focuses on the process of self-awareness and the capacity to make decisions about one's own life. Notably, Siu Pham's films tend to move beyond binary oppositions such as male–female, East–West, tradition–modernity, and past–present, as seen in *Do Hay Day?* and *Con Duong Tren Nui*. Human identity is understood in terms of multiplicity, intersection, and continual transformation, rather than being confined by gender, race, ethnicity, or cultural origins. The ideas of multiplicity and intersectionality contribute to the formation of a transcultural gender discourse in which women's

freedom is associated with the capacity to define their own sense of self and move beyond predetermined norms.

Chapter Summary

Through the three case studies, chapter 2 demonstrates that each director's artistic worldview is formed through the interaction of personal experience, creative conditions, and historical and cultural contexts. Bach Diep combines the revolutionary inspiration of her cinematic background with an interest in women's destinies and inner lives. Viet Linh focuses on postwar trauma, marginalized lives, and the aspiration to be understood. Siu Pham explores transcultural identity, journeys of self-awareness, and individual freedom. Despite their different contexts and approaches, all three directors portray women as subjects with emotions, the capacity to make choices, and the need to construct meaning in their lives. Their different approaches to the construction of gender discourse establish distinct intellectual and aesthetic foundations for each director. These foundations, in turn, provide the basis for chapter 3's analysis of how their artistic conceptions are manifested through film poetics.

CHAPTER 3: FILM POETICS AND THE MANIFESTATION OF THE STYLES OF BACH DIEP, VIET LINH, AND SIU PHAM

Chapter 3 examines five aspects of film poetics: narration and point of view, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. Its primary focus is to clarify how the three directors organize cinematic language to transform the artistic worldviews and gender discourses discussed in chapter 2 into specific forms of expression. Through comparative analysis, the chapter identifies relatively stable principles of formal organization that contribute to the distinctive styles of each director.

3.1. Narration, Point of View, and the Female Gaze

In Bach Diep's films, narration primarily follows the classical model, characterized by a relatively linear narrative progression, clear causal relationships, and the central position of characters. In *Ngay Le Thanh* and *Huyen Thoai Ve Nguoi Me*, the stories unfold through events in the characters' lives while devoting considerable screen time to their psychological development. The point of view initially tends to be observational and seemingly objective, but gradually shifts towards the experiences of the female characters. The monologues, gazes, and emotional states of Huong in *Huyen Thoai Ve Nguoi Me*, and of Thao in *Ai Gian Ai Thuong*, enable viewers to approach the tragedies from the women's perspectives. Bach Diep's female gaze thus emerges primarily through empathy and the provision of expressive space for female characters, while the narrative structure remains closely connected to the humanistic and communal values of revolutionary cinema.

Viet Linh tends to move from classical narration towards art-cinema narration, with an emphasis on psychological realism, memory, and ambiguities in the characters' perceptions. In *Ganh Xiec Rong*, reality and dreams intermingle, reflecting the psychological state and unfulfilled aspirations of the boy Dac. In *Dau An Cua Quy*, the story of a girl with a birthmark is structured through subjective experiences, allowing viewers to approach the world from the perspective of a character stigmatized by her community. The female gaze in Viet Linh's films is more clearly expressed through the way women's experiences and emotions are brought to the center of narration, while the prejudices shaping their lives are called into question. This gives rise to a distinct female gaze.

In Siu Pham's films, narration is fragmented, associative, and experimental, tending to blur the boundaries between reality, memory, and imagination. In *Can Phong Cua Me*, the film's chapters are organized around states of being and ideas rather than following the conventional progression of a plot. In *Do Hay Day?*, the dead may appear and participate in the everyday activities of the living, within a stream of imagination interwoven with ordinary life. The point of view also shifts among different states of perception rather than maintaining a stable observational position, creating a multi-perspectival narrative. Siu Pham's female gaze is associated with self-inquiry into identity, the body, memory, and the right to choose. It also expands the possibilities of representing subjects whose identities are not confined by fixed gender norms.

3.2. Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène in Bach Diep's films is strongly grounded in realism, drawing on familiar spaces of everyday life such as houses, kitchens, communal courtyards, cooperatives, and fields. Props, costumes, and performances generally reflect ordinary daily activities, helping to establish the characters' social circumstances and positions in life. In *Ngay Le Thanh*, the spinning frame, bundles of sedge, and handmade agricultural tools help recreate the rhythms of rural women's lives, while also reflecting the connection between labor and their dignity. Mise-en-scène thus creates an accessible cinematic world in which women's experiences are expressed through seemingly ordinary details.

In Viet Linh's films, mise-en-scène is rich in visual composition and symbolism, often constructing space as a layer of memory or a psychological state. In *Me Thao – Thoi Vang Bong*, the estate, with its old house, garden, river, and objects associated with artistic activities, creates a secluded world imbued with nostalgia. Props such as the dan day lute, wine jars, and oil lamps not only recreate the cultural setting but also carry symbolic meanings. Costumes and performances are carefully restrained. The character Cam has no dialogue, yet her gaze and gestures convey a rich inner life.

Siu Pham's mise-en-scène tends towards conceptual expression, combining realistic spaces with surreal, absurdist, and performative elements. In

Do Hay Day?, the ancestral death anniversary gathering brings together both the living and the deceased, blurring the boundary between reality and imagination. In *Can Phong Cua Me*, the faces of passers-by are magnified through glass windows, while the appearance of a clown creates a sense of unease and estrangement. Mise-en-scène serves not merely to support the narrative but also to evoke associations with memory, loneliness, and the human psyche.

3.3. Cinematography

Bach Diep employs a realist approach to cinematography, emphasizing clear compositions, contrasting lighting, and medium and close-up shots to convey psychological states. The camera is generally static or moves slowly, maintaining sufficient distance for viewers to observe the characters. In *Ngay Le Thanh*, the contrast between light and shadow in the church and cemetery helps convey Nhan's crisis of faith. In *Huyen Thoai Ve Nguoi Me*, several close-ups of the mother's face-as she is in prison, holds her child, or silently endures grief-are held longer than is conventionally expected. This allows emotion to accumulate naturally rather than being intensified through dramatic techniques.

Viet Linh uses color, lighting, composition, and camera movement as means of expressing memory, emotion, and psychological states. In *Chung Cu*, confined framings and cool color tones help convey the urban residents' sense of constraint and alienation. In *Dau An Cua Quy*, scenes in which the demon girl watches a wedding procession from a distance or runs along a sandy slope at sunset are filmed in extended long shots, combining backlighting with fluid camera movement. These choices create a contrast between the beauty of nature and the tragedy of the character's fate. Notably, the camera repeatedly places viewers in the female character's position as an observer, thereby reversing the relationship between the one who looks and the object being looked at.

In Siu Pham's films, digital cinematography, handheld camera movement, unconventional angles, and long takes create a visual language marked by intuition. In *Do Hay Day?*, the handheld camera follows the characters, producing an effect close to documentary observation. In *Con Duong Tren Nui*, aerial shots captured by drone and long takes are used to expand the spatial field, while also creating moments in which characters look back at the recording device. The long takes in *Can Phong Cua Me* and *Vao Doi* extend the duration of perception, allowing loneliness, memory, and the process of self-awareness to emerge through the movement of bodies and the spaces they inhabit.

3.4. Editing

Editing in Bach Diep's films primarily follows the principles of continuity editing, ensuring narrative clarity and coherent causal relationships. The editing pace is generally slow, with pauses that allow emotions to accumulate. In *Ngay Le Thanh*, editing regulates the emotional progression by retaining pauses after significant events. In *Ai Gian Ai Thuong*, the intercutting of scenes showing Tuan

preparing for his wedding with scenes of Thao quietly caring for her child creates a contrast between happiness and loss. Rather than intensifying conflict through rapid cuts, the editing brings the characters' pain into focus through the relationships established between shots.

Viet Linh organizes editing around emotional currents and memory, frequently interweaving the present, recollections, and imagination. In *Dau An Cua Quy*, the dream wedding of the girl with a birthmark is juxtaposed with images of her actual circumstances, highlighting the distance between aspiration and reality. In *Ganh Xiec Rong*, editing contributes to the film's distinctive poetic quality. The slow, even pace sustains a sense of wandering throughout the film, allowing viewers to perceive the vulnerability of lives constantly moving between art and everyday existence. Editing in Viet Linh's films thus creates temporal structures rich in psychological depth, lyricism, and associative connections.

In Siu Pham's films, editing tends towards open and fragmented structures, prioritizing rhythm, sensation, and association over narrative continuity. *Can Phong Cua Me* is divided into conceptually oriented sections such as "The Gift," "Anger," "Work," and "Fragility." Abrupt cuts and the intermittent appearance of the clown disrupt the narrative flow. In *Do Hay Day?*, images of everyday activities, documentary-like footage, and surreal moments are juxtaposed, allowing reality and imagination to coexist. Editing thus becomes a means of organizing the viewer's experience and associative processes.

3.5. Sound in Film

Bach Diep organizes sound according to a realist approach, using everyday dialogue, ambient sounds, and music associated with the cultural memory of the community. The sounds of children crying, rain, labor, and church bells help establish the characters' living environment and convey their emotional states. In *Ai Gian Ai Thuong*, the folk song *Beo Dat May Troi* is juxtaposed with scenes of Tuan preparing for his wedding and Thao caring for her child alone, creating an emotional contrast. The music in *Huyen Thoai Ve Nguoi Me* helps express longing, fidelity, and maternal love.

Viet Linh uses dialogue, ambient sounds, music, and silence to draw viewers into the characters' memories and reflections. In *Chung Cu*, the song *Dem Dong* evokes Minh Ly's memories and sense of alienation. In *Me Thao – Thoi Vang Bong*, the sounds of musical instruments and ca tru melodies both recreate a traditional cultural environment and convey the decline of an artistic world. Moments of silence following significant events prolong the emotional experience without requiring verbal explanation.

Sound in Siu Pham's films is distinctly experimental. Dialogue is restrained and sometimes takes on a poetic rhythm; classical music, sound effects, and silence participate directly in shaping the emotional structure. In *Can Phong Cua Me*, a scene in which an amputee dances to classical music creates a poetic

space that goes beyond a merely illustrative function. In *Do Hay Day?*, the image of a man seemingly playing an imaginary violin with the tendons in his neck, accompanied by Johann Sebastian Bach's *Cello Suite No. 1*, blurs the boundary between actual sound and imagination. Music in her films therefore has the capacity to organize rhythm and open up layers of association that operate independently of the images.

Comparative Summary Table of the Stylistic Models of the Three Directors

Analytical Dimension	**Bạch Diệp**	**Việt Linh**	**Síu Phạm**
Distinctive Poetic Features	Classical narration; a point of view combining observation with character experience; realist mise-en-scène and cinematography; continuity editing and a relatively slow pace. Diegetic sounds of everyday life.	Psychological and artistic narration; a point of view rooted in subjective experience; expressive cinematography; editing interweaving reality, memory, and symbolism. Traditional music.	Experimental and associative artistic narration; an observational point of view that establishes distance; flexible cinematography; idea-driven editing; sound with an autonomous expressive function; classical music.
Predominant Organizing Principles	The representation of historical and social reality from a humanistic perspective, emphasizing human experience and everyday life, particularly those of women; the portrayal of heroic qualities through ordinary relationships and situations.	The integration of realism with lyrical and symbolic elements; the organization of cinematic form to express the inner lives, memories, and subjective experiences of female characters.	The economy of expressive means, focusing on ideas and essential elements; the use of metaphorical imagery, observational distance, and open structures to stimulate reflection and invite audience interpretation.
Generalized Stylistic Model	Realist–Humanist	Psychological–Symbolic	Experimental–Associative

Chapter Summary

Through the examination of five aspects of film poetics, Chapter 3 demonstrates that the styles of the three directors emerge from the coherence among their artistic worldviews, gender discourses, and approaches to organizing cinematic language. Bach Diep's films are characterized by classical narration, realist mise-en-scène, restrained cinematography, continuity editing, and sound rooted in everyday life. Viet Linh tends towards psychological narration, subjective points of view, spaces imbued with lyricism and memory, symbolic imagery, and a lyrical editing rhythm. Siu Pham develops an experimental cinematic language through fragmented narration, conceptual mise-en-scène, flexible camera angles, long takes, open editing structures, and sound rich in associative possibilities.

Based on this comparison, the dissertation identifies three stylistic models: Bach Diep's feminization of revolutionary heroism and construction of psychosocial realism; Viet Linh's combination of realism and symbolism in the construction of a modern feminist gaze; and Siu Pham's critical reflection on and deconstruction of gender codes, together with the construction of multidimensional gender subjectivity. These findings are derived from the specific cases examined and are not intended to establish a universal model of women's film style.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines the styles of three film directors, Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham, through an integrated approach combining auteur theory, film poetics, and feminist film criticism. Based on an examination of their films, produced in different periods and under different creative circumstances, the dissertation clarifies the relationship between historical and cultural contexts, artistic worldviews, gender discourses, and systems of formal choices in the formation and manifestation of directorial style.

The findings demonstrate that style is neither a purely individual signature nor a direct consequence of biological sex. It emerges from the interaction among personal experience, creative individuality, historical and cultural environments, and the processes through which cinematic language is selected and organized. Gender experience participates in this process, contributing to the ways directors perceive human beings, social life, and women's positions in society. However, such experiences are transformed through each director's individual worldview and artistic choices. They therefore do not give rise to a unified model of women's film style.

First, the dissertation identifies three distinct artistic worldviews and three different approaches to constructing gender discourse. In Bach Diep's films, the artistic worldview is closely associated with revolutionary ideals, war, and a sense of community. Women are represented in relation to family, nation, and history,

while also possessing their own inner lives, emotional wounds, and psychological crises. In Viet Linh's films, the artistic focus shifts more towards the individual, the body, memory, emotion, and moral choices in the postwar and Đổi Mới periods. Women become subjects of experience and perception, frequently confronting conflicts between personal aspirations and social constraints. In Siu Pham's films, experiences of migration and cultural exchange expand gender discourse to encompass issues of interculturality, transcultural identity, and existential freedom. These three cases reveal different perspectives on women, shaped by distinct creative circumstances and cultural frames of reference.

Second, the dissertation identifies the mechanisms through which style is manifested in the relatively stable coordination of different aspects of film poetics. Narration, point of view, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound are interrelated, forming an aesthetic whole. Bach Diep's style is distinguished by its foundation in realist aesthetics and humanistic inspiration. Coherent classical narration, points of view closely aligned with female characters, realist mise-en-scène, restrained cinematography, continuity editing, and everyday sounds contribute to the portrayal of human beings in relation to family, community, and history. Viet Linh's style is strongly lyrical and psychological, expressed through art-cinema narration, subjective points of view, spaces of memory, visually expressive imagery, nonlinear editing rhythms, and traditional music with strong emotional resonance. Siu Pham's style develops in an experimental and transcultural direction, characterized by fragmented narrative structures, the interweaving of fiction and nonfiction, highly constructed mise-en-scène, flexible camera work, associative editing, and the organization of sound as an emotional flow.

These findings enable the dissertation to identify three distinct stylistic tendencies: humanistic realism in Bach Diep; lyricism and psychological depth in Viet Linh; and experimental, transcultural filmmaking in Siu Pham. These designations summarize the predominant principles of artistic organization in their films; they are not intended to reduce each director's entire body of work to a limited set of individual techniques.

Third, the dissertation's originality and academic contributions are reflected in three aspects. First, it offers a systematic approach to the styles of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham by combining auteur theory, film poetics, and feminist film criticism. Within the scope of the materials examined, this represents one of the systematic research approaches to these three cases. Second, the dissertation develops an analytical framework for directorial style across three interrelated dimensions: historical and cultural contexts; artistic worldviews and gender discourses; and systems of cinematic language. This framework enables style to be examined in relation to the conditions of its formation, its ideological content, and its modes of expression. Third, the dissertation proposes an approach

to style through two organically related levels: the mechanisms of style formation and the mechanisms of style manifestation. Accordingly, the identification of style must be grounded in an analytical process that first recognizes recurring and relatively stable formal characteristics, before synthesizing them into principles of artistic organization bearing an individual signature. This constitutes an important methodological contribution that may inform other studies of directorial style involving different historical, cultural, and creative variables.

In terms of practical significance, the dissertation contributes additional research materials on Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham, while further clarifying the roles and contributions of women film directors to the history and landscape of cinema. Its findings may serve as reference materials for teaching film theory, film analysis, gender studies, and creative practice. The combination of gender discourse analysis and the examination of cinematic form also suggests an approach to films featuring female characters that foregrounds subjectivity, experience, and modes of expression.

Despite these contributions, the dissertation has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The study focuses on three cases-Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham-and examines a corpus of 19 feature films: nine by Bach Diep, six by Viet Linh, and four by Siu Pham. The number of films and the circumstances under which they were produced are not entirely comparable across the three cases. Consequently, the comparative findings primarily aim to identify stylistic characteristics and principles of artistic organization, rather than to establish a uniform system of comparison based on equivalent numbers of films or production conditions. The selected films serve the specific research objectives and do not cover the entire creative trajectories of the three directors. Therefore, the conclusions are valid only within the scope of these three cases and the films examined.

In conclusion, the dissertation has identified the distinctive features of the styles of Bach Diep, Viet Linh, and Siu Pham, while clarifying the relationship among artistic worldviews, gender discourses, and film poetics in the formation and manifestation of directorial style. These three cases demonstrate the diversity of ways in which women film directors construct artistic worlds and organize cinematic language. This diversity enriches the study of directorial style and broadens the possibilities for approaching cinema through the perspectives of gender and poetics.

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