

THE PREMISES OF FORMATION OF ECO-CONSCIOUS LITERATURE IN THE MEKONG DELTA IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

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Abstract – *In the first twenty years of the twenty-first century, ecological literature in the Mekong Delta appeared in many works with typical genres such as poetry and short stories. Many writers and poets are concerned about the reality of the environment in the delta, so they have integrated and included issues with a clear ecological consciousness in their works. To answer the question of why eco-conscious literature appeared in the Mekong Delta, the article focuses on explaining the issues of natural, social, and cultural conditions and environmental changes. As ecology affects the sense and responsibility of writers, this article shows that each region with different natural, cultural and social conditions has a more or less impact on the formation of literary characteristics in each region, especially for eco-conscious literature. A literary work expressing ecological consciousness often refers to environmental changes that have a negative impact on human life. The literary works relating to this issue mainly mention the consequences that people have suffered from climate change, soil, water, air, and flora or reveal people's attitudes and feelings towards the situation they are witnessing. Therefore, the natural, cultural and social conditions and their changes directly affect the formation of a part of literature with ecological consciousness in this area.*

Keywords: *eco-consciousness, Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The artist's mission is to reflect on issues relating to human life. Eco-literature is a means for writers to convey profound and meaningful messages about the ecological environment.

It demonstrates the artist's responsibility to the environmental crisis that threatens the existence and development of people. When studying environmental problems in other fields of science, researchers often affect human perception by providing specific data on ecological situations, specifying causes and consequences, and proposing solutions to conserve and maintain the balance of ecology. However, for people to change their actions, literature plays an important role by not only affecting perception but also by appealing to emotions and encouraging a strong sense of responsibility regarding ecological issues. Literature inherently has an educational function, so when it combines scientific knowledge about environmental issues with artistic expression, literature will have a profound impact on the readers' perception, emotion and morality. Influenced by effective ecological literature, humans can not only change their actions but also worry about all ecological problems. Ecological literature clearly shows its topicality when it is associated with such issues as climate change, environmental pollution, drought, floods, erosion, landslides, contamination and salinization. When writing about environmental issues, writers express not only their interest in the living environment around them but also the mission and responsibility of an artist to life and humanity. They help readers understand more about ecology, environment risks and disasters so that people can raise their appreciation and change their actions and attitudes toward nature. Literature is a form of social consciousness deeply influenced by real life.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco-criticism examines literary works that contain ecological themes and express the relationship between humans and an environment which is at risk of falling into a serious crisis. The movement to study literature from an ecolog-

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ical perspective appeared between the 1960s and 1970s. The term ‘ecological criticism’ was identified in the essay ‘Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism’ in 1978 by William Rueckert [1].

Since 2011, the field of eco-critical research in Vietnam has attracted the attention of many scholars in translation activities and applied empirical studies. Many studies on contemporary Vietnamese ecological literature have shown that this is of great interest to scholars in the context of increasingly complex environmental changes. Particularly in the Mekong Delta, many studies have been carried out from the point of view of ecocriticism. In 2014, Tran Thi Anh Nguyet, considered a pioneering scholar in the field, contributed early works applying ecological criticism theory to practical research in domestic and regional literature through articles like ‘Nature in Nguyen Ngoc Tu’s short stories from the perspective of ecocriticism’ [2] and ‘Nature - Endless inspiration of Eastern literature’ [3]. Tran Thi Anh Nguyet [2] gives readers an overview of the change in the approach of Western scholars in critical research. According to the interpretation of the article by Tran Thi Anh Nguyet, Western scholars have pointed out that the causes of environmental crises are mainly rooted in Western cultural traditions that separate culture from nature. Anthropocentrism has existed in Western culture for a long time, an attitude towards nature that makes people tend to ignore the benefits of the environment and focus on only material and spiritual values. Therefore, scholars like Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm [4] have proposed to change thoughts, perceptions, and approaches to Earth-centered ideologies. Recognizing that this transformation is due to the ecological changes in daily life, many scholars in all fields, including social and humanities studies, have claimed that it is necessary to recognize the seriousness of problems affecting the environment and the change of the Earth.

Eco-critics open readers up to reflect on environmental issues described in literature. Assessing literary works from an ecological perspective, critics raise the need to change people’s perceptions, attitudes, and behavior toward nature. Eco-

criticism emphasizes that humans need to listen to the voice of nature and creatures so they can understand their place in the world, find peace in their souls, and coexist with the environment instead of trying to grasp and conquer it. Some other notable works on ecological criticism in Southern Vietnamese prose include ‘Contemporary Southern short stories from the perspective of eco-spiritual criticism’ by Nguyen Thi Kim Tien [5], Eco-criticism with Southern prose by Bui Thanh Truyen – Editor [6]. Authors of Eco-criticism with Southern prose [6] mentioned quite a few issues, of which the author Tran Thi Anh Nguyet [7] mentioned some social-historical premises of the formation of Vietnamese ecological prose in general in the chapter ‘Ecocriticism – Potential tendency in studying Vietnamese literature.’ The author mentioned a number of aspects that are considered as a premise for the formation of Vietnamese ecological prose such as industrialization and modern urbanization causing nature to change, the abuse of scientific advances to exploit nature, and the downsides of urban civilization development.

The ecologically conscious literature in the Mekong Delta also derives from the premise of natural, economic, cultural and social conditions, especially changes in the ecological environment in the Mekong Delta in the first twenty years of the twentieth century. Many researchers of Mekong Delta literature have paid attention to the content reflecting nature and the factors affecting the formation of ecological consciousness in their works, including Ha Van Thuy [8], Le Thieu Nhon [9], Nguyen Binh Dong [10], and Huynh Cong Tin [11]. Researchers have shown the natural factors of the delta, the cultural and social characteristics that leave a clear mark in the Mekong Delta literature. The natural element of the river is the main inspiration for many writers and poets. The impact of the living environment has formed in them a creative attitude that helps them write works with bold images of nature in the South of Vietnam. The above cited articles suggested necessary elements to understand the premises affecting the formation of eco-conscious literature in the Mekong Delta. On that basis, the study orients to closely exploit the factors relating

to natural, social and cultural conditions, especially the ecological and environmental change in the Mekong Delta in the first twenty years of the 21st century. They are the main premises that have greatly influenced the formation of ecological literature in the Mekong Delta in recent years.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Literature with eco-consciousness*

Ecological literature carries an irreplaceable mission and responsibility for changing people's consciousness and actions on environmental issues. Through the art of words, writers and poets put knowledge about nature into their compositions, express their feelings, thoughts, concerns and awareness about environmental issues profoundly. Researcher Vuong Nac, quoted from Bui Thanh Truyen [6, p.38] said:

'Some works may not even depict natural scenes at all or show the writer's natural love, the works just need to show an attitude of disapproval of the acts of nature, destroying ecology, exposing the ideological and cultural roots of ecological danger, can be considered ecological literature.'

Through ecological literary works, readers understand the role, value and influence of the environment on the life and existence of all humankind. People consciously their decentralize their role to have an empathetic view of nature and to take more humane actions toward the environment around them.

The environmental risks that eco-literature is concerned about is the change of the eco-environment turning for the worse, possibly due to environmental degradation relating to human impact. This impact takes place in a specific space and location for a long process and leads to ecological degradation. In eco-literature, when environmental hazards are reflected, their hidden meanings are expressed. The writer raises the ecological reality, not only making the reader feel worried and concerned about the ongoing ecological crises, but also helping the reader to be aware of the environmental consequences caused by humans. Eco-literature has put the environment at the center of it, seeing the reflection on ecological hazards as a way of affirming its

mission in crafting an environmental message. According to researcher Vuong Nhac Xuyen, quoted from the translation of Do Van Hieu [12], eco-criticism...

'focuses on the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, advocates the transformation of humanity from 'self-consciousness' to 'ecological consciousness'. Humans and the earth have a harmonious relationship between life and existence, humanity can no longer be the lord of all species, but a member of all species on earth, living and dying with other members of the natural world'.

Thus, cultural ecology considers humans as part of the environment. Ecological risks are a matter of common concern for humanity, not an individual problem of each locality and each country. When reflecting on ecological risks, the literature has sounded an alarm over the current state of the environment, thereby affecting people's awareness and consciousness, even though the work only talks about ecological risks in the region within a specific space and time. Regarding ecological risks, Donald Worster [13, p.xxii] said:

'We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecological functions but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them'.

Literature reflects on ecological dangers to raise alarms about the serious environmental crisis that is taking place. Education in such literary works is clearly revealed and is an essential function of literature. According to Cheryll Glotfelty [4, p.xx]:

'Most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, at time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty

and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse’.

Eco-literature not only describes nature and reflects ecological risks, but also shows a clear ecological consciousness. Ecological consciousness includes human emotions, knowledge and beliefs about changes and impacts on nature to service human existence and economic development. In the process, people have revealed serious ethical violations such as the exploitation of nature. When humans violently interfere with nature for the sake of economic development, it can have unintended consequences, such as blocking the flow of water in large rivers to restore water quality to services for hydroelectricity development can cause serious consequences, completely changing the inherent natural ecosystem, not to mention catastrophic hydroelectric dam failures that cause enormous loss of life and upset downstream ecosystems. According to researcher Vuong Nhac Xuyen, quoted from the translation of Do Van Hieu [12], eco-literature...

‘contributes to exposing the ecological risks of the modern world, critiques the central anthropological value point of view, and reflects on modern civilization, leading to ecological risk. Eco-literature does not consider man as the center of the natural world, nor does it consider human interest as an absolute measure of natural value judgment’.

Ecological literature focuses on reflecting ecological consciousness from ethical, cultural and aesthetic aspects. It concerns itself with such questions as: How do people deal with nature and reform it to serve their lives? Do people pay attention to maintaining the sustainable development of the ecological environment? Do people know how to listen to the voice of nature? Do people sympathize with the degradation of nature? That is a problem raised from the point of view of ecological ethics. In contemporary Vietnamese literature, many works have deeply reflected ecological ethical issues, including such works as: *Song mai voi cay xanh*, *Khach o que ra* (Nguyen Minh Chau), *Muoi cua rung* (Nguyen Huy Thiep), *Tieng khoc va tieng hat* (Trang The Hy), *Bong cua cay soi* (Do Bich Thuy), *Chuyen di san cuoi cung* (Suong Nguyet Minh),

Gio le, *Canh dong bat tan* (Nguyen Ngoc Tu). Regarding poetry, many authors also show a clear ecological consciousness in their works such as: *Dat mo*, *Canh chim bay qua*, *Nhung bong hoa mua thu* (Mai Van Phan), *Canh dong*, *Cap cuu thien nhien*, *Khoi u*, *Vuon chim ke chuyen*, *Ghi nhanh lữ*, *Mat chim* (Le Chi), *Mua hoa vang*, *Dem nuoc noi*, *Tro lai dong tu giac* (Trinh Buu Hoai), *Nho dong*, *Tieng chim bao nuoc*, *Phac thao buc tranh co* (Le Tan), *Mua nuoc day*, *Khuc hat phu sa*, *Di qua mua nang han*, *Neu mien Tay khong lut* (Nguyen Lap Em), *Am anh nuoc*, *Canh dong thuong nho*, *Dat*, *Con cua dong* (Van Trieu), *Phia mua cam bac la*, *Nuoc rong ve bien*, *Ve vuot mat canh dong*, *Canh dong qua phu* (Nguyen Thanh Hai), *Con ac mong*, *Ben dong chieu*, *Dem song Hau* (Truong Trong Nghia), etc. Writers and poets like those above not only describe nature with a sense of love and harmony but also deeply express ecological consciousness when reflecting on environmental hazards and disasters and human behavior towards nature.

Literature with ecological consciousness is concerned with the relationship between humans and the natural world, thereby orienting human actions in improving and maintaining the existence of nature. Literary works that do not purely describe the image of nature but do illustrate a clear ecological consciousness and are still considered works with the characteristics of ecological literature. In medieval literature, nature was one of the objects for characters to convey and express their moods. The consciousness of medieval literary composers expressed deep admiration and love for nature. The compositions show that also more or less reveal the ecological consciousness even though the writer does not take an ecological stance to compose. In modern literature, many literary works are also not completely written from an ecological standpoint, but still have ecological consciousness, they are still considered objects of ecological criticism.

Literature with ecological consciousness also shows man's responsibility towards nature. From reflecting on ecological risks, literature pays attention to expressing human's sense of responsibility towards nature, urging people to take action to maintain ecological balance. Humans need to

realize their role in maintaining and balancing the development of the ecosystem in general. It is one of the solutions to reduce ecological risks. When people are aware of the great role of nature in their lives, they will be aware of what they need to do and what responsibility they need to have to preserve and maintain the ecological balance.

B. The natural, social and cultural conditions of the Mekong Delta affect the formation of eco-conscious literature

The effects of natural conditions on eco-consciousness in Mekong Delta literature

Each region has different characteristics of natural conditions such as topography, climate, weather and soil, affecting the formation and development of life, economy, politics, culture and society. Literature is a form of social consciousness, and one of its roles is to express all movements and the existence of objective reality through the lens of the subject. Literature is influenced by real life, so when the natural, cultural and social conditions change, inevitably the selected topics reflected in the literature also change more or less. These conditions contribute to the formation of content characteristics reflected in literature in each region.

The Mekong Delta in Southern Vietnam is an area with diverse characteristics in terms of ecosystems. The most prominent feature of the natural conditions in the Mekong Delta is the interlaced system of rivers and canals. According to the authors Nguyen Cong Binh, Le Xuan Diem, Mac Duong [14, p.19]: ‘Natural factors (climate, rivers, canals, sea, soil) of the Mekong Delta interact to make for the landscape of this region to always be in a recognizable dynamic state’. The terrain is low and relatively flat, stretching from the Vam Co river basin to the Ca Mau cape. Therefore, the waterway system here has strong development. People travel, live and trade mainly by canoe and boat. The history of geographical development shows that the Mekong Delta is deposited every year by alluvium, so the land is relatively fertile and favorable for agricultural development. Thanks to the two tributaries of the Mekong River, the Tien and Hau rivers, vast, fertile fields have been formed. The Mekong River

annually provides a large amount of alluvium and aquatic species to the downstream area, making this area always diverse in flora and fauna. The favor of nature has made the life of the delta residents always stable. Due to the characteristics of living conditions associated with the system of rivers and canals, delta residents have always been able to adapt to the changes of all water fluctuations in daily life and production activities. During the length of reclaiming and opening land, people have been known to take advantage of and improve the natural environment to serve their lives. The life of the inhabitants of the delta is associated with rivers and canals, where the inhabitants establish hamlets. In the North and Central regions, people live in villages and hamlets. Houses stick along the roads for easy travel, business, and trade. In the Mekong Delta, residents focus on living along the two banks of the river to facilitate travel and daily life. Recently, with the development of economic life, roads to villages and hamlets have been opened, promoting the strong development of traffic types in the region and creating favorable conditions for people’s daily life.

The climate of the Mekong Delta is not divided into four seasons like in the Red River Delta in the North of Vietnam, but mainly has two seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. The weather is always cool and temperate, favorable for agricultural development. Nature here rarely has big changes such as storms and floods that often occur in the North and Central region, so fields, crops and gardens are not destroyed by violent fluctuations of natural disasters. The land is rich and fertile, with alluvial accretion all year round, especially in the flood season. In addition to the vast fields that are considered the granary of the country, the Mekong Delta also has lush gardens with many kinds of delicious fruits. Rivers and canals here provide fresh water for irrigation and cooling for large fruit gardens. The ecological environment in the Mekong Delta is characterized by the flood season. Every year, from August to November of the solar calendar, the flood phenomenon in the Mekong Delta reappears, bringing to the delta great fishery resources and providing a large amount of fertile

alluvium for the soil in the Mekong Delta. This is also the time when the fields are washed and rested to start a new crop.

The nature of the Southern region in general, the Mekong Delta in particular, in the first days when people arrived in this land, was extremely wild, with dense forests, luxuriant reeds, and wild animals lurking. Humans have bravely faced adapting and renovating nature to survive. According to researcher Ho Xuan Mai [15, p.58]:

‘The climate in the South, although not harsh, certainly cannot be quickly adapted to the changes of weather. Illnesses arise, but they have to defy them. The field is vast but full of sedges and reeds. If you want to have a field, you have to reclaim it, you have to clear the field with weeds, even though you know there may be many wild animals lurking there.’

In the early period of reclaiming this land, the diaspora were mostly poor farmers who left the country to find new land to do business and live, so to survive in a new land full of difficulties and dangers, people must help, rely on, love each other to overcome the dangers and tribulations in life. Especially, they have to adapt to the ecological and environmental conditions in a completely foreign land. The Mekong Delta has both favorable natural conditions and difficult conditions due to its tropical and monsoonal characteristics. According to the authors Nguyen Cong Binh, Le Xuan Diem, Mac Duong [12, p.20], this natural condition ‘is not only favorable for crops, livestock, and human life. It exists and develops in a state of contrasts, contrast between river and sea, dry season and rainy season, flood and drought, abundant freshwater but very little, suitable soil and alkaline soil, and salty soil.’

Each region’s habitats have certain characteristics. The living environment is the basis for creating the characteristics of the culture, language, and personality of people. Humans exist inseparably from natural conditions. It is an important basis for creating a cultural system in each region. People’s attitude towards nature in the Mekong region has gradually formed a culture characterized by rivers. They understand the harshness of the environment and find ways to adapt, renovate, and utilize available resources to

maintain their lives. They understand that the nature in the Mekong region is extremely generous, so they also know how to appreciate and love it. Eco-ethics and ecological consciousness formed in their behavior and entered their consciousness naturally. Literature also leaves behind works in which people praise the richness of Southern nature as a way to express gratitude to the country.

The living environment has a great influence on the formation and development of culture in the community. The culture of the Southwest region was formed in association with the characteristics of ecology and living environment, different from other regions in the country. Communities living in rural areas have different cultures and activities from those in urban areas. Residents living in river areas also have different activities and cultures than residents living in mountainous areas. The dissimilarity is due to the differences in the living environment and ecological environment in each region. Features of topography, climate and soil have helped the people to form their living and cultural features. The culture of the people of the Southwest region is associated with the characteristics of the river. All of their cultural activities are associated with the elements of nature and living environment, forming in them the attitudes and culture of behavior that are unique to the land of the nine dragons.

Influence of social conditions on eco-consciousness in literature

Current Vietnamese communities in the the Mekong Delta have only been formed for over three hundred years, compared to other regions in Vietnam. The people from other places who came here to reclaim and establish hamlets are mostly exiles from the Central region, where natural conditions are not very favorable for economic development. In the early migration to the South, they also faced many difficulties. In the Mekong Delta, exiles know how to take advantage of the available resources from nature to live. Gradually, they invented ways to improve nature to adapt and exist. In the process of working, they know how to unite and rely on each other to help each other overcome difficulties in life. In the first days of setting foot in the delta region, populations who stayed did not want to return

to their home regions where it was difficult to do business and live in. That means they dared to take risks and dared to accept all difficulties and dangers. Until the end of the seventeenth century, the Mekong Delta was still a new land that was not under the control of the feudal state, so people who came here could freely reclaim and set up hamlets. These conditions have shaped the way they choose to adapt to natural and social conditions. The Mekong Delta has distinctive geographical conditions that are different from other regions, so their forms of living and work were characterized by rivers.

In the process of existence and development, as many different residents from all parts of the country came to the Mekong Delta to set up a business, they brought their traditional culture and typical living habits to each region. When entering a new land, people gradually form relationships with each other and with nature. Favorable natural conditions have helped the people in the Mekong Delta mainly rely on agriculture. To help each other coexist and face dangers and hardships, people have had to coexist and rely on each other. Therefore, generosity, respect, and dignity increased, building a prominent social relationship in community life. The relationships are reflected in the social life of the Mekong Delta from within each family, clan, and village, and even in the relationship between the living and the deceased. The Mekong Delta is home to four major ethnic groups including Kinh, Khmer, Hoa and Cham. When living together, they will have exchanges and impacts on lifestyles and daily activities. The close relationship among the four ethnicities creates interference and harmony in customs and practices among ethnic groups.

According to Marx (as cited in [16, p.82]), ‘The essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.’ In that process, a system of cultural language is formed. The coexistence of at least four ethnic groups in the Mekong Delta region has created cultural influence and language interference among Kinh, Khmer, Cham, and Hoa communities. Residents of the Mekong River Delta originally came from Northern Vietnam and Central Vietnam, but their

voices have changed greatly due to the impact of natural and social conditions. The residents of the Mekong Delta have their own characteristics of pronunciation and the use of words in communication. Explaining the causes leading to the formation of rustic and simple language characteristics in the communication of people in the Southwest region, Ho Xuan Mai [15] pointed out several factors derived from personality characteristics in the community, from people’s behavior, and from the natural conditions of the river topography. According to the author, the Khmer community has lived in the land of nine dragons since before the diaspora came here from Northern Vietnam and Central Vietnam. The writers have penetrated and reflected the real life of the inhabitants of the delta. Diep Hong Phuong [17, p.242] said that:

‘I love the simple life of farmers, the innocence of Khmer girls, and the lovely features of the Tieu and Quang people... in the village community of the South West. I take a lot of notes and write a lot about life, past events, and portraits of historical figures’

It can be said that social conditions have greatly influenced the cultural development in each region. Man’s behavior in the relationships between humans and humans with nature depends on the conditions prescribed by nature and society. The Mekong Delta writers and poets, with the cultural sense of the Southern people, have included very specific cultural imprints in their works.

Influence of cultural conditions on eco-consciousness in literature

Each region has its cultural characteristics formed and developed based on certain natural and social conditions. Therefore, when learning about culture, many researchers have conceptualized based on both material and spiritual factors. Bui Thiet [18, p.11] defined that:

‘Culture refers to all human creations in terms of material, spiritual and in terms of behavior, they are creations and activities that are useful to human life, human society and the surrounding world’.

For those of traditional Vietnamese heritage, the Mekong Delta is a new land compared to

other regions. The natural conditions are completely different from where their ancestors used to live. Therefore, when entering a new land, they must establish a new society with new relationships, which will inevitably arise, forming new cultural characteristics besides the traditional cultural features of Vietnam. From a geo-cultural perspective, the Mekong Delta's culture has obvious differences compared to other regions. Based on geographical conditions and natural circumstances, one can explain the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants of the Mekong Delta. The geo-cultural perspective considers humans themselves as a part of nature. Humans need to interact with nature in the process of survival and development. That interaction can be an adaptation to the inherent natural conditions around them. Maybe they need to affect nature to improve it to suit their purposes and needs. In the process of interaction, people will create tangible and intangible cultural elements. Intangible cultural factors of the residents of the Mekong Delta are expressed through the process of adapting to the living environment. They are cultural and personality imprints that reflect their lifestyle and behavior toward people and nature. Elements of material culture leave their mark on the objects and products created by the inhabitants of the delta while they interact with each other and the natural environment.

The Mekong Delta has very unique cultural features. Researching on cultural characteristics of the Mekong Delta, Tran Phong Dieu [19, p.27], said:

‘The outstanding feature of this region’s culture is the river culture, which is reflected in wet-rice agriculture. Fishing practices, travel, festivals related to water, and even language of communication are imprinted with water... and it is also the river and canals that have made an important contribution to the lives of people here.’

Adaptability and flexible behavior formed in the culture and personality of the delta residents are due to the influence of the water environment. Humans must adapt to survive in a land where there are always fluctuations of water. Each ethnic group in the region has different living cul-

tures and production practices. The combination of cultures creates diversity and richness in the cultural picture of the Southwest region. In the process of labor, production, and the struggle for survival in the region, the communities have supported and helped each other adapt and survive in the wild and dark nature. Between ethnic groups, there is cultural interference, creating a unique culture. Besides, the diversity of religions, such as Buddhism, Caodaism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Christianity, Protestantism and Islam has made the cultural beliefs of Mekong Delta residents more diverse. It is the changing living environment that has caused people to change their personalities and culture to suit the new environment. The typical culture of the Mekong Delta has been created over a very long time, according to the Southern research book by Son Nam [20, p.28]:

‘People of working age, coming from the Central region are usually old people, middle-aged, identity has been bold, personality has shaped like the case of cement has been stuffed in water, hardens, difficult to change, becomes the truth. At least a few generations later, the new generation of young descendants gradually proved to be flexible, less formal, easy to adapt to the situation, therefore, daring to be creative, affirming that in order to rise, life will be diverse’.

Thus, in the process of settlement, the inhabitants of the Mekong Delta both maintain their own culture and make changes to suit the new living environment; in addition, they have to accept the cultural features of other communities to harmonize and connect. Due to their own unique identity brought to the community, acculturation was formed. It is the natural and social conditions that create the unity and specificity of the Mekong Delta culture. The Mekong Delta culture is unified with national culture, because, when the Vietnamese ancestors came here to explore, this place was only full of jungle and wilderness, and the people who came here brought the traditional culture of their homeland. Gradually, when social relationships are established, new cultural features are created based on

their inherent cultural features.

Because the Mekong Delta is a new land with the coexistence of many ethnic groups, the cultural space is an open space and the mixing and selective cultural exchange have created its own cultural imprints of the region. The life of the delta residents is closely related to water due to the characteristics of topographical conditions, so the living and cultural methods are associated with the river. This is considered a land with an abundant natural food source due to the diversity of flora and fauna. Besides, people also create a variety of foods suitable to the natural conditions of the region such as livestock, farming, and seafood processing. Therefore, the source of food becomes more and more abundant, contributing to the diversity of culinary culture and creating the uniqueness of the meals of the delta residents. Artistic culture is also associated with rivers. Talking about art and culture, Huynh Cong Tin [21, p.28] said:

‘In a vast area of water, people sometimes feel lonely, want to sing, and want to relax. That’s the reason for the development of songs. More correctly, the above profession rivers in leisure time are favorable conditions for the development of folk art and culture’.

Human life is closely linked with nature, so the awareness of ecology is reflected through art forms. In each type of activity, different laborers have appropriate forms of singing. The chants arise in the process of working as one form of entertainment for the audience to forget their hardships and bring joy to themselves. In the Mekong Delta, festivals have profound spiritual meaning. One of the typical festivals that writers have included in their works is the communal house worship festival. This is a festival of praying for peace, giving thanks to heaven and earth, hoping for timely rains and favorable weather. It provides an opportunity for people to have the opportunity to meet and exchange with each other. This cultural and artistic feature has really become popular and penetrated deeply into the soul of the residents of the Southwest region.

The cultural behavior of people in the Mekong Delta has its own characteristics associated with social history when immigrant people from many

different lands come here to reclaim and establish hamlets. In the process of reclaiming and renovating this land, they have established social relationships in the community. Therefore, behavioral culture is clearly revealed in all aspects of life, both between people and people, and also between people and nature. The Mekong Delta culture has different and unique features compared to culture in other regions due to natural conditions, living environment and social environment. Throughout history, the Mekong Delta’s culture has always had movement and development. Due to the coexistence of many ethnic groups, the Mekong Delta’s culture has been acclimatized and integrated from many different cultural streams to create diversity the delta’s culture.

Recent ecological changes in the Mekong Delta

There are many reasons that make the ecological environment change in the Mekong Delta in recent years become more and more serious. Notably, the ecological environment change is heavily influenced by the acceleration of industrialization and modernization, which does not focus on sustainable development or the lack of awareness in protecting and preserving the ecological environment in a part of the population.

The Mekong Delta is a land favored by nature with a diverse ecological system, yet climate change, natural disasters, storms, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and droughts are problems that seriously affect human life. While Vietnam is heavily affected by these conditions, the Mekong Delta is an area that is greatly affected by climate change. Scientists have continuously issued warnings about environmental dangers, and climate change is a global issue because the earth’s environment is an interconnected whole. Each region has its unique problems due to different conditions. In recent years in the Mekong Delta, climate change has made natural disasters, droughts, floods, alum, and salinization more and more serious, significantly affecting the lives of residents and the region’s ecosystems.

The Mekong Delta is the region most strongly affected by climate change in Vietnam. In recent years, the prolonged drought situation, and the disruption of production structure due to the shift

from the agricultural model of rice production to industrial shrimp farming, have caused the salt-water intrusion to become more and more complicated. People's daily life and production are greatly affected. Cracked, dry fields, dead rice, and affected ecological environment are continuous situations in recent years in the Mekong Delta.

It can be said that climate change has caused great damage to the Mekong Delta, especially in the first months of the dry season. The lack of fresh water causes salt water to penetrate deep into the mainland, and many fruit orchards die due to lack of water, due to saline soil. This situation occurs regularly on an annual cycle, and although the level of influence is more or less different, it has affected the ecological environment, affecting the sustainable development of the region.

In the history of development, humans have been impacting nature to maintain their lives. However, the impact on the environment is increasing day by day because of the economic development policies, causing the ecological environment to be significantly affected. Humans have to face the ecological problems associated with accelerating industrialization, modernization, and economic development that expose people to unforeseen dangers. When humans abuse nature, they can pay a very heavy price for their actions. Landslides, floods, and droughts appear, and one of the causes is also the consequences caused by humans. As science and technology developed, people used them to exploit the natural environment. For the sake of economic development, people are willing to block dams of large rivers to develop hydroelectricity, to exploit mineral and natural resources. The primordial forests and the exploited mangrove forests have a great impact on the maintenance and balance of the ecosystem. In the Mekong Delta, when the forest area shrinks and is over-exploited, the creatures that no longer have their natural habitat are gradually lost, and rare birds such as the red-crowned crane, also leave the forest. The mass development of industrial shrimp farming also causes significant consequences. As the shrimp farming areas are expanded, the risk of environ-

mental pollution and disease due to inadequate renovation and dredging can cause problems impacting the aquatic environment, negative consequences for the natural shrimp farming areas, and the loss of ecological balance. The development of industrialization has a significant impact on the ecological environment. Prioritizing industrial development means that people must accept the impact on the environment to some extent. Therefore, people must consider sustainable and long-term development; otherwise, people will face significant threats from environmental hazards.

In addition, ecological change is also caused by the lack of human consciousness. Humans see themselves as subjects and impose their views on nature. This concept has existed for a long time in the history of human development. They carry in them the desire to conquer and master. Up to modern times, humans still impose their subjective views on nature, so they give themselves the right to rule and dominate nature. Despite being warned about environmental dangers by scientists, many people still voluntarily and surreptitiously cut down trees and destroy forests, causing erosion and landslides. Many people still consider the hunting and extermination of animals as normal while this action greatly affects the ecological balance. Especially, in the period of industrialization and modernization, many people are not aware of the harmful effects of industrial waste, so they secretly let it be discharged into the environment, causing serious consequences for health and ecology. The development history of the Mekong Delta shows that, in the process of reclaiming, establishing hamlets and developing agriculture, delta residents have shown a close relationship with nature. To survive in an environment with many dangers lurking and threatening, humans have found ways to conquer and live in harmony with nature and the environment. During the period of accelerating economic development, the Mekong Delta also encountered many environmental problems. When promoting agricultural productivity, people apply the achievements of modern science and technology in production. However, what causes the danger lies in human consciousness. The

application of the achievements of science and technology in labor and production is essential, but the problem lies in the lack of caution and consideration when abusing pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. Productivity can be increased, but the quality of agricultural products is affected, directly affecting the health of consumers. In particular, when such drugs are abused, the growth environment of organisms is affected. The amount of shrimp, fish, crab, frog and other species in the wild is decreasing day by day. Not to mention, the fact that humans exploit to destroy all living species also creates an ecological imbalance. It is known that in the past when exploiting shrimp and fish, humans were always aware of maintaining their source of life and growth. But today, for profit, people want to exploit more, so they have used destructive fishing means such as electric fishing, small nets, etc., which poses a huge challenge to humans.

Living in an environment that depends on a lot of natural conditions, the people of the Southwest of Vietnam have formed a very typical behavior that is dealing with nature. In the Mekong Delta's literature, the writers are very aware of the ever-greater importance of the fusion between man and nature. Works that reveal the spirit of ecology help readers understand more deeply the relationship between humans and nature. Humans need to behave delicately and harmoniously in a symbiotic relationship rather than forcing nature to submit in any way.

Writers also show meaningful messages about the ecological environment when building the character's behavior toward nature. People in the Mekong Delta consider the natural environment closely associated with their material and spiritual life. Literature is a form of social consciousness, so when there are changes in the environment and society, literature also changes the pattern and the subject of reflection. Literature cannot keep the old themes forever but needs to adapt to all changes in history, which is the real picture of life. In life with many difficulties, people always find ways to adapt to the ecological environment, live in harmony, and stick with nature.

The short stories expressing the message of behavior with the natural environment are mainly

written on topics associated with life in the countryside, with rivers and plains. Many authors reflect these topics in their works, for example: *Chim hac bay ve* (Ngo Khac Tai), *Nguoi coc* (Nguyen Thi Diep Mai), *Cau xa xu Kinh Cung* (Luong Minh Hinh), *Nho dong* (Le Ngoc Mien), *Chuyen tau cuoi mua dong* (Dang Hoang Tham), *Chiec cau qua kinh* (Sau Nghe), *Bien nguoi menh mong*, *Tho Sau* (Nguyen Ngoc Tu), etc.

The Mekong Delta's literature in the first twenty years of the 21st century has been greatly influenced by the premise of nature, economy, culture and society. The Mekong Delta poets also pay more attention to the theme of nature and environment. In the past twenty years or so, ecological issues have been noticed and strongly expressed in poetry. The poets not only expressed their lyrical voices, showed their attachment, harmony, and earnest love for nature, but also expressed concern and anxiety about many worrying ecological problems taking place in the Mekong Delta. Many poems are written on the ecology of the delta, describing the destruction of the environment by humans, expressing concern and anxiety about ecological problems, and lamenting the damage caused by natural disasters. Examples of such poetry include *Nhung trien de vo*, *Con ca loi song dai* (Truc Linh Lan), *Ve lai O Long Vi* (The Lan), *Phu Quoc*, *Tham hiem*, *Noi nho sac mau*, *Canh dong*, *Nham dem tung ngay*, *Khong de hoa*, *Cap cuu thien nhien*, *Khoi u*, *Doi co trang*, *May khuc giat minh* (Le Chi), *Lut len* (Tran The Vinh), *Dong trang* (Luu Van Nhan), *Tieng ech dem mua*, *Ban mai*, *Tieng nac*, *Dem Nga Hau* (Van Trieu), *Han han*, *Noi voi chu chim co don* (Nguyen Trung Nguyen), *Dem ngoi voi song* (Nguyen Bang). Many poets are also troubled by consciousness and troubling behavior of humans towards nature, for example *Khong de hoa*, *Mua xuan o xa*, *Dem hac*, *Thoi gian*, *Nhan nguoi tho san* (Le Chi), *Muoi nam tro lai Cu Lao*, *Con se mo coi*, *Cat bay* (Le Quang Trang). During this period in the Mekong Delta, people witnessed serious environmental change. Many familiar ecological spaces have disappeared, replaced by an urbanized space full of threats and instability. Example poets reflecting this include *Song can*, *Mua he la kho* (Dang Hoang Tham),

Mekong, Tieng khoc cua la phoi, Nong dan (Van Trieu), *Thuong nhung dong song* (Nguyen Giang San), *Bay len tu canh dong, Canh buom vuon xua* (Truong Trong Nghia), *Dung di qua song* (Tran Duc Tin), etc.

The writers of the Mekong Delta have understood very well the living conditions and culture of the people here, so they have shown the residents' behavior towards nature and life in the river region very realistically and vividly. Writers and poets show sensitivity to reality so that they can ponder, reflect and with their talents produce works that penetrate deeply into the mind and heart. People who know how to love, appreciate, and do the right things for the ecological environment and social environment are getting better and better.

IV. CONCLUSION

The natural, economic and social conditions of the Mekong Delta at the beginning of the 21st century have undergone great changes. This has influenced the formation of a literary array in which there is poetry with a clear ecological sense. The delta residents used to live in harmony with nature, relying on nature to develop. But recently, climate change, the consequences of promoting unsustainable economic development and the disrespectful behavior of a part of the population have caused many changes in the delta's ecological environment. People are becoming more and more insecure and feel anxious about reality. Faced with that situation, writers and poets cannot stand aside. Eco-conscious writers focus on exploiting nature and the relationship between humans and nature to highlight the basic features of natural, human, and spiritual ecology. The relationship between humans and nature is expressed by writers and poets under the basic characteristics of harmony and conflict. On the one hand, they exploit the inherent beauty of nature, and on the other hand, they reflect the profound ecological crises when humans interfere and affect nature. The process of man's impact on nature has gradually led to change and caused unpredictable dangers. Writers and poets have frankly acknowledged the ecological situation that is threatening the lives of the delta residents

as a revenge of nature for humans. There have been many pages written on the subject of nature, life and people in the Mekong Delta. Writers and poets with the mission of a writer have expressed their voices in the face of ecological crises. The issue of environmental trauma has become a problem that makes writers and poets unable to be indifferent. They find it necessary to raise their voices to protect nature, and influence people's perceptions to make them take more practical actions.

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