

High-school students' perception of the American War through literature: a case study from Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

The present case study explores the reception of American War literature among Vietnamese high-school students. In April and May 2020, seventy-seven seventeen-year-old students from *Lê Hồng Phong High School for the Gifted* (Hồ Chí Minh City) participated in this study by answering Google form surveys about literary texts that form part of the Vietnamese national curriculum. The main findings show that 86% of the students deem it necessary to study literary works about the American War because of the historical and documentary value they provide. A vast majority of participants (95%) would be interested in reading literary texts written by American authors to learn about the war from a transnational perspective. This would require an alternative approach to the teaching of the American War in general, and its literary works in particular, with a revision of the national curriculum to include a wider variety of texts and authors.

Introduction

Although the American War¹ (better known in Western countries as the Vietnam War) ended forty-five years ago, it still has a considerable impact on Vietnamese society nowadays. This impact cannot only be measured by the high numbers of casualties or injured Vietnamese citizens that resulted from the conflict. How the war has psychologically hurt or even destroyed survivors' mentality, and especially, how it has separated the nation are the questions that still haunt the victims. Herring (1991) argues that the war exacerbated the historic, political and cultural differences between North and South Vietnam that 'even the most heavy-handed methods could not force the freewheeling and resilient south into a made-in-Hanoi mold' (116). Herring also believes that the ultimate losers of the war were the South Vietnamese, since, after the war, they had to endure poverty, oppression and bitter experiences in the 'reeducation' camps. During the war, Saigon was the capital of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) – the government of South Vietnam. It was also the place that witnessed the collapse of the RVN after terrible fighting among people who spoke the same language and believed that they shared the same Vietnamese identity. Nowadays, Saigon/ Hồ Chí Minh City is the largest city in Vietnam and plays an imperative role in leading the country's economy. Hồ Chí Minh City is diverse, tolerating different opinions from other ethnic groups and minorities in comparison to the official capital city of the country – Hanoi in the North (Dror 2018). These aforementioned features make Hồ Chí Minh City a place embracing multiple thoughts and perspectives living together, including distinct perceptions on the American War which can differ from the opinions held in other parts of the country. This makes Hồ Chí Minh City an interesting place to investigate Vietnamese citizens' point of view on the war.

The American War has touched universal issues that still apply to our globalized

world these days, principally peace building and empathy development among different groups of people. Should the pain and hurt of minorities be forgotten and only voices of the majority be heard, as a solution for a unified nation? Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Nothing ever dies: Vietnam and the memory of war* (2016) illustrates multiple ways in which the war is still alive in diverse contexts with its unresolved memories. To create empathy and erase misunderstandings among different groups of people, voices of people suffering, even if they belong to the minority should not be ignored or tried to forget. This is the reason the American War cannot be forgotten and victims of the war from both the North and the South of Vietnam should be heard.

Young people in modern Vietnam inherited the cultural trauma of the war. They are also the generation who step by step are moving the country forward. There were sharp differences in politics and approaches to education between North and South Vietnam during the American War. Today, there is still misunderstanding, as well as distinct thoughts between North and South that have passed down to the newer generations of Vietnamese. In order to heal the long-term divisions in the country and the wounds caused by the war, we believe it is useful to understand how young Vietnamese perceive the war, and what they think about the way the war is taught at school. Investigating Vietnamese youth's perception about the American War also opens a door to the understanding of what the Vietnamese youths nowadays believe and value as this will affect the present and future of the country.

As the first step of a larger project targeting to study the perception of Vietnamese high-school students about the American War and how it is taught in public education in Vietnam through literary works, this study aims to investigate how high-school students in Ho Chi Minh City perceive the American War as well as how they evaluate the literary works written about the war included in the national curriculum. We have decided to conduct this study using literary works, as literature can offer an acute representation of reality, as well as being an arbiter of culture that can make a difference when it comes to constructing young people's identities.

With the above-mentioned aims in mind, the main research questions for this study are the following:

- How do Vietnamese high-school students perceive the American War through the Vietnamese literary works taught in the Vietnamese national official curriculum?
- How do Vietnamese high-school students respond to the texts dealing with the American War?

Theoretical framework

The American War and its impacts on contemporary Vietnamese youth

The American War (also called the Vietnam War) is the war between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) or North Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) or South Vietnam (1955–1975). More than thirty thousand books, articles and manuscripts have been written about this conflict which stretched over the territory of Vietnam into Laos and Cambodia, becoming the second Indochina War (1955–1975). This extensive war literature analyzes distinctive dimensions of the military and socio-political implications of the war. The majority of the monographs focus on the American role in the war, while on the Vietnamese side, the position of the DRV has been emphasized, leaving behind the role of the RVN. This has led Olga Dror to conclude that: ‘this approach turns the war solely into a conflict between the communist Vietnamese and the anti-communist, or imperialist, Americans’ (Dror 2018, 3).

Many scholars have agreed that Vietnam was in fact a ‘burning part’ of the conflict between the communist world led by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) versus the anti-communist world led by the United States. However, as Dror (2018) rightly notes:

The war between the DRV and the RVN was an armed conflict between two polities identifying themselves as representing the same national ethnicity: Vietnamese. These two polities put this unifying identification aside and fought for the ideologies that set them apart. It was a struggle between different visions that Vietnamese had about the kind of society they wanted to live in and to bequeath to the next generation (Dror 2018, 3). Today, although the country has been unified under the lead of only one Party – the Party of Socialist Republic of Vietnam whose precursor was the DRV, the differences between the North and the South in terms of thoughts and ideologies still remain, as a consequence of the country division during the war. Therefore, we deem it essential to briefly review the differences in ideologies between North Vietnam and South Vietnam which were built and developed during the American War in order to have a background for further understanding students’ perception of the war in South Vietnam nowadays.

Dror (2018) points out three different ways of directing youth of the two parts of Vietnam, through education systems, social organizations, publication policies and venues, and educational and social narratives. In this paper, we believe that it is necessary to concisely present the educational system and social narratives by which North and South Vietnam tried to build two different generations inside one country in order to have an overview about the Vietnamese literary works written

serving the American War during the period 1955–1975, when the war took place. The educational systems employed in the DRV and the RVN, differed considerably. While the North mainly focused on one ideology related to building socialism and being willing to fight and die for the unification of the whole country, education in the South tolerated the diversity and did not emphasize politics (Dror 2018).

Regarding the literature about the American War written in the war period 1955–1975, the writings for the youth oriented by the DRV targeted to create a young generation obedient to the Party and the State (Dror 2018). Dror summarizes the main features of the literary works written by authors following the DRV, which includes focusing on love and devotion to the Party led by Ho Chi Minh while simultaneously bringing up hatred towards enemies to encourage youth to fight against the foe invading the country. Furthermore, these texts intend to offer a representation of class struggle and point out that revolution would be a possible solution to tackle oppression and injustice. Primary topics encompass love for the nation, progress of building socialism in the North and fighting against the enemy as well as invasion to liberate the South and unify the whole country. The main characters are heroes and their noble and courageous actions. They are the role models for young citizens to follow and become. These texts were mostly authored by party leaders or communist cadres.

In the RVN, the textbooks to educate children and youth aimed to build two contrasting movements: nationalists and communists in which the nationalists targeted to bring happiness and independence for the Vietnamese while the communists aimed to actualize and spread their ideas under the ‘cloak of patriotism’ (Dror 2018, 239). The textbooks tended not to mention any effort of the DRV to defeat the French colonialism in 1954 with the Dien Bien Phu Battle, but explained the French defeat as the contribution of both two movements and accused the communists for betraying the Vietnamese by signing the agreement in 1946 to allow the French to return to the North for the second time, and then signing with the French the Geneva Agreement in 1954 to divide the country into two parts (Dror 2018, 240). She also contends that there was not a clear identification of the enemy among the literary works published in the RVN. After investigating the textbooks, the author hardly found any discussions of the communist regime. Instead, the main notion of the war is sorrow and severe devastation.

From Dror’s perspectives, during the war, the two different thoughts about the American War were formed in the two parts of Vietnam: the North and the South. In the North, the main ideas included to love the nation, liberate South Vietnam to unify the country by fighting against colonization, the imperialist and the American being identified as the enemy. On the other hand, in the South there was not a clear identification of the enemy but the devastation of the war as well as the two

movements/forces simultaneously existing in the country: the nationalists and the communists.

Nu-Anh Tran (2006) investigates South Vietnamese identity being influenced by the physical appearance of the American during the American War. She analyzed articles published in the inner pages of *Chinh Luận* newspaper (from 1965 to 1969), which according to the author, was one of the most respected and influential, as well as mentioned Americans or the American presence. Tran (2006) cited Fitzgerald's opinion in the book *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (1972) which argues that Saigon elites were 'a self-interested group, culturally alienated from their own people and willing to give up their independence to their new American masters' (Tran 2006, 171). In addition, after reviewing other studies, she summarizes that 'most scholarship has characterized the Republic of Vietnam as a pseudo-state and a pseudo-society that lacked collective coherence. South Vietnamese population lacked a strong sense of cultural or political identification with the Sài Gòn-led nation-state' (Tran 2006, 173). The study of Tran (2006) points out that as being affected by the American presence, readers and writers of the newspaper built the discourse on Vietnamese identity or identified themselves 'by highlighting their historical and literary heritage, by constructing ideal images of Vietnamese womanhood, by requiring certain attributes for community inclusion, and by drawing boundaries to delineate group membership, all the while operating under the tension of desiring Vietnamese autonomy and accepting American assistance. To negotiate this tension in identity discourse, they drew upon existing constructions of identity inherited from the colonial era; thus, this discourse most likely reflected both the colonial legacy and the effects of the American presence' (Tran 2006, 197).

Literary works about the American War in the present Vietnamese national official curriculum

All literary works about the American War selected to be a part of the Literature textbook for high school students are from Communist authors (most of them are soldiers directly fighting in the battlefield). The topic concentrates on humane emotions such as love for family and the nation, willingness to protect the country from American invasion; awareness of the national heroic tradition, readiness to be a part of it to gain the integrity of the nation; the untamed spirit of people from many classes all over the country to fight against the enemy- the American ('The Xanu Wood', 'Children of a Family'). Some of the works show the tragic bloody war as well as people's sacrifice, while some wake up yearning in Vietnamese youth's hearts to save their own country ('The Xanu Wood', 'The Country').

In the national literature curriculum for senior high school students [chương trình Ngữ văn lớp 12], there are two works writing directly about the fighting of

Vietnamese people against the enemy in the American War in the period of 1955–1975. They are ‘Children of a Family,’ [‘Những đứa con trong gia đình’, 1966] by Thi Nguyen [Nguyễn Thi] and ‘The Xanu Wood’ [‘Rừng xà nu’, 1965] by Trung Thanh Nguyen [Nguyễn Trung Thành]. Other works written in this period include ‘The country’ [‘Đất nước’], which is an excerpt from *Mặt đường khát vọng* – [Road of aspiration], being created in 1971 and printed the first time in 1974 by Khoa Diem Nguyen [Nguyễn Khoa Điềm], ‘The ferryman on the Da river’ [‘Người lái đò Sông Đà’, 1960] by Tuan Nguyen [Nguyễn Tuân], ‘The wave’ [‘Sóng’, 1967] by Xuan Quynh [Xuân Quỳnh]. Among them, ‘The country’ is a modern poetry epic focusing on the origin or identity of each Vietnamese individual, aiming to wake up the youths in South Vietnam about the national spirit, persuade them to solidify and fight for a unified nation. ‘The ferryman on the Da river’ is a chronicle about the journey of a ferryman in the Da river, a formidable river in Northern Vietnam. ‘The wave’ is a love poem which expresses yearnings of the female heart.

‘Children of a Family’ [‘Những đứa con trong gia đình’, 1966] by Thi Nguyen is a short-story. In the settings of Southern Vietnam, the story narrates the transference of members in one Communist family the tradition of fighting against the enemy for a united Vietnam. While the parents have sacrificed in the war, their children keep fighting to avenge the enemy in spite of their young ages. The story is famous for its poetic beauty and convertible timeline structure. ‘The Xanu Wood’ [‘Rừng xà nu’, 1965] by Trung Thanh Nguyen is a short-story. The story is set in a mountainous region in Southern Vietnam, and tells about the bloody war between Stra village (an ethnic minority who supported the Communist Party) and soldiers of the RVN. The hero is Tnu, a child who has been raised by all villagers, then grows up and becomes a Communist soldier. His tragic and legendary life reflects Stra villagers’ fight progress against the enemy. The story is characterized as an epic tendency work.

It is also noteworthy that students need to learn literary works written about the war in the national curriculum in their secondary school as well. The literary works include: ‘Distant stars’ [‘Những ngôi sao xa xôi’] written in 1971 by Lê Minh Khuê, ‘The ivory comb’ [‘Chiếc lược ngà’] written in 1966 by Nguyễn Quang Sáng, ‘The poem about the transport platoon’ [‘Bài thơ về tiểu đội xe không kính’] written in 1969 by Phạm Tiến Duật, ‘The fire stove’ [‘Bếp lửa’] written in 1963 by Bằng Việt, ‘The sound of the chicken at noon’ [‘Tiếng gà trưa’] written in 1965 by Xuân Quỳnh. Except the poem ‘The sound of the chicken at noon’ which is in the curriculum for grade 7 students, the rest belongs to the curriculum for grade 9 – the senior year of secondary education in Vietnam. All of them were the works written under the guidance and control of the DRV.

Literary works and the theory of reception

Stuart Hall (1993) proposed the theory of reception, based on the circulation of communication, which includes three factors: sender-message- receiver. Hall put forward the notion that the process of communication has two features, including relative autonomy and determinateness which happen in a discursive form. Determinateness means that both the process of encoding/ production and decoding/ reception do not happen in a random moment, instead they occur in a determinate moment with specific social and political relations affecting the process of encoding and decoding. Message production and message reception do not always happen simultaneously. Different moments of encoding and decoding and the diversity of audiences who have different backgrounds and ideologies can lead to receivers' misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the message that the sender intended to transfer. This makes the process of communication become relatively autonomous, meaning that the production and the reception have their own autonomy that 'no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated.' (Hall 1993, 508). Applying Hall's theory of reception in understanding Vietnamese students' perception of the literary works written about the American War, it can be seen that the message that the author (the sender) wanted to transfer was encoded in the text. Students are the receiver decoding the message in a moment which is significantly different from the moment of production. While the receiver decodes the message when living in peace under the lead of one Party which unified the country (the Communist), the sender produced the message when still witnessing the separation of the country into two parts with grievous battles and fights. This can affect what students as the receiver interpret the message that the sender sent.

Studies on the perception of the American War in modern Vietnamese context

Studies on the perception of the American War in modern Vietnamese context mostly agree that from the Vietnamese' perspectives, the American War is to fight against foreign colonization in order to gain independence (Lockard 1994; Schwenkel 2009).

Craig A. Lockard (1994) argues that the Vietnamese view the American War as the resistance to foreign countries intending to invade and dominate the country, which is a phase in the long traditional history of fighting against foreign powers, such as the Chinese and the Mongolian to protect the independence of the own country. Christina Schwenkel (2009) contends that an approach to investigate historical knowledge production in Vietnam should be transnational, producing and being produced by border-crossing memories and their entanglements. Schwenkel

proposes the research question ‘what does memory of the “American War” (as it is called there), look like in Vietnam?’ (Schwenkel 2009, 7). By applying an ethnographic approach, meaning to study knowledge production and memory forming in Vietnamese museums, memorials, wartime photography, tourist sites, discourses of American soldiers about returning as well as discourses about torture of prisoners of war, Schwenkel has found out that for most people in contemporary Vietnam, the war is perceived as one in a series of struggles against imperialism and foreign invasion, a nationalistic identity and tradition of resistance.

Although the American War is largely considered as the resistance to the invasion of foreign countries, there is still rethinking of the war with the appearance of novels written after the war, such as *The sorrow of war* (1987) by Bao Ninh and *Beyond illusions* (1987) by Dương Thu Hương. These recent novels offer a deconstruction of the ideals of the war: battle is seen as meaningless and inhumane, while all the idealism and heroism of Communist soldiers shatter down (Tran 2018).

Methods

Participants

There are seventy-seven students voluntarily participating in the study. All students come from Le Hong Phong high school, which is a high school for gifted students in Ho Chi Minh City. At the time the study was conducted, they were from seventeen to eighteen years old and in the last year of their high school. In the pre-survey, there are seventy students voluntarily responding to the questionnaire (forty-seven males, thirty females). In the post-survey, there are seventy-four responses of seventy-four students (forty-four males, thirty females).

Instruments

The study uses Google Form surveys to collect students’ opinions: a pre-reading and a post-reading survey (please see Appendix A and B). The pre-reading survey aims to get an overview of students’ general ideas about the American War, background knowledge and expectations for the texts they were about to read while the post-reading survey targets to obtain students’ perspectives about the war and their opinion on the texts after the analysis in class.

Procedure

The data were collected with Google forms from 7th April to 3 May 2020. The forms were sent by email to the students. The data have been manually coded with categorizing strategies, basing on the two primary relationships between things: similarity and contiguity (Maxwell and Chmiel 2014, 23), as well as connecting strategies. All the

data were analyzed by using a combination of inductive and deductive coding with both concept-driven and data-driven categories in order to build a coding frame.

The coding frame follows the requirements of qualitative content analysis (Schreier 2014, 175), including: (i) unidimensionality which means main categories cover one aspect of the material only, (ii) mutual exclusiveness (subcategories in one main category are mutually exclusive, meaning that one member cannot belong in more than one subcategory), (iii) exhaustiveness (all relevant aspects of the material must be covered by a category). The requirement of mutual exclusiveness does not infer that each unit is coded only once. Instead, each unit can be coded only once under one main category.

Based on the replies, categories, subcategories and patterns were defined following below steps.

- (i) First, manually categorizing data: In this step, data segments are grouped into categories by applying both inductive and deductive coding, which allows both concept-driven and data-driven categories. The main categories follow two requirements of qualitative content analysis, including unidimensionality and exhaustiveness.
- (ii) Second, establishing sub-categories in each category: The sub-categories are formed under the requirement of mutual exclusiveness of qualitative content analysis.
- (iii) Third, pilot coding: In this step, the data is manually coded in order to fix the category frame.
- (iv) Fourth, coding with the frame: The data is manually coded with the frame established from step two and three.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the research with the following parts:

- (i) Vietnamese students' perception of the importance of studying literary works about the American War.
- (ii) Vietnamese students' reception of the literary works written about the American War in the national curriculum. This second part is divided into three main groups: (i) students' favourite contents when reading literary works about the American War, (ii) the literary works written about the war in students' memory and feelings, (iii) students' perspectives of literary works written about the war in the national curriculum for high school students and (iv) students' expectation for the literary works written about the American War.

(iii) Vietnamese students' perception of the American war.

The small parts and categories in each part are divided, following the qualitative content analysis to code the data collected. This method allows both concept-driven and data-driven categories to be established. From the questions in the pre-reading and post-reading surveys, students were asked to evaluate the importance of studying literary works written about the American War, their taste of reading related works and why, what they remember and how they feel about the literary works written about the war, their expectation for other works with similar topics and what they learn about the war from the literary works that they read. According to students' responses to the aforementioned questions, the findings were presented in a correspondent way to their answers.

Vietnamese students' perception on the importance of studying literary works about the American War

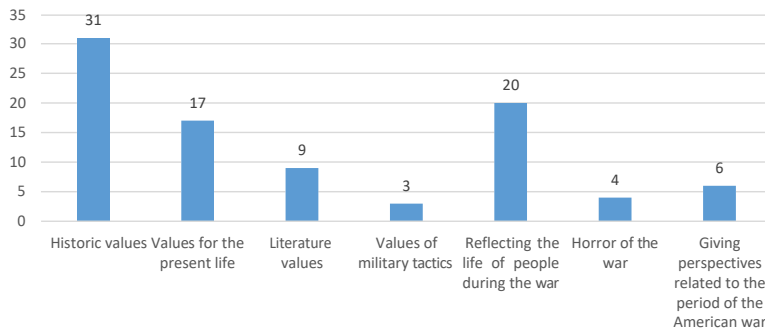
There are seventy-seven students voluntarily participating in the pre-survey of the study. Among them, sixty-five students (84%) find it necessary to learn about literary works written about the American War while the number of students undervaluing the necessity of studying those works is twelve, accounting for 16%.

The reasons why learners believed that it is important to learn literary works about the American War are presented in the Bar chart I. Among those reasons, a majority of students (n = 31) believed that the historic value is a primary reason, accounting for 40% of participants. Documentary values (n = 20) and values for present life (n = 17) rank the second and the third in the list of reasons to study literary works about the American War. On the contrary, not many learners believed that the necessity of studying those works lies in their literature values (n = 9, accounting for 11.7%). In addition, the number of students who wanted to explore different viewpoints related to the American War period is six (n = 6), and only a few students desired to discover the military tactics (n = 3) and horror of the war (n = 4) through literary works.

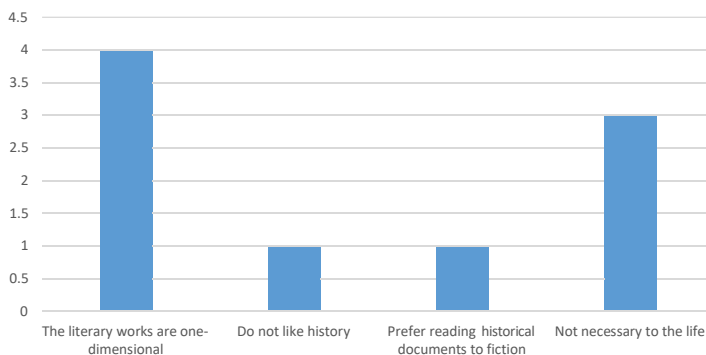
Regarding the students who did not value the necessity of studying the literary works about the American War, four people explained that the literary works in the national curriculum are one-dimensional, which does not reflect different aspects of the American War (n = 4), therefore, they did not give an overview or a full-sided view about the American War. Three students argued that learning about the American War is not significant to the present life which requires other knowledge, attitudes and skills to live in the world of globalization with global citizens (n = 3). Learners need a lingua franca like English and knowledge of big influencing countries in the world, like the USA rather than knowledge of an historic event like

the American War. One student said that he does not like studying things involved in history and another one prefers investigating history through historical documents rather than reading fiction of history (n = 1).

Barchart I: Pre-survey's results:
Reasons why it is necessary to learn literary works about the American War



Barchart II: Post-survey's results
Reasons why learning literary works about the American War is not necessary



Vietnamese students' reception of the literary works written about the American War in the national curriculum

Students' favourite contents when reading literary works about the American War

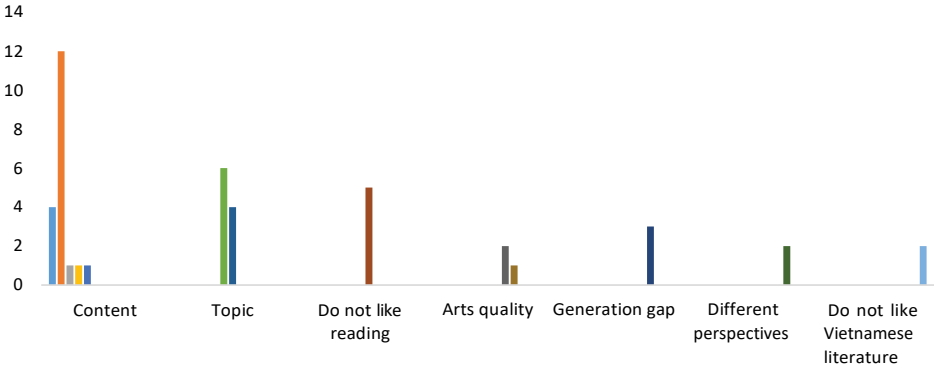
In the pre-survey, more Vietnamese students participating in the study did not like reading literary works (n = 42 in the total of 77) about the American War.

The reasons why students did not like reading literary works about the American War are presented in the Bar chart III. Among those reasons, most students believed that the content of literary works about the American War makes them not attractive enough (n = 19), it was believed to be boring or arid, repetitive (about life of Vietnamese people laboring and participating in the war or animosity towards the rival and love for the nation), painful, and lack of depth, as well as aims to transfer revolutionary ideals. Ranking the second is the topic of the works about history or wars (n = 10). Five students did not like reading in general, making it become the third major reason (n = 5). The numbers of students devaluing the arts of the literary works written about the American War (n = 3), preferring to study history through historical documents rather than literature (n = 3), as well as finding it difficult to read these literary works because of the generation gap (n = 3) are three. Two students had different perspectives from the authors', which is also the number of students who did not like Vietnamese literature.

There are thirty-five students (45.45%) who liked reading literary works about the American War. The reasons given by the students are shown in the Bar Chart IV. A majority of students (n=18) explain that the works help them to know about their country – Vietnam and life of the Vietnamese in the war, including both soldiers and civilians, how they lived in a severe situation and fought against the enemy, their love to the nation as well as their spirit, perseverance and courage to overcome extreme obstacles. The students also shared that the literary works affected their affections. They mentioned the emotions of pride of their country, being motivated and emotive. Five participants found the literary works attractive because it describes the reality in a detailed and emotive way as well as the plot contains thrilling events, igniting readers' curiosity. One student even showed wonders and interests for the future of people (who are described in the literary works that followed the Communist Party) after following the Communist Party and the Revolution:

I would like to know the life of people after following the Communist Party if they had much less obstacles or not, as I could see our people were so miserable without following the Communist Party. [Đã em muốn biết thêm là số phận những người sau khi theo Đảng họ có trở nên đỡ cơ cực hơn nhiều không ạ, vì em thấy nếu không theo Đảng đồng bào mình khổ quá.] – Participant 64.

Bar chart III: Pre-survey's results: Reasons why students do not like literary works about the American War



repetitive

painful

history

typical for epic

like Vietnamese literature

boring/ arid

transfer the revolutionary idea

do not like reading

generation gap

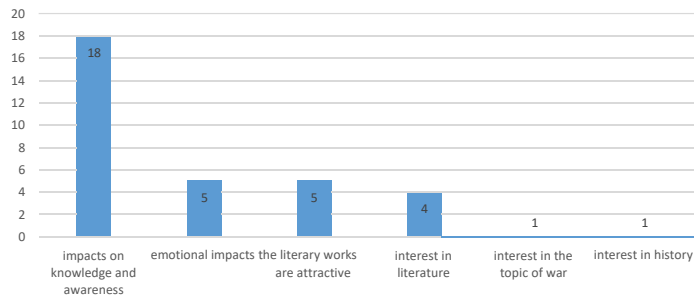
lacks the depth

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low quality

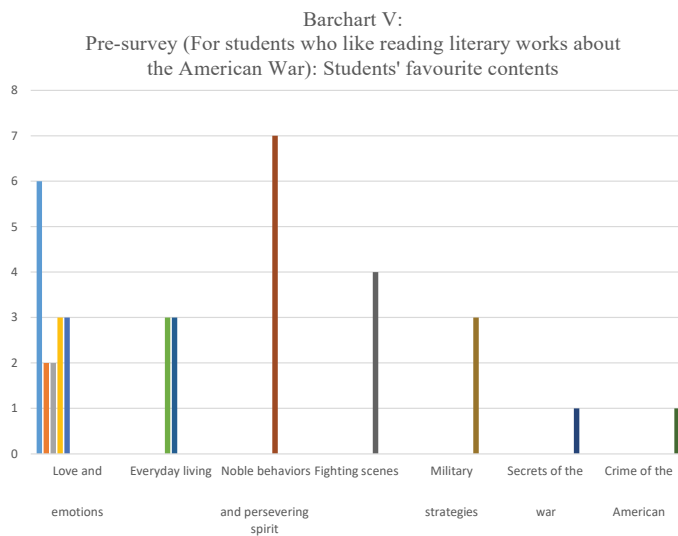
different perspectives do not

Barchart IV:
Pre-survey's results: Reasons why students like reading literary works written about the American War



The students who liked reading literary works about the American War also shared their taste of choosing the artworks, concerning main characters, contents and plot. In terms of the main characters, there are three groups of characters: (i) ordinary people which are perceived from their everyday life with love and emotions, including both civilians and soldiers ($n = 16$), (ii) nameless heroes being comprised of heroic civilians and soldiers ($n = 7$), and (iii) historical characters which are real in the history, such as commanders or leaders ($n = 1$).

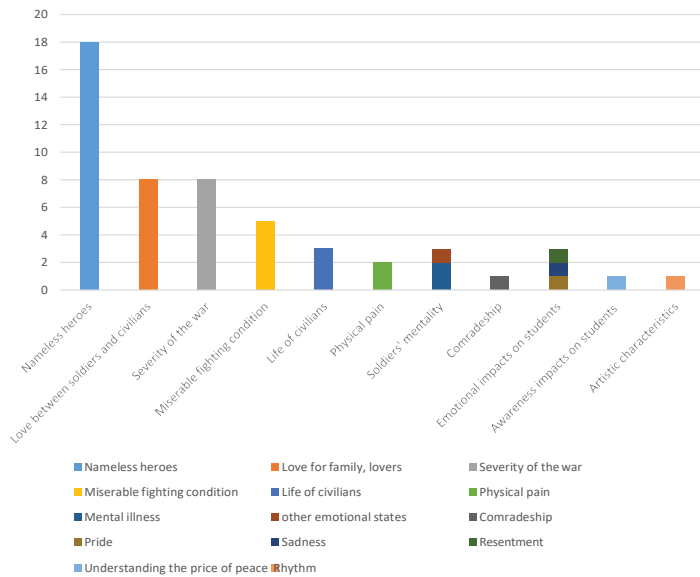
Regarding the content, the content is summarized in the bar chart V. From the bar chart V, it can be seen that students tend to be engaged more in exploring personal aspects and everyday life of people living under the war, especially the love and emotions of soldiers to their family, lovers and homeland although some of them also express their tendency to heroes with admirable behaviors. It is notable that three students focused on a romantic topic which is the couple's love of people in the war. For the students' taste, the American is not the center of the war, instead, they want to know what Vietnamese people experienced in the war.



About the plot of the story, students did not have many requirements for the plot. Only three subjects mentioned their expectations for the plot of the literary works which are expected to be thrilling, attractive and surprising.

There is a slight increase in students' affection to the literary works written about the American War in the Vietnamese national curriculum from the pre-survey to the post-survey of the study. In the post-survey, forty-three students (58%) wanted to read similar works written about the American War (like the works they learnt at school) and sixty-six students (in the total of seventy-four, accounting for 89%) wanted to introduce those works to their friends and foreigners. The reasons for their recommendation are presented in the section '*Students' perspectives of literary works written about the American War in the national curriculum*'.

Barchart VI: Pre-survey's results:
What students remembered about literary works written about the American War that they have learnt or read

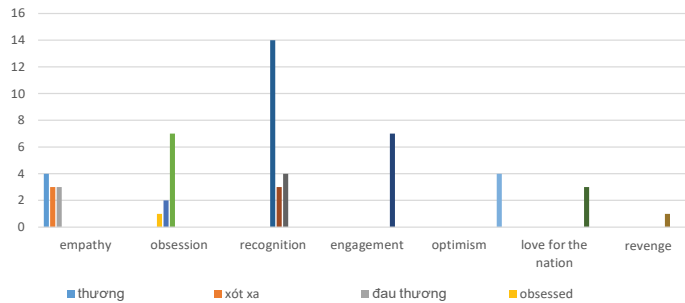


Barchart VI: Pre-survey's results: What students remembered about literary works written about the American War that they have learnt or read.

The literary works written about the American War in students' memory and feelings

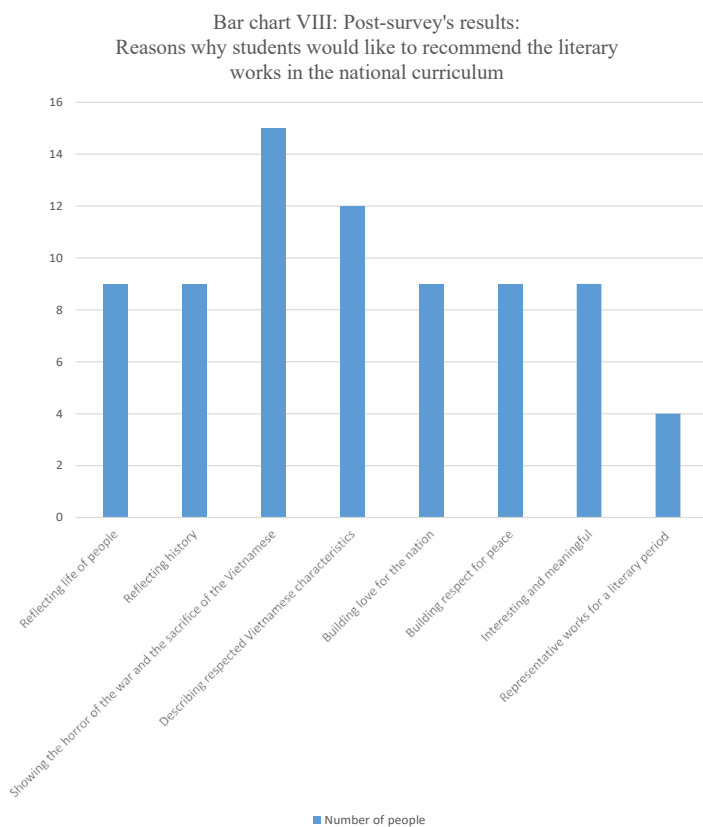
In the pre-survey, thirty-nine in the total of seventy-seven students could name the literary works that they had read or learnt about the American War (50.6%). Among them, there are eleven students naming other literary works outside the official national curriculum. From what students had learnt and read, what they remembered are given in the Bar chart VI. The contents that still remained in students' memory include nameless heroes with their love to the country and their optimistic perspective, courage and perseverance to overcome difficult situations of the war (n = 18), the love between soldiers and civilians (family, lovers) that was separated by the war (n = 8), and severity of the war which caused both physical and mental pain for people experiencing the war (n = 8). On the contrary, only a few students remember characteristics of the literary works (n = 1) and the content of comradeship (n = 1).

Bar chart VII:
Pre-survey's results: Students' feelings after reading the literary works written about the American War



The students who still remembered the literary works written about the American War in the pre-survey also presented their feelings about those works. The feelings are divided into eight groups (Bar chart VII). The most common feelings shared by students include recognition (n = 21), empathy (n = 17) and obsession (n = 12). It is also notable that the negative emotion of ‘revenge’ is not popular in students’ affection as only one student mentioned this emotion. And only four students remembered the optimistic atmosphere of the literary works.

In the group – ‘empathy’, students shared that they felt being strongly touched by using the following words to express their emotions: *thuong* – a Vietnamese word to name the feeling consisting of empathy, compassion, and humanity love, *xot xa* – a Vietnamese word to call the feeling which is a mixture of empathy, humanity love, compassion and pain, and *dau thuong* – the feeling made of different emotions and abilities including empathy, mourning or grieving, pain, and love. Regarding the group – ‘obsession’, the words used include being obsessed, *nặng nề* – a Vietnamese word to express a strong feeling of pressure or heaviness, sad. For the group – ‘recognition’, it is sorted into three subcategories: being proud and admire, respect and appreciate the effort and heroes’ noble actions, and feeling thankful.

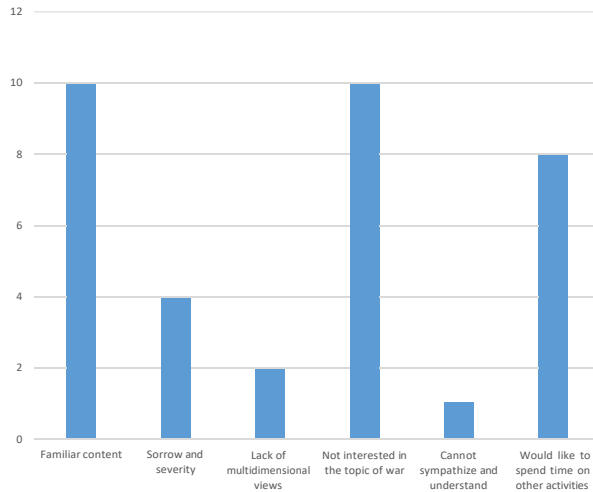


Bar chart VIII: Post-survey's results: Reasons why students would like to recommend the literary works in the national curriculum.

Students' perspectives of literary works written about the American War in the national curriculum for high school students

In the post-survey, a majority of students (86%) wanted to recommend the literary works written about the American War in the national curriculum to other people. The reasons (Bar chart VIII) for their recommendation are the following: (i) the literary works reflect the life of people in the American

Bar chart IX: Post-survey's results
Reasons why students do not like to read literary works written about the war similar to the ones of the national curriculum



War (n = 9) as well as (ii) the history of the nation (n = 9), (iii) show the horror of the war and the sacrifice, death, blood and tears of Vietnamese people for a united country and the peace (n = 15), (iv) describe respected characteristics of Vietnamese people living and fighting in the war (n = 12), (v) build love and pride of nation as well as responsibility to the country for the young generation (n = 9), (vi) help Vietnamese people respect for peace gained by the ancestor, a united country and what they are having at present (n = 9), (vii) the literary works are worth reading, meaningful and interesting (n = 9), (viii) they are the representative works for the literature of the American War period (n = 4). By recommending the literary works, students showed their respect for the value of the literary works in the national curriculum.

In the post-survey, students who did not like to read similar works written about the American War (like the ones they have learnt in the curriculum) are thirty-one (42%). The reasons they gave are similar to their opinions in the pre-survey (Bar chart IX). The main explanation includes the content is familiar (about ideals, bravery and persistent spirit to fight against the enemy, the pain and revenge, love for the nation and crime of the American; n = 10), students are not interested in the topic of wars or revolution (n = 10), and they want to spend time on other activities rather than read works about the American War (n = 8). Two students responded that the works lack multidimensional perspectives to view the war and the war is seen in a subjective way while another could not sympathize and understand the works of the national curriculum. One student said that:

I do not like topics of wars; authors and literary works tend to support one side. History is always written by the winner, not only in Vietnam but also in other countries. [Bản thân em không thích những chủ đề chiến tranh, các tác giả, tác phẩm nghiêng về một phe quá nhiều. Lịch sử được viết bởi kẻ chiến thắng, không phải chỉ riêng Việt Nam, mà các lịch sử nước khác cũng vậy.] - (Participant 66).

In addition, several students (n = 5) also showed doubts about the characteristics of characters built in the literary works by the two authors (Thi Nguyen and Trung Thanh Nguyen). They made questions wondering the conflict between personal pain and revolutionary ideals or love to the nation. For instance, one student (participant 51) asked: ‘How can you still think of the country while you were experiencing physical pain because of torturing? [Sao anh bị tra tấn đến vậy mà còn nghĩ cho nước nhà?]' (A question to Tnú – the main character of ‘The Xanu Wood’). Another student (participant 18) shared the same wonder:

How can you overcome an overwhelmed pain of seeing your wife and child being tortured to die to continue your revolutionary career? [Nếu có cơ hội được gặp Tnú, em sẽ hỏi anh tại sao có thể vượt qua nỗi đau quá lớn là chứng kiến vợ con bị đánh chết ngay trước mắt để tiếp tục sự nghiệp cách mạng?]' - A question to Tnú – the main character of ‘The Xanu Wood’.

One student (participant 61) doubted whether the people sacrifice in the war because they believe in revolution or as a result of their love to their lovers and family, as shown in the question below:

Why you did not give out information about Tnú? - Assuming that the enemy will really forgive Mai and their child. I think everyone can say that it is the revolutionary spirit but I think there is more than that, such as Mai’s love for Tnú. [Em sẽ hỏi Mai tại sao không khai Tnú ra; giả sử rằng tên giặc sẽ thực sự tha cho mẹ con Mai. Em nghĩ mọi người có thể nói đó là tinh thần cách mạng nhưng em cho rằng có nhiều thứ hơn thế chẳng hạn như là tình cảm Mai dành cho Tnú.] - A question to Mai – Tnú’s wife – a character of ‘The Xanu Wood’.

The optimistic view to take part in the war and fight against the enemy is also suspected by two students with a question wondering the emotions of a young lady desiring to participate in the army and a question about the truth of the reality reflected in the story

Have you ever been scared or regretted anything when spending all your youth fighting for the nation? Because you are also a girl with dreams for a better life

[Chị đã từng sợ hay nổi tiếu điều gì chưa khi dành cả tuổi xuân để chiến đấu cho đất nước?] - A question to Chien – a character of ‘Children of a family’ from participant 9.

In the story ‘Children of a family’, I want to meet the author and ask: “Are the characters in the story a real image or just a work created to encourage the resistance of the nation?” [“Hình tượng các nhân vật trong câu chuyện là hình tượng có thật hay chỉ là một tác phẩm được dựng lên để khích lệ tinh thần kháng chiến của dân tộc ta?”] - A question to the author of ‘Children of a family’ from participant 57.

One student (participant 57) questioned the reasons why a specific Vietnamese soldier followed the enemy (theRVN):

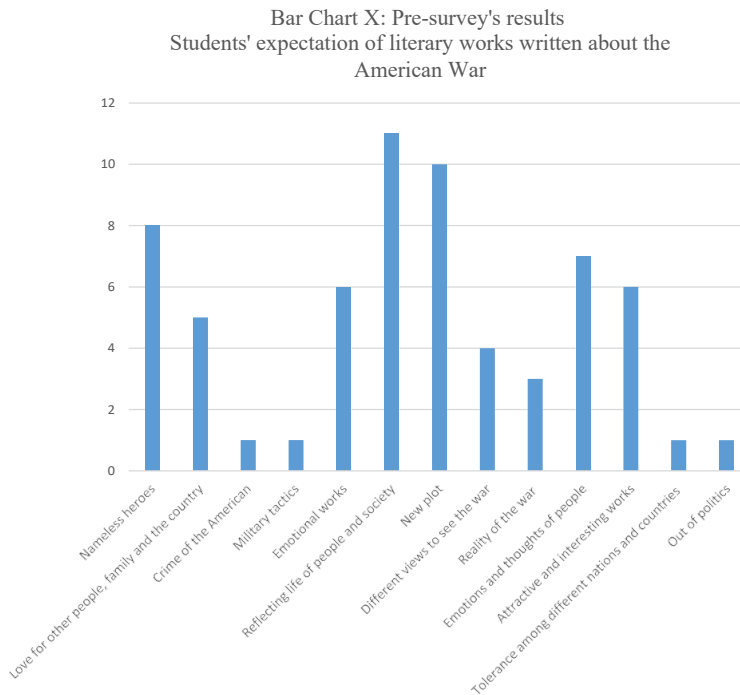
In the story ‘The Xanu Wood’, I want to meet the character Duc to ask: “Why you did not follow the Party to fight against the enemy but follow the enemy to fight against the Party? Was this due to admiration of the enemy’s strength, cowardice or desire for power?” [Trong truyện Rừng xà nu, em muốn gặp nhân vật Dục để hỏi: Vì sao không theo Đảng chống giặc mà lại theo giặc chống Đảng? Do ngưỡng mộ sự cường thế của giặc, hèn nhát hay ham muốn quyền lực?].

Students’ expectation for the literary works written about the American War

In the pre-survey, the students also presented their expectations for the literary works written about the American War that they were going to learn (Bar chart X). There is a contrast in students’ expectation about the works that they are going to study. Some students wanted to keep reading literary works written about good characteristics of nameless heroes in the war (n = 8), love for the family (n = 2) and the country (n = 1) as well as love among people (n = 2), crime of the American (n = 1), ways of fighting or military tactics (n = 1). Students also wanted to read the works which are emotional (n = 6) and reflect the life of people (n = 9) and the society (n = 2).

In another light, other students wanted to find new things in the topic, details of the works, ways of narrating the war, and the plot that they have never experienced before (n = 10). Several students also asked for the truth from different points of views or participants (n = 4), or the other side, other citizens, soldiers being involved in the war (which can be even the extreme sorrow or include other opposite or negative sides) because they believe that there is not only optimistic view on the war (n = 6). They also wanted to know more about the reality of the war (n = 3). A number of students wanted to know the emotions and thoughts of people (both citizens and soldiers) about the war (n = 7). There was a group of students who did not follow these two aforementioned

directions. They wanted to read attractive and interesting works (n=6), out of politics (n=1), showing tolerance among different nations and countries (n = 1) and including a happy ending (n = 2).



Bar Chart X: Pre-survey's results Students' expectation of literary works written about the American War.

In the post-survey, a majority of students wanted to read literary works written about the American War from the point of view of American soldiers (70 students, 94.6%). The reasons they gave include: (i) to see the war in other and multidimensional perspectives (n = 63), (ii) to understand how American soldiers felt and thought when participating in the war (n = 5), (iii) to know why the American created a meaningless and cruel war (n = 2), (iv) one student believes that the literature written by the Americans will reflect the reality in a simple and honest way.

It is also noteworthy about the way students called the American and their actions when explaining that they wanted to view the war in (the) other or multidimensional viewpoints, because it reflects their views towards the American and their perception of the American War. Twenty-nine used the phrases 'the other side' or 'the other front line' to call the American (n = 29, 39%). Five juveniles called the American 'enemy', and five is also the number of students who utilized 'the invader' to refer to the American. Two students used the word 'loser' to mention them, and one called them 'the people who caused mental and physical harm to my nation'. Ten people called the action that

the American did in the war by the following phrases: ‘to create the meaningless and horrible war’ (n = 2), ‘to invade’ (n = 6), ‘to rob’ (n = 1), ‘to rule Vietnam’ (n = 1), ‘to cause mental and physical harm’ (n = 1), ‘to occupy’ (n = 1).

Among the students wishing to know the feelings and thinking of the American soldiers participating in the war, one person desired to know if the American soldiers could feel how the American government/ Empire was cruel and what they thought when conducting the crime in the representative of the American government, two students wanted to know how the soldiers felt when participating in the horrible and meaningless war, one student wished to understand the American’s thinking of the terrible war they created, and another one longed for knowing if the American really revenged, hated and wanted to torture the Vietnamese people like what he heard from rumors.

On the contrary to the opinion viewing American soldiers as the ‘invader’, ‘the creator of the war’, there are six students believing that American soldiers are also victims of the war, two students clearly said that American soldiers were forced to invade another country. One student (participant 41) showed his desire to know the reality about the war and he is the only one to question directly who created the war:

I always want to know what foreigners think of the resistance war created by them or by us, to have an overview about both sides, so I can understand clearly about the war, how it happened. [Em luôn muốn biết những người ở nước ngoài nghĩ gì về cuộc kháng chiến do họ gây ra, hay do chúng ta gây ra, muốn nhìn một cách tổng quan hơn về hai phía, thì em mới hiểu rõ được về cuộc chiến đó thật sự diễn ra như thế nào ạ.].

Only four students do not want to read literary works written about the American War by American soldiers. Among them, two students believe that the works written by the American cannot reflect the war in a fair way while one student does not want to experience more sorrow by reading about the war.

Vietnamese students’ perception about the American War

From the pre-survey to the post-survey (Bar charts V, VI, VII, VIII, and Table 1), almost all students agreed with the following notion about the American War:

- (i) The war was extremely grieving, and Vietnamese people sacrificed a tremendous amount of blood, death, and tears to gain peace and a unified country.

Table 1. Words and phrases students use to call the American and their actions.

Categories	Words and phrases	Number
Words and phrases students used for the Americans	The other side, the other front line	29
	Enemy	5
	The invader	5
	Loser	2
	The people who caused mental and physical harm to my nation	1
Words and phrases students used for American actions	To create the meaningless and horrible war	2
	To invade	6
	To rob	1
	To rule Vietnam	1
	To cause mental and physical harm	1
	To occupy	1

From the number of students recommending the literary works written about the American War that they learnt at school (Pie chart IV) and their reasons to recommend them (Bar chart VIII) as well as students' favourite contents when reading literary works about the war (Bar chart V) and their expectation to read the war from the American perspectives (Table 1), it can be interpreted that a number of students surveyed perceived the American War as the war between the Vietnamese and the American in which the American was the other side, the invader and who ignited the war:

- (i) The horrible war was created by the Americans/American government.
- (ii) The Americans and their allies are the enemy or the invader, or the other side of the war. They caused overwhelming pain for the Vietnamese people and the country.
- (iii) Vietnamese people are the victims and are seen as the protagonist in the war. Their mentality and physicality were terribly hurt. Although Vietnamese people suffered the war, they still showed their spirit, perseverance and love for their family, people and the nation.
- (iv) Vietnamese people participated in the war to fight against the enemy invading and causing terrible crime for the nation, gain independence and unify the whole country.
- (v) The Americans are the losers and the Vietnamese are the winners in the war.

Among the opinions believing that the American War is the war between the Vietnamese and the American and the American is the loser, there are also critical opinions re-evaluating the role of both American and Vietnamese basing on their own investigation and reading:

The Americans do not admit their failure, considering it as the Vietnamese civil war between the North and the South, and they only participated to support the South, similar to the way the Soviet Union and China supported the North,

therefore, the documents they made tend to follow the things mentioned above. However, I do not agree with this assumption, because the American intervened significantly in this war, and for us, we received the support in terms of weapons and strategies, but the people who stood up for the Nation were only Vietnamese citizens. [Người Mỹ không thừa nhận về thất bại của mình, xem đây là một cuộc nội chiến giữa hai miền Nam Bắc, và họ chỉ tham gia vào giúp đỡ miền Nam, tương tự như Liên Xô và Trung Quốc giúp đỡ miền Bắc, vậy nên tài liệu họ làm thường có xu hướng đi theo những điều trên. Nhưng em không đồng ý với ý kiến này, vì người Mỹ đã can thiệp quá sâu vào cuộc chiến này, còn chúng ta chỉ nhận sự trợ giúp về vũ trang, chiến lược, còn lực lượng đứng lên chiến đấu vì Tổ quốc thì chỉ có dân tộc Việt Nam.] - Participant 12's response to the last question of the post-survey.

The story written by the Americans will have different perspectives in comparison with Vietnamese works. One of those is the fact that American combatants were not totally cruel who shot people without being scared but most of them were young, being forced to the battlefields compulsorily and there were some people who were scared of death as well. Therefore, we could see the demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the U.S which became bigger and bigger because they did not want their children to go to the place of death, leading to the Paris Peace Accords. This is what I know about foreign works written about the Vietnam War by American authors. [Câu chuyện được viết bởi người Mỹ sẽ có những góc nhìn khác so với tác phẩm Việt Nam. Một trong số đó chính là lính Mỹ trong chiến tranh Việt Nam không hoàn toàn là những kẻ độc ác, bắn người không gớm tay mà phần lớn trong số họ là những người trẻ, được đẩy ra chiến trường một cách bắt buộc và có những người lại rất sợ chết. Chính vì lẽ đó, ta thấy làn sóng biểu tình chống chiến tranh Việt Nam được thúc đẩy tại Mỹ trở nên lớn mạnh do họ không muốn con em mình phải vào chỗ "Thập tử nhất sinh" dẫn đến hiệp định Pa-ri. Đó là những gì em đã biết được về các tác phẩm ngoại quốc do tác giả Mỹ viết về chiến tranh Việt Nam.] - Another response to the last question of the post-survey from participant 68.

On the contrary, there are other students who hold different views on the American War (Bar charts II, IX), which are the following:

- (i) In the national literature curriculum, the war is presented in a one-dimensional and subjective way (n = 4), lacking depth and aiming to transfer the ideals of revolution.
- (ii) American soldiers participating in the war are also human beings and war victims (n = 6).
- (iii) The war is meaningless (n = 2).
- (iv) The right or wrong party in war does not exist, but clearly there are winners

and losers. The citizens and soldiers forced to be involved in the war are the most suffering people.

The students expected to know more about the American War in the following aspects:

- (i) Want to know the war in a multi-dimensional view (n=63), other sides of the war, especially the thoughts of people experiencing and fighting in the war from both Vietnamese people and American people.
- (ii) Want to know why the Americans created or participated in the terrible war (n = 2).
- (iii) Want to know the experience and thoughts of American soldiers who also had to separate from their home country, family and fight in the war. The students questioned if they recognized their crimes and why they still did the crimes (n = 5).
- (iv) Want to know the truth.

To conclude, a majority of students understand the sorrow and horror of the American War. There are a number of students perceiving the American War as the war between the Vietnamese and the American in which the Vietnamese were the victims, and the American was the other side, the invader and who ignited the war as being taught at school. However, there are several opinions viewing the war out of the perspective of how it was told for students in the national curriculum. Those students require for the truth, more dimensions and aspects to view the war from different participants as well as diverse points of view. In addition, some students also view the war from the political perspectives, not only the nationalist perspectives. Therefore, they see the American soldiers participating in the war are not the enemy, instead, they are also the victims of the war. The government is responsible for the war instead of the soldiers.

Discussion

The findings of the study are discussed based on the reception theory proposed by Hall (1993) which explains the reception of literary works based on readers' backgrounds. According to Hall, there are three receiver positions: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional code. The first position refers to the receiver who views the code in the dominant way because s/he shares the same assumptions and cultural background and stereotypes as the sender. With this dominant-hegemonic position, there is little misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver.

The majority of students who recommend the literary works written about the American War by the Vietnamese authors explain their response with similar reasons

to the purposes of literary works written to support the DRV during the war pointed out by Dror (2018). The reasons include reflecting the miserable life of people under colonization, the sacrifice and persistent spirit of Vietnamese people to fight for the ideals of unifying the country. With this perspective, the war is not perceived from the politics point of view, but from the nationalist point of view. Apparently, in line with the education and the mainstream perception of the American War in Vietnam (Schwenkel 2009), which is to protect the country against foreign power, there is no misinterpretation between the authors and the students who are the receivers although they are totally different in terms of their war experience. The literary works were written by the DRV authors, and students are living under the lead of the Communist Party at the present. The times and experience can be different, however the ideals and cultural bias come from the same root.

The second receiver position, according to Hall, is the negotiated version. Hall explains about this position: ‘Decoding within the *negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule’ (Hall 1993, 516). The third view is the *oppositional code*: ‘He or she detotalises the message in the preferred code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference’ (Ibid, 517). From the students’ responses, it can be seen that there are views from the negotiated position in which students on one hand accept the value of the message the sender intended to transfer, simultaneously on the other hand, understand that the message lacks a multidimensional view to see the war. There are a few students who have the ‘oppositional code’ that totally deny the value of the works, believe that they are totally one-dimensional and refuse to receive more messages similar to the one transferred in the works that they learn at school. As Tran (2018) points out that after the war, the rethinking about it has appeared and being expressed in novels of Vietnamese authors, even the ones who supported the DRV in the war, such as Bảo Ninh with *The sorrow of war*, Dương Thu Hương with *Beyond illusions*, etc. The works written about the war to support the DRV in the national curriculum are questioned by some students, which actually reflects the stream of rethinking about the war that has happened in Vietnam after the war ended in 1975.

The study has some limitations. Students from Le Hong Phong high school (Hồ Chí Minh City) are gifted students, who have been selected in a competitive entrance exam, therefore, the sample cannot be represented for all students in Hồ Chí Minh City. However, as they are carefully chosen, they can become the representative for the intellectual youth from Hồ Chí Minh City, giving their opinions about the war and its related literary works taught in the national curriculum.

The study has implications for both research and practice. In terms of research, it

is one of the first studies to investigate the perception of Vietnamese high school students about the American War as well as literary works written about the war in the national high school curriculum, which can be the base for further studies about the image of the war (one of the most historic events in Vietnamese history) pictured in the Vietnamese youth. This helps to understand what Vietnamese youths nowadays value, how they think about the hurt and separation of their country in the past, which is a foundation to build sympathy and heal the wounds of the Vietnamese caused by the war. In terms of practice, understanding how students perceive the war and the literary works written about the war contributes to re-evaluate the ways of teaching this historic event as well as the related literature in the national curriculum. The voices of minorities suffering in the war cannot be buried or ignored. The students want to know the war from multi-dimensional perspectives, therefore, it is necessary to make changes in the way to approach the American War in Vietnamese national education to embrace more voices, to listen to other opinions, to build empathy and heal the wounds caused in the war. The changes need to be created from the base of insightful understanding about the war, its sorrow and respect for peace.

Conclusions

The research finds that a majority of students (86%) believe that it is important to study literary works written about the American War because of the historic value of the war itself and documentary values of literary works written about the war. On one hand, a large number of participants (89%) believe that the literary works in the national curriculum are valuable because they reflect the life of people in the war as well as the history of the nation, showing the horror of the war and the sacrifice of Vietnamese people for a united country and peace. The works contribute to build youths' love and pride of the nation, waken their responsibility for the country, and make them respect what they have at present. However, a notable number of participants (42%) do not want to read similar works because the content is believed to be familiar (about ideals, bravery and persistent spirit to fight against the enemy, the pain and revenge, love for the nation), the atmosphere of the works is sorrowful and severe, and notably, the works lack multidimensional perspectives to view the war. Several students also show doubt on what the works reflected, especially about the revolutionary ideals messaged in the works, especially when they were confronting physical and mental pain as well as personal love and desires. Almost all students (95%) want to read the war from the American perspective as they want to view the war in a multidimensional way to come closer to the truth. This requires a changing approach in teaching the American War in general and literary works written about the war in particular.

Regarding students' perception of the war, almost all students understand the sorrow and horror of the American War. There are a number of students perceiving the

American War as the war between the Vietnamese and the American in which the Vietnamese were the victims, and the American was the other side, the invader and who ignited the war as being taught at school. However, there are several opinions viewing the war out of the perspective of how it was told for students in the national curriculum. They see those American soldiers participating in the war are not the enemy, instead, they are also the victims of the war. The government is responsible for the war instead of the soldiers.

Note

1. This paper will adopt the form 'American War' in accordance with the way the conflict is referred to in the Vietnamese national curriculum today. 'American War' is the short for 'Resistance War against America' [Kháng chiến chống Mỹ].

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Appendix

A. Pre-reading survey

Please answer the following questions about the topic: ‘Literature about the American War’. You should write a minimum of 50 words per question. You can answer either in sentences/paragraphs or by using bullet points/numbers.

- (1) Do you think it is important for you to learn literary works about the Vietnam War against the American (1955–1975)? Why/not?
- (2) Are you interested in reading novels, short-stories or poems about this war? Why/not? If the answer is yes . . .
 - (a) What kind of stories would you like to read? (here you mention topics, plots, char-acters, etc)
 - (b) What would you like to learn through these stories?
- (3) Do you know or do you remember any literary work (novels, short-stories, poems) about the Vietnam War against the American (1955–1975) that you have learnt at school or read at home (or elsewhere)? Please name these texts and the authors here.
- (4) About the literary works that you have read (in reference to the previous question) say
 - (a) What do you remember about them?
 - (b) What did you learn from them?
 - (c) How did they make you feel?
- (5) Soon you are going to read two fictional short-stories that deal with the Vietnam War against the American (1955–1975). These two stories were written by Vietnamese soldiers. What kind of information do you expect to find in these stories? (here you can mention topics, plots, characters, values, feelings, etc.)

B. Post-reading survey

You have recently read two short-stories about the War against the American (1955–

1975): ‘Rừng xà nu’ [‘The Xanu Wood’] by Nguyễn Trung Thành and ‘Những đứa con trong gia đình’ [‘Children of a Family’] by Nguyễn Thi. Please answer the following questions about each one of the stories. You should write a minimum of 50 words per question. You can answer either in sentences/paragraphs or by using bullet points/numbers.

- (1) ‘Rừng xà nu’ and ‘Những đứa con trong gia đình’: which story did you like the most and why?
- (2) What are the things that you like and appreciate from these stories? (at least 3 per story)
- (3) What are the things that you do not like from these stories? (at least 3 per story) If you could change anything in the story, what would it be?
- (4) Which is your favourite character? Describe this character and the things you like about him/her. (one answer per story)
- (5) Which is your least favourite character? Describe this character and the things you don’t like about him/her. (one answer per story)
- (6) If you had the chance of interviewing the authors, or meeting some of the characters, what would you like to ask them? Suggest some questions or comments.
- (7) After reading these two short-stories, have you learnt anything new/different from the American War that you didn’t know from before?
- (8) Are these two short-stories different or similar to other literary works that you have read before at school, at home, or elsewhere?
- (9) Would you like to read more stories like these? Why/not? Would you recommend these stories to your friends/other people your age?
- (10) These two stories were written by Vietnamese soldiers/writers. Would you like to read stories about this same war but written by American soldiers/writers? Why/not? Do you believe that these other stories would be different or not? Why/not?