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**TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN VIETNAMESE SHORT STORY
LITERATURE**

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Introduction

Since Đổi Mới reforms in 1986, Vietnamese literature has undergone significant transformation. As Vietnam embraced market reforms, globalization, and greater openness, short story writers gradually departed from earlier socialist-realist tropes toward introspective realism, psychological depth, and stylistic experimentation. Nguyen Ngoc Tu, for example, embodies the Southern literary tradition while introducing multi-dimensional characters rooted in Mekong Delta culture, reshaping regional narratives. At the same time, female voices—from Doan Thi Lam Luyen to Phan Huyen Thu—have expanded thematic scope, foregrounding gendered experience and emotion within modern society.

Methods

This qualitative literary study employs comparative textual analysis and reception studies. A corpus of canonical and emerging short stories (2000–2025) by Vietnamese writers—including Nguyễn Ngọc Tú, Bảo Ninh, Nguyễn Hương Duyên, and several female authors—was selected. Textual analysis focused on narrative structure, point of view, thematic motifs, and cultural context. Reception and criticism were traced through secondary literature and scholarly commentary, especially on gender trends and regional identity.

Results

1. Narrative Technique and Perspective

Modern Vietnamese short story writers have increasingly moved away from the linear, event-centered storytelling characteristic of socialist realism and earlier revolutionary literature. Instead, they experiment with multi-perspectival narration, where a single story may be told through several voices, each offering a different angle on the same event or character. This approach not only destabilizes the notion of a singular “truth” but also reflects the complexity of contemporary Vietnamese identity in a rapidly changing society.

Another important shift is the emphasis on psychological interiority. Characters are no longer portrayed primarily as representatives of social classes or political ideals; rather, their inner lives, private thoughts, and subtle emotions take center stage. Scholars such as Philip Taylor (*Fractured Memory: The Representation of Trauma in Vietnamese Literature*, 2001) have pointed out how Vietnamese authors increasingly use stream-of-consciousness techniques, interior monologues, and

fragmented time structures to convey the disorientation of individuals caught between tradition and modernity.

This fragmentary storytelling often mirrors the discontinuities of memory and trauma. For instance, Bảo Ninh’s narrative strategies in *The Sorrow of War*—though a novel—have influenced the short story form, where flashbacks, non-linear sequencing, and abrupt shifts between past and present are common. Similarly, Nguyễn Ngọc Tư’s short stories often juxtapose ordinary rural scenes with sudden psychological insights, blending realism with lyrical reflection.

By disrupting chronological order and privileging subjective perception, modern Vietnamese short stories align with global postmodern narrative strategies while retaining culturally specific features—such as the oral storytelling tradition and regional dialectal inflections. This fusion of traditional narrative modes with modern experimental techniques has become a hallmark of post-Đổi Mới short story literature.

Modern writers increasingly employ shifting or multi-perspectival narration. Studies have noted a growing trend toward exploring psychological interiority and fragmentary storytelling rather than linear plots typical of earlier periods

2. Themes of Everyday Life and Internal Consciousness

In the post-Đổi Mới era, Vietnamese short stories have shifted markedly away from revolutionary-minded heroism and collectivist ideals that once dominated national literature. Instead of glorifying political struggle or collective sacrifice, modern short fiction gravitates toward personal and intimate narratives. Writers focus on the inner world of characters, exploring experiences of regret, longing, solitude, disillusionment, and quiet resilience.

This thematic transformation has been closely linked to Vietnam’s socio-economic reforms, which encouraged a more open cultural climate and greater attention to the complexities of individual life. The countryside, previously portrayed in literature as the heroic backdrop of resistance, now emerges as a site of ordinary struggles and unspoken emotions.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tư is a central figure in this thematic reorientation. Her stories, deeply rooted in the Mekong Delta’s cultural and ecological landscape, highlight the emotional subtleties of rural existence—loneliness, broken relationships, generational gaps, and the bittersweet attachment to land and tradition. Scholars such as Patricia M. Pelley and Philip Taylor note how her writing captures the nuanced tension between regional identity and the forces of modernization. Through understated plots and understated emotions, she gives voice to the everyday lives of marginalized characters—farmers, women, and villagers—thus offering a counter-narrative to the triumphalist accounts of the past.

Themes of memory and loss are also prevalent. Many stories revisit personal and collective pasts not as monumental history but as fragmented recollections embedded in daily life. Instead of depicting war as a field of heroism, writers such as Bảo Ninh and Nguyễn Ngọc Tư frame it through its lingering psychological scars, grief, and intergenerational trauma.

In this way, modern Vietnamese short stories emphasize individual subjectivity and inner truth over collective ideology. This thematic evolution has broadened the Vietnamese literary canon, aligning it

with global trends of literary introspection while remaining deeply anchored in the country’s regional cultures and lived realities.

3. Rise of Female Authorship and Feminist Concerns

One of the most significant developments in modern Vietnamese short story writing is the increasing visibility and influence of female authors. Writers such as Nguyễn Hương Duyên, Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, and younger voices featured in anthologies like *Longings: Contemporary Stories by Vietnamese Women Writers* (2023) have brought fresh perspectives to Vietnamese literature by foregrounding women’s selfhood, agency, and lived experience within a traditionally patriarchal society.

These authors often center narratives on domestic life, motherhood, generational conflicts, and the constraints of cultural traditions, while simultaneously challenging those very boundaries. Their stories reveal the tensions between personal desire and social expectation, giving voice to emotions and struggles that were marginalized or silenced in earlier, male-dominated literary frameworks. As researcher Le Thi Bich Hong notes, contemporary female authors “expand the Vietnamese short story into a sphere of gender consciousness where female voices negotiate between tradition and modernity” (*Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 2018).

Beyond thematic contributions, female authors have also been at the forefront of narrative innovation. Their stories often employ fragmented structures, interior monologue, and shifting points of view to mirror women’s subjective realities and the multiplicity of female identity. Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, for instance, has been praised for combining regional dialects, lyrical prose, and subtle irony, which not only enrich her characters’ inner worlds but also question dominant narratives of national identity.

By articulating questions of gender, sexuality, and selfhood, these writers contribute to a broader feminist reorientation of Vietnamese literature. Their work situates Vietnamese women not merely as supporting figures in historical or revolutionary narratives, but as central protagonists with complex psychologies and autonomous voices. In doing so, they not only reshape thematic horizons but also help reconfigure the aesthetics of the Vietnamese short story, ensuring that women’s perspectives remain integral to the country’s literary modernity.

4. Influence of Market, Globalization, and Digital Platforms

Since the Đổi Mới reforms of 1986, Vietnam’s gradual integration into global markets and cultural flows has profoundly reshaped its literary landscape. As the Tap Chi Cong San commentary notes, writers of the post-Đổi Mới generation increasingly respond to global influences, mass media, and popular culture, resulting in a more diverse and experimental body of short fiction.

One clear trend is the rise of market-oriented publishing, which encourages writers to adapt to reader demand and explore commercially viable themes such as urban life, romance, and social change. This has led to a pluralization of literary voices, where canonical authors coexist with younger, more experimental ones who publish online or through small independent presses.

Globalization has also introduced new narrative models and literary styles. Writers draw inspiration from world literature, cinema, and translated texts, incorporating postmodern fragmentation, metafictional devices, and hybrid genres into their short stories. This stylistic openness allows

Vietnamese short fiction to enter into dialogue with international literary movements while retaining its distinct cultural identity.

Equally important is the role of digital platforms and the internet, which have democratized the production and circulation of literature. Online forums, social media, and e-publishing enable marginalized voices—especially women, youth, and regional authors—to bypass traditional publishing gatekeepers and reach wider audiences. As noted in recent literary surveys, online short story contests and web-based magazines have become incubators for emerging talents, some of whom later transition into mainstream publishing.

Moreover, globalization has fostered diasporic connections, with Vietnamese writers abroad (e.g., Viet Thanh Nguyen) influencing domestic literary conversations, and anthologies in English translation (such as Longings, 2023) bringing contemporary Vietnamese female writers to international readers. This exchange expands the visibility of Vietnamese short fiction, situating it within the global literary marketplace while also sparking debates over authenticity, cultural preservation, and literary commodification.

Thus, the post-Đổi Mới era has not only diversified the themes and techniques of the Vietnamese short story but has also transformed its conditions of production and reception. Literature is no longer solely mediated by state institutions but thrives in a decentralized, hybrid environment shaped by global cultural flows, market dynamics, and digital innovation.

Discussion

Modern Vietnamese short stories reflect a departure from earlier social-realist, nation-focused narratives toward more intimate, regionally rooted, and self-reflexive writing. The interplay of regional identity (e.g. Southern Delta life), female subjectivity, and digital-age readers has fostered a pluralistic literary environment. Narrative experimentation—such as fragmented structure and shifting perspectives—mirrors broader global literary trends while retaining Vietnamese cultural specificity. Female authors in particular have challenged dominant forms, contributing both to narrative innovation and to discussions of gender and identity.

Conclusion

Since Đổi Mới, Vietnamese short story literature has undergone significant development. Key trends include the shift to interior, everyday-themed narratives; expanded narrative styles dealing with consciousness and fragmentation; and the rising prominence of female writers and marginalized voices. Authors like Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Bảo Ninh exemplify how regional tradition and historical trauma are transformed through modern storytelling. Future research might trace the impact of platforms like online literary magazines and the diaspora voice (e.g. Viet Thanh Nguyen) on shaping global visibility for Vietnamese short stories.