

It seems that building a country based upon the rule of law is still very challenging, and the shift from “subjects” to “citizens” must still overcome many obstacles.

12. THÁI HẠO

Translated by Vũ Ngọc Kiều Khanh

Subsidized Literature

Originally posted on Facebook by Thái Hạo on April 17, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/story.phpstory_fbid=379200590753633&id=100059910855657.

I have seen many questions about and criticisms of the silence of Vietnamese writers and poets regarding the case in which a leader of a literature newspaper has been accused of rape by a female poet. The case has been stirring public opinion for over ten days. I have been paying close attention but have seen very few reactions. Other than a handful of people who have made objective comments from a scientific angle or a rational perspective, the majority keeps silent, afraid to get involved.

To be clear, I am not pushing for one side or the other. You may be on DTP’s side or on LNA’s side or on the side of justice, as long as you do not irrationally attack the other side.

But what I want to focus on here is the large number of observers who remain silent or issue vague pronouncements.

Why is this the case? I think that the practices of subsidized literature are to blame. If our writers and poets could not publish in government newspapers and journals, where would they be? Publishing on Facebook doesn’t cut it. Once there were sites where you could publish outside of Vietnam, like *Tiền Vệ* or *Da Màu*. Now they are not so easy to access, and you may fall under suspicion for publishing there. As a result, there is just one “local pond” to swim in, so if you make trouble for others, you know what will happen. Shutting your mouth is a more prudent approach. There is not

much to say about those who maintain a consistently neutral posture. They follow the ideology of a bamboo tree, biding their time, waiting for the situation to become clear. Or they spout meaningless homilies like “five plus five is ten” or “an early riser is sure to be in luck.”

Having been published (or rejected) by the newspapers (of the Writers’ Association) in our country, it is easy to discern the “peculiarities” of our system. Much of the time, publication is the result of favoritism. Sometimes, it’s a function of kickbacks. If writers and editors have a prior relationship, publication may reflect their fondness for each other. Let’s stick together: you greenlight me, I praise you; you grant me a favor, I appreciate you. “We” only engage with each other, showering each other with compliments, awarding each other prizes, crying in each other’s arms. We don’t know and we don’t need to know what’s going on with people outside of our little circle.

The dais of literary honor in our country is narrow. Only a small number of people can fit on it at one time. Countless others stand outside this literary inner circle. Hence, although the benefits are nominal, many are obsessed by the desire to be a member of this circle. For such people, “silence is golden” remains a good strategy. If you are lucky, you can briefly find room on the dais, a truly glorious position. Therefore, without needing to communicate to one another, our writers, poets, critics, and researchers all do the same thing.

A small pond that has had no water flowing in or out for a long time becomes stagnant. Fish are plentiful but the water grows murky, and nobody can see. Occasionally a shadow is seen, which quickly disappears—and nobody knows where it is.

Now, with a big event happening in the field, those who are called “the engineers of the soul,” “the multi-tone lutes,” or “the conscience of the country” do not dare to speak up, not even a tiny bit. It’s very strange, but that is what’s happening. Calmly, unquestioningly, unemotionally.

I miss literary debates, the events in our literature field from the beginning of this century, which were very passionate. Then, we had real literature, real artists breathing with their time. Today is so different. People nowadays hold their breath, waiting for the sky and sea to become calm again. Then they trim their beards, slip on their shoes, pull up their jeans, and join the ranks once again of artists and mafiosos. Once again, they talk

about important things, recite poetry, and flirt with each other. They shower each other with awards once again.

The economic subsidy system died in 1987 due to growling stomachs. At that time, the line between the life and death of the economic system was clear: failure to change meant death. But the literature subsidy system has remained in place for an additional thirty-five years despite the fact that the only ration it distributes is a fleeting place on the absurd dais of literary honor.

Literary progress is always slow, but our country's literature conveys an unusually ugly and sloppy picture after many decades, and there are no signs of change any time soon.

13. DẠ THẢO PHƯƠNG

Translated by Vũ Ngọc Kiều Khanh

The Diary: Evidence of a Crime

Originally posted on Facebook by Dạ Thảo Phương on April 26, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/dathaophuongvn/posts/pfbidoX69ED64dXED5j32VtBewEMruFVVj26ELMgrYJGDKUqiKstb4GpWLNcVepUDM9l>.

This long-lost diary stores the deepest pain in my life. It followed me from the beginning when I was bewildered as I searched for justice, then lived with other documents of my entire case at a certain law firm named Trần H. N. & Associates, belonging to the lawyer Trần Hữu Nam, located at No. 1, Nguyễn Gia Thiều, Hà Nội.

As the years passed, I dared not think about finding it again.

But on April 23, 2022, Trần Hữu Nam found the diary and delivered it to my sister, poet Hàm Anh.

GLOOMY DAYS

It was those dark times when I was forced to abort my first child, the one that was the result of being raped for the first time by Lương Ngọc An. I lived in