

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
VAN HIEN UNIVERSITY

BUI QUANG KHAI

**EXISTENTIAL SENSIBILITY
IN SOUTHERN URBAN POETRY (1965 - 1975)**

Major: Vietnamese Literature
Major Code: 9220121

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
IN VIETNAMESE LITERATURE

Ho Chi Minh City – 2026

The dissertation was completed at: Van Hien University
Academic Supervisor 1: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Hoai Anh
Academic Supervisor 2: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ho The Ha

Reviewer 1: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vo Van Nhon
Reviewer 2: Dr. Dang Quoc Minh Duong

The dissertation will be defended before the University-level Dissertation Evaluation Committee convened at:
HungHau Campus: Functional Area 13E, Nguyen Van Linh Boulevard,
Binh Hung Commune, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
At 1:30 p.m. on August 8, 2026

The dissertation can be consulted at the following libraries:

- Vietnam National Library
- Learning Resource Center of Van Hien University

INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for Choosing the Topic

Urban poetry of Southern Vietnam in the period 1965 - 1975 constitutes an important component of modern Vietnamese literature, offering a profound reflection of spiritual life and the consciousness of human destiny amid the contexts of war, urbanization, and a crisis of values. Experiences of death, absurdity, loneliness, and existential anxiety gave rise to an enduring existential sensibility that permeates poetic creation during this period.

Although numerous studies have approached Southern urban poetry from historical, formal (poetic), and cultural perspectives, existential sensibility has not yet been systematically examined as an intellectual-aesthetic paradigm governing poetic creation, particularly in terms of both ideological content and artistic modes of expression.

Meanwhile, existentialism was vigorously received into the intellectual and artistic life of Southern Vietnam prior to 1975. Applying existentialist theory to the study of Southern urban poetry not only helps to elucidate the philosophical depth of these works but also clarifies their humanistic value and the spirit of artistic innovation embodied by the poets.

Therefore, the selection of the topic “*Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975*” aims to fill a gap in existing scholarship and to contribute to a re-evaluation of this poetic current as an intrinsically valuable component in the trajectory of modern Vietnamese literature.

2. Objects and Scope of the Study

2.1. *Object of the Study*: The dissertation focuses on the body of urban poetry in Southern Vietnam during the period 1965 - 1975, with particular emphasis on poetic works published within this timeframe by representative poets who were actively writing in Southern urban centers.

2.2. *Scope of the Study*: The dissertation confines its investigation to fundamental existential categories such as nothingness, freedom, death, anxiety, loneliness, and rebellion - categories that are both philosophical in nature and transformed into aesthetic sensibilities in poetry.

3. Research Objectives

The dissertation aims to apply existentialist theory to analyze and elucidate existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 in terms of both ideological content

and artistic modes of expression, thereby affirming the intellectual, humanistic value and the position of this poetic current within the trajectory of modern Vietnamese literature.

4. Research Methods

The dissertation employs historical-social methods, existential criticism, analysis and synthesis, comparative and typological approaches, combined with an interdisciplinary perspective integrating literary studies, existential philosophy, poetics, cultural studies, and linguistics in order to clarify the manifestations of existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry during the period 1965 - 1975.

5. Contributions of the Dissertation

5.1. Scholarly Significance:

The dissertation contributes to systematizing existential sensibility in the study of modern Vietnamese poetry and identifies the distinctive manifestations of existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 on both ideological and artistic levels.

5.2. Practical Significance:

The dissertation repositions the value and status of Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 as a meaningful component of modern Vietnamese literary development, while also opening up an existential approach to the research and teaching of literature.

6. Structure of the Dissertation

In addition to the Introduction, Conclusion, References, and Appendices, the main body of the dissertation is organized into four chapters:

Chapter 1: *Theoretical Foundations and an Overview of Research on Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975.*

Chapter 2: *Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975, Viewed through the Categories of Nothingness, Freedom, and Death.*

Chapter 3: *Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975, Viewed through the Categories of Anxiety, Loneliness, and Rebellion.*

Chapter 4: *Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975, Viewed through Modes of Expression.*

CONTENT

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON EXISTENTIAL SENSIBILITY IN SOUTHERN URBAN POETRY, 1965 - 1975

1.1. Historical, Political, Social, and Cultural Context of Southern Vietnam (1965 - 1975)

1.1.1. Historical, Political, and Social Context

The period from 1965 to 1975 was marked by the intensification of war, during which Southern Vietnamese society fell into prolonged instability, and human life was dominated by violence, death, and a pervasive sense of the absurdity of existence. The collapse of traditional value systems, together with widespread uncertainty and anxiety about the future, deepened individual consciousness and intensified feelings of loneliness and alienation in urban life. These historical, cultural, and social conditions provided the foundation for the formation and development of existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry during the period 1965 - 1975.

1.1.2. Cultural Preconditions

Between 1965 and 1975, cultural life in Southern Vietnam was profoundly influenced by Western culture through education, journalism, publishing, and translation activities. Intellectual currents - particularly existential philosophy - were widely received and became an important source of inspiration for intellectuals and artists. The interaction between traditional culture and modern Western culture contributed to the formation of a strong sense of individual consciousness, encouraging people to reflect on their own destiny, freedom, and existential responsibility. These cultural preconditions created favorable conditions for existential sensibility to penetrate and manifest clearly in Southern urban poetry during the period 1965 - 1975.

1.2. Existentialism: Its Formation and Fundamental Categories

1.2.1. The Formation of Existentialism

Existentialism emerged and developed in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an intellectual response to the crisis of modern society. This movement affirms individual existence and emphasizes freedom of choice, responsibility, and human destiny in an absurd and uncertain world. Existentialism focuses on the study of the human being as a concrete, embodied subject, valuing the uniqueness and ultimate significance of the individual as the central concern and core of philosophy. Scholars have argued that existential thought can be traced back to antiquity; however, it

was not until Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre formulated ontological theories that foregrounded individual human existence that existential philosophy was systematized in a comprehensive manner.

1.2.2. Fundamental Categories of Existentialism

Existentialism begins with an awareness of nausea and the absurd, reflecting feelings of revulsion and the meaninglessness of existence: Sartre uses “nausea” to describe a mode of living like a thing, prior to the recognition of freedom and responsibility, while Camus emphasizes “the absurd” as the rupture between the human longing for meaning and a meaningless world. From this epistemic shock, existentialism develops a set of categories tracing the human journey of awakening-from anxiety and loneliness to freedom, commitment, rebellion, and the confrontation with death - thereby affirming the human person as free, singular, and responsible, and providing a theoretical foundation for interpreting the spiritual depth of Southern Vietnamese urban poetry (1965 - 1975) amid war and existential crisis.

1.3. An Overview of Research on Existentialism in Southern Vietnam (1965 - 1975)

1.3.1. Research on Existentialism at the Theoretical and Applied Levels

1.3.1.1. Theoretical Studies of Existentialism

Existentialism was received in Southern Vietnam after 1954, initially through the translation and introduction of Western philosophical and literary texts. From after 1965, amid the context of war and urban spiritual crisis, existentialism became an object of in-depth theoretical study, with numerous works systematizing its ideas, core categories, and introducing major philosophers. Particularly notable is *Existential Philosophy* by Trần Thái Đình, which exerted a significant influence on shaping the understanding of existentialism in Southern Vietnam prior to 1975. Other scholars approached existentialism as a philosophy of life, emphasizing freedom, responsibility, and human personhood, while also challenging reductive interpretations. After 1975, studies of existentialism in Vietnam continued to develop from a humanistic perspective, providing an important theoretical foundation for examining the influence of existentialism in literature, especially in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975.

1.3.1.2. Applied Studies of Existentialism

In twentieth-century Vietnamese literature, especially in Southern urban literature from 1954 to 1975, existentialism was received not only as a philosophical system but also as an intellectual and aesthetic tendency that exerted a profound influence on literary creation and criticism. The period

from 1954 to 1964 marked an initial experimental phase, laying the groundwork for applying existential categories to the interpretation of human destiny and individual freedom. From after 1965, amid the context of war and spiritual crisis, the existentialist tendency became more conscious and systematic, leaving a clear imprint on literary production and giving rise to existential criticism, thereby renewing approaches to Vietnamese literary interpretation and deepening the humanistic dimension of Southern literature prior to 1975.

1.3.2. An Overview of Research on Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry (1965 - 1975)

1.3.2.1. Before 1975

Before 1975, research on Southern urban poetry imbued with existential sensibility was conducted primarily within the contemporary literary scene itself, closely associated with creative practice and artist - led criticism. Critics such as Bùi Giáng, Uyên Thao, Tạ Ty, Cao Thế Dung, and Đặng Tiến, through aesthetic intuition and a philosophically informed sensibility, identified prominent manifestations of existential sensibility in poetry, including anxiety, loneliness, absurdity, freedom, and the yearning for transcendence. Although these readings did not yet constitute a clearly articulated theoretical framework, they laid an important foundation for existential critical discourse in Southern Vietnam prior to 1975, while also affirming Southern urban poetry as a profound space of reflection on human destiny and the meaning of existence.

1.3.2.2. After 1975 in Vietnam

After 1975 - particularly following the Đổi mới reforms of 1986 - Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 gradually came to be studied within a more open and objective academic context. Domestic scholarship has progressively restored the ideological and aesthetic value of Southern urban poetry, while also identifying existential sensibility as a significant characteristic associated with existential anxiety, awareness of death, freedom, and human destiny in wartime. Nevertheless, most studies have tended to adopt general, historical - social, or isolated formal approaches, and have yet to develop a systematic investigation that views existential sensibility as a comprehensive and enduring ideological-aesthetic category.

1.3.2.3. After 1975 in the Diaspora

In overseas scholarship, works by Võ Phiến, Nguyễn Vy Khanh, and others approach Southern urban poetry from retrospective and diasporic perspectives, highlighting the transformation of poetry from romantic inspiration toward bitter, skeptical, and existentially anxious tones. These studies

emphasize the testimonial value and creative ethos of a generation of poets living amid war and spiritual crisis. However, they largely remain at the level of description and general evaluation, without delving deeply into existential sensibility as an ideological and artistic paradigm with specific modes of expression.

Chapter 1 Summary

In general, both domestic and overseas studies acknowledge that Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 is deeply marked by a sense of existential sorrow, feelings of loneliness, skepticism, and a longing for freedom. However, no study to date has undertaken a comprehensive and systematic examination of existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry in terms of both ideological content and artistic expression. This research gap constitutes the scholarly basis for the present dissertation's approach to the subject from an existential perspective, viewing existential sensibility as a central and enduring ideological-aesthetic axis.

CHAPTER 2: EXISTENTIAL SENSIBILITY IN SOUTHERN URBAN POETRY (1965 - 1975)

VIEWED THROUGH THE CATEGORIES OF NOTHINGNESS, FREEDOM, AND DEATH

2.1. Existential Sensibility Viewed through the Category of Nothingness

2.1.1. *The Human Being as a Being of Nothingness*

In Southern Vietnamese urban poetry of the period 1965 - 1975, the human being emerges as a nihilistic entity, existing in a state of emptiness, anxiety, and uncertainty before a world that no longer offers any metaphysical ground. Rooted in the existential conception of humanity as “thrown into the world,” this poetry profoundly articulates an awareness of the finitude and absurdity of existence. In *Dặm mắt*, Thành Tôn perceives life as a meaningless loop: “*A hundred years, a draft tasted in a single sneeze / A hundred years of days stamping in place.*” Within the same sensibility, Du Tử Lê in *Khúc Thụy du* confronts the human being with the ultimate question of existence: “*when I am no longer here / what will I be able to carry / to the other side of the world,*” thereby exposing the emptiness of all secular values in the face of death. Nihilism continues to govern the trajectory of life in Nguyễn Đức Sơn’s poetry, from “*a golden youth, a stream of dreams, a sky of poetry*” to the final outcome “*grown up, I die on the shore of nothingness,*” as well as in Thanh Tâm Tuyền, where death becomes a constant sensation of existence: “*I am deadly sad, like being sleepy.*” Through these representative poems, Southern urban poetry portrays the human being as a fragile,

lonely, and anxious entity amid nothingness; yet it is precisely in this confrontation with the void that the existential subject does not entirely surrender, but persistently questions, resists, and seeks to affirm the self through the language of poetry.

2.1.2. *Nothingness - Awakening the Idea of Transcendence*

Nothingness is not perceived merely as a state of emptiness or as the negation of life's meaning; it also becomes a limiting situation that awakens the idea of transcendence in the existential human being. Confronted with the realities of war, a crisis of values, and the disintegration of spiritual foundations, the lyrical self exists in a state of disorientation, "thrown into existence" in a world that is no longer whole, where all traditional frameworks of meaning are destabilized. However, from this experience of nothingness, Southern urban poets do not remain in despair but transform nothingness into a driving force for questioning being and seeking transcendence. The idea of transcendence is first evoked through a return to spiritual depth and human solidarity as fragile yet enduring sources of support, expressed in the resonant memories found in Nguyễn Đức Sơn's poetry: *"The soul has been incubating for a thousand years in blades of grass / A dragonfly's wings wavering within the spirit"* (*Hồn đã ủ ngàn năm*), or in the longing to return to humanity's origins in Ý Yên's *Tìm về địa đàng*: *"Wandering endlessly, we keep walking without remembering / A nameless road into a dark alley, circling around."* On this basis, the human being moves toward self-awareness as a free being, compelled to create meaning for life while remaining deeply conscious of finitude, as Nguyễn Bắc Sơn expresses in *Chân dung tự họa*: *"We live in this world like idle wanderers / Drifting from the cradle to the grave."* This drifting does not signify surrender but rather a lucid attitude toward the transience of existence; from this perspective, death is placed within the continuous cycle of cosmic birth and decay, liberating the human being from obsession with an absolute ending: *"When you die / You will become thunder and lightning... / In the universe of ceaseless birth and dissolution"* (*Con trai ta chào đời người bạn ta nằm xuống*). At a deeper level, the idea of transcendence reaches a state of communion with the universe, when the human being relinquishes the ego and accepts life as it is, expressed in the meditative and contemplative voice of Cung Trầm Tưởng: *"At night I lie thinking of the sea, longing for the open waters / Hearing clouds, the soul drifts in the vast sky"* (*Thân phận*), or in the sense of release in Nguyễn Đức Sơn's *Tôi thấy mây rừng*: *"The sky was born for that dusk / I saw the forest clouds flying far away."* Thus, in the existential sensibility of Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, nothingness is no longer the

endpoint of meaning but becomes a source of spiritual energy that awakens the longing for transcendence, enabling the human being to rise above existential exile and affirm existence through freedom, choice, and the capacity to merge into the profound depth of being.

2.2. Existential Sensibility Viewed through the Category of Freedom

2.2.1. Freedom - Living as One's True Self

Freedom in poetry is no longer a soaring metaphysical dream but a bitter awakening in which the human being is compelled to confront the harsh reality of the self, as Nguyễn Đức Sơn expresses in *Thất vọng*: “*one empty night my soul rose very high / ... / where shall I shelter my own body,*” where freedom is simultaneously a fall and an act of bearing one's own destiny. In the realm of love, existential freedom is manifested as the capacity to love and to accept separation without resentment, regarding rupture as an inevitable part of existence, expressed in the quiet tone of Du Tử Lê: “*You leave, a stringed instrument shatters / From that moment dusk spreads across the sky*” (*Lệ mưa*), or in the distant and fragile space of *Đêm mưa hành quân* by Bùi Khiết: “*The city's green lights seen from afar / I stand in desolation, my heart still dreaming.*”

The sense of freedom is driven to ontological depth in the poetry of Nhã Ca, where the female subject dares to determine her own life and death as a radical existential declaration: “*I too freely squander my entire life / ... / The girl who dies bears the name of wild grass*” (*Khi hai mươi tuổi*), affirming the right to live and the right to vanish without external validation. On the plane of existential resistance, freedom is expressed through acts of refusing assimilation and rejecting fabricated symbols of glory, as in the figure of the soldier in Nguyễn Bắc Sơn's *Tiệc tẩy trần của người sống sót*: “*Strip off the battle coat and fling away the apricot blossoms / ... / Please throw it all away, please begin again,*” a choice to return to personal being rather than continue existing as an instrument of history. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Sa expresses freedom through subtle silence and refined detachment, viewing the act of “finding one's own seat” as a profound existential gesture: “*Each statue finds its own place to sit / You too find your seat / ... / Silence*” (*Pho tượng*). In the poetry of Cung Trầm Tưởng, existential freedom is transformed into an inner state of release, where the human being liberates the ego through dissolution into the infinite: “*At night I lie thinking of the sea, longing for the open waters / Hearing clouds, the soul drifts in the vast sky*” (*Thân phận*), while in Bùi Giáng, freedom reaches its rebellious extreme when the poet directly confronts death and refuses all predetermined limits of destiny: “*O Death! I do not consent to this*” (*Tài tặng từ thần*).

Thus, in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, existential freedom does not appear as an abstract ideal but as a concrete mode of living: the human being dares to love, to abandon, to remain silent, to rebel, and to assume ultimate responsibility for one's own existence, thereby affirming personal being in an absurd and turbulent world.

2.2.2. Freedom - The Choice of Commitment

Existential freedom is not only perceived as a state of individual consciousness but is also actualized through the choice of commitment - the deliberate act of confronting history, war, and human destiny in an absurd world. Commitment here does not signify heroic epic or the idealization of action; rather, it denotes the voluntary assumption of existential responsibility, the acceptance of loneliness, loss, and even death as inevitable consequences of the chosen way of living. In *Thưa mẹ, trái tim*, Trần Quang Long articulates commitment as an ontological decision, when poetry ceases to be an aesthetic refuge and becomes an existential act: *"I will sharpen my poems into stakes / to pierce the bellies of the invaders,"* and when poetry itself proves powerless, personal life is placed at the extreme limit of choice: *"Using my own heart as an explosive / living or dying only once."* Here, freedom is not an escape from history but a conscious choice to confront and act with full awareness of human finitude.

In the same spirit, the poetry of Nguyễn Bắc Sơn, Trần Dạ Lữ, and Phạm Triều Nghi depicts the soldier as a being "thrown into" war, living on the absurd threshold between life and death: *"Eating rice beside a corpse / one hand scooping food, the other holding a gun"* (*Bữa cơm chiến trường*), or *"Sleeping in a hammock on sandy hills at night / suddenly feeling an immense sadness within"* (*Mặt khu Lê Hồng Phong*). Commitment does not erase existential sorrow; rather, it sharpens the individual's awareness of personal fragility. On another level, the poetry of Ngô Kha, Trần Vàng Sao, and Lê Văn Ngẩn elevates commitment to a humanistic and communal dimension, when the choice to be present amid collective suffering becomes a moral responsibility: *"in the burning zone of war I am only a bar of iron / hurling myself into despair"* (*Mùa đông chiến tranh ở Huế*), or *"I love this country with bitterness"* (*Bài thơ của một người yêu nước mình*). Thus, in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, the choice of commitment constitutes the most concentrated manifestation of existential freedom: human beings may not be redeemed from pain, but they retain the right to determine their attitude toward that pain. Commitment therefore becomes

an act of affirming being, in which freedom lies not in outcomes but in the very choice and responsibility that individuals voluntarily assume in their journey of existence.

2.3. Existential Sensibility Viewed through the Category of Death

2.3.1. Death and Human Destiny - A Hard-to-Accept Truth

Many poets such as Bùi Giáng, Cung Trầm Tưởng, Đinh Trầm Ca, Du Tử Lê, Nguyễn Sa, Nguyễn Đức Sơn, and Thanh Tâm Tuyền approach death not to aestheticize or redeem it, but to expose the ultimate fragility of human destiny. In Bùi Giáng's poetry, death bears the mark of bodily destruction and the radical disintegration of existence: "*The human body shattered behind / a thousand years, eyes closed, unhealed sorrow*" (*Gió bão Tây Nam*); in Cung Trầm Tưởng, the aura of death envelops the entire living space, turning death into a state of presence: "*Mist - mourning cloth sways and covers the head / veiling the damp soul with sorrow between yin and yang*" (*Nghĩa địa*). Đinh Trầm Ca views death as a continuous fragmentation of being, in which the human subject "dies" repeatedly in memory and anticipation: "*Yesterday I suddenly died twice... / today I suddenly died once more*" (*Những trận chết*).

For Du Tử Lê, death is absurd, sudden, and awakens existential consciousness at the moment of dying: "*he suddenly remembered he was still too young / dying - dying for no reason, dying achieves nothing*" (*Khi người chết trẻ*), or becomes an existential truth present from the moment of birth: "*I have been dying since the very moment of first breath*" (*Bài cuối năm*). Meanwhile, Nguyễn Sa blurs the boundary between life and death through a light, dreamlike tone, treating death as part of an illusory existence: "*lie back and become a lunar dream*" (*Hư ảo trắng*), whereas Thanh Tâm Tuyền confronts death with the resolute defiance of the existential self: "*I die without smiling, without smiling*" (*Đừng bắt tôi từ biệt*). Thus, in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, death is both a hard-to-accept truth and a limiting situation that forces individuals to re-examine the value of living. Rather than leading to despair, death becomes an epistemological anchor through which human beings gain a deeper awareness of finitude and thus live more lucidly, honestly, and responsibly in each moment of existence. This constitutes the humanistic depth of existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry, where death does not negate life but renders life more precious than ever.

2.3.2. *Death in War - Confronting the Obsession*

In the light of existential thought - particularly Heidegger's conception of life as a journey toward death - Southern poets do not approach war through epic inspiration or the romanticization of sacrifice, but regard it as an inhumane reality in which death not only destroys bodies but also collapses faith, human bonds, and spiritual values. In Hoài Khanh's poetry, war appears as an inescapable cycle of violence and mourning: *"War, and then war again / ... / gray afternoons / nights draped in mourning"* (*Ngày con tôi khóc*), where death becomes the cold language of the age and human beings are pushed into profound existential doubt.

Nguyễn Bắc Sơn approaches death with a tone both sardonic and bitter, viewing the soldier's death as sudden, ordinary, yet haunting, exposing the transience of military life: *"If I should accidentally die of drunkenness / my soul would surely turn into drifting clouds"* (*Mật khu Lê Hồng Phong*), or dissolving into fragile forms of being: *"My soul will become fireflies / wandering in the forests of Thái An."* In Nguyễn Đức Sơn's poetry, death unfolds within a silent, contemplative space, where the soldier confronts life and death with lucid quietude: *"tomorrow I return to the cold grave / ... / have I harvested enough worldly dreams yet?"* (*Tĩnh mặc*), an unanswerable existential question about the meaning of human life.

Thus, in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, death in war is not merely a biological end but a mode of existence - an all-encompassing obsession that sharpens human awareness of fragility and finitude. By looking directly at death, poets transform pain and loss into a profoundly humanistic anti-war discourse, awakening the desire to live, to love, and to preserve human dignity in a world devastated by violence. It is precisely within the obsession with death that poetry becomes a space for self-questioning, reflection, and the affirmation of life as a conscious existential act.

Chapter 2 Summary

Throughout Chapter 2, this study has focused on clarifying existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 through three central categories: nothingness, freedom, and death. Nothingness is regarded as the foundational state of existential consciousness, from which arises the need for self-awareness and the affirmation of being. Freedom is inseparable from choice, commitment, and individual responsibility toward life and war. Death, as a persistent obsession, both exposes the finitude of human existence and intensifies awareness of the value of life and human

dignity. These three categories interweave to form the reflective and humanistic voice characteristic of Southern urban poetry in the period 1965 - 1975.

CHAPTER 3: EXISTENTIAL SENSIBILITY IN SOUTHERN URBAN POETRY (1965 - 1975) VIEWED THROUGH THE CATEGORIES OF ANXIETY, LONELINESS, AND REBELLION

3.1. Existential Sensibility Viewed through the Category of Anxiety

3.1.1. Anxiety - Understanding Human Destiny

Anxiety emerges as an existential mode of being, in which human beings become deeply conscious of the fragility of their lives in the face of war, separation, and the absurdity of historical circumstances. Anxiety does not remain at the level of fear or sorrow; rather, it becomes a journey of reflection aimed at understanding human destiny and questioning the meaning of existence. In the poetry of Du Tử Lê, anxiety is associated with a yearning for escape and the search for serenity, expressed through the image *"The bird abandons the realm of sorrow / Following rain and wind toward fields of flowers and grass"* (*Khai hội*). For Phạm Cao Hoàng, existential anxiety accompanies a directionless journey of departure, where human beings confront impermanence and ontological emptiness head-on: *"Setting out as the moon tilts above the mountain ridge / The earth bids farewell with a song of parting"* (*Gã hàn sĩ ấy lại ra đi*). In Nguyễn Bắc Sơn's poetry, anxiety takes the form of spiritual impasse amid an unjust war, when the body survives but the inner life has already been hollowed out: *"I am fortunate that my limbs remain intact / yet my soul is empty and forlorn"* (*Căn bệnh thời chiến*). Tô Thùy Yên, by contrast, renders anxiety in a subdued, downward gaze before reality, where departure is stripped of glory and filled instead with humiliation and solitude: *"I set out, head bowed as I set out / pretending not to see the shame"* (*Giã biệt*). Alongside these voices, anxiety in love also becomes a lens for recognizing human destiny: from the sorrowful melancholy of Vũ Hoàng Chương, the fragile solitude of Nguyễn Sa, to the eccentric, dreamlike, and restless tone of Bùi Giáng, as well as the muted existential anguish in Hoài Khanh's poetry. Overall, Southern urban poetry transforms anxiety from a personal emotion into an intellectual category, through which human beings not only suffer but also attain self-awareness, enter into dialogue with their own being and with their historical moment, and thereby affirm the humanistic and philosophical depth of existential poetry prior to 1975.

3.1.2. *Anxiety - Discovering Unique Personhood*

Anxiety may be approached as a distinctive state of consciousness in which the existential subject does not remain at the level of transient sorrow or hesitation, but actively moves toward self-recognition and the affirmation of personal being. Anxiety becomes a means through which individuals detach themselves from imposed frameworks, gaining a clear awareness of themselves as unique and irreplaceable persons. In Nguyễn Bắc Sơn's poetry, anxiety is associated with a silent yet resolute choice of resistance and an awareness of living as an autonomous self: "*In this city I am an anti-war man / ... Living quietly—who could ever understand me?*" (*Cười lên tiếng khóc bi hùng*). Anxiety here does not signify self-pity but rather an existential attitude aimed at preserving personal integrity. For Trần Đức Uyển, anxiety is transformed into a lucid posture of release, in which the human being attains inner freedom: "*Asking where to go? Anywhere will do / Let us sleep by the stream tonight*" (*Buổi chiều ngồi trên cầu*). Anxiety also carries a tone of irony, demystification, and nonchalant defiance in Nguyễn Bắc Sơn's poetry: "*Sages and philosophers are merely lazy fellows / lingering over the banquet of human existence*" (*Đại Lãn*), thereby affirming the right to live differently, to live freely without sacrificing intellectual depth. Within the lyrical current, Nguyên Sa and Tô Thùy Yên show how anxiety is softened and transformed into delicate hesitations before time and memory: "*Fearing that love letters may not bear enough meaning / I change the ink to match the color of a purple dress*" (*Tuổi mười ba*), or "*Do you still search for last summer?*" (*Vườn hạ*). Notably, anxiety also opens a pathway toward existential connection, as the self dissolves into nature and memory, as seen in Du Tử Lê's poetry: "*From that moment I became as small as a grasshopper... / My beloved is a smooth green meadow*" (*Giao khúc tháng sáu*), or in Nhã Ca's gentle longing for her homeland: "*Grass, trees, worms, and crickets of my homeland / softly lull the mother's voice, the child's hammock swaying*" (*Quê nhà*). Taken as a whole, anxiety does not drive the human being into despair but becomes a path toward self-awareness, enabling individuals to affirm their unique personhood, discover inner freedom, and forge enduring bonds with life. Through this process, poetry opens up a profoundly humanistic space for the authentic existence of the human being.

3.2. *Existential Sensibility Viewed through the Category of Loneliness*

3.2.1. *Ontological Loneliness - The Destiny of the Exiled*

Existential loneliness here emerges as a consequence of freedom and finitude, when each individual must bear existence alone and can never fully share lived experience with another. Within this poetic current, the human being appears as an exile even amid familiar surroundings, carrying within an

unending sense of wandering. In Nguyễn Sa, loneliness manifests through the negation of reality and the past - a mental flight intended to sever ties with a life of exhaustion: *"I will leave, leave very far away / ... And sever those second-hand days of the past"* (*Tôi sẽ bỏ đi rất xa*). For Nguyễn Đức Sơn, loneliness takes the form of exile within memory and lost love, where personal sorrow is transformed into ontological sorrow: *"though the years have thinned the lingering of love... / sorrow summons an entire horizon awakened"* (*Sầu vương*). On a metaphysical plane, Quách Thoại pushes loneliness to its extreme, as the human being stands amid the world without finding any sacred support: *"I suffocate in the scent of distant absence... / Like ice, dangerously, I live a hellish life"* (*Như băng trường tình*), turning existence itself into a realm of spiritual exile. This sensibility is further intensified in the poetry of Tô Thùy Yên, where the self confronts vast space and absolute inner silence: *"I cannot hear even the sound of my own monologue / ... Within my heart, life blossoms in utter solitude"* (*Chiều trên phá Tam Giang*), revealing loneliness as a painful awareness of youth, love, and finitude. For Hoài Khanh, loneliness becomes a poetic destiny, gathering all states of desolation, restlessness, and the obsession with nothingness: *"And I, a distant grain of sand / One night, by chance, affection dissolves into dew"* (*Trong giọt sương tan*). Overall, in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, ontological loneliness not only reflects the pain of war and social rupture but also becomes a creative impetus and a path toward self-recognition, through which the existential subject confronts the self, the meaning of life and death, and affirms the value of existence amid the deep silences of lived experience.

3.2.2. Loneliness among One's Kind - The Search for Spiritual Resonance

Loneliness among one's fellow beings emerges as a profound existential sensibility, when individuals confront not only ontological isolation but also a keen sense of alienation within the very community in which they live. This sensibility extends the tradition of reflective melancholy in national literature while bearing a distinctly modern existential tone, in which human beings feel *"restlessly adrift"* even in their own homeland (Hoài Khanh, *Bắt đầu*). The quiet farewells of wartime expose ruptures between people, between love, youth, and memory, as seen in the premonitory moment of departure in Nguyễn Nho Sa Mạc's *Từ giã*: *"it is a farewell to your once-beautiful hand / ... nurturing memories within small arms."* From private tragedy, loneliness expands into collective pain and the shattered destiny of the homeland, leaving behind spiritual "scars" of the age (Nhã Ca, *Vết sẹo*). On a reflective plane, loneliness among one's kind is also linked to moral and existential crisis, when the violence of war erodes humanity itself, as Nguyễn Bắc Sơn exposes in *Chiến tranh Việt Nam và tôi*: *"When we kill without feeling horror at*

our hands / that is when we have not yet understood the absurdity of life.” Trần Dạ Từ pushes this sensibility into the ultimate interior monologue of creation: *“I write poetry in order to speak to myself”* (Làm thơ), where poetry becomes a fragile support for existence. Unlike the *Thơ Mới* movement - where loneliness tends toward cosmic contemplation and transcendence - loneliness in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 bears a pressing existential quality, arising from a fractured and absurd society. Yet it is precisely in this condition that poets continue to seek spiritual resonance through love, memory, and poetry, as an effort to preserve human connection and affirm the value of life amid the disintegration of the age.

3.3. Existential Sensibility Viewed through the Category of Rebellion

3.3.1. Rebellion - A Longing for Love

Rebellion, in the spirit of Camus, is not a negation of life but an act of affirmation - *“I rebel, therefore I exist.”* In the poetry of this period, rebellion is closely bound to the need to love, to live, and to preserve humanity amid destruction. From the self-aware feminine voice of Lê Khánh, where love becomes a questioning of fate and prejudice *“The girl bows her head, grieving her bitter destiny”* (Em là gái trời bất xấu) to the sense of alienation of the soldier unable to reintegrate into civilian life in Trần Dạ Từ *“When I return to the city, I will surely be a stranger”* (Thư gửi người ở lại) rebellion appears as a form of spiritual self-defense. In Nguyễn Bắc Sơn, Lâm Hảo Dũng, and Lê Công Sinh, rebellion takes on a raw and instinctive quality, as the longing for love merges with the longing to live: *“I crave making love as much as I crave living”* (Người về), turning the body and emotion into a manifesto against death. For Nhã Ca, rebellion is linked to feminist consciousness, elevating women as subjects of love and life: *“For we create love / create flowers, leaves, and life on this earth”* (Đàn bà là mặt trời). In the poetic world of Bùi Giáng, rebellion assumes a wandering, surreal form, where love and longing become an endless spiritual exile: *“Across a thousand leagues, remembering only one”* (Dặm nghìn một nhớ). Overall, rebellion in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 is not destructive negation but an affirmation of life through love. Love functions simultaneously as spiritual refuge and existential resistance, enabling human beings to preserve dignity, identity, and meaning in a world of division.

3.3.2. Rebellion - Challenging an Absurd World

From an existential perspective, rebellion as a challenge to an absurd world in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 appears as a conscious mode of being, in which individuals refuse submission to chaos, war, and meaninglessness, choosing instead to affirm the self through living, loving, and commitment. Rebellion here does not signify blind destruction but an effort to transcend nothingness in

order to protect humanity and the freedom to choose one's own meaning in life, as expressed in a generational manifesto: *"The fire has burned from the depths of consciousness / ... / Every tree, every inch of land, every human being / stands together along the same frontline"* (Phan Thị Mai – Trần Quang Long). Within this sensibility, Nguyễn Bắc Sơn rebels through a gentle yearning for a humane realm amid harsh reality: *"Somewhere there still flows a river / somewhere there is still a rosy sun"* (*Viết cho Nhị Hồng*), where love becomes a refuge against poverty and fate. Hoàng Trúc Ly chooses rebellion through innocent, soaring dreams of love as a means of escape from suffocating reality (*Nằm mộng thấy nữ sinh*), while Phạm Thiên Thư transforms pain and romantic tragedy into a contemplative journey, turning *"a tear"* into *"a luminous pearl"* (*Xưa là giọt lệ*), representing a quiet, spiritually inflected form of rebellion. Elsewhere, the spirit of resistance appears in the longing to abandon war and return to humanity: *"Strip off the battle coat and fling away the apricot blossoms / I bid farewell to the life of weapons and medals"* (Nguyễn Bắc Sơn), or in the memory of homeland as a bulwark against exile and alienation in the poetry of Lê Văn Ngân. By contrast, Thái Ngọc San elevates rebellion to the level of collective eruption, transforming the awakening cry into a *"tempestuous source"* confronting and overturning the absurd order of history (*Thạch Chuôn, nguồn vũ bão của rừng nhiệt đới*). From private dreams of love to fierce calls for communal awakening, Southern urban poetry of this period constructs a multifaceted image of the rebellious human being: quietly preserving humanity while also daring to break through in order to affirm the right to a meaningful life. Rebellion, therefore, is not a rupture with life but a journey of self-redemption, enabling human beings to stand firm before absurdity, continue loving and hoping, and exist as free subjects within the darkness of the age.

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 demonstrates that existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 is crystallized through three interrelated categories: anxiety, loneliness, and rebellion. Anxiety enables human beings to reflect on destiny and affirm personal personhood; loneliness is identified as the ontological condition of the exiled self while simultaneously awakening the desire for spiritual resonance; and rebellion functions as an existential act that resists absurdity, safeguards dignity, and preserves meaning in life. These three categories intersect and transform one another, forming a distinctive intellectual and aesthetic field in which the existential human being appears both unsettled and lucid - daring to confront, to resist, and to preserve humanity amid the fractures of the age

CHAPTER 4: EXISTENTIAL SENSIBILITY IN SOUTHERN URBAN POETRY (1965 - 1975) VIEWED THROUGH MODES OF EXPRESSION

4.1. Existential Sensibility Viewed through Artistic Space and Time

4.1.1. *Artistic Space - The Experiential Field of the Lyrical Subject*

From the perspective of modes of expression, artistic space in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 emerges as an experiential field of existence, in which the lyrical subject not only exists but also reflects upon, interrogates, and constructs the self amid a fractured world. This space transcends its function as a physical backdrop to become an inner realm, where war, the city, memory, nature, and death simultaneously appear as existential limits. In Hoài Khanh's poetry, the city and the late night become spaces of ontological crisis, where the self doubts its own identity: "*Casually gazing at the city glowing in countless colors / Am I still myself from former days?*" (*Đêm trắng canh tàn*), or "*Cold moon-mist spreads boundlessly on all sides*" (*Đội chờ đêm đi*) - images that reveal human beings as exiles within a familiar world. For Nguyễn Đức Sơn, space takes on an impermanent and unstable quality, as the external world directly mirrors inner states: "*You fear the mulberry fields turning into seas / Our hearts too will one day turn into seas and mulberry fields*" (*Giữa mùa nắng vàng*), affirming the fragility of both the world and the self. In Cung Trầm Tưởng's poetry, cemeteries and the "nameless land" become spaces of contemplation on petrified time: "*Dusk blurs into the nameless land / Time turns into stone, piling upon a lifetime*" (*Nghĩa địa*), while Tuệ Sỹ constructs an inward, enclosed space of self-confrontation: "*Now looking back at the four gloomy walls / Forest streams far away flow against and along the current*" (*Nhớ tuổi vàng*). Even the defiant voice of Nguyễn Bắc Sơn remains within this experiential trajectory, as he stands amid stone graves and cold moonlight to become acutely aware of human finitude: "*Thinking that one's life will not reach a hundred years / The moon rises tonight, chilling the place of rest*" (*Trên đường tới nhà Xuân Hồng*). Overall, artistic space in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 is thoroughly internalized; each image carries ontological significance, transforming poetry into a spiritual journey of the existential human being - lonely yet lucid, estranged yet unwilling to relinquish the desire for self-awareness and the search for existential meaning.

4.1.2. *Artistic Time - The Tragedy of the Desire to Exist*

In Southern urban poetry of the period 1965 - 1975, artistic time appears as an existential tragedy, in which the human desire to exist is continually eroded by the irreversible flow of memory,

the present, and projection. Time is no longer an objective measure but becomes a structure of consciousness, where each moment is bound to an awareness of finitude and an obsession with loss. In Hoài Khanh's poetry, time acts as a force of ontological disintegration, as the self reflects upon itself within a stream of decay: *"Days pass within the germ of fading consciousness / Shattering mirrors each time the face is seen"* (*Ngày tháng trôi qua*). For Bùi Giáng, time is stripped of linearity and transformed into a dream-reality continuum, where past, present, and future intermingle in a wandering sensibility: *"Dusk sketches dreams, casting spells upon the leaves / ... / Dawn rises, layers of wandering drifting toward the end"* (*Hoàng hôn vẽ bóng*). In Nguyễn Đức Sơn's poetry, time bears the mark of nothingness and exile; the more memory is summoned, the more the present appears desolate: *"Time passes, leaving behind the remains / Of memories now beginning to disintegrate"* (*Mặt trời xưa*), or *"Tomorrow I return to the cold grave / ... / Have I gathered enough earthly dreams yet, my love?"* (*Tĩnh mặc*). Yet within this temporal tragedy, human beings still seek humanistic anchors against nothingness: maternal love (*"What river ever flows far from its source without turning murky"* *Đêm cuối năm viết cho má*, Nguyễn Dương Quang), homeland (*"Still striving to return and lie upon the motherland"* - *Bóng ta hắt hiu trên con đò cuối năm*, Nguyễn Đông Giang), friendship and human fellowship (*"Yet thinking that heaven gives us friends as well / To drape warm arms over our wandering lives"* - *Mai sau dù có bao giờ*, Nguyễn Bắc Sơn). In sum, time in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 is both a mark of existential tragedy - exposing human finitude and disintegration - and a spiritual impetus urging human beings to cling to love, memory, and humanistic faith in order to continue existing within the flux of impermanence.

4.2. Existential Sensibility Viewed through Poetic Tone

4.2.1. The Nostalgic Tone - A Journey through Memory

The nostalgic tone becomes a crucial mode of expressing existential sensibility, through which human beings travel against the current of time to confront memory as a means of self-interrogation and self-recognition. Nostalgia is not merely a longing for the past but a state of consciousness in which the past invades the present, exposing the collapse of happiness and existential fractures, as Trần Dạ Từ exclaims: *"Raising a hand to shield the eyes / Past"* (*Dạ khúc một hai ba*). In Nhã Ca's poetry, nostalgia bears a tone of withdrawal and acceptance, as the self contracts in order to survive amid historical devastation: *"Let old grief be set aside for a moment / A child's footprints hide within the shadows of days"* (*Vết chân con*). For Vũ Hữu Định, youthful

memory returns within the cyclical rhythm of the Lunar New Year, revealing the tragedy of an unfinished life: “*At thirty - one my hair is already gray / Still a lifetime carrying wandering dreams*” (*Bữa rượu cuối năm*). This nostalgic tone also resonates as a refrain calling one back to origins in Vũ Hoàng Chương: “‘*Returning*’ - *who has not done so at least once?*” (*Trở về*), or becomes a historical lament for a homeland devastated by war: “*The homeland remains upon a single stream of tears*” (*Ngọn đước nào, Lữ Quỳnh*). Particularly in Hoài Khanh’s poetry, nostalgia crystallizes into an exilic melancholy, where personal memory merges with collective memory: “*At times old dreams lie in ruins / ... / Alas for the tender green realm now withered*” (*Mộng cũ phai tàn*). Overall, the nostalgic tone in Southern urban existential poetry is not mere retrospection but a painful existential journey, through which human beings confront loss, war, and impermanence, thereby revealing their effort to preserve meaning and reconstruct existence in a deeply fractured world.

4.2.2. The Interrogative Tone - A Journey toward the Self

Amid a poetic space permeated by existential sensibility, the interrogative tone is constructed as a vital poetic strategy that allows the lyrical self to turn inward and engage in dialogue with itself in the effort to identify the self. In Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, interrogation does not seek fixed metaphysical truths but manifests a state of crisis-consciousness, in which human beings are compelled to question identity, the meaning of life, and the limits of existence. Questions of life and death, of memory and time, of the fragile presence of the self recur as echoes of inner speech, expressing a solitary and anxious subject: “*Am I still myself from former days?*” (Hoài Khanh), or “*Who is who, aching while waiting for whom?*” (Tô Thùy Yên). In this poetic world, the existential self is not a stable entity but an open structure, continually shifting between doubt and the desire for self-understanding. The interrogative tone thus becomes an endless spiritual journey, in which poetry functions as the final refuge where human beings reflect upon themselves, assume responsibility for their own existence, and affirm personhood amid an absurd and fractured reality.

4.3. Existential Sensibility Viewed through Poetic Language

4.3.1. Secular and Everyday Language - Returning to the Free Personhood

In Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, secular and everyday language is employed as an existential mode of expression aimed at desacralizing poetry and returning it to concrete, finite human existence. Language no longer serves to idealize reality but instead directly exposes worldly destinies, instinctual sensations, and simple desires for living, thereby affirming the free personhood

of the individual. In Trần Vàng Sao, a starkly descriptive and emotionally restrained linguistic system foregrounds the biological presence of the poetic self: *"I sit on the ground and / a plate of meat lies plentiful before me"* (*Tôi được ăn thịt*), where existence is perceived solely through a moment of pure sensation. Nguyễn Tất Nhiên, by contrast, fragments language to an extreme, tuning each word into an independent emotional beat: *"Rain / On and on / Without stopping / ... / Wet / One leg / Loving / You"* (*Đi trong mưa nhớ Duyên*). Through this fragmentation, trivial elements of everyday life are placed alongside seemingly eternal values, bringing existential paradox into sharp relief. Everyday language is further pushed toward parody and ethical anti-normativity in Nguyễn Tất Nhiên's poetry, or boldly combined with the sacred in Nguyễn Đức Sơn's work: *"you have not yet urinated, yet my soul is already wet"* (*Vũng nước thánh*), as a means of negating imposed value systems and asserting emotional freedom. For poet-soldiers such as Bùi Khiết, Dã Nhân, Hoàng Lộc, Trần Dạ Lữ, and others, plain and unadorned language becomes a vehicle for expressing loneliness, loss, and a sense of estrangement from the self after war: *"When I return to the city, I will surely become a stranger"* (*Thư gửi người ở lại*). Thus, secular language in Southern urban poetry not only reflects harsh reality but also functions as an aesthetic - philosophical value, transforming poetry into a space for existential witnessing and opening a path back to free personhood: the right to live, to love, to feel, and to assume responsibility for one's own choices.

4.3.2. Symbolic Language - Deciphering Existential Destiny

In Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, symbolic language plays a central role in articulating existential depth. Familiar images drawn from nature and everyday life - such as rivers, darkness, the moon, wind, the body, and death - are transformed into semiotic codes of destiny, time, and human being, thereby opening philosophical reflections on the flow of life, loneliness, exile, and the longing for freedom in an absurd world. Each poet constructs a distinct "linguistic field," with a particular expressive style and symbolic system, reflecting existential sensibility from individual perspectives. This diversity demonstrates that Southern urban poetry is not only rich in artistic form but also constitutes a living space of thought, where human beings confront nothingness and persistently question the meaning of existence amid war, urbanization, and crises of being.

Chapter 4 Summary

Existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 is crystallized through modes of artistic expression: space - time, poetic tone, and language. Space and time are internalized

into mental space and temporal consciousness, where human beings confront finite destiny and existential crisis. Poetic tone - particularly nostalgia and self-interrogation - becomes the voice of an existential self living amid uncertainty, absurdity, and rupture. Poetic language moves between two poles: the everyday - secular and the symbolic - metaphysical, remaining closely tied to the brutal realities of war while simultaneously opening onto philosophical depth. From this perspective, existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry is not merely an ideological content but a distinctive aesthetic paradigm, contributing decisively to the artistic value and profound human significance of the poetry of this period.

CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned research findings, the dissertation has clarified the manifestations of existential sensibility in the poetry of South Vietnamese urban poets during the period from 1965 to 1975 from various perspectives, including content, ideology, and artistic expression. This was a distinctive period in modern Vietnamese literature, when the country was divided and South Vietnam became a complex cultural space characterized by intense encounters between national identity and Western influences, tradition and modernity, the realities of war and the aspiration for peace. In this context, existential sensibility—a philosophical and intellectual tendency that exerted a wide-ranging influence on Western spiritual and intellectual life—found favorable conditions for being received, transformed, and expressed in the works of South Vietnamese urban poets. The following are the major research findings achieved by the dissertation:

1. First, in terms of ideological content, Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 profoundly articulates the central categories of existentialism, such as the consciousness of nothingness, the longing for freedom, confrontation with death, existential anxiety and loneliness, as well as rebellion as a form of resistance. These manifestations are not superficial borrowings, but the result of intellectual exchange and an authentic reflection of the existential condition of urban individuals living amid war. Metaphysical preoccupations with destiny, existence, and the limits of individual life became the inner axis of many poets' creative work. Poetry thus serves not only as a record of personal emotions but also as an existentialized space in which the self enters into dialogue with itself, with others, and with the universe. Through poetry, poets articulate existential awareness through their persistent struggles with life and death, love and hatred, belief and doubt, hope and despair.

2. Second, in terms of artistic expression, existential sensibility is conveyed through a variety of distinctive artistic forms, giving rise to a poetic structure characterized by fragmentation, indeterminacy, and multi-layered meanings. Artistic space in existential poetry is often an inner, affective space: enclosed rooms, nocturnal cityscapes, taverns, dark alleys, or even the imaginary and nihilistic realms of the solitary lyrical self drifting and self-reflecting. Time in poetry is frequently stripped of linearity, becoming discontinuous and absurd, resembling an aimless stream of consciousness. Poetic language bears strong marks of abstraction and symbolism, rich in metaphysical imagery. The system of poetic images is densely populated with symbols of loss, alienation, and meaninglessness, such as darkness, dust, ashes, blood, human shadows, and abysses. Poetic tone tends toward monologue, estrangement, and self-interrogation, at times shifting into a forthright and resistant voice - a rebellious utterance within an absurd society. Together, these elements constitute a distinctive existential poetics closely associated with the process of modernization in Vietnamese literature.

3. Third, on the theoretical level, the dissertation contributes to systematizing and clarifying the concept of “existential sensibility” in the relationship between philosophy and literature. Building on Western existentialist philosophy, the study identifies the specific manifestations of this sensibility within the particular context of Southern urban literature from 1965 to 1975. This reception is shown to be not merely an “imported influence” but also the result of endogenous responses to social reality, historical circumstances, and the wartime urban psyche. The dissertation synthesizes a flexible theoretical framework capable of illuminating the depth of this emerging intellectual tendency in Vietnamese poetry, while also opening pathways for subsequent interdisciplinary approaches.

4. Fourth, in terms of academic and practical value, the dissertation helps to affirm the independent and distinctive position of Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 within the trajectory of modern Vietnamese literature. Although limited in its temporal duration, this body of poetry demonstrates considerable artistic stature, simultaneously reflecting social reality and engaging with philosophical depth. Through the examination of poets such as Thanh Tâm Tuyền, Nguyễn Sa, Bùi Giáng, Nguyễn Bắc Sơn, Hoài Khanh, Trần Dạ Từ, Nhã Ca, Tô Thùy Yên, Vũ Hoàng Chương, Nguyễn Đức Sơn, Cung Trầm Tưởng, Lê Văn Ngân, Ngô Kha, among others, the dissertation demonstrates the capacity to transform Western thought into an existential sensibility imbued with a distinctly Vietnamese cultural identity. In doing so, it establishes Southern urban

poetry from 1965 to 1975 as a powerful act of self-awareness and a bold aspiration toward artistic innovation. Moreover, the findings of the dissertation may serve as useful reference materials for teaching, learning, and research on modern Vietnamese poetry, particularly in courses on Southern literature, urban literature, and modern literary theory and criticism.

5. Fifth, regarding the limitations and future research prospects, the dissertation focuses primarily on analyzing representative manifestations of existential sensibility in a selection of prominent Southern urban poets. Issues related to social reception, comparative influences between Southern Vietnamese existential poetry and international existential poetry, as well as the continuation of existential poetry after 1975, have not yet been explored in depth. These limitations, however, also provide a foundation for future research directions, such as comparing Southern and Northern existential poetry of the same period; examining the reception of existential poetry across different historical stages; investigating the re-emergence of existential sensibility in contemporary Vietnamese poetry from a post-existential perspective; or conducting in-depth studies of individual existential categories (death, nothingness, rebellion, etc.) through specific authors.

Overall, the dissertation has achieved its stated research objectives by systematically and comprehensively analyzing the characteristic manifestations of existential sensibility in Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975, thereby elucidating both the ideological depth and the distinctive artistic value of this poetic current. Based on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literature, philosophy, and intellectual history, the dissertation not only sheds light on a significant poetic phenomenon in modern Vietnamese literature but also opens new perspectives in literary theory and criticism, particularly through existential and ontological approaches to poetry.

6. The study also contributes to expanding the interpretive space of modern Vietnamese literature through humanistic and interdisciplinary lenses. Approaching Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 in relation to existentialist thought is not merely an effort to trace the aesthetic and intellectual values embedded in the Southern literary legacy, but also an affirmation of the equal legitimacy of diverse literary currents within the nation's modern literary history. From this perspective, the research repositions Southern literature from 1954 to 1975 - including urban poetry - as an endogenous and indispensable component of the overall cultural and intellectual heritage of modern Vietnam. Despite having been fragmented by particular historical circumstances, Southern literature

contains profound ideological, aesthetic, and humanistic values that merit more equitable, multidimensional, and scholarly reassessment in the contemporary context.

Nevertheless, alongside its notable ideological and artistic contributions, Southern urban poetry from 1965 to 1975 also reveals certain limitations arising from its specific historical context and creative mentality. Formed largely within wartime Southern urban spaces and strongly influenced by Western thought - especially existentialism - some works tend toward extreme individualism, at times losing their connection with community and traditional values. Moreover, due to an emphasis on indeterminacy, absurdity, and non-linearity in artistic thinking, many poems become difficult to access, structurally ambiguous, and heavily laden with metaphysical symbolism while lacking concrete experiential depth, which may lead to a sense of isolation or excessive irrationality.

7. Continued research, preservation, and promotion of this literary corpus are fully consistent with the major cultural development orientations of the Party and the State, as emphasized in the Resolution of the Fifth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW (2014) of the Eleventh Central Committee on building and developing Vietnamese culture and people to meet the requirements of sustainable national development, along with other cultural policy documents of the Renovation period. These policies clearly affirm the principle that cultural development must be grounded in inheritance, adaptation, and the promotion of the finest values of the past, while valuing diversity, openness, and the capacity for interregional, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational dialogue. In this spirit, Southern literature from 1954 to 1975 - particularly urban poetry reflecting existential sensibility - should be incorporated into processes of reconstruction and integration in order to form a more comprehensive view of the map of modern Vietnamese literature.

From this perspective, the study *Existential Sensibility in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975* was conducted with the aspiration of contributing a modest voice to the ongoing scholarly endeavor toward a scientific, modern, and humanistic literary criticism. Despite its limitations, the author hopes that the dissertation's initial findings may stimulate further reflection and academic dialogue, laying the groundwork for more extensive future studies and contributing to the recognition and promotion of the enduring values of Vietnam's spiritual and cultural heritage in the contemporary era.

LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

1. Bui Quang Khai. (2022). *The Sense of Existential Loneliness and Human Destiny in the Poetry of Hoài Khanh*. Journal of Science - Van Hien University, 8(1), ISSN 1859 - 2961.
2. Bui Quang Khai. (2023). *The Wounds of the Existing Self in the Poetry of Trần Dạ Từ*. Journal of Science - Van Hien University, 9(1), 53. ISSN 1859 - 2961.
3. Bui Quang Khai. (2025). *Existential Time and Space in Southern Urban Poetry (1965 - 1975): Ontological Awareness and Poetic Expression*. Journal of Arts Education - Vietnam National University of Arts Education, No. 54. ISSN 1859 - 4964.
4. Bui Quang Khai. (2025). *The Reception of Existentialist Philosophy in Southern Urban Literature (1954 - 1975)*. Journal of Science - Hanoi Metropolitan University, No. 99 (August 2025). ISSN 2354 - 1512.
5. Bui Quang Khai. (2025). *Existential Sensibility Viewed through Nostalgic and Interrogative Tones in Southern Urban Poetry (1965 - 1975)*. Journal of Arts Education - Vietnam National University of Arts Education, No. 57. ISSN 1859 - 4964.
6. Bui Quang Khai. (2026). *Southern urban poetry (1965 - 1975) in contemporary critical discourse*. Journal of Science - Van Hien University, 11(2), ISSN 1859 - 2961.
7. Bui Quang Khai. (2026). *The Existential Self through Spatial - Temporal Sign Codes in the Poetry of Nguyen Duc Son*. Journal of Science - Van Hien University, 11(3), ISSN 1859-2961.
8. Bui Quang Khai. (2026). *The Existential Sense of Freedom in Southern Urban Poetry, 1965 - 1975: From Affirmation of Being to the Choice of Commitment*. Journal of Science - Hong Duc University, 87, ISSN 3030-4644.