

Characterization of peasants in short stories of Lu Xun (China) and Nam Cao (Vietnam) before 1945

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Abstract: This article researches, analyses and compares the peasant character in short stories from Lu Xun - Chinese author and Nam Cao - Vietnamese author. The idealistic similarity of this character is how it criticized the semi-feudal and semi-colonial society in China and Vietnam in the first decades of the 20th century, which drove the farmers to destitute and forced them to oppression and ethical deterioration. Distinctively, while criticising the workers in the peasant caste, both authors did not intend to humiliate this character. On the contrary, both valued their kind, rustic and diligent nature. Artistically, both authors employed aesthetics principles from critical realism to convey the character. The idealistic difference of Lu Xun and Nam Cao is expressed in the emphasis on revolution and contemporary social change in Lu Xun works, and the thorough consideration of the regular reality in Vietnamese rural areas, in which farmers revolted through criminalization. This article used structurally systematic, historical, analyse and comparative methods. From the research results, this article confirms that the similarities between social characteristics in China and Vietnam in the semi-feudal and semi-colonial period served as inspiration to the aesthetic and artistic consciousness of both Lu Xun and Nam Cao, hence the contentual and artistical similarities in creating the peasant character.

Keywords: Character, Peasant, Short stories, Comparison, Lu Xun, Nam Cao.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Lu Xun is an important figure in Chinese literature and is often considered to be the founding author in the contemporary Chinese literature. Nam Cao is a Vietnamese author who integrated the Vietnamese short story genre to this genre in the world contemporary literature. He is considered to be a pinnacle author of the Vietnamese literature in the 20th century. Both authors Lu Xun and Nam Cao shared similarities in their position in the transitioning period to contemporary literature in China and Vietnam. In the short story genre, each author expressed their distinctive creativity, however, many similarities can be identified in both their works, one of which is the construction of the peasant character in their short stories.

II. THE PEASANT CHARACTER IN LU XUN SHORT STORIES

Short stories written by Lu Xun were mainly published in two collections namely *Call To Arms* and *Wandering*. The circumstance to these works is the semi-feudal and semi-colonial society from the 1910s to the 1930s. His short stories consist of diverse characters like intellectuals, farmers, beggars, tea vendors, revolutionists, women who worked in filiate factories, children... However, the most portrayed character in his short stories is the peasant character, especially in his early works. As a democratic revolutionist, Lu Xun expressed profound empathy towards these characters, who were mostly exploited and driven to destitute. Most notable were the character of Ah Q in the novella *The True Story of Ah Q*, Hsun in *My Old Home*, Hsiang Lin's wife in *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Ai-ku in *The Divorce*...

1. Thematic ideology of the peasant character

The peasant character had already been depicted in the literary period before Lu Xun. However, the portrayal of this character was frequently distorted, showing only its narrowness without any positivity. This prejudiced view came from authors with dehumanizing and outdated ideologies. Even in works from authors from the same period as Lu Xun, the peasant character was depicted to be "shielded" by the empathy from above or "praised" by the distorted view of some petit-bourgeois authors. This was not Lu Xun's case. In his works, the peasant character was genuinely portrayed with its many perks.

The portrayal of workers in the peasant caste is an important theme in Lu Xun's early works. The family from his mother's side were also farmers. He spent many of his adolescence years in the countryside. Though growing up in the city, he often visited his relatives with his mother and was therefore familiar with the rural society and was close with these workers. The sensitivity towards peasants and their lives and his view of democratic revolution were portrayed distinctively in his peasant characters. Different to the empathy shown towards farmers in the so-called "pastoral literature", Lu Xun depicted them with poignancy, pique but also sympathy, he described their demand for revolution through worrisome plights and at the same time exposed the way feudalism exploited the farmers to the extreme.

Most notable in Lu Xun's depiction of the peasant character is the character of Ah Q in *The True Story of Ah Q*. This character is emblematic in the world literature with its original ideological, artistic and life values. Lu Xun simultaneously valued their kind and honest nature and criticized human's many flaws in Chinese society at that time. Hence, this character emphasized the need for a change in society, in other words, a revolution.

The character Hsiang Lin's wife in *The New Year's Sacrifice* was a hardworking and honest farmer, who only wished to make ends meet through laboring. However, her plight was bitter and tearful. Hsiang Lin's wife was depicted to be backed into a corner by society, which led to her having to beg for money. Through her tragic life, Lu Xun showed the four metaphorical ropes tied around the character's neck: the administrative, the heavenly, the paternal and the patriarchal authorities. The tragic destiny of the character was caused by the exploitative and immoral society. The message that Lu Xun placed in this tragic character is that in order for people to have a peaceful life, there needs to be a societal transformation.

In distinction from *The New Year's Sacrifice*, *My Old Home* described the bankrupted rural scene in the early modern Chinese society. In contrast to the well-off earlier years, the character Hsun was defeated by life in his later years. This contrast goes to show all the catastrophe of Chinese agricultural workers such as having many children, crop failure, taxes, theft and oppression from mandarins. Hsun was a common representation in the rural China at the time. From a hardworking, kind and honest person, Hsun had to endure many tragedies. These very tragedies turned him into a feeble-minded, depressed person, who is obsessed with insurmountable class distinction, and who eventually gave in to "the god" of destiny. Lu Xun utilized this character in order to address the issue that human suffering is conveyed by the society, and the only way for peasants to achieve happiness is to change the current society.

Moreover, in the short story *The Divorce*, the life of the fearless female character Ai-ku was defeated by the people of the manipulative feudalism, a representative of which is the character Seventh Master. This story not only vividly exposed the vicious and manipulative ways to control the peasants of the upper classes, it also criticized the limited perception of small-scale farmers at that time.

The interpretation of the peasant character in these Lu Xun short stories selected above shows the main ideology of these types of character, which strongly criticizes how the feudal and colonial society pushed peasants into poverty and criminality; at the same time shows the appreciation towards the farmer's kind nature, their work ethic and hardworking spirit. However, the peasant character is also criticized by their disadvantages and bad habits. Through these characters, Lu Xun raised the issue that in order to improve the lives of the peasants, there must be a transformation of the current society. These ideologies were also the human and revolutionary values that are frequently expressed throughout Lu Xun's works.

III. METHODS OF CHARACTERIZATION

Lu Xun's short stories about workers of the peasant caste are realistic literary works. Therefore, he usually applied basic artistic principles when constructing a character, similar to many other famous realistic writers in the world. These principles consist of choosing a model, describing similarities combined with distinctions, having one character comment on other characters, creating character development and constructing typical characters in typical circumstances.

In choosing a creative model, Lu Xun had a consistent view and showed his versatility and creativity in the process of constructing characters in general, or in this particular case, characterizing the farmers. When discussing about the generalization of literature artistic characters, Lu Xun wrote: "When a painter paints someone, he usually observes quietly, memorize, then concentrates his mind to paint, and not uses just one model for his work"¹. There are two approaches to choosing a model in composing a literary work: to assign one particular person, or to collect different features from diverse models to create one person. Like many realistic writers in the world like L. Tolstoy, A. Chekhov, N. Gogol (Russia), H. Balzac (France), Thacker (Britain)..., Lu Xun chose the latter to build his character. He said: "How my characters are portrayed in my works came from the things that I observed or the things that I heard, but I've decided not to use the truth completely, but to select a few, then alter them or develop them until they are able to carry what I want to express. My characters usually

¹Zhang Zheng, *Lu Xun - A Collection of Literary works*, Literature Publishing House, Vol. 3, pg. 455.

have mouths from Zhejiang, faces from Beijing or clothes from Shandong. They are very collective"². Lu Xun usually advised young writers to "choose the materials carefully, do research, don't write a saga based on meaningless stories and consider them opulence". In Lu Xun's works, it is easy to see how some details were omitted based on their lack of relevance to the social context of the story. According to Chinese scholars, the characteristics of Ah Q was a creative collection of real fortuneless farmers in Lu Xun's hometown like A You, Ah Quei, they also resembled those of the son of a landowner family in decline like Tong.

When choosing Ah Quei as the model for his character Ah Q, Lu Xun only selected a few certain features from the appearance and unprogressiveness of Ah Quei, other features like his "laziness" were discarded, as they did not represent a working labor. Therefore Lu Xun's Ah Q appeared to be somewhat outdated, however he was very hardworking. In doing so, Lu Xun eliminated the coincidental and noncharacteristic features of the model and portrayed only the necessities and the character's nature (in this case is the peasant character - the peasant Ah Q). When portraying the model Tong, Lu Xun utilized his "love tragedy" to characterize Ah Q's "love tragedy", but with a clear artistic motive. When Ah Q fell in love with a servant, he knelt down in front of her and said: " Will you marry me?", this woman screamed and her cousin served Ah Q some hits with a stick. He then "proposed" to several widowers and married women, only to be beaten again. When occurred to Tong, these incidents did not carry much meaning to them, but with Ah Q, the incidents held a profound social meaning. Ah Q's love tragedy was considered insulting towards the "sanctuary" values of Mr. Zhao, of feudalism and of the Weichuang village customs. Therefore, in the story, Ah Q was deemed a traitor. "In *My Old Home*, the characterization of Hsun was also built upon models of real people like Shuang Xi, Gui Sheng, Lu Yi, Zhang Fu Qing".³

In his process of constructing a character, Lu Xun also focused on showing the character's similarities and differences. Each of Lu Xun's characters is emblematic for the Chinese working class, but is portrayed as a distinctive person with their own qualities and characteristics. Therefore, the character Hsun in *My Old Home* can be considered to be representative of the peasant image at that particular time period in China. Hsun possessed all of a farmer's honorable qualities: he was hardworking, quiet and very kind. These qualities were illustrated in a specific person, with a rebellious adolescence, who was pushed away by society to become a dull and peculiar being. Ah Q was the prime example of the combination between similarities and differences. The similarity of this character is portrayed as him being a farmer, and the difference thereof lies in his peculiar criminal manners, his self-absorption, which he called "Ah Q's Victories". This method of constructing a character helps Lu Xun to depict the motional, development and altering characteristic traits. At the beginning of *The True Story of Ah Q*, Ah Q is shown to be victoriously delusional, then as the story progressed, his characteristics were depicted to slowly deteriorate to misery and despair. Likewise, Hsun in *My Old Town* was portrayed as an intelligent and agile person in the beginning, then turned to be slow and dull. In *The Divorce*, the character Ai-ku was portrayed to be fearless and rasping, contrasting vastly with her later characteristics, which were submissive and easily intimidated.

Beside these artistic methods mentioned above, Lu Xun in turn applied societal commentary made by the characters themselves in the story as a way to indirectly comment on these characters. In the field of literary theory, this method is called "character perspective". This method was applied by Lu Xun in an artistic, unique and effective way, in which the attitude of the protagonist towards other characters is considered to be a standard to judge the good or bad nature of these characters. For example, Ah Q commented on the son of the Qian family to be "a faux Westerner, a spy for foreigners". This commentary turned out to match the character's true nature.

Another distinctive and dialectical artistic method of realistic literature in the construction of characters is the construction of emblematic characters in an emblematic context. Lu Xun used this method in his creative process to express his characters in an authentic way, their motion and development were caused by the similarities and differences, the generalization and specification in the depiction of a story. This was Lu Xun's major contribution to the Chinese literature, he modernized the short story genre in China and integrated this genre into not only Western modern literature but also world literature at large. In *The True Story of Ah Q*, the symbolic characterization of the protagonist was a prime example of Lu Xun's art of building a representative character in a representative context. The context mentioned in this story, the Weichuang village before and after the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, also portrayed the semi-feudal and semi-colonial society in China, in which people from all social classes, both intellectuals and workers from the poor peasant caste, lived together. This particular context affected Ah Q immensely, and the protagonist had to endure both mental and physical damage. This portrayal characterized the poor peasants living in that time and their many hardships: their land was taken away, they couldn't find a stable job and had to take up various job for money, they were bullied and isolated... The most extreme representation thereof is the protagonist's psychological practice called "Ah Q's

² Zhang Zheng, *Lu Xun - A Collection of Literary works*, Literature Publishing House, Vol. 3, pg. 398.

³ cited from Cheng Guang Wei, *Interpretation of Lu Xun' Classic--Famous Interpretation*, Huashan literature and Art Publishing House, 1954, Vol.1, pg. 116.

Victory", which was both satirical and tragic. The execution of Ah Q also depicted the chaotic transitioning time in China, where trust was rarely observed. The portrayal of other characters like Hsun in *My Old Home*, Hsiang Lin's wife in *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Ai-ku in *The Divorce* were also closely linked to the representative social situation at the time.

IV. THE PEASANT CHARACTER IN NAM CAO SHORT STORIES

Nam Cao is considered by many to be the pinnacle writer of the critical realistic literature in the period of 1930 - 1945 in Vietnam, especially in the final developmental stage of this trend (1940 - 1945). His short stories consist of various character types like children, women, middle-aged people, seniors... with focus on poor bourgeois intellectuals and workers in the peasant caste. More than 20 of Nam Cao's short stories have the theme of rurality and the peasant character. Having rural roots, Nam Cao obtained a deep understanding of farmers and the situation in rural areas. He was also compassionate with the farmers and their living condition, and utilized this knowledge in his compositions to depict the peasant characters candidly, combined with distinctive artistic and profound moral values. Examples of which are the characters of Chi Pheo and Thi No in short story *Chí Phèo*, Hac in *Lão Hac* ("Old Man Hac"), Ty in *Một bữa no* ("A full meal"), Dan in *Một đám cưới* ("A Wedding"), Lang Ran in *Lang Rận*...

1. Thematic ideology of the character

Nam Cao was a latecomer to the literary period from 1930 to 1945. Prominent writers who had already distributed their legacy before Nam Cao include Vu Trong Phung with his novel *Số đỏ* ("Dumb Luck"), Nguyen Hong with *Bỉ vỏ* ("Down and out")... Among these writers, two have already successfully used the peasant characterization in their works to depict society's diseases were Ngo Tat To with the character Dau in *Tắt đèn* ("When the light is out") and Nguyen Cong Hoan with the character Pha in *Bước đường cùng* ("Dead end"). Nam Cao followed the steps of these writers while characterizing the poor and tormented peasants who were also rebellious against the cruel and unjustifiable semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. However, in a new circumstance in a new level, Nam Cao recognized the distorting transition typical in rural areas and there appears the physically and mentally distorted type individualized in the characterization of Chi Pheo. This protagonist of the short story of the same name was considered distinctive and original in the modern Vietnamese literature. Through the characterization of Chi Pheo and various other peasants in his works, Nam Cao expressed his criticism towards the diseased semi-feudal and semi-colonial society, which served as the context of the moral deterioration and criminalization of the people in the peasant caste. Nevertheless, he also asserted his respect towards the moral virtues of these same people like their diligence, wholeheartedness and hopefulness.

Typical for the peasant characterization in Nam Cao's works is Chi Pheo in the short story of the same name. This character was abandoned at birth, thus did not know who his parents were, he lived in various families while having numerous jobs, was then wrongly accused and served time in jail. It was during this period that his morals were depraved and he turned into a criminal. Chi Pheo then fell in love with Thi No, a naive and unsightly woman, but was not requited. Desperate, he took a knife to his old master, killed him then committed suicide. Through the characterization of Chi Pheo, Nam Cao portrayed the patternized socio-cultural situation in Vietnam, in which peasants were cruelly oppressed and exploited, leading to the rebellion in form of criminalization. It is worth mentioning that Nam Cao refrained from denigrating these characters. On the contrary, he investigated their mentality to assert their dignity in the desperating circumstance, where they were deprived of both physical and moral values. The ideology of criticizing the semi-feudal and semi-colonial society and the demoralization of certain farmers at that period of time and respecting the farmers' noble qualities were individualized in the character of Chi Pheo. This is also typical in the characterization of peasants in many of Nam Cao's works.

In short story *Old Man Hac*, the character Hac was also a general peasant who struggled with poverty and starvation in a destitute and dead-end life. Hac's life was very unfortunate. His wife passed away early, his son was resentful for not being able to marry the girl he loved and left town. Hac was left with only the dog Vang, a gift from his son. He was faced with starvation, loneliness, many health issues and was forced to sell his beloved dog. Although struggling in destitute, he held his dignity, refused to cave in to criminality and remained loyal to his deceased wife and son. When backed into a deadend with nothing to eat, he ended his own life tragically with dog poisoning. With the characterization of Hac, Nam Cao expressed his moral ideologies: on one hand he criticized the society and treasured the diligence of the Vietnamese peasants.

In other Nam Cao short stories about farmers like *A full meal* or *A wedding*... other characters were also portrayed with features similar to Hac or Chi Pheo: unfortunate and impoverished to the point of destitute, however still kind, honest and hopeful. The character Dan in *A wedding* was a 14-15-year-old girl of peasant caste who had an ominous life but was nevertheless filial to her parents and attentive to familial matters. The

character Ty in *A full meal*, who was also turmoiled by a destitute and impoverished life was originally a kind and benevolent woman...

Overall, the thematic ideologies of the peasant characterization in Nam Cao's short stories were the criticism of the feudal and colonialist society in rural areas and the recognition of moral values in the Vietnamese peasants. These ideologies also expressed the author's hope for the cruel society to change, which was Nam Cao's overall moral ideology.

2. Methods of characterization

In building the peasant character or in the general characterization in his works, Nam Cao predominantly utilized artistic principles similar to that of the realism in Europe since the 19th century. These principles include: selection of model from fiction, description combined the differences and similarities, having one character commenting on another character, typical characterization in typical circumstance.

Nam Cao focused especially on the model selection as a base for his characters. Once while meeting with fellow author Vu Bang, Nam Cao jokingly said: "My perception of life is simple. Life is actually not so labyrinthine like in romantic novels. When you're hungry, you eat, when you're thirsty, you drink. I think portraying things exactly like they are is enough. Why do they need to come up with anything else?"⁴. Although merely an informal talk with friends, Nam Cao succeeded in creating distinctive characters like Chi Pheo, Thi No in *Chi Pheo*, Hac in *Old man Hac...* from real people.

Nam Cao's models for his short stories were mostly real people from his impoverished village - Dai Hoang village, fictionalized with the name Vu Dai in *Chi Pheo*. The character Chi Pheo was based on three real life models. The first one was a man named Chi from Dai Hoang village, Ly Nhan district, Ha Nam province. His parents passed away early, his family also did not have any property, he therefore had to work for a landowner family in the village named Truong Phao. He worked as a pig butcherer and was excellent in preparing pig offal. Once finished with his butchering job, he usually asked for a piece of offal and a bottle of alcohol to drink, then returned to his shack to sleep. Contrary to Chi Pheo's antics including cussing or stabbing himself with glass, Chi was merely a kind peasant. The second model was his grandmother's cousin named Dao, whose characteristics were faintly reflected in Chi Pheo. He had a wife named No, or commonly called in the village Thi No. He worked for the landowner Chanh Binh (original model for the antagonist Ba Kien in *Chi Pheo*). Dao did not have an affair with one of the landowner's wives. This feature was created by Nam Cao. The third model was named Trinh. He was originally not from Dai Hoang village, had no family and was an alcoholic. When drunk, he had the habit of walking through the village while cussing. This model bore the most resemblance to the character of Chi Pheo in Nam Cao's work. However, the major difference between Trinh and Chi Pheo was that Trinh had a wife and many children. Of the three models for the character Chi Pheo, Dao and Trinh died in the village, and Chi later left town.

It is to be observed that Nam Cao based his character Chi Pheo on real life human figures. He strategically selected features and characteristics from these three models and included his own fictional details in order to complete the character. This selection of features embodied the interpretation of art under the perspective of the writer, in which the writer chooses to select, add or omit certain features to perfect his/her fictional character.

The characterization of Hac in *Old man Hac* originated from Nam Cao's observation of two models living close to his family. The first model was San, whose house was next to Nam Cao's. He was a poor but kind man, who had a dog named Vang, whom he treated like his own child. The other model was Luong, an indigent old man who took his own life by eating dog poison. The character Hac mirrored partly these two models, having obtained certain aspects but also possessed his own features.

In hindsight, many of Nam Cao's peasant characters were based on real life models. The models of characters like Thi No, Ba Kien, Binh Chuc in *Chi Pheo*, Lang Ran in *Lang Ran...* were indeed villagers in Nam Cao's hometown Dai Hoang.

To portray these characters, Nam Cao followed the principles of constructing typical character in a typical circumstance, individualization in connection with generalization, having one character commenting on another, using a system of details including typical details to further portray the characters' mental state... When creating Chi Pheo, Nam Cao put this character in a typical circumstance at that time, represented by the Vu Dai village. In this village, the gap between the poor peasants and the feudals was evident; other negative sides such as the power struggle, the exploitation and misuse of honest people and the division of the people of power depicted through the Ba Kien, Doi Tao, Nam Tho family... were also exposed. People's life in the village was representative of the peasants' life at that time and was abundant with wrongfulness and injustice. It was this circumstance that produced Chi Pheo, with all of his typical and individualized characteristics. His typical characteristics were of a kind and hardworking peasant who became destitute and was forced to criminalization

⁴ Vu Bang (1969), *Nam Cao - nhà văn không biết khóc* (Nam Cao - The writer who never cries), Saigon Newspaper, Vol. 95.

by society. This character was individualized by his acts of criminality, for example stabbing himself on the face with broken glass pieces, threatening others, swearing and cussing... Present in this character were the typical features of a peasant: on one hand a kind and hardworking farmer and on the other hand a violent criminal. From this characterization, Nam Cao reflected on a patternized situation of peasants in Vietnam at that time, where they were severely exploited, which resulted in their turn to criminalization.

The characteristics of Hac in *Old man Hac* were also constructed in a typical circumstance, in which the peasants were constantly faced with poverty and starvation. His past was also typical for an unfortunate character: his wife passed away, his son left town to work in a rubber forest for not being able to marry the girl he loved. Hac's only company was the dog Vang, a gift from his son. He fell slowly into despair, in both terms of situation and mentality, but refused to turn into a criminal and steal from others like Binh Tu - another character in the story. He was faithful to his wife, longed for his son and stayed honest until death. Hac represented the peasants who, despite their tragic life, remained pure and honest.

Other characters like Lang Ran in *Lang Ran*, Ty in *A full meal*, Dan in *A wedding...* were also portrayed in relation to a typical circumstance, combined with various other artistic methods of realism. Therefore, the peasant character in Nam Cao's works had an authentic and vivid presence, as if they were real people in life.

V. COMPARISONS

The peasant character was a central symbol in short stories by both Lu Xun and Nam Cao. With their literary intelligence, both authors have elevated many characters to the level of a typical character, especially in the beginning of the contemporary literary era. The most distinctive character by Lu Xun was Ah Q in *The True Story of Ah Q*, and by Nam Cao was Chi Pheo in *Chi Pheo*. The characterization of these two showed many literary similarities of Lu Xun and Nam Cao. The moral value of their works were also referenced in the differences in the peasant characters, which affirmed their position in the history of modern literature in both China and Vietnam.

The first similarity in the peasant characters by Lu Xun and Nam Cao was that these characters all shared a tragic fate: turning from kind, honest and hardworking farmers to destitute and eventually death under the pincers of colonist and feudalism. Ah Q in *The True Story of Ah Q* and Chi Pheo in *Chi Pheo* were the most typical among these characters. Many other of Lu Xun and Nam Cao's characters did not suffer moral depravity but inevitably died of starvation, like the character Hsiang Lin's wife in Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Hac in Nam Cao's *Old man Hac*...

The second similarity was the establishment of the characterization based on the nature of society and of the peasants at that time. The nature of society was the moral degradation and criminalization of many peasants. However, the nature of the peasants was honesty, kindness, hard work and patience. Along with providing a realist description of the society and the life of peasants at the time, the two authors also voiced their criticism to this very society and showed their appreciation towards the peasants. The major idealistic similarity between Lu Xun and Nam Cao was the desire for a revolution and for the peasants to have a contented life. Comparing to Nam Cao, the sense of revolution was more prominent in Lu Xun's literary works.

The third similarity was the typical characterization in critical realistic literature. This characterization was created based on artistic - aesthetic principles of critical realistic literature, for example the selection of models for the character, typical characterization in typical circumstances, description of the characteristics in relation of similarities and differences and of the system of typical characteristics, the commenting from one character to another; description of the character development. Therefore, the characters in both Lu Xun and Nam Cao's works showed authenticity, like life-like people in normal life: they walked, talked, got upset, moved about... in a specific and vivid way.

The last similarity was the presence of one pivotal work in both Lu Xun's and Nam Cao's writing career. In Lu Xun's career, it was *The True Story of Ah Q*, and in Nam Cao's, it was *Chi Pheo*. The protagonists of these two stories had their similar revolt against the society by criminalizing themselves to show the dark and diseased side of society. These two characters both possessed unsightly physical and mental distortion, but in diversified way. The physical difference was Ah Q's disadvantage, and were exploited in certain situations. Chi Pheo's appearance, especially his shaved head, white teeth against his dark face brought fear to others. Ah Q's mental distortion was described through his imaginary psychological "victory", and Chi Pheo's was through his actions of hurting himself on the face, drinking alcohol and swearing at other villagers and at the people who gave birth to him. Lu Xun's purpose of creating the character Ah Q was to expose the national social disease to the mass, and to urge for a cure or a change in society. Nam Cao's purpose of the characterization of Chi Pheo is to provide a realistic description of the rural areas in Vietnam at that time, to show the unmoral society which served as the circumstance for the demoralization and criminalization of many peasants.

VI. CONCLUSION

Short stories with focus on peasants were significant creative works of both Chinese writer Lu Xun and Vietnamese writer Nam Cao. These short stories shared many similarities, one of which is the circumstance of the semi-feudal and semi-colonial society from the 1910s to 1930s in China and from the 1920s to 1940s in Vietnam. In this time period, both countries were influenced by the Western European culture, more specifically by the Russian, French and British critical realistic literature. This influence combined with other cultural aspects in China and Vietnam were inspirations for many of Lu Xun's and Nam Cao's literary works. Therefore, in the works of both authors, many comparisons can be observed in the peasant characterization, which were the national portrayal of farmers at the time.

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