

Research Article

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The Role of Vietnamese Children's Literature in Addressing Ecological and Cultural Challenges

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study examines the function of ecocriticism in Vietnamese children's literature, emphasizing the incorporation of ecological themes to promote environmental consciousness and cultural preservation. The analysis emphasizes the distinctive contributions of Vietnamese authors like Vu Hung and Nguyen Nhat Anh, who transform nature from a passive backdrop into an active participant in their narratives. Themes including deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and the anthropomorphization of nature are analyzed to elucidate their influence in fostering empathy, stewardship, and responsibility in young readers.

Materials/methods. Research examines how Vietnamese children's literature embodies the nation's ecological and cultural legacy, tackling global environmental issues within a regional context. The methodological techniques from prior research, including thematic, narrative, and cultural analyses, are examined to comprehend how these works inform readers about sustainability and ecological interdependence.

Results. Finding indicates that, although substantial advancements have been achieved in connecting ecological consciousness with narrative techniques, deficiencies persist in examining obscure writers, marginalized ecological issues, and the convergence of ecological motifs with social justice. The assessment highlights the necessity for additional research regarding the changing function of children's literature in tackling current environmental challenges.

Conclusion. This review critically synthesizes current studies to highlight the transformative influence of Vietnamese children's literature on fostering environmental awareness in future generations, thereby maintaining a balance between cultural legacy and ecological responsibility. It establishes a basis for subsequent research on how literature can motivate sustainable behaviors and principles in young readers.



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1. Introduction

Environmental issues have emerged as a global concern, impacting multiple fields, including literature and cultural studies. As human activities increasingly affect the natural environment, there is an escalating necessity to examine how literature reflects, critiques, and confronts these ecological issues. Ecocritical theory, arising in reaction to the environmental crisis, functions as an interdisciplinary framework that analyzes the intricate connections among literature, culture, and the natural environment. Ecocriticism examines the environmental values and ideologies present in literary works, offering a framework for comprehending how literature can promote sustainable relationships between humans and their environment (Ismail, 2024; Srividhya, 2022; Thuy & Chi, 2022). Children's literature, as a significant instrument for education and socialization, possesses considerable potential for cultivating ecological awareness in youth. Numerous studies worldwide have shown that children's literature has a significant role in developing positive attitudes toward nature, increasing ecological awareness, and promoting a sense of duty for environmental stewardship (Bonnett & Williams, 1998; Hirst & Wilkinson, 2022; Iwaniec & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). Children's literature, via vivid storylines and imaginative realms, fosters a passion for nature while promoting sustainable habits and ecological stewardship, rendering it an essential medium for confronting environmental issues. In the Vietnamese context, children's literature provides abundant chances to examine the interaction between ecological topics and literary expression. This article employs ecocritical theory to validate the existence of environmental themes in Vietnamese children's literature, examine the perspectives of Vietnamese authors on ecological matters, and illustrate literature's capacity to enhance environmental consciousness among readers. This study highlights the interdependent relationship between children's literature and ecocriticism, stressing literature's function in educating future generations on the significance of environmental preservation and respect. The article aims to emphasize the environmental aspect of Vietnamese children's literature while also contributing to the wider discussion on literature's role in tackling ecological issues. This study seeks to connect ecocriticism with children's literature to encourage further investigation into how literary works might foster ecological awareness and sustainable actions in Vietnam and abroad.

2. Methodology

This article employs a qualitative literature review methodology designed to synthesize existing scholarship on ecocriticism and children's literature in the Vietnamese context. Rather than producing new empirical data, the study critically integrates prior theoretical and textual analyses to highlight how ecological motifs are embedded in Vietnamese children's narratives. The approach is grounded in ecocritical theory, which provides a conceptual framework for interpreting the relationship between literature, culture, and the natural environment. This framework allows for the identification of recurring themes such as anthropomorphism, environmental degradation, biodiversity preservation, and human–nature interdependence.

The review process involved thematic, narrative, and cultural analyses. Thematic analysis was used to identify dominant ecological motifs—such as forests, rivers, animals, and rural landscapes—across a range of children's literary works published in Vietnam from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Narrative analysis facilitated the examination of literary techniques that transform nature from a passive backdrop into an active character within the story, thereby illustrating ecological agency. Cultural analysis was employed to situate these works within Vietnam's socio-historical context, considering the influence of war, modernization, and globalization on the evolution of ecological consciousness in children's literature.

The corpus examined included both canonical and contemporary authors, ensuring representation of diverse voices and genres. Classic works by Vu Hung, To Hoai, and Vo Quang were

considered alongside more contemporary texts by Nguyen Nhat Anh, Trung Trung Dinh, and younger authors emerging from initiatives such as the Dialogue with Nature project (2009–2010). In addition, the review incorporated children’s comics, short stories, and fairy tales that explicitly embed ecological values, thereby broadening the scope of the analysis beyond mainstream prose narratives. These materials were selected because they are widely circulated in Vietnam, frequently included in educational contexts, and recognized for their cultural resonance.

The literature search was conducted through academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) as well as local publishing houses (e.g., Kim Dong Publishing House). Secondary sources included critical works on ecocriticism in Southeast Asia, Vietnamese literary history, and cross-cultural studies of children’s literature. By triangulating international theoretical perspectives with Vietnamese literary traditions, the study aimed to produce a balanced and contextually sensitive synthesis.

Finally, the analysis followed a comparative and integrative logic. The ecological motifs identified in Vietnamese children’s literature were compared with broader trends in global ecocriticism (e.g., Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax*), allowing for insights into both convergences and divergences. The integrative dimension of the review ensured that ecological concerns were examined not in isolation but in relation to cultural identity, pedagogical function, and the ethical responsibilities of literature in shaping children’s worldviews.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Interest in Ecology in Vietnamese Children’s Literature

Vietnamese children’s literature has undergone significant evolution, particularly in its engagement with ecological themes. Although the development of children’s literature in Vietnam became systematic only after 1945 (Ly, 2003; Truyen et al., 2019), investment in this literary field has remained limited, both in terms of mechanisms and policies as well as in theoretical foundations for writing (Marr, 1981). Within this context, works imbued with a true ecological spirit emerged primarily through spontaneous efforts rather than structured initiatives.

One standout figure in this domain is writer Vu Hung, whose works, written between 1960 and 1980, are considered pioneering examples of “green” literature. While global ecocriticism gained prominence only in the 1970s, Vu Hung’s experiences living and working in Vietnam’s forests uniquely positioned him to create vivid depictions of nature. Vu Hung’s deep connection to the forests, shaped by his time in Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai, and military service in Binh Tri Thien and Central Laos, allowed him to portray the forest not merely as a setting but as a central character. His works encapsulate the nuances, rhythms, and vitality of the natural world, earning him recognition as a “builder of a natural museum with words”. Beyond describing forest life, Vu Hung’s stories emphasize ecological values such as adapting to environmental changes, preserving habitats, and fostering mutual care among living beings (Hung, 2014).

In addition to Vu Hung, other Vietnamese writers have contributed to ecological aesthetics in children’s literature. Doan Gioi’s *Southern Forest Land* (*Đất rừng Phương Nam*), Pham Ho’s *Flower Stories and Fruit Stories* (*Chuyện hoa, chuyện quả*), and Ma Van Khang’s *Red Cotton Flower* (*Hoa gạo đỏ*) and short stories like *Mr. Pon and the tiger cub* (*Ông Pôn và chú hổ con*) highlight ecological themes through diverse narratives. Writers such as Nguyen Nhat Anh and Que Huong have also explored environmental topics, creating works that inspire children to appreciate and respect nature. A systematic interest in ecological topics within Vietnamese children’s literature emerged around 2009–2010, driven by the Dialogue with Nature project. This collaborative effort by the Danish Writers Association, Kim Dong Publishing House, and the Hanoi Writers Association encouraged Vietnamese authors to engage with ecological themes. The project resulted in notable works like *The*

Ducks Swim Across the River (*Đàn vịt bơi qua sông*) (Truong Tiep Truong), The Story of the Four Seasons (*Chuyện kể của bốn mùa*) (Nguyen Huong), Chi's Garden (*Khu vườn của Chi*) (Dang Ngoc Minh Trang), and The Earth is a Circle (*Trái Đất là một vòng tròn*) (Phan Tran Minh Thu). These contributions reflect a growing recognition of the urgent need for literature to address environmental concerns.

Fairy tales, a beloved genre within Vietnamese children's literature, have also embraced ecological themes. Writers like Tham Tam, To Hoai, Vo Quang, and Tran Duc Tien have created stories centered on animal characters, emphasizing the importance of nature and the animal world in children's lives. Contemporary authors such as Nguyen Phan Que Mai (*Mun oi! Run away! - Mun oi! Chạy đi!*) and Nguyen Thi Bich Nga (*Don't Tread on the Grass - Đừng giẫm lên cỏ*) have further advanced the ecological narrative, crafting works that resonate with both children and adults. This growing interest in ecology within Vietnamese children's literature reflects the genre's transformation in response to changes in nature, society, and global literary trends. By integrating ecological themes, Vietnamese writers have not only enriched the literary landscape but also contributed to raising environmental awareness among young readers, fostering a deeper connection between children and the natural world.

3.2. Ecological Approaches in Vietnamese Children's Literature

Vietnamese children's literature illustrates a significant and developing connection between narrative and ecology, as authors incorporate environmental themes into their works to cultivate ecological awareness (Heise & Pham, 2024; Rato, 2024; Thuy, 2024). This connection is illustrated not only by the portrayal of nature as a primary theme but also by the literary techniques employed to highlight the symbiotic interaction between humans and the environment. Echoing the philosophy of *The Lorax*—"Speak for the trees, for the trees have no words" (*Hãy nói thay cái cây, vì cái cây không có lời nói*) (Seuss, 1971)—Vietnamese children's literature elevates the voice of nature, rendering it a vibrant and engaging element inside storytelling.

Author Vu Hung distinguishes himself as a trailblazer in ecological narrative within Vietnamese children's literature. Although most Vietnamese authors incorporate nature as a background or backdrop, Vu Hung elevates it to the role of a protagonist. His works, like *The Call of the Forest* (*Tiếng gọi của rừng*) and *The Story of the Old Forest* (*Chuyện ở rừng già*), offer profound insights into the forest ecology, depicting it as a linked community with distinct rhythms and hierarchies. Vu Hung illustrates elephants as adhering to a matriarchal system, a "*distinct personality*" that reflects human social systems, while emphasizing the solitary and primordial nature of rhinos as representative of the species' persistence. Vu Hung articulates the forest as a multifaceted living organism, characterized by intricate social structures and emotional interactions, through evocative and scientifically substantiated depictions. He depicts monkeys as intelligent beings, yet subject to hierarchical aggression, illustrating a complex perspective on survival and adaptation. These representations not only inform young readers about biodiversity but also elicit empathy for non-human organisms. Vu Hung's narratives function as "*natural museums*", systematically documenting the flora and wildlife of Vietnam's forests while safeguarding their cultural and ecological importance.

In *Secret in the Valley* (*Bí mật ở thung lũng*), Trung Trung Dinh examines the diverse ecology of Vietnam's Central Highlands, elevating the natural landscape to a dynamic character (Trung, 2023). His depictions of cassia fistula (*cây muồng hoàng yến - muồng vàng*), Bombax Ceiba (*hoa pơ lang*), and the tranquil IA Sao waterfall are infused with cultural and ecological importance. The "old forest streaks" characterized as "deep", the "bright yellow" floral carpets, and the "soaked night dew" pathways transcend ordinary imagery—they represent the persistent vitality of nature in influencing human experience. Through the integration of ecological and cultural components, Trung Trung Dinh depicts the Central Highlands as a microcosm of Vietnam's ecological abundance. His sculptures underscore the inherent worth of nature, portraying it as a collaborator in human existence rather

than a commodity for exploitation. This storytelling method cultivates an understanding of the interdependence between human and ecological systems, encouraging readers to cherish and safeguard these fragile connections.

Comics have been a potent tool for expressing ecological issues in Vietnamese children's literature. Works like *Island - or the Strange Adventure on the Whale's Back* (*Đảo - hay chuyến phiêu lưu kỳ lạ trên lưng cá voi*) by Do Thai Thanh and *The Forest in a Bottle* (*Khu rừng trong chai*) by Huỳnh Trọng Khang utilize the synergy of language and images to animate ecological storytelling (Khang, 2023; Thanh, 2009). These narratives frequently embrace a non-anthropocentric viewpoint, depicting water, forests, and gardens as primary characters. For example, *Island* chronicles the voyage of a youngster atop a whale, highlighting the symbiotic connection between humanity and marine organisms. Likewise, *The Forest in a Bottle* illustrates the conservation of a complete ecosystem within an enclosed environment, representing the fragile equilibrium necessary for life sustenance. These works artistically illustrate ecological connection, diminishing the perceived separation between humans and the environment, so encouraging readers to adopt sustainable principles.

Nature is frequently shown as a restorative and transformative power in Vietnamese children's literature. In *Grass Wedding* (*Đám cưới cỏ*) by Que Huong (Huong, 2019), the natural environment serves as a refuge where characters seek comfort and rekindle happiness. The narrative depicts the "sea of sound" generated by grass, flowers, and bees, which "consumes all joy and sorrow in a melody of emptiness", exemplifying nature's capacity to comfort and revitalize. In Tran Duc Tien's *Moon Buried in the Grass* (*Trăng vùi trong cỏ*) (Tien, 2006), the grassland functions as a realm of repose and communion. Characters such as the Lonely Lizard (*Thằn lằn cô đơn*) and Gecko Weather Forecaster (*Chuyên gia dự báo thời tiết Tắc kè*) cultivate relationships within this ecosystem, illustrating how nature promotes community and a sense of belonging. Such narratives highlight the nurturing attributes of the natural environment, establishing it as a crucial factor in the emotional and psychological growth of children.

In Vietnamese literature, children frequently act as intermediaries between humanity and the environment. Their naivety and inquisitiveness enable kids to establish distinctive bonds with nature. In *Leaf melody* (*Nhạc lá*) by Bui Minh Quoc (Quoc, 2020), a small girl's captivating leaf melody rejuvenates a millennium-old tree, representing the regenerative influence of creativity and empathy. In *Stork* (*Cò Gà*) by Que Huong, the Cot's compassion for an injured stork exemplifies the significant influence of human empathy on the environment. These narratives emphasize the function of children as ecological advocates, whose behaviors cultivate reverence and stewardship for the environment. Their engagement with nature contests anthropocentric perspectives, validating the inherent worth of all organisms.

Vietnamese children's literature often contests the supremacy of anthropocentric tales by highlighting the agency of nature. In "Sitting and Crying on a Tree" (*Ngồi khóc trên cây*) by Nguyen Nhat Anh, the character *Đông* is initially alienated from the forest due to concerns instilled by adults (Anh, 2013). Nevertheless, his connection with a turtle—a guardian of diminutive creatures—enables him to perceive the forest as a "tranquil utopia". The narrative demonstrates nature's function in fostering human development and restoration. The turtle, representing ecological resilience, signifies the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature. Their acts, including the sabotage of hunters' traps, underscore the forest's ability for self-preservation and its crucial function in safeguarding biodiversity. Nguyen Nhat Anh's narrative asserts that nature is an essential component of human existence, warranting respect and guardianship.

Vietnamese children's literature exhibits a significant dedication to ecological issues, employing narrative to enhance comprehension of the natural environment (Thuy, 2024). In the writings of

authors such as Vu Hung, Trung Trung Dinh, and Nguyen Nhat Anh, nature is elevated from a mere backdrop to an active participant in the narrative. These narratives not only inform young readers about environmental concerns but also motivate them to cultivate harmonious relationships with the ecosystems they occupy (Korteweg et al., 2014). By highlighting the interdependence of all living organisms, Vietnamese children's literature fosters a transition from anthropocentrism to an ecological perspective, cultivating a generation of ecologically aware individuals (Tran et al., 2024).

3.3. Village and Forest Ecology in Vietnamese Children's Literature

Vietnamese children's literature frequently derives inspiration from the natural environment, with village and forest ecologies as predominant topics (Hieu et al., 2017). These settings stimulate environmental and cultural ties while also reflecting a deeper philosophical comprehension of humanity's interaction with nature. The countryside provides a nostalgic feeling of stability, whilst the forest embodies a domain of adventure, survival, and enigma. Collectively, these ecosystems provide a complex tale, illustrating the interdependence of life.

Rural environments are fundamental to Vietnamese children's literature, displaying a profound connection to heritage and identity. They function as symbolic realms where human existence and environment dwell together, infused with cultural identity and emotional significance. In Vo Quang's oeuvre, particularly in *Flower and Fruit Stories*, the countryside is depicted as a vibrant, dynamic ecology. His novels encapsulate the beauty and vibrancy of rural existence, frequently intertwining human experiences with the marvels of nature, including the beginnings of flora and fruit. Likewise, To Hoai's *De Men's Adventures* expands this ecological perspective by illustrating the odyssey of a newborn cricket. The narrative converts the countryside from a restricted area into an entrance to vast landscapes, encouraging readers to investigate the broader world while gently diminishing human supremacy (Poremba, 1991). Tran Duc Tien's works, such as *The Moon Buried in the Grass* and *The Hedge Hamlet (Xóm Bờ Giậu)*, explore the profound emotional resonance of the countryside. His protagonists, frequently departing from their rural residences, are inevitably compelled to return by memories and the intrinsic attraction of their roots. In *Dewdrops of Night*, the countryside, perceived as an always tranquil and remote recollection, reemerges with a vitality that satisfies the characters' yearning during an urban power outage. In these writings, Tran Duc Tien depicts the countryside as both a physical locale and a symbolic embodiment of identity and spiritual nourishment. In village literature, nature frequently exceeds its passive role, actively engaging in human emotions and storylines. In Nguyen Nhat Anh's *Wish a Good Day (Chúc một ngày tốt lành)* (Anh, 2014), the romantic narrative of the pig Smut (*Lọ Nồi*) reflects the experiences of its human owner, Cu. The narrative employs personification to emphasize the profound emotional bonds between people and non-human entities, generating a sense of togetherness and empathy (Hamratanaphon, 2020). The countryside is not only a backdrop but a dynamic, living organism that influences and mirrors the life of its residents.

The countryside symbolizes cultural identity, but the forest embodies the wild and enigmatic facets of nature (Trigger & Mulcock, 2005; Wilson, 2012). In Vietnamese children's literature, the forest is frequently depicted as a multifaceted ecology regulated by its own principles, necessitating that humans learn to cohabit with respect. Vu Hung, a trailblazer in forest-centric tales, vividly animates the outdoors in works such as *The Elephant Away from the Herd (Con voi xa đàn)* (Hung, 2015). Based on his experience as a soldier in the Central Laos forests, Vu Hung depicts the jungle as a structured and harmonious ecology. He delineates four essential principles of survival: evading interspecies conflict, responding to environmental alterations, conserving habitats, and fostering mutual assistance. These rules not only direct animal behavior but also provide moral instruction for human readers. The territorial limits of animals—gaurs residing in bamboo hills or elephants dwelling in banana forests—underscore the necessity of respecting boundaries and fostering coexistence. Vu Hung's narratives emphasize the matriarchal structure of elephants, correlating with feminist

ecological critiques that link the exploitation of the environment to the oppression of women. Vu Hung presents a vision of harmonious living through matriarchal systems, where leadership based on nurturing and preservation guarantees the ecosystem's longevity. His evocative depictions of the forest's "wordless order" highlight the connection of humans and environment, prompting readers to reconsider their position within this complex network. Ma Van Khang, a distinguished author, derives inspiration from his experiences in the hilly area of Lao Cai. His works, including *Red Cotton Flower*, immerse readers in the vivid yet wild splendor of the mountains. He portrays the unrefined beauty of isolated areas through poetic depictions of red kapok flowers blossoming against a clear blue sky (Khang, 2014). His portrayals of San Cha Chai (*San Cha Chải*), characterized by its golden cogon grass and ancient bamboo woods, conjure a vivid sensory impression of nature. Ma Van Khang's depiction of the forest is not only descriptive but profoundly immersive, enabling readers to engage with its sights, sounds, and aromas. In Ma Van Khang's writings, the forest frequently serves as a site of both refuge and adversity, where characters grapple with their anxieties and constraints. The primordial forests, shrouded in mist and thick vegetation, symbolize the uncertainties and enigmas of life. By highlighting the "untamed and spine-tingling" characteristics of the forest, Ma Van Khang accentuates its function as a realm of metamorphosis and development.

In Vietnamese children's literature, nature is frequently anthropomorphized, establishing a connection between human and non-human realms (Poremba, 1991). Animals, plants, and natural occurrences possess anthropomorphic traits, cultivating empathy and a profound appreciation for the natural environment. Vo Quang's *Golden-Haired Calf* (*Con Bê lông vàng*) depicts the calf as a tentative, inquisitive creature, embodying the purity and marvel of youth. Likewise, Phan Thi Vang Anh's *Kittens Go to School* (*Mèo con đi học*) used animals to examine human experiences, including the pleasures and apprehensions associated with schooling. In Tran Dang Khoa's *Coconut Tree* (*Cây dừa*), the tree is depicted as a convivial companion, "extending its arms to embrace the wind". This anthropomorphism obscures the distinctions between humans and nature, prompting readers to perceive the natural world as a collective of equals. The forest creatures in Vu Hung, including elephants and deer, exhibit a spectrum of emotions—joy, yearning, and anger—that parallel human feelings. These representations emphasize that nature is not a passive setting but an active contributor to the emotional and moral framework of the world. By depicting nature as a character with its own agency, authors compel readers to perceive themselves as integral components of a broader ecological system (Larson, 2011).

Vietnamese children's literature, through its vivid portrayals of rural and forest ecosystems, provides a comprehensive examination of humanity's connection with the environment. Rural environments elicit nostalgia and cultural continuity, but forest narratives compel readers to honor and conform to the principles of the natural world (Armstrong, 2024). Utilizing personification and immersive narrative techniques, authors such as Vu Hung, Tran Duc Tien, and Ma Van Khang construct a literary environment that highlights the interdependence of all living beings. These works both honor the beauty and diversity of Vietnam's natural settings and foster a sense of responsibility and respect for the environment. By depicting nature as a dynamic and sentient force, Vietnamese children's literature encourages young readers to adopt ecological harmony, safeguarding these bright green landscapes for future generations.

3.4. Attitude Towards Nature in Vietnamese Children's Literature

Vietnamese children's literature is abundant in ecological themes, emphasizing the significance of nature and the repercussions of human actions on the environment. Utilizing vibrant narratives, anthropomorphic animal characters, and symbolic depictions of nature, these works examine the fragile equilibrium between humanity and the natural environment, imparting lessons on sustainability, ecological deterioration, and the ramifications of conflict (Sampson, 2023; Thomas, 2023). The depiction of nature in these narratives functions as both an aesthetic and a narrative tool,

while also embodying significant moral and ecological consequences. Subsequent sections will go into specific examples from prominent Vietnamese children's literature, analyzing themes of ecological degradation, ethical treatment of animals, the impact of war on nature, and the spiritual connection between humanity and the natural world. These literary works provide cautionary narratives and ethical instruction, prompting readers to contemplate their environmental obligations.

A multitude of Vietnamese children's narratives address environmental degradation with striking, frequently sad specificity, compelling readers to acknowledge the severity of ecological challenges. The depiction of the environment in these narratives serves not merely as a backdrop for the plot, but as an active agent in determining the characters' destinies. In the narrative *When the Coyotes Leave the Steppe* (*Khi sói đồng cỏ rời thảo nguyên*) by Nguyen Thi Bich Nga, the author depicts a drought that devastates the steppe, transforming it into a desolate wasteland. The desiccated land and dehydrated fauna represent the direct consequences of climate change, a situation that numerous readers may identify as a pressing, tangible concern. The author employs animals such as coyotes to illustrate the human struggle against environmental deterioration resulting from natural disasters, emphasizing the profound link between all living beings and their environments. Likewise, the pieces *The Forest in a Bottle* and *Swimming Upstream* (*Bơi ngược về nguồn*) depict instances of deforestation and pollution, illustrating how human endeavors have depleted the vitality of previously flourishing ecosystems. In *The Forest in a Bottle*, the conversion of a verdant rural landscape into an urbanized settlement underscores the depletion of biodiversity and natural resources. The erection of high-rise structures results in the invasion of forests and the displacement of indigenous species. The inability to observe the moon due to atmospheric pollution illustrates the suffocating consequences of industrialization, when even the most basic marvels of nature are concealed. This illustrates not only the loss of physical landscapes but also the emotional and spiritual detachment that humans cultivate from nature in the quest for advancement. In *Swimming Upstream*, the contamination of rivers by a food processing facility symbolizes the overarching environmental negligence of industries. This scenario results in the widespread mortality of salmon, underscoring the delicate equilibrium of aquatic ecosystems. The narrative critiques unsustainable industrial practices that put profit over environmental conservation.

In Vietnamese children's literature, the representation of animals is profoundly symbolic, with these creatures frequently embodying moral teachings regarding human conduct. The animals in these narratives serve as active moral compasses, illuminating the complexities of human cruelty and benevolence. In *Mun, Run Away!* (Mai & Clara, 2012), the canine emerges as a poignant casualty of human avarice. The narrative denounces both the larceny of dogs and the consumption of dog meat, depicting it as an exploitation of innocent beings for financial profit. Mun, the canine, is depicted as an innocent and affectionate figure, highlighting the ethical dilemma of whether such abuse is justifiable. The narrative, as perceived through Mun's perspective, condemns the consumerist mentality that objectifies life—both human and animal—for egocentric ends. Conversely, in *The Lost Dog* (*Con chó lạc nhà*) by Khang (2014), the treatment of the dog serves as a metaphor for humanity's neglect of nature. The guys hurling stones at the dog symbolize the violence humans frequently display towards animals, and the scene in which the dog is ultimately murdered highlights the moral degradation stemming from this cruelty. Ma Van Khang exposes anthropocentrism and prompts the reader to reevaluate their ethical perspective on animal rights. This act of violence against the dog metaphorically symbolizes the broader violence perpetrated against nature by human activities, including poaching, deforestation, and pollution.

War profoundly affects human civilizations and the natural environment, as clearly illustrated in several Vietnamese children's narratives. The relationship between human conflict and ecological degradation is apparent in narratives that depict the destruction of landscapes and species as a direct

consequence of combat (Morrow et al., 2022). In Vu Hung's *The Elephant Far from the Herd*, the devastation of the Truong Son forests due to military operations, encompassing deforestation for road construction and the application of poisonous chemicals in battle, exemplifies how conflict results in the obliteration of natural habitats. The narrative illustrates that even majestic creatures, such as elephants, are susceptible to the atrocities of human cruelty. This convergence of warfare and ecology illustrates that armed conflict impacts not just human existence but also yields enduring repercussions for ecosystems, resulting in species extinction and the disturbance of natural cycles. Vu Hung's tale addresses the utilization of harmful chemicals in the conflict against nature, reflecting the actual repercussions of deforestation, herbicides, and other chemical pollutants on flora and fauna. The desolate trees and deceased fish symbolize the moral deterioration of society, illustrating how warfare and human aggression frequently inflict lasting damage on the environment. The association between environmental destruction and human conflict conveys a potent anti-war message within the framework of ecological awareness, prompting readers to reflect on the extensive, frequently overlooked consequences of warfare.

Numerous Vietnamese children's tales emphasize the spiritual bond between humanity and nature, suggesting that disrespect for nature may lead to both material and spiritual devastation. These books urge readers to comprehend the divine or spiritual aspects of nature, fostering a reverence that transcends practical or utilitarian applications. In *The Sea Princess (Nàng công chúa biển)* by Tran Hoai Duong, nature's fury is embodied as the sea's vengeance following the theft of pearls that had safeguarded the ocean for ages by a witch. This mythological perspective on ecological devastation underscores the sanctity of nature and posits that humans who excessively exploit resources jeopardize their spiritual equilibrium and provoke nature's wrath. The return of the pearls to the ocean symbolizes the restoration of equilibrium and the recognition of the moral significance of ecological stewardship. The narrative imparts the notion that the environment transcends mere physicality and embodies a spiritual essence warranting reverence. Furthermore, in the mythical narrative *The First Sunny Day (Ngày nắng đầu tiên)* by Que Huong, the flood symbolizes nature's vengeance, which ensues when humanity fails to coexist harmoniously with their surroundings. The flood that ravages the protagonist's existence symbolizes the vengeance that nature can impose when it is exploited. This narrative exemplifies the significance of coexisting with nature and the dire repercussions of disregarding this connection. The flood, as a natural calamity, demonstrates the necessity for ecological understanding and respect.

The pedagogical significance of these narratives is in their capacity to impart lessons about environmental awareness, ethical animal treatment, and the repercussions of human avarice (Khan et al., 2024). Vietnamese children's literature uses vivid imagery and emotive storytelling to cultivate a sense of duty towards nature and to encourage a more empathic perspective on animals, fostering sustainable living and understanding of environmental fragility. The analytical perspective on pollution, deforestation, and consumerism in these works aims to stimulate contemplation and incite action among readers. These narratives illustrate the catastrophic consequences of human exploitation of nature, prompting readers to scrutinize their own activities and views regarding the environment. The moral narratives emphasize the immediate repercussions of environmental degradation while urging future generations to maintain ecological balance and adopt sustainable behaviors for the planet's preservation.

Vietnamese children's literature offers a diverse array of narratives that intertwine ethical teachings with environmental consciousness. By illustrating animals as moral agents, the detrimental consequences of war, the spiritual connection between humans and nature, and the pressing necessity for environmental justice, these works have emerged as significant educational resources. These narratives urge readers to empathize with the natural environment and acknowledge their responsibility in its preservation, cultivating a more compassionate, accountable, and sustainable

relationship with the earth, thus nurturing a generation that comprehends the significance of coexisting harmoniously with nature.

3.5. The Significance of Developing The Ecological Worldview of Vietnamese Children's Literature

The incorporation of ecological topics in Vietnamese children's literature is essential for cultivating the environmental awareness of young readers. By integrating nature into engaging narratives, authors cultivate empathy, responsibility, and reverence for the environment, prompting youngsters to perceive themselves as active contributors to its conservation (Clayton & Myers, 2015; Chawla, 2020). These paintings convey important lessons about sustainability through anthropomorphized flora, fauna, and ecosystems, highlighting the interdependence of all living entities. The compelling narratives motivate children to value nature's beauty and to combat environmental degradation, guaranteeing that future generations inherit a well-preserved and respected world.

The profound relationship between literature and ecology is grounded in philosophical contemplations of human-nature interactions (Zapf, 2016). Ecocriticism, as an academic field, originated from an increasing environmental awareness in the late 20th century. It challenges conventional anthropocentric perspectives on nature, advocating for an integrated worldview that perceives humans as integral components of a broader ecological system (Love, 2003). In Vietnamese children's literature, this philosophical transformation is reflected in the anthropomorphism of nature, which is depicted as a moral actor imparting qualities such as respect, empathy, and stewardship to children. These ideals are imparted not through monotonous instructional methods but through captivating narratives that elicit emotional reactions and stimulate contemplation. Philosophers such as Aldo Leopold contend that humans must transition from a land ethic centered on domination over nature to one founded on stewardship and accountability for the environment. This ethical paradigm is evident in numerous Vietnamese children's stories, where nature is shown not merely as a resource to be exploited, but as a living being with inherent rights and demands. By integrating such concepts into literature, these works aspire to cultivate a generation of readers who not only comprehend the environment but also possess a profound moral duty to safeguard and conserve it.

The narratives referenced in the passage, including Chi's Garden and Bathing in the River (*Tắm sông*), function not merely as sources of entertainment but as instruments for moral and ecological instruction. Children's literature frequently navigates the intersection between fantasy and reality, enabling young readers to immerse themselves in imaginative realms while still addressing tangible societal concerns. The narratives in these works assume the role of influencing children's attitudes about the environment, frequently integrating ecological concerns into the characters' development. Chi's Garden serves not merely as a narrative about gardening; it functions as a metaphor for cultivating a sense of responsibility for something greater than oneself. Chi's evolution from indifference towards the garden's disorder to that of a diligent caregiver exemplifies the progressive cultivation of ecological consciousness. Chi's ultimate affection for her garden reflects the evolution of children's comprehension of the natural environment. This metamorphosis signifies the evolution of children from passive recipients of environmental knowledge to active participants in environmental care and stewardship. Likewise, Bathing in the River imparts a significant lesson regarding the repercussions of human activity on the ecosystem. The river, previously pristine and abundant with life, is now contaminated with refuse, exemplifying the detrimental consequences of human carelessness. However, the youngsters in the narrative do not passively acquiesce to the river's destiny; they actively endeavor to rehabilitate it. This shift from environmental deterioration to restoration underscores that ecological challenges are not insurmountable; they may be mitigated

via social action, stewardship, and accountability. The narrative conveys a potent message to children: they possess the ability to influence the destiny of the environment.

One of the most intriguing features of children's reading is its capacity to expand the imagination and render abstract concepts tangible (Maine & Waller, 2011; Sipe, 2008). In the field of ecology, where challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss may appear remote or daunting, literature offers youngsters a means to understand and connect with these issues more intimately. By portraying animals, plants, and natural environments as sentient beings, literature anthropomorphizes nature, facilitating emotional connections for youngsters. In *The Legend of the Coconut Tree (Sử tích cây dừa)*, the tree transcends its role as a basic landscape element, embodying anthropomorphic characteristics. The coconut tree epitomizes love, sacrifice, and resilience. This anthropomorphism fosters a profound emotional bond between the kid reader and the natural environment. By contextualizing the environment in this manner, literature cultivates empathy and aids youngsters in recognizing that the degradation of nature is not merely a scientific issue but a moral one (Wenzel, 2019; Young, 2018). Furthermore, narratives depicting nature as a sentient being capable of feeling and reacting, such as those authored by Vu Hung or Ma Van Khang, elevate this empathy to a higher level. The notion that animals possess their own emotional experiences—exemplified by the tiger grieving Mr. Pon's demise—demonstrates that non-human beings are as worthy of compassion and respect. Such representations are essential for fostering in youngsters an awareness of their connectivity with the natural world, wherein all living entities, whether human or non-human, constitute a larger, collective ecosystem.

The literature for Vietnamese children, emphasizing ecological issues, significantly influences the wider cultural and social milieu. These tales foster a cultural transition towards sustainability by underscoring reverence for nature, the significance of conserving biodiversity, and the imperative of coexisting harmoniously with the environment. In Vietnam, where swift development exerts significant strain on the environment, these narratives act as a subtle yet compelling reminder of the necessity to revert to a more balanced and sustainable lifestyle. The impact of these works transcends individual children; they mold the societal collective psyche. Literary ecological messages urge parents, educators, and community leaders to advocate for sustainable behaviors, extending beyond the home to encompass wider social situations (Orr, 1991). By imparting ecological ideals to children early on, literature can foster a generation that prioritizes environmental conservation and endeavors to save the natural world for posterity (Buriro et al., 2023). The cultural significance of children's literature in Vietnam is paramount. The nation has historically maintained a profound relationship with the environment, grounded in its agricultural heritage and rural populations. Nevertheless, the forces of technology and urbanization frequently result in a detachment from this natural legacy. Vietnamese children's literature facilitates the reconnection of children with the environment through narratives, ensuring the transmission, adaptation, and preservation of traditions and values in an increasingly dynamic world.

The future of Vietnamese children's literature, as indicated in the passage, depends on the ongoing incorporation of ecological themes alongside wider societal challenges. Authors may examine the effects of climate change, urbanization, and biodiversity loss on local communities (Grimmond, 2007). They may also address global ecological issues, including the interdependence of ecosystems and the impact of humans on planetary health. Vietnamese children's literature has the opportunity to explore the intricate relationships between indigenous cultures and the environment. Research on the traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous populations, their sustainable agricultural methodologies, and their spiritual affiliations with the land might provide significant insights into alternative relationships with nature (Mazzocchi, 2020; Mohd Salim et al., 2023; Nelson & Shilling, 2018). These works not only offer ecological education but also aid in the preservation of cultural variety and indigenous knowledge. The amalgamation of ecological themes with social

challenges, like poverty, inequality, and human rights, may provide novel elements for narrative development. Children's literature can illuminate the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on vulnerable people, enhancing comprehension of the connections between environmental sustainability and social justice (Kavanagh et al., 2021). Narratives that examine these relationships may inspire youngsters to engage in critical thinking regarding their contributions to fostering a more equitable and sustainable world.

Vietnamese children's literature plays a crucial and impactful role in fostering ecological consciousness. These works teach children on environmental protection through innovative storytelling, moral lessons, and captivating narratives, while also inspiring them to assume responsibility for the natural world (Aur lio et al., 2021). The amalgamation of ecological themes with human values, including empathy, respect, and responsibility, guarantees that these lessons will resonate with children as they evolve into the forthcoming generation of environmental custodians. The future of Vietnamese children's literature is poised to further investigate and enhance the themes of ecological sustainability. By fostering a profound connection to nature, developing empathy for all living beings, and enabling youngsters to advocate for environmental protection, these initiatives will significantly influence the planet's future. Upon finishing these works, readers are not merely entertained; they are motivated to become stewards of the world, striving to restore and conserve its beauty for future generations.

4. Conclusion

Vietnamese children's literature, by incorporating ecocritical themes, effectively cultivates environmental awareness and ethical responsibility in young readers. By depicting nature as an engaged entity in narratives and merging ecological issues with cultural values, these works foster empathy, stewardship, and a profound comprehension of humanity's interconnection with the natural environment. Authors like Vu Hung and Nguyen Nhat Anh have developed narratives that go beyond mere amusement, tackling urgent concerns such as deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss, while also honoring Vietnam's abundant biological history. These narratives foster a generation of environmentally aware individuals while underscoring literature's significant role in promoting sustainability and cultural preservation, guaranteeing that future generations inherit not only a livable world but also the values essential for its protection.

Declarations

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