

Changes and continuities in the evaluation of a purged Vietnamese writer (1930s–2020s): A case study of *khái hng* of the self-reliant literary group

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Deskripsi Lengkap: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=9999920521480&lokasi=lokal>

Abstrak

This article examines domestic and international critiques of the literature of the Vietnamese-language writer *Khái Hng*, who was active from the French colonial period to the eve of the Indochina War. It then explores changes and continuities in Vietnamese literary criticism in light of changes in the nation's cultural policies. *Khái Hng* was one of seven members and the most prolific writer of the Self-Reliant Literary Group, founded in 1933 in Hanoi. In 1941 he was arrested by the French for anticolonial activities. Following World War II, he supported the Vietnamese Nationalist Party as an editor of the Party's newspapers. In 1946 he was captured by the Communist-led *Vit Minh*, and in 1947 he was executed. On the grounds that he was involved in the Party against the *Vit Minh* and was purged by the *Vit Minh*, few serious studies have been conducted on *Khái Hng* despite his stature as a leading writer in the 1930s and 1940s. Although former South Vietnamese scholars recognized the importance of *Khái Hng*'s late works, they had to start by collecting these materials, which had been scattered due to national division and war; also, South Vietnamese students of literature tended to prefer the study of foreign literature to domestic literature. After the fall of the former South Vietnam, those who fled abroad as refugees had to start earning a living from scratch. Therefore, few of them studied literature at academic institutions, and little serious research was conducted on *Khái Hng*, including his activities in the latter years of his life. However, as *Lai Thúy* points out, avoiding such "sensitive issues" in Vietnam makes it difficult to truly understand the country. This paper carefully traces the treatment of the literature created by *Khái Hng*, who was recognized as a "sensitive issue." At the same time, it attempts to dismantle the formula that was constructed with the rise of social realism: romanticism=bourgeoisie=decadence=reaction, which has become a simplified and somewhat established theory in Vietnamese literary history since *Khái Hng*'s death. Focusing on a specific writer reveals the complex ways in which the cultural policies of a war-torn nation were operationalized at the civilian level.