



**Discourse of Minority Communities:  
Comparing Archetypal Heroes in Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's  
"The Tiger's Heart" (1971)  
and John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* (1947)**

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[ *Abstract* ]

This article compares archetypal heroes in Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's "The Tiger's Heart" and John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. It aims to explore the voices of marginalized groups and ethnic minorities who suffer amidst the clash of civilizations. In exploring cultural communication between minority and mainstream communities as embodied by the archetypal heroes in the two works, this article highlights implications of resistance against values of the dominant. The method of "mythization" in modern Eastern and Western Literature, as this article argues, demonstrates the importance of minority discourses in as far as cultural conflicts in the globalizing world are concerned.

**Keywords:** Archetypal hero, folk narratives, minority discourses, minority communities, mythical thinking

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## I . Introduction

*The Pearl* is a short novel by John Steinbeck, winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel first appeared in 1945 in *The Woman's Home Companion* and was published in 1947. Despite being written after “the years of greatness, (1936-1939)” (Hayashi 1993) the work in its condensed form “has generated more contradictory criticism than any other work by Steinbeck” (Owens 1985: 35). The author reconstructs a modern parable based on popular Mexican folk narratives about the deep mysteries of the human heart, the nature of good and evil, the power of love, and the lofty values of family. Meanwhile, “Trái tim hổ” (“The Tiger’s Heart,” 1971) is the first story in the series *Những ngọn gió Hua Tát* (*The Winds of Hua Tát*, 1989), which established Nguyễn Huy Thiệp as the most recognized writer in modern Vietnamese Literature. Based on folk narratives of ethnic minorities in the Vietnamese Northwest mountainous region, this story is animated by the essence of its mythic characters’ indigenous culture. It poses different questions about victory and failure, happiness and sorrow, and love and envy. The works of Nguyễn Huy Thiệp and Steinbeck concern the position of marginalized classes and communities often disadvantaged and oppressed. This study will analyze the process of cultural dialogue between minority and mainstream communities, re-examining the values that are surrendered to the dominant. Simultaneously, this study intends to explore the “remythification” of Eastern and Western modern literature and the emergence of minority discourse at a time of cultural conflict and globalization. The archetypal method will be used to examine the heroes in the two works.

For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the term “minority” connotes “a certain position, a speaking position for the purpose of creating literature” (2015: 12). “Minority” literature, for this article, are those outside or along the periphery of mainstream literature. At the border, minority literature continuously transforms, rejects all standards to maintain power, and even blurs taxonomic categories. They liberate language and look for things outside language (Deleuze and Guattari 2015). By dreaming the alienated dream, that

is “knowing to create a minority” (Deleuze and Guattari 2015: 95), and putting themselves in the position of minority, and observing from this perspective, authors writing about disadvantaged communities have developed a conversation between this marginalized group and the dominant. Meanwhile, the term “other” refers to colonists who are marginalized by colonial discourse. This concept elucidates the constraints that provide colonized with a sense of identity dependence. “In post-colonial theory, it can refer to the colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ‘ego’” (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 154-156).

This article compares archetypal heroes in the two literary works to contribute to the dialogue between minority and official communities. Additionally, this study also examines the identity of minority communities through Native American discourse in Steinbeck and ethnic minority discourse in Nguyễn Huy Thiệp.

## **II. Cultural Identity and Mythical Thinking**

The twentieth century was regarded as a century of violent changes in both the West and the East. Economic crises widened the divide between rich and poor, and cruel wars broke cultures and shattered values. From an artistic standpoint, this tumultuous era compelled new modes of artistic expression. Among them is “mythization,” which according to E.M. Melentinsky began in the 1910s in the Europe (2004: 24), 1950s and 1960s in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (2004: 500). This “renaissance” of myth in literature not only returned to folklore, but also strived to create new myths that capture the multifaceted realities of modern life, as well as the deep conflicts in the spiritual life of man (Melentinsky 2004).

As a central phenomenon in the history of human culture, myth contributes to identifying a culture and shapes thinking of individuals and the community. The vitality of myth is such that “even when a culture no longer believes that its myths are true explanations, these stories often survive as receptacles of important

cultural values" (Murfin and Ray 2003: 284). The lasting influence of myths in cultural history is reflected in existing cultural values and mythical thinking. Being considered the foundation of human thought, the way of mythical thinking is permanently present in human consciousness, political systems, and artistic creation. In the technocratic era, the return to myth has taken place strongly in the field of literature and proved effective in portraying the spiritual face of the times and "showing awareness of some new existential problems" (Đặng 2020).

Notably, although recreating myth to explain life, penetrating the complex spiritual world of people, and connecting literature with history, philosophy, and religion in the modern context, this process of transformation and creation has never been separated from cultural identity. Discussing cultural identity, Arnold Grod in *Theories of Culture* focusses on specific groups and the different interactions between cultures and individuals. According to him, "identity is generally understood as an emergence of a set of characteristics by which an individual is recognised as such. Cultural identity is based on characteristics by which the individual is recognised as a member of a culture" (2019: 180). Within cultures, the system of myth and archetype that individuals in a culture share is closely related to cultural identity. Mysterious stories throughout history often contain the eternal cultural values of a community, and the sharing of such myths by individuals has contributed to the strengthening of cultural identity. This article explores the rebirth of the archetypal hero in Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's "The Tiger's Heart" and John Steinbeck's *Pearl*, as it also studies cultural identity and the cultural roots in the mythical thinking of the two writers. It unravels national cultural characteristics, unique community consciousness, and socio-historical contexts formative to minority discourses.

The post-war and renovation period after 1975 is considered a turning point in the Vietnam's transformation. After two fierce and bloody modern wars, Vietnamese Literature intensively evolved, embodying a tensions between the old and new, backward and progressive, the ideal and broken reality. The postwar period, particularly the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) and the accompanying economic reforms and social upheaval, reshaped Vietnamese

traditional cultural identity. This complex and vibrant social context promoted democratization, awakened individuals, and modernized literary sensibility. It was in this context that Nguyễn Huy Thiệp emerged as an honest and humane writer, a breath of fresh air in the literary landscape.

Nguyễn Huy Thiệp is considered phenomenal for his unique writing style. A master of the short story, he wrote with a distinct mythical sensibility. "Nearly all of his stories present components of myth, legend, folk song, and proverb," as evidenced by the fact that "almost all of his stories present materials of story, legend, folk song, and proverb" (Philimonova 2001: 59). These are consciously embedded, making "the folk living in his works...an independent and vast subject" (Philimonova 2001: 60). "I usually find traditional values," Nguyễn Huy Thiệp said. "I believe that a writer must begin with his country's most primitive experiences. In some way, we need to start with the Vietnamese people's national origins" (Nguyễn 2001: 383). Not only are folklore and cultural identity a significant source, but the end or purpose of Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's artistic journey. Amidst the complicated and multifaceted postwar context, folklore animates his mythical thinking especially in a country with dualistic cultural values and hidden conflicts.

Similarly, Steinbeck's work is shaped by a period of great change in the United States, including a time of prosperity and recession (1929-1933) and two world wars (1914-1918, 1939- 1945) (Hamby 2005). Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas, California, an area known for its fertile land, rugged mountains, and vast fields that are frequently shrouded in fog. It was a land inhabited by Indians for millennia before the conquest of the West. Unlike other contemporary American, Steinbeck is inextricably associated with the American West, specifically the poverty and marginalization of many of its citizens. The rural and folklife experiences of Steinbeck's miserable youth inspired him to write masterpieces about the problems of disadvantaged individuals and minorities severely affected by the Great Depression and postwar instability. As with Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, Steinbeck spent his youth as a correspondent during World War II. The battlefield experience led him to express concern for the unlucky and rage against war. However, Steinbeck's

successful mythological works, like those of Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, do not focus on issues of war, but rather on the narratives of the disadvantaged. Steinbeck lived long to see further social disintegration in the 1960s, the rise of dictatorships, the intensification of economic injustice, and the beginnings of environmental crisis.

American culture's desire to build the nation in the context of diversity has also become a deep source of conflict. And while Steinbeck was truly interested in the American spirit that vivified rapid industrialization and the country's rise as a superpower, he ended up exploring its internal conflicts as may be seen in the contending cultures, particularly that of the minorities and indigenous. This he did this in *The Pearl*, a work which successfully deploys mythologization.

Steinbeck's *The Pearl* is avowedly inspired by a Mexican folk narrative detailed in *The Log from the Sea Cortez* (1995) about a great pearl that brought its finder both wisdom and disaster during a 1940 journey to the Gulf of California. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's *The Winds of Hua Tát* portrays the lives of people in a world shaped by indigenous myth, folktales, and legends. All were inspired by his years of isolation in the vast Northwest mountains.

On the one hand, we have Steinbeck, stating in the beginning of *The Pearl*: "If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone derives his or her own meaning from it and reads his or her own life into it" (1948: [preface]). On the other hand, we have Nguyễn Huy Thiệp saying: "Those traditional stories may reflect much human sorrow, but it is through an understanding of those experiences that our soul develops moral wisdom, dignity, and humanity" (2021: 12-13). While Steinbeck transforms a brief folk narrative into a complicated novella, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp favors a concise narrative with diverse metaphors. Juxtaposed, their archetypal heroes are show similarities and distinctions.

### III. Archetypal Heroes in "The Tiger's Heart" and *The Pearl*

The hero is one of humanity's earliest and most enduring of

archetypes. This is constantly reconstructed over time, depending on cultures and eras, though always in line with basic motifs (Nguyễn 2017). These stories frequently extol the hero's exploits, courageous virtues, and self-sacrifices for the benefit of the community. Thus, the hero serves as a living embodiment of the community's conception of moral standards and aesthetics. Accordingly, literary works reflect social phenomena and the voices of individuals and groups through this archetype (Nguyễn 2021).

The strange attractiveness of the hero in mythology worldwide drove Joseph Campbell, an American mythologist, to explore and formulate a standard model of this archetype. Campbell (2004) separates the seventeen stages of the hero's journey into three primary rites in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: departure, initiation, and return. Additionally, Campbell emphasizes that not all hero myths follow the seventeen stages; some focus on a single stage, while others organize the stages according to respective internal logics. Following Campbell's work, David Adams Leeming (1981) divides the hero's journey into eight stages but retained the three primary rites in *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*. This article will utilize the aforementioned frameworks to compare the heroes in the "The Tiger's Heart" and *The Pearl*.

*The Pearl* narrates the story of Kino, an Indian fisherman who lives in La Paz, Mexico, with his wife, Juana, and their small child, Coyotito. Kino is young and strong with a "brown forehead," "his eyes were warm and fierce and bright" (Steinbeck 1948: 4). However, he always "felt weak and afraid and angry" (Steinbeck 1948: 10) when faced with Spanish doctor, who represents the race that conquered his forbears. In the "The Tiger's Heart," two Black Thais, Pùa and Khó, live in Hua Tát, a small town in Northwest Vietnam. Pùa is a beautiful girl with "skin as white as a peeled egg, silky and long hair, and lips as red lipstick" yet she is "paralyzed in both legs, lying in one place for a long time" (Nguyễn 2021: 13). Khó is an orphaned parent isolated from everyone due to his poverty and ugliness.

Both Kino and Kho are illiterate minority who seek peace for those they love. Kino is the family's breadwinner and a strong

defender of Juana and Coyotito. His nobility is illustrated by his tenacious opposition to the doctor's servants, who refused to treat his child. While defending the pearl and his family from pursuers, Kino decides to throw the pearl to the ocean to be free. On the other hand, Khó's heroic traits are highlighted by an endless pursuit of evil tigers and his incredible achievement of killing tigers for the treatment for Púa by a tiger's heart.

<Table 1> Rites and Stages in the Heroes' Life Cycle

Act	Stage	Khó	Kino
<b>Departure</b>	The Call to Adventure	Púa is a beautiful girl but has both legs paralyzed	Coyotito is stung by a scorpion and close to death
	Refusal of the Call		
	Supernatural Aid		
	The Crossing of the First Threshold		Kino and his wife took their son to the doctor's house, and the doctor refused them because Kino is poor; Kino finds a great pearl
	Belly of the Whale		
<b>Initiation</b>	The Road of Trials	The Killing tigers and treatment for Púa by a tiger's heart	Kino goes to town to sell the pearl, and the pearl buyers collude to cheat Kino; greedy people try to steal the pearl; Kino kills his attacker. Kino flees with his wife and son to the capital to sell the pearl; Kino kills three hunters
	The Meeting with the Goddess		
	Woman as the Temptress		
	Atonement with the Father		
	The Ultimate Boon		



Act	Stage	Khó	Kino
<b>Return</b>	Refusal of the Return	The villagers see Khó and the dead tiger carcass. The strangest part is that someone stole the tiger's heart, and Khó and Pùà die shortly afterwards	Kino and his wife return to the town and throw the pearl into the deep sea
	The Magic Flight		
	Rescue from Without		
	The Crossing of the Return Threshold		
	Master of the Two Worlds		
	Freedom to Live		

Both heroes share the basic stages—the call to adventure, quest and challenge, return. Both embody typical motifs in their extraordinary missions—Khó kills the tiger to get its heart necessary, the cure for Pùà, and Kino murders four hunters to protect his family. However, both also deconstructs and re-establishes the archetype to reflect the spirit of their times. Both characters resemble the archetype in early stage: Khó is an orphan, and Kino has almost no recollection of his youth; yet, ancient memories and folk wisdom permeate their consciousness. Both Khó and Kino are lone heroes facing the dark shadow of civilization. Khó kills the tiger, a wild animal revered in Asian culture as the "lord of the mountain." Kino leads his little family in evading an attempt by hunters to rob the pearl; he kills them to protect his family. Neither of the protagonists are given any supernatural or heavenly aid in their quest. They both risk life and limb with only a deep spiritual belief in the future.

What sets them apart is the way they ended, which may be located in the archetypal stage of imperfect return and the absence of canonization. "The Tiger's Heart" concludes with an unexpected episode that contrasts from normal folk narrative motifs: someone steals the tiger's heart; Khó loses the opportunity to marry Pùà; and his death leaves haunts the conscience of people around him. In *The Pearl*, Kino loses everything when throws the pearl back into the sea, but he experiences illumination. He grows stronger and wise, understanding the essence of evil. Finally, he gives up ambition to achieve true freedom.

Khó and Kino share a similar social class origin, both being disadvantaged ethnic minorities. Khó lives in Hua Tát, a small, isolated village where everyone "lives a simple life" and engages heavily on agriculture and hunting (Nguyễn 2021: 11). He is also disfigured in the manner of Quasimodo, with "his face pockmarked by smallpox; his hands reach his knees, his legs are thin, and he moves as if he were running all the time" (Nguyễn 2021: 15). This further isolates Khó, who never attends village meetings or festivals. Meanwhile, Kino is a poor fisherman who lives in a small cottage by the seaside of La Paz town with his wife and children. His only possession is an old boat he inherited from his grandfather, the family's only source of income. Kino's Indian heritage always reminds him of the ruthlessness of the wealthy and white races, which consider the as "lowly creatures...as though they were simple animals" (Steinbeck 1948: 19). This makes Kino constantly feel helpless, fearful, and defeated.

The status, background, and initial circumstances of the hero all have an impact on the character's fate, as well as their motivation to embark on the journey. From the familiar and ordinary world, the hero embarks on a journey to a strange world. The dynamics of this spatial change are generalized by Campbell in the goals of important journeys and tasks such as searching for identity, love, the promised land, knowledge, revenge, or rescuing the community. The heroes in works under consideration serve the same purpose: Khó is tasked to kill the tiger and Kino attempts to sell the pearl because of his desire for a better life. Khó wants to marry Pùà, but only on the condition he retrieves a tiger's heart for the girl's healing. If Kino succeeds in selling the pearl, he will be able to send Coyotito to school.

With Kino, suffering and happiness go hand in hand. When the scorpion stings his son, he is fortunate enough to find the rare pearl. This becomes a reason for everyone to try outsmarting Kino. When his son suddenly dies, he begins to understand the true nature and face of evil and forges a spiritual bond with his minority community. With Khó, existence seems to be intertwined with his awful name (Khó means "hard"). Khó suffers greatly in life, having lived an unhappy childhood, and only to be defeated by thieves in

his moment of glory. Along with ambition, each embody their community's context-dependent aesthetic and moral standards.

Carroll Britch and Cliff Lewis highlight the Indian dilemma and conflict in the face of Western culture in "Shadow of the Indian in John Steinbeck's Fiction" (1984). In essence, Steinbeck's main concern is the Indians' impasse, and he aims to go deep into their choices and prognosis. With the Indian hero, the shame of his race's being second class and historically persecuted by colonizers motivate him to bow down to oppressors. When luck strikes with the discovery of the pearl, Kino plans to change his life, marry his wife in church, buy new clothes and a rifle, and send his son to school. His ambition transforms from outward prosperity to inner spiritual liberation. These dreams also depict his people's economic, political, and cultural marginalization and reveal opposition against white domination. Unlike Kino, Khó's quest to hunt, kill, and obtain the tiger's heart is not for fortune, but to obtain a vital cure for Pù'a's condition. It also becomes his way of transcending his community's prejudice against his kind. Additionally, the hero's status in the return rite varies significantly between the two characters. Despite his many losses and being out of touch with reality, Kino experiences epiphany as he realizes the downside of ambitions. Khó's story begins and ends in solitude, but his sorrow serves as a spark for the entire Hua Tát to come alive.

Both stories conclude with the heroes' return, both imbued with the mark or intervention of the divine. Towards the end, Kino's neighbors consider him as "(having been) removed from human experience," "(having) gone through pain and (having) come out on the other side," and "(having been given an) almost magical protection" (Steinbeck 1948: 123). Meanwhile, as one reads the story of "Nàng Sinh," another one of the ten short stories that compose *The Winds of Hua Tát*, one is told that villagers have constructed a temple in honor of Khó in remembrance of his heroic mission in the past year. This detail also illustrates the diverse perspectives on canonization held by each community. Despite their differences in time and context, "The Tiger's Heart" and *The Pearl* share the same motif of searching for sacred objects to save lives. "The Tiger's Heart" seeks to awaken the community about minority discourses,

whereas *The Pearl* aims to enliven consciousness to moral values.

#### IV. A Liberating Discourse of Minority Communities

Examining the heroes in *The Pearl* and “The Tiger’s Heart” reveals archetypal similarities and differences that offer liberating discourses for minority groups. Through the heroes’ lives and fates, these works addressed impositions of the center to the periphery. Overall, both *The Pearl* and “The Tiger’s Heart” subvert the rule of the dominant, which has also been internalized by minority communities. Nguyễn Huy Thiệp is a writer influenced by folk culture, yet he consistently exhibits a very discerning creative process. This is evident in the way he plots his stories, which do not necessarily follow the logic of folk narratives.

The law of karma prevalent in Vietnamese folk narratives dictates that “The Tiger’s Heart” should afford Pù and Khó a happy ending. However, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp’s uncompromising realism constructs a sad and unexpected ending: the tiger’s heart is robbed and the hero’s achievements undermined. The lonely young hero does not escape the tragedy that has been following him from childhood. The absurd, comic ending sharply contrasts with the happy endings in folk narratives. However, it is this tragic ending that typifies the essence of existence in a way understood by an author “having a strong dislike for the usual conclusion” (Nguyễn 2021: 276).

This theme of self-reflection theme is also present in *The Pearl*. When discussing the pearl-making process, the narrator explains that in the past, pearl divers believed that these “were accidents, and the finding of one was luck, a little pat on the back by God or the gods or both” (Steinbeck 1948: 27). As a result, when Kino’s neighbors see him holding a pearl, they wonder “how such fortune could come to any man” (Steinbeck 1948: 36). However, as the narrative develops, it becomes obvious that the pearl does not only bring good fortune to its discoverer but also stir “something infinitely dark and evil in the town” (Steinbeck 1948: 35).

The characters in both works represent the response of minority groups to the repressions of the center. Kino's ambitions in *The Pearl*, consisting of prosperity and independence, are all part of the proverbial American dream, which offer the ideal of equal opportunity for all. "It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers... erected in older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class" (Adams 1932: 405). However, the forces of evil that conspire to keep Kino from achieving his life-changing ambition expose the American dream's darkness. The American dream is the exclusive property of its architects. It is not for indigenous peoples and is only meant to deceive illiterate natives like Kino.

Meanwhile, Khó does not have a happy family, and is fated for more tragedy. Despite this cold portrayal, the story still roots itself to Vietnamese culture which values family and community, and making sacrifices for the greater good. Nguyễn Huy Thiệp demonstrates that people's limiting beliefs and prejudices shape harshness of life and serve as hurdles that cause individuals to stumble miserably on their path to personal happiness. On the other hand, treasures like pearls or tiger's hearts are magnificent in their ability to alter one's life, destiny, putting back the trust and confidence to man. On the other hand, both stories also portray modern man's delusory aspirations for justice, happiness, and love. Reality is terribly harsh. These delusions ultimately bring about the destruction of the characters. Khó and Pùa do not end up together, while Kino sees images of death as he throws away *the pearl*, as if cutting himself off from ghostly illusions. He even sees his son in a very sorry state, "lying in the little cave with the top of his headshot away" (Steinbeck 1948: 97).

Vietnamese culture, being part of the Eastern tradition, frequently emphasizes the importance of community and the position of the individual in relation to the community. Khó is misunderstood and ostracized, growing up alone like "a stray animal on an unknown path" (Nguyễn 2021: 14-15). Khó's reclusiveness shows his isolation from the community. To a certain extent, it

threatens the integrity of the community. Towards the end, even his success in slaying the tiger is forgotten upon his death; "people have forgotten it as many bitter things happen in this life" (Nguyễn 2021: 15). To emphasize the hero's isolation, the narrator hardly details Khó's journey to hunt the tiger and is only intimidated. His life, achievements, and death are coldly portrayed in the narrative.

Meanwhile, Kino learns to value the interconnection between individuals and communities within a cultural tradition. In the beginning of the story, the poor fishing village community banded together after hearing about what happened to Kino's boy: "The screams of the baby brought the neighbors" (Steinbeck 1948: 14). They follow Kino's family to the old doctor's house since the incident "(became) a neighborhood affair" (Steinbeck 1948: 16). They then silently disperse when the doctor starts dressing down Kino for his poverty and refuses to treat Coyotito. When Kino discovers the priceless pearl, his neighbors gather in his thatch cottage to "share their joy" and hear about Kino's plans for the future. Unfortunately, Kino's materialistic ambitions bring him isolation, and he "(feels) alone and unprotected" (Steinbeck 1948: 43). As his connection with the community breaks down, he faces a string of deceptions that awakens him. The doctor surprisingly changes his mind to treat Coyotito, but only to find out where he got *the pearl*. Some strangers attempt to steal *the pearl*, but fail. Meanwhile, the town's pearl dealers conspire to convince Kino to sell *the pearl* at a very low price. Unable to accept his being duped by the entire town, he flees to sell *the pearl* elsewhere. He is convinced that has "defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life" (Steinbeck 1948: 77). Kino thinks that his success will uplift his community; his failure will mean continued oppression. Coyotito's being shot and killed in the encounter as they flee signals not only tragedy but failure. However, when the couple return to their homeland, and consequently return *the pearl* to the ocean, they reconnect to the community. Kino is transformed by his understanding of his position in that unjust society.

Folk narratives synthesize cultural beliefs, psychology, and collective experience. It affirms community traditions and values. These are usually transcended by works from modernity to represent

contemporary concerns. “The Tiger’s Heart” talks about loneliness and isolation in a minority community rife with selfishness. It is no longer a community that encourages heroes to accomplish their destinies. Meanwhile, *The Pearl* portrays a character whose desire for freedom pushes him break the shackles of oppression by reconnecting with his true self.

Minority community discourse centers on responding to and resisting the dominance of the center. In the case of Steinbeck and Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, we see a return to the ideals of indigenous peoples believed to have been saved from the contamination of "civilization." Despite being part of the center, they interrogated dominant discourses as impositions on minority communities. Khó of “The Tiger’s Heart” raises awareness about people from the highlands, a place Nguyễn Huy Thiệp immersed in for ten silent years. It is certain that he has found warmth and optimism in people like Khó, who dwell in idyllic, quiet villages, and almost mystical villages like Hua Tát. For Mai Anh Tuấn, "Nguyễn Huy Thiệp has continuously compelled readers to rethink mountains and ethnic groups" (2018) More precisely, he argues for a reversal of roles: ethnic minorities may be instrumental in restoring the lost values and soul of people from the plains. This may be the only way to keep progress and civilization. Prejudices of all forms have to be made obsolete.

## V. Conclusion

Juxtaposing “The Tiger’s Heart” and *The Pearl* offers an interesting dialogue that transcends geographical, historical, or cultural contexts. Seen archetypally, the heroes are seen to embody folk consciousness amidst the hustle and bustle of contemporary culture. Nguyễn Huy Thiệp and John Steinbeck took the side of the downtrodden, honoring their exceptional dignity and goodness. Steinbeck’s hero aspired to challenge and evade the impositions of powerful white community. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp’s hero aspired to achieve the purest of human ideals amidst the flawed nature of his community. Both works espouse a productive minority

discourse that advocates for the protection and preservation cultural identity among ethnic groups. “If natives or others were always seen as secondary figures, imperfect replicas of the colonizer, wearers of borrowed cultural rags; if native society was invariably represented as disorderly or ethically degenerate; it was important that they remake themselves from scratch. It was essential that they reconstitute their identity on their own terms, that they Indianize, Africanize, or Caribbeanize themselves. They effectively needed to give birth to a new identity, to speak in a language that was chosen, not imposed” (Boehmer 2006: 344-345).

### Acknowledgement

This research was funded by Ministry of Education and Training under grant number B2022-ĐHH-03. The author(s) also acknowledge the partial support of Hue University under the Core Research Program, Grant No. NCM.DHH.2022.10.

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Received: Oct. 21, 2021; Reviewed: Nov. 22, 2021; Accepted: Jan. 15, 2022