

The Static and Dynamic Geographical Distribution and the Spatial Construction of Hanoi in Selected Novels by Contemporary Vietnamese Writers Abroad: A Literary Geography Approach

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a qualitative analysis grounded in literary geography of the construction of Hanoi in the novels of five contemporary Vietnamese writers abroad: Lê Ngọc Mai, Lê Minh Hà, Thuận, Hiệu Constant, and Phan Việt. Building on Zeng Daxing's model of static and dynamic geographical distribution in *An Introduction to Literary Geography*, the study examines how authorial geography—comprising formative rootedness and migratory trajectories—shapes the literary production of urban space. Methodologically, the article combines geo-biographical mapping, close reading, and comparative thematic analysis to investigate the interaction between lived geographical experience and textual form. The findings demonstrate that static distribution establishes Hanoi as a formative space of origin, where childhood experience and cultural sedimentation constitute a foundational layer of literary identity. Dynamic distribution, by contrast, reconfigures Hanoi through migration, displacement, and transnational comparison, transforming it into a mobile and relational spatial construct. Building on these two dimensions, the study proposes the notion of a geographical filter as a mediating mechanism through which lived geography is translated into narrative form, producing Hanoi as a layered and continuously reconstituted literary space. The article argues that Hanoi in these texts is neither a stable homeland nor a purely diasporic abstraction, but a relational geography generated through the interaction of memory, mobility, and narrative mediation. By adapting Zeng's framework to Vietnamese diasporic writing, the study contributes to literary geography by demonstrating how biography, migration, and spatial imagination converge in the literary construction of urban space.

KEYWORDS: Hanoi; literary geography; Vietnamese writers abroad; Zeng Daxing; static and dynamic geographical distribution; geographical filter; spatial imagination

1. INTRODUCTION

Alongside the decline of historicism as the sole organizing paradigm and the rise of the spatial turn in the late twentieth-century humanities and social sciences, literary geography has emerged as a significant analytical approach concerned with the relationship between literary texts, geographical space, and the subject of writing. This development reflects a broader theoretical shift that repositions geography as both an aesthetic and epistemological category, especially in postmodern and global contexts where movement, displacement, and transnational circulation reshape the ways in which place is imagined and narrated [1–3].

Hanoi occupies a distinctive position in contemporary Vietnamese literature written abroad. For writers who were born, educated, or culturally formed in Hanoi and later lived in France, Germany, Russia/the former Soviet Union, or the United States, the city returns not merely as a setting but as a dense structure of memory, affect, and cultural identity. In this corpus, Hanoi appears as a childhood alley, a postwar street, a socialist capital, a place of return, a lost sensorium, and a point of comparison with Paris, Berlin, Moscow/Leningrad, and American academic spaces. The city is therefore not simply represented; it is repeatedly reassembled from afar through mobile consciousness.

This article examines five contemporary Vietnamese writers abroad: Lê Ngọc Mai, Lê Minh Hà, Thuận, Hiệu Constant, and Phan Việt. Although their migration histories, narrative voices, and linguistic positions differ, their literary production shares an important relation to Hanoi or the greater Hanoi region as a place of birth, upbringing, education, early work, or formative cultural experience. To ensure generic coherence, the primary literary corpus is limited to novels and novelistic fiction; interviews, author

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profiles, and publisher paratexts are used only as supporting evidence for reconstructing geographical distribution and authorial self-positioning.

The article addresses three research questions: (1) How does the static geographical distribution of the selected writers construct Hanoi as a formative root-space in relation to memory and literary identity? (2) How do dynamic geographical trajectories of migration reshape the perception and representation of Hanoi in their novels? (3) How does the geographical filter operate as a mediating mechanism in the literary construction of Hanoi? The central argument is that Hanoi in this corpus is constructed through the interaction of formative rootedness and transnational mobility. It is neither a fixed origin nor a purely imaginary city, but a relational space produced through memory, loss, comparison, return, and narrative mediation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Writers and Geographical Imagination in Literary Geography

From the perspective of literary geography, a writer's biography is not merely a sequence of personal facts but a spatially embedded trajectory shaped by interactions with specific geographical environments. This approach reconsiders the role of place in literary production, emphasizing how natural and cultural geographies inform a writer's aesthetic orientation, creative psychology, and narrative construction. While earlier literary scholarship often treated geography as contextual background, literary geography asks how space actively enters literary imagination, narrative structure, and symbolic meaning [1,2].

Building on the premise that geographical environment plays a formative role in shaping the creative subject, literary geography has increasingly focused on the geographical distribution of writers as a key analytical approach. By examining sites of birth, upbringing, education, residence, migration, return, and literary activity, such studies reconstruct the spatial formation of authorship and clarify how literary works are shaped by both home-place and guest-place cultures. This is particularly relevant for overseas Vietnamese writing because migration turns place into a comparative and often unstable category rather than a self-evident homeland.

In the present article, Hanoi is approached not as an empirical city reproduced in fiction, but as a literary construction shaped by authorial geography, memory, distance, and narrative form. The analytical focus is therefore not only the textual appearance of Hanoi but the relationship between the writing subject and the geographical experiences through which Hanoi becomes narratable.

2.2. Zeng Daxing's Model of Static and Dynamic Distribution

Zeng Daxing's *An Introduction to Literary Geography*, published by the Commercial Press in Beijing in 2017, is important for this article because it offers a research design for correlating authorial life-space and textual space rather than merely noting biographical facts [1]. Zeng distinguishes between a writer's static geographical distribution and dynamic geographical distribution. Static distribution refers to relatively stable locations of birth, growth, education, and early cultural formation. Dynamic distribution records subsequent movements such as study, travel, migration, exile, residence abroad, return, and shorter episodes of circulation.

The distinction is especially useful for the study of Vietnamese writers abroad. Static distribution registers the influence of home-place culture, while dynamic distribution registers the influence of guest-place cultures. In Zeng's emphasis, the place of growth may be more decisive than birthplace alone because youthful memory shapes values, worldview, language, and early spatial imagination. For writers whose creative lives unfold across several countries, this distinction makes it possible to explain why the same city can function simultaneously as origin, loss, comparison, and method.

Zeng's model should not be applied deterministically. A writer's geographical trajectory does not mechanically produce a literary image of place. Rather, static and dynamic distribution provide a framework for interpreting how biographical space is transformed into textual space through memory, selection, narrative technique, and aesthetic reconfiguration. This article therefore uses Zeng's concepts as interpretive categories that guide close reading and comparative analysis [1,2].

2.3. Geographical Filter and the Construction of Literary Space

Building on Zeng's framework, this article introduces the notion of the geographical filter as a mediating mechanism in the construction of literary space. The geographical filter refers to the processes through which geographical contexts and experiences are selectively internalized, transformed, and expressed in literary creation. While static distribution shapes the spatial grounding of identity and memory, and dynamic distribution introduces new comparative perspectives, the geographical filter explains how these two dimensions are translated into literary form.

The concept is particularly productive for analyzing overseas Vietnamese writing because migration produces a condition in which the homeland is neither simply present nor simply absent. Hanoi is remembered through distance, compared with foreign

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urban environments, and re-encountered through return. This process resembles what memory studies describe as reflective rather than restorative nostalgia: the texts do not attempt to rebuild a lost home as intact and complete, but dwell on distance, incompleteness, and temporal doubleness [3].

Existing Vietnamese criticism has provided valuable individual readings of Thuận, Lê Minh Hà, Phan Việt, and other writers, especially with regard to migration, Hanoi landscapes, and transnational memory [20,24,25,26]. However, the consulted literature has not yet offered a comparative study of these five authors through a unified literary-geographical model explicitly based on static/dynamic distribution and the mediating role of the geographical filter. This gap justifies the present article.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Analytical Procedure

This article adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design. It combines geo-biographical mapping, close reading, and comparative thematic analysis. The aim is not to quantify the frequency of Hanoi-related references but to explain how Hanoi is produced as a literary space through the interaction between authorial geography, textual representation, and the mediating role of the geographical filter.

The analysis proceeded in three connected stages. First, the study mapped each writer's static geographical distribution, including birthplace or place of growth, educational formation, and early professional setting. Second, it reconstructed dynamic distribution, including study abroad, migration, long-term residence, secondary relocation, and return. Third, it conducted close readings of selected novels to examine the operation of the geographical filter as a mediating mechanism between lived geographical experience and literary articulation. This procedure makes it possible to account for both the rootedness of memory and the transformations introduced by mobility, thereby showing how Hanoi emerges as a layered, relational, and evolving literary space.

The textual analysis identified markers of Hanoi such as toponyms, streets, schools, lakes, food, smells, weather, routes, domestic rituals, and comparative city-pairs. These markers were then grouped into four analytical themes: formative Hanoi, remembered urban texture, diasporic estrangement and return, and transnational comparison. Author interviews, publisher materials, and biographical sources were treated as important data for literary-geographical reconstruction, but they were not used as substitutes for textual analysis of the novels.

3.2. Corpus and Selection Criteria

The corpus consists of selected novels and novelistic fiction associated with Lê Ngọc Mai, Lê Minh Hà, Thuận, Hiệu Constant, and Phan Việt. The authors were selected because each has a meaningful relation to Hanoi or greater Hanoi as a place of birth, growth, education, early work, or cultural formation; each has experienced significant dynamic distribution outside Vietnam; and each has produced literary representations of Hanoi, return, displacement, or transnational comparison. Taken together, the five authors form a compact literary-geographical constellation: statically, Hanoi and greater Hanoi dominate; dynamically, the corpus fans outward to Russia/the former Soviet Union, France, Germany, and the United States.

Table 1. Corpus, geographical distribution, and selected novel corpus

Author	Static distribution	Dynamic distribution	Selected novel corpus and evidence
Lê Ngọc Mai	Born in Hanoi (1962); trained in literature at Hanoi General University.	Completed doctoral study in Moscow by 1990; worked at Hanoi General University until 1993; later moved to France.	Tìm trong nỗi nhớ (2003); Trên đỉnh dốc (2006).
Lê Minh Hà	Born and raised in Hanoi (1962); early teaching career connected with Đan Phượng and Hanoi-Amsterdam High School.	Living and writing in Berlin since 1994.	Trăng góa (1998) used only as supporting fiction context where relevant; Gió tự thời khuất mặt (2005; reissued 2024); Phố vẫn gió (2014; reissued 2024); Những ta (2024).

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Thuận	Born in Hanoi (1967); formative years split between Hanoi and a period in Sài Gòn.	Studied at Pyatigorsk in Russia; pursued graduate study at Paris 7 and the Sorbonne; long-term settlement in France.	Made in Vietnam (2002); Chinatown (2005; reissued 2022); Paris 11 tháng 8 (2006); T mất tích (2007); Vân Vy (2008); Thang máy Sài Gòn (2013); Thư gửi Mina (2019).
Hiệu Constant	Born in 1971 in Thường Tín, former Hà Tây; formative connection to Hanoi through study commute and university life.	Studied French at Hanoi General University; moved to Paris in 1998; later studied comparative literature at Paris-Sorbonne IV.	Côn trùng (2008); Đường vắng (2011); Đời du học (2014); Tình viễn xứ (2023).
Phan Việt	Birthplace not specified in the consulted sources; intensive formative education in Hanoi at Foreign Trade University.	Left Vietnam in 2000 for Omaha; moved to Chicago for graduate study; later held academic appointments in the United States.	Tiếng người (2008), with Phù phiếm truyện (2005) used only as supporting fiction context where relevant.

3.3. Geo-biographical Timeline

The timeline below synthesizes the main static bases and dynamic trajectories documented in the biographical and bibliographical sources. It is retained in textual-table form to avoid the layout problems that often occur when small timeline graphics are submitted to journal platforms.

Table 2. Indicative timeline of static and dynamic geographical distribution

Year/period	Event	Interpretive relevance
1962–1971	Lê Ngọc Mai, Lê Minh Hà, Thuận, and Hiệu Constant are born in Hanoi or greater Hanoi; Phan Việt's later education connects her literary formation to Hanoi.	Static distribution clusters around Hanoi and the wider Hanoi region.
1980s–1990s	Lê Ngọc Mai and Thuận follow Soviet/Russian educational routes; Lê Minh Hà works in Hanoi before settling in Berlin.	Dynamic distribution mediates the passage from Hanoi to socialist and post-socialist transnational spaces.
1994–1998	Lê Minh Hà settles in Berlin; Hiệu Constant settles in Paris.	Germany and France become long-duration guest-place cultures.
2000 onward	Phan Việt leaves Vietnam for the United States and later works in American academia.	The United States produces an analytic and self-reflexive return-gaze.
2002–2024	Key novels by the five writers appear, are reissued, translated, or discussed in criticism.	Hanoi becomes a mobile literary space across Vietnam, Europe, Russia, and the United States.

4. Findings

4.1. Static Distribution: Hanoi as Formative Geographical Ground

Read through Zeng's static/dynamic lens, Hanoi in this corpus begins from place of growth rather than from a generic national homeland. Static distribution is not simply a biographical fact. It provides the first spatial grammar through which the writer learns to perceive streets, institutions, domestic spaces, political routines, and social relations. For these writers, Hanoi functions as a formative root-space because it supplies both sensory memory and interpretive categories for later encounters with foreign cities.

Lê Ngọc Mai's *Tìm trong nỗi nhớ* is exemplary. The remembered city is assembled from embodied sites such as an alley, a tree, a school street, the road to Nội Bài, and Hồ Tây. The novel's speaker calls one alley "thế giới riêng biệt của tuổi thơ tôi" ("the

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private world of my childhood,” translation mine), and later identifies Lý Thường Kiệt as the street carrying the densest sediment of adolescence [4, p.256-257]. This is static Hanoi in Zeng’s sense: not abstract origin, but the fine-grained urban ecology of growth.

Lê Minh Hà builds a similarly formative Hanoi with stronger social-historical emphasis. In her fiction, Hanoi is not reduced to the symbolic capital of the nation; it is a lived space of houses, schools, alleys, old villas, collective housing, weather, smells, and speech. Her reflection that Hanoi becomes easier to write because it is a lived setting underscores the immediacy of spatial experience in literary creation [15]. In this sense, the city supplies a reservoir of language, affect, and urban habitus that continues to structure writing after migration.

Thuận’s reflections on her formative years in Hanoi demonstrate how historical and political experience becomes sedimented in literary consciousness. Her childhood knowledge of war, household registration, ration stamps, censorship, and the everyday vocabulary of socialism constitutes not merely a lexical repertoire but a historically grounded personal archive that informs her reconstruction of the subsidy-era city [16,17]. Hanoi is therefore not simply remembered; it is reactivated as a site of critical reflection and narrative reworking.

The same logic applies, with different intensities, to Hiệu Constant and Phan Việt. Hiệu Constant’s formative link to greater Hanoi and university life in Hanoi produces a spatial imagination shaped by commuting, peri-urban aspiration, and the movement from provincial edges toward metropolitan education. Phan Việt’s intensive education in Hanoi at Foreign Trade University makes the city an intellectual and emotional coordinate even when her later writing is refracted through the United States [22,27]. Static distribution thus stabilizes literary identity across shifting spatial contexts while allowing each author’s Hanoi to differ in texture, class positioning, and narrative function.

4.2. Dynamic Distribution: Migration and Spatial Reconfiguration

Dynamic distribution changes the city’s literary status. France, Germany, Russia/the former Soviet Union, and the United States are not only places where the writers live, study, or work; they become interpretive positions from which Hanoi is reimagined. The selected authors belong to a generation of post-1975 intellectual migrants whose trajectories extend across Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America. Their movements are often non-linear, involving secondary migration and multiple relocations rather than a simple origin–destination pattern.

For writers based in Vietnam, geographical movement may not always produce a decisive rupture in the cultural-linguistic environment; Hanoi can remain an immediate and continuous living space. By contrast, for overseas Vietnamese writers, migration introduces a structural distance that reconfigures the relationship between the creative subject and the city. Hanoi is no longer only inhabited directly; it becomes an object of reflection mediated through global experience and cross-cultural comparison.

Within this framework, dynamic distribution reprocesses lived experience across multiple spatial contexts. Exposure to different cultural and ideological environments does not erase Hanoi but reframes it. Thuận notes that her experiences in France and Russia are inseparable from her writing, while Lê Minh Hà observes that everyday life abroad enabled her to reinterpret what she had previously experienced in Hanoi [18,23]. Such reflections suggest that migration produces not estrangement alone but productive recontextualization.

This reconfiguration gives rise to a distanced perspective. Physical displacement allows writers to observe Hanoi not from within the uninterrupted flow of daily life but from a reflective position shaped by comparison. Lê Minh Hà describes life abroad as providing a necessary perspective for reassessing time, memory, and cultural continuity [19]. Similarly, Phan Việt remarks that looking from the United States allowed her to notice details in Hanoi that were invisible when she lived there [27]. Distance therefore functions not simply as loss but as a condition for deeper spatial understanding.

The experience of return further complicates dynamic distribution. Short-term homecomings often produce dissonance between remembered and lived Hanoi as rapid urban transformation disrupts continuity. Lê Minh Hà’s perception of a noisier, more fragmented city and Phan Việt’s sense of temporal dislocation show how return generates both familiarity and estrangement [21,22]. In such moments, Hanoi appears as an othered home: no longer fully coinciding with either personal memory or contemporary reality.

4.3. The Geographical Filter: From Lived Geography to Literary Form

Building on the distinction between static and dynamic geographical distribution, this section conceptualizes the geographical filter as the mediating mechanism through which lived geographical experience is transformed into literary space. Rather than functioning as direct representation, the selected novels show that Hanoi is continuously reconstituted through cognitive selection, affective translation, and aesthetic reconfiguration shaped by migration.

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At the cognitive level, the geographical filter reorganizes how Hanoi is perceived through transnational comparison. In the novels of Thuận, Lê Minh Hà, Phan Việt, and Hiệu Constant, migration to France, Germany, the United States, and Russia produces a shift in perceptual frameworks. Western urban infrastructures, social norms, and cultural logics operate as implicit benchmarks through which Hanoi is measured, reinterpreted, and sometimes destabilized. In Hiệu Constant's *Đời du học*, for example, the character Tiến reads unfamiliar foreign interiors through Hanoi spatial templates; a confined room is associated with the Hanoi tube house, demonstrating how bodily experience abroad is cognitively remapped through familiar spatial forms [13, p.198].

At the affective level, the geographical filter translates migration-induced emotions into narrative form. Hanoi becomes an emotionally fractured space shaped by the tension between familiarity and estrangement. In *Tìm trong nỗi nhớ*, Lan Chi reconstructs Hanoi through toponymic recall—Hàng Bài, Lý Thường Kiệt, Hồ Tây—where place names operate as mnemonic anchors that stabilize a fragmented sense of self [4]. Yet this act of recollection simultaneously reveals the limits of memory because Hanoi exists primarily as an imagined totality sustained through longing rather than continuity.

The experience of return intensifies this affective tension. In Lê Minh Hà's *Những ta*, Ngân encounters a transformed urban landscape shaped by rapid modernization and market-driven urban expansion. Formerly familiar spaces become unrecognizable, producing dislocation within the very geography once considered home. The reflection that "Hanoi of Ngân and me has disappeared" marks a central paradox of diasporic return: homecoming does not automatically restore belonging but can produce a renewed awareness of loss [8, p.149].

At the aesthetic level, the geographical filter determines how Hanoi is formally constructed within narrative discourse. The city rarely appears as a unified urban totality. It emerges instead as a fragmented, multilayered, and dynamically reassembled literary space. This formal fragmentation reflects the epistemological condition of migration, in which lived space is constantly reorganized through memory, displacement, and transnational comparison.

A first aesthetic manifestation of this mechanism is the predominance of autobiographical or semi-autobiographical narrative structures. In Thuận, Lê Ngọc Mai, Lê Minh Hà, Phan Việt, and Hiệu Constant, the first-person or closely focalized narrative voice often functions as a nucleus through which Hanoi is re-encountered as lived memory rather than an external object. The boundary between author and narrator is frequently blurred, producing what may be described as an autobiographized Hanoi, where spatial representation is inseparable from self-writing.

At the level of narrative architecture, Hanoi also operates as an organizing principle. In Thuận's *Thang máy Sài Gòn*, Paris, Saigon, and Hanoi function not as chronological settings but as spatial coordinates organizing memory and identity [11]. In Phan Việt's *Tiếng người*, fragmented spatial organization corresponds to the protagonist's psychological disintegration, in which Hanoi appears as a series of discrete memory fragments rather than a stabilized whole [14]. Across these works, the geographical filter operates as a principle of fragmentation and recomposition through which Hanoi becomes a palimpsestic, mobile, and relational literary space.

4.4. Narrative Outcomes: Memory, Return, and Transnational Comparison

One consistent outcome of the geographical filter is the construction of Hanoi through remembered urban texture. Hoàn Kiếm, the Old Quarter, Tạ Hiện, routes near Long Biên, inner streets, schools, and lakes function as high-density mnemonic nodes. Streets, food, smell, weather, ambient sound, and school routes become spatial shorthand. The city is not described evenly as a whole; it is reassembled through sensory and affective fragments.

A second outcome is reflective and fractured memory. Nostalgia in these novels is usually reflective rather than restorative. Thuận's Chinatown places memory in radical motion: a Vietnamese woman immobilized in the Paris métro mentally traverses Paris, Hanoi, and Leningrad at once [9]. Even a brief detail such as Vĩnh's knowledge of roast pigeon at Tạ Hiện condenses urban memory into food, street name, and intergenerational transmission. The city is preserved precisely as rupture, remainder, and unfinished attachment.

A third outcome is transnational comparison. Hanoi is rarely left alone; it is relationally written. Lê Ngọc Mai's heroine leaves for Russia, returns to Hanoi, fails to secure a stable life there, and later moves to France. Thuận triangulates Paris, Leningrad, and Hanoi. Lê Minh Hà writes from Berlin and returns to Hanoi through layered retrospection. Hiệu Constant stages movement between greater Hanoi, France, and other postcolonial or European spaces. Phan Việt's American trajectory turns Hanoi into an object of high-resolution observation rather than pure sentiment.

These shared patterns do not produce a single model of "Hanoi abroad." Lê Ngọc Mai offers an elegiac micro-topography of remembered Hanoi; Lê Minh Hà creates a social palimpsest of old and postwar city; Thuận produces fractured transnational montage; Hiệu Constant foregrounds comparative perception and migrant spatial learning; Phan Việt turns Hanoi into an object

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of disciplined diasporic observation. Thus, overseas Vietnamese literary Hanoi is not a subtype of nostalgia-writing but a field of divergent urban epistemologies.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Host-country Inflections

The analysis demonstrates that host-country geographies do not merely provide background settings for migration narratives but function as active epistemic and aesthetic forces in the production of literary Hanoi. Each destination restructures the perceptual, affective, and narrative conditions through which the city is reimagined, resulting in distinct modalities of spatial inscription across the corpus.

France is the most powerful dynamic pole in the corpus, but it does not produce a single French-inflected Hanoi. In Lê Ngọc Mai, France is the location from which Hanoi becomes painfully unrecoverable, a city available through recollection and emotional afterlife. In Thuận, France—especially Paris and its suburbs—activates comparison, bureaucratic vulnerability, racialized perception, multilingual irony, and dislocated memory. In Hiệu Constant, France functions primarily as a space of learning, adaptation, and comparative perception in which Hanoi and greater Hanoi are brought into relation with European and postcolonial environments rather than as a simple domestic counterpart.

Germany shapes Hanoi differently in Lê Minh Hà. Berlin functions as a location of long-settled distance rather than a site of overt translingual play. The result is a quieter, more sedimented urban memory. Hanoi emerges as a place of return, re-observation, and painful comparison between inherited civility and contemporary transformation. The city is refracted less through bureaucracy and more through texture, atmosphere, human character, and the moral weather of everyday life [8,18,21].

Russia/the former Soviet Union is crucial not as a final host country but as a relay-space. For both Lê Ngọc Mai and Thuận, the Soviet/Russian trajectory mediates the transition from socialist-era Hanoi to wider Europe. In *Tim trong nỗi nhớ*, the departure from Nội Bài to study in Russia is an inaugural rupture; in Thuận, Leningrad forms one point in the spatial triad of Chinatown [4,9]. Russia therefore works as an intermediate dynamic distribution: neither pure home-place nor final settlement, but a durable guest-culture that reshapes how Hanoi is remembered.

The United States gives Phan Việt's Hanoi a different tonality. Her formation in Omaha and Chicago, followed by academic appointments in the United States, makes distance analytically productive. Her reflection that from the United States she noticed different details in Hanoi, and her later acceptance of a partial tourist-position on return, foregrounds reflexivity, community observation, and a self-conscious method of seeing [22,27]. Hanoi becomes not only memory but also fieldwork on the self.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

The article makes three theoretical contributions. First, it demonstrates the value of Zeng Daxing's static/dynamic model for the study of contemporary Vietnamese literature abroad. The model helps connect authorial geography with textual construction without reducing literature to biography. Second, it contributes to literary geography by showing how a city can be constructed through the interaction between formative place and migratory movement. Third, it contributes to diaspora-oriented Vietnamese literary studies by showing that different migration routes produce different literary geographies.

The main contribution of this approach is to show that Hanoi in overseas Vietnamese writing is best understood not as a static homeland-image but as the interaction of static roots and dynamic mobility. Static distribution anchors the city in formative experience, while dynamic distribution disperses and reconfigures it across global trajectories. The geographical filter, as proposed in this study, clarifies how these two dimensions are translated into narrative form, enabling Hanoi to emerge as a layered, mobile, and continuously renegotiated literary geography.

The comparative result is equally important. France produces a broad spectrum of Hanoi representations, from irrecoverable elegy to multilingual urban montage. Germany sharpens the city as palimpsest and return-memory. Russia mediates the first rupture from socialist-era Hanoi. The United States produces a reflexive observer-position in which Hanoi becomes thinkable precisely through distance. These are not merely background geographies; they are active co-producers of literary Hanoi.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the literary construction of Hanoi in selected novels by five contemporary Vietnamese writers abroad through Zeng Daxing's literary-geographical framework. The analysis shows that the writers' static distributions cluster around Hanoi and greater Hanoi as spaces of upbringing, education, early work, or formative cultural experience, while their dynamic distributions extend to Russia/the former Soviet Union, France, Germany, and the United States. This interaction

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produces Hanoi as formative ground, remembered urban texture, fractured diasporic memory, transnational comparison point, and site of reflective return.

The article therefore argues that literary Hanoi in contemporary Vietnamese writing abroad should not be treated as a fixed homeland image. It is a mobile literary-geographical formation produced by biography, urban memory, migration, and narrative technique. The five writers construct Hanoi differently, but all demonstrate that the city becomes more complex when written from afar: it remains emotionally central while also becoming estranged, comparative, and analytically charged.

Future research may extend the corpus to other overseas Vietnamese writers, combine literary geography with digital cartography to visualize Hanoi-related toponyms, and deepen the relation between literary geography and diaspora memory through publication history, translation history, and archival research. These steps would move the project from an exploratory comparison toward a fuller literary-geographical history of Hanoi in contemporary Vietnamese writing beyond national borders.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not applicable. This study analyzes published literary texts, public paratexts, and publicly available secondary materials; it does not involve human participants, experiments, or unpublished personal data.

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Data availability: The primary texts, public paratexts, and secondary materials used for the analysis are listed in the references.

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