The Influence of Existentialism in Buu Chi’s Paintings

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Abstract: Buu Chi is one of the genius artists of modern Vietnamese painting. His works carved profound values in the artist world and painting viewer, both in Vietnam and the world. There is one remarkable characteristic which makes Buu Chi’s paintings becoming specifically is philosophic aspect. His works not only influenced by ‘Yin and Yang’ idea of Book of Changes and ‘impermanence’ idea of Buddhism but also inherited thought of existentialism which deeply impacted on South Vietnam society pre-1975 period. It can be said that, existentialism contributed a noticeable part to create typical sense for Buu Chi’s paintings, especially his oil-paintings. His works are combination of various influences of existentialist writers, philosophers and painters such as Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger and Alberto Giacometti. Some typical themes of existentialism including nothingness and absurdness of the world; transience and aloneness of human; uniqueness and rebellion of the subject; the obsession of time and death... are represented in Buu Chi’s paintings. Therefore, each his painting is a profound expression of human condition in the world. In this article, we analyze and describe the influence of existentialism to Buu Chi’s works which focused on two basic themes including: (1) the solitary and transient condition of human, (2) resistance.

Keywords: Influence, Existentialism, Buu Chi’s Paintings

1. Introduction

Buu Chi was born in October 8th, 1948 in Hue city. He belongs to a royal family (Nguyen Dynasty). Buu Chi is Tuy Ly Vuong’s grandnephew who is the 11th prince of King Minh Mang. His father, Ung Thuyen, is truly fond of painting[1]. His mother is a teacher who teaches French in Dong Khanh high school. She even translated Truyen Kieu¹ into French. Some of his family members are also the outstanding people in Vietnam, such as Professor Buu Y². Professor Buu Nam³ who have a lot of valuable writings in researching and teaching literature and linguistic.

After graduating highschool, because of his father’s expectation, Buu Chi pursued the Law major and obtained BA degree of Law in 1971.

To be born into an intellectual and artistic family, Buu Chi had the advantage to get in touch with painting. From the childhood, he was always excellent in painting discipline in his school. In his family’s bookcase, there were much painting books which written in French. Therefore, in Buu Chi’s high school time, with a great love for painting, he began to study by himself via books. Due to memory of his family members, while at Hue University as a student of Law Department, Buu Chi drew very much[2]. Because of war situation and scarce materials, he had to draw on the wall, even, he used chalk and charcoal to draw his paintings.

His enterprise as he admitted, divided into two main periods: the former is from 1970 to 1975, the latter is from 1976 to 2002 (the year he passed away)[3]. In the first stage, Buu Chi took part in the student’s struggle movement of Hue city and he employed his artistic work as a weapon - a resistance voice of the intellectual. His paintings were the means to manifest opinions of war and peace. The primary kind of Buu Chi’s painting in this period was ‘pen-nib - Chinese-ink’ type. He published his works on some

¹ The Tale of Kieu by Nguyen Du
² Buu Y was born in 1937, in Hue City, who is a famous Vietnamese translator, writer and cultural researcher. He used to be a French lecturer at French Department of Hue University of Education. Buu Y translated in a large number of French writings into Vietnamese. Because of his contributions in spreading French culture, he was offered Order of Academic Palms by France Ministry of National Education in May of 2015.
³ Buu Nam was born in 1953, in Hue City, who is a lecturer of World Literature at Literature and Linguistic Department of Hue University of Education.
magazines and panels which served to anti-war demonstration. Inside Vietnam, Buu Chi’s paintings became the encouragement for his friends and comrades. Outside Vietnam, his works appeared on many well-known newspapers and magazines. Particularly, one of his paintings became the symbol of anti-war campaign which chosen by peace-love movement of Boston University’s student[4].

Since participating in student’s anti-war operation in South Vietnam, the ‘puppet government’ put Buu Chi into prison in 5 years with “unobedient and rebellious” accusation[5]. After 1975, when the war ended, Buu Chi had his freedom, he “comes back to worry about himself, concentrates on internal life”[2]. At this time, he changed to draw oil-paintings. His canvas demonstrates human’s great concerns including happiness, misery, life and death, human’s fineness and universe’s infiniteness.

Besides, as his proficient French, he early acquired French culture, France and Western countries’ philosophy trends and painting. According to Nguyen DucXuan, at the time of high-school and university, Buu Chi studied many trends of Western painting[6]. On the other hand, Buu Chi was also interested in reading books of philosophy, politics, Book of Changes. At the end of Buu Chi’s life, he pondered upon Buddhism discourses. He often discussed with his friends about philosophy, particularly existentialism which was one of popular philosophic trends at that time in South Vietnam. Subjects of existentialism such as absurdness, aloneness, unstableness, time and life, freedom, resistance... etc. were manifested in Buu Chi’s paintings strikingly. Contemplating his works, especially canvas of the after-1975 period, the viewer perceives combination of Albert Camus’ absurdness, Friedrich Nietzsche’s rebellion, Martin Heidegger’s time and living opinion, Kafka’s magical realism and Alberto Giacometti’s solitary and finite condition of human. Furthermore, Buu Chi’s paintings also influenced on ‘Yin and Yang’ idea of Book of Changes and ‘impermanence’ idea of Buddhism.

In his enterprise, Buu Chi had joined in a great deal of exhibitions at home and abroad. In 1986, he took part in painting composing camp and exhibited his works in Soviet Union. He had another painting exposition with Hoang Dang Nhuán[7]in Hanoi. He still organized two other exhibitions with the artist, one in Hue, 1989 and another in Saigon, 1997. Buu Chi got his private exhibition in 1994 which held in Hong Kong. In 1995, he was one of the artists of ‘The Right to Hope’ exposition of United Nations. There were 47 countries’ artist participating in the event. Moreover, from 2000 to 2002, Buu Chi made three painting exhibitions with his friend, DinhCuong[8].

Unfortunately, when Buu Chi was having his best artistic ability to draw, he passed away in December 14th, 2002 due to a cerebrovascular accident. He left to Vietnamese painting over 300 works, including canvas, pen-nib painting and ‘gunny painting’. In addition to, he left 80 ‘quill-pen and Chinese ink’ paintings which drawn from 1996 to 1999 and unpublished yet.

Nowadays, Buu Chi’s paintings appear in Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Singapore Fine Arts Museum and in much individual collections over the world [7].

2. Aspects of Existentialism in Buu Chi’s Paintings

2.1. The Solitary and Transient Condition of Human in the Absurd World

According to existentialism, human’s destiny is aloneness. Each person has to put on their shoulder this fate. SørenAabye Kierkegaard claimed that, humankind cannot depend on the others for help. They can only rely on themselves. As Friedrich Nietzsche considered, aloneness is a necessary experience, a doleful condition for men rising to create themselves. Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre asserted that loneliness is the absolute. Humans are always alone on their own living process. Nobody can take the place of ‘I’. Process to affirm their own subjectivity and unique is the way to reach the absolute aloneness. On that way, man cannot find the others’ sympathy. Existentialism philosophers not only mention about loneliness, but also emphasize on transient, transitory and unstable situation of human being. They believed that the best misery for people is death. Each day elapses man comes close to death. Blaise Pascal also mentioned about finite condition of life and infinite state of time. Meanwhile, Heidegger considered death is unsteady condition of life that is irresistible and harsh fate for people. Man is to be born to come death. Hence, human cannot dodge death. Matter of limited life becomes the strict theme and ontology in Heidegger philosophy.

Buu Chi’s youth went through the war, day-to-day he had to see his relatives, his friends and his compatriots’ death. That is the reason why he early had opinion of human’s transient and unstable condition. Simultaneously, he also acquired idea of existentialism soon. As a result, in his works, human condition is an outstanding theme and it has a strong attachment to his life-work. Viewing his paintings, especially canvas, the audience can recognize these above topics, for instance, The Woman on the Edge of a Volcano, Circus, Last Freedom - Last Peace, Facing the Voids, Absurdities, Obsession of Good and Evil, Suspended on Time, Tottering on Time, Thinking of Time, Time and The Crumbling Match.

As can be seen from Buu Chi’s works, he had obvious influence from Alberto Giacometti[6] who is the famous Swiss

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4 Hoang Dang Nhuán was born in 1942 in Hue. He is a talent artist who participated in painting exhibitions in many countries over the world, such as: Poland, Germany, England, Soviet Union (Russia), Czechoslovakia, Japan, Korea, America, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore.

5 DinhCuong was born in 1939, is a Vietnamese well-known artist. He is now living in Virginia, America. He attained many prizes at home and abroad. DinhCuong is one of Buu Chi’s close friends.

6 Alberto Giacometti (October 10th, 1901 - January 11th, 1966) was a very famous Swiss artist of the 20th century. He was a well-known sculptor and painter. His sculptures exceptionally describes long-slender shapes of human as skeletons.
artist and sculptor. In many Alberto Giacometti’s works, he describes people’s slim, slender, sickly images. They seemly are fading but still go toward to look for something. His renowned works as *Walking Man* or *Standing Woman* are considered as symbol of aloneness and eternal isolate of human being. It is a portrait of existentialism people who are so sore and tragic. Jean-Paul Sartre claimed that Giacometti’s sculpture is miniature image of existentialism human which is lonely, isolated and deeply sunk into the world of nothingness[8]. Similarly, in Buu Chi’s paintings, there are also many character’s thin, emaciated, faint images. Contemplating his paintings, the viewer seemly fully lost their experiences about human body. His characters still have legs, head, body but there is no sign of skin and flesh. However, there is a striking point is that the audience sees a large amount of bone images. Human shape in Buu Chi’s paintings is the symbol of existentialism people who are solitary, anxious, painful and unstable. These meanings manifest pessimistic and sorrowful rhythm of existentialism. From lay-out aspect, there are many resemblances between Buu Chi’s works and Alberto Giacometti’s sculptures. If Giacometti’s characters often are slender-shaped and isolated from real space around them, Buu Chi’s ones are diminutive people who thrown into immense and magical space. Buu Chi’s artistic space often depicted by ‘hot’ and ‘dark’ style, for instance brown and grey-yellow, cold-grey with deep dark which symbol to the strange, empty and unknown world.

Furthermore, the contrast between human being and space-time often depicted in the highest rate to express aloneness and tinniness of human condition. Surrounded by the boundless space and endless time, man is desolate, lonely and he does not know where to go.

Moreover, there is a connection between Buu Chi’s paintings with Franz Kafka’s characters. According to Nguyen Xuan Hoa, Buu Chi is a man who is fond of literature[9]. Buu Chi took French and literature in his high school period. Additionally, there are many his family members and friends relating to literary field. By means of them, Buu Chi had favorable chances to read Kafka and, as a result, influenced by him. It can be said that, if Kafka’s writings are polyphonic voice, Buu Chi’s works will be polychromatic painting of human condition. There is the nonsensical, broken and traumatic world where people are pushed into highest aloneness, taken their human right away and deformed their shape. There are many transformations in Kafka’s writings including human, animal, space, time... etc. His characters are usurped their personalism and they are malformed. For instance, there are 13 characters who are deformity in *The Trial*. Franz Kafka built an extraordinary world where humans are sick, un-mental and un-ethical. They live glacially, phlegmatically and unemotionally. Interestingly, there are some same points between Buu Chi’s paintings and characters of Kafka’s *The Trial*. Human in Buu Chi’s works has the same figure with Kafka’s inspector who has withered head, bony body and crooked nose. The Vietnamese artist’s characters also have a bit inflexibility of Rabinsteiner K, a deep-set eyes of Kullich. They are often transformed into strange forms which escape from ordinary experience of vision. Along with time, Buu Chi’s paintings reach to more surreal state, in consequences structure of human body is more irreducible. In some paintings, through same brush works (almost same or full same), in some cases are diminutive characters, the others are all faded skeletons, Buu Chi seemly insists on abstraction, non-individuality and non-character of humans. If Kafka’s personae are often called by abbreviated name or no name, the audience also will be difficult to distinguish gender, age and individual factors of Buu Chi’s figures. Humans in his paintings are bare and solitary people. They remove every convention of history and society. They have no impersonation and mask, no resume and faction. They are nameless and tiny. They are left out by the others. They exist as the object.
Besides, human’s aloneness and anxiousness on their journey to look for themselves also are manifested in Buu Chi’s paintings. They are alone characters who see their own aloneness. They are solitary and frightened before huge space. They are lonely and panic before inexhaustible time. To express man’s aloneness and anxiousness, Buu Chi often places his character in the close relationship with space and time. Space in his paintings usually is darkness and turmoil. This is deserted and mysterious space as the newborn period of universe. His color is frequently sad-dark and profound as exterminative hole which permanently waits for swallowing diminutive people up. Man nearly is blown up, pulverized by that space. To be in front of Buu Chi’s paintings, the viewer feels at once stuffy, repressed and feels to falling freely or into the dark hole of universe. The reason why is arrangement of color, line and light which is Buu Chi’s particular technique. It can be said that by means of method of space and time expression, Buu Chi would like to show his viewer a strange world with human. There, man is thrown into that world and related to it incessantly. For instance, in his Civil War7, human had put into strange world recently where there are unsafe, fickle and obsessive. This unsafeness brings collision and contradiction with their own compatriot and fellow human. Another work, called Absurdities8, his character looks like Sisyphus who carries alone fate on his back. The absurd person in Buu Chi’s works is as same as Albert Camus’ characters. They are exiled into this world. They have wish to attain to complete union but they are powerless, silent and agnostic about themselves and the world. Human is desolate, alone in a strange life, deathlike in break of religion where man lost their faith, as a result, they have to witness their own collapse painfully. Buu Chi’s characters hardly accommodate to physical properties, on the contrary, they are lead by infatuated and panic. Marks of ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’ in some Buu Chi’s paintings including Absurdities, Rolling Whole Life9, Good and Evil Obsession10, Egg and Rock11... etc. help his audience to experience more clearly the influence of existentialism ideal between Buu Chi’s art and Albert Camus’ novel. In which, there is no image of plants and trees and the others. Human looks like a fragile hyphen among immensity of universe. Therefore, absurdness is not only the same as Sisyphus heavy rock on his shoulder; isglacial and overcast as color of painting; but also tense as contrast between the rock and tiny character. Each person in Buu Chi’s works contains a metaphor of human situation in this world. They are painful, panic, crazy, anxious or peaceful and relaxed to fight against nothingness. Human’s sore tragedy is repressed extremely. However, as same as Camus’ point of view, Buu Chi’s works also have its own beauty of aloneness. Despite of lamentable conditions, man still aspire to search themselves back. Aloneness, followed by existentialism theory, is a necessary state and a human’s sublimation. Among the loneliness, humans looks at themselves, live as they are, and have chance to affirm their personalism. The meaning of existentialism aloneness is depicted by Absurdities and The Woman on Vocalno Mouth12, two works of Buu Chi. These paintings are songs to praise the beauty of solitary people. Simultaneously, these creations are also a message to warn everyone that: despite of danger, aloneness is a necessary state, and, if people dare to face the danger, they can discover

7 Vietnamese: Nội chiến
8 Vietnamese: Sự phi lý của cuộc sống
9 Vietnamese: Lần mới đời
10 Vietnamese: Ám ảnh thiện ác
11 Vietnamese: Trứng và đá
12 Vietnamese: Người dân bất trên miệng núi lửa
new experiences, create their own destiny. We would like to the true freedom and penetrate our mind. However, we still live in safe situation; we want to possess everything; we do not want to exchange; we are afraid of loneliness and every signs which can be harmed us. How can we do what we expected?

Along with aloneness, existentialist always has awareness of ephemerality of life. One of the human’s most frightened feelings is to face infinite time-flow of universe. Heidegger is a philosopher who deeply discusses about relationship of existence and time. His opinion of time is different from classic philosophers. He called time is ‘temporality’ and considered it as structure of ‘Dasein’. It means that, time depends on human subjectivity. As Heidegger, ‘Dasein’ created time. Time is only human existence and the existence always throws it forwards. Actually, time is only as same as human essence and human essence always throws it towards. It still is in the reality but it throws itself towards the future; it still is in the reality but it throws itself back to the past[10].

Due to profoundly acquiring Heidegger’s viewpoint of relationship between time and life, in Buu Chi’s paintings, motif of time and life is special and distinct aspect which is very different from other artists. In most of his paintings, time appears and it is always put in relation with life. Sometimes he expresses time via symbol of sun and moon, on the other while, he depicts it directly through clocks. No matter what method, time frequently identifies itself with human and it becomes man’s terrible obsession. His drawings of clock and human often make his viewer thinking about transience and ephemerality of people. In his paintings, man usually is hung over and faced death each minute and hourly. It is not soft and deformed as clocks in paintings of Salvador Dali Buu Chi’s ones are often indefinite rocks which sometimes are rough, sometimes are firm square rock, even glacial and harsh. Every clock is superb with big Roman numbers. Every clock is majestic, onerous, quiet, secret and agnostic like time. Contrast to these clocks is tiny body which is slim as frail as a thread. Sometimes, character is suspended on the hand and looks like the cross; sometimes painfully died on big Roman numbers of clock; sometimes run away to escape from the life-and-death rule. The contrast between clock which emblems to endlessness of time and person’s diminutiveness in Buu Chi’s paintings is a message to assert human’s death obsession and short life. If Martin Heidegger uses characters to describe his experiences of time and existence, Buu Chi utilizes colors to express his profound feelings of time and human condition. Time in Buu Chi’s works is sometimes solid and thick, sometimes light and thin which permanently covers human as an unavoidable oath. Heidegger’s idea, ‘human is a being-toward-death’ is expressed by Buu Chi’s painting language concretely and successfully. His characters who are suspended from hand are repeated many times to emphasize that “I am put in the face of death penalty: I will die, nearly die, certainly die in the near future, absolutely cannot avoid death”[11]. Each his canvas of time and life is a reminder his audience: death is not termination in the end of road, it is not strange with man; it is each existential person bringing death up inside themselves as ‘immanent possibility’. At any time, man is being on the way to their death. Death is raised in human’s existential process. Living is that progressing forward even taking latent death.

13 Salvador Dalí who has real name is Salvador Domingo Felipe Jacinto (May 11th, 1904 - January 23rd, 1989) was an outstanding Spanish surrealist painter. He also is one of the best effect artists of the 20th century. His most famous painting is The Persistence of Memory which drawn three o-clocks. All of three ones are tiny, flexible as burnt. Its shape is twisted but still pulls people’s memory back.
On the other Buu Chi’s painting type, still-life painting, transience and aloneness of human condition are depicted strikingly. A great deal of his still-life paintings like *Broken Mask*₁⁴, *The Broken Cup of Coffee*₁⁵, *Broken Glass*₁⁶, *Raising up the Spirits of the Dead*₁⁷, *Raw-boned Fish*₁⁸ have metaphor of human condition and human’s existential journey. Broken cups of coffee, motleycolored lines of coffeeon white background, empty chairs without person sitting, lonely paraffin-lamps, broken glasses on black background, raw-boned fishes with big opening eyes as an SOS about destitution or cigarette-ends which mark moment of perish... etc. All of these still-life canvases display aloneness, void, burst and death that people have to confront in their life. The most outstanding canvas which depicts these meanings is *The Crumbling Match*₁⁹. He drew a match on a white background. The match is burnt by itself on a white and flat space. Afterwards, the remains are black lines of charcoal which are burnt smell and painful. Image of dying match is a metaphor of life as existentialism theory. That is to say, human life is a dying match which is transience and aloneness.

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14 Vietnamese: Tĩnh vật mặt nạ vỡ
15 Vietnamese: Tách cà phê vỡ
16 Vietnamese: Cốc thủy tinh vỡ
17 Vietnamese: Cầu hồn
18 Vietnamese: Con cá trơ xương
19 Vietnamese: Que diêm tàn
As can be said that, since influence of existentialism, Buu Chi’s paintings contain a large number of meditation of human condition. His character is dyed by a sorrowful color of existentialism. That is the fleetingness and unstableness before inexhaustible time, transitoriness and loneliness before profound space. In that space and time, human is a dark shadow which is deprived of their skin and flesh. They are languid, flowing and suspended from the hand (clock), or, they are crooked to run away as a powerless man. People ought to carry illogical fate on their back and incur fierce oath. It do is a tragedy. Buu Chi’s deep mediation and expression in his paintings due to his existentialism reception which makes his works achieving profound philosophy, attraction and fascination.

2.2. Rebellious Spirit in Buu Chi’s Paintings

As existentialism’s conception, although man was born and passed away casually, he still need to overcome what he is and rise what he will be. Existentialist has to take responsibility for his life. He also have to create himself by incessantly progressing andleaping at all times despite of nothingness leap.

Existentialism advocates human’s endeavor and attempt. That is Nietzsche’s characters who are eager to build new values and ready to demolish outdated-traditional values. That is also Albert Camus’ fighting people who dare to cope with nothingness and brave all to assert themselves. Generally, existentialist is bold enough to risk and live as they are and dare to overcome mediocre things to affirm the subjectivity. Risk is a concept of existentialism which manifests the existentialist’s necessary rebellion. With this capability, existentialist takes action drastically and makes their choice definitively. They do not depend on the crowd, on the others’ evaluation. “In this risk, I show myself is subject. Risk, I received responsibility to be human. Risk, I undertook it by myself”[10].

“From within his essence, Buu Chi is a rebellious man. He not only rebels against himself but also wants to devastate around orders”[12]. That is an important basic for him receiving struggling spirit of existentialism easily. The spirit is showed in his life style and his creative enterprise. From the aspect of life, when he was a student of Law Faculty, he strongly fought against the unreasonable reality of South Vietnam. That is the reason why he was accused “no submission” and put into prison in 5 years. After Liberation Day (April 30th, 1975), because of bureaucracy and absurdness of society, Buu Chi once more time obviously showed his rebellious attitude. For instance, when leftist deviationism gained ground in his office, he offered up resistance by leaving out his position in Huong River Magazine20 to be a free artist. From the side of art, he declared that, “If you want to make progress, you have to shed your skin to see yourself”[13]. Hence, savoring Buu Chi’s paintings, the audience can feel his rebellious spirit obviously in each brush-stroke, each color part and each layout. That is the rebellion to nothingness world, violence and outdated, mechanical and imposed thought.

In his early stage, Buu Chi mostly drew by ‘pen-nib and Chinese-ink’. At that time, he also was a famous and representative artist of antiwar movement in South Vietnam. His paintings were used like a weapon to struggle to America’s invasion and puppet government of South Vietnam’s repression. His well-known works at that period are On August Field21, Waiting for Day Rising22, The Day of Undaunted Struggle23, Regaining the Life24, Disguised Guys25, Prisoner Breaks the Shackles26… etc. In this kind of creation, popular images are shot and killed people by lethal weapons. Nonetheless, they do not surrender and menare not pessimistic but they still have a steadfast will to fight unreasonable reality, restore life and regenerate to be human. In spite of various expressions, Buu Chi’s paintings are filled with brimful hope andwill and rebellious spirit. Drastic and transient attitude with crime of American imperialist and Saigon’s puppet government are essential spirit for Buu Chi creating illustrious ‘pen-nib and Chinese-ink’ paintings. However, his works in this period still did not have a high artistic level. The reasons why are material and means are too primitive. Besides, in his early times, drawing with him is a method to struggle for Vietnam’s freedom and peace. For these reasons, he mainly focused on the content than the art.

In the period of 1975 to 2002 (the year he passed away), Buu Chi changed to draw oil-painting. Although quantity of canvas is almost as same as pen-nib and Chinese-ink paintings, the quality is very particular.

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20 Vietnamese: Tạp chí Sông Hương
21 Vietnamese: Trên cánh đồng tháng tam
22 Vietnamese: Đợi ngày lên
23 Vietnamese: Ngày quật khởi
24 Vietnamese: Giành lại đời
25 Vietnamese: Những kẻ giả hình
26 Vietnamese: Người tự be xứng
After 1975, although there is no war, the life still appears much of complicated and fierce matters. Due to influence of leftist deviationism and long existence of bureaucratic and subsidized structure, Vietnamese society has many new difficult problems. Thus, Buu Chi’s rebellious spirit in this period was depicted by a new form. He was against people’s doctrinaire habit and their hypocrisy. To express this kind of theme, he used caricature and ironic method which are demonstrated clearly by some his works including *Arms and Legs*, *White Book of Fox*, *The Rat*, *Human’s Tragedy*, *A Type of Intellectual*...etc.

Even if not to be live as the pre-1975, Buu Chi’s rebellious will in his paintings is expressed skilfully and subtlety. Especially, his meditation of human’s condition and life is deeper with every passing day. Consequently, his philosophy of existentialism is demonstrated more and more evidently. Idea and art are combined sensibly which makes his creation becoming more perfectly. In many paintings, Buu Chi used surrealist and abstract factors reasonably to highlight his thoug of human being. If putting these works side by side including *Absurdities*, *Rolling Whole Life*, *The Hand Pulls the Time*, *Raw-boned Fish*, *Circus*, *Facing to nothingness*, the audience will see that, in spite of tiny shapes, they are not weak. Conversely, they have a brimful of fighting spirit. His characters are who to be enlightened as Camus’ motif. In which, they suddenly awake to the nonsensical walls, they cast off disguise which is covered by daily habits. To the absurdness of life, his characters do not idolize the absurdness to create a belief of religion, and, do not suicide to flee the absurdness also. On the contrary, they chose rebellious way. Rebellion is to keep intact pulling situation between “I” and the world; against to compromise with unreasonableness; combat the illusion, shelter and cowardly deserters.

They are like Sisyphus who knows his action is nonsensical and meaningless, however, he still dares to take charge of his living journey to live (in *Absurdities*). They are aware of life just is a rolling stone but they still hug it and approve of risk living (in *Rolling Whole Life*). They are awake to the boundless time but they are still ready to cope with it (in *The Hand Pulls the Time*). As can be seen from his art, each painting is a speaking of rebellious idea. Rebellion is to accept the limitation of life and to be continued to live with it. If there are no purposes, the life is more worth living. Rebellion is to live without hope but not really hopless. Living is to bring the absurdness up which means that looking it straight in the eye, not hang our head in surrender, not run away. Rebellion is the unique way for human seeking their identity, and only by this way, “I” find the human’s lofty essence. Thus, humans are not pessimistic and frightened. They always have a full awareness of themselves, of their existence in the world, even, men usually thrust to rise and affirm themselves. These are rebellious men who are described in Buu Chi’s paintings. They struggle to outdated opinions, deceitful words and trivial people. They fight to creedal rules and absurdness of human life before endless space and time. It can be said that, perceiving Buu Chi’s creations, the viewer can imagine to “Nietzsche’s face which is uncollective, struggles to formalize and attaches much importance to superman. Like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, diminutive characters of Buu Chi’s paintings would like to escape from social regulation, combat the oath of universe which cements human being”[14].

Figure 13. *Rolling Whole Life*, oil-painting, Buu Chi.

Figure 14. *The Hand Pulls the Time*, oil-painting, Buu Chi.

Existentialism claimed that, resistance is not an anarchical and instinct action, its true meaning, the most important part,
Humans in Buu Chi’s paintings can determine by themselves. Self-determination is that man can choose himself. There, these diminutive people select them as a free man who dare to throw himself in dangerous spot and act. They would sooner be miserable but free than be happy but slavish. They determine by themselves to prove that they are a liberal subject who can make themselves responsible for their life. Buu Chi created characters who are bold enough to be themselves. They consider self-determination is an approach for their personalist progress. Self-determination is maybe wrong or harmful for themselves, even dead. However, to be an existentialist, they do not care these damages and mistakes. Nobody has no fault, nevertheless, if man is so afraid of error that does not dare to determine, this situation is still more disastrous than the mistake. Humans in some canvases such as The Hand Pulls the Time, Karma, Hopeless and Hope and Heaven or Hell are the representative for existentialism conception of the venture. In the venture, human can demonstrate they do are subject. Risk to assume responsibility for being human. Risk to gain a victory over themselves. It is the philosophic message that Buu Chi would like to send to his audience and human being.

3. Conclusions

Due to above analyses, it can be said that, conception of people, human condition and the unreasonable world in Buu Chi’s paintings are the combination of influence from other existential writer, philosopher and artist including Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger and Alberto Giacometti. By means of painting language, Buu Chi makes existentialism theory in other works of philosophy, literature, sculpture and also painting to creatively reborn in his paintings. It can be realized that, from the artist aspect, the artist had been fairly much influenced by Alberto Giacometti and Franz Kafka; from the ideal aspect, on the other hand, his works had outstandingly been marked by Albert Camus and Martin Heidegger. Images of absurd and rebellious human as ‘Sisyphus type’ were reiterated many time in Buu Chi’s painting. Furthermore, Martin Heidegger’s thought of the relationship between the time and human being also clearly acquired and employed by the Vietnamese artist which became a particular motif of his painting. Observing Buu Chi’s work, the viewer, on the one hand, pushed into a desolate and illogical world where the people are tiny, slender, transient and solitary; on the other hand, they incessantly question about their own condition, about meaning of life, as a result, they rise in revolt and stand up ready to assume the responsibility and live with all their heart no matter what it can be a useless passion. People in Buu Chi’s painting, sometimes, are scorpions, locusts as loathsome bones which escaped from tomb. It is crawling, running, whirling, rolling, flounder, screaming... It is alone and solitary on the wild ground; panic on the nothingness. It looks up to the immense and dark sky. It is not as same as anyone but everyone can find himself by looking it. Due to his specific mode and excellent art technique, Buu Chi built an art line which has the particular individuality. The painting color is often ‘heavy’ and ‘hot’ in contrast and opposite state. In some works, he makes his audience feeling there are various layers of color overlaped each other which creates a vivid beauty of color. The raw material of oil painting, the collision of light, color, shape and space, which is used purposely, make Buu Chi’s painting the fierce, tormenting, panic, devastative, rebellious and tragic sensation as human

35 Vietnamese: Chậu nguyên cho sự trở lại của nhân loại
36 Vietnamese: Lưỡi gươm Damocles
37 Vietnamese: Nghiệp chướng
38 Vietnamese: Tuyệt vọng và hy vọng
39 Vietnamese: Thiên đàng và địa ngục
condition in the absurd world. Surrealism of space, obsession of time, diminution of human condition, panic of emotion, hope and rabidity of men to the life produce Buu Chi’s work the prominent ideal value and human life depth which obviously manifests his own life, personality and his own artistic creation.

His artistic world opens for the audience a way to back to the life inside them, a journey to recognize each person’s characteristic. Each painting, each part of color, each shape contains profound philosophic ideas of human being. Simultaneously, each creation is a key for the viewer opening the gate which is sealed by a large number of nothingness, anxiousness, frightened... etc., and from that action, humans find out their own eternal life.

References


