

Thế giới

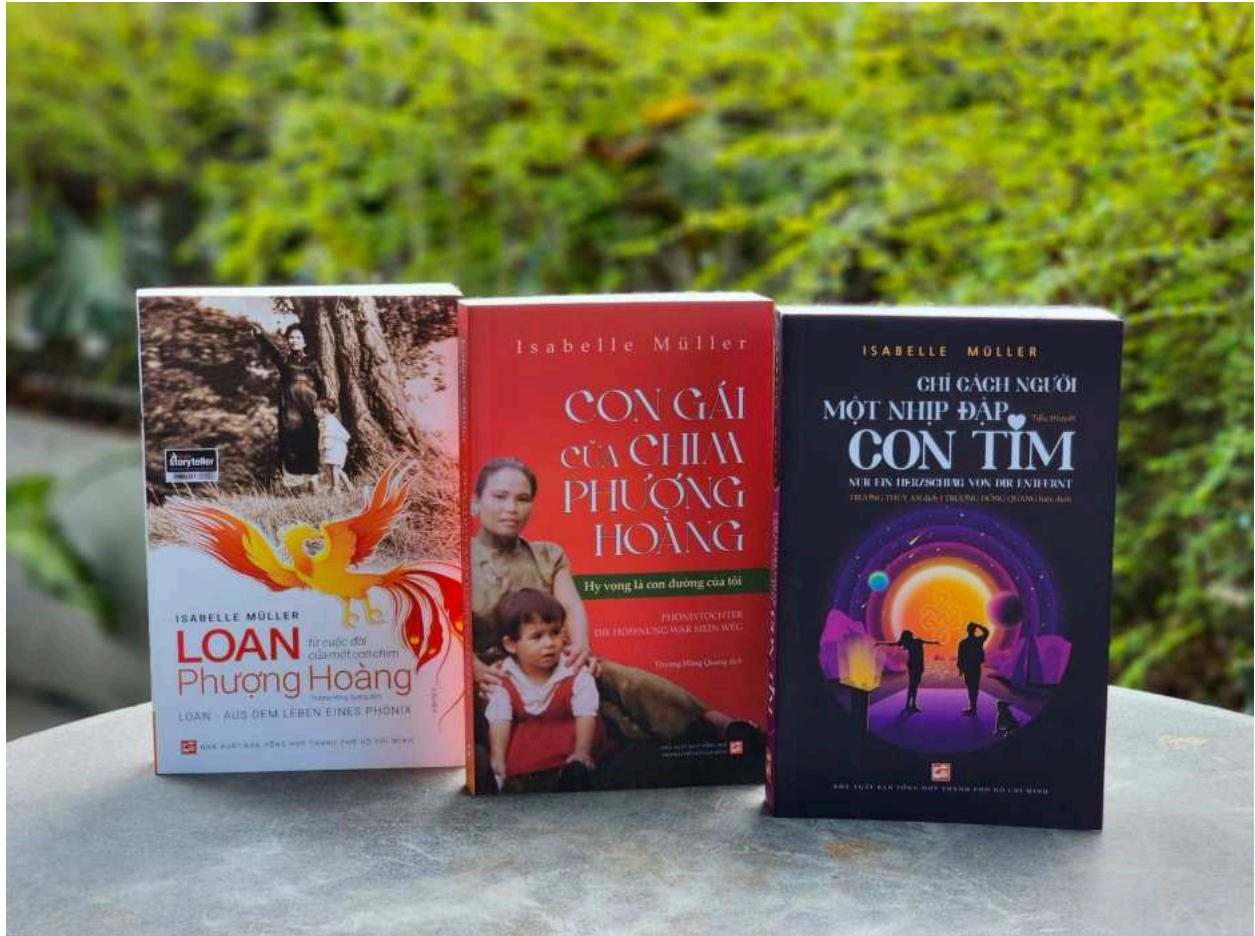
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The work “Loan - From the life of a phoenix” by the writer with Vietnamese-French blood was awarded the Third Prize at the 10th National Award for Foreign Information. On this occasion, The World and Vietnam Newspaper had a conversation with the author, who is making very meaningful and practical contributions to her homeland, where her mother, “a phoenix, took flight from the ashes” of war and prejudices...





Writer Isabelle Müller talks with reporters from The World and Vietnam Newspaper



Writer Isabelle Müller's works have been published in Vietnam, including "Loan - From the Life of a Phoenix" which recently won Third Prize at the 10th National Award for Foreign Information.

Congratulations to writer Isabelle Muller for winning the 10th National Foreign Information Award with her book "Loan – From the Life of a Phoenix" – a book about her mother's special life. Could you share more about the journey to this Award?

First of all, I am very happy that this Award has honored the book about my mother, Mrs. Dau Thi Cuc, our mother Loan. The story of Mother, a simple, small Vietnamese woman, born 95 years ago, but her fate and life were a challenging journey, reflecting the historical context of Vietnam at that time. Therefore, I want to dedicate this Award to my mother Loan, because it is the story of her own special life. I am only the person who recorded my mother's story. My mother is the one who truly deserves to receive this important Foreign Information Award.

For me personally, this is a great honor that makes me and my family very happy. I am happy to see that the story about the efforts and strong will of my mother - who dared to overcome prejudices to rise up for a better life, to have the right to education when she was a very young girl - has been welcomed by Vietnamese readers. That is wonderful!



Ms. Isabelle Müller and her husband at the 10th National Foreign Information Awards Ceremony, at the Opera House, Hanoi, December 3, 2024.



Writer Isabelle Müller took a photo with Politburo member, Head of the Central Propaganda Department Nguyen Trong Nghia and delegates at the 10th National Foreign Information Awards Ceremony. Writer Isabelle Müller took a photo with authors and representatives of the group of authors who won the Third Prize at the 10th National Foreign Information Awards Ceremony.



Writer Isabelle Müller takes a photo with the authors, representing the group of authors who won the Third Prize at the 10th National Foreign Information Awards Ceremony.

This book has been cherished by me for a long time and written for 2 years, with very real stories about the life of a small Vietnamese woman, a "phoenix" who always finds a way to overcome difficulties, the pain that tears both body and soul to rise up, build her own life and convey the message of optimism, gratitude and never giving up of my mother.

I am also very happy that in Vietnam, this work has been reprinted for the fourth time. That shows that readers are very interested in the book and the life of Loan's mother and the message that my mother and I want to convey: That is love, kindness and always taking action, even the smallest...

Surely she has put a lot of heart and emotion into telling stories about her mother's life to convey messages from the heart not only about her own family but also to reflect a period of ups and downs that the Vietnamese people have gone through?

Yes, I think this is really a story that life has written. No one, including my mother or myself, intended to become a "historical figure", but that is what happened. My mother is the image of a simple woman, who just wanted to live her own normal life. And I think she is smart enough, different enough to recognize the role of fairness, of justice.

My mother lived during a period of many historical events in Vietnam. For her, at that time, many things happened that she probably did not fully understand. She simply tried to find a place to

live peacefully. But in reality, she could not stay out of the vortex of the times, of history. And for me, following her life journey is a particularly interesting thing.

When I wrote this story, it was a truly fascinating experience. For example, when the conflict began in Hai Phong in 1946, when my mother returned from a period in the far north of the country, it was the first time she witnessed Hai Phong being bombed by the French, the beginning of the real war. She saw and felt those things with her own eyes...

For me, telling her life story is not only her own story, but also an opportunity to describe how ordinary people felt about the times. You know, in books, people often describe the perspective of great things, historical figures but rarely describe the real feelings, tell the story of ordinary people.

Especially, in war and conflict, ordinary people, mothers and families are the ones who suffer the most. They lose loved ones, children, husbands, brothers... It is these great pains that are often not described much. I think my mother's story has recreated quite a lot of the atmosphere and what happened during that difficult historical period of the Vietnamese people and homeland.



Writer Isabelle Muller.

So is it the special life of Loan's mother and her wishes that motivated and inspired her to establish the Loan Foundation named after her mother and to regularly travel to remote, isolated highland areas to help poor children and women with very difficult lives there?

As you know, readers may have read many articles about the Loan Foundation (LOAN Stiftung), about how I fulfilled my mother's dream - she always wanted to contribute something to her homeland and help children in the most difficult places. That's why I said "we" - my mother and I received this Prize together.

In the 1930s, when my mother was still in her homeland of Vietnam, she was not allowed to go to school just because she was a girl. On the path to freedom and happiness, with an indomitable will and a thirst for knowledge, she risked her life to have access to education. Finally, in 1955, she had to leave her war-torn homeland to follow her husband to France. In her husband's homeland, she encountered rejection and racism because of the color of her skin. Yet, despite extreme poverty, she persevered, taking care of her five grown children, always emphasizing that education was a great privilege.

As the youngest child of Loan's mother, I still remember that time very clearly, remembering how cold and hard the tiled floor of our bedroom was, because we didn't have any beds. Remembering the coldness of those around us, because we couldn't keep up with them materially. I remember how hard it was to keep the little bit of honor left and to fight the loneliness that was gradually nesting in our hearts.

However, there were also complete strangers who, through their selflessness, selflessness and love, stepped into our lives, shaped our personalities until now and through that helped us once again have faith in the good things in life. Their warmth gives us strength and nurtures our hope that one day we can repay the good things we have received and help others in need.

From those good things, that meaning and my mother's philosophy of life, Loan Fund was born in May 2016.



Ms. Isabelle Muller with students in the mountainous area of Ha Giang province

However, I can only do what I can. That means, if there is not enough funding, there will be fewer projects, but I always try my best, wondering how to mobilize more funding for the Fund.

Since its establishment in 2016, Loan Fund has had many scholarship programs for children in remote areas, those who do not have easy access to education like children in the city. Currently, we are rushing to complete the work to be able to start construction of a boarding house for students in Ta Van commune, Quan Ba district, Ha Giang. This is a very remote mountainous commune and we will try to complete the construction by September next year. It is wonderful to think about the day this project is completed to have more new accommodation for the students here.

In addition, Loan Fund also awards scholarships to students, including 250 ethnic minority students studying in Ho Chi Minh City and implements other educational projects for children in mountainous areas in Yen Bai, Lao Cai, Dien Bien, Cao Bang... These activities help students have the conditions to study and have the opportunity to change their lives, thereby creating a brighter future.



A student accommodation area in Lao Cai province sponsored by Loan Fund.





Writer Isabela Muller personally inspected a project funded by the Loan Fund.

Trong giai đoạn 2016 -2023, Quỹ Loan đã triển khai hiệu quả 39 dự án tại 8 tỉnh của Việt Nam: Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Cao Bằng, Sơn La, Điện Biên, Lào Cai, Yên Bái và Hà Tĩnh. Với tổng số tiền đã đầu tư cho các dự án lên đến: 1.530.384,39 USD. Tổng số tòa nhà đã xây dựng là 27. Tổng số trẻ em được giúp đỡ trực tiếp là 4797 em. Tổng số trẻ em được nhận học bổng từ năm 2016 đến nay là 337. Số trẻ mồ côi tìm được người bảo trợ tại Đức là 23. Ngoài ra, có hàng trăm hộ dân và hàng ngàn người dân địa phương

*được hưởng lợi gián tiếp từ các công trình xây dựng do Quỹ Loan hỗ trợ.
(LOAN Stiftung)*



It is known that in addition to the support from Loan Fund, you also have other projects for poor children in the highlands, especially after the severe impact of Typhoon Yagi. Can you share about these projects?

You know, I was very close to Phu Tho when a bridge collapsed after Typhoon Yagi. It was a terrible time and I could see the devastation of this storm right in Hanoi. I felt very heartbroken when I saw the old trees uprooted, broken and scattered... I felt that many people had experienced the same regret as me. But I was also very proud to see the Government deploying the army very quickly to help the people and to see people everywhere volunteering to bring water and food to help each other in times of trouble. It was a great sign of solidarity and that really impressed me.

My first thought when I saw the devastation of Typhoon Yagi was to help the people in the most affected province. I didn't want to just make a donation to put into a common fund to be distributed somewhere. I wanted to know exactly how the money would be used, who would receive it and what it would do. And it took me about three weeks to find out which schools and students needed the most help because I knew that many other countries, organizations and individuals had donated a lot to help Vietnam.

So, my focus and the Loan Foundation's focus is on children. I want to directly help some schools and children, especially kindergartens. Currently, we are supporting five kindergartens in Lao Cai province and providing scholarships to two students orphaned by Typhoon Yagi so that they can continue their studies. We found sponsors in Germany with about 32,000 euros for this project and it was all done within a month.

In her book, she tells the story of her mother - a woman from the previous generation, representing the traditional mindset in Vietnam that women should not go to school or pursue higher education. But Loan's mother thought differently. So, in addition to providing material and financial support, does the Loan Fund also aim to help change the mindset of whether girls and young women have more opportunities to access and pursue higher education?

You know, this is a topic that needs more discussion and in fact I don't want to change traditions. I just want traditions that are too old to change to be more suitable for today. I mean, traditions are very important because they have very precious values such as respecting family, respecting elders, being kind and knowing how to unite and support each other... These values are very, very precious regardless of the past or today. But the important thing is, men and women need to be treated equally. This is the core principle, everyone needs to have equal rights.



Ms. Isabelle Muller represents Loan Foundation to receive the Human Act Prize 2023.

Women have proven that they are very strong. For example, during the war, if there were no Vietnamese women, it would have been very difficult to win. That is just one example. I also see the great potential of women, even in the fields of science and technology. This is true not only in Vietnam but all over the world.

As you know, in the past, there were very famous female writers and scientists, but they had to hide behind a male name because at that time, the recognition of women as equal to men was not accepted. And reality has also proven that in many cases, in many fields, women are not only good but sometimes even better than men!

In our funds, I do not create a "women's revolution" like "let's go out and fight". No, not at all!

What I want is for women and girls to be protected and to be recognized for their strength. Therefore, our foundation does not only help girls but also boys. I help everyone, I want them to see a role model, like my mother was, someone who only wanted justice, equality and an independent life.

Look at me, born in Europe, growing up in poverty, a girl with no money but receiving a scholarship from the French state to go to university. I took this opportunity to learn languages, because it was the fastest way for me to finish and find a job, to become independent. Thanks to that, I created my own path, developed my potential and tried to achieve a better life.

Look at me, you can see that it is possible, to develop your own abilities. I think so! Because that is a law of life. A rule may be great at a certain point in time, but times move and evolve, which means you need to adjust the rules to suit the times.



Ms. Isabelle Müller went directly to the project site in Lao Cai to inspect.



Mrs. Isabelle Müller gives books to children in the highlands.



Ms. Isabelle Müller with highland students in Ha Giang province.



Ms. Isabelle Müller with highland students in Ha Giang province.



Ms. Isabelle gives books to students of Hope School, Da Nang city

This trip back is probably the hundredth time you have returned to Vietnam to help your homeland. How do you feel about the changes taking place in Vietnam, in which you have made very practical contributions, and where will Vietnam be in the future as we all wish?

Vietnam has changed dramatically since the first time I visited in the 90s after the embargo and economic sanctions were lifted. At that time, Vietnam in general and Hanoi in particular were still very poor and faced many difficulties.

In those years, there were only a few bicycles on the street and occasionally a car. The scene was very peaceful but you could still feel the echoes of war. But now, everything has developed a lot! Hanoi is covered with high-rise buildings and the streets are extremely busy... But indeed, I still cherish and remember the traditional beauty of Hanoi more than other modern cities with many high-rise buildings such as Ho Chi Minh City or Da Nang because Hanoi still retains its traditional beauty.

Hanoi has developed more, is more vibrant and modern. The city is always bustling, people are busy going back and forth to work, trade and leisurely strolling around, sightseeing, walking around... I feel the joy and happiness of everyone on the streets, in the shops, even though there are still difficulties at this time. I know that the average income of Vietnamese people is not as high as many other places in the world, but the development is very remarkable and I see that people welcome these changes with joy and great hope for the new steps of the country.



Exhibition of images of Loan Fund supporting disadvantaged children for a better future.

With this development, I am sure that Vietnam will be in a different position in the future, because Vietnamese people, like my mother, are very hard-working and dedicated, especially in developing education. I have seen these advances in young families, parents of my generation have understood that the key to a better future is education. Therefore, many families have tried to save money to invest in their children's education.

Another thing that is easy to see is that the children I meet today are very smart, know how to develop their potential and are very confident. Young children can already speak two or three languages. When I witness this, I know that in the future, they will have many opportunities to develop their skills anywhere in the world. That makes me feel very happy!

Thank you very much!

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