

AN OVERVIEW OF VIETNAM'S TREASURE OF FOLK FUNNY STORIES

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The first person who used the term funny story in Vietnam, was perhaps Mr. Dang Thai Mai, an outstanding researcher. He used it in his article *Human significance in funny stories* carried in the Review Tri Tan in three issues of 81, 82 and 83 in 1943. However, not until the 1960^s that the term “funny story” was established as the name of a folk genre of narrative story in the treasure of Vietnamese folk literature. Before 1943 and in the following years, terms like funny story, punch, anecdote, laugh, smile, funny folk tale, joyful story, sadness relieving story, satirical story often appeared in collections of funny stories of different authors.

That is why when identifying names of funny stories, we meet with several terms such as joke discussion, satirical story, funny story and punch. The term funny story is mostly used. In the Literature Dictionary, when defining the term, Associate Professor Chu Xuan Dien wrote: "It is also called *humourous stories* (meaning forest of laughs) which is one of the narrative genres representing the school of folk humour consisting of types of story different in depicted targets and humour. In Vietnamese folk funny stories, they are humourous and satirical stories."⁽¹⁾ Humourous stories is not exactly a separate funny story. That name is used to call funny stories in general either humourous or satirical. So, at first, humourous stories had a broad sense and was not necessary a "vulgar story" as commonly understood. In common concept, humourous stories is humorous, satirical and vulgar. We accept that concept."⁽²⁾

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¹ Many authors. The Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1984, Vol.2, p. 454

² *Folk literature*, The Ministry of Higher Education and Vocational Training, Hanoi, Vol. 2, p. 206

That is why, the term "funny story" is accepted in all recent projects of collection and research on folklore ⁽³⁾. There has not been agreement among folklore researchers about classification of funny stories. Authors of the book "History of Vietnamese literature" ⁽⁴⁾ of the Pedagogy University divided funny stories into three categories: humorous story, satirical story and "truyen humourous stories". Professor Dinh Gia Khanh and professor Chu Xuan Dien, in their book "Folklore literature" ⁽⁵⁾ divided funny stories into two types humorous story and satirical story. They identified "humourous stories" are humorous stories and satirical stories containing vulgar elements. In the textbook The Vietnamese Folklore Literature ⁽⁶⁾ of Prof.Dr. Le Chi Que, Associate Prof. Vo Quang Nhon and Associate Prof. Nguyen Hung Vi divided funny stories into two categories "humorous and satirical stories. They also divided satirical stories into two sub-groups: friendly satirical stories and satirical stories about enemies. Associate Professor Hoang Tien Tuu, in the book The Vietnamese Folklore Literature maintained that folk funny stories mean humourous stories, humorous story and satirical story. Commenting on the categorization of funny stories, Prof.Dr. Kieu Thu Hoach said". In our country, categorisation of Funny stories is still a controversial issue." ⁽⁷⁾

In general, based on the objectives of story makers, funny stories are divided into two categories: humorous stories and satirical stories. As far as story makers are concerned, there are funny stories produced by individual, and funny stories produced by collectives. In these cases, the producers are different. Individual make funny stories. There are cases where story makers are all members of a village and where funny stories are circulated.

I.

As compared with other genres of folklore of Vietnam, funny stories was collected and studied later.*

1. From the 10th to 19th centuries, given the concept saying that funny stories were only for entertainment and were made by lower casts in society, scholars did not considered collection of funny stories their objectives. In that period, only some Chinese books recorded funny stories. The book *Cong du tiep ky tuc bien* of

³ According to Prof. Dr. Kieu Thu Hoach, this term is equal to the term tieu tho'i

⁴ Vol.1, 3rd edition, 1970 The Educational Publishing House.

⁵ The Higher Education and Vocational Training Publishing House, Hanoi, vol1 (1972) and vol.2 (1973)

⁶ The Bookshelf of DHDT, Hanoi, 1990.

⁷ In the article "Some Issues in Studying Funny Stories", Literature Review, 2nd edition, 1999, p.27

* Reference: an article of Vu Mai Hoang, Op.cit.

Tran Quy Nha (⁸) was revised on the basis of the book *Cong du tiep ky tien bien* of Vu Phuong De. *Cong du tiep ky* (which means anecdotes written during free time) was produced by Vu Phuong De in 1975 and supplemented by Tran Qui Nha. Among the 7 categories identified by Tran Qui Nha, *Mong ky-Phu tap ky* consisted of stories very close to funny stories. The part included 18 stories numbered from 33 to 50. Stories numbered 33, 41, 43 and 45 contained humorous elements.

The book “Son cu tap thuat” of Dan Son written in late 18th century has two funny stories: Khanh thuong (Mean trader) numbered 28 and “Dich quan hoi” (The Association of mandarin exchange).

In the 19th century, the book *Van nang tieu su* which included short stories in Chinese written by Pham Dinh Duc (⁹) recorded and edited. According to Vu Mai Hoang (¹⁰), *Van nang tieu su* included original text in 5 volumes with 103 stories. Its appendix had 5 articles and 2 forewords. The 6th story (Greedy results in difficulties) and the 19th story (Human head, animal voice) of the 2nd volume, the 4th story (Physician and sorcerer play joke on each other), the 6th story (Greedy, anger and stupidity), the 7th story (Greedy) and the 12th story (A quick-minded bad soldier) of the 4th volume were the stories collected and included in books of funny stories by folklore researchers.

In the early 20th century, a book of funny stories in Chinese-transcribed Vietnamese was printed in 1916. Its origin was kept by Phuc An. It was new humorous stories (or Telling humorous stories). The first volume included 29 stories and the second volume included 18 stories dealing with different contents and targets. It is noticeable that 14 funny stories with vulgar elements appeared in the book.

Under the French rule, the book which started the process of collecting funny stories in national language was Humorous stories of J.J.B. Truong Vinh ky was published in 1882 (edition of the C.Guill et Martinon book shop). The book included 38 stories collected by Truong Vinh Ky and were told in a natural literary style. The language was the daily used language of Southern Vietnam in late 19th century. It is possible to say that the book is the first brick that laid the foundation to the collection and publication of funny stories in national language latter on.

⁸ According to Nguyen Dang Na, the article *Tuc cong du tiep ky, author and work*, Han Nom Review, 2nd edition, 1989 and the book *Van xui tu su Vietnam trung dai*, the Educational Publishing House, 2nd edition, Hanoi 2001, p.397-404, the book named *Tuc cong du tiep ky* and its author is Tran Tro.

⁹ He was born in 1849, passed baccalaureate, one assumed the post of district education officer and mandarin

¹⁰ In the article *Collection and editing folklore sunny stories of the Vietnam: from the beginning to the late 20th century* in the book *A century of collection and study of folklore*, The association of folklore.

In 1886, A.Landes published the book *Contes et legends annamites* (L'imprimerie coloniale Publishing House, Sai Gon). The part of funny stories are one of the three parts: legends, tales and funny stories. With 22 funny stories, A.Landes made a great contribution to the collection of folk funny stories.

In 1888, Truong Vinh Ky published the book. Interesting and useful stories collected from stories of the past (edition of ADG shop, Bock). It had 40 funny stories among 74 stories in the book.

In 1895, Huynh Tinh Cua published the book *Tedium-relieving stories* ⁽¹¹⁾. The book was written with an aim of reducing tedium, for enjoyment. However, it included many folktales. Only 1 story was later collected by Vuong Hong Sen and put into his book *Funny stories of the past*. That was the story *Ky vien* story.

In the 20th century, more books of funny story, humorous story and humorous stories were published. In 1910, the book “*Doi co ky quan*” edited by Mr. Dang Le Nghi and published by the Phat Toan Publishing House included 42 stories with some funny stories. They were the 10th story (What is done by night appears by day), the 22nd story (Frog breaks pot), and the 40th story (Ginger treat bon don illness) ⁽¹²⁾. In 1912, Phung Hoang Sang announced the book “*Humourous stories*” published by the Phat Toan Publishing House. This was a continuation of the flow of Truong Vinh Ky’ *Funny stories*, a collection of high quality. ⁽¹³⁾

In 1913, Tran Phong Sac edited the book *Humorous stories* (Imprimerie commerciale C. Ardin, 1913. it consisted of 2 volumes. The first volume has 98 funny stories, and the second volume had 66. This book included a large number of funny stories as compared with previous edition. It was noticeable that the author used the language of daily life of Southern Vietnam in the early 20th century.

In 1913, in Hanoi, Han Khanh published the book “*Humour*” (printed by the Mac Dinh Chi Printing House). The book had the subtitle as “*story of some beautiful women and gentlemen of Vietnam in the past*. It had only one funny story: *Less intelligent than women*.

In 1914, Phung Hoang Sang and Duong Diep published the book “*Truyen tieu dam*” including 50 stories. The book was printed by the Imprimerie de l'Union printing House in Sai Gon. Though the name of the book is “*Truyen tieu dam*” in the first part of the book, the two authors did not use this word but “*humourous stories*”. Their viewpoints and aims were manifested through the following verses:

¹¹ We used the 6th edition of Khai Tri, 1960.

¹² We read this stories in the book *Funny Stories of the Past*, Vuong Hong Sen, the Viet Huong Publishing House, 1972.

¹³ We used the 5th edition of the Past and present Publishing House, 1928 and collection of Vuong Hong Sen’s *Funny Stories of the Past*, the Viet Huong Publishing House.

Collecting strange things as a pleasure

To please everybody

The interesting stories can also help relieve tedium

In *Truyen tieu dam*, thus, there were some stories with vulgar elements (¹⁴)

In 1915, Tran Van Ty published the book "Interesting humorous stories"

(The Bao Ton Printing House, Sai Gon) (¹⁵).

Since 1918 to 1924, Tho An Pham Duy Ton put out a set of three volumes "Humourous stories of An Nam". The 3rd edition of the first and second volumes were printed in 1924. The first edition of the 3rd volume was printed in early 1918 (Ich Ky Publishing House, Hanoi).

In 1921, Lac Sinh published the "New humorous stories"

In 1929, the Ting Dan printing house put off the press "Funny stories"

In 1932, the Bui Van Nhan printing house (Ben Tre) put out two volumes of the book "Funny stories" of Huynh Khac Tuong. (¹⁶) In fact, the book "Funny stories" the first volume of Huynh Khac Tuong had only 04 humourous stories. The remaining were quizzes and stories about celebrities.

Also in 1932, the Pham Van Thinh Printing House, Sai Gon published the works "Legends of Vietnam". The 5th part included "interesting funny stories for entertainment which are not considered humourous stories". The author regarded funny stories as a part, equal to the other 4 parts of folk legends. However, he did not include "vulgar stories" in his work.

After all, by the early 20th century, the collection and compilation of funny stories have actively carried out. In the period under the monarchy, Confucian scholar only collected funny stories and put them in collections of other types such as myths, stories of the gods and historical stories. In the decades in late 19th century and early 20th century, the collection and compilation of funny stories were carried out by intellectuals influenced by the Western culture in a new and systematic way.

From 1945 to 1954, the collection and compilation of funny stories did not develop as before.

¹⁴ The 4th edition was printed in 1923 by the Past and present Publishing House included 50 stories, but not the story "Tien Tu".

¹⁵ We read these stories in the collection of Vuong Hong Sen, *Funny Stories of the Past*, the Viet Huong Publishing House.

¹⁶ We have not yet has the 2nd volume of the book.

In 1949, Do Nam published the work “Vietnam’s humourous stories” with 29 humourous stories.

In 1950, Cong Thanh put off the press the work “Humourous stories and legends” with two volumes.

In 1952, the Pham Van Tuoi Printing House, Sai Gon published the book “New humourous stories” and “Lo Lec da du I” of Lac Sinh.

From 1954 to 1975, the collection and compilation in the south and the north were quite different.

In the north, in 1957, Nguyen Hong Phong published the book “Vietnam’s laughters” ⁽¹⁷⁾. The total number of funny stories collected by Nguyen Hong Phong were 148 stories. In the same year of 1957, Van Tan published the book “Vietnam’s laughters” ⁽¹⁸⁾. Though the book was only a research product, the author included many funny stories; 28 humourous stories and 17 comic stories. In 1957, Zuy Nhat and Tung Giang published the work “Treasure of funny stories” ⁽¹⁹⁾. Nguyen Le published the work “Vietnamese legends and funny stories”. In 1965, Nguyen Hong Phong, Truong Chinh, Do Thien, Dang Viet Thanh, Hoang Tuan Pho published the work “Vietnam’s homourous folklore” ⁽²⁰⁾.

In south Vietnam, in 1957, Nguyen Quynh published the work “Laughter-provoking legends”. In 1963, Tu Xe published the book “101 laughter-preventing stories”. In 1969, Dang Tran Huan presented to readers the book “Stories which women are not allowed to read. In 1971, Vuong Hong Sen published the work “Funny stories of people of the past”. This was a collection of funny stories of Truong Vinh Ky, Huynh Tinh Cua, Bui Quan Nho which had been published. In 1973, An quan Trung Viet published the book “Sense of humour in poetry in Hue” of Hoang Trong Thuoc. The book sounded like a discussion. But in fact, it is a collection of 51 funny stories and anecdotes with poems. After 1975, the collection and compilation of funny stories made much achievements. The first work with funny stories published after the liberation of the south was “Vietnam’s folk humourous stories” ⁽²¹⁾ of two authors Truong Chinh and Phong Chau. The first part of the book consisted of 230 stories.

In 1985, Minh Tam, Nguyen Xuan Kinh and Tang Kim Ngan published the book “Vietnam’s folk homourous¹ stories”. In the same year, Truong Chinh also

¹⁷ *The Literature History and Geography*, Publishing House republished the work of the Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1990.

¹⁸ Republished by *the Literature History and Geography*, Publishing House.

¹⁹ The Labourers’s Publishing House, Hanoi, 1957.

²⁰ The Literature Publishing House, Hanoi.

²¹ Op.cit, Hanoi, 1985.

made known his work Vietnam's folk funny stories published by the Educational Publishing House.

In 1986, the Youth Publishing House published the book "Laughters in the resistance base". This was a collection of funny stories consisted of modern folk funny stories.

In 1988, the Literature and Art Association of Bac Thai province (now Thai Nguyen and Bac Can province) published the book "Frightened to death by wife" which included funny stories collected by several people.

Also in 1988, the Literature and Art Association of Chau Doc province published the book "Placing traps on trees" of Nguyen Huu Ai which consisted of 81 stories. In the same year, Nguyen Duc Dan compiled the book "Collection of funny stories of the work", first volume including 11 Vietnamese folk funny stories ⁽²²⁾.

In the same year, the Literature and Art Association of Nghe Tinh province (now Nghe An and Ha Tinh province) published the book "Modern funny stories" of Thai Kim Dinh, Le Thai Son, Thach Quy and Nguyen Hong.

In 1989, Bui Manh Nhi, Nguyen Tan Phat and Tran Tan Vinh published the book "Folk funny stories of the south" (The Ho Chi Minh city Publishing House). Besides essays, the authors made public 107 folk funny stories.

On 1992, Ninh Viet Giao published the book "Carrying grapefruits across river" which consisted of folk stories of Nghe Tinh. Also in the same year, Kinh Bac made public the two-volume book "101 folk funny stories of Vietnam" published by the Literature Publishing House.

In 1993, two authors Nguyen Cu and Phan Trong Thuong published the book "Treasure of Vietnamese humourous stories" ⁽²³⁾ with 342 stories.

In 1994, Ngoc Chi published the book "Laughter"

In 1995, Vu Ngoc Khanh published the book "Vietnamese humourous stories" ⁽²⁴⁾

And "The Treasure of Vietnamese funny stories" ⁽²⁵⁾. The author painstakingly collected funny stories of six categories: funny stories, humourous stories, local funny stories, funny people, funny stories on stages and funny stories in anecdotes.

Since 1995, many books of folk funny stories of many authors were published. They were mainly collection of funny stories with little or no editing. These

²² The Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1988.

²³ Op.cit.

²⁴ The Culture-Information Publishing House, 1995.

²⁵ Op.cit

include “The treasure of Vietnamese humorous stories” of Pham Truong Tam (The Youth Publishing House, Hanoi, 1999), the “Selected Vietnamese humorous stories” of Thi Long (The Da Nang Publishing House, 2001), “The selected funny stories, stupid man” of Que Chi (The Youth Publishing House, Hanoi) and the “Vietnamese folk funny stories” of Dang Viet Thuy (The Culture-Information Publishing House, 1989)

2. If separate funny stories received much concern by folklore collectors for more than 1000 years, funny stories of villages received attention much later.

In 1984, Vo Xuan Trang published the book “The story of Vinh Hoang Doctor Laureate” (The Publishing House of Binh Tri Thien province) which consisted of 19 stories about Vinh Hoang Doctor Laureate.

It is possible to say that this was the first book of funny stories of villages. Then, Tran Quoc Thinh introduced villages having funny stories of Ha Bac province (now Bac Ninh and Bac Giang provinces) in his work “Stories of villages in the south” which included 241 stories of 14 villages. Tran Quoc Thinh made a contribution to the treasure of funny stories of Vietnam by introducing funny stories of 14 northern villages.

In 1994, Duong Huy Thien introduced to readers a book of funny stories of Van Lang village, Tam Thanh district, Phu Tho province. The book was entitled “Van Lang funny stories” which consisted of 47 funny stories.

In 1998, Tran Quoc Thinh collected all funny stories of village through out the countries and produced the book “Funny stories of villages of Vietnam” (The Literature and Art publishing House). This was a careful collection of funny stories of village so far.

In short, the process of collecting funny stories both separate funny stories and stories of villages has undergone a period of more than a century from the first work of Truong Vinh Ky named “Humourous stories”. As far as the quantity is concerned, from 38 first funny stories made known to public by Truong Vinh Ky, now there are hundreds of funny stories. They were contribution of many generations of collectors.

2.1. The process of studying funny stories reflected the development of folklore branch in its capacity of a scientific branch

2.2.1 Before the August Revolution in 1945, the first person who made public funny stories was perhaps, professor Dang Thai Mai with his work “The significant ideology of funny stories”. The author maintained that art would serve people. And this concept confirmed the human characteristics of funny stories.

From 1945 to 1954, Truong Tuu dealt with funny stories. The work “Vietnam popular Literature and Art” (published by The new Cultural Cooperative, Thanh Hoa, 1951) was an approach to folklore including funny stories. He spent Chapter

V to speak of the artistic characteristics of popular literature and the art of Vietnam. He divided popular stories into two categories: legends and world affairs. The latter included humourous stories, comic stories, everyday life stories and work stories. In fact, Truong Tuu did not directly deal with funny stories, but the work stories already implied funny stories and humourous stories. As he was much influenced by Frost's ideology that he explained sex and vulgarism under the light of Frost's ideology. He wrote "Particularly, the backbone of funny stories, behavior and heroes in the stories is vulgarism. It seems that the Vietnamese ordinary people was so extremely depressed that they responded in such a way" (²⁶). However, Truong Tuu placed funny stories, humourous stories in the category of folk prose and looked at them from artistic angle.

Besides, in the period, other works such as "Useful funny stories" "Dong Linh duong phuong duc", "A brief history of Vietnam" of Minh Trang also dealt with funny stories.

After 1954, the study of funny stories in the north and the south did not develop in parallel. In 1955, the Song Lo Publishing House published the book "Remarks on the art of popular literature" of Nguyen van Phu. The author spent one page dealing with funny stories. In 1957, Tung Giang and Zuy Nhat published the book "A treasure of funny stories" (The Working People Publishing House). In the foreword of the book, the author confirmed the aims of funny stories and the right to laughter.

Also in 1957, Nguyen Hong Phong published the book "Vietnamese funny stories (The Literature-History and Geography Publishing House). Besides the funny stories, the author spent 70 pages for theory. It is possible to say that, Nguyen Hong Phong was the first to study funny stories in a comprehensively manner with Marxist viewpoints. The author separated stories about Trang Lon, Trang Quynh (doctor laureates) from humourous stories, calling them long satirical creations. The author spoke of the social and critical significance of humourous stories such as: entertaining, causing fun and criticising the feudal regime. He mentioned the three main artistic characteristics of humourous stories: stories which exploiting natural contradictions. These contradictions were so arranged that they caused more interesting and stronger laughs. Some stories used vulgarism as a cause of laughter. Other used man's stupidity or rigidity as the cause of laughter. Different from Truong Tuu, Nguyen Hong Phong did not consider vulgarism in funny stories as "physical depression" but it was the response of farmers to stringent feudal ethical regulations particularly when they were leading a difficult life.

²⁶ Vu Hoang Mai, Op.cit, p 158.

Also in 1957, Van Tan published the book “Vietnamese laughter” (The Literature-History-Geography Publishing House). This was a meticulous and detailed work on funny stories. He divided funny stories into two categories: funny stories and humorous stories. His observations of the content and artistic characteristics of the two categories were scientific. According to Van Tan, targets of laughter in funny stories are bad things among people and the opposing class of the working people. As far as artistic aspect was concerned, funny stories consisted of 6 characteristics. They were exaggeration, vulgarism, dramatics, ending without conclusion, reality and short. Humorous stories consisted of 6 characteristics. They had high level of imagination. They often exaggerated typical case and used punch with rich forms of expression and reality. Conclusions were often advice given by the authors.

In the process of studying funny stories, the work “Vietnamese laughter” of Van Tan was the first work, together with “Vietnamese funny stories” of Nguyen Hong Phong were works of special value. Marxist viewpoints helped the authors discovered that the funny stories were against the feudal regime, thus eradicating thinking that funny stories were created only to entertain, amuse and relieve sadness.

In 1957, Vu Dinh Lien, Edo Duc Hieu, Le Tri Vien, Truong Chinh and Le Thuoc-members of Le Quy Don group produced the work “A brief history of Vietnamese Literature”. In the work, the authors spent one chapter on humorous stories. Mr. Huynh Ly was the one who wrote the chapter which named “Humorous stories”. He confirmed the anti-feudalist spirit of authors of funny stories as well as the value of causing funs and criticism of humorous stories. But he held that laughing is only a means. The artistic value of humorous stories, according to him, was that it contained many typical cases which had high dramatic characteristics.

In 1960, when assessing the two works of Nguyen Hong Phong and Van Tan, Tran Thanh Mai wrote an article entitled “Some characteristics of humorous stories”. He confirmed the social content of humorous stories, considering fun as a means not an aim of those who had created humorous stories.

He said, “Outside elements and events which occurred suddenly were among necessary conditions to create laughters”⁽²⁷⁾. He pointed out that “The secrete of causing laughter in humorous stories is mainly the arrangement and organisation of non-natural phenomena, misunderstood situations, vulgarism, stupidity in certain special circumstances.”⁽²⁸⁾

In the 60s’ of the 20th century, achievements were made in the study of funny stories. The research started with the text book “History of Vietnamese literature”,

²⁷ Literature research review, edition 8, 1960, p. 49.

²⁸ Op.cit.

volume 1 of a group of authors. They were Bui Van Nguyen, Nguyen Ngoc Con, Nguyen Nghia Dan, Hoang Tien Tuu, Do Binh Tri and Le Tri Vien-all were lecturers at pedagogical University. Then the term funny stories were used as the name of a category. In folklore, funny stories were mentioned along side legend, myth, folk tale and fable. The issue here was not only the term but the authors established scientific grounds of funny stories' content and art.

In 1963, though not being a folklorist, Nguyen Tuan- a great writer- confirmed the ideological and philosophical contents in Vietnamese humorous stories in his article entitled "We should laugh" which he read at the 11th Congress of the Vietnamese Writers Association on January 11.

In 1973, the work "Folk Literature" ⁽²⁹⁾ of the two authors Dinh Gia Khanh and Chu Xuan Dien was published. The author applied viewpoints of Marxism into the research of folklore. They divided funny stories into two level of laughter's. First was the simple humorous stories. Second was humorous stories having social significance. Hence, two categories of funny stories: humorous stories and satirical stories.

In 1974, Cao Huy Dinh, in his work "Studying the development of Vietnamese folklore", mentioned the fact that in funny stories, people expressed their wish "to say farewell to the feudalism regime". ⁽³⁰⁾

Meanwhile, in the south since 1954 to 1975, less studies of funny stories was conducted. There were some work such as "Laughing, causes and nature" ⁽³¹⁾ , "The spirit of satire in Hue poems."

In 1979, the two authors Truong Chinh and Phong Chau included in their the book: "Vietnamese folk laughter" not only funny stories but also some discussions about Vietnamese folk laughter. As their predecessors, Truong Chinh and Phong Chau reasonably analysed targets of laughter, methods causing laughter, social significance of laughter.

In 1988, Nguyen Duc Dan and other authors spent many pages in the work "A collection of funny stories of the world" ⁽³²⁾ to speak about laughter and funny stories. The most noticeable part in the book was the chapter about methods to causing laughter as the authors approached the funny stories from the angle of morphology.

In 1990, Hoang Tien Tuu, while producing university textbooks, published the work "Vietnamese folk literature", 2nd volume. The author devoted part D on

²⁹ The Higher Education and Vocational Training Publishing House, Hanoi, 1973, from p.190 to 234.

³⁰ The Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1974, from 161 to 176.

³¹ Published by Pham Quang Khai, Sai gon, 1968.

³² The Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1988.

funny stories including folk stories. He analysed them in different angles: categorisation, establishment, development, content and significance of funny stories.

Also in 1990, Le Chi Que, Vo Quang Nhon and Nguyen Hung Vi published the text books named "Vietnamese folk literature." ⁽³³⁾ the authors studies funny stories in the form of folk self-narration. He studied from different angles: the forms, category, content, art of humourous stories and satirical stories.

In 1991, in the chapter "The development of history of Vietnamese folk literature" of the text book "Vietnamese folk literature", volume 1, Do Binh Tri mentioned funny stories when analysing folk literature from the 16th to 19th centuries.

In 1993, Nguyen Anh Tiem made public his article; "Humour from folk funny stories to modern prose" in the Folklore Review. The author dealt with the development of humour to contemporary prose.

In 1994, Phan Thi Dao and Phan Trong Hoa in their article "Instigating laughter by logical methods through some Vietnamese folk funny stories" carried by the Cultural Review, 5th Edition, 1994, he suggested that the study of funny stories should be conducted under the angle of poetry.

In 1996, Vu Ngoc Khanh made public his work "Travel to the land of laughter" ⁽³⁴⁾. Beside the funny stories and stories of doctor laureates from page 159 to 211, the remaining part was divided into three chapters by the author. Chapter 1: Vietnamese laughter, chapter 2: To the land of laughter and chapter 3: Meeting with laughing people. With that approach, the work had more or less found a way of effectively studying funny stories.

In 1996, Nguyen An Tiem wrote the article "Entertaining humour in folk funny stories" which was part of his doctora thesis. In the same year, the Hanoi Pedagogical College published it in the book "From natural laughter to intellectual laughter". The author had a closer look to measures to create laughter and made a fair analysis of the relation between humour and laughter.

In 1999, Kieu Thu Hoach made public the article "Some issues on studying funny stories". Reviewing the collection and study of funny stories, the author pointed to problems to be solved in funny stories such as terminology, categorisation, functions and targets of funny stories. It is true that these are problems of great concern which need to be solved thoroughly by researchers.

In 2000, Vu Mai Hoang issued the article entitled "Collection and compilation of folk funny stories of Vietnam: from the beginning to the 20th century. The

³³ Library of the Hanoi University, 1990.

³⁴ The Educational Publishing House, Hanoi.

author reviewed the whole process of collection, compilation and research of funny stories (the author included collected stories and study on doctor laureates in this part) through the process of history.

2.2.2. If separate funny stories and stories on doctor laureates were thoroughly studied, the research of funny stories of villages was started much later.

In 1984, Vo Xuan Trang devoted 24 pages on essay under the title "Stories about Vinh Hoang doctor laureate- a unique satirical phenomenon in Vietnamese literature" to review content and artistic characteristics of funny stories.

In 1984, Nghiem Da Van wrote the article "Preliminary survey of villages which produce funny stories of Vietnam" ⁽³⁵⁾, introducing Dong Sai, Dong Khang and Tru O villages.

In 1988, in the foreword to the work "Funny stories of the north", Associate Professor Do Binh Tri spoke of his presentiment of the value of funny stories of Ha Bac and throughout the country. His presentiment was: "It is noticeable that these funny stories- or funny stories of villages - do not conform to the concept saying that funny stories are a form and they can be divided into two categories: humourous stories and satirical stories" ⁽³⁶⁾. It was a precious scientific presentiment.

In general, fundamental issues of folk funny stories were studied and presented in an clear way. It is possible to say that the results made by folklorists were great. However, many problems of funny stories were still open such as catergorisation of funny story and poetry of funny stories.

II.

The working people are said to be creators of folklore in general and folk funny stories in particular. The content of this concept as V.E.Gusev put it: "Society is a community of social groupings and classes established in history. It creates the foundation of each society, and the social structure of people in different historical stage. It is not unchanged. On the contrary, it changed from era to era even in a social forms". ⁽³⁷⁾ In other words, the working people is not immutable and in traditional society, this was all the more obvious.

In the traditional Vietnamese society, farmers were obviously an important force in social structure. However, scholars played an important role in Vietnamese villages at that time. Vietnamese scholars, to a certain extend, were scholars of villages. They were associated with villages not only in a capacity as spokesmen of Confucianism, but creators and disseminators of culture. It is

³⁵ The Educational Publishing House.

³⁶ *The funny Stories of the North*, the Ha Bac Cultural and Information Service, 1988, p.3.

³⁷ *Folklore Fine Arts, Vietnamese Version* of Hoang Ngoc Hien, Da Nang Publishing House, 1999, p. 32.

possible to say that, Vietnamese scholars were creators and disseminators of folklore. Thus, in folk funny stories, Chinese characters, parallel sentences, and classic references appeared. On other words, creators of funny stories of the Viet were not only farmers but also scholars. Thus, it is not complete to say “The Viet laugh” as Do Thuy Lai put it. We must say that the creators of Vietnamese folk funny stories consist of different people strata and classes including farmers and scholars.

1. It is difficult to judge exactly the time in history when folk funny stories of the Viet appeared. If conditions for appearance and development of funny stories are identified as when there were laughable bad things in society and creators of funny stories had the demands and were able to use funny stories to criticise bad practices as Associate Professor Hoang Tien Tuu identified, there might be two possibilities for funny stories to appear:

-First, folk funny stories of the Viet were created to criticise bad customs and practices of people. It is difficult to identify the time of its creation. Given its nature, folklore was always recreated and created constantly through history.

- Second, it is possible to identify the time of establishment of funny stories criticising the corrupt and decadent monarchy society. “Most of Vietnamese folk funny stories were created during the Le and Nguyen dynasties in the 18th and 19th centuries. This historical period satisfy completely fundamental conditions for development of folk funny stories”.⁽²⁸⁾

In reality, it is difficult to identify and associate the development of Vietnamese folk funny stories with historical periods before the 18th and 19th century, because material about Vietnamese folk funny stories during these periods were scarce. The major part of highest value in the treasure of folk funny stories of the Viet was folk funny stories created during the 18th and 19th centuries

2. The Vietnamese funny stories were people’s and social attitude towards aesthetics as well as good and bad things. Researchers often quoted Aristotle’s saying: “What is laughable is bad” to prove this thing. The Vietnamese, from scholar to farmer, from city dweller to cultural activist had an outstanding creativity. They produced funny stories at different levels. “Our ancestors were artists who created the laughter of Vietnam in different forms and scales”.⁽³⁹⁾ Associate Doctor Vu Ngoc Khanh took time to set up a table of lexis of laughter and he announced 201 lexis of laughter in the life of the Vietnamese. However, the laughs had also many colours and tones. There was physical laughter. There was also psychological laughter associated with a certain aim. Laughter is always an attitude, a response of creators before the reality, the good and bad things of

²⁸ Hoang Tien Tuu, Op.cit, p.88.

³⁹ Nguyen Tuan, *We Should Laugh*, in the book “*New Tasks of Literature*”, the Cultural publishing House, Hanoi, 1963.

people and society. The good, bad things and laughable things through people's laughter constitute a real world, the world of laughter. In other words, laughter is always an aspect of people's soul. Thus, the Vietnamese are always optimistic.

The world of folk funny stories is a real world which is quite different from the world of legends, myths, and tales. Entering that world, we met many characters with all laughable good and bad habits. First, there were people with power. Different from the stories about Quynh and Lon doctor laureates, kings, lords, in separate and unchained stories, though there was not kings, Diem Vuong (the God of Hell) appeared with an ugly face. Diem Vuong was depicted in the story "I crave for it" as a greedy person. He heard a pig retelling how it was slaughtered. The pig said that I was shaved and washed. Then I was split into small pieces. They fried sliced onions and seasoned me with salt and fish sauce... Diem Vuong then halted the pig: "Stop it. It makes my mouth water." This detail depicted Diem Vuong as a greedy person and a hypocrite who was in the position of a judge. There was another Diem Vuong in the story "Can you delay for one more night". He was also an irresponsible judge. The soul of a thief and the soul of a prostitute reincarnated in a mandarin and his wife. The soul of a physician was put into a cauldron of oil. The portrait of Diem Vuong appeared again when the soul of the physician said : Can you delay for one more night so that I can tell my son to rob and my daughter to work as a prostitute. If they do good things they will be put into a cauldron of boiled oil. Mandarins were also present in funny stories. In the monarchy administration, they were considered to be "parents of people". However, they were depicted as incompetent and irresponsible. They only squeezed money out of people. The story "A clean mandarin" depicted a mandarin who was known to be "clean". However, he laid bare his true face when telling his wife: "You are so stupid. Why do you tell them that I was born in the year of the Rat. If you tell them I was born in the year of the Buffalo, we can have a bigger amount of gold." The story "Than bia tra nghĩa" (The God of the target returns good deeds) was about an army officer who never shot to the target or in other words he was incompetent. Another characters in funny stories were physicians, monks, teachers and sorcerers. First, there was a stupid teacher (in Bat was Bat tree) and a greedy teacher (The teacher ate on the sly, and The teacher slobbered honey), a teacher who flirted with a lady-the host of the house where he taught. Not only teachers, but also monks who violated religious commandments. A monk flirted a girl (in nam mo boong), a monk liked to eat dog meat.

Besides teachers and monks were physicians. They were not better than the teachers and monks: an ignorant physician (A physician learnt to wade), a charlatan.

There were another people including geomancer, sorcerer, and magician. There were verses expressing the attitude of the working people:

If the earth can speak

The geomancer can hardly have teeth.

In funny stories, that attitude was also obvious. It created such stories as “It was because of geomancer; A teacher and a sorcerer; A fortune teller and a physician”.

Through a word of characters full of laughter, people wanted to express their negation of reality. That was “an expression of people’s wisdom and ethical superiority over those who oppressed them”.⁽⁴⁰⁾ In funny stories, the working people did not acknowledge what the ruling class in the monarchy society propagated. In other words, the coat of paint over those values covered by administrators peeled off before the cheerful laughter. Here, the working people did not show their gratitude to teachers and physicians. Instead they saw clearly laughable people among them. The laughter in these cases would make teachers and physicians cleaner. This is the anti-feudalist value of folk funny stories.

The working people did not only focus their laughter on rulers, cultural practitioners, characters representing authority but also on bad practices and habits. Flattery, henpecked, greediness and meanness were exposed to laughter. Laughter, in these cases were like a dose of medicine which help purify people’s souls. The story “Eating sweat potato on the sly” depicted a husband who stealthily eat sweat potatoes while his wife was not at home. But he wife returned while he was eating it. He had to put it into his trousers’ pocket to hide it. But, it was too hot that he had to jump up and down and lied to his wife :”I was too happy to see you come back home.” The story “Not me” was about a henpecked husband. When he was questioned by his wife, he answered: “If it was me, I brought it inside before it rained.”

In funny stories, an element the value of which needs to be considered was the relation between the stories’ plots and laughter. Some stories used vulgar elements, or even sex. These stories’ subjects could be conjugal life, man and woman’s sex organs. These stories included “Lay gio rau”, “Getting used to the food”, “Tired because of standing” ect... Many researchers tried to explain and assessed this phenomenon. First, there must be a differentiation between vulgar and sex elements. Professor Nguyen Hong Phong made a precise remark about humourous stories “humourous stories often use what is called vulgarism as a subject for laughter and a tool to create laughs”.⁽⁴¹⁾ Professor Nguyen Hong Phong also made an observation: “Sensual stories were often about woman’ sex organs or man and woman sexual relations. Vulgar stories used the above-said elements to create laughter, considering them as tools not the aims of the stories. Of course, humourous stories also consist of vulgar and sensual elements, but the

⁴⁰ V.R. Gusev, folklore aesthetic, *the Vietnamese Version* of Hoang Ngoc Hien, the Da Nang Publishing House, 1999, p. 571 and 572.

⁴¹ *Vietnamese Humorous Stories*, reprinted, The Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1990, p.47.

number of these humorous stories is few. In these cases, humorous stories only used the rude, unnatural and ridiculous aspects as tools to create laughter".⁽⁴²⁾ The practice of using vulgarism, sex organs or sexual relations to cause laughter in funny stories of the Viet resulted from a cultural religious belief very popular in Vietnam. It was organ-worshipping cult which was started in between Paleolithic and Neolithic era. Influenced by the Chinese culture, this religious cult was broken down its vestiges were found in the treasure of folk funny stories of the Viet.

3. Funny stories are a form with unique characteristics, quite different from legends or myths. First, creators of folklore produced laughable situations which often include contradictions between real and false things, natural and unnatural things, logical and illogical things. These situations appeared when there were contradictions. Laughter was triggered when these contradictions were solved. For example, witnessing a neighbor being scolded by his wife, a henpecked husband blurted out: "If I were him...". Immediately, he was questioned by his wife "What did you do if you were him?" The poor henpecked husband was so frightened that he had to say: "If I were him I brought it inside before it rains." This caused joyful laughter as he was the same as other henpecked men.

To create laughter, creators took advantage of exaggeration. Everyday life stories and stories in funny story books were both similar and different. In real life, no one who was nearly drowning could be so stingy to bargain for a lower sum of money he would pay his savor. Readers accepted that story even it was unreasonably exaggerated. The event that funny story is very close while very far from reality made the humour acceptable by the Viet.

The ways to end funny stories are also their unique characteristics. The funny stories do not have good endings but abrupt and sudden endings. This characteristic make funny stories different from legends. Legends often have good endings. They paint another world where poor, oppressed and exploited people will be liberated, happy and better off. The ends of funny stories are often bare and sometimes painfully sad. They lay bare the bad and false things. These stories are often about greedy teachers or husbands and wives eating on the sly. Behind the laughter are tears that make people meditate about the plight of people in traditional society where food shortage is always a tormented concern. By criticising the bad habit of eating on the sly, the stories purify people's souls. On the other hand, some stories have sudden endings which caused laughter and a discovery of people's nature. Take the story: "A teacher speak rashly" for example. When he was discovered, he put a question: "Can I ask you a question, is this road to the paradise?" That is a sudden end, laying bare the nature of a lewd teacher. The ends of the funny stories, thus, are different from the formula endings of legends" the poor and oppressed people will eventually be triumphal and happy.

⁴² Op.cit. p. 51.

The creators of folk funny stories led readers and listeners without giving early warning of the ends to cause sudden stops that caused laughter.

III.

Funny stories are a form of Vietnamese folklore. The big treasure of folk funny stories express the aesthetics of the Vietnamese working people. They used laughter to criticise the ruling class and other cultural practitioners, the bad things. The laughter caused by the stories help purify people's souls. The laughter provoking situations were often contradictions, settlement of contradiction, exaggeration of creators.

Out current society is no longer a rotten monarchy society which had many laughable things in the 18th to 19th centuries. Historical conditions for satirical laughter do not exist. However, bad habits and customs of cadres have not yet been removed. Thus, the laughter of folklore are still effective.

With these values, the Vietnamese folklore is a spiritual asset of our people to enter the future. Laughter is always tool of optimistic people. The vitality of folk funny stories lies in that aspect and will stay on with time and people.