

## **Agricultural Culture Characteristics Expressed Inproverbs and Idioms about Working and Producing Of Tay People in Tuyen Quang Province**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The article explores idioms and proverbs referring to the producing and working activities of Tay people in Tuyen Quang and initially studies the characteristics of agricultural culture reflected by them. Idioms and proverbs about producing and working activities of Tay people have short forms and lively images which illustrate agricultural production associated with cultivating, growing crops and raising animals, which results in a clear demonstration of the past production life of Tay people. At the same time, idioms and proverbs also affirm the cultural characteristics of Tay people in Tuyen Quang province.*

**KEYWORDS:** *idioms, proverbs, Tay people, agricultural culture.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Idioms and proverbs are considered “pockets of wisdom”, containing the quintessence of a culture. Can name the authors: Stathi, Gumpel (1974), Fernando và Flavell (1981), J. Seidl và McMordie (1988), Mostafa (2010), Alan Dundes... Studying the idioms and proverbs of an ethnic will reveal the natural and social context of their formation. Such as, J. Seidl và McMordie: “An idioms can be defined as a number of words which, when taken together, have a different meaning from the individual meaning of each word” [3]. Or “Idioms are fixed of expressions, whose meaning is not immediately obvious from looking at the individual words in the idioms” [4]. Therefore, they can be considered a smaller version of a historical and natural museum of each ethnic. In Encyclopedic dictionary: “A proverb is a simple and concrete saying popularly known and repeated which expresses a truth. Based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. They are often metaphorical” (Wikipedia). Alan Dundes: “A proverb is a traditional propositional statement consisting of a topic and a comment” [2].

Studying about idioms and proverbs, we realized that they draw a lot of attention from researchers in the world. What they all agree about idioms is that those groups of words are image suggestive and expressive, the meaning of the idiom is created by the combination of lexical that make up idioms; they carry the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the people that produce and use them. Regarding proverbs, they believe that those groups of words may be a comment, an experience of a piece of advice concluded from the real life of the seniors. Thus, the content of both idioms and proverbs contains and reflects people's knowledge of objects and phenomena of the objective world. What distinguishes them is that, on the one hand, proverbs are generalized conceptions; while, on the other hand, idioms are presented and interpreted into judgments and experiences. In this article, we use the concept of idioms and proverbs simultaneously when they reflect the cultural characteristics of the people who produce and use them.

2. Research on idioms and proverbs in Vietnam follow three main directions: literature approach, linguistic approach and cultural approach. Those research directions are characterized by the research field and have achieved certain achievements. However, they focus on the definitions of idioms and proverbs, and the values that they reflect. In this article, we study idioms and proverbs in the direction of studying culture from a linguistic perspective. Idioms and proverbs reflect the cultural characteristics of an ethnic. Studying idioms and proverbs of the Tay ethnic group in Tuyen Quang province with a view to find out about the cultural characteristics of this ethnic group is a brand new topic which has never been studied.

3. Tuyen Quang is a province with many ethnic groups. This place is the home for more than 22 ethnic groups, and 8 groups which have larger population are Kinh, Tay, Dao, Cao Lan, Nung, Hoa, H'Mong and San Diu. The second largest group is Tay people (185,456 people), mainly distributed in Chiem Hoa district and Na Hang district. The traditional history and cultural identity of ethnic minorities are formed from cultivating activities, which refer to agricultural cultural characteristics. This is reflected in the Tay idioms and proverbs about producing activities.

## II. MAIN CONTENT

### 2.1. Survey results

The Tay people mainly practice agricultural production. As they often live in the areas which are near the foot of the mountains, a water source, or a location convenient for farming, the Tay people in Tuyen Quang have favorable conditions for cultivation and production. Although Tuyen Quang has high terrain, there are plenty of rivers, streams, and lakes for agricultural production. It can be said that the Tay people in Tuyen Quang with labor and intelligence have made Tuyen Quang become a developed economic region with combined agriculture and forestry. Idioms and proverbs not only contain the meaning and reality of residence but also refer to the work done by locals. The characteristics of labor of Tay people are reflected in agricultural culture.

117 proverbs and idioms have been surveyed, 22 of which are idioms and proverbs reflecting the experience related to the weather; 59 idioms and proverbs reflect experience on cultivation, 17 idioms and proverbs reflect the experience of breeding, 4 idioms reflect both cultivating and breeding practice. Thus, according to the survey, idioms and proverbs reflecting the experience of cultivation occupy the largest part, which shows that, cultivation, especially rice cultivation, occupies the leading position in agricultural production. Idioms and proverbs that reflect the experience of breeding make up the smallest amount, as this is not of common practice in Tuyen Quang. Thereby, it can be seen that Tay idioms and proverbs clearly reflect typical aspects of the real life of agricultural production of this ethnic group. Different elements of agricultural production of Tay people in Tuyen Quang are expressed in numerous aspects.

### 2.2. Cultural characteristics through idioms and proverbs about Tay's producing activities

#### 2.2.1. Idioms and proverbs reflect the experience of cultivation

Cultivation is considered the main activities in production, including planting and harvesting crops on the fields. Land used for cultivation are valleys interspersed with hills, terraces and small fields. The characteristics of cultivation of Tay people in Tuyen Quang province are reflected in idioms, proverbs, and preserved by idioms and proverbs.

In terms of experience in cultivation, idioms and proverbs of Tay people refer to fields and land. Of the 59 idioms and proverbs reflecting the cultivation experience of Tay people, there are 7 idioms and proverbs referring to fields and land. The carefulness in selecting land and the appreciation of the role of land are the because of the fact that land is the main means of making a living of the Tay people. The proverb says: *Thai đin phăng nhặng đin liêng* (When one dies, one is buried under the land; when one lives, one is fed by the land). It shows that the Tay people in the past emphasized the role of land (đin) to human life. "Đin liêng" means that land creates jobs, the source of wealth and the transfer to the next generation. According to the Tay's concept, farming is a highly-appreciated profession: *Síp gản puôn vào bổ tăng lạo chuôi đin* (A group of men who do business cannot be compared to a farmer). This proverb shows that, in the past, farming was a sure thing while trading fluctuated. Thereby, the ancient Tay people attach great importance to farming and agricultural production. Also, because of that concept, they are very proud of their farming "*Téng bắt đay kin pya, hắt nà đay kin khâu*" (Go fishing and eat fish, farming and eat rice).

Along with appreciating the role of land, proverbs and idioms of Tay people also reflect experiences on land care (14 idioms and proverbs). For example, *Nà đay nhòong khún* (Good fertilizer makes good fields), *nà đay nhòong chả* (Good plants make good fields). *Rầy vắn pá, nà tốc dùm* (A good field has moderate slope, a good field is low-lying land) (the natural conditions of the terrain determine the quality of the rice). The experience of soil preparation is summarized by Tay people, for example: *Nà lai phura muôi mã, khâu lai sác khâu khao* (A lot of harrowing leads to full seeds, a lot of pounding leads to white rice) suggests that land should be plowed carefully. *Thêm vầy biai, thêm lai đậu khâu* (The more grass is taken away, the more rice is brought about) suggests that clearing the grass must be done thoroughly and carefully. *Pát khâu cầu tèo vại* (A bowl of rice takes nine times of plowing and harrowing) recommends children to respect the products of their labor. That proverbs and idioms reflect the experience of land use shows that agricultural production is associated with topographic characteristics in high mountains and reflect the cultivation characteristics of the Tay people.

With mostly hilly and mountainous terrain, cultivated fields are only valleys and upland fields following the foot of the mountain, Tay people highly appreciate the role of water in rice cultivation. Out of 117 idioms and proverbs surveyed, 8 idioms and proverbs refer to this content. For example: *Ship đon rầy phya, bầu tăng rầu nà pác nặm* (a bunch of fields on rocky mountains are not equal to a field near the water source); *Síp nghé phật phò, bổ tăng nà vò nặm vạ* (Ten of the forges are not equal to a high field waiting for rain to get water for planting). According to the Tay's conception, agricultural activities, though may be difficult due to dependence on source of water, are better than forging.

Idioms and proverbs revealing about how seedlings for planting activities work, showing that they are very interested in breeding. Tay people seem to believe that high productivity is mainly due to good seed selection. There are 18 idioms and proverbs relating to this content. For example, *Nà dằm nặm dẻ, khâu ké sam pi, dầu mì tấp tời* (who have wet rice fields will have plenty of rice). These are experiences for rice cultivation which show that good seedlings result in great yields. *Quai chường chá và chường nà* (take care of the plants and you will have everything, take care of the fields and you will have nothing) emphasizes the importance of selecting seeds.

In terms of cultivation, Tay people have drawn experience of planting and harvesting time in idioms and proverbs. According to them, agricultural production must follow the right season and the time to ensure productivity. For example: *Nà dằm tằm ngoảng á, khâu bỏ quá ngài chiêng* (If you are late for transplanting, there will surely be a shortage of rice). *Sip co lả, bỏ tắng hả co thua* (ten late transplanted plants are not equal to five early transplanted ones) means that transplanting must be on time to produce high yield. *Phú phí sí sip vắn*, (Plans are growing and can be harvested within forty days). *Buron sam lờng chá, buron há dằm nà* (March sowing, May planting) summarize the experience of the old rice transplanting technique which has still been applied by the Tay people. *Buron chiêng tò mạy rị, buron nhi tò mạy phai* (First, build a garden fence, then, build a dam). In the first month, they have to find trees to build a garden fence, then, in the second month, they have to find trees to build dam, driving water to the fields so that rice can be transplanted in the third month. *Buron nhi khúy vô phây*. In lunar second month, in the mountainous areas, it is still very cold, so it is necessary to prepare a fire to warm up as well as to continue to care for plants that are less resistant to cold and skip the trees requiring warm weather. *Phước bỏ quá xính mình, khinh bỏ quá cốc vũ* (plant taro before the beginning of the spring) (from April 4 to April 19). So, the season-related experience has been concluded in a very detailed way and bears the imprint of farming in the high mountains, depending on the terrain and weather.

### **2.2.2. Idioms and proverbs reflect the experience of the weather**

Agricultural cultural imprints are also expressed in idioms and proverbs reflecting the weather, including experiences of weather forecasts to adjust the agricultural activities in accordance with the weather. Because agricultural practice in the mountainous areas highly depends on natural conditions and climate, people in the past took the weather into serious consideration. *Phân dậu giú rườn rắ và, phân vại óc nà nặm bấp* (If it rains in the morning, stay at home, washing the blankets. If it rains in the afternoon, go to the corn field) means forecasting the weather helps to adjust the work accordingly. *Phân dậu khâu thác dần* (If it rains in the early morning, dry the rice). *Phân vại, hoài lảm lảng* (If it rains in the afternoon, do not let buffalo go to the meadow). This is because in the mountain terrain, it is difficult to find buffalo when they go out to eat. The experience of weather forecasting is also shown in the forecasting of the suitable weather for planting. *Ván rẫy ngoòng phân mà, dằm nà ngoòng đét rợn* (When sowing on upland, we look forwards to rain; when sowing on downland, we look forwards to sunshine). It is not difficult to understand this proverb. Farmers often hope that the weather is favorable for their work. When they cultivate on steep fields which get dry easily, they need more water from the rain while cultivating on low land is often negatively affected by flood and waterlogging, that is the reason why they look forwards to the sunny weather. *Vạ đặng buron chiêng phiêng lắt phuông lý và đặng buron nhi pây hí xum mần* (If there is thunder in the first month, there will be enough rice to eat. If there is thunder in the second month, we will be starve). As the weather affects the crops, thunderstorms in the first month mean that there will be enough water for plants, otherwise, they will lose their crops, so they have to eat wild plants. *Vạ lả mèo keo thái giác hác đay kin* (Keo people hate rain whereas Hác people love it). The reason for this proverb lies in the fact that Hác (Kinh) people are often vendors, so they love sunny weather when they can sell produce. In contrast, Hác (Nung) people need the rain for irrigation. *Vông lếch nõng, vông toòng lẹng*. This means when there is a dark circle around the Moon, there will be heavy rain while the light circle around the Moon is a sign for drought. *Xo chắt đoi khâu, xo cẩu đoi mùa* (If it rains on the seventh of the month, it will be rainy on the ninth). *Xo há hần nà hai* (The crescent Moon can be observed on the fifth of the month). Due to the high mountain terrain, the crescent Moon (new moon) appears on the 5<sup>th</sup> of lunar calendar. *Xử thử quá phai* (In Xu Thu period, there will be continual rains). Tay people have concluded that in Xu Thu period (from 23<sup>th</sup> of August to 26<sup>th</sup> of September), the rain usually becomes heavier. *Yền phân hần đét, và phiét gĩ đặng* (Sunshine appears after the rain, lightning appears then does thunder), *Moóc khin: phân, moóc lờng: đét* (mist in the high air means rainy weather, mist in the low air means sunny weather). *Vắn phân đay kin lầu, tọ xấu lạo đénh vại* (Rainy days are suitable for those who are lazy, not for those who work). The weather does affect farming practice because even on rainy days, farmers must work while lazy people stay at home and do nothing. *Vạ đặng cón đặng lẹng* (If there is thunder before the rain, there will be a drought). *Căng rọng và đét óc, nạn khoác và phân mà* (Monkeys cry, then it is sunny, deer cries, then it is rainy).

### **2.2.3. Idioms and proverbs reflect the experience of breeding**

In the ancient agricultural production of the Tay people, in particular, and of the Vietnamese people, in general, there were always images of animals, from most important animals such as buffaloes to other

poultry and cattle. Having surveyed idioms and proverbs about production of Tay people, we encountered images of animals, to which Tay people paid special attention, especially buffaloes and cows, as a companion to Tay farmers in cultivation. Tay people highly appreciate the role of these animals in production. *Tua mò giò vô khô* (cows support the poor) Cows help farmers to plow rice and raise a herd of cattle. *Liêng vài nhằng nần viẻ, liêng mò mẽ pi tua* (Raising buffalo is slower than raising cows). This is because cows are more likely to develop herds. *Sam bươn vằn mẽ pát, chắt bươn vằn mẽ cáy* (Raising a flock of duck takes three months while it takes seven months to raise a flock of chicken). *Liêng Nốc soa cáy thườn* (Raising a flock of pheasant) means that if people choose to raise wild animals, they will go back to the wild once they grow up, which is just a waste of time. *Vài seng thây nà dẻ, vài mẽ thây nà vằn* (Male buffaloes for low lands, female ones for slope).

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Idioms and proverbs about working activities of Tay people in Tuyen Quang have a natural but lively image, which symbolizes and reflects the reality of the Tay's agricultural production since ancient times. They give us a better understanding of the Tay's valuable experiences in agricultural production as it depends a lot on the weather and high mountain terrain. Moreover, these idioms and proverbs also have cultural values, reflecting the cultural characteristics of the Tay's culture. They enrich the folk literature treasure of Tay people, in particular, and Vietnamese folklore, in general.

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