

## Cao Lan Folk Riddles In Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam

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**Abstract :** Cao Lan is one of 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam. In the oral folklore of the Cao Lan people, the riddle not only reflects folklore but also helps to recognize the way the Cao Lan people perceive world. However, like many literature genres of other ethnic minorities in Vietnam, the Cao Lan riddle is also at risk of disappearance. Collecting, studying, and discovering the contents of Cao Lan riddles is one of the measures to help preserve riddle in particular and Cao Lan folklore in general. The article is the result of the collecting Cao Lan folk riddles in Tuyen Quang and research to see how to perceive the world of indigenous peoples.

**Key words:**

Date of Submission: 12-09-2020

Date of Acceptance: 29-09-2020

### I. INTRODUCTION

Folk riddle is a genre of Vietnamese folklore; “the main function is to reflect the characteristics of things and phenomena by the method of anonymity and the art of jamming transformation (transform one object into another), which the people often used in group activities to challenge others’ capacity of reasoning, understanding, and for the purpose of entertaining”[3]. Study on folk riddles in Vietnam has existed for a long time, but at a general level, or just stopped at collecting and solving puzzles.

### II. CONTENTS

1. Cao Lan people now live in Northern Midlands and Mountains region of Vietnam, most of which are located in Tuyen Quang. There are many studies on the folklore of the Cao Lan ethnic group in Tuyen Quang such as “Cao Lan folk songs”, “Cao Lan folk tales”, “Cao Lan Xinh singing”, etc. However, these works just include initial collection or general introductions. Regarding the folk puzzle genre of Cao Lan people in Tuyen Quang, so far it is almost empty. Up to now, study on the genre of folk riddles of Cao Lan people in Tuyen Quang is only included in *the Quizzes of ethnic minorities in Tuyen Quang* (Ethnic Culture Publishing House, 2011) by Ha Van Vien and Phu Ninh. In this book, the authors introduce a collection of puzzles of some ethnic groups in Tuyen Quang like Pa Then, San Diu, Cao Lan, Mong, Dao, Tay. Thus, there has not been any research on the formal characteristics of Cao Lan folk riddles in Tuyen Quang in terms of the structural composition of the riddles. During the research, through fieldwork activities, the researchers were able to compare the variants in different localities, and at the same time collected the puzzles used by the Cao Lan people. The riddles are divided into three categories: Puzzles on objects (20), Puzzles on animals (06), Puzzles about plants and other phenomena (13).

The Cao Lan folk riddle consists of two parts, the utterance and the object; the utterance is in verse, in order to describe object of the riddle in an authentic, logical but strange way to make it difficult to guess; The solution names the objects, which are common things and phenomena that everyone knows.

For example:

Folk riddle	The answer
<i>An tam pày cọn, mớ chun pây nãng.</i> The hilt goes first, the stick follows	Mouse
<i>Saây tèo độc, soong tèo kẹn</i> <i>Tèo lắt léo, tèo đệt đi.</i> Four legs like ink, two pull drag	Buffalo
<i>Lầu bán đội mớ, thưng bán quất cây.</i> village head beat the flag, the end of the village waved the flag.	The buffalo wears a bell
<i>Bán câu mây sẵn dờ ọc mùm.</i> My village has a bunch of bearded women	Goats
<i>Lấp hùm phòng hân</i> <i>Khắc phây pây lâu.</i> Late at night engraves the fire on the way	Fireflies

The riddle is a question in the form: What is the name of the object with the shapes, characteristics, uses or names like the object spoken? The riddle utterance is always clear but the riddle object is always hidden. The riddle object is often described as an “animal” or “something” different from it. The puzzle object is always associated with the worldview of the Cao Lan community.

For example,

*Tu ma slam kha,  
Thú hấu pây lau.*

(Three-legged dog

Running into the forest before barking (axe)).

In the example above, the axe (riddle object) is described as a “three-legged dog”, Or sometimes riddle object is described as a “chicken”:

*Chám bặc khóm chám slay  
Chám slay khóm lục cạy.*

(Three big chickens cover three small chickens, Three small chickens cover three big chickens).

The hilt goes first, the stick follows (Mouse): *Ăn tam pây cọn, mớ chun pây nấng*. Hence, the riddle object is not expressed in words in the utterance but is implicitly understood. Thanks to the similarities, the utterance represents the object. The riddle object is really an implicit comparison.

2. The world of riddle objects and the imagination from objects in Cao Lan folk riddles: The survey results show that the contents covered in the riddles of the Cao Lan people are the names of things and phenomena. Therefore, the object (topic) reflected in the puzzle is very wide, including objects, phenomena in the natural world and social life related to humans and what humans can observe (listen, see, feel). The content of Cao Lan riddles is highly realistic. The reality comes from the perception of the world among Cao Lan people.

Riddles about man-made devices and facilities include 20 questions, occupying the largest number of the puzzles we have collected and surveyed. The Cao Lan’s utensils used for production consist of axes, wooden scales, water pipes, wild animal traps, etc.

Based on their understanding of the structural characteristics and functions of those production tools, the Cao Lan people depict them from different angles to create interesting riddles. Like the riddle of the Kinh people, the majority of the Cao Lan riddles are about everyday things and events surrounding rural life and are related to production like the riddle of a house, household appliances, or tools for labor.

Items for production:

*Sục sục sọc sọc,  
Thăm tị tục tọc*

The body is tied to the fork

The rattle is hung as fruit (wooden scale);

*Tu ma slam kha,  
Thú hấu pây lau?*

Three-legged dog

Running into the forest before barking.

*Tò pay loong ki koòng,  
Tò ma long i ét.*

When going out, it sounds “ki koòng”

When coming back, it sounds “i ét” (water pipe);

*Cò công táy mây,  
Sấp sây thăm hò.*

Crouching under the base awaiting

Whoever complains is to cut his own neck (a trap).

The riddles reflecting the worldview of the indigenous community on materials for production also present the characteristics of agricultural culture, shifting cultivation combined with exploiting forest products of the Cao Lan. How to perceive the world in folk riddles is always associated with everyday items in labour production.

In addition to labor production tools, the Cao Lan people also use everyday appliances as riddle objects. These are simple items such as a sharpening stone, a curtain, a tea pot, a kettle, a mill to grind grains, etc.

For example,

*Làn mông mông tu vài thai*

*Pỏ pây xí mết*

*Pỏ mà xí mết.*

My family has a dead buffalo

One going out cuts a piece

One coming in cuts a piece (sharpening stone);

Or:

*Dâu cay nằng ần fơi*

*Hầu cay khốc lấu mơi.*

In a distance it sounds like a market

Closer to see it turns out a stump (mill to grind grains);

*Nần dâu kêu*

*Dần dâu chộng.*

Lying down to wait for more food

Standing up to discard (a metal tool of the Cao Lan people, used to dig soil, almost like a spade of the Vietnamese people).

Items in everyday life:

*Đáy kên vớ mầy đáy kên*

*Kên lưi pùm lấu thai.*

Do not eat that is not to eat

Eat and then beat the head to die immediately (pipe for smoking);

*Đãng phây khươn đoi, nun phột tấy lầy?*

And simmering on a hill, boiling water in a stream? (a hookah).

*Tú vài đăm chộng nhieu pặc*

*Tú vài pặc chộng nhieu lưng?*

Black buffalo white urine

white buffalo yellow urine? (Kettle and teapot).

*Soong tèo say nừng ăn tầy*

*Chỉ túi to bẹ ngu mùi?*

Two straps like a bag

Body like a rat eating five spices? (Betel bag)

*Tú nâu pây lầy lầy*

*Hói sáy tấy kệp hà?*

Threading like a rat

Gutting on the roof? (Needle and thread).

*Làn mông mông tu vài đăm*

*Chộng nơi pặc.*

His family has a black buffalo

White shit (pot to cook sticky rice);

*Chám bặc khóm chám sậy*

*Chám sậy khóm lực cạy.*

Three big chicks covered three small chicks

Three small chicks covered chicks (Curtain).

In different regions, although the riddle is sometimes expressed in various ways, the answer is the same.

*Riddles about creatures, animals (06 questions), plants (10 questions)*

Quizzes on the creatures, animals, plants familiar close to human life, especially in rural environments such as: banana tree, bamboo shoot, bamboo, buffalo, tortoise, goat, firefly, etc.

For example:

*Tán mùi đắc đèn mạt kên mầy lùn pèn?*

*A beautiful tree*

Edible but not to climb (Banana tree);

*Mùng pạ mây đông, thông công xúut?*

My family has a bamboo without any joint (Onion);

*Cắm nhậy thau vọt*

*Tới lấy thau phụng pọt?*

*Young with slippery head*

*Old with bushy head (Bamboo shoots and bamboo);*

*Bán câu mây sẵn dơ ọc mùn.*

*My village has a bunch of bearded women (Goats).*

Quizzes about animals, fruit trees close to human life are also very popular in the riddle of the Kinh people.

For example, Cao Lan people have a riddle:

*At the gate of the village plays the drum*

*At the end of the village holds the flag*

The Kinh people also have a riddle:

*Four men beat the earth*

*One waves the flag*

*One man lifts the grass*

*One removes dung (Buffalo).*

Riddles of human organs and human affairs (03 questions):

The Cao Lan riddle also has quizzes for certain parts of the human body and human affairs such as the eyes, grinding rice, rolling cotton, etc.

*My family has two girls*

*Both touched and scared (The eyes).*

Riddles about some parts of the human body and the work of people in the riddle treasure of the Kinh people. If

Kinh people have a puzzle about the mill:

*Standing in the middle of the house*

*Whoever touches, it burst into tears.*

The Cao Lan people also have a similar puzzle:

*In a distance it sounds like a market*

*Closer to see it turns out a stump.*

*The riddles of phenomena in nature and the universe:* These are natural phenomena observed by folk authors and closely related to human life.

For example, in the riddle of rain, the Cao Lan people say,

*Thousands of threads, millions of threads*

*Falling into the forest disappearing.*

The Kinh also have similar quizzes about natural phenomena:

*Do not paint but red (Sun)*

*Do not knock but call (Thunder)*

*Do not pick but fall (Rain).*

The topics of Cao Lan riddle are also expanded in other things and phenomena, but in general, the rural theme still accounts for the majority, which proves that the riddle has existed since ancient time and the author were mostly farmers.

The objects of the riddle are the phenomena in the objective world, mostly related to the daily activities of the labourers. The Cao Lan folk authors do not quiz about things that are strange to them, or to their lives. The objects and phenomena mentioned are those that are close to the life of the Cao Lan people in the mountainous areas. When observing things, Cao Lan folk authors just stopped at the emotional awareness, direct observation which was not systematized and generalized. Those that are often observed are more likely to be included in the riddle. The Cao Lan folk authors often describe things in the riddle in a rustic form in terms of appearance.

### III. CONCLUSION

Through collecting and researching Cao Lan folk riddles in Tuyen Quang, it can be affirmed that the Cao Lan riddles have many similarities with the riddles of the Kinh people in both content and art. Also, the Cao Lan people tend to describe the appearance characteristics or what they can observe directly with the eyes. The basic content of the riddle is in favor of natural knowledge and is usually simple, close to the life of the indigenous people. In order to reflect the characteristics of things and phenomena, most folk authors use anonymity method and the art of confounding transformation (transforming one object into another) in a semi-enclosed manner, also known as special art. Quizzes are used in collective activities to challenge the ability to guess, test knowledge and entertain.

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MA. Lê Thị Thu Nga. "Cao Lan Folk Riddles In Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(9), 2020, pp. 44-48.