

CHAPTER 4

WORLDVIEW REFLECTIONS

4.0 Introduction

Since “languages are cultural phenomena” (Hiebert 1976:129), this section is a reflection of what we can learn about Vietnamese worldview, in particular values, based on this analysis of metaphor and metonymy in the previous chapter. In general, according to Vuong G. Thuy, the Vietnamese culture does not give a strong emphasis on materialism but on four categories of values, namely spirituality, education, family and humanism (1976:15). Three out of these four values are found in data of folk songs and will be referred to as self-sacrifice, values relating to family, and feminine virtues in this thesis. Two of them, faithfulness and values relating to family, exist in contemporary songs and poems. This look at worldview through the conceptual metaphors and metonymies in Vietnamese folk songs will help us see who Vietnamese people really are and how they think about emotions or in this case, the concept of love.

As mentioned in 2.3, worldview refers to “the basic assumptions about the natures of reality and morality” (Hiebert 1976:369). It also includes other components such as norms, judgements, values and beliefs. However, this chapter will focus only on Vietnamese values or what people often think is good, reflected in folk and contemporary songs/poems. That is because values, as Scupin said, are “a central aspect of the nonmaterial culture of a society” and they also have a certain impact on the behavior of the members of a society as well (1992:36).

4.1 Values reflected by conceptualization of “love” in the past

Most Vietnamese folk songs were composed in a society influenced by Confucianism which sets certain rules in relationships, i.e. parents and children, teacher and students, men and women. Self-sacrifice, values relating to family, and feminine virtues are the three groups of values that are highlighted in the group of data relating to folk songs.

4.1.1 Self-sacrifice

According to Vuong G. Thuy (1976), self-sacrifice is rooted in the idea that the self is considered to be secondary in any relationships in a society (Vuong G. Thuy 1976:15). This explains the girl’s willingness to wait for her beloved, who often travels miles and miles away, without being certain about his coming back in (43).

(43) (*Appendix A:IB4*)

Thuyền về có nhớ bến chăng
boat come back whether miss dock or not

Bến thì một dạ khẳng khăng đợi thuyền
dock then one heart insist wait boat

‘Does the boat think of the dock when it goes?

As to the dock, it will be there waiting for the boat.’

This also reflects another characteristic expected in love between men and women, faithfulness by keeping a promise or a vow. This expectation is implicitly shown by different poems reflecting one’s sadness or disappointment when one finds one’s beloved has broken the promise of being faithful to each other in their relationship. Examples (44) and (45) are some examples to be mentioned for this case.

(44) (Appendix A:IB6)

Gọi đò chẳng thấy đò sang
call boat NEG see boat come

Phải chăng bến cũ phụ phàng khách xưa?
whether dock old betray passenger old

'The boat is called but it does not come

Is it the old dock that has betrayed its long-time guest (the boat)?'

(45) (Appendix A:IVA28)

Hai ta đang nhớ đang thương
two 1S PRO miss PRO love

Ai về phân quế rẽ hương cho đành
whoever return divide cinnamon divide fragrance be callous

Hai ta đang nối dây dài
two 1S PRO connect thread long

Ai cầm dao sắc cắt hai dây lia!
whoever take knife sharp cut two thread separate

'Both of us are deeply in love

[Then the one] who return is callous [enough] to separate a cinnamon tree from its fragrance.

Both of us are connecting a long thread

[Then] someone uses a sharp knife to cut the thread and makes it into two separated parts.'

To put it in a broader context, faithfulness is also strongly stressed in a context of a family, especially to a woman. A woman is supposed to follow three practices (*tam tông*), to obey her father before her marriage (*tại gia tông phụ*), to be submissive to her husband after her marriage (*xuất giá tông phu*) and to listen to her grown-up sons if she happens to become a widow (*phu tử tông tử*) (Vuong G. Thuy 1976:25; Jamieson 1995:18). There are two reasons explaining this practice. First, one is

supposed to self-sacrifice because one is considered secondary, as mentioned above. Secondly, compared with boys, girls are not as highly valued because men are believed to have the potential to bring honor to the family later due to their educational or social success. This can be seen by different sayings like “one boy, that’s something; ten girls, that’s nothing” or “a hundred girls are not worth a single testicle” as quoted in *Understanding Vietnam* (Jamieson 1995:18). Even though this issue is not found in folksongs used in this thesis, it is impossible to deny its influence on women in the old society.

Self-sacrifice is seen not only in a love relationship between two participants but also between one and one’s homeland. Generally, Vietnamese people are deeply attached to their land or native village, etc. Therefore, Vietnamese people, no doubt, will think about their own food and working environment whenever they talk about their own land. This is seen in a folk song that a man recites before his leaving from his native village in (46).

(46) (*Appendix C:IB6*)

Anh đi anh nhớ quê nhà
1S,M go 1S,M miss homeland

Nhớ canh rau muống nhớ cà dầm tương
miss soup kind of vegetable miss egg-plant pickle soy sauce

Nhớ ai dãi nắng dầm sương
miss whoever be exposed to sun be exposed to mist

Nhớ ai tát nước bên đường hôm nao
miss whoever scoop water by road day that

‘When I leave, I miss my homeland

[I] miss rau muong soup and pickled egg-plant

[I] miss the one who is weather-worn

[And I] miss the one scooping water by the road that day.’

In the same light, because of the close attachment to their homeland, Vietnamese seem to be less dynamic and mobile than their Western counterparts. However, it is noticeable that men are still willing to leave their village to fulfill their duty to the country, if necessary, in most situations. This, again, reflects the idea that one needs to self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

4.1.2 Values relating to family

The second group of values seen in most folk songs is about family. To most Vietnamese, the family has a very important role, if not to say, being the center in their lives. It is where a child is first aware of the hierarchy with different practices that are supposed to follow, depending on genders and roles in a family. It is also where one learns the first two important concepts, filial piety (*hiếu*) and moral debt (*ơn*) to their parents (Vuong G. Thuy 1976:17-8; Jamieson 1995:16). Children are taught to show their filial piety by obeying, respecting and honoring their parents who gave birth to them. Moreover, a child needs to be aware of the moral debt which can never be paid back to the parents because of their rearing him/her. To show gratitude to parents, a child will always try to please their parents and in every way, “to increase their comfort, to accede to all their wishes, to fulfill their aspirations, to lighten their burden of work and of worry, and to comply with their wishes in all matters, great and small” (Jamieson 1995:17).

The family tie or more exactly, the relationship between parents and children is very strong. Therefore, it is not uncommon that one needs to think of their parents first, even if that means they have to sacrifice their own happiness in love or marriage or any dreams and ambitions in life. This explains the common fact in the past that a couple who is deeply in love with each other, still accepts unwillingly to be separated and to obey their parents to follow an arranged marriage. Example (47) illustrates this. It is a vivid reflection of one’s sadness when one has to sacrifice one’s happiness

by being separated from the beloved in order to express one's filial piety to parents who do not approve of the relationship.

(47) (*Appendix A: IE12*)

Chim bay về núi Sơn Trà
bird fly go back mountain Son Tra

Chồng Nam vợ Bắc, ai mà muốn xa
husband South wife North whoever ever want set apart

Sự này cũng tại mẹ cha,
CLF this also because mother father

Cho nên đũa ngọc mới xa mâm vàng.
so that chopstick gem then far away tray golden

'The bird flies back to the Son Tra mountain

The husband in the South, the wife in the North, who wants to be separated like that?

This has come because of your parents' disagreement,

Therefore, it is only something like this which could cause the gem chopsticks and the golden tray to be apart.'

Briefly, *hiếu* 'filial piety' and *ơn* 'moral debt' are what mainly influence children's behaviors and decisions in a family. Once again, self-sacrifice is seen in values relating to family. This is because only when one is considered to be secondary in a parent-children relationship, one would try to do their best to please their parents.

4.1.3 Feminine virtues

Finally, the feminine virtues are strongly stressed in most folk songs. Although both men and women are expected to behave in certain ways according to Confucian teaching, a woman's behavior is more highlighted in songs. As Vuong G. Thuy (1976) presents in her book of *Getting to know the Vietnamese and their culture*, a good Vietnamese woman, according to the old custom, is supposed to have four "feminine virtues":

“...(1) she must be good at housework, needlework, or any work peculiar to women (*Công*); (2) she must have feminine deportment and appearance (*Dung*); (3) she must speak gently and be careful with her speech (*Ngôn*); and (4) she must show good conduct and act in a virtuous way (*Hạnh*).” (Vuong G. Thuy 1976:25)

The first virtue *Công* is described by the action of cutting grass in (48) and scooping water in (49). With the simple language to describe a woman’s everyday work, the male singer implicitly values the hard work of his girl, which is also what he remembers while being far away from his homeland:

(48) (Appendix A:IA1)

Ơi *cô* *cắt* *cỏ* *một* *mình*
exclamation particle 2S,F cut grass one self

Cho *tôi* *cắt* *với* *chung* *tình* *làm* *đôi*
let 1S cut with contribute love make pair

Cô *còn* *cắt* *nữa* *hay* *thôi?*
2S,F still cut more or not

Cho *tôi* *cắt* *với* *làm* *đôi* *vợ* *chồng*
let 1S cut with make pair wife husband

*‘Listen to me please, you are cutting the grass all alone,
Allow me to cut it with you, our love together makes us a pair.
Will you continue cutting or will you stop?
Allow me to cut it with you as husband and wife.’*

(49) (Appendix C:IB6)

Anh *đi* *anh* *nhớ* *quê* *nhà*
1S,M go 1S,M miss homeland

Nhớ *canh* *rau* *muống* *nhớ* *cà* *dầm* *tương*
miss soup kind of vegetable miss egg-plant pickle soy sauce

Nhớ ai dãi nắng dầm sương
miss whoever be exposed to sun be exposed to mist

Nhớ ai tát nước bên đường hôm nao
miss whoever scoop water by road day that

'When I leave, I miss my homeland

[I] miss rau muong soup and pickled egg-plant

[I] miss the one who is weather-worn

[And I] miss the one scooping water by the road that day.'

In summary, the three values that are implied in folk songs are self-sacrifice, family and feminine virtues. The teaching that most dominates in any relationship in the old society is that one is supposed to be secondary. This leads to self-sacrifice which is expressed in behavior such as to put aside one's happiness in love and marriage or to be willing to leave one's own native village for one's country, for example. It is also what most people choose to express in their filial piety to parents.

4.2 Values reflected by conceptualization of "love" in the present

Slightly different from values in the past, those reflected by metaphor and metonymy of love in the present songs or poems mainly relate to self-sacrifice shown by faithfulness and values relating to family.

4.2.1 Faithfulness

The first value, faithfulness, is still what men and women long for in their relationships though contemporary songs or poems may not directly talk about keeping vows between couples (like folk songs). The desire or expectation about faithfulness is expressed in a more indirect way as seen in (50)-(52).

(50) (Appendix B:IIA16)

Tình mình thiên thu sâu
love 1PL forever deep

'our love will always be deep'

(51) (Appendix B:IIIA21)

Nhưng tình ta bất tử vì mở đầu nhân loại
but love 1S immortal because begin humankind

một cuộc chơi riêng.
one CLF game private

'But our love is immortal because it gives us a private game among mankind.'

(52) (Appendix B:VA28)

Tình vẫn bền lâu tình còn tươi màu
love still last long love still bright color

'love that endures and is still full of color'

Generally, most contemporary songs or poems do not give a specific description of one's love relationship with its own expectations. However, by some general words *bất tử* 'immortal', *bền lâu* 'long-lasting' and *thiên thu* 'forever', it is possible to see that the wish and desire in one's love relationship has been the same, that is, faithfulness from each participant so that their love can be long-lasting, forever or immortal.

Even so, the present day situation also has some changes compared with that in the old days. In the past, remarriage (to a widow) was forbidden because the widow would be considered unfaithful, which was a shame to her, if she remarried. Similarly, divorce was not acceptable because it made a woman and her family lose

face. This is because by a divorce, a woman might be suspected of being guilty of one of seven cases, according to which a man could leave his wife. That is barrenness, adultery, unwillingness to worship one's parents-in-law, talkativeness, thievery, jealousy and incurable disease (Đào Duy Anh 2000: 121). However, remarriage or divorce is no longer an unusual phenomenon nowadays. Even though destroying the happiness of a family is avoided as much as possible, remarriage is also acceptable to most people in certain circumstances.

4.2.2 Values relating to family

In addition, the value of family still plays an important role in Vietnamese thinking. Even though there are no contemporary songs or poems directly talking about love for family used for analysis in this thesis, it is possible to see that love for family is a miniature of love for homeland. One cannot love one's country without loving or thinking of one's family with all its aspects such as food, transportation, games, etc. which play the main roles in both family and country. Therefore, the song *Quê hương* 'Homeland' in (53) reflects both the love for one's country and in a sense, the love for one's family. Once more, the emotional attachment that Vietnamese people always have with their family and their land still strongly remains over time.

(53) (*Appendix C: IIB9*)

Quê hương là chùm khế ngọt
 homeland be bunch star-fruit sweet

Cho con trèo hái mỗi ngày
 for 2S climb take everyday

Quê hương là đường đi học
 homeland be road go learn

Con về rợp bướm vàng bay
 2S come back be overshadowed butterfly yellow fly

Quê hương là con diều biếc
 homeland be CLF kite blue

Tuổi thơ con thả trên đồng
 childhood 1S fly on field

Quê hương là con đò nhỏ
 homeland be CLF boat small

êm dềm khus nước ven sông
 quietly row water by river

Quê hương là cầu tre nhỏ
 homeland be bridge bamboo small

Mẹ về nón lá nghiêng che
 mother come back hat leaf tilt cover

Quê hương là đêm trăng tỏ
 homeland be night moon bright

Hoa cau rụng trắng ngoài thềm
 flower areca fall white out porch

Quê hương mỗi người chỉ một
 homeland every person only one

Như là chỉ một mẹ thôi
 like be only one mother final particle

Quê hương nếu ai không nhớ
 homeland if whoever NEG miss

Sẽ không lớn nổi thành người
 ASP MAR NEG grow up become person

*'[My] homeland is a bunch of sweet starfruit [on the tree]
 that I climb up to take everyday.*

*[My] homeland is the road to school
 Overshadowed by yellow butterflies.*

[My] homeland is a blue kite

That I fly on the field in my childhood.

[My] homeland is a small boat

That quietly rows on the river.

[My] homeland is a small bamboo bridge

On which mother walks home with her grass hat tilted to the side.

[My] homeland is a bright moonlit night

When the areca flowers fall and are white on the porch.

Everyone has only one homeland

As one has only one mother.

If one does not remember one's homeland,

They will never mature into a real person.'

To put it in a broader context of current society, values of family are still preserved by the contemporary government in different ways. For example, June 28 is 'family day' in Vietnam, according to the prime minister's decision in 2001 (www.vnexpress.net/Vietnam, 08/05/2001). The decision is, no doubt, a contribution to a process of reminding of and preserving different family values in an always-changing society.

Roles of women are also improved with more and more equal education for both genders at all ages. Although it is still desirable for women to have traditional characteristics, *Công-Dung-Ngôn-Hạnh*, they will not be looked down on or despised by society if they happen not to satisfy those four virtues. Women, in general, have more freedom in their career, family, marriage and they are not completely dependent on males as they were in the past.

In summary, contemporary songs and poems, with their indirect devices convey two prominent values, faithfulness in one's love relationship and an attachment to their lands and families. Even though these values are not directly expressed, they are certainly implied and desired still in these days.

4.3 A brief look at values over time

So far, values of the past and the present have been looked at. If in the old days, self-sacrifice, values relating to family and feminine virtues were highly valued, then, in the present society, faithfulness and values in relation to family still play main roles in Vietnamese people's lives.

First, the teaching that one needs to sacrifice for others because one is considered lower than others is the main highlight in any relationship of the old days. Therefore, it is seemingly easier for anyone to forget himself and to do something beneficial for others in those days. In present society, however, the teaching of self-sacrifice has somewhat faded and lost its former dominant role. Even so, it is still observed in the scope of a family. This can be seen by the continual existence of family hierarchy that one needs to learn about in order to behave appropriately, depending on one's age and gender. Parents, nowadays, probably are not able to ask their children to obey them completely like their forefathers. However, children still show their respect and obedience and try to please the elders in a family as much as they can. Therefore, it is possible to say that self-sacrifice still remains in a family relationship, but not as strong as it was in the old days when one would sacrifice one's own happiness in love and marriage in order to follow one's parents' requirements.

Faithfulness can also be seen in a love relationship. In the old days, it was shown by keeping the promise to be faithful in love with one's beloved even when the couple were not married yet. In the contemporary situation, faithfulness is no longer verbally expressed. It is, however, implicitly expected and desired in one's relationship. It is directly mentioned only when one of the two participants breaks the expected faithfulness in their relationship. Besides, different issues relating to faithfulness such as remarriage or divorce are also looked at with different perspectives. Neither of them are strange or forbidden phenomena in the present society. However, even in the

situation where divorce is happening more and more, faithfulness is still reminded of as a Vietnamese traditional trait that should be preserved.

In addition, family attachment has played a main role in Vietnamese people's lives. In the old days, people were so strongly tied to their land, village and family that they hardly went anywhere beyond their village. Vietnamese people in present society are slightly different. They are more willing to travel around and to be far away from their families. So, it is possible to say that the family tie is no longer a hindrance to a Vietnamese in discovering the new world out on their own.

This tendency of dynamics and mobility, no doubt, more or less affect their family attachment. Increasingly, young Vietnamese people feel like they cannot be *captured* within their four walls anymore. This explains why most of them spend less time with their families than with their jobs, friends or any activities of city life. The relationship between family members, therefore, is affected. More and more miscommunication between generations, or even between those who are of the same age in a family has been happening due to the lack of talk between family members. This also leads to different social problems such as divorce, drug-addiction among teenagers, or material pursuit to the detriment of expected social values. The change of thinking about family attachment, then, leads to both positive and negative results in present society.

Briefly, not all the values of the past have been preserved. If any of them is no longer suitable with the new society, it is left out. Besides, the present situation, with so many changes, decides the best way to maintain different values of the old days. The old values, therefore, may be seen in slightly different forms compared to what was observed in the past. Even so, it is surprising and encouraging to see that different traditional values, with adapted versions in new situations, still exist in the contemporary society.