

# Happy Images in Vietnamese Perception Through Idioms of Happiness: A Cultural Approach

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**Abstract**—Idioms illustrate special linguistic units since they reflect human wisdom in the perception of the world (Giang, 2023b). They have intertwined and transformed into archives of a community's culture in the past. Idioms also play a significant role in the linguistic ontologization of emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, etc. Semantically, idioms in Vietnamese are all perceptively associated with typical images (Hanh, 2008), and idioms of happiness have their own happy images. The paper aims to investigate the happy images Vietnamese people perceive through idioms of happiness from a cultural perspective. This is a descriptive study that presents the theoretical background of Vietnamese idioms in general and the findings and discussion of happy images behind the idioms of happiness in particular. To gather the data, a hand search of Giang's (2018) collection of Vietnamese idioms was conducted to provide a corpus of 32 entries, from which three groups of happy images were identified. Results from this study show that happy images in Vietnamese perception through idioms of happiness derive from (i) animals, (ii) human body parts, and (iii) events and festivals.

**Index Terms**—happy images, idioms of happiness, idiomatic meanings, Vietnamese perception, cultural perspective

## I. INTRODUCTION

Essentially, words and expressions, including idioms, have formed the vocabulary system of a language (Hanh, 2008). Unlike other linguistic units, idioms contain national cultures and views (Giang, 2023a). Idioms are used to figuratively express ideas. They make the speakers' speeches vivid and rich. Therefore, a person's ability to develop a communicative relationship might depend on how well he uses idioms in his conversations. The most notable benefit of idioms, moreover, is that they give users a completely new linguistic means of expressing ideas. Indeed, a language's color and vitality can be characterized by its idioms.

According to Hanh (2008), there have been three approaches in researching idioms in Vietnam: etymology, synchronic evolution, and contrastive analysis. In the first place, studies on idioms under etymology go into a broad field. These investigations show how each idiom developed and changed over time. It is a demanding job that takes a lot of time and effort. Etymologizing, or recovering idioms' origins in order to make their meanings clear, is the principal method employed in these studies (Giang, 2008). The authors who typically focus on this area are Hanh (2002) and Minh (2007). Synchronic evolution is the second approach in studying idioms. Descriptive studies conducted by numerous researchers, such as San (1974), Duc (1995), Hanh (2008), Luc and Dang (2009), Giang (2016), etc., help to partially infer the cultural variables that underlie the idioms. The third approach involves analyzing idioms through contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis works are based on research projects of original discovery and synchronic evolution. There have been several attempts to determine the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and another language, particularly English, in terms of idioms of emotion (Trao, 2009; Tien, 2022), idiomatic verb phrases (Long, 2010), idiom translation (Lan, 2001; Phuc, 2009), structural and semantic components of idioms (Giang, 2013), etc. Giang (2023b) also proposed that these in-depth investigations of idioms provide fantastic chances for cross-linguistic comparison and analysis.

Giang (2023b) carried out an investigation into comparative images in Vietnamese perception through idioms with comparisons, and it is considered the first research work on idioms in terms of images behind idiomatic meanings. It was found in Giang (2023b) that comparative images Vietnamese people perceive through idioms with comparisons originate from humans, animals, objects and materials, natural phenomena, food, and plants. These comparative images of idioms serve as a mirror that reflects not only the geographical and natural features of Vietnam but also the rich material and spiritual lives of the Vietnamese people. Indeed, idiomatic meanings are generally based on images, and

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uncovering happy images in Vietnamese perception through idioms is one of the ways to make Vietnamese cultural values behind the idioms explicit.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. Defining Idioms

Traditionally, Vietnamese idioms are believed to be unpredictable or non-compositional (Menh, 1972; Chau, 1981; Dan, 1986; Duc, 1995; Hanh, 2008; Luc & Dang, 2009). The idioms are non-compositional since their meanings are not the sum of the meanings of their component parts. For instance, the phrase *ếch ngồi đáy giếng* ‘frog sit bottom well’ which is paraphrasable as “have limited knowledge because of little communication” is an idiom, for its idiomatic meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of its constituents (*ếch*, *ngồi*, *đáy*, and *giếng*).

According to Dan (1986), an idiom is a fixed group of words serving a complete sense and descriptive value. More specifically, Hanh (2008) supposed that “an idiom is a fixed group of words that is firm in terms of structure, complete and figurative in terms of meaning, and is widely used in daily communications” (p. 31). The fixation of an idiom in Hanh’s (2008) definition refers to two criteria: (i) the constituents forming an idiom are generally unvaried in usage, and (ii) the order of the constituent parts forming an idiom is unchangeable. In terms of semantic perspective, Hanh (2008) also emphasized that the idiomatic meaning is not the result of the compositional function of constituents forming an idiom. Similarly, Luc and Dang (2009) stated that the idiomatic meaning of an idiom cannot be captured although the meaning and syntactic properties of each word of that idiom have been learned. Generally, an idiom is a set expression whose meaning cannot be determined by examining the meanings of its separate constituents, according to the majority of Vietnamese linguists.

From a cognitive perspective, most Vietnamese idioms, according to Giang (2018), can be analyzed and have meanings that are at least partially motivated. For example, *xanh vỏ đỏ lòng* ‘green covers red bowels’ is an idiom, in which *xanh vỏ* [green covers] describes the appearance (form) whereas *đỏ lòng* [red bowels] gives the nature (content), i.e., the idiom represents an image of the appearance and the nature that are opposite. *Xanh vỏ đỏ lòng* is paraphrasable as “while the interior is fine, the exterior appears to be poor”. The idiom *cua sừng làm nghé* ‘saw horns become buffalo calfs’ which means “one who is old tries to be young and innocent” is another example. The meaning of this idiom can be analyzed by looking at *cua sừng* [saw horns] as *người già lớn tuổi* [the old] and *làm nghé* [become buffalo calfs] as *cố làm ra vẻ trẻ trung, ngây thơ* [try to be young and innocent]. The present analysis is based on the image that an old buffalo wants to have its horns cut to become a calf (Giang, 2018). Giang (2018) also classified Vietnamese idioms into four categories based on Fernando and Flavell’s (1981) classification of idioms: transparent (all constituents are explicit), semi-transparent (some constituents are explicit and the others are implicit), semi-opaque (all constituents are implicit but possibly interpretable), and opaque (all constituents are implicit). This is his way of saying that Vietnamese idioms range in appearance from completely transparent to completely opaque.

Indeed, an idiom has its own typical properties, and here is a list of the characteristics that make up a Vietnamese idiom. An idiom in Vietnamese (i) is a phrase whose constituents can be unvaried or varied under definable control; (ii) is regarded as a complex scene with a bipartite semantic structure that can be analyzable: a literal reading and an idiomatic meaning based on an image; (iii) has meaning that usually differs from the meanings of the combination of its constituents but is at least partly motivated; (iv) expresses a pure concept (Giang, 2018).

### B. Idioms From a Perspective of Culture

In Kramsch (1998), language is the primary means through which social lives are performed. Language has numerous intricate relationships with culture when it is utilized in communication contexts. Kramsch (1998) also explained that facts, ideas, or events are all expressed through words because they deal with a stock of knowledge about the world. Besides, words reflect people’s attitudes, beliefs, and points of view. It means that language expresses cultural reality.

Hanh (2008) stated that language is a means of conveying and preserving the cultural heritage of a nation. In other words, language is a reflection of culture, and culture has a direct impact on how language is formed. According to Hanh (2008), Vietnamese idioms, like those in any other language, are a treasure keeping the rich and unique cultural features of the nation. In terms of cognition, idioms show a transformation in how people conceptualize their surroundings (Giang, 2018).

Geography, habitat, production mode, national thought, etc. in Binh (1999) are regarded as typical factors defining the distinctive qualities of idioms in each language. Giang (2018) also noted that the significant cultural differences between English and Vietnamese in terms of the origins of idioms are from living conditions, history, religions, beliefs, traditions, and customs. The idiom *night cap* in English is an example. From a literal reading, a *night cap* is a type of headwear worn at night while sleeping. Unexpectedly, this idiom is used to describe a glass of wine or something to drink before going to bed (Binh, 1999). If we are not English, we would find it hard to understand the idiomatic meaning by looking at separate constituents of the idiom. Nevertheless, it is difficult for the English to learn the Vietnamese idiom *com lành canh ngọt* ‘cooked rice good soup tasty’ [a happy family or a united team] since their main food is bread but rice.

Lan (2001) highlighted how crucial national thought is in defining comparative images by providing a table that compares the uses of idioms with comparisons in Vietnamese, English, and Russian. The results in Lan (2001) showed that comparative images are very popular things from people's everyday lives in each nation. In addition, Hanh (2008), apart from structural and semantic properties, particularly paid attention to the use and artistic value of Vietnamese idioms.

In a nutshell, language and culture coexist and reinforce each other constantly (Zhang, 2007). They are so intrinsically linked that understanding or appreciating one requires the knowledge of the others. Actually, idioms, which are special linguistic units, reflect national cultures and views. It is why Hanh (2008) said that the underlying cultural factors behind idioms need to be uncovered.

### C. Images and Idiomatic Meanings

*Image* in Cambridge Dictionary (2023) is “a picture in your mind or an idea of how someone or something is”. This mental picture appears according to people's real experiences, especially when using language. Along with other linguistic units, people use idioms as a means of communication to express their own ideas through images (Giang, 2018). Indeed, idiomatic meanings are usually based on images. For example, *like water off a duck's back* is an English idiom associated with the image that water is poured onto a duck's back and flows down without stagnation. People's perception of this image in a certain context provides the phrase with a new special sense: “have no effect”. Similarly, the idiom *như chó với mèo* ‘like dog and cat’ in Vietnamese is linked with the image of a relationship between a dog and a cat. The image shows that dogs and cats are animals that do not like each other, so they cannot be friends, and when they are close to each other, there will be war between them. The idiomatic meaning is then produced from this image. Finally, *như chó với mèo* is paraphrasable as “be always conflictive”.

External semantic cognition is typically what drives idiomatic meanings. According to Giang (2018), it is the process by which humans perceive their immediate surroundings, including the social, natural, and imaginary worlds. The surroundings in Giang (2018) refer to what people have encountered, such as things, animals, plants, flowers, events, culinary art, food, clothing, bodies, bodily functions, colors, numbers, climate, laboring, etc. It is noteworthy that each nation has its own views of the surrounding world. An illustration of this is animal cognition. The idiom *work like a horse* in English describes someone who is diligent, and the idiom *chăm chỉ như con ong* ‘work like a bee’ in Vietnamese is used with the same meaning. In these idioms, “horse” in English and “bee” in Vietnamese are comparative images indicating how hard-working someone is.

Images and idiomatic meanings have a close relationship with each other. Images are the background shaping the idiomatic meanings through people's perception. In other words, idiomatic meanings come from people's perception of the world around by images.

## III. METHODS

The study undertakes an investigatory model giving an in-depth discussion of happy images in Vietnamese perception through idioms of happiness. According to Wisker (2001), descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation, or phenomenon with detailed information. Wisker (2001) also elucidated that in descriptive research, the characteristics of phenomena are described through description, classification, measurement, and comparison. The study generally addresses the theoretical background of idioms in Vietnamese and then the results and discussion of happy images in idioms of happiness. Following explanations and comments for the illustrational instances, deductive reasoning is used to give concluding remarks.

The data are restricted to idioms of happiness taken from Giang's (2018) collection of Vietnamese idioms. A hand search of idioms in Giang (2018) helps to establish a corpus of 32 idioms of happiness. From our corpus, happy images of idioms are divided into three categories according to their formation origins as follows:

(i) Happy images from animals: e.g., *như cá gặp nước* ‘like fish meet water’ [be happy to meet the right person in the right situation, satisfying one's desires], *chuột sa chĩnh gạo* ‘mouse fall into rice jar’ [be happy to have a comfortable life because of sudden luck], *vui như sáo* ‘happy as/like starling’ [feel so happy], etc.

(ii) Happy images from human body parts: e.g., *nở gan nở ruột* ‘dilate liver dilate intestine’ [feel extremely happy and satisfied], *mát lòng mát dạ* ‘cool intestine cool intestine’ [feel extremely happy and satisfied], *tay bắt mặt mừng* ‘hand shake face happy’ [shake hands for joy], etc.

(iii) Happy images from events and festivals: e.g., *như bắt được vàng* ‘as catch gold’ [feel so happy], *vui như hội* [happy as festival] [be very happy], *vui như Tết* [happy as/like Tết (Vietnamese traditional Lunar New Year)] [be very happy], etc.

The happy images that serve as the foundation for idioms were characterized and analyzed after the data had been gathered and categorized. In addition, Vietnamese idioms used for illustrations in this study had to be translated into English. Nevertheless, most Vietnamese idioms do not have corresponding English ones, and vice versa. We employ word-for-word and paraphrase translation techniques, introduced by Baker (1992), to preserve consistency in the final product. Word-for-word translation would convey the literal meanings of the original words in the source language, whereas paraphrase would help to keep the idiomatic meanings.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, 32 idioms of happiness were collected from Giang's (2018) collection of Vietnamese idioms. Within this corpus, three happy image groups of idioms were identified: happy images from animals (9 idioms, accounting for 28.125%), happy images from human body parts (14 idioms, accounting for 43.75%), and happy images from events and festivals (9 idioms, accounting for 28.125%).

## A. Happy Images From Animals

In Cambridge Dictionary (2023), a *fish* is "an animal that lives in water, is covered with scales, and breathes by taking water in through its mouth, or the flesh of these animals eaten as food". *Cá* [fish] are "vertebrates that live in water, breathe with gills, and swim with fins" (Phe, 2017, p. 139). In fact, water is not only fish's favourite habitat, but it also determines their survival. For some reason, fish are separated from their water environment, which is probably the worst thing for them. Without water, they cannot breathe, swim, or find food, and they will die soon. In this situation, the fish's greatest desire is to return to their aquatic environment. (1) shows an image that a fish is happy to be back in the water environment determining its life. From this image, the Vietnamese use (1) to mean that someone is happy to meet the right person in the right situation, and this fact satisfies their desires.

- (1) *(như) cá gặp nước*  
 '(like) fish meet water'

[be happy to meet the right person in the right situation, satisfying one's desires]

Fish in water are happy, but anabas testudineus in showers are even happier. *Cá rô* [anabas testudineus] is "a freshwater fish that usually lives in ponds or lakes, has a slightly flattened oval body, hard scales and spines on the dorsal fin, and can live for a long time without water" (Phe, 2017, p. 142). Naturally, the anabas testudineus appears from gray-green to light green; the back is darker than the belly; there is a dark dot on the tail and another dot on the back of the gills. The colour of scale edges and fins is light. The gill caps have serrated shapes. These fish have strong sharp teeth, arranged in rows on both jaws, on which there are small sharp teeth: the middle teeth are larger than the sides, and the teeth are also on the corners. In Vietnam, the anabas testudineus are found in almost all regions. They live in freshwater environments such as rice fields, ponds, trenches, gutters, reservoirs, lakes, rivers, canals, etc. Since ancient times, Vietnamese people (both children and adults) in the countryside have eagerly waited for the first showers of the rainy seasons to catch the anabas testudineus jumping ashore. After several days of waiting, when the first rains of the seasons fall, the anabas testudineus dodge upstream to the shores and onto the fields. The reason the anabas testudineus climb to the fields in the rainy seasons is to exercise the instinct to maintain their species; the purpose of fish migration is to find a deeper water area to lay eggs. These fish choose to lay eggs at this time because of the available aquatic plants and algae in the rainy seasons. It means that the food is abundant, providing adequate nutrients and energy for the father and mother fish to carry out their reproductive instincts, and it is also a rich source of nutrition for the baby fish. Anabas testudineus do not have habits of keeping and raising their babies, so the food source in the rainy seasons is a vital factor. The gills of the anabas testudineus are very strong and have many sharp spines that help the fish move on land easily. A more important factor is that the fish also have accessory respiratory organs on the gills, so they can stay on land in wet conditions for a long time while the other fish cannot. That the anabas testudineus have joy and fun when the first showers of the rainy seasons pour down is the image of (2). The Vietnamese have used this image to refer to the joy of having a favorable opportunity.

- (2) *cá rô gặp mưa rào*  
 'anabas testudineus meet shower'

[be happy to meet the right person in the right situation, satisfying one's desires]

Beside the images of fish, Vietnamese people also use the images of birds to express happiness through idioms. According to Vietnamese Dictionary (Phe, 2017), *chim* [birds] are "vertebrate egg-laying animals having heads with beaks, feathered bodies, and wings for flying (mostly)" (p. 225). They have unique digestive and respiratory systems that are highly responsive to flying activities. Many species of birds annually migrate to very distant places, and some others make shorter and more irregular flights. Birds are social animals that communicate with each other through calls and songs and engage in swarm activities such as cooperating in breeding, hunting, moving, and attacking their enemies. Most birds are socially monogamous, usually in mating seasons for a certain period of time. Parent birds usually lay and incubate their eggs in nests. Baby birds, after hatching, have extra time in the care of their parents. For Vietnamese people, birds are wild animals with free lives. If they are kept in cages (imprisoned), they will feel miserable and look forward to a free life outside. The image of a bird that is locked and suddenly released from the cage through its door is associated with (3). This idiom is paraphrasable as "someone feels extremely happy and free from the bondage". Chickens are also birds that have been domesticated for thousands of years. Despite being domesticated, they still carry a wild nature and enjoy free lives. The chickens, when escaping from the coops, are as happy as the birds out of the cages. Therefore, (3) and (4) are synonymous idioms.

- (3) *chim sỏ lồng*  
 'bird released from cage'

[feel extremely happy and free]

- (4) *gà sống chuồng*

‘chicken released from coop’  
[feel extremely happy and free]

*Sáo* [starlings] are “small birds that have black feathers and white spots on their wings often live in flocks” (Phe, 2017, p. 1119). Although starlings have small bodies, they are very sturdy. They have small flattened heads. The most prominent feature on a starling’s face is its sharp hard bright yellow beak. Starlings have large clear eyes with yellow borders around and rather long necks compared to other birds. Thanks to this feature, when standing, they always stand with chests out and straight backs, which makes them look very haughty and arrogant. Starlings also have long strong wings, so they can fly in the sky for a long time without getting tired. In fact, they are Vietnamese people’s favourite birds. For the Vietnamese, starlings are beautiful, intelligent, and always happy. That the starling leaps is the image expressing the joy in (5). Since starlings are always cheerful and active, they are also the comparative image of *vui* [happy] in (6).

(5) *nhảy chân sáo*  
‘leap leg starling’  
[feel so happy and leap]

(6) *vui như sáo*  
‘happy as/like starling’  
[feel so happy]

*Chuột* [mice] are “rodents that have pointed snouts, oval ears, and elongated tails often destroy crops and can spread plague” (Phe, 2017, p. 258). In Vietnamese people’s lives, mice are familiar animals. They forage for food and proliferate with human productive labor in the vast rice fields. Despite being animals that have many negative effects on human lives, mice are still very common. They live and hide in fields, bushes, warehouses, kitchens, or even farmers’ houses. The Vietnamese in the past (and a few Vietnamese people today) often used jars to store rice or liquid lard for gradual cooking. Rice, especially sticky rice, and liquid lard are the mice’s favourite foods. That a mouse suddenly falls into a jar of rice or liquid lard is considered a lucky thing. This image is associated with the idiomatic meanings of (7), (8), and (9). These three idioms refer to people who are very happy to have comfortable lives because of their sudden luck.

(7) *chuột sa chĩnh gạo*  
‘mouse fall into rice jar’  
[be happy to have a comfortable life because of sudden luck]

(8) *chuột sa hũ nếp*  
‘mouse fall into sticky rice jar’  
[be happy to have a comfortable life because of sudden luck]

(9) *chuột sa lọ mỡ*  
‘mouse fall into liquid lard jar’  
[be happy to have a comfortable life because of sudden luck]

Thus, Vietnamese idioms of happiness can be associated with images of animals in different favorable conditions. To indicate the degree of happiness, the Vietnamese think of the reactions of animals such as fish, birds, mice, etc., when they are in the conditions they expect: birds are free, fish return to water, mice are in a place full of their favourite food, etc.

### B. Happy Images From Human Body Parts

Human bodies have many different parts; however, only some parts such as hands, feet, faces, eyebrows, bellies, livers and intestines appear in Vietnamese idioms of happiness. The Vietnamese have a very special way of linguistic thinking when they see the belly as the brain or the head. *Mở cờ* ‘unfurl a flag’ [happy] in Phe (2017) is “a state of extreme joy and happiness” (p. 849). Instead of *mở cờ trong đầu* ‘unfurl flag in head’, Vietnamese people say *mở cờ trong bụng* ‘unfurl flag in belly’ [feel so happy in one’s heart], and this image indicates the feeling of happiness in the heart. The meanings of (10) and (11) are the same because they are variants of each other.

(10) *mở cờ trong bụng*  
‘unfurl flag in belly’  
[feel so happy in one’s heart]

(11) *bụng như mở cờ*  
‘belly like unfurl flag’  
[feel so happy in one’s heart]

*Nở* [dilate] in Vietnamese Dictionary (Phe, 2017) is a verb having four meanings: (i) bloom in a spontaneous way (flower buds); (ii) break the eggshells to be out (hatch); (iii) give birth; (iv) increase the volume without increasing the mass (dilate). Vietnamese people use the verb *nở* [dilate] in idioms according to the fourth sense. In Vietnamese perception, when happy, some parts of the body will be bigger than usual. Therefore, the images of body parts dilating such as *mày* [eyebrows] and *mặt* [face] in (12) and (13), *gan* [liver] and *ruột* [intestine] in (14) and (15), and *khúc ruột* [a piece of intestine] in (16) indicate happiness and satisfaction.

(12) *nở mày nở mặt*  
‘dilate eyebrows dilate face’

- [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (13) *nở mặt nở mày*  
 ‘dilate face dilate eyebrows’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (14) *nở gan nở ruột*  
 ‘dilate liver dilate intestine’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (15) *nở ruột nở gan*  
 ‘dilate intestine dilate liver’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (16) *nở từng khúc ruột*  
 ‘dilate each piece intestine’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]

In Vietnamese perception, the coolness in body parts also presents happiness. The meaning of *mát* [cool] in Vietnamese Dictionary (Phe, 2017) is “having a pleasant feeling or not being hot” (p. 807). The word *mát* [cool] could go with body parts such as *mày* [eyebrows] and *mặt* [face] in (17), *lòng* [intestine] and *dạ* [intestine] in (18), *lòng* [intestine] and *ruột* [intestine] in (19), and *gan* [liver] and *ruột* [intestine] in (20) to manifest happiness and satisfaction.

- (17) *mát mày mát mặt*  
 ‘cool eyebrows cool face’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (18) *mát lòng mát dạ*  
 ‘cool intestine cool intestine’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (19) *mát lòng mát ruột*  
 ‘cool intestine cool intestine’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]  
 (20) *mát gan mát ruột*  
 ‘cool liver cool intestine’  
 [feel extremely happy and satisfied]

As shown in (21), a happy person actively moves (dances) their hands in a bag when chatting joyfully. This image is used to convey happiness. The physical gesture in (21) appears to reveal the mood in a secretive manner. To express happiness and to share it with others, Vietnamese people also shake hands as indicated in (22). In addition to facial and hand expressions, smiling, as seen in (23), is crucial for the transmission and manifestation of joyful emotions. A person who is happy also shows the act of leaping (jumping up). This image is found in (24).

- (21) *múa tay trong bị*  
 ‘dance hands in bag’  
 [move hands for happiness]  
 (22) *tay bắt mặt mừng*  
 ‘hand shake face happy’  
 [shake hands for joy]  
 (23) *tươi cười hớn hờ*  
 ‘jocund smile merry’  
 [smile for joy]  
 (24) *nhảy căng lên*  
 ‘jump up’  
 [jump up for joy]

This section has so far given explanations of happy images of idioms associated with human body parts such as eyebrows, face, mouth, liver, intestine, hands, and legs. In Vietnamese perception, a happy person is someone who is able to move upward in mood by making the body parts dilate or cool, dancing the hands, and showing a very joyful face or smile.

### C. Happy Images From Events and Festivals

In childhood memories, Vietnamese people, especially those born in the countryside a few decades ago, used to get excited when they looked forward to their mothers’ return from markets. That mothers came from markets was a special event for the children. Waiting for their mothers in these cases meant that they looked forward to the moment of having the nosh bought at markets. In the past, because of difficult economic conditions, candies and many other delicious kinds of nosh were not as common as they are these days. At that time, what mothers usually bought for their children at countryside markets were *bánh gạo* [rice crackers], *kẹo bột* [powdered candies], *bánh đúc lạc* [soft rice cakes made of rice flour, peanuts, and lime water], *bánh đa* [rice wafers], etc. Although these kinds of food were simple and cheap, they still made the children so happy. The image that the children get excited when their mothers return from markets is the degree of *mừng* [happy] in (25).

- (25) *mừng như mẹ đi chợ về*  
 ‘happy as mother go market back’  
 [feel so happy]

The happy image in (26) derives from the event that a man graduated with a first-rank doctorate in a court feudal examination. A first-laureate graduate called *Trạng nguyên* (often known as *Trạng*) was awarded distinguished accolades and fame (Trao, 2009). The king greatly rewarded those who passed the court feudal examinations and appointed them as mandarins. The men graduating with first-rank doctorates in court feudal examinations were solemnly welcomed in their homeland. Their names were carved into stone stelae and etched in gilded lettering. In Vietnamese feudal dynasties, *Trạng nguyên* was the highest title in the high-level advisory board for the kings. Therefore, all these produced a life of ultimate abundance and bliss (Trao, 2009).

- (26) *sướng bằng đỗ Trạng*  
 ‘euphoric as graduate first-rank doctorate’  
 [feel extremely happy]

There are many events that take place during one’s life, and getting valuable things is also a happy event. *Của* [treasures] in (27) are valuable objects belonging to someone. *Vàng* [gold] in (28) is a precious metal for jewellery. Vietnamese people frequently base their assessment of someone’s wealth on how much gold they own. For the Vietnamese, gold has also long been seen as God’s gift to those who are helpful and compassionate. Getting *của* [treasures] in (28) and catching *vàng* [gold] in (29) are the images that indicate one’s feeling of happiness.

- (27) *như vớ được của*  
 ‘as get treasures’  
 [feel so happy]

- (28) *như bắt được vàng*  
 ‘as catch gold’  
 [feel so happy]

It can be said that Vietnam is a country of festivals. Festivals are cultural events organized by the community. A set of behaviors and gestures known as *lễ* [rites] are performed to honor the gods and represent the people’s sincere but unfulfilled aspirations. *Hội* [reunions] that are cultural, religious and artistic activities of the community are derived from people’s needs. In Vietnamese culture, festival activities are very typical cultural areas. Festivals are folk cultural activities that appear in almost all parts of the country. Many festivals that were born thousands of years ago are still maintained today. Festivals in Vietnam always focus on sacred characters who are worshiped as human gods or natural gods. It is the image that converges the most beautiful human qualities, helps people remember their roots, and aims to be good and build a happy life. Traditional festivals in Vietnam usually take place in spring, and a few in autumn, the two most beautiful seasons of the year, and at the same time when farmers have free time. Any festival that takes place attracts a lot of participants, and during the festival, there are many fun activities. Therefore, participating in the festivals means being in a joyful bustling atmosphere, and the image of festivals indicates the degree of *vui* [happy] in (29), (30), and (31).

- (29) *vui như mở hội*  
 ‘happy as open festival’  
 [be very happy]

- (30) *vui như hội*  
 ‘happy as festival’  
 [be very happy]

- (31) *vui như trải hội*  
 ‘happy as go festival’  
 [be very happy]

Tết is a shortened name for Tết Nguyên Đán (Vietnamese traditional Lunar New Year), which is based on the Lunar calendar, a lunisolar calendar. The annual Lunar New Year typically lasts 7-8 days at the end of the preceding year and the first 7 days of the next year (from December 23 to the end of January 7 of the Lunar calendar). For Vietnamese people, Tết is the biggest traditional festival of the year. During Tết days, there are various customs practiced such as visiting people’s houses, planting trees, and especially giving children and old people lucky money as a special wish for the new year. Tết is also a time for family get-togethers. At Tết, Vietnamese people try to prepare a lot of food, especially traditional dishes such as *bánh chưng* [sticky rice cakes], *giò lụa* [pork pies], *nem* [spring rolls], etc. Everything is available or abundant on these days. According to Vietnamese culture, if people lack something at Tết, they won’t have it the rest of the year. On Tết days, people forget all the troubles of the past year and hope for a better upcoming year with success, good health, money, love, and friendship. Therefore, Tết implies happiness and abundance. It is the comparative image indicating the degree of *vui* [happy] in (32).

- (32) *vui như Tết*  
 ‘happy as Tết’  
 [feel so happy]

## V. CONCLUSION

Idioms in Giang (2023) are considered unique linguistic units because they include cultural traits and national perspectives. All idioms of happiness in Vietnamese are associated with their own happy images. In Vietnamese perception, the happy images behind idioms come from animals, human body parts, events, and festivals. To indicate the degree of happiness, Vietnamese people think of the images that animals are in their favourite environments: fish return to water; anabas testudineus are in the first showers of the rainy seasons; birds and chickens are released from cages; mice suddenly fall into a jar of rice or liquid lard. In terms of human body parts, physiological reactions and behaviours such as facial expressions, leaping, and laughing are associated with happy images. It establishes a link between an internal mental state and the practical and/or psychological actions that take place in a joyful environment (Trao, 2009). The happy images from human body parts are also indicated via the lateral dilation of the face, eyebrows, intestines, or liver, and the coolness in the face, eyebrows, intestines, or liver. Happy events (mothers' return from markets and getting treasures or gold) and festivals, especially Tết, are comparative images showing the degree of happiness in the idioms. Thus, the meanings of idioms of happiness in Vietnamese perception are all associated with happy images from different joyful contexts. In other words, the happy images help to make the idiomatic meanings more transparent.

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