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Daylight Robbery

There once lived a greedy man in the Land of Jin. One day he went to the market, and while there started grabbing everything in sight, at the same time saying: 'I'll eat this, I'll wear this, I'll have this, I'll use this'. As he was carrying the goods away, the stall-holders ran after him, demanding payment, to which the man replied: 'Greed blinded me. I thought they all belonged to me instead of you. But never mind, now I've got them why not let me keep them, and later on, when I grow rich, I'll pay you for them?'

The market superintendent thought that the man was an idiot, so he gave him a caning and ordered him to return the goods to their rightful owners. Everybody in the markets laughed at the greedy man, but he retorted: 'There are people in this world far more greedy than I am, who resort to all kinds of surreptitious tricks to steal other people's belongings. Despite my greed, at least I took your goods in broad daylight. Surely then, in comparison to those others, am I not the better man? By laughing at me, you have only proven that you have not given the matter much thought.'
Lấy cua giua ban ngay


Người coi cho thấy gần đó, đánh cho may roi, bát của ai phải trả lại người ấy. Cả chợ cuối end. Anh ta mảng: 'Thé-gian còn nhiều ke hieu-loi hơn ta, thường dùng thiên phương bách ke ngấm ngầm lấy của của người. Ta đây tuy thế song lấy giua ban ngay, so với những ke ấy thì lạ chẳng hơn ru? Các người cuối ta là các người chưa nghi kỳ!'

(Trích Có Học Tinh-Hoa)
APPENDIX 2

Production of Fake Pharmaceuticals

Recently, the world has had to face the disturbing reality of the spread of fake products throughout the pharmaceutical market. This has resulted in the untimely deaths and disablement of many innocent victims, some of these being children.

For example, recently in Nigeria, 109 children died as a result of having been given fake medication by the staff of a Children's Hospital, believing it to have been manufactured in Holland. In Mexico, the Ministry of Health launched an investigation, and uncovered a range of fake pharmaceuticals just in time. Consequently, the Government confiscated up to 17 thousand types of various medications, many of which were mixed with coffee powder, sawdust and even soil.

In various villages throughout Burma, hundreds of people took fake antimalarial drugs which only caused their illness to become worse. In Europe alone, millions of tablets used in the treatment of cardiac disease were found to be fake and lacking quality control.

Last March, in particular, an Iranian chemist in America was sentenced by the legal authorities for the manufacture of fake Naprosyn, a drug used in the treatment of arthritis. According to informed sources, these organisations responsible for the manufacture of fake pharmaceuticals have a highly sophisticated network with many branches throughout the world. These organisations have netted over $US 150 billion during the past decade.

Amongst the fake pharmaceuticals on the market are the most popular ones such as Zantac, Selokeen, Andriamicin, Fansidar, etc...Generally speaking, all the fake medications replicate the genuine ones which makes it very difficult for the lay person to differentiate between them.

PREFERRED TRANSLATION
Tinh-trạng chế-tạo thuốc men giá

Trong thời gian gần đây, thế-giới đang chịu một thucht-tế đang lo ngại về tình-trạng lan truyền những loại thuốc giá trên thị-trường y đức, khiến cho nhiều người, trong đó có cả trẻ em, phải chê một cách tức tưởi oan ức, cũng như nhiều người bị tàn tật.


Tai Miền-diễn, hàng trăm người tại nhiều làng mạc đã uống phải những loại thuốc rát giá khiến cho bệnh tật gia-tăng gặp bội. Riêng ở Châu Âu, người ta đã khám phá ra hàng triệu viên thuốc dùng để trị-liều bệnh tim được chế-tạo giá mạo không dược phàm chát.


Trong số những loại thuốc chế-tạo gian lận trên thị-trường, người ta ghi nhận có những loại thuốc rát phổ-thống như Zantac, Selokeen, Adriamicin, Fansidar ... Nhìn chung toàn bộ những loại thuốc giá đều có hình-thức nhu thuốc thật khiến cho người thương khó có thể phân-biệt được chán giá.

(_approx. 250 words)

APPENDIX 3

Collocational Competence Test

1. My sister is always complaining that her breasts are as flat as a _____________.
2. We've been drinking all night, but let's just have one for the ________ before closing time.
3. He had been through many highs and ____________ in his marriage before he finally divorced.
4. Even though I've tried all kinds of diets, I'm afraid, I'm not winning the battle of the ____________.
5. It was a case of a stitch in time saving ____________, when I repaired the roof tile before the heavy rains started.
6. I'm not sure of the price, but ____________ the top of your head, what would you say it could be worth?
7. The soccer team is on a ____________ this season, because no other team has beaten it.
8. I found it difficult to concentrate on the ____________ and flow of the teenagers' conversation because of the slang they used.
9. You must make sure you have the house looking ____________ and span before the visitors come.
10. ‘__________ up' said the footballer to his team as he poured the beer down his throat.
11. My friend said 'long time, no ____________' when I met him again after about an absence of two years.
12. He was lying ____________ drunk in the gutter, so we picked him up and put him under a cold shower to revive him.
13. As a matter of ____________, that's the first time I had heard about his divorce.
14. When I went to get up I found that my arm felt as though it had pins and ____________ in it, because I had slept on it.
15. She is always making the wrong decisions and putting the cart before the ____________.
16. I'm sure you ____________ a rat the same as I do about the way he always seems to have large amounts of money.
17. I'm thrilled that you want to marry me, because I thought you'd never ____________.
18. The morning peak hour traffic going into the city was ____________ to bumper until well after 11 o'clock.
19. Just because he's very quiet, he's also very wise. It's a case of ____________ waters run deep.
20. His child was like a chip off the old ____________ in that he liked to play tennis.
21. Politicians try to lead us up the ____________ path when they tell us lies in order to hide the real truth.
22. You can't use your credit card to buy goods here because it's a cash and ____________ store.
23. Before you get married I will have to let you know about the facts of _________ if you don’t want to get pregnant straight away.

24. You know that every fairy story in English starts off with ‘Once _________ a time’.

25. I shouldn’t have to explain it to you, when it’s written there clearly in _________ and white.

26. Women have ways and _________ of getting whatever they want from men.

27. If you go out with that criminal you will be playing with _________, because he could involve you in his activities.

28. He wants the back yard tidied up so I will take these odds and _________ to the tip.

29. Obtaining the services of that man for no charge at all is a real feather in your _________.

30. My decision to stay here rather than leave meant that I jumped from the _________ pan into the fire because the cyclone blew the house down and I was injured.

31. I’ve told you before that I don’t want you to rush your work and not do it thoroughly. More haste, less _________ please.

32. Her boy friend was a real man of the _________ in that he knew all the best restaurants and all about sophisticated living.

33. Whether things are good or bad, I’ll still stick with you through thick and _________.

34. The compere kept stopping to introduce the artists, and he didn’t know how to keep the ball _________, so he lost our attention.

35. I’ve talked about the problem to you all in this auditorium, now I open it up to the _________ so that you can discuss it or question my speech.

36. Mum told me to give Grandma a _________ hand because she couldn’t get out of the car on her own.

37. I’ll say it again son. If you don’t jump to _________ right now and clean up your untidy room, I’ll stop you going to the pictures.

38. Would the owner of this dog please come and claim it before it’s taken to the pound?

39. The vagrant was wandering the streets, and as he had no _________ address it was difficult to deliver his mail.

40. I hate being given things to do at such short _________, because it disrupts my organisation.

41. She is always wearing a _________ when you meet her because she is such a charming person.

42. The teenager told me she had seen the pop star in the _________ when she went to the airport to see him arrive.

43. When people are faced with a problem you can soon sort the _________ from the goats amongst them, by the way they respond.

44. I’ve had enough of your telling me how you are so clever at sewing. Why don’t you just _________ up or shut up?

45. He is a person who always remains _________, calm and collected, no matter how bad the situation may be.
46. When my father died, I was glad that my husband was there as a ____________ to lean on during my grief.

47. She would love to be teenager again but now she is fifty, it’s too late to turn the ____________ back.

48. A lot of water has gone under the ________________ since we were all young children in our home village.

49. No matter how hard I try to be as clever as my father I have never been able to fill his ________________.

50. I can’t be sure of what the future ____________ for me because we are living in a war zone.
## APPENDIX 4

Collocational Competence Test Results

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<th>Number of Correct Answers</th>
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### Test Results

![Test Results Graph](image-url)
APPENDIX 5

A sample of English regular items

aboriginal activist
absolutely necessary
acknowledge the crowd
acute embarrassment
adopt the attitude
adoption agency
advanced pregnancy
alive and kicking
aloof image
apologize profusely
arcane reasons
arse-end of the world
baby boomer
back of one's mind
backstairs diplomacy
bark vigorously
battery hens
battle of the bulge
beads of perspiration
bear a resemblance
beat shyness
believe genuinely
biological parents
blame squarely
blended family
blood parents
boat capsizes
boom gate
boomerang effect
boots squelch
booze bus

[người tranh-dâu mạnh-mẽ cho thể-dân]
[vô cùng/tới cần thiết]
[góc tay đáp lên lại đảm đồng hoàn-hộ/tấn thường mình]
[nguồn chúng tôi]
[tướng chấp nhận thái-dô]
[co-quan nhân/xin con nuôi]
[có thai sắp đến ngày sanh]
[khoẻ mạnh tinh táo/sống-dòng linh-hoạt]
[hình ảnh/thái độ xa cách]
[xin lỗi hét lời]
[lý do thẩm-kin]
[tân cùng của thê-giói/vũ-truy]
[người/трê em sinh ra/ra đời trong thời-ky ngày sau Đề-nhi Thê-chiên, lumin vô chồng đàn-tử]
[trong ức/trí nhỏ/dâu]
[chính-sách ngoại-giao của hàu]
[sử dụng/đám ỉ]
[gà công-nhâp]
[trấn giác chống phi mập; ăn kiêng khem để giữ eo]
[những giọt mồ hôi]
[trong giọng ai]
[tránh/chừa then thùng/nguống ngưng]
[tin tưởng thực tính]
[cha mẹ ruột]
[trách cáu/dố lời thằng thùng]
[gia đình vợ chồng có cả con anh con tôi sống chung; vợ chồng rõ giá cấp lại]
[cha mẹ ruột]
[tầu đắm lật úp]
[cong xe ra vào có chạn bänger thanh ngang tự động nâng lên hạ xuống]
[hiểu quả đối ngức]
[giày ưng/ông lời kẻu ơc ặng/lơm bom]
[xe hôi cảnh-sát chảnh người lái xe bất thủ hôi rượu]
border dispute
branch-stacking war
break and enter
break the fall
brick of cocaine
brisk walk
bullet-proof vest
burning issue
business tycoon
button eyes
callous killing
cap rents
capture one’s attention
carrot-and-stick policy
carry a grudge
cash and carry
cat and mouse
cateract blindness
catwalk queen
celebrate hugely
celebrity photographer
charitable organisation
cheat death
chemical castration
cherished memories
Christmas revellers
clean and decent
coat of paint
colossal debt
come and go
come-from-behind victory
communication gap
compassionate leave
compulsive gambler
concerted effort
construction hat
Continental breakfast
couch potato
crime wave
criticize trenchantly
crux of the problem
culinary skills
cult leader
curtain calls
dampen one’s spirit
day of shame
dead and buried
die unnecessarily
dispel the rumours
disperse the crowd
divide and conquer
divulge the secrets
dollar dips
double life
dream evaporates
dressing table
drink driver
drought-stricken farmers
duck and weave
dull and lifeless
dustbin of history
dwindling hope
eat and run
eclipse one’s targets
eligible bachelor
eligible virgin
empty gesture
encumbered vehicle
endangered species
enjoy immensely
exclusion zone
exhaust emissions
expert witness

fame and fortune
farcical marriage
fast and loose
fast lane
financial irregularities
fire fighter
fit and proper
flagging economy
flame licks
flash of arrogance
flippant question
float the idea

flood of calls
fly-by-night operators

food stall
forget and forgive
form a wedge
form of identification
formidable opponent
forwarding address
fountain of wealth
fountain of youth
fulsome praise
fund-raising concert
funeral parlour
galloping inflation
gauge the chances
gem world
gesticulate wildly
getaway car
ghost writer

give and take
give generously
glean the information
glittering future
gloom and doom
grant someone bail

[vui chơi thỏa thích; vở cùng thích thú]
[vùng cảm giác]
[hoài khởi do xanh nhà ra]
[nhận-chừng được mới ra toà làm chứng về những vấn-dề trong phạm-vi chuyển-môn của người ấy]
[dành vong tiền tài]
[hôn-nhăn giả-tạo]
[nhanh nhạy ẩu đao]
[cuộc sống biểu thể/đầy truy-hoạn]
[lem nghề tài-chính/tiền bạch]
[linh/người cứu hoả]
[thích hợp và dùng cách]
[kinh-tế suy-sụp]
[ thereof]
[thoảng hiện về kiểu cảng]
[cầu hỏi ốc nhà]
[đưa ra ý kiến cho mọi người suy nghĩ/thảo-luận]
[điễn-thoại gọi đến tôi tiếp]
[những kẻ làm ăn lừa đảo chạy lạng]
[quấy/quan bàn thức ăn]
[quênten và tha thụ/xóa bố hận thú]
làm thành vong dài chán
[giấy tờ tùy thân/thẻ căn-cước]
[dịch-thủ đăng ngai]
[địa chỉ chuyển thư]
[nủi cua; giấu nút độ độ vách]
[suối nguồn tuổi trẻ]
[khen quá lỡ]
[buổi văn-nghệ gầy quý]
[nhà quan người chết]
[làm-phạt phi-mã]
[lương-dỉnh cơ may]
[thẻ-giói chau bau/dã qui]
[mưa tay loan xạ trong lúc nói]
[xe hội đầu đời sẵn để tẩu thoát]
[người viết truyen/sách cho cách chính-xách mà không để tên mình]
[cho và nhận; có đi có lại]
[rồng long cứu giúp, mở lòng tũ-bì giúp tiền bạc cho nhiều]
[thầu thấp tình-túc/thông-tin]
[tương-lai sáng lạn]
[buồn bã âm đạm]
[cho ai tài ngoại hậu tra]
gratuitous violence
gun-running mission
hail of bullets
halt the bloodshed
hard and fast
hard-won freedom
harrassment victim
harsh reality
hatch a plot
heap praise
heart and soul
hearts-and-flowers journalism
here and there
high and dry
high and mighty
high-powered delegation
hit and run
hit the headlines
hit-and-run accident
hitch-hiking backpacker
hurl abuse
idealistic prank
immense damage
immunity deficiency
imperial wife
impose an embargo
inconsolable grief
inflict wounds
insult intelligence
intensely loyal
invasion of privacy
jig school
joint of marijuana
judge harshly
kick the habit
knock-out gas
Lady Luck
landslide victory
lashes of the cane
launch a book
launch an attack
lie massively
lift an embargo
link inextricably
lip of embankment
load guilt
long-stated goal
lose one's love
lose one's respect
love affairs
lovers' lane
malignant tumour
manage a household
match-making agency
material urges
mental instability
meteoric rise
midlife crisis
mile-wide grin
Miss Universe
monumental novel
mortally wounded
most likely
mountain of debt
movie preview
mudslinging match
musty odour
narcissistic leader
narrow escape
neck and neck
nice and easy
no-fly zone
no-frills airline
nocturnal habit
nuisance call
odds-on favourite
off-screen husband-and-wife
off-screen partner
oil glut
open fire
opposite number
orthopaedic injuries
ounce of cynicism
outwork agreement
overturn the decision
pall of dust
palliative care
parent-teacher night
peace initiative
peal of church bells
pearly whites
personal best
pet fish
picket line
piercing whistle
pillion passenger
pin one’s hopes
plant a kiss
plum offer
pod of whales
poignant occasion
poke fun
policy holder
pop the question
popularity sags
possess drugs
pot belly
praise effusively
precocious daughter
press the flesh
profundely deaf
quell the fire
'Quit for Life' campaign
raise the alarm
rave review
read voraciously
red carpet treatment
red-nose day
refuse flatly
regain one's consciousness
reject categorically
relinquish one's leadership
remove threat
retaliatory action
rice harvest
rim of the ocean
ring of artificiality
risque jokes
road toll
rock fisherman
rowdy behaviour
rugged coastline
rumours fly
run-of-the-mill hotel
sadly missed
safe and sound
safe seat
sale clearance
say tartly
scale the fence
scare-mongering tactics
scathing letter
scream obscenities
sea of paparazzi
search and destroy
security cordon
seek refuge
senseless death
serial killer
sex drive
shed tears
shoestring budget
shoot-to-kill order
shopping spree
shoulder-length hair
silent number
skeleton staff
skip classes
smoke inhalation
society heir
soft-porn actress
solemn music
speed camera
speedway accident
spirits soar
split-second decision
squirrel mentality
staggered shifts
stash of cigarettes
state funeral
state-of-the-art technology
stop-gap measure
street kids
stretch of road
strike gold
strip and search
stroke of luck
subversive literature
superbly rich
surrogate mother
sweet revenge
tabloid terrorism
tall-poppy syndrome
tears of happiness
tempestuous weather
there and then
thick accent
thong-free zone
ticker-tape parade
tie the knot
time bomb
tooth and nail
touch of class
traffic snarl
train of thought
trial and error
tuft of hair
tug-of-love victim
turn the table
tyre mender
umbrella organisation
unassailable fact
undergo an operation
underworld figure
unknown eatery
violate grossly
vote overwhelmingly
wage a war
wedded bliss
wee-small hours
weep openly

weigh an anchor
well and truly
wet nurse
wetting and soiling
whiplash injuries
whirlwind romance
white trash
whiz kids
wobbly tooth
wool grower

workout scene
yell threats

[hạnh-phúc lứa đôi]
[hai ba giờ khu vực/sáng]
[khóc không còn che đầu nơi/không cảm lòng được; khóc nức nở]
[nhờ neo]
[thật sự/nhất định]
[vụ em]
[đái đầm iả dồn]
[bi thương ở gẫy, trên cốt tủy sống]
[con lộc ái tình/củ sét ái tình]
[bạch-quỷ]
[thần động]
[rằng lung lay]
[nha nóng/người chăm nuôi cue đẻ lấy lòng]
[canh tập thể-dục]
[la o de dọa]
APPENDIX 6

A sample of Vietnamese regular items

ăn bám
bái truất tối ác
bàn tay bụ bẫm
bàn tay xinh xinh
bay thấp thoáng
bỏ lão gắt gừ
bỏ thói quen
bối nhỏ cá nhân
bớp méo sự thật
bùa hộ mệnh

buhn môm
bung biển Cộng-sân
bội büt
bọ ngọc nồ nang
bọ ngọc vạm vỡ
bốc lên nghi ngút
bắn chết
bắp chân
bắp thit nhão
cá kiếng
cầm giấc non nao
canh bá
canh sông
cảnh sát ‘quận’

cây cói khô héo
cây cói xác xo
cây gổ lim
cây máy gai góc
chết ngay
chân tuồng
chém liền hói
chia sẻ niêm vui
chính phục trái tim
chơi gà
chơi khám
chổi tai
chóng cụt ác liệt
coi trọng

[to be a parasite/dole bludger]
[to eradicate/wipe out crime]
[chubby hands]
[delicate hands]
[to flit (of birds)]
[elders nod their heads]
[to break the habit]
[to smear one’s reputation]
[to distort the truth]
[(life-protecting charm); magic charm/ talisman/amulet]
[(idle mouth)/feel like wanting to have something to chew]
[Communist outposts/marquis]
[journalistic lackeys]
[well-developpped breasts]
[well-built chest]
[to billow (of smoke)]
[to shoot someone dead]
[calves of one’s legs]
[flabby muscles]
[pet fish]
[anxious/foreboding feeling]
[third watch (of night)]
[lifestyle]
[to be ‘grilled’/interrogated by the police]
[wilted trees]
[bare trees]
[mahogany tree]
[thorny rattan trees]
[to die instantly]
[the true picture/image]
[to hack into someone without stopping]
[to share one’s happiness]
[to capture/win someone’s heart]
[cock fighting]
[to play tricks on someone]
[it jars/aggravates on someone]
[to fight back fiercely/ retaliate strongly/fight to the death]
[to have a high regard]
con công múa
con hở tinh khôn
con sói quan quai
con sói mới
con sói tru
con vật nhéo
công việc nương rẫy
cuộc sống nghèo túng
cuộc sống thoải mái
cu-xu hào-hiếp
cười khbay
cười phá lên
cười sáng sắc
cười vang
cười ngắt ngưỡng
cắt đường
dịch nguyên văn
dối dao sắc khoẻ
dòổng
dấu chân thú
dặp mắt nơi cơn
dám tàng cụ hành
dàn sói
dạng viễn ma
dấu đơn diễn cuồng
dêm hớt-cần
dính thần
dối mắt dực
dối tay chai sẵn
dối nửa
dòng chất
dưa mun
dương công-danh
dám máu
dêu tâm tập
dung lom khom
dừng tàn ngàn
dối oanh liệt
dđo lucrơi
d[dancing/prancing/strutting peacock]
c[clever/cunning tiger]
c[worm squirms/wriggles]
c[sacrificial wolf]
c[wolf cries/howls]
c[jungle leeches]
c[farm work]
c[poverty-stricken life]
c[comfortable/high/good life]
c[to behave extravagantly/treat people generously]
c[to snigger; a sniggering laugh]
c[to burst out laughing]
c[to burst out cackling]
c[to roar with laughter/laugh uproariously]
c[to totter/teeter]
c[to take a short-cut (of distance)]
c[to translate verbatim]
c[in the best of health/in perfect health]
c[to go beserk/bananas; turn nasty]
c[animal footprints]
c[(to smash one’s pot of rice); to ruin one’s bread and butter]
c[to hold a funeral/funeral held]
c[pack of wolves]
c[phantom party members]
c[excruciating/unbearable pain]
c[(wedding feast night); wedding/nuptial night]
c[(to adjust one’s look); to take a second look/to look carefully]
c[glazed eyes]
c[calloused hands]
c[pair/set of chopsticks]
c[to closely/tightly shut]
c[ebony-black chopsticks]
c[(road to fame); career path]
c[saturated/covered in blood]
c[even/well-aligned (of teeth)]
c[to stand with one’s back bent/be bowed]
c[to stand perplexed]
c[glorious/illustrious life]
c[tongue-tied]
dấu gòi chün xuống

dấu gòi quy xuống
dày bác
dày ấp
gan ruột cao xe
giệt đầm máu
gió hú
gừng giã nhở
ham sỏng
hành vi tham nhũng
hành-quyết tàn-nhan
hí vang
hiếu lọ mọ
hoa cúc đại
hoa mặt
hoảng-dế vi-hành

hội viên ma
hộ gầm
hộ rung rạp
im thin thít
ít nằng
kết-an với vả
kề hà tiến
khai thác kỹ lượng
khai tâm bấy
khát vọng mình liệt
khóc sút sùi
khóc thét
khoe mếp
khốn ba năm, đại một giờ
khác khoái đói chờ
ký ức sống đầy
lật up
liệt hai chần
lòng phơi phơi
lồng ong
luồng tâm cần rút
luồng tâm nhẹ nhàng

[knees are sagging/go from under one]
[weak in the knees/ become weak-kneed]
[full of silver/money]
[full to the brim]
[to burn the insides/guts out]
[to cold-bloodedly kill]
[wind howls/ howling of the wind]
[ground ginger]
[to love life]
[corrupt behaviour/practices]
[to execute brutally]
[to give a loud neigh]
[to understand vaguely]
[wild chrysanthemums]
[to be bedazzled; be over-awed]
[emperor walks/ mingles with/among his people]
[phantom club members]
[tiger roars]
[tiger stalks]
[dead silence; one’s lips are sealed]
[little sunshine]
[to prematurely condemn]
[penny-pinching person]
[to investigate/explore carefully]
[to make a false statement]
[strong thirst/desire; great ambition]
[to sob/weep/cry openly]
[to cry one’s heart out; sob uncontrollably]
[corners of one’s mouth]
[(three years of wisdom you have gained guarding your virginity, and in one hour of vulnerability you lose it); five minutes of fun and nine months of worry]
[to wait anxiously/in agony]
[memories stir up]
[to tip over (of boat)]
[paralyzed/immobile from the waist down]
[light-hearted/carefree]
[(wasp’s waist); hour-glass figure]
[conscience pricks (somebody)]
[clear conscience]
lương tâm thanh thần
lương vàng
lưỡi rìu
lưỡi rìu quan

lâu xanh

lửa đổi lộc bích
lửa đổi trang truyền
ma âm
ma chai
mái nhà sàn
mảng nền chẳng
mây xà xuống
miếu nhỏ
miệng nhay nhay
mò sòng
mùa đông khủng khiếp
mùi nò

mùa bất thần
mùa tàn
mò hời vavaş ra
mặt rộ
mặt trái xoan

một sai tay
mắt long lành
mắt ti hí
mắt tròn ngược
mắt dỏ hơ
mắt dỏ ngâu
nắm kín dáo
nắm liệt giương

nắm lim đìn
nắm lận lộc
nắm phúc
nắm rạp (xưởng mặt đất)
nắm vật vưởng
nghe vàng vang
ngọn cây xào xạc
nguồn tin dòng trời

người chánh trực
người chồng gây vợ
người cầm trách

[relaxed conscience]
[(tael of gold); ounce of gold]
[(axe-tongue); axe-head; axe-blade]
[(axe-tongue buckled); axe-head blunts]
[(green pavilion); house of ill-repute]
[ludicrous lie/cheating]
[extraordinary/blatant lie/cheating]
[possessed by demons/evil spirits]
[under the spell of evil spirits]
[the roof of the house on stilts]
[spider spins a web]
[clouds descend/gather]
[small shrine]
[to gnash one’s teeth]
[to dredge the river]
[terrible winter]
[well-developed nose]; flared nostrils]
[to rain suddenly; sudden/unexpected rain/downpour]
[rain lets up/stops]
[to sweat profusely/copiously]
[pock-marked face]
[(Japanese lilac-fruited face); oval-shaped face]
[an arm's length]
[twinkling/sparkling eyes]
[slitty eyes]
[one’s eyes rolled back]
[red eyes]
[blood-red eyes]
[to lie hidden/concealed]
[to lie hidden/secreted/concealed]
[to be bed-ridden/be confined to bed]
[to lie half-asleep]
[to lie neglected/unloved]
[to lie in ambush]
[to slink low (on the ground)]
[to lie uncared for/be unloved]
[to hear something from afar]
[rustling of the branches/tree tops]
[(heaven-shattering news); earth-shattering news]
[trustworthy/honest person]
[thin gaunt husband]
[the leader/helmsman/conductor]
người có lỡ sỉ
người hiện lương
người ta đồn
người từng trái
người vô âm thầm
người đây bất trắc
người miệng
người thu lụ
người thup xuống
người hi
nhai ngâu nghiêm
nhan vật nói tiếng
nhat tình
nhe rạng
nho không hát
nho xấu ngông
nhe đa
nhấy xổ
nói nằng hoạt bất
nói thách
nuộc dài nhỏ ra
nuộc mắt rắn rụa
nuộc mắt rộng rỏng
nom nồp lo âu
nóc bí tí
nọ sạch đến
nơi tuyệt vòng đàng cay
ông chủ ma tùy
ông lão lưu khu
Ông Xanh
ô phan-phát
phương sân
quàng đói
quận băng/khuây
quây tụ tung
râu quắp
run bàn (càng người)
rổ chẳng chỉt
[old-fashioned person]
[honest person]
[rumour has it that; it is rumoured]
[worldly person]
[unassuming/timid wife]
[unpredictable/unstable person]
[to be shy in speaking up]
[to sit hunched up with one's arms around one's legs]
[to squat on your haunches]
[horse neighs]
[to smuggle/import illegally]
[to chew away voraciously]
[well-known identity]
[cowardly nature/disposition]
[to bare one's teeth]
[seedless grapes]
[hot climate grapes/vines]
[easily deceived; gullible/naive]
[to lunge]
[to be articulate]
[to bring up the price in anticipation of a bargaining]
[saliva drips]
[tears welled up]
[tears streaming/running down (one's face)]
[constant sense of fear]
[to be staggering drunk]
[(the debt of books and lamp); the debt owed by those who have not completed their studies]
[bitter despair]
[(narcotics boss); drug lord/baron/ringleader]
[stooped old man]
[(Mr. Blue); God; the Creator]
[pockets of distributors]
[hordes/scores of hunters]
[a certain period of one's life]
[to forget completely]
[to swish around hither and thither]
[(bent whiskers); drooping whiskers]
[to shudder/shake/quake with fear]
[entirely covered in pock marks]
say khuột
suối tai
sáng giọng
song but rút
song có đòn
giản-dị/chät-phác
song hòa-thuần
song lang thang

song làm lui/thui thòi
gằng tung
song quanh quan

song sung-túc
song vui vẻ
dau khó

sùng ruộ
tạ thiể
ten việt thue
ten đề tiền
thân hình còn cô
thân hình lấn chắc
tháng Tư Đen

thành làu
thit sây
thua sạch túi

thực tráng đềm

tieng tâm vang đối
tin dòn bay
tinh người
tọa tha bồng
dâu hâu hí
dài tim rung động
trán cao
trán trẻ ánh sáng
trang nhất (tọ báo)

trở xuống
dơi trở chứng
tuần trang
tấm ngữ tràn

trace: dead drunk/totally intoxicated/inebriated
[en: to be dead drunk/totally intoxicated/inebriated]
[en: it sounds right to the ear]
[en: to speak rudely/be insolent]
[en: to live anxiously]
[en: to live alone/be lonely]
[en: to live a simple/monastic-type life]
[en: to live harmoniously/in harmony]
[en: to live a vagabond life/live the life of a wastrel]
[en: to live desolately]
[en: to live in poverty]
[en: to live within the confines of (the local area)]
[en: to live comfortably/be well-off]
[en: to live happily]
[en: to live a miserable existence/in misery]
[en: horn of liquor]
[en: 100 kilograms of meat]
[en: journalistic lackeys]
[en: mean/despicable person]
[en: skinny body]
[en: firm body]
[en: Black April (April, 1975 when Saigon fell to the Communists)]
[en: red-light district; brothel]
[en: smoked/dried meat]
[en: to lose all one's money (from gambling)]
[en: to stay awake throughout the night); to stay up all night]
[en: fame spreads widely/fame renowned far and wide]
[en: rumours fly/abound]
[en: human compassion]
[en: the court set (him/her) free; to be acquitted]
[en: to pay generously]
[en: heart skips/misses a beat]
[en: high/broad forehead]
[en: suffused with light]
[en: (first page); front page (of a newspaper)]
[en: skin and bone]
[en: weather goes beserk/turns nasty]
[en: phase of moon]
[en: naked/bare chest]
tự nguyện dẫn thần

vết căo cầu
vết chấn hổ
vẻ đẹp hiềm cổ
viên đạn oan nghiệt
vị thuốc thanh

vùng chạy
vợ chồng lương tuội
vô (cánh) uế oai
xác còng queo
xác thối rữa
xẻ rách trần

xương cốt mòn nát
uốt sưng

[to volunteer to bring oneself into something]; to sacrifice personal gains for the common good by doing something]
[claw marks]
[traces of the tiger]
[rare beauty]
[(cruel bullet); fatal bullet]
[(miraculous cure); miracle/wonder drug]
[to free oneself and quickly run off]
[elderly/ 'Darby and Joan' couple]
[to flap (one’s wings) languidly]
[hunched-up corpse]
[(decomposing/rotting body]
[(to tear off one’s forehead); to tear off one’s skull]
[rotten and decayed bones]
[soaked to the bone/wet to the skin]
a leopard can't change his spots  
a stitch in time saves nine  
below/above one's station  
all brawn and no-brains  
all in the same boat  
all the best  
as easy as a pie  
as easy as falling off a log  
as flat as a pancake  
as old as the hills  
ask and you shall receive  
bite the hand that feeds you  
carry coals to Newcastle  
charity begins at home  
cop it sweet  
couch potato  
crime does not pay  
dress in borrowed plumes  
drop a brick  
escape by the skin of one’s teeth  
familiarity breeds contempt  
five minutes of fun and nine months of worry  
getting off at Redfern  
give someone the green light  

have a heart of gold  
have cold feet  
He drinks like a fish  
He drinks like Bacchus  
he who hesitates is lost  
he’s waited on hand and foot

he has the luck of the Irish  
hit the jackpot  
hold a seance  
take pot-luck  
If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again  
It’s not over till the fat lady sings  
jump out of the frying pan into the fire  
kick the bucket  
laugh till you cry

[chó đen giữ mục]  
[dùng để nước đén chân mới nhạy]  
[mòn đang hầu đòi]  
[vai u thệt bắp]  
[dòng hời đong thuyễn]  
[chúc bình an vô sự]  
[dể như bồn; dễ như chời]  
[dể như bồn; dễ như trở bàn tay]  
[dep lép nhu dong hò omega]  
[xua nhu trái đất]  
[con có khắc mẹ mới cho bù]  
[xia rằng cop; làm anh hùng]  
[vô ơn bác nghĩa; ăn cháo đa/đái bất]  
[chô cuí về rúng]  
[ăn cóm nhà vác ngà voi]  
[lạnh thủ]  
[lực si ghé bàn hạnh]  
[thien bất dung gian]  
[cuà người phúc ta]  
[phấm lơi]  
[thoát trong đường to kể tóc]  
[yêu chỗ chỗ liêm mặt]  
[khơn ba năm đại một giới]  
[mua ngoài quan ái]  
[bắt đèn xanh/cho phép cho ai làm cái gì]  
[có tâm lòng vàng]  
[so hãi; on lạnh xưởng sống]  
[uống rượu nhu uống nước lâ]  
[uống rượu nhu thần Lưu Linh]  
[trâu châm uống nước đức]  
[han được (vô) hậu colspan nước rốt]  
[hàn may mán/dô là lung]  
[trùng lớn]  
[lên đồng bòng]  
[thủ thơi văn]  
[thua keo ngày bay keo khác]  
[chuyên đầu đa đén hội chung cuộc]  
[tránh vô dua gập vô đa]  
[chet; cúp bình thiêc]  
[cưới ra nước mắt]
laughing on the outside, crying on the inside
leave someone in the lurch
life hanging by a thread
life wasn’t meant to be easy
like a Greek God
lips as red as cherries
lucky at cards, unlucky in love
make a mountain out of a molehill
make hay while the sun shines
more haste less speed
play with fire
pop the question
press the flesh
rats desert a sinking ship
red sky at night, shepherd’s delight
red sky in the morning, shepherd’s warning
send someone to Coventry
smell a rat
spick and span
standing there like stunned mullets
still waters run deep
strike while the iron is hot
the marriage/relationship is on the rocks
the marriage/relationship went sour
the stars are against me
the stars must be in the wrong place
they can move mountains
time and tide wait for no man
turn a blind eye/to turn a deaf ear
wait for something to fall into your lap
walk like Charlie Chaplin
waste not want not
What star were you born under?
What’s your star sign?
you can’t be serious!
you can’t have your cake and eat it too
APPENDIX 8

A sample of Vietnamese non-regular items

ăn Cháo dạ/dái bát
ba cọc ba dòng
bán quấn buôn quanh
bung di bung nưa
chây nhà ra mắt chuột
chốt cán áo rạch
chỏ ngấp phái rủi
cong xương sồng, cong xương suôn
cười ra nước mắt
com bưng nước rót
com không lành, canh không ngọt
dán ông rộng miệng thì sáng
dán bà rộng miệng tan hoang cửa nhà
dẻ bac dó tinh
dến xin như nước Tàu
di với But, mặc áo cà-sa;
di với ma, mặc áo giây
di đếm lầm cùng có ngày gặp ma
dương voi đối tiền
giản cá chém thơt
gần chua gọi But bằng anh
im lang như hoá đá
im ru như mặt nước hổ thu khác nhau ở chỗ là khác nhau với
không thấy đổ mày làm nên
khớ môi nói là
lên xe hoa
lung như lung kiến vàng
lúc sì ghé bánh
[to bite the hand that feeds you]
[meagre wages/earnings]
[to trade within the confines of the local area]
[(to take another step forward); to remarry (of a woman)]
[rats desert a sinking ship]
[to add insult to injury]
[to wait for things to fall into your lap]
[a back-breaking task]
[laugh till you cry; laughing on the outside, crying on the inside]
[(she) waits on (you) hand and foot]
[the relationship went sour]
[the man with a wide mouth looks imposing]
[the woman with a wide mouth will break a happy home]
[lucky at cards, unlucky in love]
[as black as Indian ink]
[If you go with Buddha, wear a monk's robe; if you go with a ghost, wear a paper tunic]
[like someone who goes out in the dark often enough, they will, sooner or later, come face to face with a ghost]
[you can't have your cake and eat it too]
[don't kill the messenger!]
[familiarity breeds contempt]
[stony silence; silence as a stone]
[the silence is deafening]
[the only difference is]
[as strong as an ox/mallee bull; as fit as a fiddle]
[without the teacher I bet you will never be successful in life]
[the only problem is]
[to walk down the aisle]
[an hour-glass figure]
[couch potato]
ma cù bắt nạt ma mới
miệng còn hỏi sữa
muu sử tài nhân, thành sử tài thiên
mẹ tròn con vuông
ngacam cuối nổi chân suối
ngồi but phun ноч độc
ngu si hương thái bình
nhà ngồi cây mít
như đêm với ngày
nói giáo cho giấc
nổ sách đến
ông nói gà, bà nói vịt
ông án cha, bà ăn nem
phi cao đăng bắt thành phu phù
phòng bệnh hơn chữa bệnh
rượg cả ao liên
răng den hat huyễn
rồng dương du-luân
sáng vác o đi, tối vác về
tai nghệ mắt thây
thao trường đơ mở hói,
chiên trường bót đơ máu
thua keo nay, bày keo khác
thuần vọ thuan chồng, tát bè Đong cùng can
tiễn học lé hữu học văn
tiến trao cháo mực
[the old hand pushes the new hand around]
[(the smell of milk still on one’s breath); a young, inexperienced person]
[Man proposes, God disposes]
[both mother and baby are doing well/fine]
[to be happy in Hades/ after death]
[(the pen tip releases poison); poison pen]
[ignorance is bliss; ignorance prevails]
[(a tile-roofed house with jackfruit trees); superly rich]
[like night and day; like chalk and cheese]
[to give a spear to your enemy]
[(debt of books and lamp); a moral debt to oneself for not having completed their academic study]
[(He talks about chickens, she talks about ducks); irrelevant talk]
[extra-marital sex; adultery; love affair]
[no university, no marriage]
[prevention is better than cure]
[fountain/mountain of wealth]
[teeth as black as custard-apple seeds]
[for the scrutiny of the public; as a matter of public interest]
[(someone carries an umbrella out in the morning and carries it home in the evening); a good-for-nothing male person]
[to eyewitness; to see with one’s own eyes]
[more sweat in training means there’ll be less blood spilt on the battle field]
[If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again]
[they can move mountains (of a happily married couple)]
[first comes manners, then come literacy]
[cash and carry]
trâu buộc ghét trâu ăn
trâu châm uống nước dục
tầm chưởng thích cù
uống rượu như thần Lưu-linh.
uống rượu như uống nước lá.
xiài rạng cọp
xuối tay nhắm mắt
yêu chó chó liêm mắt

[the tall-poppy syndrome]
[he who hesitates is lost]
to dig deep into the books
[(He) drinks like Bacchus]
[(He) drinks like a fish]
to bell the cat
[at the end of one's time on earth]
familiarity breeds contempt
APPENDIX 9

Vietnamese Source Text

Bạn Đọc Việt


Những người đã viết về Lê Đình Điều, nhưng có một điều mà tôi chúc, ngoài anh và tôi ra, không có ai biết, và đó là một ký niệm vui, khi chúng tôi còn học tập quân sự trong trường Võ Khoa Thứ Đức vào năm 1969. Mà nếu những lề thì may ra chỉ LĐĐ, người đã có thời đày chung tại Hội Việt Mỹ Sai Gòn với tôi, có thể nhớ ra ‘cái đếm hôm ấy đếm gì?’

Báo số 125, tháng Chín. Tôi đã đọc bài ‘Đạo kinh tối tiễn, điểm gắp gò chúng cho tóm nguồn Việt’ của LM Trần Cao Tuồng và thấy là cao kiến, có ý hướng tốt, vì văn đề thở cùng tôi tiên, thường được người miền Nam gọi nôm na là Đạo Ông Bà, đã được nhắc nhớ tôi, mà đọc biết được nhiều nhờ tôi bởi một vị linh mục. Có điều là văn về, lối diễn tả, nhưng đoạn tác giả thích khác, tôi thấy có nhiều chỗ hỏi khó hiểu, nên mất bớt đi cái hay của bài viết. Nhưng đó cũng có thể là lỗi tại tôi.


Ông Vũ viết hay đã dấn, nhưng có chỗ lấp lánh về ‘Trời hay Thiên nhiên hay Định mệnh?’ của tác giả, có thể cũng là hay dấn, dễ phân bắc lại tác giả họ Trần về một số vấn đề liên quan đến ‘Ông Trời,’ thì tôi chưa thúc sự cảm thấy ngamburg, vẫn còn đợi hiểu. Nhưng đó cũng có thể là lỗi tại tôi.

Cùng trong số báo 126 này, tôi đọc biết để ý đến bài ‘Cuốn từ điển tài bàn tầm lân’ của Đặng Trần Huan, trong đó tác giả nhận xét về quyển ‘Từ Điển Việt Anh’ của Bùi Phùng. Qua là ‘vài thua không che được mắt Thanh!’ Tôi thật không ngờ về cụm Chữ nhiệm
Khoa Tiếng Việt, trường Đại học Tổng hợp Hà Nội, lại để cho thiên hạ được dịp 'bồi lộng tiềm vẹt' nhiều đến thế! Giáo sư Bùi Phung, nếu tôi nhớ không lầm là cháu cụ Bùi Kỳ, tôi đã được gặp mặt vài lần tại Hà Nội vào những năm đầu thập niên 1990 qua những lần tôi từ Úc-dài-lợi về tham dự Hội nghị Giáo dục tại quê nhà. Tôi đã từng có được dự một hội nghị về 'Nghiên cứu Văn học Bắc Âu' tại Hà Nội vào năm 1993 và tôi hồi đấy vóng khi được nghe Giáo sư Bùi Phung phát biểu quan niệm về cùng tiêu cực của ông về việc dịch thuật—một việc làm, theo ông, là vô vọng, đặc biệt là khi phải dịch tục ngữ, thanh ngữ. Ông người cao lớn, béo tốt, đeo kính cận đeo cài, tinh tình vui vẻ, dễ mến, thích ăn nhậu. Tôi mến ông, chúng tôi thích cho nhau nửa buổi, và với thế, tôi còn muốn gặp nhau lần nữa. Tuy ông ghi nhiều ngừa, ông mong có thư nhập cao cho các sản phẩm trí tuệ của mình, nhưng có lẽ ông không nghe tiếng tục làm về chuyển chủ nghĩa, tiếng Anh tiếng Việt, đếm in an, xuất bản. Riêng về 'Cuốn từ điển tài bản tám lần' của ông, tôi đang nghĩ xem có cách nào hay nhất để chuyển đến tay ông những lời 'vàng ngọc' của tác giả Hồ Đăng hay không? Mà lần này, nếu có, sẽ không phải lời tay tôi: người đưa thư (the messenger).

Nhà soạn từ diễn ho Bùi, người mà vào đầu thập niên 1980, nếu tôi nhớ không lầm, đã có công sưu tập 'tấm chương trích cu' tại Trung tâm East-West Center thuộc Đại học Hà-ôai-di, Hoa Kỳ, chắc phải hiểu câu nói của người Mỹ 'Don't kill the messenger!' nghĩa là gì? Và như thế, nếu có dip gặp lại tôi, tôi chắc ông sẽ chỉ cười 'khá.'  

Trịnh Nhật (Sydney, Australia)
APPENDIX 10

English Target Text

Readers’ Opinions

After a break in subscribing to 21st Century magazine, at least over a period of one year, a friend in Stockton, near San Francisco, continued to subscribe to it on my behalf. Consequently, I had a chance to keep in touch with your magazine, starting with Issue No. 124, August 1999. The two articles which attracted my attention and which I found interesting were ‘A Good Friend’ by Le Tat Dieu, written in memory of Le Dinh Dieu, and ‘Saigon: Days and Months of Uncertainty’ by Tran Doan Nho, writing about the wretched and miserable lives of the people of South Vietnam after the so-called Liberation Day. ‘A Good Friend’ is moving and full of love; ‘Saigon: Days and Months of Uncertainty’ has many strange aspects, full of the fine details depicting the humiliation of the human condition. A great deal has been written about Le Dinh Dieu, but, I am sure, there is one thing which no one knew about, except Le Dinh Dieu and myself. And it was a fond memory we shared when we were training in the Thu Duc Military School in 1969. If her memory were to be jogged, then hopefully, Dieu’s wife, who had once taught with me at Saigon’s Vietnamese-American Association (VAA), may remember as to ‘What sort of a night was that?’

Issue No. 125, September 1999. I paid attention to the article ‘Ancestor worship, the common meeting point of Vietnamese beliefs’ by Father Tran Cao Tuong, and thought it a brilliant idea with good intentions, because the issue of ancestor worship, which is commonly called by people from Southern Vietnam ‘Ancestor Religion’, was mentioned, in particular, by a Catholic priest. The only problem is the style, the way of expressing ideas and the quotes inserted by the author, I found, in many places, a little difficult to comprehend, thus more or less diminishing the quality of the article. However, this could just be my fault.

Issue No. 126, October. When reading the article, ‘A Few Exchanges with Father Tran Cao Tuong’ by Nguyen Hung Vu, I found myself breaking out in beads of perspiration. Surprisingly, ‘my ignorance’ was not permitted ‘to prevail’ because of the sharp pen, the logical argument, and the intellectuality of the author. Vu ‘did not’ believe Tuong had good intentions, other than ‘to put all his eggs in one basket’ for his own religious purposes. What a strange idea! After referring to a so-called science of spirituality which is emerging, Vu wrote a paragraph with which I agreed: ‘The belief in a particular religious doctrine is a personal matter which I do not want to confront, but for me, the more important thing other than my own belief is my ability to question and re-assess what I think I believe in.’ I like even better the following paragraph that Vu wrote: ‘When the heart of a human being has developed to such an extent that it blossoms and bears fruit, the question of ‘my religion, your religion’, will no longer exist. There will be no boundaries, no question of right or wrong, no question of ‘non-believers’, and the believer, with all those values that go with that belief will be able to respect the religion of others, in the same way as he or she respects his or her own religion.’

Nguyen Hung Vu writes magnificently, there is no doubt, except for his argument about ‘Heaven, Nature or Destiny?’, which is probably interesting, as a counter to the writer
Tran Cao Tuong about a number of examples regarding 'Heaven' I am still waiting to totally absorb his reasoning. It hasn’t been fully digested yet. However, it could be my fault.

Also in Issue No/ 126, I particularly took notice of the article 'The dictionary which has been published eight times' by Dang Tran Huan, in which the writer commented on the 'Vietnamese-English Dictionary' compiled by Bui Phung. 'You can't cover the eyes of a saint with a fine cloth', as they say in Vietnamese. In fact, I was flabbergasted that the former Head of the Vietnamese Language Department of Hanoi University gave people the opportunity 'to nit-pick' to such an extent. Mr. Bui Phung, if my memory serves me correctly, is the well-known and well-respected Bui Ky's nephew, who I met several times in Hanoi in the early 1990s, when I made a return trip from Australia to attend education conferences in my homeland. Coincidentally, I had a chance to attend a conference on 'Scandivanian Literary Studies' in Hanoi in 1993, and I was somewhat disappointed when I heard Mr. Bui express his extremely negative viewpoint on translation—an undertaking, which according to him, was one of hopelessness, particularly when rendering proverbs, sayings and idioms. He has an imposing, well-built stature, wears thick-lensed spectacles, has a pleasant and likeable nature, likes winning and dining. I like him. We like to make each other laugh, and because of this I would like to meet up with him again. However, like the majority of people, he expects good return for his intellectual activities, but probably he has not been serious enough about the way he has dealt with words and their meanings in both English and Vietnamese, particularly those that have been seen in print. With regard to Mr. Dang's comments on the eighth edition of Mr. Bui's Vietnamese-English Dictionary', I am wondering which is the best way to convey to the book writer the 'pearls of wisdom' of the book reviewer. If this somehow happens, it would not be my fault this time.

This lexicographer Bui Phung, who in the early 1980s, if I am not mistaken, undertook six months of intensive work 'digging deep into the books' at the East-West Center of the University of Hawaii in the USA, must have understood the American expression: 'Don’t kill the messenger!' And so, when we meet again, I believe, he will get a good laugh out of my doing him such a service.

(1000 words)
APPENDIX 11

Translation of Nhât Tiên’s short story

What Color Rose will we wear for Mom?

The following is a translation of a short story by the celebrated Vietnamese writer, Nhât Tiên. The story first appeared in a Vietnamese magazine published in California in 1983 at the time of the Vu-Lan Festival, Ullambana, which is the Buddhist Wandering Souls Day celebrated at the time of the full moon of the 7th lunar month. On this day Mahayana Buddhists commemorate and pay homage to the devotion of one of the Buddha’s chief disciples, Maudgalyayana, (Viet: Mục Kiên Liên) who, according to legend, refused to enter Nirvana until his sinful mother had been saved from the suffering of Hell. Maudgalyayana visited his mother in Hell and with the help of the Buddha’s other disciples saved her. Buddhists believe that on this day the wandering souls can enter the world of Man and partake of the offerings provided. Because of the legend Vietnamese Buddhists also use the day to show particular respect to their mothers and go to the pagoda to pray and make offerings. Those whose mothers have died wear a white rose, while those whose mothers are still alive wear a red rose. - Ed.

The world of Thin, widow of the late school teacher, has now been whittled down to two small spaces: the narrow strip of land running along the garage wall and that corner of her mind where her fading memory conjured up a jumbled host of fond reminiscences: a sign of approaching old age.

One must admit that the narrow strip of land is the result of perfect care. Its width is about 1.20 meters and its length about 7 meters. Most of the time in her day is swallowed up in cultivating the garden. There are chilli bushes, as well as patches of coriander, sweet leek, perilla, mint and spring onions. There’s always enough to provide a full plate of vegetables any time the family sits down to enjoy bò nhúng giăm or gỏi cuốn çeşm mắm nem. It is only at times like this that the family fully appreciate the work Thin puts in watering and fertilizing the garden.

Tuan said, ‘Now that you eat the vegetables you don’t think Mom’s garden is a waste of time do you? You keep insisting that we should just race down to the supermarket and buy the vegetables but I haven’t yet seen either of you willing to get off your backsides and do that.’

Thuy looked at her brother, pursing her lips, she said, ‘It’s all very well for you to criticize us but I don’t see you going to the supermarket.’

Thu joined in, ‘If you’re not prepared to help with the cooking and shopping, what’s going to happen when you marry Huong? Will you just sit there while she pours your drinks and serves you meals.’

‘Why wouldn’t I? I’m marrying a Vietnamese girl not an American girl,’ retorted Tuan.

Thu’s eyes stared in amazement as she looked at her brother, ‘Ha! So you believe that if you marry a Vietnamese girl you will be able to force her to be your slave and she will do your bidding. No way! I can’t see that happening.’

‘Go and ask Mom if you don’t believe me. The most important things a Vietnamese girl learns is submitting to three in life: Father, Husband, and Son. She also

1  fondue-style beef
2  seafood salad rolled in rice-paper and dipped in fish pickles
must learn four virtues: proper work, proper demeanor, proper speech, proper conduct. Isn't that true, Mom?” he replied.

Thin just looked at her children, not saying anything. Ever since the day she arrived in America, she had given up voicing her opinion. To Thin everything around her was bewildering and beyond her understanding, completely severing her from the experiences gathered in a lifetime. That is to say, when confronted with anything here she was bewildered and confused. Everything she said was wrong and she had become a child in her own household. Everywhere she went she had to be taken by the hand and in anything she wanted to do she had to first ask her children’s opinion. Even when her children were gathered trying to explain something to her she still couldn’t make head or tail of what was going on. The day Tuan got a regular job, he replaced the old TV with a brand new one. Tuan had said, ‘This set has remote control, Mom. If you want to watch TV, whatever you do don’t touch any buttons on the TV itself. Everything is set up, so all you need to do is sit on the sofa and press the buttons on this thing.’

Tuan had handed the remote control to the old lady. She took it timidly as if it would break the minute she touched it…

He continued to explain, ‘…This is the on button, this is the off button and this is the volume. This one here is to change the channel and this one is the mute button; so if the telephone rings while you’re watching you can pause the sound.’

Her brain was totally confused and couldn’t take everything in. When she handed it back to Tuan, she had said impatiently, ‘That’s too complicated and anyway I don’t like TV very much, it talks a lot of nonsense and I don’t understand any of it.’

‘Then just listen to the music Mom.’

‘I don’t like the modern music, it seems to punch at my ears and my head starts to ache.’

In the end her entertainment was confined to a few cassette tapes of Vietnamese classical theatre which she had listened to time and time again on her ancient cassette player. She didn’t mind the cassette player as it was simple and easy to operate. The only trouble was that when she listened to the tapes, Thuy didn’t seem to mind, but Thu would grumble anytime the tapes were on.

Thu would say, ‘Switch it off please because I get a headache from that droning, nagging sound. I don’t know how you can listen to that.’

There were times when Tuan felt a bit sorry for his mother and thought his sisters were being a bit cruel. He shouted at them, ‘This is the only enjoyment Mom has, why don’t you let her listen to her music.’

Thu would retort, ‘Why doesn’t she wait for us to go to school and then she can listen all day if she wants to.’

Naturally, Thin never wanted to become the cause of her children’s arguments so she reached out to press the button to stop the tape. She looked at her children through sad eyes and opened the back door to go and stand in the backyard. She stared at the wall on the other side of the lawn. The wall, painted in a dark pink lime wash, reflected the hot June sunshine and the glare hurt her eyes. She thought about her own tiny world, the little garden plot, 1.2 meters by 7 meters, with its shallots, mint, coriander and perilla.
A few weeks ago she had met Old Phong at the shopping centre, who promised that the next time Thin came to visit her she would pull up some rôp cã plants and give to Thin. Thin had happily announced this piece of news to her children and had suggested timidly, 'When someone can spare the time, would one of you drive me to Old Phong's place so that I can pick up the rôp cã plants to put in the garden here.'

At this, Thuy had shrugged her shoulders and stuck out her tongue, 'Yuk! rôp cã, no way. I give up. I feel like fainting just thinking about it.'

Thu said, 'Me too! How on earth can you like such a vegetable?'

Again Tuan intervened on behalf of his mother, 'Mom likes to eat it even if you don't. Why don't one of you drive her there so she can get the plants.'

'I'm busy this week because I'll be helping Lieu to plan her birthday this Saturday and on Sunday one of your friends is having a party and I'm invited,' Thuy replied.

Tuan turned to Thu, 'Then Thu, why don't you drive Mom to Old Phong's place? What are you doing this weekend?'

Thu shot back defiantly, 'And what are you going to do?'

Tuan stared at her defiantly jutting chin. Thin hurriedly intervened, 'It's alright, if everyone's too busy this week, next week will do.'

But the next week had passed into a month. The subject of rôp cã had come and gone in minutes and was immediately forgotten except by Thin. She was still waiting for the chance to drop in to see Old Phong.

Back in Vietnam, Thin had been addicted to the habit of rubbing her teeth with tobacco and chewing betel. When her husband was alive, out of affection for her he had planted a vine of betel next to a trellis in the backyard of their spacious house in Saigon. The plant had grown gradually covering the overhead trellis. In the corners of her mind the memory which stood out the most was the image of the trellis of betel leaves but not simply because she was so addicted to chewing betel at the time but it reminded her of all the love and care her husband had for her. When her husband died, the trellis had been covered in luxuriant green, and many a time, as she stood by herself picking the leaves, she allowed herself to sob, hidden by the trellis. Her eyes would still be red when she went back into the house. At that time, her children had been young and innocent. Thu had only just turned 5, Thuy was 8 and Tuan, a boy of 12. She then devoted her days to love and care for the children. As they got a little older, Thu and Thuy enjoyed helping her fold the betel leaves around a mixture of tobacco, areca nut and lime. She smiled to herself as she thought about their small chubby hands awkwardly filling the leaves and finally stabbing with a betel stem to hold it all in place. The results were often less than neat and very lopsided but it was a happy time and Thin remembered feeling happy and at peace watching them solemnly completing their task.

Ever since arriving in America both Thu and Thuy had been in agreement suggesting their mother stop her betel chewing habit. Thu explained, 'Chewing betel is not done in this country. If your mouth is covered in blood-red they think we are savages.'

Thuy added, 'You see! There's not a soul in the whole of America who chews betel. If you chew betel in this country everyone will stand and stare at you.'

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3 an aromatic herb which has a distinct fishy smell (Saururaceae = 'Lizard Tail').
Although more sympathetic Tuan was inclined to agree with his sisters and said, ‘Why don’t you let them buy you some chewing gum if you want to keep your mouth busy. Thu! after school this afternoon can you drop in somewhere and buy some of that cinnamon-flavoured gum, which might be more to Mom’s taste.’

It was the first time Thu had agreed to any of her brother’s suggestions. All three of them had joined together as one to break Thin’s betel chewing habit. So Thu energetically went about the task of bringing home many varieties of chewing gum; long flat pieces, small white squares, as well as the cinnamon-flavoured Dentyl gum that Tuan had suggested.

When Thin realized the amount of money spent on the gum she had said emphatically, *No! No! Why on earth did you buy so much gum? If you want me to stop chewing betel, I will. I don’t need chewing gum...*. She continued in a sadder tone, ‘...When in Rome... Now I live in a different place I will conform.’

Indeed, Thin stopped betel chewing for good. She never ate any of the gum Thu had brought home. Her habit had been crushed but the memory of a trellis of lush green betel leaves would stay with her forever. There were days when the children were out that Thin would sit on the sofa with her arms wrapped around her knees, looking at the glass window which became blurred in the glare. She looked so thin and small curled up on the immense sofa looking like an old lost cat. Only a few years had passed since coming to America but already her hair had gone completely white. As her eyes blinked from the glare, her heart was in the tiny living room in Saigon looking out into the yard where the betel leaves climbed over the trellis. With his own hands her husband had made the bamboo trellis. The sounds of the street on the other side of the wall reached her and she thought she could hear the sound of a motor-pedicab as it passed the street beside the market. She heard once again the sounds coming from the public water tap and those of peddlars shouting out their food wares as well as the train from Bien Hoa chuffing past the level crossing. Her homeland was far away and out of sight and could only exist now in a corner of her mind. Her thoughts drifted back to when the four of them first arrived in America. They would all sit down together to a meal eagerly competing with each other to talk about something they remembered about Vietnam. Such fond memories of her late husband, Saigon, school, streets, relatives and friends. These occasions became more and more rare until it was only Thin who was left telling the stories. They hardly ever ate as a family anymore. At noon, the children had lunch at school and in the evening they arrived home at different times. Thu was usually the earliest and the hungriest. She would go to the kitchen and heat a bowl of vegetable soup (ready made in a cellophane bag) and eat it with several slices of bread.

Thin would implore, ‘Only eat a little bit, not too much, wait until the evening when the whole family can eat together.’

Eating together! That was the one small dream Thin still held for this household. It was only on very rare occasions now that the whole family ever sat down to a meal together; perhaps occasionally on weekends. By the time Tuan arrived home at night, Thu and Thuy had already retired to their room and closed the door.

Early evening would often find Thin, sad and lonely, dozing off in the chair waiting for her children to come home. The dishes she’d laid out on the table for their meal, grew cold. There might be pickles, meat cooked in fish sauce and vegetable broth.
Some nights Tuan would sit down to the food out of kindness to his mother. He wasn't really hungry but he would scoop half a bowl of rice instead of a full bowl. After that he would continue his meal by making up some packet noodle soup. Tuan was absolutely addicted to noodle soup. He never seemed to grow tired of it. At other times, Tuan would carry a big bowl of noodle soup into the living room and eat it while he watched TV. So a pot of nicely cooked white rice would often be left sitting on the table. Thin never threw anything out. After she cleared the table she would put the leftover food in the refrigerator to re-heat for her lunch the next day. Many a time Thin added a little bit of water and made herself a bowl of rice soup from the leftovers of the night before. As time passed, her lunch of rice soup became an established habit. For the whole of her life Thin had a horror of throwing anything away. Even, in Saigon, at a time when she was quite comfortably off she never believed in waste. Her children had often heard her use the expression: 'If you waste what is given by God, you won't have it again for another ten generations'. Thin lived her life as though the eyes of Heaven or Buddha were always looking down. So she worried even if she spilled as much as a grain of rice on the floor. That's why any leftover food was always put in the fridge, even if it was only salted fish sauce, salted prawn heads or crumbed fish that had been simmered in fish sauce.

Thuy had once shouted, 'Mom, there's plenty of food in this country, but you spend your life eating food that's off.'

Thin retorted, 'Damn you! It's good food and it's not off!'

Thu joined in, 'If it's not off then you keep re-heating it all week. If you don't throw the food out, I will!'

Thuy was as good as her word. She would wait until her mother was absorbed in the garden and set about cleaning out the fridge. Out would go rice soup, old cooked rice, fried Chinese cabbage, cooked shrimp paste, and something 'blackened' which looked like neither meat nor fat, intermingled with some shrimp barbel. The clean fridge would last about a week then Thin would be back to her old habits again, storing leftover food. Eventually the children didn't bother any more and let her free to adhere to her own eating and drinking habits, just as her children each had a favourite dish. For Thu it was the vegetable soup, Thuy loved rice vermicelli with barbecued pork and Tuan sat with his bowl of noodle soup as he watched T.V. After each of them had finished eating they would head for their separate rooms and shut the door. The image of the shut door in American homes left Thin with the feeling of horror; she was not only shut out of their rooms but out of their lives. She had no idea what her children did behind their doors. Sometimes she stood out in the corridor under the weak yellow light. In reality she was only a few feet from each of them but in loving closeness she was at a great distance. They would never know, there were many a day when she would be so overcome by emotion that she would lay her head against the wall and sob.

In the past she could have a thorough knowledge of her children's daily activities. She would be able to tell whose piece of garment it was, which of Tuan's trousers had been mended, which of Thuy's or Thu's tops had a split seam or needed a button. She could also tell if Thu had scratched her hand, when the wound had healed or when the scab had eventually dropped off. She could even tell what tooth of their comb had broken, which of their sandal straps had come unstuck and whose handkerchief had been stained with purple ink. In those days she'd known her children as well as she could read her own palm.
Now she was barely allowed to step through the doors of their rooms. If she wanted any of them she had to stand outside and knock on the doors. Sometimes, when Thin wanted to speak to one of the girls, Thu and Thuy might open their wooden doors a fraction, just enough to put their heads out and exchange a few words with Thin and then the door would be snapped shut again. Thin had come to realise that in every way the children had flown out of her reach. Each of them now had his or her own world both in its strict and figurative sense of the word.

Once Tuan had been ill and lay in bed for three days. Thin had then found herself rejuvenated. She bustled about the kitchen making hot rice soup, chopping onions, squeezing orange juice, soaking hot face towels and preparing condensed milk and gathering Tuan's dirty laundry and washing and hanging it to dry. During this time she was able to come and go from Tuan's room as she pleased without knocking. She gave herself up to the luxury of sitting at the end of his bed for hours. Sometimes she would put her hand to his forehead or stroke his feet or simply pull the covers around him. At other times she would straighten the bed clothes or listen attentively to his laboured breathing. She was so busy and full of love but it only lasted three days. In the evening of Tuan's first day back at work, Thin hesitantly approached Tuan's tightly closed door. She knocked softly.

'Tuan called out, 'Who's there?'

'It's Mom.'

'What do you want Mom?'

'I just wanted to know if you're feeling alright today.'

'Fit as a fiddle. No worries! Mom,' replied Tuan loudly.

Thin stood thoughtfully by his door for a moment and turned and walked away. Intermingled with the joy she felt at Tuan's recovery, was an indescribable feeling of anxiousness that she had lost something precious. She again went to sit on the sofa, curling up like an old sick cat. She looked through the glass window into the deep hollow of the dark sky thinly dotted with stars. As if from afar the sound of music reached her vaguely, echoing from behind the doors of her children's rooms. She immediately regretted her very foolish thought, 'Thu, Thuy, I have never ever seen them sick!'

(California, 1983)
APPENDIX 12

Translation of Nguyễn Huy Thiệp’s short stories

The breezes of Hua Tat

In the North West region there was a small village populated by the minority black Thai, and lying about one mile from the foot of Chieng Dong Pass. The village was called Hua Tat.

Hua Tat village was located in a long and narrow valley, surrounded on all sides by high mountains. At one end of the valley was a small pond, the water of which never ran dry. At autumn time, wild yellow chrysanthemums bloomed around the pond, the colour of which dazzled your eyes.

One could leave by many different ways from the valley of Hua Tat. The main route was covered with small stones and just wide enough for a water-buffalo to pass through. Both sides of this route were lined with bamboo, mangosteen, mango trees and hundreds of types of climbers the names of which were unknown. The footprints of many people were imprinted on this road, amongst these reportedly being, those of an emperor. Hua Tat valley received little sunshine, so all year round there was a kind of haze hanging over the village which caused people and animals to become blurred images the eyesight. This created a kind of mystical atmosphere.

At Hua Tat old stories were told in every little nook and cranny, in much the same way as the small yellow wild flowers grow. It was believed that if a man held this kind of wild flower in his mouth whilst drinking, he would never get drunk. This flower was much like the small white pebble streaked with red lines as fine as thread, which lay hidden at the bottom of the stream. Women liked the pebbles. They took them home and put them in their camisoles for a hundred days. When they made their husbands’ beds they hid the pebbles in the bedding. There existed an old wives’ tale which said that when a husband had lain on such a bed he would never think of other women.

Hua Tat was a small, isolated village and the village people led a simple but honest life. The farm work was arduous and tiring, as was the hunting; however, the people were always very gracious and hospitable.

When arriving in Hua Tat, a visitor would be invited to sit by the fireside, and to drink alcohol from an animal horn whilst eating the dried meat of jungle animals. If a visitor was a fair and honest person, the host would offer to tell an old story. Possibly many of these stories recounted human hardships, but because we understood about those hardships, it evoked in us a clear sense of morality, forgiveness and human compassion.

Nowadays, the characters of these old stories live no longer. At Hua Tat they have become as dust and ashes. However, their spirits are still lingering around the totems on the roofs of the huts. They are like as the breezes.
The tiger's heart

There was once a girl named Pua who lived in Hua Tat village. Her beauty was unsurpassed throughout all the other villages. Her skin was as white as alabaster, her hair was long and smooth and her lips were red as cherries. The only problem was that Pua was paralysed from the waist down, so all the year round she was confined to one place only.

When this story took place Pua was 16 years old. At this age she was considered to be at threshold of the discovery of romance—in the Spring of her life. One may have many romances, but a girl can experience Spring only once in a lifetime. At the age of 16, it is considered to be the beginning of Spring for someone, but when one turns 19, that is when Autumn is believed to have set in.

Spring at Hua Tat was filled with the sounds of music from bamboo pipes which enveloped the surroundings of the village girls' houses. The grass below the stairs leading to the huts could not grow. In its place lay a flattened silvery coloured area of earth. At the stairs of Pua's hut there was no music because nobody wanted to take a girl who was paralysed as his wife. Men took pity on her, even children pitied her. People prayed that the evil spirits would leave her body, and they searched to no avail for a cure for her affliction. Her legs remained lifeless.

That year Hua Tat endured an horrific winter. The weather went berserk. Trees and plants dried out, withered and died because of the extreme frosts. Water froze into ice. That winter, in the jungles of Hua Tat, there appeared a fierce tiger who stalked around the village all day and night. The village became deserted. Nobody dared to go into the fields and terraces to work. In the evenings the bottoms of the staircases leading to the huts were barricaded with thorny branches and doors were tightly shut. In the mornings, the footprints of the tiger could be seen around every hut. The whole village lived in a constant state of fear.

It was rumoured that the tiger had an extraordinary heart. Its heart was thought to be as small as a pebble and transparent in colour. The heart was also considered to be a magic charm as well as a miracle drug, for whoever received that heart, would be blessed with good luck and wealth all their life. That heart, if preserved in alcohol, would be able to cure all fatal diseases. Surely if this drug were to be taken by Pua it would cure her paralysis.

Rumours quickly spread, like a bird on the wing, throughout the valley. In the kitchen, by the fireside, by the water's edge and streams, in the fields and on the terraces, everywhere, people talked about this tiger's heart. Rumours spread as far as the lowlands where the Kinh people lived, and to the top of the high mountain abodes of the H'mong people. Rumours that come from simple-minded people, strangely enough, are more amusing than those which would usually only be expected of worldly people.

Many people hunted the tiger. Amongst these were the Thais, the Kinhs and the H'mongs. Some people wanted to hunt it for its heart to use as a magic charm, whilst others wanted the heart as a cure for disease. How could you blame them? In one's life, who has never once sought to pursue a dream? Among the hordes of hunters, the largest group were the young men of Hua Tat village. They wanted to capture the tiger's heart in order to cure Pua. The tiger hunt lasted till near the end of winter, however, as if there was something supernatural, the cunning tiger knew how
to avoid ambushes. The true fact was that the hunters themselves were being hunted by the tiger. More than ten people were killed by the ferocious tiger and the sound of people's moaning mixed with the howling of the wind, lingered throughout the village. People gradually became discouraged. The number of hunters diminished as fast as ripe fruit falls from a tree, until finally, only one hunter was left. That was Kho.

Kho was a young man from Hua Tat village, an orphan living like 'con dim'– an animal who lives in isolation avoiding human contact. Kho never took part in any village gatherings or festivals, partly because he was poor, and partly because he knew that he was ugly. He had once had chicken-pox and his face was covered entirely in pock marks. His body was deformed, in that his arms reached down to his knees, and his legs were spindly. He was always hurrying, just like 'con dim', who is known never to walk, but always to run.

When the villagers knew that Kho had joined the hunt, many were astonished. They were even more astonished when, they found that Kho was going to hunt the tiger, not for the sake of the magic charm of its heart which would bring good luck to him alone, but for a cure for Pua. Every nightfall they saw Kho standing furtively at the foot of the stairs to Pua’s hut with a forlorn love-sick look on his face.

Hua Tat villagers did not know where Kho was looking for signs of the tiger. Neither did the tiger know where to look for signs of an 'animal' like Kho. The tiger knew of the danger, so he changed his lairs and his trails. Kho and the tiger stalked each other hour by hour.

One night, when people were sitting on the floor of Pua’s hut, telling stories, they heard the sound of a gunshot. The noise resounded like a clap of thunder. There was an ear-splitting roar from a tiger which echoed throughout the mountains. The tiger was dead! Kho had killed the tiger, for sure! The whole village was panic-stricken, and a hustling and a bustling arose, like a storm in a jungle. People yelled with excitement and many of them cried out aloud, with tears in their eyes. The young men of the village lit their torches and went into the jungle to look for Kho.

However, they did not find Kho and the tiger’s body till it was nearly dawn. Both of them had fallen down a steep abyss near the stream. Kho had broken his back and his face was covered in the tiger’s claw marks, whilst the tiger had been shot through the head. The bullet had torn off most of the tiger’s forehead, and continued through to his brain.

However, the strangest thing was that the tiger’s chest had been slashed open and his heart was longer there. The cut made by the knife was still fresh, and the blood covering both sides of the cut was dripping continuously and bubbling. Someone had stolen the tiger’s heart! All the young men of Hua Tat village grew silent, their heads bowed low for they were angry and bitter. More than ten people had been killed during the Winter because of this ferocious animal, and now two more people were dead because of the tiger. That was Pua as well as Kho.

The people of Hua Tat village buried the tiger on the spot where he was killed. Nobody ever spoke of the miracle of the tiger’s heart. They forgot about it just as they had forgotten many other distressing things that had happened in the world. This was how it was! Nowadays, very few people remember this story.
The biggest beast of all

Those days in Hua Tat there lived a family, but the people were unaware from which village they had come. They built their house on the outskirts of the village near the mysterious jungle. Only an elderly couple lived in the house and everywhere they went, they were inseparable. The wife was always quiet and unassuming, never saying a word all day. The husband was tall and skinny with a miserable look on his face, and his nose was like the beak of a bird. His eyes were hollow and glazed, and glowed with a cold and fearful burning. The husband was also a skilful hunter, and with a rifle in his hand, jungle birds and animals rarely escaped death. His rifle seemed to have a will of its own. At the back of his house, feathers from birds, and bones from dead animals piled up. The piles of strewn bird feathers looked as black as Indian ink, whilst the piles of chalk-white animal bones were mottled with traces of smelly yellowish-coloured fluid. These piles were as huge as a grave. The old hunter was like the God of Death of the jungle. Birds and jungle animals feared him and the hunters of Hua Tat were both jealous and angry with him, for he did not spare any animal within range of his rifle. Someone even said that he had seen with his very own eyes, the old hunter kill a dancing peacock.

The story went that the dancing peacock had a head gracefully arched like a blade of paddy-rice, its tail displayed in a half-circle of myriad hues, and the rays of the sun reflected the fire-light glittering like gold from its feathers. It cleverly moved around with circular motions. Only love could have prompted it to move in such a delicate and precise fashion. The dancing peacock had been alive, and then, 'bang'! the rifle jerked, spouting a tongue of red fire. The peacock collapsed, its wings coloured with the five colours of the rainbow were saturated in blood. Then the hunter's wife had arrived with her dark, dried-up, skinny body, and had silently picked up the peacock and put it into the basket strapped to her back.

However, all his life the old man only hunted the everyday birds and beasts of the jungle. He had never hunted down any beast weighing three tonnes or more. His rifle had only shot small dumb animals, and this aggravated, as well as upset him.

All of the village people of Hua Tat shunned them. Nobody associated with them or wished to talk to the couple, and if they crossed their path, the villagers automatically turned away to avoid meeting them. Because of this the old hunter, together with his unassuming wife, lived a lonely life.

By the end of the year, the jungle was almost devoid of foliage, birds disappeared and hid themselves, and there were no traces of any animals whatsoever in the jungle. Never before had the people of Hua Tat experienced such a difficult time, and it was even rumoured that Heaven was punishing them.

The old hunter also experienced difficulty in seeking food. His wife wandered in and out of the jungle. It was the first time in his life that he had found himself in such a situation. During the first three phases of the moon, his rifle had never been fired. The old man arose when the cock crowed, set off armed with his rifle, and did not return until it was completely dark. His elderly wife no longer had enough strength to accompany her husband. So she stayed home by the fire and waited for him. The flame of the fire that she kindled seemed as if it was possessed by a ghost, for it did not glow red, but burnt with a pale blue light like the eyes of a wolf.
On this particular occasion, the old man had been away the whole week. He was exhausted, and his knees were sagging with fatigue. His muscles were flabby to such an extent that when he pinched them it felt as if he was pinching blood-sucking leeches. He had to drag himself around painfully, but could find nothing; not even a tiny bird nor a butterfly. He was bewildered and panic-stricken. Was this Heaven punishing the world, as had been rumoured by the people?

Eventually, the exhausted old man dragged himself home and as he approached the stream on the outskirts of the village, he stopped and looked towards the direction of his home. There was the fire-glow, burning pale-blue in colour. He thought that his wife would still be awake, waiting up for him. He tightly closed his glazed and hollow eyes and for a short time he reflected on this, then he decided to return to the jungle. His nose had sensed the scent of an animal. Luck was really with him this time! He sighted the animal. It was the peacock dancing, its legs moving delicately towards the right, its tail fanning into a circle towards the left. The bright emerald green colour on the tuft of its head was so glorious! The old man raised his rifle and 'bang!' The shot rang out. He heard a high-pitched cry, and he rushed towards the fallen beast. It was his wife! She had gone into the jungle to wait for him. She was still holding a clutch of peacock feathers in her hand. The old hunter lay down on his stomach with his face buried in the pools of blood which were flowing on to the rotting vegetation, the smell of which was nauseating, like the stench of a dead rat. He cried out suddenly in despair, like the cry of a wild boar and lay there for a long time. Black clouds descended and the forest darkened and became as hot as someone with a fever. Near dawn, the old man sprang up, as quickly as a gibbon, for he had conceived an idea to use his wife's body as prey to hunt for the biggest beast he had ever caught in his life. He lay in the bushes at arm's length from his wife's decomposing body, waiting in agony, but Heaven had punished him, for no beast came. Only Death came to him!

Three days later people dragged his hunched-up corpse from the bushes. A trace of a bullet-hole was on his forehead. At last he had gunned down the biggest beast in his life.

A woman called Bua

At Hua Tat there was an extraordinary woman called Lo Thi Bua. When she walked out in the streets nobody greeted her. People would say: 'She is an evil witch. Don't get close to her!' Mothers warned their children against her and wives gave warnings to their husbands. Bua was a charming woman. She was tall and well-built with strong hips and a firm body. Her breasts were smooth and well-developed. She always smiled and was full of life with a radiance that attracted people to her.

She lived alone with her nine children, however, nobody knew who the fathers of the children were. Even Bua herself did not really know who her children's fathers were. At times many men had lived with her, but in the end they dumped her. Youts, with the smell of mothers' milk still on their breath, and lacking experience as fathers, older, more experienced men, brave hunters and penny-pinching men. Each came into her life in many different ways, and when they left, they did so again in many different ways. With regard to romance, the male sex is usually crafty and irresponsible, whilst the female is often too trusting and devoted. Bua welcomed all the men who came to her and was also indifferent when they left her. Her fatherless children were raised solely by Bua, for Bua had no strong attachment or connection to
any men in the village. She lived in a way which showed that she had nothing to hide. Whether she cared about what people said or not, who knows?

Her large family lived happily, harmoniously, and in poverty. Women in the village became incensed and they often sneered and screamed abuse at her. However, deep down they were frightened because the men in the village joked about their lust for her. They sat around the fireplaces, their eyes grew bright and sparkling, and drooled about the thought of her.

At Hua Tat everyone led a normal family life according to tradition. A wife had a husband, children had a father. Indeed, there had never been such a weird family situation as Bua’s. A wife without a husband, children without a father, and nine children who didn’t even resemble anyone or even each other. Evil rumours spread like an epidemic throughout the village. The gossiping of the women spread quickly, like chicken fever through a fowl-yard. The women regarded these rumours more seriously than the men, so they forced the men to try and find a solution to this situation. In other words, the men were obliged to either ask Bua to leave, or the women would find out who the fathers of the children were. How could such a family be allowed to stay within Hua Tat? These children would become young adults, both male and female, and they would break with all the old traditions. There were many times that the men in Hua Tat village tried to hold a meeting, but it was to no avail. Many a man felt guilty for having been part of it, and their conscience pricked them. They did not dare to publicly admit to fathering the children. They were scared that their naive and faithful wives would spread the true story; and felt that this would be even worse than living a poverty-stricken life.

That year, nobody knew why, but in the jungles of Hua Tat, countless numbers of yams sprung up and the people were able to dig up huge roots without any effort at all.

When cooked, these yam roots became crumbly in texture with a sweet aroma and a rich taste, and on eating them one was left with a lingering piquant taste on the palate which was very satisfying. Bua and her children flocked to the place where the yams were growing, for the jungle was generous and welcomed everyone with open arms.

One day, after following the growth pattern of one particularly large root, Bua and her children dug up a chipped porcelain jar, the colour of which, because of its great age, resembled the skin-colour of an eel. Bua scraped a layer of dirt away from the mouth of the jar, and was surprised to find that the jar was full of glittering gold and silver ingots. Bua trembled and shook with excitement, she felt weak in the knees, and tears of joy welled up in her eyes. Her children rushed to surround her, looking in fear at their mother. Suddenly, in an instant, this poverty-striken woman who had been looked down upon by all, became the richest woman in the village.

The planned meeting of the men of Hua Tat village to discuss Bua was no longer necessary. Men, one by one, readily came to Bua’s hut to admit to fathering her children. The naive and faithful wives urged their husbands to go and accept their children and bring them home. It turned out there were not just nine fathers, nor even twenty. As many as fifty men came. However, Bua did not recognise any of these men as the fathers of her children, but they came, and when they did, all received a present to keep their good wives happy.
At the end of that year, Bua married a gentle widower who was a hunter and was also childless. Perhaps this was finally her true love, because she shed tears of joy and happiness on her wedding-night. She had never felt the same with other men.

Bua should have given birth to another child, her tenth, to her true husband, but this woman was not accustomed to giving birth amidst wealth, and in the traditional way. She unfortunately died in childbirth lying amidst cosy, comfortable piles of blankets.

The whole community of Hua Tat attended her funeral, men, women and children alike. They finally had forgiven her, and perhaps, she too forgave them.

A most amusing dance-party

Ha Thi E was the oldest daughter of the village chief, Ha Van No. Rarely was anyone as beautiful as E. She had an hour-glass figure. Her eyes twinkled like the stars above and her voice was soft, so that when she laughed her laughter was light and carefree. E was beautiful, there was no doubt, but her virtue was also unsurpassed. She was the pride of the villagers of Hua Tat, and the whole village hoped that she would one day find a worthy suitor. So did the village chief Ha Van No, and also the village elders. To give a beautiful girl such as E to an unworthy suitor, would be an offence to Heaven, because she was Heaven’s gift to the village of Hua Tat. Who would be chosen? People openly brought up and discussed the topic of choosing E’s husband at village meetings. Those who wished to become Chief Ha Van No’s son-in-law were many. There were the young men from Hua Tat village, as well as other young men from outside the village. The elders of Hua Tat village stayed up all night drinking at least five jars of liquor, then they decided to hold a contest to choose someone who had honourable characteristics, even though this might prove to be a most difficult. Who would be able to fulfil all these virtues? Men gathered around fireplaces to discuss this and no one really knew how much meat and alcohol was ‘downed’. It seems the younger generation nowadays cannot make a decision without drinking alcohol, instead of just plain water.

One day a young man who looked very impressive came to talk to the village chief and the elders, ‘Bravery is the most precious but the most difficult virtue to find. I’m the one with this virtue.’

‘Prove it then’, the chief of the village said.

The man went into the jungle and returned in the late afternoon carrying across his shoulders a wild boar which he had killed. The beast weighed more than 100 kilograms, and its hair was coarse and spiky like a porcupine. It was already dead, but its bloodshot eyes still showed its final rage. He dropped the beast to the floor of the hut, his eyes were radiant and his body was surrounded in an aura. Everybody heaped praise on him.

The village chief asked his daughter, ‘You see, this man is brave indeed. He has proved himself to have the virtue of bravery.’

E smiled. Her heart skipped a beat when she looked into the courageous eyes of her suitor. There was fire in those eyes. But as clever as she was, E knew that brave people are pre-occupied only with what they themselves can achieve in life.
E replied, ‘Quite right, my father! This man has proved his courage. That virtue is really precious, but father, that virtue is not difficult to find because it only took him from early morning till this afternoon to prove it.’

The elders nodded their heads in agreement to what E said. The boar was slaughtered and the whole village danced all night in celebration of this precious but not difficult to find virtue.

Another time there was a young man who looked bright and intelligent, and who came to talk to the chief and the elders of the village: ‘Wisdom is the most precious virtue, but also the most difficult to find. I am the one that has this virtue.’

‘Prove it then’, said the elders to the young man.

The young man went into the jungle. In the afternoon, upon his return he brought back a pair of live otters. Otters are the wiliest animals in the jungle, for they are very cunning, and to trap them is a feat that is beyond most people. The young man smiled, his eyes were shining and his body was surrounded in an aura. Everybody praised him.

The village chief said to his daughter, ‘You see, this man is clever indeed. He has proved himself to have the virtue of wisdom.’

E smiled. Once again her heart skipped a beat. The suitor’s eyes were fiery and stormy. But clever people will always suffer hardship and even misfortune, and they know too much.

E replied, ‘This man has proved his precious virtue, but father, that virtue is probably not difficult to find because it only took him from early morning till this afternoon to prove it.’

The elders nodded in agreement. They agreed to what E said. The otters were slaughtered and the whole village danced all night in celebration of this precious but not-difficult-to-find virtue, for all honest young men in the jungle need this virtue.

Another time, there appeared a burly young man riding on horseback into the village. This young man said: ‘Wealth is a most precious virtue, but it is most difficult to find. I am a wealthy man.’ He then threw numerous pieces of gold and silver on the ground. People were dazzled at the sight. The village chief and the elders sat in silence, because they had never before seen a man as rich as this.

‘Wealth is something you do not need to prove!’ said the burly young man.

The village elders nodded in agreement and so did the village chief. The burly young man smiled but his eyes were stormy and fiery, and full of darkness. His body was surrounded in an aura.

The village chief asked E: ‘Well, my daughter, is wealth the most precious but most difficult virtue to find?’ ‘Difficult to find, yes.’ E replied. ‘Wealth is not a virtue, but deceitfulness is. One cannot be rich without being deceitful.’

The village elders burst out laughing, then they arranged an all-night party and entertained the man.

At last, a young man from Hua Tat village came to see the village chief and the elders. He was called Hac, an orphan, the most brilliant hunter in the village. Hac said to everyone: ‘Honesty is the most precious virtue, but it is most difficult to find. I am the one that has this virtue.’
‘Prove it then’, everybody said. Hac replied: ‘Honesty is not like a silver necklace that can be displayed and touched by everyone.’ People started to talk about this noisily and animatedly and the village chief became enraged, his face was red with anger.

‘You must prove it!’ the village chief screamed out. He had noticed E’s eyes looking lovingly at Hac. ‘Who would believe someone like you? Who said that you have the virtue of honesty?’, the village chief asked.

‘Heaven knows!’ replied Hac. ‘I know it too!’ E said solemnly.

‘You fools!’, the village chief roared. He looked to the village elders for support. He knew that elderly people always look for the simple solutions to every problem in life. Finally, one of the village elders said to Hac: ‘Let’s pray to Heaven then! At present there is a drought. All the water sources from the mountains have run dry. If you really are honest, pray to Heaven for rain.’

The following afternoon, the Hua Tat villagers set up an altar in order to pray for rain. The atmosphere was sultry and stuffy. Hac stepped up to the altar solemnly looking to the sky and said: ‘I live an honest life, although I know that being honest can often cause you to suffer and be disadvantaged. However, if honesty can gain forgiveness for sins and bring love to all the world, please, Heaven, let the rain pour down.’

At the time, the sky was clear and the air was still. Suddenly, as if from far away, an unexpected gust of wind blew up. All the treetops in the jungle rustled and small whirlwinds sprung up at ground level. In the afternoon, the sky was full of clouds, and at nightfall, rain came tumbling down.

Then the village people danced nearly all week to celebrate the wedding of Hac and E, the village chief’s daughter.

This was the happiest party of all at Hua Tat village. The whole village was staggering drunk and even every house pole, and every tree in the garden was invited to drink a large horn of liquor.

The wolf’s revenge

At Hua Tat there was a family with the surname of Hoang. They were a family of hunters. When it came to Hoang Van Nhan’s generation their fame had spread widely throughout the village. Nhan was a sharp shooter and he was always the leader of the hunt for he had no sense of fear. This trait was the same as possessed by his father, his grandfather and his great grandfather.

Nhan had two wives, but both of them were barren. When he was more than 50 years old, Nhan married another woman, and fortunately this wife gave birth to a baby; a boy who was as beautiful as an angel. Nhan called him Hoang Van San.

From the time he was five years of age, he followed his father into the jungle as Nhan was determined to train his son to become a fine hunter. The village elders offered him advice, ‘Just wait until San is over 13 years of age. That is the age when he will be fully mature, and he will not be harmed by the evil spirits that lurk in the jungle. You should have a healthy respect for the jungle and its terrors. If you let him go into the jungle at such an early age, it will not be good for him.’

Nhan replied, ‘When I was five years of age, my father had already allowed me to follow him into the jungle.’
The village elders added, 'It is different now compared to the old days. Your father had four children but you have only one.' Nhan smiled sneeringly. Young people today sneer at the old people in the same way. We don't know that the old people's words are often like a portent of the future, because old people understand what fear means, even though the feeling of fear does not bring them joy.

San gradually grew up, and at eight years of age he could even trap wild fowl in the jungle. At ten years of age he could hit a target and score seven shots out of ten. Nhan realized that it was about time that he took his son to hunt wild animals, so when his son was 12 years of age, Nhan took him on a wolf-hunt.

On this occasion, as many as 30 hunters followed Nhan. Wolves are very cunning, and proud, jungle animals, as well as being cruel and crafty. When they are attacked by hunters, they scatter and some sacrifice themselves to ensure the safety of the leader of the pack. Nhan was an experienced hunter, so he allowed a number of hunters chase these sacrificial wolves, whilst he and others gave chase to the leader. He was not going to be deceived by the leader of the pack. It was an ageing female wolf with reddish-coloured fur. When she ran, she slunk low on the ground and dashed in a zig-zag pattern. Nhan was determined to stay in hot pursuit, pushing her to the very depths of her last stronghold, the lair.

San followed his father closely. He had been used to the sound of the cry of wolves. Nhan taught his son how to distinguish between the various sounds and signs made by wolves: the cry of command, the cry of calling, the cry of fear, and even the different meanings attached to the wagging of their tails. By the end of the day, the pack of wolves had nearly all been killed by the hunters.

The hunters cornered the female leader in her lair, a deep cavern in which there were limestone columns covered in dark-green moss. The female wolf was old, the coarse fur on her back was mottled and silver-grey in colour. Having been pushed into her lair she fought ferociously, her eyes were bloodshot, and one wondered what she was thinking at this time. For an instance, she stared at Nhan as if to imprint his image on her mind, then she flung herself into the depths of the cavern where her children were nestling together. No sooner had she grabbed one of her cubs in her mouth, then a shot rang out. Nhan kept firing rounds of shots into the wolf's back. The female wolf fell on top of her tiny cubs, biting hard into the top part of the cub's head. The hunters swarmed in and dragged the body of the wolf out, at the same time capturing the cubs. Young San prised open the mother wolf's mouth, picked up the cub and took it home. This was the finest cub in the litter.

The cub grew up with the dogs. He still bore the teeth marks on the top of his head; a scar upon which no fur grew. The cub was raised in Nhan's house and was used to humans. It had a dog's characteristics, only its eyes and its mannerisms were different. Its eyes were wild and its mannerism was sly. Nhan and also his son San did not like this wolf-cub. However, the wolf never showed that it disliked anyone or any animal in the house. It avoided any conflict and its compromising attitude was very disturbing. It did not compete with the other dogs for food and it did not cause any trouble to the horses, goats, pigs or chickens. It lived in isolation and seemed very understanding. However, it was apparent to the animal that everybody in the household disliked it.

Time went by, and soon San had turned thirteen years of age. Nhan set the date on which prayers would be offered up to the spirits on behalf of his son and he
ordered the members of the household to slaughter two pigs, as well as slaughter the wolf as a treat for the villagers.

On this day, when the members of the household were preparing for the ritual killing of the pigs, something horrific happened. San was sitting next to his father, wearing his best clothes made of satin. He had the distinguished look of a man of importance. Nhan asked his son to oversee the servants’ work. San nodded his head and took three jumps down the gilt-edged wooden stairs, but unfortunately, the leg of his satin trousers caught the edge of the tread, and he fell to the ground right beside the wolf who was tethered with an iron chain. The wolf, lying half-asleep, was suddenly startled and jumped up. San hit his head on a stone lying beside the wolf. His mouth went against the iron chain which was attached to the neck of the wolf, and blood started gushing from San’s mouth. The sight of the gushing blood stirred the subconscious mind of the beast, and reminded it of something in the past. It jumped up, baring its sharp white teeth and fangs, and bit right into San’s throat where the faint traces of a recent ringworm attack still remained. Nhan’s servants rushed in a panic to the scene, but the wolf was in a maddened frenzy and would not let go of the lad. It bit, scratched and tore into every piece of blood-covered flesh, tendon and ligament from San’s throat. San died instantly, his eyes rolling up into his head. There was a gaping reddish-coloured hole in his throat from which spurted bubbling gushes of blood. The blood had spurted all over the wolf’s head, making his dishevelled furry head red in colour.

With great difficulty the people managed to drag the wolf a way from the young lad. Nhan, holding an axe in his hand, approached the wolf, tears streaming down his face. People stepped aside to let him pass through. Nhan was quaking with shock. The wolf cringed down. The chain was wrapped around the base of the stairs. For an instant, Nhan stood still, and then he suddenly wielded the axe and repeatedly rained blows down on the iron chain. The axe-head became blunt from the blows, and the links of the chain came away. The wolf gave a few yelps and then dashed towards the jungle; on its neck still remaining a short, dangling piece of chain. People surrounded Nhan in disbelief, as he dropped to his knees next to the body of his only son. In anguish he ran his long, bony fingers though the blood-soaked ground.

The forgotten land

Lo Van Panh was a well-known old man in the village of HuaTat. He was more than eighty years old, however his teeth were even and as well-aligned like the teeth of a seventeen-year-old man. He needed to only use one arm to effortlessly lift up the stone mortar used to pound rice. He worked with the strength of three men, and his ability to drink alcohol was the same. He could take on many men at the one time in a drinking bout.

The young men of the village looked upon him with great respect. Mr. Panh had three wives, eight children and about thirty grandchildren. They lived together in harmony and in affluence. Families are just like coal- kilns. The burning coals radiate warmth towards each another, but, later on, the heat generated can burn each individual piece of coal to destruction. Aren’t families the same as this?

This would not have happened if Mr. Panh had stayed within the confines of the Hua Tat valley. However, all of a sudden, he had the bright idea to go to Muong Lum to buy water-buffaloes. In fact, if only he had wanted just to buy water-buffaloes he
would not have had so much trouble. What he needed to do was to go to the Chi or Mat village. There Mr. Panh could buy the best buffalo for ploughing. But Muong Lum was where Mr. Panh lived in his youth, and memories of the past flooded into his heart.

Muong Lum was a remote and distant region, as far away as Chau Yen was. Muong Lum, in the minority Thai language, means 'The Forgotten Land.' Here there were mountains which had existed from ancient times, covered with abundant, lush tree-growth, and sheltering vast numbers of birds and animals.

On that particular day, Mr. Panh on horseback was nearing Muong Lum just as night fell. Suddenly, a violent hailstorm plummeted down. Mr. Panh looked around in order to find where to take shelter, but all he could see were hills covered in wild grass, the blades of which were as sharp as knives.

Hailstones came pouring down. His horse was so frightened he baulked. He neighed loudly and pawed at the ground.

Mr. Panh dismounted quickly from his horse cursing and swearing. He had never seen such a heavy downpour. The wind was so strong, and the hailstones hit his body with such force that they stung. The night closed in, and the roaring sounds of lightning made the earth tremble. The horse broke loose from its tether and dashed downhill. Mr. Panh was about to give chase when suddenly, a small black shadow appeared running towards him. He looked carefully to see what the shadow was. It was a girl who was coming back from working in the fields. She had come across the unexpected downpour and she was so frightened that she was stumbling and running, and at the same time crying out to Heaven for mercy. When she sighted Mr. Panh she was exhausted and she fell into his arms.

It was pouring rain. The hailstones were splattering like bullets on the ground. Mr. Panh stood shielding the lass, whilst the girl put her face in her hands and her whole body trembled. She confidently leant against Mr. Panh's strong well-built chest. Mr. Panh consoled her:

'Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! the Heaven's anger will eventually pass.' They stood like that amidst the hills covered with wild grass, surrounded by the roaring of the thunder and the hailstones. Mr. Panh was overwhelmed by a feeling of something mystical happening to him. Through his life's experience he had never had such a feeling. He knew that this was what he had been thirsting for. It was more than romance, more than the women he had met; it was 'bliss!' When it had stopped raining, there shone from above, hazy, rose-coloured rays of sunlight. The lass took her hand away from Mr. Panh's hand in embarrassment. He had never seen anyone more beautiful! She quickly ran off, and he haltingly chased her, stumbling after her, and finally managed to grab her by the hand.

'What's your name?' he asked, 'I will come tomorrow and propose marriage to you. Do you find me pleasing?' The lass was bashful for a short time, but after a while she mumbled: 'My name is Muon, from Muong Lum village'.

She pushed away from him and ran away down the hill, her lily-white, well-rounded calves flashing as she ran. Mr. Panh crouched down, sweating profusely and feeling faint. Happiness overwhelmed him. He lay stretched out on the wet grass, ignoring the huge black ants crawling all over his naked chest. He passed out until his
clever horse woke him by using its hot mouth to gnash at a big curly tuft of hair sticking out of Mr. Panh's ear.

The following afternoon he rode his horse to the village to look for Muong's house. He kneeled down and offered the money he had intended for the buying of water-buffaloes to Muong's father. Being aware of the visitor's proposal, Muong's father roared with laughter. He called to his wife, his children and the villagers. Everybody joked and talked about it. Mr. Panh did not seem to mind the ridicule which was a sharp as the cut of a knife. Muon hid herself behind the door and peeked out through the chinks of the door. She found it amusing and thought it laughable. Indeed she had completely forgotten the hailstorm from last night, her tears, and their chance meeting on the hillside.

Adamantly, Mr. Panh repeated his proposal again and again. Everybody stopped laughing after a while because it had become too much for them to tolerate. Finally, Muong's father was obliged to set the following conditions:

'All right. If you want to become my son-in-law, you must be able to fell a mahogany tree which is the biggest on Phu Luong mountain, and bring the tree here. The lumber from this tree will be used later on for yours and Muong's house.'

Everybody again burst out laughing. They all knew that the diameter of this particular mahogany tree at its base was bigger than the arm-span of eight men. It grew on the top of a stony mountain which was so high that if one stood there looking down to Muong Lum village, you would think that the whole village was only the size of the roof of a hut.

Muon's reply was as quick as a knife going through butter, 'All right, providing you keep your promise'.

The following day, Mr. Panh climbed to the top of the mountain, and with just the first blow of his axe into the base of the mahogany tree he became exhausted. He finally died when his heart gave out.

Muon did not attend Mr. Panh's funeral. On that particular day she had to go to Yen Chau market to watch the cock-fighting. In the afternoon on the way home, she again was caught in the rain, but this time there were no hailstones.

The forgotten horn

In the attic of the village chief Ha Van No there lay a horn which had lain there since time immemorial. The horn was made from the horn of a water-buffalo complete with silver inlays. It was cracked with age and covered with cobwebs, whilst inside the horn, wasps had made a nest. Nobody took any notice of it, so it lay there, neglected and unloved.

That year, in the jungles of Hua Tat there suddenly appeared a strange type of black worm. These worms were as small as toothpicks and clung together all over the branches and leaves of the trees. When you went into the jungle or out into the fields and terraces, you could hear the click-clacking of the contraction of their bodies as the moved, and the munching sound as they chewed the leaves. This made people shudder with fear. There were no leaves which those worms would not or could not eat; from blades of rice and bamboo leaves right down to the thorniest rattan leaves. They chewed away voraciously.
The chief of the village, Ha Van No, became thin and drawn with worry. He, together with the villagers, tried every possible way to eradicate these mysterious worms. They would shake and set fire to the trees in order to smoke them out, and the pour boiling water on them, or else a liquid made from the juice of special leaves, but all was in vain. The worms multiplied faster than ever, at a strangely unusual speed.

Hua Tat village looked as if it were desolate and plague-ridden. People discussed the possibility of evacuating Hua Tat to go and live in other places. The village elders pondered on the problem at a meeting, and everyone invited a spiritual healer to come and pray for the salvation of the village. The chief, Ha Van No, ordered water-buffalo and pigs to be slaughtered, and offered them up to the gods in order to receive their blessing. The spiritual healer said, 'The bones of the ancestors of the Ha family are rotten and decaying and turning into these worms. You must take these bones and expose them to the sun to cleanse them in order to rid yourselves of these worms.'

The village chief was taken aback by this statement. The Ha clan had a custom of burning their dead, and after the burning ritual, the bones were put in small earthen urns and hidden away. Of all the people in the clan, there was only ever one clansman who knew the whereabouts of the urn. Before his death, this person would choose another to succeed him. Tales were told that if a feud broke out, your enemies might find the bones, grind them up and mix them with gunpowder to shoot you. In this way, the whole clan could be exterminated. The Ha clan was not without many an enemy. If the bones were to be taken out to cleanse, the hiding place would be disclosed, and it was as good as giving your enemies a golden opportunity to destroy the whole clan.

The village chief pondered upon this, for he knew the enemies were stalking him every inch of the way, but how could he stand helplessly by watching the worms destroying his homeland?

One night at the end of the month, the chief awoke and called to his son Ha Van Mao to join him in searching for the bones. Mao was eighteen years of age with a face that was both handsome and intelligent, and he was cleverer than most other people. The chief and his son set off secretly. The hiding place of the bones of the Ha clan was in a deep cave high up on the top of a mountain, and the roots of a century-old tree totally covered the entrance to the cave. In order to gain entrance, the chief and his son had to push aside the thick trailing tree roots. After a great deal of hard work, they managed to retrieve the earthenware urn and bring it out of the cave, just as the first rays of sunlight broke through.

The chief of the village opened the earthen urn, displayed the bones on the ground and washed them with alcohol. The bones were intact, not rotten and decayed as the spiritual healer had foretold. Amidst the pile of bones there was a silver chain, exquisitely crafted. Mao asked his father, 'What’s this chain used for?'. The answer was 'I don’t know!'. The chief of the village wondered about this himself. 'Possibly, it may have been used to attach to a weapon.' 'I like it!' Mao said to his father, and he quickly attached the chain to his own body.

Both father and son left the cave and took the short-cut down the mountain side. When they approached a bend in the path, not far from the cave, they saw a group of strangers lying in ambush. The chief recognized his enemies and he told his
son to go ahead to the village and called the villagers to come to his rescue, whilst he himself would stay behind and stop the enemies in their tracks.

The chief of the village worked out a plan to try and trick his enemies into staying far away from the vicinity of the secret cave. In this one-sided situation, his fate was hanging in the balance, as if by a fine thread.

Mao went back to the village. He immediately called to the best sharp-shooters in the village to accompany him to the jungle to rescue his father. Sporadic shooting echoed through the jungle and made Mao’s heart feel as if it were on fire. Not until noon were they able to locate the village chief who was tied to the foot of a tree at least ten miles’ distance from the secret cave. His rifle was out of bullets and had been thrown down at his feet, and his enemies had cut out his tongue, because he would not disclose where his clan had hidden their remains.

Mao took his father back to the village. The chief did not die, but from that day onwards he was dumb and could not speak. The worm plague was still spreading and becoming more damaging, day by day. Mao became furious and ordered that the spiritual healer’s tongue be cut out to avenge his father, then he ordered that preparations be made to evacuate the village.

On the day that he was packing, Mao found the horn in the attic. On the horn there was a little hole to which one could possibly attach a chain. He suddenly remembered the silver chain taken away from the ancestors’ bones. So, he took it and attached it to the horn. The old horn, all of a sudden, looked as if it had new life. Mao held up the horn to his lips and hesitantly blew upon it. What a strange sound came from it! As soon as the horn sounded, the black worms on the trees suddenly squirmed and fell to the ground. Mao was amazed. He held on to the horn and tried to blow upon it several times. The black worms fell down like rain. He was so happy that he quickly ordered everybody to stop packing.

The whole village rejoiced and followed Mao into the jungle. All through the day the old horn resounded with its strange noise. Black worms kept tumbling down like rain, and the people scooped them up and destroyed them. The plague was over within the space of a day. After this the people of Hua Tat village had a big celebration and the old horn was placed solemnly on the altar.

From that day on, every morning in Hua Tat, the sound of the horn echoed throughout the village. The sound of this ancient horn was a reminder to all to remember their ancestors, and it heralded the peaceful time without the harmful worms.

That horn was always carried around by the old dumb man Ha Van No, and it looked just like an ordinary horn, with not the slightest bit of difference between it and any other horn that you may see. In fact, it even looked uglier and its sound was not as loud as an ordinary horn, even though it had worked wonders.

A man called Sa

The craziest person in Hua Tat village was Sa. He was the youngest son of Mr. Pach, a man who was the head of a large family, including eight children and nearly thirty grandchildren. Mr. Pach was a well-known identity throughout the Muong villages.
Since childhood, Sa had been playful and adventurous, and all his life he dreamed of achieving something extra-ordinary. Ignoring all good advice, he adamantly did anything that he wanted to do; for instance, drinking? Who was there that could down twenty horns of alcohol in one go? Try him! Hunting deer? Who could chase a deer to the point of exhaustion, for more than three days on end, till the deer collapsed beaten and broken? Try him! Who could wield a 'fighting stick' more quickly and cleverly than he could? Who could play the pan-pipes more beautifully than he could? And added to all this, who could capture a woman’s heart more skilfully than he could?

On one occasion, the people of Hua Tat village had worked hard all day at catching fish which were then placed on a boat ready for distribution to all the villagers. Sa came along, and tipped over the boat. Ignoring the jeers and abuse from the villagers, he just roared with laughter and jumped in amongst the silvery mass of fish which were swishing around, hither and thither.

He was crazy as a loon, to the point that he would have jumped into a burning fire if someone had dared him to do so. To him, praise from a child or a woman was more precious than gold. However, the truth of the matter was that nobody in Hua Tat praised him. They did not even call him by his proper name. Instead they called him ‘The Crazy Kid’, ‘The Lunatic Kid’, or ‘The Nutty Kid’. He was just like a strange animal living in the midst of human beings. Sa lived this way full of anxiety, and in misery, so much so that he became unsure of his intellect and talents. At a festival he would be happy one minute, and as mute as if he had been turned to stone the next. He would sit all day long, month in, month out, making different kind of toys or weapons, but when they were completed, he would throw them away. Nobody entrusted such an unpredictable young man with anything. Unbearable loneliness tore at his heart and his hunger for life and his intense desires put him apart from the everyday routines.

When he was thirty years of age, a salt trader from the lowlands induced him into leaving Hua Tat. As well as doing this, Sa left with the intention of achieving great things in another region. After Sa had left, life in the village became even more dreary. Fights were not as fierce as they had been before, women did not have as many affairs, there were no longer any all-night dance parties, the smiles were few and far between, and even the birds flying in the skies above Hua Tat flapped their wings lanquidly. People became grumpy and looked as if they were burdened down with a heavy work-load. Within a short time they realised that they were missing him and that they regretted his departure. News of Sa was sometimes carried back home by the salt trader, and the news amazed everybody. It was reported that he had taken part in the Save-the-King movement in the lowland area, and at one stage he had acted as an ambassador in a far-away and remote country. On another occasion, it was reported that he had been banished because of his involvement in a plot against the Royal Court.

Women started to use Sa as an example to hold up before their husbands. The people of Hua Tat village brought up his name when comparing the deeds of people of Hua Tat with those of other villages, and they went even further by mentioning things which Sa had not even done. The mere mention of his name gave them pride.

Time passed. People thought that Sa had probably died in a foreign land, but suddenly he reappeared. He was no longer young and exuberant. There he was, a
hunched-up old man resembling a forest dweller. One leg had been amputated and his old eyes were watery and weak. When asked about the remarkable life he had experienced, Sa replied hesitantly. Rumours previously spread by the salt trader had a certain amount of truth to them. The people of Hua Tat built a hut for Sa, and he lived an ordinary, everyday life like other people. When someone would start to talk about the stories of long ago he would avoid talking about them.

Sa married and the elderly couple had a son. He lived to the age of seventy before he died; however, it was rumoured that before his death, he recounted this story, ‘The last period of the ordinary life I lived in Hua Tat village living like everybody else, was, in fact, my greatest accomplishment.’

Could this have been true? No one in Hua Tat ever discussed it, but Sa’s funeral was held with all the solemnity giving to a person of royal blood.

The plague

At Hua Tat there lived a couple, Lu and Henh. They had been close since childhood, and when they grew up, they fell in love, married and had children. They were very familiar with each others’ gestures and thoughts and were never apart. When it happened that a cholera epidemic broke out in Hua Tat, by that time the couple had been together for fifty years.

The epidemic originated in Muong La and Mai Son, and spread from there to Hua Tat on a day when the weather was strange and eerie: with both scorching sun and heavy, driving rain. The humid steam arising from the ground, together with the oppressing heat, was everywhere, and made people feel full of trepidation. Children died first, followed by the aged; poor people died, followed by the rich; the good died before the bad.

Within the phase of the half-moon, thirty people had died in Hua Tat village. People hastily dug holes to bury the dead and sprinkled lime on the bodies, and by the time night fell it was as if the God of Death was holding a dance-party under the reddish-glow of moonlight.

People of Hua Tat tried to control the epidemic by drinking hard liquor and eating ground ginger mixed with garlic and hot chilli. They even forced bowls of these mixtures into the mouths of bread-fed babies. The babies screamed and screamed because their insides were burning up. Who cared? At least if you are alive, you are still able to experience the burning sensation!

When the epidemic broke out, Lu was away from home. His habit of gambling and carousing, which he had had since childhood, had caused him harm many times over. However, this time his habit proved to be his saviour. Throughout the period of the epidemic, Lu was far away in Muong Lum busily pursuing his gambling habit. For ten days straight, Lady Luck was with him constantly, even when he went to the toilet, where he even found money there. His fellow gamblers suspected that he had a magic charm. On his last day, weighed down with all his bags of money, Lu left to go home, leaving the others in despair, and with feelings of bitterness towards him.

As he passed through Yen Chau market, Lu bought a horse, without even bargaining, which shocked the Kinh horse-trader so much that he hit himself for not having charged Lu more. Lu then went to an inn and drank so much that he did not realise that someone stole his winnings whilst he was drunk. Lu was teetering and
tottering on his new horse as he wended his way homewards. He felt very light-hearted.

When he arrived on the outskirts of the village he was shocked to see that green leaves had been stuck into and all over the fences. White lime lay everywhere. The totems on the roofs of the huts were swarming with fattened crows.

Lu was stopped from entering the village: instead he was directed to go into the mysterious jungle where his children had only just that morning buried their mother. Henh, his wife, had died and her newly-dug grave had been sprinkled with lime. Lu dashed into the jungle on his horse to the place where his wife lay buried. He prostrated himself before her grave wailing and sobbing pitifully.

‘Oh, Henh!’, Lu cried out. ‘How can I live any longer without you? Who will boil the water for me to wash myself, after I have toiled in the fields all day? After I have been out hunting, who will make a special dish for my dinner? Who will share both my happiness and my sorrow?

Lu wept for a long time. Memories stirred within him causing him pain. He felt great sadness at the loss of his wife and he realized that he had been ungrateful and indifferent, whilst his wife had been generous, tolerant and long-suffering. The more he thought about it, the more he regretted what he had been, and the more intense was his love for her. Whether it be a small morsel of food or a beautiful piece of cloth, Henh would always let him have it. All these things were for him and the children. Henh was a sister, a servant and a mother to him; and him, what had he done for Henh over the past fifty years?

With his head bowed low before his wife’s grave, Lu suddenly heard moaning coming from under the earth. It was Henh! He had known every breath that his wife made, so he immediately recognized it as her moaning. Brushing aside his initial shock, Lu hurriedly clawed at the earth, hoping deep down that a mistake had been made, and that she might still alive.

The more her dug, the more distinct the moaning became. Lu was overwrought with happiness. His hands were cut and spurting blood, but he did not feel any pain. At last, he managed to pry open the lid of the coffin. He noticed that Henh’s breathing was shallow. Dragging his wife from out of the coffin, Lu quickly lay her across the saddle of his horse, holding tightly on to his bag of money, and rushed as fast as he could to Chi village to look for the doctor. He was stopped from entering the village, so Lu poured half of his money on the ground to give the guards. Finally, he and his wife were allowed to enter, on condition that he give the guards two-thirds of his money instead of half. Upon entering the village, Lu found his way to the doctor’s house where he piled the remainder of the money in front of the doctor and begged him to try his best to save Henh.

Lu could not anticipate the disaster that was about to happen to him for he also contracted the disease. Both of them died that very night. The doctor took the money and held a funeral for them. Both were buried in one grave and when the grave was filled with dirt, it was sprinkled with lime as well as a bundle of white banknotes.

Under the three metres of dirt, Lu’s spirit was probably happy in the netherworld. The plague in Hua Tat ended some time afterwards. The feelings of panic regarding the plague continued to linger on for many generations before they
The grave in which Lu and Henh were buried was now a high mound of earth covered with thorny rattan trees. The old people of Hua Tat called it 'The Grave of the Faithful', but to the children it was just known as 'The 'Grave of the Victims of the Plague'.

The girl called Sinh

Sinh was an orphan girl living in Hua Tat village. It was said that in the olden days her mother had been beguiled by evil spirits, leaving her in the jungle to fend for herself. Sinh was an emaciated-looking girl. She had never eaten wholesome food nor worn beautiful skirts and blouses. She was low-class and lived a lonely life, hidden as does a quail.

At Hua Tat, on the way to the spooky jungle, there was a small shrine which was used to worship Kho, the man who had killed a fierce tiger in days of yore. In the shrine there was a small fist-sized stone which was laid upon a brick shelf. The stone was as smooth as polished marble. Deep inside the layers of stone there were red streaks as tiny as blood vessels. Whoever wanted to pray for something had to touch the stone, putting his or her mouth close to it, and confide their wishes to the stone itself. The stone had been there on the shelf of the altar since time immemorial, witnessing the lives and fate of many people. It became a mysterious, sacred object which at night time, glowed brightly as if it were on fire. The many miseries of life, and the prayers asking for favours accumulated deep in the heart of the small stone.

One day, a stranger came from the lowlands. He was big and tall and he rode a sturdy black horse. He called in to the village chief's home to visit the elders. Strolling around he became very much aware of the village customs. The villagers of Hua Tat guessed that he was either a trader in bone marrow, or in rare animal furs. He had vast amounts of money, and he behaved extravagantly and generously, in a most noble manner.

It so happened that the stranger passed by Kho's shrine and sighted the stone. He decided to pick it up and have a closer look, but strangely he could not lift the stone from the altar. Astonished he called the villagers to come and see what was happening. People gathered in huge numbers around the small shrine. The visitor let each person, one by one, try to lift up the supposedly immovable stone, but it was all in vain. The stone was too heavy.

'What was the mystery surrounding the stone?', he asked. 'In this village, is it possible that there is someone who has not tried to lift the stone?'

The people checked and discovered that Sinh was missing. They had completely forgotten about her.

The visitor asked everyone to go and ask Sinh to come. She was digging taro roots at the head of the river.

Sinh arrived at the shrine and everybody stepped aside to allow her to pass. He asked her to lift the stone. As if by a miracle, to everybody's amazement, Sinh was able to lift the stone like a breeze. Everybody yelled for joy.

Sinh handed the stone over to the visitor. The sun's rays shone upon her calloused hands and her disfigured fingers. Sinh gently squeezed the mysterious sacred object, and the stone suddenly melted away into water, right in front of everyone's
eyes. The drops of water were as clear as teardrops, slipping through her fingers and falling to the ground, making star shapes in the dust.

The visitor stood dumbfounded, and then wept. He asked permission of the villagers to take Sinh away with him, and he presented her with a new skirt and blouse. Sinh suddenly became extraordinarily beautiful beyond belief.

The following day, the visitor departed from Hua Tat village. It was rumoured that Sinh was very happy after that for the visitor had been an emperor in disguise, travelling amongst his people.

At Hua Tat, the pebbled road leading out of the valley is narrow, just wide enough for a water-buffalo to pass through, and is fully lined with trees, such as bamboos, mangoes, etc. and hundreds of unknown climbers. This road is called the Sinh Road, and up to the present time it still exists.