

# The Working Beauty of Nghe Tinh People in Vi and Giam Folk Songs and Their Current Meaning

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## Abstract

Labor plays a very important role in the socio-economic life of people. For Nghe Tinh people, work is a part of their life. Vi, Giam folk songs are a special type of folklore, considered a "native product" of Nghe Tinh region, containing many aesthetic and content values; in which, the core content value is a true reflection of the daily life, work, thoughts and feelings of the people of Nghe Tinh. The article analyzes the following basic contents: *Firstly*, analyze to clarify the role of productive labor in the lives of Nghe Tinh people. *Secondly*, analyze to explain the expressions of the beauty of the work of Nghe Tinh people in Vi, Giam folk songs. *Thirdly*, pointing out the meaning of the beauty of labor in Vi, Giam folk songs for Nghe Tinh people today.

**Keywords:** Labour, Nghe Tinh people, Vi, Giam folk songs, meaning

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## 1. Introduction

Nghe Tinh has long been known as a poor, arid, rocky land with harsh climate, tough for working. Author Nguyen Chung Anh has a profound comment: "*Nghe Tinh is a place with bad land and poor people. There are more mountains and forests than farmland, the foothills are rocky, and the coastal areas are acidic and salty. The climate in Nghe Tinh region is different from other places, in the summer the sun is hot, the Lao wind blows dry and kills the trees, in the rainy season there are heavy floods, and the cold lasts until February and March, when rice cannot grow.*" (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.95). With such harsh natural conditions, in order to be able to live and survive, the people in this land had to be resilient, persistent, industrious, and hardworking in the process of natural improvement, working and production, which makes Nghe region become a "sacred land with extraordinary people", producing many famous talents and good generals.

There is a masterpiece of folk culture left by our ancestors that truly records the process from the beginning of the world, the busy and struggling life of Nghe Tinh people on this land, which is Vi and Giam folk songs. Contributing to the formation and success in terms of content and value of Vi and Giam folk songs of Nghe Tinh, we must mention the beauty of Nghe Tinh people in the working and production process. Because the origin of the formation of Vi and Giam folk songs of Nghe Tinh is from the working environment, the main working entity is the people. Vi, Giam folk songs are the product of the working and production process and the crystallization of the soul, character, intelligence, and morality of the people of Nghe Tinh. So, what role does working play in the lives of Nghe Tinh people? How is the beauty of Nghe Tinh people through the process of working and production expressed in Vi and Giam folk songs? What is their current meaning? This article will contribute to clarifying those questions.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. Role of working and production in life

As we all know, working and production play a particularly important role in life. Society is attached to nature through the actual process of human activities, first of all, the production process. Working is the first basic characteristic that distinguishes human activities from animals. However, working is also the first, most basic and most important factor that creates an organic unity between society and nature as "working is first of all a process taking place between man and nature, a process in which man, by his own activity, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (C. Marx and Ph. Engels, 1996, p. 657).

Working is an indispensable part of human life: "Working is the purposeful, conscious activity of humans to create products to serve the needs of human life. Working is the most essential activity of humans, the criterion to distinguish human activities from the instinctive activities of animals. Working not only creates wealth but also improves people themselves, developing them both physically and mentally" (Marxist-Leninist political economy textbook, 2007, pp.21-22). According to the Vietnam Encyclopedia: "Working is the process of conscious and rational human activity, whereby humans change natural objects and adapt them to satisfy their needs. Working is the basic condition of human existence. Thanks to working, humans have separated from the animal kingdom, can control natural forces and force them to serve their own interests" (Vietnam Encyclopedia, 2002, p. 642). Humans evolved from apes into humans thanks to the process of working and production. From the point of view of Marxism-Leninism, the most important social activity of humans is working and production:

"Humans are the only animals that can, through working, escape the state of being purely animals." (C. Marx - France, 1994, p.673). Working creates material wealth, daily food and clothing. Working is also joy in life. Working helps improve health, brain development, etc.

Thus, working not only creates material wealth but also creates spiritual value for people and society. Thanks to working and production, biological humans can become social entities, subjects of "natural history", rational, "social instincts". Working is a decisive, necessary and major condition that determines the formation and development of humans both biologically and socially.

Nghe Tinh people clearly understand the important role of working and production in their lives. *Firstly, working is joy, forget all sorrows in life.* People here not only find joy from work but also forget the sadness and sorrow of life: *It would be better to go to the mountains and eat dry rice grains / Stay at home missing you, not knowing when the pain is gone* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.65). In the "Summary Report on Intangible Cultural Heritage of Vi and Giam of Nghe Region, submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the National Council of Cultural Heritage, and proposed to UNESCO to register it as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity" affirmed the role and meaning of the heritage of Vi and Giam folk songs in working: "With work, Vi and Giam are a means of relieving fatigue, encouraging positivity, optimism, and love of life. Vi and Giam are a means of creating and synthesizing the strength of many people when practicing in the context of collective working." [10; p.422].

*Secondly, love originates from work.* They work diligently and enthusiastically as they find joy and love in work. For Nghe Tinh people, love originates from work, using work as a measure to form the basis for love to become husband and wife: *Loving you is not due to your look / Loving you because you are simple, hardworking* (Ninh Viet Giao, 2015, p.410). When working, people also think about love, about the person they love and wish to have the person they love: *In high water we retreat/ Pearl is not as good as you* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.64). Nostalgia and affection in love also originate from work: *When I leave, I miss the hat you hung / I miss the house you lived in the bamboo you planted* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.63).

Love is associated with the life, with livelihood, "love" is not possible "without food ", "without food", how can we survive to "love"?:

I do not work as a farmer and I buy rice from the river market.  
Full of cash.  
But the drought keeps coming or the rain and floods keep rising.  
Immense rice field, rotten potatoes under.  
Am I in peace of mind? Indifferent to life! no worry about life.

(Giam song)

People want to marry each other to be protected, share with each other in life, work together and enjoy the fruits of working: *Wish when we become a family / Husband plows, wife transplants, old mother makes meals* (Ninh Viet Giao, 2015, p.410); *Wish we make it / You do weaving, I do farming* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.77).

*Thirdly, working creates material wealth to help people here overcome poverty.* People believe in the power of working, only working can create material wealth, true working with sweat and tears will make wealth last. That is the value of working that is true in all times. Life goes on quietly like that, husband and wife tell each other to do business, still diligently, chopping firewood to earn a daily meal: *I pile the woods, you make the fences / On sunny days, we tie / On rainy days, we sell* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p.423).

*Fourthly, working creates the value of success, the philosophy of success.* One precious thing is that Nghe Tinh people are always proactive in their work, staying up late and waking up early to complete the work even though it is very hard. Surely life in this harsh land has taught the people here to have a foresighted nature. When they have a job, they care, and calculate. Life is inherently full of risks, they do not allow their work to fail or at least try to limit the risks. Therefore, to complete the job well, people here are always proactive and prepare everything in advance: *Staying up at night / Getting up, sifting and grinding/ Taking care of the work / To build a career/ To make a career* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p.399). We learn lessons about the philosophy of life, including the philosophy of success. That is to always be proactive in work, prepare the necessary and sufficient elements, be hard-working, endure suffering, limit possible risks and failures, anticipate difficulties so that when the opportunity arises, you will be successful "When times are good, you will succeed" (Ho Chi Minh).

*Fifthly, working connects emotions, and solidarity, which is a measure of talent, strength, consensus, and working together.* People also take working as a measure of talent, strength, consensus, working together before agreeing to go to the same house: *I lower the Buddha's field / I dry out Giao canal to let me be in the same village with you* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.63). First of all, the most important thing for farmers is health. If a son or daughter wants to get married and get married, first of all, he must have good health so that he can take care of the ploughing in the future. Then it is talent, wisdom and diligence, working together, having the same passion and suffering together, then together we can overcome many storms of life: *As oranges, tangerines pass Bong / Because you are diligent, my heart dreams; Loving each other we are not afraid of difficulties / Preserve*

*our love, enough foods.*

*Sixthly, honest working is the foundation of sustainable development.* Always consider working as glory, so despite hunger, poverty, the people here are still very gentle and proud of their poverty as they know that what they are doing is noble. Honest working is the foundation of sustainable development. A boy once responded to a girl who worked as a fish griller:

You sell fried (grilled) fish to feed someone,  
Your shirt is torn, and your shoulders are worn out?  
The girl responded proudly and without any shame:  
I sell fried (grilled) fish to raise my children,  
Torn shirt let it be, worn shoulders let it be (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.63).

It is clear that working has nothing to be ashamed of, in conscience and life. In any case, working is glorious. Genuine working, honest business are business ethics, doing business creates the sustainable development that society is aiming for.

## **2.2. Expressions of the working beauty of Nghe Tinh people in Vi and Giam folk songs**

The working beauty of Nghe Tinh people is expressed very clearly and specifically in Vi and Giam folk songs:

*Firstly, it is the sinewy, healthy, brave, steadfast, and confident beauty of a man from Nghe An.* When it comes to working, especially manual work, people will think of fatigue, disheveled hair, and farmers who work hard all year round and "sell their faces to the land and their backs to the sky". However, when we sing Vi and Giam folk songs, we do not come across these scenes. On the contrary, the image of Nghe Tinh workers appears with a serene and healthy beauty. Living in harsh natural conditions, the burning Lao wind season, and the bitterly cold winter seem to be unable to bury and destroy the beauty of the people here. On the contrary, the sun and wind make the skin and hair become more strong, rustic, and simple with the color of time. That is the beauty of experience and training from work. Nghe Tinh men often appear with the beauty of strength, agility, and decisiveness, shown in jobs such as chopping wood, rowing boats, carrying axes, forging chisels, forging gills, etc. are brave people who built their careers with nothing: *Don't blame me for being hungry and having a small house. When I get home tomorrow, I'll fix it and turn it into a tent.*

A girl who was skeptical about the man she loved, afraid that marrying that man would not be able to take care of her family life, exclaimed: *Your house is lavish all around / Go out to sing at night and what to eat for dinner?* That worry of a girl is also not uncommon as the man is usually the breadwinner of the family. However, the man replied in a very calm tone: *Honey, don't be afraid, don't worry/ Our hands and eyes will take care of our home.*

Confident in his own strength and the power of love, cooperation, and unanimity, the man believes that with his hands and eyes, the couple will build everything and advises the girl not to be afraid, not to worry. Girls only need a strong and brave man who will be a strong shoulder for them to lean on throughout their lives. Human hands can do everything, that's why our ancestors had the saying: "Rich eyes, poor hands" or "My hands can do everything, with human strength, even stones and rocks can become rice."

Not only that, the men in Nghe Tinh region are confident in their abilities and talents, daring to do things that are considered "contrary" to life to prove their bravery and talent beyond others. We can easily come across images of "backwards", "boating against the water", "against the Rang" to see the inherently "against" life of the people here: *I return to the nine sections of the Nai Festival/ With the pole up and down, against the water, who to ask for help?* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.63); *Your boat goes along Che river / My boat goes against Rang alone; Your boat goes along Che river / My boat goes against Luong cliff alone (The boat song of the La river)* (Nguyen Dinh Dac, p.65); *The boat goes against water, he pushes the pole forward / A deserted section of the river, a sad man (Pho River song).* Use the harshness to highlight the boldness, recklessness and bravery of people who dare to think, dare to do, dare to take responsibility.

*The beauty of the men of Nghe region also exudes boldness, recklessness, dare to think and dare to do, rise up to change fate and circumstances, not sit and wait, stagnate, wait for "luck": If the river is deep, the sea is also deep/ If you want to catch big fish, you should have long fishing line* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.98). "Reaching far ocean" is the desire to conquer challenges and difficulties to build a great career.

*Secondly, it is the beauty of ingenuity, lightness, flexibility, sophistication, agility, resourcefulness, tolerance for pain, hard work, perseverance and patience of the girl from Nghe region.* While the boy appears with a sinewy, strong, sturdy, and confident beauty, the beauty of the girl from Nghe region appears like a girl in a fairy tale with her skillfulness, and gentleness, with rosy cheeks that still had a few drops of sweat, her eyes were deep and captivated. That beauty emerges from daily tasks such as weaving, raising silkworms, reeling silk, spinning, and grinding rice: *Oh quick-hand weaver / Her talking eyes, Make me fall in love; I am a girl / Doing the silk job / White silk and yellow cocoons / buying and selling* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p.405).

Not only does she appear with a gentle, agile, and resourceful beauty, the girl from Nghe region also has the beauty of quick hands, quick eyes, and quick mouth in doing business, and her excellent trading skills are

famous for being unique in the world.: *This girl is from Do Luong / She measures a cloth, she measures clothing / She is energetic/ Go to Lang market in the morning, Dua market in the afternoon* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p.410).

*That is also the beauty of a woman who is patient, hard-working, and diligent*, a life that only cares for her husband, children, and thin shoulders to take care of the family. The women of Nghe region may not be talented, but thanks to their diligence, perseverance, hard work, and suffering in working, they can take care of their family financially, even from nothing. They help their husbands and children build reputation and illustrious careers: *Please study well / Let me weave cloth to earn money; Keep your learning/ For fields work, a cow, leave them to me* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.62). It seems that we can feel the woman from Nghe region always rubbing martial arts like a hard-working bee, always working with her hands and feet all-year-round, month-round, "I won't not let the land rest, won't stop my hands.": *When the water is dry, I go to the river to look for crabs and fish. When the water is high, I go to the forest to pick coriander leaves* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p. 60).

When considering working is joy and happiness, the people here work very quickly and resourcefully: *Oh quick-hand weaver / Her talking eyes make me fall in love; Who went up to the army / Bar, roll, bump, pipe, my life* (Nguyen Chung Anh, 1958, p.62). "Bar, roll, bump, pipe" are tools of weaving, Nghe girls are skillful, agile, and active at the same time, able to master the operations to be able to weave beautiful, durable fabrics. Not only quick with her hands but also quick with her eyes, the very skillful movements and postures of the weaving girl make everyone admire and praise her. They work as if they are performing an art, their eyes are still pretty but their hearts are still passionate. That is truly ingenious. The created works are not only the result of sweat and effort but also the crystallization of the worker's intelligence, soul, and sublimated emotions. Working is not simply working anymore, but it is passion, creative art. Women are no longer simple, country girls, but when they work, they become talented and poetic workers and artists who weave beautiful tapestries for life.

*Thirdly, the beauty lies in the rhythmic, tacit, and harmonious combination between the boys and girls of Nghe region.* Nghe Tinh people usually do not work alone or individually, they do it individually. On the contrary, they work in solidarity and cohesion, and most of all, it is the harmonious coordination in work that can create high productivity. In daily life, the people of Nghe region often advise each other very gently: "Don't talk too harshly about big or small things." Being superior to each other is not only because of strength or talent, people here value each other in their advice, sharing, respect for each other's opinions, and sharing in suffering and trying together. Especially in work, it is necessary to share, understand each other's ideas, and respect each other so that work will be productive and work will go smoothly. Simple daily tasks such as splitting bamboo, weaving, and lurking to catch fish also demonstrate the rhythm and understanding of Nghe region men and women: *Mom carries an ax to chop the slingshot/ I carry the knife to chop tree/ I split it into eights, into quarters/ The slingshot also splits it into eights, splits it into quarters/ Then I knit it, tuck it.*

Whenever they do something, whether big or small, heavy or light, simple or complex, they "invite each other" to do it together and often do it "together". Nghe Tinh proverbs have a sentence: *Go down to the river to find crabs / Bring home to cook with sour apricots in the forest / Sweet and sour / Salty salt and spicy ginger please don't forget each other* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p. 65). When they go to work in the fields or go up the mountain to chop firewood, pick bamboo shoots, or pick vegetables, they all "invite each other" to go together: *Come back and invite some boys / Invite some girls / Nothing to do recently / Go to the green forest to pick (break) firewood* (Phan Thu Hien, 2018, p.406). They do things "together": *Get off the boat with a friend / Share a boat with a friend.* To see that the people here, whether bitter or sweet, have each other and share with each other.

Learning about the working beauty of Nghe Tinh people in Vi and Giam folk songs, we see that the beauty of working people has gone beyond its inherent nature. It is not only diligence, hard work, and suffering, but it is also the will, talent, and extraordinary energy of the people here. The image of Nghe Tinh people at work is exuded, enhanced with warmth, harmony, sophistication, flexibility and sublimation, completely different from the reality of everyday life with dark heads, rough limbs, and dry and rough voices. It is clear that working is not only a responsibility and obligation, but also the joy and passion of people's lives here.

### **3. Meaning of the working beauty for Nghe Tinh people today**

In any era of society, working always has special value and meaning. The working values left by our ancestors are always inherited and developed by the next generation. For the people of Nghe Tinh, the value of working beauty becomes the foundation and motivation for the people of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces to inherit, apply and develop in the new era. Especially in today's market economy, Nghe Tinh people need to revive the good tradition of working from many generations to build an increasingly better life in their homeland. These are valuable qualities such as: diligence, creativity, perseverance, patience, tolerance, and hard work in production.

Besides, in today's industrialized and modernized economy, there is a great need for people with good health, bravery, daring to think, daring to do, and determined to start a business. People need to have the desire to rise up and conquer challenges to build a great career. With inherent virtues and beauty in working crystallized in Vi and Giam folk songs, it shows that Nghe Tinh people are used to difficulties and challenges,

with a strong courage to overcome circumstances, today that beauty has become a driving force and a fulcrum for people here to build a life in new conditions and circumstances.

With a tradition of respecting righteousness, affection, and ethics, in any living situation, Nghe Tinh people still put ethical culture first. In a market economy, an ethical culture in business is necessary, considered a core factor for sustainable development.

The ancient life of Nghe Tinh people was in close contact with nature and villages. More than anyone else, they understand that human life is not separate from the natural environment. Although the natural conditions of Nghe Tinh are not favorable, the nature here is still very poetic and majestic. The economic development associated with environmental protection; the protection of natural resources is paid attention by people here. With a sure and careful working personality, the people here prefer sustainable and long-term development. Therefore, in doing business, economic development helps them think and consider to associate development with a green and sustainable economy.

Finally, the spirit of solidarity in working and production and in the lives of Nghe Tinh people has remained unchanged for many generations. Sharing the same "Nghe" voice and the same Hong Lam culture, Nghe Tinh people, wherever they are, they always unite and help each other. The power of solidarity, shared commitment, sharing, and mutual respect are necessary factors to help working and production achieve high productivity.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, we see that the working beauty of Nghe Tinh people, in addition to the inherent beauty of diligence, and hard work of Vietnamese farmers, also has its own beauty. That is the working beauty full of bravery, the sublimation of delicate emotions, the harmonious coordination, the solidarity with suffering, and above all, the endurance that brings admiration. It is our own inherent beauty, and also the resonance of solidarity, sharing, and shouldering burdens together. All of that working beauty has the unique and profound characteristics of the people of Nghe region. We understand that in order to have a prosperous and happy life, the people of Nghe region had to be strong, persistent, and brave. From poor, rocky land and harsh climate, they have always risen, overcoming all circumstances and difficulties to move forward. In particular, the land is poor but the will is not, the morality is not tainted, above all, it is the land of people who value gratitude and love.

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