

**GENERAL REPORT ON THE SCIENTIFIC INVENTORY OF VÍ  
AND GIẶM FOLK SONGS OF NGHỆ TĨNH  
Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies**

**I. Scientific inventory implementation period**

+ **Period 1 – 25-30 December, 2012**

+ **Period 2 – 19 February to 8 March, 2013**

**II. Purpose of scientific inventory**

- To survey and assess the current status of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in Vietnamese communities in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, where Ví and Giặm Folk Songs were created and have been passed down and practiced over a long period of time.

- The first step was to systematically collect specific data from the community, in order to assess the existence of facilities and cultural activities related to Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in the villages/residential areas, including the current status of Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups (established in accordance with decisions made by the government or cultural management agencies of the communes and districts of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces); Following this, plans were made to continue the implementation of activities for the collection, preservation and exploitation of the heritage values generated by Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh (as has occurred at different levels in most of the localities for a very long time now).

- To collect scientific data, according to UNESCO's established criteria, in order to develop a file to submit to UNESCO in support of the nomination for the "Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh" to be added to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

**III. Geographical location of scientific Inventory**

1. Characteristics of the geographical location, system of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in villages/residential areas, and the communities of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces:

- Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh are two coastal provinces in the North Central region of Vietnam. During their periods under the domination of northern invaders, the provinces were known as Cửu Chân (under the Han Dynasty), Cửu Đức (Tấn Dynasty), Nhật Nam (Tùy Dynasty), Hoan Châu (Đinh and Tiền Lê Dynasty), Nghệ An (Lý and Trần Dynasty), Xứ Thừa tuyên Nghệ An (Lê Thánh Tông Dynasty), Nghĩa An Town (Tây Sơn Dynasty), and Nghệ An Town (Nguyễn Dynasty). In 1831, Nghệ An Town was divided into the two provinces of Nghệ An (North of Lam River) and Hà Tĩnh (South of Lam River) by King Minh Mệnh. In 1976, Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh were remerged into Nghệ Tĩnh province, but were separated back into the two provinces of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh in 1991.

- The region contains mountainous, midland, delta, and coastal areas, has a harsh climate (especially in summer) and barren land. It also has an extensive river system, with the regions largest rivers, the Lam and La Rivers, contributing favourably to terraced wet rice cultivation. The region is also home to a variety of traditional trade villages. Its topography and natural conditions have helped develop its culture of shifting cultivation, wet rice cultivation, farming, and inland fishing.

- Nghệ An is the largest province in Vietnam, with an area of 16,500 km<sup>2</sup>. It has a population of nearly 3 million people, consisting of mostly Kinh (Việt) people, but also some people from ethnic minority groups, including Khơ mú, Thái and H'Mông, living in mountainous areas. Hà Tĩnh province is comparatively much smaller in area (6,000km<sup>2</sup>), with a population of approximately 1.2 million people, consisting once again mostly of Kinh (Việt) people, with some ethnic minority people, such as Chứt, Thái, Mường and Lào, also living in mountainous areas.

- Nghệ Tĩnh is a sacred land of extraordinary people, having produced a large number of celebrities, heroes and outstanding preeminent leaders throughout a history of founding and defending the country. It is a land with a particularly strong tradition and fondness for learning, and is home to many current and former laureates of prestigious competitions/examinations, famous arts villages, Generals, and loyal subjects, as well as culturists and scientists of national and international stature.

- Nghệ Tĩnh is a land with a long revolutionary tradition. It was severely devastated during the two wars against France and America. In fact, history has had a severe impact on the tangible aspects of social life, especially cultural relics and spiritual beliefs.

- Nghệ Tĩnh is an ancient land with a common dialect – the Nghệ language. The majority of village communities generally have similar customs, beliefs and folklores. As the most prominent group, the Vietnamese people living in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces share a close sense of community and patriotism, along with the general characteristics of their culture. Over the course of history, during natural and social events, and whilst participating in founding and defending the country, the people of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, living in the villages and communes, have created and maintained a rich and diversified source of folklore and heritage, including many forms and identities of "Lam River – Hồng Mountain", most notably the Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, which have become daily food for the minds of people of all generations, and have contributed to and nurtured the personality and soul of Nghệ Tĩnh's people throughout history.

2. Selection of the villages for inclusion in the inventory was mainly based on the following issues:

The determination of the cultural space and administrative region for the inventory of the Ví and Giặm Folk Song's heritage was based on the following three sources:

(i) Data sources surveyed, recorded and introduced in books, research, essays, and articles, published between 1943 and 2012, on activities directly related to Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, were obtained from famous collectors and researchers, including Nguyễn Tất Thứ, Nguyễn Đông Chi, Ninh Việt Giao, Thái Kim Đình, Lê Hàm, Thanh Lưu, and others from Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces (through scientific summarization and recording of the preservation and promotion of the values of the Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh, and information provided by the Cultural Centers of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh), in order to identify the scope of the cultural space – the social and human environment – and the administrative region where Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities have been practiced for a very long time.

(ii) Data sources collected during the inventory of the heritage of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs by Officials working in the Departments of Professional and Cultural Heritage Management at the Cultural Centers of the Departments of Culture, Sports and Tourism for Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, were used to develop a file to support the nomination of the element for inclusion on the national list of intangible cultural heritage for 2011 and 2012.

(iii) Field survey sources collected from the districts and towns of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces by research teams from the Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies more than ten years ago (during cultural studies of villages, festival restoration and cultural planning, etc.), and survey and research data collected in accordance with the anthropological method by the research team, who implemented the inventory project at the end of 2012.

The determination of villages where activities related to Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are practiced was made in accordance with the following criteria:

- Firstly, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities must have been carried out in the location, recognized by neighboring villages and/or exchanged during the course of their practice.

- Secondly, there must be at least 3 people or more, who are knowledgeable about and proficient in the practice of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, living in the village;

- Thirdly, localities that would have met at least one of the above two criteria in the past (prior to 1954), but now do not have any residents who really understand the heritage and practices of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, are still determined to be spaces of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities.

- The localities that had previously (more than ten years ago) established Groups (at the commune and district levels) from people living in their villages were considered an independent inventory unit, with the aim of exploiting the quantitative data on the subject matter for the scientific inventory of heritage.

In general, the villages included in this inventory are located in areas with dynamic natural conditions, with most belonging to the delta districts of Nghệ Tĩnh. In Hà Tĩnh province, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities spread to the mountainous districts and semi-mountainous plain areas, such as Vũ Quang and Hương Sơn.

The most recognizable characteristics emerging from the survey on the existence of activities related to Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces include the following: Firstly, the majority of villages with Ví and Giặm Folk Songs activities are concentrated on fluvial terraces, predominantly alongside one of the regions two main rivers – the Lam or La River. Secondly, most trade villages (there are 21 famous traditional trade villages with Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, south of the Lam River, in the districts of Nghi Xuân, Thạch Hà, Kỳ Anh, Đức Thọ, Can Lộc, Hương Khê and Cẩm Xuyên, and Hồng Lĩnh Town) practice Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities. Thirdly, the villages that have Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, such as centers for practicing the arts, are primarily located in areas with great traditions and histories of success in competitions/examinations, as well as famous generations of people in the field of literature (Nghi Xuân and Can Lộc in Hà Tĩnh, and Nam

Đàn, Quỳnh Lư and Thanh Chương in Nghệ An). Fourthly, from a cultural-geographical perspective, the generations have a strong attachment to local history, politics, economics, culture, and society, as well as having a common dialect. Therefore, there exist no differences in habits, customs and beliefs between sub-areas (districts and towns). Lastly, due to the regions revolutionary traditions, the severity of its experience during war, and the harshness of its climate, many tangible cultural and religious relics have been destroyed, and the practice of cultural and religious activities interrupted for a long time, with "atheism" increasing in popularity in all classes of people.

#### **IV. Method of implementation**

Methods used to collect information included interviews/questionnaires, in-depth interviews, group discussions, historical retrospections, and statistics, as well as soliciting the opinions of community representatives to make comments on the content of cultural heritage created and preserved in their communities. Interdisciplinary research methods (i.e., bibliography, archaeology, textology, museology, and sociology, etc.) were also used in analyzing and comparing the data sources to determine the survey and inventory audience.

#### **V. Difficulties encountered**

- Over the course of time, due to social and historical developments, and changes in physical geography, as well as the way administrative units are organised, many places have changed. As old places have evolved into towns and cities, the old language has been replaced by modern language. There are few people remaining who really understand the Ví and Giặm heritage. Artists are generally uninterested in transmitting heritage. Young people have not been transmitted information on the heritage in a sustainable and systematical manner (although many works collected by Nguyễn Tất Thứ, Nguyễn Đông Chi, Ninh Việt Giao, and Nguyễn Chung Anh, etc., have been published). Many administrative borders have been modified or expanded (both resident areas and

administrative names). Many trade villages were destroyed or altered. Many religious customs and festivals are not practiced to the same extent as in previous time periods (especially when compared to 1945 and earlier), which is consistent with the dominance of contemporary over traditional culture. The continuation of traditional cultural activities between generations has also been interrupted by war, as well as other socio-historical events.

- During the course of direct investigation at the localities, we found that many relics associated with the worship of ancestors, village tutelary gods and Buddha (communal houses, temples and pagodas, etc.) have been destroyed or seriously damaged. Many worshipping objects have been restored in a completely new location, with modernized architecture. They, therefore, have no spiritual attraction to the community. Before 1954 (surveyed in Hà Tĩnh), prior to the practice of conducting Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in religious relics, people living in many trade villages conducted rituals before working and singing. This practice in the present day is almost no longer.

- Over the past decade or so (since 1996), the majority of villages have evolved and/or been divided into residential areas, which have been renamed based on ascending numbers (i.e., area 1, 2, 3, etc). This has gradually resulted in the loss of the traditional names of groups of villages, which had been used by communities for thousands of years, were rooted in people's cultural subconsciousness, and were associated with the characteristics and origin of villages, as well as other traditional cultural values. Many sprawling and overcrowded villages have also been divided by the government into smaller residential areas, making it easier to break down the cultural regime of the village unit, such as people's compliance with village regulations (which are common in most villages of Nghệ Tĩnh), which were established and enforced by the previous generation. Therefore, only residential areas, which had originally belonged to the traditional village with the existing religious relics, take an interest in and understand (to different degrees) the object of local worship.

Other residential areas have also diverged away from their religious relics, along with their sense of responsibility to the worship of the objects.

- Most traditional trade villages in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces have been tremendously affected due to the process of movement, as well as the development of economic, cultural and social life, leading to their narrowness, metamorphosis or disappearance. This reality has deeply impacted on the cultural heritage space.

- In many communal areas of inventory, cultural management staff and leaders are often young, unqualified or poorly informed about traditional culture, resulting in them unsatisfactorily meeting cultural management requirements, and unable to help communities collect, study and preserve their local heritage. As a result, many villages' valuable relics that have been destroyed or degraded do not have restoration plans (through socialization) proposed for them, nor are they proposed to the competent authorities for evaluation and the provision of funding for their restoration, repair and renovation. Many intangible cultural heritages are not collected and recorded. Most leaders at the commune and district levels have focused on establishing Folk Songs Groups, displaying a preference towards the stage form, and developing the movement to meet the demands of festivals and local folk song contests. As a result, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in many villages have been spontaneous, unconnected and too brief to transmit to younger generations.

- The collection and exploitation of data from the community was limited due to the lack of time taken to conduct the survey, the large size of the region (especially Nghệ An province) over which the work was conducted, and the experience of the staff. This partly affected the results of the inventory and research, especially the evaluation of the specific characteristics of the heritage and ancient language system and dialects, associated with the activities of traditional festivals, in particular, and the villages' community culture and the practice of Ví and Giặm Folk Song heritage in general.



## **VI. Main advantages**

- Whilst undertaking the inventory, the research team was ably assisted by the government and cultural management teams at the commune and district levels, as well as by village mayors and Group managers, who all took a keen interest in instructing and facilitating the inventory, in order to ensure that it meet all of its requirements. The Groups managers, unit secretaries and cultural staff of villages in most communes, in particular, directly participated in the organization of local discussion groups, taking the initiative to solve all problems that arose in the group discussions, in order to provide as much information as possible for the inventory survey.

- All people (but especially the elders and members of the Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups) directly or indirectly involved in the provision of information in most villages were enthusiastic and unanimous in their community's need for the conservation, exploitation and transmission of the Ví and Giặm Folk Song's heritage. Some elders provided particularly precious materials that they had collected, compiled or translated as good references when completing the questionnaires.

- The specific, prompt and urgent direction of the leaders of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, as well as the instruction and support in the provision of documents by the professional staff at the Departments of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the two provinces (especially the Heritage Management Department, Professional Department and Cultural Center), during the implementation of the heritage survey and inventory, contributed significantly to ensuring that the inventory was completed in accordance with the schedule and requirements.

- The implementation of the inventory received attention and direct collaboration from Ví and Giặm master practitioners, as well as many retired officers, who had participated in arts and culture management activities in the localities. This facilitated community members improved awareness of the heritage and exact answers to inventory-related inquiries.

## **VII. Quantitative results from inventory survey**

Drawing on the forementioned advantages, and overcoming the difficulties encountered, the research team (in close collaboration with the officials in charge of culture in the communes, staff from the Department of Professional and Heritage Management within the two provincial Departments of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and especially the master practitioners and Heads of Groups in almost all localities) obtained certain results. The data and information provided by community groups, through their completion of questionnaires, confirmed that: the data source is relatively diversified, with new information about systems of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces in both historical and contemporary periods.

When the survey and inventory of the Ví and Giặm Folk Song heritage of Nghệ Tĩnh was completed, the places where the heritage was practiced were identified as follows:

In Nghệ An province (1 city, 2 towns and 17 districts, encompassing 427 administrative units of communes, wards or towns), the Ví and Giặm Folk Song heritage has been practiced in the administrative territory of 14 districts, towns or cities (Vinh City, Cửa Lò Town, Thái Hòa Town, Anh Sơn District, Diễn Châu District, Đô Lương District, as well as Hưng Nguyên, Yên Thành, Nam Đàn, Nghi Lộc, Nghĩa Đàn, Quỳnh Lưu, Tân Kỳ, and Thanh Chương districts). The community units of inventory include: 60 communes/wards/towns, with 168 villages/hamlets/residential areas and 60 Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups.

In Hà Tĩnh province, the Ví and Giặm Folk Song heritage has been practiced in the administrative territory of 12 districts/towns/city (Hà Tĩnh City, Hồng Lĩnh Town, and the districts of Cẩm Xuyên, Can Lộc, Đức Thọ, Hương Khê, Hương Sơn, Kỳ Anh, Nghi Xuân, Thạch Hà, Vũ Quang, and Lộc Hà). The community units of inventory include: 38 communes/towns/wards, with 92 villages/hamlets/residential areas and 15 Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups.

In the two provinces combined, 2677 individuals (Nghệ An: 776 men and 896 women; Hà Tĩnh: 547 men and 503 women) signed up to represent their communities, and signal their commitment to agree with the policy of the government in relation to the submission of the national file to UNESCO for the nomination of the "Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh" to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013.

### **VIII. Some specific results from the inventory survey**

The materials collected from the survey included many contents, which can be divided into two main aspects: quantitative material (mainly used the quantitative method, such as interview questionnaires, statistics, etc., to collect materials) and qualitative data (collected via retrospective and ethnological methods, etc.).

This information reflects: 1/Name of the heritage and identification of activities related to the Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh; 2/ Activities of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh in contemporary society; 3/Basic characteristics of the activities of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh; 4/The typical means of transmitting the heritage; and, 5/The issues raised during the course of conserving and exploiting the cultural values generated by the activities of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh.

#### **1. Name of the heritage and identification of the activities related to the Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh**

##### ***1.1. Name of heritage***

The heritage is called different names by different communities living in the villages/hamlets/residential areas, as well as by different Groups. Specific key names include the following:

- Ví and Dặm Folk Songs;
- Ví and Giặm Folk Songs
- Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh
- Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Region

- Hát đò đưa sông La (Barcarolle of La River);
- Hát ví phường Vải (Singing of the fabric weaving guild);
- Dân ca giao duyên Ví, Giặm (Ví and Giặm alternative folk songs between girls and boys);
- Groups of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs.

Comments: Among the names of the heritage listed above, the three most commonly used names are Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh, and Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Region. Most of the trade villages or former trade villages, where Ví singing was practiced, named Ví singing according to the careers of their residents. The majority of researchers in Nghệ An (Ninh Viết Giao, Lê Hàm, Thanh Lưu, and Đỗ Bảo, etc.), who were interviewed directly, believed that the name Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghe Region was the most suitable, in view of the shared culture of the region. Many people said that "Nghe Region" appeared in 1480 (Lê Thánh Tông Dynasty), however, according to the history books, the word "Region" first appeared in the Complete Annals of Great Việt, when it used the word "Thừa Tuyên" in reference to the division of the administrative areas of the Hậu Lê Dynasty. Meanwhile, the results of the inventory show that the majority of respondents record the name of the heritage as Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh, with the word "Giặm" written as "Gi". The respondents who recorded the name of heritage as Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghe Region were mainly residents of the villages/hamlets/residential areas of the districts of Nam Đàn, Can Lộc and Đô Lương, as well as Cửa Lò Town and Vinh City, in Nghệ An.

## ***1.2. Identification of activities related to the Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh***

### *1.2.1. Formation and existence*

Most of the answers to the questionnaire show that: Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are the key part in the folk lyrical poetry treasure created by the Vietnamese communities in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, in all aspects of

work, as well as community activities. Despite hundreds of years of existence and development, there are some typical examples of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, such as:

- Song systems associated with work and occupations are mainly created and handed down in trade villages (fabric weaving, hat sewing, baking, knitting, shipbuilding, carpentry, copper casting, pottery, and forging, etc.). Ví singing is practiced widely, usually associated with the name of the main occupation in each locality. Among the trade villages, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities tend to be practiced more in the districts of Hà Tĩnh province than those of Nghệ An.

- The song system associated with the demand for conjugal relations is largest.

- The song system associated with family and clan relationships provides admonition and education between generations.

- The song system praising the homeland, country and famous people of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces.

- The song system characterizing the narrative genre, expressed in the form of Giặm, is associated with the formation of villages, events, historical phenomenon, as well as the special characters of certain villages.

As with other types of folk songs in other localities, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ region also arise and develop. Based on its formation up until now, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are sometimes quiet. Generally speaking, however, the history of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs has continued to develop in both breadth and depth, but never disconnecting. However, according to statistics, 95% of responses said that from 1954 to 1975 most Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in the villages were not cared about nor practiced at the Group level or higher. The reason being that because of the fierceness of the war, the community did not have the cultural space to practice activities, were not allowed to gather in groups, and had to fight in the destructive war against America.

While there are many different research materials on the history and origin of the Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghe region, most of the evidence suggests that it was during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when it developed and become a popular form of folk performance in the community, involving the participation of many classes, from workers to laureates of competitions/examinations, as well as Confucian scholars and contemporary intellectuals. From the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs were widely popularized, with a number of centers formed, involving the active participation of patriotic Confucian scholars, such as Phan Bội Châu and Vương Thúc Quý, etc. Therefore, in addition to more methodical contents, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs also express feelings of patriotism and national solidarity in scholarly and academic style.

Since the mid-twentieth century, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghe Region have undergone some changes in relation to the performing environment, form and topics, and in line with socio-economic changes in society, and to meet the changing needs of the public. Ví and Giặm Folk Songs have been preserved and developed in the community by their mass performance, through the activities of Groups, bringing them to the stages, schools and mass media. Currently, there are four categories or levels of Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups:

- The Groups established by villages/hamlets/residential areas;
- The Groups established by the commune authorities;
- The Groups established by the Department of Culture and Sports or the Cultural Center at the district level; and,
- The Groups established by artists, who are knowledgeable and passionate about heritage transmission and preservation.

In relation to the current status of the Ví and Giặm Folk Song heritage, the opinions and statistics generally agree that:

- For reasons associated with the modernization of society, such as the development of science and technology and the mass media, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are likely to be lost in many villages (especially localities that have been urbanized or towns). There is often a lack of suitable conditions to practice these ancient songs after the performing environment and space changes; the artists who have a thorough knowledge of, hold onto and practice Ví and Giặm Folk Songs skillfully are now elderly and unable to practice, or have even died already. Moreover, there are very few successors;

- At the Cultural Centers or the Groups established by the government, adapting or composing without a thorough understanding of the old methods is likely to "stage" Ví and Giặm traditional folk songs. Many methods have changed and even altered the heritage; some current practitioners are not masters of the performance technique or the traditional method content, and are also affected by the performance style of the modern stage.

- Despite their positive impact in relation to the construction of cultural life at the grassroots level, including the maintenance of the Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, and provision of the performance and movement foundation for the community, most of the Cultural Centers at the district level show some limitations, impacting on the inherent aspect of traditional Ví and Giặm Folk Songs activities, such as through their inclination towards theatrical performances, which do not spread the inherent nature of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs throughout the community.

### *1.2.2. Method and space of performance*

#### a. Expression method and connotation of the heritage's name

- 100% of the responses provided during the discussion groups were in consensus in regards to their general understanding of the heritage: Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are a special part of the folklore treasure of Nghệ region, formed from the working life and activities of the working people, performed under any circumstances and conditions by a range of different practitioners.

- 45% of responses did not differentiate between Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, which have similarities in terms of their objects, methods, space, and performance time, but also have their own unique characteristics, which differ in relation to their form of expression, music and lyrics, etc.

- In regards to the connotation of the concept/name of the Ví Folk Song: Most of the survey and interview groups agreed that Ví means comparison; or Ví means “vói” (translated as "with, towards") – as in the male side sings with the female side. Colloquially, Ví singing means "vói singing". The male side stays on the road and sings towards the yard or house of the girls, or the person who is in the field “sings towards” the other field, or the passer by sings towards the person who is in the field, etc. In other words, communicating by singing in a certain space. Ví singing is a free style of singing, composing and reciting a poem extempore in six-eight-syllable verses, seven-seven-six-eight-syllable verses, and variants of six-eight-syllable verses, based on the expressions and dialects of Nghệ region. Its method is easy to understand and practice. "Giặm" in the language of the Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh people means insertion or filling in a missing place. Some people understand "Giặm" as meaning singing while stamping ones feet. If Ví singing mostly uses six-eight-syllable verses, Giặm uses a style of singing involving speaking in rhythms based on five-syllable verses (called ngũ ngôn). Each Giặm song has many passages, most commonly consisting of five lines, in which the 5<sup>th</sup> line repeats the 4<sup>th</sup> line.

- 100% of the inventory’s discussion group agreed that Ví and Giặm songs have diversified expressions, with many different intonations and tunes. First of all, depending on the performance environment and time, as well as the sentiment and psychological state of the singer (happiness, sadness, love, anger, longing, hate, etc), and the different living conditions and situations, Ví and Giặm songs are performed in various tunes. Furthermore, based on the fundamental tunes, and depending on the singers’ careers, there are a number of different names, such as Ví of fabric weaving guild (Ví phường vải), Ví of



Husking Rice (Ví xay lúa), Ví of making pastry (Ví làm bánh), Ví of barcarolle (Ví đò đũa), Ví of knitting guild (Ví phường đan), Ví of firewood cutting (Ví phường củi), Ví of gold guild (Ví phường vàng), Ví of conical hat making guild (Ví phường nón) Ví of paddy cultivating guild (Ví phường cấy), Ví of reaping guild (Ví phường gặt), Ví of fishnet knitting guild (Ví phường chắp gai đan lưới), and so on. In general, Ví folk songs are rich in tunes because in Nghệ Tĩnh each job can be sung and compared (as mentioned above), but when singing they only differs in their tones.

- 65% of people who took part in the discussions understood that Ví Folk Songs has three main performance forms, including non-alternative singing (*hát lẻ*), alternative singing (*hát đối đáp*) and organized singing (*hát cuộc*). The non-alternative singing involves singing alone while working or conducting daily activities, such as cultivating paddy, reaping, rowing a boat, lulling a baby to sleep, or husking rice. Alternative singing involves boys and girls singing by repartees at any time and anywhere. The organized singing involves boys and girls singing in sequence, specifications and procedures, and is usually practiced by a number of working troupes, according to strict specifications and procedures, and displaying a high level of perfection in Ví and Giặm singing.

- In terms of possessing a complete understanding of the processes and procedures of Ví folk singing, 40% of the Group was fully aware of the process at each stage:

- The first stage includes prelude singing (*hát dạo*), greeting singing (*hát chào*), congratulatory singing (*hát mừng*), and inquiring singing (*hát hỏi*).

*Hát dạo* (prelude singing) involves singing to test an opponent. They will stay if they like, otherwise they will go elsewhere. After *hát dạo* (prelude singing) is finished, and it is reasonable to continue, they will begin *hát chào* (greeting singing) and *hát mừng* (congratulatory singing). *Hát chào* (greeting singing) and *hát mừng* (congratulatory singing) are followed by *hát hỏi* (inquiring singing). *Hát hỏi* (inquiring singing) involves learning about the other

party's homeland, family and marital status. *Hát hỏi* (inquiring singing) is usually sung by the female side.

- The second stage includes *hát đố* (singing by quiz) or *hát đối* (singing by repartees), requiring the other party to answer and reply.

This is the most important stage of Ví singing, where boys and girls can test their talent, knowledge and intelligence. *Hát đố* (singing by quiz) involve a quiz of word, books, practical knowledge about life, working, occupations, medicine, weather, and other worldly things. The most difficult is *hát đối* (singing by repartees). It requires not only the use of strict symmetry in knowledge, but also word (noun for noun, adjective for adjective, etc). Confucian scholars who participate in Ví singing are also often teachers, making their lyrics better and smoother, but also more profound and subtle, rugged and inaccessible.

- The third stage includes *hát mời* (invitation singing), *hát xe kết* (singing to make advancements towards conjugal relations or for making friends with others) and *hát tiễn* (singing to say goodbye).

*Hát mời* (invitation singing) is most prevalent at the beginning of a working troupe's Ví singing, such as Ví phường vải (singing of the fabric weaving troupe) and Ví phường nón (singing of the hat sewing troupe). Typically, when the male side approaches a female, who is weaving fabric or sewing a hat, from the gate, the female is required to answer the quiz/repartees – i.e., it is a challenge of talent, knowledge and intelligence for the female side. At this time, the female side will invite the male side into her house, before singing to invite him to have water, cigarettes and betel. When the two sides have developed a strong attachment, and expressed their deepest and earnest love, their singing will move on to *hát xe kết*. When the two sides fall in love with each other, *hát xe kết* may be very long, all night and with many confidences. Finally, in similar fashion to *hát già bạn* in Quan họ folk songs, the host and guest

enter into the *hát tiễn* stage (singing to say goodbye), showing their attachment, earnestness and promise.

Based on this content, most discussion group members could see similarities between the expression of Ví singing and Quan họ Bắc Ninh folk songs.

- In regards to the general understanding about Giặm singing: Giặm singing has many types, such as Giặm kể (singing while telling), Giặm nói, Giặm vè and Giặm cửa quyền (singing in royal places), Giặm ru, and Giặm xẩm, etc. However, there are two main melodies – *hát ngâm* and *hát nói*. Giặm singing, especially Giặm vè, with its narrative, advice, telling, admonishment and explanation, as well as humour, wit, sarcasm, and satire, is quickly composed. Giặm singing between boys and girls has contents, such as love, remembrance, reproach, and sulks. Giặm singing is easy to remember and learn. It is the voice, breath, customs, and practices of the countryside. It conveys answers to topical questions. Giặm singing uses a lot of local phonology, such as “*mô, tê, răng, rúa, bà tui, and bậy chóa, etc*”. The procedures involved in Giặm singing are basically similar to Ví singing, with it also sung over three stages, but in stages not as methodical or strict as Ví singing:

- The first stage mainly includes *hát dạo* (prelude singing)
- The second stage includes *hát đố* (singing by quiz) or *hát đôi* (singing by repartees);
- The third stage mainly includes *hát xe kết* (singing for the advancement of conjugal relations or for making friends with others).

#### b. Performance space

- 100% of participants agreed that the performance space of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs is very diverse, with the songs able to be practiced anywhere, including the space associated with a specific work activity, the living space of the family or community, or even in the rivers, fields or other places. The

performance location is often a common storage yard, cultural house or ground with a great old tree.

- About 5% of respondents in Hà Tĩnh province (mainly elders from the trade villages in the districts of Thạch Hà, Can Lộc and Kỳ Anh), and a number of communes in the districts of Đô Lương, Nam Đàn and Thanh Chương in Nghệ An province, suggested the space of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities was often associated with worship and spiritual beliefs relics (communal houses, temples, and pagodas, etc.). In such space, the labourers (knitwork, hat sewing, and fabric weaving, etc) and singers often make offerings to the dead and burn incense, in order to ask the God's permission to borrow the communal house, temple or pagoda, before they gather to work and sing Ví and Giặm Folk Songs. This particular practicing space was most popular in the trade villages prior to 1954, when the religious relics of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces were present in the trade villages, in particular, and the countryside in general. From 1954 to 1975, most of the religious relics of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces were destroyed by weather, war, bombs, or government, who established policy of eradicating "superstition". However, a number of communal houses and a series of ancestral temples have been restored since the 1990s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- 100% of the discussion groups agreed that Ví and Giặm Folk Songs have been practiced during nearly all community activities, including anniversaries, birthday parties, housewarming parties, one-month-old baby celebrations, the annual ceremonies of villages, and, in more recent years, at funerals, with content such as maternal love, gratitude to grandparents and parents, and the deceased more generally (particularly in the districts of Nghệ An province).

## **2. Activities of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in contemporary society**

Synthesizing the opinions divulged from the discussions conducted in the two provinces, most of the participants said that, from 1954 to the 1980s, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities were mostly spontaneous, and depended on the needs

of individuals or certain groups at the localities. According to the opinions provided for the inventory, the main reasons for this are as follows:

- Due to circumstances of war, especially the period of fighting the destructive war against the American invaders, which included incurring heavy damage under bombing, the community did not have the ability nor time to participate in public or collective performance activities, as they did in times of peace. Nghệ Tĩnh was at the epicentre of the destructive war, suffering significantly from bombing. It is, therefore, unsurprising that there is no cultural space for the community.

- During wartimes, the State's cultural institutions prohibited activities, such as festivals, as well as practical expressions of individual and collective spiritual beliefs, in order to focus on their political duties in fighting against the foreign aggressors. In these historical times, all performance activities in relation to love, syrupy sentiment and individual feelings (like activities such as Quan họ, Ca trù and Xoan, etc.) were strictly prohibited.

- After 1975, although the country was peaceful and united, the cultural mechanism and institutions did not change in a proper and timely manner. Over the following two decades, socio-economic life was extremely difficult; there were not suitable conditions in the communities to organize performance activities; most traditional performance activities have not been restored or invested in. In comparison with other provinces in the country, Nghệ Tĩnh was severely affected by the war (in relation to both human and material resources). As a result, its focus during the post-war period was on recovering the economy, and then the cultural and human environment.

- From 1995 onwards, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities have been given more attention by the government and cultural managers at both the provincial and commune/ward levels. The status of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities is demonstrated through different forms of organization and activities as follows: Firstly, the community has paid greater attention to the presence of prestigious

artists and teams in the same residential space, has had the sense to participate in activities or learn all the lyrics to meet their personal needs and preferences, and has participated in common activities of the village, such as birthday parties, funeral, wedding, etc. Secondly, the government and cultural management teams at commune and district levels have established Groups, attracting individuals with the ability to sing and a passion for heritage, as well as organizing internal activities for the community, in addition to meetings. Thirdly, a number of local artists have founded Groups or other singing groups, with the group or individuals funding the activities of their hobby. Fourthly, the commune and district levels of government (and, in recent years, with the participation of the provincial and central levels) now annually fund and organize folk song contests amongst localities, thereby, stimulating the awareness and development of cultural activities at the grassroots level. The establishment of Cultural Centers at the district level has also had a positive impact on the movement. Fifthly, as the economy has improved in most localities of Nghe Tinh, so has the community's need for and capability of organizing Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in their villages. Finally, in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh, Centers for folk song preservation and traditional theatres have been established, creating the professional environment required for preserving, teaching, as well as spreading the local cultural heritage through direct message, as well as the media.

### **3. Basic characteristics of the activities of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh**

Based on the general awareness of the community, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs have the following main characteristics:

- 100% of the discussion groups thought that Ví and Giặm Folk Songs would be very easy to receive and practice by any person from Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces (these people use and understand the same dialect).
- The practice of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs is not selective in relation to time, space or circumstance. People can sing Ví and Giặm Folk Songs at any

time, from working to every other corner of daily life, without unusual instruments, props or clothes. Ví and Giặm Folk Songs can be practiced during formal ceremonies, funerals, parties, and other activities, by individuals or groups of people, communities, and the general public.

- For the people, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs represent their daily and natural words, can be used to tell stories, have a heart-to-heart with each other, or monologize.

- 100% of discussion groups believed that Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are not constrained by style, prosody or words. The singers can suitably extemporize in order to express their thoughts, attitudes and feelings, in all circumstances, space and time. Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are used most naturally to meet the educational needs of families, schools and society. This is very consistent with (and a product of) Nghệ Tĩnh as a land of traditional fondness for learning and competitions/examinations.

- Ví and Giặm Folk Songs are generally easy to popularize in communities that speak the Nghe language (dialect of Nghệ Tĩnh).

- In the perception of most people, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs contain complete knowledge about culture, history, farming techniques, interactions with nature, and society, as well as nuances of Nghệ Tĩnh behaviour handed down by their ancestors.

#### **4. The typical means of transmitting the heritage**

- Up until now, most Vietnamese village communities in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces have expressed a deep fondness for singing and listening to Ví and Giặm Folk Songs. However, not all forms of folk song activities have attracted interest from the villages/residential areas, with the exception of spontaneous outbreaks. Except for some trade villages focusing on hat sewing, knitwork and baking in Hà Tĩnh province, most types of activities are scattered and personal.

- The main force directly participating in Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities are the middle-aged (40–50 years old and over), who have aptitude, good singing voices, or have participated in performance activities previously. The forms of teaching within the community are primarily arbitrary, discontinuous and unmethodical.

- Through inventory cards, 85% of participants confirmed that the young generation, along with the children of families in their villages, is enthusiastic and excited to directly participate in singing activities. During random interviews, children (ages 10–15 years), who participated in performance activities at their locality or school, said that they always liked to learn and sing Ví and Giặm Folk Songs self-consciously, although they were paid remuneration if permitted by their school and family. However, due to the pressures of modern society and the time allocated to study, they have not self-consciously learnt about the origins of folk songs, including the songs of their locality's previous generations.

- 80% of discussion groups said that, at present, their children do not have time to attend village singing activities and learn Ví and Giặm Folk Songs methodically and systematically. The reason for this was that they were required to spend 70% of their time studying in class or at home, and the other 30% supporting their families undertake economic activities (because the majority of villages in Nghệ Tĩnh suffer from economic hardships). Meanwhile, television and modern music has attracted the young, reducing the attractiveness of traditional singing.

- Currently, many Groups established by the government at the commune level want to teach, but 100% of them reported difficulties in relation to sourcing a suitable location and funding, and are generally entirely dependent on the material facilities of the commune government.

- Most people would like to learn Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, but they are not recorded in documents. Therefore, the number of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs



practiced in villages is very low, monotonous and mainly new. Many ancient Ví and Giặm Folk Songs that were previously wide spread have now been forgotten and not yet revitalized.

- Most villages/residential areas do not have the space nor material facilities for teaching, due to the irregular links between schools, at all levels, and artists, as well as the strict and/or lack of mechanisms and policies in relation to physical maintenance. Teaching at school is conducted by pluralistic teachers, or teachers trained in modern music, during extra-curricular activities.

- Members of Groups and cultural centers at district level have been moving towards professionalism in their performances of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, including expanding their use of instruments and modern clothes. However, this leaves the transmission of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs at risk of being staged, and diverging from the traditional folk performance methods.

## **5. Some issues that arose during the course of conserving and exploiting the cultural values generated by the activities of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs of Nghệ Tĩnh**

### ***5.1. Status and positive effects of heritage***

- Until now, most cultural activities, in general, and Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in particular, have been given attention and restored, both in a material (rebuilding the cultural house of the community) and spiritual sense (establishing Groups and organizing folk song contests), by the government leaders and cultural managers of the 14 districts/towns of Nghệ An province and 12 districts/towns of Hà Tĩnh province. However, due to poor local economic conditions, as well as different subjective and objective circumstances, the number of establishments dedicated to traditional art activities are limited, mainly to towns and urban areas.

- Due to the prohibition of many forms of performance activities, festivals and beliefs (for many reasons) for nearly half a century, the culture has been

discontinuous, and given insufficient management attention by the local authorities and people, in many villages in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, resulting in many relics being destroyed or occupied at different levels. Many ceremonial items, as well as the ancient interiors of worship, in many villages that worship progenitors have been destroyed or dilapidated. Meanwhile, the demand for religious activities amongst the community is still very high. In most localities, the reconstruction of belief and worshipping establishments is primarily financed and built by people and family lines with ancestors in the system of competitions/examinations, or supported by people who have the capacity and economic means. This is most evident in the districts of Can Lộc, Hương Sơn and Thạch Hà in Hà Tĩnh, and Quỳnh Lưu, Nam Đàn and Thanh Chương in Nghệ An province.

- Awareness of the importance of preserving and maintaining traditional performance activities, in general, and Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, in particular, in the villages/residential areas is mainly held by the middle-aged or older people, through their participation in Groups and by being the most active in each locality.

- The establishment of a system of Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups in 60 communes/wards of Nghệ An province and 15 communes/wards of Hà Tĩnh province, along with the operation of traditional theaters and traditional folk song preservation Centers at the provincial and district levels in Nghệ Tĩnh for nearly ten years now, has attracted the attention of the masses, with the localities without existing Groups, actively promoting their establishment. Some mountainous districts of Nghệ An province, where ethnic minority communities reside, have also started developing plans for the development of cultural groups, using local Vietnamese people to transmit the heritage of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, and selecting people to participate in folk singing competitions at the commune and district levels.

- In most villages/hamlets/residential areas, radio and television stations have increased people's exposure to Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, as well as the singing activities of particular areas, by broadcasting programs dedicated to the teaching of folk songs. As a result, people can develop a deep understand and love of, as well as learn, Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, which are familiar and popular. According to the people, this is a large positive because it provides families with more vivid forms of education for their children about society, culture, the arts, and how to live a more moral lifestyle in general.

- From the inventory cards completed by 75 Ví and Giặm Folk Song Groups during the practical survey in the localities with Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, it was found that the government and cultural management at all levels, especially the commune level, directly dispatched participants for organizing, operating, monitoring, and checking all steps in relation to preparing talented people and material resources, and rehearsing and operating the activities of the Groups. The survey cards completed by the community representative groups show that the people are satisfied with the local authorities at the commune and village levels. This demonstrates a clear consensus and willingness to maintain the festival traditions, and act positively in relation to exploring the values and significance of the traditional culture and arts environment, in order to reconstruct cultural life at the grassroots level for present and future generations.

- In the spirit of socialization with the Group leaders, the government at the commune level has strictly coordinated with the community in the conservation and exploitation of intangible cultural heritage values. According to the statistics, 90% of public opinion agreed with the initial steps of the local authorities in relation to the restoration, conservation and exploitation of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs through the process of organizing the activities of the local folk song Groups.

## ***5.2. Some actual risks to the heritage***

- From the survey, 95% of people confirmed their communities limitations in collecting and recording the history of cultural and religious relics in their villages/residential areas, as well as the processes involved in running local traditional festivals (fewer and fewer people know the Han and demotic scripts, with some locality possessing no one that understands them). In many villages, traditional forms of games associated with Ví and Giặm Folk Songs have almost disappeared. A few Elders in a number of villages (mainly artists or retired intellectuals) have recorded information, but in a spontaneous manner, and according to the subjective awareness of the particular individuals. However, they have not exchanged this insight, tried to build on it, or popularized it in the community. This situation has resulted in the loss of valuable intangible cultural resources created and practiced in the past, leaving present day religious and culture activities monotonous and unsystematic, whilst also losing part of the unique and interesting identity of Nghệ Tĩnh.

- 80% of discussion groups believed that Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, with references to classical Chinese–Vietnamese idioms, had been re-expressed or removed by practitioners meaning that listeners could no longer understand them. That has resulted in many Ví and Giặm Folk Songs composed, improved and perfected by intellectuals either being lost or not handed down in the original way, reducing the diversity of their content and the value of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in general.

- 70% of discussion groups participating in the heritage inventory believed that the performance environment of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs had been excessively deformed in terms of its ecological space, working context and activities in the villages. This is especially obvious in the trade villages. Due to land development and changes in the demand for labor under the new social conditions, most of the traditional trade villages that practiced Ví and Giặm Folk Songs activities prior to 1975, such as the fabric weaving, pottery and carpentry villages, have all been changed, connected or completely altered to suit the

needs and new conditions of the community. Therefore, activities of Ví of fabric weaving guild, Ví of conical hat making guild, Ví of firewood cutting guild, and Ví and Giặm of husking rice, have not been able to be preserved, maintained and practiced as they were in the past. Lasting for over ten years, this situation has resulted in the loss of Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in most of the villages of Nghệ Tĩnh.

- 95% of people participating in the discussion proposed to enhance the role of government at all levels in the organization of the intellectual investment and effort in collecting, recording, publishing, and distributing the intangible cultural heritages related to local cultural traditionals, in general, and Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, in particular, to all members of the community.

- Currently, the majority of villages with Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities are experiencing tight economic circumstances, while also being physical incapable of developing the folk song learning movement, nor organizing Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, as they did in the past. 100% of discussion groups requested that the authorities at all levels care about and support the transmission and restoration of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in their villages.

- 100% of discussion groups said that the government and social organizations were not interested in funding or supporting the practice of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities in their villages. As a result, Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities were now informal, arbitrary, discontinuous, and unstable.

- 100% of discussion groups said that most of the people directly involved in teaching Ví and Giặm Folk Songs, especially the master practitioners with a thorough knowledge of the heritage, are not very well cared for in spirit nor materially by the state and authorities at all levels. Many older artists, who have been famous for a long time (deceased or too old), are no longer interested in material benefits or being honored. Also, their knowledge of the heritage is not being exploited in a timely manner. As a result, part of the heritage of Ví and

Giặm Folk Songs has disappeared, causing disadvantage and loss for the cultural areas of Nghệ Tĩnh, in particular, and the culture of the whole country in general.

- 100% of discussion groups said that it was necessary to increase the time provided to introducing Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in the media at all levels, in order to prevent modern music from dominating the traditional folk songs of Nghệ Tĩnh, in particular, and of the whole country in general.

- 90% of people participating in the discussion said that the government is not dynamic or creative enough in expanding relations and mobilizing the efforts of non-governmental organizations, and other social components, in the conservation, exploitation and promotion of the value of local cultural heritage. As a result, the potential for socializing the preservation of cultural heritage is not powerful enough to attract people to the heritage, or encourage heritage transmission between generations.

- According to the opinions of the representatives of the Folk Song Groups established by communes or districts, the different cultural management levels put an emphasis on administrative documents, are inclined towards the organization of propaganda for lines and policies, and have not taken the initiative to closely collaborate with the grassroots level in developing an immediate and long-term action plan of the conservation and exploitation of the cultural values generated by Ví and Giặm Folk Songs in the localities. The Groups' activities are more focused on training its members for folk singing competition at all levels, rather than promoting its everyday popularity in the community. In the departments responsible for cultural management and studies (Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of districts/towns and the cultural staff of communes/wards, etc), the majority of professional staff are young, with limited knowledge of traditional culture, and poor in relation to learning and deep research. As a result, participation in cultural management at the grassroots

level is severely limited, and even deviates from the professional awareness and cultural needs of the community.

- Collaboration between schools and local levels in protecting and promoting the cultural heritage values of the villages is also not very close. Propaganda and education is limited and has not led to the forming of a wide and deep movement in the community. Currently, the content and method of transmitting Ví and Giặm Folk Songs is primarily dependent on the awareness, capacity of understanding, and subjective realization of music teachers. There is no collaboration between artists or an appropriate remuneration policy.

- Finally, the majority of people have asked the authorities at all levels to pay more attention to using good relations and favourable material conditions, in order to attract successful entrepreneurs willing to fund the movement of Ví and Giặm Folk Song activities, in particular, and the exploitation and promotion of the values of cultural heritage at the localities, in general, from the local, national and international communities.

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