



Superlative Degrees in Vietnamese Perceptions of Humans Through Idioms with Comparisons

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Abstract

Idioms are unique linguistic expressions that contain cultural elements of a nation, and a rich worldview of different ethnic groups belonging to different cultures this study aimed to investigate superlative degrees in Vietnamese perceptions of humans through idioms with comparisons. A descriptive research study method with a comparative approach guided this study. The data for this study was restricted to idioms with comparisons by humans taken from Hanh's (2008) collection of Vietnamese idioms. A random search of idioms from this text helped to identify a corpus of 132 idioms. The data was analyzed in the light of a theoretical foundation of Vietnamese idioms and analysis of the superlative degrees the sampled idioms were divided into five groups superlative degrees of emotions, appearances, states, activities, and personalities. Findings reveal that superlative degrees in Vietnamese perceptions of humans through idioms with comparisons are associated with the Vietnamese customs, culture, tradition, habit, and thinking. The findings also revealed that the Vietnamese perceptions of humans are expressed through idioms with comparisons in terms of emotions, appearances, states, activities, and personalities, in which idioms with comparisons by emotions take up the majority. The study has implications in Vietnamese people's everyday experiences, common knowledge, and cultural reasoning, which shape their distinct perspectives on the world.

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Introduction

In contrast to other language units, idioms reflect national cultures and viewpoints. Idioms are unique linguistic constructions that crystallize the cultural elements of a nation, truly and extremely rich worldview and outlook on life of communities of different ethnic groups belonging to different cultures (Thuy, 2009). Idioms are folk cultural deposits which express the close relationship between language and national culture. They are

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a means of expressing concepts metaphorically. They give the speakers' remarks depth and vibrancy. Therefore, a person's proficiency with idioms in speech may have an impact on his capacity to build communicative relationships. Furthermore, the most significant advantage of idioms is that they provide users with a whole new linguistic means of expressing thoughts. Indeed, an idiom can convey the color and life of a language. Since idiomatic phrases play an interesting role in language, they have meanings beyond what words can express. Idioms are a tangible and distinctive aspect of any language, even though they are figurative and metaphorical until they are comprehended. They give the speaker the freedom to express themselves, voicing particular feelings without explicitly saying so. They also provide cultural interpretations of societal norms, values, and beliefs. Idioms provide us with a glimpse into the speaker's past ideas, feelings, and opinions.

In the Vietnamese context, historically, several classifications have been made of idiom studies. First and foremost, most idiom studies fall within broad categories of etymology, synchronic evolution, and contrastive analysis (Hanh, 2002, 2008; Minh, 2020). These studies demonstrate how each idiom evolved and altered over time. While the etymologizing traces back the origin of idioms to clarify their meanings, the synchronous evolution presents how idioms evolved in close coordination with other linguistic units like metaphors, etc.; and contrastive analysis helps comparing and contrasting Vietnamese idioms with another language, especially English. Nguyen (2009) further categorizes Vietnamese idioms into four groups: transparent (all constituents are explicit), semi-transparent (some constituents are explicit and the others are implicit), semi-opaque (all constituents are implicit but possibly interpretable), and opaque (all constituents are implicit). It means that Vietnamese idioms appear from completely transparent to completely opaque.

Vietnamese idioms have also been classified for their symmetrical features (Duc, 1995), namely, symmetrical comparison and non-symmetrical comparison. Hanh's (2008) classification of Vietnamese idioms into three primary types is based on their compositions and the development of idiomatic meanings, viz., symmetrical figurative idioms, non-symmetrical figurative idioms, and idioms containing similes. Last, but not the least, Vietnamese idioms are also often divided into three groups: idioms with pairs, idioms with comparisons, and idioms with ordinary rules. From a linguistic standpoint, these categorizations of Vietnamese idioms take into account both the structural and semantic characteristics, though none of these classifications is predicated on consistent criteria.

Several research initiatives have been made in the past to establish the cognitive, semantic and cultural factors of idioms (Kramsch, 1998; Nang, 2020; Nguyen, 2009; Tien, 2022); and to compare and contrast Vietnamese idioms with another language, especially English, in terms of emotional idioms (Nguyen, 2016; Tien, 2022), idiomatic verb phrases (Long, 2010), idiom translation (Lan, 2001; Phuc, 2009), and color idioms (Leksono, Jantem, & Linh, 2020). Among all types, idioms with comparisons are frequently employed in the Vietnamese language and communications. There are three major constituent parts of this type: contents of comparison, connectors of comparison, and comparative images. The contents of idioms with comparisons appear in two forms: closed and open, in which closed comparative contents are more common; the connectors of comparison are expressed as different linguistic units such as adjectives, verbs, nouns, etc; and the comparative images indicate the degrees of contents of comparison, and in some cases, they show the superlative degrees, which have not been investigated in past studies.

Past studies have mainly dealt with idioms with comparisons in Vietnamese in terms of their structural patterns and the semantic relationship (Duc, 1995; Hanh, 2008; Minh, 2013). Lan (2001) and Nang (2020) have dealt with idioms with comparisons, and highlighted the symbols, images and objects that are compared in Vietnamese idioms. However, superlative degrees in the comparative images of these idioms have been ignored. In the absence of the superlative element in the Vietnamese idioms, they insinuate typical cultural traits and distinctive views of the Vietnamese. Superlative degrees originate from comparative images of idioms with comparisons and imply typical cultural characteristics and unique viewpoints of the Vietnamese people.

The present study aimed to examine the superlative degrees in Vietnamese perceptions of humans through idioms with comparisons from a cultural perspective. The main objective of making a descriptive study of idioms with comparisons by humans was to reveal human characteristics such as emotions, appearances, states, activities, and personalities described with the superlative degrees through comparative images.

Literature Review

- *Vietnamese Idioms*

Duc (1995) defines an idiom as a set of words with a definite sense and descriptive value. Hanh (2008) proposes, more precisely, that "an idiom is a set of words that are often employed in everyday speech and have a stable structure with a complete and figurative meaning" (p. 31). The "stable structure" feature of an idiom in Hanh's definition refers to two criteria: (i) the components of idiom are often not variable in usage; and (ii) the sequence of component parts cannot be changed. Hanh (2008) also focuses on the artistic value and application of Vietnamese idioms, apart from their structural and semantic characteristics. As a result, semantically due to their composition, idioms do not provide the idiomatic meaning. In a similar vein, Luc &

Dang (2009) claim that even when the syntactic characteristics and meaning of each word in an idiom has been learned, the idiomatic meaning of an idiom cannot be fully captured. Most Vietnamese linguists agree that an idiom is typically a set expression whose meaning cannot be ascertained by analyzing the meanings of its individual constituents.

Vietnamese idioms have traditionally been thought to be erratic or non-compositional (Duc, 1995; Hanh, 2008; Luc & Dang, 2009; Nhung, 2023), owing to the inconsistent meanings of their components. For example, the phrase *nước đổ đầu vịt* ‘water pour head duck’ which is paraphrased as “a potentially hurtful remark or situation that has no apparent effect on the person involved” is an idiom, but its idiomatic meaning cannot be inferred from the meanings of its individual words (*nước*, *đổ*, *đầu*, and *vịt*). However, from a cognitive view, the majority of Vietnamese idioms, according to Tien (2022), are able to be examined and have meanings that are at least somewhat motivated.

These definitions suggest that an idiom does have certain typical qualities. For the purpose of the current study, an idiom in Vietnamese is defined as a phrase (i) whose component parts can be unvaried or varied under definable control; (ii) which is regarded as a complex scene with a bipartite semantic pattern that can be analyzable; a literal reading and an idiomatic meaning based on an image; (iii) which has a meaning that usually differs from the meanings of the combination of its component parts but is at least partly motivated; and (iv) which expresses a pure concept.

- *Idioms From a Cultural Perspective*

A large body of research, including descriptive studies (Duc, 1995; Hanh, 2008; Luc & Dang, 2009; Nang, 2020) have contributed to the understanding of the cultural perspective underlying the idioms. According to Kramsch (1998), language serves as the main instrument in framing idioms for social interactions. When language is used in communication contexts, it has many intricate links to culture. In other words, language is an essential component in creating and preserving what is referred to as culture, which encompasses customs, behaviors, and ways that people interpret their surroundings. Language allows us to define and communicate identities, categories, attitudes, values, and belief systems to other people. Kramsch (1998) clarifies that idioms originate from thoughts, ideas, facts and occurrences of the world, and are all communicated through language. In addition, idioms also convey people's attitudes, convictions, and viewpoints, thus functioning as a means of expressing cultural reality. Hanh (2008) asserts that language serves as a tool for transmitting and conserving a country's cultural legacy, and adds that culture directly influences language production, and language itself is a mirror of culture.

According to Ping (2018), idioms are particular linguistic combinations that represent an individual's cultural background. They contain coded information that is crucial to understanding social development and national culture. Deep cultural implications can be found in idioms. They have historical roots, depict the mentalities of many ethnic groups, and allude to particular lifestyle patterns. Their arrangements are both logical and random. Hanh (2008) claims that, like idioms in any other language, Vietnamese idioms are a treasure that preserve the rich and distinctive cultural traits of the country. Idioms reflect a shift in how people see their environment in terms of cognition. Geographical location, habitat, style of production, national mindset, etc. are considered typical aspects defining the unique characteristics of idioms in each language (Binh, 1999).

In fact, the roots of idioms in both English and Vietnamese have substantial cultural variations, stemming from historical events, living conditions, faiths, beliefs, traditions, and customs. Lan (2001) made a comparison of the use of idioms in Vietnamese, English, and Russian, to demonstrate the importance of national thought in defining comparative images. The findings revealed that comparative images are commonly taken from people's daily lives in every country. In summary, language and culture continuously coexist and strengthen one another. Since they are inextricably related, knowledge of the others is necessary to comprehend or appreciate one. Idioms, being unique linguistic units, truly mirror country cultures and perspectives.

- *Idioms With Comparisons*

Hanh (2008) defined Vietnamese idioms with comparisons as fixed groups of words with figurative meanings derived from comparative structures such as *hiền như Phật* ‘kind as Buddha’ [very kind], *nói như vẹt* ‘speak like a parrot’ [be talkative], *lẩn như chạch* ‘sneak away like a loach’ [sneak away in a quick way], etc. Although an idiomatic comparison and an ordinary one is similar in composition, they differ in certain aspects. In an ordinary comparison, two items from the same category are compared to determine how similar or different they are. For instance, “*Lan chăm chỉ như mẹ cô ấy* [Lan is as hard-working as her mother]” is an ordinary comparison because it refers to two people of the same category. Lan's mother is hard-working and Lan is hard-working, too, but we do not know how hard-working Lan is. Conversely, an idiomatic comparison highlights or exaggerates specific qualities by putting one item on the same line as another in a different category. In the example, “*Lan chăm chỉ như con ong* [Lan is as hard-working as a bee],” this sentence is an idiomatic comparison in which the comparison is made between Lan and a bee. It shows how hard-working Lan is since her hard work is compared to the bee's assiduousness.

Idioms with comparisons are a common kind of idioms in Vietnamese (Hang, 2020). Three component parts make it possible, viz., contents of comparison, comparative images, and connectors of comparison, in which the comparative images make the contents of comparison explicit through linguistic connectors of comparison. In *khỏe như trâu* ‘strong as a buffalo’ [very strong], *khỏe* (strong) is the content of comparison; *trâu* (a buffalo) is the comparative image; *như* (as/like) is the connector of comparison. In addition, *tày* (as/like), *bằng* (as/like) and *tựa* (as/like) are also the connectors of comparison. Closed contents of comparison are those that occur concurrently with comparative pictures and connectors of comparison; open contents of comparison are those that do not present concurrently with comparative images and connectors of comparison. Comparative images typically display the degrees, manners, or attributes of the contents of comparison. In the present study, comparative images of idioms with comparisons denote the superlative degrees of the contents of comparison associated with humans.

Methodology

• Research Design

The study employed an investigative paradigm to provide a thorough discussion of superlative degrees in Vietnamese perceptions of humans through idioms with comparisons. Descriptive research, according to Wisker (2001), aims to precisely and methodically characterize a population, circumstance, or event with comprehensive details. Wisker (2001) further clarifies that descriptive research uses description, classification, measurement, and comparison to describe the properties of phenomena. The study begins with the theoretical foundation of Vietnamese idioms, followed by the findings and discussion of superlative degrees of idioms with comparisons by humans. Deductive reasoning was utilized to provide concluding remarks after explanations and comments for the illustrative instances.

• Data Collection

The data of the study was restricted to idioms with comparisons by humans taken from Hanh’s (2008) collection of Vietnamese idioms. A random search of idioms from this text helped to identify a corpus of 132 idioms with comparisons by humans. From this corpus, superlative degrees of idioms with comparisons by humans were divided into five categories according to their contents of comparison, as follows:

(i) Superlative degrees of emotions: e.g., *đau như cắt ruột* ‘painful as cut bowels’ [experience intense sadness], *buồn như đĩ về già* ‘sad as prostitute become old’ [become so sad and unable to change the situation], *vui như Tết* ‘happy as Tết’ [feel so happy], etc.

(ii) Superlative degrees of appearances: e.g., *đẹp như tiên* ‘beautiful as a fairy’ [very beautiful], *xấu như ma* ‘ugly as a ghost’ [extremely ugly], *béo như con cún cút* ‘fat as a quail’ [extremely fat], etc.

(iii) Superlative degrees of states: e.g., *thuộc như lòng bàn tay* ‘familiar as a palm’ [know by heart], *vững như bàn thạch* ‘steady as a slab of stone’ [extremely steady], *thuộc như Thổ Công thuộc bếp* ‘familiar as Kitchen God know kitchen’ [know by heart], etc.

(iv) Superlative degrees of activities: e.g., *gắt như mắm* ‘speak like fish sauce’ [speak with a harsh tone], *khinh như mẻ* ‘scorn like sour Vietnamese fermented rice’ [scorn somebody], *cãi nhau như mổ bò* ‘argue like butchering a cow’ [argue loudly], etc.

(v) Superlative degrees of personalities: e.g., *hiền như Bụt* ‘kind as Buddha’ [extremely kind], *thật như đếm* ‘honest as count’ [extremely honest], *lười như hủi* ‘lazy as a leper’ [extremely lazy], etc.

• Data Analysis

Following the collection and classification of the data, the superlative degrees derived from comparative images were examined and described. Additionally, translations into English were required for analyzing the Vietnamese idioms, since most idioms in Vietnamese do not have equivalents in English, and vice versa. To maintain consistency in the final output, the translation approaches described by Baker (1992) were used, that involved word-for-word translation, which helped to retain the original words’ literal meanings in the source language. Paraphrasing was also performed as helped to preserve the idiomatic meanings,

Results and Findings

From the Hanh’s (2008) corpus of Vietnamese idioms, 132 idioms were randomly sampled for this study which included comparison of “humans” from both biological and social perspectives. From the biological perspective, Vietnamese idioms often provided assessments of people in terms of their natural, innate, and genetic aspects such as physical power, endurance, appearance, etc. From the social perspective, Vietnamese

idioms with comparisons view humans under the lenses of spirituality, with abstract connotations such as personality, behavior, inherent qualities, capabilities, emotions, states, or actions. For example, the connector of comparison, *như* (like/as) (not making an appearance in some instances), is used to push comparative images depicting humans to superlative degrees to emphasize appraisal or condemnation, reflecting the views of honor or criticism in social perception on a variety of human aspects from a traditional perspective.

In this corpus, superlative degrees of idioms with comparisons by humans present the basis of similarity that the contents of comparison (human characteristics) and comparative images (objects, phenomena, behavior, etc.) are based on. These idioms have two semantic layers: literal and idiomatic. To further elaborate, biologically human-evaluating idioms tend to be perceived in literal meanings, whereas socially human-evaluating idioms are mostly understood in idiomatic meanings. Table 1 summarizes the idioms sampled for this study.

Table 1: Superlative Degrees in Vietnamese Perceptions of Humans Through Idioms with Comparisons.

No	Superlative Degrees in Vietnamese Perceptions of Humans	Number of Idioms with Comparisons	%
1	Superlative degrees of emotions	39	29.55
2	Superlative degrees of appearances	29	21.97
3	Superlative degrees of states	24	18.18
4	Superlative degrees of activities	24	18.18
5	Superlative degrees of personalities	16	12.12
Total		132	100.00

Humans are a totality of social relationships; as a result, Vietnamese idioms that evaluate people also cover all aspects, from external appearance to personality and mind. Table 1 shows that there are five superlative degree groups in Vietnamese perceptions of humans through idioms with comparisons: superlative degrees of emotions (39 idioms, accounting for 29.55%), superlative degrees of appearances (29 idioms, accounting for 21.97%), superlative degrees of states (24 idioms, accounting for 18.18%), superlative degrees of activities (24 idioms, accounting for 18.18%), and superlative degrees of personalities (16 idioms, accounting for 12.12%).

• *Superlative Degrees of Emotions*

In Vietnamese perceptions, in order to express the multi-dimensional nature of human emotions, bodily organs like *ruột* (bowels), *lòng* (intestines), and *dạ* (intestines) tend to be used to symbolize the carriers of human emotions (Thuy, 2009). In Vietnamese idioms with comparisons, images of devastation, melancholy, or utter disappointment, which are semantically superlative, are the most popular. The following examples (1-8) of idioms show the superlative degrees of sorrow involving the images of bowels, intestines, or other human body parts that are cut, torn, fractured, tightened, altered, and rubbed.

(1)	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>cắt</i>	<i>ruột</i>
	‘painful	as	cut	bowels’
			[experiencing intense sadness]	
(2)	<i>lòng</i>	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>cắt</i>
	‘intestines	painful	like	cut’
			[experiencing extreme sorrow]	
(3)	<i>ruột</i>	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>cắt</i>
	‘bowels	painful	like	cut’
			[experiencing extreme sadness]	
(4)	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>hoạn</i>	
	‘painful	as	altered’	
			[experiencing extreme sorrow]	
(5)	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>xé</i>	<i>ruột</i>
	‘painful	as	tear	bowels’
			[experiencing extreme sadness]	
(6)	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>đứt</i>	<i>ruột</i>
	‘painful	as	sever	bowels’
			[experiencing extreme sorrow]	
(7)	<i>ruột</i>	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>xát</i> <i>mắm</i>
	‘bowels	painful	like	rub salt’
			[experiencing extreme sadness]	
(8)	<i>ruột</i>	<i>đau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>thắt</i>
	‘bowels	painful	like	tighten’
			[experiencing extreme sorrow]	

For Vietnamese people, the damage done to the bowels and intestines mentioned in examples (1-8) refers to the irreparable hurt to the human soul. When a body part is cut, severed, or torn, it brings about an extremely painful experience of physical sensations (cutting bowels and intestines in (1), (2), and (3); altering (cutting the male reproductive organ, a means of maintaining their race) in (4); tearing and severing the bowels in (5) and (6); rubbing salt onto the bowels causing immense pain of erosion in (7); and the bowels being tightened by a rope in (8)). However, from a figurative viewpoint, these idioms also act as a mode of expression of immense mental pain and negative human emotions such as utter despair or extreme misery and sadness. The expression of pain both physically and mentally through these comparative images helps convey the superlative degrees of emotions, contributing to the depiction of unsurpassable, excruciating pain with nothing on par and seemingly exceeding the human limit of suffering.

In Vietnamese idioms with comparisons, the negative emotions are also symbolized through words referring to the bodily internal organs such as bowels, intestines, and livers associated with states of withering, decay, rotting, and irreversibility (the connector of comparison *như* (like/as) do not usually appear in these idioms). For instance, example (9) *buồn thối ruột* 'sad rotten bowel' [feel extremely sad]; (10) *buồn thối ruột thối gan* 'sad rotten bowel rotten liver' [feel extremely sad], (11) *như gan rầu ruột héo* 'like liver rotten bowel wilted' [feel extremely sad], and (12) *như tan nát cõi lòng* 'like ruined intestine' [feel extremely sad], utilize images of bodily organs such as bowels, intestines, and livers to represent a vessel for emotional storage and the deepest thoughts of humans. When comparing the state of damaged organs, it means that this sadness has been pushed to a superlative degree. These superlative degree images have contributed to the amplification of negative emotions through the means of over-exaggeration, showing how much Vietnamese people appreciate spiritual values. Alongside using the state of internal organs to express sadness, in idioms with comparisons, the Vietnamese also use comparative images as risky and unwanted events that humans have to endure as an objective rule with no way of repressing them, as seen in examples (13-17).

(13)	buồn	như	cha	chết
	'sad	as	father	'die'
			[feel extremely depressed]	
(14)	<i>buồn</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>gái đi</i>	<i>về già</i>
	'sad	as	prostitutes	become old'
			[become so sad and unable to change the situation]	
(15)	<i>buồn</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>chó</i>	<i>chết con</i>
	'sad	as	a dog	losing her puppy'
			[feel extremely depressed]	
(16)	<i>khóc</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>cha</i>	<i>chết</i>
	'cry	like	father	'die'
			[feel extremely depressed]	
(17)	<i>khóc</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>mưa</i>	
	'cry	like	rain	
			[feel extremely depressed]	

All situations stimulating sadness mentioned above happen away from human intention: a father passing away in (13) evokes feelings of immense sadness, a deceased loved one gone from the world; as for the aging prostitutes in (14), they no longer possess the physical attraction to engage in prostitution, losing their ability to make a living; the dog in (15) is a fiercely intelligent creature that exerts all its energy into protecting its offspring, as a result, the pain of a dam losing its puppies is an insurmountable pain; the Vietnamese have a tradition of honoring their ancestors, when parents die in (16), their children express great gratitude towards their birth-givers through the act of weeping. In many places, there is a custom of using the cries of children to measure filial piety. Human tears are inherently limited due to the regulation of the lacrimal gland, so tears falling like rain in (17) have pushed the state of sadness to its peak, which cannot be expressed in words and can reach an infinite state. Therefore, the comparative images of idioms with comparisons have pushed themselves to the limit of superlative and become "the peaking point of extremity and possible infinity" (Dung, 2010).

Beside sadness, Vietnamese idioms with comparisons also express human feelings of anxiety and worry. In order to show the superlative degrees of anxiety and insecurity, Vietnamese people often compare this negative emotion to situations that are urgent or even life-threatening, as seen in example (18) *Lo như cá nằm trên thớt* 'worried as a fish on a chopping board' [feel extremely worried] and (19) *(lo) như ngồi phai cọc* 'worried as sitting on a pole' [feel extremely worried]. The state of a fish on a chopping board in (18) is a situation similar to the final moments of execution, where the fish is being prepared for processing in anticipation of the knife chopping down on it, ending the life of the fish. Sitting on a pole in (19) is also an urgent and emergency situation, with the potential of inflicting life-threatening damage on the respective individual if immediate aid is not available. Therefore, comparative images, which entail serious situations, illustrate wariness and anxiety furthered to superlative degrees.

Besides, in order to express superlative degrees of anxiety, the Vietnamese have used bodily organs such as the bowels or intestines to express unwanted negative human emotions, as exemplified in (20-22):

(20)	ruột	rối	như	tơ vò
	‘bowels	tangled	like	crumpled silks’
(21)	<i>lòng</i> ‘bowels	<i>dạ</i> intestines	[feel extremely confused] <i>rối bời</i> ‘tangled skein’	
(22)	<i>lòng</i> ‘bowels	<i>dạ</i> intestines	[feel extremely confused] <i>như</i> like	<i>lửa đốt</i> ‘burning flames’
			[feel extremely confused]	

The fact that people are confused and stuck in their careers or emotional endeavors is one of the reasons leading to feelings of anxiety. When depicting the feelings of anxiousness, the Vietnamese tend to compare bodily internal organs such as bowels or intestines (symbolizing the place containing human emotions and feelings) with comparative images of *tơ vò* (crumpled silks) in (20), *rối bời* (tangled skein) in (21), or *lửa đốt* (burning flames) in (22). These comparative images indicate the superlative degrees of anxiousness when falling into a state of restlessness, anxiety, or wariness.

In idioms with comparisons, the Vietnamese also tend to use bodily organs such as bowels, intestines and eyes as comparative images with connotations of unsalvageable hurt, expressing the superlative degrees of exasperation, as illustrated in examples (23-31):

(23)	tức	(như)	lộn	ruột
	‘angry	(as)	mess up	‘bowels’
(24)	<i>tức</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[become extremely angry] <i>nổ</i> explode	<i>ruột</i> ‘bowels’
(25)	<i>tức</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[become extremely angry] <i>lòi</i> protrude	<i>con ngươi</i> ‘pupil’
(26)	<i>tức</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[become extremely angry] <i>nổ</i> explode	<i>mắt</i> ‘eyes’
(27)	<i>tức</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[become extremely angry] <i>nổ</i> explode	<i>đom đóm</i> ‘phosphene’
(28)	<i>giận</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[be extremely angry] <i>sôi</i> boil	<i>gan</i> ‘liver’
(29)	<i>giận</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[be extremely angry] <i>sôi</i> boil	<i>máu</i> ‘blood’
(30)	<i>giận</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[be extremely angry] <i>sôi</i> boil	<i>tiết</i> ‘blood’
(31)	<i>giận</i> ‘angry	<i>(như)</i> (as)	[be extremely angry] <i>bầm gan</i> bruised liver	<i>tím ruột</i> ‘bruised bowels’
			[be extremely angry]	

Although the connector of comparison *như* (like/as) can be omitted in usage, idioms (23-31) are still considered idioms with comparisons. According to cognitive linguistics, human biological experience allows the decoding and recognition of complex metaphors related to the human body's experiential mechanisms. Lakoff & Johnson (2003) pointed out the concept of container through contemplation about oneself. We are physical beings, separated from the rest of the world by the surface of our skin, and we also perceive the world as if it were outside of us. Each of us is a container, with the boundary being the body surface and the inside-outside orientation. Our internal-external orientation is projected onto other physical objects that are also constrained by surface boundaries. In Vietnamese perception, the human body is a container, and human anger is a physical catalyst. Based on natural biological mechanisms, when in a state of anger, the human body gradually heats up because the heart beats faster and blood rushes to the brain, causing the body temperature to increase. The body is a container; when the liquid (blood) in the container heats up, it will lead to the phenomenon of "boiling," overflowing, and the pressure in the container increasing, causing the phenomenon of inflation, explosion, or deflation.

(32)	mừng 'happy	như as	bắt được get [feel so happy]	của treasures'
(33)	<i>mừng</i> 'happy	<i>như</i> as	<i>bắt được</i> catch [feel so happy]	<i>vàng</i> gold'
(34)	<i>mừng</i> 'happy	<i>như</i> as	<i>cha chết</i> deceased father [feel extremely happy]	<i>sống lại</i> revive'
(35)	<i>vui</i> 'happy	<i>như</i> as	<i>mở cờ</i> unfurl flag [feel extremely happy]	<i>bụng</i> stomach'
(36)			<i>trong</i> in <i>cười như địa chủ được mùa</i> 'laugh like landlords have good harvests' [laugh for happiness]	
(37)			<i>cười như bắp rang</i> 'laugh like corn pop' [laugh for joy]	

Therefore, comparative images such as *lộn ruột* (bowels messed up) in (23), *nổ ruột* (bowels imploding) in (24), *lòi con người* (pupils protruded) in (25), *nổ mắt* (eyes exploding) in (26), *nổ đóm đóm* (phosphene exploding) in (27), *sôi gan* (liver boiling) in (28), *sôi máu* (blood boiling) in (29), *sôi tiết* (blood boiling) in (30), and *tím ruột* (bruised bowels), *bầm gan* (bruised liver) in (31) contribute to the superlative degree of anger, similar to the state of a container exploding when the pressure increases. Beside sadness and anxiety, human emotions also involve joy, happiness, and experiences of external expressions such as eyes and smiles. In idioms with comparisons, when talking about human emotions of joy and happiness, Vietnamese people tend to use comparative images of unexpected situations that are difficult to occur in both natural and unnatural conditions, as seen in (32–37):

The Vietnamese perceive *của* (treasure) in (32) and *vàng* (gold) in (33) as a material with great physical value, and as a result, rich families often store the commodity. Gold is also posed as a marital criterion in some local customs, or an invaluable marital treasure gifted by the respective families to the bride and groom in the hopes of fostering a life of wealth and prosperity. This commodity also has high international trade value, and in Vietnamese culture, the term “gold” has become multi-dimensional, ranging from its physical value to its abstract viewpoint and symbolism of valuables. *Vàng* (gold) is also a symbol for human value, becoming a measuring tape for human integrity. Therefore, the comparative image *bắt được vàng* (catching gold) is the superlative degree of happiness, similar to an individual obtaining an object of high value, also perceived as a sign of good luck. A fictional and illogical event that a deceased father revives in (34) and unfurl flag in (35) are other comparative images indicating the superlative degree of happiness.

Vietnamese people also use laughter to express a superlative degree of happiness and joy, as seen in (36-37). During feudal times, Vietnamese society was divided into classes. The landlord class was wealthy but used to have inherent greed. It was the class that exploited the labor of the peasantry to get rich through their sweat and tears. Landlords owned a lot of land and turned farmers into their employees. Therefore, at any time there was a good harvest, the wealth of the landlord class became greater. The comparative image *địa chủ được mùa* (landlords having good harvests) in (36) shows overwhelming joy, fulfillment, and unparalleled satisfaction. When corn kernels are roasted in a pan at the right temperature, they will expand, and the starch inside will swell and reveal a layer of white powder. The shape of the corn kernel when it blooms can resemble the shape of a flower or resemble a laughing mouth. Popped corn kernels make continuous, popping sounds that are fun and crispy. Therefore, the comparative image *bắp rang* (corn popping) in (37) describes the crisp sound of laughter, which makes the ears crispy and pleasant.

To express happiness and joy, Vietnamese people also use comparative images of traditional festivals as seen in (38-39):

(38)	vui 'happy	như as	Tết Tết' [be extremely happy]	
(39)	<i>vui</i> 'as	<i>như</i> happy	<i>trẩy</i> attend [be very happy and excited]	<i>hội</i> festivals'

Vietnam is a multi-religious country, however, the majority follow Buddhism. Vietnamese people celebrate Tết (the Lunar New Year according to the Chinese lunar calendar) and have the custom of worshipping their ancestors. Tết (Lunar New Year) in (38) is an occasion for family reunion; children and grandchildren remember and pay tribute to the deceased and to generations of ancestors. In addition, Tết holidays last for many days, so localities have many festivals, both worshipping gods and village tutelary gods,

praying for peace in the country and people, good weather, and the growth of all things. There are also festival activities (traditional games) to help people have fun and preserve their indigenous cultural identity. Therefore, *trẩy hội* (attending festivals) in (39) is also a comparative image indicating the superlative degree of happiness and joy.

• *Superlative Degrees of Appearances*

Human appearance is a category that is mentioned a lot in Vietnamese idioms with comparisons in terms of both praise and criticism (positive and negative). Idioms having positive meanings are often associated with comparative images of things and phenomena that become standards of beauty and have stable values in Vietnamese cultural life such as *tiên* (fairy), *Kiều* (a beautiful woman in Kieu story), *Bụt* (Buddha), etc. Idioms with negative meanings involve comparative images of things and phenomena that represent the bad, the negative, and the unwelcome in the Vietnamese cultural consciousness such as *ma* (ghost), *quỷ* (devil), *hủi* (leper), etc. or others of anti-aesthetic shapes such as *cối xay* (mill), *hạt mít* (jackfruit seed), *trâu trương* (bloated deceased buffalo), *bỏ sứt cạp* (bamboo basket with the broken rim), *con cun cút* (quail), etc., as seen in (40-43):

(40)	đẹp	như	tiên	
	‘beautiful	as	a fairy’	
			[very beautiful]	
(41)	<i>đẹp</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>tiên</i>	<i>giáng thế</i>
	‘beautiful	as	a fairy	descend on earth’
			[very beautiful]	
(42)	<i>đẹp</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>tiên</i>	<i>sa</i>
	‘beautiful	as	a fairy	land’
			[very beautiful]	
(43)	<i>đẹp</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>Kiều</i>	
	‘beautiful	as	<i>Kiều</i> ’	
			[very beautiful]	

Tiên (a fairy) in (40), *tiên giáng thế* (a fairy descending on earth) in (41) và *tiên sa* (a fairy landing) in (42) are essentially imaginary characters in fairy tales, representing the beauty of both appearance and soul. The comparative image of a fairy represents perfect beauty and holiness. *Kiều* in (43) is a literary character in *Kim Vân Kiều truyện* (the story of Kim Vân Kiều) by Thanh Tâm Tài Nhân (the pen name of the author). The poet Nguyễn Du adapted this story into a poem-story written in *Nôm* (an ancient Vietnamese language). *Kiều* is prominent for her perfect natural beauty, which indicates a superlative degree of beauty.

Besides beauty, idioms with comparisons also express ugly appearances, as seen in (44-50):

(44)	xấu	như	ma	
	‘ugly	as	a ghost’	
			[extremely ugly]	
(45)	<i>xấu</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>ma lem</i>	a begrimed ghost’
	‘ugly	as		
			[extremely ugly]	
(46)	<i>xấu</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>ma mut</i>	
	‘ugly	as	a dirty ghost’	
			[extremely ugly]	
(47)	<i>xấu</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>quỷ</i>	
	‘ugly	as	a devil’	
			[extremely ugly]	
(48)	<i>xấu</i>	(<i>như</i>)	<i>ma</i>	<i>chê</i>
	‘ugly	(as)	ghost	refuse
			[extremely ugly]	<i>quỷ</i>
				devil
				<i>hờn</i>
				resent’
(49)	<i>bẩn</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>ma lem</i>	
	‘dirty	as	a begrimed ghost’	
			[extremely dirty]	
(50)	<i>bẩn</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>hủi</i>	
	‘dirty	as	a leper’	
			[extremely dirty]	

Ghosts in (44–46) or *devils* in (47–49) are all supernatural characters, unreal in reality; however, in the cultural consciousness of Vietnamese people, they are characters from the underworld, with strange appearances, appearing secretly, causing confusion and fear for people. *Hủi* (a leper) in (50) is a person who has a contagious disease, causing ulcers on his body and loss of limbs. This is one of the Vietnamese exaggerations to express the superlative degrees of ugliness. It is also a way to criticize and blame, creating aesthetic laughter to stimulate change in a positive direction.

In addition, the ugliness of human builds is also expressed through many idioms with comparisons, as see nin (51-56):

(51)	to	như	Hộ pháp
	'big	as	a Colossus' [extremely big]
(52)	to 'big	như as	<i>bồ sứt cạp</i> a bamboo container with the broken rim' [extremely big]
(53)	<i>béo tròn</i> 'fat	như as	<i>cối xay</i> a rice mill' [extremely fat]
(54)	<i>béo</i> 'fat	như as	<i>con trâu trương</i> a bloated deceased buffalo' [extremely fat]
(55)	<i>béo</i> 'fat	như as	<i>con cun cú</i> a quail' [extremely fat]
(56)	<i>tròn</i> 'round	như as	<i>hạt mít</i> a jackfruit seed' [extremely round and fat]

Previously, the Vietnamese mainly engaged in agriculture. In each farmer's household, there was a bamboo container in order to store rice grains after the yield crop, meant for consumption for the entire season until the next crop yield. As a result, this container had a large capacity. *Cạp* 'the rim of a container' is a bamboo rim in order to cap *bồ* (a container), keeping it compact and tight. *Bồ sứt cạp* (a bamboo container with the broken rim) in (52) would burst open, creating a big and contorted stature. Every Vietnamese farmer's family in the past had a rice mill to be self-sufficient in rice. This rice mill with hand thrust is round, large, and heavy. The comparative images such as *bồ sứt cạp* (a bamboo container with the broken rim) in (52), *cối xay* (a rice mill) in (53), *con trâu trương* (a bloated deceased buffalo) in (54), *con cun cú* (a quail) in (55), and *cái hạt mít* (a jackfruit seed) in (56) all involve body builds that are plump, stout, and overweight. *Hộ pháp* (a Colossus) in (51) refers to the big and prideful stature of a man. In Vietnamese pagodas, there are always two statues of Colossus on both sides of the front halls. These statues appear big and prideful, wearing armor, General's hats, swords, and Kim Cang beaters.

• *Superlative Degrees of States*

To describe human states through idioms with comparisons, the Vietnamese have a tendency to use comparative images with superlative degrees to describe a state or circumstance of human beings. For example, when describing an impoverished and penurious situation, they use the idiom (57) *rách như tổ đĩa* 'torn as tổ đĩa' [in rags and tatters] or (58) *rách như xơ mướp* 'as torn as loofah' [extremely ragged]. *Tổ đĩa* (name of a tree) in (57) is a type of plant commonly found on the shores of ponds, with leaves bearing rugged characteristics and looking as if torn into tiny pieces. *Xơ mướp* (loofah) in (58) is the loofah of old luffa, which creates multiple small, soft, and tough openings. (57) and (58) promote the images of torn up clothes worn by people from lower social classes living in poverty. In addition, to touch on the burdened and indebted way of living, the Vietnamese utilize (59) *nợ như chúa Chổm* 'owe like King Chổm' [heavily in debt]. The conception of this idiom stems from the discoursing entailing the King of the Lê Dynasty, having been identified as Chổm in childhood. His mother accidentally came across King Lê Chiêu Tông one instance while under surveillance by Mạc Đăng Dung in Đông Hà district, before getting pregnant and giving birth to Chổm. Born into poverty, Chổm made numerous loans wherever he could to make ends meet. When Nguyễn Kim declared a revolution against the Mạc Dynasty, they found Chổm as blood related to the Lê Dynasty, hence declaring him King. However, when the King returned to his village to receive honor, the people still held his debts against him and asked for their compensation. From then on, (59) was founded to describe the situation of being heavily indebted, where old debts have not been returned while new burdens sit heavy on his shoulders, akin to King Chổm, once humbled and impoverished.

When reflecting on human proficiency of a particular situation, the Vietnamese use comparative images bearing objective, obvious, and definitive connotations, as seen in (60-61):

(60)	thuộc	như	lòng bàn tay		
	'familiar	as	a palm' [know by heart]		
(61)	<i>thuộc</i> 'familiar	như as	<i>Thổ Công</i> Kitchen God [know by heart]	<i>thuộc</i> know	<i>bếp</i> kitchen'

The comparative images in (60) and (61) help reaffirm the effectiveness of learning by heart, as knowing the palm of one’s hand is something inherent to each individual, while the endeavor of *Thổ Công* (the Kitchen God), according to traditional beliefs, is to reign and watch over the kitchen, hence the fact that they have full knowledge of the kitchen is inherently obvious, as exemplified in (62-67):

(62)	vững	như	kiềng ba chân		
	‘steady	as		a tripod’	
			[extremely steady]		
(63)	<i>vững</i>	<i>như</i>		<i>bàn thạch</i>	
	‘steady	as		a slab of stone’	
			[extremely steady]		
(64)	<i>vững</i>	<i>như</i>		<i>thành</i>	
	‘steady	as		a fortress’	
			[extremely steady]		
(65)	<i>vững</i>	<i>như</i>		<i>thành đồng vách sắt</i>	
	‘steady	as		bronze and iron walls’	
			[extremely steady]		
(66)	<i>chắc</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>đinh</i>	<i>đóng</i>	<i>cột</i>
	‘firm	as	nail	hammer	pillar’
			[say or promise extremely firmly]		
(67)	<i>nói</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>rựa</i>	<i>chém</i>	<i>đá</i>
	‘say	as	machete	chop	stone’
			[say or promise extremely firmly]		

The Vietnamese then had the custom of cooking using wooden stoves. In order to elevate the pot onto the stove, Vietnamese people created a stool made out of iron or cast iron, with 3 extremely sturdy legs. Example (62) does not solely mention the physical state of steadiness, it also bears the symbolic representation of concreteness, deliberateness, and sternness in thinking or the mental state of human beings. Other idioms have comparative images of objects with optimal firmness, such as *bàn thạch* (a slab of stone) in (63), *thành* (a fortress) in (64), and *thành đồng vách sắt* ‘bronze and iron walls’ in (65). Similar to the comparative image *đinh đóng cột* (hammer a nail into a pillar) in (66), it would be almost impossible to remove a nail when penetrated deep into wood. Definitive conversational expression is also a representation of an honorable and trustworthy individual. Whereas, *rựa chém đá* (a machete cuts through a stone) in (67) is a reassurance of the weight of verbal communication and the candidness of one who holds true to their integrity. As a result, it can be seen that these patterns describe the superlative degrees in comparison, with the choice of images all satisfying the criteria of firmness and steadiness at the extreme end of the spectrum.

• *Superlative Degrees of Activities*

The way human interaction is conducted is a special point of contention in Vietnamese idioms. The activities and behaviors of humans reflected through this format bear diverse and exuberant qualities. However, in the corpus of idioms with comparisons, we have noticed that a majority of idioms all present behaviors with negative connotations and worthy of criticism. For this specific type of idiom, the Vietnamese use the comparative images of smelly ingredients such as *mắm* (fish sauce), *mắm tôm* (shrimp paste), *mế* (sour fermented rice), etc. to indicate the superlative degrees, as revealed in (68-72):

(68)	gắt	như	mắm		
	‘speak	like		fish sauce’	
			[speak with a harsh tone]		
(69)	<i>gắt</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>mắm tôm</i>		<i>thối</i>
	‘speak	like	shrimp paste		addled’
			[speak with a harsh tone]		
(70)	<i>khinh</i>	<i>như</i>		<i>mế</i>	
	‘scorn	like		sour fermented rice’	
			[scorn somebody]		
(71)	<i>coi</i>	<i>người</i>	<i>như</i>		<i>mế</i>
	‘treat	people	like		sour fermented rice’
			[a contemptuous attitude or gesture]		
(72)	<i>khinh khinh</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>chĩnh mắm</i>	<i>thối</i>	
	‘treat	as	a jar of fish sauce	addled’	
			[a contemptuous attitude or gesture]		

In Vietnamese cuisine, boiled dishes usually go with sauces, such as *mắm* (fish sauce) or *mắm tôm* (shrimp paste). *Mế* (sour Vietnamese fermented rice) is also one of the popular ingredients used in the preparation of dishes. These sauces are rancid in nature and could easily be spoilt if not properly stored, resulting in foul-

smelling odors. Due to a lack of sophistication in communicative behavior, the linkage between human activities and spoilt rancid sauces indicates the superlative degrees. It reflects the logical thought process that if humans are not capable of bearing the foul smell of addled sauces, then there is no tolerance for the indignant, contemptuous, and morose behaviors mentioned in (68–72).

Moreover, to criticize activities that do not fit within the cultural and social norms established by the Vietnamese, in idioms with comparisons, they also use comparative images of communal Vietnamese activities bearing connotations of anarchy and lacking in cohesion.

(73)	<i>cãi nhau</i>	<i>như</i>	<i>chém</i>	<i>chả</i>
	'argue	like	chop [argue extremely loudly]	meat'
(74)	<i>cãi nhau</i> 'argue	<i>như</i> like	<i>mổ</i> butchering [argue extremely loudly]	<i>bò</i> a cow'
(75)	<i>nói</i> 'speak	<i>như</i> like	<i>tát nước</i> splashing water [scold someone extremely harshly]	<i>vào mặt</i> on face'
(76)	<i>nói</i> 'speak	<i>như</i> like	<i>chan tương</i> pouring sauce [scold someone extremely harshly]	<i>đổ mẻ</i> pouring sour fermented rice on <i>mặt</i> face'

Arguing, which falls under the category of reactive behaviors raising conflict, is associated with activities such as chopping meat or butchering a cow, with underlying implications of engagement in loud and troublesome arguments where one is yet to finish the point before being interrupted by the other, not letting on, and taking an ineffectual stance. According to Vietnamese Dictionary (1999), (74) is defined as “acrimonious arguing without tolerating each other.” The comparative image *tát nước vào mặt* (splashing water on one’s face) in (75) refers to the incessant nagging and bickering to the point of not being able to control one’s action similar to splashing water; the comparative image *chan tương đổ mẻ* (pouring sauce and sour fermented rice on one’s face) in (76) uses two rancid types of sauces, which shows that verbal cues with the intention to inflict mental harm however the situation unfolds, only satisfying the desire to engage in verbal warfare to ease their anger.

On the other hand, the behavior that promotes arrogance and ignorance and the belittling of others is also reflected in (77) *coi người như rơm rác* ‘treat people like straw rubbish’ [a contemptuous attitude or gesture]. *Rơm rác* (straw and rubbish) in (77) refers to valueless agriculture waste, often disposable, and used by Vietnamese to be burnt into tar, creating manure designated for improving soil porosity. The criticism of superficial and disloyal behaviors is demonstrated through examples : (78) *cạn như lòng bàn tay* ‘shallow as palms’ [treat someone badly], (79) *trở mặt như trở bàn tay* ‘turn face like turn hand’ [treat someone badly], and (80) *bạc như vôi* ‘ungrateful as lime’ [treat someone badly]. The Vietnamese compare a flippant attitude with the act of *trở bàn tay* (turning the back of one’s hand) in (79), which shows how easy it is for humans to be impudent, shifting as quickly as turning the back of one’s hand. *Lòng bàn tay* (palm) in (78) is innately flat and shallow. Bearing these characteristics in mind, the Vietnamese have drawn similarities between audacity with the palm. In (80), the audacious behavior of humans is linked with the image of *vôi* (lime) because of its white exterior after being forged through heat and water. In Vietnamese architecture, lime is used in a mixture with water and spread across the surface of a construction to beautify and conceal the blemishes of the construction. With that characteristic, the word *vôi* (lime) in Vietnamese could also be transferred semantically in a human context and spread across the surface to conceal blemishes, altering the facial characteristics of humans. As a result, *vôi* (lime) has been embedded into the human consciousness as a physical symbol of instantaneous change. When referring to an emotional state of meaning, this term represents impudence and the change in human behavior towards certain situations.

Moreover, some comparative images are also demonstrated in the description of activities related to the speed or movement of human beings, as found in examples (81-85):

The comparative images like *bay* (fly) in (82) and *tên bắn* (a flying arrow) in (83) have shown the superlative degrees of speed. Moreover, the choice of using comparative images surpassing regulated levels such as *điên* (crazy) in (81), *ma đuổi* (chased by a ghost) in (85), and *chó phải pháo* (a dog meets firecrackers) in (84) also contributes to the way or speed at which humans move, which could not be any faster. This is due to the fact that these movements are impacted by mental factors such as being chased to the point of intimidation or due to mental disorders causing directional disorientation. In general, humans do not experience biological death in their lifetimes. As a result, it seems that all fear the beyond that exists spiritually, where unseen entities exist, called ghosts by the Vietnamese, as in (85). When under pursuit by a ghost, humans have only one option: to run as if their lives depended on it in order to escape. Dogs, a domestic pet, have a fear of the sound of firecrackers. These are derived from previous Vietnamese customs, when people would light firecrackers on New Year’s Eve in anticipation of the impending year. This sound frightens dogs, triggering them to bolt away in fear;

hence, the Vietnamese use the comparative image *chó phải pháo* (a dog meets firecrackers) as a familiar form of extremist expression in idioms. In opposition to fast pace is sedation and stalling.

(81)	Chạy 'run	Như like	Điên crazy' [run at a very fast speed]	
(82)	<i>chạy</i> 'run	<i>như</i> like	<i>bay</i> fly' [run at a very fast speed]	
(83)	<i>lao</i> 'move	<i>như</i> like	<i>tên</i> arrow [move at a very fast speed]	<i>bắn</i> shoot'
(84)	<i>chạy</i> 'run	<i>như</i> like	<i>chó phải</i> a dog meet [run at a very fast speed]	<i>pháo</i> firecrackers'
(85)	<i>chạy</i> 'run	<i>như</i> like	<i>ma</i> ghost [run at a very fast speed]	<i>đuổi</i> chase'

To describe this spectrum, the Vietnamese use superlative images to express mindless sedation with no attention to time, causing others to wait anxiously, as seen in examples (86-88):

(86)	Làm 'do	Như like	Lục Bình water hyacinth [do something at a very slow speed]	Trôi float'
(87)	<i>chậm</i> 'slow	<i>như</i> as	<i>rùa</i> a turtle' [move at a very slow speed]	
(88)	<i>chậm</i> 'slow	<i>như</i> as	<i>sên</i> a snail' [move at a very slow speed]	

Rùa (turtles) in (87) are slow-moving creatures due to their heavy and bulky shells, impeding their movement, whereas *sên* (snails) in (88) are soft-bodied reptiles, moving with their tongues at a slow speed. *Lục bình* (water hyacinth) in (86) is a type of slow-moving water-based flora that floats on water with submerged roots. Year-round, water hyacinth floats wanderingly and seems to barely alter its course unless caught with the tide, making it difficult to observe. Consequently, when using these superlative expressions, the Vietnamese have made linkages between the images of stagnant and sluggish movement and the reflexes of human beings, reaching levels of extremity and being unsurpassed.

• *Superlative Degrees of Personalities*

Human beings, when exposed to social relationships, have the ideal environment to express their personalities. Typical types of human personalities, including suspicion, honesty, kindness, anger, and idleness, among others, are all reflected in idioms with comparisons. The Vietnamese have a tendency to use objects, events, and characters as comparative images to emphasize typical human personalities, which can be classified in three categories: comparative images from characters in literary works, comparative images from fictional or supernatural characters and comparative images from materials, objects, phenomena, or properties. These comparative images showing the superlative degrees are seen in examples (89-99):

(i) Comparative images from typical characters in literary works:

(89)	Đa Nghi 'suspicious	Như as	Tào Tháo Tào Tháo (Cao Cao)' [extremely suspicious]
(90)	<i>nóng</i> 'hot-tempered	<i>như</i> as	<i>Trương Phi</i> Trương Phi (Zhangfei)' [extremely hot-tempered]

Tào Tháo (Cao Cao) in (89) and *Trương Phi* (Zhangfei) in (90) are both renowned literary characters in the Chinese novel *Tam quốc diễn nghĩa* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms). Zhangfei was a general of the House of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms in Chinese history. According to the record books, he was well-versed in both literary and martial arts, carrying a big frame and impressive stature, notorious for his strong moral integrity but hot temper. Cao Cao was a politician and military strategist famous during the Eastern Han Dynasty. The record books described Cao Cao as mischievous and notorious for his intense suspicion of others. When he came to fame, Cao Cao had murdered many of his loyal followers. As a result, upon his death, he ordered his subordinates to construct 72 imitation graves due to his wariness for anyone who had animosity

against him that might unearth his grave as revenge. With the provided context and the comparisons between the temperament of Zhangfei and the wary natures of Cao Cao, the Vietnamese have used these comparative images to indicate the superlative degrees of human personalities.

(ii) Comparative images from fictional or supernatural characters:

(91)	hiền 'kind	như as	Bụt Buddha' [extremely kind]	
(92)	<i>lành</i> 'gentle	<i>như</i> as	<i>Bụt</i> Buddha' [extremely gentle]	
(93)	<i>ngịch</i> 'naughty	<i>như</i> as		<i>quỷ sứ</i> 'fiend' [extremely naughty]

Bụt (Buddha) in (91) and (92) is a recurring character in Vietnamese fairy tales with magical powers, representing social equality and constantly striving to aid the weak, justice, and the eradication of evil. This explains their kind and gentle nature, as they are the embodiment of these characteristics. In superstition, *quỷ sứ* (fiend) in (93) refers to soldiers in the underworld, tasked with the torture of the souls of the guilty. *Quỷ sứ* (fiend) is also used as a reference to naughty and sinister children. In the conversational verbal communication of the Vietnamese, fiends appear in spoken language when used as a means to verbally reprehend individuals for their destructive tendencies.

(iii) Comparative images from materials, objects, phenomena, or properties:

(94)	Thật 'honest	Như as	Đếm count' [extremely honest]	
(95)	<i>hiền</i> 'kind	<i>như</i> as	<i>cục đất</i> a piece of soil' [extremely kind]	
(96)	<i>hiền</i> 'kind	<i>như</i> as	<i>phỗng đất</i> a clay statue' [extremely kind]	
(97)	<i>hiền</i> 'kind	<i>như</i> as	<i>củ khoai</i> a sweet potato' [extremely kind]	
(98)	<i>kín</i> 'discreet	<i>như</i> as	<i>bưng</i> cover' [extremely discreet]	
(99)	<i>lười</i> 'lazy	<i>như</i> as		<i>hủi</i> a leper' [extremely lazy]

Đếm (count) in (94) refers to listing ordinal numbers or calculating to know the amount from beginning to end, with a view to validating the numbers. An individual who bears the characteristics of "as honest as counting" is truthful and direct, with no dubiousness. *Cục đất* (a piece of soil) in (95) is also used to refer to matter that exists on the surface of the earth. A piece of soil cannot move itself without external or human influence. Describing one as "as kind as a piece of soil" is to depict an individual as non-confrontational and does not seek conflict with others around them, almost to the point of submissiveness. *Phỗng đất* (a clay statue) in (96) is a traditional toy of the Kinh Bắc region made from clay, also known as *đất* (argil). A traditional clay statue represents a character bearing the likeness of the Buddha, holds educational values, and reminds children of gentle and kind living standards. As a result, the comparative image of *cục đất* (a piece of soil) in (95), *phỗng đất* (a clay statue) in (96), or *củ khoai* (a sweet potato) in (97) is used to describe the superlative degree of honesty and kindness. The comparative image *hủi* (a leper) in (99) originates from the seasonings behind an individual with leprosy: being wounded in peripheral nerves, causing a lack of sensation on the skin, paralysis in certain limbs and impeding movement, convulsions, infecting limbs, and deteriorating, preventing the affected individual from engaging in labor and rendering them immobile.

Conclusion

Idioms are historical, traditional cultural artifacts that play an important role in the preservation of culture in every nation (Hanh, 2008). They are likened to encyclopedias, a reflection of material and spiritual social life. They are also formed and established together with the development of the national language and are used in mass in all aspects of social life. The research into idioms not only contributes to the specialty of the language but also

preserves cultural identity. Idioms in Vietnamese bring out the outstanding features of Vietnamese customs, culture, tradition, habit, and thinking. Idioms with comparisons are one of the most popular types of idioms, structured by three component parts: contents of comparison, connectors of comparison, and comparative images. Contents of comparison are usually explicit, and the idiomatic meanings come from comparative images, which represent the degrees of contents of comparison. For the idioms with comparisons by humans, the comparative images indicate the superlative degrees. The findings of the study show that Vietnamese perceptions of humans are expressed through idioms with comparisons in terms of emotions, appearances, states, activities, and personalities, in which idioms with comparisons by emotions take up the majority. The superlative degrees of contents of comparison indicate the unique viewpoints of Vietnamese people on the world around them through everyday experiences, conventional knowledge, and cultural reasoning. This is a staple in wet rice farming lives, conversational cultures, and especially typical traits in the personalities of Vietnamese people.

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