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**Asian Content for the World's Children**

## **Vietnamese books for children**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm so glad to be in Singapore to participate in Asian Festival of Children's Content 2011 (AFCC-2011). This is a brilliant initiative from Asian culture activists who love children. I think the content of this Festival will be an useful contribution not only to cultural activities for Asian children but also enrich the cultural life for children all over the world.

Our Vietnam has a long history of children culture. Folklores, folksongs, traditional children games and lullabies are still passing from generations to generations. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the interaction with Western culture, the “quốc ngữ” – one type of writing system that record the Vietnamese using Latin letters – has been created and is now being used formally and commonly in Vietnam. Since then, the writing literature in Vietnam has developed strongly, among which is a separated theme for children.

From 1957, with the foundation of Kim Đồng Publishing House, the first publisher for children books in Hanoi, the development of children books in Vietnam has grown quickly and vividly.

In our meeting today, I am honoured to introduce three pieces of literature which has strong Vietnamese sense and was published by Kim Dong Publishing with millions of copies and favoured by many generations of Vietnamese children.

The first piece, considered as the opening of literature for Vietnamese children, is **Diary of a cricket** from the famous writer **Tô Hoài**. The book was written since 1941, which is nearly 70 years to now, and has millions of copies in Vietnam. The book has also been translated and published in several other languages such as English, French, Russian, German, etc... This original and interesting book tells a story about an adolescent cricket. He was a vigorous, reckless and aggressive cricket. He was caught

by some children and forced to fight with other crickets as a game for the children. He learned and saw that fighting is a bad game. He then ran away and travelled to a lot of places: bog of the frogs, hay field of the dragonflies and grasshoppers, and house of ants...There he has watched a heedlessness of three girls which caused a disastrous flood for the house of ants. From the sympathy with hardship of many creatures, the Cricket wanted that all creatures in this world live in harmony and the world will become a happy place for all.

The ideology of the story was expressed vividly in the scenes of the insects' lives: the Cricket, Mantis, Longicorn, dragonflies, frogs, ants...The artistic world of the book is really a world of tropical region which is hot and humid with many ponds, bogs and flood threatening ...It totally different with the artistic world of western region with rabbits, wolves ... with Snow Queen, Arctic reindeers ... It can be said that writer Tô Hoài has contributed a Imagination Land with rich Asian colour to the artistic world for children.

Folklores with magical features, as a wish, an aspiration from weak, little people who want to reach for happiness, are always a sweet gift for children who have a lot of imagination. Writers for children in the world have always been creating new folklores to ease the pain of human society. Here I would like to introduce a new folklore '**Searching for Mother**' from writer **Nguyễn Huy Tưởng**. He is the founder and first director of Kim Đồng Publishing House. The folklore '**Searching for mother**' was written while Vietnam was still invaded and oppressed by foreign colonist. The story was about a family lived in a mountain. Bad people had made the two children lost their father and stayed away from their mother. The author named the two main characters of the book *Nhà* (means *Home*), *cô bé Gạo* (means *Rice*). The names of these two characters has stated the simple wish of Vietnamese (and may be other South East Asian at the time) which is having *home* to live and *rice* to eat. The magical character in the story is a *Louse*, a parasitic animal that live closely with poor people. Normally a louse would suck human blood. Here, the author let the Louse be on the same side with poor and weak people. The Little Louse went into the bad guy's tummy and turned him into a tiger. The magic of the folklore began from the love of the author with the children that made even animal (the *Louse*) felt moved. Love has become an extraordinary strength, a magic. The character who brought the two children to find their mother is an *Eagle*, a big bird that lives in the forest and has been made magical by author. In Vietnam, there are three types of eagle: black eagle, blue eagle in the Central Highland and white chest eagle in Côn Đảo and Phú Quốc islands. In Vietnamese literature, eagle is a symbol of strength, courage, long view and immortality. In this piece of literature, children can see a supernatural and magical image "*The Eagle's body is soft like cotton, warm like sunlight, the Eagle's voice is as clear as the sound of flute*". With this cute little folklore, writer Nguyễn Huy Tưởng has contributed to the treasure of children folklores more magical artistic image with Vietnamese breath.

When Vietnam entered the new innovating period, Vietnamese children keep pace with global culture. Characters from Andersen's fairy tales, Walt Disney cartoon, and Japanese manga such as Doraemon... have become familiar friends of Vietnamese children. The cultural exchange has motivated the writers to create from our own traditional culture. **'The adventure of Teu - the water puppet'** from writer Lê Phương Liên has been written in 2009.

Teu the water puppet is a character who play MC role in Vietnamese tradition water puppet show. It is a popular and familiar character in Vietnamese village cultural life where culture stick with rice fields, ponds and lakes. In the story, the author let Teu (who is made of wood) fight with Ma Mốc (Mould Ghost) – a kind of fungi that destroy wooden things especially in the hot and humid weather. He had an adventure to the seabed and then got lost in the place where turtle lay eggs and finally return to his sweet home - water puppet theatre. The story of Teu is accompanied with a story of two children from the central coast region who wanted to learn to perform water puppet show. The author let Teu travel and get lost as a warning about the risk of losing traditional cultural value. With the conclusion of the two children from faraway fishing village bringing Teu back to the National Water Puppet Theatre, the author wants to show the belief of keeping cultural value in the children.

In this tight schedule of the workshop, it is difficult to show hundreds of literature pieces for Vietnamese children, the stories about daily life of children which are now making the reading culture in Vietnam become effervescent.

By presenting these three pieces of literature for Vietnam children in three different time era, I would like roughly sketch out the effort of Vietnamese writer in the expression of Vietnamese culture for children. The trend of searching, realizing and praising the original beauty with strong local characteristics is now being emphasized more and more in the writing for children in Vietnam.

In the global development and harmonization nowadays, children in city area have easy access to books and different cultures. With the development of internet, the culture blending is becoming wider and deeper. The world would, however, be monotonous if there are only strong cultures from developed country with strong publishing industry all over the world. There are still many children from poor regions who have not got simple wishes satisfied. They are lack of books to read, especially books that are suitable for children life and soul. I hope that from such meeting like this, writers, illustrators, publishers for Asian children will have more motivation for new creation to bring happiness for children in our own countries, and also a contribution to the joy of children in the world.

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