



Cây tre

It is a plant with multiple use in Vietnam. Thanks to this plant, everything is possible in a country where nothing is easy, and where the people will not let any obstacles reject or stop them. It is the plant that lulls the life of a Vietnamese from the cradle to the tomb. Once deceased, the body of the dead person rests upon a tray made of bamboo. In a somewhat humoristic manner, **J.C. Pomonti**, a specialist in matters on Asia, has often labeled our civilization in his index of **Le Monde** newspaper as "the bamboo civilization" or "the chopsticks civilization". It is true that there are only four countries in Asia that make up this civilization (China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam). But in Vietnam, the culture of the bamboo is very significant. The bamboo is quoted in poetry, as well as in proverbs and folks songs.

*Friend, enjoy your life now before you become too old
The bamboo has only one growth and man has only one life
Let's enjoy springtime before it goes away
Otherwise old age will catch us on its way*

The bamboo

It is also said in Vietnamese:

Tre già làm sao uốn

Difficult to bend a bamboo when it is old

to remind parents that it is easier to educate their children in their tender age as it is harder to do it when they grow older. In the old days, Vietnamese people used this hollow, lightweight, and sturdy wood to build partitions, fences several meters high to protect their village against robbers. In the village, bamboo gives you everything. It provides the whole house; timber for walls, partitions and floors are made of slats of bamboo. Everything in the house is made with this hollow wood (furniture, beds, tables, various accessories, etc...) even drinking glass. Split into thin strips, it is used to weave ropes and strings. One makes use of the filament of bamboo called kelates to make baskets of any kind for transport as well as the conic hat to provide shelter from rain and the sun. One knows how to make good use of this wood to create usual tools (the water bucket, the smoking pipe etc...). Bamboo also provides food for animals and even to the villagers, who eat as asparagus, the most tender bamboo shoots.

Even the roots of this hollow wood, unearthed and dried in the sun for entire weeks, would be used at the approach of Tet as firewood to cook sweet rice cakes, or to provide heat during the cold winter months in north and central Vietnam. The bamboo becomes thus something "sacred", intimate, and peculiar to the village. It is thanks to the hedges made with this plant that the Vietnamese village finds its tranquility and intimacy as well as its traditions and virtues. Bamboo thus becomes the guardian angel of the villagers. That is why it is said in a Vietnamese proverb that:

The King's authority stops at the gate of the village's bamboo hedge.

Phép vua thua lệ làng

It is also why nowadays this incomparable plant that facilitated our lives for so long can only be found in the village. The bamboo and the village are so closely dependent that a comparison is made of a man followed by his shadow. That is why one finds this evocation every now and then in the Vietnamese poetry. Every Vietnamese probably has that feeling on his or her passage to his or her native village through the following four verses:

*Thì bao nhiêu cảnh mơ màng,
Hiện ra khi thoáng cổng làng trông tre*

**One's dream becomes reality
Upon seeing the village's gate among the bamboo trees**

*Dừng bước nơi đây lòng ngổn ngang,
Ngùi trông về Bắc, nhớ tre làng.*

**As I stop here, a feeling of disorientation falls upon my heart
Forlornly looking north, I begin to miss the bamboo hedge of my village.**

To find the bamboo is to find the village.
That is why

the bamboo becomes the representative symbol of Vietnam.

