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FOUR-SYLLABLE IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS  
IN VIETNAMESE

by

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*The Editors*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	111
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1. Historical Trends	1
2. Criteria for Selection	2
3. Classification	2
4. Grammatical Functions	3
5. Conclusion	4
Table 1: Internal Structure of Four-Syllable Idiomatic Expressions	3
<i>Notes</i>	5
Group 1 Predicate: Transitive Verb; Direct Object: Noun	7
Group 2 Head: Noun; Modifier: Adjective	18
Group 3 Head: Noun; Modifier: Noun	25
Group 4 Subject: Noun; Predicate: Verb	31
Group 5 Determiner: Numeral; Head: Noun	36
Group 6 Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Adjective	39
Group 7 Modifier: Adjective; Head: Noun	42
Group 8 Head: Adjective; Modifier: Noun or Verb	45
Group 9 Predicate: Transitive Verb; Direct Object: Nominalised Adjective	47

	<i>Page</i>
Group 10 Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Verb	49
Group 11 Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Noun	51
Group 12 Head: Noun; Modifier: Verb	53
Group 13 Relator: Time Expression; Head: Noun	55
Group 14 Determiner: Numeral; Head: Verb	57
Group 15 Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Adverb	58
Group 16 Predicate: Verb; Location Complement: Adverb	59
Group 17 Head: Noun; Modifier: Indefinite Article	60

70	Group 10: Verb; Inner Complement; Verb
71	Group 11: Verb; Manner Complement; Noun
72	Group 12: Verb; Modifier; Verb
73	Group 13: Verb; Time Expression; Noun
74	Group 14: Noun; Number; Verb
75	Group 15: Verb; Manner Complement; Adverb
76	Group 16: Verb; Location Complement; Adverb
77	Group 17: Verb; Modifier; Modifier; Verb

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. HISTORICAL TRENDS

Vietnamese literature can be divided generally into four periods from its beginning to the present. Each period is marked by distinct characteristics:

- (1) an oral literature composed of folk songs,<sup>1</sup> dictions, proverbs, and fairy tales transmitted and enriched from one generation to another;<sup>2</sup>
- (2) an essentially Confucianistic,<sup>3</sup> Buddhistic,<sup>4</sup> and Taoistic kind of literature written in Chinese characters;<sup>5</sup>
- (3) a regional literature, freed from the scholastic Chinese influence and including masterpieces written in "nôm", or demotic characters;<sup>6</sup>
- (4) finally, a truly national literature, using the romanised alphabet or "quốc-ngữ",<sup>7</sup> which is coloured in both style and thinking<sup>8</sup> by influences from the western world.

In all of the four literary periods, and also in modern spoken Vietnamese, there has been a strong tendency toward using a two-two syllable rhythm.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Vietnamese syllables<sup>10</sup> are usually grouped in two-two rhythmic groups. This tendency has been crystallised into poetic norms of four-syllable lines.

The folkloric literary period produced many folk songs, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions of four-syllable lines. The following folk song is an example.

Lạy Trời mưa xuống,	<i>I pray for the rain to fall,</i>
Lạy nước tôi uống,	<i>So that I may have water to drink,</i>
Lạy ruộng tôi cày,	<i>Rice fields to plow,</i>
Lạy cơm bát đày,	<i>Full rice bowls (to eat),</i>
Lạy khúc cá to.	<i>And big slices of fish.</i>

The second period was heavily influenced in both form and content by Chinese poets and philosophers.<sup>11</sup> It is well known that combinations

of four syllables have been a favoured feature in Chinese writings since the beginning of Chinese literature. A classic example of this fact is the *Shi Jing* (Kinh Thư, or *Book of Songs*) by Confucius, which was written almost entirely in four-syllable lines. The influence of the *Shi Jing* on both Chinese and Vietnamese writing cannot be overemphasised. Until very recently, Chinese and Vietnamese students were required to memorise such classics, making them an integral part of their literary expression. In Chinese literature, four-syllable expressions, often constructed with parallelism and symbolism, can be traced to early times, as, for instance, to the Han or Tang dynasties. The same literary form is often found in Vietnamese poems and is called Tứ-Tuyệt (*perfect four-syllable form*).

Eugene Ching<sup>12</sup> gives psychological reasons for this fondness for parallelism. He writes: "Chinese architecture, interior decoration, landscaping, and many other aspects show that the Chinese culture is traditionally in favor of symmetric structure." The same can be said about traditional Vietnamese culture. From this symmetry and parallelism, the Vietnamese, probably while imitating the Chinese, developed an intellectual pastime called "câu đối" (*pairing sentences*).<sup>13</sup> For example, one may match "Bên dưới có sông" (*on the lower side, there is a river*) with "Bên trên có núi" (*on the upper side, there is a mountain*). There are many contrasting pairs like this in Vietnamese. Four-syllable idiomatic constructions are, to a large degree, constructed in this way.

## 2. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Four-syllable idiomatic expressions are very common in Vietnamese. They are frequently used in ordinary conversation as well as in sophisticated literary writings. An indication of sophistication has always been that a person can quote, in a speech or writing, tetra-syllabic sayings and idiomatic expressions.

There are probably over three thousand four-syllable idiomatic expressions known to traditionally educated Vietnamese. The 825 expressions listed here were selected either because they are fairly well known to the average Vietnamese or because of their particular content. They are presented in the hope that, as ready-made, idiomatic expressions in common use, they will prove useful to students of Vietnamese and of interest to cultural anthropologists and linguists.

## 3. CLASSIFICATION

The selected 825 four-syllable idiomatic expressions may be classified, according to their internal structure, into 17 groups as shown in



Table 1. These expressions are interlocking grammatical constructions in that syllables 1 and 3 are of the same part of speech and have the same grammatical function, while syllables 2 and 4 are likewise similar both in nature and function. In the following table only the function and nature of syllables 1 and 2 are given, because syllables 3 and 4 reflect syllables 1 and 2. For example, the first group listed in the table should be interpreted as follows: the 1st and 3rd syllables have the function of a predicate, and each is a transitive verb; the 2nd and 4th syllables have the function of a direct object, and each is a noun.

The expressions in group 7, which have the non-Vietnamese word order of adjective modifier and noun head, are clearly of Chinese origin. The expressions in all other groups may be of either Chinese or pure Vietnamese origin.

Table 1  
INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF FOUR-SYLLABLE IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

GROUP	INTERNAL STRUCTURE	N.E.
1	Predicate: Transitive Verb; Direct Object: Noun	187
2	Head: Noun; Modifier: Adjective	130
3	Head: Noun; Modifier: Noun	98
4	Subject: Noun; Predicate: Verb	85
5	Determiner: Numeral; Head: Noun	46
6	Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Adjective	45
7	Modifier: Adjective; Head: Noun	41
8	Head: Adjective; Modifier: Noun or Verb	36
9	Predicate: Transitive Verb; Direct Object: Nominalised Adjective	27
10	Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Verb	26
11	Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Noun	21
12	Head: Noun; Modifier: Verb	21
13	Relator: Time Expression; Head: Noun	20
14	Determiner: Numeral; Head: Verb	17
15	Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Adverb	11
16	Predicate: Verb; Location Complement: Adverb	7
17	Head: Noun; Modifier: Indefinite Article	7

N.E. = Number of Expressions

#### 4. GRAMMATICAL FUNCTIONS

The four-syllable expressions, no matter what their internal structure, can be used in various positions in a Vietnamese sentence. They

occur in all clause-type matrices. The following examples show the versatility of the four-syllable expressions in the clause matrix.

#### 4.1. As subject in various clause types

##### a. Equational clause

Bất lỗi bắt phải hoài không tốt.

*It is no good to point out all the time what is good or bad  
(in other persons).*

##### b. Intransitive active clause

Aó lụa quần là như anh mới đi được chớ.

*Silk dress, crepe pants like you can go thus.  
(One can go only if one is as rich as you are.)*

#### 4.2. As different types of predicate in various clause types

##### a. Equational identificative predicate

Anh ấy, tiền rừng bạc biển.

*That man, money (as) forest, bills (as) ocean.  
(He is very rich.)*

##### b. Active intransitive predicate

Anh ấy đi không về rồi.

*That man go negative, come back already.  
(He went but was unsuccessful.)*

##### c. Submissive passive predicate

Anh ấy bị họ ăn tươi nuốt sống.

*That man be they eat fresh swallow alive.  
(He was maltreated by them.)*

#### 4.3. As manner complement

Anh ấy đi làm việc chăn đơn gối chiếc nơi xa-xôi.

*That man go work single foot, lone pillow in remote place.  
(He went to work alone in a faraway place.)*

## 5. CONCLUSION

There is a great deal of variety in the form, structure, and function of the four-syllable idiomatic expressions in larger grammatical constructions. A careful study of them will provide the student of Vietnamese with more insight into the morphology<sup>15</sup> and syntax of the language, and will also give valuable information about the culture. It is hoped that the student will find these sayings challenging, and that

learning many of them will make him more versatile in his linguistic abilities, providing at the same time a deeper understanding of the Vietnamese people.

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#### NOTES

1. See Nguyễn Đăng Liêm, "Vietnamese Folk Songs", *Hemisphere* 12, No.7 (July 1968):32-34.
2. See Nguyễn Đăng Liêm, ed., *Vietnamese Culture Reader*, mimeographed (Honolulu: Asia Training Center, 1968), to be published.
3. See Bửu Dương, *The Confucian Tradition in the History of Vietnamese Education* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1958).
4. See Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., *The Path of the Buddha* (New York: Ronald Press, 1956).
5. See Vũ Tam Ích, "A Historical Survey of Educational Developments in Vietnam", *Bulletin of the Bureau of School Service* (University of Kentucky) 32, No.2 (December 1959):1-135.
6. See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, "Chữ Nôm, the Demotic System of Writing in Vietnam", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (1959):270-4.
7. See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, *Quốc Ngữ: The Modern Writing System in Vietnam* (Washington D.C., 1955).
8. For a study of cultural influence in Vietnam from the outside world, see Gerald C. Hickey, *The Study of a Vietnamese Rural Community - Sociology*, mimeographed (Saigon: Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, 1960).
9. For a study of Vietnamese tones and intonation, see Aurélie Hương Mai Trần, *Stress, Tones and Intonation in South Vietnamese* (Ph.D. diss., The Australian National University, 1969).
10. For a statistical study on Vietnamese syllables, see Nguyễn Đăng Liêm, "Phonemic Sequences in Vietnamese", *Zeitschrift für Phonetik, Sprachwissenschaft, und Kommunikationsforschung* 20, No.4 (1967):325-34.

11. See William T. De Bary *et al.*, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).
12. "Four-Syllable Expressions in Chinese", *Project on Linguistic Analysis*, vol.7 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1964), pp.1-62.
13. See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, "Parallel Constructions in Vietnamese", *Lingua* 15 (1965):125-39.
14. For a grammatical description of Vietnamese, see Laurence C. Thompson, *A Vietnamese Grammar* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), or Nguyễn Đăng Liêm, *Vietnamese Grammar: A Combined Tagmemic and Transformational Approach* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, C4, 1969).
15. See David D. Thomas, "On Defining the 'Word' in Vietnamese", *Văn-Hóa Nguyệt-San* (Saigon) II (1962):519-23, or Laurence C. Thompson, "The Problem of the Word in Vietnamese", *Word* 19 (1963):39-52. Four-syllable expressions, according to their grammatical function in larger linguistic units, could, to some extent, be considered as "words".

## Group 1 - 187

Predicate: Transitive Verb; Direct Object: Noun

1. *Ái chủng hợp quần* *Love for the race, sociability; sociable person*
2. *Ái nam ái nữ* *Love male, love female; hermaphrodite*
3. *An bản lạc đạo* *Content with poverty, enjoying naturalism; to be content with one's fate*
4. *An cư lạc nghiệp* *To live peacefully, to work joyfully*
5. *An phận thủ thường* *To be content with one's fate, to preserve one's routine*
6. *An tâm an dạ* *To have one's spirit and mind in peace*
7. *An thổ trọng thiên* *To rely upon the earth and the sky; fatalism, laziness*
8. *Ăn bơ làm biếng* *To love and be lazy (lazy man)*
9. *Ăn cơm đá bát* *Fig.: to eat rice but receive nothing (to do good but receive evil)*
10. *Ăn cháo đá bát* *To eat soup and kick the bowl; to be ungrateful*
11. *Ăn dưa ăn muối* *To eat cucumbers, to eat salt; to have a poor diet*
12. *Ăn ốc nói mò* *Fig.: eat as a snail, speak blindly; to speak of things one does not know*
13. *Áp đầu gối tay* *Fig.: to speak, conjugal intimacy (head covered, arm for pillow)*
14. *Âu lộ vô cơ* *To neglect world affairs in order to enjoy the company of seagulls and herons*
15. *Bạ ai vớ nấy* *To take what drops down in one's hand; to be friendly with the first person encountered*
16. *Bạc tình phụ nghĩa* *To be ungrateful, deny loyalty*

17. Bạc thần khinh ngôn *To be talkative and to speak incautiously*
18. Bài nạn tức tranh *To eradicate bad things and to stop disagreements*
19. Bại phong thương hóa *To corrupt the customs, harm ethics*
20. Bại tục đồi phong *To corrupt the customs, corrupted customs*
21. Bày binh bố trận *To display troops, to plan the battle; to display*
22. Bày điều đặt chuyện *To invent items, to create topics; to lie*
23. Bày lời xen hoa *To invent things that don't exist*
24. Bày mưu định kế *To plot, to plan ruses*
25. Bày mưu lập mẹo *To set a snare, to play a trick*
26. Bành da xé thịt *To open the skin, to tear up the flesh; to wound savagely*
27. Bán tròn nuôi miệng *To sell the backside to feed the mouth; to prostitute oneself*
28. Bán vợ dợ con *To sell one's wife, to enslave one's child; no other resource, complete poverty*
29. Bật sơn củ dĩnh *To lift mountains and big pots; to be very strong*
30. Bất lỗi bất phải *To point out what is bad and what is good*
31. Bấm bụng quyết lòng *To pinch one's stomach, to make up one's mind; to be content with less than one expected*
32. Bẻ hành bẻ tỏi *To pick onion, to pick garlic; to criticise people for small imperfections*
33. Bẻ nõ lìa tơ *To pick buds, separate young things; to depart*
34. Bế môn tỏa cảng *To close doors and entries; isolationism*
35. Biên phòng tịch ký *Fig.: to mortgage*

36. Bới lông tìm vết *To search for a small defect under the plumage; to look for minute defects*
37. Đồn tro đãi trấu *To preserve ashes, to sort out the rice husks; avarice*
38. Bỏ phong tróc ảnh *To catch the wind and the shadow; i.e. that which is impossible*
39. Buôn mây bán gió *To buy clouds, sell wind; risky commerce*
40. Buôn thần bán thánh *To buy idols, sell saints; simony*
41. Cải ác tùng thiện *To abandon bad behaviour; to adopt good behaviour*
42. Cấm chợ ngăn sông *To forbid marketing, to block rivers; isolationism*
43. Cầm cân nảy mực *To handle the scale, to use ink; to direct, to give directions or rules*
44. Cầm phòng tuần tráp *To take care of a room, to guard crates; to serve someone*
45. Cẩn răng bóp bụng *To keep one's teeth tight, to squeeze one's belly; to keep quiet, to be silent*
46. Cầu mây khẩn gió *To pray to the clouds, beg the wind; to run after fruitless things*
47. Cày mây cuốc gió *Flow clouds, hoe the wind; free life in the open air*
48. Cậy thế cậy thần *To rely upon strong position; saintly power*
49. Co đầu rút cổ *To bow one's head, to cringe; to be timid*
50. Cố công cùng sức *To make efforts, exhaust one's strength*
51. Coi gió bỏ buồm *To observe the wind in order to hoist the sails*
52. Cởi lòng phơi ruột *To unveil one's heart, to expose one's bowels; to reveal one's innermost concepts*

53. Chặn ngõ đón truông      *To bar the way, to close the path;  
to obstruct someone's opportunity*
54. Chắp cánh liền cành      *To put on wings, to link branches;  
to give someone a start*
55. Chỉ non thề biển      *To point to the mountain, to swear  
upon the sea; to vow*
56. Chia lòng chia trí      *To divide the heart, to divide the  
mind; to be absent-minded*
57. Chia yên rẽ túy      *To divide ducks and essences; to  
separate a couple*
58. Chiêu binh mãi mã      *To recruit troops, to buy horses;  
to prepare for war*
59. Chiêu hiền đãi sĩ      *To welcome sages, to honour scholars*
60. Chọc trời khuấy nước      *To tickle the sky, to stir up water;  
to be very powerful*
61. Chọn đá thử vàng      *To select stones in order to test  
the gold, evaluate the gold  
content; to test*
62. Chôn nhao cắt rún      *To bury the placenta, to cut the  
umbilical cord; birthplace*
63. Chơi trăng thưởng nguyệt      *To enjoy the moon; to return to  
nature*
64. Chửi chó mắng mèo      *To swear at dogs, to curse cats;  
to curse someone by disparaging  
his animals*
65. Day tay nắm miệng      *Trembling hands, clenched mouth;  
to be angry*
66. Dắt lối đưa đường      *To conduct and show the way*
67. Dập liễu vùi hoa      *To bury the willow, to destroy the  
flower; to assault a girl*
68. Di tình thích tính      *To like one's behaviour and character*
69. Dĩ ân báo oán      *To receive good and return evil*
70. Dĩ công đại chúng      *To replace free distribution by  
individual labour*
71. Dĩ độc chế độc      *To use one poison to neutralise  
another*



72. Dĩ đức báo đức *To return good for good received*
73. Dĩ đức báo oán *To return good for evil received*
74. Dĩ huệ trừ oán *To use kindness to calm anger*
75. Dĩ huyết tẩy huyết *To use blood to clean blood; an eye for an eye*
76. Dĩ lộ đồng qui *To arrive at the same aim by different ways*
77. Dĩ oán báo oán *To return evil for evil received*
78. Dịch tục di phong *To change the customs*
79. Dĩ thân dịch vật *To make oneself a slave of material things*
80. Dở ngô dở khoai *To be half corn, half potato; cannot determine what it is*
81. Dời non tát bể *To move mountains and dry up seas; accomplish impossible task*
82. Dựng vợ gả chồng *To marry off one's children*
83. Đánh nam dẹp bắc *To fight in the South, to pacify the North*
84. Đánh trống động chuông *To beat drums, to ring bells; to overpublicise*
85. Đặng cá quên nôm *To get the fish, to forget the trap; to be ungrateful*
86. Đặng chim bẻ nỏ *To get the bird, to destroy the crossbow; to be ungrateful*
87. Đặng vợ mất chồng *To obtain the wife, to lose the husband; it is not wise to interfere in a family's discussion*
88. Điều binh khiển tướng *To give orders to troops and officers*
89. Định đôi gả lúa *To match a couple, to marry off one's children*
90. Đọc sách ngâm thơ *To read books, to recite poetry; to be a scholar*
91. Đội trời đạp đất *To carry the sky in one's hand, to stamp the earth with one's feet; to live*

92. Đơm hoa kết quả *To bear flowers, to form fruit; to get results*
93. Được voi đòi tiên *To receive an elephant, to ask for an angel; to ask for too much*
94. Ép liễu nài hoa *To squeeze the willow, to insist upon the flower; to violate a girl*
95. Ganh hiên ghét ngõ *To hate veranda and gate; to hate somebody, to envy somebody*
96. Ghẹo nguyệt trêu hoa *To kid the moon and the flower; to court a girl*
97. Giành trâu cướp ruộng *To fight over buffaloes, to steal rice fields; to take by force*
98. Giấu đầu lòi đuôi *To hide the head and show the tail; to unsuccessfully hide something*
99. Giữ vàng giữ ngọc *To preserve gold and pearls; to preserve one's chastity*
100. Giồi phấn thoa son *To put on powder and lipstick, to make up; to hide imperfections*
101. Giục ngựa buông cương *To speed up the horse, to loosen the reins; to hurry*
102. Hải mận bẻ đào *To pluck pears and peaches; to violate a girl*
103. Hao binh tổn tướng *To lose troops and officers; to waste*
104. Hao tài tổn của *To lose money and property; to waste money*
105. Hẹn ngọc thề vàng *To swear upon pearls and gold; to vow*
106. Hờn duyên tủi phận *To hate one's fate, to be ashamed of one's destiny*
107. Kết cỏ ngậm vành *To weave grass holding the edge in the mouth, to form the hem; to be grateful*
108. Kết tóc xe tơ *To tie up hair, to bind up silk; to get married*
109. Kết thù gây oán *To crystallise hatred, to create animosity; to make enemies*

110. Khai đường mở lối      *To open a road and thoroughfare;  
to begin something*
111. Khai hoa nở nhụy      *To flower, to develop stamens; to  
give birth to a child*
112. Khi cụ nghinh tân      *To look down upon the old, to  
over-welcome the new*
113. Khua môi múa mồm      *To move lips, to manipulate the  
mouth; to talk too much*
114. Lắc đầu tác lưỡi      *To shake one's head, to cluck one's  
tongue; to show one's discontent-  
ment, discouragement*
115. Lấy mặt làm trái      *To turn the right side into the left  
side; to distort*
116. Lấy ơn làm oán      *To return bad for good; to be  
ungrateful*
117. Liệt đá vá trời      *To throw boulders, to mend the sky;  
impossible task*
118. Liều thân hoại thể      *To sacrifice the body, to ruin the  
body; to commit suicide*
119. Long trời lở đất      *To shake the sky, to erode the earth;  
terrible*
120. Lừa thầy phản bạn      *To cheat teachers, to betray friends*
121. Mang râu đội mũ      *To put on a beard, to wear a hat;  
to play a role*
122. Mơ hoa tưởng nguyệt      *To dream of flowers, to think of the  
moon; to think of the impossible*
123. Mua lòng bán thịt      *To buy entrails, to sell meat*
124. Nâng khăn sửa tóc      *Fig.: to elevate one's turban, to  
prepare a suitcase; to take care  
of one's husband*
125. Ném đá giấu tay      *To throw rocks, to hide one's hands*
126. Ngăn sông cách núi      *To cut off rivers, to separate  
mountains; to separate two spouses,  
two lovers, to be separated*
127. Ngâm hoa vịnh nguyệt      *To read poems glorifying flowers and  
the moon; to return to nature*

128. Ngắm trăng thưởng nguyệt *To admire the moon, to enjoy the moon; to return to nature*
129. Phản dân hại nước *To betray the people, to do harm to the country*
130. Phò vua giúp nước *To assist the king, to help the country*
131. Quất ngựa ra roi *To whip the horse, to take out the whip*
132. Quấy hôi bôi lọ *To stir up a stench, to blacken with soot; to humiliate*
133. Rào đường rấp ngõ *To fence off roads, to close entries*
134. Soi gương đánh phấn *To look at a mirror, to put on powder; to make up*
135. Soi đường dẫn lối *To light up the road, to show the way*
136. Sơn son thếp vàng *To paint red, to sculpt with gold*
137. Tạo thiên lập địa *To create the sky, to form the earth; the beginning*
138. Tìm hoa vấn nguyệt *To search for flowers, to ask the moon; to see a girl and talk to her*
139. Tìm tiên học đạo *To search for sages, to study religion*
140. Tích cốc phòng cơ *To preserve grains, to avert bad events; to be prudent*
141. Tô son điểm phấn *To put on lipstick, to put on powder; to make up*
142. Tống cựu nghinh tân *To say farewell to the old, to welcome the new*
143. Tu binh mã mã *To improve troops, to buy horses; to prepare for a war*
144. Tu nhơn tích đức *To improve oneself, to accumulate moral qualities*
145. Tu tâm dưỡng tánh *To improve one's heart, to improve one's character*
146. Tụng kinh gõ mõ *To say prayers, to beat the gong; to observe religious practices*

147. Tùy cơ ứng biến *To observe circumstances (in order to) modify accordingly*
148. Tham công tiếc việc *To be greedy for citations, to be reluctant to do work*
149. Tham đó bỏ dăng *To be greedy for a floating fish trap, to neglect a stationary fish trap; to be frivolous*
150. Tham quyền cố vị *To be greedy for power, to strengthen one's position*
151. Tháo cũi xổ lồng *To open a kennel, to free from a cage; to free oneself*
152. Thay bậc đổi ngôi *To change one's social rank, to replace one's role*
153. Thay dạ đổi lòng *To change stomach, replace bowels; to change one's sentiment*
154. Thay hình đổi dạng *To change one's appearance, to disguise*
155. Thay hồn đổi xác *To change soul, to transform body; to become different*
156. Thay xiêm đổi áo *To get changed, to change clothing; to change*
157. Theo chân nối gót *To follow in one's footsteps*
158. Thề non hẹn biển *To swear upon mountains, to promise upon seas; to vow*
159. Thêm mắm dặm muối *Fig.: to add preserved fish and salt; to invent details*
160. Thi tài đua sức *To compete for talent and force*
161. Thờ cha kính mẹ *To worship the father, to respect the mother*
162. Thù ân báo oán *To return evil for good*
163. Tranh danh đoạt lợi *To usurp fame, to plunder profit*
164. Tranh lèo gặt giải *To compete for awards*
165. Tranh quyền cướp nước *To usurp power, to plunder a country*
166. Trao thân gửi phận *To give one's body and destiny into someone else's hands; to get married (for a girl)*

167. Trêu hoa ghẹo nguyệt      *To tease flowers, to bother the moon; to court a girl*
168. Trọng nghĩa khinh tài      *To respect moral virtues, to disregard riches*
169. Trốn chúa lộn chồng      *To run away from the lord, to confuse the husband; to be unfaithful (for a wife)*
170. Trốn sưu lậu thuế      *To dodge taxes*
171. Trợn mắt phùng mang      *To round one's eyes, to puff out one's cheeks; to show one's anger*
172. Trù cha hại mẹ      *To curse the father, to harm the mother*
173. Trù mưu tính kế      *To plan a strategy, to project a scheme*
174. Truyền tử lưu tôn      *To transmit to sons, to retransmit to grandsons*
175. Vạch lá tìm sâu      *To uncover leaves to search for worms; to look for minute details*
176. Van công khẩn nợ      *To beg for merit, to ask for postponement in paying one's debt*
177. Vay mật trả gừng      *To borrow honey and pay back ginger*
178. Vấn tổ tầm tông      *To retrace the family line, to make inquiries about one's ancestors*
179. Vẽ rắn vẽ rồng      *To draw snakes and dragons; to make up details*
180. Vong ân bội nghĩa      *Ungrateful, thankless*
181. Vu oan giá họa      *To calumniate, to slander*
182. Vung phân tưới nước      *To spread fertilizer, to irrigate, to provide fully*
183. Xả thân cầu đạo      *To sacrifice one's body, to search for religion; to enter a religious order*
184. Xây thành đắp lũy      *To build citadels, to construct fortifications*
185. Xo vai rút cổ      *To hunch one's shoulders, to draw in one's neck; timid*

186. Xoe tơ kết tóc

*To bind silk, to weave hair; to  
get married*

187. Xôi kinh nấu sử

*To boil a book, to cook history;  
to study hard*

## Group 2 - 130

Head: Noun; Modifier: Adjective

1. Áo lụa quần là *Silk dress, crepe pants; well dressed, rich*
2. Binh hùng tướng mạnh *Strong troops, powerful officers; strong army*
3. Biển cạn non mòn *Dry sea, corroded mountain; eternal vows*
4. Biển rộng trời cao *Wide ocean, high sky; open space, great opportunity*
5. Bướm lả ong lơ *Incontinent butterflies and bees; loose morality*
6. Canh tàn khắc lậu *Time flies*
7. Cây cao bóng mát *Tall tree, refreshing shade; good place, opportune situation*
8. Cỏ rậm rừng hoang *Thick grass, savage forest; wild area*
9. Con hiền dâu thảo *Pious son, virtuous daughter-in-law; good family*
10. Con thảo cháu hiền *Pious child, virtuous grandchild; good family*
11. Con thơ vợ dại *Young child, inexperienced wife; i.e. situation of a man who has a heavy family duty*
12. Cờ gian bạc lận *To cheat at gambling, to cheat*
13. CƠM CAO GẠO KÉM *Expensive cooked rice, scarce uncooked rice; high cost of living*
14. CƠM LÀNH CANH NGON *Healthy rice, tasty soup; i.e. harmony in family*
15. CƠM THỪA CÁ CẶN *Scraps of rice and fish; scraps of food, impoverished situation*
16. CƠM TRẮNG CÁ TƯƠI *White rice, fresh fish; good food*
17. CỬA ÍT LÒNG NHIỀU *Little thing, big heart; small offerings but with lots of goodheartedness*



18. Cửa cao nhà rộng *High door, large house; rich*
19. Cha già con muộn *Old father, late child*
20. Cha hiền con thảo *Sage father, pious son; well-educated family*
21. Cha lú chú khôn *Stupid father, intelligent uncle; to have a relative to get advice from*
22. Chân đơn gối chiếc *Single foot, lone pillow; to be lonely*
23. Chồng chung vợ chạ *Husbands and wives in common; polyandry, loose sexual behaviour*
24. Chồng khéo vợ khôn *Skilful husband, intelligent wife; well-matched couple*
25. Chơn lấm tay bùn *Dirty foot, muddy head; hard-working people*
26. Chơn mềm tay yếu *Soft foot, weak hand; physically weak, the fairer sex*
27. Chơn ướt chơn ráo *Wet foot, dry foot; inexperienced, new in the profession or situation*
28. Chức trọng quyền cao *Important job, great authority; very important people*
29. Da nhăn má cốp *Shrunken skin, hollow cheeks; old age or marks of hardship*
30. Danh chánh ngôn thuận *Correct address, proper speech; correctness, equity in speech*
31. Dao to búa lớn *Big knife, large hammer; i.e. dangerous person*
32. Đất lạ trời xa *Strange land, faraway sky; strange area, unfamiliar place*
33. Đất rộng trời cao *Wide land, high sky; great opportunity*
34. Đầu bù tóc rối *Tangled hair; sloppy appearance*
35. Đầu đen máu đỏ *Black head, red blood; countrymen*
36. Đầu râu tóc bạc *Head with beard, white hair; age, experience*
37. Đầu tặc mặt tối *Dirty head, dark face; hard-working people*

38. Đầu xanh tuổi trẻ      *Green head, young age; youth, inexperience*
39. Điều nặng tiếng nhẹ      *Strong cause, weak argument; arguments*
40. Đồng khô cỏ cháy      *Dried field, burnt grass; poor area*
41. Gan bầm ruột héo      *Dried liver, wilted intestines; very sad*
42. Gan đục lòng trong      *Troubled liver, clear heart; intricacies of human sentiment*
43. Gối chiếc chăn đơn      *Lone pillow, single blanket; loneliness*
44. gừng cay muối mặn      *Peppery hot ginger, salty salt; hard realities of life*
45. Giấy trắng mực đen      *White paper, black ink; irrefutable proof*
46. Gió lặng sóng êm      *The wind stops, the waves are calm; peace*
47. Hoa tàn nhụy úa      *Wilted flower, yellowing stamens; old age*
48. Hoa thải hương thừa      *Discarded flower, unwanted perfume; woman with questionable past*
49. Hoa thơm cỏ lạ      *Fragrant flower, foreign grass; newness, exoticism*
50. Hương phai phấn lạt      *Vanished perfume, faded powder; age, lack of freshness*
51. Hương tàn khói lạnh      *Withered incense, cold smoke; the forgotten dead*
52. Khố rách áo ôm      *Torn shorts, torn dress; poor, poverty*
53. Liễu yếu đào thơ      *Weak willow, young peach tree; young girl*
54. Lòng ngay dạ thẳng      *Straight intestines, straight stomach; frankness, innocence*
55. Lời nặng tiếng nhẹ      *Heavy word, light voice; arguments*
56. Lưng dài vai rộng      *Long back, wide shoulder; physical strength*
57. Lưng mỏi gối dưng      *Tired back, shrunken knee; exhausted*

58. Lương cao bổng hậu *High salary, good benefits; good job*
59. Ma thiêng nước độc *Powerful ghosts, contaminated water; highlands*
60. Mai gầy liễu yếu *Thin willow, weak cherry tree; young girl*
61. Mắt lờ tai điếc *Dull eye, deaf ear; to be old, to ignore*
62. Mặt búng da chì *Flabby face, dark skin; ugliness*
63. Mặt dặng mày dày *Thickened face, hardened eyebrows; ashamed*
64. Mặt to tai lớn *Big face, long ear; powerful*
65. Mâm cao cỗ đầy *Full food tray, heavy load of food; feast, treat*
66. Mẹ góa con côi *Mother widowed, child orphan; death of the father*
67. Mẹ tròn con vuông *Round mother, square child; mother and child both healthy*
68. Mảnh gầy mặt võ *Thin body, exhausted face; emaciated*
69. Mảnh trần thân trụ *Naked body; impoverished, complete poverty*
70. Mộ xiêu mã lạnh *Tilted gravestone, quiet tomb; forgotten dead*
71. Mộ yên mã đẹp *Peaceful tomb, beautiful gravestone; well-worshipped ancestors*
72. Môi hở răng lạnh *Fig.: defenseless, imminent danger, the peril is big*
73. Môn dương hộ đối *Family of the same social rank*
74. Mưa đại gió mai *Wild rain, northwest wind; unexpected circumstances*
75. Mưa sầu gió thảm *Sad rain, dramatic wind; sad circumstances*
76. Mưa thuận gió hảo *Favourable rain, good wind; favourable circumstances*
77. Năm cùng tháng tận *Ending year, finishing month; hopeless*

78. Năm vận tháng hạn      *Year of bad luck, dry month; bad circumstances*
79. Nắng dài mưa dầu      *Burning sunshine, rain of oil; unbearable hardships*
80. Niên tráng lực cường      *The healthy years, powerful strength; youth and strength*
81. Non bồng nước nhược      *Light mountain, weak water; weak country*
82. Non cao bể rộng      *High mountain, wide sea; difficulties*
83. Non xanh nước biếc      *Blue mountain, dark blue water; natural beauty*
84. Ngọc tốt vàng ròng      *Good pearl, pure gold; pure virgin girl*
85. Người đưng nước lạ      *Foreign people, strange country; foreign land*
86. Người no kẻ đói      *Sated people, hungry people; inequality in life*
87. Người khôn kẻ dại      *Intelligent people, stupid masses (some are intelligent)*
88. Người phải kẻ quấy      *Right people, wrong people; the human race*
89. Người phàm mắt tục      *Mortal being, abject eye; the mortals, this world*
90. Người sang kẻ hèn      *Rich people, poor people; inequality of life*
91. Nhà cao cửa rộng      *High house, wide door; rich*
92. Nhà dột cột xiêu      *Leaking house, tilting pillar; decrepitude*
93. Nhà hoang chủ chết      *Deserted house, dead owner; deserted place*
94. Nhà ngang dẫy dọc      *Wide house, numerous roofs; rich*
95. Nhà tan cửa nát      *Crumbled house, crushed door; disaster*
96. Phận ảm duyên hôi      *Damp destiny, smelly condition; bad luck*
97. Phận đẹp duyên ưa      *Beautiful destiny, pleasing condition; good luck*

98. Phu quý phụ vinh      *Noble husband, glorious wife*
99. Phước chí tâm tinh      *Happiness, intelligence*
100. Quan cần dân trễ      *Mandarin needy, subject late  
(when the Mandarin is in trouble,  
the people are late)*
101. Quần bó áo ôm      *Tight trousers, clinging dress;  
sexy dress*
102. Quần manh áo rách      *Trousers in pieces, shirt torn;  
poor people*
103. Quần trần áo trụ      *Bare trousers, naked dress; very  
poor*
104. Quyền cao lộc cả      *Great authority, huge happiness;  
influential and lucky*
105. Quyền cao tước trọng      *Great authority, important grade;  
influential*
106. Răng long tóc bạc      *Shaky tooth, white hair; old*
107. Sen ngó đài tơ      *Lotus that is half open, tender  
peach; young girl*
108. Sơn cao thủy thâm      *High mountain, deep water; difficulties*
109. Sơn cùng thủy tận      *At the end of the mountains and of the  
sea; very remote place*
110. Sức cùng lực tận      *At the end of one's force, strength  
exhausted, power ended; exhaustion*
111. Tai ngơ mắt điếc      *Unseeing eye, deaf ear; to ignore  
things*
112. Tai to mắt lớn      *Big ear, huge eye; very important  
person*
113. Tài sơ trí siển      *Elementary talent, rudimentary  
intelligence; not very well  
qualified*
114. Tay lấm chơn bùn      *Spotted hand, muddy foot; hard-working  
people*
115. Tay không chơn rời      *Empty hand, still foot; idle*
116. Tình ngay lý gian      *True situation, false argument; the  
state of a suspect who cannot  
demonstrate his innocence*

117. Tóc bạc da mồi                    *White hair, spotty skin; old age*
118. Thân bại danh liệt                *Paralyzed body, ruined fame; ended career*
119. Thân cô thế quả                   *Lonely body, impaired authority; no supporters*
120. Thế cùng lực tận                  *Finished authority, ended force; at the end of one's force and resources*
121. Thóc cao gạo kém                 *Expensive paddy, scarce rice; high cost of living*
122. Trà dư tửu hậu                    *Bountiful tea, plenty of wine; social gathering, conversation*
123. Trai tài gái sắc                   *Talented male, beautiful female; well-matched couple*
124. Trầu héo rượu lạt                 *Withered betel leaf, flavourless liquor; loss of interest*
125. Trời cao bể rộng                  *High sky, wide sea; great opportunity*
126. Trời cao đáy dài                  *High sky, deep sea bottom; great challenge*
127. Trời quang mây tạnh              *Clear sky, dispersed cloud; clear sailing ahead (we have passed through the difficulties)*
128. Trời thăm vực sâu                 *Deep sky, profound abyss; great challenge*
129. Văn hay chữ tốt                   *Good literary style, beautiful writing; well educated*
130. Vợ yếu con thơ                   *Weak wife, young child; heavy family responsibilities*

## Group 3 - 98

Head: Noun; Modifier: Noun

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Áo vải quần bô       | <i>Cotton dress, linen pants; peasantry</i>   |
| 2. Ân cha nghĩa mẹ      | <i>Father's gratitude, mother's kindness</i>  |
| 3. Ân vua lộc nước      | <i>King's gratitude, country's grace;<br/>royal favour</i>  |
| 4. Bạc nển vàng thoi    | <i>Masses of silver and gold</i>  |
| 5. Bãl, bể nường dâu    | <i>Hazards of life</i>  |
| 6. Bãng cơ ngọc cốt     | <i>Skin like ice, bones like pearls;<br/>beautiful girl</i>   |
| 7. Binh rông tướng cộp  | <i>Elite soldiers, select officers</i>  |
| 8. Bút thơ đồ trận      | <i>Literary studies</i>   |
| 9. Cá chậu chim lòng    | <i>Fish in the pool, birds in the cage;<br/>to lose one's liberty</i>   |
| 10. Cành vàng lá ngọc   | <i>Golden branch, pearl leaf; beautiful<br/>girl</i>  |
| 11. Cây nhà lá vườn     | <i>Tree of the house garden, leaf from<br/>the garden; fig.: offerings that<br/>are not very worthy but goodheartedly<br/>given</i> |
| 12. Con dòng cháu giống | <i>Descendant of a very fine family</i>   |
| 13. Con ong cái kiến    | <i>Bees and ants; humble people</i>   |
| 14. Con ông cháu cha    | <i>Fig.: son of a very important person</i>   |
| 15. Con rồng cháu tiên  | <i>Children of dragons, nieces and<br/>nephews of fairies</i>   |
| 16. Công cha nghĩa mẹ   | <i>Deed of the father, affection of the<br/>mother</i>  |
| 17. Cơm nhà việc người  | <i>One's own rice, another person's work;<br/>to work for others' benefit</i>   |
| 18. Cửa chồng công vợ   | <i>Husband's belongings, wife's work</i>  |
| 19. Củi quế gạo châu    | <i>Wood as expensive as cinnamon, rice<br/>as expensive as pearls; scarcity,<br/>penury</i>   |

20. Cung vàng bể ngọc      *Golden palace, ocean of pearls;  
opulence*
21. Chiếu đất màn trời      *The earth as a sleeping mat, the  
sky as a tent*
22. Chim trời cá nước      *Bird in the sky, fish in the water;  
something impossible to get hold of*
23. Chồng chúa vợ tôi      *The husband is like a lord, the wife  
a slave*
24. Chồng loan vợ phượng      *Husband as a phoenix, wife as a  
phoenix; well-matched couple*
25. Chơn giày chơn giép      *Foot in shoe, foot in sandal; rich  
people*
26. Chơn mây cuối trời      *The foot of clouds, the end of the  
sky; very far lands*
27. Chơn mây mặt biển      *The foot of clouds, the surface of  
water; very far places*
28. Chớp biển mưa nguồn      *Thunder on the sea, rain at the  
source; something very common*
29. Chước quỷ mưu thần      *The stratagem of a ghost, the scheme  
of a devil; skilful but evil  
tactics*
30. Đàn anh lũ yến      *Band of orioles, flock of swallows;  
lovers*
31. Đầu bò đầu bướu      *Head and hump of an ox; very stubborn*
32. Đầu dây mối nhợ      *The beginning of the thread; the  
cause*
33. Đầu đình xó ngõ      *In every corner; homeless*
34. Đầu đường cuối chợ      *Beginning of a street, end of a  
market; beggars' place*
35. Đầu ghềnh cuối bãi      *The top of a waterfall, the end of a  
beach; inaccessible place*
36. Đường kim mối chỉ      *The way of the needle, the beginning  
of the thread; needlework*
37. Đầu mày cuối mắt      *Beginning of eyebrows, end of eyes;  
to make eyes (at someone)*
38. Đầu Ngô mình Sở      *Ngô heads, Sở bodies; incoherence*



39. Đầu sông ngọn nguồn *Beginning of the river, source of the spring; beginning*
40. Đầu trâu mặt ngựa *Buffalo's head, horse's face; unscrupulous people*
41. Đầu voi đuôi chuột *Elephant's head, mouse's tail; imbalance*
42. Đường chỉ mũi kim *Thread line, needle head; needlework*
43. Gang vàng dạ thép *Gold liver, steel stomach; strong-willed person*
44. Gia viên diên sản *Heritage*
45. Giá áo túi cơm *Coat hanger, rice pocket; useless person*
46. Góc biển chơn trời *The corner of the sea, the foot of the sky; faraway place*
47. Hang cùng ngõ hẻm *Deadend cave and street; very remote and unknown place*
48. Hòn tên mũi đạn *Arrowhead, bullet point; deadly hazards*
49. Hương đăng trà quả *Incense sticks, tea and fruit; offerings*
50. Kẽ răng chơn tóc *The root of a tooth, of a hair; deep subconscious thoughts of a person*
51. Khô lân chả phụng *Dried unicorn meat, phoenix pie; delicacies*
52. Khuôn vàng thước ngọc *Mold of gold, yardstick of jade; perfection*
53. Lá gió cành chim *Leaf of the wind, branch of the bird; the path of love*
54. Lá ngọc cành vàng *Leaf of jade, branch of gold; beautiful girl*
55. Lầu son gác tía *Red floor, pink penthouse; place for a noble girl to live*
56. Lòng chim dạ cá *Entrails of birds, stomach of fish; ungrateful, disloyal*
57. Lòng gấm dạ thêu *Brocaded entrails, embroidered stomach; kindhearted*

58. Lòng lang dạ thú      *Entrails and stomach of animals;  
cruel*
59. Lòng son dạ đá      *Entrails of vermilion, stomach of  
rock; inflexible*
60. Lời vàng tiếng ngọc      *Words of gold, voice of jade; kind  
words*
61. Lũ kiến đàn ong      *Group of ants and bees; a crowd*
62. Mạn trời chiếu đất      *The sky as a tent, the earth as a  
sleeping mat; homeless vagrant*
63. Manh quần tấm áo      *Pants, dresses; clothing*
64. Mắt phượng mày tằm      *Eyes of a phoenix, eyebrows in the  
shape of the silkworm; feminine  
beauty*
65. Mặt hoa da phấn      *Face as a flower, skin white as  
powder; feminine beauty*
66. Mặt chai da đá      *Face of glass, skin of rocks; cruel,  
stubborn*
67. Mặt người dạ thú      *Human face, animal heart; cruel, bad*
68. Mặt sắt râu ngô      *Steel face, corn whiskers; insensible,  
indifferent*
69. Mắt sứa gan hùm      *Liver of jellyfish, liver of a tiger;  
cruel*
70. Mẹ cú con tiên      *Owl for mother, angel for son*
71. Mây Sở mưa Tần      *Sở clouds, Tần rains; sexual relations*
72. Mẹ gà con vịt      *Hen for mother, duckling for offspring;  
stepmother raising children of the  
first marriage*
73. Mèo đàng chó diêm      *Vagrant cat, frivolous dog; good-for-  
nothing, scamp*
74. Mèo mả gà đồng      *Cats of cemeteries, hens of the open  
air; good-for-nothing, shameless*
75. Miệng hùm gan sứa      *Mouth of tigers, liver of jellyfish;  
cruel*
76. Miệng hùm nọc rắn      *Mouth of tigers, venom of snakes;  
terrible words*
77. Minh đồng gan sắt      *Body of copper, liver of steel;  
inflexible*

78. **Mình hạc xương mai** *Body of a crane, bones like a cherry tree; beautiful girl*
79. **Mình vàng tóc ngọc** *Golden body, jade hair; figure of a beautiful girl*
80. **Nắng lửa mưa dầu** *Burning sunshine, rain of boiling oil; difficult times*
81. **Nem công chả phượng** *Preserved peacock meat, phoenix dish; delicacies*
82. **Nhà tranh vách đất** *Straw house, earth walls; poverty*
83. **Ông Tư bà Nguyệt** *Mr Silk, Mrs Moon; the Gods of marriage*
84. **Quê cha đất tổ** *Fatherland, ancestors' land*
85. **Sân Trình cửa Khổng** *School of the Chinese, door of Confucianism; traditional education*
86. **Tai trời ách nước** *Catastrophe from the sky, calamity from the water*
87. **Tài tử văn nhân** *Person of talent, man of literature; talented literate*
88. **Tay thầy thuốc thợ** *Hand of the master, medicine of the professional; good practice*
89. **Tiền lưng gạo bị** *Money in the money belt, rice in the basket; supplies sufficient for a journey*
90. **Tiền phong đạo cốt** *Good posture, good form; commanding appearance, martial bearing*
91. **Tiền rừng bạc biển** *Money like a forest, silver like an ocean; very rich*
92. **Tin ong sứ điệp** *News from a bee, message from a butterfly; love message*
93. **Tình vợ nghĩa chồng** *Love of a wife, affection of a husband; conjugal affection*
94. **Trà đình tửu điểm** *Place for coffee, table for wine; place for pleasure*
95. **Trà lâu tửu quán** *Tea house, wine shop; place of pleasure*

96. Trường văn trận bút      *School of literature, battlefield  
for pens; literary studies*
97. Vóc ngọc mình ngà      *Figure of jade, body of ivory;  
beautiful girl*
98. Xóm liễu làng hoa      *Hamlet of willows, village of flowers;  
place of pleasure*

## Group 4 - 85

Subject: Noun; Predicate: Verb

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Âm tiêu dương tan     | <i>To spend in the daytime, to waste at night; to ruin oneself</i>  |
| 2. Bèo giạt hoa trôi     | <i>The lentil strays, the flower drifts; uncertain future</i>   |
| 3. Bèo trôi sóng vỗ      | <i>The lentil floats, the waves beat; difficult time</i>  |
| 4. Bụng làm dạ chịu      | <i>The belly does, the stomach bears the consequences; one has to bear the consequences of one's acts</i> |
| 5. Bụng mang dạ chửa     | <i>The belly carries, the stomach is pregnant; to be pregnant</i>   |
| 6. Cát bay đá chạy       | <i>The sand flies, the rocks run; calamity</i>  |
| 7. Cát dập sóng vùi      | <i>The sand buries, the waves cover; to disappear in the water</i>  |
| 8. Cỏ mọc rêu phong      | <i>The grass grows, the moss spreads; forgotten tombs</i>   |
| 9. Của đau con xót       | <i>Possessions create pain, children cause hurt; to regret one's wealth</i>                               |
| 10. Cha sinh mẹ dưỡng    | <i>The father conceives, the mother nourishes</i>   |
| 11. Cha truyền con nối   | <i>The father wills, the children inherit; succession in the family</i>                                   |
| 12. Chị ngã em nâng      | <i>The elder sister falls, the younger one supports</i>   |
| 13. Chim kêu vượn hú     | <i>The birds call, the monkeys howl; very remote place</i>  |
| 14. Chim sa cá lặn       | <i>The fish drowns, the bird falls; utmost beauty</i>   |
| 15. Chồng chèo vợ chống  | <i>The husband rows, the wife pulls; common conjugal efforts</i>  |
| 16. Chuông hồi tiếng dục | <i>The bell urges, the voice insists; haste</i>   |

17. Dầu sôi lửa bỏng      *The oil boils, the fire burns;  
unbearable time*
18. Đạn lạc tên bay      *The bullet goes astray, the arrow  
flies; hazards*
19. Đất lở trời nghiêng      *The earth erodes, the sky tilts;  
terrible*
20. Gió cuốn mây bay      *The wind carries, the clouds drift;  
hazards*
21. Gió dồi sóng đập      *The wind and the waves beat; difficult  
time*
22. Gió đi cỏ lủt      *The wind passes, the grass lies down;  
to adapt to circumstances*
23. Hoa cười ngọc thốt      *The flower laughs, the jade speaks;  
very beautiful girl*
24. Hoa nhường nguyệt thẹn      *The flower yields, the moon is  
ashamed; very beautiful*
25. Hoa trôi bèo dạt      *The flower drifts, the alga strays;  
unfortunate fate*
26. Hồ tan keo rã      *The glue melts, the gum decomposes;  
separation*
27. Kẻ bưng người bợ      *People carry and flatter; important  
person*
28. Kẻ cười người khóc      *Some people laugh, some cry*
29. Kẻ chầu người chực      *People wait for; important person*
30. Kẻ đón người nghênh      *People meet and greet; important  
person*
31. Kẻ đưa người rứt      *People welcome and say farewell;  
important person*
32. Kẻ gởi người thưa      *People denounce and report*
33. Kẻ giành người giựt      *People disputing (over desirable  
merchandise)*
34. Kẻ hầu người hạ      *People wait upon; important or rich  
person*
35. Kẻ mua người bán      *People buy and sell; commercial  
activity, prosperity*

36. Kẻ ở người đi                    *Some people stay, some leave;  
separation*
37. Kẻ qua người lại                *People pass and return; crowd,  
activity*
38. Kẻ tới người lui                 *Some people come, some go*
39. Kẻ thở người than                *People sigh and lament*
40. Kẻ thù người ghét                *People hate and are hostile; a person  
hated by everybody*
41. Kim rời cái rặng                  *The needle goes astray, the mustard  
falls; charm, inclination*
42. Khỉ ho cò gáy                     *The monkey coughs, the turtle-dove  
coos; remote*
43. Lá gió cành chim                 *The leaf in the wind, the wing of  
the bird; love letter*
44. Lá rụng cành rơi                 *The leaf falls, the branch drops;  
fallen*
45. Ma trêu quỷ hờn                 *The ghost tricks, the devil hates;  
hopeless, desperate*
46. Mắt thấy tai nghe                *The eyes see, the ears hear;  
irrefutable, true*
47. Mưa gào gió thổi                 *The rains roar, the wind hurls;  
stormy weather*
48. Mưa sa gió táp                    *The rain falls, the wind howls;  
dangerous place, remote*
49. Nắng táp mưa sa                  *The sun burns, the rain falls; bad  
climate*
50. Nước chảy đá mòn                *The running water erodes the rocks*
51. Nước chảy hoa trôi                *The running water makes the flower  
drift*
52. Nguyệt đổi sao dời                *The moon and the stars change  
positions; change*
53. Người đi kẻ ở                    *Some people leave, some stay;  
separation*
54. Ong chường bướm chán           *The bee and the butterfly are  
satiated; abandoned, forlorn*

55. Ong qua bướm lại                    *The bee goes, the butterfly returns;  
place for pleasure*
56. Phu xướng phụ tùy                *The husband speaks, the wife listens*
57. Quạ bắt diều tha                 *The hawk catches, the crow carries  
away*
58. Quan tha nha bắt                   *The mandarin discharges, (but) the  
clerk seizes*
59. Quỷ khóc thần sầu                 *The ghost cries, the devil is sad;  
it is unrighteous*
60. Quỷ sợ thần kinh                   *The demon is afraid, the devil  
trembles in terror; terrible*
61. Quít làm cam chịu                 *The tangerine does, the orange bears  
the consequences*
62. Sao với nguyệt lặn               *The stars disappear, the moon hides;  
very beautiful*
63. Sóng giập gió dồi                 *The waves shake, the wind tosses*
64. Tiếng vào lời ra                   *The voice comes, the words go;  
arguments*
65. Tai bay họa gởi                    *Disaster flies, misfortune gropes;  
misfortune*
66. Tàng che lọng lợp                 *The shade covers, the parasol shades;  
well protected*
67. Tay bắt mặt mừng                 *The hands shake (to shake hands),  
the face is gay; to be pleased  
to see and to welcome somebody*
68. Tay đấm chơn đá                   *The hands beat, the feet kick; to  
fight*
69. Tay làm hàm nhai                 *The hands work, the jaws chew; to  
make just enough for a living*
70. Tay xách nách mang              *The hands carry, the arms hold; to  
carry many things*
71. Tin đi mối lại                     *The news goes out, the message comes  
back; frequent communication*
72. Thổ lặn ác tà                     *The hare (fig.: moon) disappears,  
the sun sets; time passes*
73. Thổ tử hồ bì                       *The hare dies, the fox is sad; love  
for one's race*



74. Tre già măng mọc      *The bamboo gets old, the bud grows;  
succession of generations*
75. Trời che đất chở      *The sky covers, the earth supports;  
supernatural protection*
76. Trời đánh thánh đâm      *The sky hits, the earth stabs;  
unscrupulous person*
77. Trời tru đất diệt      *The sky exterminates, the earth kills;  
calamities*
78. Trời xui đất khiến      *The sky presses, the earth compels;  
providence*
79. Vạ gió tai bay      *Calamity blows (like the wind),  
disaster flies; calamity*
80. Vách đổ tường xiêu      *The wall falls, the partition tilts;  
decreptitude*
81. Vàng ròng bạc chảy      *The gold flows, the silver cascades;  
waste*
82. Vật đổi sao dời      *Things change, stars move; change*
83. Voi giầy ngựa đạp      *The elephant smashes, the horse steps  
on; to maltreat*
84. Xuân qua hạ lại      *The spring goes, the summer returns;  
time flies*
85. Xương tàn cốt rủ      *The bones corrode, the joints rot;  
to be sad*

## Group 5 - 46

Determiner: Numeral; Head: Noun

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Ba bó một giạ         | <i>Three bundles, one stubble;<br/>speaking about very careful work</i>                    |
| 2. Ba cục ba đồng        | <i>Three rolls, three piastres; exact<br/>count</i>  |
| 3. Ba cơm bảy cháo       | <i>Three rice courses, seven soups;<br/>difficult task</i>                                 |
| 4. Ba chân bốn cẳng      | <i>Three feet, four paws; at full speed</i>  |
| 5. Ba chớp ba nhoáng     | <i>Three glimpses, three glares;<br/>without care, not well considered</i>                 |
| 6. Ba dẫy bảy kê         | <i>Three rolls, seven stacks; masses of<br/>things</i>                                     |
| 7. Ba dẫy bảy ngang      | <i>Three rolls, seven reams; masses of<br/>things</i>                                      |
| 8. Ba đầu sáu tay        | <i>Three heads, six hands; very talented<br/>person</i>                                    |
| 9. Ba điều bốn chuyện    | <i>Three items, four topics of<br/>conversation; generally</i>                             |
| 10. Ba đời bảy họ        | <i>Three generations, seven family<br/>names; generations</i>                              |
| 11. Ba đưng ba loài      | <i>Three classes, three categories;<br/>many species</i>                                   |
| 12. Ba hồn chín vía      | <i>Three spirits, seven vital souls;<br/>the whole spiritual force</i>                     |
| 13. Ba sương một nắng    | <i>Three periods of fog, one period of<br/>sunshine; hardships</i>                         |
| 14. Bách nhân bách khẩu  | <i>A hundred men, a hundred mouths;<br/>each person has his own opinion'</i>               |
| 15. Bốn phương tám hướng | <i>Four cardinal directions, eight<br/>directions; cardinal directions,<br/>everywhere</i> |
| 16. Chín đụn mười trâu   | <i>Nine granaries, ten buffaloes; rich</i>   |
| 17. Một đầu một kép      | <i>One head, one actor; two persons in<br/>perfect harmony</i>                             |

18. Một đồng một cốt *One field, one skeleton; two persons in perfect harmony*
19. Một nắng hai sương *One period of sunshine, two of fog; hardships*
20. Một duyên hai nợ *One destiny, two fates; pre-destined affinity*
21. Muôn hồng ngàn tia *Ten thousand red rays, a thousand beams; radiance*
22. Năm cha ba mẹ *Five fathers, three mothers; to be under the command of many people*
23. Năm cơm bảy cháo *Five rice courses, seven soups; hard work*
24. Năm châu sáu giòng *The five continents, the six human races; the world*
25. Năm đụn bảy bồ *Five heaps, seven granaries; rich, good harvest*
26. Năm hồi mười hiệp *Five times, ten turns; many times*
27. Năm khi mười họa *Five times, ten times; very rarely*
28. Năm lần bảy lượt *Five times, seven turns; many times*
29. Năm ngăn bảy nắp *Five partitions, seven divisions; red tape*
30. Năm tao bảy tiết *Five strands, seven seasons; many times*
31. Năm thê bảy thiếp *Five wives, seven concubines; polygamous*
32. Tứ cố vô thân *Four hazards, no one; alone, abandoned*
33. Tứ mùa tám tiết *Four seasons, eight weathers; the year*
34. Tứ phân ngũ liệt *Four divisions, five dissensions; dissensions*
35. Tứ phủ vạn binh *The four principal divinities (sky, earth, water, forest), ten thousand troops; power*
36. Tứ phương bát diện *Four directions, eight faces; everywhere*
37. Thập tử nhất sinh *Ten deaths, one survival; difficult to survive*

38. Thiên hình vạn trạng      *A thousand forms, ten thousand states; multiform*
39. Thiên lao vạn khổ      *A thousand difficulties, ten thousand hardships*
40. Thiên sơn vạn thủy      *A thousand mountains, ten thousand waters; great space, variety*
41. Thiên phương bách kế      *A thousand means, ten thousand tactics; many ways*
42. Thiên thu vạn tuế      *A thousand autumns, ten thousand years; eternal*
43. Thiên truy vạn điệp      *A thousand successions, ten thousand repetitions; uncountable*
44. Trăm công ngàn việc      *A hundred jobs, a thousand things to do*
45. Trăm hồng ngàn tia      *A hundred red rays, a thousand beams; radiance*
46. Trăm mưu ngàn kế      *A hundred plots, a thousand tactics; many ways*

## Group 6 - 45

Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Adjective

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. Ăn cực ở khổ       | <i>To eat poorly, to live miserably</i>  |
| 2. Ăn dung ngồi rồi   | <i>To eat and sit idly; to be unoccupied, idle</i>   |
| 3. Ăn đói mặc rách    | <i>To eat yet have hunger unsatisfied, to dress raggedly; undernourished, badly dressed, very poor</i> |
| 4. Ăn hoang mặc rộng  | <i>To eat wastefully, to dress abundantly; to spend a lot</i>  |
| 5. Ăn giàng nói dối   | <i>To eat and speak deceitfully</i>  |
| 6. Ăn kì làm dối      | <i>To eat seriously, to work amateurishly</i>  |
| 7. Ăn no mặc ấm       | <i>To eat enough, to dress warmly; to have enough food and clothing</i>                                |
| 8. Ăn no ngủ kỹ       | <i>To eat enough, to sleep well; to have a good life</i>   |
| 9. Ăn nhín mặc nhúm   | <i>To eat stingily, to dress penuriously</i>   |
| 10. Ăn ngay ở thật    | <i>To eat straightforwardly, to live trustworthily; to be sincere</i>                                  |
| 11. Ăn ngon mặc đẹp   | <i>To eat good food, to dress beautifully; to be well off</i>  |
| 12. Ăn nguyệt ăn xuôi | <i>To eat up one side, down the other; to get by any means, to bribe, to be corrupt</i>                |
| 13. Ăn sang mặc chói  | <i>To eat richly, to dress brilliantly; to live a rich life</i>  |
| 14. Ăn sang mặc trọng | <i>To eat and dress luxuriously; to be well off</i>  |
| 15. Ăn sống nuốt tươi | <i>To eat alive, to swallow fresh; to devour, to take by force</i>                                     |
| 16. Ăn sung mặc sướng | <i>To live and dress abundantly; to live a good life</i>   |
| 17. Ăn tiện ở tặn     | <i>To eat stingily, to dress penuriously</i>   |
| 18. Ăn to nói lớn     | <i>To eat a lot, to speak loudly; to have rude manners</i>   |

19. Ăn tươi nuốt sống      *To eat fresh, to swallow alive;  
to devour, to take by force*
20. Ăn thiệt làm dối      *To eat seriously, to work sloppily*
21. Ăn thô nói tục      *To eat without manners, to speak  
coarsely; to have rude manners*
22. Bại hư bại vọng      *To rot completely and hopelessly;  
corrupt, rotten*
23. Bàn dài bàn mỏng      *To discuss thick and thin; to discuss  
the strong and the weak points*
24. Bàn khôn bàn dại      *To discuss the intelligent and the  
stupid; to weigh the pros and cons*
25. Bàn suông tán hão      *To discuss uselessly, to argue  
unrealistically*
26. Bắt tròn bắt méo      *To scrutinise for the round, for  
the deformed, to search for  
deformity; to criticise, to  
examine minutely*
27. Bỏ rơi bỏ rớt      *To let something fall by carelessness*
28. Bỏ ngược bỏ xuôi      *To run forward and backward; to run  
everywhere*
29. Buồn ỉ buồn ê      *To be really sad*
30. Cày sâu cuốc bẫm      *To plow deeply, to hoe firmly; hard  
work in the fields*
31. Cười ngất cười ngượng      *To choke with laughter*
32. Chạy ngược chạy xuôi      *To run back and forth; to run in  
all directions*
33. Chết mê chết mệt      *To die of passion, to die of fatigue;  
passionate, impassioned*
34. Chửa hoang đẻ lạnh      *To be pregnant out of wedlock, to  
give birth in the cold; to have a  
child out of wedlock*
35. Dạo mỏng rào thưa      *To fence off thinly and thickly; to  
speak with many reservations*
36. Đan tinh đan tử      *To study, to think over carefully*
37. Đánh to thua lớn      *To play for high stakes, to lose  
enormously*

38. Đãng cao viễn vọng  
*To climb up high, to see far;  
learned person*
39. Làm chơi ăn thật  
*To work amateurishly, to eat  
seriously; gain not equal to  
expenses*
40. Mang nặng đẻ đau  
*To carry heavily, to give birth  
with suffering; the pain of labour*
41. Mua giành bán giýt  
*To buy and sell while disputing  
over the merchandise; to contend  
for business*
42. Mua may bán đắt  
*To buy fortunately, to sell at high  
price; to be fortunate in business*
43. Quạt nóng ấp lạnh  
*To fan when it is hot, to heat when  
it is cold; conjugal care*
44. Sinh sau đẻ muộn  
*Born late, come to life late; inferior*
45. Sống giờ, chết giờ  
*To live half, to die half; very  
unhappy, very painful; to be  
half alive, half dead*

## Group 7 - 41

Modifier: Adjective; Head: Noun

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. An cư lạc nghiệp      | <i>Peaceful place to live, settled profession; peace</i>                                 |
| 2. Ấm cật no lòng        | <i>Warm (kidneys), full (stomach); good life</i>   |
| 3. Bà tâm khổ khẩu       | <i>Maternal heart, (but) harsh mouth</i>   |
| 4. Bạch diện thơ sinh    | <i>White face, recently born; inexperienced</i>  |
| 5. Bầm gan tím ruột      | <i>Purple liver, blackened bowels; very angry</i>  |
| 6. Bầm mặt tái môi       | <i>Purple face, blackened lips; very angry</i>   |
| 7. Cả cơm lớn tiền       | <i>Big meal, big bill; "If you want to play, you'll have to pay."</i>                    |
| 8. Cả tiếng dài hơi      | <i>Big voice, long breath; long arguments</i>  |
| 9. Cô lậu quả văn        | <i>Narrow-minded, mean literary style; narrow-mindedness</i>                             |
| 10. Cô nhi quả phụ       | <i>Orphan, widow</i>   |
| 11. Cô thân chiếc bóng   | <i>Lonely person, single shadow; lonely</i>  |
| 12. Cùng đường khắp nẻo  | <i>The end of roads and passes; by all means</i>   |
| 13. Cùng hội cùng thuyền | <i>Same association, same boat; in the same situation</i>                                |
| 14. Cường hào ác bá      | <i>Influential boss, cruel chief; cruel superior</i>                                     |
| 15. Danh gia vọng tộc    | <i>Fine family, famous clan</i>  |
| 16. Danh lam thắng cảnh  | <i>Famous mountains, spectacular scenery</i>   |
| 17. Đau lòng xót dạ      | <i>Hurting heart, sore stomach; pitiful</i>  |
| 18. Đốt que ế củi        | <i>Expensive cinnamon, cheap wood; to run after something and neglect something else</i> |



19. Gian phu dâm phụ      *Culpable husband, sinful wife;  
adulterous couple*
20. Hào hoa phong nhã      *Noble and elegant appearance*
21. Ích quốc lợi dân      *Useful to the country, beneficial  
to the people*
22. Kín cổng cao tường      *Secluding gate, high wall; secluded  
(girl)*
23. Lớn tiếng rộng họng      *Big voice, wide-open mouth; rude*
24. Mạt kiếp cùng căn      *Penniless fate, end of good fortune;  
hopeless*
25. Minh nguyệt thanh phong      *Clear moon, healthy wind; beautiful  
weather*
26. Minh quân lương tể      *Intelligent mandarins, honest generals;  
good administration*
27. Minh tâm khắc cốt      *To carve in the heart and bones; to  
perpetuate the memory*
28. Phàm phu tục tử      *Mean husband, vulgar son; of low  
birth*
29. Tao nhã mặc khách      *Distinguished man, good writer;  
well-educated man*
30. Tận tâm kiệt lực      *With all the heart and strength;  
devoted*
31. Tiên chủ hậu khách      *First the host, then the guests; to  
take care of oneself before the  
others*
32. Tốt mã rã đám      *Good horse, ruined party; if  
excessively equipped, then an  
unsuccessful enterprise*
33. Túc trái tiền oan      *Debt from a preceding life; Buddhist  
fatalism*
34. Thành tâm thiết ý      *Pious heart, true idea; honest, pious*
35. Thiện nam tín nữ      *Virtuous males, religious females;  
believers in the Buddhist religion*
36. Thuận buồm xuôi gió      *Favourable sails and wind; good luck*
37. Thuần phong mỹ tục      *Honest and refined customs*
38. Tràn giang đại hải      *Long river, immense ocean; endless*

39. Trắng da dài tóc      *White skin, long hair; beautiful*
40. Trung thần nghĩa sĩ      *Loyal subjects, righteous men*
41. Yên nhà lợi nước      *Peaceful house, beneficial to the country; profitable*

## Group 8 - 36

Head: Adjective; Modifier: Noun or Verb

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Anh hào liệt sĩ      | <i>Cousin, person of the same family rank as oneself but belonging to an elder branch</i>   |
| 2. Bất loại siêu quần   | <i>Exceptional, eminent</i>   |
| 3. Bất thiên đại đảm    | <i>Very great courage</i>   |
| 4. Bất ngô bất ngạo     | <i>Not arrogant or haughty</i>  |
| 5. Cao lễ dễ thưa       | <i>(With) big gifts, (it is) easy to ask (for a favour)</i>                                 |
| 6. Cô phong độc phú     | <i>Exceptionally talented</i>   |
| 7. Cùng thông bĩ thái   | <i>Impasse or through road, failure or success</i>  |
| 8. Dày gió dạn sương    | <i>Hardened by the wind and fog; experienced</i>  |
| 9. Đa ngôn đa bại       | <i>Many words, many failures</i>  |
| 10. Đa ngôn vô ích      | <i>Many words, no results</i>   |
| 11. Đa sầu đa cảm       | <i>Full of sadness and sad feelings; easily saddened</i>                                    |
| 12. Đa tình chí mạng    | <i>(To be) full of love (sometimes can be) disastrous</i>                                   |
| 13. Đa mưu túc trí      | <i>Full of tricks, plenty of intelligence</i>   |
| 14. Đau chóng mạnh chầy | <i>(Gets) sick quickly, recovers slowly</i>   |
| 15. Đắm nguyệt say hoa  | <i>Submerged by the moon, drunken by flowers; given to pleasure</i>                         |
| 16. Đính tai nhức óc    | <i>Deafening the ears, causing the head to ache; unbearable</i>                             |
| 17. Gần nhà xa ngõ      | <i>Near to the house, far to the gate; two families that do not see each other any more</i> |
| 18. Lao tâm nhọc trí    | <i>Painful to the heart and mind</i>  |
| 19. Lỡ chơn trái bước   | <i>To stumble, to slip, to make a mistake</i>   |

20. *Lừng danh nổi tiếng* *Shining name, brilliant fame*
21. *Mau chơn nhạy miệng* *Quick in running and speaking; quick*
22. *No cơm ấm áo* *Full (of food), warm (clothing)*
23. *Phúc chủ may thầy* *Lucky (in getting the) master and (the) doctor; to have found the right method*
24. *Quá lứa lỡ thì* *Over-age, missed opportunity; spinster*
25. *Quanh năm suốt tháng* *All the year round (the month round)*
26. *Quãng kiến đa văn* *To see widely, to speak much; well educated*
27. *To gan lớn mật* *Big liver; brave, daring*
28. *Tối lửa tắt đèn* *Extinguished fire, extinguished torch; needy*
29. *Thảo cha ngay chúa* *Pious to the father, honest to the lord*
30. *Trái tai gai mắt* *Pounding the ear, a thorn in the eye*
31. *Trắc nết lang tâm* *Bad behaviour, evil (heart)*
32. *Vang trời dậy đất* *The whole sky resounds, the whole earth shakes; terrible*
33. *Vô công rồi nghề* *No work (easy profession); has little to do*
34. *Vô duyên bạc phận* *Unlucky (fate), unhappy (lot)*
35. *Xanh vỏ đỏ lòng* *Green outside, red inside; kind-hearted although having a crude appearance*
36. *Xứng đôi vừa lứa* *Well-matched couple*

## Group 9 - 27

Predicate: Transitive Verb; Direct Object: Nominalised Adjective

1. **Âm đàm chỉ khát** *To drink an intoxicating beverage to quench one's thirst; for a little pleasure, to get disaster*
2. **Ẩn ác dương thiện** *To hide the evil and show the good*
3. **Bác cổ thông kim** *To be well versed in the old things, to be well aware of the new things*
4. **Bạc hạ mị thượng** *To disdain inferiors, to flatter superiors*
5. **Bàn hư tán nhảm** *To discuss the negative, to talk about nothing; dull discussions*
6. **Bàn ngang tán dọc** *To discuss width, to talk about length; to speak at random*
7. **Bớt giận làm lành** *To calm one's anger, to do good; calmed anger*
8. **Cải tà qui chánh** *To reform evil, to return to righteousness; to reform*
9. **Có mới nới cũ** *To have the new, to forget the old*
10. **Cô ơn phụ ái** *To ignore a favour received, to neglect a favour; ungrateful*
11. **Cử thanh xích trọc** *To choose honest individuals*
12. **Chia vui xẻ ngọt** *To share joy, to divide sweetness*
13. **Dày sành đập sỏi** *To step on experience; to be experienced*
14. **Dĩ bạo địch bạo** *To use violence in response to violence*
15. **Dĩ tiểu địch đại** *To exchange little for much*
16. **Dinh tư bội công** *To increase one's own profit, to neglect the masses' wealth; to seek for one's own profit*
17. **Dục tốc bất đạt** *To hasten and get no result; you get nowhere if you hurry*
18. **Đạt tài thành đức** *To achieve talent, to realise a quality; fulfil talent and virtue*

19. **Đổi trắng thay đen** *To change white, to replace black; to change*
20. **Hữu sinh vô dưỡng** *To give birth and take no care; to give birth to one's children but to have no care for them*
21. **Ngôn thiểu tri đa** *Few words, much intelligence; to speak little but to know a lot*
22. **Sớt ngọt xẻ bùi** *To share the sweet, to divide the tasty; to share the good things in life*
23. **Suy hơn tính thiệt** *To think of the advantage, to take the disadvantage into consideration; to think of the pros and cons*
24. **Sưu cao thuế nặng** *To tax heavily*
25. **Thay cũ đổi mới** *To replace the old with the new*
26. **Thay đen đổi trắng** *To replace black, to change white; to change completely*
27. **Thông kim bác cổ** *To know the new well, to be well aware of the old*

## Group 10 - 26

Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Verb

1. Ác giả ác báo *The bad are punished; imminent justice*
2. Ác y ác thực *Terrible clothing and food; miserable life*
3. Ăn có ở không *To be present at meals but not at work*
4. Ăn gỏi nằm nhờ *To eat and lie down at others' homes; to be homeless*
5. Ăn không nói có *To eat negatively, to speak positively; to lie, to slander*
6. Ăn không ở nề *To eat and do nothing; to stay idle*
7. Ăn ngả nằm ngồi *To eat while lying down, to lie back while sitting; bad manners*
8. Ăn vay mặc nợ *To eat and to dress while borrowing; to be indebted, to borrow for food and clothing*
9. Ăn vụng làm càn *To eat stealthily, to work recklessly; reckless*
10. Bàn ra bàn vào *To discuss, to deliberate; to give opposite opinions*
11. Băt chặt băt khoan *To overload somebody with work, to observe him closely; undue harassment*
12. Buôn thua bán lỗ *To buy at an exceedingly high price, to sell at a loss; bad business*
13. Cày thuê cuốc mướn *To plow and hoe for pay; to have no land of one's own, to be poor*
14. Còn ăn hết nhịn *To eat when there is still something, to abstain when there is nothing left; self-reliance*
15. Còn nước còn tát *To bail when there is still water; while there is life there is hope*
16. Chết đăm chết chém *To die of stab wounds; curse*
17. Chịu giở chịu vả *To be spat upon and slapped; to be humiliated*

18. Chối bay chối biến *(To deny while flying and disappearing);  
to lie shamelessly*
19. Đay đi đổi lại *To reply quickly*
20. Đáo đi đảo lại *To beat around the bush*
21. Đói ăn khát uống *To eat when one is hungry, to drink  
when one is thirsty; to satisfy  
one's need*
22. Lỡ ăn lỗ chịu *To eat when one makes a profit, to  
endure when one incurs a deficit;  
self-reliance*
23. Lường thăng trao đấu *To change measurements; to cheat*
24. Mạnh được yếu thua *To win when one is powerful, to lose  
when one is weak; survival of the  
fittest*
25. Mua lạy bán dạ *To bow when buying, to plead when  
selling; to be on the weaker side*
26. Thương vay khóc mướn *To love and weep for money*



## Group 11 - 21

Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Noun

1. Ăn chay nằm đất *To be a vegetarian, to lie down on the ground; to practise religion*
2. Ăn đình ngũ quán *To eat at the village temple, to sleep in a tavern; vagrant*
3. Ăn đời ở kiếp *To eat the whole life, to stay the whole generation; to stay forever in the same place*
4. Ăn gió nằm mưa *To eat in the wind, to lie down in the rain; to have many misfortunes*
5. Ăn lông ở lỗ *To eat raw meat, to live in a cave; savage*
6. Ăn sương nằm tuyết *To eat in the fog, to lie down on the snow; to live a hard life*
7. Ăn thuở ở thì *To eat and live accordingly, conforming to the current rules*
8. Ăn xó mó xiêu *To eat in a corner, to handle a broken pot; poverty-stricken*
9. Ăn xối ở thì *To live from day to day*
10. Ăn xưa chừa nay *To eat in the past, to abstain now; to profit from experience*
11. Cầm thương lên ngựa *To arm oneself with a spear, to mount a horse; military sorties*
12. Câu chuôm thả ao *To fish in a marsh, to drop (it) in a pond; not to profit from what one has*
13. Đi mây về gió *To go on a cloud, to return on a wind*
14. Đi ngược về xuôi *To go upstream, to come back downstream; to give oneself all hardships to arrive (at one's aim)*
15. Học tài thi mạng *Your study progress depends upon your talent, but your examination results depend upon your fate; fatalism*
16. Thua lừa mắc lận *To be cheated*

17. Thương thay khóc mướn *Simulated sorrows (to sigh and weep for payment)*
18. Van thay lạy mướn *To scrape and bow for payment; to simulate religious acts*
19. Vào châu ra chực *To wait upon hand and foot; excessive submission*
20. Vào lòn ra củi *To cringe when entering and going out; excessive fear of the stronger*
21. Xui nguyên dục bĩ *To excite the two parties in dispute*

## Group 12 - 21

Head: Noun; Modifier: Verb

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Cách ăn nết ở         | <i>Manner of eating, conduct of living; manners, behaviour</i>                      |
| 2. Công ăn việc làm      | <i>Work to earn one's living</i>  |
| 3. Công đồng thương định | <i>Work equalled, business determined; to accept something with a common accord</i> |
| 4. Công trọng ơn dày     | <i>Great merit, immeasurable deeds</i>  |
| 5. Cờ gian bạc lận       | <i>(To cheat at chess and gambling); to cheat</i>                                   |
| 6. Cơm ăn áo mặc         | <i>Rice to eat, clothing to wear; food and clothing</i>                             |
| 7. Cửa đóng then cài     | <i>Doors shut, latches locked; over-defensive</i>                                   |
| 8. Chồng chấp vợ nối     | <i>Second husband, second wife; second marriage</i>                                 |
| 9. Đầu ấp tay gối        | <i>Head covered, arm used as pillow; conjugal affection</i>                         |
| 10. Đường đi lối về      | <i>The way to go, the path to come back; way</i>                                    |
| 11. Đường đi nước bước   | <i>The way to go, the path to step on; way</i>                                      |
| 12. Lời ăn tiếng nói     | <i>The way to eat, the voice to speak; manners, behaviour</i>                       |
| 13. Lời qua tiếng lại    | <i>The voice to, the speech fro; arguments, discussions</i>                         |
| 14. Màn treo sáo phủ     | <i>Drapes hung down, shutters pulled down; well-decorated (house)</i>               |
| 15. Quần vận yếm mang    | <i>Trousers worn, blouse put on; all dressed up</i>                                 |
| 16. Tả xông hữu đột      | <i>The left attacked, the right invaded; to attack on all fronts</i>                |
| 17. Tiền mất tật mang    | <i>Money lost, infirmity remains; unsuccessful enterprise</i>                       |

18. Tiền trao cháo mút *Money given, soup poured; pay first before you get your merchandise*
19. Tranh treo màn cuốn *Paintings hung, drapes fixed; to decorate (house) beautifully*
20. Trâm cài lược vắt *The pin on, the comb in place; to dress up beautifully*
21. Văn tập võ luyện *Literary knowledge tried out, military science practised; practice*

## Group 13 - 20

Relator: Time Expression; Head: Noun

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Nay dao mai thốt    | <i>Today knife, tomorrow chopping board; fighting all the time, having arguments all the time</i> |
| 2. Nay đau mai mạnh    | <i>Sick today, well tomorrow; poor</i>  |
| 3. Nay lãn mai lựa     | <i>Delaying today, choosing tomorrow; hesitating, non-committal</i>                               |
| 4. Nay tan mai hiệp    | <i>Dispersing today, regrouping tomorrow; ephemeral</i>   |
| 5. Nay trôi mai nổi    | <i>Today drifting, tomorrow floating; errant, vagabond, Bohemian</i>                              |
| 6. Nay vậy mai khác    | <i>Today like this, tomorrow like that (different); not constant</i>                              |
| 7. Ngày than đêm thở   | <i>To sigh in the daytime, to lament at night; to continually express one's feelings of doom</i>  |
| 8. Ngày trông đêm đợi  | <i>To expect (somebody) in the daytime, to wait for him at night; to wait all the time</i>        |
| 9. Sớm cơm chiều cháo  | <i>Rice in the morning, soup in the evening; good treatment</i>                                   |
| 10. Sớm đầu tối đánh   | <i>To surrender in the morning, to fight at night; untrustworthy</i>                              |
| 11. Sớm thăm tối viếng | <i>Visits in the morning and in the evening; well looked after</i>                                |
| 12. Tiền trảm hậu tấu  | <i>To decapitate first, to report after; "fait accompli"</i>                                      |
| 13. Tự cổ chí kim      | <i>From ancient to present times</i>  |
| 14. Từ đầu chí cuối    | <i>From beginning to end</i>  |
| 15. Tự thuở chí vĩ     | <i>From beginning to end</i>  |
| 16. Thượng hành hạ hậu | <i>To work first, to enjoy later</i>  |
| 17. Thượng thổ hạ tả   | <i>Vomiting and diarrhoeic; be badly sick</i>   |
| 18. Thượng thực hạ hư  | <i>Real first, unreal afterwards; ephemeral</i>   |

19. Trên thuận dưới hòa      *Harmony at upper and lower levels*
20. Trước lạ sau quen      *Stranger at the beginning (but)  
friendly at the end*

## Group 14 - 17

Determiner: Numeral; Head: Verb

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Ba chìm bảy nổi       | <i>Three-tenths submerged, seven-tenths afloat; having a difficult time, ups and downs</i> |
| 2. Ba lo bảy liệu        | <i>Three-tenths worrying, seven-tenths calculating; to worry and think</i>                 |
| 3. Ba lựa bảy lọc        | <i>Three-tenths selecting, seven-tenths choosing; to select carefully</i>                  |
| 4. Bách chiến bách thắng | <i>A hundred times fighting, a hundred times winning</i>                                   |
| 5. Bách chiết bất hồi    | <i>A hundred times smashed, never losing courage; persistent</i>                           |
| 6. Bách chiết thiên ma   | <i>A hundred times smashed, a thousand times crushed; come what may, whatever the cost</i> |
| 7. Bách triết thiên ma   | <i>To expose oneself to a hundred dangers and a thousand perils</i>                        |
| 8. Bán sinh bán tử       | <i>Half dead, half alive</i>   |
| 9. Bán sống bán chết     | <i>Half dead, half alive</i>   |
| 10. Bán tín bán nghi     | <i>Half believing, half doubting</i>   |
| 11. Năm lọc mười lựa     | <i>Five times screened, ten times eliminated; very carefully selected</i>                  |
| 12. Nửa úp nửa mở        | <i>Half closed, half open</i>  |
| 13. Thiên biến vạn hóa   | <i>A thousand times changed, ten thousand times transformed</i>                            |
| 14. Thiên tân vạn khổ    | <i>A thousand times renewed, ten thousand times wretched; conservatism</i>                 |
| 15. Thiên trụ vạn điệp   | <i>A thousand times succeeding, ten thousand times repeated; uncountable</i>               |
| 16. Trăm đắng ngàn cay   | <i>A hundred times bitter, a thousand times peppery hot; very bitter, harsh, grievous</i>  |
| 17. Trăm khéo ngàn khéo  | <i>A hundred times skilful, a thousand times intelligent; very skilful and intelligent</i> |

## Group 15 - 11

Predicate: Verb; Manner Complement: Adverb

1. Ăn chơi ở lố *To eat and live lavishly, wastefully*
2. Ăn chung ở chạ *To eat together, to live together;  
to have an affair*
3. Ăn chung ở lộn *To eat together, to live together;  
to have an affair*
4. Ăn nhùng ngồi rồi *To eat and sit idly*
5. Âm khiển mình tru *To punish secretly, to kill in the  
dark; sneaky*
6. Bàn ra tán vào *To discourage, to encourage; to  
intervene in others' business*
7. Đánh đôi đánh đọ *To frequent, to tie friendship; to  
familiarise oneself (with pejorative  
meaning)*
8. Đi quanh về tất *To go around, to come back straight;  
to make every effort*
9. Đi trưa về sớm *To go in the afternoon, to come back  
early in the morning; to go out  
often, to work hard*
10. Đi sớm về tối *To go early, to come back late; to  
work hard*
11. Quanh đi quẩn lại *To turn around and around; summary,  
repetitive (bad connection)*



## Group 16 - 7

Predicate: Verb; Location Complement: Adverb

1. Ăn trên ngồi trước      *To eat at the head table, to sit in the front; important person*
2. Dối trên lừa dưới      *To lie and cheat*
3. Đón trước rào sau      *To guard the front, to fence off the back; to prevent any hazard, to speak with reservation*
4. Ở trên gạt dưới      *To ward off blows from all directions*
5. Gỡ ra buộc vào      *To untie, to tie; to change one's position, opinion*
6. Nói ra nói vào      *To speak for and against*
7. Rào trước đón sau      *To fence off the front, to guard the back; to prevent any hazard, to speak with reservation*

## Group 17 - 7

Head: Noun; Modifier: Indefinite Article

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Bữa nào bữa nấy     | <i>Every day, all days</i>  |
| 2. Cha nào con nấy     | <i>Like father, like son</i>  |
| 3. Chàng đâu thiếp đây | <i>Wherever you (my husband) are, I<br/>should be there</i>         |
| 4. Chứng nào tật nấy   | <i>Such vice, such infirmity; incorrigible</i>                      |
| 5. Kẻ nọ người kia     | <i>Those people, those folks, they, them</i>                        |
| 6. Nồi nào vung nấy    | <i>This pot, this cover; two things<br/>should match each other</i> |
| 7. Rài đây mai đó      | <i>Today here, tomorrow there; vagrant</i>                          |