MASTER'S THESIS

Representation of corruption in Vietnam's contemporary mass media: Insights from online news satirical cartoons

by

Ho Manh Tung

ID: 51118011

Supervisor: Prof. Joseph Progler

March 2020

Master's Thesis Presented to Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Asia Pacific Studies

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, my wife, and my daughter for supporting me during this journey. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Joseph Progler, my supervisor, and Prof. Vuong Quan Hoang, my mentor, for providing me with invaluable inspiration, feedback, and guidance. This thesis is also immensely improved due to the comments of Prof. David Askew, Prof. Kaori Yoshida, and Prof. Peter Mantello. I would also like to thank Prof. Ho Si Quy, the people of Institute of Philosophy (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences), and the people of Centre for Interdisciplinary Social Research (Phenikaa University) for their continued support and encouragement. Finally, to Ho Manh Toan and Nguyen Minh Hoang, who accompany me during many sleepless working nights, I am in your debt.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
2.1. Political satire around the world	11
The West	12
China	15
The developing world	17
2.2. A brief history of the art of satire in Vietnam	19
Chapter 3: Materials and Methods	24
3.1. Materials	24
3.2. Methods: A mixed method approach	24
3.3 Four dimensions of political satire's effects: Activism, Affects, Educational value, and Social Solidarity	27
Chapter 4: Results and Observations.....	33
4.1. Taboos	33
4.2. The use of auxiliary markers	34
4.3. Stereotypical representation of corruption	36
4.4. The willingness to represent corruption as a systemic problem	39
4.5. Depicting the people's struggles and its political implications	46
4.6. Descriptive statistics of the random sample	48
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	55
Continuity with the past	55
The how and why of satirizing systematic corruption	57
More tolerant?	57
More cynical?	60
Collective reflection and social solidarity	61
Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks	64
References	67

Table 1: Distribution of generic versus individualistic depiction; the presence of auxiliary markers; the presence of systemic corruption; the presence of traditional motifs; the presence of international motifs	48
Table 2: Distribution of target categories	50
Table 3: Distribution of the continuous variables	52

Figure 1: A 3blues-and-1red model for the rationale to study satirical cartoon in online news in Vietnam.	8
Figure 2: An example of the final dataset	27
Figure 3: Four dimensions of political satire extracted from the literature.	28
Figure 4: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, no. 185, June 1999 as cited by (Phan, 2003). The editor of a newspaper points at the portraits of famous people on the wall and remind his artists to not draw them realistically.	34
Figure 5: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2017 December 19. The figure presents a reality show called “Road to the peak of corruption,” in which the contestants present their failed national projects..	35
Figure 6: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2018 November 8. The figure presents the illusion of punishment within the political system. An official is punished and get demoted, yet somehow after that, he arrives at a higher position.....	36
Figure 7: Tuoi Tre Cuoi’s Facebook page, 2018 December 19. A government official takes his son to a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller says it doesn't matter which Chinese Zodiac sign he is, and he is always the son of a "mandarin."	37
Figure 8: Tuoi Tre Cuoi’s Facebook page, 2018 November 12. The picture depicts the corrupted officials as rats digging holes and eating from the national budget.....	38
Figure 9: Tuoi Tre Cuoi’s Facebook page, 2019 January 1. Corrupt officials are depicted as insects.	39
Figure 10: Tuoi Tre Cuoi’s Facebook page, 2017 December 19. Depiction of systemic corruption. A dad and his son are having a conversation, in which, the son repeatedly asked at which level a bribery will affect their livelihood.	40
Figure 11: Tuoi Tre Cuoi’s Facebook page, 2018 December 1. Depiction of corruption in education as a systemic problem. The higher authority in education forces the lower to “achieve,” which eventually results in students getting hit by their teachers.	41
Figure 12: Tuoi tre cuoi, 2019 June 21. The corrupt force (the rats) bribes the anti-corrupt force (the cat) with the envelope to notify them with the gold ring.	41
Figure 13: Figure 13: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2019 July 3. If you win, you get everything; if you fall, you can fall back to retirement. The cartoon portrayed the race between the official decision to prosecute (Quyet dinh khoi to), which is held by the police, and the official decision to retire (Quyet dinh nghi huu).	42
Figure 14: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2016 July 1. The excuse “assignment according to the correct protocol” is being used as a magic shield to protect politicians from charges of nepotism and cronyism. In the cartoon, the old man, likely to be a father or a family member, a assures the young man, who is assigned a managerial role, that there is a magic shield.	43
Figure 15: Tuoi tre cuoi. 2019 June 21. A very slow resignation.	44
Figure 16: Tuoi tre cuoi, 2019 July 15. A corrupt official offers his dirty money for immunity from the “stove”.	45
Figure 17: Tuoi tre cuoi. 2019 Jan 04. Land is often captured, or “eaten”, by corrupted interest groups, those who “overeat” it has to enter the “stove”—the party’s recent euphemism for	

the anti-corruption campaign. There are many kinds of lands: public, planned, compensating, bidding, etc., which are often “eaten” by the corrupted.	46
Figure 18: Tuoi tre cuoi. 2019 June 20. A father told his son a man who sits in the dark is not about being strong, but he is only scared of the electric bill.	47
Figure 19: Tuoi tre cuoi. 2019 July 16. Studying hard is no longer the way to get ahead in life: The young man is thinking about the time when he studied hard while his parents equally cheered him on.	47
Figure 20: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2019 Feb 26. The meeting of the kitchen gods: The king of heaven is highly pleased with the sports achievement of the country, meanwhile, the kitchen gods who take care of education and economics are goofing around.....	49
Figure 21: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2018 October 15. Being a rich kid means hoarding a lot of gas and fuels.	50
Figure 22: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2018 Sep 25. Vietnamese government and Industry 4.0: Zero listening, zero seeing, zero knowing, and zero inspecting.	51
Figure 23: The histograms of the distribution of total social media reactions (a), comments (b), and shares (c).	53
Figure 24: Tuoi Tre Cuoi, 2018 June 24. The whole family being government officials. An old man walks into a town, and he finds every government building belongs to a family. .	54

Representation of corruption in Vietnam's contemporary mass media: Insights from online news satirical cartoons

Abstract: The art of satirical cartooning in Vietnam, a one-party state where the media environment is not fully open, is currently subject to multiple liberating forces: a globalized emerging economy, the rise of social networks, and a rich tradition of satire. This thesis examines the effects of this new dynamics on the evolution of the satirical art form by analyzing changes in the representation of corruption in cartoons of a well-known and pioneering state-owned online news outlet in Vietnam. Using a mixed method approach, the study finds a heavy use of auxiliary markers (in 100% cartoons of the random sample) and an enduring taboo of not depicting real-life public figures too realistically or unflatteringly (99% of the sample is generic depiction of people). These findings indicate the influence of a strict media environment as well as of a Confucian culture where “face” is almost a sacred value. The growing trend of depicting corruption as a systematic problem, which is present in 45% of the sample, hints at a change in the sensibility of the audiences and a movement toward a more tolerant mediascape. Yet, this may also be a worrying sign of increasing cynicism and apathy among the audiences. Nonetheless, the practice of political cartoons in Vietnam has provided an important public venue for collective political reflections and social solidarity on a daily basis.

Keywords: political satire; satirical cartoons; social media; mass media; arts; corruption

Chapter 1: Introduction

Vietnam provides a unique circumstance for a study on how satire was employed for political and social critique in the age of social media: (i) the country always has a rich tradition of satire; (ii) its population is young and tech-savvy, provided with unprecedented freedom in political expression thanks to the rise of online social media, and (iii) the one-party state constantly updates its legal and technical measures to stay on top of these changes. This study fleshes out the possible impacts of social media on the deployment of satirical cartoons in online news to express socio-political critiques in the one-party society.

Figure 1: A 3blues-and-1red model for the rationale to study satirical cartoon in online news in Vietnam.

Figure 1 presents a 3blues-and-1red model that captures the rationale to study satirical cartoons in Vietnamese online news. The three blue factors represent three liberating forces: the globalized market economy, a rich tradition of satire, and social media. The red element represents a constraining force: the one-state party's rule in Vietnam. The remarkable growth of the Internet in Vietnam, to which the State did not attempt to supervise or design in the beginning, has wholly altered Vietnam's information and the media landscape in just a couple of decades. In 2017, it is reported that from 54% to 60% of Vietnam's 90 million people population is online (Abuza, 2015; Dien-Luong, 2017a; Hayton, 2010; Nhan-Dan, 2017). In

terms of sheer numbers, Vietnam is “a Facebook nation” with 64 million (67% of Vietnam’s population) accounts, putting the country at 7th in the world (Ha-Phuong, 2017). On average, Vietnamese people spend 2 hours 39 minutes on social media daily (Lao Dong Infographic, 2018), and nearly half of the population get daily news from social media (Minh-Nga 2018).

It is then not surprising that social media and the Internet have fostered greater freedom of political expression and engagement for Vietnamese people. The British historian Tim Doling noted “Facebook has been nothing short of a revolution in Vietnam” (Dien-Luong, 2017a; Thiem, 2017); Nguyen and Vuong (2016) also argued in Vietnam, digitizing is democratizing. Many protests that are organized online were successful in pressuring the government to change its policies (Bui, 2016; Dien-Luong, 2017b; Vi-Tran, 2018). Regarding the news, with social media, the possibility of going viral has changed the media business model, even though they are all controlled by the state. Many journalists, if not directly, measure the success of their articles by the number of reactions and shares they attract online, and they are, therefore, at least sensitive to it (Bradley & Hoang, 2016). As satirists can largely be seen as the “natural populists” (Wagg, 1998), satire arguably fits really well with the interests of the journalists in the age of social media. There have already been cases in which the satirical element of an article seems to account for its success in going viral. For example, the article on the “PhD and Master Incubator,” a graduate school with a suspiciously high rate of turning out people with highest academic qualifications, got reacted to 14,000 times on Facebook (Hong-Hanh, 2017). Other news outlets that had less catchy titles when reporting this case receive much less attention, even though they are of the same level of popularity and credential (Hoang-Thuy, 2017; Le-Van, 2017; PV, 2017).

This background makes it apt to ask whether or not the art of political satire in Vietnam experiences any changes under the influence of the three liberating forces. If things have changed, how so? And to what extent is the contemporary practice of satire the continuation

of its historical socio-political characteristics? In answering these questions, the study will look at the representation of corruption in satirical cartoons from a state-owned online news outlet, *Tuoi Tre Cui* (*Youth Humor*), who represents the dynamic in Figure 1 perfectly.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Political satire around the world

"Satire is, therefore, a hopeful genre; it suggests progress and the betterment of society, and it suggests that the arts can light the path of progress."- (Colletta, 2009)-

This section explains the basic aspects of political satire, then goes on to explore the differences and similarities of the art of political satire in the East and the West, as well as, in a democratic setting and an authoritarian setting.

Satire, in the broadest sense, is an art of using humor, irony, exaggeration to criticize and expose some ridiculous aspects of people's behavior, their stupidity, and vices. Given that the nature of political satire is to hold up vices and follies in the political realm to humorous, witty scrutiny and criticism, and through it, to effect changes, satire is, as Griffin (1994) argues, is a moral art, and Colletta (2009) goes further and argues that satire is an optimistic genre. Griffin (1994) explains the objective of satire is to convince an audience that certain things and people are wrong or preposterous through the use of exaggeration and some forms of fiction. According to Griffin, satire is different from the pure comedy by virtue of referencing to the real world, satire's victims usually are from the real world, and they are treated with a dark and sharp tone referencing to real-world moral standards and purposes.

Colletta explains why the art form, though it existed since the ancient Greek period, only came into popularity since the arrival of the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment. Satire works because it employs incongruity, which could only be recognized by reason. The artists, whether deploying Horatian satire, which is more amiable in mocking or Juvenalian satire,

or more censorious and insulting, trust the capacity of human for rationality and hope when people realize their shortcomings reflected in a joke in an exaggerating manner, they can correct these faults (Colletta, 2009). To sum it up, Colletta writes, satire “suggests progress and the betterment of society, and it suggests that the arts can light the path of progress.” Another essential component of satire is irony, which is the act of saying or expressing the contrary to what the author and the audience know is (or ought to be) the case. Jonathan Swift’s “The modest proposal” (1729) is often cited as the most successful and dramatic satirical use of irony (Colletta, 2009; Hall, 2014).

One of the crucial aspects of satire is the laughter that arises from the interaction between the producer (writer, comedian, cartoonist) and the audience through a number of mediums: print, cartoon, TV, audio, or online networks. Furthermore, the producers and mediums do not exist in a vacuum; they are situated in a socio-political and economic environment. Hence, different socio-political-economic backgrounds are expected to induce different variations and mutations of the art form. With that in mind, the next section delves into the differences in the evolution of political satire in the West, China, other developing countries, and Vietnam where the macro-environments are vastly different from one another.

In the West, where democracy is the norm, political and media actors have increasingly deployed satire to bring attention to heated issues. The process is driven by the need to compete in the free market and democratic elections. By contrast, in China, due to the intense surveillance and self-censorship, the critique in political satire is much more overt. Studies on political satire in the West, especially those from America, often bring up the worry that postmodernist cynicism has become too pervasive. Most studies on online Chinese satire have, therefore, shown how this practice is primarily about social solidarity.

The West

The production and consumption of political satire have traditionally been tied with subversive intent. In satire, the powerful are frequently brought down low while the weak are empowered (Gao & Pugsley, 2008; Phan, 2003). This is how satire holds so much appeal for the public, as George Orwell has aptly put: “Every joke is a tiny revolution” (2004). However, as the art itself evolves, one can argue the boundaries between serious critical reflection and pure entertainment, between politics and humor have been blurred. It is still an open debate whether political satire has facilitated political engagement, or whether the art is a mere form of political expression, or whether it has even generated only cynicism and disengagement among the spectators. The debate takes place in the growing complexity of modern media environment and contemporary politics.

In the West, to compete, political actors, as well as media actors, have increasingly deployed humor to influence public opinions. For example, Bill Clinton was one of the first presidential candidates in the U.S. to make an appearance on entertainment programs and talk shows, turning these platforms into political media to sell himself to the American public. After that, in Western media, there has been a growing convergence between “hard” politics and “soft” media, between entertainment and news, between politics and humor. This fact is signified by the births of a growing number of successful shows that heavily rely on political satire, such as the late-night shows by David Letterman and Jay Leno, or Bill Maher's *Politically Incorrect* and *Real Time* (Lichter, 2018; Owen, 2017). As entertainment programs increasingly seek to mine political contents, the old-fashioned programs that struggle to keep up with the competition have now rushed to make their content more entertaining. The Internet and social media have furthered this trend with the emergence of online news outlets such as VICE, Vox, BuzzFeed, or the Young Turks. In the most extreme, one can arguably say: all satire is political, all humor is political, and all news is entertainment.

However, studies that investigate satire and political participation in the democratic West show a multitude of factors that can influence this relationship between these two factors. For example, researchers differentiate between late-night comedies and parody/satire (Hoffman & Young, 2012; Hoffman & Young, 2011; Jacobs & Wild, 2013). The *Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are typical examples of political entertainment in the form of parody and satire, while *The Late Show* or *The Tonight Show* represents late-night comedy. In late-night comedy, the jokes focus on personalities or traits of politicians and punchlines-oriented, for parody and satire, the jokes invite the audience to resituate a political situation, often very substantively. In a survey 499 students of diverse backgrounds, Hoffman and Young (2011) find a positive relationship between viewing parody/satire with political participation, but not the punchlines-oriented late-night comedy. Using a different approach, Jacobs and Wild (2013) analyze the cultural sociology of the two famous political satire shows in the U.S.—*The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. The authors use the concept of the aesthetic public sphere, which is built upon from Habermas' public sphere (Habermas, 1991). The concept of aesthetic public sphere essentially looks at entertainment media's civic value, which helps guide the political scientists to look at the hybrid among politics, news, and entertainment of political comedy. The authors argue that the cultural hierarchies and the dominant discourses have limited the kind of influence these new media can exert on the public discussions. Thus, to provoke more critical reflection in public, political comedy should be situated within a broader context organized by elite media rather than being considered only belong to the informal public. Colletta (2009) argues the pervasive postmodern irony in political satire shows in the U.S. has encouraged political disengagement. Taking *The Colbert Report* as an example, Colletta argued the reader of Colbert's jokes only find the jokes funny because he or she had been aligned with Colbert's politics already. Though one can read Colletta's argument as an attack on Colbert or Jon Stewart personally, for not doing more than just turning all news into entertainment, Colletta is worried more about the toxic role of television

as a medium that mediates the postmodern contemporary culture. As television programs self-reflexively cite other programs, satire television has undermined the “seriousness” of meaning in the U.S.’s contemporary culture. As Colletta lays out for the traditional satire to work, two things are necessary: a stable set of values and engagement. Both the satirist and the audiences must agree on what is normative, what is real, what is true, what is right, and they must agree there can be some changes for the better once what is short of normative, true, real and right are pointed out. When these two conditions do not hold if satire exists, it exists only to further itself, it becomes self-referential, which is a characteristic of the postmodern world.

China

As the political and media context of China is very similar to Vietnam, and there is a wealth of studies on online satire in this country, reviewing these studies can be informative. First of all, there has never been a society that is surveilled and digitally controlled like China. According to Meng (2011), the commonly used term “the Great Firewall” of China is misleading in that it has undermined the sophisticated system the Chinese government has put in place to control the Internet. It is better to conceptualize the Chinese control of digital political communication as a multi-layered evolving system of legal and technological measures designed to encourage self-censorship and control, shape, and guide all political expressions (Esarey & Xiao, 2011; Meng, 2011; Wang, Juffermans, & Du, 2016). This system has evolved as a response towards the ever-growing complexity of online political engagement of Chinese netizens. Grasping this will enable a more nuanced understanding of how sophisticated the Chinese people are in finding the balance between expressing criticisms of the government and evading state-censorship and state-thought-policing. Chinese online political satire, as a form of mediated political engagement, needs to be understood in this context.

There is an on-going debate on whether Chinese online political satire is essentially about political resistance. The proponents of the view that Chinese online satire is a straightforward form of resistance essentially draw on the work of Bakhtin's understanding of the carnival, the time and space in Medieval Europe that is wild and grotesque where all rules and norms are suspended. Li Hongmei, for example, sees online satire in China as a place where power relationships are temporarily suspended (Li, 2011), while Meng (2011) views online satire in terms of a virtual carnival, a collective effort in resistance. In light of this perspective, George Orwell (2004)'s "Every joke is a tiny revolution" is often referred to. The critics of this approach, however, argue that it necessarily negates the complex and ambiguous power dynamics that the practice negotiates. Many also point out the most crucial aspect of Chinese online political satire is the solidarity and communal sharing (Nordin & Richaud, 2014; Yang & Jiang, 2015; Yang, Tang, & Wang, 2015), even within those who view the practice under the lens of carnival and resistance (Meng, 2011). There are different nuances to this line of argument. Yang and Jiang (2015) use the concept of "ritual satire," developed by Test (1986, pp.67), and show the engagement of Chinese netizens in creating, re-mixing, re-making and circulating the jokes goes beyond political resistance, it is first and foremost about social solidarity, about sharing a communal laughter. Meanwhile, Nordin and Richaud (2014) point out, in taking the official discourse then mockingly using them in a daily basis, the urban youth in China is engaging in depoliticizing the Party's languages, rather than directly challenging the government's politics. Szablewicz (2014) reviews the academic debate on *diaosi*, one of the most popular internet memes of 2012 in China, and interpret as a signal for the disillusionment among young Chinese netizens about the lack of chances for upward socio-economic mobility. The authors argue *diaosi*, as an infrapolitical practice, is a fusion of political critique, identity-making, meaning-making, and cyber ritual phenomenon. The authors show how this online practice is a collective attempt to create critical social solidarity and politics of cultural intimacy. The notion of identity formation,

rather than critique, has been noted by Guo (2018) through an analysis of the underlying patterns of Chinese catchphrases online from 2013 to 2015. Tang and Yang (2011) study the phenomenon of the satirical song “grass-mud horse” that took over the Chinese cyberspace in 2009-2011. Applying the framework of “symbolic power,” the authors show how the horse gains power from the social context and allows Chinese people to vent their cynicism, frustration, and resentment against the government’s policy. Moreover, this symbolic power is likely only to provoke harsher controls of the state over the Internet, which has been demonstrated by Luqiu (2017). Consequently, the phenomenon reveals the imbalance between the symbolic and the coercive power.

Overall, the studies in China have shed light on the complicated relationship that political satire has with the Internet, social media, and the single-party society. Most emphasize the communal/collective aspect, the covert-criticism nature of Chinese online satire. These features will become relevant in the present study on online political satire in Vietnam, a country with generally similar media and political environment to China. This trend is also relevant to countries with a similar background such as Vietnam, whereby the art of political satire is influenced by the dynamics of the single-party state, market economy, and the growth of the Internet (Sharbaugh & Nguyen, 2014; Vuong et al., 2018; Vuong, 2014).

The developing world

In reviewing the state of political satire in other developing countries, this section generates a breadth of understanding of the subject, which can later factor in the analyses of the Vietnam case.

Skoric, Zhu, and Pang (2016) study political expression and participation in social media in Confucian Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Though all of the countries in the study share the same Confucian heritage, they are

different democratically. The study finds political participation in authoritarian countries is much less compared with democratic countries, yet political expression is quite similar across the spectrum. This finding is explained by invoking the subtle form of political expression such as satire and sarcasm that could circumvent suppression. Regarding online political satire in two former Soviet states, Belarus and Ukraine, Miazhevich (2015) discovers a quite similar pattern to the study of Skoric et al. (2016). The ironic participatory popular practice takes on different patterns in the two countries, as it responds to the growth of new media technology as well as to the political development in each country. Using a longitudinal case-study approach and analyzing the linguistic and visual aspects of online political satire in the two countries from 2003 to 2013, the author shows that the aspiring democracy Ukraine offers much more freedom and flexibility in the practice while Belarus restricts the alternative public space much more strictly. However, in both cases, the author expresses concerns that online political satire can risk the fragmentation of the civic society as well as the inconsistency in the discourse, which could eventually lead to the marginalization of alternative voices.

A study in India locates online satire within a vibrant digital production context that characterizes contemporary Indian public life (Punathambekar, 2015). Punathambekar essentially understands satire as a compelling narrative and communicative form of thinking and caring about politics in modern day India. The author shows how online satire in the form of videos has linked the issue of the current elections with age-old problems such as castes, class, gender, sexuality, and religious nationalism. Owen (2017) looks at online political satire in post-uprising Bahrain as a form of creative resistance and examines how social media's role in shaping and defining the practice. Owen argues social media plays a vital role in the emergence of a new form of satire, and it allows the social activists to challenge the attempt of the government to spread its account of the revolution in 2011.

Similar to Owen's research, Marzouki (2015) explores the satirical YouTube videos in post-protest Morocco and argues the web has enabled a new participatory medium and a competing cultural form for the cultural citizenship in the country.

A study of the effects of political satire on students in two universities in North Central Nigeria found evidence for the educational value of the art form. The authors demonstrate through a statistical analysis of the survey data on 366 students that there is a positive association between political knowledge and exposure to both mainstream political satire and social media satire. For political attitude, the authors shows exposure to social media satire remains a positive predictor (Mustapha, Omar, & Atoloye, 2019). Similarly, a Pakistani study which surveys people of various demographic background shows that political comedy should not be viewed merely as entertainment, rather, people in Pakistan can often get political information from these comedy programs. As a result, political comedy can be harnessed to create awareness of political situation (Zaheer, 2018). Riaz, Nazir, and Bhatti (2018) also study Pakistanis subjects and finds evidence that political satirical shows are the main source of information and raise awareness for the respondents, however, there is no statistically significant effect on political affiliation and voting behaviors.

To date, there have been very few studies on online political satire in Vietnam; the notable one is the work of Sharbaugh and Nguyen (2014), which studies the emerging meme-making culture in Vietnam. The authors analyze two case studies and conclude that the widespread practice of digital remix and meme-making is a cultural-specific form of civic and political engagement, though not explicitly about political resistance, they can exert a subtle and but real influence on Vietnamese emerging economy. This study falls very much in line with other studies that have been done in China, where most researchers focus on the subtlety of the practice and its cultural and contextual characteristics.

2.2. A brief history of the art of satire in Vietnam

“Trăm năm bia đá cũng mòn

Ngàn năm bia miệng vẫn còn trơ trơ”

“Hundreds of years eventually erase that which is inscribed in stone,

Thousands of years won’t take away that which is inscribed by the mouths.”

-Vietnamese Proverb-

Though the literature on satire and satirical cartoons in Vietnam has been quite limited, especially those written in English, there is evidence of a rich tradition of satire in the country. One can find evidence for the lively rich tradition of satire in Vietnam in folk culture. Satirical storytelling could be traced to the early thirteen-century when the famous 398-line poem “Truyện Trê Cóc” (lit. “A story of the catfish and the frog”) was believed to be recorded (Woodside, 1988). The poem recounts a lawsuit between two frogs and a catfish at the office of the nearest Confucian court over the tadpoles that were supposedly the frogs’ but stolen by the catfish. The story, thus, mocks the Confucian mandarin system for its inability to understand the natural law of the environment (Woodside, 1988). At the same time, it is worth noting that, according to Phan (2003), in traditional Vietnamese society, people can be punished for having socially unacceptable behaviors by spreading satirical songs and verses (vè) about the violator. The proverb above captures this sense: it implies the harshest punishment for a person being bad-mouthed, ridiculed and laughed at; that his reputation is forever tainted.

The earliest physical evidence of satire in Vietnam can be found in woodblock reproduction of traditional drawings dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century (Phan, 2003). These drawings, many are highly satirical in nature, depict the life of ordinary people in traditional villages of Vietnam. For example, animals in human roles are regularly used to

lampoon and satirize foolish and hypocritical behaviors. Arrogant people are often portrayed as toads, oppressive village officials as cats, while the poor and the oppressed as mice (Phan, 2003).

Perhaps the folktales about Trang Quynh, which all Vietnamese children read, represent the satirical spirit of the Vietnamese people the best. Trang Quynh is a folktale character, who lived around the latter half of the 17th century, succeeded in passing the exam for a place in the feudal court but decided to decline the prestige. Trang Quynh's tales are about how he uses satire to blaspheme the Gods and the Spirits, to make fun of the King, the Lord, the mandarins, the wealthy or the pseudo-intellectuals (Nguyen, 2013). In a comparative study of witty characters in East Asian folklore by Nguyen (2013), Trang Quynh is compared with North Korea's Kim Sondal. The author concludes these witty characters might be different in terms of social status, yet, they share a pattern of using their wit and mischievousness to subject those who enjoy power, wealth and social status but lack competence, humility, and kindness to the satirical laughter of the mass. According to the author, these characters are the symbol for the people's dream of intelligence, courage, and creativity. In many ways, they act as the arbiter of social justice for the common people. According to Hoang (2014), before 1945 or before the establishment of the Vietnamese nation, stories about Trang Quynh were widespread, and they were retold spontaneously, after that, people started to view the folktales as the tales imbued with the critical spirit of the people. It is not an overstatement that Trang Quynh is indeed one of the most known folk characters in the Vietnamese souls.

The aim of satire in modernized Vietnam is similar to the anonymous satire in the pre-modern Vietnam, which is to target social injustices, to ridicule those in power, and to give a voice to the suffering masses (Phan, 2003). The Vietnamese people, during their primary education, also study two satirist poets who lived the 19th century, Nguyen Khuyen (1835-1909) and Tu Xung (1870-1907). They lived in the chaotic period of the beginning of the

French colonization of Vietnam, which has fueled the satirical element in their poetry (Ngo, 2013). The subjects of their satirical poetry range from their own selves to the bad habits of the people in their normal daily life, to the political life of the time. In the French colonial time, *Dumb luck*, a classic novel that was written by Vu Trong Phung in 1936, was famous for the using satirical devices to critique the decadent and hypocritical lifestyles of the so-called “high society” and “intellectual class” at the time (Mai, 2016).

Here, besides noting the noble and optimistic aims of satire (Colletta, 2009) in the Vietnamese tradition, it is also important to emphasize how economic pressure and political change have shaped the evolution of satire in modernized Vietnam. Driven by the desire to increase sales, by 1930s, newspapers had increasingly used jokes, cartoons, and humorous stories, making this an established practice. The subject for the jokes was outdated social and religious practices and of course, the colonial rulers and their puppet royal courts (Lent, 2014; Phan, 2003). As the French government in Vietnam at the time began to crack down on satirists and intensify censorship, the explicit caricatures gave way to a more symbolic representation—the artists turned to symbols rooted from the folk songs, verses, and literature. For example, people with pot-belly and barefoot often represent backwardness and ignorance of the rural residents; obese men dressed in government uniform or mandarin robe represent the greediness and corruption in the political system. During the 30 years of wartime, from 1945-1975, cartooning in North Vietnam focused on the war efforts, some famous artists such as Si Ngoc, Bui Xuan Phai, Huy Toan, etc. all published their illustrations in state-owned newspapers (Le-Thuy, 2011; Lent, 2014). While in the South, the practice continued to flourish with the success of one of the most famous satirical artists in Vietnam, Nguyen Hai Chi. His works were even featured in the *New York Times*, *Asahi Shinbun*, and *Newsweek* (Lent, 2014; Phan, 2003). After the unification in 1975, political satire in forms of cartoons did not fare well until after Vietnam opened to the world in 1986. Lent (2014)

suggested that the combining force of the political environment, as well as the harsh economic reality of the time, was perhaps behind the lack of development in satirical cartooning.

Since 1986, thanks to gradual economic reforms and an open-door policy, Vietnam has enjoyed continual rapid economic growth, consistently recording a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of over 6% in the recent five years (Vuong, 2019a; Vuong, 2019b; Vuong, 2014). Among the developing countries, Vietnam has become one of the most globalized economies, having signed bilateral free trade agreements with many major players, including China, Japan, Korea, India, etc. (Kopf, 2018; Vuong, 2019b). The economic transformation has undoubtedly carried important implications for the practice of political satire in the country. The newfound prosperity has given the Vietnamese more time to catch up with the daily news, including trending satirical contents. To meet this growing demand for news content, most newspapers and magazines now have their online sites and released illustrations and cartoons daily. Compared with the 1990s period, when satirical cartoon only appeared weekly in major newspapers such as *Nhan Dan*, *Thanh Nien*, and *Tuoi Tre* (Lent, 2014), now the art form has become a daily production.

Tuoi Tre Cuoi's print edition and the now 15-years-old Vietnam Television show's *Year End Meeting (or Tao Quan)* are the two examples of popular satirical productions prior to the age of social media. These media platforms tackle controversial issues such as corruption, social trends, political and economic events and their use of satire has gradually become more sophisticated (McAllister & Luckman, 2015). Now with the rise of social media, all newspapers have launched their Facebook sites which interact with the audience on a daily basis (Nguyen, 2012). Another important change in the age of the Internet and social media is that major news outlets have started to use the cartoons drawn by their readers more

frequently, while just nearly eight years ago, most of them only used the drawings of their in-house artists.

Chapter 3: Materials and Methods

3.1. *Materials*

In order to answer the research questions, this study analyzes the changes in the content and forms of the satirical cartoons in *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* (*Youth Humor*), the magazine captures the 3blue-1red dynamics shown in Figure 1. First, *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* has a long tradition of being at the frontier of using satirical cartoons for political and social critiques. According to John A. Lent (2014), *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* is an important venue for cartoonists in Vietnam given the absence of a journalistic tradition, centuries of mandarinal bureaucracy and one hundred years of colonial censorship. Second, it is a magazine subdivision of *Tuoi Tre* (Youth), one of the most widely read newspapers in Vietnam, founded in 1975 as a mouthpiece of the Ho Chi Minh branch of the Communist Youth Union (Nguyen, 2012). The paper's daily print circulation reached about 400,000 in 2010 (McKinley, 2011), a figure that has not been updated since. *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* is filled with satirical cartoons, illustrated jokes, and caricatures. The magazine has become so popular that Keenan (1997, cited by Lent, 2014) suggested that it was setting the agenda for modern satire in Vietnam (Lockyer, 2006). In recent years, with the penetration of the Internet and the rise of social media (Abuza, 2015; Hayton, 2010), *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, as with other news outlets, launched its Facebook homepage in 2015 and now enjoyed the readership of 550,000 followers. With such an important role for the practice of political cartoon in Vietnam, *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* is a well-suited source of data for the purpose of this study.

3.2. *Methods: A mixed method approach*

To find out the changes in the content and form of satirical cartoons of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* over time, this study utilizes both the qualitative and the quantitative approach. In terms of the qualitative analytical framework, this thesis is inspired by Scott (2007)'s work on a comparison of comic book propaganda from World War II to September 11. Scott (2007) focuses on the changes in the representation of heroes in comic books in the U.S. over the years, and extracts from there the socio-cultural meanings. Similarly, this study observes the changes in the representation of corruptions in *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* over time. Moreover, this study also relies on previously published works on Vietnamese satirical cartoons such as Phan (2003), Keenan (1997) and Lent (2014) to mark off the important changes that have happened. To extract the meanings of these changes, this study will compare and contrast the changing patterns of online satire in Vietnam with Chinese and American online satire.

The quantitative approach aims at substantiate the observations done in the qualitative parts. A random sample of 100 cartoons from 2018 Apr 09th to 2019 September 30th is selected. To ensure the sample is truly random, a strict procedure is followed. We start with the period from 2019 September 30th to September 24th. Then using a random number generator on the Internet with a constraint set from 1 to 7, a random day is picked in that block of 7 days. In this case, the computer generates number 3, which means 2019 September 25th is picked, any political cartoons on that date are chosen to be coded. The process is repeated until a sample size of 100 is achieved. In this way, every single day from 2019 September 30th backward has a chance to be represented in the final sample.

These cartoons are available in the official Facebook page of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, which is launched on 2015 January 1st. To achieve a random sample, for each week in the period above, a date will be randomly chosen using a random number generator, then I will pick the cartoons published on that date until the all weeks are represented in the sample. These cartoons will be codified or datified based on the following variables:

- **Date collected:** The date on which the data were collected.
- **Date published:** The date on which the cartoons were published.
- **Target categories:** Governance, Socio-culture, Education, Environment, Daily life.
- **Presence of auxiliary markers:** If there is the presence of auxiliary markers, then this variable will take “1” as the value; if not, then it will be “0.”
- **Presence of systemic corruption:** If there is depiction of systemic corruption, i.e., rotten aspects of the political system, then this variable will take on value “1;” if not, then “0.”
- **Presence of traditional motifs:** If there is the presence of traditional motifs such as folklores, idioms, songs, verses, stories, etc., then this variable takes on value “1;” if not, then “0.”
- **Target categories:** The target of the joke in the cartoons. There are four categories: (1) morality: concerning the morality of government officials or of the people related to the political system; (2) governance: concerning any example of failed or incompetent governance; (3) injustice: any depiction of the injustice or unfair condition, especially, when it contrasts livelihood of the citizen and those in power; (4) Daily struggles: any depiction of the daily struggles and concerns of the citizen that are relevant to governance.
- **Generic or Individualistic:** Whether the depiction of the people in the cartoons resemble real politicians or public figures, or it is generic depiction.
- **Presence of international elements:** If there is the presence of international motifs or elements, for example, names of famous Westerners, Hollywood movies, memes, etc., then the value will be “1;” if not, then “0.”
- **Likes:** number of likes the cartoon received on the date of data collection
- **Comments:** number of comments the cartoon received on the date of data collection
- **Shares:** number of shares the cartoon received on the date of data collection
- **Total number of social media reactions:** the sum of likes, comments, and shares.

An example of the final dataset is shown in Figure 2:

Code	Date collect	Date publ	Target Categories	Individual/Gen	Aux_Markers	Syst_corruption	trad_motif	international	captions	likes	comments	shares	Links	Notes
C001	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Morality	Generic	1	0	1	0	1	1294	0	16	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C002	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Inequality/Injustice/	Generic	0	1	0	0	1	406	0	11	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C003	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Daily struggle/Envir	Generic	1	0	0	0	0	4104	2	222	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C004	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Governance	Generic	1	1	0	0	1	900	0	18	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C005	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Governance	Generic	1	1	1	0	1	4904	0	341	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C006	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Governance	Generic	1	1	0	0	1	2356	0	56	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C007	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Morality	Generic	1	1	1	0	1	953	0	17	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C008	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Morality	Generic	1	1	1	0	1	1795	0	27	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C009	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Daily struggle/Envir	Generic	1	1	1	0	1	4988	0	182	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C010	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Inequality/Injustice/	Generic	1	1	1	0	1	3488	0	124	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C011	2019 Nov 29	2019 Sep	Daily struggle/Envir	Generic	1	0	0	0	1	2921	0	102	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C012	2019 Nov 29	2019 Aug	Daily struggle/Educ	Generic	1	0	0	0	0	6394	0	334	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C013	2019 Nov 29	2019 Aug	Daily struggle/Cost	Generic	1	0	0	0	1	4260	0	142	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C014	2019 Nov 29	2019 Aug	Governance	Generic	1	1	0	0	0	8806	3	413	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	
C015	2019 Nov 29	2019 Aug	Morality	Generic	1	0	0	0	0	3587	0	53	https://www.facebook.com/tuoi	

Figure 2: An example of the final dataset

The dataset is first saved in an Excel file, then, later transformed into a csv file. The csv file is processed and analyzed using R software (v3.6.1).

3.3 Four dimensions of political satire's effects: Activism, Affects, Educational value, and Social Solidarity

In order to analyze the significance of the results both in terms of its socio-political meanings as well as its value for the scientific literature, this study proposes that the significance of the results should be analyzed through the following four dimensions: activism, social solidarity, educational value, and affects. These four dimensions have been identified through reviewing the literature on scholarly works done on the nexus of political satire, satirical cartoons, and social media (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Four dimensions of political satire extracted from the literature.

First, on the dimension of activism, there are multiple studies, especially those done in the democratic West, that have explored the effects of consuming satirical political news on political engagement or political participation. Usually, a combined method of experiment and interview is the instrument of these studies. The researchers evaluate the level of political participation by asking the respondents to answer a survey of their engagement with specific political activities such as attending a political speech or debate, contacting public official, doing campaign work, posting comments online, etc. (Hoffman & Young, 2011); contacting elected official, attending a campaign event, etc. (Cao & Brewer, 2008); holding up a sign on a political issue (Lee & Kwak, 2014).

Second, the affect dimension is essentially about the emotions, feelings, and perceptions of the individual audience. There are both qualitative and quantitative ways that have been used to understand this dimension of political satire's effects. On the qualitative front, scholars often worried that the tone of political satire tends toward cynicism, which might

create in the audience a sense of political apathy, especially among the famous political entertainment shows such as *The Daily Show* (Hart & Hartelius, 2007), or the *Colbert's Report* (Colletta, 2009). Colletta (2009) deploys the framework of postmodern irony to criticize the use of satire among the modern television show. On the quantitative front, researchers often utilize experimental design to flesh out the effects of satirical news exposure (Brewer, Young, & Morreale, 2013; Rill & Cardiel, 2013; Stewart, 2011), survey is also among commonly used method (Lee, 2014). For example, Rill and Cardiel (2013) recruit 321 individuals and exposed them to user-generated satirical videos, then test their level of political cynicism, political information efficacy (how confident a person feels about their political information), candidate favorability, and candidate credibility prior and after viewing the videos. In contrast, Baumgartner (2008) only uses the posttest-only experimental design, in which the authors tested the evaluation of candidates after the participants were exposed to a political cartoon. Another example is Brewer et al. (2013) measuring political trust (the trust in the ability of the government) and internal political efficacy (the trust in one's ability to have a good understanding and significant participation in politics) in participants who read satirical news versus those who do not. Another common method is the use of interview, for example, Lee (2014) attempts to understand the effects of exposure to online satire among young people by performing statistical analysis of the correlation between how they feel about certain candidates of the Chief Executive Election in Hong Kong and their level of exposure.

Third, on the educational value of political satire, there are both theoretical as well as empirical works on how satire can educate. The theoretical works highlight that satire, at its best, can convey a sense of proportion to all subject matters; however difficult they are. As such, Hall (2014) proposes a "satiric vision of politics," in which satire can serve as a powerful medium to teach important lessons about international relations. McAllister and Luckman (2015) view the political humor used in the famous Vietnamese Television show,

The Kitchen God, not only as entertainment but also a critical reflection of the political life of the Vietnamese nation. Hayes (2016) argued for the effectiveness of satire in teaching difficult issues in public affairs classroom. The current empirical literature shows that viewers of political satire programs tend to gain a modest amount of knowledge about political issues. However, there are conditions to these findings. For example, one of the important hypotheses of the learning effect of exposure to satirical news is that consumption of political comedy is a gateway to the acquisition of knowledge from conventional news, and multiple cross-sectional survey data and experimental studies have provided firm support to this hypothesis (Xenos & Becker, 2009). Specifically, researchers have found getting exposed to political entertainment such as *The Daily Show* is correlated positively with the level of campaign knowledge among youth and those with more education, and positively associated with attentiveness toward a political issue (Cao, 2010). A recent study by Becker and Bode (2018) shows that, compared with traditional news, political comedy is just as good as a source of knowledge gain, but not as effective for evaluation of issue importance. This is in line with what Glazier (2014) has previously suggested that in a political science classroom, political satire, used in a diverse and critical manner can increase political efficacy.

Finally, the dimension of social solidarity is perhaps the contribution of Chinese researchers doing work on the issue of online satire in China. Yang and Jiang (2015) examine the practice of online political satire in China and distinguished five types of network satire practices. The authors, utilizing the framework of Test (1986)'s ritual satire and de Certeau (1984)'s everyday practice, show that in the context of China, online political satire is essentially a networked act that serves to create a sense of social solidarity and cohesion among the digital community. In the language of de Certeau, the everyday act of sharing, reading, responding to, creating political jokes on digital networks amount to not only cultural reception but also production. And in light of Test's ritual satire, online satire in China is an act of performing and expressing oneself in a communal context; circulation of

jokes about our political life serves as a medium of sociality, and it provides a license for individuals in the community to continue the jokes. The study of Yang and Jiang (2015) builds on the previous works on Chinese online satirical memes such as “*e gao (online spoofs)*” by Meng (2011), “*grass mud horse*” by Tang and Yang (2011), “*diaosi (loser)*” by Yang et al. (2015) and Szablewicz (2014), and turning state official language into jokes by Nordin and Richaud (2014). These studies apply various conceptual frameworks such as the symbolic power (Tang & Yang, 2011), infrapolitics (Yang et al., 2015), or “structure of feelings” (Szablewicz, 2014), but all converge to show that the practice of online satire in Chinese context is deeply about collective identity-making, fostering emotional bond with one another, and communicating increasing recognition of the lack of social upward mobility in China. As such, these works highlight the importance of conceptualizing the effects of political satire in terms of social solidarity, which appears to be missing in the works on televised political satire in the West.

It is important to stress here that the four dimensions can overlap and intersect with each other. The clearest case of overlapping is perhaps the relationship between the affect dimension and the social solidarity dimension. One can argue that social solidarity is a feeling or attitude produced as a result of exposure to political satire, which means it should not be a separate dimension. However, given the objective of this study is to: (1) study the changes of contents and forms of political satire in Vietnamese news media; and (2) understand the socio-cultural and political meaning of these changes, it is helpful to spell out social solidarity as a new dimension for analytical purpose. First, as social solidarity is an aspect that comes out predominantly from studies on online satire in China, a country which has a lot of socio-political similarities with Vietnam—the subject of this study, putting social solidarity as a separate dimension, as a practical matter, would enhance the clarity of the analysis. Second, in truth, affect is such a broad issue that it can even encompass both educational value and social solidarity. However, in such case, one can still perform the analyses along these two

sub-dimensions. This suggests having them as separate dimensions will not deduct from the analyses.

Chapter 4: Results and Observations

4.1. Taboos

“The inversions, reversals, subversions, the breaking of rules and crossing of invisible lines that characterize humorous phenomena may have some universal shapes and shifts, but they remain intimately and often elusively localized in their nuance and content.”(Carty & Musharbash, 2008)

Political satire and satirical cartoons are common communication devices around the world; however, the cultural specificities often dictate what are appropriate and what are not within a local region. Clearly, taboos, i.e., what are not allowed to be depicted in satirical cartoons, make up an interesting area for an in-depth examination. Phan (2003) and Keenan (1997) have observed there is a major difference between the political cartoons in the West and in Vietnam. While in Western countries, high-profile politicians and other public figures are often depicted in the cartoons in very unflattering manners, in Vietnam, it is a taboo for cartoonists to do so. Caricatures of Vietnamese national leaders were almost non-existent. However, there has been increased freedom among the cartoonists to take this taboo and subject it to satirical depiction as well. For example, in 1999, in *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, there was a cartoon (Figure 4) where the editor of a newspaper pointed to the portraits of the national leaders and famous people on the wall and reminded the artist not to depict them too realistically.

Figure 4: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, no. 185, June 1999 as cited by (Phan, 2003). The editor of a newspaper points at the portraits of famous people on the wall and remind his artists to not draw them realistically.

As Phan (2003) has pointed out, in cases where the government officials are convicted, these restrictions are removed. However, surveying the cartoons published by *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* over the past three years, during which the anti-corruption campaign of the government has intensified, and several high-profile national leaders have been arrested, this study has not found any example of the realistic depiction of the government officials. It seems that the liberal sentiment represented in 1999 (Figure 4) has never become mainstream.

4.2. The use of auxiliary markers

As seen in Figure 5, the cartoon employs the speech balloon, which says: “You must remember these faces and your drawings must never resemble them.” This seems to be a general tendency of political cartoons in Vietnam. The artists tend to employ auxiliary markers and verbal cues so as to guide the readers toward their authorial intent, avoiding erroneous interpretations. It seems this tendency has not changed until now. Figures 5 and 6 are obvious examples. As can be seen in Figure 5, the satirical cartoon presents the "Road to the peak of corruption" reality show. In the picture, the prize is awarded to the government

official who is in charge of failed projects that are altogether worth VND12 trillion (USD517 million) (perhaps it refers to the 12 failed national projects of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, each valued at trillion of dong (LDO, 2017)). In order to interpret this cartoon, it is clear that verbal cues are helpful.

Figure 5: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, 2017 December 19. The figure presents a reality show called “Road to the peak of corruption,” in which the contestants present their failed national projects.

The tendency toward using auxiliary markers is often analyzed within the classification of cartoon audiences into low-brow and high-brow categories. The audiences with less education who might need more verbal cues and symbols are categorized as low-brow, while the more educated audiences are categorized as high-brow (Alba, 1967). In the case of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, the magazine caters to the widest possible audience. Thus, it might be the case that most of their intended audience would need the verbal cues to make sense of the cartoons. However, it can also be the fact that the strict political environment in Vietnam forces the artists not to take the risk to let the audience infer the meaning of their cartoons too liberally. It is important to remember that *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, after all, is a state-owned enterprise.

Figure 6: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, 2018 November 8. The figure presents the illusion of punishment within the political system. An official is punished and get demoted, yet somehow after that, he arrives at a higher position.

4.3. Stereotypical representation of corruption

In terms of stereotypical representations in Vietnam's political cartoon, the most prevalent is the stereotype of the greedy, corrupt government official. In Figures 7, 8, and 9, the corrupt government officials are drawn with a big, fat belly. In fact, in Figure 7, the more corrupt an official is, the fatter and bigger he looks. In many cases, the government officials are also referred to as a mandarin of a royal court ("*quan*" in Vietnamese). Figure 8 presents a satirical cartoon on the problem of nepotism, in which the government official is referred to using the language of a royal court.

Figure 7: *Tuoi Tre Cui's Facebook page, 2018 December 19. A government official takes his son to a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller says it doesn't matter which Chinese Zodiac sign he is, and he is always the son of a "mandarin."*

The depiction of the greedy corrupted mandarin/official as a big, fat person is well-established in Vietnamese culture (Phan, 2003). However, there are some important changes that should be noted. In the past, as Phan (2003) pointed out, the backward and ignorant poor persons are often depicted as rats. Nowadays, the corrupt officials are the like of rats digging holes and eating from the national budget (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Tuoi Tre Cui's Facebook page, 2018 November 12. The picture depicts the corrupted officials as rats digging holes and eating from the national budget.

The corrupt officials are also likened to the images of insects, which appear to be small and harmless but, in reality, cause all sorts of problems (Figure 9). The reference could be drawn from Vietnamese culture in which many well-known idioms about insects are often derogatory or pejorative. One instance is the phrase: “*Con sâu làm rầu nồi canh*” which translates to “one worm ruins the whole pot.”

Figure 9: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi's Facebook page, 2019 January 1. Corrupt officials are depicted as insects.*

4.4. The willingness to represent corruption as a systemic problem

A notable development in Vietnamese political cartoon is the willingness to depict corruption as a systemic problem. Phan (2003) argues that political cartoon in Vietnam tends toward showing corruption is the result of only a few greedy and immoral behaviors as this is the position of the ruling party as well. However, in recent years, there seem to be more cartoons depicting this problem as systemic. Figures 8 and 9 are very clear examples. In Figure 10, the dad and the son are having a conversation. The son asks the dad why the bald and fat person is so rich. The dad tells him he is rich because his subordinates bribe him, and the subordinates take bribe from his staffs. Somewhere along the line, the normal vendors

have to bribe some government officials, which eventually leads to higher prices of goods. In most of the conversation, the father assures his son that there is no connection to their life, but when it comes to the hike of commodity prices, the father admits to the son he is wrong.

Figure 10: Tuoi Tre Cui's Facebook page, 2017 December 19. Depiction of systemic corruption. A dad and his son are having a conversation, in which, the son repeatedly asked at which level a bribery will affect their livelihood.

Figure 11 below depicts the corruption in education as a systemic problem, in which pressure for achievements from high-up the chain of command makes people within the hierarchy pushes each other, leading to the incident of a teacher hitting her students.

Figure 11: Tuoi Tre Cuoi's Facebook page, 2018 December 1. Depiction of corruption in education as a systemic problem. The higher authority in education forces the lower to "achieve," which eventually results in students getting hit by their teachers.

Figure 12: Tuoi tre cuoi, 2019 June 21. The corrupt force (the rats) bribes the anti-corrupt force (the cat) with the envelope to notify them with the gold ring.

Figure 12 shows another aspect of systematic corruption: law enforcement and corrupt officials tend to work together. The cat represents anti-corruption law enforcement, the rats symbolize corrupt officials. The rats bribe the cat by an envelope containing money and a golden bell so that whenever the cat comes, the rats would be notified. Another aspect is depicted in Figure 13, where an on-going race between the decision to prosecute some politicians and the decision to retire is taking place. In the caption of the cartoon, the cartoonist twitches a well-known proverb “*được ăn cả, ngã về không*” (if you win, you get everything; if you fall, you lose everything) to “*được ăn cả, ngã về hưu*” (if you win, you get everything; if you fall, you can fall back to retirement). This is to show that often corrupt politicians were able to deploy the retire tactics to escape prosecution. Essentially, the artists represent how a flawed system is being leveraged to allow corrupt people to get away with their crimes.

Figure 13: Figure 13: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, 2019 July 3. If you win, you get everything; if you fall, you can fall back to retirement. The cartoon portrayed the race between the official decision to prosecute (*Quyết định khởi tố*), which is held by the police, and the official decision to retire (*Quyết định nghỉ hưu*).

Another way the artists depict the “escape route” of corrupt politicians is the excuse of following the correct procedure or protocol. Often, this excuse is often depicted as the magic shield (Figure 14), protecting the politicians from all charges of nepotism or cronyism.

Figure 14: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, 2016 July 1. The excuse “assignment according to the correct protocol” is being used as a magic shield to protect politicians from charges of nepotism and cronyism. In the cartoon, the old man, likely to be a father or a family member, assures the young man, who is assigned a managerial role, that there is a magic shield.

Another way is the politician can escape charges is writing a letter of resignation, the artist plays with the word “*từ chức*,” which means “to resign”, but “*từ*” also means slow in Vietnamese (“*từ từ*”), hence, a letter of really slow resignation is depicted.

Figure 15: Tuoi tre cuoi. 2019 June 21. A very slow resignation.

The anti-corruption campaign in Vietnam in 2019 was initiated by the General Secretary, Nguyen Phu Trong, in which, he used the word “wood” for corrupt officials and “stove” for the campaign. He specially emphasizes we need to keep the stove burning. Since then, the “stove” has become a cultural reference point for the anti-corruption efforts. It is frequently used by satirical cartoonist, Figure 16 and Figure 17 are clear cases.

Figure 16: *Tuoi tre cuoi*, 2019 July 15. A corrupt official offers his dirty money for immunity from the “stove”.

Figure 17: *Tuoi tre cuoi*. 2019 Jan 04. Land is often captured, or “eaten”, by corrupted interest groups, those who “overeate” it has to enter the “stove”—the party’s recent euphemism for the anti-corruption campaign. There are many kinds of lands: public, planned, compensating, bidding, etc., which are often “eaten” by the corrupted.

4.5. *Depicting the people’s struggles and its political implications*

People’s daily struggles is also a common topic for satirical cartoonist of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*. For example, the cartoonists often use humor to make fun of the rise in necessities such as electricity (Figure 18), gas, and water; the lack of social upward mobility through education (Figure 19); environmental problems; or bad traffics.

Figure 18: *Tuoi tre cuoi*. 2019 June 20. A father told his son a man who sits in the dark is not about being strong, but he is only scared of the electric bill.

Figure 19: *Tuoi tre cuoi*. 2019 July 16. Studying hard is no longer the way to get ahead in life: The young man is thinking about the time when he studied hard while his parents equally cheered him on.

4.6. Descriptive statistics of the random sample

The purpose of this quantitative analysis is to substantiate the observation of done in the previous section, for example, the prevalence of auxiliary markers, the taboo of depicting real people too realistically, etc. The descriptive statistics of the sample are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1: Distribution of generic versus individualistic depiction; the presence of auxiliary markers; the presence of systemic corruption; the presence of traditional motifs; the presence of international motifs

	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Generic	99	99%
Individualistic	1	1%
Auxiliary markers	100	100%
Systemic corruption	45	45%
Traditional motifs	29	29%
International elements	24	24%

In Table 1, it is clear that the observations on taboos, auxiliary markers, and willingness to depict corruption as a systemic problem are backed up. Looking at the frequencies of the generic depiction versus individualistic depiction, 99% of the cartoons use generic depiction of people. The only case that uses caricatures of real-life public figures is presented in Figure 20 below. In this cartoon, the popular TV program that airs every Lunar New Year's Eve is referred to. And the actors of the program were recognizable.

Figure 20: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, 2019 Feb 26. The meeting of the kitchen gods: The king of heaven is highly pleased with the sports achievement of the country, meanwhile, the kitchen gods who take care of education and economics are goofing around.

For auxiliary markers, 100% of the cartoons use verbal cues to guide the reading of the audiences. 45% of the cartoons explicitly mention some rotten aspects of the political system, which clearly shows there is a great willingness of the state-owned media outlet to use depict corruption as a systemic problem.

It is somewhat more surprising that the artists use the traditional motifs and the international elements to a similar degree (29% to 24%, respectively). Figure 21 shows an example of Vietnamese cartoonists using the popular meme “rich kid” to make fun of the situation of the rising cost of gas. It is quite common that whenever the government decides to raise the price of gas, people will try to hoard as much as fuels as possible before the date. In many ways, the rising cost of necessity goods is the common cause of political frustration among Vietnamese people.

Figure 21: *Tuoi Tre Cui*, 2018 October 15. Being a rich kid means hoarding a lot of gas and fuels.

Table 2: *Distribution of target categories*

	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Morality	17	17%
Injustice	5	5%
Governance	45	45%
Daily struggle	33	33%

In Table 2, the percentage of the depiction of injustice is lowest with only 5%, while governance is the problem most depicted at 45%. The second highest is the daily struggle with 33%, followed by morality of government officials with 17%. With the failure of governance and the daily struggle of the people being the most targeted subject of the political cartoons, it implies a high willingness to point to systemic nature of the problems. In Figure 22, the competency of a government body is questioned, and the artist referred to the concept of Industrial Revolution 4.0, popularized by Klaus Schwab (Schwab, 2017), which has become a buzzword in Vietnamese media since 2017. Playing on the “4.0”, the artist says for

a government body in Vietnam, 4.0 actually means zero listening, zero seeing, zero knowing, and zero inspecting.

Figure 22: *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, 2018 Sep 25. Vietnamese government and Industry 4.0: Zero listening, zero seeing, zero knowing, and zero inspecting.

In Table 3 and Figure 23, we can see the distribution of the reactions to the cartoons on Facebook. The one outlier case is the case where a cartoon (Figure 23) got more than 23,000 total social media reactions. A cartoon would get an average number of like of 3,381 and an average number of total social media reaction of 3,635. As the two numbers are tracking each other so closely, this suggests most of the reactions on Facebook are likes. Comments and shares are less common, with the average being 46.34 and 207.24, respectively.

Table 3: Distribution of the continuous variables

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Likes	179	22,463	3,381	2,878.487
Comments	0	359	46.34	64.384
Shares	5	1,029	207.24	216.149
Total social media reaction	186	23,065	3,635	3,055.242

(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 23: The histograms of the distribution of total social media reactions (a), comments (b), and shares (c).

Figure 24: *Tuoi Tre Cui*, 2018 June 24. The whole family being government officials. An old man walks into a town, and he finds every government building belongs to a family.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This section discusses the meaning behind the changes and the continuity with the past of the contemporary satirical cartoons. By invoking the framework presented in Figure 1 and Figure 3, this section hopes to link the observations found in this thesis with the current literature and the current socio-political situation in Vietnam.

Continuity with the past

This thesis has presented an analysis of the representation of corruption in Vietnam's political cartoon. Using the examples from a popular state-owned satirical magazine, this study shows that the representation of corruption in Vietnam's contemporary mass media exhibits some continuity with its traditional historical characteristics. First, it is still a taboo to depict high-profile politicians too realistically, though this taboo was once a subject of satire (see Figure 4). When randomly sampling the cartoons of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, this study finds that 99% of the time, the artists depict people in a generic manner. This is perhaps a result of the conservative Confucian heritage, which has been a dominant force in Vietnamese culture (Vuong et al., 2018). In this tradition, the issue of the "face" is almost a sacred value (Han, 2016). To compare with satirical cartoons in the West where caricatures of politicians and public figures are common, there is a stark contrast in Vietnam – such caricatures are almost non-existent in one of the most popular places for satirical cartoons in Vietnam. One is left wondering, is this trait a reflection of the cultural differences? Or is this trait the results of the censoring policy of the state? In a high-profile case such as the case of changing exam scores of Son La province, a Northern province in Vietnam, or the case of Ocean Bank that resulted in a national loss of VND 800 billion (US\$ 34.5 million), there is no caricature of people who get caught in the state-owned media. Yet, in the non-state-owned outlets or private blogs such as baotienngdan.com or daichung10.blogspot.com, there are caricatures.

However, the caricatures do not exaggerate some facial or bodily features like in many satirical cartoons in the West. This suggests the taboos are both political and cultural.

Second, another continuity with the past is the heavy use of auxiliary markers and verbal cues to guide and interpret the meaning of satirical cartoons. In the random sample, 100% of the cartoons use verbal cues to guide the reading of the audiences. This observation suggests that the strict political and media environment in Vietnam, to an extent, has made the artists unwilling to take risks to let the audiences interpret the meaning freely. Another possible explanation might be using the auxiliary markers is a strategy the editorials would use to ensure that audiences from all kinds of demographics feel at ease understanding the cartoons. Given the popularity of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, this economic aspect certainly makes sense.

Third, in terms of stereotypical representation of the corrupt official, the results show that the artists continue to refer to many traditional elements of Vietnamese cultures such as idioms, proverbs, folk songs, and folk literature. The quantitative analysis finds that traditional motifs show up in 29% of the cartoons, while the international elements show up in 24%. These are the results that capture the influence of economic and international liberation which are shown in Figure 1. To go beyond the number, it is helpful to turn to McAllister and Luckman (2015)'s analysis on the famous year-end TV comedy show, *Tao Quan (The Kitchen God)*. The authors show that the use of idioms, proverbs, folk songs, and folk literature in this show conveys lessons and moral wisdom. The authors focus on the contrast between the new, disorder, messy aspects of contemporary socio-political realities and the orderliness of the values and beliefs sculpted into idioms and folklores. They showed that this contrast is intensified and accentuated by comedic strategies. And the authors went on and argued that through these contrasts, the show helps the audiences to remember the past, to evoke in them a sense of Vietnamese identity, to think about the future, and how to

set things right in a liminal period of a year: The Lunar New Year's Eve. For McAllister and Luckman (2015), this is essentially a critical reflection process.

In the case of daily satirical cartoons of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*, although there is no liminal moment that invites the audiences to contemplate the life of the nation, the way *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* deploys satire seems to carry out the same function. For example, by referring to the modern politicians as the mandarins, perhaps, they highlight the moral identity and moral standard of the people who work as public servants as conceived by Confucian ethics. It has been argued that moral legitimacy is of higher importance compared to constitutional legitimacy in Vietnam, as state officials place special importance on their moral capacity to govern and are consequently held accountable to the public standards of virtue (đức) (Endres, 2014). In the public discourse on the morality of public servants, the state often stresses the importance of finding people with both talents or competency (tài) and moral virtue (đức).

The how and why of satirizing systematic corruption

More tolerant?

As documented in the results section, one of the major findings of this study is that there is a willingness to depict corruption as a systemic problem. Analyzing this change along the dimension of affect presented in the Materials and Methods section, it is a legitimate question whether the change can be seen as evidence of an increasingly tolerant media and political environment or a growing sense of cynicism among the public. Specifically, with a fast-growing market economy that is increasingly embedded into the global network, a growing influence of social media, a young tech-savvy population, does Vietnam's media and political environment become more tolerant, which results in the mainstream depiction of corruption as systemic? Or does the Vietnamese public become more cynical and accepting that corruption is a normal part of politics, hence, the frequent depiction of systemic corruption?

Phan (2003) has noted corruption in Vietnam tends to be depicted as the problem of only a few dishonest and greedy people, according to the official party line back then. However, things have moved in the opposite direction, as can be seen in sections 4.3 and 4.4. First, in terms of symbolism, a notable change is the image of the rat is now reserved for the corrupt officials, while in the past, it is the poor and backward persons that were likened to the rats (Phan, 2003). Second, as shown in section 4.4., as all sorts of different nuances of corruption are being exposed and mocked in the satirical cartoons of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*. There are a few potential causes for this new willingness of satirizing systematic corruption. It is important to keep in mind that *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* is actually a mouthpiece of the Ho Chi Minh branch of the Communist Youth Union (Nguyen, 2012), which is under the control of the Communist Party of Vietnam. From this fact, one can infer that there are changes in the way the party's view on corruption. It is a fact that the ruling party has intensified the quest to root out corrupt members (Hung, 2018; Vuong, Vuong, Ho, & Nguyen, 2019), resulting in the prosecutions of many high-profile politicians. Moreover, in many nationally televised events, the party has always acknowledged the problem of corruption is rampant within all levels of the government (Hayton, 2010). Perhaps, under this environment, the artists have found themselves greater freedom and are more willing to produce arts that challenge corrupted aspects of the current political system.

It will be amiss if the role of social media is overlooked. Past studies on social media in Vietnam have indeed highlighted the upward trend in social activism and civic openness in expressing opinions about political news. Sharbaugh and Nguyen (2014), in a study on the online meme-making culture in Vietnam, have noted the unprecedented eagerness of the citizens to openly discussing a scandal of the Ministry of Health, even a Facebook page calling for the resignation of the Minister of Health achieved 105,000 likes. Another example is “the case of 6,700 people for 6,700 trees,” which is well documented by Bui (2016) and

Gillespie and Nguyen (2019). In this case, the movement started with social media. First, key opinions leaders such as Tran Dang Tuan, a former senior government official, and Ngo Bao Chau, a Fields medalist, who published open letters on their Facebook pages voicing concerns historical and environmental loss as the results of the plan. Then a Facebook page titled “6,700 people for 6,700 trees” was created on March 2015 to protest the plan Hanoi’s local government’s plan to cut down old trees in the city. Activism in the digital network quickly became activism in physical space where people spontaneously organized tree-hugging events, tree-protecting walks or tying yellow knots to the trees. Hanoi authorities eventually had to stop the plan and open an investigation on to the officials who carry it out, and these officials were eventually disciplined on the ground that they violated current regulations (Bui, 2016). Clearly, social media has had a liberating effect. It is possible that under the effects of social media, and the globally integrated economy (Vuong, 2018), Vietnam’s young, tech- and-media- savvy population (Minh-Nga, 2018) has experienced a change in sensibility. As a result, they are more likely to enjoy a more nuanced depiction of corruption. Instead of pinning down the problem of corruption onto a few bad people, the consumers of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* have become more sophisticated and come to enjoy a more holistic viewpoint. This, in turn, generates a market pressure on the artists of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*—a state-owned outlet, yet must survive the economic reform all the same.

This narrative of how things changed is indeed optimistic. It makes a case this change in the art form reflects of a shift in the political orientation of the country towards a more open, democratic, free environment, which reflects the 3Blue-and-1Red dynamics captured in Figure 1. The interplay of a globalized market economy, a rich tradition of satire, the penetration of social media in people’s lives, and the rule of the one-party state produce a more open media environment that tolerates a more straightforward discussion of corruption. Nonetheless, is it all?

More cynical?

As much as one is encouraged by the signs of growing tolerance and openness in Vietnam's politics, one should be proportionately cautious with the worrying trend that social media is also used to manipulate the public. Bui (2016) has noted, although, in a sense, social media has opened up a new political space for participation of Vietnamese people, the high-profile cases of cyberactivism are all highly emotionally charged. Hence, he admonished:

“Meaningful participation to influence the political process on social issues at a broader and deeper level requires more than just the spontaneous reactions and emotions of the participants in cyberspace. Trust and respect among the people interacting on the social media are often not the rules of game.” (Bui, 2016, p. 107)

As social media can be co-opted by political actors to serve their specific political purpose, so is political satire. One can interpret the growing willingness to present corruption as a systemic problem in satirical cartoons as a sign of increasing media and political openness, yet, the frequency and the repetition of this theme can be a worrying sign of growing cynicism too. Moreover, as demonstrated in section 4.5, there are frequent cartoons about daily struggles of Vietnamese people that hint at something politically rotten: quickly damaged expensive infrastructure, rising utility bills, lacking social upward mobility, lacking jobs, questionable education programs, etc. It raises a question whether that is a sign of a growing apathy among the audiences of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*'s satirical cartoons. It is a justifiable concern among the scholars on the effects of political satire that instead of making the viewers more politically active, it actually makes the audiences more cynical and fragmented (Colletta, 2009; Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Miazhevich, 2015). Subject to the differences in designs and presumptions of experimental studies, the empirical literature remains

inconclusive whether the consumption of political satire increases activism or cynicism (Shao & Liu, 2018).

Here it is important to question the nature of the presumed causal relationship. Perhaps activism or cynicism is dependent on other circumstantial factors other than the level of exposure to and consumption of political satire. For example, in a discussion of petty corruption between Vietnamese state officials and small-scale dealers at the border of Vietnam and China, Endres (2014) shows the local traders both feel that bribery gives them a better opportunity for businesses, yet, “the corrupt exception likewise pushes them into a de facto illegality where they remain subjected to arbitrary “lawmaking” and excluded from legal protection.” In other words, this is an example of a dynamics, in which, both the citizens and the government officials cynically goes beyond the provision of the existing law to negotiate a deal that benefits them both. If cynicism is inherent in the governing process and how the citizen interacts with it, then perhaps, the only appropriate response is to make jokes about the system. While the jokes might not inspire any immediate changes, they can still contribute to the education of the scale and scope of the problems and a certain degree of vigilance among the people about the system’s and the people’s follies and hypocrisy.

Collective reflection and social solidarity

Being caught up in the debate whether political satire produces a higher level of political engagement or cynical attitude among the citizens, one can overlook the two other dimensions of the possible effects of political satire: learning and social solidarity (See Figure 3). Viewed from the dimension of affect and activism, political satire’s effects on its audiences are controversial. Viewed from the other two dimensions, the effects appear to be more tangible.

In fact, there are both theoretical and empirical works that support the learning effects of political satire. For example, Hall (2014) argues for a “satirical vision of politics,” in which he examines the use of satire since Aristophanes and proposes satire can be an instrument for political education and provides a robust foundation, ontologically and epistemologically, for a theory in International Relations. Hayes (2016) explores how satire can fit into public affairs classroom and facilitate education of critical pedagogy. Hayes points out that in public affairs education, students are expected to be familiar with systematic and institutional problems in society, and that can have melancholic effects. Hence, satire can be harnessed as a delivery device to help capture student’s attention, at the same time, ease them into more difficult conversations about social problems. Previous experimental studies suggest political comedy can provide a gateway to learning about political situations in traditional news (Becker & Bode, 2018). Clearly, exposure to political satire can be positive for the audiences in terms of political education. This learning process can be amplified by social media to become a form of collective reflection, which, as shown by research on Chinese online satire practice (Szablewicz, 2014; Yang & Jiang, 2015; Yang et al., 2015), can enhance social solidarity.

In this study, the investigation of the representation of corruption in contemporary political cartoon in Vietnam does resonate with the observation of McAllister and Luckman (2015) when they analyze the popular 15-years-old satirical TV show called *Tao Quan (The Kitchen God)*: the show has fulfilled its two-fold task—entertaining a large audience and offering a critical reflection on the life of the nation at the liminal time of the Lunar New Year’s Eve. Whether or not Vietnam’s contemporary political satirical cartoon can be considered a form of political engagement is a debatable subject, as shown by the analysis of McAllister and Luckman (2015), similar to *The Kitchen God*, *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*’s satirical cartoons can be a venue both for political entertainment and reflection in a daily basis. With

the transition of *Tuoi Tre Cui* into social media platforms, the interactive nature of social media can support a transformation of online satire into an everyday networked practice. And as shown by de Certeau (1984), all everyday practices are tactical in nature and thus form a kind of creative resistance to the oppression of the dominant political forces.

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

It has been observed all over the world that changes in networking technology and modern political environment can bring about changes in the way political satire is deployed. Arguably, the act of producing, consuming, sharing, commenting on online satirical contents should be discussed within the context of the rise of social media, the increasing penetration of the Internet, and the rapidly changing global politics. This thesis has looked at online satirical cartoons of the state-owned media outlet--*Tuoi Tre Cuoi* in Vietnam. Studying the contents and forms the satirical cartoons of *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* have shed a light on how the dynamics of economic liberation, international integration, social media and Internet penetration, and the one-party state (Figure 1) has produced changes the art of political satire. The current study also reflects on how the practice of political satire and satirical cartoons continues using traditional motifs and elements. However, the thesis is not exempt from limitations, which can be addressed in future research. First, this study, as it stands now, is lacking theoretical contribution to the literature. In future studies, conceptual frameworks that have been used in recent works such as the symbolic power (Tang & Yang, 2011), infrapolitics (Yang et al., 2015), “structure of feelings” (Szablewicz, 2014), or aesthetic public sphere (Jacobs & Wild, 2013) can be examined and discussed in the context of Vietnam’s online satire. Moreover, the random sample can be expanded to cover the entire period *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* published its cartoons on Facebook, from January 2015 until now. Future works can also look at other platforms of satirical cartoons in Vietnam besides the *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* to widen the research materials. As this work has laid the groundwork for coding or datifying the cartoons, widening the research materials and sample will help the quantitative analysis become more in-depth and rigorous.

Within the current scope, however, this research has met its objectives: identifying the recent changes and the historical continuity in the practice of political satirical cartoon in

Vietnam, and providing for the first time a quantitative method to analyze content and form of satirical images in this context. Its findings, therefore, do add to the literature on graphic representations of corruption. Using both the qualitative and quantitative method, this study finds that although subjected to huge economic pressure and a more tech-savvy, Western-media-literate audiences, *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*'s satirical cartoons still refrain from depicting public figures and politicians realistically. This taboo is made fun of in *Tuoi Tre Cuoi*'s own cartoon in 1999 (Figure 4), but it seems this liberal turn never fully materializes. The endurance of this trend, as analyzed in the Discussion section, might be partly due to censoring policy of the government, and partly due to political as well as cultural self-censoring. Even the more liberal and Western-friendly media outlets only publish cartoons with very little exaggeration of facial and bodily features compared with the real people. With unflattering depiction of real-life politicians are almost non-existent, it implies the taboo will be here to stay. Another notable continuity with the past is the pervasive use of auxiliary markers. It is still an open question whether this is the result of a strict media environment, where artists do not want to take risk letting the audiences interpret the cartoons for themselves, or whether with so few competitors on satirical cartoons, *Tuoi Tre Cuoi* never needs to evolve its art as the magazine only needs to make sure readers from all demographics can feel at ease interpreting the art works.

The most significant change is the observation that there is a greater willingness to represent corruption as a systemic problem. A closer examination into this matter suggests the media environment might become more tolerant of the globalized market economy and the rise of social media, yet, the consumer might become cynical or apathetic. A more optimistic outlook is that although the same political problems (incompetent and immoral government officials, mismanagement, nepotism, lacking check and balance, etc.) occur and being rendered into satirical cartoons, the daily exposure to this art form will still serve useful

purposes for social justice: collective reflection and social solidarity (see Figure 3). As demonstrated by many previous studies on the education and efficacy effects of exposure to political satire, one should not underestimate the power of humor and comedy. As suggested by Chattoo (2019), comedy can influence social justice in many ways: “attracting attention, persuasion, offering a way into complex issues, dissolving social barriers, and encouraging message sharing.”

It is clear that political humor can be the source of many contradicting states of mind: it can persuade us to take action or to sit back and shrug at the world’s problems. Yet, to only conceive of the power of political satire in these two extremes would deprive us of seeing this art form as the catalyst for learning, critical reflection, and social solidarity. The philosopher Thomas Nagel famously writes about the absurdity of human existence in a journal article titled “The absurd”:

“If a sense of the absurd is a way of perceiving our true situation (then what reason can we have to resent or escape it? Like the capacity for epistemological skepticism, it results from the ability to understand our human limitations. It need not be a matter for agony unless we make it so. Nor need it evoke a defiant contempt of fate that allows us to feel brave or proud. Such dramatics, even if carried on in private, betray a failure to appreciate the cosmic unimportance of the situation. If sub specie aeternitatis there is no reason to believe that anything matters, then that doesn't matter either, and we can approach our absurd lives with irony instead of heroism or despair.” (Nagel, 1971)

Nagel argues our sense of our life being absurd arises from our ability to view things from a broader perspective: to view ourselves stripped of any presuppositions and see that had we been constituted differently, the seriousness with which we take our life would not be so serious. He offers us irony as a cure for this feeling of the absurd. In the case of satirical cartoons in Vietnam, this lesson can be applied, allowing us to reflect on the mismatch

between aspiration and reality of Vietnam political system through political satire should not throw one into despair or arouse one into heroism. Perhaps a sense of proportion and a satiric vision of politics should be counted as a triumph.

References

- Abuza, Z. (2015). *Stifling the public sphere: Media and civil society in Vietnam*. Retrieved from International Forum for Democratic Studies: <http://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Stifling-the-Public-Sphere-Media-Civil-Society-Egypt-Russia-Vietnam-Full-Report-Forum-NED.pdf#page=37>
- Alba, V. (1967). The Mexican revolution and the cartoon. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9(2), 121-136.
- Baumgartner, J. C. (2008). Polls and elections: editorial cartoons 2.0: The effects of digital political satire on Presidential candidate evaluations. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 38(4), 735-758.
- Becker, A. B., & Bode, L. (2018). Satire as a source for learning? The differential impact of news versus satire exposure on net neutrality knowledge gain. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(4), 612-625.
- Bradley, F., & Hoang, K. N. K. (2016). Ambient news in Vietnam: Opportunities, risks, and influences in the emergent use of social media In A. A. Azman & E. K. Rachel (Eds.), *Social Media in Asia: Changing paradigms of communication*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
- Brewer, P. R., Young, D. G., & Morreale, M. (2013). The impact of real news about “fake news”: Intertextual processes and political satire. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25(3), 323-343.
- Bui, T. H. (2016). The influence of social media in Vietnam’s elite politics. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35(2), 89-111.
- Cao, X. (2010). Hearing it from Jon Stewart: The impact of the Daily Show on public attentiveness to politics. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 22(1), 26-46. doi:10.1093/ijpor/edp043
- Cao, X., & Brewer, P. R. (2008). Political comedy shows and public participation in politics. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 20(1), 90-99. doi:10.1093/ijpor/edm030
- Carty, J., & Musharbash, Y. (2008). You've got to be joking: Asserting the analytical value of humour and laughter in contemporary anthropology. *Anthropological Forum*, 18(3), 209-217. doi:10.1080/00664670802429347
- Chattoo, C. B. (2019). A funny matter: Toward a framework for understanding the function of comedy in social change. *Humor*, 32(3), 499-523.

- Colletta, L. (2009). Political satire and postmodern irony in the age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42(5), 856-874.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Dien-Luong. (2017a). In Facebook, young Vietnamese see an ally. Retrieved from Vnexpress website: <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/in-facebook-young-vietnamese-see-an-ally-3535044.html>
- Dien-Luong. (2017b). In Facebook, young Vietnamese see an ally. *Vnexpress*. Retrieved from <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/in-facebook-young-vietnamese-see-an-ally-3535044.html>
- Endres, K. W. (2014). Making law: Small-scale trade and corrupt exceptions at the Vietnam–China border. *American Anthropologist*, 116(3), 611-625.
- Esarey, A., & Xiao, Q. (2011). Digital communication and political change in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 22.
- Gao, J., & Pugsley, P. C. (2008). Utilizing satire in post-deng Chinese politics: Zhao Benshan Xiaopin vs. the Falun Gong. *China information*, 22(3), 451-476.
- Gillespie, J., & Nguyen, Q. H. (2019). Between authoritarian governance and urban citizenship: Tree-felling protests in Hanoi. *Urban Studies*, 56(5), 977-991.
- Glazier, R. A. (2014). Satire and efficacy in the political science classroom. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 47(4), 867-872. doi:10.1017/S104909651400119X
- Griffin, D. H. (1994). *Satire: A critical reintroduction*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Guo, M. (2018). Playfulness, parody, and carnival: Catchphrases and mood on the Chinese Internet from 2003 to 2015. *Communication and the Public*, 3(2), 134-150. doi:10.1177/2057047318770467
- Ha-Phuong. (2017). Vietnam climbs to seventh worldwide for number of Facebook users: report. Retrieved from Vnexpress website: <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/business/data-speaks/vietnam-climbs-to-seventh-worldwide-for-number-of-facebook-users-report-3614034.html>
- Hall, I. (2014). The satiric vision of politics: Ethics, interests and disorders. *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(1), 217-236.
- Han, K.-H. (2016). The feeling of “Face” in confucian society: From a perspective of psychosocial equilibrium. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 1055. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01055
- Hart, R. P., & Hartelius, E. J. (2007). The political sins of Jon Stewart. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24(3), 263-272. doi:10.1080/07393180701520991
- Hayes, N. (2016). Satire as an educative tool for critical pedagogy in the public affairs classroom. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 38(4), 251-266.
- Hayton, B. (2010). *Vietnam: rising dragon*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hoang-Thuy. (2017). Hang loạt sai phạm ở "lo san xuất tiền si" [Many misconducts in "the PhD factory"]. Retrieved from VnExpress website: <https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/giao-duc/hang-loat-sai-pham-o-lo-san-xuat-tien-si-3633421.html>
- Hoang, T. P. (2014). Trang Quynh, Ong là ai? [Who is Trang Quynh?]. Retrieved from <http://tuanconghthuphong.blogspot.com/2014/04/trang-quynh-ong-la-ai.html>

- Hoffman, L., & Young, D. G. (2012). Acquisition of current-events knowledge from political satire programming: An experimental approach *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 20(5), 290-304. doi:10.1080/15456870.2012.728121
- Hoffman, L. H., & Young, D. G. (2011). Satire, punch lines, and the nightly news: Untangling media effects on political participation. *Communication Research Reports*, 28(2), 159-168.
- Hong-Hanh. (2017). Choáng với kết luận sai phạm trong "lò ấp" tiến sĩ, thạc sĩ của Học viện Khoa học xã hội [Shocked with the conclusion of the investigate in to the “PhD and Master Incubator” of the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences]. Retrieved from Dan Tri website: <http://dantri.com.vn/giao-duc-khuyen-hoc/choang-voi-ket-luan-sai-pham-trong-lo-ap-tien-si-thac-si-cua-hoc-vien-khoa-hoc-xa-hoi-20170827070957594.htm>
- Hung, N. M. (2018). Vietnam in 2017: Power consolidation, domestic reforms, and coping with new geopolitical challenges. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2018(1), 407-428.
- Jacobs, R. N., & Wild, N. M. (2013). A cultural sociology of the Daily Show and the Colbert Report. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 1(1), 69-95.
- Keenan, F. (1997). Satire: licensed to laugh. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 160, 44-46.
- Kopf, D. (2018). Vietnam is the most globalized populous country in modern history. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/vietnam-is-the-most-globalized-populous-country-in-modern-history/>
- LDO. (2017). Infographic: Điểm mặt 12 dự án thua lỗ nghìn tỉ của Bộ Công thương [Infographic: Take a look at the 12 failed projects, each worth a thousand billion VND, of the Ministry of Industry and Finance]. Retrieved from <https://laodong.vn/video-thoi-su/infographic-diem-mat-12-du-an-thua-lo-nghin-ti-cua-bo-cong-thuong-680093.bld>
- Le-Thuy. (2011). Thăng trầm biếm họa Việt Nam [The up and down of satirical cartoon in Vietnam]. Retrieved from <http://daibieunhandan.vn/default.aspx?tabid=78&NewsId=206903>
- Le-Van. (2017). Kết luận thanh tra việc đào tạo tiến sĩ tại Học viện Khoa học Xã hội [Concluding the investigation of the PhD training at the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences].
- Lee, F. L. F. (2014). The impact of online user-generated satire on young people's political attitudes: Testing the moderating role of knowledge and discussion. *Telematics and Informatics*, 31(3), 397-409. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2013.08.002>
- Lee, H., & Kwak, N. (2014). The affect effect of political satire: Sarcastic humor, negative emotions, and political participation. *Mass Communication and Society*, 17(3), 307-328.
- Lent, J. A. (2014). Cartooning in Vietnam: A brief overview. In J. A. Lent (Ed.), *Southeast Asian cartoon art: History, trends and problems* (pp. 122-139). Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland.
- Li, H. (2011). Parody and resistance on the Chinese internet. In D. K. Herold & P. Marolt (Eds.), *Online society in China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival* (pp. 83-100). London and New York: Routledge.

- Lichter, S. R. (2018). *Politics is a joke!: How TV comedians are remaking political life*. London: Routledge.
- Lockyer, S. (2006). A two-pronged attack? Exploring Private Eye's satirical humour and investigative reporting. *Journalism Studies*, 7(5), 765-781. doi:10.1080/14616700600890422
- Luqiu, L. R. (2017). The cost of humour: Political satire on social media and censorship in China. *Global Media and Communication*, 13(2), 123-138.
- Mai, T. H. (2016). Tiếng cười trong tiểu thuyết Số Đò của Vũ Trọng Phụng [The laughter in the novel Dumb Luck of Vu Trong Phung]. *Khoa học Xã hội Việt Nam*, 8(105), 102-106.
- Marzouki, M. E. (2015). Satire as counter-discourse: Dissent, cultural citizenship, and youth culture in Morocco. *International Communication Gazette*, 77(3), 282-296.
- McAllister, P., & Luckman, T. C. T. (2015). The Kitchen God returns to Heaven [Ông Táo Về Trời]: popular culture, social knowledge and folk beliefs in Vietnam. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 10(1), 110-150.
- McKinley, C. (2011). Vietnam. In A. Heslop (Ed.), *Financially viable media in emerging and developing markets: World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers*. Retrieved from http://www.wan- ifra.org/sites/default/files/field_article_file/Financial_Viability_Report_WAN-IFRA.pdf.
- Meng, B. (2011). From steamed bun to grass mud horse: E Gao as alternative political discourse on the Chinese Internet. *Global Media and Communication*, 7(1), 33-51.
- Miazhevich, G. (2015). Sites of subversion: online political satire in two post-Soviet states. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(3), 422-439.
- Minh-Nga. (2018). Half of Vietnamese get news from social media, survey finds. Retrieved from <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/business/data-speaks/half-of-vietnamese-get-news-from-social-media-survey-finds-3698212.html>
- Mustapha, L. K., Omar, B., & Atoloye, S. A. (2019). Influence of satirical media content on orientation to politics among Nigerian youth. *Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 11(2), 91-110.
- Nagel, T. (1971). The absurd. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68(20), 716-727.
- Ngo, T. K. O. (2013). Chất trào phúng trong thơ Nguyễn Khuyến và Tú Xương [Satirical Poetry of Nguyen Khuyen and Tu Xuong]. *Tạp chí Khoa học Đại học Sư phạm TP HCM*(46), 76-82.
- Nguyen, N. C. (2013). Truyện nhân vật thông minh láu lỉnh trong văn học dân gian Đông Á (Trường hợp Trạng Quỳnh của Việt Nam và Kim Sondal của Triều Tiên) [Stories on witty characters in East Asian folklore (Vietnam's Trang Quynh and North Korea's Kim Sondal)]. *Tạp chí Khoa học Xã hội thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*, 4(176), 31-37.
- Nguyen, P. M., & Vuong, Q. H. (2016). In Vietnam, Digital is Democratizing. Retrieved from CIMA-NED website:
- Nguyen, T. B. (2012). *Social media as a marketing channel for traditional newspapers: Tuoi Tre Newspaper*. (Bachelor), Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Lahti, Finland.

- Nhan-Dan. (2017). Internet users account for 54% of Vietnam's population after 20 years. Retrieved from <https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/science-it/190837/internet-users-account-for-54--of-vietnam-s-population-after-20-years.html>
- Nordin, A., & Richaud, L. (2014). Subverting official language and discourse in China? Type river crab for harmony. *China information*, 28(1), 47-67.
- Orwell, G. (2004). *An Age Like This: 1920-1940 (The Collected Essays, Journalism & Letters #1)* (S. Orwell & I. Angus Eds. Reprint ed.). Boston, Massachusetts: David R. Godine.
- Owen, M. J. (2017). Satire, social media and revolutionary cultural production in the Bahrain uprising: From utopian fiction to political satire. *Communication and the Public*, 2(2), 136-153.
- Phan, T. T. (2003). Speaking pictures: Biem hoa or satirical cartoons on government corruption and popular political thought in contemporary Vietnam. In L. B. W. Drummond & M. Thomas (Eds.), *Consuming Urban Culture in Contemporary Vietnam*: Routledge Curzon.
- Punathambekar, A. (2015). Satire, elections, and democratic politics in digital India. *Television & New Media*, 16(4), 394-400.
- PV. (2017). Nhiều sai phạm tại Học viện Khoa học xã hội [Many misconducts at Graduate Academy of Social Sciences]. *Nhan Dan*. Retrieved from Nhan Dan website: <http://nhandan.com.vn/phapluat/thoi-su-phap-luat/item/33924502-nhieu-sai-pham-tai-hoc-vien-khoa-hoc-xa-hoi.html>
- Riaz, D., Nazir, F., & Bhatti, M. B. (2018). Influence of political satirical shows on youth's participation in democratic process. *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 11(1).
- Rill, L. A., & Cardiel, C. L. (2013). Funny, ha-ha: The impact of user-generated political satire on political attitudes. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(12), 1738-1756.
- Schwab, K. (2017). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.
- Scott, C. (2007). Written in red, white, and blue: A comparison of comic book propaganda from World War II and September 11. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40(2), 325-343.
- Shao, L., & Liu, D. (2018). The road to cynicism: The political consequences of online satire exposure in china. *Political Studies*, 67(2), 517-536.
- Sharbaugh, P. E., & Nguyen, D. (2014). Make lulz, not war: How online remix and meme culture are empowering civic engagement in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, 1(3), 133-168.
- Skoric, M. M., Zhu, Q., & Pang, N. (2016). Social media, political expression, and participation in Confucian Asia. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 9(4), 331-347.
- Stewart, P. A. (2011). The influence of self- and other-deprecatory humor on presidential candidate evaluation during the 2008 US election. *Social Science Information*, 50(2), 201-222. doi:10.1177/0539018410396616
- Szablewicz, M. (2014). The 'losers' of China's Internet: Memes as 'structures of feeling' for disillusioned young netizens. *China information*, 28(2), 259-275.
- Tang, L., & Yang, P. (2011). Symbolic power and the internet: The power of a 'horse'. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(5), 675-691.

- Test, G. (1986). *Satire: Spirit and art*. Tampa, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Thiem, B. H. (2017). The new meaning of political participation in cyberspace: Social media and collective action in Vietnam's authoritarianism *Political Participation in Asia* (pp. 109-125): Routledge.
- Vi-Tran. (2018). People in Vietnam openly challenge appellate court's decision in child molestation case, demanding tougher sentence. Retrieved from The Vietnamese website: <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2018/05/people-in-vietnam-openly-challenge-appellate-courts-decision-in-child-molestation-case-demanding-tougher-sentence/>
- Vuong, Q.-H. (2018). The (ir)rational consideration of the cost of science in transition economies. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2(1), 5-5. doi:10.1038/s41562-017-0281-4
- Vuong, Q.-H. (2019a). Breaking barriers in publishing demands a proactive attitude. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 3(10), 1034-1034. doi:10.1038/s41562-019-0667-6
- Vuong, Q.-H., Bui, Q.-K., La, V.-P., Vuong, T.-T., Nguyen, V.-H. T., Ho, M.-T., . . . Ho, M.-T. (2018). Cultural additivity: behavioural insights from the interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in folktales. *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1), 143. doi:10.1057/s41599-018-0189-2
- Vuong, Q.-H., Vuong, T.-T., Ho, M.-T., & Nguyen, T. H.-K. (2019). The 'Same Bed, Different Dreams' of Vietnam and China: How (Mis) trust Could Make or Break It. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 18(1), 93-128.
- Vuong, Q. (2019b). The financial economy of Viet Nam in an age of reform, 1986-2016. In P. M. a. N. Y. U. Volz (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Banking and Finance in Asia* (pp. 201-222). London, UK: Routledge.
- Vuong, Q. H. (2014). Vietnam's political economy: a discussion on the 1986-2016 period. *WP-CEB N°14-010 Universite Libre de Bruxelles*.
- Wagg, S. (1998). *Because I tell a joke or two: Comedy, politics and social difference*. London: Routledge.
- Wang, X., Juffermans, K., & Du, C. (2016). Harmony as language policy in China: An Internet perspective. *Language Policy*, 15(3), 299-321.
- Woodside, A. (1988). *Vietnam and the Chinese model: a comparative study of Vietnamese and Chinese government in the first half of the nineteenth century* (Vol. 140): Harvard Univ Asia Center.
- Xenos, M. A., & Becker, A. B. (2009). Moments of Zen: Effects of the Daily Show on information seeking and political learning. *Political Communication*, 26(3), 317-332. doi:10.1080/10584600903053569
- Yang, G., & Jiang, M. (2015). The networked practice of online political satire in China: Between ritual and resistance. *International Communication Gazette*, 77(3), 215-231.
- Yang, P., Tang, L., & Wang, X. (2015). Diaosi as infrapolitics: Scatological tropes, identity-making and cultural intimacy on China's Internet. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(2), 197-214.
- Zaheer, L. (2018). Public affinity for political discourse in Pakistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 25(1), 229-241.