**Sinh thì means “to die”?**

Nguyễn Cung Thông (Tom Nguyen)
Education Consultant/Independent Researcher
Australia

**ABSTRACT**

*Sinh thì* is a compound verb which for Vietnamese Catholics means “to die”, but *sindh* also means a lifespan (living years/period) to most Vietnamese. This creates ambiguity when one tries to understand a statement such as “*Khi mồ côi con sinh thì người mẹ phải lo dũ chuyện,” to mean either (a) when a baby is born, the mother is very busy, or (b) when a baby dies, the mother is very busy. *Sinh thì* means *giờ lên* (lit. ascending hour) in Việt-Bồ-La dictionary (1651)\(^1\), these two words were written as 生時. This paper seeks to find a plausible explanation of the above situation through Nôm sources in the works of Girolamo Majorica S.J. (viz. 翁垩⾐衣那枢傳 Ông Thánh I-na-xu Truyền [The Story of St. Ignatius], 1634) or others. Nôm ideographic source for *sindh* were consistently written as 生時, which can be associated to Alexandre de Rhodes' explanation of ‘ascending hour’ by observing Vietnamese Bác Trưng Bổ dialects and Mường dialects. *Răng* (tooth, Vietnamese) or *thằng* (Mường Bi) were transcribed uniformly as 生 sinh in 安南譯語 An Nam Dịch Ngữ.\(^2\)

Hence *sindh* gives us an interesting linguistic case of European priests trying to mix and communicate with local Vietnamese in cross cultural, religious and dialectal traditions.

**AUTHOR/PROFESSION**
Nguyễn Cung Thông (Tom Nguyen)
Education Consultant/Independent Researcher

**CONTACT DETAILS**
(Home) +61395613678 (Mobile) 0422874335

ADDRESS
1/27 Glen Court, Glen Waverley 3150 Victoria, Australia

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