

For H're people, death is not a reason to grieve. Death can come at any time, and although most of us know that, a Vietnamese tribe possibly takes it bit better than most.



The H'Re people are scattered across central Vietnam with a population of around 130,000. The biggest community lives in the mountainous district of Ba To in Quang Ngai Province, where they preserve most of the group's traditions, including the seemingly casual way of taking death in their stride.

In other cultures, sons and daughters usually opt for a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates as a gift for their parents...not a coffin while they're still alive and kicking.

The group's favored coffin is a dug-out tree, and considered a prized gift between relatives.

51-year-old member Pham Van Do from Quang Ngai made a dugout coffin for his mother more

than 20 years ago.

“I spent a whole day in the jungle trying to find this tree,” Do proudly says.

“It took 30 strong men to carry it home.”

He spent one week shaping the tree into a coffin of more than two meters long with a separate lid.



Pham Van Do (right) and his mother sit by the dugout coffin he made for her. Photo by VnExpress/Thach Thao

Do said he and his brothers have made five coffins. They used one nearly 10 years ago for their father's funeral and offered the others as gifts to relatives.

His mother said she is ready for her turn.

"It's time I joined my husband, my ancestors. I'm happy that my children have prepared for my departure," she says. Now aged 70, she still works in the family's rice fields and collects firewood every day.

Locals say the tradition has been preserved for hundreds of years. Most people have a coffin waiting for them by the time they're 60. If one of their younger relatives suddenly dies, they get the coffin and a new one is made.

The coffins somehow have a bigger meaning than a sad farewell.

Nguyen Dang Vu, director of Quang Ngai's culture department, said that many ethnic groups in Vietnam take death as a matter of course and not a reason to grieve.

They prefer a dugout coffin because they spend their entire lives in the jungle, he said.

Carrying the shape of a dugout canoe, the coffin also symbolizes smooth sailing to the world of eternity, he says.

However, Vu says the tradition is fading and is no longer strictly followed due to rapid deforestation.

In this Vietnamese tribe, a coffin is a gift most treasured

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