Title
Contested Memories: Hát Bội/Tuồng Performance as Technology of Memory in Vietnam and the Diaspora

Author
Tran, Kim Nguyen

Publication Date
2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Contested Memories: *Hát Bội*/*Tuồng* Performance as Technology of Memory in Vietnam and the Diaspora

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Ethnomusicology

by

Kim Nguyen Tran

2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Contested Memories: *Hát Bội*/*Tuồng* Performance as Technology of Memory in Vietnam and the Diaspora

by

Kim Nguyen Tran

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Helen M. Rees, Chair

At its core, this project is about memory, the relationship between memory and official histories, and the role that the performing arts have in constructing our cultural memories. Through multi-sited fieldwork in Vietnam (Hanoi, Tam Kỳ, Quy Nhơn, and Hồ Chí Minh City) and the Vietnamese refugee community of southern California, my research focuses on the musical theatre genre *hát bội*, with origins that can be traced as far back as the eleventh century. This art form has undergone transformations during Vietnam's tumultuous history, through French colonialism, a nationalist fight for independence, a communist revolution, recent economic reforms, and in the refugee community that fled the war. The myriad ways (films, fiction, memoirs, photographs, political speeches, memorials) and perspectives in which Vietnamese history, especially the war, has been told are often highly contested. This dissertation centers around the social and political meanings ascribed to *hát bội* today across national and

diasporic communities, and how *hát bội* is a medium through which the negotiation and construction of contested memories have taken place. In Vietnam, I examine three state-sponsored *hát bội* troupes and their performances at a highly political national competition, organized by the government. In this state-sponsored competition, I look at the ways in which performances of *hát bội* have been able to both sustain and subvert nationalist memories. In southern California, I argue that performances of *hát bội* are framed in the context of nostalgia, loss, and longing for a no longer existing homeland, and in the context of American society that has often left South Vietnamese experiences unrecognized. Through the art from of *hát bội*, I examine lasting effects of war, colonialism, and imperialism in Vietnam's history and in the Vietnamese refugee community, and how this story has been told.

The dissertation of Kim Nguyen Tran is approved.

Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo

Timothy Rice

Roger Savage

Helen M. Rees, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

for my family

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am immensely grateful to my many teachers and advisors who supported me throughout this project. Members of the *hát bội* community in Hanoi, Quy Nhơn, Tam Kỷ, Hồ Chí Minh City, and Little Saigon were so generous with their time and open to sharing their experiences of this art form with me. I would like to especially thank Phạm Ngọc Tuấn, Hoàng Ngọc Định, Nguyễn Gia Khoán, Phan Nga, Hoàng Chương, Nhu Mì Đào (and family), Quỳnh Lan Dương, and Ngân Anh for their help and guidance with my research in Vietnam. In Little Saigon, Dương Ngọc Bầy, Trần Hải Đệ, and Ysa Lê were tremendously supportive of my work. My committee members, Helen Rees, Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, Roger Savage, and Tim Rice were invaluable to this project, especially Helen Rees who read countless drafts and revisions. I would also like to thank Phong Thuyet Nguyen, who supported my very first project on Vietnamese music long ago while I was attending high school at Phillips Academy Andover, and Ted Levin, who, while I was studying at Dartmouth College, was really the first person to introduce me to the subject of ethnomusicology and encourage me to pursue it. This project was supported by two US Department of Education Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowships, a UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship, and Teaching Fellowships in the UCLA Asian Languages and Cultures Department. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, both blood and chosen: my dad for singing Vietnamese lullabies to me as a child, my mom for making sure I learned the Vietnamese language, my grandmother for keeping it in good use, my niece and nephew (Sarah and Adam) for their young infatuation with music, and my husband Derrick (and family) for all of the support and love that nourishes all aspects of my life.

VITA

EDUCATION

2010 MA, University of California, Los Angeles

2007 BA, Dartmouth College

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2017 Adjunct Instructor, Glendale Community College

2015-2017 Teaching Fellow, University of California, Los Angeles

2014-2015 Graduate Research Assistant, University of California, Los Angeles

2011-2015 Teaching Associate, University of California, Los Angeles

2009-2011 Teaching Assistant, Univeristy of California, Los Angeles

2006 Teaching Assistant, Dartmouth College

PUBLICATIONS

2015 Liner notes for music album, *Prisms Cycles Leaps*, Orenda Records.

2014 "Truong Ba's Soul in Butcher's Skin," Translator and editor. In *The Methuen Drama Anthology of Modern Asian Plays*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 451-518.

2014 Review of Catherine Diamond, *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2012). In Theatre Research International 39(2): 152-153.

2014 Review of Barley Norton, *Songs for the Spirits: Music and Mediums in Modern Vietnam* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009). Review translated into Chinese by Zhong Juandi. In Da Yin/Ritual Soundscapes 9:275-277.

2009 "Experimental Music in Vietnam." Article translated into Swedish by Andreas Engström. In *Nutida Musik* (4): 5-13.

PRESENTATIONS

2016	"Legacies for Vietnamese Music Scholarship in the Smithsonian Archives." Roundtable Panelist. Society for Ethnomusicology Annual Conference. Washington DC, November 11.
2015	"Contested Memories: Repurposed Histories in Contemporary Vietnamese Classical Opera in Vietnam and the Diaspora." Annual Association for Asian Performance Conference. Montreal, July 30.
2014	"Hát Bội Classical Opera as Technology of Memory in the Vietnamese American Community." Annual Association for Asian American Studies Conference. San Francisco, April 17.
2012	"Vietnamese Classical Opera as Symbol: Nostalgia and Nationalism in the Diaspora." 17th International Conference of the European Foundation for Chinese Music Research. Leiden, The Netherlands, September 14.
2007	“The Tamale, Ghana Eye Clinic: What We Did, What We Could Not Do, and What We Are Doing.” 4th Annual Unite for Sight International Health Conference. Stanford University, April 17.

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

2014-2015	UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship
2013-2014	US Department of Education Foreign Language & Area Studies Academic Year Fellowship
2012-2013	US Department of Education Foreign Language & Area Studies Academic Year Fellowship
2011	UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship
2009-10	UCLA Chancellor's Prize in Ethnomusicology
2008-09	US Department of Education Foreign Language & Area Studies Academic Fellowship in Vietnamese/Vietnam (declined)
2007-08	Dartmouth Graduate Fellowship in Music, Vietnam
2006	Humanitarian Team of the Year Award, Tamale Teaching Hospital, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

In the mainstream American consciousness, "Vietnam" hardly refers to a country or its people, but rather to a war, its aftermath, and no less an era in American history. Many Americans, particularly those of the younger generation, view the Vietnam War in terms of a conflict between the US and Vietnam, and tend to forget or be unaware of the war as a civil conflict between North and South Vietnam. Collective memories of the US surrounding the Vietnam War have become an essential part of the nation's cultural and political terrain—images of Pete Seeger and Joan Baez playing war protest songs, flowers in rifle barrels, lush green foliage burning in napalm, emotionally tormented war veterans, a somber black wall. These collective memories have been reenacted, represented, and referred to in films, fiction, memoirs, photographs, political speeches, and memorials, in ways both overt and subtle.

But Vietnam, too, has its own narrative of what occurred during the "American War," and Vietnamese refugees in the US, many of whom are now American citizens, have their own, often conflicting accounts of this history. The events that took place on April 30th, 1975, are a pertinent example. In the early morning hours of that day, North Vietnamese forces had gained control over key strategic points in Saigon, and it soon became clear that the Southern forces could not hold the city. At 10:24am, Dương Văn Minh, President of South Vietnam, announced an unconditional surrender, inviting the provisional revolutionary government to engage in "a ceremony of orderly transfer of power so as to avoid unnecessary bloodshed in the population." The North Vietnamese forces did not verbally respond, but under the command of Colonel Bui Tin, burst through the presidential palace gates with T-54/55 tanks. Minh and thirty of his advisors were waiting on the palace steps. Minh said to Tin, "I have been waiting to transfer power to you." Tin replied, "There is no question of you transferring power. Your power has crumbled. You cannot give up what you do not have" (Oliver 2001).

This moment in history is commemorated annually in contemporary Vietnam as the Liberation of South Vietnam and as National Reunification Day. In Vietnam, April 30th is a day of celebration, when patriotic citizens proudly display the red Socialist Republic of Vietnam flag bearing a yellow star. Here in the US, the same day is remembered in a starkly different manner by the Vietnamese refugee community, many of whom were from South Vietnam. As a child, I remember attending the annual commemorations organized by the Vietnamese American community of Boston. A large banner with bold letters was hung across the wall that read: Remembering the Day of National Regret – April 30 (Tưởng Niệm Ngày Hận Quốc – 30/4). To the Vietnamese American community, April 30th was and is to be remembered as a day of grief and mourning, at the loss not only of lives but of a country that can no longer be returned to.

Although I was born in Boston more than ten years after April 30th 1975, my generation and those beyond it in the US and in Vietnam experience what cultural critic Marianne Hirsch (1996) calls "postmemory," a form of memory that gains its power not through recollection but rather through mediation, imaginative investment, and creation. Andreas Huyssen (1995), too, argues that it is the gap between the representation of memory and the experience of an event that inspires artistic engagement with a notion of the past. Vietnam's tumultuous political history—particularly in the 20th century through French colonization, occupation by the US, independence, transformation into a socialist society with centralized economy, market reforms allowing privatization, and eventual acceptance into the World Trade Organization—has been remembered and forgotten in a myriad ways. Marita Sturken (1997) explains this malleability and negotiation of memory through what she terms "technologies of memory," the objects, images, and representations, but also the artistic practices, narrative, and audiovisual techniques used to produce and give meaning to cultural memory.

My research focuses on one such technology of memory, the Vietnamese theatrical tradition of *hát bội*, also known as *tuồng* in the north of Vietnam. In this dissertation I will for the most part use the term *hát bội* to refer to the theatrical form, but it is important to note that this term has connotations regarding region, style, and authenticity (see figure 1.1 for map of Vietnam and fieldwork locations).[1] With origins that can be traced as far back as the 11th century AD, *hát bội* uses elaborate costumes and makeup, symbolic gestures, dialogue, singing and music to express historical, legendary, and topical narratives. During the peak of its development and up until 1950, *hát bội* was widespread and served as a functional art form for educational, ethical, or political purposes, in addition to being entertainment. My dissertation research centers around the social and political meanings that are ascribed to *hát bội* today across national and diasporic communities, and how the performance of *hát bội* has been a medium through which the negotiation and construction of multiple and contested versions of cultural memories vying for differing social, cultural, economic, and political stakes have taken place. I focus on performance in particular, and how, as Diana Taylor writes, "performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Schechner has called 'twice-behaved behavior'" (2005:3). Due to its early origins, *hát bội* is considered by most to be a "traditional" art form, yet in the 20th century and beyond, *hát bội*

[1] In most state-sponsored documents and discourses surrounding the art form, *tuồng* is used as the "official" term to represent the art form nationally. Other terms are considered regional and not representative. For example, the name of the theatre based in Hanoi, the country's capital, is "Tuồng Theatre of Việt Nam," while theatres located in other areas are "Tuồng Theatre of Đào Tấn" (Đào Tấn was a prolific writer of *hát bội* plays from the central region), "Theatre of Traditional Arts of Imperial Huế" (which performs not only *hát bội* but also other theatrical and musical forms), and "Theatre of the Art of Hát Bội in Hồ Chí Minh City." Only the Hanoi-based theatre bears the national title of belonging to Việt Nam as a country. However, most scholars agree that *tuồng* is a relatively recent term promoted and popularized by the state in the 20th century, and that *hát bội* was the term used during the art form's development and golden era (16th-19th centuries). The troupe based in Hanoi is by far the most well supported troupe in the country in terms of funding, resources, and opportunities for international performances.

performance practices have undergone recent and divergent transformations that maintain its relevance in a contemporary context in Vietnam and the diaspora.

Vietnam: Memory and History

Vietnam's complex and tumultuous history of imperial and colonial rule, a prolonged struggle for independence, a Communist-led revolution, several wars, and transition of the centrally planned economy to a market-driven one, has been accompanied by numerous attempts to redefine historical meaning and remake the past. For this reason, processes of memory making have figured prominently in recent cultural studies of contemporary Vietnam (Bradley 2001; Ho Tai 2001 and 2005; Nora Taylor 2001; Kennedy and Williams 2001; Olsen 2008; Schwenkel 2009). I argue that contemporary performances of *hát bội* plays, too, have been "modernized" to appeal to contemporary audiences through the use of newly written or newly staged plays depicting Vietnamese historical events and the Vietnamese present in particular and deliberate ways. Other traditional genres of Vietnamese music and Western musical techniques have also been incorporated into contemporary *hát bội* plays in order to appeal to a wider audience. A brief history of Vietnam follows in order to contextualize the ways in which historical narratives have been constructed, and to better understand the reasons why distinct groups have attempted to shape Vietnam's historical meanings in multiple and contested ways.

Vietnam's ancient history dates back to archaeological findings that show human remains from as far back as the Paleolithic era (c. 10,000 BC). The prehistoric Đồng Sơn culture beginning at about 600 BC during the Bronze Age in particular had an important influence on Vietnamese civilization, with the development of rice cultivation, keeping of livestock, and skilled bronze casting that included Đồng Sơn drums, found widely in Southeast Asia and

southern China (Corfield 2008: 2).[2] The ancient site of the legendary Hồng Bàng Dynasty of the Hùng kings (2879 BC to 258 BC), which had been dismissed by the French as a fairy tale, was only recently discovered by Vietnamese archeologists and is considered the first Vietnamese state (Jamieson 1993: 7). However, by 111 BC, after the invasion by Han Emperor Wu Di, Vietnam became incorporated into the empire of the Chinese Han Dynasty (Corfield 2008: 3).

For the next thousand years until 938 AD, Vietnam would mostly remain under Chinese rule, with only brief and temporarily successful independence movements.[3] Due to this long period of domination by China, debate exists concerning whether Vietnam should be considered culturally part of East Asia rather than Southeast Asia, with its adoption of Confucianism, the Mandarin examination system, and the early Vietnamese writing system, *chữ nôm*, which was based on Chinese characters. The country regained full independence under the Vietnamese lord Ngô Quyền in 938 AD, and during the subsequent Lý and Trần dynasties (1109-1400 AD), Vietnam enjoyed its golden era of music and culture, when *hát bội*, with origins in Chinese *zaju* theatre, was introduced as entertainment for the Vietnamese royal court (Nguyen 2010: 25). A series of Vietnamese dynasties followed, and from the sixteenth century onwards, civil strife engulfed most of the country.

The country was reunified over a century later when the Tây Sơn brothers, in a series of peasant rebellions, established a new dynasty lasting from 1778 to 1802. Tây Sơn rule was defeated when the remnants of the Nguyễn lords, aided by the French, unified the country under the Nguyễn dynasty in 1802 (Corfield 2008: 13). In a series of military conquests between 1859

[2] Cast out of bronze, Đồng Sơn drums were intricately decorated with geometric patterns, scenes of daily life and war, the phoenix (which has become a symbol of Vietnamese culture), other animals, and boats. The drums were used as musical instruments, cult objects, and heirlooms.

[3] These independence movements include those led by the Trưng Sisters (40-43AD) and Lady Triệu (circa 248 AD) (Corfield 2009: xv).

and 1885, aided by Catholic militias who had been persecuted under the anti-Christian movement among Vietnamese literati, Vietnam's independence was gradually eroded by France (Brocheux 2009: 29). In 1887 the entire country formally became part of French Indochina. The French administration imposed significant political and cultural changes upon Vietnamese society, including a Western-style education system and the propagation of Roman Catholicism, with most French settlers based around the southern city of Saigon. The French developed an agro-industrial economy based on rubber plantations, mining, and other industries born out of urbanization and the policy of infrastructure development (ibid.: 125-126). A nationalist political movement emerged, with leaders such as Phan Bội Châu, Phan Đình Phùng, Phan Chu Trinh, and Hồ Chí Minh calling for independence from the French.

Following the military defeat of Japan in 1945,[4] the Việt Minh, a communist and nationalist liberation movement led by the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary Hồ Chí Minh, occupied the northern city of Hà Nội and proclaimed a provisional government.[5] The French deployed additional military troops to restore colonial rule in northern Vietnam, and the Việt Minh began a guerilla warfare campaign against the French in 1946. The French and Vietnamese loyalists were decisively defeated by the Việt Minh in the 1954 Battle of Điện Biên Phủ, allowing Hồ Chí Minh to negotiate a ceasefire from a favorable position at the subsequent Geneva Conference. Under the Geneva Accords of 1954, French Indochina ended and the colonial administration was dissolved (Tarling 2000: 45). The country was partitioned at the 17th

[4] Japanese forces occupied northern Vietnam beginning in September of 1940 until the end of World War II. A famine occurred in northern Vietnam in 1945 due to the compulsory sale of rice to the Japanese state at a small fraction of the market price. The problem was compounded by a lack of dike management after US bombings and flooding in 1944, which caused a massive loss of crops (Nguyen Khac Vien 1975: 92-95; Pham 1985: 181-182). Estimates range from one million (10% of the area's population at that time) to two million deaths caused by the famine (Marr 1984: 104; Bui 1995: 575-576).

[5] At this time, the US Office of Strategic Services (precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency) was clandestinely supporting Hồ Chí Minh and his independence movement against the French, in exchange for intelligence. Later in the conflict the US would support South Vietnam (Brocheux 2011: 198).

parallel, with the communists led by Hồ Chị Minh in the north (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and the loyalist forces led by Vietnam's last emperor, Bào Đại, in the south (State of Vietnam), which did not recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a legitimate government (Jamieson 1993: 232).

During a three-hundred-day period of free movement aided by the US Navy program "Operation Passage to Freedom," almost one million northerners moved from north to south, mostly Catholics fearing religious persecution by the communists. In a rigged election in the south, the US-supported Catholic Ngô Đình Diệm ousted Bào Đại with 98% of the vote and a 133% voter turnout in Saigon (Karnow 1997: 223-24; Jacobs 2006: 95). While the Geneva Accords had stipulated that Vietnam would hold national elections in 1956 to decide who would govern a unified Vietnam, Diệm refused to do so, cancelling elections. Fearing that communist Hồ Chí Minh would win if national elections were held, the US supported South Vietnam, citing the "domino theory" of the Cold War, which speculated that if one state in a region fell to communism, surrounding states would follow.

The National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (or Việt Cộng) began a guerilla campaign in the late 1950s to overthrow Diem's government in the South. In the North, the communist government launched a land reform program and executed between 50,000 and 172,000 people in campaigns against wealthy farmers and landowners, among other purges (Margolin 1997: 568-69; Rosefielde 2009: 110). The Soviet Union and North Vietnam signed treaties providing increased Soviet military support in 1960 and 1962. Meanwhile, in the South, Diệm sought to crush his political and religious opposition through imprisonment, torture, and executions. In May 1963, mass protests erupted against Diệm's policies and treatment of Buddhists, precipitated by the shooting of nine unarmed civilians who were protesting the ban on the Buddhist flag. A violent crackdown by the Diệm regime followed, which led to the

breakdown of his relationship with the US. In November 1963, Diệm and his brother were assassinated in a CIA-backed coup (Miller 2013: 280). The US began increasing its contribution of military advisors to support South Vietnam's struggle against the communist insurgency, and began ground combat operations in 1965. China and the Soviet Union continued to provide material aid and advisors to North Vietnam, and the pro-communist Việt Cộng in the South accessed supplies via the elaborate underground Ho Chi Minh Trail that passed through Laos (Corfield 2008: 79).

The Tet Offensive in 1968, although a military failure for the north, shocked the American establishment and turned US public opinion against the war.[6] With increasing domestic opposition and international condemnation, the US began withdrawing troops from Vietnam in the early 1970s. Following the Paris Peace Accords of 1973, all American combat troops were withdrawn. In 1974 North Vietnam began a full-scale offensive, culminating in the "Fall of Saigon" described earlier in this chapter. In the aftermath of the war, the communist government undertook a massive campaign of economic and social reforms. Farms, businesses, factories and the press were collectivized, and many South Vietnamese with ties to the previous regime or the US were sent to reeducation camps, where prisoners were routinely subjected to exhausting physical labor, torture, and other poor living conditions (Le 2009: 189-210, 192). Cultural products such as literary works, newspapers, and musical works published in the south before 1975 were officially banned and confiscated if discovered, labeled as tainted twice over by imperialism: first by French colonization and second by the US occupiers (Khai Thu Nguyen

[6] During the Vietnamese Lunar New Year (Tet) of 1968, a ceasefire agreement was made for two days during the holiday, with both North and South Vietnam making national radio announcements to civilians notifying them of the temporary halt in violence. Nonetheless, communist forces launched an attack that began early on January 30, 1968, the first day of Tet. The Battle of Hue, one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the war, took place during the Tet Offensive, resulting in the destruction of the city and the execution of thousands of civilians in the Hue Massacre. This and other violence inflicted by North Vietnam have been suppressed in official narratives and public discussions after the war (Nguyen-Vo 2005: 160).

2010). As victors in the war, the North took part in multiple acts of what Thu-Huong Nguyen Vo calls "historical amnesia" (2005:167). The southern capital of Saigon was renamed Hồ Chí Minh City, streets were renamed after a pantheon of national or revolutionary martyrs, monuments and cemeteries of South Vietnam's war dead were demolished and razed, and there was suppression in official narratives and public discourse of the violence inflicted on the South by the North.

In the decades following the Fall of Saigon, Vietnamese came to the US in large numbers, constituting the largest population movement to the country since the immigration of the Jews during and after WWII. They now number over 1.5 million and represent the largest and most culturally influential population of the global Vietnamese diaspora (Pelaud 2011: 8). The initial wave of refugees came from South Vietnam, fearing retaliation by the communists due to their affiliation with the South Vietnamese administration and its American allies. Unlike most emigrants, South Vietnamese had very little time to prepare physically or emotionally for their departure. Many had faced the traumas of war or of the reeducation camps, and felt deeply abandoned by the US withdrawal (ibid.: 9).

South Vietnamese memorials to the dead had already been physically destroyed and culturally "forgotten" by the victors of the civil war. But as refugees in the US, South Vietnamese again found that their dead were not accorded the same humanity and dignity as American dead. Viet Thanh Nguyen writes, "from the American perspective, the Vietnamese bodies must be dehumanized, de-realized, in order to allow for the humanization of the American soldier and the substantiation of his body and, through it, of American ideology and culture" (1997: 618). The Vietnam War Memorial is a potent example; framed in the nationalist context of the Washington Mall, the Memorial "forgets" the Vietnamese and "remembers" the American veterans as the primary victims of war. As Yen Le Espiritu writes, "Without creating an opening for a Vietnamese perspective of the war, these dramatic and public commemorations of the

Vietnam War refuse to remember Vietnam as a historical site, Vietnamese people as genuine subjects, and the Vietnam War as having any kind of integrity of its own" (2005: xiv).

In the context of a controversial and morally questionable war, Vietnamese refugees have become most visible (or perhaps only visible) in public discussions of the war when framed as successful, assimilated, and anti-communist immigrants who are grateful beneficiaries of freedom in the US. Espiritu sees this narrative of the "good refugee" as a key in enabling the US to turn the Vietnam War into a "good war," with Vietnamese in the US becoming evidence that ultimately the war was "necessary, just, and successful." Espiritu terms this the "we-win-even-when-we-lose" syndrome that undergirds US remembrance of Vietnam's losses as historically necessary for the progress of freedom and democracy (2005: xv). In her book *The Gift of Freedom*, Mimi Thi Nguyen dissects the concept of the "gift," drawing from Derrida, as an aporia in which "the gift as transfer of a possession from one to another shapes a relation between giver and recipient that engenders a debt, which is to say that the gift belongs to an economy that voids its openhanded nature" (2012: 7). Mimi Thi Nguyen focuses on the figure of the Vietnamese refugee as the double target of "the gift of freedom": first through war and second through refuge, with the imposition of debt precluding the subject's freedom from escaping colonial histories that have deemed them "unfree." The gift is "a surface on which power operates as a form of subjection" (2012: 8).[7]

As Nguyen-Vo notes, it is no wonder that Vietnamese Americans would have such a strong urge to remember in the midst of so much forgetting (2005: 159). Due to the multiple layers of historical amnesia they face, in addition to their unplanned departure as refugees, Karin

[7] Nguyen is drawing from Judith Butler's comments on Foucault's concept of subjection to be "literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. This notion of subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally acts on a given individual as a form of domination, but also activates or forms the subject" (Butler 1995: 230).

Aguilar-San Juan argues that "strategic memory projects" are crucial for Vietnamese Americans in their desire to form a collective identity and to build communities abroad, in remembrance of a homeland that no longer exists. Svetlana Boym's concept of "restorative nostalgia" similarly reveals that memory is a practice, a performance or project rather than a thing, in its attempt to reconstruct an idealized lost home that perhaps never existed (2001: 43). I argue that *hát bội* musical performance, especially in the context of theatre, which is open to what Diana Taylor terms the "scenario" paradigm, is a means through which we can understand the social structures and behaviors that the Vietnamese and Vietnamese American community draw upon in memory making.[8]

Although there have been numerous ethnomusicological studies in the past two decades that have investigated the role of musical performance in the construction of memory and history (Seeger 1991; Feld 1995; Shelemay 1998; McNally 2000; Emoff 2002; Wong 2004; Bithell 2006; Feldman 2006; Ritter 2006 and 2014), many of the seminal works in the field of memory studies were written in earlier decades (Foucault 1977; Appadurai 1981; Lowenthal 1985; Nora 1989; Connerton 1989; Huyssen 1995). Paul Ricoeur's writing on the exercise of memory and forgetting, including the role of ideology in the abuses of memory, has also informed my work (Ricoeur 2004). My study of *hát bội* performance will be deeply informed by these studies of memory because of Vietnam's complex and contested history of political upheaval and the circumstances surrounding the everyday lives of Vietnamese American refugees. In the context of memory studies, I ask, why is *hát bội* still being performed today? What relevance and meaning does this ancient theatrical tradition have in contemporary Vietnam and the refugee

[8] Taylor explores the "scenario" as an act of transfer, a paradigm that is formulaic, repeatable, portable, and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation. The potential number of versions of scenarios allows for multiple meanings, levels, and perspectives (2005: 54).

community abroad? Through what performance practices are these meanings constructed and perceived, and why and how are these meanings contested by distinct groups of people?

Music and Memory

Interest in the relationship between music and memory within ethnomusicological studies has been developing, particularly since the mid 1990s and early 2000s. Earlier studies by Kay Kaufman Shelemay (1998) and Stephen Feld (1995) draw compelling connections between musical and linguistic structures of songs themselves and the construction of cultural memories. Shelemay's study of the Judeo-Arabic musical tradition of *pizmonim* songs in the diasporic communities of Syrian Jews examines melody itself as "an integral part of historical memory" (5), and how "song provides a medium that binds together disparate strands of experience, serving as a malleable form of cultural expression able to transcend the vagaries of time and place" (17). Shelemay writes that the pizmonim tradition "spoke for itself," and her analysis privileges insider perspectives, allowing theoretical value and methodological frameworks to emerge from "the musical materials and exegesis of its carriers" (2). Similarly, in his study of the sung-texted weeping tradition of the Kaluli (Bosavi) people of Papua New Guinea, Feld analyzes song structures themselves, examining the boundaries between lingustic and musical creativities and how they interact and combine to form both sonic and semantic features.

Although these studies by Shelemay and Feld form intriguing connections between sonic/linguistic structures and the construction of memory and meaning, this theoretical approach has not been pertinent to my study of *hát bội* performance as a technology of memory. Due to the rigid musical conventions found in *hát bội,* with little room for musical innovation when performed in traditional ways, direct relationships between sonic elements themselves and memory-making in *hát bội* performances are uncommon. Following ethnomusicologist Thomas

Turino, Michael McNally, in his work with Ojibwe singers of the White Earth reservation, writes, "the 'sound object' may or may not be among the more salient features of musical culture. In some cultures, the more important aspect of musical experience may be found in the social relationships that surround the music making" (2000: 17). Contemporary *hát bội* performances, I argue, are one such case in which the "sound object" gains its power not in and of itself, but through the narratives that the art form in its totality creates in the construction of historical memories.

Other authors such as Anthony Seeger, Ron Emoff, and Heidi Feldman have affirmed the ways in which musical performances in the present have the ability to create new meaning from the past and can also inform the future. Although Seeger's study centers on the Suyá Indians of Brazil, fundamentally, it examines history itself, and how "when groups sing, they are doing more than creating sounds in the present; they are creating both the past and the present and projecting themselves into a future of their own construction" (1991: 34). In his study of musical practice and spirit posession on the east coast of Madagascar, Emoff similarly discusses what he terms "recollecting" as "enacting varied pasts . . . collectively extracting from the past to empower, embellish, and make sense of the present" (2002: 107). Examining the musical revival of African musical heritage in Peru, Feldman writes that the "missing heritage" and "forgotten rhythms of Black Peru" and were excavated by leaders of the revival to conjure "newly imagined links to the past" (2006: 4). My study of how *hát bội* performances have constructed narratives that have shaped historical memories of the past in ways that are relevant and meaningful in the present very much follows the theoretical frame of these previous ethnomusicological works.

In addition to examining history and memory, some ethnomusicological studies have also considered how in particular siutations, trauma and the dispossession of history have created a profound role for musical performance in reclaiming lost, forgotten, or traumatic histories.

Deborah Wong notes the importance of the refugee experience in her work with Khamvong Insixiengmai, a Laotian *mualam* (singer of *lam*, sung poetry with stylized dance movements). Through *lam* performances, Khamvong is able to recall "a past that is painful but necessary to remember. By doing so, he gives it a place in history, a place that is of central importance to the Lao who fled to escape disaster. In a way, he is busy creating a contemporary origin myth, a tale of separation and emigration" (Wong 2006: 35). Paul Allen Anderson's study of music and memory during the Harlem Renaissance also points to the historical traumas that African American intellectuals and musicians faced, writing that the "progress of the New Negro depended on successful recuperation and elucidation of the long-maligned black cultural inheritance," and that "the half-understood haunting of the present by the racial traumas of the recent past was a reality too deeply felt to be considered banal" (2001: 4).

McNally's study similarly examines Ojibwe hymn singing at wakes for the deceased as an artful response to colonization and historical dispossession. He writes, "so many die young and die violently at White Earth, [that] each successive wake resonates with the dispossession of history and urges collective reflection on both social and existential matters. Gatherings around death have become crossroads where the community takes stock of history and where it resolves to act on that history" (2000: 19). My research on *hát bội* in Vietnam and its diasporic community ostensibly is focused on a single genre of musical theatre, but the underlying questions strive to comprehend more deeply the historical legacies of war, colonization, imperialism, communism, and the refugee experience, and the ways that *hát bội* performances reveal negotiations of these historical pasts in the present.

In addition to recognizing the traumas of the Ojibwe experience in relation to music making and memory making, McNally also asks questions about the construction of cultural authenticity. For example, how is it possible that a musical tradition (hymns) once promoted by

missionaries to root out "Indianness" could be transformed into a space for Ojibwe to negotiate colonialism and allow perserverance and survival to be possible? (2000: 5). Other authors who examine questions of cultural authenticity in relation to music and memory include Dale Olsen and Benjamin Filene. In his study of popular music in Vietnam, Olsen states his objective as trying to figure out "what is Vietnamese about Vietnamese rock and pop music" (2008: 8). Following Arjun Appadurai, Olsen offers a dichotomy between the "politics of remembering and the economics of forgetting" to analyze Vietnam's popular music scenes. This aspect of forgetting that is inherent in any act of remembering is often left out of studies on music and memory. However, I do not believe that remembering has a monopoly on shaping the political, or that only forgetting can function in economic ways.

Benjamin Filene's work on public memory and American roots music questions the contruction of cultural authenticity by considering how cultural workers, or as he terms them, "middlemen" (folklorists, record company executives, producers, radio programmers, and publicists), have created rigid definitions of what "pure" folk music is and have also defined America's musical "margins" and "mainstream" (2000: 2-5). In the context of *hát bội*, I also examine cultural authenticity, in particular the often contradictory goals of the state in regard to promoting the authenticity of traditional arts on a national level. On the one hand, official discourses often emphasize the need to "preserve" the essence of traditional art forms, yet on the other hand, innovation is encouraged in order to appeal and be socially relevant to the general public. There are also regional differences in performance practices of *hát bội* that allow each region to lay claim to cultural authenticity for particular historical or political reasons.

Several other authors have focused on identity in their studies of music and memory. Another work by Dale Olsen, on the diasporic Japanese population of five countries in South America, looks towards music making as a vital activity for identity formation and cultural

survival of Nikkei (people of Japanese descent) abroad (2004). Following Jan Assmann, Olsen proposes two types of memory as a framework to analyze music making in the South American Nikkei population: communicative memory (as typified by musical associations and organizations) and cultural memory (acts by individuals that depend upon a specialized practice or "cultivation") (2004: 6). Mary Helen Thuente takes a different approach in her study of the harp as a site of debate about Irish culture and identity. Using the metaphor of a palimpsest, Thuente examines the "layers of interconnected cultural memories" that allow depictions of the harp to be an iconic site that reveals constructions of English colonialism, Irish nationalism, and Irish identity (2011: 65). By contrast, Lise Waxer centers her study of popular music geographically in the Columbian city of Cali as a site for understanding Latin American modernity. In particular, she examines how Caleño citizens have engaged in a creative process of self-production and identity creation through salsa-centered and record-centered cultural practices; she shows how these practices anchor their experiences during the tumultuous changes taking place in Cali that have accompanied the rise of urbanization (2002). Although my study is multi-sited geographically, cultural identity is of key interest in my work, particularly in the Vietnamese refugee community as they look towards a no longer existing homeland while finding ways to sustain their heritage and cultural identity in the context of a host country. This maintenance of cultural identity is complicated further when both the homeland and host country have engaged in repeated acts of "historical amnesia" (Nguyen-Vo 2005).

Hát Bội's Transformations in Vietnam: Origins, Colonialism, Socialism, and Đổi Mới Economic Reforms

Hát bội is a highly symbolic theatrical genre in its use of color, costumes, makeup, and conventions of gesture and movement (see figure 1.2, a nineteenth-century etching of *hát bội*

actors). For example, each color has an association with personality traits when seen on a character, either in costume or in makeup: blue with arrogance and cunning, red with righteousness and loyalty, orange and grey with youth, green with instability and change, pink with the divine and sacred. Gestures and movements are also highly symbolic; a character that points with one finger is a female, scholarly, or civil character, while pointing with two fingers indicates a martial character. Pointing downwards indicates something very close, while pointing outwards indicates something very far away. A character walking just three circles around the stage can be enough to convey a long, difficult, journey, and one stick with rope fringe can be used to signify a horse's head, body, tail, or may be a whip, depending on the manner in which it is held (Huynh 1984: 95-99).

The legendary, historical, and topical narratives expressed in *hát bội* often include Confucian virtues of loyalty, righteousness and justice, and filial piety. Traditionally, the busiest season for *hát bội* performances is during the second and tenth months of the lunar calendar. Festivals celebrating the full moon (*rằm*) of these months pay respect to deities that protect the population. The second lunar month festival is associated with male deities, while the tenth month is associated with female deities. Performances of *hát bội* are integral to these festivals, and take place in the local *đình* (community/village temple). There are also particular patrons/deities, usually founders or protectors, associated with local villages that have their own commemorative festivals, in which traveling *hát bội* troupes will often be invited to perform throughout the year (interview with Dương Ngọc Bầy, November 29, 2010). The central and southern *hát bội* troupes also have a strong tradition of performing during the three-day *lễ kỳ yên* that takes place during days 14, 15, and 16 of the third month of the lunar calendar (March or April of the Gregorian calendar), in which a set of rituals (*hát chầu*) requiring a *hát bội* troupe takes place in the village *đình*, ending in the full performance of a *hát bội* play each night. These

rituals represent the relationship between humans and the universe through depictions of the universe's creation; the rotation of the sun and moon; elements such as fire, wood, metal, and water; the seasons; and embodiments of luck, prosperity, and longevity (*phước*, *lọc*, *thọ*) (interview with Phan Nga, April 2, 2013). There is a saying amongst *hát bội* performers that as long as the *hát chầu* rituals exist, the *hát bội* tradition will stay alive.

Through my observations, traditional plays are normally three to four hours long, with three to four acts (*màn*), and two to three scenes (*lớp*) within each act. However, more recent, newly written plays performed by state-sponsored troupes are often shorter in length (maximum two hours), with more numerous (five to seven) but shorter *màn*, and one to four *lớp* within each *màn*. This shorter overall length of plays and shorter *màn* within the plays, as compared with more traditional *hát bội* performances, is a deliberate attempt to maintain the attention of contemporary audiences, in line with the state's goal of creating art that is socially relevant for the masses. State-sponsored troupes will also often perform short excerpts of plays (around ten to twenty minutes), either for tourist audiences (in venues such as state-owned theaters, amusement parks, and hotels), or for the local populations in "outreach" performances in villages on city outskirts (usually outdoor performances) that are often side-by-side with other short spoken-word plays that are a part of government awareness campaigns about social evils (anti-drugs, anti-prostitution, anti-corruption, etc.).

A *hát bội* ensemble includes a percussionist, considered the leader of the ensemble, who plays a range of drums including the largest, *trống chiến*, the smaller *trống cái*, and the medium-sized *trống quân*, as well as a hung gong, *đồng la*. The *trống chiến* (war drum) and *đồng là* are often heard in unison, especially during battle scenes, but are also used to mark the beginning of scenes, the end of scenes, and to punctuate certain movements of the actors (abrupt turning, looking, pointing, etc.). The *trống cái* and *trống quân* are both support drums that are heard in

response to the main *trống chiến* and *đồng la* rhythms. A small two-headed barrel drum called *trống cơm* (rice drum) is also often part of the percussion section. The drum heads of the *trống cơm* are smeared with rice paste in order to tune them one-fifth apart in pitch, and also to create overtones that produce the specific timbre of the drum. The *trống cơm* is often heard during sung performances of the *hát nam* mode (see below for description). The very large and deep sounding *trống chầu* drum is also always present during *hát bội* performances, but is not played by an ensemble member. This *trống chầu* is usually placed in the front of the audience at the foot of the stage, and played by a respected community member, marking musical phrases and poetic verses (see figure 1.3) (Lê 2007: 143-148).

The instrument in the *hát bội* ensemble with the most prominent sound is the *kèn* double-reed oboe, which has a piercing nasal timbre and is one of the loudest instruments (its construction makes it difficult to play at a very low dynamic). The most characteristic use of the *kèn* is during dramatic scenes with heightened emotions, such as grief, shock, anger, violence, etc., when its piercing timbre plays blaring melodies. Stringed instruments traditionally used include the two-stringed bowed fiddles *đàn nhị* (also known as *đàn cò*) and *đàn líu,* from the same family as the Chinese *erhu*, as well as the three-stringed *đàn tam* and two-stringed *đàn kìm*, which are plucked lutes. The *đàn nhị* and the *kèn* are normally played by the same person, who is usually one of the more experienced members in the ensemble. The two bowed fiddles, *đàn nhị* and *đàn líu* normally play a line following the vocal melodies, with ornamentations. The plucked *đàn tam* and *đàm kìm* also follow the vocal melody, but fill in the line with more notes, acting as an supporting accompaniment for the singer. Beginning in the second half of the 20th century, an adapted electric guitar (with hollowed out frets that allow for pitch bending and ornamentions) began to appear in the ensemble, along with an electric bass guitar, the plucked zither *đàn tranh* and plucked monochord *đàn bầu*. The adapted electric guitar and *đàn tranh* function similarly to

the *đàn nhị* and *đàn líu*, shadowing the vocal melody but not completely in unison, while the single-stringed *đàn bầu* is often associated with loneliness and emotions such as sorrow and grief (see figure 1.4) (Lê 2007: 148-150 and interview with Dương Ngọc Bầy, March 22, 2014).

There are several types of vocalizations in *hát bội*, including *nói thường*, which is normal speech, with no clear poetic meter; *nói lối*, stylized speaking at a higher pitch, with some sense of rhythm as the text is in rhyming couplets (there are many modes of *nói lối* that each convey a particular emotion or narrative situation, including *lối xuân*, *lối ai*, *lối xằng*, *lối thường*); *hát nam*, a singing style that is thought to be influenced by songs from the Cham ethnic minority (there are also different modes within *hát nam* that each convey a particular emotion or narrative action, including *nam xuân*, *nam ai*, *nam dưng*, *nam chạy*, *nam biệt*, *nam thoàn*); and *hát khách*, a singing style thought to be influenced by Chinese music due to its use of the pentatonic scale (there are also various styles within *hát khách* styles that convey narrative action, including *khách thi, khách phú, khách tử, khách tẩu mã*) (Khai Van Tran 1970: 13-30). In general, *nối lối* passages are the most common type of lyrics in *hát bội* performances. *Hát nam ai*, *hát nam xuân,* and *hát khách* are also frequently heard in regular narratives. The other styles are used only in particular dramatic situations. For example, *hát nam chạy* is used while fleeing, *hát nam biệt* is used to say farewell, *hát khách tử* is for death scenes, and *hát khách tẩu mã* is used while riding a horse.

The exact origins of *hát bội* are ambiguous and debated. Oral histories state that a Vietnamese lord hired a Chinese actor to train his harem maids to perform theatre around 1005 AD. The actor then returned to China while his Vietnamese students formed small stage groups, performing for the entertainment of nobility. Written records show that Lý Nguyên Cát (Li Yuanji 李元吉), a Chinese soldier and performer of *zaju* theater, was captured by Trần Hưng Đạo

and was taken to the Đại Việt court of Hanoi in 1285, where he taught techniques of *zaju* theater (Nguyễn 2010: 25). At this time, the structure of performances likely resembled *zaju* theater, consisting of songs, dances, and music, without a narrative plot, and may not yet have been called *hát bội* (Lam Doan Tran 1991: 15). Most scholars believe that *hát bội* developed out of *zaju*, eventually forming distinctly Vietnamese characteristics in narrative content, musical rhythms, and singing styles during the Lý and Trần dynasties (1109-1400).

However, others contest this, asserting that *hát bội* did not fully come into being as a separate theatrical genre, with narrative framework, characters, and dramatic conflict until the later Lê dynasty (1428-1788), citing writings by Lê Qúy Đôn that mention the full-length play *Sáu Người Con Của Trưng Vương* (Queen Trưng's Six Children).[9] Vietnamese musicologist Hoàng Chương argues that the origins of *hát bội* begin with Đào Duy Từ (1572-1634).[10] Due to the ostensible similarities between *hát bội*, *zaju* and Peking opera, much of the Vietnamese-language literature on *hát bội* deliberately attempts to distinguish *hát bội* from Chinese theatrical traditions (Pham 1986; Đao 2003; Ton 1993; Đinh 2005).[11] Under the Tây Sơn (1788-1801) and Nguyễn dynasties (1802-1945), *hát bội* flourished and entered its golden age, especially under the rule of Nguyễn Tự Đức (1847-1883). Tự Đức was talented in the arts himself, and

[9] Lê Qúy Đôn (1726–1784) was a philosopher, poet, and government official. He was responsible for a large number of encyclopedic, historical, bibliographical, and philosophical works, among them the largest volume of Vietnamese literature written in the Chinese language. Today, one of the largest technical universities in Vietnam, Lê Qụy Đôn Technical University in Hanoi, is named after him, and most cities in Vietnam have a major street named after him.

[10] Đào Duy Từ was born in the North but fled south to Bình Định because he was not allowed, due to his father being a lowly folk singer, to take the royal mandarin examinations. Hoàng Chương argues that *hát bội* began as a folk theatrical form (*dân gian*) that Đào Duy Từ taught to common people, before it was adopted by the imperial courts, and then later was disseminated again widely to broader audiences (interview with Hoàng Chương).

[11] *Hát bội's* links in origin with Chinese theatre may be in part why Vietnam has chosen not to nominate *hát bội* to be considered for the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, while many other traditions perceived as more "authentic" to Vietnamese culture have been nominated and recognized (*nhã nhạc, quan họ, ca trù, xoan*, the gong culture of the central highlands, the *gióng* festival, and *đờn ca tài tử*) (http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/lists). Another complicating factor is that regional differences prevent a unified *hát bội* or *tuồng* performance practice being presented as a nominee.

constructed several *hát bội* theaters, including the royal court Minh Khiêm theater in 1864, which was his venue of choice for enjoying performances (Tôn 1993: 37).

Đào Tấn (1845-1907), recognized as one of the greatest *hát bội* playwrights, who is often dubbed the "father" of *hát bội*, began his career in 1872 under Tự Đức's patronage.[12] Tự Đức was the artistic director for Đào Tấn's first plays, but the writer soon found the emperor's direction to be restrictive and began producing his own plays independently. Known for his focus on dramatic narratives that resonated with the masses, lyrical and poetic texts, and individual character development, Đào Tấn was also a mandarin (scholar-bureaucrat under the imperial examination system), serving as chief of the Quảng Trạch district and governor of Thừa Thiên province, and minister in the royal court. He was a supporter of the Đông Du (Go East) independence movement, which encouraged young Vietnamese to obtain higher education in eastern countries such as Japan and China, then return to liberate Vietnam from French colonialism. As a higher-level mandarin, Đào Tấn hid reports about the movement from the Nguyễn court. When this was discovered, the emperor demoted Đào Tấn, and he retreated from the court. His play *Trường Phi ở Cổ Thành* (Zhang Fei in the Ancient Citadel) was written about the third-century Han Dynasty General Zhang Fei as an allegory in opposition to the Nguyễn Dynasty's decision to surrender six northern provinces and six southern provinces to the French (Huu and Borton 2006: 18).

Under French colonialism, Vietnamese theatre became influenced by Western literature. A genre of spoken drama developed, *kịch nói*, as well as *cải lương*, a form of "renovated" musical theatre, with plots from contemporary life. Both *kịch nói* and *cải lương* began to influence *hát bội* in the twentieth century, and by the 1950s, urban *hát bội* was at a standstill,

[12] The *hát bội* troupe of Bình Định, the birthplace of Đào Tấn, lays a strong cultural claim to his legacy, with the state-sponsored troupe and theater named after the writer.

while troupes in rural areas were still active. An interesting example of French influence on *hát bội* is Ưng Binh Thúc Giạ Thị's *Đông Lộ Địch*, created in 1928 and based on the narrative of the French tragedy *Le Cid* written in 1636 by Pierre Corneille. Like Le Cid, Đông Lộ Địch kills the father of his lover, Chimene/Chi Manh, in order fulfill his duty to his own father and homeland. However, Chi Manh does not forgive and marry Đông Lộ Địch as Chimene does for Le Cid; torn between her love and filial duty, Chi Manh leaves everything and goes into exile, seeking oblivion in the Buddha. This adaption offers a telling insight into the mind of a *hát bội* playwright working under French colonization, through aesthetic choices made and the divergence in narrative ending.

Under the guise of a "humanist colonization," the French agreed upon a need to revitalize Indochinese arts in a report produced in 1937 for the Exposition internationale des arts et techniques de Paris: "It seems that we must assume the role of conserving the artistic domain of the people whose education we have undertaken, the unique character and originality of their national art, to help them rediscover elements that they have misjudged or forgotten, and to emphasize their identity rather than impose our own" (Brocheux 2009: 230). In a similar vein, Alexandre Varenne, politician and founder of the newspaper *La Montagne*, warned French colonists against teaching the natives that France "is their homeland" and cautioned, "Make sure they have an Asian education that is useful to them in their country" (ibid.: 226). The French did not impose any strict official policies against *hát bội* performance, but several incidents of violence inflicted by the French during Vietnam's struggle for independence have become near-legend in the *hát bội* community, including the destruction of the Chợ Cần theatre in 1947 following a massacre of the local population in Quảng Trị and the death of famous *hát bội* artist Thất Luân, who defiantly commanded French soldiers to kill him rather than be taken prisoner (Huu and Borton 2006: 22).

Meanwhile, Vietnamese communists in the north made a historic change in policy by putting issues of class struggle and socialist revolution on the backburner to concentrate fully on the question of national independence. In the 1943 "Theses on Culture" written by Việt Minh political theorist Trường Chinh, there is a remarkable absence of Marxist formulations, with the words "worker" and "peasant" noticeably absent. The document laid out the dangers to Vietnamese culture posed by French colonialism and Japanese occupation and presented a stark choice: Vietnamese culture would become even more backward if the fascist culture won, or it would break free of its chains and catch up with the rest of the world after a victorious national revolution. In order to support the revolution, intellectuals in Vietnam were to struggle against both Eastern and Western philosophy (e.g. Confucianism, Descartes, Kant, Nietzche) and the intellectual schools of the day (classicism, romanticism, naturalism, and symbolism) (Ninh 2002: 28). The document introduced three guiding principles for a new Vietnamese culture: *dân tộc hóa, đại chúng hóa*, and *khoa học hóa*, translated by David Marr as "patriotism, mass consciousness, and scientific objectivity" (Marr 1983: 364). Ninh considers Marr's translation of *dân tộc hóa* as inadequate, noting that *dân tộc* is embedded in a web of ethnic and cultural-linguistic factors rather than national or territorial concerns of "patriotism." Thus, she translates *dân tộc hóa* as a combination of "Vietnamization" and "nationalization," since the term *hóa* emphasizes an action to be achieved rather than a mere ideological concept (Ninh 2002: 29).

In regard to theatre, the Việt Minh held the Conference of Debate on Theater in 1950 to discuss the art form's relevance. Western-style spoken theater, which was considered "modern" theater, gained support during the resistance because of the ease with which everyday conversations and current events could be portrayed. The theatrical form *kịch thơ* or "poetic play," with its immersion in verse and predominantly historical themes that emphasized heroic and dramatic episodes, was a striking example of an indigenous development of a new form of

art, having appeared only a few years after the August Revolution.[13] However, *kịch thơ* was considered too slow and therefore not appropriate for the resistance, and the form eventually disappeared from the Vietnamese stage. *Hát bội,* due to its focus on historical personages, was fervently denounced by some as impossible to maintain given its feudal nature, while others championed it as having real and practical uses (Ninh 2002: 99-100).

In the third National Parliamentary Debates of 1966, President Hồ Chí Minh famously said to veteran *hát bội* artist Nguyễn Nho Túy: "Tuồng is good! It is a treasure of the people, but it needs to be improved, we should not stop its progress here. However, do not sow sesame seeds that will grow into corn" (Tôn 1993: 219).[14] The ambiguity in Hồ Chí Minh's metaphor fittingly illustrates many of the tensions found in newly written *hát bội* plays in Vietnam today. In a socialist context, "improvement" of a traditional art form often looks towards "modernization" in order to resonate with the social reality of the masses in a populist way—yet how does the art form simultaneously maintain its "Vietnamization" and "nationalization" character of *dân tộc hóa* that was introduced in the "Thesis on Culture" as a guiding principle in building a new Vietnamese culture? How does one "improve" on the art form, without allowing one's sesame seeds to grow into corn? In his study of cultural change in socialist Cuba, Robin Moore points to the similarly contradictory goals of post-revolutionary Cuba in regard to the arts: promoting the cultures of marginalized groups within society while at the same time manifesting a desire to "raise" the standards of these same groups, which are seen as socially down-trodden (Moore 2006).

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[13] The August Revolution began on August 18, 1945, as a series of demonstrations and an uprising against French rule. Within two weeks of the Japanese surrender, the Viet Minh declared independence and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, on September 2, 1945 (Huynh 1971: 761).

[14] My translation. Original Vietnamese: "Tuồng tốt đấy! Đó là vốn quí của dân tộc, nhưng cần phải cải tiến, không nên dẫm chân tại chỗ. Tuy nhiên, chớ có gieo vừng ra ngô" (Tôn 1993: 219).

In addition to the pressure to create *hát bội* plays that would be deemed "appropriate" in a socialist context, the Đỗi Mới economic reforms of 1986 caused *hát bội* audiences to dwindle as the country's population, especially in urban areas, suddenly gained access to a flood of new cultural products previously unavailable.[15] *Hát bội* was forced to "compete" with new technology and cultural products from abroad and to experiment with new ways of appealing to contemporary audiences, including tourist audiences. One such experimentation was the 1997 production of *Sanh Vì Tướng, Tử Vì Thần* (Serving the General in Life, Serving the People in Death). Aimed at courting foreign audiences, the production included no dialogue or singing; instead it relied on music, lighting, and conventions of movement from *hát bội* to structure the narrative of the performance (Nguyễn 2011: 202). Other examples include the staging of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Hồ Chí Minh Hát Bội Troupe in collaboration with Nordic Black Theater from Oslo, Norway, and the setting of the classic *Hồ Nguyệt Cô Hoá Cáo* (Lady Moon Resumes Her Form as a Fox) in a contemporary context, with non-traditional costumes and the rewriting of text to omit *hán-việt* (Sino-Vietnamese) words in order to be more accessible to audiences.

In Vietnamese-language texts, there is much debate amongst *hát bội* scholars about the worthiness and appropriateness of these experimentations and adaptations of the art form. As most published materials in Vietnam are printed through state-run publishers, scholars and critics who write about modern experimentations in *hát bội* for the most part fall in line with official policies, which are often contradictory and vague (Hoang 2009; Cat 2006; Hung 2003; Mich 2005). By looking at contemporary adaptations of *hát bội*, I would like to understand not only

[15] The Đỗi Mới economic reforms were initiated by the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986, with the goal of creating a "socialist-oriented market economy." The reforms moved away from a centrally planned economy and caused Vietnam to become one of the fastest growing economies, with a GDP growth rate of 8.4 and 8 percent in 2004 and 2005. With a growing middle class also comes the growth of income disparity; disposable income in Vietnam's two largest cities is six to ten times the rural average, and estimates of government corruption are estimated to cost up to 5 percent of the GDP (Grinter 2006).

the contradictory socialist policies towards the arts, but also the slippages that occur between official policies and the reality of artists in practice attempting to fulfill these ambiguous goals.

Hát Bội as "Technology of Memory": Performativity, Confucianism, Authenticity

Marita Sturken launches the term "technologies of memory" in her book *Tangled Memories* (1997), through her analysis of reactions to the Vietnam War and the AIDS epidemic and the subsequent cultural transformations that occurred in the US during the 1980s and 1990s. Sturken borrows Foucault's notion of technology, first introduced in his *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, in which he analyzes the presence of a "technology of sex" in bourgeois society (1989: 90). By "technology of sex," Foucault describes modern sexuality as regulated not by law, but rather by discourses of power, thus deeming it an effect or product of a "complex political technology" (ibid.: 127). Following Foucault, Sturken argues that technologies of memory are also implicated in the power dynamics of this "complex political technology," involving people in an active process of memory-making in relation to institutionalized discourses and cultural practices (1997: 10).

In *Tangled Memories*, Sturken shows how remembering itself is a form of forgetting, and how exclusion is an inevitable part of memory formation. Ricoeur, too, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, discusses the exercise of memory and its uses and abuses, but also discusses how forgetting can be a result of blocked memory, passive forgetting, or even active forgetting (or what he calls a "wanting-not-to-know") (2004: 449). In this way, claims of "authenticity" made by *hát bội* troupes are not simply based on regional stylistic differences; rather, by staking a claim in the authenticity of their own performance practices, each *hát bội* troupe is contesting the cultural claims of other groups as "inauthentic" or invalid. Ricoeur also discusses the role of ideology in the formation of identity, on the deepest level of integrated symbolic mediation, to

account for the abuses of memory through imposed narratives.[16] It is at this level that Ricoeur contends that imposed memory becomes "authorized" as official history, through institutional or instructed memory that is publicly learned and celebrated in order to remember events of a common history with respect to a common identity (ibid.: 85). In this way, the narratives that in *hát bội* performances construct memory have a legitimizing function, used to stake a cultural claim on what are considered authentic and inauthentic representations of the Vietnamese nation and people.

Technologies of memory also engage memory-making as a site of representation. Artistic works and performances particularly can become a site in the social practice of self-representation as well as self-understanding. As Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik contend, memory practices are always a form of "re-presentation," making past experiences present again in the form of images, sensations, or affects (2009: 4). As Nguyen-Vo writes, "One does not become recognizably human until one acts in one's history. And for that, one needs to have a history" (2005: 159). Practices of memory-making involve a "conjuring up of the past that makes it present again; times of yore become tangible, material and capable of 'touching us'" (ibid.: 10). Yet, how we remember the past not only serves the interests of the present, but also affects the future it helps to bring into being (ibid.: 2). Technologies of memory are active sites of representation and self-representation of oneself in the past and present, but can also serve as a site to imagine what one is to become.

[16] Ricoeur provides a model of the three levels at which ideology functions: 1) the level of dissimulation, the most apparent level, where ideology can distort reality by representing a particular interest as universal; 2) the political level of legitimation, in which a claim to authority exists that does not always match a belief in authority; and 3) the deepest and least visible level of integration and of the interpretive grid that through symbolic mediation allows us to assign respect, esteem, beauty, and value, to the world around us.

Performativity

In my analysis of *hát bội* as a technology of memory, I argue that the theatrical genre gains its power and ability to shape cultural memory through its performative qualities, its deployment and interpretation of Confucian themes through performance, and its ability to stake a claim on cultural authenticity. As cultural critic and performance studies scholar José Muñoz puts it, theories of performativity and performance studies as a mode of analysis are framed through the act of *doing*, rather than an epistemological perspective framed through *knowing*. Rather than analyzing what we *know* about a text through an "infinite play of interpretation," performance studies asks what the performance *does*, materially and politically in the world (2002).

In my analysis of how *hát bội* is able to create multiple and distinct cultural meanings, Diana Taylor's discussion of the "scenario" as paradigm is particularly helpful (Taylor 2005). Taylor points to four ways in which the scenario can reveal social structures and behaviors that are highly relevant to the analysis of *hát bội* performance as technology of memory. First, scenarios require us to wrestle with embodiment, the social construction of bodies in particular contexts. Scenarios by definition introduce a critical distance between social actor and character. Whether through imitative representation (an actor assuming a role) or through performativity (social actors assuming socially regulated patterns of appropriate behavior), the scenario allows us to keep both actor and role simultaneously in view, so that one can recognize areas of resistance and tension. Second, scenarios, through their encapsulation of both setup and action, are formulaic structures that predispose certain outcomes yet allow for reversal, parody and change (Diana Taylor 2005: 29-31). Like Bordieu's *habitus,* scenarios are "durable, transposable, dispositions" but rather than referring to broad social structures such as class, scenarios refer to more specific repertoires of cultural imaginings (Bourdieu 1989: 72).

Third, scenarios have a multiplicity of forms of transmission that remind us of multiple systems simultaneously at work (writing, telling, reenacting, miming, gesturing, dancing, singing), each with its own strengths and limitations. Fourth, scenarios are not necessarily repetitive, and allow for a continuity of cultural myths and assumptions through reactivation rather than duplication. Rather than a copy, the scenario constitutes a once-againness. For example, the "frontier" scenario in the US organizes events as diverse as smoking advertisements and the hunt for Osama Bin Laden (Diana Taylor 2005: 31-32). Through the consideration of scenarios in my analysis of *hát bội* performances, I aim to understand more fully how the practice of *hát bội* can reactivate cultural myths while taking part in the constitution, contestation, and transmission of cultural and social knowledge in the Vietnamese and Vietnamese American communities.

Confucian Themes

Confucian themes within *hát bội* plays are one type of scenario that is ripe with possibilities and interpretations. China's various attitudes towards Confucianism are a potent example of these possibilities. During various periods of Chinese history (Taiping Rebellion [1850-1864], May Fourth Movement [1915-21], and the Cultural Revolution [1966-1976]), Confucianism was criticized. In 1966, red guards destroyed the Kong family cemetery in Confucius' hometown of Qufu, looting two thousand graves and hanging naked corpses from trees, in their oath to "annihilate the Kong family business" (Jaffe 2013). Yet in 2010, the Chinese government spent $3.8 million to renovate the Confucian Temple and Cemetery of Qufu, and planned to open a museum on the site that will cost an additional $79.4 million (ibid.). Four hundred and eighty Confucius Institutes, sponsored by the Chinese government, are now present around the world, with the goal of promoting Chinese language and culture as well as

facilitating international cultural exchanges. During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Confucianism figured prominently in the opening ceremonies, with 2008 drummers clad in ancient-style costumes chanting the opening lines of *The Analects of Confucius* (Angle 2012: 5). How is it possible that Confucianism has garnered such particular and distinct reactions during various periods of Chinese history?

Confucianism's openness to differing interpretations may be in part due to what some scholars have deemed the Confucian system's divorce of ethics from religion. Unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, where ethics has always been firmly linked to religion, there is a striking absence of any specifically religious teachings in Confucius' foundational text *The Analects* (Smith 1974). This focus on ethics and a practical humanism, or what philosopher Herbert Fingarette has called "the secular as the sacred," has allowed various authors to interpret Confucianism as compatible with Marxism (Nguyen 1974), Christianity and Jesus (Neville 2000), and a future Confucian Constitutional Order for China (Jiang 2013). I believe that Confucianism and its themes, analyzed through the paradigm of scenario and its repeatability, is one aspect of *hát bội* that allows its contemporary performance to convey such diverse cultural meanings, ranging from heroic narratives of historical or revolutionary martyrs, the dangers of contemporary social ills such as prostitution and drug use in Vietnam, and a nostalgia and loyalty to a no longer existing country when *hát bội* is performed in the diasporic context.

It is important to note, as historical Liam C. Kelley writes, that Confucianism is a modern Western term that does not have an exact original indigenous equivalent. Much of the English language scholarship on Confucianism in Vietnam has argued for its limited influence and appeal, which to some degree has been an effort to counter the writings of colonial era scholars who had labeled Vietnam as a "little China." However, as Kelley notes, while challenging this claim, many scholars of Vietnamese history and philosophy appropriated rather than interrogated

the concept of "China" that colonial era scholars had employed (Kelley 2006: 316, 360-361). Kelley discusses how in recent years, scholars of East Asian history and culture have begun to use the concept of "repertoire" to discuss religious practices such as Buhddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, to show how "individuals marshaled different ideas and practices at different times in different circumstances but which never constituted an all-encompassing ethos, or cultural system" (ibid.: 315).

Nevertheless, as Confucianism entered Vietnam, beginning with the first Chinese domination from 111 BC, it has had a powerful influence on Vietnamese thought, through its ethical system and hierarchical organization of society. This was further reinforced as the Confucian examination system was adopted in Vietnam by the royal courts, until it was suspended by the French in the early twentieth century. Confucian virtues of loyalty, righteouseness and justice, and filial piety are often found in *hát bội* plays. Elements of Buddhism and Taoism at times also appear in the plays, as these religions, together with Confucianism, have had a strong influence on Vietnamese philosophy (Napier and Vuong 2013).

Cultural Claims of Authenticity

Each region that performs *hát bội* lays a cultural claim to authenticity, for differing reasons. Founded in 1959, the government-supported troupe based in Hanoi lays claim to being the official representative nationally for Vietnam, with the title of "National Tuồng Theater of Vietnam." This troupe is also by far the most generously supported by the state, with an entire neighborhood (Khu Văn Hóa Mai Dịch) in Hanoi dedicated to housing, rehearsal space, meeting rooms, and administrative offices for *hát bội* artists, along with other stage artists in *chèo* and circus arts. There is also a theater in a more central area of the city that caters to tourists, with performances of short excerpts of *hát bội* plays twice a week, year-round. In Hanoi, there is an

annual performance by young performers in training, where they showcase a particular role that they have learned from a veteran performer. Although the troupe does transcribe its instrumental music and singing styles into Western notation, the method of learning gestures, movements, and acting is through one-on-one repetition guided by a veteran artist. The Hanoi-based troupe also has the most opportunities for international travel as the national representative, and has made performance tours to Spain, Germany, Egypt, and Korea (interview with Phạm Ngọc Tuấn, June 13, 2013).

The central region of Bình Định lays cultural claim to the "father" of *hát bội*, Đào Tấn, who was born Bình Định's largest city, Qui Nhơn. Founded in 1952, the government-supported troupe and theatre in Qui Nhơn are both named after Đào Tấn. Đào Tấn is largely credited for developing *hát bội* during its golden era, and for his strict, clear, teaching methods that included the martial arts of Bình Định within this region's *hát bội* training regimen. There is also a history of written scholarship on *hát bội* of Bình Định. The only available Vietnamese-language dictionary of *hát bội* (published in 1998 with support from the Vietnamese government and a Toyota Foundation grant) is an important resource, and focuses on the central region of Bình Định in its description of stylistic details, with the assumption that these are the standard in *hát bội*. In the 1980s, a number of scholars and artists from Bình Định were invited by the Hanoi troupe to train their *hát bội* performers and remain there to this day. The only doctoral student in Vietnam I am aware of who was researching *hát bội* (Nhu Mì Đào) focused her studies on documentation of the Bình Định tradition.[17]

[17] Other international doctoral students researching *hát bội* include Quynh-Lan Dương, a French-Vietnamese student at the Sorbonne who is working on the Ho Chi Minh City government-sponsored troupe, and Esbjorn Wettermark, a Swedish national studying at Royal Holloway University of London, who is studying the Hanoi government-sponsored troupe.

The southern government-supported troupe based in Hồ Chí Minh City, founded in 1977, two years after Vietnam's reunification, has by far the least state support. Their dilapidated theater is badly in need of repairs, but as it is seated on prime real estate in Hồ Chị Minh City, government officials have been eyeing the property, and the troupe has been told that they will be moved to a location on the outskirts of the city within the next five years. Unlike the Hanoi and Qui Nhơn troupes, the HCMC troupe does not have a large budget for scenery or props, but prides itself on this lack of staging as being more true to the origins of *hát bội.* The southern tradition of *hát bội* is also the only one that still does not notate its music in Western notation, instead teaching music, singing, movement, and acting all through the traditional mode of oral transmission. Unlike the Hanoi and Qui Nhơn troupes, the Hồ Chí Minh City troupe does not use "modern" transposition techniques to differentiate melodies for male and female singers, and thus considers its singing style to be more "original" than other regions, as well as more difficult to perform. The Hồ Chí Minh City troupe has also criticized the other two troupes for over-rehearsing and performing in a "stiff" way compared to their more relaxed style (interview with Phan Nga, April 2, 2013 and Hurũ Danh, April 2, 2013).

Other government-sponsored troupes also exist in urban areas, such as the Đà Nẵng Tuồng Theatre, the Khánh Hoà Traditional Theater, and the Thanh Hóa Tuồng Theatre. However the three described above are the best-known in the country due to their strong claims of authenticity in the *hát bội* tradition. Independent "folk" troupes also exist in rural areas and remain quite active outside cities, but are largely left out of the state-sponsored festivals and competitions. In official language, the folk troupes are labeled as "non-professionals" or "amateurs"; in practice, it is generally acknowledged by *hát bội* artists that folk troupes have more skilled performers than the "professional" troupes do. As performers in the folk troupes do not receive a monthly salary from the state, they depend financially on the tradition of audience

members throwing money (usually in between the spokes of a fan) on stage during particularly moving scenes of a live performance, as well as being well known enough to be invited by other villages to perform at their *đình* temple during festivals and paid an honorarium. There is a certain stigma associated with state-sponsored troupes amongst independent *hát bội* performers, in that state-sponsored troupes are required to fulfill certain quotas of performances in order to receive their salary and at times will not go beyond that (interview with Nhu Mì Đào, April 4, 2016 and Hoàng Ngọc Định, April 26, 2016).

Due to the large number of active independent folk troupes and the variations in styles that exist, even within a region, broad research on folk troupes is quite difficult. The performance schedules of folk troupes are structured around local festivals held annually based on the lunar calendar. Thus, it is difficult to document and compare regional performances of local festival rituals, since an individual researcher can only be in one location at once for each festival. As an individual researcher, I have chosen in this study to focus on the more accessible government-sponsored troupes that participate in national competitions, as well as the diasporic troupe of Little Saigon in Southern California.[18] But it is important to note that further research is needed on the very active folk troupes, and in future studies I hope to learn more about the role of folk troupes in maintaining and shaping the *hát bội* tradition.[19]

[18] After discussions with Vietnamese music researchers in France such as doctoral student Quynh-Lan Dương, musicologist YLinh Le, and Professor François Picard of the Sorbonne, we are confident that currently, the Little Saigon *hát bội* troupe is the only group of *hát bội* performers based outside Vietnam. An Australian woman named Eleanor Clapham studied *hát bội* in Hanoi for several months, during which time she performed frequently, but since her return to Australia she has been inactive in the art form (see http://www.eleanorclapham.blogspot.com).

[19] A few independent troupes have even toured internationally, such as the Đồng Thinh troupe of Vĩnh Long province that performed at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival "Mekong River: Connecting Cultures" in 2007. Ngọc Khanh, leader of the independent Ngọc Khanh troupe, also traveled as an individual with Phong Nguyen and his ensemble when they toured the east coast of the US in October, 2013. The ensemble made seven stops at universities including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and New York University (Tang 2010 and Thang Tran 2013).

Moving to Westminster, California, the troupe in Little Saigon, too, has its cultural claim to authenticity. This troupe was established by Dương Ngọc Bầy, a 1964 graduate of the Saigon National School of Music (renamed the Hồ Chí Minh Conservatory of Music after 1975), who received a Kenneth Picerne Senior Artist Grant in conjunction with the Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association (VAALA) to hold free *hát bội* classes in the Little Saigon community beginning in 2009. In the diaspora, performances of *hát bội* are often tied to feelings of nostalgia for the homeland. However, this homeland is not present-day Vietnam; rather, the nostalgia is for a pre-1975, pre-communist Vietnam that no longer exists (or may never have existed in the romanticized and imagined form that has taken root in people's memories). Thus, there is a belief that culture from before the communist takeover is more "pure," since it is untainted by communist propaganda and socialist policies. Performances of *hát bội* in the Vietnamese American community are often contextualized as maintaining authentic Vietnamese culture within a diasporic bubble, while the community continues the fight against communism and human rights violations in Vietnam in the hope that when communism falls, this authentic culture might be reinstated. My analysis of *hát bội* performances in each of these locations, Hanoi, Qui Nhơn, Hồ Chí Minh City, and Little Saigon, attempts to understand through what means each region is able to lay its claims of cultural authenticity, and how *hát bội* as a technology of memory is able to accommodate each of these claims.

Fieldwork Methodology and Chapter Outline

My methodology has largely been ethnographic, through interviews with *hát bội* performers, scholars, event organizers, administrators, and audience members; and through documentation of *hát bội* performances, classes, and troupe organizational meetings. In addition, I have conducted archival research for print materials as well as video and audio recordings

associated with *hát bội*. My main period of fieldwork in Vietnam took place from January through June 2013 in Hồ Chí Minh City, Qui Nhơn, Tam Kỳ, and Hà Nội, with support from a Southeast Asia FLAS grant. Previously, I conducted preliminary research from September through December of 2007 through a Dartmouth Graduate Fellowship under the guidance of Phong Nguyễn; and from June through August of 2009 during the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Vietnamese Advanced Summer Institute (VASI) language program. Although I collected materials relating to both officially state-sponsored troupes and independent "folk" troupes, the focus of my dissertation will be on the state-sponsored troupes. Beginning in 2009, I have also been in close contact with the Little Saigon *hát bội* troupe in Southern California, by attending classes and performances, and helping to bring the troupe to UCLA multiple times to perform and hold workshops on campus. The Little Saigon troupe was the subject of my MA paper, completed in 2010 (Kim Nguyen Tran 2010). In collaboration with the Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association, I assisted the troupe in applying for an Alliance for California Traditional Arts grant, which they were awarded in 2013.

As noted above, the leader of the Little Saigon troupe, Dương Ngọc Bầy, is a graduate of the Saigon National School of Music (now the Hồ Chí Minh City Conservatory of Music) and provided many contacts through her colleagues and former students in Vietnam. Phong Nguyễn, through the Institute for Vietnamese Music, also introduced me to *hát bội* artists and scholars, including Nhu Mì Đào, a doctoral student at the Hồ Chí Minh City Conservatory of Music who was writing her dissertation on *hát bội* as performed in Bình Định province. I focused my interviews and data collection on three of the officially sponsored troupes: Nhà Hát Nghệ Thuật Hát Bội Thành Phó Hồ Chí Minh, based in Hồ Chị Minh City; Nhà Hát Đào Tấn, based in Qui Nhơn; and Nhà Hát Tuồng Việt Nam, based in Hà Nội. Of particular interest was the state-sponsored "National Competition of the Professional Theatrical Arts of Tuồng and Folk

Musicals" (Cuộc Thi Nghệ Thuật Sân Khấu Tuồng và Dân Ca Kịch Chuyên Nghiệp Toàn Quốc) that took place from May 18 through 26, 2013. This national competition takes place every two to three years, and in 2013 was renamed a "competition" rather than retaining its previous title of "festival" (*liên hoan*). The competition included state-sponsored troupes of both traditional *hát bội* and modern musical theatre from all over the country, and was an insightful look into official attitudes towards theatrical arts (particularly in terms of which troupes and plays were given what awards and the reasons why) and the ways that each regional troupe chose to portray and represent itself to a national audience as well as in front of the panel of judges.

Rather than structuring my dissertation in a chronological fashion around the history of *hát bội*, I will ground the text in the ethnographic present, by presenting an analysis modeled after Geertzian thick description of the national competition as well as recent performances by the Little Saigon troupe. Through this analysis, I will introduce layers of history and interviews in a non-chronological way, in order to reflect the layered way that historical and cultural memory is embodied and evoked in the present through performance. I adopt the structure of a theatrical performance as a metaphor for the way to structure the dissertation chapters, as follows.

Setting the Stage: The Opening Ceremonies of the National Competition of the Professional Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals, 2013

This short section sets the stage for the first three acts, which all take place at the National Competition of the Professional Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals, 2013. The opening ceremonies of the competition reveals the political context and structure in which the state-sponsored troupes must operate on a regular basis.

Act I: Nhạn Cô Thần - Nguyễn Tri Phương (Singular Hero – Nguyễn Tri Phương)

This chapter examines the play performed at the competition by the Hanoi-based Vietnam National Tuồng Theater. It tells the story of military general Nguyễn Tri Phương (1806-1873), who was dedicated to protecting Vietnam from European influence and military conquest by France. However, his refusal to adopt Western technology led to the eventual conquest by the French. Nguyễn Tri Phương's final defeat took place in 1873 in defense of the Hanoi citadel. When he was taken prisoner, Nguyễn Tri Phương dramatically protested politically and morally by tearing off his bandages and starving himself to death (see figure 1.5). The play had elaborate staging, lighting, and group choreography, and included some musical elements from the northern folk tradition of *hát xẩm* as well as *ca trù* and also *hò Huế* (from the central region). In the competition, this play won a silver medal for the ensemble cast, as well as two gold medals and three silver medals for individual actors. Why would the Hanoi troupe choose to represent itself on the national stage with this particular story, with the use of folk musical elements in the play? Why did the judges choose to award the troupe an ensemble silver medal, rather than gold? Does this particular staging of a 19th century historical narrative have relevance to contemporary audience members or government officials? This chapter will delve into these questions while also examining the scenarios of corruption and loyalty that are presented in the play.

Act II: Đêm Sáng Phương Nam (Shining Night of Phương Nam)

This chapter analyzes the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theater's performance of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, which tells the story of how Nguyễn Huệ (1753-1792), also known as Emperor Quang Trung, leader of the Tây Sơn dynasty, won the Battle of Rạch Gầm-Xoài Mút against Siamese forces, with the help of heroine Bùi Thị Xuân and her army of female soldiers (see figure 1.6). Nguyễn Huệ was born in Bình Định and is considered one of the most successful military

commanders in Vietnamese history. However, rather than focusing on Nguyễn Huệ, *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* pays more attention to the relationship between Bùi Thị Xuân and her female right hand commander, Bảo Trân. In addition to these two heroines, the play features several other women in supportive roles. Like the Hanoi troupe, the Đào Tấn troupe's performance had elaborate staging, lighting, and choreography that included Siam-esque costumes, dancing, and music. The original music for this play was composed by the vice-director of the troupe, Nguyễn Gia Thiện, and included Thai-inspired musical elements within *hát bội* musical forms. This play did not win any ensemble awards, but won two gold medals and four silver medals for individual actors. Why did the Đào Tấn troupe choose to represent itself with the story of a Tây Sơn heroine, and also feature many other women on the national stage? How were the adaptations to traditional *hát bội* dance, costume, and music, with Thai-inspired elements, received by the judges and audience members? Why was the troupe not awarded an ensemble medal? Does the story of the Tây Sơn heroine Bùi Thị Xuân and her army of female soldiers have relevance to contemporary audiences or governmental officials? In particular, this chapter examines the role of women on stage, and how their symbolic representations are used to define the nation.

Act III: Tử Hình Không Án Trang (An Execution with No Trial)

This chapter considers the play *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* as performed by the Hồ Chị Minh City Hát Bội Troupe. This play tells the story of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (924-979), the first emperor of Vietnam following the country's liberation from the rule of the Chinese Southern Han Dynasty. The narrative of the play centers around the assassination of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and his son, and the power struggle to gain the throne by those who surround Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. However, the play's narrative diverges from common historical accounts of the death of Đinh Bội Lĩnh and his son. Rather than portraying Đỗ Thích as the emperor's murderer, which is a common historical

belief, the play shows Đỗ Thích being framed by Hồng Hiến, who ultimately kills even his own wife for more power. This particular event in Vietnamese history still draws debate and theories of conspiracy today. The dramatic narrative of the play that involves five deaths was performed on an almost empty stage, with very minimal props, simple group choreographies, and traditional costumes (see figure 1.7). The music at times borrowed dissonant elements often called "extended technique" in the Western classical music world, particularly during highly dramatic scenes. This play did not win any ensemble medals, but won one gold medal and six silver medals for individual performers. Why would the Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe choose a contested historical narrative that tells a story of the struggle for power to represent itself on the national stage? How is the use of Western extended techniques and the lack of elaborate staging received by audience members and the judges? Why was the troupe not awarded any ensemble medals? Does this particular staging of a 10th-century narrative have social relevance to contemporary audiences or to government officials? In addition to these questions, this chapter examines the erasure of South Vietnam's histories and the ways in which these histories can reemerge through the figure of the ghost.

Act IV: Little Saigon Troupe Tết Festival

This chapter analyzes the Little Saigon *hát bội* troupe's performances for Tết new year festivals in southern California. Rather than performing an entire play, the troupe often selects excerpts, due to the number of actors available and their skill levels. In their performance at the UCLA Vietnamese Language and Culture Club (VNLC) 2014 Tết Festival, the troupe is incorporated into the skit written by VNLC, which tells the story of a young soldier and his mother and younger sister who are waiting for him to come home to celebrate Tết. I also analyze excerpts from the troupe's debut performance in February of 2010, held at the local *Người Việt*

newspaper's community stage. The Little Saigon troupe does not have any trained musicians as members besides their leader Dương Ngọc Bầy, and uses only musical recordings with sporadic live drum accompaniment in their performances. The members are beginners in the art form, and at times treat the troupe as a social club rather than a serious art form, to the frustration of Ms. Bầy. How is it possible that the Little Saigon troupe can stake a strong claim in cultural authenticity when their actual performances are not necessarily the most true to tradition? What cultural meanings do *hát bội* performances in the diasporic community have for contemporary audience members? How are *hát bội* narratives restaged and reinterpreted in a diasporic context in order to maintain their social relevance? This chapter examines how the politics of memory in the refugee community frame *hát bội* performances in the context of nostalgia, longing, and loss, combined with an anticommunist sentiment that is compounded by the American ideals of freedom, independence, and democracy.

Epilogue

This section summarizes the abilities and limits of *hát bội* performance as a technology of memory. I will look at the changing dominant narratives in Vietnam and the Vietnamese refugee community of the United States in light of recent global political events, such as the United States lifting the arms embargo against Vietnam in 2016, despite numerous human rights violations against political dissidents and activists. In the refugee community, there has been a shift away from conservative politics in the younger generation, with the formation of several progressive organizations such as Viet Unity and the Hai Bà Trưng School for Organizing. I will also reflect on my role as researcher and member of the Vietnamese-American community, and how this perspective has affected my analysis.

MAP OF VIETNAM
Fieldwork locations

Figure 1.1. Map of Vietnam and fieldwork locations.

Figure 1.2. Etching by Etienne Antoine Ronjat, circa 1878, titled *Costumes de théatre, à Hué : chefs guerriers.*

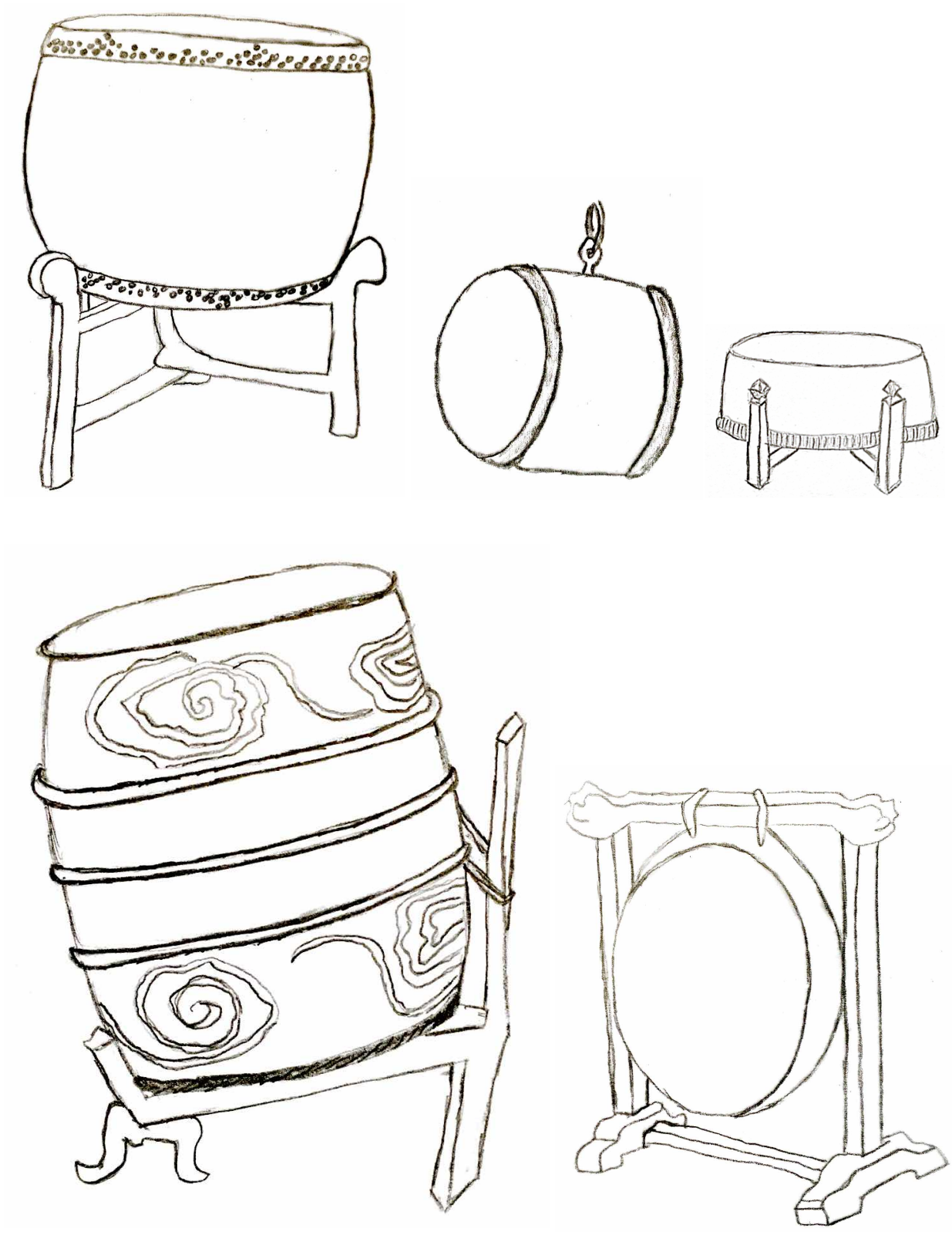


Figure 1.3. Percussion instruments in the *hát bội* ensemble. Clockwise from upper left: *trống chiến*, *trống quân*, *trống cái*, *đông la*, *trống chầu.* (Drawings by Kim Nguyen Tran)

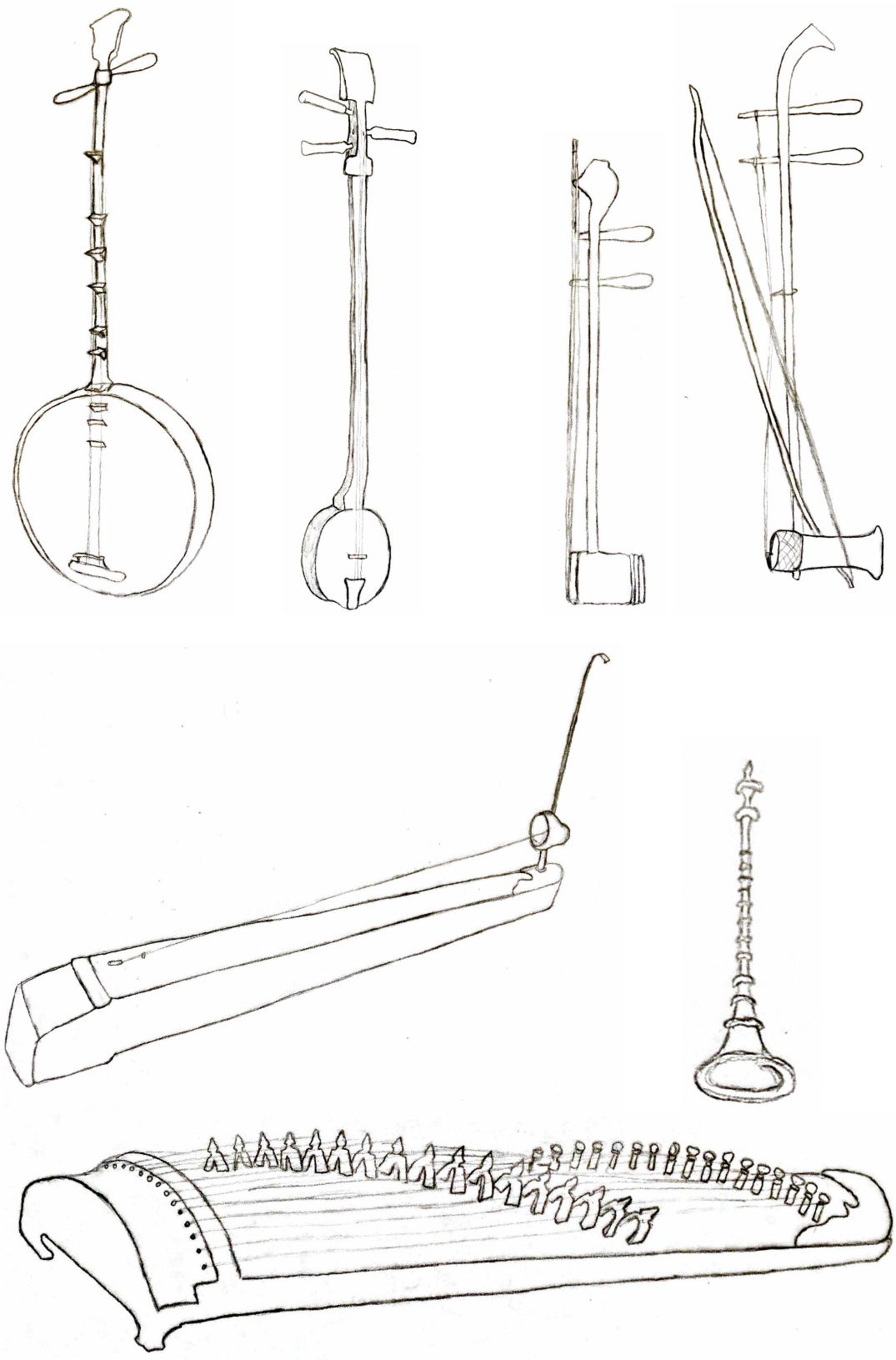


Figure 1.4. Line above, left to right: *đàn kìm*, *đàn tam*, *đàn líu*, *đàn nhị*. Below, clockwise from upper left: *đàn bầu*, *kèn*, *đàn tranh*. (Drawings by Kim Nguyen Tran)

Figure 1.5. Final scene of *Nguyễn Tri Phương,* performed by the Vietnam National Tuồng Theater at the National Competition of the Professional Theatrical Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals, 2013 (photo by Kim Nguyen Tran).

Figure 1.6. Victory over the Siam army in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, performed by the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theater at the National Competition of the Professional Theatrical Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals, 2013 (photo by Kim Nguyen Tran).

Figure 1.7. Dương Thị Ngọc Vân mourns the death of her husband, emperor Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and son, Đinh Liễn, who have been assassinated with poison. From *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng*, performed by the Hồ Chị Minh City Hát Bội Troupe at the National Competition of the Professional Theatrical Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals, 2013 (photo by Kim Nguyen Tran).

Figure 1.8. Members of the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe and friends after the "Kỷ Niệm 50 Năm Bảo Tồn Nghệ Thuật Hát Bội" (Commemorating 50 Years of Preserving the Art of Hát Bội) performance, celebrating their leader Dương Ngọc Bầy (center with white wig and red hat), 2014. American and South Vietnamese flag visible on far left and right, respectively (photo by Kim Nguyen Tran).

SETTING THE STAGE:

THE OPENING CEREMONIES OF THE NATIONAL COMPETITION OF THE PROFESSIONAL ARTS OF TUỒNG AND FOLK MUSICALS, 2013

Looking from the front, the contours of the Quảng Nam Province Cultural Center are shaped like the Petit Palais of Paris—a central arch above the entrance with two sets of pillars supporting the arch and two rectangular wings flanking either side.[20] However, the façade of the Center is not decorated with flamboyant engravings of nude figures typical of Third Republic Beaux-Arts architecture. Instead, the space within the central arch contains a carving of a stylized lute with its body formed by a circular *âm-dương* (yin-yang) symbol, with the head and long beak of a *chim lạc* bird on either side of the instrument (see figure 2.1).[21] Inside the Center, this image appears again above the stage of the auditorium, which seats 850 people (see figure 2.2). Looking upwards towards the ceiling, the audience sees a large dome decorated with geometric figures that resemble in again, a stylized way, the decorations found on *đông sơn* drums: a sunburst in the center, and a ring of *chim lạc* birds around the outer rim, along with a series of lights (see figures 2.3). Geographer William S. Logan has described this type of visible layering of past geopolitical influences in Vietnam's urban landscape as disruptions that dismantle and displace while at the same time engaging and coexisting with past architectural legacies, demonstrating shifting ideological regimes of representation (2000: 9).

[20] The Hồ Chí Minh City Municipal Theater (built between 1887-1900 as the Opéra de Saigon) was also modeled after the architecture of Petit Palais, now the City of Paris Museum of Fine Arts, and the Hà Nội Opera House (built between 1901-1911 as the Opéra de Hanoi) was modeled after the Palais Garnier, the older of two opera houses in Paris.

[21] *Chim lạc* birds are commonly found on the elaborately decorated bronze drums of the Đông Sơn period (approximately 1000 B.C. to 100 A.D.) and are often used as a symbol of ancient Vietnamese culture and traditions.

As I look up at these images in the Quảng Nam Province Cultural Center, I think of my educational home institution's main performing venue, Royce Hall at the University of California, Los Angeles, and remember that it, too, has symbolic images emblazoned onto the ceilings of the portico entrance (fresco paintings of each academic subject personified and holding a object that represents the subject), and the quote "Education is learning to use the tools which the race has found indispensible" directly above the main stage. The stage here in Quảng Nam has two large signs on either side, with quotes from Communist Party documents. On the left, the sign reads:

> As the party in authority, the party needs to prioritize the formation and arrangement of a cadre for an entire system of communist politics. The party unites and leads the cadre's mission and manages the cadre on all levels, while at the same time taking responsibility for the organization of members in this system of communist politiccs.
> (Excerpt: *Resolution of the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam*)[22]

And on the right, the other sign reads:

> The party needs to be solid and strong about party politics, ideology, and organization; needs to regularly update itself, correct itself, and attempt to improve its the level of realization and innate ability to lead. It needs to hold firm to the heritage that unifies the party and guarantees satisfactory democracy and order in the activities of the party.
> (Excerpt: *Building a Strong and Leading Country in the Period of Reaching Ultimate Socialism*)[23]

The signs are printed in yellow font on bright red plaques, the colors of the Vietnamese communist flag (see figures 2.4 and 2.5).

As I set up my tripod to document the opening ceremonies of the competition, I'm happy to have the company of three other women researchers present: Ngân Anh, a Hồ Chí Minh City native, law school student and journalist with a love of *hát bội*; Dương Quỳnh Lan, a French-

[22] My translation. The original sign reads: "là đảng cầm quyền, đảng phải chăm lo đào tạo, bố trí cán bộ cho cả hệ thống chính trị. Đảng thống nhất lãnh đạo công tác cán bộ và quản lý đội ngũ cán bộ, đồng thời phát huy trách nhiệm của các tổ chức thành viên trong hệ thống chính trị" (Trích: văn kiện Đại hội VIII Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam).

[23] My translation. The original sign reads: "Đảng phải vững mạnh về chính trị, tư tưởng và tổ chức, phải thường xuyên tự Đổi mới, tự chỉnh đốn, ra sức nâng cao trình độ trí tuệ, năng lực lãnh đạo. Giữ vững truyền thống đòan kết thống nhất trong đảng, bảo đảm đầy đủ dân chủ và kỷ luật trong sinh hoạt đảng." (Trích: Cương lĩnh xây dựng đất nước trong thời kỳ quá độ lên CNXH).

Vietnamese who is a doctoral student in ethnomusicology at the Sorbonne; and Đào Nhu-Mì, a doctoral student at the Hồ Chí Minh City Conservatory of Music writing her dissertation on *hát bội* in Bình Định Province. After a few days of the competition, people start referring to the four of us as a collective unit, "bốn cô gái" (four young women), as we are a bit conspicuous with all of our documentation equipment and gear combined (see figure 2.6). We set up our camcorders, audio recorders, and cameras with some time to spare, and spend a few minutes chatting before the ceremony begins.[24] Nhu Mì tells me that she has stayed up late the night before these opening ceremonies working on an essay about Bác Hồ (Uncle Hồ) for a competition that required the participation of all the teaching faculty at the Hồ Chí Minh City Conservatory of Music. Faculty members were to watch six documentaries on the life and teachings of Bác Hồ, then write an essay reflecting on the meaning that his teachings have in their lives. She is tired and not looking forward to the long, often drawn-out introductions that take place before official events such as this one.

I notice that the center front row of the audience has been reserved for honored guests of the event, including government officials from the national and local level, as well as a panel of judges. The table in front of them is covered with a crisp white tablecloth with bottled water and several floral centerpieces. A large banner spanning the entire stage background reads "The National Competition of the Professional Theatre Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals" in large print in the center, with smaller print above reading "The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism – The People's Committee of Quảng Nam Province – The Office of Performing Arts – The Association of Theater Performers of Vietnam – The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Quảng Nam Province," and below, the location and date of the event, Quảng Nam,

[24] The descriptions of the opening ceremonies and the *hát bội* plays that follows are based on my video documentation taken during the competition, in addition to copies of the plays' scripts.

May 18, 2013. The entire background of the banner is imprinted with the image of one of the most famous bronze *đồng sơn* drums, the *Cổ Lọa*, complete with concentric geometric patterns, humans, and *chim lạc* birds. The bottom of the banner is covered in lotus blossoms coming up from the ground, as if the stage were a lotus pond (see figure 2.7).

An announcer comes out onto the well-lit stage and begins introducing the event. He is the first of four introductory speakers at the event, which, like many other official Vietnamese events, at time feels long-winded with its obligatory greetings and remarks. Wearing a Western suit and tie, the announcer tells the audience that this event is a result of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism's declaration to hold a national competition of the professional theater arts of *tuồng* and folk musicals here in the city of Tam Kỳ, Quảng Nam Province, from May 18 to 28 in the year 2013. He continues, speaking about the rich tradition and history of revolution and resistance here in the Quảng Nam region. This area is the birthplace and home of several patriots who loved our country, he says, including people such as Hùynh Thúc Kháng and Phan Châu Trinh.[25] He also mentions that UNESCO has recognized two heritage sites in this region, the Hindu temple ruins of Mỹ Sơn and the ancient town of Hội An (or Fai-Fo), which are now popular tourist sites for both domestic and international travelers.

Choosing Tam Kỳ in Quảng Nam province was a deliberate departure on the part of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and the other planning committees, as all previous national *hát bội*/*tuồng* festivals have been held in the city of Qui Nhơn, Binh Định Province.[26] The Bình Định region is often referred to as the "cradle" of *hát bội* development and is the home

[25] Hùynh Thúc Kháng (1876–1947) and Phan Châu Trinh (1872–1926) are often associated with each other as leaders of the Vietnamese nationalist and anti-colonial movement. Most major cities in Vietnam have streets named after both men. Phan also used the alias Tây Hồ, and Hùynh is often referred to as "Cụ Hùynh" (great-grandfather Hùynh) by the general Vietnamese population.

[26] This national event in 2013 was also the first time the term "competition" (*cuộc thi*) was used in the event's title rather than the term "festival" (*liên hoan*), emphasizing the attainment of awards rather than the event simply being a gathering place for artists.

of famous *hát bôi* playwright Đào Tấn. In conversations with Nhu Mì, whose hometown is Qui Nhơn, she seemed disappointed at this change in location and saw it as a publicity and marketing strategy from the government to draw tourists to Hội An during the upcoming "Quảng Nam Heritage Festival of 2013" from June 21 to 26, celebrating the 10th anniversary of UNESCO's recognition of Hội An Ancient Town and Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary, both of which are in Quảng Nam province.[27]

The announcer then introduces the honored guests in attendance, including Hoàng Tuấn Anh, head-minister of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and member of the executive committee of the Communist Party; Vương Duy Biên, vice-minister of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and "Outstanding Artist" (*Nghệ Sĩ Ưu Tú*) in theatrical directing; Phạm Thị Lọc, vice-chairwoman of the Battle Front Committee of Quảng Nam Province; Đinh Hài, director of the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Quảng Nam Province and co-head of the organizing committee of the competition; Ngô Hoàng Quân, vice-director of the Association of Performing Artists of Vietnam, co-head of the organizing committee of the competition, and "Outstanding Artist" (*Nghệ Sĩ Ưu Tú*) in classical cello performance; Lê Tiến Thọ, director of the Association of Theatrical Arts of Vietnam, member of the steering committee of the competition, and "People's Artist" (*Nghệ Sĩ Nhân Dân*) in *hát bội* performance; and Trần Minh Cả, vice-chairman of the People's Committee of Quảng Nam and co-head of the steering committee of the competition. Representatives from each of the eleven performing troupes are then asked to come up on stage to accept a bouquet of flowers on behalf of their troupe. The representatives line up on stage to a recording of a march in the style of John Philip

[27] Nhu Mì has a special connection to arts in Qui Nhơn not only because it is her hometown, but also because her father is the director of the Qui Nhơn Cultural Center as well as a *hát bội* playwright and former performer. She has attended, since a very early age, many of the national *hát bội* festivals that had been held previously in the city.

Sousa, with prominent brass, winds, and percussion. The representatives wave the flowers above their heads as cameras snap away during the photo opportunity (see fig 2.7).

The panel of judges is then introduced. The panel includes Professor Tắt Thắng, a theater critic and chairman of the judging panel; Professor Hoàng Chương, director of the Center for Research, Preservation, and Development of National Culture; "People's Artist" in arts administration Trần Đình Sanh, member of the executive committee of the Association of Stage Artists of Vietnam; "People's Artist" in *tuồng* theater Nguyễn Thị Hòa Bình, member of the executive committee of the Association of Stage Artists of Vietnam; and "Outstanding Artist" in theatrical directing Trần Minh Ngọc, vice-chair of the Association of Stage Artists of Hồ Chí Minh City and member of the executive committee of the Association of Theater Artists of Vietnam.

The second speaker, a young woman dressed in a traditional *aó dài* with yellow tunic and red pants (the colors of the Vietnamese Communist flag) then comes onto the stage.[28] She greets the honored guests again, the entire audience, and all of the media outlets, especially the national state-run television channel VTV1 that is broadcasting the event. She continues, saying that the country is currently in a very busy period of time full of activities, including the celebration of the 123rd birthday of Bác Hồ, which was May 19, 1890. It is in this context that the two local committees together with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism planned the competition to take place, in this location with a rich history and culture of resistance and revolution. The event is part of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's declaration 28501 to continue "building and developing national arts during the upcoming period of time from 2013 to 2020."

[28] The *aó dài* dress has become a gendered symbol often associated with the nation of Vietnam, especially in the popular contemporary beauty pageants in Vietnam and the Vietnamese diaspora of the United States. For further discussion about the history of the *aó dài*, including its recent resurgence in popularity after a period of public disapproval of the *aó dài* immediately following the communist takeover in 1975 (due to its association with "bourgeois decadence" and "capitalist wastefulness" of elite women), see Lieu 2013.

She then introduces the third speaker, Trần Minh Cả, vice-chair of the People's Committee of Quảng Nam Province, to make further remarks.

Vice-chair Cả greets his comrades on both the local and national level, the veteran artists present, the panel of judges, the media outlets, the eleven participating theater troupes, and the audience. He speaks about his province, Quảng Nam, and how the people of this place have passed through a history of struggle and development that has resulted in the creation of "invaluable culture." He mentions that this competition coincides with "our beloved" Bác Hồ's birthday and is meant to glorify invaluable national culture. This event precedes the Fifth Heritage Festival of Quảng Nam to be held in Hội An from June 21-26, 2013 that will celebrate the "rich and colorful national culture of this region." Cả continues to speak about how Quảng Nam is one of the earliest places where the *tuồng* stage was established and how it has been associated with historical *tuồng* troupes such as Đức Giáo and Khấn Thọ, as well as being the home to a number of *tuồng* playwrights such as Nguyễn Hình Diễn, Ống Phước Hổ, GS Hoàng Châu Ký and outstanding *tuồng* artists such as Nguyễn Nho Túy, Nguyên Lai, Nguyen Phẩm, and Ngo Thị Liệu, whose names have been recorded "for the ages in Vietnamese history books." Cả then speaks about *tuồng*'s role in revolutionary arts, saying that during Vietnam's two wars of resistance[29] *tuồng* artists were able to continue and develop traditional arts by forming the Tuồng Troupe of Interzone V (*Đoàn Tuồng Liên Khu V*), which served a cadre of Vietnam's soldiers on all fronts of the war. He reminds us that *tuồng* performers simultaneously served the role of artist and soldier, carrying guns to fight against foreign invaders. Many artist cadres have sacrificed their lives and served as what Cả calls "a beacon of light and reason, lifting the morale of

[29] The "two wars of resistance" that are often mentioned in modern Vietnamese history refer to the struggle against French colonialism, the "First War of Resistance" (or what is known in the West as the "First Indochina War," from 1945 to 1954), and later the "Second War of Resistance Against U.S. Imperialism" during the American military occupation of Vietnam that continued until 1975.

revolutionary art." Vice-chair Cả then again thanks his comrades, the judges' panel, and the artists, wishing them health, happiness, and a successful competition.

The last speaker is then introduced, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and chair of the steering committee of the competition, Vương Duy Biên. After his obligatory greetings on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, Vương speaks about his vision for the goals of the competition. In what he calls the exciting and encouraging atmosphere of the 123rd birthday of our chairman Hồ Chí Minh, he says that here in Tam Kỳ,

> We inherit the quintessential characteristics of *tuồng*, while new qualities of the art form contribute to its revival, in order to bring relevance to these treasures and traditions of the people of the *tuồng* stage. This is the duty and mission at the heart of professional *tuồng* performers in the work of building and developing the foundation of a Vietnamese culture.

According to Vương, the competition should assesses the quality of theatrical works, the results and effects that the *tuồng* art form has had in the most recent period of time, and how to direct the art form's development in the coming years. The competition is an opportunity to focus on and invest in the creation of new *tuồng* plays that are able to "satisfy the needs of the people," while at the same time serving the requirements of important fatherland holidays in the coming year of 2014-2015.

Vương also speaks about the competition as an opportunity to encourage exchange between artists and to share experiences of how to discover innovative works produced by performers and artistic groups, as well as experiences about the business of planning, managing, and organizing activities, and carrying out solutions to "restore, revive, and develop *tuồng* and folk musicals in this new period of history." He continues, saying, "We hope that this competition will draw attention to new talents of today, and we will honor those collectives and individuals who show excellence in the laborious and creative process of the art form." Vương then goes through the obligatory thanks to comrades and leaders, as well as the local and national

media/press for attending and distributing information, and to all the "Vietnamese brothers and sisters" (*đồng bào*) in the audience who have come from near and far for their "active, positive, and constructive zealousness" for the competition. On behalf of the steering and organizing committees of the competition, Vương officially declares the competition open, to polite applause from the audience. Thus begins the nine-day competition that includes fifteen performances by eleven different theatre troupes from throughout Vietnam.

The state-sponsored competition, through the presence of both national and local government officials and the political rhetoric used by them, is imbued with a sense of obligation and responsibility to building a strong national identity and Communist Party of Vietnam. However, as seen in the introductory remarks of the opening ceremonies of this national competition, official government approaches to the arts and culture are often contradictory and vague, with references to a "quintessential" (*tinh hoa*) Vietnamese culture that needs to be maintained, yet at the same time should be "developed" (*phát triển*) to meet the demands of contemporary Vietnamese society. The opening play of the competition that immediately followed the opening ceremonies of the competition, titled *A Rat Race in the Darkness* (*Đường Đua Trong Bống Tối*) and performed by the folk musical troupe from the Center for the Preservation and Distribution of Folk Song Heritage of Nghê An, is an example of an attempt to fulfill the demands of the party's official rhetoric. According to its introduction, the play was written and inspired by recent remarks made by Hoàng Tuấn Anh on the "urgent and pressing contemporary problem of corruption in the process of obtaining promotions and degrees." Hoàng is the head minister of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and is one of the honored guests attending the competition.

The plot of *A Rat Race in the Darkness* centers around the competition for the position of vice-chair in a ministry department, as seen through the perspective of three different people

attempting to buy their rank and power through money and other means (such as sexual favors). In the words of the play's introduction, this corruption is an example of "one of the improper and toxic behaviors that needs to be rejected from contemporary life and society in order to contribute to the faith that all classes of our people have for the leadership of the Party." *A Rat Race in the Darkness* won a gold medal in the category of best ensemble performance, with its use of traditional *ví* and *giặm* folksong melodies that originated from the Nghệ An area, but with lyrics depicting a contemporary plot relevant to concerns that Party officials had recently voiced.[30] Although none of the *hát bội* troupes performing in the national competition won any ensemble gold medals, the tension between attempting to maintain traditional elements of the ancient art form while at the same time navigating the obligation to express what would be appropriate themes relevant to contemporary Vietnamese society (in the eyes of the judges' panel, national and local officials, and audience members) can be seen in the performances of all the troupes.

[30] Not long after the competition, *ví* and *giặm* folk songs from Nghệ An province were recognized in 2014 by UNESCO on their Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (United Nations Scientific, Educational, and Cultual Organization 2014).

Figure 2.1. Quảng Nam Province Cultural Center. (Photo by Ngọc Viên Nguyễn, November 5, 2012)

Figure 2.2. Carving above interior stage of the Quảng Nam Province Cultural Center. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

Figure 2.3. Interior dome of the Quảng Nam Province Cultural Center. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

Figure 2.4. Sign on left side of stage. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

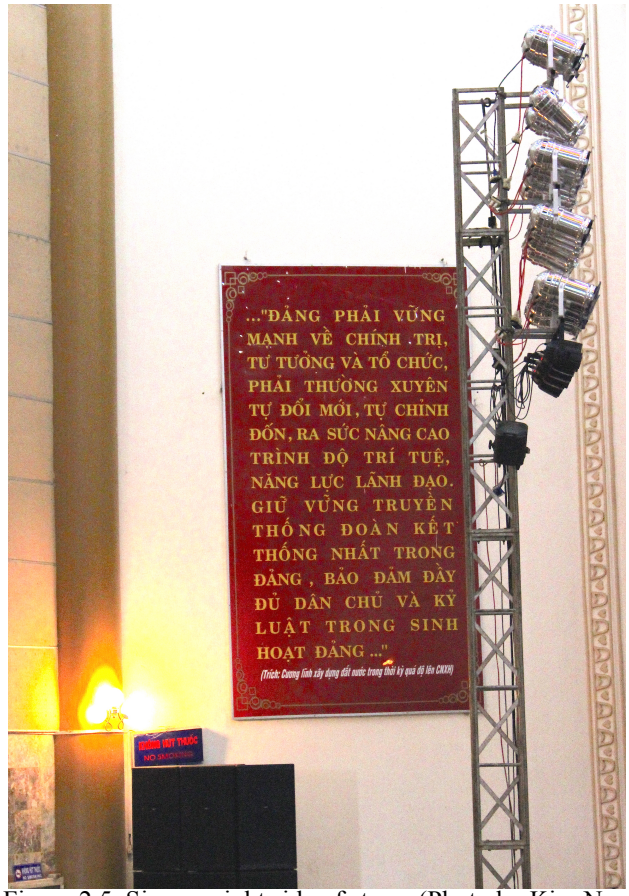


Figure 2.5. Sign on right side of stage. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)


Figure 2.6. From left to right, Ngân Anh, Quỳnh Lan Dương, and Nhu Mì Đào. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

Figure 2.7. Representatives from the eleven theater troupes accept their bouquets of flowers. Notice the the *đồng sơn* drum pattern on the banner's background and lotus pond across bottom. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

ACT I: *SINGULAR HERO—NGUYỄN TRI PHƯƠNG*

PERFORMED BY THE NATIONAL TUỒNG THEATER OF VIETNAM

Why would the Hanoi-based National Tuồng Theater choose the story of General Nguyễn Tri Phương to represent their region at the national competition? Nguyễn Tri Phương is known for his brave resistance and refusal to submit to the French during a time when other high-ranking imperial officials wanted to surrender power to the French, whose technologically advanced warfare seemed impossible to defeat. The play opens with Emperor Tự Đức (1829-1883) in emotional agony over the state of his country. He has just received news from a general that six provinces in the South have fallen to French forces. Many of his advisors have told him to negotiate and hand power over to the French in order to maintain peace in the country, but Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son Nguyễn Lâm are the only two advisors unwilling to concede their homeland. After several battles and the refusal to adopt Western technology, both Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son die defending the Hanoi citadel that is overtaken by French forces in 1873. Nguyên Lâm dies on the battlefield, while his father is gravely injured and taken prisoner by the French. In the closing scene of the play, Nguyễn Tri Phương dramatically protests politically and morally by tearing off his bloody bandages, refusing medical attention from the French, starving himself to death. Despite promises from the French that he would be given a position of power upon his surrender, Nguyễn Tri Phương chooses to die rather than accept these proposals.[31]

According to the National Tuồng Theater's program notes, the gravely injured Nguyễn Tri Phương is famously quoted shortly before his death, saying, "I am now aimlessly and barely

[31] It is well documented historically that Nguyễn Tri Phương was injured and then captured by French forces in 1873, and that he died shortly thereafter. However, the dramatic details, such as Nguyễn Tri Phương ripping bloody bandages from his body before dying, is an historical interpretation and staging by the National Tuồng Theatre.

living without a purpose, how can that compare with a noble death in loyalty and honor?" (*Bây giờ ta chỉ lay lắt mà chết, sao bằng thung dung chết vì việc nghĩa*?). The Confucian virtue of *nghĩa* (honor and loyalty to one's emperor and/or nation) is commonly found in *hát bội* plays. In the context of the politically conscious national competition, the National Tuồng Theatre's portrayal of a heroic Nguyễn Tri Phương who is an exemplary figure in the fulfillment of *nghĩa* towards his emperor, nation, and people entangles itself with commonly observed narratives of post-colonial revolutionary *liệt sỹ* (national martyrs), whose chronicles and imagery of heroic sacrifices for the nation dominate public commemorations, memorials, museums, and architecture of contemporary Vietnam (Schwenkel 2009: 108). The ubiquity and repetition of these *liệt sỹ* narratives of sacrifice and resistance against foreign aggression in public life reveal how, as Claire Sutherland writes, official narratives surrounding Vietnam's national identity and citizenship are "constructed in opposition to empire" (2005: 153).

Why was Nguyễn Tri Phương's story chosen to represent the National Tuồng Theater, when many other historical Vietnamese figures also died during their resistance against foreign invaders? Nguyễn Tri Phương's well-known contemporary Phan Thanh Giản (1796-1867) also famously committed suicide rather than surrender to French forces in the South, only five years before the death of Nguyễn Tri Phương. However, Phan Thanh Giản's family background (his grandfather and grandmother were ethnic Chinese), his high level of education, and his position as one of the most powerful mandarins in the Nguyễn court do not quite fit into official narratives of the ideal heroic *liệt sỹ*.[32] Likewise, Trần Bình Trọng (1259-1285), a famous military general who died defending Đại Việt against Mongol invaders and who, like Nguyễn Tri

[32] Despite many who viewed Phan Thanh Giản's decision to end his own life as heroic when French forces overtook southern Vietnam, in 1868 his name was removed from the stone stele listing the country's mandarins. His name was reinstated by emperor Đồng Khánh in 1886 (*Đại Nam Thực Lực* [Chronicle of Greater Vietnam] Vol. 37, 1997: 223-225). Prior to 1975, a main thoroughfare street in central Saigon was named Phan Thanh Giản. After the fall of Saigon, a main thoroughfare, Phan Thanh Giản street, was renamed Điên Biên Phủ street in remembrance of the 1954 battle that led to the withdrawal of the French in Vietnam.

Phương, rejected the gold and power offered to him in exchange for surrender, was born into a position of relative power. Trần Bình Trọng was a descendant of emperor Lê Đại Hành (941-1005) and husband of the daughter of emperor Trần Thái Tông (1218-1277).[33]

In comparison, Nguyễn Tri Phương came from relatively humble beginnings, from a family of farmers and carpenters. He did not come to prominence through the mandarin examination system but rather is known for being fiercely self-made. This background is in line with dominant narratives during and after the revolution concerning what Vietnam's new society and culture should look like; party theorists such as Trường Chinh and Hoài Thanh pondered the issue of how to define national culture with a disdain for "high culture," yet an ambivalence towards "low" popular culture. Others, such as Tố Hữu (one of Vietnam's most famous revolutionary poets), emphatically believed that Vietnam's new culture must be defined as and only as popular culture. In a speech at the 1956 National Congress of Culture, Tố Hữu states:

> Culture is the product of the working class. . . . Culture is the spiritual sustenance of the masses. . . . Our view is totally opposite of the ruling class. The exploiting ruling class did not accept culture as the product of the working class but as the product of genius, of God, of the group of individual intellectuals. . . . [The ruling class] did not see culture as being in the service of the people and the masses but as entertainment for those who "eat and do nothing" (ăn không ngồi rồi). (Ninh 2002: 167)

The attitude of disdain by Party officials towards the "ruling class" still lingers in contemporary Vietnamese society in the way that individuals are promoted to positions of societal responsibility. As former North Vietnamese colonel Bui Tin writes, cadres in the postwar years were chosen on account of their classification as non-exploitative peasants rather than their vision and experience (1995: 26). This so permeated everyday life that a commonplace joke developed "about the foreigner who visited Vietnam and asked why the security police

[33] Despite their similar tones of defiance, Trần Bình Trọng's refusal to accept a position of power offered to him by Kublai Khan's prince Toghan by saying "I would rather be a ghost in the South than an emperor in the North" (*Ta thà làm ma nước Nam chứ không thèm làm Vương đất Bắc*) is actually better known and more often recited by Vietnamese students of history than Nguyễn Tri Phương's declaration before his death (Hảo Thị Trần 2007: 51).

(*công an*) always go around in groups of three. The reply was that one could read, another could write and the third was there to control these two intellectuals" (Philip Taylor 2001: 74).

Scenarios of Corruption and Loyalty

As Patricia Pelley writes, the creation of a postcolonial "new history" (*lịch sử mới)* with a narrative of resistance, revolution, and victory played a critical role in building and legitimizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's newly formed communist government (2002: 9-10). Vietnam's postcolonial legacy has been fraught with tensions between competing visions and historiographical processes of how to frame the past in ways that would disentangle the newly established state from the previous colonial social and historical structures and practices. I argue that contemporary performances of *hát bội*, through their use of dramatic "scenarios" (as referred to by Diana Taylor) are a contemporary part of these historiographical processes, or what Hayden White describes as "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found*, and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (1978: 82). Although the *hát bội* play *Nguyễn Tri Phương* is based on historical events surrounding the death of Nguyễn Tri Phương, some scenes and characters in the play have been dramatized and/or completely fictionalized. It is in these scenes, where history is interpreted through dramatic narrative, that we might see revealed how the National Tuồng Theater is active in historiographical processes of constructing memories that align with their preferred telling or framing of history, or what White describes as the arranging of historical events into a "hierarchy of signifiers" to produce coherent chronicles (1973: 7). Since this process of remembering through historiography is selective, the choice of what to remember at the same time involves an act of forgetting.

One such scene in the performance, which has no basis in historical evidence, is a scene in which Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son, Nguyễn Lam, disguise themselves as commoners and witness the death of a village manager (in an unnamed village) at the hands of French forces. Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son have been sent by Emperor Tự Đức from Huế in the central region (the country's capital at that time) to protect Hanoi in the north, which is under attack by the French. A corrupt Vietnamese imperial official named Lê Quỳ, who is also present in this secne, has been collaborating with the French and has aided them in killing the village manager. Singing in the *nam ai* mode, a woman and a man exchange a dialogue describing their grief for the village manager (see example 3.1 for transcription). The *nam* mode has four main variations, each associated with certain emotions or dramatic situations: *nam xuân* (woeful and majestic), *nam ai* (tragic and sad), *nam chạy* (being chased or lost), *nam biệt* (saying farewell). Lyrics in the *nam* mode are also always written in set poetic meters: *hạ bát* (a verse of at least six syllables and a verse of less than eight syllables), *song thất lục bát* (two verses of seven syllables or more, the third verse six syllables, the fourth verse eight syllables), or *lục bát gián thất* (first verse of six syllables, the second verse eight syllables, and the following verses seven syllables) (Lê 2007: 158).[34] Soon, the male and female villagers singing in the *nam ai* mode are joined by eight other villagers who surround the body of the deceased man and perform highly choreographed and stylized versions of basic hand movements found in *hát bội*, and sing in unison expressing their grief (see figure 3.1).

Although the villagers are dressed in the plain clothing of commoners (*aó bà ba* and *aó tứ thân* of the northern region in muted, neutral-colored fabrics) rather than royal clothing (brightly colored silk robes that would have long, flowing, sleeves), the villagers raise the short fabric on their sleeves to their cheeks, in the same way as royalty would, to signify their tears for

[34] For transcriptions of the *nam* mode as well as other modes used in *hát bội,* see Trần Hồng 1997.

the village manager's death. The man sings, "My brother, where is your soul now?," and the villagers respond, "Oh brother! The flat ground is suddenly surrounded by a tornado," performing in unison the *bê* hand gesture, with fingers extended and trembling with palms facing the audience, to express their emotional turmoil. The villagers then sing in unison, "Why did you not wait, brother, for vengeance to be completed?," using hand movements that a martial character would typically use. As they say "vengeance to be completed," they point aggressively with the index and middle fingers of each hand together with palms facing each other rather than downwards, to indicate looking at vengeance as an idea in the distance. Unlike state-sponsored troupes, it is highly unusual for independent folk *hát bội* troupes to use choreography on a group scale such as this, involving ten actors in coordination. State-sponsored troupes do deploy this type of choreography regularly, which at times resembles the aesthetics of socialist realism in its imagery. This larger-scale choreography has only appeared in the performances of state-sponsored troupes in the last few decades and was introduced into the art form by directors and performers who had studied theater abroad at locations in the former Soviet Union (interview with Đặng Bá Tài, June 12, 2013).

The corrupt official, Lê Quỳ, with his two soldiers, watches from the left side of the stage, while the disguised Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son Nguyễn Lâm watch from behind the villagers. Lê Quỳ, although not a real historical figure, falls into one of the conventional role categories found in *hát bôi* called *kép nịnh*, or male fawner, who is a typically a conniving character who flatters those in power for his own gain. Visually, the *kép nịnh* character normally has white makeup on his face, an uneven or sparse beard, and a crooked nose. In this particular play, Lê Quỳ also has a prominent prosthetic hunchback (which, in an earlier scene, his soldiers mock, saying that it formed because their master was always bending over and kneeling to the ground in order to fawn on others) and a verbal stutter to convey a sense of indecision,

cowardice, and incompetence. He has a pale white face, flimsy moustache, and thick, comical eyebrows. Seeing the villagers mourning, he tells his two soldiers, who are carrying guns, which signify their collaboration with the French, to arrest all the villagers and bring them to the vice-admiral, Phó Đề Đốc.

The villagers ask what crime they have committed. Stuttering, Lê Quỳ, with whispered suggestions from his two soldiers, conjures up a list of false accusations: "The crime of causing chaos in our country. The crime of undermining imperial orders. The crime of assaulting soldiers. The crime of angering the French." He again commands the soldiers to arrest the villagers, when Nguyễn Tri Phương, still in disguise as a commoner, literally and figuratively stands up for the people, challenging the alleged crimes. "An imperial official should be like a shining light, not leaning on your wealth and powers while belittling the people," he says. Lê Qùy, unaware of Nguyễn Tri Phương's identity, insults him by saying, "Shut up right now! Old man, who are you to question the authorities? How can people below think they are important?" Lê Quỳ then commands his soldiers to arrest Nguyễn Tri Phương, at which point Nguyễn Lâm draws his sword, ready to slay Lê Quỳ in defense of his father. Lê Quỳ attempts to draw his sword unsuccessfully, stumbling over both his words and his movements. He is nearly slain by Nguyễn Lâm but is saved by the vice-admiral, Phó Đề Đốc, who enters the scene at this moment.

Phó Để Đốc asks Lê Quỳ what the situation is, and Lê Quỳ tells Phó Đề Đốc that all of the villagers have been going against orders, especially this particular old man, pointing to Nguyễn Tri Phương. Phó Để Đốc asks the old man to turn towards him, so that he can see the man. Very dramatically, in synchronization with the *trống chầu* drum and cymbals, Nguyễn Tri Phương turns towards Phó Đề Đốc, revealing his identity. The shocked vice-admiral recognizes his commanding officer, general Nguyễn Tri Phương, who is under direct order from Emperor

Tự Đức, and cowers to his knees. Lê Quỳ drops to his knees as well, visibly shaking in fear. Nguyễn Tri Phương then proclaims, nobly,

> An imperial official should stand firm so that the people can see them in both the sun and the rain. Here you cower and hide. Who will our people depend on to survive? Here, look at this man [pointing to deceased village manager]. The people could not depend on our imperial officials. Imperial officials could not depend on the hearts of the people. The loss of our country begins with this!

Pointing at Lê Quỳ, Nguyễn Tri Phương says, "The one deserving prosecution is in fact you!," at which point Lê Quỳ, already on the ground, stumbles further and bows repeatedly to Nguyễn Tri Phương, begging for mercy.

This fictionalized scene that takes place in an unnamed village, without any historical evidence to support its details, is designed in a way that frames Nguyễn Tri Phương as a populist leader of the masses who is opposed to corruption and foreign aggression. Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son are powerful men, yet disguise themselves as commoners, becoming one with the masses in order to see the practical reality that the villagers are experiencing under French occupation. After he has revealed himself, Nguyễn Tri Phương's noble words again frame him as empowering the masses. When he states, "The people could not depend on our imperial officials. Imperial officials could not depend on the hearts of the people. The loss of our country begins with this!," Nguyễn Tri Phương equates the existence and identity of the nation with "the hearts of the people." In this dramatized scene, Nguyễn Tri Phương's words and actions are in stark contrast to the attitude of the corrupt Lê Quỳ and Phó Đề Đốc characters, who are acting in accordance with in the well-known proverb originating from that time period, "The country can be in any state, as long as the King and imperial officials remain," which equates the existence of the nation with those who hold power.[35]

[35] Translated from the Nguyễn Tri Phương program notes: "Đất nước thế nào cũng được, miễn Vua va Quan con."

The fictional characters Lê Quỳ and Phó Đề Đốc, in their corruption and collaboration with the French, conjure the dialectical and discursive terms of "traitor" and "hero," or "collaborator" and "patriot," that are so often found in narratives surrounding Vietnam's history, especially in postcolonial narratives of resistance and liberation. In the 1960s and 1970s, the South was regarded by the North as a site of corruption, an "enemy within" that was Vietnam's most vulnerable site of foreign contamination due to its collaboration with the French and Americans, and an openness towards capitalism (Duong 2012: 6) . Here, too, in the play *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, we see that Lê Qùy and Phó Để Đốc are the weak, cowardly characters whose actions will lead to the loss of Vietnamese territories and power, but more importantly Vietnam's culture and sense of nationhood. As Lan Duong writes, during the war against the Americans, the northern regime portrayed the southern Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) as feminized, decadent, and cowardly in contrast to the resolute and unyielding soldiers of the northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Using the rhetoric of treason together with the term "puppet regime," northern depictions of southerners denoted a submission to the power and seduction of American influence that was gendered as feminine (ibid.: 6). The portrayal of the corrupt character Lê Quỳ, with his high-pitched voice, slender figure, sparse beard, and feminized mannerisms is a typically gendered representation of a cowardly and submissive traitor who is collaborating with foreign invaders.[36]

Another fictionalized scene of corruption involves the vice-admiral Phó Đề Đốc and his wife (who are covertly working for French officer and explorer François Garnier) and their attempt to bribe Princess Đồng Sơn (the wife of Nguyễn Lâm and daughter of Emperor Tự Đức) to persuade Nguyễn Tri Phương and Nguyễn Lâm to surrender to the French. They bring the

[36] See also the article by Charles J. Levy "ARVN as Faggots: Inverted Warfare in Vietnam" for American perspectives that depict the ARVN as feminized and homosexual (1971).

princess, who has just finished expressing her nostalgia and longing for home (the capital, Huế), luxurious items such as "diamonds from Hong Kong" and "silk from Korea" (see figure 3.2). At first, being the virtuous character she represents, the princess refuses the gifts, simply saying that she has done nothing to deserve the precious goods. But Phó Đề Đốc urges her to accept the gifts, so that they can discuss a "necessary issue" later. When the corrupt scheme is revealed to the princess, she dramatically stumbles in shock, using traditional *bê* footwork (one foot crossed in front of the other with knees bent and both feet rapidly shifting to one side while keeping the upper body still) to show her distress at the proposal. The princess's immediate movement and facial expression of shock coincides with a drum beat and cymbal crash, followed by drum strokes that roll quickly, then ritard, following the pace of her footsteps. The princess refuses the bribe, saying that the French are stomping disrespectfully over the grounds where their ancestors lie buried. In reaction, Phó Đề Đốc mocks her "virtuousness and bravery" by calling it meaningless and implying that her refusal to accept the bribe will force the French to attack, leading to the death of her husband on the battlefield. She again performs the *bê* footwork motions when she realizes the potential for her husband's demise.

The princess still refuses, calling Phó Đề Đốc and his wife opportunistic traitors working for the enemy. The wife of Phó Đề Đốc attempts again to persuade the princess to accept the bribe, saying, "We only have one life to live. One hundred years pass by like a sparrow in the window. Princess, please accept our gifts. Between life and death, you can only choose one." Thinking of the possibility of her husband's death, princess Đồng Xuân considers the bribe for a moment by picking up the tray covered with a red cloth that contains the diamonds and silk—but after a few silent moments, she dramatically throws the tray across the stage and shouts at Phó Đề Đốc and his wife, "Are you two not afraid that history will condemn you? Selling your homeland to gain power. You have the heart and soul of a wolf, without any conscience!" Seeing

that the material goods are not enough to persuade the princess, Phó Đề Đốc then orders his soldiers (who like Lê Quỳ's soldiers have guns, signaling that they are collaborating with the French) to throw the handmaiden of the princess into the ocean, where fish will consume her. Forced to choose between her loyal handmaiden and her homeland, princess Đồng Xuân sings in anguish using the *nam ai* mode and ultimately allows her handmaiden to perish (see figure 3.3).

Although the setting of the scene described above takes place more than a century earlier than the setting of a *A Rat Race in the Darkness* (the opening play of the national competition, performed by the Center for the Preservation and Distribution of Folk Song Heritage of Nghê An), *Nguyễn Tri Phương* depicts a similar scenario in which corruption has taken hold in Vietnamese society and will lead to the downfall of the country. In *A Rat Race*, set in contemporary Vietnam, an old retired Party leader watches the younger generation of leaders be corrupted by materialism and greed, which in official discourses has been in a large part blamed on the *Đổi Mới* market reforms of 1986 that led to more privatization and an influx of foreign cultural products into Vietnam. In *Nguyễn Tri Phương,* we again see corruption in both the *nịnh* character of Lê Quỳ and in the attempted bribing of princess Đồng Xuân by Phó Đề Đốc. Both of these situations are framed to be the result of foreign influence: in *Nguyễn Tri Phương* the enemy and source of corruption is the French colonial empire, while in *A Rat Race* the enemy is consumerism and capitalistic greed imported from the West.

This narrative of foreign influence as a corrupting force has been employed as part of the conceptualization of Vietnam's national identity and its nation-building endeavors both historically and in contemporary Vietnam. During the revolution, foreign influences were often seen as one of the many difficulties facing the cause. In a 1974 article titled "The Other War" in the north Vietnamese jounral *Vietnam Studies*, written on the eve of the communist victory in the South, Nguyen Khac Vien and Phong Hien discuss the significant proportion of the population

that had been distracted from combat with the "real enemy" by being caught up in the ills of urban alienation, the rise of a consumer society, the proliferation of prostitution (especially to serve American military personnel in South Vietnam), the emergence of a materialistic bourgeoisie class, "addiction" to foreign films, romance novels, and the rise of drug addiction. These "neo-colonial poisons" (*nọc độc thực dân mới*) were seen as a force that permeated the civilian population and extinguished their revolutionary spirit, dulling their morals and effacing their humanity (Tran Quang 1976: 10). Recently on exhibition at the Hồ Chí Minh Museum in Hanoi, there were two rooms that display the dangers of foreign influence: one concerning "Western decadence" that features a life-size image of Marilyn Monroe as well as an Edsel car emerging from a wall, and another on the misuse of science and technology, featuring images of the destruction of Hiroshima and the famous photo of a young Vietnamese girl running from napalm taken by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Nick Ut (Schwenkel 2009: 162).

Reactivating Dramatic Scenarios

As an art form of symbolic conventions, traditional *hát bội* is in this way self-referential in its creation of a universe and story through the performer's movements and voice, with very little staging and outside props. Well-versed audiences know and recognize the meaning of these conventions, and also notice when a play makes reference to other well-known *hát bội* plays in its narrative. There are two scenes in *Nguyễn Tri Phương* that reactivate scenarios from already existing *hát bội* plays. The first scene involves a monologue by Nguyễn Tri Phương in which he is coming to terms with the fact that he must confront the French forces in violent conflict. For him, surrender is not an option. He condemns the imperial officials who are considering surrender, calling them selfish and opportunistic, with no loyalty for their country. During this monologue, he holds and strokes a red, silk, cloak that the emperor has given him as a sign of the

trust that the ruler has in Nguyễn Tri Phương. He begins to sing in the *nam ai* mode, expressing his sorrow that he is is a singular hero (*nhạn cô thần*), the only imperial official left who will remain loyal to the nation. During this monologue, Nguyễn Trí Phương's wife, Nguyệt Thi, has been watching from behind her husband. As he sings in the *nam ai* mode, she interrupts him mid-sentence, fastening the red silk cloak around her husband's neck.

Nguyệt Thi tells her husband that she has been unable to sleep, seeing her husband look "half alive, half dead." She asks him what is wrong. He tells her that the imperial officials are cowardly and refuse to stand up against the French, and that if this continues the French will surely overtake all three regions of the country. Nguyệt Thi then does something that is reminsicent of another *hát bội* character, Trưng Trắc, from the play *Trưng Nữ Vương* (The Trưng Queens). Nguyệt Thi reminds her husband that he has already fought so many battles, loyally defending his country, even losing his younger brother in the battle at Chí Hòa, where he was gravely wounded himself. She believes the emperor is asking too much of an old man of seventy years by commanding her husband to defend the North. Alluding to Nguyễn Tri Phương's impending death, Nguyệt Thi asks, "After the storm has passed, who will come home, and who will remain on the battlefield? If you are buried under the green grass, who will glorify your name and wish you a long life?" Nguyệt Thi then begs her husband to submit his resignation to the emperor, so that he might spend more time with his wife, children, and grandchildren (see figure 3.4). Nguyễn Tri Phương laughs loudly at this suggestion. He tells his wife that she loves him too much, but has forgotten that he is Nguyễn Tri Phương—one of the greatest military generals in history, who has sent countless invaders to their retreat. Resignation is not an option in the mind of Nguyễn Tri Phương.

This interaction between Nguyễn Tri Phương and his wife Nguyệt Thi brings to mind a scene from the play *Trưng Nữ Vương* involving Trưng Trắc and her husband, Thi Sách. Trưng

Trắc is older of the two Trưng sisters, famous for leading a succesful rebellion against China in 40 AD and ruling over Vietnam for two years until their deaths in 43 AD.[37] In the early twentieth century, famous patriot and nationalist Phan Bội Châu composed a *hát bội* play that appropriated the Trưng sisters' story to promote the movement for national independence. Phan Bội Chau portrayed the killing of Thi Sách as the catalyst for the Trưng sisters' revolutionary fervor (Marr 1984: 200). However, there is little historical evidence that Thi Sách was killed by the Chinese before the uprising led by the Trưng sisters. The murder of Thi Sách was fabricated by those who had difficulty believing that a woman had the ability to lead her husband into politics or battle (Huỳnh 2004: 11).

In the *hát bội* play composed by Phan Bội Châu, a pivotal scene occurs during a conversation between Thi Sách and Trưng Trắc. Thi Sách has heard rumors of the terrible oppression that his country's people have endured under the rule of Tô Định. Thi Sách is planning to confront Tô Định and asks Trưng Trắc for her opinion. Just as Nguyệt Thi does in *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, Trưng Trắc here attemps to persuade her husband into rethinking his decision. She uses the example of Chinese martyr Kinh Kha (荊軻, Jing Ke), who was killed during his failed attempt to assasinate the brutal Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang (260-210 BC), to dissuade her husband, saying, "Who knew Kinh Kha would die at the blade of his enemy? My dear, was that not a waste of a brave life? Kinh Kha wanted vengeance for Yên, but his brave soul still owes honor to his nation. Please, my dear, reconsider."[38] Thi Sách, like Nguyễn Tri Phương, refuses to be swayed by the pleading of his wife, saying, "If Kinh Kha did not spill his

[37] There are varying accounts of the Trưng sisters' deaths. The *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Han Shu* 後漢書) states that they were executed, while other legendary accounts describe their suicides by throwing themselves into a river and their acension into the skies (Yu 1986: 454).

[38] Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang was famous for finishing the Great Wall, mass book burnings, and executions of insubordinate scholars under his rule while enacting major economic and political reforms with the goal of standardization of diverse practices, as well as for the terra cotta army that protects his mausoleum (Wood 2008).

heroic blood, would anyone know his brave name today? I've already made up my mind. Don't worry my dear. If I hesitate due to the bonds of husband and wife, how can I repay my debt to the nation?"[39]

In both *Nguyễn Tri Phương* and *Trưng Nữ Vương*, the historical narratives are imbued with patriarchal patriotism that depict the men nobly and unequivocally choosing loyalty and honor towards the nation over the emotional pleas that their wives make in the name of family. Nguyễn Tri Phương laughs at the mere suggestion of resigning in order to spend time with his wife, children, and grandchildren, while Thi Sách disregards his wife's pleas in the play, but ultimately sparks his wife's rebellious actions of vengeance that lead to her heroic bravery for the nation. Political scientist Kim Huỳnh argues this patriarchal heirarchy of values and traits that left men undeniably at the top and center was constructed in the plays for the sake of being "realistic," and also shifts the Confucian feminine notions of self-sacrifice and piety from the home to the nation (2004: 11).

The second scene in *Nguyễn Tri Phương* that reactivates a scenario from a previously written *hát bội* play is the final scene depicting Nguyễn Tri Phương's death. This scene of *Nguyễn Tri Phương* and the last scene in the play *Gan Bất Khuất* (Indomitable Liver), written in 1964, have similar tropes of loyalty and bodily sacrifice for the sake of one's nation. In the final hours of Nguyễn Tri Phương's life, Phó Đề Đốc makes a last attempt to seduce the general into a surrender: first by persuading him that surrender to the French will ensure the safety of Princess Đồng Xuân (the emperor's daughter), and second by offering him a position of power in the French-controlled South. Nguyễn Tri Phương has already lost his younger brother in the battle at Chí Hoà, and both his wife and son have been killed in the most recent battle when he was fatally

[39] See Act IV for discussion of an excerpt of Trưng Nữ Vương performed by the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe in southern California.

injured. Phó Đề Đốc exploits these losses against Nguyễn Tri Phương, telling him that there is nothing left on this earth for him to hold on to, except for his *nghĩa khí* (empty honor and loyalty), so he might as well gain something from the French. Nguyễn Tri Phương curses Phó Đề Đốc in response, calling him a traitorous dog (*cẩu tặc*), for suggesting that Nguyễn Tri Phương would accept this bribe in betrayal of his country. He dramatically rips off the bloody bandages around his abdomen covering his injuries and throws them to the ground, declaring that he must die because he has allowed Hanoi to fall into the hands of the French (see figure 3.5).

Nguyễn Tri Phương then begins a *hát khách tử* sequence that ends with his death as he clutches his intestines. The *hát khách* singing style, always pentatonic, is used when a character is feeling brave, courageous, eloquent, or determined, in different dramatic situations. There are different variations of *hát khách*, including *khách thi* (a poetic version in the *thất ngôn tứ tuyệt* meter of four verses, each with seven syllables), *khách tẩu mã* (while riding a horse, either fleeing or sending a message), *khách tửu* (while drinking wine or making a toast), and *khách tử* (while dying), heard in this scene. *Khách tử* is performed at a slower tempo than the other *hát khách* variations, with the vocal melody drawn out over the accompanying *kèn* oboe, *đàn nhị* (two-stringed bowed lute), *đàn tam* (three-stringed plucked lute), and percussion punctuating the ends of phrases.

The final scene of *Gan Bất Khuất* is just as visceral in its depiction of a loyal patriot who stands up against foreign invaders and traitors of the nation. The main character, old man Thương, who was a soldier in the "liberation army" (*giải phống quân*), has a son who has been captured and killed by "cowardly American invaders" (*giặc mỹ ngụy*). In cold blood, they take the liver of Thương's son, give it to him, and tell him to cook a meal with it to feed them. Clutching the bloody bag holding his son's liver, Thương begins a monologue describing his pain in this situation. His son's "indomitable" (*bất khuất*) liver is still fresh with its red color as

Thương cries painful tears of blood. He continues describing the liver, saying it is a liver of bonds (*tình*), a liver of honor (*nghĩa*), a liver of filial piety (*hiếu*), a liver of loyalty (*trung*), a liver that will crush foreign invaders (*lũ xâm lăng*) and a liver that will decimate betrayers of the nation (*quân bán nước*). Thương recounts how his son, already fatally injured, was still able to kill his murderer by biting his neck before dying. He decides that he must avenge his son's death, since his son has died bravely defending the nation.

Thương then cooks his son's liver and feeds it to the American invaders. When they have had their fill and are drowsy, he draws a knife on them, stabbing two fatally. He is able to grab a rifle and shoot another one, but is also shot himself in the process. As he lies critically injured, liberation forces arrive to save him. Smiling, he is able to stand up and proudly holds up the bloody, red, bag that held his son's liver next to a liberation army soldier who holds the red liberation army flag with a yellow star. In both *Nguyễn Tri Phương* and *Gan Bất Khuất*, the foreign invaders and those who collaborate with them are depicted as inhumane characters, devoid of any loyalty towards the nation or ethical obligations. In *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, the corrupt Phó Đề Đốc is called a traitorous dog (*cẩu tặc*) for his opportunistic betrayal of the nation, while the American soldiers in *Gan Bất Khất* are demonized in their cruel, inhumane, pychological torture of Thượng by forcing him to cook his own son's liver. The trope of loss, through the death of loved ones and the visceral image of blood as a symbol of sacrifice for the nation, is also pervasive in these scenes. In *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, the general has lost his younger brother, wife, and son for the nation, and ultimately dies himself when he rips off the bloody bandages covering his wounds. In *Gan Bất Khuất*, the bloody bag that held the liver of Thương's son is held up together with and equal to the liberation army's flag, red and triumphant in death. Although set in different time periods, both *hát bội* plays use the Confucian virtues of loyalty and honor towards one's nation to depict heroes in Vietnamese history who have resisted foreign

aggression—in the case of *Nguyễn Tri Phương* the agressors are the colonial French during the late 19th century, while in *Gan Bất Khuất* the aggressors are American occupiers in the second half of the 20th century.

In the context of a national competition that is organized and closely monitored by both local and state party officials, these *hát bội* scenarios repeat in a formulaic yet reactivated way revolutionary and postcolonial narratives of Vietnam's nationhood "in opposition to empire" (Sutherland 2005: 153). The depiction of Confucian values of loyalty and honor (*trung nghĩa*) to one's emperor and nation over one's self and family becomes entangled with modern *liệt sỹ* imageries found in public commemorations, memorials and official discourses surrounding revolutionary narratives of resistance against foreign invaders. Bùi Tín, a former People's Army of Vietnam colonel, writes about how communist revolutionaries, despite their attempts to build a new society and culture, continued to operate in Confucian ways: "If they had traveled abroad, it was mostly to communist countries. They had escaped from a feudal and colonialist society to become revolutionaries, but their conduct clearly remained Confucian, given the way they deferred to one another to preserve harmony and discipline as was done within a traditional village or family hierarchy" (Bui Tin 1995: 105). Recent biographies of Nguyễn Tri Phương urge contemporary readers to learn from his heroic deeds, maintaining his relevance in Vietnamese society today. In a biography of Nguyễn Tri Phương by Hồng Thái, the 19th-century general's sacrifices are portrayed as a fulfillment of the idea of "Nguyễn Tri Phương, a brave and courageous person, unafraid of the enemy, determined to resist, with the spirit of fighting invaders, not only on the battlefield but even when he had fallen into their hands, he is a precious

pearl bead from which everyone, all of us, can learn a lesson" (Nguyễn Khác Đạm 1998: 148).[40] Hồng Thái ties Nguyễn Tri Phương's legacy directly to the memory of Hồ Chí Minh and his revolutionary ideals:

> his [Nguyễn Tri Phương's] life is carried on immortally, his life has led to success and lit the way for thousands of lives with the bones and blood of our Fatherland. They have expressed this truth, the rallying words of the immortal Hồ Chí Minh: "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom. . . . If there is just one invader left in our nation, we must continue to fight, resist, destroy, and sweep the invaders away." (Thái 2001: 808).[41]

Musical Cues: *Ca Trù* and *Hát Xẩm*

The traditional *hát bội* music used in the play *Nguyễn Tri Phương* does not deviate much from standard modes commonly found in *hát bội*, and is used in ways deemed appropriate by the panel of judges. Hoàng Chương, a member of the judges' panel and director of the Center for Preservation and Development of National Vietnamese Culture, writes in a magazine article following the competition, "one sign we should celebrate in this competition is expressed through the music. The basic musical forms used in the plays were able to maintain the soul and essence (*hồn cốt*) of traditional *tuồng*, without any destruction of the art form" (2013).[42] Musical genres and cues outside those traditionally used in *hát bội* are also included in *Nguyễn Tri Phương* for particular reasons, at times to simply set the location of a scene, to symbolize a character or theme in the narrative, or provide social and/or political commentary. For example, a Western march is used to signal the entrance of French officials into a scene, *hò Huế* songs are

[40] "Nguyễn Tri Phương, con người dũng cảm, không sợ địch, kiên quyết kháng chiến, có tinh thần đánh địch, không phải khi còn trên mật trận mà cả khi đã rơi vào tay chúng rồi, quả là viên ngọc qúy đáng để cho mọi người chúng ta học tập" (Nguyễn Khác Đạm 1998: 148).

[41] Vì phương châm, lẽ sống ông hằng theo đuổi là phương châm, lẽ sống đã được dẫn dắt, soi sáng bằng nghìn đời xương máu Tổ Tiên, được đúc kết thành chân lý, lời kêu gọi hung hồn, bất hủ Hồ Chí Minh: 'Không có gì qúy hơn độc lập, tự do. . . . Hễ còn một tên xâm lược trên đất nước ta, ta còn phải tiếp tục chiến đấu, quyết sạch nó đi!'" (Thái 2001: 808).

[42] Original Vietnamese: "Một tín hiệu đáng mừng qua cuộc thi lần này được thể hiện qua âm nhạc. Về cơ bản âm nhạc được sử dụng trong các vở diễn vẫn giữ được “hồn cốt” của tuồng truyền thống, không bị 'phá tuồng" (Hoàng Chương 2013).

used to indicate that a scene is taking place in the central region, and the *đàn bầu* monochord is used repeatedly in scenes in which characters ponder their loyalty and love for their homeland. The genres of *hát xẩm* and *ca trù* (explained below) are used in more indirect, yet complex ways. Both genres originated in the North and are used to indicate the location of scenes in Hanoi, but the genres are also employed to further express political themes in the drama and engage in a familiar way with contemporary audiences whose members might not have a firm grasp of the conventions of movement and music found in *hát bội*.

Hát xẩm is a genre of folk music that originated in northern Vietnam. It is traditionally performed by blind musicians singing and accompanying themselves on *đàn bầu* and *đàn nhị*.[43] *Hát xẩm* performers typically would play in outdoor public areas, traveling from town to town to earn their living. The genre often borrows songs from other folk musics such as *quan họ*, *trống quân*, *hát chèo*, with themes from popular stories such as *Lục Vân Tiên*, and the *Tale of Kiều*. In *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, a *hát xẩm* musician is included twice in the play: once in the scene immediately following the introduction of the corrupt, hunchbacked imperial official Lê Quỳ, and immediately before the scene in which the village manager dies at the hands of French soldiers. The use of *hát xẩm* music functions as a way to set the location in the North as well as the time period, but the *hát xẩm* musician's character also takes on the role of a wise, social commentator or sage. He is blind, yet possesses insights that those with sight do not (see figure

[43] The *đàn nhị* is a Vietnamese two-stringed bowed lute, usually with snake skin covering the sound box. The *đàn nhị* is in the same instrument family as the Chinese *erhu* and the Korean *haegum* bowed lutes. Although the *đàn nhị* is found in traditional Vietnamese ensembles throughout the country, the similar two-stringed bowed lute *đàn gáo* (made with a coconut shell resonator) is a southern instrument. The *đàn bầu* is a monochord zither that is played using harmonics to produce six basic notes. The notes in between these six basic notes can be reached by bending a flexible buffalo horn that is attached to the single string in order to change the string tension and pitch. The *đàn bầu* is often associated with longing, nostalgia, and loneliness, and is commonly used to play vocal melodies since the subtle pitch bending of the instrument can mimic vocal inflections and the tonal Vietnamese language.

3.6). The lyrics of the songs, which are written in the *lục bát*[44] poetic meter, are directly relevant to the drama's plot:

Hát Xẩm Song I - English Translation
Our country has a long history
But imperial officials are scared to face people of the West
A bamboo parasol is arrested in the streets
Westerners believe their name has power

Imperial officials remain silent and still
Can anyone guess what tomorrow will bring?
Facing the West our pain has no end
To the people, officials are like a collapsed bridge in a storm

Hát Xẩm Song I - Original Vietnamese
Nước Nam có chuyện thả đời
Quan Triều sợ hải trước người Tây Phương
Lọng tre bố cáo trên đường
Người Tây lại kéo trên đường cậy tên

Quan Triều thì cứ lặng thinh
Đố ai đoán biết sự tinh mai sau
Trước Tây nguyên khổ không đầu
Trước dân quân lại như cầu rũ mưa

Hát Xẩm Song II - English Translation
Who chooses fire, and who chooses the sword?
Leaning this way and that, who will this road belong to?
Creator, look down at us and see
Our country covers the stream of history with a woven basket

Hát Xẩm Song II – Original Vietnamese
Ai bên hỏa chiếng canh cường
Đã nghiêng sao ký biết đường chi ai
Hoàng Thiên ngó xuống mà coi
Nước Nam lấy thúng úp vòi chuyện xưa

[44] The *lục bát* poetic meter is well-known throughout Vietnam and is embedded deeply in the collective Vietnamese pysche through *ca dao* (folk poetry or proverbs that reflect on subjects such as life, morality, nature, and beauty). The *lục bát* meter literally means "six eight," which refers to pairs of verses, the first line with six syllables and the second line with eight syllables. As the Vietnamese language is tonal, each line follows a tonal schema that emphasizes a lilting rhythm to the verses (in a way comparable to the rhythm created in a limerick). Arguably the most famous Vietnamese literary work, *Truyện Kiều* (Tale of Kiều), written by Nguyễn Du (1766-1820), utilizes the *lục bát* meter in its 3,254 verses (Huynh 1987).

Both *hát xẩm* songs reference the presence of the West in Vietnam, during the French colonial period. In the first song, the old man sings about the fear that imperial officials have of the West, despite Vietnam's long history. Bamboo parasols were carried by Vietnamese citizens of a high social class; thus, even those will bamboo parasols can be arrested in the streets (*bố cáo trên đường*) by French authorities, who believe in the power of their mere names (*cậy tên*). The *hát xẩm* player asks, who chooses fire (referencing the French military's use of firearms) and who chooses steel (referencing the swords used by Nguyễn Tri Phương), then foreshadows the French victory over Nguyễn Tri Phương by saying that Vietnam attempts to cover the stream or water spring (*vòi*) of history impossibly with a woven basket (*thúng*) (see examples 3.2 and 3.3 for transcriptions of the *hát xẩm* song vocal melodies).

There was discussion in the early 2010s in official statements and various Vietnamese national media outlets about how *hát xẩm* should be recognized by UNESCO on their representative list of intangible heritage of humanity, but to this date, this has not yet occurred (Nguyễn Thơm 2014). The death of the legendary *hát xẩm* performer Hà Thị Cầu, on March 3, 2013, shortly before the national competition, was a great loss to the *hát xẩm* community. Born in 1918, she was the oldest known *hát xẩm* singer and had received numerous national awards. In 1998 she was named a "Ninh Binh Chèo Artisan" at the national *chèo* festival;[45] in 2004 she was given the title "Vietnamese Folklorist" by the Association of Vietnamese Folklorists and named an "Outstanding Artist" by the Vietnamese government; and in 2012 was given the Đào Tấn award for her contributions to preserving the *hát xẩm* art form (Xuan 2013). She was even given a tribute in the popular Vietnamese TV series *Gương Mặt Thân Quen* (A Familiar Face), when

[45] *Chèo* is a genre of folk musical theatre that originated in the northern Vietnam. Music from the *chèo* repertoire is commonly used to accompany performances of *múa rối* (water puppetry). *Chèo* plays often have a satirical element to them, usually a critique of societal norms. In more recent times, *chèo* has become symbol of "authentic" northern culture, as seen in the internationally recognized film *Bao Giờ Cho Đến Tháng Mười* (When the Tenth Month Comes) directed by Đặng Nhật Minh (1984).

the winning contestant Hoài Lâm performed as Hà Thị Cầu in the penultimate episode of the second season in 2014 (Thiên Hương 2014).

Ca trù is a genre of music that features a three person ensemble: a *đàn đấy* long-necked lute, a small *trống chầu* drum, and a female vocalist who also plays the percussion instrument *phách*.[46] *Ca trù* was traditionally performed in *ca trù* inns that elite members of society such as scholars and bureaucrats would frequent in order to be entertained by the fusing of poetry and music in *ca trù.* After the end of French colonization in 1954, the new communist government prohibited *ca trù* performances and venues, closing down many of the *ca trù* inns due to their association as a place for prostitution, gambling, and opium use, and the genre began a steep decline. During the communist revolution and war, a genre such as *ca trù* could not be used as an ideological weapon in the way that other musical genres had been by communist cadres, due to its association with the scholarly elite, prostitution, and drug use. However, in more recent years, *ca trù* has become a symbol of national pride and cultural identity, in large part due to being recognized by UNESCO on their list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2009. Several other revival projects undertaken by state-run organizations such as the Vietnam Musicology Institute and international agencies like UNESCO and the Ford Foundation have also helped to increase the genre's prestige in the eyes of the public (Norton 2015). A *ca trù* ensemble is also featured in the music of Đại-Lâm-Linh, an avant-garde indie-folk band, who was the subject of British ethnomusicologist Barley Norton's documentary film *Hanoi Eclipse* (2010).

[46] The *đàn đáy* has three strings that are tuned in fourths and ten frets that allow for pitch bending when the string is pressed towards the neck. The small *trống chầu* is usually given to a respected member of the audience to play, marking the musical phrases, poetic verses, and also praising or admonishing the perfomers with specific drum sounds. The *phách* is a percussion instrument made of a rectangular wooden block and two sticks. The female vocalist, who also plays the *phách*, uses a vocal technique that quickly truncates the breath called *Đỗ hột* (falling pearls) that mimics the sound of pearls falling on a hard surface. *Cà trù* musical performance featured prominently in the film *Mê Thảo, Thời Vang Bóng* (The Glorious Time in Mê Thảo Hamlet), directed by Việt Linh (2002).

Two instances of *ca trù* songs are used in *Nguyễn Tri Phương*. The first occurs when princess Đồng Xuân is missing her home of Huế (in the central region) while in Hanoi (in the north), and the second is used to close the very last scene, following Nguyễn Tri Phương's dramatic death:

Ca Trù Song I – English Translation
Green, green, mountain
Love, love, for country
Who is it
That lies waiting
For the person
Now lost here
Now lost here

Ca Trù Song I – Original Vietnamese
Non, xanh xanh
Sơn tình tình
Thủa ấy ai
Nằm chờ
Mà người ngày ấy
bây giờ lạc đây
Bây giờ lạc đây

Ca Trù Song II – English Translation
Green mountain, blue water
Oh love of country, love of country
Peace we could not find

Infinite pain for the people of today
People of today, now are lost here

Ca Trù Song II – Original Vietnamese
Non xanh, Nước xanh
Sơn tình, sơn tình
Chưa tìm được

Ngậm trường cho người ngày nay
Người nay, bây giờ lạc đây.

In both instances, *cà trù* is used to set the location of the scene in Hanoi, as well as the historical time period. Although much of the lyrics use abstract imagery to convey love for one's nation (the colors green and blue when referring to mountains and water, respectively, are often

metaphors used to describe the beauty of Vietnam) that refer to the colonial period in which princess Đồng Xuân and Nguyễn Tri Phương lived, the lyrics also reference the current "here and now," as well as the "people of today" in a way that connects the themes of the historical play with the contemporary Vietnamese audience and society.

This sentiment of Nguyễn Tri Phương's history and narrative being a lesson that Vietnamese citizens of today and the future should learn from and look towards as a model of exemplary behavior is seen throughout the Vietnamese-language biographical literature on the life of Nguyễn Tri Phương. Biographer Đào Đăng Vỹ writes: "Thus, Nguyễn Tri Phương is dead, but not dead. Because his name is written in history books and has been engraved in the hearts of an entire nation of people! The story of Nguyễn Tri Phương is a history lesson for contemporary and future generations and is an eternal shining example for the children of our land, Vietnam" (1974: 230).[47] Thái Hông, another major biographer of Nguyễn Tri Phương echoes a similar sentiment in his account of the military general's life:

> Nguyễn Tri Phương's confidence was ultimately realized. His death and his call to action has been accepted by many subsequent generations. The fulfillment of Loyalty and Honor [Nghĩa], is the road to the Ultimate Loyalty and Honor [Đại Nghĩa], which is: our Fatherland's independence and the freedom of our nation's people. (Thái 2001: 808)[48]

The use of a *ca trù* excerpt, a genre recognized by UNESCO and currently more widely-known than *hát bội*, further emphasizes the troupe's attempt to maintain the relevance of Nguyễn Tri Phương's history to contemporary Vietnam.

[47] Original Vietnamese reads: "Cho nên Nguyễn Tri Phương 'tử mà bất tử.' Vì tên Nguyễn Tri Phương đã ghi vào sử sách, đã ghi vào tâm hồn của cả một dân tộc! Tiểu-sử Nguyễn Tri Phương là một bài học lịch sử cho cả hiện tại và tương lai, là một gương sáng muôn đời cho con em đất Việt."

[48] Original Vietnamese reads: "Vậy, tâm sự Nguyễn Tri Phương đã giải tỏa. Cái chết, lời kêu gọi của ông đã được nhiều thế hệ cháu đáp lại. Vì chữ Nghĩa, con đường của ông là Đại Nghĩa, là con đường độc lập của Tổ Quốc, tự do của Nhân dân" (Thái 2001: 808).

Evaluations of *Nguyễn Tri Phương*: Preservation and Innovation

In the national competition, *Nguyễn Tri Phương* was awarded a silver medal in the ensemble category. No *hát bội* performances in the entire competition were awarded the gold medal, and thus *Nguyễn Tri Phương* was awarded the highest medal of all *hát bội* troupes. This decision by the judges' panel was meant as a signal to the state-sponsored *hát bội* troupes that the quality of performances had declined, since in all previous national competitions, at least one performance had been awarded the highest medal of gold in the ensemble category (interview with Hoàng Chương, June 15, 2013). How is it determined whether contemporary *hát bội* peformances have been successful and effective? What characteristics do the judging panel and audience look for to evaluate the quality of performances?

According to Hoàng Chương, director of the Center for Research, Preservation, and Development of National Culture, who was a member of the judges' panel at the national competition, at the core of what makes *hát bội* different from other forms of theater is what he terms its character as an art form with "conventions and symbolism" (*cách địa và ước lệ*) (interview with Hoàng Chương, June 15, 2013). Đặng Bá Tài, director of *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, echoes a similar sentiment when he says that the body of the actor is at the center of *hát bội* performance, and that "each performer is a universe" (interview with Đặng Bạ Tài, June 12, 2013). Thus, there is typically very little staging in traditional *hát bội*; the actor is expected to create objects, time, space, and narrative through their symbolic movements and singing. In traditional *hát bội*, the use of props is very minimal, but when they are utilized, props express meanings to the audience symbolically through what is done with the object by the actor rather than through the physical form of the object itself. As Hoàng Chương puts it, "if the stage is already full, then there is nothing for the *hát bội* actors to create . . . it took centuries for these

conventions of symbolic movement and sounds to be developed . . . they should not be adapted without reason" (interview with Hoàng Chương, June 15, 2013).

One of the main criticisms that the judges' panel had concerning the performances in the competition was the loss of this essential symbolic character of *hát bội*; several plays included staging, props, and/or choreography that were deemed too literal and thus no different from spoken theater performances. For example, in *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, nine giant incense urns painted gold on one side and with a brick pattern on the other side were used throughout the play to show changes in scenery. These were deemed inappropriate by the judges, especially on one occasion where Emperor Tự Đức leans on one of the urns while using un-stylized everyday movements to write a letter on typical paper rather than symbolic fabric that is traditionally used in *hát bội* performances to indicate a letter. A similar criticism was made of the play *Phò Mã Thân Cảnh Phúc*, also performed by the National Tuồng Theater troupe, when Princess Thiên Thành is taken hostage. Traditionally, a cloth covering her hands loosely would indicate that she has been taken prisoner, while still allowing for freedom of movement for an expressive performance. In the contemporary performance, the princess was literally tied to the tree with a rope, restricting her movements. The judges also took offense at the tree itself to which she was tied, as it was complete with branches and leaves that flew across the stage as Princess Thiên Thành was saved by her husband wielding a sword.

Although *Nguyễn Tri Phương* was criticized by the judges for not being traditional enough, the play's director, Đặng Bá Tài, voiced his intentions to take the art form further in terms of experimentations in performance and use of themes directly relevant to contemporary Vietnamese society. Although many criticisms of performances in the competition were based on the perceived loss of the art form's essence (*tính tuồng*), much of the official discourse surrounding contemporary *hát bội* performances emphasizes the protection (*gìn giữ*),

preservation (*bảo tồn*), and simultaneous development (*phát triển*) of the art form, and a need to meet the needs and demands of contemporary society (*đáp ứng nhu cầu xã hội*). Conversations with administrators at the National Tuồng Theater about how these contradictory goals might be achieved rarely included practical advice that *hát bội* performers, playwrights, and directors could apply to the creative process. Metaphors comparing the experience of new *hát bội* audiences to a new culinary experience were common; for example, the director of the National Tuồng Theatre, Phạm Ngọc Tuấn, described how artists must "dilute" performances for audiences who have never been exposed to *hát bội*, just like one must dilute strong coffee or spices for new diners, while the vice-director of the National Tuồng Theatre, Nguyễn Gia Khỏan, described how we must be patient with audiences who are not yet interested in *hát bội*, since people who eat chicken and *giò* (a common sausage) everyday will eventually become curious about other more interesting foods (interviews with Phạm Ngọc Tuấn and Nguyễn Gia Khoản, June 13, 2015).[49]

According to Đặng, *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, although a historical narrative, is "completely modern" in its integration of the outside music genres of *ca trù*, *hát xẩm*, and *hò Huế* in its attempt to connect with contemporary audiences, as well as in the choices in staging and group choreographies. The play's director acknowledged that for many audience members who know and love the conventions of traditional *hát bội*, *Nguyễn Tri Phương* was "too new." However, Đặng expressed a desire to push the art form even further, using contemporary stories and characters rather than historical ones. In an interview after the competition, Đặng described an idea he had for a contemporary *hát bội* play exploring modern day ethics and morality in

[49] Bác Hồ himself used a food metaphor to talk about the future of *hát bội* when speaking with the famous artist Nguyễn Nho Túy: "Tuồng is good! It is a treasure of the people, but it needs to be improved, we should not stop its progress here. However, do not sow sesame seeds that will grow into corn" (my translation, Tôn 1993: 219).

Vietnamese society by telling the story of a Vietnamese girl who comes from a poor family and is forced to become a prostitute in order to pay for educational fees. This story is certainly in the realm of practical possibility, as there have been other works such as *Người Cáo* (2005) and *Sanh Vi Tướng Tử Vi Thần* (2007) that have similar themes that explore contemporary ethics. Other members of the National Tuồng Theatre have been a part of much more experimental works, one of the notable examples being a collaboration with Vietnamese avant-garde pianist Phó An My titled "Dialogue with Tuồng" (*Đối Thoại Với Tuồng*).[50]

Limitations of of *Nguyễn Tri Phương* and State-Sponsored Arts: Traitors and Heroes

The oppositional tropes of traitors/heroes and corruption/virtue that are found in the structured scenarios of *Nguyễn Tri Phương* often entangle themselves in official historical narratives and state discourses, leaving out the complex realities of social actors who live in complicated social conditions with historical legacies. Themes of national unity and resistance against foreign rule have dominated the tellings of Vietnamese history, with the heroic glorification of those who resisted and the demonization of those who did not (Cindy Nguyễn 2011: 56). There is no room in the scenarios of *Nguyễn Tri Phương* for the possibility of characters who might contradict themselves by acting in the space between "traitor" and "patriot." As Lan Duong writes, "treacherous subjects" have been caught between opposing forces of nationalism, communism, occupying powers, and domestic states with competing claims to the name of Vietnam. These after-effects of colonialism and foreign occupation have led to anxieties surrounding betrayal and its inverse, loyalty, creating what Timothy Brook calls

[50] *Đối Thoại Với Tuồng* (Dialogue with Tuồng) was composed by Nguyễn Tuệ for Phó An My on piano, Nguyễn Ngọc Khánh on *kèn* (double reed oboe), Anh Quý on *trống chiến* (large drum), and vocals by *Lê Sơn Quý*. Much of the piece is an atonal exploration of the timbre and rhythms used in *hát bội* music that includes a long section of stylized laughing found in *hát bội* plays. The premiere performance was broadcast on the national television station VTV1 in 2014.

"collaboration's haunting of the postwar world" (Duong 2012: 2-3). In the context of a highly politicized, state-sponsored national competition, the tension between characters on stage who adhere rigidly to simplified binary traits and the reality of social actors' behaviors rife with inconsistencies in complicated historical circumstances is particularly apparent.

There have been various instances of official narratives shaping representations of historical figures into the binary categories of "hero" or "traitor" in a formulaic way, leaving out critical complexities and contradictions. One example is the case of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, a colonial clerk, translator, editor, and author with accommodationist views towards the French that often earned him the title of "collaborator" in historical accounts. In her article "Beyond Betrayal: Collaborators in Early 20th Century French Colonial Vietnam," Cindy Nguyễn reveals the problematic nature of the simplistic and binary labels of traitor and hero, collaborator and patriot, by recontextualizing Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's writings. Due to increasingly harsh French retaliation against anti-colonial dissent, even the most "patriotic" and "revolutionary" Vietnamese writers were eventually forced to become public advocates for some form of "collaboration." In contrast to the well-known patriots and revolutionaries Phan Bội Châu and Phan Châu Trinh, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh focused on cultural and social "modernity" as the primary method of gaining Vietnamese independence. He embraced the power of print media and the romanized *quốc ngữ* Vietnamese written language as vehicles for social and political critique and communication. Thus, he was not simply a colonial clerk and interpreter with collaborationist tendencies, as he is often portrayed; he was an independent journalist and editor who provided an open channel of communication through which Vietnamese could examine French and Western ideologies and through which the French could better understand Vietnamese culture (Cindy Nguyễn 2011: 57). How might a character such as Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's be portrayed on the stage of a state-sponsored national theater competition? We can only speculate—but it seems unlikely that

Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh would even be chosen as character due to the nuanced nature of his writings and his straddling of the line between patriot and collaborator.

The case of composer Trịnh Công Sơn (1939-2001) is another potent example of the ways in which remembering and forgetting the stories of "heroes" and "traitors" have shaped Vietnamese perceptions of history. One of the most prolific and beloved songwriters in Vietnam, Trịnh Công Sơn was initially known as an anti-war songwriter and singer, and was dubbed the Bob Dylan of Vietnam by American folk singer Joan Baez. After 1975, many of his family members fled to the United States as refugees, but Trịnh insisted on staying in South Vietnam. Because of the political nature of his music, he endured four years of forced labor in the reeducation camps. His songs were banned by the communist government until 1995, and even today only pieces with themes of love and sentimentality towards destiny are officially allowed to be performed. In urban areas such as Hồ Chí Minh City, copies of Trịnh's music are widely available in music shops, and he remains one of the most popular and well-known composers, despite the long ban on his music (Olsen 2008: 134). Tribute concerts, cafés, restaurants, music scholarships, and, since August 2015, even a beautiful tree-lined street in Hanoi that runs around the West Lake now bear the composer's name.

In more recent coverage of the composer, official media outlets have conveniently forgotten the prosecution that Trịnh faced at the hands of the government. *Việt Nam News* in 2001 wrote that Trịnh "was one of those composers who mingled naturally with the new life in the country after the liberation of southern Việt Nam in 1975" and made no reference to his forced imprisonment (Olsen 2001: 134). This seems to be an example of what Laurel B. Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams deem the government's attempts to frame "the past without the pain" (2001). Writing about the industry that has developed around foreign tourists in Vietnam, Kennedy and Williams describe the representation of history in government-approved

tour packages that provide patrons "with an experience of the country very distant from the experience of people in Vietnam—its history, its culture, its people—designed for Westerners, though their own eyes" (157). Schwenkel, too, recounts the diliemma facing tourism officials overseeing Vietnam War sites as being "how to make the war a palatable, multisensory experience without making it too real, perilous, or offensive" (2009: 86). With the ban on Trịnh Công Sơn songs after 1975, the government first attempted to force a "forgetting" of the musical legacy of a "traitor" who wrote anti-war songs, but subsequently relented, to the extent of permitting an organized "remembering" that allows only Trịnh's love songs to be performed.

In the context of a state-sponsored national competition, we see in *Nguyễn Tri Phương* the limitations placed on art created in highly politicized conditions. In an interview with Đặng Bá Tài, the director of *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, Đặng speaks to the difficulties and tensions that artists face when working in a state-sponsored enviroment. Artists are constantly aware of where their work falls between discourses of preservation and maintainance of "essential" *hát bội* characteristics on the one hand, and a need for "innovation" in order to appeal to contemporary audiences and accomodate state-sanctioned themes on the other. Đặng addresses these tensions:

> We must keep the essence of *tuồng*. That cannot change. . . . If you want to develop the art form you need to build on it with the values of our national and ethnic culture [*văn hóa dân tộc*]. If you want to make a play that will resonate with audiences, you can't simply transform a *tuồng* play into a spoken word play. It needs to use the words of *tuồng*, but confront contemporary issues. (Interview with Đặng Bá Tài, June 12, 2013)

Continuing, Đặng also speaks to the pressures that *hát bội* directors and writers face when creating new plays in the context of contemporary socialist Vietnam:

> In the West, I'm not sure how one would go about the "socialization" (*xã hội hoá*) of the arts, but in Vietnam, this has been done. Here, one needs to delve deeply into contemporary society to accomplish that. But there are difficulties. Each nation has a different system of politics. Perhaps the openness of democracy has a different viewpoint and method of doing things. There might be a wider diversity in artistic works. Here, it's not that we can't do that. But there are more limitations. Limitations in both the conceptualization and practical aspects of creating art. (Interview with Đặng Bá Tài, June 12, 2013)

Xã hội hoá is a relatively recent term that translates literally to the combination of "society" (*xã hội*) and "to make into" or the suffixes "-ize" and "-ation" (*hóa*). It belongs to a family of politically loaded terms that also end with *hóa*, such as *dân tộc hóa* (nationalization or Vietnamization), *đại chúng hóa* (popularization), *khoa học hóa* (to make scientific), and *công nghiệp hóa* (industrialization). The term *xã hội hoá* in the context of the arts refers to bringing topics, themes, styles, and other references that are relevant to contemporary society into the creation of new works. Some of the attempts to accomplish this in *Nguyễn Tri Phương* were critized by the judges, such as the use of Western-influenced staging practices, while the inclusion of *ca trù* and *hát xẩm* along with other outside musical genres was generally perceived as appropriate innovation. The drama of the play falls squarely into the formulaic and oppositional tropes of "hero" and "traitor" that are so prevalent in depictions of Vietnamese history, earning the performance the highest award of all *hát bội* troupes in the competition, but falling short of what the judges' panel would consider an outstanding success.

Figure 3.1. Villagers perform choreographed movements in unison as they mourn the death of the village manager. See Nguyễn Tri Phương and his son Nguyễn Lâm in the center background and Lê Qùy with a prosthetic huchback on the left in blue, speaking to his soldier in yellow and red. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 19, 2013)

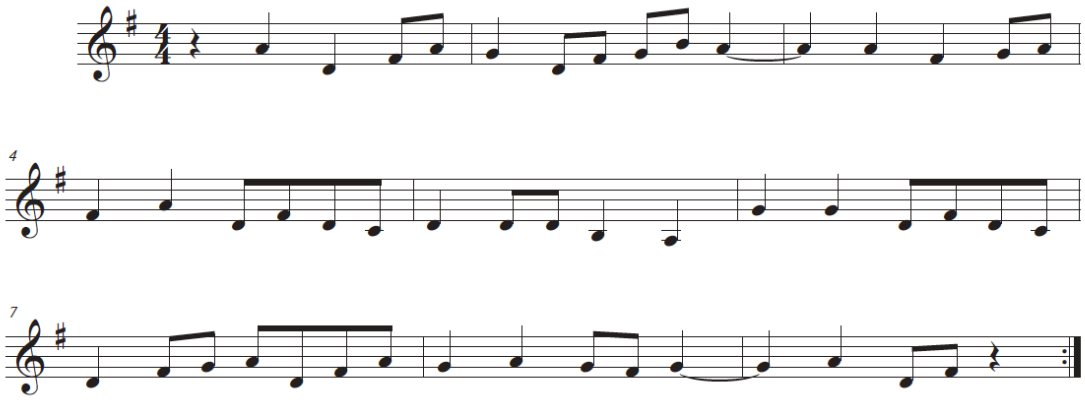
Figure 3.2. Princess Đồng Xuân is surprised by gifts (center pedestal) from Phó Đề Đốc (center in dark blue) and his wife (far right, holding fan). See also the Princess's handmaiden on the left. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 19, 2013)

Figure 3.3. Princess Đồng Xuân is distressed as Phó Đề Độc's soldiers take her handmaiden prisoner. Notice the soldier's rifles, signalling their collaboration with the French. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 19, 2013)

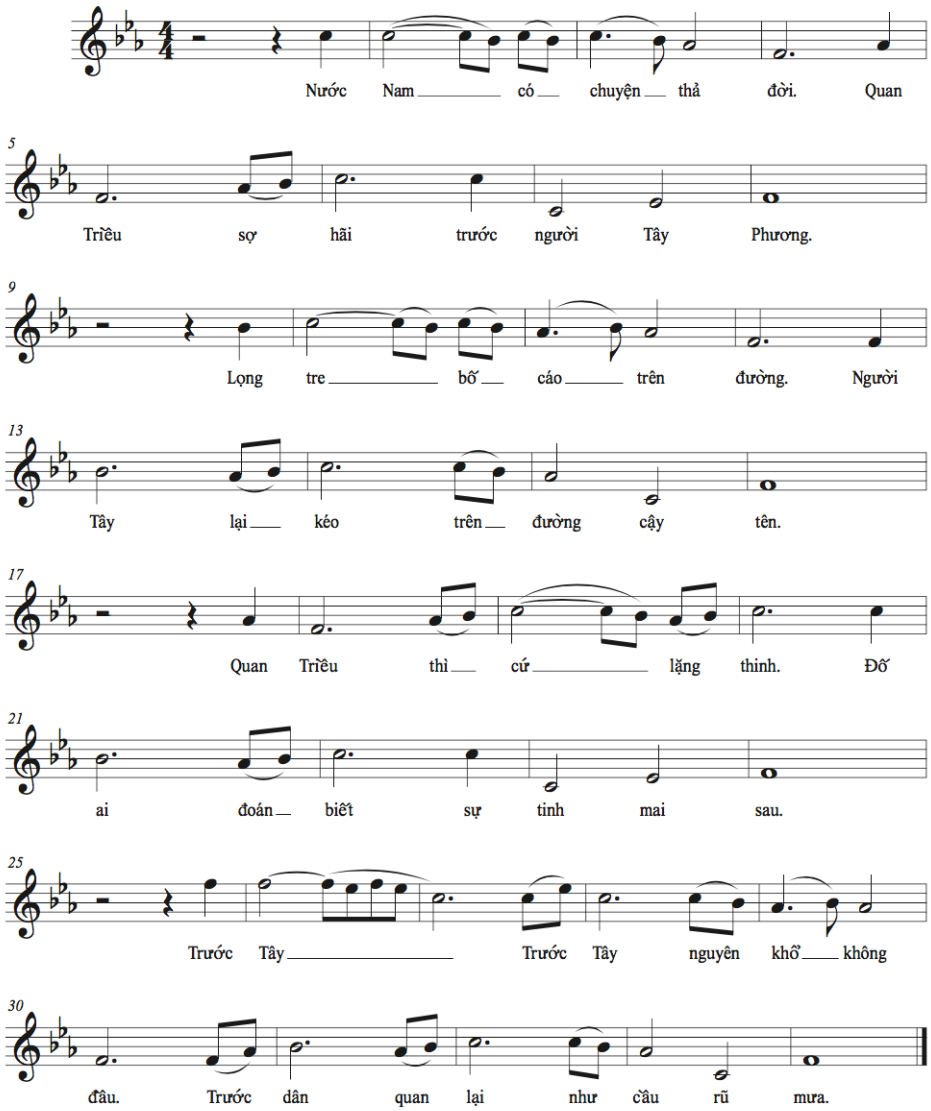
Figure 3.4. Nguyệt Thi urges her husband to resign from his position. Nguyễn Tri Phương is wearing the red silk cloak the emperor has given him as a sign of their respect and trust for each other. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 19, 2013)

Figure 3.5. Final moments of Nguyễn Tri Phương's life. See on right and left the bloody bandages he has torn off and thrown to the ground. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 19, 2013)

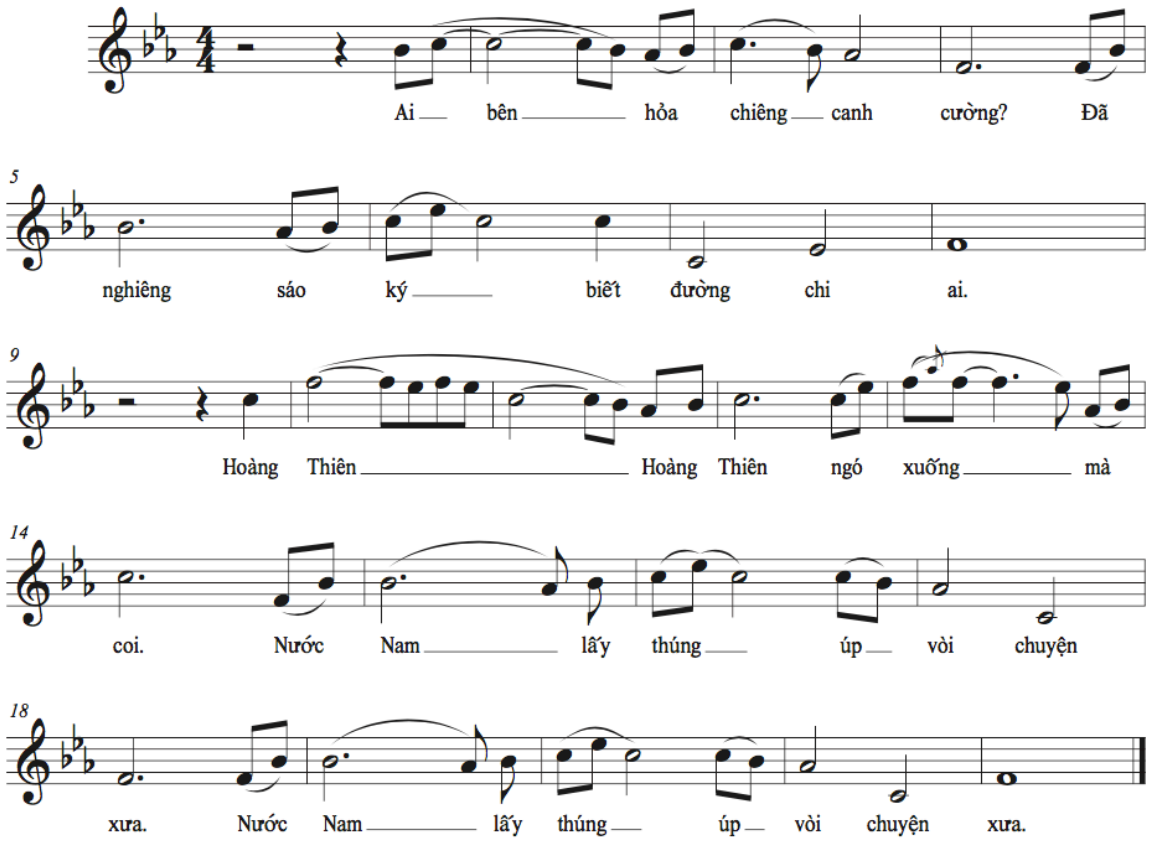
Figure 3.6. The *hát xẩm* musician accompanies himself on the *đàn nhị* bowed lute. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 19, 2013)



Example 3.1. Melodic outline of *nam ai* mode. The melody can end at the G that is tied from the end of measure 8 to the beginning of measure 9, or can be repeated depending on the text. (Transcription by Trần Hồng)



Example 3.2. Transcription of Hát Xâm Song I by Kim Nguyen Tran.



Example 3.3. Transcription of Hát Xầm Song II by Kim Nguyen Tran.

ACT II: *ĐÊM SÁNG PHƯƠNG NAM* (SHINING NIGHT OF PHƯƠNG NAM) PERFORMED BY THE ĐÀO TẤN TUỒNG THEATRE

Women and Allegories of the Tây Sơn Uprising

Why would the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre choose to perform a play centered around the Tây Sơn era heroine Bùi Thị Xuân? Written by Văn Trọng Hùng and Đoàn Thanh Tâm, the play *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* is an account of the battle at Rạch Gầm-Xoài Mút, in which Bùi Thị Xuân for the first time commands her own troops for the Tây Sơn, and the events that precede the battle. The Tây Sơn period (1771-1802) is one of the most significant eras of Vietnamese history; the era has undergone substantial historiographical interpretation that has often been contentiously debated. In his seminal English-language study of early 19th-century Vietnam, Alexander Woodside argued that "modern Vietnamese history opens with the Tây Sơn Rebellion" (1971: 4). The era has been culled by Vietnamese historiographers in the past and present to address questions of political legitimacy, social conflicts, confrontations with "outsiders," and national division and unification (Dutton 2006).

Vietnamese communist historians have often interpreted the ultimately failed Tây Sơn movement as an expression of the rising of a collective peasant will that was a prelude to modern socialist Vietnam. Historian Patricia Pelley has written about how, for the so called "new" historians from Hanoi, the Tây Sơn era was a crucial period in the development of revolutionary history, with "the August Revolution of 1945 mark[ing] the completion of the Tây Sơn period that had begun some 150 years before" (2002: 38). Historian George Dutton has challenged this narrative, arguing that the Tây Sơn uprising was not caused by political discontent and the rising of a collective peasant will that was a precursor to modern Vietnamese socialism, but rather by the realities of everyday economic hardship (2006).

During the final stages of the second Lê Dynasty (1428-1778), Vietnam was under nominal official rule by the politically powerless Lê rulers. In reality, two warring feudal families held control of the country: the Trịnh lords in the north, who centralized their power in Hanoi, and the Nguyễn lords in the south, who ruled from their capital in Huế (Trần Trọng Kim 2005). The Tây Sơn brothers (all of whom were born in Bình Định province where the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre is located), Nguyễn Huệ (also known as emperor Quang Trung), Nguyễn Nhạc, and Nguyễn Lu, led a series of uprisings against the feudal Trịnh and Nguyễn lords beginning in 1771.[51] In 1773, they captured the city of Qui Nhơn (home of the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre), which would become the Tây Sơn capital. In 1776, the remaining members of the Nguyễn lord family were killed except for Nguyễn Ánh, who fled to Siam (or Xiêm in Vietnamese). In Siam, Nguyễn Ánh allied himself with the Siam Emperor Rama I, who provided Nguyễn Ánh with troops and supplies to fight the Tây Sơn with the aim of eventually annexing southern Vietnam as Siamese territory. The play *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* is set during this time, as Nguyễn Ánh, in Siam, plots an attack on southern Vietnam to reclaim the land that the Tây Sơn brothers had controlled.

Đêm Sáng Phương Nam is based on historical events rooted in Bình Định province and the Tây Sơn uprising, but also includes several fictionalized characters and scenes. Female characters have a particularly prominent role in the *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, in comparison to other plays in the competition. In addition to Bùi Thị Xuân and her right-hand female military commander Bảo Trân, other female characters include Ngọc Mai (the daughter of a mandarin loyal to Nguyễn Ánh, but the lover of a Tây Sơn soldier), Chị Năm (the mother of a child whom

[51] Of the Tây Sơn brothers, Nguyễn Nhạc was the oldest, Nguyễn Lu the middle brother, and Nguyễn Huệ the youngest. Nguyễn Nhạc assumed the Tây Sơn throne 1778, and his younger brother Nguyễn Huệ was crowned emperor Quang Trung in 1788, until Nguyễn Ánh recaptured control of Thăng Long (the northern capital) in 1802 (Trần Trọng Kim 2005: 359).

Bùi Thị Xuân has saved from being killed by Siam troops), Bà Sen (an old female villager who urges others to fear the Siam troops), a woman from an unnamed ethnic minority tribe who offers her support to the Tây Sơn troops, and an entire village of peasant women who rise up to fight against Nguyễn Ánh and the Siam troops at the urging of Bùi Thị Xuân. Why would the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre troupe choose to represent themselves at the national competition with a play that includes such numerous female characters from the Tây Sơn era, many of whom are fictionalized?

As Hue-Tam Ho Tai writes, the figure of woman has been inscribed with multiple and varied meanings in the Vietnamese cultural landscape. Images of "heroic mothers," whose faces are lined with age and grief, fill museums that honor those who lost their lives for the revolution (see figure 4.1). On giant billboards, smiling young Vietnamese women wearing flowing *aó dài* beckon tourists and foreign investors with images of a "peaceful country where local traditions and the global economy combine harmoniously" (2001: 167). Portrayed as mothers, daughters, wives; peasant women and city girls; idle rich and toiling poor; resourceful and powerless; heroic and weak; self-sacrificing and selfish; traditional and cosmopolitan—Vietnamese women embody the dilemmas and contradictions that are involved in making sense of war and postwar, revolution and counterrevolution in Vietnam (Ho Tai 2001: 168, 192).

Representations of women have also played a central role in the construction of mythology and symbolism in the imaginings of historical continuity in Vietnam's past and present. Historian Wynn Wilcox has written extensively about allegories in Vietnamese historiographies that have been refined to tell stories about the present by utilizing the past. In particular, Wilcox writes about three debated myths in Vietnamese history that have emerged out of historiographies of the Tây Sơn period, through the lives of two women: Lê Ngọc Hân (1770-1799), a princess during Lê rule, and Hồ Xuân Hương (c. 1770-1822), a poet known for her

irreverent social and political commentary who is regarded by many as one of Vietnam's greatest classical poets.[52]

The first myth, perpetuated by historians in North Vietnam, was that Ngọc Hân and the Tây Sơn emperor Quang Trung were madly in love with one another. This supposed love has been one of the central devices in the efforts of Marxists historians in 1950s Vietnam to legitimate the rule of Quang Trung and the Tây Sơn regime in general. One such example is an article written by Văn Tân, one of the preeminent literary critics and historians of the Tây Sơn period, in 1956 in the journal *Tập San Nghiên Cứu Văn Sử Địa* (Journal of Literary, Historical, and Geographical Research). Analyzing a poem written by Lê Ngọc Hân called *Tiên Thánh Thăng Hà Hoàng Hậu Ai Vãn* (The Funerary Love Oration of the Empress on the Occasion of the Emperor's Death), Văn Tân "constructed a myth of Lê Ngọc Hân that bolstered the legitimacy of North Vietnam's claims to represent the will of the Vietnamese people by linking feelings of the people, metonymically represented by Lê Ngọc Hân's grief, to Quang Trung, and ultimately, Hồ Chí Minh" (Wilcox 2005: 419). In reality, the myth of a singular love story between Lê Ngọc Hân and Quang Trung is difficult to sustain. Quang Trung was married to at least three wives, and Lê Ngọc Hân's eulogy for her husband follows a set pattern for its genre that may have been overestimated as evidence for her affections towards Quang Trung (Wilcox 2005).

The second myth, which was widely circulated by magazines in South Vietnam, directly contradicted the first: that Lê Ngọc Hân secretly hated her husband to the point of poisoning him to death. In 1961, Nguyễn Ngọc Khánh wrote a series of issues in the widely respected and

[52] Wilcox (2011) has also written about other allegories in Vietnamese historiographies such as the case of emperor Minh Mạng (1791-1841), French bishop Pigneaux de Béhaine (1741-1799), diplomat Bùi Viện (1839-1878), and historical allegories of national unification in relation to the American War. Also, see Christoph Giebel's *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory* (2004) for contested historical narratives, shaped by the Communist Party, surrounding Tôn Đức Thắng (1888-1980), the first president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

influential magazine *Phổ Thông* (Universalism) claiming to have evidence showing that Lê Ngọc Hân was responsible for poisoning Quang Trung. This myth, in tandem with another far-fetched claim that Nguyễn Ánh (later emperor Gia Long) was so struck by Ngọc Hân that he married her in 1802 after retaking Phú Xuân (now Huế), has been used to assert that Lê Ngóc Hân's true loyalty was with the Lê, not the Tây Sơn. In this way, Lê Ngọc Hân's body has been used to assert symbolic continuity between the Lê and Nguyễn dynasties, lending legitimacy to the Nguyễn regime and specifically to Nguyễn Ánh, who has been posited as a symbol of southern Vietnam. While Marxist historiography in Hanoi claims legitimacy of the Tây Sơn movement through historical discontinuity with the Lê and Nguyễn regimes, in the South, the myth of Ngọc Hân's murder of Quang Trung and marriage to Gia Long prevents her from acting as a national lover in the northern historiographical tradition, lending legitimacy to the Saigon government of the 1960s through a historical continuity with the Nguyễn dynasty (Wilcox 2005).

The third myth, perpetuated in large part by historians from northern Vietnam, was that Hồ Xuân Hương wrote her famously irreverent and openly sexual poems during the Tây Sơn period rather than the Nguyễn dynasty. Being born in 1770 and having died in 1822, Hồ Xuân Hương and her writings could be placed in either the late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century. However, many of the "new" Hanoi historians of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Văn Tân and Nguyễn Lọc, chose to place her in the late eighteenth century Tây Sơn era, enacting a powerful narrative of a repressed Vietnamese continuity under the feudal and Confucian regime during the Lê dynasty. Thus, she is framed as being representative of the Tây Sơn period's progressive protosocialism, and the anti-Chinese, anti-feudal will of the Vietnamese people of this time. In reality, Hồ Xuân Hương's poetry and its social criticism are not limited to the Nguyễn regime—she is critical of all oppressive institutions in northern Vietnam, making no mention of particular support towards Tây Sơn governing policies. Despite his obvious

admiration for Hồ Xuân Hương's poetry, particularly its anti-feudal elements, Văn Tân's analysis of Hồ Xuân Hương's poems centers upon establishing a connection between her writing and the society in which she lived, ultimately taking away her active agency as a cutting-edge writer and framing her as a product of her time (Wilcox 2005).

These three examples are cases in which historical women of the Tây Sơn period have been the subject of contested historiographcial efforts to "invest stories about the past with meanings as paradigms for the future" (Wilcox 2005: 413). However, in the case of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, female characters of the Tây Sơn era have been completely fictionalized, yet interact with historical figures such as Bùi Thị Xuân and Nguyễn Huệ. While interacting with historical figures, these fictionalized female characters reactivate "scenarios" (Diana Taylor 2005) involving Vietnamese women that have been previously employed within the Vietnamese symbolic landscape; these scenarios make reference to documented historical events, but also construct allegorical meanings that often speak more to the present than to the past. In this chapter we will examine the scenarios of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* that take place in the Tây Sơn period, but have deployed various images, representations, and roles of Vietnamese women, at times from more modern eras, to evoke their allegorical power.

Mobilizing the Village and Civilian Population

One such fictional character is chị Năm, whose name translates to "fifth older sister" (it is common to use one's sibling ranking as a nickname in Vietnamese families, especially in southern regions). Chị Năm appears in the middle of a scene in which Tổng Ngưu, a *kép nịnh* (fawning role) character who is loyal to the Nguyễn dynasty, visits an unnamed village to convince the people there to support Nguyễn Ánh and the Xiêm troops. Tổng Ngưu, dressed in a silk brocade *aó dài*, tells the villagers that they should assassinate Bùi Thị Xuân, who is on her

way to their village. The scene opens with an old man acting as the village leader, while all other seven villagers on stage are female, dressed in everyday, plain, *aó dài* made from simple cotton fabric (in contrast to the more formal silk brocade worn by Tổng Ngưu) in muted colors such as dark brown, beige, navy blue, and faded yellow (see figure 4.2).[53]

Tổng Ngưu continues, asking the villagers to whom they owe their land, rice, clothing, and connections with their ancestors and the past (*nối dõi* and *nối dòng*). An unnamed female villager replies that this debt to the Nguyễn emperor is as clear as day, since each generation has a debt to the previous generation that needs to be imbedded deeply in their memory (*đời nối đời, con cháu phải tạc ghi*). An older woman, named Bà Sen (Mrs. Lotus), interjects, saying that she has doubted her own loyalty to the Nguyễn lords ever since the Nguyễn rulers welcomed Xiêm troops into the country. She has heard stories of the Xiêm troops murdering and robbing civilians, burning homes, and raping women, with no mercy towards the old or young (*giết người, cướp của, đốt nhà, hãm hiếp đàn bà, chẳng tha già trẻ*). Tổng Ngưu laughs at Bà Sen, telling her not to believe such silly rumors. These words come from the mouth and tongues of the Tây Sơn rebels (*đây chỉ là miệng lưỡi giặc Tây Sơn*), who are attempting to instill fear and chaos in the people. Tổng Ngưu then tells them of a foolish and ignorant (*dại khờ*) village near them that abandoned their homes to follow the Tây Sơn rebels, after listening to the coaxing words (*lời phỉnh dỗ*) of Bùi Thị Xuân. Tông Ngữu urges the villagers to aid Nguyễn Ánh by rising up against the Tây Sơn and killing Bùi Thị Xuân, tempting them with rewards of gold and silver if they do so. The old village leader tells everyone to have their swords and weapons ready, as he goes to the edge of the village on the lookout.

[53] *Aó bà ba* tunic with loose flowing pants is a common casual outfit associated with peasants in the countryside, but also became a symbol of the resistance guerilla forces, especially when paired with a black-and-white checkered scarf.

At that moment, Bùi Thị Xuân appears on stage with her right-hand female military commander, Bảo Trân, who is holding a baby. Bùi Thị Xuân tells the people she has a message from Long Nhương (Nguyễn Huệ), the leader of the Tây Sơn. The old man tells Bùi Thị Xuân that this village is not like the others, and the women villagers tell her not to waste her conniving words (*lời dụ dỗ uổng công*) on them, calling her a hostile enemy (*thù địch*). Bùi Thị Xuân pleads with the villagers to withhold their suspicions and doubts for a moment, so that she can express what is in her heart and soul (*bày tỏ tấc lòng*). She continues, saying that ever since Nguyễn Ánh has allowed the Xiêm invaders (*giặc Xiêm*) into their homeland, it has caused nothing but landscapes of pain, death, and grief (*gây nên cảnh đau thương tang tốc*). For this reason, the Tây Sơn troops have arrived here to destroy the Xiêm army, in order to rescue the country from the wrath of these foreign invaders (*ngoại xâm*). Bùi Thị Xuân urges each and every villager, using the familial terms *bà con* (literally grandmothers and children), to return (*về*) with the Tây Sơn so that together they can join forces and stand up against the invaders.[54]

Her speech is not enough to change the hearts of the villagers. The old man tells the villagers not to believe Bùi Thị Xuân, saying that she has brought a dead body (herself) here, without any hope of escape (*người mang xác đến đây không còn mong lối thoát*). The villagers in unison shout, "Kill Bùi Thị Xuân!" and raise their arms and weapons, ready to slay the female general. Suddenly, in the distance backstage, we hear a female voice yell, "Stop!" (*khoan*). A woman clothed all in white, the color of grief and mourning in Vietnamese culture, slowly emerges from backstage. She asks where her baby is, takes the baby that Bảo Trân has been holding, then falls to her knees at the center of the stage (see figure 4.3). If the villagers will kill

[54] The term *về* in Vietnamese has a connection with returning to a place, especially to one's home (*nhà*), hometown (*quê*), or homeland (*quê hương*). Using the term *về*, Bùi Thị Xuân implies that, by supporting the Xiêm troops and Nguyễn Ánh, the villagers have strayed away from their home and should return to their rightful home by following the Tây Sơn.

Bùi Thị Xuân, then they must kill this mother and child first, says the woman. Calling the woman chị Năm (fifth sister), the shocked villagers ask why she would protect a hostile enemy, saying she must be insane. Chị Năm replies that she has indeed been insane and stupid, confusing her enemies and friends; she has been calling a person who is worthy of respect and love (*đáng kính đáng yêu*) an enemy invader (*kẻ thù, giặc*).

We find out that it is none other than Bùi Thị Xuân who has rescued chị Năm's child, the baby whom Bảo Trân was holding, from the death of an "alluring red fire" (*mồi lữa đỏ*). Again using the familial terms *bà con*, chị Năm asks the villagers why they do not call the Xiêm troops hostile enemies. Stuttering and sobbing, chị Năm reveals that in addition to attempting to kill her child, the Xiêm troops have killed her husband and have raped her. She begins singing in the *nam ai* mode (see discussion in Act I) of her sorrow and pain at the blood that has been shed. Bà Sen then pleads with the villagers, still using the familial terms *bà con*, saying that wherever the Xiêm troops remain, then pain, suffering, death and grief, too, remain. She says that the Xiêm troops will invade each and every one of the villagers' homes. She continues, saying that only now do the villagers believe the violence that the Xiêm troops have inflicted, since they have seen it with their own eyes. At that moment, the Xiêm troops ambush the villagers from all sides. Bùi Thị Xuân and Bảo Trân lead the villagers in defending themselves, gloriously defeating the Xiêm troops.

This fictionalized scene not only sets up a battle in which Bùi Thị Xuân is the heroic savior of the entire village; in this scene we also find out, through the character chị Năm, that Bùi Thị Xuân has saved a specific individual, chị Năm's child. Chị Năm is so moved by Bùi Thị Xuân's actions that when the villagers are about to assassinate the military general, that she is willing to sacrifice herself and her child to save Bùi Thị Xuân and to change the minds and hearts of the other villagers in regard to their loyalty towards Nguyễn Ánh. Chị Năm's actions

allow the villagers to see a revealed "truth," that they have been mistaking and misjudging their friends (the Tây Sơn) as foes, and their foes (Nguyễn Ánh and the Xiêm troops) as friends. But elements of the character chị Năm are also representative of the feminization of the Vietnamese symbolic landscape that often took place within discourses surrounding the American War, especially in North Vietnam. In Western thought, battle traditionally masculinizes the landscape, as men bear arms and organize themselves to protect their country, property, and women. Yet other scholars, such as Drew Faust, a historian of the American civil war, have pointed to how the mobilization of men feminized public space (in the American South) as women assumed tasks that were previously reserved for men (Faust 1996). As Hue-Tam Ho Tai writes, in Vietnam, war feminized space in a different manner (2001).

Vietnamese space was transformed not due to women moving into public areas left empty by men, but rather through the blurring of public and private spaces. Unlike the South, North Vietnam was able to successfully mobilize large numbers of women to fight in the war against American occupation. The feminization of the landscape was part of a fundamental strategy in the North of total mobilization in order to rescue the nation from foreign invasion, in a large part through the tradition of guerilla warfare. Guerilla warfare is a strategy that blurs distinctions between the frontline and the rear, combatants and civilians, masculine battlefield and feminine domestic space—a strategy that works best when the population can be convinced that not only is one's country under attack, but that one's home and family is imperiled (see figure 4.4). It is a strategy that lures the foreign enemy deep into the homeland onto Vietnamese soil, so that they can be "surrounded by hostile peasants intent on defending homes and villages" (Ho-Tai 2001: 175).

Chị Năm's character enables the mobilization of the villagers through this blurring of public and private space that guerilla warfare utilizes. Not only have the country's borders been

crossed and invaded by the foreign Siam army, the villagers' homes and families have been violated and attacked, and chị Năm's own body has been raped.[55] In this scene, chị Năm mobilizes her fellow female villagers to fight against Siam forces by joining the Tây Sơn; but the framing of this scenario in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* of foreign aggressors invading not only the country's borders, but also the villager's home and hearth, is strikingly similar to the rhetoric used to mobilize the civilian population, particularly women, in the North during the fight against American occupation:

> People's War is also women's war because women's participation is essential for its success. The concept that every citizen is a soldier and must be trusted is a tried and tested tradition. It was first used to defeat the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. During the People's Wars of this century, again, there are no civilians. A peaceful village one day may become a combat zone the next. The front is everywhere and everyone is involved in the fight. (Bergman 1975: 118)

During this scene, chị Năm awakens the civilian population to the cruelty of the Xiêm invaders, and the villagers, now guerilla soldiers, are forced to take up arms to defend and their nation, as their "peaceful village" in an instant (complete with the synchronization of flashing lights and sound effects) is transformed into a "war zone" through no choice of their own. This blurring of civilian and soldier, home and battlefield, is typical of the propaganda used by North Vietnam to mobilize citizens during the war of resistance against the Americans.

Commemoration of Heroic Vietnamese Mothers (*Bà Mẹ Việt Nam Anh Hùng*) and War Dead (*Tu Sĩ*)

Immediately following this scene with chị Năm is one that reactivates another common scenario used in the symbolic landscape of Vietnamese history, that of the heroic mother who has lost her child in war. During the battle defending chị Năm's village, Bảo Trân sacrifices her

[55] See Bergman's *Women of Vietnam* (1975: 60-79) for the politics of rape culture in Vietnam during the American war. The pillaging of villages and abduction of women by the Siam forces in this play are portrayed in a similar light to war crimes committed by American GIs such as the Mỹ Lai massacre.

life to save Bùi Thị Xuân while fighting the Siamese troops. During a prolonged death scene, we find out that Bảo Trân is an orphan whom Bùi Thị Xuân had saved from death at a young age. Bùi Thị Xuân raises the child, who later joins her troop of female soldiers and becomes one of her right-hand commanders. At first, we see Bảo Trân and Bùi Thị Xuân as sisters; they use the terms sibling terms *chị* (older sister) and *em* (younger sibling) to refer to one another, and fight side by side, both in leadership positions. However, as Bảo Trân's narrative unfolds in her death scene, Bùi Thị Xuân is framed not as a sister, but rather as a nurturing mother-figure who is in the midst of losing the child (now a heroic soldier) whom she has cared for and helped to develop to an honorable adulthood. It is important to note that Bảo Trân is an entirely fictionalized character. Although Bùi Thị Xuân often led and fought with other female military commanders (Bùi Thị Xuân is the most famous member of the *Tây Sơn Ngũ Phụng Thư* [Five Tây Sơn Royal Female Phoenixes]), there is no historical evidence for the existence of the character Bảo Trân.[56]

In the battle scene between the villagers and the Siamese army, Bảo Trân and Bùi Thị Xuân fight fearlessly to defend the village. In the staging and choreography, we first see Bùi Thị Xuân come to the rescue of the old village leader who has been attacked by two men at the same time, then Bảo Trân single-handedly staves off six men who surround her from all sides. Both Bùi Thị Xuân and Bảo Trân seem invincible in the scene, each wielding two swords, one in each hand, with intricate movements, killing every soldier in their paths.[57] At one point, Bùi Thị Xuân is attacked simultaneously by two soldiers. Bảo Trân comes to her aid as Tổng Ngưu, who is off

[56] Tây Sơn Ngũ Phụng Thư is the name give to a group of female heroines of the Tây Sơn era whose members include Bùi Thị Nhạn, Trần Thị Lan, Nguyễn Thị Dung, Hùynh Thị Cúc, and Bùi Thị Xuân (Vũ Thị Ngọc Khuê 2008: 130).

[57] Bình Định province is known for its incorporation of martial arts into its performances of *hát bội*, as Đào Tân's method of teaching emphasizes martial arts training more than in other regional styles of *hát bội* performance (interview with Đào Minh Tâm, April 30, 2013).

the edge of the stage in the audience, unseen by the two women, aims a bow and arrow at Bùi Thị Xuân's back. Tổng Ngưu's *kép nịnh* character, like Lê Quỳ in *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, symbolizes the cowardly and submissive nature of those collaborating with foreign invaders (in the case of Lê Quỳ, the French, and in the case of Tổng Ngưu, the Siamese), which is further emphasized by Tổng Ngưu's cowardly aiming of the arrow at Bùi Thị Xuân's back as she fights two other soldiers. As Bảo Trân comes to Bùi Thị Xuân's aid, Tổng Ngưu's arrow strikes Bảo Trân.

In a prolonged death scene, we learn more about the relationship between Bảo Trân and Bùi Thị Xuân. As noted previously, up until this moment in the play, the two women refer to one another as sisters, making reference to *tình nghĩa chị em khăng khít* (devotion and attachment of sisterly love) and using the terms *chị* (older sister, Bùi Thị Xuân) and *em* (younger sibling, Bảo Trân) to refer to one another. As she realizes her injuries are too grave to survive, Bảo Trân tells Bùi Thị Xuân that as an orphan child, she will be forever in debt for being saved, protected, and raised by Bùi Thị Xuân. Bùi Thị Xuân taught and guided Bảo Trân at every step of her life, then allowed her to join the troop of female soldiers. It is because of this debt that Bảo Trân wanted to save Bùi Thị Xuân's life, saying that even if she dies, she will happily let go of life because it will fulfill her hopes and desires by paying back that debt (see figure 4.5).[58]

A solo bamboo flute (*sáo tre*) plays during this scene, which often symbolizes a nostalgia for youth and childhood memories. Bùi Thị Xuân reminds Bảo Trân that she has promised to bring the younger woman back to her hometown (*quê*) in the countryside after the fighting has ended. There, they will visit the Trường Trầu riverbank and bath in the Côn river. Bùi Thị Xuân tells Bảo Trân that before she knows it, they will be chatting and catching up with one another, reminiscing about their countless shared memories (*trò chuyện hàn huyên bao kỳ niệm*). In this

[58] Original Vietnamese: Dù có chết cũng vui lòng thỏa dạ. Thỏa dạ vẹn tròn nguyện ước.

scene, Bùi Thị Xuân is transformed into a comforting mother-figure to the fictionalized character Bảo Trân. Why would the Đào Tân Tuồng Theatre troupe choose to add this motherly dimension onto an already heroic female historical figure such as Bùi Thị Xuân, known for her military prowess? The mourning and commemoration of Vietnamese soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in defense the homeland has been dominated by the voices of mothers rather than wives.[59]

In Vietnamese culture, it is customary to pay respects to a fallen soldier's mother in order to honor the man. It is the mother, rather than the wife, who is a "cultural vector of grief and memory" (Ho Tai 2001: 177). This may be due in part because Vietnamese men who fought during the American War were often too young to have been married or to be fathers; but even if they were, traditional Vietnamese social structures do not require a man to "cleave to his wife" as in Western culture. Women were expected to leave their families to live with their husband's family; thus, we find the terms *ngoại* (outside) for maternal relations and *nội* (inside) for paternal relations. Imagery surrounding Vietnamese mothers often symbolizes the nostalgic days of childhood and sense of connectedness with one's personal past (Ho-Tai 2001: 168). This can be seen as Bùi Thị Xuân tells the dying Bảo Trân, as a motherly figure, that she will bring Bảo Trân back to her home village, where they can visit the Trường Trầu port, bathe in the Côn river water, and where they will be bonded together again soon, reminiscing about all their nostalgic memories together.[60]

In more official discourses, mothers have also played an important role in the revolutionary cause. Lê Duẫn, as Party General Secretary, declared at a gathering of political cadres in 1959, "It is in women that we find the essence of our national characteristics. The fine

[59] This is quite different from Western commemorations of the war dead. Often the soldier's memory resides with their wife or sweetheart, and as American novelist James Jones (1967) puts it, war is a "widow-maker."

[60] Original Vietnamese: Xong chiến trận, chị sẽ đưa em về quê mẹ, thăm bến Trường Trầu, rồi tắm nước sông Con. Chị em mình quấn quýt sớm hôm, trò chuyện hàn huyên bao kỷ niệm.

traits of the Vietnamese character are first of all present in Vietnamese women. I noticed in prison that most of our revolutionaries had fine women as mothers" (Mai and Le 1978: 138). There have been several "heroic mothers" exhibits in national museums as well as numerous monuments dedicated to heroic mothers, including one recently completed in Tam Kỳ (the city where the 2013 National Competition of the Professional Arts of Tuồng and Folk Musicals took place) in March 2015 (see figure 4.6).[61] The title of "Heroic Mother" is a designation made by the state that requires official verification, and is received by mothers who have lost an only son, two sons, or three sons in war. However, only mothers who lost sons who died fighting for the revolutionary cause are given the title; countless mothers in South Vietnam lost sons, but their grief remains officially unrecognized and erased from public memory (Ho-Tai 2001: 181).

Public discourse in Vietnam surrounding the portrayal of mothers has also played an important role in post-war relations with the US. There had been a period of reconciliation between the US and Vietnam following the normalization of relations between the two countries that occurred in 1995, with an increase in veterans' projects that enabled US soldiers to return to Vietnam in order to make peace with their experiences there, and an official visit from President Bill Clinton in 2000 (Burghardt 2005). An example of narratives during this period of symbolic reconciliation can be seen in the short story "Under the Bamboo Grove" (1999) by Trần Thanh Giao, published in *Vietnamese Literature Review.* "Under the Bamboo Grove" tells the story of an American mother who seeks closure by finding her deceased son's remains in Vietnam. He had been badly wounded in battle, and took shelter in the house of a Vietnamese woman who was living alone, because her son and husband were also fighting. The Vietnamese woman took

[61] This recently completed heroic mother monument in Tam Kỷ is currently the largest in Vietnam, standing at 18.6 meters tall and 120 meters wide at the base, and is modeled after the image of heroic mother Nguyễn Thị Thứ (1904-2010), who lost a total of 11 children and grandchildren between 1948 and 1975 in the wars against the French and Americans (*Tuổi Trẻ News*, March 25, 2015).

care of the wounded soldier until he passed away, then dug a grave and buried him. Twenty years later, the Vietnamese woman is still alone because her sons and husband died in the war, and she is visited by the American soldier's mother. The soldier's family offered the woman money for her aid to him, but she refused, saying "I looked after him like a son. I did not care for him for money. I am a mother and treated him as my child, as I too lost children in the war" (Schwenkel 2009: 47-48).

Widely read and circulated, "Under the Bamboo Grove" became a metaphor for reconciliation between Vietnam and the US. The narrative of the story allows the American mother both to recognize the moral and military triumph of the Vietnamese and realize the humanity of Vietnamese people as co-sufferers rather than enemies. However, this tone of reconciliation began to change in later years, with images of repentant, remorseful US soldiers returning to Vietnam all but disappearing a decade after the normalization of relations. In a 2004 interview, the director of the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City spoke in about the unwillingness of visiting veterans to take on historical accountability, with denials of culpability: "The number of US veterans who visited the museum is increasing. But they usually deny any wrongdoing. . . . They say they were a doctor or nurse or electrician—someone who was not responsible. They are afraid to tell the truth" (Schwenkel 2008: 49).

Although Bảo Trân is a fictionalized character of the Tây Sơn era in the play *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, the staging and imagery surrounding her glorification in the play as a heroic soldier who sacrifices her own life for Bùi Thị Xuân, and ultimately, for the cause of resisting foreign invaders, is typical of commemoration rituals that are publically staged in contemporary Vietnam for fallen soldiers of the North. As Bảo Trân dies, it is not only Bùi Thị Xuân who mourns her death. As Bùi Thị Xuân cries openly, asking whether Bảo Trân can hear the strong winds mourning her in all directions (*bốn bề lộng gió*), the villagers gather around the two

women, raising their sleeves to their faces silently to wipe away their tears. Chị Năm is on her knees to the right of two women, holding her outstretched *khăn tang* to show that she is mourning for both her husband and Bảo Trân.[62] As lightening strikes and thunder rumbles (signifying Bảo Trân's soul leaving her body), Bùi Thị Xuân shouts loudly, "The waves of the Rạch Gầm river are alive in the hearts of our nation's people!," further emphasizing the shared grief that Bùi Thị Xuân, chị Năm, the villagers, and the entire nation have for the *tu sĩ* war dead who have sacrificed themselves for the sake of the country. Several soldiers enter the scene and lift Bảo Trân onto a platform at the back of the stage as the villagers venerate her from below (see figure 4.7). Dim red light floods the stage and a spotlight shines on Bảo Trân. Off-stage, we hear a southern folk melody (*hò miền nam*) being sung with the following lyrics (see example 4.1 for transcription):

> Hò ơ, hò ơ (humming)
> Đất Phương Nam thương nhớ muôn đời,
> Người con gái Tây Sơn.
> Gian khó không sờn, quên mình vì quê hương.
> Gian khó không sờn, quên mình vì quê hương.
>
> Translation
> Hò ơ, hò ơ (humming)
> The land of Phương Nam loves and remembers for eternity,
> This daughter of Tây Sơn.
> Enduring suffering with determination, she forgets herself for the homeland.
> Enduring suffering with determination, she forgets herself for the homeland.

A similar melody in the same heptatonic scale is also used in a scene involving Ngọc Mai and Lê Chu, which will be discussed later. *Hò* folk melodies have similar characteristics with *lý* folk melodies, but *hò* songs are often associated with a particular activity, such as farming, and may have originated as a way to pass the time during work activities (Trần Vân Khê 2004: 81).

[62] The white *khăn tang* is a long band of white fabric that is worn around the foreheads of blood-related family members of the deceased, from the moment of death until burial, as symbol of grief and mourning, usually for three days.

Official narratives of war were often used to legitimize war efforts and strengthen the population's will to fight, especially in North Vietnam. Extensive attention is still given to dead soldiers by the state so that their deaths are regarded as noble and meaningful acts. The veneration of Bảo Trân's heroic sacrifice as an act enabling the existence of the nation, as well as an act that inspires others to defend the nation, can be seen in Nguyễn Huệ's words upon hearing of Bảo Trân's death:

> And there is commander Bảo Trân. Our young, small, sister. You lie behind in our ancestors' land in the South. Your blood, and the blood of your comrades, combines with the tributaries and rivers. Your blood is absorbed into the plants and trees, becomes the heart of the soil. The earth boils with life, the rivers awaken with seething resentment, urging us onto the battlefront, demanding the recognition of our country's people.[63]

Nguyễn Huệ's elegiac speech sounds strikingly similar to Hồ Chí Minh discussing the deaths of several Party members who were killed or executed by the French:

> The blood of martyrs has made the revolutionary flag dazzlingly red. Their courageous sacrifice has prepared the earth of our nation to bloom into a flower of independence and result in our freedom. Our people must eternally record and remember the meritorious efforts of the martyrs. We must constantly study their courageous spirit to transcend all difficulties and tribulations, and realize the revolutionary work that they have passed on to us. (Vietnam Institute of Philosophy 1973: 275)

Both speeches invoke imagery of the blood of fallen heroes seeping into the physical earth/soil of the nation, while at the same time calling people in the present to reap the benefits of these heroic acts and be inspired to model their behavior after these historical figures. Death by "sacrifice" is considered the ultimate honor, placing the deceased into a venerable heroic category that transcends the individual's physical annihilation, through eternal remembrance and publicly displayed rewards (Malarney 2001: 50).

[63] Original Vietnamese: Còn tùy tướng Bảo Trân. Một người em gái nhỏ. Em nằm lại ở nơi phương Nam đất Tổ. Máu của em và máu của người thân. Máu hòa vào vạch nước, dòng sông. Máu thấm xuống rừng cây, lòng đất. Đất chuyển mình sôi sục. Sông dậy sóng hờn căm. Thúc dục ta, trận chiến sắp ra quân. Quyết định sự tồn vong của dân tộc.

In constructing their narrative of warfare, Vietnamese communists have often highlighted and popularized historical continuities between their contemporary struggles and Vietnam's earlier struggles. Other nations have similarly glorified dead soldiers, as Kapferer (1988), Mosse (1990), Tumarkin (1994), Hardacre (1989), Hobsbawm (1983) have described. General Võ Nguyễn Giáp, the key military strategist during the definitive battle of Điện Biên Phủ during the French War, has stated publicly:

> During our history, all victorious wars of resistance or liberation, whether led by the Trưng Sisters [first century], Lý Bôn [sixth century], Triệu Quang Phục [sixth century], Lê Lợi [fifteenth century], or Nguyễn Trãi [fifteenth century], have shared the common characteristic of a continuous offensive aimed at casting off the yoke of feudal domination by foreigners. (Vietnam Institute of Philosophy 1973: 269)

Thus, the death and sacrifice of Bảo Trân (although an entirely fictional character) in the name of protecting the nation from the Siamese foreign invaders during the Tây Sơn era can be seen as an act that is contiguous with the historical struggles of other Vietnamese heroes sharing the same noble and transcendent qualities.

After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, state-organized commemoration rites continued to allow war dead to be reborn into the pantheon of heroes who suffered and died to protect and liberate the motherland, transitioning from death to immortality. However, the notification and confirmation of soldier deaths to family members was notoriously slow due to poor communications, and there is even speculation that the Communist Party deliberately delayed notifications to keep morale high in rear areas (Malarney 2001: 62). The slow notification in addition to the dearth of details about the exact location and date of death and at times the absence of a corpse often caused disruptions in traditional Vietnamese funerary rites and death anniversary ceremonies (*giỏ*). State-sponsored commemoration rites and newly constructed monuments for the war dead also continued to exclude those who died serving in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in the South, and existing cemeteries and monuments

dedicated to South Vietnamese soldiers were removed and destroyed after 1975. The traditional and state-sponsored commemorations through which war dead are remembered and forgotten are used, as cultural anthropologist Shaun Kingsley Malarney writes, to "make specific claims about the nature of our social world, necessity of political unity, glory of an empire, or simply the need to put the dead to rest" (2001:72).

In the 1980s, several revisionist films came out in Vietnam that undermined the commemorative pretensions of the Vietnamese state, including *Brothers and Relations* (*Anh và Em,* 1987), *How to Behave* (*Câu Chuyện Tử Tế,* 1985), *When the Tenth Month Comes* (*Bao Giờ Cho Đến Tháng Mười,* 1984), and *Fairy Tale for Seventeen-Year-Olds* (*Truyện Cổ Tích cho Tuổi 17,* 1986). Although the fictional character Bảo Trân is glorified in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* as a noble soldier who has transcended her physical body by being inducted into the immortal pantheon of heroes, in reality, veterans living in contemporary Vietnam often face a very harsh everyday existence. The film *How to Behave*, for example, follows several decorated veterans of the French and American wars who barely eke out a subsistence living for their families as cyclo drivers and bicycle repairmen. Their contributions to the war effort are largely ignored on a practical everyday level by the state. The films of this revisionist period in the 1980s contain a common insistence that the ideological base of state constructions of war and the commemoration of war dead actually conceal more than they reveal (Bradley 2001: 222).

The Role of Women's Bodies in Defining the Nation

The character Ngọc Mai is another example of a fictional female character in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* who embodies several tropes involving women that have been utilized in the symbolic landscape of Vietnam. In the opening scene of the play, we find out that Ngọc Mai has been abducted by Siam troops, who have been taking women throughout the countryside. Ngọc

Mai is the niece of Tổng Ngưu (fawning character) and the daughter of Lưu Phước Trung (a mandarin loyal to Nguyễn Ánh), but is the lover of Lê Chu (a soldier for the Tây Sơn). Lưu Phước Trung is a mandarin completely devoted to Nguyễn Ánh; at one point in the play, he even unsuccessfully attempts to assassinate Nguyễn Huệ. Lưu Phước Trung expects to be executed by the Tây Sơn leader for his actions, but instead, Nguyễn Huệ shows him mercy and pardons him, with the hope that this demonstration of compassion and humanity (in stark contrast to the barbaric Siam forces) will win over the hearts of those like Lưu Phước Trung, who are still loyal to Nguyễn Ánh. Nguyễn Huệ sees this loyalty as the key to defeating Nguyễn Ánh and the Siam troops, saying "Before all, I must secure the hearts of the people. I must entice the talented from the other side to join us."[64]

During this scene we learn about the details of Ngọc Mai's abduction. Tổng Ngưu tells Lưu Phước Trung and Nguyễn Ánh that he has heard some "good news." Chiêu Tăng (the nephew of Rama I) has taken a liking to the abducted Ngọc Mai, and he may choose her to become his wife. Lưu Phước Trung is shocked, and asks Tổng Ngưu how this could possibly be good news. Tổng Ngưu replies that because Ngọc Mai is both beautiful and talented, Chiêu Tăng loves her and values her. If he chooses her to be his wife, then Tổng Ngưu, his brother Lưu Phước Trung, and their whole family will be more rich and powerful. Furthermore, the young, beautiful girl will help encourage the Siamese troops to strengthen their alliance with Nguyễn Ánh.[65] Here, Ngọc Mai's body and her relationship with Chiêu Tăng are used as a pawn in Nguyễn Ánh's political strategy for defeating the Tây Sơn. Despite his loyalty to Nguyễn Ánh, Lưu Phước Trung condemns the Siamese troops who have pillaged the country, and asks Nguyễn

[64] Trước hết ta phải thu phục lòng dân. Ta phải thi ân để đãi sĩ chiêu hiền.

[65] Nó có sắc có tài như thế ấy, nên Chiêu Hoàng tôn, Ngài rất yêu rất quý Ngọc Mai. Nếu cháu nó được chọn làm phu nhân của Chiêu Hoàng tôn thì anh em mình, dòng họ mình . . . cảnh giàu sang, phủ qúy cũng thơm lây. Hơn nữa, có gái đẹp gái tơ thì binh tướng Xiêm, Càng dốc sức, dốc lòng giúp Chúa!).

Ánh if it would be possible to defeat the Tây Sơn without the aid of the Siamese troops. Equating the loss of his daughter with the loss of the nation, he asks Nguyễn Ánh, "How can we allow our daughter, our country's people, to have such a shameful reputation?" Nguyễn Ánh replies that he understands the strong feelings of Lưu Phước Trung, whose daughter has been abducted by the Siamese, but that without the aid of the Siamese troops it would be impossible to defeat the Tây Sơn. Thus, Ngọc Mai's body has been sacrificed by those loyal to Nguyễn Ánh for the cause of creating an alliance with the Siamese, in order to ensure victory over the Tây Sơn.

This scenario of a woman as a self-sacrificing patriot, often a bodily sacrifice as a prostitute, has deep resonances in traditional Vietnamese culture, especially within literature. During French colonial rule, debate began over the efficacy of collaboration with colonizers, in which the prostitute became a metaphor for acceptance of foreign rule. The popular Chinese legend of Tay Thi (Xi Shi 西施), who is credited with ensuring the victory of king Yue over the king of Wu during the period of the Warring States (403-221 BC), is well known in Vietnam. The king of Yue presented Tay Thi to the Wu court after the defeat of the Yue kingdom, believed to be a precursor to the Vietnamese state. Because of her transcendent beauty and skills in the feminine arts, she purportedly distracted and corrupted the king of Wu with her charms, making him less vigilant and enabling the Yue to defeat and destroy the kingdom of Wu many years later (Schafer 1967: 82-83).[66] Another widely-known example is *Truyện Kiều* (Tale of Kiều), by Nguyễn Du (1766-1820), regarded by many as the most significant piece of Vietnamese literature. The epic poem tells the story of the heroine Kiều's willingness to prostitute herself for the sake of her family. Conflicting interpretations of the epic poem's meaning emerged during the "writing brush wars" of the 1860s, in the wake of French colonial

[66] For more on the story of Tay Thi, see also Johnson 1980 and Johnson 1981.

conquest, with scholars questioning whether Kiều's actions were the behavior of a self-sacrificing daughter, or an expression of disloyalty cloaked with a false sense of filial piety (Bradley 2001: 214). Leading collaborators such as Phạm Quynh justified their decision to support French rule by comparing their plight with Kiều's. If collaborators' acceptance of French rule was analogous to Kiều's willingness to prostitute herself, both parties were doing so with the purest of motives, for the ultimate good of the nation (Ho Tai 1991: 109-113).

In the case of Ngọc Mai in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, she is not only asked to sacrifice herself for the sake of Nguyễn Ánh's cause, but is also asked by the Tây Sơn to serve as an embedded informant within the Siam territory. Which side will she ultimately decide is worthy of her bodily sacrifice? In a scene where Ngọc Mai, already betrothed to Chiêu Tăng (nephew of Siam emperor Rama I), speaks with her lover Lê Chu, the audience sees where Ngọc Mai's true loyalties lie. Under cover of night, Lê Chu sneaks into Siam territory, both to gather intelligence about the Siam military forces for Nguyễn Huệ, and to visit his lover Ngọc Mai. She is happy to see him, but expresses her shame for now being betrothed to Chiêu Tăng, saying that she is not worthy to be with him, comparing herself to a *bèo* plant whose leaves have been shattered by the waves of flowing river water.[67] Lê Chu assures her that their love is still alive, telling her not to dare be ashamed or suggest that they separate; in midst of the chaos of war, countless people have endured and suffered bitter situations. He says he sees her soul clearly, now that they are again hand in hand, joining together all the love and longing of the past months of being separated.[68] Ngọc Mai asks her lover if she can escape with him, as she is ready to face adversity

[67] Also known as pistia or water lettuce, the *bèo* plant is an aquatic species with thick soft leaves in the form of a rosette that float on the surface of water. Original Vietnamese: Thiếp không không xứng đáng với chàng. Như thiếp giờ đây cánh bèo phiêu dạt giữa dòng nước trôi.

[68] Original Vietnamese: Giữa thời buổi loạn ly chinh chiến, biết bao người chịu cảnh ngộ đắng cay. Tấm lòng nàng, Lê Chu đả rõ. Ta khuyên nàng chớ ngại ngùng mà nói tiếng phân lý. Giờ đây tay lại cầm tay, dồn bao thương nhớ tháng ngày đợi mong.

and dangers despite her small stature, but Lê Chu tells her that the Tây Sơn need her to stay within enemy lines, as an embedded informant. Lê Chu then gives her a red scarf that belonged to a soldier, calling it both a symbol of their love in the promise that they will see each other again, and also a symbol of her service to the Tây Sơn (see figure 4.8). Tying the scarf around her neck, Lê Chu says that from now on, she is to be considered a female soldier, contributing her strength with the rest of the troops to force out the foreign invaders. At this time, we hear the same melody (using the same heptatonic scale) heard during Bảo Trân's death scene, but with different lyrics (see example 4.2 for transcription):

Nhớ thương bao ngày
Giờ chia tay lưu luyến người ơi
Gió sương trong đời
Vượt qua bao gian khó hiểm nguy
Người ra đi theo ánh trăng thề
Giử trọn tình quê mỗi lúc chia xa
Đây chiếc khăn hồng thắm đẹp tình đôi ta.
Đây chiếc khăn hồng thắm đẹp tình đôi ta.

Translation
Remembering all of the days
Now saying farewell while wanting to stay
The storms in our lives
Passing through difficulties and dangers
You leave now, with the moon as your promise
To keep your loyalty to the homeland when you are far away
This red scarf is colored with our love of each other.
This red scarf is colored with our love of each other.

In this scene where Ngọc Mai recieves the red scarf, we hear the first two measures of the melody that is found in the earlier Bảo Trân death scene (see example 4.1 measures 13-16 and repeated at 17-20) repeated twice (see example 4.2 measures 13-15 and 15-17), then the melody is heard in its entirety (example 4.2 meaures 18-21) with a ritardando to the end. In this scene, the red scarf given to Ngọc Mai is a physical object that is able to symbolically hold both the promise of her loyalty towards her lover Lê Chu and her service to the Tây Sơn as an undercover

informant. These two loyalties of romantic love and nationalistic heroism are further linked and conflated through the use of the same melody heard during Bảo Trân's death as a heroic and noble soldier.

Ngọc Mai's actions are exemplary of the type of "appropriate" love that was commonly encouraged during the 1960s by women's magazines that were published and widely circulated in the North, such as *Phụ Nữ Việt Nam* (Vietnamese Woman). One example of this conception of love can be seen in a 1961 letter published in *Phụ Nữ,* in which a woman writes of her turmoil as she waits for her lover to divorce his wife. The magazine gives the following advice:

> According to our new conception, we must reject the idea of love as a thing that cannot submit to any law and requires only spontaneous feeling. . . . This concept of love is egoistic love and is opposed to our society today. Those who hold this view are still slaves to feudal capitalist feelings, and only think of themselves. . . . This way of loving lacks revolutionary morality. (Pettus 2003: 38)

A Vietnamese archeologist similarly speaks in an interview about the strict prohibitions she faced as a student in the 1960s: "I didn't dare think about boyfriends back then. My teachers and my parents would have said that I wasn't serious, that I wasn't committed to my studies, which meant that I wasn't thinking about the society and about improving my country" (Pettus 2003: 38). Ngọc Mai's love for Lê Chu is not only a romantic love, but one with a "revolutionary morality"; thus, despite her loyalty for Lê Chu, she agrees to be betrothed to Chiêu Tăng, the enemy invader, in order to gather information for the Tây Sơn, just as Kiều sacrificed her body as a prostitute for the sake of her family, and as Thi Tay used her beauty and skills in the feminine arts to corrupt and distract the Wu emperor.

In a later scene, we see Ngọc Mai dressed in Siam-esque clothing (a tall, golden, pointed headpiece and a flowing blue dress with structured golden shoulders that turn upwards), indicating that she has been accepted into Siamese culture by Chiêu Tăng (see figure 4.9). Ngọc Mai serves Chiêu Tăng wine, while he tells her how lucky and blessed he is to have such a

beautiful piece of jade beside him, so he can be comforted after the hardships of battle. Drunk and wobbling, he gestures for her to come sit on his lap. Ngọc Mai resists, saying, "Please don't make me scared, dear." While taking swigs of wine, Chiêu Tăng continues, "You are so beautiful. The more I look at you the prettier you look. The more upset (*xao xuyến*) you are, the more I fancy you. Come here so that I can caress and hold you, so that together we can be lost in the blissful infatuation of love!" Ngọc Mai pushes him away, gets off his lap, and reminds him of his promise to marry her once the fighting with the Tây Sơn has subsided.[69] Clearly inebriated, Chiêu Tăng laughs, saying that since he is royalty, he would never break his word. In an act that the audience recognizes as false, Ngọc Mai strokes Chiêu Tăng's ego by saying that he is a deserving hero, and that as humble girl, all she wants is to become the princess of Băng Cốc (Bangkok).

Chiêu Tăng stands up, wobbling with drunkenness, and exclaims that he has already taken over three provinces. Gia Định will be next, and the Tây Sơn will be wiped out with one fell swoop. He calls for a celebration for his troops' victory, and a group of female dancers wearing matching costumes emerges, whose dance movements very loosely mimic those of classical Thai dance, to the point of caricature. The dancers even include a brief and scaled-down rendition of "Thousand-Hand Guan Yin," in which the drunken Chiêu Tăng takes part (see figure 4.9).[70] At the end of the dance, Lê Chu enters the scene disguised as a Siamese soldier. Lê Chu tells Chiêu Tăng he is a Cambodian soldier who was captured by the Tây Sơn forces, but was spared execution by Nguyễn Huệ if he would send a message to Chiêu Tăng. Ngọc Mai stands

[69] Chiêu Tăng's vulgar and unwanted aggression towards Ngọc Mai's body is reminiscent of portrayals (in films, novels, news stories, etc.) of American soldiers in Saigon who would frequent bars with Vietnamese sex workers during US involvement in the civil war (see Bergman 1975: 80-91).

[70] Guan Yin is a the Buddhist spiritual figure of mercy and compassion. The dance "Thousand Hand Bodhisattva (Guan Yin)" was created by Chinese choreographer Zhang Jigang (b. 1958) for 21 hearing-impaired dancers, and was first performed internationally at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in 2000 (*China Daily* 2005).

beside Chiêu Tăng, recognizing her lover but not revealing his identity. Lê Chu brings gifts of gold and silver to Chiêu Tăng, as well as a letter from Nguyễn Huệ asking the Siamese army for a ceasefire. Chiêu Tăng accepts the terms of the ceasefire, but as soon as Lê Chu leaves, tells Nguyễn Ánh that he will break the agreement and attack the Tây Sơn when they least expect it. Ngọc Mai is silently present through these discussions, pouring wine for Chiêu Tăng while listening to all the details of his military plans.

As soon as Ngọc Mai has a chance, she sneaks out of Siamese territory to warn Nguyễn Huệ of Chiêu Tăng's plot to send their entire navy fleet to Mỹ Tho during the ceasefire. Nguyễn Huệ asks Ngọc Mai if she is absolutely certain of this. She kneels down at his feet, saying that if he has any doubts or suspicions about whether she is telling the truth, she would gladly lay her life down at that very moment so that he would believe her. Nguyễn Huệ is moved by her words, and asks her stand up. He tells her that he only wanted to test her heart, since she has two streams of loyalty, her father, Lưu Phước Trung, and her lover, Lê Chu. But now he understands her heart clearly, that she can see wrong from right. He continues, saying that even though her father is foolishly loyal (*ngu trung*) to Nguyễn Ánh, Ngọc Mai, as a daughter, is full of loyalty for the Tây Sơn. She understands Nguyễn Huệ's concerns, saying that she has endured many false defamatory words. People have said that she sold herself to the invaders because of her hunger for power and wealth. But, she says, no one could tell the pure jade from the false gold.[71] She continues her speech, saying that she is a true daughter of these rivers, who is attuned to the ebbing and flowing of the waterways. She has drawn a map of the waterways and when the tides will rise and fall, so that Nguyễn Huệ can plan his naval attack and defeat the Siam invaders.

[71] Ngọc Mai chịu lặm điều phi thị, tiếng rủa nguyền bia miệng thế gian. Tham phú quí, bán thân cho giặc. Tham giàu sang theo lũ sói lang. Ai hay ngọc đá thau vàng.

Nguyễn Huệ tells Ngọc Mai that he is so moved with gratitude by the heart and soul of this daughter of Phương Nam. He continues, saying that when the country has been flooded with dangerous difficulties, in order to save our breed (*nòi giống*) from tragedy of the destruction of the nation, all people must combine their efforts as one heart. Lê Chu, too expresses his admiration for Ngọc Mai's loyalty by saying that even though she has been in enemy territory, she has maintained her efforts to destroy the enemy. Using the metaphor of a caged bird, Lê Chu describes Ngọc Mai as having broken her cage and spread her wings, standing together in strength with all who resist the invaders, awaiting battle day. Ngọc Mai assures Lê Chu and Nguyễn Huệ that although they are physically apart, her heart will long for the day when victorious songs can ring throughout the land.[72] She asks permission leave so that the Siam troops don't grow suspicious of her absence, then exits.

As Ngọc Mai leaves, the women villagers whom Bùi Thị Xuân and Bảo Trân saved arrive on the scene, asking to meet with Nguyễn Huệ. As if answering his pleas for all people of the nation to unite, the villagers tell Nguyễn Huệ that they would like to contribute to the efforts of the Tây Sơn to wipe out the Siam troops in any way they are able. The women tell Nguyễn Huệ that if they cannot contribute materially, they will contribute their labor. If they cannot contribute guns, they will contribute boats. Day and night, they will not complain about the laborious work of splitting bamboo to create a dam across the river. When refering to themselves, the women use the familial terms *bà con chúng tội*, which literally translate to "our grandmothers and children," but is in generally used to refer to one's extended family.[73]

[72] Từ giã tuy rằng cách mặt, nhưng lòng Ngọc Mai này, mong đợi ngày vang khúc khải ca.

[73] Nay bà con chúng tôi, đều chung lòng chung sức, quyết cùng với Tây Sơn chống giặc. Kẻ thì góp của, người thì gòp công. Kẻ thì góp sòng, góp thuyền. Người thì góp dầu mù u, lửa đốt. Ngày đêm chẳng quan công khó nhọc, chẻ tre bện sáo, làm cọc ngân song.

The villagers' expression of their tireless collective efforts to support the Tây Sơn, Ngọc Mai's sacrifice of her love for Lê Chu and endurance of Chiêu Tăng's affections in order to serve the Tây Sơn, and Nguyễn Huệ's insistence of collective sacrifice for the salvation of the nation all echo the principles of self-control, self-sacrifice, and hard work that govern Confucian codes of female virtue. In the post-war years, these feminine virtues were transplanted from the domain of marriage and filial duty to the realm of socialist nation-building in much of the official rhetoric concerning appropriate female behaviors (see figure 4.10). Through collective labor, women could become better citizens and a better mothers, with the nationalized feminine virtues of endurance and self-sacrifice. In this way, the state attempted to substitute the collective family of society/nation for the family of private households as the primary authority in governing female behavior.[74] Vietnamese women became both a marker of revolutionary progress and a vessel of timeless national tradition that was at the core of the communist party's cultural struggle on the path to socialist modernity (Pettus 2003: 37, 76).

In more recent years, the Vietnamese government has represented women as a buffer to counter corrupt influences of the Đổi Mới economic reforms (1986) such as gambling, drug use, prostitution, divorce, consumer desires and profit-driven capitalism of urban culture. Women are expected to condition the population, through their influence on their own families, to meet the physical, moral and intellectual demands of national development. The state's desire to foster prosperous, self-sufficient, and politically compliant households has encouraged women's traditional roles as nurturing mothers, devoted wives, and skilled housekeepers, at times in direct contradiction to the progressive ideals of the socialist years. The "enlightened housewife" was at

[74] This sentiment is echoed in Nguyễn Huệ's words in the final scene of the play that link the collective triumph on the battlefield with the individual sacrifices of families: "There is no victory in battle without loss and grief of loved ones . . . from every family, each with their own particular situations." (Không có chiến thắng nào mà không có sự tang thương mất mát . . . từng gia đình, từng cảnh ngộ khác nhau.)

the center of this idea of a "new family" that combined traditional values of filial piety, maternal devotion, and marital faithfulness with the rational-scientific standards of a "modern" nuclear household—namely, proper nutrition, hygiene, economic discipline, birth control, marital "democracy" and good parenting, defining "progress" as the natural culmination of the Vietnamese national spirit (Pettus 2003: 12-13).

In this same scene where the villagers express their desire to join the Tây Sơn efforts, a woman dressed in textile patterns commonly found among ethnic minority groups in the central highlands region accompanies the villagers. At one point, she steps aside from the group, taking center stage, telling Nguyễn Huệ that even though she is not of the majority ethnic Kinh group, the hearts of all the people are one (see figure 4.11). She has brought some fruit as a gift to the troops as her contribution to the cause. Nguyễn Huệ thanks the woman and tells the villagers that if he can gain their trust and will to stand with the Tây Sơn, if every citizen is a soldier, then like an inevitable rising tide they will together sink the enemy attempting to steal their nation.[75] This ethnic minority character does not appear in any other scene and does not contribute significantly to the narrative of the play. Yet, her inclusion is clearly deliberate, as she appears in the scene as a point of focus at the center of the stage, speaking directly to Nguyễn Huệ. She is unnamed and does not mention which particular ethnic group she belongs to, only saying that she is not of the Kinh majority. In this way, the woman marks her identity through difference. Why would *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* include an ethnic minority women of the central highlands, who is a very minor part of the overall narrative, so deliberately and centrally in this particular scene?

In a 2002 article from *Asian Ethnicity*, art historian Nora Taylor writes about the role of highland ethnic minorities in Vietnamese visual culture. In the case of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam,*

[75] Nếu được bà con tin tưởng, đứng về đại nghĩa Tây Sơn, mỗi người dân là một nghĩa quân. Thì sẽ như sóng triều dâng nhấn chìm quân cướp nước.

the ethnic woman is included as a sign of national unity and progress, which draws from "colonial racial classifications as well as the anti-colonial notion of the 'the people'" (Nora Taylor 2002: 233). The woman arrives with other villagers, rather than with members of her own community, and is represented as part of the "the people," yet is too different to be representative of the people. Through an identity that is marked with difference, national unity and progress can be projected by the mapping of backwardness onto the highland ethnic minorities. In other words, when appropriated into visual culture, highland ethnic minorities can indicate the inclusiveness of the national community while at the same time serving as a measure of how far the nation has progressed past pre-modern, "uncivilized" culture. The cooperation and loyalty of highland ethnic groups was also essential to the nationalist Việt Minh movement that relied on the support of highland peoples in battles against the French. Thus, the inclusion of ethnic minorities as subjects in state-sponsored artwork during this time was common. In more recent years, the growing tourist industry in Vietnam and the desire of foreign visitors to experience "authentic" and "traditional" culture has spurred a revival of this type of art as a commodity, usually created by Vietnamese Kinh majority artists (Nora Taylor 2002).

Revealing the True Selves of Subjects

Besides *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, there are at least two other instances of the story of the battle of Rạch Gầm-Xoài Mút being performed on the Vietnamese theatrical stage, one of which is in the form of a *cải lương* opera.[76] Examining these plays in tandem with *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* reveals some common themes between the works. In a book commemorating the 200th anniversary of the battle of Rạch Gầm Xoài Mút, poet and cultural critic Hoài Anh writes about

[76] *Cải lương*, or *tuồng cải lương*, has origins in southern Vietnam and developed in the early twentieth century. The term *cải lương* can be translated as "renovated theater," and the genre combines elements from *hát bội* theater, classical Vietnamese music forms, folk songs, and modern spoken drama.

his reflections upon seeing a performance of the *cải lương* play *Tiếng Sóng Rạch Gầm* by Ngọc Linh. In this version of the battle of Rạch Gầm-Xoài Mút, heroine Bùi Thị Xuân is notably absent, but other fictionalized characters at times are parallel to and at other times diverge from those in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*. One key character in *Tiếng Sóng* is Lê Xuân Giác, who like Lưu Phước Trung, is loyal to Nguyễn Ánh. Lê Xuân also has two daughters (Xuân Hồng and Xuân Lan) who, like Ngọc Mai (Lưu Phước Trung's daughter), have been abducted by Siamese troops.

Although he has been a follower of Nguyễn Ánh, the abduction of his daughters makes Lê Xuân Giác question his own loyalties, especially when a soldier of Nguyễn Huệ, Trương Phước Loan, is able to free one of his daughters, Xuân Hồng, in exchange for some valuable pearls. After Xuân Hồng is released, Trương Phước Loan returns to Nguyễn Huệ and tells him about Lê Xuân Giác's situation. Nguyễn Huệ sees Lê Xuân Giác as a fundamentally good and loyal person who, due to circumstances, has followed an incorrect path (*đi lầm đường*). He has reached an impasse because of his unwillingness to let go of his blind loyalty (*bê tắc vì mang mãi trong lòng cại nghĩa ngu trung*) towards Nguyễn Ánh. Nguyễn Huệ asks Trương Phước Loan to give Lê Xuân Giác a letter, believing that with some heartfelt words, he can help Lê Xuân Giác to "see the shining correct path that he should follow, to help the people and our nation" (*thấy được con đường sáng nên theo, để giúp dân, giúp nước*). This scene from *Tiếng Sóng* can be interpreted as a parallel scene to the one in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* in which Nguyễn Huệ attempts to gain Lưu Phước Trung's loyalty through an act of mercy by sparing Lưu Phước Trung's life after he has attempted to assassinate Nguyễn Huệ. However, after this scene in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, Lưu Phước Trung disappears from the play, while his daughter, Ngọc Mai, becomes a central character in the narrative. In the narrative of *Tiếng Sóng*, the fate of Lê Xuân Giác ends in a starkly different manner.

Upon receiving Nguyễn Huệ's letter, Lê Xuân Giác decides to change his loyalties, helping the Tây Sơn troops by responding with a letter that outlines Nguyễn Ánh's military strategy. En route to Nguyễn Huê, this letter is intercepted, and Nguyễn Ánh discovers Lê Xuân Giác's betrayal. Lê Xuân Giác is captured by Nguyễn Anh's forces, and he is accused of being a traitor. In response, Lê Xuân Giác does not deny the change in his loyalty, insulting Nguyễn Ánh by calling him a traitor for bringing foreign invaders into the country who are pillaging the lives of innocent people, all for a small amount of gold. A furious Nguyễn Ánh commands his troops to behead Lê Xuân Giác. As the sword hits Lê Xuân Giác, Xuân Lan comes to her father's aid, but she is stabbed and killed. Mourning his daughter, Lê Xuân Giác gives a long tirade about all the sins Nguyễn Ánh has committed against the nation. Lê Xuân Giác, too, is gravely injured. He is bleeding, yet his eyes remain wide open. Nguyễn Ánh and the Siamese troops cower and shake with fear, retreating as Lê Xuân Giác shouts, "Your swords are useless. You will never be able to kill me!" Lê Xuân Giác then bites his own tongue, committing suicide.

In his comments about *Tiếng Sóng*, Hoài Ánh praises Lê Xuân Giác, who in the end "finally is awakened, returning to genuine loyalty by contributing to the efforts to destroy foreign invaders, as repentance for his previous mistaken actions" (Hoài 1985: 237).[77] Just as the villagers in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* were at first loyal to Nguyễn Ánh, but were shown the truth about the foreign invaders through chị Năm's experiences, and as Ngọc Mai's true loyalties are in the end revealed as she sacrifices her love for Lê Chu to aid the Tây Sơn as an embedded informant, Lê Xuân Giác, too, in *Tiếng Sóng*, is awakened to his true loyalties by the heartfelt letter he receives from Nguyễn Huệ, and ultimately dies rather than betray the Tây Sơn.

[77] Original Vietnamese: "Cuối cùng mới thức tỉnh về với chính nghĩa và góp phần vào kế hoạch tấn công tiêu diệt giặc để chuộc lại lỗi lầm của mình" (Hoài 1985: 237).

In her seemingly unrelated study of Vietnamese sex workers, Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ discusses the theme of deception that is pervasive in narratives about prostitutes, and the state's use of these narratives to produce certain truths about its subjects. Media coverage and governmental entities often depict prostitutes through the lens of deception, whether it be deceiving clients about their HIV-positive status to "whores" being portrayed as dishonest, cheap, withered, ugly, even frightening, all hidden under the masks of make-up and clothing (Nguyễn-Võ 2008: 120). This depiction of a deceptive prostitute is not so different from Ngọc Mai's portrayal in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, as she is disguised in Siamese clothing and pretends to be affectionate towards Chiêu Tăng, while the audience knows that she is in love with Lê Chu. In order to acknowledge the social problem of prostitution, the state first "exposes" the subjects as false, so that the when sex workers are detained in carceral rehabilitation camps, they can be reinscribed with a truth about the kind of subjects the women should have been (Nguyễn-Võ 2008: 130).

In actual practice, the carceral rehabilitation camps focus on vocational training in slow, monotonous jobs, such as sewing, mat-making, embroidery, matchbox-making, etc., that require patience, dexterity, docility, and a kind of worker accountability connected to a particular narrative about Vietnamese femininity that matches government agendas that face a globalized economy. In political education classes, women are taught tradition, morality, and ethics, so that the "girls understand the essence of being a woman" (*bản chất người phụ nữ*). Wardens often referred to these political education classes as an "ethical education" (ibid.: 136). A song that was taught to inmates during these ethical education classes shows the ideal transformation from "a life of dust" to becoming "a good person" that a rehabilitated woman should experience:

> *Em* [younger sibling] had followed a life of dust
> One day *em* turned to this school
> A school of love to show the way

Em has awakened and now will change
With friends, learning to progress
Các anh [older brothers] have taught em the boundless love
So em can become a good person. (Nguyễn-Võ 2008: 132-33)

Discussing the writings of Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, Nguyễn-Võ considers how the ideology of state apparatuses and institutions "hail" on individuals to imagine their relationships with the larger world (God, the nation, society, etc.), which brings forth their identities as subjects of this larger world. Althusser sees this relationship as imaginary, while the modes of production are real. Nguyễn-Võ proposes that the global division of labor relations with its flexible modes of production, too, is imaginary, and creates a mental picture that government agencies reference while "hailing" on their subjects. The sex worker rehabilitation camps draw from this global imaginary in asking women to imagine themselves as their "true" selves, as low-wage, Asian, female, docile, dexterous, and patient piece-workers (Nguyễn-Võ 2008: 139).

While Nguyễn-Võ argues that governments actively produce truths about their subject populations through police and incarceration in camps that employ cultural authenticity in constructing identities of citizens and directing their choices, I consider how these imagined truths are also being created through the scenarios and allegories of state-sponsored theatrical performances. By watching *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* as well as *Tiếng Sóng Rạch Gầm*, audience members are asked to recognize the deception and truths that unravel on stage, whether it be the villagers, who are at first deceived by Nguyễn Ánh, then find out the truth from chị Năm's traumatic experiences with the Siamese soldiers; Ngọc Mai, who agrees to a betrothal with Chiêu Tăng while in love with the Tây Sơn soldier Lê Chu, but ultimately reveals herself as true and righteous through her service as a spy for Nguyễn Huệ; or Lê Xuân Giác, who at first is loyal to Nguyễn Ánh but is later "awakened" by a heartfelt letter from Nguyễn Huệ, and in the end dies

for the Tây Sơn cause. As audience members watch performances of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* (or any other historical *hát bội* play), if they accept their identity as members of the Vietnamese nation, they are asked to implicate themselves in the narratives of the play and imagine and/or question the authenticity of their own subjectivity in relation to the national allegories depicted on stage. Whether or not these imagined truths produced by state-sponsored arts create their intended outcomes in real choices and behaviors in the practical world is uncertain.[78]

The Role of Musical Cues in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*

The Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre used several repeated musical cues in their performance of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*. The use of a solo *đàn bầu* (monochord zither) to symbolize loyalty for the nation, often through noble acts such as sacrifice, was the most frequent musical cue used, with four instances throughout the play. The first example is the scene in which the father of Ngọc Mai, Lưu Phước Trung, is spared execution by Nguyễn Huệ, despite his attempt to assasinate the Tây Sơn leader. When he realizes he will not be executed, Lưu Phước Trung simultaneously expresses disbelief in his fortune and doubts towards his loyalty to Nguyễn Ánh with stylized laughter, while a solo *đàn bầu* is heard in the background. Nguyễn Huệ then reminds his generals that the only way to victory over the Siam is through winning the hearts of the people (*muốn tiêu diệt quân Xiêm, trước hết phải thu phục lòng dân*). For this reason he needed to show mercy towards Lưu Phước Trung, a mandarin loyal to Nguyễn Ánh.

The other three occurrences of *đàn bầu* solos all occur in scenes of grief and mourning. The first is the scene where Nguyễn Huệ is told that his soldiers have died on the battlefield, and

[78] In Nguyễn-Võ's study, the carcereal rehabilitation centers for sex workers had high rates of recidivism. Many women find themselves homeless upon release due to the disruption of their social networks and the incurring of high amounts of debt to support their families during their incarceration. This leads women to return to sex work, with at times even more desperate situations than before (Nguyến-Võ 2008: 140).

that their bodies could not be retrieved and were still lying on enemy soil. As Nguyễn Huệ wipes away tears, a *đàn bầu* solo plays. The second is heard in the scene with chị Năm, as she mourns her husband's death and her own rape at the hands of the Siam troops. The third scene that utilizes a solo *đàn bầu* is in the very last scene of the play, as Nguyễn Huệ gives a speech about sacrifice, recognizing Bảo Trân as a hero and saying that they will construct a monument in her memory. As he speaks about her, her ghost enters the stage, and we again hear a solo *đàn bầu*. All three scenes depict grief and mourning: the first of a commander grieving his fallen men; the second a wife mourning her husband and her own trauma; and the third a fallen woman whose sacrifice will be remembered by her country. The monochord *đàn bầu* is often associated with longing, sadness, nostalgia and loneliness. The single string is attached to a flexible buffalo horn that can mimic the subtle pitch inflections of the voice and more specifically the tonal characteristics of the Vietnamese languages. There is even a common saying that young women should not listen to the sound of the *đàn bầu*, as they might be seduced by its voice and abandon their families. Unlike the *đàn nhị*, *đàn tỳ bà*, and *đàn tranh*, which belong to families of instruments that exist in variant forms in China and Korea (respectively, the *erhu*, *pipa*, and *zheng* in China, and the *haegeum*, *bipa*, and *gayageum* in Korea), the *đàn bầu* is uniquely "Vietnamese" in its construction and sound.

Another musical cue used by the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theater Troupe is during a dream sequence that includes a southern *hò* folk song. Unlike the heptatonic *hò* melody previously discussed that occurs multiple times as a musical elipsis linking Ngọc Mai's sacrifice of herself for the nation to the heroic death of Bảo Trăn, the tetratonic *hò* melody heard in this dream sequence is heard only once, on this occasion. The scene opens on a river, with the water depicted by eight female dancers wearing long, flowing dresses with wide, draped sleeves (see figure 4.12). Their choreographed movements work in tandem with crescendo and decrescendo

rolls on a cymbal and drum to invoke the waves of the river. Adding to this blurry, dream atmosphere is the *hò* folk song, which is unmetered and sung in a tetratonic scale with microtonal inflections (see example 4.3 for transcription). In this dream sequence, Ngọc Mai meets her lover Lê Chu by the moonlit river where they had first promised their love to one another. They reminisce about this meeting over the river for a few moments before the rolling waves (movements by the eight female dancers together with rolling cymbals and drums) sweep Lê Chu away and she is awoken from her dream. The *hò* folk song evokes a nostalgia for idylic times through its familiar melody, but this sense of longing is also present in the song's lyrics, which describe a beautiful landscape and ideal love that Ngọc Mai has been separated from[79]:

> Mênh mang một dải sông Tiền.
> Nước mây biêng biếc, con thuyền nhẹ trôi.
> Thiếp chàng xứng lứa vừa đôi.
> Tình nồng duyên thắm nói lời yêu thương.
>
> Translation
> Vast is this running river Tiền.
> Water and clouds are deep blue, a boat flowing softly.
> This couple is matched well together.
> Strong feelings and deep fate tell of this love.

The last musical cue used in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* is a motive played by the *kèn* oboe at the beginning of all scenes set in Siam or to indicate a Siamese character. This motive occurs in the very first opening scene of the play, introducing Nguyễn Ánh in Siam; in the scene where we see Chiêu Tăng and Ngọc Mai who has been abducted by the Siam; as Lê Chu enters the stage disguised as a Siamese soldier; and in the final battle scenes as the Siamese troops enter the stage. This repeated motive played by the *kèn* double-reed oboe is uncharacteristic of

[79] A similar *hò* was used by Vietnamese American artist Dình Q. Lê in his 2006 installation *The Farmers and the Helicopters* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The installation included a three-channel video projection, with a woman singing a *hò* melody about how a dragonfly's flight patterns can be used to predict the weather juxtaposed with intervews with farmers speaking about their experiences with helicopters (with their own flight patterns) during the Vietnam War.

conventional *hát bội* melodies. The motive's ascending motion through close intervals (thirds and seconds) loosely mimics, in a caricatured way, the fast and turning melodic lines played by the *renak ek* (treble xylophone) of the classical Thai *piphat* ensemble, while its timbre is similar to the *pi nai* oboe (see figure 4.4 for transcription).

Evaluations of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*

In the national competition, *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* received two gold medals and four silver medals for individual performers, but no ensemble awards or individual awards for playwright, director, composer, or set designer. In an article written following the competition, Professor Hoàng Chương (director of the Center for Research, Preservation, and Development of National Culture and a judge at the competition) viewed the lack of medals as a serious sign of the decline of the art form. The Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre Troupe is in many ways the most respected troupe, known as the "red older brother" (*anh cả đỏ*) due to its previous name during the revolution (Tuồng Troupe of Interzone V [*Đoàn Tuồng Liên Khu V*]) and its position as the oldest troupe (formed in 1954). Hoàng Chương criticized the narrative writing in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, especially its depiction of Nguyễn Huệ and Bùi Thị Xuân. Rather than depicting Nguyễn Huệ and Bùi Thị Xuân as heroic and victorious, Nguyễn Huệ cries three times in grief and mourning, while Bùi Thị Xuân is transformed into a "spokeswoman for propaganda" (*người phụ nữ dân vận*) in the village scene. Hoàng Chương also viewed the inclusion of Lưu Phước Trung's assassination attempt on Nguyễn Huệ in the narrative to be outlandish and unrealistic. In the same article, Hoàng writes about *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* as follows: "There were weaknesses from the script itself to the staging, so despite the excellent performances from well-

known actors and actresses of Bình Định, it was not enough to save the production" (Hoàng Chương 2013).[80]

In an interview, the director of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, Hoàng Ngọc Định, emphasized the importance of innovation (*cải tiến*) in new *hát bội* plays.[81] He completely rejects the notion that *hát bội* is an immutable (*bất biến*) art form that should be performed exactly as it was hundreds of years ago, saying that "the art of *tuồng* does not belong in a dead museum." He spoke of his desire to create a play based on the life of Đào Tấn that would explore the question of how to keep the *hát bội* art form alive in the future, through the eyes of a character who is a contemporary of Đào Tấn. According to Hoàng Ngọc Định, the role of the director is essential to this innovation, viewing directors as the "link between stage and life." Hoàng Ngọc Định also stressed the need to develop a methodical system (*cơ chế chính xác*) for the transmission of *hát bội* to younger generations, in a way that adapts to current technologies and the contemporary pace of life (interview with Hoàng Ngọc Định, April 26, 2013).

These opinions about innovation, the role of *hát bội* directors, and the transmission of the art form are highly contested. Đào Minh Tâm, the director of the Quy Nhơn Cultural Center and an award-winning *hát bội* playwright, directly contradicts much of what Hoàng Ngọc Định says. Although Đào agrees that new plays need to be written, he expressed concern about the growing power that contemporary directors have over *hát bội* productions. In the past, before the existence of state-sponsored *hát bội* troupes, directors in the Western theatrical sense did not control *hát bội* productions and performances. The leaders and organizers of independent, folk *hát bội* troupes would generally be the most experienced and talented performer in a troupe, with

[80] Yếu từ kịch bản đến dàn dựng, vì vậy cho dù diễn viên ở đất tuồng Bình Định nổi tiếng hát hay cũng không cứu vãn nổi!

[81] Hoàng Ngọc Định is also director of the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre in Quy Nhơn and has been recognized with the title of "Outstanding Artist" by the state.

the title *thầy bầu* (for a man) or *bà bầu* (for woman). In the state-sponsored troupes, a Western-style theatrical director is needed, due to the contemporary staging, lighting, and choreography that is expected in official performances and national competitions. In some cases, these directors have studied theatrical directing but are not *hát bội* performers themselves. Đào views this as one of the main reasons for the recent decline in the quality of *hát bội* productions among state-sponsored troupes (interview with Đào Minh Tâm, April 30, 2013). Hoàng Chương, too, discusses how some directors are "over-confident" (*quá tự tin*) or hesitant to invite experts in who might point out the weaknesses in their craft (Hoàng Chương 2013).[82]

Đào is also cautious about accepting institutionalized teaching methods that are used in the state-sponsored troupes. He views the traditional method of learning, with basic training beginning at age eight and ending at age sixteen before a student's first performance, as the most thorough and effective way to learn the art form. In the state-sponsored troupes, a student completes their training in all *hát bội* arts (make-up, costumes, movements, singing) and graduates from the school in only three years. He also recognizes that many of the recently written *hát bội* plays do not appear to have a very long performance life-span. Many are staged once and forgotten, with a few exceptions such as the satirical play *Nêu Sò Ốc Hến* (Clam, Oyster, Snail, and Mussel), which actually has older origins in the *chèo* northern folk singing tradition (interview with Đào Minh Tâm, April 30, 2013).

The critiques of *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam* and the contested debates between arts administrators in Quy Nhơn (the hometown of Đào Tấn) regarding the development of artistic innovations in *hát bội* productions, as well as methods of transmission, are occurring in varying degrees and in different permutations throughout the *hát bội* community in Vietnam. However,

[82] Hoặc là ngại chuyên gia chỉ ra những điểm yếu của mình, cũng có khi vì không muốn làm xáo trộn những gì đã định hình—nhất là đối với những đạo diễn quá "tự tin" vào năng lực và khả năng sáng tạo của mình.

these discussions amongst administrators are limited to issues surrounding the state-sponsored *hát bội* troupes, with little to no official attention or support given to maintaining the vitality of independent folk troupes. As Hoàng Chương has written, generous financial state support does not necessarily guarantee the quality of *hát bội* performances:

> Some plays could have several hundred million *đồng* [several thousand dollars] invested in the production, yet they will avoid inviting experienced artists who have a deep understanding of the art form to ask for their opinions and support. . . . This causes many *tuồng* productions, like other folk musical traditions, "to be satisfactory and good," yet still lacking in the elements of authentic traditional art.[83] (Hòang Chương 2013)

When I spoke informally with audience members who attended *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, several members expressed sentiments about the performance that echoed the judges' asessments. One audience member commented about the map of the Rạch-Gầm Xoài Mút River that depicted Nguyễn Huệ's military strategies, saying that this looked out-of-place, strange, and unncessary in a *hát bội* play (fieldnotes, May 18, 2013, Tam Kỳ.) In his remarks at the closing ceremonies of the competition, Tắt Thắng, chair of the judges' panel, also spoke about how large-scale scenery and props were too literal and distracted attention away from the performer's abilities to use symbolic gestures and conventions to create the universe of the play, which is at the heart of *hát bội*'s emotional power:

> Objects and people [on stage] should not appear to use laws of physics, models, or mimic real life, but rather use what we call the laws of symbolism together with symbolic conventions and conventions that legend-ize (*huyền thoại hoá*). . . . Ideally, this does not need any reinforcement, and only when absolutely necessary should we use the support of scenery, staging, props . . . their usage creates limitations and a feeling of amiss and offense.[84]

[83] Người ta có thể đầu tư chi hàng mấy trăm triệu cho việc xây dựng một vở mới, nhưng lại ngại mời những chuyên gia tâm huyết, am hiểu về lĩnh vực đó góp ý, bổ sung . . . Điều đó khiến cho nhiều tác phẩm tuồng cũng như dân ca kịch "rằng hay thì thật là hay", nhưng vẫn thiếu vắng những yếu tố thuộc về nghệ thuật truyền thống đích thực. (Hoàng Chương 2013)

[84] Sự vật và con người không được tái hiện bằng luật pháp khí hậu mô phạm bắt chước mà bằng cái ta quen gọi luật pháp ước lệ, cùng với tượng trưng cách điệu và huyền thoại hóa . . . Lý tưởng là không cần cầu viện mà bất cân sĩ lắm mới phải cầu viện nghệ thuật phong màng, trang chí, kiệt bục . . . Điều đó tạo nên phàn cản về sự trái quấy" (Tắt Thắng 2013).

Another audience member mentioned their dislike for the directorial style of Hoàng Ngọc Định, who replaced veteran female *hát bội* artist Hoà Bình as director of the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre in 2010.[85] The same audience member suggested a personal bias in the director's choices (Hoàng Ngọc Định's daughter, Thanh Bình, played the fallen heroine Bảo Trân) to explain what she deemed the over-veneration of Bảo Trân's character on stage (fieldnotes, May 18, 2013, Tam Kỳ). Due to problematic choices in staging and directing in addition to weaknesses in the play's narrative and script, the judges' panel awarded medals to individual actors who performed in *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, but refrained from awarding any medals for the ensemble, writer, set designer, composer, or director.

[85] Although Hoàng Ngọc Định is recognized by the state as an "Oustanding Artist," Nguyễn Thị Hoà Bình outranks him with the title of "People's Artist." In 2014, the former vice-director of the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre, Nguyễn Gia Thiện, was promoted to director.

Figure 4.1. A display of photographs of heroic mothers at the Vietnamese Women's Museum in Hanoi. (Photo by Laura Davis, December 28, 2015)

Figure 4.2. Tổng Ngưu dressed in silk brocade, speaking with villagers dressed in plain clothes. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

Figure 4.3. Chị Năm falls to her knees holding her baby, whom Bùi Thị Xuân has rescued. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

Figure 4.4. Propaganda poster at the Vietnamese Women's Museum in Hanoi: "Every Citizen is a Soldier." (Photo by Laura Davis, December 28, 2015).

Figure 4.5. Bùi Thị Xuân mourns for the dying Bảo Trân. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 18, 2013)

Figure 4.6. Heroic Mother monument in Tam Kỳ City, Quảng Nam Province. (Photo by Michael Tran, August 29, 2015)

Figure 4.7. Bảo Trân raised onto platform, while villagers venerate her from below. Chị Năm stands at the front of the stage, holding an outstretched *khăn tang*, symbolizing her grief. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

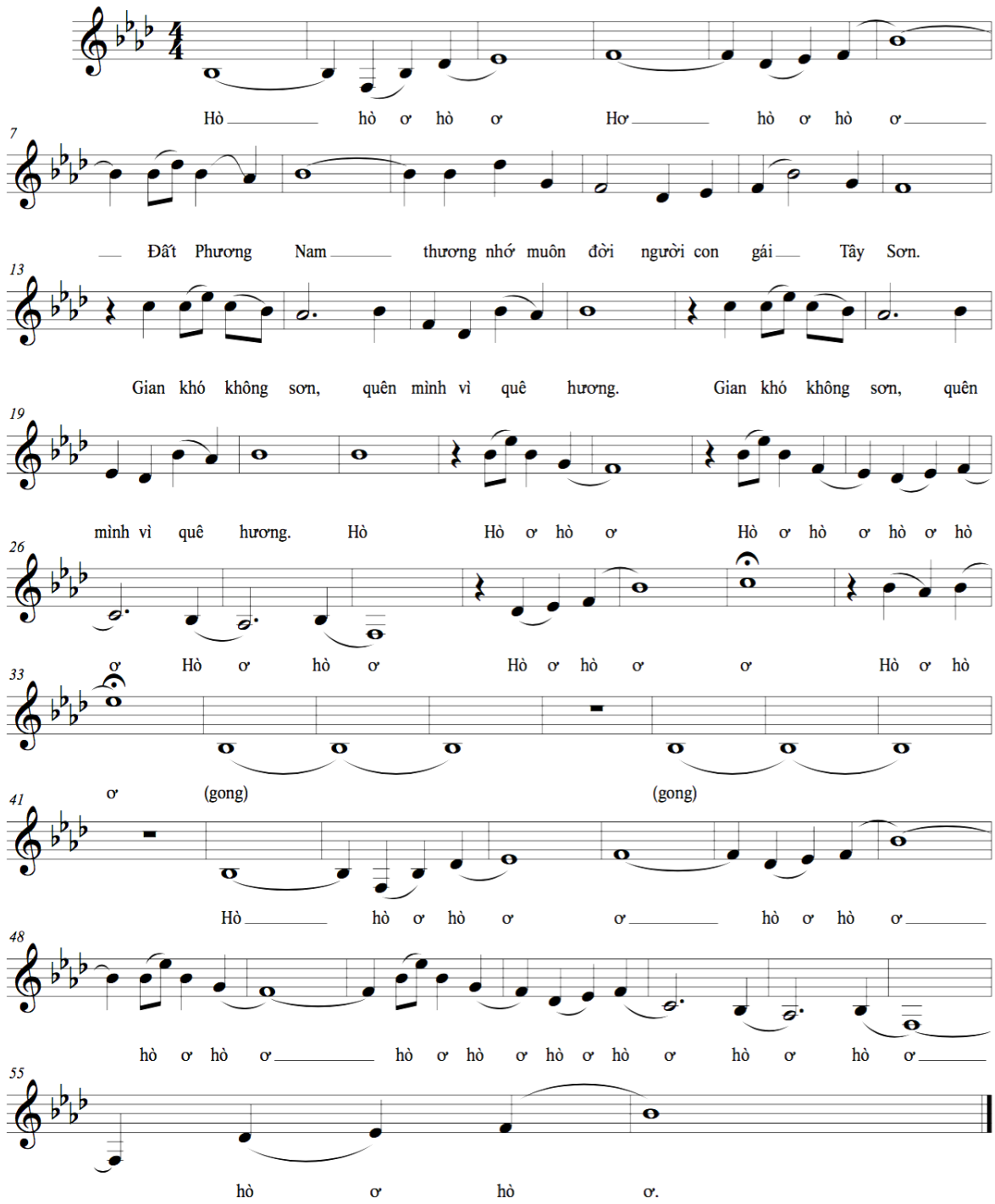
Figure 4.8. Lê Chu ties the symbolic red scarf around Ngọc Mai's neck. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 18, 2013).

Figure 4.9. Siamese dancers forming the arms of Guan Yin, with Chiêu Tăng in far back. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)

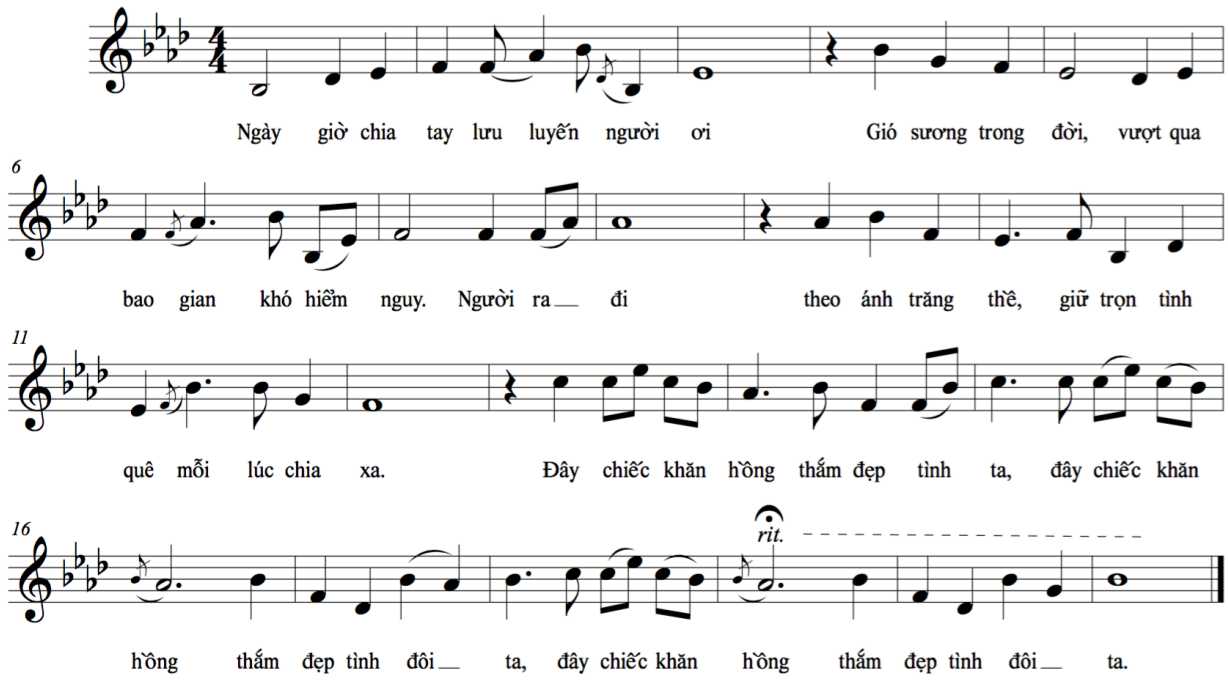
Figure 4.10. Propaganda poster at the Vietnamese Women's Museum in Hanoi: "Heroic, Indomitable, Honest, and Responsible." (Photo by Laura Davis, December 28, 2015)

Figure 4.11. Unnamed ethnic minority woman of the central highlands stands at center stage, speaking to Nguyễn Huệ. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 18, 2013)

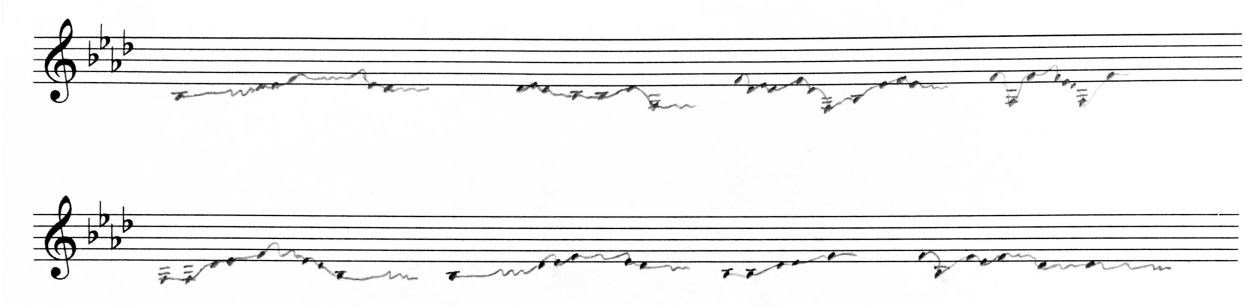
Figure 4.12. Dream sequence with eight dancers representing flowing water of the Tiền river. Lê Chu and Ngọc Mai embrace one another behind the dancers. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 18, 2013)



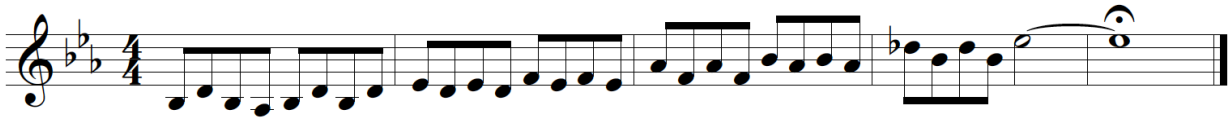
Example 4.1 Transcription of song during the veneration of Bảo Trân, after her death. (Transcription by Kim Nguyen Tran)



Example 4.2. Transcription of song after Lê Chu gives Ngọc Mai the symbolic red scarf. (Transcription by Kim Nguyen Tran)



Example 4.3. Transcription of unmetered, tetratonic *hò* folk song heard in dream sequence. (Transcription by Kim Nguyen Tran)



Example 4.4. "Siam" motive played by *kèn* oboe caricaturing a melodic line of a classical Thai *piphat* ensemble. (Transcription by Kim Nguyen Tran)

ACT III: *TỬ HÌNH KHÔNG ÁN TRẠNG* (AN EXECUTION WITH NO TRIAL) PERFORMED BY THE HỒ CHÍ MINH CITY HÁT BỘI TROUPE

Legitmacy of Rule and Histories in the South

Written by Trương Huyền, the *hát bội* play *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* (An Execution Without Trial) recounts several incidents in the life of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (924-979), later crowned emperor Đinh Tiên Hoàng (968-979), including his assasination by poison.[86] However, the play deviates from most historical accounts that assert Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was poisoned by Đỗ Thích, a mystic who allegedly saw a vision of a star falling into his own mouth and interpreted this as a sign of his destiny to rule as emperor (*Đại Nam Thực Lực* [Chronicles of Greater Vietnam], and *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* [The Complete Anals of Đại Việt]). Instead, *Tự Hình Không Án Trặng* tells the story of how the misunderstood Đỗ Thích was actually framed by the fictional character Hồng Hiến, a talented but opportunistic and ruthless mystic from "phương Bắc," which means literally "the northern place," but is understood to be China.

The play begins before Đinh Bộ Lĩnh becomes emperor, while he is serving emperor Dương Tam Kha of the Ngô dynasty for a short period of time (944-950). Dương Tam Kha himself was the brother of the Ngô queen, wife of emperor Ngô Quyền. Ngô Quyền placed Dương Tam Kha into the position of regent over his young son, Ngô Xương Ngập, the heir to the throne. However, when Ngô Quyền died, Dương Tam Kha forced his nephew to abdicate, and took over the throne from the child emperor. Ngô Xương Ngập fled, while Dương Tam Kha formally adopted his younger brother, Ngô Xương Văn, to further legitimize his rule. In 950,

[86] Trương Hình is a relatively well-known author who has collaborated several times with the celebrated *hát bội* performer and playwright Đinh Bằng Phi. Đinh has been honored with the state's title of "People's Artist" (Nghệ Sĩ Nhân Dân) and is also known for being a scholar of the southern style of performing *hát bội*, with numerous publications to his name, including the book *Nhìn Về Sân Khấu Hát Bội Nam Bộ* (Reflecting on the Southern Hát Bội Stage).

Ngô Xương Văn led the army in dethroning his uncle and brought his older brother, who was in hiding, home to share the throne. In the end, Dương Tam Kha was spared execution due to his familial relation, but was demoted to a lower offical position (Trần 2005: 34-36).

As presented in the play, although Duong Tam Kha's daughter, princess Dương Hậu, is already married and has a child (Ngô Ngọc Khánh), Dương Tam Kha wants her to marry Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, who has shown great military talents. The play then leaps ten years into the future, showing the passage of time through battle movements and changes in costumes, after Đinh Bộ Lĩnh unifies the country by defeating twelve warlords who held power across Vietnam after the death of the two young Ngô brothers who had shared the throne. After his military victory, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh crowns himself emperor Đinh Tiên Hoàng and marries the Ngô princess Dương Hậu in order to further legitimize his power. Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Dương Hậu have a daughter, Lan Dung. Lan Dung is very close to Đỗ Thích, who is a long-time friend, advisor, and protector of the emperor, and is like an uncle to the princess. She confides in him, telling him that she is worried about her husband Ngô Ngọc Khánh (the son of Dương Hậu from her previous marriage) because he has been sullen and cold. Lan Dung was given to Ngô Ngọc Khánh as a wife in an effort to unite the Ngô and Đinh families and to quell any desire for vengeance that Ngô Ngọc Khánh felt when Đinh Tiên Hoàng became emperor after the disintegration of the Ngô dynasty. Đỗ Thích has a bad premonition about Lan Dung and is worried for the safety of the young woman, whom he cares for like his own niece.

Meanwhile, Đinh Tiên Hoàng's first-born son from a previous wife, Đinh Liễn, has plotted to kill his younger brother, Hạng Lang (first son of Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Dương Hậu), because his younger brother is heir to the throne. Đinh Liễn sees this as unfair and bad for the country, since he is not only the older brother, but has also fought alongside his father to defeat the twelve warlords and unite the country; thus, the older brother Đinh Liễn has more experience

in dealing with national matters and believes he should be the rightful heir to the throne. In the scene where we discover that Hạng Lang has been killed, his older brother feigns shock and grief, but Đỗ Thích is able to see through this act, questioning why the murderers left Đinh Liễn's quarters untouched while ransacking his younger brother's (see figure 5.1). Speaking with his wife privately, Đỗ Thích expresses his concern that the throne is in danger, with many people surrounding it and trying to gain power.

In the following scene, Ngô Ngọc Khánh, who is still resentful about his family's loss of power, asks Hồng Hiến, who is known for being a talented mystic, for a prophecy. Hồng Hiến at first feigns reluctance to give a prophecy, but eventually tells Ngô Ngọc Khánh that he foresees that the days of the Đinh dynasty are numbered and will not last more than two generations. Greedy for power and seeing this as a sign of his own ascendence to the throne, Ngô Ngọc Khánh pays Hồng Hiến a large sum of money to ask Lê Hoàn, the leading general under Đinh Tiên Hoàng, for a pledge of alliance with him. Hồng Hiến agrees, and takes the money. Lan Dung then enters the scene, looking for her husband. Ngô Ngọc Khánh's feelings towards his wife are torn, because he sees that Lan Dung is so beautiful, but he despises her father for taking the throne from the Ngô family. In a dramatic scene, Ngô Ngọc Khánh cuts Lan Dung's face first to take away her beauty, then kills her (see figure 5.2).

Meanwhile, Hồng Hiến convinces a concubine that he will give her a powerful position in the imperial court if she puts poison in the wine bottle that Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Đinh Liễn will drink from later that night. She at first refuses, but then agrees, thinking of the power she will gain if she completes the action. Still mourning the death of his son, Hạng Lang, and his daughter, Lan Dung, Đinh Tiên Hoàng insists on drinking the night away with his remaining son Đinh Liễn. While they are clearly both inebriated, Đinh Tiên Hoàng questions his son's motives, insinuating that he knows Đinh Liễn has plotted to kill his younger brother. Đinh Tiên Hoàng

confronts his son about wanting the power of the throne, asserting that only he himself is the true emperor (see figure 5.3). At one point as the poison sets into Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's bloodstream, his crown falls off. Đinh Liễn places it over his own head, as if trying out the throne and its power (see figure 5.4). They soon both succumb to the poison and fall unconscious, then die. Hồng Hiến meets the concubine who has poisoned the emperor and his son, telling her to celebrate now that she will gain power. As they embrace joyfully, Hồng Hiến suddenly stabs her in the abdomen, leaving her dead body with the dead emperor and his son.

Đỗ Thích and Lê Hoàn discover the dead bodies. Dương Hậu soon appears, inconsolable with grief over the death of her husband and step-son, having also recently lost her daughter Lan Dung and other son Hạng Lang (see figure 5.5). She demands to know who has carried out this bloodshed. Lê Hoàn enters the scene with his troops and reveals that he has found the knife that stabbed the concubine, which has Đỗ Thích's name engraved on it (see figure 5.6). The troops surround Đỗ Thích, and he is executed immediately and unjustly. The final scene in the play then jumps to one year later, as Đỗ Thích's wife is comememorating the death anniversary of her husband. Hồng Hiền unexpectedly visits their home, to pay his respects on the anniversary of Đỗ Thích's death. Đỗ Thích's ghost returns, and Hồng Hiến's role in framing Đỗ Thích is revealed to his wife. In order to protect his reputation, Hồng Hiến has Đỗ Thích's wife killed. She dies, but returns as a ghost at her husband's side as the play ends.

Why would the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe choose to perform a highly contested historical narrative to represent themselves at the national competition? During Vietnam's civil conflict and in the aftermath of the communist victory, various aspects of southern Vietnamese history have been marginalized, reinterpreted, revised, and even erased by northern narratives and discourses. Southern culture, especially urban Saigon, was viewed as simultaneously degenerate and vulnerable, having been "tainted" by imperialism twice over by both French

colonialism and the American occupation. In northern discourses, American neo-colonialist capitalism had destroyed the fine cultural traditions and revolutionary spirit of the South. Northern soldiers had been told that their southern counterparts were starving and diseased under US tyranny, some even bringing meager packets of food for family members in the South. In reality, after reunification, northern soldiers found in the South a stunning array of luxuries and consumer wealth, and the South became a highly sought-after post for government officials (Philip Taylor 2001: 34).

After the Geneva Accords in 1954 that divided the country at the seventeenth parallel, a number of Marxists moved to North Vietnam, and a number of important anti-communists came to the South. With the founding of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), US "modernization" and "nation-building" theory was advanced as the ideological premise of the southern-based state. At the same time, the communist North attempted to realize their own vision of a socialist modernity, declaring departures from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's (North Vietnam's) vision of modernity as invalid and rejecting developments in non-communist territories from being legitimately "modern" (Philip Taylor 2001: 19). In South Vietnam, the communist party's relevance as the Vietnamese antithesis to colonialism was not as compelling as it had been in the North. Numerous International Communist Party (ICP) members and supporters in the South were executed or imprisoned in the failed Southern Uprising of 1940. The southern ICP was plagued with tactical miscalculations and political failures, including the politically disastrous elimination of its rivals in the wake of the 1945 August Revolution. The Communist Party failed to secure an effective coalition with the diverse political and religious movements of the southern region. Ultimately, control over the South had to be established through a full-scale invasion from the North, hardly an "evolution of consciousness" emerging within the people of the region (Philip Taylor 2001: 18).

With this historical context in mind, it is not surprising that the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe would include several instances in *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* where the legitimacy of power is challenged: Dương Tam Kha and his usurption of the throne from his nephew, the child emperor; Đinh Liễn's plot to kill his half-brother, who in his mind is unworthy to be heir of the throne; and Ngô Nhật Khánh's resentment at the Ngô throne being taken away from his family by Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. Ngô Ngọc Khánh's words most explicitly touch upon a debate over the legitimacy of rule in the private conversation he has with his wife, Lan Dung, before he disfigures and kills her. Lan Dung is the daughter of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and Dương Hậu (Ngô Ngọc Khánh's mother), and embodies the internal turmoil and ambivalence that Ngô Ngọc Khánh feels towards the emperor, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh.

In this scene, Ngô Nhật Khánh tells his wife that she is like a wild orchid in the forest, with the voice of a singing nightingale and shimmering eyes like jade. Ngô Ngọc Khánh praises whoever created her, then grabs and gropes her. She pulls away, telling him to please not make her fear him. He replies that perhaps his wife is scared of him, but he should also be scared of her. He continues, explaining that beauty is deserving of fear, as it can lull men into a state of trance when they are trying to leave behind their boyhood. Beauty can make men forget their fathers and ancestors, and forget to avenge their nations. He tells Lan Dung that her father, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, is very talented, and probably does not want anyone else to desire the emperor's throne. Lan Dung is shocked to hear this, and asks her husband if he himself covets the emperor's throne. His response is telling. Ngô Ngọc Khánh states that it does not matter whether or not he wants to be emperor. But the fact remains that he is the only remaining link to the Ngô dynasty, and he has an obligation to continue his family's royal lineage. In this way, Ngô Ngọc Khánh is demonstrating that the throne rightfully belongs to him and that he cannot change that rightful inheritance, despite his own individual aspirations.

Lan Dung, however, tells Ngô Nhật Khánh that no dynasty lasts forever, saying that clouds gather and part just as nations have times of decline and prosperity. She explains to her husband that her father deserves recognition for bringing peace and security to the nation when it was in chaos, and his rule is further legitimized by marrying the Ngô princess. Thus, the Ngô family is still in power, as she remains queen. Ngộ Nhất Khánh does not accept his wife's words. He tells her that he is determined not to retreat even one-half step backwards, because he must rule over the nation (Ta nhứt định không lùi nữa bước, giang san này phải thuộc về ta). Ngô Ngọc Khánh's rejection of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's power and his questioning of the legitimacy of reign echoes the South's modern history in two ways: the struggle to gain control of southern regions by the communist regime during the civil conflict and also the ambivalence towards the legitimacy of the communist party's rule immediately following Vietnam's reuinification.[87]

After the communist victory, cultural products from the South such as literary works, newspapers, and musical works published before 1975 were officially banned, confiscated if discovered, and at times destroyed publicly (Khai Thu Nguyen 2010, Philip Taylor 2001: 124). One year after "liberation," an editorial appearing in the theoretical journal *Học Tập* summarized the revolution's success and acheivements: "Within only a year of complete liberation, the southern revolution has progressed with great strides. How completely has the face of southern society changed. This is a great victory for compatriots in the South throughout our country" (*Học Tập* 1976: 4). In reality, the new regime's adminstrators in the South found it difficult to persaude urbanites of the advantages of centralized state control over the exchange and

[87] Vietnamese author, journalist, and well-known blogger Trương Huy San (b. 1962), under the penname Huy Đức, published the two-part book *Bên Thắng Cuộc* (The Winning Side) in 2013 while a Fellow at the Neiman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. The book touches upon politically sensitive topics such as the impact of the reeducation camps, discrimination against and persecution of ethnic Chinese, and the ways in which the South may have in fact liberated the North economically (rather than the prevalent public narrative of the North liberating the South from American occupation) after Vietnam's reunification. While the book has not been officially banned, the Vietnamese government has been highly critical of it (Fuller 2013).

distribution of goods. By 1978, Hà Huy Giáp describes the construction of socialism in the South as being far from "inevitable," as it had been previously characterized:

> In the South, American neo-colonialist capitalism had very serious effects on economic, cultural, and social life. A typically American bourgeois ideology was devised and propogated as the "national interest" and "nationalist"; there was an Americanized culture, and for twenty years, the enemy did their best to destroy the fine cultural traditions and revolutionary spirit of our people, to destroy the souls and undermine the human dignity of our compatriots. Besides millions of quislings turned into mercenary soldiers, against the revolution, millions of others were ensnared in the American way of life, namely prostitutes, hooligans, ruffians, drug-addicts, superstitious people. (1978: 17)[88]

As victors in the war, the North also carried out multiple acts of what Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo calls "historical amnesia" (2005:167). The southern capital of Saigon was renamed Hồ Chị Minh City, streets were renamed after a pantheon of national or revolutionary martyrs, monuments and cemeteries of South Vietnam's war dead were demolished and razed, and there was suppression in official narratives and public discourse of the violence inflicted on the South by the North. While not refering directly to the South, the introduction to the play *Tự Án Không Trạng* alludes to inaccurate or incomplete representations in history when describing the intention of the play in its use of a quote from Lao Tzu, spoken by the character Hồng Hiến: "*Tự Hình Không Án Trạng* has borrowed the words of Lao Tzu to shape the destinies of the main characters in these two dynasties [Ngô and Đinh] while at the same time making every effort to give further clarification to the points which history has not yet made clear."[89]

Although emperors Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Lê Hoàn are far more towering figures in Vietnamese history than Đỗ Thích, *Tự Hình Không Án Trạng* focuses its narrative on the lowly Đỗ Thích. Not only is Đỗ Thích the main character of the narrative, the play also offers an

[88] Hà Huy Giáp (1908-1995) was a communist revolutionary who during his lifetime served as vice-minister of the of the ministry of education, vice-minister of the ministry of culture, and director of the research committee of party history (*Đồng Chí Hà Huy Giáp: Mốt Nhà Yêu Nước, Một Người Cộng Sản* [Comrade Hà Huy Giáp: A Patriot and Communist] 2005)

[89] Vở "Tự Hình Không Án Trạng" đã mượn lời của Lão Tử để khắc họa cho số phận các nhân vật chính yếu của hai triều đại này đồng thời cũng cố gắng làm rõ thêm những điều mà lịch sử còn chưa làm rỡ.

alternative interpretation of Đinh Tiên Hoàng's assassination, one in which Đỗ Thích has been unjustly framed. This rarely recounted interpretation of Đinh Tiên Hoàng's death is, in the introduction's estimation, a "clarification" of historical events. The importance of Đỗ Thích's character was also shown in the fact that role was given to the troupe's most experienced and talented actor, Hữu Danh, who was the only member of the troupe to win a gold medal for their performance at the national competition.

The actual Lao Tzu quote spoken by Hồng Hiến is as follows, in the final scene of the play: "Hoạ hề phúc chi sở ý, phúc hề họa chi sở phục" (Adversity is the place on which fortune leans, and fortune is the hiding place of adversity). The introduction continues, stating:

> Fortune and adversity, evil and virtue, are mixed up and confounded. Because of this, the meaning of this play hopes to contribute by adjusting a few points that are not clear in the shared consciousness. Understandings that this play wants to contribute, in order to correct a few points that are not clear in our consciousness, are a new way to evaluate the representations and actions of a number of historical figures from one thousand years ago.[90]

Fortune and adversity are not always what they seem, and historical narratives can be contested by those in the present as well. Just as southern culture had been portrayed as that of an impoverished place oppressed by neo-colonial American occupation, but in reality was part of a cosmopolitan urban center rife with luxury consumer goods, Đỗ Thích, too, has been characterized in various historical accounts as having assassinated Đinh Tiên Hoàng when in "reality" (as depicted by *Tự Hình Không Án Trạng*) he was a loyal friend and protector of the emperor and was executed unjustly. What the North deemed to be a historic "liberation" of the South in 1975 was in fact felt by many southerners to be the initiation of an oppressive force that censored and destroyed a vast array of southern cultural products and erased southern narratives from public discourse.

[90] Phước – họa, chánh – tà đan xen lẫn lộn, do đó những lý giải của vở này cũng chỉ mong góp phần điều chỉnh một số điều còn chưa được chính xác trong nhận thức, cách đánh gía những hình tượng, hành vi của một số nhân vật lịch sử cách nay đã đúng một ngàn năm.

Modernity and Music in the South

Despite the North's exclusion of southern culture from representing a valid form of "modernity" due to the presence of French colonial and neo-colonial influences, the South has long been a heterogenous place full of hybridizations and transmutations. As social scientist Huynh Ngoc Trang describes it, the paradox of the South was that nothing could be found in its original form. Both indigenous culture and diverse imports were subject to constant transformations. According to Huynh, the culture of the central Vietnamese provinces of Thuận-Quang had formed the basis of Southern culture, since most early immigrants to the South were from this region. Thus, from the very beginning, Southern culture diverged from that of the Red River delta in the North, featuring substantial influences from the Indianised culture of the indigenous Cham people, as well as the folk culture of the central coast migrants, many of whom came from non-elite social classes (Huynh 1992: 59).

Rather than settling in concentrated clusters by the Red River delta, southern settlements were scattered across the streams and canals of the southern plain. Due to the sparseness of the population, settlers were highly hospitable towards newcomers of all ethnic backgrounds and social classes who could contribute scarce labor resources. This led to a cultural climate of openness and uncertainty towards tradition. The region also saw the early emergence of the major urban center Gia Định (now within the city limits of Hồ Chí Minh City), which was a "fascinating beacon" for a way of life unfamiliar to many Vietnamese: "The customs of this urban area were seen as truly fashionable and they represented an entirely different order of luxury to the ancient refinements and the rural lifestyle" (Huynh 1992: 63). According to Huynh, the southern region had already incorporated a multi-racial confluence of cultural currents and hybridization a hundred years prior to French colonization (65). In the 1940s, heterogenous

thinking about modernity in the South already existed, with Hoa Hào millenarian Buddhism, the religious universalism of Cao Đài,[91] and the Saigon café scene in which Phan Chu Trinh's reformist ideas, self-reliance, neo-traditionalism, anarchism, non-communist nationalism, and Japanese-influenced Pan-Asianism were discussed (Philip Taylor 2001: 19).

For Huynh, the musical theater form *cải lương* typified southern culture in its synthesis of diverse musical and theatrical genres, its costume styles, and plots drawn from varied eras and places all over the globe, as well as its intrinsic characteristic of constant transformation:

> *Cải lương's* quality of acceptance on no fixed principles could possibly be viewed as mere mixture, yet from a different, more open and positive perspective, this characteristic signifies what is typcial about the South—a crossroads with doors always open to waves from all the four corners of the earth from the time of its first settlement to today. (Huynh 1991: 69)

Other examples of the ecclecticism of southern culture such as urban cosmopolitanism and the development of the syncretic Cao Đài religion were viewed not as legacies of colonial times, but rather as evidence of the region's essential qualities of dynamism and cultural ferment at work since the beginning of Vietnamese settlement in the area.

Music was perceived by the North to be an effective scheme in the US strategy of psychological warfare in South Vietnam. According to Vietnamese musicologist Cuu Long Giang, melody was exploited as a sensual payout in the neo-colonial libidinal economy, where the regime could "buy the population's political indifference or ethical neutralisation in return for melodic satiety" (Philip Taylor 2001: 48). Cuu believed that the danger of music existed in its subtle capacity to paralyze struggle through the medium of sound: "This kind of music incited an embittered or vacuous state of mind. . . . Even deadlier, by various flirtations and lulling (*ru ngũ*) sounds (*âm thanh*) this variety of music also aimed to express a content preventing every

[91] See the documentary *The Left Eye of God: Caodaism Travels from Vietnam to California* (Hoskins and Hoskins 2008) for a portrait of how the syncretic Cao Đài religion (incorporating European figures such as Victor Hugo and Jeanne d'Arc, along with religious figures such as Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, and Confucius into its rituals) has continued to develop in immmigrant congregations.

exertion and paralyzing the energy to struggle . . . it prevented all exertion in a great number of people whose oppression was subtle and even tolerable (Cuu 1976: 42). Other official critics saw the combination of sensuality and anti-communist ideology as a dangerous form of neo-colonial culture:

> Another innovation of the anti-communist literati was to seek ways to mix poisons of reaction and decadence together in the same work. It would be very advantageous if reactionary contents could be introduced into decadent works in a certain dosage or another. That would be doubly dangerous, for it would at the same time be poisonous with regard to thought, sentiment, and the soul, or in other words both reactionary-ize [*phản đồng hóa*] those who have been poisoned and animalize [*thú vật hóa*] them with regard to their souls and way of life. (Thach Phương and Tran Huu Ta 1977: 48)

Because of its association with dangerous neo-colonial culture, the commodity market of pop music in the South was discredited as a signifier of "civilization" or the "modern," and was rather seen as "psycological weapons applied methodically to extinguish the qualities of citizenship held as normal in the North during war time" (Philip Taylor 2001: 54).

The southern Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe was the last state-sponsored troupe to be formed (1978) and does not receive as much financial support or opportunities for international performances when compared with the National Tuồng Theatre based in the North. The actors in the Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe, especially in recent years, have generally received fewer of the prestigous awards in state-sponsored national competitions. Yet, the troupe is very proud of their closeness to the social practices of the Southern people, specifically rituals during the *Lễ Kỳ Yên* festival that takes place annually in communal *đình* temples, especially the *Lễ Xay Chầu* ritual, in which *hát bội* performances are integral in portraying humanity's relationship with the natural world.[92] A significant portion of the Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe's activities, namely the *Lễ Kỳ Yên*

[92] The *Lễ Xây Chầu* ritual has six parts, sometimes with an additional seventh, all of which are performed by *hát bội* artists in the local village's community temple (*đình*) on the second day of the *Lễ Kỳ Yên* festival. Each part of the *Lễ Xây Chầu* represents an aspect of humanity's relationship with the universe. The first part depicts the creation of the universe (*Khai Thiên Tịch Địa*), the second represents the sun and the moon's orbits (*Xang Nhật Nguyệt*), the third personifies luck, prosperity, and longevity (*Tam Tài*), the fourth shows the four kings of heaven representing each cardinal direction (*Tứ Thiên Vương*), the fifth represents the earth and four seasons (Đứng Cái), the sixth depicts

rituals, take place outside the state's required performances, which are offically screened and approved before occuring.

Stylistically, contemporary *hát bội* in the South is often percieved to be more diverse in its influences when compared to other regional *hát bội* practices, with its incorporation of elements from *cải lương* musical theater, *hồ quảng* musical theater, and music of the ethnic Chàm people. The Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe was the only troupe during the national competition to utilize the *đàn phím,* an electric guitar with scalloped frets to allow for pitch bending, which is part of the standard musical ensemble in the relatively recent musical theater genre *cải lương*. The Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe has also participated in several experimental *hát bội* plays such as *Sanh Vì Tướng, Tử Vì Thần*, in which no words, only music, choreographed movements, staging, and lighting were utiltized to express its narrative (performed at the 2007 National Festival of Experimental Theater); *Người Cáo*, a retelling set in contemporary times of the classic *hát bội* play *Hồ Nguyệt Cô Hoá Cáo*; and adaptations of two Shakespeare plays in collaboration with Cliff Moustafe (Norway) and Khải Thư Nguyễn (US): *Romeo and Juliet* and *Another Midsummer Night's Dream in Hồ Chí Minh City*.

During the performance of *Tự Hình Không Án Trạng* in the national competition, the Hồ Chí Minh Hát Bội Troupe also repeatedly used what would be considered in Western art music "extended techniques," or unconventional timbres that are often unmetered and atonal, throughout the play. The Hồ Chí Minh Troupe used these "extended techniques" quite frequently when compared to other *hát bội* troupes, with most troupes omitting this Western-influenced musical technique completely. One of the most striking uses of these unusual timbres was in the final scene of the play, in which the spirit of the deceased Đỗ Thích returns to visit his wife.

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eight fairies who present offerings to the village (*Bát Tiên*), and the optional seventh part is a representation of a happy buddha who brings joy to villagers (*Gia Quan Tấn Tước*) (interview with Phan Nga, April 2, 2013).

When his spirit performed any actions in the material world, such as invisibly throwing Hồng Hiến's joss sticks across the stage, an electric guitar tremelo, an electrically amplified *đàn bầu* in the low register and a cymbal tremolo were combined to create a wavering, chromatic texture similar to sounds found in early Hollywood horror film scores. This sound is uncharacteristic of traditional *hát bội* music and traditional Vietnamese music in general (see example 5.1 for transcription). Another musical cue that evokes sounds conventionally associated with Western musical elements is when Hồng Hiến plots to kill Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and his son, Đinh Liễn, while laughing maniacally together with a low electric bass line that outlines a progression of close minor intervals, creating a chromaticism that is uncharacteristic of traditional Vietnamese music (see example 5.2 for transcription).[93]

While more eclectic in its musical influences, the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe is the most conservative troupe in some of its other performance and transmission practices. For example, the Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe is the only state-sponsored troupe that does not transcribe its music into Western notation. This lack of transcriptions may be in part the reason why the Hồ Chí Minh Troupe does not transpose male and female vocal parts into more comfortable ranges the way all other state-sponsored troupes do. The original untranscribed vocal melodies (which are in the same range for both male and female roles) is perceived to be more authentic to traditional *hát bội*, but more difficult for contemporary audiences to listen to as well as being more difficult to perform and to learn. The Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe is also the only state-sponsored troupe that still maintains a strict traditional method of oral transmission without using Western musical notation when training younger performers. These conservative

[93] The Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe has also participated in the 2007 experimental *hát bội* play *Sanh Vì Tướng Tử Vì Thần* (Born as General, Death for the People), which uses only music and gestures (no singing or words) to convey the meaning and emotions of the story. The play was an attempt to bring *hát bội* to the attention of foreign audiences in a more accessible way.

techniques and methodologies as well as the usage of the term *hát bội* were often cited by troupe members as reasons why the Hồ Chí Minh City Troupe and southern *hát bội* performance practices in general were more "authentic" to the roots of traditional *hát bội* than northern or central *tuồng* performance practices.

Đỗ Thích and Ghosts of Vietnam

Discussing post-war politics, Katherine Verdery examines how dead bodies have posthumous political life in the service of creating a newly meaningful universe, instituting ideas of normality, accountability, punishment, and the ability to reconfigure communities that people participate in (1999: 126-127). Writing about inter-war Germany, Walter Benjamin similarly discusses historical memory as a theater of living fragments of the past that haunt the present (2005). Through an examination of ghosts, we might be able to understand how living social actors express their collective existence and personal aspirations through the actions of "deceased" imaginary beings, who are often considered, in conventional social theory, to be conceptually outside the domain of social order. Ghosts may be on the margins of socially revered spiritual deities, yet they are still constitutive of order in social life and ideas that inform our understanding of wider moral and political issues (Kwon 2008: 3).

One example of how dead bodies have come alive in post-Vietnam War politics was during then president Bill Clinton's visit to Vietnam in 2000. According to his autobiography, the most memorable location of Clinton's visit was a mud field west of Hanoi that was believed to be the crash site of a F-105 fighter-bomber. At the time of Clinton's visit, the mud field had become a forensic excavation site in search of pilot Captain Evert, one of the many US servicemen listed as "missing in action." Speaking with a local group of villagers hired to help with the excavation, Clinton said, "Once we met here as adversaries. Today we work as partners." The exhumation of

the missing soldier became an important symbolic gesture in the "political burial" of the Vietnam War (Sanger 2000).

In the American memory, death in Vietnam largely meant the death of a soldier (as seen in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial), while in Vietnam, death in the American War was mainly depicted as the death of combatants in official Vietnamese memorial art, cemetaries, and cenotaphs. However, in reality, death during this conflict could have been anyone for the Vietnamese—young, old, male, female, combatant or non-combatant, of communist or anti-communist sympathies (Kwon 2007: 14). Another example of the ways in which death has been depicted or ommitted historically is in the narratives of Cold War scholarship. The idea of the Cold War as an "imaginary war," based on the idea of avoiding actual war through competitive readiness for war, is a paradigm based on North American and European experiences in the second half of the twentieth century that contradicts how the wider non-Western and post-colonial world experienced the same era with a series of civil wars and other forms of organized political violence (Westad 2005: 2). Scholarship of this period has not paid much attention to the reality of tragic mass deaths that occurred outside Europe and North America (Kwon 2007: 4).

In Vietnam, until recently, ghost stories were strongly discouraged from being discussed in public spaces; at times such discussion was even deemed unlawful and punished, but ghost stories have been increasingly tolerated in more recent years (Kwon 2007: 11). The state's rejection of war ghosts is understandable, as modern nation-states require a hierarchy of value in war death to establish its legitimacy (Mosse 1990, Hobsbawm 1983, Gillis 1994). But it is difficult to introduce a hierarchical system into the ghost world, where the difference between combatants and civilians, and between heroic and tragic deaths, that are distinguished so clearly in official media, are marginal and at times irrelevant in popular ghost narratives. Foreign or Vietnamese ghosts, hero or villain ghosts, are not distinguished in Vietnamese ritual interactions

with ghosts (Kwon 25-26). This ability for domestic rituals to fill in the gaps left by rigid state commemoration rites in tandem with the onset of economic reforms in Vietnam has provoked a revival of village-centered commemorative rituals for the dead across local Vietnamese communities, as has happened in Taiwan and some parts of China (Tai 2001, Feuchtwang 2001, Jing 1997, Mueggler 2001).

In the closing scene of *Tự Hình Không Án Trạng*, Đỗ Thích's wife is visited by her husband's ghost on the one-year anniversary of his death. She is dressed in white, the color of mourning in Vietnamese culture, and has a *khăn tang* tied around her head, as is customary of the mourning family members of the deceased. Kneeling in front of the ancestral altar, she describes how pain still cuts her in the gut and pierces her bones, and adds that each passing day is heavier with the burden of her husband's memory, while each night she is boiling with silent anger.[94] She says that she wishes she could die to be with her husband. At that moment, Đỗ Thích's spirit steps out from the curtain and appears behind the altar, invisible to his wife but seen by the audience. His face is pale white and he is also dressed in all white. As he appears, the *đàn bầu,* electric guitar, and cymbals roll with tremolos, creating a wavering, chromatic sound. She hears his voice, which says that he has been here and there, but has now come home as a lost and crooked soul, with disintegrated flesh and bones full of injustice.

Believing that her husband killed the emperor, Đỗ Thịch's wife does not understand his words. She asks Đỗ Thích why he is full of reproach if he was the one who killed the emperor, with hopes of gaining power. Đỗ Thích is shocked when he realizes his wife has believed the people who framed him. With a blaring *kèn* oboe melody, Đỗ Thích performs *lia* movements (shaking hands and the repeated pivoting of toes and heels to form a "v" shape, then "upside-side down "v" shape, in order to move sideways while maintaining an upright posture) to convey his

[94] Đau dứt ruột, hận thấu xương, ngày nặng mang nỗi nhớ, tối sôi sục hờn căm.

shock, asking his dear wife if she really believes that he killed the emperor. The *kèn* is the most prominent instrument in the *hát bội* ensemble, with its sharp, nasal timbre that can easily be heard above the other instruments. Blaring *kèn* solos are commonly heard during scenes of heightened emotional or dramatic events, to convey shock, grief, anger, disbelief, violence, etc.

Đỗ Thích's wife explains that she doesn't know what else to believe. Everyone has told her that Đỗ Thích fulfilled the prophesy of the emperor's death. Pleading with his wife, Đỗ Thích is able to reach through the material world and physically move her around the stage without ever touching her. He asks her to please help him bear this burden of injustice, as his soul has been restless for a year now. Yet, his own suffering and the suffering of the assassinated emperor still remain. Đỗ Thích tells his wife that he wishes he could die a second time so that he could express his feelings for her. She cannot see her husband but senses his presence and presses her palms in the air as if against a wall, while Đỗ Thích, too, holds up his hands, inches away from hers (see figure 5.7). At that moment, Hồng Hiến appears in the scene, as the wavering tremolo sounds of the *đàn bầu*, electric *đàn phím* guitar, and cymbals abruptly stop.

Đỗ Thích's wife does not recognize Hồng Hiến, asking who the stranger is. Hồng Hiến replies that he was an imperial official serving the same emperor as Đỗ Thích. He has come exactly one year from Đỗ Thích's death in order to pay his respects. Hồng Hiến asks Đỗ Thích's wife if he may burn some candles and incense at the altar, in order to remember the deceased. As he says "the deceased," Hồng Hiến points to the spirit of Đỗ Thích, who is now behind the altar, emphasizing to the audience the physical presence of Đỗ Thích's spirit (see figure 5.8). Đỗ Thích's wife is not moved, but tells Hồng Hiến that in the past year, he is the only person who has visited her husband, so Hồng Hiến should go ahead and do what he needs to do. Hồng Hiến thanks Đỗ Thích's wife, then lights joss sticks to place onto the altar. As Hồng Hiến moves towards the altar, the electronic tremolo sound returns as the spirit of Đỗ Thích raises his arm.

Hồng Hiến is overcome by a physical force that turns his body around and prevents him from placing the joss sticks. Hồng Hiến tries once more to place the joss sticks, but this time is pushed even further across the stage by the supernatural force (see figure 5.9). On the third attempt, the joss sticks are knocked out of Hồng Hiến's hands and fly across the stage as Đỗ Thích raises his hand.

The restless, wandering spirit of the deceased Đỗ Thích is unable to find peace due to the truth of his framing remaining obscured. Because he has been framed by those who are power-hungry for the emperor's throne, Đỗ Thích could be considered what Heonik Kwon calls a "political ghost," a being uprooted from home and excluded from ritual remembrance for political reasons (2007: 21). In the Vietnamese historical imagination, there is a concept of "phantom salt," as illustrated in the well-known proverb "Đời cha ăn mặn, đời con khát nước" (When the father's generation eats salt, the child's generation is thirsty). The desire for water that an individual has is felt in the present, but the origin of this desire may be in the past, as a result of their ancestor's actions. In this way, the thirst of the dead is a material phenomenon that manifests itself in the lives of people living in the present, just as the ghost of Đỗ Thích is able to reach beyond his own death and command a physical presence in the material world.

Hồng Hiến is surprised but not shocked by the presence of Đỗ Thích. He comments that although the door of the house has been closed and locked for a year, somehow, Đỗ Thích's wife has been able to maintain all of the rituals to honor her husband within its walls. She replies that it is the obligation of a wife to her husband, but that she does not use words as eloquently as Hồng Hiến. She asks Hồng Hiến how he is able to use such respectful words, when her husband was the victim of his murderous scheme (*ám hại*). Hồng Hiến laughs at Đỗ Thích's wife, and asks her why she remains so bitter towards him. However respectful Hồng Hiến's own words are, Đỗ Thích is gone, regardless. Hồng Hiến says that he is there to genuinely honor Đỗ Thích and

to praise the bravery and courage of his wife, since she has stood by her husband for an entire year. Đỗ Thích's wife asks if Hông Hiến means to insinuate that she is in danger, and should have fled her home by now in order to avoid death. When Hồng Hiên replies yes, Đỗ Thích's wife defiantly tells him that he and his men should go ahead and accomplish their mission (i.e. kill her).

Hồng Hiến is amused, calling Đỗ Thích's wife strange for treating life and death as if they were a game. Full of resentment, she responds that what is more strange is how Hồng Hiến would frame her husband for such a crime, and meanwhile, a year has passed, and she wants to die, but still cannot die. Hồng Hiến laughs, telling Đỗ Thích's wife that she must remember that anyone in her husband's situation would have died, because men kill each other in seeking the peak of wealth and fame. But if he were to kill her, he would gain nothing and lose nothing. He tells her that she should continue to quietly and peacefully live her life. Noticing the plaque hanging on Đỗ Thích's altar, which reads, "Hoạ hề phúc chi sở ý, phúc hề họa chi sở phục" (Adversity is the place on which fortune leans, and fortune is the hiding place of adversity), he says that she must have experienced many things in her life (*thông thái*). Hồng Hiến tells Đỗ Thích's wife that she must understand that the buds of adversity do not grow from chaos, but instead are found easily in peaceful, prosperous times. The happiest times in our lives are the easiest times for us to welcome adversity into our lives.

Đỗ Thích's wife rebuts this, saying that she did not hang the plaque only for herself to reflect on, but also for others to do so. She tells Hồng Hiến that through his actions, he has shown her that the story of her country today is not so different from the story of his country, and that he should remember this. She speaks of the Coup of Chen Bridge (Binh Biến Trần Kiều) in China, in which foreign invaders were repelled and a young child emperor was cast aside (*phế đi*) in order to raise a new emperor's cape (*long bào*) to wish a long life to the ascending emperor

Triệu Khuông Dẫn (趙匡胤, Zhao Kuangyin).[95] Đỗ Thích's wife says that this historical situation is no different from their present time. She tells Hồng Hiến that he has performed his international relations like the plot of a *tuồng* play, moving people like pawns across a chess board with a clear strategy. Is that not worth praising? she asks.[96]

By now, Hồng Hiến realizes that Đỗ Thích's wife is well aware of his role in the death of Đỗ Thịch, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, and Đinh Liễn. He calls her a "talented and dangerous" (*lợi hại*) woman, but praises her understanding of events. However, he wants to remind her of another saying from the past, which is that intelligent (*khôn*) people die, reckless (*dại*) people die, while only people who know (*biết*) are able to survive. Hồng Hiến tells her that in this story of the present, she has been both intelligent and reckless, knowing, but still not knowing enough. Laughing, Hồng Hiến asks her, if she has allowed him to see what she knows, how can she now stay alive? Đỗ Thích's wife is unfazed, telling Hồng Hiến that he has exposed his true nature to her (*bộc lộ hết chân tướng*).

Hồng Hiến tells Đỗ Thích's wife that since she is about to die, he will allow her to know one more thing. In his country (China) in the "old days" (*ngày xưa*), people were already willing to sell out their emperor in order to gain wealth and power (*buôn vua để cầu được vinh sang tột đỉnh*). Laughing, he asks her if she sees that today, the act of killing the emperor is even more simple and easy. Still defiant, Đỗ Thích's wife tells Hồng Hiến that he is the one who needs to die. She attacks him with a bottle of wine, and he counterattacks with a knife, but is thrown off

[95] The Coup of Chen Bridge that Đỗ Thích's wife mentions took place in 960 AD, nineteen years before the death by poisoning of Đinh Tiên Hoàng and his son in 979. The two event had some parallels, with seven-year-old Guo Zongxun inheriting the Later Zhou throne, just as the young Đinh Hạng Lang was heir to the throne before being killed by his brother. Guo Zongxun was dethroned when Zhao Kuanyin (趙匡胤, Triệu Khương Dẫn), a military governor at the time, was proclaimed emperor during a midnight mutiny carried out by his own troops (Paludan 1998: 122-123).

[96] Chuyện đại sư quốc gia mà ông diễn như là tuồng hát. Ông điều khiển con người ở đây như những con cờ theo bài bản ở xứ ông, thì không giỏi hay sao?

her in the same way he was thrown when attempting to place the joss sticks on the altar, complete with the same *đàn bầu*, electric *đàn phím* guitar, and cymbal tremolo effects. Hồng Hiến hands Đỗ Thích's wife over to his soldiers and tells them that if he finds her alive later, they will all die at his hands.

Before she is slain by the soldiers, Đỗ Thích's wife speaks to her husband, asking him to hear her regrets a thousand times. She tells him that her first sin was when she stopped him from resigning his imperial position, since this was essentially the same as leading him to his death. The second sin Đỗ Thịch's wife recounts is that a full year after her husband's death, she still carried doubts about his loyal nature. She tells her husband that looking into the face of Hồng Hiến now, she now sees clearly. She knows that her husband kept his obligations and loyalty with a clear and true conscience, and that he is still as complete a hero as he was before, without ever wavering. Because of these two sins, Đỗ Thích's wife says that she deserves to die one thousand times. The soldiers then surround her and kill her with their swords, and she joins her husband behind the altar, now a ghost herself (see figure 5.10).

The narrative of *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* not only offers an alternative interpretation of a well-known historical event, the play's closing scene also allows the dead Đỗ Thịch to speak, be remembered, and even interact with the physical world of the living. In Vietnamese culture, ghosts are understood to be separate from ancestors, as ghosts have undergone unnatural, premature, painful or violent deaths, or have died in a way in which their families cannot perform the proper burial and death anniversary rituals needed for the deceased to be honored and remembered as ancestors (for example, because of an unknown time or place of death, or an unretrievable body). In the case of Đỗ Thích, he became a ghost due to his unjust execution. Ghosts in Vietnam are far from being merely ideas of history. They have concrete historical

identities that belong to the past, yet are believed to continue to exist in the present in a way that is empirical rather than allegorical (Kwon 2008: 2).[97]

As noted previously, the war dead of the South were not accorded the same respect as those who had fought in favor of the communist revolution by the victors of the war. Families in south and central Vietnam have been torn between familial obligations to attend the memories of their war dead through kinship rituals and the political obligation to refrain from commemorating those who fought against the communist revolution. Even the act of inviting the spirit of one's brother who died fighting on the losing side into a domestic ritual can become at once a moral and political practice (Kwon 2008: 159). The expression of deep regret by Đỗ Thích's wife for failing to meet her obligation to remember and honor her husband as a loyal protector and true friend of the emperor is framed as a similar injustice of memory that allows his ghost to haunt the present. The Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe's depiction of Đỗ Thích returning as a ghost calls attention to the ways that the dead of the past haunt the living in the present, and how local kinship rituals hold an important role in remembering and honoring the dead when state commemorations fail to do so.

Evaluations of *Tự Hình Không Án Trạng* and the Dynamics of State Sponsorship

In the national competition, *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* won more medals for performances by individual actors than any other troupe (one gold medal and six silver medals, for a total of seven). However, the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe did not win any medals for the ensemble, director, stage designer, playwright, or composer. The Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội

[97] Countless ghost stories exist in Vietnamese folklore, as well as in popular culture. Examples include the film *When The Tenth Month Comes* (1984) by Vietnam's most influential and well-known director, Đạng Nhật Minh; the well-known folktale *Tấm Cám,* which has parallels to *Cinderella* by the Brothers Grimm (in the Vietnamese version the main character Tấm is killed by her stepsister and returns as a ghost for revenge); and more recently, the collection of short stories set in Hanoi and the diasporic community of the US titled *The Frangipani Hotel* (2014) by Vietnamese American author Violet Kupersmith, based on Vietnamese ghost tales.

Troupe used notably fewer props on stage, no background scenery, and hardly any large scale choreography. This may in part be due to the troupe receiving less financial support from the state than other state-sponsored troupes, but is also a reflection of the troupe's attempt to maintain the bare-stage aesthetic of traditional *hát bội*. While the judges' panel criticized other performances for the over-use of scenery and literal use of props due to their distracting from the performances of the actors, no such complaints were lodged against *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng.* Hoàng Chương, a judge at the competition and the director of the Center for Research, Preservation, and Development of National Culture, praised the actors' individual performances in an article written shortly after the competition:

> The actors of the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe in this play have kept the traditional Southern region's style of *hát bội*, with a few places that sound similar to *cải lương*, or a bit of *Triều – Quảng*. The actors gave everything and performed outstandingly, making every effort to express clearly the personalities of each character through their regional style of singing and gestures traditional to Southern *hát bội*. Because of this, if anyone was not familiar with Southern *hát bội*, it would be difficult for them to appreciate fully the attractive qualities of this *tuồng* play.[98]

The director of *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng*, "Outstanding Artist" Trần Ngọc Giàu, is a well-known spoken word theatrical director, whom the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe asked to direct the play for the competition. Trần does not regularly direct *hát bội* plays, and is not a performer of *hát bội* himself. Hoàng Chương noted the effective techniques that Trần brought to the *hát bội* stage from spoken theater, but wrote that in a few places it was "not yet truly a *tuồng* play."[99]

There was also a notably increased complexity in the characters of *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* when compared to the more clearly delineated (good/bad, patriot/traitor, virtuous/corrupt) characters in the plays performed by the National Tuồng Theatre and the Đào Tấn Tuồng

[98] Diễn viên hát bội Tp. Hồ Chí Minh trong vở này vẫn giữ phong cách tuồng (hát bội) Nam Bộ xưa có đôi chỗ hơi giống cải lương, hoặc một ít lai tuồng Triều - Quảng. Đặc biệt diễn viên đã diễn hết mình, cố gắng làm rõ tính cách từng nhân vật bằng lối hát và múa đặc trưng hát bội Nam Bộ xưa, vì vậy nếu ai chưa quen xem hát Bội Nam Bộ thì cũng khó cảm thụ được hết cái hay của vở tuồng này.

[99] Còn đôi chỗ chưa thật là tuồng.

Theatre. In *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* we see glimpses of the complicated inner lives of characters. We see that Ngô Ngọc Khánh does not want to be emperor, yet feels obligated to take hold of power since in his mind he is the rightful Ngô heir; we see his ambivalence towards his wife whom he loves for her beauty, but is resentful towards because of her father; we see that Đinh Liễn feigns sadness while secretly celebrating the death of his own younger brother, and we see him struggle with his loyalty towards his father while at the same time coveting the crown and its power for himself. Hoàng Chương notes this complexity in the play:

> Playwright Trương Huyền in the play *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* has recounted a historical event full of drama in the Đinh family, with a climax of emperor Đinh and others being murdered. Because this historical setting is full of contradictions, upheavals, conflicts, full of complexities, the author brings many complications to the stage, but the contradictions of the characters are not fully understood and are difficult to watch by the audience, who may not understand the author's artistic intentions. (Hoàng Chương 2013)[100]

The Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Theatre was the last of the state-sponsored troupes to be formed, two years after reunification in 1977, but the troupe had been active independently before receiving state support. Due to its late emergence as a state sanctioned-entity, in addition to the relatively poor funding it receives from the state, performances by the Hồ Chí Minh City Hát Bội Troupe appear to be less tightly bound to the familiar narratives and tropes that are commonly found in official discourses when compared to the National Tuồng Theatre and the Đào Tấn Tuồng Theatre. This lack of adherence to narratives and tropes commonly utilized by state apparatuses may be the reason for the Hồ Chí Minh City Theater Troupe's lack of medals in the national competition. Through its depiction of the unjustly executed ghost of Đỗ Thích and by offering an alternative interpretation of a well-known historical event, *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng* is able to subtly subvert the dominance of state-sanctioned commemorative rituals for the

[100] Tác giả Trương Huyền với vở Tử hình không án trạng đã phản ánh một hiện thực lịch sử đầy biến động trong nội bộ nhà Đinh và cao điểm là vua Đinh cùng nhiều bộ hạ bị sát hại. Vì bối cảnh thời kỳ lịch sử đầy những mâu thuẫn, biến cố, xung đột, đầy những chuyện rắc rối, nên tác giả đưa lên sân khấu nhiều rắc rối nhưng lại thiếu mâu thuẫn giữa các phe phái mà chưa lý giải hết được, nên người xem có phần khó hiểu ý đồ nghệ thuật của tác giả.

dead and question the validity of official historical narratives.[101]

[101] This is is my own interpretation, which was not explicitly supported by interviews with troupe members or administrators, as admission of this would likely not be looked on favorably by the state. However, in informal, off-the-record conversations, musicians and artists have spoken about the necesity to find indirect ways, which are open to ambiguous interpretations, to veil criticism of the state.

Figure 5.1. Đỗ Thích (right) catches Đinh Liễn (left) celebrating the death of his younger half-brother, Đinh Hạng Lang. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 24, 2013)

Figure 5.2. Ngô Ngọc Khanh holds the dead body of his wife, Lan Dung, whom he has slashed in the face and killed. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 24, 2013).

Figure 5.3. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh confronts his son, Đinh Liễn, about whether he covets his father's throne. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 24, 2013).

Figure 5.4. Đinh Liễn tries on his father's crown as Đinh Bộ Lĩnh begins to succumb to the poisoned wine. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 24, 2013)

Figure 5.5. Dương Hậu mourns the death of her husband and son. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, May 24, 2013)

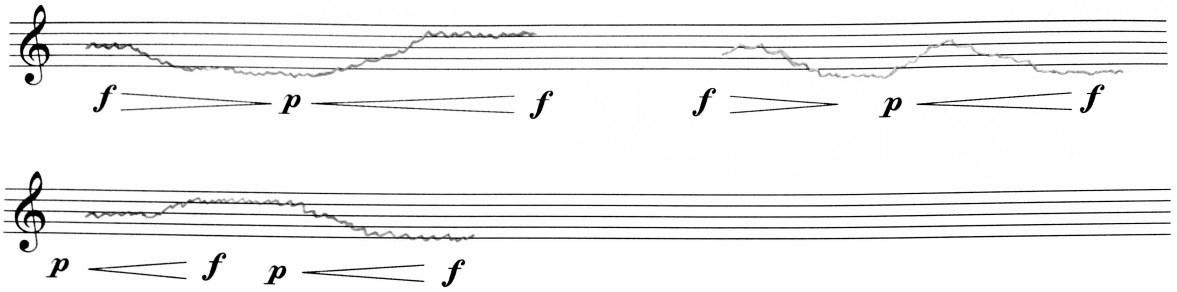
Figure 5.6. Dương Hậu sees Đỗ Thích's name engraved on the knife that stabbed the deceased concubine (in pink). Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and Đinh Liễn lie dead in the center, Đỗ Thích to the far right, and Lê Hoàn to the far left. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 24, 2013).

Figure 5.7. Đỗ Thích and his wife raise their hands across from each other. Đỗ Thích's wife cannot see her husband, but feels his presence. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 24, 2013)

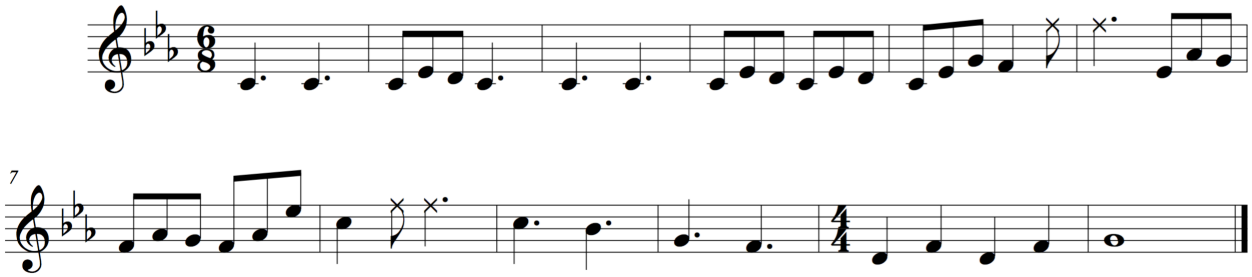
Figure 5.8. Hồng Hiến points his fan at the invisible Đỗ Thích when saying "the deceased," calling attention to Đỗ Thích's physical presence. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 24, 2013)

Figure 5.9. Hồng Hiến's joss sticks are thrown in the air by Đỗ Thích's ghost. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 24, 2013)

Figure 5.10. Đỗ Thích is joined by his wife behind the ancestral altar after she is killed by Hồng Hiến's men. (Photo by Quỳnh Lan Dương, May 24, 2013)



Example 5.1. Transcription of wavering *đàn bầu* and electric guitar musical cue used to depict Đỗ Thích's physical presence. Each phrase aligns with one attempt by Hồng Hiến to place joss sticks on the altar, but is pushed away by Đỗ Thích's ghost. (Transcription by Kim Nguyen Tran)



Example 5.2. Transcription of bass line played by electric guitar as Hồng Hiến plots to poison Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and Đinh Liễn. The chromaticism of the minor intervals outlined is uncharacteristic of traditional *hát bội* melodic lines. (Transcription by Kim Nguyen Tran)

ACT IV: THE LITTLE SAIGON HÁT BỘI TROUPE

The Politics of Memory in the Vietnamese Refugee Community

In the mainstream American historical consciousness, the Vietnam War ended with the "Fall of Saigon" and the withdrawal of the US military from the Vietnam on April 30, 1975. But the legacy of that war continues on in myriad ways within the everyday lives of millions of Vietnamese refugees, now far flung across the globe. The American military's engagment with the conflict and the ways in which the US participates in and dominates the "industry of memory" surrounding the conflict has created an enviroment for refugees with unique social and cultural forces that do not exist in the other nations where Vietnamese refugees have resettled.[102] Caroline Kieu-Linh Valverde has described a model of "triple domination" to descibe the ways in which overlapping structural forces shape the identity and influence the actions of many Vietnamese refugeees and the subsequent generations of Vietnamese Americans in the US (Valverde 2002).

The first force in this model concerns issues of assimilation and the psychological and socio-cultural implications of becoming an American citizen. This includes an acceptance of not only laws and regulations that govern citizens, but also certain "nation-building myths," which include a belief in the American Dream ideas of socieconomic mobility through hard work, civil liberties, freedom, individualism, and independence, and the remnants of a Cold War mentality against communism. The second force is the overarching ideology of anti-communism that exists within the Vietnamese American community, especially among the first generation of refugees who have faced an erasure of their histories as former members of the defeated side in the civil

[102] For a comparative study of the Vietnamese American and French Vietnamese communities and the differences in how anti-communism manifests itself in cultural works, see Jane Le Skaife's 2013 dissertation "Transnational Tightrope: A Cross-National Study of Vietnamese in France and the United States."

war, South Vietnam. There is a desire to reiterate these erased personal stories and experiences of trauma in the refugee community that often expresses itself in displays of anti-communism embedded within cultural productions. This hard stance has softened over the years, but there remains a vocal minority within the community that believes that any relations with Vietnam would constitute support of communism and be an act of betrayal of South Vietnam's legacy. The "silent majority," consisting of the younger generation, but also some older first-generation refugees, feels this pressure and must find ways to resist the dictates of the minority while dodging the communist label, often resulting in acts of self-censorship in cultural production.

The third force is the growing reality of current-day Vietnam (rather than a nostalgic, pre-1975 idealistic imagaining of the nation) as a possible "homeland" and cultural center, especially after the economic and societal *Đổi Mới* reforms of the 1980s. In more recent years, leaders and politicians have began to include *Việt Kiều* (overseas Vietnamese) in Vietnam's national discourses, praising *Việt Kiều* and calling on them to return to rebuild their "homeland" through technical training, remittances, and other investments. While navigating these three forces in their everday lives, the Vietnamese American refugee community also finds itself imagined as "a victim of communism" in need of rescue in many of the public discourses and American commemorations of the Vietnam War, which maintain the symbolic capital of the US as "democratic savior," and ultimately justifies US involvement in the civil conflict (Dương 2011: 49).

As Karin Aguilar-San Juan writes, "in certain undeniable ways, this dominant memory [in the US] is achieved with a carefully measured dose of forgetting—at the expense of Vietnamese people" (2009: 67). Not only is this dominant narrative constructed by *remembering* events of the past, there is an active *forgetting*, or what Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo calls "historical amnesia," that takes place (2005: 165). Nguyen-Vo describes the historical memories of three

groups, "the victors" (the current Vietnamese government), "the progressives," and the "empire builders."

As the victors in a civil war, the current Vietnamese government has suppressed public discussion of violence inflicted upon South Vietnamese by northern troops, and has committed physical acts of erasure by demolishing statues and cemeteries dedicated to South Vietnamese soldiers, in addition to reinscribing streets, city, and institution names with a pantheon of national heroes, such as Hồ Chí Minh. In the US, progressives on the Left branded South Vietnamese puppets of US imperialism, erasing any legitimate position for those in the South acting in the extremely complex realities of war. Thus, any acts of anticommunism in the US by Vietnamese refugees were seen as reactionary, while the violence of post-war policies of dislocation and imprisonment was often neglected. On the other hand, the conservative Right in the US, or what Nguyen-Vo terms the "empire builders," have retooled the collective Vietnamese immigrant narrative into one of assimilation by model minority citizens living the American Dream, in order to justify US involvement in Vietnam (and other wars). Yen Le Espiritu calls this the "we-win-even-when-we-lose" syndrome, which represents Vietnamese immigrants as the grateful beneficiaries of US-style democracy, and makes the war, no matter what the cost, ultimately necessary, just, and successful (2006).[103]

As Nguyen-Vo writes, "It should not surprise anyone that Vietnamese Americans would want to remember amidst all that forgetting. One does not become recognizably human until one acts in one's history. And for that, one needs to have a history" (2005: 159). Vo Dang argues that cultural production and the examination of its multiple dimensions can "call into being" the

[103] For discussion of the central myths surrounding the Vietnam War, which have excluded women, black Americans and the Vietnamese in literature, popular music, visual arts, photojournalism, and cinema, see the essay collection *Tell Me Lies About Vietnam,* (Louvre and Walsh 1988). Also see Dittmar and Michaud 2000 for the appropriation of the Vietnam War by the American culture industry in documentary films, television reporting, and Hollywood films.

ommissions in previous historical constructions of Vietnamese diasporic identities (2008: 49). Rather than viewing anticommunism as a reactionary politics, Vo Dang presents it as a cultural praxis that manifests itself in Vietnamese American cultural productions as a platform upon which Vietnamese refugees have "performatively charted the terrain of refugee subjectivity and social belonging, as well as a forum for authoring alternative truths in tension with national histories in Vietnam and the US" (2005: 3).[104]

In order to understand the ways in which the Vietnamese American community contests these "truths," we must examine "unlikely archives, unexpected places where power has left an indelible mark, and rethink the ways that those on the ground negotiate with power in their daily lives" (Vo Dang 2005: 22). I argue that contemporary performances of *hát bội*, especially when embedded within mainstream cultural events such as Lunar New Year Tết Festivals, are one of these "unlikely archives" in which the unrecognized narratives and experiences of Vietnamese Americans can be "called into being." This "unlikely archive" of *hát bội* performance can also act as a mode of transmission for maintaining in future generations, who may not have not experienced war first-hand, what Mariane Hirsch calls "postmemory," a form of memory that gains its power not through recollection but rather through mediation, imaginative investment, and creation (1996).

Origins of the Little Saigon *Hát Bội* Troupe and its Debut Performance

The leader of the *hát bội* troupe in based in Little Saigon of southern California is Ms. Dương Ngọc Bầy (see figure 6.1). Dương Ngọc Bầy graduated with the first class of *hát bội*

[104] Dang's groundbreaking scholarship on anti-communism was vital in understanding the cultural politics of the Vietnamese American community. As Polish-American historian Thaddeus Radzilowski notes, the subject of anti-communism has often been avoided by academic scholars: "those who study ethnic and immigration history are rarely interested in anti-communism or treat it as a kind of embarrassment" (2009: 15).

students at the Saigon National School of Music in 1964 (renamed Hồ Chí Minh City Music Conservatory after 1975), and joined the faculty there in 1967. She taught *hát bội* here until 1975, when the school was restructured and the theater department was moved to the College for Theater and Cinematography. She remained on the *hát bội* faculty in the new theater department until her immigration to the United States in 1992, with twenty-five years of teaching experience. Bầy's endless enthusiasm and energy for her art form is inspiring, especially as she is now in her seventies. Although after arriving in the US she worked as a medical aide in order to support herself and her family, she has actively given lectures, held workshops and classes, and led performances of *hát bội* throughout the southern California area, especially since retirement in 2006. After holding a workshop on *hát bội* at UCLA in 2005, Bầy was encouraged by Barbara Gaerlan (assistant director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at UCLA) and Yoshiko Okazaki (then a visiting scholar in the Department of Ethnomusicology at UCLA) to hold regular classes for students and the wider community.

With assistance from the Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association (VAALA), Bẩy was awarded a Kenneth Picerne Foundation Artist Outreach Grant in 2008 and an Alliance for California Traditional Arts Living Cultures Grant in 2013 in order to support her *hát bội* classes and performances. Although the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe peforms regularly throughout the year, I have chosen two particular performances for my analysis, both of which occurred in the context of a Lunar New Year Tết celebration: the troupe's debut show after only six months of classes on February 21, 2010, and the troupe's performance for the Vietnamese Language and Culture (VNLC) club's student-organized Tết Festival at UCLA in 2014.

The debut performance of the troupe in 2010 was a milestone for *hát bội* development outside Vietnam. At that time and at the time of this writing, this group remains the only *hát bội* troupe actively performing outside Vietnam. Although recordings of *hát bội* were available in the

diasporic communtiy, the 2010 debut performance ended a forty-year absence of live *hát bội* in the Vietnamese refugee community. Most Vietnamese refugees in the United States fled from south Vietnam, where there is a strong tradition of social practices, especially the *Lễ Kỳ Yên* festival and *Lễ Xay Chầu* rituals, that are closely tied to *hát bội* performances. The troupe's performance at UCLA was notable in that there was a collaboration between Dương Ngọc Bầy and the students who organized the VNLC Tết Festival in planning the drama section of the celebration. I argue that these two performances of *hát bội*, among many others, are an example of what Karin Aguilar-San Juan calls "strategic memory projects" that are "carefully designed plans for thinking about the past, [that] select, preserve, or generate anew memories with an eye towards their potential uses in the present" (Aguilar-San Juan 2009: 64).

The Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe's debut performance attracted the attention of several local television and radio stations, newspapers, and an enthusiastic audience of around 200 community members. This debut performance for the eleven-person fledgling troupe after only six months of study was the first of many performances to come; the troupe is now performs regularly at venues such as the Institute of Vietnamese Studies, Buddhist pagodas during festivals and commemorations, fundraising events for community organizations, and workshops held in schools and universities. Before the existence of the troupe, *hát bội* recordings were rare and live performances unheard of in the US, despite the significant presence of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees in the country since the 1960s. Today, most of the *hát bội* troupe's recent public performances are available to all on the internet via The Federation of Overseas Free Vietnamese Communities' YouTube channel (freevn.net).

Aside from being the largest community of Vietnamese outside Vietnam, Little Saigon is also the media and entertainment capital of the Vietnamese American community, and some would say, of the larger global Vietnamese diaspora. It is home to several Vietnamese language

television stations, radio stations and newspapers, as well as being the epicenter of the Vietnamese American music industry, which contains a recording industry larger than that in Vietnam itself (Đỗ 2008). The cultural products made in Little Saigon are distributed and sold in Vietnamese communities throughout the United States, Australia, France, Germany, and, sometimes illegally, in Vietnam. As the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants, some of my own very first memories of music were watching, with my grandmother in Boston, videocassettes of Vietnamese pop stars performing on the still popular "Paris by Night" series, produced in Little Saigon in the late 1980s.

VAALA, which hosted the debut *hát bội* performance, has become an indispensible part of the cultural fabric of the Vietnamese American community in southern California. Founded in 1991,VAALA organizes numerous cultural events such as art exhibitions, book signings, musical recitals, theatrical plays, year-long art, theater, and music classes, as well as annual events such as the Vietnamese International Film Festival and the Children's Moon Festival Art Contest. With its mission of connecting and enriching communities through Vietnamese arts and culture, VAALA's motto is one of social action through the arts: "Make Art. Build Community." In addition to producing arts programs, VAALA also endeavors to provide a space for artists to interact in an ongoing dialogue; to facilitate communication, tolerance and understanding between people of diverse backgrounds; and to advocate for inclusiveness in order to transcend boundaries within the community and internationally.[105]

Although its place as a beloved and respected pillar in the Vietnamese American community of southern California is undeniable, VAALA has also faced controversies over some of its curational decisions, most notably the *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks (Nghệ Thuật Lên Tiếng)*

[105] For more information about the organization and its mission and activities, see the official VAALA website www.vaala.org.

exhibit in January of 2009.[106] After the *Los Angeles Times* published an article about the exhibit featuring a photographic diptych by Brian Đòan that included images of the flag of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and a bust of Hồ Chí Minh, the curators of the exhibit and Ysa Lê (executive director of VAALA and MC for the debut *hát bội* performance) were beseiged with criticism, obscene phone calls, and threats of protests by members of the Vietnamese American community. The event was covered in various national and international forums, and demonstrators numbering in the hundreds protested outside the exhibit site, even after the exhibit had been forced to close down due to pressure from the community and local politicains. Before the exhibit closed, several art pieces were vandalized with spit, spray paint, and by putting women's underwear with an attached menstrual pad onto Đòan's diptych.

As these protests occurred less than two months before the *hát bội* debut performance, VAALA and the troupe were very conscious about how the community would interpret the performance, and took precautions to avoid any protests, especially due to *hát bội*'s origins in the Chinese genre of *zaju*. One of these steps was to display prominently the South Vietnamese flag, and ensure the absence of the official flag of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Other measures were more subtle, such as the changing of the fabric covering a prop used in a solar/lunar eclipse ritual from red to orange, as a troupe member had noted that the red fabric looked like a communist flag. During its earlier existence, many scholars viewed *hát bội* as a convenient form of mass media that performed the task of teaching civics and social demeanor to the emperor's subjects, only a small number of whom were educated (Nguyễn Phước Thiện 1969: 2). In the context of the pressure to be politically conscious and to practice self-censorship that VAALA

[106] F.O.B. stands for "Fresh Off the Boat" a term used to decribe recent immigrants (often Asian) who have not yet assimilated to their host country's culture, language, or social practices, and can be used to describe the behaviors of stereotypical of new immigrants, such as their broken English. Although in some circles the term is considered to be derogatory, in 2015, an American sitcom with the same name, *Fresh Off The Boat*, debuted on ABC. Loosely based on the life of chef and food personality Eddie Huang, *Fresh Off the Boat* was the first American sitcom to star an Asian American family since the short-lived *All American Girl* series starring Margaret Cho in 1994 (Yang 2014).

faced, what social function could *hát bội* possibly serve for of the Vietnamese refugee population living in Southern California today, in the twenty-first century? Why was there so much interest in the debut performance of this traditional and esoteric art form that had been absent from the community for forty years, with media and press attention, as well as a strong turn-out from local community members? In my analysis of performances by the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe, I attempt to unravel the answers to these questions.

The Affect of Humor: *Trịnh Ấn Phá Pháp Trường* (Trịnh Ấn Halts the Execution) and Club O' Noodles' *Laughter From the Children of War*

According to several reviews from local newspaper outlets and general audience reactions during the show, the *hát bội* excerpt *Trịnh Ấn Phá Pháp Trường* was a clear highlight of the debut performance. This excerpt featured two of the youngest members of the troupe: David Phạm, who was ten years old at the time, and Lê Thanh Quốc, Dương Ngọc Bầy's grandson, who was twelve years old at the time. One of the most skilled members of the troupe, Trần Tường Nguyên, was also featured in the excerpt. Trần Tường Nguyên had previously been a *hát bội* student of Bầy at the College of Theater and Cinematography in Hồ Chí Minh City, and did not realize his former teacher was living in southern California until he saw a local newspaper story about the *hát bội* classes at VAALA shortly after Bầy recieved the Kenneth Picerne grant. The play recounts the story of three close childhood friends who have sworn to be blood brothers: Trịnh Ân, Triệu Khuông Dận, and Cao Hoài Đức. One of the blood brothers, Triệu Khuông Dận (also known as Zhao Kuangyin, 趙匡胤 , 927-976) would later become emperor of China.

One day, when all three are now grown men, Trịnh Ân sees the royal carriage, reserved to

carry only the emperor, on the road. Trịnh Ân postrates himself on the ground out of respect for his blood brother and emperor, Triệu Khương Dẫn. However, Trịnh Ân soon realizes that rather than the emperor, the uncle of the empress has been riding in the carriage. Trịnh Ân demands that the uncle dismount from the carriage, which he refuses to do, then forcibly removes the uncle from the carriage, causing some minor injury. The uncle, humiliated, returns to the palace and recounts the event to his niece, the empress. She demands that her husband order the execution of Trịnh Ân in retaliation for his treatement of her uncle. Seeing that his friend and blood brother was simply showing respect for him and his royal carriage, Triệu Khương Dẫn refuses to order an execution. The empress gives her husband large quantities of wine, waiting until he is inebriated to persuade him to sign the execution order for Trịnh Ân's death.

The excerpt at VAALA begins at the execution grounds, with Lê Thanh Quốc, the executioner, leading Trần Tường Nguyên, in the role of Trịnh Ân, onstage to meet his death. Trịnh Ân's hands are tied, and his face is is made-up with a crooked mouth and one eye larger than the other in a permanent look of distress. Lê, Bầy's grandson, has recently moved to southern California from Vietnam, and his Vietnamese pronunciation is perfectly fluent with a southern regional accent. Lê recites his lines, saying that the time has come for an execution to take place. He wishes Trịnh Ân a life of service to the nation, and a death that is revered by the people (*sanh vi tướng, tử vi thần*), so that his death may fulfill his loyalty to the nation and emperor. As the executioner raises his sword, Trịnh Ấn, Trịnh Ân's son played by David Phạm, rushes in to thwart the death of his father. Trịnh Ấn asks his father what sin he possibly could have commited to deserve capital punishment. As young David utters his first lines fluently on stage, the audience cheers with delight and applause. Trịnh Ân tells his son that he is young and naïve; if he cannot yet take care of himself, how can he worry himself with matters of the nation? Trịnh Ân tells his son to stand aside so that he can accept his punishment and his loyalty to the

emperor can be carried through to the end (see figure 6.2).

Trịnh Ấn refuses to stand aside, admitting his youthfulness, but saying that his filial obligations to his father weigh heavily on his pained heart. Thus, he had to ask what sin his father committed. Trịnh Ân continues, saying that on the outside, the emperor and Trịnh Ân are ruler and subject, but the reality inside is that they are blood brothers. They have sworn an allegiance to each other, to live and die together. Speaking to his father, Trịnh Ấn asks, how could the emperor then order his execution? Has the emperor forgotten that they come from the same symbolic womb? Has he forgotten about their friendship and brotherhood? Wiping tears away from his face, Trịnh Ân tells his son that he, too, would like to know what crime he has committed, but he does not know. Trịnh Ấn cannot accept that his father should die without any proof of crime or conviction. He demands to ask the emperor himself what crime Trịnh Ân has committed. If the emperor is able to describe the crime from beginning to end, then it will still not be too late for Trịnh Ân to face his justified punishment.

Trịnh Ân reprimands his son, saying that if he were to question the emperor, that would be a violation of a subject's loyalty to his ruler. It does not matter if the emperor has explained what crime was committed or not, a ruler has the right to punish in both the light and the dark. Trịnh Ân says he will listen to the emperor's words in order to fulfill his loyalty, just as Trịnh Ấn should listen to his father's words in order to fulfill his filial obligations. Trịnh Ân continues, saying that a house without loyalty and filial piety would put to shame thousands of years of order. Trịnh Ân commands his son to go home and leave him at the execution grounds. Trịnh Ấn again refuses. With anger, he says that if the emperor has not followed the virtues of a just ruler, then why should he, as a subject, act virtuously for his ruler? Trịnh Ấn promises to halt this execution with his own hands, and would rather rescue his father than follow the orders of an unjust emperor. Trịnh Ấn is furious, calling his son a foolish, disloyal, and un-filial child. He is

dishonorable, without a father or an emperor. Trịnh Ân breaks the chains around his hands and grabs the sword from the executioner. He says that he will kill his ungrateful child rather than be unloyal to the emperor. Trịnh Ân swings the sword three times at his son. David forgets to dodge the blows at first, but quickly remembers, then recites his lines begging his father not to kill him, and spinning away as unseen fairies (*tiên*) whisk him to safety.

The audience responded most positively to the *Trịnh Ấn Phá Pháp Trường* excerpt out of all the portions of the troupe's debut show, and were especially enthusiastic about David Phạm's performance. Not only is David one of the youngest members of the troupe, he is also bi-racial, with a Vietnamese mother and Caucasian father. David was born in the United States, and although he speaks Vietnamese, does so somewhat haltingly and is clearly more comfortable with English in everyday situations.[107] His lines for the the play, however, were learned by heart, and flowed naturally and comfortably as he also performed the appropriate gestures on stage. His presence on stage brought cheers, applause, and delighted laughter to the audience. But why would a young bi-racial boy performing an ancient *hát bội* play, fluently and naturally, be humorous to an audience of mostly first-generation Vietnamese refugees living in the United States?

In order to approach this question, I look to Diana Taylor's discussion of the "scenario" paradigm (2005) as a set-up that relies on live particpants (actors) and is structured around a schematic plot with an intended (although adaptable) end. Taylor points to how scenarios can reveal social structures and behaviors, in particular requiring us to wrestle with embodiment and the social construction of bodies in particular contexts. Scenarios by defintion introduce a critical distance between social actor (who assumes socially regulated patterns of appropriate behavior)

[107] See Tran 2010 for description of an interview conducted in Vietnamese with David Phạm by a local Vietnamese television network, in which his language skills were on display.

and character (an actor assuming a role through mimetic representation), while keeping both in simultaneous view on stage, revealing areas of resistance and tension. Humor within performance can often come from this tension, when audience expectations of a social actor and/or character are broken or shifted in surprising ways.

For a different pespective on humor in the Vietnamese American refugee community, I looked to Club O' Noodles, a Vietnamese American theatre troupe, which Yutian Wong profiles in her 2010 book *Choreographing Asian America*.[108] One of Club O' Noodles' satire pieces, *Laughter from the Children of War*, has a scene called "From War to Hollywood in America" that parodies Hollywood and Broadway productions about the Vietnam War. The scene draws most notably from the musical *Miss Saigon*, which itself was based on Puccini's 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly*, which in turn was inspired by the short story of the same name, first published in 1903, by American author John Long. While *Miss Saigon* tells the story of an American soldier in Vietnam who is already married but falls in love with a Vietnamese prostitute, the short story *Madame Butterfly* is based on the recollections of Long's sister and husband, who were Methodist missionaries who had traveled to Japan. Both *Miss Saigon* and *Madame Butterfly* have been criticized for their depictions of Asian women that many scholars have described as orientalist, racist, and misogynistic (Kondo 1990, Yoshihara 2004, Rij 2001, Porter 2015, Schlossman 2002, Degabriele 1996, Lee 1997, Xing 1998).

In the Club O' Noodles parody, Vietnamese actors are rehearsing a production inspired by *Miss Saigon* while the Director supervises them. Two female actors are in the spotlight with the Director, while the rest of the cast watches as visible spectators. One woman is The Ghost of

[108] On their Facebook page, Club O'Noodles writes the following on their "About" section: "Founded in 1993, Club O'Noodles is a Vietnamese American theater troupe that celebrates the blend of Vietnamese and American culture through the following goals: to bridge the gap between Vietnamese and other communities, enriching the diversity of American culture through performance art; to promote interest in and support for performance art in diverse communities through innovative and socially conscious work; and to create an environment that nurtures and supports artists in the development of their craft and skills."

Madame Butterfly, dressed with signifiers of "Japaneseness," in a purple kimono and an ill-fitting geisha wig complete with flowers and chopsticks built in, while carrying a large plastic knife. The second woman is named Ms. Saigon (who is understood to be a parody of the character Kim from *Miss Saigon*) wearing a traditional white *áo dài* and holding a toy gun. Side by side, the two women perform the most dramatic moment in their respective theatrical productions, the scene of their deaths, with pained looks on their faces. The other cast members, who watch as spectators, are hysterical, embracing each other while the music swells and yelling phrases such as "It's so moving! The music is so beautiful!" Ms. Saigon points the gun to her head as The Ghost of Madame Butterfly lifts her knife in preparation for *hara-kiri* suicide. Just as they are about to commit their fatal acts, Ms. Saigon screams, "Cut the music, cut the music!," and demands to know where The White Guy is (Yutian Wong 2010: 75-76):

> Ms. Saigon: Where is The White Guy?
> The Director: What white guy?
> Ms. Saigon: we need a White Guy!
> The Director: A white guy? What for?
> Ms. Saigon: You know, to save us! I am not going to kill myself without . . . a White Guy.
> Butterfly: Pinkerton? Pinkerton?
> Ms. Saigon: Shut up! Casting director, I want a White Guy, and I want him NOW!
> The Director: Ms. Saigon, please calm down. We're trying to look . . .
> Ms. Saigon: Try harder! [*she threatens him with a gun*]
> Director: Is there a white guy in the house? We need a White Guy.
> (Wong 2010: 76)

In this moment, Ms. Saigon is insisting on the impossibility of playing the role of herself without a white referent, and making fun of practice by which any Asian body can play any other Asian body when used as a backdrop, as she and Madame Butterfly are to their white protaganists. She reverses the scenario by implying that The White Guy, too, can become a replaceable object. Anyone will do at that moment in the piece, since the important thing to remember is that Ms. Saigon simply needs the presence of A White Guy to complete the

narrative that accompanies the climactic moment of her suicide (Wong 2010: 76). As "From War to Hollywood in America" is a parody of other theatrical productions through its activation and reversal of existing scenarios, we can see the critical distance between the Vietnamese social actors in real life and the Vietnamese (or supposedly Japanese) characters on stage, and the tensions that exist between the two.

The character Ms. Saigon is able to reveal with clarity, through the humor of reversal, the female Asian stereotype that she exists as in the Broadway production *Miss Saigon*. However, in reality, the Vietnamese-American performers in Club O' Noodles are real-life actors looking for work in the present-day film, television, and media industries that continue to produce very few and limited (rarely leading) roles for Asian Americans; these industries have also recently come under fire for a pattern of casting white actors in roles written for Asians (Hess 2016). The humor of the scenario comes from this tension in knowing the difficult reality that Asians Americans face as actors in the mainstream media industry and the agency that the character Ms. Saigon is able to enact within the scene to reveal her stereotypical role within the narrative of *Miss Saigon* (and the role of the character Cio-Cio San in *Madam Butterfly*).

When David Phạm plays the role of Trịnh Ấn, we, too, see a distance between his self as a social actor and the character he plays. The humor and delight of the mostly first-generation audience in seeing David performing *hát bội* is brought forth by this distance, as his young, bi-racial, second generation self fluently performs an art form with esoteric words, lyrics, and movements that is hundreds of years old, an art form that is markedly "traditional" and "Vietnamese." It is this tension between social actor and character that allows for a humorous affect in the audience.[109] By being spectators and acting out with reactions in the space of their

[109] I refer to "affect" in the Deleuzian sense as a moment of intensive quality (Deleuze 1986) or as a bloc of sensations waiting to be activated by a spectator (Deleuze and Guatarri 1994). Anne Smelik has also described affect

reception, the audience is in a way generating meaning to itself, as Martin explains in his discussion of dance ethnography:

> Reception gets conceived as a matter of simple transference of the idea of the art object to its audience, rather than a transformative social activity that brings context into performance . . . part of what the audience was trying for was the assertion of its capacity for evaluation. The audience was listening to itself. . . . Applause emerges at the moment of the audience's fullest self-recognition. (Martin 1995: 113)[110]

Rather than writing about audiences, Deborah Wong extends this process of generating meaning through the agency an individual choosing to listen to specific types of music: "they listen to themselves, but this act of choice and perception is no solipsistic mirror, but rather a critical moment of representation" (Wong 2004: 259). As the audience at the debut *hát bội* performance cheers, laughs, and applauds, their reactions can tell us about what they see of themselves onstage, as they watch the young generation of Vietnamese Americans performing a revered traditional art form. The audience's reactions can reveal to us their surprise, delight, and perhaps their hopes of a possible future in which the Vietnamese refugee community and the subsequent generations of Vietnamese Americans can maintain their roots through language, culture, and traditional art forms in the United States.

Intrinsic to this meaning is the concept of "traditional music" in the Vietnamese American community, which is often confused with and linked to "Vietnamese music," with varying and often contradictory definitions and criteria. In her work with the diasporic Vietnamese community in refugee camps, resettlement camps, and newly settled enclaves of the 1980s and 90s, Adelaida Reyes notes:

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as "an experience for the spectator that comes prior to meaning" (Smelik 2009: 53). Seigworth and Gregg also offer a helpful definition: "Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relations as well as the passages (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (2010:1).

[110] For a study on the role of affect in stand-up comedy performance as a social and embodied experience, see Shouse 2007.

> On one level, the apparent contradictions found resolution in the *concept* traditional as historical reality, distant and abstract, and as a present-day reality assigned a contemporary function. . . . As contemporary reality, it was considered an important element of what is Vietnamese—a shared heritage, a symbol of community, in a society where what is Vietnamese needed to be defined. Yet, *as a sound*, traditional music remained elusive. (Reyes 1999: 95)

Chau Nguyen, director of the traditional music group *Lạc Hồng* and a major advocate for traditional music, also recounts the ambiguity of this often used term in the Vietnamese American community: "When people say 'traditional music,' they don't know what that means. . . . They cannot imagine what style, what form, but they know the term" (Reyes 1999: 146).

The community's concept of acceptable traditional music excludes musical forms from present-day Vietnam that are perceived as carriers of communist messages, while embracing what the communist government banned. This includes music whose physical attributes are historically continuous with the Vietnamese musical sound system and sounds that may coincide with what the current government calls traditional, as long as it is dissociated from government purposes (Reyes 1999: 149). In an interview with Reyes, Thu Nguyen, a pre-1975 Vietnamese immigrant, states his position on the matter: "I am not against the form of art, of drama, of traditional music. I am against the message ingrained in the product" (Reyes 1999: 147).[111] For this reason, despite *hát bội's* official sponsorship by the communist government in Vietnam and the pressure that state-sponsored troupes feel to align their narratives with common tropes espoused by the state, the diasporic community accepts and supports *hát bội* performances in the refugee community as a "valid" traditional art form.

This conceptualization of the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe's performances as being a

[111] After 1975, leaders in Vietnam's national music conservatories, many of whom were trained in the Soviet Union, made nationwide changes in the pedagogy of traditional music in Vietnam. In official discourses, these changes were an attempt to "modernize" traditional music, which in many cases meant, in practical terms, to"Westernize" musical practices. Standardizing regional stylistic differences through Western notation was one attempt at creating a newly minted pan-Vietnamese national music. This type of music was termed *nhạc dân tộc cải biên*, literally translated as "reformed folk music," or in Miranda Arana's translation, "neo-traditional music" (1999). The new genre of music also included original composed pieces on traditional instruments, with new tunings influenced by the Western scale, and transcriptions in Western notation used for teaching (Phong Nguyễn 2007: 157).

"traditional music" genre is further complicated by the fact that currently, the only live instrument used during their performances (besides the voices of the performing actors) is the large *trống chầu* drum played by Dương Ngọc Bầy to cue the actors. Dương Ngọc Bầy knew that it would be difficult to find musicians in the United States who could play the accompaniment music for *hát bội*. Before leaving Vietnam, she enlisted a number of her students to create recordings of the basic *hát bội* music sequences, and since moving to the United States, she has asked them to make further recordings in Vietnam and send them to her. These recordings, along with several others compiled by Professor Châu, mentioned above, limit the scope of the troupe's performances, not only in repertoire, but also in making the vital interactions between actors and live musicians in *hát bội* performances impossible. Actors and musicians in live performances will constantly take cues from one another to set tempo, phrasing, and dynamics as appropriate to the narrative and drama of the play.

Despite these complications in what is considered a "traditional" performance, there is evidence that the community considers art forms that are practiced in the diaspora to be more "authentic" than art forms in Vietnam that have been tainted by state ideologies and propagandistic themes. In a radio interview with local news station Radio Free Asia, Nam, a man who came to the United States thirty-two years ago, commented on his reaction to the debut *hát bội* performance:

> I had the feeling that I was reliving the experiences I had growing up in Viet Nam, but at the time I was only watching *hát bội* on TV. Now, it's in a live format that I'm enjoying the art form that I saw in the old days. It is such a traditional art form, I like it very much. I think the VAALA board did the right thing, and it is very respectable to have people taking charge and putting in so much effort. I see the sacrifices people make in order to practice the art form.[112] (Hà Giang 2010)

[112]Mình có cảm tưởng như là mình sống lại cái cảm giác mình lớn lên hồi bé ở Việt Nam, hồi đó coi trên tivi thôi. Bây giờ coi sống như vậy thì thấy là có cái cách để mà mình thưởng thích nghệ thuật hồi xưa đó, cái bộ hát bộ nói rất là truyền thống, thích lắm. Mình nghĩ là ban tổ chức VAALA đã làm một điều đúng và rất là khích hệ bởi vì có những người đứng ra làm những chuyện như vậy, bao nhiêu là công sức, mình đã thấy sự hy sinh cố gắng của những người làm nghệ thuật.

A woman named Linh, interviewed by Radio Free Asia, expressed her feeling that the debut performance showed her that traditional Vietnamese culture could survive in a diasporic context, saying, "They deserve our encouragement—it's the new year, they've only had class for six months, and the children, the adults, both young and old, had something to contribute. I'm very glad to see that our culture can still be maintained" (Hà Giang 2010).[113]

The first comment not only shows a nostalgic association with *hát bội* and the homeland that refugees can no longer return to; it also reveals that for some members of the refugee community, their first experience of live *hát bội* performance was the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe's debut show that took place in the United States, rather than in Vietnam. As most Vietnamese refugees in the US fled from South Vietnam, the nostalgia for homeland that many refugees feel is not directed towards present-day Vietnam, but rather to a non-communist, pre-1975 Vietnam that no longer exists, or perhaps never existed in its idealized form. The attempts to maintain what is deemed as acceptable traditional culture in the diasporic "bubble" of southern California may also be a pursuit to maintain an "authentic" culture of pre-1975 Vietnam that is untarnished by communist state propaganda. In this way, *hát bội* performances may be, as Michael Ross describes musical meaning, "less a sound than a strategy, not so much a style of music as a state of mind" (Ross 1998: 20).[114]

Collapsing Linear Time: *Trưng Nữ Vương* (The Trưng Queens) excerpt and Recitation of *Tống Biệt Hành* (Farewell)

[113] Thấy rất là đáng khuyến khích, mà đầu năm nữa, mà mới có mấy tháng mà mấy em, người lớn, người trẻ và người già đều đóng góp hết, rất là vui là cái văn hóa mình vẫn còn giữ được.

[114] The community seems to unequivocably accept *hát bội* as a traditional art form despite the fact that many modifications have been made to the troupe's *hát bội* performances, such as altered costuming and props, shortened excerpts, and using only one live instrument (drum) with pre-recorded music, which in some senses make performances "less authentic."

During the same debut show, another notable excerpt performed was from the *hát bội* play *Trưng Nữ Vương* (The Trưng Queens), written by Vietnamese nationalist movement leader Phan Bội Chau (1867-1940). This excerpt tells the tale of the Trưng Sisters (Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị), who famously repelled Chinese forces from Vietnam and ruled the country for a short period of about three years from 40 to 43AD. The excerpt begins with Trưng Trắc's husband, Thi Sách, bemoaning the cruel treatment of the Vietnamese under Chinese domination (see figure 6.3). He decides that he must travel to Giao Chỉ where the Chinese offical Tô Định has been oppressing Vietnamese people to defend his country. He asks his wife, Trưng Trắc, for her opinion. Trưng Trắc tells her husband that she, too, is angered by the way that Tô Định has treated her people, and wants vengeance. However, she cautions Thi Sách to control his anger and to wait for the right opportunity to attack. Trưng Trắc reminds her husband about Kinh Kha (Jing Ke, 荊軻) in China, who unsuccessfully attempted to assasinate the unjust emperor Tần Thủy Hoàng in the third century.[115] She says that his death was a waste of a young and talented person, who even in death still owes a debt since he was unable to bring honor to his nation.

Thi Sách laughs at his wife's historical references, asking her why she would bring up the past in order to force those in the present to give up their ambitions. Thi Sách tells his wife that he will use Kinh Kha as an example, too. He then asks her, if Kinh Kha had not spilled his heroic blood, would anyone know his brave name today? Thi Sách says that he has already made up his mind. If he were to hesitate due to the bonds of husband and wife, he would be unable to ever repay his debt to the nation. Trưng Trắc tells her husband that he has already earned his share of honor for the nation, but that she won't stop his noble heart. They share one last cup of wine

[115] Kinh Kha attempted unsucessfully to assasinate Tần Thủy Hoàng, also known as Qin Shi Huang, founder of the Qin dynasty, who unified state walls into the Great Wall of China and is said to have banned and burned many books in addition to executing scholars (Goldin 2005: 151). Qin Shi Huang is also famous for being buried with the terracotta army of over 8000 soldiers and hundreds of chariots and horses (Portal 2007).

together before he departs. Seeing his wife in tears, Thi Sách tells her to stop crying, as she is a woman of high reputation and it makes her look weak, and makes his heart anxious. She says she will not stop his departure, but simply wants to say farewell until they meet again. Thi Sách assures her that as long as he can repay his debt to the nation, that will be enough.

The excerpt included in the debut performance ends here, but the story continues with Thi Sách being killed by Tô Định. In the *hát bội* play's narrative writen by Phan Bội Châu, it is Thi Sách's death that inspires his wife to raise an army and lead the uprising against the Chinese. In reality, there is little evidence to suggest that Thi Sách was killed before the uprising occurred. For the sake of being "realistic," Phan composed a drama with patriarchical values that unquestionably placed Thi Sách at the fundamental heart of the story (Huỳnh 2004: 11). In this way, Phan was also able to shift the Confucian feminine notions of self-sacrifice and piety from the home to the nation, appropriating the narrative in order to promote the movement for Vietnamese national independence (Marr 1984: 200). Phan famously urged young women to answer when asked if they were yet married, "Yes, his surname is Việt and his given name Nam. He is more than three thousand years of age, has resisted the Han dynasty and beaten the Ming, and yet he does not look old" (Huỳnh 2004: 11).[116]

In the twenty-first century context of the Vietnamese refugee community of southern California, Thi Sách's journey to defend the nation is framed in a way that takes on new meaning, as well. In the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe's debut show, the *Trưng Nữ Vương* excerpt was immediately preceded by a recitation of a well-known poem called *Tống Biệt Hành* (Farewell) that is still taught in the Vietnamese public school curriculum to this day. The poem

[116] This quote is referenced in the well-known 1989 film *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* by Vietnamese filmmaker, writer, literary theorist and composer Trinh T. Minh-ha, who is currently a professor in the departments of Gender and Women's Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley. The film revolves around questions of identity, popular memory, and culture, and is framed as a documentary about Vietnamese women that questions the nature of documentaries and the politics of interviews and documentation.

was written in 1940 by Thâm Tâm. The text of the poem is as follows, with my own translation.

Tống Biệt Hành by Thâm Tâm
Đưa người, ta không đưa qua sông
Sao có tiếng sóng ở trong lòng?
Bóng chiều không thắm, không vàng vọt
Sao đầy hoàng hôn trong mắt trong?

Đưa người ta chỉ đưa người ấy
Một giã gia đình một dửng dưng.

Ly khách! Ly khách! Con đường nhỏ
Chí nhớn chưa về bàn tay không
Thì không bao giờ nói trở lại!
Ba năm mẹ già cũng đừng mong.

Ta biết người buồn chiều hôm trước:
Bây giờ mùa hạ sen nở nốt,
Một chị, hai chị cũng như sen
Khuyên nốt em trai dòng lệ sót.

Ta biết người buồn sáng hôm nay:
Giời chưa mùa thu, tươi lắm thay,
Em nhỏ ngây thơ đôi mắt biếc
Gói tròn thương tiếc chiếc khăn tay...

Người đi? Ừ nhỉ, người đi thực!
Mẹ thà coi như chiếc lá bay,
Chị thà coi như là hạt bụi,
Em thà coi như hơi rượu say.

Farewell by Thâm Tâm (translation)

I accompanied you to the river, but I could not cross.
Why is there such stirring in my heart?
The twilight sky, neither dark, nor light.
How do your clear eyes reflect the darkness?

I accompanied you, alone, there.
A family, once. Ties can be broken, once.

A traveler departing on this small road,
Full of ambition, will not go home with empty hands.
You will never speak of return!
Frail mother, waiting for three years, do not hope.

I knew of your sadness yesterday afternoon:
Now, the last lotuses are blooming.
One sister, two sisters, are also like these lotuses.
Young brother is left with flowing empty tears.

I knew of your sadness this morning.
The midday autumn sky so bright,
Young brother's innocent eyes reflect,
Surrounding his longing in this small handkerchief.

Yes, you depart. You truly depart.
Mother, perhaps see it as a leaf blowing in the wind.
Sister, perhaps see it as a grain of dust.
Young brother, perhaps see it as the sting of bitter wine.

Thâm Tâm wrote the poem at a time when the French still had full control over Vietnam, and the Japanese had just invaded northern Vietnam during WWII. At that time there was debate in Vietnam about how to gain independence from the French, with some nationalists favoring armed conflict, others a peaceful non-violent movement, and several communist factions looking towards China and the Soviet Union as models for revolution. *Tống Biệt Hành* captures the sentiments of a young man going off to fight for his country, but remains ambiguous about what how and what he is fighting for, with no mention of actual political affiliations or causes. A textbook on Vietnamese literature published by the Ministry of Education echoes this ambiguity of a young man going on a journey for both himself and his country:

> Thâm Tâm has a pithy, rugged voice with the air of ancient poetry, especially in poems like "Can Trường hành," "Vọng Nhân Hành," "Tống Biệt Hành." His poems delve deep into reflections of a hidden soul that loves the nation, with a longing to "go on the road" – above all in order to escape a life at a standstill. (Trần Đình Sử et al. 2007: 58)[117]

This ambiguity is telling, since this poem is still currently taught in literature courses as a canonical work in the Vietnamese public school system, yet is also well-known and loved by refugees in the United States. This ambiguity is interpreted by Nguyễn Thanh Thủy, a local

[117] Thâm Tâm có giọng thơ rắn rỏi, gân guốc, phảng phất hơi thơ cổ, nhất là những bài hành như Can trường hành, Vọng nhân hành, Tống biệt hành. . . . Thơ ông sau những tâm sự uất ức đó đây, là một lòng yêu nước kín đáo và cả khát vọng "lên đường" - trước hết là để thoát khỏi cuộc sống bế tắc

Vietnamese poet who recites the poem in the *ngâm thơ* style (see figure 6.4). [118]

Before reciting the poem, Nguyễn Thanh Thủy says to the audience:

> I would like to recite the poem *Tống Biệt Hành* by Thâm Tâm, telling of the story of a man breaking ties with his family, his familiar and beloved home, to go on the road and realize an ambitious quest, swearing to not return with empty hands. Like a Kinh Kha traveling to Tân to punish the ruler, like a Thi Sách meeting Tô Định, in order to speak out for the voice of freedom, democracy, and independence of the country of Vietnam. This poem captures the large ambitions of our courageous, talented heroes.[119]

In her remarks preceding the recitation, Nguyễn draws parallels between four different historical time periods: the young man in Thâm Tâm's poem readying himself for the road in the 1940s, Kinh Kha's failed assassination attempt upon Tần Thủy Hoàng in 228 BC, Thi Sách's journey to confront Tô Định in 40 AD, and lastly, the present time, in which refugees might feel the urge to "speak out for the voice of freedom, democracy, and independence" for the country of Vietnam, whose communist regime has committed a multiplicity of human rights violations against political dissidents and activists. Events that happen in three different historical time periods, the first a period of nationalism against French colonization, the second an attempted assassination of an unjust emepror in China, and lastly Thi Sách's resistance against Chinese domination over Vietnam, are all brought forth into the present through both an anticommunist criticism of the current government in Vietnam and the extolling of the American values of "freedom, democracy, and independence." In all four cases, the figures with "large ambitions" are framed as "courageous, talented heroes" who deserve our respect and reverence.

This breaking down of the linearity of history by pulling the past into the present in

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[118] *Ngâm thơ* is a form of reciting poetry that is not a straight reading, but rather closer to a chanting of the verses. *Ngâm thơ* is not considered song, but has some melodic elements that are closely linked to the tones of the words in the poem being recited. The Vietnamese language has six different tones that must be considered when setting words to music, in order to ensure comprehension and achieve metrical/melodic aesthetics. *Ngâm thơ* is often accompanied by a solo instrument such as the monochord zither, *đàn bầu*, or the seventeen-string zither, *đàn tranh*.

[119] Thanh Thủy xin diễn ngâm bài thơ Tống Biệt Hành của Thâm Tâm nói lên tâm sự một người dứt áo từ biệt gia đình, nơi chốn thân quen, để lên đường thực hiện một hoành tạo chí lớn của mình. Với một lời thề không trở về với tay không. Như một Kinh Kha sang Tần chuất khách. Như một Thi Sách đi gặp Tô Định, để nói lên tiếng tự do, dân chủ, độc lập của Việt Nam. Bài thơ này cũng là một phần nói lên những chí lớn của bậc anh tài.

layers is also seen in an observation made by Vo Dang in the Vietnamese refugee community of southern California shortly after the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center. In Little Saigon, outside the central Asian Garden Mall, Vo Dang describes seeing a Vietnamese American woman in her late fifties manning a table with a large sign reading "Terrorism = Communism." Vo Dang asks, given that communism no longer poses a real threat to America and the "free" world, what this strategy of equating communism with terrorism might do for Vietnamese refugees in this present moment of terrorist preoccupation. Vo Dang suggests that the political statement by this elderly woman is

> a call to remember those who have been easily dismissed or forgotten by the US nation-state. This sign serves the purpose of inscribing a different memory of a different war in the here and now; a memory which Vietnamese refugees continue to live with day to day. The sign brings 'Vietnam' into the present. Most importantly, the sign suggests that we, Vietnamese refugees, still matter and we are still here to tell our stories. (Vo Dang 2008: 4)

When considering the performance of scenarios and how this might call into being unrecognized experiences by pulling the past into the present, I return to Anneke Smelik and her discussion of affect, which she calls "an experience for the spectator that comes prior to meaning" (Smelik 2009: 53), or as Deleuze and Guattari describe, a bloc of sensations waiting to be activated by a spectator (1994). Although Smelik writes about cinema rather than live performance, she discusses how affect, the "in-between-ness" that passes from body to body, can break down conventional notions of time and memory: "As a moment of intensive quality, affect provokes a non-linear, dynamic vision of time. Affect creates a time continuum that envelops past, present, and future, undoing the authority of the past that so often ties subjects obsessively to their recollections" (Smelik 2009: 67). This moment of "intensive quality," the pre- or hyper-linguistic character of which inheres in the audience's experience of the *Trưng Nữ Vương* excerpt and the *Tống Biệt Hành* poem recitation, supersedes the everyday order of linear time through bringing together incidents, events, and stories from different historical time periods in

ways that are meaningful in and for the present. The reactivation and reinterpretation of the scenario of individuals in different historical time periods who have undergone journeys in order to stand up for their people or nation in both the *Trưng Nữ Vương* excerpt and the *Tống Biệt Hành* poem recitation is able to bring forth a reaction in the audience, through affect, that is meaningful and relevant in the present for the Vietnamese refugee community. That is, they (the audience) must find ways to give voice to the unrecognized experiences and narratives of Vietnamese refugees and find a means to insert themselves into the social landscape of America and its nation-building myths, as well as bring attention to the hidden traumas committed by the victors of the civil war (North Vietnam) and by the current communist government.[120]

Introduction to the UCLA Vietnamese Language and Culture Club (VNLC) Tết Festival

The UCLA Vietnamese Language and Culture Club (VNLC) organizes a Tết Festival celebration campus every year, and in 2012 for the first time included a performance of *hát bội* in the show. In 2014, VNLC again asked the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe to help celebrate the new year with the UCLA campus community. It is notable that there are two Vietnamese student groups on the UCLA campus. VNLC (founded in 1994) focuses on raising awareness of Vietnamese culture and language on the UCLA campus and is the organization that plans and executes the Tết Festival celebration, while the Vietnamese Students Union (VSU, founded in

[120] The strong sentiment of anticommunism found in the refugee community is more than just a symbolic reactionary politics; there are several examples of organized efforts by former members of the south Vietnamese regime to form an exiled government with nation-building activities outside Vietnam that have led to actual anticommunist military campaigns undertaken in Southeast Asia. In 1981, the diaspora cadets of the National United Front for Liberation of Vietnam (NUFLVN) met their Southeast Asian comrades in Laos and Thailand, setting up base camps and funneling ammunitions to the area in order to stage rebellions that would reverse the outcome of the Vietnam War (Tuyen Ngoc Tran 2007: 165). In the same year, two other anticommunist diasporic groups (the Anticommunist Viets Organization [ACVO] and the Vietnamese Organziation to Exterminate Communists and Restore the Nation [VOECRN]) claimed responsibility for the assassination of Vietnamese American journalist Duong Trong Lam, whose progressive activities and writings were labeled as communist (Tuyen Ngoc Tran 2007: 149-50). The recent PBS Frontline and ProPublica documentary *Terror in Little Saigon* (2015) investigates the murders of five Vietnamese American journalists and two other individuals in the diasporic community between 1981 and 1990 that are suspected to have been political assassinations.

1977) is more of a political and social justice advocacy organization that coordinates the annual Black April Commemoration and "Where's the Love" event (a commemoration of the death of former VSU president Thien Minh Ly, who was the victim of a fatal hate crime in 1996 [Anton 2008]), as well as planning conferences and events throughout the academic year to recruit and retain Southeast Asian students at UCLA.

Tết celebrations are typically seen as a neutral safe space, while Black April commemorations are unambiguously political in nature, even if these commemorations convey that refugee politics are cultural (Vo Dang 2008: 50). However, in my analysis of the VNLC Tết Festival and the *hát bội* performance included in the show, I contend that even these seemingly "neutral" spaces are imbued with narratives that shape the Vietnamese diasporic identity in ways that are not overtly political, but are political through the suble ways that the refugee story is told and represented to an audience. Douglas Padgett, a Franklin Fellow at the US State Department, has discussed how Tết celebrations are an explicit, even pedagogical display of Vietnamese-ness, constituting a primary "memory-site" for the Vietnamese community. Tết marks decisive moments in the life of the community, a set of practices and ideals in which and by which the community reflects itself to the wider American community (Padgett 2007: 102).

As participants walk into the VNLC Tết Festival space, they see a stage with chairs lined up in rows for the audience on one side of the large ballroom, while the other side is set up as an interactive experience. A long table is full of traditional Vietnamese dishes such as *bánh cuốn*, *bánh chưng*, *nước mắm*, *chả giò,* and *chè* and *thạch* desserts, with VNLC members dressed in either traditional clothing or formal wear (shirt and tie) ready to serve the food. Another table has the popular gambling game typically played at New Year's to test your luck, *cò cua cá cọp*, while next to it, a student dressed up as a *thầy bói* is ready to predict your fortune or give you advice

for important life decisions, based on your birth date, year, and time.[121] The most promiment station is a large scenic backdrop painted to look like Chợ Bến Thành, the largest open market in Saigon, which unquestionably marks this imagined/created (or "imagineered" [Padgett 2007: 80]) location as south Vietnam (see figure 6.5). A chest of traditional Vietnamese clothing is next to the backgdrop, so that participants can try on clothing and snap a photo of themselves posing in front of Chợ Bến Thành.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Đêm Tất Niên," which literally translates to "New Year's Eve," but the VNLC coordinators chose to translate the phrase as "My Heart is Home," perhaps to emphasize the fact that on this night, Vietnamese family members are expected to come home and gather together to welcome the coming new year (see figure 6.6). In the opening remarks of the performance portion of the celebration, the master of ceremonies reads remarks in English and Vietnamese to greet the audience. After explaining the importance of the Tết holiday in Vietnam and its associations with family, love, and rebirth, the master of ceremonies acknowledges that there is a difference in the ways that Tết is celeberated in Vietnam and in a diasporic context, saying: "By recreating this event, we hope to reconstruct the lively spirit and festive atmosphere of Tết. Whether or not you are already familiar with Vietnamese culture, we hope that you enjoy tonight's festivities in all its color and liveliness, and we thank you for joining us tonight to usher in the New Year."

Some community members see changes in the celebration of Tết in the diasporic context as a loss of authentic culture. Others, as we observed previously, actually see the refugee community as holding onto the older, authentic traditions more effectively than contemporary

[121] A *thầy bói* (literally, teacher of divination) is a practitioner of *bói toán* (divination). The stereotype figure of a *thầy bói* is usually an older male, wearing a black *aó dài* and dark glasses, at times with a beard.

Vietnam. A refugee in her fifites who is an educated professional in the community explained this sentiment:

> The way we celebrate Tết here is more traditional now than the way people celebrate over there now. Here we tend to recreate the old things. Here we conserve the old ways. Just like old Vietnamese here, speak the Bắc language here. So now there's two Bắc—the new Bắc over there and the old Bắc over here. And they say they cannot understand the words over there now." (Padgett 2007: 96-97)

In any case, Vietnamese holidays such as the Tết celebration are a visible way that the Vietnamese American community can discursively work through the complex multiplicity of positionings in which they find themselves situated as refugees, exiles, and American ethnics.

Remembering One's Own: Narratives of War in *My Heart is Home* and *Nguyễn Trung Trực*

The structure of the performance portion of VNLC's Tết Festival was a series of scenes from their original composed drama titled *My Heart is Home* interspersed with other cultural acts such as a traditional dance, a modern dance, a martial arts number, a short fashion show, and a play excerpt performed by the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe. In addition to the *hát bội* performance, several other other musical elements were used in the VNLC Tết festival show. The music was all pre-recorded except for a karaoke number performed by three students of the song "Khúc Giao Mùa" (Song to Welcome Spring) by composer Huy Tuấn (1970-). Other pieces used during the fashion show or during intermission included popular songs commonly heard during the Tết New Year season, such as "Xuân và Tuổi Trẻ" (Spring and Youth) by La Hối (1920-1945) and "Anh cho em mùa Xuân" (You Brought Me the Spring) by Nguyễn Hiền (1927-2005). Both of these recordings picked by VNLC were sung by famous vocalist Khánh Ly.[122]

[122] To clarify, the descriptions and observations in this chapter are based on my fieldnotes, photography, and video recording of the VNLC Tết Festival 2014.

VNLC's Tết Festival coordinator had been in contact with Dương Ngọc Bầy during the planning of the event, asking her to pick a *hát bội* excerpt that would complement VNLC's narrative drama. Their original play tells the story of a young soldier fighting in the war for South Vietnam, while his mother and younger sister long for him to come home in time for the Tết New Year. The mother has already lost her eldest son in the war, and her younger son, Sơn, was inspired by his older brother to join the fighting. The mother works as a *phở* street vendor and is the sole income earner for her family, but due to the stresses of supporting her family alone, she becomes ill with high blood pressure and is unable to continue working. The younger sister, Linh, must take time off from school to work in her mother's place, as her brother is not there to help support the family (see figure 6.7). Meanwhile, Sơn is on the battlefield and writes letters to send home telling his family about his experiences in the war (see figure 6.8). He and his friend are injured in a battle and are taken as prisoners of war. One day, Linh comes home and tells her mom that the Americans have "pulled out" and the war is over. The mother panics and wonders what will become of her son. In a simulteanous scene that takes place on the other side of the stage, we see Sơn and his friend in a reeducation camp. The scene changes and an unclear amount of time passes. In the final scene, Sơn is happily reunited with his mother and sister. They embrace each other, crying, as the lights fade and the play ends (see figure 6.9).

The *hát bội* play that Bầy picked to be included in the VNLC Tết Festival was an excerpt that she composed with one of her students, Thanh Long. The play tells the story of Nguyễn Trung Trực (1839-1869), a fisherman and native of Bình Định province who led guerilla forces in the Mekong delta that fought for independence from colonial France, most notably sinking the navy ship L'Esperance (Nguyen Thanh Thi 1992). The *hát bội* excerpt echoes VNLC's narrative, with similar themes such as a mother waiting for her child to return from war, the tensions between familial and national obligations, and honoring the heroic sacrifices of those who have

fought for the sake of the nation. The VNLC Tết coordinators placed the *hát bội* excerpt following a scene where Sơn is seen writing a letter home to his family, with a voice-over reading his letter.

In the *hát bội* excerpt, we first see Nguyễn Trung Trực training two women in the skills of martial arts and swordsmanship to be part of his militia army (see figure 6.10). Once he has finished their training, the women leave the stage and he begins a monologue. In the self-reflective monologue, he says that by morning he trains militia fighters, while by afternoon he works as a farmer, with Bình Định as his home. But he has been sleepless recently, seeing the French invade further into Vietnam each day, while his people are mistreated and oppressed.[123] The French troops' actions have caused his stomach to turn in a hundred different directions. He wants to defend his country, yet is worried about leaving his old mother at home, alone.[124]

Trung Trực's mother then enters the scene, overhearing her son's words (see figure 6.11). She tells him that even though she is old, she is still loyal to her country. He is still young, so he should go out to help his country. Trung Trực explains to his mother that the French colonialists have invaded Vietnam and overtaken the six southern provinces (nam kỳ lục tỉnh). He kneels to ask his mother's permission to go and save his country. His mother understands, telling him that as he is an honorable man, she must encourage him to honor his country. Despite her old age, she realizes how important the work for the nation is.[125] He thanks her for allowing him to go, and makes sure that the neighbors in the village will take care of her. He tells his mother that despite the difficulties of war, that is not what causes him to hesitate to leave; it is knowing that his mother will be lonely and solitary at home, leaning against the doorframe waiting for his return,

[123] Thấy vận nước, ngủ không an giấc, nhìn giặc Tây, xâm lấn mỗi ngày. Ôi, dân tộc ta, bị lao khổ đọa đày.

[124] Muốn cứu nước non, nhưng lòng lại vấn vương, thân mẩu thân phải cô đơn nơi thôn ly.

[125] Tuổi hạc đã cao, nhưng quốc gia là đại sự.

that is painful for him to think about.[126] His mother tells him that the business of the nation is heavy, and that he should hurry up and go so that when he finishes he can return home, quickly. She tells him not to let her white-haired head (old person) wait for his black-haired brow (young person).[127] After they say their final farewells to one another, Trung Trực exclaims at the end of the scene that united together as one heart, the nation will repel the invaders.[128]

During this excerpt, Dương Ngọc Bầy is clearly the veteran performer on stage. Despite her older age, her movements, speech, and singing are all more precise than those of the younger Thanh Long. As with all of the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe's performances thus far, the instrumental music used during this excerpt is pre-recorded, except for the actors' vocals. At one point after Dương Ngọc Bầy enters the stage, Thanh Long, in the role of Trưng Trực, finishes his lines too quickly, before the pre-recorded track for that segment ends. Dương Ngọc Bầy hears this and is the connsumate performer; without hesitation, she improvises lines until the next track begins and they can resume the rehearsed scene. It is unlikely that anyone in the audience realized the timing error, as the excerpt was written by Dương Ngọc Bầy and her student Hồ Ân very recently, and would not be known by audience members who recognize classic *hát bội* plays. Dương Ngọc Bầy's adept ability to improvise were able to save Thanh Long from an awkward and unplanned period of silence and stillness on stage while the pre-recorded track played out.

There are several notable commonalities between VNLC's *My Heart is Home* and the *hát bội* excerpt. In both narratives, we see the tension between familial obligations and the sacrifices needed to heroically defend one's country. In the *My Heart is Home*, Sơn is inspired by his

[126] Mẩu thân ơi, con đâu có sá chi phải giải gió dầm sương khi con đi rồi, mẹ ở nhà, thui thủi có một mình, đây có phải là cảnh đoạn trường, để mẹ già phải tựa cửa, chờ trông.

[127] Đừng để phất phơ, đầu bạc trông chờ mày xanh.

[128] Quyết một lòng, đuổi bọn xâm lăng.

deceased brother, whom both he and their mother call a "hero," to enlist in the military, yet he knows that his absence will cause hardships that his family must endure while he is unable to help support them. The younger sister, Linh, at one point laments to their mother angrily, "Anh hai [older brother] was the best. Why did he have to be so brave and try to save everyone else, and not himself first." Their mother calmly responds, "Là anh hùng thì phải hi sinh một chúc [In order to be a hero, you need to make sacrifices]. A hero is a hero, even if it costs his life." Nguyễn Trung Trực expresses similar hesitations about leaving home and family to defend southern Vietnam from French colonial forces: "I want to save my country, but my soul is at an impasse. For me to do this, my mother must be lonely in her own home village."[129] Nguyễn Trung Trực's mother encourages him to go anyway, saying, "As you are a man and my son, I have urged you to repay your debts to our nation."[130] In both narratives, the need to defend one's country is ultimately given more importance than familial obligations, as both mothers encourage their sons to leave home to become heroes for their nation, through war.

Both narratives also privilege a south Vietnamese perspective as the central experience of war. Nguyễn Trung Trực is known as a common farmer and fisherman who was able to raise a militia army in the deep south of the Mekong Delta that fought against French colonization. My *Heart is Home* was able to indicate unequivocally that the location and perspective of the play was a southern Vietnamese one. Sơn's mother is seen wearing the southern *aó bà ba* shirt in the very first scene, and her accent is heavily southern, using a *y* sound for the letters *v*, *gi*, *d*, and *tr*, as well as a *w* sound for the consonant *qu*. The play also shows a chaotic scene of south Vietnamese in distress as they receive word that American forces are finally withdrawn. Sơn's mother frantically runs outside, with turbulent street sounds surrounding her, asking strangers,

[129] Muốn cừu nước non, nhưng lòng lại vấn vương. Thân mẫu phải cô đơn nơi thôn lý.

[130] Là thân nam tử, mẹ đã khuyên con nên đền ơn xã tắc.

"Excuse me, can you please help me? Oh my gosh, do you know what happened to our soldiers? I don't know, let's get out of here. What? What about my son? Where is my son? I can't lose another one of my children. Trời ơi, tại sao? (Oh heavens, why?)." No one answers or helps her, and she collapses in the street. A northern perspective would of course have portrayed the American military withdrawal as a celebrated victory for the communist cause, the "liberation" of the South, and the reunification of Vietnam.

As Viet Thanh Nguyen has noted in his discussion about the ethics of remembering, it is not surprising that south Vietnamese in exile insist mostly on remembering "their own." Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, too, has discussed how the "historical amnesia" that has taken place within constructed narratives on both the American political Right and Left, as well as by the victors in the civil war, has pushed south Vietnamese to remember their stories. Viet Thanh Nguyen notes how, despite the north Vietnamese being more willing to remember women and civilians than the Americans, and Americans being more willing than the Vietnamese to remember the enemy, neither side shows much inclination to remember south Vietnamese, who "stink of loss, melancholy, bitterness, and rage" (Viet Thanh Nguyen 2016: 9).

VNLC's *My Heart is Home* and the *Nguyễn Trung Trực* excerpt recount narratives from the perspective of southern Vietnamese, but do so in a flat, simplified way that obscures the complexities of war that exist on all sides of a conflict. Niether Sơn nor Nguyễn Trung Trực are ever made to explicitly explain or justify the ideological cause that they are risking their lives (and their families' livelihoods) for, nor are they ever faced with the ethical dilemna of injuring or killing another human being in the midst of war. The portrayal of Sơn in particular, as we hear him reading letters he has written to send home, asserts an innocence and good-heartedness on his part:

> The battlefield is a scary place, but I make the best of it. It is kind of like that children's game . . . uh . . . *cảnh sát bắt kẻ trọm* [cops and robbers]. Sometimes, *anh hai* [eldest brother] would be the robber, and I would be the police . . . I've met a lot of inspirational people. But I also met a lot of depressed guys. One guy kept telling me "*sẽ không về đâu*," at this rate, we'll never get to go home. But I try to keep my head on positive things. At least I'm alive and I'm here now. And I'm fighting for our country. I also made a really good friend who is always watching my back. . . Anyway, I hope you're doing well. I can't wait to come home. I miss you both a lot. Sơn.

In his closing lines, Nguyễn Trung Trức expresses a sense of inevitabilty of his militia' s victory against the French, saying, "united together as one heart, we will repel the nation's invaders" (quyết một lòng, đuổi bọn xâm lăng). In her work with both Vietnamese American and French Vietnamese refugee communites, Le Skaife has described these flattened, simplified stories as "stock stories," usually anticommunist in nature, that are "dominant narratives held in reserve and used to preserve a particular status quo" (2013: 29). These stock stories not only shape people's perceptions of a particular situation, but also serve to legitimize and maintain those perceptions.

To examine these flattened, simplifed, stock stories, I look towards discussions of the ethics of remembering, and what Viet Thanh Nguyen terms an "ethics of recognition." As Milan Kundera has noted, total memory, which would include memories of our own, both individual and collective, as well as the memories of the Other, is neither practical nor possible, for something is always forgotten. Whether we forget despite our best interests or due to powerful interests that actively supress memory, Kundera calls these absences of memory "the desert of organized forgetting" (1996: 218). In these deserts, memory becomes, like water, a strategic resource of power (Viet Thanh Nguyen 2016: 10). Although the United States may have lost the Vietnam war, it has "won the war in memory on most of the world's cultural fronts outside of Vietnam, dominating as it does moviemaking, book publishing, fine art, and the production of historical archives" (ibid: 15).

Ricoeur also outlines an ethics for remembering that turns towards the ability for us to see the humanity in others, and to remember others: "The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than self." He urges us to see others as victims of injustice in order to compel us to take up the cause of justice for others: "Justice is the component of otherness inherent in all the virtues that it wrests from the closed-circuit of the self with itself . . . the moral priority belongs to the victims. . . . The victim at issue here is the other victim, other than ourselves" (2004: 89). In her post 9/11 work *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violince* (2001), Judith Butler, too, turns towards the other as victim, aiming her outrage towards American accountability and the inability of Americans to grieve for others.

Rather than focusing on the other constantly as victim, Viet Thanh Nguyen presents not an ethics of remembering, but rather an ethics of recognition. He argues that it is not enough to simply remember others as human; we must be able to recognize the inhumanities that lie within humanity, in both others and ourselves. Examining Butler's stance, Nguyen problematizes seeing the other only as victim, or as an object of pity, because this places the other beyond criticism and relegates the work of empathy to "ourselves," the "we" of which in Butler's case is the West. Nguyen writes, "to be a subject, rather than to be an other, means that one can be guilty, and such guilt can be and should be examined as fully as Western guilt" (2016: 76). Nguyen also considers how the term "banality of evil," coined by Hannah Arendt in 1963 to describe the complicity of ordinary Germans in the unspeakable crimes committed by the Nazi regime, has generally been reserved for the West itself, "as a sign of subjectivity, of agency, of centrality, even for the most unimportant of Westerners who functioned as nothing more than cogs in the war machine" (2016: 96). Nguyen calls the West's inability to see beyond others as victim a "patronizing pity" that prevents the possibility of recognizing others as full subjects who are, capable of heroism, victimhood, guilt, and the entire spectrum of complex, contradictory, and flawed subjectivity,

including the banality of evil. This recognition of both ourselves and others as full subjects is vital when attempting to understand multiple perspectives of history and memory, especially in the aftermath of conflict and during attempts of reconcilation.

Although the *hát bội* excerpts *Nguyễn Trung Trực* and *My Heart is Home* are meaningful memory projects for south Vietnamese to remember their own humantity that has often been unrecognized in public discourses and official commemorations, these simplified, flattened stock stories fail to recognize the complexities of both the humanity and inhumanity in others and themselves. Following the work of rhetoric and Southeast Asian Studies scholar Penh Cheah, Nguyen argues that conventional views of inhumanity as an aberation of humanity lead to the "usual sentimental, humanist hand-wringing over the inhuman behavior of various individuals, tribes, parties, and nations" (2016: 91). This allows those who have not experienced inhumane tragedies such as genocide the ability to point in horror and ask how such inhumanities could have been allowed to occur, when in reality, as Cheah notes, these horrors could have happened anywhere with the right "inhuman conditions" (Nguyen 2004: 90). According to Nguyen, when recognizing the humanity and inhumanity in ourselves and others, we are asked to forget "the idea that anyone or any nation or people has a unique claim to humanity, to suffering, to pain, to being the exceptional victim," as this often leads to further violence and vengeance committed in the name of the victim (Nguyen 2004: 97). In order to move towards an ethics of remembering that might be helpful in reducing political and violent conflicts, and promote reconciliations post-conflict, Nguyen reflects,

> An ethics for remembering others often encourages us to see others as human, which seems inarguably good. In contrast, however, an ethics of recognition says that the other is both human and inhuman, as are we. When we recognize our capacity to do harm, we can reconcile with others who we feel have hurt us. This ethics of recognition might be more of an antidote to war and conflict than remembering others, for if we recognize that we can do damage, then perhaps we would go to war less readily and be more open to reconciliation in its aftermath. (Nguyen 2016: 73)

The arts, with their ability to imagine new realities beyond what already exists, especially the performing arts and their ability to bring new emotional affects and meanings to their live audiences, constitute a vehicle ripe with potential for realizing Nguyen's vision of this ethics of recognition. The performing arts allows for the potential to bring forth hitherto unrecognized stories into the collective consciousness in a profoundly affective manner that could have reverberating consequences far beyond performances themselves.

Figure 6.1. Dương Ngọc Bầy backstage before a performance in Orange County in November, 2012. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, November 20, 2012)

Figure 6.2. Trần Tường Nguyên in the role of Trịnh Ân on the left, David Phạm in the role of Trịnh Ấn in the center, and Lê Thanh Quốc in the role of the executioner on the right. (Photo by Helen Rees, February 21, 2010)

Figure 6.3. Minh Chánh in the role of Thi Sách on the left, and Kim Lang as Trưng Trắc on the right. (Photo by Helen Rees, February 21, 2010)

Figure 6.4. Nguyễn Thanh Thủy recites the poem "Tống Biệt Hành" by Thanh Tâm. (Photo by Helen Rees, February 21, 2010)

Figure 6.5. UCLA students pose in front of the painted backdrop depicting Chợ Bến Thành, the largest market in Hồ Chí Minh City. Motorcycles and bicycles are painted in the street, as well as *phượng vỹ* (phoenix tail) tree branches with red blossoms (in the upper right-hand corner), which can be found throughout the city. (Photo by Khanh Le, February 9, 2014)

Figure 6.6. The VNLC Tết Festival brochure, with title "Đêm Tất Niên" (New Year's Eve) translated as "My Heart is Home." (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, February 9, 2014)

Figure 6.7. Linh tells her mother not to worry, and that she will take over the phở vending so that her mother can rest. Both are wearing the southern aó bà ba, Linh in pink and her mother in light blue, which sets the scene in South Vietnam. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, February 9, 2014)

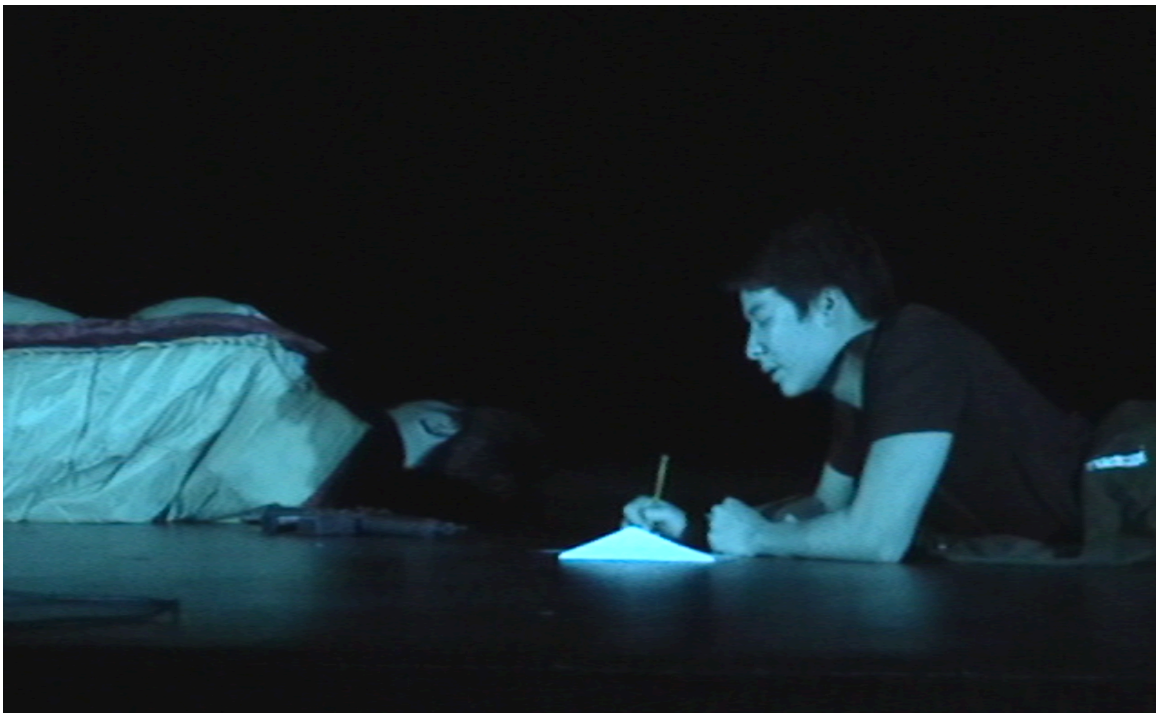

Figure 6.8. Linh writes a letter to send home as his friend sleeps. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, February 9, 2014)

Figure 6.9. Sơn is reunited with his sister Linh and mother. Linh is wearing a traditional *aó dài*, the mother is still wearing her blue *aó bà ba*. A *nón lá* conical hat can be seen on the floor, as well as a plastic chair and plastic net used to cover food, both of which are ubiquitous in Hồ Chí Minh City. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, February 9, 2014)

Figure 6.10. Thanh Long in the role of Trưng Trực, and his two students, played by Trần Ý Thu and Hồng Nga, training to be part of his militia. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, February 9, 2014)

Figure 6.11. Trung Trực, played by Thanh Long, and his mother, played by Dương Ngọc Bầy. (Photo by Kim Nguyen Tran, February, 9, 2014)

EPILOGUE

This dissertation has sought to disentangle the ways in which *hát bội* performances have been used to produce and reproduce contested memories in contemporary Vietnam and in the refugee community of southern California. In Act I: *Nguyễn Tri Phương*, we consider how scenarios of corruption and loyalty, tropes of traitors and heroes, and the use of musical cues with instruments (*đàn bầu* and *đàn nhị*) as well as other musical genres (*hò Huế*, *ca trù*, and *hát xẩm*), all contribute to telling the story of a "singular hero" of the nineteenth century, a story very much sanctioned by the Vietnamese state. In Act II: *Đêm Sáng Phương Nam*, we examine the role of women, as prostitutes, mothers, soldiers/heroines, and members of an imagined ethnic minority, and their symbolic representations of the nation, within the telling of Tây Sơn heroine Bùi Thị Xuân's story of expelling Siamese forces from Vietnam.

In Act III: *Tử Hình Không Án Trạng*, we consider how contestations of the legitmacy of rule and the erased histories of the South (which have manifested themselves at times through symbolic appearances of ghosts, who return to tell unrecognized stories) come together in a new interpretation of historical events surrounding the assassination of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. And finally, in Act IV: The Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe, we examine how the politics of memory in the refugee community of southern California frames *hát bội* performances in the context of longing, loss, nostalgia for a no longer existing homeland (South Vietnam), and an anticommunist condemnation of the current regime in Vietnam that is compounded with the American ideals of freedom, independence, and democracy. This epilogue will discuss the limitations that *hát bội* faces as a technology of memory, the complications of conducting research in communities in which I felt both a part of and apart from, and the shifts in dominant narratives that are taking place currently in Vietnam and the diasporic Vietnamese refugee community.

The Limitations of Hát Bội as a Technology of Memory

Although performances of *hát bội* play a powerful part in memory-making in contemporary Vietnam and in the diasporic community of southern California, *hát bội* as a technology of memory has limitations. Because the art form itself has such strict structures, not only in musical material, but also in its conventions of color, elaborate costumes and makeup, symbolic gestures and movements, and set literary meters, memory-making can be seen most clearly in anomalies to these conventions, or, in the activation/reactivation of dramatic scenarios (Diana Taylor) and the framing of performances in particular contexts. Through scenarios that *hát bội* plays bring to audiences, *hát bội* performances in Vietnam and its diaspora have a powerful potential to function as "vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [behavior], or what Schechner has called 'twice-behaved behavior" (Diana Taylor 2005: 3). However, due to the music of *hát bội* (in its traditional form) being rigidly structured (with rules about the appropriate modes, tempo, meter, dynamics, and phrasing for particular emotions or dramatic situations), only a small space exists for creative musical interpretations.

For this reason, in my analysis of music, I have focused on deviations from traditional *hát bội* musical conventions and on the introductions of outside musical elements or genres, as these moments not only test the boundaries of what is considered "traditional" in *hát bội*, but are also often points of creative engagement with the construction of cultural and historical memory-making. It is important to note that other musical forms currently practiced in Vietnam may have a more expansive potential to create narratives and counternarratives directly through music, due to the structure of the musical genres being more open and unimpeded by strict rules and conventions. One example (among other popular music forms) is the burgeoning rap/hip hop

music scene in Vietnam, which has taken on a palpable poltical bent in recent years, most notably and visibly with the viral music of rappers Nah (Nguyễn Vũ Sơn) and Suboi (Hàng Lâm Trang Anh).

Nah (b. 1991) was born in Vietnam, but has been in the United States for his undergraduate studies, in Oklahoma, since 2013. Before coming to the US, Nah had already begun to gather a substantial following as a young artist who performed rap music that highlighted the societal problems in Vietnam, particularly Hồ Chị Minh City. In early 2015, still studying in Oklahoma, Nah released (via YouTube) the single titled "Địt Mẹ Cộng Sản" (Fuck Communism) or "ĐMCS", criticizing the Vietnamese government's corruption, censorship, and history of violence (Winn 2015). The single sent shock waves across the diasporic community with its brazen and outspoken critiques that are rarely seen publicly from Vietnamese nationals. In addition to releasing the single, Nah wrote an opinion piece about "ĐMCS" that was published in the Seattle Times. The single was covered in several diasporic Vietnamese-language media outlets, including various news sites, blogs, and local television stations that conducted and broadcasted interviews with Nah. Public Radio International, the Huffington Post, and the BBC also profiled Nah and the released single.[131]

In 2013, with support from VAALA, the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe received a Living Cultures Grant from the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA), in order to produce a set of *hát bội* instruction videos led by Dương Ngọc Bầy, that was, like Nah's single ĐMCS, posted publicly on YouTube.[132] Despite the digital format and same mode of distrubution online,

[131] In June 2015, Nah posted a video of himself reading an apology for the creation of ĐMCS. Around this time, all videos of ĐMCS were deleted from his YouTube channel and remain deleted as of January 2017, although copies of the video continue to circulate on other channels. There is speculation that perhaps his family in Vietnam was threatened in order to pressure Nah to delete the materials and post an apology, but there is no confirmation of this.

[132] More information about the ACTA grant that VAALA and Dương Ngọc Bày received and the *hát bội* project can be found here: http://www.actaonline.org/content/vietnamese-american-arts-letters-association

the *hát bội* instruction videos had a very small following, and little to no coverage in local media, when compared to Nah's "ĐMCS". Because of its esoteric conventions, it is difficult to imagine performances of *hát bội* ever reaching audiences as wide as those reached by rap music in Vietnam and the diaspora, even with access to online and digital modes of distribution.

Suboi (b. 1999), also a rapper born in Vietnam, recently came to national and international attention after an exchange with United States president Barack Obama in May 2016, at a town hall meeting organized by the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) in Hồ Chí Minh City.[133] During the town hall, Suboi asked Obama whether or not a country should support its arts and culture in order to build the future of the nation. Obama's response, along with Suboi's brief rap for the president, went viral in the Vietnamese American community and beyond. Obama's response was: "let's be honest. Sometimes art is dangerous . . . And that's why governments sometimes get nervous about art. But one of the things that I truly believe is that if you try to suppress the arts, then I think you're suppressing the deepest dreams and aspirations of a people" (Obama 2016).

Unlike Nah's brazen criticism of the communist government, Suboi takes a more indirect approach in her music. In a 2016 marketing video, as campaign ambassador for the Swedish multinational clothing-retail company H&M, Suboi openly speaks about the censorship that artists in Vietnam face, but says that this censorship actually pushes her to be more creative and find ways to rap her messages in a more poetic way, through metaphors.[134] Although rap does face government censorship and oversight to a certain extent, as all the arts and the media in Vietnam do, the dependence upon state funding and the participation in national competitions by

[133] Suboi makes a point to refer to Hồ Chí Minh City as Saigon. She has this previous name, Saigon, tatooed on her left wrist, rather than the official name of the city, which refers to the communist revolutionary leader.

[134] "There is censorship in Vietnam. But, I think it's fine, there is no perfect nation. I use metaphors, everything is read between the lines. It's great for me. It makes my art more like poetry" (H&M official YouTube Channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuxt5ZkdEHU).

state-sponsored *hát bội* troupes in Vietnam causes *hát bội* to be more tightly controlled by the government in ways that might be impossible to enforce in the the underground rap scene in Vietnam.[135]

When compared to *hát bội* as an art form, rap/hip hop has a much more open structure with four basic elements: MCing/rapping (delivering rhyming lyrics over an external meter), DJing/scratching (mixing recorded music as it is playing, at times using percussive techniques of scratching), break dancing (a form of street dance that includes acrobatic elements), and graffiti art. These four basic elements allow for a tremendous amount of interpretation and flexibility, as seen in the ways the art form has been appropriated and adapted to different cultures, languages, histories, and musical traditions. From its very beginning in the 1970s, rap/hip hop was an art form of protest that expressed the post-industrial experiences of urban Black and Latino youth, who had been largely ignored in public discourse. The genre of rap/hip hop continues to be relevant today in areas across the globe, but its history is much shorter when compared to the long history of *hát bội*. *Hát bội* is the oldest musical theatre genre in Vietnam that is still actively performed today, with origins as far back as the eleventh century.

Despite its rigid structures and conventions, *hát bội* has developed and transformed itself throughout Vietnam's political, economic, and cultural transitions, maintaining a presence in contemporary Vietnam and migrating with the refugee community to southern California. Although my research focuses on contemporary performances of *hát bội*, further research on *hát bội*'s transformations through each of these eras in Vietnamese history would be a fascinating

[135] Rap/hip hop music has not only been appropriated by Vietnamese and Vietnamese American musicians. Recent scholarship has shown how rap/hip hop music has manifested itself in myriad variations in a wide range of geographical locations such as Ukraine (Helbig 2014), Japan (Manabe 2006), Taiwan (Schweig 2013), the Southeast Asian American community (Dao 2014), the Samoan diaspora (Henderson 2006), the Hawaiian native community (Teves 2011), the American Indian community (Amsterdam 2013), the Filipino American community (Viesca 2012), and throughout the continent of Africa (Charry 2012).

look at how the politics of memory has played out in different time periods. The long history of *hát bội* allows it to be considered a "traditional" artform, one that has a claim to authenticity as being distinctly "Vietnamese." This claim to authenticity plays a part in how and why *hát bội* performances have been used in some cases to promote narratives sanctioned by the communist government as part of its memory-making apparatus, but have also, in other cases, been able to contest these narratives and offer counter-narratives (as seen in the Hồ Chị Minh City Hát Bội Troupe and the Little Saigon Hát Bội Troupe). It is important to note that I have chosen to focus on the three most well-known state-sponsored troupes based in large cities in Vietnam, and have almost entirely left out the independent folk troupes that have a lively presence in Vietnamese ritual life, especially in more rural areas. Further study of independent folk troupes would provide an insightful comparative perspective in relation to state-sponsored troupes.

Straddling Divides: Motives and Points of View

As the daughter of Vietnamese refugees, I did not always find a clear line between the academic and personal reasons for my research. My attempts to unravel the ways that narratives have shaped memory surrounding Vietnam are not purely motivated by a desire to produce knowledge for academia; a large part of my motivation is deeply personal in nature, rooted in a need to understand my own culture, history, and identity in a more profound way. Although I examine *hát bội* as a theatrical art form, the questions that drive my work are at once more personal and more expansive. Why am I here (in the United States)? How did my community and I come to be here (in the United States)? Where do I belong? Where does my community belong? What is my story? What is my community's collective story, and how is it being told? What does it mean for me to conduct academic research with these personal questions in mind, or as Linda Trinh Vo writes, "what are the methodological and analytical implications of third-

world scholars from first-world academic institutions studying third-world communities in the first-world?" (2001: 17).

While conducting fieldwork in Vietnam and the Vietnamese refugee community, I found myself constantly navigating the blurry line between "insider" and "outsider." While in Vietnam, in many ways, my appearance, language skills, and knowledge about Vietnamese social customs were a way to gain acceptance and access to research subjects and opportunities. But this was not always the case. As a young female with Vietnamese physical features, at times I was met with preconceived notions about my background, intelligence, and the seriousness of my work, especially when approaching potential research contacts for the first time, without an introduction from any colleagues. These instances manifested themselves at best as simply being ignored or dismissed, and at worst, being propositioned innapropriately. While conducting fieldwork in Vietnam, I often wondered if I would be afforded more respect and authority, and perhaps even more time and access, as a white, male "outsider." After some time, I devised a strategy when approaching research contacts without an introduction from a colleague. Depending on the situation, at times I would intitially engage in English in order to clearly establish myself as an American. After introducing myself, in English, as an American researcher, I would then reveal that I also spoke Vietnamese and was the daughter of Vietnamese refugees.

While conducting fieldwork in Little Saigon, I felt a similar straddling of an "insider" and "outsider" perspective. Much of the time, I was accepted into the *hát bội* class and viewed simply as an especially curious student who wanted to have long discussions with classmates, while taking notes. At other times, I was treated as a bit of a novelty. When telling community members that my work would lead to a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology (the closest Vietnamese term is *dân tộc nhạc học*, which literally translates to "ethnic music studies"), I was met with puzzled

looks and questions. How did I come to study such a thing? What did my parents think of my choice of study? What kind of work would I have upon graduating? I certainly was not part of the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese Americans, who were born in Vietnam but arrived in the US at a young enough age to acquire fluency in English and assimilate into American culture at a high degree. But I felt a similar sense of being in-between, perhaps as a part of a "backwards" 1.5 generation, who were born in the US, but have attempted to acquire Vietnamese language fluency, actively engage with Vietnamese culture and history, and spend as much time in Vietnam as possible (Tran 2010).

In the Vietnamese American community, it is often difficult to voice any political positions that are not anti-communist, particularly when speaking with older members of the community who have endured harsh treatment and deep traumatic experiences at the hands of the communist regime. Vo Dang writes about the complications of being part of the community conducting academic research and the tensions between her subjects' wishes and her obligations to maintain a critical academic stance, in her work on anti-communism:

> How do I disentangle, in order to make coherent, the observations and reflections of small and large-scale community and organization events, the interviews and casual conversations with individuals and the post-meeting group chats, my own volunteer work, the friendships that have been forged through countless social interactions that were never purely business nor pleasure, and the conflicting needs and desires of my subjects and my own? If I heed some of my subjects' wishes and write a moral narrative that posits Vietnamese communists as perpertrators and Vietnamese refugees as victims, I would only reinforce the idea of the "emblematic victim" serving the interest of a hegemonic US history-making apparatus. (2008: 35)

For so called "native" researchers, even while identifying and being accepted as a member of the community in which we do research, the epistemological break is still present and needs to be crossed when it comes time to leave the field of experience and begin written analysis.[136] There is no escaping the practice of being part of a culture, implicating oneself in the ideologies of a

[136] For discussion of the complexities of "native" ethnographer identities, see Kirin Narayan (1993), Kempny (2012), and Chawla (2006).

society, whether you consider the culture your "own" or not, and the act of stepping back, "away" from this culture, to analyze and make sense of the what the ideology of the field of experience is, in terms of structure, symbolism, and meaning. However, this epistemological break, this objective separation from the field of experience, can be felt in a deeply personal way.

In the far reaches of my pysche, my research on this ancient musical theatre genre of *hát bội* has been much more than producing knowledge about the art form itself; it has been a way for me to understand and reconcile the disconnect that I have felt from my "own" Vietnamese culture, but also, from my American culture, also my "own." What is this strange experience of being American, but not quite American enough, Vietnamese, but not quite Vietnamese enough? In a country where I was born, a country that "took in" and "saved" my family as refugees, giving us the "gift" of freedom (Mimi Thi Nguyen 2012), how is it possible that I, and my community, could feel foreign and marginalized? What is my place here, what is my community's place here, where do we belong? Where can we tell our stories? Are we able to tell our histories in the places that we call home? What role do the performing arts have in telling our stories? These deeply personal questions drove my research, and at times made it impossible for me to have any type of "objective" stance for analysis. But, perhaps, as Cuban American anthropologist and writer Ruth Behar writes, "anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (Behar 1996: 177).

Other Vietnamese American scholars have also described this uneasy feeling of displacement in one's own home as a driving force behind their work. In an interview with Charlie Rose, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Viet Thanh Nguyen describes a formative childhood experience, while watching the Hollywood Vietnam War film *Apocalpyse Now*, that he has attempted to unravel in his work for over three decades:

> I saw it [*Apocalypse Now*] when I was a young boy, ten or eleven, it made a huge impact on me in a negative way. It is a very powerful work of art, but it is a powerful work of art partially because it silences the Vietnamese people. As a young boy growing up, I was both American and Vietnamese, and I was completely split in two by the experience of watching that movie and I always wanted to respond to it. . . . As an American, I'm watching this movie, I see it through American eyes, I'm rooting for the American soldiers, and then they kill Vietnamese people. And at that moment, I think, am I American or am I Vietnamese? Am I the one I'm supposed to identify with or am I the one being killed? (Viet Thanh Nguyen 2016)

Trịnh T. Minh Hà has also written about the feeling of being a constant stranger as a "third-world" scholar trained in the "first-world":

> But I am a stranger to myself and a stranger now in a strange land. There is no arcane territory to return to. For I am no more an "overseas" person in their land than in my own. Sometimes I see my country people as complete strangers. But their country is my country. It's not a tenable place to be. I feel at once more in it and out of it. Out of the named exiled, migrant, hyphenated, split self. The margin of center. The Asian in America. The fragment of Woman. The Third within the Second. Here, too, Their country is My country. The source continues to travel. The predicament of crossing boundaries cannot be merely rejected or accepted. Again, if it is problematic to be a stranger, it is even more so to stop being one. (Trinh 2011: 34)

Yet, even while feeling like a perpetual foreigner who belongs to no singular place, Trịnh is often asked to speak as a representative, on behalf of entire categories of people:

> Even today, after two decades of relentless critical work on the politics of racially, sexually, and professionally discrimatory practices, it still happens that when I'm invited to speak, I'm asked with great expectations to speak as a representative—of a culture, a people, a country, an ethnicity or a gender considered to be mine and my own. In other words, tell us about Vietnam, be woman, talk Asian, stay within the Third World. We all seem to know the dilemma of speaking withint authorized boundaries, and yet the urge to orientalize the Oriental and to africanize the African continues to lurk behind many Westerners' well-intended attempts to promote better understanding of cultural difference. (Trinh 2011: 13)

My Vietnamese background, my family, and my community, are a endless source of inspiration, but also a deep source of trauma and anxiety. In my family, like in many Vietnamese families, speaking about the traumas of war is difficult. These unspoken traumas have manifested themselves in myriad ways in the Vietnamese and Vietnamese American community—alcoholism, emotional and/or physical abuse, untreated mental health issues—, and in many cases these unspoken traumas are repeated and passed down in the next generation if not

met with some type of counseling or treatment that helps to heal and resolve these traumas.[137] The motives for my work on *hát bội* are rooted in examining the legacies of a war, a conflict that "ended" with US withdrawal of troops in 1975, but has had after-effects still felt in concrete ways in the everyday lives of Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans today. Through *hát bội*, I wanted to examine the lasting effects of colonialism and imperialism in Vietnam's history, the ways in which, as Viet Thanh Nguyen says, all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield and the second time in memory. This examination of *hát bội* allows small parts of this large memory-making apparatus, or what Viet Thanh Nguyen calls the "industries of memory," to be visible, but falls far short of being fully representative of the the broad spectrum of post-war experiences that Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans face in their everyday lives.

Shifting Narratives in the Vietnamese Refugee Community and Vietnam

My analysis of *hát bội* performances in present-day Vietnam and the diaspora exposes some of the dominant narratives and counter-narratives in memory production embedded in the art form, but these narratives are constantly in flux with the changing currents of geo-political power. In recent years, there has been a notable shift away from the staunchly anticommunist ideology that had permeated all levels of Vietnamese American cultural life. This can be seen in the continued work of groups such as VietUnity, a grass-roots community organization (founded in the San Francisco Bay area in 2004) that supports progressive issues of social justice and self-determination. The VietUnity branch in southern California has maintained a deliberate low profile in order to avoid backlash (organized protests, red-baiting, boycotts, public name-calling) from anticommunist individuals in the community, but recently decided for the first time to write

[137] See Vo Dang 2008 for disccusion of unspoken and/or unspeakable stories and traumas in the Vietnamese American community.

and release a public statement in response to the 2016 presidential elections. VietUnity is an important and relatively new space for Vietnamese Americans who see the destruction that extreme anticommunist stances have caused in the community to explore alternatives to this ideology.[138] There is also a growing movement towards solidarity with other communities of color in the US, and a recognition of how the Asian model minority myth has been used to justify and uphold anti-Blackness in this country.[139]

Dominant narratives in Vietnam are also constantly in transition, albeit seemingly at a slower pace than in the Vietnamese American community. The Vietnamese government has faced a slew of recent protests, including those in relation to the government's response to a large chemical spill that occured in April 2016, originating from the Taiwanese-owned steel factory Formosa, that affected over 120 miles of the central coast and resulted in a devastating fish kill in an area with an economy that depends heavily on fishing. In May 2016, the Office of the United Nations High Commisioner for Human Rights urged the Vietnamese government to avoid the use of excessive force, citing "increasing levels of violence" against demonstrators (Paddock 2016). Despite continued concerns about human rights violations in Vietnam, the US lifted the ban on weapons sales to Vietnam at this time. The lifting of this ban was timed in conjuction with US president Barack Obama's visit to Vietnam in May 2016.

The Vietnamese government had agreed to allow political and social activists to meet with Obama during his 2016 visit, but in the hours preceding the meeting, several of the activists (Nguyễn Quang A, a businessman who ran as an independent candidate for parliament, but was

[138] In the summer of 2016, I participated in the Hai Bà Trưng School for Organizing, a training session developed by VietUnity, that targets young progressive organizers who identify as Vietnamese or Vietnamese American. It was in this space of the Hai Bà Trưng School that, for the first time, I felt open to express all parts of my identity (female, educated, progressive leaning, etc.) in the presence of a group of other Vietnamese and/or Vietnamese Americans, without a constant, dull, fear of being ostracized for my political leanings or opinions.

[139] There have been signs of support in the Vietnamese diaspora for Syrian refugees who have also been displaced directly as a result of US military intervention (Do 2015, Caulderwood 2015, Regencia 2015).

disqualified by the government; Phạm Đoan Trang, a prominent blogger and journalist; and Hả Huy Sơn, a laywer who specializes in defending dissidents) were physically barred from attending the meeting (Harris and Parlez 2016). The Vietnamese government has faced increasingly outspoken criticism from dissidents and politically active artists, such as Nah and Suboi mentioned above. Another example is Mai Khôi, a singer-songwriter, dubbed the Lady Gaga of Vietnam, who along with two dozen other activists and dissidents, ran for parlimentary seats as independent, non-party candidates, in 2015 (Ives 2016).

It is my hope that this dissertation, in its analysis of a centuries old-art form, *hát bội*, might be an entryway into understanding the deep-rooted causes of how Vietnam, the Vietnamese people, and the Vietnamese American people have been remembered and forgotten in public discourses and narratives. The performing arts, with their powerful potential to imagine future realities (and new interpretations of the past) as technologies of memory, will play a critical role in shifting narratives about Vietnam and its diaspora. The *hát bội* art form has clear limitations in its role as a technology of memory, but can serve as a case study for further analysis in the broad range of possible studies relating to the role of the arts in the continuing production of memory surrounding Vietnam and its diaspora.

APPENDIX A
VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE PRONUNCIATION AND NOTES

Consonants	IPA	English sounds	Examples
b	/b/	bee	bao (bag)
c, k, q	/k/	cat	con (child), kính (glass), q: in qu
ch	/c/	chip	cho ("give")
d, gi	/z/(Northern)	zoo	dao (knife), giá (price)
	/j/(Central, Southern)	yes	
đ	/d/	do	đi (go)
g, gh	/g/	goal	ghen (jealous)
h	/h/	hat	hên (lucky)
kh	/x/	loch	khói (smoke)
l	/l/	link	lái (drive)
m	/m/	my	mẹ (mum)
n	/n/	net	nền (floor)
ng, ngh	/ŋ/	sing	ngồi (sit), nghe (hear/listen)
nh	/ɲ/	canyon	nhanh (fast)
p	/p/	pen	p: in ph
ph	/f/	fine	phở (pho)
qu	/kw/(Northern, Central)	queen	quen (familiar)
	/w/(Southern)	will	
r	/r/	run	rau (vegetable)
s	/s/(Northern)	sun	sen (lotus)
	/ʃ/(Central, Southern)	shy	
t	/t/	tip	tối (dark)
th	/tʰ/	thank	thích (like)
tr	/ʈ/	try	trơn (slippy)
v	/v/	vote	vẽ(draw)
x	/s/	stun	xem (watch)

Vowels	IPA	English sounds	Examples
a	/aː/	far	xa (far)
ă	/a/	father (shortened a)*	mắt (eye)
â	/ə/	but *	đất (earth)
e	/ɛ/	red	xe (vehicle)
ê	/e/	may *	hên (lucky)
i, y	/i/	me	hình (image), yêu (love)
o	/ɔ/	law	lo (worried)
ô	/o/	spoke *	cô (she)
ơ	/əː/	sir	trơn (slippy)
u	/u/	boo	bún (noodle)
ư	/ɨ/	uh-uh *	mứt (jam)

Tone name	Diacritic Mark	Pronunciation
Ngang (Level)	no diacritic	middle starting point; intonation remains level
Sắc (Sharp)	acute accent(´)	middle starting point; gradual rising
Huyền (Hanging)	grave(`)	low starting point; gradual falling
Hỏi (Asking)	hook(̉)	middle starting point; quick falling, staying there for a while, then quick rising back to near middle: valley-shape
Ngã (Tumbling)	tilde(~)	middle starting point; quick rising, slight gradual falling, quick rising
Nặng (Heavy)	dot(.)	middle starting point; sharp falling

Note about Vietnamese Names and Spellings

Vietnamese surnames normally come before first names. However, some Vietnamese and many Vietnamese Americans choose to use their surname second, after the first name. In this text, I have kept the order of surname and first name of authors as they appear in publiations, and how interviewees have preferred to use their names. If publications include diacritic marks, I have included them in this text. If publications have not included diacritic marks, I have omitted them in this text.

I have used the simplified English spelling of the cities Hanoi and Saigon, and the nation Vietnam. In the Vietnamese language, these locations are spelled as follows: Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, and Việt Nam.

APPENDIX B
OUTLINE OF VIETNAMESE HISTORY

Triệu Dynasty	207-111 BC
First Chinese Domination	111 BC – 40 AD
Hai Bà Trưng (Trưng Sisters)	40-43 AD
Second Chinese Domination	43-544 AD
Early Lý Dynasty	544–602
3rd Chinese domination	602–938
Ngô dynasty	939–967
Đinh dynasty	968–980
Early Lê dynasty	980–1009
Later Lý dynasty	1009–1225
Trần dynasty	1225–1400
Hồ dynasty	1400–1407
4th Chinese domination	1407–1427
Later Trần dynasty	1407–1413
Later Lê dynasty	1428–1788
Mạc dynasty	1527–1592
Trịnh lords	1545–1787
Nguyễn lords	1558–1777
Tây Sơn dynasty	1778–1802
Nguyễn dynasty	1802–1945
French Indochina	1858–1945
North Vietnam (Democratic Republic of Vietnam)	1945–1976
South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam)	1955–1975
Socialist Republic of Vietnam	1976
Đổi Mới Economic Reforms	1986
Normalization of Relations with US	1995
Vietnam joins APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation)	1998
Vietnam joins WTO (World Trade Organization)	2007
US arms ban on Vietnam is lifted	2016

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