

Huế and Tài Tử Music: The Concept of Music and Social Organisation of Musicians

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Nhạc Huế [*Huế* music] and *nhạc tài tử* [*tài tử* music] are the two genres of chamber music, which originated and flourished in Huế (Central Vietnam) and Southern Vietnam, respectively. The concept of music and the social organisation of musicians in these two traditions present a mixture of indigenous and Chinese aspects. While the indigenous elements form the core of the tradition, Chinese elements were grafted onto indigenous ones for socio-cultural reasons. This study presents an examination of theoretical and social aspects of the music of these two traditions.

Indigenous Concept of Music in Huế and Tài Tử Traditions

The indigenous concept of music as a means for emotional expression played an important part in the formation of various intra- and extra-musical features of *Huế* and *tài tử* music. This concept of music underlined many musical traditions of Vietnam, and was noted in various pre-twentieth century general studies of music. In his *Vân Đài Loại Ngữ* [Writings Compiled at the Dais of Clouds] (1773), Lê Quý Đôn stated that "sounds reflect the inner feelings of man; words describe the objects and phenomena in man's world" (1972:37). This concept is also exemplified in the works of many Vietnamese writers and poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These writers tended to associate instrumental music and *đàn tranh* music with certain emotional states. Various examples of such associations appear in well-known verse narratives such as *Chinh Phụ Ngâm Khúc* [Chant of a Soldier's Wife] by Đặng Trần Côn and Đoàn Thị Điểm, *Cung Oán Ngâm Khúc* [Distressed Chant in the Royal Palace] by Nguyễn Gia Thiệu, and *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* [New Verse of the Broken-hearted] by Nguyễn Du.

In the Distressed Chant in the Royal Palace, Nguyễn Gia Thiệu (1741-1798) associated the sound of instrumental music and the emotion as follows (1950:45):

*Càng đàn càng địch càng mê,
Càng gay gắt điệu, càng tê tái lòng.*

The more [she] plays the stringed instrument or the flute, the more [she] is possessed by the sounds
As the dissonance of the music increases, so does the deep sadness in [her] heart...

Nguyễn Du (1765-1813) described the emotional force of the music played by Thúy Kiều in his *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* as follows (1925:181):

*Một cung gió tủi mưa sầu,
Bốn dây nhỏ máu năm đầu ngón tay...*

A single tone embodies winds of distress and rains of sadness,
[The sounds emerge] as if the fingertips were bleeding on the four strings...

The concept of music as a means of personal expression has prevailed in the process of making and appreciating music among *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians and audiences. *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians always use emotional terms such as sadness, happiness, joyfulness and tranquility in their descriptions of the extra-musical characteristics of classical pieces. Nguyễn Văn Kỳ, one of the great *đàn tranh* masters of the *tài tử* tradition in the first half

of this century, also asserted that the sound of music has the power to affect the "soul and heart" of man (1956:31). Writings on *Huế* and *tài tử* music by non-musicians reflect the same tendency to associate music and emotions (Dương Quảng Hàm 1968:138; Toan Ánh 1985: 31, 59).

The design of the modes and the skeletal nature of *Huế* and *tài tử* compositions which allow performers to add individual touches in the performing process appear to correlate with this concept. In fact, each mode in *Huế* and *tài tử* music is associated with a specific emotion as follows:

***Huế* music**

Modal system	Emotional association
<i>Khách</i>	Happiness
<i>Thiền</i>	Solemnity
<i>Xuân</i>	Tranquility
<i>Ai</i>	Sadness, Melancholy

***Tài tử* music**

Modal system	Emotional association
<i>Bắc</i>	Happiness, gaiety
<i>Hạ</i>	Solemnity, reverence
<i>Xuân</i>	Tranquility, serenity
<i>Ai</i> and <i>Oán</i>	Sadness, melancholy

These extra-musical meanings generate from a set of technical conventions related to tonal material, melodic construction, the use of ornaments, and the tempo of the music. By applying these conventions in music making, performers can evoke a recognisable emotion associated with a specific mode. Psychologically, the association of these musical aspects with emotion is somehow codified in the mind of listeners familiar with *Huế* and *tài tử* music.

Huế and *tài tử* musicians also classified pieces in their classical repertory according to mode and emotional association. In *Huế* music there are two groups of pieces called *bài khách* [pieces in the *khách* category] and *bài nam* [pieces in the *nam* category]. The *khách* group consists of pieces in *khách* and *thiền* modes. The *nam* group consists of pieces in *xuân*, *ai*, and other mixed systems. In Southern Vietnam *tài tử* musicians divided the twenty principal pieces of their repertory into four groups called *sáu bắc* [six pieces in *bắc* mode], *ba nam* [three pieces in the *nam* category], *bốn oán* [four pieces in *oán* mode] and *bảy bài lớn* [seven pieces in the *hạ* mode].

In the performance of *Huế* and *tài tử* music, performers make a significant contribution

to the final shape of the piece of music through improvisation on and elaboration of pre-existing melodies. A piece of *Huế* and *tài tử* music provides performers with a melodic framework only. To play a piece, performers have to elaborate its framework in their personal style. Such a practice certainly derives from the concept of music as a means of expressing personal feelings.

Social Organisation of Musicians

The concept of music as a means to express personal emotion could have been the reason why *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians kept performances in small private venues. In fact, the majority of *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians have only provided private entertainment for small audiences. Both performers and listeners belonged to an intimate circle, including members of a family, close friends and colleagues. These performers formed small groups of their own and gave performances at their own houses or on small private boats along the river on moonlit nights. *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians also played alone (that is, without the presence of an audience) for their own enjoyment.

This practice of keeping performances private prevented *Huế* and *tài tử* music from being commercialised. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, few *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians were professionals. In *Huế*, they were either the members of the royal family such as princes, princess, and lords or mandarins and their families (Hoàng Yến 1921a: 384-386). Other performers were members of rich, well-educated families who did not have to make a living by playing music (Hoàng Yến 1921a: 384-386). This explains why *Huế* music was regarded as a type of *quan nhạc* [music for mandarins]. Until the early decades of this century, *Huế* music still maintained its social prestige as "noble music" (Le Bris 1927: 142). In southern Vietnam, performers of *tài tử* music could be merchants, landlords, scholars, teachers, government officers, or members of rich and well-educated families (1).

Two other social factors could have also motivated non-professional activities among *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians. Before the influx of Western culture in the twentieth century, the Vietnamese did not hold favourable attitudes towards professional entertainers and musicians. Professional musicians had a very low social status. Laws discriminated against professional musicians between 1462 and 1706. Professional musicians and their descendants were banned from doing civil examinations (Đỗ Bỉnh Đoàn 1962:57-58). The National Dynasty's Penal Laws also imposed penalties on mandarins and their descendants who married professional singers (Đỗ Bỉnh Đoàn 1962:57).

These attitudes arose from the common belief that professional musicians had immoral life-styles. The popular saying "*xướng ca vô loại*" [singing is immoral] was often applied to the musical profession. The fact that a number of female singers in the *ca trù* tradition were also prostitutes may have been the reason for this belief. Therefore, the option of making a living as a professional artist was not taken up by *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians, especially those who wished to retain respectability.

In addition, Vietnamese professions were not highly compartmentalised before the twentieth century. Indeed, it was not uncommon for a person to work as a professional in one field and a highly skilled amateur in another, especially in the arts. For example, a scholar would often double as an amateur poet, musician and/or doctor, or a farmer would double as an amateur craftsman or musician. As a result, opportunities for patronage and commercial activities in many artistic fields, including literature, poetry, and music, were few. This socio-cultural environment was certainly an important factor behind the tendency towards non-professionalism among *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians.

Apart from the indigenous concepts and practices discussed above, *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries borrowed a number of extra-musical aspects from China. The pro-Chinese policy of the Nguyễn kings between 1802 and 1883 and the promotion of Confucian ideals as a symbol of patriotism by the anti-colonial movement between 1884 and 1905 were the main motivations behind the decision of *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians to borrow Chinese extra-musical features.

Chinese Extra-musical Features in *Huế* and *Tài Tử* Music

Aspects of Chinese culture were first introduced into Vietnam during periods of Chinese occupation between 43 and 938 A.D. However, the extent to which the Vietnamese accepted aspects of Chinese culture before the tenth century is not known. Recent studies of Vietnamese society in the eleventh century indicate that its socio-political activities were based on indigenous rather than Chinese patterns (Whitmore 1990:117-138, Taylor 1990:139-176). Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Vietnamese monarchies began to adopt Chinese, especially Confucian, ideals as the principal guidelines for social, cultural and political activities. The organisation of Vietnam's government and system of education were closely modeled on its Chinese counterparts. In addition, the Vietnamese monarchies adopted Chinese as the official written language for all government documents and communications. Only the Hồ dynasty (1400-1407) and the Tây Sơn dynasty (1788-1801) promoted the use of Vietnamese script *chữ Nôm* as the official written language (2). As a result of these policies, Chinese language and Confucian values were highly respected among the Vietnamese elite and literati.

This socio-cultural trend was further intensified by the pro-Chinese, anti-Western policy of the Nguyễn kings between 1802 and 1883. Apart from re-establishing Chinese as the official written language and developing the system of Confucian education, the Nguyễn kings also promoted the strict application of Confucian social practices. The severe restriction placed on women's rights was one example of this policy. According to ancient custom, Vietnamese women were entitled to a number of rights afforded by their male counterparts. Equality was recognised in the Hồng Đức Code of the Lê dynasty (1428-1788) (Duiker 1983:119) (3) but was abandoned under the Nguyễn dynasty. The Nguyễn kings also implemented an anti-Western policy in order to protect the Vietnamese Confucian culture from being "corrupted" by the influx of Western ideals. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European Catholic missionaries began their activities in Vietnam and were welcomed by the Vietnamese authorities (Phạm Văn Sơn 1971:16 and 21-25). The Portuguese, Dutch, French and British established trading contact with the Vietnamese during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, from the establishment of the Nguyễn dynasty in 1802 Western values were considered to be a threat to the Confucian culture of Vietnam. King Gia Long (d.1819) and King Minh Mạng (d. 1840) turned down every request to establish trading agreements between Vietnam and France, Britain and the United States. Between 1820 and 1855, the Nguyễn kings took extreme actions against the Catholic missionaries and the Vietnamese Catholic Church. European missionaries, Catholic believers and all those who abetted them were arrested and executed. Furthermore, the Nguyễn kings rejected or ignored every proposal made by Vietnamese mandarins and scholars who had studied or traveled abroad to adopt Western science, technology, and Western industrial and commercial systems (Phạm Văn Sơn 1971:55-56).

The anti-Western, pro-Chinese policies of the Nguyễn dynasty motivated a pro-Chinese, anti-Western sentiment among the Vietnamese. As the French began to colonise parts

of Southern Vietnam in 1862, Confucian values became part of the patriotic symbol in the fight against the invader. Despite the fact that the Vietnamese monarchy lost most of its power to the French in 1884, Confucian thought continued to dominate socio-cultural activities in Vietnam until the early decades of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, French efforts to spread French language, thoughts and ideals among the Vietnamese encountered great difficulties because the local people were not cooperative.

The great majority of scholars and intellectuals left the French-controlled areas and moved to rural areas to open private schools which propagated Confucian studies in order to counteract the spread of French values (Nguyễn Anh 1967a: 40). Until the 1910s and 1920s, French schools were regarded as places for traitors and for the propagation of anti-traditional values (Nguyễn Hiến Lê 1968: 107). These schools never succeeded in enrolling the required number of students, despite attractions such as scholarships, free books, papers and pens (Nguyễn Hiến Lê 1968: 107, Nguyễn Anh 1967a: 40-41). The French reacted by ordering the provincial heads to send a required number of students to the French schools. The Vietnamese elite responded by sending unemployed people and servants to these schools (Nguyễn Anh 1967a: 41-42). Thus, Western culture had little impact on the Vietnamese socio-cultural life until the 1910s. On the contrary, Confucianism had become a symbol of patriotism and was proudly practiced by the Vietnamese.

This socio-political environment motivated a tendency to adopt Chinese ideals or models in different artistic fields. Vietnamese writers used Chinese language and poetic forms side by side with Vietnamese language and forms. In architecture, Chinese models provided the patterns for the decoration or design of many temples, royal palaces and private houses. In the decoration of the *đàn tranh*, Vietnamese craftsmen showed a strong preference for Chinese motives in the making of the mother-of-pearl inlays on the sidepieces of the instrument. These decorative patterns were used as symbols of good fortune or nobility. For example, the pattern depicting a bat symbolises happiness, while the patterns depicting a double gourd, a writing brush, and a pear-shaped lute represent leisure, scholarship, and artistry respectively. Other patterns depict the four noble Chinese arts of music, chess, poetry and calligraphy or painting. In addition, various patterns depicting well-known events or stories in Chinese history, literature and legends appeared in the decoration of the *đàn tranh*. Until recently, these patterns still appeared side by side with those, which represented either well-known historical events or famous architectural achievements in Vietnam.

With respect to music, *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians of this period tended to adopt Chinese extra-musical concepts and practices. These included the adoption of the Confucian concepts of music, the application of practical disciplines of Chinese *qin* players, the use of Chinese loan words in the making of titles of compositions, the employment of Chinese stories in the making of song-texts, and the formation of social restrictions on female *đàn tranh* musicians.

In their theoretical writings and oral statements, many *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians who learnt their art in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries tended to borrow the Confucian concept of the cosmological and ethical significance of music in order to re-interpret the meanings and functions of *Huế* and *tài tử* music. Between the 1950s and 1990s, a number of *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians such as Nguyễn Hữu Ba, Nguyễn Văn Thịnh, Bùi Văn Hai, Hai Biểu and Hai Ngư continued to propagate these borrowed concepts.

The notion that music is a part of nature and expresses the harmony of heaven and earth is the basis of the belief that the five main tones of music are associated with the five

materials (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) (Hai Biếu nd:tape D59, Nguyễn Văn Thịnh 1963: 103, Tân Việt Điều 1961:371, Bùi Văn Hai nd:1). This notion is a direct borrowing from the Confucian cosmological concept of music. Bùi Văn Hai (nd:1) and Tân Việt Điều (1962 : 371-372) even used direct quotations from the Chinese book *Yueh Chi* [Record of Music] to support their arguments. The adoption of the Confucian cosmological view of music gave rise to the belief in the sacredness of music, for the Vietnamese had always regarded the sky and earth as being powerful and sacred entities in their life. To show their respect for music and to maintain its harmony with nature, *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adopted a number of practical disciplines from Chinese *qin* players. These disciplines are the *lục kỵ* [six forbidden rules] and the *thất bất đàn* [seven situations not suitable for the performance of stringed instruments] (Hoàng Yến 1919:237, Bùi Văn Hai nd: 8). The Six Rules forbid the playing of a stringed instrument under the following disruptive climatic conditions: when the weather is too hot, when it is too cold, when there are strong winds, when it is raining heavily, when it is snowing, and when thunder sounds.

When nature is not "harmonious", it is not appropriate to play music, which is designed to express natural harmony. The Seven Situations regard the playing of stringed instruments as being inappropriate during a funeral service or mourning in one's house, in noisy surroundings, when one's mind is occupied by other things, when one is not well-dressed, when incense has not yet been burned, when one's body is not clean, and when a listener does not understand the music. The aim of these rules was certainly to show respect for music. Playing music for listeners who do not understand it was regarded as degrading music; to do so was referred to as *đàn khảy tai trâu* [playing music for the ear of a water-buffalo]. Formal preparations such as burning incense and the avoidance of situations, which cause distraction, were intended to increase respect for musical performances.

These two sets of rules were borrowed directly from the rules for the Chinese *qin* players as recorded in the sixteenth century book *Jin Gu Qi Guan (Kim Cổ Kỳ Quan)* [Old and New Wonders] by Yong Bao Lao Ren (Ứng Bảo Lão Nhân) (nd: 41). The rule, which forbids musicians to play when it is snowing, confirms the Chinese origin of these sets of rules, as Vietnam is in the tropics. The extent to which *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians adhered to these two sets of rules in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is unknown.

However, a number of photographs of *đàn tranh* players in Huế in the early 1960s indicates that the practices of wearing formal dress and burning incense before playing music were still maintained by a number of *Huế* musicians (Thái Văn Kiểm 1964:plate 10). In the South, these practices no longer existed in the 1950s. According to master Nguyễn Văn Kỳ, the formalities in performances of *tài tử* music decreased in his time, and performers no longer burnt incense and wore formal dress before each practical session (1956:1-2).

In addition, a number of musicians borrowed the Confucian concept of music as a means for ethical and educational guidance in their re-interpretation of the social functions of *Huế* and *tài tử* music. In Confucian China, music was regarded as one of the four noble arts (music, chess, poetry and painting) by which an individual could purify his thought and spirit. Music was also one of the six essential subjects of a Confucian education, which included ritual lore and practices [*Lễ*], music [*nhạc*], archery [*xạ*], riding [*ngự*], literature and philosophy [*thu*] and mathematics [*số*]. Following the Chinese view, some *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians asserted that "wise men of ancient time invented music as a means to correct man's thought and character" (Hoàng Yến 1921a: 371), and that it was through the study of music that one "learnt the spirit of orderly organisation and disciplinary practice" which was embodied in the organisation of musical materials and the execution of these materials (Hoàng Yến 1921f:370). Some *Huế* musicians even

borrowed the Confucian view about the emotional restrictions on music in their theoretical writings. According to the Chinese classic *Yueh Chi* [Record of Music], if music is to serve as a means of ethical guidance, it should be emotionally restricted. The "right music" should bring neither sadness nor too much joy (Kaufmann 1976:36). Music that expresses extreme sadness or cheerfulness was considered to be "evil music", which could have bad effects on man's virtue (Kaufmann 1976:39). Vietnamese musicians adopted this view by stating that *Huế* music expresses joy but not license, sorrow but not defeat. They supported their arguments by direct quotations from the *Yueh Chi* and the *Lun Yu* [the Analects] (Nguyễn Hữu Ba 1969:21). Such statements certainly contradict the indigenous concept of music as a means by which to express personal emotions and feelings. *Huế* musician Nguyễn Hữu Quát harshly criticised the adoption of these Chinese views and maintained that they had nothing to do with *Huế* music (1921:176). His view is supported by the fact that none of the musicians who borrowed Confucian concepts of music actually abandoned the indigenous concept of music as a means for emotional expression. In fact, they tended to graft Confucian concepts on to the indigenous ones, thus removing the logic from their argument because of the contradiction between the two ideals.

If these Confucian views "had nothing to do" with *Huế* and *tài tử* music, then why were they adopted by musicians of these two traditions? In my opinion, the aims of *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians in adopting the Confucian concepts of music and the practical disciplines of Chinese *qin* players were to increase the social value of their art, to heighten their social status, and to enable their art to function effectively in the socio-cultural conditions of Vietnam in this period. As Chinese and Confucian ideals were highly valued and respected by the Vietnamese, the re-interpretation of the meanings and functions of *Huế* and *tài tử* music from the Confucian viewpoint and the adoption of the practical disciplines of *qin* players, who were always respected scholars in China, would certainly have helped to heighten the social value of these two types of music and the social status of musicians.

Also, in order to increase the social value of their music, *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians tended to use Chinese loan words in the making of titles of their compositions. In fact, all principal pieces in the classical repertoire of *Huế* and *tài tử* music have Chinese loan words in their titles. Some of these titles, such as *Lưu Thủy* [Flowing Water] and *Phụng Cầu Hoàng* [The Male Phoenix Courting the Female] are direct transliterations of the titles of well-known pieces mentioned in the Chinese literature (4). In the nineteenth century, there was also a tendency to create song-texts in Chinese to be sung in Vietnamese pronunciation of Chinese characters. In a collection of twenty-five pieces of *Huế* music dated from c.1863, the song-texts of ten pieces are in Chinese (Trần Văn Khê 1961: 69). Even though Chinese has no longer been used in song-texts written in the twentieth century, the practice of using Chinese loan words in the titles of compositions prevailed until the 1970s.

The preference for Chinese loan words was certainly motivated by the promotion of Chinese as the official written language by Vietnamese monarchs between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries. This practice led to the rise of the belief among the Vietnamese that Chinese loan words "sound more respectable" than their indigenous counterparts. Therefore, most of the important terms in arts, music, literature, science, technology, economics, and politics were derived from Chinese. This practice has continued in Vietnam until the present time.

In addition to the use of Chinese loan words in the titles of compositions, *tài tử* musicians tended to create song-texts based on Chinese stories, legends and historical events, such

as the story of Boya (Bá Nha) and Ziqi (Tử Kỳ), and the story of Xiangwu (Hạng Võ) and Yuji (Ngu Cơ) (5). Many of these stories promote Confucian ethical concepts such as *tam cương* [three bonds] and *ngũ thường* [five virtues] (6). None of the song-texts of *Huế* music that I have collected so far are based on Chinese stories. This suggests that the level of Chinese influence in *tài tử* music was greater than in *Huế* music. The influx of Chinese refugees and migrants in the provinces of Southern Vietnam since the seventeenth century is probably the main reason for this higher level of Chinese influence in *tài tử* music.

After China had been taken over by the Man Chu in 1680, thousands of Chinese fled to Vietnam and resettled in Mỹ Tho, Biên Hòa and Hà Tiên (Lê Quý Đôn 1977:229, Vương Hồng Sển 1968b:18-19). From 1778, many Chinese merchants and migrants came to Gia Định and Biên Hòa and developed Chinese "zones" in these areas (Vương Hồng Sển 1968b:41-45). The policy of favouring the Chinese culture of the Vietnamese monarchs enabled Chinese culture to flourish in these areas. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese tales and historical accounts had become very popular among the South Vietnamese. In the first decade of this century, publications of verse narratives based on Chinese stories and translations of Chinese classical fiction were in great demand in Southern Vietnam (Sơn Nam 1974:118-120). The popularity of Chinese stories explains why *tài tử* musicians of this period based their song-texts on these stories.

Apart from providing the sources for re-interpreting the meanings and functions of *Huế* and *tài tử* music, Confucian thought also affected the social organisation of *đàn tranh* musicians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contemporary sources on Vietnamese instruments indicate that the *đàn tranh* has basically been an instrument favoured by female players (Lê Huy and Huy Trân 1984: 93; Trần Quang Hải 1975: 3).

This view is supported by the fact that the majority of *đàn tranh* students, teachers and performers at the present time are female. Moreover, the majority of *đàn tranh* students at the conservatories of music and private classes are female. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, there were not many accomplished female *đàn tranh* performers. Of the twelve *đàn tranh* virtuosi in Huế during this period, only three were female; but their full names were not recorded (Hoàng Yến 1921a:384-386). In the South, all well-known *đàn tranh* performers were male.

In my view, it was the influence of Confucianism that caused the dominance of male *đàn tranh* players in *Huế* and *tài tử* music before the 1920s. In fact, the Nguyễn kings' strict application of Confucian social practices that severely restricted women's rights prevented women from participating in socio-cultural activities and political affairs. Between the first and eighteenth centuries, women made many significant contributions to Vietnamese socio-political affairs. Trưng Trắc, Trưng Nhị and Triệu Thị Trinh were the leaders of the two prominent independence movements in the first and the third centuries respectively. Most of the Trưng sisters' generals were women. Under the Đinh dynasty (968-980) and the Lý dynasty (1010-1225), the queen or a highly-ranked concubine could be appointed acting head of the government or could participate in the decision-making processes of the government during the transition period after the king died or when the king was at the frontline during wartime. Under the Trần dynasty (1225-1400), Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Châu wrote *Kê Minh Thập Sách* [The Cock Greeting Dawn: A Ten Point Political Proposal], which consisted of suggestions to improve the conditions of the society (Phượng Lan, nd:27). In the same period, Trần Nữ Nương commanded the Vietnamese army in battles against Champa (Phượng Lan, nd: 32). In Lam Sơn uprising against Chinese occupation (1418-1427), Phạm Thị Ngọc Trân, Trần Ngọc Hảo and Huy Trân managed military supplies, while Nguyễn Thị Bành commanded local resistance units in Thanh Hóa (Hoàng Khôi & Hoàng Đình Thi, 1978:15-18).

Women's rights to participate in socio-political activities were gradually restricted along with other rights when Vietnamese monarchs began to adopt Confucianism as the guidelines for social, cultural and political activities since the fifteenth century. Confucian ideology propagates a system of gender roles in society: a social role for men and a domestic role for women. This is exemplified in the Confucian concepts of *tam tòng* [three submissions] and *tứ đức* [four virtues], which orientated women, especially those from established urban families, towards domestic affairs only. According to the three submissions, a woman owed obedience to her father, to her husband after marriage and to her oldest son after her husband's death. The four feminine "virtues" include domestic skills, beauty, calm speech, and virtuous character. Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, however, Confucian system of gender roles was not strictly applied and women's rights were still recognised in the Hồng Đức Code of the Lê dynasty (1428-1788). This enabled a number of women to participate in social activities. Under the Lê dynasty, Princess Đoàn Trang was appointed *nữ tổng binh* [female commander] and led the Vietnamese army in many victorious battles (Phượng Lan, nd:33). Under the Tây Sơn dynasty (1788-1801), Bùi Thị Xuân was a General and Field Commandant of the army and became one of the well-known Generals of the Tây Sơn army. Many women authors such as Ngô Chi Lan (15th century), Đoàn Thị Điểm (1705-1748), and Hồ Xuân Hương (late 18th/early 19th centuries) rose to prominence during this period.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the Nguyễn dynasty's promotion of a strict application of Confucian ideology led to a significant decrease in women's participation in social activities in urban areas. Even when a woman reached significant achievements in a specific field, her name and biography were rarely recorded. For example, a very prominent female poet of the nineteenth century was only known as *bà huyện Thanh Quan* [wife of the head of the Thanh Quan province], despite the fact that her works were widely admired.

Thus, in this social environment, the participation of female *đàn tranh* players in teaching activities or performances outside the family circle was not encouraged. This led to the scarcity of excellent female *đàn tranh* players and the dominance of male performers in teaching activities and in "public" performances. Male dominance in social engagements only began to diminish in the latter half of this century when Vietnamese society underwent a process of modernisation. During this time many Confucian concepts and values were abandoned. Since then female *đàn tranh* players' involvement in public activities has increased, and now outnumbers male players.

Summary

Huế and *tài tử* music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were characterised by a strong tendency to graft Chinese extra-musical ideals and practices on to indigenous ones. The adoption of Confucian concepts of music led to the re-interpretation of the meanings and functions of *Huế* and *tài tử* music, the application of practical disciplines of Chinese *qin* players, and the placing of social restrictions on women *đàn tranh* players. Chinese influence is also explicit in the use of Chinese loan words in the title of compositions and the creation of song-texts based on Chinese stories. The basic motivation behind this process of adopting Chinese extra-musical aspects was non-musical. As Chinese and Confucian values were highly respected by the Vietnamese elite during this period, *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians tended to graft Chinese extra-musical aspects on to indigenous ones so as to increase the social value of their art.

From a socio-cultural viewpoint, the preference for Chinese extra-musical aspects and the

rejection of Western ones among *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians reflected the nature of the processes and results of culture contact in Vietnam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, although the Vietnamese were in contact with both Chinese and French cultures, their pro-Chinese, anti-Western attitude led to the acceptance of Chinese values and the rejection of French values. The pro-Chinese, anti-Western policies of the Nguyễn kings between 1802 and 1883 and the promotion of Confucian ideals as the symbol of patriotism by the anti-colonial movements between 1862 and 1905 played a significant part in the formation of these socio-cultural attitudes. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the socio-political environment was a dynamic factor behind the development of *Huế* and *tài tử* music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Despite the adaptation of many Chinese extra-musical and practical aspects, *Huế* and *tài tử* musicians have always maintained the indigenous concepts of music as a means by which to express personal emotions as well as typical musical features of these two traditions. In the next two chapters, I shall examine the fundamental musical features of *Huế* and *tài tử* music in order to demonstrate the ways in which the indigenous concept of music as a means of expressing emotions directed the development of technical and practical aspects of these two types of music.

NOTES:

1. The term *nhạc tài tử* ["music for skillful artists" or "music for talented amateurs"] may have derived from the non-commercial practice of performers of this tradition (The term *tài tử* means "a talented person", "a skillful artist" or "a talented amateur").

2. The Vietnamese written language, the *chữ Nôm*, was based on Chinese characters.

3. A complete English translation of the laws under the Lê dynasty is provided in *The Lê Code: Law in Traditional Vietnam* (1989) by Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Tạ Văn Tài and Trần Văn Liêm.

4. *Liu Shui* (*Lưu Thủy*) [Flowing Water] was the title of the piece that Boya (Bá Nha) played for Ziqi (Tử Kỳ) when they met for the first time. *Feng Qiu Huang* (*Phụng Cầu Hoàng*) was the title of a well-known composition for the Chinese *qin* which was composed and played by Sima Xiangru (Tư Mã Tương Như) (d.117 B.C).

5. Boya (Bá Nha) and Ziqi (Tử Kỳ) lived in China in the third century B.C. Boya (Bá Nha) was the great *qin* player and Ziqi (Tử Kỳ) was the great listener. They developed an intimate friendship soon after they met. After Ziqi (Tử Kỳ) died, Boya (Bá Nha) broke his instrument. They had a sincere and understanding friendship in music.

Xiangwu (Hạng Vũ) was the Lord of the Sở kingdom in the third century B.C. After being defeated by the Hán forces, he committed suicide. His wife, Yuji (Ngư Cơ) killed herself soon after. Their story emphasises faithfulness and chastity in love.

6. According to the Three Bonds, an individual should be loyal to the king, show filial piety to his father and be faithful to his spouse. The Five Virtues include human warmth, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and sincerity.

REFERENCES:

All references cited in this article are listed in the bibliography and discography (pp.

146-182) of the book *Đàn Tranh Music of Vietnam: Traditions and Innovations* by Lê Tuấn Hùng (1998).

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