

Grassroots Development and Preservation of Ca Trù Singing in the Course of History

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Received on 1 March 2023. Accepted on 23 May 2023.

Abstract: Ca trù is a complex form of sung poetry found in the North of Vietnam using lyrics written in traditional Vietnamese poetic forms (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO, 2009). The practice of ca trù was well-known nationwide in Vietnam in the past, however it just got significant recovery in 2009 with the recognition of UNESCO. Ca trù groups comprise three performers: a female singer who uses breathing techniques and vibrato to create unique ornamented vocal sounds, while playing the clappers or striking a wooden box, and two instrumentalists who produce the deep tone of a three-stringed lute and the strong sounds of a praise drum. Some Ca trù performances also include dance (UNESCO, 2009). A close look at its grassroots development in the past may give the solutions for restoring and developing Ca trù in the future. The paper presents the development of ca trù in history, an example of a grassroots quản giáp in Nghệ An to illustrate how good ca trù was in the past, the manpower and financial challenges it is facing now, and reiterate some recommendations that were given by UNESCO (2009) and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2010).

Keywords: Ca trù, Nghệ An, development, intangible heritage.

Subject classification: Cultural studies.

1. Introduction

Ca trù is a complex form of sung poetry found in the North of Viet Nam using lyrics written in traditional Vietnamese poetic forms (UNESCO, 2009). Ca trù is also called hát thể, hát à đào, hát cửa đình, hát cửa quyền, hát cô đầu, hát nhà tơ, hát nhà trò or hát ca công. When it is performed in the royal residence, it is called nữ nhạc, or hát cửa quyền (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn- Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 37). Ca trù has become more well-known since it was recognized as one of the items of world intangible cultural heritage. Not only the young Vietnamese but also many foreigners are attracted to the unique rhythms and singing method of Ca trù (Quỳnh Hoa, 2013).

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According to Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2010), ca trù has many forms. However, the most widely known and widely performed type of ca trù involves only three performers: a female vocalist, a lute player and a spectator (who also takes part in the performance). The female singer provides the vocals whilst playing her “phách” (small wooden sticks beaten on a small bamboo box to serve as percussion). She is accompanied by a man who plays the “đàn đáy”, a long-necked, three-string lute used almost exclusively for the “ca trù” genre. The last performer is the spectator (often a scholar or connoisseur of the art) who strikes a “trống châu” (praise drum) in praise (or disapproval) of the singer’s performance, usually with every passage of the song. The way in which he strikes the drum provides commentary on the performance, but he always does it according to the beat provided by the vocalist’s “phách” percussion.

The music instrument in ca trù has some distinctive characteristics. As Nicolas (2019) points out, “many musical instruments in Southeast Asia are evocative of the natural landscape and spiritual life of its early settlers. The oldest and most common musical instruments are made of bamboo, a plant that is found across the region. With soft and gentle sounds, bamboo instruments are played in expressing human feelings and fostering artistic communications among villagers. The bronze gong ensembles are revered among village communities for communicating with the spirit world. Village rituals since times past invoke this kinship between the human and spiritual realms”.

The researcher Nguyễn Xuân Diện supposed sound law of ca trù is quite complicated (Nguyễn Xuân Diện, 2010). Ca trù has five tones, namely Nam Bắc Huỳnh Pha Nao. Until now, music researchers do not have a consensus about what "Nam Bắc Huỳnh Pha Nao" really is. However, Sino-Nôm documents have specific suggestions about how those words were sung. It is also possible that in 1734, ca trù was used in state-level diplomatic receptions (Hồng Minh, 2007).

Just briefly mentioning the cultural geography of the guild, we have seen a thousand years of history of Vietnamese ca trù art. From the royal space to the countryside, from the religious ritual environment to the place of wine jars and bags of confidant poems, ca trù is often present everywhere. In Vietnam's traditional folk music, we can affirm the exemplary classic of this special art form (Bùi Trọng Hiền). Ca trù originated from royal singing in the past (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 23). These authors argue that there were no records of songs and dance in Vietnam in the periods before the dynasties of Đinh and Early Lê, however there were evidences (official and non-official documents) regarding songs and dance in the period from Lý Dynasty to Nguyễn Dynasty (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 24), and singers were called “con hát” (i. e., a female singer) (Ibid: 31). The first event of singing and dance was under King Lý Thái Tông, in the second year of

Thiên Thành reign (1029) (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huê, 1962: 24). Then, King Lý Thái Tổ appointed a person to be the *quản giáp* (manager) of the royal music team in the 16th year of Thuận Thiên reign (1025). This event is very important to the formation of the *ca trù* guild.

Nguyễn Xuân Diện (2010) argued that around the 15th century, *ca trù* had appeared in Vietnamese culture. The archaeological basis given is the carvings of the *Đáy* instrument - a special three-stringed instrument used only in *ca trù*, found in village communal houses and village pagodas in the North of the 16th century. Regarding written documents, the discovery of the poem *Đại nghi bát giáp thưởng đào giải văn* by Dr. Lê Đức Mao (1462-1529) in the book *Lê Genealogy* (A.1855, Sino-Nôm Institute Studies' library) compiled at the end of the 16th century revealed that it was the first document to use the word “*ca trù*”.

One of the best descriptions of *ca trù* should come from the document filed to UNESCO in 2009 to register *ca trù* in the list of World Intangible Heritage:

“*Ca trù* groups comprise three performers: a female singer who uses breathing techniques and vibrato to create unique ornamented vocal sounds, while playing the clappers or striking a wooden box, and two instrumentalists who produce the deep tone of a three-stringed lute and the strong sounds of a praise drum. Some *ca trù* performances also include dance. The varied forms of *ca trù* fulfil different social purposes, including worship singing, singing for entertainment, singing in royal palaces and competitive singing. *Ca trù* has fifty-six different musical forms or melodies, each of which is called *thể cách*. Folk artists transmit the music and poems that comprise *Ca trù* pieces by oral and technical transmission, formerly, within their family line, but now to any who wish to learn. Ongoing wars and insufficient awareness caused *Ca trù* to fall into disuse during the twentieth century. Although the artists have made great efforts to transmit the old repertoire to younger generations, *ca trù* is still under threat due to the diminishing number and increasing age of practitioners”.

(UNESCO, 2009).

According to Bùi Trọng Hiền, *ca trù* (ả đào) guild is a unified social and professional organization, recognized by the feudal state and has appointed a dignitary to take care of the guild - called the *quản giáp* (i.e., manager). *Ca trù* is present in many Northern provinces, as far as Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, on average there were several ả đào villages in each district. The villages joined together to form each ward with its own name, sharing in guarding communal houses and temples in the district to earn a living. In the guild, the *quản giáp* was responsible for administration of the guild in a district, he oversaw and arranged everything. This was a position that was elected by the professional people in the guild, so *quản giáp* must be a leader with outstanding talent and virtue. Below

quản giáp was the council of family tycoons (also known as communal house tycoons). All business affairs were clearly divided, there was never any encroachment or competition for interests. In the past, the guild was considered a very stable organization, people in the guild had their own customary laws, maintained professional relationships, and loved and cared for each other.

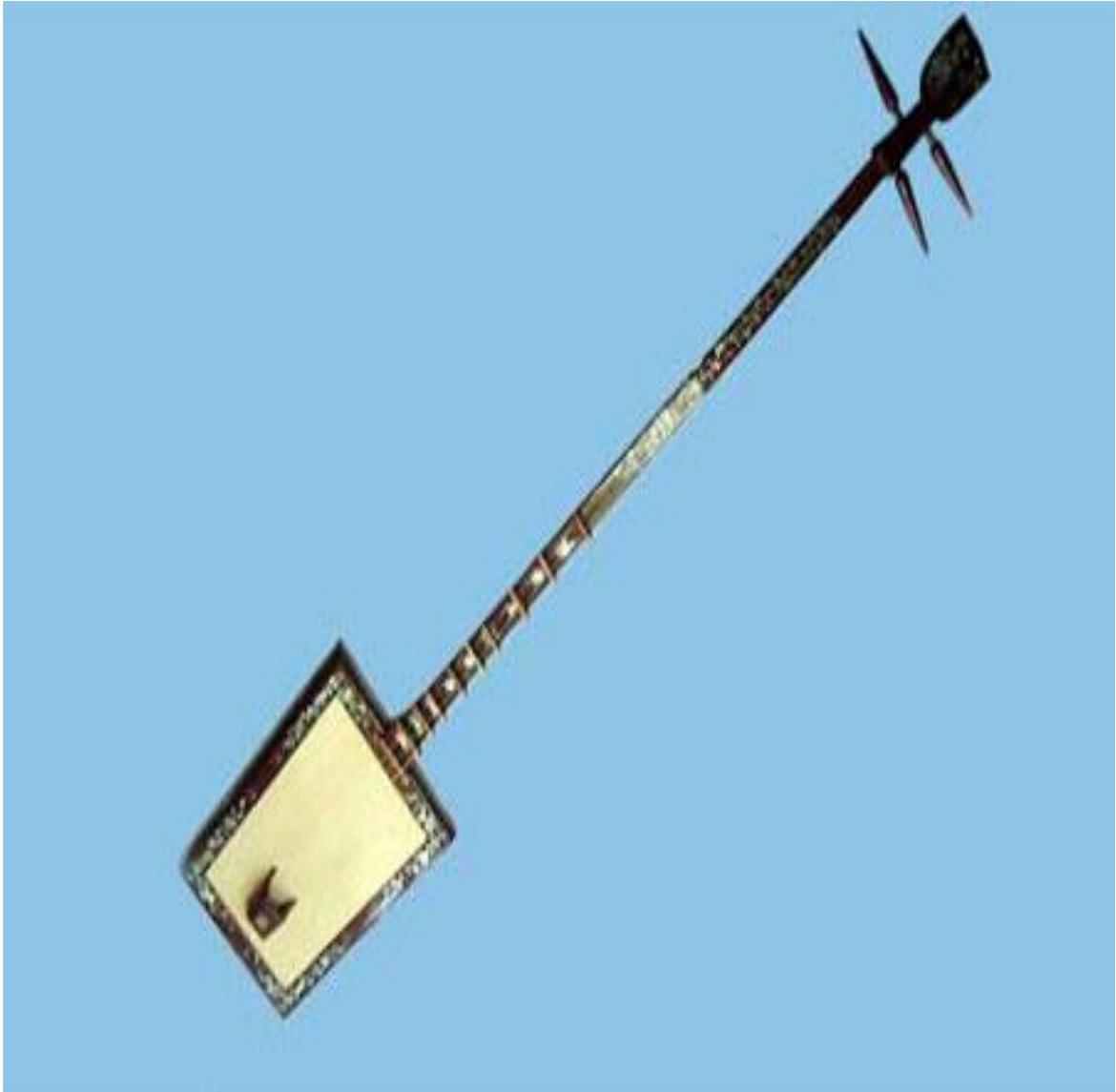
However, the current situation of ca trù is far from the peak it enjoyed nearly a century ago. Recently, even several officials of the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism in a number of localities were surprised to learn that in their area there used to be a ca trù guild, and there are still a few ca trù artists still alive. It is the evidence to see how much oblivion has come to a unique heritage like ca trù. According to common sense, a music genre can only have a place in the hearts of the public if it has its own enjoyment environment. The gap in traditional ethnic music education in general, and ca trù in particular, is a situation that has been continuously warned for decades (Bùi Trọng Hiền).

Current documents suggest that ca trù appeared first in Hà Tĩnh, then it spread to other localities. A close look at how it developed in the course of history, and the way grassroots people practiced may help to enrich the knowledge of ca trù. The main obstacle for such a mission is that there are few documents in the area today, because anything related to ca trù, in the past 50 years, was considered the reflection of the shame, the bad practice of people, so a lot of the documents were destroyed. The authors intend to have a close look at the remaining documents, research papers, and records of a Trần family lineage in Nghệ An to see the main course of ca trù and the mission to preserve it today.

2. The course of ca trù singing

Nghệ - Tĩnh is thought to be the cradle of hát ả đào. The appearance of ca trù is attached to Đinh Lễ from Cỗ Đạm village, Nghi Xuân district, Hà Tĩnh province under Lê Dynasty. He was born in a rich family, and he was talented with generous characteristics. In the legend, he met some gods, and those gods taught him make musical instruments and how to sing and dance. His marvelous music performance earned him fame, a very beautiful wife and prosperous career of singing and dancing (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn- Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 42). People from Cỗ Đạm village and students of Đinh Lễ and his wife built a temple at Cỗ Đạm to worship the couple in memory of their contribution. The temple is named “Tổ cô đầu” (the founder of ca trù singers), or Bạch Hoa princess temple. After their death, the king awarded Đinh Lễ the title Thanh Sà Đại vương, and his wife Bạch Hoa got the title Mãn đà hoa công chúa (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 43).

Picture 1: *Đàn đáy*, One of the Musical Instruments in a *Ca Trù* Performance



Source: Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

By the end of the Lê Dynasty, *Ca trù* was also known as *Nữ Nhạc* (light music performed by women), or singing at the royal court, or in noble families. Later, this singing style developed beyond its scope and was sung at festivals, weddings, longevity wishes...etc. At this time, it was called *Hát ả đào*. It used a wide range of musical instruments (Lan Hương, 2004).

The name of ca trù, or ả đào, is still a mystery. Ngô Thời Sĩ argued that in the reign of King Lý Thái Tổ (1010-1028), there was a very good talented singer called Đào Thị, and she received a lot of awards from the king. It is also noteworthy that “Đào Thị” is actually not a name, rather it is the reference for a female from the lineage of Đào. In feudal time, people did not care the name of women (and also women’s equivalent status), they were just “a female” in a certain lineage. The word “Thị” was used to show that this was signal of a female, so “Đào Thị” was a female of Đào lineage, “Nguyễn Thị” was a female of Nguyễn lineage, etc. Because of the love for Đào Thị singer, all singers afterward were called “Đào nương” (a girl from the Đào lineage).

Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề also mentioned the fact that there was a singer of Đào lineage in Đào Đặng village, Tiên Lữ district, Hưng Yên province who was very smart and killed a lot of troops of Ming and stabilized the region. When she passed away, people in her village built a temple to worship her and called that village “Ả Đào”. Afterwards, all singers were called “ả đào” in memory of her.

However, the name seems more appropriate if we see it from perspective of dialect. In Hà Tĩnh, the birthplace of Đinh Lễ and his wife, people often call a female as “ả”, meanwhile “ả” is mainly not used in the North. People in the North often use the term “cô”, “bác”, “chị”, etc. Therefore, “Ả Đào” in Hà Tĩnh dialect means “a female from Đào lineage”, or “a female whose name is Đào”. This may partly reflect the origin of the name of ca trù singing.

This is in line with explanation of the name of ca trù singing in the book *Ca trù bị khảo*. In the past, singing at the temples required a card made of bamboo, which was called “trù”. On each card, there was sign to be recognized. If audience enjoyed the performance, they would give the singer a “trù”. “Ca” means “singing”, so there is one explanation that “ca trù” is the singing performance and gets the awards of “trù”, because after singing, singers collect “trù” and exchange it for money as agreed before (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 45). The amount money for each “trù” is tentative, it may vary from time to time, place to place. Each giáo phường will determine how much audience will have to pay for each “trù”. The more “trù” one đào nương gets after a performance, the more famous she is. It is also noteworthy that đào nương does not directly receive the sum of money, rather the quản giáp or ông trùm will collect the money and later give it to the ca nương (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962).

So, in one ca trù performance, a singer (ả đào, cô đầu, đào nương), a đàn đáy performer and audience are required. The number of audience may vary, from one to tens, even hundreds. What is special in a session of ca trù is that audience also the judge: the audience gets a drum, they give compliment or critics to the đào nương by the way they beat on it. If

she sings well, audience will give her good remarks (good sound) by beating in the middle of the drum, and if she does not sing well, the audience will beat in the side of the drum, which make a strange sound – and it is the signal that the *đào nương* does not sing well. The connection between audience and singer is therefore very important, the audience is not just a music consumer but also a judge of the show.

Picture 2: Ca nương Kim Ngọc and *Đàn đáy* Performer Bá Hải, Hanoi Ca trù Club



Source: Lao động Newspaper, 23 February 2020.

UNESCO assesses the value, contribution and current status of ca trù in the cultural life of Vietnam from the information provided in Nomination File 00309, ca trù singing for inscription on the Urgent Safeguarding List, as follows:

a. Ca trù singing embodies a range of musical and dance practices, as well as expertise and knowledge of poetry, constituting an identity marker of Vietnamese communities that is transmitted today by musicians and devotees dedicated to performing, teaching and developing the tradition;

b. Ca trù has seen a revival of interest in recent years, creating an important base for developing a sustainable ca trù culture in a modern context, yet the element's viability is still at risk due to the small number of musicians with sufficient competence, knowledge and skill to perform and teach ca trù, a lack of financial resources necessary to sustain and develop the form, the loss of traditional performing places, and rapid processes of economic, social and cultural change;

c. The proposed safeguarding measures are coherent and wide-ranging, supported by an ambitious and well-funded plan to safeguard ca trù that can be expected to have a significant impact on the sustainability of the practice and transmission of ca trù singing, while relying on the deep knowledge still existing in the participating communities;

d. The element has been nominated with the free, prior and informed consent of communities, groups of musicians, their families, ca trù clubs, and with the support of relevant Government departments, while the inscription and the proposed safeguarding measures will pay adequate respect for the customary practices and rules concerning various rituals, local beliefs and associated family matters.

(UNESCO, 2009).

3. Life and practice of Ca trù of Trần Quang Ánh

According to genealogy, Mr. Trần Quang Ánh (also has other names of Trần Công Ánh, Trần Minh Ánh) was born in the second year of Đức Nguyên reign (in 1675, under King Lê Gia Tông).

He was born in a powerful family, his great-grandfather and father were all famous wardens and singers in the capital city of Thăng Long. His father was a ca trù warden and was awarded the title baron of Tĩnh Yên. His mother was a famous actress. Therefore, from a young age, he was raised in a ca trù art environment, his parents took good care of him, taught him every chord and rhythm, and instilled a love of art. He was not only good at music, but also good at literature and martial arts.

When he grew up, he was recruited to work at the lord's palace. He was both a man of literature and martial arts, but also had musical talent, so the lord trusted him and always

kept him in his sight. During his time as a mandarin in the lord's palace, he had many merits such as protecting the royal palace, being in charge of the music team, escorting soldiers to fight enemies on the border, overseeing tax collection in localities, and serving in state affairs. ... Thanks to that, he was continuously promoted and given many benefits.

In June of the 3rd year of Vĩnh Hựu (1737), Lord Trịnh sent a diplomatic delegation to China. To prepare for this important mission, several months in advance, everything had to be carefully prepared. At this time, Mr. Trần Quang Ánh had the responsibility of preparing logistics and gifts for the envoys to take away. This is an extremely important task, concerning the country's relations and politics, so everything must be careful.

The order dated April 22, 3rd year of Vĩnh Hựu (1737) wrote: "Now it is time to send the minister to the North for diplomatic mission, so you are promoted to be in charge of military officers in the organization and to lead military officers." Trần Quang Ánh had to prepare elephants, horses, flags, guns, ammunition, weapons, and military supplies of all kinds. Everyone must be careful in everything they do; soldiers must not make any small mistakes, and if they commit crimes, they will be punished according to national law. The number of officers and soldiers under his administration were 378. After a successful mission, he was promoted. To reward his contributions to the dynasty and society, the court awarded both his parents several noble titles. This is also the time that he practiced ca trù a lot.

In the first year of Cảnh Hưng's reign (1740), he and Bùi Thế Đạt, the Duke of Đoan, went to fight bandits on the border, quelled the enemy and pacified the people, and got many achievements. Trần Quang Ánh set the base for performance of ca trù in his hometown in this period.

After retiring and returning to his hometown, he saw that his countryside was deserted in many sunken fields. He spent his wealth to recruit people to reclaim the land and establish new villages. It is believed that he spent money and effort to reclaim land, recruited people to establish villages, and established new hamlets after seeing the abandoned fields

Thanks to that, his hometown was increasingly expanded, the fields were rich, and the population was crowded. In addition to recruiting people to establish villages, he also taught ca trù to future generations. For those with musical talent and the qualities of a virtuous artist, he would create conditions to help them and train them to become both talented and virtuous singers and instrumentalists. Based on that, he contributed to making this art develop more and more widely and was the basis for forming the famous guild later on.

In his time, the organization of a guild was very close. There were several branches in a guild, and the most respected and talented one should be elected "ông Trùm" (the boss). Then, those "ông Trùm" gather and elected the best of them to be "Quản giáp" (warden).

Trần Quang Ánh was the *quản giáp* in his area. He, like all other *quản giáp* in Vietnam, was recognized and had the authority to deal with all the issue in his guild. Members of the guild (*ông trùm*, *quản giáp*, *ả đào*) were aware of, and obeyed, the regulations nationwide (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 49).

Once in a year, *ông trùm* had a meeting to worship the founder of the guild, then they solved any conflict within the guild. All the parties should pay respect to the decision of *ông trùm*, and all *ả đào* were taken care of by a male in her family (father, elder brother, or husband). If an *ả đào* commit a mistake, her *quản giáp* would summon all senior members in the guild and gave the indictment: For serious crime (actually, mistake), such as asking for money, trading sex, that *ả đào* should be rejected and her identity would be informed to all other guild so that she would not be accepted in any other guild. For misdemeanor that an *ả đào* commit, she would have to pay the fine for the guild (Đỗ Bằng Đoàn, Đỗ Trọng Huề, 1962: 50). That is why *ả đào* always respected the regulation, she did not dare to flirt the *quản ca* or any other position because she feared the consequences.

Trần Quang Ánh died in 1744, his grave was in Đồng Hà. After his death, the people were grateful and built a temple to worship him and pray for many miracles. The dynasties all bestowed orders on Yên Xuân village to worship. The legend recorded as follows: the villagers remembered his merits and built a temple. From then on, when people encounter misfortunes, they pray for rain and prayers. Today, his temple still has its foundations in Yên Xuân village.

The records of Trần Quang Ánh in the course of *ca trù* development, however, are still quite limited in terms of number and influence. The most important ones are the two decrees conferring deity on him during the Khải Định reign. The first decree was issued on March 18, the second year of Khải Định (1917). The second was on July 25, the 9th year of Khải Định (1924).

Records of Trần Quang Ánh started from 1706, when he was promoted group leader with the title Count of Năng Thọ, then in 1708 he was given the title Marquis of Năng Thọ. The total documents directly related to him that we can access are 16, which was issued in the year 1706, 1708, 1709, 1712 (two documents in this year), 1714, 1717 (two documents in this year), 1718, 1719, 1720 (two documents in this year), 1721, 1723, 1725, 1729 (two documents in this year), 1730, 1732, 1733, 1734 (two documents in this year), 1737, and 1739 (two documents in this year).

In his life, Trần Quang Ánh did not travel too much. This is his advantage to focus on his profession and enriching his talents of music, however it also forced him to adapt to some challenges. Indeed, *ca trù* was not particularly popular in his hometown. The spread of *ca trù* just happened in a number of localities, so the attention of the leaders of an

administration unit may matter. Trần Quang Ánh was a good officer, and he was also a talented *quản giáp*. This is why *ca trù* developed in all localities Trần Quang Ánh worked.

Trần Quang Ánh was a loyal servant of the Lê Trung hưng dynasty, serving under 7 Lê kings (Lê Gia Tông, Lê Hy Tông, Lê Dụ Tông, Lê Duy Phường, Lê Thuần Tông, Lê Ý Tông, Lê Hiến Tông), and Trịnh Lords (Trịnh Căn, Trịnh Cương, Trịnh Giang, Trịnh Doanh). He was both a *ca trù* warden but also a court martial general. When working as a court mandarin, he was devoted, completed his duties excellently, was loved by kings, respected by courtiers, and was granted many high-ranking salaries and titles. When he returned home, he built his homeland, expanded the village, taught *ca trù*, and when he died, the people expressed gratitude and built a temple to worship him. He is both the village's blessing god and the ancestors of a *ca trù* guild.

4. Towards preserving and developing *ca trù*

Thanks to countless efforts, UNESCO recognized *ca trù* in 2009 and inscribed *ca trù* singing on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. However, preserving and developing *ca trù* is still a long way to go.

For any locality that does not have the advantages of tradition in developing *ca trù*, it may be more difficult to preserve *ca trù* in the context of modernization. Le Tuan Cuong (2020) states that “along with the history of the national struggle, innovation, socio-economic development, especially international integration, new types of culture have been introduced to Vietnam while the traditional art has not caught up with the trend and has not met the demands of the public. This has directly contributed to the weakening of the values of traditional culture in general and folk art”. In addition, Khang Tan Nguyen, Thach Hue Man (2022) describe the fact that young artists using traditional Vietnamese cultural materials to create modern entertainment MV products, and they enjoy much success in the music market. This poses a threat to traditional music because audience will pay more attention to the modern trend, but if we can take advantages of it, traditional music may get the shortcut to a wider range of audience, and gradually they will become more interested in traditional music.

Indeed, *ca trù* has a very limited influence in cultural life today in the region. People seem to enjoy modern music, or other kind of traditional music because the cradle of *ca trù* here was broken long before. Restoring *ca trù* should come from solving the most difficult issue, the human capital and financial shortage. Dinh et al. (2023) propose that unique values of the traditional music heritage “should be further promoted to introduce their folk music to a wider audience and develop community-based tourism”, because “bringing folk

music into community tourism development can help to preserve and develop these musical genres in contemporary society”. Khang Tan Nguyen, Thach Hue Man (2022: 232) elaborate: “Vietnamese traditional culture is still a topic of interest to many young people. However, instead of learning through traditional channels such as schools and books, the public now has more choices and videos have become one of the most popular approaches thanks to the vivid combination of images and sound”.

Quỳnh Hoa (2013) addressed the challenges of developing human capital in ca trù:

Unlike modern music, ca trù has its own system of music notation and space, and is applied by the phách. Đào nương or the ca trù’s singer, needs to learn how to use the phách properly before even learning the vocal method. Another unique feature of ca trù is that its lyrics are poems, and could fit any type of poem, long or short. In ancient times, officials or poets would invite the Đào nương to come to perform at home and ask the ca trù band to use their poems for the lyrics. They could also invite friends to enjoy the đào nương’s voice and comment on the melody. It takes a beginner 3 to 10 year to master the vocal and phách techniques. The most difficult part of ca trù is the singing and using the phách, to accompany the singing, many people can mimic some ca trù’s tunes but they can’t fake knowledge of how to use phách. The phách is the backbone of the singer.

Without human capital in ca trù, no one can have the tool to restore and develop it. Therefore, training sufficient performers, especially đào nương, is of special interest. More than just pride, the human capital should be well-prepared to present such genre of music as the national treasure of Vietnam. In the course of history, we can hardly see any kind of music that all parties enjoyed so much as that in ca trù: Music goers became composers, and later, in the show, they give credit for all performance of the singer, of the drummer. For a person played the role of different people, this can only happen in ca trù. The need for sufficient audience and music performers is still big obstacles, that no one alone in a short period of time can solve.

The second issue that makes restoring ca trù challenging is the financial issue. Training a đào nương requires 10 years, and a little less for a drummer. However, the pay for them is not up to expectation, and the chance for them to appear in public light and gain attraction, fame, is still very limited because there are few audiences of this kind of music. Result of Khang Tan Nguyen, Thach Hue Man (2022) shows that:

“Vietnamese culture has deeply attracted interest of many young people. They are gradually learning how to absorb, inherit and develop national cultural values. The preservation and dissemination of national culture are increasingly concerned and promoted. In the digital age, young people cannot only learn about culture through books and paper documents, but also have access to other closer and more vivid methods through various arts and entertainment. And MVs are a new medium that can effectively carry out the task of cultural transmission”.

In a broader perspective, whether traditional music can survive and thrive depends on a lot of factors. Nicolas, A. (2019) has a thorough description of this scenario:

The traditional music and performing arts in the ASEAN have found new powerful conduits of transmission with the advent of the digital age. Although claims of cultural ownership over music and dance occasionally appear on social networks and media platforms, the ubiquity of the Internet has in fact benefitted the general public, allowing them access to images and sounds hitherto unknown. Modernization has taken its toll on the region's musical heritage. Ancient elements of indigenous music have faded away. The influx of popular and Western music has increasingly eroded the space and demand for traditional music. Many orchestras in the region feature diverse musical instruments tuned to a common Western tuning system, thus relinquishing their Asian musical roots. The fusion of Asian musical ensembles with Western musical instruments has forced the tuning of gongs, xylophones, metallophones, and singing to the Western diatonic scale, losing their indigenous resonances, sonorities, and timbres. Urbanization and the migration of the young into urban areas disrupted the discontinuity in generational transmission of music. Village rituals and ceremonies play an important role in preserving ancient religious systems where music, dance, and theatre were essential as part of agricultural life, trance and curing rites, and communal well-being. The onslaught of mass media and the Internet has also accentuated the de-sacralization of ritual spaces, leaving many musical traditions behind as memories of the past.

The solutions for this dilemma are therefore not easy. From perspective of researchers and policy makers, the recommendations of UNESCO (2009) are of the most appropriate for all parties to consider and implement:

Commends the State Party for having activated resources and promoted Ca trù among the younger generation, encouraging musicians and presenting organizations to identify talented students with a view to ensuring the continued viability of Ca trù singing;

Recommends that the State Party include younger artists and learners alongside elderly artists and teachers in its proposed measures aiming at providing financial incentives for Ca trù musicians;

Underlines the importance of education programs to raise awareness of the poetry used as ca trù song texts as well as ca trù musical forms and aesthetics; and emphasizes that the improvisatory techniques that are central to ca trù performance should be the focus of transmission efforts;

Further recommends that the audiovisual safeguarding, inventory and systematization of documents on ca trù singing be done in line with appropriate standards of audiovisual preservation and access;

While acknowledging the importance of restoring customary performance venues, encourages the State Party to focus its safeguarding efforts primarily on investing in human resources;

Further encourages the State Party to ensure that the proposed safeguarding measures continue to be implemented with a high degree of co-ordination between governmental departments, cultural organizations and communities, groups and individuals with expertise and knowledge of ca trù.

The arguments of Schipper (2009) are remarkable. He distinguishes five major factors that may help the sustainability of any music culture beyond musical structure and content itself, or in other words, preservation and development. First, it is the clear definition of being a musician/singer/organizer, etc. and one's relationship to the community (how he or she is viewed in the eyes of the public) are of great importance for the future of any tradition. Secondly, the education and training of the music should attract sufficient people learn music (formally or informally) so that there will be competent performers in the next generation. Thirdly, the music industry (media and markets) is crucial, we have to clearly expect who pays (an audience, a government, a corporation, or philanthropy). Fourthly, it is infrastructure and regulations that make the existence of music to leniency in enforcing sound restrictions, protection of copyright, and international trade agreements, while other kinds of music have virtually been regulated or taxed out of existence. Fifthly, contexts and constructs may be the key to sustainability for much music: how it relates to its stakeholders, how it functions in traditional and new contexts, and especially how it is regarded in its community in terms of cosmologies, aesthetics and prestige, which has always been a crucial trigger for musical sustainability.

Such arguments may be very helpful in the context of Vietnam in preserving and developing ca trù. Vietnam (and the world, through UNESCO) has recognized the great culture value of ca trù, so the preservation and development of this kind of music is of special need. However, the means for transferring this kind of music to the next generation may face a lot of obstacles. The lack of human resource should be addressed first, because there are few senior *đào nương* today, as well as other positions. The environment for teaching ca trù, the class, and more important, the learners: who are willing to learn such a difficult kind of music without assurance of fame, money, or just profession? Let alone the trend of modern music, ca trù may have to find a tough way to get a sustainable position in the music life of the country. The most feasible way is to start in the places it once dominated, because in these localities people may find it admirable and adorable.

Schipper (2009) argues that these mechanisms, once identified, can inform and empower communities to forge their own musical futures if made available freely through an accessible web-interface which will make it possible for people across the world to access advanced tools for analysis and practical case studies to inform forward planning across cultures and communities, on their own terminals and on their own terms. This is in line with what Pham Tiet Khanh (2022) describes the obstacles for traditional music today, namely “increasing integration and exchange, and under the strong and constant influence

of the wave of Western civilization, the development and popularity of modern audiovisual media, new and attractive music shows on television and social sites”. In preserving the traditional music, we should also pay attention to what Thanh Thuy Nguyen (2019) points out: “The teaching of traditional music is equally related to the commercialized views of women as it is grounded in the preservation of tradition”, because “intercultural and interdisciplinary artistic practice can propose social change, and provide counter images of traditionally gendered behavior”.



Mr. Nguyễn Văn Khuê (Giáo phường Thái Hà) is guiding đàn đáy for a learner of ca trù at home. Source: Lao Động Newspaper, 4 February 2018.

Nicolas (2019) states that the musical scene of Southeast Asia evolves and transforms with time, greater attention and resources should be directed to keeping alive the region's music traditions in its myriad forms. Music loss is the loss of part of our history and our legacy. This view is shared by several authors (Hồng Minh, 207; Nguyễn Xuân Diện, 2010; Nguyễn Đình Lâm, Ngô Minh Hùng, Quang Văn Sơn, Lương Khắc Đình, 2021; Thanh Thuy Nguyen, 2019). From perspective of keeping traditional music, all the efforts to preserve ca trù should be done in harmony with other kinds of traditional music, not only in one locality but in the whole country and region of Asia. Nicolas (2019) goes on to suggest that without adequate preservation efforts, the region's musical heritage that is fading away will leave permanent lacuna in the fabric of values that define who we are and where we come from. The sources for new musical thoughts and ideas are embedded in these ancient traditions from which one may draw inspiration. Music in Southeast Asia has flourished as it is rooted in what music means for the people of the region - its philosophy, spirituality and symbols that evoke the sounds of peace and tolerance amidst a world of diversity and linkages.

In term of practicality, the case of preserving and developing đàn bầu at Vietnam National Academy of Music is a good example of how to teach students learn traditional music, and traditional music instruments, including ca trù. Kongkhunthian, W., Leaboonschoo, S., Thang, T.N. (2015) report the process of teaching traditional musical instruments as follows:

“The academy supports and organizes an appropriate environment for learning, as well as development of the instrument shape and sound quality. The teaching process of the đàn bầu curriculum goes from basic to professional level. The curriculum aims at developing the knowledge and skill of students playing the instrument in different song patterns such as chèo, Huế, tài tử cải lương. Students are taught to change sound keys, interpret music scores, and adjust playing techniques. Teachers are responsible for organizing activities and the preparation of instruments. Teachers demonstrate by playing the instrument and encourage students to imitate. The curriculum content is divided into determined levels of difficulty and there are mid-term and final examinations. In their final year, students must demonstrate the accumulation of their knowledge, which is carefully and precisely assessed by teachers and assessment committees”.

It is always easier said than done, and meaningful small steps in preserving traditional music may be better than a broad, vague policy. More money and man power should be given to accelerate the pace of training đào nương, đàn đáy performers. Many provinces and cities are lacking a master singer. They have to invite masters from Hà Nội clubs to teach young students (Việt Nam News, 2018). Training these artists at the large scale can help boost the effectiveness of facility, teacher, and curricula (Pham Tiet Khanh, 2022). The artists should receive sufficient support from state agency to earn their own living first, then to follow the fame in their career (Nguyễn Đình Lâm, Ngô Minh Hùng, Quang Văn Sơn, Lương Khắc Đình, 2021). Vietnamnet (2021) reported that Hanoi authorities

made great efforts to revive and develop this genre. In addition to seminars on preserving and promoting the heritage's value, Hanoi's cultural sector enhanced its research and documentation of ca trù songs and melodies that elderly artisans harbored; supported the expansion of spaces at several relic sites and landscapes in association with tours; and organized many festivals and contests to create "playgrounds" for ca trù practitioners as well as to seek young talent.

5. Conclusion

Cultural heritage is of great importance for all peoples of the world (UNESCO, 1954). Music, although not a "physical" item, has as much importance to describing a culture as its physical counterparts, such as paintings, sculptures, and funerary objects, not only in modern times, but in the past as well (Inawat, 2015). Ca trù singing is included in the inventory of Vietnamese musical heritage and performing arts held by the Vietnamese Institute for Musicology within the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (UNESCO, 2009). Along with efforts from the communities, the further support of specialized agencies and local authorities in providing operating funds and preferential policies for artisans, organizing teaching activities and developing performing spaces is very essential. In terms of teaching and passing on to younger generations, it is crucial to focus on training singers and instrument players in accordance with high standards to ensure quality (Vietnamnet, 2021).

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism promulgated some guidelines to enhance the possibility of making ca trù more popular in Vietnam. Accordingly, State should look towards raising the communities' awareness and capacity in preserving and promoting the unique value of this cultural treasure; assist ca trù performers not only in performances, but also in sharing experiences with performers of other singing genres in and outside the country, thus enriching their understanding of cultural diversity and ways to protect it.

The ministry plans to systematically compile lists of the songs of the two art forms, both ancient and contemporary, and design communications campaigns to introduce them widely in society so as to draw the people's attention to conserving these treasures in a sustainable manner.

The ministry will adopt preferential measures to honor the talented performers who have been greatly devoted to preserving and promoting the values of these intangible heritages, and issue policies encouraging performers to teach youngsters their art. Also, performers having made significant contributions to the preservation and promotion of ca trù will be honored with the titles "The People's Artist" and "Emeritus Artist" as a way to encourage them to do more to keep these singing genres alive for future generations.

The ministry will formulate programs to teach the types of singing in arts schools and at general schools, targeting to train generations of young performers who will help maintain the love duet and ceremonial singing in contemporary life.

The State will also increase investment, along with mobilizing funds from various sources in society, for the preservation of these cultural treasures. This is very important given the circumstance of lacking interest in traditional music in particular and traditional heritage in a certain proportion of population, making it difficult for materializing the resurgence of ca trù.

Proper and applicable policies are very important in giving directions for the preservation and development of ca trù. Vietnamese people, especially young people today, “have the habit of watching newly released MVs of artists, the appearance of more and more art projects using folklore materials will have a positive impact on the public’s cognitive process concerning the topic of Vietnamese culture” (Tan Khang Nguyen and Thach Hue Man, 2022), therefore the ways of preserving traditional music like ca trù is of special importance. Preservation and development need to suit modern life. The intangible heritage should move in accordance with life today (Việt Nam News, 2018).

To preserve and develop ca trù, it seems to have insurmountable obstacles in terms of required infrastructure – a theatre with excellent acoustics, a large stage, and a fly tower; extended and expensive training to a high-level for the participants – director, conductor, soloists, orchestra, and chorus; and finally an audience sufficiently enculturated to appreciate the event, and sufficiently affluent to be able to afford tickets. The scenario of ca trù followed opera, which survives quite well on its carefully constructed prestige as one of the highest and most complete forms of art of European culture, could inspire the governments, corporate sponsors and philanthropists to support it to a level incomparable to any other art form (Schippers, 2009).

The positive signals have already appeared, though still modest. According to Vietnamnet (2021), “at the time when ca trù was listed among Intangible Cultural Heritages in Need of Urgent Safeguarding by UNESCO, Hanoi only had a few clubs. However, there are now nearly 20 groups and clubs regularly performing and over 50 people with the ability to pass it on to younger generations. The clubs have preserved over 30 ancient styles, songs and dances while developing an additional 20 new melodies”. Hanoi is still leading the course of preservation and development of ca trù, and it still needs a long way to go.

We can also apply information technology to preserve and develop ca trù singing and intangible culture to help introduce ca trù widely to attract tourists (Nguyễn Đình Lâm, Ngô Minh Hùng, Quang Văn Sơn, Lương Khắc Đình, 2021). And using modern means may be one of the best tools, as “integration of Vietnamese cultural elements into the MV is not only entertaining and educating, improving efficiency in preserving, preserving and

spreading diverse and rich cultures, but also imbued with Vietnamese identity” Khang Tan Nguyen, Thach Hue Man (2022:232). It is necessary to support contemporary artists in bringing the art form closer to young audiences (Việt Nam News, 2018).

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