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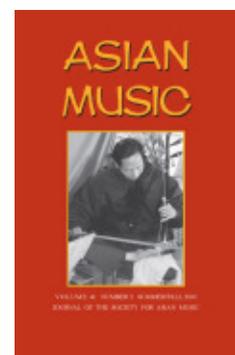
## **Singing the Past: Vietnamese Ca Tru, Memory, and Mode**

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## Singing the Past: Vietnamese *Ca Tru*, Memory, and Mode<sup>1</sup>

*Barley Norton*

Ba Nho holds the *dan day* lute close to his face. . . . With dignity, he plays the opening phrase. . . .

Never before had Co To heard the sound of the *dan day* full of such misery and grief. The sound was so sullen and suppressed, as if it could not be set free into the atmosphere. . . . The sound was a deep feeling that could not be expressed. . . . The sound was a gust of wind unable to blow through the cracks of a thin bamboo screen. . . . The sound was a quivering leaf falling off a branch. . . .

The rhythms of Co To's bamboo clappers (*phach*) were fast like a bird calling out for help in the midst of a storm. . . . Not a single strike of the beaters was dull. The sound was sharp like the stroke of a knife. Beating the *phach* in that way gave glory to the bamboo and gave it a soul. . . . The lute and voice intertwined and soared (Nguyen Tuan 1946, 61–2).

The above quote, which is taken from the 1946 novella *Chua Dan* by Nguyen Tuan, describes a *ca tru* performance.<sup>2</sup> At the climax of the novella, the author describes Co To—the *ca tru* singer who also plays the bamboo clappers—listening to the suppressed, mournful sound of her late husband's *dan day* lute being played by Ba Nho. Co To had promised her husband that the lute would never be played after his death and she implores Ba Nho not to play it. After repeated visits to Co To's home, Ba Nho insists on playing the lute and persuades her to sing again. Ba Nho's aim is to bring together Co To and his master, Lanh Ut, who plays the "praise drum" (*trong chau*) during the performance. Lanh Ut, like Co To, is bereaved; Lanh Ut's wife was killed in a train accident, and since his wife's death he has withdrawn from life and neglected his responsibilities as the head of Me Thao hamlet. Ba Nho arranges the *ca tru* session as a form of salvation for both Lanh Ut and Co To, to help them heal the pain of bereavement that has shattered their lives and to offer them the hope of new love, but in fact love has already developed between Co To and Ba Nho. The tragedy, as both Co To and Ba Nho are fully aware, is that the consequences of playing the lute will be fatal: as Ba Nho plays the lute his fingers begin to bleed and soon he is awash with blood and dies. The climax of the novel ends

in Ba Nho's self sacrifice for those he loves, and a pagoda, Chua Dan, is built to honor his memory.

### ***Chua Dan: Love and Death, Colonialism and Revolution***

In *Chua Dan*, Nguyen Tuan demonstrates his profound knowledge and understanding of *ca tru* through his use of language, which is imbued with specialized musical terminology and references to famous songs and poems. The intensity of *ca tru* performance is heightened for dramatic effect, but nonetheless Nguyen powerfully evokes both the sound of *ca tru* and its performance context in the first half of the twentieth century. The "traditional" performance context described in the novella is referred to as a "singing session" (*buoi hat*) — a leisurely, undefined period of time set aside for talking, drinking rice wine, and making music — as opposed to a formal "performance" (*trinh dien*) presented to a passive audience. The singing session provides a forum for intimate interaction between the musicians themselves and other guests participating in the session, and for appreciation of each others' artistry. It is a site in which intense personal feelings are brought to the fore through participation.

Aesthetic contemplation of the words of the poem, of the singer's delivery of the poem and of the phrases of the lute, is at the heart of the performance practice. It is also encoded in the music: one of the drummer's roles is to "praise" the skill of the singer/percussionist and lutenist during the performance, by beating one or more times on the frame of the praise drum. Much of the significance of singing sessions is therefore predicated on a vision of music making where the personal relationships between the performers and other "participants" are far from incidental. Rather, it is the intimacy of *ca tru* within a close-knit social world that makes the singing sessions so potent.

The love story involving the three central characters, Ba Nho, Co To, and Lanh Ut, is narrated retrospectively in the second chapter of *Chua Dan*. The opening chapter of the novella begins in the authorial present (that is, the mid-1940s) with scenes of a French prisoner-of-war camp in which Lanh Ut—who is introduced as Linh, prisoner 2910—has been incarcerated. It is only in the second chapter that the story reverts back to the period when Lanh Ut was head of Me Thao hamlet, before he was imprisoned and before he "sold" (*ban*) Me Thao hamlet to "foreigners" (*nguoi ngoai quoc*) (1946, 69). The portrayal of *ca tru* singing sessions in Me Thao hamlet, in the second chapter, is therefore preceded by descriptions of the nationalist fight for independence against the French. The novella positions the Vietnamese cultural tradition of *ca tru* in opposition to French colonialism, and it may be interpreted as nostalgic for a

traditional way of life in rural Vietnam, a way of life that was severely threatened and disrupted by foreign intervention and modern technology.

*Chua Dan* was published shortly after the August Revolution of 1945, by which the Vietnamese communists led by Ho Chi Minh initially gained control over northern Vietnam, and it has been reported that the author wrote the novella in order to express his “feelings” (*noi long*) about the revolution (Giang Quan 1997, 118). Nguyen Tuan was himself imprisoned twice by the French for his opposition to colonialism (Ngo Van Phu et al. 1999, 638), and from the first page of *Chua Dan*, anti-colonialist sentiments are evident through references to the “terror” (*khung bo*) of French rule and descriptions of the harsh conditions experienced by Lanh Ut in the prisoner-of-war camp. The August Revolution is directly addressed in the final chapter, which is full of hope for a communist future free from poverty, inequality, and misery. Alongside this optimism for the ideals of the revolution, Nguyen also argues passionately for the continuation of *ca tru* through the narrator of the story urging Co To, who since the revolution has retreated from everyday life and become a Buddhist nun, to continue singing *ca tru*. The final sentence of *Chua Dan* has a prophetic tone: “Dearest Co To, until this day there has yet to be a human revolution that has ‘got rid of’ singing” (Nguyen Tuan 1946, 84).

Written immediately after a dramatic turning point in Vietnamese contemporary history, *Chua Dan* reflects on the position of *ca tru* during the French colonial period and its uncertain future following the August Revolution. One of the most striking aspects of the novella is the way in which it explores the tensions, anxieties, and human tragedies that resulted from the often violent collisions between pre-revolutionary Vietnamese traditions and ways of life, French colonialism, and revolutionary Communism. The novella is also remarkable, viewed with the benefit of hindsight, in the way it foreshadows many of the political issues that have affected *ca tru* in the second half of the twentieth century.

Nguyen Tuan’s *Chua Dan* provides a point of departure for discussion of the historical and political context of *ca tru*, which is addressed in more detail in the next section of this article. This investigation is followed by a closer examination of *ca tru* music based on analysis of a piece called “Bac Phan.” The main aim of the musical analysis is to investigate the modal theory of *ca tru*, which has not been taken into account in previous research on Vietnamese modes. The final section of the article, “Singing the Past,” situates the musical analysis, once again, within the broader cultural context through an evaluation of *ca tru*’s cultural significance in contemporary Vietnam. Recent attempts to revive *ca tru* are considered in relation to widespread struggles over public memory

in the post-*doi moi* era, and it is suggested that attachment to *ca tru* is bound up with recollections of the past and patriotic nostalgia.

### Historical and Political Background

Nguyen Tuan's novella presents what might be referred to as a traditionalist view of *ca tru*. In keeping with scholarly writing in the first half of the twentieth century (see, for example, Nguyen Don Phuc 1923), *ca tru* is portrayed in *Chua Dan* as a "refined" (*thanh nha*) and "scholarly" (*bac hoc*) genre with a long history.

The historical development of *ca tru* is complex and largely unexplained. Although a number of authors have claimed that *ca tru* dates from the Ly dynasty (1009–1225), evidence for this assertion is scant. A recent publication by Nguyen Xuan Dien (2000), which includes a useful summary of the differing origin theories proposed by scholars, maintains that further research is needed before definite conclusions can be drawn about the history and development of *ca tru*. However, there is some evidence to suggest that an early form of *ca tru* performed by a large ensemble existed during the Le dynasty (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries), and that the contemporary ensemble form—that is, a male *dan day* lute player, a female singer who also plays the *phach* (clappers), and a male drummer who plays the praise drum (*trong chau*)—emerged in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century (Nguyen Xuan Dien 2000; see also, Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue 1962).

In the nineteenth century, *ca tru* was performed in a variety of performance contexts with each context employing distinctive terminology, song texts, and repertoire. *Ca tru* was known as *hat cua dinh* (lit., "singing in the *dinh*") at rituals and feasts for the guardian spirits (*than thanh*) in the village communal house (*dinh*), *hat thi* (lit., "singing contest") at competitions, *hat nha to* at banquets for scholars or "mandarins" (*quan vien*), and *hat choi* (lit., "singing for entertainment") at scholars' private homes. In the last 20 years or so, *ca tru* has become the most commonly used general name for the genre, whereas *hat a dao* (lit., "songs of the songstresses") was more common before the 1980s. *Ca* is a Sino-Vietnamese word meaning "singing" or "song" and *tru* is thought to be derived from *the*, which means "card" (Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue 1962, 45). In this context, *the* refers to the bamboo tokens used as an indirect payment for the musicians. While the musicians performed, the scholars listening would throw the tokens into a basket in order to praise the performance, and at the end of the event, tokens were collected and converted into money.

Nguyen Tuan's novella draws on the *hat choi* performance context, with Lanh Ut fulfilling the role of the scholarly aesthete. For *hat choi* sessions, scholars

would invite a singer and lutenist to perform in their homes for their own pleasure. The etiquette of *hat chôi* permitted the scholars to play the drum and to present poems, which they may have written themselves, to the singer. It was expected that a singer would be able to sing poems “on the spot,” without prior rehearsal. Through the evocation of *hat chôi*, Nguyen Tuan draws on the “refined” heritage of *ca tru*, a heritage that is lost once the French take over Me Thao hamlet. Patriotism is important here. In the novella, *ca tru* is situated in opposition to French colonialism; music provides an escape from the overwhelming grief felt by Lanh Ut after his wife’s death and an escape from the inevitable destruction of traditional village life by the colonialists. (Lanh Ut’s wife, it should be noted, was killed by an accident on a French-built railway, and as a result Lanh Ut banned all forms of modern technology from the hamlet.)

The traditionalist, patriotic picture in *Chua Dan* of *ca tru* as a source of solace and redemption from the ruptures in Vietnamese society under colonial rule is, however, quite different from the prevailing view that emerged in the new communist society in northern Vietnam. Communist rhetoric argued that *ca tru* was tainted by colonialist decadence and corruption, rather than antithetical to it. Dao Trong Tu, for instance, in a book dense with Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, argues that French colonialism “ruined” the genre:

The *hat a dao* [*ca tru*], a traditional competition which gave charm to the villages in the Red River delta, degenerated into “songs of pleasure girls.” This undermining work consisted of an ethnic devaluation and a sociological abatement, after the material bases of culture had been eliminated. The folklore, treated with contempt, in the end exists only among the most disinherited strata of the population, the most vulnerable to colonial cataclysms. A terrible famine thus gave the coup-de-grace to the last holders of the traditional heritage (Dao Trong Tu 1984a, 100–1).

. . . the *a dao* [*ca tru*] song was born and for several centuries was one of the most beautiful popular artistic traditions. French colonialism ruined these village customs of virtue and culture and reduced the *a dao* song to the role of an accompaniment to prostitution (Dao Trong Tu 1984b, 26).

Dao Trong Tu’s reference to “songs of pleasure girls” invokes *ca tru*’s association with prostitution and opium smoking. In the decades preceding the August Revolution, *ca tru* was popular as entertainment in “singing bars” (*ca quan*) or “singing houses” (*nha hat co dau*). A prominent advocate for *ca tru*, Nguyen Xuan Khoat (1980, 11), has provided a vivid description of these singing houses:

During the French colonial period, the number of singing houses reached several hundred, and there were about 2,000 “rice wine singers” scattered around the

“gates” of Hanoi. These singing houses were not different from normal people’s houses . . . but in the evening the doors were opened, the lamps shined, and in the house were girls wearing makeup and fancy clothes. . . . The groups of guests who came to listen numbered between 2 to 3 or 4 people. Each singing house usually had one singer and a few “rice wine singers.” The “rice-wine singers” did not know how to sing; they were there to greet the guests, make tea, and invite the guests to drink rice wine and smoke opium, etc.<sup>3</sup>

In the above extract, Nguyen Xuan Khoat makes a distinction between “singers” (*co dau*) and “rice-wine singers” (*co dau ruou*), who did not sing and were often considered to be prostitutes.<sup>4</sup> The blurring of the boundary between singers and prostitutes—and the association of singing houses with gambling, drugs, and sex—led to *ca tru* being “condemned by many people” (Nguyen Xuan Khoat 1980, 10), regardless of whether rice-wine singers were present at performances or not. According to critics, *ca tru* had become a “rotten and depraved ‘game’” (*tro choi’ hu hong, truy lac*) for the amusement of decadent bourgeois capitalists (Nguyen Tuong Phuong 1996[1966], 551; see also To Dong Hai 1999). To what extent the French were responsible for the “depravity” of the singing houses, or indeed the extent to which *ca tru* had become a “depraved game,” is difficult to ascertain in retrospect, but the association of *ca tru* with prostitution and drugs was the main reason why it gained a negative reputation.

In *Chua Dan*, Nguyen Tuan studiously avoids discussing popular urban performances in 1940s Hanoi, despite the fact that his deep knowledge and admiration for *ca tru* was at least in part developed through visits to singing bars and his loving memory of a Hanoian singer called Chu.<sup>5</sup> By setting the novella in Me Thao hamlet, Nguyen Tuan is able to contrast traditional Vietnam with the destructive forces of French colonialism, without becoming enmeshed in the contentious world of Hanoi’s singing bars. The passionate plea for the continuation of *ca tru* at the close of *Chua Dan*, however, is prophetic of the genre’s demise following the August Revolution.

At the end of the Franco-Vietnamese War, which lasted from 1945 to 1954, some *ca tru* singing houses still existed in Hanoi, but these venues were shut down by the city authorities in the years after 1954 due to “corrupt” practices.<sup>6</sup> With the closure of the singing houses, *ca tru* artists who had previously made a living playing at them could no longer perform professionally and had to find other work (Bach Van 1999, 162). When I first went to Hanoi in 1994, I soon became aware that Kham Thien Street was famous for its numerous singing bars, as I began studying with the renowned lutenist Chu Van Du (1905–1995) who lived in a small alley off Kham Thien Street. Chu Van Du began playing the *dan day* when he was 13 years old, and by his late teens he was making a living

playing at singing bars in Kham Thien Street. When the singing bars closed during the 1950s and 1960s, Chu, like many other professional *ca tru* artists, had to find a manual job to earn a living. In Chu Van Du's case, he became a cleaner at a hospital and never performed professionally again. Chu Van Du, who sadly died several months after my first visit to Vietnam, was one of the last of the generation of *ca tru* musicians active prior to the August Revolution.

The Vietnamese Communist Party's vision of the role of the arts in society was that they should serve the ideological interest of the Party, the nation, and the socialist revolution, and help build a "new society" (*xa hoi moi*) based on communist principles (Norton 2002). *Ca tru*'s association with "disreputable" singing houses, as well as its position as a form of entertainment for the scholarly elite in the feudal system (Foreign Languages Publishing House 1975), meant that it was not well suited for appropriation as a "socialist art." Elderly musicians I interviewed said that the local authorities prohibited *ca tru*, and that from the late 1950s to the late 1980s performances were extremely rare in northern Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> Apart from when musicians played secretly in their own homes, there were just a few occasions when *ca tru* was officially recognized and permitted to be publicly performed, recorded, or broadcast on the radio.<sup>8</sup> On these occasions "revolutionary" song texts were sometimes included, but the music itself was not "modified" to suit revolutionary communist ideology, unlike many other types of traditional music (Norton 2002). For example, in a recording made by the Voice of Vietnam Radio in 1980, the famous singer Quach Thi Ho sings a patriotic text called "Many Springs" (Nhung Mua Xuan) without altering the *ca tru* music or vocal style. "Many Springs" charts the "resplendent" (*choi loi*) springs of Vietnamese history and repeatedly praises the Party.<sup>9</sup> The final lines of the text are as follows:

In the eightieth spring [1980] we are even more resplendent,  
 With the Party, the rough road has the scent of flowers,  
 Our Vietnam has written more songs,  
 More music for the generations, more heroic pages of history,  
 Celebrate that Vietnam is 35 years old,<sup>10</sup>  
 Celebrate our Party's fiftieth birthday,  
 Our people's army sings a song of unity.

Revolutionary song texts are markedly different from conventional *ca tru* poems. A diverse corpus of poems is used as song texts and new poems may be incorporated into the corpus. However, many of the poems that have become famous as *ca tru* song texts were written by poets like Nguyen Cong Tru (1778–1859), Cao Ba Quat (?–1855), and Duong Khue (1836–1898) in a "golden age" of Vietnamese literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Com-



Figure 1. A gathering of the Hanoi Ca Tru Club in August 2002. The founder of the club, Bach Van, stands to introduce the next performance.

mon themes of the classic *ca tru* poems include ambition, patience, pessimism, hedonism, nature, love, moral teachings, and irony/humor.<sup>11</sup>

In contemporary Vietnam, pre-twentieth century *ca tru* poems are preferred to revolutionary song texts. Since the implementation of economic reforms known as *doi moi* in 1986, a more liberal cultural climate has developed, and musicians consider the revolutionary song texts to be lacking in literary merit, inappropriate and anachronistic. The post-*doi moi* era has seen a modest *ca tru* revival: in 1991 the Hanoi Ca Tru Club (Cau Lac Bo Ha Noi) was established by Bach Van, a number of *ca tru* clubs outside Hanoi have also been founded (for example, the Ha Tay Province Ca Tru Club), and one Hanoi-based group, the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble (Nhom Ca Tru Thai Ha), has made several European tours and recordings. The Hanoi Ca Tru Club meets on the last Sunday of every month in the Greek Creek Daoist Temple on Cat Linh Street and is the only organization that regularly organizes *ca tru* performances in Hanoi (see Figure 1). The Hanoi Ca Tru Club has approximately 200 members, most of whom are elderly. The main problem that Bach Van has encountered since establishing the club has been maintaining regular performances, as there are very few competent *ca tru* musicians, especially *dan day* players, in Vietnam



Figure 2. Teaching *ca tru* outside a temple in Co Dam village, Ha Tinh province. A row of elderly singers teaches a group of young girls to sing *ca tru*.

today. Bach Van has often sought musicians living in rural provinces to perform at the club, and at the Lunar New Year of 2001, she organized a special *ca tru* festival at the Temple of Literature (Van Mieu), which brought together musicians from several Vietnamese provinces. Unfortunately, however, only a few of the musicians who performed at the festival were proficient performers. The trips I have made to rural areas attest to the impoverished state of *ca tru* music culture. For example, there are very few musicians in villages such as Lo Khe (Dong An district) and Co Dam (Ha Tinh province), which are famous for their *ca tru* heritage. When I visited Co Dam in July 2002 some elderly singers demonstrated their attempts to teach the younger generation *ca tru* (see Figure 2), but much of the musical knowledge and practical expertise had already been lost.

*Ca tru* has never been taught at Vietnamese music institutions (Norton 1996; Arana 1999), and because of the lack of commercial opportunities there is little incentive for musicians to learn the genre. In 2002, however, the Ford Foundation awarded a large fund (a share of US\$100,000 split with a program for the revival of water puppetry) for the teaching and preservation of *ca tru*. It remains to be seen what the lasting impact of this teaching program will be.

### *Ca Tru* Modes (*Cung*)

I would now like to turn to “the music itself.” Having conducted initial research into *ca tru* over a period of 4 months in 1994 and 1995, and having continued to attend performances while in Hanoi from 1996 to 1998, I went to Vietnam in the summer of 2002 with the aims of continuing my practical learning of *ca tru* and exploring in more depth the musical processes involved in performance. Moving beyond previous research that concentrated on processes of improvisation (Norton 1996), I intended to investigate the modal characteristics of *ca tru*. I had been alerted to the existence of *ca tru* modes through brief references in Vietnamese secondary sources, and had noticed changes in scale during the course of some pieces, yet details about the modes were elusive as they were not often discussed by musicians. Previous work on Vietnamese modal theory has not taken *ca tru* into account, and I was keen to contribute to an understanding of mode in Vietnamese music through further research. From a personal point of view, I was also stimulated by the prospect of learning some of the challenging pieces that include modal changes, as the pieces I had previously studied did not (for example, “Muou,” “Hat Noi,” and “Xam Hue Tinh”).

Much less is known about mode in Vietnamese music compared with other Asian musics. In the overview of modal systems in Asia in *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* there is only a brief mention of Vietnamese modal theory based on the research of one scholar, Tran Van Khe (Powers and Perlman 2001, 844). In *La musique Vietnamienne traditionnelle* (1962), Tran outlines a Vietnamese modal theory that he maintains is broadly applicable to many types of Vietnamese traditional music. His discussion of mode highlights the hierarchy and function of scale pitches, the ornamentation used on specific pitches, distinctive melodic phrases, and aesthetic associations. According to Tran, there are two fundamental modal systems or *dieu* that are generally recognized by musicians throughout Vietnam: the *bac* (lit., “north”) and the *nam* (lit., “south”) mode. Each of the two modal systems is then subdivided into various “nuances” (*hoi*). *Nam* and *bac* nuances in this system are distinguished by slight alterations to the pitches and ornamentation of the mode. In general, the *bac* mode and its nuances convey various shades of “happy” sentiments, and depending on the nuance, the *nam* mode conveys tranquil, serene, or sad sentiments (Tran Van Khe 1962, 219, 223).

Most of Tran Van Khe’s analysis pertains to the southern chamber music genre, *nhac tai tu*, and related repertoires from central Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> Other Vietnamese musics, including *ca tru*, are discussed in a separate section dedicated to “regional song” from the northern, central, and southern parts of Vietnam. Tran includes a brief analysis of the piece “Hat Noi,” concluding that the lute

part uses the pentatonic scale C-D-F-G-A and the vocal line predominantly rests on the pitches A and D with occasional use of pitch F. However, he acknowledges that his general modal theory is not applicable to *ca tru*: “Hat Noi . . . does not have the characteristics of either the *bac* or the *nam* modal system” (Tran Van Khe 1962, 246–8).

In the Vietnamese literature on *ca tru* there are frequent references to modes, which are referred to as *cung* rather than *dieu*.<sup>13</sup> Typically, Vietnamese sources list five *cung* along with a brief description of their aesthetic characteristics. Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue, for example, provide the following list:

1. *Cung nam* is even (*bang phang*) in a low register (*xuong thap*)
  2. *Cung bac* is solid (*ran roi*) in a high register (*len cao*)
  3. *Cung huynh* is sticky (*dinh*) and fast (*mau*)
  4. *Cung pha* is plaintive (*ai oan*) and quirky (*lo lo*)
  5. *Cung nao* is oblique (*chenh chenh*) and used to move from one *cung* to another.
- (Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue 1962, 61)

In addition to the descriptions of the modes above, some Vietnamese sources state which modes are used for some pieces, but none offers detailed musical analysis.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the *ca tru* musicians I have spoken with were aware of the names of the five *cung*, yet they were unable to tell me about the relationship between the modes and their practical music making. The lack of explicit, conscious knowledge of the modal system among contemporary musicians does not necessarily represent a radical break with the past. The best musicians of the previous generation—for example, the lutenists Pho Dinh Ky, Dinh Khac Ban, and Chu Van Du, and the singer Quach Thi Ho—who were involved in transmitting the tradition to the musicians still active today, rarely referred to the five *cung* (private correspondence, Nguyen Manh Tien and Nguyen Thuy Hoa, February 1996 and Trinh Tuan Khai, August 2002). Indeed, it would seem that at least since the mid-twentieth century musicians have not consciously utilized the *cung*, and this is corroborated by the following statement by Tran Van Khe in an article published in 1960: “in my research to date of Vietnamese traditional music, I have not yet met a *ca tru* singer who knows clearly what the five *cung* are” (Tran Van Khe 1960, 53).

### A Musical Analysis of “Bac Phan”

During my fieldwork trip in the summer of 2002, I recorded and transcribed multiple versions of pieces performed by the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble and learned to play several of these pieces on the *dan day*. Following Widdess’s



Figure 3. A performance at the Hanoi Ca Tru Club, August 2002. Ngo Trong Binh plays the *dan day* and Nguyen Thi Chuc sings and plays the *phach*.

collaborative approach to transcription and analysis (1994a), I discussed the recordings and transcriptions at length with the performers in order to gain insights into the performance practice. Although I made transcriptions of numerous pieces, the analysis presented in this article will focus on one performance of a piece called “Bac Phan” by the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble. A video of this performance, recorded on August 11, 2002, along with a transcription of the vocal sections of “Bac Phan” and further short video extracts of individual “instrumental phrases” (*kho*), can be downloaded at: [www.roehampton.ac.uk/catru/](http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/catru/). This website was created in conjunction with this article in order to give the reader direct contact with the performances discussed, and I am grateful to the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble’s permission for the use of video material on the website. In the video extracts, Nguyen Manh Tien plays the *dan day* and Nguyen Thuy Hoa sings and plays the *phach*. The *trong chau* is played by Nguyen Van Mui, who is the director of the ensemble and the father of both Tien and Thuy Hoa.

The *dan day* is a three-stringed lute with a trapezoidal body and a long neck,



Figure 4. A member of the Hanoi Ca Tru Club playing the “praise drum” (*trung chau*).

which has 9 to 12 frets (see Figure 3 for a picture of a *dan day* with 12 frets; Tien’s *dan day* has 10 frets). The strings of the *dan day* are tuned at the interval of a fourth and are plucked with a plectrum made of bamboo or plastic. The *phach* is a small slab of bamboo about 30 cm long, which is played with two wooden beaters, one in each hand (see Figure 2). One of the beaters is solid and the other is split in half lengthways to give a slightly different sound. Complex rhythmic patterns are created with three basic strikes: a double-bounce, “ricochet” strike (known as *to rop*) with the solid beater, a single strike (known as *phach*) with either beater, and a strike with both beaters together (known as *chat*). The rhythmic patterns on the *phach* accompany the musical phrases of the *dan day* and punctuate the singing. The *trung chau* is a small double-headed cylindrical drum that is hit with a thin beater (see Figure 4). The praise drum may be struck on its head (the *tom* stroke, usually notated by “O”) or on the frame (the *chat* stroke, usually notated by “+”). In pre-revolutionary *hat choi* performances, the drummer (known as *cam chau*) was a male scholar, an

aesthete with detailed knowledge of *ca tru* rather than a specialist “musician.” This tradition is maintained at the Hanoi Ca Tru Club, where the praise drum is played in turn by members of the club, who have a keen interest in and appreciation of the music and poetry, but who do not consider themselves to be “musicians.” The drummer has two main roles: he acts as a participating member of the “audience” who oversees and “judges” the performance, and he also adds to the musical fabric by marking the musical structure.

As the person who presides over the proceedings, the drummer calls for the performance to begin by playing three *tom* strokes, and he can praise good moments in the performance through playing one or more *chat* strokes in succession. If the performance is not to the drummer’s liking, he also has the power to terminate the piece at any point by playing five, six, or seven *tom* strokes followed by one *chat* stroke. The musical structure of pieces is marked through codified drum patterns. For example, at the end of a phrase the drummer can play the *lien chau* pattern, which consists of three *tom* strokes, or the *xuyen tam* pattern, which starts and ends with a *tom* stroke with one or more *chat* strokes between the *tom* strokes (for example, 0+0, 0++0, 0+++0). Video excerpt 9 on the website provides some examples of the drum patterns.<sup>15</sup>

The contemporary *ca tru* repertoire consists of about a dozen pieces or “musical forms” (*the*).<sup>16</sup> I have glossed *the* (lit., “form” or “shape”) as *musical form* in order to emphasize the flexibility inherent in the structure of *the*. Each musical form has a distinct identity, while at the same time providing scope for the creation of new realizations in the act of performance. Musical forms are differentiated through characteristic musical and poetic features, and distinctive performance practices and aesthetic connotations. “Bac Phan” is an “even” (*bang phang*) and “orderly” (*don*) musical form, which belongs to the *hat chôi* repertoire. It is conventionally performed as an opening piece for *hat chôi* singing sessions or as a prelude to performances of “Muou-Hat Noi” (“Muou” usually precedes “Hat Noi”). The particular song text for “Bac Phan” varies, but it always consists of six lines in the *luc bat* (lit., “six eight”) poetic form. A translation of the poem used by the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble is provided in the final section of this article.

I have chosen “Bac Phan” for analysis because it has relatively clear modal characteristics compared with other musical forms. “Bac Phan” literally means “returning to the *bac* mode,” and according to several Vietnamese sources it begins in the *nam* mode and “changes” (*chuyen*) gradually to the *bac* mode (see, for example, Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue 1962, 62). The only other musical form that refers to a mode in its title is “Cung Bac” (lit. “*bac* mode”), yet contrary to its emphatic title, “Cung Bac” also uses more than just one mode.<sup>17</sup>

### 1) Instrumental phrases (*kho*) and transposition

The concept of phrase features prominently in Vietnamese music. In *ca tru*, instrumental phrases, known as *kho*, are performed on the *dan day* and *phach* during the *luu khong* sections when there is no singing.<sup>18</sup> There are five main instrumental phrases: *kho song dan*, *kho giua*, *kho xiet*, *kho doc*, and *kho la dau*. Versions of these phrases are played at the beginning of several musical forms (in, for example, “Muou,” “Hat Noi,” “Bac Phan,” “Gui Thu,” “Thet Nhac,” and “Cung Bac”) in the sequence listed above.<sup>19</sup> Some *kho*—usually *kho song dan* or *kho doc*—are also performed as interludes between vocal sections. In addition to the five main *kho*, the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble also mentions another *kho*, *kho rai* (see video extract 3). The Ensemble does not consider *kho rai* to be one of the “main” instrumental phrases, but rather describes it as an augmented version of *kho song dan*, with a different musical function: *kho rai* is played as an “end phrase” to conclude some musical forms, whereas *kho song dan* is performed as an “opening phrase.”<sup>20</sup>

When learning *ca tru*, lutenists memorize different versions of the instrumental phrases, which are, to a great extent, fixed. The flexibility for variation in the instrumental sections is primarily limited to choosing which version of a *kho* to play. Lutenists do not strive to create new versions of *kho* in the act of performance.<sup>21</sup>

Figures 5 to 10 are transcriptions of the five *kho*, which can be downloaded from the website accompanying this article. The Western five-line staff is used to denote the *dan day* pitches; the *phach* part is not notated. Duration is indicated with conventional note stems, but bar-lines are not included as from an emic perspective the phrases are not grouped into measures with strong and weak beats. Lutenists distinguish between three types of ornamentation (*luyen lay*): vibrato (*rung*), glissandi or slides between pitches (*nhan*), and an ornament that is unique to the *dan day* called *vay*. Vibrato is used on most pitches to assist sound projection. On the score, only wide vibrato, which substantially alters the pitch of the note, is marked with a wavy line after the note head. Slides between pitches are indicated with a straight line between note heads. The *vay* ornament is based around a plucking technique consisting of a downstroke (followed by a pause), a quickly played upstroke, and then a final downstroke (followed by a pause). In addition to the characteristic plucking technique, the *vay* ornament uses slides and vibrato. Usually there is a slide down to the first pitch or between the first and second pitches (in which case the slide is either down a tone or a minor third), followed by a reiteration of the second pitch with a wide vibrato. Only one *vay* appears in the *kho* transcribed below (see Figure 9), which is indicated with a square bracket linking the three



Figure 5. “Kho Song Dan” (Video excerpt 2)



Figure 6. “Kho Giua” (Video excerpt 4)



Figure 7. “Kho Xiet” (Video excerpt 5)



Figure 8. “Kho Doc” (Video excerpt 6)

plucked notes and a “V” above the bracket (see also Figure 13). *Ca tru* musicians make a distinction between two different performance styles: *khuon* and *hang hoa*. *Khuon* (lit., “model,” “shape,” or “mould”) performances outline the fundamental musical “model” with minimal embellishments. The *khuon* style is restrained and characterized by precise phrases based on the essential musical elements. The *hang hoa* style—which literally means “flowery”—is more expansive than *khuon*, elaborating upon, and deviating from, the fundamental model. *Khuon* and *hang hoa* are general aesthetic terms that are applied to all aspects of performance, but they are also used specifically in relation to instrumental phrases. There are numerous *khuon* and *hang hoa* versions of *kho giua*, *kho xiet*, and *kho doc*, whereas *kho song dan* and *kho la dau* do not have *hang hoa* variants, as these phrases are only subject to minor variations. The *kho* transcribed in Figures 5 to 9 are in the *khuon* style. They use three pitches D, F, and A, with the addition of pitch G in *kho song dan*, and ornamentation is sparse (with just a wide vibrato on pitch F). In order to give an impression of the differences between the *khuon* and *hang hoa* styles, a *hang hoa* version



Figure 9. “Kho La Dau” (video excerpt 7)

Figure 10. *Kho Doc* in *hang hoa* style (Video excerpt 8)

of *kho doc* is transcribed in Figure 10. Compared with the *khuon* version of *kho doc* transcribed in Figure 8, the *hang hoa* version is longer, and it uses more pitches (both C and G are used in addition to D, F, and A), a wider intervallic range (a tenth, rather than a sixth), and more ornamentation (for example, slides as well as wide vibrato). In this way, instrumental phrases are made more “flowery” than in the model.

The *kho* transcribed in Figures 5 through 10 are played for several musical forms (including “Muou,” “Hat Noi,” and “Gui Thu”). Because of their ubiquity, they can be referred to for the purposes of this article as the “standard *kho*.” For some musical forms, however, such as “Bac Phan” and “Thet Nhac,” the *kho* are played at a different pitch level on different frets of the *dan day*. The four *kho* at the beginning of “Bac Phan” in video excerpt 1—*kho song dan*, *kho giua*, *kho xiet*, and *kho doc*—use the scale G-B $\flat$ -C-D-F, a transposition up a fourth compared with the standard *kho*, which use the scale D-F-G-A-C. (To facilitate comparison, the *dan day* is tuned at the same pitch level for all of the video excerpts on the website).<sup>22</sup> The first three *kho* in video excerpt 1—*kho song dan*, *kho giua*, and *xiet*—are the “same” as the standard *kho* transcribed in Figures 5–7, except for the transposition up a fourth; only the fourth *kho*, *kho doc*, in the opening instrumental section of “Bac Phan” before the voice enters, is different from the two versions of *kho doc* transcribed in Figures 8 and 10. Having outlined the instrumental phrases and their transposition, let us now turn to discussion of *métabole* and *mode* in “Bac Phan” as a whole.

(o) phan nho thuong [Instrumental section: kho song dan]

xa huong tranh niem nho canh (o) [etc]

Figure 11. The transition section of “Bac Phan”

## 2) *Métabole and mode*

Tran Van Khe uses the term *métabole*, first used by Constantin Brailoiu (1955), to describe “the succession of two different scales” (Tran Van Khe 1962, 225). Brailoiu coined the term *métabole* in his analysis of pentatonic melodies in order to avoid the term modulation, which is closely associated with Western tonal harmony. While it is quite possible to use the term modulation outside the context of Western music (see Tokita 1996), I will refer to *métabole* rather than modulation, in line with previous writing on Vietnamese music.

At the start of the performance of “Bac Phan,” Thuy Hoa and Tien use the scale G-B $\flat$ -C-D-F, but they close using D-F-G-A-C (that is to say, the final section of “Bac Phan” is at the same pitch level as the standard *kho* transcribed above). Between the starting and ending points, there is a short transition section that uses a different scale (personal correspondence, Nguyen Manh Tien, August 2002). Figure 11 is a transcription of the voice (top staff) and lute (bottom staff) of the transition. As with many other musical forms, there is no regular pulse in the vocal sections of “Bac Phan,” so Figure 11 uses proportional notation, with note stems omitted. The transition consists of seven syllables of text, *phan nho thuong xa huong tranh niem*, sung to three pitches, E $\flat$ , C, and B $\flat$  (the syllables *nho canh* mark the end of the transition). The *dan day* accompaniment also includes pitch G. The E $\flat$  is the only pitch not shared with the scale used prior to the transition (that is, G-B $\flat$ -C-D-F), and it is repeatedly emphasized through a motif consisting of a slide from E $\flat$  to C, which is used for four syllables. The transition is brief and uses four pitches, instead of the usual pentatonic scale. However, on a recording of “Bac Phan” by the singer Quach Thi Ho and the lutenist Dinh Khac Ban, the *dan day* accompaniment includes the pitch F during the transition section, thereby making the pentatonic scale

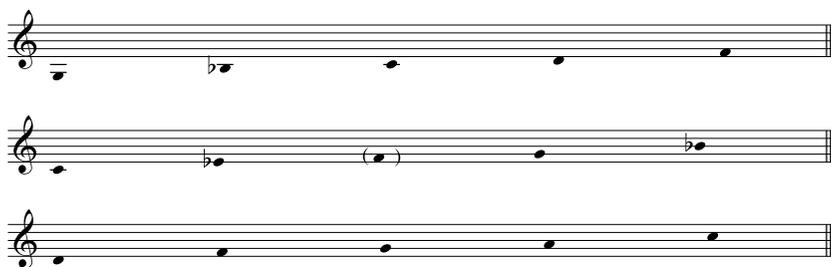


Figure 12. Scales used for “Bac Phan”

C-E $\flat$ -F-G-B $\flat$ .<sup>23</sup> When I played Dinh Khac Ban’s recording to Tien, he accepted that pitch F could be used, even though he never included it himself.

The end of the transition is marked with a *métabole* on the syllables *nho canh* in which the E $\flat$  is no longer sung and pitch D is introduced. This is followed by a (frequently repeated) vocal motif consisting of a slide from F to D, which is a transposition of the prominent E $\flat$ -C motif in the transition section. In other words, the E $\flat$ -C vocal motif moves up a tone to become F-D. This motif establishes the new scale of D-F-G-A-C, which is used for the rest of the musical form. Figure 12 outlines the three scales used in “Bac Phan,” with pitch F in the second scale placed in brackets to indicate its non-essential status. Information about ornamentation and pitch hierarchy can also be established from the analysis of “Bac Phan.” Both Tien and Thuy Hoa were aware that specific ornamentation occurred on specific pitches, and they pointed out the “main notes” (*not chinh*) and “subsidiary notes” (*not phu*).<sup>24</sup> Figure 13 summarizes the ornamentation and the hierarchy of pitches of the three “Bac Phan” scales. The “main” and “subsidiary” notes are indicated through clear and filled-in note heads respectively. Slides between pitches are notated with lines between adjacent notes, and the permitted direction of slides is indicated with arrows (slides in either direction with two arrows, upward slides with one arrow, downward slides with no arrows).<sup>25</sup> So how do the excerpts gathered together as Figure 13 relate to the *ca tru* modes? Although the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble could not categorically confirm the names of the *cung* in different sections of “Bac Phan,” some hypotheses can be made. If “Bac Phan” does change modes as Vietnamese scholars have suggested, then Figures 13a and 13c might relate to *cung nam* and *cung bac* respectively. Similarly, if the function of *cung nao* is to enable the “move from one *cung* to another,” Figure 13b might relate to *cung nao*. More important than establishing the names of the modes is the identification of some fundamental musical principles. Most of the repertoire makes extensive use of the scales and ornamenta-

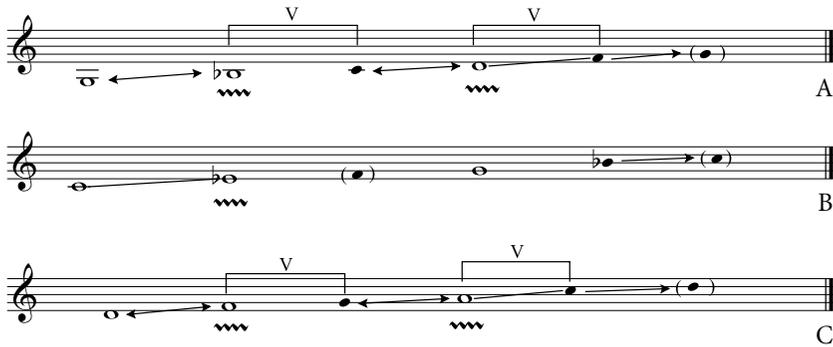


Figure 13. Modes used for “Bac Phan”

tion outlined in Figures 13a and 13c, and I will concentrate on these two modes, as the brevity of *cung nao* in “Bac Phan” would make any claims about this mode unreliable without further analysis.

Figures 13a and 13c have the same intervallic relationships, ornamentation, and hierarchy of pitches. This would suggest that—in marked contrast to *dieu nam* and *dieu bac* in the southern Vietnamese chamber music, *nhac tai tu*—these factors are not significant in distinguishing between *cung nam* and *cung bac*. The fact that many *kho* may be transposed, unaltered, to a different pitch level corroborates this claim, and it also suggests that characteristic melodic patterns are not a feature of *cung*. Similarly, tempo does not seem to be an important factor, as there is no direct relationship between the *métabole* of “Bac Phan” and tempo changes.<sup>26</sup> Further analysis of several *ca tru* musical forms may demonstrate other distinguishing characteristics for the less commonly used modes.<sup>27</sup> However, from the analysis of “Bac Phan,” it can be concluded that the musical differences between the two main *ca tru* modes consist only of a shift in relative pitch level: *cung bac* is a fifth higher than *cung nam*, but the intervallic relationships of the scale, the hierarchy of pitches, and the ornamentation on specific pitches are maintained.

In a comparative study of modal systems, Powers (2001) states that theoretical modal systems contrived by scholars are usually “closed” or “symmetrical” as opposed to systems that comprise phenomena of actual practice, which are “open-ended” or “non-symmetrical.” Closed systems cannot be added to with further categories, are often used primarily for classificatory purposes, and are usually “general rather than specific, closer to ‘scale’ than to ‘tune’” (Widdess 1994b, 32). From the analysis of “Bac Phan” above, it can be postulated that *ca tru* modal theory is a “closed” rather than an “open” system, closer to “scale” than to “tune.” *Ca tru* modes also conform to the idea of a closed system in that

the addition of new modes and categories is not a feature (at least in contemporary practice), although it differs in the respect that *cung* are not generally used for classification purposes.

In the absence of an explicit modal theory elucidated by practitioners, a full picture of *ca tru* modes will likely remain elusive, particularly in regard to aesthetic factors. Nonetheless, the above analysis of “Bac Phan” has revealed specific musical characteristics that underlie *ca tru* performance, and has moved toward a partial understanding of *ca tru* modal theory.

## Singing the Past

The Wilting Lotus Flower

*Who holds the wilting lotus flower?  
Feelings last a long time, but the days are short; winter passes into spring.  
Where can a lover from the past be found?  
Fate brings memories of love,  
Memories of a scene far away.  
If you sadly miss your home village then find a way to return.*

Sen Tan

*Sen tan ai da chiem hue  
Tinh dai ngay ngan dong da sang xuan  
Tim dau cho thay co nhan  
Lay cau van menh thay phan nho thuong  
Tranh niem nho canh xa huong  
Nho que bang lang tim duong tham que*

Time passing. Nostalgia for a past love, long gone. Sad memories of a distant home. In just six dense lines, “The Wilting Lotus Flower” powerfully evokes nostalgic memories of the past. “The Wilting Lotus Flower,” which is an extract from the epic poem “The Tale of Kieu” written by Nguyen Du (1766–1820), is the song text used for the performance of “Bac Phan,” analyzed above, by the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble.

In a recent book, *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Ho Tai 2001), researchers of Vietnamese culture draw attention to the ways in which the past and memory are being remade, revised, and reimagined since the onset of the economic reforms of *doi moi*. In her introduction to the edited volume, Hue-Tam Ho Tai eloquently discusses the widespread resurgence of pre-revolutionary tradition in post-*doi moi* Vietnam in relation to official history and public memory. She points out the limitations of pitting hegemonic official history in simple opposition to counterhegemonic public

memory, and instead offers a more nuanced account in which public memory “coexists in a symbiotic fashion” with official history (Ho Tai 2001, 7). She discusses how in different contexts individuals and groups may align public memory with official history, may cling to the past and utilize it for particular purposes (including counterhegemonic purposes), or alternatively may seek refuge from official history in forgetting or “willed amnesia.”

The attempt to reclaim and revitalize *ca tru* is, I would argue, a prime example of these struggles over public memory in late socialist Vietnam. The public memory of *ca tru*—articulated through musical performance, popular and scholarly writing, and other media—is of a refined Vietnamese cultural tradition with a long and distinguished history, a tradition whose strong links to the pre-revolutionary past should be celebrated rather than criticized as “colonial corruption.” For many of the elderly members of the Hanoi Ca Tru Club, *ca tru* encapsulates their nostalgia for Vietnam prior to war and revolution: it recalls personal memories of listening to *ca tru* in their youth, of youthful romance, and of a bygone Vietnam. On attending the Hanoi Ca Tru Club in the summer of 2002, one of the attendees, Nhan—who had during previous visits to Hanoi taught me Vietnamese and who had come to see me perform the *dan day*—said that listening to *ca tru* had made her feel “sad” (*buon*).

Nhan, a woman who is herself in her sixties, explained further that it had made her sad to see the predominantly elderly male members of the club clinging to a past that had long since been swept aside by revolution and war. Nhan’s feelings of sadness were, I would suggest, born of a palpable sense of nostalgia among members of the club. This yearning for the past is articulated in poems like “The Wilting Lotus Flower” and through the sounds of the lute, clappers, and praise drum, which are strongly associated with “the old days” (*ngay xua*). The nostalgia for *ca tru* is a patriotic form of nostalgia, in which outside influences, including the French colonial presence, is erased from memory. Patriotic nostalgia is a narrative of pure Vietnameseness, a longing for a utopian past.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the period when *ca tru* was officially criticized and prohibited, celebratory personal memories of *ca tru* continued to be nurtured by some individuals and groups. After several decades in which *ca tru* was for the most part silenced, these personal memories have, in the post-*doi moi* era, come to the fore and been openly expressed as public memory. As with many other cultural traditions that were condemned in Party documents and by officials during the revolutionary period, *ca tru* is no longer at odds with Party policy but instead is being aligned with it. *Ca tru* is increasingly being promoted as a cultural activity that contributes to the Party’s aim of developing Vietnamese culture, which is “rich in national color” (*dam da ban sac dan toc*).<sup>29</sup>

Musicians’ knowledge of *ca tru* was severely damaged during the decades,

from the 1960s to the late 1980s, when public performances were non-existent (except for a few notable exceptions). The vibrant musical culture of the pre-revolutionary period withered away, with only a few musicians privately keeping their musical memory of the genre alive. The oral transmission of the music to the next generation was restricted to just a few individuals. In the case of the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble, Tien and Thuy Hoa managed to privately listen to, and learn from, the best musicians of the previous generation only because of the persistence and initiative of their father, Nguyen Van Mui, and because of the distinguished *ca tru* heritage within their extended family. Now that the *ca tru* musicians who were active prior to the Communist revolution have died, the pre-revolutionary musical heritage is only accessible through recordings.<sup>30</sup> The retreat of musical knowledge into secret, private memory, as opposed to being openly expressed as public memory, has had an extremely detrimental effect on *ca tru* musical culture.

Despite the relatively impoverished state of *ca tru* in Vietnam today, it holds a powerful place in the Vietnamese cultural imaginary and its public presence has increased considerably in the last decade. In recent years there has been an explosion in the number of newspaper and magazine articles on *ca tru*, new and old recordings have been released on tape and CD, and several documentaries on *ca tru* have been produced by Vietnamese Television (VTV). Nguyen Tuan's novella *Chua Dan* has also been used as the basis of a feature film directed by Viet Linh and titled *The Glorious Time in Me Thao Hamlet (Me Thao Thoi Vang Bong)*. Since its first screenings in 2001, the film has received critical acclaim within Vietnam and at several international film festivals. In keeping with the celebratory public memory of *ca tru* as a national cultural tradition, the director has described the film as her attempt to make "a Vietnamese identity movie."<sup>31</sup>

As a foreign ethnomusicologist I have undoubtedly had an "impact" on the "field" (Cooley 2003), and I may have also had some small effect on public attitudes toward *ca tru*. For instance, a 35-minute documentary called *A Westerner Loves Our Music (Nguoi Tay Me Nhac Ta)*, made by VTV about my research on *ca tru* and other Vietnamese musics, has been shown on Vietnamese television several times since 1999 (Norton n.d.). In the documentary I am shown playing the *dan day* and talking about *ca tru*, and at times I am represented as a salvage ethnomusicologist. The final voice-over of the documentary is illustrative: "unintentionally or not, through his research of Vietnamese traditional music, Barley Norton has helped us with something we ought to do, that is to 'see' Vietnamese culture and to develop our 'national identity' (*ban sac dan toc*)."

In *The Country of Memory*, Ho Tai suggests that one of the reasons why revis-

ing the past is such an important issue in late socialist Vietnam is because “the struggle over the past is an aspect of the struggle to control the future” (Ho Tai 2001, 6). The few *ca tru* musicians in Vietnam today have had to struggle to reclaim the past, and the future of *ca tru*, like the future of Vietnamese culture and society as a whole, is filled with uncertainty. As much as *ca tru* is about “singing the past,” it is also about singing for a future in which pre-revolutionary traditions and sentiments have a respected place in a rapidly changing, “modern” Vietnam.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I owe the deepest debt of gratitude to the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble—Nguyen Manh Tien, Nguyen Thuy Hoa, Nguyen Van Mui, and Thanh Hoai—for their musical inspiration and warm friendship. I would also like to sincerely thank the many other musicians and *ca tru* enthusiasts who have been so generous during my field research, especially Bach Van, Chu Van Du, Pham Thi Mui, Ngo Trong Binh, Nguyen Van Khue, Nguyen Thi Chuc, and Trinh Tuan Khai. The research for this article was made possible by a small grant awarded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, which I gratefully acknowledge.

<sup>2</sup> *Chua Dan* has yet to be published in English. All translations from Vietnamese throughout this article are my own.

<sup>3</sup> Nguyen Xuan Khoat, who was the president of Vietnam’s Musicians Association from 1940 to 1942, had firsthand experience of Hanoian singing bars. His interest in *ca tru* predates the August Revolution, and he published a number of short articles on *ca tru* in the early 1940s (see, for example, Nguyen Xuan Khoat 1942, 1943). After the revolution, he defended *ca tru* against Marxist-Leninist criticism and argued that it should be respected and revived (Nguyen Xuan Khoat 1980).

<sup>4</sup> *Ca tru* singers may be referred to by a number of terms, including *co dau*, *co dao*, *a dao*, or *dao nuong*. According to Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue (1962, 45–6), *dao nuong* was coined after a famous singer, Dao Thi, from the Ly Thai To dynasty (1010–28), and *a dao* was coined after a famous singer during the Ho dynasty (1400–07), whose family name was Dao and who became a hero because of a successful plot that defeated invaders from China. The “a” of the compound word *a dao* was often replaced with *co* because “a” gained negative associations with prostitution, and *dao* was commonly rendered as *dau*, hence *co dau*.

<sup>5</sup> Shortly before his own death, Nguyen Tuan wrote a short story in memory of the singer Chu under the pen name Nguyen Quang Sang (Nguyen Tuan 1999 [1987]). See Giang Quan (1997, 118) for further discussion of Nguyen Tuan’s affection for Chu.

<sup>6</sup> In his book on the history of *ca tru* in Kham Thien street in Hanoi, Giang Quan states that according to police reports there were 50 *ca tru* singing houses with licenses

and 45 without licenses in 1954, compared with a total of 270 singing houses in 1937 (1997, 115).

<sup>7</sup>*Ca tru* is a northern Vietnamese music tradition. Discussion of *ca tru* in southern Vietnam prior to the reunification of the country under the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1975 is outside the scope of this article.

<sup>8</sup>In a long article called “Hat Cua Dinh Lo Khe,” published in a book of the same name, Chu Ha (1980) documents a number of *ca tru* performances and radio broadcasts in the 1960s and 1970s: a performance at the Temple of Literature (Van Mieu) in Hanoi during the Lunar New Year in 1962, which President Ho Chi Minh attended (Chu Ha 1980, 59, 124; see also Giang Quan 1997, 110); broadcasts on Vietnamese radio in 1975 and 1976 (Chu Ha 1980, 124); and performances of *hat cua dinh* in the village of Lo Khe a few miles outside of Hanoi (Chu Ha 1980, 61). It should be noted that Chu Ha and Nguyen Xuan Khoat, who also contributed an article to the book *Hat Cua Dinh Lo Khe*, were advocates for *ca tru*. Within the context of the Party criticism of *ca tru*, they argued that *ca tru* made a positive contribution to revolutionary communism, perhaps to ensure that the book was accepted by the censors. Following the publication of *Hat Cua Dinh Lo Khe*, a film by Tran Tinh, *Hat Cua Dinh*, was made in the early 1980s.

<sup>9</sup>“Many Springs” is one of two recordings of *ca tru* by the singer Quach Thi Ho that I acquired from the Voice of Vietnam Radio. The UNESCO recording of Quach Thi Ho made by the France-based musician and musicologist Tran Van Khe during a trip to Hanoi in April 1976 includes just one “revolutionary text” written by Chu Ha (Tran Van Khe 1991 [1978]; see also Tran Van Khe [1997, 3–15] for a personal account of his encounter with *ca tru* musicians in Hanoi). For further examples of revolutionary *ca tru* song texts, see Ngo Linh Ngoc and Ngo Van Phu (1987) and Chu Ha (1980).

<sup>10</sup>The text refers to the 35 years since Ho Chi Minh’s declaration of independence in 1945. The Vietnamese Communist Party (formerly called the Vietnamese Labor Party) was founded in 1930.

<sup>11</sup>This summary of themes is taken from Nguyen Van Ngoc’s analysis of poems in the Hat Noi form (1932). For further discussion of *ca tru* poems, see Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue (1962) and Addiss (1973, 1992).

<sup>12</sup>The only scholar who has provided a detailed assessment of Tran Van Khe’s conceptions of mode in relation to *nhac tai tu* music is Trainor (1977).

<sup>13</sup>As Nguyen Thuyet Phong has noted, “it is not easy to find a nationally accepted term equivalent to ‘mode’” (Nguyen Thuyet Phong 1998, 455). Both *dieu* and *hoi* may be used to refer to mode in some contexts, but *ca tru* modes are referred to as *cung*.

<sup>14</sup>Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue’s description of the *cung* is very similar to information included in earlier publications, such as Nguyen Don Phuc (1923, 285), and later publications, such as Ngo Linh Ngoc and Ngo Van Phu (1987). In addition to the five main modes, Nguyen Don Phuc (1923, 285) mentions two “subsidiary” (*phu thuoc*) modes, *cung ham* and *cung tram*, and Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue (1962, 61) briefly mention another mode, *cung phu*. None of these sources give an indication about where or how the information on the *cung* was obtained.

<sup>15</sup>For full details of the drumming patterns, see Cuong Sy (1935). See also Norton (1996, 80–5).

<sup>16</sup>The most common musical forms in the contemporary repertoire can be heard on two CD recordings by the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble: *Ca Tru: The Music of North Vietnam* (Nimbus Records NI5626), with sleeve notes by Barley Norton; and *Viet Nam: Ca Tru, Tradition du Nord* (Inedit W260070), with sleeve notes by Tran Van Khe.

<sup>17</sup>This is based on my own transcriptions and analysis of “Cung Bac,” and on discussions with the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble. Ngo Linh Ngoc and Ngo Van Phu (1987, 233) assert that “Cung Bac” uses the *nam*, *bac*, and *pha* modes, although they do not provide any supporting evidence for this claim.

<sup>18</sup>For most Vietnamese musics, musical phrases are usually referred to as *cau* (lit., “sentence”); the term *kho* (lit., “width” or “shape”) is only used by *ca tru* musicians. *Luu khong* (lit., “flowing without [words]”) is a general term that is not genre specific. In addition to the *kho* played during *luu khong*, there are also other *kho* played on the *phach* during vocal sections. For further details see Norton (1996).

<sup>19</sup>The last phrase, *kho la dau*, is rarely performed in its entirety, as it is usually interrupted by the entry of the singer. During the singing sections, the lutenist plays an “improvised” (*ngau hung*) accompaniment for the vocal line, which deviates from the *kho*.

<sup>20</sup>There are some variations in the names for musical phrases mentioned by other scholars (see Norton 1996, 42). The classification of *kho* given in this article conforms to that employed by the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble.

<sup>21</sup>There is, however, an inherent flexibility in the length of some *kho*: *kho doc*, for instance, may be expanded through the repetition of short motifs within the *kho*. For further discussion of the *kho*, see Norton (1996).

<sup>22</sup>*Ca tru* musicians do not employ a notion of absolute pitch: the *dan day* may be tuned higher or lower in order to suit the singer’s vocal range. Nonetheless, the relative pitch level of the *kho* is differentiated through playing on different frets of the *dan day*.

<sup>23</sup>The recording is *A Dao: People Artist Quach Thi Ho*, CD1 released by the Vietnam Musicology Institute.

<sup>24</sup>Prompted by my transcription of “Bac Phan,” Tien pointed out the “main notes” (*not chinh*) and “subsidiary/passing notes” (*not phu*), but he emphasized that these Vietnamese terms were borrowed from Western music theory and were not traditional concepts employed in relation to *ca tru*.

<sup>25</sup>Figure 13 takes into account both the voice and lute ornamentation. As the lutenist’s role during vocal sections is to accompany and support the voice, the ornamentation on the *dan day* often mirrors the vocal ornaments, except in the case of the *vay* ornament, which is idiomatic to the *dan day*. Attentive readers who have examined the full transcription of “Bac Phan” available on the website will notice that not all the ornamentation outlined in Figure 13c is used during the one performance transcribed. Because the scale outlined in Figure 13c is only used for approximately the last 30 seconds of “Bac Phan,” all the ornamentation that is permitted does not actually occur in any single performance. The ornamentation outlined in Figure 13c is based on extensive discussions with the Ca Tru Thai Ha Ensemble and transcriptions of several performances of “Bac Phan.” The members of the ensemble also pointed out that the scale and ornamentation used in the final section of “Bac Phan” are the same as those used for “Muou”

and “Hat Noi”; when “Bac Phan” is performed as a prelude to “Muou-Hat Noi,” there is an uninterrupted transition from one musical form to the other with no *métabole*. Previous analysis of multiple versions of “Muou” and “Hat Noi” (Norton 1996) further corroborates the ornamentation outlined in Figure 13c.

<sup>26</sup>The only *ca tru* mode that is associated with tempo is *cung huynh*. *Ca tru* musicians associate the “fast section,” known as *dung*, of the musical form “Ty Ba Hanh” with *cung huynh*, but do not link *métabole* or *cung huynh* with the *dung* of other musical forms (for example, the *dung* of “Hat Noi”).

<sup>27</sup>Space constraints will not permit further analysis of long musical forms like “Ty Ba Hanh” which, according to Vietnamese scholars, make use of all five *cung*, nor will I discuss here the other two modes mentioned by scholars, *cung huynh* and *cung pha*.

<sup>28</sup>See Stewart (1993 [1984]) for an extended discussion of nostalgia as narrative.

<sup>29</sup>For example, in the opening address of a conference on *ca tru* in Ha Tinh province in 1998, the vice-president of the People’s Committee of Ha Tinh province, Tran Dinh Dan, stated that the conference helped promote the Party’s policy of developing “an advanced Vietnamese culture rich in national color” (Bureau of Culture and Information, Ha Tinh Province 1999, 6). A detailed discussion of this Party policy can be found in Ministry of Culture and Information (1999).

<sup>30</sup>The oldest recordings of *ca tru* that I have heard date from 1935. Nguyen Manh Tien has learned a number of instrumental phrases (*kho*) from these recordings including some performed by his paternal grandfather, Nguyen Van Xuan, a *dan day* player who owned a singing house in Hanoi in the 1930s.

<sup>31</sup>This remark from an interview with Viet Linh has been reported on various internet sites, including the websites of the Vietnam News Agency (<http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn>) and Vietnam Express (<http://vnexpress.net/>).

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