

From the experience of some asian countries in protecting intangible cultural heritage to the protection of the cai luong theater in ho chi minh city

Из опыта некоторых азиатских стран в охране нематериального культурного наследия до охраны театра цай лыонг в хошимине

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Театр Цай Луонг является одним из выдающихся нематериальных культурных объектов Вьетнама. В "прошлом" следы Цай Луонга были все над Вьетнамом. Особенно в Хошимине, там было еще больше, чем 50 cai Luong troupes performing together, attracting millions of spectators. However, in recent years, this type of theater has been declining and has lost its status in the cultural and artistic life of the city's people. This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, a diachronic perspective, and a quantitative research method. Through a comprehensive analysis of secondary literature, the author will focus on the following contents: the concept of Cai Luong Theater; historical overview of the formation,

ABSTRACT

Cai Luong Theater is one of Vietnam's outstanding intangible cultural heritage. In the past, Cai Luong's footprints were all over Vietnam. Especially in Ho Chi Minh City, there were once more than 50 Cai Luong troupes performing together, attracting millions of spectators. However, in recent years, this type of theater has been declining and has lost its status in the cultural and artistic life of the city's people. This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, a diachronic perspective, and a quantitative research method. Through a comprehensive analysis of secondary literature, the author will focus on the following contents: The concept of Cai Luong Theater; historical overview of the formation, development and value

development and value of cai Luong theater art in Ho Chi Minh City; analysis of the current status of protection of cai Luong theater art in Ho Chi Minh City in recent years; analyze the experiences and lessons learned from as as нематериальное культурное наследие. The article also draws on the experiences of Japan, South Korea and China to propose a model for the sustainable protection of cai Luong theatrical art in Ho Chi Minh City in the future. This can be said to be a novelty of this paper, which helps to provide a beneficial solution for the protection of the Cai Luong Theater in Ho Chi Minh City in contemporary society.

Ключевые слова: охрана наследия, Цай Льюнг, театр, Хошимин.

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of Cai Luong theater art in Ho Chi Minh City; analysis of the current status of protection of Cai Luong theater art in Ho Chi Minh City in recent years; analyze the experiences and lessons learned from Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and China in protecting intangible cultural heritage. The article also draws on the experiences of Japan, South Korea and China to propose a model for the sustainable protection of Cai Luong theatrical art in Ho Chi Minh City in the future. This can be said to be a novelty of this paper, which helps to provide a beneficial solution for the protection of the Cai Luong Theatre in Ho Chi Minh City in contemporary society.

Keywords: preservation, Cải lương, theatre, Ho Chi Minh City.

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1. Overview

Many researchers in Cải lương theatre agree that it officially emerged in Vietnamese society in 1918. The event marking the establishment of Cải lương as a theatre form was on March 15, 1918 when the first Cải lương troupe of master Năm Tú in Mỹ Tho, Tiền Giang was launched. After more than 100 years of existence and development, Cải lương theatre has created unique cultural values as a means of public entertainment, conveying noble thoughts and moral standards to guide people towards the values of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Cải lương — a 100-year-old traditional theatre genre of the southern region has long been the subject of study for many researchers in Vietnam. As a result, hundreds of scientific works have been published in various forms such as journals, conference papers, theses, dissertations, research projects, monographs, and memoirs. These scientific publications approach Cải lương theater from many different perspectives, including art studies, policy, theater history, cultural management, and notably, many works emphasize the role of the audience in the preservation and development of Cải lương theatre. Accordingly, audience plays the key role that determines the actual existence of this form of theatre art. Here are some notable scientific publications Cải lương theater in Ho Chi Minh City: 12 Years on the Road to Renewal by Nhuận Vũ (1987); Cải lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City: Searching for an Audience by Nguyễn Thị Minh Thái (1997); Cải lương Art: Pages of History by Phan Bình Tòng (1997); The Last 23 Years of 300 Years of Saigon – Ho Chi Minh City Cultural Arts by Trần Trọng Đăng Đàn (1998); Cải lương

Theater in the South: 1918 – 2000 by Đỗ Dũng (2003); Cải lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City by Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc and Đỗ Hương (2007); Drifting Along Life's by Bảy Nam (2009); Cải lương Theater Art: Inheritance and Transformation by Phạm Trí Thành (2009); Surveying and Promoting Traditional Arts in Ho Chi Minh City: Cải Lương Theater by Huỳnh Quốc Thắng et al. (2010); Northern Cải Lương Theater in Cultural Transition by Trần Thị Minh Thu (2012); Cải Lương Theater Art in the South: Impacts of Management Methods by Võ Thị Yến (2013); Hát Bội, Đờn Ca Tài Tử, and Cải Lương at the End of the 19th Century and the Beginning of the 20th Century by Nguyễn Lê Tuyên and Nguyễn Đức Hiệp (2013) Current Activities of Cải Lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City: Audience Preferences and Demands by La Thoại Vân (2016); Cải Lương Art in the South: A Perspective on the Movement and Promotion of Cultural Values in Contemporary Context by Nguyễn Thị Trúc Bạch (2017); A Century of Formation and Development of Cải Lương Art in Vietnam (1918 – 2018) by Various Authors (2018); Tracing the History of Cải Lương Theater in Saigon (1955 - 1975) by Ho Chi Minh City Theater Association (2018); The Path of Cải Lương by Nguyễn Tuấn Khanh (2018); Cải Lương Art in Ho Chi Minh City in the Current Context by Hoàng Sơn Giang (2018); Current Status of Preservation and Promotion of Cải Lương Art Values in Today's Society by Thanh Hiệp (2018); Development Paths of Đờn Ca Tài Tử and Cải Lương Theater by Phạm Thái Bình (2019); Cải Lương in Saigon 1955-1975 by Trần Minh Ngọc (2022); Developing the Audience for Cải Lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City (A Case Study of Trần Hữu Trang Cải Lương Theater by Nguyễn

Hồ Phong (2022), etc.

Regarding the audience of Cải lương theatre in these works, Vietnamese researchers focus on three fundamental aspects including the audience's demand for Cải lương art, the current fluctuations in the audience, the reasons for the decline in audience numbers, and solutions for audience development. Most researchers emphasize that in order to sustainably preserve and promote Cải lương, developing the audience is a particularly crucial solution. However, there is a lack of in-depth studies on audience development for preserving Cải lương in Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, this research aims at filling this gap.

2. Scope, research methods, and concept of Cải lương

Scope of research

The article focuses on assessing the current state of preserving and promoting Cải lương, specifically in terms of audience development in Ho Chi Minh City.

Research method

The article employs a quantitative survey method with a sample size of 535 participants, including 301 participants who are interested in Cải lương and 234 participants who are not. The survey participants are students, freelancers, civil servants, employees of enterprises, etc. The technique used to process the survey data is SPSS software. The survey method is to directly distribute questionnaires to the survey participants. For participants who are interested in Cải lương, the survey space is at Tran Huu Trang Cai Luong Theater. For participants who are not, the survey space is

where they live.

The concept of Cải lương

To date, there are still various interpretations of the term "Cải lương" among researchers in Vietnam. According to Khanh (2018), if we break down the term in Sino-Vietnamese, "cải" means "to change" or "to amend," and "lương" means "good" or "virtuous." Therefore, when combined, "cải lương" signifies "to change for the better." However, he also notes that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term "cải lương" implied a sense of "changing the old for the new," calling for "modernization" according to Western civilization. For instance, "cải lương hương chính" referred to reorganizing village administration in a new manner; "Đám tang cải lương" indicated a funeral organized according to Western rituals; and "Chèo cải lương" referred to performing chèo theater with stage settings similar to those of the West. The author also mentions that in 1916, in the Southern region, the Long Xuyên Educational Association, led by Lê Quang Liêm, established the "Cải Lương Kịch Xã" group to perform plays in French and Vietnamese. Afterwards, the term "cải lương" appeared frequently in the press in Southern Vietnam, especially in the Saigon – Chợ Lớn area. However, this term was not used to refer to the cải lương theater as we know it today, but rather to spoken drama.

At the present time, there are still various interpretations of the term "cải lương" among researchers in Vietnam. According to Khanh (2018), if we break down the term in Sino-Vietnamese, "cải" means "to change" or "to amend," and "lương" means "good" or "virtuous." Therefore, when combined, "cải lương" signifies "to change for the

better". However, the author also notes that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term "Cải lương" implied a sense of "changing the old for the new," calling for "modernization" according to Western civilization. For instance, "cải lương hương chính" referred to reorganizing village administration in a new manner; "đám tang cải lương" indicated a funeral organized according to Western rituals; and "Chèo cải lương" referred to performing chèo theater with stage settings similar to those of the West. Khanh also mentions that in 1916, in the Southern region, the Long Xuyên Educational Association, led by Lê Quang Liêm, established the "Cải lương kịch xã" group to perform plays in French and Vietnamese. From that point on, the term "cải lương" appeared frequently in the press in Southern Vietnam, especially in the Saigon — Chợ Lớn area. However, this term was not used to refer to the cải lương theater as we know it today, but rather to spoken drama.

Thus, the initiative "Cải lương hát Bội" in the Southern region at the beginning of the 20th century can be understood as a desire to innovate and modernize this traditional theatre form, which was in decline in terms of both artists and the content of the performances, including the singing styles, costumes, etc. (Khanh, 2018, pp. 60-89). This context led to the emergence of "Cải lương" — a "new" form of theatre art that aimed to meet the needs of enjoying arts of the Southern audience when hát Bội was no longer captivating enough.

3. Main findings of the present study, new findings and discussion on audience development for the preservation of Cải lương theatre in Ho Chi Minh City

3.1. Main findings of the present study

After processing the survey data from 535 participants, including 301 participants who are interested in Cải lương and 234 participants who are not, as well as analyzing published secondary data, this article presents several main findings of the present study:

- The Party and State's policies regarding the preservation of traditional theatre arts, including Cải lương, have been developed quite comprehensively.

- Currently, Trần Hữu Trang Cải lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City is one of the region's leading traditional art troupe and bears primary responsibility for preserving Cải lương.

- From 2015 to 2024, Ho Chi Minh City, represented by the Trần Hữu Trang Theatre, has implemented several activities to attract the city's audience to Cải lương performances. These activities include audience research, enhancing marketing efforts, organizing performances, and educating the public about Cải lương through children's theatre programs and school performances.

- Staff who take responsibility for preserving Cải lương in Ho Chi Minh City have not been adequately equipped with or updated on the knowledge related to cultural economics and the operational development of a traditional art form within a market economy context.

- A segment of the audience in Ho Chi Minh City, particularly young people such as students, does not have many opportunities to regularly and consistently engage with Cải lương performances, especially those of high quality in both content and

form. Meanwhile, they are exposed daily to various forms of modern entertainment. This indirectly contributes to the decline in the interest of young people in Cải lương in Ho Chi Minh City.

3.2. New research results

- The implementation of these policies has been very slow, particularly in areas such as attracting non-state investment, upgrading technical facilities, training human resources, modernizing the creation, production, and dissemination of theatrical works, and developing the cultural and arts market. Some policies have been put into practice, but their impact remains limited, particularly in terms of financial support for those involved in creating theatre art. This is a primary reason for the other limitations in preserving cải lương theater, with a particular focus on audience development.

- The resources of Trần Hữu Trang Cải lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City are not strong enough to produce high-quality cải lương performances that attract the public. The theater also lacks the necessary resources to enhance its competitiveness in the performing arts and entertainment market. Additionally, the theatre's social media presence is weak, and its productions do not target a specific audience segment. The quality of cải lương performances does not meet the expectations and desires of the public, and there is no clear identification of the target audience in marketing activities. Moreover, the approaches to engaging and attracting younger audiences are neither suitable nor effective.

- Activities include audience research, enhancing marketing efforts, organizing performances, and educating the public about Cải lương

through children's theatre programs and school performances have not been very effective because the implementation methods are not suitable, resulting in a failure to cultivate a cultural appreciation for Cải lương among the youth. As a consequence, the actual audience turnout for the theatre's cải lương performances remains low.

- Staff who take responsibility for preserving Cải lương in Ho Chi Minh City have not been adequately equipped with or updated on the knowledge related to cultural economics and the operational development of a traditional art form within a market economy context.

- Many audience in Ho Chi Minh City does not have many opportunities to regularly and consistently engage with Cải lương performances, especially those of high quality in both content and form. Meanwhile, they are exposed daily to various forms of modern entertainment. This indirectly contributes to the decline in the interest of young people in Cải lương in Ho Chi Minh City.

3.3. Discussion

In addition to some initial research results above, the research results also raise some issues that need to be discussed further in preserving the art of Cải lương from the perspective of audience development. The specific issues are:

- Should Cải lương theater take the needs of the public as the basis for improvement and reform to attract the public. Can Ho Chi Minh City restore the audience of Cải lương to the development stage when each performance had thousands of spectators?

- Is it true that most students in Ho Chi Minh City no longer feel interested and excited about traditional theatre art forms such as Cải lương .

- Some Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and China have achieved much success in preserving intangible cultural heritage, including traditional theater arts. So what can Vietnam learn from these countries to attract the public to enjoy Cải lương ?

4. Conclusion

Firstly, Cải lương is a traditional art form with many unique cultural and artistic values. The ups and downs of more than a century of formation and development have made Cải lương a research subject for humanities in Vietnam. However, there has not been any multi-dimensional and in-depth research on the preservation of Cải lương theatre in Ho Chi Minh City from the perspective of audience development.

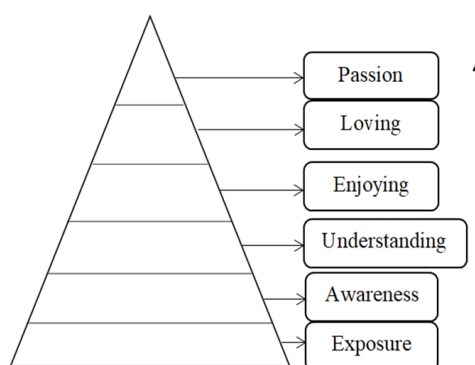
Secondly, Cải lương theatre was once very popular with the public in Vietnam, as well as in Ho Chi Minh City. But today, Cải lương theatre is showing many signs of decline, of which the decline in audience is the most typical manifestation.

Thirdly, the state as well as the Ho Chi Minh City authorities have introduced many policies to preserve traditional theatrical arts, including Cải lương. As a state-owned art unit, over the years, Tran Huu Trang Cải lương Theater has implemented many solutions to preserve Cải lương theatre, including implementing activities and programs to develop audiences for Cải lương. However, these solutions have not been effective. Therefore, the number of audiences enjoying Cải lương stage pro-

grams has not shown signs of recovery.

Fourth, in the face of the fact that many solutions have been implemented but the number of audiences coming to Cải lương stage over the past years has not improved much, the problem is that there needs to be a more suitable solution model. This model will be proposed by the author of the article in the section below.

Based on the practical reality of the low effectiveness of the solutions implemented for developing audiences for Cải lương theater, as well as lessons learned from the successful preservation of traditional performing arts in China, Japan, and South Korea, the author proposes a solution for preserving Cải lương theater in Ho Chi Minh City through audience development by implementing an art education program for young people, following a 6-step process. This 6-step process is modeled according to different levels as follows:



The 6-step process to be implemented in the art education program for young audiences in Cải lương theater.

Step 1 (Level 1): Exposure

This is the most basic step in the 6-step process outlined above. At this stage, the organization

conducting the art education activities needs to create opportunities for young people to engage with Cải lương theater. This exposure can be achieved through Cải lương performances in which young people are the key audience. Programs such as "Learning Theater" and "Children's Theater," currently being implemented by the Trần Hữu Trang Cải lương Theater in Ho Chi Minh City, are examples of ways to introduce young audiences to Cải lương. This exposure should be repeated with the same group over a long period of 3-5 years. Regarding the methods of exposure, both voluntary and compulsory approaches should be applied (in which young people are required to attend cải lương performances). During this exposure process, it is important to allow young individuals to express their feelings and attitudes toward Cải lương in an independent and proactive manner.

Step 2 (Level 2): Awareness

Step 2 can only be implemented when young people have had the opportunity to engage with Cải lương theater. At this level, depending on the specific age group of the young audience, the organization running the art education program should organize specific activities to help them understand the "portrait" of Cải lương in various aspects, including its historical formation and development, expressive features related to music, costumes, and stage decor, as well as genres, content of performances, and the production process of a Cải lương performance. Ways to help young people learn about Cải lương can include organizing discussions, thematic talks about Cải lương, with young attendees as the audience; integrating these topics into local cultural lessons within the official education curriculum, etc. Participation in activi-

ties designed to increase awareness of Cải lương should also be encouraged in both proactive and reactive ways (in which they are required to learn).

Step 3 (Level 3): Understanding

The practical foundation for implementing step 3 is that young people have gained knowledge about Cải lương theater through the activities in step 2. The higher requirement at this level is for those young individuals who have engaged with the art education programs in step 1 and 2 to begin developing a deeper understanding of Cải lương theater after their exposure and knowledge of this art. The outcome of step 3 will be a crucial foundation for the target audience of the Cải lương art education programs to cultivate positive aesthetic feelings, resulting in a keen interest on cải lương. For young audiences to truly "enjoy" Cải lương, a prerequisite is that they must understand the expressions and cultural values of this theatre form.

Step 4 (Level 4): Enjoying

This is the positive aesthetic feeling that those implementing Cải lương education programs hope to cultivate in the artistic perception of young audiences. For the majority of Cải lương theater audience, the minimum motivation to encourage them to decide to attend a Cải lương performance is that they greatly enjoy this art. One of the motivations for developing a "liking" for cải lương among young audiences is their level of understanding of it. However, relying solely on this motivation would not lead to sustainable audience development for cải lương. Therefore, art education programs must aim to ensure that young audiences genuinely enjoy for Cải lương. There are various ways to achieve this goal, one of which is for

production companies, such as the Trần Hữu Trang Cải Lương Theater, to invest resources in enhancing the quality of performances, both in form and content. When audiences experience a Cải lương performance that is not only well-crafted and profound in content but also aesthetic, it will help foster, sustain, and develop their affection for Cải lương. The significant outcome of step 4 is to establish and strengthen the foundation for those conducting Cải lương art education programs to move toward the next level: making young audiences fall in love with Cải lương.

Step 5 (Level 5): Loving

According to psychological principles, the feeling of "enjoying" is more likely to fade than the feeling of "loving" a particular art form. This is because preferences tend to be more flexible and changeable, especially among young audiences. In contrast, a "love" for a traditional art form represents a more stable and enduring emotional state. Therefore, those implementing Cải lương art education programs should aim to cultivate a sense of love for Cải lương among young audiences. Achieving this goal will create a loyal audience for Cải lương, who will be willing to pay to enjoy performances filled with elements they cherish. Love for Cải lương theater encompasses various aspects such as admiration for the artists, appreciation for the music and lyrics, and empathy for the characters and human dramas portrayed in each performance. Thus, to foster a love for Cải lương in young audiences, production and performance organizations need to build, preserve, and enhance the elements that contribute to this love in their hearts.

Step 6 (Level 6): Passion

Those who are passionate about Cải lương will face no psychological barriers when deciding to attend or listen to Cải lương whenever they have the opportunity to satisfy their passion. This is the most enduring artistic emotion compared to merely enjoying or loving. Therefore, this is the most challenging level to achieve in the process of developing audiences for Cải lương theater through art education programs. This goal becomes even more difficult in contemporary society, where young people have access to a multitude of vibrant and appealing cultural and entertainment forms. However, once this level is reached, Cải lương theater will gain a loyal audience. The key to achieving this level of audience engagement is that steps 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 must be taken effectively and efficiently.

To successfully implement the 6-step process for developing audiences through art education activities in Cải lương, specific conditions must be considered:

The implementing organization must accurately identify the target audience for the process, which includes individuals aged 6 to 18, corresponding to three educational levels including primary, middle, and high school.

The organization needs to understand and effectively apply the psychological characteristics of different age groups to create art education programs tailored to each level and age.

The target group for the art education programs in Step 1 (Level 1) must be maintained and continued in Steps 2 and 3. This ensures that the accumulation of cultural capital regarding Cải

lương theater is minimally disrupted in the consciousness of each young person.

The duration of a cycle for applying a program to a specific target group will depend on that group's characteristics, but it must adhere to the principle that the cycle is completed within one educational level.

Sufficient financial resources must be available to comprehensively and systematically invest in all resources including human, resources, and technology to support the creative activities of Cải lương theater; such resources must be robust enough to continuously implement the 6-step process in Cải lương art education over an extended period.

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