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Abstract

LOCKING UP MUSICAL SYSTEMS THROUGH TRANSLATED ORAL TERMINOLOGY IN THE SOUTH-VIETNAMESE MUSIC OF THE TALENTED

The South-Vietnamese Music of the Talented (*Đờn ca tài tử Nam Bộ*; an item inscribed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of the World) provides a wide field of possibilities to study a relatively closed system of musical terms, orally transmitted and academically explored since the mid-20th century. A central question of this paper is the capability of the musicians to memorize or to depict their musical thoughts for self-guidance. Looking into the history of the given musical system and its realization in musical practice, some remarkable observations can be made that result in considerations far beyond this one specific example.

Interestingly, the lead instrument, the *đàn kim* (long necked moon lute), served for a long time as didactic tool in teaching and practicing a quite strictly used framework of repertoire and performance categories that were widely discussed among the musicians. Latest in the 21st century, this highly valued part of South Vietnamese music traditions is taught and practiced with teaching tools in modified staff notation or in a transformed and individually modernized *gongche* of which exist different versions and representing different schools or circles. This paper is to discuss the possibility of re-introducing vernacular terminology in order to refine core features of this tradition instead of eliminating them through an imposed terminology taken from classical European standard writings and from sinophile re-interpretations.

Field work consisting of long-term participant observation and regular discussions with musicians from diverse lineages add up to the complex picture of a musical tradition that is relatively young yet old enough to be considered closed. As a theoretical framework discourse analysis and hermeneutics are applied. The author has been researching about this topic since 20 years and wants to present concise results made in this very specific area that is often under-represented in general publications on the topic.

Keywords

musical system, translation, South Vietnam, *Đờn ca tài tử Nam Bộ*

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