



Changes in Funeral Music Practices of Vietnamese People in the Northern Delta, Vietnam

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Abstract

The funeral music of the Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta represents unique type of traditional musical heritage practiced and passed down by many generations of Vietnamese people to this day. Vietnamese people often say: “Sống dầu đèn, chết kèn trống” (If you live with lamp oil, die with trumpets and drums) - meaning that the sound of drums and trumpets at the funeral of the dead is like fire and oil in human life. However, this unique artistic heritage is facing a risk of change, as many traditional qualities in this type of music are gradually hybridizing and disappearing. The main research method of this study is qualitative research, focusing on in-depth interviews with elite artisans - elderly people with good memories and the ability to excel in practicing funeral music. In-depth interviews are done with artisans in families who have practiced and taught funeral music for generations. Research results show that the funeral music of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta has changed quite a lot compared to tradition; Modern compositions songs are gradually being practiced in the Vietnamese funeral space here. The main reason is that the local cultural heritage management and preservation policy, for many years, was not given much attention. At the same time, pragmatic economic factors resulting from these artisans practicing this heritage in the face of the impact of the new economic context of society - are also the central cause of this transformation. The need to preserve this precious heritage in the cultural and social life of contemporary Vietnamese people is also an issue discussed in this study.

Keywords: funeral music; unique heritage; Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta; change; social context; preservation and promotion

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008, during a field trip to study music in Buddhist rituals in the northern delta to conduct a doctoral thesis on this topic, the author was amazed by the legacy of funeral music of the Vietnamese in this area – a unique traditional art that is almost not discussed by domestic music researchers. When meeting with many ar-

tists practicing funeral music and receiving preliminary knowledge of this unique heritage, the author realized that a return to this issue would be necessary after completing the thesis. In 2012, the author focused on researching the topic with the desire to provide a full picture of the funeral music in the northern delta region, contributing to preserving and promoting this unique artistic heritage in contemporary cultural

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life. However, the author also realized that practitioners of traditional funeral music are losing their ways and identity as many run for profit by using non-traditional music sources to attract customers. Therefore, to gradually decipher the unique values of traditional Vietnamese funeral music, the study will evaluate its changes with the desire to raise awareness among national and international researchers related to traditional performing arts.

In the cultural life of Vietnamese people, folk music is part of their lives from birth until death. From lullabies for babies over nursery rhymes for teenagers and children and folk songs that depict the love of adulthood to forms of funeral music that send people off to the other side – all of these forms of folk music express their own unique features and core values of a culture with thousands of years of history.

In Vietnam, traditional funeral music is a functional art form. As a functional art, funeral music is performed according to specific principles and regulations throughout the funeral until the dead person is buried. Each ethnic group and religion uses funeral music according to its principles, but each musical element is used as signal and command to help the funeral procession take place according to these principles, sequentially, and with a certain meaning. According to Caswell (2012), both sacred and secular music are common for funerals when personalized for the individual passed away. Music in a funeral setting is used as a means of control, inclusion and exclusion, a source of collective action, and as a means of creating or transforming emotions and recalling the deceased. Musical instruments are used according to the specific cultural principles of each cultural group. As such, the H'mông only allow drums when someone dies, and they are not used at other traditional cultural activities. The Chăm H'roi in Phú Yên use gongs when performing the funeral; the Lô Lô in Cao Bang province use bronze drums for the dry ghost ceremony, which must be buried in the ground when someone dies.

That is, when someone dies in the village, people do a ritual to dig up the grave for a bronze drum to perform the funeral. When the funeral is done, people bury this musical instrument in the ground. This instrument is not kept in the house but is always buried in the ground, according to their traditional beliefs.

Funeral music has always shown a sad nature. Whether it is the funeral music of the Mường, the Tày, the Thái, or the Êđê or whether the music is used in the funerals of Catholics, Buddhists, followers of Cao Đài or other belief systems, most funeral music expresses sadness, pain, and suffering. McFerran and Crooke (2016) argue that the age-old relationship between music and emotion makes this connection almost inevitable. Therefore, in the traditional culture of Vietnamese ethnic groups, regardless of the cultural context, historical period, or religion, ceremonial music is always a means of expressing the thoughts of the living to the dead, that is, primarily sadness, except for some special cases which will be analyzed below.

Practical research on traditional folk music in Vietnam over the years has shown that most forms of traditional funeral music are constantly changing. In each historical period, music has changed and new musical melodies and traditional musical instruments were added and built up. As ethnic communities live in coexistence, alternating with each other, they have exchanges and import cultural and musical influences of each other. However, the State of Vietnam attempted to reform rituals in the period after 1954. This “state functionalism” could not succeed in controlling all meanings and values, as funeral ceremonies had long become tradition and a habit deeply ingrained in the social and cultural life and community consciousness. Nevertheless, the transformative dialogue (According to the traditional Vietnamese point of view: Music functions as a dialogue between the living, between the living and the dead, and even between humans and gods, in a sense, in indigenous cultural traditions) began to take place, which was

a dialogue with its historical forebears, creating a set of rituals and ritual ideas, including the use of music (Malarney, 1996).

Among the musical heritage of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, funeral music is the richest form, preserving many traditional elements. Accounting for over 80% of the population in the region and a rich history, the Kinh in the North of Vietnam have created their own unique traditional culture, of which funeral music is one of the legacies that can confirm the specificity of this region's funeral music culture. The appearance of funeral music, as well as its constituent parts, will be analyzed in depth in the main body of the article.

Research on the funeral music of Vietnamese people in the North has been carried out by numerous researchers lately with different aspects. In 2001, Le Cam Ly published a study on the cosmology and the Vietnamese people's view of life through funeral performances. The author discussed the issue of funerals from an ethical and cultural point of view, considering funerals as a form of promoting village feelings, filial piety, and devotion. Issues related to the economics of funeral workers were also initially studied here. In 2006, researcher Dang (2006) also studied this issue, and he approached funerals from a musical and cultural perspective. He identified the importance of funerals in the cultural life of Vietnamese people, as well as other life-cycle rituals, including wedding ceremonies. Loan described the basic funeral orchestra, including instruments such as traditional woodchips trumpet (*kèn dăm*), nhị (*ehu*), bass erhu (*hồ*), traditional bamboo flute (*sáo trúc*), traditional rice drum (*trống cơm*) and tam instrument (*đàn tam*).

In 2012, during the fourth international conference on Vietnamese studies, held in Hanoi, Loan presented a study on the changes in the practice of funeral music of Vietnamese people in the northern delta, focusing on the changes and the direct impact of policies and history. However, like previous studies on funeral music, due to the lack of survey data, the research results

were not as expected. Identifying funeral music as an issue that needs to be researched to supplement the scientific literature for ethnography in Vietnam, and so, the author continued to expand the surveys in many other provinces and cities in the northern delta. In addition to identifying musical characteristics in this area, the work discusses in depth the changes and causes of any changes. The hypothesis is that the funeral folk music of the Vietnamese people in the north of Vietnam has changed but still retains many traditional values. Thus, preserving and developing traditional funeral music is also an important measure to preserve traditional Vietnamese characteristics.

Funeral music is recorded in many countries around the world and is dominated by folk and traditional music (Caswell, 2011; Prelovšek, 2017; Jones, 2008). In Europe's Primorska region, the practice of contemporary funeral music follows the local folk tradition, also with various traditional weeping songs. Funeral and music choices are colored by the presence of the sea, bringing out the most popular local bands and repertoire (Prelovšek, 2021). In Slovenia, according to Prelovšek, folk music predominates, followed by popular music; classical music is rarely requested at funerals (Prelovšek, 2017). And, funeral music has more value, more acoustic energy, more musical expression than non-funeral music. Meanwhile, the appearance of dances at funerals is very rare (Hanser et al., 2022).

Funeral music emerges from funerals and performs specific functions. Funerals constitute expressive action – a communication system that articulates human-to-human relationships between humans and the natural and supernatural environment – and an ethical system encryption is carried out to achieve certain effects in these relationships (Hampton, 1982). The music that people choose at funerals provides an interesting reflection on a society's attitudes towards death and how society at large over death expresses grief. In a way, funeral music explores the tension

between fitness and the need for personal expression in funerals as exemplified by musical choices (Sandra and Davidson, 2016). Music can perform a number of valuable psychological functions in dealing with grief. The music used in funerals has evolved towards interpreting life, and this reflects important changes in approaches to questions of life and death (Sandra and Waldo, 2016). Emotions in the ringing of bells for the dead in England between AD 500 and AD 700 mattered in certain communities and individuals. Bells announced the cycle of life and death. The bell notified the whole parish community when someone died, and they are crucial in ritual performance, death, burial, and mourning. Simultaneous ringing of bells can unite and divide parishes, as performing the ritual sounds of death, burial, and mourning, and is special to each emotional community (Dolly, 2016). People who participate in music therapy often deal with grief and loss issues related to their other experiences with disability and mental and physical illness. The age-old relationship between music and emotion makes this connection almost inevitable (Katrina and Alexander, 2016). And, contemporary funeral rites are all concerned with 'living religion' – how religion is 'lived' both inside and outside an institutionalized environment and how relationships with the deceased are not severed but continue. Funeral music referring to heaven and angels can also be considered an element of the ritual (Bruin, 2019).

Music is also a symbol and signifies the behavior of a society and culture. It supports cultural norms, displaying them in symbolic form through public performances, and ensures that acceptance and reinforcement of cultural norms is achieved as basic characteristics of the community. Funeral music is also highly political because the people who practice the music communicate social issues. Thus, politics and social context govern funeral music; conversely, funeral music has an important place in society (Woma, 2012).

Funerals constitute the social nature

of death and mourning, often working to ease the painful transition for the bereaved. The physical, typographic, semantic, spatial, and temporal organization of these textual artifacts mobilizes the sentiments and structures of moral relationships during a funeral. Tradition is nourished by ritual, and it can retroactively limit the possibilities for moral conduct (Shohet, 2018). For example, music is important in the social life of the H'mông, influencing the framing pattern, and it is found in funeral music. It reflects social organization, the art of language forming, poetic structure, and graphic design that can be extended and applied to the *qeej's* musical and social roles in funerals (Catherine, 2003).

Funeral musical variation is a common rule. As observed by Chan and Chow (2017), when studying the British presence of traditional Chinese culture in Hong Kong in 1841, Hong Kong became an effective location for the study of Chinese culture, social change, and its impact on funeral rites (Sharon et al., 2017). In China, social context is important in creating music in society. Funeral and ceremonial music underwent various modifications during the 20th century in the city of Yulin, the regional capital, illustrating the contrast with the region (Jones, 2009). However, local traditions are still clearly reflected in the music in each region. Funeral ritual music in southern Anhui province, located just west of Shanghai, has a variety of Chinese funeral sounds, creating a distinction between Eastern and Western music (Kun, 2014). Funeral traditions in many parts of China are still maintained, in contrast to some other traditions that were abolished under Maoism. Despite profound social upheavals, the meaning of funerals in rural society has remained unchanged enough for associations to maintain (Jones, 2008). Similarly, Japanese funeral music has many variations from tradition (Hirochika, 1986).

In many traditions, funeral music can be traced back to ancient songs and chants designed to ward off spirits. Tradition remains important for individuals in

choosing funeral music over music of personal significance in that it relates to the individual's memories, values, and beliefs. It illustrates how the music played at funerals, to some extent, reflects the changing attitudes towards death in society at large. However, with the changing practice of funerals today, including the increasing problem of cremation in secular funerals in the 20th century, musical choices began to change. Most of the music chosen for funerals in modern Western cultures reflects personal values, regardless of whether those values include religious beliefs (Sandra and Jane, 2016).

Thus, funeral music exists in each culture and accompanies the culture from a very early age, with traditional music as an important background. The emergence of funeral music also demonstrates the symbolism and values of indigenous culture, in which music functions according to the individual philosophies of each particular cultural community.

The northern delta, also known as the Red River Delta, combines various subcultures with great similarities in geographical and cultural characteristics and includes the provinces and cities Hà Nội, Hải Phòng, Hải Dương, Hưng Yên, Nam Định, Thái Bình, Hà Nam, Vĩnh Phúc, and Bắc Ninh province. Apart from Thái Bình and Hưng Yên, there are no mountains. The rest of the provinces have only small mountains and hills (Thong, 2006).

In this paper, the author hypothesizes and shows that the funeral music of the Vietnamese people in the northeastern region has been preserved and promoted until now because of its function as an environment and performance space. It should be added that the Vietnamese here practice traditional ancestor worship beliefs, not monotheistic religions. However, many Vietnamese practice a larger religion (such as Catholicism) and ancestor worship. Whereas in the West, those would be mutually exclusive, these syncretistic belief systems work in Vietnam. Although it has changed alarmingly, it is necessary to research and, from there, preserve the cul-

tural values of traditional Vietnamese music, particularly traditional funeral music.

Funeral music has had changes and impacts from policies and social contexts in many aspects, most clearly since *Đổi mới* (1986). Historically, around the middle of 1980, the domestic economy fell into a serious crisis, and people suffered as the cooperative economy revealed many inadequacies. Facing that crisis, in December 1986, the Sixth National Party Congress was held and set the direction for urgent and comprehensive strategic change, including the agricultural and rural economy. Previously, Vietnam's economy was self-sufficient with centralized bureaucratic subsidies under the direct management of the state. At the congress, the multi-sector economy, including the private and individual economy, began to be discussed, creating conditions for people to develop. According to Do (2009), the 1986 reform has made way for sociocultural and religious transformations in Vietnam in line with Vietnam's reintegration into the world markets.

The Central Resolution No. 10-NQ/TW from April 5, 1988, on rural economic renewal of the Politburo stated that one key content was to create economic autonomy opportunities for households. The following Resolution of the Fifth Conference of the Seventh Central Committee of the Party dated June 10, 1993, on continuing innovation and rural socio-economic development put the agricultural and economic development in the direction of commodity production in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country, considering it a strategic task of top importance (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2007). The Resolution of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee (Term VII) focused on promoting the industrialization of agriculture and rural areas, along with restructuring the rural economy (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2007). However, besides the socio-economic renewal through these resolutions, it is impossible not to pay attention to the strong and comprehensive impact on folklore in the villages. Com-

munal music, particularly funeral music, had been affected by the Prime Minister's strategy to build a new rural cultural life in the 2010-2020 period according to Decision No. 800/QĐ-TTg dated June 4, 2010. This was a "catalyst" ("chất xúc tác") that has acted as another important step for the transformation of funeral music, especially in funeral marriages, in which time has been reduced.

Also, Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW dated August 5, 2008, of the 10th Party Central Committee Conference asserted that this strategy has helped develop individual economic thinking. Thus, the renovation policy, especially the economic renovation, has led to changes in all aspects of social life, including funeral music culture. This is reflected in three points: First, being a traditional folk music form, funeral music partly became professional music when practitioners could make a living. This is certainly a motivation but also a problem that brings with it countless adjustments to the content and musical properties. In fact, while in the past, people who practiced funeral music only served because they were indiscriminate and had little "lucky money" ("lộc"), then later on, this profession could "deal" ("thỏa thuận") with homeowners for wages. According to Practitioners 24 and 25, the average salary for a funeral is currently VND3.3 million. If they work in Hanoi, the price can range from VND4.5 to 5.0 million. In addition, a large amount of money is collected from "crying services" or "crying for hire" ("khóc thuê"). It should be emphasized that, in the cultural tradition of the Vietnamese here, they also hire members of the music troupe to perform funeral music and cry for them, tell stories, and showcase the living people's feelings for the deceased. This additional task for funeral musicians is called "khóc thuê," roughly translated as "crying for hire." This is also the result of the market economy, which has helped rural people, including those who work at funerals and weddings, to have the opportunity to promote their traditional occupations and personal economic development.

METHOD

The study will also consider the direct impacts of the State of Vietnam's cultural, economic, and political policies to clarify the changing characteristics of funeral music in the north of Vietnam. The open-door policy and socio-economic development are the most notable reasons for the transformation of funeral music. These overarching changes are the core reasons for the change in funeral music practice. The analysis of these impacts on funeral music will be important for the state's adjustment of cultural policies.

The main research method used to compile the data for this paper was field research. Folk artists, who are old but still lucid and were born into families with many generations of funeral music practice, were the focus of in-depth interviews. Renowned artists and groups of ceremonial music artists in each locality were surveyed in-depth, both with common interviews and participatory interviews, during their practice of funeral music. Some funerals were deeply observed to study the entire process, the principles, the sequence of musical pieces, and the musical instruments in the funeral orchestra. In the process of interviews and fieldwork in localities, the author also utilized genealogies and professional records as main research resources.

Besides this, the funeral music of the northern Vietnamese was approached with several theories, such as the musical theory of traditional Vietnamese music, functional and symbolic theory, and cultural theory, to clarify the position and nature of funeral music in the Vietnamese cultural and spiritual life.

Thus, the study is also based on the research method of ethnomusicology, combining methods from cultural anthropology and religious studies to show that funeral music has a close relationship with Vietnamese culture and is an indispensable part of Vietnamese cultural life. Based on research methods of cultural anthropo-

logy, the author conducted in-depth interviews with insiders (người trong cuộc), those who directly practice funeral music and those who hire musical groups to perform funerals for their loved ones.

The survey sample is made up of those who practice and teach talents in funeral music practice, especially families with a multi-generational tradition of practicing this type of music in Bắc Ninh and Hải Dương, Hanoi, Nam Định, Thái Bình, and Hưng Yên – all localities where there are still many talented artisans. The interviews focused on the history, names, and characteristics of funeral music in general and the different genres of singing and instrumental music and performances used in funerals. The interviewer also attended the musical performances and observed the instruments in each locality. In addition, several religious experts were selected for in-depth interviews to clarify issues. Interviews specifically focused on families of musicians with many generations of funeral music practice, including 25 interviews with people who practice and teach funeral music, five interviews with local shamans (thầy cúng); five interviews with people in the area, and three religious experts. Although the number of interviews was only 35, the author found that focusing on older, experienced people led to reliable research results. They are people who have been involved in the creation, practice, and teaching of funeral music. In addition, relevant experts and individuals who have a profound understanding of acculturation and folk art were selected for interviews.

Through religious research, funeral music is shown to perform a sacred function at a funeral. In other words, the songs of the music used in the funeral are performed according to the regulations in each funeral procession; lyrics cannot be practiced spontaneously like in entertainment music outside a funeral. This is true not only in Vietnam but also in neighboring China. For instance, the number of performers in Chinese funeral music should be odd, usually 5 or 7 people. Numbers and

colors have symbolic meanings, clearly representing the Chinese theory of the origin of the universe. During funerals, the “qupai” (a type of music) is chosen from a variety of more than 100 tunes, the choice of which depends on the age of the deceased. During such a 3-day ritual, the Chinese perform most of the day in front of their home (Iguchi Junko, 2004). Thus, the use of music is disciplined and strictly regulated, similar to Vietnam.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Functions of funeral music and its fate in comparison with some other regional folk music genres

The traditional funeral music of the Vietnamese people in the northern delta consists of three components:

One is the system and organization of the orchestra. The system includes the *Lâm khốc* system, including *Lâm khốc ai*, *Lâm khốc xuôi*, *Lâm khốc ngược*, *Dàn Thưa*, *Bản Chở*, and *Thái Bình*. *Lâm khốc* means the forest weeps with a sadness that cannot be expressed in ordinary language, but only with the *Lâm khốc* melody in traditional Vietnamese funeral music. In it, *Lâm khốc ai* is performed at all stages of the funeral ritual, from the time of admission to the end of the burial of the dead; The *Lâm khốc xuôi* is the music used when bringing the coffin (quan tài) of the dead from the house to the cemetery for burial; *Lâm khốc ngược* is a piece of music used to perform when the burial of the dead is completed – performed on the way back to the home of the dead, at the end of the funeral rite. *Dàn thưa*, *Bản chở*, and *Thái Bình* are songs that are used interchangeably during the funeral process, similar to *Lâm khốc ai*, used mainly when the coffin of the dead has not been taken to the cemetery to bury. These songs are used and performed by the orchestra, in which the trumpet plays the melody mainly.

In the music system, there is also singing, often accompanied by “crying trumpets” (*Khóc kèn*), and the actual crying of the deceased’s loved ones when they visit

the funeral.

Orchestral arrangements are divided into two categories: i) Drums and trumpets and ii) the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds. Among them, the organization of drums and trumpets is the oldest and most important tradition. The Eight Sound Orchestra was traditionally reserved for those 70 years old or older; young deceased would not be mourned with this orchestra, but only with drums and trumpets. However, this tradition has changed.

The second is a system of short folk dramas, which includes *Mục Liên - Thanh Đẽ*; *Rowing - Horse spear* (*Chèo đò- Giáo ngựa*); *Twenty-four filial piety* (*Nhị thập tứ hiếu*); and *Uncle Tau Listens to the trumpet* (*Chú tàu nghe kèn*).

Despite the simple composition system, it entails the richness, diversity, and uniqueness of its culture and art. The paper will look into these systems in-depth in the main body of the paper.

The study also uses functional theory to interpret the music's specific function in funerals, identify funeral music, and study its function and changes in this region. In sociology, religion, and art, understanding the parts or the relationship of smaller things in the bigger picture has helped scientific researchers to recognize and decipher many interesting phenomena. Finding out the function of each part in the whole of a certain structure means approaching functional theory, which is also known as functionalism or structure-function theory. The basic content of functional theory can be laid out with the following three aspects:

Firstly, any social phenomenon exists and develops in a certain structure; if that structure is lost, it means that the object's meaning of existence is lost.

Second, a structure consists of many components, and each individual part expresses and assumes its function in the synthesis of the elements that make up that structure.

Third, the function of each part, in addition to the positive functions in the structure, there is also a type of counter-

function, which, according to Le Ngoc Hung (2011), can reduce the viability and adaptability of the structure.

Thus, the essence of functional theory is to see each individual object in a certain structure and the role of individual objects in the whole of a phenomenon. The making of this theory has contributed an important part to social research and other aspects of social life.

Many successful studies by foreign scholars approached the phenomena of ethnography, culture, and religious beliefs in Vietnam from different perspectives. Two famous figures are Georges Condominas (1921-2011) and Léopold Cadière (1869-1955). Nowadays, the application of functional theory to the study of religious phenomena in Vietnam can bring about various results. In this article, the author uses Emile Durkheim's functional theory to understand the relationship between music and Buddhist rituals in the case of Buddhism in Hanoi.

In Vietnam, Durkheim is known by religious researchers for his significant contributions and new perspectives when studying religious phenomena, especially through the work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* from 1912. According to him, "when one explains a social phenomenon, it is necessary to find only the effective cause which is the cause that produces it and the function it fulfills" (Le Ngoc Hung, 2011). This is true when looking at the phenomenon of ritual music. Music is an indispensable part of the Vietnamese funeral rites. Instruments and each piece of music in the funeral have a function, from the beginning of the ceremony ("Lễ Nhập quan," lit. "Entering into the coffin") to the end ("lễ Hạ huyệt, lit. "lowering the grave"), music is performed its specific function. The following subsection will explain more about music and the relationship between music and the funerals of Vietnamese people in the northern delta.

The function here is understood as the traditional social function of funeral music in which Vietnamese funeral rites are alive as well as the conditions for mu-

sic to be maintained to promote, develop, and make up the body of Vietnamese funeral rites. If this condition is lost, it means the loss of function as well as no reason for the existence of funeral music. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) stated that any stable system is composed of different but inter-related parts, which work together to form the whole, creating the system stability. The contribution to the stable operation of the system is called a function (Bui and Dinh, 2021). Looking at the social function of folk music in the northern delta, we can see this clearly. In the past, in pure folk cultural activities, musical forms such as wallets, drums, and storks were used as means for people to follow. At each age, village people would express and convey their thoughts, feelings, and emotions to themselves, their family, their children, and their friends and lovers. By the second half of the 20th century, that function had gradually been disappearing and is now completely lost. This comes from the fact that its traditional living environment and performance space no longer exist and instead become a professionalized environment. In the words of researcher Nguyen (2006), this phenomenon is the “shifting from the living environment to the artistic environment.” Looking back at history, from the second half of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, after Western missionaries were coming to Vietnam, the country’s cultural life has been interwoven between traditional and non-traditional cultures. This period can be considered when non-traditional cultural flows penetrated strongly and continuously in several waves. Books on the culture, society, and science of countries such as France, England, and Germany were gradually translated and disseminated to the intelligentsia and those who served the purpose of exploiting the colonies of the French colonialists. Marxist and Leninist books and newspapers representing the working class were also translated, published, and propagated into Vietnam. In general, it can be seen that many aspects of social life in the country also followed

a new trend. In music culture alone, the musical reform movement in the 1930s, which began as a means of translating and putting lyrics into Western music tunes, began to gain popularity. After the August Revolution of 1945, the public education movement (Bình dân học vụ) was founded, launched, and put into operation by President Ho Chi Minh, once again contributing to bringing popular culture to a higher level. Its influence spread to most provinces and cities nationwide. Since the mid-20th century, it was possible to see the two traditional cultural flows of Vietnam and the West gradually merging. Many new cultural forms were born and changed. Especially after the new Vietnamese music scene appeared, the public’s musical tastes changed a lot, gradually replacing traditional folk music with the main creations of scholarly and professional music, which was theoretically absorbed from the Western music background.

New lines of music, composed and performed in new forms, appeared. The theatricalization of previous traditional music forms – such as *Tuồng*, *Chèo*, and *Đờn Ca-Tài Tử* (Cải Lương theater) began to develop and influenced many traditional art forms. As mentioned above, when people’s needs change, the means of serving those needs change at the same time. It may not be difficult to explain why today’s young generation no longer uses the tunes of lullabies to convey affection and moral education to children from the moment they lie in the crib. Children no longer play folk games and create rhymes. Young men and women no longer use songs like *Ví* singing, *Đúm* singing, and *Trống quân* singing to reciprocally sing together to express their affection, love, and feelings towards one another. The performance environments and spaces changed, their function ceased to exist, and thus, their nature changed. A basic summary of some of those changes in some art forms can be seen in Table 1.

We can see that the original content, form, and performance spaces of the above folk music genres disappeared and beca-

Table 1. Comparison between the content, form, and performance space of some folk songs in Bắc Ninh and the northern

Category	Old			Now		
	Content	Form	Space	Content	Form	Space
Lullaby singing	Improvisation	Lull the baby to sleep	In the cradle/ In the hammock	Collect, memorize	Solo performance	On the stage
Ví singing						
Đúm singing			Outside the courtyard,			
<i>Trống quân singing</i>	Improvisation	Reciprocity (collective)	around the village well, under the banyan tree	Collect, memorize	Collective performance	Performing on stage
<i>Xa mạc/Bồng mạc singing</i>						

Source: Survey in 2012-2022 in Bắc Ninh and Thái Bình province

me art forms that are gradually being specialized on the stage. It also shows that it no longer exists when its traditional social function is no longer synonymous with reason.

Looking at funeral music, we see that the above argument is not entirely true for this genre. Vietnamese funerals can be considered a constant in Vietnamese culture, so up to this time, funeral music still retains its function, closely associated with its living environment as well as its meaning, role, and position in the cultural and spiritual life of people in Bắc Ninh and the northern delta. Thus, one might wonder: While many other forms of folk music have been and are in danger of being lost, disappearing, and deformed, in what state is the funeral music of the Vietnamese people in Bắc Ninh province? This question will be the focus of the analysis in the section below.

Changes in funeral music today

When comparing the changes in funeral music practices of Vietnamese people in Bắc Ninh province, the author focused on conducting in-depth interviews and observations, including with some artists whose families have worked in funeral music for many generations. They are referred to as professional funeral trumpet players (“nghề thổi kèn đám ma”) who chose to perform as a career. With their

professional experience, the materials obtained from them are reliable and among the most original sources that the author synthesizes and presents within the formal system (of songs and musical works, that is Lâm Khốc, Bản Chở, Thái Bình, Dân Thừa, etc.), the organization of the orchestra, and the performances.

In a formal system

When recognizing the changes in the Vietnamese people’s funeral music practice in the northern delta, the study first examines the changes in the formal system. In addition to the rhythms in the performance, which will be analyzed later, four main songs are still maintained and used: Forest of tears - “Lâm khốc” (including “Lâm khốc xuôi” and “Lâm Khốc ngược ai”); Seamless - Thái Bình (“Dân Thừa - Thái Bình” (also known as “Cách cú”); Ban Choo (“Bản Chở”); and “Sing - cry” (“hát khóc”), used with trumpet and drum. In addition, those who are long-lived also use Lưu Thủy. This is one of the songs in the formal system of Nhã Nhạc, but it has been used in funeral rites of Vietnamese people in the northern delta and Bắc Ninh for hundreds of years and is part of the tradition of Vietnamese funeral music. The above compositions, in terms of musical properties, can be divided into two types: deep, sad tones – such as Lâm khốc ai – and sad tones, such as Lâm khốc xuôi and

Dàn thừa. Artists use the adjective “fresh” to describe their music. Traditionally, these songs will be used with a specific function. A typical funeral procession with Lâm khốc ai and “Sing - cry” could look as follows: Starting with the Phát Phục (wearing funeral attire) ceremony over reciting and placing the dead body in the coffin to burying the dead person’s coffin in the ground, the two songs Lâm khốc ai and Lưu Thủy (for the old people in the past) are used; When the grave is lowered and buried, the funeral procession uses the two songs “Dàn thừa” and “Lâm khốc xuôi”; When the dead are summoned, attendants mainly use the “Thái Bình” song; “Sing - cry” is used when a tenant’s family member cries.

However, what are the aspects that changed over time? They can be generalized into the following three issues: First, the omission and addition of musical instruments in the practice process. In the past, the song Lâm khốc ai was used in the form of “the drums are played forward / the trumpet blows back” (“Trống đánh xuôi, kèn thổi ngược”) – that is, a small drum is used to beat and keep at the first beat (regular rhythms) not divided into accents – and two trumpets go against each other, then that principle was later broken and lost. This is expressed through two points: the drum can be supplemented with a large drum and a gong placed in the lying position, keeping the rhythm (“trì tục”) with regular rhythmic sounds. The two trumpets go in the direction of each other (both play the same musical melody, but one has a low pitch and the other a higher one), and there are additional *nhị* instruments, *sáo* flute, and *đàn bầu* instrument. Compiled from in-depth interviews with practitioners, the author gathered that adding drums and string instruments will make the sound richer and better and thus will be more suitable for listeners. However, it would be important that during the performance, the substitution between the members of the orchestra will help the trumpet player and the drummer lose more energy. While in the past, Lâm khốc

ai ưả performed with all its elements – a sequential opening, middle, and end part – now, people only use parts of it. In such a practice process, as long as one person in the orchestra improvises a tune or sentence in the song, the others can follow it right away. According to field research, this stems from the breaking of traditional principles from the past, such as “Trống đánh xuôi, kèn thổi ngược” – (that is, the drums always play one rhythm, but the trumpets play another. This transformational step is also caused by the metamorphosis of the concept of “death with oil lamps/ death with drums” (“Sống dầu đèn, chết kèn trống”) (any death must have trumpet and drum sounds as a means of expressing the pain of loss of family members). Third, in the “Sing - cry” form, there are also expressions of borrowing and integrating some non-traditional tones (Traditional tones here are understood as those used in indigenous Vietnamese people mourning ceremonies). Especially for the last one or two decades, people who cry for hire get a fairly high “remuneration”, so some have professionalized this genre by adding more musical instruments. While in the past, after each “cry” sentence would be an unanswered passage with two or three trumpets (“Kèn tiểu, kèn trung, or Kèn đại”) along with a small drum, today, people in Bắc Ninh city have often added drums and other musical instruments to accompany the rhythmic sounds in the form of a professional traditional folk orchestra. The melody of the “Sing - cry” genre has been losing its inherent characteristics. Instead, it is influenced by some other musical genres, including Chèo singing, making the method better than before. Talking about this phenomenon, practitioner 3 added that when teaching children in the traditional way, the elders taught them again, but when they practice, they do it their way, so they also change their practice a lot. In the author’s opinion, this phenomenon comes from the change in musical aesthetic perception.

Thus, the changes in the formal system of funeral music compositions,

Table 2. Comparison of transformational aspects in Lâm khốc ai before and after the national innovation period

Before innovation	After innovation
Melodies in verse order, deep and sad Performing in the form of “backward-beating drums and backward trumpets”; Mainly uses drums (mostly one) and trumpets (one to three)	1. Has been irreversibly altered; 2. Influenced by non-traditional melodies such as Chèo singing, especially modern songs: Tình Cha by Ngọc Sơn and Tình Mẹ by Y Vân; 3. Breaking the rules and very little first-form 4. Arranged into an orchestra

Source: Author's direct survey from 2012 to 2021

through the analysis of Lâm khốc ai, clearly show four sequential levels of melody, tonal nature, performance form, and additional instrumental accompaniment. The same is true in other cultures. According to Prelovšek, A., music at a traditional funeral usually includes an orchestra or trumpet in Ljubljana and the surrounding areas. But by 2016, this music was increasingly replaced by a girl's voice and an instrumental ensemble (Prelovšek, 2017). The northern delta of Vietnam has the most notable additions of modern, non-traditional songs, which will be analyzed in more detail below.

In orchestra organization

Orchestral organization is a concept the author borrowed from professional modern music to easily analyze the changes in Vietnamese funeral music, including the additions and variations in the practice of funeral music.

In the funerals of Vietnamese people in the northern delta, two orchestras are now commonly used, with drums, gongs, and trumpets, forming the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds (“*dân bát âm*”). According to some older people who are still practicing funeral music, before the 1980s, there were only drums, gongs, and trumpets in Vietnamese funerals. The drums consist of a big drum (Trống lớn: Drum surface diameter is about 45-50 cm, with an average height of 65-75 cm), a small one (Trống ban: The drum surface diameter is about 30 cm, the average height is 18 cm); a gong (chiêng: The gong surface diameter is about 25 cm, the average height is 10 cm), and trumpets, popularly three: minor (higher, high-pit-

ched), middle, and big (lower pitch). The two main instruments, drums and trumpets, are present in the funeral from the casketing of a body until the burial. The gong (also known as “Lệnh”) only performs the function of notifying attendees before and during the process of bringing the deceased's coffin to the cemetery.

As for the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds, the instruments added were formerly not part of traditional funeral music but folk ceremonies (originating from the royal court) and associated with the communal house ceremony and were a product of the cultural institution of Confucianism. Their presence in funerals is the result of a move from court music to folklore and village tutelary rituals and, possibly, from performing for the emperors. The elderly practice the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds in the village god's ceremony (“Chấp lễ”) of the communal house. However, it was only acceptable at funerals of older people aged 70 and over; young people who died were not allowed to use this orchestra. But after 1986, the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds was used in many funerals in the north, no longer distinguishing young and old, which means it changed the function and taboo from before. Currently, there is no document that specifically records and details this step, but based on the history of traditional music and in-depth interviews with older people working in the profession, the move seems logical.

Called Orchestra of the Eight Sounds (Bát âm), in the northern delta, this orchestra is popular with the following instruments:

- The erhu (Nhị)
- The bass erhu (Hò)

- The Flute (Sáo)
- The bass Flute (Tiêu)
- The Tam instrument
- The one string instrument (Đàn bầu-“Độc huyền cầm”)
- The rice drum (Trống cơm)

However, the number of musical instruments and participants in this orchestra is not always sufficient because of the family's economic condition of the deceased or because gathering the full number of people participating in a funeral orchestra is very rare. In addition, three other musical instruments – the rice drum, the zither, and sinh tiền instrument – are only common in some localities such as Bắc Ninh, Hưng Yên, and Thái Bình.

It should be added that the concept of “Bát âm” does not depend on the number of instruments used. Centuries ago, the name of the orchestra was derived from the eight instruments. But now, people only keep the name of this orchestra, and the number of instruments is not eight like before, maybe just 5-6 instruments. Practitioner 23 said the musical instruments used in funerals in Bắc Ninh today are mainly three: the đàn nhị, the đàn bầu instrument, and the sáo flute.

Regarding the changes in the organization of the orchestra and its conception and usage, we can see three points: 1) While in the past, the “Bát âm” orchestra was only used when the mourners were elderly people, today it is present in most funerals in villages in Bắc Ninh; 2) Stemming from the break in principles and conceptions of using musical instruments, today, in the funeral process, the above instruments (drums, gongs, trumpets, and octaves) are combined and used in a unified orchestra; 3) The function of this orchestra has changed in that, in the past, they only performed their compositions (drums and trumpets played *Lâm khốc*, *Dàn thưa*, and others – the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds played *Lưu Thủy* and *Thái Bình*). Today, the two orchestras – that is, drums and trumpets and the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds – have been harmonized, especially when performing non-traditional songs such as

Father's Love (Tình cha) and *Mother's Heart (Lòng mẹ)* – which are new music that was composed in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Thus, through the analysis of the Orchestra of the Eight Sounds and its participation in the funerals, we see a change in the organization of the funeral music. It manifests itself in the introduction and mixing of the two above-mentioned musical organizational structures and in the use and principles. These are the most remarkable points in the transformation of the funeral orchestra from the previous tradition. This is also the result of the process of changing aesthetic tastes, which leads to a change in the concept of using musical instruments, which could eventually lead to the disappearance of some of these traditions.

In folk drama

The changes in the practice of funeral music are not only limited to the two above-mentioned aspects, but also manifest profoundly in the performances. In Bắc Ninh, Hưng Yên, and Thái Bình, there are four traditional funeral acts:

- *Mục Liên – Thanh Đề*
- Twenty-four filial piety (*Nhị thập tứ hiếu*)
- Horse spear boating (*Chèo đò giáo ngựa*)
- *Uncle Tau listens to the trumpet (Chú Tàu nghe kèn)*

However, two of these acts remain only in the memory of the older practitioners. Practitioner 7 said *Chú Tàu nghe kèn* and *Chèo đò giáo ngựa* had practically ceased to exist. Thus, this paper focus on analyzing the changes in such acts through excerpts from *Mục Liên – Thanh Đề*. *Mục Liên* was a disciple of Buddha, and *Thanh Đề* was the mother of *Mục Kiền Liên* or *Mục Liên*. This play is a folk performance based on a story recorded in Buddhist scriptures about a mother and son with two opposing qualities. Practitioner 2 explained *Thanh Đề* is the mother of *Mục Kiền Liên* (also known as *Mục Liên*) who lives greedily and cruelly, creating many sins. So, when she died, she was banished to evil paths and reborn as a hungry ghost. In contrast,

Mục Liên, with his holy, predestined nature and determination to practice cultivation, became one of the ten great disciples of the Buddha and was considered talented and virtuous. After seeing that his mother was placed on the path of hunger in the depths of hell, suffering under torture, he had pity on her and was very sorrowful. He returned to tell Buddha everything and begged for a way to save his mother. The Buddha taught that although his filial piety was great, he needed to rely on the blessing power of monks and nuns in the ten directions to liberate his mother. And so, he followed Buddha's words to find a way to save his mother.

The Mục Liên - Thanh Đề funeral play focuses on the excerpts from the story and consists of three parts:

- *Head spear* ("Giáo đầu"),
- *The way to save mother* ("Con đường cứu mẹ"), and
- *The Mother Rescue section* ("Giải cứu cho mẹ").

Through research in the area, and with the characteristics associated with the central sub-region and developed religious centers such as Luy Lâu, Thăng Long, and Nam Định, we found this show to be imbued with Buddhism; it can even be considered part of the Buddhist culture. This can be seen clearly from the study of the performances and melodies, which have characteristics close to those of many genres of Buddhist music in this region. When conducting in-depth interviews with Practitioners 1, 2, 3 and 20, 21, and 22 – all of whom are talented artisans in Bắc Ninh and Thái Bình – the author noted many unique genres of singing and speaking performances – four of these stand out the most:

- *Singing giàu History*
- *Đàn thâm*
- *Kể Thập ân*
- *Kể hạnh*

These melodies are now also only in the memory of a few artists and rarely used in any funeral rites nowadays. When old people die, the old women (known as "Các già") organize a team to perform while others bring the coffin to the cemetery.

This is also the aspect that changed the most noticeable in terms of musical composition and performance. It should be added that, because the methodology in the performances lies in its unified system, relatively independent of the formal system in other musical components of the funeral rites, they are separated here for analysis. According to Practitioners 1, 2, and 3, this situation stems from two main reasons: First, although full plays take about 4-6 hours, nowadays, local authorities only allow funerals to perform funeral rites until 10:30 pm due to concerns about noise pollution in the community. It should be added that, the duration of the performances depends mainly on the use of the above tunes. The string is the main reason why the musical composition system in Mục Liên performance in funeral music has formed and developed many unique features. The time limit is one of the reasons why the show has to be shortened, and the use of melodies is therefore cut off and gradually disappearing. Next, those who practice funeral music today, in addition to a few elderly people or those who have been handed down from the family's professional tradition, are mostly young, so learning and practicing mourning music is essential. However, the main ceremony stops at the drum trumpet, so the performances are not well-learned, mainly grasping stories and then reciting, singing, and speaking them based on some Chèo tunes.

Thus, the environment and age fundamentally change the aesthetic concepts and tastes in those who learn to practice funeral music. This can explain why in the current Mục Liên - Thanh Đề performances in some localities only use Chèo singing but not some traditional songs. Besides the change and disappearance of ancient singing tunes, the introduction of many Chèo melodies along with changes in performance and costumes, are also the underlying causes. The most obvious manifestation is the professionalized costumes. In the past, performers mainly wore brown áo dài with "thâm đất" material (also known "vải phim"), but today, people

le have moved to the costumes of professional.

The most obvious changes in the Vietnamese mourning acts are seen in the reduction of excerpts, the theatricalization of the performances expressed in the performers' demeanor and costumes, and the disappearance of ancient songs that were replaced by some modern Chèo tunes. Those are the fundamental changes and, at the same time, the most remarkable core points when looking at the changes in funeral music performances today.

Discussion

The development and transformation of folk and funeral music through different periods is inevitable. This is not only happening in Vietnam but also in other cultures and can be described as a global trend. In China, Hwee-San Tan recorded in a memorial ceremony for the dead in Minnan (southern Fujian) called Gongde, possibly performed by experts in Buddhist rituals. Such changes – such as in musical composition systems and musical performances at funerals – were due in part to state control and partly to Buddhists' redefinition of ideological orthodoxy, the basis of which lay in an early Buddhist reform movement in the 20th century (Tan, 2002). Each genre is historical, so cultural policy and social context are directly affecting the preservation of the function and traditional values of funeral music in contemporary society. This can easily explain why some genres are now gone while others continue to exist and develop. As for funeral music, to continue its mission, it has constantly changed to adapt to the specific living environment. That is a social environment in which the influence of political and cultural institutions leads to a change in the aesthetic tastes of the subject who created it. Before 1986, the self-sufficient and cooperative economy made people's economic thinking and perception, in general, passive, while the multi-sector economy with private enterprises has helped them to be proactive in accessing methods of household economic development

and career problems. This was the cause of the socio-economic change. This is also an important cause leading to the uncontrolled changes of funeral music in this area, which makes it necessary to find suitable policies to protect the traditional values of this unique art form.

As change is a historical category, it can reflect both positive and negative directions. It can be seen that the transformation and change in traditional culture and music without being built on the traditional foundation will risk the loss of ancient values that the Vietnamese have created for centuries. This second aspect can be seen when considering the changes in the practice of Vietnamese funeral music in Bắc Ninh province. Many traditional forms of music have been and are in danger of disappearing as many new things that are not part of tradition are introduced. This is the reason the religious beliefs of the Vietnamese are facing erosion and metamorphosis, threatening to degrade the fine customs and traditions in culture, such as ancestor worship customs and funeral rituals.

Change is inevitable, but policy is an important factor in that general direction of change, which can go in one direction or another. When formulating economic development policies, following corresponding cultural and social policies is often necessary to ensure common sustainable development. Reasonable policies will motivate and impact the consciousness and responsibility of all subjects in society. In other words, in cultural preservation, the role of the masses is decisive, thereby providing policies and strategies in which education, promotion, and public orientation work towards sufficient awareness of cultural heritage. If we have a consensus, we can build a traditional culture in relation to the whole community. Cultural development policy can only be effective and practical with the participation and support of the entire community, based on a common understanding of those traditional values. The government needs to preserve traditional culture in the best way

possible, avoiding situations like Fjelstad and Nguyen TH's stated: "Vietnamese people have engaged more in displays of rituals, constructed more temples, renovated places of worship, traded religious objects, and participated in public and private rituals. Strikingly, some prevalent ritual practices once regarded as backwardness, superstitions, or even social evils boomed again in Vietnam"(Ngo, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Traditional music comes from culture in its respective context. Traditional art develops aspects that are consistent with the general cultural development history of a community and humanity. However, cultural policy could destroy many precious traditional values of Vietnamese ancestors and bring many other negative consequences in contemporary social life.

Over thousands of years, the Vietnamese have shaped traditional music with its nuances, of which funeral music is an important and indispensable part of the cultural life of the people. However, along with other traditional folk art forms, for a long time, the policy of focusing on economic development has led to a negligence of many traditional cultural and artistic aspects, including funeral music. This is a critical issue for the study of traditional arts. Artists who practice folk and funeral music do not have the opportunity to express their identity and talent, as well as protect the heritage handed down by their forefathers. Therefore, as soon as possible, the government should come up with suitable policies to protect artisans and the traditional folk heritage of the country, including traditional funeral music.

From the field studies, the article has recognized an important problem in the study of funeral music in the northern delta: Before studying the unique characteristics of this art form, it is necessary to evaluate its status, and at the same time, provide the rationale for making policies to preserve and promote this artistic heritage in the cultural life of contemporary Vietnamese

people. The analysis of the changing funeral music in the northern delta can serve as a necessary element for conducting further studies on the issue. The author's future research will also be conducted in the same direction.

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