

THE FRENCH CULTURAL ACCULTURATION PROCESS IN VIETNAMESE SONGS BEFORE 1975

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Abstract

Vietnamese songs emerged as a necessity due to the influence of French culture. When Vietnamese New music emerged, Vietnamese people had their own songs. These songs not only inherit elements of Western culture but also bring characteristics of Vietnamese people's composition. The interaction between Eastern and Western cultures in this genre is expressed in various ways. The characteristics of content, theme, style, and genre of the song reflect not only the Vietnamese society of the time and the thoughts and emotions of the Vietnamese people, but also the ways of importing French culture into Vietnam. The musical characteristics, ethnicity, and influences of Western culture are expressed through three typical elements such as structure, material, and tonality. This created an intersection of Eastern–Western culture in the genre of the song.

Keywords

French culture, acculturation, Vietnam, song, Vietnamese music before 1975.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, French culture deeply influenced many areas of social life in Vietnam, through various means. The fields of arts and culture were greatly influenced by this process, in which the art of music, and particularly Vietnamese songs, expressed this very clearly. The French brought Western musical genres to Vietnam along with new styles of music and writing. It fundamentally changed the way Vietnamese music was composed, from traditional forms of folk music to the fixed form (Bui Huyền Nga, 2002; Đỗ Hồng Quân, 2015) of authorship. The birth and transformation of the music genre in Vietnam from the early 20th century to the early 1975 is one of the pieces of evidences of the exchange and reception of French culture in Vietnam.

The research purpose of this article is to clarify the effects of the French acculturation process on the birth and characteristics of the Vietnamese song genre before 1975.

The approach methods employed include musicological and interdisciplinary approaches to analyze and compare works. It also combines musicological aspects with historical culture to examine the results when comparing musical characteristics in the Vietnamese song genre with Western music in general and French music in particular.

This research method uses theoretical research methods to analyze the musical characteristics of Vietnamese songs and explain the characteristics through the process of French cultural acculturation, more specifically from the characteristics. French songs and other musical forms and instruments were imported into Vietnam.

The impacts and benefits of research results are mainly for the field of musicology. The research results can be considered a reference for those researching music history, music theory, and composition.

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This research will focus on analyzing the process of formation, development, reflection of the social situation, and musical characteristics of Vietnamese songs before 1975 in the context of receiving the influence of French culture and art. The study also highlighted the effects of French culture on Vietnamese music as well as the analysis of Eastern–Western cultural interference in these works.

THE STRUCTURE

At the beginning of the 20th century, when the French appeared in Indochina, they brought new cultural trends to Vietnam and had a profound influence on the culture of art. In history, this period represents important cultural exchanges that profoundly transformed the artistic scene in general, and particularly music. It is in this context that the genre of Vietnamese song was born. In Vietnam, in all genres of music, we can say that the genre of song always plays a predominant role in reflecting social life, which is remarkable compared to other musical genres. It expresses the musical language of the time in a flexible and characteristic manner. In terms of formation, development, content character, and music of this genre under the influence of French culture, it can be analyzed with two main elements: French culture in Vietnamese song and Eastern–Western exchange in the musical language of this genre.

VIETNAMESE SONGS REFLECT WAYS OF FRENCH CULTURAL ACCULTURATION

The history of world music over different periods has proven that intercultural interaction is indispensable. In the 20th century, this became more powerful and clearer than ever with the introduction of Western civilization to the East, and vice versa, Asian artistic culture began to spread to the West. In Vietnam at this time, the French brought changes in politics, economy, culture, and art. In art, we saw changes in the fields of painting, sculpture, architecture, and the like with an expressive language; the different styles from traditional art have long been in our country. Also, with music, the influence of French music created the emergence of new music genres, contributing to improving the level of theory, composition, performance, and enjoyment of music in Vietnamese society. In the book *Lược sử âm nhạc Việt Nam (History of Vietnamese Music)*, researcher Thuy Loan mentions the development of the Vietnamese music scene and the cultural revitalization of the West, in which French music, above all, contributed to the emergence of new music genres, including the type of song. The Vietnamese song was born from a combination of cultural, social, and historical factors, including the elements themselves and the elements absorbed from abroad, in which French cultural adaptation played an important role. French music spread to Vietnam in different ways, from community activities, education, religion, communication, and media. Conversely, it is the characteristics of Vietnamese songs, both in terms of lyrics and music, that clearly reflect how French culture entered Vietnam. We can say that these songs reproduced the process of introducing French culture to Vietnam in the early 20th century. The manifestations of the process of introducing French culture into Vietnamese songs are analyzed under two aspects: the direct effects of French music and the indirect effects of French cultural activities.

THE DIRECT IMPACT OF WESTERN MUSIC ON VIETNAMESE SONGS

The direct influence of French music on the formation and development of Vietnamese songs contributed to the birth and formation of the compositional language of this genre. This influence is divided into two elements: the first is the influence of French vocal forms in the formation of Vietnamese songs, and the second is the influence of Western musical compositions on the composition of this genre.

First, about the influence of French vocal genre in the formation of Vietnamese song, in the French music scene, which is very popular with the Chanson genre—a genre of music that

emerged from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance and is widely understood as songs with lyrics. In Vietnam, previously, only folk songs, which are unpublished songs, were used for the entire community, associated with human activities. For this reason, folk songs often have many variants to match the style and culture of each locality. When French songs became widespread in Vietnam, melodies and rhythms immediately became popular among Vietnamese intellectuals. Initially, they put Vietnamese words to these songs, forming the movement *Lời ta điệu tây* (Vietnamese lyrics, Western music). Until 1938, when Nguyễn Văn Tý, a songwriter, first presented his works in Hanoi, it gave birth to new Vietnamese music, marking a period when Vietnamese people composed and played their own songs. This is the time when the Vietnamese song was officially published, and only after a short period, this genre developed a variety of very rich styles. These songs are different from folk songs because they are works by specific authors. They are fixed on the melody, so basically no variations. The song is divided into three trends: patriotic, revolutionary, and romantic. From the above three trends, songs have been developed with different themes and genres such as praiseworthy songs, collective songs, marching songs, dream songs, lyrical songs, sympathy songs, folk songs, folk music, and, moreover, there are also songs for children. The song has become the most used type of music in the lives of Vietnamese people until now. Western culture in general and French culture in particular also contribute to shaping a new way of writing in Vietnam, which is poetry with a romantic, lyrical style. After the influence of French romantic literature, a movement of romantic poetry appeared in Vietnam, including the new poetry movement of the *Tự lực văn đoàn* group. In Vietnam, at that time, many famous works were composed by poets such as Mậu Thời Gian by Nguyễn Xuân Khoát (poem by Doan Phu Tu), *Cô Hải Mơ* by Văn Cao (poem by Nguyễn Bình), the songs *Lời Kỹ Nữ* (poem by Xuân Diệu), *Bông Hoa Rừng* (poem by Thế Lữ), *Tiếng Thủy Dương* (poem *Ngậm Ngùi* by Huy Cận), *Lời Vũ Nữ* (poem by Nguyễn Hoàng Tu), *Tiếng Hát Thu* by Lê Thương (poem by Lưu Trọng Lư), *Tổng Biệt Hành* by Võ Đức Thu (poem by Tân Đà), and the like (Thụy Loan, 1993: 111). And until now, composing songs by poetry is still a popular way in Vietnam.

The influence of French music is an opportunity for Vietnamese people to interact with Western music through a wide variety of musical genres. This contributed to the birth of larger vocal compositions. Genres such as choir, opera, chorus, and theatrical play were born as a manifestation of Western musical acquisition through French cultural reception. The appearance of these genres shows a positive change not only in terms of performance and composition but also in terms of enjoyment and the aesthetics of music for Vietnamese people.

The second is about the influence of access to Western musical instruments on the composition and performance of Vietnamese songs. In the process of cultural exchange, the French also brought Western musical works, performances, and Western musical instruments to Vietnam. Since then, musical instruments have gradually formed in the musical life of the Vietnamese. For this genre of song, the form of the song with musical accompaniment composed by the composer himself gradually formed. This genre is known as the category *Ca khúc nghệ thuật* (Art song), which is close to the Romance vocal genre of Western music. This shows progress in art and professionalism in Vietnamese songs.

Western music in general and French music in particular are also introduced to Vietnam through distinctive brass bands. At the beginning of the 20th century, brass bands were popular in big cities, from national or military performances to orchestras playing in gardens or public places. Previously, in Vietnamese music, only traditional musical instruments such as đàn bầu, đàn tranh, sáo, nhị, and so on were played. The orchestras we most often encounter are the *Bát âm* orchestra with eight types of instruments and the large and small orchestras of the royal court. Most of them use traditional Vietnamese instruments. Since the 20th century, the structure of the orchestra using brass instruments has begun to appear more and more in Vietnamese music. Conversion to brass orchestras with many works used in military or ceremonial rituals and large-scale national community activities became very popular. The interpretation of Vietnamese songs with brass bands in solemn ceremonies is still widely used today.

THE INDIRECT EFFECTS OF FRENCH CULTURAL EXCHANGE ON VIETNAMESE SONGS

The composition of Vietnamese songs was influenced by not only musical activities in general but also cultural exchanges through the reception of French culture in Vietnam. This is the spread of knowledge, performance, and musical composition in the spirit of Western music through music lessons in French schools. In addition, the introduction of Western religions to Vietnam is another factor of cultural exchange that has a significant influence and is reflected through the type of song.

About the influence of French music education in Vietnamese songs, music classes in French local schools play an important role in introducing French culture to Vietnam. These schools mainly teach children of local French officials, but also Vietnamese children. These people are the link in the transmission of French music in terms of music theory and popular in terms of characteristics and techniques of Western musical instruments. Vietnamese people first learned to play Western instruments, popularly known as the piano, violin, cello, flute, trumpet, trombone, and the like; after that, Vietnamese composers used these instruments in orchestras dedicated to a group of instruments. They can be played alone or accompanied. In addition, for orchestral works of small to large scale, it is also the time of the emergence and flourishing of musical works. It is a great change in the history of the development of Vietnamese music.

Linked with musical instruments, the genre of art songs is a combination of vocal and instrumental elements. Authors composed the lyrics and joined the fixed accompaniment, which was often played by the piano, but also accompanied by a group of instruments. These are works of the song type, but they are different from collective songs and revolutionary songs. These songs are often chamber music, professional, and artistic both in lyrics and in musical accompaniments. The genre of art song was born around the 1960s of the 20th century, when the formation of Vietnamese music began, and until now, this genre has developed both in quantity and in composition technique, contributing to the professionalism of the song in Vietnam.

In the early 20th century, there was a remarkable period after the era of songs written in the style of *Lời ta điệu tây* (Vietnamese lyrics with Western music), which is known as the period of New Music, also called Renovative Music. These were songs whose compositional language clearly influenced the French musical style. They could be found on phonograph records, in cafes, and in imported books from France. The intellectual class in Vietnam at that time was mostly fluent in French, so the accessibility, understanding, and preference for French songs were widespread. This is reflected in the fact that New Music songs were mainly composed by intellectuals. These songs often reflect the thoughts and emotions of the intellectual class; therefore, the lyrics are aesthetically pleasing, highly imaginative, sometimes poetic, metaphorical, and polysemous, rather than straightforward and rustic like folk songs. These songs apply compositional techniques from Western music, including melody, harmony, structure, style, and performance technique. . These musical works were the most obvious expressions of the influence of French songs on the musical life of Vietnam in the early 20th century.

About the influence of the process of introducing Western religions into Vietnamese songs, one of the most popular ways to spread French culture in Vietnam was through religious activities and movements aimed at spreading Christianity and Protestantism. In Vietnam, Buddhism is considered the main religion. Phan Ngoc, a musicological researcher, in his study Vietnam-France Cultural Contacts, confirmed, In Vietnam, Catholics are the first to have knowledge about the West (Tô Ngọc Thanh et al. 2003), and they are the first to use Western analytical methods as far known to them to examine Vietnamese culture and society. In the past, in traditional music, folk songs often expressed thoughts according to Buddhist doctrine or referred to religious activities such as attending Buddhist ceremonies, praising the beauty of temples, and so forth. Even today, songs about Buddhism continue to be produced increasingly, helping listeners imbibe and understand the teachings of Buddhist philosophy. Until the early 20th century,

when Christianity and Protestantism were disseminated in Vietnam, many composers wrote songs praising the Christian God, expressing faith in the power of God, or incorporating religious content into the thoughts of the songs. Popular songs known include *Sad Hymn* by Nguyễn Vu, *Love God* by Thai Nguyễn, *God Calls Me* by Gia An, and *Thanksgiving Hymn* by Thien An. These songs often have lyric content that is bright, pure, aesthetically pleasing, and highly educational, encouraging people to live a good and righteous life. The melodies are often gentle, flowing, and usually conducted in consonant intervals, avoiding dissonant intervals and melodies contrary to human biological senses. These songs related to Christianity and Catholicism play an important role in reflecting the spread of these religions in Vietnam, as well as reflecting the acceptance and changes in the perspectives and thoughts of the Vietnamese people up to the present day.

Western music in general and French music in particular are also disseminated in Vietnam through brass bands, which are very characteristic. In the early 20th century, brass bands became popular in large cities, from formal performances by the State, the military, and the like to bands playing in flower gardens or public places. Previously, in Vietnamese music, only traditional musical instruments such as the monochord, zither, flute, two-stringed fiddle, and the like were popular. The common ensemble formations were various traditional music ensembles such as Eight sounds ensemble, Big band ensemble, Small band ensemble, mostly using traditional Vietnamese musical instruments. From the 20th century onward, the structure of ensembles using brass instruments began to appear more and more in Vietnamese music compositions. Even with the genre of songs, especially marching and revolutionary songs, which have heroic, collective characteristics, the adaptation of brass band arrangements has become quite popular in military ceremonies or solemn ceremonies, national activities, community events on a large scale, and the like. The performance of Vietnamese songs by brass bands in solemn ceremonies remains widely used to this day.

It can be seen that works in the genre of songs have authentically and specifically reflected the pathways through which French music has been disseminated into Vietnam, from music education activities, musical events, religious activities, and so forth to the changing mindset and language of composition of artists in general, and musicians in particular. In fact, the role of Vietnamese songs is much greater. Reflecting the process of cultural transmission is just one aspect of this role; moreover, songs across different periods are also a chronicle, recreating the history of the Vietnamese nation, not only in the period of struggle for independence but also in the period of renovation and nation-building.

THE EAST-WEST CONVERGENCE IN THE MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SONGS

Vietnamese music, before being influenced by Western music, was already a distinctive and rich musical tradition. Folk music has a long-lasting, intense vitality, playing an important role as the root of other music genres such as professional music and court music. Through a long period of being influenced by music from China, India, Champa, and the like, traditional music still maintained its roots, and instead, it even more deeply expressed its influence. The melodies, tunes in folk songs, and traditional musical instruments are still preserved in court music and professional music, creating a distinct national character in traditional music genres in Vietnam. When works of New music emerged, alongside the Western-style composition language, the material of ethnic music did not disappear but still existed; authors interwove Western music language with traditional music, creating an East–West exchange in the genre of songs.

EAST-WEST CONVERGENCE IN THE CONTENT AND ARTISTIC IMAGES

The content of songs shows a clear influence from Western culture, especially topics influenced by late 19th-century Romanticism. During this period, Romantic literary and musical works tended to depart from reality, aiming for lofty dreams that were unattainable in reality, a characteristic that was clearly reflected in Western artworks in general and in songs in particular. For Vietnamese songs, many works were influenced by this theme, creating one of the three main trends, namely the romantic music trend. The trend of romantic songs includes three components: dreamy, sentimental songs; melancholic, compassionate songs; and rustic songs, carrying the influence of folk music. Each component has its own characteristics in terms of melody. In the romantic song category, we can mention songs such as *Dreamy Stream*, *Heaven*, and *Ancient Zither* by composer Van Cao; melancholic and compassionate songs are exemplified by songs such as *Endless Boat*, *Autumn Raindrops* by Dang The Phong, *Farewell* by Doan Man, *Winter Night* by Nguyễn Van Thuong, and the like; some songs carrying the influence of rustic, folk music such as *Mother of the Countryside*, *Country Child*, *Rice Carrier* by Pham Duy, *Elephant and Stork Going Out to Eat at Night* by Nguyễn Xuan Khoat, *Thang Bom* by Le Thuong, and the like (Tú Ngọc et al, 2000). Among them, many songs focus on the multifaceted, deeply emotional feelings of individual artists, somewhat detached from reality. The trend of romantic songs has contributed to a period of Vietnamese music with beautiful melodies, rich in imagery, poetic quality, and emotional richness, creating artistic values and developing the mindset and composition language of musicians. However, alongside that, there are songs with themes of rustic, folk character; although they have a romantic nature, they still carry the traditional folk cultural color of Vietnam, that is, the expression of the convergence between Western culture and the traditional culture of the nation in the genre of songs.

In addition to the themes and images influenced by Western culture, Vietnamese songs mainly reflect themes and images related to the country, Vietnamese people, and culture, such as the two national resistance wars, the movement of the country's construction, and the portrait and the emotional life of the Vietnamese people.

During the two national resistance wars, songs from the period 1945–1975 vividly reflect the atmosphere of struggle and urgency of a heroic era, closely following each event and activity in life, in different regions, recording comprehensively the milestones along the historical timeline.

Through the two resistance wars² that Vietnam fought against other countries, Vietnamese music gave birth to a large number of songs closely tied to memorable events, such as musical history pages that may help future generations vividly and authentically feel the heroic resistance period of Vietnam. In this period, typical songs include *The National Guard Battalion* by composer Phan Huynh Dieu, *For the People, Forget Oneself* by Doan Quang Khai, *Marching Far Away* by Do Nhuan, *307th Battalion* by Nguyễn Huu Tri, *Pulling Cannons* by Hoang Van, or *Binh Tri Thien Smoke and Fire* by Nguyễn Van Thuong.

Furthermore, each event and milestone in the nation's history is vividly recorded in songs, such as the victory at Dien Bien Phu, the struggle in the South, the 1968 Tet Offensive, the Mau Than Offensive, the Khe Sanh campaign, and the great event of Vietnamese national history, the victory of liberating the South, and reunifying the country in 1975.

² The war with the French colonizers ending 1954 and then the undeclared war against the American occupants ending 1975.

Songs not only reflect wartime Vietnam but also praise the leadership of the Party and the socialist era. With collective song genres, composers have also composed many songs praising the country, such as *Welcome to the Vietnamese Workers' Party* by Do Minh, *My Homeland is Liberated* by Van Chung, *Peace in Our Country* by Nguyễn Mạnh Thuong, *Singing for Our Country* by Le Loi, *Celebrating Our Beautiful System* by Xuan Oanh, and *Celebrating Our Beautiful Life* by La Thang. Some songs of the political genre include *My Homeland Over Ten Years Has Grown* by Hong Dang, *Words of the Motherland* by To Hai, *Song to the Mainland* by Luong Ngoc Trac, and *Each Step I Love My Motherland More* by Tan Huyen. Additionally, there are songs written for teenagers to stimulate love for the Party, Youth Union, the system, and the revolution. These songs focus on praising the leadership of the party and the state in leading the nation through the revolution, with great achievements. These songs often have cheerful melodies and lyrics with praising and trusting tones, thereby instilling confidence in the masses in the leadership of the party and the socialist system.

Furthermore, in the genre of songs from the period 1945–1975, we also have a large number of songs praising the love for the homeland. These could be songs praising nature and landscapes of Vietnam. Depicted in these songs are often images of villages, rural landscapes, or historical landmarks. Among them, typical songs written about the villages and rural areas of Vietnam include songs such as *My Village* by Van Cao, *My Hometown* by Nguyen Duc Toan, or even songs written for children such as *Praising the Motherland* by Hoang Van, *My Homeland Brightens* by Mong Lan, *My Village is Green and Fresh* by Phong Nha.

The genre of songs also depicts the people's love for different regions of the Motherland such as Hanoi, Hue, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, and Quang Ninh. Song texts in this theme convey the emotions and impressions of people who have visited these places, thereby helping listeners imagine and gain more knowledge about the various regions in Vietnam.

The theme of patriotism necessarily involves portraying movements, competitive activities in labor and production to contribute to the construction of the country. All these activities are vividly depicted in the songs of this period and help future generations imagine in a specific way, a difficult yet heroic time in Vietnam. This atmosphere is clearly reflected in songs about labor activities, production, and nation-building such as *The Construction Chant* by Thai Co, *The Iron Buffalo* by Trần Chuong, *The Song of the Forest Worker* by Pham Tuyen, *Greetings to the Heroic Ma River* by Xuan Giao, and *Heroic Thanh Hoa* by Hoang Dam. Additionally, there are songs about revolutionary movements such as *The Song of the Bomb's Echo*, *Youth is Always Ready. Take to the Streets*, and *Sing for My Compatriots* by young people, especially students striving for achievements in labor and studying to contribute to the construction of the motherland. Even for children, there are songs that elevate the spirit of unity among the Vietnamese people as well as globally.

About the portrait of the Vietnamese people, Vietnamese song texts specifically and subtly portray the image of the Vietnamese people. The depiction of people in songs can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes specific individuals, such as leaders, heroes, or outstanding children of the nation, who are shining examples recorded in music to remind future generations to learn from and emulate. The image of uncle Ho is a noble image, present in songs as a monument to patriotism, compassion for the people, and spiritual support for the Vietnamese people to confidently overcome the difficult revolutionary period. It is easy to see that the image of uncle Ho is a pervasive image throughout various stages of song genres, dominated by the musical praise and nostalgic feelings of people from all walks of life and regions of the homeland, always looking toward the great father figure of the nation with boundless love and respect. Even in children's songs, the image of uncle Ho has spread to the younger generation in a very innocent and pure way. Furthermore, songs from this period also dedicate a large

number to praising outstanding individuals of the nation, along with their achievements, unwavering sacrifices, and the nostalgia for those who stayed behind, such as songs about Vo Thị Sau, Nguyễn Văn Trôi, Trần Thị Ly, Nguyễn Việt Xuân, Be Văn Đàn, and Nguyễn Đức Cảnh. These are heroic history pages that help future generations understand the resilience and steadfastness of their ancestors during the 30-year period of resistance to build and defend the nation.

The second group is songs that depict the portrait of the people of the era, the image of people throughout a historical period recorded in combat, labor, production, and daily life. The portrait of the Vietnamese people in this period is dominated by the image of resilient fighters in combat. It can be said that the image of people in combat is the main theme in songs from 1945 to 1975, with stories of soldiers' lives in fierce resistance battles. This is the career of training and fighting for soldiers on the battlefield, in combat, and on large battlefields. Alongside this is the image of people in labor, production, and nation-building. These are people associated with images of fields, factories, and farms, working diligently to restore and build the country. Moreover, we cannot overlook the image of Vietnamese people in emotional relationships such as camaraderie, military–civilian unity, and family affection. It can be seen that songs from this period authentically and vividly depict the urgent labor atmosphere to restore and build the country during and after the resistance wars.

A profoundly humane and ‘Asian-themed’ topic is the image of women. The image of women always plays an important role in songs at any stage. They are not only hardworking, kind-hearted individuals but also heroic, resilient mothers who become a solid rear support, contributing significantly to the victory of the entire nation. Women are depicted in songs praising maternal love and about women in the battlefields of the South, rural women, and girls in the rear area.

A characteristic theme about the emotional life of the Vietnamese people is deeply portrayed in the genre of songs, namely the theme of the emotional life of the Vietnamese people. And for a country that has gone through many years of tumultuous resistance, the most frequently addressed theme is camaraderie, comradeship, the bond between the military and the people, the bond of village solidarity, and romantic love. The songs depict the bonds, sharing in struggle, in the daily lives on the battlefield, sharing the emotional thoughts of soldiers, and showcasing the close relationship between the military and the people throughout the journey of resistance until today. Village solidarity, the tradition of mutual aid and sharing among the Vietnamese people, is also a common theme in various stages of Vietnamese songs. Additionally, there are songs about romantic love—or love songs—which occupy a considerable amount of time in this period. In the context of a nation enduring prolonged, fierce wars, romantic love alongside independent works can also be intertwined and integrated into love for the country.

Thus, alongside themes of romance, detached from the influence of Romanticism in Western culture, themes about the country, its people, and cultural life in Vietnam are the factors that give color to the national identity and Vietnamese traditions in the genre of songs.

THE INTERSECTION OF EAST AND WEST IN THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

The language of music is a clear manifestation of the combination of Western and Eastern cultures in Vietnamese songs. French songs have been present in Vietnamese cultural life in many different forms; Vietnamese people have embraced these songs through various channels, from religion and culture to daily activities. The influences of music in French songs combined with the traditional vitality of the Vietnamese people have been clearly reflected in the language of music in Vietnamese songs, where the three most apparent aspects are musical structure, material, and tonal.

In terms of musical structure, French songs are often composed in small forms such as one-, two-, or three-part forms. This has had a clear influence on Vietnamese songs. Most Vietnamese

songs from the past to the present have been written in similar forms and structures, with both one-part form and two- or three-part form being common. The division of different structural scales such as musical phrases, musical sentences, and musical sections is inherited with balance, symmetry, coherence, and a clear cyclical nature. Therefore, the common method of dividing structures is still symmetrical, with a musical section divided into two musical sentences, each musical sentence divided into two musical phrases, and the like, and parallel structures are usually equal in the number of main beats. An exemplary song from the Modern music period that can illustrate this is *Winter Night* by Nguyễn Văn Thuong. In the musical sections, musical sentences, and musical phrases, balance is formed, and they often mimic or use similar musical material, creating a unified musical language for the entire piece.

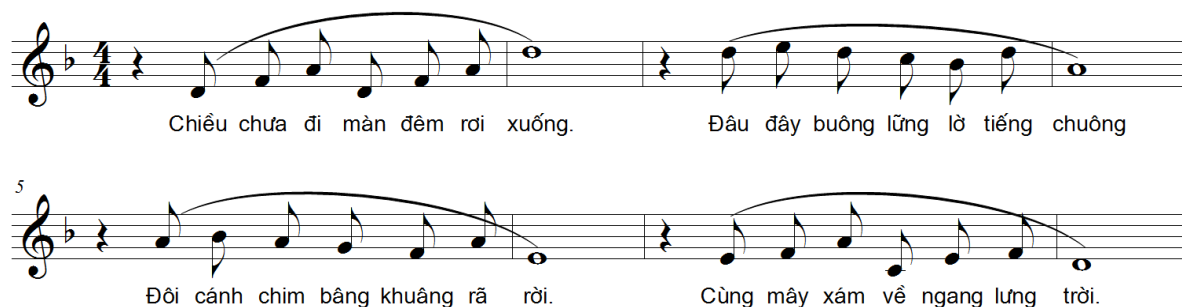


Figure 1: Đêm đông [*Winter night*] by Nguyễn Văn Thuong. Reprint with permission of the author from a song leaflet.

In addition to this, there are many other songs that clearly demonstrate the method of dividing structures as illustrated above. The forms inherited from French music in Vietnamese songs have brought about balance and neatness according to a clear, understandable, and perceptible principle. This can be said to be the most important factor in the structural aspect that French music has influenced in Vietnamese songs. However, despite undergoing many developmental stages with various changes, in the structural language of Vietnamese songs, we can still find the characteristic imprints of traditional Vietnamese music.

According to Doãn Nho, Vietnamese folklore can be divided into two groups: singing groups and recitation groups to improvise a poem, which will be then recited. Previously, in traditional Vietnamese music and folk songs, we can also easily find structures that are not balanced. At this time, the lengths of musical phrases and musical sentences depend on the expression and meaning of the lyrics. For example, in the folk song *Lullaby* of the Xe Dang ethnic group.



Figure 2: Complete outline of the song *Ru em*, Xe Dang folksong. Reprinted from a song leaflet with permission.

In this folk song, we can see that musical sentences and musical phrases are constantly changing in length, creating a shift in rhythm in the music. With folk music, the lyrics are a reenactment of human thoughts and feelings, so the lyrics are often simple, easy to understand, innocent, and straightforward, so the simple musical structure is the flow of human thought; it can be long, short, and change the position of accents to fit the content and nature of the song. This is

quite common not only in folk songs specifically but also in other genres of folk and traditional music in Vietnam.

Therefore, in songs from the modern period to the present, alongside songs with balance, neatness, and composition according to the formulas of single-, double-, or triple-section forms, besides that, breaking the balance is still quite common but usually only to a certain extent, in combination with balance. For example, a musical section is divided into two equal musical sentences, but within each musical sentence, it can be divided into unequal musical phrases. Especially in songs with folk influences, the freedom in the framework of structures is much clearer than in songs composed entirely in Western musical language. This can be illustrated in the song *Konia Tree Shadow* by Phan Huynh Dieu, with lyrics by Ngoc Anh.

Figure 3: Outline of the song *Bóng cây Kơ nia*, music: Phan Huynh Dieu; lyrics: Ngoc Anh. Reprinted by the author from a song leaflet with permission.

In addition, another way that authors (Phạm Xuân Hùng, 2025) often use to incorporate the national character in songs is by combining the song genre with traditional folk music genres, leading to changes in the structure of the songs, most commonly in the arrangement of auxiliary parts such as introductions, interludes, or conclusions. In many traditional Vietnamese music genres, there are forms of free singing or spoken singing in auxiliary parts, interspersed with the main part. The most common are genres such as *ho*, *vi*, *giam*, and the like with free rhythmic singing or spoken parts interwoven with singing sections. For example, in the song Vietnam, the most beautiful name, the author introduced a free singing section at the beginning, using the interjection *Ho... o, ho... o* as the opening part in the Southern folk songs. Or in the song *Going up the mountain* by Hoang Viet, which also begins with a free rhythm section like a *ho* verse, but not only using interjections but with clear lyrical content, structured as a complete musical section, although it still resembles a non-divided musical section. In another song, with a complete introductory musical section with a slow singing style, the division of musical phrases is clear and balanced, such as in the song *Spring Returns to Dak K'rong River* by To Hai.

Figure 4: *Sông Đắc K'rong mùa xuân về* [Spring Returns to Dak K'rong River] of To Hai. Reprinted with permission from a song leaflet.

This introductory section is distinguished from the subsequent sections by its slow pace and undefined rhythm. Not only the introduction but also the interlude sections within the structure of the song are used to vividly showcase the colors of Vietnamese folk music, often presented

as complete musical sections in both music and lyrics, presented in the form of tempo rubato. Other songs use introductory or interlude sections with a free rhythm character and carry the flavor of folk music. Examples include *A Glimpse of West Lake* by Pho Duc Phuong, *The Singing of Lam River* by Dinh Quang Hop, *The La River Girl* by Doan Nho, and *Who Goes to Hue* by Duy Khanh. Thus, the combination of various structural scales, from small to large, from the main part to the auxiliary part in songs combined with traditional Vietnamese music genres, is also a typical manifestation of the fusion between Eastern and Western music in this genre.

Many Vietnamese songs have integrated Western-style composition structures with traditional music structures, combining Western song genres with typical structures of Vietnamese folk music genres and creating works that express the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures in the language of music.

About musical materials, it can be seen that many Vietnamese songs have popularized compositions based on the mentioned rhythm styles, which is a very clear expression of absorbing Western musical language, here directly from French songs. This influence is still very common today, but it has been expanded to include rhythms imported from Latin America such as bolero, Chachacha, Rhumba, Salsa, Samba, and Tango, creating a rich repertoire of styles for composers to express their intentions accurately and specifically.

However, alongside exploring rhythms imported from the West, Vietnamese composers have also incorporated traditional music materials into song genres, creating folk flavors and national colors in songs. Distinctive folk music genres such as ho, ve, and li are flexibly and logically combined to create the fusion of East and West in song genres, which is a genre introduced to Vietnam through cultural exchanges from the West in general, and from France in particular. Vietnamese songs have a characteristic dominance of pitch in both lyrics and melody. Vietnamese songs have six tones: flat, grave, acute, question, tilde, heavy. Each tone gives a different feeling of high- and low-pitch frequencies. Vietnam is a multiethnic country, with each ethnic group in each region having different pronunciation characteristics and tones. Therefore, the correlation between melody, pitch, and tones in lyrics creates a distinctive feature for the music of each region. Songs that apply the characteristic features of a region will create the influence of that region. Songs with folk influences are very popular in Vietnam. Since its inception to the present day, it is very easy to find songs with folk influences. Most folk music genres are inherited and appear in song genres. The application is mainly based on the characteristic intonation and pronunciation of each region and typical melodies in folk music genres.

In the Northern region, the influence of Quan ho folk music appears in songs such as *Evoking Quan ho*, *Love by the Quan ho River* by Duc Mieng, *Returning to the Homeland* by Pho Duc Phuong, and the like. The color of Cheo melodies is used in songs such as *The Country Girls of Quan ho* by Pho Duc Phuong, *Quickly Harvesting Good Rice* by Le Loi (lyrics by Huyen Tam), *Plowing the Land Solidly* by Nguyễn Cuong, or *Monologue of Thị Mau* by Nguyễn Cuong, or like *Liberation of Dien Bien* by Do Nhuan with the melody of Cheo Sap Qua Cau. Another Northern music genre is Ca tru, which is applied in songs such as *A Note of Ca tru on Spring Days* by Nguyễn Cuong, *Crescent Moon* by Huy Thuc (poetry by Phi Tuyet Ba), *A Glimpse of West Lake* by Pho Duc Phuong. The Northern lullaby style is incorporated into songs like *Mother's Love for Her Child* by Nguyễn Van Ty, or the speaking-singing style in the Xam genre is shown in the song *The Mother Stitched the Soldier's Shirt* by Nguyễn Van Ty. Songs with influences from Middle of Vietnamese folk music genres such as Vi singing and Giãm singing such as *A Sentimental Tune of Ha Tinh People* by Nguyễn Van Ty, *The Singing of Lam River* by Dinh Quang Hop, *The La River Girl* by Doan Nho, *Tied at the Hometown Pier* by An Thuyen, *Angry but Loving* by Trần Hoan; and folk chants are reflected in songs like *Quang Binh*, *Our Homeland* by Hoang Van, *Who Goes to Hue* by Duy Khanh, and *Welcome to the Mã River Hero* by Xuan Giao. The music of the Central Highlands is brought into songs such as *You Are the Po Lang Flower* by Duc Minh, *The Shadow of the Kơ Nia Tree* by Phan Huynh Dieu, and *Spring Returns to Dak K'rong River* by To Hai. For the Southern folk music genres such as Ly melodies, they are used in songs like *Searching for People Who Sing Ly Lovingly* by Vinh An, *Quang*

Nam, Beloved by Phan Huynh Dieu with the Ly Tang Tit melody, and *Mother's Heart* by Y Van with the flavor of Southern folk music. Meanwhile, the Southern lullaby style is used in songs such as *Standing at the Ben Tre Pier* by Nguyễn Văn Ty, and there are many more songs using the colors of Southern folk music such as *Vam Co Dong* by Truong Quang Luc and *Still Missing Bitter Vegetables Growing After the Summer* and *You Walk on the Green Grass* by Bac Son.

The prevalence of songs with folk influences is one of the clearest characteristics of the cultural interaction between East and West in Vietnamese songs, affirming the ethnic identity and the enduring vitality of folk music genres that exist even in genres imported from the West.

In terms of tonal harmony, the most evident expression of the combination of Western musical language and Vietnamese music is modality in a diatonic sense. The musical language in Vietnamese songs has fundamentally changed compared to earlier songs, where the pentatonic scale, which was said to be very common in traditional Vietnamese music, has gradually given way to major and minor scales. Common in Western music are major and minor scales. These scales consist of seven steps, including natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales. Major and minor scales bring stability and clear attraction to music, so songs written in Western major and minor scales often clearly differentiate between stable and unstable steps. Meanwhile, Vietnamese music before the cultural assimilation with France used to be very popular with the pentatonic scale. According to Associate Professor To Vu, Actually, the new 5-tone system of Vietnamese folk songs is popular and the reason, as suggested, may be due to the tone of the Vietnamese language (Tô Vũ, 2002.). These scales consist of five steps without semitones, depending on the distance between steps, forming different pentatonic scales such as Fa, Huynh, Bac, Nam, and Nao. Unlike major and minor scales, pentatonic scales do not really demonstrate a clear attraction to any particular step; the stability and instability between steps are only relative. Pentatonic scales are one of the most characteristic features of Eastern music in general and of Vietnam in particular, playing an important role in creating the ethnic identity and the folk music flavor in new music works. Each region in Vietnam uses different pentatonic scales, and the pentatonic scales in folk music in the Northern, Middle, Southern, and Central Highlands regions all have their own characteristics. Therefore, each pentatonic scale will create characteristics for the folk music of each region. It can be seen that there are clear differences in the effectiveness of music between major and minor scales and pentatonic scales, creating differences in the characteristic features of the two composing languages between the East and the West. The interaction between East and West in Vietnamese songs can be analyzed based on the combination of types of scales based on two main forms: combining at the same time or alternating.

In many songs, the tonality is formed by combining a major scale with a pentatonic scale. In this case, the music can be expressed in full in seven steps, but among them, the melodic elements focus more on five out of seven steps, creating the flavor of a dominant pentatonic scale on the background of a 7-tone scale. For example, in the work *Farewell* by Dang Huu Phuc, it can be seen that both the melody and the accompaniment are very influenced by the nature of a dominant pentatonic scale A H D E F#, besides the tone G, but the pentatonic-scale tone still dominates. This not only creates a folk flavor but also brings about a very natural harmony, while also creating harmony in the musical colors of Western music and traditional Vietnamese music.

Another way to combine Western 7-tone and 5-tone scales in Vietnamese songs is for these scales to alternate. With this method, the music in the piece will create successive color patches through different stages. In the work *Lullaby* by Trần Thanh Hà, the author used the tones F G B C D to create a melody with the flavor of traditional Vietnamese music, but in the next section of music, the author switched the scale to the color of B-flat minor, and although it still only consisted of five tones (F Ges B C Des), this formula did not evoke the characteristic of traditional Vietnamese music but instead brought out the color of Western minor scales. This transition phase takes place in just nine beats, then returns to the pentatonic-scale color of traditional

Vietnamese music. The flexible application of major and minor scales with pentatonic scales has created a unique style in each author's Vietnamese song, providing rich colors for works in this genre. With this method, the effectiveness of music is achieved by combining both colors of two different types of scales at the same time, creating the ethnic character of Vietnamese music in harmony with the language of Western music.

The combination of major scales with pentatonic scales brings about an intersection of colors between Western music and traditional Vietnamese music. The use of pentatonic scales in the genre of songs not only simply creates the color of folk music (Bui Huyền Nga, 2002) but also shapes the genre and the regional characteristics of folk music used in songs.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the genre of songs in Vietnamese music before 1975 marked a turning point when Vietnam received influence from French culture. Though this genre was imported from the West, it quickly became the most rapidly developed and popular musical genre in Vietnam. Songs are an inevitability of history, with the direct conditions being influenced by French culture. And conversely, this genre itself reflects very specifically and completely the process of its cultural assimilation through its content, imagery, and characteristics of musical language in works. Vietnamese songs have reproduced an entire period of the country's history in general as well as the culture of art in particular, vividly showing the importation routes of French culture and Western music that were introduced to Vietnam at that time, while also creating an intersection between two cultures in the language of composition.

Thus, the genre of art songs is not only a step in the history of Vietnamese music but also a historical step in the past that marks important periods and events of the country. It is also a cultural page demonstrating the combination of Western art with Vietnamese folk art.

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