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Governing Music in Vietnam: From Socialist to Post-Socialist Use of Nationalism

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by

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All errors in this dissertation are mine, alone.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Governing Music in Vietnam:

From Socialist to Post-Socialist Use of Nationalism

By

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After the war and the failed experiment of socialism in the South, the Vietnamese government opened up doors for the logic of the market to enter to correct for the unintended consequences of a planned economy. When the market found its way into the socialist system, almost everything that could be sold was sold. There is a market of governance, where the government engages in the buying and selling of its own authority, for instance, in the form of permission for self-expression, in both the official and the unofficial realms. There are also domestic and international markets for the nation and the representation of history as approved by the Party. In this thesis, I looked at the music industry in Vietnam, which represents a microcosm of the hybrid extension of socialism, one previously unaccounted for in the literature of democratization theories. Instead of following a neat trajectory from a Leninist totalitarian regime with a command economy to a post-socialist regime that accepts and practices market economy, which ultimately leads to democratization of the political system, as many democratization and modernization theorists claim, the Vietnamese government shows its strong resistance to

democratic changes. In fact, after nearly a quarter of a century from the time the Vietnamese government decided to incorporate the logic of the market in 1986, the political regime remains steadfast in its control of freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

INTRODUCTION

Nguyễn Thanh was born and grew up in Northern Vietnam during the War Against the Americans, as the North Vietnamese government put it. Under the socialist regime, he received scholarships to attend the Hanoi Conservatory of Music. He was trained to write music to serve the war effort and the socialist regime. His songs contain images of workers, peasants, and the glory of their hard work; he also wrote about the victorious soldiers, the wives, the mothers sending off their sons and husbands to war while keeping up with their duties at home, the battlefields, the nationalistic spirit in overcoming the enemies, and about the shining leadership of the Communist Party in winning the war, taking over the South, and bringing peace to Vietnam. Those were the safe themes to write about; hardly anything else would pass censorship at the time.

Nguyễn Thanh never saw the South as it was separated from the North by the seventeenth parallel defined in the Geneva Accord since 1954. Then the war between the North, which was firmly under socialism, and the South, with the aid of the Americans, escalated in the 1960s. Thanh was a music student at the time and graduated at the height of the war. He joined the army and brought his songs to the soldiers at the frontline. He was injured a couple of times, but his love for Vietnam kept him going with his guitar.

When the North took over the South in 1975, Nguyễn Thanh entered Saigon for the first time. For economic reasons, he decided to settle there with his family, teaching music at a local school, giving private lessons, and continuing to compose songs. After 1975, the North decided to impose nationalization of the means of production in the South and tried out socialism there for awhile until the government realized that the model of command economy did not work in the South, nor in any other part of Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government then began a series of economic reforms to allow for some privatization of the economy, which also applied to the realm of music production. Censorship is still there, but composers can produce their own recordings. Composers like Nguyễn Thanh can partner up with a record company and make their songs available. As Nguyễn Thanh wanted to produce a CD with his nationalistic songs ranging from wartime in the North through peacetime, he submitted a program to the producer, who paid the censorship bureau a fee to clear it. The fee often consists of two parts, an official fee per publication clearance and an unofficial charge to keep members of the censorship bureau happy. If the censorship bureau finds the program for the CD safe for production, then they will grant permission; if not (i.e., politically/culturally sensitive), then no matter how much money in the envelope, the bureau would not take the political risk to let the production pass. Once the permit is granted, Nguyễn Thanh can begin to record and produce the CD; he will have to buy the number of stamps corresponding to the number of copies he produces to be affixed on the CD covers to make sure that the CD is a legitimate product, a conduct very similar to the socialist bureaucracy before the time of economic reform. Beyond that, the composer and the record producer are responsible for marketing their products to the consumers. How well the CD sells will depend on the market.

The prototypical vignette above captures the essence of the post-socialist government of Vietnam, evolving from a socialist regime to a structure that incorporates the logic of the market but still able to maintain vestiges of socialism.

Indeed, the infiltration of the logic of the market into the socialist government of Vietnam has sparked a series of changes in modes of governance, the system and the

ways by which rulers run the country. Through a study of music production in Vietnam, I show how the entrance of the market complicates socialist governance in the realm of performing arts and argue that the government of Vietnam maintains its rule in the face of transnational pressures by perpetuating the commodification of governance, the selling and buying of political authority, and by capitalizing on nationalism as a means to expand and consolidate the Party's legitimacy to rule.

Contrary to assumptions that reformist agendas with market economy weaken the state, the government of Vietnam adapts and adopts new methods of rule, which intentionally or unintentionally help control for so-called "reactionary factions" and other unwanted challenges to the state. I argue that, from a socialist government, the Communist Party controlling Vietnam has extended socialism into the current mode of governance with a hybridized logic of the market grafted on to the governing system. In such fashion, the Party legitimizes its identification with the government by sensationalizing nationalism, hijacking the Vietnamese people's love for their country and wish for independence from foreign influence, so that the Party could gain as much control over the government as possible and establish socialism as an ideology for the state. When economic pressure forced changes, the Party would still be able to maintain its grip on power by retaining its legitimacy with its continuing effort to cultivate nationalistic spirit and by hybridizing the socialist mechanism of control with the logic of the market, in which the Party-controlled government is able to make profits from buying and selling its own power.

The case of music production in Vietnam will help illustrate the hybrid extension of the socialist mode of governance as the socialist government has always sought control

in politically sensitive areas such as the arts because of their ability to influence the mass via public presentations and media outlets.

In this chapter, following Foucault, I will define government as an abstract concept or act of governing (Foucault, “Governmentality”). Government as such is different from the state as a reductionistic entity that is considered separate from the society. The concept of government encompasses the state and the society as the act of classifying, defining, and ruling over the political entity of the state, the social life bubbling within the state, and each individual within the society in both private and public capacities. Hence, government in the broad sense provides a holistic approach to examining power relations within the state and the society, without falling into the reductionist tendency of state theorists.

Furthermore, Foucault’s approach to theorizing government improves on the method of analysis in the case of Vietnam. First, Vietnam does not fall neatly into the category of a democratic or an authoritarian political regime with a command economy or a market economy as often classified in the body of democratization theories.¹ The government of Vietnam with its adoption of socialism, as I will show, applies authoritarian rule in all aspects of life, and as the logic of the market enters, the government transforms its methods of rule to adapt flexibly to the market as well as reshaping the logic of the market to fit the government’s authoritarian nature. Secondly, Vietnam has built a fortress of nationalism since the resistance wars against colonialism (Pelley). Nationalistic sentiment has bound Vietnamese people together through time,

¹ The body of literature on democratization mostly focuses on a process of transitioning from variations of authoritarian rule to some forms of popular rule, particularly democracy (Almond and Verba), (Diamond), (Inglehart), and (Przeworski).

and socialist leaders found a host to inject the parasitic ideology of socialism in order to promote a post-colonial, socialist government of Vietnam. The socialist government has been rallying its subjects under the banner of nationalism, taking advantage of people's nationalist sentiments as a tool to rule. At the same time, the subjects of rule also subscribe to nationalism as part of their collective identity.

When the logic of the market breaks into the socialist mode of government, then Party's rule hides under the cloak of nationalism as part of the ideological transition from socialism to post-socialism. The simultaneous commodification of nationalism and governance, with nationalism acting as a front for socialism as an ideology, is part of the new governmentality, or technology of government. Socialism takes one step back in post-socialist government for effectiveness in ruling. The new way or technology to govern addresses all levels of population from the ruling echelon of the Communist Party down to each Vietnamese and unifies the logic of commodity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Governmentality

Modern states develop certain rationalities of rule, or governmentality, a term coined by Michel Foucault, which entail specific technologies of the governing of conduct to produce particular outcomes for individuals as members of the society and for the society-at-large. In a series of lectures at Collège de France in Paris, Foucault explored a new way of conceptualizing government as an art of rationalizing and scheming to produce desirable results for each and all (Gordon). Foucault's genealogical studies of government analyzed the progression from ancient regimes' sovereignty to the making of subjects via disciplinary regime to the concept of rationality in government in

the modern world, incorporating aspects of power deployment strategies preceding the type of governmentality discovered since mid-eighteenth century (Foucault, “Governmentality”). Both internal and external to the state, governmentality signifies the modern state’s polishing techniques of rule and achieving the ability to be “both an individualizing and a totalizing power” through the accumulation of knowledge about the individuals and the system (Foucault, “The Subject and Power”). Modern states create matrices of civil conducts to force individuals to become more “civilized.” The people’s living conditions have improved with clinics administering matters of health, police administering matters of safety, and other well-designed public spaces controlling for unwanted behaviors.

In his essay, “Subject and Power,” Foucault designated two meanings to the concept of “subject,” that is “subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge... suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (781). In reality, it is impossible to separate the techniques of rule from the techniques of the self, which Foucault defined as, “techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves” (Foucault, “The Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth”). Thus, the power of the state comes from the ability to be “both an individualizing and a totalizing power” (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 782). Totalization refers to the ability of the state to fix its gaze on the subjects of rule by deploying various techniques to normalize the subjects’ behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, and desires, while individualization refers to the state’s

concurrent identifying those who fall out of the norms for particular treatments (Diseger). With the ability to reach inside every individual and subject the individual to social norms, power relations between the state and its subjects deliver different kinds of subjects, and in circular motions the subjects reinforce certain kinds of power relations or introduce new relations through resistance.

Thus, power is not simply vested in the hands of the governors, but power exists because of the governed subject's ability or inability to act. Nikolas Rose explored the concept of freedom that is associated with power in modern, Western societies in his genealogy of neo-liberal government. Beyond the structure of classic liberalism, which, he argued, has framed freedom as the dialectical opposite of government, Rose proposed that freedom "has inspired the invention of a variety of technologies for governing" (Rose). As an instrument of rule, freedom creates subjects for the liberal system of governance. Building upon Foucault's studies, Rose examined the contemporary, neo-liberal organization of Western states, which are modeled after the functioning of the market. The introduction of the market into governance transforms bureaucracy into business, turning the ethics of public service into private management (Rose 150). The concept of freedom to choose underlies this paradigm of rule. Modern individuals are forced to be free only within the range of options presented to them by expert rule. Experts teach individuals how to live a responsible, healthy, and civil life. As the governed subjects take up the identity of customers in Western societies, they demand accountability, transparency, and efficiency from the government. These activities, in turn, help maintain and strengthen the power apparatuses.

Neo-liberal governance and its creation of a particular kind of subject in the West, as Rose described it, however, may not apply wholesale elsewhere. Scholars such as Thu-huong Nguyen-Vo and Aihwa Ong observed that neo-liberal technologies of governing reconfigure many political landscapes, from post-colonial to authoritarian to post-socialist countries, and redefine tactics to manage populations, to reorganize bureaucracies, to administer newly defined spaces. In their critiques, Nguyen-vo and Ong looked at how globalization introduces the logic of the market into politics, redefines the concept of citizenship, and sorts citizens into categories that are subject to different regulations to serve the market forces. Post-socialist, authoritarian regimes incorporate the logic of the market differently than countries in the West to produce various subjects using different technologies of rule in order to best serve the interests of the regime in maintaining power.

Socialism in Vietnam

Socialism in Vietnam carried elements similar to Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski's prototypical descriptions of totalitarian socialist government. The six basic features the authors listed included (1) "an official ideology," which has always been Communism in Vietnam²; (2) "a single mass party," in this case the Communist Party of Vietnam, which, unlike Friedrich and Brzezinski's definitional description, has been led by a group of men and some women; (3) "a system of terroristic police control," which has always been an essential feature to obtain information and to control the masses in Vietnam; (4) "a technologically conditioned near-complete... control... of mass communication," easily seen in Vietnam through the censorship mechanisms discussed in

² Speaker of the National Assembly Nguyễn Phú Trọng, a Politburo member, wrote recently in *Tạp Chí Cộng Sản* [Communist Review], that the Communist Manifesto together with Marxism-Leninism are still the guiding principles for the Communist Party of Vietnam (P.T. Nguyễn).

this thesis; (5) “a similarly... control... of effective armed combats,” which is not unfamiliar to the Vietnamese army; (6) “a central control and direction of the entire economy,” the main feature of the socialist state of Vietnam since independence from the French until recent reforms in the mid-1980s (Friedrich and Brzezinski).

Beyond the common features of socialist governments, socialism in Vietnam was also dependent on nationalism to hide its claws when necessary, especially when the ideology became unpopular to the masses.

Nationalism as a cloak for socialism

One of the ways post-socialist, authoritarian regimes differ from Western countries in their use of the logic of the market can be traced back to the socialist co-optation of nationalism as a means to domesticate the ruled subjects. Nationalism in Vietnam not only constitutes a colonial-fighting past but also extends into the socialist and post-socialist present.

Benedict Anderson referred to the nations as "imagined communities" and nationalism as the subjective sense of common consciousness and shared destiny. Anderson argued that imperialism played an essential role in creating the national consciousness of former colonies in Africa and Asia. For Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is a constant reconstruction project of the present, not merely a product of the common past (Halbwachs). But collective memories of the past help in the reconfiguration of how certain memories are remembered at any point in time. Vietnam has a memory of fighting and living under colonialism, which various political factions could use to create collective representations that may trigger feelings of love, hatred, loyalty toward the country and the political party and form a new or renew a certain

political consciousness. Therefore, a working mechanism of collective memory coupling with the institutional condition of colonial authorities induced patriotic feelings in the Vietnamese. The Communist Party only had to hijack the progress in fighting colonialism, which was an expression of nationalistic feelings, to effectively remake the Vietnamese people's collective memory. Furthermore, Lenin's writing provided the justification for organizing a socialist society under the banner of nationalism, at least temporarily.

The path from capitalism as imposed by the colonial ruling class to true communism, according to Lenin, must go through the intermediary socialist structure of government with the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" (Lenin, "State and Revolution") . Lenin considered socialism as the first stage of communism, or a completely classless society. In a less developed, isolated country such as Russia, Lenin believed that a government could build socialism within the walls encasing a nation (Ree). Lenin advocated the system of co-operative property on land, nationalization and standardization of the means of production, and was optimistic that the proletarian leadership can maintain the system until the state withers away toward true Communism. Within the same term, he also called for a pervasive system of government whereby socialism enters "into everyday life," rather than a separation of the governing apparatus and the subjects it governs (Lenin, "Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij"). Lenin allowed for socialism to flourish in one country without considering the possibilities of failure due to capitalism taking over while waiting for an international revolution. As Levine argued, Lenin's socialist prescription lacked the consideration for existence of politics or governance after the state withers away (Levine). Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm correctly

identified that Marxism and the socialist movement has become national in nature (Hobsbawm).

Yet certain components of Leninist ideas, such as the use of Taylorist assembly line for organizational purpose, proved quite attractive for the Vietnamese as a tool for organization of the state post-colonialism. Leninist socialism offered the leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party the broader sense and guidance toward re-organizing the post-colonial society plagued by divisions and chaos (Woodside). In a detailed analysis, based on Partha Chatterjee's characterization of the three periods in the nationalist thought process (Chatterjee, "Nationalist Thought and the Colonial Discourse"), Kim Ninh explored the last stage of state-building under the theme of organization and echoing the need for organization in a newly emerging state, where "organization of both ideology and structure became key, for organization served the dual purpose of clearly establishing the path that society must follow and containing any inclination to stray from such a defined course" (Kim).

Nationalism in post-colonial countries, as Chatterjee argued, may invert the theoretical pattern of nationalistic development in the West with the full suite of enlightenment, rationality, and modernity; instead, the post-colonial countries may find themselves emerging from historically-dependent contexts and not at all a derivative of the Western conceptualization of nationalism (Chatterjee, "Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India"). In the case of Vietnam, Leninist socialism opened up a path for re-organization of the society and centralized power for systematic control. Political leaders soon found themselves committed to a socialist ideology with a

governmentality that effectively utilized nationalism as a tool for advancing toward socialism then international Communism.

The technologies of rule discussed in Foucault's works dismissed the concept of ideology, claiming that freedom is actually beyond being part of Marxian false consciousness. Nguyễn-võ argued for the role of ideology in explaining the "fragmentation at the level of symbolic representation caused by the neoliberal economy's needs for the use of both choice and coercion to produce differentiated labor and segmented access to consumption" that the author found in her study of neoliberalism in Vietnam (Nguyễn-võ, "The Ironies of Freedom" 241). The author suggested looking for "ideological work in the practices of government (Nguyễn-võ, "The Ironies of Freedom" 255)." In my case, the ideology is nationalism, and the "ideological work" is how nationalism interacts with socialism, producing the kind of subjects submissive to an essentially socialist, authoritarian government.

The feelings the Vietnamese people committed toward their nation formed the bedrock for building a nation after colonialism, and the Vietnamese socialist leaders found in Leninist authoritarianism the necessary tools to organize the state. Nationalism provided the missing link between socialism on the one hand and the Vietnamese people subject to a socialist government on the other. The subjects of rule internalized the love for the nation while the Communist Party forced down their throats the principles of organization and centralization. There was only one way to love Vietnam, and that was to be loyal to the Party, even for colonialist fighters in prison cells, as Peter Zinoman observed in prisoners' writings, "The party's need to reassert the legitimacy of its monopoly over political power required a popular literary form that cleaned up,

embellished, and celebrated the history of its heroic struggles and sacrifices” (Zinoman). The Party became successful in its vanguard leadership role when the people started to identify the Party with the heroic nation and gave credit to the leadership of the Party for regaining independence from foreign invasion.

Commodification of governance and nationalism

When socialism could no longer sustain the country economically, and the control economy failed, the logic of the market entered as an alternative, and I would argue a better one, to allow the Party more degrees of freedom to control and manipulate the society. Here, I will not open up a debate on how or why the Communist Party decided to adopt the market economy or where the pressure came from; rather, I will focus on the analysis of what has happened since the logic of the market was incorporated into governance.

The logic of the market has not acted solely in a sterile environment to reorganize government for the purpose of efficiency, as Rose argued, for the case of the polishing of techniques to govern in the West, at least not in the case of Vietnam. I argue that Vietnam’s recent incorporation of the market into its logic of socialist governance has created a different rationality of government than the neo-liberal governance the West seems to exhibit. In Vietnam, the state commodifies governance into products that are for sale to its citizens while retaining its monopoly on the production and distribution of authority. Hence, the transactions cannot be considered contracts that both the state, or the provider, and its citizens, or the consumers, should honor. Rather, the power lies in the hands of the provider, who can withdraw and change the contract at any given time

without the consent of the consumers. The consumers, in this case, are very much at the mercy of the provider.

To complete the commodification of governance, consumers of governance must also be self-governed. To this end, Rose theorized that the neo-liberal governmentality engineers subjects for self-regulation (Rose). Nationalism, as a common denominator that binds Vietnamese rulers and ruled together through wartime, becomes an object of value suitable for commodification. In a market economy, the government can buy and sell nationalism in packages tailored differently toward different groups – for multinational corporations, hard-working, docile characteristics of domestic workers would be desirable features of Vietnamese-ness; for subjects of rule, the people of Vietnam, the Vietnamese essence would be part of the cultural consumption and lifestyle to mark Vietnamese from other nationalities in a globalized world. The flexible packaging of nationalism simultaneously works and reworks the process of commodification of governance so that one cannot be isolated from the other.

Some authors argue that post-socialist states are weak because the market is permitted to operate on politics and introduces non-political spheres, which undermine the centralization of power and the role of the state as the sole distributor (Walder). However, the post-socialist state still retains vestigial socialist bureaucratic characteristics that I deem to be significant in holding onto the power necessary to maintain the role of the sole distributor of power in a state. For instance, in my opening vignette, the composer in the post-socialist state still has to go through the whole bureaucratic system to obtain permission to produce his record, except for the ordeal where he had to pay his dues unofficially and officially to the system because the logic of the market has entered

socialist governance, making government officially "post-socialist." What comes after socialism does not merely make government weak. Contrarily, I might argue, post-socialism can become much more mischievous with the shifting away from socialism to the extolment of nationalism, one step removed from socialism itself, yet the government still retains its power to rule over the individuals in the society, permitting or not permitting one to produce a certain cultural product as in the above case of the composer who writes nationalistic songs. Hence, when the logic of the market entered socialist government, marketization of authority was made possible, and nationalism covered up socialism, an ideology that had been foreign to Vietnamese, who have had a long history fighting for their country's independence.

Another argument attaches itself to modernization theory in claiming that developing countries experience corruption, defined as inappropriate usage of public office for private gains (Ades and Di Tella; Sandholtz and Koetzle), as part of the experience of modernization; corruption is similar to a sickness that would be cured eventually when the countries become modernized (Werner). Such an argument poses the risk of assuming that there is a government that does not have corruption, and that would be an advanced, industrialized country. However, I would argue, corruption would not diminish with modernization but rather; it is an essential part of a post-socialist economy. A socialist government has a bureaucratic system in place, making it possible for the restructuring of the system to allow for a unique arrangement whereby authority is bought and sold officially as well as unofficially (i.e., under the definition of "corruption"). The socialist bureaucracy works with seals and stamps of approval, which represents authority, to exert control over society (Friedrich and Brzezinski). Once the

logic of the market entered the socialist government, the market reworked the existing socialist bureaucracy into a form of post-socialist bureaucracy that served two purposes: first, to maintain a strong political grip over the society (e.g., a system set up for continuing monitoring and censorship of cultural products in the case of the composer aforementioned); second, to benefit from the logic of the market by buying and selling the authority through the bureaucratic system of stamps and seals (e.g., also in the case of the composer aforementioned, the fees paid to the government and under the table to government officials to facilitate the process of obtaining permission for production and the sales of stamps to be affixed on the final recording product to make it official for the market). The post-socialist government allowed and was subject to abuses to bring in secondary sources of income and benefits for those holding power. Rulers then perpetuated the system to continue gaining from it. Thus, the government was refueled to continue its monopoly on power, not as a sole distributor of resources but also as a producer of governance products and a facilitator regulating the market of governance and, at the same time, benefiting from it.³

In this transformation from socialism to neo-liberalism within the context of today's globalization, the government of Vietnam imposed rules and regulations onto the realm of individual expression, particularly in the performing arts, which constitutes a site for studying the limits and constraints placed upon the artists as subjects within and beyond the national borders, as well as for observing the negotiations around certain cultural policies and local policing, as products of revised governing strategies. Popular

³ By monopoly, I mean the state's nearly complete control over the ability to grant or withhold permission for any cultural products. The state will not allow anything it deems dangerous to its existence to pass the censorship gate, no matter how much an individual pays; hence, the price and room for negotiation is not limitless.

music was one of the earliest marketized forms of art that is target for governmental control because of its capability to influence the mass.

POPULAR MUSIC AS A SUBJECT OF STUDY

My project focuses on the Vietnamese industry of popular songs because lyrics lend specific, incisive social meanings to music. As a German composer put it, “Music can give unambiguous expression to political concern only by way of the text with which it is associated” (Gruber). In other words, although there remains flexibility in interpreting the meanings of the lyrics according to different social contexts, the range of interpretations can be narrower than music without lyrics.

There are two reasons for choosing popular music production as a site of study. First, music can serve political purposes. In socialist countries, the government nationalizes cultural production enterprises and censors musical content, while using cultural products for propagandizing purpose (Manuel; Ramet; Kraus). In Vietnam, music has functioned as a tool for mass mobilization through war and peace time. Composers have written marches, songs arousing nationalist sentiments such as national anthems, an epitome of this genre, and songs promoting government’s agenda. Music, through its ability to be transmitted orally and aurally, has become one of the fastest ways to carry political messages far and wide.

Secondly, music has been commodified since the early twentieth century in Vietnam, occupying a large share of the cultural market. As a form of cultural commodity, music has been performed in social gatherings, in clubs, on stages, on mass media such as radio, television, the Internet, reaching millions of listeners. Even with a period of official disruption to the market during socialism, black markets for music still

exist. Singers, producers, and composers have participated in making profits from this large market.

THE POLITICS OF MUSIC PRODUCTION

In the following chapters, I argue that the introduction of the market into a socialist system of governance commodified the production and distribution of goods and services, opening up opportunities for artists and music producers to bring their musical products to the mass market. At the same time, the logic of the market also commodified governance and nationalism. The post-socialist government monopolized the ability to achieve official authorization for the process of commodification through rules and decrees. The commodification of governance broke down the authority from one central source into packages that could be bought and sold in the form of permits, licenses, paperwork. Music producers and artists became consumers of these governmental products. Simultaneously, the reverse was happening: government maintained its grip on power monopoly by increasing the revenues from the process and outcomes of commodification and by preventing challenges to its monopoly. The process of commodification of governance brought about changes to the socialist system that yielded benefits to the power holders. The outcomes of commodification of governance were the official and unofficial sources of revenues such as taxes, legal fees and bribes, respectively.

In their unique position, artists and music producers acted to interface with the government and the market. Producers and artists respond to the demands of the market to earn profits. They also have to comply with the government's requirements as subjects of rule. Foucault described the modern government polishing techniques of rule and

achieving the ability to be powerful through the accumulation of knowledge about the individuals and the system (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 782). The government’s rule incisively reaches into individual lives and blankets over the whole society.

The Vietnamese socialist government’s power produced an individual subjectivity equipped with the ability of self-censorship, negotiating powers, and will to resist authority. In Vietnam, the government used various strategies making artists into nationalist, socialist, and entrepreneurial subjects. The government also subjected music consumers to consumerism and nationalism with the assistance of music producers and artists through their cultural products. Before the intricate involvement of the market in the late 1980s, the government subjected artists to national (and the Party’s) projects of revolution and national reconstruction. Composers wrote songs to mobilize through the wars against the French and the Americans and to encourage participation in reconstruction projects during the 1970s and 1980s, and singers organized by national and local troupes performed them. Artists fed on nationalism and socialism, while the state helped reproduce the nationalist and socialist subjectivities by the ways the artists lived and performed. When its own policies of marketization forced the government to face the market of music industry in the early 1990s and the transnational movements of music production and artists since 2000, the government has had to revise and adapt new technologies of rule, while continuing its policing activities. From mass mobilization, artists and producers now switched over to the mass market with obligations to consume products of governance, which comes in the form of permits and the buying and selling of authority. This process is meant to produce individualized sentiments that ultimately

serve the national goal of industrialization-modernization, where capitalism boosts the economy under the banner of the government's political monopoly.

Within the contemporary context of the Vietnamese state, artists often did not develop means to resist authority but eventually became co-opted into the new governing apparatus. The market served as a buffer zone for the government to lessen the visibility of its grip as artists now responded directly to the market with fewer control mechanisms. Artists also learned to comply with the state's rules in order to benefit from the market rather than developing resistance to authority. Although the recent cross-border movements of artists further complicated the government's ability to govern artists' self-expressions, these movements also create new opportunities for the government to extend its governing apparatus beyond national borders. Artists legally still had to seek permission to perform abroad and brought back revenues to the state in the form of income tax. The content of performance abroad was often self-censored and helped reproduce images of a modernizing nation. The government, meanwhile, continued to reproduce the national subjects.

The following chapters will explore several aspects of governmentality in a post-socialist, neo-liberal context through the popular music industry. Chapter 1 will begin with a history of the governance of popular music. The genre of popular songs was born during French colonialism, so it carries a close relationship with resistance movements, mass entertainment, and the politics of governing arts. After the French, Vietnam was divided in half, and each regime had a different policy toward the arts. Different cultural policies at the local level governed artists differently. Once Vietnam was reunified under socialism, artists served the state in multiple capacities until the state incorporated the

market system to allow room for the artists to maneuver between mass consumption and the state's authorization.

Chapter 2 looks at how the government and the Party, through music, used nationalism to sell themselves and their socialist ideology to the masses during the nation-building, socialist period after independence from the French in 1954 through and including the taking over of the South after the Vietnam War until the economic reform in the mid-1980s. Vietnamese people had carried nationalistic sentiments since the resistance war with the French colonialists, so it was convenient for the Communist Party to make use of the existing sentiments and build up support from the masses for socialism.

Chapter 3 examines how nationalism has become commodified in the hybrid extension of a socialist government to help fashion a novel ruling technology. After the economic reforms of the mid-1980s, Vietnam began marketing its national essence for profitable trades, to export the national image of docile, cheap labor for foreign companies' contract and to paint over the ravages of the war by images more suitable for tourism (Schwenkel). Vietnamese govern themselves by creating and absorbing the national subject as a desirable entity as shown in the music products offered to consumers. The commodification of nationalism lines up well with the commodification of governance; the latter of which I argue was part of the developmental path of a post-socialist society. Authority was bought and sold, and individual nationalistic sentiments inadvertently brought about the transactions within the system of commodification of governance. As the logic of the market entered governance, nationalism covered up socialism as an ideology, but traces of socialist bureaucracy remained to assist in the

formation of the post-socialist structure facilitating the buying and selling of authority, particularly as shown in the process of obtaining permission to publish or broadcast music.

The conclusion chapter attempts to draw links among the concepts in a summary of arguments and a discussion of possibilities of opening up spaces that allow for evolutionary changes in governmentality.

METHODS

The majority of my fieldwork was completed in Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City (HCM City), the largest, most boisterous cultural market and prime site for policing activities, especially in popular songs after 1986. Saigon is appropriately the center for cultural production and consumption in Vietnam today. Of the 53 record producers in Vietnam, 48 established themselves in Saigon (TPO Online). Singers trained elsewhere would flock to the city for a chance to achieve fame. Music show business thrives with new demands for entertainment from the consumers, who include not only individuals but also corporations. Entertainment activities in clubs, bars, café's occur nightly, not only on weekends (L. Văn). Corporations provide economic support for shows in exchange for advertisement of their products or services (N. Lê), but the effectiveness of their investments are not always guaranteed (Trong nước... mỗi món chờ tài trợ [Live Shows in Vietnam...Long Wait for Sponsorship]).

Another part of my fieldwork was done in the Los Angeles and Orange County areas, where there is the largest concentration of Vietnamese-American population in the U.S. Naturally, this population has a need for entertainment. Composers, singers, and

producers from Vietnam visit Southern California regularly, while their expatriate counterparts who reside in the United States go to Vietnam for shows.

I conducted 20 interviews with singers, composers, musicians, and producers during the months of June-July and November-December 2006 in Vietnam as well as August-April 2007 in the United States. Using the methods of oral history interviews, I asked the interviewees how they began their music careers, how they produced music, how they interacted with the state, and how the market functioned. When the questions were deemed politically sensitive, the interviewees could elect not to answer. Most of the time during my fieldwork, I found the interviewees to be quite cooperative when talking about their lives, their works, and the process of music production. When I began asking about political questions, a few were reluctant to offer a direct answer; others were eager to do so as a way to document the injustices they felt the system imposed.

Besides the interviews, I did participant-observation in nightclubs and stages in Saigon. I participated in the night life to observe the environment and the performances as part of the fieldwork. Newspaper and magazine articles were also informative sources of news about and analyses on artists' lives, performances, and interactions with the market and the state. I relied on newspaper and magazine archival resources available online to provide secondary materials to triangulate my interviews and observations.

Chapter 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOVERNANCE OF MUSIC

The history of Vietnamese modern music can be traced back to French colonial times in the mid-nineteenth century, mostly transmitted through missionaries and military personnel. “Modern” and “civilized” are concepts commonly associated with colonialism and the introduction of a Western civilization into the indigenous culture, in this case French and Vietnamese, respectively. Modern music means a departure from the traditional ways of making and consuming music, adopting the Western scales and habits of listening, wholly or partly. Music as a form of self-expression has always been subject to government’s regulations in Vietnam since the time of monarchy. In this chapter, I will trace some of the developments on how music has been governed through contemporary history since colonial times.

EARLY COMMERCIALIZATION OF MUSIC

Music was one of the earliest forms of Vietnamese arts to be commercialized. Since the fifteenth century under the Lê and Nguyễn Dynasties, Vietnamese music has been differentiated into popular and court music with many genres fully developed, such as theater, dance, chamber music, and songs serving political as well as entertainment purposes (P. T. Nguyễn). Together with the Nguyễn Dynasty’s accelerated geopolitical expansion beginning in the seventeenth century (Nguyễn-võ, “Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict”), various music types also migrated southward and evolved into distinctive, Southern musical traditions of folk songs and ceremonial instrumental music (nhạc lễ) as well as later chamber music (đờn ca tài tử) and theater (cải lương) by

the early twentieth century with self-supporting troupes traveling across the land (P. T. Nguyễn).

Roman Catholic missionaries were among the first to bring Western music into Vietnam via their Catholic masses beginning in 1533. Nevertheless, because of their relatively small number of converts and the government's religious suppression, the liturgical music could not spread until the French completely colonized Vietnam (Tú, Nguyễn, and Vũ). In 1858, the French-Dutch alliance began occupying the port of Danang in central Vietnam. By 1861, Saigon surrendered to French control, and toward the end of the nineteenth century, all of Vietnam bore the yoke of colonialism. Administratively, the French divided Vietnam into three regions, Tonkin (North), Annam (Central), and Cochinchina (South).⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Catholic missions and churches took strongholds in cities and villages. Church choirs and recitation of prayers in Latin introduced Vietnamese congregations to Western music (P. T. Nguyễn; Vũ, Vũ, and Loan). The French also recruited Vietnamese into military bands (Gibbs, "Spoken Theater, La Scene Tonkinoise, and the First Modern Vietnamese Songs").

Technological evolution at the beginning of the twentieth century brought about radio, recordings, and phonographs. As Foucault noted in a conversation with Pierre Boulez about contemporary music, "[M]usic has been much more sensitive to technological changes, much more closely bound to them than most of the other arts" (Foucault and Boulez). Vietnamese music was no exception. During the 1910s and 1920s, while colonial resistance movements often went together with intellectuals' and

⁴ Even without this division, each region had carried its own subculture and rich musical histories (P. T. Nguyễn), but political separation created a deeper sense of regional identities that often obstruct attempts to forge a unique, national identity in peace time. The same might remain true for contemporary Vietnamese music-making and cultural policies and their implementations at the local level as I will show in this project.

artists' call for modernization of the country and the people (Marr, "Vietnam's Tradition on Trial, 1925-1945"), Vietnamese developed a taste for French popular culture including cinema, theater, and music. Meanwhile, Western record companies such as Victor, Columbia, Pathé, Beka, Odéon, dominated the Vietnamese music market by the late 1920s (Tú et al., "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam"). Popularity of Western songs sung by Joséphine Baker, Tino Rossi, and the like, induced a movement to put Vietnamese lyrics to European tunes (bài ta điệu tây),⁵ which peaked in the 1930s (Tú et al., "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam").

Beginning in the mid-1930s, some of the first songs with original melodies using Western diatonic harmonization gave birth to "new music" (tân nhạc), an urban, transcultural movement that had come to stay (Tú et al., "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam"). The influence of Western harmonization has been widespread since, pushing indigenous musical concepts of heterophony, rhythmic syncopation, and ornamentation into oblivion.^{6, 7} Most prominent in this period were romantic songs and marches.⁸ One of the most vocal supporters of "new music," Nguyễn Văn Tuyên, advocated using indigenous materials for the melody together with Western notation as a way to modernize Vietnamese music while preserving some traditions. He went from South to North to call for such creativity and received nationwide support (V. T. Nguyễn).

5 Huỳnh Hữu Trung (Tur Chơ) of the South spearheaded this movement. The Vietnamese lyrics were not mere translations but original, sometimes subversive, renderings. For instance, French national anthem "La Marseillaise" had several versions of Vietnamese lyrics about fighting foreign invasion. See P. T. Nguyễn, M. P. Trần, and Gibbs, "Yellow Music Turning Golden."

6 During the Western transculturation process, and throughout Vietnamese music history, however, lyrics from indigenous melodies have always evolved to adapt to the current political and/or cultural contexts (lời mới điệu cổ). See Phạm, "Tân Nhạc Khái Quát," and Tú et. al., "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam."

7 Even the National Conservatories have been promoting "neo-traditional" music (nhạc dân tộc cải biên), indigenous melodies with Western harmonization, in accordance to the government's cultural policies, rather than encouraging the development of indigenous concepts. See (Arana).

8 Some of the first composers and their early works include Lê Yên ("Bề bàng" – 1935); Văn Chung ("Bên hồ liễu" – 1936); Lê Thương ("Xuân năm xưa" – 1936); Hoàng Quý ("Bóng Cờ Lau" – 1938), Doãn Mẫn ("Biệt ly" – 1939), Lưu Hữu Phước ("Tiếng Gọi Sinh Viên" – 1939).

Composers formed groups in major cities to discuss and perform new music and to challenge themselves to compose (D. Phạm, “Tân Nhạc Khái Quát” and Đinh).

By 1945, “new music” had become popular from urban to rural areas with its own diverse repertoires. Music was printed in newspapers, magazines, published as sheet music, broadcast on radio⁹, and recorded. Later, historians would label the songs composed in this period “pre-war” (tiền chiến).¹⁰

EARLY POLITICIZATION OF MUSIC

As a conduit for spreading nationalist sentiments as well as propaganda, music has been employed for many political usages. “New music” (tân nhạc) started to establish its roots in Vietnam in the midst of political changes. The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), founded in 1930, was trying to play a leading role by co-opting various political factions in the North but it was not so successful in the South (Beresford). Since its beginning, the Vietnamese socialist state headed by the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) has already paid a lot of attention to the arts and members of the artistic community. Even before the socialist state was formed, to create a united front against French occupation, in 1943, the VCP organized artists and writers into the Cultural Association for National Salvation (CANS) (Văn Nghệ Sĩ Cứu Quốc) as an effort to mobilize intellectuals and artists for the resistance movement. One of the leaders of the VCP, Trường Chinh, had also written “Theses on Culture” in the same year to clarify the Party’s principles for a

⁹ Radio Indochine, founded in 1946 in Saigon, under program director Nguyễn Văn Cồn, played a central role in promoting new songs. Besides, there were Radio Saigon and Philco Radio founded in the late 1930s in Saigon for commercial purposes; they broadcast cải lương (reformed theater) music, which was widely recorded on Asia, Béka, Pathé, Victor, etc. See Hồ and Phạm.

¹⁰ Covering a wide range of topics from romantic relationships to patriotism, the composers and works representative of this period included: Văn Cao (“Buồn tàn thu” – End-of-autumn melancholy), Phạm Duy (“Cô hái mơ” – Lady picking apricots), Lê Thương (“Tiếng thủy dương” –), Hoàng Giác (“Mơ hoa” – Beautiful dreams), Đặng Thế Phong (“Giọt mưa thu” – Autumn’s raindrops), La Hối (“Xuân và tuổi trẻ” – Spring and youth), Nguyễn Xuân Khoát (“Chờ đợi bình minh” – Waiting for dawn), Hùng Lân (“Rạng đông” – Aurora), Thâm Oánh (“Nhà Việt Nam” – Vietnam Homeland), Hoàng Trọng (“Tiếng đàn ai” – Someone’s melodies).

new Vietnamese culture embodying “patriotism, mass consciousness, and scientific objectivity” (dân tộc hóa, đại chúng hóa, khoa học hóa) (Trường, “Đề Cương Văn Hóa Việt Nam”).

When Japan took over the French posts in Vietnam in March 1945, the last emperor of Vietnam, Bảo Đại, re-established his rule with a provisional government headed by Prime Minister Trần Trọng Kim. This government adopted Lưu Hữu Phước’s “Tiếng gọi sinh viên” (Calls to the students) (1941) with altered lyrics as Vietnam’s national anthem. Within a couple of months, Japan’s capitulation in World War II prompted Emperor Bảo Đại’s abdication, and the VCP moved quickly to gain popular support in claiming victory of what became known as the August Revolution (Marr, “Vietnam 1945: A Quest for Power”). In the same month, a congress meeting at Tân Trào officially adopted Văn Cao’s “Tiến quân ca” (Soldiers’ march) (1944) as the party anthem for the VCP. A month later, Hồ Chí Minh read the declaration of independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and the resistance war against the French began. By 1946, Văn Cao’s song was ratified as the national anthem for the DRV (Gibbs, “The Music of the State: Vietnam’s Quest for a National Anthem”).

In a socialist society, art forms are ways of expression that need some of the strictest measures of control because they can have influences over the masses and can be used as tools for the state’s propaganda (Kraus). After the August Revolution of 1945, Trường Chinh’s “Theses” became more popular among writers and artists, and it was deemed “the first building block in the construction of the official cultural policy” (N. B. Kim). Nationalism was the highest priority, almost to the point of squashing individualism. Therefore, when cases about intellectual freedom needed resolution,

Trường Chinh delineated further guidelines for cultural policy-making in his 1948 “Marxism and Vietnamese Culture.” The CANS evolved into the new Vietnamese Association of Art and Literature (VAAL) (Hội Văn Nghệ Việt Nam) in the same year, acting as an umbrella organization for different Artists’ Associations with membership distribution among all creative intellectuals (N. B. Kim 84). After eliminating several other political factions, the VCP succeeded in establishing itself as a vanguard party, and was ready to implement Marxism in Vietnam (N. B. Kim 39).

When the war against the French began in 1945, many artists followed the “nation-building resistance” banner by moving out of French-occupied areas into interzones throughout Vietnam (N. B. Kim 84). Branches of the VAAL existed in most interzones, but the young state could not control all creative activities; rather, the interzones’ decentralized administration offered artists and intellectuals a place to “meet, create, and exchange ideas in a vibrant atmosphere” (N. B. Kim 31).

During the resistance period against the French, composers wrote mostly about the war of resistance, arousing patriotism and propagandizing for the new government. The government used music, along with other art forms, as a tool to galvanize people behind the revolutionary cause. Well-known artists, who were composing and singing pre-war, romantic songs, retreated to the interzones and turned toward political messages as a source for creativity. The content of songs directed audience toward the resistance effort. Some of the familiar faces and their patriotic works were Đỗ Nhuận (“Du kích sông Thao” – Guerillas on Thao river), Dương Minh Ninh (“Tự túc” – Self-reliance), Văn Cao (“Sông Lô” – Lô river), Nguyễn Hữu Trí (“Tiểu đoàn 307” – Battalion 307), Lê Yên (“Bộ đội về làng” – Soldiers returning to the village), Hoàng Vân (“Hò kéo pháo” – Song

of artillery). The revolutionary leader Hồ Chí Minh and the VCP were also new topics for songwriting as, for instance, in at least three songs with the same title, “Ca ngợi Hồ chủ tịch” (Praises for Chairman Hồ), by Văn Cao, Lưu Hữu Phước, and Đỗ Nhuận, and “Chào mừng Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam” (Greetings to the Vietnamese Labor Party¹¹) by Đỗ Minh. The songs were performed in cultural gatherings in the interzones and broadcast widely (D. Phạm, “Hồi Ký 2”).

Beyond the government’s propagandizing campaign for the war against colonialism via songs tailored toward adults, for the first time, the Vietnamese government paid attention to inculcating patriotism among children. As part of the political agenda, the government began pushing for political indoctrination beginning in elementary schooling in the interzones, as Ninh documented (N. B. Kim 107). The government encouraged songwriting for children, and the composers quickly caught on to the suggestion. Children’s songs came pouring in, mostly with patriotic and familiar content describing images of daily life in the interzones or heroic children and adolescent fighters alongside Uncle Hồ as models. Examples of these themes are “Kim Đồng” (Kim Đồng, a young hero) and “Ai yêu Bác Hồ Chí Minh hơn thiếu niên nhi đồng” (Who loves Uncle Hồ Chí Minh more than us children) by Phong Nhã, “Lý và Sáo” by Văn Chung, “Lớp học trong rừng” (Classroom in the forest) by Phạm Tuyên, “Bé đeo ba lô” (Child carrying backpack) by La Thăng.

Outside of the interzones, the general trend of songwriting for political purposes as endorsed by the resistance government was much more diluted. Those remaining in or returning to the French-occupied areas continued the romantic tradition about personal love, wishes for peace, and general love for the country in songs such as Phạm Duy (“Bà

¹¹ This is another name for the Vietnamese Communist Party.

mẹ quê” – Mother in the countryside, “Tình ca” – Love song), Văn Phụng (“Mơ khúc tương phùng” – Dreaming time of unity), Lê Thương (“Hòa bình 48” – Peace 48).

Closer to the end of the resistance war in the early 1950s, the government began tightening its grip on intellectuals’ and artists’ creativity. The Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China’s cultural policy-making by that point had started to have an impact upon the top leaders of the VCP, Hồ Chí Minh, Trường Chinh, and Tố Hữu, who themselves were occupied as cultural and art theorists (N. B. Kim 85). By 1950, socialist realism imported from Stalin’s Soviet and Mao’s China received the government’s endorsement as the main guidance for creativity. Socialist realism sought to further the goals of socialism and Communism by works of realistic art that reflected the propaganda of the dictatorship of the proletariat (James). In Vietnam, Nguyễn-võ argued that the Party promoted socialist realism to ensure that the Party has always had the main role to play in history and in creating history (Nguyễn-võ, “The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam”).

Combined with the Communist viewpoint (lập trường) in the arts were the 1951 rectification campaigns and publications of self-criticism in 1953, in which artists were forced to go through denunciation of their previous works as “petit bourgeois” or too sentimental with the potential of being anti-revolutionary (N. B. Kim 111). For instance, the Communists banned Southern traditional songs that carried tones of sadness from being performed (Hò). Observing the political change, several composers, like Phạm Duy, left the interzones for the French-occupied areas, such as Hanoi and Saigon (D. Phạm, “Hồi Ký 2”).

SOCIALIST GOVERNING OF MUSIC

The victory of the Vietnamese revolutionary army in Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 symbolically ended the war of resistance against the French. In the Peace Accord signed in Geneva, Vietnam was divided into two halves, with the area north of the seventeenth parallel belonging to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under the influence of the Soviet Union and China, and the region south of the border becoming the new Republic of Vietnam, with the involvement of the French in the late 1950s and later the American during the 1960s and 1970s. Along with the stream of people leaving the North, many artists and intellectuals also migrated away from the grip of the Communists to seek creative freedom in the South. The reverse trend also occurred during the North-South Vietnam war with soldiers, among them several famous composers, from Southern interzones traversing the Trường Sơn Mountains to the North to join the resistance effort against the Americans and their government in the South (Tú et. al., “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” and T. K. Nguyễn, “Những Gương Mặt Âm Nhạc Thế Kỷ”). As a result, music compositions from the North and the South diversified into various styles and topics during the war.

In the North, after the DRV claimed independence from the French in 1954, politics became intertwined with the arts. The DRV re-organized artists and intellectuals in preparation for milling them through the centralized mechanisms of censorship and appropriation of creative works. Eventually, state apparatuses decided which works to purge and which to allow. The government began by centralizing creative activities, urging artists to write for national causes and to send positive messages about the revolution and Party leaders. The government also compelled artists to instill hope for

building a better socialist society (Trường, “Mấy vấn đề văn nghệ Việt Nam hiện nay”) while purging personal, petit-bourgeois, and anti-revolutionary sentiments using forms of economic and political punishments (Tô).

Music in Northern Vietnam

Socialist Structural Organization for the Arts

To accomplish the self-prescribed tasks, the Political Committee of the People’s Army (Tổng cục Chính trị Quân đội Nhân dân) ordered a restructuring of the management organs of culture and arts. In 1955, the state created the Ministry of Culture (Bộ Văn Hóa) from the Ministry of Propaganda (Bộ Tuyên Truyền), which had served the anti-French era. Inheriting propaganda works and incompetent, apathetic cadres, the Ministry of Culture had difficulty fulfilling its duties to monitor and encourage the creation of cultural works. Whereas the Ministry of Culture belonged to the government, the state reorganized the cadres in the original Ministry of Propaganda into the Propaganda and Ideological Training Committee (Ban Tuyên Huấn), a subordinate organ of the Party. In effect, since the Party directed the government’s activities, and the personnel of the two bodies often overlapped, the Ministry of Culture conducted its affairs under the guidance of the Party (N. B. Kim 171). Kim Ninh described the centralized organizational structure of the Ministry, which extended to the local levels,

Nationally, there were five main offices: the Bureau of Publication (Cục Xuất Bản), Bureau of Cinema (Cục Điện Ảnh), Department of Arts (Vụ Nghệ Thuật), Department of Mass Culture (Vụ Văn Hóa Đại Chúng), and Department of Cultural Liaison (Vụ Liên Lạc Văn Hóa)... The Department of Arts dealt with national troupes of all performing genres and of the schools teaching performing arts... At the local level, the Ministry of Culture’s network was to be an integral part of the local administrative structure, with offices in cities, provinces, districts, and communes (N. B. Kim 169-170).

Consistent with the policy of centralization, the Ministry, in particular, grouped 22 state performing troupes into four units, and nationalized all private cultural activities by eliminating private publishers, dictating appropriate content for cultural expression, and founding public performing arts and training schools (Tú et al., “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 304 and N. B. Kim). At the local levels, efforts were made to build cultural houses (nhà văn hóa)¹², going-down-to-the-people campaigns of 1958,¹³ and mass movements aimed at popularizing intellectual and artistic activities.¹⁴ Large festivals of music, dance, and theater were organized and attracted huge attendance. For instance, the 1954 National Artists’ Festival in Hanoi, in celebration of national independence, produced 33 performances for an audience of 168,000; the program included various indigenous and transcultural songs, dances, and instrumental music, with guest artists from China and the Soviet Union (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 303).¹⁵

Once the Vietnam War started in 1965, composers and performing artists were expected to perform for the national goal of winning the war against the American-backed government in the South. For the North, the purpose of the war was to unite the country under one flag. The DRV financed cultural activities and put artists on the state’s payroll either through employment as bureaucrats serving some functions related to the

12 A cultural house, according to the Ministry of Culture’s 1956 definition, is “a place where the peasants of a village come to meet and talk, read books and newspapers, perform, play games, or exhibit agricultural products... also a place meant to guide the cultural activities outside [the village], to guide the xã’s cultural movement” (N. B. Kim 181).

13 The campaigns were intended to familiarize the cultural cadres, intellectuals, and artists with the life of workers and peasants, to send a political message about the benevolence of the authoritarian state, to gather facts about the life of the proletarian class, and, finally, in some cases to punish the intellectuals and artists who showed signs of discontent (N. B. Kim 188).

14 The agenda for the inclusion of all people in the creative process gave rise to festivals of amateur dancers, singers, and musicians, Voice of Vietnam Radio’s broadcasting of amateur performances recorded by their mobile studios, as well as movements for “singing to drown out bombing” (tiếng hát át tiếng bom) when the war escalated. See Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam”.

15 Also see vivid accounts of the festivals together with critiques in Tô Hải.

arts and propaganda or by work-to-order. The pay was limited, mostly not enough for the artists to live month-to-month, so artists had to find other means to survive.¹⁶

After the war started in the mid-1960s, independent artists were recruited to join the army as performers for troops. The artists served the popular needs for entertainment, transmission of ideology, and, probably most importantly, relief of suffering from the poor economic conditions and the life-endangering war while maintaining the hope of victory. As American bombing escalated during the 1960s, creative activities went literally underground and were reformulated as mass movements, such as “singing to drown out bombing” (Đ. S. Phạm, “Ba Mươi Năm Xây Dựng Nền Âm Nhạc và Múa Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Việt Nam” 163 and Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam”).

Another activity of the composers was their organizational effort beginning in 1957, when they formed the Composers’ Association of Vietnam (Hội Nhạc sĩ Sáng tác Việt Nam), a member of the state’s umbrella National Front (Mặt Trận Tổ Quốc). Starting with about 50 members (T. N. Phan), membership had grown to more than 400 by the end of the war in 1975 (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 333). Some of the founders and leaders of the Composers’ Association included Văn Cao, Lưu Hữu Phước, Phan Huỳnh Điểu, Tạ Phước, Nguyễn Xuân Khoát, Văn Chung, and Đỗ Nhuận (T. N. Phan). Composers wrote not only songs but also orchestral and instrumental works, operettas, and choral pieces, yet songs remained the most popular genre. Yet, according to composer Tô Hải’s account of the Composers’ Association, the organization was actually full of composers who did not know how to write music and had no understanding of music theory; for many of them, the only criterion for their election into

¹⁶ Complaints about artists’ financial hardship were documented in critiques published in Nhân Văn and Giai Phẩm as well as in reports and policy recommendations to the government. For example, see Sỹ, Đỗ, and D. P. Nguyễn. For accounts of individual artists, see Xuân.

the association was their loyalty to the Party and their acquaintance with high-ranking officials (Tô 183).

Criticism and Censorship

From 1954 to 1975, building socialism had proven a huge task for the DRV, particularly among artists, whose debates on collectivization and nationalization of the arts remained vibrant to a certain extent in the beginning of a long period under complete socialist control. At the same time, the state set up censorship mechanisms to control artworks and artists. Nonetheless, the system of repression has never achieved perfection and continuously evolves as artists voice their opposition or, ironically, contribute ideas to improve the effectiveness of the system, a phenomenon quite common in socialist countries (Haraszti).

One of the earlier debates centered on the interpretation of Marxist leadership in the arts. For a brief while in 1956, artists questioned and criticized the Party's involvement in the arts in the oft-quoted case of *Nhân văn – Giai phẩm*. *Nhân văn* (Humanism) and *Giai phẩm* (Masterpieces) were two publications in Hanoi from one of the few private publishing houses left after 1954¹⁷ with contributions from well-known authors and critics.¹⁸ Articles by Phan Khôi and Trương Tửu attacked the censorship mechanisms in place and called for freedom of creativity from the social realist paradigm that demanded defining artistic beauty through propaganda, awards, criticism, and education (K. Phan and T. Trương). Although the articles did not negate the Party's leadership role in politics, the authors called for artistic freedom, which they carefully

¹⁷ "According to a 1958 report by the Ministry of Culture, an incomplete survey conducted at the end of 1954 showed some eighty-four publishing houses, located mostly in Hanoi. In the changing political tide, many had stopped doing business, but by 1955 it was reported that there were altogether seventeen publishing houses in Hanoi, with four scattered in Bắc Giang, Vinh, Hải Phòng, and Thanh Hóa," (N. B. Kim 142).

¹⁸ For detailed accounts of the *Nhân văn-Giai phẩm* affair, see N. B. Kim 121-163 and N. T. Nguyễn.

differentiated from political anarchism. Artistic freedom meant, Trương Tửu argued, that artists should develop their own styles and expressions, especially when the Communist political leadership provided the societal conditions conducive toward such freedom of expression. The existing, strict, and narrow guidelines for socialist realism, in Trương Tửu's view, were part of the political leaders' misinterpretation of the true meaning of socialism. Within a year, the state quickly censored the *Nhân văn – Giai phẩm* publications and reprimanded the participants.¹⁹

After the *Nhân văn – Giai phẩm*, there were other publications in literary circles that hinted at or continued direct criticisms of the Party's directives and the state's cultural cadres (N. B. Kim 155-163). By 1958, however, the state had successfully purged all dissident elements by forcing them to undergo self-criticism, banishment from intellectual circles, expulsion from professional organizations, relocation, and imprisonment (N. B. Kim 154-160).

The state blamed the Ministry of Culture for not upholding ideological commitment in the *Nhân văn-Giai phẩm* affair. Hence, beginning in 1958, the Ministry underwent an overhaul to reestablish its authority in cultural matters and policy-making. All private publishing houses were nationalized by 1959 (N. B. Kim 199). Kim N. B. Ninh argued that one of the furthest-reaching impacts of the Ministry's ideological re-orientation was its tightening of the education of the younger generations of artists to ensure that they followed the prescribed ideologies (N. B. Kim 204-236). But beyond education, in an effort to rectify practicing artists' ideology, the Party reasserted socialist realism and only allowed for a monolithic canvas in artistic creativity, "Socialist content

¹⁹ Hồ Chí Minh signed an ordinance regulating newspapers on 12/14/56, and the next day, 12/15/56, *Nhân văn* was banned.

with indigenous form” (văn nghệ xã hội chủ nghĩa về nội dung và dân tộc về hình thức).²⁰

Artists could sense the danger of ostracization looming if they ventured to challenge the Party’s authority, as in the case of *Nhân văn-Giai phẩm* and similar publications.

Therefore, it was best to follow the Party’s instructions or not to produce anything at all.

In the realm of music, the division of labor helped sharpen expertise and turn music into a production process: music critics, composers, and performers were all placed under socialist control (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” and Tô).²¹ The state organized “creative camps” for composers to produce songs in line with national agenda. The camps also fostered a space for making critiques and shaping creative works as well as promoting competition among composers (N. B. Kim 200-201). Composers were directed to utilize indigenous materials, especially highland ethnic people’s melodies and rhythmic patterns with Western harmonization.²² For content, the composers mostly focused on the political themes of winning the war, sacrificing personal sentiments for the collective achievements, mobilizing of the proletariat for national goals, and praising the Party’s leaders and the soldiers on the frontline. The use of indigenous elements aided in popularizing the songs. In addition, marches and the use of the major musical mode conveyed hope and masculinized the songs for the purpose of bolstering military spirit. Even though slow tempos and expressiveness were used in the more sentimental

20 Vietnam’s Labor Party (also Vietnamese Communist Party)’s letter to the Second National Congress of the Arts, “Phần đầu cho một nền văn nghệ dân tộc phong phú” [Working toward Rich, Indigenous Arts], in *Tập san Âm nhạc*.

21 In his memoir, composer Tô Hải, who lived in North Vietnam before 1975, delivered a personal account of life for writers and artists under the socialist, totalitarian regime, confirming other research.

22 In the mean time, the Hanoi Conservatory was instrumental in promoting “neo-traditional” music by borrowing from the Chinese the setup and style of a European orchestra for indigenous instruments and compositions. Even though the state tried to claim the use of indigenous music for excavating nationalist sentiments, the endorsed modernization of traditions shattered the native philosophy of indigenous music, a large part due to lack of true training in indigenous music and possibly the urge to conform to other socialist countries’ cultural policies. See Arana and Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam.”

songs, sentimentality was well-tempered and a forward-looking note often concluded the piece.²³

One music critic from North Vietnam, Nguyễn Thụy Kha, noted about the period 1954-1975, “If we conclude that in this period music has served politics most strictly, then we have to further realize that, among the arts, music was the most subservient. When any political events occurred, music responded immediately” (T. K. Nguyễn, “Nửa thế kỷ âm nhạc từ một cách nhìn [A view on Half a Century of Music]”). The state successfully installed a self-censorship mechanism that was effective enough to block the anti-revolutionary spirit from appearing in creative works; therefore, the Ministry of Culture would not have to be responsible for banning certain inappropriate works because the composers actively stifled the “wrong” creative ideas as they crept into their thought process. Only politically correct musical ideas had a chance to become actualized.

Music in Southern Vietnam

Music serving politics

From 1954 to 1975, while the government in the North organized, directed, and gradually nationalized all aspects of creativity, artists in the South had relatively more freedom to express themselves, although their freedom was limited from time to time under the excuse of national security. This liberality meant that, within the realm of “new music,” there were quite a few themes, a number of trends, and several movements. Though the Southern government did subsidize composers to write songs with political

23 Among the popular songs of this period were Lưu Hữu Phước’s “Giải phóng miền Nam” [Liberating the South], 1960, under the penname Huỳnh Minh Siêng; Nguyễn Văn Thương’s “Dân ta đánh giặc anh hùng” [Our people fight the enemy heroically, 1966]; Thuận Yến’s “Mỗi bước ta đi” [Every step we march, 1965]; Huy Thực’s “Tiếng đàn ta-lư” [Sound of ta-lu, an ethnic instrument, 1967]; Phạm Tuyên’s “Như có Bác Hồ trong ngày vui đại thắng” [As if Uncle Hồ were still with us on the joyous day of victory, 1975]; Hoàng Hiệp and Đăng Giao’s “Câu hò bên bờ Hiền Lương” [A chant on the riverbank of Hiền Lương, 1957]; Phó Đức Phương’s “Những cô gái Quan họ” [Ladies singing Quan họ, 1966]; Nguyễn Đức Toàn’s “Biết ơn Võ Thị Sáu” [Homage to Võ Thị Sáu, 1958]; Hoàng Hiệp and Phạm Tiến Duật’s “Trường Sơn Đông, Trường Sơn Tây” [On the East side, on the West side of Trường Sơn Mountains, 1972]; and Hoàng Việt’s “Tình Ca” [Love song, 1957].

messages supporting the regime and its leaders, calling young people to arms, or summoning the Communists to surrender, other themes in songwriting such as anti-war and escapism were permitted to exist to a certain extent alongside political songs. But the government of the Republic of Vietnam did organize several apparatuses to promote, direct, and censor the content of creative works, especially those blatantly criticizing the government and/or supporting a pro-Communist agenda.

After the 1954 Accord, among the composers who moved South were Phạm Đình Chương, Văn Phụng, Nguyễn Hiền, Ngọc Bích, Đan Thọ, Nguyễn Túc, Trịnh Hưng, Canh Thân, Vũ Thành, Phó Quốc Lân, Nhật Bằng, Huyền Linh, Hoàng Trọng, Phạm Mạnh Cương, and Thẩm Oánh. Compared to the North, creative activities in the South at that time were initiated by individuals rather than mobilized by the state, and the market drove popular music instead of the state's directives. However, there were several instances of censorship on the basis of political or cultural reasons. The late 1950s, for example, saw the closure of dance clubs and brothels because President Ngô Đình Diệm wanted to clean up the society. Hence, privately-owned music clubs mushroomed and provided a venue for singers and composers (Hò). The state also organized music festivals, though not as extensively as did the government in the North. Delegates of performers were also sent overseas to compete. However, not many composers went overseas to study music, largely because they had to self-finance rather than receive state support as their counterparts in the North did (Hò).

Politically, the First Republic of Vietnam under the reign of President Ngô Đình Diệm (1955-1963) promoted anti-Communist sentiment in music-making. During President Diệm's rule, in an attempt to make his subjects worship his dictatorship, the

national anthem was sung with a song, “Suy tôn Ngô Tổng thống” (Admirations for President Ngô). Some of the anti-Communist songs included Trọng Khương’s “Về Miền Nam” (Going Southward), Nguyễn Hiền’s “Tiếng Than Miền Bắc” (Grievances in the North), Chung Quân’s “Hận Bến Hải” (Vengeance at Bến Hải River), Hùng Lân’s “Con Đã Về Đây” (I’ve Come Home) (Hồ 134-135).

When the war escalated in the 1960s, official demands for propagandistic, militaristic songs grew. Minh Kỳ, Trần Thiện Thanh, Lam Phương, and Trúc Phương were among the prolific composers for this genre; some of the singers like Duy Khánh, Chế Linh, Nhật Trường, and Thanh Thúy also associated themselves with the genre and became very successful (Hồ 123). At the same time, Communists from the North set up the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, an insurgent organization infiltrating the territory of the Republic. The Front created organizations to criticize the government for allowing unhealthy cultural behaviors such as prostitution and snack bars (Hồ 254). Censorship in the South could also be arbitrary, depending on the personnel in the Ministry of Information and Culture. From 1972 to 1975, the performances of Chế Linh, a popular voice for country-style genre of songs, were banned because his performances were thought to weaken the soldiers’ warrior spirit (Hồ 273)!

Music for entertainment

Unlike the Northern socialist government, who preferred marches over dance music, Southern Vietnamese government did not prohibit entertainment music. European and American dance rhythms, such as those of the waltz, rumba, mambo, cha cha, tango, habanera, boléro, and later the twist, slow and slow-rock, had attracted urban followers since the early 1930s and prompted composers to write more songs based on the rhythmic

patterns (Hồ; Gibbs, “Rumba on the Mekong: Bolero as a Vietnamese Popular Song Form”). In the South, the mambo, rumba, and boléro provided rhythmic patterns to many easy-listening, folk-like songs, termed “nhạc sến,” a style of composition which garnered much popularity in the rural areas and denoted a lower-class social status. Hoàng Thi Thơ, Trúc Phương, Trần Thiện Thanh, Khánh Băng, etc., were among the Southerner composers famous for love songs written in this style (Hồ; Gibbs, “Rumba on the Mekong: Bolero as a Vietnamese Popular Song Form”).

Later on, beginning in the 1960s, another wave of foreign music, this time pop-rock together with the use of electronic instruments, crashed onto the Southern shore and swirled a large group of adolescents and young adults to the beats of Elvis Presley, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Johnny Halliday, and Dalida. The Southern government, once again, did not prohibit the foreign influence. Appropriately, this style of music and its subsequent adaptation to Vietnamese popular music through translations of lyrics came to be known as “nhạc trẻ” (music for youngsters), an escape valve from the war. Vietnamese musicians and singers formed bands with English names like The Dreamers, Strawberry Four, and The Uptight, to perform rock music in clubs that serviced not only Vietnamese but also American soldiers whose presence was keenly felt after the war escalated in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, the Southern government even sponsored a “nhạc trẻ” concert (Nam). Another escapist venue of expression popularized by the duo singer-composer Lê Uyên-Phương consisted of existentialist songs philosophizing about life, love, and death (Hồ 281-312).

The relatively relaxing political censorship in the South allowed room even for anti-war compositions. As the war continued during the 1960s, several composers, most

notably Trịnh Công Sơn, wrote songs in opposition to the war, depicting its atrocities and yearning for the peaceful reunification of the country. Trịnh Công Sơn published his song collection “Kính Việt Nam” (Prayers for Vietnam) after the Tet Offensive of 1968. The anti-war movement helped spread his songs. Even though the police watched his steps, and they might even have suspected him working as a Northern Communist spy, Trịnh Công Sơn was unharmed throughout the war in the South (Liên).²⁴

Several other popular movements involving singing, acting, and dancing, aimed at bringing music to the people and introducing daily-life reality into music (“du ca” with composers Nguyễn Đức Quang, Ngô Mạnh Thu, Phạm Duy, Phan Ni Tấn, and Trầm Tử Thiêng), also appeared around this time. The songs spoke of the history and the people of Vietnam in styles suitable for large gatherings to arouse passions for Vietnam, in contrast to extremely sentimental love songs (DuCaVN).

Yet love songs still made up a large proportion of Vietnamese compositions in the South, mostly uncensored by the Southern government at the time of their publication and/or broadcast. However, most of the same songs were collectively labeled “yellow music” (nhạc vàng) and deemed socially sick by Northerners during the war. These songs spoke of sentimental love, broken hearts, and selfish emotions, which were topics viewed as unfit for the fighting effort and the cultivation of revolutionary spirit. When Vietnam reunified in 1975, the socialist government expanded the term “yellow music” to cover songs by most composers in the South during the 1954-1975 period whose political viewpoints were on the enemies’ side or politically ambiguous. This type of music encompassed most of the categories of songs discussed thus far for the South

²⁴ Liên Thành was a former high-ranking, spy-watching official in the Southern Vietnamese government, based in Huế, the central province of Vietnam and Trịnh Công Sơn’s hometown.

(Taylor). The enemies, as most Southerners soon found out, included the obvious American invaders, Vietnamese anti-Communists, and all others who might have different opinions than the Northern government.

Socialist grip after reunification

The equation of “yellow music” with “anti-revolutionary” and the term’s new coverage after 1975 became most evident just three weeks after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. The new government immediately launched a long-term cultural initiative in South Vietnam to “wipe out reactionary and degrading culture” (bài trừ văn hóa phản động và đồi trụy). The campaign targeted “literary works and musical compositions published before 1 May 1975,” all of which were banned. According to the official daily Sài Gòn Giải Phóng, by the first week of the campaign, the government systematically confiscated 462,456 items in Saigon, which was renamed Hồ Chí Minh City, and ordered the burning of thousands of books, sheet music, and sound recordings in public within the first month (T. H. Lê).

From then on, purges of culturally harmful materials have taken place regularly. Within six months of 1981, Tạp chí Cộng Sản [Communist Review] reported the number of materials confiscated in Saigon far exceeded those in Hanoi: 60 tons of books compared to 167 copies, 41,723 compared to 1,216 music tapes, 53,751 songs and paintings compared to none, respectively (Taylor 124). Even decades later, in the first couple of years in the twenty-first century, the amount of bootlegged and pirated copies of various cultural products confiscated annually in Saigon has remained colossal. In 2003, the Municipal Culture and Information Administrative Unit (Sở Văn Hóa Thông Tin, hereafter SVHTT) collected 800,000 video, audio, and data discs, 9,738 books, and

10 tons of unfinished products.²⁵ In 2004, the institution destroyed 20 tons of “culturally poisonous materials” (văn hóa phẩm độc hại).²⁶ Another 20 tons were eliminated in 2005.²⁷

Spectacles of fire devouring the cultural products of the South reflected some of the government’s measures to turn the whole country into a socialist utopia. Despite its call for unity and peace, the socialist government’s priority was to brainwash the Southerners by subjecting them to physical hardship as well as mental re-education in camps. Several artists were able to leave prior to the South’s capitulation. Quite a few artists, who could not get away in time, escaped by boat throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Once abroad, the composers and singers in exile often voiced their opposition and criticisms of the socialist government, and the government further condemned them as traitors and members of reactionary factions (Nam).

Within Vietnam, beginning in 1975, the government put a priority upon installing and organizing cultural cadres at the local level in the South, applying centralized mechanisms to prevent the emergence of counter-revolutionary thoughts and behaviors among Southern artists, nationalizing creative and publishing venues, and continuing the campaigns to confiscate and destroy decades of creative work. Under the guidance of the Fourth Party Congress in 1976, groups of composers were mobilized to take fieldtrips and resettle in remote areas to contemplate, understand, and produce songs appropriately related to the glory of the victorious Party and the reunified country. Vietnam’s war with and occupation of Cambodia (from 1978-1989) and war with China (1979) also became song topics for patriotism. By the late 1980s, composers wrote more than 1,000 works on

25 See “Kết quả hoạt động văn hóa thông tin 2003” (SVHTT).

26 See “Hoạt động văn hóa thông tin 2004” (SVHTT).

27 See “Đánh giá tình hình hoạt động văn hóa thông tin 2005” (SVHTT).

the socialist realist topics of industry, agriculture, commerce, and transportation (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 655).

Around 1978, the government began promoting a movement to perform political songs (ca khúc chính trị) throughout Vietnam, with the original aim to broadcast messages about loyalty to the ruling Party and socialist realism. By 1982, the participants in the movement transformed it to include electronic bands and pop-rock songs similar to those of the “music for youngsters” (nhạc trẻ) movement before 1975. The movement dwindled away in the mid-1980s (Hữu). In the mean time, despite the wiping-out campaign, pre-1975 songs with familiar singers reappeared in black markets and on overseas Vietnamese-language radio programs by the British Broadcast Company and Voice of America, whose broadcasts penetrated Vietnam via short-wave radio. The penetration of diasporic music was alarming to the cultural cadres and quite telling about the dry-and-boring, officially-sanctioned music (Dương).

MARKETIZING MUSIC AND GOVERNANCE

The Sixth Party Congress in 1986 opened Vietnam to economic liberalization. Thereafter, the Party took a double-edged approach to art. On the one hand, as the Party had defined the role of cultural and creative works as tools for the Party’s leadership and nationalistic projects, the government could not allow as much cultural freedom as it would in economics. Freedom of expression remained (and still is) a threat to the government. The Party and the state have also stayed constantly watchful of the black-market invasion of pre-1975 and the compositions of Vietnamese in exile (“Danh mục bài hát trước 1975”). Even after 1986, all creative works from Vietnam or elsewhere still

had to go through a censorship committee for approval before getting to the public (“Hội đồng thẩm định nghệ thuật TpHCM: Đang chờ những thay đổi”).

On the other hand, the state encouraged “socialization” (xã hội hóa) of cultural arts; this means creative projects lose umbrella subsidies by the state but could still be financed by non-state actors such as corporations and individuals or even the state but only on a competitive basis. In terms of rhetoric, Nguyễn Đình Thi, a former secretary of the Writers’ Association, proposed change to the slogan, “Arts to serve politics” (Văn nghệ phục vụ chính trị) into “Arts to serve the revolution” (Văn nghệ phục vụ cách mạng). Similarly, Huy Du, a former secretary of the Composers’ Association, proposed speaking of “arts under the Party’s leadership” (văn nghệ dưới sự lãnh đạo của Đảng) rather than “Party directing arts” (Đảng lãnh đạo văn nghệ) (Đ. Trần 182). However lighter the revised rhetoric may sound, the state and the Party continued to occupy leadership roles in determining the directions for arts and culture (Luân).

As economic reforms took hold in Vietnam, the market demanded the revival of love songs, which were then deemed less dangerous to the government. After some revolutionary composers returned to the theme in the early 1980s, others followed their footsteps. Vietnam also embarked on a new industrialization-modernization national project (công nghiệp hóa hiện đại hóa đất nước), so self-expression was permitted as part of the project. Moreover, globalization had an impact on Vietnam’s economy, and, along with that, it led to receptivity to foreign music. Although overseas Vietnamese works remain under watch, foreign pop-rock music began to flood the Vietnamese market in the late 1990s. There was the return of American, Chinese, Korean, English lyrics translated

into Vietnamese, and the influence of foreign tunes in Vietnamese songwriting (Thanh and N. V. Trần).

As music regained its commercial value after the government allowed the market to operate again in Vietnam, commodification of governance became the new process that renewed and refueled the government itself. Since the government retained its authority over commercial releases of music products, it could decide which products may hit the market. With the power to grant permission, the government can sell the right to produce in the form of a seal of approval and can make money from the censorship process. Music production in post-socialist Vietnam, which includes both audio-visual products and live shows, survived by satisfying the government's requirements, paying the government for permission to participate in the market, and holding onto the laws of supply and demand from the market.

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the history of governance of music in Vietnam. Government's control of cultural production under socialism in the North and in post-1975 South Vietnam helped put in place the structure ready for the commodification of governance to take place later on under marketization. The next chapter will examine the particular relationship between nationalism and socialism during the resistance movement through the period of building of socialism. The subsequent chapter will focus on recent history of post-socialism and the transformation of the involvement of nationalism and the commodification of power after the logic of the market entered governance.

Chapter 2

THE SOCIALIST NATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF MUSIC

The socialist movement, later institutionalized into a party and finally a government in Vietnam (Woodside, “History, Structure, and Revolution in Vietnam”), has sought constantly to foster an ideological partnership with nationalism against colonialism in the mid-twentieth century (Connor). And a socialist nation was born in the North in 1945. Post-colonial nations struggling over state-building may find the concept of nationalism as “a theory of political legitimacy,” per Ernest Gellner (Gellner). Beyond that, Craig Calhoun expanded the concept of nationalism to include “the preeminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to ‘the people’ of a country” (Calhoun). Indeed, after 1945, the neonatal, post-colonial state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North invoked the rhetoric of nationalism in its attempt to build a socialist society by using nationalism as an ideological tool in the process (Pelley).

In this chapter, I will discuss how the socialist, Leninist state hijacked nationalist sentiment for socialist advancement in building the Vietnamese post-colonial society to serve the state organization. Hồ Chí Minh and his associates depended on nationalistic sentiments to build the Vietnamese Communist Party’s strength. Since the Party was able to be more persuasive to more Vietnamese people under the cloak of nationalism, the Party became of the leaders in the struggle against foreign forces. After emerging as the top party, the VCP eliminated other nationalist forces and focused on building socialism in Vietnam (Woodside, “History, Structure, and Revolution in Vietnam”).

Benedict Anderson famously theorized the nation as an imagined community (Anderson). As Vietnam began the state-building process, the leaders in the VCP decided to transform and purify the way the nation was imagined. Patricia M. Pelley argued that the VCP adapted features of Marxism but rewrote history to keep frozen an official vision of Vietnam: “a state-centered society unperturbed by internal divisions and unmarked by the passage of time” (Pelley 58). Nationalism helps actualize the socialist state’s agenda of centralization by providing a common denominator to unite different factions in the society. The revised vision of Vietnam after 1954 was one “unified in language, territory, economy, and culture” despite the potential ideological conflict with international Communism (Pelley 82). During the socialist state-building period from 1945 to 1965, the state of Vietnam and the Party forged the spirits of unity and collectivity, akin to a religious tone, with rigorous attempts to break down what they viewed as sinful individualistic sentiments among members of the society (N. B. Kim 116-117).²⁸

The production and consumption of music, given the art form’s potential widespread influence, showed the linkage forged by Communist leaders among the government, nationalism, and the masses under the government’s rule. In music, the government dictates the content, via the producers, as a means of delivery of nationalist and socialist messages to the consumers. In this chain of mass cultural production, the producers either comply with the government’s directives and appropriate the content as their own, or act on their own will with the risk of the government accusing them of anti-

²⁸ The author wrote about intellectuals’ life transformation after the revolution, of which similarities could be found among artists: “Images of light, the perception of truth, and of being saved and guided by a higher authority allowed intellectuals to be reborn as blank slates, children who would now be shaped into useful adults under the guidance of the Party...The Party and its companion, the revolution, became fully reified” (N.B. Kim 117).

Also, see Tô. In his memoir, composer Tô Hải, who lived in North Vietnam before 1975, delivered a personal account of life for writers and artists under the socialist, totalitarian regime, confirming other research.

revolutionary activities. The consumers in the totalitarian state, generally speaking, do not have many choices other than what the government feeds them (Haraszti).²⁹ A relatively small “black” market exists on the side, but when the government assumes its Leninist role, non-state sectors could easily be crushed (Fforde and De Vylder).

Nationalism, the Vietnamese people’s sentimental investment in their land, has granted the socialist government of Vietnam the appearance of promoting an ideology that pertains to the common good of its citizens, whose interests have been vested in the land within the national borders. At the same time, the government has always been ready to use its supreme power to preserve its inviolability, one mechanism of which is censorship, and music serves as a typical target and vehicle to transport the government’s messages. Therefore, the tight ruling structure, that houses the spirit of nationalism which has sealed together the Party and the nation into one package, dictates the kind of music to be produced and performed to serve the nation, the government, and the Party, by fixating on the ideology of social collectivism, while rejecting capitalist individualism (Tô). The reference to socialism was clear in Trường Chinh’s “Thesis on Vietnamese Culture,” where the Politburo leader prescribed clearly the order of the socialist revolution: First, political revolution; then cultural revolution; and finally socialist reform; all must be led by the Party.³⁰ The political revolution set up a new structure of government, and the Cultural Revolution reformed the way people as a collective think and act. Thus, music plays an important part in the socialist society-building agenda. In the end, a complete socialist society, which melded together the government, the Party, and the nation, became firmly in place.

²⁹Haraszti wrote about a typical socialist state using the example of Hungary and how it deals with artists in general. I borrow his theorization toward the case of music.

³⁰ The article referred to the Indochine Communist Party, the predecessor to the Vietnamese Communist Party (Trường, “Đề Cương Văn Hóa Việt Nam”).

Composer Văn Cao lived through the socialist, Leninist state in the North, and became subject to the post-socialist structure at the time of marketization. I chose his story to recap the development of the Leninist-style government, its deployment of nationalism to serve the government's interests, and particularly its monopoly over music production to drive the masses toward the spirit of collectivity and to forge a cohesive nation. A composer friend of Văn Cao, Phạm Duy, chose a different path by leaving the socialist North for the South when Vietnam was about to be split in half, and his experience deviated from that of Văn Cao. I borrow Phạm Duy's account of his life as a composer in the South to contrast with Văn Cao and sharpen my analysis.

Văn Cao

Born in Hải Phòng on November 15, 1923, Văn Cao originated from a blue-collar, working-class family. Vietnam during his teenage years was bustling with movements toward modernity, from industrialization to modernizing literature and the arts to pockets of resistance against French colonialism. For example, Hoàng Ngọc Phách wrote one of the first Vietnamese modern novels, published in the North in 1925, and the 1930s witnessed a series of romantic novels, most famously by the Tự Lực Văn Đoàn writers. About the same time, the first art institution for colonial Vietnam, École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de l'Indochine, was founded in 1925 in Hanoi and graduated several classes of Vietnamese artists who combined Western techniques on indigenous media. The music scene was also filled with attempts to indigenize Western-style music, at first by translation of only the lyrics, followed by original compositions of both lyrics and music.

In high school, Văn Cao learned music, but he dropped out early due to his family's financial situation. He turned to martial arts and became one of the very few composers who were proficient at the trade, which later put him in assignments beyond the cultural arts as he served the Viet Minh revolution. Văn Cao began composing in 1939 with the first song “Buồn tàn thu” (Melancholic end-of-autumn), which a friend and also famous composer, Phạm Duy, helped make popular by singing it in music gatherings. During the next couple of years, Văn Cao wrote romanticized music and lyrics typical of the pre-war style, accentuating the beauty of love, nature, and memories, that quickly propelled him to the rank of nationally-known composers. His songs, “Thu cô liêu” (Deserted autumn-1940), “Cung đàn xưa” (Old-time music-1940), “Thiên thai” (Fairies' haven-1941), “Bến xuân” (Spring harbor-1942), “Suối mơ” (Dreamy stream-1943) drew up the pastel colors of unrequited love. Văn Cao also wrote poems and painted. Only once, he participated in a group exhibition with three oil paintings, one of which titled “Dance of the suicide,” receiving many accolades, but none of the paintings was sold. Văn Cao, at the time, was struggling financially even when his music had become popular from North to South Vietnam (T. K. Nguyễn, “Văn Cao – Người đi dọc biển”).

Văn Cao, up to this point, was a typical case of a pre-revolutionary romantic artist and composer. Like romantics in his cohort, he wrote poetically of individual romance, of sad love, of private relationship between two persons. The individualized sentiments expressed in Văn Cao's songs captured a lost generation, as one critic would label it retrospectively (V. Nguyễn), who had not seen the light of guidance from the Communist Party or become enlightened by revolutionary ideals.

Many young people around the time of French colonialism were very much like Văn Cao, with amorphous dreams and clouded futures. The socialist movement realized the void in leadership and gradually offered a grouping where starving and lost individuals could band together. Socialist cadres actively recruited new members to form a political force in the name of resistance against colonialism.

As he was literally starving in 1944, Vũ Quí, a friend of his and an official in the socialist movement, recruited Văn Cao to serve the revolution and become eligible to get on the army's payroll. Văn Cao quickly attained "enlightenment" after joining the revolution, however, and shed his past romanticism with equal speed. From a person lost in romantic sentiments without seeing any light at the end of the tunnel, Văn Cao now woke up to the cause for fighting, an organization to fight for, and comradeship.

As Văn Cao's involvement with the revolution escalated, he came to head an assassination unit and published underground anti-colonial materials. By this time, he came to know the woman soon to be his wife, a daughter of a photographer who owned a studio and a print shop, which helped facilitate Văn Cao's involvement with the revolution. Văn Cao orchestrated and participated in assassinating several Vietnamese nationals accused of being spies or collaborators with the French and the Japanese. He worked at the print shop to make flyers and bulletins propagandizing for the revolution. Among the publications was *Độc Lập* (Independence), a newspaper with an aim to coax the petit bourgeois to join the Democratic Party, one of the facades of the Communist Party.

At its birth in 1945, the provisional, precursorial socialist government of Vietnam, in reality more like a revolutionary movement among existing movements, already

showed its totalitarian agenda in the production of nationalistic cultural products. The government's control extended further and became more elaborate as time went on. During the revolution, Việt Minh was comprised of many political and militia groups, both Communist and non-Communist. In fact, at the time, the Communist forces shared power with other non-Communist groups, but the former's organizational skills helped them to eventually consolidate power. The Communist cadres blended in other nationalist movements, hiding well behind the armor of nationalism to fight colonialism (Pelley). Văn Cao worked with a Communist cadre in exchange for basic provisions at the time when Northern Vietnam was experiencing starvation; yet, being an idealist himself coming from a proletarian background, Văn Cao was easily aroused by the patriotic call to fight against colonial oppression.

Besides actively fighting in the revolution, Văn Cao also contributed his musical talents. Vũ Quý commissioned Văn Cao to write songs for the revolution. Văn Cao immediately switched from writing romantic songs to composing a series of songs celebrating the soldiers and their winning battles, glorifying the revolution and legitimizing its cause in fighting the French and Japanese colonialists. One of the starters, “Tiến Quân Ca” (Song of the Advancing Army), was composed in 1944 and later brought fame to him via its election to become the national anthem (T. K. Nguyễn, “Văn Cao – Người đi dọc biển”).

Văn Cao recalled, Vũ Quý assigned him to write a song for the revolutionary army to rally warriors' spirits in preparation for fighting the Japanese (Nghiêm, “Vài tâm sự của nhạc sĩ Văn Cao về Tiến quân ca”). The songwriting instructions from Vũ Quý, an experienced Communist cadre, had nothing to do with socialism or the messages from the

revolution of the proletariats to advance toward international Communism. Rather, the song that Văn Cao was to compose should have had everything to do with arousing passion to fight the colonialists in the name of patriotism. After agonizing for hours, Văn Cao began with the first few notes of the tune. He recounted being inspired by anger and sadness, seeing people starving and dying around him, which exploded into the image of the Vietnamese army advancing under the flag of national salvation, leading the whole country out of colonialism. In November 1944, he himself made the plate for the song to be published for the first time in the underground *Độc Lập* [Independence] newspaper (Nghiem, “Vài tâm sự của nhạc sĩ Văn Cao về Tiến quân ca”). President Hồ Chí Minh approved Văn Cao’s “Tiến Quân Ca” as the national anthem of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on August 13, 1945, before his declaration of independence. At the First National Congress meeting in 1946, “Tiến Quân Ca” [Song of the Advancing Army] was officially made the national anthem, and the selection was inscribed in the 1946 version of the DRV Constitution (Cục Văn Hóa Thông Tin Cơ Sở).

From the first note to the last, Văn Cao’s “Tiến Quân Ca” was purely nationalistic. Images of blood, guns, and corpses appear all over the lyrics of “Tiến quân ca” (Song of the Advancing Army). The nation’s army in its revenge would “eat the liver” and “drink the enemy’s blood,”³¹ symbolizing its resolution to wipe out invaders. Văn Cao used the plural pronoun “we” repeatedly to depict the collective will and acts of the revolution. There was no mention of the individual, considered lost in the collective effort to “rescue the nation,” all “with one heart.”

Song of the Advancing Army

Go Viet Minh army with one heart to rescue the nation's,
Ever louder, footsteps echo on the rugged road.

³¹ Văn Cao’s original lyrics, by some oral accounts, later revised to “quarter the corpses”.

The flag, imprinted with victory's blood, bears the nation's soul.
The sound of distant guns vie with our martial song;
The road to glory is built upon our foes' corpses.
Conquering adversity, Vietnamese troops will open the theater of war.
Vow to quarter the corpses³² and drink the enemy's blood.
Advance quickly to the battlefield.
Advance! Shout out together!
Our prayers are located here in our young men's wills.

Go Viet Minh army, gold star fluttering in the wind
Lead the race out of this miserable place
Together, with our common strength we'll build to make a new life.
Let's arise and smash our shackles.
Even if our corpses are scattered and our bones are smashed, don't be discouraged
Try to sacrifice so our lives will be brighter.
For so long we've swallowed our anger
Where are our weapons? Let's hit the road!
Hey everybody! Don't let your hearts forget!
Bắc Sơn Đô Lương and Thái Nguyên.

Translated by Jason Gibbs from the 1944 version (Gibbs, "The Music of the State: Vietnam's Quest for a National Anthem").

From the national anthem to subsequent songs, Văn Cao devoted his craft to glorify the army, the battles, the collectives, ignoring the portrayal of the individual's sentiments, which were loaded in his previous creative period. But the collective "we" in Văn Cao's songs called for sacrifices toward nationalistic, not socialist, goals. After "Tiến quân ca," Văn Cao wrote "Chiến sĩ Việt Nam" (Vietnamese Warriors) for the two military branches in existence at the time: the army and the cavalier. His vision for the army went beyond the available resources, for he also wrote "Không quân Việt Nam" (Vietnamese Airforce) and "Hải quân Việt Nam" (Vietnamese Navy) for the air and navy forces that were yet to be organized. In 1947, Văn Cao composed "Trường ca Sông Lô" (Epic song about the Lô River), depicting the battles on the famous river, where the Vietnamese army was first defeated and then came back victoriously. In the songs, Văn

³² Jason Gibbs translated Văn Cao's lyrics printed in 1944 with the gory phrase "eat the liver" replaced by "quarter the corpses."

Cao produced the image of the nation unambiguously as one fighting the enemies, which were clearly the colonialists and their associates. There was nothing fuzzy in logic and no room for different interpretations.

The revolutionary Việt Minh movement of Vietnam, the predecessor of a socialist state, was hiding well under the ideology of nationalism to recruit cadres like Văn Cao, to unite the political front by eliminating other nationalist factions also fighting against the French, and to consolidate power. As the revolution demanded it, Văn Cao provided the cultural materials to cultivate a sense of patriotism among the people. It was common in this period for composers to write patriotic songs. Văn Cao's composer friend, Phạm Duy, also wrote a similar series of songs for the revolution, as did other composers in the same period. Following Việt Minh's call to arms, Văn Cao and Phạm Duy took their families and retreated to different interzones to fight the French. They contributed to the cultural front of the revolution with the songs they wrote and helped spread the message of nationalism for the Communists. For some time, Văn Cao operated a bar in a mountainous area as a place for revolutionaries to gather and exchange information while Phạm Duy wrote songs and entertained soldiers. However, the gulf between the two composers widened as Phạm Duy left the interzone in 1951 and returned to French-occupied Hanoi, then Saigon. Văn Cao stayed behind.³³

Văn Cao and Phạm Duy

Tracing the line of songs written by Văn Cao and Phạm Duy after the latter left for the South provided the contrasting picture necessary in understanding the establishment of governmental apparatuses to control cultural production in the North as

33 See T. K. Nguyễn, "Văn Cao – Người đi dọc biển." Also, see Phạm Duy's memoir. After Phạm Duy returned to Vietnam permanently, the website has no longer been accessible. An edited version of his memoir was then published by Phương Nam Films in Vietnam.

the region became the socialist part of the country. From 1954, when the Geneva Accord split Vietnam in half, the tentacles of the socialist regime in the North began to pull in creative forces and organized them to serve the government. Under the government's directives, composers packed nationalism into cultural products for mass consumption. Because of its centralized mechanisms of control and propaganda, the socialist government could organize huge festivals and conferences on performing arts, which used to attract hundreds of performers (Tú et al. "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam" 301-303).

The production of the nation through music promoted history as an embodiment of the state, whereby the government was able to appropriate and legitimize the state's history in fighting the French and, later, the justification of fighting the Americans as invaders on ancestral land to reunify Vietnam (Pelley). The songs make statements about the war, describe succinctly the protagonists and the antagonists, and create nationalist sentiments for mass consumption. When the government got control of the content and form of music and gained the ability to dictate the appropriate materials for mass consumption, the composers either complied with the system in existence or became ostracized from it. The government's repressive methods of rule produced compliant subjects, either through their politically correct works or their silence, for staying silence meant no outwardly behavioral resistance, regardless of what the subjects were thinking or feeling.

Văn Cao apparently stopped writing songs for a while after 1951. He worked as an editor for *Văn Nghệ* magazine and was elected a board member of the Vietnamese Association of Art and Literature (VAAL – Hội Liên hiệp Văn học Nghệ thuật Việt Nam). He published an epic poem titled "People by the seaport" (Những người trên cửa

biển) in 1956 with dissident poets Lê Đạt, Trần Dần, Hoàng Cầm, all participants in the Nhân văn-Giai phẩm movement (NVGP).³⁴ In 1958, he composed three pieces for piano solo. From 1963 until his death in 1995, Văn Cao wrote little music, only a couple of songs, a chamber symphonic work, and a few film scores. He had become effectively silenced in the aftermaths of NVGP as discussed in Chapter 1.

Phạm Duy, after moving to Saigon in 1951, continued songwriting. His output, unlike Văn Cao, was extremely prolific, and this was a key difference between a composer living in the repressive, socialist regime in the North versus one flourishing in the relatively freer South. Phạm Duy wrote all kinds of songs for many purposes, covering a wide range of topics from love to politics. In the North, Phạm Duy was viewed then as a traitor, who had turned his back on the revolutionary movement and promoted an unhealthy cultural lifestyle with too much individualized sentiments through his songs (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 626-628). But in the South, Phạm Duy was regarded as an iconic figure in Vietnamese music, for his creativity in songwriting. Not all concepts presented in his songs passed the Censorship Bureau in the South, but most did.³⁵ Phạm Duy was given airtime on the radio, and he also traveled around to promote his songs (D. Phạm, “Hồi Ký 2”). According to personal interviews with two persons³⁶ who worked in committees accessing the merits of creative works for broadcasting or publishing in South Vietnam, the broad criteria for censorship were whether the work promoted Communist ideology and/or whether the work could be

34 The Nhân văn-Giai phẩm affair refers to a political controversy in Northern Vietnam from 1955 to 1958. The initial relaxing of political restrictions prompted intellectuals to publish their opinions about the socialist system, demanding more freedom and democracy, in several volumes of Nhân văn and Giai phẩm periodicals. The government quickly shut down the publications and put the participants in jail. See discussion in Chapter 1.

35 The Censorship Bureau in the South, according to personal interviews, allowed for most creative works to be broadcast or printed, except for those who blatantly supported the socialist regime in the North or were deemed culturally inappropriate. The two criteria used, informants told me, were quite arbitrary, depending on the personnel staffing the bureau at the time. Relatively speaking, the South was still more open than the North before and during the time of war.

36 The interviewees wished to remain anonymous.

deemed obscene according to Vietnamese culture, the latter category being very opaque. Furthermore, one person admitted that most items passed censorship, and many items that were spurious, or at least questionable, sometimes went through censorship as well due more to personal whims of the committee members than to any clear-cut basis.

Văn Cao did not leave for the South, but singers still performed his pre-war love songs in the South during the country's division period from 1954 to 1975. One artist-writer, who migrated to the South, admired Văn Cao as “an artist above all artists” (Tạ Ty). Meanwhile, Văn Cao's works, except for the national anthem, received death sentences in the North. These all began with his involvement with the NVGP group.

Văn Cao and Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm

In the first Spring 1956 issue of *Giai Phẩm*, Văn Cao published the poem “Anh có nghe thấy không?” (Have you heard?), which was critical of the society and the corrupt administration. The issue was quickly confiscated, and the Party reprimanded poet Trần Dần and writer Tử Phác. But the height of prosecution for speaking out for artistic independence from politics was yet to come. Văn Cao would not feel the political retaliation for his participation in the NVGP movement for the next two years. In 1957, members of the newly founded National Composers' Association still voted Văn Cao into its executive board (T. N. Phan). He continued to publish his dissenting opinions about literature and the arts.

By 1958, sensing the danger of dissension among artists and writers, demanding for more freedom of expression, the VCP's Politburo passed a resolution condemning the NVGP group as “saboteurs on the ideological and cultural fronts” (Abuza). The VCP then sent hundreds of writers and artists to re-education courses and forced them to take

fieldtrips to faraway provinces. A couple of writers and artists were imprisoned; many were effectively silenced. As a punishment, Văn Cao lost his memberships in the Writers' Association and the Artists' Association and was removed from the office of the Composers' Association (Gibbs, "The Music of the State: Vietnam's Quest for a National Anthem"). He had to write a self-criticism and became the subject of harsh condemnations by poet Xuân Diệu in the latter's publication. Xuân Diệu accused Văn Cao of producing outdated bourgeoisie ideology in his writings and insinuated that Văn Cao was organizing NVGP artists into an anti-government, anti-revolutionary movement.³⁷

Together with writers Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, Nguyễn Tuân, artist Huỳnh Văn Đứng, and composer Nguyễn Văn Tý, Văn Cao received an order signed by Tố Hữu, a poet and member of the Politburo, sending them on a fieldtrip to learn about "real life" in a remote area at Tây Bắc (V. T. Nguyễn).³⁸ The rationale behind these "real-life" fieldtrips was for the writers and artists to shed their petit-bourgeois thinking and become more in touch with workers, farmers, soldiers in the socialist society, one of the ways to train for socialist realism.

Văn Cao did not write any music again until 1963, when he was commissioned to compose a film score. None of Văn Cao's poems were published until 1985. After the war ended in Vietnam in 1975, there was even a failed attempt to replace the national anthem (Gibbs, "The Music of the State: Vietnam's Quest for a National Anthem").

37 See D. Xuân. Xuân Diệu wrote, "những tư tưởng văn nghệ của Văn Cao, bóc trần ra, chỉ là một mớ bùng nhùng bèo nhèo quan điểm nghệ thuật tư sản, tại sao nó không phát ngôn ra ngay cuối thời Pháp thuộc, mà Văn Cao để dành ấp úng mãi, vừa rồi, đã mười mấy năm sau cách mạng, mới nín lấy "thời cơ" mà phất nó lên thành cờ, thổi nó ra thành kèn, hòng tập hợp văn nghệ sĩ sau lưng mình?"

38 Composer Nguyễn Văn Tý recalled the trip in an interview by Nguyễn An on Radio Free Asia, 9/19/08, also mentioning that Văn Cao became ill, however, and the trip was cut short to deliver him into the hospital.

The production of music under the socialist regime

The socialist regime could not mold Văn Cao into a socialist producer according to its wish, but the government did produce a compliant subject out of Văn Cao the composer. Văn Cao stayed silent for some time without producing anything, but he was not actively resisting the system, either. Except for the universal national anthem, people living in Northern Vietnam almost forgot Văn Cao, for his pre-revolutionary music was no longer performed.³⁹ Văn Cao's unhappy story, however, did not mean that music production stopped in the North. Composers still produced a sizable volume about the war, calling for victory against the Americans and the South, about the socialist world and its beauty.

The Ministry of Culture was founded in 1955. In the next several years, it organized the performing arts into several units: the People's Central Song and Dance Unit (Đoàn Ca Múa Nhân dân Trung ương), the Southern Song and Dance Unit (Đoàn Ca Múa miền Nam), the Vietnamese Philharmonic Orchestra (Dàn nhạc Giao hưởng Việt Nam), the Choir (Dàn hợp xướng) [both of which were combined into the Vietnamese Orchestra, Choir and Opera Theater (Nhà hát Giao hưởng – Hợp xướng Nhạc Vũ Kịch Việt Nam)], the Central Traditional Music Unit (Đoàn Ca nhạc Dân tộc Trung ương), the Voice of Vietnam Music Unit (Đoàn Ca nhạc Đài Tiếng nói Việt Nam).

The government perceived music, like other art forms, as a profession that needed professional training and development, which was also a part of social engineering toward a socialist society. Upon its formation, the Ministry of Culture began to train a new generation of artists and re-train the older generations to accept the socialist thinking

39 Even in a commentary article published in the North on pre-war music from 1930-45 by Trương Đình Quang (Vài ý kiến về tình hình âm nhạc thời kỳ 1930-45), after citing all the prominent names and their romantic versus revolution songs, Văn Cao was mentioned only in a footnote very briefly as belonging to the same category of composers who wrote both types of songs, the former condemned by the socialist government.

mode and to produce socialist beings. The Arts branch of the Ministry of Culture actively organized courses and schools. The government invited professional trainers from the Soviet Union, North Korea, and China to drop by to conduct master classes and seminars in music and dance (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 311).

Like a sweatshop manufacturing ready-to-wear shirts, the government’s training mechanisms were churning out professional composers and musicians with a socialist tendency. According to the official version of music history, popular songs (ca khúc quần chúng) during the 1954-1975 period served to build the socialist society as well as to encourage people to fight against the American occupation in the South (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 335). The socialist content of songs became diversified beyond patriotism, praise for the Party and the leaders, and international communism. Composers tackled topics pertaining to socialist realism, glorifying the socialist subjects of workers and farmers. At the same time, they wrote songs to attack the Americans and the Southern government in a campaign to bolster the soldiers’ morale in fighting the war.

Since its inception, the socialist government’s cultural policy has always encouraged the use of folk elements in music compositions, and composers incorporated traditional Vietnamese music more extensively (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 337). Folk elements mark out Vietnamese music from other countries’ music, which is important to the process of branding the nation for consumption. The socialist Northern government encroached upon every individual’s private life (N. B. Kim). And each person was bound to accept the products of nationalism, especially in music consumption. Since there were almost no other alternatives such as pop, rock,

sentimental music which spread wildly in the South, the music produced in the North had a definite, captive audience, and furnished a kind of “precious immunity” from foreign music influences.⁴⁰

In the South, composers like Phạm Duy and Hoàng Thi Thơ also used folk elements in their music. However, the difference between the North and the South was mostly in political, agenda-based productions versus composers’ individual choices in composition, respectively, for mass consumption. The need to write music for nationalistic purposes in the North originated from the state through music instruction in schools, whereas the need in the South came mostly from the demand of the mass market.⁴¹ Even anti-war, anti-government music survived in the South. An often-cited example was Trịnh Công Sơn, a pacifist songwriter whose songs was extremely critical of the war in the South. Lưu Hữu Phước, a leader of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFL), also known as Huỳnh Minh Siêng, wrote songs to promote the revolution and popularized them among students and followers in the South (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam”). Although the Southern government might refuse to give airtime to these songs on radio stations, this did not keep the songs from being copied and transmitted from person to person and sung in informal gatherings. Sometimes, the Southern government did order that specific songs be written to serve political purposes, such as anti-Communist propagandas or calls to Northerners to defect to the South. However, these were particular orders for certain composers.⁴² This was different from

40 See “Những khúc dân ca giao duyên cổ truyền trong di sản văn hóa dân tộc ngày càng thâm nhập vào tiềm thức thẩm mỹ của các thế hệ trẻ, tạo ra một sự ‘miễn dịch’ rất đáng quý,” in Tú 405. The so-called “precious immunity” sounds more like an assertion on the part of the music commentators and music historians. After 1975, when electronic keyboards were introduced to the North, the Northern younger generation quickly caught onto the music they did not have a chance to hear before, producing a whole new generation of composers and a break from the styles previously known to them.

41 A censorship bureau existed in the South before 1975 to censor cultural materials, mostly on political ground. See Võ. I also confirmed with author Võ Phiến in a personal interview in Santa Ana, California, in 2007.

42 I conducted interviews with two composers in Saigon who had published music in the South before 1975 but wished to remain anonymous, 7/13/06 and 12/4/06.

the North, where there was a blanket agenda that composers either had to comply or withdraw from the music scene and stop composing altogether, as in the case of Văn Cao.

Music education during wartime

The ubiquitous promotion of folk elements in modern compositions was on the teaching agenda for the newly founded Vietnam School of Music in the North since 1956. Some of the most famous composers belonged to the first class of composition: Hoàng Việt, Hoàng Hiệp, Huy Thục, Trương Đình Quang, etc (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 323). Their graduation from the School of Music established their status as professional composers, not just amateurs writing music. The school had taught them how to write modern music using traditional folk elements, and their job would be to apply the skills learned.

Beyond the professional Vietnam School of Music, there existed several branches of short-term music educational institutions serving local populations throughout the North. The purposes of the local schools were geared toward training cultural cadres with enough music knowledge to conduct group activities and toward preparing a younger generation to enter professional schools. Even though the localities of the schools were in the North, students were recruited in the South and the Highlands to be sent north to attend the schools. After completing their studies, they could return to the South to participate in the war against the Americans and South Vietnamese.⁴³ The professional Vietnam School of Music also trained students from neighboring Laos and Cambodia (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” and Tô).

Together with recruitment and training, the Party also mobilized researchers and cultural cadres to collect and study Vietnamese folk music. The Ministry of Culture

⁴³ Northern Communists planted the National Liberation Front in the South to fight against the South Vietnamese and the U.S. army during the war (1959-1975).

issued instructions to cultural cadres and experts to form committees for the collection, preservation, studying, and teaching folk melodies, musical instruments, and folk dances. The official Committee for the Study of Music (Ban Nghiên cứu Âm nhạc) included Hoàng Kiều, Phạm Sửu, Phúc Minh, Vân Đông, Trần Kiết Tường, Nguyễn Viêm, Nguyễn Tài Tuệ, Lê Toàn Hùng, Nguyễn Ngọc Oánh, and new graduates from the Vietnam School of Music such as Tô Ngọc Thanh, Hồng Thao, Vĩnh Long, Lê Quang Nghệ, Lê Huy. After the NVGP affair, composer Văn Cao also joined the Committee in 1959 to do research and menial jobs, staying away from creative activities as cultural cadres had denounced his music to be deteriorating-romantic-bourgeois in spirit (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” and T. G. Nguyễn).

The collection of folk-related cultural elements until 1975 was quite impressive: more than 1,500 melodies and oeuvres, nearly 6,700 folk songs from 44 ethnic minorities, 121 traditional music instruments, more than 4,000 folk music-related photos and paintings, and numerous artifacts (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam” 327). The Committee also published many documents and books on the study of folk music.

The extensive collection of folk arts aided in music education and research, advanced awareness of folk cultural preservation, as well as legitimized the legacy of the Party. The Party, through its cultural arms, connected nationalism to socialism by claiming folk culture as an indelible part of the Vietnamese people; hence, the government was able to force onto the Vietnamese people the idea that there was not much of a difference between nationalism and socialism, the ideology of the day. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education aligned the system of research and education with the Party’s directives in order to promote socialist nationalism as a

product for mass consumption. Especially during wartime, the ideological product was extremely necessary to galvanize support (besides coercion) behind the war. North Vietnam, by choosing the Communist ideology, was closed to the capitalist half of the world and only knew the other socialist half. This choice closed off other possibilities for the masses, leaving whatever the government, via the Party's directives, presented to them. The government also forced music as a cultural product into the same production line in producing compositions that used folk elements to make them familiar to the masses and sell the associated nationalism tied to folk culture. The government accomplished this task by structuring the educational system to produce the kind of desirable composers who would write desirable, socialist-nationalist songs, eliminating unwanted features of capitalist ideology by punishment.

Songs to educate children in the socialist regime

The socialist regime paid particularly strong attention to rearing children and forming them to fit the mold of socialist citizens. Specifically, music has served as a mass educational vehicle in transporting ideology to young minds. The Party's educational and youth organs promoted songwriting for youth among composers. The Ministry of Education published the first collection of children's songs in 1956 for official use to teach music in schools. The Central Children's Committee (Ủy ban Thiếu niên Nhi đồng Trung ương), the Youth Labor Brigade of Vietnam (Đoàn Thanh niên Lao động Việt Nam), and the Composers' Association (Hội Nhạc sĩ Việt Nam) organized songwriting contests in 1962, 1967, 1968, and 1973 (Tú et al. "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam" 441). Given the awareness of the need for this genre, most professional composers wrote at least a few children's songs.

The children's song content mirrored the adult version. During the French resistance period (1945-1954), children's songs praised war heroes and heroines, promoted patriotism among youth, and incubated a sense of reverence for the Party and the leaders, particularly Ho Chi Minh. After independence from the French, children's song topics expanded to include concepts of parents, home, school, daily activities, the love of nature, and representatives of the proletariat such as soldiers, workers, farmers, etc. Then during the war with the South, children's songs also included themes about wishes to take back the South. Melodies in children's songs were often easy to sing and to memorize, and they were in musical major keys to promote positive spirits.

A song by Mộng Lân, for example, attempted to engrave in children's minds the idea that they belonged to the younger generation that would inherit the Party's revolutionary tradition. His song, "Em là mầm non của Đảng" (I am the baby bamboo shoot of the Party), described the pride of a young person growing up during the revolution, happy to see the Party lead, and likened the Party to the sun that shines on victorious ideology. Another song by Phạm Tuyên, "Chiếc đèn ông sao" (The star-shape lantern), combined in short verses the traditional mid-Autumn lanterns, which generations of children learned, with the yellow star as a patriotic symbol on the red flag of socialist Vietnam, and the wish to push out the invaders and take over the South as the star shines Southward.

Even though none of the Northern Vietnamese children during the country's division period (1954-1975) had ever seen the South, composers used images of the beautiful, lush South in their songs to promote the idea that the South and the North should be reunified into one Vietnam. The dream of the South, for instance, was

expressed in Hoàng Long – Hoàng Lê’s song “Em đi thăm miền Nam” (I visit the South) and Hoàng Nguyễn’s “Miền Nam của em” (My Southern region).

Hồ Chí Minh, the supreme Communist leader, also became a popular topic for children’s songs. Xuân Giao’s “Em mơ gặp Bác Hồ” (I dream of meeting Uncle Hồ) depicted a child’s love for Hồ Chí Minh as an elder uncle in his/her family. The portrait of Uncle Hồ captured in the song emphasized his familiar long beard and white hair, features that children could identify easily. In the song, a child even kissed Uncle Hồ on his cheek, danced and sang for him, and received his praises in return. Phạm Tuyên’s “Ai yêu các nhi đồng bằng Bác Hồ Chí Minh” (Who loves children more than Uncle Hồ Chí Minh) also propagandized Hồ’s patriarchal love for children and vice versa.

Children during wartime were used to the idea of mothers working and fathers fighting in the war, thus absent from home. Hàn Ngọc Bích’s “Đưa cơm cho mẹ đi cày” (Meal delivery for mom in the field) was a song about a child having to bring the meal to his/her mother who was plowing in the field. Plowing was considered a man’s job, but all the men in the village had gone to war, leaving the women to take on this heavy load. During the 1960s when the war escalated, the experience of having to evacuate due to bombing in the North was described in Phạm Đức Lộc’s “Bé bé bằng bông” (The stuffed doll). As the child evacuated with her family (the gender implied was probably female rather than male, as boys would not be playing with dolls), she would hold the doll as her mother pushed her in a wooden cart out of the city. When the country won the war, the girl would return to the city.

From a young age, children became acquainted with images that glorified the ideals of socialism, the value of labor, the unquestionable leadership of the Party and Hồ

Chí Minh, the structure of a socialist, patriarchal society, and how they should dutifully obey their Party, the nation, teachers, and parents, perhaps in that particular order. The nation was the big family. Hence, socialist leaders became elders that should be respected by all in the national family of Vietnam. The goal was to produce “future working citizens who would be loyal to the people’s democratic regime and have all the quality and capability necessary to serve the resistance and the people” (N. B. Kim 208). Music helped spread the teachings and ideology quickly and effectively via the school and the oral tradition. Children listened to songs, memorized them, sang them, and passed them on to their friends. Composers also knew how to present the teachings and the ideology in the most unambiguous manner so that messages delivered to children were pure and untainted by other harmful thoughts or ideas. Thus, music became one of the primary conduits for promoting the image of loyalty to the Party through indoctrination from an early age. Similarly, songs for adults served as instruments of socialist propaganda.

Songs during wartime

An effective way to control the composition process was to administer a neighborhood-watch system, where one would be watching one’s neighbor for extraordinary activities and reporting any wrongdoing to the local police immediately. In the North, particularly in urban areas like Hanoi, people lived in an over-crowded environment, so privacy was a luxury that few, if any, enjoyed. When someone was constantly watching over someone else, the only options were to keep silent, to comply with the Party’s directives, or to speak out and accept the punishments that entailed. After the NVGP affair in the late 1950s, Văn Cao chose to keep silent for many years,

writing poetry in his notebook which he shared only with his wife (T. B. Nghiêm). He was somehow shielded from the onslaught of persecution of the NVGP people probably because his name was associated with the national anthem.

If a composer were to write music according to his own predilection that was not dictated by the common trends of the day, he would not have a place to publish, broadcast, or perform it. Hence, such compositions would be pronounced dead even before birth. The state had learned a lesson from the NVGP affair that artists should not be allowed to express themselves outside of the Party's frame of thoughts.⁴⁴ The harsh ramifications for those involved in the NVGP affair taught others not to commit the same mistake by expressing themselves through any means that might influence the public. Even expressing oneself privately was not easy, given the cramped living environment and constantly watchful eyes of neighbors.⁴⁵ The forced self-punishment in the form of self-criticism alone had the potential to drive the perpetrator into insanity, notwithstanding other forms of ostracization and removal from society through imprisonment or forced labor in remote camps (N. B. Kim). Furthermore, the government's monopoly of power extended to its absolute power over punishment, which Foucault referred to as the kind of power that can be both individualizing and totalizing. The government watched the subjects and disciplined them into a uniform group with similar thoughts, behaviors, desires, and beliefs. At the same time, the government also kept track of subjects who fell out of the parameters set by the government for appropriate treatments such as imprisonment and re-education in labor camps to bring them back into the norm.

44 See N. B. Kim, particularly chapter 4 "Intellectual dissent: The Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm period." Also see Tuấn Nguyễn's dissertation on the NVGP affairs.

45 For a detailed account of urban Hanoi during wartime, see Turley 370-397.

Hence, the repertoire of possible songs written by potential composers was limited by the Party and the state's cultural framework. To serve the war against the American and the Southern government, and to inject socialism as an ideology into everyone's mind, the songs had to contain particular lyrical and musical content. Some of the popular genres were marches, songs for collective singing, love songs, choral works, and song cycles. The collective received more emphasis than the individual; the personal sentiments of the masses were castrated as in the examples below.

In the beats of the soldier advancing south, composers paid particular attention to writing marches. The common 4/4, sometimes 2/4, time signature and strong, regular rhythm drove a march forward. On top of the music, the lyrics at times depicted a cheerful, forward-looking mood, at other times an anger-arousing mood was expressed. Mostly, lyrics contained messages about the battles, praises of the Party, the leaders, and the army, and patriotic pledges to win the war. In 1964, when the war escalated in the North with American bombing, the Composers' Association took the lead in organizing fieldtrips for composers to visit sites where bombing had just occurred to write about the attacks (Tú et al. "Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam" 343). Socialist realist compositions probably could not have been created without realistic, situational inspirations. Composers did not simply work from their imagination; they were charged with a duty to study reality before putting their pens down to compose. Without direct sources of inspiration from reality, a possible danger of the return to petit-bourgeois sentimentality might be lurking. Hence, this was one way to keep the composers in line with the Party's directions. The result of the 1964 fieldtrips were Đỗ Nhuận's "Giặc đến nhà ta đánh" (When enemies come to our doorstep, we fight), Văn Chung's "Từng bước đi vững chắc"

(Firmly step by step), Tô Hải's "Sẵn sàng bắn!" (Ready to fire!), Trần Thụ's "Nhanh tay lưới, chắc tay súng" (Quick to catch the fish, firm on the firearms).

Besides the marches, there were a variety of songs composed with a socialist, patriotic purpose. People sang them at social gatherings and at work, and they were performed on the radio as a means of propagating messages to the people. There were social songs for the masses, which were the easiest to sing and became popularized, as well as sentimental songs for solo performances.

The social songs for the masses were characterized by a cheerful spirit, moderate to fast tempo, and easy-to-sing melodies, and were graced with folk elements from time to time. Socialism as an ideology about advancing the proletariats blended with nationalism in song content revolved around the love of the fatherland, wishes for peace, descriptive praises of particular provinces to accentuate their beauty, the work and progress contributing to the war effort, the famous battles, the everyday work to build and rebuild a war-ravaged society, the positive spirit of the proletarian workers and farmers, and the ethnic people's contribution to the society. When possible, folk music would be incorporated in songwriting. Nguyễn Xuân Khoát's "Hò kiến thiết" (Song for building the nation) was an example of the genre using folk elements such as a call-and-response type of singing during work, reflecting both the spirit of the working class and patriotism in rebuilding the country already ravaged by war. Nguyễn Văn Tý's "Bài ca năm tấn" (Song about five tons) employed elements of Northern theatrical music (chèo) in motivating the farmers to meet the five-ton rice quota in order to help the North win the war. Trần Chương's "Con trâu sắt" (The iron buffalo) metaphorized the tractor as it replaced the buffalo for plowing the fields and propagated the image of the soldier

retiring from the army to work the field in peace. There were also Phạm Tuyên's "Bài ca người thợ rừng" (Song about the forester) and "Yêu biết mấy con đường" (Love for the roads), Hoàng Vân's "Bài ca giao thông vận tải" (Song about transportation), Lưu Cầu's "Về đây với đường tàu" (Come back to the railways) praising the work of the rail workers, An Chung and Trương Tuyết Mai's "Tôi người lái xe" (I the driver) and "Xe ta ơi lên đường" (My truck, let's go).

Satirical messages against lack of diligence in work, for instance, sometimes graced the repertoire. Songs of this type were not numerous. Vĩnh Bảo's "Cô gà mái mơ" (The hen) and "Nhắn cô mấy điều" (A couple of messages to you) carried satirical critiques of people who did not want to commit to a labor-based society or tried to avoid work. Based on the small number of satirical songs compared with the much larger repertoire of socialist and nationalistic songs, I would deduce that the government did not encourage satirical songs because the tendency to become satirical might lead to further critical thinking about the supposedly perfect socialist paradise. Therefore, most of the songs published during the socialist, wartime period contained direct, easy-to-understand, positive messages rather than anything that might have double meanings, ambiguity, or different interpretations.

The subject indicated in the songs was often a collective rather than an individual because they were identified with the working class, the common people. Doãn Nho and Hữu Thịnh's "Năm anh em trên một chiếc xe tăng" (Five brothers on a tank) described the collective spirit of the soldiers in fighting the war, resembling five fingers of one hand, all with the feeling and action coordinated as one. Vũ Trọng Hối's "Anh hùng đâu cứ phải mày râu" (Heroes don't have to be male) praised the involvement of women in

work as in shooting down American bombers. Nguyễn Đình Phúc's "Bô lão chúng ta còn dẻo dai" (We seniors are still strong), Nguyễn Văn Tý's "Trúng rồi các cụ ơi!" (We seniors hit the target!), and Đỗ Nhuận's "Hát mừng các cụ dân quân" (Singing in celebration of the senior militia) described the role of seniors in fighting the war, from shooting down American bombers to guarding the fields. The message was clear: everyone should contribute to the same cause, collectively.

In sentimental songs, even when the subject of the song should or might have been an individual, even with slower tempo and with feelings, the subject was supposed to transmit the idea that the individual represented a collective, and the singers and listeners were supposed to feel the spirit of the collective through the music, not through an individualized experience. When a singular subject came into the song, the person played the role of a model that exemplifies virtues of a sacrificial or hard-working spirit. Thus, the end-product continued to support the idea of the collective. The songs written in such a spirit contributed to the propaganda effort of promoting socialism. Therefore, the sentimental songs written in the socialist nation-building period were very much different from the songs that Văn Cao wrote in the romantic era before joining the Communists to fight colonialism (see discussion elsewhere).

Sentimental songs in the socialist period often utilized folk elements, especially those that accentuated sentimental feelings or were indigenous to the song's description of a geographical area. Hoàng Hiệp and Đăng Giao's "Câu hò bên bờ Hiền Lương" (Chanting on Hiền Lương Riverbank, the geographical mark dividing North and South Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Accord) exemplified the use of Southern folk characters in the melody, while employing folk-influenced lyrics to describe the yearning to be

reunited with loved ones on the other side of the river, which divided Vietnam in half. Hoàng Vân's "Quảng Bình quê ta ơi!" (Quảng Bình my hometown!) became one of the most popular and famous provincial songs (tỉnh ca). It had the folk chanting and call-and-response elements of the Quảng Bình region as the song fashioned a musical and lyrical painting of the landscape and famous landmarks.

The private melted into the public even in some of the most sentimental treatments of subjects such as family love. Composers wrote songs to emphasize the image of the nation as a big family, and the family units making up the big family, if necessary, were always to perform their duties in sacrificing for the big family, which symbolized the nation, the motherland, and the patriarchal figure of leadership like Hồ Chí Minh. Nguyễn Văn Tý crafted a Northern folk lullaby-influenced melody in "Mẹ yêu con" (Mother's love for children, 1956), and his lyrics described a mother's suffering in carrying a child in her womb for nine months before giving birth, which served as a simile for a country going through nine years of war of resistance before reviving as a victorious nation. Đào Ngọc Dung's "Địu con đi nhà trẻ" (Carrying the child to kindergarten, 1968) used ethnic Thai folk lullaby to describe the mother's love for her child and the patriotic claim that the child would own the land and the future of the nation.

As most composers were male, they often objectified female subjects through their involvement as subjects of the songs. An Chung's "Đường cày đăm đàng" (Responsible plowing tracks, 1966) served as a propaganda song for the "Three Responsibilities" (Ba đăm đàng) campaign in which Northern Vietnamese women assumed responsibilities for production at work, for housework in the family, and for

fighting the war from where they lived. Thái Cơ's "Thư ra tiền tuyến" (Letter to the frontline, 1966) contained the wife and lover's exchange with her partner at war. Phạm Minh Tuấn's "Qua sông" (Crossing the river) paid tribute to the women working as communication liaisons for the front. Doãn Nho's "Người con gái sông La" (Girl of the La River) used folk elements to allude to the heroism of the girls in the region of Nghệ Tĩnh. Huy Du's "Nổi lửa lên em" (Girl, put on the fire, 1968) took inspiration from a female soldier who fought the war to her last breath.

The topic most absent from the songwriting during wartime was intimate relationships. It was probably permissible to love the family, the nation, the Party, and the leaders, but intimate love between two persons (that is, heterosexual, since homosexuality was always a political taboo) should stay muted. The lack of songs about intimate relationships set the South, where love songs populated the field of songwriting, apart from the North. After all, crafting songs in the South was not completely a state-controlled activity even though songs went through the censorship bureau to weed out Communist propaganda before publication or broadcasting. However, the South did not have a centralized directive about cultural production as in the North. Meanwhile, the North recoiled from songs that had music and lyrics resembling the pre-war period, those of Văn Cao, for instance (V. Nguyễn). The North, indeed, began labeling sentimental songs about love relationships in the South during the war as "yellow/jaundice music" (nhạc vàng), a kind of sickly creativity that weakened the country's warrior spirit. Therefore, the state in the North prohibited listening, singing, and writing the type of "yellow music" so popular in the South, and music critics slashed "yellow music" to death (Vũ, Chí and Loan).

Intimate relationships as a topic for songwriting in the North had to maintain ties with love for the nation as in Hoàng Việt's "Tình ca" (Love song). Hoàng Việt was a composer from the South who migrated north to join the army. He left his wife in the South, so the song he wrote was for her to be transmitted via radio broadcast to the South, where she could listen to his message of personal love inside the envelope of patriotic love of the nation. Thus, a consequence of state-influenced music was a focusing of topics covered to a more socialist and nationalistic theme.

The Party's broad concern lay in the building of nationalistic sentiments among artists and writers, who belonged to the category of cultural leadership for the masses. Nationalism served as the foundation for the revolution and for adapting to socialism, and the petit-bourgeois individualism in the works of artists and writers was viewed as an obstacle to socialist advancement (N. B. Kim and Pelley).

Songwriting and the shaping of socialist society

Popular composers strictly stayed on the political track prescribed to them when writing songs in the North during the war against the South and the Americans. Songs were popularized by radio broadcasting (T. Phạm), public performances, and usage in social gatherings and workplaces (Đ. S. Phạm, "Bàn về nhạc nhẹ [On light music]"). They carried particular socialist and nationalistic messages to help educate and guide the society toward socialism (examples of songs previously described in this chapter). The use of folk elements in songwriting contributed to the ways songs could be popularized by feeding listeners with melodies that might sound more familiar to them while inculcating a sense of national pride through the music. The state and the Party used nationalism to sell themselves and their socialist ideology to the masses. The state and

the Party branded nationalism onto their ideological product of socialism in order to make it more palatable to the masses, impressing upon them the idea that socialism was the only correct path toward independence of the nation, which, in turn, would lead to happiness and prosperity (Hà).

In the process of branding nationalism onto socialism, the state silenced composers like Văn Cao. The state controlled the artists' paychecks as all cultural productions became nationalized, so artists either complied with the state's wishes and produced what the state wanted them to produce or left their professions as artists (Tô). State scrutiny of artists' works ensured filtering of unsafe, reactionary materials (even sentimental, "yellow" music was considered reactionary) (Cửu, "Âm nhạc phản động"), so artists would fare best to commit to self-censorship before the state had a chance to sort out reactionary from non-reactionary materials.

Since risk-taking in artistic creativity was not a clear option for most, the state could ensure no unpleasant surprise in deploying nationalistic sentiments to build a socialist society. The Leninist state had also built mechanisms to control the society so that members of the society stayed in line with the Party's direction. Duties to the nation, which was synonymous with the Party, came before the family and the individual as expressed in many of the songs composed during wartime. The social was also the political in a Leninist society.

The repressive structure of the Leninist state offered the basis for the extension of itself, the post-socialist state, in which commodification of governance and the continuous monopoly on patriotism became possible. The monopoly over patriotism allows the Party to adjust the way it sells the nation as appropriate to the current situation.

As the Leninist state with its totalitarian governing apparatus moves to post-Leninism, or a transformed extension of Leninism, my next chapter will examine how nationalism is deployed again to help sell the government in the new arrangement of its structure. The nation becomes a trademark affixed to goods and services, which allows the producers to retain the surplus value. When producers can make a profit from their products, the government and the officials representing the government collect revenues not only in the legal forms of taxes and fees but also through the unofficial form of bribery. Both of these revenue generators are essential to the survival of a post-Leninist state. The final price of these transactions is then passed on to the consumers. Meanwhile, the government does not loosen its grip on the society, since post-Leninism is an extension of Leninism. The government continues to control the content of cultural products such as music, now under the occasionally “invisible” cloak of nationalism. In this “invisible” cloak, the government can magically hide its apparatus, yet its power and presence do not necessarily diminish.

In the next chapter, I shall explore the Party’s use of nationalism as a way to sell its brand, including the revival of the long-silenced, pre-war music of Văn Cao, as long as the cultural product is profitable. I shall also point out the mechanisms in place that helps commodify governance so that the government may rule without distraction from authoritarianism.

Chapter 3

NATIONALISM AND GOVERNANCE COMMODIFIED

IN A POST-SOCIALIST STATE

In the photograph, a frail, old man sat quietly in front of a black grand piano, hands on his knees. He did not play, keeping his head down, eyeing the black-and-white keyboard. His hair was snow white, providing contrast to the black suit he was wearing. In the spacious room with French windows swung open, where he was sitting, someone had put a blooming branch of peach blossoms, typically seen at Tet time, or Lunar New Year's celebration, in Hanoi. The peach blossoms and the opened windows seemed to promise youthful changes, but the old man appeared oblivious to signs of spring, perhaps buried in his own memories.

The photograph was of Văn Cao (1923-1995), a composer since the pre-war music period (nhạc tiền chiến) and author of the national anthem for socialist Vietnam; the photographer, David Alan Harvey; the magazine, National Geographic, November 1989. Documenting Vietnam at the dawn of economic liberalization, a reform movement termed *đổi mới*, the magazine borrowed the image of a composer who had seen much and lived through the vicissitudes of history in Northern Vietnam, as an icon to capture a stereotype about post-socialism, with some sense of irony.

Already known for the national anthem, Văn Cao's pre-war songs spearheaded the post-socialist movement to revive romantic music written before the war. After years of silence, besides his one song chosen to be the anthem, Văn Cao's music has become a necessary staple of contemporary music scene in Vietnam after *đổi mới*, the economic reform period starting in 1986 following the failed socialist experiment. After 1975, the

North Vietnamese socialist regime implemented socialism in the South, and the results were disastrous. The properties of capitalists were confiscated; daily commodities turned into monthly rations; black markets sent prices sky-high while per capita income plummeted. To reverse the economic situation which sent Vietnam spiraling downward for a decade after 1975, the government began its economic reform programs called *đổi mới* in 1986 (Beresford and V. T. Trần).

Đổi mới in economics spilled some degree of liberalization over into cultural production. Both nationalist and sentimental music have become commodities serving the market in the new economic reform era, when the government started to allow for some degree of freedom to trade. Yet cultural liberalization came in fits and starts; the first attempt to change the conception of culture after *đổi mới* lasted for less than a year before the Party pulled back for fear of excessive expression that would be harmful to the nation, the Party, and national security. Then slowly the Party released its grip again in the early 1990s, at a time when the Party became less paranoid. Moreover, the cultural producers have learned quickly that the Party had always been watching.

In this chapter, I argue that the period since *đổi mới* established an extension to the period of building socialism, which provided a pre-existing structure for particular attributes that fashioned a different model of the neo-liberal state than the one commonly known in the West. The post-socialist state entails the process of commodification of power, which enables government to rule without having to switch from authoritarianism.⁴⁶ Scholars have argued that the state in the West, however, commodifies its power by shifting the responsibilities to pay for services to its citizens, thus increasing effectiveness for the ruling apparatus (Rose).

⁴⁶ As suggested in chapters 1 and 2.

I further argue that, beyond the state, the nation also became conveniently commodified in the post-socialist period to strengthen the structure of governance to serve the Party's monopoly of cultural production. By "nation," I draw upon Gellner's assertion that "nationalism... engenders nations, and not the other way around (Gellner 55)," in which a nation is a collection of history and ethnicity interpreted as a force to draw a collective together and assign its members a common identity. The nation, as embodied in cultural productions such as music products and contests, can be packaged, bought, sold, and used as a means for the Party to legitimize its rule over Vietnam in time of globalization.

To clarify, I consider the Vietnamese post-socialist government as a hybrid extension of the socialist, Leninist predecessor. The concept of a hybrid extension is useful to understand how the Vietnamese government's socialist, bureaucratic tentacles elongated into the ruling of contemporary society, without fully shedding socialism. The logic of a socialist government grafted onto the logic of the market and gave birth to a hybrid logic of the post-socialist government. The government continues to be controlled by the one and only Communist Party, which still dictates guidelines for the creative process and products. Furthermore, the logic of the market induced a change from socialism to post-socialism while providing the basis to form a hybrid batch of tools to rule. A post-socialist government employs the market, including the commodification of governance, where the market would be most useful in producing capital for the state, helping the government maintain its strength to rule. At the same time, the hybrid nature of the government resides in the combination of Party-ruled socialism and partially marketized economy, as in the slogan "market economy with a socialist orientation"

(kinh tế thị trường với định hướng xã hội chủ nghĩa).⁴⁷ Within the realm of cultural production, the Party has had a long history of monopoly via censorship and through ownership of production units. Hence, the hybridity between the market and governmental control in cultural production permits profit-making for the artists as they produce products to feed the demands of the market; meanwhile, the government can still control certain kinds of permissible products by forcing the producers to go through censorship. In addition, with the government's ongoing monopoly of the means of production, the artists can only use nationalized printing houses and disc manufacturers to manufacture their products, and nationalized radio and television stations are the only outlets for broadcasting their music and music-making legally.

To help rule the country, the Party needs legitimacy, and this is where the nation comes in. Throughout the war of resistance, the Party promoted the use of the nation to cover up the Party's socialist ideology, so that people could pledge allegiance and sacrifice themselves for the purpose of gaining national independence. After the reunification of the country and the socialist struggle, the nation was transformed to serve the Party's ruling apparatus in a different way. The Party now promotes the nation by directing the production of cultural essence for consumption, hence continuing to make the nation into a type of commodity.

Under socialism, the Party controlled and directed all activities, private or public, and there was no official market, only the planned economy. In post-socialism, the

47 Nguyễn Quốc Chánh, a dissenting poet in Vietnam, talked about the ability to buy permission to publish cultural products: "Mặc dù gọi là xin, nhưng thực ra có gì cho không đâu. Đúng tên của nó phải gọi là mua và bán. Mua giấy phép và bán quyền được phép in và phát hành. Đã mua và bán, lẽ ra phải thoải mái. Đảng này vừa muốn bán vừa sợ mất quyền chuyên chế. Và kẻ mua, vẫn không mua được cái thứ mà đúng ra không nên có trên đời. Đó là giấy phép". Translation: "Although the act is called asking for permission, nothing is given for free. The exact name for the transaction ought to be buying and selling--the buying of the permit and the selling of the permission to publish and distribute. Since it's commerce, buyers and sellers ought to be comfortable. Not in this case. Sellers want to sell, yet are afraid of losing the authoritarian power to permit. And buyers still can't buy the thing that shouldn't exist in the first place: the permit" (Q.C. Nguyễn).

government allows the market to operate as long as the latter generates income for the state. The post-socialist government uses the market as a tool to increase its revenues, which may aid in strengthening its rule. In the West, neo-Foucauldians noted, the government marketizes its services by charging fees, scaling down the bureaucratic system while subcontracting its services to run more efficiently. The Vietnamese post-socialist government commodifies governance by charging fees (both officially and unofficially) while maintaining control of individual liberties. The freedoms limited by the government involve particularly those that may lead to disobedience, disagreement, and challenges to the state's authority. The market allows safer kinds of freedoms to be exercised, such as the buying and selling of goods, services, and the cultural production that might be profitable, as well as serving the state and the Party's interests. A neo-liberal government in the West may aim toward smaller, more effective governance, but the Vietnamese post-socialist, neo-liberal government transforms the ways it uses power to control the private and public spheres, with the help of the market.

Not only does the Vietnamese post-socialist government commodify governance, it also commodifies nationalism. The nation gathers nationalistic sentiments and delivers a sovereign, collective identity, which becomes useful for the government as a means of rule (Smith 24). Patriotism is for sale. Patriotism becomes a product that the government very much needs to legitimize itself in the eyes of the people it rules. The love for one's country should stay parallel with the loyalty for the Party and the government.

Previously, nationalism played a huge role in mobilizing Northern Vietnamese for the war of resistance against the French then against the Americans and finally to take over South Vietnam. Patriotic music was freely distributed and broadcast as part of

propaganda campaigns. Since the market's participation in socialism, patriotic music became a commodity, produced for sale under different forms and even performed in clubs. The customers of patriotic music are retired soldiers and those belonging to the generation who lived through the wars, who reminisce over a time that has passed. Beyond patriotic songs and marches, the use of folk elements in music has also been commercialized in the form of contests, prizes, and marketing tools in order to lure expatriates back. Additionally these also contributed to Vietnam's musical portrait in a globalized world.⁴⁸

In this chapter, I analyze the post-socialist market of music as a part of the process of commodification of governance and nationalism. The revival of pre-war music, the doomed production of music critical of the society and the government immediately after *đổi mới*, the new use of folk elements to sell the nation in a global market, the return of Saigon to its former "glory" as a capital of commercial music production of all kinds – these events – when strung together – describe facets of post-socialist music production in Vietnam and offer us a look through the prism of the authorized buying and selling of the commodified transactions of power soaked in nationalism to protect the Party's legitimacy.

Post-1975 cultural policy

Saigon fell in 1975 to the North Vietnamese army. As the Northern Communist government took over the Southern political administration and reunified Vietnam, the new government began a cultural and political purge to clean out published works that were deemed "reactionary in content and poisonous to the youth."⁴⁹ Lữ Phương, Deputy

⁴⁸ Interestingly, I found a parallel between the sales of patriotism and of wartime memories to promote tourism. See Bradley 196-226 and Schwenkel 3-30.

⁴⁹ Hanoi Liberation Radio broadcast on 6/30/1975, translated version quoted in Denney.

Minister of Information and Culture for the Provisional Revolutionary Government, was in charge of classifying cultural products into categories, which he explained in an article in *Sài Gòn Giải Phóng* daily newspaper: Category A included overtly anti-Communist and pro-American sentiments; category B gathered materials that are “provocative and poisonous”, promoting “a decadent licentious way of life... crime, [and] racial discrimination”; category C included “yellow songs, romantic poems, negative romantic novels, ghost stories and even books written from the feudalist, petit bourgeois point of view which have spread skepticism and thinking which is divorced from the realities of work, combat, etc.”; materials that were allowed to circulate belonged to category D (neutral, not anti-communists), category E (which “has realistic, critical contents which are limited because of abstract idealism but are of value in condemning the feudal colonialists and the crimes of the old regime”), and category F (the best, with “national democratic contents which encourage struggle, and was created by writers and artists in the mass struggle movement”) (Phuong).

Two years later, the government issued an instruction to build the socialist human being and fight against the reactionary ideology and culture in the South.⁵⁰ In this instruction, the Party reasoned that ideology and culture can motivate the construction of the new political and economic regime; hence, cultural and artistic affairs had to be part of the political and daily life of the people. The new cultural foundation ought to have “a socialist content and nationalist quality” as well as “the character of the Party and the people based on the ideological foundation of Marxism-Leninism”.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Instruction No. 08-CT/TW issued on 4/13/1977 on cultural and artistic affairs.

⁵¹ See Instruction No. 08-CT/TW, *ibid*.

Echoing the government's policies, Northern Vietnamese music critics quickly condemned Southern music as “decadent” (sa đọa or đồi trụy) and “reactionary” (phản động), which should be “swept away”.⁵² The critics blamed sentimental love songs for weakening the spirit of the Southern Vietnamese and bashed the pro-South army songs for propagandizing for the imperialist America, refuting any contribution the songs might have toward the Vietnamese culture and the cultivation of the people's patriotism (Cửu, Một thứ âm nhạc mạo ‘dân tộc’).

Hundreds of thousands of tapes, books, magazines, discs were consumed by fire. Residents of Saigon took out their recording collections and personal libraries and burned them. They were afraid of police searches and seizures as well as accusations of belonging to the reactionary factions if “reactionary” cultural materials were found in their homes. The state officials created other fire spectacles to burn the materials confiscated as part of the ongoing campaign to wipe out politically reactionary and culturally decadent materials.⁵³

Meanwhile, the literary and creative world went stagnant with much listlessness among writers and artists, who had just emerged from a war and had gotten crushed with censorship in peace time. One of the first writers in the North to complain about the Party's orthodox guideline for creativity was Nguyễn Minh Châu in a literary critique article in 1978, followed by a more controversial article by Hoàng Ngọc Hiến in 1979 (N. T. Nguyễn 264). According to Tuấn Nguyễn's documentation of the road to reform in literature, the surge in the realization of social realism as a way to compose creative works, exposing ugly facets of the society, brought much fear to the Party, which

⁵² For an example of the published critiques, see Cửu, “Âm nhạc phản động.”

⁵³ See descriptions in Chapter 2.

mobilized a group of writers against social realism itself, including Trần Độ (N. T. Nguyễn 265).

Then came the economic reforms of 1986 with some hints of a broader reform agenda for cultural affairs. Trường Chinh, then President of Vietnam and an important figure in the Politburo, proposed the slogan, “Reform or die” (Đổi mới hay là chết). Nguyễn Văn Linh, the Party’s General Secretary (1986-1991) and a key figure in the reform movement, wrote a series of editorials called “Things that need to be done immediately” (Những việc cần làm ngay) in the Party’s daily newspaper, the *Nhân Dân*. In the series, Linh attacked the incompetence and corruption among the cadres and called for transparency and respect for the law.⁵⁴ Trần Độ, a former member of the Politburo who headed the Party’s Culture and Arts Committee and Assistant Secretary of the Department of Cultural Affairs, as one of the key participants in the discussions and policy-making, detailed in his memoir *Reform, an Incomplete Joy* (Đổi mới, niềm vui chưa trọn) the process of cultural reforms within the Party.⁵⁵

Trần Độ recalled that, in 1987 when the Politburo headed by Nguyễn Văn Linh decided on reforming cultural policies, the leader asked him to help draft a new resolution to provide guidance for cultural affairs. Trần Độ and his staff organized several conferences to gather ideas from writers, artists, composers, directors, playwrights, etc., for the drafting of Resolution 05, as it was called. In one of the final sessions, Nguyễn Văn Linh even met with around a hundred cultural workers to listen to their recommendations. The discussions revolved around topics such as how the Party

⁵⁴ An example from N.V.L.’s editorials (dated 1/10/1987) was re-printed in Trần 231-233.

⁵⁵ After Trần Độ was expelled from the Party in 1999 because of his dissension, his memoir was published in the United States by Văn Nghệ Publishers in 2000. Since Trần Độ was a dissident and the Party maintained an official view of its own history, and because of limited resources, I do not have enough documentation to cross-check the information provided in Trần Độ’s memoir. The published work, hence, is taken for face value in my writing, pending further debates.

should define its leadership, how much would be too much censorship, how to promote creativity, the relationship between arts and politics, and the inadequacy of the social and economic support for the artists. The artists requested that the Party “unties” (cởi trói) their creativity. Nguyễn Văn Linh, in his response speech, stressed the necessity of “untying” of the organizational structure and policies governing creativity. He called for immediate attention by the Party and the government to provide changes for the artists. But he also encouraged the artists to create changes by becoming bolder in expressing themselves.

Finally, on November 28, 1987, Nguyễn Văn Linh signed Resolution 05. The resolution placed the “new Vietnamese culture” on “the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology” and defined it as “a socialist culture rich in cultural essence.”⁵⁶ The new culture should contain “beautiful traditions such as patriotism, humanism, and revolutionary heroism” as well as the spirits of “democracy, internationalism, and scientific thinking” (Đ. Trần 157). Since the economy had been liberalized by the policy-making of the 1986 Party Congress, the resolution called for the artists to apply their creativity so that the results would contribute actively to the economic and social goals in the liberalization process (Đ. Trần 158). Resolution 05 also provided a guideline for censorship: “Artistic works that do not violate the law, are not reactionary (anti-nationalism, anti-socialism, anti-peace) and are not socially corrupt (promoting crimes, decadent lifestyle, destroying human values), have permission to circulate and to be evaluated by the public and subject to criticisms...” (Đ. Trần 196).

⁵⁶ “Nền văn hóa mới Việt Nam xây dựng trên cơ sở những nguyên tắc của chủ nghĩa Mác-Lênin là một nền văn hóa xã hội chủ nghĩa đậm đà bản sắc dân tộc,” in Trần 157.

The language in the resolution reaffirmed the Party's leadership in all aspects of creativity. However, the resolution seemed to have recognized that the artists and their creativity had matured after peace was established and the country reunified for over 10 years. Therefore, paranoid governmental officials could slacken their control over creative activities a bit so that the artists would have a chance to become liberated, grow, and contribute to the progress of Vietnam. "Art for art's sake" was never formally recognized in the resolution, but language in the legislature did hold that art must be useful in economic and social advancement. Any kind of freedom of expression implied in the resolution, hence, would be a product with some use to the government and the Party, well-fitting to the newly designed course of economic liberalization. Furthermore, the Party reserved its absolute right to censor artistic works deemed "reactionary" or "corrupt" as detailed in Resolution 05.

Even with its tone and much deference for the Party, Resolution 05 caused quite a bit of controversy within the Politburo. Political pressure apparently forced Nguyễn Văn Linh to change his mind and become more conservative in terms of cultural policy. Trần Độ was expressing his disappointment in the memoir about the political outcome of the resolution. Nearly seven months after the resolution was passed, members of the Party decided to tighten control over what they considered the apparently rampant creativity of writers and artists. According to Trần Độ, the Party began to put blame on the loosening management of creative works for the outburst of, most notably, literary works in the style of social realism touching on social, economic, and political issues that had remained taboos since the NVGP affair (Đ. Trần). Social realism is a style of artistic

expression often depicting social concerns with stories of social injustices, economic hardship, and life struggles.

The publication of literary criticism, short stories, poems in *Văn Nghệ* and *Sông Hương* magazines constituted a large part of controversial social realism. The playwrights also contributed a number of socially critical plays to the list. Yet, in music, the change was much more subtle and indirect. It is noteworthy here that most, if not all, of the artists' creative works supported the cultural reform agenda, not much of anything out-of-the-ordinary or against the government (which would be truly "reactionary"). Artists, writers, and composers did not try to overthrow the government but only to improve it and the Party's leadership. There were more demands for plurality of thoughts and ideas, but nothing as taboo as multi-party democracy. In fact, the 1987 reform resembled the 1956-58 NVGP affairs in its lack of political demands for pluralism in the mainstream publications.⁵⁷ The music scene in 1987 was not as boisterous as the literary world but for one composer who tried to express his social critique via a series of songs that were banned after a couple of performances. Although he was writing songs critical of the society at the time, his compositions still lied within the vein of constructive criticism to help the government improve its ruling.

The case of composer Trần Tiến illustrates how paranoid government officials could become in the face of the government's attempt at the logic of the market, to allow for artists to respond to their audience's demand. At the same time, the government sought to steer the process of commodification of both governance and the nation toward purely making money from selling authority and patriotism while eliminating unwanted, potentially reactionary factors. The government could garner no financial gains from

⁵⁷ Beyond that, the political dissidents have always tried to voice themselves via unofficial, unauthorized means to disseminate their ideas.

Trần Tiến's shows; moreover, the Party would have to deal with the consequences from the public's inquisitiveness and critiques. Trần Tiến put forth questions that might encourage more questions from the audience about the state of the economy and the corruption within the government (even though the Party was never named directly in the songs), and that was enough for the Party to consider his shows harmful.

Therefore, in between Trần Tiến's realist commentary on society and the idealist songs composed for the government that left listeners lost in boredom, the Party would have to approve another genre that was at least safe enough for the Party, if not bolstering its legitimacy, while engaging in the logic of the market. The market forced the ruling apparatus to leave some room for the law of demand and supply. This meant an option immediately crept into consideration: the long-despised, sentimental love songs, depicting personal relationships. But, first, the case of Trần Tiến was worth mentioning in the sequence of events.

Trần Tiến and his banned 1987 pop-rock shows

In 1987, a popular songwriter decided to try writing some socially critical music. Together with his fellow musicians, he formed a band, "Trắng Đen" (Black and White) to perform a program of his pop-rock compositions. After two performances in Saigon, the local municipal government banned the program, and the local police was chasing down Trần Tiến the composer. As I shall show in this section, the songs themselves were neither very close to revolutionizing Vietnamese music nor carrying revolutionary/anti-revolutionary sentiments (depending on which side was examining them). On the one hand, Trần Tiến had dared to try something new and quite refreshing for a music scene that had become stale in Vietnam. On the other hand, if we observe closely, neither the

songs nor the composer presented a dissenting attitude toward the Party or the government but only products very suitable to the reform agenda and matching the way the Party had wanted to commodify the nation.

Trần Tiến was born in 1947 in North Vietnam to a middle-class, non-Communist family before the state's move to transform the petit bourgeoisie into near-property-less everyone else. After his father passed away, his family became even poorer. In a personal interview, Trần Tiến recounted that he aspired to become a scientist, not a musician, but he came into contact with music to earn a living. He began his music career doing a variety of backstage chores, followed by singing in groups and finally solo (T. Trần). As the war with the South escalated, Trần Tiến joined the Northern army marching Southward through the Trường Sơn Mountain Trail. He survived the soldier's life and malaria before getting back to Hanoi for his music education. Like many composers from the North, Trần Tiến attended school to become socialized into the kind of music composition that would be acceptable within the Party's agenda. Like his peers, he explored folk music and has been employing the elements in his compositions ever since. Unlike his Northerner counterparts, however, Trần Tiến broke out of the mold by using more of the Western-influenced pop-rock that dominated the Southern music scene in the 1960s and 1970s.

Trần Tiến's music career has been very smooth since the beginning.⁵⁸ His first song, "Bài ca thanh niên ra tiền tuyến" (Song about youth in the front), earned him first prize in a contest in the late 1960s.⁵⁹ He went into training at the National Conservatory in Hanoi from 1972 to 1980 in Composition and Vocal. During this period, he wrote a

⁵⁸ The brief recapturing of Trần Tiến's music career was taken from Đ. Q. Lê. Trần Tiến himself provided a copy of the thesis.

⁵⁹ See "Tiếng hát át tiếng bom" (Singing to drown out bombing), a mobilized songwriting contest and performance in the North, especially during the height of the war, when Americans had begun bombing the North.

number of songs glorifying the nation (e.g., *Giai điệu Tổ quốc* – Melody of the fatherland) and putting the post-war reconstruction into a positive light (e.g., *Vết chân tròn trên cát* – Footprints of a crutch on the sand) (Đ. Q. Lê).⁶⁰

Trần Tiến first visited Saigon in 1975 and permanently moved his family there by 1981. The contact with the South inspired him to write songs that carried folk elements and individualized subjects that went beyond march-style songs that immortalized the revolution and the nation. He has become popular among Southerners as well. Some examples include “*Mặt trời bé con*” (Little sun), “*Thành phố trẻ*” (Youthful city), and “*Ngẫu hứng Lý qua cầu*” (Improvisation on a Southern folk tune).

In 1986, the Party’s General Secretary Nguyễn Văn Linh’s call for reform sparked widespread enthusiasm among writers and artists, including composer Trần Tiến. He responded with a series of songs for his band *Trắng Đen* (White and Black) to perform a concert program titled “*Đối thoại 1987*” (Conversation 1987). The program included 16 songs that were critical of the society and, more or less, social realist: “*Trần trụi 87*” (Naked 87), “*Rock đồng hồ*” (Rock about the clock), “*Trong phòng hải quan*” (In the custom’s office), “*Chuyện năm người*” (Stories of five persons), etc. The songs spoke of the poor living standards in Vietnam, corruption, life after the war in much sadder notes than the positive, idealist take from a socialist government’s standpoint. The songs brought some enthusiasm into the unflattering music scene at the time, full of idealist, revolutionary songs that were not serving the consumers’ needs for something different, more controversial, more exciting.

“*Trần trụi 87*,” for instance, was a song about poverty-ridden Vietnam in 1987. It described the reality of Vietnam at the time, where people had to struggle to earn a living,

⁶⁰ The song was about a disabled veteran, who carried the wound from the war but still became helpful to the society.

making them into selfish beings. In the song, Trần Tiến lamented the loss of human dignity due to poverty and reminded the audience about the soldiers' sacrifice for the war only to see the current deplorable state of the country.

Another song that raised objections from state officials was “Rock about the clock” (Rock đồng hồ). In it, Trần Tiến submitted the ruling officials to the metaphor of a short hand on the clock indicating the hour, and the whole population was compared with the thin second hand that works very hard without anyone noticing. Only when the second hand dies out do we notice that the clock has stopped working. The metaphor implied Trần Tiến's negative opinions about the system in Vietnam, where the ordinary people have had to work very hard to serve the interests of the officials. Even though the song was not one of Trần Tiến's musically best, it did make a comment on sensitive political issues of the day, and government officials were not particularly thrilled about it, so they eventually shut him down.

In the program, Trần Tiến also continued experimenting with folk elements in “Ngẫu hứng Lý qua cầu” (Improvisation on a Southern Vietnamese folk tune) and “Tùy hứng Sông Hồng” (Improvisation about the Red River). A critic described the two songs as evoking feelings of “fidelity, human love, patriotism” through their use of simple folk melodies (Tú, “Đối thoại 87: Một cách tiếp cận cuộc sống [Conversation 87: A way of expressing life]”). He further praised the composer for trying to incorporate different facets of life in the program. Indeed, the content of the program did not stray too far from the Party's general directives to fight corruption, to enhance patriotic feelings, and to make socialism more human.

The concert program was performed twice in Saigon on November 12 and 14, 1987. A few days later, the municipal cultural unit (SVHTT) of Saigon issued a notice to ban all activities by the rock band Trắng Đen, including all its songs and all its local performances. The official notice stated that the band was performing songs with “bad content” that had not been granted permission to circulate and was “inciting public anger.”⁶¹ On January 11, 1988, the Vocal Department of the Composers’ Association of Vietnam organized a session for Trần Tiến to perform a selection from his concert program to a jury. Then on January 15, the jury met again to discuss the content of the program. The results of the discussion were recapped in a newspaper article published in the Party’s *Nhân Dân*.⁶² One of the main criticisms of Trần Tiến’s songs in the concert program was that they did not produce any positive thoughts about change other than lamenting about the situation at hand. One critic offered a metaphor of “impure elements” (nhiều hạt sạn) existing in Trần Tiến’s lyrics, delivering bad social outcomes (hiệu quả xã hội của sáng tác trở nên xấu).

Trần Tiến recalled that he came very close to getting jail time with the incident. In a personal interview in 2006, he said that the Saigon police chased him after the concerts. He had to hide at a friend’s house for a couple of days before he was able to arrange a flight to Hanoi, where the Party’s General Secretary Nguyễn Văn Linh protected him (T. Trần and Hiebert, “Singing between the lines”).

Half a year after the pursuit in Saigon, on June 25, 1988, SVHTT-Đà Nẵng invited Trần Tiến to perform a selection from the concert program at Đà Nẵng’s Cultural Center. A subsequent article praised Trần Tiến for his effort to reveal his true feelings

61 See Thông báo số 988/TB-VHTT của Sở Văn Hóa Thông Tin Tp. HCM về việc đình chỉ hoạt động của nhóm ca sĩ mang tên “Trắng Đen” signed by Deputy Director Trần Văn Tài on November 21, 1987. A scanned copy of the document was furnished by Trần Tiến.

62 See Sáng tác của nhạc sĩ Trần Tiến. A scanned copy was provided by Trần Tiến.

about the social phenomena he observed and emphasized that his observation expressed through songwriting did not stray much from reality. The critic also pointed out that the set exhibited individualism in creative work, which had remained a taboo for artists for years, and called individualism a “sacred right” (quyền thiêng liêng) to which Trần Tiến had properly claimed ownership.⁶³ Then in 1994, Trần Tiến performed “Trần trụi 87” (Naked 87) at a concert in Hanoi; it was not clear whether the song was part of the program or something improvisational.⁶⁴

Trần Tiến’s compositions, as in the above case, were not deemed acceptable. The state apparently was still apprehensive about the kind of songwriting that was critical of the society even when the songs’ content was the result of the call for *đổi mới* (reform). When the ultimate goal of the Party has been to build up its legitimacy to rule, anything standing in its way should be cast out, even if it were the commodification of governance or nationalism. The government only sustained practices of *đổi mới*, of privatizing government-controlled enterprises, of enticing a market for the arts, when the activities were still under the Party’s control, and would trim anything outside the realm of safety for the Party to fit into the ruling paradigm. The capacity for the government to accept challenges to authority was very limited.

There was an obvious demand among the public, however, for something more juicy than revolutionary songs beaten into people’s eardrums so regularly for many years during the war. The market with listeners willing to pay for and to listen to new songs

63 See “Trần Tiến với ‘Đổi thoại 87’” by Kim Viên in Báo Đà Nẵng, unknown date but possibly published shortly after the performance referenced on June 25, 1988. Scanned copy of newspaper tear sheet provided by Trần Tiến.

64 The concert (12/28/1994) was first in a series of five nights by Trần Tiến’s band in Hanoi, as documented in Lao Động newspaper, 1/1/1995. According to a witness, who claimed to have attended one of the concerts, Trần Tiến’s performance of “Trần trụi 87” was from an audience’s request and was not in the program.

opened up, of course, under the government's control (H. Lê).⁶⁵ Furthermore, love songs about relationships between two (or three) persons would not present any imminent, perceptible threat to the Party and the government, and I would argue that the love songs could even lull the masses to sleep along the same line that the Party's leaders had feared during the war, leading to their prohibition. Reversing the prohibition, however, would allow the government to apply the logic of the market to the production of music.

Love songs' revival, a safer alternative

After the 1988 tightening of the "untie" period (cởi trói), the music world became more cautious in releasing music. The music industry has been state-owned in socialist Vietnam since the 1950s. Only from the beginning of the 1990s did the government allow for some flexibility in ownership, permitting private companies and individuals to take part in the production process.⁶⁶ With privatization, the music industry began responding to consumers' demands.

The 1990s turned out to be the "Golden Age of Vietnamese Pop," a period in which the music industry in Vietnam was refreshing itself with the revival of pre-war love songs, the birth of new compositions, discoveries of exciting, young talents, and the access of better recording equipments. All of these actions have triggered a rejuvenation of the Vietnamese pop scene domestically as well as enabling the export of music products abroad for the first time since the formation of the socialist state in 1945.⁶⁷ The Vietnamese pop music industry has found a niche between the sterile songwriting of

⁶⁵Le's article actually argues that, ironically, there is no real market for music in Vietnam due to censorship by the government and, hence, no such thing as commercial music, either.

⁶⁶ See personal interview with a deputy director of a major record company in Saigon, who requested anonymity, 12/2008.

⁶⁷ See personal interviews with various producers during my field trip in December 2006. Various articles have also confirmed this phenomenon such as M. P. Trần.

wartime and the government's regulations against politically sensitive lyrics, such as love songs.

In the 1990s, the government cautiously allowed songs about heterosexual love, love toward one's country, and questions about love and life, as they were topics for safer creative outlets than songs that might be more critical of the government as in the Trần Tiến's incident in the late 1980s. The public was also craving for a revival of love songs and new vocal talents. The technology to produce recording had just arrived in Vietnam, and domestic duplication of compact discs was then monopolized by the government since the technology involved was expensive. Making a copy of a compact disc was virtually impossible given the rarity of the necessary hardware at the time, so the music industry became a profitable business selling discs and tapes to consumers.⁶⁸

At last, on the stage, in recordings, and through different media, singers performed songs that people wanted to listen to and enjoy besides the repertoire of revolutionary songs. Although the government still banned much of the pre-1975 music that carried political content or whose authors were regarded as anti-revolutionary, the ruling apparatus permitted the circulation of a number of songs composed in the South before 1975 that had a general message about love. According to announcements from the Ministry of Culture and Information cited in a newspaper article, the Ministry allowed close to 200 songs to be performed after 1975; then, in 1995, an additional 219 songs were added to the list for circulation, including both the pre-1945 national and the pre-

⁶⁸ See personal interview with Việt Tân, a music producer and director of his own record company, in Saigon on 7/24/2006.

1975 Southern works; in 2004, the Performing Arts Unit allowed another 67 songs (“Danh mục bài hát trước 1975”).⁶⁹

Pre-war songs were the least controversial, however, because the official view suggested that composers during the period before 1945 were important to the foundation of Vietnamese popular music and to the history of Vietnamese music in general (Tú et al. “Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam”). The pre-war songs often contain the theme of individuals’ love relationships (or else patriotic calls to fight the French) and do not mention anything politically controversial. Furthermore, the number of pre-war composers and their songs was smaller than that of the later periods, so it was easier for the government to categorize and review them. The government, for instance, restored composers like Văn Cao to his former glory as the politics surrounding him died down in the 1990s, and people again became interested in his music.

The 1990s was also a period in which new compositions and composers sprang into existence. The songs that became popular were mostly love songs with perennial themes as in songs of pre-war periods, although with somewhat new music. For the government, at least, love songs were a more benign choice for consumers. The average music consumers would be so consumed in their own individual love and life problems that they would forget about bigger society-related problems created by the system.

Given the social and political setting as described above, composer Văn Cao presents a specific case study where both political and economic forces played out simultaneously. The nation needed Văn Cao in the time of economic reform, not only for his immortal national anthem, but also for his love songs that inadvertently, perhaps,

⁶⁹ This article tallied the number of songs allowed up to 2004 as over 400, but a rough calculation, if the numbers provided were correct, indicated the number of songs may be closer to 500 out of a couple thousands of songs composed before 1975 (no institution has provided an accurate estimate of the total number of songs pre-1975, however).

contributed to the market by acting as a commodity. Văn Cao's pre-war songs, ranging from militant to romantic topics, provided a rich source of entertainment with economic value for listeners in the period of change from socialism to one in which socialism was hybridized with the market as part of the Party's agenda.

The return of Văn Cao

For a while during the war, with the exception of the national anthem, the Party did not allow publication or broadcast of Văn Cao's music. In 1981, after Vietnam was reunified, the Party even wanted to change the national anthem by organizing a contest for a new national anthem. However, the effort died out, and the new Vietnamese Constitution reaffirmed that Văn Cao's "Tiến Quân Ca" (Song of the advancing army) was the national anthem of Vietnam (Gibbs, "The Music of the State: Vietnam's Quest for a National Anthem" 129-174).

Văn Cao's pre-war music then benefited from the new direction to socialize the arts (xã hội hóa) in the 1990s, another way to encourage self-censorship with incentives from the market economy. Although the Party's direction did not formalize into a resolution until 2005, activities with a tendency to socialize the arts began in the early 1990s.⁷⁰ According to an article in the Party's publication *Nhân Dân*, the socialization of the arts means that creativity is to respond to market demand so that the artists can earn a living by themselves without being dependent on the subsidies or salaries from the state; instead, the private sector would be responsible for finding the programs that the government would approve, producing the programs, and selling them for profit.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Refer to the government's Resolution No. 05/2005/NQ-CP issued in 2005. In Vietnam, law-making often comes after the fact to reaffirm in legal words the deeds that had taken place (as in the example of "phá rào," "khoán chui" before "đổi mới" in 1986).

⁷¹ Field notes were taken from personal interviews with three producers in Saigon, all confirming the same market mechanisms in operation, December 2006.

However, the government still reserved the right to regulate the artists' creative works (Trung).

After decades of listening to revolutionary lyrics and the beats of marches, people yearned for a kind of music that was more mellow, less about killing the enemy, and more romantic. The Northerners' post-war contact with the South, where the pre-1975 regime had allowed different traditions of music to flourish, also prompted changes in musical tastes. There were several signs of the changes.

First, the concept of “nhạc nhẹ” (musique légère, or, literally, light music) appeared after the war ended as an alternative form of entertainment.⁷² On the one hand, Northerners, who were used to listening to war mobilization music, now wanted peacetime music. On the other hand, after trying to confiscate, burn, and destroy the cultural materials deemed poisonous in the South, officials believed they needed to provide Southerners with a healthier alternative than the sickly “yellow” or reactionary music. State-trained music critics pushed composers, then, to write “light” music to fill the void. “Light” music was to have the following characteristics: be entertaining; induce a happy/relaxing mood; have bright or mellow melodies but not be overly melancholic (as in “yellow” music); contain moderate, easy-going, or fast rhythms but without the tempo craziness of rock or syncopation in Western beats; be with or without vocal accompaniment; have a simple, neat musical structure; and be easy to understand for most people (Phúc, “Nhạc nhẹ [Light music]”).

Secondly, roughly a decade after 1975, listeners brought back pre-war romantic music (nhạc tiền chiến lãng mạn) albeit through semi-underground effort because the

⁷² An overlapping concept was “green music” (nhạc xanh, youthful/upbeat/optimistic music serving peace time) in oppose to “red music” (nhạc đỏ, or revolutionary music) and “yellow music” (nhạc vàng, or decadent music). See a discussion of the concept of “green music” in (Vân) and (Brown). See discussions of “light music” in Phúc, “Nhạc nhẹ [Light music],” Đ. T. Nguyễn, Đ. S. Phạm, “Bàn về nhạc nhẹ [On light music],” L. Lê, and X. Nguyễn.

government had not officially allowed this type of music to circulate yet. Even before *đổi mới* (reform) and *cởi trói* (untie) at the Sixth Party Congress, in 1985, a concert performing Văn Cao's music was organized in Saigon (Taylor 154). State-trained music critics, who were part of the cultural cadres, observed the return of the pre-war romantic music, so they tried to explain its revival. When Hanoi chose to sponsor some of the first public performances of pre-war music in the late 1980s,⁷³ it was not clear whether the government had granted permission for the songs that were performed in the concert programs, but their mere reappearance heated up the discussion among music critics on what should be allowed in music, especially in Hanoi, the birthplace of socialism. In Saigon, however, even when the government banned pre-1975 music, the black market has always served as a ready source for clienteles who refused to enjoy the revolutionary songs of the victors (Taylor 153).

The role of the expert in reviving love songs

In order for romantic songs to return to the market, the Vietnamese government must have made the decision to release the songs for commercial usage. The government had to rely on cultural experts' opinions to come up with the decision. Most cultural experts who could voice their opinions to the government would have certain linkages to the governing apparatus. The experts, in this case music critics, worked as bureaucrats in different culturally-related, state-run organizations, which have been in place since the time of building socialism in the North since the mid-1950s (see Chapter 1). The experts' opinions, together with members of the censorship bureaus, therefore, had some weight on the government's decision-making process in terms of what to allow and what should

73 Two concert programs, in particular, raised concerns among cultural officials and music critics, "Nhớ tuổi xuân" and "Khúc hát trữ tình," both of which performed in Hanoi around 1988, as referenced in V. Nguyễn.

not be allowed into the market. Hence, the experts/music critics' role could be seen as a vestige of socialist bureaucracy extended into post-socialist governance and helped ushered in the new music market controlled by the government. Therefore, opposing views of Vietnamese music critics merit a discussion here as a reflection of a part of the post-socialist government's decision-making process toward the inclusion of romantic music, particularly the pre-war music, in the official, commercial repertoire.

Music critics' opinions on pre-war music spanned the spectrum from maintaining the socialist-realist aesthetic of optimism to accepting the romanticist aesthetic, even if the latter might include themes of death and pessimism. At one end of the spectrum, some critics wanted to promote a more liberal view toward music as an art form to be evaluated by aesthetic standards rather than on strict judgment of content (as long as the content was not offensive to the nation or the Party) (N. Ó. Nguyễn). At the opposite end, other critics gripped onto a narrower view of music as a cultural tool that can serve in the anachronistic effort to build socialism (even in the post-socialist period); hence, they maintained, music should transmit positive thoughts and spirit in praise of national (and the Party's) progress (V. Nguyễn). The common call-to-action, which both sides used to defend their critical positions, ironically, was that pre-war music should be placed in its socio-historical context.

Some critics felt that the expressions of melancholy and desperation conveyed in pre-war romantic music were appropriate only for the time before the revolution; after the revolution, personal depression was supposedly cured effectively, and the collective was to have brought optimism to all. Hence, without a correct understanding of the place of pre-war romantic music in history, the consumers of such music would be misguided in

harmful ways because the music could evoke unpleasant feelings which they might link to the depressing economic situation and the oppressive political environment of Vietnam at the time (or even in the present moment). The nation would certainly not be well-served if its people were too consumed by their personal feelings of sadness. Even though the critics at this end of the spectrum did not completely discourage listening to pre-war romantic music, they strongly suggested that the government should guide consumers toward better listening habits and a more unified aesthetic view and should curb music production activities that maximized profit-making by accommodating consumers' demands.

Other critics came to the defense of pre-war romantic music by arguing that it was a form of defiance, albeit full of resignation, against Euro-centric cultural domination. The critics in this camp cited the history of modern Vietnamese music, beginning with Western influence via missionary work and French colonialism, when composers were only putting Vietnamese lyrics onto French melodies. Fighting against Western cultural colonialism, composers of the pre-war romantic period employed folk elements and created an unprecedented style of music, something that Vietnamese people could claim their own, which contributed to the recognition of nationhood and the building up of a burning sense of patriotism, a necessary precedent for the revolution. Furthermore, the content of pre-war romantic lyrics consisted of feelings of resignation, depression, or yearnings for escapism, which were naked expressions of the reality under French colonial rule. Therefore, the critics argued, pre-war romantic music should be able to reclaim its deserved place in history and be available for listeners to appreciate it. The

critics in this camp, however, continued to reject a market-guided cultural consumerism and believed in expert guidance for mass musical taste.⁷⁴

Using almost the same line of argument, Vũ Tự Lân, a music critic and researcher, summarized composer Văn Cao's early achievements and contribution to music. He depicted Văn Cao as a talented artist with a sensitive soul, who had begun composing music at the age of 17 in a social, historical, and artistic context full of turmoil. At that age, without anyone's guidance, it would have been difficult to avoid being influenced by the prevailing Westernized, romantic, weak compositions of the time. However, as someone with a good nature and prodigious talent, Văn Cao shone a ray of light on sublime romanticism without displaying a weak spirit or over-sentimentality. Although his compositions were influenced by the popular musical trends of the time, he had almost unconsciously allowed folk melodies to enter his compositions in some of his first compositions.⁷⁵

In this analysis, the critic elevated Văn Cao's music to a higher level than the decadent "yellow music" that the government banned. He also justified the musical value of Văn Cao's songs by their proximity to Vietnamese folk music, which was always part of the Party's guidelines for compositions. Văn Cao's closeness to folk music could also be viewed as evidence of his love of the fatherland, which would contextually be synonymous with his loyalty to the Party. So the Party nodded "yes" to his music, setting several conditions to ensure that the music would do no harm to society: (1) the music

⁷⁴ For an example of the argument, see N. Ô. Nguyễn.

⁷⁵ Vietnamese text: Là một nghệ sĩ tài hoa với tâm hồn nhạy cảm, Văn Cao bước vào sáng tác âm nhạc từ tuổi 17 trong một bối cảnh xã hội - lịch sử - nghệ thuật đầy biến động. Ở lứa tuổi ấy, nếu không có bàn tay diu dặt, nâng đỡ chân tình và hiểu biết, khó tránh được những xu hướng Âu hóa, lãng mạn, ủy mị phổ biến đương thời. Tuy nhiên, với bản chất lạnh mạnh, một năng khiếu bẩm sinh, ngay những bước đầu, Văn Cao đã khơi được một nguồn ánh sáng tuy lãng mạn nhưng thanh cao, không ủy mị, suốt mướt. Mặc dầu chịu ảnh hưởng của trào lưu âm nhạc thời thượng bấy giờ, nhưng những làn điệu dân ca đã nhập vào ông một cách gần như vô thức, giúp ông có được những âm hưởng dân gian ngay trong những sáng tác đầu tay của mình (T. L. Vũ).

was pre-revolutionary, not anti-revolutionary; (2) appropriate guidance about the socio-historical background of the music should be furnished to consumers.

After the Party's approval of the reinstatement of Văn Cao's position in Vietnamese music in the 1990s, his pre-war romantic and revolutionary songs regained their popularity among singers, producers, and broadcast programs. About the same time, streets in big cities like Danang, Hanoi, Saigon, and Haiphong (his birthplace) were renamed after Văn Cao. Ánh Tuyết, a singer who has achieved fame through her expressive performances of Văn Cao's songs, champions pre-war music in 2000s. She opened a night club mostly to deliver pre-war and romantic music to a broader audience, including the work of composers Văn Cao, Phạm Duy, Trịnh Công Sơn, Ngô Thụy Miên, and Từ Công Phụng (Ánh).

The return of Văn Cao's music in the market signifies the Party's commodification of nationalistic spirit and revolutionary history in the marketing effort directed toward the Vietnamese people that it rules. In the official version of history, the Party was the only vanguard force in fighting for the Vietnamese people's independence and advancing the interests of the people; the Party brought peace to the nation after pushing out the French and the Americans. Through Văn Cao's music, this official version of history became a commodity for Vietnamese to consume.

Whatever the Party's guidelines, the final judgment as to whether a piece of music could be aired depended on its success in becoming a commodity in the commercial music market as well as within the process of buying and selling authority. A commercially successful piece of music may sell very well in the black market but may never make it on air if it does not receive the government's authorization. On the

contrary, a piece of music being authorized to play on air by the government's endorsement does not necessarily mean it will be popular with the masses.

The Vietnamese post-socialist government's appropriation of Văn Cao's pre-war songs for commercial purposes also secured a place for nationalism in the newly formed marketplace in the 1990s. The government claimed Văn Cao, with his national anthem as a given trademark and his pre-war songs, as part of the Vietnamese musical heritage. He was memorialized as a national icon. Contrary to the time when the socialist government shunned Văn Cao from the 1950s through late 1980s, the extension of the socialist government with a hybrid market since then welcomed him and his products for their marketability in the form of nationalism for sale to the masses and for their ability to reinforce the legitimacy of the state, and, in turn, the sole Party running it. As we will see in the next section, Văn Cao was not the only example of a composer whose work could be made profitable for the state.

The surge in neo-folk-style songs

Lê Minh Sơn is an award-winning composer one generation younger than Trần Tiến, whose songs are popular among singers seeking more challenging, artistic music. He depends heavily on folk melodies as basic materials to craft his songs. Composer Trần Tiến considered Sơn the second-generation composer within his own folk-influenced lineage who was born in peacetime (T. Trần). Sơn, born in 1975, was young enough not to know anything about the war and sensitive enough to capture the beats of the current time from rock to hip-hop. Trained at the National Conservatory in Hanoi as a classical guitarist, Sơn switched to composing in 2000 and soon rose to fame with “Bên bờ ao nhà mình” (By our pond), “Chuồn chuồn ớt” (Red dragonfly), and other songs. In

his songs, Sơn wove folk-influenced melodies into modern rhythmic patterns while maintaining a classic structure of songwriting, a trend in composition which could be labeled aptly “neo-folk-style” music. The singers who championed Sơn’s music also belong to the generations achieving fame during the 1990s (Thanh Lam) and in the new century (Ngọc Khuê, Tùng Dương).

State-sponsored songwriting contests today reinforced the trend of using folk elements in modern ways, quite consistent with the slogan in the 1998 resolution on culture from the Eighth Congress of the Politburo: “Developing a progressive Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity.” The Party wanted to lead Vietnam toward a culture that was “progressive and patriotic with national independence and socialism at its core” (Ngo). Therefore, the Party encouraged activities that help build the specific culture that the Party wanted, one of which was the monthly “Vietnamese Songs” contest (Bài hát Việt). The contest has been organized by the national television network VTV since 2005 to promote songwriting and introduce new works to its audience via television broadcast. The name of the song contest itself already implied that the submissions must exhibit Vietnamese characteristics. How to define what constitutes Vietnamese essence in the songs has turned out to be an issue for discussion (T. T. Phạm). In this case, folk influences might have aided many of the songs in winning the contests by casting them in a more favorable light before the judges. Examples were “Bà tôi” (My grandma), a melting pot of folk elements depicting sentiments toward old Vietnamese village life by Nguyễn Vĩnh Tiến; “À í a” (Ah-ee-ah) by Lê Minh Sơn; “Mưa bay tháp cổ” (Rain on the old tower) by Trần Tiến, etc.; their success encouraged others

to write more of the same modernized folk style (“Bài hát Việt số 2-2007: Dân gian hiện đại vượt trội”).

In promoting this trend, the Party pushed forward a Vietnamese face for marketing purposes in a globalized economy, by integrating into the world without losing Vietnam’s unique characteristics. After all, the Party was very well-versed in using music as a tool for propaganda throughout the war. So the commodification of the nation at the present through songwriting contests and song promotions is the contemporary version of its propaganda effort.

However, the propaganda effort might not have been as productive as the Party wanted. As Vietnam opened up to the world, the country and its people also came in contact with other cultures. Development in technology such as Internet access allowed Vietnamese to connect with the world and listen to global trends of music. Whether the government permitted it or not, Vietnamese did gain wider access to many choices of music as an indirect result of globalization. Vietnamese consumers of music products could and did choose among different types of music, and the folk-influenced, state-promoted songs did not always sell fast. Instead, consumers turned to foreign-influenced tunes, old songs from the pre-war period, and love songs from the 1990s “golden age,” and “yellow music” before 1975, as their choices for listening.

Whether using folk elements to write melodies on top of hip-hop beats could be evaluated as sufficient adaptation or modernization of Vietnamese music is a topic of discussion for music critics. However, the government’s endorsement of the new type of music via song contests and airtime play meant either that the government was uncertain as to how to carry out its leadership role in the cultural realm to ascribe the boundary

between Vietnamese-ness and other-ness, or that the government accepted the neo-folk-style songs as one of the legitimate expressions of nationalistic sentiments.

Evidence seemed to point to both. A singer and songwriter complained to me about the arbitrary evaluation of works to be allowed or not allowed in the Vietnamese system of censorship. He said there existed no clear criteria as to how a work would be “too foreign” or more authentically Vietnamese – sometimes, for instance, the use of foreign words like “hello” would be permitted in a Vietnamese-language song, but a word like “okay” in another song would not pass censorship.⁷⁶

The impact of the logic of the market in post-socialist Vietnam is palpable in the above example. On the one hand, the young composer wanted to compete in the music world by bringing in trendy elements into his music. On the other hand, the post-socialist censoring mechanism would not let his music pass as such perhaps because the censorship bureau considered the use of foreign elements (language use) as straying from the purity of Vietnamese language and culture, making the song (i.e., a cultural product) impure. While using hip-hop beats (a foreign element) in music compositions would be able to pass censorship, employing foreign words in the lyrics was not endorsed. The double standards seemed to reflect the complexity of this post-socialist government’s cultural policy as Vietnam interacts with the world via globalization.

Criteria in post-socialist censorship and the process of commodification of governance are the next topics of discussion. Through observing the interaction between censorship mechanisms and the process of commodification of governance, one could see how the post-socialist government functioned to sustain itself and how the music industry

⁷⁶ See personal interview with a singer/songwriter in his twenties in Saigon who would prefer to remain anonymous, July 2006.

survived by satisfying the government's requirements and holding onto the laws of supplies and demands from the market.

Censorship, a case of commodification of governance

Music production could be divided into two types: audio-visual products such as compact discs, video, karaoke, etc., and live shows. Government officials referred to the content of the audio-visual products and live shows as programs. In either kind of production, producers were responsible for dealing with both the government and the market.

Producers were private, joint-venture, or state-owned companies who have met the state's regulations and have been granted permission to become producers by the government.

Individuals who would like to produce a musical product would have to go through a producer and cannot bypass this step to organize or produce something on their own. The Vietnamese government prescribed a set of procedures for producers to follow as well as the fees that the government collected in order to process the granting of permission. Success or failure on the market side, however, would be the burden of producers in a post-socialist state. Therefore, the producers would have had studied the market in advance and calculated the logistics and the risks before releasing a product.

Audio-video productions

Audio-video production companies⁷⁷ follow a general process for producing audio and visual products (Hành trình ra đời của một chiếc đĩa: Con đường đau khổ dài 3 tập [Journey of a CD: The tortuous road told in 3 chapters]). Ideas for a new product are first presented to the company's board of executives, who authorizes a study of the market for the product. The person in charge of studying the market would look at sales

77 Production companies, by the government's definition, must have enough staff on the executive and editorial boards and the production unit with professional degrees.

records from retail stores and the company's wholesales to determine if the product would meet the market's demand. As of 2006 in Vietnam, there was no market research company that did research on cultural consumption, so each record company usually staffed a researcher for the purpose. After studying the market, the researcher would present the results to the board, who decides whether the company should proceed with the production.

After the preliminary round, if the company's executive board approves the program for production, the program would be produced in draft form and sent over to the Municipal Culture and Information Administrative Unit (Sở Văn Hóa Thông Tin, hereafter SVHTT) for approval together with the required fee (SVHTT, "Hướng dẫn thực hiện Quy định" and Nhật). SVHTT is the municipal or provincial apparatus of the Ministry of Culture and Information. If SVHTT approved the program, the SVHTT would grant the company the permission to produce and distribute the product. If not, then the company must revise the program according to the SVHTT's recommendations. In reality, the company often has its own editorial board in charge of self-censoring the program content before submission to the SVHTT so that nothing serious could be detected. Government's censorship is based on two umbrella criteria: (1) politically reactionary (*phản động*) or (2) culturally inappropriate (*vi phạm thuần phong mỹ tục*) (Q. T. Lê).

The producer, depending on his/her connections with the officials at SVHTT, may wish to include an envelope to make the transaction smoother and faster. Although the envelope may not contain a huge amount of money, it is part of the courtesy offered by members of the corporate world to the governing body in order to buy out a favor. Some

producers, whom I interviewed, believed that without the envelope the file would take much longer to process through the censorship bureau. On the decree governing this process, the SVHTT should process the application within seven business days, but in reality it could take as long as a month for them to approve a program. The envelope is a substantive and symbolic gesture toward requesting a favor of speedy processing and, sometimes, a raise in the order of processing priority (“Hội đồng thẩm định nghệ thuật TpHCM: Đang chờ những thay đổi”). As long as there is a need for the favor of speedy processing, unofficial space for negotiation exists.

After the program has been approved for production, the company finalizes the master copy of the production and sends a copy together with the municipal production license to the Bureau of Performing Arts (Cục Nghệ Thuật Biểu Diễn), which belongs to the Ministry of Culture and Information (Bộ Văn Hóa Thông Tin), in Hanoi. The Bureau then sells the requested number of stamps to the producer. Each copy of the product requires a stamp, which signifies that the government has granted permission for the product to appear on the market legally and could be exported without going through the censorship bureau a second time. The number of stamps issued corresponded to the number of copies available to the market. The stamp contains the name of the program, the name of the producer, the distribution license number from the SVHTT, and the numerical order of production, which is unique to each product copy. The last line on the stamp warns, “Any form of duplication is strictly prohibited” (“Nghiêm cấm in sao dưới mọi hình thức”). The stamp is affixed to the back cover of each CD or DVD copy. The product then becomes ready to be released to the public.

The stamp symbolizes a vestige of a centralized distribution system in a socialist society. Without it, the producer could not release any products. So the producer has to comply with all requirements in order to ask for the final stamp of approval. The stamp carries a price, though nominal, as set by the government. The government does not provide the stamps for free. The producer, without other options, has to purchase the stamp as a product of sales from a government participating in its own market of service monopoly.

Live show productions

If timing could be crucial for audio-visual products, then the temporal factor plays an even more important role in live show productions. Unlike an audio product, which could recover its expenses during a longer period of time, live shows happen only once for a very specific period of time, and its financial success or failure appears instantly, so the producers would feel a lot more pressure. Besides studying the market and justifying for the show, producers must work closely with the authority to submit the program, get the necessary permit, and stage an actual program run-through for a censorship bureau before the program would be ready to be presented to the audience on the date, time, and location advertised.

Similar to producers of audio-visual products, producers of live shows need to acquire the necessary staff which must include an editor and a director, both of whom must have graduated from a government-accredited college. Graduating from an accredited college, however, does not mean that the graduates could take on the challenges of show production. Because of this requirement, sometimes private producers would pay the graduates to borrow their credentials to only to fill the

requirement while the producers move on with their own ideas or with other more talented personnel without the necessary college degrees (Bảo).

After gathering the staff, producers need to fill out an application for permission to produce the program, in which they would have to list the time and location of the production, the type of program, its content and participants, and attach a statement of adherence to copyright regulations, contracts with performers, and a space rental contract. Producers submit the application to the SVHTT and wait for approval within the timeframe of seven business days. Before the program could be produced, it would be subject to a mock performance, which is to replicate exactly the content scheduled on-stage, specifically for the Artistic Committee of Music and Dance (Hội đồng Nghệ thuật Ca Múa Nhạc), a censorship bureau of SVHTT. The fee for the application and the Committee's examination of the production would be commensurate to the full length of the program, meaning pop music shows were often charged the highest fees because they were the most lengthy. The censorship process is also recurrent so that a song would have to go through the Committee every time it is to be performed even though it had been approved once before (SVHTT, "Hướng dẫn thực hiện Quy định" and Nhật).

The Censorship Committee would be comprised of artists with credentials, often retired, appointed by SVHTT. As of 2004, although the SVHTT collected censorship fees, the Committee members still were not compensated fairly for their time; instead, their incomes would come from the show producers who presented envelopes with a substantial amount for them to continue their job ("Phản hồi từ bài viết 'Nỗi sợ về hội đồng phúc khảo' "). During my fieldwork in 2006, two producers confirmed with me that producers still offered "envelopes." One singer/producer told me that the Committee

members expected a certain amount of money per envelope depending on the scale of the show. Usually, the producer would prepare enough envelopes for all Committee members, but sometimes the number of members who came to the mock show exceeded the number expected, and the producer would have to ask the head of the Committee for instructions on how to divide up the money so that each member would be satisfied. Pleasing Committee members is a crucial task because the mock show often occurs a couple of days before the real one, so any substantial changes deviating from the original plan might prove disastrous, though, most of the time, members' recommendations for changes were minor. Committee members do have the power to stop a show from proceeding as planned if it violates government's rules and regulations (Báo). In this case, the government imposes the system of censorship by its monopoly of power. Producers feed the system and keep it alive by generating incomes for the censorship personnel.

Control extended beyond the border

The extension of socialist bureaucracy apparently yielded formidable results in crafting post-socialist technologies for governance. The government has set up a censorship system with enough filters to ensure few slippages in the music products that performers and producers would be allowed to circulate within the country. This is also the case for music performances abroad.

Singers who want to perform abroad need approval from the unit with which they are contracting. Also, freelancers are required to get permission from the municipal or central cultural administrative unit (Sở or Bộ Văn Hóa). The singers must submit a letter of invitation from the organizers abroad together with an application to perform abroad to

the administrative unit in charge. At the other end, the overseas organizers can also submit an application to invite singers from Vietnam via the Vietnamese consulate offices (Đ. T. Phạm). In recent years, there have been several cases where singers broke the rules by performing programs considered to have violated “the aesthetics and customs” of Vietnamese culture (thuần phong mỹ tục) and/or denigrated the Party and the state. Two examples were Quang Dũng’s appearance in Thúy Nga’s production and Bảo Yến’s in Asia’s production.⁷⁸ Both are famous singers from Vietnam, and their appearances in the United States without permission were considered violating the law. Furthermore, both production companies were considered to be anti-revolutionary. In the case of the male singer Quang Dũng, he was performing together with the top diva Khánh Hà in a medley of love songs by Diêu Hương, the content of which was neutral, without politically controversial elements. However, the Vietnamese government considers Thúy Nga’s Paris-by-night an anti-revolutionary production company due to its previous track record. Thus, Quang Dũng’s appearance in such a company could not be approved by the government, even if he had sought permission. In the case of female singer Bảo Yến, not only did she perform with an anti-revolutionary, overseas production companies, namely Asia Entertainment and Thúy Nga, but she was also performing songs by composer Trúc Hồ, whom the government has not granted permission for him to publish or broadcast his songs in Vietnam.

The punishments for transgressors showed the Party and state’s effort to control how Vietnam is being presented to the world, particularly to Vietnamese diasporic communities. The performers may earn extra income abroad by selling the nicer images

⁷⁸ See “Xử phạt ca sĩ biểu diễn tại hải ngoại còn quá nhẹ?” [Fines for singers performing abroad too little?]. This article noted that Bảo Yến was prohibited from performing in Vietnam due to her repeated violations while Quang Dũng had to pay several million VND in fine (a couple of hundred USD), only a fraction of what he earned overseas.

of the nation via their performances abroad, but they may not make the Vietnamese leaders look incompetent. In other words, the performers cannot perform socially-critical songs or those representing an alternative version of history (involving the former South Vietnamese army, for instance). They should self-censor and follow guidelines if they wish to receive permission to travel and perform abroad.

CONCLUSION

The music industry represents a microcosm of the hybrid extension of socialism in Vietnam. Socialism propelled the Northern Vietnamese through the war with music that tried hard to lift up their spirits and affirm the unique socialist version of history. After the war and the failed experiment of socialism in the South, the government opened up doors for the logic of the market to enter triumphantly to correct for the unintended consequences of a planned economy. When the market found its way into the socialist system, almost everything that could be sold was sold. There is a market of governance, where the government engages in the buying and selling of its own authority, for instance, in the form of permission for self-expression, in both the official and the unofficial realms. There are also domestic and international markets for the nation and the representation of history as approved by the Party. Moreover, singers, producers, and composers can benefit from performing within the Party's standards.

As I have demonstrated thus far, the music industry reflects facets of the process through which socialist Vietnam enters post-socialism, or more specifically a hybrid extension of socialism. So I chose the music production process as a case study to demonstrate my two points. First, the entrance of the market allows nationalism to cover up socialism further. Secondly, the incorporation of the logic of the market in a post-socialist government permits the buying and selling of power or authority. Furthermore, the buying and selling of authority extends overseas to control for performances abroad.

Vietnam represents a case of the hybrid extension of socialism, one previously unaccounted for in the literature of democratization theories. Instead of following a neat trajectory from a Leninist totalitarian regime with a command economy to a post-socialist

regime that accepts and practices market economy, which ultimately leads to democratization of the political system, as many democratization and modernization theorists claim, the Vietnamese government shows its strong resistance to democratic changes. In fact, after nearly a quarter of a century from the time the Vietnamese government decided to incorporate the logic of the market in 1986, the political regime remains steadfast in its control of freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

Most recently, during the summer of 2009, the government showed its muscle in the most recent effort to crush political factions and attempts to present different opinions online. Three Internet bloggers have been jailed for their blogging activities; several activists were locked up for their political involvement with a budding political party competing with the Communist Party. Within a short period of time, under the government's pressure, all of the jailed activists admitted to their so-called wrongdoings, illegal activities, trying to seek the government's leniency in sentencing (Trà). Bloggers, who were released from jail, promised not to blog on the same "sensitive" subjects again (H.Q. Nguyễn). Current sensitive topics included China-Vietnam relations, which had gone sour with the Chinese bauxite mining in Vietnam and the land-sea dispute between the countries; the demand for democracy; religious repression throughout Vietnam, particularly in a Northern province that caused stirs among Catholic followers. The mono-party government did not seem to release its grip on power after all these years of benefitting from the logic of the market. My thesis, therefore, offers a different way to discuss neo-liberal government in this post-socialist context, adding to the existing literature on neo-liberalism in the West.

Neo-Foucauldians provided novel conceptual tools to analyze the behaviors of government and its various linkages to individual conduct, economic activities, and social life. Neo-Foucauldians such as Nikolas Rose traced the transformation of governmental technologies and rationalities in the history of Western societies, in which the state evolved from feudalism to monarchy to liberal democracy. Within the framework of liberal democracy that is the essence of modern government in the West, the government develops technologies for effective governing, which is termed neo-liberalism. Modern governments depend heavily on knowledge and expertise to exercise their technologies and rationalities in order to promote individuals' self-governing, making government more efficient.

Neo-Foucauldians observe the porous interaction between the society and the state and set a new, analytical framework in which government co-exists with a body of knowledge in all aspects of life, all linked together by a set of mobile, fluid, and complex apparatuses. Taking on Foucault's perspective on government, neo-Foucauldians set out to analyze Western, advanced liberal democracies, one of several species of government in the world. My thesis presents another slice of Foucault's view on government. Applying Foucauldian analytical tactics, I looked at what happened when a socialist government transformed into one that adopted the logic of the market while maintaining its authoritarian ruling mechanisms.

The post-socialist system of rule, first of all, seems to have reneged upon the Western counterpart's promise of freedom and choices for the subjects when incorporating the logic of the market. As I have shown thus far, the Vietnamese government adopted the logic of the market in a way that ensures that the Party's power

be uncompromised, especially in the realm of culture. In music production, the government has been constantly and closely watching the realm of self-expression since the Communist Party first rose up as a political force in Northern Vietnam in 1945. During the twenty-year war with the South Vietnamese and the American forces until 1975, composers and performers suffered the harshest totalitarian control of creativity: all songs uniformly served the purpose of winning the war; all artists were subject to the same political education and ideology; and all minds were directed to the same nationalistic agenda of victory for the Communists. Meanwhile, in the South, although freedom of expression was not secured because of political factions and the Southern Vietnamese state of war against the North, relatively speaking, Southern Vietnamese composers, producers, and performers enjoyed more freedom of expression. When the North took over the South in 1975, the socialist government purged Southern artists and destroyed their works, labeling them anti-revolutionary. As the economic situation in Vietnam worsened because of the failure of the planned economy, the mono-party government decided to change its strategy and opened the door to market economy.

The logic of the market presented new keys for the government to devise different technologies to rule. Within the music industry, the government allowed for certain types of romantic music previously labeled decadent and anti-revolutionary to be performed and produced again. These kinds of music, however, must not pose a threat to the government in terms of being critical or invoking an alternative version of history. Songs that criticize how the government was operating or songs that glorify the Southern Vietnamese soldiers or that call for democracy and freedom would definitely be banned from broadcasting and publishing. The official version of history states that the Party is

the sole leadership force in the country and had triumphantly led Vietnam through the war toward socialism. By putting up censorship mechanisms, the Vietnamese government is bound to earn revenue by the law of supply and demand as producers line up to pay the fees, both official and unofficial, to the government, so that they can get the products out for sale, participating in the market allowed by the government. Revenue, of which bribery can also be counted as one unofficial source, perpetuate the rule of the authoritarian regime by feeding it and keeping it alive.

Indeed, the hybridization between socialism and market economy formed a mutated species of government, in which new technologies of rule were engineered to maintain the level of control for the ruling apparatus. Thus, there are characteristics within the hybrid extension of socialism that are not accounted for in the body of literature on corruption modeled after modernization theory. In some part of the corruption literature, as crudely put, there are arguments that governments in the developing world will rid themselves of corrupted officials before becoming advanced, industrialized countries;⁷⁹ corruption is considered a temporary state of affair on the path toward establishing modern government.⁸⁰ However, the case of Vietnam illustrates otherwise. On the trajectory toward a modern government, if that were ever its aim, Vietnam did not seem to improve in terms of fighting corruption after more than two decades following the introduction the logic of the market. The phenomenon called corruption has become better integrated and less visible in the system of governance, as the government has institutionalized corruption in the new technologies of rule.

79 One body of literature argues that economic factors can influence corruption, so that economic growth can contribute to institutional developments which strengthen which help curb corruption in advanced, industrialized countries. See Glaeser, La Porta and Lopez-de-Silanes.

80 Another body of corruption literature argues that restricted market can influence the extent of corruption, so the opening up of the market will help in alleviating the problem of corruption, among other factors. See Ades and Di Tella 982-983.

Particularly in the music industry, the government set up a censorship bureau to filter music productions with enough power to arbitrarily fix the price for a production to pass censorship, yielding a margin of profit for the bureau itself.

The Vietnamese government's new technologies of governance after adopting the logic of the market in an authoritarian setting also came with the masking and re-masking of socialism with nationalism. Nationalism during the war with the foreign forces pushed the army forward at any cost to achieve victory. Through different campaigns, composers were encouraged to write monotonous music about the struggles to win the war, about the glory of the army, and so on. After the war, socialism took over nationalism as an ideology and consolidated further the Party's monopoly of power.

However, socialism failed in feeding the people, and the logic of the market entered governance. Nationalism once again surged forward and became an ideological platform for marketing Vietnam to its people. Nationalism served well as a guiding principle for artistic creativity through song contests and performances. Nationalism branded products and helped sell them domestically and abroad. Most importantly, as Kim Ninh alluded, the revival of nationalistic sentiments helped with the integration of a Vietnam fragmented by war (N. B. Kim 243). I push this assertion further by proposing that nationalism opened up more possibilities for the government to integrate the governing apparatus into the society for more effective ruling, by covering up socialism, so the Vietnamese people would have fewer reasons to reject the government system.

The Communist Party of Vietnam, since its inception as ruler of Vietnam, has equated itself with the country. To serve the nation means serving the Party. To be loyal to one's country is also pledging loyalty to the Party. In such way, the Party took

advantage of the Vietnamese people's love for their country and extracted profit from it. The Party turned into a father figure to the people to guide and punish them as it saw fit, in order to maintain law and order. The government's censorship bureau aided the Party in maintaining its status as a sovereign body of authority to govern Vietnam unchallenged. And the people had to help with the revenues to keep the system running. In the music industry, these would be both the unofficial and official fees payable to the censorship personnel. So the system of governance continued to live on with its internal feeding tubes.

The government used nationalism in helping to unite the Vietnamese people under the flag of socialism, for nationalism was more palatable than Communist internationalism as the Party found out during the struggle against the French before 1945. Some Vietnamese studies scholars seemed to be quite fascinated by the intellectual trail of Communist ideology in Vietnam since the establishment of the Communist Party during the 1930s, treating the ideology as one of the guiding, modern forces for the Vietnamese revolution against the French (Woodside, "History, Structure, and Revolution in Vietnam"; Marr, "Vietnam's Tradition on Trial, 1925-1945"). My study brought out the utilitarian side of the government's use of nationalism, not socialism, in convincing the people to fight the wars. When the planned economy, a central feature of socialism, failed, the government switched to the market economy in another utilitarian move to survive. The government created and perpetuated new technologies of rule as circumstances arose, rather than sticking to a fixed principle or an ideology in its pure form such as Communism or nationalism.

However, the government proved to be uncompromising in its resistance to share its power. Permission for broadcasting or performing a song is granted only if its content is safe enough. Between the two criteria for censorship, cultural and moral on the one hand, and political on the other, the government guards the political end much more carefully. Countless numbers of songs passed through censorship recently, with the lax cultural standards, according to some music critics (Hoàng). Yet songs with political messages, even calls for reform (as in the case of Trần Tiến discussed elsewhere), can hardly see the daylight in the mainstream market. Their only hope would be the Internet or the black market. The distribution of songs with content deemed anti-revolutionary or threatening the status quo, however, might bring costly consequences such as jail time or fine or both to all those who were involved, from the composer to the consumer. Therefore, most would not risk their limited liberty living in Vietnam for the more restricted life in prison.

For the artists living under socialism and currently the post-socialist society, losing a little bit of freedom to express their political opinions may not be deemed a significant loss, but they would have much to gain financially and socially if they comply with the system of governance. Miklós Haraszti observed the Hungarian intelligentsia still living under socialism in the mid-1980s:

Today, those who had the advantage of education and professional training are members of a secure, organized middle class. Leading technocrats and experts form the upper class, enjoying undeniable privilege. All the intellectual professions have been given political responsibilities; since everyone is a state employee, an objective bureaucraticism conceals the class egotism that governs

the distribution of goods and the machinery of publicity. In this modernization of society the intelligentsia had nothing to lose but its independence, in return, it gained half a world, and possesses it on condition that it protects the unity of this world and interprets its own power as service (Haraszti 18).

In Vietnam, after the logic of the market entered government, although artists were no longer state employees as under socialist time before the mid-1980s, depending on the artists' compliance, they can earn a living participating in the entertainment industry which has become high in demand as the market economy was allowed to be active. Composers, who want to have their music broadcast, printed, or recorded, need to write the kind of music and lyrics, if applicable, that can pass the censorship bureau. Singers, who want to perform, also have to put up with the political restrictions. The same thing goes for producers. Composer Trần Tiến, after living in Saigon for two decades and gaining much popularity in Vietnam, was able to buy real estate properties in central locations in the city as well as elsewhere. As I spoke with him in December 2006, he no longer felt the urge to write songs that caught attention politically. Popular singers like Hồng Nhung, Thanh Lam, Đàm Vĩnh Hưng, Mỹ Linh, and so on, have never stood up to deliver any political messages even though more young people can recognize their names better than those of the Politburo members. Singers, who did not like the government, when given the chance, would leave Vietnam rather than risking themselves by voicing their political opinions while staying in the country. Indeed, the government of Vietnam has been quite successful in co-opting the artists, which the Party has always considered to be one of the most important segments of the society. This is because artists hardly want to risk losing their status or income.

There might be some who expressed themselves “between the lines”, but Haraszti dismissed their behaviors as posing a threat to the state because in the end they only served as a gauge for the state in watching out for more risky behaviors,

The space between the lines offers relative freedom without risk, and so we may profess ourselves to be the lobbyists of innovation. This well suits the state. Our art has become a subtle barometer of all the tensions that could threaten to shatter state culture. This phenomenon has no dynamic and no direction of its own. It is the froth churned up by the perpetual waves of decentralization and recentralization.⁸¹

The state is still above “the space between the lines,” constantly watching it. Artists’ independence and freedom from state control are still unattainable in the Vietnamese post-socialist system of governance. Ultimately, neo-liberal governance appears in different forms in different places, depending much on political histories. Post-colonial, post-socialist government in Vietnam uses the market to accomplish its perpetual grip on power, leaving almost no space for political possibilities.

⁸¹ “We” are the state artists in Haraszti 147

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