



HERITAGE
OF FUTURE PAST

INTRODUCTION

This collection of heritage stories has been created by Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth, a British Council programme taking place in Vietnam as well as Colombia and Kenya.

Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth is a pilot initiative exploring the use of cultural heritage for growth that benefits all levels of society. Cultural heritage in this context means many things, from the built environment through to cultural traditions such as music and language. Inclusive growth means working with and for all levels of society to reconcile the divide between economic growth and rising inequality.

In Vietnam, the in-country Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth project – known as Heritage of Future Past – works with communities, heritage bearers and contemporary artists to safeguard and promote music and film heritage which are under-represented or at high risk of disappearing.

Music and film heritage – especially that of under-represented groups - including ethnic minority groups located in remote, rural areas – are becoming increasingly less visible in Vietnam's contemporary culture and society, against the backdrop of rapid economic growth. Within this context, efforts in safeguarding valuable and at-risk intangible cultural components have received very little attention and support. The situation affects the capacity of communities surrounding said components to develop their human capital and contribute to national development.

The ten stories within this publication are told through the view of people and places involved in the programme so far – to document, highlight and share the value, beauty and opportunities cultural heritage can bring from a diverse range of perspectives. Each story holds its own identity, creativity and uniqueness, yet all are inspired by a common sense of purpose; to promote the importance and relevance of cultural heritage in celebrating the past, further understanding our present and creating a shared future.

When knitted together these stories both reveal and raise awareness for the transformational power of cultural heritage and its ability to develop cross-cultural understanding in today's society. As demonstrated through the lens of Vietnam's rich cultural heritage in this collection, it is uniquely positioned to do many things; from acting as a conduit for the exchange of ideas across generations to providing a pathway for building collective, sustainable livelihoods.

Our sincere thanks to the authors Barley Norton from Goldsmiths, University of London, and Hoàng Văn Chung from Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, who travelled to many locations and interviewed many participants to make sure that the stories really capture the essence of the people at the heart of the project and their worlds. We believe these stories should be kept and shared for the benefit of people who tell their stories, and those who will listen and share these stories further.

HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

THE SOUND OF
GONGS IN MŌ H'RA VILLAGE
HERALDS A NEW ERA
OF CULTURAL TOURISM





As the sun sets one evening in January 2020, the people of Mơ H'ra village, in Gia Lai province in the Central Highlands, dance around a fire to the deep, pulsating sound of gongs and drums. Their eyes glimmer with joy, their shadows dance with the flames.

Although the villagers perform enthusiastically, it is not easy for the Bahнар who live in Mơ H'ra to maintain their heritage. Many ethnic minority people living in the Central Highlands face considerable challenges and have to work hard to sustain themselves in difficult economic circumstances.

Cultural heritage has the potential to alleviate some difficulties. It can be used as a resource to enhance people's livelihoods and economic sustainability. Supported by the British Council's 'Heritage of Future Past' programme, Mơ H'ra is keen to develop cultural tourism. Over the last year, villagers have worked with specialists in community-based tourism to develop practical ways of enabling visitors to appreciate their heritage. The village's iconic communal house or rông, a thatched building on stilts made of wood and bamboo, has been renovated as a welcoming exhibition space. Inside the rông, tourists can learn about Bahநар cultural practices and traditional artefacts. These include old work tools, embroidered fabrics and different musical instruments, including a set of 13 gongs and drums, and bamboo xylophones and tube-zithers.

The gong ensembles have been reorganized and they hold regular rehearsals under the supervision of Đinh H'munh, the head of the village. According to Đinh H'munh, villagers used to dance and play gongs at important community events held during different seasons of the year. But now there are two gong ensembles, a children's group and an adult group, which are ready to perform whenever tourists visit. Đinh H'munh also intends to expand the musical offering further by teaching children to sing folksongs and to play other traditional instruments. As well as enjoying performances, visiting tourists can purchase handicrafts like embroidered cloth and enjoy eating local specialities like fire-roasted chicken, special root vegetables and sticky rice cooked in bamboo tubes.

Đinh H'munh and other members of the village's community-tourism committee, including a girl in her late teens called Đinh Thị Mến, travelled to different provinces to learn lessons from others who have improved their local economy through cultural tourism. Đinh Thị Mến also took a course to train as a tourist guide. Previously she had considered leaving the village to find work, but after completing the course she decided to stay and help promote Mơ H'ra as a site for cultural tourism. Đinh Thị Mến had to learn more about her heritage from village elders to introduce it to outsiders and she plans to study Bahநар history and traditions in even more depth in the future.



As a tourist attraction, the sound of gongs and drums of Mơ H'ra can be heard resonating down the valleys beyond the village and through the surrounding fields of maize and sugar cane. Now the gong ensembles not only transmit stories about the past, they also anticipate being a vital part of the village's livelihood into the future.

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[Gong Ensemble](#)

[Đinh H'munh Song](#)

HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

THE
FUTURE
OF
TRADITION





How can traditional art forms exist in Vietnam today? How should contemporary artists engage with tradition to develop new work? What is the value of indigenous culture in a rapidly globalising world? These are some of the big questions at the heart of the "The Future of Tradition" project supported by the British Council's 'Film, Archive and Music Laboratory' (FAMLAB) Fund. Through performances, artist talks and 'open studio' workshops, the project provided a forum for exploring the pressing issues faced by artists in Vietnam today.

One of the consultants for the project, the musician Son X, explained some

of the thinking behind it: "Vietnamese society today is confused. We don't know who we are or where we are from. This is one of the reasons why many young artists today want to go back to their roots". Despite such interest in connecting with the past, it is not easy to find a meaningful way to do so. Son X himself is steeped in a form of traditional music theatre called chèo. He learnt rhythms from master chèo drummers from a young age. But many contemporary artists without such training are searching for new ways to relate to cultural traditions. To help such artists engage with indigenous culture, Son X devised a new theatre work called "Two

Ladies Nguyệt Cô" ("Hai Nàng Nguyệt Cô"), which combines live electronics with two types of traditional music theatre, chèo and tuồng. He also acted as a mentor for emerging artists. "Many young artists ask me, how should we develop tradition? I say to them that you must be sincere and true to yourself because the essence of tradition resides inside you, in your everyday life, not in the specific forms or materials of traditional art forms".

Such advice resonated with some young artists involved in the project like the 22-year-old artist La Mai. During the workshops, La Mai created a piece of performance art inspired by the traditional chèo play "Súy Vân Feigns Madness" ("Súy Vân giả dại"). At the climax of the play, the female character Súy Vân pretends to be mad in a vain attempt to release herself from a tragic love triangle. In a frenzied state, Súy Vân sings and dances around the stage, flitting uncontrollably between conflicting emotions. When developing her new work, La Mai watched this famous scene over and over again, writing down Súy Vân's different movements and feelings of anguish. La Mai traced the path of the theatre actress, cutting out the pattern on a white mat, and during her performance she poured white sand into the grooves in the mat. La Mai's new creation did not reference Súy Vân directly, so the audience would not necessarily be aware that it was influenced by chèo music theatre. Reflecting on the workshop,



La Mai remarked, "I did not want to exploit tradition, I wanted to have a dialogue with Súy Vân and express my individual feelings".

The Future of Tradition was an ambitious project and it genuinely seems to have had a significant impact on the work of many young artists. Certainly, for La Mai the project was a valuable experience: "Participating in the project has changed me", she said, "it has made me more emotionally sensitive to tradition".

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HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

LOST
LEGENDS
IN
PARADISE

THE HANOI
NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL





The Hanoi New Music Festival 2018 was an historic event. It was the largest festival of exploratory forms of new music that has ever been held in Vietnam. For the Festival, artists came to Hanoi from Japan and eight countries from across Southeast Asia. The famous Japanese guitarist and composer Otomo Yoshihide said he felt like he was in paradise during his time at the Festival because it was such a valuable opportunity to make friends and collaborate with other Asian musicians.

Running over six days in December 2018, the Festival was curated by the Hanoi-based composer Trần Thị Kim Ngọc. Audiences at different venues across Hanoi were treated to a bonanza of alternative

music, from multimedia performances of music, theatre and video through to performance poetry, 'noise' music, and nightclub sets by experimental DJs.

The 'Connecting Heritage' initiative of the British Council supported some creative work inspired by cultural heritage, which was performed at the Festival. This included the "Lost Legends" concert held in a disused, ramshackle film studio on Thụy Khuê street in the centre of Hanoi. The multimedia piece "Nguyệt Cô turns into a fox" (Hồ Nguyệt Cô hóa cáo), composed by the Festival organiser Kim Ngọc, was part of the concert.

"Nguyệt Cô turns into a fox" is a tragic legend performed in traditional

Vietnamese opera, tuồng. According to the old tale, a female fox cultivates powers of witchcraft over thousands of years and finally manages to obtain a magical jade with the power to transform her into a woman called Nguyệt Cô. While living on earth, Nguyệt Cô becomes infatuated with a vainglorious general who tricks her into giving him the jade. Upon losing her powers, Nguyệt Cô turns back into a fox and ultimately dies in agony. The legend is a cautionary tale about misplaced trust and betrayal in love.

Kim Ngọc's composition sets the old story in a radically new way. Two film screens on the stage project traditional tuồng artists performing and talking about the legend, and these images are delicately blended with a live ensemble of five musicians playing Western classical instruments. Reflecting on her creative journey devising the work, Kim Ngọc commented, "The piece employs contrasting concepts and elements - the past and the future, East and West, film and music - to create different layers of expression. I wanted to immerse the audience in these different layers so they could choose to perceive the piece in their own way".

Kim Ngọc pointed out that not all contemporary artists feel the need to draw on cultural heritage when searching for their individual, unique voice. But she added, "In a society like Vietnam it is really important to connect to heritage, it is part of our identity that we cannot reject. Some successful

artistic projects with links to heritage have sprung up recently. If the British Council's Connecting Heritage programme didn't exist, many of these wouldn't have taken place."

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HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

BEAT
- BOXING V.
TRADITIONAL
DRUMMING

THE VALUE
OF HERITAGE
IN A GLOBALISED
WORLD



Hoàng Anh's zest for life is infectious. Sitting with him in his small studio apartment in a French-colonial house in Hanoi, he flicks through a stream of video clips, excitedly recounting stories about his different media projects. The variety of work he shows me is impressive, if slightly overwhelming: From glossy music videos of up-and-coming bands to clips of him learning traditional music from elderly masters; From big budget TV adverts produced by his company "Fly in the Dust Media House" to raw footage of his intrepid adventures riding around on old Soviet-era motorbikes.

Now in his late 20s, Hoàng Anh belongs to an internet generation more at home with global pop culture than with Vietnamese traditions of the past. But he wants to change this. Using the power of new media technology, he aims to inspire his generation to reconnect with their heritage and to change the common perception that indigenous culture is old fashioned and unimportant.

For his film project 'See the Sound', funded by the British Council's FAMLAB Fund, Hoàng Anh worked with musicians from different generations to build bridges between the old and the new. In the film we see a young Vietnamese-American beatboxer, Trung Bào, performing with a senior drummer, Chí, who plays traditional rhythms of chèo music theatre. To appeal to the social-media generation, these innovative

performances are shot in a high-tech dynamic way. Hoàng Anh thinks such collaborations have great potential to reveal the contemporary relevance of heritage. "I want to breathe life into tradition, to connect the older and younger generations in a new way using media", he says.

Hoàng Anh's passion for indigenous culture was sparked by an epiphany he had during one of his motorbike trips in the mountainous region of northern Vietnam. While riding in a remote part of Yên Bái province, he stumbled across what looked like an abandoned temple. Intrigued, he ventured in. The temple was deserted and he was about to leave, when suddenly an old woman appeared. She asked him why he had come to this Mother Goddess temple. He replied that he just liked going to remote places where few people travelled, but she disagreed. She told him their meeting was predestined. He had been drawn to the temple, she said, because the Mother Goddesses had love and compassion for him. The old woman lamented that the beauty of Vietnam's culture would be lost if people turned their backs on indigenous beliefs like the Mother Goddess religion.

Touched by the old woman's sincerity and devotion, this chance encounter led Hoàng Anh to think deeply about the value of heritage in a globalised world. He loves how the internet has broken down barriers, but expresses concern about what



will happen to Vietnamese culture if young artists blindly follow global trends and are disconnected from their heritage. "We need to overcome the cultural disruption that happened in the past", he says, "so that the younger generation can emerge and discover the value of old things. Not in order to reject modernity. But to build a way of life and a contemporary culture that is more profound and empathetic, and which includes more of the beauty and value of the past".

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HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

" W A R R I O R ,
W H O
A R E Y O U ? "

CINEMA

IN SOUTH VIETNAM

BEFORE 1975



In 2019, the film critic Lê Hồng Lâm went on a long journey around the USA, visiting 10 cities in 5 different states. He went there to meet famous directors and actors from the 'golden age' of cinema in Saigon before 1975. Based on his journey, Lâm has written a book titled "Warrior, Who are You?": Cinema in South Vietnam from 1954 to 1975.

The film industry in South Vietnam flourished and over 300 films were produced over two decades. Most of the films were funded by private companies at time when going to the cinema was becoming a popular form of entertainment. "During the first

period in the late 1950s and early 60s, most of the films concentrated on love stories. After that, some films started to reflect more on the context of war and people's fate', Lâm said.

A host of film stars emerged during this special period of cinema history due to the creativity and experimentation of Vietnamese directors, many of whom were trained abroad. These stars are still remembered fondly by the older generation today, but Lâm found it difficult to uncover interesting information beyond second-hand anecdotes. "Very few people were able to talk

about these old films in any detail as many of the people involved in making them have already passed away. There is a dearth of archive materials and those that do exist are often poor quality and difficult to access", Lâm said.

In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, Lâm searched for some of the key players in Saigon's film industry who are still alive. Most of the famous actors and directors went to America after the war ended in 1975, so it was fortunate that he received funding from the British Council's 'Film, Archive and Music Lab' Fund (FAMLAB), which enabled him to travel to do research. Even with this support, it was not easy to contact people and set up interviews. Many actors had given up their profession when they left Vietnam and some refused to meet him for personal reasons. Others were difficult to locate and were scattered around the USA. In the end, Lâm's perseverance bore fruit and he managed to interview stars like the actor Trần Quang and the actresses Kiều Chinh and Kim Vui.

Lâm's meeting with Kiều Chinh at her home in California was especially memorable. For more than 6 hours, Kiều Chinh recounted memories of her career in Saigon, which began in 1957 with the film *The Bell of Thiên Mụ Temple* (Hỏi chuông Thiên Mụ). She featured in many Vietnamese and American movies during the 1960s, but it was her role as the lead in the 1971 war epic,

Warrior, Who are You? (Người tình không Chân dung) that made her a household name. In this dramatic film, a beautiful girl leaves Saigon, risking her life to enter a dangerous battlefield in the hope of meeting the soldier she loves. In the tragic ending, she finds him badly wounded, his whole body covered in bandages. Kiều Chinh also talked to Lâm about her career as an actress after 1975 and her appearances in famous films like *The Joy Luck Club* (1993). She is among the very few Vietnamese film stars who achieved success in the film industry after migrating to the USA.

Lâm worked on his book for two years and there were many moments when he despaired. Although he learnt a lot from his trip to the USA and his interviews with former film stars still living in Ho Chi Minh City, it was often hard to verify information. Research about the history and culture of South Vietnam also raises issues that are still politically sensitive and this made it hard for him to reflect frankly on pre-1975 films. According to Lâm, Saigon cinema is an important part of Vietnam's cultural history that cannot be denied, yet few people know about it and there is a danger that much will be lost forever unless films are preserved and documented now. Through reading his book, Lâm hopes that more people will appreciate a valuable part of Vietnam's film heritage.

HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

BEAUTIFUL
AND REAL

SUSTAINING
CẢI LƯƠNG MUSIC
THEATRE

Cải lương music theatre is in decline. Its audiences have dwindled and few live performances are staged. Such a gloomy assessment is common amongst artists and theatre lovers who witnessed cải lương during its heyday during the 1950s and 1960s in South Vietnam. But nostalgia for the past and soul-searching about the reasons for Cải lương's difficulties are of little help. Practical strategies to reinvigorate the theatre are very much needed.

The theatre director Hồng Dung's life work has been devoted to sustaining Cải lương. Born into a famous artistic family, theatre was part of her everyday life growing up. As audiences for Cải lương decreased during the 1980s, she resolved to do everything she could to support the art form. Hồng Dung has strong opinions about why the popularity of music theatre has decreased and how to increase public appreciation of the art. "At a glance, one may think Cải lương is simple. Yet it is truly subtle and delicate. A lack of proper research and education has meant that many people do not know its core artistic values", she said.

Hồng Dung's ideas about Cải lương are rooted in the legacy of her late father, Năm Châu. He was a famous performer who wrote acclaimed plays like "Smell of Brandy, Scent of Love", "Late-Night Stage" and "Wife and Lover". Based on her understanding of her father's plays, Hồng Dung emphasises two core principles at the heart of Cải lương – the beautiful and the real. These principles,

she says, can be found in scripts like "Late-Night Stage", which tells the story of a married couple who are both theatre artists. At the beginning of the play the couple live a perfect life, performing joyfully together on the stage. But their lives go awry when the husband chases after material wealth and ends up leaving his wife. Hồng Dung considers this narrative to reveal her father's central artistic vision, that Cải lương must be a pure art form that realistically addresses the issues people deal with in their everyday lives. The moral of the story is that the beauty of Cải lương will be lost if performers seek quick financial gain by slavishly following trivial, commercial tastes

Hồng Dung's mission, she says, "is to promote the artistic values that my father spent his entire life developing". This has included establishing grassroots programmes for teaching singing and promoting the values of Cải lương. With financial support from the British Council's Culture Heritage for Inclusive Growth project, Hồng Dung set up singing classes in the busy centre of Ho Chi Minh City. When the classes were advertised, she was surprised by how many young people registered for the programme. In the end, 30 students were selected for the opening classes, which focused on fundamental performance techniques, and 10 continued on to more advanced classes.

The students came from all walks of life. One of the students called Hiếu, who

works in the tourist industry, reflected on how much he learnt from the classes: "although I have been singing Cải lương as an amateur since I was a child, it was only after I attended the classes that I knew how to correctly control my breathing, how to keep in time with the rhythm and how to fully express the feelings of the lyrics". The classes have helped Hiếu with his job of organising Vietnamese cultural events for international tourists. Due to his training, he now feels confident performing classic songs and introducing Cải lương to foreigners. Hiếu believes it is possible for Cải lương to regain its appeal as long as it is performed on well-designed stages that enable audiences to become fully immersed in the dynamics of the live performance.

The commitment of students like Hiếu exceeded Hồng Dung's expectations. "The students were so enthusiastic", she commented. "Although the teaching programme has finished, they still meet up and perform together. Some of the advanced students have also opened their own classes to teach others". The students' passion has encouraged Hồng Dung to continue running teaching programmes in the future. She is also working on new productions of her father's classic plays in the hope that new audiences will rediscover the beauty of Cải lương theatre.





BRINGING
HMONG FOLKSONGS
TO THE WORLD

In his cramped flat on the outskirts of Hanoi, the young musician Giàng A Bê is working until the early hours of the morning. His eyes strain as he edits video on his old, dusty computer. He cannot sleep as he is excited about finishing his first documentary about Hmong music titled *A Folksong Journey* (Hành trình Dân ca).

The 30-minute film is the culmination of a 9-month project called 'Our Music' (Âm nhạc của Chúng mình), which was carried out by Bê and a group of his Hmong friends. Supported by the British Council's 'Film, Archive and Music Lab' Fund (FAMLAB), the project aimed to explore the cultural practices of Hmong people that are in danger of disappearing. Few Hmong under the age of 30 know how to perform traditional music, Bê said, so it is important to find new ways to encourage young people to connect with their cultural heritage.

Bê recently graduated from the Hanoi University of Culture but he was born and grew up in Yên Bái province in northern Vietnam. For the project, the team made trips back to the mountainous northern regions where there are large populations of Hmong people. They went to find elderly musicians and singers, so they could record and document traditional melodies. On their return, they translated lyrics from the Hmong language into Vietnamese and created new arrangements of songs. Traditionally, Hmong songs are often performed a cappella, without an instrumental accompaniment, but the team experimented with combining traditional songs with contemporary pop music. "A Song to Choose a Husband" is one of the melodies they arranged. It is a much-loved song because of the beauty of the words and its cultural significance: the song advises Hmong girls how to find a good fiancé. In

the modern remixed version, the solo female voice floats over a backing of electronic beats and the sounds of traditional instruments like the qeej mouthorgan and raj nplaim bamboo-reed flute.

Bê is a leading member of the Hmong Action Group (AHD), a volunteer organisation set up by young Hmong. AHD strives to change negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and raise awareness of the value of Hmong culture amongst the Vietnamese people as a whole. Bê's father was a master performer of traditional instruments like the qeej mouthorgan. But it wasn't until after his father's tragic death that Bê realised the value of Hmong music and began to study traditional instruments himself. The cultural break that Bê experienced as a result of his father's untimely death gave him a very personal motivation for becoming a cultural activist and embarking on the British Council project.

On the 28th December 2019, the project team hosted a film screening and discussion in the theatre of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities in the centre of Hanoi. When the film *A Folksong Journey* was shown, it received an emotional reception from the Hmong community, including Bê's mother who travelled to the capital for the event. Members of the audience told Bê that the film's vivid portrayal of Hmong culture made them feel pride in their heritage. Bringing Hmong folksongs to downtown Hanoi was a major landmark in the lives of Bê and his friends. They hope that the folksongs featured in the film will inspire more people to enjoy and value Hmong culture.





HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

THE
CAPTIVATING SOUND
OF THE
GINANG DRUM:
CHILDREN MAKING FILMS
ABOUT
CHAM CULTURAL
HERITAGE



In 2019, a boy called Thắng made a short film about his musical journey learning to play a traditional drum. The 8-minute film, titled "Thắng - The Boy Who Learns to Play the Drum" ("Thắng - Cậu Bé Học Trống"), was produced by Thắng and a group of his school friends. It offers a children's point-of-view on the cultural practices of the Cham people who live in Binh Nghia village, in the Bắc Sơn commune of Ninh Thuận province.

"We made the film so that viewers could understand more about Cham cultural traditions and musical instruments", Thắng said. The film focuses on Thắng's learning of the ginang, a large double-headed barrel drum made of wood and buffalo skin. In performances, interlocking rhythms are usually played by two men on a pair of drums. Each player makes different sounds, striking one drumhead with a stick and the other one with the hand.

Historically, the Cham people were influenced by Hinduism from India and most of the villagers in Binh Nghia follow an indigenized form of Brahmanism. Music is an important part of their religious rituals. It is performed for ancestors and for Brahman deities on a trio of instruments: the ginang, a frame drum called the paranung, and a type of shawm called the saranai. In Cham cosmology this trio of instruments represents three levels of the universe: the high-pitched saranai is at the top, the paranung produces sounds in the middle register, and the booming bass sound of the ginang is at the bottom.

Thắng chose to learn the ginang because, he said, "it is popular in the village and has a loud, interesting sound. It is used a lot in village rituals that take place every month or two". Thắng had such passion for music that, whenever he was not attending



school or helping out his parents around the house, he would rush to his drum teacher's house to have lessons. His progress and enthusiasm are captured in the documentary film. After six months, he managed to learn the fundamental techniques and play several pieces. His dream, in the future, is to perform the ginang at the largest religious festival called the "Kate", which is organized annually at ancient Cham towers.

As well as the portrait film about Thắng, other groups of school children from Bắc Sơn commune made other films. As part of a programme supported by the British Council's Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth project, these children completed a filmmaking course, which taught them all the theoretical and practical skills needed to shoot and edit video stories.

Over the course of four months, three groups of teenagers made three more

short films. Their films depict the cultural life of Cham people and the landscape where they live. They include images of green rice paddies with mountains in the distance, giant wind-turbines looming over red-tiled roofs, and narrow alleyways bordered with sun-drenched gardens. Against this backdrop, the ginang drum is prominent in all the films. Its significance as an important cultural symbol is approached from different angles. The films explore drum-making techniques, the instrument's origin and ritual role, and they include interviews with master drummers. The young, budding filmmakers had to overcome many challenges. They had to learn how to construct a narrative and manage technical issues with filming and recording sound. Editing hours of video material down to a short film, under 10 minutes long, was a difficult task. The process of making films enabled the children to explore their cultural traditions using the modern technology they are naturally attracted to. It also empowered them to contribute to the preservation of their musical and religious heritage.

Elderly artists in Binh Nghia village said they were delighted to see children happily working on their films and were inspired by the children's energy and enthusiasm. The artist Sâm Tấnh, who is one of just a few musicians in the village who have mastered the ginang, remarked that, "teachers like me are trying hard to train children well, so our music traditions will be kept alive".



HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

PLANTING SEEDS
FOR
THE FUTURE
OF GONG CULTURE



Playing sets of gongs is an important musical practice of ethnic minority communities in the Vietnamese Central Highlands. In 2005 UNESCO recognized the "Space of gong culture" as a Masterpiece of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Despite this international recognition, dramatic cultural change in recent years has meant that traditional gong performances have dwindled. To help support the transmission of gong culture of the Bahнар people, the British Council initiated a training programme in schools in Kon Tum Province as part of its Cultural

Heritage for Inclusive Growth project. In 2019, experienced Bahнар musicians from local villages were invited to teach at the Kon Rẫy Boarding School, which is dedicated to children from ethnic minority groups. A total of 45 students, aged 15 and 16, were taught in 3 different classes.

Learning to perform in gong ensembles helped students develop deeper cultural understanding. The teacher responsible for overseeing the classes, Y Mai Phương, said that as well as learning performance skills, students were taught about the cultural context and meanings of pieces. They learnt, for example, whether pieces were traditionally performed to commemorate the building of a large communal house (called a *rông*), or to celebrate a bountiful harvest or victory in battle. Y Mai Phương also added that, "Pupils were trained in a systematic way, so by the end they could play numerous pieces and also teach playing skills to others".

One of the classes was reserved for female students only. The headmaster Trần Đạo said this promoted gender equality. In the past, gongs were exclusively played by men, but the headmaster thought it was important to ensure that all his pupils could access the training. Reflecting on her participation in the classes, a slight year-nine student called Y Đào said she initially found it awkward carrying the largest gong, because it was made of bronze and was very heavy, but with practice she quickly got used to it. Together with her female classmates, she



worked hard to ensure her group performed as skillfully as the others. When asked why she joined the classes, Y Đào replied, "learning to play gongs helped me understand more about my heritage".

At the end of the training, all the groups participated in a final performance in front of the whole school. One of the boys who performed, A Nghiệp, said he felt happy and proud when he heard his friends cheering and clapping at the event. The experience, he said, had inspired him to become a musician: "I want to become a folk artist who knows lots of different pieces, so in the future I can teach them to young people, just like the artists who taught me".

The village chief A Jring Đeng was one of the artists who taught at the school. Before starting the training, he was worried about whether it would be successful, because few teenagers in his village were

interested in performing gongs at ceremonies. But he was impressed by how hard the school students practiced. For many years, A Jring Đeng has sought to raise awareness of cultural heritage in his community: "To encourage the youth to learn about gong culture, I tell them that we cannot lose the tradition because it is part of our spiritual life. Although our ancestors departed long ago, they still want to hear the sound of gongs. Performing in the gong ensemble shows gratitude to our ancestors and enables us to receive their blessing and protection".

The British Council also supported A Jring Đeng to organise gong-teaching sessions for teenagers in his village. For the village chief, the project has rekindled hope that it is possible to keep gong culture alive. In the rolling hills of the Central Highlands, seeds have been planted so that traditional heritage can be cultivated into the future.

HERITAGE OF FUTURE PAST

LIVE ART
PERFORMANCE
IN HANOI

THE BOLERO EFFECT



Two women wearing elegant red dresses stand in a stairway. They sing overlapping phrases accompanied by the plaintive sound of a solo cello: "On a wave of sadness ... I have never known such fear." An estranged couple lying together, fully clothed on a bed, stare vacantly into the distance. They recite enigmatic lines like, "existence", "silence", "they will come", "send a letter". A conductor leads a group of singers, who sit around a table after an enchanting candle-lit dinner. The closing words of the song are, "Why don't you say one more goodbye? Another. Wait."

These are scenes from a live art performance called "The Bolero Effect", which took place in a house in Hanoi in December 2019. Created by the UK-based

artist Moi Tran, "The Bolero Effect" transformed an everyday house into an extraordinary site for an immersive encounter. Breaking down conventional barriers between performers and spectators, the audience was invited to mingle with the ensemble cast, joining them in the hallway and stairs, in the kitchen and bedrooms. The script written by Moi Tran was intentionally ambiguous and fragmented to allow for different interpretations. Rather than imposing a linear narrative arch, Moi Tran said she wanted to facilitate a "site of appearance", a shared space for igniting conversations about Vietnamese migration and transnational identity.

Moi Tran was born in Quảng Ninh province in northeast Vietnam, but as a

Vietnamese person with Chinese heritage she was forced to leave Vietnam as a young child in the late 1970s. Now an established professional working in the London theatre scene, Moi Tran was awarded a grant from the British Council's FAMLAB Fund to return to Vietnam to lead a collaborative, interdisciplinary project. Over the course of three months, she worked closely with a creative team in Hanoi, which included the curator Đỗ Tường Linh and the

composer Tú Nguyễn. The team collaborated with an ensemble of community performers, many of whom were not professionally trained. An aim of the project was to create an open forum for marginalised voices to be heard.

The idea for the performance was inspired by bolero, a form of popular music with a complex and controversial history. Bolero emerged in South Vietnam during the 1960s, but in North Vietnam it was prohibited and criticised as "weak" and "sentimental". After the end of the war in 1975, bolero continued to be very popular among the Vietnamese diaspora. For Moi Tran hearing bolero songs at community gatherings, while growing up in England, was a formative

experience. Bolero, she said, was an emotional catalyst for conveying memories and expressing feelings of sadness and longing that were not openly discussed. Since the 1990s, bolero has become extremely popular in Vietnam once again and the performers were drawn to participate in "The Bolero Effect" because of their strong emotional connections to music. Because of its power to move across borders and to evoke emotions, music was an ideal medium for starting conversations about transnational identity.

Reflecting on her return to Hanoi to devise "The Bolero Effect", Moi Tran said she was interested in examining what it means to be Vietnamese across diverse transnational communities. Ultimately, she said, the project was about "finding the future of relationships and connections between the two communities, in the diaspora and the homeland. How do we learn to understand each other so we don't make the mistakes of the past? How do you learn to empathise, understand and embrace the different types of lives that people have lived and will continue to live, but also recognise a shared history?". Through a collective process of artistic work, through performing and listening to music together, "The Bolero Effect" created a space for exploring these pressing questions.

BARLEY NORTON

Barley Norton is Reader in Ethnomusicology and Director of the Asian Music Unit (AsMU) in the Music Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. Since first visiting Vietnam in the 1990s, Barley has carried out extensive field research on Vietnamese music and cultural heritage. As well as writing books and articles about Vietnamese music culture, he has shot and directed ethnographic films. Major publications include a book about the role of music during spirit

possession rituals, *Songs for the Spirits* (University of Illinois Press 2009), and two films about contemporary music, *Hanoi Eclipse - The Music of Dai Lam Linh* (Documentary Educational Resources 2010), and *Make a Silence - Musical Dialogues in Asia* (2019). He has also published two coedited volumes: *Music and Protest in 1968* (Cambridge University Press 2013), which won the American Musicology Society's 2014 Ruth A. Solie Award; and *Music as Heritage* (Routledge 2019).

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Hoàng Văn Chung is a researcher in Sociology, currently the Head of Department for Theories and policy on religion at the Institute for Religious Studies (IRS), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS). Since 1999, Chung has focused his investigation on new religious phenomena, folk religion, Buddhism, and state-religion relationship in Vietnam and carried out a lot of ethnographic fieldwork among diverse religious-ethnic communities. His major publications include *New*

Religions and State's Response to Religious Diversification in Contemporary Vietnam (Springer 2017), an edited book *Major values and functions of Buddhism in contemporary Vietnam* (Social Sciences publishing house 2019), and a book chapter entitled "The double-layered religious diversification in post-Renovation Vietnam" in *Religious Diversity in Asia* (Brill 2019).

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