

## **PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL- ARTISTIC FORMS IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT (THE CASE OF HÁT GHEỌ, PHÚ THỌ)**

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Being an ancient land, centre of the former Văn Lang, Phú Thọ has quite a rich natural environment with the mixed terrain of hills and deltas and the convergence of huge rivers and tourist attractions. It is the natural environment, glorious depth of history along with the creativeness, compassionateness and aestheticism of Ancestral Land's people that create favorable conditions for the introduction of traditional cultural-artistic forms, including hát Ghẹo.

Through following descriptions, we would like to provide an overview of hát Ghẹo and its values. Accordingly, we would like to initially propose some measures to preserve Hát Ghẹo that can also be applicable to other traditional cultural- artistic forms in the context of an increasingly cultural integration where cultural- artistic forms are facing such huge challenges

### **I. Features of hát Ghẹo**

*Hát Ghẹo* (or *hát Ghẹo anh* or *hát Nước nghĩa*) is the dual love songs of people from various villages. This is one of the

cultural products of people in the Ancestral Land, generated in the center of the Ancestral Land cultural region as well as being one of the constituent parts of the traditional cultural treasure of Vietnam. Hát Ghẹo has features of the nature, society and personality of people in this region. It is the location of a buffer zone in combination with the diversified terrain, especially the presence of such huge rivers as Đà River, Lô River and Thao River that creates favorable conditions for Phú Thọ to exchange with various regions. These are also factors that helps hát Ghẹo to acquire more tunes to improve its diversity.

#### *1. Organization and sequence of oratorio*

It is told by artists that in the past when the village organized a festival, a meeting of elders and all villagers was organized one month before the festival to discuss about ritual. This meeting was

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called *cầu hội diện* or *cầu họp mặt*. Each individual in the village contributed money, rice for the organization of the ritual. *Dân nước nghĩa* (“twined village”) was often invited to this meeting for discussion and having a party. In years of bad harvest, village would organize small meetings in which *dân nước nghĩa* was not invited. In years of good harvest, the village would organize huge meetings and invite *dân nước nghĩa* to take part in their discussion and party of up to four or five trays of food.

Hát Ghẹo is the folk dual singing between male and female and unrelated to the ritual. However, there is hát Ghẹo at the end of each festival and it only starts when the ritual in the communal house has been completed. In other words, hát Ghẹo is never performed before the ritual, sacrifice. Upon completing the party at the nightfall, males and females start inviting each other to the singing location.

It is regulated by *nước nghĩa* custom, village invited to the singing will assign males while village organizing the singing will assign females to welcome. In this situation, males often wear áo the (“the shirt”), white pants, turban – which are the most beautiful costumes often used in festivals only. Welcoming females often wear white five-paneled aristocratic gown, short jacket, bright red brassiere, silk pants, colorful belt, key chain and kerchief.

Hát Ghẹo is performed in 4 stages called 4 tones by the folk: Firstly *Ví mời/đãi*

*trầu*; Secondly *Giọng sống*; Thirdly *Sang giọng*; Forthly *Ví tiễn/đưa chân*.

Starting the singing, after two twined parties have some common greetings, males and females start singing *Ví đãi trầu*. Through betel pieces – the intermediary that can be considered an excuse – females invite males while sing improvised, courteous Allegories such as:

“Miếng trầu để đĩa bung ra  
Xin anh nhận lấy để rồi thử than”

(Quote *Ví đãi trầu*)

*Giọng sống* is the music feature people use to sing various songs. Lyrics of *Giọng sống* have a certain sequence and similar contents. Each lyric includes many sentences, some of which are for females, some for males and some for both to which some words or form of address to make it suitable; for instance, females sing “*vì anh em mới tới đây*” when males replace “*vì anh*” by “*vì chị*” and sing “*vì chị em mới tới đây*”, etc.

*Sang giọng* has a nature of freedom, males and females can sing any tones first. Each tone can have two, three lyrics and each partner only sings one lyric. The person singing first can sing any lyric while the person singing later sing the remaining lyric that is considered as opposite tone. In *Sang giọng* phase, to create an exciting environment for the singing competition, people often hold singing competition with the rules of competing in sentence and voice. The party impossible to have an antiphony will be the loser.

*Ví tiền chân* is generated from passionateness, intimateness, nostalgia of each male and female; therefore, lyric of *Ví tiền chân* is emotional. Females see males out for a long way of five to seven kilometers and sing *Ví*, so nostalgically that they seem to be difficult to say goodbye. Only when the sun rises up, do they say goodbye to each other and then each of them comes back to the village on their own way.

## 2. Music, lyrics and setting music to a poem

Like other folk songs, music in hát Ghẹo is the partial reflection of language through music and is also perfected over time. Of course, during this development, hát Ghẹo is impossible to be separated from Vietnamese in general and local language in particular and is strongly influenced by social context at each period, each historic period.

In the first phase - hát *Ví*, music is simple. *Ví* is not a song but likely to be a speech with the initiation of singing. Lyrics is primarily based on 3 audio scale with tempo of same speed, narrow pitch. Take the quote of the following *Ví đăi trâu* as an example.

Despite similarities with music in *Ví*, freedom in the singing, the operation in the 3 audio scale of the lyrics and so on, *Sống* has certain changes to make it softer and more likely to singing.

Music of *Sang giọng* is totally different. Music is more liberal and is mainly operated in a five audio scale rather than the 3 audio one in *Ví* and *Sống*. Based on the music, components in the audio

scale, rhythm operation, vocal gauge, etc., it is possible to say that: *Sang giọng* is strong influenced by the culture exchange among various regions and it has a longer way of development compared to *Ví* and *Sống* due to being the final phase. Based on *Ví*, *Sống* and *Sang*, it is possible to divide hát Ghẹo into two parts.

### VÍ ĐĂI TRĂU

(Trích)



Em thưa với anh em. Miếng trâu để đĩa bưng



ra. Xin anh nhận lấy để mà thờ than. Thưa anh

### GIỌNG SỐNG

(Trích)

Nhịp tự do

NGUYỄN ĐĂNG HÒE (Lược ghn)



(À) anh (ò) ơi (à) bây giờ cơm rọn mấy nước thò, (à) tấm rắng



(à) sức miệng (à) em ra ngó hầu anh, (Chữ) em

*First* are major voices of hát Ghẹo, including *Ví* and *Sống*. Regarding *Ví*, music and rhythm are simple and mainly controlled by the lyrics; therefore, singers should be good at responding and excellent at using sentences rather having a good voice.

*Second*, Ghẹo are likely to be songs or are real songs. This accounts for a large percentage in which each song has a certain emotional content.

In hát Ghẹo, artists often set music to a poem in 3 common ways: The first is to set music according to the sequence of sentences also called downstreaming.

The second is to repeat one, two or three first words of the sentence before using the first method. The third is to reserve the sequence of a poem in which the last four words of the six word sentence is often put into the initial before coming back to the beginning. This is, however, rare in hát Ghẹo.

Lyrics in hát Ghẹo use many metres; however, words are more popular than scholarly. There are many local ancient words. Along with the major sin-eight-word distich metre, hát Ghẹo also use many other metres including seven-lined stanza, seven-seven-six-eight word metre, four word metre, vocal metre, etc. The major content of the songs is love of couples as well as the satire and lampooning of ruling forces in the feudal society.

## II. Values of hát Ghẹo

Over history periods, generations in Phú Thọ has succeeded to create, polish, refine and supplement many new factors to make hát Ghẹo become a singing style containing many unique values of this Ancestral terrain.

What should be mentioned first is *the community association in the spirit of “the good leaves protect the worn-out leaves”*. Through stories told in hát Ghẹo, people often feel the spirit of solidarity and mutual support to overcome challenges and difficulties. Additionally, each lyric presents the clever behavior to change rancor into harmonious relationships, “the good leaves protect the worn-out leaves” if possible. What is more important is the

close relationship and brotherhood in which they consider each other as brothers to share happiness and sadness in their lives, creating the community strengths.

Second is *behaviorial* value. Hát Ghẹo is also considered as a book recording behaviors of emotion and sentimental attachment of loving couples, behaviors of husband and wife and family relationships.

It is the careful organization of the hát Ghẹo that reveals the respect and honor to the twined village. When signing or talking, both parties address in a polite and courteous way to show their mutual respect. When singing, the leader of the male singing group is often called and leader of the female singing group is called bà trùm (jointly called quan trùm in some regions) while the remaining males and females are called quan anh, quan chị respectively. In addressing, people often use very polite words such as: “dạ em thưa anh ạ”, “dạ em thưa chị ạ”.

Although nước nghĩa custom does not exist any more, this addressing method still has strong impacts on the daily life of the locals. Such polite addressing is still used by hát Ghẹo artists, regardless of age. Moreover, the selection of clothes and singing location also shows this respect. Generally speaking, this is a valuable lesson about the social behavior.

The third is *values of education about life awareness*. Lyrics in hát Ghẹo are reminders of next generations about the

necessity of close relationships, mutual affection and gratitude found nowhere else. Lyrics of hát Ghẹo sometimes mention twined villages, from ancient times up to now, to remind of the time when villages were twined with each other. Betel invitation is also a lesson passed on to the next generation about guess welcoming: A greeting is higher than a tray of banquet food. Way of speaking in each lyric is also the education of each person about the acceptance of the fact, sometimes harsh fact, to survive, to wing a dream and find out suitability about unsuitable things to satisfy their desires. Other values of life recognition are also presented in the lyrics of hát Ghẹo such as economical wedding; behavior in two families, etc.

The fourth are *aesthetic values, artistic values*. Lyrics in hát Ghẹo are mainly selected, accurate, clear, strong and steady words. The beauty of hát Ghẹo is the beauty of language, structure thanks to the natural expression of the emotion. Each lyric contains fervid emotions and love. Many plain and simple sentences are very tactful. Daily comparison is also often used in the lyrics of hát Ghẹo. The simile in hát Ghẹo is quite plentiful, general, abstract but is still able to show the simplicity of the innocent beauty and sincerity.

The artistic value is firstly reflected through the diversity of the tone. Only in Sang giọng, there are up to 36 tones, including pensive, passionate tones and pure, soaring, pulsating ones. This tone diversity in each phase has certain

artistic values. It is the simple to complex, coarse to soft and flexible development, etc., in combination with the development of melody based on various audio scales, method of setting music to the poem, etc. that are also significant artistic and aesthetic values remained by Phú Thọ folk artists.

The fifth is the *folk knowledge treasure*. Knowledge of the natural environment brings out lyrics and singing about land, water resources, vegetation, fauna and flora, climate, etc. Regulations about the weather, land analysis, vegetation analysis are also summarized in the lyrics of hát Ghẹo. Additionally, working experiences in handicraft such as net knitting, brocading, embroidering, experiences on planting, soil preparation, cloth dying, etc. are also included in hát Ghẹo.

Over many historic periods, local generations have preserved, innovated, passed on the traditional custom, regardless of certain interruption to make it exist in the current life of people in this region.

### **III. Some issues related to the preservation and development**

The unification of the nation, especially, initial years of the Innovation period has witnessed the quiteness many traditional artistic- cultural forms, including hát Ghẹo. The collection, study, conferences and seminars organized at the village, commune, district and province levels have not really drawn the attention of the locals while the investment budget has been insufficient. The propaganda

and education to make the youth understand about values of hát Ghẹo are infrequent, making hát Ghẹo considerably eroded or even almost forgotten. Comparing with hát Xoan (“Xoan singing”), hát Ghẹo draws less attention as hát Xoan is also used for religious purposes.

Thanks to investments since 1990, hát Ghẹo is on the way of recovery and development. Along with organizing public cultural activities, Phú Thọ Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism has also made various plans to preserve, maintain and develop many unique folks of the province, including hát Ghẹo. Public cultural movement, including hát Ghẹo, has widely been organized.

The preservation, promotion and development of traditional folk culture initially needs the preservation of its core humanity, ethnic identity and community feature. With this spirit, we hereby recommend some initial measures to preserve and develop hát Ghẹo under the current circumstance.

*- For the study, collection, preservation and development purpose:* The prerequisites for the preservation and development of hát Ghẹo are having expertised staff and sufficient funding. Studying, collecting staff should go to the locality having the tradition of hát Ghẹo to record and recognize accurate original traditional tones. Collections should be used as reference materials in the province’s museum and library as

well as copied to have materials for studies and propaganda. Such collections can be made into books and discs for publication.

*- For public cultural activities and professional artistic activities:* Only when hát Ghẹo comes back to daily activities of the locals, does it survive and develop. However, returning hát Ghẹo to the people and public cultural movement of people in Phú Thọ is not simple. However, this, when being successful, will be the best measure to preserve and develop hát Ghẹo.

Regarding professional artistic activities, it is essential to have proper policies to encourage artists, musicians, etc. of internal and external artistic groups to approach hát Ghẹo and compose and make programs based on hát Ghẹo. It is also essential to make certain adjustment and write new lyrics to make it suitable to the current life. To turn to public artistic activities, it is needed to reorganize hát Ghẹo clubs at villages and communes and remain the regular operation of such clubs. Moreover, it is possible to organize competitions among different groups and clubs in each festival or suitable occasions of the village and commune to make people excited about recovering traditional cultural forms in general and hát Ghẹo in particular.

*- Regarding education in schools:* It is crucial to integrate hát Ghẹo into the curricular and extracurricular of schools in Phú Thọ which helps us bring hát Ghẹo to the youth.

- For cultural-tourism activities in the locality: Phú Thọ has many tourist attractions and historical sites, creating favorable conditions for the development of tourism. Integrating hát Ghẹo into culture- tourism activities will bring potential opportunities for the preservation and development of hát Ghẹo. Furthermore, it is essential to recover hát Ghẹo in local festivals, especially, Hung Temple festival in which hát Xoan is an indispensable ceremony and hát Ghẹo can be put into singing programs.

It is possible to once again confirm that hát Ghẹo is one of the unique mental products generated by people in Phú Thọ. Hát Ghẹo is an ancient folk song with unique characteristics about origin, performing, space, time and object. Therefore, hát Ghẹo is not a branch of hát Xoan. During the establishment and development, hát Ghẹo is also influenced by cultural exchanges that makes it more flexible in the expression.

Thanks to considerable mental values in the life of the locals, hát Ghẹo is deserved to be one of the objects to be especially preserved and developed in the current situation of Phú Thọ. However, the preservation and development of values of hát Ghẹo in the current situation is not an easy task. In order to recover and promote values of hát Ghẹo in the current situation, it is needed to have an urgent and strategic plan and the close cooperation between the people and authorities.

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