

ABSTRACT

Understanding the Dragon's Theatre: An Anglophone Historiography of Vietnamese Theatre

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Anglophone scholarship on Vietnamese theatre has a complex history; its authors range from British and American explorers to current day Asian theatre scholars. The evolution of English-language scholarship on Vietnamese theatre is directly tied to the historical events experienced by these authors. The purpose of this thesis is to detail this scholarship and examine the historiographical developments used in analysis of the theatre. Much like other areas, the Anglophone historiography on Vietnamese theatre shifts with the research interests of the authors and their approaches to writing. This study, which discusses the evolution of these writings, demonstrates how knowledge on Vietnamese theatre is produced and disseminated to the English-speaking world.

Understanding the Dragon's Theatre: An Anglophone Historiography of Vietnamese Theatre

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DEDICATION

To Mai and Anabelle

CHAPTER ONE

An Anglophone Historiography of Vietnamese Theatre

Introduction

Anglophone scholarship on Vietnamese theatre has a complex history; its authors range from British and American explorers to current day Asian theatre scholars. The evolution of English-language scholarship on Vietnamese theatre is directly tied to the historical events experienced by these authors. These changing viewpoints on Vietnamese theatre evolved within a complex culture. The earliest writers, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, primarily made personal observations about theatrical events within the larger context of their diplomatic or commercial visits. It is not until after the fall of French Indochina in 1954 that dedicated scholars began to discuss the specific styles and influences of Vietnamese theatre with the Anglophone world. Currently there are several scholars who delve deeper into the relationship between Vietnamese theatre and its representation to the rest of the world. This study looks at the differing perspectives on Vietnamese theatre amongst Anglophone writers and discusses how these writings converge with the larger relationship between Vietnam and the Anglophone world.

Although this work will focus on Anglophone scholarship, it is important to remember that Vietnam has been heavily influenced by two non-Anglophone nations, China and France. Due to one thousand years of Chinese rule, Vietnam displays many of the same Confucian teachings as its neighbor to the north. The Vietnamese theatrical

form of *tuong*, which was taught to the Vietnamese by the Chinese *tuong* master Ly Nguyen Cat (who was captured during the Tran dynasty) (1225-1400), displays many similarities to *jingju* opera such as elaborate costumes and makeup. The French colonization (late 1800s-1954) of Vietnam also had tremendous influence, especially on language and architecture. The French were also primarily responsible for influencing the more modern theatre forms known as *cai luong* (reformed theatre) and *kich noi* (spoken theatre) in the early twentieth century.

Problem and Research Question

The main aim of this work will be to create an Anglophone historiography of Vietnamese theatre. The meaning of the word “historiography” is often ambiguous and depends on the context in which it is used. Historiography, as noted by French scholar Michel de Certeau, is a paradox of the terms history and writing that attempts to connect “the real and the discourse.”¹ For the purposes of this study, “historiography” is defined not only as the writing of history but also investigating the means and intent of historical discourse.

There is a plethora of research available in English on Asian theatre in books, journal articles, and various other sources. However, the research on Vietnamese theatre is severely lacking when compared to the theatre scholarship on other Asian countries such as Japan, China, and India. For example, the first significant publication written by an Asian theatre scholar which includes Vietnam is Faubion Bowers’ *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama*, published in 1956. Bowers dedicates under five

¹ Certeau, Michel de. *The Writing of History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), xxviii.

pages of his 360-page book (around 1%) to Vietnamese theatre. Even Greenwood's recent and comprehensive, *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre* devotes 17 of its roughly 800 entries (around 2%) to Vietnamese theatre. This relative number of entries correlates to the world influence of Vietnam and its place of importance amongst scholars. Also, this lack of theatre scholarship on Vietnam, when compared to other Asian countries, creates an opportunity for Asian theatre scholars to fill in the gaps.

This study attempts to fill one of the gaps in Vietnamese theatre scholarship. There are several reasons why there has not yet been an Anglophone historiography of Vietnamese theatre. For most of its existence, Vietnam has not been a home for many Anglophone speakers; this is the primary reason for the lack of writings in English on Vietnamese culture. Another reason for the lack of an Anglophone historiography on Vietnamese theatre is that Vietnam has been a country under constant foreign occupation throughout its history; however, neither of these countries were Anglophone in nature. The two countries that had the most influence on Vietnam were China and France. Vietnam was a part of Imperial China for over one-thousand years (111 BCE-939 CE). Later, Vietnam was a French colony from the late 1850s until Dien Bien Phu in 1954, as a result the French produced a fair amount of scholarship on Vietnamese theatre, including government reports and cultural journals, but little of this material was translated into English. These two countries' influence in Vietnamese theatre can clearly be seen through both their traditional (China) and modern (France) forms.

It is only in recent history that Vietnam has become a member of the global community. Now that Vietnam is an independent country and relations with Anglophone countries have improved, there is a greater opportunity for scholars to study Vietnamese

theatre. Shortly after the Vietnam War, it became a member of the United Nations which helped in its mission to be more cooperative with the international community. Also, Vietnam later joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 in order to accelerate its economic growth, promote regional stability, and share its culture with neighboring countries and international tourists. Many organizations, including The Vietnam Association of Theatre Artists and the International Theater Associations for Children and Youth, promote Vietnamese theatre to foreign audiences by touring its different theatre styles abroad.

There are several major historiographical themes discussed in this thesis. One is the evolution of writings from generalized statements to specific discussions about Vietnamese theatre. This progression has led to a better understanding of Vietnamese theatre by an Anglophone audience. Another is the impact of trade and the establishment of a cultural relationship and its effect on various forms of Vietnamese theatre including water puppetry (tourism) and traditional forms. Finally, another significant trend is English works on Vietnamese theatre by Vietnamese writers who attempt to explain their culture to the Anglophone reader.

Methodology and Literature Review

For the purposes of this study, the historiography of Vietnamese theatre in the Anglophone world will be divided into three time periods. Each of these periods is clearly defined by historical events in Vietnam which affected its relationship with the Anglophone world. The three time periods are

- 1.) Adventures and Learning (Pre-1955): This chapter will look at the beginning writings on Vietnamese theatre from the late 18th and early 19th centuries

through the end of the Indochina War in 1954. Specifically, it will address the first hand accounts of British and American explorers, diplomats, spouses, and students. Their writings come from personal observations of classical theatre performances and focus on several themes such as music and the actor-audience relationship. Their writings also display a Western mindset of superiority when it comes to classifying the ‘exotic other’ in the East.

2.) Scholarly Beginnings (1955-1994): This chapter will cover Anglophone scholarship on Vietnamese theatre during the Vietnam War through President Clinton’s decision to lift the trade embargo between Vietnam and the United States. It will start by looking at the first steps taken by Anglophone scholars who lived in Vietnam to describe theatre within the larger context of Vietnamese culture. Then, it will look at the early efforts by Asian theatre scholars, such as Faubion Bowers and James Brandon, to document the complex history of Vietnamese theatre. Many scholars during this time were Anglophone professors with backgrounds in Asian theatre. They toured several countries within Asia, for the purpose of studying its types of theatre, and published books based on their first-hand accounts. Their studies generally placed Vietnamese theatre within the larger context of other Asian/Southeast Asian theatres. Finally, this chapter will look at the first Anglophone writings by Vietnamese that were published in Vietnam.

3.) Globalization (1995-2015): This chapter will cover the Anglophone scholarship for the twenty years since the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam. It will begin by looking at the continuing trends from

the previous time period with regards to writings on Vietnamese theatre being in the context of culture, Southeast Asia, and works by Vietnamese authors. During this period, there was a relative “explosion” of research on Vietnamese theatre by scholars such as Khai Thu Nguyen and Catherine Diamond. Many of these scholars wrote several journal articles which looked at Vietnamese theatre from dynamic perspectives including its political, social, and economic interaction both within Vietnam and with the global community. They are able to create these works, in part, because of the new relationships between American and Vietnamese theatre artists through travel, touring companies, and the ease of communication due to advancements in technology.

As with most historiographical works, the methodology for this study will use both textual sources and online databases. It will rely on sources including books, journal articles, magazine articles, encyclopedias, and dissertations. Analysis of these resources on Vietnamese theatre will inform an understanding of the changing perspective on theatre in Vietnam for over two hundred years as seen by English speaking scholars and visitors.

The greatest amount of resources will come from articles written in scholarly journals. Currently, the most important journal for this type of work is *Asian Theatre Journal* which discusses a range of topics within Vietnamese theatre including basic facts about theatre styles, the impact of theatre in Vietnamese culture, and current trends. This journal is dedicated to the performing arts of Asia and focuses on both traditional and modern theatrical forms. The articles found within *Asian Theatre Journal* allow interested Anglophone readers to learn about and study Vietnamese theatre.

Authorship of books about Vietnamese theatre run the gamut from early explorers with no specific knowledge of Vietnam or theatre to specialist scholars with strong backgrounds in both theatrical practice and Vietnamese culture and history. The books published by early explorers were composed to detail Vietnamese culture and spend only a few pages describing the use of theatre within Vietnamese society. Books written by early Asian theatre scholars, such as James R. Brandon's *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, described Vietnamese theatre alongside several other Southeast Asian theatre practices. Finally, books in English by recent Vietnamese authors attempt to explain Vietnamese theatre to an Anglophone audience.

Another resource on Vietnamese theatre can be found in entries within reference books such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and indices. Examples of these include entries on Vietnamese theatre in *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993), and the two volume *Encyclopedia on Asian Theatre* (2007). In these works, scholars such as Kathy Foley, editor of *Asian Theatre Journal*, James Brandon, professor of theatre at the University of Hawai'i and Lorelle Browning, founder of the Vietnam-America Theatre Exchange (VATE), author entries on Vietnam ranging from classical and modern theatres as well as more specialized subjects such as experimental theatre and women in Vietnamese theatre. Other resources that are examined include magazine articles, multimedia works and doctoral dissertations. In addition, the Internet, as a tool, allows interested researchers to access a majority of the resources on Vietnamese theatre.

Applying all of these works toward this study creates a historiography of Vietnamese theatre and should help the reader see the patterns and outliers of the historical literature on Vietnamese theatre in English. It also sheds light on the changing

views of Vietnamese theatre by Anglophone speakers, from navy officers to current day Asian theatre scholars, and what impacted the writing of these authors. This work will create an Anglophone historiography on Vietnamese theatre and bring new resources to those interested in learning about Vietnamese theatre.

CHAPTER TWO

Adventures and Learning (Pre-1955)

As part of the colonial project, from the late 1700s until the mid 20th century, Britain and the United States, as well as other nations, engaged in a process of exploration and colonization around the world. Both nations realized that Asia contained valuable resources and attempted to establish diplomatic relations with nations such as Japan, China, and Vietnam. Each Western nation wished to learn about these new cultures in order to understand their “mysterious” ways of life. Therefore, explorers, diplomats, and scholars from each country were the first Anglophone authors to write on Vietnamese theatre; they recorded their primary observations and the role of the theatre within Vietnamese culture.

The first Anglophone authors to write down their observations of Vietnamese theatre did so within the context of diplomatic visits. British and American diplomats traveled with explorers to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations (in the years between 1790s to 1820s).¹ These diplomats were tasked with establishing relations, primarily for commerce, between their home nations and Southeast Asia during this time period. The majority of their diplomatic writings were about their attempt to meet the emperor of Annam in order to establish trade between the two countries. However, within

¹ During this time period Vietnam was known by several different names including Annam and was also a part of Cochin China. For simplicities sake, I will refer to it as Vietnam throughout this thesis.

each diplomatic journal, there were references to Vietnamese theatre. Most of these authors discussed one or two instances in which they watched a theatre performance.

Both British and American diplomats and explorers published their findings after returning home as books or newspaper articles for the middle and upper class to read. These writings primarily discussed the landscape and culture of Vietnam including Vietnamese ceremonies, government, and social structure. Each diplomat attempted to write an overall introduction of the country by recording their observations for their fellow countrymen.

All of these works were viewed, by newspaper and journal article authors of the time, as important foundations in understanding Vietnamese culture. While these authors' writings on theatre were brief, they detailed how it was perceived by those watching it for the very first time in a nation thousands of miles away from home. A majority of these works also displayed the western mindset of superiority throughout. Each author stated, either directly, or indirectly, that the Western culture was superior to Vietnamese culture.

These writings were also praised for the illustrations, and later photographs, which brought the Anglophone world into closer contact with Vietnamese society. These visual images helped readers see what the explorers experienced during their journey. A majority of these pictures showed the agricultural and geographical landscapes of Vietnam. In addition, there were a few photographs and an artist's rendering that showed Vietnamese actors and dancers during a performance.

The three works that include observations about Vietnamese theatre from British explorations and diplomatic missions were written by Sir George Staunton, Sir John Barrow, and Gabrielle M. Vassal. The first known Anglophone writing on Vietnamese

theatre was presented in *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*. This book, published in 1797, detailed the collective writings of Sir George Staunton, Sir Erasmus Gower, and Earl George Macartney. These three men were the leaders in the Macartney Embassy which was the first envoy from Great Britain to China. The purpose of this envoy was to open up new ports of trade between the two nations as well as establish a permanent British embassy in Beijing.

The British desire to open up more ports of trade was due to the Chinese backed Canton System which restricted British trade. This is why the three men were sent on a voyage aboard the *HMS Lion* to establish a better relationship with the Chinese. Although the embassy failed in its mission to establish greater trade between the two nations, it was considered a success by the British due to the large amount of cultural, geographical, and political observations that were recorded.

The next diplomat to give his account of watching Vietnamese theatre was Sir John Barrow, who had accompanied Macartney as a private secretary on voyages to the Cape of Good Hope in earlier years and was also with Macartney on his initial mission to China. In the preface of his book, *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*, Barrow cited the first expedition by the British as being the foundation that he hoped to add onto with his observations. Although he readily stated that his book may not lead to any new major discoveries, he noted that “So little is known to Europeans of the kingdom of Cochinchina, that every piece of authentic information respecting it may be considered

valuable.”² Barrow understood the importance of accurate information about another culture in order to better understand the ‘other.’

The next major look at Vietnamese theatre was written in *On & Off Duty in Annam* by Gabrielle M. Vassal in 1910. Mrs. Vassal, an English woman married to a French army doctor, noted in the opening line of her book that “a few weeks after our marriage we got out marching orders for Annam.”³ She described how she had never heard about Annam and, despite concerns from her family, she was looking forward to living there. While living in Vietnam Vassal wrote about everyday life which included thorough account of Vietnamese culture.

Vassal had the distinct advantage of living in the society she was writing about, unlike those before her. She was not sent on a diplomatic mission and thus, she was not constrained by “diplomatic niceties.” Also, Vassal wrote at a time when the country of Vietnam was a colony of French Indochina, as such European influences were beginning to percolate throughout Vietnamese culture. This influence was seen in Vietnamese theatre with the modern forms of *cai luong* and *kich noi* in the early twentieth century.

Each author’s writings on Vietnamese theatre demonstrate similar themes. One of the primary traits in each of these author’s writings was their racial bias and superior attitude towards the Vietnamese. All three authors described their reactions while observing certain aspects of the Vietnamese culture they believed showed signs of an inferior race. Predominantly, Vietnamese people were painted with a broad brush and

² John Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the Years 1792 and 1793* (London, 1806), viii.

³ Gabrielle M. Vassal, *On & Off Duty in Annam* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1910), 12.

were often seen as having a poor diet and hygiene. They were also viewed by the authors as being a people of low moral values who were willing to trick others in order to get what they wanted.

Vassal's writings displayed the most superior attitude of the three authors in her daily observations. Her first reaction upon arriving to Vietnam was that, "...it was only after I had been several weeks in Annam that I was able to distinguish one sex from the other."⁴ She believed that this was due to the similar fashions among both men and women, however her categorization of the natives as 'dark forms,' regardless of gender in comparison to the French citizens demonstrates her clear racial bias.

Another example of Vassal's racial attitude occurred when she arrived in the small town of Nhatrang where she and her husband lived. She noted, "The healthy condition of Nhatrang is due in great measure to the segregation of whites and natives; the importance of this hygienic rule can never be too greatly emphasized."⁵ Vassal constantly criticized the natives' lack of hygiene by noting their clothes, smell, and blackened teeth.

One-hundred years earlier, Sir John Barrow made similar observations within his writings concerning the natives' character. One instance of Barrow's superior attitude comes almost immediately upon his arrival. He quickly mentions that he and his crew, "...found them all, from the highest to the lowest, most importunate beggars, craving without the least ceremony for every thing that might suit their fancy."⁶ In reference to a

⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶ Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina*, 298.

Vietnamese general, along with several soldiers, coming aboard his ship and stealing several objects including a mirror. Barrow also believes that he and his men are vulnerable to pick pockets while they are being entertained in the streets.

However, shortly after this observation Barrow took some time to reflect on how he perceived the new culture in which he was placed. As if aware how future generations might judge him, Sir Barrow stated that: “In attempting to draw a very general sketch of the character of this nation, I am not unaware of the risk I incur of being drawn into error...after all, an accurate portrait is hardly to be expected.”⁷ Barrow recognized that his observations were almost certainly surface level as a long stay and an intimate knowledge of the Vietnamese culture was required for a more realistic picture.

A vast majority of Macartney’s writings focused less on the people of Vietnam and more on the geographic, trade, and governmental aspects of the country. For example, Macartney spent about ten pages describing the port of Turon, modern day Da Nang, and taking measurements of the landscape. Macartney and his crew, however, were entertained by the locals and he wrote down the first interaction between the British and Vietnamese theatre.

Vietnamese theatre was described within the chapter on McCartney’s mission to Cochin China. Macartney recalled how he and his envoy were treated well upon their arrival. They ate and drank with the Vietnamese and were taken by a host on a short walk to a local theatre performance “where a comedy had been ordered...upon the occasion.”⁸

⁷ Ibid., 299.

⁸ Staunton, George, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China, Vol. I*, (Philadelphia, 1799), 338.

He went on to describe what he believed to be the characters of an old man and a humorous clown based on their expressions, body movement, and the audience's reaction. Macartney also described the village audience: "The place was surrounded with crowds of people, and many of them perched upon the boughs of adjoining trees, from whence they might see, at an open part of the building, the spectators within doors, about whom they were in this instance, more curious than about the actors upon the stage."⁹ It is the case that the British travelers were more cause for intrigue to the locals than the theatre that was being performed as each culture found the other fascinating and was interested in learning more about each other. This is the only mention of theatre in the two volumes of Macartney's writings on Vietnamese culture and his experiences; however, it should be remembered that his primary focus was to introduce the reader to all facets of Vietnamese culture and not a specific writing about Vietnamese theatre.

Barrow noted similar experiences to those of Staunton, Gower, and Macartney when he described Vietnamese theatre and its value as entertainment. Much like his comrades, Barrow went to the theatre and remarked that he found:

...the actors busily engaged in the performance at all hours of the day, proceeding apparently with as much ardor when no spectators were present as when they were. Being hired for the day, a crowded or a thin audience made little difference to the performers; all their concern being the receipt of their pay on the finishing of their work.¹⁰

Barrow suggested that the actors may consider the audience obsolete since they would be paid whether people showed up or not. It was an interesting observation as his conclusion about the actor's energy when the audience was not there must have been learned from

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina*, 288-289.

another source. The actor-audience relationship that Barrow described appeared to be in stark contrast with what he, and other Englishmen, would have been accustomed to during the Romantic period in Western theatre.

Another differing viewpoint Barrow offered later in his book dealt with the use of music in Vietnamese theatre. Sir Barrow recalled how, a few days after the first theatre incident, he and his party entered a building and saw that "...a party of comedians was engaged in the midst of an historical drama" and how they were "...keeping up an incessant noise and bustle during our stay."¹¹ He saw the actors as almost a nuisance as he tried to eat with his important guests.. After complaining about the temperature and the massive crowds that came to get a look at the Europeans, Barrow discussed how the actors used music to create a "horrible crash of the gongs, kettle drums, rattles, trumpets and squalling flutes, that was so stunning and oppressive..."¹² In fact, Sir Barrow cited the novelty of the scene itself as the only reason it could be perceived as entertaining.

These observations reveal that, while Barrow could appreciate the energy of the actors earlier on, he did not consider it a high priority. He was required to establish a relationship with the Vietnamese elite and, as such expressed a dislike of the 'folk' theatre of Vietnam, with its massive crowds and lack of comfort for the audience.

Shortly after his previous observation, Barrow changed his attitude and wrote what could be considered the first analytical look at Vietnamese theatre by an Anglophone author. He began his analysis by saying:

¹¹ Ibid., 295.

¹² Ibid.

The most entertaining as well as the least noisy part of the theatrical exhibition was a sort of interlude, performed by three young women, for the amusement, it would seem, of the principal actress, who sat as a spectator in the dress and character [*sic*] some ancient Queen; whilst an old eunuch, very whimsically dressed; played his antic tricks like a Scaramouch or buffoon in a Harlequin entertainment.¹³

Although Barrow did not name the play specifically, it can be inferred that he was watching a play in the style of *cheo* as it used stock characters and comedic effect. Sir Barrow not only described the theatrical scene but also made a comparison between a Vietnamese performers and *commedia dell'arte* stock characters. He also later observed the singing of the chorus as having “measured time” and compared it to that of Scottish music. Barrow finished his description of the performance:

Knowing nothing of the language, we were of course as ignorant of the subject as the majority of the English audience is of an Italian opera. In the shed of Turon, however, as well as in the theatre of the Haymarket, the eye was amused as well as the ear. At each repetition of the chorus the three Cochinchinese graces displayed their fine slender shapes in the mazy dance, in which, however, the feet were the least concerned. By different gestures of the head, body, and arms, they assumed a variety of figures; and all their notions were exactly adapted to the measure of the music. The burden of the chorus was not unpleasing, and was long recollected on the quarter-deck of the *Lion*, till the novelty which succeeded in China effaced it from the memory. In the latter country, however, we saw no dancing neither by men nor women, which makes it probable that this part of the Cochinchinese entertainment must be an amusement of their own invention, or introduced from the western part of India.¹⁴

Although Barrow was writing down primary observations, he took the time to analyze aspects of the performance he witnessed. His overall analysis showed a deeper level of thinking than previous authors as he compared aspects of the performance to similar techniques used elsewhere in the theatrical world. In addition, gave readers the visual

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 296.

element of an engraved plate to help them see what he was describing (See Appendix A). Also, his ability to distinguish the parts of the performance that may have originated in India or Vietnam showed his growing knowledge about Asian theatre in general and his worldly experience.

Barrow continued his thoughts about the theatre as discussed the role of finance:

No entrance money is ever expected in the theatre of China or Cochinchina. The actors are either hired to play at private entertainments, at a fixed sum for the day; or they exhibit before the public in a temporary shed, entirely exposed in front. On such occasions, instead of cheering the performers with empty plaudits, the audience throw among them pieces of copper money; for this purpose, the mandarins brought us some hundred pieces strung on cords, of the same kind as those which are current in China.¹⁵

It is uncertain how the actors reacted to the money being thrown on the stage as Barrow did not explain if they stopped to pick it up or continued with the show until the end. This insight from Barrow showed, again, how he was interested in showing the reader aspects of the actor-audience relationship which displayed a cultural difference between British and Vietnamese theatre customs.

Sir Barrow, after having visited the theatre several times, ended his several page analysis by putting direct names to the type of performances that he witnessed. He also explained the cultural differences in musical appreciation:

By the Cochinchinese the regular drama is called *Troien*, or a *relation of histories*. To the operatic interlude of recitative, air and dancing, they give the name of *Song-sang*; and a grand chorus accompanied with the *gong*, the kettle drum, castanets, trumpets, and other noisy instruments, is called the *Ring-rang*. The Ambassador had ordered his band to attend on shore, where they played a few light airs; but the Cochinchinese had no ear for the soft and harmonious chords of European music. Their *Ring-rang* and

¹⁵ Ibid., 295-6.

their *Song-sang* were infinitely superior in their estimation, and were the more applauded in proportion as they were the more noisy.¹⁶

It can be accurately concluded from Barrow's remarks that he was describing a performance of what is today known as *tuong*. *Tuong* is a piece of theatre that is operatic in character and the subject matter often deals with historical and mythological tales of the Vietnamese. It is also clear from his description that neither culture understood the value placed on the tone of music by the other. The British preferred what they heard as a softer tone in music while the Vietnamese music relied on being loud and brash (according to the British). Barrow did not consider that the music was more pleasing to the audience because it was expected; this observation showed a lack of understanding about the Vietnamese culture.

Barrow's observations demonstrate how he changed his opinion on Vietnamese theatre within a short period of time. He first seemed to be too confused and agitated by the music to note anything else. However, after seeing a second performance, Barrow recognized that Vietnamese theatre could be a pleasing entertainment full of interesting movements and actions. Once he was able to acclimate his hearing to the Vietnamese music the theatre became a viewing experience that he constantly attempted to understand by comparing it to other theatres around the world.

Much like Barrow, Gabrielle Vassal's writings detailed several experiences with Vietnamese theatre. Her first came after a few days in Saigon. She and her husband began to explore the city and they came upon a "Chinese theatre."¹⁷ It is interesting to

¹⁶ Ibid., 296.

¹⁷ Gabrielle Vassal, *On & Off Duty in Annam*, 30.

note that, unlike Barrow, she did not make the distinction between Vietnamese and Chinese cultures. Rather, she lumped the Vietnamese theatre in with Chinese. The only recollection she had from this first visit was being told that it was the “third day of the piece, and that the final scene was eagerly expected.”¹⁸ Vassal did not give any other details and switched topics in her writing. Fortunately, Vassal continued to view theatre as she lived in Vietnam and her time observing it grew significantly.

After living in Annam for a few months, Gabrielle Vassal wrote an entire chapter on the social position of women. Within this chapter, she commented that: “Chinese women are never seen on the stage, the women’s roles being always taken by men. In Annam, however, women take an active part in performances, but nevertheless both actresses and dancers are looked upon as standing very low in the social scale, and are frankly despised.”¹⁹ Vassal’s insight showed that she began to recognize a difference between Chinese and Vietnamese theatre by noting how Vietnam was a more progressive society than China with respect to women’s role in theatre. She also gave the reader an idea of the social standing of actresses and how they were not revered in Vietnamese society. Finally, in this chapter, Vassal commented about gender and the seating arrangement in the Vietnamese theatre. She pointed out that, while women are allowed in the theatre, their seats were always separated from the men. Unfortunately, Vassal did not go more in depth as to why this seating arrangement was necessary as she was commenting more on the role of women in society rather than audience seating arrangements.

¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁹ Ibid., 145-6.

Vassal's final comments regarding theatre came from a performance she saw during the annual Tet celebration. This entry was the most extensive as she outlined a performance and the audience reactions. She described a night performance outside with the actors on stage being illuminated by torches. Vassal discussed the contortions and movements of the actors' bodies as they portrayed different animals and the audience reaction at moments of heightened tension in the story. In contrast to Barrow, Vassal witnessed a different method of audience appreciation. Rather than throwing money, which was the custom earlier, a gong was placed by the actors and if the spectators were pleased by what they saw, they struck it. The celebration lasted well into the morning as "long into the night we heard their shrill screams and cries, intermingled with the sound of gongs and drums and the crackling of squibs and crackers."²⁰ As may be evident from the text, Vassal's observations continued the theme of these authors cultural superiority when describing the exotic 'other.'

Unlike Barrow, Vassal saw theatre from the perspective of someone who lived in Vietnam. Her privilege of living in the society allowed her to see the performances from a different perspective. While still an outsider, she was able to comment on the theatre of Vietnam within the larger aspect of the Vietnamese culture. However, although she lived in this society, her views on Vietnamese theatre do not appear to be as nuanced as Barrow's.

There are several reasons for each British author's lack of interest in Vietnamese theatre during their time spent in country. For Macartney, the writings on Vietnam were only a small part of his embassy's journey to China. A majority of his book concerned

²⁰ Ibid., 168.

the voyage from Britain into the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, stops made to different countries along the way, and the interactions with China. Therefore, it is not surprising that Macartney dedicated very little time to Vietnamese theatre in his writings.

Although his accounts of Vietnamese theatre were greater in scope than Macartney's, John Barrow also does not dedicate much of his interest towards Vietnamese theatre. Like his predecessor, Barrow's primary concern was establishing a diplomatic relationship with a foreign country. His writings were primarily about the geography of Vietnam as well as interactions between himself and government officials.

Finally, although Vassal had the advantage of living in Vietnam, she dedicated a majority of her writings to her daily life in Nhatrang and broader aspects of Vietnamese culture such as religion, education, and family life. While theatre was an important part of the Vietnamese culture where she lived, she viewed it as a form of entertainment that at its best gave insights to social constructs such as gender and at its worst, was viewed as annoying and dissonant through a culturally superior lens.

The diplomatic ties that were sought by the British towards Cochin China were reflected by the United States as well. As a newly independent nation, the United States was interested in trade with Cochin China almost immediately. In 1787, then American minister to France, Thomas Jefferson was interested in the rice seed from Cochin China writing to William Drayton of South Carolina: "The dry rice of Cochinchina has the reputation of being whitest to the eye, best flavored to the taste, and most productive...I will endeavor to procure some to be brought from Cochinchina."²¹ Unfortunately, Jefferson's hopes of an American ship travelling to Cochin China would not happen until

²¹ Robert Hopkins Miller. *The United States and Vietnam 1787-1941* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1990), xv.

Captain Jeremiah Briggs sailed over in 1803 aboard the *Fame* and the first American to comment on Vietnamese theatre would not occur until 1819 with Captain John White onboard the *Franklin*.

As a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, John White, like the explorers before him, traveled to the city of Turon, during his voyage. He made it clear in the introduction of his journal, later published as *A Voyage to Cochin China* (1824), that “This volume was not originally intended for publication, but written as a Memoir to be deposited in the archives of the East India Marine Society of Salem.”²² Most of White’s journal detailed the geographical layout of Cochin China and the lifestyle by which its people lived.

The first work written by a scholar that included writings on Vietnamese theatre was the book *French Indo-China* by American historian Virginia Thompson in 1937. This book was written for the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR). IPR was an international, non-governmental organization established in 1925 with the awareness of the United States’ new role as a world power after World War I. The IPR was also meant to provide a forum for discussion of problems and relations between nations of the Pacific Rim. It supported conferences, research projects, and publications.

It is interesting to note that Thompson shared the same views as the early British explorers: “Lost between the more stimulating and turbulent countries of Indian and China...Indo-China has been largely lost to view.”²³ She went on to implore others to study Indo-China in greater depth since, in her opinion, it effected Western civilization.

²² John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China* (London, 1824), v.

²³ Virginia Thompson, *French Indo-China* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 9.

Thompson also conceded in the beginning of her book that, although she had visited Indo-China, she had never lived there for any period of time and was not familiar with the native languages. Her conclusions were largely drawn from other texts and conversations with those who had written extensively about French Indo-China.

Each of these two authors also exhibited the same superior racial/cultural attitude toward the natives as their British counterparts. For example, White's first conclusion about the Vietnamese after observing them for a short time was that he, "was convinced that the Cochin Chinese were in many respects but little removed from a state of deplorable barbarism."²⁴ He later explained his conclusion by stating:

In person, the Cochin Chinese are perhaps somewhat smaller than their neighbors the Malays, and of the same colour, though generally not so well formed; their constant habit of chewing areka imparts to their mouths a most disgusting appearance; and, what is very remarkable, they never wash their faces and hands, or bodies.²⁵

Not only did he note the color of the Cochin Chinese skin, White made the assumption, similar to Vassal, that the Vietnamese were unhygienic.

Much like White's observations, Thompson wrote with an attitude of superiority towards the Vietnamese although she tied their 'lesser' culture to a different source. Specifically, on her section entitled "Annamite Psychology," Thompson related the behavior, morals, and philosophy of the natives to the climate in which they lived. She began by quickly generalizing in her statement that, "If one succeeds in understanding a

²⁴ John White, 33.

²⁵ Ibid., 37-8. Areka, or Areca, is a nut that is often chewed after being wrapped in betel leaves.

single *nhaque*, or peasant, one understands them all.”²⁶ Thompson continued by criticizing the hygiene of the natives, “Their colour is drab at the outset, and their general negligence is increased by layers of dirt and betel-chewing. Native methods of eating show a similar indelicacy. There is absolutely no thought of the body’s beauty.”²⁷ She continued to describe the people of Vietnam in this way while connecting these habits and behavior to the climate. Thompson drew the conclusion that, “Perhaps it is the brilliant sunshine that has weakened their sensory reactions along with their will power.”²⁸ Thompson’s reasoning throughout her article was tied to the theory of environmental determinism. This theory studies the connections between a person and their physical environment. Specifically, it states that the climate in which a culture lives predisposes them to certain patterns of behavior and societal development.

While each author displayed racial attitudes within their writings, they also each wrote about Vietnamese theatre. Captain John White, spent four months in and around Vietnam and commented on several aspects of the culture. John White labeled the Vietnamese theatre, likely in the *tuong* style, as “dramatic entertainments” for the people whose “plays are generally of an operatic character, and the drama turns upon historical events.”²⁹ White commented on the open building in which the performance happened, the payment of actors, stock characters, and the tone of their singing. One new

²⁶ Thompson, 43.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 45.

²⁹ John White, 302.

contribution that White made was the description, for the first time, about costumes that the actors wore as “...draperies...of the most fantastic character.”³⁰

However, although White did contribute something new to the Anglophone reaction to Vietnamese theatre, he continued to display the same lack of interest as his predecessors. Vietnamese theatre, although seemingly appreciated, was not as important to these explorers and diplomats as the physical layout of the country, cities, and interactions with the government officials of Vietnam. Their missions required a different kind of information and therefore little thought was given to recording in depth observations on the stage.

It should be noted here that after John White left Vietnam in 1820, with a case of elephantiasis, that no commercial American ship appeared in Saigon again until 1860. This is due in large part to the fact that, like the British, the Americans were not able to establish commercial agreements with the Cochinese in the early part of the nineteenth century. After 1860 American events such as the Civil War and France establishing control over Saigon in the 1880s, led to U.S relations with Vietnam largely only functioning through other powers such as China, France, and Japan.

Thompson however had a mandate to discuss Vietnam through her job at IPR. Thompson’s analysis of Vietnamese theatre focused less on individual shows and subsequent audience reaction and more about the theatre and its role within the culture. However, Thompson’s writing was the first that was written from a distance. She had not been to the theatre and, thus, her generalized statements may be questioned. For example, Thompson wrote that: “there is not room for individual interpretation” when it came to

³⁰ Ibid.

the audience or actors' role in the theatre.³¹ According to her, stories were told with such precision and tradition that even the slightest detail 'out-of-line' was met with disdain. She later compared the Vietnamese drama to Greek theatre since the "effort to depict the universal and the abstract in human life, rather than the local and realistic..." is emphasized.³² However, she did not cite any specific material to back up her claim. This lack of direct evidence by Thompson brings her credibility on Vietnamese theatre into question. It should be noted that Thompson's insistence on a static performance style and her connection between classical Vietnamese and Greek theatres was similar to the scholarly rhetoric surrounding both the Sanskrit theatre of India and the No theatres of Japan at this time.

The same lack of interest in Vietnamese theatre was shared by these two authors as along with their British counterparts. White, like Macartney and Barrow, were more concerned with establishing trade and discussing relations with government officials. Thompson also spent little time on Vietnamese theatre for two reasons. One, her entire writings covered the topic of French Indo-China. Second, she could only write what had been told to her by those who had already written on the topic or who had travelled to French Indo-China. The lack of previous knowledge on the topic would help explain the lack of writing by Thompson on Vietnamese theatre.

A quick note should be made that very few reviews exist for the journals of the British and American explorers and other writers during this time period. Those that do pointed out how valuable the information was in learning about a new culture. They also

³¹ Thompson, 49.

³² Ibid.

pointed to how important the illustrations were in showing the reader Vietnamese culture. Specifically, there were several reviews of Vassal's book and her writings were praised because of her descriptions of Vietnamese society including: education, family life, and festival celebrations.

Despite their general negativity about Vietnam and its culture, most of the authors commented on the theatre with an optimistic point of view. The only general problem they had with the theatre was the music that accompanied the performance. Otherwise, each author seemed to be fascinated by actors' movements, audience reactions, and how theatre was used within the Vietnamese culture. The theatre was often appreciated, to varying degrees, in the final analysis of most authors during this time period.

In conclusion, there are many similarities among these early writers on Vietnamese theatre. First, their primary purpose in writing was to describe the culture and landscape of Vietnam as a whole and thus Vietnamese theatre for them was another piece of the puzzle. Second, none of these authors had any type of specialization in theatre. They were either seamen, diplomats, spouses, or academics. Also, most of them were explorers in a foreign land who gave their unbiased, and somewhat racist, opinions with little thought for analysis. However, these authors established the base for Anglophone knowledge on Vietnamese theatre. They contextualized Vietnamese theatre within its own culture and these early descriptions of Vietnamese theatre evolved from an exotic 'other,' to a part of a culture, and the beginnings of scholarly context.

CHAPTER THREE

Scholarly Beginnings (1955-1994)

World events in the twentieth century, most notably the Cold and Vietnam Wars, led to a greater amount of research and interest in Vietnam by Anglophone authors. This chapter will discuss Anglophone writings on Vietnamese theatre from after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 to the lifting of the trade embargo between the U.S. and Vietnam in 1994. This time period is marked by political and social unrest between Vietnam and the Anglophone world as well as within Vietnam itself. Each of these authors, who were comprised of cultural scholars, Asian theatre scholars, and others including Vietnamese writers, created a solid foundation of research through the publication of books, articles, and encyclopedias. The cultural scholars during the 1950s began writing about Vietnamese theatre within the context of Vietnamese culture. Their observations displayed the role that theatre had in everyday Vietnamese life. The Asian theatre scholars of the 1960s and 70s in contrast were primarily American theatre professors who visited several countries within Asia for the purpose of studying different types of theatre and published books based on their first-hand accounts. These Asian theatre scholars primarily discussed Vietnamese theatre within the context of other Southeast Asian performance styles. They investigated many aspects of Vietnamese theatre including regional differences, theatres' use during wartime, and the use of music on the stage. Finally, it is during this time period that other authors, some who were Vietnamese, began to write about their theatre with the Anglophone world as the intended audience.

America's interest in Vietnam during this time period increased due to Vietnam's fall to Communism in the North, after the end of French colonialism with the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and the resulting Vietnam War. Then President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent military advisors to the American-backed South in a commitment to support President Ngo Dinh Diem and a noncommunist Vietnam. With President Diem's assassination in 1963 and the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, the U.S. began a military insurgency into Southern Vietnam in order to fight the Communist regime in the North. These events created a new interest by Americans towards Vietnam which led to several books being published to educate the public.

The war had a major influence on Vietnamese theatre and the resultant historiography. The division between North and South during the war was reflected in the theatre of Vietnam with the theatres viewed in a regionalist light. The more ancient forms of *tuong* and *cheo* were popular in the north while those in the south preferred *cai luong*.

The war's influence on Vietnamese theatre historiography is seen in how Vietnamese theatre during the 'American War' changed from a form of entertainment into a political tool used by both sides in order to spread their message to the public. This is recorded in government documents from the Joint United States Public Affairs Office to the United States military (JUSPAO) which detailed the use of theatre during the war in the South. JUSPAO was a multi-agency organization that supported efforts in South Vietnam from 1965 to 1972. It was used primarily as an entity for public affairs, diplomacy, and psychological operations which included theatre. Several memos described how the U.S.-friendly South used Van Tac Vu drama teams to spread the message of democracy. They would do this through 'seed-planting' performances which

showed the North as being evil and an entity to be liberated from. On the other side, Kathy Wilkerson, a member of the radical Weather Underground Organization, described how the National Liberation Front spread their message of Communism through culture-drama programs. She notes that the strongest audience reaction and applause came from the overtly political moments during the show. Wilkerson concludes by stating that the actors of every troupe also doubled as soldiers when necessary.¹ These documents written during the Vietnam War revealed how Vietnamese theatre was used as a tool for political propaganda, by both sides, to illustrate different political ideologies, rather than for entertainment purposes.

For the next two decades (1975-1995) there was a drop off in regards to Anglophone research on Vietnamese theatre. Perhaps the greatest reason for this is that relations between the United States and its allies and Vietnam were strained immediately after the war up until the mid-1990s. The U.S. imposed a trade embargo (1975) after the war and refused to normalize relations between the two countries until Vietnamese troops no longer occupied Cambodia. For their own part the Vietnamese requested financial assistance from the United States in exchange for information about M.I.A. American soldiers. These issues, along with other points of contention, led both nations to have a hostile relationship with each other and influenced the lack of scholarship on Vietnamese theatre.

Vietnamese theatre was later impacted by the *doi moi*, or open door, policy. Adopted in December of 1986 the *doi moi* policy opened Vietnam to the global economy and abandoned some socialist doctrines. By the early 1990s Vietnam's economy began to

¹ "Vietnam." *The Drama Review* 13, no. 4 (1969): 146-153

prosper and the culture began to change. Due to this policy traditional forms of Vietnamese theatre, *cheo* and *tuong*, began to suffer in urban areas while the more contemporary forms of *cai luong* and *kich noi* were well represented. However, as Vietnam was “inundated with videos from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the USA, as well as its own locally made low-budget videos.”² Due to the *doi moi* policy theatre was changed. Many authors during this time period describe how the theatre began to suffer because of all the new technology now available to the Vietnamese public. The modern theatre practitioners in Vietnam during this time fared better than their traditional counterparts; however, they “must still steer a course between government restrictions and a public that wants entertainment, usually comic, above everything else.”³

The interest in Vietnam during this time period led many scholars to travel to and live in Vietnam for the purposes of studying its culture. These early cultural scholars helped introduce works on Vietnamese theatre to the Anglophone public. These works were comprised of general information on all aspects of Vietnamese culture. These books were primarily written for the American public in order to understand the Vietnam during the War. American servicemen and women also used these texts for educational purposes.

The first of these informational books was *Vietnam Yesterday and Today* (1966) by Ellen Hammer. Ellen Hammer was one of the first American scholars to continually visit Vietnam and was also viewed as one of the first to become a scholar on Vietnamese

² Diamond, Catherine. “The Pandora’s Box of ‘Doi Moi’: the Open-Door Policy and Contemporary Theatre in Vietnam.” *New Theatre Quarterly* 13, no. 52 (Nov. 1997): 373.

³ Ibid., 374.

history and culture. In fact, Hammer was known for her work in the 1950s on the topic of the colonial rule of French Indochina. *Vietnam Yesterday and Today* “attempts to describe the complex background of recent developments in Vietnam” during the early 1960s.⁴ Having spent much time in Vietnam up until then, Hammer’s writings were sympathetic to the Vietnamese people and their culture. While discussing the social institutions of Vietnamese culture, Hammer dedicated a short section to the importance of literature and the arts. She noted the Confucian respect for scholars and the written word was a large influence on the Vietnamese people. She quickly described how both theatre and song were used to spread the country’s history to even the most ignorant peasants.

Hammer stated:

Companies of actors travelled through the countryside performing plays adapted from the Chinese to depict episodes of Vietnamese history and literature. In recent times the popular Cai Luong lyric theater developed spontaneously in the south, free of Chinese influence, and moved northward. This was unusual in a country where the north for many centuries had been the historic center from which the national culture radiated southward.⁵

While Hammer acknowledges the Chinese influences on traditional theatre she neglects the French influences on the South, that the North Vietnamese were more hesitant to accept, and how it changed the movement of theatre practices in Vietnam. Perhaps this is because she concluded this section by quickly comparing the struggles against the French and the Communist North and how theatre was being used by the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War: “During the resistance against France, as today, roving bands of

⁴ Hammer, Ellen. *Vietnam: Yesterday and Today*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966. P. iii.

⁵ Ibid., 221.

entertainers were used by the Communists to carry their doctrine to the people.”⁶ As we saw earlier in this chapter, this will not be the first time that the use of theatre as a political tool during war was mentioned.

Another informational text, also published in 1966, and written by an American was *Customs and Culture of Vietnam* by Ann Caddell Crawford. Much like Hammer’s book, Crawford outlined the general life of the Vietnamese people and the role that theatre served. Crawford arrived in Vietnam in 1963 with her three children. Her family, including her husband who was an officer in the U.S. Army, lived in an integrated part of Saigon. She taught English while there and credits one of her students, Hau Dinh Cam, with helping her write the book since he would guide her around the countryside and “explain the subtleties of Vietnamese culture.”⁷ Crawford, unlike Hammer, spent several pages describing the theater of Vietnam. She described the three major forms of Vietnamese theatre at the time: *hat boi (tuong)*, *hat cheo*, and *cai luong*. Her descriptions of *hat boi* included its origins, the changing stigma of being an actor, and the conventions of staging and costumes during a production. The second section, which covered *hat cheo*, was very short when compared to the other two forms. However, despite this, she noted how, “this particular form of popular theatrical art is most favored in North Vietnam. It is a simplified version of the Hat Boi.”⁸ Crawford’s lack of significant

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For a more comprehensive view on Crawford and her time in Vietnam, please see the 1997 review of her book at: <http://thingsasian.com/story/enduring-classic-ann-caddell-crawfords-customs-and-culture-vietnam>.

⁸ Crawford, Ann C. *Customs and Culture of Vietnam*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1969.

writing on this form may be because of her home base in Saigon; she knows very little about a form of theatre popular in North Vietnam. It is also interesting to note that she believes *hat cheo* to be a ‘simplified’ version of *hat boi*. It is not known if this was a conclusion that she came to on her own or if this information was given to her as a matter of opinion by her student or another South Vietnamese.

Crawford’s last section on *cai luong* discusses its popularity among those in South Vietnam. According to her, many of the actors and actresses who perform a *cai luong* piece were idolized like movie stars and “some who cause as much ruckus when they play in a Vietnamese town as rock and rollers do in the United States.”⁹ This comparison paints a picture of how popular *cai luong* is in Southern Vietnamese culture. However, Crawford ended her piece on a somber note as she states that “many of the conservative Vietnamese fear that *cai luong* or the modern theater is dealing a death blow to the traditional *hat boi* theater in Vietnam.”¹⁰ This concern showed the shift in Vietnamese theatre from traditional to the modern.

These changes help highlight one of the major changes within Vietnamese historiography during this time. Authors no longer describe Vietnamese theatre monolithically. They begin to distinguish between the varying forms of theatre and categorize them based on regional differences and origins. This contrasts greatly with the authors from chapter one who rarely named the theatre being watched and did not distinguish between the varying forms of Vietnamese theatre.

⁹ Ibid. 139.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Both Hammer and Crawford's books were guides on Vietnam that allowed the American public to learn about several aspects of Vietnamese culture. Both wrote with American servicemen and women in mind to be a resource for them to use in a foreign country that they would be living in for an extended time period. Caddell's was also written for American students.¹¹ These two books helped the general public in America learn more about Vietnam than what they were watching on television during the Vietnam War.

Another cultural guide book was written by Indian-Afghan diplomat and author Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah. Shah, states in his book, *Viet Nam* (1960), that historians should be interested in Vietnam due to the phenomenon of "Culture-Mixing," where Vietnam was influenced by both Indian and China.¹² Out of his two-hundred plus page book, Shah dedicated five paragraphs to Vietnamese theatre. He writes a general picture of traditional and modern Vietnamese theatre forms and their popularity. Interestingly, Shah describes the traditional forms of theatre in Vietnam as being "enjoying great popularity throughout the country,"¹³ which directly conflicts statements made by others about traditional Vietnamese theatre just a few years later.

One of the final cultural publications is *Classical Dance and Theatre in South-East Asia* by Jukka O. Miettinen. Miettinen, a Finnish writer and theatre director, created the book since he saw "surprisingly little has been published on the South-East Asian

¹¹ Steven Bailey, "An Enduring Classic, Ann Caddell Crawford's Customs and Culture of Vietnam," *Things Asian*. February 1, 1997. <http://thingsasian.com/story/enduring-classic-ann-caddell-crawfords-customs-and-culture-vietnam>.

¹² Shah, Sirdar Iqbal Ali. *Viet Nam*. (London: The Octagon Press, 1960)

¹³ *Ibid.*, 205.

traditions.”¹⁴ Vietnamese theatre is covered in the last and shortest chapter in the book. Primarily, he looks at the history behind each major form of Vietnamese theatre and its possible origins. He also has several photographs that show the many different forms of Vietnamese theatre that help the reader see what is being described.

American professors produced the bulk of writings during this time period on Vietnamese theatre. The U.S. government and other organizations such as the Ford Foundation funded many of these researchers’ works in order to learn more about Vietnamese culture during and after the Vietnam War. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the Ford Foundation committed many fellowships to those wishing to learn about foreign countries in a form of Cold War diplomacy. Many of the authors who wrote about Vietnamese theatre, and other Asian theatres, during this time period received these fellowships. Others were Anglophone teachers who taught English in Asian countries. The three primary authors who wrote about Vietnamese theatre were Faubion Bowers, James R. Brandon, and Colin Mackerras.

Faubion Bowers was a military man who served in many roles post WWII including work in the censorship bureau. After the war, Bowers wrote *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama*, as a product of his long tour of Asia with future wife Santha Rama Rau.¹⁵ Published in 1956, Bower’s book dedicates roughly five pages to Vietnam, the same amount as Hong Kong and less than any other entry, with roughly half of this writing discussing the theatre. The first half of Bowers’ entry

¹⁴ Miettinen, Jukka O. *Classical Dance and Theatre in South-East Asia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): v.

¹⁵ Leiter, Samuel L. “Founders of the Field: Faubion Bowers.” *Asian Theatre Journal* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 314-321.

describes the historical conflict in Vietnam and its connection to China. Bowers' writing compares to his predecessors in the 18th and 19th centuries when he describes the Vietnamese people: "The Vietnamese people look Chinese in physique and appearance...They have borrowed from the Chinese with little or no modification...a mysterious, implacable code of behavior, and even their basic eating habits."¹⁶ When Bowers begins to discuss Vietnamese theatre, he quickly mentions the origins and progression of *tuong (hat boi)*, *cai luong*, and *kich noi*. His analysis focuses almost exclusively on the comparison between Vietnamese and Chinese theatre. A majority of his comments on Vietnamese theatre were about the origins of each form coming from China.

Bowers concludes that, "Vietnam, as I write, is a country in distress and its theatre reflects this as clearly as do its politics."¹⁷ The problem with Vietnamese theatre during this time period, according to Bowers, is that it is conflicted with itself due to the country's two opposing ideologies. Bower's book was recognized at the time as a foundational piece for English readers since: "Until the publication of this volume there was no book to recommend to the reader of English wanting a general knowledge of the Oriental theatre."¹⁸ It would seem that the importance of Bowers' book, at least with respect to Vietnamese theatre being included with other Asian theatres, is that it was the first publication to do so. Later in his review, Ernst notes that: "The book is a journalistic

¹⁶ Bowers, Faubion. *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama*. (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1956): 304.

¹⁷ Ibid., 306.

¹⁸ Ernst, Earle. Review. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 16, no.1 (Nov. 1956): 114.

survey with both the shortcomings and virtues of that form of writing. It precludes pausing for reflection or synthesis.”¹⁹ This lack of reflection or synthesis is reflected in Bowers’ entry on Vietnam with his short description about the forms of Vietnamese theatre and their apparent deference to Chinese forms. Today, Bowers’ work is considered as “an astonishing contribution, and, while some of it is dated today, it remains the only book in which a single author describes so many forms of Asian theatre, all of it based on personal experience.”²⁰

The first Anglophone Asian theatre scholar to write extensively about Vietnamese theatre was James R. Brandon. Much like Bowers, Brandon was a military man who was stationed in Japan during the occupation. He eventually returned to the U.S. to study at the University of Wisconsin where he received his PhD in theatre. Although his primary academic focus was on Japanese theatre, Brandon wrote two books on Southeast Asian performance forms. His first book, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, was published in 1967 and covers a vast amount of information on the “social and historical circumstances” of many Southeast Asian theatres including Vietnamese theatre.²¹ Brandon’s goal was “to present to the interested Western reader some of the basic facts about theatre in Southeast Asia as it exists and functions today.”²² He was able to write the book as a result of a

¹⁹ Ibid., 115.

²⁰ Leiter, *Founders of the Field: Faubion Bowers*, 318.

²¹ For a more extensive biography of James R. Brandon, please read the following article: Jortner, David and Kathy Foley. “Founders of the Field: James R. Brandon.” *Asian Theatre Journal* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 341-355.

²² Brandon, James R. *Brandon’s Guide to Theater in Asia*. Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976. P. vii.

year's research in Southeast Asia from 1963-1964 on grants from Michigan State University-International Programs/Ford Foundation. Brandon's coverage on Vietnamese theatre is immense for the time period and the topics include the use of theatre as propaganda, censorship of plays by the government, and the influence of television and radio.²³

Brandon's book was the "first major critical study in English of the performance traditions of the pan-Southeast Asian region."²⁴ Brandon's book chose "to deemphasize the national and language boundaries to highlight common patterns: traditional village/palace genres, urban popular forms of the late colonial period, and modern spoken genres."²⁵ This approach allowed others to see the connections between the theatres of Southeast Asia; it displayed the similarities and differences between each form. However, this approach by Brandon did have its critics as "specialists in the individual countries who took exception to his border-crossing approach."²⁶ While this may be understandable for some of the Southeast Asian nations, this approach works well for Vietnamese theatre as it was written in the infancy of Anglophone writings and added a plethora of new information for those who wanted to learn more.

Brandon's book, still in print almost fifty years later, is considered by many to be a cornerstone for English readers of Asian theatre. It was correctly described in 1968 that,

²³ Brandon, James R. *Theatre in Southeast Asia*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967)

²⁴ David Jortner and Kathy Foley. "Founders of the Field: James R. Brandon," 350.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 351.

“It is one of those works we can expect to find quoted and requoted in term papers and footnotes for the next decade.”²⁷ In fact, Brandon’s book is still found in most bibliographies of books and articles that discuss Vietnamese theatre. However, there have been a few criticisms of *Theatre in Southeast Asia*. These include its generalist statements and the fact that Brandon was not a fluent speaker in many of the native languages.²⁸

Brandon also referenced Vietnamese theatre in his 1976 publication *Brandon’s Guide to Theater in Asia*. The purpose of this book, Brandon states, is “to help the traveler in Asia find and enjoy exciting living theater.”²⁹ This book could be viewed as the first publication directed at helping tourists better understand what to expect when it came to Vietnamese theatre. Another interesting aspect of Brandon’s introduction is his ‘dagger and star’ system as he rates the individual theaters of each country. Although he admits that both are personal evaluations, Brandon remarks that the amount of daggers, four being the highest rating while two describes a ‘bore,’ also “reflects the way people of the country view their drama.”³⁰ This seems to be a grand statement considering that Brandon, although conducting his research in the country discussed, is an outsider who is only experiencing a small piece of the theatre in each country.

Within the chapter on Vietnamese theatre, Brandon discusses the general characteristics of Vietnamese theatre and where a tourist, or interested theatre scholar,

²⁷ Scott, A.C. Review. *The Modern Language Journal* 52, no. 1 (Jan. 1968): 34.

²⁸ Becker, A.L. Review. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 4 (Aug. 1968): 911.

²⁹ Brandon, James R. *Brandon’s Guide to Theater in Asia*. (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976): 3.

³⁰ Ibid. 6.

could go to watch it. Brandon specifically notes that music is the most important element in Vietnamese theatre and he hints also about the effect of regionalism mentioned earlier. He states that the war has left the South in disarray and comments on the uncertain nature of Vietnamese theatre at the time: “Theater conditions described here are certain to change.”³¹ This is a recognition by Brandon that Vietnamese theatre is always evolving and displays an advancement in scholarship. This book by Brandon is viewed as a welcome contribution for both the Asian theatre scholar and for a tourist.³² Daggers and stars aside, Brandon’s guide gives the reader an excellent glimpse into 1970s Vietnamese theatre.

The final publication by an Anglophone Asian theatre scholar during this time period came in November and December of 1984 when noted Chinese theatre scholar Colin Mackerras travelled to Vietnam and recorded his observations of the contemporary theatre through watching performances and conducting interviews.³³ His observations were published as “Theatre in Vietnam” in *Asian Theatre Journal* in 1987. Mackerras’ extensive study covers each form of Vietnamese theatre historically, socially, and economically; he constantly cites Brandon’s work as well as that of Vietnamese ethnomusicologist Tran Van Khe.

³¹ Brandon, James R. *Brandon’s Guide to Theater in Asia*. (Honolulu: The university Press of Hawaii, 1976): 155.

³² Dasgupta, Gautam. Review. *Performing Arts Journal* 1, no. 3 (Winter 1977): 116.

³³ Mackerras, Colin. “Theatre in Vietnam.” *Asian Theatre Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 1-28.

One interesting point of Mackerras' article is the influence of Chinese theatre on the classical form of Vietnamese *tuong*. Mackerras highlighted the ongoing debate amongst Vietnamese artists when it came to the influences jingju had on *tuong*. Mackerras concluded: "I suspect there was indeed a Chinese influence on *tuong*, and a strong one at that. But it was gradual...If the influence did accelerate at some time, it was probably in the nineteenth century when Beijing opera was well established."³⁴ Mackerras' observation about the influence of Chinese theatre certainly was more open-minded, as opposed to Bowers thirty years earlier, and created another layer of discussion.

Later in the article, Mackerras discussed the then current state of Vietnamese theatre by describing the different performances he attended. One of the interesting aspects of Mackerras' writing here is the social interaction that can be found amongst the audience during a performance.

I am told that young men attend the open-air theatre, where there are no seats and people can move about freely during the show, specifically for the purpose of finding girls, who often make themselves available in groups in strategic places. There were undoubtedly signs of such courtship at the open-air renovated theatre performance I attended at Nha Trang. There is nothing surprising in the practice. In a country where the government is still trying to eliminate the age-old Confucian system of arranged marriages, opportunities for young people to meet members of the opposite sex assume extreme importance.³⁵

Mackerras' observes the unique role of theatre in the social interactions between Vietnamese men and women. Vietnamese theatre serves as a 'dating scene' for members of the audience during a performance due to aged societal expectations.

³⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

Finally, Mackerras concludes, similar to Brandon's outlook written eleven years earlier, that the "Vietnamese theatre is not in particularly good health."³⁶ Despite the popularity of *cai luong* and *kich noi*, Mackerras notes: "The country has by no means recovered fully from the war, and the overall national situation and low morale affect the theatre as they do other activities of society. I found very few signs of the sort of creativity and enthusiasm which lead to a burgeoning of theatrical expression."³⁷ Mackerras pointed to the societal health of Vietnam and its impact on the theatre. The affects of the Vietnam War, and the resulting government, were still affecting the stage. Mackerras' article is also cited often among today's Vietnamese theatre scholars because of his first hand accounts and insight into Vietnamese theatre productions.

Much scholarship during this time period was placed in encyclopedias of world and Asian theatre. The two primary encyclopedias that discuss Vietnamese theatre are: *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre* (1988) and *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993). These two sources quickly became major reference sources for Asian theatre scholars.

The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre is the first Anglophone theatrical encyclopedia that gives attention to Vietnamese theatre. Published in 1988, all of the entries on Vietnamese theatre were contributed by Kathy Foley. Foley, currently a professor of theatre at the University of California, Santa Cruz, first discussed the cultural impact on Vietnamese theatre and then split it into four different sections including: folk performance, classical performance, popular theatre, and spoken drama; she notes that

³⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁷ Ibid.

Vietnamese theatre can be easily recognized by each of these characteristics. She cited several sources including Mackerras and Brandon in her writings as she described each genre of theatre and its standing in Vietnamese culture. Foley finished by stating the importance of actors in Vietnam as many of them are paid comparably well to those who are professional teachers or in medicine. This comment about actors pay is directly substantiated in Colin Mackerras' article where he states the same. According to Foley, the government viewed the arts as an important tool in "raising political and social consciousness."³⁸

The second encyclopedia that covered information on Vietnamese theatre is *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, published in 1993. This collection, edited by James Brandon, followed its predecessor closely in form and content on Vietnamese theatre. This is not surprising as Brandon noted that this encyclopedia "opened the opportunity to revise and improve what were already excellent articles."³⁹ Kathy Foley was once again a contributor for the selections on the traditional theatre of Vietnam while historian and scholar Krishen Jit contributed the selections about modern theatre in Vietnam. The section on spoken drama was extended significantly to include topics such as: the influence of the communist party, the *doi moi* effect on *kich noi*, and how the spoken drama can become distinctly Vietnamese in the near future. Also, an 'artist' section was added that highlighted two influential Vietnamese theatre artists, both deceased, and their accomplishments. Finally, *mua roi nuoc* was given its own section in this encyclopedia as

³⁸ Foley, Kathy. "Vietnam" In *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*. Ed. Martin Banham. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 1046.

³⁹ Brandon, James R. *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993): vii.

more details were written about this puppet genre. This edition was used by Asian theatre scholars as a primary resource for many years.

Other sources from this time period can be classified as being written by ‘specialty’ authors. These are works produced by people with a specialty in one background or another that connects to Vietnamese theatre. These include authors who are puppeteers, ethnomusicologists, and Vietnamese artists.

Along with the previously mentioned encyclopedias, two dictionaries were written that hold selections on Vietnamese theatre during this era. One interesting addition to the study of Vietnamese theatre during this time period comes from A.R. Philpott in his book *Dictionary of Puppetry*. Philpott was a teacher, performer, and writer of puppetry throughout his lifetime. He created his dictionary as an introduction to puppetry and its uses across the globe. Philpott’s section on ‘Vietnamese puppets’ discussed the water puppets of Vietnam or *mua roi ngoc*. He gave a quick account of how the puppets were used during a show. This book helped to introduce this form of Vietnamese theatre to the audience and put the work in the context of world puppetry.

Another helpful dictionary resource was the *Dictionary of Traditional South-East Asian Theatre* by Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof in 1994. Yousof began his research under the guidance of James R. Brandon and was able to receive a research grant from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. He hoped that “the present dictionary, the first of its kind, will be of some use to scholars and students of traditional South-East Asian theatre,” as well as that his work would “stimulate further research in the performing arts and in allied disciplines, particularly in the remoter regions of South-East Asia where as

yet much remains to be done.”⁴⁰ Yousof continued to search and compile information on other Asian theatre forms for current and future generations.

Although the primary focus of Yousof’s book is on the countries of Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, there are three entries within his work on Vietnamese theatre. Unfortunately, Vietnam’s three entries are the fewest of any country listed within the dictionary, with Laos coming in a close second with four entries. Yousof quickly covers the three main forms of Vietnamese theatre: (lowercased and italicized) *hat boi*, *hat cheo*, and *cai luong*. Nothing new is added by the author but his inclusion of Vietnamese theatre allows for another resource to be available to those who may be interested in learning about it. Yousof also continued the trend of placing Vietnamese theatre within the context of other Southeast Asian theatre performing arts.

The first dissertation written exclusively about Vietnamese theatre was Duane Ernie Hauch wrote his dissertation on “The Cai Luong Theatre of Viet Nam, 1915-1970” at Southern Illinois University in 1972. Hauch notes that: “It is the purpose of this study to describe the development of the cai luong theatre in Viet Nam and to describe cai luong as a theatre form.”⁴¹ Hauch went on to give the most comprehensive history of *cai luong* theatre even to the present day. Hauch became interested in *cai luong* theatre while visiting Saigon for his master’s thesis in 1968-1969. He received a fellowship by the Center for Vietnamese Studies at Southern Illinois University and was able to obtain most of his information from interviews with actors or troupe managers. Hauch was also

⁴⁰ Yousof, Ghulam-Sarwar. *Dictionary of Traditional South-East Asian Theatre*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): preface.

⁴¹ Hauch, Duane Ernie. “The Cai Long Theatre of Vietnam, 1915-1970.” Southern University at Carbondale, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 1972: 4.

able to watch several performances on consecutive nights by different troupes in order to understand the importance of *cai luong* in Vietnamese culture. Hauch also translated four scenes a *cai luong* piece called *Kim Van Kieu*, from the epic Vietnamese poem, into English. This is perhaps the longest translation of a Vietnamese play at the time and thus is a major step forward in the research on Vietnamese theatre.

It is also during this time period that Vietnamese people begin to publish works in English to explain their culture to the rest of the Anglophone world. Song Ban, at the time, wrote the only book dedicated solely to the topic of Vietnamese theatre in 1960. Ban's book, originally written in Vietnamese and then translated into English by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, focused on a general introduction of all the forms in order to inform the reader of its basic history. Little is known about who Ban was and if he was also the translator of the work. However, within Ban's work it is apparent that theatre was used as a political tool during the Vietnam War as he concludes by discussing its possible power against then South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem: "...if Ngo Dinh Diem is haunted by the plays of our theatre and trembles at hearing our folk songs, isn't this clear proof that we are on the right road for building a theatre worthy of its long history of struggle?"⁴² Unfortunately, there has been little to no reaction to Ban's book by the general public as well as those who write about Vietnamese theatre. This is likely due to the lack of an Anglophone presence in North Vietnam as well as Anglophone antipathy toward these works.

⁴² Ban, Song. *Vietnamese Theatre*. (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960): 51.

Another Vietnamese resource that deserves a quick mention during this time period is the *Vietnamese Studies* journal. This journal has been published by the Gioi Publishers since the middle of the Vietnam War in 1964. The Gioi Publishers is the official foreign language publishing house of Vietnam. They began to produce *Vietnamese Studies* as a compact encyclopedia of Vietnam including agriculture, villages, and politics. One issue of *Vietnamese Studies* was dedicated to the modern Vietnamese theatre forms of *cai luong* and *kich noi*. This is the only resource, along with Song Ban's book, during this time period that was produced within Vietnam and written in English for Anglophone readers.

Also, one area of emphasis for Asian scholars during this time period was placed on the use of music. Articles by noted ethnomusicologists Tran Van Khe and Stephen Addiss focus on the aspects of music in theatre. Khe's scholarship focuses on the ancient forms of *cheo* and *tuong* as well as the renovated theatre of *cai luong*. Stephen Addiss focused on other aspects of music in theatre including: instruments, rhythms, and tones. The need for research in this area was not surprising as music was seen as an inclusive aspect of every form of theatre in Vietnam other than *kich noi*. These contributions were viewed as a great introduction for English listeners to hear Vietnamese theatre as the works had been translated. These recordings, primarily on cassettes and CDs, were among the first works that allowed the Anglophone world to experience the Vietnamese theatre instead of reading about it in a book.

Finally, a quick note must be made about the lack of British scholarship during this time period. One of the only articles that can be found, "They're Dancing the Lambada in Hanoi," was written by British native Noelle Janaczewska. Now an

Australian playwright, Janacsewska described her experience while watching many different forms of theatre during a night of celebration in Hanoi. She found artistic inspiration in all of the different ideas. Throughout her personal experience in watching the productions she gives the reader a short history of each form and how each has been defined over the years.

There are several reasons for the lack of British scholarship on Vietnamese theatre during this time period. The end of World War II began the process of decolonization as Britain left several countries from the 1940s through the 1990s including: India, Egypt, Africa, and Hong Kong. Also, there was little British involvement in the Vietnam War as forces departed in March of 1946; the Vietnam War was referenced as the “American War” by those living in Vietnam. These two events led to a decrease in British scholarship on Vietnamese theatre during this time period.

In summation, the theatre scholarship that exists on Vietnamese theatre during this time period was primarily written by cultural scholars, Asian theatre scholars, and ‘specialty’ authors. Unlike the explorers who came before them, most of these authors during this time period wrote exclusively about theatre in Asia and its cultural impact. Vietnamese theatre was still being written about within the larger context of Southeast Asia. A majority of these resources were dedicated to basic facts regarding the forms of Vietnamese theatre and how the theatre was impacted economically and culturally before, during, and after the Vietnam War. Also, these scholars were the first to put forth scholarship, rather than solely personal observations, on Vietnamese theatre by noticing its multiplicity of forms as well as the evolving nature of the Vietnamese stage.

CHAPTER FOUR

Globalization (1995-2015)

This chapter will look at the relative explosion of research on Vietnamese theatre due to the improving relations between the United States, Britain, and Vietnam, and the subsequent increase in scholarship by academics such as Khai Thu Nguyen and Catherine Diamond. During this time a majority of works written were by academic scholars who produced detailed examinations of specific aspects of Vietnamese theatre. While books which contained writings on Vietnamese theatre still viewed it within the larger context of cultural and Asian/Southeast Asian theatre the majority of scholarly works were printed in journal articles, especially *Asian Theatre Journal*. The authors were able to create these works, in part, because of new relationships between American and Vietnamese nations as well as American and Vietnamese theatre artists.

Relations between Vietnam and the Anglophone world improved during the 1990s. In July of 1995 American president Bill Clinton announced the formal normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Clinton's action was a psychological step where America began to look at Vietnam from a new perspective. Britain, which had already established the British Council for Peace in Vietnam in 1965, strengthened its ties with the country by creating the British International School in Ho Chi Minh City in 1997. These new diplomatic relations, along with the *doi moi* (open door) policy allowed for more travel to Vietnam by Anglophone visitors.

With the growth of Anglophone-Vietnam relations there was a greater desire by both sides to share ideas. As a result, Vietnamese theatre companies toured around the United States and Britain simultaneously. At the same time, Vietnam attracted tourists who visited the theatre to experience *mua roi nuoc* or *cai luong*. This new relationship between these nations led to an open dialogue amongst theatre artists and scholars as well as the general populations to learn about each other's culture.

Scholarship also grew during this time period due to advancements in information technology. The explosion of the Internet in the 1990s allowed for scholarship to progress rapidly; more information could be shared amongst those with an interest in Vietnamese theatre. Search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and multimedia platforms such as YouTube allow anyone to watch or learn about the basics of Vietnamese theatre at the click of a button. Even a cursory search of Vietnamese theatre on Google produces over four million links that discuss various topics on the subject such as the theatre forms of *tuong* and *cheo* or what theater to visit while in Vietnam. Also, a quick search of *mua roi nuoc* on YouTube results in over fifty-thousand videos of water puppetry performances ranging from professional companies to television documentaries.¹ No longer is a person required to go to the library or to buy a specialized publication on Asian/Southeast Asian theatres to learn about Vietnamese theatre. The Internet allows anyone with an interest to learn similar information at a faster rate. This ability to communicate and share information lead to a greater understanding of different cultures in the world as the 'other' was revealed.

¹ Some examples include: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIXg3nRa-tc> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nErl8Wa21U>.

The writings on Vietnamese theatre during this time period continued in the same context as the previous one with regards to cultural writings, encyclopedia entries, as a part of Southeast Asian theatre, and writing by Vietnamese authors and published in Vietnam. The two primary shifts within scholarship on Vietnamese theatre over the past twenty years were the growth of interest in water puppetry and the reaction of Vietnamese theatre to global influences.

With the rise of tourism to Vietnam it is no surprise that a plethora of travel guides have been published to inform travelers about several aspects about the country and culture.² These books often include specifics about Vietnamese theatre and, much like Brandon, Hammer, and Crawford, explain current trends and theater locations for tourists. One of the books written in this vein, and used by other scholars of this time period, was *Culture and Customs of Vietnam* (2001) by Mark W. McLeod, an associate professor of history at the University of Delaware and a specialist in modern Vietnamese history, and Nguyen Thi Dieu, an associate professor of history at Temple University and a native Vietnamese. It was a part of the *Culture and Customs of Asia* book collection and was written with students and the general public in mind. In the preface, the authors describe how their motivation for the work began with:

...the general reader, high school student, or undergraduate who wants an introduction to Vietnamese culture must choose between a plethora of works by non-specialists that are often factually erroneous and works by Vietnam specialists that are narrowly focused, extremely detailed, and mainly concerned with theoretical issues of interest only to other scholars.³

² More information and specific numbers on the rise of tourism to Vietnam can be found on the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism website at: <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/cat/1501>.

³ McLeod, Mark W. and Nguyen Thi Dieu. *Culture and Customs of Vietnam*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001): xiii.

These authors viewed themselves as historical specialists of Vietnam who corrected “facts” laid out by non-specialists; they gave a general overview of Vietnamese customs and cultures without introducing complex scholarly issues that may not interest the general reader. The book was primarily based on original research using French and Vietnamese sources as well as personal experiences from living in Vietnam during the past three decades.

The writings on Vietnamese theatre within *Culture and Customs of Vietnam* are presented in the chapter on ‘Performing Arts’ where the authors describe the stage as being “...alive and well in today’s scene.”⁴ The performing arts, according to McLeod and Dieu, have thrived due to their ability to adapt to outside influence . Theatre is classified into two sections: traditional (music) theater, as almost every form of Vietnamese theatre uses music, and water puppetry. Within the section on traditional theater the authors cover the general points about the forms of *cheo*, *tuong*, *cai luong*, and *kich noi*. It is interesting to note the inclusion of *kich noi* into this section by the authors as there is little music and the form of ‘spoken theatre’ is not considered a part of traditional theatre. The same can be said with regard to the inclusion of *cai luong* in this section as it is considered, which the authors note, a more modern form of theatre. As the book is a cultural guide for interested travelers and tourists, the authors’ decision to separate *mua roi nuoc* may highlight the uniqueness of Vietnamese water puppetry as each of the other forms has historical influences from China (traditional forms) or France (modern forms).

⁴ Ibid., 169.

The decision to give *mua roi nuoc* its own section displays a recognition by the authors as to its importance in Vietnamese culture, connections to the world, and interest to tourists. McLeod and Dieu describe the history of water puppetry along with descriptions of the puppets and scenes within a performance. They finish the entry on water puppetry by noting its popularity as a representation of Vietnam: "...the best of these state-supported troupes continue to delight domestic as well as international audiences."⁵ The importance of *mua roi nuoc*, as well as the writings dedicated to it by scholars of this time period, will be discussed later in the chapter.

Much in the same way that Vietnamese theatre was still discussed within the context of Vietnamese culture, it was also still written about within encyclopedias which added to the wealth of knowledge on Vietnamese theatre after 1994. The two encyclopedias recently published were: *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama* (2007) and the *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre* (2007). Each of these collections, one concise and the other extensive, contributed to the field of knowledge about Vietnamese theatre.

First, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, edited by Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn, both drama professors at Vassar College, dedicates a few pages to Vietnamese theatre as they acknowledge within the introduction: "It is the fate of reference works that despite their attempts to be comprehensive certain areas will remain underdeveloped."⁶ Much as with the encyclopedias mentioned earlier, Dr. Kathy

⁵ Ibid., 182.

⁶ *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama, Vol. 2*, Ed. Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): x.

Foley writes the section on Vietnam and all of Southeast Asia. Foley gives a short history on each form that echoes earlier encyclopedias. However, her conclusion offers new insight into the primary purpose of Vietnamese theatre:

Though experimental work has emerged, theme and content remain circumspect. Whereas the modern drama in much of Southeast Asia is an openly political theater, attacking government and addressing the ravages of modern life, the theater of Vietnam follows a Marxist model. Theater is a didactic tool for inspiring people to ideologically and socially correct behavior.⁷

Foley's discussion, continued by Khai Nguyen later on, argues that modern theatre in Vietnam is used primarily as a political tool by the government to teach its citizens how to behave in a socialist society.

On the other end of the spectrum, the *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre*, edited by Samuel L. Leiter, was a two-volume collection that included several new entries on Vietnamese theatre from directors and directing to religion in theatre. Leiter acknowledged in the introduction of the encyclopedia that: "Despite the riches of Asia's theatre, the twenty-first century began with only two significant reference books specifically dedicated to the subject."⁸ Kathy Foley, Lorelle Browning, and Colin Mackerras authored the entries on Vietnamese theatre.

Each of these scholars created detailed new information within their short essays; one describing actors and acting: "French approaches were superseded by Russian and Eastern European training, which became available from the 1950s to the 1970s. Stanislavskian, socialist realism, and Brechtian ideas gained currency in North Vietnam

⁷ Ibid., 1423.

⁸ *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre Vol. I*, Ed. Samuel L. Leiter, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007): x.

and spread to the South after 1975...”⁹ Despite the expanse of specific entries on Vietnamese theatre such as experimental theatre, Luu Quang Vu, and theatre companies, Vietnam was also placed within the context of Southeast Asian theatre on other topics such as masks, women in Asian theatre, and dance in theatre. However, Vietnam was not listed with other countries, Asian and Southeast Asian, for many topics including playwrights and playwriting, scenography, stages, criticism, and training. Despite these exclusions, the *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre* is an excellent reference source for those interested in learning about many aspects of Vietnamese theatre.

Another trend in the Anglophone writings on Vietnamese theatre that continued from chapter two was the publications by Vietnamese scholars living in Vietnam and writing in English. Much like Song Ban before them, the authors of *Vietnamese Theater* wrote a book that is intended as an introduction to Vietnamese theatre for the general Anglophone reader. Lead author Dinh Quang, author, theatre director, and drama professor, described the book’s purpose within the introduction: “...it will provide a variety of information on theater genres typical of the rich ethnic diversity of a Southeast Asian culture, giving the interested readers background material...”¹⁰

The book covers each form of Vietnamese theatre (*tuong, cheo, cai luong, kich noi*, and *mua roi nuoc*) as well as sections on folk-sung drama and circus in Vietnam. The section on folk-sung drama discusses the regional differences in song and dance and is classified by *Hue, Bai choi*, and *Nghe Tinh* folk-sung dramas. Quang details a short

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ Quang, Dinh et al. *Vietnamese Theater*, (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1999): foreword.

history of the Vietnamese circus, and notes that, much like *mua roi nuoc*, it is used as a symbol of Vietnam as it tours around the world.

Another work by a Vietnamese author, and one of the most substantial writings on Vietnamese theatre after 1994, comes from the collection of articles written by Huu Ngoc. Ngoc, a comprehensive scholar of Vietnamese history, literature, and culture, published the fourth, and latest, edition of *Wandering Through Vietnamese Culture* in 2004. Originally titled *Sketches for a Portrait of Vietnamese Culture* in 1995, Ngoc's compilation of previously written articles featured in the Sunday edition of *Viet Nam News* under the heading of *Traditional Miscellany* for over 10 years and was bound together to create an encyclopedic publication of over one-thousand pages on Vietnamese culture. The newest edition included two-hundred and fifty additional articles with several of them discussing theatre.

A majority of the entries on Vietnamese theatre fall under the 'Art' section of the book and two of the prominent themes throughout are synopses of different plays and the cultural impact of the West on Vietnam. Within the context of Vietnamese literature and storytelling, Ngoc described many stories in the *cheo*, *cai luong*, and *tuong* forms of theatre with which the Vietnamese were familiar. Ngoc also constantly discusses the impact of the West, and its idea of individualism, on Vietnamese culture and the idea of collectivism. Within his brief introduction to Vietnamese history and culture, Ngoc notes:

In the domain of art, graftings of western elements onto Vietnamese culture have renewed and enriched national traditions... Traditional theatre also passed through metamorphoses that enriched it. The classic opera *tuong* and the popular opera *cheo* were influenced by the French stage: they borrowed from it the composition of scenes, a more natural language, and a more tightly woven-production. In *cheo*, the role of the buffoon is central, but too-frequent joking risks banality and threatens the lyricism of certain plays. The sense of measure learned through French plays provides the necessary correctives. There were even two genres

inspired by the Western stage created for the urban public just after the First World War: renovated, or reformed theatre (*cai luong*), and spoken theatre (*kich*), or modern drama.¹¹

Ngoc appears to concede the preferable measure of French plays as opposed to those found in Vietnamese theatre. A majority of Ngoc's entries on theatre are within a thirty-page range and include: a conversation with Vietnamese pianist and song composer Nguyen Xuan Khoat about lost *cheo* recordings during after World War II, an instance of Japanese Noh theatre performed in Hanoi, the multicultural production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2000, and discussions with Vietnamese dramatists about performing and directing classical French plays. This volume of work provides small snapshots of Vietnamese theatre and its uses in Vietnamese culture. It is also published by the foreign publishing house of Vietnam, The Gioi Publishers, who wants to spread a message of cultural diplomacy.

A prominent area of research during this time period has been Vietnamese water puppetry (*mua roi nuoc*). The reason for this seems to be two-fold. First, that *mua roi nuoc* is unique only to Vietnam. While several forms of puppetry are shared across many countries, only Vietnam has puppets that 'dance' on the water while their story is told. Second, this form of theatre has been showcased by the government throughout the country as a way to draw in tourists. Therefore, *mua roi nuoc* is the most easily accessible and perhaps the widest spread form of theatre in Vietnam. This fascination with water puppetry led many scholars and travelers alike to write about the history and experience of water puppetry and share it with an Anglophone audience.

¹¹ Ngoc, Huu. *Wandering Through Vietnamese Culture*, (Vietnam: The Gioi Publishers, 2004): 1089.

One of the most comprehensive writings on water puppetry in the past twenty years is a chapter contained within James Edward Goodman's book *Uniquely Vietnamese*. James (Jim) Goodman has lived in Asia since 1972 and has travelled to many countries including China, Thailand, and Vietnam. Within *Uniquely Vietnamese*, printed in 2005 by Vietnamese publishing house The Gioi Publishers, Goodman attempts to 'fill the gap' in the knowledge of Vietnam to the general public with topics ranging from Vietnamese history to the importance of communal houses, religion, and the arts.

Goodman specifically references Vietnamese theatre in two different chapters. The first covers the topic of water puppetry while the second focuses on the people's theatre of *cheo*, which will be discussed later. The chapter on water puppetry begins with the importance of agriculture, specifically boating and fishing, in Vietnamese culture and how *mua roi nuoc* was created. Goodman gives a very detailed description of the water puppetry including the setting, puppet movements, how the puppets are made, types of music used for a show, and many other aspects of *mua roi nuoc*. One primary aspect that the author discusses is the history that is tied to the storytelling. Water puppet scenes and skits are preformed by different guilds, most in the north of Vietnam, and draw their influence from *tuong*, *cheo*, and Chinese stories from the past.

Goodman then discusses the history of water puppetry in Vietnam: "Like all Vietnamese arts and crafts, the water-puppet tradition fell into decline in the colonial years and the wars of the 20th century. When Vietnam regained its independence the new government in Hanoi announced a policy of support for all the traditional arts and

crafts...”¹² However, later wars and economic hardship led to a decline in the arts and *mua roi nuoc*. It would not be until the *doi moi* reforms in the 1980s that *mua roi nuoc* would see a comeback in performances and number of guilds.

Furthermore, Goodman cites a specific instance that led to the rejuvenation and renewed interest in *mua roi nuoc*:

The water-puppet tradition got a further boost when the Nam Chan guild took its show abroad in the early 90’s (is apostrophe needed? Check). The show garnered rave reviews and aroused much interest wherever it played, whether in Europe or, later on, in the United States. Upon the troupe’s return home, the government decided that Western tourists would probably appreciate these performances.¹³

According to Goodman, this tour led the Vietnamese government to build a large theatre to attract more tourists to the country. This also led to local pride amongst the Vietnamese as *mua roi nuoc* became a nationalist symbol that could be shown to the rest of the world. Goodman ends his chapter on *mua roi nuoc* by reminding the reader that water puppetry reflects the essence of Vietnamese culture. He notes that each performance shows “festival activities like so many fellow villagers have witnessed. And above all, they perform the vignettes of everyday life that remind their audience of their very own village, always the best place on earth in which to live.”¹⁴ This final summary by Goodman reflects the communal aspect of *mua roi nuoc* and, even though it has become globally popular due to its uniqueness, how it is based in the local customs and culture of Vietnam.

¹² Goodman, James Edward. *Uniquely Vietnamese*. Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2005, 202.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 204.

Another resource dedicated to the topic of *mua roi nuoc* is an article written by Dr. Kathy Foley, in 2001. In “The Metonymy of Art Vietnamese Water Puppetry As a Representation of Modern Vietnam” (published in *The Drama Review* (TDR)) Foley begins by asking the question: “How is it that the art of a limited and specific group comes metaphorically to represent an entire nation?”¹⁵ The rest of Foley’s article looks at the case study of *mua roi nuoc* and how it reflects the metonymy of art.

Foley gives a quick introduction to contemporary water puppetry including where it takes place, a walkthrough of a performance, and the appeal of watching the puppets walk on water. She then gives a comprehensive history of Vietnamese water puppetry including both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Foley goes on to describe a modern scene from a *mua roi nuoc* performance that represents the idea of a peaceful country that lives in harmony. She concludes from this scene that: “Mua roi nuoc is flourishing in this time of peace and serving as an important vehicle whereby Vietnamese represent Vietnam to themselves and others. An obscure art of the Red River delta has through the metonymy of art come to represent the essence of the nation...”¹⁶ The conclusion of the performance represents what Vietnamese wish to display to themselves and foreigners: that the battles fought, between themselves and against invaders, were worth the fight. What once was a village art form now represents an entire country to the rest of the world.

¹⁵ Kathy Foley, “The Metonymy of Art: Vietnamese Water Puppetry As a Representation of Modern Vietnam,” *The Drama Review* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2001), 129.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

Cited as a primary resource in the previously mentioned article by Foley, Margot Jones' 1996 dissertation on water puppetry is another work that deserves to be mentioned. Jones' dissertation was completed at the University of Hawai'i under the guidance of several professors including James R. Brandon. Titled "Mua Roi Nuoc: The Art of Vietnamese Water Puppetry: A Theatrical Genre Study," Jones' dissertation is the most comprehensive study on *mua roi nuoc* as it considers its origins, traditional guilds, stages, and puppets, as well as performance content, and concludes with modern purposes for *mua roi nuoc* including its use as a representative model to the rest of the world.

The topic of *mua roi nuoc* is also discussed in several books on puppetry. One of the primary resources is *Puppetry: A World History* by Eileen Blumenthal, a theatre professor at Rutgers University. Blumenthal states up front that her work encompasses all kinds of works at varying times and places and that the normal methodology would call for a division based on genre, place, or time. However, she believes that:

"Classifying this body of work according to *where*, *when*, or *how* would mean repeating the same story again and again. It is *what* puppets are, their basic nature, that makes them so special... This book, therefore, offers just an overview of history and technique and then switches to a thematic approach. Drawing together material from different continents and periods, it examines the distinctive nature and abilities of constructed performers and surveys the kinds of roles they have played in human societies."¹⁷

Blumenthal's different approach to discussing puppetry gives readers a new way to look at puppetry and the different connections that can be made from different styles, countries, etc. At the end of her work, she has given the reader a good sense of the overall field of puppetry and an insight into its major aspects. It is also interesting to note that

¹⁷ Blumenthal, Eileen, *Puppetry: A World History*. (New York: Abrams, Inc., 2005): 7.

Blumenthal cites Kathy Foley as a person who helped answer questions regarding Southeast Asian and South Asian puppets and masks. In the early chapters of her book, Blumenthal quickly cites the historical connections between *mua roi nuoc* and Chinese puppetry: “As Chinese influence spread through much of East Asia, including the present Vietnam and Korea, so did China’s constructed actors.”¹⁸ She continues this narrative later in the book by pointing to *mua roi nuoc* as an import, likely from China, which had been ‘revamped’ and made uniquely Vietnamese.

Another book on puppetry that covers examples of *mua roi nuoc* is *Asian Theatre Puppets: Creativity, Culture, and Craftsmanship*. This book was written by Asian puppet theatre expert and director of the Lin Liu-Hsin Puppet Theatre Museum Robin Ruizendaal and includes photographs by Wang Hanshun. It was published in 2009 and was made possible by the Asian Cultural Council. Specifically, this book was produced to celebrate the ACC’s 10th Anniversary of its Taiwan Fellowship program as the collection that is displayed in the book comes from Paul Lin. Dr. Lin was the founder of the Taiyuan Arts and Culture Foundation which promotes traditional puppet theatre in Taiwan. Ruizendaal mentions the impact of technology on puppet theatre and how it inspired Lin to start his collection:

The arrival of the age of mass communications saw Asian puppet theatre companies rapidly disappearing. The ones that were left either continued to perform as part of religious rituals, with little function as entertainment, or became folk shows for tourists. This swift decline inspired Paul to start collecting Asian puppet theatre artifacts. First, he focused on the heritage of Taiwan, but soon puppets from all over Asia became part of his collection, which now includes over 8,000 puppets and related items.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹ Robin Ruizendaal, *Asian Theatre Puppets: Creativity, Culture, and Craftsmanship*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009): 6.

Vietnamese theatre certainly falls into Ruizendaal's observation that *mua roi nuoc* has primarily become a folk show for tourists. Later in the introduction, Ruizendaal pointed out the uniqueness of the water puppets of Vietnam as they were not easily categorized by how they are manipulated with both poles and strings. The combination of these two types of puppetry, as well as the aspect of water, lead to an audience thinking that: "The puppets seem to be alive as all forms of contact with the operator are invisible, as the bamboo poles are under the water's surface."²⁰ This uniqueness of Vietnamese water puppetry and its economical impact are the primary reasons that it has become a national symbol of artistry and is used to draw tourists to visit Vietnam.

A majority of Ruizendaal's book consists of photographs which display the puppet collection of Paul Lin. Although the collection is primarily made up of Chinese and Taiwanese puppets, there are seven photographs of different *mua roi nuoc* puppets for the reader to observe. Along with each color photo, there are descriptions which describe the materials used, the regional areas where the puppets are seen, and who the puppets represent. Although there is little in the way of discussion about *mua roi nuoc*, this book inverts the traditional publications about *mua roi nuoc* as it is primarily a visual aid for readers to see what water puppets look like and spends few pages to its history. These detailed photographs were a key addition to the publications on Vietnamese theatre. This book accomplishes its goal of introducing a unique art to a wider audience by showing the types of puppets that would be used during a performance.

The second major shift in Anglophone writings on Vietnamese theatre during this time period come from two scholars: Catherine Diamond and Khai Nguyen. Unlike the

²⁰ Ibid., 15.

male dominated era of the 1950s through the 1990s, the two leading scholars on Vietnamese theatre over the past twenty years have been women. They are also different from Thompson, Hammer, and Crawford as they have both written specific articles on Vietnamese theatre as well as considering its role within its own society and on a global scale.

Catherine Diamond, a professor and theatre director at Soochow University in Taipei, Taiwan, and Khai Thu Nguyen, the Program Director of the Department of Humanities and Education at the University of California Berkeley have written several articles, book chapters, and books, which reveal changing attitudes of research in Vietnamese theatre. They not only describe the influences on and of Vietnamese theatrical forms but they also focus on specific issues within Vietnamese theatre and how these issues represent Vietnam from a global perspective. This change in viewpoint is taken by almost every writer of this period and the scholarship on Vietnamese theatre moves beyond introduction. These authors have the ability to delve deeper into the relationships of Vietnamese theatre, both within itself and Vietnam as well as with Anglophone countries around the world, for two reasons. First, they are able to use the work of their predecessors as a foundation of knowledge to build upon. Second, with the global changes mentioned above, there is more of an open dialogue between Anglophone scholars and their Vietnamese counterparts in learning and sharing more knowledge about Vietnamese theatre. Specifically, these authors looked at the global impact on Vietnamese theatre and how that impact has challenged ideas of gender, national identity and aesthetics, among others.

Catherine Diamond's first major article covered the relationship between the *doi moi* policy and its effect on contemporary theatre in Vietnam. Because the "open door" policy was an economic decision made by the government, several traditional elements Vietnamese culture were threatened with foreign alternatives. Diamond discusses the difference in popularity between the more traditional forms of *tuong*, *hat boi*, and *cheo*, with the more modern form of *cai luong* and *kich noi*. The more modern forms of theatre were able to keep up during the open door policy with the influx of videos, television, and films because they continued to address contemporary issues.

One new interesting point that Diamond introduces to the reader is the emergence of the 'mini-theatre' (*san khau nho*) form theatre in Vietnam. This form of theatre describes "a genre that is both contingent on its space – small and informal – and experimental in style."²¹ This is the first time that this form of theatre has been introduced to the Anglophone audience. Diamond continues by giving an example of an experimental theatre production and contrasts it with other forms of Vietnamese theatre. Her first article is full of new information and shows the global impact of the open door policy on Vietnamese theatre at the time.

Catherine Diamond's second article on Vietnamese theatre appeared in a 1999 issue of *American Theatre* magazine. Diamond discussed the relationship between the annual celebration of Tet and the theatre offerings centering around a post-war theme. She mentioned several plays and theatre companies that performed during the three week festival of Tet and discussed how each one "offers scope for serious reflection: on the

²¹ Diamond, Catherine. "The Pandora's Box of "Doi Moi:" The Open Door Policy and Contemporary Theatre in Vietnam." *New Theatre Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1997): 378.

role of women in contemporary society, the threats to traditional identity, relations with the *viet kieu*, revival of religion, cultural exploitation by the moneyed class.”²² Within her article, Diamond allowed for the reader to experience the many complex issues the current Vietnamese theatre examined. The specific examples of plays and theatre troupes as well as her ability to watch the plays gives great credibility to her article and serves as a justifiable starting point for those who wish to see or learn about Vietnamese theatre.

Diamond’s next article was published in *Asian Theatre Journal* a month later. This time she covered the specific topic of Vietnam’s female dramatists in both stage and screen. Much like her first article, her examples of theatrical productions are from the *cai luong* genre. Her article was primarily divided between Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi dramatists. Within each section, Diamond gave specific details about current productions that are being written, directed, and acted primarily by women. She also mentioned the many possible factors as to why women were the primary participants in theatre including: traditional women’s roles in theatre, the Communist Party’s attempt at equality, and/or that so many men died during the war that women were required to step in and fill the role of dramatists. Whatever the reason, Diamond illustrated that women had much more freedom in the theatre than they did in film. Diamond discussed a current trend in the theatre that, along with helpful production shots, allows the reader to understand what the Vietnamese theatre was like in the current day. This information is valuable as it revealed the historical relationship between actresses and Vietnamese theatre as well as a comparison between actresses and their counterparts in film.

²² Diamond, Catherine. “During Tet, Postwar Reflections: Celebration and questioning at a Vietnamese festival,” *American Theatre* 16, no. 7 (1999): 62.

Roughly six years later, Catherine Diamond published another article on Vietnamese theatre that focused on the many different layers of the spoken drama (*kich noi*) genre. She discussed how all of these layers, including: *cheo*, French realism, socialist realism, and western performance art have combined to create a unique hybrid form of theatre that is distinctly Vietnamese. Diamond referenced the Vietnamese dramatist Nguyen Dinh Nghi as a resource for explaining the evolution of the spoken drama throughout the years. This evolution has led the spoken drama genre to be a multi-faceted tool that can be used by different theatre troupes in order to give their message to an audience. Diamond, as is customary in her articles, spends a majority of the article dissecting how this form is used by different theatre troupes all over Vietnam including: Vo Van Tan 5B, The Youth Theatre, The Central Dramatic Company of Vietnam, and the Hanoi Municipal Theatre. Diamond concluded in her article that: “People in the cities might not go to the theatre to *get* their news, but the theatre provides them with a commentary on what they read in the papers, and allows them both the intellectual space to contemplate their society...”²³ This not only tells the reader about the theatre’s position in Vietnamese culture as a mirror of society , but also displayed the global role that theatre serves as a means to allow society to question itself. Diamond also displayed the influx of global influences on spoken theatre and how this variety allowed theatre troupes a multiplicity of ways to reach their audience.

Five years later, in 2010, Catherine Diamond continued her theme of globalization with her most current article which was published in the *Southeast Asian*

²³ Diamond, Catherine. “The Palimpsest of Vietnamese Contemporary Spoken Drama.” *Theatre Research International* 30, no. 3 (2005): 220.

Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) journal. The journal's mission is to create a forum for scholars and researchers who are interested in the performing arts, among other topics, of Southeast Asia. In this article, Diamond is once again reporting on current issues in Vietnam and the effect of globalization within the theatre and vice versa. The majority of Diamond's article is spent on five different international festivals that have taken place in countries along the Mekong River. These festivals are drastically important because they "allow for free play and exploration in a given form. They proved an opportunity for the participants to bond even when they have little or no language in common by shifting the emphasis away from verbal communication to movement and visual expression."²⁴ This ability to work with one another across cultural lines allows each practitioner to be prideful in their own work but also to incorporate elements that they find intriguing from another culture's theatre. Diamond's discussion about these festivals allows those who are interested to learn about the impact of globalization within Southeast Asian theatre. This new form of sharing ideas amongst cultures is an exciting possibility that exists for those who want to share Vietnamese theatre with the global community.

In 2012, Catherine Diamond published a book, from the University of Hawai'i Press, entitled *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. Within her preface, Diamond acknowledges that a major influence on her works has been James R. Brandon's *Theatre in Southeast Asia*. The reader of this book is reassured that Diamond will give a comprehensive view on Vietnamese theatre because she notes that she has been to each country noted in her book several times as well as observing many

²⁴ Diamond, Catherine. "The Mekong Goes Global: International Festivals/Regional Gatherings." *SPAFA Journal* 20, no. 1 (2010):16.

performances and interview performers, scholars, and spectators about the conditions of their theatre.

Catherine Diamond uses much of her previous work to create her chapter on Vietnamese theatre in *Communities of Imagination*. She discusses: the Tet celebrations of 1999, the impact of the *doi moi* policy on Vietnamese culture and theatre, the flexibility and multiple layers of the *kich noi* genre, and the influences of the experimental theatre. Diamond concludes that: “Despite all the ideological weight it has been made to bear in the twentieth century to comply with conflicting demands of political censorship, socialist ethics and aesthetics, audience expectations of novelty, and commercial viability, the Vietnamese theatre shows resilience and imagination.”²⁵ This final analysis is similar to other scholarly works of this time period: that Vietnamese theatre overcomes many obstacles on its way to becoming unique amongst the other theatres of Southeast Asia and the world.

Catherine Diamond’s impact on the scholarship of Vietnamese theatre is immense. Her ability to analyze current trends in Vietnamese theatre has helped others learn about the evolution that has occurred across different theatrical genres in Vietnam. While she does spend some time giving the basic details that have been given before her, a lot of Diamond’s work is original and introduces more topics for discussion when considering Vietnamese theatre such as the multiplicity within Vietnamese theatre forms and the global impact of the past twenty years. Each of her articles looks at a contemporary topic of Vietnamese theatre and how it is being treated in different regions

²⁵ Diamond, Catherine. “Staging the *Doi Moi* Generation and the Treasures of Vietnamese Tradition.” In *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012): 90.

of Vietnam which gives the reader special insight that otherwise would not be available to them.

Much like Catherine Diamond, Khai Thu Nguyen focused on the role of Vietnamese theatre as a place impacted by globalization. Specifically, she discussed how Vietnamese theatre was influenced and has influenced politics and identity. Khai completed her dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley in 2010 entitled: “Sensing Vietnam: Melodramas of Nation from Colonialism to Market Reform.” Within this work Khai discusses the use of melodrama as a tool for political discourse and as “...a double-edged sword for subversive and conservative political action within processes of decolonization, socialist development, and neoliberalism.”²⁶ This initial work by Khai, which looked at the role of melodrama as a marker of national identity as well as its ability to construct a political subjecthood, laid the groundwork for a majority of her published articles and book chapters.

One of Khai’s first works was an essay published within *Portrayals of Americans on the World Stage: Critical Essays*. This publication, edited by Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., discussed drama around the world that depicts Americans and the United States. Khai’s chapter: “Marking the Nation from the Outside: Vietnamese-Americans as Object in the Vietnamese Play *Da Co Hoai Lang*,” elaborated on the issue of immigration and the idea of diaspora. She used Julia Kristeva’s theory of the object to discuss how identity was classified for Vietnamese Americans after the Vietnam War. Khai Nguyen argued that: “While the play uses Vietnamese Americans to create a fixed national identity, it shows

²⁶ Nguyen, Khai Thu. “Sensing Vietnam: Melodramas of Nation from Colonialism to Market Reform” (PhD, University of California, Berkeley, 2010): 1.

as well the very transformation of the concept of national identity from a fixed, coherent, and geographically placed idea to one that accounts for heterogeneity and transnational linkages.”²⁷ This essay reveals the play’s importance by the discussion that it brings up about ‘otherness.’ In a globalized world, according to Nguyen, the ‘other’ loses its identity created by geographic and other boundaries and instead becomes a diasporic subject. Thus, the issue of what makes one ‘Vietnamese’ is problematized and identity is no longer viewed as a simple designation.

In 2011, Khai Nguyen published her article “Another Midsummer Night’s Dream” in Ho Chi Minh City,” in *Asian Theatre Journal* (ATJ). This article describes the activity of the North-East-West-South (NEWS) theatre company (of which she was a cofounder and co-director). Khai describes the process of putting on a production of *Another Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Ho Chi Minh City in 2009 as a way to look at identity. After describing the roots of NEWS and the history of *hat boi* and Shakespeare in Vietnam, Khai discussed the beginning collaborations for intercultural theatre in Vietnam between Vietnamese and Western theatre troupes and its varied success since the 1990s. The specific production put on by NEWS only used a few pieces of dialogue from Shakespeare while improvised dialogue would fill in the spaces as well as mix “...performance styles, types of dress, times, places, and cultural texts...”²⁸ This led to a questioning of ‘authentic’ identity as the boundaries became varied.

²⁷ Nguyen, Khai Thu. “Marking the Nation from the Outside; Vietnamese-Americans as Abject in the Vietnamese Play *Da Co Hoai Lang*,” In *Portrayals of Americans on the World Stage: Critical Essays*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009): 174.

²⁸ Nguyen, Khai Thu. ““Another Midsummer Night’s Dream” in Ho Chi Ming City,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 28, no. 1 (2011): 215.

Another article of Khai's: "A Personal Sorrow: "Cai Luong" and the Politics of North and South Vietnam," was published in *Asian Theatre Journal* a year later. Within this piece of work, she looked at the relationship between the form of 'reformed' theatre and its use by the Vietnamese Communist Party at the end of the Vietnam War. Khai states:

The abjection, overamplification, and reshaping of southern *cai luong* worked to reaffirm the masculinity and legitimacy of socialist realism, to rebuild Ho Chi Minh City through facilitating the erasure of "colonial" culture, and to create images of a coherent nation toward which citizens can return. A discourse against melodrama and *cai luong* helped in the purging of "excess" in southern culture and identity, while a reformed *cai luong* would help reshape new subjects for a unified Vietnam.²⁹

Cai luong was viewed not only as feminine and excessive by the North, but it also was a reminder of colonization as it originated within and was influenced by the French occupation. Thus it was seen by the communist North as displaying the characteristics of capitalism that distracted from the 'truth' of socialist realism. The communist North attempted to mandate what defined a culture as being 'Vietnamese' by spreading its political propaganda throughout Vietnam. Khai Nguyen pointed out how political changes influenced the evolution of a form of theatre in Vietnam, because of its foreign influences, to one being redefined as solely Vietnamese.

The rise in the amount of research on Vietnamese theatre in the past twenty years displays a trend of progress for Anglophone readers who wish to learn about Vietnamese theatre. This progress has been greatly aided by the advancement of technology since it is now easier than ever to share information. Most writings during this time period were published in online academic journals. This new way of sharing information, short

²⁹ Nguyen, Khai Thu. "A Personal Sorrow: "Cai Luong" and the Politics of North and South Vietnam," *Asian Theatre Journal* 29, no. 1 (2012): 263.

articles rather than significant books, also leads to the idea of learning about a given topic at a faster rate.

The post-1994 research on Vietnamese theatre continues the trends of earlier years with its inclusion within cultural, Southeast Asian, and Vietnamese publications. There are also new trends emerging with the importance of *mua roi nuoc* as a symbol of Vietnam to the rest of the world as well as current trends in Vietnamese theatre including its impact with regard to identity and politics. The growth of scholarship on Vietnamese theatre, as well as the availability for students to study Vietnamese language and culture at several universities across the globe, displays a current trend of rising interest by Anglophone readers to learn more about Vietnamese theatre.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The Anglophone writings on Vietnamese theatre have changed in both scope and critical thinking throughout the years. The initial reactions of explorers and diplomats evolved into current journal articles that analyze specific issues and trends within Vietnamese theatre. The writings of each time period are classified by authorial qualities as well as historical impact.

The writings that existed pre-1955 revealed an attitude of initial discovery as the explorers and diplomats wrote down their observations of Vietnamese theatre. These writings were, of course, not the primary reason for their visit and thus there was little attention paid to Vietnamese theatre and its place within the culture of Vietnam. These authors primarily displayed a racial bias within their writings as they were both fascinated and disgusted by the exotic ‘other.’ Although these writings do not offer much in the way of critical thinking, they do offer historical insight due to the initial reactions to Vietnamese theatre by the authors.

The writings on Vietnamese theatre after the fall of Dien Bien Phu until the lifting of the trade embargo between the U.S. and Vietnam demonstrated a massive step forward in research. The primary sources for this time period come from scholars who traveled to Vietnam to specifically study its theatre. Vietnamese theatre was largely placed within the context of Vietnamese culture or other Southeast Asian performance forms. Each part of Vietnamese theatre that was discussed was placed either within a cultural context or

regarded its similarities or differences to other Southeast Asian theatres. There were also the beginnings of Anglophone writings by Vietnamese scholars who wished to introduce the topic of Vietnamese theatre to an Anglophone audience. The writings during this time period laid the groundwork for future scholars and the general public by explaining the basics of and categorizing Vietnamese theatre.

The final writings of this study, post 1994, offer a deeper insight into topics on Vietnamese theatre. The prevalence of technology, and specifically the Internet, has allowed for information to be shared more easily and at a faster pace. This has allowed for many scholars to write articles on specific issues within Vietnamese theatre and publish them in online academic journals. Trends continue from the previous time period as some writings on Vietnamese theatre still place it within a cultural or geographical context. The two primary scholars, Catherine Diamond and Khai Thu Nguyen, expand upon the topics of current trends, identity, and politics within Vietnamese theatre.

The current state of research on Vietnamese theatre still pales in comparison to that for other Asian countries, primarily Japan, China, and India. Among many missing pieces of work, there are still no books solely on Vietnamese theatre by a non-Vietnamese author. The only two books, one by Song Ban (1960) and the other by Dinh Quang (1999), were published in Vietnam as resource guides for Anglophone readers. There is also a tremendous lack of translated plays, both from the classical and modern repertoires, from Vietnamese theatre available for Anglophone readers. Instead, scholars who are proficient in Vietnamese language have summarized plays within their English-written articles. Hauch's dissertation, written over thirty years ago, is one of the few full translations available; a quick perusal of Japanese, Chinese, or Indian theatre shows

numerous anthologies and translated works. In contrast, few Vietnamese plays are even translated and those that are, are not readily available. Finally, there is little research on specific Vietnamese playwrights and directors of Vietnamese theatre. These missing works, among others, highlight a need for more research by Anglophone authors on Vietnamese theatre.

Fortunately, current day Anglophone scholars have the means to enhance the volume and quality of research on Vietnamese theatre. As stated in chapter three, there is a wealth of information on Vietnamese theatre thanks to the Internet. This tool can now be used as a starting point for knowledge and also allows potential scholars to communicate easily with authors of previous Anglophone works on Vietnamese theatre. From these new relationships, scholars have the ability to gain a deeper knowledge by establishing contacts and possibly conducting more field research on Vietnamese theatre. Hopefully, with a renewed interest, current day and future Anglophone scholars will consider researching new topics within Vietnamese theatre and share their knowledge with other scholars and the general public.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

“A Scene in the Cochinchinese Opera”



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