

Mai Thảo - “Sài Gòn: Vietnam's Cultural Capital”

[Word Count: 387]

Vietnamese culture, thriving today and growing stronger tomorrow, finds its starting point and genesis in the heart of Sài Gòn.

The light of culture blazes today amid the vast expanse of our nation's life, a fiery torrent of vitality circulating within a body that harbors the infinite potential of youth's creative vigor. This lifeblood emanates from the heart of Sài Gòn, a city that has transformed itself from the murky canals of yesteryears to assume a new spiritual form: that of a pulsating heart, with its arteries and beams of light crisscrossing, radiating throughout its entire being.

Sài Gòn is no longer mere hands and feet; it has become a heart. Historic events have shifted the nation's focal point, and Sài Gòn now grows, supplanting a decaying Hà Nội as the epicenter that gathers goodwill and the collective efforts of existing cultural activities across all sectors. From foreign visitors arriving at Tan Son Nhat airport to ocean-crossing ships anchoring in the city's tranquil port, to those separated by vast oceans, hearing a voice, a song, or music broadcast through the ether, or reading a newspaper column recounting the testimony of culture – all who think of Vietnam carry within their souls the lush image of a sprawling city that has become the center for all the nation's spiritual forces amidst a season of creation.

The city has changed, donning a new robe of culture over its natural cloak. The tropical sun's brilliant golden rays burn brighter, now imbued with the increasingly rich and vivid light of culture.

From a meaningless dot on the map to the construction projects that define the city's expanding surface, Sài Gòn has risen vertically, radiating horizontally, and permeated deeply to transform from a mere southern metropolis into the spiritual capital of the entire nation. Sài Gòn has assumed its position, accepting its mission after Hà Nội relinquished its own. The cultural flame has ignited here today, and the vitality of youth, driven from a place of paralysis, destruction, and collapse, converges in Sài Gòn, joining forces with its existing vibrant energy. The city, the gem of Asia and the essence of our land, now contains the hues of fertile soil where the finest blossoms of a cultural season compete to flourish, with tangible achievements being gradually collected and organized into diagrams and systems.

Questions:

1. What is the main idea of the article?
2. What imagery does the author use to describe Sài Gòn as a cultural capital?

3. Based on the article, what type of tone do you think the author, and many new Northern Vietnamese migrants, feel about their prospects in this new home, in the Republic of Vietnam?

Article excerpts translated from: Sài Gòn Thủ đô văn hoá Việt Nam. Mai Thảo. (2019, March 23). Người Tình Hư Vô.

<https://nguoitinhhuvo.wordpress.com/2019/03/22/sai-gon-thu-do-van-hoa-viet-nam-mai-thao/>

Longing for the Homeland - Phạm Duy

Phạm Duy (October 5, 1921 – January 27, 2013[1]), born Phạm Duy Cẩn, was a prominent Vietnamese musician, instrumentalist, singer, and music researcher. He is widely regarded as the greatest composer of modern Vietnamese music, especially of the “New Music” (*tân nhạc*) genre, with an extensive and diverse body of compositions, many of which have become classics and are well-known among the Vietnamese people. His music often incorporates elements of traditional Vietnamese music combined with techniques and structures of Western classical music, resulting in a unique style with many groundbreaking and influential works spanning several generations. He also initiated and directed many trends and styles for modern Vietnamese music. In addition to composing and performing, he made valuable contributions to research on Vietnamese music. He once held the position of professor of music at the Sài Gòn National School of Music. He is also considered a writer, with four volumes of memoirs highly praised for their literary and documentary value. With a career spanning over 70 years and encompassing many important historical periods of the country, he is regarded as a "giant" of Vietnamese music. In 1952, he fled with his family from the North to South, and in 1975, he escaped as a refugee to the US, living in Santa Ana for almost 30 years. Before his death, he moved back to Vietnam in 2005, with the hope of living in his homeland one last time.

About Tình Hoài Hương (“Longing for the Homeland”)

[Word Count: 379]

When I started composing again, I wrote the song "Tình Hoài Hương" (Longing for the Homeland) in 1952. This song falls into the category of homeland legends that I created, thanks to the opportunity to travel across the three regions of the country in times of peace and war... This song is no longer a situational love song like before. It is a sentimental song, my own nostalgia for half of my homeland that I just had to leave. Little did I know that it would become the nostalgic song for a million migrants to the South two years later. Then, when another million people, at another time — that is, after the historic day of April 30, 1975 — had to cross the sky and sea to leave the S-shaped peninsula, the song "Tình Hoài Hương" from 20 years ago became a very appropriate song for that million people, from that year onwards.

The song speaks of missing the charming peach river, the bustling afternoon market, the young bamboo arch, and the warm village smoke there, in my naive life, there is a gentle buffalo dreaming beside the children, there is a beloved old mother listening to the sound of the flute... Oh, how nostalgic! Today, when mentioning the song "Tình Hoài Hương," I still feel that from the moment I sat missing the peach river in my old hometown [in Hà Nội] in 1952, I had dreamed of an afternoon turning direction so that I could cross the deep oceans, go across the vast continents, live happily in a love of a thousand paths... Unexpectedly, 23 years later, I went into political exile and realized the dream of crossing the border to become a wandering person of the nostalgic song. Then from there, I got to travel all over the world, even though many times tears flowed back to the mixed homeland, I still thank life immensely.

Why did I have such a great longing at the end of 1952? Missing all the smallest details of the past is not enough, but also projecting my thoughts to the love of thousands of horizons that I have never set foot in. Could it be because the creative power has been suppressed for nearly two years and is now fully released?

- Memoir of Phạm Duy

Tình Hoài Hương - Phạm Duy Lyrics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuNrKwz-Vqw>

Vietnamese Lyrics: https://lyric.tkaraoke.com/17610/tinh_hoai_huong.html

English Translations:

My homeland has beautiful, extended rivers
 Water flowing into its square fields
 Fragrant rice stalks, enough for two seasons
 The sounds of grain and villagers echo alluringly throughout the night

My homeland has breathtaking canals
 As markets close and the afternoon fades into the horizon
 Brown shadows appear on the road I step into
 The warm hearth, the fresh bamboo canopy, the layer of smoke rising from my village!

When you come home, will you remember your love?
 When I come home, I will remember her smile of laughter
 Who will come home to buy a smile?
 Let me naively buy a piece of life for myself

Oh, my homeland! The banyan tree embraces the children with its shade

The midday sunlight stirs sleepily among the leaves
Water buffaloes graze peacefully on the hills
Dreaming of what? They wait in loneliness to hear me play the flute again.

Oh, my homeland! My beloved mother's hair has greyed
Her lullaby brings nostalgia for my childhood
Her arms gentle as wisps of hair
Oh, how much longer will these shadows retain their color!

Nostalgic love for my homeland
The afternoon blue smoke clings to my drowning heart
The afternoon comes and goes
We live happily in love forever.
Love of a thousand directions
Our love for each other is as deep as the ocean.
Oh, to be a wanderer!
Tears spill profusely and return to my hometown
So far from my homeland! I love my homeland, that is my homeland!

Rock & Roll in the Republic of Vietnam

Questions to consider: Vietnam, influenced greatly by French culture, evolved rapidly through its exposure to American culture, music, and influence. This created new identities and ways of expression, including Protestantism, rock and roll, Hollywood-esque movies, and more. How might such influences have affected Vietnamese identity, and what influences make the Vietnamese American community unique in its culture?

[Word Count: 256]

The origins of rock music are nearly coincident with Vietnam's 1954 partitioning; Elvis Presley's first single was reaching the radio airwaves as the French agreed to withdraw from Indochina. Not long afterward, American advisors and military personnel were arriving in South Vietnam bringing the latest American popular music with them. Rock was the music of the Cold War and was an often unwitting combatant in a larger ideological war. In the West it was seen both as an enemy from within and as an expression of freedom and peace. The Soviet block dreaded it because of its possible ability to focus youth and their rebellion. These confusions of cultural and ideological viewpoints have influenced the reception of rock music in Vietnam. From 1954 there was an embargo on all Western entertainment in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and its capitol, Hà Nội. Rock entered Vietnam through Sài Gòn, the capital of the Republic of Vietnam, better known as South Vietnam. Though subject to the scrutiny of a society at war, it was not subject to heavy censorship and was even incorporated into the propaganda engine of the southern state. After the fall of Sài Gòn and the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the victorious Communists banned the South's music including rock. Nevertheless, rock remained a part of Sài Gòn's collective memory and its influence traveled north to Hà Nội. Although it has always been a minority taste, rock has long found a devoted audience among Vietnam's elite youth attending private schools and universities.

Gibbs, J. (2008). How does Hanoi rock? The way to rock and roll in Vietnam. *Asian Music*, 39(1), 5-25.

Hòn Anh Giận Em - Tuấn Lê

Vietnamese Lyrics: <https://lyrics.vn/lyrics/4348-hon-anh-gian-em.html>

Pre-1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41XH0NYc08w>

After 1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cK8XgdvmLLo>

English:

Husband:

Why so sad, you won't even say?
I've come home, but you're not happy today.
Before we wed, I told you then
As husband, wife, we'd start again
Never fight, or others will mock and grin.

Wife:

Night by night, you're away,
Alone in our small home I stay,
Our honeymoon just passed, and you still stray.
I miss you, my cheeks smeared with powder,
Without you, my mirror and comb don't matter,
The life of a girl is like a peach blossom awaiting spring

Husband:

My love! My love! Soldiers fight foes far away,
There's no time at home to stay,
It's so hard, and you blame me?
My love for you is great,
But duty to the country holds more weight,
Be strong! In peace, we'll reunite and celebrate.

Wife:

My love! My love! Love brings pain, it's true,
Love brings loss and hardship too,
In a messy room, with blankets astrew.
A man's life takes many turns,
A woman's path is straight and stern,
With me gone, don't you dare flirt or yearn!

Husband:

Don't be jealous, this is the soldier's way,
Handsome soldiers draw eyes, what can I say?

Wife:

If there's no fire there wouldn't be smoke, that's plain to see,
Why keep arguing endlessly?
Jealous girls mean they love their husbands dearly.

Husband:

I have returned, after long times away,
And we'll love each other more each day,
Fifteen days of leave, and we'll hold these memories today.

Wife:

Love brings both joy and spite,
Petty quarrels add flavor to life,
If others laugh or judge, we'll bear the strife.