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The "Phân Toàn Tàu" Ritual of the Bó Y People: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Musical Communication in Weddings

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Abstract

This study examined the role of the traditional "Phân Toàn Tàu" ritual in Bó Y weddings, highlighting that it was not only a form of folk singing but also a unique cultural communication practice of the Bó Y community. Through content analysis of song lyrics, participant observation at weddings, and interviews with artisans and community members, the study provided in-depth insights into the formation, artistic characteristics, and socio-cultural significance of this ritual within the context of intangible cultural heritage. The findings indicated that "Phân Toàn Tàu" was not merely a performance tradition but also a structured form of communication between two families, conveyed through symbolic lyrical exchanges and expressed through refined melodies. This distinctive style set "Phân Toàn Tàu" apart from the more spontaneous wedding singing practices of some other ethnic groups. Beyond its aesthetic and ritualistic values, this practice played a crucial role in strengthening social relationships, transmitting intergenerational knowledge, and fostering community cohesion. Through a comprehensive analysis of "Phân Toàn Tàu" as a case study of musical communication in ritual contexts, the research clarified the complex relationship between oral traditions, cultural identity, and heritage sustainability. By positioning this practice within the global discourse on intangible cultural heritage, the study emphasized the urgency of documentation, preservation, and adaptive development to ensure its continuity amid rapid socio-cultural transformations. These findings also contributed to broader discussions on the preservation of folk music among ethnic minority groups and the safeguarding of traditional oral art forms in multicultural societies worldwide.

Keywords: *Phân toàn tàu ritual, musical communication, Bó Y weddings, cultural identity, preservation of intangible cultural heritage*

Introduction

The Bó Y people belonged to the group of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam. As of 2019, their total population was approximately 2,500 (Vietnam, 2019; Viet et al., 2024). They had a deep love for singing, incorporating it into various aspects of life, including entertainment, labor, social communication, courtship, weddings, and funerals.

Typically, in marriage ceremonies, the meetings between the groom's and bride's families—such as the engagement proposal, betrothal ceremony, and wedding—served as formal and significant rituals in wedding culture. These rituals carried sacred meanings, symbolizing the union of the two families in mutual respect and their hopes for the couple's future happiness while affirming their recognition of the marriage. The solemnity of these rituals was reflected in the meticulous and serious preparation, as well as the careful and respectful arrangement of offerings, demonstrating the groom's family's reverence toward the bride's family. Beyond diplomatic formality, these occasions provided opportunities for both families to express solidarity, commit to long-term bonds,

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However, among the Bó Y people, these ceremonies evolved into the traditional custom of "Phân Thòan Tâu" in weddings. This distinctive wedding practice of the Bó Y involved folk singing as a form of communication between the groom's and bride's families before proceeding with other wedding rituals. These songs played a crucial role in introductions and in creating a relaxed and joyful atmosphere between the two families (Việt, 2013).

Through the lyrical exchanges, the distinct characteristics of Bó Y communication culture became evident. The verses in "Phân Thòan Tâu" were both simple and familiar yet contained sophistication and subtlety, reflecting the speakers' eloquence and hospitality. Furthermore, the content of "Phân Thòan Tâu" songs also conveyed aspects of architectural culture and living spaces of the Bó Y people, offering insights into their daily lives and customs. This tradition illustrated the refinement of their communication culture, the harmonious combination of words and actions, and the interplay between tradition and cultural exchange within the wedding space.

This study aims to investigate the cultural and communicative dimensions of "Phân Thòan Tâu" in Bó Y wedding rituals. The research examines the role of these songs in mediating interactions between the two families and seeks to decode the implicit cultural messages conveyed through the song exchanges. By doing so, this research provides insights into the broader cultural, social, and behavioral values of the Bó Y community. The specific research questions addressed in this study are: How does "Phân Thòan Tâu" reflect the cultural, social, and communicative characteristics of the Bó Y community? What messages and values are conveyed through the lyrical exchanges in this ritual?

In the contemporary context, the tradition of "Phân Thòan Tâu" faces the threat of extinction due to the aging of traditional folk artisans and the increasing influence of modern practices and intermarriage with other ethnic groups. This underscores the urgent need for systematic research and preservation efforts to safeguard this intangible cultural heritage. Through meticulous documentation and analysis, this study not only captures the cultural and communicative essence of "Phân Thòan Tâu" but also contributes to the broader discourse on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, providing a valuable resource for future generations.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored music as a medium of communication, shedding light on its multifaceted roles across social, cultural, and psychological contexts. Far from being a mere form of entertainment, music serves as a bridge that fosters human connection and interaction. It enables individuals to engage meaningfully in social situations, particularly benefiting children and those with language challenges, by creating unique communicative experiences that strengthen relationships within communities (Hewett & Corke, 2014; Chaiyakhe et al., 2023; Brand & Bargil, 2010; Assaf et al., 2024; Mustafa et al., 2018). Moreover, the role of music in collaboration and creativity has been widely documented, with research demonstrating its capacity to nurture social bonds through cooperative and imaginative processes (Morgan, 1998; Su, 2017). Within the field of psychology, music emerges as a potent tool for emotional expression and empathy,

influencing feelings and behaviors in ways that deepen interpersonal connections (Cross, 2014; Feld, 1984). Beyond its emotional dimensions, music plays a pivotal role in rituals and cultural identity, providing a profound lens through which to understand its cultural and social significance (Pavlicevic, 2000; Holmes, 2012).

In many societies, music holds a central place in rituals and ceremonies, especially in weddings. Wedding songs across cultures reveal the diversity of musical expressions used to convey emotions and uphold cultural values (Mtose, 2011; Juraev et al., 2020). These songs are not merely ornamental; they act as powerful tools for intergenerational connection, transmitting traditions and values across time (Henry, 1975; Rüütel, 2002). Music's ability to preserve and reflect folk culture has drawn considerable scholarly attention, with researchers highlighting its role as a repository of cultural, historical, and community values (Särg, 2009). For instance, studies have shown how immigrant and indigenous musical traditions interweave to create vibrant cultural spaces that reflect both adaptability and richness in modern communities (Anisimov et al., 2020). Similarly, traditions such as *regilaul* among Estonians serve not only to accompany social events but also to encapsulate shared identities and collective memories (Oras, 2010). The Udmurt Mad'Song genre offers another example, addressing cultural and political tensions, further illustrating the power of music as an expressive and reconciliatory medium (Nurieva, 2010).

Vietnamese folk music, particularly within ethnic minority communities, epitomizes the intertwining of artistic expression and cultural identity. Research into Bô Y folk music underscores its profound connection to traditional values and its vital role in preserving ethnic identity amidst the pressures of modernity (Việt, 2010; Phụng, 2015). Musical traditions within this community, expressed through festivals and customs, illustrate a harmonious interplay between humans, nature, and society, where music serves as both a source of enjoyment and a custodian of cultural heritage (Phụng, 2015; Hà, 2018).

Although significant contributions have been made to understanding the relationship between music and culture, in-depth studies on folk singing as a form of communicative ritual remain limited, particularly regarding the "Phân Toàn Tâu" custom in Bô Y weddings. This musical communication ritual is unique, reflecting the profound cultural values of the community. A detailed examination of this tradition not only highlights the distinctive features of Bô Y culture but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in the context of globalization. This study seeks to bridge that gap while contributing to the protection of cultural identity in the modern era.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

Communicative culture was a system of rules, norms, and values that governed the ways individuals interacted within a community. This definition encompassed both verbal and nonverbal communication, deeply influenced by factors such as tradition, beliefs, religion, and social status (Feld, 1984; Merriam, 1960). The key components of communicative culture included language, behavior, rituals, and nonverbal expressions (gestures, eye contact, attire). In each community, communicative culture functioned not only as a tool for exchanging information but also as a means of expressing respect, fostering social cohesion, and defining individuals' positions in society (Cross, 2014; Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; Hall, 1976).

Music was an integral part of culture, simultaneously reflecting and shaping a community's values, beliefs, and customs (Stone, 2015). The relationship between music and cultural-social factors was evident in how music extended beyond entertainment to serve as a communicative tool and a medium for conveying cultural messages and national identity (Henry, 1975; Mulaudzi, 2013; Nettl, 2005). In rituals and social events, music reinforced social bonds within the community and symbolized connections between humans, sacred spaces, and spiritual elements (George, 2014; Titon, 1992). Thus, music possessed a multidimensional role in culture, both reflecting traditional values and contributing to their preservation over time (Feld, 1984; Merriam, 1960; Sutherland, 2016).

Ethnomusicology was the study of music within its cultural context, where music was examined not only from theoretical or technical perspectives but also through anthropological and sociological lenses (Rice, 2013; Titon, 1992). Research methods in ethnomusicology included musical analysis, participant observation, and interviews with artisans and community members (Merriam, 1960; Nettl, 2005). Through this approach, ethnomusicologists explored the interaction between music and other cultural factors, such as rituals, religion, and social relationships. Analyzing musical traditions within their cultural context illuminated the relationship between music and cultural identity while contributing to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (Al-Saeedi et al., 2016; Haider et al., 2019; Jam et al., 2017; Stone, 2015; Titon, 1992; Ochoa, 2013).

This study employed qualitative research methods, including interviews, audio recordings of songs, and direct observation of wedding ceremonies. Interviews were conducted with eight members of the Bô Y community, comprising five folk song artisans and three shamans. These individuals played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the "Phân Toàn Tâu" songs, providing valuable insights into vocal techniques, lyrical meanings, and the cultural values embedded in this ritual. Additionally, they were responsible for organizing the "Phân Toàn Tâu" ceremony in Bô Y weddings.

Audio recordings of songs performed during the "Phân Toàn Tâu" ritual facilitated the collection of concrete musical materials for analysis. Furthermore, direct observation of wedding ceremonies offered firsthand insights into the organization of the ritual, the communicative dynamics between the two families, and the functional role of the songs within the wedding context.

This study received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards. We were committed to respecting the privacy and identity of all research participants. The artisans and community members were fully informed about the study's objectives and procedures, and they provided verbal consent before any data collection took place. Additionally, we pledged to use the collected information responsibly, ensuring that cultural knowledge was documented and presented with integrity and respect, contributing to the preservation and development of the Bô Y cultural heritage.

Folklore artisans and shamans from the Bô Y community were interviewed to obtain insights into their cultural roles and traditional practices.

Structure and Performance of “Phân Toàn Tâu” in Weddings

The “Phân Toàn Tâu” was a traditional communication ritual embedded in Bô Y weddings, comprising five pairs of call-and-response stanzas between the bride’s and groom’s families. Sung to the tune of “Sinh Phấn,” a folk melody unique to the Bô Y people, the structure of this ritual exemplifies the intricate interplay between music, language, and culture. The first three pairs (1, 2, and 3) consist of two-line verses, where the second line repeats the first, setting up a question-and-answer dynamic. The final two pairs (4 and 5) adopt continuous stanzas without line breaks, creating a statement-and-response format that deepens the communicative exchange.

The performance of “Phân Toàn Tâu” unfolds as a dialogue, beginning with the bride’s family posing the first question, followed by the groom’s family’s response. This exchange progresses through five stanzas, each one serving as a step toward granting the groom’s family permission to enter the bride’s house and continue with the wedding ceremony. Throughout the dialogue, the bride’s family keenly observes the groom’s side, playfully using any mistakes as an opportunity to impose light-hearted penalties, often involving the consumption of wine. This practice adds an element of joviality to the proceedings. The five stanzas are structured as follows:

The performance format consisted of an antiphonal singing exchange between the representatives of the bride’s family and those of the groom’s family. The bride’s side initiated the exchange with a questioning verse, to which the groom’s side responded. The exchange proceeded through five rounds of questions, and only after completing them was the groom’s party allowed to pass through the symbolic barrier and enter the bride’s house to perform the wedding rituals. Throughout the singing process, the bride’s side carefully listened for any mistakes made by the groom’s representatives, using them as an excuse to impose drinking penalties, thereby creating a lively and festive atmosphere at the wedding.

The content of the five pairs of stanzas was structured as follows: In the first stanza, the bride’s side asked where the groom’s party had come from, and the groom’s representatives responded by mentioning the locations where they lived. In the second stanza, the bride’s side inquired about the reason for their visit, and the groom’s representatives tactfully expressed their respect for the bride’s parents, stating that they had come out of affection for the bride’s father and mother rather than for the bride herself. In the third stanza, when asked whom they were seeking, the groom’s side once again answered that they had come to see the bride’s parents, not the bride. In the fourth stanza, the bride’s side humbly remarked that their hospitality might have been inadequate, while the groom’s side responded by praising the warmth and generosity of the welcome they had received. Finally, in the fifth stanza, the bride’s side invited the groom’s representatives inside, and the groom’s side sang a request for permission to open the door and step into the bride’s home.

Content of “Phân Toàn Tâu” in Weddings

The content of “Phân Toàn Tâu” in Bô Y weddings was not merely a form of communication but also an artistic expression of folk singing, reflecting the community’s musical communication culture. According to artisan N.K.P., “The lyrics were not strictly fixed but could be improvised depending on the circumstances and the interlocutors.” This flexibility allowed the bride’s side to

test the groom's representatives' wit and provided opportunities for drinking penalties, contributing to the lively atmosphere of the wedding celebration.

The structure of the five pairs of stanzas re-enacted the sequential flow of everyday interactions while adhering to traditional rituals. In the first pair, the bride's representatives opened with a question about the groom's place of origin, demonstrating politeness in receiving guests. The groom's side responded by mentioning their hometowns, establishing an initial connection. The second pair of stanzas centered on the purpose of the groom's visit. Rather than giving a direct answer, the groom's side skillfully conveyed respect by stating that they had come out of affection for the bride's parents rather than for the bride herself. This subtle phrasing highlighted the refined nature of Bó Y communication, where verbal exchanges not only conveyed messages but also created a favorable impression.

The third stanza pair delved deeper, as the bride's representatives asked whom exactly the groom's side was seeking. Even if they had never met the bride's parents before, the groom's representatives responded with certainty, affirming that they were looking for "the master and mistress of this house." This demonstrated confidence and intelligence. In the fourth stanza pair, the bride's side humbly expressed concern that their hospitality might have been inadequate, while the groom's representatives replied with words of praise and appreciation. This reflected the social principle of "choosing words carefully to please others," a common cultural trait in Vietnamese society.

The final stanza pair focused on the bride's invitation for the groom's side to enter, employing metaphorical language that maintained both respect and the bride's family's dignity. For instance, the bride's side stated that the door latch had not been fastened, inviting the groom's side to open the door themselves—a gesture that conveyed both expectation and subtle elegance. This symbolic act was also associated with the architectural traditions of Bó Y Trình Tường houses, where a loudly creaking main door was considered a good omen, believed to ward off evil spirits.

In summary, "Phân Toàn Tâu" in Bó Y weddings not only enhanced the ceremonial nature of the event but also reinforced family and social values. With its structured five-stanza format, skillful verbal exchanges, and profound cultural significance, this performative tradition exemplified the Bó Y people's ritualistic, respectful, and intimate style of communication.

The Roles of Participants in the "Phân Toàn Tâu" Ritual

In the "Phân Toàn Tâu" ritual, the roles of each party were distinctly delineated. The bride's family took the lead, initiating the ritual by singing first and posing questions that challenged the groom's family to respond. These questions were not merely ceremonial; they often presented complex scenarios, compelling the groom's family to demonstrate their wit and ability to reply effectively. This exchange was more than a simple dialogue—it was an opportunity for the bride's family to test the groom's side's communicative skill and social agility.

The groom's family, particularly the matchmakers or groomsmen, had to carefully pay attention to both the lyrics and melody to avoid making mistakes, which could result in playful penalties such as drinking wine. These penalties were not just punitive, but also added a layer of fun and liveliness

to the proceedings. The singing exchange, therefore, transcended its role as a communication form—it became an essential mechanism for demonstrating respect and establishing rapport between the two families.

The performance of the matchmakers was seen as a reflection of their competence and character. The quality of their singing and the finesse with which they navigated the exchange were believed to have a spiritual significance, influencing the overall success and harmony of the wedding. As such, matchmakers were often selected for their exceptional communication abilities and singing talent. In addition to these skills, it was also crucial that they had a high alcohol tolerance. This consideration arose from the nature of the penalties, which involved drinking from large bowls rather than small cups, meaning the penalties were substantial.

In some instances, grooms would even bring along individuals with exceptional drinking abilities, ready to take over for the matchmakers if the penalties became too excessive. This practice reflected a broader cultural tradition within the Bô Y people, where the ritual of forced drinking—often used for entertainment—was integrated into wedding customs.

Through these dynamics, the “Phân Toàn Tâu” ritual became not just a symbolic act within the wedding, but a profound reflection of the cultural values, social expectations, and traditions of the Bô Y people. It served as a space where communication, respect, and social bonds were forged through song and playful challenge, while also honoring the communal practice of drinking as both a ceremonial and social activity.

Musical Characteristics

The music used in the “Phân Toàn Tâu” ritual was a characteristic modal form of Eastern musical traditions known as “lân điệu,” which did not exist in Western music in the same way. The distinct feature of “lân điệu” lay in its system of musical notes and their arrangement, creating a unique musical space with strong expressive power. However, unlike Western scales, “lân điệu” was not always based on rigid theoretical musical rules; instead, it was often free, flexible, and varied according to genre, cultural context, and even performance style. In Eastern folk music, “lân điệu” was considered a fundamental element in shaping the identity and emotional depth of a composition. The notes within “lân điệu” could be prolonged or ornamented in distinctive ways, allowing performers to elevate their emotions through each note. These characteristics not only reflected the movement of music but also captured the dynamism, emotional fluctuations, and socio-cultural contexts of different historical periods.

In cultures such as Vietnam, China, India, and some other Southeast Asian countries, “lân điệu” could encompass various scales, including pentatonic, heptatonic, or other variations, offering a sense of familiarity, accessibility, and emotional resonance. These “lân điệu” were used to convey stories, messages, or even express community lifestyles and perspectives.

The Bô Y people's “lân điệu,” known as “Sinh Phấn,” possessed distinctive characteristics that were markedly different from the common pentatonic scales found in Vietnam, China, and Southeast Asia. “Sinh Phấn” was based on a three-tone system (three intervals between musical notes),

consisting of the notes D, E, G, and A (1- 1.5 - 1). Compared to the five-tone "Thương" mode, which was widely used in Vietnam and comprised the notes D1, E, G, A, C, and D2 (1 - 1.5 - 1 - 1.5 - 1), "Sinh Phấn" lacked the notes C and D2. The omission of these two higher notes from the full pentatonic scale (D1, E, G, A, C, D2) created a unique musical quality—both reducing the richness of the pentatonic scale and generating an ambiguous musical texture.

The key differences between "Sinh Phấn" and "Thương" lay in the fact that "Sinh Phấn" functioned as a simplified version of "Cung," lacking the notes C and D2, resulting in a simpler, more rustic sound. Despite having a narrower harmonic range, "Sinh Phấn" effectively conveyed the cultural identity of the Bô Y people, maintaining a direct and accessible musical expression closely tied to the community's daily life. This simplified musical structure aligned with the conversational nature of folk performances, particularly in wedding rituals, where interaction between parties was central rather than complex emotional expression.

Thus, although "Sinh Phấn" employed only three tones and was less musically rich than pentatonic scales, it was highly effective in facilitating communication. Its three-tone structure was designed for call-and-response singing, making it perfectly suited for the question-and-answer format characteristic of folk rituals like "Phân Toàn Tàu." This "làn điệu" encouraged direct and spontaneous musical exchange, which was crucial for the communal nature of the ceremony.

The melodies used in the "Phân Toàn Tàu" ritual had a simple and gentle tonal quality, reinforcing a clear communicative function. The neutral melodic progression—neither distinctly major nor minor—created a rustic and sincere musical atmosphere, perfectly complementing the solemnity of the wedding ceremony. With a structure that was easy to remember and sing, Bô Y music fostered connection and understanding between the two families, enhancing the communal spirit of the event.

Rhythmic structure played a crucial role in shaping the emotional impact of the songs. The symmetrical phrasing between the two families, exchanged through sung verses, produced a smooth musical flow that reinforced harmony in their interactions. The steady rhythm, combined with a slow tempo, made the songs easy to remember and sing along to, contributing to the intimate and joyous atmosphere of the wedding.

The use of a duple meter (2/4) ensured that the songs remained regular and easy to follow, with each side singing lines of equal syllabic and rhythmic structure. This symmetry not only created a seamless musical flow but also fostered harmony and unity between the two families, enhancing the celebratory yet solemn ambiance of the wedding ceremony.

Example 1: Stanza 1

Performer: Ngũ Khôi Phụng
Transcribed by: Author

In

Bride's Family: Mãng
Groom's Family: Tàu

cái tí là oé xâu táy pè pàng
vàn tàu a oé đầu táy pè pàng
mà sía táy pè pàng
mà lạc táy pè pàng
quáng là thảo tân tít tân tân tít táy
a lạc thảo tân tít tân tân tít táy
tân tít táy pàng lò là mà tân tít táy pàng
tân tít ngáy vài ngựa tàu mà tân tít ngáy vài
quáng là thảo?
xâu tàu thảo!

English:

The Bride's Family:

Where did you come from in the distant land? From which vast country did the guests come? Which large country did you arrive from? Feet followed feet, steps followed steps; Which country did your feet come from? From which distant land did your feet arrive?

Where did you come from in the distant land? From which large country did the guests come? Which vast country did you arrive from? Feet followed feet, steps followed steps; Which country did your feet descend from? From which vast country did your feet return?

The Groom's Family:

"We were in the land of fog; We went to the land of black clouds; I came from the side of the crow's nest! Feet followed feet, steps followed steps; My feet went from Sậy village; My feet arrived from Si village!"

"We were in the land of black clouds; I descended from the land of black clouds; I came from the muddy village! Feet followed feet, steps followed steps; My feet descended from Sậy village; My feet arrived from Đa village!"

A prominent feature of the lyrics in the "Phân Toàn Tâu" wedding ritual was the humility when singing about oneself and the praise when singing about others, reflecting the everyday communication style of the Bó Y people. For instance, in the fourth exchange, the bride's family referred to their own home as a "lều" (hut), even though they had prepared melons and fruits for the guests. However, they modestly claimed that they had not grown any and had nothing to offer. In response, the groom's family was not allowed to repeat the word "hut" but had to use the word "nhà" (house), complimenting the bride's family for successfully growing melons and fruits for the guests. According to artisan N.K.P., "If the groom's side carelessly repeated the word 'hut' instead of changing it to 'house,' they would be penalized with a drink, as it would have been considered an insult, implying that the bride's family was poor!"

The lyrics were rich in imagery (associated with specific cultural phenomena). For instance, in the third stanza, the bride's family used images like large land, vast land, 12 rafters, 12 bundles, 12 fathers, 12 mothers... while the groom's family used images such as the land of fog, the land of black clouds, and the crow's nest... (possibly referring to Lao and Chải villages, which are the crow villages in Yên Minh district, located in the mountainous area shrouded in clouds year-round).

The roundabout and metaphorical expressions (like riddles, creating communication situations) were present when the bride's family asked the groom's family, "What do you remember or love that brought you here, or did you mistakenly come to this place?" They stated that the hut had no gate and that the door had no bolt, implying they were ready to welcome guests into their home.

Therefore, the lyrics of the "Phân Toàn Tâu" contained symbols reflecting many aspects of the cultural life of the ethnic group, such as the geographical names Sậy village, Si village, Đa village... connected to the local ecological environment where these types of plants grew abundantly or places with many crows like the crow village; the stony entrance and the planting of melons indicated the common external arrangements seen in the earthen-walled houses of the Bó Y; associated with spiritual concepts like the number 12, which was considered complete (since a year always had 12 months), with the custom of chewing betel, and the social hierarchy shown through the decisive status of the elderly, as well as the construction techniques of houses like using rafters in the house frame and the main door often creaking loudly when opened, a common feature in the architecture of earthen-walled houses

Example 2: Stanza 4

Performer: Ngũ Khởi Phương

Transcribed by: Author

Bride's Family: Tàu của pùa di
Groom's Family: Tàu của pùa di

mây đam a tinh Tàu tinh pùa di mây
đam lạc a tinh Tàu đàn pùa di đam

đam a má Tàng mây i hà đầu chạp à
lạc a má Tàng chỉ i hà đầu chạp à

pá Tang mây má hà đầu chạp hằng Pin lăng
pá Tang mây má hà đầu chạp hằng Pin lăng

i vừa hấu choài đầu mây dài
i vừa hấu choài tàu dài lièo.

In English:

Bride's Family: Near the gate, we could not grow melons; Next to the hut, we could not grow fruits; There was nothing for you to have for dessert; There were no fruits for you to enjoy; Betel and areca for refreshments, you were not allowed!

Groom's Family: Near the gate, we had grown melons; Next to the house, we had grown fruits; There were things for you to have for dessert; There were fruits for you to enjoy; Betel and areca for refreshments, we were good to go!

The Art of Using Folk Songs as a Means of Communication in Bó Y Weddings

The art of "Phân Toàn Tàu" demonstrated that in the culture of the Bó Y people, folk songs were not merely a form of art but also a symbolic means of communication, particularly during weddings. Instead of using ordinary speech, the two families in a wedding communicated through antiphonal

singing, creating a space imbued with ritualistic and artistic significance. The opening songs performed by the bride's family often carried meanings of inquiry or challenge, such as "What brings you here?" or "The twelve beams of the gate." These were not merely welcoming gestures but also a subtle test of the groom's family's wit and responsiveness. In return, the groom's family replied with courteous and respectful songs to convey their goodwill and earnestness regarding the marital union, forming a musical dialogue that was both solemn and intimate.

The uniqueness of the antiphonal singing in Bó Y weddings lay in both its content and performance context. The songs carried not only specific messages but also profound symbolic meanings, as reflected in lines like "No melons are planted by the gate," which expressed material modesty while emphasizing sincerity and hospitality. This practice was performed using the distinctive "Sinh Phấn" melody, combined with the singing space at the bride's family's doorway, creating a uniquely communicative setting unlike any other antiphonal singing traditions in Vietnam. Additionally, the Bó Y people ingeniously incorporated festive elements such as verbal challenges, intentional mistakes, or wine-drinking penalties, which rendered the musical exchanges lively and natural.

Using folk songs as a medium of communication not only enriched cultural life but also contributed to the preservation of ethnic identity in the modern context. These antiphonal singing exchanges fostered deep connections between the two families while affirming the cultural values of the Bó Y community. As a result, their wedding ceremonies transcended mere family events to become works of art and vibrant expressions of tradition, culture, and creative spirit.

"Phân Toàn Tâu" in Social Relationships and the Challenges of Cultural Preservation

"Phân Toàn Tâu" profoundly influenced social relationships among families and within the broader community. Participation in this ritual not only allowed family members to express mutual respect but also strengthened bonds and solidarity. Music served as a vital bridge, enabling younger generations to understand and absorb their ancestral cultural values while fostering an open and welcoming environment for social interaction.

Moreover, "Phân Toàn Tâu" functioned as a communal forum where members gathered, interacted, and shared common cultural values. This ritual underscored the role of music in connecting people, fostering relationships, and maintaining a strong social network. Through their songs, the Bó Y people not only expressed their unique cultural identity but also nurtured lasting relationships within their community.

However, despite its profound cultural significance, "Phân Toàn Tâu" faced numerous challenges in the modern era. Urbanization, the advancement of information technology, interethnic marriages, and shifts in lifestyle significantly impacted the preservation of traditional customs. Younger generations had fewer opportunities to engage with folk art forms, increasing the risk of these valuable cultural elements fading away.

Additionally, competition from modern entertainment forms further diminished the presence of "Phân Toàn Tâu" in daily life. To safeguard and promote the cultural value of this tradition, the

Bố Y community needed to implement practical measures, such as organizing cultural exchange activities, transmitting "Phân Toàn Tâu" to younger generations, integrating this ritual into artistic performances, and encouraging community participation in cultural preservation efforts.

In the contemporary context, preserving "Phân Toàn Tâu" was not solely the responsibility of the Bố Y community but also required support from relevant authorities and cultural organizations to raise awareness of this intangible cultural heritage's value. Coordinated efforts ensured that this unique tradition continued to thrive, serving as a living testament to the enduring cultural spirit of the Bố Y people.

Conclusion

This study clarified that "Phân Toàn Tâu" was not only a form of folk art but also a unique means of cultural communication that deeply reflected the social values and identity of the Bố Y community. Through an analysis of song lyrics, field observations, and interviews, the research provided a comprehensive view of the significance of this ritual within the ethnic cultural system.

The study's key contribution lay not only in elucidating the role of "Phân Toàn Tâu" in the cultural life of the Bố Y people but also in expanding the understanding of musical communication in wedding ceremonies among ethnic minority communities. These findings enriched the body of knowledge on oral expressive arts, particularly how communities used music as a tool for social connection and tradition preservation in the context of cultural change.

However, the research also revealed that "Phân Toàn Tâu" faced the risk of fading away due to urbanization, technological advancement, and cultural interactions. This challenge was not unique to the Bố Y people but represented a broader issue for many intangible cultural heritages worldwide. Therefore, preserving and promoting the value of this ritual was not solely the responsibility of the local community but also required attention from researchers, cultural organizations, and heritage conservation policies on a larger scale.

Future approaches needed to focus on further examining the transformation of "Phân Toàn Tâu" in the modern context and proposing feasible solutions for its preservation. Integrating traditional elements into cultural education, as well as developing strategies for restoring and promoting this heritage at national and international levels, played a crucial role in maintaining the vibrancy of "Phân Toàn Tâu."

Cultural heritage preservation was not merely about safeguarding an ancient practice but also about protecting the shared spiritual and humanistic values of humanity. The findings of this study contributed to broader discussions on the preservation of folk music and musical communication traditions among minority cultures worldwide. Recognizing, documenting, and promoting the existence of "Phân Toàn Tâu" not only helped protect the cultural identity of the Bố Y people but also contributed to global efforts in safeguarding intangible heritage in the face of continuous societal changes.

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