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TUỒNG CHOREOGRAPHY FROM A SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

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– Library of Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Cinema

– Academy website: <http://www.skda.edu.vn>

INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for Choosing the Topic

Tuồng developed over a lengthy historical process, approximately from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and became a traditional Vietnamese art form. Tuồng is a composite performing art that encompasses singing, dance, acting, theatrical play, and choreographic movements. Throughout its history, many works have become classics of traditional Vietnamese theatre, including *Sơn Hậu*, *Dương Chấn Tử*, *Giác Oan*, *An Trào Kiếm*, *Tam Nữ Đồ Vương*, and *Võ Tam Tư Trảm Cáo*.

Traditional Tuồng performance integrates literature, painting, music, dance, choreographic movement, and acting, with acting at its centre. Choreography, also called Tuồng dance, is therefore an indispensable component of Tuồng performance. It is one of the three performance modalities—stylized speech (nói lối), Tuồng singing, and choreography—employed by performers in constructing stage character types. Gestures, bodily actions, and movements are all transformed through convention, exaggeration, and stylization into choreographic patterns. These patterns are model-based physical movements, stylized, amplified, and rendered conventional. Their principles and functions are an essential part of Tuồng performance.

Semiotics is the scholarly study of signs and has achieved significant advances. Scholars such as Charles Sanders Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Umberto Eco are well known in international and Vietnamese scholarship. From a semiotic perspective, Tuồng choreography can be interpreted in a detailed, rigorous, and systematic way in terms of how choreographic movements communicate meaning as performers construct character types such as *kép* (male roles), *đào* (female roles), *lão* (elderly roles), and *hề* (comic roles). The choreographic sign is treated as the signifier, which carries a signified—that is, the meaning it conveys. Meaning production is examined in relation to the surrounding cultural, social, aesthetic, and performance codes of traditional Tuồng plays. Choreographic signs carry meaning and play a particularly important role for performers on stage.

The research topic, “Tuồng Choreography from a Semiotic Perspective,” systematically investigates signs in Tuồng choreographic movements and the movement codes of Tuồng theatre. It examines how choreographic signs within conventional performance sequences contribute to the construction of character types, how they produce meaning and communicate messages to audiences, and how choreography is encoded and decoded and may be applied in practice. The research thereby contributes to the preservation and development of Tuồng choreography in particular and Vietnamese traditional theatrical art in general.

2. Research Aims and Tasks

2.1. Research Aims

Overall aim: To investigate Tuồng choreography from the perspective of semiotics, drawing on established and tested theoretical foundations, in order to offer a further scholarly interpretation of the broad and deep layers of meaning associated with Tuồng choreography in performance.

Specific aim: To analyze the system of Tuồng character models and the choreographic models employed by performers when portraying roles in traditional Tuồng plays from a semiotic perspective, thereby clarifying the meanings of choreographic signs and their indispensable contribution to Tuồng performance.

2.2. Research Tasks

The study identifies the theoretical foundations of Tuồng choreography and semiotics, and examines Tuồng choreography from a semiotic standpoint. Using three traditional productions staged by the Vietnam Tuồng Theatre, published sources, video recordings, and interviews with experts, performers, and researchers, it analyzes Tuồng character types and their distinctive choreographic models.

On the basis of the semiotic theories of Saussure, Peirce, and Umberto Eco, the doctoral researcher investigates representative choreographic movements associated with traditional Tuồng character types, clarifying the contributions of choreography as one of the three principal performance modalities.

The study also identifies applications and practical methods for encoding and decoding Tuồng choreography in contemporary Tuồng performance, archiving, and preservation, as well as for the development of Tuồng theatrical performance today.

3. Research Subject and Scope

3.1. Research Subject

Tuồng choreography: the formation and historical development of Tuồng art in general and Tuồng choreography in particular; choreographic models and their representative movement sequences and actions that help performers portray Tuồng roles and construct theatrical character types.

Semiotics: key issues in semiotic studies and the theoretical foundations employed by the doctoral researcher in investigating the topic.

Tuồng choreography from a semiotic perspective: movement codes and cultural codes in traditional Tuồng productions; the movements associated with Tuồng character types examined through F. de Saussure's concepts of signifier (form) and signified (content), C. S. Peirce's triadic theory of the sign, and Umberto Eco's theory of reception codes.

3.2. Scope of Research

The scope encompasses Tuồng choreographic models, traditional Tuồng character types, semiotics and relevant semiotic perspectives, and the study of Tuồng choreography through a semiotic lens. Particular attention is paid to the character and choreographic models in three representative traditional productions by the Vietnam Tuồng Theatre: *Sơn Hậu*, *Nữ Tướng Đào Tam Xuân*, and *Võ Tam Tư Trăm Cáo*.

TRANSLATION STATUS: This PDF contains an English translation of the front matter and the Introduction through Section 3.2 only. It is NOT a complete translation of the source's 27 pages.