

THREE INCONSPICUOUS WOMEN IN DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM: TEXT
AND CONTEXT IN PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY
TUỒNG THEATER OF HUẾ, VIETNAM

by

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A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Dr. Kenneth M. George.

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The performance titled "Highlights of Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" is an example of how a theatrical troupe for the genre Tường in Huế, Vietnam, created its own version of an ancient and classic story through performance. The Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts and their director faced a complex of considerations that influenced the way in which they created their version of the story. Considerations towards audience, a prior textual version of the play, aesthetic constraints of the Tường genre, and contexts of Vietnamese language, culture, and history all affected the performance which I saw and helped lead to the version of the story presented. This thesis attempts to understand this one Tường performance in terms of some of its many contexts and constraints in order to explore how and why the director chose to present the story in the way she did.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

...And always, the actor must fight against a savage and barbarous racket of an orchestra where, amidst the rolling of the drum and the shrillness of 'clinkers', in a hodgepodge of gong blows, sneezes of tin symbols, and metal creakings of 'ting' 'ting,' a piercing oboe pours a dash of vinegar. Neither the smelly village-class crowds that huddle on bamboo tressles like monkeys on a perch, nor the actors who recite like parrots, understand much, if anything at all. Only the occasional scholar can attain a delicate pleasure at the hearing of a text. (Gras 1910: 101)

The above statement was made by E. Gras, the French colonialist who was treasurer for the colony of Annam at the beginning of the twentieth century. From this description, where is *his* place in that hierarchy of audience members? Apparently, he does not associate himself with the "smelly village-class crowds." Yet his evident inability to find a "delicate pleasure" from the performance does not liken him to the "occasional scholar" who attended the performance. As a foreigner, Gras somehow feels himself distinguished from the audience despite the fact that he was amongst the crowd of audience members that night in 1910.

In this short statement, Gras ranks the audience according to a hierarchy based on knowledge of the performance material. As noted, there is the 'occasional scholar,' who comprehends the performance in relation to its written text and, simply by being Vietnamese in 1910, understands much of the context of the story. Then there are the 'smelly village-class crowds' who, according to Gras, do not understand the text of the story at all. However they, too, were Vietnamese in 1910, and undoubtedly understood the cultural context of the performance in a way that Gras did not. Lastly, there is the ethnographer, E. Gras, who, free of the constraints of textual and contextual knowledge, orbits above this hierarchy in a sort of French colonial omniscience.

For which class of audience, then, did the actors perform on that night? Was the performance only for the 'occasional scholar' with his/her 'delicate pleasure' in mind? If this is true, then why did the 'village-class crowds' throng to the theater night after night (Gras 1910: 100)? Was the play not for them, too? Or was the performance for M. Gras? The average person in the audience shared a common feeling with the occasional scholar that there was some enjoyment to be had in attending the performance. Even Gras felt some need to be there, if only to record the event as a specimen of his exotic experiences.

The knowledge one carries with oneself to a performance partly determines the story one sees (Herrnstein Smith 1980: 233). In the case of Gras, his impressions were based on no knowledgeable foundation, and the story he saw was subsequently unintelligible to him. Yet the other ranks of audience, with their varying degrees of education, found regular pleasure in attending Tuồng theater performances in Huế, Vietnam, in 1910. When watching that one performance, what stories did the various audience members see? In performing that play, what stories did the theater troupe present?

This thesis has to do with the question of stories. How does the textual and contextual knowledge that the audience member brings with him/herself to the performance determine the story that he/she sees? How does the acting troupe attempt to present that story to the audience and for whom is that story presented? How should the ethnographer record the performance as a story of her own?

In discussing one theatrical performance, I shall compare the story as it is presented in the performance to the story presented in the written work that served as a basis for the performance. This particular performance was based on a written script given to me by the director of the arts troupe that performed. Because the script serves as a foundation for much of the action and dialogue of the performance, I view the script as an important constraint that influenced the performance. However, there are strong differences between the story in the script and the story performed. A comparison of the two stories as they are

presented shall shed light on the performance's role as a "social transaction" (Herrnstein Smith 1980: 232). In addition, I hope to demonstrate how this 'social transaction' conjuncts with its own contexts and constraints in performance.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith's article "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," argues for a study of "narratives" (which would include theatrical performances) that considers the complexity of their relations to social, and other, considerations:

In seeking to account for either the forms and features of individual narratives or the similarities and differences among sets of narratives, we might profitably direct our attention to the major variables involved in those transactions: that is, to the particular motives and interests of narrators and audiences and to the particular social and circumstantial conditions that elicit and constrain the behavior of each of them (1980: 233).

By comparing the story of one performance titled, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," to the story of the performance's written script, I do not attempt to reveal the "basic story" of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." I do not propose that my summaries of two versions of the story will reveal the story's "Rosetta Stone" from which all other "versions" of the story emanate.¹ Rather, I use the comparison of the story in the text to the story in the performance to illustrate how the performance was a "[responsive]"

¹ Herrnstein Smith discusses how seemingly similar narratives are often compared as "versions" of the same "hypothetical basic story," when in fact, that "basic story" does not exist. These versions are often compared in order to find the source of the story, and in doing so, overlook the way in which "versions" are stories within themselves, and serve as "responses" to the context and circumstances in which they are told (1980: 225). She points out how a writer, when comparing two narratives, summarizes those narratives according to "plot line" or some other construct as a means of revealing the common core of the stories. Yet in doing so, the writer's summaries of the stories undoubtedly change according to his/her own considerations of the "motives and purposes of [his/her] summarizing" (1980: 217). Thus, a comparison of stories cannot result in a discovery of their basic, root story. Rather, comparison of stories results in further "re-telling" of stories through "summaries," different perspectives, and "interpretations" (221). However, these "summaries" that are used as methods of comparison between stories can be useful when narratives are seen as "acts" performed in response to various sets of conditions (1980: 225). My thesis focuses on a written version of the story that served as a basis, or a constraint, of the performance. I do not attempt to equate the two stories, nor am I concerned with finding a common root story that they share. Rather, I am comparing two stories which are known to be related to one another.

function of the variable set of conditions in which [it was] performed" (Herrnstein Smith 1980: 232). I consider the text story and the performance story in relation to each other. The written text is known to be the basis, to a great degree, for the performance. The performance is both a condensation of the written story and a story of its own. Depending upon the perspective and knowledge of the audience member, it may be seen in either light.

Thus, in order to understand a performance, one must consider how the story was presented as well as how it was perceived. In order to understand the changes in the story as it moved from text to performance, I must first construct a foundation of contextual and textual knowledge from which to view the performance. The advantage of this perspective is that it allows us to see the performance in its fullest relation to the textual story. From this vista, I shall examine how the performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" was built of modern considerations as well as historical and cultural contexts, and constraints.

I shall build my textual understanding through an examination of "action events" as they occur in the written text of the play titled, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." "Action events" in this thesis are defined by changes in character interaction marked by the entrance and exit of characters on the stage. Knowledge of context shall be built from explorations of Vietnamese culture, history, and language in relation to both the text and the performance. Likewise, I will analyze some non-textual aesthetic constraints on Tuồng theater in order to understand how they contribute to the performance.

The purpose of building a perspective based on a textual knowledge of the play is to show how one written Tuồng story became a different Tuồng story when it was performed and adapted for a modern audience. In order to understand how the story changed between text and performance, I must first root myself in an understanding of the history of Tuồng and Vietnam as well as the written story of the play. Then, when watching the performance, the differences between the story of the written text and the story of the

performance shall be clear. By this comparison, I hope to understand to what audience the contemporary performance was directed and how that affected the story that was performed. In other words, I shall explore the ways in which the performance I saw was a "social transaction" (Herrnstein Smith 1980: 232).

Through this exploration of a story as it is performed, I am shaping my own experience of the performance. As ethnographer, I am also trying to explain that experience in the most complete way. For this reason, I cannot attempt to analyze the performance in and of itself, ignoring its text and the many contexts that add to it. A performance is an aesthetic culmination involving the text, the movements and voice of the actors, costumes and makeup, lighting and stage properties, musical accompaniment (if any), and even the audience (Becker 1979). All of these factors must be considered when trying to understand such a staged event.

Johannes Fabian, in his book, *Power and Performance*, notes that "a text is a communicative event in its textual realization. Performance is the text in the moment of its actualization" (1990: 9). Both of these events, the text and its performance, are inherently connected to one another. However, they are also connected to the individual times and circumstances in which they were produced and the history that preceded them. The way in which the performance 'actualizes' the text, or puts it into play, can either *strengthen its relation to* the textual realization, or *distinguish itself from* the textual realization. As we shall see in the exploration of the Tuồng play, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," the performance I saw 'actualizes' its text in such a way as to *distinguish itself from* it. The change between the stories of the text and performance appears to have been out of concern for the times and circumstances in which the play was performed.

These complex considerations that make up theatrical performances first interested me in the spring of 1997 while I was studying abroad in Huế, Vietnam. During this time, I was an intern at the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts (Đoàn Nghệ Thuật Truyền

Thống Huế). learning how to make the costumes for the theatrical genre Tuồng under Ms. La Thị Cẩm Vân. Studying the construction of a few basic hats and robes was the beginning of my interest in Tuồng and my appreciation for its complexity. As I studied the method of construction of hats and robes, I soon noticed what I thought were inconsistencies in what I was learning. While I was being taught to make duplicate costumes of very stylized costumes, I saw examples of costumes that seemed different from the "standard." There were multiple "versions" of the same costume (Hermstein Smith 1980: 215). It seemed that, after a basic foundation of knowledge was mastered, there was room allowed to the artist to add a degree of his/her own expression in creating the costume.

For example, look at the robe for a military mandarin of the highest rank, pictured below in Figure A. The picture at left is one model for the costume as it is used in Huế. The right picture, Figure B, is a variation of that model, but still represents the highest-ranking

**Figure A. Military
Mandarin's Costume #1**



**Figure B. Military
Mandarin's Costume #2**



military mandarin. These costumes have similarities but also have differences in style, shape, and decoration. What do these differences mean?

In this example, the red foundation for the costume must not change because it represents the high rank of the military general. Likewise, there must be a dragon embroidered over the chest of the robe, showing that the general works under the king. However, the costumes are cut in two different shapes. The back of the costume on the left is one piece while the right costume's back has split tails. The left has a blue capulet over the shoulders and the right, a red. One is of satin fabric, the other of velveteen.

As a student learning how to make these costumes, I wanted to know: Do these two different costumes represent the exact same character and are the differences merely a result of designer's choice? Or do these variations distinguish between specific characters of specific plays? In reality, both factors may account for the differences. The designer must take many factors into consideration when creating a costume. These considerations include adherence to formal costume structures that are pre-determined (the embroidered dragon on the front), modern practicality (embroidering the dragon by machine rather than by hand), and a touch of design choice (embroidering a serpent dragon on the front rather than a dragon head).

In addition, I began to see that certain costumes signified specific, named characters and, without knowing the character and its play, it is difficult to understand its costume. The two generals' costumes in the picture may be designed for two different, high-ranking military general characters in two different plays. There may be no "basic" costume for the military general, even though all military general costumes may share certain features.² The majority of Tuồng plays are taken from famous stories that have been told time and again in innumerable ways.

² This idea is comparable to Barbara Herrnstein Smith's argument that there is no "basic story" (1980: 219).

Many of the characters from these plays are famous. Even though the average Vietnamese person today might not 'know anything about Tuồng,' many people recognize the names and personalities of certain characters, or the plots of famous plays. Tuồng to me, however, was completely new and I saw that a broader understanding of the art was necessary in order for me to comprehend its costumes.

The way different considerations towards pre-determined rules and innovation combine in the making of costumes could be said of the making of a Tuồng performance as a whole. The formalized rules for Tuồng costumes serve as 'constraints' that are interpreted at the moment the costume is made. In the same way, Tuồng theater in general is made of many 'constraints,' which contribute to its performance. 'Constraints' in this thesis is used to mean relatively set models framed in the past, or 'prior texts' that determine the making of future models (Becker 1979).

Alton Becker's work entitled, "Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theater," discusses many of the "constraints on text-building" when trying to understand the written and spoken texts of Javanese shadow theater (1979: 211). He says that, "texts whose contexts are distant from the best-trained readers require philological notes as an essential foundation for interpretation" (1979: 212). Becker defines the "new philologist" of his time as one who builds his/her 'foundation for interpretation' not only from the literary contexts of the text, but from historical, political, psychological, and other contexts as well (1979: 212). Thus one must understand the many contexts of a text in order to understand the text itself.

As a foreigner looking at a Tuồng performance, I am trying to "conceptualize a conceptionally distant" *performance* and so, must first build a foundation of Tuồng's contexts (1979: 212). Unlike Becker, I am building my understanding of a specific text in order to focus on the instance of one *performance*, rather than focus on a text. I am trying

to understand the text *in relation to* its 'moment of actualization,' that is, the performance (Fabian 1990).

Becker sees "any meaningful activity [as] a conjunction of preexisting constraints (or rules, or structures, or laws, or myths) with the present, the unpredictable, particular *now*" (1979: 213). Though he is referring to a text as the 'meaningful activity' in this sentence, the theatrical performance could also be seen in this light, as a concurrence of preexisting constraints with the '*now*.' In the case of Tuồng theater, these 'constraints' would be the set rules for making the costumes, the ways of painting the actors' faces, the stylized gestures and singing methods of the actor, the set of accompanying instruments and their musical patterns, and all elements of Tuồng which claim to have certain rules.

Another 'constraint' on a performance is the written text of the play, which also must 'conjoin with the *now*,' or be 'actualized,' as it is performed (Becker 1979: 213; Fabian 1990: 9). The pre-set constraints on, and the context of, a performance, interact with the '*now*' when the performance is staged. My interest lies in how the arts troupe and their director Ms. Cẩm Vân chose to use the constraints and contexts to actualize the story in performance. Why is the performance actualized in the way that it is? How is that performance perceived?

My interest in Tuồng grew from recognizing its complexity as an artistic endeavor. This theater art is deeply related to the stories it tells, the history that has shaped it, the dynasties and regimes that have controlled it, and its presence in contemporary Vietnam. Its plays performed are a reality, representative within a larger reality of society, culture, history, and politics. While I hope to make my thesis to be more than a purely theatrical examination of Tuồng, I don't attempt to 'de-code' Vietnamese culture and society by looking at a Tuồng play. After all, Vietnamese culture, and all cultures, are in continuous performance, built of innumerable texts and contexts, acted both from constraints and improvisation. There is no code to a culture. On the other hand, to ignore the relations

Tuồng has to concepts beyond the theater would be to imply that those relations are insignificant, which they are not.

I will examine one classic Huế Tuồng play and one performance entitled, "Three Women In Defense of the Kingdom" ("Tam Nữ Đồ Vương"), in relation to its context in Vietnamese history and culture, the constraint of its written text, and some of its aesthetic constraints. By doing so, I hope to guide the reader to a richer understanding of one Huế Tuồng play. I shall then show how the performance tells a different story than the text and explore some reasons why, in order to understand how Ms. Cẩm Vân, the troupe director, interpreted this story in relation to a modern Vietnamese context.

The works of foreigners who have examined Vietnamese Tuồng theater (or Hát Bội, as it is called in the southern areas of Vietnam) have generally been of a descriptive nature (see Hauch 1970; Brandon 1976; Coulet [1926] 1954; Gras 1910). Those by Hauch and Brandon seem to carefully withhold personal judgment of the theater art they describe, perhaps because that was not the purpose of their work. In addition, apprehensions of drawing conclusions about Vietnamese culture based on insufficient information and an incomplete comprehension of Tuồng may have convinced these writers to avoid stepping beyond a descriptive approach. Perhaps they feared likening themselves to a colonialist mindframe such as that of E. Gras, the French treasurer for the former colony of Annam, whose impressions of a 1910 Tuồng performed in Huế are noted at the beginning of this thesis. His description of the "village-class" in the audience as "monkeys on a perch" and actors who don't know the meaning of their lines leaves Gras with a shaky foundation upon which to build a greater understanding of Tuồng or Vietnamese culture.

One notable exception to the foreigners I have described who have studied Tuồng is Georges Coulet, who wrote his dissertation about Hát Bội (Tuồng in southern Vietnam) in 1926. His work, while giving a detailed and accurate description of the art as he saw it, contains his own informed, philosophical judgments on the nature of the art and the way it

appealed to Vietnamese people at that time ([1926] 1954). Coulet attempted to understand the relation that the historic stories and characters of Tuồng plays had to the contemporary performances he saw. He says,

The incident [of history that is described in a Tuồng play] is nothing in itself. It is only the symbol and translation of human life [that] the Annamese theater seeks ultimately to capture behind and through the incident...Let it suffice...to say here that the story presented is not a reconstitution or a resurrection of the past, but history living and lived ([1926] 1954: 38).

Most Tuồng sources written in Vietnamese do not consider what the play can tell us about Vietnamese culture because the genre is being discussed within its own cultural context, and those ideas are assumed. Indeed, as a foreigner looking at Vietnamese theater, it is easiest to avoid discussing the deeper meanings of Tuồng for fear of making a ludicrous misdiagnosis. Yet this discourse is essential if I am to try to understand what 'delicate pleasure' the 'occasional scholar' may find (Gras 1910). It is also necessary if I am to understand the considerations taken in making a modern Tuồng performance.

This need for engagement is true not only for foreigners interested in Tuồng but also for Vietnamese. Fabian (1990: 18) argues for a shift from "informative to performative ethnography" and extends his definition of 'performance' to be "both a description of the ways people realize their culture and of the method by which an ethnographer produces knowledge about that culture." Therefore, I, as audience member to the play, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" and as author of this thesis, have a role in these performances and a responsibility to them. I hope not only to describe the staged performance, but also to explore how the performance is guided by many contexts, past and present, and textual and aesthetic constraints. The goal in doing so is to make one performance intelligible and interesting in the light of its contemporary context.

This thesis is divided into three main sections. The first will discuss Tuồng theater in terms of some of its many historical contexts. This will serve as the contextual foundation

for examining the constraint of text of the play "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" and other aesthetic constraints in relation to the performance in the next section. The last section will analyze how the text and performance present two different stories of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." Also in this section, I shall explore some of the reasons why Ms. Cẩm Vân, director of the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, decided to perform the story in this way.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS TƯỜNG? SOME HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF TƯỜNG IN HUẾ

When looking at the long historical contexts that preceded the theatrical performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," in Huế, central Vietnam, on April 26, 1998, there are many factors to consider. In this historical examination, I have not attempted to pinpoint every factor that influenced the development of Tường and the performance piece. The objective in exploring the contexts of the past here is to shed light on how those factors may have contributed to the present moment that was the staged performance of the play. This will help us understand what stands behind that performance. While this section mainly addresses the issue of historical context, other relevant contexts and constraints such as language and culture will be addressed when examining the play directly.

At what point in Vietnamese history did the performing art of Tường come into being? This question is much debated and the response depends upon whether one defines Tường as being born of Chinese culture or as having originated from within Vietnamese culture. As any theater art, including Tường, is in a constant process of development and change, the point at which it 'is' or 'isn't' depends on the characteristics one uses to define that art.

I have been using the word Tường to refer to the specific theatrical genre, the topic of this thesis. This word has multiple meanings and origins that deserve examination. Not only does the term *Tường* refer to a specific genre within Vietnam, but it can be used simply to mean any 'play.' One could say, "let's go see a *tường* of Shakespeare." It can also mean 'to have the semblance or air of', as in "he has the *tường* of a nobleman." This

word is derived from words meaning 'a sight'³ and 'a representation' or 'image'⁴ (Phạm Duy 1975; 113; Tôn Thất Bình, personal communication, May 8, 1997). Therefore, the theatrical genre *Tuồng* is simultaneously a manner or air, a representation or image, a sight, and a play.

Tuồng is often compared to Chinese opera (ching hsi) because many *Tuồng* plays are based on ancient Chinese stories or characters (Trần Văn Khê 1971: 70). Themes for *Tuồng* plays are often taken from events and stories of Chinese history. Like Chinese opera, *Tuồng* plays are performed with few stage props in a space mostly "devoid of scenery" (1971: 73). The few stage properties that are used are highly symbolic and, depending on how they are used, represent very different things. For instance, "a table and stools may serve as furniture just as well in the dwelling of a court dignitary as in a poor student's cell. [One of the same] stools, placed on the table makes a mountain shoot up" (1971: 73).

The principle male characters of both Chinese ching hsi opera and *Tuồng* theater often have colorfully painted faces and elaborate costumes. However, the ways that characters' faces are painted and the details of the costumes distinguish *Tuồng* theater from Chinese ching hsi opera (1971: 74). In both theater forms, the face paint and costumes are representative of the character's personality traits and disposition as well as his/her social and political status and ambitions.

Likewise, the actors in both theater forms use very "stylized gestures and attitudes" to express their characters, though the Vietnamese *Tuồng* does not distinguish between the "hundreds of sleeve movements, hand play and steps" like Chinese ching hsi opera (1971: 75). However, *Tuồng* has its own signature movements, such as "moving sideways without lifting the feet... to express suffering or deep emotion" (1971:75).

³ 'cảnh tượng'

⁴ 'tượng hình'

The characters of both Tuồng and Chinese opera (ching hsi) plays come from all classes of society and "good men" and "bad men" are "clearly distinguished" (1971: 73).

According to Tuồng expert and author, Trần Văn Khê, "the plays have approximately the same ending: the good are rewarded, the wicked punished, the kings restored to their thrones, though they are for a time threatened by traitors who are often killed at the end by the loyal subjects" (1971: 75). However, modern Tuồng plays have been written that focus on other themes, such as "national news,...companionship, and friendship" (Phạm Duy 1975: 117).

These similarities do not make Tuồng and Chinese ching hsi opera the same theater form, nor should Tuồng be viewed solely as a derivation of Chinese ching hsi opera. Trần Văn Khê frames Tuồng in this light:

We must recognize that the Vietnamese...Tuồng...has been influenced by the Chinese theater, but it has not sought to copy that pattern slavishly. It has been able to retain and develop its own originality, to adapt the text of the plays, the stage affects and the songs and elocution to the taste of its public (1971: 70-71).

The use of the word Tuồng to mean the genre also has a spatial and temporal context within Vietnam. This word did not come into wide use in Huế (central Vietnam) until the 1950s (Huỳnh Ngọc, ed. 1995). The term Tuồng generally originated from the northern areas of Vietnam (Trần Văn Khê 1971: 70). The use of this term may have spread south with the influence of Hồ Chí Minh's National Liberation Front and the new Democratic Republic of Vietnam after their victory over the French at Điện Biên Phủ in 1945 (Nguyễn Khắc Viện 1993). Before that time, *Hát bội* or *Hát bộ* was used to refer to the same art in Huế. *Hát* means 'to sing' and *bội*, probably of the same origin as the word *bộ*, means 'to gesture and move.' *Hát bội* is the art of simultaneously singing and gesturing. (Huỳnh Khắc Dụng, 1970, Pp. 15). The terms *Hát bội* or, sometimes, *Hát bộ* are generally used in the southern areas of Vietnam when referring to the same art and are often still used in Huế.

Tuồng/Hát bội exists as a theater art throughout the length of Vietnam, in the northern, central, and southern areas. The art in each region has developed its own characteristics and so, the Tuồng in Huế cannot be equated to Hát bội in Sài Gòn. Huế Tuồng has greater influence from past royal regimes, as Huế was the political seat of Vietnam for over 100 years. In turn, Hát bội in Hồ Chí Minh City (Sài Gòn) has retained greater Chinese influence than that of Huế because of its large population of Chinese immigrants. This thesis is concerned with Tuồng as it appears in Huế (hereafter referred to as Huế Tuồng), and more specifically, the Huế Tuồng that has descended directly from the royal regimes' Tuồng troupes.

Concerning the common origins of these regional theater arts, some forms of dance and song were in existence in Thanh Hóa province in northern Vietnam as early as 2,300 years ago (Hauch 1970). These traditions served as the basis for later Vietnamese performing arts, according to Mr. Tôn Thất Bình, a professor of Vietnamese literature at Huế University and expert on Tuồng of Huế (personal communication, May 15, 1997). Another obvious influence on Tuồng (sometimes claimed to be the origin of Tuồng)⁵ is from China. This influence was gained during the one thousand years that China ruled Vietnam (from 2,100 to 1,100 years ago).

The Champa kingdom occupied areas of central Vietnam that are now Thừa Thiên Huế province until the 14th C. when Vietnamese King Trần Nhân Tông consented to the marriage of his daughter to the Cham king, receiving this central area of Vietnam in return (Nguyễn Khắc Viên 1993). The Cham had an influence on Vietnamese music styles, adding instruments and mournful tones of singing which are still evident in the singing styles of Ca Huế (Huế folk song) and certain songs in Huế Tuồng (Nguyễn Khắc Viên 1993; Hauch 1970).

⁵ See Trần Văn Khê's, "Le Théâtre Vietnamien" 1959.

The direct introduction of Chinese influence is often attributed to the teachings of one individual. This man was a Chinese actor named Lý Nguyên Cát, who was detained by the troops of a Vietnamese general⁶ during his defeat of the invading Mongols in 1285 (Nguyễn Khắc Viên 1993; Phạm Duy 1975; Hauch 1970; Trần Văn Khê 1971). With these various and wide influences, Tuồng has developed both out of its native culture and foreign influence amidst Vietnam's constant struggles to assert an autonomous identity.

With the formation of the Nguyễn dynasty in 1802, King Gia Long established the capitol in Phú Xuân, now Huế (Trần Kiều Lại Thủy, 1997), thus beginning the distinction of Huế Tuồng from the art in other regions. The Nguyễn lords were the last feudal dynasty to rule Vietnam and under their sponsorship and approximately one hundred years of rule, Tuồng experienced its peak of development through governmental support. During the reigns of two of these Nguyễn kings, Minh Mạng (1820-1840) and Tự Đức (1848-1883), Tuồng in Huế became more closely associated with royalty than ever before (Nguyễn Huy Hồng 1986: 87-88). King Minh Mạng raised a Tuồng troupe which was the sole property of the royal family (one of the descendants of which is the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts). With his support, the costumes were developed to more closely resemble the real dress of the king, queen and mandarin characters that make up the plays (Tôn Thất Bình, personal communication, May 8, 1997). Royalty, including mandarins⁷, attended performances at his personal theater⁸ within the Royal Citadel (Nguyễn Huy Hồng 1986: 88; Tôn Thất Bình 1993: 70).

⁶ General Trần Hưng Đạo, credited as one of the Vietnamese generals who liberated Vietnam from China.

⁷ I use the term "mandarin" as a translation of the Vietnamese word "quan". While 'mandarin' is often associated with Chinese scholars, it is used in this thesis to refer to Vietnamese scholars who attained royal status by passing the test for scholarly achievement ('quan văn', or 'literary mandarin'), by proving their military prowess ('quan võ', or 'military mandarin'), or simply by being rich and maintaining a high place in society. 'Mandarin' is the term most commonly used in Vietnam as the translation of 'quan'.

⁸ This theater, built in 1926, was named, "Duyệt Thị Đường" (Nguyễn Huy Hồng 1986: 87; Tôn Thất Bình 1993: 53).

King Tự Đức, who began his reign in 1847, was "crazy about poetry and Tuồng" and also built a private theater⁹ at his residence and future tomb just outside of Huế in 1864 (Phạm Duy 1975: 116; Trần Kiều Lại Thủy 1997: 34; Tôn Thất Bình 1993: 53). More Tuồng plays were produced or re-written during his time than ever before. King Tự Đức established a royal Tuồng troupe consisting of "three hundred top performers chosen from all over the country" (Phạm Duy 1975: 116). This king of letters supported the reform of Tuồng theater, advocating slight changes in wording or music to increase compatibility of speaker with the music's rhythm, so as to re-attain the full effect and meaning of the piece, which he felt was being lost in contemporary practices. He even sought to regulate the work of Tuồng troupes that performed for the common people outside of the royal citadel, requiring that all "plays performed before the masses must also be performed before the king, so that improvements might be made" (1986: 90).

The king, being the ultimate wordly authority as the son of Heaven, and the highest scholar in the country, surely saw his regulation of the Tuồng theater as beneficial to his dynasty's reign over Vietnam. The majority of Tuồng plays depict a righteous king and good citizens who stand by him through times of trouble or when corrupt officials attempt to overthrow him. Thus, financing such a popular form of propaganda and 'guiding' its development had the king's best interests in mind.

It is apparent that, not only did Tuồng troupes differ regionally, but socially as well. The private Tuồng troupes of Kings Minh Mạng and Tự Đức performed only for royalty and seldom left the Citadel. While the king, particularly Tự Đức, often brought troupes and performers into the Citadel from the outside to perform for him, his personal troop almost never performed for the public so long as he was in power. Royal Tuồng was called Tuồng of the "inner road"¹⁰ (Hữu Ngọc 1995: 661). The 'inner road' is used to describe

⁹ Tự Đức's theater was named, "Minh Khiêm Đường" (Tôn Thất Bình 1993: 53).

¹⁰ 'Inner road' here, is "Đàng trong" in Vietnamese.

anything relating to royalty in Vietnam. Huế, as the ancient royal capital, is still thought of as the heart of Vietnam, the place where the road leads in. People, regardless of where they are from, say, "I will go *into* Huế," but, "I will go *out to* Hanoi."¹¹

One of the poets contracted by Tự Đức to produce and repair Tuồng works was Đào Tấn, (1844-1907), regarded as one of the most brilliant and prolific Tuồng writers ever (1986: 88-89; Phạm Duy 1975: 116). He also served as mandarin under Tự Đức's successor¹² (1975: 116). Amongst his works is a restoration of the ancient Tuồng cổ play of unknown origin, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom,"¹³ the play that is the focus of this thesis. This re-written version is considered a classic, exemplary model of Tuồng and is characteristic of Tuồng plays of that time with its theme of "the death of the king and courtiers uprising" and honoring "heroes who died for the country" (1975: 116; Trần Kiều Lại Thủy 1997: 35). Many of Đào Tấn's heroes "placed their duty to country above their love for their family," as we shall see in "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" (Phạm Duy 1975: 117).

There are specific Vietnamese terms which serve to classify Tuồng plays categorically. These differentiations are based on place of origin of the play, time of origin, and finally, its deemed quality as a performance piece. An ancient Tuồng play is referred to as *Tuồng cổ*. Beyond that, there are a variety of opinions on the meanings of the different types of Tuồng plays.

Some authors, such as Hauch (1970) and Phạm Duy (1975: 117-118) distinguish two other types of Tuồng and define them in opposition to one another. In their opinion, there is *Tuồng đồ*, ("common" plays) "based on both Vietnamese and Chinese legends, poems, and novels whose subject matter is domestic rather than royal" (Hauch 1970: 21) versus

¹¹ In Vietnamese, "Tôi sẽ vào Huế," but, "Tôi sẽ ra Hà Nội."

¹² King Thành Thái (1889-1909) was Tự Đức's successor. King Thành Thái is known to have loved Tuồng so much that he insisted on playing a role in a performance (Phạm Duy 1975).

¹³ The play, in Vietnamese, is "Tam Nữ Đồ Vương (Hồi II)."

Tuồng thầy (plays of the masters), born of, and dealing with, royalty. However, these definitions are problematic in the assumptions they make. They define the 'plays of the masters' to mean plays about royalty. Thus, if it does not concern royalty, the play cannot be considered a classic, exemplary model. Likewise, these definitions pit the two types of plays in opposition to one another, as royalty v. the commoner, and somehow negate the complex, though possibly socially distant, relationship that royalty and commoners had to one another in dynastic Vietnamese society.¹⁴

Regardless of whether the subject of a *Tuồng* play is royalty or common people, the plays consistently focus on a common good force (consisting of royal, common, and supernatural personages) in confrontation with a deplorably evil force (containing royal, common, and supernatural characters, as well) (Hauch 1975: 25; Phan Kế Bính [1913-1914] 1987). Whether the *Tuồng* troupe was the official Troupe of the Royal Court¹⁵ or one of the many local and travelling troupes¹⁶ which seldom, if ever, had contact with royalty, all types of *Tuồng* plays were performed for all levels of society (1975: 24-25).

For these reasons, I prefer a different classification of *Tuồng* plays than that of Duy (1975) and Hauch (1970). Expert on *Tuồng* and royal life in Huế, Mr. Tôn Thất Bình defines *Tuồng đồ* simply as a *Tuồng* play of Vietnamese origin, whether it concerns royalty or not (1993). He uses the additional term *Tuồng pho* to refer to *Tuồng* plays of Chinese origin. The phrase *Tuồng thầy* (plays of the masters), according to Tôn Thất Bình, is only used to distinguish excellent plays from others. In this way, he describes the play "Three

¹⁴See Phan Kế Bính's chapter entitled, "Vua Tôi," which means "King and Subject (or, 'I')," and explains the citizen's duty to his/her king and the king's duty to his people ([1913-1914] 1987: 189-192).

¹⁵ This troupe was called the "Phường Nhà Trò" (Hauch 1970).

¹⁶ These travelling groups were formerly called, "phường gánh," which means, literally, "shoulder-pole troupes." This name comes from the fact that many of these groups packed and carried their entire performance by shoulder pole, with their belongings dangling at either end. (Hữu Ngọc 1995).

Women in Defense of the Kingdom" as a play with Vietnamese origins (*Tuồng đồ*) that is both an exemplary play (*Tuồng thầy*) and an ancient play (*Tuồng cổ*) (1993: 124-125). Using this description, it is no wonder that my teacher at the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts chose this particular play when I asked her troupe to perform a *Tuồng* play which not only exemplified the genre *Tuồng*, but Vietnamese culture as well.

According to Nguyễn Huy Hồng in his book, *Traditions of the Huế Stage (Truyền Thống Sân Khấu Huế* 1986: 91), it is because of the influence of Nguyễn kings like Tự Đức and the work of scholarly subjects like Đào Tấn, that *Tuồng* achieved the status of a complete "nghệ thuật dân tộc" or "national art tradition", while "bringing with it the character of the people" that makes up the art. The word 'dân tộc' means 'a nation', 'a race', and 'a people' all at once. The use of the word "national" art tradition here is my best translation of nghệ thuật "dân tộc," but, as I explain, "dân tộc" means more than 'nation.' Since 1975, Vietnam has nationalized all of its traditional arts.

Nguyễn Huy Hồng's perspective on this historic time in the life of *Tuồng* theater was most likely framed by his contemporary experiences. His 1986 book was written during some of Vietnam's most difficult periods of reconstruction after the war with the United States and may indeed be a nationalist's perspective. He may be looking back at the time of the arts under the Nguyễn kings as a model for his country's attitude toward the arts under its newly gained independence. The Nguyễn kings era was a time when Vietnam ruled itself relatively successfully for one hundred years. During the time of the Nguyễn, the relationship between government and people through the arts was stronger than it had ever been known to be. A continuation of this relationship has been supported by Vietnam's post-1975 government.

However, the word 'dân tộc' (a nation/a people/a race), is not merely a political creation in Vietnam. In one light, 'dân tộc' may be taken to mean a 'nation' with a common government. Yet in another, deeper light, the sense of being a unified 'dân tộc' may come

from a common heritage, a common language, and shared traditions. While I think that 'dân tộc' is often used in Vietnam from both lights, I feel there is greater relevance in the latter definition because it is inclusive of people of the same cultural heritage, even though their political ideologies may conflict. Despite bitter differences amongst Vietnamese people in Vietnam and throughout the world concerning political issues, they share, to varying degrees, a sense of being of the same 'dân tộc.'

Through this discussion, we see that Tuồng in Huế, during the time of its royal sponsorship, was linked both to those within, and without, the citadel walls. Nguyễn Huy Hồng argues that if, during its reform, Huế Tuồng had been viewed solely as...

...a scholarly art, confined to the knowledge of books and dis-including the traditional arts of the people (according to a certain standard), then it would have found it difficult to attract the people. That is why Huế Tuồng (and Tuồng of the Royal Court) has incorporated into itself aspects of regional literary arts of the people and in return, has contributed to the development of those arts (1986: 92).

Huế Tuồng during the time of the Nguyễn carried the characteristics and customs of the people and was fed, enriched, and regulated by the finances and desires of the ruling royal court.

Phan Kế Bính's work of 1913-1914 describing Vietnamese customs, explains that Tuồng plays tell 'stories of ancient kingdoms and serve as models for the generations of kings, loyal subjects, and the population-at-large that follows.' "Tuồng is a portrait of our predecessors and a lesson in morality taught by that reality" (1987 [1913-1914]: 356). In this statement, Phan Kế Bính says that Tuồng presents moral lessons from the past through its 'portrait of [Vietnamese people's] predecessors.' The reality that teaches these lessons is in the portrait- the performance. While the events told in the ancient story occurred in the past, these stories still serve as a 'model' ('gương') for the present. 'Gương' not only means 'model', but 'mirror' and 'reflector'. By looking in this mirror, we see the past that is embodied in our living, moving reflection. By looking at the past, we see ourselves.

These model-mirrors are the context for the performance. The image reflected is a construct of the troupe performing and the audience members' perceptions.

As I noted before, Georges Coulet feels that, in Tuồng plays, "the story presented is not a reconstitution or a resurrection of the past, but history living and lived" ([1926] 1954: 38). The models of history that live in the present moment make up the Tuồng performance. The way in which these models place themselves in that present moment is indicative of that moment's circumstances. The performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" was one such moment and will be used to illustrate these points.

CHAPTER III

CONTEXT OF THE PERFORMANCE "HIGHLIGHTS OF THREE WOMEN DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM"

Now that I have examined some of the historical contexts that enrich Huế Tuồng and ultimately enriched the performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," I must consider the context upon which my own performance (the writing of this thesis) stands. Many of my experiences in researching this topic have taken place from the point of view of a 'student.' During my study of costumes with the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts under troupe director Ms. Cẩm Vân, it occurred to me that I was learning much more about 'how one learns' than I was about Vietnamese theater. Yet, by this experience, perhaps I was learning much more than I realized about Vietnamese theater.

Through numerous negotiations and philosophical debates on the nature of learning, the head of the arts troupe, Ms. Cẩm Vân, and I agreed that I was a student, a pupil, a 'học trò'. 'Học' means 'to study' or 'to learn,' and together with 'trò,' means something like 'to learn by imitating.' Learning was not about making mistakes until I figured it out on my own. Rather, learning was about acting very carefully to follow the model of my teacher, and cutting costumes from muslin fabric until I perfected my methods. Only then would I get to make the real thing from satin fabric. Although no one ever told me so directly, I felt myself, as student, to be a direct representation of, and reflection on, my teacher. My work was my teacher's work. In this way, I learned how to learn, and put great trust in my teacher. For this reason, too, I became more patient with having my questions answered. I haven't stopped having my own ideas, but I trust that there are

reasons for the decisions that my teachers make. It was under such circumstances that I returned to my teacher, Ms. Cẩm Vân, director of the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, and asked to rent the troupe to see a live Tuồng performance.

The Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts (called the Đoàn Nghệ Thuật Truyền Thống Huế), is a descendant of the royal troupes for the Nguyễn kings (such as kings Minh Mạng, Tự Đức, and Thành Thái). Ms. Cẩm Vân establishes her troupe as far back as 1613. This was the year that the first Nguyễn lord¹⁷ assumed rule over southern Vietnam (personal communication, Huế, Vietnam, April 29, 1997; Huard & Durand 1994: 48). Ms. Cẩm Vân's family has been in this arts troupe for five generations. Her father, Mr. La Châu, an expert costume maker and actor, received Vietnam's highest award for a performing artist, the title of, "superior artist" in 1997 in his 80's. Currently there are 45 members in the troupe.

When I met Ms. Cẩm Vân again, I asked her to choose a suitable play, one that she felt was exemplary of both Tuồng and Vietnamese culture in general. She replied, without hesitation, that her troupe would perform a famous ancient Tuồng, "Tam Nữ Đồ Vương" ("Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom"). She explained that it was a play about a father, a retired mandarin who is loyal to his country, who must kill his young mandarin son who is scheming to overthrow the kingdom. She then found a handwritten copy of the play script, which she gave me to copy and study. We set a date and time for the performance, and I went home.

During the next week or so, I filled out formal invitations to my performance, inviting the dean and rector of Huế Teachers' University, fellow English teachers and all of my good friends. In all, I passed out around twenty invitations, but only seven of my guests arrived. These guests, along with twenty or so people who I assumed to be friends and

¹⁷ The first Nguyễn lord, before the time of the Nguyễn kings, was Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên.

family of the performers formed the audience along with myself on that hot, mid-April Sunday afternoon.

Yet it was not merely the heat that prevented the remaining thirteen of my invitees from occupying their place in the audience. More than one of my invitees had told me on a previous occasion that he had no interest in Tuồng, that he couldn't understand it. Some of my invitations were more of a social courtesy extended than an expectation of attendance. However, I bore the embarrassment of my teacher when she asked where the audience was and most of the higher-ranking invitees never arrived.

Apparently, times have changed. In the 'old days,' a high-ranking mandarin in the audience would be invited to sit before the trống châu (cái), a large drum that sat before the stage. Phạm Duy, author of *Musics of Vietnam*, notes that the mandarin who beat the trống châu followed a number of basic guidelines. 'One beat marked the end of a line of song, two beats meant "good", three beats was for "excellent." One beat "tich" ["one stick placed on the (drum) face and the other striking the center"] criticized the performer(s) and one beat "tang" ["at the rear of the membrane with the flat of the stick"] meant that the mandarin wished to discuss the performance with the manager' (1975: 122,123).

The invitation to hold the stick of this drum was not only an honor to the mandarin, but also an honor to the troupe performing. This mandarin was at once actor and audience, responsible for marking the ends of sung lines and regulating the rhythm of the spoken lines, as well as expressing his own impressions of the performance (Huỳnh Khắc Dụng 1970: 321). His expressions represented the audience as a whole as there was traditionally no applause or yelling from the crowd, even at the conclusion of a performance (1970: 321).

The audiences of Royal Troupe performances of times past also held the scripts to the plays, written in Nôm characters (written Sino-Vietnamese that predates the contemporary, romanized script), reading along as the actor recited his/her lines. The audience made sure

that the actors said their lines correctly and skillfully, carefully checking each actor's performance according to the script. The troupe head was responsible for the troupe's performance and could be beaten or thrown in prison if the performance was deemed to be poor by the audience (Tồn Thất Bình, personal communication, Huế, Vietnam, 5/8/1997). In addition, the audiences of Royal Huế Tuồng during the time of the Nguyễn were more attuned to the Sino-Vietnamese language of the plays, which is very different from modern, spoken Vietnamese. Nowadays, it has been said that only "scholars" understand many of the Sino-Vietnamese words that make up Tuồng plays (Trần Văn Khê 1971: 75).

I am not a classicist who laments the loss of the good old days of Tuồng and who scorns the average modern Vietnamese person who knows very little, and cares very little, about Tuồng. However, I do recognize the need for a certain amount of education about this art if one is to understand it. I don't purport that the loss of a mandarin to beat the communal drum, nor the contemporary advent of applause at the end of a performance, signals the death of Tuồng. Nor do I see these changes as a disgrace. There is something to be said for appreciating and learning from the past, but it is another thing altogether to live in it. The Tuồng performance I saw was live, with a live, albeit small, audience, and live actors. It was a living performance.

It was not until I returned to the United States that I was able to watch the video-recording I had made of the live performance again and again. Only after I had the chance to translate the written script, did I really begin to understand the play and performance, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." Even though I had found a summary of the general plot before seeing the performance, I still found it extremely difficult to follow the story and to tell what was happening. Ideally, I would like to know enough about Tuồng and Vietnamese culture to see a performance and be able to analyze it at that great moment. However, my level of understanding at this point limits much of my analysis to retrospect, the VCR, and my Vietnamese-English dictionary.

Yet even if I were Vietnamese and an expert on Tuồng, I would still have had to know the story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" very well in order to understand the story of the play. What the audience and I saw was not the written play performed in its entirety. Rather, we saw "Tam Nữ Đồ Vương: *Trích Đoạn*," or "*Highlights of Three Women Defend the Kingdom*." Thus, the play performed in Huế in April of 1998 was *highlights* of a work that had been re-written by famous literary mandarin Đào Tấn in the second half of the 19th Century, which was taken from an ancient Tuồng of unknown (but assumed to be Vietnamese) origin.

Furthermore, Đào Tấn's work is referred to as "Tam Nữ Đồ Vương: *Hồi II*," meaning either, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom: *Act II*" or "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom: *the 'resuscitated' version*." Based on the descriptions I have found of the play, Đào Tấn's version tells the whole story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," not just the second act (Hữu Ngọc 1995: 568; Võ Văn Tường 1994: 107). Therefore, I infer the meaning of "Hồi II" here to be, the 'resuscitated' version or, Đào Tấn's bringing back to life the story from the distant past.

The Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, in 'highlighting' the story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" did not follow the script exactly. Instead, they created four main scenes in the play from the original eight scenes, omitting large portions of the written work and adding some explanatory lines, songs, and jokes to smooth the transition from highlight to highlight.

The entire play, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" takes about three afternoons to perform (Hữu Ngọc, ed. 1995: 568). However, that does not fit the time schedules nor the attention spans of modern audiences, so "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" was performed as "*Highlights of...*" during approximately an hour of one afternoon. The version I saw can be divided into four scenes:

- I. (Scenes I-VI of the written work) The discovery and confirmation that the disloyal Tạ Kim Hùng,¹⁸ mandarin son of the loyal, retired mandarin, Tạ Ngọc Lân, plans to overthrow the kingdom along with Triệu Văn Hoán.
- II. (Scenes IV-VI of the written work) The rescue of the Queen by retired mandarin Tạ Ngọc Lân and young Buddhist monk Triệu Tư Cung.
- III. (Scene VII of the written work) Sending-off ceremony and pre-death funeral for Tạ Ngọc Lân, who has decided to kill his disloyal son.
- IV. (Scene VIII of the written work) Confrontation of Tạ Ngọc Lân with Tạ Kim Hùng

Thus there is a great difference between Đào Tấn's written work that tells the entire story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" and the performance, which re-tells the famous story in shortened version, *and* tells its own, new version. The performance, while following the text closely enough to ignite the memory of one who knows the textual version of the story, also appeals to the amateur viewer who does not know of "Three Women Who Defend the Kingdom." This is because its sequence of events, though leaving out many details of the original story, follows a cohesive logic on the stage and carries the air of an entire production, which indeed, it is.

I am seeking to understand the experience of the viewer who has a strong foundation of knowledge about the prior text of the play, its place in relation to Vietnamese culture and history, and some of the aesthetic constraints acting on the performance. Through this, I hope to attain a certain pleasure from the performance. I also hope to diffuse that pleasure to the readers of this thesis. In order to do so, it is important to understand the text that serves as a constraint of the performance before looking at the performance itself.

Secondy, by understanding the story first through the text, it will be possible to examine

¹⁸ A formal description of the characters can be found below (pp.) to help the reader remember who is who.

how the performance acts out two functions simultaneously: it reminds of an old story and; performs a new one. Finally, we can consider why the play was performed in this way.

When referring specifically to the lines used in performance, I will generally focus on the last two scenes, as they closely follow the written work and I have been able to translate those two scenes [See Appendices A and B]. The first two scenes of the performance contain a great deal of the action of the written story in a very short amount of time. They incorporate bits and pieces of Scenes I-VI of the written work (see division of performance scenes, above), and are therefore very difficult for me to follow exactly. However, I can outline what is happening in these scenes. For this reason, most of my analysis of the aesthetic and textual constraints interacting with the performance will focus on the last two scenes. I hope to infer as much meaning as possible from the first two scenes and will examine them closely in relation to how they condense and interpret the text.

Principal Characters of the Story, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom."

Listed in Descending Political and Social Rank¹⁹

<i>Queen Dowager: (Chánh Hậu)</i>	Pregnant wife of the deceased King and temporary heir to the throne until her son, the succeeding king, is born
<i>Triệu Văn Hoán:</i>	Highest-ranking mandarin (title of Thái sử) and second in line to succeed the king after the prince. Disloyal to the former king- Only the pregnant Queen stands in his way of the throne! (This character does not appear in performance, but his Evil Forces are represented through Tạ Kim Hùng)
<i>Lý Khắc Minh:</i>	Second-highest ranking mandarin (title of Thái phó) under Triệu Văn Hoán. Loyal to the former king
<i>Tạ Ngọc Lâm:</i>	An old mandarin, loyal to the king and Queen Dowager, who has retired to the countryside after becoming tired of mandarin politics. Father to Tạ Phương Cơ and Tạ Kim Hùng
<i>Tạ Kim Hùng:</i>	Mandarin son of Tạ Ngọc Lâm, disloyal to the king. Schemes with Triệu Văn Hoán to usurp the throne. Brother of Tạ Phương Cơ
<i>Triệu Tư Cung:</i>	Son of the evil Triệu Văn Hoán, loyal to the king. Young military mandarin who left the palace to become a monk after disagreeing with his father's sense of politics
<i>Lý Xuân Hương:</i>	Dutiful daughter of Lý Khắc Minh
<i>Phương Cơ:</i>	Dutiful daughter of Tạ Ngọc Lâm, sister of Tạ Kim Hùng
<i>Bích Hà:</i>	Dutiful maid-servant of Xuân Hương

¹⁹These descriptions are taken both from my own impressions and Nguyễn Lộc and Võ Văn Tường (1994: 107, 110).

CHART I: Family Relations of Principal Characters of the Play “Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom”



A Summary of the Written Text of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom"²⁰

The King has died and the Queen, pregnant with a son and heir to the throne, has become temporary ruler until her son is born. Triệu Văn Hoán is the highest-ranking mandarin²¹ and next heir to the throne after the unborn prince. He wants the Queen dead so that he can usurp the throne. Tà Kim Hùng, another disloyal mandarin, also wants to see the Queen die and works as commander-in-chief for Triệu Văn Hoán's evil cause. Triệu Văn Hoán and Tà Kim Hùng, in their efforts towards a common objective, have adopted each other as foster father and son, respectively. Together, they accuse the Queen of having become pregnant by a secret lover, and create a love letter detailing the affair as evidence to convict her. The second highest-ranking mandarin,²² Lý Khắc Minh, upon seeing this evidence, doubts its legitimacy, but because he must conform to the law, suggests that the Queen be imprisoned until a trial is conducted. He recommends that Triệu Văn Hoán assume the throne until the Queen's guilt is proven. This gives Lý Khắc Minh time to think of what to do.

Meanwhile, in the countryside, retired mandarin Tà Ngọc Lân worries that his son, Tà Kim Hùng, is scheming with Triệu Văn Hoán to overthrow the kingdom. He decides to go down to the Royal Court himself to find out what's going on. His daughter, Phương Cơ, fears that her father's old age and direct approach will prevent him from succeeding and volunteers to go herself, disguised as a crazy woman. After a debate, Tà Ngọc Lân sees the ingenuity of her plan and lets her go. Phương Cơ appears outside of the Royal Court, pretending to have lost her mind with grief over her father's death (he's not really dead). The news of Tà Ngọc Lân's death is somehow passed on to Tà Kim Hùng. Through these

²⁰ Taken from Kịch bản Tuồng cổ, "Tam Nữ Đồ Vương," Hồi II, Đào Tấn, apparently re-written from memory by unknown author, Huế, Vietnam, 9/29/97; Nguyễn Lộc and Võ Văn Tường (1994: 107, 110).

²¹ The title of highest-ranking mandarin is "Thái Sử."

²² The second highest-ranking mandarin is called "Thái phó."

investigation at the Royal Court, Phương Cờ learns that her brother is indeed involved in an evil scheme to overthrow the kingdom and kill the Queen. She rushes home to tell her father.

Back at the Royal Court, Lý Khắc Minh sits at home wondering how to save the Queen, who seems destined for execution. His daughter, Xuân Hương, overhears him troubling to himself and comes up with an idea: she will pose as the imprisoned Queen, and face execution to save the Queen. This proposal, in turn, is overheard by Bích Hà, the maid-servant of Xuân Hương, who declares that it is she who should die in the place of the Queen, not Xuân Hương. Xuân Hương, Bích Hà argues, is the talented daughter of a mandarin, and Bích Hà is but a maid-servant. Bích Hà cannot be convinced otherwise and it is agreed that she will pose as the ill-fated Queen.

Enlightened by Phương Cờ's findings from her venture to the Royal City, old man Tạ Ngọc Lân hurries to tell Triệu Tử Cung, the former mandarin who is now a young monk, of the Queen's impending execution. Tử Cung, overcome with anger at his father's (Triệu Văn Hoán's) evil intentions, discards his monastic garb and once again dons the robe of a military mandarin. Unaware of Lý Khắc Minh, Xuân Hương and Bích Hà's noble action to save the Queen, Tử Cung and Tạ Ngọc Lân decide that they must rescue her. The pair interrupt the execution party led by Tạ Kim Hùng on its way to the execution grounds, rescuing the Queen, who they find to be Bích Hà disguised as the Queen. The Good Forces escape together with Bích Hà to Hồng Sơn mountain and a thwarted Kim Hùng returns to his palace, angry and worried.

Up on the mountain, the Queen and both parties of Good Forces converge. Tạ Ngọc Lân announces that he will return to the palace to kill his disloyal son, Kim Hùng, and open the way for the Good Forces to defeat Kim Hùng and Triệu Văn Hoán's army. The Good Forces hold a ceremony in honor of the life of Tạ Ngọc Lân, who then sets out to accomplish his aim, sure that he will die in the attempt.

Ngọc Lân gains entrance into his son's home by asking to become a servant. When Kim Hùng asks why Ngọc Lân is not dead, as Phường Cờ had said, Ngọc Lân claims that Phường Cờ went crazy and ran off with a pack of bandits. She made up the lie about her father's death. After Kim Hùng allows his father to become a servant, Ngọc Lân sets the palace afire and lets in his troops. Father and son fight and perish together in the flames.

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The above is the story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" as it is written in the text that was used as a basis for the performance. It is the text of the performance. In addition, I have explored some of the historical and cultural contexts that preceded this text and staged performance. Yet there are the additional contexts of music, singing style, formalized movement, costume, makeup, and stage decoration which further contribute to the performance. Each of these elements, within itself, is its own art and is so complex that it is not possible to discuss each one's every aspect in this thesis. For this reason, I have chosen to analyze these aspects as they contribute to one performance. By this, I hope to leave the reader with an understanding of *some* singing styles, *some* costumes, and *some* methods of painting a character's face to enhance the character as these aspects occur in the performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." Through looking at one performance, we can understand these 'texts' in their "moment of...actualization" (Fabian 1990: 9). Some of my inferences about the singing style, etc. are based on the iconography of styles in Tuồng theater that are used to express fixed personal traits in certain characters. Yet much of my understanding of this performance has come from my own interpretation of its text and its wide and intricate contexts. Indeed, the 'delicate pleasure' for me in this performance, has come about through my trying to understand it and explain it appropriately. Let us now look at the *performance* of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom", divided into four scenes.

## Performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom"

### Scene I: Phường Cờ Goes Down to the Royal City

The music ensemble<sup>23</sup> sitting before the stage opens Scene I with the sounds of the 'battle' drum and the 'oboe.' Tuồng music accompanies actors' motions as well as their speaking and singing throughout the performance. It could also be said that the actors follow the music (Phạm Duy 1975: 119). Phường Cờ sneaks onto the stage, rolling along the floor, her eyes wide and darting to and fro. The stage is bare, except for a two-step platform towards the rear and a large trunk that rests on the platform. Both are painted grey. Phường Cờ wears the traditional robe of a common woman, in two layers and a green headband, tied in a bow at the side of her head [See [Figure E](#)]. The under-layer of her robe is a plain mauve, covered by a green robe, split down the front. Under the two robes she wears a long skirt of the same green fabric. This outfit resembles the áo dài<sup>24</sup> of northern Vietnamese women in the way the two, long front-pieces of the green robe are tied together at her waist, only it seems that Phường Cờ has missed one of her arms when she put on her robe. Perhaps this is part of her disguise as a crazy woman. She holds in her hand a leafy branch. Her branch is similar to the feather duster-like horsewhips that other characters use to symbolize their horses. However, Phường Cờ has apparently walked to the Royal City, so perhaps she uses the branch to hide behind. As she rolls along,

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<sup>23</sup>The makeup of instruments in a traditional Tuồng orchestra varies. It may include as many as: six large drums ("trống chiến, trống quân, trống ban/lệnh, trống sấm, trống cơm, trống chầu/cái") (Trần Hồng 1997: 51); four types of oboe ("kèn tiêu, kèn trung, kèn bầu, kèn đại") (1997: 74); a two-stringed 'fiddle' (đàn nhị/cò); a two-stringed 'fiddle' with a wooden, bowl-shaped base (đàn gáo/hồ); a small gong (thanh la); a monochord instrument with a 'whammie' (đàn bầu); various types of bamboo flute (sáo trúc); a two-stringed lute (đàn nguyệt); and the 16-stringed zither (đàn tranh/thập lục) (1997: 51-89). See [Figure R](#) for illustrations of these instruments.

<sup>24</sup> Traditional dress worn by Vietnamese women, consisting of a long, dress-like, fitted shirt with split sides from the waist down, worn over wide-legged pants.

sneaking from one place to another near the Royal Citadel, the 'battle' drum accents her movements.

From backstage, a voice makes a regal announcement, then two palace guards begin stalking in from opposite sides of the stage, hunched over with their two-headed spears<sup>25</sup> poised. *Phường Cở* spins around, hunkers into the shadows downstage, then flips her hair over her head and back, as if to change her character. The drum rolls with the cymbals and the light illuminates *Phường Cở*, who bursts into a fit of mad laughter. She stands and loudly recites a small 'ditty' in a steady rhythm, admitting her presence to the searching guards who, as yet, do not see her, while showing the audience that she has, indeed, taken on the role of a crazy woman.

When, at last, the guards find her sitting on the small platform, she invites them, "Come here! Come here!" [*Figure C*] then stands and walks upstage, looking far into the distance. Singing one line of a song, *Phường Cở* draws the guards into her game, then finishes the second line with an unexpected joke, whacking a guard on the head with her leafy branch and exploding into laughter again. She continues the song in this manner, both shocking and flirting with the guards. The guards do not know what to make of her, but seem quite easily fooled and even start singing along with her. When they are lost in song, *Phường Cở* tries to slip past them through the Citadel gate, but the guards catch her.

The guards are not long entertained by this crazy woman before they begin to worry that the Royal Carriage, expected to pass by soon, will come while this woman is sitting there and they will get in trouble. They tell her to, "Go away!" but she refuses. Finally, they 'convince' her that she can leave in the Royal Carriage and they escort her offstage, throwing her out [See *Figure D*]. The guards march offstage in the other direction.

An attendant soldier enters, involved in a conversation with an off-stage voice. He is apparently arguing over who's turn it was to go somewhere, and it turns out that it was his

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<sup>25</sup> The two-headed spear is called "lương đầu thượng" (Nguyễn Lộc & Võ Văn Tường 1994: 211).



Figure C: 'Crazy' Phương Cơ Calls the Palace Guards, "Come here! Come here!"



Figure D: The Palace Guards Escort 'Crazy' Phương Cơ Away from the Royal Palace

turn, but he was left behind. The soldier then begins complaining to the audience about his responsibilities, then finally decides to take his horse (perhaps he was supposed to go in the Royal carriage and missed it?). He grabs his pink feather-duster horse-whip<sup>26</sup> from offstage and mounts his pink horse by swinging his leg over the whip. The attendant soldier is obviously even more of a fool than were the two guards and starts quoting the famous song, "Ngựa Ô" (Black Horse), and adding his own lines that detail how to ride his horse. He's trying to speed off in order to catch up with the party that left without him, when Phương Cờ runs up from behind and grabs his belt, preventing his horse from going anywhere. The soldier, in mid-song, can't figure out why his horse won't go and turns around to whip it.

Upon seeing Phương Cờ, he shrieks with fear and asks from where she came [See [Figure E](#)]. Cờ answers, "I came down from the sky, and up from the earth!"

"Whether from the sky or from the earth, you're still at fault here!" the attendant soldier exclaims. "Let me go!"

Cờ continues to detain him and states that she won't let him go until he explains what strange event is going on at the Royal Palace. At first, the attendant soldier refuses, but after a struggle with the intent Phương Cờ, he gives in. Being cowardly and a fool, he is willing to part with secret news in order to get away from her. After pulling her leg a few times, he finally becomes serious and declares:<sup>27</sup>

Em đã lấy hỏi, khi anh phải bận thần,  
Tội tử vì giam lại ngục hình  
Mười ngày nữa khai đao ánh nguyệt!

You question me, when I have so much to worry about  
The one with the guilty horoscope has been thrown in prison  
Ten days from now, to be beheaded under the light of the moon!

---

<sup>26</sup> The horse whip is called, "roi ngựa" (Nguyễn Lộc & Võ Văn Tường 1994: 211)

<sup>27</sup> This is my best approximation of the attendant soldier's lines here.



Figure E: "Let me go!" exclaims the Attendant Soldier

The one cursed with the guilty horoscope is the Queen. *Phượng Cờ*, upon hearing this news, releases the attendant soldier and spins around in a flurry of disconcert, the back of one hand to her forehead. The soldier rides off and *Phượng Cờ*, alone on the stage, sings a soliloquy in a mournful tone. She then runs offstage, rushing to tell her father of the Queen's imminent execution.

### Scene II of the Performance: *Tạ Ngọc Lân* and *Tử Cung* Rescue the Queen

The stage lights change to a redder tone and old man *Tạ Ngọc Lân* rushes out from stage left, swinging a stick in a martial form as an oboe crescendos with a drumbeat. He wears the unbelted, wide-sleeved robe of a literary mandarin in a deep, satin blue, with light blue trim at the sleeve hems and around the collar. The blue robe reveals another satin robe worn underneath, of maroon color. Beneath this, he wears white pants. A brown band is tied around his head and he is barefoot. Old man *Ngọc Lân* has white hair and a long white beard and mustache that hang to his waist [See [Figure S](#)]. This white beard is worn only by loyal and proud characters and its length emphasizes *Ngọc Lân*'s elderly status (Nguyễn Lộc & Võ Văn Tường 1994: 202). Because the beard and mustache hang in roughly three sections, the old man *Ngọc Lân* can be assumed to be kind and honest (Lê Hoàng & Hồng Phượng 1992: 5).

*Tạ Ngọc Lân* is one of three characters in the performance to wear distinctive face paint [See [Figures S and T](#)]. From the way his face is painted, his character and personality traits may be further understood. The area around his eyes is painted in a large, drooping circle of whitish grey/green, signifying the man's old age and former status as a general (1992: 14). The base color of the paint is green, covered with white on the sides of the face and chin. Features of the face are drawn in black lines over the white areas. In the

case of the character of Tạ Ngọc Lâm, each side of his face is relatively symmetric and none of the black lines cross each other, emphasizing his straightforward, honest disposition.

In addition to revealing the personality traits of the character, the facial paint enhances the actor's facial expressions. The lightly shaded, open area around Tạ Ngọc Lâm's eyes draws attention to his eye movement. When he opens them wide, the whites of his eyes seem larger than ever and when he squints, the painted part overwhelms his eye and it seems to disappear. Also, as Tạ Ngọc Lâm speaks and contorts his face to express different emotions, the black lines seem to change shape and enliven these expressions.

Tạ Ngọc Lâm enters the stage, and the character Triệu Tử Cung stands towards the back of stage right, dressed in the yellow robe and hood of a monk. Ngọc Lâm is apparently agitated and swings his arm and leg in martial movement to the beat of the music and the rhythm of his words. He explains that he must kill his traitor son, Tạ Kim Hùng, who is scheming with Triệu Văn Hoàn (Triệu Tử Cung's father) to kill the Queen and overtake the throne. Tử Cung is standing at respectful attention with hands raised to his chest, left hand covering his right fist. His eyes grow wide upon hearing Tạ Ngọc Lâm's words and he utters a short response of surprise and spins around. As Ngọc Lâm continues to explain, Tử Cung spins around again, this time pulling of his robe and hood and exchanging it at the edge of backstage right for a battle axe [See [Figure F](#)]. His freshly discarded monk's robe reveals the pink, belted uniform with green trim and a split front worn by young generals.

This moment is Tử Cung's social transformation from monk to general. This transformation occurs at the same moment that Tử Cung is negating his relations to his father in order to save the kingdom. With ax and stick in hand, Tử Cung and Ngọc Lâm continue to speak and sing, devising a way in which to rescue the Queen. They march in a circle and seem to be on the journey to the Royal Palace. They determine that they will rescue her as she is taken from prison to the execution grounds.



Figure F: The Young Tũ Cung Transforms from Monk to General

Suddenly, the music gains tempo and Tạ Ngọc Lân and Triệu Tử Cung duck behind either side of the grey platform at the rear of the stage. The Queen, and her two 'ladies-in-waiting,' Bích Hà and Xuân Hương, have their hands bound before them. They are shoved out across the stage by the attendant soldier. The treacherous Tạ Kim Hùng, son of Tạ Ngọc Lân, marches in boldly behind the prisoners. This scene is depicted in Figure G. At the far right of the picture, Kim Hùng is walking onto the stage. The silhouette of Tử Cung can be seen crouched in the right background.

In an instant, Tử Cung jumps out from behind the platform and battles with Tạ Kim Hùng, as the prison party continues walking off stage left. Ngọc Lân then takes over the fighting as Tử Cung follows the Queen and her party, leading them to escape to the mountain. Ngọc Lân and his son, Kim Hùng, fight for an instant, then Kim Hùng runs away in fear, off stage right. Kim Hùng doesn't recognize his father because it is too dark and he thinks that his father is already dead. Ngọc Lân yells after his son, ironically, "Damn your father's grave!" He then runs after the Queen and her party towards the mountain off stage left, closing Scene II.

### Scene III of the Performance: Ceremony in Honor of the Life of Tạ Ngọc Lân

The scene opens with the good forces standing in a line across the stage, facing the audience [See Figure H]. The ruling Queen stands in the center, on the highest step of the grey platform. Her ladies-in-waiting, Xuân Hương and Bích Hà, stand on the lower step of the platform, on either side of the Queen. On either side of these women, young general Tử Cung stands on the edge of stage left, while second-highest mandarin Ly Khắc Minh is at right. Upstage, towards the right, old man Tạ Ngọc Lân stands on his own platform, slightly lower than the Queen's. No one can be higher than the King or, in this case, the



|                                     |              |              |           |              |                            |          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|----------------------------|----------|
|                                     |              |              |           |              |                            |          |
| Ngọc Lân                            | Queen        | Xuân Hương   | Attendant | Bích Hà      | Tứ Cung                    | Kim Hùng |
| (unseen, crouching<br>behind Queen) | (imprisoned) | (imprisoned) | Soldier   | (imprisoned) | (crouching in the shadows) |          |

**Figure G: The Moment Before the Queen's Rescue**

ruling Queen, but Ngọc Lân approaches this level. His daughter, wearing a plain white, traditional áo dài dress and white head band, kneels on her knees before her father. White is the color of mourning in Vietnam and white head bands are worn by members of funeral parties. White áo dài are also associated with female high school and college students who often wear them as uniforms. The white áo dài, in turn, has come to represent female youth and innocence, like that embodied in the character Phương Cơ.

This group that is loyal to the Queen has gathered at the mountain to pay tribute to the life of Tạ Ngọc Lân before he goes down to the Royal City to die killing his evil son, Tạ Kim Hùng. This scene of the play lasts longer than any other and consists of an elaborate eulogy to the hero, Tạ Ngọc Lân. During this time, the Queen and the group sing their praises to him, followed by periods of explanation in which Ngọc Lân details his plan for killing his son and helping the good forces to defeat Kim Hùng's troops. He also bids farewell to the Queen and her followers and his dear daughter. Throughout this ceremony, Phương Cơ protests her father's departure and mourns the imminent deaths of her father and brother by each other's hands. The overall tone of the scene is sorrow and an acceptance of suffering to come.

Scene III contains very little physical action, but a great deal of singing and stylized speaking. It is also noteworthy for the expression with which Tạ Ngọc Lân delivers some of the most important lines of the play that carry the play's theme. Through my description of the scene, I will focus on these aspects of dialogue and how they are expressed.

The Queen begins by speaking in the formalized style called "nói lối." This means, literally, "to speak, showing the way," and is used, in this case, to introduce the scene (Huỳnh Khắc Dụng 1970: 286). Each "nói lối" line is five to seven syllables long, but the number of lines is undetermined. While "nói lối" sounds very much like singing, it is considered a spoken style. This style makes up most of the words expressed in a *Tuồng*



**Figure H: The Good Forces Stand at Hồng Sơn Mountain**

(left to right: Triệu Tử Cung, Lý Xuân Hương, The Queen Dowager, Bích Hà, Lý Khắc Minh, Tạ Ngọc Lân, Tạ Phương Cơ)

performance, and allows for the actors to vary their speed and expression in speaking according to their movements and feelings (1970: 286). The Queen says,<sup>28</sup>

|                                  |                                                             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tạ Ngọc Lân xứng danh dũng tướng | Tạ Ngọc Lân, deserving of the title, "brave general"        |
| Bia sử đề tạc để ngàn Thu        | His stone memorial, engraved to last a thousand autumns     |
| Vì quốc dân tiêu diệt quân thù   | For his country's people, he annihilates the enemy          |
| Lìa cốt nhục khừ trừ con giặc    | Severing flesh from blood (bone) to eliminate his rebel son |

This statement is followed by four more complementary lines spoken by the group in unison to Tạ Ngọc Lân. Thus the Queen's power and the strength of her support network are emphasized. They are a unified team, of one mind.

It is an interesting theme that the good and evil characters in this performance are blood relatives. Ngọc Lân, in confronting the evil that is threatening the kingdom, must also confront the reality that that evil is born of him. He, therefore, takes it on as his own responsibility to exterminate that evil. Likewise, the young monk-turned-good general, Triệu Tử Cung, faces the fact that it is his own father, Triệu Văn Hoán, schemes alongside Tạ Kim Hùng to usurp the throne. Ngọc Lân, by deciding to kill his son, has chosen his nation and people over his family. In fact, I argue that his nation becomes his family. After all, it is the Queen and her followers who are holding the ceremony to mourn the imminent death of Tạ Ngọc Lân. In addition, the behavior of Kim Hùng somehow justifies his negation as a son. This behavior becomes clear to the audience in Scene IV of the performance, when Ngọc Lân and Kim Hùng meet face to face.

Phượng Cở, Ngọc Lân's daughter and Kim Hùng's sister, bears the greatest burden of suffering from this situation.

She protests:

Ôi cha ơi  
Tội cho con, khổ cho con lắm...cha ơi!

Oh, Father!  
A crime against me! Such misery for me...father!

<sup>28</sup> I apologize for any misspellings in the Vietnamese lines of the play. The script that I was given was handwritten and contained many misspelled words. When possible, I have tried to correct the misspellings.

Ngọc Lân looks down at his helpless daughter, and replies:

(Nói Lối Rịn):

Thương phận gái liễu bờ nhược chất

Cũng chen vai gánh vác non sông

Nhưng con phải để cho cha đi:

(Nói Lối Bóp):

Giết anh con là Tạ Kim Hùng!

Tên phản loạn bất trung thất hiếu!

("Speaking the way" in a mournful style):

Pity the woman's fate, made of the weary  
sedge and willow (the weaker sex)

Who also must struggle to shoulder the  
homeland

But you must let your father go to:

("Speaking the way" in an angry style):

Kill my son, Tạ Kim Hùng!

That seditious name, disloyal and undutiful!

After three lines of sorrow directed at his daughter, Ngọc Lân's thoughts revert to the task at hand and he is inflamed with anger. He flips to the speaking style of Nói Lối Bóp to express his emotion.

In Tạ Ngọc Lân's last line of the above statement, he alludes to two qualities inherent in a good person, which are missing in his son. These are the qualities of loyalty ("trung") and dutifulness to one's parents ("hiếu"). Loyalty, here, generally means loyalty to one's nation and people. This trait is obviously lost upon Kim Hùng who wants to overthrow the government in order to gain personal power. An exploration of the quality of "hiếu," or dutifulness, in Vietnam, will further illuminate the depths of Kim Hùng's evil character.

At this point in the story, Kim Hùng has already heard from Phương Cơ of his father's death and, as the oldest son in a Vietnamese family, is responsible for the "work of dutifulness"<sup>29</sup> in which he oversees his parents' funerals as well as cares for their graves and their places among the ancestral altar inside the son's, or family's home. This work is seen as perhaps the most important work in the life of the eldest son (Phan Kế Bính [1913-1914] 1987: 162-163; Tân Việt 1993: 63). Yet Kim Hùng does not even acknowledge his father's death after hearing of it! Of course, his father is not really dead, but Kim Hùng doesn't know that.

<sup>29</sup> This "work of dutifulness" is called "việc hiếu."

Besides the "work of dutifulness," after one's parents pass on, there is the everyday dutifulness to one's parents while they are living. While I was in Vietnam or when speaking with Vietnamese people in the U.S., I have frequently heard a group of parents talk about someone's child, saying something to the effect of, "oh, he's a good kid, he has 'hiếu,' you know." "Hiếu" is an important quality in a child.

Phượng Cờ, unlike her brother Kim Hùng, is the epitome of dutifulness and loyalty. Concerned for her father's safety in his old age, she volunteers to go to the Citadel by herself in Scene I, thus becoming one of the 'three women in defense of the kingdom.' She is apparently unmarried and lives at home, caring for her father. It is she who bears the brunt of sorrow in this play, as she will lose both her father and her older brother. Ngọc Lân acknowledges her difficult situation- there is no glory in this for her. He says that Phượng Cờ, like other women, 'shoulders the homeland' and is burdened with the weight of that responsibility for the rest of her life. As Ngọc Lân says this line ("Pity the woman's fate, made of the weary sedge and willow/ Pushed to shoulder the homeland"), he raises his arms in a respectful bow with his left, open hand covering his right fist. This turning point in Phượng Cờ's life is all the more sorrowful as we see her crying to her father, clothed in that white innocence.

Although my translation of Scenes III and IV of the performance into English helps to convey the meaning of the lines to the reader who does not understand Vietnamese, the aesthetic effect of the sound of the Vietnamese lines is mostly lost in the conversion. In my English translation, I have generally tried to retain the word inversion that is used poetically in the Vietnamese. However, the rhythm of the words as they are expressed in Vietnamese does not translate into the English. I mentioned the speaking style, "nói lối," ("speaking the way") earlier, which is generally written in lines of five- to seven-syllables. As most of the lines in a Tuồng play are delivered through the structure of "speaking the way," most of the play follows this five- to seven-syllable spoken rhythm.

Personally, this has the effect of making certain lines reverberate in my memory. It also makes the shift from one speaking style into another speaking style or a song seem more dramatic and increases the viewer's awareness of the shift in intention or emotion of the speaker. For example, in the case of a shift from one type of "speaking the way" to another, the speaker is constrained by five- to seven-syllable lines. That 'constraint,' while limiting the actor's speaking in one sense, provides a framework in which the actor can transform from one emotion or thought to another and make this change all the more clear. Returning to the lines mentioned above, Ngọc Lân shifts from "speaking the way" in a mournful tone<sup>30</sup> to "speaking the way" in an angry tone.<sup>31</sup> Each of these five lines contains seven syllables, providing a steady rhythm to his speaking.

The pace of the first two lines is slow and strung together in a sentimental outpouring. Then, the middle line serves as the transition, as Ngọc Lân commands his daughter, "you must let your father go to..." This line is spoken with more practicality, with less pity and at a more conversational rate than the first two lines. Finally, Ngọc Lân shifts into the angry style of "speaking the way" as he exclaims, "Kill my son, that Tạ Kim Hùng/ That seditious name, disloyal and undutiful!" As he says these last two words, "disloyal and undutiful" ("bất trung thất hiếu"), he shifts his eyes to one side and lifts and flings his beard in a great circular motion of disgust (See Figure I).

In this example, each of Ngọc Lân's five spoken lines is seven syllables long. Within this rhythmic 'constraint,' the character modulates his speaking speed, tone and word stress to define his intentions and emotions. His words, when spoken in the angry style mentioned above, are weighted with significance according to the actor's personal expression. The emphasis, again, falls on the last words, "disloyal and undutiful."

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<sup>30</sup> Nói lối rịn

<sup>31</sup> Nói lối bóp



Figure I: "Kill my Son, Tạ Kim Hùng! That Seditious Name, Disloyal and Undutiful!"

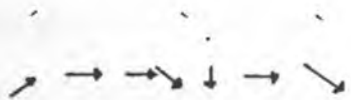
The actor, in considering these aesthetic constraints with the constraint of text as he/she acts in the moment of the performance is similar to the costume maker who was able to make two variations of the general's robe discussed in the introduction of this thesis. In the same way that there are basic characteristics for the general's costume defined by certain constraints, there is also a set pattern of speaking one's lines that serves as a foundation upon which the actor performs. As we saw in the case of the general's costumes, these pre-existing constraints did not result in identical products. Rather, at least two interpretations of the costume were shown to be possible in the two different pictures. Likewise, the actor has room to interpret, and improve upon, his/her role and many variations of that role may result.

Another important aspect to consider when reading the English translation of the last two scenes of the play is that the tonal effect of the Vietnamese words is lost. Vietnamese is a language consisting of five tones, meaning that the speaker must raise and lower the pitch of his/her voice when speaking in order to pronounce correctly. The diacritical marks written over the Vietnamese words in this thesis signify the tones of those words. In this way, Vietnamese has often been described as a 'singing' language. (Huỳnh Khắc Dụng 1970: 286).

This tonal aspect is used to the benefit of a *Tuồng* performance. For example, extremes of emotion are often expressed by the use of words that require the speaker to raise the pitch of his/her voice. Look again at Tạ Ngọc Lân's last two lines spoken to his daughter. He has just become inflamed with anger and 'speaks the way' in the angry tone. Below each word is the tone that is used in pronouncing it. The arrow follows the path of the speaker's voice as the word is pronounced:

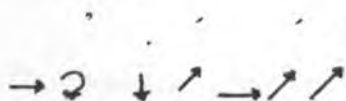
Giết anh con là Tà Kim Hùng!

Kill my son, that Tà Kim Hùng!



Tên phản loạn bất trung thất hiếu

That seditious name, disloyal and undutiful



The last four words, "bất trung thất hiếu" ("disloyal and undutiful") raise the actor's voice three times, showing Ngọc Lân's extreme anger at his son's lack of duty to his father and country. In the performance, the actor exaggerates these tones by raising his voice even higher than normal, increasing the potency of their effect. Thus the constraints on tone and syllabic rhythm in the speaking of the actors in a *Tuồng* performance do not hinder expression. Rather, these rules invite expression.

At this point in the performance, Tà Ngọc Lân steps down from his pedestal and addresses the group of Good Forces standing behind him, explaining his plan of attack on his son, Kim Hùng. The music gains tempo and the beat resembles the sound of a galloping horse. Ngọc Lân sings two seven-syllable lines in the singing style called "hát khách tẩu mã." "Hát khách" means "to sing in the visitor's way," meaning 'in Chinese style.' The singing style "hát khách" was directly borrowed from the Chinese, but is no longer equal to a Chinese style because of its long use in Vietnam (Huỳnh Khắc Dụng 1970: 294). "Tẩu mã" means "galloping horse" and is used to describe the sound of this particular style of hát khách. This style is used in moments of great excitement. In this case, Ngọc Lân is telling the Queen and her followers how he will rush into battle against his son as he says these two lines:

Phóng hỏa hợp đồng vây dinh phủ  
Phân binh mai phục diệt loài gian

I've contracted to set afire his large estate and besiege it  
Separated [Ngọc Lân and the good forces], we will lie in wait  
to exterminate that breed of evildoers.

Yet Phương Cở cannot understand his logic and continues to cry for her father [see Figure J]. The "galloping" Chinese singing style of Ngọc Lân ends abruptly and the oboe wails to accompany the singing style of "hát nam ai" as Phương Cở cries out:

Lụy chứa chan đôi đường ly biệt

The tears overflow as we separate down two roads

The singing style of Phương Cở here is deeply sad and cuts a clear distinction between the glorious side of Ngọc Lân's planned killing of his rebel son and its painful reality.

The ceremony in honor of Ngọc Lân continues and the Queen orders two soldiers to bring out a table, upon which is a flask of liquor, white funerary head scarves, and burning incense. Beginning with the Queen, the members of the Good Forces walk up to the table one by one and solemnly tie the white scarves around their heads [See Figures K and L]. The Queen invites old man Ngọc Lân to drink a cup of the liquor on the table, toasting his departure. He takes the cup and gulps it in one shot, then slowly trickles his fingers down his beard, as if to follow the liquor running down for the last time.

I have found no information describing this kind of 'funeral' that honors a party who is not yet dead. Yet perhaps the question of whether Ngọc Lân is dead or alive is irrelevant at this point. After all, the 'dead' in Vietnam still maintain lines of communication with the living. Dead relatives are considered to still require the materials things, shelter, and family comfort that a living person needs. Paper effigies of money, clothing, and cars are burned and sent to one's dead relatives on special occasions (Tân Việt 1993: 117). Ancestral altars are cared for regularly and fresh coffee or tea, and sometimes cigarettes are placed out for one's ancestors to enjoy. The dead are not so far from the living and Tạ Ngọc Lân, though living, is not far from the dead. Because it is known that Tạ Ngọc Lân will die and because of the deep esteem in which he is held, the reason for having this ceremony is understandable.



Figure J: "Father ! The Tears Overflow as We Separate Down Two Roads!"



Figure K: The Queen Mourns Tạ Ngọc Lân's Sacrifice for the Kingdom

The singing style of "hát nam ái" (sorrowful style) is used until the scene ends as the group continues its goodbyes to Ngọc Lân before he departs. His daughter wails:

Cha! Xót xa máu chảy ruột mềm!

Father! When one of the same blood (same nation) is hurt, so I am hurt. This stings my heart!

This phrase is ironic in the way it equates family and nation by the phrase "of the same blood." By this, Phương Cờ seems to be saying two things. Firstly, that the pain of her father and brother hurts her, and secondly, that the pain of her country and people pains her as well. Thus, if Ngọc Lân stays with her and does not defend the kingdom, Phương Cờ will feel the pain of her people. Yet if he goes, she will suffer the loss of her father.

With this, Ngọc Lân makes his final departure and Phương Cờ attempts to pull him back. He slips out of his blue mandarin's robe revealing a plain maroon robe underneath and leaves Phương Cờ grasping the blue robe as he walks offstage. She runs after him and the Queen issues the orders for the good forces to prepare for battle. The good forces march off stage in a royal procession.



Figure L: The Good Forces Mourn Tạ Ngọc Lân with Burning Incense and White Head Scarves

#### Scene IV of the Performance (Final Scene): Father and Son Battle

The stage is dark and the battle drum and oboe begin playing loudly as battle cries and cheers are heard from offstage. The stage lights up and the character Tạ Kim Hùng, evil son of Tạ Ngọc Lân marches onstage as if he is larger than life. The setting of the stage is the same, except for small differences, which tell the audience that the setting is no longer the mountain and is now the mandarin residence of Tạ Kim Hùng. These differences appear in the wooden chest that sits atop the platform at the back of the stage and two small ceramic stools set at either side of the platform. It has been turned around to reveal a painted face of a red, wooden dais. By this maneuver, the chest is no longer a mountain, but a piece of furniture in Kim Hùng's home.

Kim Hung's costume, the most extravagant of all the characters, is the armor of an army general in a light green [See [Figure M](#)].<sup>32</sup> Over the center chest is a red sun, representing heaven. There is an embroidered tiger's head in the center front of the armor, just above the bottom hem, slightly hidden by yellow tassels. The tiger's head is reserved for military mandarins/generals because of the animal's fighting prowess. Above the tiger head is a triangular piece like a cod-piece that is embroidered with a bat. Bats are a symbol of happiness and luck. White fur lines the edges of the armor plates, showing this costume's influence from China, which has a colder climate (as Vietnam is a tropical climate, there is no need for fur-lined armor).

Kim Hùng wears the helmet of a military general, made to resemble metal armor with its silver color and small air holes punched out all around it. A yellow, spring-mounted yarn ball sits on the center of the hat, just above the character's forehead. Above that, is another spring-mounted red piece that symbolizes the sun/moon/heaven. At the peak of the hat's pointed top is a final spring-mounted piece, a little sword standing on end. On the back of

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<sup>32</sup> The costume is called the "giáp võ."



**Figure M: Commander-in-Chief and Head General, Ta Kim Hùng Am I!**

the hat, there is another bat. The spring-mounted objects jiggle as the actor moves his head. The character of Tạ Kim Hùng moves with strong jerks of his head in order to fully activate the rippling of his helmet.

Tạ Kim Hùng's boots are black with a white, platform sole.<sup>33</sup> The toe of the sole curves upward circularly. The particular style that Kim Hùng is wearing here is special to central Vietnam in its extreme curvature of the sole. Nguyễn Lộc and Võ Văn Tường discuss the use of this type of boot in their book, *Vietnam's Hát Bội Theater Art*, saying, "to walk with this kind of boots on is as difficult as to walk with a ball fastened under each foot. It takes much practice to master the use of such boots. However, when used skillfully, such boots enable an actor to express vividly his inner feelings" (1994: 208).

Kim Hùng takes great, regal steps as he walks around on the stage in these boots, and his every movement seems to be strong, exact, and carefully orchestrated. He spins around once, stopping and jerking his head towards the audience, one bent arm held up before him proudly. He speaks in the style called, "bạch," used to introduce oneself and explain one's position. Such explanation, when delivered in the style of "bạch," is usually a "telling of one's glorious feats and dauntlessness" (Huỳnh Khắc Dụng 1970: 286). In this case, Kim Hùng's self-introduction by way of the "bạch" style is delivered in a seven-syllable quatrain (four lines):

Võ nghệ lẫm lẫm lực cự đường  
Oai phong lẫm lẫm chúng kinh nhường

Khắp Châu khét tiếng tai vô địch  
Chư Quận lừng danh thế quật cường

By our skillful martial arts, we have no competitor  
Venerably imposing, we sneakily frighten the enemy  
into surrender

Notorious throughout as the invincible  
Our districts win fame as the indomitable

These lines are spoken at varying speeds, with some words 'sung' in a quavering voice, and others yelled out quickly and viciously. Also, as Kim Hùng says these words, he seems to be demonstrating his martial prowess, almost dancing as he speaks. Below, I

<sup>33</sup> These boots are called "hia" (Nguyễn Lộc and Võ Văn Tường 1994: 208).

have written the English translation of his first four lines of self-introduction. The words in italics represent those sung with pride and the underlined words are those that he yells out fiercely.

*By our skillful martial arts, we have no competitor!*

*Venerably imposing, we sneakily frighten the enemy into surrender!*

*Notorious throughout as the invincible!*

*Our districts win fame as the indomitable!*

Kim Hùng emphasizes the words he wants to use to scare his opponents by yelling them out, interspersed with moments of pride as he brags about his troops' strength. When saying the words, "surrender" and "indomitable," he shifts from 'singing' to screaming in the middle of the word for a monstrous effect. As he finishes each line, his troops, heard from backstage, yell out in support.

Further expression is added in Tà Kim Hùng's facial movements, enhanced by his painted face [See [Figure U](#)]. His character is the third male character in the play to have a painted face. The base of his painted face is a solid black, covering his forehead, nose line, and lower jaw. This represents Kim Hùng's "naivety, righteousness, and quick temper" (Lê Hoàng and Hồng Phương 1992: 6). The area around each eye is drawn in two large, upward ovals of orange and white, showing Kim Hùng's youth (1992: 86). His beardless state is also a sign of his youth. Over the orange and white areas, Kim Hùng's face is painted with numerous black stripes that twist and cross each other. The presence of the stripes suggests that Kim Hùng is a "rebel" and their twisted quality alludes to his "cruel and deceptive" character (1992: 6).

As Kim Hùng speaks, he contorts his face and the painted lines move, exaggerating his expressions. Compare the two images of Kim Hùng's face as he speaks, pictured in [Figures V and W](#). The black line encircling his eyes draws attention to his eye movements

and, as he changes his face from Figure V to Figure W, the white painted part of his face seems to grow and open out. As Kim Hùng widens his eyes and the black lines extend, his eyes appear to grow even larger. His imposing presence is frightening.

After this introduction spoken in the style of "bach," Kim Hùng changes to "speaking the way," beginning with two five-syllable lines in which he introduces himself as the commander-in-chief:

Quyền Đô Đốc tướng quân  
Tạ Kim Hùng là mỗ!

The acting commander-in-chief and head general  
Tạ Kim Hùng am I!

He pulls his green fan from behind his belt, opens it, and flutters it before himself, walking to the back of the stage, where he sits upon the red dais. His attendant soldier comes in and bows respectfully, saying that a visitor has come to the door claiming to be Tạ Ngọc Lân, Kim Hùng's father. At this, Kim Hùng is bewildered. He thought his father had died, he had heard the news from the 'crazy' Phương Cơ. He is angered at the thought that his father still might live, but, out of curiosity and desire to solve the issue, he permits the old man claiming to be his father to be allowed inside.

After the soldier leaves to bring in Ngọc Lân, Kim Hùng sits contemplating his circumstances. He explains to the audience that his sister had come earlier and delivered the news that his father had died. As he goes on to himself and the audience, he does not want to admit that that man could be his father and says, "That father is in no way my father!"<sup>34</sup>

Kim Hùng sits in fury on the dais with his back turned to the entrance. Ngọc Lân enters and takes a step towards Kim Hùng, tempted to attack him from behind. Then Ngọc Lân moves back and faces the audience, bowing low and saying, "Dạ?" ("Yes?"). This is a respectful way of answering, used to respond to the commands of an elder or someone of

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<sup>34</sup> In Vietnamese, "Cha ấy chẳng phải là cha."

higher rank. As Ngọc Lân stands facing the audience, Kim Hùng cannot see his face and only the audience is privy to the angry and expressive action of Ngọc Lân's eyes that contrast his still manner.

Kim Hùng uncrosses his legs and faces his father. Leaning forward with his hands mounted on his knees, he demands:

Thằng già nào lạ mặt  
Có phải là Tà Ngọc Lân?  
Lân đó, hả Lân?

What old fellow goes there with the stranger's face?  
Is it Tà Ngọc Lân?  
Lân huh? Is it Lân?

Kim Hùng says this last line as a cocky provocation designed to challenge his father. Of course, he recognized his father upon his entrance. Yet he refuses to address Ngọc Lân as a son should address his father. In Vietnamese, the equivalent of the pronouns "you" and "I" are determined by the relationship between the two speakers. In the case of Tà Ngọc Lân and Kim Hùng, Kim Hùng should call himself "child" ("con") and call Ngọc Lân "father" ("cha"). Even though he is a high-ranking mandarin, Kim Hùng will always be ranked lower than his father, who raised him to be a mandarin and was a mandarin himself. Yet throughout this scene, Kim Hùng linguistically denies his familial relation to his father and in fact, demands that his father treat him as a superior. Ngọc Lân responds to Kim Hùng's provocation in the affirmative, saying that he is indeed Tà Ngọc Lân, "father of Mr. Tà Kim Hùng."

Kim Hùng tells Ngọc Lân to sit down on the stool near him. Ngọc Lân picks up the stool and hesitates to sit. He spins around as if to hit Kim Hùng with the stool, then places it down in front of Kim Hùng and sits down on the stage in front of the stool, not on it. It is evident that both parties are greatly disturbed. Kim Hùng flaps his fan with contempt and Ngọc Lân seems barely able to converse with his son without trying to kill him. Both are trying to appear in control of themselves, but their fury seeps through. Kim Hùng commands Ngọc Lân to sit to one side of him then clarifies his "superior" position:

Ông Lân: Đây là dinh quan quyền phẩm tước

Không như nơi vách đất chuồng trâu  
Đã đến đây, phải quỳ gối phải cúi đầu

Bỏ nếp cũ, con đứng sau cha ngồi trước, nghe chưa?

This is the residence of a rightly entitled  
mandarin

Not the earthen hut of an ox  
You've come here, you must prostrate  
yourself and bow your head

According to the old routine, the child stands  
behind, the father sits before, do you hear  
me?

These words are an attempt to utterly humiliate Ngọc Lân. He addresses his father as "ông," a polite, but distant (in terms of affection) term used to address an elder who one does not know. Likewise, Ngọc Lân generally addresses his son with this term. In the last line of Kim Hùng's insult to his father ("According to the old routine, the child stands behind, the father sits before"), Kim Hùng means, metaphorically, that he is the father and Ngọc Lân is the child. This is clarified by Ngọc Lân's controlled response patronizing his son's arrogance:

Dạ, Lão biết rằng chứ!  
Ông là quan, là cha là mẹ  
Lão là dân, là cháu là con

Yes, of course this old man knows!  
You are the mandarin, the father and mother  
This old man is of the people, the grandchild  
and child

Meanwhile, Kim Hùng nods his head in agreement, flattering himself. His arrogance is then checked by Ngọc Lân's exclamation, "How you offend, sir!"

Author Phan Kế Bính's early twentieth Century publication about Vietnamese customs discusses the roles of mandarin and subject during a time in which Vietnam was still under a feudal system. He says, "our customs view the mandarin as the mother and father of the people" and discusses how this custom is sometimes abused by mandarins who do nothing to help the people and only help themselves ([1913-1914] 1987: 198, 200). If the mandarin is father and mother to the people, then that mandarin has an equal responsibility to care for the people just as the people must respect the mandarin.

Kim Hùng is suspicious of his father and accuses him of arriving there in order to hurt him. He asks where his sister is, the one who lied to him about his father's death. Ngọc Lân continues to play with Kim Hùng's superiority complex and acts as submissive as possible, bowing before him and always replying with the respectful and demeaning acknowledgement, 'Dạ, dạ' [See [Figure N](#)]. Through this scheme, he 'begs' Kim Hùng to accept him as his subject because he has been "thrown out" in his old age by Phương Cỗ, and accuses her of having run off with a bunch of crooks. Kim Hùng is greatly amused by this thought of his sister's lack of filial piety and insults her, laughing:

Cỗ, nó cũng bỏ ông, nó đi rồi à?  
Mồ...cha...mày Cỗ, đó là con mất dạy

That Cỗ, she's cast you away, huh?  
Damn (on her father's grave) that Cỗ, that sloth of a child has forgotten her teaching

It is ironic the way Kim Hùng stresses the words "Damn on her father's grave," while looking directly at his father. Ngọc Lân replies with greater irony and anger:

Đúng là đồ mất dạy, Mồ cha, đồ Cỗ!

Nó là con lạc chợ trôi sông

Chẳng khác kẻ bất trung thất hiếu!

True! She is a child who has lost her teaching, damn (on her father's grave), that Cỗ!

That one is a lost child from the drifting river market (one without origin, parentless)

No different from those who are disloyal and undutiful!

The irony appears as Ngọc Lân himself stresses the words "father's grave" while damning his daughter (meaning he is damning himself). Furthermore, he insults his own daughter as one who is parentless, thereby insulting himself. This is strong evidence of Ngọc Lân's conviction that he must carry the burden of his son's offense because his own (lack of) teaching his children has resulted in their misbehavior. Ngọc Lân's conviction of his own guilt as a father only endears him to the audience who knows him as a good man. It seems that Ngọc Lân already considers himself to be dead from humiliation. All of the words he uses to describe Phương Cỗ, who we know to be a good person, seem directed at Kim Hùng, who is too naive to infer the double meaning of his father's words. Ngọc Lân



Figure N: "You are the Mandarin, the Father and Mother  
This Old Man is of the People, the Grandchild and Child"

again throws his beard as he says the words "disloyal and undutiful" (as seen previously in Figure I).

As Ngọc Lân begs to become his son's servant, he is undergoing a social transformation from father to servant. He is also cutting his family bond to Kim Hùng so that he can kill him. This is the second time we see a 'social transformation' precede a battle scene in which the protagonist and antagonist are blood relatives. Once Ngọc Lân negates his relation to his son, Kim Hùng, killing him is not so complicated.

Kim Hùng considers accepting his father as his subject, not out of pity for the old, outcast man, but because he thinks his father may be able to train his troops in the martial arts that he knows. He commands Ngọc Lân to demonstrate his martial skill and the old man moves about the stage showing his remaining feats. Kim Hùng seems satisfied and agrees to let his father stay as a palace guard under the condition that Ngọc Lân will teach martial arts to his troops until the day they are victorious. Ngọc Lân fakes gratification and accepts this humiliating proposition.

At this point, Kim Hùng calls in the attendant soldier from stage right and orders him to explain the entrances and exits of Kim Hùng's palace to the new guard, Ngọc Lân. Kim Hùng departs after explaining that Ngọc Lân is forbidden to enter the private room of Kim Hùng, offstage right. The attendant soldier remains and gets a laugh out of the fact that the father of a mandarin has become his servant. The soldier tells Ngọc Lân all of the entrances into the palace in a quick rhythm, then leaves.

Ngọc Lân is overjoyed to have gained this information and wastes no time in running from entrance to entrance on all sides of the stage, 'opening' each door by sliding his hands across in front of him. Though he makes no obvious movement to show that he is lighting the place on fire, the stage lights turn to red as he opens the doors. After opening the last door, Ngọc Lân bows towards offstage left, and walks backwards, motioning in the good forces led by the Queen. They have been lying in wait outside Kim Hùng's palace and,

upon gaining entrance into the place, run across the stage and divide offstage in opposite directions. Their forces have the place surrounded. The red lights now flood the stage and blink.

Ta Kim Hùng, wearing only his white underclothes and a headband, runs out barefoot in a panic from his private room, offstage right. He swings a large blanket and dances around it [See [Figure Q](#)]. This blanket is the flames that he is trying to escape. He jumps up on the grey platform at the rear of the stage and throws the flame blanket behind. Though now without the blanket as a prop, Kim Hùng continues the action of dancing against the flames which seem to be engulfing him. He calls out, "Father! Father!" asking to be saved. This is the first time that he has addressed his father in the proper way and Kim Hùng seems almost pathetic in this position without his regal armor.

Ngọc Lân enters and the two begin to battle. In the flames, it seems difficult for them to see one another, but they manage to fight. At first it seems that Kim Hùng is the stronger, then it is Ngọc Lân [See [Figure P](#)]. As the two roll entangled on the stage, Phương Cờ is heard screaming from offstage. She scampers onstage with her back to the audience and on her knees. Moving across the stage on her knees, she swings her arms out in great circles of distress, screaming for her father and brother through the flames. A similar way of sidling across the stage on one's feet is described by Trần Văn Khê in his article, "Traditional Theater in Viet-Nam" as an indication of "suffering or deep emotion" (1971: 75). Phương Cờ's sidling on her knees produces the same effect, though perhaps it is more disturbing because she is on her knees.

Kim Hùng lays mortally wounded on the ground as Phương Cờ stands up and runs across the encompassing area, lost in the fire and smoke. Her father stands up calling out to his daughter and moves up onto the grey platform at the rear of the stage. His son crawls up to him, reaching out for his father. Phương Cờ, again on her knees, scampers



**Figure O: Young Rebel Tạ Kim Hùng is Trapped in the Flames**

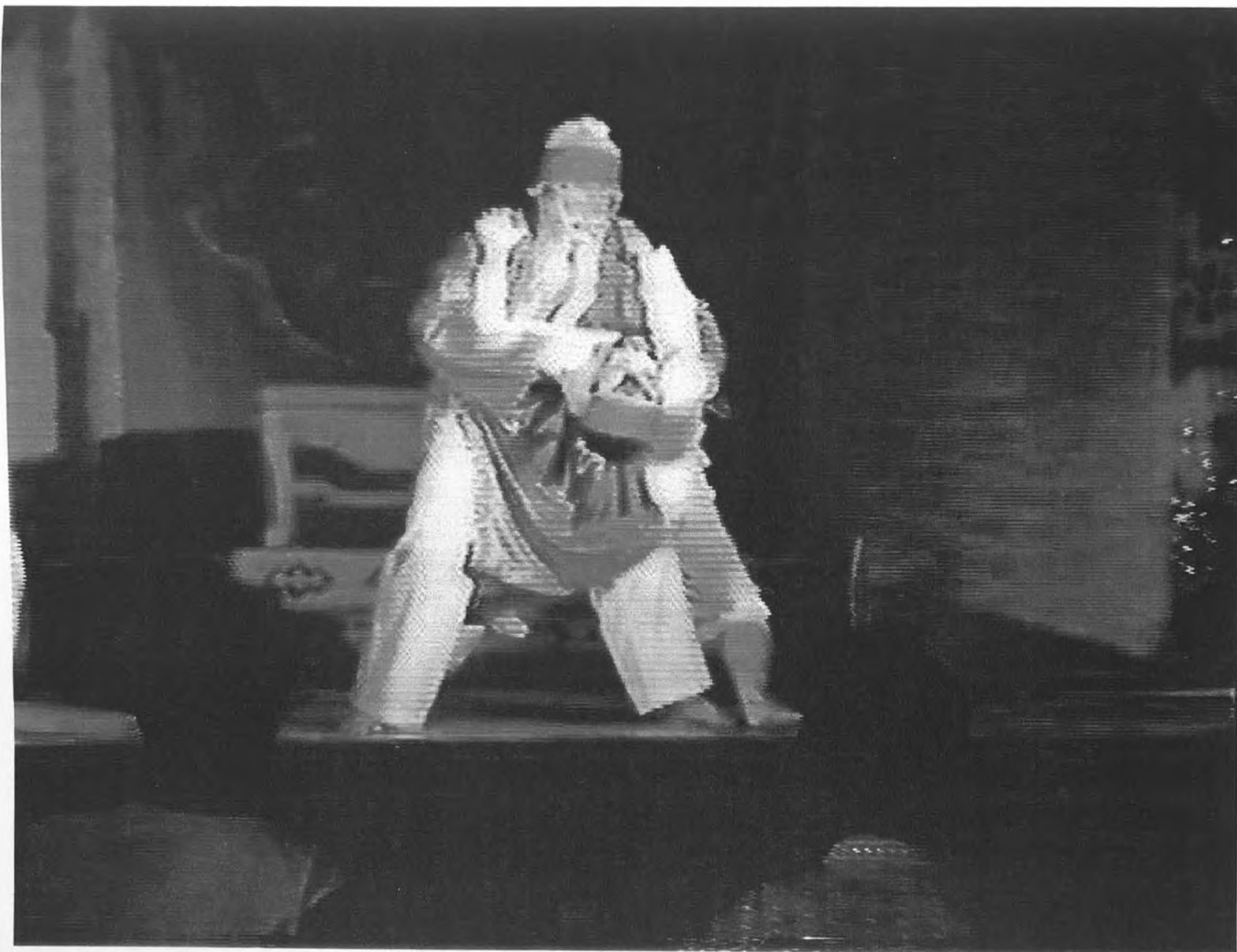


Figure P: Father and Son Fight

up to her father and brother. The scene ends with Ngọc Lân dying standing, supporting his dead son, as Phương Cờ reaches out to them [See Figure Q].





Figure Q: Father and Son Perish in the Flames as Daughter, Phuong Co, Reaches Out

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PERFORMANCE AS ITS OWN VERSION OF "THREE WOMEN IN DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM"

#### Comparison of the Performance Story to the Textual Version in Terms of "Action Events"

Through the description of the performance, we see how Vietnamese history, culture, and language are embodied as context in the performance. Tạ Ngọc Lân's bowing before his mandarin son in Scene IV and asking to become his servant is a social humiliation. Historically, we know that the mandarins of the Royal Court in Huế had power over the people ('The mandarin is the father and the mother of the people,' Phan Kế Bính [1913-1914] 1987: 198, 200). Yet when Tạ Kim Hùng, who yields this power, attempts to subjugate his father as the "of the people, the grandchild, the child," we feel a great sense of injustice against the father, Tạ Ngọc Lân. This moment in the performance makes use of historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts all at once. From this small exchange is presented a corrupt mandarin son and his shamed father. Kim Hùng's evil political ambitions override his concern for his father, thereby helping to justify Ngọc Lân's negation of familial relations to his son and his decision to kill him.

In addition, the aesthetic constraints of costume, singing style, movement, and music further illuminate the themes of the story performed. The costume and painted face of the character Kim Hùng are fierce and overbearing while Ngọc Lân's costume is simple and humble and his painted face looks more kind. The majestic vanity with which Kim Hùng

moves contrasts sharply with the humble stance of servitude to which Ngọc Lân bows down (See Figure N).

The contextual and aesthetic properties of the performance are what make the story come alive on the stage. This is the 'moment of actualization' of not only the text, but of all the contexts and constraints that act on a performance as well (Fabian 1990). Now I turn to the question of how this 'actualized' performance interacted with its present circumstances when it was staged. Why was it performed as "Highlights of" a story in the way that it was?

In order to understand why the director of the performance chose to enact certain events of the written text and ignore others, I must compare the events of the written story to those of the story of the performance. From this, we can see what events from the text were included in the performance and which ones were discarded. Then, we can look at the performance story within itself, in order to try to understand why Ms. Cẩm Vân, director of the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, chose to present the story in this way.

Scenes I and II of the performance encompass the "action events" from Scenes I-VI of the written work. The sequence of action in the performance leaves out many details of the written work, yet still maintains a logical flow. In my comparison, I define an "action event" as a moment in the story in which certain characters meet or one character meets with the audience. When referred to specifically, each "action event" will be labeled Event A, Event B and so on.

The sequence of "action events" charts the changing flow of character interaction. Thus, in the written script, when Tạ Ngọc Lân speaks privately to the audience about his suspicions of his son's activities, that is marked as one "action event." The progression from one "action event" to the next is determined by a change in the characters that appear on stage. If one character sits alone on stage, that is an "action event." When another

characters enters, a different "action event" begins. If both of these characters leave the stage and two new characters come out, there is a third "action event."

I have chosen to compare "action events" rather than scenes in Comparison Chart II. Most scenes from the play are made of multiple "action events." The division of scenes in the written work seems to be based on the subject of the action or reason for the action. For instance, in Scene I, Tạ Ngọc Lâm suspects his son of evil (Event A), then his daughter offers to go down to the Royal City to learn the truth (Event B). However, I arbitrarily divided the scenes for the performance based on the Events of the written work and the times at which the stage lights were dimmed between 'scenes.' For this reason, I cannot really compare scenes because my division of the performance's scenes is based on supposition. "Action events," on the other hand, are easy to define in a consistent way throughout both the text and the performance (Herrnstein Smith 1980: 232). The comparison of "action events" between the written story and the performance will support my effort to examine the performance as a "social transaction." This 'social transaction' occurred between the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, its director (Ms. La Thị Cẩm Vân) and the audience on April 26, 1998 (1980: 232).

As the text of the play is written in script form, it notes the entrance and exit of characters as if it were a staged event. Because the written script is known to have served as a significant constraint on the performance, it is important to understand how the script was used in performance. This can be attained by a comparison of the "action events" of each story, listed in the order that they are presented to the audience. A comparison of the "action events" of the written work to those of the performance shows how the staged performance is both a condensation of the previous story and its own, different tale. While the performance story has a strong relation to the textual realization of the story, this performance *distinguishes itself from* the story of the text by presenting a new story.

CHART II: Comparison of Action Sequences in Text and Performance  
Version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom"

| Performance Story: "Highlights of..."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Action Event | Story through the Written Work                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>A</b>     | <p><b>Scene I: Tạ Ngọc Lân's Suspicion</b></p> <p>Soon after the King's death, retired mandarin Tạ Ngọc Lân suspects his mandarin son Tạ Kim Hùng of treachery and plans to go down to the Royal City to learn the truth.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>B</b>     | <p><b>Phường Cở's Offer</b></p> <p>Phường Cở offers to go to the Royal City in her father's stead, disguised as a crazy woman.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>C</b>     | <p><b>Scene II: Văn Hoán and Kim Hùng's Scheme</b></p> <p>At the Royal Court, highest-ranking mandarin Triệu Văn Hoán schemes with mandarin Tạ Kim Hùng to frame the Queen for infidelity and pregnancy by her lover. Her conviction for this crime will cause her execution and make way for Triệu Văn Hoán's rise to the throne.</p>                                                                           |
| <p><b>Scene I : Phường Cở at the Gate</b></p> <p>Phường Cở appears at the gate of the Royal Palace in the guise of a crazy woman, trying to learn whether her brother, Tạ Kim Hùng, is working to overthrow the kingdom. She meets the two gate sentries and tries to get through, but they eventually make her leave.</p> | <b>D</b>     | <p><b>Phường Cở at the Gate</b></p> <p>Outside the Royal Palace, Phường Cở meets the soldiers that guard the entrance gate and pretends to be crazy, then leaves. She seems to be crazy from sorrow over the death of her father and the news eventually gets back to Kim Hùng. (I might be wrong about Phường Cở pretending her father is dead, but somehow, Kim Hùng receives news of his supposed death.)</p> |

**Performance Story: "Highlights of..."    Action Event    Story through Written Work**

|  |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>E</b> | <p><b>Kim Hùng Plants the Love Letter</b></p> <p>Kim Hùng comes up to the guards of the Palace gate from the outside pretending to be a 'commoner.' He acts disheveled and nervous and the sentries do not recognize him as a high-ranking mandarin. The guards block his entrance into the Palace and, in his haste to run away, he 'unknowingly' drops the letter he is carrying. The guards pick it up to read it, but they can only make out the Queen's name.</p> |
|  | <b>F</b> | <p><b>Ly Khắc Minh Reads the Letter</b></p> <p>Ly Khắc Minh, second highest-ranking mandarin, happens by and the guards tell him of the strange man who approached them and then dropped the letter. They give the paper to Ly Khắc Minh to read. The love letter, intended for the Queen, is apparently written by the Queen's lover and details their night of passion on a boat during which the Queen became pregnant.</p>                                         |
|  | <b>G</b> | <p><b>Phượng Cờ Makes Ly Khắc Minh Think Again</b></p> <p>The 'crazy' Phượng Cờ appears on stage again and meets Ly Khắc Minh. She sings a patriotic song about the benevolence of the ruling dynasty and heaven's mandate that this dynasty should rule for a long time. She then disappears.</p>                                                                                                                                                                     |
|  | <b>H</b> | <p><b>Ly Khắc Minh Considers</b></p> <p>Ly Khắc Minh, moved by Phượng Cờ's song, remains and considers the situation. His intuition, which mistrusts this "love letter," struggles against the evidence that the two sentries witnessed the lover coming to the gate. He brings the letter before the Royal Court.</p>                                                                                                                                                 |

**Performance Story: "Highlights of..." Action Event Story through Written Work**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>I</b> | <p><b>Scene III: Queen Imprisoned/<br/>Triệu Văn Hoán Takes the Throne</b></p> <p>In the Royal Palace, the evil Triệu Văn Hoán (highest-ranking mandarin) and others view the letter and determine that the Queen must be guilty. Ly Khắc Minh, however, mistrusts this conviction and beseeches the Court to imprison the Queen until they hold a trial, rather than executing her immediately. Until her trial, Triệu Văn Hoán will assume the throne.</p>                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>J</b> | <p><b>Phượng Cờ Fears Some Evil</b></p> <p>Phuong Cờ, still outside the Palace gate, overhears Triệu Văn Hoán's announcement calling all the troops into the Palace to begin an investigation, but she does not know why there will be an investigation.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p><b>Phượng Cờ Learns the Truth</b></p> <p>A soldier passes through the Palace Gate, apparently in a rush to catch up with a group that left somewhere without him. The 'crazy' Phượng Cờ pulls him back and insists that he tell her what has been going on inside the Palace. After conflict between the two, he tells her that the Queen, pregnant by a man other than the King, will be executed in ten days. He then rides off. Phượng Cờ rushes offstage to tell her father.</p> | <b>K</b> | <p><b>Phượng Cờ Learns the Truth</b></p> <p>Phượng Cờ waits outside of the Palace Gate until a soldier rides out. She detains him and threatens that she will not release him until he tells her why the troops held a meeting in the Palace. Eventually, he explains that the Queen's pregnancy is the product of a love affair, and the child is not the son of the King. The Queen, he says, has been thrown in prison and will be executed in ten days. Her and the child's death seems inevitable.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>L</b> | <p><b>Phượng Cờ Informs Her Father</b></p> <p>Phượng Cờ rushes home and shares the news with her father, Tạ Ngọc Lân. Ngọc Lân praises his daughter as a hero for her work.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

**Performance Story: "Highlights of..." Action Event Story through Written Work**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Scene II: Tạ Ngọc Lân and Tử Cung Plan</b><br/>Tạ Ngọc Lân enters the stage armed with a stick for battle and explains to Triệu Tử Cung that the Queen will be executed shortly because of the evil treachery of Tử Cung's father, Triệu Văn Hoán, and Ngọc Lân's son, Kim Hùng. Tử Cung discards his monk's robe, takes up a battle ax, and the two head for the Royal Palace to rescue the Queen.</p> | <b>M</b> | <p><b>Scene IV: Tạ Ngọc Lân and Tử Cung Plan</b><br/>Tạ Ngọc Lân has decided that something must be done to save the Queen and goes to see Triệu Tử Cung, the young man who devoted himself to a Buddhist monastery after disagreeing with life as a mandarin under his father, the evil Triệu Văn Hoán. Tạ Ngọc Lân informs Tử Cung of the plot to kill the Queen. Tử Cung decides to resign from his monk-hood and go with Ngọc Lân to the Royal City to rescue the Queen.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>N</b> | <p><b>Scene V: Lý Khắc Minh Worries</b><br/>At the home of good mandarin Lý Khắc Minh sits at home worrying that the Queen will die.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>O</b> | <p><b>Xuân Hương's Proposal</b><br/>Xuân Hương overhears her father's (Lý Khắc Minh's worries) and enters. She proposes to disguise herself as the Queen and be executed, saving the Queen's life.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>P</b> | <p><b>Bích Hà's Decision</b><br/>Xuân Hương's maid-in-waiting, Bích Hà, overhears this proposal and offers to do the job herself. After a debate, Bích Hà insists that she will impersonate the Queen and be executed.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Q</b> | <p><b>Queen's Rescue #1</b><br/>Lý Khắc Minh, Xuân Hương, and Bích Hà go to the prison and Bích Hà takes the Queen's place. The three say their mournful farewells to Bích Hà. Xuân Hương leads the Queen to escape to the mountain.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>R</b> | <p><b>Kim Hùng Takes the Queen to Execution</b><br/>The evil Kim Hùng comes to take the Queen (Bích Hà impersonating the Queen) to be executed. Lý Khắc Minh pleads with him to wait.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

**Performance Story: "Highlights of..." Action Event Story through Written Work**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>S</b> | <b>Tu Cung Witnesses the Queen Leave Prison</b><br>Tư Cung witnesses the Queen's (Bích Hà's) removal from the prison on her way to the execution grounds and prepares for his and Tạ Ngọc Lân's attack to rescue her.                                                 |
| <b>Queen's Rescue</b><br>Tạ Ngọc Lân and Triệu Tư Cung hide at the back of the stage as the Queen prisoner and her two ladies-in-waiting (Xuân Hương and Bích Hà) are escorted across the stage from the prison to the execution grounds. | <b>T</b> | <b>Scene VI: Queen's Rescue #2</b><br>On the bank of a river, the Queen (really Bích Hà) stands waiting for execution. Ly Khắc Minh stands by her. Tư Cung appears and frees her. Kim Hùng sees that the Queen has been freed and debates whether to chase after her. |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>U</b> | <b>Bích Hà- Safe</b><br>Bích Hà, Tư Cung, and Ngọc Lân meet up again and congratulate each other on the escape.                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>V</b> | <b>Kim Hùng and Triệu Văn Hoán Think</b><br>The two disloyal mandarins discuss what to do now that they have lost their prisoner, the Queen.                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>W</b> | <b>Ngọc Lân Passes By</b><br>Ngọc Lân passes by a soldier guarding the palace of Tạ Kim Hùng                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>X</b> | <b>The Guard Reports</b><br>The palace guard reports to Tạ Kim Hùng and Triệu Văn Hoán that he saw three people pass by.                                                                                                                                              |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Y</b> | <b>Ngọc Lân, Tư Cung and Bích Hà Run By</b><br>These three good characters debate the strengths of their opponents while still scampering through their territory.                                                                                                    |

**Performance Story: "Highlights of..."**    **Action Event**    **Story through Written Work**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Queen's Rescue, continued...</b></p> <p>...As the shackled Queen stumbles across the stage, Kim Hùng marches in behind them and is confronted by Tử Cung. The two battle shortly, then Ngọc Lâm takes over as Tử Cung escorts the prisoners off stage to safety. Ngọc Lâm and Kim Hùng fight briefly, then Kim Hùng runs away.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p><b>Z</b></p>   | <p><b>Tử Cung Escapes Death</b></p> <p>Tử Cung and Ngọc Lâm hide, waiting for their opponents. First, Tử Cung and Kim Hùng have a brief confrontation, then Ngọc Lâm saves Tử Cung by fighting with Kim Hùng for a moment. Kim Hùng runs back to his house in fear and Ngọc Lâm and the group head for the mountain. Kim Hùng does not know that he was fighting his father because it was too dark and he thinks his father is already dead.</p>                                                                                                                                                             |
| <p><b>Scene III: Ceremony for Tạ Ngọc Lâm</b></p> <p>The good forces, consisting of the Queen, Tạ Ngọc Lâm, Ly Khắc Minh, Triệu Tử Cung, Phương Cờ, Xuân Hưởng, and Bích Hà, are gathered at the mountain. Tạ Ngọc Lâm announces his plan for killing his son, which involves him gaining entrance into his son's home, then secretly letting the good troops in and setting the place on fire. The group holds a ceremony in honor of the life of Tạ Ngọc Lâm as Phương Cờ mourns the impending deaths of both her father and her brother, Kim Hùng. Tạ Ngọc Lâm sets out for the Royal City once again.</p> | <p><b>A A</b></p> | <p><b>Scene VII: Ceremony for Tạ Ngọc Lâm</b></p> <p>The good forces, consisting of the Queen, Tạ Ngọc Lâm, Ly Khắc Minh, Triệu Tử Cung, Phương Cờ, Xuân Hưởng, and Bích Hà, are gathered at the mountain. Tạ Ngọc Lâm announces his plan for killing his son, which involves him gaining entrance into his son's home, then secretly letting the good troops in and setting the place on fire. The group holds a ceremony in honor of the life of Tạ Ngọc Lâm as Phương Cờ mourns the impending deaths of both her father and her brother, Kim Hùng. Tạ Ngọc Lâm sets out for the Royal City once again.</p> |
| <p><b>Scene IV: Kim Hùng Brags</b></p> <p>Kim Hùng, at home, introduces himself to the audience and describes his glories.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p><b>B B</b></p> | <p><b>Scene VIII: Kim Hùng Brags</b></p> <p>Kim Hùng, at home, introduces himself to the audience and describes his glories.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

**Performance Story: "Highlights of..."**    **Action Event**    **Story through Written Work**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tạ Ngọc Lân Becomes<br/>Kim Hùng's Servant</b></p> <p>Tạ Ngọc Lân arrives at his evil son's house and asks to become his son's servant, pretending to be outcast by his daughter and Kim Hung's sister, Phương Cờ. Kim Hùng is surprised that his father is not dead and Ngọc Lân explains that his sister, Phương Cờ, went crazy and told him a false rumor about his father's death. Kim Hùng asks Ngọc Lân to display his martial talents and, after determining that he is still a capable fighter, allows his father to stay as a servant on the condition that he train Kim Hung's troops in martial arts. In this way, Ngọc Lân gains entrance into his son's home.</p> | <b>CC</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tạ Ngọc Lân Becomes<br/>Kim Hùng's Servant</b></p> <p>Tạ Ngọc Lân arrives at his evil son's house and asks to become his son's servant, pretending to be outcast by his daughter and Kim Hung's sister, Phương Cờ. Kim Hùng is surprised that his father is not dead and Ngọc Lân explains that his sister, Phương Cờ, went crazy and told him a false rumor about his father's death. Kim Hùng asks Ngọc Lân to display his martial talents and, after determining that he is still a capable fighter, allows his father to stay as a servant on the condition that he train Kim Hung's troops in martial arts. In this way, Ngọc Lân gains entrance into his son's home.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Attendant Soldier Gives Directions</b></p> <p>The attendant soldier explains the ins and outs of Kim Hùng's house to the new 'servant,' Tạ Ngọc Lân</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>DD</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Attendant Soldier Gives Directions</b></p> <p>The attendant soldier explains the ins and outs of Kim Hùng's house to the new 'servant,' Tạ Ngọc Lân</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tạ Ngọc Lân Opens the Doors</b></p> <p>Ngọc Lân opens all doorways to make way for the Good Forces' entrance.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>EE</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tạ Ngọc Lân Opens the Doors</b></p> <p>Ngọc Lân opens all doorways to make way for the Good Forces' entrance.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Final Battle</b></p> <p>Ngọc Lân opens the doors of Kim Hùng's residence to allow the good troops to pass through its outer fortification and sets the place afire with himself inside. Kim Hùng, also trapped inside, is confronted by his father and the two fight and perish in the flames. Phương Cờ, in utter distress, reaches for her dead father and brother.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>FF</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Final Battle</b></p> <p>Ngọc Lân opens the doors of Kim Hùng's residence to allow the good troops to pass through its outer fortification and sets the place afire with himself inside. Kim Hùng, also trapped inside, is confronted by his father, Ngọc Lân, and the two fight and perish in the flames. The good forces break into the house too late in order to save Ngọc Lân's life. Ngọc Lân dies standing and is carried off by the good troops. A national holiday is declared by the Queen in honor of his life.</p>                                                                                                                                                  |

From this comparison, it is evident that many of the "action events" told in the written work are not used in the performance. In fact, out of approximately thirty-two written "events," only eleven are acted out in performance. These eleven performed events make up the entire staged performance. Although the eleven events as seen on stage are acted out slightly differently than in the written events (ie., by using different words, songs, etc.), the same general events and actions occur. Compare between the performance and the written work (the left and right sides of Comparison Chart II, respectively) the events labelled *D*, *K*, *M*, *T*, *Z*, *AA*, *BB*, *CC*, *DD*, *EE*, and *FF*. These are the eleven "action events" which occur both in the written work and the performance. In each of these events, a similar, and somewhat equitable course of action takes place between the written text and the staged enactment. In this way, the differences between the written work and the performance lie mostly in the *omission* of certain information or events, rather than in a *change* in the information presented.

These omissions are evident on multiple levels, ranging from the elimination of entire events down to specific lines. If the comparison between the written work and the performance is narrowed to the actual lines of the characters, there are not only omissions, but additions of sung or spoken lines and whole songs or jokes. Despite these variations, the larger events and their subsequent courses of action remain intact. In other words, the information presented to the reader or audience member in the written text and the performance of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" might be seen as almost the same, with the performance merely being a simplified version of the written work. On the other hand, the performance might be seen as a story independent of a prior written version, if the viewer has no knowledge of the textual realization of the story.

### Choice and Consideration in the Performance of a New Version of the Story

Let us now look at the performance in two lights, one which assumes a relation to the text, and another which ignores it. In another way, how does the performed story appear if we know all about the prior textual version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom?" What story do we see if we know nothing of the text from which the performance originated? The purpose of this comparison is to try to understand why certain "action events" were chosen for performance over others.

By comparing the story of the performance *in light of* its textual story with the performed story *apart from* the textual version, we shall see that the story performed *distinguishes itself from* the story of the text. This comparison will show that, by choosing specific "action events" over others to become "highlights" of a performance story, the acting troupe ultimately *transformed* the story from its textual version.

Because of the omission of many events of the written story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," the performance story must be changed slightly in order to make the "action event" pieces of the performance glue together in a logical whole. These very small changes between the written story and the performed version are only evident to one who knows the textual story well. If one knows the text well, the story of the performance is not that of the text. Nor is it simply "Highlights of..." a previous version of a story.

The different stories appear in the way that the shared "action events" Z and AA are actualized in the performance and the text. These "action events" contain the "Queen's Rescue (#2)" by Tạ Ngọc Lâm and Tư Cung (Event Z) and the following Event AA, in which the Queen and both teams of Good Forces stand united at the mountain camp. If one expects to see the story of the text in the performance, he/she will be surprised to find an inconsistency here. However, if one does not know the text, there is no inconsistency in the story performed.

Let us look at the "action events" in the performance that lead up to the inconsistency between the Queen's rescue (Event Z) and the Queen standing at the mountain with the Good Forces (Event AA). In this comparison, I shall present each of these "action events" first as if it is given that the performance is related to its prior textual story. Secondly, I shall present the same "action event" as if it has no relation to the written story. This comparison shall show how the performance has a story that distinguishes itself from the text's story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom."

With Scene I of the performance, we see a woman who is pretending to be crazy, trying to fool two guards to the Royal Palace into letting her enter (Event D). Based on the textual version, we know her to be *Phường Cở*. We also know that *Phường Cở* is on a mission for her father to learn whether her brother is trying to overthrow the kingdom since the king's recent death.

In Event K, *Phường Cở* stops an attendant soldier and pressures him to tell her what is going on inside the Citadel. He reveals that the Queen, pregnant by her lover and not the king, will be executed in ten days. Based on the written version, the Queen is carrying in her womb the rightful heir to the throne, fathered by the king before his death. The Queen has been falsely accused by *Tạ Kim Hùng* and *Triệu Văn Hoán* after *Kim Hùng* forged a love letter from the invented 'lover' and planted it in the hands of the Palace Guards. Because *Văn Hoán* is next in line to the throne after the prince, we know that this is *Kim Hùng* and *Văn Hoán*'s scheme to usurp the throne by causing the pregnant Queen's execution.

Without this textual basis, however, it is a shock that the Queen will die. This information is the reason that *Phường Cở* has been sneaking around the stage, at the gates of the Royal Citadel. On stage, *apart from* the preceding text, we learn only through *Phường Cở* that the Queen is falsely accused. Yet *Phường Cở* does not explain the prior textual version of the story, including how the Queen came to be accused or how *Kim*

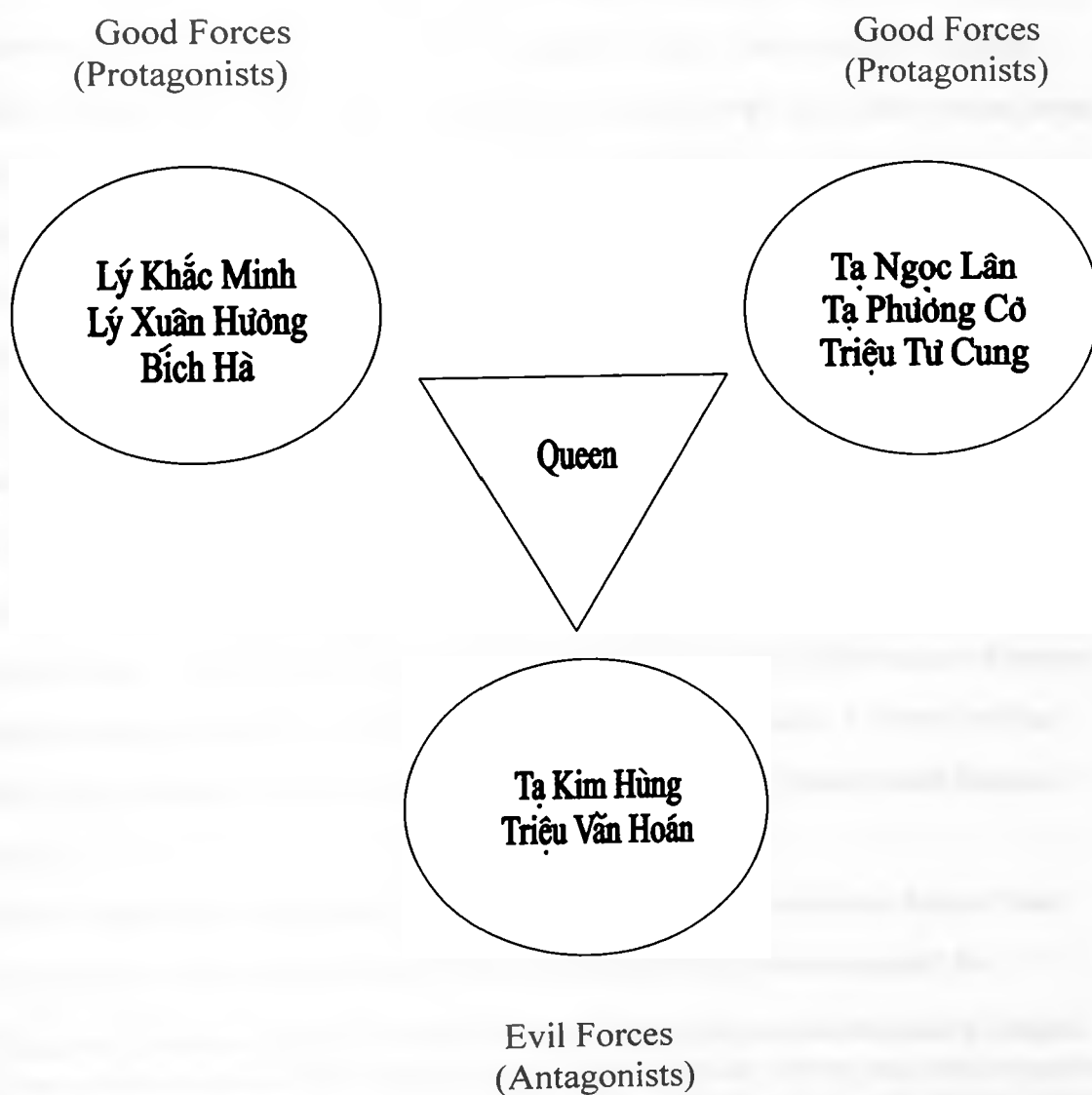
Hùng is involved. The staged version does not mention that good mandarin Lý Khắc Minh was cornered into imprisoning the Queen in order to gain time to think and that the evil Văn Hoán has now temporarily been placed on the throne. Though Triệu Văn Hoán's character never appears in the performance, his presence as the Evil Forces who have taken the throne is evident through the character Kim Hùng's status as commander-in-chief.

In Scene II of the performance (Event *M*), old man Ngọc Lâm meets the young monk, Tử Cung, and convinces him to give up monkhood in order to help him save the kingdom. The staged version of the story does not explain that Ngọc Lâm went to see Tử Cung at the monastery because it is Tử Cung's father who is scheming with Ngọc Lâm's son, Kim Hùng. Naturally Tử Cung would want to help because he used to be a military mandarin until he disagreed with his father's ambitious politics and became a monk.

In Events *T* and *Z*, Ngọc Lâm and Tử Cung rescue the Queen as she is led across the stage towards her execution. At this point in the performance, the staged story distinguishes itself from its prior textual version. In the written version, Tử Cung and Ngọc Lâm rescue only one person who they believe is the imprisoned Queen about to be executed. However, after rescuing her, Tử Cung and Ngọc Lâm learn that the woman they rescued was not the Queen, but Bích Hà disguised as the Queen. This is the point in the textual version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" where one party of Good Forces (Tạ Ngọc Lâm and Triệu Tử Cung) learns that they have unknowingly been working alongside another group of Good Forces (Bích Hà, Lý Khắc Minh, and Lý Xuân Hương) (See Chart III). Ngọc Lâm and Tử Cung find that the other group of Good Forces had already rescued the Queen before them, and that Bích Hà was prepared to die in the Queen's place.

Yet the "action event" of the Queen's rescue is presented quite differently in the performed version of the story. In Events *T* and *Z* of the performance, Ngọc Lâm and Tử Cung crouch in the shadows at the rear of the stage. Then, the shackled Queen is pushed

CHART III:            Makeup of Protagonist and Antagonist Forces  
                              in the Textual Version of “Three Women  
                              in Defense of the Kingdom”



out onto the stage, followed by two ladies-in-waiting, who are also shackled (See [Figure G](#)). These ladies-in-waiting are never introduced by name in the performance and they have no individual spoken lines. They represent Xuân Hương and Bích Hà because these are the only other female characters in the play besides the Queen and Phương Cơ.<sup>35</sup> In this way, all three female characters who, in the textual version, were involved in the substitution of Bích Hà for the Queen (Event Q) appear on stage at once as three prisoners. Therefore, the performance version implies that there was *no substitution* in which the Queen was replaced by Bích Hà. The staged story presents only one Queen's rescue rather than the two rescues of the written version. Thus, when Tử Cung and Ngọc Lân jump out from the shadows at the rear of the stage, they are rescuing the *real* Queen, Xuân Hương, and Bích Hà. The work of the other party of Good Forces (Bích Hà, Lý Khắc Minh, and Xuân Hương) is inactive in the performance version.

In the subsequent scene (Scene III), all of the members of both teams of Good Forces meet on the mountain with the Queen standing in the center (See [Figure H](#)). According to the textual version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," the real Queen in this scene should be a different person than the "Queen" (Bích Hà disguised as the Queen) of the prior scene. The actor who played the Queen in the last scene should be one of the two women standing beside the real Queen in this scene on the mountain. Yet this is not the case in the performance which shows the same actor playing the Queen in both Events Z and AA.

Why is there this inconsistency between the text and the performance in Events T and AA, the Queen's rescue and the Queen with the Good Forces at the mountain? In

<sup>35</sup> Though the performance presents the story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" in a slightly different way than the textual version, the same characters (even characters with very small roles) are used in both versions. The performance does not present all of the characters of the written story. However, it does not add any different characters, such as two new ladies-in-waiting. Therefore these women must be Xuân Hương and Bích Hà.

consideration of the story of the text, the performance is inconsistent. However, when viewed *apart from* the textual version, the staged version of the story makes sense. The Queen and her two ladies-in-waiting are rescued in Event *T*. The Queen and these same two women appear with her in the next, Event *AA*, at the mountain camp with the Good Forces.

If Ms. Cẩm Vân, the troupe director, had chosen to enact the story in these two "action events" to be the same as the text, it would have disrupted the logic of the story of the performance. If Events *Z* and *AA* had been acted out *according to* the text, we would see Bích Hà as the Queen in Event *Z* and the real Queen as the Queen in the next Event *AA*. Yet the viewer who has no knowledge of the text would be confused by this change of actors playing the Queen's role which is not accounted for in any other event of the performance. One who expects to see *highlights* of the story performed according to the textual version might appreciate the subtle significance if one actor played the Queen in one event (meaning Bích Hà), and a different actor played the Queen in the following event. However, when looking at the story in performance apart from the textual story, this subtle change would only be confusing.

In reducing the performance time of the play, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" from three afternoons to approximately one hour, large parts of the textual version of the story were cut to make "highlights." Yet in order to maintain a cohesive logic to the staged story "Highlights of Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," small parts within the performed "action events" of the preceding textual version were changed. Tạ Ngọc Lân and Tử Cung rescued the actual Queen in the performance, even though they rescued Bích Hà disguised as the Queen in the text. If, in the performance, Ngọc Lân and Tử Cung had rescued Bích Hà instead of the real Queen, the performance would have had to account for the Queen's rescue #1, described in Event *Q* of Comparison Chart II. The

performance would have had to explain why the "Queen" turned out to be Bích Hà. The Queen's rescue #1 involves a whole side of the story which is left out in the performance.

In order to live in the present times, a performance troupe must consider the expectations and time schedules of its audiences, as well as its own economy. If the performance troupe does not expect the audience to understand a large portion of the words and symbols in the performance anyway, there is no sense in dragging it out for three days. In addition, who has time to attend a three-day performance? The average "weekend" in Vietnam is one day, usually Sunday. During my time in Vietnam, I watched numerous musical, theatrical, or movie performances, most of which took place on a Saturday night or a Sunday. The majority of these performances were of a length comparable to those in the U.S., ranging from one to three hours, regardless of the genre.

This performance was staged because I requested it. Ms. La Thị Cẩm Vân, director of the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, agreed to my request because she knew of my interest in Tuồng after studying Tuồng costumes under her the prior year. However, Ms. Cẩm Vân's troupe did not make this version of the play especially for me, but had performed the story in a similar way before. On the day that I requested to see a play, she told me that it would be no problem, they were already prepared. The idea of performing a play as "highlights of" a prior version was not created specifically for me, but for other audiences to which Tuồng is now performed. Ms. Cẩm Vân's use of this condensation of the play is out of a pre-conceived consideration of who her audiences will be.

In this way, Ms. Cẩm Vân's troupe is always involved in a "social transaction" with its perceived audience when creating a staged performance (Herrnstein Smith 1980: 232). Thus the performance which was put on for me was a "function of the variable set of conditions in response to which [it was] performed" (1980: 232). Because the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts had apparently used the concept of "*Highlights of Three*

Women in Defense of the Kingdom" before my request to see a play, I know that this performance cut from the textual version in this way was more than a response to *me* and the "variable conditions" that I represented as their audience. In fact, Ms. Cẩm Vân announced at the performance that this version was first performed 36 years ago. Ms. Cẩm Vân's choice to use this version of the story and direct its performance in the way that she did was out of consideration for the audience for which her troupe was performing and the points of the play which she felt to be fundamental.

According to Ms. Cẩm Vân, these modern Tuồng audiences consist mainly of small groups of "researchers (both Vietnamese and international), artists, and foreign tourists," who undoubtedly have varying levels of knowledge about Tuồng (personal communication, 4/29/97). Of the many foreign tourists who come to Vietnam, most do not speak Vietnamese and might attend something such as a "traditional Tuồng performance" as part of their cultural "experience," without any prior knowledge of the art. I myself had very little prior knowledge of the play when I saw it. Performing condensed versions of longer Tuồng stories may better serve the attention spans of modern audiences, especially those of foreign tourists who do not understand much anyhow.

From 1997 to 1998, I attended two other performances by the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts in addition to the performance I personally arranged. Both of them consisted of a variety show of Royal Dance, another specialty of the Troupe, and both were directed at foreign audiences (French tourist groups). Service to foreigners may be of increasing concern to performing arts troupes such as the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts, which can expect to make more money from foreign audiences than from Vietnamese audiences. Performances of this kind might be booked as regular events for tour groups and could serve as a large source of income for a performing arts troupe.

Why did Ms. Cẩm Vân choose this performance "version" of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" (Herrnstein 1980: 233)? By choosing for her troupe to perform these

"highlights" of this play, Ms. Cẩm Vân was, in effect, choosing what she felt to be the "basic story," or the most important story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" (1980: 218). It is her version of the "basic story." A further examination of the "action events" used in performance will help us understand what themes of the textual version were most "basic" or important, according to Ms. Cẩm Vân's version. This will show what she felt was exemplary in the play that she chose for me.

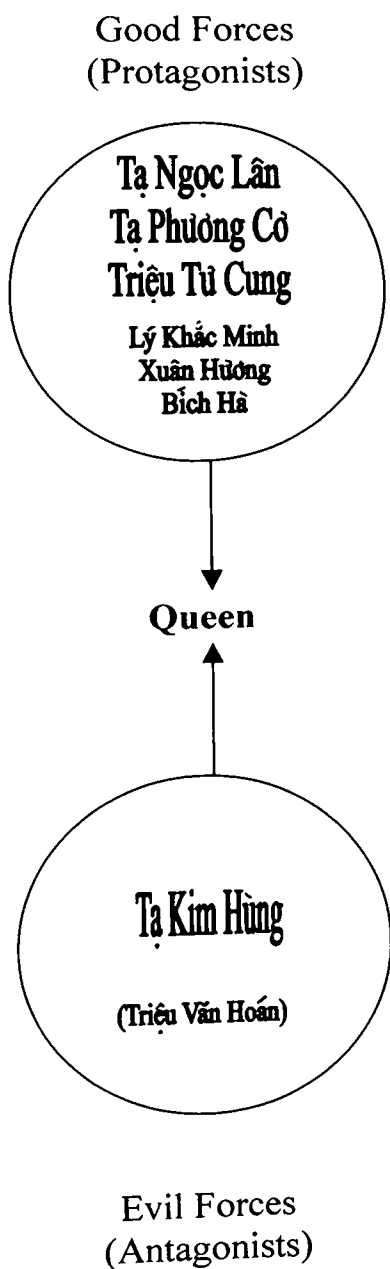
### The Performance As A Dialogue Between Good and Evil

Now I shall more carefully examine how the textual version of the story was cut to make the performance version and what themes and action the resulting version emphasized. The eleven "action events" used in the performance revolve around three groups of characters taken from the textual version. The three groups of characters in the written story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" consist of two groups of Good Forces (protagonists) acting against one group of Evil Forces (antagonists). The makeup of these forces is depicted in Chart III. One Good Forces group contains Lý Khắc Minh, Lý Xuân Hưởng, and Bích Hà. The other Good Forces group is made of Tạ Ngọc Lân, Tạ Phương Cờ and Triệu Tử Cung. The Evil Forces from the text consists of Tạ Kim Hùng and Triệu Văn Hoán. In the performance, however, only one group of Good Forces carries the most important action of the performance and the Evil Forces are simplified (See Chart IV).

The Good Forces containing Tạ Ngọc Lân, Tạ Phương Cờ, and Triệu Tử Cung perform all of the action in the "action events" of the performance, though they may be supported by characters from the other group of Good Forces or in conflict with the Evil Forces. The Evil Forces in the performance are represented by only one person, Tạ Kim Hùng. The evil character Triệu Văn Hoán does not appear at all in the performance, though he is mentioned. What happens to character interaction in following this simplified character structure of the performance?

In the textual version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," two groups of Good Forces act independently of each other against the Evil Forces for most of the story (as in Chart III). Only after Ngọc Lân and Tử Cung (representing one Good Forces group) realize that they have rescued Bích Hà of the other Good Forces group, and not the Queen, do these two protagonist forces unite (Event Z). From that point on, the collective Good Forces are led by Tạ Ngọc Lân to defeat the Evil Forces. Yet in the performance, the story

CHART IV: Makeup of Protagonist and Antagonist Forces in the Performance of “Highlights of Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom”



of two groups of protagonists acting independently to save the Queen is not told. The performance only presents the story of the Good Forces of Tạ Ngọc Lân acting independently, then acting with the support of the other Good Forces (shown in Chart IV).

The eleven Events *D, K, M, T, Z, AA, BB, CC, DD, EE, and FF* are the "action events" of the textual version that are used in the performance. These eleven "action events" contain all the heroes of the text. Tạ Ngọc Lân carries the essential action of the play by confronting the Evil Forces represented by his son. In this way, the performance version *highlights* the theme of confrontation between a loyal father and his disloyal son. The conflict of good with evil is compounded by the fact that the "good" is related by blood to this "evil." The message of a righteous kingdom supported by good subjects is characteristic of a *Tuồng* play. This version of the play consistently represents *Tuồng* in this light.

Why weren't the "highlights" of the story the events of the *other* group of Good Forces against the Evil Forces? For instance, if the director Ms. Cẩm Vân chose not to focus on the story of Tạ Ngọc Lân against his evil son and instead focused on the story of the Queen's rescue #1, the antagonists would probably have won and the effective delivery of the play's theme would have been diminished. The team of protagonists consisting of the characters Lý Khắc Minh, his daughter Xuân Hương and the lady-in-waiting, Bích Hà, were only capable of rescuing the Queen as they did in the text. Beyond that, they had no martial power to conquer the Evil Forces that still controlled the throne. According to the written version, after this team of Good Forces rescues the Queen from execution, there remains the problem of the evil Triệu Văn Hoán and Kim Hùng still controlling the throne.

A greater force is required to exterminate the Evil Forces and restore the sanctity of the kingdom. That force is Tạ Ngọc Lân, who fathered the evil character, Tạ Kim Hùng. Therefore, it is understandable that Ms. Cẩm Vân chose the story of Tạ Ngọc Lân and his son, Kim Hùng, as the element of the story, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom."

By focusing on the story of Tạ Ngọc Lân's Good Forces and his son Kim Hùng's Evil Forces, the complicated plot of three interacting parties depicted in the written text is simplified to a *dialogue* between two forces, Good and Evil, in the performance (Compare Charts III and IV). This dialogue makes the performance easier for one who does not know the previous textual version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" to understand. In addition, this dialogue between a protagonist and antagonist maintains the moralistic emphasis of the Tuồng play while simplifying its plot to fit the time constraints of modern expectations. The audience still walks away from the play with a sense of a righteous king/kingdom and good people who defend that righteousness. Nowadays, this work is done in only an hour and a half, whereas it used to take three days for "Three Women to Defend the Kingdom."

Furthermore, Ms. Cẩm Vân's dialogue approach to highlighting the story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" allows for the actors to use Tuồng's aesthetic constraints to emphasize the differences between Good and Evil in the performance in a strong, bi-polar way (Chart IV). The character Kim Hùng's actions, dress, facial paint, and voice express vanity, pride, and fierceness while the character Ngọc Lân's movements, costume, painted face and vocal expression are humble, benevolent, and gentle (See Figure N). Ngọc Lân's sense of fatherly responsibility (the need to kill his corrupt son) contrasts sharply with Kim Hùng's utter lack of filial piety. Kim Hùng is self-seeking while his father is selflessly devoted to his country. The conflict between Good and Evil placed in a family context makes the theme of loyalty more impressive and the performance's ending a simultaneous victory and tragedy. The aesthetic constraints of the performance are fully utilized to further the polarization between protagonist and antagonist in this performance.

Ngọc Lân's Good Forces achieve victory through an interesting process beginning with family relations that conflict with loyalty to the kingdom, followed by a negation of these relations through social transformation, and ending with a battle in which the disloyal party

is defeated. There are two battle scenes in both the performance and textual versions. Both of these battles are initiated by Tạ Ngọc Lân's Good Forces against the Evil Forces and, in both cases, the good characters are fighting against their own family members. These battles occur in Event *T* in which Tử Cung and Ngọc Lân rescue the Queen, and in Event *FF*, the final battle in which Ngọc Lân fights his son Kim Hùng.

In Event *T*, Tử Cung agrees to discard his vows as a monk and become a soldier again in order to help Ngọc Lân rescue the Queen. According to the textual version of the story, Tử Cung had originally become a monk in order to quietly protest against his father, Triệu Văn Hoán's evil political ambitions. As Tử Cung rips off his monk robe to reveal the robe of a young general, he is undergoing a social transformation (See [Figure F](#)). This transformation coincides with his decision to negate his familial relations to his father in order to help dethrone him and restore the kingdom (Events *T* and *Z*, see [Figure G](#)). While the character of Tử Cung's father, Triệu Văn Hoán, does not actually appear in the performance, the character Kim Hùng represents his collective effort with Văn Hoán to usurp the throne.

Likewise, the second battle scene (Event *FF*), is preceded by a social transformation on the part of Tạ Ngọc Lân. In this "action event," Ngọc Lân appears at the palace of his son and begs to become his son's servant (Event *CC*, see [Figure N](#)). As Ngọc Lân undergoes this social transformation from father into servant, he negates his paternal relationship to Kim Hùng. Kim Hùng naively accepts his father's proposed servitude as an attestation to his victory over his father. Once the family ties are broken, Ngọc Lân proceeds with his plan of attack, and succeeds in killing his treacherous son.

The character Tạ Ngọc Lân is the apparent hero of the Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts' version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." Then who are the "three women" mentioned in the title? As defined by the textual version of the story, they are Phương Cờ, Xuân Hương, and Bích Hà. Phương Cờ becomes a hero when she

ventures to the Royal City by herself *disguised* as a crazy woman to find out about her brother's scheme. Xuân Hương is hero upon proposing to *disguise* herself as the Queen and die in her place, and Bích Hà is the third hero when she offers to take Xuân Hương's place and die in *disguise* as the Queen.

These three heroic female characters have small roles in both the textual and performed versions of the story, a low socio-political status compared to the other principal characters, and each of their heroic actions is covered by disguise. Why are their identities so inconspicuous? Why are these almost unnoticeable characters paid homage in the titles of both the written and performance version of the story?

Phường Cờ, Xuân Hương, and Bích Hà are the lowest ranking of the principal characters in the story in terms of their social and political positions. Yet it may be that the low rank and position and the gender of these three women characters is a significant factor relating to their place in the title of the play. Among all the principal characters of the story, Phường Cờ, Xuân Hương and Bích Hà carry the lowest political and social obligation to sacrifice themselves for their country. Yet all three characters, in their righteousness, offer to do so. Furthermore, all three women offer to do this work without a face or place of honor in the annals of history, for they may die disguised as someone else.

Though the 'three women's' parts in the defense of the kingdom are small, they are nonetheless significant and the Evil Forces could not have been overcome without the work of these women in the story. Through their actions, the audience sees that the work of saving the kingdom is a responsibility of the people, not just the mandarins and other officials. While all the principal characters in this play were of royal blood to some degree, the most 'average' characters and those considered to be the weakest (women) were the first to offer their lives for their country with no expected glory in return.

In the case of the character Tạ Ngọc Lâm's sacrifice for his country, he died knowing that "for a thousand autumns, the history books shall be engraved as a memorial to [his]

name." Xuân Hường and Bích Hà, on the other hand, offered to die in disguise as the Queen, and leave no trace of their existence. Likewise, Phương Cờ is the one left "shouldering the homeland" after her father and brother kill each other (See [Figure Q](#)). The title of the play embodies this *Tuồng* story's theme of selfless sacrifice for one's country and shows examples of young people who, though not obligated, make the decision to perform a courageous action for their country, with no hope of glory.

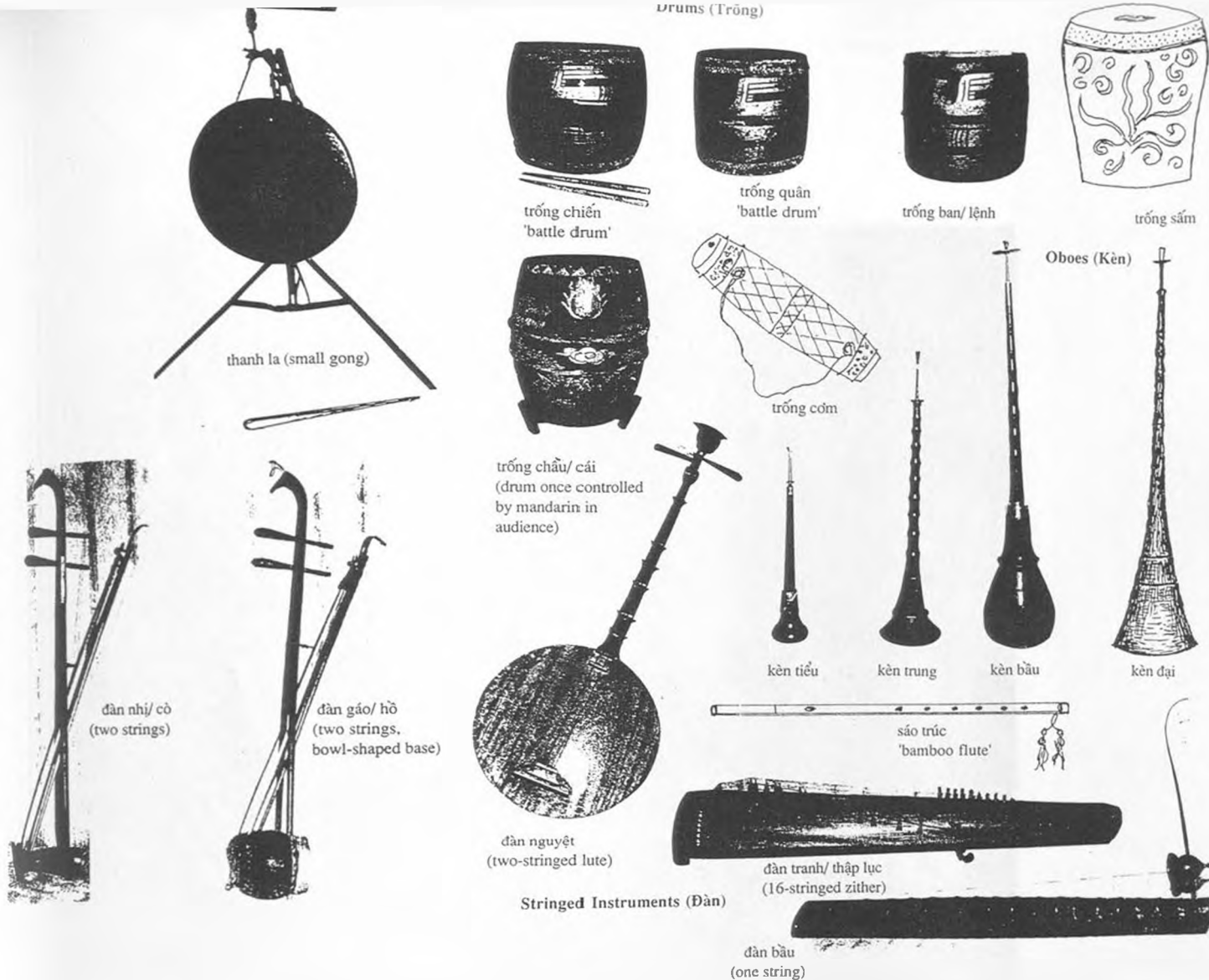
Yet, in the performance, the audience is only introduced to one of these "three women in defense of the kingdom," Phương Cờ. The other two, though they appear in the performance, are not known to have saved the Queen by volunteering to take her place at her execution. In fact, the characters of Xuân Hường and Bích Hà say nothing at all and appear as helpless victims who we fear will be executed along with the Queen in Event *T*, rather than the heroes that they are in the written version (See [Figure G](#)).

The performance cuts and pastes the original text to make its own story. Yet it still carries the title, "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom" despite the fact that the viewing audience has no way of learning who these three women are without knowing the text. In changing the story to fit a modern context of performance, all but one of the three quiet female heroes of the text become inconspicuous.

The arts troupe director, Ms. Cẩm Vân, faced a number of considerations in creating her own version of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom." One of the factors Ms. Cẩm Vân had to consider was shortening the play to fit what she deemed to be a modern audience's expectations and level of understanding. Subsequently, she had to determine what she felt to be the "basic story" of the play (Hermstein Smith 1980: 220). Thirdly, she had to decide how to enact this story as an aesthetic performance that 'highlighted' the themes she felt were important. This resulted in her own version of the story of "Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom."

As we have seen, Ms. Cẩm Vân's version focuses on the story of a dialogue of conflict between a good father, Tạ Ngọc Lâm, and his evil son, Kim Hùng. Despite the fact that two of the three quiet heroines of the prior story are inevident in the performance, the theme of loyalty towards, and unfulfilling sacrifice for, one's country is preserved in the story of the remaining heroine, Phương Cờ. It is Phương Cờ who lives on in suffering after the deaths of both her father and brother. The story that ends in her father and brother's dual to the death was *initiated by her* volunteering to go down to the Royal City to help her father determine her brother's doings. It is Phương Cờ who must "shoulder the homeland" alone.

Ms. Cẩm Vân's version *distinguishes itself from* the prior written version of the story. In creating her performance of "Highlights of Three Women in Defense of the Kingdom," Ms. Cẩm Vân chose coherence in a new story over accuracy in an old one. The Huế Troupe for the Traditional Performing Arts' performance tells a complete story, skillfully interweaving the prior text and aesthetic constraints of Tuồng with contexts of Vietnamese history, language, and culture. The title of the performance, now inconsistent with the story it narrates, remains as an artifact of a previous story, and a signifier of all that came before, and is still embodied in, the performance.



Part of the Huế Troupe  
for the Traditional  
Performing Arts'  
Music Ensemble,  
Seated Before  
the Stage



Figure R:

Some Common Instruments Used in Tuồng Performances and their Names  
(pictures taken from Trần Hồng 1997: 51-89)



Figure S: The Character Tạ Ngọc Lân



**Figure T: Facial Paint for the Character Tạ Ngọc Lân**



**Figure U: Facial Paint for the Character Tạ Kim Hùng**



**Figures V and W: Changes in Facial Expression Emphasized  
by the Character Ta Kim Hùng's Face Paint**



## APPENDIX A

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF SCENES VII AND VIII OF SCRIPT  
 FOR "THREE WOMEN IN DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM"  
 (SCENES III AND IV OF PERFORMANCE)<sup>36</sup>

Scene VII (Set at a Mountain Camp)

The mandarins Khắc Minh, Bích Hà, Tử Cung, and the other Good Forces enter from both sides. They are followed by Phương Cở, who wears a robe of mourning, and Elder Tạ Ngọc Lân. The Empress Dowager enters last.

*Empress Dowager:*

Dear talented and righteous subjects  
 We send off our noble elder  
 Tạ Ngọc Lân, deserving of the title "brave general"  
 His stela (stone memorial) engraved to last for eternity  
 For our people, he annihilates the enemy  
 Separating bone from flesh (himself from his own relation) to eliminate his rebel child

*All the mandarins in unison:*

Oh, noble elder:  
 Now has come the hour of your resolve to sacrifice your silver head  
 Laying down your life for your country, selflessly  
 We ask to bow before you, and leave your sacred memory  
 A courageous person to be held (by Legend) for posterity  
 [(Singing style of hát Khách)      -For posterity, passed down as an everlasting model  
                                                             -For a thousand autumns, the history books will be  
                                                             engraved as a memorial to your name]

<sup>36</sup> The sentences set off by brackets [...] are lines from the written script which were not used in performance.

*Ngọc Lân:*

Noble Empress, talented and righteous subjects  
 It is thus: Old and unblessed with happiness, I father a wayward, insolent son  
 Who seeks to overthrow the country and kill the people  
 That the father must bear his son's offense, I am determined  
 My son is such that: I have made up my mind to put an end to this mutual  
 destruction of my own flesh and blood

*Phường Cơ:* (Speaking in the style of Nói Lối Rịn)

Oh, father!

A crime against me, such misery for me, oh father!

*Ngọc Lân:* (Lối Rịn)

Cơ: Pity the woman's fate, made of the weary sedge and willow (the weaker sex)  
 Who also must struggle to shoulder the homeland  
 But you must let your father go to:  
 (Speaking in the style of Nói Lối Bóp) Kill my son, Tạ Kim Hùng  
 That seditious name, disloyal and undutiful

*Phường Cơ:* (Lối Rịn)

Father!

I pity my own father, old and weak

On entering the tiger's den, it's difficult to put up a good fight

*Ngọc Lân:*

There is no need, dear daughter!  
 We have a scheme to lure the tiger from its den (mountain)  
 A chance for simultaneous attack from inside and outside (ancient Chinese military tactic)  
 (Singing in the style of Hát Tàu) I've contracted to set afire the large estate and besiege it  
 Dear mandarins: I within and you without  
 Separated, lying in wait to exterminate that breed of evildoers

*Phường Cơ:* (Singing in the style of Nam Ai)

Father! The tears overflow as we separate down two roads

*Ngọc Lân:* (continuing Nam Ai)

Cơ! Let your father go, dear daughter:

Put away sentiments of home and father and turn your worries to your people

*Empress Dowager:* (calls)

Insurgent soldier! Bring out the incense table

(The insurgent soldier brings out the incense table. On it rests a gourd of wine and some funerary headbands. The Empress comes forward and takes a headband, tying it around her forehead. Then the mandarins do the same, in turn. The Empress Dowager takes a glass of wine and holds it up...)

Noble Elder! This glass of wine is dedicated to your silver head  
To see one off before departure

These are the sentiments of a Queen in a scene of separation

Favorite subjects: For the great cause of our nation, please prostrate yourselves  
with a bow

(Everyone bows down)

(in the style of Xưởng) Separating eternally, the tears overflow as we bow down

*In Unison:*

Two mandarin subjects of the king, father and son have taken two roads

*Ngọc Lân:* (continuing)

This land, I have made up my mind to strengthen  
The state has exhausted its ability to remain unified

*Empress Dowager:* (Nam Ai)

Noble elder:  
Before this ceremony of passage, unblessed with gold, but full of love

*In Unison:*

Oh, noble elder:  
The worthy troubles of people throughout the ages are forgotten

*Phường Cơ:* (Nam)

Father! When one of the same blood (same nation) is hurt, so I am hurt. This  
stings my heart  
Born in a settled position, raised and educated well, I have not yet paid a particle of  
compensation

*Ngọc Lan:*

Noble Queen Dowager, talented and righteous subjects  
This old man leaves his little girl, *Phường Cở*, deserted  
I ask to hand her over to you

A young orphan, motherless, and father, lost

(*Nam*) I go out, content in my old age  
Goodbye

(The old man goes. *Phường Cở* rushes headlong following him, to pull him back again)

*Cở*! Let go, let your father go!

I take my own life for my country. Your father is determined

(Elder *Tạ* turns away *Phường Cở*, then exits)

*Phường Cở:*

Father! Father!

Stop, let your young one go with you

(*Phường Cở* runs after her father, exits)

*Empress Dowager:* (calls)

Favorite subjects

(continuing *Nam*) Pass down to the army to continue the advance...

(...the red torch of attack issues the marching orders...)

(Curtain)

Scene VIII (Set at the Resident Mansion of Tà Kim Hùng)

*Kim Hùng:* (Speaking in the style of Bạch)

By our skillful martial arts, we have no competitor  
Venerably imposing, we sneakily frighten the enemy into surrender  
Notorious throughout as the invincible  
Our districts win fame as the indomitable

(Speaking in the style of Nói Lối):

The acting commander-in-chief and head general  
Tà Kim Hùng am I!  
In the Royal Court, I have heard they're a little scared  
Out amongst the crowds, I see terrified faces  
They support the kingdom and so, protect the state  
Acting as regent to carefully preserve the country

*Soldier:* (Enters)

Sir: There is an old man here, declaring himself by the name:  
Tà Ngọc Lân, your own father, the great mandarin  
He stands on the front path  
And requests you bring him in for a formal interview

*Kim Hùng:*

How strange! What Tà Ngọc Lân, I received news of his death  
What Tà Ngọc Lân is there still living?  
I want to know clearly the pros and cons of this

*Attending Soldier:*

Let's let him in to see his face.

(Soldier exits- Kim Hùng bares his thoughts)

*Kim Hùng:*

How strange, a few days ago  
It was said that: Mr. Tà Ngọc Lân had died  
Now how brazen is this corpse to live again!  
I must look for myself  
To set straight this evil personally  
That father is in no way my father  
Greater filial piety only troubles the word

*Ngọc Lân:* (Enters before Kim Hùng)  
Yes (respectfully)

*Kim Hùng:* (threateningly)  
Where is the old fellow with the stranger's face?  
Is it true you are Tạ Ngọc Lân?  
Lân, huh? Is it Lân?

*Ngọc Lân:*  
Yes, This old man, myself, am called Tạ Ngọc Lân  
The father of Mr. Kim Hùng, commander-in-chief

*Kim Hùng:* (grabbing the table)  
This is the residence of a rightfully entitled mandarin  
Not the earthen hut of an ox  
You've come here, you must prostrate yourself and bow your head  
According to the old routine  
The child stands behind, the father sits before

*Ngọc Lân:*  
Yes, I know you are the mandarin, the father the mother  
I am of the people, the grandchild, the child  
How you offend sir!  
(Speaking in the style of Nói Lối Rịn):  
This dear silver head, how lonely it is  
So I came here, to depend on you for food and clothing  
[(Singing in style of Nam) Food and clothing to pass days of hunger and cold  
Anyway, there are also the emotional ties of father  
and son, to see  
Each other's face: They're waning, I close my eyes  
and lower my hand]

*Kim Hùng:*  
No crying! You plan to harm me cruelly! So  
Wherever that child, Cở, went, I'm sure you know

*Ngọc Lân:*  
Yes, your Excellency, that child Phương Cở, your little sister  
Presently: Follows an ox-headed, horse-faced bunch (those lost to the sense of  
shame)  
Runs after a despicable fellow  
Forgets all her ancestors  
Thinks not of her father

*Kim Hùng:*

That Cỗ, she's cast you away, huh?  
 Damn (on the grave of her father) that Cỗ! That sloth of a child has forgotten her teaching

*Ngọc Lân:*

True, she has lost her teaching, you curse at her sharply, damn that Cỗ!  
 Not a shred of good:

That one is a lost child from the drifting river market (one without origin, parentless)

No different from those who are disloyal and undutiful

Anyhow, because we are flesh and blood, I came here

(Speaking in the style of Nói Lối Rịn):

Hoping you might pity a weak, old man

Help in providing for me a mat and a bit of rice

But before this, I ask that you make of me your servant. Then,

I ask the favor that you foster me

[(Singing in the style of Nam):

Foster me in these old years of desolation

A place for me, unblest with happiness, my son follows an unrighteous path

My daughter follows treachery, let this old man stay here

Living alone, in the heat and cold, who have I to depend on?]

*Kim Hùng:*

I forbid you to moan and cry

You came here, you must follow the circumstances

You want to work as a servant for me

How can I have the heart to deny you?

Oh, Lân- Hùng asks

Those double martial arts moves you used to know,

Is your remaining health sufficient to still be able to teach or not?

To help me train the whole army

To have a greater force of martial spirit

*Ngọc Lân:*

Dear sir... my martial arts skills are still strong

*Kim Hùng:*

Good! [(calls out) Where are you, soldier? Come out

I entreat you: Watch the old man, he is the hand of our adversary.

As he displays his talents, see how you might challenge him!

*Attending soldier:*

Yes, this old man fathered a mandarin  
If, inadvertently, I kill him, who will bear the conscience of guilt?

*Kim Hùng:*

It's I!

*Attending soldier:*

Thus, old man, please take care (rolls up his sleeves)]

*Ngọc Lân:*

Dear sir, need we bow upon our entrance, or not?

*Kim Hùng:*

I see no need for it, ever

*Ngọc Lân:*

Well, then, you see no need

[(Elder Tà uses his martial arts to strike Kim Hùng, who defends. The soldier falls headfirst from a kick, and sits crying.)]

*Kim Hùng:*

There! There! Lân uses a wicked move  
I am on my guard to ward off the danger  
I see you're still strong enough, it's nearly  
Dark already, so  
You may stay and teach martial arts to the ranks  
And depend on me until the day of promised victory

*Ngọc Lân:*

This old man is much obliged to your Excellency

*Kim Hùng:*

Okay, (calls) Soldier!...now show  
The old man the entrances and exits, so that he may understand  
Clearly this mandarin house, do you hear me?

*Attending soldier:*

Yes, sir, I hear clearly

*Kim Hùng:*

It's like this, Mr. Lân! You are sequestered out here, you're not permitted in my private room

(Kim Hùng exits... the old man and the attending soldier remain)

*Attending soldier:*

Most respected elder, devoid of happiness  
 Made servant to your son  
 The affections of blood siblings no longer (Phường Cơ and Kim Hùng)  
 The way between father and son also lost  
 Enough: I entrust you here as a sentry  
 You must prevent thieves and burglars from coming and going

(Sets to leave, but the old man calls him back...)

*Ngọc Lân:*

Hey, one more thing!  
 Show me the doors into the house  
 And the ways out again

*Attending soldier:*

Okay, but you must remember!  
 (Told in single rhythm)      The door through the barracks  
                                          Makes for a difficult return  
                                          This is the South door  
                                          In the soldiers' stringent watch  
                                          This is the North door  
                                          Inward-outward circulating  
                                          This is the East door  
                                          Descending into Mr. Tao's chamber (kitchen, Mr.  
                                          Tao=kitchen god)  
                                          I hand it over to you  
                                          Having thoughtfully completed  
                                          The commander-in-chief's recommendations  
                                          You are his subject

[It's ridiculous, the son, as mandarin, seizes his father to be his subject!]

(Attending soldier exits)

*Ngọc Lân:* (fully satisfied)

So,  
That ruse was a smart one  
That trick has seen its fulfillment  
On killing Kim Hùng, the snake is without its head (the group has lost its leader)  
And Triệu Văn Hoán is like a bird with a broken wing  
Soon comes the deciding hour

(Opening all doors, the generals and army of old man Lân sneak in. The old man does a stylized dance, making fire. Quickly, the door to the Citadel is opened.)

[(The old man throws aside the fire... the whole residence is in flames...)] [In the performance, Kim Hùng dances to represent the fire.]

[*Empress Dowager:* (Decrees)

Attack!

*Ngọc Lân:*

Set afire the private room

(Sounded from the dressing room, representing *Kim Hùng's troops*):

Fire surrounds the barracks  
It burns up in all four directions  
We ask the commanding general  
Let us out, rescue your reinforcements]

*Kim Hùng:* (enters, panicked)

[Where, where... oh enough...  
The flames surround and overpower  
Violent black smoke blinds the sky]  
Father! Father! I beseech my father to hurry here  
And rescue his young child from danger

(He runs out in all four directions, but is intercepted by insurgent soldiers)

[Stop, stop: Serious danger, serious danger  
Poor accident, wretched mishap  
It will satisfy you, father, to put me out of harm's way]

*Ngọc Lân:*

Cold Kim Hùng: Guilty, you have met your doomsday  
 [(Singing in the style of Hát Tầu);

As you are: A guilty accomplice

To a band to kill the people, and harm the country

I swore: I would break all relations with the deep bond of father and son  
 And exterminate my hard sloth of an ungrateful son]

(Father and son fight. Nearly breathing his last, old man Tà uses a deadly move to kill Kim Hùng. Before he exhausts, the group of mourners hold up the old man's body and remove the corpse of Kim Hùng offstage.)

*Phường Cơ:* (runs out)

Father!...father!

[For his country, he laid down his life. Determined to die,  
 His silver head was true to the term "fully dedicated to one's country"]

*In Unison:*

Elder General, Ngọc Lân, has passed away

But: The golden stela (memorial) of history will be carved as an everlasting  
 model

*Empress Dowager:* (calls)

Favorite subjects:

Let us prepare for the national mourning of an insurgent hero

(Elder Tà dies while standing. Khắc Minh and Tư Cung come and take a leaf of the tassel flag and hold it over the body of elder Tà. Two insurgent soldiers carry the old man in their arms up high... the background music heightens its mournin...and the curtain slowly...closes)]

written in Huế, September 29, 1997

## APPENDIX B

## VIETNAMESE SCRIPT OF SCENES VII AND VIII FOR "THREE WOMEN

## IN DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM" ("TAM NỮ ĐÔ VƯƠNG")

## (SCENES III AND IV OF PERFORMANCE)

Màn VII (Cảnh Sơn Trai)

Các quan: Khắc Minh, Bích Hà, Tư Cung, Khương Hoành đều ra  
hai bên, kể đến Phương Cơ trong bộ Tang phục cùng Lão Tà đi ra, sau cùng là  
Chánh Hậu ra...

*Chánh Cung:*

Thưa các hiền thần, đến dự khánh lễ  
Tiễn chân Lão Trượng:  
Tạ Ngọc Lân xứng danh dũng tướng  
Bia Sứ đề tạc để ngàn Thu  
Vì quốc dân Tiêu diệt quân thù  
Lìa cốt nhục khử trừ con giặc

*Các Quan Đồng Thanh:*

Lão Trượng ơi:  
Giờ quyết tử hiến dâng đầu bạc  
Quyết hy sinh vì nước quên mình  
Chúng tôi xin bái biệt anh linh  
Người Trung dũng lưu (Truyền) hậu thế  
(Hát Khách)      Hậu thế lưu truyền gương bất diệt  
Thiên thu sách sử tạc bia danh

Ngọc Lân:

Tâu chánh cung, cùng các hiền thần  
là: già vô phước sinh trai ngỗ nghịch  
Chạy theo phường cấp nước hại dân  
Tội con là cha chịu đã cam  
con nên chi: Lão đành đoạn tướng tàn cốt nhục

Phượng Cơ: (Nói Lối Rịn)

Ôi cha ơi  
Tội cho con, khổ cho con lắm...cha ơi...

Ngọc Lân: (Nói Lối Rịn)

Cơ: Thương phận gái liễu bờ nhược chất  
Cũng chen vai gánh vác non sông  
Nhưng con phải để cho cha đi là:  
(Nói Lối Bóp) Giết anh con là Tạ Kim Hùng  
Tên phản loạn bất trung thất hiếu

Phượng Cơ: (Nói Lối Rịn)

Ôi cha ơi  
Thương thân phụ tuổi già sức yếu  
Vào hang hùm khó nổi chống ngăn

Ngọc Lân:

Không can chi mô con ạ... như cha đây  
Đã có mưu diệu hổ ly sơn  
Thừa Cơ hội nội công ngoại kích  
(Hát Tấu) Phóng hỏa hợp đồng vây dinh phủ  
Thừa các quan. Trong có tôi, ngoài có các quan  
Phân binh mai phục diệt loài gian

Phượng Cơ: (Hát Nam Ai)

Cha ơi...Lụy chứa chan đôi đàng ly biệt

Ngọc Lân: (Tiếp)

Cơ... Con để cho cha đi con ơi:  
gác tình nhà cha lo việc quốc dân

Chánh Cung: (gọi)

Nghĩa quân...Bày hương án

(Nghĩa quân bưng bàn hương án ra, trên bàn hương án có bầu rượu và một số dây khăn tang, chánh cung tới lấy khăn tang, chít lên đầu, lần lượt các quan. Chánh cung gót ly rượu, cầm lên)

Lão Trương ơi

Đẩy chén rượu hiến dâng đầu bạc

Tiến đưa người lúc trước ra đi

Tình chứa tôi trong cảnh phân ly

Chư Khanh:

Vì đại nghĩa xin qùy bái Tạ

(Tất cả đều qùy xuống)

(Xướng) Tử biệt sanh ly lụy chứa chan

Đồng Thanh:

Quan thần phụ tử cách đôi đàng

Ngọc Lân: (Tiếp)

Giang Sơn lão quyết lo bồi đắp

Xã tắc quân liên nguyện bảo toàn

Chánh Cung: (Nam Ai)

Lão Trương ơi

Trước lễ đàn võ vàng thương nhớ

Đồng Thanh:

Ôi Lão Trương ơi:

Công ơn người muôn thuở nào quên

Phương Cơ: (Nam)

Cha ơi... xót xa máu chảy ruột mềm

Sinh thành dưỡng dục con chưa đến  
mấy may

*Ngọc Lân:*

Tâu Chánh Hậu cùng các hiền thân:  
 Già còn chút gái Phường Cờ quạnh quẽ  
 Già xin gửi lại  
 Trẻ mồ côi không mẹ mất cha  
 (Hát Nam) Ra đi yên phận tuổi già  
 Xin chào

(Lão đi...Phường Cờ lần theo níu lại)

Cơ...con buông ra, để cho cha đi con ơi  
 Quyên sinh vì nước cha đà quyết Tâm

(Lão Tạ hát Phường Cờ ra rồi hạ)

*Phường Cờ:*

Bồi cha...bồi cha  
 (Hát Nam) Dừng chân cho trẻ theo cùng

(Phường Cờ chạy theo cha, hạ)

*Chánh Cung: (Gọi)*

Chú Khanh...  
 (Tiếp Nam) Truyền quân tiếp ứng...

(...đuốc hồng tiến công tiến quân...)

(Màn Kéo)

Man VIII (Cảnh Dinh Kim Hùng)

*Kim Hùng: (Bạch)*

Vũ Nghê lừng lừng cự đường  
Oai phong lẫm lẫm chúng kinh nhường  
Khắp châu khét tiếng tài Vô địch  
Chữ quân lừng danh thế quật cường

(Nói Lối):

Quyền Đô Đốc Tướng quân  
Tạ Kim Hùng là mỗ!  
Trong Triều nội nghe hơi khiếp sợ  
Ngoài lê dân thấy mặt kinh hồn  
Phò Triệu Vương xã tắc bảo Tôn  
Cùng Nhiếp Chính Sơn hà gìn giữ

*Quân: (Vào)*

Thưa: Có ông già tự xưng tên họ  
là: Tạ Ngọc Lâm thân phụ Đại quan  
Còn đứng trước tiên đàn  
Xin gửi vào yết kiến

*Kim Hùng:*

Lạ thật: Tạ Ngọc Lâm nào, đã có tin chết mất  
Tạ Ngọc Lâm nào, mà lại vẫn sống còn  
Muốn biết rõ thiệt hơn

*Quân Hầu:*

Ta cho vào xem mặt

(Quân hạ...Kim Hùng tự bọc bạch)

*Kim Hùng:*

Lạ thật, cách đây mấy ngày, đầu đội Tang chi về đây  
báo tin rằng: Ông Tạ Ngọc Lâm đã chết rồi  
Nay sao lại sống còn trở xác  
Cũng phải nhìn tận mặt  
Để xét rõ chính tã  
Cha ấy chẳng phải là cha  
Hiếu thêm phiền chữ hiếu

*Ngọc Lân:* (Vào, rồi đi trước mặt Kim Hùng)  
Dạ...

*Kim Hùng:* (Thộp nạt)  
Thằng già nào ở' đầu lạ mặt  
Có phải ông là Tạ Ngọc Lân  
Lân...đó hả Lân?

*Ngọc Lân:*  
Dạ: Lão chính là tên Tạ Ngọc Lân  
Cha của ông Kim Hùng Đô Dốc

*Kim Hùng:* (Thộp bàn)  
Đây là dinh quan quyền phẩm tước  
Không như nơi vách đất chuồn trâu  
Đã đến đây, phải quỳ gối phải cúi đầu  
Bô nếp củ, con đứng sau cha ngồi trước

*Ngọc Lân:*  
Dạ, Tôi biết ông là quan, là cha là mẹ  
Lão là dân, là cháu là con  
Tội lắm ông ơi!  
(Lối Rịn) Thân đầu bạc, quanh quẽ cô đơn  
Nên lão đến đây: Nhờ người giúp chén cơm manh áo

[(Hát Nam) Cơm áo qua ngày đói rét  
Dù sao đi nữa cũng tình nghĩa cha con, được thấy  
Mặt nhau: Lúc hơi Tàn, nhắm mắt xuôi tay]

*Kim Hùng:*  
Không được khóc. Ông định trừ tội à! Vây con  
Cơ nó đi đâu, chắc ông cũng biết chứ

*Ngọc Lân:*  
Dạ, Thừa quan lớn, con Phương Cỏ, em gái của ông  
Hiện nay: Nghe những bọn đầu Trâu mặt ngựa

Chạy theo phường mèo mả gà đồng  
Quên tất cả cha ông  
Chẳng nghĩ gì trên tổ

*Kim Hùng:*

Con Cờ, nó bỏ ông nó đi rồi à!  
Mồ...cha...mày Cờ, đồ con mất dạy

*Ngọc Lân:*

Đúng, nó là con mất dạy, ông chửi rửa cho lấm lũng  
Chẳng ích lợi:  
Nó là con lạc chợ Trôi Sông

Chẳng khác kẻ bất trung thất hiếu  
Dù sao đi nữa cũng tình cốt nhục tôi đã đến đây  
(Lối Rịn):

Mong ông hãy thương thân già yếu  
Giúp dùm cho manh chiếu lũng cơm  
Trước xin làm tôi tớ sớm hôm  
Sau nường Tựa nhờ ớn nuôi dưỡng

[(Hát Nam):

Nuôi dưỡng tuổi già hiu quạnh  
Tủ cho lão, vô phúc con trai thì theo phường bất chính,  
Con gái thì theo lũ gian Tà, để cho lão đây  
Sống một mình ấm lạnh, nhờ ai?]

*Kim Hùng:*

Tôi cấm ông không nên than khóc  
Đã đến đây phải biết tùy thời  
Ông muốn xin làm Tớ làm Tôi  
Ở...Lân...đi, Hùng hỏi...  
Những miếng võ song phi tấn thối  
Sức ông còn dạy nổi hay không?  
Để giúp tôi luyện tập ba quân  
Thêm khí thế tinh thần Thượng Võ

*Ngọc Lân:*

Thưa ông... việc võ nghệ lão còn sức

*Kim Hùng:*

Hay lắm, [(gọi) quân đâu? Ra đây, Tao cho  
phép mày:      Coi ông già, là tay địch thủ,  
Cứ trở tài, đấu thử xem sao!

Quân Hầu:

Dạ! Ông già này, là cha đẻ ra quan  
Nếu lỡ ra: Con đánh chết, thì ai mang tội trạng?

Kim Hùng:

Đã có Ta!

Quân Hầu:

Vậy ông già, hãy coi chừng (xắc tay áo)]

Ngọc Lân:

Dạ, Thưa ông, vô có cần bái tổ hay không?

Kim Hùng:

Kim hà cô hà, trước sao sau vậy

Ngọc Lân:

Vậy là Kim hà cô hà

[(Lão Tạ dùng miếng võ đánh Kim Hùng chống đỡ. Tên quân hầu bị một đá té nhào, ngồi khóc)]

Kim Hùng:

Ấy ! Ấy! Ông Lân dùng miếng hiểm  
Hùng thủ thế đỡ nguy  
Tôi thấy ông vẫn khỏe mạnh đó, thôi, trời đà hầu  
Tôi rồi, vậy thì:  
Ông ở đây dạy võ cho ba quân  
Để nường Tựa qua ngày đoán Thắng

Ngọc Lân:

Gì xin đội ơn quan lớn!

Kim Hùng:

Được rồi... (gọi) Quân hầu!...bây bây về  
cho ông già, cửa vào lối ra, để cho ông Tạ hiểu  
rõ, lễ độ nhà quan, nghe chưa?

Quân Hầu:

Dạ bẩm quan, con nghe rõ rồi ạ!

*Kim Hùng:*

Vậy ông Lân! Tạm ở ngoài này, cấm không được vào trong phòng thất

(Hùng hạ... còn lại Lão và quân hầu...)

*Quân Hầu:*

Thừa cụ già vô phúc  
 Làm nô bộc cho con  
 Tình ruột thịt chẳng còn  
 Đạo cha con cũng mất  
 Thôi: Cháu giao cụ ở đây canh gác  
 phải đề phòng trộm cắp vào ra

(Định đi, Lão gọi lại...)

*Ngọc Lân:*

Ấy, ấy, chú chi đó ơi!  
 Bày cho tôi các cửa trong nhà  
 Và những lối vào ra đi lại

*Quân Hầu:*

Vậy cụ phải nhớ!  
 (Kể nhịp một) Cửa quy doanh trại  
 Đường đi lại khó khăn  
 Đây cửa hướng Nam  
 Lính canh phòng nghiêm ngặt  
 Đây cửa hướng Bắc  
 Xuất nhập lưu thông  
 Đây cửa hướng Đông  
 Xuống buồng ông Táo

Xin bàn giao ông lão  
 Đã chu đáo xong xuôi  
 Quan Đô Đốc dặn rồi  
 Cụ là người Tôi tớ  
 [Cũng tức cười, con làm quan, bắt cha làm tôi tớ]

(Hạ)

*Ngọc Lân:* (Đắc ý)

Như vậy là:

Kế kia đà diệu kế

Mưu nọ đã thành mưu

Giết Kim Hùng là rảnh không đầu

Triệu Văn Hoán, như chim gãy cánh

Sắp đến giờ quyết định

(Mở tất cả các cửa, tướng, quan của nghĩa quân lên vào. Lão dùng Vũ Đạo làm lửa...  
Kíp mau mở cửa Thành a)

[(Lão hát lửa...cháy cả Dinh...)]

[*Chánh Cung:* (Ra lệnh)]

Truyền ngoại kích nội công

*Ngọc Lân:*

Phóng hỏa thiêu dinh thất

*Tiếng hậu trường:*

Dạ, Dạ: Lửa bao vây doanh Trại  
Bốc cháy khắp bốn phương  
Xin Đô Đốc Tướng Quân  
Cho xuất quân cứu Viện]

*Kim Hùng:* (ra, hốt hoảng)

''[Ồ đâu, ở đâu... ôi thôi...]

Ngọn lửa bao vây áp đảo

Khói đen cuồn cuộn mù trời]

Bối cha...cha ơi! Phiên phụ thân kíp đến nơi

Mau cứu nguy, con trẻ

(Chạy ra cả bốn hướng... bị nghĩa quân chặn đánh)

[Thôi thôi: Nguy cấp nguy cấp  
Khổ Tai Khổ Tai  
Hỏi phụ thân giúp sức giải vây]

*Ngọc Lâm:*

|                |                             |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Bố Kim Hùng:   | Tội mày đã đến ngày tận Số  |
| [(Hát Tấu):    |                             |
| Như mày là:    | Tội ác a Tòng               |
|                | Theo lũ hại dân hại nước    |
| Tao đã nguyên: | Tình thâm đoạn tuyệt        |
|                | Diệt trừ nghịch tử lung đồ] |

(Hai cha con đánh nhau, gần tắt hơi, lão Tạ dùng thế hiểm giết chết Kim Hùng, trước khi ông kiệt sức tất cả chạy đến đỡ xác lão...đem xác Kim Hùng vào)

*Phường Cơ:* (chạy ra)

Cha...cha...ôi:  
[Cha vì nước hiến thân, quyết tử  
Tuổi bạc đầu Vẹn chữ Trung lương

*Đồng Thanh:*

Lão Tướng Ngọc Lâm, người đã mất  
Nhưng: bia Sủ Vàng, Tạc để đài gương

*Chánh Cung:* (gọi)

Vậy chứ Khanh  
Lập nghi lễ quốc tang nghĩa sĩ

(Lão Tạ chết trong thế đứng, Khắc Minh và Tư Cung vào lấy lá cờ ngũ sắc trùm lên người Lão Tạ, hai nghĩa quân đến bồng lão Tạ lên cao...  
Nhạc nền ai oán trôi lên... Màn từ từ... kéo)]

Huế, 29/9/1997

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