

THE ROYAL COSTUME OF NGUYỄN DYNASTY: VISUAL ARTS ANALYSIS AND RESTORATION IN VIETNAMESE ENTERTAINMENT WORKS

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Article information

Received: 03/2024

Accepted: 06/2024

Available online: 06/2024

ABSTRACT

Up to now, the Nguyễn dynasty costume system is still considered the wealthiest and the most distinctive among the Vietnamese feudal dynasties because of the number of documents and artefacts. Moving from the Nguyễn dynasty costume visual arts approach, the research presents the brilliant beauty of costumes through the artefacts of the artisans of the time. The current trend of the antique costume restoration of Vietnamese entertainment is exciting. Some producers have performed very successfully, and others have not been interested in the historical values, and cultural values that antiques have left behind. Through methods of fine art analysis, historical, interdisciplinary approach, analytical and synthesis, and comparative, the study finds the artistic aspects of the Nguyễn's costume. The "Cloud Dragon" was the iconic image of Nguyễn Emperor and prioritized placing it on their imperial robe. The artistic elements create the harmony of beauty and function within the Nguyễn royal costume. This article gives objective evaluations on the current state of the antique costume restoration work on some Vietnamese entertainment art products, thereby proposing solutions to raise awareness of preserving Vietnamese people's physical, cultural heritage through film and music. The article concludes that the beauty of Nguyễn's costumes is shown in many aspects of colours, designs, layouts, decorative model projects, etc. It needs to be preserved and developed. The inheritance generation with the desire to bring the history of ancient costumes to the world, and to honour the national costume tradition.

Cho đến nay, hệ thống trang phục triều Nguyễn vẫn được cho là giàu có và đặc sắc nhất trong số các triều đại phong kiến Việt Nam, bởi số lượng tư liệu và hiện vật để lại đã chứng minh điều đó. Đi từ hướng tiếp cận nghệ thuật tạo hình trang phục triều Nguyễn, bài nghiên cứu trình bày vẻ đẹp rực rỡ của trang phục qua nghệ thuật tạo tác của các nghệ nhân đương thời. Trào lưu phục dựng cổ phục hiện nay của nghệ thuật giải trí Việt Nam đang diễn ra rất sôi nổi. Một số nhà sản xuất đã thực hiện rất thành công, một số khác còn chưa thực sự quan tâm đến những giá trị lịch sử và giá trị văn hóa mà cổ phục đã để lại. Thông qua các phương pháp phân tích mỹ thuật học, lịch sử, tiếp cận liên ngành, phân tích và tổng hợp, so sánh, bài nghiên cứu chỉ ra những khía cạnh nghệ thuật tiềm ẩn có trong trang phục nhà Nguyễn. "Rồng mây" là hình ảnh mang tính biểu tượng của Hoàng đế nhà Nguyễn và được ưu tiên đặt để trên áo triều phục. Các yếu tố nghệ thuật tạo nên sự hài hòa về vẻ đẹp và chức năng của trang phục cung đình Nguyễn. Nghiên cứu này đưa ra những đánh giá khách quan về hiện trạng phục dựng trang phục cổ trên một số sản phẩm nghệ thuật giải trí của Việt Nam, từ đó đề xuất những giải pháp nhằm nâng cao ý thức bảo tồn di sản văn hóa vật thể của người Việt thông qua phim ảnh, âm nhạc. Bài nghiên cứu kết luận rằng vẻ đẹp của trang phục nhà Nguyễn được thể hiện ở nhiều khía cạnh từ màu sắc, kiểu dáng, bố cục, đồ án hoa văn trang trí,... nó cần được bảo tồn và phát huy giá trị. Thế hệ kế thừa với mong ước mang lịch sử trang phục cổ ra thế giới, đồng thời tôn vinh truyền thống trang phục dân tộc.

Keywords: Nguyễn dynasty, court dress, cultural heritage, costume restoration, Vietnamese film.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of Vietnamese feudal dynasties, the Nguyễn dynasty possessed a treasure trove of costume regulations that both achieved aesthetic value and carried the historical value of a gloriously feudal dynasty from 1802 to 1945. During 143 years of existence and development, Nguyễn's artisans know how to create artistic elements into the court space including architecture, furniture, sculpture, painting and even royal costumes. Nguyễn dynasty royal costumes were reserved by court historians in volume 78 and volume 242 of *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* to discuss the dress of the Emperors, Queens, Princes, Princesses, and Mandarins; from costumes used in court holidays, inaugurations, Tet holidays, to traditional costumes, and lingerie.

Studying the features of the Nguyễn's costume system, we found the ambitious temperament of the person who wore it, which was the outer form that feudal Kings wanted to show their power across the country. At the same time, the costume system was a brilliant result for feudal art. In this study, the authors focus on exploiting the aesthetic values of Nguyễn's royal costumes from an artistic perspective through materials, layouts, colours, and the image of Vietnamese Dragons on the imperial robe of the Nguyễn dynasty.

Aware of the importance of preserving and restoring the physical, cultural heritage, Vietnamese people have applied the artistic values of antique costumes in entertainment arts, including cinema, music, drama, etc. However, the restoration of antique Vietnamese costumes in general and Nguyễn's costumes in particular also faced many difficulties in terms of funding, historical knowledge and textile materials. Some producers have done a great job of restoring antiques on film; on the contrary, others have done superficial things to commercialize art. In order to clarify the above issues, in terms of fine arts, the article affirms that Nguyễn's costume is an object heritage that needs to be preserved for a long time, and it needs serious investment and restoration in entertainment works in Vietnam.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article uses the following five methods of scientific research:

- i. Method of Fine art analysis: Analyze the art of creating Nguyễn's costumes through forming languages including materials, colours, layouts, and animal patterns. Through the presence of forming language elements, the beauty of court dress forms a complete and uniform regulatory system, harmonious in the function and cultural conformity of Huế court space.
- ii. Method of Historical: Through historical sources of Nguyễn dynasty costumes and study of remnants of artefacts, in collaboration with the method of refined art analysis, the history of royal costumes is placed in the impact relationship of the art.
- iii. Method of Interdisciplinary approach: Fine arts combined with History, Culture, and Aesthetics.
- iv. Method of Analytical and Synthesis: Synthesis of theories related to the study, including the selection and arrangement of documents to build the theoretical basis. Thereby, the article analyzes the subjects of study and assesses the situation of costume restoration of the Nguyễn dynasty in some Vietnamese entertainment works.
- v. Method of Comparative: The comparison between the artefacts of Nguyễn dynasty costumes, paintings, historical photos and costumes in some Vietnamese entertainment works, thereby proposing solutions to improve the authenticity of royal costumes in entertainment works now and in the future.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1945), the last monarchy of Vietnamese history, advanced thinking and awareness after contact with French culture. However, before French culture impacted Vietnamese life, the Nguyễn dynasty remained a Confucian country during the reign of King Gia Long (1802-1819), King Minh Mạng (1820-1841), King Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), and King Tự Đức (1848-1883). Therefore, Nguyễn's costumes influenced the style and decorative motifs of the Qing costumes (China), a Confucian country at the same time (Tran, 2021).

According to the history of *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* (abbreviated as *Hội điển*), based on the book set reprinted in 2005 by the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities of Vietnam - Institute of History, Thuận Hoá Publisher. This book is a set of books compiled during the Nguyễn dynasty in the court rule genre, documenting the rules, regulations, and data related to the organization and operation of a dynasty, compiled by the Nguyễn's Ministry from the 1st Gia Long year (1802) to the 4th Tự Đức year (1851). In particular, Nguyễn's royal costumes are mentioned by the court historians in volume 78 and volume 242. By the time of King Thành Thái (1889-1907), officials in the Government proposed to review, amend, and supplement the charters that had been recorded in *Hội điển*. The Nguyễn's Ministry has continued to compile *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ tục biên* (abbreviated as *Hội điển tục biên*) as a follow-up to *Hội điển*. *Hội điển tục biên* recorded quite accurately and fully the activities of the Nguyễn dynasty in the second half of the 19th century, corresponding to the Kings' time: Tự Đức, Dục Đức, Hiệp Hoà, Kiến Phúc, Hàm Nghi and Đồng Khánh. The Huế Monuments Conservation Centre has implemented the Vietnamese translation of the *Hội điển tục biên* in cooperation with the Vietnam Institute of History for ten years (2002-2012), the Education publisher has printed the first volume in 2004. In this history books, the records of Nguyễn's costume are in volume 19 (y phục châu mừng), volume 22 (quan phục), volume 23 (tế phục), volume 30 (áo mũ cử nhân - áo mũ tiến sĩ), and volume 54 (ban thưởng).

From the 1st Gia Long year (1802) to the 4th Tự Đức year (1851), the form of court dress changed many times, but the most complete were the regulations on costume under the King Minh Mạng. When Nguyễn Ánh (King Gia Long) was crowned in 1802, the King assigned the Ministry of Ceremonies to summon skilled artisans in cutting, embroidery and costume decoration throughout the country to Huế capital, to undertake the work of designing costumes for the court. Nguyễn's court dresses are divided from Emperors, Queens, Empresses, Odalisque, Crown Princes, Princes, Princes (princedom), Princesses, Civil Mandarin, Military Mandarin to Soldiers.

Nguyễn's King costumes have many types: Đại triều costumes, Thường triều costumes, Ceremonial costumes (Cổn Miện dress, Xuân thu dress) have a variety of colours and decorative patterns. The themes of decorative pattern on the costume were strictly followed; besides the decorative themes: thuỷ ba, liên đăng, hồi văn, cổ đồ, bát bửu, flower branches, vines, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the mountains. The images of an animal were always focused and distinguished by position and title (The Grand Secretariat, 2005):

- i. The Emperor robe had 5-claws Dragon embroidery (Figure 1).
- ii. The Crown Prince dress had 4-claws Dragon embroidery, and this was a masked Dragon, not decorated with Phi long or Hồi long triều nhật (Figure 2).
- iii. The Prince (princedom) dress had Mãng and Giao embroidery, representing the shapes with a lower rank than Dragons (Figure 3).
- iv. The Queen and the Empress Dowager dress had Phoenix embroidery, a phoenix project gliding in a circle (Figure 4).
- v. The Princess and Odalisque dress had Loan bird embroidery, which the image of phoenix was simplified and had a tail strip (Figure 5).
- vi. The Civil Mandarin and Military Mandarin dress depended on the rank, and the animal embroideries differed (Figure 6).



Figure 1: The 5-claws Dragon embroidery on the Emperor robe.

Source: The authors took this photo at The History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, HCMC, 2017.



Figure 2: The 4-claws Dragon embroidery on the Crown Prince dress.

Source: Đại Việt Cổ Phong, 2017.



Figure 3: The Mãng embroidery on "Mãng lan" of the second junior rank Mandarin.

Source: The authors photographed this dress in the private collection of the collector Nguyễn Hữu Hoàng, Huế, 2017.



Figure 4: The Phoenix embroidery on the Queen and the Empress Dowager dress.

Source: Đại Việt Cổ Phong, 2017.



Figure 5: The Loan bird embroidery on the Princess and Odalisque dress.

Source: Đại Việt Cổ Phong, 2017.



Figure 6: The Mandarin titles with the animal embroideries.

Source: The authors took these photos at Vietnam National Museum of History, Hanoi, 2018.

With a brief history of the Nguyễn royal costume system, we notice the ambitious temperament of the dynasty. It is the external form that the feudal Kings wanted to show power through colours, decorative motifs and materials. In visual principles, visual balance is always given special attention by artists/artisans. Based on the psychological state, the human brain is influenced by the earth's gravitational pull in the vertical direction. Therefore, each person's balance axis is the vertical line passing through the radial vertical axis of the body and pointing towards the center of the earth. A horizontal line perpendicular to the vertical axis creates visual balance when looking at an object (Nguyen, 2011). Researching documents related to layout in costume making, has shown that the decorative layout on royal costume of the Nguyễn dynasty has the form of a vertical axis of the human body (Vu, 2022). Costumes of the Nguyễn dynasty were created according to symbolic conventions, both retaining the core spirit of kingship and condensing artistic symbols (Tran, 2023).

Related to costume design issues for entertainment works, specifically films. Costumes must reflect the era, culture and artistic elements. Costume accuracy plays an important role in the filmmaking process. "Film is a cultural product and, therefore, it must reflect the culture of its origin. The cultural background of the film is enunciated through the use of costume, make-up, and props that are apt in affirming the culture being represented" (Bature-Uzor, 2023). Costume designs are the efforts of designers based on creativity. Costume designers work with their teams, to create costumes that reflect the inner world of the characters, the time, place, and conditions in which they live, their social class, culture or their lifestyle (Torregrosa, Noguera & Luque-Zequeira, 2023). Therefore, in order for entertainment works to be well received by the public, producers need to consult experts and at the same time do in-depth research to ensure that the costumes on film are visually effective and realistic.

In fact, the film's symbology includes the type of costume and style, the material structure of the costume, and the style that the actors wear it. "Costumes provide the physical and tangible characterizations to the character(s) by bringing to life the screen writer's imaginative creations as identifiable personalities/ character(s) for the viewer" (Bature-Uzor, 2023).

4. RESEARCH OF NGUYỄN ROYAL COSTUMES THROUGH VISUAL ARTS

Under Nguyễn, most of the materials used to create works of art, including architecture, painting, sculpture, ceramics and even court dress, were strictly regulated and managed by the court. Regarding costumes, the Nguyễn dynasty has stringent regulations specific to each class in society, based on the following criteria: fabric, colour, sewing style, decorative motifs, and the number of dresses (Tran, 2016).

4.1. Textile materials

The costumes were made very elaborate and delicate under the supervision of the Ministry of Ceremonies. The artisans knew how to use rare and expensive materials combined with gold thread to create a unique dress system. A beautiful outfit needs a harmonious combination of style and material, the value of the material expressing the essence and status of people in

society. During the Nguyễn dynasty, the artisans paid great attention to the material in creating costumes. Commonly used materials were rare fabrics that only royalty can afford, such as Sa, Đạn, Silk and many types of Brocade woven by complex technical qualifications, such as Nhiều Cát fabric (used as a turban from the King to civilian, elaborate and complex weaving techniques, but now lost), Brocade Silk, and Lĩnh. Most fabrics were woven in traditional craft villages specializing in silk weaving for the court. From the 9th Gia Long year to 1945, high-end textiles were seen as a tax instead of paying taxes with money. In addition to the fabrics woven in the domestic, at the end of the 19th century, the Nguyễn dynasty began to promote the expansion of international transactions, trade exchanges with China, India, Japan, etc. Therefore, there have been some textiles such as Gấm đạn - Sa, Lĩnh, Trừu - Kim tuyến - Áo trừu - Hầu bao - Gổĩ, Trừu len, Sơn dầu fabric, Wool silk, and Velvet entered into Vietnam. On the other hand, the silk fabrics used to sew costumes and accessories were all high-end fabrics, which have been ordered in China. Kings Gia Long and Minh Mạng often sent envoys to China to buy Gấm đạn in the regions of Southern China and Jiangnan (Tran, 2016).

In each artwork, the material is a language that forms the characteristic aesthetic value of innovative products. Fabrics were a leading factor for Nguyễn artisans to create all kinds of court dresses. The material was the first language that shaped the beauty of costumes. A beautiful costume, but if using the wrong material, that outfit no longer achieves the original core value, which is the aesthetic value - the value of beauty. According to author Lâm Vinh: "Language is the 'first element' of artistic work, the decisive material means of art, the first sign and the final experiment of artistic aptitude and professional qualifications of the artist" (Lam, 1997). The Nguyễn artisans have been very skillful in choosing the suitable material. It was beautiful in all aspects and exuded the majesty of the Kings. The fabric of the Nguyễn was the glory and wealth of a dynasty.

4.2. Costume-shaped layout

With the art mindset of the artisans, almost all forms of Nguyễn's royal costumes with simple, natural shapes in the isosceles trapezoid layout narrow at the top and expand at the bottom. The dress shape is wide and comfortable with two long and wide sleeves, creating majesty for the wearer (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Art in any period tends to serve the ideological concerns of the dominant group (Berger, 2017). Therefore, in order to show authority, stability, and balance to the wearer, the main shaping method on Nguyễn dynasty costumes is to create a symmetrical layout. In fine arts, a right-left symmetrical structure is a reasonable geometric structure, not only in the human body but also in creatures in nature. The symmetrical solution is a biological method of development. This aesthetic viewpoint has been tested over millennia by humanity (Nguyen, 2011).

In 1744, with the influence of the costume reform of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Khoát, it marked the arrival of the Áo Ngũ thân, which became the national dress of the Nguyễn dynasty later. The Áo Ngũ thân was a type of dress sewn with five fabric pieces: the front flap is two pieces, the back flap is two pieces, the inner right body creates a short one, a total of five; distinguished from the type of dress sewn in four fabric pieces as Áo Tứ thân. In the time of King Minh Mạng (1820-1841), with a decree prohibiting harsh costumes, Áo Tứ thân, Áo Giao lĩnh, loincloth, waist fabrics, and Lê Trung Hưng's towels and hats were all banned under this period (Historical Academy of Nguyễn Dynasty, 2010). Therefore, at that time, in folk spreading the lyrics of the proverb:

“Tháng tám có chiếu vua ra,
Cấm quần không đày người ta hỡi hùng.”
(August got the King's decree out,
People do not wear pants without a crotch).

This command left people wearing Áo Ngũ thân in daily life. However, in the regulations of Nguyễn's costume and remnants of artefacts, it proves that the court also applied the style of the Áo Ngũ thân in the costume style for Kings, Queens, Officials, and Odalisque. Before Raglan Áo dài appeared, the Áo Ngũ thân was cut from the fabric from the body to the sleeve without the sleeve seams. The above layout creates delicate and straightforward harmony, and there is an analytical balance from the front to the back. The artisan of the Nguyễn dynasty was brilliant, and they knew how to combine a simple shape with elaborate decorations. These two elements complement each other to make the costume. However, the decoration is dense but does not show an overwhelming feeling.



Figure 7: The artefacts of the Nguyễn dynasty, 19th-mid 20th centuries.

Source: The authors took this photo at The History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, HCMC, 2017.

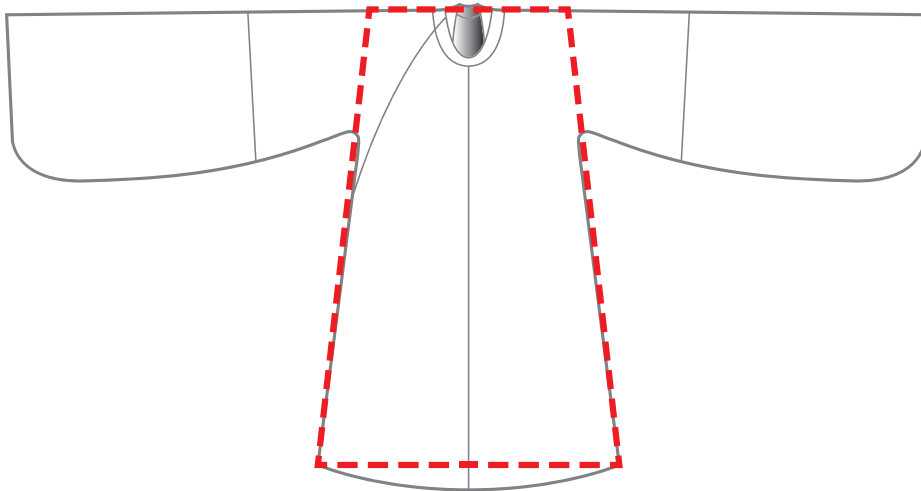


Figure 8: The simulation of the costume shapes in the isosceles trapezoid layout.

Source: Authors, 2021.

The balance and harmony in costume decoration became lively with creating the dark and brightness with specialized and rich embroidery threads. On the Đại triều coat of the King, the position of the Dragon's eye is the centre of the decorative layout, taking the Dragon's head as the middle point, from which the details are decorated symmetrically. The iconic image of the 5-claws Dragon occupying the most extensive area on the King's coat, there are two Chinese words above the Dragonhead: 萬 (Vạn) and 壽 (Thọ), meaning longevity, the eternal life expectancy for the King. Below is the stretch of water of Thủy ba and the Tam Sơn top in which this river belongs to the King. The densely decorated clouds covered the coat, blending into the Dragon to create a powerful effect on the King. At the bottom of the flap, the image of "lưỡng long tranh châu" in symmetrical composition, along with the flames, is designed balance the Dragons. The threads sewing on the gleaming Dragon scales made of real gold is pulled out and attached to the coat (Figure 9).

With an arranged layout that creates a light and powerful effect for the wearer, the Nguyễn artisans, based on the set rules of the court, produce sophisticated decorative model schemes. By the number of decorative motifs on the costume, that beauty is successfully expressed with the integrity and meticulousness of the creator while affirming the primary thoughts that rule the King's country.



Figure 9: The Đại triều coat of the King with the Cloud Dragon (5-claws Dragon) embroidery.

Source: The authors took this photo in the particular subject "Vàng son nhung gấm" at The History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, HCMC, 2016.

4.3. Colour palette

Based on *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* and the original artefacts preserved to this day. It is noticed that the King's ceremony dress used "chính hoàng" colour (dark yellow), the Queen's ceremony dress used "hoả hoàng" colour (yellow-orange), the Crown Prince's ceremony dress used crimson, the Princes and Princess's ceremony dresses used "xích tử" colour, the Odaliques were allowed to wear "đại hồng" colour (red) (Figure 10).

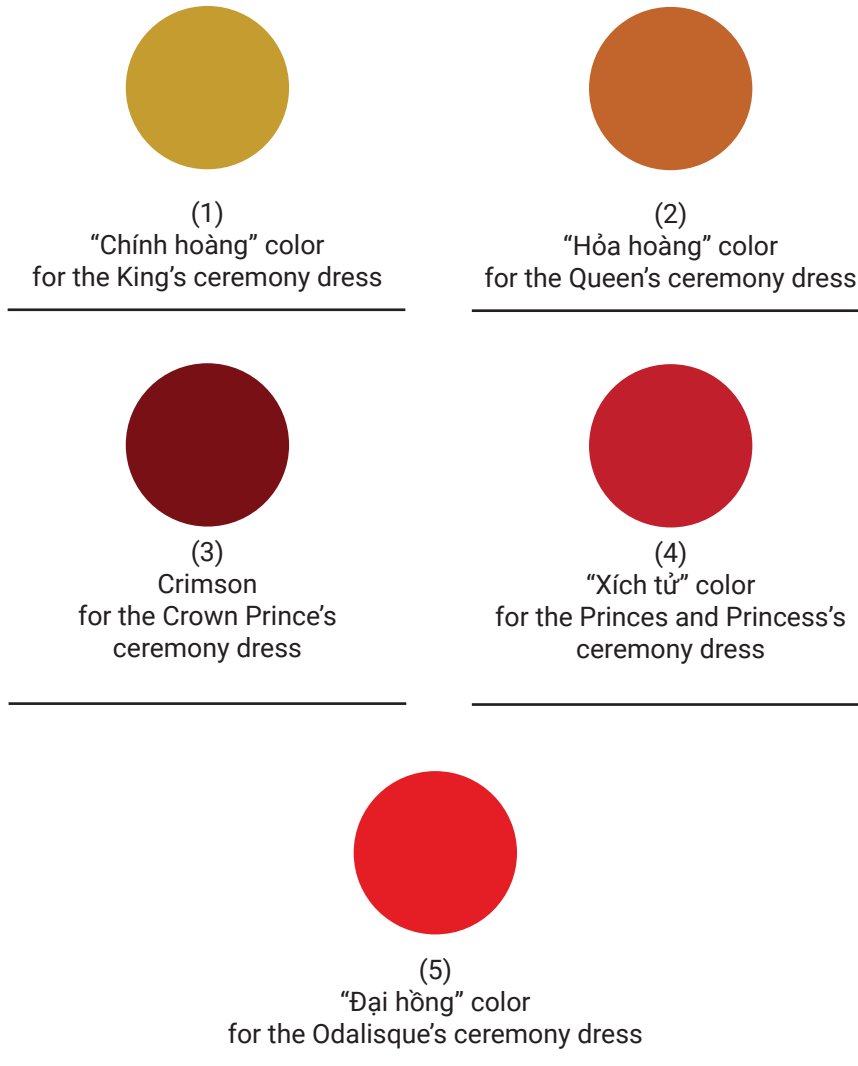


Figure 10: The colour range of the Nguyễn royal costumes.

Source: Authors, 2021.

The primary colour's distinction on the royal dress was intended to hierarchy and showed ritual in the court. Simultaneously, the Nguyễn dynasty strictly regulated the colour, headed by the King's dark yellow, and only the King could wear this one. Modern historians claim that Kings of the East (China, Vietnam, etc.) wore yellow, because yellow in Chinese means "Hoàng", while "Hoàng" means King. In the Five Elements yellow is the Saturn; Saturn is the central position. The King chose yellow to present himself as the centre of the country. In addition, yellow is the colour of heaven and earth, where the origin of all directions and power, it should be considered the most precious colour for the King to show his highest status. Meanwhile, civilians were usually not allowed to use yellow, but only brown in the time of feudalism; brown symbolized simplicity, countryside, which was the colour of alluvial soil. Therefore, brown was also the preferred color of most Vietnamese farmers.

Many artworks in Huế are imprinted with the five-colour set discovered by the late artist Phạm Đăng Trí. He has selected the primary colours that were somewhat popular: yellow and indigo (blue hidden in purple), red and jade (green hidden in blue), blue and fire yellow (orange-yellow), turquoise (blue hidden in green), amber (red-orange), etc. (Pham, 1982). If the colour follows the Five Elements include white (Venus), black (Mercury), green (Jupiter), red (Mars) and yellow (Saturn). According to the Huế five, the colours are somewhat different, including red, yellow, purple, green and blue (Figure 11). The Huế, five colors format, was found mainly on the Vitreous enamel, used to craft court objects and exterior decoration of palaces in Huế such as Thái Hòa palace, Phượng Môn, Ngưng Hy, or Minh Lâu. The Huế court dresses also follow this five-colour format, especially the purple characteristic of this land (Figure 12). In general, each ethnicity, country or historical period has its traditions for evaluation and evaluation aesthetic mindset. The commonly used feudal class colour is red, yellow for the King, civilians used a dark brown. The beauty of the feudal period and the Nguyễn dynasty, in particular, is the beauty of dominance. Power belongs to the King, and the King dominates the people with an authoritarian rule. Thus, colour was crucial and one of the factors to distinguish class, status, title in the court. A clear division created a systemic aesthetic value and was applied thoroughly from the Imperial city to the village.

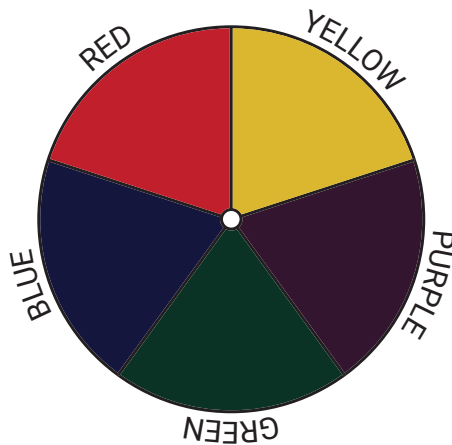


Figure 11: Huế five-colour wheel.

Source: Authors, 2021.



Figure 12: Coloured columns on the sleeves of Nhật Bình dress.

Source: Đại Việt Cổ Phong, 2017.

5. THE "CLOUD DRAGON" IMAGE ON THE NGUYỄN EMPEROR'S COSTUME

5.1. Dragon symbol of the Nguyễn dynasty

The Dragon is a supernatural fantasy animal, elevated to become a symbolic mascot in Eastern culture and a popular image for the Vietnamese people (Nam & Khanh, 2008). Dragon is a mascot present in almost all art of humanity, but the Vietnamese Dragon is still considered to have its unique characteristics, dissimilar Dragons of other ethnic groups (Phan, 2000). However, the image of a Vietnamese Dragon is quite similar to the image of a Chinese Dragon. In the process of exchanging and transforming of Chinese culture, the Vietnamese have received the motif, the meaning of the Asian Dragon image from the Chinese. That combination has shown that the Vietnamese Dragon becomes lively and different, developed from many feudal dynasties in history. In addition to symbolizing the King's power, the Dragon also has many other symbolic meanings. Dragons symbolize the power of the men, while women choose the image of the phoenix as a symbol. According to feng shui, the places where geographers think have beautiful positions, converging many spirits called "long mạch" (favourable geomantic features) or "long huyết" (good layer of earth to bury the dead). Vietnamese people are very superstitious in the legends of "long mạch". It is believed that if a man buried his father's bones in the land of "long mạch", he would be a King.

The Nguyễn Dragon is no exception, and it inherits all the quintessence of art and spirituality from previous times. The Nguyễn dynasty was the last dynasty of Vietnamese feudal class. It became even more reactionary to the backward dominance, utterly dependent on the command of the French colonials. The mixing of East-West, Europe-Asia factors have somewhat influenced the costumes's art.

The Nguyễn Dragon was the exclusive symbol of the Emperor. In this case, the Dragon embroidery has 5-claws on the Emperor's coat (Tran, 2016). The Emperor wore a Dragon embroidered coat called "long bào", a Dragon carved on the throne called "long ngai", or a Dragon in a bed called "long sàng", etc. Dragon shapes also appear on many other tables, cabinets, chests, or books. Regardless of the item with a Dragon shape of 5-claws, it is an item for the King to use directly. In addition, the Dragon was embroidered on the coat of the Crown Prince, and this Dragon has always had 4-claws, called "rồng mặt nạ". Moreover, the Prince's coat was embroidered in the shape of Mãng (Tran, 2016). The variations of Dragon were also embroidered on the uniforms of the Officials.

Dragons were shown in various concepts. In the image of "lưỡng long tranh châu", we recognize two Dragons fighting for the pearls, which are not surrounded by flames. Regardless of the theme, the Dragon was surrounded by clouds, spread out like silk strips or rolled up luxuriously. Dragons hidden in clouds or combined with clouds with fire strands covered in fins. The fire strands and clouds are always stylized with their artistic style. Cloud decoration created an extraordinary form called "long ẩn vân" (Dragon hidden in the clouds). The Dragon meanders in the clouds and, in turn, exposes each part of the body. In the art of the Nguyễn dynasty, especially in the art of the court, from the Imperial city to the village, the most popular and outstanding image was always the Dragon (Nam & Khanh, 2008).

5.2. The "Cloud Dragon" on the Emperor's costume

The Dragon of the Nguyễn period had unique characteristics of a whole dynasty. The artistry of Dragons was shown in many poses, hidden in the surrounding clouds, mouth the word 壽 (Thọ). The Dragon's body was not long but winding with a large curvature, a gaint Dragon's head, deer horn-like horns pointed backwards, the Dragon's eyes were large, the lion's nose, the mouth reveals canines, the fins on the Dragon's back had rays, the Dragon's beard curved from under the eyes evenly on the sides, the Dragon's legs had 5-claws and were exclusive to the King (Nam & Khanh, 2008), (Nguyen, 2016). Dragons symbolized the prosperity and power of the nation. It became a symbol of the authority of the feudal dynasty (Nam & Khanh, 2008). The Nguyễn Dragon appears among the clouds, the lines of the Dragon shape are hidden behind many layers of clouds, the Dragon soars into the sky with an airy spirit of freedom (Figure 1 and Figure 9). The divine Dragon can be generalized as like water, love to fly, fluent in the sky, good at change, flexibility, announce good omens, and bad omens. Dragons have the ability and function to connect heaven and earth as a bridge between heaven and earth. The Emperors call themselves "Thực long Thiên tử" (Son of Lord) because they are aware of the Dragon's divine. An example of a Cloud Dragon has appeared on Mũ Miện (the Crown) of Nam Giao ceremony in the shape of a square upper part, around the lower part, with the words 萬 (Vạn) and 壽 (Thọ), and two words "Thiên-Địa" in gold. The twelve Cloud Dragons hovering over the Crown made the iconic images come alive with the meaning that the Emperor was the Son of Heaven, the power that governed the whole world was in his hands.

The Cloud Dragon image was covered in the dress of the Nguyễn Emperor, mainly on the Official and Ceremonial dresses (Figure 13 and Figure 14). According to Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ, the Nguyễn Kings had two types of ceremonies, including the Cống Miện dress used in Nam Giao ceremony and the Xuân Thu dress used during the ceremonies at the Tông Miếu temple (Table 1). The image of “Cloud Dragon” was very popular with Nguyễn Emperor and prioritized placing it on their imperial robe. There was a symbol of a 5-claws Dragon hidden among the clouds on the background of precious golden silk on each imperial robe. That 5-claws Dragon and the yellow on the robes possessed only one person.



Figure 13: The Cloud Dragon at the bottom of the Emperor robe.

Source: The authors took this photo at The History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, HCMC, 2017.



Figure 14: The Cloud Dragon at the sleeve of the Emperor robe.

Source: The authors took this photo at The History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, HCMC, 2017.

Table 1

Category of royal costumes for King Nguyễn.

Nguyễn’s King costumes	Hat	Robe
Đại triều costumes	“Cửu Long Thông Thiên” Crown (or “Xung Thiên” Crown)	Royal robe, đai ngọc, xiêm y, hộ tất, bí tất, hài
Thường triều costumes	“Cửu Long Đường Cân” Crown	Robe, xiêm y, bí tất, hài
Cống Miện dress	Mũ Miện	Áo Cống, xiêm y, tế tất, đại thụ, ngọc bội, cách đới, đại đới, bí tất, hài
Xuân Thu dress	“Xuân Thu” hat	Áo giao lĩnh, xiêm y, bí tất, hài
Military uniform	“Đại Long” hat	Narrow-sleeved robe, mã quả, xiêm y, đai Loan, hài

Source: Authors, 2021.

In general, the Dragon was a sacred animal favoured by King Nguyễn, and it also represented the King. Currently, the image of the Dragon is no longer sacred, but it is still put into the decoration in architectural works, paintings, art carvings, etc. (Nam & Khanh, 2008). At all times, the Dragon is a part of Vietnamese cultural life.

6. THE HARMONY OF AESTHETICS AND FUNCTION OF NGUYỄN ROYAL COSTUMES

In human demands, the top is to eat, wear and stay not only for people to survive but also to affirm a cultural life and their level of civilization. Author Chu Quang Trứ commented: "Human nature is an artist, so the items that people create are not only for use but also beautiful. In many human demands, emerging first is to eat, wear and stay to survive and assert a cultural life and a level of civilization. Therefore, from the most practical things, they also contain an increasingly rich aesthetic value" (Chu, 2013). In addition to the requirement to be beautiful, an outfit must be suitable for each object and living space. Artwork in the Nguyễn dynasty maintained the essential characteristics of applied art. The beauty of art was united with the useful. It included functions, structures, and ergonomics. Products served the needs of royal life, including cups, bowls, tables, chairs, cabinets, altars, etc., or costumes always converged two elements: beautiful and functional.

Most of Nguyễn dynasty costumes were sewn in a specific form, and often the coat shapes tended to be wide long sleeves. Beautiful costumes are a harmonious combination of many layers of clothing such as áo cổn, thường, kế y, tế tất, đại thụ, and bí tất; coordinate with accessories such as Mũ Miện, ngọc bội, cách đối, đại đối, and hia hài. The costumes were strictly regulated; the King's imperial robe must be different from the Crown Prince's, the Crown Prince's dress must be different from the Prince's dress, and the Queen's gown must be different from the Princess's. The shape of the costume was required to be suitable for the circumstances and living environment of the people in the court, such as Đại triều, Thường triều, Nam Giao ceremony, and Tịch Điền ceremony. The costume of Kings, Queens, Princes and Courtiers was often worn during the Great Festivals, with the space of gold palaces and exquisitely carved architecture, sophisticated decorations to create a magnificent and monumental space.

Royal costumes of the Nguyễn dynasty along with the surrounding daily life scenes were taken in paintings or photographs with profound historical value. In the work *L'Indo - Chine française* by Governor-General of French Indochina Paul Doumer (1857-1932), there is a painting of King Thành Thái in Tịch Điền ceremonial dress, wearing a Cửu Long Đường Cân crown, sitting on the throne in 1905. The interior space of the palace in this painting depicts the scene of the Emperor was residing in Thái Hòa palace, where the Nguyen dynasty's royal ceremonies took place (Figure 15). In addition, there are many rare documentary images of King Khải Định during his reign, among them are photos of the king was sitting on the throne. The king wore royal robes, a Xung Thiên crown on his head, and shoes embroidered with two dragons on his feet, stepping on the back of a unicorn on the throne, with a leisurely and temperamental demeanor (Figure 16 and Figure 17).

In a set of watercolor paintings called *la Cour de Hué* by artist Nguyễn Văn Nhân in 1895, currently displayed at Vietnam National Museum of History, Hanoi. The set includes six paintings vividly depicting daily life scenes at important departments of the Huế court, including: "Le Conseil Secret", "Ministère des l'Intérieur", "Ministère des Finances", "Ministère des Rites", "Ministère des Traveau publics", and "La Cérémonie de Phục Mệnh". In particular, the painting "La Cérémonie de Phục Mệnh" depicts mandarins were wearing royal costumes, performing rituals in front of Càn Chánh palace yard (Figure 18). These paintings of royal costumes that are also vividly recreate activities of the Nguyễn dynasty. Although antiquities are powerful testaments to a culture, in addition to written documents and artefacts (original and restored) in museums and private collections, visual works also bring theoretical basis increases persuasion. Visually, it fully represents landscape elements, scenes of ceremonies, or royal activities and historical people.



Figure 15: Drawing of King Thành Thái was wearing Tịch Điền ceremonial dress, sitting on his throne, in 1905.

Source: Photo printed in the book *L'Indo - Chine française*, author Paul Doumer, Vietnamese translation by The Gioi Publisher released, 2016, p.284.



Figure 16: Photo of King Khải Định was wearing a royal robe, sitting on his throne.

Source: Photo printed in the photo book *Annam 1919 - L'Indochine française*, published in Paris, 1919.



Figure 17: Photo of King Khai Dinh and four pillars of the Hue court, including four mandarins leading the Privy Council.

Source: Photo printed in the photo book *Annam 1919 - L'Indochine française*, published in Paris, 1919.



Figure 18: The painting “La Cérémonie de Phục Mệnh” by artist Nguyễn Văn Nhân, in 1895.

Source: Trần Đình Sơn.

An applied art product needs to be placed in the people-products system or a wider environment-people-products (Nguyen, 2011). A beautiful outfit not only pleases the wearer and enhances the beauty of the body, but it must also be suitable for the circumstances and environment in which the person is present. Nguyễn's court dress was created not to enhance the beauty of the physique or to overcome the disadvantages of body structure. However, it was created for the Nguyễn Kings to show the authority and prosperity of their dynasty.

7. SOME REVIEWS OF THE RESTORATION OF THE NGUYỄN'S ROYAL COSTUME IN VIETNAMESE ENTERTAINMENT WORKS

7.1. Current situation

In recent years, the Vietnamese youth community has exported many groups, many organizations specializing in researching and restoring antique Vietnamese costumes. It can be an excellent signal because young people have started to have a particular interest in the culture and history of the country's costumes. The history and culture of Nguyễn costumes are widely applied in entertainment products such as movies, TV series, and music videos (MV). The genre of Period films has been in public since the 1950s. However, the restoration of antique costumes in the film was sketchy or historically wrong. The costumes in these film products did not follow the standards of feudal costumes. The clothes were flashy colours and confusingly beaded. The mistakes in costume restoration are to blame; the superficiality of the producers in the antique costume study has somewhat shown the heartlessness of the national cultural history. In general, the genre of Period films is a complex field, the difficulty is not in terms of content, but the difficulty is in the costume system and the shooting context. It requires the filmmaker's heart and a massive investment in costume restoration.

Up to now, the web drama "Phượng Khấu" directed by Huỳnh Tuấn Anh is considered to have the most significant investment in the Nguyễn's costume system. The costumes were designed and restored by a group of tailors Ý Vân Hiên, in collaboration with researcher Vũ Kim Lộc. The types of court dress restoration in the film are very sophisticated, respecting the original colour palette of antique costumes. The techniques of embroidery decorative patterns such as clouds, fire, Tam Sơn top, thủy ba, water waves, Dragons, and phoenixes reach a high level. The two wings on the back of the Emperor's Đại triều costume are also shown as the original, this is also a very typical detail of the court dresses for kings and mandarins of the Nguyễn dynasty. Although the historical costume on this film is controversial on social media, we must also recognize that the film has spent a very worthy investment in costumes (Figure 19 and Figure 20). It is very precious to learn and study antique costumes for today's younger generation. Whether historical documents or surviving costume artefacts are guaranteed to bring the court dresses back to modern times, it is not entirely all research material. In 1885, during the Battle of Huế (Citadel falling incident), French colonists entered the palaces and stole countless items, royal robes, gold and silver from the Imperial Court of Huế. Therefore, we could not restore the Nguyễn's costumes following the original 100% because the regulations on-court dresses were extremely strict, but it constantly changed in each dynasty of the Nguyễn Kings. The movie audiences need to have more objective views on this issue.



Figure 19: The Emperor robe in the web drama "Phượng Khấu".

Source: dantri.com.vn, 2020.



Figure 20: The Nhật Bình in the web drama "Phượng Khấu".

Source: Thiên Nam Lịch Đại Hậu Phi, 2020.

Based on the *Cử Long Thông Thiên* crown of the Nguyễn Emperor on restored works and artefacts (Figure 21), compared with the Emperor's crown in the film played by actor Thanh Loc (Figure 19). The shape of the crowns is similar and the proportions are high. The details on the crown are meticulous, almost identical to original hats. On top of that, this type of crown was chosen by the filmmaker in accordance with the *Đại triều* ceremony. However, the construction of space and objects inside Thái Hòa palace were not accuracy. In the scene, behind the king is a backdrop with a picture of a five-clawed dragon in the clouds. In royal art, this is called the great golden curtain. This backdrop is still quite modest, the decorative details seem to be simplified, not reaching the grandeur of Huế royal decorative art. Besides, when comparing photos of the Emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty sitting on the throne (Figure 16 and Figure 17), wearing shoes and stepping on the back of a unicorn, this is a very typical sitting posture of the Nguyễn Emperor. Further examining the bronze statue of King Khải Định made in France in 1920, currently located at Thiên Định palace, Khải Định mausoleum (Huế) also has the style of sitting on a throne and stepping on the back of a unicorn. Thus, the footage in the film still does not meet the accuracy compared to historical facts.



Figure 21: The Cữu Long Thông Thiên crown in: (a) painting by artist Nguyễn Văn Nhân in the album *Grande tenue de la Cour d'Annam*; (b) painting of King Đồng Khánh by a French artist; (c) bronze statue of King Khải Định at his Tomb; (d) artefact at the Vietnam National Museum of History, Hanoi; (e) crown revived by artisan Vũ Kim Lộc.

Source: Photographed and collected by the authors, 2020.

The costumes of “Phượng Khẩu” were made almost perfectly, but it still had some limitations, especially film techniques (Computer-Generated Imagery - CGI). The 3D segments of Imperial Court or *Đại triều* were done forcibly and lacked smoothness when switching scenes (Figure 22). As mentioned, Nguyễn costumes are only beautiful when placed in Huế court space to effectuate the visual harmony. Consequently, entertainment products nowadays have difficulties in terms of choosing a context. If choosing the Huế Imperial Court, the mausoleum or the palace as a filming setting, the producers should also consider designing light not to damage the relic sites. On the other hand, in Huế, there are still some works that are seriously deteriorating or under construction, such as Thái Hòa palace, Đồng Khánh tomb, Dục Đức tomb, and Kiến Trung palace.



Figure 22: A 3D segment of Imperial Court in the web drama “Phượng Khấu”.

Source: Screenshot of “Phượng Khấu” Episode 2, 2020.

Another entertainment work launched in 2020 is the music video “Không thể cùng nhau suốt kiếp” by singer Hòa Minzy. This is a historical music video inspired by the tragic love story of Queen Nam Phương and King Bảo Đại. The song in the video was composed by musician Mr. Siro and produced by director Kawaii Tuan Anh. The costumes were designed and restored as closely as possible to history by the design team Ý Vân Hiên, VekrisNa and Nguyễn Ngọc Hằng.

During the reign of King Bảo Đại (1925-1945), the King and Queen gradually adopted Western clothing, so photos of them wearing royal costumes were rare. In singer Hoa Minzy’s music video, the ceremonial dresses only appear in the first few seconds (0:55-1:20) in the wedding scene of King Bảo Đại and Queen Nam Phương, filmed at the Trường Lang in the Forbidden City of Huế (Figure 23). However, the scene is impressive enough, showing the methodical investment of the production team. Focusing on the two main characters, the audience can admire the two sets of Đại triều costumes, which are the Dragon and Phoenix robes. Thereby, the Dragon robe is dark yellow, embroidered with a 5-claw dragon, accompanied by a Cửu Long Thông Thiên crown. The yellow-orange phoenix robe, embroidered with a phoenix image, comes with a Cửu Phượng crown, all very elaborately crafted.

The design team has successfully recreated these two important ceremonial dresses, which are almost exactly like the artefacts. However, when compared with the photo taken of Queen Nam Phương on her wedding day in 1934, she was wearing a Nhật Bình dress with a turban on her head instead of wearing a Đại triều dress like in the video (Figure 24). News and pictures of this wedding also appeared quite a lot in French newspapers and magazines at that time. Pictures in the newspapers also showed the Queen wearing Nhật Bình dress, sitting on a rickshaw on the wedding day. Thus, the design of the Queen’s costume in the wedding scene is not historically accurate, nor is it appropriate for this important event.



Figure 23: Wedding scene of King Bảo Đại and Queen Nam Phương in the music video “Không thể cùng nhau suốt kiếp” by singer Hòa Minzy.

Source: Screenshot of music video “Không thể cùng nhau suốt kiếp”, 2022.



Figure 24: Queen Nam Phương wore Nhật Bình dress and a turban on her wedding day in 1934.

Source: Documentary.

This music video has many outstanding advantages, beautiful film colors, bringing back emotions of the past. The scene was filmed right at the Complex of Huế Monuments such as An Định Palace and the Imperial Citadel of Huế. Before each historical event, there are subtitles clearly stating the location and time of occurrence. The Queen’s daily outfit was also meticulously restored, almost identical to the original, including the Áo dài and turban, and even the jewelry was exquisitely crafted, especially the necklace with the image of the Cross. These images are associated with Queen Nam Phương (Figure 25).

In the later stages of the Nguyễn dynasty, the Queens in the palace often wore a turban on the head during court occasions. The turban was one of the most popular accessories of the Queen to show the authority of the mother of the world. In the souvenir house of Đức Từ Cung (Đoan Huy Empress Dowager, mother of King Bảo Đại) also kept the turban for the Empress Dowager and the Queen up to 12 meters long, the size of these turbans was more significant than the turbans of the civilian. The style of wrapping a Huế’s turban was different from the style of Tonkin. Huế’s turban was wrapped with the edge of the towel facing upwards on the inside. The second layer was wrapped outside in front of the first. Most of the turbans were made of Nhiều fabric because it has a rough surface, so when wrapped, it does not slip like ordinary silk (Tran, 2016). Overall, through creating costumes for the characters in the music video, it shows that the production team spent a lot of time, thorough research, and building every small detail. This is a very valuable highlight in historical entertainment works in Vietnam.



Figure 25: Scene of Queen Nam Phương wearing an Áo dài, a turban, and a Cross necklace in the music video “Không thể cùng nhau suốt kiếp” by singer Hòa Minzy.

Source: Screenshot of music video “Không thể cùng nhau suốt kiếp”, 2022.



Figure 26: Portrait of Queen Nam Phương wearing Áo dài and her head wrapped in a turban.

Source: Documentary.

Through some of the above discussions, the issues to be raised in the restoration of the Nguyễn court dresses:

- i. The young team specializing in researching and restoring costumes are available, but not much.
- ii. Lack of funding for costumes in the film.
- iii. Lack of proper shooting context to enhance beauty of the costume.
- iv. Lack of promotion and support from the state or authorities.

7.2. Propose solutions

Youth and a sense of preservation of cultural heritage in the international integration process remain an issue that needs to be educated early. Inheritance is very clearly shown in the current entertainment products in Vietnam. Compared to neighbouring countries, the cultural heritage of the Nguyễn dynasty was greatly lost due to the war. Therefore, the task of preserving and promoting it is essential. Currently, research activities on Nguyễn's costumes only come from several individuals who are scholars, artisans, researchers including Trịnh Bách, Trần Quang Đức, Trần Đức Anh Sơn, Trần Đình Sơn, Vũ Kim Lộc and several other scholars in Huế. Young research groups were also gradually formed, but not much. The restoration of antique Vietnamese costumes in general and Nguyễn's costumes, in particular, takes much time, effort and money. Putting an antique costume on film is a long journey in the next few years. Vietnamese Period films are still in the beginning stages with a wide range of Chinese Period films. The problems that need to be addressed appropriately, the authors propose some new solutions to raise the degree of Vietnamese Period films to a higher level:

Firstly, build a specialized research team on antique costumes. In the Nguyễn's dynasty, the Kings put the Ministry of Ceremonies in charge of producing and designing costumes for the whole court. Nowadays, we also need such a specialized agency to restore the antique costumes rightly. Through cinema to recreate history.

Secondly, establish an Evaluation Authority (EA), assessing the quality of antique film

costumes before going public. The appraisal team consists of researchers, scholars, historical advisors with extensive experience in the field of Huế court dress study.

Thirdly, bringing the history of Vietnamese costumes into the general education program, through which students recognize the unique beauty of royal costumes, aware of the importance of preserving and promoting national cultural identity, especially costume culture.

Fourthly, film and music video producers need to seriously research and choose the proper filming context because the court dresses are beautiful when they are put into a suitable space.

Finally, producers need to have plans to invest in the restoration of film costumes, serving historically valuable films.

In industry 4.0, public opinion comes from social networks very quickly, so ancient Vietnamese entertainment products need to be careful in the production process. Costumes determine the success of entertainment products, primarily works with ancient titles, the content and costumes must be true to history.

8. CONCLUSION

In any era, costumes are essential in life. For Nguyễn's history, costumes were essential elements in culture, fine art and history. The beauty of Nguyễn's costumes is shown in many aspects of materials, colours, designs, layouts, decorative model projects, etc., combined with accessories such as Mũ Miện, hia hài, and ngọc bội create a beautiful harmony. From clearly distinguished colours to the layout of decorative motifs, it has shown the ambition of the ruling class since the beauty in Nguyễn's costumes is the beauty of dominance. During 143 years of existence, the Nguyễn dynasty has left behind a brilliant and glorious costume system that deserves to become a proud national cultural heritage. It needs to be preserved and developed. Nguyễn's costume regulations were well documented in the history books. However, with this study, the authors could not write fully present. This study aims to clarify the beauty of costumes with an approach to visual arts perspective.

The application of antique costumes to film requires elaborate preparation, exploration of documents or artefacts to produce art products that are both accurate and valuable.

Although there are many antique research groups, it is necessary to have cultural management agencies verify the quality and authenticity of the costumes restored. Analyzing and synthesizing documents on Nguyễn's costumes to discuss issues related to costume restoration in entertainment products in Vietnam, the research is inevitable for subjective reviews. Therefore, the study's authors tried to carefully select information, thereby contributing to improving and changing the mindset of the younger generation, who look at the cultural heritage of costumes. In conclusion, to have a complete costume system, the Vietnamese feudal dynasties have built, changed and improved over many periods to suit the lifestyle of Vietnamese people. Nowadays, the inheritance generation wants to bring the history of ancient costumes to the world, to honour the national costume tradition, and to affirm the artistic values of culture on the Dragon-shaped "S" land.

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