MÕ MAGAZINE

#Special Issue

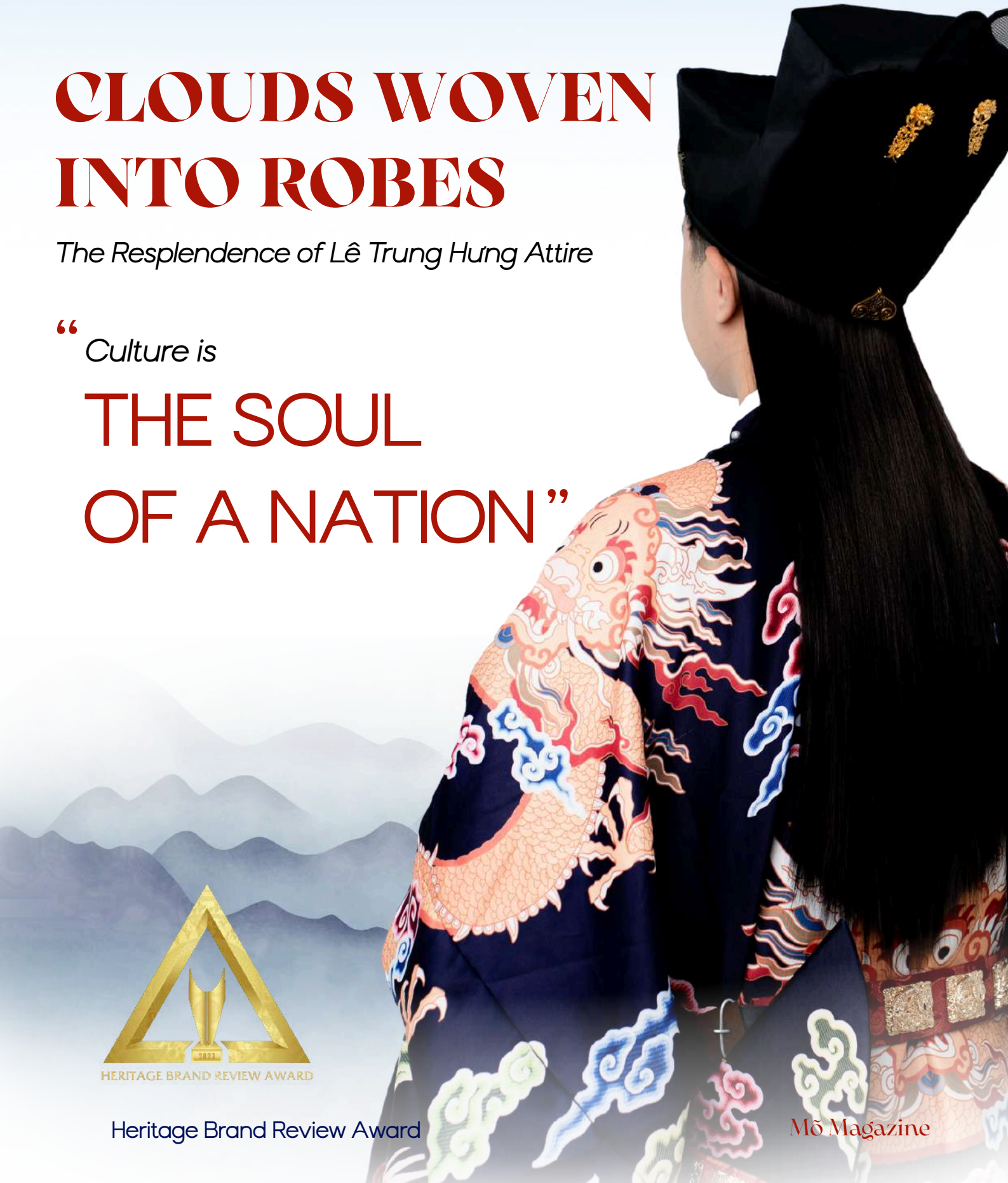
CLOUDS WOVEN INTO ROBES

The Resplendence of Lê Trung Hưng Attire

"*Culture is*

THE SOUL

OF A NATION"



HERITAGE BRAND REVIEW AWARD

Heritage Brand Review Award

Mõ Magazine

OPEN LETTER

When we speak of the Lê Trung Hưng era, what often comes to mind are the long years of civil strife - the tumultuous power struggles between the Lê, Trịnh, and Nguyễn lords. Yet beyond the dust and echoes of warfare lies a luminous chapter too often forgotten - a time when culture, artistry, and courtly rituals flourished, forging a unique aesthetic that blended East Asian refinement with the indelible spirit of Vietnam. It was during this period that the ceremonial dress system took on a defined form, carrying forward the legacy of regional traditions while asserting a distinctly Vietnamese identity. Every robe, headpiece, and garment became a living testament to a culture in constant evolution.

As young people navigating the rapid currents of the modern world, we hold more dearly than ever the value of identity. In moments of reflection, we've come to realize that history does not only reside in chronicles and battlegrounds, but also in the folds of fabric and the weave of cloth - where our ancestors entrusted their spirit, virtue, and resilience.

This issue of our magazine is an offering - a message from youth who cherish culture, reaching out to kindred souls searching for themselves in the depths of tradition. As you turn each page, we hope you not only admire the elegance of the garments, but also feel the golden age awaken once more - not through the clash of swords, but through the quiet, profound beauty of Vietnamese culture.

Though many sources have faded with time, we believe that as long as there are those who care, culture still has a chance to be reborn. On this journey, we are not alone. Scholars, artists, and researchers continue to preserve and retell history through their writings and brushstrokes.

We are deeply grateful for invaluable works like *Ngàn năm áo mũ* by Trần Quang Đức, which opened up a scholarly window into the world of Vietnamese attire. We admire the tireless dedication of Dr. Đoàn Thị Tình in preserving and sharing knowledge about Vietnam's traditional dress, and we cherish the emotive, meticulous illustrations of Trịnh Quang Vũ in Trang phục triều Lê - Trịnh. We must also celebrate Dệt nền triều đại by the Vietnam Centre - a bold, creative endeavor by young minds like ours, blending heritage with innovation.



Within the scope of this magazine, we have chosen to use the term interpretive reconstruction when referring to the illustrated and photographed depictions of traditional garments. Unlike restoration, which implies a faithful and exact recreation of an original model, interpretive reconstruction acknowledges the inevitable limitations imposed by time. After centuries of historical upheavals, not every detail has survived intact to allow for complete reproduction. What we offer instead is a synthesis drawn from fragmented sources - ancient records, archaeological findings, and modern academic research - all woven together to revive a portion of a memory long faded. Though we may fall short of absolute fidelity, we hope these efforts bring the public closer to history, allowing them to glimpse the beauty that once graced a brilliant era.

To bring this magazine to completion and into the hands of readers, we extend our deepest gratitude to the organizing committee of the *Heritage Brand Review Award* - visionaries who created a meaningful platform where young creativity is fueled by a love for culture and a commitment to preserving national identity.

The steadfast support of the organizers was not only the firm foundation upon which this magazine was built, but also a source of encouragement - affirming our belief that today's small efforts can help carry the current of heritage forward into contemporary life.

Lastly, alongside garments from private collections, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the research group *Lịch Triều Khảo Điển* and the project Cẩm Thượng Thiêm Hoa - fellow young idealists who provided scholarly guidance and lent artifacts, helping us shape a rich and meaningful publication.

Their support was more than material - it was a spiritual collaboration, a shared belief that culture holds enduring values, and that awakening those values is both the responsibility and privilege of our generation.



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LÊ TRUNG HƯNG
A RESPLENDENT ERA

The Lê Trung Hưng period - marked by upheaval, yet radiant with cultural and aesthetic flourishing - stands as a powerful testament to the enduring vitality of the Vietnamese spirit.

LÊ TRUNG HƯNG

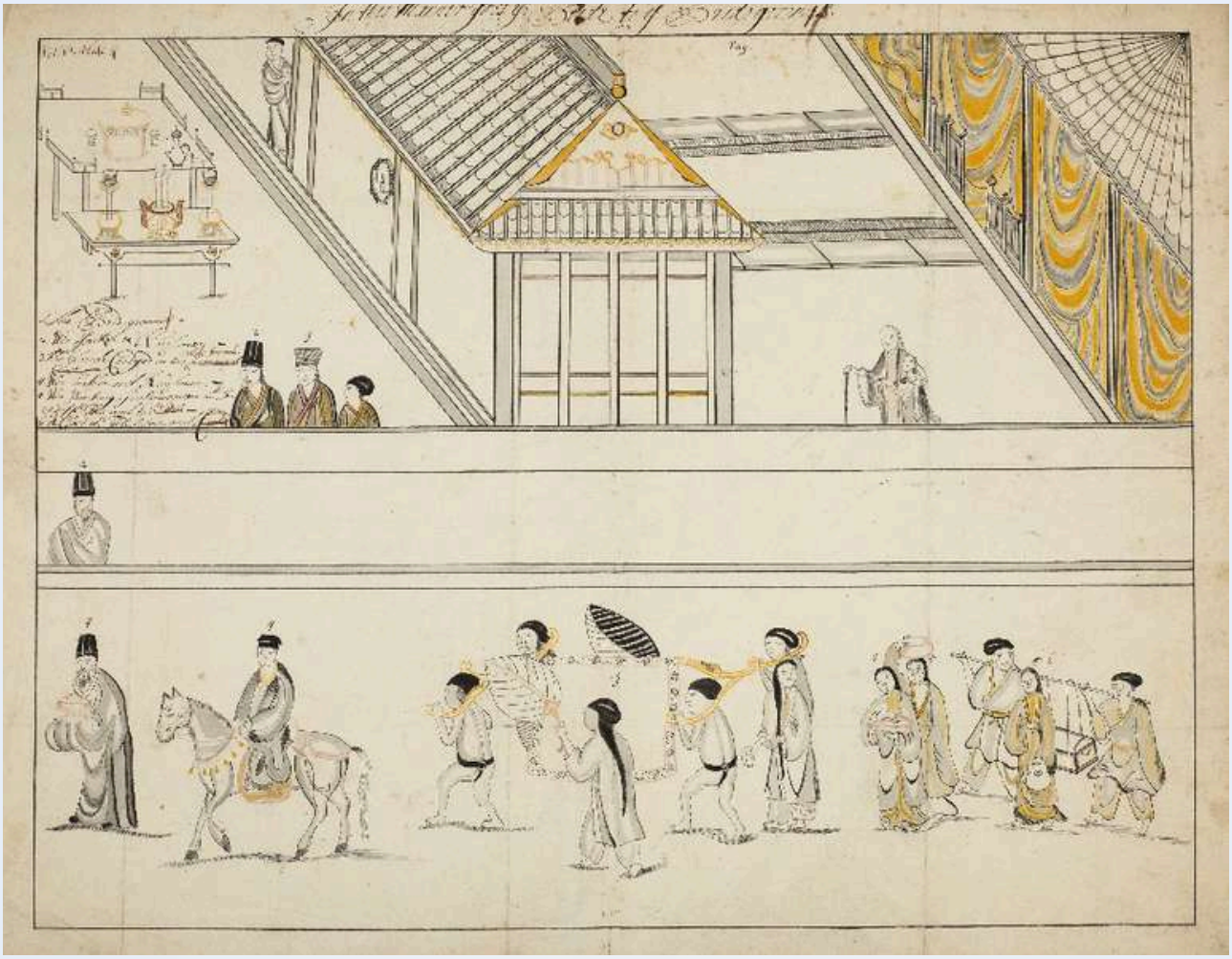
(1533-1789)



marked the continuation of the Hậu Lê dynasty after the brilliant Lê Sơ period. After the years of turmoil and interruption, the Lê dynasty was restored when Lê Trang Tông - the first monarch of this era - was assisted to the throne in Thanh Hóa by the veteran official Nguyễn Kim.

Amid sweeping historical changes, the Lê Trung Hưng dynasty served as a bridge between past and present, preserving the legacy of a royal house that had once symbolized order and stability. This was a period in which the presence of the Lê dynasty, although no longer holding real power, still carried great symbolic and cultural significance within the orthodox flow of Đại Việt.

Lasting for 249 years, The Lê Trung Hưng dynasty was the longest-surviving feudal dynasty in the history of Vietnam. While it avoided invasions from the North, the country was engulfed in internal conflict - from the civil war between the Southern and Northern Courts to the prolonged power struggle between the Trịnh - Nguyễn lords.

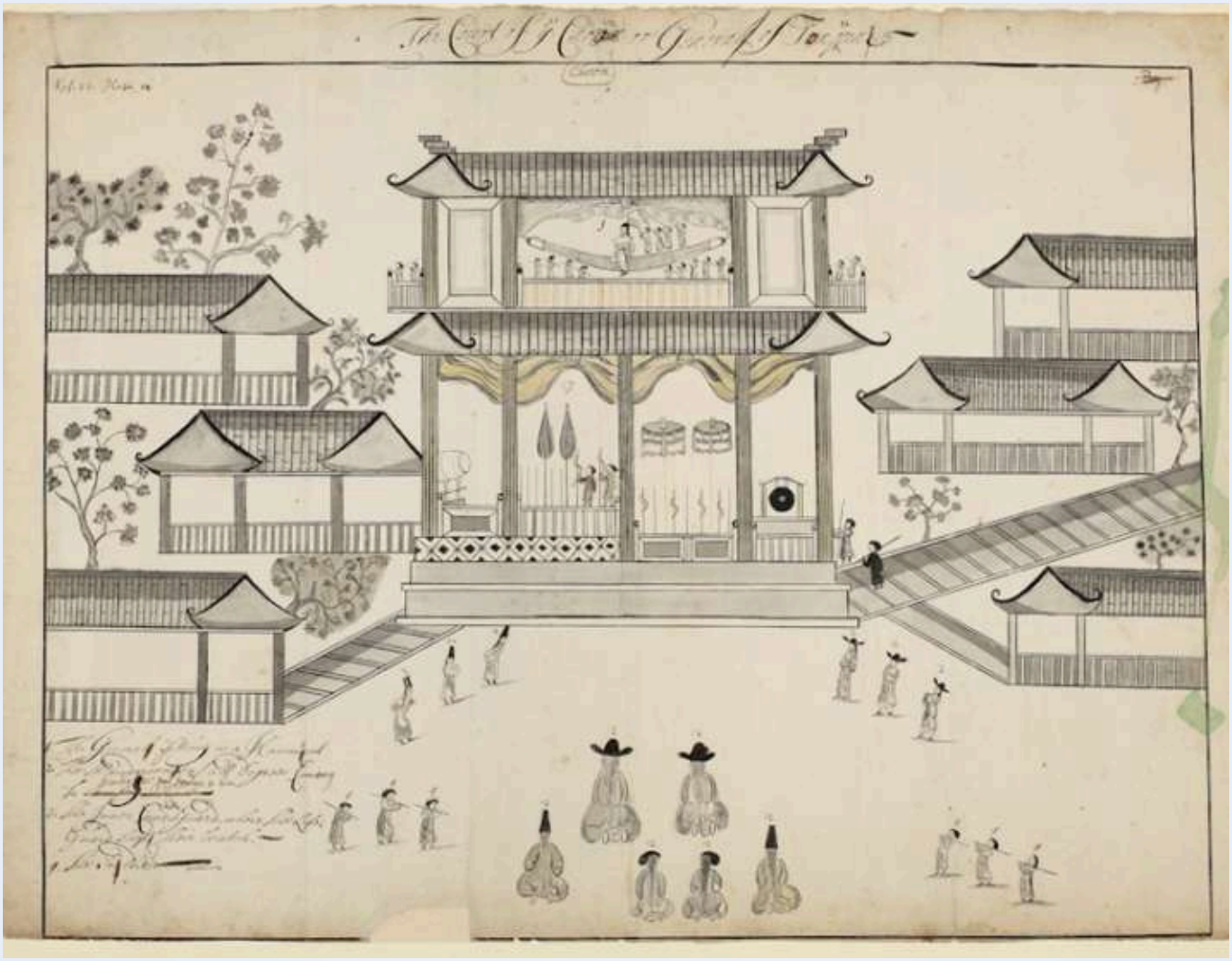


Painting of a wedding ceremony in Samuel Baron's "Description of the Kingdom of Dang Ngoai", 1685

Nevertheless, in the midst of the political haze, another life quietly flourished: the prosperity of the economy and urban centers. Kẻ Chợ (Thăng Long) bustled with artisan quarters and merchant streets, Phố Hiến thrived along the banks of the Red River, Hội An dazzled with ships from afar, and Phú Xuân gradually emerged as the new center of Đàng Trong.

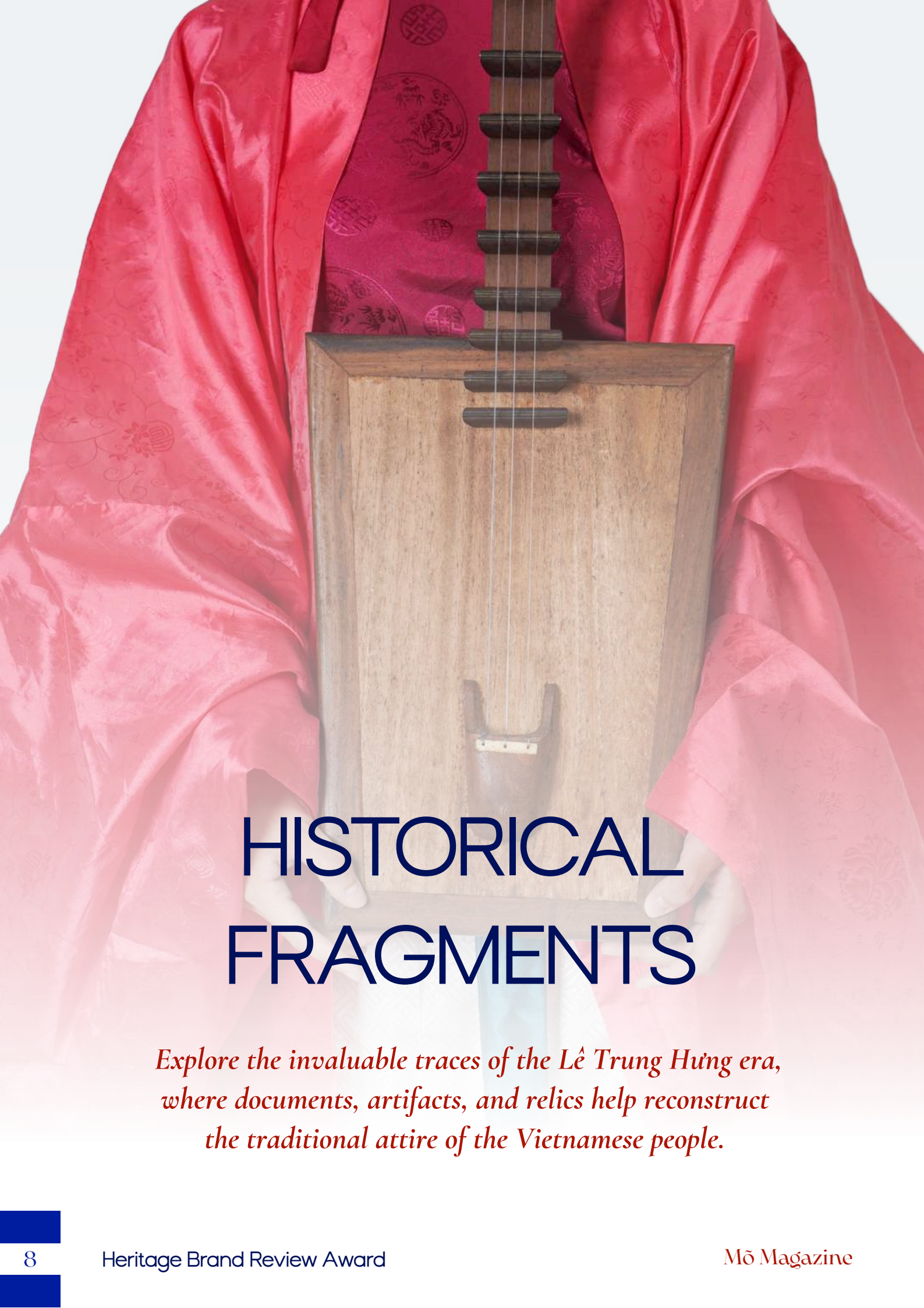
From Phan Huy Chú to Western missionaries, and even modern scholars, many have praised the economic vitality of the Lê - Trịnh era - a time when the rhythms of life continued to rise in the midst of division and turbulence.

The history of Vietnamese costumes is a long story of exchange and creativity. Like Japan and Korea - countries in the same cultural space - Vietnam was also deeply influenced by Chinese civilization. However, what makes the Vietnamese people's unique identity is the ability to adapt flexibly: accepting the quintessence but not losing the core of indigenous culture.



Painting of Lord Trinh's palace in the book "Description of the Kingdom of Dang Ngoai" by Samuel Baron, 1685

During the Later Le Dynasty, the royal court issued two regulations on costumes in 1661 and 1721. The regulation in 1661 continued the legacy from the early Le Dynasty, while the 1721 milestone showed an effort to perfect the clothing and hat regime through sending envoy Nguyen Cong Hang to the Qing Dynasty to consult on the etiquette. However, the elements adopted were always Vietnamized, from shape, color to usage, creating a system of costumes that were standardized but still had its own identity - a smooth fusion between the elements of the royal court and the spirit of Vietnamese culture.



HISTORICAL FRAGMENTS

Explore the invaluable traces of the Lê Trung Hưng era, where documents, artifacts, and relics help reconstruct the traditional attire of the Vietnamese people.

In the 235 years since the official end of the Lê Trung Hưng dynasty, our country has undergone numerous historical upheavals, marked by successive large and small-scale wars throughout the following centuries. These turbulent events have led to a significant loss and degradation of documents, artifacts, and relics related to the Lê Trung Hưng period. This scarcity has posed considerable challenges to the research, understanding, and reconstruction of the social landscape, as well as the attire of both commoners and the royal court of that era.



"Chronicles of the Dynasties" was painstakingly researched and compiled by scholar Phan Huy Chu over 10 years (1809-1819)

The book series is considered the first encyclopedia of our country, a treasure trove of valuable scientific documents for social science research.

Nevertheless, it is truly valuable that a number of important documents and artifacts have been preserved, offering glimpses into the customs, lifestyles, and attire of our ancestors during the Lê Trung Hưng period. Among these, Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí by Phan Huy Chú stands out as a pioneering work, regarded as the first specialized treatise in Vietnam to systematically record the dress codes of the royal court during the Later Lê dynasty. This work not only provides foundational information on court attire regulations but also vividly reflects ceremonial norms and reveals the depth of the political and social life of the time. In addition, other significant works such as Gia Định thành thông chí by Trịnh Hoài Đức and Phủ biên tạp lục by Lê Quý Đôn also contributed to portraying the customs and modes of dress of the Đại Việt people during this period.

In addition to written records, the remaining body of artifacts - particularly paintings and statues - from this period also plays a crucial role in the visual reconstruction of historical clothing. Notably, most ancient statues found in pagodas across the Northern region today date back to the Lê - Nguyễn dynasties, reflecting a historical context closely aligned with the Lê Trung Hưng era. These statues, through their carved details of garments, silhouettes, and colors, serve as "living documents" that vividly illustrate the clothing styles, aesthetic sensibilities, and religious beliefs of the Vietnamese people of the time. Furthermore, ancestral worship paintings preserved in family lineages from this period are also regarded by researchers as valuable evidence, enriching the corpus of materials available for the study of folk dress and ceremonial life in early Vietnamese society.



The Worship Painting of Trạng Bùng Phùng Khắc

The painting was commissioned by Emperor Ming Shenzong and presented to Phùng Khắc Khoan during his diplomatic mission in 1598. Later, it was respectfully displayed by the Lê king and Trịnh lord at Hoằng Đạo Thư Đường - the institution where Trạng Bùng once taught and promoted Confucian thought.



A Statue of a Merit Buddhist (Hậu Phật) from the Lê Trung Hưng Era at Bút Tháp Pagoda (Bắc Ninh)

Hậu Phật is a form of worship practiced to honor those who made meritorious contributions or donated property to the temple. These individuals are often commemorated with statues or steles as a gesture of gratitude, allowing future generations to remember and emulate their virtuous deeds.



Samuel Baron, a merchant born to a Dutch father and a Vietnamese mother, was the author of A Description of the Kingdom of Tonqueen - a work that offers a vivid and detailed depiction of Vietnamese society and daily life more than three centuries ago. This book was first published in 1732.



The flourishing of international trade under the Lê - Trịnh period also brought valuable external sources to later generations. Researcher Bỉnh Di noted: "The Lê - Trịnh dynasty was the first in history to expand trade with the West; a Dutch trading post was established in 1645, followed by an English one in 1686...". These are clear traces of a once-prosperous Thăng Long, driven by the growth of a commodity-based economy, handicraft industries, and commercial exchange. Through these trade activities, many foreign merchants and envoys who visited Đại Việt recorded, illustrated, and described the customs, clothing, and daily life of the Vietnamese people. These records and images, offering an external and objective perspective, have become valuable reference materials for contemporary research. As a result, we now have more grounds for cross-referencing, verifying, and gradually reconstructing the historical appearance of Vietnamese attire during the Lê Trung Hưng era with greater authenticity.

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) was a French traveler and gem merchant in the 17th century. His writings, along with those of several other Westerners about Tonkin (Đàng Ngoài), were translated by Nguyễn Trọng Phấn and published in the book Vietnamese Society from the 17th Century (Xã hội Việt Nam từ thế kỷ XVII).



THE TRACES OF ANCIENT GARMENTS

Explore the distinctive styles of clothing from the Lê Trung Hưng period - each garment representing a vital part of the culture and daily life of the past.

ÁO (CROSS-COLLARED ROBE)
GIAO LĨNH



"Áo giao lĩnh" is a type of traditional clothing widely found in East Asian cultural spheres, notably in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.



According to various studies, this type of garment originated from China and was adopted by the Vietnamese quite early - possibly as early as the first period of Chinese domination during the Eastern Han dynasty, following the Trung Sisters' uprising.



The Vietnamese historically referred to this garment as “áo cổ chéo” (cross-collared robe) or “áo tràng vạt”, emphasizing the characteristic overlapping of the two panels at the front, forming a Y-shape - where the right flap overlaps the left one (“giao” means to cross, and “lĩnh” means collar).

Structurally, the “áo giao lĩnh” typically consists of five to six joined pieces of fabric, with the hem reaching the knees or ankles. The sleeves could be either fitted or wide, depending on the wearer’s preference or purpose. In 1681, the French traveler Jean Baptiste Tavernier described the Vietnamese attire as follows:

> “...formal yet simple. It is a long garment reaching the heels, resembling the Japanese long robes. Both men and women dress similarly, without much distinction. Their robes are tied at the waist with a silk sash, and they wear beautifully crafted gold and silver ornaments.”

However, after 1945, when the feudal regime ended, the áo giao lĩnh gradually disappeared from everyday life. Today, this garment is often seen in historical films or on traditional theater stages such as tuồng and chèo.

Due to its ancient origins and certain similarities with traditional costumes of neighboring countries, the áo giao lĩnh is often regarded as "foreign" and has received limited public acceptance, sometimes even facing rejection.



The painting Thiền thu tuyệt diễm đồ from China, 15th–16th century, is currently preserved at the National Museum of Beijing.



The painting Mĩ nhân đồ from Korea, dated to the 19th century, is currently housed at the Jangseung Art Museum in Seoul.

Meanwhile, in countries such as Japan, Korea, and China, garments with cross-collared designs remain integral to their cultural identity, often regarded as "national costumes" and actively promoted through cinema and festivals. Although kimono, hanbok, and hanfu each have distinct styles, they all originate from the same principle of the cross-collared collar - a hallmark of East Asian cultural exchange.



The painting "Beauty Holding a Fan" from Japan, 19th century, is currently preserved at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA.









ÁO (ROUND-COLLARED ROBE) VIÊN LĨNH

"Áo viên lĩnh", also known as "áo đoàn lĩnh" or "áo cổ tròn" (round-collared robe), is a type of traditional Vietnamese garment characterized by a fully closed, rounded neckline - a key feature that inspired its name. According to various studies, this style originated in Central Asia, was subsequently introduced into China, and later spread across East Asian civilizations, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

In the dictionary "Đại Nam Quấc Âm Tự Vị" by Huỳnh Tịnh Của, the term "viên lĩnh" (員領) is defined as referring to a closed, round collar-commonly known in folk language as "cổ trịt" (tight collar), "cổ tròn" (round collar), "cổ kiềng" (necklace-like collar), or "cổ mảng" (broad collar).







Men and women wearing round-collared robes in the painting "Triumphant Return of the Literati" from the Lê Trung Hưng period. *The original artifact is housed at Đền Độc Lôi, Nghệ An, and is currently on display at the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts.*

During Vietnam's feudal period, "áo viên lĩnh" was widely worn across all strata of society, regardless of gender - from commoners to members of the mandarin class. It was even used for formal court ceremonies.

In terms of structure, the "áo viên lĩnh" closely resembles the "áo giao lĩnh". It was sewn from five to six panels of fabric forming the body of the robe, with an inner flap and sleeves that could be either narrow or wide, depending on the intended use. The neckline was designed to completely encircle the neck and was typically fastened using a row of buttons positioned diagonally across the right shoulder down to the waist.



Documents on the viên lĩnh garment remain relatively abundant in historical records and visual arts. The *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*, in the annals of the Lê dynasty, recorded:

"From now on, on days of court audiences, farewells, or formal introductions, the wearing of round-collared robes, as decreed for officials, shall be observed."



Painting "Portrait of Han Ik-mo," Korea, 18th century. Currently preserved at the Brooklyn Museum, USA



Painting "Crown Prince Shōtoku," Japan, 8th century. Currently preserved at the Tokyo National Museum

Not only in Vietnam, but archaeological artifacts and paintings from China, Japan, and Korea also demonstrate that the round-collar robe was once widely prevalent. However, compared to the cross-collar robe, the round-collar robe is less frequently recreated in contemporary life today. It mainly appears in historical films, traditional performances, or in ceremonial reenactments.



A section of the Chinese painting 'Han Xi Repeating the Night Banquet Scene' from the 12th century. Currently preserved at the Palace Museum, Beijing







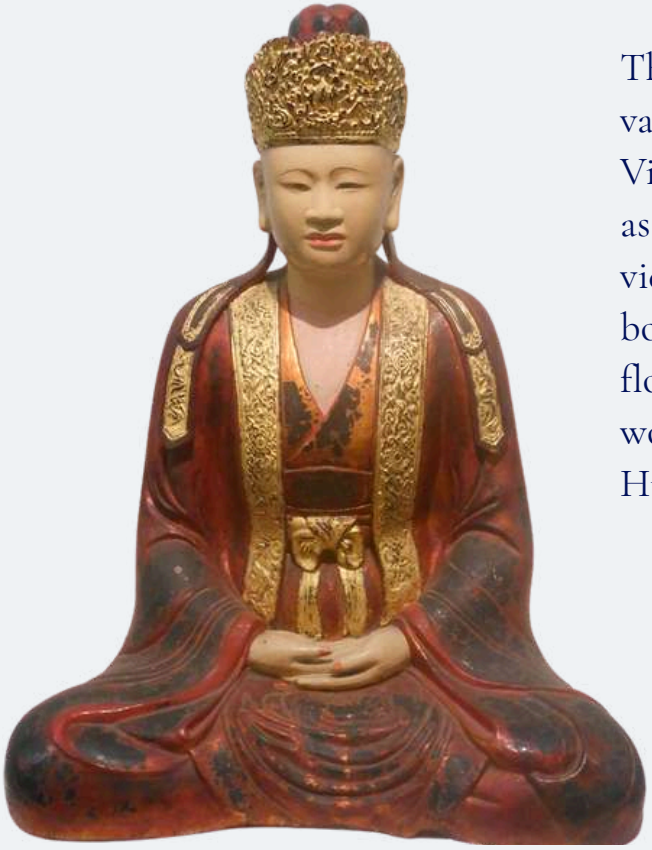




ÁO (PARALLEL-COLLARED ROBE) ĐỐI KHÂM



Áo đối khâm, unlike the "áo giao lĩnh" and "áo viên lĩnh", is constructed from four panels of fabric, forming a four-part robe (tứ thân). The term "đối khâm" derives from the structure of the collar: two front panels designed symmetrically and running parallel to each other.



This type of robe was once widespread across various East Asian cultural spheres, including Vietnam, where the "áo đối khâm" often served as an outer layer worn over "áo giao lĩnh" or "áo viên lĩnh". The typical form featured a long body covering down to the knees, wide and flowing sleeves, and it frequently appeared on worship statues dating from the Lê Trung Hưng period.

Reproduction of the statue of Princess Le Thi Ngoc Duyen at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum (Original at But Thap Pagoda, 17th century)
The statue wears a cross-collared shirt inside, and a double-collared shirt outside, with the neck flap delicately carved.



There are currently no surviving ancient texts that precisely record when the "áo đối khâm" first appeared in Vietnam. However, through religious sculptures and votive paintings, it is evident that this robe became common during the Hậu Lê period. Particularly, the áo đối khâm is often depicted in the attire of noblewomen, suggesting that it was widely adopted by women in daily life at the time.

Giao Chi people in the 17th century book "Vạn quốc nhân vật đồ"
You can see the woman wearing a round-necked shirt inside and áo đối khâm

During the Nguyễn dynasty, "áo đối khâm" evolved into different forms: in folk culture, it became the "áo tứ thân" (four-part robe), while in the royal court, it developed into the "áo Nhật Bình" - a ceremonial costume worn by imperial concubines and royal women during rituals and important court events.



Photo of Princess Mỹ Lương, also known as Bà chúa Nhất, in Nhật Bình costume in 1930
She was the sister of King Thành Thái

Not only in Vietnam, versions of the áo đối khâm have also been identified in archaeological artifacts, paintings, and historical records from countries such as China, Korea (Joseon Dynasty), and Japan. Although the names and garment styles may vary slightly across different periods and cultures, a common feature remains the parallel and symmetrical collar design, symbolizing neatness and propriety.



The painting 'Noblewoman, Her Mother, and Three Servants' from Japan, 18th century. Currently preserved at the Art Institute of Chicago, USA



The painting 'Lady Choe Ban during the Goryeo period' from Korea, 14th century. Currently preserved at the National Museum of Korea, Seoul



The painting 'Listening to the Qin' from China, 6th century. Currently preserved at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan







THƯỜNG

(Traditional Skirt)



Thường, also known as “quần thường”, “quầy thường”, “xống”, or “xiêm”, is a type of traditional clothing resembling a modern skirt, designed to cover the lower body. The “thường” is typically made by joining two or more panels of fabric into a cylindrical form, wrapping around the lower torso. Beneath it, the wearer would commonly wear a pair of white trousers. On the upper body, women usually wore an áo y (a type of blouse), thus historically, women's attire was sometimes collectively referred to as y thường - meaning blouse and skirt.

This type of garment was not only used in daily life but also served as a significant element in women's formal attire across various Vietnamese dynasties, including the Lý, Trần, Lê, and Nguyễn periods.



During the Lê dynasty, the version of thường worn by women was called "côn đang", constructed from seven overlapping fabric panels. The *Chỉ Nam Ngọc Âm Giải Nghĩa* (an ancient Vietnamese dictionary) describes: "Côn đang" is the skirt worn by women. It is wrapped by layering seven panels across the body," illustrating the sophisticated and graceful appearance of this skirt design.



A noble lady depicted in the painting "Hoàng Thanh Chức Cống Đồ." *It can be seen that the woman is wearing multiple layers of overlapping skirts underneath*

Due to its practicality and cultural significance, similar types of skirts were also widely used in other East Asian countries, particularly among women. For instance, during Japan's Heian period, noble girls underwent a coming-of-age ceremony called "thường trứ", where donning the traditional skirt symbolized their transition to adulthood.



"Hwa Cheon-Sikbu" (Harmonious Household Etiquette), Korea, XVIII century. Preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art



"Washing Clothes" - from the painting series Giseon Pungsokdo Yeop (Genre Scenes of Daily Life). Held at the Museum of Korean Christianity



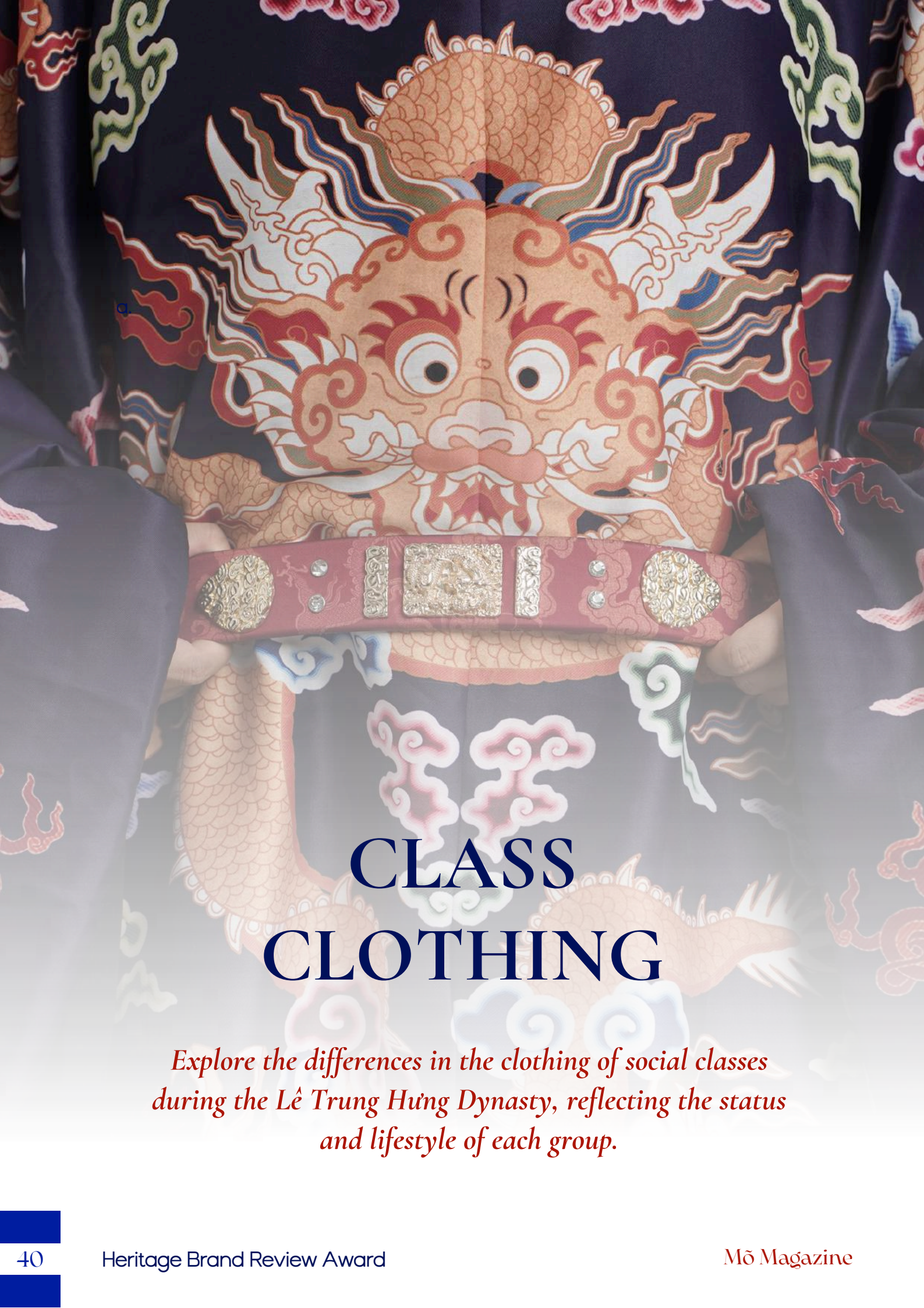
"Han Xi Zai's Night Banquet" (Han Xizai Yeyan Tu), China, circa 12th century. Preserved at the Palace Museum, Beijing











CLASS CLOTHING

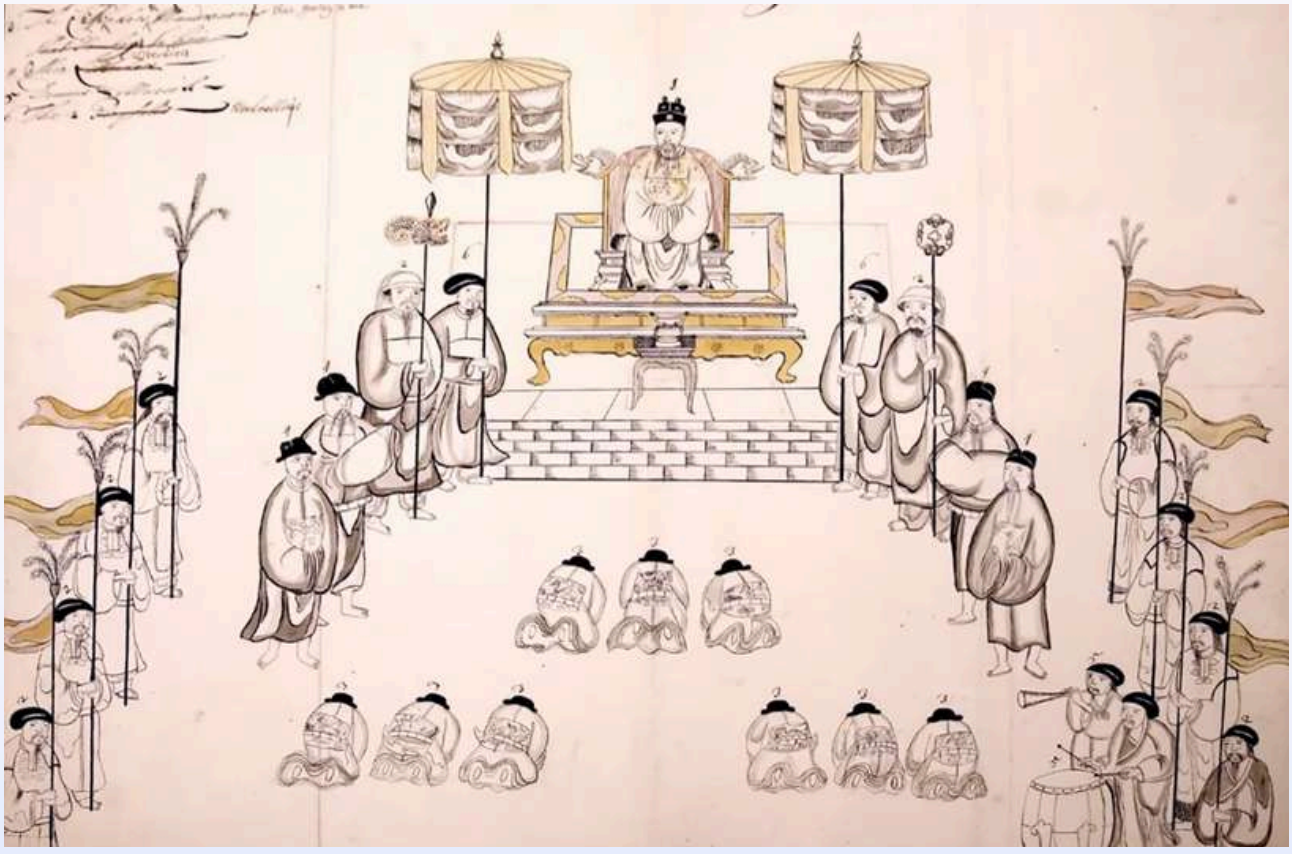
Explore the differences in the clothing of social classes during the Lê Trung Hưng Dynasty, reflecting the status and lifestyle of each group.



Royal Attire of Kings and Lords

During the Later Lê Dynasty, King Lê was considered a symbol of authority, the emperor of the Southern country. However, this was only a title, not a real power. Therefore, the costumes of King Lê during this period were also simplified and changed compared to the previous Early Lê Dynasty. In the *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, Phan Huy Chú also talked about the costumes of the Lê kings and Trịnh lords during this period:

> "From the Later Revival period onwards, during grand ceremonies such as enthronement, investitures, or issuing royal edicts, His Majesty would wear the Xung Thiên crown, don the Hoàng bào (imperial yellow robe), and fasten a jade belt...The Lords, during great rituals like the Heaven Sacrifice or court ceremonies, would wear a purple robe, the Xung Thiên crown, and a jade belt."



Painting of the court scene of the Later Lê Dynasty around 1684 - 1685 by Samuel Baron



Statue of King Lê Thần Tông (1607 - 1662)
at Mật Sơn Pagoda, Thanh Hóa

Similarly, *Khâm định Việt sử Thông giám cương mục* (The Imperially Ordered Annotated Text and Comprehensive Mirror of Vietnam History) also recorded:

> "... upon reaching the Canh Phục Hall outside the sacrificial altar, His Majesty would wear the Xung Thiên crown, the Hoàng bào, and the jade belt before proceeding to the Chiêu Sự Hall to perform rites."

From these sources, it is evident that on major ceremonial occasions, the Lê kings wore the Hoàng bào, donned the Xung Thiên crown, and fastened a jade belt.

ÁO BÀO (CEREMONIAL ROBE)

Regarding the style of the áo bào (ceremonial robe) during this period, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí* noted:

> "Each year, during the New Year's Eve offering ceremony at the Kính Thiên Palace and other ritual observances, sa đoạn fabric from the North was used, dyed azure blue, and embroidered with the 'Grand Gathering of Dragon and Cloud' motifs."

A significant artifact - the ceremonial robe of King Lê Dụ Tông, unearthed in 1958 - offers a vivid and authentic representation of the Lê kings' and Trịnh lords' attire from this era. The robe features the Long Vân Đại Hội motif, with two large dragons embroidered on the chest and back, smaller dragons on the shoulders, and surrounding patterns of clouds, flames, and waves.



Fragments of fabric and garments
Depicting motifs of dragons, clouds, and flames found in the royal tomb

XUNG THIÊN HAT

Accompanying the Long bào (dragon robe) is the Xung Thiên crown - a distinctive imperial headpiece reserved for the monarch. The crown features a low front and a dramatically elevated rear, with two upright wing-like projections reaching toward the sky, hence the name Xung Thiên, meaning 'rising to the heavens.' This crown shape is also commonly seen in depictions of East Asian sovereigns, such as those from China and Korea.

From court attire, one can clearly perceive that the grandeur and majestic presence of Vietnamese imperial garments during this period were comparable to those of other Sinosphere countries, where ritual and the monarch's image were highly revered as symbols of divine mandate and authority.



A drawing by Samuel Baron depicts King Lê wearing a royal dragon robe and donning the ceremonial Xung Thiên hat



Ceremonial Attire of Lord Trịnh

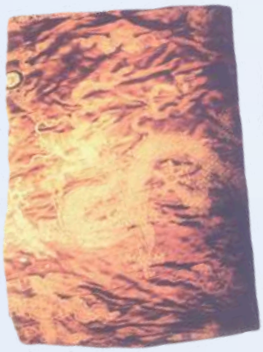
A reconstructed Trịnh lord's court attire in imperial purple, featuring the Long vân đại hội motif, was adapted from the Long bào of Emperor Lê Dụ Tông to convey the authoritative splendor of a prosperous era. The Xung Thiên crown is decorated with gold-carved 'two dragons flanking the sun' and five-clawed dragons, symbolizing the Son of Heaven in the Lê dynasty style.



"Xung thiên" hat

Áo Giao Lĩnh (Lined cross-collared robe)

Imperial robe
Based on Artifacts





Đai (Belt)

Hia (Royal boots)



The Poem "Imperially Composed at the Từ Thức Grotto"



Supplementary material

IMPERIALLY COMPOSED AT THE "TỪ THỨC" GROTTO

Trịnh Sâm Lord (1739-1782) was one of the most powerful and refined lords during the Lê Trung Hưng era. Renowned in politics, he also left his mark in the arts, possessing a soul that cherished natural beauty and aesthetics. During a southern journey, Trịnh Sâm visited Bích Đào Grotto - now known as the Từ Thức Grotto - and composed the poem Imperially Composed at the Từ Thức Grotto in 1771.

The poem portrays a mystical fairyland scene at dusk: the grotto entrance closing in the sunset glow, fairy garments shimmering in the distance, and rocks echoing with ethereal tones like palace music. Through delicate metaphors and nostalgic inspiration, Trịnh Sâm not only praises the beauty of the Từ Thức Grotto but also conveys a profound philosophy: whether in the immortal realm or the earthly world, joy and beauty are finite in the face of time. Each verse reflects his melancholy about worldly changes and urges people to cherish the fleeting moments of life.



Facsimile executed by Nguyễn Hữu Sử (Institute of Religious Studies)

Imperially Composed at the Từ Thức Grotto (Trịnh Sâm)

Poem in Classical Chinese:

Chu trình thừa hứng phỏng Từ lang,
Động khẩu y nhiên toả tịch dương.
Bích quải nghê thường quang ỷ tú,
Thạch xao phụng quản hưởng cung thương.
Tiên hôn tự tích tam sinh khế,
Trần hải kinh kim kỷ độ dương.
Mạc thuyết Dao Trì thừa tuấn nhật,
Tư du hà dị lãng Bồng hương?

Literal Translation:

Nhân nhàn rỗi đi thuyền tới thăm Từ Thức,
Cửa động khép lại sau bóng chiều tà.
Xiêm áo như treo trên cao sáng lấp lánh,
Gió mưa gõ vào đá vang lên điệu cung thương.
Lời thề duyên tiên hò hẹn kiếp ba sinh,
Biển dâu nay đã bao lần thay đổi.
Đừng cho rằng thời gian nơi cõi tiên trôi nhanh,
Vui chơi ở chốn đó chừng ấy cũng đã đủ rồi.






御製題徐式崗
舟程乘興訪徐郎崗口依然鎖夕陽
碧掛覓裳光綺繡石敲風
僊婚自昔三生契塵海經今幾
揚葉說瑤池乘駿日斯遊何異
閬蓬鄉
日南元主題
辛卯仲春臣高搏奉寫
Lagarwood

Supplementary material

AGARWOOD

SYMBOL OF POWER AND DIPLOMACY

Agarwood, the resinous heartwood formed from the wounds of the Aquilaria tree, is not only a precious fragrance, but under the Lê dynasty (15th-17th centuries), it became a sacred material intertwined with power, spirituality, and national diplomacy.

In East Asian cultures, agarwood has long been present in royal rites, coronations, and court rituals as a sacred substance linking earth and heaven - a symbol of supreme monarchical authority. At the same time, its fragrance permeates folk beliefs, found on ancestral altars, in pagodas, and throughout festivals in both rural and urban spaces - its smoke carrying prayers for peace across the land.



The Trầm Hương Tower Monument is a radiant symbol of Khánh Hòa Province today

During the Revival Lê period, according to records in Phủ Biên Tạp Lục by Lê Quý Đôn, agarwood (trầm hương) was a rare and precious product, strictly harvested for tribute and royal rituals in the Southern Region (Đàng Trong), and also exported to Japan, China, and the Arab world. Agarwood was not only a sacred material but also became a symbol of Đại Việt's economic and cultural standing on the regional trade map. Other records also show that Japanese merchants came to Hội An to purchase agarwood along with various other products such as silk, camphor, aloes, and pepper. This proves that agarwood was not only highly valued domestically but also widely favored in international markets, helping affirm Đại Việt's prestige and commercial position in East Asia.





EVERYDAY ATTIRE OF KINGS AND LORDS

Alongside ceremonial court attire, the daily clothing (thường phục) of Lê dynasty kings and Trịnh lords during the Lê Trung Hưng period was strictly regulated. This attire helped distinguish the upper ruling class from lower-ranking officials. According to scholar Phan Huy Chú, Lê kings wore purple or black aily clothing along with a Tam Sơn hat. The Trịnh lords - who held actual political power - also wore purple garments and donned the Tam Sơn hat when receiving court officials during formal occasions.

Based on these records, and by examining the statue of a Trịnh lord at Kim Liên Pagoda (Hà Nội), one can observe detailed features consistent with historical descriptions. The statue - believed to represent either Trịnh Sâm or Trịnh Giang - depicts the lord wearing a purple robe with tight-fitting sleeves and a straight silhouette, reflecting the elegance of the time.

This appearance aligns with descriptions in *Vũ Trung Tùy Bút* by Phạm Đình Hổ of the everyday attire worn by Lê kings and Trịnh lords:

> ...round neckline, flat front, embroidered with horsehair on the lower hem, with golden embroidery above the forehead to denote rank. This type of hat and robe was typically worn by kings and lords in audiences or when entering the inner palace



Tượng một vị chúa Trịnh có niên đại thế kỉ XVIII ở chùa Kim Liên, Hà Nội

Furthermore, during the excavation of King Lê Dụ Tông's tomb, in addition to ceremonial garments, archaeologists discovered a yellow cross-collared robe decorated with dragon-and-cloud motifs, believed to have been worn in everyday life.



The cross-collared robe believed to be everyday attire, unearthed from King Lê Dụ Tông's Tomb in 1958

Based on the limited surviving sources, it can be inferred that in daily life, King Lê and Lord Trịnh favored cross-collared robes made from intricately embroidered fabrics, paired with round, flat-topped hats. These garments conveyed both solemnity and a reflection of royal status.

Everyday Attire of the Lê Dynasty Emperor

The attire is a reconstructed version featuring a yellow cross-collared robe - the color of the Son of Heaven. Its patterns are inspired by relics from King Lê Dụ Tông and historical sources to evoke the regal splendor of a flourishing era in the nation's history. The headdress is adorned with engraved golden motifs, referencing designs found on the ceremonial hat of Lord Trịnh from Kim Liên Pagoda.



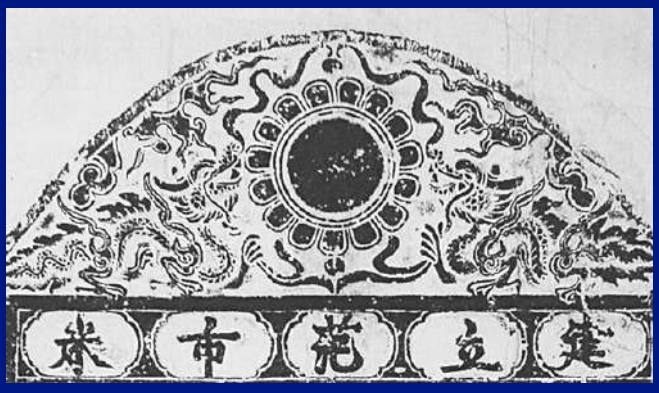
THE REGAL FLOWER
THE REGAL FRUIT

For over a thousand years, Vietnam's natural world has been blessed with an abundance of products imbued with royal symbolism. Among them, the longan and the chrysanthemum stand out as enduring emblems throughout history - revered respectively as the 'fruit of royalty' and the 'flower of royalty' ("vương giả chi quả" and "vương giả chi hoa")

The Phố Hiến longan, praised by Lê Quý Đôn as sweet and fragrant like 'heaven's holy nectar,' has flourished since the 16th century, during the height of Phố Hiến's prosperity in southern Vietnam. The over-400-year-old ancestral longan tree at Hiến Pagoda still bears fruit each season, serving as a living testament to this renowned variety—once traded by sea to Japan and offered to the emperor during the Minh Mạng reign. More than a gift of the land, the longan is also a valued medicinal ingredient in traditional medicine. Today, it continues to thrive under rigorous international standards, reaffirming the enduring value of the 'fruit of royalty'.



The longan tree on the 9 Tripod Cauldrons of the Nguyễn dynasty



The chrysanthemum motif on the steles of the Later Lê revival period (according to researcher Vũ Kim Lộc)

Excavations at the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long have uncovered many artifacts - such as ventilated bricks, ridge tiles, and tile backs carved with chrysanthemum motifs, alongside dragon, phoenix, and lotus patterns - indicating the widespread presence of this flower in royal architecture of the time. Even earlier, the chrysanthemum appeared during the Đông Sơn period, flourished in the arts of the Lý and Trần dynasties, and was depicted on golden plates, princess robes, empress crowns, and aristocratic jewelry. Its presence continued in the art of the Lê Trung Hưng and Nguyễn dynasties.



The Headdress on the Statue of Lord Trịnh at Kim Liên Pagoda















The Attire of Noblewomen

Compared to their male counterparts, historical records concerning the attire of aristocratic women during the Lê Trung Hưng period remain relatively limited. Nevertheless, several religious sites - such as Bút Tháp Pagoda and Mật Sơn Pagoda - feature statues of notable female figures including Princess Lê Thị Ngọc Duyên, Lady Trịnh Thị Ngọc Cơ, and Empress Trịnh Thị Ngọc Trúc, offering valuable visual sources. These reveal that upper-class women often wore multiple overlapping layers of garments, commonly consisting of a yếm (undergarment), a giao lĩnh (cross-collared robe), a viên lĩnh (round-collared robe), a wrap-around skirt, and occasionally an outer đối khâm (symmetrical-collared robe). Decorative motifs such as dragons, phoenixes, clouds, waves, and floral patterns suggest an elegant aesthetic imbued with refinement and nobility.



Replica of the statue of Princess Lê Thị Ngọc Duyên. Currently housed at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum (the original is located at Bút Tháp Pagoda, dated to the XVII century)



Statue of Empress Trịnh Thị Ngọc Trúc, dated to the XVII century. Originally worshipped at Mật Sơn Pagoda (Thanh Hóa), now preserved at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum



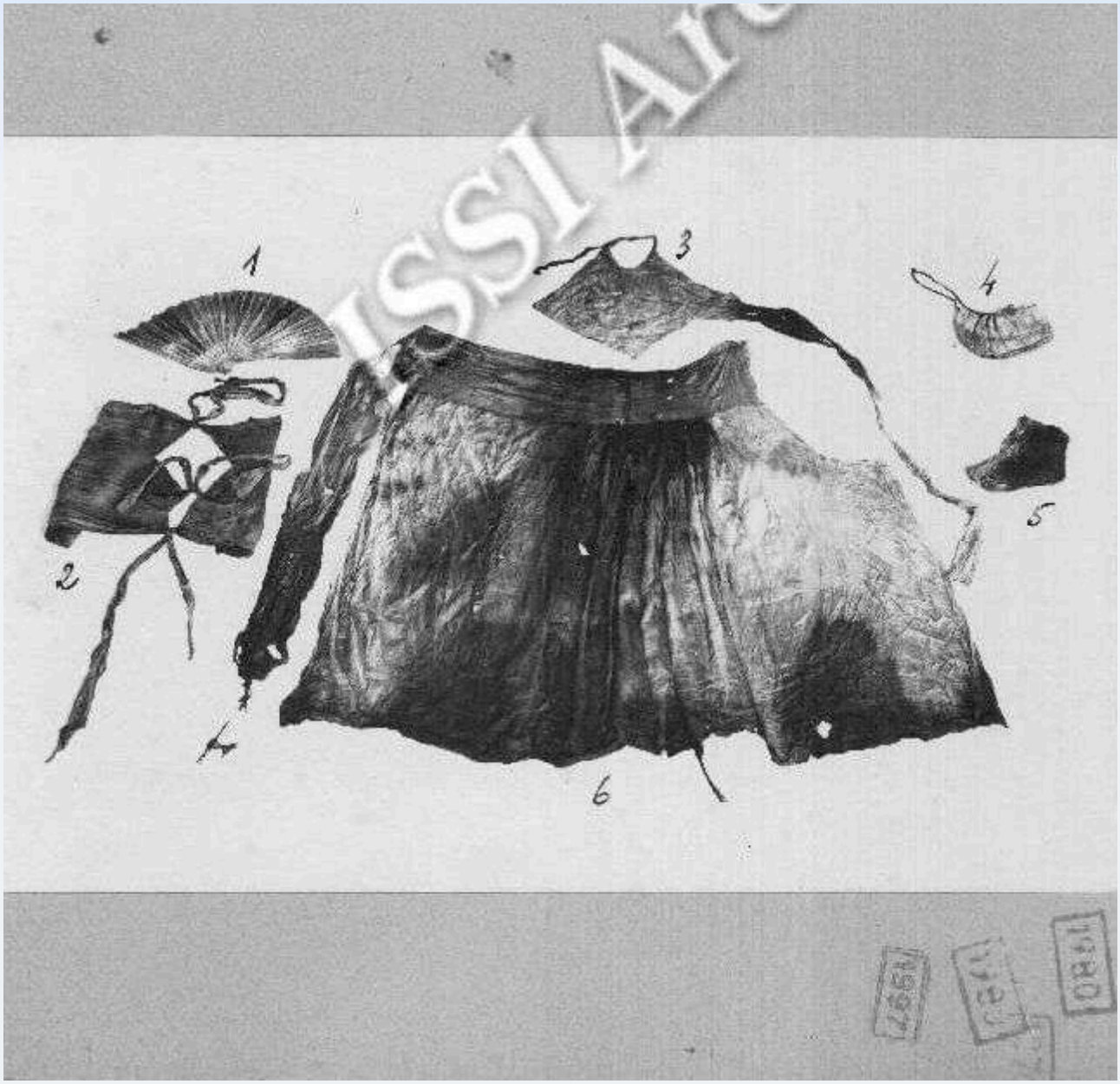
Replica of the statue of Princess Trịnh Thị Ngọc Cơ. On display at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum (the original is venerated at Bút Tháp Pagoda, dated approximately to the XVII century)

One of the rare documents that helps illustrate the attire of noblewomen is the garment found in the ancient Hoằng Đức tomb (Thanh Hóa), excavated in the late 1950s and believed to belong to Princess Ngọc Dung - the daughter of the de facto ruler of Đàng Ngoài at that time.



Archival photograph from the École française d'Extrême-Orient of the discovered robe

The robe is woven with dragons using metallic gold thread on a red fabric background. According to archival photographs from the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), the garment features four-clawed dragons and cloud motifs - patterns typically associated with the aristocracy. Although the artifact now survives only in a faded black-and-white photo, it is undeniably one of the most luxurious women's garments from the Lê Trung Hưng period.



Archival photographs from the École française d'Extrême-Orient showing the "yếm" (bodice) and "thường" (skirt)

In general, the attire of noblewomen during the Lê Trung Hưng period often featured multiple overlapping layers, made from luxurious materials such as brocade and silk, intricately woven or embroidered with motifs of dragons, clouds, and floral patterns. Their manner of dress clearly reflected the opulence, social status, and strict ceremonial codes of the aristocratic class of the time.

The Princess's Attire

The outfit is a reconstruction based on the giao lĩnh robe found in the ancient Hoang Duc tomb, featuring cloud and four-clawed dragon motifs traditionally worn by high-ranking aristocrats. The princess character is styled with a feather fan, a type of fan that has been used throughout the long history of East Asian countries.




Áo giao lĩnh
(Cross-collared
robe)
Feather
fan
"Bánh cáy"
Dây thao
(Decorative
cord)
Thường
(Traditional
Skirt)

Supplementary material

BÁNH CÁY

(VIETNAMESE FIVE-COLOR STICKY RICE CAKE)

Behind the sweet and nutty flavor of bánh cáy - a traditional specialty of Thái Bình - lies a somber legend tied to one of the most serious royal scandals of the Lê Trung Hưng period.

According to local lore, in 1725, Lady Nguyễn Thị Tân - a noblewoman entrusted by King Lê Hiển Tông to care for the Crown Prince—was the only person allowed to visit him during his confinement. Witnessing his declining health due to Lord Trịnh Sâm's deliberate deprivation, she secretly prepared a nourishing cake to replace his plain meals.

Combining her knowledge of traditional medicine and local confectionery like chè lam, she crafted a soft, fragrant cake using puffed rice, candied ginger, peanuts, mung beans, and gac fruit. The cake followed the principles of the Five Elements, Five Colors, and Eight Tastes, and helped restore the Prince's strength.

After returning to her village, she passed on the recipe, giving rise to bánh cáy. With a history of over 200 years, the cake is named for its resemblance to cáy crab roe - common in Vietnam's rice fields. Today, her temple is a recognized Provincial Cultural Heritage Site, and she is honored as the founding figure of bánh cáy making in Thái Bình.



The Ancestral Temple of Banh Cay Craft Founder Nguyễn Thị Tân has been officially recognized as a provincial-level cultural and historical site by Thai Binh Province.









OFFICIAL ATTIRE OF MANDARINS

The official attire of Vietnamese mandarins during the feudal period was largely influenced by various Chinese dynasties, but each era also carried its own distinctive marks, reflecting the unique cultural identity of Vietnam. During the reign of Lê Trung Hưng, the official dress was influenced by the Ming dynasty but was clearly regulated starting from the time of King Lê Hiến Tông, creating unique and distinctive features.

The winged hat and ceremonial robe - the attire of mandarins from that period - not only represented their official status but also became symbolic icons closely associated with the image of the Vietnamese feudal royal court.

According to "Hoàng Thành chức cống đồ":



Depiction of a Đại Việt official during the Lê Trung Hưng period, as illustrated in the Qing dynasty's Huang Qing Zhigong Tu (Illustrated Tributaries of the Qing Empire)

> Civil officials in An Nam wore a "sa" hat, a court robe, a belt, with a long sash hanging down, and leather shoes. Military officials of An Nam wore a "sa" hat with a flat crown, a court robe, a belt, black leather shoes with pointed toes, which were different from the civil officials' shoes.



A painting depicting the Annamese tributary mission to the Qing court in the early 18th century, executed by Qing dynasty court painter Vũ Chi Đỉnh (Wu Zhiding).

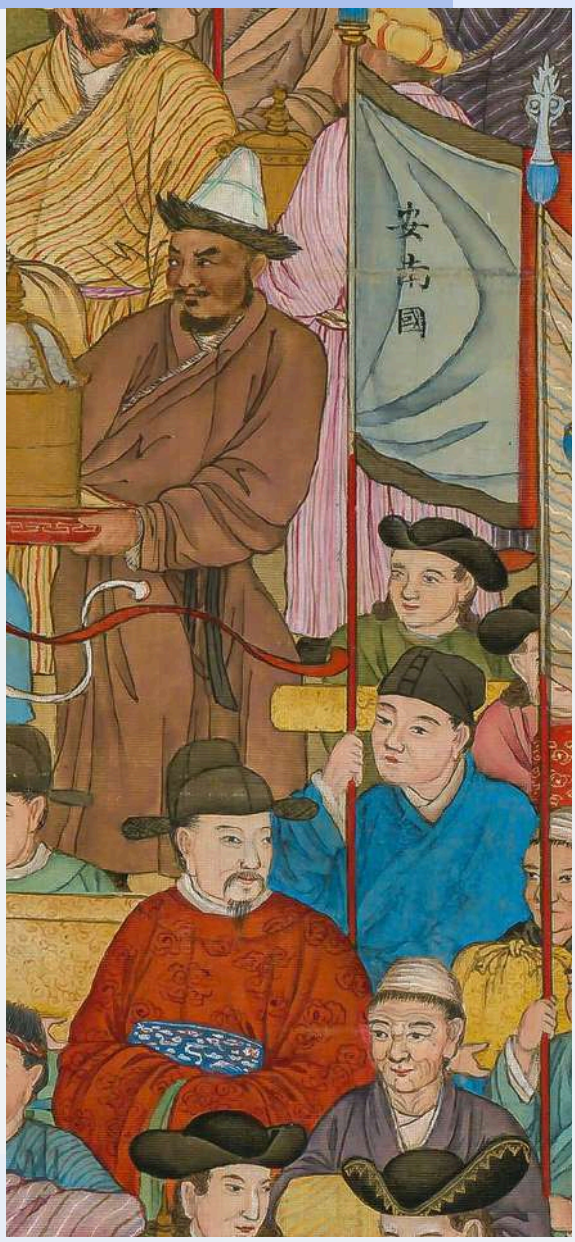
ROBES AND ATTIRE



Replica of the statue of Duke Nguyễn Thế Mỹ at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum. The original, dating from the XVII century, is worshipped at Đồng Dương Pagoda in Hải Dương

The official attire during the Lê Trung Hưng period was characterized by the viên lĩnh robe, distinguished by its round collar, wide sleeves, and a loose, calf-length silhouette. Although this style of clothing had already appeared during the Lý and Trần dynasties, a notable innovation introduced under the Lê was the phú hậu flaps - two fabric panels extending from the front hem to conceal the side slits. These flaps not only served practical purposes but were also designed increasingly higher and broader over time, often adorned with intricate patterns, thus establishing a uniquely Vietnamese feature distinct from those found in culturally related countries.

Within the royal court, the rank of officials was clearly indicated by the color of their garments. The hierarchy of colors, symbolizing status and rank in the feudal order, proceeded as follows: purple (highest), red, green, and blue.



A Vietnamese official depicted in the Vạn quốc tiến cống đồ - a painting portraying foreign tributary delegations to the Qing court at the Forbidden City in the late 1750s.

WUSHAMAO

Accompanying the official robe (bào phục) of mandarins during the Lê Trung Hưng period was the mũ cánh chuồn—the Vietnamese term for the wushamao, a traditional hat characterized by two wide flaps extending backward. This style of hat frequently appears in historical dramas from China and Korea.

The wushamao originated during the Tang dynasty and was further developed under the Ming dynasty, becoming a symbol of official authority within the rank and attire system. The Vietnamese subsequently adopted and adapted this design to align with their own cultural identity.

The hat was constructed from black fabric stretched over a bamboo or wooden frame, with two flaps spread out like dragonfly wings, symbolizing the solemnity and status of the official class.




大越

Official Attire of Mandarins

The attire is reconstructed based on illustrations of officials from the Lê Trung Hưng period, featuring long robes (áo bào) and wushamao.



Narcissus Pot

Inscription:
大越 (Great Viet, the official name of Vietnam from the Lý dynasty to the Trần dynasty)

Supplementary material

NARCISSUS FLOWERS

A REFINED HOBBY OF THE INTELLECTUAL CLASS

The exact origins of the narcissus flower appreciation tradition remain unclear, but by the early 20th century in Thăng Long - the ancient imperial capital - this pastime had become an elegant cultural practice associated with the scholarly and refined elite.

The name 'narcissus,' meaning 'water fairy,' evokes a delicate and pure beauty, embodying an ethereal and graceful spirit. Every part of the plant exudes nobility: the bulb gleams pure white, the roots extend long and cloud-like, the leaves rise like jade swords, the flowers are immaculate white with bright yellow stamens, and they emit a gentle, lingering fragrance.



The traditional enjoyment of narcissus flowers (circa 1910)



Enjoying Narcissus Flowers Then (1910) and Now

The uniqueness of the narcissus flower lies not only in its delicate form but also in the meticulous and dedicated cultivation practices. Starting from the 11th lunar month, enthusiasts would painstakingly select bulbs, soak them in water, trim and shape the leaves, and carefully twist the roots to achieve elegant shapes often inspired by the Four Mythical Creatures: the Dragon, Qilin, Turtle, and Phoenix. Each bulb becomes a living artwork, reflecting the skilled hands and soul of the artisan.

Notably, in old Hanoi, there was a traditional narcissus flower contest held in early spring. Winners were honored with couplets, firecracker cakes, and a bright red silk scarf—items symbolizing auspiciousness and prosperity for the new year. Thus, the narcissus flower was not only a refined pastime but also a cultural emblem, embodying the appreciation of beauty and the ancestral reverence of the people of ancient Tràng An.


Camboja
SIAM
Cochinchine
Tsiampe
Boutra
Mahaprapri
Bantran
Cham
Balbanont






HAINAN
Yai-tcheou
I. Tenhosa
Tenkiau
2 Sœurs
des Tigres
B. Caboca
C. Tro
B. du Turon
I. Prac
de Bril of
Prayssse droogte
P.e Champelle
Champelle falso
C. Batang
Turon
P.e Cataon
Colaure
de Cataon
de Engelsche
Macelés fields
Faifo
C. Pangan
Baubo
Quanhia
Koa-lay
Koatrou
Boxhoo
Quinhin
Nehotmay
Ranran
Bonten
Fu-moy
Vadems bank
KE-MOY
B. Pa
Baye



EVERYDAY ATTIRE OF MANDARINS

The Thường phục - or Thị phục - of officials during the Lê Trung Hưng period, known as áo Thanh Cát, was a regulated garment worn during official ceremonies and court duties. According to the Khâm định Việt sử Thông giám cương mục, in 1720 the court established a formal set of ceremonial attire, which included:

"...Wushamao, Thanh Cat robe, and jade-threaded ceremonial cords were all distinguished according to official rank."

According to scholar Trần Quang Đức, the áo Thanh Cát was made from a special type of cát fabric, processed through dyeing, starching, pounding, and drying to produce a characteristic dark indigo color. As also recorded in Lê Quý Đôn's Vân Đài loại ngữ:

> "It is customary in Nam Việt to dye cloth with indigo, then over-dye with brown, add a bit of glue, pound it with a mallet, then dry it, and that is called Thanh Cāt robe. All people, officials and commoners alike, wear it, differing only in length to denote status."

In addition, this fabric could be dyed into various shades such as hỏa minh, vi minh, and quỳ. The quỳ tone - also called 'horn color' - was known for its deep crimson hue. Hỏa minh and vi minh shared similar undertones but appeared brighter, distinguishing them by their degree of vibrancy.

Accompanying the Thanh Cát robe were various official hats. As recorded in *Vũ Trung tùy bút* by Phạm Đình Hổ, during Lord Trịnh Cương's reign, court regulations stipulated that when the lord handled state affairs at the palace, officials wore the Bình Đính hat and the Thanh Cát robe. However, when he received guests elsewhere, civil officials wore the Lương Cân hat, and military officials wore the Yến Vĩ hat.



According to Trần Quang Đức, in practice, officials could wear the Bình Đính, Lương Cân, Yến Vĩ, and Đinh Tự hats on regular days. Hence, Lương Cân and Yến Vĩ were categorized by Vũ Trung tùy bút as everyday ceremonial or administrative attire.

A carved depiction of a mandarin wearing the Đinh Tự hat at Hoành Sơn communal house (Nghệ An), dating from the 18th century

It is evident that during this period, many types of hats were used for rituals and administrative duties. However, only a few can be studied today through surviving artifacts - most notably, the Bình Đính and Đinh Tự hats.



A rare surviving Bình Đính hat is currently preserved at the ancestral temple of Admiral Nguyễn Công Triều (1614-1690) in Đông La commune, Hoài Đức district, Hanoi



In addition, ancestral worship paintings of mandarins from the Revival Lê period offer valuable insights into their daily lives. Most commonly, these portraits depict them in layered giao lĩnh robes, bareheaded, and wearing traditional shoes, conveying an air of nobility and solemn dignity.

Ancestral painting of Duke Tôn Thất Hiệp - a general of the Nguyễn Lords in Cochinchina



Portrait of Grand Councillor Nguyễn Quý Kính, dated to the 18th century. Currently enshrined at the Nguyễn Quý ancestral hall (Hà Nội)



Portrait of Duke of Luân (Luân Quận công) Vũ Công Chấn, dated to the 17th century. Currently enshrined at the Vũ family ancestral hall (Nam Định)



Portrait of Marquis of Kiến Trung (Kiến Trung hầu) Trịnh Đình Kiền, dated to the 18th century. Currently on display at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum.

The portrait of Grand Councillor Nguyễn Quán Nho (1638–1708)

Currently preserved at the Nguyễn Quán family home in Vạn Hà township, Thiệu Hóa district, Thanh Hóa province, the portrait is painted on silk, measuring 1.6 meters in height and about 1 meter in width. According to family accounts, the painting was created by a Qing dynasty artist during Nguyễn Quán Nho's diplomatic mission to the North.



Everyday Attire of Mandarins

This outfit is a reconstruction based on the ancestral portrait of Grand Councillor Nguyễn Quán Nho. The figure wears a cross-collared robe with circular motifs, a headpiece, and holds a fan. We believe the Yến Vĩ hat previously discussed closely resembles the Phong Cần hat of the Nguyễn dynasty, which was commonly worn by Confucian scholars and intellectuals.











ATTIRE OF NOBLEWOMEN

Similar to the attire of noblewomen, historical records concerning the clothing of high-ranking ladies (mệnh phụ phu nhân) from this period are exceedingly rare. However, based on a few valuable surviving artifacts, it can be inferred that their garments typically consisted of multiple layers, made from luxurious fabrics, and crafted with meticulous attention to detail.



A painting of a noble lady in the "Tribute Delegation to Qing" scroll



Replica of the statue of Lady Nguyễn Thế Mỹ, wife of a District Duke, at the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts. The original, dating to the 17th century, is enshrined at Đông Dương Pagoda, Hải Dương

The missionary Cristoforo Borri recorded:

> "They wore five or six layers of skirts in different colors, with the innermost layer reaching down to the ground, making it so heavy and formal that their feet were completely concealed..."

In terms of demeanor, it was customary in our country at the time to let one's hair fall freely, regardless of gender or social class. Cha Marini, in "Italian Travelers in Their Journey Through Vietnam," noted:

> "During the period of Chinese rule, both men and women wore their hair in high buns. But once they freed themselves from foreign domination, they let their hair down and walked barefoot as a symbol of liberty."



The statue of Lady Yến, wife of the District Duke, is worshipped at Hội Linh Quán, Thanh Oai District, Hanoi. *The statue depicts her with neatly flowing hair, finely sculpted with care*



However, noblewomen tended to pay meticulous attention to the grooming of their hair, influenced profoundly by Confucian and Taoist values embedded in daily life. Decorum and composure were essential virtues, making hairdressing an important expression of one's status and authority.

Overall, noblewomen and high-ranking ladies of this period shared many similarities in their clothing and adornments. The surviving ancient statues are vivid testaments to the graceful and modest beauty of Vietnamese women of old.



Portrait of Minh Nhẫn Nhụ Nhân, Lady Bùi Thị Giác (1738 - 1805).
Currently on display at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hanoi

Attire of Noblewomen

The recreated garment draws inspiration from the patterns found on an inner layer depicted in the portrait of Minh Nhẫn Nhụ Nhân Bùi Thị Giác, aiming to evoke the opulent beauty of Vietnam's past.



The decorative patterns on the garments are inspired by those depicted in the portrait of Minh Nhẫn Nhụ Nhân







Supplementary material

THE BETEL CHEWING TRADITION

A DISTINCTIVE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE

The custom of betel chewing dates back to the Hùng Kings era, rooted in the legend "The Tale of Betel and Areca"—a vivid symbol of marital fidelity and brotherly love. A piece of betel marks the beginning of conversations, connecting people through layers of cultural meaning.

A single morsel reflects the yin-yang and five-element philosophy: the areca nut represents the sky (yang), lime from stone symbolizes the earth (yin), and the betel vine links the two. The combination of sweet, spicy, hot, and bitter flavors creates a fragrant, warming taste - reddening lips and deepening human bonds. In both folk and royal contexts, the preparation and offering of betel became a subtle art form, rich in ritual and aesthetics.

This tradition spanned all social classes and appeared in weddings, funerals, and ancestral rites. It is shared by many ethnic groups, such as the Mường, Thái, Tày, and Ê Đê, each adapting it in unique ways while preserving its communal spirit.

Betel-chewing sets - lime pots (ống vôi), trays, slicing knives, lime tubes, and decorative boxes - date back to the Lý and Trần dynasties. Beyond function, each item reflects refined taste and respect for a custom that has shaped Vietnamese cultural identity for centuries.



A bronze betel box from the Early Lê dynasty (15th century), used to store betel, medicinal substances, and small personal items.



A gold spittoon embossed with a dragon motif from the Nguyễn dynasty, used for discarding betel juice and residue.

COMMONER CLASS

Regarding the attire of the common people during the Lê Trung Hưng period, various textual sources have provided researchers with detailed descriptions of their conduct and clothing. Notably, in the Gia Định Thành Thông Chí, the author Trịnh Hoài Đức wrote:

> The common people wore their hair loose and walked barefoot; both men and women wore short-sleeved áo trực lĩnh, garments sewn closed at the sides without trousers. Men used a strip of cloth wrapped around the waist, fastened at the navel and extending below the buttocks, called a khố. Women wore unfurled tube skirts and large hats.



The term "áo trực lĩnh" is understood to be another name for the áo giao lĩnh. From these descriptions, it can be inferred that the clothing of men during this period was relatively simple - typically consisting of a loincloth and a short-sleeved giao lĩnh robe worn over it. This manner of dress was well-suited to the country's hot and humid tropical climate, offering both practicality for daily life and convenience for labor.

Painting of daily life during the Lê Trung Hưng period in "Võ Quan Vinh Quy Đồ" at Độc Lôi temple (Nghệ An), dated 18th century



Painting of daily life during the Lê Trung Hưng period in "Giảng học đồ" kept at the National Museum of History, dated 18th century

Trịnh Hoài Đức's observations aligned closely with those of Lý Tiễn Căn, a Qing dynasty official who traveled to An Nam (Vietnam), as recorded in *An Nam Ký Sự* (Records of An Nam):

> "Both men and women wore large-collared robes, without distinction, and no trousers. Women wore unfurled tube skirts."

Similarly, *Văn Triều Văn Hiến Thông Khảo* (Comprehensive Records of the Civilized Court) describes commoner clothing as follows:

> Men wrapped a cloth around their waist, passed it under their buttocks, then brought it forward and tied it up. Women used silk to cover their chests.



Regarding women's attire, Jerome Richard, in his Natural, Civil, and Political History of Tonkin (published in 1778), provided further descriptions:

> In general, women dressed quite modestly. They wore long skirts and one or more short robes similar in style to those of men. They tied a yếm - a piece of cloth or silk shaped like a heart - around their chest to enhance their appearance. (...) Wealthier or titled women wore extremely wide and long undergarments and short-sleeved nightgowns in the same style as their inner and outer robes. (...) The clothing of Tonkinese people varied greatly in color. The most common was white - the natural color of silk or fabric. Black was often chosen by those of higher status.





The Giao Chi (Northern Region) and Quảng Nam (Southern Region) People in the Boxer Codex (1590)



A painting depicting traditional folk games during Tết holiday by artist Samuel Baron, 17th century



A painting of a man from An Nam in the book Thanh chức cống đồ - compiled by the Qing court from the 16th year of Qianlong Emperor (1751) to the 22nd year (1757), and later revised multiple times.













A painting of a woman from An Nam in the book Thanh chức cống đồ - compiled by the Qing court from the 16th year of Qianlong Emperor (1751) to the 22nd year (1757), and later revised multiple times.























Reconstructed image of a man from the Lê Trung Hưng period wearing a viên lĩnh robe.











Reconstructed image of a woman from the Lê Trung Hưng period wearing a traditional yếm (undergarment), layered with an outer đối khâm robe and everyday skirt.

















Reconstructed image of a woman from the Lê Trung Hưng period wearing a viễn lĩnh robe over a traditional yếm (undergarment), with a thường skirt underneath. She is depicted wearing a ba tầm hat - a traditional Vietnamese conical hat style.



Depiction of a woman holding a conical hat in the painting "Văn Quan Vinh Quy Đồ" from the Lê Trung Hưng period. The original artwork is from Độc Lôi Temple (Nghệ An) and is currently housed at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum.

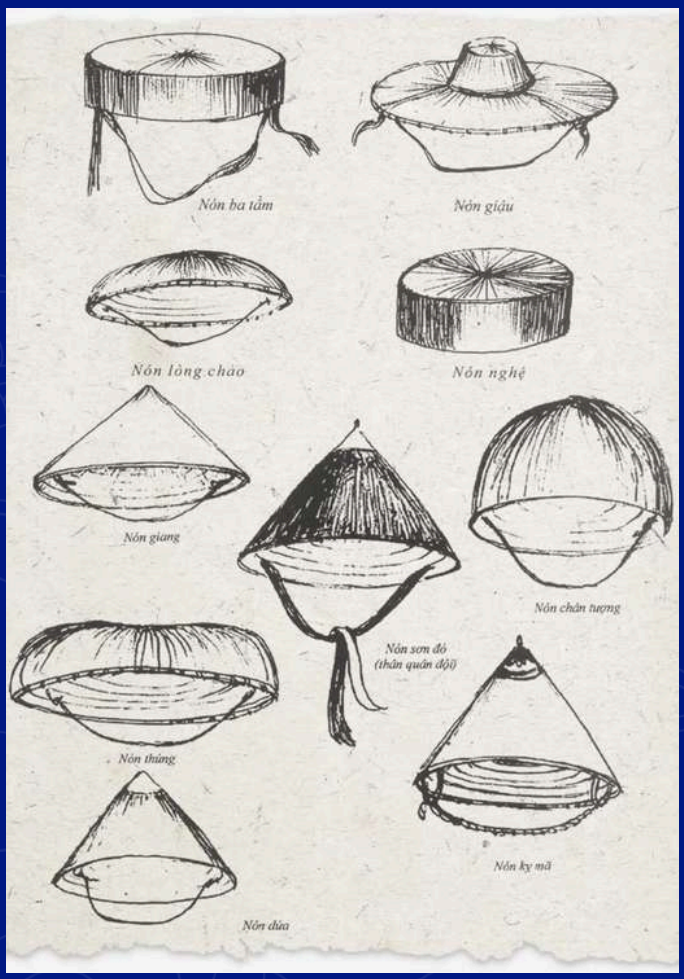
Supplementary material

CONICAL HAT

IRREPLACEABLE ITEM OF VIETNAMESE IDENTITY

"Nón lá" has long been staple in Vietnamese history, intimately tied to daily life since era of Đông Sơn culture. Depictions carved on surface of Ngọc Lũ bronze drum and legends such as that of Mother Âu Cơ wearing giant hat show how deeply rooted conical hat is in early days of the nation.

According to ancient records, Vietnamese have worn hats made from leaves since time immemorial. In Lingwai daida 嶺外代答 by Zhou Qufei, it is noted that Giao Chỉ people wore leaf hats. Wenxian Tongkao (Comprehensive Examination of Literature) by Ma Duanlin also describes: "Giao Chỉ people wear leaf hats to shield from sun and rain". "Trúc Lâm Đại Sĩ Xuất Sơn" painting still preserves images of Trần dynasty leaf hats with broad brims and pointed tops. During Nguyễn dynasty, Trịnh Hoài Đức's Gia Định Thành Thông Chí mentions that southern Vietnamese used leaf hats in daily life.



Henri Oger's Technique of the An Nam People catalogues various hat types.

Despite harsh tropical monsoon climate, Vietnam's nature provides abundant materials. Through skillful hands of both humble farmers and master artisans, countless types of conical hats have been crafted - using palm leaves, gồi, lụi, pandanus leaves, coconut leaves, as well as straw, bamboo slats, bamboo pith, and lotus leaves. From sturdy "nón thúng" of Nghệ An, delicate "nón ngựa" of Bình Định, to poetic "nón bài thơ" of Huế and simple "nón lá" of Chuông village - each conical hat is not just sun and rain protection, but also vessel of Vietnamese soul and identity across generations.

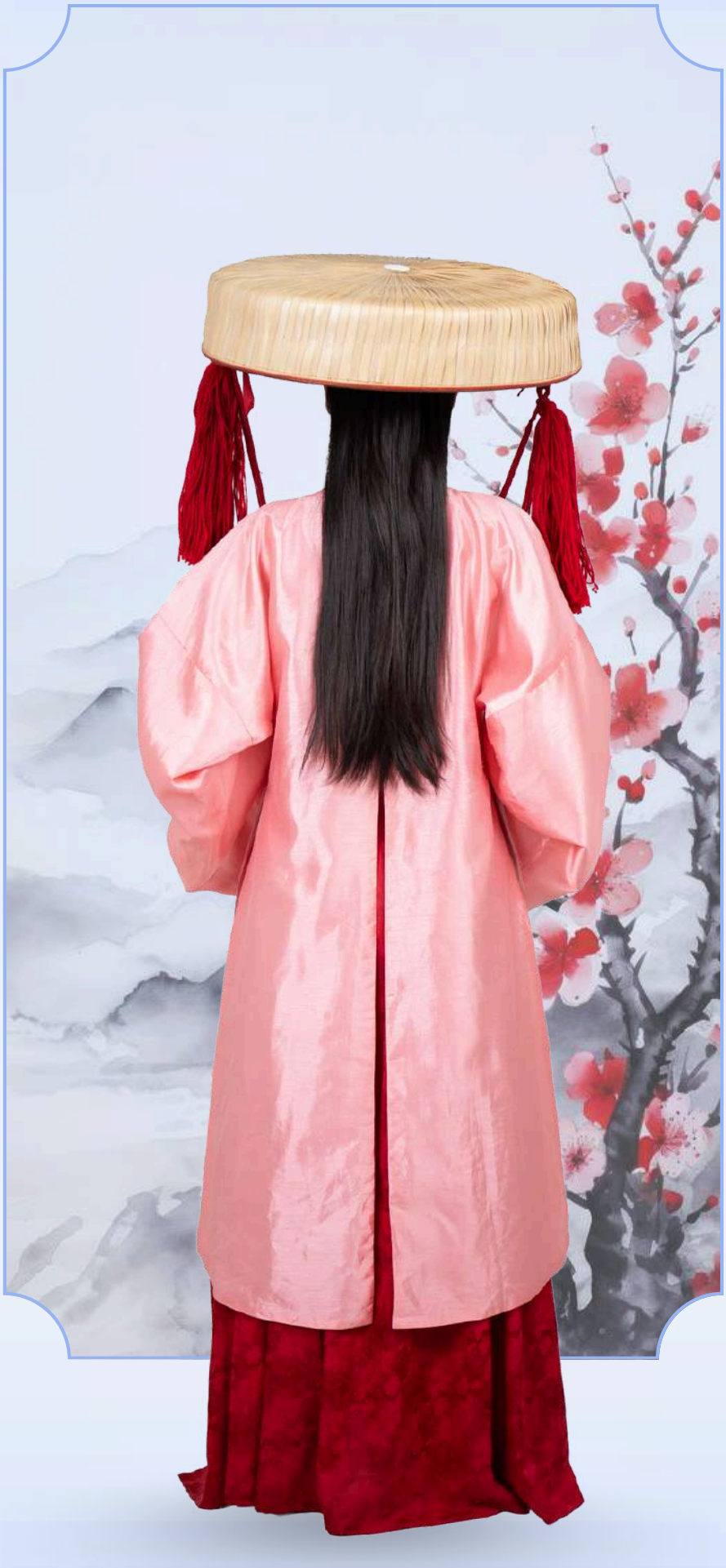













東京トウキョウ

Reconstruction of Man from An Nam, based on a painting in Portraits of Foreign Vassals (a collection of illustrations depicting the appearances of foreigners).. Figure wears "áo giao lĩnh" underneath and "áo bán tý đối khâm" outer garment, holding feather fan.











Reconstruction of Songstress from Lê Trung Hưng period, wearing "áo đối khâm" over "yếm" and "thường", holding "đàn đáy" (long-necked lute). Inspired by XVIII century painting Portraits of Literati Women, once displayed near altar of General Phạm Tử at Đình Ngoại, Thanh Liệt Commune, Thanh Trì, Hà Nội.



Supplementary material

ĐÀN ĐÁY

A UNIQUELY AND PURELY VIETNAMESE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

The "đàn đáy", a Vietnamese plucked lute, emerged more than 500 years ago and is closely associated with "ca trù" - a sophisticated form of chamber music native to Vietnam. While instruments such as the "đàn tranh" (16-string zither) or "đàn tỳ bà" (pear-shaped lute) can be found across various East Asian cultures, the "đàn đáy" is a uniquely Vietnamese creation. With its long neck and high, detachable frets, the instrument reflects both refined craftsmanship and functional adaptability, enabling performers to produce captivating, richly expressive sounds emblematic of Vietnamese identity.



The "đàn đáy" is used in the art of "ca trù"

What sets the "đàn đáy" apart from all other string instruments is its singular sonic quality. When a performer slides their fingers along the strings toward the resonator, the sound produced is simultaneously soaring and resonant—featuring rapid flourishes, tremolos, and ornamental techniques that are distinctive to this instrument. Equipped with three silk strings, the "đàn đáy" offers a tonal range that blends smoothness with emotional depth, making it ideally suited for the mystical melodies of "á đào" singing.

According to Associate Professor Dr. Thụy Loan, the "đàn đáy" began appearing in temples and communal houses—such as Lỗ Hạnh, Hoàng Xá, and the Tam Lang shrine—around the 16th to 17th centuries. However, some scholars believe that the instrument may have originated as early as the 15th century.

"For a thousand years and more,
The voice of the đàn đáy lingers in the songs of fair maidens."
(Vũ Trí Viễn)





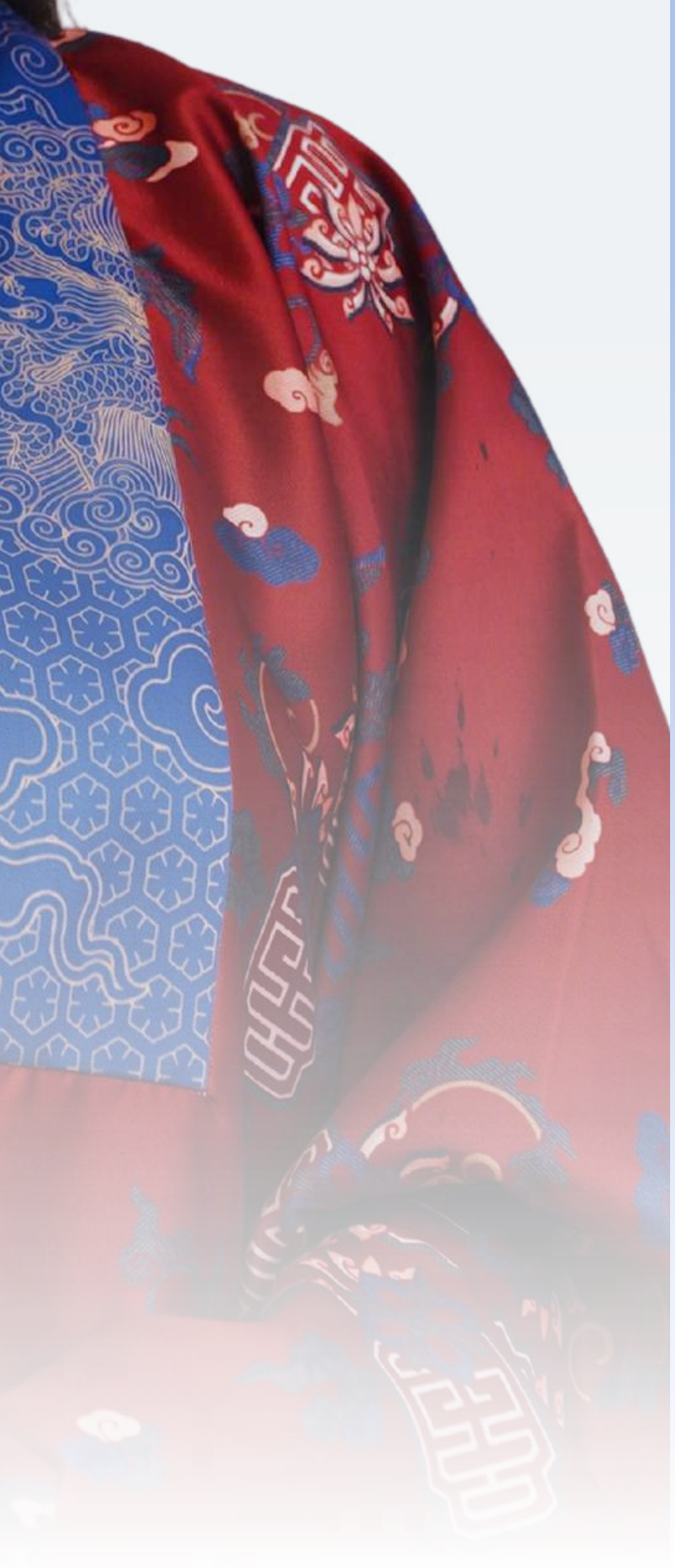






CULTURAL IDENTITY

From a Glorious Past to the Present, the distinctive attire of the Lê Trung Hưng era lives on - preserved by devoted hands and hearts that cherish Vietnam's cultural heritage.



LE TRUNG HUNG ERA COSTUMES IN THE FLOW OF CULTURE

From majestic dragon-embroidered imperial robes and classical cross-collar garments to elegant đối khâm robes, the attire of the Lê Trung Hưng era vividly reflected Vietnam's ceremonial life, daily practices, and cultural spirit during a historically turbulent period. These garments were more than just clothing or symbols of authority-they embodied profound layers of culture: from sophisticated weaving and tailoring techniques, colors denoting social rank, to each motif and stitch conveying the era's worldview, social hierarchy, and aesthetic values. In doing so, Lê Trung Hưng era attire helped weave a rich tapestry of national identity - a resilient current that has endured through the tides of history.

BRINGING TRADITIONAL ATTIRE INTO MODERN LIFE

Rooted in these historical and spiritual values, today's efforts to restore and promote Vietnam's traditional attire - especially that of the Lê Trung Hưng era - are not merely about reviving old images, but also about rekindling national pride in the hearts of younger generations. Notable cultural events such as the Ho Chi Minh City Ao Dai Festival, the *Vietnamese Attire Day - Green Hair, Flowing Robes*, or *Bách Hoa Bộ Hành* have created vibrant platforms where traditional garments are brought to life amid the rhythms of contemporary society.



Image source: Cẩm Thượng Thiềm Hoa



Image source: Cẩm Thượng Thiềm Hoa

Particularly striking is the image of young people wearing traditional costumes, performing and parading through city streets, breathing new life into cultural heritage. Every fluttering robe and graceful step not only reimagines the refined aura of the past, but also affirms a lasting bond between past and present. This is how Lê Trung Hưng costumes and by extension, Vietnamese identity - continue to shine and flourish in today's globalized cultural landscape.



A NEW JOURNEY

A New Journey of the Young: Not Just Preserving, But Awakening Culture Through Their Own Voice and Rhythm of the Times

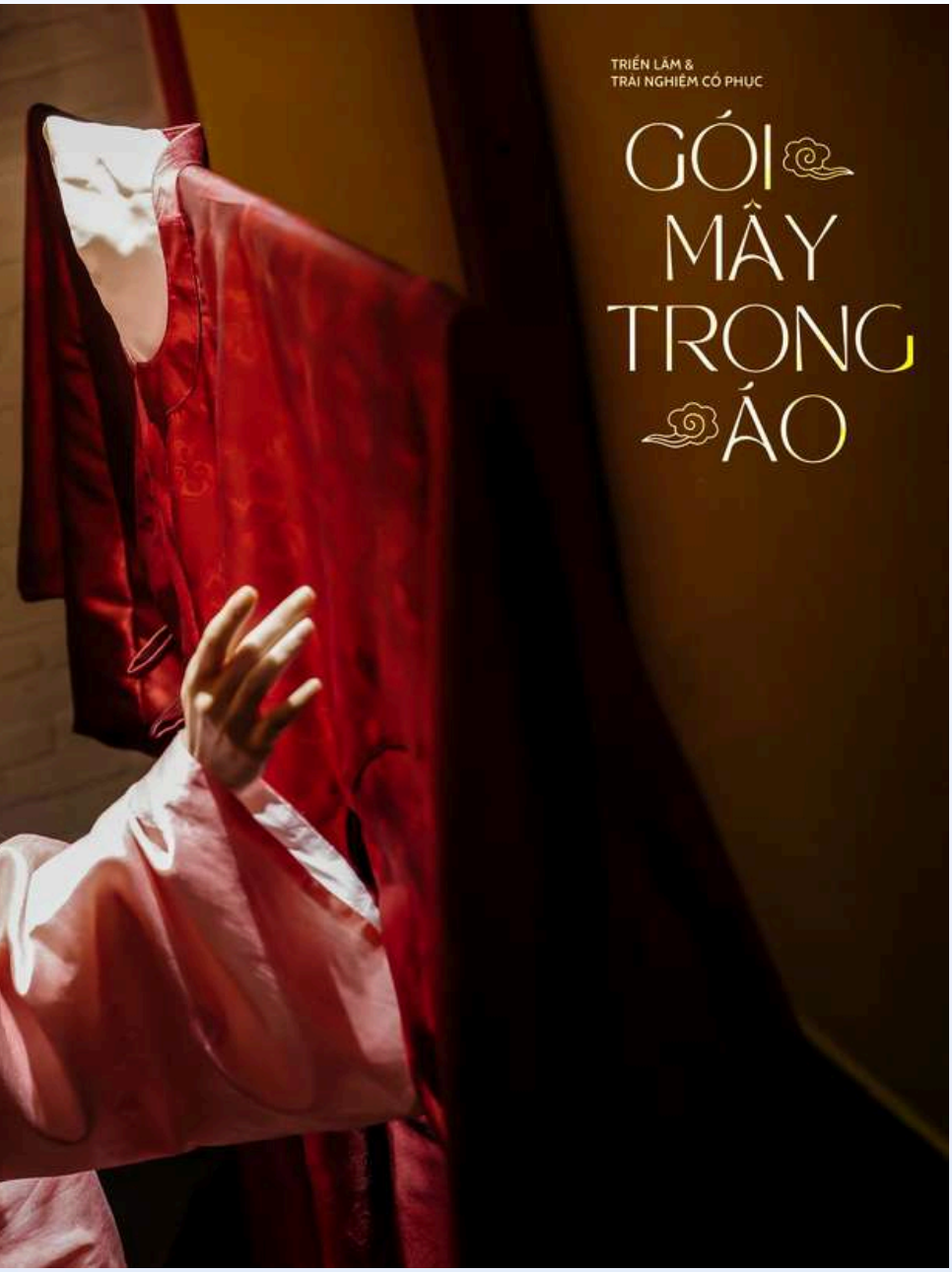
CLOUDS WOVEN INTO ROBES

A Commitment to Our Cultural Journey

In harmony with the powerful current of cultural revival, in April 2025, the editorial team of Mõ Journal organized a striking exhibition entitled "Clouds woven into robes". This event was not merely a display of garments and adornments from the Lê Trung Hưng and Nguyễn dynasties - it was a journey into the heart of the past. Through a multi-sensory experience, participants were transported into a space of deep nostalgia, where they could see, hear, and even touch the vividly reconstructed costumes that evoked a magnificent era of Vietnam's cultural history.



Over the course of three days, the exhibition welcomed hundreds of visitors whose warmth and appreciation deeply moved us. Among them were scholars - PhDs and MAs in the social sciences - who not only offered words of praise but also heartfelt encouragement. There were groups of students fresh from revising their history lessons, brought by their teachers to witness firsthand the attire of old and reconnect with the roots of their heritage. Elderly visitors came too - some traveling by bus from Củ Chi, others making long journeys from the Central Highlands - driven by a desire to see with their own eyes the splendor that once filled the nation's cultural pride. And of course, there were the young people, their eyes shining with curiosity as they listened intently to the stories of a golden age, brought to life in every thread and detail of the traditional garments.



Though the exhibition closed nearly a month ago, we believe this journey is only just beginning. The event was not confined to a single space or moment; it was an open invitation to all who wish to walk with us in reviving and preserving the cultural brilliance of the past. In doing so, we are not only safeguarding history - we are also building a future where culture endures, alive in the heart of every Vietnamese soul.













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CLOUDS WOVEN INTO ROBES

The Resplendence of Lê Trung Hưng Attire

#special issue

