

# THE TRANSFORMATION OF ROYAL COURT ATTIRE IN VIETNAM FROM THE 10<sup>TH</sup> TO THE 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Nguyễn Đăng Khoa<sup>1</sup>, Đỗ Xuân Giang<sup>2</sup>, Lê Phạm Hoàng Long<sup>3</sup>

*Nhận bài: 23/06/2023; Nhận kết quả bình duyệt: 07/10/2023; Chấp nhận đăng: 07/01/2024*

*©2024 Trường Đại học Thăng Long*

---

## Abstract

In the early 10th century, Vietnam gained independence after nearly 1.000 years under the rules of the Chinese dynasties. At the beginning of the administrative reconstruction, the dress of the mandarin class, although newly regulated, was deeply influenced by the acculturation process from China. Studying the changing process of the imperial court dress in Vietnam throughout history will contribute to raising awareness of the Vietnamese's traditional cultural values. In this paper, the authors will put efforts into explaining the causes of similarities in costume culture between Vietnam and China through the historical period from the 10th to the 14th century. It is expected that the results of the research paper will initially lay a scientific foundation for the restoration of traditional costumes into the lives of Vietnamese people nowadays.

**Keywords:** traditional costumes, mandarin class, Vietnam, 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Century

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Clothing is one of the components of material culture, reflecting the cultural and civilizational development of a nation. Besides functional aspects (responding to the natural environment, fulfilling aesthetic needs), the clothing of a nation also mirrors its cultural behavior towards social environments and

organizational culture. Through the culture of dressing, we can understand the societal structure and organization of various community groups.

As a cultural element, the attire of an ethnic or of a nation is significantly influenced by the process of cultural exchange and assimilation. Major civilizations often have a direct

---

<sup>1</sup> Văn Lang University

<sup>2</sup> Education Publishing House in Ho Chi Minh City

<sup>3</sup> Education Publishing House in Ho Chi Minh City

impact on the transformation and assimilation processes of less advanced nations or civilizations.

Located adjacent to the Chinese civilization and having a history of resisting foreign invasions for over a millennium, Vietnam has inevitably been influenced by the assimilation process from China. As a result, while retaining many cultural characteristics from the Văn Lang – Âu Lạc era, many cultural elements have undergone significant changes, even adopting Chinese culture as a standard for development, including clothing.

During the first cultural revival process (from the 10th to the end of the 14th century), the Vietnamese strove to define traditional elements (to affirm independence) but also had to rely on the cultural standards of a major nation as a foundation. Thus, we can see a blend of acceptance and creativity in the nation, aiming to assert the perception of a "Minor China" (小中华) but simultaneously distinct enough to proclaim: "The mountains and rivers of the South, the ruler of the South resides."

From the perspective of the ruling authorities, successive Vietnamese dynasties such as the Ngô, Đinh, Early Lê, Lý, and Trần, issued numerous decrees and edicts to standardize national dress codes. Notably, the

attire of the royal court and civil and military officials. We can easily observe the similarities and differences in the dress regulations of court officials throughout these monarchical periods.

Using historical-logical and comparative methods through historical documents from China and Vietnam, the authors will endeavor to analyze and describe the transformation process of court official attire in Vietnam from the 10th to the end of the 14th century. This paper aims to enhance understanding of the continuity in cultural attire and the "national aspiration for independence, asserting uniqueness within the commonality of East Asian culture" (great unity, small differences – 大同小異). Additionally, the results of this paper lay the groundwork for the current movement of restoring traditional national attire among the younger generations in Vietnam.

## **2. THE TRANSFORMATION OF COURT OFFICIAL ATTIRE IN VIETNAM (FROM THE 10TH TO THE 14TH CENTURY)**

### **2.1. Ngô – Đinh – Early Lê Dynasties (from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century)**

#### *2.1.1. The Attire of Court Officials*

After proclaiming himself king in 939, Ngô Quyền established a system of officials and court rituals, and also specified the colors of the officials' attire (Printed in Internal Affairs Officials Edition, 1998a: 204) <sup>1</sup>. This was the first time the “determination of clothing colors” (regulation of attire colors) of a dynasty in Vietnam was officially recorded in history.

During the Đinh and Early Lê dynasties (968 – 1009), regulations concerning the attire of civil and military court officials were recorded in the years 975 (Printed in Internal Affairs Officials Edition, 1998a: 213) <sup>2</sup> and 1006. Among these, a significant regulation that shaped the court attire for the Early Lê and later the Lý dynasty was the adoption of court attire regulations similar to those of the Song dynasty (Printed in Internal Affairs Officials Edition, 1998a: 234).<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1.2. Characteristics and Standards of Court Officials' Attire

Although the specific details of the clothing color regulations under the

Ngô dynasty (939) were not recorded, the cultural influence of the Tang dynasty was distinct, and the regulations considered as “standards” were actively adopted by influenced states. The authors believe that the “determination of clothing colors” under the Ngô dynasty was influenced by the clothing color regulations during the reign of Emperor Gaozu of the Tang dynasty (era name Wude). According to these regulations, officials of the third rank and above wore purple robes, fifth rank and above wore red, seventh rank and above wore green, and ninth rank and above wore blue. These robes featured a curved collar with wide sleeves (曲领大袖), were worn with a horizontal sash joining the flaps of the robe (横襕), belted with a leather belt, a balanced official headpiece, and black leather shoes<sup>4</sup>.

After the Ngô dynasty, along with political upheavals in China, the influence of the Tang dynasty on the Đinh and Early Lê dynasties gradually diminished. By the year 1006, the

---

1 Kỷ Hợi (己亥), the 1st year [939], (Jin Tianfu the 4th year). Spring, the king began to proclaim himself as king, established Lady Dương as the queen, appointed hundreds of officials, and established the court ceremonies and official attire – 王始稱王立楊氏為后置百官制朝儀定服色.

2 Ất Hợi (乙亥), [Thái Bình – 太平] the 6th year [975], (Song Kaibao the 8th year). Spring, the dress and headgear of civil and military officials were formalized – 定文武冠服.

3 Bính Ngọ (丙午), [Ứng Thiên – 應天] the 13<sup>th</sup> year [1006], (The king still used the Ứng Thiên (應天) era name; Song Jing De the 3rd year).

Spring, February,... The system and court attire for civil, military officials, and religious figures were revised to conform to those of the Song dynasty – 改文武臣僚僧道官制及朝服一遵於宋. However, Vietnamese historical records slightly differ in timing for this event: the year Đinh Mùi (丁未), 2nd year (1007). The system for civil and military officials was set, fully following that of the Song dynasty. Cited from (Anonymous, 2019: 75).

4 三品以上服紫五品以上服朱七品以上服綠九品以上服青其制曲领大袖下施横襕束以革带帕头乌皮靴. According to the Song history – volume 5: Remaining clothing regulations.

Early Lê dynasty entirely revised their court attire to align with the system of the Song dynasty. According to Song regulations, the court attire for officials included three types of hats: the Tiến Hiền hat (進賢冠, Jin Xian Guan), the Diêu Thiềm hat (貂蟬冠 Diao Chan Guan), and the Giải Trãi hat

(獬豸冠, Xie Zhai Guan), all worn with standard court robes (Chu y 朱衣 – Zhu Yi), (Chu thường 朱裳 – Zhu Chang).

At the beginning of the Song dynasty, regulations were established as the table below: (傅伯星, 2020: 70):

Table 1: The Song regulations of court attire

Rank	Robe Color	Hat	Accessories
First Rank	Purple	Qi liang guan (七梁冠)	Jade belt, long gold belt, jade button
Second Rank	Purple	Liu liang guan (六梁冠)	Jade belt, long gold belt, jade button
Third Rank	Purple	Wu liang guan (五梁冠)	Jade belt, long gold belt, jade button
Fourth Rank	Purple	Wu liang guan (五梁冠)	Gold belt, long gold belt, jade button
Fifth Rank	Red	Si liang guan (四梁冠)	Gold-patterned belt, short gold belt, jade button
Sixth Rank	Red	San liang guan (三梁冠)	Gold-patterned belt, short gold belt, jade button
Seventh Rank	Green	San liang guan (三梁冠)	Ivory belt, wooden button
Eighth Rank	Green	San liang guan (三梁冠)	Ivory belt, wooden button
Ninth Rank	Green	Er liang guan (二梁冠)	Ivory belt, wooden button



## 2.2. The Lý – Trần dynasties (from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century)

### 2.2.1. The Attire of Court Officials

In addition to inheriting the ceremonial attire regulations from the Early Lê dynasty (as printed in the Internal Affairs Bureau edition, 1998a: 340)<sup>1</sup>, the Lý period (1009 – 1225) also had specific regulations concerning the mandarins' attire, as recorded in the years 1030 (Internal Affairs Bureau edition, 1998a: 254)<sup>2</sup> and 1059. Notably, the regulations for wearing the Phốc Đầu hats (幞頭 – Futou) and boat-like shoes (鞢 – xie) became the official ceremonial dress code of the Lý and later Trần dynasties (Internal Affairs Bureau edition, 1998a: 272)<sup>3</sup>.

Along with records related to the court official's attire regulations in 'A Brief History of Vietnam' ('Việt sử lược'), 'Complete Annals of Đại Việt' ('Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư'), and contemporary steles, the group of authors also noted some records from Chinese authors, such as 'Responses

from Beyond the Borders' ('Lĩnh ngoại đại đáp') by Zhu Qu Phi (Southern Song period), and 'Comprehensive Studies of Civil Culture' ('Văn hiến thông khảo') by Ma Duan Lin (Yuan period).

After replacing the Lý dynasty, the Trần dynasty continued to inherit old regulations along with introducing new ones regarding attire in the years 1300, 1301, and 1396. Like during the Lý dynasty, several Chinese authors such as Chen Jiangzhong and Wang Daiyuan from the Yuan period recorded the attire of the mandarins of Đại Việt under the Trần dynasty.

### 2.2.2. Characteristics and Standards of Court Officials' Attire

When referring to the attire of officials in contemporary Đại Việt, Zhu Qu Phi noted that on ordinary days, they wore "black Sam robes with round, tight collars and four flaps similar to Bối tử (背子 – Beizi) robes, known as Tứ diện (四顛 – Sidian) robes, and usually black trousers."

<sup>1</sup> Ất Dậu (乙酉), [Thiên Chương Hữu Đạo – 天彰有道] the 2nd year [1225], (From December onwards it was the era name of Trần Thái Tông Kiến Trung (陳太宗建中) the 1st year; Lizong of Song, Baoqing the 1st year). Winter,... December 11<sup>th</sup>, Mậu Dần (戊寅), Chiêu Hoàng (李昭皇) hosted a grand assembly at Thiên An (天安) Palace, seated on a precious platform, officials wore court attire to the audience, bowing in the courtyard. Chiêu Hoàng (李昭皇) then removed his robe and invited Trần Cảnh (陳煚) to ascend to the throne...

<sup>2</sup> Canh Ngọ (庚午), [Thiên Thành – 天成] the 3rd year [1030], (Song Tiansheng the 8th year)...

Summer, April,... The style of headgear and robes for noble civil and military officials was formalized – 定公侯文武冠服

<sup>3</sup> Kỷ Hợi (己亥), [Chương Thánh Gia Khánh – 彰聖嘉慶] the 1st year [1059], (Song Jiayou the 4th year)... Autumn, August, the emperor was in the Thủy Tinh (水晶) Palace decreeing officials to wear phốc đầu (幞頭) and boat-like shoe (鞢) to be admitted to the court. The wearing of phốc đầu (幞頭) and boat-like shoe (鞢) started from then – 帝御水晶殿朝百官令戴幞頭著鞢方許入朝戴幞頭著鞢自此始.

Regarding the headscarves, the author mentions that Ô Sa Cên (烏紗巾 – Wu sha jin) was a distinctive feature used to differentiate the people of Đại Việt from the people of Song (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 94, 95)<sup>1</sup>. Regarding the attire of Đại Việt envoys, Zhu reported that both civil and military officials wore purple robes, wore red-based horn belts, and did not wear Ngư đại (魚袋 – Yudai) (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 81, 82)<sup>2</sup>. Discussing the attire of envoys, Ma Duan Lin recorded the luxury of Đại Việt through the envoys wearing hoods, boots, carrying scepters, wearing red shoes, gold belts, and horn belts, all adorned with gold (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 78)<sup>3</sup>.

With the regulations of 1300 (Printed by Internal Affairs Department, 1998b: 85)<sup>4</sup>, we know that at this time, the attire of officials was very clearly prescribed regarding

the type of hats, color, length of sleeve cuffs, etc., specifically: civil officials wore black Đinh tự hats (丁字巾 – Dingzi jin), chant officials then wore blue full-flower hats as per the old regulation. The sleeve cuffs of both civil and military officials were from 9 spans to 1 meter and 2 spans, not allowing less than 8 spans<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, it was regulated that civil and military officials must not wear xiêm, chant officials must not wear ordinary (blue full-flower hats with two gold bands attached on both sides). By 1301, documents recorded further regulations that all civil and military officials wore Đinh tự hats (丁字巾), adding a piece of purple silk mixed with azure to cover the hair (Printed by Internal Affairs Department, 1998b: 85)<sup>6</sup>. By the year 1396, the last year of the Trần dynasty's regulations was recorded. In June, the court regulated the attire of civil and military officials,

---

<sup>1</sup> "Wrapped in a black silk turban, the tip is round and small, starting from the forehead with fine pleats as if sewn, extending up to the top" 裹烏紗巾頂圓而小自額以上細褶如縫上徹於頂 – Cited from Zhu Qu Phi.

<sup>2</sup> When the envoys came, both civil and military officials wore purple robes and red belts with rhinoceros belts, without fish... – "When the envoys arrived, all civil and military officials wore purple robes and red belts with rhinoceros belts, no fish included" 使者之來文武官皆紫袍紅鞵通犀帶無魚 – Cited from Zhu Qu Phi.

<sup>3</sup> The envoys wore headscarves, boots, red shoes, and gold belts with rhinoceros belts, each boasting a golden box... – "Envoys wore turbans, boots, red shoes, and gold belts with rhinoceros belts, each boasting a gold box" 使者幞頭靴笏紅鞋金帶犀帶每夸以金箱之 – Cited from Ma Duan Lin.

128

<sup>4</sup> Canh Tý (庚子), [Hưng Long – 興隆] the 8th year [1300], (Yuan Dade the 4th year)... Winter, October, the new style of hats and robes for civil and military officials was regulated. Civil officials wore black letter hats, and officials of rites wore blue floral hats as per the old regulations.

<sup>5</sup> The sleeve length of the civil and military officials was regulated to be from 9 spans to 1 meter and 2 spans, not allowing use below 8 spans. Civil and military officials were not allowed to wear casual clothes; officials of rites were not allowed to wear usual (blue floral hats had two gold bands attached to the sides).

<sup>6</sup> Tân Sửu (辛丑), [Hưng Long – 興隆] the 9th year [1301], (Yuan Da De the 5th year)... Spring, January, it was decreed that all civil and military officials must wear black letter hats, adding a piece of deep blue and purple silk covering the hair.

specifically (Printed edition of the Internal Affairs Bureau, 1998: 189): first rank officials wore purple robes; second rank wore dark red robes; third rank wore light pink robes; fourth rank wore green robes; fifth, sixth, seventh rank wore azure robes; eighth and ninth rank wore blue robes. Inner palace officials used dual-tube pants, not robes. Individuals without rank and the lower class wore white. Chanting officials from sixth rank and above wore Cao son hats (高山巾 – Gaoshan Jin), and the sixth-rank or higher officials wore belts and leather boat-like shoes.

Regarding the color of hats, the primary officials wore black hats, and the secondary ones blue hats. Military officials of the sixth rank wore Chiết xung hats (折衝巾 – Shechong Jin), and from seventh rank downwards wore Thái cổ hats (太古巾 – Taigu Jin); Secondary seventh rank wore Toàn hoa hats (攢花巾 – Zanhua Jin). Imperial inspectors wore Khước phi hats (却非巾 – Quefei Jin).

Trần Cương Trung described the hats of Đại Việt officials as follows: "*dark blue, made from lacquered silk,*

*wrapped around the forehead with an iron band, the front part high one span, curved back to the nape, secured with a reverse belt, the tip of the hat had an iron hook, and individuals with authority added a strip of fabric to the hook. At home, they went bareheaded, wore hats when seeing guests, and if traveling far, someone carried the hat...*" (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 124)<sup>1</sup>. Wang Daiyuan also provided additional details about the attire of Đại Việt envoys: they "*wore robes, carried scepters, all walked on land.*" Moreover, they had "*white faces and black teeth,*" wore "*belts, hats, wore Tang robes, and overcoats in black, silk socks, square shoes*" (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 35).

From "An Nam Chí Lược" (An Historical Account of Annam) by author Lê Tắc (who lived in exile in Yuan territory), we have learned additional information about the attire of Đại Việt officials at the time (Lê Tắc, 2009: 241, 242). Regarding the ceremonial Dress:

- Hats: The 'Củng Thần' hats (拱宸冠 – Gongchen Guan) worn by officials of the Marquess rank (two levels) and the 'Minh

<sup>1</sup> The turban's color is deep blue, painted silk is used for it, running across the forehead with an iron wire, raised one foot in front and bent to the neck with a belt tied in a knot at the back; the top has an iron hook, and if in office, a belt is added to the hook; at home or when meeting guests, they wear the turban; during travels, a person carries the turban... – "The turban is of deep blue color, made from painted silk, with an iron wire across the forehead, raised a foot high at the front and bent to the neck with a belt tied in a knot at the

back; the top has an iron hook. If holding an official position, an additional belt is attached to the hook. At home or when meeting guests, the turban is worn; when traveling, the turban is carried by an assistant" – 巾色深青髻辮为之贯额以铁线前高一尺而屈之及颈以带束反结其后项有铁钩有职掌则加带于钩家居囚首见客乃巾远行则一人捧巾以从 – Cited from Chen Yuan, Annals of Yuan Poetry – Volume 9: Collection of Poems from the Mission.

Tự' rank (明字 – Mingzi) (one level) are distinguished by the size and density of gold butterfly and bee ornaments attached to the hats. The 'Cổn Miện' hats (袞冕 – Gun Mian) worn by external affairs officials and generals feature interwoven gold and silver edges. Silver 'Cổn Miện' hats are used by officials from the rank of secretary to senior censor of the forbidden city. The 'Dương Đường' hats (揚棠冠 – Yangtang Guan) for palace attendants and high-ranking officials are adorned with gold bee and butterfly ornaments, varying in size and density, while those of lower ranks are unadorned.

- Robes: Embroidered phoenix-pattern robes for officials of the Marquess ranks and 'Minh Tự' (明字) ranks; purple robes for lower ranks.
- Accessories: 'Cổn Miện' (袞冕) for officials from the rank of great envoy downwards; official documents are adorned with 'Kim ngư đại' (金魚袋 – Jinyu dai)

Regarding everyday Attire:

- Hats: 'Phốc Đầu' hats (幘頭) are worn by external affairs officials, generals, officials from the rank of secretary to senior censor of the

forbidden city, court attendants, secretaries, and subordinate officials.

- Robes: Purple robes.
- Accessories: Belts made of rhino horn or gold; ivory clasps.

Additionally, the high-ranking officials wear hats made of purple and azure velvet with six tassels attached to a crossband at the back during regular court sessions; middle-ranking officials wear purple tassels, and lower-ranking officials wear black tassels. The 'cân hoàn' (巾環 – Jinhuan) are made of gold for high-ranking officials and ordinary materials for others.

### **3. COMMENTS AND EVALUATIONS ON THE CHANGES IN THE ATTIRE OF COURT OFFICIALS IN VIETNAM (FROM THE 10<sup>TH</sup> TO THE 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)**

#### ***3.1. Changes in the Attire of Court Officials***

Phan Huy Chú once wrote: "*Our country of Vietnam, having established a civilized state, absorbed the customs of China. With each emerging era, there were ceremonies, and modifications [were made] to the literature and arts, and so forth, including regulations on hats and robes, ceremonial guards, and palanquins which served to distinguish between superiors and subordinates.*" (Phan Huy Chú 1992, 5)

### 3.1.1. Factors Influencing Changes in the Attire of Court Officials

During the period from 939 to 1400, we recorded eight changes in the regulations for the attire of court officials, occurring in the years 939, 975, 1006 under the Ngô – Đinh – Early Lê dynasties; the years 1030, 1059 under the Lý dynasty; and the years 1300, 1301, and 1396 under the Trần dynasty. We believe the following reasons account for these changes:

- (1) **Reasserting Independence and Political Stability:** The redefinition of attire was a way to assert independence and contribute to the stabilization of the political landscape in the early days of independence. This is evident as each emperor, upon establishing their dynasty alongside appointing consorts and crown princes, also issued regulations for the attire of court officials during court sessions and work at the governmental offices. This was recorded in the clothing regulations of the years 939 (under the Ngô dynasty); 975 (under the Đinh dynasty); 1030, 1059 (under

the Lý dynasty); 1300, 1396 (under the Trần dynasty).

- (2) **Influences from Chinese Culture and Relations:** With the philosophy of "absorbing Chinese culture" and maintaining good relations with China, several Vietnamese dynasties adopted the contemporary Chinese dress codes. This was explicitly observed in the regulations of 1006 (under the Early Lê dynasty) with the adoption of the Song dynasty's court attire in Đại Việt. However, when the Yuan dynasty ruled China, Đại Việt, with an attitude of "*disliking the Yuan, favoring the Song*" (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 103), did not adopt any Yuan dress codes into Đại Việt. This attitude was reflected in King Trần Minh Tông's poem "Vietnamese Border" (Institute of History, 1988: 740)<sup>1</sup>, in the poem "Retouching the Portrait of the Great Ming Envoy Dư Quý – Part 2" (Tái họa Đại Minh quốc sứ Dư Quý – kỳ 2) by Phạm Sư Mạnh<sup>2</sup>, and in the discussions in "Ức Trai's Miscellaneous Records – Volume 6: Additional Geographies" (Ức Trai Di Tập –

---

<sup>1</sup> "Si Ming Zhou borders our country, barely separated. The language is not much different, but the clothing is... There is no barrier between the Chinese and the Barbarians; both ascend together to the realm of longevity".

<sup>2</sup> "...The new dynasty changed the customs of the Hồ, making the rituals and attire revert to those of the Han era."

Tập 6: Dư Địa Chí) by Lý Tử Tấn (Nguyễn Trãi, 1960: 53) <sup>1</sup>.

**(3) Asserting Independence through Specific**

**Adjustments:** To further assert independence from China, detailed and unique adjustments were made within each type of clothing, aligning with local geographical and cultural factors. Đại Việt dynasties also established clothing regulations that differed from those of the contemporary Chinese dynasties. This was noted from records by authors from the Southern Song and Yuan periods.

*3.1.2. Changes in the Attire of Court Officials*

It must be recognized that the attire of court officials during the Ngô – Đinh – Early Lê – Lý and Trần dynasties was

very rich and diverse, expressed in types, colors, and styles. While the Ngô – Đinh dynasties adopted the dress code color scheme according to the Tang dynasty system, by the Early Lê dynasty, the court dress code was introduced (in the year 1006), and the Lý dynasty applied the official dress code of the contemporary Song dynasty (in the year 1059).

From the records in historical texts and chronicles, the group of authors has noted that under the Lý dynasty, several types of hats were used (as recorded in the Inner Cabinet Editions, 1998a: 302, 332) (Đinh Khắc Thuân, 2021: 310) (Inner Cabinet Editions, 1998b: 30, 75) such as the phốc đầu (幘頭), lương quan (梁冠)<sup>2</sup>, củng thần (拱宸)<sup>3</sup>, tam trùng (三重冠 – Sanchong)<sup>4</sup>, and ô sa cân (烏紗巾). Additionally, the accompanying accessories of the officials included

---

<sup>1</sup> "Since the Yuan's entry and subsequent exit from China, the world has changed, speaking the Hồ language and wearing Hồ clothes, but only our country, the Zhou family in Kim Lăng (金陵), and the Zhao family in Kim Sơn (金山) remained unchanged. When Ming Emperor Taizu ascended the throne, he sent Yi Te Dan to express condolences. Dụ Tông (陳裕宗) sent Doãn Thuần Thần (尹舜臣) for diplomatic exchanges. The Ming emperor questioned the national envoy and praised the customs and attire as being as civilized as those of Central China."

<sup>2</sup> Kỷ Dậu (己酉), [Thiên Thuận] year 2 [1129], (Song Jian Yan 3<sup>rd</sup> yea)... March, Lý Tử Khắc submitted a report saying that there are white deer in the forests of Jiang Di... Lý Tử Khắc was appointed as the Secret Envoy, placed in the

ranks of the illustrious, and wore a seven-beam hat. – 李子克上言江底林有白鹿遷子克樞密使列明字秩冠七梁冠.

<sup>3</sup> Bính Dần (丙寅), [Trị Bình Long Ứng] year 2 [1206], (Song Khai Xi year 2). Spring, February, Đàm Dĩ Mông was appointed as Grand Protector, wearing Củng Thần (拱宸冠 – Gong Chen crown). – 拜譚以蒙爲太保戴拱宸冠.

<sup>4</sup> In the ninth month of the year Mậu Ngọ (己) (1138)... When the rebels were captured, the Grand Commander brought the army back to report the victory, and the king generously rewarded them, recording their merits in history. The king bestowed a three-tiered hat, comforted the family of the Grand Commander, and ensured their relatives were honored...



hốt (笏 – Hu)<sup>1</sup>, belts, ngư đại (魚袋)<sup>2</sup>, and boat-like shoes (鞞).

Under the Trần dynasty, further items were recorded such as nhung phục (戎服 – Rongfu) (Inner Cabinet Editions, 1998b: 10)<sup>3</sup>, and thanh sam (青衫 – Qingshan) (Inner Cabinet Editions, 1998b: 46). Compared to previous dynasties, the variety of robes, hats, and accompanying accessories had become more diverse: In terms of robes, there was the phượng ngư tú phục (鳳魚綉服 – Fengyu Toufu – a robe embroidered with phoenix and fish motifs) (Trần Quang Đức, 2017: 150, 151); in terms of hats, there were Kim ngân gián đạo Miện (金銀間道冕 – Jinyin Jiandao Mian – Miện hats with interwoven gold and silver borders), Ngân Miện (銀冕 – Yin Mian), Dương Đường hats (揚棠冠), Cao Sơn hats (高山巾)<sup>4</sup>, Chiết Xung hats (折衝巾), Thái Cổ hats (太古巾)<sup>5</sup>, Toàn Hoa hats (攢花巾), and Khước Phi hats (却非巾)<sup>6</sup>; in terms of accessories, there were ivory

hốt (笏), belts, and kim ngư đại (金魚袋).

## 3.2. The Cultural Nature of Court Official Attire

### 3.2.1. The Diversity and Richness of Court Official Attire

Recognizing its role within the East Asian order, Vietnam (Đại Việt) from early on implemented strict dress codes based on the model of the Chinese dynastic official attire system. Moreover, the dual mindset of wanting to represent a "Minor (or Little) China" while also expressing an independent and autonomous attitude towards the northern dynasties led to significant exchanges and adaptations in the attire of court officials as well as in traditional Vietnamese clothing in general. This resulted in a diversity and richness that met the characteristic of "great unity, small differences" (大同小異) of all cultural expressions within the East Asian bloc

<sup>1</sup> Mậu Tuất (戊戌), [Hưng Long] year 6 [1298], (Yuan Dade year 2)... Winter,... December,... Appointed Trần Thì Kiến as an Internal Administrative Counselor with Intervening Authority. The king bestowed upon him a hốt (笏 – a ceremonial tablet inscribed with the emperor's own poetry)

<sup>2</sup> This type of regalia is mentioned on various steles from the Lý – Trần periods such as: Bảo Ninh Sùng Phúc monastery stele (1107), Sùng Nghiêm Diên Thánh monastery stele inscription (1118), Đại Việt Quốc Đường Gia Đế Tứ Đế Sùng Thiện Diên Linh pagoda stele (1121), Bạch Hạc Thông Thánh Quán final record (era of Đại Khánh – between the years 1314 and 1324), Từ Ân monastery stele inscription of the Xương Phù era year 6 – year 1382.

<sup>3</sup> Đinh Hợi (丁亥), [Kiến Trung] year 3 [1227], (Song Baoqing the 3<sup>rd</sup> year)... The king held court at the Hall of the Great Brightness where a hundred officials wore military attire (戎服 – Rongfu), performed two bows, and then withdrew.

<sup>4</sup> Designed like the Viễn du style hat (遠遊巾 – Yuanyou Guan), but not concave, standing straight, without a removable tube.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Rites*, this is a hat for newly appointed officials, made of dark fabric.

<sup>6</sup> Designed like the Trường quan style hat (長冠 – Chang Guan), 7 chi high, made of bamboo, but narrower at the bottom.

### *3.2.2. The Importance of Court Official Attire in Vietnamese Culture*

Court official attire is a part of the clothing system of an East Asian nation, alongside royal attire and commoners' clothing. Unlike the commoners' attire, court official attire must ensure ceremonial propriety and convey authority in interactions with the emperor and the public.

From a diplomatic perspective, court official attire served as a means for the emperors of Đại Việt to convey their nuanced foreign policy towards China. As a smaller nation, maintaining independence and ensuring peace were always top priorities for the royal court. Although overall, we managed to maintain the autonomy of our dress regulations (for example, Đại Việt kings continued to wear the black Cống (袞) robe embroidered with twelve patterns, and the Bình Thiên hat (平天冠 - Pingtian Guan) with twelve tassels, to affirm equality with the Chinese emperor), there was also some reliance on certain Chinese dynastic regulations to demonstrate goodwill and tactful humility. It seems that the harmonization between the attire of the emperor (asserting independence and autonomy) and that of the officials (indicating humility and respect) is a characteristic not only in the clothing culture but also in all aspects of Vietnamese culture (reflecting the balance of yin and yang)

### **3.3. Some explanations about the costume transformation process**

When examining the transformation of court official attire in Vietnam from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, we go into several explanations for the adjustments made, including:

**Firstly**, the changes in the attire of Vietnamese court officials during this period primarily served *diplomatic purposes*. As mentioned earlier, during this time, Vietnam and many other small countries around China were largely independent and autonomous but always had to show submission to the "Celestial Empire". We all know that a characteristic of Chinese foreign policy then was the conferral of titles and the tribute system, and as a southern neighbor, Đại Việt naturally had to participate in these practices (Luu Văn Lợi, 2004: 10, 11). However, this submission was aimed at pacifying and reassuring the Chinese dynastic monarchies, primarily to avoid or minimize attacks or aggression from them.

Throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Đại Việt maintained a policy of peace and friendship with China; however, it must be acknowledged that attacks from the "Celestial Empire" during this period were frequent and intense (each Vietnamese and Chinese dynastic period experienced conflicts and even



wars). Therefore, from a clothing perspective, Đại Việt also flexibly followed the trends of the "Celestial Empire". Whenever China adjusted the attire for its court officials, Đại Việt gradually learned and adapted flexibly to similar contemporary forms of attire to resemble the northern court. This similarity in attire, from the perspective of the "Celestial Empire", meant that they could consider this "small country" as showing willing submission, thereby reducing their "attention" towards that nation, in this case, Đại Việt.

**Secondly**, the changes in the attire of Vietnamese court officials during this period also aimed to *reflect a stance of equality with the Emperor (or the model) of China*. The use of attire in Vietnam that always changed flexibly according to the regulations of each contemporary "Celestial Empire" dynasty had reasons beyond diplomacy. Đại Việt harbored an independent spirit and clearly wanted to assert its national status. Although always appearing submissive, Vietnam also wanted to prove that it was not inferior in terms of civilization compared to the vast neighboring country of China. The use of attire originated from the current

regulations of the Chinese dynastic monarchies – which regarded themselves as the center of East Asian civilization – was also being used by Đại Việt, and it clearly had to be recognized as "civilized" compared to China and its neighboring countries.

Here, another aspect that needs attention is that Đại Việt always considered China (of the Han people) as a measure of civilization, viewing itself as equal to the Han. Therefore, the Vietnamese *mentality did not accept (or frankly, did not submit to) the Chinese dynastic monarchies ruled by foreign ethnic groups*. This explains why Đại Việt did not accept changes in attire according to the dress code of the Yuan dynasty, as it was ruled by the Mongols (considered a barbarian tribe) and not the Han, thus not worthy of being considered civilized for Vietnam to follow. At that time, Vietnam continued to use the attire regulations of the Song dynasty until the Ming dynasty (ruled by the Han) was established in China. Afterward, in 1368, Doãn Thuần Thần was sent by Emperor Trần Dụ Tông as an envoy to the newly established Ming dynasty. The Ming emperor inquired about the national history and praised Đại Việt's customs as: "A civilized state" and bestowed a poem

*Annam in the South has the Trần,  
With customs not of the Yuan,  
Attire follows the Zhou mode,  
Ceremonies and music of the Song  
ministers.*

*An Nam tế hữu Trần,  
Phong tục bất Nguyên nhân,  
Y quan Chu chế độ,  
Lễ nhạc Tống quân thần  
(Nguyễn Trãi, 1960: 53)*

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In summary, during the initial phase of re-establishing the country after nearly a thousand years of Northern domination and undergoing a strong process of Sinicization, Vietnam had to start shaping new cultural values to ensure two objectives: (1) Maintaining a good relationship with the Chinese court (to ensure peace, independence, and autonomy); and (2) Reviving the traditional cultural identity of the nation from the pre-domination era. Therefore, the enactment of clothing regulations within the country also followed the above trend. The dynasties of Ngô, Đinh, Early Lê, Lý, and Trần frequently issued decrees that regulated dress codes for both the common people and the officials and nobility, closely following the standards of the Chinese court.

In the effort to restore and study original documents, including those from China, we, the authors, has tried to accurately reconstruct and describe the process of shaping and changing the attire of high-ranking officials during the early establishment of a new culture in an independent, autonomous period. Here, we initially explain the reasons for this shaping and transformation. It stems from the geographical and historical relationship that is inseparably linked (which could be called fate) between Vietnam and China, as well as the strong national spirit of the Vietnamese. And in this

positive aspect (i.e., the national spirit and the desire to escape Sinicization) is also mixed with a negative element (i.e., the need to maintain peaceful relations, showing outward "submission" to the "Celestial Empire"). Therefore, balancing these yin and yang elements was necessary to ensure the objectives and the survival of the nation, of Vietnamese culture. This natural balancing process not only does not erase our national identity but also clearly delineates the differences between Vietnamese culture and Chinese culture, affirming the "great unity, small differences" (大同小異) within East Asian culture.

The results of this study hopefully will lay the groundwork for scholars to pay more attention to the history of Vietnamese clothing, leading to further research in terms of space (expanding to common folk clothing) or time (from the Later Lê period to the end of the Nguyễn dynasty) with the aim of creating a complete mosaic of the development of Vietnam's clothing culture.

#### References

- Imperial Cabinet Print Edition (1998a). Complete Annals of Đại Việt, Volume I (*Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Tập I*). Hanoi, Vietnam: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Imperial Cabinet Print Edition (1998b). Complete Annals of Đại Việt, Volume II (*Đại Việt sử ký*

- toàn thư, Tập II*). Hanoi, Vietnam: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Đinh Khắc Thuần (2021). *Vietnamese Stele Inscriptions from the Chinese Domination to the Trần Dynasty (Văn bia chữ Hán Việt Nam: Từ thời Bắc thuộc đến đời Trần)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: National University Press.
- Anonymous (2019). *A Brief History of Vietnam (Việt sử lược)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Hồng Đức Publishing House.
- Lưu Văn Lợi (2004). *Vietnamese Diplomacy (1945 – 1995) (Ngoại giao Việt Nam (1945 – 1995))*. Hanoi, Vietnam: People's Police Publishing House.
- Nguyễn Trãi (1960). *Remaining Works ofỨc Trai: Extra Territorial Records (Ức Trai di tập: Dư địa chí)*, Translated by Phan Duy Tiếp and edited by Hà Văn Tấn. Hanoi, Vietnam: Văn sử học Publishing House.
- History of the Song Dynasty, Volume 4: Additional Records (Tổng sử, quyển 4: Dư phục chí). Retrieved from <https://zh.wikisource.org/>
- History of the Song Dynasty, Volume 5: Additional Records (Tổng sử, quyển 5: Dư phục chí). Retrieved from <https://zh.wikisource.org/>
- Trần Quang Đức (2017). *A Thousand Years of Caps and Robes: The History of Vietnamese Costumes from 1009 to 1945 (Ngàn năm áo mũ: Lịch sử trang phục Việt Nam giai đoạn 1009 – 1945)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: The World Publishing House.
- East-West Language and Culture Center (Eds.) (2009) – Lê Tắc. *Brief Records of An Nam (An Nam chí lược)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Labor Publishing House.
- Committee for Social Sciences of Vietnam – Institute of Literature (1988). *Poetry and Literature of the Lý and Trần Dynasties, Volume II (Thơ văn Lý – Trần, tập II)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Committee for Social Sciences of Vietnam – Institute of Literature (1978). *Poetry and Literature of the Lý and Trần Dynasties, Volume III (Thơ văn Lý – Trần, tập III)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Institute of History of Vietnam (Trans.) (1992) – Phan Huy Chú. *Institutive Regulations of Historical Dynasties, Volume 2 (Lịch triều hiến chương loại chú, tập 2)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Fu Boxing (2020). *The Grand Song Robes: Illustrated Guide to Song Dynasty Costumes (大宋衣冠: 图说宋人服饰)*. Shanghai, China: Ancient Books Publishing House.