

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

LE THI AN HOA. *The process of formation, development and changes of Hue royal festivals from 1802 to 1945*

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Nguyen dynasty, the last monarchy of Vietnam, has chosen Hue as the capital city of the country for 143 years (1802-1945). Along with building a centralized state apparatus, the Nguyen Kings established and executed more and more diverse, stringent and methodical regulations on rites and ritual ceremonies. Those ritual heritages are commonly called the Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals.

The royal festivals are one of the most important factors forming Hue culture, creating a typical identity of Hue in the comparison with other cultural areas of the country. However, the Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals have been failed to remember for a long period of time. Therefore, there is a dearth of foundations for research on Nguyen dynasty in general and Hue royal festivals, in particular, in order to ensure its comprehensiveness and objectiveness.

The thesis "*The process of formation, development and changes of Hue royal festivals from 1802 to 1945*" aims at defining the basis of the formation and development of the Nguyen dynasty's royal festivals which hit its peak under the

King Minh Mang's reign in many aspects. The thesis whereby points out the specific characteristics, positive aspects and extremely important role of the Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals; clarifies the changes of these festivals before the impact of several objective and subjective factors in the period of 1885 - 1945. Since then, the thesis evaluates the role of the festivals in the Nguyen dynasty's court cultural life and significant factors affecting and forming the Hue cultural identity.

Apart from the Introduction, Conclusion, References and Chapter 1 covering a research overview, the main content of the thesis is represented in 3 chapters (Chapters 2 to 4).

Chapter 2: Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals in Hue in the period of 1802 – 1885

The royal court festivals in the Nguyen dynasty inherited from that of the former dynasties, and also learnt from the Chinese ones in accordance with the Confucian model such as Giao Sacrifice, Xa Tac Sacrifice, Field-ploughing Ceremony (*Tịch điền*), sacrifice at the Temple of Literature, Enthronement ceremony, Welcome spring Ceremony (*lễ Tiến xuân ngưu*), human chess Ceremony (*lễ Kỳ đạo*), Ceremony of proclamation of doctor lists (successful candidates in the national examination – *lễ Truyền lô*), etc.

In addition, the Nguyen dynasty also formally regulated a number of traditional rituals arising from the needs of spiritual life, beliefs of the community. In the process of transformation, traditional folk rituals have been gradually organized in a solemn, methodical and stringent way to convey the noble status of the royal family or the supreme authority of the kings.

Out of the royal court festivals in the Nguyen dynasty in the period of 1802 - 1885, the most distinguishing ones included monthly court rituals (Great ritual at Thai Hoa Palace and regular ritual at Can Chanh Palace); three great festivals (New Lunar Year festival on the first day of a new lunar year; Double Fifth Festival on the 5th of the 5th lunar month; the king's birthday ceremony); sacrifice for agricultural deities at field-ploughing festival on every summer; Calendar Offering Day (*lễ Ban sóc*) on the 12th lunar month; Enthronement Ceremony; funeral ceremony; welcome spring festival, festival for tending graves (or pure brightness festival) (*lễ Thanh minh*); double ninth festival on the 9th day of the 9th lunar month (*lễ Trùng cửu*); tidying-up ceremony (*lễ Phất thức*); queen mother's birthday; imperial concubine's birthday; crown prince's birthday; queen's birthday and the national day, etc.

For *Sacrifice ceremony*: According to the Nguyen court's official regulation, the ritual was divided into *Đại tự* (great rites including Giao Sacrifice, Xa Tac Esplanade, temples of ancestors of the kings), *Trung tự* (medium rites at

temples of emperors, Confucius temple at the Temple of Literature, agricultural deities esplanade) and *Quần tự* (popular rites including ceremonial sacrifices at temples for *Thành hoàng* (village tutelary god), system of temples for wind deities, water deities or nature deities, god of fire, temples of founders of medical practices, shrines of the Dragon King of the South Sea; founders of the nation, etc.)

Out of Six Ministries (*Lục bộ*), the Ministry of Rites (*Lễ Bộ*) was a superior office in charge of state ceremony, rituals and sacrifices, imperial examinations and diplomatic relations. The Court of Imperial Sacrifices (*Thái thường tự*) and Court of Imperial Banquets (*Quang lộc tự*) were the two major offices conducting all sacrificial rituals and organizing official culinary occasions respectively.

Chapter 3: The Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals in the period of 1885-1945

It's estimated that there were more than 100 royal festivals conducted by the Nguyen Kings at Hue capital during their reigns. Most of them were performed in Gia Long and Minh Mang dynasties on the basis of traditional festivals inherited from the former dynasties and new ones organized suitable with the demands of the cultural, spiritual and religious life of new dynasty.

The subjects of the Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals were the Hue court, the kings and royal families, which reflected clearly in the Grand Audience Ceremony. The ceremonies mostly organized on

mid-Spring (February, the second month of Spring) and mid-Autumn (August, the second month of Autumn). Most of them happened at royal palaces, mainly at Thai Hoa Palace, Can Chanh Palace and other palaces of empress dowager, dowager noble consort, princes... depending on the ceremony purposes and contents. The scale of the ceremony and the procedure time were simplified and shortened respectively after the period of 1885-1945 due to the Hue court's decline in the economy's potential. Take the medium and popular rites as an example, they were held twice a year (in spring and autumn), but only once a year as from the first year of Emperor Dong Khanh's reign (1886) forward. The sacrificial accessories were also reduced.

In the Emperor Khai Dinh's reign, some new royal festivals appeared such as the National day ceremony (*Hưng quốc khánh niệm*), which respected both the traditional rituals and popular festival. From the late XIX and early XX centuries, the fall of Hue imperial capital (in 1885) and the intervention of the colonial power had made remarkable changes in the royal rites. From 1885 to 1945, feudal states lost their roles; royal festivals were not held completely and solemnly; political elements did not honour the royalty orthodoxly.

Chapter 4: Characteristics, values and conservation of the Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals

Arising from the spiritual demands which were both the belief in God and praise for royal power: the Nguyen dynasty's royal

court festivals were the consequences of the acquirement and development of royal festivals in Vietnamese former dynasties and Chinese court in a new background, a new dynasty with similar and different features.

Reflecting the honour of dynasty and royal families: In the system of the Nguyen dynasty's rituals, there were many festivals, mainly rites and sacrifices organized at temples of ancestor, emperors and their wives... This form honoured the royalty's power and gave prominence to the emperor's family. Under the Nguyen dynasty (1802 – 1945), royalty's members paid special attention to their ancestor's worshipping which was much more completed and regulated in comparison with that of the former dynasties.

The Nguyen dynasty's royal festivals were held in a large scale with rites and court music, appreciated the 'ritual' part, lessened the 'festive' part. The royal festivals in the Nguyen dynasty were performed every year, mainly on some most important solar terms ('*tiết*') such as the Beginning of Spring, New Lunar Year (*tết Nguyên đán*), First Full Moon of the new year (*tết Thượng nguyên*), Double Fifth Festival or Lucky Festival or Festival of the Living (*tết Đoan dương*), Hungry Ghost Festival (*tết Trung nguyên*), New Rice Festival (*tết Hạ nguyên*), Winter solstice (*Đông chí*). These festivals were mostly held on the spring and autumn, especially in the 2nd and 8th lunar months. The festival time was flexible, some lasted in one day, some for three days or

even seven days (in sacrifice ceremony at esplanade). The royal festivals were varied and diversified, which were held at many places in ancient Hue capital city, some were organized between the capital city and other different national regions. Whether the ceremonies of the Nguyen Dynasty were formed during the reign of King Gia Long or King Minh Mang and more or less adjusted year by year depending on the socio-economic conditions of the year, in general, they were held in accordance with the royal regulations. The Hue royal festivals consisted of 'ritual' part and 'festive' part. The former was attached more importance than the latter. The Nguyen dynasty paid much attention to performing rituals instead of entertainment. Royal festivals were established by the emperor and organized by his mandarins. They were deeply influenced by the Confucianism thoughts. Royal festivals, regardless of rituals or rites, accompanied with the court music.

The Nguyen dynasty's royal festivals conveyed a deep humanity. The Nguyen dynasty's royal festivals were not only to honour the royal power, praise the royal families and satisfy the emperors' spiritual demands but also pray for peace, good weather, good harvest with the Giao Sacrifice, Xa Tac Sacrifice, Field-ploughing Ceremony, etc.

The humanity in festivals was expressed in building the temples, organizing sacrificial ceremonies or worshipping the former dynasty's emperors, showing the gratitude to the ancestor

and meritorious officials. Besides, the ceremony for fallow graves, ghost sacrifice ceremony... expressed the sympathy and the humanity with unfortunate people. While Lunar New Year Festival, Double Fifth Festival showed the continuity of the nation's traditional cultural values; ceremony for the proclamation of doctor lists honoured the talents of the country... The traditional festivals also preserve many distinctive cultural and artistic activities. Excluding limited parts due to the feudal era and ideology, the Hue royal court festivals contain cultural values that are positive and enriching humanity.

On the conservation matters: The conservation and enhancement of the Nguyen dynasty's royal court festivals shall observe the requirements of the Cultural Heritage Law, ensuring to conserve the origin of the heritage. The reconstruction of the royal court festivals of the Nguyen Dynasty must be based on the source material to ensure maximum authenticity, limit the stage factors and focus on ritual parts. Although Nguyen Dynasty feudalism was no longer available, the space of the royal court ceremonies was largely intact. Therefore, the construction is supposed to take place exactly in the space it once existed. The preservation and promotion of the royal court festivals of the Nguyen Dynasty must be associated with the Hue Festivals to create unique tourism products, and can also lead to the socialization.

From the real preservation practices of Hue's cultural heritage in general, royal court festivals in particular, the following issues should be paid much attention to effectively promote their cultural values: i) Preserving royal festivals and promoting their values for tourism must strictly comply with the Cultural Heritage Law; ii) Preserving and promoting the cultural heritage values also mean the protection of the cultural

heritage successors or folk artisans; iii) Preserving and promoting royal festivals must be aimed at introducing the heritage to the public. Therefore, it is necessary to professionally prepare the introduction of the royal court festivals in general and each particular festival in particular.

The thesis was successfully defended at Hue University of Sciences in 2017.

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