



Typical Values of the Nguyen Dynasty's Decorative Art on Bronze Objects in Hue

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Abstract

In the general relationship of culture and art, the Nguyen lords and kings made many contributions to the shaping and development of Cochinchina, enhanced the country's position and influence with other countries in the region. The decorative art on bronze objects in the Nguyen Dynasty contains many cultural, historical and aesthetic values with multi-dimensional and multi-layered symbol. This has shown the synthesis of values, in which aesthetic value is one of the outstanding points. The decorative art on bronze objects in the Nguyen Dynasty take an important role in preserving and conserving national artistic and cultural values. Besides this, the expressive value on bronze and the emotiveness from the surface of the material also enhance the values of the decorative art. The Nguyen Dynasty's decorative art on bronze objects in Hue has shown the richness of art and culture. Through the study we can see and feel the great ingenuity and creative spirit of the artisan classes. This is one of the factors affirming the position of the Nguyen dynasty's decorative art on bronze objects in the general of Vietnamese bronze art.

Introduction

History has also shown that in periods of social development, with less war, more works of art will appear. Specifically, bronze works of high value appeared in the middle period of the Nguyen lords and mostly in the reign of King Minh Mang during the reign of the Nguyen kings. The relics of the reign of King Minh Mang in Hue are works that continue the cultural values of the Kim Long period (1636-1687). This is considered one of the most prosperous times in the history of the Nguyen kings. Many regulations, institutions, and art works were formed and born, of which two works are classified as national treasures of Vietnam: Cuu Dinh and Nine gods. The bronze relics in Hue have marked the culture in which is a combination of folk elements and elements of the same family. Regardless of any angle, the bronze relics of this period have also marked the cultural and historical values of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vo Huong An, 2012).

It can be said that the group of relics of the Nguyen contemporaries in the relics of the ancient capital of Hue are considered typical works of high cultural and artistic value (Phan Thuan An, 2000). The bronze relics of this period bear the imprint of the shape of Dang Ngoai, intersecting with the culture of Dang Trong, and are highly appreciated by researchers, including 4 sets of relics recognized as national treasures of Vietnam. The scarcity of copper material, especially in the time when the Nguyen lords often fought wars from Dang Ngoai to Cochinchina, showed a very special context of the formation of bronze works. this. Decorative art on Nguyen contemporaries in Hue reflects cultural values and actual context through decorative projects, decorative patterns on each relic, group of relics (Vinh Phoi, 2000). The bronze relics of this

period are identified with specific periods through the missing items on the relics along with a system of decorative patterns (Phan Thanh Hai, 2007). This is the basis for researchers to identify time factors as well as specific divergences. In addition, the bronze artifacts of this period are also evidence for the development of the bronze casting period, as well as the basis for evaluating the casting and decoration techniques on bronze at that time.



Figure 1. The symbol of the stork catching fish on the cauldron at the same time as the Nguyen lords

The art of decoration on bronze in Hue reflected cultural values through the continuation of images from the shaping styles encountered in Dang Ngoai such as the division of umbrellas in some pagodas and communal houses in the south. North of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the art deco style of this period. The interaction by indigenous Champa elements such as the division of decorative layout in the form of umbrellas, the pattern developed in the shape of a string of flowers is quite typical, in addition, it also influences Western elements such as laces, decorative crown (Nguyen Huu Thong, 2001).

The value of bronze is not only sustainable in terms of physical structure but also has spiritual meaning, this is a sacred material because since ancient times people have considered materials such as bronze and stone associated with the power of the gods. The value of bronze also includes and converges the power for human prayers to the gods. Therefore, in terms of bronze beliefs, there are also religious values, the most stable beliefs that people want to show before the gods.

For that reason, the formation of bronze casting villages has contributed to shaping the appearance of bronze in folk to a number of bronze works with the coordination of the court. In which, there is the impact of factors on political institutions, religion, regional characteristics and practical social needs (Trung et al., 2022). The groups of workers in these craft villages also often move and are not fixed, so there is an exchange of experience and techniques in the process of disbanding and shaping new groups of workers in other bronze casting villages. each other throughout the country. The bronze relics preserved in Hue are symbolic works with high artistic value, the products made by good artisans gathered by the Nguyen lords and kings to the capital. For implementation, because they are products serving the needs of the royal family, these works are focused on very standard investment in the stages of mold making to

the quality of the materials. Therefore, for a long time, the bronze relics of this period still retain the beauty of the surface as well as the texture of the details.

Historical Value

Vietnamese bronze casting has a very long tradition, when the Dong Son civilization flourished in the Red River and Ma River areas and then gradually moved down to the South following the footsteps of the Lac Vietnamese residents. In this infancy, everything was very rudimentary with new village characteristics and a lot of movement so the villages were small in size. After the Northern domination period, bronze casting centers appeared and gathered around the Red River area such as Cau Nom, Dai Bai in Bac Ninh, Ngu Xa Center in Thang Long. Some small bronze casting villages in the Dang Trong area at that time such as Duc ward (Hue), Phuoc Kieu (Quang Nam), Bich Lien (Quang Ngai). in which Duc ward in Hue was the most developed.

Based on the evolution of Vietnam's feudal history, it shows that due to the need to provide products and supplies for the royal court and religion, there are many "bronze casting villages" that have clearly formed outside. next to the powerful authorities of the contemporary feudal regime: production is close by for easy control (such as gun minting - minting money) or for orderers to easily ask workers to do as they please. As an example, the Ngu Xa casting ward was formed near the capital of the Later Le dynasty (King Le Thanh Tong sent some Dai Bai village workers (Tog De Kieu, Thuan Thanh district, Kinh Bac province) to Thang Long to mint coins and Royal palace in the area of Truc Bach Lake (Phan Thanh Hai, 2005).

The history of bronze art in Cochinchina was also formed during the process of Lord Nguyen Hoang's opening to the South, leading to many waves of migration to the South, forming many famous craft villages, including copper casting. The socio-cultural situation in the early Nguyen period had many uncertain characteristics because the migration to the South was quite massive, which led to the formation of mixed villages, the administrative character was still unstable. loose, not tight. The approach to the indigenous Champa culture also has more or less conflicts, creating new cultural practices that are harmonized between the indigenous regions. With the policy of national security, the Nguyen lords attached great importance to social stability because the social context in the early period was quite complicated. Nguyen Hoang foretold about the use of religion to win people's hearts and Buddhism was focused on developing by Nguyen Hoang as well as the later lords to make the policy of national security and rule, that's why during this time. Many temples were established. In the early days of the Nguyen Lords, Buddhist culture had a strong influence on all aspects of life. The influence of the Buddhist spirit was built from the foundation of Lord Nguyen Hoang, this is one of the two periods when the religious spirit was in harmony with the common spirit of the nation like the Ly - Tran dynasties. During this period, the state sponsored Buddhism and considered it as an orthodox ideology that played a key role in the development orientation, that's why during this period a lot of Buddhist works. Churches were concentrated on investment and construction, pagodas were built with a dense density like this period. Hoang Giac Pagoda (1721), Sung Hoa Pagoda (1602), Thien Mu Pagoda (1601), Thuyen Ton Pagoda.

The formation of craft villages and then focusing on professionalizing them into statues serving the Nguyen lords and kings has gathered many good craftsmen throughout the country to perform many bronze works such as: set of 11 copper cauldrons, Dai Hong Chung Temple Thien Mu, Khanh Dong, village bells, pagodas in the Nguyen lords, or the works of the Nine Dinh and the Nine Deities of the Nguyen Kings. Decorative art on bronze relics has a long history associated with many important events of the country. The sets of bronze relics made

during the time of the Nguyen lords and kings have left great historical values, recognizing the contribution of the ancestors in creating valuable works. high value. The study of bronze relics of this period is essential to find out about the national historical values (Hang et al., 2021). Through the evaluation and analysis of decorative themes used in this period, we can see that great messages and ideas have been conveyed through motifs and decorative projects on the system of decorations. The set of bronze relics is still kept in Hue Ancient Capital. It can be said that these are proofs of a period of development in the country's bronze decorative arts.

Art does not inherently depend on the exact chronological divergence of history, it is an underground circuit that runs through and smolders through different periods, depending on each different time and historical context. different, decorative elements such as themes, styles, and layouts also have different changes. Besides, the impact of cultural, historical and social factors, the exchange and acculturation with other cultures and techniques also partly affects the art in general and the decorative arts on the map. copper in particular (Trung et al., 2022). That is why it is possible that a relic of one period has the decoration style of another period. It is also the reason to realize that the decoration style of each period is not always absolute according to historical divergence. This is further explained when the patterns on the bronze wares of Cochinchine still echo the decorative features of Dang Ngoai such as the elongated rattan shapes, the decoration of solid and fat blocks on the bronze bells. An Luu pagoda, Thuyen Ton pagoda or on the Nguyen Lord's day at Thien Mu pagoda (Hue), or like the Tay Son contemporaneous bell like La Chu temple bell, it has a decorative style of the Nguyen lords...and many Other bronze artifacts are still preserved in folklore and in Hue's relics



Figure 2. The sophistication of decorative pieces on the Cuu Dinh (under King Minh Mang)

Aesthetic Value

The concept of aesthetics is set forth to include the creative meanings, beauty trends of each period and period and its role in the cultural, historical and social contexts that have created the values. there. This value is a combination of basic decorative elements and artistic images to create a beauty that integrates aesthetic concepts. The art of decoration on bronze in Hue has achieved aesthetic values and figurative thinking, reflecting the aesthetic point of view of social reality.

Aesthetic values are also expressed through the combination of folk beauty combined with royal elements. These values are intertwined, making the decorative arts on the relics of this

period become richer and more diverse. Aesthetic value from the fusion of monumental, unique and sophisticated in technique.

In the artistic images on bronze in Hue, the association with agricultural thinking and the expectation of a harmony of nature, praying for favorable rain and wind, thus showing many elements of nature. such as on Cuu Dinh, cauldron, khanh dong... The artistic image of animals in real life also creates quite vivid artistic images. The aesthetic values originate from the crystallization of patterns through the development of elements associated with nature. The decorative layout is not rigidly molded but has flexibility in arranging the main and minor details, thus partly reaching the aesthetic values on the basis of culture and decoration.

The aesthetic value is also created by the sum of the values of strokes, arrays, and golden ratio (Golden Section). Besides, the construction of decorative images on the bronze relics here also brings many selective and reasonable elements through the way of dividing the layout on the bronze relics. In the set of Cuu Dinh, we also see the stratification of the layers of decorative images into 3 floors, the decorative images are also simplified in key details to generalize the typical places, animals and plants of each region. domain. The image of a long lance-shaped cloud brings a sense of peace and slowness on the bells and bells. The images of animals in folklore that seem to be rarely used such as the images of wild boar, swallow, and stork on copper cauldrons have shown subtle observation and at the same time revealed the elements. The folk aesthetic mixed with the royal court is shown very subtly in the sets of decorative themes. The themes of the vast nature of heaven and earth such as images: The two crosses and bowls on the bronze altar at Thien Mu pagoda, the images of clouds, rain, wind ... on the Cuu Dinh or the images of yin and yang on the bronze bells, etc. showed the judgments of contemporary visual views. The calculation and distribution of decorative figures in the same subject and casting and carving techniques have shown the ingenuity and talent of the bronze casting artists of this period.

The aesthetic values and decorative images on bronze relics in Hue have shown the perception of visual effects through the decoration method, layout selection and decorative images. The aesthetic value is also expressed through the construction of the image of the spirit animals, the way of posing the main characters of the main characters. The animals in the quartet besides the turtle are real, the other animals are also formed on the basis of fictional animals. The development of Confucianism during the Nguyen kings also made the construction of symbolic animals for emperors or queens such as dragons and phoenixes also more special, more detailed. This is also shown more clearly, when the dragons on the main bronze pillars (two pillars in the middle) of the wards are shown in detail with the dragon's head by a high relief block, the body is also shown. show detailed specifications. Meanwhile, the two outermost columns are only represented by the stylized image of dragons and clouds. Even the main paths of the steps in the works, the stone dragons on the steps are decorated in a realistic style, while the dragons on the left and right wings are only shown in the way decorative stylized.

From the construction of these images, it also shows the role, position and hierarchy of people passing through those gates and steps. Therefore, in the art of bronze decoration in this period, there were also feelings of artistic values through metaphorical images, which created the decorative arts in Hue in general and On bronze in particular, the multi-layered, multi-meaningful meaning creates depth in the mind about the representations in the decorative patterns. Therefore, the receiving object must be suitable with the spatial context, regional factors or aesthetic perception factors.

This is clearly shown through the decorative language of the symbol derived from elements derived from the reality of folk life in the early Nguyen period and then standardized according to the development of Confucianism to become into standard sets of resources such as: the quartets of the four times, the four spirits, the bowls of buu, the bowls of fruit, etc. in the Nguyen kings' period. This is the convergence and crystallization over a long time and became an identifying feature for the art of this period. Stemming from those origin factors with the characteristics of wet rice residents depending on the weather and nature, therefore, the desire for a divine protection, the wish for favorable rain and wind, is expressed. clearly in the decoration of the Vietnamese. The image of the dragon in folklore is also a metaphorical image of the image of rain clouds and water sources. The phoenix is a metaphorical symbol for the appearance of the saint, the Dragon Horse (a variant of the Lion) with the image representing the horizontal axis of heaven and earth.

It is a combination of the low relief block on the surface of the patterns on the surface of the cauldron and the high relief block on the handle of the cannon, on the handles of the copper cauldron through the "fish to dragon" decoration. In the group of eight-handled cauldrons), the fishtail is represented by the concave strokes on the cauldron's body and in turn is the cauldron handle decorated by small dragons with circular blocks floating out of the surface space of the cauldron's body. Besides, it is also clearly seen on the bronze bell straps decorated by the Giao, the python, the dragon through the periods from the lord to the Nguyen king. The decoration of the dragons on these bells is shown in the form of a round statue, the head is described in great detail, or on the bronze poles decorated in a very "long hidden pattern" style. lively, the body is decorated in a relief style, especially the head created by a prominent circular block on the column body has shown a very flexible and soft combination, the perception is more obvious when surveying the wards. This bronze gate was built in front of Thai Hoa Palace, King Minh Mang's mausoleum, and King Thieu Tri's mausoleum. In Cuu Dinh, it shows the harmony between the block space of the peak body combined with the embossed reliefs that make the Cuu Dinh like a round statue with embossed patterns on the pillars. The kneeling part is decorated in the style of a tiger face. Here the perception is expressed through the luminescent elements on the round blocks that make the surface of the block more prominent. The dominance of the block in the outdoor space, combined with the thin thickness of the decorative pattern on the surface of the bas-reliefs, makes the bronze decorations in Hue more multi-dimensional, at every angle. different will also show an overview of these relics.

The connection and transition between the two shallow and deep spaces on the same relic has created a synthetic decorative language, which merges and complements visual elements for each other. It is these factors that make decorative art on bronze in Hue richer and more diverse. This also shows the meticulous and precise calculation in the mold making stages, the skill of handling high and low blocks, convex and convexity of the artists.

Material Expressive Value

The expressive value of material is considered the self-value of each type of material, the material itself has created its own value. This is considered one of the values that are difficult to quantify and give a specific sensory evaluation because the determination of these values depends on many different factors. The expressiveness of the material is created by the synthesis of elements and is one of the values associated with other decorative art values. The expressive properties created by the specificity of the material, combined with the interactive elements on the surface and the effect of the lighting of the surrounding space, add to the expressive value.

For the formation of a work of art as well as the evaluation of the value of a work, the material plays a very important role. Each different material brings aesthetic values, artistic language and creates different expressive values. Expression in the material comes from the basic properties of the material and other related factors in which the role of the decorative arts. The specific nature of the material is also one of the factors related to the different rendering techniques on the surface. For example, on stone materials, there will be key techniques such as chisels, carvings, copper materials are mainly casting techniques, mold making techniques, carving are also used but not as much as casting techniques. Other specific factors also change accordingly according to the material used.

The calculation of techniques applied to each individual material also poses a problem of choosing the appropriate technique. With time, the surface of the material will have certain changes due to the process of exposure to the environment, factors such as sun, rain, humidity making the surface of the material more or less changed. In terms of color, surface, this is probably why researchers often use the romantic name that is color time. Due to its physical properties that can withstand the harsh weather conditions and the wear and tear of time, copper is considered a symbol of power and strength, as well as a symbol of eternity. dynasties, so this is the material chosen by the Nguyen kings and lords to be used. The use of precious materials during a period of scarcity in material supply made the relics of this period play a very important role. Therefore, besides the emotional elements of aesthetics, this is also a beauty created by important symbolic elements. In the process of studying and surveying the relics of this period, the first thing that we can feel is the sophistication in the selection of images and symbols along with the elaborateness in the performance. from casting techniques to material surface treatment techniques.

As one of the rare and precious materials, copper was strictly controlled by the court. The transactions of buying and selling these materials were all through the control of the court. It is illegal to buy and sell copper materials personally. Because of the scarcity of this material, the choice to use copper is only focused on key works of the court or some works serving community beliefs. The bronze casting technique in Hue was inherited from Dang Ngoai through groups of workers following the Lord to the South, besides it was the introduction of Western techniques through sea trade and missionary activities under the Nguyen lords.

In the decorative arts of the Nguyen lords and kings, bronze material was only present in important places and performed in key works. Most of these works are associated with the presence of the court and kings. During the survey at the works of the complex of Hue Monuments, there are quite a few wards in Hue architectural decoration, but most of them are made of stone or embossed masonry, only works of the nature of expression. The symbol of power of the court as in front of Thai Hoa Palace, or the entrance to the tomb of King Minh Mang and Thieu Tri was made of bronze. And only the middle entrance is decorated with dragons and clouds in a realistic style, while the side entrances on both sides are decorated in the style of dragons and clouds.

In addition, this is also one of the rare materials, so besides the purpose of being used in important works, utensils related to the king, the court or military fields such as cannons. arrows, etc., copper is also used in works related to religious activities such as bells, bells, statues. This material is also used for works of special character. Symbols of the dynasties such as Cuu Dinh, Nine Cannons, Bronze Cauldron or Dai Hong Chung in new Buddhist works are made of bronze. Trading in copper material is under the management of the Nguyen Dynasty, so it is very limited in using this material for other fields.

Besides, the copper material with a glossy surface has increased the contrast and representation of the details of the blocks and accompanying patterns. Most of the bronze artifacts related to the palace are located in the exterior space, so the interaction of natural light is considered the main light source to create volume. The golden copper color of the surface of the material also plays a certain role in creating a warm and calm color that matches the surrounding space context. The self-color of the copper material with the resonance of light has created the vibes of the representation, from the solid mass of shallow spaces to the deep space layer, from the local space to the total space. body of bronze relics. In decoration, each color is often associated or associated with a certain meaning. For the yellow five elements representing the earth element, stand in the middle and be the central position. That is why yellow is often considered the color of nobility, often used as the main color in works and objects for kings. This is also the factor that makes the golden color on the relics more solemn and mysterious.

Conclusion

The research process shows that the decorative art on the relics of Nguyen contemporaries in Hue is a branch of the flow of Hue decorative arts. This is a new research aspect that inherits the foundation of national cultural and artistic values in the spirit of cultural interference and acculturation between periods. Decorative art on bronze relics in Hue is rich in images with the characteristics of decorative language of the material, which is the continuous flow of national artistic and cultural values, creating a decorative style on copper. These values have a close symbiotic relationship that creates existing values and intangible values through the process of cultural exchange and acculturation. These are also the explanatory factors for the values achieved through the decorative arts of Nguyen contemporaneous relics in Hue.

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