

## ***ĐỒ SỨ KÝ KIỂU:***

### **The Chinese Porcelains Made for The Vietnamese Courts from The 17<sup>th</sup> Century to The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century\***

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#### **Abstract**

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From the latter half of 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese courts sent the envoys to China for the diplomatic relation. Besides the diplomatic missions, these envoys also went to ceramic kilns in China to commissioning the high quality porcelains, bringing them back to Vietnam for the needs of the Vietnamese courts.

These porcelains, called *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* (Commissioned patterned porcelains), though made in China, having the “Vietnamese criteria”, such as: the Vietnamese reing titles; the decorative motifs on these porcelains is affected by the Vietnamese arts; the poems on these porcelains were written in Nôm script of Vietnam, or the authors of these poems were the Vietnamese.

These were the very special porcelains, the products of cooperation between the Vietnamese and Chinese in the past. And now, they become the favourite antiques with the Vietnamese and the foreign collectors.

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**Key Words:** *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*, commissioned patterned porcelains, Chinese porcelains, Vietnamese courts, Lê - Trịnh era, Nguyễn lords era, Tây Sơn era, Nguyễn era.

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## I. OVERVIEW OF *ĐỒ SỨ KÝ KIỂU*

The phrase *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* (Commissioned patterned porcelains) as used in this paper denotes the porcelain which the Vietnamese, including kings, mandarins and the common people as well, commissioned from porcelain kilns in China during the era from the latter half of 17<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those porcelain pieces were made to specific commissionings with regard to shapes, colors, decorations, literary inscriptions and/or titles.

Up to the present, those porcelain pieces have been known as: *Bleus de Hué* or *Đồ sứ men lam Hué* (Cobalt blue underglaze porcelains of Hué).

### 1. The technical term *Bleus de Hué*

The technical term *Bleus de Hué* appeared for the first time in L. Chochođ's article *La Question de la Ceramique en Annam et les Bleus de Hué*, in *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie France* (BCAF) in Sài Gòn in December, 1909(532). The article dealt with the porcelain displayed in the royal palaces in Hué, which, according to the author, had been commissioned from China.

The term *bleus de Hué* was used for the second time by a French

priest and scholar, L. Cadière, in his book *Index du BAVH 1914 - 1923*. In the book L. Cadière inserted the term *bleus de Hué* in the bibliography of the article *Sur quelques Porcelaines Européennes décorées sous Minh Mạng* by L. Dumoutier in *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué* (BAVH) (Dumoutier 1914, 47-51). He noted that “*In Hué, people have seen porcelain pieces such as plates, bowls, saucers, tea-cups and the like, with white glaze, which had been made in Europe and then brought to Annam where artists in the royal palace further adorned with polychrome decorative and inscribed on the exterior bottoms the marks pertaining to Minh Mạng reign*”.<sup>1)</sup>

L. Dumoutier ascribed that these pieces were made at the kiln Stoke Upon Trent in England in the 1780s before being purchased by King Minh Mạng (1820 - 1841) who then had them decorated and inscribed with his reign mark for subsequent stocking in the palace for royal use (Dumoutier 1914, 47). One detail worth considering is that in this 7-page article, L. Dumoutier did not use the term *Bleus des Hué* even once, but when L. Cadière wrote a summary of L.

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1) Later, various designs in multi-colored glaze were added to these pieces and the mark of Minh Mạng's reign was inscribed on the bottom of each piece. These pieces were then fired again. A tea-pot (Inv. No. BTH 519/Gm 2907) was now being preserved at Hué Royal Antiquities Museum. Originally the tea-pot had a white glaze, a bouquet of roses was subsequently added, with the Chinese characters: 明命十二年曾畫 (Painting added in the 12th year of Minh Mạng's reign) were inscribed on the base. Under the reign of King Thiệu Trị (1841 - 1847), the royal households continued to commissioning porcelains without any decoration from Europe and had decorative designs added to these blanks in Vietnam. There is also a tea-pot with white glaze and yellow decorations (Inv. No. BTH 724/Gm 3445), kept in Hué Royal Antiquities Museum, beside the lug of which are these words in Han characters in black enamel: 紹治元年奉製 (Made to commissioning in the 1st year of Thiệu Trị reign).

Dumoutier's article for *Index du BAVH 1914 - 1923*, he used the term *bleus de Hué* to denote porcelains of European origin which L. Dumoutier had dealt with, but with a meaning quite different from the phrase *bleus de Hué* as used by L. Chochod in 1909.

Scholar Vương Hồng Sển, however, was the person who brought about a new way of interpreting the term *bleus de Hué* which has been widely used till today. In 1944, in his article *Les Bleus de Hué à décor Mai Hạc* in *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises (BSEI)*, Vương Hồng Sển used the phrase *bleus de Hué* to denote those porcelain pieces that the Vietnamese commissioned from the kilns in China, and not those commissioned from Europe by the Nguyễn court, mainly in 19<sup>th</sup> century (Vương Hồng Sển 1944, 57-64).

Nowadays, *Bleus de Hué* is the term that foreign researchers applied to porcelains made in China and exported to Vietnam, including those imported by the Lê - Trịnh court (1533 - 1788) in Đàng Ngoài (the Outer Region), the Nguyễn lords court (1558 - 1774) in Đàng Trong (the Inner Region), the Tây Sơn dynasty (1778 - 1802) and Nguyễn dynasty (1802 - 1945), as well as Chinese porcelains imitating *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* which were produced during the era from the latter half of 17<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. The technical term Đồ sứ men lam Huế

The first person to use the technical phrase *đồ sứ men lam Huế* was none other than Vương Hồng Sển, in his articles for *Bách khoa thời*

đại, Văn hóa nguyệt san, published in Sài Gòn, and for the book series *Hiếu cổ đặc san* (6 volumes) which were published before 1975 by the author himself. In the year 1993 - 1994, Vương Hồng Sển published two more books, *Khảo về đồ sứ cổ men lam Huế* (A Study of *Bleus de Huế*) and *Khảo về đồ sứ men lam* (A Study of Cobalt Blue Underglaze Porcelains)<sup>2)</sup>, in which he used the terms *Đồ sứ men lam Huế* to denote porcelains which the kings, the lords, the mandarins and the common Vietnamese people had commissioned from China from the Lê Restoration era to the Nguyễn era (18<sup>th</sup> century to 20<sup>th</sup> century). I think that the phrase *Đồ sứ men lam Huế* is the translation of *Bleus de Huế* which Vương Hồng Sển used in his first article *Les Bleus de Huế à décor Mai Hạc* for BSEI in 1944.

Coined by Vương Hồng Sển, the phrase *đồ sứ men lam Huế* has become popular among antique collectors and researchers.

### 3. Other technical terms

Besides the two technical terms *bleus de Huế* and *đồ sứ men lam*

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2) Prior to the year 1975, Vương Hồng Sển compiles 6 books on antiques and the pleasure of collecting antiques, which called *Hiếu cổ đặc san* (Antiquity lovers' special books). These books are: *Phong lưu cũ mới* (Old and new grand styles), Sài Gòn, 1970; *Thú xem truyện Tàu* (The pleasure of reading Chinese stories), Sài Gòn, 1970; *Thú chơi cổ ngoạn* (The pleasure of collecting antiques), Sài Gòn, 1971; *Khảo về đồ sứ cổ Trung Hoa* (A study of old Chinese porcelains), Sài Gòn, 1971; *Cánh Đức Trấn đào lục* (Notes on ceramics in Jingdezhen), Sài Gòn, 1972.

After 1975, Vương Hồng Sển wrote *Khảo về đồ sứ cổ men lam Huế* (A study of *Bleus de Huế*, 1993) (2 volumes), published by HCM City Publishing House, and *Khảo về đồ sứ men lam* (A study of cobalt blue underglazed porcelains, 1994) was published by Mỹ thuật Publishing House. Many contemporary researchers regard him as the pioneer in the field of studying and collecting antiques, including Đồ sứ ký kiểu.

*Huế*, which are widely used, other names suggested by local and foreign scholars with various interpretations have been given to this group of porcelains.

Various terms have been suggested, such as *Đồ sứ men trắng vẽ lam* (White underglaze porcelains with blue designs); *Đồ sứ ngự dụng và quan dụng thời Lê - Nguyễn* (Porcelains used by the king and porcelain used by the mandarins during the Lê - Nguyễn era); *Đồ sứ ký kiểu của triều Nguyễn* (Commissioned patterned porcelains under the Nguyễn dynasty); *Gốm men xanh trắng của triều Nguyễn* (Ceramics with blue and white glaze of the Nguyễn dynasty); *Gốm lam Huế* (Cobalt blue ceramics of Huế); *Đồ sứ đặc chế* (Porcelains made by special order); *Đồ lam Huế* (Blue wares of Huế); *Đồ sứ đặt hàng* (Ordered porcelains) and so on.

#### 4. The technical term Đồ sứ ký kiểu

As a researcher of this particular family of porcelain, I realize that all the technical terms so far in use, such as *Bleus de Huế* or *Đồ sứ men lam Huế*, are far from being accurate. They are even conducive to misconstruing as Trần Đình Sơn once pointed out. New terminologies suggested by researchers which I have listed above, are, however, still controversial.

\* The technical term *Đồ sứ men lam Huế* is likely to make us think that the porcelains were made in Huế (L. Chochod committed this mistake in the book *Huế. La Mystérieuse*). Moreover, *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* were decorated not only with cobalt blue color but also with

multi-colored glaze (*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* of Khải Định reign for example). Furthermore, not only the Nguyễn court in Huế commissioned porcelains from China, but the Lê - Trịnh court in Đàng Ngoài and the Nguyễn lords court in Đàng Trong did the same as well.

\* The technical terms *Đồ sứ men trắng vẽ lam* or *đồ gốm lam Huế* indicate only the material of the antique object but not its origin or how it was made, which is most important. Besides, the specialist circle has clearly distinguished between *đồ sứ* (porcelain) and *đồ gốm* (ceramic). Hence *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* is obviously *đồ sứ* (porcelain) and not *đồ gốm* (ceramic).

\* The technical terms *đồ sứ ngự dụng và quan dụng thời Lê - Nguyễn* tells us the time of production and the owners of this group of porcelains but it does not give us any suggestion as to where they were made and how they were made. Besides, this group of porcelains was commissioned not only by the royal family and the mandarins of the Lê - Trịnh court and the Nguyễn court but also by a lot of merchants as well. There were items for the royal family's and the mandarins' use, and others for the common people.

Having spent some time researching on this subject, I realize the respective limitations of all the technical terms so far in use such as *Bleus de Huế*, *Đồ sứ men lam Huế* and also the newly coined technical phrases.

For this reason, I suggest using the technical terms *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* (Commissioned patterned porcelains) with a date phrase added to it when necessary, for example:

- *Đồ sứ ký kiểu thời Lê - Trịnh* (*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Lê - Trịnh era): This term denotes porcelains commissioned from China with styles and patterns designated by Lê - Trịnh court in the Outer Region from the latter half of 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

- *Đồ sứ ký kiểu thời chúa Nguyễn* (*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Nguyễn lords era): This term denotes porcelains commissioned from China with styles and patterns designated by the Nguyễn lords in the Inner Region, typically by Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu, from the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

- *Đồ sứ ký kiểu thời Tây Sơn* (*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Tây Sơn era): This technical terms denotes porcelains bearing poem inscription in Nôm script, which were commissioned from China at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Many researchers think that they date back to Tây Sơn era.

- *Đồ sứ ký kiểu thời Nguyễn* (*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Nguyễn era): This technical terms denotes porcelains produced in China by commissioning. The patterns were designed by the Vietnamese in the period 1804 - 1925, under the reigns of Gia Long (1802 - 1820), Minh Mạng (1820 - 1841), Thiệu Trị (1841 - 1847), Tự Đức (1848 - 1883) and Khải Định (1916 - 1925).

The term *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bears the following “Vietnamese features”:

\* *Đồ sứ*: The term *đồ sứ* is used because the object under discussion is *đồ sứ* (porcelain), not *đồ gốm* (ceramic), with a great content of kaolin and the melting of clay body, indicating that the firing temperature has exceeded 1,300°C, the temperature required to make a porcelain product in the true sense of the word.

\* *Ký kiểu*: This means sending the models and patterns to the kilns in China where the porcelain pieces would be made as commissioned (by the royals, the mandarins or the common Vietnamese people from the Lê Restoration era to the Nguyễn era). The following characteristics have helped me confirm that these porcelains were made in the *ký kiểu* (commissioned/custom order) mode.

- These porcelains, although made in China, bear the “Vietnamese features”, such as:

+ The decorations on the pieces feature Vietnamese landmarks, such as Hải Vân Mountain, Thúy Vân Mountain, Tam Thai Mountain, Thuận Hóa Market, Thiên Mụ Pagoda, Hà Trung Lagoon and so on.

+ The poems inscribed on the pieces are either in Nôm script, which are invented by the Vietnamese and not in use in China, or in Han script but composed by Vietnamese authors such as Đào Duy Từ, Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu, King Thiệu Trị, King Tự Đức...

+ The *reign marks* on the porcelains are the dynastic titles of Vietnamese kings such as Gia Long, Minh Mạng, Thiệu Trị, Tự Đức, Khải Định; or the *year marks* thereon coincide with the years when the Vietnamese delegations were sent to China.

+ The decorative patterns on the porcelains do not follow any Chinese prototype. They bear the imprints of Vietnamese decoration style which is also seen on other materials such as bronze, canvas, paper previously used in sculpture, architecture, and on paintings from the Lê - Trịnh era to the Nguyễn era.

- Those porcelains were reserved for the Vietnamese only and

could not be found in the Chinese markets at the time.

\* *Thời Nguyễn, thời Lê - Trịnh, thời chúa Nguyễn, thời Tây Sơn...* are time tags defining the dating limits of the porcelain pieces under consideration.

Compared with other terms used, this phrase is not verbose; it can, furthermore, serve to clarify three things: the material used to make an object, how it was made and when it was made. That is the reason why I propose the technical term *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* and use it throughout this paper.

## **II. ĐỒ SỨ KÝ KIỂU DURING THE LÊ - TRỊNH ERA IN ĐÀNG NGOÀI**

### **1. Starting point of Đồ sứ ký kiểu in Đàng Ngoài**

On the evidence of historical records, and particularly by dating the artifacts on the basis of their glaze and decorative style in comparison with those of dated Chinese porcelains, I conclude that the practice of commissioning porcelains in Đàng Ngoài occurred after the years 1682 - 1683 and continued until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the imperial kilns of the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1912) were restored under Emperor Kangxi's direction (1662 - 1722).

## 2. Đồ sứ ký kiểu during the Lê – Trịnh era

### (1) Relations between the missions and the commissioning of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*

In view of the relations between Đại Việt (i.e. Vietnam at that time) and Da Qing (i.e. China at that time), the Lê - Trịnh dynasty must have sent a number of missions to China to pay tribute, to ask for nomination, to show gratitude or to impart bereavements. As regards the era when Trịnh lords were in power, from the first Lord Trịnh Tùng (r. 1570 - 1623) to the last Lord Trịnh Bồng (r. 1787 - 1788), 38 missions were sent to China.

It is unknown how many among those 38 missions were engaged in the commissioning of patterned porcelains. This is due to the fact that all the pieces commissioned by the missions of the Lê - Trịnh era did not bear *year mark* or *reign mark*, which is different from those commissioned by the Nguyễn dynasty afterwards. They all, instead, had the common inscriptions 內府侍... (Made for the Inner Palace) plus a location word such as 中 (Central), 右 (Right), 南 (South), 北 (North), 東 (East), 兌 (West)<sup>3</sup> or 慶春侍左 (Made for the Principal Palace Shrine).

### (2) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Lê – Trịnh era

These porcelains classify themselves as two main groups bearing different marks: 內府侍... (Made for the Inner Palace) and 慶春侍左

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3) The word 兌 (*đoài*) was used to mean the West (*Tây*) because the title of the 4<sup>th</sup> Trịnh Lord, Trịnh Tạc (1657 - 1682), was Tây Đô Vương, Tây was thus a forbidden word.

(Made for the Principal Palace Shrine).

**1) Đồ sứ ký kiểu bearing the marks 內府侍… (Made for the Inner Palace)**

These were the group of porcelains having the marks written in underglaze cobalt blue, including 內府侍中 (Made for the Inner Central Palace), 內府侍右 (Made for the Inner Palace at Right), 內府侍南 (Made for the Inner Palace in the South), 內府侍北 (Made for the Inner Palace in the North), and 內府侍東 (Made for the Palace in the East). As an exception, the mark 內府侍兌 (Made for the Inner Palace in the West) was applied in relief on a white-glazed surface.

The types of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍… usually consist of bowls, dishes, tea-sets, spittoons, brush-stands, painting holders, flower vases, lime-pots, beakers, brush pots... but bowls and dishes account for a dominating number.

\* *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍中 (Made for the Inner Central Palace)

*Chính cung* (Principal Chamber) or *Trung cung* (Central Chamber) was the dwelling of the Trịnh lords. *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍中 are, therefore, thought to be especially reserved for the lords. They were commissioned under the reigns of lords: Trịnh Cương (r. 1709 - 1729), Trịnh Giang (r. 1729 - 1740), Trịnh Doanh (r. 1740 - 1767) and Trịnh Sâm (r. 1767 - 1782). This group of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* decorated with *long vân* (dragon and cloud), *lưỡng long triều nhật* (two dragons attending to the sun), *long thọ* (dragon attending to the character 壽), *thủy ba* (diaper pattern with water waves). *Đồ sứ ký*

*kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍中 under the reign of Lord Trịnh Sâm are, furthermore, decorated with *long lân* (dragon and unicorn), *long phụng* (dragon and phoenix), *tản vân* (scattering clouds), women and camellia flowers...

\* *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍右 (Made for the Inner Palace at Right)

These pieces were commissioned during the reigns of Lord Trịnh Cương and Lord Trịnh Giang; they were decorated with phoenixes. *Hữu cung* (Right Palace) was the palace of the first wives of the Trịnh lords. The phoenix, in the old Chinese arts, was regarded as the symbol of the queen or the woman. That is why *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍右 were decorated with paintings of *long phụng triều nhật* (dragon and phoenix attending to the sun), or *long phụng khánh thọ* (dragon and phoenix surrounding the character 壽). Philippe Truong, a French researcher, posits that these porcelains were used in the *Hữu cung miếu* (Right Palace Shrine) in the lord's residence, which functions as the place of worship dedicated to the deceased members of the lord's family rather than household wares for the ladies in *Hữu cung* (Right Palace). He further attributes that those pieces were commissioned by Lord Trịnh Cương and Lord Trịnh Giang (Truong 1998, 45).

\* *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍南 (Made for the Inner Palace in the South)

*Nam cung* (South Palace), as Vương Hồng Sển puts it, was the kitchen in the *Nội* (Imperial Palace) complex. He assumes that *Đồ sứ*

*ký kiêu* bearing the mark 內府侍南 are patterned pieces made to commissioning, which were used in the *trù viện* (kitchen) of the Lê king(Vuong Hồng Sển 1993, 140). This does not sound plausible to me. Philippe Truong maintains that *Nam cung* was one of Lord Trịnh Sâm's two places of entertainment, the other place being *Bắc cung* (North Palace) (Truong 1998, 36). As it is written in *Đại Việt sử ký tục biên* (Additional Notes of History of Đại Việt), *Nam cung* (South Palace) was built in 1776 and Lord Trịnh Sâm gave a big celebration feast there(Truong 1998, 37). *Đồ sứ ký kiêu* bearing the mark 內府侍南 are chiefly bowls and dishes, decorated with lotus and mandarin ducks; lotus and crabs(Figure 01); lotus and locusts; or lotus with inscription of illustrative poems.



Figure 1. Plate, “lotus flowers and crabs” pattern, bearing the mark 內府侍南, ĐSKK during the Lê - Trịnh era

\* *Đồ sứ ký kiêu* bearing the mark 內府侍北 (Made for the Inner Palace in the North)

*Bắc cung* (North Palace), according to Philippe Truong's investigation,

was located on Trúc Bạch lake, to the east of hồ Tây (West Lake) in Hà Nội. It is the place where festivities were usually held by Lord Trịnh Sâm (Truong 1998, 38). *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍北 were the household wares used in this place. Decorative motifs usually include butterflies, peony flowers, orchids and inscribed with illustrative poems (Figure 02).



Figure 2. Plate, “peonies and butterflies” pattern, bearing the mark 內府侍北, ĐSKK during the Lê - Trịnh era.

\* *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍東 (Made for the Inner Palace in the East)

*Đông cung* (East Palace) was the Crown prince’s residence. It was built in 1720s after this title of nobility was created. *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍東, therefore, must have been commissioned after this point of time, that is from the reign of Lord Trịnh Cương onwards. Usually they feature images of the qilin, one of the four mythical animals and depending on particular choice of decorative theme, one or two or even three qilins are depicted together with

clouds, a sphere or a gold coin. During the reign of Lord Trịnh Sâm, *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍東 were decorated with animals such as pheasant, deer... or trees such as apricots, dwarf bamboos and orchids, together with blocks of marble. There were also the brush cases bearing the mark 內府侍東 decorated with dragons and qilins(Figure 03).



Figure 3. Brush case, “dragon, clouds and landscape” pattern, bearing the mark 內府侍東, ĐSKK during the Lê - Trịnh era.

\* *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍兌 (Made for the Palace in the West)

*Đoài cung* (West Palace) was the residence of Đặng Thị Huệ, Lord Trịnh Sâm's favorite imperial concubine. 兌 (*đoài*) is one of the *Bagua* (Eight trigrams), indicating the cardinal direction of the West (*Tây*). In observance of the ban to mention the word *Tây* as part of the title of Tây Đô Vương Trịnh Tạc, it was replaced by *đoài*. Having great compassion for Đặng Thị Huệ, Lord Trịnh Sâm reserved for her the best and most valuable things he could find and *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍兌 were among them. Those pieces were

commissioned by Lord Trịnh Sâm himself, decorated with pairs of phoenixes, landscapes with pavilions, human figures, orchids, flowers and grass. Some pieces were decorated with clouds in the process of transforming into dragons. Of all known motifs, women standing beside a row of weeping willow trees is considered to be the most typical one of all *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 內府侍兌.

## 2) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the marks 慶春侍左 (Made for the Principal Palace Shrine)

*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 慶春侍左 usually are bowls, dishes and tea-sets. They are perhaps the most beautiful *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*. The clay body of these pieces is pure white with average thickness. The color pigment is usually a strong tint of cobalt blue, sometimes turning slightly glittery purple. The decorations are exquisite. Sometimes we can come across small tea-cups bearing only two words 慶春 for the lack of space to inscribe all the four words 慶春侍左.

Just like the mark 內府 (Inner office or department), the mark 慶春 (Celebrating the spring) has raised a lot of controversies among researchers of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*. 慶春 means celebrating the spring. The French collector Loan de Fontbrune translates it as “*palace of eternal spring*” (Fontbrune 1995, 40), The German collector Thomas Ulbrich interprets it as “*welcoming the spring*” or “*spring blessings*” (Ulbrich 1998, 268). Researcher Trần Đình Sơn also takes the view that 慶春 means welcoming the spring and, as on porcelain pieces bearing the mark 慶春 one can also see the characters 慶 and 壽 (Celebrating longevity) written in *zhuan shu* script, he deduces that 慶春 pieces

were made especially for the 慶壽 ceremony which was held in Cấn Đức Palace to celebrate longevity for Lê king on the eve of new year or “*probably to be displayed in Vạn Thọ palace, the residence of the Lê king*”(Trần Đình Sơn 1995, 18). Meanwhile, Vương Hồng Sển asserts that *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 慶春 were produced during the reign of Qianlong (1736 - 1795); Lord Trịnh Sâm commissioned them for himself after he had lost interest in *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* with marks 內府侍... and had offered them all to the Lê king(Fontbrune 1995, 31). Researcher Hy Bách’s standpoint is that *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 慶春侍左 were commissioned by the Trịnh lords and used as objects of worship in the *Tả điện* (Left Palace) and in the annual ceremonies offering sacrifice to Heaven in the first month of the lunar calendar to pray for good luck, to commemorate the ancestors, to celebrate longevity and to pray for timely rains and favorable weather(Hy Bách 1994, 82).

However, Philippe Truong’s research reveals that *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 慶春侍左 were used in the *Chính cung miếu* (Principal Palace Shrine). This shrine is located on the left side within the boundaries of the Lord’s residence, and was dedicated to worship the deceased lords. The first person to commissioning the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 慶春侍左 was Lord Trịnh Cương, through a mission in 1715(Truong 1999, 41). Lord Trịnh Giang and Lord Trịnh Sâm also commissioned 慶春侍左 pieces. Common ornamental designs on the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* bearing the mark 慶春侍左 include *long vân khánh thọ* (dragon and unicorn surrounding the characters 慶 and

壽) and *long phụng khánh thọ* (dragon and phoenix surrounding the characters 慶 and 壽).

### 3) Đồ sứ ký kiểu bearing the mark 壽 an-d Đồ sứ ký kiểu without mark

In addition to the two main groups of porcelain bearing the marks 內府侍... and 慶春侍左, Đồ sứ ký kiểu during the Lê - Trịnh era contains the items bearing the mark 壽 (*longevity*) written in *zhuanshu* script, and the items without mark. Types of these items are chiefly bowls, dishes, tea-sets and water-pipe..., decorated with scattering clouds, flower and bird, unicorn, dragon and phoenix, the character 壽 (Figure 04, 05) written in *zhuanshu* script...



Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 4. Plate, “dragon and qilin surrounding the character 壽” pattern, bearing the mark 慶春侍左, ĐSKK during the Lê - Trịnh era.

Figure 5. Bowl, “dragon and clouds” pattern, bearing the mark 壽, ĐSKK during the Lê - Trịnh era.

### III. *ĐỒ SỨ KÝ KIỂU* DURING THE NGUYỄN LORDS ERA IN ĐÀNG TRONG

Concurrent with the existence of the Lê - Trịnh dynasty in Đàng Ngoài, the Nguyễn clan, beginning with Nguyễn Hoàng (r. 1558 - 1613) set up their own court in Đàng Trong. Nine Nguyễn lords in turn ruled over the territory extending from the southern bank of Gianh River. As yet we are still unsure about how many among the nine Nguyễn Lords actually commissioned porcelains from China. However, the remaining objects enable us to certify that the sixth Lord, Minh Vương Nguyễn Phúc Chu (r. 1691 - 1725), was the one who commissioned a lot of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* from China.

Being the eldest son of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Thái, Nguyễn Phúc Chu was enthroned in 1691. In 1693, he was addressed with the title 國主 (Lord of the Kingdom). Henceforth, this title was used in all the edicts concerning domestic administrative and diplomatic affairs. Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu took refuge in Buddhism, adopting the religious name of 天縱道人 (Heavenly Libertine Buddhist Sage). Hence at the end of a poem or a literary piece, he usually wrote the words 道人書 (A Buddhist Sage's writing).

In 1701, Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu sent Mr. Hoàng Thần and Mr. Hưng Triệt to China with tributes and a letter requesting the Qing dynasty to recognize him as king of a separate country, independent of the polity controlled by the Lê kings and the Trịnh lords in Đàng Ngoài. The mission turned out to be a failure as the Qing dynasty

feared that the rise to power of the Đàng Trong would be a future peril for China in the South. Perhaps that unsuccessful mission should be credited to have passed on to later generations a number of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* which bear the mark of this dynasty.

The *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the reign of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu are chiefly bowls and dinner plates bearing the mark 清玩 (Pure trinket) written in *zhuanshu* script (Figure 06). The decorations feature landscapes together with poems (Figure 07, 08) about Huế and her vicinity, the places the lord used to visit and celebrated their beauty in his poetry. Until now collectors of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*, both in Vietnam and abroad, have collected a lot of porcelain pieces, commissioned by Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu. These pieces are featured with landscapes and poems composed by the lord himself:



Figure 6. Bowl, with landscape of the Hà Trung Lagoon in Huế and the poem in Han script: “Mist descends on Ha Trung Lagoon”, marked 清玩 in *zhuanshu* script, ĐSKK during the Nguyễn lords era.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Figure 7. Tea-saucer, with landscape and the poem: “What a superb view of that huge castle...” in Nôm script, bearing the mark 成化年製, ĐSKK during the Nguyễn lords era.

Figure 8. Tea-saucer, with the painting of Tur Dung Estuary in Huế, the exterior is inscribed with the poem “Tur Dung Scenic Spot” in Nôm script, ĐSKK during the Nguyễn lords era.

- Landscape of a market in Thuận Hóa (an old name of Huế) and the *thất ngôn bát cú* poem (8 lines having 7 words each) in Han script, titled 順化晚市 (The Market in Thuận Hóa into the Evening).

- Thiên Mụ Pagoda in Huế, accompanied by the *thất ngôn bát cú* poem in Han script, titled 天姥曉鐘 (The Morning Bell from Thiên Mụ Pagoda).

- Hải Vân Mountain, between Huế and Đà Nẵng, and the *thất ngôn bát cú* poem in Han script, titled 隘嶺春雲 (Spring Clouds at the Top of Hải Vân Mountain).

- Tam Thai Mountain and Thái Bình Pagoda in Đà Nẵng, and the *thất ngôn bát cú* poem in Han script, titled 三台聽潮 (Listening to the Sound of the Waves at Tam Thai Mountain).

- Landscape of Hà Trung Lagoon in Huế, and the *thất ngôn bát cú*

poem in Han script, titled 河中烟雨 (Mist Descends on Ha Trung Lagoon).

In addition, there are a number of bowls and dishes with paintings depicting various scenes of Huế and poems in Nôm script, which are verified as *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the reign of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu:

- A tea-saucer with the *thất ngôn bát cú* poem in Nôm script, titled 思容勝景 (Tur Dung Scenic Spot) on the exterior base. The painting of Tur Dung Estuary near Huế is on the interior base. The Nôm script poem is an extract from the work 思容晚 (Ode to Tur Dung) by Đào Duy Từ, a meritorious official under the reign of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu.

- A tea-saucer, the exterior base of which has a Nôm script poem in the form of *ngũ ngôn tứ tuyệt* poem (4 lines having 5 words each), titled 三台圖 (A Painting of Tam Thai Mountain). The Thái Bình Pagoda on Tam Thai Mountain (Ngũ Hành Sơn Mountain in Đà Nẵng) is painted on the interior base.



Figure 9. Bowl, flower pattern on the honeycomb design, bearing the mark 阮 (Nguyễn) in *zhuanshu* script, ĐSKK during the Nguyễn lords era.

- The tea-saucer bearing the mark 成化年製 (Made during the Chenghua reign) has the painting of a castle and the *thất ngôn bát cú* poem in Nôm script: 蔑贖樓臺卒美仙... (What a superb view of that huge castle...).

In addition, there are vessels bearing the word 阮 (*Nguyễn*) written by *zhuan* script (Figure 09), decorated with dragon and cloud, floral and the 丁-patterns. I maintain that they are *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* produced during the Nguyễn lord's era.

#### IV. ĐỒ SỨ KÝ KIỂU DURING THE TÂY SON ERA

##### 1. Porcelains considered being *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Tây Sơn era

So far, it seems that researchers as well as collectors of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*, both in Vietnam and abroad, have been influenced by Vương Hồng Sển's viewpoint on the commissioning of this group of porcelains.

In their published papers, these researchers have come to the agreement that porcelains bearing the mark 珍玩 (Precious trinket), made about the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, decorated with landscape and figure are the products commissioned by Tây Sơn rulers from China. Also included in this group are a number of pieces having illustrative poems inscribed in Nôm script. The evidence they provide is, however, not sufficiently convincing.

In his book *Khảo về đồ sứ men lam Huế* (A Study on *Bleus de Huế*), Vương Hồng Sển presents three pieces of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* having the mark 珍玩 (Figure 10), which he regards as typical of the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* group commissioned during the Tây Sơn era. They are:



Figure 10. Wine-pot, with painting of the tale “Sprawl” and two verses: “Crossing my legs and snoring loudly. I find life as peaceful as it was under the Tang - Yu dynasties” in Nôm script, bearing the mark 珍玩, ĐSKK during the Tây Sơn era.

- Tea-saucer, with landscape and figure, two verses in Nôm script: 扃紘論制時事。我瑛明課太平 (Fumbling for lice with his fingers, he is discussing playfully current events. Dismounting from his donkey, he is delighted to welcome peace era).

- Tea-saucer, with landscape and figure, two verses in Nôm script: 僂鯨聯劇哎呼呼。謔姪拯恪唐戾退淳 (Crossing my legs and snoring loudly. I find life as peaceful as it was under the Tang - Yu dynasties).

- Tea-cup, with landscape and figure, two verses in Han script: 風月清留雙賦艷。烟波晴泛一舟輕 (Such a beautiful scene, with bright moon and fresh wind. A boat is gracefully gliding on top of the waves).

- Tea-saucer bearing the mark 珍玩. The painting on the tea-saucer depicts a mandarin with folded arms sleeping at the foot of a cedar tree. Beside him are two verses in Han script: 用社隨人休著意。清風松下旨高眠 (Free from the cares of being utilized or discarded. In the fresh wind, under the pine tree I am enjoying my sound sleep) (Vương Hồng Sển 1993, 215).

Philippe Truong, introduced another dish marked 珍玩 (Precious trinket), featuring three cranes flying among nine clouds, together with two verses in Han script. He explained that the three cranes represented the three Tây Sơn brothers Nguyễn Nhạc, Nguyễn Huệ and Nguyễn Lữ, and the nine clouds symbolized the nine years of rebellion, from 1778 to 1786. Hence, he concluded that the dish was commissioned by the Tây Sơn regime.

## 2. Who commissioned đồ sứ ký kiểu during the Tây Sơn period?

On the evidence of the historical documents available and the study of those objects considered to have been commissioned by the Tây Sơn court, I think that the Tây Sơn court did not commission *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* but, during the Tây Sơn era, the commissioning of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* did occur. Please permit me to elaborate further.

- Before seizing Phú Xuân citadel (i.e. Huế city at present) and Thăng Long capital (i.e. Hà Nội capital at present) in 1786, the three Tây Sơn brothers concentrated only on fighting the Nguyễn troops and later, the Trịnh troops. They, therefore, did not have a chance to

go to China to commissioning *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*. After seizing Thăng Long, Nguyễn Huệ, who subsequently became King Quang Trung of the Tây Sơn court, confiscated the wealth of the Lê kings and Trịnh lords, and transported it to Huế. Included in their wealth were the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* marked 內府侍… (Made for the Inner Palace) and 慶春侍左 (Made for the Principal Palace Shrine) were commissioned by the Lê kings and the Trịnh lords. Those pieces were enough for the use of Tây Sơn court during the short existence of this empire.

- Those pieces were later confiscated again by King Gia Long when Tây Sơn was defeated in 1801 and a number of them are now stored in Huế Royal Antiquities Museum, together with other porcelains which the Nguyễn court commissioned from China from 1804 to 1925.

- Besides the porcelains impounded from the Lê - Trịnh court in Đàng Ngoài, King Quang Trung and King Cảnh Thịnh of the Tây Sơn court were interested in commissioning domestic porcelains, probably to bestow to the subordinate mandarins and officers. This helps explain the existence of the Bát Tràng ceramics, dating around the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and bearing the marks: 光中年製 (Made during the reign of Quang Trung) and 景盛年製 (Made during the reign of Cảnh Thịnh). They also bear the 內府侍中 (Made for the Inner Central Palace) mark. There are assumptions that these marks were inscribed on the pieces by the potters at Bát Tràng ceramics village with the aim to express their attitude towards the new dynasty. The latter hypothesis is, however, unsubstantiated.

- The vast stock of porcelain confiscated in the Đàng Ngoài and the

domestically produced pieces as mentioned above would suffice the use of Tây Sơn court and they did not have to commission the porcelains marked 珍玩 from China, which were of the second grade, far inferior in quality than the 內府侍... (Made for the Inner Palace) pieces and 慶春侍左 (Made for the Principal Palace Shrine) pieces they had in hand. I believe that those porcelains marked 珍玩 (Precious trinket) with the Nôm poems inscribed on them, were commissioned for their own use by the imperial envoys during the two missions to China in 1789 and 1790.

Probably they were not commissioned for the Tây Sơn court. Those pieces were the products of the *minyao* (commoner's kilns), not the *kwanyao* (state kilns). They are, therefore, not of excellent quality and aesthetic value.

## V. ĐỒ SỨ KÝ KIỂU DURING THE NGUYỄN ERA

### 1. Relationships between the missions and the commissioning of Đồ sứ ký kiểu during the Nguyễn period

From historical records by the Nguyễn dynasty<sup>4)</sup> and researchs of

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4) For example: Nội các triều Nguyễn (The Cabinet of Nguyễn dynasty), *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* (Repertory of the Administrative Regulations in the Kingdom of Đại Nam), translated by Historic Institute, 15 volumes (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 1993); Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn (The Bureau of National History of the Nguyễn dynasty), *Đại Nam thực lục* (Veritable Record in the Kingdom of Đại Nam), translated by Historic Institute, 38 volumes, (Hà Nội: Khoa học - Khoa học xã hội, 1962-1978); Viện Nghiên cứu Hán Nôm và Học viện Viễn Đông Bác cổ Pháp, *Di sản Hán Nôm Việt Nam. Thư mục đề yếu* (Essential Bibliographies in Han and Nôm

the researchers such as Vương Hồng Sển(1993), Bửu Cầm(1966, 46-51), Philippe Truong(1998), etc., I gather that in the Nguyễn era, under the reigns of Gia Long(1802-1820), Minh Mạng (1820-1841), Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), Tự Đức (1848-1883) and Khải Định (1916-1925) at least 42 missions were sent to China for various purposes. Because of domestic turmoil and the resistance against the French invasion, no missions were sent to China in the era from King Dục Đức to King Duy Tân (i.e. from 1883 to 1916). After *The Jiashen Treaty* (1884), diplomatic relationships between Đại Nam and Qing's China came to an end due to the French colonialist's pressure. The missions to China in the years 1921, 1924 and 1925, under the reign of Khải Định, did not have any diplomatic significance. They went just as far as Guangdong to commission porcelains.

Having studied related historical documents and the objects themselves, I assume that the missions sent during the Nguyễn era had a strong connection with the commissioning of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* from China, as articulated below:

During the time-span from the reign of King Gia Long to the reign of King Kiến Phúc (from 1802 to 1884), the Nguyễn empire had sent 39 missions to China (the names of the chief and deputy chief of missions as well as the dates of the expeditions are readily available). The Khải Định court also sent personnel to China to commission *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* in the years 1921, 1924 and 1925 (there are no records of the names of the men sent on these missions). On *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under

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Script), 3 volumes, (Hà Nội: KHXH, 1993)...

the Nguyễn era, I have found 52 *year marks* corresponding to the times when 25 out of 42 missions were dispatched to China. In addition, there are pieces having reign marks such as: 明命年製 (Made during the Minh Mạng reign), 明命年造 (Manufactured during the Minh Mạng reign), 紹治年製 (Made during the Thiệu Trị reign), 紹治年造 (Made during the Thiệu Trị reign), 嗣德年製 (Made during the Tự Đức reign), 嗣德年造 (Manufactured during the Tự Đức reign), 啟定年造 (Manufactured during the Khải Định reign), etc., which were commissioned to meet the needs of the court and the royal families. A large number of these can be found in storage at the Huế Royal Antiquities Museum and in private collections, in Vietnam and overseas.

- The envoys sent to the China were chiefly charged with asking for kingship conferment, paying gratitude, announcing royal funeral, or conveying congratulations, etc., and, in addition, they had to purchase goods for the court, including porcelains.

- Besides commissioning *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* for the court, many envoys commissioned porcelains for themselves as souvenirs, gifts or as offerings to places of worship of their own clans. Typical of these are pieces bearing the words 嗣德戊辰中秋鄧季祠堂祭器... (Altar objects for the family shrine of Đặng family, made in mid-autumn of the Wuchen year under the reign of Tự Đức...) which were commissioned by Đặng Huy Trứ in 1868(Figure 11).



Figure 11. Tureen, “happiness and fortune support themselves peacefully” pattern, bearing the mark 嗣德戊辰中秋鄧季祠堂祭器福履綏將, commissioned by Đặng Huy Trứ in 1868.

- Many business firms and businessmen in Hà Nội also commissioned *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* simply to satisfy their own needs. Such pieces have the year marks 河內期昌 (The glory of Hà Nội), 河內廣記發式 (Style created by shop Quảng Ký in Hà Nội), 丁卯天成 (Object made by the Heavens in the Dingmao year), etc.

- In addition, it should also be mentioned that with their knowledge of market demand in Vietnam the Chinese produced pieces using the designs, patterns and poems provided by the Vietnamese but bearing their own Chinese marks in order to sell to the Vietnamese market. Those are the porcelains having the marks: 玩玉 (Jade trinket), 雅玉 (Elegant jade), 若深珍藏 (In the collection of Ruoshen), etc., which can be classified as *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* during the Nguyễn era, because of the “Vietnamese criteria” associated with these pieces.

## 2. Đồ sứ ký kiểu in the Nguyễn era

The Nguyễn dynasty was established by King Gia Long in 1802

and Huế was chosen as the capital city. Only five of the 13 Nguyễn reigns commissioned porcelains from China, namely Gia Long (1802 - 1820), Minh Mạng (1820 - 1841), Thiệu Trị (1841 - 1847), Tự Đức (1848 - 1883) and Khải Định (1916 - 1925). Due to their short existence, domestic political turbulences caused by the French invasion or financial difficulties, there was no commissioning of porcelains under the reigns of the other kings, from King Dục Đức to King Duy Tân (1883 - 1916). After ascending to the throne, King Khải Định commissioned porcelains from China again, and also from France, chiefly for his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday ceremony in 1924. Bảo Đại, the last king of the Nguyễn dynasty, did not commission porcelains from China, but from Sèvres (France).

(1) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Gia Long (1802 – 1820)

This is the founding reign of the Nguyễn dynasty. After the hard days of civil wars, the new king himself was not concerned with living in the lap of luxury or acquiring valuables. On the other hand, after seizing the capital Phú Xuân, King Gia Long confiscated the wealth that Nguyễn Huệ had expropriated from Lê kings and the Trịnh lords in Thăng Long and brought it all to Huế in 1786. This wealth included porcelains commissioned from China by the Lê - Trịnh court. These pieces, in my view, were enough to keep the Gia Long court satisfied. In addition, King Gia Long commissioned several Bát Tràng blue and white ceramics with crackled glaze including vases, jars and big-sized flower pots for interior decorations of the palaces. These ceramics bear the marks 嘉隆年製 (Made

during the Gia Long reign) and 嘉隆年造 (Manufactured during the Gia Long reign) (Figure 12). These marks were written by kaishu scripts in underglaze blue color. The National Museum of Vietnamese History (Hà Nội) is currently holding 13 objects of these porcelains. This shows that from the dawn of his dynasty, King Gia Long made a point of using domestic goods instead of commissioning them from abroad.



Figure 12. Tea-pot, with “the carp enjoying the moonlight” pattern, bearing the mark 嘉隆年造, ĐSKK during Gia Long reign.

King Gia Long, however, had sent at least nine diplomatic missions to China to take care of foreign affairs with the Qing court, such as asking for conferment of kingship, paying tribute, showing gratitude and so on. It was the envoys in those missions who commissioned *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* from China.

*Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Gia Long are the white glazed porcelains with underglaze cobalt blue paintings, chiefly household vessels such as bowls, dishes and tea-sets. Most of them feature floral motifs, landscapes or figures, in association with illustrative poems in

Han and Nôm scripts. An exception of this era is a hollow bowl featuring four dragons chasing one another in the clouds and the mark 甲子 (The Jiazi year: 1804) enclosed in two double circles.

Besides the bowl marked 甲子 already mentioned, typical examples of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Gia Long include:

- Tea-sets marked 甲子 and 甲子年製 (Made in the Jiazi year) with two cedars, in association with two verses in Han script or with a mandarin on a donkey, followed by an errand-boy.

- Bowl for altar water in the imperial palace in Hué, marked 甲子年製, inscribed with Han script on the exterior 諫太宗十思疏 (Ten pieces of advice for King Taizong), by Wei Zheng (580 - 643), an official in the court of Emperor Taisong (627 - 649) under the Tang dynasty in China (Collection of Hué Royal Antiquities Museum). Some other similarly decorated bowls bear the marks 嘉慶 (The Jiaqing reign) or 甲子年製 and 博古 (Conversant in antiquity).

- Dinner plate, marked 甲子年製 in double square, decorated with floral and leaf designs. This mark can also be seen on plates featuring three phoenixes alternately with three objects in the *bát bửu* (eight treasures) set: the fan, the castanets and the bamboo tocsin.

- Tea-set marked 戊辰 (The Wuchen year: 1808), featuring landscape and figure with five willows, alluding to Tao Qian (365 - 427), who had the pseudonym *Master of Five Willows*.

- Bowl marked 戊辰年製 (Made in the Wuchen year), featuring landscape and figure of the theme the four professions: fisherman, woodcutter, farmer, scholar.

- Big bowl marked 己巳年製 (Made in the Yisi year: 1809),

featuring landscape and figure. Vương Hồng Sển infers that the landscape painted on it is that of Huế (Vương Hồng Sển 1993, 52).

- Big bowl marked 庚午年製 (Made in the Gengwu year: 1810), featuring landscape and figure in association with a poem on the fisherman in Nôm script.

- Big bowl marked 庚午年製 (Made in the Gengwu year: 1810), featuring landscape and figure in association with a poem on the woodcutter in Nôm script.

- Bowl marked 庚午年製 (Made in the Gengwu year: 1810), with image of Buddha, featuring four lotus flowers and four words: 阿彌陀佛 (Buddha Amitabha) in Han script.

- Bowl marked 庚午年製 (Made in the Gengwu year: 1810), decorated with apricot, orchid, chrysanthemum, fine-leafed bamboo, associated with four poems in Han script in praise of them.

- Tea-set, decorated with *mai hạc* (apricot and crane), and two verses in Nôm script: 曉嗽盃趣煙霞。梅羅(鹵)伴舊(旧)鶴羅(鹵)卦(土)涓(卷)<sup>5</sup> (Happy is the pleasure of roaming up hills and down dales. The apricot is an old friend, the crane an acquaintance), regarded as typical sample of *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Gia Long. In some cases, these verses in Nôm script were substituted by verses in Han script. The *mai hạc* objects under the reign of Gia Long have these marks: 玩玉 (Jade trinket), 玉 (Jade), 金仙奇玩 (Exceptional trinket of a golden immortal). This decorative motif with apricot and crane was later used in porcelains of the Tự Đức reign.

- Bowl marked 己卯年製 (Made in the Yimao year: 1819) and

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5) The characters in brackets () were used to replace those before them in some cases.

simply 己卯 (The Yimao year), with landscape and figure.

In my opinion, the pieces mentioned above were not commissioned by King Gia Long for his own use, but by the officials who went on mission, for themselves. The majority of the marks on these pieces are, therefore, *year marks*, corresponding with the time when missions were sent to China.

The most interesting piece of all the *Đồ sứ ký kiếu* of this time is a tea-pot, now kept at the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts (Hà Nội). It bears the mark 嘉隆年造 (Manufactured during the Gia Long reign), written in a double oval. The tea-pot has the shape of a quadrilateral cube, smaller in the upper part, larger in the lower part, thus having the section as an axe shape, and a square mouth. It has four sides: the two flank panels are decorated with fish and sea-weed; the side with the handle is decorated with two orchid sprays. The side with the spout is decorated with a poem of four five-character verses written in Chinese: 古今同親愛。遠近慕知音。清香飄滿坐。故友遇佳人 (Those who followed me and those who have just come to me, I treasure them all. They may live far away, they may live close by, be that as it may, the main point is they understand me. The place is filled with tea fragrance. The beautiful maids are serving tea for me and my old friends). Above the poem are two characters: 壽 (longevity) and 篆 (seal).

The existence of those two pots indicates that the court of Gia Long did commission *Đồ sứ ký kiếu* from China and they are indeed the precious gems among the *Đồ sứ ký kiếu* treasure of the Nguyễn era.

(2) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Minh Mạng (1820 – 1841)

The Nguyễn royal court saw a time of peace and prosperity under the reign of Minh Mạng (1820 - 1841). After twenty peaceful years, order was restored throughout the country. As far as the court affairs were concerned, King Minh Mạng introduced administrative reform to consolidate the power of a centralized feudal regime. In the field of construction, he took measures to re-construct the Citadel and the Imperial City on a large scale. Many palaces, temples, and shrines were built. A number of old palaces were enlarged, embellished with more decorations. The king commissioned large-size porcelain pieces such as vases, pots, pedestals and jars to decorate the exteriors and the interiors of the palace. Furthermore, by this time the court activities such as: major imperial audience assembly and regular imperial audience assembly had been organized into a routine procedure. Large banquets and ceremonies were held regularly. The court, therefore, had commissioned a wealth of utility vessels, tea-services and wine pots for the banquet service, for daily use in the palace and in the governmental offices.

Among the typical *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Minh Mạng were the large-size planters and jardinières, from 55 cm to 60 cm in diameter, to be displayed outside the grand palaces as Thái Hòa, Càn Chánh, Diên Thọ, Thế Miếu. The designs on these grandiose vessels are strictly stipulated: those placed before the imperial palaces should have *long ẩn vân* (dragons hidden in the clouds) or *lưỡng long triêu*

*nhật* (two dragons attending to the sun). Those at the royal temples should have *viên long* (coiling dragons); those in the courtyards of Diên Thọ Palace and Phụng Tiên Palace should be decorated with landscapes. Besides these planters, the king commissioned flower vases, beakers, joss-stick pots of various sizes for decoration in the temples. These are painted with the motifs of dragons and clouds, flowers and grass, birds. Most of them do not bear any marks. However, particular objects especially commissioned for the king, have dynastic titles on them, such as 明命年製 (Made during the Minh Mạng reign), 明命年造 (Manufactured during the Minh Mạng reign). These are meticulously decorated. In a research paper printed in the periodical *Tribus*(Ulbrich 1998, 237-283), Thomas Ulbrich brought to notice a vase, 147 cm high, decorated with nine *viên long* (coiling dragon) on the *văn cảm quy* (diaper pattern with honeycomb) background. Written above the largest coiling dragon on the main sides is the mark 明命年製 (Made during the Minh Mạng reign). Of all the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Minh Mạng identified and publicized by the collectors, this example has the most perfect condition and the largest size.

Besides the porcelains reserved for displaying in the palaces, Minh Mạng commissioned for himself and the royal family thousands of porcelain pieces for daily use, such as bowls, plates, spoons, tea services, the scholar's four precious articles (ink stab, ink stick, writing brush and paper), painting cylinders, ceramic plaques and pestles. Most of these pieces bear the marks: 明命年製 (Made during

the Minh Mạng reign), 明命年造 (Manufactured during the Minh Mạng reign), 日 (the Sun) and are decorated with paintings of the four sacred animals, clouds and waves) (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Water-pipe, “two dragons attending to the sun” pattern, bearing the mark 日, ĐSKK during Minh Mạng reign.

During this time, mandarins serving in the missions to China also commissioned ĐSKK for themselves, chiefly tea-sets, paintings cylinders, brush holders, and food services. These pieces are usually decorated with landscape designs, flowers or poems in Chinese script. These porcelains bears *year marks*, such as 庚辰年製 (Made in the Gengchen year: 1820), 庚辰 (The Gengchen year), 甲申年製 (Made in the Jiashen year: 1824), 乙酉年製 (Made in the Yiyou year: 1825), 乙酉 (The Yiyou year), 丙戌年製 (Made in the Bingxu year: 1826), 丙戌 (The Bingxu year), 丁亥年製 (Made in the Dinghai year: 1827), 戊子年製 (Made in the Wuzi year: 1828), 庚寅年製 (Made in the Gengyin year: 1830), 丙申 (The Bingchen year: 1836); or *marks of the producing kilns* such as: 官窑內造 (Made at the state kiln), 陶玉製售 (Jade ceramic made for procurement), 若深珍藏 (In the

collection of Roushen), 玩玉 (Jade trinket), 世德定製 (Made for Shide), 雅玉 (Elegant jade), 玉 (Jade). Rhetorical phrases serving the same purpose as the marks, for examples 荆山片玉 (Jade piece of Jingshan mountain), 賞心樂事 (Everything is enjoyable with a peaceful heart), 閒心樂事 (Everything is enjoyable with a leisured heart) can also be used found.

Of particular interest is an altar bowl for offering water, with the mark 丙戌年製 (Made in the Bingxu year), Hải Vân Mountain landscape design, in association with the first four verses in eight heptasyllabic line poem, 隘嶺春雲 (Spring Clouds on Top of Ải Lĩnh mountain), composed by Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu. Thus, this poem has been featured twice on the ĐSKK. First, it was seen inscribed in full on a bowl marked 清玩 (Pure trinket) in *zhuan* script, commissioned by Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Later, only four verses of the same poem were featured on a bowl marked 丙戌年製 (Made in the Bingxu year), commissioned in 1826, under the reign of Minh Mạng.

It is worth noting that under the reign of Minh Mạng, two types of bowls with landscape and figure design in association with two illustrative poems in Nôm script were commissioned by the thousand. One type inscribed with the poem: 蔑式掣印侑... (On the water where the sky is mirrored...), bear the 日 or 玩玉 marks. Later the court had the word 礼 (Ceremony) engraved on the exterior bottom of the object, implying that this is for use at the important ceremonies in the palace. The other type illustrates the story of Bo Ja - Zi Qi, associated with a poem in Nôm script: 停倚伴知音... (Two close

friends…) and marked with the character 日 (the Sun).

### (3) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Thiệu Trị (1841 – 1847)

Although he was on the throne for only seven years, King Thiệu Trị commissioned the most *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* of all the Nguyễn kings.

Aesthetically, porcelains under the reign of Thiệu Trị were perfect in every aspect, from design to quality of glaze and clay body. They can match the pieces bearing the marks 內府侍… (Made for the Inner Palace) and 慶春侍左 (Made for the Principal Palace Shrine) procured during the Lê - Trịnh era. Porcelains under the reign of Thiệu Trị are rich in form and style, particularly those for use in food services, drinking, making offering and decorating places of worship. Particularly, this era saw the appearance of many types of porcelain of various shapes: curved, hexagonal, octagonal pieces imitating European porcelains, besides those having globular shape often seen in previous time. Dragons and clouds are the most common decoration patterns on the pieces of Thiệu Trị time. Designs of the *văn cảm quy* (diaper pattern with honeycomb), *thủy ba tam sơn* (waves and three mountains), continuous flowers and leaves coming out from inside the objects (*lá lật* style as called by the specialists) are typical of the decoration on porcelains of this era.

The marks on these porcelains are also diverse. There are marks with dynastic title such as 紹治年製 (Made during the Thiệu Trị reign) and 紹治年造 (Manufactured during the Thiệu Trị reign) (Figure 14, 15). Thiệu Trị particularly commissioned a kind of high



Figure 14



Figure 15

Figure 14. A set of covered tureen on raised foot, “rolling dragon” pattern, bearing the mark 紹治年造, ĐSKK during Thiệu Trị reign.

Figure 15. Tea-set, “rolling dragons” pattern, bearing the mark 紹治年造, ĐSKK during Thiệu Trị reign.

quality porcelains, decorated with two dragons attending the sun. The mark bears dynastic titles of the two Kings Minh Mạng and Thiệu Trị, which seems to commemorate one king who had just passed away and another king who recently came to the throne. In addition, the mark with the word 日 (the Sun) continued to appear on porcelains of this era. Certain groups of these porcelains have the word 日 inscribed on the bottom. Some pieces have an association of the dynastic title, 紹治年製 or 紹治年造 written on the rim, and the word 日 inscribed on the exterior bottom. The reign of Thiệu Trị is the only reign that commissioned porcelains with the mark of two coiling dragons to represent reign mark, instead of the usual marks inscribed in Han scripts. Under the reign of Thiệu Trị, four missions were sent to China in the years: Xinchou (1841), Yisi (1845) and Bingwu (1846), and the marks corresponding to these years are also found on ĐSKK: 辛丑年製 (Made in the Xinchou year: 1841), 辛丑

(The Xinchou year), 乙巳 (The Yisi year: 1845), 丁未 (The Dingwei year: 1847).

Typical specimen of the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Thiệu Trị are offering fruit-trays, bowls on raised foot, tea-sets, tureens and saucers, and hookahs. All of them are hexagonal or octagonal in shape, and decorated with coiling dragons. Four words 紹治年造 are written on the four corners of the outer rim of the object. Another type of porcelains regarded as typical of the reign of Thiệu Trị are covered tureens on lowed foot, featuring *long hí thúy* (dragon playing with water) on the *văn cật quy* (honeycomb) background, the mark takes the form of *viên long* (coiling dragon) painted in the middle of the underside of the cover and on the bottom of the object. While large-size objects were in favor during the reign of Minh Mạng, the reign of Thiệu Trị commissioned small-size objects which were mostly the daily utility items such as bowls, plates, ewers, cups and altar pieces such as offering fruit-trays, betel-trays and lampstands. The object that were commissioned in highest number are deep dishes with the mark 紹治年製 and *lưỡng long triêu nhật* (two dragons attending to the sun) painted on the interior or two dragons chasing each other on the exterior. The quality of these deep dishes, represented by the sophisticated drawing and brightness of glaze color, can match that of the porcelains bearing the mark 內府侍... under the Lê - Trịnh era. Food vessels and wine bottles with floral and landscapes patterns and the mark 內府 (Inner Office or Department), continued to be commissioned during the reign of Thiệu Trị.

Mandarins going on diplomatic missions also brought home pieces

marked 辛丑 (The Xinchou year) and 乙巳 (The Yisi year), having the same glaze, shapes and styles with the designs of two cranes flying side by side, fine-leaved bamboo and deer, and buffalo lying at rest. These same designs are also found on objects of the same era that, however, bear the marks 大順 (Dashun reign title), 玉樓 (Jade pavilion) or 博古 (Conversant in antiquity).

There are also a group of objects considered to have been commissioned by the mandarins going on missions during the reign of Thiệu Trị. They are the tea-sets with the marks 玩玉 (Jade trinket) or 金仙奇玩 (Exceptional trinket of a golden immortal), the design of a mandarin sitting in a boat with roof with a rowing man at the stern, in association with two verses in Han script: 魚家度皇家. 陰星遇帝星 (The fisherman ferried the king. The Yin star met the Di star) or: 平橋人喚渡. 撐出小舟來 (A man standing on the bridge was calling out to a boat. A small boat was coming) (Vương Hồng Sển 1993, 131).

#### (4) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Tự Đức (1848 – 1883)

Thirty-six years on the throne made Tự Đức the Nguyễn king with the longest time of ruling. It was long enough for him to commission a great number of porcelains. The *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Tự Đức are, therefore, rich and diverse in types, styles and designs (Figure 16, 17). They are, however, more related to those under the reign of Minh Mạng than those under the reign of Thiệu Trị. King Tự Đức was a lover of literature and a well-known poet of the literary circle of the Nguyễn era.



Figure 16



Figure 17

Figure 16. Vase for pitch-pot game, “dragon playing with water” pattern, without mark, ĐSKK during Tự Đức reign.

Figure 17. Porcelain table with wooden frame, “landscape and figure” pattern, without mark, ĐSKK during Tự Đức reign.

The porcelains procured during Tự Đức reign often have landscape designs associated with illustrative verses in Han or Nôm script. Many landscapes of Huế are painted on these pieces, such as Thúy Vân Mountain and Thánh Duyên Pagoda.

Among the pieces for interior decoration inside the palaces, Tự Đức reign commissioned the quadrilateral cubic flower pots with *khóa lồng* pattern (pattern with hexagons hooked together), a popular motif which appeared on numerous *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* of the Lê - Trịnh era.

The Tự Đức court ordered utility vessels featuring dragons and clouds and the marks 嗣德年製 (Made during the Tự Đức reign) or 嗣德年造 (Made during the Tự Đức reign), for use in the imperial palace. The group of porcelains bearing the mark 嗣德年製 often consists of covered tureens or hollow dishes having the interior

decorated with rolling dragons. This represents a continuation of the style under the reign of Thiệu Trị, but the shape is not hexagonal or octagonal. Shallow dishes or curve-walled dishes, bearing the mark 日 and the patterns of dragons, clouds and water waves were popular under the reign of Tự Đức. The court also commissioned lots of vessels, decorated with flowers and foliage, landscapes, illustrative poems in Han or Nôm script, for use at court banquets. As a majority of them are for the mandarins' use, these pieces do not have as good quality kaolin or as sophisticated decorations as those for the king's use. The marks on these pieces are usually 內府 or names of the kilns such as 玩玉, 玉, 雅玉 and so on.

The reign of Tự Đức is also famous for its tea-sets of the *mắt trâu - lật đật* (buffalo's eyes - tumbler) style, with designs of landscape with figure, illustrative poems with *nhất thi, nhất họa* (one poem, one painting) style and dozens of different marks.

In Philippe Truong's collection, there is an object which is possibly the most exceptional of all the *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Tự Đức. It is a plate whose exterior is decorated with *long ẩn vân* (dragons hidden in the clouds) design. The exterior bottom of the object is marked 玩玉 but on the interior bottom, the two characters 嗣德 (The Tự Đức reign title) are written in *zhuan* script in an underglaze circle.

The mandarins of this era also commissioned plenty of porcelains for themselves. Under the reign of Tự Đức, 14 missions were sent to China, under Qing dynasty then, on different purposes. To mark the journey, the commissioners brought home a great many *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*

such as tea-services, hookahs, brush holders with the year mark on them: 壬子孟冬 (The 10<sup>th</sup> month of Renzi year: 1852), 丁巳年製 (Made in the Dingsi year: 1857), 戊辰年製 (Made in the Wuchen year: 1868), 辛未年製 (Made in the Xinwei year: 1871), 嗣德辛未 (The Xinwei year of Tự Đức reign: 1871), 丙子御製 (Made in the Bingzi year for imperial use: 1876). During this era, Đặng Huy Trứ (1825 - 1874) commissioned the most *Đồ sứ ký kiểu*. He was twice dispatched to Hong Kong in 1865 and to Guangdong in 1867 - 1868 to inquire about the situations of the Western countries, and to study their advanced technology with a view to help modernizing the country (Phạm Tuấn Khánh 1995, 85-90). In his journey to Guangdong in 1867 - 1868, Đặng Huy Trứ compiled ten books and commissioned a series of ceramic vessels, flower vases with the marks consisting of 14 or 16 words in Han characters, beginning with 嗣德戊辰中秋鄧季祠堂祭器... (Altar objects for the family shrine of Đặng family, made in mid-autumn of the Wuchen year under the reign of Tự Đức...). These words are arranged to form a circle on the exterior bottom of the objects. These pieces were offered to the family shrine of the Đặng clan.

Usually the marks on *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* commissioned by the mandarins under the reign of Tự Đức are the names of kilns such as 玩玉 (Jade trinket), 若深珍藏 (In the collection of Ruoshen), 雅玉 (Elegant jade), 蘇洲珍玩 (Jade trinket of Suzhou), 福源定製 (Made for Fuyuan) or *marks of dedication or good wishes*, for example: 金仙奇玩 (Exceptional trinket of a golden immortal), 家藏定物 (Object

in the collection of the family), 雅玩留香 (Elegant trinket for holding fragrance)...

(5) *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Khải Định (1916 – 1925)

The whole country was completely under the control of the French colonialist during King Khải Định's nine years on the throne. The king was nothing but a puppet on the throne while the foreign and domestic affairs were handled by the French. The situation led to two consequences:

- Firstly, diplomatic relations with China came to an end. Consequently, no more ĐSKK was made as the Khải Định court ceased to send envoys to China.

- Secondly, the close relations with France and the passion for rare and exotic objects of Khải Định made the royal palace full of porcelains (and many other objects) commissioned from Europe, mostly from France. These pieces usually are products of the kilns in Sèvres (France). The porcelain is white, the decoration is in golden powder and the designs themselves are copies of European designs. Usually the two words 啟定 (The Khải Định reign title) or 大南 (Kingdom of Đại Nam) are elegantly written on the interior bottom or the exterior bottom of the object.

As using and commissioning *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* from China was a tradition of the Nguyễn court, King Khải Định could not help but following this practice. To prepare for the celebration of the King's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday (1924), the court sent men to Guangdong to commission various types of pedestals, flower planters with under dishes, and flower vases in the years 1921 and 1924. These pieces were used to

decorate the interiors of the palace in the Imperial City of Huế on that occasion.

The *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* under the reign of Khải Định are very diverse. The King commissioned not only blue and white but also polychrome wares or pieces with relief designs. There are dozens of flower vases in the collection of Huế Royal Antiquities Museum, which are transferred from Cần Chánh Palace in the Purple Forbidden City. The vases are 90 cm high, decorated with paintings of flowers and birds with *wucai* (five-colored) glaze. The mark 啟定年造 (Manufactured during the Khải Định reign) is inscribed on the collar of the vase (Figure 18). Some of the vases have brown relief dragons. The majority, however, are hexagonal pedestals, about 76 cm - 77 cm high, decorated with paintings of flowers, birds and coins, bearing the mark 啟定辛酉年造 (Manufactured in the Xinyou year during the Khải Định



Figure 18. Vase, “flowers and birds” pattern, bearing the mark 啟定年造, ĐSKK during Khải Định reign.

reign: 1921) (Figure 19). The rest of the vases are decorated with flowers, birds and landscapes, with the mark 啟定甲子年造 (Manufactured in the Jiazi year during the Khải Định reign: 1924) or 啟定年造, etc.



Figure 19. Pedestal, “flowers and birds” pattern, bearing the mark 啟定辛酉年造 (1921), ĐSKK during Khải Định reign.

In 1925, Khải Định commissioned a number of white enameled vessels with underglaze cobalt decoration and the mark 啟定乙丑 (The Yichou year under the Khải Định reign: 1925) for use at the banquets in the palace. In the collections of Trần Đình Sơn and Thomas Ulbrich, there are flower vases in baluster shape (with flanges and flare mouth), with *bát tiên quá hải* motif (eight Taoist immortals crossing the sea) and the mark 內府待造 (Manufactured for reception in the Inner Palace). They are also ĐSKK under the reign of Khải Định. Khải Định is the last Nguyễn king to have commissioned porcelains from China.

**VI. ĐỒ SỨ NGỰ DỤNG (THE KING'S PORCELAINS),  
 ĐỒ SỨ QUAN DỤNG (THE MANDARINS' PORCELAINS),  
 ĐỒ SỨ DÂN DỤNG (THE COMMON PEOPLE'S  
 PORCELAINS)**

Not only the Vietnamese courts commissioned *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* from China, but also the mandarins and wealthy people in Vietnam at that time commissioned porcelains at the Chinese kilns to serve their needs.

The social status of the people who commissioned *Đồ sứ ký kiểu* somewhat determined the quality, decorative designs, glaze color and drawing style on the pieces.

- *Đồ sứ ngự dụng* are pieces especially commissioned for the king. The marks are usually the dynastic title of the king. Sometimes they are substituted by symbols such as *viên long* (coiling dragon). *Đồ sứ ngự dụng* were made at the *yuyao* (royal kilns), *kwanyao* (state kilns) which were the kilns managed by the Qing dynasty. These pieces use excellent clay, high-quality glaze and pigment, exquisite drawings. The decorative designs are usually the four mythical creatures, the eight treasures and landscapes.

- *Đồ sứ quan dụng* are pieces commissioned to be used in the palaces or those commissioned by the mandarins for their own families. These pieces were sometimes produced by the *kwanyao* but usually they were made at the *minyao* (common people's kilns). They do not have as good quality kaolin as imperial wares; drawings are

not as sophisticated and the four supernatural creatures were not allowed to be used as decoration. Instead, the designs are usually flowers and grass, landscapes and figures, poems and animals.

- *Đồ sứ dân dụng* are porcelains commissioned by the common people, chiefly from the *minyao* kilns. The kaolin, the glaze, the designs and drawings are of lower quality in comparison to those of the *đồ sứ ngự dụng*; however, the quality and aesthetics of these pieces can sometimes be comparable with those of the *đồ sứ quan dụng*. The decorations on the *đồ sứ dân dụng* are diverse but they must not include forbidden designs as determined by the court.

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## 17-20세기초 베트남 황실용으로 제작된 중국 청화백자

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17세기 후반부터 20세기 초반까지, 베트남 황실은 외교 관계를 위해 중국에 사절단을 파견했다. 이 사절단은 외교적 임무 외에 최상급 자기를 주문하기 위해 중국의 가마를 방문하였고, 베트남 황실에서 필요로 한 자기를 가지고 베트남으로 돌아왔다. 이러한 자기를 도 스 끼 끼에 우(Đồ sứ ký kiểu (주문 제작한 자기)) 라고 부르며 중국에서 제작되었지만, 베트남 황제의 연호, 베트남 예술을 담은 문양, 자기에 베트남 문자인놈(Nôm)으로 적힌 시나 베트남 시인의 시가 새겨진 ‘베트남적인 특성’이 녹아있다. 이 자기는 과거에 베트남과 중국 간의 교류의 산물로서 매우 특별하였고, 지금은 베트남인과 외국인 수집가에게 인기있는 고미술품이다.

**주제어:** 주문 제작한 자기(Đồ sứ ký kiểu), 중국 자기, 베트남 황실, 레-썬 씨, 응우옌 씨, 락 썬 왕조, 응우옌 왕조