

# New Insights on *Phap Lam Hue* (Hue Painted Enamels) under the Nguyen Dynasty

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## Abstract:

Among the cultural heritage of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802 - 1945) in Hue, the former royal capital of Vietnam, *phap lam Hue* (Hue painted enamels) stands out. *Phap lam Hue* is architectural, pottery and art objects with copper core body coated with layers of enamels in different colors. Due to their high resistance to external forces as heat and rain and the passage of time, these enamels were used to adorn roof tops and ridges of royal palaces. They also appeared in decorative panels depicting scenery, flowers and vegetation, birds and literary works on wall panels between upper and lower roofs of palaces, or on gates in royal palaces and tombs in Hue. The study of *phap lam Hue* has been carried out over the past 20 years, but until now researchers have not established a consensus on several issues such as: Which type of technique does *phap lam Hue* belong to? Is it called *phap lam* or *phap lang*?<sup>1</sup> Even the question whether *phap lam Hue* were manufactured in Hue, Vietnam, or elsewhere in Asia is still controversial. New documented objects, observations and study trips to museum collections in Europe and China during the last years make it possible to give further information about *phap lam Hue*.

**Keywords:** *phap lam Hue, Hue painted enamels, falang, bespoke painted enamels, Nguyen Dynasty*

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<sup>1</sup> In Chinese, this kind of material is call 珐琅 (*falang* in *pinyin*, *phap lang* in Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation). However, from the Nguyen Dynasty time (1802 - 1945, the Vietnamese was used the term *phap lam* (珐瓏) instead of *phap lang* (珐瑯).

## Introduction

From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century French researchers such as L. Gaide, H. Peyssonneaux and R. Orband have studied *phap lam Hue* of the Nguyen period and published their works in *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué* (Gaide and Peyssonneaux, 1925; Orband, 1917). The paper of Pham Dang Tri (1982) marks the beginning of the research of this group of unique objects in terms of material, decorative perceptions, and artistic works.

Since then, dozens of articles on this subject were written by painters, researchers or antique collectors and were published in Vietnam and overseas. These articles delve into aspects such as origin, name, form, core body components, place of original manufacturing, reasons for discontinuation of the craft, and process of rediscovery or restoration of the craft. However, there is no consensus about the origin of the name *phap lam Hue*, technical and artistic features and delineation of different forms. Suspicion has also been raised “whether *phap lam* were really produced in Hue under the Nguyen and not imported?” (Tran Dinh Son, 2005; Pham Hy Tung Bach, 2005).

My research into this subject over the past ten years based mainly on the study of object which were displayed and conserved in palaces, tombs and museums in Hue. Furthermore, in a study tour in 2004 - 2005 to China, Japan, France and Belgium I had the opportunity to visit collections of *phap lam* and cloisonné made in these countries during the 16<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### About the name *phap lam* (painted enamels)

In a previous paper I have referred to Pham Dang Tri’s view, which was supported by many researchers, including myself, as to why under the Nguyen the phrase *phap lam* was used instead of *falang* (珐瑯) as used by the Chinese. He wrote “That is because character *lang* (瑯) is homonymous to character *lam* (瀾) which forms part of the name of Lord Nguyen Phuc Lan (1635 - 1648), especially as pronounced in Hue. Therefore, in order to get around the guilt of profanation character *lang* (瑯) is pronounced slightly different...” (Pham Dang Tri, 1982: 37).

I would now like to explain the matter of naming from a different angle based on Chinese records.

*Geguyaolun* (Manual of antique studies) compiled by Caozhao in the 21<sup>st</sup> year of Hongwu reign (1388) of the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644) refers to utility items such as incense burners, flower vases, boxes, bowls, etc with copper core body covered in colored glazes often seen in rooms of ladies of rich and powerful families, which were called *Jingtailan* (景

泰藍) wares later (Rowson, 2002: 190). These items were referred to at the time as *Guiguoyao* (鬼國窯: wares of Devil's country) or *folangkan* (佛郎嵌) and were brought to China by the invading Mongol forces in second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century (Chen Lihua, 2002: 9). Because of their place of production, Dashi region<sup>1</sup>, these items are also known as *Dashiyao* (大食窯) wares (Chen Lihua, 2002: 9).

*Jingdezhen tao lu* (Notes on manufacturing of ceramics in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, China), compiled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has a section dealing with ancient wares (Chen Lihua, 2002: 10) in which reference was made to *Dashiyao* wares as follows: *Dashiyao* wares made in Dashi region had copper core body under a layer of sky blue glaze in five brilliant colors. They are similar to *folangkan*, of unknown production period, which are also called *Guiguoyao* until the Qing period (1644 - 1911) when they are referred to as *falan* (發藍), and also, incorrectly, as *falang* (琺瑯) (Chen Lihua, 2002: 11).

*Gugung cangjin shutai falangqi* (Cloisoné and painted enamels preserved inside the Forbidden Purple City) compiled by Chen Lihua tells that *falang* (琺瑯) is also called *folang* (佛郎), *folang* (拂郎), *falan* (發藍) (Chen Lihua, 2002: 12). On the basis of production method of the core body and techniques of color application and decoration Chen Lihua divided cloisonné products of China into four categories:

- *Chasi falang* (掐絲琺瑯): cloisonné with compartments.
- *Huafalang* (畫琺瑯): painted enamels.
- *Zantai falang* (鑿胎琺瑯): carved cloisonné.
- *Touming falang* (透明琺瑯): cloisonné with transparent glaze (Chen Lihua, 2002: 14-18).

Chen Lihua also added that compartment cloisonné which were known as *Dashiyao* wares or *Guiguokan* in the Yuan dynasty (1271 - 1368) are now commonly referred to as *Jingtaiwan*. *Huafalang* (painted enamels) in Guangzhou are known as *Yangci* (洋瓷) (Chen Lihua, 2002: 15). *Zantai falang* (carved cloisonné) are also called *folangkan* (佛郎嵌), which are made in similar way to carved cloisonné except that instead of using copper wires, decorative motifs are forms by carving into the core body (Chen Lihua, 2002: 16). Chinese literature tells us production techniques of *chasi falang* (cloisonné with compartments) with are at their peak under King Jingzong of Ming Dynasty, Jingtai reign (1450 - 1456). Because of this they are also known as the famed *Jingtaiwan* cloisonné (Chen Lihua, 2002: 18).

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<sup>1</sup> In the book *Gugung cangjin shutai falangqi* (Cloisoné and painted enamels stored in the Forbidden Purple City) Chen Lihua, based on Chinese historic documents, wrote "During the Song (960-1279) and the Yuan dynasty (1279 - 1368), the Chinese called the Arab region-in Western Asia "Dashi", now is Xinjiang (新疆) of province in China" (2002: 9).

However, according to Chen Lihua (2002: 19), since Jingzong reign lasts just seven years and was unfolding during a period when the country had been weakened, it is not possible that China was able to mobilize resources and manpower to produce such a large quantity of exquisite cloisonné as passed down through the generations. In fact, there are many cloisonné bearing the mark *Jingtai nianzhi* (景泰年製) were cloisonné of the period “Late Yuan - Early Ming” which had been transformed and re-fired. There are also a number of cloisonné bearing the Jingtai reign mark made in subsequent period by people who admired Jingtai. The reality is that from Jingtai reign onward the Chinese people refer to all *chasi falang* (cloisonné with compartments) as *Jingtailan* cloisonné.

After the discussed Chinese records, the cloisonné production industry originates from Dashi in *Xiyu* (Xinjiang province at present) came to China in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, the early name of these products were *Dashiyao* ware. As products of a foreign country the Chinese people called them *Guiguoyao* (“wares of Devil’s country”).

The name of these cloisonné products has changed over time. It has evolved from *Dashiyao* wares or *Guiguoyao* at the beginning to *falan* (珐琅), *folang* (佛郎), *falang* (拂郎) in the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The last of which is derived from a distortion in pronunciation of the phrase *falan* as initially these products were often covered with a blue glaze.

- These days *falang* is a generic name for all products made with copper core body, and covered with a layer of multi-colored glaze before firing. Depending on production techniques (using copper wires or carving directly on core body to form designs) and glazing techniques (by applying glazes to compartments or painting directly on the copper core body) these products are classified into four groups: *chasi falang* (cloisonné with compartments), *huafalang* (painted enamels), *zantai falang* (carved cloisonné) and *touming falang* (cloisonné with transparent glaze). With regard to the first group, from the reign of Jingzong cloisonné with compartments are also known as *Jingtailan* wares.

- In comparison with the above mentioned Chinese record, the *Dai Nam thuc luc* (Veritable Record in the Kingdom of Dai Nam) of the Nguyen period (1802 - 1945) mentioned: “In the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Minh Mang reign (1827)... established *Phap lam tuong cuc* (Factory of Painted Enamels)” (NHON, 1965: 330). As the historian of Nguyen 璽 dynasty recorded this *Phap lam tuong cuc* as 珐 匠局<sup>1</sup> it may be asserted that:

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<sup>1</sup> Gaide and Peyssonneaux have described decorations in *phap lam* in Kien Thai Vuong’s tomb in the section *Émaux d’Annam* and refers to a decree issued by the court concerning activity of the *Phap lam tuong cuc*, also provides handwriting shape of the word *phap lam* like that in *Dai Nam thuc luc* (Gaide and Peyssonneaux, 1925: 34).



From the phrase *falan* (发蓝), which relates to the blue color appearing on the product, the Chinese pronounced the characters as *falang* (珐琅). The Chinese character *fa* (珐) and character *lang* (琅) in the name *falang* have a common prefix *yu* (玉: jade), and *lang* (琅) refers to a kind of jade. When these products were imported into Hue under the Nguyen they were called *phap lam* (珐蓝), and the character *lam* (蓝) was given the prefix *yu* (玉: jade). It is said that the change was carried out because the character is homonymous with a nationally revered character of the Nguyen, hence is forbidden to name anything else.<sup>1</sup>

In my view, the Nguyen was very creative in coining the phrase *phap lam* (珐蓝), especially in adding prefix *yu* (玉) to character *lam* (蓝: blue) to form character *lam* (蓝): blue jade). In doing so the name *phap lam* of Hue preserves the meaning of value “precious as jade” of the phrase *falan* and at the same time maintains connection with character *lam* (蓝) in the phrase *falan* (发蓝) that has existed earlier.

### **From *huafalang* (painted enamels) to *phap lam Hue* (Hue painted enamels)**

Painted enamel industry have started in Limoges (France) and Battersea (England) in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These two centers invented the techniques of using feather brush to draw colored designs onto the copper core body that has been treated with an undercoat before firing. These products were called *émail peint sur cuivre* (French) or *painted enamels* (English). The techniques were later copied by craftsmen in other Western European countries including Germany, Holland and Italy, and in Western Asia.

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Jesuit priests brought painted enamel products into China via Guangdong (Rowson, 2002: 190-91). The Chinese quickly adopted the technology and called their painted enamels *huafalang* or *Yangci*, which mean “Western glazed ware”. Manufacturing techniques of painted enamels also require the application of a layer of undercoat onto the core body, and decorative designs are painted directly onto the undercoat using a five-colored glaze before firing. The core body of painted enamels / émails / painted enamels / Western glazed wares is often made of red copper, although there are products with gold, silver or brass core body. Onto this core craftsman applied decorative designs using multi-colored silica-based glaze. The decoration style is similar to that used on the contemporary overglazed polychrome ceramics in China. Painted enamels made by Chinese craftsmen were called *huafalang* or *Guangfalang* (Guangdong painted

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<sup>1</sup> Pham Dang Tri thinks that it is due to avoiding mentioning the tabooed word Lan (瀾) in the name of Lord Nguyen Phuc Lan (1982: 41). However, Tran Dinh Son thinks that it is due to avoiding mentioning the tabooed word Lan (蘭) in the name of Queen Tong Thi Lan, King Gia Long’s wife (2005: 110).

enamels). These products for royal use were produced by the factory set up by Emperor Kangxi (1661 - 1722) in the royal citadel, while those for ordinary people were produced in Suzhou (Jiangsu province), Yangzhou (Jiangsu province) and Guangdong (Rowson, 2005: 188-91).

From the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Guangdong was famous for the production of painted enamels to export Western countries. These products have a red copper core body and decorated with motifs of flowers, vegetation, fruits, scenes and human figures. Subsequently Western techniques of polishing and using perspective were adopted together with scenes and human figures from the Western countries. These *huafalang* products were called *Canton enamels* by Westerners (Rowson, 2005: 191).

From Guangdong, *huafalang* products have been shipped to all corners of the world including Vietnam. However, we still have not any documentation that Chinese trading ships brought painted enamels to the Thanh Ha - Bao Vinh port in Hue or Hoi An port in Quang Nam province, we found the *huafalang* products at the historical sites as the aristocratic and merchant residents in these regions have possessed *Jingtai* wares and *huafalang* products bearing the reign marks Xuande (1425 - 1435), Kangxi (1661 - 1722) and Qianlong (1735 - 1795) which indicates their arrival in Hue and Hoi An before the first King of the Nguyen Dynasty Gia Long (1802 - 1820). People purchased these wares for use as altar pieces or interior display. After the Nguyen Empire was established, Vietnamese officials on mission to China brought back Chinese *Jingtai* wares and *huafalang* products for display in their houses.

At that time Mr Vu Van Mai of Hue, noting that there was a high demand for *huafalang* products among the aristocracies, decided to go to Guangdong to learn the craft of production of these products. On return to Vietnam he reported to the king and was given the task of establishing a factory to produce *huafalang* products for the court. *Dai Nam thuc luc* records that: "In the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Minh Mang reign (1827)... established *Phap lam tuong cuc* (Factory of Painted Enamels). Mr Vu Van Mai, painter of Noi Tao (Imperial Workshop), learned *phap lam* craft. Thereupon it was decreed that *phap lam* factory be established, equipped with a workforce of 15 persons. The number would be augmented if required" (NHON, 1965: 330). *Phap lam* factory was set up in Hue from that time.

*Phap lam* industry of the Nguyen came directly from *huafalang* industry of Guangdong, and not *chasi falang* (cloisonné with compartments) industry of Beijing. Compared to Beijing, Guangdong is closer to Vietnam.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the Nguyen period King Gia Long had invited talented tile makers from Guangdong to Hue to establish factory producing tiles with multi-colored glaze in Long Tho (in the outskirt of Hue Citadel) to serve construction

and decoration needs of the court.<sup>1</sup> Thus Guangdong and Vietnam by then had a firm relationship, and it was logical for Mr Vu Van Mai and his disciples to learn the craft from Guangdong rather than from Beijing.

### Types of *phap lam* Hue

Based on historical records of the Nguyen Dynasty and French researchers' articles published in *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué* together with studying the existing *phap lam* sources in royal palaces and museums in Hue, we could see that production techniques of *phap lam* began in Vietnam in 1827, developed and reached their peak under the reigns of King Minh Mang (1820 - 1841), King Thieu Tri (1841 - 1847) and King Tu Duc (1848 - 1883); declined after the period of "three kings alternately ruled the country for a short time" (1883 - 1884).<sup>2</sup> Although *phap lam* production was restored under the reign of King Dong Khanh (1885 - 1889), it failed to revive and fell into further decline, and finally disappeared.

According to various documentary sources, the Nguyen Dynasty had *phap lam* produced in three sites: *Phap lam tuong cuc* (Factory of Painted Enamels) inside the Imperial City in Hue, in Ai Tu (Quang Tri province) and in Dong Hoi (Quang Binh province).<sup>3</sup>

The existence and operating time of *phap lam* factory of the Nguyen Dynasty, from the beginning to the end, was over 60 years. However, the legacy of *phap lam* of the Nguyen Dynasty as seen in palaces and tombs in Hue, in museums, private antique collections in Vietnam and abroad is abundant, both in quantity, types and shapes.

According to their locations, forms and utility, *phap lam* can be divided into two types:

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<sup>1</sup> This group of craftsmen from Guangdong consisted of four persons lead by Mr. Heda. They came to Long Tho in 1810 and instructed craftsmen of the Nguyen dynasty the technique of building kilns, exploiting materials, making enamels, forming shapes and firing products. After finishing their task, they went back with many rewards from the court (NHON, 1964: 11).

<sup>2</sup> King Duc Duc (for three days in 1883), King Hiep Hoa (from June 1883 to November 1883) and King Kien Phuc (from December 1883 to August 1884).

<sup>3</sup> Gaide and Peyssonneaux refer to the document of a storekeeper at *Vo Kho* (the office in charge of all kilns, workshops and stores of the Nguyen dynasty in Hue), dated the 8th year of King Minh Mang's reign (1827). This document states that all vats shipped to Hue must be weighed and registered before being distributed to the kilns that make stoneware, and to the units that produce crystal and *phap lam*. The document also gave information that in addition to the workshop of *phap lam* in Hue, the Nguyen also set up workshops in Ai Tu (Quang Tri) and Dong Hoi (Quang Binh) (1925: 32).

### *Phap lam decorated on architectural structures*

They are works of *phap lam* used as exterior decorations, incorporated into structures of the Hue monuments complex under the Nguyen, including:

- Gourds representing the principles of the universe, the sun, the moon, scimitar-shaped flames, etc. are installed at the middle of roof-ridges of major structures in the Imperial City and tombs of Nguyen kings such as the Ngo Mon gate, Nhat Tinh Mon gate, Nguyet Anh Mon gate, Hien Lam Cac pavilion, Sung An Dien palace, Bieu Duc Dien palace, Ngung Hy Dien palace, Minh Lau pavilion. They are also found on the two gates at either end of Trung Dao Kieu bridge in the Imperial City and on the gates in front of the tombs of King Minh Mang and King Thieu Tri.

- Motifs of dragon, phoenix, five-colored clouds, etc. installed on either end of roof-ridges and dropping ridges of palaces, pavilions, etc. form a style of colourful “scimitar ends” that enhance the splendor of these structures.

- Decorative panels depicting scenery, vegetation and animals, the four seasons, the eight treasures, etc. alternating with panels of poems carved in Chinese script in the style of “one poem, one painting”, form wall panels which surround the roofs and the gables of palaces, pavilions in the Imperial City and tombs. These flat panel decorations also appear on gates at either end of bridges: Trung Dao Kieu (inside Imperial City), Thong Minh Chinh Truc Kieu (inside King Minh Mang’s tomb), Chanh Trung Kieu (inside King Thieu Tri’s tomb), etc.

- Wall paintings are made of *phap lam* in whole sheet or by assembling several small pieces of *phap lam* products. Stood out among these are two *phap lam* paintings hung in the interior of Bieu Duc Dien palace depicting flowers and birds. Also hung are four glass paintings depicting still life in the style of counter-painting, and three black enameled and gilded wooden paintings inlaid with Chinese texts made of mother-of-pearl. Also belonging to this type are horizontal panels and parallel sentences, banners with Chinese script carved in relief in the middle and surrounded with chrysanthemum scrolls, bat carrying ribbon or golden coin in its beak. Sometimes, horizontal panels are seen on gates in front of royal palaces and tombs of kings, serving as name plates or teachings extracted from the Book of Songs of Confucianism. For instance, the horizontal panels read: *Chinh dai quang minh; Chinh truc dang binh; Cao minh du cuu; Trung hoa vi duc*, appeared on the gates in front of Thai Hoa Dien palace, or two horizontal panels read: *Chinh dai quang minh* and *Thong minh chinh truc* in front of the grave of King Minh Mang.

Craftsmen also produced individual Chinese characters in *phap lam* for the main gate of King Thieu Tri’s tomb. This gate is made of marble stone and in the middle of the gate is a horizontal panel also made of blue marble with four Chinese characters *Minh duc vien hi*

(明德遠矣) in *phap lam*. Two obelisks on either side are attached with two parallel sentences also made of *phap lam*, formed with individual Chinese characters. These characters are often coated with yellow enamel or blue enamel while those on the horizontal panels or plates are made of sheet *phap lam* and often covered with black enamel.

Decorative motifs of given themes on structures are usually composed of smaller works of *phap lam*, joined together by iron frames or copper strips. For exterior decorations, the predominant colors of red, pink, lemon-yellow, and blue giving a bright and vivid look to these imposing and quiet structures.

The composition of *phap lam* works depends on the size, scale and function of each structure, as well as shape and decoration style. For example, dragon, phoenix, sun, pearl and gourd are positioned only on roof ridges of major palaces while five-colored clouds or stylized dragon to smaller palaces or gates. Similarly, only wall panels between upper and lower roofs of large palaces or façade of major structures are adorned with works in form of the eight treasures, the four seasons, etc., and popular designs like flowers, birds are placed in less important positions.

### *Phap lam for daily use, ritual ceremonies and interior decoration*

This type forms the largest number in the collection of *phap lam* in the Hue Royal Antiquities Museum. These works are abundant in both shape and decorative designs and can be classified into four small groups as follows:

- The first group consists of items for daily use including bowls of different sizes, dishes, trays, tea services, betel-nut trays, spittoons, etc.
- The second group consists of items for rituals including offertory fruit-trays on raised foot, altar wine jars, offertory boxes on raised foot, covered tureens, incense burners, altar flower vases, lampstands, etc.
- The third group consists of items for interior decoration in royal palaces, temples including large-sized vases, dishes hung on wall, flowerpots with gold branches and jade leaves, pots, etc. Also in this group are pairs of peach, pomegranate, buddha-hand citrus fruits in relief used in decoration of house walls or panels hung in royal palaces, tombs.
- The fourth group consists of items for recreation and aesthetic including pitch-pots, make-up covered boxes, jewel boxes, etc.

The abundant decorative designs include flowers, floral patterns, the four mythical animals, the eight treasures, landscapes and figures, etc. This type is extremely varied in color and ranges from monochrome to polychrome. And the choice of color is influenced by functionality of the vessel. For instance, ritual items often feature red, lemon-yellow, white



and dark blue, while household articles feature turquoise, purple-pink, green and light brown. Besides, there are items not completely covered with enamels and the unglazed areas reveal the copper core body or often are embellished with materials such as jade, agate, color glass.

This type of *phap lam* was mainly produced under the reigns of King Minh Mang, King Thieu Tri and King Tu Duc, but those made in the reign of King Thieu Tri are of superior quality. Although King Thieu Tri was on the throne for seven years, *phap lam* produced during his reign, is well-known for their beauty. The decorative patterns on *phap lam* made during this short reign are very fine, and the colors harmonious. On the other hand, those made during the reigns of King Minh Mang and King Tu Duc are coarse.

Under the reign of King Minh Mang, apart from the five-colored *phap lam*, blue and white *phap lam* were also produced in the same forms, and with the same types of decorations as those on the *do su ky kieu* (or *bleu de Hue*) under the Nguyen period. In addition to popular ornamental themes such as the four mythical animals, flowers and birds, etc., *phap lam* made during the reign of King Minh Mang are also decorated with European themes such as landscapes with figures, with some figures wearing European costumes.

### ***Phap lam ky kieu* (bespoke painted enamels) under the Nguyen Dynasty**

A question that has been raised in the mind of many researchers when studying and enjoying *phap lam Hue* is that the technical quality and artistic level seen on *phap lam Hue* vary considerably. The variation becomes more striking when comparing *phap lam* products like dragons, clouds, the sun, the moon, scimitar-shaped flames decorated on up-turned roof-ends, on roof ridges, on wall panels between upper and lower roofs of palaces, etc. in Hue with *phap lam* products for interior decoration, or for daily use and rituals.

There are groups of *phap lam* of the same functionality, date of production and decorative designs but with different enamel quality, materials for the core body, and techniques and competency in forming shape. The contrast is typically seen when comparing *phap lam* items for rituals marked *Minh Mang nien che* (明命年製: made during the reign of King Minh Mang) with those marked *Minh Mang nien tao* (明命年造: made during the reign of King Minh Mang). For this reason, Gaide and Peyssonneaux distinguished the term *émaux d'Annam* (*phap lam* of Annam) with the term *émaux faits pour l'Annam* (*phap lam* made for Annam) (Gaide and Peyssonneaux, 1925: 32) when referring to *phap lam* items decorated in the prince Kien Thai Vuong's tomb.

After many years of researching *phap lam Hue*, I have come to the conclusion that while decreeing the making of *phap lam* in the workshops in Hue, Ai Tu and Dong Hoi,

the Nguyen Dynasty also commissioned *phap lam* in Guangdong, then had them inscribed with Nguyen kings' reign marks. This practice has caused future generations to think that these *phap lam* were also produced in the imperial workshops. In fact, they were *Phap lam ky kieu* (bespoke painted enamels).

The reasons for this are as follows:

Although *Phap lam tuong cuc* (Factory of Painted Enamels) was established in 1827, workers of *Phap lam tuong cuc* were inexperienced and had yet to master production techniques in the early period, and there was also shortage of manpower. Meantime the demand for display, decoration, construction of royal palaces, temples, etc. during the reign of King Minh Mang was high. Therefore, the Nguyen Dynasty had the *phap lam* locally produced and at the same time ordered high quality pieces from Guangdong to meet the requirements of the court. These *phap lam ky kieu* were of perfect quality, and technically and artistically far superior to locally made *phap lam*.

After a period of operation under instructions of experts from Guangdong, factories of *phap lam* under the reigns of King Thieu Tri and King Tu Duc of the Nguyen Dynasty were able to produce refined products by themselves to serve the needs of the court and royal family. However, after Vietnam had been invaded by the French, its economy fell into decline, the treasury was exhausted, many factories were closed. Guangdong experts returned home and the production gradually declined from then on.

- After King Dong Khanh came to the throne (1885), the court tried but failed to restore the craft because of the long time lapse, meagre national budget, and dispersal of craftsmen. In order to restore royal palaces and tombs that were sacked and severely damaged after the imperial Hue city was occupied by French troops on 5 July 1885, the court of King Dong Khanh once again had to send officials to Guangdong to order *phap lam ky kieu*. The presence of a lot of beautifully colored flowerpots with gilded wooden branches and colored glass leaves reproduced under the reign of King Dong Khanh to replace those with golden branches and jade leaves looted by the French in Hue royal palaces and tombs is vivid evidence.

The above observations are supported by the following evidences. In their paper Gaide and Peyssonneaux distinguished two terms "*émaux d'Annam*" (*phap lam* of Annam) and "*émaux faits pour l'Annam*" (*phap lam* made for Annam) to call two different types of *phap lam*: "one includes large and rough pieces and the other less coarse"<sup>1</sup> (1925: 32). They have suggested: "All large and coarse *phap lam* decorated on the roof tops, dragons, stylized-

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<sup>1</sup> Originally: "Ces deux appellation *émaux d'Annam* et *émaux faits pour l'Annam* désignent les deux séries, de grosses pièces et des pièces de moindre volume..." (Gaide and Peyssonneaux 1925: 32).

shaped dragons as well as flat *phap lam* pieces decorated on the gates of the Imperial City, were surely locally produced... While, if the researchers who specialized in Annam arts, if the visitors who often reminded the image of Hue in their memories and often referred to fine arts handicrafts that they had met in this region, all mentioned *phap lam Hue* in their works, nothing can be based on to positively affirm that the so-called *phap lam Hue* are actually made in Hue" (Gaide and Peyssonneaux, 1925: 35).

Although Gaide and Peyssonneaux presented a lot of evidence for the production of *phap lam Hue* under the Nguyen Dynasty (Gaide and Peyssonneaux, 1925: 34), they also insisted that the *phap lam* items here were meticulously made, just like those commissioned from China... The items such as those decorating the tomb of Kien Thai Vuong or those being kept in *Noi Phu* (Imperial Storehouse) were still commissioned by the Hue dynasty in Guangdong, via the Chinese merchants in Hue.<sup>1</sup>

- By objects: Gaide and Peyssonneaux's paper published in 1925, based on the survey results of Kien Thai Vuong's tomb which was constructed in 1886-1888 under the reign of King Dong Khanh, showed that in addition to *phap lam* made in Hue, King Dong Khanh ordered *phap lam ky kieu* (bespoke painted enamels) from Guangdong to decorate his father's tomb. The *phap lam ky kieu* were placed on bronze gates in front of the tomb, on the gate of the circular enclosure in which Kien Thai Vuong's remains are buried, and on the screen in front of the tomb. After 120 years of existence, most of the *phap lam ky kieu* have been fallen off, lost and damaged. Fortunately, Hue Royal Antiquities Museum still owns several dishes of *phap lam ky kieu*, originally found as decoration in Kien Thai Vuong's tomb, which prove the ideas of Gaide and Peyssonneaux that King Dong Khanh ordered *phap lam ky kieu*.

As already mentioned above, that the Hue court ordered *phap lam ky kieu* from Guangdong had happened from the reign of King Minh Mang, when the techniques of making *phap lam* were just been introduced into Vietnam rather than under the reign of King Dong Khanh. The following objects will prove this point:

- A dish with dragon and clouds pattern [Fig. 1] is dated to the reign of King Minh Mang because the blue and white *phap lam* existed only in Vietnam and appeared under the reign of King Minh Mang. The dragon on this dish has five claws and bears characteristics of dragon under the Nguyen with sin-shaped body; layers of double scales and fin are

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<sup>1</sup> Originally: "Ainsi qu'il vient d'être dit, il faut donc considérer comme provenant de commandes faites en Chine par la Cour d'Annam les pièces d'émail de fabrication soignée... Des commandes d'objets en émail, semblables comme formes à ceux qui agrémentent le tombeau de Kien Thai Vuong, ainsi qu'à ceux conservés au "Trésor" du Palais, sont encore faites de nos jours à Canton, pour la Cour de Hué, par l'entremise de commerçants chinois de la place" (Gaide and Peyssonneaux, 1925: 35).

similar to those of dragons often seen in royal decoration under the Nguyen. However, it is not yet a complete Nguyen dragon because its tail, horns, mane still bear characteristics of Chinese dragon under the Qing dynasty. In my view, this is one of the *phap lam ky kieu* in early Minh Mang reign. Although Chinese painters had to paint the dragon according to the order of the buyer, the Chinese dragon remained an impressive image in the mind of the painters, thus making the “bespoke dragon” is not quite a Nguyen dragon.

- A betel-nut box [Fig. 2] kept by Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, is marked *Minh Mang nien tao* (明命年造), so many researchers in Hue consider it *phap lam Hue*. It features five-colored floral design against yellow background. The color, decoration style, production techniques and some design details (red peony) on the box are similar to those on Chinese dish in *falang* (Chinese painted enamels) [Fig. 3], marked *Daqing Qianlong nianzhi* (made during the reign of King Qianlong, Great Qing Dynasty) in *zhuanshu* script.

- Another betel-nut box in *phap lam* [Fig. 4], marked *Minh Mang nien tao* (made during the reign of King Minh Mang), painted with five-colored floral design against blue background. The color, decoration style, production techniques, the core body and some design details (flowers, leaves, especially black leaf-shaped diaper pattern around its rim, etc.) on this box are similar to those on Chinese dish in *falang* [Fig. 5] and Chinese milk-jug in *falang* [Fig. 6] dated to Qianlong (1735 - 1795) reign.

- A small flower-vase [Fig. 7] and a flowerpot with gold branches and jade leaves [Fig. 8] and two *phap lam* flowerpots [Fig. 9 and 10] asserted Chinese *falang* by foreign experts. Similarly, comparing the betel-nut boxes marked *Minh Mang nien tao* (明命年造) with the above Chinese *falang* items, we easily see that the flowerpots have similarities in shapes, decoration style, color and techniques of painting enamel. Even their thickness is the same. These features lead us to the conclusion that these objects have the same place of production, the same production techniques, and were made at the same time.

- A leaf-shaped tea-saucer made during the reign of King Minh Mang [Fig. 11] and the tea-saucer of a tea service, marked *Minh Mang* (明命) [Fig. 12] are of the same size and shape; but the piece in Figure 11 has better decoration, more beautiful color and its design is similar to that on a Chinese *falang* dish [Fig. 13]. Therefore, I think that the tea service and tea-saucers in Figure 12 is *phap lam* made in Hue, the tea-saucer in Figure 11 is *phap lam ky kieu* ordered from China by the Minh Mang court.

- Comparing two *phap lam Hue* objects bearing *Minh Mang nien che* (明命年製) mark [Fig. 14 and 15] with the above introduced *phap lam ky kieu* objects bearing the mark *Minh Mang nien tao* (明命年造), we can easily see that the former objects have poorer painted decoration, lower enamel quality, thinner core body and lighter weight than the latter. In characters, *Minh Mang nien che* (明命年製) mark on the two genuine *phap lam Hue* was



inscribed in *zhuanshu* script in red enamel on ivory white glaze, while *Minh Mang nien tao* (明命年造) mark was inscribed in *kaishu* script in black enamel underglaze; the technique of writing on this item is also better than that on the two items marked *Minh Mang nien che* (明命年製).

Summarizing, I think that under the reigns of King Minh Mang (1820 - 1841) and King Dong Khanh (1885 - 1889), meaning the early period and the end period of making *phap lam* in Hue, in addition to *phap lam* produced in Hue for exterior decoration and for daily use, the Nguyen Dynasty also ordered high quality *phap lam* [Fig. 1, 2, 4, 7, 11] from Guangdong. Although these *phap lam* products were made in China, they conformed the shapes, patterns and designs, etc. of the Nguyen Dynasty so we can call them *phap lam ky kieu* (bespoke painted enamels) of the Nguyen Dynasty.

The marks on genuine *phap lam Hue* are often written in *zhuanshu* script, using words "... *nien che*"; while those on *phap lam ky kieu* are often written in *kaishu* script, using words "... *nien tao*". It is perhaps the reason why Gaide and Peyssonneaux distinguished two terms *émaux d'Annam* (*phap lam Annam*) and *émaux faits pour l'Annam* (*phap lam* made for Annam) as a distinction between *phap lam Hue* and *phap lam ky kieu* of the Nguyen Dynasty (1925: 34-35).

It is noticeable that, besides *phap lam*, the Nguyen kings from Gia Long to Khai Dinh had got into the habit of ordering porcelains, glass paintings from China for display and use in the Hue royal palaces. Especially, King Minh Mang not only ordered porcelains from China but also commissioned tea services marked *Spode* in England, had them added enameled decoration and his reign mark in Vietnam then fired again before using. He also commissioned five faience lime-pots with colored transfer-printed decoration in Copeland & Garrett (England) factory for use in Hue. King Thieu Tri commissioned tea services in Sevres (France) and had them added the inscriptions *Thieu Tri nguyen nien phung che* (紹治元年奉制: funeral offering, the first year of the reign of King Thieu Tri, 1841) before using.

## Conclusion

The history of coming into being, existence, development, decline and disappearance of *phap lam Hue* lasted just over 60 years (1827 - 1888), while the history of existence and development of techniques of making *falang* in China extend over 700 years, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century together with the invading Mongolian Yuan forces. Today the Chinese industry is still flourishing. So the techniques of making *falang* of China, in all aspects from shapes to enamels, colors, decoration style and firing are better than those of Hue under the Nguyen.



However, it can be affirmed that the Nguyen Dynasty was more creative in the application of *phap lam* in daily life than the Chinese. While the Chinese and Westerners consider *falang* / *painted enamels* only as a kind of material to produce items for daily use, for rituals or for fine souvenirs, the craftsmen making *phap lam* under the Nguyen used painted enamels as architectural materials in the construction of royal palaces and tombs in Hue. They made full use of high resistance quality of *phap lam* material to mechanical and physico-chemical impact to make decorative motifs adorned the exterior of structures which were built in a land with severe weather and climatic conditions. Therefore, over 200 years of existence the decorative motifs in *phap lam* on the structures in Hue still retain their bright colors, thus lessening a sense of melancholy and tranquility inherent among the relics in Hue while still retaining an air of splendor in a weather beaten ancient capital city. This is an achievement of *phap lam Hue* in comparison with other types of *phap lam*.

*Phap lam Hue* came into being in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in a setting when Vietnam had yet to encounter scientific theories of colors of the West, but craftsmen making *phap lam Hue* were able to attain significant achievements in using colors. The late painter Pham Dang Tri remarked: “craftsmen making *phap lam Hue* knew early the way of adjusting colors to a fine level, created methods of using color patches, discovered a process of using contrasting colors, etc. *Phap lam Hue* feature bright and splendid colors of great strength. They feature typical colors of the daily life in that royal period, and reflect the Hue contemporary arts of the time” (1982: 40). It is the most accurate remark about *phap lam Hue*, about their valuable contributions to the arts, especially to Vietnamese painting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig 1. Round serving dish with dragon and clouds, *phap lam ky kieu*, Minh Mang period. Private collection, Ho-Chi-Minh City, Vietnam. Photo: Philippe Truong**



Fig 2. Betelnut offertory box, *phap lam ky kieu*, Minh Mang period. Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Vietnam. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 3. Plate, Chinese *falang*, Qianlong period, Qing Dynasty. Museum of East Asian Art in Berlin, Germany. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



**Fig 4. Betelnut offertory box, *phap lam ky kieu*, Minh Mang period. Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Vietnam. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son**



**Fig 5. Round serving dish, Chinese *falang*, Qianlong period, Qing Dynasty. Museum of East Asian Art in Berlin, Germany. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son**





Fig 6. Milk-container, Chinese *falang*, Qianlong period, Qing Dynasty. Munich State Museum of Ethnology, Germany. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 7. Bonsai pot, *phap lam ky kieu*, holding golden branches with jade flowers and leaves, *phap lam ky kieu*, Dong Khanh period. Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Vietnam. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 8. Bonsai pot with four raised feet, *phap lam ky kieu*, Dong Khanh period.  
Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Vietnam. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 9. Bonsai pot, *phap lam ky kieu*, Minh Mang period.  
Museum of Fine Arts of Rennes, France. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 10. Bonsai pot, Chinese *falang*, Qing dynasty.  
Collection of Asiatica gallery of Georg L. Hartl in Muenchen, Germany.  
Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son





Fig 11. Tea-sauce, *phap lam ky kieu*, Minh Mang period.  
Collection of Philippe Truong in Paris, France. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



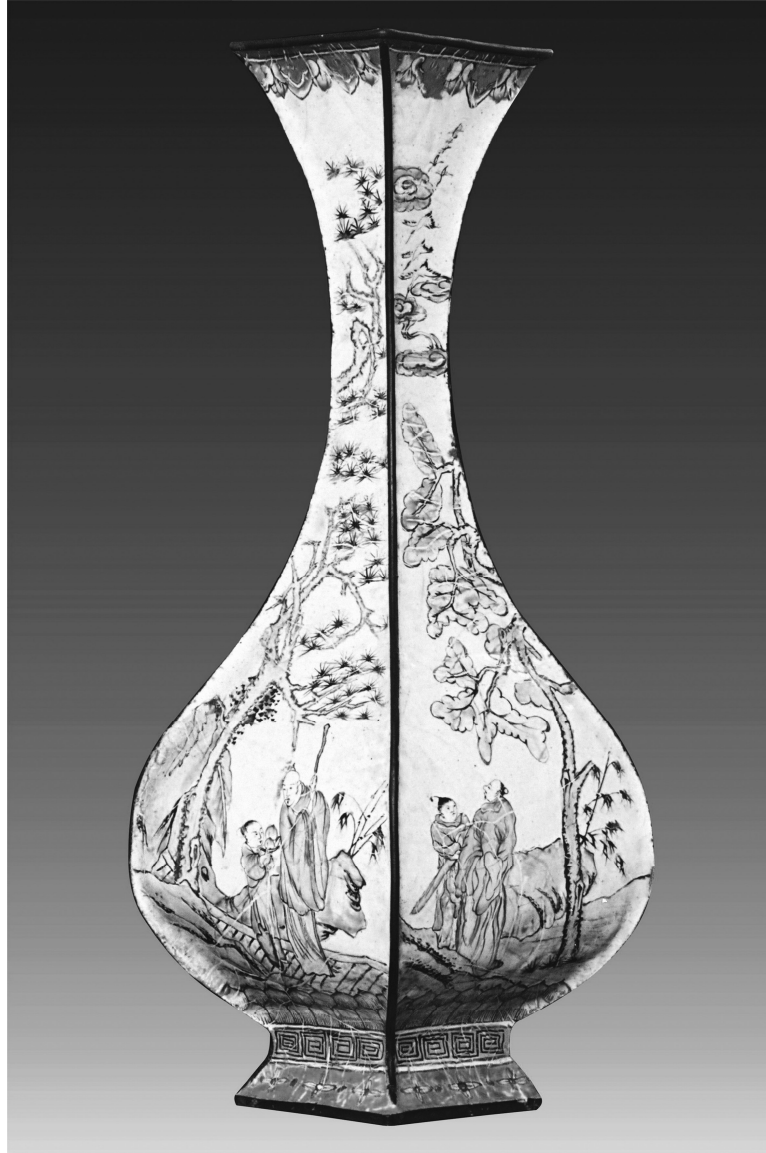
Fig 12. Tea-cup and tea-sauce, *phap lam Hue*, Minh Mang period.  
Collection of Philippe Truong in Paris, France. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 13. Tea-sauce, Chinese *falang*, Qing Dynasty.  
Museum of Fine Arts of Rennes, France. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



Fig 14. Censur, *phap lam Hue*, Minh Mang period.  
Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Vietnam. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son



**Fig 15. Offertory flower-pot, *phap lam Hue*, Minh Mang period.  
Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Vietnam. Photo: Tran Duc Anh Son**

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