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& GIANG.IT

A MINDMAP OF STYLE
IN CONTEMPORARY
VIETNAMESE FASHION

We trace the great ideologies, the remnants of the monuments, and the revival of mystical fantasy.

We were lost in the ecstasy blender of the Indochinese avant-garde leftist and the simulated digital universe.

We are busy chasing the shadow of our ancestors as we realize that the present land has transformed into a matrix of nostalgic modern and futurist bliss.

We inspect the archives, but in the technology age their data has already transformed the past into "animate images,"¹ trans-mitted by the indigenous' trans-lation, from ancient sacred costume "khăn châu áo ngũ" into the motorbike headpiece for the trans-gender dance that worships Mother Goddesses; or into the utilitarian uniform of the Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization, a dress code for a local trance dungeon party.

The past is right in front of us. Flash display for 15 seconds on Tik Tok and Story.

MODERN/ MODERNITY

The modern dream probably began with the anti-colonial, nationalist Reform movement Duy Tân in the early 20th century, with the anonymous manifesto 'The Strategy of Civilization and New Learning' (文明新學策), published in 1904, which emphasized the prerequisite to escape from the stagnant feudalist past and towards văn minh: "civilization." In 1936, more than two decades since the French colonial forces extinguished the Duy Tân movement, the satirical realist writer Vũ Trọng Phụng published the novel Dumb Luck, which mocked these pseudo-progressive values. In it, the character Văn Minh, the owner of the most fashionable European clothing tailor shop in Hanoi, is archetypal for the damaging remix of Westernized aesthetics to cover up the hysteria of Vietnamese modernity. The word văn minh - "civilization" - turns into the name Văn Minh, appearing more hubristic with capital letters, and perhaps also a tragic comedy of modern Vietnamese society.

The unstoppable discharge of modernization emerged once again, in 1986, when the Communist state signed the Đổi Mới policy, exceptionally allowing a free market under its single-party control. Since the 1990s, goods imported into Vietnam have effectively become more diversified and updated. "The West" is gradually

no longer a taboo of the anti-capitalist, but becomes an attractive source of investment, freedom, and fashion.

Y2K

Y2K fashion is now coming back. In Vietnam, however, this trend may need nostalgic specification. The period around Y2K (the late 1990s, early 2000s) of Vietnam, especially Saigon, is full of splendid dreams brought back from overseas Vietnamese, in which the most popular is the direct-to-video series of musical shows Paris by Night, directed by Thuy Nga Productions in the United States since the early 1980s in the Việt kiều, or overseas Vietnamese community. Absorbing the trendiest entertainment in the US, heavily investing in stage design, choreography, and glamour fashion, Paris by Night appears as a future capitalist scenario drawn up by the diaspora for the domestic Vietnamese moving towards.

BUNG LỰA

"Bung lựa" is slang for an attitude of being fully engaged in a specific action. It is said to have originated from the famous comedy Gặp Nhau Cuối Năm, which is re-versioned and broadcast every Lunar New Year's Eve by the Vietnam's Central Television Station. It is based on the Taoist celebration of Ông Táo, the Táo Mandarins (female and male), or

THE AVANT-GARDE PAST IS IN FRONT OF US

PERFORMATIVE ARCHIVE

IDEOLOGY REMIX

ĐỔI MỚI/RENOVATION

MODERN/MODERNITY



MAJIXIMALISM

CAODAIMISM

BUNG LƯA

STYLING REMIX

Y2K

ASIAN FUTURISM

MUDA BONG ROL

BUNG LƯA AS STYLING FOR TIGRE BIA



ĐẠI HỌC QUỐC GIA HÀ NỘI
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THÔNG TIN VÀ TRUYỀN THÔNG



more widely, “the Kitchen God,” who on Lunar New Year returns to heaven to report to the Jade Emperor on the affairs of each family household. In the comedy show, instead of family Táo, these Mandarins represent the various affairs of a nation, like Economics, Education and Culture. In the 2016 play, comedian Công Lý as The North Star Mandarin wears a costume disguised as a woman, with the approval of the Jade Emperor, who allows him to live his life to the fullest with his chosen female identity. This Mandarin wears a traditional dress and is happy to flip the wide silk sleeves, dance, and pose. Since then, the phrase Bung lụa has become popular among the queer community and refers to excessively dynamic movements, fearless attitude, and maximalist aesthetics.

BUNG LỤA as styling for Tigre Bia Tigre Bia is one of the most prominent emerging stylists in Vietnam today, with his own signature counter-trending outfits. He experiments in referencing disparate cultural symbols, especially spiritual cultures in Vietnam and Asia, and morphs the wearer’s body through clothing in the process. In the music video “Đôi Khi” (Nodey ft Suboi, directed by Anh Phi Cako) and the trailer for Suboi’s album “No Nê” (directed by Thảo Đan Nguyễn Phan), the singer, songwriter, and dancers appear in an aesthetic that blends tradition,

costume, and apocalyptic maximalism. Tigre removes the hip-hop outfit stereotype for rapper Suboi, transforming her into the image of diverse supernatural forces. We recognize some of the nuanced elements of the traditional costumes. Still, at the same time, they are as if blurred by the bizarre rituals and the surreal aesthetic of video games, with distorted bodies with thorns, extra long nails, headpieces, etc. abound. Suboi appears as the twist of the traditional image of the married woman; she is a remix of a bride, a mother, a rapper, a goddess, and a demon, surrounded by half-human, half-animal dancer-creatures.

MÚA BÓNG RỎI

Traditionally in Đạo Mẫu (Mother Goddess religion) in the North, mediumship—where spirits and deities enter a person’s body and grant wishes to those who have come to pray—is the core ritual of the religion. Here, the medium embodies the spirit of the divine. In the South, particularly in the Mekong Delta, these rituals are restyled: instead of mediumship, the ritual leader worships by way of dancing and singing in the ritual known as “múa bóng rỗi,” understood as amusement for the deities. Besides the costumes, these dancers—comprising fluid-gender performers—also use special props like a golden tray, which is a sign of mingling ethnic

rituals among the Chăm, Khmer, and Vietnamese whose cultures have been carried along the Mekong River across Cambodia and Vietnam. The more magical and surreal the dancers can perform towards the deities, the more the audience will cheer up. Thus “múa bóng rỗi” practitioners experiment with unusual props, such as plastic stools and motorcycles as headpieces. The penchant for entertainment, with its sense of ease, lack of hierarchical positioning, and lack of want to attain the heights of the divine, conversely makes it all the more powerful, and marks a notable characteristic for rituals in the Southern region.

CAODAISM

The reason for the birth of Cao Dai religion (originally, Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ - The Great Faith of the Third Universal Redemption) in Southern Vietnam in the 1920s is still a debated topic. This is the period when Southern Vietnam transitioned to the modern era. However, unlike North and Central Vietnam, where the urban and rural areas already have established close-knit social systems, the South is a “new land” of migrants with loose social structures, including the communities migrated from China, Khmer, and Cham migrated from Cambodia, if they didn’t already live there before the extension of the Nguyen Dynasty to the South

in the late 19th century. The name Cao Đài is supposed to have come from the half-awake dream of Ngô Văn Chiêu, a former official in the French colonial government, when he practiced 付乩, a mystical type of spirit-writing popular in Taoism and various folk religions in East Asia. Chiêu saw the Jade Emperor possessing him, calling him Cao Dai Fairy. He further mixed these impressions with theories from Lao Tzu books, fairy tales, Catholic scriptures, Protestantism, Shakyamuni Buddha, Confucianism, Li Bai, and Quan Cong to conceive of this synthetic belief. Using the eye as a symbol—like the eye of God watching over sentient beings—Cao daism quickly attracted millions of people from all walks of life from businessmen and intellectuals to farmers. The Cao daist Temple is a complex of decorative motifs synthesizing many religions and aesthetics. The same goes for their sermons, including introductions and exhortations quoting a variety of religions. This is perhaps one of the most hybrid religious remixes in the world!

MA(R)XIMALISM

Military and communist-inspired clothing, merging with diverse cultural influences! Styling as free appropriation of collective means of (cultural) production! Marxists and maximalists united!