

BEHAVIOR OF THE NGUYEN DYNASTY FOR TEACHERS IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

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Abstract

This article examines the educational policies and cultural behavior of the Nguyen Dynasty toward teachers in the South to answer the following questions: What were the policies for establishing schools in the South? What was the purpose of the Nguyen Dynasty in regulating teachers and students? What were the differences in behavior of the Nguyen Dynasty toward Southern teachers compared with other localities? What were the similarities and differences between public and private schools in the South? To answer these questions, we collect and document bibliographic sources. Using methods of comparison, analysis, and synthesis, we outline the process of implementing educational policies in general, policies to manage teachers in the South in particular, and assess the role of teachers and teacher standards in improving the quality of education during the Nguyen Dynasty. In addition, this article also compares the differences in the behavior of the Nguyen Dynasty toward teachers in public and private schools in different localities and provides comments and assessments on the cultural behavior of the Nguyen Dynasty toward teachers in the feudal South.

Keywords: Behavioral culture; Confucius; Nguyen Dynasty; Southern Vietnam; Teacher.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Human history shows that education plays a vital role in the strong development of a nation. Training and talent acquisition hold critical positions in the construction and development processes that are crucial for the prosperity of a dynasty. Therefore, the Nguyen Dynasty attached great importance to education, using competent and ethical teachers to educate and train talented people for the country.

After its establishment in 1802, the Nguyen Dynasty ruled a vast land and deployed a particular administrative mechanism. At this time, central Vietnam (Annam) was divided into four subdivisions (Quang Duc, Quang Tri, Quang Binh, and Quang Nam) directly governed by the royal court and eight localities. The North (Tonkin) was divided into eleven districts, and the South (Cochinchina) was divided into five provinces¹ governed by local officials (Luu & Vo, 2021). At the time, southern Vietnam was the southern region of the Nguyen Dynasty's territory. Its name was changed many times; the first time was when Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu established *Phu Gia Dinh* (Gia Dinh Prefecture) in 1698. After that, King Gia Long changed its name to *Tran Gia Dinh* (Gia Dinh Province) in 1802, and later, in 1808, it was altered to *Gia Dinh Thanh* (Gia Dinh Citadel) with five towns (Phan An, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, An Giang, and Ha Tien). In 1832, King Minh Mang abolished the name *Phu Gia Dinh* and made six provinces official (Phien An, Bien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, An Giang, and Ha Tien). In 1834, the 15th year of Minh Mang's reign, the king again altered the provinces of the southern region, including Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, An Giang, and Ha Tien (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 1965).

As a newly claimed territory, southern Vietnam had particular characteristics that distinguished it from other regions. During the time of the Nguyen and Tay Son, it was a separate region with its own identity. At the time, the South was home to many ethnic groups, such as the Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, Cham, Ma, and Stieng, of which the Khmer and Cham were greatly influenced by Indian culture. Different religions also existed, such as Buddhism, Islam, and Brahmanism. Trinh (1999, p. 142) wrote: "Gia Dinh people worship Buddha, practice their religion, and respect female gods." Although they were exposed to many religions, the ethnic groups in the South did not adopt the Confucian ideology of the Nguyen Dynasty.

After claiming the southern region as Vietnamese territory, the Nguyen Dynasty implemented numerous policies to consolidate and develop Confucian moral philosophy in the new southern land. Initially, King Gia Long supplemented Confucian ethics in the region by promulgating *Hoang Viet luat le* (Gia Long laws and regulations). King Minh Mang further strengthened Confucian regulations by adopting mandatory principles to govern people's daily lives, such as the responsibilities of parents and children in the household. Therefore, Confucianism gradually penetrated the cultural and spiritual lives of the southern people.

¹ Five districts in Gia Dinh are Gia Dinh, Ha Tien, Tran Bien, Vinh Tran, and Truong Don (in southern Vietnam today).

In addition, to increase Confucianism's influence and strengthen the government's power in the newly claimed region, the Nguyen Dynasty quickly imposed an education and examination system to select talented people to participate in local management boards. The Nguyen Dynasty acquired experience and lessons in educational management from the Late Le Dynasty and established Confucianism as the ideological foundation for social development. The court paid great attention to education and valued the fundamental role of teachers in determining teaching and learning quality. Teachers are the ones who awaken the potential within students and develop their internal strengths. It is a noble and essential mission of every teacher. Teachers guide their students with knowledge and teach them how to self-study, read books, explore, research, discover, and use knowledge to serve practical purposes. Through characters, classics, and stories, learners can draw lessons and know how to apply them to social situations. This learning method stimulates students' curiosity about learning. Confucius once stated, "An object has four corners. Knowing one corner means figuring out the other three. If you keep asking how to do it, then teaching shall serve no purpose" (Nhóm tri thức Việt, 2014, p. 26).

Policies on school construction and management, salaries, and other matters were implemented shortly afterward. In the South, the Nguyen government esteemed teachers and adopted many approaches to create favorable conditions for educational development. The Nguyen Dynasty's behavior toward teachers is considered to be a cultural behavior of the dynasty. Therefore, studying and researching the Nguyen Dynasty's cultural behavior toward teachers is to study the royal court's concerns over salaries, policies, teaching quality, and the role of teachers in society.

In this study, the author applied M. Foucault's discourse theory to learn about the cultural behavior of the Nguyen Dynasty toward its teachers. This theory was developed during the 1960s in Europe (Trịnh, 2021, p. 35). Initially, discourse theory was associated with anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics. Later, the object of discourse theory expanded to include cultural research, verbal arts, forms of instruction, and the study of the social and cultural contexts of different forms of communication. In Vietnam, discourse theory has been applied in research since the 1980s. Discourse is understood as conversational or written language in literature, sociology, and the history of ideas. The concept extends to the study of practical social activities. Therefore, discourse reproduces the social and political order and contributes to social transformation. This article applies discourse theory to understand the guidelines and policies of the kings and royal courts of the Nguyen Dynasty concerning teachers and students in public and private schools. Political elements of the feudal state expressed in the king's discourse decrees were the ideological transfer from Buddhism to Confucianism, which was the state management policy of the period. Discourse is one of the tools used by the state, represented by the king, to hold and exercise power. Through the king's words, edicts, decrees, etc., the king's ability, morality, and ideology were demonstrated clearly to obtain the audience's understanding, trust, and obedience. To achieve this goal, the king must build the image of a wise man with good moral qualities and outstanding intelligence to meet the people's expectations.

Many authors have taken a historical perspective in their research. Examples include Cao Xuan Duc, author of *Quoc Trieu Huong Khoa Luc* (Cao, 1993); Son Nam, author of *Ancient Gia Dinh* (Son Nam, 1993); Cao Tu Thanh, author of *Confucianism in Gia Dinh* (Cao, 1996); Nguyen Tien Cuong, author of *Educational Development and Examination Regime in Feudal Era of Vietnam* (Nguyễn, 1998); Li Tana and Anthony Reid, editors of *Southern Vietnam Under the Nguyen: Documents on the Economic History of Cochinchina (Đàng Trong), 1602–1777* (Li & Reid, 1993); Choi Byung Wook, author of *Southern Vietnam Under the Reign of Minh Mang (1820–1841)* (Choi, 2010); Nguyen Dinh Tu, author of *Biographies and Behavior of Scientists of Sinology in Southern Vietnam* (Nguyễn, 2013); Dinh Van Niem, author of *Examination, Degree, Academic Title Under Vietnamese Feudal Dynasties* (Đinh, 2011); and Phan Huy Le, who edited the book *The Southern Region – The Process of Formation and Development* (Phan, 2017). These authors have analyzed the developmental process of the southern region in terms of political, historical, cultural, social, and educational aspects. They researched the process of organizing schools, conducting examinations, and selecting talented individuals for the country, highlighting the remuneration policy for officials and teachers. However, their works do not analyze in depth the differences between the treatment of the teaching staff in the South and that of other regions by the Nguyen Dynasty, nor do they explain why there was such a difference. This article aims to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the Nguyen Dynasty's selection and use of teachers in the South.

2. EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH DURING THE NGUYEN DYNASTY

After claiming the South as Vietnamese territory, more people ventured into the newly acquired land to explore. The process of reclaiming wasteland took three to four generations. When sending people there to establish villages, wards, and communes, the Nguyen lords focused on expanding arable land and growing food; therefore, education in these early years was not yet central. The initial form of education was small classes organized by villagers, and teachers were invited to teach the organizers' children and grandchildren or children in the neighborhood. Classes organized by monks at temples were another form of education. Later, several Confucianists from Thuan Hoa left their homeland and settled in Gia Dinh. Most notably, Confucianist Vo Truong Toan opened a school in the village of Tan Hung that attracted hundreds of students and mostly trained talented people for the South (Nguyễn, 2013, p. 8). Later, Dang Duc Thuat, a Confucianist from Phan Rang who was good at history, came to Gia Dinh to teach and successfully attracted many students. This was the foundation of the educational system in the South.

At that time, the South had many private schools, and teachers gave private lessons at students' homes to teach the "three wise words." Learning these was useful in performing rituals, conducting funerals and death anniversaries, and writing wills. Assessing the above issue, people said that it is a thousand-year-old tradition of studiousness of the Vietnamese (Trần, 2018, p. 286). By the end of the 18th century, Nguyen Anh had established the position of provincial education commissioner, promulgated learning standards, and organized an examination system and a Confucian way of studying for graduation. Each village typically had a private school run by a *Nhieu*

hoc.² Students learned Chinese etiquette, classics, basic calculations, and Chinese Nom characters. Each district had a school, and the learning program was similar to that of the village school, but the content was broader. The provincial education commissioners, education officers, and teachers were subject to inspection by the feudal court of the Nguyen Dynasty. In addition to private schools and the homeschooling system, the court organized schools to train scholars. These schools followed a career-based path for students to become officials. Documents show the following:

The Nguyen Dynasty established a provincial studies house in the eastern area of Phu My village in Cochinchina for local students to study. In 1805, this project was built outside the old Bat Quai citadel on the right. It was moved to Tan Thuan near the Dui market church in 1815 and then to its current location, Thi Nghe, in 1824. The district studies house, built in 1836, the 17th year of Minh Mang's reign, was in My Hoi village to the west of the district prefecture. (Trần, 2018, p. 305)

Before establishing the Huong exam (the first-degree examination at the provincial level), the exam was called *Tam Truong* (three rounds). Scholars had to comply with examination regulations similar to those of the Huong exam. Those who passed this exam had an educational level equivalent to a bachelor's degree. The first exam was held in the Year of the Earth Monkey (1788) with appointed scholars Trinh Hoai Duc, Le Quang Dinh, Ngo Tong Chau, Pham Ngoc Uan, Le Ba Tham, and Nguyen Dinh Duc. Twelve students passed the second exam held in the Year of the Metal Pig (1791), including Nguyen Dinh Quat, Nguyen Cong Xuan, Nguyen Huu Thu, Doan Van Hoang, and Truong Minh Thanh. The third exam was held in September of the Year of the Fire Dragon (1796), in which 14 people passed, including Ngu Khac Minh and Pham Dang Hung (Nguyễn, 2013, p. 13). In the above list, nine southern students were the first to pass the third exam in this region.

Nguyen Anh established the Nguyen Dynasty after defeating the Tay Son army. After ascending the throne, he concentrated on enlightening people's knowledge and reorganizing the training and examination system in the South. In the Year of the Water Rooster (1813), King Gia Long organized the first Huong examination at the Gia Dinh school for candidates in Binh Thuan, Bien Hoa, Phien An, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Thanh, and Ha Tien. Following the examination at Gia Dinh, the Nguyen Dynasty began to organize the Huong examination from Quang Binh to the south, with Le Chinh Lo, the Inspector of the Ministry of Rites, being the primary examiner of the Gia Dinh school (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2014, p. 93). Although there was no specific regulation on the recruitment and use of officials specifically for the South, the Nguyen Dynasty had many forms and measures to favor this region to achieve further goals, such as nurturing the requisite human resources to establish a suitable and effective local government. King Gia Long applied a flexible "remedial exam" mechanism, creating favorable conditions for southern students. Typically, candidates for the Huong exam must return to their hometown (place of birth) to take the exam for the first time. However, for students in the South, the court implemented a "favorable" policy, allowing them to take the test in the

² The name of the person who ranked first on the civil service exam during the Nguyen Dynasty.

place where they lived. In 1821, King Minh Mang allowed “Phu Yen scholars to return to the South to take the Huong exam at their place of residence, while students from Binh Dinh in the North must go to the exam venue to take the exam” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2007b, p. 450).

Initially, the Huong exam took place every six years in the South, but the interval between exams was later reduced to three years. Students who wanted to take the Hoi and Dinh exams had to go to Hue. In 1864, King Tu Duc organized the Huong exam in An Giang Province for candidates in the three western areas governed by the royal court and the three eastern provinces under French control; this was the last exam in the southern region (Nguyễn, 2013, p. 10). Thus, there were 19 Huong exams organized in the South, from the first Huong exam in 1813 under the reign of King Gia Long to the last exam in the year of the Wood Rat (1864) under Tu Duc’s reign. The highest number of bachelor’s degrees awarded was 20 in 1847, and the lowest was 8 in 1813. In addition, several southern students chose to go to the central region to take the examinations at the Thua Thien and Binh Dinh schools.

Despite the many advantageous policies, the number of southern students attending school and taking exams was much lower than in other regions. The examination in the South existed for 51 years (1813–1864). During this time, only 253 bachelor’s degrees were granted to majors in Chinese studies across the six southern provinces. This is quite a modest number compared with those of the northern and central regions. Some possible reasons are presented.

- The southern region was new; the local people were used to farming and were more concerned with making a living than studying for exams. In addition, the first Vietnamese residing there were primarily poor, uneducated farmers, exiled prisoners, and soldiers going to war. Thus, they were not likely to pursue learning.
- Education in the South was fully formed in the middle of the 18th century, so there was a lack of foundation and organization, unlike in the thousand-year-old cultural place of Thang Long-Hanoi. Most southern residents at the time “were less infiltrated and controlled by the Chinese Confucian intellectual class than in the North” (Luu & Vo, 2021, p. 3742). Confucianism was introduced later and was only dominant for about a century in the South. Therefore, Confucian education and examinations failed to impact people’s lives. People only marginally integrated the Confucian ideas of loyalty, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faithfulness, bravery, and incorruptibility with the southern people’s lifestyle of righteousness without being greedy for material goods.
- Finally, southern people lived in the Mekong River basin, so they enjoyed the privileges of nature. They did not have to endure the harshness of natural disasters but rather had rich resources, fertile land, and a convenient life. “Gia Dinh of Vietnam is rich in rice and fish; no one ever goes hungry living here”

(Trình, 1999, p. 160). Therefore, people in the South mainly wanted their children to be literate and benevolent, not to become mandarins, which was different from the goals of people from the northern and central regions who advocated studying to pass exams, become mandarins, and get promoted. Therefore, in most cases, the textbooks of teachers in the South were not the *Three Character Classics* or the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*. The required textbook for southern students was *Minh Tam Buu Giam*. This book is not an official Confucian book but a collection of excerpts from Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist books, including moral sayings and human philosophies to nurture student well-being, foster virtue, and guide their daily behavior.

These are the reasons why people in the South were less likely to go to school and take exams compared to those from other regions. However, although the number of southern students attending school was small, they valued decency and were eager to learn. Trinh Hoai Duc writes, “People adore ethics, and studying the *Four Books*, *Five Classics*, and *Gangmu* is the way to discern ...” (Trình, 1999, p. 4). In *The Great Southern Unification*, regarding the customs of Gia Dinh Province, the historians of the National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty comment on the people of the southern region: “They traditionally believe in integrity and despise wealth. Scholars love to read books. They clearly understand righteousness, but the writing is uncoordinated” (Cao & Đoàn, 1984, p. 27). The academic foundation in the South was established late, and the number of people who received a bachelor’s degree in Chinese studies was small. Still, there were as many talented people as in other regions of the country at the time. Most scholars passing exams in the South worked as mandarins for the Nguyen Dynasty; the rest participated in the resistance war against the French, lived in seclusion, opened schools, or treated sick people. During the national events of the late 19th century, southern Confucian intellectuals were the people’s spiritual support in patriotic movements. They upheld the heroic spirit of fighting against foreign invaders, permanently preserving Confucian qualities. They are the pride of Vietnamese and Southern education.

3. POLICY ON THE EFFECTIVE USE OF TEACHERS DURING THE NGUYEN DYNASTY

3.1. Role of teachers in the education system

After stabilizing the country, the kings of the Nguyen Dynasty were intent on developing an education and training system in the South. The court wanted to promote Confucianism, expand the bureaucracy, and train and recruit more talented people by conducting examinations. “On the one hand, the Nguyen Dynasty wanted to attract talent from former dynasties, and on the other hand, it wanted to use people trained by the court itself (especially those from the central and southern regions) to work for the new government” (Trần, 2002, p. 6). To retain control over the new land, the Nguyen Dynasty advocated finding talented people in the South to manage local government and develop education and training mechanisms. Although the number of people passing the exam in the northern and central regions was high, they were not appointed to important posts. “From now on, it is imperative to select diligent Southerners to be appointed, regardless

of whether they pass exams or not” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2007a, p. 117). The reason for this decision is that the South had many unique economic, social, and cultural characteristics, so by recruiting talented local people who had a better understanding of the characteristics of the region, the court expected to receive more support from the people, contributing to improving the administration of the region.

However, Southerners were not interested in studying and taking exams, so the Nguyen Dynasty issued many policies to encourage and create optimum conditions for local people to participate in teaching and learning activities. The Nguyen Dynasty built schools in the southern region and recruited local teachers. The selection of mandarins, including teachers, was expanded and less strict than in other areas. “The selection was not based on hereditary factors but on the candidate’s talent, honesty, responsibility, and love for this new land, regardless of nationality, race, and family lineage” (Trịnh, 1999, p. 246). The recruitment of mandarins and teachers in the South did not necessarily occur through royal examinations or the system of hereditary aristocracy. Instead, the court recruited people of different nationalities, religious figures, and even people with a martial arts tradition to become teachers. The Nguyen Dynasty believed that “talent is a national treasure, so let us not waste it. In addition to exams, the government must recruit excellent mandarins for the court and talented people to govern the countryside. They all serve the king and glorify the national cause” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 1993, p. 311). Through the decrees and discourses of experts, we see that the concept of talent of the early Nguyen Dynasty rulers was quite flexible. They focused on recruiting skilled people, not only Confucian scholars but also talented people in other fields, such as mathematics, military science, and religion.

Most Southerners who passed the Confucian exams at the Gia Dinh School were employed as educational administrators or teachers in public schools in the South. Some examples are District Education Commissioner Le Dang De, who passed his bachelor’s degree in 1843; Nguyen Cong Hoan, who passed the Huong exam in the Year of the Earth Rabbit, Gia Long 1819, became an official and was the chief examiner of the Huong exam in Nam Dinh in 1840; Nguyen Thanh Tu, who passed the bachelor’s degree in Chinese studies on the Huong exam in 1855 and worked as a district education commissioner; Nguyen Van Quyen, who received his bachelor’s degree in 1837 and worked as a mandarin in the position of provincial education commissioner; and Pham Van Trung, who held the position of provincial education commissioner of An Giang Province.

Thus, to manage and train talented individuals in the new region, the Nguyen Dynasty implemented many policies to develop local education. Many schools were built, and the South’s resources were used to perfect the education system. As proof, King Gia Long established a house of studies in the capital and told his servants, “The house of studies is to nourish competent people. I want to follow the tradition of setting up schools and teaching students to serve the country” (Huỳnh, 2018, p. 62).

To develop a learning system to train talented individuals and improve the level of knowledge of the people, the school system under feudalism was divided into two

types: public schools managed and organized by the government and private schools established by the people themselves.

Public schools were opened by the royal court and placed under the management of the Ministry of Rites and Studies of the court. The public school system was organized from the prefectural level to the district and provincial levels to meet the people's needs. In 1803, King Gia Long established a national school named "*Quoc Hoc*" in Phu Xuan. In 1821, King Minh Mang changed the name "*Quoc Hoc*" to "*Quoc Tu Giam*" (National Academy), built a lecture hall and two campuses on the left and right sides, and provided salaries to supervisors to monitor the studies in Hue, the capital at the time. In addition to the national academy, many other public schools were built, such as a house of studies for the king, princes, and royal descendants, and public schools for the children of the mandarins and for local children.

In addition to public schools, many schools opened in villages and hamlets during this period. These were called private schools or *Huong hoc* (village schools). They were established to help students in remote areas and children of low-income families who could not study in the ward, district, or capital. Although called "*Huong hoc*," these schools had classes for beginners and even university students. The private schools can be divided into three types in terms of their level.

(1) Schools in homes were small, with few students. These classes were often begun by the parents of the students, and teachers were invited to teach the children and the children of families from other villages. Many private classes were set up by parents; nearly all large villages and communes had them. Toan (1991) shows that rich or well-off families welcomed teachers to teach their children. In addition, these teachers could also accept other children from the village to join the class (p. 77). Other classes were begun by the teachers themselves.

(2) Private schools were typically very spacious and full of books by virtuous, talented, and famous Confucian scholars, with a larger number of students. In these schools, the teachers were Confucian scholars who had passed the exam. They might be currently working as mandarins, retired, or have resigned as mandarins to teach. These schools were more well-known, with many students passing exams with high scores and participating in the feudal government to help the country and the people. Typical schools are those of Vo Truong Toan, Dang Duc Thuat, Nguyen Dinh Chieu, and Phan Van Tri, Nguyen Thong.

(3) In addition, private schools in the South were organized in religious establishments to provide education for local people. The teachers were priests or monks. This type of private school also attracted many southern students.

Education during the feudal era of Vietnam was indispensable; therefore, opening a school was not bound by complicated conditions as it is today. Any Confucian scholar could open a school or classes; families who love their children to learn could invite

teachers to their homes to teach their children, and these teachers could turn schooling at home into a private school for everyone in the hamlet, village, or district.

3.2. Role of teachers in society during the Nguyen Dynasty

In feudal times, “teacher” was a comprehensive concept. A teacher not only gave lectures and equipped students with knowledge but also worked in schools or as an administrator to manage the examination system in the provinces and districts. People working as provincial, prefectural, or district education commissioners, or as *Teu Tuu* (principal), *Tu nghiep* (vice-principal) of *Quoc Tu Giam*, or *Hoc bo thuong thu* (minister of learning), were teachers. Some teachers never had students. Sometimes they were just mandarins majoring in martial arts or literature. However, when they were appointed to be examiners and mark exams, they were still considered teachers, and all candidates in the region or country were considered their students. Sometimes, when people attended a lecture or literary commentary, met a competent official, listened to a piece of advice or a story, or learned a lesson, they considered those talented people teachers and respected them. A Vietnamese saying best describes this mindset: “A word you learn is from a teacher; half a word you learn is still from that teacher.” People understood the term teacher in a broad sense, as “*tam nhan dong hanh, tat huu nga su*” – if three people go together, there must be a teacher among them (Vũ, 2007, p. 12).

A teacher is not only a knowledgeable person teaching in the classroom but also a standard of personality, ethics, and lifestyle and acts as a shining example for students to follow. Teachers must have profound knowledge, good moral character, a friendly lifestyle, and a close relationship with everyone. They nurture students’ understanding of national cultural traditions and sense of origin and arouse patriotism and national pride with each lecture. They are portrayed as a guide to knowledge and a forger of a child’s education. Teachers influence all aspects of a student’s life. Matters that involve the role of teacher include prescription medicine for sickness, funeral instructions, rituals for the Tet holiday, Feng Shui, age comparison of husband and wife, and lawsuits. To people, a teacher is a living dictionary, an encyclopedia.

To be worthy of people’s trust in the teaching profession, teachers were very much conscious of improving their professional knowledge and maintaining ethics. Society always believed in teachers’ personalities and talent and considered them the standard and role models. Moreover, not only must the teacher maintain standards of character and morality, but his family members must as well. His wife, children, and relatives were also responsible for maintaining the morality and reputation of their husband or father. The teacher’s wife was respected and called an instructress; the people respected his children and grandchildren. Even though the students are older than the teacher’s children, they still respectfully call the teacher’s children older brothers or sisters.

In traditional perception, teachers were usually men and must be of a certain age to have enough experience and knowledge to teach students and improve teaching quality. Forty years or older was considered the age to reach moral and ideological maturity, have profound knowledge, and be respected by the people. Women were not allowed to attend

school, so they did not participate in teaching. There were a few rare exceptions of female teachers, namely, Nguyen Thi Lo, Nguyen Thi Due, and Nguyen Thi Hinh. However, in the South, no female teachers are recorded.

Thus, the teaching profession was respected and promoted by society. To achieve that honor, each teacher must always train to be worthy of this position. To teach, a teacher must have a certain level of expertise, be of a certain age, continually cultivate and improve knowledge, have good moral qualities, lead a simple and healthy lifestyle, and always maintain good relationships with everyone. Teachers must be mindful of their profession, love their work, and be responsible for their students, proving themselves worthy of what society has given to the teaching profession.

4. POLICY ON RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF TEACHERS IN THE SOUTH DURING THE NGUYEN DYNASTY

The Nguyen Dynasty's policy on school teachers was very specifically regulated. Teachers were sometimes appointed by the king, especially those for the princes. Such teachers were chosen very carefully; they were good teachers, experienced, and dedicated to teaching the princes. According to volume 2 of the book *Examples of the Imperial Order of the Great Southern Conference*, the Nguyen Dynasty's regulations in choosing teachers for royal children involved the "comprehensive selection of people with extensive education to teach princes and royals" (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2005, p. 656). Minh Mang stated in his second year:

Since ancient times, every country has always had talented people. To become a competent force, they must rely on learning. ... The king's descendants have gone to the house of studies. Only by being careful in choosing your teachers and friends and always being honest can you stop destructive habits and become a person of righteousness with good qualities to serve the nation. (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2005, p. 73)

In addition to valuing the teachers at *Tap thien duong* (a school for princes and the imperial family), the Nguyen Dynasty paid great attention to the teachers at *Quoc Tu Giam*. In 1803, after establishing *Quoc hoc* (National School) in the capital, Hue, King Gia Long established *Chanh Doc hoc* (principal) and two *Pho Doc hoc* (vice-principals) responsible for assisting the principal in managing the school. In 1804, King Gia Long carried out reforms of the mandarin regime. Based on the mandarin ranking system in court, the king ranked the position of principal of the National Academy as fourth (*Chanh tu pham*) and the position of vice-principal of the National Academy as one level lower (*Tong tu pham*) than that of principal. At that time, the monthly salary of the principal was six *quan*. (*Quan* is an ancient currency unit of Vietnam used until the early 20th century. One *quan* equals 600 coins, or six *phuong* of rice. One *phuong* of rice equals 30 bowls of rice.) For the vice-principal, the salary was five *quan* and five *phuong* of rice.

After Minh Mang ascended the throne in 1820, the National Academy was changed to *Quoc Tu Giam*. The king restored the positions at the school to be similar to those of the Le Dynasty, including (1) *Te Tuu* (principal), ranked *Chanh tu pham*, who

was in charge of monitoring and training talented people for education development; and (2) *Tu nghiep* (vice-principal), ranked *Tong tu pham*, who was responsible for managing the general activities of the school and helping the principal. At the same time, the state also regulated the payroll for the academic officials and civil servants working at *Quoc Tu Giam*. Two scholars (*Hoc chinh*), ranked as *Tong Luc pham*, specialized in teaching students for different exams. Two scholars (*Giam thua*), ranked *Chanh That pham*, brought their members to do all matters related to the National Academy. Two scholars (*Dien ba*), ranked *Tong Bat pham*, and two scholars called *Dien Tinh*, ranked *Tong Cuu pham*, worked as administrative clerks, and ten scholars called *Thu lai hap luu* were not yet on the official payroll.

Along with developing the education system in the capital, the Nguyen Dynasty also paid great attention to the appointment of teachers. The Nguyen Dynasty sent excellent, reputable teachers to the South to promote educational activities. King Gia Long re-arranged the system of local teachers, including the provincial, prefectural, and district education commissioners. In the South, the king appointed one principal and one vice-principal to boost education at Gia Dinh. In 1822, King Minh Mang ordered schools built in Phu Yen, Binh Thuan, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, Ha Tien, and Ninh Binh. Each had a provincial education commissioner responsible for general supervision of children's learning, while the prefecture and district education commissioners were in charge of teaching. Gradually, the position of provincial education commissioner became available in most towns across the country.

In 1823, King Minh Mang issued an edict stating

... previously in Gia Dinh, there were positions of principal and vice-principal to take care of educational matters. Currently, the position of provincial education commissioner has been established in all palaces and towns. Nevertheless, the position of provincial education commissioner in Phien An has not been established, so the provincial education commissioner position in Gia Dinh must be changed to provincial education commissioner of Phien An, and the position of provincial education commissioner of Gia Dinh shall be abolished. (Huỳnh, 2018, p. 211)

The Nguyen Dynasty was very interested in the education system of the whole country, especially the South. The king proclaimed that if any place lacked a prefecture education commissioner or a district education commissioner, the people should report it to the ministry. For areas that have too many district education commissioners and too few students, commissioners will be transferred elsewhere, with either the local head mandarin taking on part-time duties or teachers in neighboring localities being assigned part-time responsibilities. Public schools may or may not be opened, depending on the number of students attending school. The Nguyen Dynasty focused on the development of the education system in the South.

Regarding the standards of teachers in the South and the whole country, it was stipulated that people holding the position of provincial education commissioner must be

those who have studied well and are older, with titles of senior doctor, junior doctor, or senior bachelor. Prefecture and district education commissioners must also be educated and meet the age requirement. To be a *Huong cong* or *Sinh do*, one must be 40 years old or older. To be an *An si*, one must be 50 years of age or older and have a senior bachelor or bachelor title. The education commissioners could also be people who have taken the Nguyen Dynasty's Hoi exam and passed it one, two, or three times. They were gathered, arranged according to level, and ready to be appointed to these positions according to the requirements set by the localities.

Teacher quality was regularly inspected and monitored to improve the level and quality of education. The Nguyen Dynasty had clear regulations on recruiting people to prominent academic positions for teaching tasks. In 1823, Minh Mang issued enrollment regulations.

For the positions of provincial and prefectural education commissioner, if vacant, the governor must report to the ministry, and the royal court shall appoint a council to select competent people who currently hold the position of mandarin. A list clearly stating the full names and hometowns of those to be promoted to work as provincial or prefectural education commissioners is to be prepared and presented to the king for appointment. Suppose there is a shortage of district education commissioners, either *Huong cong* or *An si*. In that case, they will be selected by officials of the fourth rank or higher in the capital, along with local officials at the palace or town level. A list is to be made and submitted to the court to wait for the king's appointment order. (Huỳnh, 2018, p. 215)

After 1824, King Minh Mang regularly tested educational officers to screen, transfer, or dismiss teachers who were not up to the job. If a teacher taught poorly, he would be replaced by someone else. Conversely, those who prepared well would not necessarily be transferred to another position. The evaluation of teacher performance was based on the exam results of local candidates who participated in the Huong, Hoi, and Dinh national exams. Thus, there were regulations on rewards and punishments for teachers in charge of local education. In 1880, King Tu Duc decided the following:

If a student has uncoordinated writing or an empty book or does not do enough exercises, then for every such book, the prefectural or district education commissioner in that locality must be demoted two levels. If there are two or more cases, the teachers must be convicted and dismissed. (Bùi, 2004, p. 363)

However, in the South, the Nguyen Dynasty implicitly applied different policies to offer rewards or decrease penalties to develop local education because

the South had few candidates taking the exam (10 people attending the exam in the district, under 20 people attending the exam in the prefecture, or under 30 people taking the exam in the province). If a student passed the exam for a senior bachelor or junior bachelor degree, the teacher in that place, if he had teaching experience of one year or more, would receive a double bonus compared to the

average rate. If no one passed, but the number of students retaking the exam was twice that of the previous exam, the penalty would be halved. (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 1966, p. 313)

Those who had been working for a long time and had high achievements would be summoned to the capital and allowed to work at the Six Boards to honor the efforts of the officials. Regarding rank, the provincial education commissioner ranked fifth and the teaching assistants ranked eighth. In 1805, the king stipulated the salary and benefits regime for academic officials: the provincial education commissioner's salary was equal to the wages of the district governor, and the teaching assistant's salary was equivalent to the prefecture governor's salary. The yearly salary of the provincial education commissioner was 800 dong. (The dong is an ancient currency unit of Vietnam.) The prefecture education commissioner's salary was 200 dong, and the district education commissioner's salary was 80 dong. Although the state selected the position of *Tong giao*, it was not on the payroll of the royal court, so they only received a small amount of money: one *quan* and one *phuong* of rice each month. In addition, they received a portion of the harvest from the local fields as payment.

In general, the king's discourse and decrees clearly show that the court intended to build and train a corps of teachers. However, the management and appointment of education officials had certain limitations. For example, localities with underdeveloped educational resources did not have teachers and received little attention from the state, with the result that learning was not promoted everywhere. Choosing well-educated and highly talented people to be teachers with the age requirement of 40 years or older was another limitation because it failed to take full advantage of talented young individuals.

With educational management policies and the use of talented people, the Nguyen Dynasty gathered a group of gifted teachers to serve the state's rule in the southern region effectively. They may have been mandarins who established the Nguyen Dynasty, Confucianists who worked for the Le and Tay Son dynasties, Chinese, Khmer, Cham, or others. King Minh Mang explained: "Gia Dinh has many talented people, but recently, they have been too lazy to study, so the number of competent scholars is limited. But I think that in this locality, the culture has just been cultivated and has not yet penetrated deeply. Training and examination development must be prioritized" (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2007b, p. 310).

Because of the above viewpoints, the Nguyen Dynasty was not too strict in organizing private schools. The feudal government's management was somewhat looser for teachers who taught at local private schools. The court did not have specific regulations on opening private schools or require qualifications to become teachers, so anyone literate could open a school at home and become a teacher. In addition, families and local authorities in communes and villages also had the right to organize classes and invite teachers to teach. Teachers who were temple monks or Taoist priests were also active in teaching activities. Some general taboos were prescribed in schools that local teachers were forced to follow. For example, singers, dancers, women, rebels, and puppet officials with bad reputations could not take the exam. Otherwise, local teachers had the

right to be proactive in all teaching and learning activities. In private schools, teachers followed the curriculum based on the books prescribed by the royal court and Confucian scriptures, historical scriptures, literature, etc. However, each teacher had a method and a roadmap tailored to each student.

Local teachers were Confucian scholars with a certain level of education, such as the junior bachelors and those who passed the Huong exam but did not wish to pursue their studies. Or, after studying history and taking the Huong exam, they could only attend two to three semesters and could not obtain a bachelor's degree. Therefore, they opened a school to earn a living and continued studying for the exams. In addition to the above subjects, local teachers may have been people who passed the exam to become mandarins but were bored with political affairs, so they resigned and chose teaching as a career. These teachers could also be officials who retired or were dismissed. They considered teaching to be a spiritual obligation to impart knowledge to younger generations. Although the state did not have specific regulations on standards for local teachers, the requirements for teachers were stringent and disciplined in terms of ethics and behavior. They must be academically talented and exemplary moral people who are respected and admired by students and the public.

5. CONCLUSION

The Nguyen Dynasty built a strong government apparatus to govern the vast southern region. Therefore, in the first years of the Nguyen Dynasty, kings Nguyen Anh and Minh Mang placed great importance on training talented people and introduced many policies to develop local education. The education system included both public and private/home schools. Public schools were opened by the royal court and placed under the management of the Ministry of Rites and Studies. In the South, the state organized schools to train scholars, and the school system was opened to provinces, prefectures, and districts. The Nguyen Dynasty was committed to building schools and making good use of resources in the South to perfect the education system. In addition to private schools, schooling at home was available in villages and hamlets. Opening a school was not bound by complicated conditions. Confucian scholars or families who wanted their children educated could organize classes and invite teachers.

On the other hand, the Nguyen Dynasty's behavioral policy toward teachers in the South is evidenced by the government's interest in building and developing education. The process of selecting and managing teachers in the South differed from that of the northern and central regions. The Nguyen Dynasty made use of all suitable candidates for teaching and learning based on their talent, honesty, responsibility, and love for the new land, regardless of family origin. Southern teachers were regulated with rewards and punishments and benefited from many favorable policies. Therefore, under the Nguyen Dynasty, a corps of teachers was established. They came from different backgrounds, lived in different localities, and taught in different types of schools. Most were famous people, and some were ordinary, unknown teachers in remote areas. Still, they were teachers whose mission was to initiate local children's education, guide them with love, and teach them with a high sense of responsibility. Local teachers played a significant

role in the education system and were greatly respected. Because of the reputation and prestige of the local teachers, the provincial, prefectural, and district education commissioners sometimes came to ask for advice, which is the reason why the relationships of teachers between schools were close and cordial (Nguyễn, 2005, p. 65).

Salary and bonus policies differed between public and private schools. Teachers at the royal court received salaries from the state, and they had to carry out their responsibilities and obligations for developing education and examinations in the feudal court. Provincial, prefecture, and district education commissioners received salaries from the royal court. For the teachers at private and home schools, villagers took care of their salaries. Public and private school curricula, teaching methods, and classroom organization were identical. On exam day, candidates took the same exam, whether it was at a public or private school.

In general, teachers in public and private schools in the South did an outstanding job of managing education locally, contributing to the education and upbringing of southern students in terms of knowledge, etiquette, and manners. The teachers in the South made significant contributions to the country's education system. They genuinely were a lever to promote the spirit of learning and the tradition of studiousness among the people of the South and to foster the state of knowledge during the developmental stages of the nation's education system. This significantly contributed to preserving the national cultural identity and provided valuable lessons and experiences for Vietnamese education.

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