

## THE ROLE OF CONFUCIANISM IN EDUCATION OF THE NGUYEN DYNASTY IN VIETNAM IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### *O PAPEL DO CONFUCIANISMO NA EDUCAÇÃO DA DINASTIA NGUYEN NO VIETNÃ NA PRIMEIRA METADE DO SÉCULO XIX*

### *EL PAPEL DEL CONFUCIANISMO EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE LA DINASTÍA NGUYEN EN VIETNAM EN LA PRIMERA MITAD DEL SIGLO XIX*

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**ABSTRACT:** Education in the Nguyen dynasty is an expression of the general cultural function of Confucian doctrine. The *Three Character Classic* says: "Jade that has not been polished cannot be used. Person that has not studied cannot know righteousness". Confucius was the first private educator in ancient China to open a school with the spirit of "teaching tirelessly" in order to train knowledgeable and pioneering people to establish social order and build the ideal social model. As a result, the education system has been increasingly improved, and the rather strict academic examinations have successfully selected many talents worthy of being "the vitality of the nation". This article focuses on discussing the role of Confucianism in moral education and academic education which has both theoretical and practical significance in today's context, and thus requires to be shed light on in the new historical conditions contribute to the cause of education in Vietnam.

**KEYWORDS:** Confucianism. Moral education. Academic education. Nguyen dynasty. Society.

**RESUMO:** A educação na dinastia Nguyen é uma expressão da função cultural geral da doutrina confucionista. O clássico dos três caracteres diz: "Jade que não foi polida não pode ser usada. A pessoa que não estudou não pode conhecer a justiça". Confúcio foi o primeiro educador particular na China antiga a abrir uma escola com o espírito de "ensinar incansavelmente", a fim de formar pessoas instruídas e pioneiras para estabelecer a ordem social e construir o modelo social ideal. Como resultado, o sistema educacional tem melhorado cada vez mais e os exames acadêmicos bastante rígidos têm selecionado com sucesso muitos talentos dignos de serem "a vitalidade da nação". Este artigo se concentra na discussão do papel do confucionismo na educação moral e na educação acadêmica, que tem significado teórico e prático no contexto atual e, portanto, precisa ser esclarecido nas novas condições históricas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Confucionismo. Educação moral. Educação acadêmica. Dinastia Nguyen. Sociedade.

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**RESUMEN:** *La educación en la dinastía Nguyen es una expresión de la función cultural general de la doctrina confuciana. El clásico de tres caracteres dice: "El jade que no ha sido pulido no se puede usar. La persona que no ha estudiado no puede conocer la rectitud". Confucio fue el primer educador privado en la antigua China en abrir una escuela con el espíritu de "enseñar incansablemente" a fin de capacitar a personas conocedoras y pioneras para establecer el orden social y construir el modelo social ideal. Como resultado, el sistema educativo se ha mejorado cada vez más y los exámenes académicos bastante estrictos han seleccionado con éxito muchos talentos dignos de ser "la vitalidad de la nación". Este artículo se centra en discutir el papel del confucianismo en la educación moral y la educación académica, que tiene un significado tanto teórico como práctico en el contexto actual y, por lo tanto, requiere ser esclarecido en las nuevas condiciones históricas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Confucianismo. Educación moral. Educación académica. Dinastía Nguyen. Sociedad.*

## Introduction

The role of Confucianism in moral education for the people was increasingly placed much value and paid attention by Nguyen kings. They exploited, promoted and thoroughly took advantage of *Filial piety* in ruling over people. They encouraged their court officials to discover and refer people who are filial to elders and caring to juniors to the king for rewards. Tu Duc came up with a definition of loyalty and filial piety for his officials to use as the standard as follows: Children are obliged to venerate their parents when they pass away; grandchildren have the duty of taking care of their grandparents, ensuring that they have food to eat and place to sleep, that their health is looked after, and that they are attended to when they are alive and buried when they are dead.

The Nguyen dynasty relied on Confucianism to indoctrinate and strengthen the close bond between members of the same family or clan. Confucianism calls for love and care for each other and encourages people to preserve the honor and promote the traditions of their family. The daily codes of conduct and the teachings of forefathers are all passed down to their descendants, further helping to deepen family relationships. Therefore, moral education and academic education and examination were focused on and received special attention by the Nguyen dynasty in building the society and reassuring the people.

As a socio-philosophical doctrine, in terms of playing its social role in history, Confucianism has positive aspects that will help us find appropriate measures to promote its values and overcome its limitations in order to build "an advanced culture imbued with national identity" in the current context of integration and development in our country today.

## Methodology

The methods mainly used in this article are: historical and logical method; analysis and synthesis; systematic approach, comparison, combination of theory, practice etc. in order to clarify the social role of Confucianism in moral education and academic education and examination of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The methods of research are used to systematize and generalize perspectives and principles that direct the use of methods in cognitive and practical activities in order to achieve optimal results. They also have theoretical meaning in the system of methods.

## Literature review

Tran Van Giau (1988) in *Philosophy and Thought* analyzed and clarified the introduction of Confucianism to Vietnam in different paths stretching through different Vietnamese feudal dynasties, as well as how the most common and basic contents of Confucianism were formed and developed in its historical process. According to the author, Confucianism in each period, depending on the ruling policy of each feudal dynasty, took different and even contradictory directions. However, all share the concepts of bonds and virtues in common. Finally, the author discussed Vietnamese Confucianism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including four basic issues: the view on Heaven's Way, the view on history, morality and rule of virtue, in which morality is the main idea of Confucianism. We believe that *three fundamental bonds* are a simplification by Dong Zhongshu (179 – 104 BC) of interpersonal relationships proposed by Confucius and Mencius, while *five constant virtues* (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and truthfulness) are also selected from moral categories proposed by Confucianism as the so-called five immovable moral norms. So, do those norms cover all other Confucian moral categories? This question has not been clearly answered.

Nguyen Tien Cuong (1991) *The development of academic education and examination in feudal Vietnam*. The author said that, stemming from the confusing social situation and from the concept of human nature, the founders of Confucianism built a relatively complete and systematic doctrine of purpose, subject, content and method of education. All of this aimed at training people with good moral character based on the ideal image painted by Confucianism to participate in politics. The author also talked about the rules of academic examinations in Vietnam at that time.

Phan Huy Le (2012) *A partial approach to Vietnamese history and culture*. The book talked about the land policies of Dai Viet in the Primal Le dynasty, including land given as

gifts to court officials and noblemen, state-owned land in villages and land owned by farmers, from which the private land ownership policy was developed. The author also discussed the academic education and examination in this period. Due to the development needs of the bureaucracy, the Le dynasty developed and expanded academic education and examination to train the Confucian intelligentsias to work as officials of the centralized monarchy. Since the book is a monograph in history, the role of Confucianism in ideology, education and examination is yet to be clear.

According to Nguyen Van Tinh (1997), *Confucian education* talked about academic education and examination and the court officials of the Nguyen dynasty. In his opinion, the academic education and examination of the Nguyen dynasty had become outdated, and thus produced less talented officials. However, to actively foster and use talents in practical activities, the Nguyen dynasty also had many positive policies and measures in training and selecting talented people through exams, official recruitments and nominations. Finally, the author said that Confucian education and examination helped to reassure that everyone can learn, and their purpose of socializing education contributed to the stability and security of social life.

Memorandum of Scientific Conference (2000) “*Vietnamese culture in the Nguyen dynasty*”. In this memorandum, there are some reports about law in the Nguyen dynasty, which agree that the law at that time was heavily influenced by that of the Qing dynasty, thus had many harsh points as well as severe, extreme and primitive punishments for offenders to promote the absolute power of the royal court.

To Nguyen Tai Thu (1997), *Confucianism and Confucianism in Vietnam* focused on analyzing the main contents of Confucianism and its role in the history of Vietnamese ideology, especially in the time of the Later Le dynasty and the Nguyen dynasty when it played a dominant role.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***An overview of the culture and social ideology in the Nguyen dynasty***

#### *About culture*

In the Nguyen dynasty, Confucian education and examination were restored; Confucian scholars grew larger in number and became the main force in the written literature of this period. Literary works written in Chinese and Nom script continued to be developed.

After ascending to the throne, Gia Long intended to reorganize academic education

and examination; but it was not until 1807 that regulations for provincial imperial exams were promulgated. In 1822, the first metropolitan exam was held, and in 1829, Minh Mang ordered to add the Third-class doctorate to the academic degree system. From 1803, the Imperial College was relocated to Hue, and the content of learning materials had no changes. Academic education and examination in the Nguyen dynasty declined in many ways compared to previous dynasties. However, a remarkable new point is that in 1836, Minh Mang established "*Tu dich quan*" - a school where foreign languages (French, Siamese etc.) are taught (QUYNH, 1988).

#### *About ideology*

Nearly 400 years before the reign of Gia Long, Confucianism had occupied the most important position in the political life of the Primal Le dynasty. Thanks to the Confucian monopolistic policy, under the reign of Le Thanh Tong, the country was prosperous, and the feudal court was able to build a strong state. Therefore, returning to the Eastern monarchical state model, Gia Long followed the path of establishing the royal court and clearly defined his way of governing the country by combining Confucian teachings of rule of virtue and rule of law.

The dominance of Confucianism in the Nguyen dynasty, in essence, is the return of the dominant position in the country governance strategy to Confucianism. How Confucianism came to be dominant is similar to that in the Primal Le dynasty, i.e., not allowing Buddhism and Taoism to involve themselves in politics. Confucian dominance highly values respecting the ruler's power, building and implementing the legal system on the basis of making Confucian moral standards into law. Morality-related offenses are clearly stated in *Hoang trieu luat le*, or *Gia Long Code*.

The Nguyen dynasty also compiled large and valuable history books, such as *Chronology of Vietnamese History (Kham dinh Viet su thong giam cuong muc)*, *Veritable Records of the Great South - Prequel Records and Principal Records (Dai Nam thuc luc - Tien bien va Chinh bien)*, *Collected Statutes and Regulations of the Great South (Kham dinh Dai Nam hoi dien su le)*, *Summary of The Royal Court's Regulations (Quoc trieu dieu le luoc bien)*, etc. Many major geographic books about the history of Vietnamese geography were also compiled, such as *Geography of the united Viet Kingdom (Hoang viet thong nhat du dia chi)*, *Phuong Dinh Geography Book (Phuong Dinh du dia chi)*, *Geography of the united Dai Nam (Dai Nam nhat thong chi)*, etc. Works on local geography also became popular, such as *Geography of Nghe An (Nghe An ky)*, *Geography and Land of the North (Kinh Bac phong tho*

ky), *Geography of Son Tay (Son Tay chi)*, *Geography of Ninh Binh (Ninh Binh chi)*, etc. In general, from the way of compiling history books to the presentation of main contents in the books mentioned above, all came from the orthodox point of view of Confucianism; therefore, in order to protect the interests of the reigning regime, many historical events were misrepresented.

In terms of spirituality, the Nguyen dynasty paid attention to organizing ceremonies to worship Heaven, Earth and Gods. As Gia Long affirmed that he ascended to the throne due to the Mandate of Heaven, from his time onwards, ceremonies of sacrifice to Heaven took place regularly. For example, in the year of the Cat (1807), on the day of the Cat, “a ceremony for sacrifices to Heaven and Earth took place at the Nam Giao Esplanade... On the day of the ceremony, the king, wearing a hat embroidered with nine dragons, a yellow robe, a jade belt and a golden overcoat, ascended to the esplanade to start the ceremony. Court officials who attended the sacrifice were all dressed in court uniforms” (NGUYEN, 1963). In the year of the Dragon (1808), on the day of the Dog, “the construction of Temple of Literature was finished to worship Confucius. Local temples of literature were also order to place the statue of Confucius in the temple for worshipping” (NGUYEN, 1963). Ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and gods are proof that the "Mandate of Heaven" doctrine had dominated the worldview of the head of the dynasty.

By the time of Minh Mang, these ceremonies were held regularly, especially when there were natural disasters and epidemics. It is written in Veritable Records of the Great South - Principal Records that: In the year of the Dog (1826), the king was worried about the prosperity of his people. One day, he himself held a ceremony in front of Trung Hoa Palace and prayed for rain. The next day, it really rained. From the palace, the king bowed his head to thank Heaven, and ordered his officials to prepare offerings for shrines to show his gratitude (NGUYEN, 1964). Ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and gods in the Nguyen dynasty are regularly seen, which reflects the appreciation of the early Nguyen kings for Confucian doctrine of "Mandate of Heaven". Not only that, but the kings also followed the rules of the Qing dynasty in conducting the ceremonies.

In *Regulations on Village and Commune's Customs (Dieu le huong dang)*, the Nguyen dynasty recommended that people of the Outer Land should see the king (the monarch) as the living Buddha, and their parents as the Buddhas who gave birth to them. This was not a call for religion conversion, but rather a warning to the people about superstition, something that Confucius did not speak of (strange things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings).

These *Regulations* said:



From now on, people should only ask for medicine if they are sick, be careful in their travel and most importantly should not believe and listen to evil men to hold nonsensical ceremonies. Priests and mediums are also not allowed practice to prevent disaster. Those who keep these habits will be severely punished (NGUYEN, 1963).

Thus, the dominance of Confucianism is associated with the anti-Buddhism and Taoism policies. *Regulations on Village and Commune's Customs* consider forms of praying, going into trance, spells and magic etc. of these religions as superstitions. Meanwhile, praying and organizing ceremonies of sacrifice to heaven are considered legitimate.

### ***The role of Confucianism in moral education***

According to Confucius, morality has lasting power only when it is reinforced by codes and rules of conduct in people's daily lives. The *Four Books* and *Five Classics* are systematic summaries of those rules. How to dress, walk, talk and greet were all meticulously regulated. The founders of Confucianism were particularly concerned with interpersonal relationships, i.e., *five relationships*.

In *Human Relationships*, Confucius demanded that the relationship between a ruler and his ministers must be based on *benevolence* and *loyalty*. That means a ruler must be benevolent, have compassion for people and know how to tell good people from bad ones to love and hate them in a legitimate way. Benevolence also means *respect and empathy*, i.e., putting oneself in other's shoes to know what should be done to help them, and never do unto others what one doesn't want done unto him. Confucius also considers *filial piety* and *brotherly love* as the root of benevolence, as these two categories root from family, where a person is born and gradually matures into a social person, and then his responsibility is not only being filial to his parents, respecting his older brothers and caring for his younger brothers, but also being loyal and faithful to his ruler. Therefore, similar to the Later Le dynasty, filial piety and brotherly love were also considered the moral nucleuses of humanity thought. Confucianism, thanks to its humanistic ideological argument from these two categories, transforms its "useful" aspects into the way of governing the country. The humanizing function of Confucianism has thus made it profoundly humanistic ideological content recognized by mankind.

Right from the early days of the dynasty, Gia Long highly emphasized Confucianism, using it to modify customs and unify culture across the country. Loyalty, filial piety and propriety are also the most basic criteria that Gia Long relied on to use people.

According to Minh Mang, human beings are born good natured, so it is the duty of man to preserve that seed of goodness through learning to be human. And to become human, according to Minh Mang, education is very needed. It is a process that requires a lot of efforts and persistence of man. Therefore, the purpose of living as Minh Mang believed is to learn to be human, to follow the good path given by Heaven and avoid bad deeds to have a good life.

In Minh Mang's thought, people who do good will enjoy happiness; goodness is the root of blessing:

One good thing done today and another tomorrow will enrich your virtue. Then, naturally, you will be safe from unfortunate incidents and disasters and will receive many blessings. If your good deeds are yet to repay, worry not, as your descendants will also be blessed and prosperous (NGUYEN, 1962).

Confucianism and Mencius' doctrine both uphold the idea of humanity. All codes of conduct are in place to distinguish between human and animals. Even ceremonies of sacrifices are also strictly regulated and cannot be arbitrarily changed. In "Discussion of Morality" (Dao bien), Tu Duc said:

[...] Heaven is the supreme being, thus, one cannot perform a ceremony of sacrifice to Heaven if he is not the son of Heaven. Ordinary people also cry out and pray to Heaven when they suffer, that is also respecting Heaven, but they do not dare to go beyond to conduct a ceremony of sacrifice to Heaven... There are 10 types of ceremonies to show the way of gods, the relationship between a ruler and his ministers, between a father and his son, as well as the distinction between the highborn and the lowborn, and between husband and wife, to see the fairness, the place of people and the order of superior and subordinate positions. Otherwise, man would be of no value and closer to animals (INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY, 1972).

This is also the key to determine the humanistic function of Confucianism, because, after all, the issue is how human distinguishes himself from animals, as stated by Mencius when it comes to interpersonal relationships.

In educating people, the Nguyen dynasty always upheld the concept of *Mandate of Heaven*. Nguyen kings all affirmed the legitimacy of the dynasty as following the Mandate of Heaven. Therefore, more than ever, the ruling class of the Nguyen dynasty always educated people to let them believe in that concept "without doubt". The idea of Heaven and Mandate of Heaven was originally introduced by Confucius and Mencius and later justified by Dong Zhongshu with theoretical grounds. Accordingly, the king is the son of Heaven who receives the divine command to educate people. This was emphasized by Minh Mang and other contemporary thinkers. The great poet Nguyen Du, a scholar from Outer Land who was



present in the early days of establishing the Nguyen dynasty proposed the view of "conflict between talent and destiny" and even developed it to the so-called "law of life": Heavens's mandate is difficult to change, thus those who raise the people must do something to calm and comfort them when they suffer. Therefore, thinkers, especially kings with high level of Confucian education knew how to take advantage of all possibilities to appease the people by asking their subordinates to take compassion for the people as their top responsibility. Minh Mang even considered the ignorance of court officials in the face of people's misery as a crime that needs to be severely punished: "... any official who can only sit and watch people suffer from hunger and cold is betraying my love for the people. He would not only be guilty of being unworthy of his position, but also deserves the offense of abandoning people" (NGUYEN, 2010).

With that in mind, through the reverence for Heaven, man realizes his good nature and thus pays attention to preserve it. The purpose of this is to educate people to have good moral character. It is also how morality is formed in each person and expanded to the whole society, creating order and discipline.

On the other hand, when it comes to truthfulness, Minh Mang believed that a king as well as his subjects must be faithful, that their words and actions must be consistent:

Each word and each action of a king will be examined by Heaven and Earth. Now, the deification edict has been issued for 5 or 6 months without being followed. You can't keep your words to the people, how can you keep your words to gods and spirits? This should be discussed immediately with other high-ranking officials (NGUYEN, 2007).

Minh Mang also set specific standards for being human, laying the moral foundation for each person in the Nguyen dynasty. Specifically, in 1834, he promulgated 10 commandments:

*Upholding ethics*: righteousness between ruler and minister, appreciation between father and son, distinction between husband and wife, hierarchy between brothers, trust between friends. In particular, court officials must observe public law and wholeheartedly do their works; scholars must study hard; soldiers must practice hard; civil servants must abide by law and are not to gain interest from citizens; children must respect and be filial to their parents; husband and wife must be in harmony; brothers must respect and care for one another; and friends must trust each other. *Keeping righteous heart*: keep one's benevolence, propriety and wisdom; the rich should not be arrogant, the poor should not have ill intentions; stay away from bad habits; avoid bad deeds and dishonest words. *Taking care of one's career*: diligently improve one's profession. *Preferring to save*: avoid luxury and waste, eat and drink in moderation. *Staying faithful*: care about relatives, get along with neighbors, respect the elders and cherish the juniors, the rich do not despise

or take advantage of the poor; no lie, no evil, no contention. *Teaching children the true way of learning*: Learning is to learn to be human. To be human is to be filial, respectful, benevolent and righteous. *No fornication*. *Carefully observing state law*: avoid breaching the law. *Being kindhearted*: often do good deeds (filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, truthfulness, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom) (NGUYEN, 2007).

Minh Mang also referred to the so-called virtuous world when it comes to the role of cultivating and practicing along the path of goodness. According to him,

a person must be filial, respectful and hardworking. He must uphold propriety, righteousness and decency in his heart. Over time, his soul will become pure and he will get closer to the virtuous world. He can become a person of both talent and virtue and bring honor to his family; or at least be an honest person who is able to continue the good traditions (NGUYEN, 2007).

Thus, the virtuous world from the perspective of Minh Mang is not something divine and transcendental, but the future created by people who cultivate their morality. That world can be considered a moral human life.

When discussing the humanistic thought of Cao Ba Quat (1809-1855), researcher Nguyen Minh Tuong wrote:

The poor, hard-working farmers in Cao Ba Quat's poetry are pitiful, because that is what he himself has experienced” (TUONG, 2010). Therefore, the humanistic thought of Cao Ba Quat is often about people who are suffering when "rice and firewood are as valuable as pearl and cinnamon"; many of them have to seek livelihood in other regions, and thus, in his opinion, need to be sympathized with. Du Fu (712-770), the Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty once wrote: "If I could get a mansion with thousands of rooms/A great shelter for all the world's scholars, together in joy” (TUONG, 2010). Similarly, in the poem *Meeting a hungry man on the road (Dao phung nga phu)*, Cao Ba Quat wrote about a young man who, despite being literate and having an occupation, lost his place in the capital and was forced to return to his hometown; however, "the way back as well as the path of life have become blurred": "Adrift on the way home/Seeing nothing but the gloomy clouds” (TUONG, 2010).

It can be said, under the reign of the Nguyen dynasty, Confucianism is considered the foundation of moral philosophy. In terms of moral construction, it retains traditional connections and accumulates a lot of historical experience. Educating people to understand and follow is an important part of traditional culture, which has relative independence and inherits from history. The ultimate purpose of Confucian morality is to serve the rule over the country and the peace of the world.

### ***The role of Confucianism in academic education and examination***

To restore the academic education and examination which had been stagnant due to previous wars, the Nguyen dynasty quickly reinforced the system of schools at different levels. Similar to the previous centuries, the school model of this time consisted of public schools managed by the state and private schools. After Gia Long moved the capital to Phu Xuan, in 1803, the Imperial College was relocated to the new capital after more than 7 centuries of being in Thang Long Citadel. That year, King Gia Long appointed a Chief Supervisor and a Deputy Chief Supervisor to supervise the study at the Imperial College. In 1821, King Minh Mang removed these two positions and appointed one Chief of first class, 1<sup>st</sup> rank; and two Deans of Studies of second class, 4<sup>th</sup> rank, to monitor the College. From the reign of Minh Mang (1820) onwards, two high-ranking officials were also appointed to take turns as administrator of the College.

Along with the improvement of training quality at the Imperial College, the Nguyen dynasty also actively expanded the network of schools at different levels from North to South, as well as regulated contents of education: In general, the curriculum is mainly about the contents of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*. In terms of academic examination, the Nguyen inherited the organization and content of examination from the previous dynasties. Regarding *Assessment and Provincial Imperial Exam*, those who want to participate in the provincial exam must have their family background and moral character certified by heads of communes, as well as pass the assessment. The assessment is nearly as strict and difficult as an exam, to discard those who are not qualified enough for the provincial exam.

Thus, the early kings of the Nguyen dynasty gradually got Confucian education into shape. The royal court paid attention to, revised and improved the organization of examination venues, examination structure, grading method and policies for both teachers and learners. Therefore, Confucian education and examination contributed significantly to the consolidation of Confucian ideology in social life.

At the dawn of the dynasty, King Gia Long was not trusted by scholars, so his court officials were mostly those who hadn't participated in any academic examinations. On the other hand, scholars of the Outer Land did not want to submit to the Nguyen dynasty, which was once seen in the early days of Quang Trung's reign, because the orthodoxy of Confucianism had been deeply rooted in their thought. That fact forced Gia Long to continue to promote the role of Confucianism in the mental social life and gradually alleviated the inferiority complex among scholars of the previous dynasty. Gia Long's thought on education

thus had positive aspects and is considered

the most systematic and consistent towards revering Confucianism and taking it as a pillar to unite the culture and ideology of the nation. Gia Long implemented synchronous and consistent policies of culture, religion and education. Thanks to that, culture and education in the Nguyen dynasty gradually entered the orbit of Confucianism and flourished, creating solid foundations for strong development in the later stages (LAN, 2007).

By the time of Minh Mang, from the first year of his reign, the words "true talent" were repeated many times. According to him,

Talented people are valuable assets of the State. Therefore, the royal court needs to have many good scholars, the countryside must not omit good men who can support me in ruling the country and educating people. All officials are responsible for nominating educated, kindhearted and upright people to Ministry of Personnel, and this agency will then propose to me to summon them. Depending on their talents, they will be appointed to suitable positions. Both civil and military officials need to have good moral character, so those who are virtuous should be nominated to meet my requirements for talented people (NGUYEN, 2007).

Thus, Minh Mang used all measures to attract talented people; he even did not care about whether they passed any exams, as long as they have both knowledge and virtues. It can be said that this is a positive view in choosing Confucian talents for the ideological foundation in ruling the country.

However, Minh Mang also paid a lot of attention to academic examinations to select talented and virtuous scholars. He said:

Since I ascended to the throne, I have only been worried about having talented people to serve me. I have searched extensively for them across the country to appoint them to suitable positions. However, there are still many brilliant students who still have not been discovered, so if exceptions are not allowed, how can I have enough good men to serve the country? From now on, if you know someone who is fluent in classics, knows to proficiently write and do math, or excels in martial arts, even if he has not been through any examinations, you can still nominate him to Ministry of Personnel and Ministry of War to refer to me (NGUYEN, 2007).

Therefore, recruiting court officials through academic examinations is not only to meet the needs of the administrative management apparatus, but also has really reflected the open-minded policy in using people.

By the time of Tu Duc, the criteria for evaluating talents were quite high: they should be knowledgeable in other fields besides reading classic books or making poems, and officials can nominate talented people whether they have been through any examinations. Therefore,

when talking about academic education and examination under the reign of Tu Duc (the 27<sup>th</sup> year), it is recorded in history that

candidates express their opinion based on prepared outlines, so it is difficult to tell if they really have insight or not; whether a candidate passes an exam depends on how much he knows about classic literature; the number of talented people found is gradually declining, perhaps due to that reason (NGUYEN, 1963)

Tu Duc commented on the learning situation at the Imperial College in Hue as follows:

Recently, teachers are considering themselves officials, thus their teachings are very sloppy. Meanwhile, students are not working hard, and very little of them pass exams. How shameful! From now on, you must really put efforts in doing your job. Teachers must not neglect their duty, and students must not learn only to have a career in the government (NGUYEN, 1963).

Thereby, it is seen that King Tu Duc always highly appreciated Confucianism, took care of academic examinations and held new examinations to recruit people with talents as officials. In addition, he also held discussions about books, history, poetry or political affairs with his officials. Tu Duc always upheld the idea of practical learning, paid attention to education and required the introduction of practical contents in the curriculum.

Thus, compared to the previous dynasties, the Nguyen dynasty especially focused on academic education and examination, making it more organized and expanding. Thanks to that, the Confucian education and examination of the Nguyen dynasty had produced a large number of scholars who made great contributions to the revival and development of national culture. The policy of using talented people through nomination overcame the situation of omitting talents, which is a new and progressive point.

***The social role of Confucianism also demonstrates its values in exercising the common cultural function based on education and teaching.***

Academic education and examination are aimed at training people who are qualified in terms of both capacity and moral character to participate in State activities. Among types of academic examination, writing "arguments" in essence is for the authorities to better "understand" the views of candidates, who come from all parts of the country to participate in the examination, bringing their lifestyle and thinking style along and expressing them in the exam. Therefore, after ascending to the throne, the first matter of interest of Le Thanh Tong was promoting and perfecting the academic examination policy:

If writing arguments in court examinations (1463-1469) was about general issues such as "the way of governing the country of kings", or "how to rule the country to attract talented people", then by 1472 or 1475, they switched to "similarities and differences in the meaning of stories, good points and bad points in political affairs of dynasties, etc." These "new style" exams require candidates to have not only academic knowledge but also their own opinions (DOAN, 1998).

Thus, as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese Confucianism, through court exams and to a certain extent, had overcome the "nonpractical" learning style of Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties.

Not only paying attention to academic examination, the Primal Le dynasty also held examinations to check the professional qualifications of the officials. Le Thanh Tong once said:

Examinations for officials are to tell the talented from the talentless, thus improve the efficiency of officials in State activities. In the time of Shu Yu of Tang, the examination was held once every three years for promotion or demotion of officials. By the time of King Cheng of Zhou, the same was held to determine reward or punishment for the officials. Now, a list of officials who have been holding their position for at least three years must be submitted without delay. If more than 100 days have passed without that list being submitted, a penalty of one quan per person not listed will be applied. Who deliberately omits a person in that list due to personal relations would also be punished (LIEN, 2011).

Under the reign of the Nguyen dynasty, academic education and examination were quite organized and strict with a system from central to local level across the country. From facing many difficulties in its early days due to Outer Land's scholars not being interested, the Nguyen dynasty both gradually built an education system that expanded the criteria to select talented people and improved the academic education. Thanks to that, many talents had been trained to serve the country, and everyone in the society was ensured the right to study.

Besides academic education and examination, the Nguyen dynasty also focused on recording history. Many important history books of the Nguyen dynasty include: *Records of the Unification of the Viet Kingdom (Hoang Viet nhat thong chi)* written by Le Quang Dinh in 1806 about towns and traffic roads from Hue Citadel to localities, *Geography of the Viet Kingdom (Hoang Viet du dia chi)* by Phan Huy Chu, *Complete Geography of Dai Viet (Dai Viet du dia chi toan bien)* written by Nguyen Van Sieu and Bui Quy under the reign of Tu Duc (1848 – 1883); *Veritable Records of the Great South (Dai Nam thuc luc)*, *Stories of the Great South (Dai Nam liet truyen)*, *Principal Policies of Minh Menh Reign (Minh Menh chinh yeu)*, *The Imperially Ordered Annotated Text Completely Reflecting the History of Viet*



*Kingdom (Kham dinh Viet su thong giam cuong muc), Principal Policies of Dong Khanh and Khai Dinh Reigns (Dong Khanh Khai Dinh chinh yeu), Summary of principal events of the national history (Quoc su toat yeu), The Imperially Ordered Collected Statutes and Regulations of the Great South (Kham dinh Dai Nam Hoi dien su le), etc.* In short, the Nguyen dynasty had made great contributions to the development of the country's history. These historical achievements have great significance for the country.

Confucianism in the Nguyen dynasty contributed to creating a good tradition of thought, morality and lifestyle in line with the feudal regime of that time. It evoked the sense of responsibility, obligation and moral feelings of each person towards the community, the eagerness to learn, the appreciation of talents and literate people, the respect for teachers and the active participation in social activities. The expansion of criteria to choose people from examinations proved that the Nguyen had tried to make full use of talents for the country.

## Conclusion

It can be said that moral education and academic education and examination in the Nguyen dynasty were all based on Confucian thought and education and took Confucianism as the orthodoxy. Nguyen kings in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were all interested in education; they themselves were directly involved in this field to recruit talents for more effective construction and management of the state apparatus. Education is not only a means to cultivate good characters and wisdom, but also the basis for developing a learning society and the key personnel for the establishment and maintenance of social order towards building an ideal social model.

The purpose of Confucian education, ultimately, is to train people to have healthy lifestyle and thoughts, thus improving the mental social life. The founder of Confucianism wished for the society to go from being brutal to being enlightened, first of all to attend *filial piety and brotherly love*, which Confucius had consistently confirmed. With that in mind, moral education is not limited in "sympathizing with others as we do ourselves", but also expanded to being tolerant and accepting differences to create a healthy yet diverse and rich culture. These findings can be used as references for researching and teaching the history of philosophy and thoughts in Vietnam.

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