



The Vietnamese education system during the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945)-The decline and impotence of feudal education for class and national interests

Pham Van Thinh

Thu Dau Mot University, Binh Duong, Vietnam

* Corresponding Author: **Pham Van Thinh**

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Abstract

The Nguyen Dynasty was the last feudal dynasty in Vietnamese history. Since acquiring power, the Nguyen Dynasty had made efforts to modernize the economy and society in order to fulfill the demands of the moment and deal with the threat of Western capitalist invasion. In the field of education, the Nguyen Dynasty was aware of the stagnant and backward situation of feudal education, which was modeled after China's Confucian education. The royal court expressed its view and desire to train talented people for the country, urging mandarins to reform the school and examination systems. However, both the court and the mandarins lacked drive and did not devise any novel approaches to meeting practical requirements. As a result, Vietnamese education during the Nguyen Dynasty was still based on Chinese Confucian principles, with antiquated educational and examination structures and material. The Nguyen Dynasty's education system was unsuitable for the country's position at the time, perplexed by the arrival of Western capitalists, and unable to serve the interests of the feudal elite and the Vietnamese nation.

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1. Introduction

Education is an integral aspect of all social forms and throughout history, with the nature of always adjusting to society's changing demands, hence contributing to societal growth. Education is not just universal and everlasting, but it is also socially and class-based (Ha Thi Mai, 2013). In terms of history, education is related to the level of development of society and has a direct impact on its development. Education emerges from a certain socioeconomic background; hence it must be governed by social processes in that society. Human society's historical growth has taken various socioeconomic shapes, and the related educational systems have also changed. When social processes change, stemming from changes in production levels and the nature of social production relations, leading to changes in socio-politics, ideology and social structure. Therefore, the entire education system corresponding to that socio-economic form must also change. In a class-based society, it is obvious that education will also have a certain class character. The class nature of education reflects the class interests of those who implement it (Dewey, 1997) ^[2].

Feudalism in Vietnam existed for over a thousand years (938–1945), corresponding to it was feudal education (Tran Quoc Vuong, 1960) ^[23]. This was education organized by the feudal State to serve the domination and interests of the feudal class. The goal of feudal education was to train the intellectual class according to Confucian ideology, to become mandarins to rule the country. During the process of existence and development, Vietnamese feudal education had periods of prosperity and periods of decline. During its peak periods, feudal education trained many talented people to perform the task of developing and managing society. In the stages of decline, feudal education revealed many inadequacies, not only in teaching content, educational goals, and learning methods but also in the strict regulations of learning and taking exams. The decline of education impacted many aspects of social life, hindered the country's development trend, and failed to meet the country's development

needs (Phan Trong Bau, 2006). The Nguyen monarchy was Vietnam's last feudal monarchy, lasting from 1802 to 1945. This was also an era of collapse for Vietnamese feudalism (Phan Huy Le, 1959). The Nguyen Dynasty's dilemma manifested itself in a variety of ways, one of which was the educational crisis. This article assesses the Nguyen Dynasty's educational crises through the lens of feudal education's deterioration and ineffectiveness non the face of class and national interests.

2. Literature review

Research documents on the history of Vietnamese education in general, and feudal education in particular, remain sparse. Only a few books have been published in the form of research and data collection about the organization and activities of feudal education in Vietnam. The earliest was the book *Licháo xiànzhāng lèi zhì* (Categorised Records of Institutions of Successive Dynasties), compiled by Phan Huy Chu (1969). The publication, written in Chinese, records events that occurred in Vietnam's examination departments throughout the dynasties; including the rules of the *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial), *Huìshì* (The Imperial examination in the capital), *Diànshì* (The top-grade examination in the imperial examination system), and the number of people passing the exams through the feudal dynasties of Vietnam. After that, Vu Ngoc Khanh (1985) ^[29] completed a publication about Vietnamese education from its beginnings to 1945. This article presented some outlines of the historical process and the role of the feudal state in Vietnam in implementing educational functions. This article also briefly outlined the achievements and limitations of feudal education, introduces a few famous schools and teachers, and documents and textbooks compiled by Vietnamese people. Also following the data collection direction of historical educational events during the feudal period, Nguyen Q Thang (2005) ^[10] described the origin of Vietnamese examinations, the ancient education system, textbooks and exam programs, exam methods... Also in the trend of describing the history of feudal education, Nguyen Dang Tien (1996) presented in quite detail the organization of education; examination; the selection, use and treatment of high achievers of Vietnamese feudal dynasties, introducing their important contributions to the dynasties and the country; typical examples of teachers and students in setting a shining example for posterity to admire and learn from... Going beyond the scope of research, Dinh Khac Thuan (1996) had a more in-depth study of Vietnamese feudal education through Sino-Nom sources. This article introduces an overview of the history of Confucian education and examinations in Vietnam, and at the same time deeply analyzed and systemized a number of aspects of education and examinations such as: institutions, school organization, and learning content, exams, exam content, passers, academic tradition and studious tradition. This article also selects and translates a number of imperial exam papers of famous scholars of the Le Dynasty; The content of these exams not only represented the content of Confucian education and examination, but also contributed to describing political institutions, ideology, and social changes in Vietnam through historical periods.

In addition to some research publications mentioned above, a number of articles on Vietnamese feudal schooling have recently appeared in domestic magazines. Tran Thi Dieu Linh (2019) investigated the characteristics of Vietnamese feudal education, whereas Tran Thi Hanh (2021) examined the

development of Confucian education in Vietnam from the 10th to the 15th centuries.

Although some progress has been made, there has been little research and appraisal of the historical, class, and social aspects, as well as the effects of Vietnamese feudal education during the Nguyen Dynasty on history and society. There is still a gap to be filled. A research examining the fall and helplessness of Vietnamese feudal education during the Nguyen Dynasty in the face of class and national interests is critical; this will help us understand more about the history of feudal education and feudal Vietnam as a whole.

In addition to study findings from published publications, this article draws on another key historical source: exam papers from people who passed imperial exams during the Nguyen Dynasty. This is an extremely valuable historical source. This information is held in Vietnam's state archives and is regarded as an official historical source for studying feudal Vietnamese history and society. By studying these exams, the article helps to define the substance of education and exams, as well as the qualifications of the learners at the time. This is also the foundation for assessing the nature, role, and function of education in fulfilling its mission before the government, society, and the times.

3. Research methods

This article uses historical research method. The development process of Vietnamese feudal education during the Nguyen Dynasty is presented in a continuous sequence, including aspects of policy, organization, educational content and examinations (Nguyen Phuong (1974). The contents were given in a segmented format, with historical background and references to other items and phenomena. According to the historical method, the article contents ensure continuity in time of events, emphasizing the conditions and characteristics of their emergence, development and manifestation, and clarifying their diverse relationships with things and phenomena occurring around the same time (Institute of Social Sciences Information, 1982). Understanding the principles of historical research, any activities related to Vietnamese education during the Nguyen Dynasty carefully consider the conditions of appearance, clarifying the process of birth and development from low to high level, from simple to perfect of these social phenomena. At the same time, it situates the evolution of feudal education in the context of multiple interacting phenomena that promote or support one another throughout their movement. Using the historical method, we may rebuild a scientific picture of the phenomena and historical events associated with feudal education under the Nguyen Dynasty (Nguyen Van Hiep, 2021).

While using the historical approach, the article follows the chronology principle, which implies describing the origin and development of Nguyen Dynasty education in the proper order. The historical approach gives an object or phenomena with an end, a moment of appearance, a formation process, and steps in its movement and growth. Only by adhering to the chronological concept can we perceive the continuity in movement and evolution of a phenomenon that has to be examined, from which we may draw out the nature, characteristics, trends, and rules of motion (Institute of History, 1974). The second concept is to highlight the breadth and diversity of the Nguyen Dynasty's educational movement and progress. Applying this theory allows us to deeply rebuild the historical atmosphere, human psychology, and

emotions in everyday objects and happenings. As we all know, history unfolds and develops through historical events and phenomena. The historical method is more than just presenting a large number of things and phenomena; it is also about knowing how to pick and show representative objects and phenomena. Those items and phenomena were the most concentrated embodiments reflecting the laws of historical movement. (Nguyen Phuong (1974).

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Vietnamese feudal education

Vietnam obtained independence at the end of the 10th century, after more than a thousand years of Chinese feudal rule (Phan Huy Le, 2011). The feudal state of Vietnam was established. However, the first dynasties (such as Ngo, Dinh, and Early Le) had brief reigns, domestic politics and diplomatic difficulties were unstable, and they lacked the resources to focus on educational growth. During the Ly Dynasty (1010-1025), after stabilizing the country's position, King Ly Thai moved the capital from Hoa Lu to Thang Long, consolidating the country in all aspects and initiating educational operations. The Ly Dynasty began to use the examination system as a form of recruiting mandarins for the government apparatus. This was the beginning showing that the State was aware of the function of education, which was to train people to manage society. In 1070, King Ly Thanh Tong established the *Wénmiào* (Confucian temple) and in 1076, established *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) in the *Shǒudū* (Capital city) as a place of learning for children of nobles and mandarins. In 1075, King Ly Nhan Tong opened the *Míng jīng bóxué* (Erudite) and Confucian examinations. In 1077, an exam was opened with three subjects: essay writing, mathematics and law to choose *Shì zǐ* (Candidates) for re-entry. In 1086, the state organized an examination to recruit people with literary qualifications. Although studying and examinations were not really organized, it proved that the Ly Dynasty kings paid attention to educational activities to train talented people.

From 1225, the Tran Dynasty replaced the Ly Dynasty, and national education received more attention. The Tran Dynasty organized exams to select *Jūrén* (senior bachelor) and students of the *Tàixuésēng* (student of the Taixue - Imperial Academy) with stricter regulations. In 1232, the Tran Dynasty opened the first students of the Taixue – *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) exam and held it every 10 years. This exam requirement was to test literary proficiency. The bureaucrat exam only required *Shì zǐ* (Candidates) to draft administrative documents, write and calculate. In 1281, King Tran established an Academy House in Thien Trung Palace. This was the first "national" school in Vietnam established by the state at the local level. In the capital Thang Long, the *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) was established. Students at the Academy House or at *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) were all descendants of royal families and mandarins.

Following the Tran dynasty, the Early Le dynasty (1428-1527) was a period of extremely prosperous development of Vietnamese feudalism. Vietnamese feudal education also recorded a period of development with stricter regulations. The feudal state officially established *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) as the highest educational agency; Lecture halls, dormitories, and libraries were built here to serve teaching and learning. In all localities, Academy houses were established and people were appointed to be in charge of the

people's education. The examination regime was more disciplined, too. In the locality there were poetry festivals, in the capital there were poetry festivals; held once every three years. The educational content of the Early Le Dynasty was still modelled after Chinese feudal education. From the time they went to school until they took the exam, students must practice according to the Confucian framework. Learning materials were Chinese books such as the *Sì shū dàquán* (The Complete Collection of Four Books), the *Wǔjīng* (Five classics in Chinese literature), and the *Zhu zǐ Bai Jia* (Philosophy and Thought in Ancient China). In addition to memorizing books, students must learn how to compose poetry and prose; When entering the exam, strict control steps must be followed. Exam regulations were strictly issued. From 1438 onwards, every 3 years the state opened *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) exams in localities to select junior bachelors and *Jūrén* (senior bachelor). Previous year taking *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) exam and the following year taking *Huìshì* (The Imperial examination in the capital). Those who passed *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) exam would be able to participate in the *Huìshì* (The Imperial examination in the capital) to select a doctorate. Those who passed their doctorate exam could take the Dien Thi (Competition which was directly presided over by the King at the King palace and the *Shì zǐ* (Candidates) listened to their presentation in the palace).

The early Le Dynasty's emphasis on educational development was also shown through the king's interest and presence in educational events. For *Huìshì* (The Imperial examination in the capital), the king personally set the exam questions and his mandarins acted as examiners. As for *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) examinations, they were held in many places at the same time, so the king regularly reminded the examination rules, stipulated necessary rules and appointed *Hànlin guān* (Scholar bureaucrat) to act as examiners. The State paid special attention to selecting and promoting the Confucian scholar class. Students taking the exam must "reveal the three majors" (three generations of background). Since 1484, King Le Thanh Tong stipulated that the rank of students passing *Huìshì* (The Imperial examination in the capital) included 3 levels: 1) *Yī jiǎ* (the 1st rank) *Zhuàngyuan* (Number One Scholar), *Bāngyǎn* (Second place), and *Tànhuā* (Third place); 2) *Èr jiǎ* (the second rank) *Jīnshì* (The highest level of the Vietnam imperial examinations); 3) *Sānjiǎ* (the third rank) (co-highest level of the Vietnam imperial examinations). These people's names were engraved on stone stele erected at the *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy), and the king gave them shirts and hats and held honor ceremonies.

If the Ly and Tran dynasties existed for 400 years, there were only 18 Imperial examinations in the capital and 319 people passed, then in the early Le dynasty, in just 37 years of reign of Le Thanh Tong, the court organized 11 examinations and selected 501 people with highest level of the Vietnam imperial examinations. There were exam departments that accepted up to 50-60 doctorates. In *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) exam, in just one Son Nam town, nearly 1,000 people passed the exam. Although the department was expanded and many people passed, the selection method was fair (Phan Trong Bau, 2006). The exam questions were diverse and the testing process was strict. Choosing a person was based on extensive learning and real talent... so scholars at that time could learn extensively without having to research meticulously, and their talents could be applied without having to be abandoned. In the country, no talent was left behind, the court

did not mistakenly use poor people (Phan Huy Chu, 1969). Feudalism weakened in the 17th and 18th centuries, as kings and mandarins indulged in luxury, siphoning money from the people to build castles and palaces. Deep disputes arose within the feudal elite as a result of rivalry for position and throne overthrow. Each clan was in a territory, resulting in perpetual civil war; human and financial resources were mobilized for war in many parts of the country. Farmers were unable to abide the royal court's control and organized several protests. As a result, Vietnam's 18th century was dubbed the "century of peasant uprisings". Due to constantly having to deal with peasant uprisings, the king and mandarins left education and exams to lower-level Bureaucrat to manage. The management was lax, Bureaucrat openly accepted bribes and then let *Shì zì* (Candidates) freely bring documents and exam halls, and hired test takers to pass. Due to funding constraints, the government announced a policy in 1750 requiring each person taking the exam to contribute three quans for the official examination, therefore these persons were commonly referred to as "three quans junior bachelors". As a result, illiterate people took the exam, and it became so crowded that they trampled each other to death outside the school gate. The school was exceedingly chaotic, with students bringing books, asking questions, and hiring individuals to take tests; there was no more control. Of course, such exams could no longer choose truly educated individuals.

4.2. The organization and content of education were sketchy and outdated in the Nguyen Dynasty

The Nguyen Dynasty was formed in 1802. Continuing the rapid decline of Vietnamese feudalism that began in the mid-18th century, the Nguyen Dynasty plunged into an even more widespread catastrophe (Nguyen Phan Quang, 2002). However, the kings at the start of this dynasty attempted to construct a stable society by prioritizing educational pursuits. As soon as he succeeded to the throne, King Gia Long instructed the court Bureaucrat: "A school is a place to house exceptional people. I wish to mimic the ancients and set up an academy house to raise students, so that literary style can rise and be kind in all resources were available for the state to use" (NHO, 1996). Despite that concern, it was not until 1807 (ie 5 years after taking power) that King Gia Long opened the first of 6 exam schools in Northern Vietnam. The exam regulations were the same as in the early Le Dynasty, those who passed three schools were called *Sinh Do* (Junior bachelor), those who passed four schools were called *Jūrén* (senior bachelor). It was the only exam during King Gia Long's reign (Vu Ngoc Khanh, 1985)^[29].

During the reign of King Minh Menh, the educational and academic regime was slightly reformed. In 1820, King Minh Menh reorganized the *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy), established an educational position, established exam regulations, and granted scholarships in the capital Hue. In the localities, the royal court reorganized schools and selected "A person with profound knowledge of Confucianism" to be teaching assistants. Before taking the exam, *Shì zì* (Candidates) must go to the continent or district to study; Once he had mastered the scriptures and knew how to write poetry, he went to the localities to teach. Twice a year, local schools held tests and selected students who were relatively proficient in literature to send them to take the test; Excellent people did not have to wait for exams but were recruited directly into *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy). The government

also paid more attention to students who were descendants of the royal family. The number of royal descendants admitted to *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) increased more than before (Phan Trong Bau, 2006). In 1823, King Minh Menh established *Jí shàn táng*, the study place of the prince and the king's family in the palace - those who in the future would rule the country (Trinh Thi Ha, 2022).

With the promulgation of new laws, King Minh Menh wanted to create an educated aristocracy to serve as the core of the feudal government. The royal educational management apparatus had not changed compared to the early Le period, but the responsibility of the Bureaucrat in charge of education was emphasized and the capacity of this team was strengthened. In 1843, the royal court issued regulations on rewards, punishments and policies to manage and supervise this team.

For students, the royal court required stricter compliance with rules. Accordingly, students were only allowed to live in the dormitory, outside of school hours they could only eat and live in designated places in the school, were not allowed to roam around, were not allowed to gather to drink alcohol, gamble, or cause trouble, cause a ruckus in school. Violations would result in expulsion. The state specifically prohibited alcohol, gambling, theft, love... Students who violated these prohibitions will be expelled from school to strictly enforce the rules. In 1853, the royal court issued a document clearly stating: "The *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) on weekdays controls scholars not to gather to drink alcohol and gamble, causing a ruckus, not to arbitrarily bring wives and daughters to stay, not to destroy the room. If there were such bad conditions, the officials at *Guózǐjiàn* (National Academy) will immediately chase them away to strictly follow the rules" (NHO, 2007).

Regarding learning content, children at the age of 7 or 8 start attending elementary school at the village school. The starting point was to learn Chinese characters with books: *Yīqiān zì* (One Thousand Characters), *Sānqiān zì* (Three Thousand Characters). The purpose was to provide children with some solid Chinese characters as an initial capital to learn more difficult books. After finishing studying *Yīqiān zì* (One Thousand Characters) and *Sānqiān zì* (Three Thousand Characters), students began to study *Chūxué wènjīn* (Beginner books teach students to learn Chinese characters), which was also a beginner book, teaching students to learn Chinese characters. After each Chinese sentence, follow the 4-syllable pattern explained in Nom script. Next, students will study books *Yòu xué wúyánshī* (Pentasyllabic Poetry for Primary Learning - 5-hour poetry used for children to learn). After finishing studying the "beginner" books, students began to study higher level books such as: *Shie Zy Ven* (One Thousand Characters), *Xiào jīng* (Advice On Filial Piety), *Mingxin Baojian* (Bright Heart-Mind Precious Mirror), *Mingdao jiāxùn* (Minh Dao's Teachings On Housekeeping), *Sānzǐjīng* (The Three Character Classic). When completing the book *Sānzǐjīng* (The Three Character Classic), learners will have a vocabulary to use as a basis for further study. After finishing studying those "beginner" books, students began to study the *Sì shū dàquán* (The Complete Collection of Four Books) and *the Wǔjīng* (Five classics in Chinese literature), which were classic books of Confucianism, as well as works of ancient Chinese literature.

The education system of the Nguyen Dynasty had no natural sciences. However, the royal court also had a facility to train

people to work in an agency specialized in observing astronomical phenomena and compiling weather and seasons, called *Qin tian jian* (Department of Astronomy). This facility had two departments: one was calendar calculation, the other was astronomical computing. Training period 3 years. The first-year calendar calculation department taught the method of calculating the Hop Ky calendar (lunar calendar); The second year taught the method of calculating the seven main calendars (sun, moon and 5 stars - metal, wood, water, fire, earth), the third year taught the method of calculating solar and lunar eclipses and what one should do, should avoid, good days, bad days...

The *Qin tian jian* (Department of Astronomy) also taught for 3 years. The first year taught the shape of the 28 main stars and the *Tian Shi Yuan* (The Heavenly Market Enclosure) and *Tai Wei Yuan* (The Supreme Palace Enclosure). The second year taught the location of the 5 stars and the shape of the constellations on the map. This was not a training school. The king often assigned a number of mandarins to teach as tutors, 1-2 people per year; If that person taught effectively he will be rewarded, if he taught poorly he will be punished. The purpose and content of teaching and learning were not intended to serve social life or production, but only to see whether days were good or bad, to predict good or bad omens, "heaven's signs".

Learning foreign languages, especially French, is an urgent need, especially since the French colonialists conquered Saigon and officially invaded Vietnam in 1859. French was not just a foreign language but also a language to understand modern science and technology, especially new Western weapons. In 1868, King Tu Duc sent five people from the court to learn French. The French language taught was also very preliminary, because the French have just opened a language school to train their military and a few administrative staff in French-occupied areas. A few years later, King Tu Duc opened the Hanh Nhan school in Hue and asked priests to teach French with a communicative learning method; Every day learn 3 long sentences (6, 7 words or more) or 4 short sentences (4, 5 words or less). The inspection was conducted twice a year, in June and December. The inspection content included: 1) drafting an official dispatch in Chinese characters and then translating it into French; 2) writing a well-written, grammatically correct article; 3) memorizing smoothly. In all 3 subjects, if learners memorized 200 sentences or more, he was considered excellent, 100 sentences were average, and less than 100 sentences were secondary.

With the above learning method, Hanh Nhan school only trained interpreters. Learners did not have enough foreign language proficiency to access Western science and technology. In 1875, the Ministry of Lai presented to King Tu Duc important works on military and Western science and technology in English such as Co Kim Martial Equipment, The Essential Book of War, and books on how to make explosive and incendiary bullets (incendiary bullets), books about cavalry, books about French grammar... but could not find a translator, even some priests who taught at the Hanh Nhan school could not translate these documents. Thus, we see that the educational content of the Nguyen Dynasty was mainly the same as that of the ancient feudal dynasties, and the same was true for examinations.

4.3. The educational reform of the Nguyen Dynasty

The educational and examination contents of the Nguyen

Dynasty just presented above show its backward nature in relation to social reality. The Nguyen Dynasty kings also knew that. Once, King Minh Menh asked a courtier: I have been focusing on editorial for a long time, wanting to foster talented people, but have not achieved much, or have I promoted people arbitrarily, not like the ancients? The courtier replied: "Most people were not good at teaching, so very few talented people succeed." Is it because of the way of teaching as the courtier said? That was partly true but not the main reason. The main reason must be considered in the educational content, because it was the educational content that determined the product of the school and the contemporary political regime. Vietnam's feudal system had become outdated centuries ago. Although the Nguyen Dynasty made many efforts to maintain discipline and build a strong society, it was unable to do so, and later on, contradictions were revealed. Big conflicts that could not be overcome. That was also a conservative ideology in the face of the country's innovation needs. Therefore, maintaining an outdated education system made it impossible to find talented people. During the reign of King Tu Duc, in the first exam when he ascended the throne, the king explained: The results of *Diànshì* (The top-grade examination in the imperial examination system) this time were only two volumes of 4 points, which was somewhat poor compared to the previous exam. Since then, the king has tried to reform regulations to find talented people. The weakness of the learners at that time was not that they did not know the historical scriptures, but that they only knew the historical scriptures, in addition they did not know or knew very superficially the problems of social reality. The king often called these issues "seasonal" or "real classics". To compensate for this limitation, in 1851, the king instructed the officials in charge of the exam: The questions should be more meaningful, the dharma level should be large, the scriptures, and the country's religion should be clear. The assignment needs to be presented in detail, discussed widely and fully to help the work of governing the country. It should not be a detailed review of ancient times but a brief overview of today's life (NHO, 1996).

In 1853, King Tu Duc again directed the provinces to pay attention to training students to understand the season right from the preliminary level (students concentrate on studying in the province when preparing for the *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) exam; Books must focus on asking about the actual situation, about the poem (an ancient literary form), if it did not clearly show its own knowledge and adapted it from somewhere else, even if it was good, it would not be accepted; Regarding poetry, whether it was *Wújīng* (Five classics in Chinese literature) or Duong Luat, each poem was about a classic or a scene, how can it be good for both literary and practical students (NHO, 1996).

Despite many efforts, 20 years later (by 1873), King Tu Duc still complained that the students' level of learning was poor and their discussion was mediocre. In one exam, the king personally failed 4 papers that had been graded by the mandarins in the imperial exam. Tu Duc instructed: From now on, in the capital as well as outside the province, officials in charge of education and students must put practice first, followed by literary words. The king also specifically stipulated that students must pay attention to learning things such as farming, taxes, labor, rituals, military, law, as well as riot control, political and social work. current country's association (NHO, 1975).

King Tu Duc's opinion was very accurate. He wanted the team of mandarins, from central to local levels, to be people with practical knowledge of the political, economic, social, and military aspects of the place where they lived, not fanciful theories. That was a completely correct request. But to do so, the state and the state agency responsible for education must improve educational programs and content. These things were thought of by the Nguyen Dynasty kings, but lacked comprehensiveness. The court also has not shown determination in radically reforming education. Imitating Chinese educational content and teaching style has become a "deep-rooted" disease in the royal court's policy decisions. In 1833, King Minh Menh issued instructions to compile sample Chinese essays into a set of sample books to distribute to Vietnamese mandarins at both the court and localities to "follow them and teach students to study" (NHO, 1975b). In 1871, King Tu Duc again distributed to the provinces the book "*Lishǐ tōng jiàn jí lǎn* (Chinese chronicle history)" by Qianlong (a Chinese king, Qing Dynasty) and instructed to bring this book along with the *Wǔjīng* (Five classics in Chinese literature) and *Sì shū dàquán* (The Complete Collection of Four Books) into teaching, when taking the exam, take the discussions and great concepts and theories in that book to ask students (NHO, 1975a).

Forcing students to read books of the Qing Dynasty (China) along with the *Sì shū dàquán* (The Complete Collection of Four Books) and *Wǔjīng* (Five classics in Chinese literature) to draw out useful things for the current state of the country is a vicious cycle that proves the imperial feudalism. Nguyen has not yet escaped dependence on Chinese Confucian ideas. In reality, Vietnam's "season" must come from the economic and social conditions that we were experiencing every day, but the kings and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty only required people to go to school without any solution to improve it. Improved content and programs, and taught learners specific directions. From one king to the next, instructions on "reforming learning regulations" were only given in general terms, without any effective solutions. King Tu Duc was one of the kings who paid the most attention to reforming educational regulations, but his reform directions did not escape the influence of China's dogmatic ideas. One time, the king even directed the agency in charge of education to: Review the rules and discuss in advance how to determine exam regulations to recruit many people and not miss talented people (NHO, 1975b). But then the exam regulations were only corrected in a general way, like *Xiāngshì* (interprovincial) exam paying attention to literature and seasons; The *Huìshì* (The Imperial examination in the capital) asked carefully about literature, about the *Sì shū dàquán* (The Complete Collection of Four Books) and *Wǔjīng* (Five classics in Chinese literature) of ancient China and historical books about the time more widely (NHO, 1975a).

In addition to extensive educational reforms, the Nguyen feudal government's definition of "talented people" was more liberal. A typical example is King Tu Duc's point of view. King Tu Duc once confessed about talented individuals: those with filial piety, honesty, and faultless virtue, can calm down the elegant and the vulgar; persons with profound intelligence, vast knowledge, and the potential to perform great things; People who were adept at consoling people according to the law, fighting, defending, and defeating rebellions were special, and they may be marshals; A diplomatic person can be clever enough to act as an ambassador; People who were good at administrative

management and reforming population management can be ministers; people with extensive education, elegant literary works of ancient and modern times, can be consultants; to people who were good at technology and techniques, can make things, make medicine, tell fortunes, read numbers, tell dates... (NHO, 1975a). According to Tu Duc, it means that talented people were no longer limited to literature or martial arts but were also skilled in economic, political, social, diplomatic, technical, and military aspects. The State's educational reforms also want to create such talents. However, the reform of educational content under the Nguyen Dynasty did not escape dependence on Chinese Confucian education ideology, so it did not bring the desired results. In fact, after many years of reform, the quality of learners was still no better than before (Phan Trong Bau, 2006).

5. Discussion

Under the Nguyen Dynasty, the Vietnamese aristocratic state had no power to change education. Since assuming control of the country, the Nguyen Dynasty kings have witnessed the enormous and practical benefits of Western science and technology. In 1860, the royal court sent a delegation of Vietnamese officials to France to study, with the goal of studying and purchasing machinery to establish an industrial school. However, while the group was still away, French colonialists assaulted Saigon, kicking off the invasion of Vietnam. Relations between Vietnam and France were tight. The court was afraid and even suspected that this delegation might be an insider for the French invaders, so it was recalled to the country ahead of schedule, even though the work had not progressed. In 1839, King Minh Menh ordered the Department of Weapons to build ships powered by steam engines, and bought a number of ships powered by steam engines from France and Germany (ships Dang Huy, Man Thoa, Man Thiep, Vien Thong). In 1875, Vietnamese workers cast the chimney and some parts of the Man Thoa ship. However, in general, contact with Western science and technology was very slow, with no significant progress.

What caused the kings and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty to be suspicious, lacking trust, and hesitant when interacting with the West? Vietnamese historical sources have shown that the ideology of the kings and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty all considered themselves superior to the West, criticizing the material civilization of the West as "lasciviousness" (infatuation with trivial material beauty). Due to the heavy Confucian ideology of China, the kings and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty all believed that Japan was "Dong di" (Eastern people lacking civilization) so they went to study "Dong di" (Western people lacking civilization). And Vietnam was "the child of the Dragon and the descendant of the Fairy, not bothering to learn from barbarians. Due to a narrow vision and fear of cost and no real benefits, most kings and courtiers were anti-Western. Even the king, when choosing someone to study abroad in France just to translate, was skeptical. The proof was that King Minh Menh, when giving his opinion on studying abroad, was: choose a person to study in France. If that person was loyal and careful, the luxurious scenery of a foreign country will also prevent him from missing his homeland. It's a distraction from studying, and a promiscuous person spends money on going back and forth, it's just a waste of effort, and in the end it's of no use. Minh Menh also took the example of a prince who, after returning from France, abandoned the

custom of worshipping at temples, causing the king to fear and regret allowing the prince to go to France. The King said, taking that case to infer, Western customs easily captivate people's hearts and were truly hateful (NHO, 1975c).

During his reign, the Nguyen Dynasty also received petitions to reform the country's economy and society, including important proposals on educational reform. Typical were the petitions of mandarins in charge of the field of education such as the petitions of mandarins Nguyen Truong To, Dang Xuan Bang, Dang Huy Tru... These petitions also have research and findings about the development of Western education and what was necessary for Vietnamese education to innovate. Some notable contents were proposals to open national, provincial and private schools, professional schools to teach occupations in processing forest products, seafood, metallurgy, and afforestation; Research and teach about dykes, flood prevention, irrigation, and drought prevention; Researching oriental medicine, importing foreign medicinal plants... In general, these were practical careers for the country's people, easy to do. These proposals were all considered and discussed by the Nguyen court but were not implemented. The royal court missed many important conditions to radically reform education to serve the country's development needs (Nguyen Truong To, 2002).

The feudal education system of the Nguyen Dynasty did not meet the requirements of history. The Nguyen Dynasty kings themselves knew that and were interested in amending policies and regulations to suit the country's realities. King Tu Duc and King Minh Menh were kings who gave many instructions to mandarins on things that needed to be changed about the organization and content of education. However, those responsible for education were mostly constrained by outdated Confucian ideology and cannot come up with any effective plans. Mandarins in charge of education consider ancient Chinese books such as the Complete Collection of Four Books and *Wujing* (Five classics in Chinese literature) of ancient China to be the "golden rule" for teaching and training talented people. The view that "summarizing all the times in the world, understanding the situation in the world, no book was as clear as the *Yi Jing* (Chinese classic books); To guide the world's political regime, there was no book better than the *Shu Jing* (A volume in the Chinese Five Classics); Collecting the wisdom of the world, helping with administrative management and peace of people, there was no book as good as the *Shi Jing* (An anthology of anonymous Chinese poetry); To rectify authority, no book was as clear as the *Chunqiu jing* (Chinese historical chronicle); No book was as clear as the book in *Lijing* (A book in the Five Classics of K'ung Tzu)" was the view of people with a deep level of education at that time (Tran Van Giau (1973).

Due to placing too much importance on Confucian classics in studying and examinations, the wishes for practical, scientific and technical content depend on personal initiative, the school does not have books to teach those things. The issues that the Nguyen Dynasty kings paid attention to teachers and learners such as rituals, military, technology, social management... were in accordance with the country's requirements at that time, but no one was able to study, nor did they. No textbook material was presented. People who went to school or took exams when asked about these issues give general, even misleading answers. The only specific evidence was that in 1868, during a royal exam, King Tu Duc gave an exam with the question: "From past to present, the issues of peace and chaos, the right and wrong actions, which

things were suitable for people?" The past can also be applied today, or if you have any suitable ideas that do not go against the king's teachings, please present them." When asking this question, the king certainly wanted to hear the opinions of highly qualified people at that time about possible domestic and diplomatic issues that could be applied to the country's situation. However, a *Jinshi* (The highest level of the Vietnam imperial examinations) replied: "We must review how to reach a place of harmony between top and bottom so that hundreds of things can be successful." Another doctor advised the king: "Follow the Tang on superior side, follow the Chinese on lower side, politics favor tolerance and kindness, law was simple and serious." That shows the level of "talented people" at that time who only knew how to take things from the ancients in China and apply them mechanically to Vietnam (Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, 1980).

In another exam, when the king asked about French weapons and how to use them. This was truly a content that goes beyond books and the understanding of learners because they have never learned or known these things. A doctor answered the king as follows: "The French guns were placed on both sides of the ship. The ship's head and stern were narrow and did not have enough space. The glass window was definitely the residence of the enemy general and contained gunpowder. If you attack the front and stern of the ship, you will surely win. If you shoot at the right window, the gun will explode and the Westerners will be burned" (Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, 1980). The content of the answers of highly qualified people at that time was a little right and a lot wrong, but we cannot criticize the respondents because they had only seen French ships in the river and did not know the minimum knowledge about structure of a warship because there were no materials taught during the learning process.

The qualifications of people with high academic degrees under the Nguyen Dynasty were not only superficial, shallow, and unrealistic, but they also had a heavy mindset of reserve and lack of confidence in all practical situations. Not understanding natural science and not believing in Western scientific and technological achievements was a reality among Vietnamese intellectuals at that time. According to the kings and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty, anything that goes against the ancients was incorrect. Intellectuals condemned and rejected Western civilization. A supposedly *Ming jing boxue* (Erudite) intellectual of that time wrote: In the West, not only was the technology skillful, but also the housing, utensils, food, and clothing were all splendid, enough to make people's eyes and ears move; The kings above and below were all merchants. They make a profit very easily, so they attract people very quickly. Alas, how lust and avarice change people's hearts! (Dang Huy Van et al. 1961). The subjective and erroneous thinking of the kings, mandarins and intellectuals of the Nguyen Dynasty, the lack of confidence and shyness of the kings, mandarins and intellectuals of the Nguyen Dynasty were caused by education. It was because the content of education and examinations that does not meet the requirements of practice has created products that were powerless in the face of the tasks of the country and the nation.

6. Conclusion

Vietnam's Confucian ideology-based education system has lasted nearly 1,000 years, and has trained a class of intellectuals to participate in managing and operating social

life. By the time of the Nguyen Dynasty, Vietnam began to come into contact with Western capitalism, the educational organization and content of learning and examinations from thousands of years ago were no longer suitable for the new situation. The ancient Confucian "governance" theories that generations of Vietnamese officials and intellectuals have applied to management have failed to meet the tasks of the times. The State has recognized that the organization and content of Confucian education was outdated and has repeatedly directed mandarins, agencies in charge of education and learners to change, focusing on practice and a scientific approach. technology, that was, the actual requirements of society, not just theoretical as before. A number of proposals for Western-oriented educational reform were also raised and discussed, but no possible solution was implemented into practice. It can be affirmed that the feudal education system in Vietnam during the Nguyen Dynasty faced the need for innovation but the State could not do it. The backwardness, antiquity and dependence on the Chinese educational model were revealed during the reign of the Nguyen Dynasty. When the country faced a war of invasion by the French colonialists, the state also showed interest in innovating the content and regulations of studying and examinations, but it all stopped at the discussion stage. In fact, neither the royal court nor the agencies in charge of education have any solutions to implement in practice. Both teachers and learners were trapped within the constraints of Chinese Confucian ideology. This delay caused the Nguyen Dynasty's feudal education not only to decline faster, but also to be helpless in the face of the important historical task of building and protecting the country against the invasion of Western capitalists. In fact, the French colonialists conquered and invaded Vietnam. The interests of the feudal class and the interests of the Vietnamese people fell into the hands of the French colonialists.

7. Reference

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