

THE NGUYEN DYNASTY WITH SEARCHING FOR VITALITY IN SOUTHERN EDUCATION (1802-1862)

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Abstract

Traditional education in Southern Vietnam developed through two main periods: the era of the Nguyen Lords (1698-1802) and the reign of the Nguyen emperors (1802-1862). This article focuses on education development in Southern Vietnam during the reign of the Nguyen emperors. Despite the numerous difficulties experienced during the decline of the feudal regime, the Nguyen emperors made significant efforts to promote education in the South. The royal court showed commitment, introduced reforms, and created favorable conditions for educational activities to thrive, resulting in greater academic success compared to the previous period. Alongside civil service examinations, the establishment of public schools and supporting educational institutions was also actively promoted. The institutionalization of state-led educational activities inherited the achievements of the earlier period and marked the consolidation of educational functions during a historical development phase

Keywords: Nguyen Dynasty, regional examination, Southern Vietnam, traditional education

1. Introduction

In 1802, the Nguyen Dynasty was established, marking the restoration of Nguyen rule over a unified nation stretching from Cape Ca Mau to the Nam Quan Pass. In the early years of the dynasty, governance and national security were still complex and unsettled. In Southern Vietnam, the Nguyen court primarily concentrated on political, military, and economic matters. In terms of politics and defense, the Nguyen Dynasty implemented firm policies to safeguard sovereignty, constructing fortifications and establishing a defense system along the borders to protect national territory. To administer the region effectively, land registers were compiled, and a comprehensive administrative apparatus was developed from the provincial to the village level. Alongside political measures, the Nguyen court introduced policies to promote economic and social development, focusing on land reclamation, plantation construction, canal digging, road building, and the improvement of both land and water transport. This relatively complete system of policies provided a comprehensive foundation that positively influenced cultural and social activities. The cultural life of Southern Vietnam entered a transformative period, with notable changes in festivals, belief systems, and cultural institutions. The intellectual class

flourished and actively engaged in social affairs. As part of the effort to build a stable society, the Nguyen Dynasty paid close attention to educational activities in Southern Vietnam, seeking to cultivate talent. This article presents the Nguyen court's efforts to build and sustain educational vitality in Southern Vietnam from the dynasty's founding until the beginning of French colonization.

2. Documents and Methodology

To date, there has been no independent study focusing solely on the development of education in Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty. To gain an in-depth understanding of the development process, state policies, and educational achievements in the South, this article examines, synthesizes, and analyzes available sources, particularly those documenting political, historical, and socio-cultural aspects under the Nguyen reign. Historical documents show that the Nguyen Dynasty placed great importance on historiography, with the imperial historiographic office, Guó Shǐguǎn (國史館, official historical compilation agency of the Nguyen Dynasty), tasked with compiling and publishing official histories. The Guó Shǐguǎn compiled and published numerous works that contain information on the political, economic, and cultural life of the Nguyen Dynasty, including valuable data on education. A notable example is Guó Cháo Xiāng Kē Lù (國朝鄉科錄), authored by Cao Xuan Duc (a high-ranking official of the Nguyen court), which records the names and hometowns of candidates who passed the regional civil service examinations from the first exam in 1807 to the final one in 1918 (Hochiminh City Publishing House, 1993). Several key publications from the Guó Shǐguǎn address various issues related to education policy and achievements in Southern Vietnam, including Dà Nán Shí Lù (大南寔錄, 10 Books, Hanoi Publishing House, 2022) and Dà Nán Lièz Huàn (大南列傳, 4 Books, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 1993), Dà Nán Yītǒng Zhì. Nán Qí Liù Shěng (大南一統志. 南圻六省, 2 Books, Saigon: National Department of Culture, 1959). In addition to these valuable historical records compiled and published by the Nguyen court, several contemporary scholarly works also serve as important resources for this article. These works, accessible in many current libraries, include: The History of Vietnamese Education Before the August Revolution of 1945 (Nguyen Dang Tien, 1996), Civil Service Examinations and Vietnamese Education (Nguyen Q. Thang, 2005), Vietnamese Education in the Modern Era (Phan Trong Bau, 2006), Distinctive Features of Vietnam's Feudal Education (Tran Thi Dieu Linh, 2019), Study Regulations and School Regulations in Vietnam's Confucian Education System from the 17th to the 19th Century (Trinh Thi Ha, 2022), and Exploring Vietnamese Education before 1945 (Vu Ngoc Khanh, 1985).

Based on the available sources, this article applies historical research methods, specifically the methods of synthesis and historical description, to present a comprehensive account of the research topic. Historical events are contextualized within their respective periods and interconnected to reconstruct the historical truth of educational activities in Southern Vietnam during the Nguyen Dynasty, viewed as a key function of the governing state.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *The Nguyen Dynasty's Efforts to Expand Education in Southern Vietnam*

The Nguyen Dynasty was established during a time when the Vietnamese feudal regime was already in decline. Monarchs indulged in extravagance, exploiting the people to construct palaces and fortresses, while deep economic and social crises were emerging. Nevertheless, the early emperors of the Nguyen Dynasty endeavored to stabilize the political landscape, strengthen and complete the state apparatus from central to local levels, and pay particular attention to education as a means of training administrative officials. Upon ascending the throne, Emperor Gia Long instructed senior court officials: "Schools are the cradle of talent. I wish to follow the example of the ancients in establishing schools to nurture students, hoping that knowledge may flourish, and virtuous talent emerge to serve the state" (Guó Shǐguǎn, 2002a). In that spirit, in 1803, Gia Long ordered the construction of the Guó Zǐ Jiàn (國子監), the highest educational institution of the court, in the capital of Hue, selecting talented officials and students from the provinces to study there. In the provinces (Zhèn), the Nguyen court appointed Dū Xué (督學, Provincial Education Commissioner); in prefectures and districts, they appointed Jiào Shòu (教授, Prefecture Education Commissioner) and Xùn Dǎo (訓導, District Education Commissioner), selecting former officials and those who had passed Xiāng Gòng (鄉貢) or Jìn Shì (進士) exams under previous dynasties to join the educational administration.

Southern Vietnam was the cradle of Nguyen's power. However, by the time the dynasty was established, the region lacked the educational traditions found in the North and Central regions. Educational institutions had yet to be developed, and the education of children largely depended on private arrangements made by local families (Pham Van Thinh, 2025). Therefore, Gia Long placed great emphasis on expanding education in the South. In 1803, a senior official of Gia Dinh province submitted a memorial to the emperor, stating: "A nation's leadership relies on talent; governance depends on education and dissemination. Recently, our country has undergone upheaval, and the talents of Gia Dinh have remained idle. Now that peace has been restored, it is time for scholars to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly. I humbly propose that the regulations be revised to give the intelligentsia adequate opportunities to serve Your Majesty." Gia Long praised this recommendation and issued a policy promoting education: each village was to select one capable and virtuous individual to be exempt from corvée labor and tasked with educating the children of the village or hamlet. Children from the age of eight would begin with primary education and study the Xiàojīng (孝經); from twelve, they would proceed to Lún Yǔ (論語), Mèng Zǐ (孟子), and then to Zhōng Yóng (中庸), Dà Xué (大學); from fifteen, they would study Shī and Shū (詩書), followed by Zhōu Lǐ (周禮), Chūn Qiū Shí Dài (春秋時代), and supplement their studies with Zhū Zǐ Bǎi Jiā (諸子百家) and history. Anyone who drank, gambled, or performed illicit songs was to be reported to the authorities and punished as a warning to others (Guó Shǐguǎn, 2002a).

The Nguyen Dynasty's efforts to reform education were further demonstrated by changes to the civil examination system in 1807. That year, the Nguyen court held the first Xiāng Shì (鄉試, regional examination) and standardized the examination process. The country was divided into six examination centers: Nghe An, Thanh Hoa, Kinh Bac, Son Tay, Son Nam Thuong, and Hai Duong. Each center had four designated officials: chief examiner, supervisor, re-examiner, and preliminary examiner. Candidates underwent four

examination rounds: Round I tested knowledge of classical texts by requiring explanations of excerpts from the *Sì Shū* (四書) and *Wǔ Jīng* (五經), written in prose with parallel structure but no rhyme, to assess comprehension of Confucian classics. Round II involved writing *Zhào* (詔), *Zhì* (制), and *Biǎo* (表): *Zhào* were imperial edicts, *Zhì* were royal commendations, and *Biǎo* were memorials expressing gratitude or congratulations. This round tested candidates' formal writing skills for future governance. Round III was poetry composition, using the seven-character regulated verse form (eight lines, seven characters each), assessing poetic skill—a crucial part of elite cultural life. Round IV required argumentative essays on specific topics, testing candidates' reasoning and knowledge of both history and contemporary issues. Candidates who passed the first three rounds were listed, and those who passed the fourth round were publicly announced. Candidates passing all four rounds received the title *Xiāng Gòng* (鄉貢), known from 1828 onward as *Jǔ Rén* (舉人, provincial graduate). Those passing three rounds were initially called *Shēng Tú* (生徒) and later *Xiù Cǎi* (秀才, licentiate). All were exempt from labor duties; *Xiāng Gòng* were also granted ceremonial robes and invited to imperial banquets (Guó Shǐguǎn, 2002c).

In October 1807, the six examination centers held the first *Xiāng Shì* under the Nguyen Dynasty (Guó Shǐguǎn, 1993). Six years later, in 1813, the Nguyen court began organizing regional examinations in provinces south of Quang Binh. The Gia Dinh examination center accepted candidates from Binh Thuan to Ha Tien, and eight *Xiāng Gòng* were selected. In 1819, the Nguyen court held another regional exam in Gia Dinh, where twelve were selected. According to Tran Duc Cuong (chief editor, 2015), that year's exam faced disruptions from the first round due to a difficult question, prompting the chief examiner to issue a new topic. The exam concluded with a scandal: one candidate who passed the third round had hidden the fact that he was in mourning, and another had hired a proxy to sit the exam. The matter was escalated to the court. Gia Long ordered an investigation, which confirmed the violations. Officials were punished by flogging; the candidate who hid mourning was sentenced to penal labor; the impersonator and the candidate who hired him were conscripted into military service.

In 1820, Emperor Minh Mang succeeded Gia Long and launched sweeping administrative reforms. He renamed the country "Dai Nam", established a new cabinet, and emphasized military development. He also placed a strong emphasis on Confucian examinations. In 1822, he reinstated the metropolitan *Huì Shì* (會試) and *Diàn Shì* (殿試) examinations in the capital to recruit scholars. Minh Mang also paid close attention to education in the South. In 1821, the governor of Gia Dinh requested two exceptions to increase the number of eligible candidates: first, that students from other provinces who had passed prior exam rounds and resided long-term in Gia Dinh be granted local status; second, that candidates in mourning be allowed to participate. The emperor approved the first but firmly rejected the second, criticizing the idea that one could pursue glory while still mourning one's parents. He advised such individuals to spend the mourning period studying and wait for the following year's exam. His ruling was both principled and compassionate.

Thanks to the central court's support and local efforts, examination administration in Gia Dinh steadily improved. In 1821, the third regional exam under the Nguyen Dynasty selected sixteen successful candidates. Thereafter, the exams were held more regularly. By 1858, when French forces launched their invasion at Da Nang, Gia Dinh had already held nineteen regional exams (Cao Xuan Duc, 1993).

TABLE 1. Detailed results of the 19 regional exams held by the Nguyen Dynasty in Gia Dinh

No.	Year	Total Number of Passers	Name
1	Guǐ Yǒu (癸酉, 1813)	8	Nguyen Bao Bang, Nguyen Tri Thanh, Luu Buu Tam, Doan Trong Quynh, Tran Van Huong, Le Van Thanh, Nguyen Tan Ba, Pham Vinh The.
2	Jǐ Mǎo (己卯, 1819)	12	Truong Hao Hiep, Dang Van Nguyen, Dang Van Mo, Truong Minh Giang, Truong Duy Hoi, Mai Thang Duong, Nguyen Cong Hoan, Huynh Van Tu, Bui Tang Huy, Chu Ke Thien, Tran Vinh Lai.
3	Xīn Sì (辛巳, 1821)	16	Nguyen Van Ky, Bui Nguyen Tho, Vo Cong Nhan, Nguyen Khac Hai, Truong Phac, Ton Duc Tho, Doan Khiem Quang, Tong Duc Hung, Trinh Quang Khanh, Nguyen Vinh Trinh, Pham Tuan, Truong Van Uyen, Le Ba Dang, Ho Van Nghia, Pham Ngoc Oanh, Le Duc Ngan
4	Yǐ Yǒu (乙酉, 1825)	15	Truong Phuoc Cang, Phan Thanh Gian, Nguyen Van Hy, Nguyen Cong Nghi, Njuyen Hau Tan, Nguyen Tong Chanh, Le Van Trung, Vuong Huu Quang, Tran Quang Tan, Dinh Hung Thieu, Dang Van Chanh, Pham Quang, Nguyen Nguyen, Dao Tri Kinh, Pham Duy Trinh
5	Wùzǐ (戊子, 1828)	16	Mai Huu Dien, Nguyen Quang Tu, Dang Trung Hy, Nguyen Van Trien, Nguyen Hau Duc, Pham Khac Nhung, Nguyen Ngoc Chan, Truong Tan Nham, Nguyen Song Thanh, Pham Don Que, Le Khiem Quang, Phan Van Thanh, Nguyen Van Nhan, Cao Phuc Le, Pham Nhu Ba, Pham Ngoc Quang.
6	Xīn Mǎo (辛卯, 1831)	10	Dinh Van Huy, Luong Quoc Quang, Huynh Man Dat, Vo Doan, Cung, Nguyen Dong Khoa, Bui Minh Thanh, Phan Vinh Dinh, Le Trung Tin, Vo Thanh Phong, Tran van Tin.
7	Jiǎ Wǔ (甲午, 1834)	9	Bui Huu Nghia, Nguyen Van Vien, Ho Van Quang, Do Tri Thanh, Ly Phong, Tran Van Long, Nguyen Duy Nhut, Le Hung Nhon, Huynh Huu Quang.
8	Dīng Yǒu (丁酉, 1837)	11	Nguyen Van Triem, Bui Van Phong, Nguyen Cong Du, Nguyen van Tri, Nguyen Khac Dieu, Le Van Du, Nguyen Tan Hoi, Nguyen Van Quyen, Vo Doan Nguyen, Tran Thanh Lap, Huynh Man Chanh.
9	Gēng Zǐ (庚子, 1840)	6	Nguyen Hoai Vinh, Le Phuoc Duc, Tran Van Lap, Vo Tan Huy, Kieu Khac Hai, Phan Van Chat.
10	Xīn Chǒu (辛丑, 1841)	15	Ho Dang Phong, Le Phuoc Luong, Nguyen Tong Cang, Nguyen Tan Minh, Nguyen Cong Vinh, Le Dao Tam, Pham Duy Hoan, Phan Cu Chanh, Duong Tan Si, Tran Xuan Hoa, Bach Van Ly, Ho Van Ngan, Nguyen Nang Khiem, Nguyen Ich Khiem, Nguyen Van Toai.
11	Rén Yǐn (壬寅, 1842)	16	Vo Duy Quang, Nguyen Duy Doan, Bui Quang Nghi, Tran Thien Chanh, Vo Nghi, Ho Tho Huong, Tong Viet Cang, Ho Ba Phuoc, Au Duong Xuan, Nguyen Quang Khue, Pham Van bang, Pham Hoang Dat, Nguyen Van Nghi, Dang Tiong Thoai, Vo Văn Nguyen, Huong Chanh Truc.

12	Guǐ Mǎo (癸卯, 1843)	15	Pham Van Trung, Tran Xuan Quang, Le Chanh Nghi, Le Huu Nghia, Pham Duy Thanh, Nguyen Duy Quang, Do Trinh Thoai, Tran van Hoc, Nguyen Doan Nguyen, Nguyen Quang Bich, Phan Van Phung, Le Dang De, Nguyen Van Tan, Nguyen Van Hung, Le Hieu Khiem.
13	Bǐng Wǔ (丙午, 1846)	18	Nguyen Xuan Y, Le Van Loan, Nguyen Nhu Lam, Phan Van Vien, Phung Tuong Van, Pham Dang Xuan, Huynh Huu Quang, Tran Van Chat, Nguyen Van Chanh, Nguyen Luong Ngan, Pham Huu Chanh, Lam Thuc Tu, Nguyen The Binh, Nguyen Tong Minh, Dang Van Chuong, Nguyen van Khanh, Ho Quang Co, Nguyen Thanh Hien.
14	Dīng Wèi (丁未, 1847)	20	Nguyen Cong Hai, Cu Khac Kiem, Le Duy Ninh, Luu Tan Thien, Truong Hoai Can, Bui Hieu Thuan, Nguyen Than Duc, Le Quang Than, Nguyen Tan Ich, Cu Khac Can, Nguyen van Tien, Nguyen Van Tho, Nguyen Gia Hoi, Do Huu Tam, Tran Huu Quang, Pham Cu, Mai Dinh Thuc, Ho Van Phong, Ly Duy Phan, Le Cong Dao.
15	Wù Shēn (戊申, 1848)	20	Nguyen Duc Hoanh, Nguyen Ham Ninh, Nguyen Duy Don, Vuong Tan Dung, Nguyen Van Phuong, Thai Van Tong, Vo Duy Hien, Tran Hoi Huu, Pham Van Hien, Nguyen Ly, Truong The Tran, Tran Thanh, Dieu Van Thanh, Le Van Long, Nguyen Khiem Trinh, Phan Tien Tru, Phan Van Dat, Tran Van Thong, Nguyen Tu Man, Nguyen Duong Xuan.
16	Jǐ Yǒu (己酉, 1849)	17	Vo The Tri, Nguyen Thoi Thong, Vo Dang Khoa, Tran Van Dinh, Bui Luong Thai, Tran Van Muu, Nguyen Khiem Hanh, Nguyen Huy, Nguyen Huu Thanh, Phan van Tri, Bui Tan, Dang Hoa, Nguyen van Khoa, Do Tri Thanh, Pham Ke Tuan, Truong Gia Hoi, Bui Nguyen Thien.
17	Rén Zǐ (壬子, 1852)	13	Nguyen Huu Huan, Nguyen Thanh Trung, Nguyen Huu Tao, Vo Duy Huong, Le Hung Liem, Huynh Van Thanh, Nguyen Xuan Phong, Nguyen Canh Chan, Nguyen Nung Huong, Mai Thoai Phuong, Bui Duc Ly, Nguyen Thanh Y, Dinh Huong.
18	Yǐ Mǎo (乙卯, 1855)	13	Nguyen Tan Thien, Tran Minh Khue, Ngo Duy Huu, Dang Van Thanh, Ha Mau Duc, Nguyen Trong Tri, Nguyen van An, Nguyen Khac Thanh, Le Van Tri, Nguyen Quang Hoang, Lê Xuan Khanh, Nguyen Thanh Tu, Huynh Gian.
19	Wù Wǔ (戊午, 1858)	9	Le Dinh Sam, Ngo Phan, Doan Tan Thien, Nguyen van Si, Au Duong Lan, Nguyen Luong Tri, Nguyen Doan Nguyen, Tran Van Phu, Nguyen Cong Binh.

3.2. Local Government Initiatives in Organizing and Promoting Education in Southern Vietnam

Before the establishment of the Nguyen Dynasty, for a long period, the organization of schools and education for children in villages throughout Southern Vietnam was entirely arranged by the local population. These were privately run classes conducted by traditional scholars (thầy đồ - traditional Confucian teacher), held either at their homes or at locations mutually agreed upon by teachers and students. Many of these schools gained a strong reputation thanks to the prestige of the teachers or the academic achievements of

their students. However, formal organization and regular learning discipline were not yet foundational elements of such institutions. Historical records affirm that by 1802 - when Nguyen Anh ascended the throne and officially founded the Nguyen Dynasty, there had not yet been a single public school established in Southern Vietnam.

With the Nguyen Dynasty's policy emphasis on educational development, local governments in the South began efforts to construct public schools to meet the educational needs of the population starting in 1802. In 1805, Gia Dinh Province established a provincial school (under Vietnam's feudal education system, the hierarchy consisted of the National Academy at the court, followed by provincial, prefectural, and district schools, while villages had only private schools run by traditional scholars). This was the first and only public school in Southern Vietnam for twenty years (Guó Shǐguǎn, 1959a). In 1821, on the occasion of his coronation ceremony, Emperor Minh Mang issued a royal edict to the nation, which included eight provisions, the eighth of which required all provinces from Quang Tri southward to appoint a Dū Xué (督學, Provincial Education Commissioner); each prefecture was to appoint a Jiào Shòu (教授, Prefecture Education Commissioner), each district a Xùn Dǎo (訓導, District Education Commissioner), and each canton a Tǒng Jiáo (education supervisor) to teach students, manage educational affairs, and promote academic growth.

Gia Dinh and Bien Hoa were the first provinces to appoint Dū Xué (督學), even before the Nguyen Dynasty was officially established (Tran Van Giau, 1998). In 1823, Emperor Minh Mang assigned Đốc học (Provincial Education Commissioners) to Vinh Thanh and Dinh Tuong. He appointed Pham Dien, then prefect of Kien Xuong, as Dū Xué in Vinh Thanh, and Nguyen Hao Duc, prefect of Tien Hung, as Dū Xué in Dinh Tuong. In 1827, at the request of the governor of Gia Dinh, the emperor approved the appointment of Xùn Dǎo officials for the districts of Long Xuyen, Kien Giang, and Ha Tien. By 1829, Xùn Dǎo were appointed in the districts of Tuan Nghia and Tra Vinh (Guó Shǐguǎn, 2022b). In 1830, educational development in Southern Vietnam saw further progress, with the Gia Dinh administration requesting more appointments for Xùn Dǎo in the districts of Phuc Chinh, Binh An, Tan Minh, Vinh Binh, Kien Hung, and Kien Dang. These developments helped education flourish in the region, student enrollment grew, and learning and exam preparation became increasingly vibrant (Guó Shǐguǎn, 2022c).

In addition to appointing educational officials from the provincial down to the district levels, the government also placed importance on constructing school buildings. Beyond the provincial school built in Gia Dinh in 1805, the period from 1826 to 1840 marked the most active phase of public school construction in Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty. In 1826, the provinces of Dinh Tuong and Vinh Long built their provincial schools. According to Guó Shǐguǎn (1959a, b), by 1862, when the French began their invasion, Southern Vietnam had a total of 24 public schools. Of these, five provinces had built provincial-level schools (Gia Dinh, Dinh Tuong, Bien Hoa, An Giang, and Vinh Long), while only Ha Tien had not. All six southern provinces had constructed prefectural and district schools. Details are as follows (Guó Shǐguǎn, 1959a, b):

- Bien Hoa Province: 2 prefectural schools – Phuoc Long Prefectural School, and Phuoc Tuy Prefectural School (1838).
- Gia Dinh Province: 2 prefectural and 2 district schools – Tan Binh Prefectural School (1837), Tan An Prefectural School (1846); Tan Hoa District School (1841), Phuc Loc District School (1841).

- Dinh Tuong Province: 2 prefectural and 2 district schools – Kien An Prefectural School (1833), Kien Tuong Prefectural School (1838); Kien Hoa District School (1835), and Kien Dang District School (1838).
- Vinh Long Province: 1 prefectural and 4 district schools – Hoang Tri Prefectural School (1837), Tan Minh District School (1852), Bao An District School (1860), Vinh Tri District School (1862), and Duy Minh District School (1860).
- An Giang Province: 1 prefectural and 2 district schools – Tan Thanh Prefectural School (1832), Dong Xuyen District School (1837), and An Xuyen District School (1839).
- Ha Tien Province: 1 district school – Long Xuyen District School (1837).

Alongside school construction, the provinces also focused on building Temple of Literature (Van Mieu) complexes to worship Confucius and other revered Confucian scholars, thereby encouraging academic excellence. Two such temples became widely known among the public: the Bien Hoa Van Mieu and the Gia Dinh Van Mieu. The Bien Hoa temple was established quite early, in 1715. After the Nguyen Dynasty was founded, the temple was renovated with care. At the center stood the Dai Thanh Hall, with the Khai Thanh Shrine to the west, storage rooms to the east, brick walls enclosing the site, Kim Thanh Gate to the right, Ngoc Tran Gate to the left, and Dai Thanh Gate at the front. In the courtyard stood the Khue Van Pavilion, housing bells and drums. In front was a bridge, and behind, the Sung Van House and Duy Le House. An outer square wall enclosed the site, with Van Mieu Gate at the front, flanked by two ceremonial side gates. The Van Mieu held ceremonial rites twice a year, in spring and autumn. At times, the emperor himself presided over the ceremonies; later, this responsibility was delegated to provincial officials. Following Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh built its Temple of Literature in 1824. By the time of the French invasion, other southern provinces had not yet constructed their temples (Guó Shǐguǎn, 1959a). Following the Vietnamese tradition of building Van Mieu, the temples in Biên Hòa and Gia Định became centers for honoring outstanding scholars in Southern Vietnam. These were also important gathering places for Confucian literati, especially for poetry societies such as Jiāding Sānjiā Shī (嘉定三家詩, The Three Poets of Gia Dinh), and Huì Shān (會山, Son Hoi Poetry Group).

4. Conclusion

To date, researchers have yet to discover any comprehensive documentation detailing how provincial, prefectural, or district schools in Southern Vietnam were organized under the Nguyen Dynasty, nor is there sufficient information regarding the scale of student enrollment or the number of teachers at these institutions. Likewise, the names and specific cultural or educational activities held at the Temples of Literature in the region remain largely unexplored and require further study. Nevertheless, from a governance perspective, the central government's attention and the determined efforts of local administrations in organizing and developing education in Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty reflected the educational function of the state - namely, the advancement of education in service of the nation and its people. Although the educational achievements in Southern Vietnam during the first half of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1862) may not appear substantial in number, they marked a significant departure from the preceding centuries, when no formal public educational structures existed in the region. Viewed within the broader context of a weakening feudal regime in Vietnam, the

collective efforts of both the imperial court and local authorities highlight the Nguyen Dynasty's particular favor and commitment to Southern Vietnam's educational development. This represents a distinctive and meaningful chapter in the region's educational tradition.

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