

The State Organization in South Vietnam at the Cochin-china Ruling Time of the Nguyen Lords

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the formation and the model of the state organization in South Vietnam at the Cochin-china ruling time of the Nguyen Lords. At that time, the state organization in South Vietnam bore a lot of special characteristics, of which some were similar to but some were different from those in North Vietnam under the ruling of the Le Kings and Trinh Lords as well as those in the region of Thuan Quang under the ruling of the Nguyen Lords. Research on the state organization in South Vietnam in this period will enable us to get further understanding of the Vietnamese feudal history specifically and Vietnam history generally.

Key words: Government; state; history of law; Cochin-china (Đàng Trong); South Vietnam; Nguyen Lord.

1. Introduction

After Nguyen Hoang returned to Thuan Hoa in 1600, the face of Tonkin – Cochin-china started to sprout. Subsequently, it was officially set up in 1627, when the Lord Phuoc Nguyen disposed the troops to battle against the Trinh Lord along Nhat Le River. Eventually, the campaign ended with a catastrophic combat in Tran Ninh in 1772. At that time, the Cochin-china government basically stopped its period of resistance against the North. Free of war affairs in the northern part, the Nguyen Lords devoted all the strength to exploitation in the South. In

1679, the Lord Phuoc Tan accepted the political asylum in Cochin-china for a group of the Ming officials who opposed the Qing (of the movement to "Oppose Qing and Restore Ming"), including Cheng Shang-chuan (陳上川) and Yang Yan-di (楊彥迪), allowing them to settle down and reclaim land in Bien Hoa and My Tho. Thus, a foundation was laid for the territorial expansion of Cochin-china towards the South. Afterwards, the Lord Phuoc Chau set up Binh Thuan Palace of Defense (Dinh) in 1693. In 1698, Nguyen Huu Canh was appointed to be a viceroy, moving to the South to establish Gia Dinh province; the state organization was, therefore, officially set up in this area. In 1708, the Nguyen Lord accepted the

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allegiance of Mac Cuu (Mo Jiu) together with the submission of Ha Tien Province. The period from 1698 to 1777 can be seen as a period of the Southward march of the Cochin-china government. When the social management system, with orthodox core was the Cochin-china political - organizational regime developed independently from the Tonkin government. At the same time, the Nguyen Lords made a striking step in stabilization of the government in the region of Thuan Quang. What was the model of the Cochin-china organizational - political system at the ruling time of the Nguyen Lords, in reality? Due to the lack of literature, it is hardly possible to get comprehensive and detailed information about the state organization in South Vietnam at the Cochin-china ruling time of the Nguyen Lords. This paper, therefore, describes in outline the main features of the administrative structure and governmental organization in South Vietnam.

2. The Nguyen Lords' governmental apparatus in Cochin-china

The Nguyen Lords' Central governmental apparatus in Cochin-china generally and South Vietnam specifically was run in the *Chính Dinh* (Central Palace). In 1614, the Lord Phuoc Nguyen established 3 departments (*ty*), including: Departments of *Ty Xá sai* (Court Documents and Petitions), *Ty Twóng thân* (Department of Rice Tax and Military Provisions) and *Ty Lệnh sử* (Department of Ceremonies). In addition, there was a department (*Ty Nội lệnh sử*) responsible particularly for all tax-related affairs consisting of two sub-

departments (*Tả Lệnh sử* and *Hữu Lệnh sử*) which were responsible for collecting the poll-tax. In 1638, the Lord Phuoc Lan set up four highest-ranking positions of the court, including: *Nội tả* (the left internal affairs), *Nội hữu* (the right internal affairs), *Ngoại tả* (the left external affairs) and *Ngoại hữu* (the right external affairs). By 1744, the Lord Phuoc Hoat proclaimed himself an emperor and still kept the highest-ranking mandarins of the court. In the Central Palace, however, *Đô tri* and *Ký lục* (two divisions of the Court of Law) changed to *Hình bộ* (Ministry of Justice) and *Lại bộ* (Ministry of Interior) respectively; *Vệ úy* (Department of Ceremonies) changed to *Lễ bộ* (Ministry of Rites); *Cai bạ* (Department of Rice Tax and Military Provisions) changed to *Hộ bộ* (Ministry of Finance); *Văn chức* (Department of Literature) changed to *Hàn lâm viện* (Academy). Two new departments were established additionally, including *Binh bộ* (Ministry of War) and *Công bộ* (Ministry of Public Affairs).

Regarding to local administrative structure, the Cochin-china government maintained the same institutions as those of the Le Dynasty: there were two “*xứ*” (regions) Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. Each region was composed of many provinces (*phủ*) and each province consisted of many districts; at the lower levels, there were cantons, communes, villages (and corresponding official positions for those administrative units, such as the commune head and the village head). Notably, the organizational structure of cantons and districts was not consistently kept. After the Lord Phuoc Hoat proclaimed himself an emperor in 1744, for instance, the administrative system was restructured, but

the positions of *Tuần phủ* (Provincial Chief) and *Khám lý* (Management Chief) were particularly appointed to take control over Quang Ngai and Quy Nhon provinces. The responsibility for tax collection was mainly undertaken by the system of *Dinh trấn* (Palace of Defense - an administrative unit like a province at present) - a social management system bearing boldly the politico-military characteristics. It was the very core of the State institutions of the Cochinchina government.

The system of *Dinh trấn* was set up in the Cochinchina at the ruling time of the Lord Nguyen Hoang, but it was restructured for the first time by the Lord Phuoc Nguyen in 1614 together with establishment of three departments in the Central Palace. There was a clear division of functions between the system of district apparatus, which carried out the residence management by locations (the basic unit was village) and the system of *Dinh trấn*, which carried out residence management by occupations (the basic unit was *nậu man* - a small group of people doing the same job). The district apparatus was mainly responsible for management of issues involved with lawsuits, examinations, and rites. In the meanwhile, *dinh trấn* was responsible for management of issues involved with conscription, labor recruitment, and taxes. The administrative system was organized according to the politico-military model (the politico-military regime) and it was the most important in the Cochinchina state institutions in the 17th and the 18th Centuries. This feature became more obvious and significant, after Viet people moved to the Mekong Delta afterwards.

By the mid-18th Century, the politico - military regime in the region of Thuan Quang started to show its dreadful weaknesses. As the process of development lasted for several centuries in Thuan Quang, its socio - economic situation required a different model of social management. Yet, in the mid-18th Century, the region of South Vietnam was initially reclaimed. Consequently, the sociological structure with Vietnamese social institutions could not be applied synchronously in all systems of material and spiritual production as well as social communication, social management and bio-social reproduction. It was necessary to have one system to play the leading role. In the regional context of complicated foreign relations at that time, the politico - military institutions of the Cochinchina government was by chance the optimal way for social management to ensure sovereignty of Vietnamese community over the new land in the South.

After the Lords Phuoc Thuan and Phuoc Duong were arrested and killed in 1777, Nguyen Nhac became a king in 1778, naming his dynastic period as Thái Đức and setting up the capital in Quy Nhon. In the same year, however, Nguyen Anh elevated to the status of the Grand Marshal Regent by the force that supported the Nguyen Court and opposed Tay Son Court. He sent the troops to occupy Saigon, starting a 10-year war in this region. By 1788, he finally occupied the whole South Vietnam. During the period 1778 - 1788, consequently, there were two opposite political forces carrying out the government organization in South Vietnam, including: the government of Nguyen Anh and the government of Tay Son. After occupying Gia Dinh for the last time, the government of Nguyen Anh step-

by-step set up and strengthened its state apparatus. Although this period was no longer ruled by the Cochin-china government, basically it was the continuity and therefore a lot of the social management characteristics of the Cochin-china government were still maintained.

3. Formation of administrative units and establishment of the state organizations in South Vietnam by the Nguyen Lords

3.1. Policy on migration, land reclamation and formation of traditional co-residence units

Vietnamese traditional and basic administrative unit is village. Originating in North Vietnam, it was then brought by migrants to South Vietnam, where they set up the traditional co-residence unit to live and reclaim land.

Prior to 1698, Vietnamese people also made spontaneous and scattered flows of migration to the South, where they gathered in villages and reclaimed land to earn a living. In *Phủ biên tạp lục (Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier)*, Le Quy Don wrote: “the whole area of several thousand square miles, including land in Gia Dinh and Dong Nai, from Can Gio, Soai Lap seaports to Dai, Tieu estuaries, was covered completely by forest. In the past, the Nguyen Lords fought against Gao-Mian (Cambodia) and seized the area. Those, who had material assets in Quang Nam, Dien Ban, Quang Ngai and Quy Nhon, were mobilized to migrate to this area. They reclaimed land and consequently the terrain in this area became so even and flat” [1, p.345]. We can take account of the origin and motives for land reclamation among generations of Vietnamese migrants

here. They used to be POWs captured by the Cochin-china government in the battles with the Tonkin government. From 1627 to 1672, there were 5 big wars between Cochin-china and Tonkin. Those long-lasting wars devastated the whole Nghe An. The POWs were sent to the area of Tran Bien Place of Defense (Phu Yen province), the southern part of Thuan Quang, and South Vietnam for land reclamation. The second wave of migration to South Vietnam for land reclamation consisted of the army escapees, criminals, and those who wanted to settle down in a new land as a heroic figure (in the opinion of some people, the swashbuckling trait of Southerners not only came from the characteristics of nature here, but also stemmed from the fact they were really adventurous people, who wanted to explore the new land). They came to South Vietnam from both Cochin-china and Tonkin. And, those who were poor coming from the two above-mentioned regions for land reclamation made up a high proportion.

The land reclaiming migrants consisted of not only Viet people, but also Cham and Hoa people. People of the declining Kingdom of Champa took the most active part in the force of land reclamation in South Vietnam. Next to Cham people, there were Hoa people. In 1679, Chen Shangchuan together with 5 thousand troops, servants and 50 battle-ships landed at Tu Dung seaport and Da Nang, submitting themselves to the Nguyen Lords. “They reclaimed land, built houses and towns. The merchant ships of Qing, Western, Japanese, and Indian people sailed back and forth in great number; as a result, Dong Pho became gradually more civilized” [5, p.91]. Thus, “the group of the

exiled Ming servants, who were semi-robbers and semi-mandarins” also came to settle down [13, p.97]. According to Ta Chi Dai Truong’s argument, “Gia Dinh, where Nguyen Phuc Anh and his nephews came in February 1775, was established owing to the land reclamation made by two groups of people, including: the exiled Ming servants, who were semi-robbers and semi-mandarins and poor Viet peasants” [13, p.97]. This assessment seems to be inadequate, because apart from the two above-mentioned groups, there were other ones, including: Viet people, who were rich and recruited laborers and agricultural equipment, and Cham people, who were herded to South Vietnam. Those people also took part in the process of land reclamation in South Vietnam.

In conclusion, many groups of people with different origins were involved in the exploitation in South Vietnam. Owing to their land reclamation, huge resources were created to be used by the Cochinchina government to set up administrative units. “For such hasty exploitation, of course, the map of Gia Dinh region in the second half of the 18th Century bore some particular features” [13, p.98]. Those features made the administrative system set up by the Cochinchina government in South Vietnam much different from that in the region of Thuan Quang.

The year 1698 was marked with a very important event that the Nguyen Lord sent Nguyen Huu Canh on an inspection tour in Dong Pho. “The Province of Gia Dinh was established. The General Nguyen Huu Kinh was appointed to be a viceroy in Chenla; Dong Pho was divided: Phuc Long district was established in Dong Nai area; Tran Bien Palace of Defense (the modern Bien

Hoa) was built; Saigon was used to build Tan Binh District; Phien Tran Palace of Defense (the modern Gia Dinh) was built, etc. Communes, villages, and hamlets were set up with specific boundaries; land was reclaimed for farming; taxes were regulated; and, the register of farming laborers was made” [5, p.111]. This marked an important step in the Nguyen Lords’ sovereignty over the South. Thanks to this event, the administrative system was officially set up by the Cochinchina government in South Vietnam.

After 1698, the Cochinchina government continued to strengthen the policy on land reclamation on the basis of establishment of two first districts in South Vietnam, which were used as the headquarter of all land reclamation activities afterwards. At the same time, the event taking place in 1698 also helped to affirm the position of the Cochinchina government before Chenla. It was a very significant step for expansion of sovereignty and exploitation in South Vietnam.

For the entire 18th Century, the policy on migration for land reclamation in South Vietnam was implemented consistently and fundamentally in various forms by the Cochinchina government. Farms were expanded. Some of them were owned by rich people, who had agricultural equipment and hired poor laborers to reclaim wild land. In addition, some of them were military ones owned by the government, as soldiers were forced to reclaim wild land as well. In the beginning of the administrative system in South Vietnam, the military forces undertook two functions: land reclamation and land defense. Along canals, outside the forest, and inside wild forest areas, furthermore, poor people gradually reclaimed land to set

up villages. By 1757, Viet people, Hoa people, and Cham people were found all over South Vietnam, from Tran Bien through the forest edges of Tien and Hau Rivers to the indigo forests in Ha Tien. According to the data of the taxes paid to the Cochinchina government in South Vietnam, excluding Ha Tien, in 1775, the number of communes/villages amounted to 1,300 with about 42,500 male laborers [14, p.80]. Each male laborer was accompanied by a wife and 3 children; i.e. the total population in Vietnam in the 17th and 18th Century was 4 times of the number of male laborers. Thus, the population in South Vietnam in the late 18th Century was about 212,500 persons.

The migration of Viet, Hoa, and Cham people resulted in a new demographic structure, new co-residence units, a new administrative organizational system, and a new management apparatus in South Vietnam. All the waves of migration, whether organized by the Cochinchina government or spontaneous, both before and after 1698, led to the appearance of new co-residence units. In 1698, consequently, Tan Binh district, Phuc Long district, and Gia Dinh province were set up, marking an initial step in establishment of the political institutions in South Vietnam.

3.2. Policy on step-by-step infiltration: Wherever land reclamation and village foundation was done, administrative units and ruling apparatus were immediately set up

In reality, the establishment of administrative units depended on many factors, of which a very important one was the population density. In such a vast and wild area like South Vietnam, pioneer residents set up the first villages from

several households; and then, the villages' population gradually grew higher. "In the South, villages were not surrounded by a bamboo enclosure. They often ran along canals with only one row of houses. There was a path running along the canal; houses were built along the rest side of the path; gardens and then fields were located behind the houses. In the areas around confluences or intersections of rivers, population was denser, forming small markets" [10, pp.80 - 81]. Due to the low population density, administrative units could not be set up all at once, as it was related to the collection of taxes. That's why administrative units were set up step-by-step in South Vietnam. Nguyen Cu Trinh's report can be seen as clear proof of the Cochinchina government's gradual expansion towards the South: "In the past, we established Gia Dinh first and Mo Xoai, Dong Nai afterwards, so that people could gather together. Eventually, we established Saigon. It is the way to make gradual expansion like silkworms eat leaves" [1, p.124].

In fact, when a new administrative unit was set up, it could be seen as a manifestation of the Cochinchina government's intervention (militarily or diplomatically) in the land, which had been ruled very loosely by Chenla. As demonstrated in the report of Nguyen Cu Trinh in 1732: "Please consider the terrain, build fortifications to divide land areas, gather laborers and soldiers, and provide farmland for settlers" [1, p.124].

Thus, the Cochinchina government applied two ways in establishing administrative units in South Vietnam. Firstly, on the basis of the population density, administrative units were set up in

the areas, where a lot of people lived, like the establishment of Gia Dinh province, Tan Binh District, and Phuc Long District. Secondly, military or diplomatic measures were used to get the land areas, which Chenla could not rule over at all, in order to establish military - administrative units first; and then, migration was organized to move people to those areas for land reclamation; at the same time, adjustments of the previous administrative units were made to make them appropriate to population changes.

Based on the available literature, we can realize some important events involved with the land expansion and infiltration of the Cochinchina government in South Vietnam. In 1698, Nguyen Huu Canh paid an inspection tour in Dong Nai, where Phuc Long and Tan Binh districts were then established (later on, in the Southerners' mind, the phrase "*residents of two districts*" was extremely significant and proudly disseminated among people, since it indicated those, who first settled down in South Vietnam officially in Tan Binh and Phuc Long Districts). At the same time, Hoa people were allowed to settle down in Thanh Ha commune, which was set up in Tran Bien, and Minh Huong commune, which was set up in Phien Tran. In 1708, Ha Tien province was established in the land ruled by Mac Cuu. "At that time, Mac Cuu assigned his subordinates, Truong Cau and Ly Xa, to submit a letter to the Lord, asking for being the head of Ha Tien. The Lord accepted the request and conferred the title of commander on him. Mac Cuu built barracks in Phuong Thanh. There were more and more people coming to live" [5, p.122]. In 1732, "the Lord assumed that Gia

Dinh had a flat and vast terrain, so he ordered officials to divide it and establish Dinh Vien Division (the modern Dinh Vien Province) and Long Ho Palace of Defense (i.e. Vinh Long Province at present)" [5, p.143]. According to Nguyen Cu Trinh's report recorded by Le Quy Don, in fact, Dinh Vien Division was established, owing to the fact that the Chenla government gave land as an offering to the Nguyen Lord, after being failed in military activities. In 1756, Nac Nguyen - the King of Chenla - offered land of two provinces, including Tam Bon and Loi Lap, to the Nguyen Lord, because Chieu Chuy Ech, a Chenla military leader, had carried out harassments in Con Man (the land ruled by the Nguyen Lord)" [5, p.165]. Dinh Vien Division was then expanded to Go Cong, Tan An, and Ben Tre. In 1757, Nac Nguyen died, so the situation in Chenla fell in complete disorder. The Nguyen Lord's troops helped Nac Ton come to the throne. Expressing his gratitude, Nac Ton offered the land of Tam Phong Long to the Nguyen Lord. And then, the Cochinchina government expanded further its territory, setting up Dong Khau barracks in Sa Dec, Tan Chau barracks in Tien Giang, and Chau Doc barracks in Hau Giang. Subsequently, Nac Ton offered 5 more provinces of Chenla to the Nguyen Lord. Performing the Nguyen Lord's direction, the land was defined as a part of Ha Tien with two new barracks, Kien Giang and Long Xuyen set up by Mac Thien Tu (Mao Tianci) [5, pp.166 - 167].

3.3. Loose binding policy

The loosely binding policy was consistently implemented by the Cochinchina government to establish and control

administrative units in South Vietnam. It made the administrative structure in South Vietnam at the ruling time of the Nguyen Lords much different from that in the region of Thuan Quang. In the context of territorial expansion and land reclamation for new economic settlements in the area, which still remained wild with a lot of resources and high political sensitivity, however, such a policy showed certain advantages.

There were a large number of reasons making the Cochinchina government accept the application of loosely binding administrative regulations in South Vietnam.

Looked at objectively, South Vietnam was a new land area far from the Central government, so the government could hardly take strict control over it. Furthermore, South Vietnam was very large with wild nature and a low population density. At the same time, the ethnic and residence composition was complicated, consisting of outlaws and bandits who came there in the hope of getting good future in the promised land. Therefore, the ruling regulations should be carried out gradually; it was impossible to do all strictly at once.

Subjectively, the Cochinchina government could not do anything better than the loosely binding administration. After 50 years of non-stop wars against the Trinh Lords (1627 - 1672), the risk of being attacked from the North still existed, although Truong Duc Ramparts had been built. Thus, they had to keep military forces to cope with it. Chenla was located in the South, where the political situation became complicated with a lot of contradictions and conflicts. A strict civil system would be, therefore, less advantageous than a militarized administrative apparatus, which

was just focused on collecting taxes without paying much attention to civil management, palace building, or trial proceeding etc... Another reason for not applying strict administration in South Vietnam is that the very Cochinchina government was on the way to set up and strengthen various fields of its administrative apparatus. In addition, they still kept in mind confidential advice given by the Lord Nguyen Hoang before he died: "For Thuan Quang land, there is Ngang (Hoang Son) Mountain and Gianh River in the north, making it full of obstacles. In the south, there is Hai Van Mountain and Da Bia (Thach Bi Son) Mountain, which are very stable. There is gold, iron available in mountains and fish, salt in the sea. It is a really advantageous land for heroes. If you know how to guide people and drill soldiers to cope with the Trinh Lords, you can get forever success. In case you cannot fight against them, you have to make every effort to keep land to wait for chance. Do not ignore my instructions" [5, p.37].

In fact, the Cochinchina government did accept and maintain a loosely binding administrative system in South Vietnam. "In the past, there were just swamps and forests in Nong Nai area. At first, 3 palaces were set up and people were mobilized to come and live. The law was very tolerant. Some people had farmland in Phien Tran County but they paid the tax on farmland like people in Tran Bien County; vice versa, some people had farmland in Tran Bien County but they paid the tax on farmland like people in Phien Tran County. It depended on the willingness of local people without any compulsions. The most essential target was to reclaim land and set up communes/villages" [3, p.81]. Administrative units were arranged disorderly, linked to each

other and to the Central government very loosely. The looseness is shown most clearly in the relation between the Central government and local administrative institutions. The two most important tasks assigned to the local administrative institutions in South Vietnam were: (1) to perform military duties for boundary protection and intervention in Chenla when necessary; and, (2) to collect taxes. According to a large number of documents, such as *Phủ biên tạp lục* (Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier), *Gia Định thành thông chí* (Annals of Gia Dinh), *Đại Nam thực lục* (Actual Chronicles of Dai Nam), the Central government had a lot of difficulties in taking control over population and land in South Vietnam and the tax collection was done just fairly well.

In such a context, the Cochinchina government surely accepted a self-governing mechanism for areas in South Vietnam. That's why Kien Giang and Long Xuyen barracks were set up in 1757 by Mac Thien Tu (Mao Tianci) but not by the Central government, although Ha Tien province was under the administration of the Nguyen Lords from 1708. A lot of activities, including military ones, carried out in Ha Tien show obviously the self-governance. For example, Mac Thien Tu had his own army and he could make military intervention in Chenla without asking for permission from the Nguyen Lords. In terms of the economic development and political life, Ha Tien was highly self-governing. In addition, the self-governing characteristics can be easily seen in economic aspects of many villages in South Vietnam at that time.

As a result of the above-mentioned loosely binding policy, the government

system set up in South Vietnam were relatively simple and it lacked close linkage. Such an administrative structure was obviously weak and only appropriate for land reclaiming people. The administrative system was set up on the basis of land reclaiming people and for the purpose of land reclamation, so the local self-governance was very high, especially in communes/villages, because of their wild natural characteristics. In the long term, however, the administrative system with simple laws would make people easily have behaviors diverging from the law and government directions as well.

4. Administrative structure and state organization in South Vietnam

In 1698, the establishment of Gia Dinh province composed of Phuc Long and Tan Binh districts was an initial step in setting up administrative units of the Cochinchina government in South Vietnam. In 1744, Nguyen Phuc Khoat proclaimed himself an emperor titled the King of Dai Viet. According to Li Tana, Thich Dai San said that Nguyen Phuc Chu proclaimed himself an emperor titled the King of Dai Viet in 1675 [14. p.80]. At the same time, the author suspected the event in 1744 and assumed that it was a mistake in *Đại Nam thực lục* (Actual Chronicles of Dai Nam), because *Đại Nam thực lục* also revealed that in 1709 Nguyen Phuc Chu used the seal titled *Đại Việt quốc Nguyễn Vương Vĩnh Trán chi bảo* (the Precious Seal of the Long-lasting Ruling Nguyen King of Greater Vietnam); additionally, the same seal was printed in a bell in Thien Mu Temple built in 1715. Basically, the organizational structure of administrative units and management apparatus in South Vietnam in the ruling period of the Nguyen

Lords can be divided into two stages: the first stage lasted from the establishment of Gia Dinh province in 1698 until the Lord Nguyen Phuc Khoat proclaimed himself an emperor (1744); and, the second stage lasted from 1744 to the end of the Cochinchina government (1777). From 1778 to 1802, there were disputes over ruling power in South Vietnam between Tay Son and Nguyen Anh. Eventually, the period of disputes was ended by the ruling of Nguyen Anh, after he occupied Gia Dinh for the last time. Although this period was no longer ruled by the Nguyen Lords, the state organization still bore a lot of administrative characteristics of the Cochinchina government. It is, therefore, necessary to view it as a period of continuity with close linkages to the Cochinchina government of the Nguyen Lords.

4.1. Period from 1698 to 1744

Before 1698, there were already administrative units in the territory of South Vietnam, although they were not exactly as the true sense of the word “administrative”. They were organizations of Hoa people, who came to do land reclamation and settle down, including: one group led by Mac Cuu and one group led by Yang Yandi and Cheng Shangchuan. In 1623, the Cochinchina government used a diplomatic measure to set up a tax collection station in Saigon. (A princess of the Nguyen Lord was married to Chey Chetta - the King of Chenla. As mentioned by Phan Khoang in *Đại Nam liệt truyện - Stories of celebrities of Greater Vietnam* - the Lord Xizong had 4 daughters. The marriage of two daughters was recorded specifically; for the rest two ones, including Ngoc Van and Ngoc Khoa, it was just written “Missing information”. Perhaps, they felt ashamed to mention the

marriage to the king of Chenla, so it was not recorded in the historical documents. The information about this event was only mentioned in the historical documents of Chenla.

In 1679, when Yang Yandi came to surrender, the Nguyen Lord started to carry out the reorganization of administrative units and land reclamation. According to *Đại Nam nhất thống chí (the Official Geographical Record of Dai Nam)*, military leaders of the Ming Dynasty came to “build houses and live together with Kinh and Di people, forming hamlets, etc.; they also set up farms and small trade groups, where all people worked and paid taxes fully” [6, p.88]. The nine isolate hamlets existed till 1779, when Nguyen Anh carried out an administrative reform in South Vietnam. At that time, he decided to remove those nine hamlets, establishing Kien Khang District and Truong Don Palace of Defense and appointing treasurers, heads of the Department of Rice tax and Military provisions, and heads of the Court of Law” [6, p.88]. Two first administrative units were, therefore, set up simply. It was the first step, based on which Nguyen Huu Canh established two districts in the South Vietnam in 1698.

After Mac Cuu migrated to Ha Tien, he also started to organize administrative units for land reclamation. “Initially, Mac Cuu - an official of the Ming dynasty in Guangdong, China - moved to the South and found that merchants from different countries gathered there to do business. He, consequently, recruited people to settle down in Phu Quoc, Vung Thom, Rach Gia, and Ca Mau, forming seven communes under his governance” [6, p.6]. The internal structure of the communes still remains

known, but it surely bore a lot of characteristics of the Chinese pattern.

In 1698, Nguyen Huu Canh established Gia Dinh Province, consisting of two districts: Phuc Long and Tan Binh. Thus, the governmental structure in South Vietnam was basically shaped according to the following vertical pattern: province - district - commune. This is a traditional structure applied in North Vietnam through many dynasties in the past and by the Tonkin and Cochinchina governments at that time.

In the beginning, there were no management institutions in Gia Dinh Province, but it was just a formalistic administrative structure composed of two dependent districts. By 1731, the management position of Gia Dinh Province was set up. A military leader was appointed to be the controller of the province. This shows that military leaders played a very important role during this period. They might hold civil and military positions at the same time. In the newly established administrative units, consequently, they paid more attention to military activities.

There were two palaces set up in the two districts of Gia Dinh Province. The palace is understood as a level in the management system. Each palace was responsible for controlling one district. Phien Tran Palace administered Tan Binh District; Tran Bien Palace administered Phuc Long District; and, Long Ho Palace administered Dinh Vien District. According to *Đại Nam nhất thống chí (the Official Geographical Record of Dai Nam)* and *Đại Nam thực lục (True Chronicles of Greater Vietnam)*, herein the noun “trấn” does not indicate an administrative unit like a province, but it was used to indicate the places in the new

frontier, such as Tran Bien which was established in Phu Yen in the mid-17th Century. The head of each palace was a military leader titled *Lưu thủ* or *Trấn thủ* (District chief). Regarding to the ruling system in each palace, there were positions of *Lưu thủ* (District chief), *Cai bạ* (head of the Department of Rice Tax), and *Ký lục* (head of the Court of Law) and infantry and marine groups” [5, p.111]. Thus, the administrative model applied by the Cochinchina government in the South Vietnam was basically similar to that of the administrative reform applied in the region of Thuan Quang in 1614.

Lưu thủ, *cai bạ*, and *ký lục* were management positions at the district level. *Lưu thủ* was the first-ranking official responsible for all activities of the palace; he, therefore, had both political and civil power. *Cai bạ* was the second-ranking official responsible for taxes, land-use and military provisions. This position was closely related to administrative and civil affairs. At the ruling time of the Lord Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, *Ký lục* was an official who worked in the Court of Law (*Ty Xá sai*) as an assistant for the head of the Department of Rice Tax and Military Provisions (*Ty Tướng thân*) and the head (*Nha úy*) of the Department of Ceremonies (*Ty Lệnh sử*). At the provincial level additionally, there were two departments, including the Court of Law (*Xá sai*) and the Department of Rice Tax and Military Provisions (*Tướng thân*); at the district level, there were *Xá ty* (the District Court of Law) and *Lại ty* (the District Division of Internal Affairs) [3, p.79]. The head of the District Court of Law was *Ký lục* and the head of the Department of Rice Tax and Military Provisions was *Cai bạ*, who was

responsible for tax collection. The existence of the two departments was mentioned just one time, but they existed in reality and were very popular in the region of Thuan Quang. Thus, we can realize that they were also commonly established in South Vietnam. Compared with the region of Thuan Quang, however, there was no *Ty Lệnh sử* (Department of Ceremonies, which was responsible for activities involved with rituals, worship, culture, and religion) in the district management system in South Vietnam.

The military force was particularly important in the ruling apparatus of the Nguyen Lords in the South Vietnam, for the purpose of ensuring effectively all activities of land reclamation, guaranteeing interests of the Nguyen government, and making military interventions in getting this new land away from influence of Chenla. Basically, the military force was divided into three groups, including: naval force, elite force, and dependent force. The naval force consisted of two kinds of troops: the Central and the local. The elite force also consisted of the two above-mentioned kinds of troops. The dependent force consisted of only the local troops.

Commune was an administrative unit at the grass-roots level. As the process of land reclamation and establishment of residence areas took place for a long time with a complicated population composition, the commune was not a stable administrative unit. Under the commune, there were villages, trade groups, hamlets, and other small groups of people. The village and the trade group were sometimes seen as the grass-roots administrative units. There is very limited literature available, so we cannot learn much about the management

positions in communes/villages. Basically, there were two positions at the commune level, including *Tướng thân* (responsible for tax collection) and *Xã trưởng* (the commune's head). The available literature hasn't yet provided convincing evidence of the number of management positions in each commune. Based on the size of communes in the region of Thuan Quang, the number of management positions in each commune was 18 at most. In the South Vietnam, they mainly undertook the task of tax collection.

At that time, Ha Tien province was organized according to the self-governing mechanism for the initial purpose of attracting the influence and the role of Mac family. With the real power allowed by the Nguyen Lords, the Governor of Ha Tien could be considered as the king of this remote land. After Mac Cuu died, Mac Thien Tu kept the position of the Governor of Ha Tien and continued maintaining the same mechanism of power.

4.2. Period from 1745 to 1777

After proclaiming himself an emperor in 1744, Nguyen Phuc Khoat carried out a reform in the administrative system in Cochin-china. In the context, administrative units in South Vietnam were expanded, re-identified, and standardized after the model of administrative structure in Cochin-china. This is an inevitable consequence of the process of land reclamation, military intervention for the usurpation of power from the Chenla government and assertion of sovereignty.

According to the administrative reform promulgated by the Lord Nguyen Phuc Khoat, the entire Cochin-china was divided into 12 palaces. "the Palace of Defense in

Phuc Long was named Tran Bien; that in Tan Binh was named Phien Tran; and that in Dinh Vien was named Long Ho”; “Ha Tien was separated from the rest as a province administered by an admiral” [5, p.153]. Thus, there were 3 palaces and one province (Ha Tien) in the South Vietnam. By that time, the palace was no longer an apparatus for district management, but it became an administrative unit.

The administrative organization in South Vietnam in this period, consequently, consisted of palaces (provinces) - districts - communes. This organizational pattern is basically similar to that in the region of Thuan Quang as well as the previous one. Yet, the number, size and norms of the new administrative units were greater and more effective, compared with the previous ones. The administrative system in South Vietnam step by step fell in line with the general framework of the Cochinchina government, showing an advance in affirming the Nguyen Lords’ sovereignty over land in South Vietnam.

At the level of palace (*Dinh*), there were 3 palaces (Tran Bien, Phien Tran, and Long Ho). Each of the palaces was responsible for administering some districts; i.e. it was similar to *Phủ*. In some places, however, one *Dinh* might consist of some *Phủ*. Here is an example. In 1770, “Tran Phuc Thanh - the head of the Court of Law (*Ký lục*) in Quang Nam Palace - was appointed to be the head of the Department of Rice Tax (*Cai bạ*); he paid an inspection tour in five *Phủ* (including Thang Binh, Dien Ban, Quang Ngai, Quy Nhon, and Phu Yen), giving advice on how to defeat the enemies and directing the troops from six military barracks in Quang Ngai and the troops in two *Phủ*, Quy Nhon and Phu Yen, to crush

out the villains” [5, p.174]. This means that *Dinh* was bigger than *Phủ*; i.e. it can be considered the same as a province afterwards or a *trấn* before 1744). Ha Tien Province still remained self-governing, but it became more and more dependent on the Cochinchina government of the Nguyen Lords. In fact, it already became an obvious part that could not be separated from the territory of Cochinchina.

Districts (*huyện, châu, đạo*) were subordinate administrative units of the province. We do not know exactly the number of districts in South Vietnam at that time, but it was surely higher than the past due to the new results in land reclamation. The management apparatus at the district level was not much different from that in the region of Thuan Quang, but the number of officials might be fewer, because the governing activities in South Vietnam were not very diversified and complicated. Based on the general regulations promulgated by Nguyen Phuc Khoat in the administrative reform, each district was led by one chief; there were also some other positions responsible specifically for military, taxation, and residence affairs.

Together with the districts (*huyện*), another administrative type (*Đạo*) was also re-established in the newly reclaimed areas, where population still remained unstable. This is a particular administrative form equivalent to a district. At that time, there were six *đạo* in the South Vietnam. Its management system was similar to that of the district, including a chief and a secretary, but it bore more military characteristics.

Commune was viewed as the grass-roots administrative unit in the state organization in South Vietnam. It was a traditional administrative unit with very little change;

basically, it was set up from villages during the process of land reclamation. There is not sufficient literature to get clear understanding of the commune administrative structure as well as its relationship with the administratively superior institutions. Theoretically, the structure of communes in the South Vietnam was, however, more open than villages in the North Vietnam.

Military forces were organized basically the same as those in the previous periods, but the quantity and equipment increased visibly. According to the statistic data from reference literature, the Central military force allocated in Tran Bien Palace of Defense consisted of 7 groups with 27 battleships; that in Phien Tran Palace consisted of 8 groups with 25 battleships; Long Ho Palace - 5 groups with 17 battleships; and Ha Tien - 3 groups with 14 battleships. Local military forces were also organized rather strictly. The number of troops in Tran Bien was about 6 thousand in all groups; in the estuaries, there were military forces doing the task of tax collection and patrol; for example, in the river mouth in Quang Hoa, there were 720 troops and 15 military boats. In Phien Tran, there were about 6 thousand troops; and in Long Ho - 13 thousand. All the communes and villages had a force of civil defense organized by local governments [1].

4.3. Period from 1778 to 1802

After occupying Gia Dinh for the first time in 1778, Nguyen Anh immediately carried out activities on setting up the governmental system in South Vietnam. It can be said that Nguyen Anh conducted a comprehensive war, including against Tay Son government, based on the ruling

experience learned from nearly 200 years of his previous generations.

For the period 1778 – 1784, the Central government of Nguyen Anh still followed the same institutions at the Cochinchina ruling time of the Nguyen Lords. According to *Đại Nam thực lục chính biên đệ nhất kỷ* (*Actual Chronicles of Dai Nam, the first official volume: Annals of Gia Long*), the Central apparatus of Nguyen Anh's government was also named *Chính dinh* (The Central Palace) located in Saigon separately from the ruling system in Phien Tran Palace. Apart from the Central Palace, the ruling apparatus of palaces/districts was also maintained the same, undertaking management of villages; the position of district chief was not set up yet.

For the period from 1778, especially from 1788 to 1802, owing to the loose social institutions from the late period of the Cochinchina government in South Vietnam, the government of Nguyen Anh generally got a lot of advantages in developing the politico-military regime to mobilize resources from this region for the war on seizing the throne for the family. Yet, the politico-military regime itself had a lot of shortcomings, of which the most visible was the lack of an effective supervisory mechanism. This made it easy for governmental officials to misuse power, resulting in impulsive or unlawful activities in social life. For the purpose of fighting against the government of Tay Son, Nguyen Anh, consequently, intended to build a centralized government with strict rules. The most obvious example is that the positions of the four highest-ranking court officials were removed and military disciplines were strengthened in 1788. Concerning the governmental organization,

a large number of prohibitions were promulgated, such as the prohibition against robbery in 1789, the decree on arresting robbers and thieves in 1797, the decree on fire prevention and robbery arrest in 1799, etc. Remarkably, the prohibition in 1799 more or less authorized local governments to have power to supervise activities of the army involved with social order and security. Since 1788, the force of Confucian scholars started to develop in the government apparatus, resulting in some impacts on the politico-military system; it became more or less constrained by the ruling class. This is the very premise for new awareness leading to the extermination of the politico-military model all over the country in 1832.

5. Conclusion

Although the state organization in South Vietnam depended on the political status of the Cochinchina government of the Nguyen Lords, it was fundamentally a politico-administrative system built on the basis of the politico-military model, in which the military force played the key role and military leaders kept essential positions in the system of the political power.

Inheriting the experience and achievements of the Cochinchina government in building the politico-military and administrative institutions for nearly 200 years, the government of Nguyen Anh got advantages in developing its governmental system in South Vietnam in the late 18th Century for the sake of the war against Tay Son government, leading to the end of the civil war between Nguyen Anh and Tay Son. Supported by the war situation, the politico-military regime with its fatal shortcomings was adjusted to strengthen the centralized system and

minimize religious factors. As a result, it proved some particular and temporary advantages, leading to certain positive achievements, of which the most outstanding was that it contributed a part towards applying traditional factors of the Vietnamese social institutions in the new land. For activities carried out by the government of Nguyen Anh from 1778, and especially from 1788, the politico-military regime that existed in Vietnam since the Le - Mac war made a long stride in integrating into the local sociological structure from the perspective of social management, resulting in positive impacts on accelerating the integration of this new land into the political and administrative history of the whole nation.

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