

**NGUYEN LORDS' POLICIES ON BUDDHISM
IN COCHINCHINA DURING THE PERIOD
FROM 1558 TO 1777**

***Abstract:** Since the beginning of Cochinchina kingdom construction, the Nguyễn lords had a policy to prioritize the development of Buddhism. Based on a large number of historical documents, the article shed a light on behavior of the Nguyễn government towards Buddhism in this period. It also assesses the role of Buddhism in consolidating social solidarity, solving the issue of ethnicity and religion, contributing to the consolidation of the State power in Cochinchina during the period from 1558 to 1777.*

***Keywords:** Cochinchina; Nguyễn Lord; Buddhism; religious policy; 16th-18th centuries.*

Introduction

In the process of establishing the government, the power of the State on the new land (Cochinchina) with the diversity of ethnicity, each ethnic community had their own cultural traditions, different religions, including: the Vietnamese, the Chams, the Khmer, the Montagnards and the Chinese, etc. during more than two centuries of existence, the Nguyễn Lords' government always had to face with two major problems such as ethnic- religious diversity and consolidation of State power in the new land.

In this context, since the beginning, the Nguyễn Lords' government had the policy on developing Buddhism. On the one hand, Buddhism was used as a tool to gather the masses, to reach a consensus of the inhabitants, Buddhism also contributed to the

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consolidation of the State power and the legitimacy of the Nguyễn Lords' government in Cochinchina. On the other hand, the government implemented measures to make Buddhism become a factor to reconcile the cultural and religious differences among ethnic minorities.

The article explores the Nguyễn Lords' government behavior towards Buddhism, thereby evaluating the role of Buddhism in strengthening power of the State and solving problems on ethnicity and religion in Cochinchina during the period from 1558 to 1777.

1. Features of residents, ethnicity and religion in Cochinchina

At the beginning, at the time Nguyễn Hoàng was the governor of Thuận Hóa (1558) - then it was expanded to Quảng Nam region (1570) - the majority of residents were the Vietnamese and the Chams. For the Vietnamese, most of them came from the northern provinces and the Thanh and Nghệ regions, so they still retained their traditional religions, in addition to polytheistic worship, the main religions were the three religions: Confucianism - Buddhism - Taoism. The Chams - an ethnic community with a long history in the Central region - live from the Hoành Sơn cape to the Bình Thuận - Biên Hòa area. The Chams were deeply influenced by the Indian civilization, the main religion was Hinduism, mainly Shaivism sect. The religious diversity has also existed within the Chams community, with 3 main groups such as Cham Brahmanism, Cham Bàni (indigenized Islam), Cham Islam¹, etc.

In the South (Nam Bộ), the Khmer community is also influenced by the Indian civilization. In addition to a number of beliefs, the main religion of the Khmer people is Theravada Buddhism. At the end of the 17th century and early 18th century, with the permission of the Nguyễn Lord, the Chinese community settled in some areas of the South, including Gia Định, Mỹ Tho, Đồng Nai, Hà Tiên, etc. The Chinese, in addition to a number of beliefs such as worshiping Caishen (God of Fortune), Guan Gong, and Thiên Phi, also believed in Mahāyāna.

In addition, among the inhabitants of Cochinchina during the Nguyễn Lords, there were the “Montagnards” (Thượng) and “Man”² people, they were ethnic minorities who mainly settled in mountainous areas and highlands. They tended to live in isolated areas on high mountains to avoid the control of the Nguyễn government, so they will be less mentioned in this article.

The Vietnamese people played the role as the main subjects among the residents and ethnic groups in Cochinchina, along with the Chams, the Khmer, the Chinese, the Montagnards, the Man, they created a diverse religious environment. In particular, Buddhism has many cultural similarities with the communities which were affected by the Indian culture such as the Chams and the Khmer, and it is also close to the Vietnamese and Chinese communities. Therefore, since the early days, the Nguyễn Lords advocated the priority of developing Buddhism, considered Buddhism as the dominant religion with an intermediary role to resolve the cultural- religious difference among the communities.

2. Policy on development of Buddhism of the Nguyễn Lords

2.1. The places of worship

During this period, the Nguyễn Lords built a large number of Buddhist temples. Since the beginning, Nguyễn Hoàng Lord built many Buddhist temples in Thuận Hóa, Quảng Nam, Quảng Bình³ lands. Many Buddhist temples were built under the reign of Nguyễn Hoàng and Nguyễn Phúc Chu.

According to *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, there were a total of 77 temples in this period. Most of palaces and towns (đình, trấn) had Buddhist temples, Phủ Thừa Thiên was the political capital and religious center of the Nguyễn Lords with 19 Buddhist temples.

Specifically, the number of pagodas were distributed in palaces and towns as follows: Kinh sư had 6 temples; Quảng Ngãi had 6 temples; Phủ Thừa Thiên had 19 temples; Quảng Bình had 4 temples; Quảng Nam had 4 temples; Bình Định had 4 temples; Phú Yên had 3 temples; Khánh Hòa had 3 temples; Hà Tiên had 5 temples; Biên Hòa had 15 temples; An Giang had 3 temples, Gia Định had 4 temples; Vĩnh Long had a temple; Định Tường had a temple.

There were 3 Temples of Literature (where worship Confucius) in Cochinchina during this period (2 in Kinh Sư, 1 in Quảng Bình). The number of 3 Temples of Literature compared to 77 Buddhist temples showed special interest in Buddhism of the Nguyễn Lord.

Buddhist temples appointed by royal decree

The Nguyễn Lord continued the tradition of deification of the previous feudal dynasties. Along with the communal temples, the temples (worshipping the god/deity) were appointed by royal decree (sắc phong), in this period, a system of pagodas was formed with the royal decree (Sắc tứ).

According to statistics of the books *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí* and *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, out of 77 pagodas, the ratio is about one third with 25 pagodas were granted the royal decree (Sắc tứ), as follows: Thiên Mục, Long Quang, Thánh Duyên, Vinh Hoa, (Kinh đô); Quang Đức, Báo Quốc, Quốc Ân, Sơn Tùng, Giác Hoàng, Tĩnh Quang, Thiên Tân (Thuận Hóa); Cảnh Tiên, Hoàng Phúc, Bảo Quang, Di Đà (Quảng Nam); Diệu Giác, Phổ Tế, Long Hưng (Quảng Ngãi); Linh Phong, Thập Tháp (Bình); Kim Sơn, Linh Sơn, Hộ Quốc, Vạn An (Khánh Hòa); Thiên Trường (Gia Định).

These pagodas used to have antithetical couplets, texts, transverse panels with golden characters “Quốc chúa đề ngự” or “Quốc vương đề ngự”. The book *Đại Nam Thực Lục* indicated that pagodas granted the royal decree were always places to organize major ritual activities of the Court. Although the regulations were not formulated, these pagodas had the same role as the “Quốc tự” temples of the Nguyễn Dynasty.

With the “Sắc tứ” pagoda system, the Nguyễn Lords expressed their desire to promote Buddhism as a mainstream religion in order to increase the influence of Buddhism in social life.

2.2. Activities and practices of Buddhism

2.2.1. Buddhism of the Court

The Nguyễn Lords respected the Buddhist moral values. In addition to the role of the heads of the Palace, the Lords always considered themselves as Bodhisattvas with the names: *Tiên Lord*,

Sãi Lord, Hiền Lord, Nghĩa Lord, Minh Lord... Some Nguyễn Lords converted to Buddhism and had clerical names such as Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu named *Hung Long*, Nguyễn Phúc Khoát named *Tư tế Đạo nhân*.

The Nguyễn Lords valued some monks in the role of spiritual guardian. In the time of *Tiên Lord* and *Sãi Lord*, Buddhism had developed, since the reign of *Hiền Lord*, the Government of Lord (Phủ Chúa) were closely attached to the Buddhist monks, especially since the appearance of Chinese monks at the end of the 17th century. During the reign of *Hiền Lord, Nghĩa Lord*, the Court appreciated Chinese monks, typically Zen master Nguyễn Thiệu - Siêu Bạch (The Línjì school - Thiền Lâm Tế), Zen Master Minh Châu- Hương Hải (Thiền Trúc Lâm)⁴. *Minh Lord* appreciated Zen master Hưng Liên in the role of national monk (quốc sư), especially loved Zen master Thích Đại Sán when this monk came to propagate the Dharma (1695-1696). Nguyễn Phúc Khoát Lord valued Zen master Liễu Quán (a Vietnamese).

According to the narration of Thích Đại Sán, during the reign of Minh Lord, the Lord was a Buddhist and his older brother Thiệu Dương believed in Buddhism so Buddhist rituals often organized in the Palace. The Lord expressed his intention to build a Buddhist government: “the mandarins who have faith will ask to be disciples of the Buddha, accept the Bodhisattva’s precepts, then be named clerical name”⁵.

In fact, many courtiers built Buddhist temples, shrines, received the Buddhist baptism, for example: Marshal Hiệp, after commanding the battle of Trịnh- Nguyễn, built a small temple to worship Buddha, sometimes discussed on Buddhism and preached; Marshal Nguyễn Cửu Vân, after the battle against Chân Lạp built Hộ Quốc pagoda; Trần Đình Ân followed, served 4 generations of Lord, in 1703, he retired, lived in Bình Trung Pagoda, he felt pleasure in studying Zen⁶; Đông Triều a mandarin of the four kings and his son named Thế Nam received the Buddhist baptism; Chưởng Thanh a great mandarin of the four kings of Đại Việt, then he received the Buddhist baptism as a Bodhisattva⁷.

The practices of royal Buddhism: The construction of pagodas regularly took place, on these occasions, the Lord often organized ceremonies, the large scale Mandala. The Buddhist temple festival was organized by the Lord lasted for 7 days, sometimes for a month. In particular, during these events, the Lord often distributed, gave money and rice to poor people.

According to the book *Đại Nam Thực Lục*: in 1602, Nguyễn Hoàng Lord “repaired Sùng Hóa pagoda. On the occasion of Mid-Autumn Festival, the Lord visited Thiên Mụ Pagoda, set up a vegetarian Mandala to make almsgiving”⁸. In the reign of Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord, in 1714, “In June, restoration Thiên Mụ Pagoda... the work lasted for a year... the Lord often visited it... In July, there was a big festival at Thiên Mụ pagoda. The Lord fasted in the garden of Côn Gia for a month, distributed rice, money for the poor”⁹.

2.2.2. Folk Buddhism

The Nguyễn Lords played the role of leading the Buddhist activities of the masses.

First, the Lords focused on preaching to people. In this activity, the Chinese monks played a crucial role such as Hương Hải, Nguyễn Thiều... During the reign of Minh Lord, after two riots related to the Chinese monks, there was a lack of Buddhist leader. Minh Lord invited the monk Thích Đại Sán to propagate the Dharma (1695-1696). On this occasion, the Lord held many ordination ceremonies for monks, the Mandala to celebrate the Buddha day (Vesak) with the scale of thousands of people.

The number of applications for ordination was more than 600 people, in fact thousands people participated in the ceremony. The king ordered the military officials to build lodges for them in 3 days... people came from all over the country, they were happy for an unprecedented festival. On this occasion, the king ordered the ordination of the Sramanera (novice), Bhiksu. The king invited the monk Thích Đại Sán to preach, and the king personally opened a vegetarian Mandala, burned incense^{10,11} ...

Then, on the occasion of Vesak, the Lord palace held a large scale Mandala¹².

In order to create favorable conditions for Buddhism to develop among the masses, the Lord palace directly organized many activities to practice Buddhism such as receiving the Buddhist baptism, studying Buddhist scriptures, chanting, teaching sutras, building lodges, providing food and drink for monks, offering, etc.. These activities contributed to fostering Buddhist belief and rituals among the masses, leading to many flourishes of Buddhist life. It was reflected in the records of Western missionaries as follows:

“Cochinchina also has many beautiful temples and pagodas with high towers and belfries. Every place has a temple to worship Buddha. There are huge statues stored gold, silver inside... No one dares to touch it ... because people believe that it is blasphemy... They organize the procession. Ceremony is solemn, respect deities and Buddha (...). The denominations take vows from the scriptures of a famous great philosopher and metaphysicist called Shakyamuni (...). They come to the Buddhist temple, worship and do procession¹³.”

Zen Master Thạch Liêm also made similar remarks. However, at the end of the 17th century, folk Buddhist activities began to fall into disorderliness.

“In my opinion, the native people have strong belief, there are pagodas throughout the country and many monks. It might be that there are profiteers among these monks (...) Buddhist Dharma is disordered, no one has real spiritual practices, monks do not keep the precepts”¹⁴.

The cause of the situation was partially lacked of leading forces. In addition, the policy of being a lifelong soldier¹⁵ was also the cause of choosing monastic life instead of being a soldier, monks did not keep the precepts, did not learnt by heart Dharma¹⁶.

In 1707, in order to prevent from escaping the army, as well as, to re-organize the monk set, Minh Lord re-defined the recruitment procedure for monks as follows: “Monks have to have the official

certificate of the mandarin, they have to practice and keep the precepts, they will be exempted from tax and services. If they go out without the official certificate and fake the official certificate, they will be soldiers”¹⁷.

In addition to the reorganization of religious life, teaching of Buddhist scriptures and Dharma, the Lord Government sent people to China to buy scriptures, including the Great Tripitaka (Kinh Đại Tạng)¹⁸ with more than a thousand sets to allocate to the temples. The book *Đại Nam Thực Lục* wrote that an official of the Ministry of Personnel Nguyễn Cư Trinh wrote the book “Sãi Vãi Vấn Đáp”, the book used the Southern characters (chữ Nôm) to interpret the Buddhist teachings to easily spread them among the masses¹⁹.

With the policy of developing Buddhism, Buddhist practices were widely popularized during this period such as building temples, preaching, daily activities like chanting, fasting, and reciting. The Lord government also had measures to rectify the religious life of monks. Notably, the Nguyễn Lords created a Buddhist community from kings, mandarins to the subjects. Besides promoting the values of Buddhism, social relationships and behavior were based on the Buddhist morality, ethics.

3. Comportment of the Nguyễn Lord’s government to the Buddhist communities

3.1. The Vietnamese community

According to the religious mentality of the Vietnamese, the tradition of Three Religions has had a long history²⁰. This tradition does not only exist in each individual mindset but it is also manifested in social life as a popular spiritual need and religious activity. In particular, the Three Religions have combined with the polytheistic belief of Vietnamese people formed a diversity of worship²¹.

When changing the living environment, Vietnamese people still maintained and preserved cultural and religious traditions, including the Three Religions. A survey of some temples in Cochinchina during this period showed that the mark of the Three religions was quite clear.

Regarding the fusion of Buddhist and Confucian elements: *Kim Sơn Pagoda* (Khánh Hòa), in 1740, Nguyễn Phúc Thuần Lord gave the pagoda the inscription “Canh Thân Niên Nguyệt Tạo” (it means the pagoda was built in the year Canh Thân) and the square seal with 4 words “Nghịệp Quảng Duy Cầ” (according to *The Book of Documents* or *Classic of History* or *Shangshu*, it means you must be diligent your career will be developed). The Pagoda was not only a place of worship for the Buddha but it was also place to spread Confucian teachings to the Buddhists and the subjects of the Nguyễn Lords²².

Regarding the fusion between Buddhist and Taoist elements: *Hoàng Phúc pagoda*, also known as *Kính Thiên pagoda* (Quảng Ngãi) was built by Nguyễn Hoàng Lord, had five antithetical couplets bestowed by Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord, four of them praised Buddhism, one of them praised Taoism²³.

Cảnh Tiên pagoda (Quảng Bình) was built by the national hero Nguyễn Hữu Dật, granted the inscription: “Sắc tứ Cảnh Tiên Tự”. The pagoda was the place to worship Buddha, “tiên cảnh” (fairyland) was belonged Taoism; however, both elements were placed next to each other. In particular, this inscription was bestowed by the Lords.

The aforementioned evidence shows that the tradition of the Three Religions and the concept of a sacred world of *Fairy - Deity - Buddha* (Tiên - Thần - Phật) was still in the minds of the Nguyễn Lords. In addition, among the Vietnamese, the tradition of the Three Religions continued to be preserved in Tunquin. A. Rhode asserted that “In general, the religious institution of Cochinchina is not different from the one of Tunquin”²⁴.

The Three Religions tradition played an important role in the Vietnamese community when the living environment had changed in Cochinchina. The continuation of the Three Religions tradition, maintenance the ethical, moral values, and social order, helped to stabilize and cohere community. It also helped to overcome breakage in faith and religious practices. In term of social administration, the continuation of the Three Religions tradition met the religious needs

of the Vietnamese migrants. In addition, it created favorable conditions for the Nguyễn Lords in the process of establishing management institutions for the Vietnamese community in the new land.

3.2. The indigenous communities

3.2.1. The Chams and the ruins of religion

The Chams community responded to the arrival of the Vietnamese migrants. Some groups continued to settle, some others moved to another place so their religious facilities were abandoned.

The Nguyễn Lords set up new pagodas in those places because they thought that these places were sacred, favorable land. Some typical Buddhist temples were built on surface of old pagodas and towers such as: Thiên Mụ, Thánh Duyên, Trấn Hải, Vinh Hoa (Kinh sư), Hoàng Phúc (Quảng Bình), Thập Tháp, Mạn Sơn (Bình Định), etc.

Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí wrote that “In the year of Đinh Mùi, Thái Tông visited the Tư Đông (Tư Hiền) seaport, there was an ancient sacred tower of Champa, so he enjoined Mr. Trần Đình Ân took the land to build a Buddhist temple, called Vinh Hoa pagoda, after a chaos, the pagoda was abandoned, it was restored in the 17th year of in the 17th year of Minh Mệnh”²⁵.

Thập Tháp Buddhist temple in Bình Định: In Thuận Chính hamlet, Tuy Viễn district, there are 10 towers Champa behind the temple so it was called the name Thập Tháp (10 towers). The year of Quý Hợi, in the year 21th of Thái Tông (1683), a Chinese monk named Bích Hoán (in 1691) gave it a sentence *Thập tháp Di Đà Tự* and an antithetical couplet²⁶.

3.2.2. “Man” people and Buddhist temple in the cave

“Man” people were mentioned in the Nguyễn Dynasty’s history to refer to the ethnic minorities who lived in the mountainous areas. The Vietnamese took over Man’s residence area as well as their Buddhist temples in the cave. The owners of the Buddhist temples in the cave may be small groups of Miên (Khmer) and the Chinese with a special worship system and practice.

According to *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, the Buddhist temples in the cave consists of Bạch Thạch, Hang (Quảng Ngãi), Thạch Cốc (Bình Định), Long Cốc (Biên Hòa). They were described as follows: “Bạch Thạch Pagoda is in Bình Sơn district. There is a stone slab measured about three *trượng*²⁷ in *Man* Mountain. Besides, there are some steps, the *Man* called Bạch Thạch Pagoda, few people come there”²⁸; Hang Pagoda in Long Phụng Mountain, Mộ Đức district, Quảng Ngãi: According to legend that there was a monk who stayed there, he used to eat mulberry leaves. People often called him Thái tăng (monk who ate mulberry). After his death, the cave was abandoned and few people came there”²⁹.

In the process of establishment power in Cochinchina by the Nguyen Lords, there were some the temples as the religious activity space of the local residents. In general, the Nguyen Lords usually respected and reserved them.

3.2.3. *Khmer people and Theravada Buddhism*

It can be said that there was similarities between Buddhism of the Vietnamese and Buddhism of the Chinese in the South of Vietnam because they were the Northern Buddhism. The dominant Buddhism of the Khmer is the Southern tradition so there were differences.

For Buddhism of the Khmer, the Nguyễn Lords organized religious activities according to the Southern tradition (Theravada) during this period. In particular, on the occasion of inviting Venerable (Oshō) Thích Đại Sán from China to propagate the Dharma, Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu ordered the organization of Sramanera (novice), Bhikkhu ordination. The monk preached, the king set up the vegetarian Mandala, offerings. More than 600 monks asked for ordination, thousands of participants joined in the ritual³⁰.

In a religious diversity context, Vietnamese people naturally exchanged and absorbed religious elements of the Khmer. However, from the perspective of religious policy, the organization of a large Buddhist Theravada's ritual of the Nguyễn Lord showed different meanings. This is a legitimization, a recognition of the State to Theravada Buddhism. The government of the Lord actively opened

common religious activity. On the one hand, it met the needs of Buddhist activities of the Khmer community, on the other hand, it helped to exchange and understand the Khmer's religion. Buddhist communities had an opportunity to interact, communicate which led to good relationships among religious communities and eliminated differences.

3.3. The Chinese immigrants community

The Buddhism of the Chinese community played an important role in creating the appearance of Cochinchina's Buddhism. *Firstly*, in the early period, when the two regions Thuận Hóa and Quảng Nam still maintained their connection with Outer Land (Đàng Ngoài), there were some pagodas of the Vietnamese and the Chinese³¹. After the Trịnh - Nguyễn war happened, the relationship between Cochinchina's Buddhism and Outer Land's Buddhism was cut off. Since, the Nguyễn Lords aimed at the Chinese monks in the policy of Buddhist development. *Secondly*, many Chinese monks followed the Minh Hương immigrants to settle in Cochinchina. There were two main period of immigration such as the groups of Trần Thượng Xuyên, Dương Ngạn Địch in the 17th century, Mạc Cửu group in the 18th century.

In this context, in order to exploit the human resources and the power of the Chinese Buddhism, the court sent people to China to buy Buddhist scriptures, appreciated the Chinese monks, some Chinese monks took the role of Quốc Sư (national monk) such as Zen master Hưng Liên). The Chinese monks also propagated the Dharma. Under the reign of Minh Lord, there was a shortage of monk to lead Buddhism, thanks to the relationship with the Chinese monks, the Lord invited the Chinese Zen Master Thạch Liêm (or Venerable Thích Đại Sán). In this period, many large-scale Buddhist activities were organized in Kinh sư, Thuận Hóa and Quảng Nam, etc.

For the Chinese Buddhist community, the Nguyễn Lords facilitate them to practice Buddhist activities. Many Chinese Buddhist temples were built in areas where Chinese people lived. The Chinese groups of Trần Thượng Xuyên, Dương Ngạn Địch settled in Gia Định, Đồng

Nai, Mỹ Tho; they had temples such as *Long Vân*, *Long Thiên*, *Khoáng Viên*, *Kim Cang*, *Đại Giác*, *Bửu Phong*; Mạc Cửu's group in Hà Tiên had Tam Bảo pagoda, etc.

The Nguyễn Lords met the needs of religious activities of the Chinese Buddhist community. Besides, they took advantage of the resources and the power of Chinese Buddhism to strengthen and develop Buddhism in Cochinchina.

In short, the Buddhist community in Cochinchina was created by different ethnic groups. In addition to the general policy of prioritizing the development of Buddhism, the Nguyễn Lords also applied flexible measures to each community. For example, they continued to maintain the tradition of Three religions: Confucianism - Buddhism - Taoism of the Vietnamese, respected for differences in religious beliefs and practices (the Chams and Khmer communities); exploited the strengths of some Buddhist communities (especially the Chinese).

It can be said that the policy towards Buddhism of the Nguyễn Lords showed respect for local religion although it was different. The Nguyễn government created a harmonious and diverse Buddhist activities which contributed to resolve the religious differences in the diversity in Cochinchina.

4. Some remarks, reviews

4.1. Buddhism contributed to the strengthening of social relationships

(1) Promotion human resources.

The Vietnamese migrants in Cochinchina consisted of migrants for their livelihood, the groups of people who supported the Mạc dynasty, prisoners, mandarins and soldiers who were dissatisfied with the Trịnh clan, or made mistakes to avoid the punishment³². In addition, in the early period, the formation of a new government, for the Chams' community, a number of small groups implicitly opposed. In this situation, since the time when the Nguyễn Hoàng Lord opened the land, along with the reduction tax policy, recruitment talents, Buddhist has played an important role in leading

peaceful life of inhabitants, inspiring human knowledge, talent and morality. In the spirit of compassion, salvation and salvation of Buddhism, Buddhist activities in this period were always associated with charity and almsgiving, the court used to give money and rice to the poor through these activities.

(2) Creation a common value (Buddhist moral value) contributed to strengthen social solidarity.

In the policy towards Buddhism, *regarding the relationship among religions*, Buddhism was appreciated, Buddhism played the role as a dominant religion. *Regarding the relations of religions and society*, the Nguyễn Lords used Buddhism in creating a Buddhist community (from the king- mandarins to the subjects), as well as, based on Buddhist morality and ethics to manage society. In fact, this idea had existed in the time of Lord Nguyễn Hoàng and it was clearly shaped under the reign of the Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu³³.

The policy aimed to create a homogeneity of religion, culture, lifestyle, social behavior. During this period, there were many Buddhist activities organized by the Court from major events to daily religious practices that took place regularly and covered all social life. In particular, Buddhism well performed the function of orientation and social solidarity. Under the leadership of the Nguyễn Lords, the resident communities had a harmonious relationship, especially they shared a common value on the basis of Buddhist morals and ethics. The greatest result of the Buddhist policy was creation a relatively homogeneous, peaceful and united society.

(3) Buddhism - a factor dissolved the religious differences in the context of ethnic - religious diversity.

In the religious environment in Cochinchina, Buddhism had many cultural similarities with the Indianisation communities, and it is also close to the Vietnamese, the Chinese and the Khmer communities. Therefore, Buddhism easily gained a status in the religious mentality of the residents. Especially in terms of doctrine, Buddhism always advises people to live in peace, kindness, tolerance, equality with a compassionate attitude, easily accepting differences. They were

factors that contributed to reconcile religious differences as well as potential conflicts within religious communities.

In addition, Buddhism in Cochinchina was constituted by many community groups and divided into two main groups: the group influenced by Chinese culture, including the Vietnamese and the Chinese following the trend of Northern Buddhism; The group influenced by Indian culture, especially the Khmer following Theravada Buddhism. For each Buddhist community, the Nguyễn Lords had a different behaviour to suit the characteristics of ethnicity and religion.

As mentioned above, the Nguyễn Lords maintained the tradition of the Three religions of Vietnamese people, respected for the local factors of the Chams and the Khmer, exploited the strengths of Buddhism of the Chinese. These measures clearly showed the respect for religious differences, created a harmonious and diverse religious environment. Until now, this feature has left a deep imprint in the cultural and religious life in the Southern region. It is a religious diversity in which the different ethnic and religious communities coexist peacefully and respect each other's religious values.

4.2. Buddhism contributed to strengthen the State power and to confirm the legitimacy of the Nguyễn Lords' government

According to the theory of *Legitimacy*, the political institutions will have to undergo a process of *Justification* to assert its legality. There are two types of power commonly used by the State such as *hard power*, including the system of *rules and law* and *soft power*, including the system of morality, religion. The process of legalization is successful when the political institution affirms its legitimacy, one of the important signs of legitimacy is the support of the masses³⁴.

In the historical context of 16th - 18th century, the Nguyễn Lords' government based on a small military force under the rule by the Outer Land's feudal government, it gradually set up the feudal government in Cochinchina. The legitimacy of the government, the support of the masses in particular was an important need of the Nguyễn Lords. Recognizing the role of Buddhism in gathering the

masses, the Nguyễn Lords relied on Buddhism to gain the support of people, to consolidate political power and assert the legitimacy government.

Buddhism has many advantages and cultural- religious closeness. Therefore, Buddhism easily had a status in the religious mind as well as the support of the masses. During this period, the Nguyễn Lords implemented the policy of developing Buddhism, using Buddhism to gather and unite people. As analyzed above, Buddhism played its function and role in social life such as *promoting human resources; strengthening social solidarity by sharing Buddhist moral value; dissolving the differences of religious community.*

Thanks to Buddhism, the Nguyễn government had the support of communities which legitimized the leadership of the feudal state in Cochinchina.

In addition, in the context of new government, the legal system (*hard power*) was in the process of perfecting, the Nguyễn Lords mainly based on *soft power*, those are Buddhist morals to perform the function of social governance. A Buddhist social community primarily operated on the basis of Buddhist ethics. This is an appropriate choice for the Nguyễn Lords to assert political power and legitimacy when the state institution was in the process of consolidation and improvement.

Conclusion

The Nguyễn Lords gradually established a State in Cochichina. They implemented the policy on Buddhism's development. It seemed to counteract the policy on promoting Confucianism of the Outer Land's government. According to some views, the Nguyễn Lords did not choose Confucianism because Confucianism promoted *loyal-filial ideology*, it is the opposite of the political path of the Nguyễn Lords because they broke away from the central government. However, the aforementioned analysis explained the reasons why the Nguyễn government implemented the policy on Buddhist development. During this period, Buddhism became the ideological base for the Nguyễn Lords' government, it helped to alleviate differences in the context of

ethnic and religious diversity, whereby the issue of ethnicity and religion was well resolved. Buddhism also showed its role and function in gathering the masses and strengthening social solidarity, it helped to strengthen the State power, to legitimize of the government of the Nguyễn Lords in Cochichina in period from 1558 to 1777.

From the perspective of religious policy, the Nguyễn Lords' experience towards Buddhism, the author believes that the Nguyễn government relatively well solved the issue of ethnic and religious diversity. In particular, the attitude of respecting the differences and having flexible measures for different religious communities is a good experience. Respecting the differences to create a diverse religious environment in harmony is the solution to resolving the differences and potential conflicts in the diverse religious environment; it contributed to strengthen *the relationship among religions and the relationship between the State and religion*. /.

NOTES:

- 1 Nguyễn Hồng Dương (Chủ biên) (2007), *Một số vấn đề cơ bản về tôn giáo tín ngưỡng của đồng bào Chăm ở hai tỉnh Bình Thuận, Ninh Thuận hiện nay*, (Some basic issues about religion and belief of the Chams in the two provinces of Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan at present), Publishing house: Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- 2 According to the way of writing in historical documents during the Nguyen Dynasty.
- 3 Quốc sử Quán Triều Nguyễn (2004), *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, Volume 1, Publishing house: Giáo dục, Hà Nội, tr. 42-43.
- 4 After the rebellion was led by the Chinese in 1692 under the reign of Minh Lord, Zen Master Nguyễn Thiệu came to cultivate at the temple of Hà Trung.
- 5 Thích Đại Sán (2015), *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, Ủy ban Phiên dịch Sử liệu Việt Nam, tái bản theo bản in năm 1963, Publishing house: Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, tr. 81-82.
- 6 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, ibid, pp. 124, 145, 161.
- 7 *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, ibid, pp. 161-162, 171-172.
- 8 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, ibid, p. 35.
- 9 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, ibid, p. 130.
- 10 *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, ibid, pp. 96-111, 123.
- 11 Theravada Buddhism of the Khmer, *Sadi* is ordained for people under 20 years old, *Tỳ Kheo* is ordained for people over 20 years old.
- 12 *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, ibid, p. 147-149.
- 13 Cristophoro Borri (2014), *Xứ Đàng Trong năm 1621*, (Cochinchina 1621), Publishing house: Hồ Chí Minh City, pp. 127-128.
- 14 *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, ibid, pp. 81-82.
- 15 Age of service, to be a soldier from 16 to 60.

- 16 *Hải Ngoại Kỳ Sự*, ibid, pp. 69-70.
- 17 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, Volume 1, ibid, p. 166.
- 18 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, Volume 1, ibid, p. 130.
- 19 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, ibid, pp. 171-172.
- 20 Trần Nghĩa (2010), “Quá trình hội nhập Nho - Phật - Đạo hay sự hình thành tư tưởng Tam giáo đồng nguyên ở Việt Nam”, (The process of integration of Confucianism- Buddhism- Taoism or the formation of ideology of the three religions’ harmony in Vietnam), *Triết học*, số 1 (224), pp. 23-30.
- 21 Trích theo Leopold Cadière (2010), *Văn hóa, tín ngưỡng và thực hành tôn giáo người Việt*, (Culture, beliefs and religious practices of the Vietnamese), Volume 1, Publishing house: Thuận Hóa, Huế, pp. 44-45.
- 22 Quốc sử Quán triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, Volume 3, Publishing house: Thuận Hóa, Huế, p. 118.
- 23 *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, ibid, p. 63.
- 24 A. Rhodes (1994), *Hành trình và truyền giáo*, (Divers Voyages et Mission), UBĐK Công giáo, Publishing house: Hồ Chí Minh City.
- 25 *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, Volume 1, ibid, p. 84-85.
- 26 *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, Volume 3, ibid, p. 50.
- 27 A unit of measurement
- 27 *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, Volume 3, ibid, p. 442.
- 28 *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, Volume 3, ibid, p. 443.
- 29 *Hải Ngoại Kỳ Sự*, ibid, pp. 96-111, 123.
- 30 Trần Hồng Liên (2000), *Phật giáo trong cộng đồng người Việt ở Nam Bộ - Việt Nam (từ thế kỷ XVII đến 1975)*, (Buddhism in the Vietnamese community in the South of Vietnam from the 17th century to 1975), Publishing house: Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, p. 10.
- 31 Phan Khoang (2016), *Việt sử xứ Đàng Trong 1558-1777*, (History of the Vietnamese in Cochinchina 1558-1777), Publishing house: Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, p. 115.
- 32 *Hải Ngoại Kỳ Sự*, ibid, p. 81-82.
- 33 Xem: A. John Simmons (2001), *Justification and Legitimacy*, Cambridge University Spress, Cambridge.

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3. Leopold Cadière (2010), *Văn hóa, tín ngưỡng và thực hành tôn giáo người Việt*, (Culture, beliefs and religious practices of the Vietnamese), Volume 1, 2, 3, Đỗ Trinh Huệ translated, Publishing house: Thuận Hóa, Huế.
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14. Thích Đại Sán, *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, Viện Đại học Huế và Ủy ban Phiên dịch Sử liệu Việt Nam, 1969.
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18. A. John Simmons (2001), *Justification and Legitimacy*, Cambridge University Spress, Cambridge.
19. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legitimacy>.