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## **Rites for/of Power: Research on the Harmony of Three Teachings in Vietnam during the Former Lê (Lê Sơ) Dynasty (1428—1527)**

**Abstract.** This article studies the harmony of Three Teachings in Dai Viet during the period of the Former Lê dynasty (Lê Sơ period) (1428—1527). Most of the previous studies have suggested that Lê Sơ was the period advocating for the monopoly of Confucianism and rejecting Buddhism and Taoism. However, this article will prove that the Lê Sơ dynasty was thoroughly using Confucian classics under the Song dynasty, applying the model of Confucian state of the Great Ming dynasty, while still developing management policies on Taoism and Buddhism. The “The Convergence of Three Teachings” was a dynastic policy, in which Confucianism played a major role in ideological, political and cultural activities, while Buddhism and Taoism played a supporting role in ritual and religious activities of the dynasty and folklore. The results show that the “The Convergence of Three Teachings” is a constant of Vietnamese history from the Lý — Trần dynasties onward. The Lê Sơ royal court both developed Confucian cultural institutions and managed Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, temples and rituals. This can also be considered the foundation for the Three Teachings to come together in the later stages.

**Keywords:** harmony of Three Teachings, religious policies, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism.

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**For citation:** Le Dinh Son, Tran Trong Duong (2024) Rites for/of Power: Research on the Harmony of Three Teachings in Vietnam during the Former Lê (Lê Sơ) Dynasty (1428—1527). *The Russian Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 8 (1): 81—93.

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## **Обряды власти: исследование гармонии трёх учений во Вьетнаме в период правления династии Начальных Поздних Ле (Ле Шо) (1428—1527)**

**Аннотация.** В данной статье исследуется гармония трёх учений в Дайвьете в период династии Начальных Поздних Ле (Ле Шо) (1428—1527). Большинство предыдущих исследований показывали, что в период Ле Шо утверждалась монополия конфуцианства и отвергались буддизм и даосизм. В данной статье доказывается, что династия Начальных Поздних Ле активно использовала конфуцианскую классику династии Сун, применяла модель конфуцианского государства великой Минской династии, продолжая при этом разрабатывать политику управления на основе даосизма и буддизма. Гармония трёх учений представляла собой

династическую политику, в которой конфуцианство играло главную роль в идеологической, политической и культурной сферах, а буддизм и даосизм — вспомогательную роль в ритуальной и религиозной жизни двора и в фольклоре. Результаты исследования показывают, что гармония трёх учений является константой вьетнамской истории, начиная с династий Ли — Чан. Королевский двор Начальных Поздних Ле развивал конфуцианские культурные учреждения и управлял буддийскими и даосскими монастырями, храмами и ритуалами. Это также можно считать основой для объединения трёх учений на более поздних стадиях.

**Ключевые слова:** гармония трёх учений, религиозная политика, конфуцианство, буддизм, даосизм.

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**Для цитирования:** Ле Динь Шон, Чан Чонг Зыонг. Обряды власти: исследование гармонии трёх учений во Вьетнаме в период правления династии Начальных Поздних Ле (Ле Шо) // Вьетнамские исследования. 2024. Т. 8. № 1. С. 81—93.

## Introduction

Some researchers argued that the Lê Sơ dynasty revered only Confucianism and tended to exclude Buddhism and Taoism, in contrast to the previous period, the Lý-Trần dynasties, when Buddhism was considered the “national religion” and Confucianism had not yet developed. Trần Đình Hượu [2020: 494] asserted, “After the brilliant development during the Lý-Trần dynasties, Buddhism lost its position as the national religion. It might still have a great influence in the public at large. However, in the political, ideological, literary and artistic fields, its influence declined, giving way to Confucianism”. Trần Quốc Vượng [2020: 428] is more specific: “In the early stage of independence [10<sup>th</sup> — 14<sup>th</sup> centuries], virtuous and respected monks became political and spiritual advisors for kings and the *national monarchy* to create the *Buddhist monarchy in the Great Viet*, which was different from the contemporary Confucian monarchy of Chinese Song dynasty”. Nguyễn Lang [2014: 479] wrote a separate chapter on “Buddhism in the Confucianism ruling period”. He argued that the decline of Buddhism was mainly reflected in the fact that Buddhism lost its intellectual leadership and no longer played a crucial role in cultural and political orientation.

The above statements give a clear picture of the influence of nationalism on the research of medieval history in Vietnam. Trần Đình Hượu’s viewpoint represents the generation of Vietnamese scholars in the period from 1970 to the present. This view holds that Buddhism was the national religion in the Lý-Trần dynasties. At present, this view has strongly influenced scholars of ideological and political history, as well as clergymen such as Trần Ngọc Vương, Lê Mạnh Thát, etc. Trần Quốc Vượng has the most interesting point of view when he said that the state model under the Lý-Trần dynasties was “national-monarchy government”. More specifically, it was a kind of Buddhist monarchy government, which is different from China’s New-Confucian

monarchy government of the Song dynasty. The introduction of the above three concepts shows that Trần Quốc Vượng is trying to see the history of dynasties in the Great Viet from the perspective of nationalism, and to separate the Great Viet from China through his contrast between Buddhism and Confucianism. This is an identity of the Vietnamese nation built from the perspective of a modern scholar.

In fact, the “*The Harmony of Three Teachings*” (henceforth, HTT) was a universal phenomenon in the Great Viet and East Asian cultures at least from the Sui-Tang dynasties onward [Gents 2013, 123–140]. It is essentially only an overlap in terms of ideology and rituals, not at the level of state organization. Because we know that only Confucianism is the ideology of political forces and has a theoretical system as well as tools to build a state model and manage society [Nguyễn Minh Tường 2015]. In the context of the The Convergence of Three Teachings, Confucianism is always the mainstream and ideology of the ruling powers. Confucian rituals (sacrificing to heaven at Nam Giao esplanade, offering sacrifices to ancestors at the Imperial Ancestral Temple, sacrificing prisoners at the Imperial Ancestral Temple, etc.) are the most important ones of a Confucian state, while the sacrifice ceremonies of Taoism and Buddhism were only secondary rituals of the royal court. Confucianism has the power to control and manage the Taoist and Buddhist sanghas, as well as to dethrone superstitious religions and customs that contradict the rites of the royal court. The abolition of unofficial spirits /temples (illegitimate temples for unofficial spirits) existed from the reign of King Trần Nhân Tông until the ruling time of King Lê Thánh Tông and the later kings. As we all know, the Lý-Trần dynasties built a Confucian state model (with the six ministries) based on the political and cultural system of the Tang-Song dynasties. Of course, the rituals of both Buddhism and Taoism were used by the royal courts of the Great Viet and China in parallel with the Confucian ones, to support for their religious administration and management [Trần Trọng Dương 2023: 1–2].

### **The policy on Three Teachings during the Lê Sơ dynasty**

In 1428, King Lê Lợi defeated the Ming dynasty, building a Confucian state based on the Song Confucian ideology. At that time, on behalf of King Lê Lợi, Nguyễn Trãi composed the *Great proclamation upon the pacification of the Wu* which summarized the uprising of King Lê Lợi King Lê Lợi's rebellion, and distributed it throughout the country. In terms of genre and content, the Great proclamation upon the pacification of the Wu represents the power discourse of the Thanh Hoa administration based on Confucian political ethics. The sentence “Our kingdom of Đại Việt is truly a domain of civility” is a cultural declaration that links the institution and civilization of the Great Viet with the political and religious community in East Asia (directly with the Great Ming Dynasty).

The kings of the Lê Sơ period were great bearers of Confucian ideology. In addition to concentrating political power, they also sought to acquire spiritual power. Immediately after ascending the throne, King Lê Thái Tổ was “particularly interested in deification, wanting to borrow the divine prestige to protect the kingdom and keep the country at peace” [Tạ Ngọc Liên 2009: 135]. This is the “deity management” activity of

the Confucian political model. The royal court also increasingly confirmed the orthodoxy of Confucianism in the government apparatus. First, the court commissioned Lương Đăng to compose the ceremonial music. Lương Đăng then imitated the regulations of the Ming dynasty to really make it, [ĐVSKTT-XI: 46a]. At the same time, the dress code for visiting the Imperial Ancestral Temple was also regulated in the government statute. After that, the Lê Sơ royal court carried out humane activities based on Confucian thought, such as pardoning prisoners during droughts or floods, or reducing taxes when a strange phenomenon occurred, and so on. The *Đại Việt sử kí toàn thư* (henceforth, ĐVSKTT) says: “Because of the extended drought, dozens of prisoners who committed minor crimes were freed under the amnesty”, or “to end the punishment from heaven, favor must be generously bestowed to the underlings. Tax and punishment reductions will be officially approved to different degrees” [ĐVSKTT-XI: 60b—61a]. In order to show the preference for Confucianism and to encourage talents, the government of King Lê Thái Tông issued regulations on organizing examinations to find talented people. This was written in the *ĐVSKTT* with the following decree: “To form a contingent of talented mandarins, selection of excellent scholars is compulsory. In doing so, we must place priority over examinations. Our state was born out of chaos in the past, the talents are as many as autumn leaves and morning stars. Right after liberating the country and establishing the government, King Lê Thái Tổ [Lê Lợi] opened schools, used three animals (buffalo, pig and goat) as sacrifices for Confucius, showed strong favor to Confucianism. However, because of the newly established government, we did not have time to set up the system of examinations. I now follow the ancestors, selecting talents to satisfy my expectations” [Ibid: 13b—14a].

In addition, policies to promote Confucianism were continuously promulgated, and abstinence rules were regularly updated. Their sole purpose was to strengthen the authority and legitimacy of Confucianism at the royal court and in the wider community. In particular, the development of the Confucian examination system and the establishment of steles engraved with the names of doctors marked the achievements and unique features in the development of Confucianism during the Lê Sơ period. In the third year of the reign of King Quang Thuận (1462), the royal court issued a regulation to organize an examination every 3 years instead of having no specific time limit as before. This decision relieved the pain of Confucianism followers and helped them feel the respect of the royal court so that they could devote themselves to learning and practicing Confucian ideals. In addition, the Confucian way of studying and taking exams also tends to change toward specialization, that is, delving deeper into specific classics. Yu Insun [2006: 34] said that the Lê Sơ government tried to apply all measures to select elite talents. At the same time, through the implementation of these policies, the influence of Confucianism, especially New Confucianism (i.e., Song Confucianism), increased in the Lê royal court.

While Confucianism is used as a school of thought to build the state model. Buddhism, Taoism and folk beliefs were used as supporting beliefs in addition to Confucian rites. In 1429, the government organized an examination to test the professional competence and morality of Buddhist and Taoist monks [ĐVSKTT-X: 68a]. King Lê Thái Tông (1423—1442) deified and held sacrifices throughout the country. Next, King Lê Nhân Tông (1441—1459) set up an altar to worship God Đô Đai

in the capital city of Thăng Long, worshipping the gods of rain, wind, thunder and cloud for all four seasons to protect the capital city [ĐVSKTT-XI: 79b].

In the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, King Lê Thánh Tông included the issue of HTT in the Hồng Đức Code (Penal Code of the Royal Court). The royal court successfully codified the scope of activities of the Three Teachings. This breakthrough is still preserved in contemporary documents, especially stele inscriptions, such as the “*Worshipping regulations in Trần Tân temple*”, which records the “confirmed hierarchies of the gods, as from the government of King Hồng Đức onward, there was a system of granting hierarchical statuses to the gods”, learning from the regulations of granting hierarchical statuses of the Lý-Trần dynasties. Thereby, the issues of the Three Teachings (mainly Buddhism and Taoism) were strictly controlled with more specific regulations. In July 1461, the royal court ordered the provinces and districts: “Local authorities must not rebuild temples or shrines that are not recognized and managed by the government” [ĐVSKTT-X: 7b]. In 1463 the royal court further ordered: “Fortune tellers, Taoists, and Buddhists in the country from now on are not allowed to meet and chat with people from the royal family [Ibid: 13b]. King Lê Thánh Tông also banned the construction of new temples, prohibited the casting of bells and the painting of statues, and forced localities to prevent shamans and mediums from deceiving people. The state restricted only the superstitious aspects of Buddhism and Taoism that were harmful to production and could violate Confucian rites and confuse people's beliefs. Buddhism and Taoism continued to be recognized and maintained. The kings of the Lê dynasty repeatedly repaired damaged pagodas, sent mandarins to pray, and organized ceremonies for the dead at pagodas” [Phan Huy Lê 2016: 188]. In addition, the Lê Sơ royal court also developed policies to protect Buddhism and Taoism from the negative effects of secularism and to prevent anyone from using Buddhism and Taoism to lure people and steal temple property.

Writing about HTT in the Great Viet, Nguyễn Kim Sơn [2007: 15] argued that the essence of this phenomenon was to “rearrange the strengths and advantages of each teaching”. Perhaps, this is a predetermined path for the three teachings, when they were used together long enough. Compared with Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism was suitable for social development, administration, and management. Therefore, the development path of Confucianism is different from the other two. When the leader of the Confucian royal court is also the leader of Confucianism, it is very unlikely for the other two religions to share power and influence in society. Along with mutual integration, the three teachings also tended to harmonize with folk beliefs, which Phan Huy Lê once observed that Buddhism and Taoism “tend to be popular in the countryside and develop in harmony of folk beliefs” [Phan Huy Lê 2016: 188].

### **Ritual practice of the Three Teachings in the Lê Sơ dynasty**

Historical sources show that the rituals of the three teachings were performed by the Lê Sơ royal court. First, we can mention the rituals of worshipping in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, or worshipping the god of grains and the soil, mountain gods and river gods right from the time of King Lê Thái Tổ and King Lê Thái Tông. In 1428, Lê

Lợi honored his parents and grandparents with posthumous titles: Grandfather Lê Đình as Emperor Chiêu Đức, Grandmother Nguyễn Thị Quách as empress dowager Gia Thục, Father Lê Khoáng as Emperor Tuyên Tổ, Mother Trịnh Thị Thương as Queen mother Y Văn [ĐVSKTT-X: 57b]. In 1434, King Lê Thái Tông ordered the construction of the Imperial Ancestral Temple in Lam Sơn to worship King Lê Thái Tổ and also in the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long to serve diplomatic activities and political ceremonies such as casting treasure seals, reporting to heaven and earth, etc. In 1445, King Lê Nhân Tông finished casting the gold statues of King Lê Thái Tổ and Queen Quốc Thái, sent a monk to perform the eye-opening ceremony, and then brought them to the Imperial Ancestral Temple [ĐVSKTT-XI: 28b–29a]. The ĐVSKTT reads: “On the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, the king paid homage to the Imperial Ancestral Temple, and then sent the civil mandarins to perform the rituals. The king went to the arena to see Prime Minister Lê Sát and all the civil and military mandarins offer sacrifices to heaven, earth, heaven gods, earth gods, mountain gods, river gods, and kill white horses to take blood and pledge allegiance. At the same time, he requested officials to offer sacrifices to gods in different regions of the country” [Ibid: 3a]. In light with that spirit, the offering of sacrifices to the society and ancestors was an activity to show power of a Confucian government, carried out by the royal court. Liam C. Kelley said: “The worship of Xã Tắc gods also [aims] to perform another important function, which is to reaffirm the hierarchical order of space and power” [Kelley 2003]. In addition, the ĐVSKTT also recorded a lot about the king himself going to fight in places, before leaving the army. After the victory, many activities were conducted to report at the Imperial Ancestral Temple. This activity was soon mentioned frequently in the *Classic of History*, associated with King Wu of Zhou’s career of defeating King Zhou of Shang. The key thing here is to encapsulate in the word “morality” according to Confucian concepts. Accordingly, heaven god will only help people with virtue, or “heaven will only refer to moral people”. Obviously, this was directly inherited in the *Classic of History* of Confucianism. Not only that, when nature appears abnormal, the responsibility will also be attributed to the leader, which is the Son of Heaven. At that time, the only thing the Son of Heaven needed to do was to correct his virtue, and to pardon the world to show his virtue. [Phung Minh Hieu 2017: 188–189]

Moreover, some Buddhist rituals were still used in the royal court. In 1434, there was a prolonged drought, King Lê Thái Tông ordered his officials to bring Buddha Pháp Vân to the capital to pray for rain like the tradition of the Lý and Trần dynasties [ĐVSKTT-XI: 8b]. Nguyễn Thiên Hữu and Nguyễn Trãi used the virtue perspective to explain the “induction of heaven and human”, to support the implementation of Buddhist rituals in the royal court. The performance of Buddhist rituals was even combined with the amnesty for prisoners, which is both compassionate in Buddhism and humanistic in Confucianism. A typical example is the organization of the filial piety ceremony and amnesty for prisoners during the reign of King Lê Thái Tông [Ibid: 13a]. Also under the reign of Lê Thái Tông, because of the prolonged drought, he processed the Buddha statue and recited the mantra to pray for rain. The ĐVSKTT added: “In the summer, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, the king ordered his officials to bring Buddha Pháp Vân from Cổ Châu monastery to Đông Kinh to pray for rain” [Ibid: 7a]. During the reign of King Lê Thái Tông, the Prime Minister Lê Sát built two monasteries, Thanh Đàm and Chiêu Độ,

with more than 90 rooms [Ibid: 12b]. Lê Văn Linh, one of the founding heroes of the Lê dynasty, also believed in Buddhism. From the advice to his children before he died, it can be known that Lê Văn Linh expressed himself as a lay Buddhist. The ĐVSKTT wrote: “Lê Văn Linh only believed in Buddhism and insisted his children on inviting reputed monks to come to his house to chant for three fasting weeks and seven moral principles, with no grand funerals” [Ibid: 66a]. In 1448, when there was a great drought, the king ordered the civil and military mandarins to have the same fasting habits as the king, and then personally came to Bảo An monastery and Cảnh Linh palace to pray for rain. He also ordered General Lê Khả to carry Buddha Pháp Vân from Cổ Châu monastery to Báo Thiên pagoda so that the monks could chant sutras to pray for the rain with the personal participation of the king and his mother [Ibid: 68b]. Buddhist religious practices is an expression of the religious power of the factions in the Lê Sơ dynasty at that time. During the reign of King Hồng Đức (1470—1496), Queen Mother Ngô Thị Ngọc Dao still diligently worshiped Buddha every day, showing kindness to even her servants and subordinates. Therefore, she was called the living Buddha [Nguyễn Xung Xác 1498].

However, conflicts of interest and power struggles between factions occurred, leading to fluctuations in Taoist and Buddhist rituals in the royal court ceremonies. Great Admiral Lê Ngân worshiped Guan Yin in his house and set up an altar to invite a shaman to perform rituals to pray for his daughter Lê Nhật Lệ (Consort Huệ) to be favored by the king. The king sent troops to arrest him at home. Consort Huệ was demoted to *Tu dung*, the medium Nguyễn was forced into exile and the shaman Trần Văn Phương had to work as an elephant herder. [ĐVSKTT-XI: 50a]. Taoist music and rituals were again secretly used to chase away solar eclipses in the Lê Sơ dynasty. In 1434, the royal court meeting was off. Because before that, Meteorologist Bùi Thị Hanh secretly said that there was a black ape eating the sun. Prime Minister Lê Sát secretly sent people to capture live apes and live monkeys to kill in the palace as sacrifices to end the disaster. The ceremony of guarding the forbidden palace does not seem to match the royal court’s regulations, so it was deliberately hidden from the officials. The two celebrants this time were Bùi Thị Hanh and Trinh Toàn Dương, who were formerly Taoist monks under the support of Lê Sát. [Ibid: 8b — 9a]. This historical record shows that Lê Sát did not use the Confucian solar and lunar eclipse rescue music but practiced Taoist music and rites. In 1448, Bùi Thị Hanh reported that there was a lunar eclipse according to the Confucian rites. However, it did not happen. The king and mandarins had made so many concerted efforts to respond to the false information. Hanh’s previous crimes were discovered and demoted to the imperial court [Ibid: 30a]. In this case, the Taoist ritual was used illegally, and caused conflict with the Confucian “solar eclipse rescue” rituals. The court then would gradually limit the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, followed by the removal of power from groups that intend to take advantage of heresy to do things detrimental to Confucianism.

During the Early Lê dynasty, Taoist rituals were also organized by the royal court. In April 1435, the court requested the provincial, district and communal officials that: “If you see any places where worms bite mulberries and rice, you must make sacrifices to finish that incident”, [Ibid: 26b]. In 1437, King Lê Thái Tông “performed a ceremony to pray for rain at Cảnh Linh abbey” [Ibid: 38a]. Praying for rain took effect many times

in every king's reign. In 1447, because of pests eating rice, the royal court sent Taoists to kill insects, as while assigning Minister of Rites, and Minister of Revenue Nguyễn Như Đổ to make sacrifices to the gods to kill rice pests [ĐVSKTT-XII: 41a—41b]. In 1448, the royal court “determined regulations on the ceremony to pray for rain and sunshine [Ibid: 47b]. In 1448, King Lê Nhân Tông “issued the decree to order military mandarins to go to Cảnh Linh abbey and Bảo An monastery to pray for rain with the participation of the king” [Ibid: 68b]. In 1467, King Lê Thánh Tông sent Taoist priests to worship and kill rice pests [Ibid: 41a—41b]. The three texts for worshipping Thunder God written in *Thiên Nam dư hạ tập* (collection of laws when being free in Dai Viet) show the influence of the theory of heaven as supreme controller of Taoism as well as the theory of heaven-man induction of Confucianism. Both theories are based on the Confucian idea of destiny. King Lê Thánh Tông felt that thunder hitting the imperial citadel was the punishment from heaven and needed to conduct a rain praying ceremony to eliminate natural disasters. This ceremony was called “Linh Bảo and belongs to the Linh Bảo sect, which was derived from the Chính Nhất sect of Taoism during the Song dynasty [Onishi 2009: 433—45]. From the events of King Lê Thái Tông and King Lê Nhân Tông, it can be seen that in the Lê Sơ dynasty, Cảnh Linh abbey became a place to pray for rain in the form of a rain praying ceremony of Taoism. In short, drought and pests were natural disasters that greatly affected agriculture, or the economic and political stability in a broader sense. Therefore, the royal court simultaneously used many rituals to pray for rain (of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and divine worship facilities throughout the country). These rituals strengthened the belief in supernatural powers, the connection between the king and people, and increased the power of the royal court.

### **Books and classics on Three Teachings in the Lê Sơ period**

During the Former Lê, Lý, and Trần dynasties, the Three Teachings classics were introduced into Dai Viet many times, including the *Buddhist Tripitaka* (in 1006, 1010, 1014, 1020 and 1295), *Taoist Canon* (1017), and *Nine Classics* (1009), *Four Books and Six Classics* (1253), *Four Books and Five Classics* (1272) of Confucianism [Trần Trọng Dương 2023: 11]. During the rule of Ming dynasty, the colonial government imposed the use of the contemporary classics system for education in Dai Viet. The ĐVSKTT said: “In 1419, the Ming dynasty granted the *Four Books and Five Classics*, *Complete Theory of Change*, *Kindness Is Corresponded by Happiness*, and *Examples of Filial Peity* to Confucianism and the prefectures, provinces, and districts, and sent monks to learn and disseminate Buddhist canons in the Sangha management agency” [ĐVSKTT-X: 3b]. This evidence shows the systematic transmission of Song-Ming Confucian classics, along with contemporary Buddhist and Taoist books. The transmission of classics is for education, training and organizing examinations to select talents. In 1426, the Ming dynasty held the Hương thí — a formerly, triennial examination in Dai Viet for the second degree of Cử nhân (bachelor) [Ibid: 18b]. The circulation of books and classics is also an expression of the Ming dynasty's policy on the HTT in Dai Viet.

After gaining independence, the Lê Sơ dynasty engraved and printed the Three Teachings classics, focusing mainly on the Song Confucian classics. In 1435, the royal



court completed the wooden mold inscription of *Complete Four Books* [ĐVSKTT-XI: 33b—34a], including *Great Learning*, *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *Doctrine of Golden Mean*. These were the texts of the Song Confucian classics that the Ming dynasty once had printed in Dai Viet. Therefore, when the demand of society increased, the royal court had to reprint them. The purpose of this inscription is to serve the teaching and learning of the official education system as well as folk Confucian education. Distributing books by the administrative system is a manifestation of the education and examination policies of the Lê Sơ dynasty. During this prosperous era of Confucianism and academic examination, the profession of engraving also developed to serve many different needs of life. The engraving agency may be the Temple of Confucius. In 1442, Nguyễn Trãi finished writing the *Book of Geography of Dai Viet*. Later, King Nhân Tông included this book in the *Collection of Valued Teachings from Domestic Books* [An Nam vũ công: 33a]. In 1467, the state issued and distributed the *Five Classics* to the Temple of Literature [ĐVSKTT-XII: 34a]. The Temple of Literature was responsible for disseminating this system of standard textbooks to thousands of schools across the country. During the reign of King Hồng Đức, the royal court every year distributed the *Four Books and Five Classics* to academic officials in the provinces and districts. In 1483, because the number of wooden molds for engraving books and classics was too high, King Lê Thánh Tông built a storage to archive the molds in the east of the Minh Luân house in the Temple of Literature [ĐVSKTT-XIII: 34a]. The development and engraving, and replication of Confucian classics was attended to by the royal court, to serve the expansion and teaching of the Confucian knowledge in the whole territory of Dai Viet at that time. The dissemination of Confucian books and classics contributed to the real development of Confucianism. Yu Insun [2006: 35] also argued that the widespread dissemination of Confucian books and classics “has important implications for the development of Confucianism”.

On the basis of Confucian classics, the Lê Sơ dynasty developed many books and had them printed, such as Nguyễn Trãi’s *Book of Laws*\* (lost books were marked with the symbol \*), \**National Penal Code* formulated in the period 1431—1449, *National Language Poetry Collection* (1459) by Phan Phu Tiên, \**Đại Việt sử kí* (continued) (1455) by Phan Phu Tiên, *Collection of Poems When Conquering the West* (1471), \**National Regulations on Mandarins* (1471), *ĐVSKTT* (1479) of Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Laws of Dai Viet* (100 volumes, 1483), *Hồng Đức Map/Map of the world* (1490), *Standards for Mandarins* (Hồng Đức period), *Comprehensive Historical Compendium of Social, Economic, and Political Institutions* (1484) by Than Nhan Trung and associates, *Collection of Good Poems* (1497) by Hoàng Đức Lương, \**Vietnamese History Reflection* by Nguyễn Địch Tâm, \**Reflection of Dai Viet History* (1511) by Vũ Quỳnh, \**Good Laws Ruling the Country* and \**Real Records on King Lê Trung Hưng Time* by Lê Tường Đức, and dozens of poetry collections by King Lê Thánh Tông, Lê Hiến Tông and many other authors. It can be seen that the transmission and use of Confucian classics during the Lê Sơ dynasty was considered an important task in designing the ideology and textbook standards for the entire country. The classics were considered the foundation for all intellectuals in society to build a “Domani of manifest civility”, in which King Lê Thánh Tông was considered a king with a strategic vision in building and design a civilized Dai Viet, with

many Confucian works compiled by the Vietnamese themselves [Trần Trọng Dương 2011: 3–28].

There were almost no historical records on the Taoist and Buddhist classics during this period. We know that the *Tripitaka* was last introduced into Dai Viet in 1295, and then engraved many times by the Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Sangha in Thiên Trường (Nam Định province) and in Thăng Long and many other localities. However, these sets have been lost so far. Under the rule of the Ming dynasty, many books of the Three Teachings were also brought to Dai Viet, but they have all been lost. During the Lê Sơ dynasty, there were only two important documents left: the *Collected Scripture on Deeds of Jade Emperor* of Taoism and the *Sūtra on Deep Indebtedness to One's Father and Mother as Spoken by the Buddha* of Buddhism.

*Collected Scripture on Deeds of Jade Emperor* was engraved during the reign of Lê Thái Tông (1434–1442), including three volumes: one, two and three. Most of the engraving molds have also been lost. There are now only three engraving molds noting on the pronunciation of difficult Chinese characters, with an illustration at the end of volume two. The molds were discovered in 1971 at Linh Tiên temple, Đức Thượng commune, Hoài Đức district, Hà Nội [Nguyễn Tài Căn 2004: 48] (fig. 1). This may be a kind of Taoist book, but it is different from similar books in the Taoist Canon, which means that the canonical content inside has been further developed by the Vietnamese. The contents inside include some rituals learned from Buddhist books such as King Trần Thái Tông's *Essays on Emptiness* (1218–1277), e.g., the part “Willing to encourage”. The last part of the book states that the three female patrons are Queen Đỗ Thị Ngọc Nha, Princess Trịnh Thị Ngọc Huyền and her mother Trần Thị Ngọc Lỗi. The person in charge of the engraving is Daoist Phan Văn Nhân — a monk at Tri Linh temple, Sơn Đồng commune, Đan Phượng district (now a part of Hà Nội). This is a Taoist scripture with the participation and contributions of aristocratic women in the Lê Sơ dynasty. At the same time, it also shows the relationship between the royal family and folk Taoism.

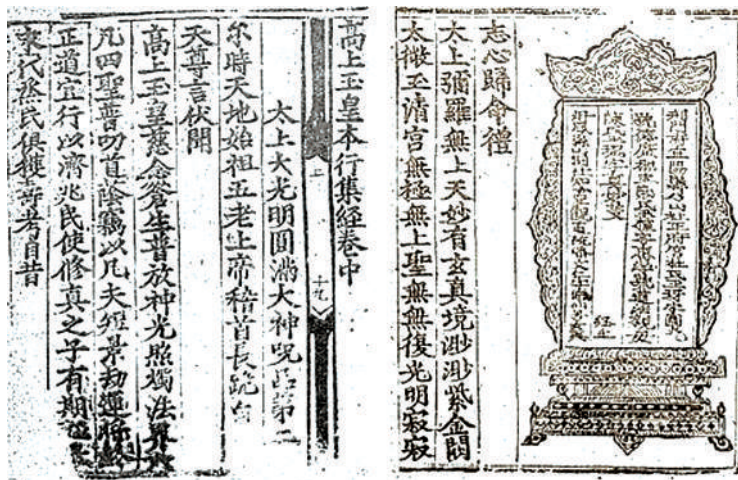


Fig. 1. Collected Scripture on Deeds of Jade Emperor, Vol. 2.

Source: [Nguyễn Tài Căn 2004: 51, 55].

The *Sutra about the deep kindness of parents as Spoken by the Buddha* is a text engraved during the reign of King Lê Hiến Tông (1497—1504) [Shimizu Masaaki 2010: 2] (fig. 2). The text preserves the exact original Chinese and Nôm scripts as well as the graphics of the original text. The text includes 46 pages, of which 19 pages have graphics. These pictures are used to illustrate the text contents. Picture number 12a is the gratitude toward the mother's nurture and protection. Picture 12b is the gratitude toward the mother during her pregnancy. Picture 13a is the gratitude toward the mother's sacrifice when giving birth. The content of this text uses Confucian concepts to teach Buddhist teachings. It shows the harmony of beliefs in spiritual activities in Dai Viet. And up until today, this sutra remains widely used. Participants in the sutra inscription are queens, consorts or devout followers of the religion.



Fig. 2. Sutra about the deep kindness of parents and how difficult it is to repay it, page 23a—24b. Source: [Hoang Thi Ngo 1999].

In addition to the above two books, King Lê Thánh Tông's *Salvation Oration for Wandering Souls of Many Sorts* is an oration for the wandering souls that simulates Buddhist rituals, including the chanting of the *Lotus Sutra*. He thereby criticized the bad habits of contemporary Confucianists, Taoists, and Buddhists, as well as the evils of mandarins, militiamen, and theft. This shows Confucian power discourse in a Buddhist style text. This Thánh Tông's text, influenced by the *Yoga Ritual for Offering Food to Flaming Mouth*, a Ming dynasty Buddhist text, was used to teach the citizens of the kingdom rather than as a ritual text. This work shows the power of Confucianism in correcting customs and educating people. In addition to the classics, it is also important to mention the Taoist and Buddhist works developed by the Vietnamese. The first Buddhist author of the Lê Sơ dynasty was Zen master Viên Thái (1400/1460) with *Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật bản hạnh ngữ lục* (A.818) — a Chinese text with Nôm translation about Buddha Pháp Vân at Dâu monastery (Bắc Ninh province). The next works are *Cổ*

*Châu Phật bản hạnh* và *Cổ Châu nghi* by an unknown Zen master written in the Hồng Đức period (1470—1496). Lương Thế Vinh (1441—1496, passed the examination for choosing the first doctoral candidate in 1463) had three works, namely *Zen science*, *Ten Teachings on Morality of Buddhism* and *Preface of Historical Records on Buddhism in Dai Viet* [Nguyễn Lang 2014: 490—491]. The first book is a textbook on Buddhist thoughts. The second book is the ten teachings on morality from a Buddhist point of view. The last one is the preface of the Historical Records on Buddhism in Dai Viet from 1203 onward. Finally, we also know a number of poems for worshipping the Thunder God recorded in the *Thiên Nam dư hạ tập* (A.334/1-10), which were used by King Lê Thánh Tông in the Taoist ritual of praying for rain.

## Conclusion

The paper explores the policy of the Harmony of the Three Teachings, the system of classics and books of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and the ritual and sacrificial activities of the Three Teachings in the Lê Sơ dynasty. It argues that “Confucian monopoly” is essentially a concept that refers to the strengthening of Confucianism in state administration based on the Song Confucian classics and ideology, and the state model learned from the Great Ming Dynasty, which is the monopolistic status of Confucianism in terms of administration and education. Specifically, Confucianism holds the leading position and has authority and legitimacy over others. The Confucian royal court has the right to administer the Sangha of Buddhism and Taoism, to eliminate superstitious rituals that take advantage of Buddhist and Taoist profiles, and to control the printing of books of the Three Teachings. Confucianism is the state leader, while the thoughts and rituals of Buddhism and Taoism both have the function of supporting the royal court in cultural activities as well as solving the spiritual needs of the royal family and the people. The phenomenon of the Harmony of the Three Teachings is essentially a common cultural concept for many centuries in Vietnam, from the Lý — Trần dynasties to the Lê Sơ and later Tây Sơn and Nguyễn dynasties.

Received: October 9, 2023

Received in revised form: February 15, 2024

Accepted: March 7, 2024

Дата поступления статьи: 09.10.2023

Дата поступления в переработанном виде: 15.02.2024

Принята к печати: 07.03.2024

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