

Traditional Vietnamese Villages as Seen from the Confucian Scholar Village

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Abstract: Studies have been carried out on traditional Vietnamese villages by researchers covering many topics, especially the socio-economy of villages. This article further clarifies the aspect of the educational and examination system of traditional Vietnamese villages. From 1075, the central-level Confucian education and the imperial examination system were officially recognized with the first *Minh Kinh bác học* examination to select high-ranking officials. This continued until 1919, when this system ended. Village education was always an important foundation for candidates taking the examinations which selected government officials in the monarchical period. This article focuses on the geographical space, economic structure, cultural characteristics of Vietnamese villages, the method of education in mandarin families, as well as the interest in, encouragement and preferential treatment of, the village towards education and examinations. The author aims to ascertain the factors that contributed to the tradition of village mandarins, and of a family, while at the same time highlighting the differences between the Confucian scholar village and traditional Vietnamese villages in general.

Keywords: Village, traditional Vietnamese village, Confucian scholar village, education, examination.

Subject classification: History.

1. Introduction

It can be said that Bùi Xuân Đính is the pioneering researcher into the Vietnamese Confucian scholar village, having published many works and theses on this topic. The appearance of this special type of village arose from the

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education system in monarchical times, which recruited mandarins through the imperial examination system (Vũ Duy Mền, 2020). The Confucian scholar village can be classified as a type of village categorized by cultural characteristics, with many similarities to a literary village. Further studies are needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Confucian scholar village in Vietnam (Bùi Xuân Đỉnh & Nguyễn Việt Chức, 2010; Đỉnh Khắc Thuận, 2010; Đặng Kim Ngọc, 2011; Bùi Xuân Đỉnh, 2019), and researchers should pay more attention to the importance and features of these villages in Vietnam's history (Sông Lam, 2016; Vũ Duy Mền, 2020).

The author applied field research into Confucian scholar villages in Vietnam; the paper focuses on this type of village from the perspective of a traditional Vietnamese rural village, in terms of inter-village space, economic, political-social structures, and village clans. On this basis the unique characteristics of this type of village are analyzed.

2. Literature review

Bùi Xuân Đỉnh (1998) was the first researcher to introduce the concept of “*làng khoa bảng*” (Confucian scholar village - a village having several Confucian scholars who sat the feudal State's examinations and passed the higher level exams (from *Phó bảng* and above). He also affirmed that this type of village was a relatively special one, embodying fascinating scientific issues that historians, ethnologists, and folklorists should study in depth (Bùi Xuân Đỉnh, 1998). Bùi Xuân Đỉnh has published many studies on the Confucian scholar village in Thăng Long [the former original name of Hanoi] (Bùi Xuân Đỉnh, 2004, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2019) to reveal a great deal of characteristics of Confucian villages, and their role in history.

Other authors who studied the Confucian scholar village have also given fairly similar definitions: “A village of Vietnamese communities in rural areas (mainly in the northern Delta region) with many people who have passed the examinations of the feudal State” (Sông Lam, 2016: 5); The Confucian scholar village is just a concept of honor among the people, not an official title conferred by the State and local authorities. It is different from the title of cultural village we use today because the latter has clear criteria. It is evaluated, and the relevant competent authority decides whether or not to confer the title on the village, while the nature and name of the Confucian scholar village under discussion falls into a different category (Đặng Kim Ngọc, 2011: 4).

Thus, “Confucian scholar village” should be understood as a traditional village of the Vietnamese people living in the countryside, where many pursued education and passed the Confucian scholar examinations of the monarchy at a high level. Thereby, a tradition of studiousness and scholarly achievements arose and were passed down through many generations, forming unique cultural features and clear creativity. Briefly speaking, a Confucian scholar village is one that has many Confucian laureates (Ngô Vũ Hải Hằng & Lê Quang Chấn, 2022).

A number of authors are trying to understand the characteristics of Confucian scholar villages. Bùi Xuân Đính (1998) made one of the first studies (1998). He proposed that these scholar villages were those with at least ten people who passed the *Phó bảng* level (and above), and 23 typical Confucian scholar villages met such criteria. In his view, if a village had many people studying Confucian literature and doctrines but historically had less than 10 doctors, then it did not meet the standard of a Confucian scholar village. He concluded that there were three main features to identify this type of village: good economy, good policies (including incentives), and good beliefs. In addition, hard work and effort, determination, and help from relatives who were mandarins may help a candidate pass the exams. Bùi Xuân Đính also carried out some research, for example Bùi Xuân Đính & Nguyễn Viết Chức (2010), Bùi Xuân Đính (2010a, 2010b), Bùi Xuân Đính (2019), in exploring aspects of Confucian scholar villages to show why some villages had consecutive successful candidates over several periods while other villages had a few candidates in a short duration. Some authors aimed to study different perspectives of Confucian scholar villages. For example, Bùi Khắc Việt & Nguyễn Đức Nhuệ (1996), Đặng Kim Ngọc (2011), Sông Lam (2016), Nguyễn Tuấn Cường (2020), Ngô Vũ Hải Hằng & Lê Quang Chấn, (2022). Their findings share a lot of similarities with that of Bùi Xuân Đính.

Case studies were also done to find common features of a typical Confucian scholar village, such as those by Bùi Xuân Đính & Lê Thị Thu Hà (2004) focused on Phú Thị village. Five determining factors were discovered: (i) being adjacent to other such villages (which meant the region maintained a good tradition of studying), (ii) being served by a good road network, (iii) being close to Thăng Long (making it convenient for people to be able to sit examinations), (iv) the support, or even sacrifice, of parents/relatives for their children/offspring, and (v) marriage between successful lineages (in terms of economy and study). Bùi Xuân Đính (2011) focused on the Confucian scholar village of Nguyệt Áng (now in Thanh Trì, Hanoi), while Bùi Khắc Việt & Nguyễn Đức Nhuệ (1996) also tried to explain the effort (and success) of generations in Hoàng Lộc (now in Thanh Hóa province). Approaching the Confucian scholar village from an interdisciplinary angle, Đặng Kim Ngọc. (2011) analyzed conditions and expressions of Confucian scholar villages in Hanoi while others such as Hoàng Lê (1993), Nguyễn Hữu Mùi (2002, 2007), and Đinh Khắc Thuân (2010) looked at Sino-Nom steles.

3. The space of villages

The environment of the Confucian scholar village is one with banyan trees, water wharves, communal houses with their yards, and being surrounded by bamboo fences similar to other traditional Vietnamese villages. However, the Confucian scholar villages are often located in favorable positions close to water and with good road connections; or they may be near local political and administrative centers. Such conditions are advantageous for traditional Vietnamese villages to transform themselves into Confucian scholar villages.

Although the space of villages is not a direct factor, it is nonetheless a fundamental one. A village favorably located near water with good roads is a requisite for economic development and improved living standards. A more developed economy is likely to have better conditions that stimulate education. This is illustrated by many villages such as the following selection: (i) Tam Son (now part of Từ Sơn city, Bắc Ninh province), which was located right next to the national main road, not too far from Thăng Long Citadel, and adjacent to the Ngũ Huyện Khê River; (ii) Kim Đôi village (now in Bắc Ninh city, Bắc Ninh province), located right next to Cầu River; (iii) Đông Ngạc village (Bắc Từ Liêm district, Hanoi city) on the Red River; (iv) Tả Thanh Oai village (now in Thanh Trì district, Hanoi city) on the Nhuệ River; (v) Quỳnh Đôi village (now in Quỳnh Lưu district, Nghệ An province) on the Mai River, near the Quên estuary; (vi) Nguyệt Viên village (now in Thanh Hóa city, Thanh Hóa province), (vii) Bội Thượng - Bội Thái village (now in Hoàng Hóa district, Thanh Hóa province) on the Mã River; (viii) Trung Cấn village (now in Nam Đàn district, Nghệ An province) on the Lam River; and (ix) Tùng Ảnh village (now in Đức Thọ district, Hà Tĩnh province) on the La River.

Being conveniently located near water and favorable land transportation created the sayings “Good soil veins gathered there, so there were more and more beautiful places; the quintessence gathered there, so many famous mandarins were born” (Phan Huy Chú, 2007: 118), or “The fields for growing seasonal rice were very good, farming and mulberry cultivation were both prosperous. Customs and characters were better than others in that region” (Phan Huy Chú, 2007: 130).

Not only are these mandarin villages blessed with favorable geographical locations, but their layout has very good feng shui and “sacred” elements, which include sacred mounds that created “shadow support” for the villagers whilst they studied. This information is passed down from generations of people who believe that these are contributing factors to the rise of the Confucian scholar village.

Mộ Trạch village (now in Bình Giang district, Hải Dương province) has Chúc Bút field (commonly known as Chúc field). On this field is the office *Cửu quán khảo văn*. The office looks into the village (to the south), on the field there is a mound of land that looks like a pen, and at the end of the mound there is a hill that looks like an inkstone. The two together look like a pen leaning against an inkstone. Perhaps it is also a concept of feng shui that the inn was built here to represent the pen, and the inkstone appears to look towards the examination path taken by the Mộ Trạch villagers.

Tả Thanh Oai village has a scattering of dozens of sacred mounds. People believe these were the spiritual “motivation” for the villagers to be studious, determined to succeed and to pursue academic careers (Phan Đại Doãn, Bùi Xuân Đỉnh & Bùi Thị Thanh Nhân, 2002).

Bội Thượng - Bội Thái village “has the backdrop of Phong Châu mountain, with the Mã River winding around the village, mountains and rivers concentrate sacred energy, the people are talented and handsome, it is “a land of outstanding people”; hence, many scholars pass their exams and become famous” (Bùi Khắc Việt & Nguyễn Đức Nhuệ, 1996: 165). People believe that the shape of the village

resembles a large inkstone and the road from Nguyệt Viên village runs down, like a pen dipping into an inkstone. The pen and inkstone are symbols of learning and examinations.

In Vĩnh Kiều village (Từ Sơn city, Bắc Ninh province) there is a sacred tomb that was built by a Chinese geomancer to repay the Nguyễn family's ancestor, called Phước Mai, who was credited with hiding and returning money to the Chinese. Legend has it that the geomancer discovered several auspicious sites. The first one had a mountain range facing it. It was predicted that it would later produce an emperor; however, the dynasty would last only one generation; the second site was on a lotus flower, and it would produce a generation of consorts; while the third site completed the Confucian scholar lineage. Phước Mai's son chose to bury his father's remains in the third site. The tomb was decorated with a dragon's vein from Cẩm Chương commune, winding like a yellow snake; on reaching Vĩnh Kiều commune it lifted its head, suddenly rising up to form two mounds. The larger mound was flat and the smaller one was slightly curved, sitting on the Chinese character 艮(gèn) and looking out to the character 坤(kūn). In the third generation after Mr. Phước Mai, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huy passed the exams and was awarded the *Thám hoa* (receiving the third highest score in the imperial exams). Later, Vĩnh Kiều village had 10 people who passed the Doctorate exam, all with the surname Nguyễn.

4. Economic structure

Economically, Confucian scholar villages were primarily agricultural villages, and were relatively developed in terms of handicrafts and commerce. On this basis, their culture and education developed prosperously.

In the context of underdeveloped agricultural production, land formed the economic basis of social relations in the countryside. The special feature of Confucian scholar villages was that land was used to encourage learning and for holding examinations. Steles reveal that, depending on the capacity of each locality, there were different forms of land contribution.

For villages with a tradition of education and examinations, there was a special, separate type of field called *Học điền* (the field to encourage learning). In the fourth year of Bảo Thái reign (1723), the regulations for granting school fields to national and village schools were stipulated as follows: national schools were granted 60 *mẫu* of field; village schools were divided into three categories: large prefectures of 20 *mẫu*, medium prefectures of 18 *mẫu*, and small prefectures of 16 *mẫu*. This type of field is also recorded on steles with names such as: *School Field Stele* [*Học điền bị ký* - Stele recording school fields]; *Housing and School field stele* [*Học xá điền thổ bị ký* - Stele recording school fields in the commune]; *Bồ Điền regulation stele* [*Bồ Điền điều ước bị ký* - Stele recording Bồ Điền commune regulations], etc. These steles are often located in the *Văn từ*, *Văn chỉ*, or *Từ chỉ* or placed in communal houses and pagodas.

According to statistics from 19 documents (stele texts) kept at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies and a copy printed by Nguyễn Hữu Mùi, these scholar steles are distributed as follows (as per today's place names): Vĩnh Tường district (Vĩnh Phúc province) - five steles; Yên Lạc district (Vĩnh Phúc province) - four steles; Bạch Hạc district (Phú Thọ province) - two steles; Lập Thạch district (Vĩnh Phúc province) - one stele; Quỳnh Côi district (Thái Bình province) - one stele; Thanh Oai district (Hanoi) - one stele; Từ Liêm district (Hanoi) - two steles; Thạch Thất district (Hanoi) - one stele; Chí Linh and Tứ Kỳ districts (Hải Dương province) each has one stele; and Yên Mỹ district (Hưng Yên province) - one stele (Nguyễn Hữu Mùi, 2002). Thus, based on the number of stele texts held by the institute, it can be seen that this type of stele text was only evident in a narrow area, in the ancient “*tứ trấn*” (four towns) region of today's Red River Delta area, where many people successfully passed the imperial exams during the monarchical period. The number of successful candidates in each area is recorded as follows: Kinh Bắc (now Bắc Ninh province): 593; Hải Dương province: 572, Sơn Nam Thượng (now Hưng Yên, Hà Nam province and a part of Hanoi): 349; Sơn Nam Hạ (now Nam Định, Thái Bình province and a part of Ninh Bình province): 134; Sơn Tây province (now Sơn Tây town, Hanoi city): 282; Thanh Hóa province: 177; and Nghệ An province: 145 (Phan Huy Ôn, 2002).

The “*School Field Stele*” stele, erected in Tự Đức 5 (1852) in Phù Lập commune, Vĩnh Tường district (Vĩnh Phúc province) shows the appropriation of privately owned fields for everyone's use for school fields, totaling eight *mẫu*. The “*Housing and School field stele*” [*Học xá điền thổ bi ký*] erected in the 23rd year of Chính Hòa reign (1702) also states: “Studying without land, how can we develop intelligence and make a way to advance virtue? Studying without land, how can we take care of the teacher and show respect for morality?” (Nguyễn Hữu Mùi, 2007). This point of view comes from the belief that teachers are scholars who do not become officials, or they retire and return to their homeland, or they are unsalaried bachelors or village teachers not on the state payroll hence they have to rely on farming and live off the profits.

The number of students in the commune, whether large or small, is managed by the commune, assigned to those who are qualified to receive the land and collect rice according to the regulations of each place to give to the teacher, replacing the state salary, making the teacher feel that he will have decent living conditions teaching.

When the Bồ Điền commune dignitaries invited teachers, they stipulated: “Invited teachers must be people holding prestigious academic degrees” (*Bồ Điền điều ước bi ký*, established in the 24th year of the reign of Tự Đức [1871]). Phù Chính commune (now in Vĩnh Tường district, Vĩnh Phúc province) stipulated at a higher level: “Welcomed village teachers must be people with a reputation for obtaining a bachelor degree or passing high school exams” (*School Field Stele [Học xá điền bi ký]*, established in the 20th year of the reign of Tự Đức [1867]). When meeting the required standards, in addition to receiving a salary in the form of rice, teachers were also given other incentives by the village or they received gifts on special annual occasions. The text on the stele of Phù Chính commune's school

fields in Article 4 stipulates: “The teacher is chosen to cultivate the school fields, and people in the hamlet cannot dispute this; or the teacher can have their family members cultivate the fields”; Article 6 stipulates: “Every year, on the three festivals of *Đoan ngọ*, *Thường tân*, and *Nguyên đán*, the teacher receives two *quan* [*quan* was a unit of money]. A teacher’s annual clothing allowance was worth six *quan*. At Văn Trung and Lăng Trung communes (now in Vĩnh Tường district, Vĩnh Phúc province) the school field stele in Article 1 records that “If the school field is in good condition (top class), it will be given to the teacher to cultivate”; Article 5 records that: “If the teacher goes to the exam, the commune will pay the teacher two *quan*, and the *Tư văn* Association must respectfully give him food and drink”. Phú Đa commune alone had a rather special remuneration rule. According to the inscription on the stele, a teacher would receive an additional amount of money called “*Tiền khách tiền*” [money of seeing off guests], which is the guest reception fee including one *quan*. The reason for this was that this particular commune held an annual practice session for scholars, on the first day of the 8th month, lunar calendar, inviting teachers to be examiners. After the exam, the commune deducted money from the wages to pay the remuneration. (Nguyễn Hữu Mùi, 2007).

In addition, there were also localities where the income generated from using school fields went towards supporting underprivileged students. For example, as recorded in its village regulations in Mạnh Trữ commune, six *sào* of land was set aside and given to students for them to cultivate.

In the village, education was encouraged in many ways. These included: providing land on which to build schools, awarding prizes (in the form of land) for the village poetry competitions, exempting Confucian scholars from corvée labor so that they could focus on studying, etc. In the regulations of Tả Thanh Oai village established in the 5th year of the reign of Khải Định (1920), it is recorded that “The village provided land for students, which was 40 *mẫu* of school fields” (Bùi Xuân Đính, 2010a).

In addition, in some Confucian scholar families, many people followed the “profession” of Confucianism, and they also had their own rules. Some lineages dictated that whoever passed the imperial examinations would be given three *sào* of rice fields on which to build a house; the clan also set aside eight *sào* of rice fields for use as school fields, and the annual profits went to providing paper and pens for the brothers in the clan, etc.

5. Social and political organizations

In Confucian scholar villages, besides the presence of political and social organizations similar to other traditional villages, such as the Elderly Association, the Buddhist Monk Association, etc., organizations such as the *Tư văn* Association, Khuyến học (Study encouragement) Association were always included.

The *Tư văn* Association (Council of Educated and Accomplished people of the village) was that of people who studied Chinese characters that would meet in the Văn chỉ or Văn từ where Confucius is worshipped. The group included those

who had passed the highest level commune/district examinations (doctorate), and village dignitaries such as Lý trưởng (head of the commune), Phó lý (deputy head of the commune), Khán thủ (leader of the village patrol force). In addition, the Văn chỉ and Văn từ of some villages worshipped those who had passed the middle examinations (*Hương cống, Cử nhân*) and those who passed the minor ones (*Tú tài*). Every year, in spring and autumn, two ceremonies were held in 2nd and 8th lunar months, and only members of the Tư văn were allowed to attend. In an examination year, all the scholars in the village gathered to perform the *Kỳ khoa* ceremony, or the whole village carried out the ceremony, to pray for many villagers to achieve success. Therefore, the Tư văn is considered the “Intellectual Association” of the village.

The stele of worship of Bằng Liệt commune (Thanh Trì district, Hà Nội) states: The stele belongs to the Tư văn festival of Bằng Liệt commune, Thanh Trì district, Thường Tín prefecture. *Tri huyện Thường Phái tử* Nguyễn Trần Tiến, *Nội giám phụng ngự* Lưu Đình Cấp, *Trùm trưởng* Lưu Đình Huy, Lưu Bách Giảng, Lưu Bách Dụ and the entire Tư văn Association bought land to build Từ chỉ as a permanent place of worship for Bùi Quốc Khái - the runner-up in the *Minh kinh bác học* examinations during the Lý Dynasty (1009-1225), the founder of Bằng Liệt village. At the same time, the village chief and the pastors took private land to create a sacred spot for the Tư văn Association to be passed down for eternity. From that moment on, profits were collected from that land for worship, twice a month in the spring and autumn and on two days of the main event (tết Đinh), to prepare enough worshipping offerings for the Từ chỉ (Đinh Khắc Thuần, 2010).

The *Tỳ Bà văn chỉ bi ký* stele states: “Our canton has long been known as a land of culture, through the dynasties there have been sages and doctors who have continued their careers in officialdom, leaving their reputations for posterity”, and “We would like to carefully recount the order of titles, positions, names, land rules, and regulations to be permanently recorded on the stone stele” (Nguyễn Văn Đáp, 2009). [Tỳ Bà canton used to belong to Lang Tài district, now Phú Hòa commune, Lương Tài district, Bắc Ninh province]. The stele inscription also states the village’s regulations and provisions regarding the benefits of those who passed the exams were as follows:

Those in the village who passed the doctorate examination were given a ceremony in their honor that included one buffalo head, one tray of sticky rice, betel and areca nuts, and wine as offerings. They were rewarded with 20 *quan*.

The ceremony held for those in the village who passed the bachelor examination included one pig’s head, one tray of sticky rice, betel and areca nuts, wine as offerings. They were rewarded with three *quan*.

On the ceremony day one pig’s head, betel and areca nuts, sticky rice and wine were offered to those who had passed the doctoral examinations, while one chicken, betel and areca nuts, sticky rice and wine were offered to those who passed the bachelor examinations. After they died, they were worshiped at Văn chỉ.

On the Doctor’s Day, each commune contributed 50 *quan*, one banner, one bunch of areca nuts, and one jar of liquor. For the bachelors, each commune

contributed 20 *quan*, one banner, one bunch of areca nuts, and one jar of liquor. On the occasion of each doctor laureate's birthday, each commune contributed 2 *quan*, one pair of parallel sentences, one bunch of areca nuts, and one jar of liquor. A birthday celebration was held for those who were 60 years old and older, and each commune contributed 60 *mạch* [a unit of money], one pair of parallel sentences, one bunch of areca nuts, one jar of liquor, and red banners.

Those who achieved fame in their official career (e.g. as a district magistrate, prefect, or high-ranking mandarin in the court), but made no achievements in the Confucian examinations, were not included in the above rankings. On the contrary, some did not get a high score, nor became high-ranking mandarins, yet their children passed the Confucian examinations (doctorates), and they were still included as "missionaries, missionaries with merit" in the second rank in the "*Đình từ tự điển*" meaning they contributed by raising their children to be students. This was a worthy honor and recognition by the village, contributing to promoting the tradition of studiousness of the particular family and clan.

As per other villages, in addition to the *Tư văn* Association, *Mộ Trạch* village also had the *Cửu quán khảo văn*, also known as *Quán Hoàng Oanh*, *Oanh Vàng* (Anh Vường). This office was used to test the literacy of the village's academic candidates before they sat the *Hương* examination. Only those who passed the test could go on to sit the *Hương* exam. If they failed the primary test, the village would not allow them to take the *Hương* exam. This could be why *Mộ Trạch* village has a long tradition of high academic achievement.

In some villages, the *Tư văn* Association was given the responsibility of inviting skilled teachers to teach children in the village. They believed that with good teachers, students would progress quickly and soon become successful. In *Văn Trung* and *Lãng Trung* communes, "the officials and the *Văn hội* of both communes, along with the faithful, were assigned to supervise and invite good teachers."

A *giáp* existed in some traditional Vietnamese villages. This was an institution in the village, undertaking many important tasks in village life such as: village management; organizing ceremonies, making offerings, carrying books to worship the village tutelary god; classifying and managing public fields and land (even in villages with little public land); and organizing village guards and patrols to look after security. In some villages that had candidates who passed the imperial examinations, and due to their tradition of learning, the *Giáp* organization was given names that had auspicious meanings and strong literary imprints. For example, *Phú Thị* village had seven *giáp*, namely *Phú Văn*, *Phú Nghĩa*, *Phú An*, *Phú Lễ*, *Phú Lương*, *Phú Vinh*, and *Phú Ân*. *Tả Thanh Oai* village initially had four *giáp* (serving the *Hoa Xá* communal house) that all had beautiful names - *Đức Lâm*, *Hoa Xá*, *Đường Khôi*, and *Phúc Lâm*.

In the villages where the candidates passed the exams, the Elderly Association included educated members who passed the exams. For example, in *Tả Thanh Oai* village, those who passed the exams, including mandarins in the court (dynasty officials), still participated in the Council of Elders. Consultation was first needed on major village affairs in order to obtain opinions and this was under the

“dynasty officials” - the decision-making authority. Their names were often included in the beginning of the village’s administrative documents.

6. The culture of Confucian scholar villages

The scholar villages have certain features in common in terms of material and non-material culture compared to other traditional Vietnamese villages. This includes the influence of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist ideologies, etc. evident in cultural structures such as communal houses, temples, pagodas, and shrines that represent these belief systems (Phan Đại Doãn, 2002; Nguyễn Quang Ngọc, 2009). However, Confucian scholar villages have a different type of cultural work in form of the Văn từ and Văn chỉ.

The Văn từ and Văn chỉ (also called Từ chỉ and Từ vũ) worship Confucius (also known as the Holy Master), the local sages and scholars in villages, hamlets, communes, cantons, and districts, to encourage learning. The *Tạo lập Văn miếu bi* (the Establishment of the Temple of Literature) stele was created in the first year of Dương Hòa (1635) at the Temple of Literature in Trà Lâm commune, Siêu Loại district, Thuận An prefecture (now in Trí Quả commune, Thuận Thành town, Bắc Ninh province). The inscription states that the commune embodies the tradition of Confucianism, where many people passed the examinations; however, there is no temple to worship the sages. Now the members of the Tư văn association are raising funds to building a Temple of Literature (Phạm Thị Thùy Vinh, 2003: 158).

The Văn chỉ (also called Đình Đông) of Mộ Trạch village held a ceremony on the Trung Đình day of spring (12th day of the 2nd lunar month) and autumn (19th of the 8th lunar month) every year. Only the Tư văn Association (also known as Tư thuộc Association or Kỳ Anh Association) members in the village attended the ceremony.

The Tư văn Association supervised all the activities of the Văn từ and Văn chỉ. A canton’s Văn từ was normally used as a school, and during the Holy Master worship season, it was used for holding ceremonies. The Association also organized the invitation of teachers from other localities to come to the canton to teach. The public funds and land of the Văn từ were used as tuition money for the teachers and to buy educational materials for the students. [Canton: administrative units, which appeared around the beginning of the sixteenth century. Each canton had eight to 10 communes]. The ancestors and scholars of the village are worshiped in the Văn từ and Văn chỉ, which are also clearly defined. Mộ Trạch village has a “*Đình từ tự điển*”, which clearly defines that the village ancestors are worshiped in the Văn chỉ, and divided into four categories: The first category was the *Hoàng bảng* (named in the honorable list, who passed the high-ranking exams); the second category related to those who contributed to education (e.g. preaching, spreading the word of religion with merit); the third category was the *Hương tiên* (passing the *Hương cống*, *Cử nhân*); and the fourth category referred to those who passed the *Sinh đồ*, *Tú tài*. The names, hometowns, titles, and achievements in the *Hội* (high-ranking) and *Hương* (middle-ranking) exams of these ancestors were often engraved on steles to honor their knowledge and encourage talents.

In some Confucian scholar villages, there were special customs associated with the ceremonies to honor scholars once they had passed the exams. Mộ Trạch village is a typical example of valuing learning, so the village's regulations had different characteristics compared to others. Instead of the first provision in the village regulations being village structure and organization, rewards and punishments for violating the regulations as per other villages in general, those of Mộ Trạch placed the ceremony to welcome village scholars when they "return" as the first provision. This aspect alone was enough to prove the importance of scholars and the encouragement of learning in Mộ Trạch village; and this also contributed to its reputation and fame as a scholars village.

7. Lineage of Confucian scholars

There are often lineages/families of scholars who came from many Confucian villages, such as the Nguyễn (lineage) in Tam Sơn, the Vũ in Mộ Trạch, the Phạm in Đông Ngạc, the Phạm in Nhân Lý, the Dương in Lạc Đạo, the Hồ in Quỳnh Đôi, the Nguyễn Trọng in Trung Cấn, the Nguyễn in Bột Thượng, the Lê in Nguyệt Viên, the Bùi, and the Phan in Tùng Ảnh (Đông Thái) and so on. These lineages have maintained their family and village tradition of scholars throughout history. This once again affirms that the families of scholars were central to the formation of scholar villages.

For a village of scholars, the scholarly lineages played a decisive role in the formation and development of the village. There were even villages with only one lineage making up a village of scholars, an example is Vĩnh Kiều village, which has 10 doctors all with the surname Nguyễn. There are villages with only two scholarly lineages such as Tam Sơn, Tả Thanh Oai, Nguyệt Áng, Kim Đôi, etc. The Nguyễn in Kim Đôi has 18 doctors; the Ngô in Tam Sơn has 11 doctors; the Phạm in Đông Ngạc has nine doctors; while the Ngô in Tả Thanh Oai, the Nguyễn in Hạ Yên Quyết, the Dương in Lạc Đạo each have eight doctors. Despite the fact they have the same surnames Dương, Nguyễn, etc., in the same village, further research is needed to ascertain if they share the same origin/lineage.

Mộ Trạch village has 36 doctors, of which the Vũ surname accounts for 30 doctors. It can be said that the Vũ in this village is the most prestigious Confucian scholar lineage in Vietnam. In the year of the Fire Monkey (1656) examination, three out of six people in the Vũ family passed the *Đồng Tiến sĩ xuất thân* examinations, which accounted for 50% of those who passed; in the year of the Earth Pig (1659) examination, in Mộ Trạch village four out of 15 people passed the *Đồng Tiến sĩ xuất thân* examinations, of which three were Vũ. A typical example is the family of Doctor Vũ Quốc Sĩ, who had five sons. All of them became high-ranking officials in the royal court, while three of them were doctors. During the reign of Lord Trịnh Tráng, 17 Mộ Trạch villagers passed the exams and became officials in the royal court, so there was a saying "Mộ Trạch held village meetings in the middle of the capital".

The Bắc Ninh - Kinh Bắc region has “Four Clans” historically famous for their Confucian scholars. They are: the Nguyễn in Kim Đôi village (now in Kim Đôi quarter, Kim Chân ward, Bắc Ninh city, Bắc Ninh province) with 18 people across three consecutive generations who passed the doctoral exam; the Nguyễn in Vĩnh Kiều village with nine people over eight consecutive generations who passed the doctoral exam; the Nguyễn in Vân Diêm village (now in Vân Hà commune, Đông Anh district, Hanoi) with six people in five consecutive generations who passed the doctoral exam; and the Ngô in Vọng Nguyệt village (now in Tam Giang commune, Yên Phong district, Bắc Ninh province) with five consecutive generations who passed the doctoral exam (Phan Huy Chú, 2007: 124).

Kim Đôi village with the Nguyễn surname is famous for its tradition of family and clan education. This is shown by the inscription of the first-ranked scholar Lương Thế Vinh on the stele *Từ Mẫn Nguyễn công kỳ thất Hoàng thị chi mộ chí*, in the year of Hồng Đức (1484), placed at the tomb of Nguyễn Lung. He had five sons who passed the doctoral exams (Hoàng Lê, 1993). These five brothers became high-ranking court officials holding many important positions. They were: Nguyễn Nhân Bĩ and Nguyễn Nhân Thiếp (both passed the exams in the year of the Fire Dog, 1466), Nguyễn Nhân Bồng (who passed in the year of the Earth Ox, 1469), Nguyễn Nhân Dư (who passed in the year of the Water Dragon, 1472), and Nguyễn Nhân Đạc (in the year of the Wood Goat, 1475). This is a “unique” phenomenon in Vietnam, comparable to the few lineages in China. During a 30 year period (1466-1497) during the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông, the Nguyễn in Kim Đôi had 12 people who passed the doctoral exam; therefore, every time he held court, King Lê Thánh Tông often said: “*Kim Đôi gia thế, chu tử mẫn triều*” (The people of Kim Đôi fulfils the whole court). A large plaque remains in place in the Nguyễn temple in Kim Đôi village, with the inscription “*Chu tử mẫn triều*”, “*Kế thế công khanh*”, meaning that the lineage had many mandarins over many generations.

Across nearly 200 years (1529-1727) the Nguyễn lineage in Vĩnh Kiều village, proudly had 10 great scholars. Starting with Nguyễn Văn Huy (who was awarded *Thám hoa* (3rd place) in the year of the Earth Ox examination, 1529), who had three children. Two of them passed the *Hoàng giáp* exam: Nguyễn Trọng Quỳnh (year of the Fire Goat exam, 1547), Nguyễn Đạt Thiện (year of the Earth Goat exam, 1559), and one passed the Doctorate exam: Nguyễn Hiền Tích (Doctorate, year of the Wood Ox exam, 1565). Nguyễn Trọng Quỳnh’s eldest son Nguyễn Giáo Phương passed the exam and was awarded 3rd place *Thám hoa* (in the year of the Fire Dog exam, 1586). In the sixth generation, Nguyễn Nhân Nguyên only passed the *Hương cống* exam but he had three children who passed the Doctorate exams: Nguyễn Công Viên (year of the Earth Dog exam, 1718), Nguyễn Đức Đôn (year of the Metal Ox exam, 1721), and Nguyễn Quốc Ích (year of the Fire Goat exam, 1727).

The Nguyễn lineage of Vân Diêm village boasts six out of seven Doctors in the village, all belonging to the Nguyễn “Đại tôn” (main branch). They include Nguyễn Thực (who was awarded the *Hoàng giáp* in the year of the Wood Goat exam, 1595), his son Nguyễn Nghi (year of the Earth Goat exam, 1619); Nguyễn Nghi’s grandsons Nguyễn Khuê and Nguyễn Sĩ (Nguyễn Khuê’s younger brother)

who passed the year of the Metal Dog exam (1670), Nguyễn Khuê's son Nguyễn Thâm passed the year of the Fire Dog exam (1706); and a distant grandson of the second branch, Nguyễn Thường (who passed the year of the Wood Dog exam, 1754).

The Nguyễn lineage of Tam Sơn village boasted Nguyễn Quán Quang who was the first Trạng Nguyên (the top scholar/the highest degree that a candidate can have) of Vietnam (he passed the exam in the year of the Fire Goat, 1247). From the second half of the 15th century, the descendants of this lineage brought the glory of their ancestors to a new level: within 31 years (1487-1518), there were six people who were brothers, a father and son, and uncle and nephew who passed the Confucian scholar examinations. The first of this group was Nguyễn Úc (the year of the Fire Goat exam, 1487) who was followed by his younger brother - Nguyễn Khiết Tú (the year of the Fire Dragon exam, 1496). More than 10 years later, Nguyễn Úc's children passed the imperial examinations one after another: Nguyễn Hy Tái (*Hoàng giáp*, year of the Metal Goat exam, 1511); Nguyễn Tự Cường (Nguyễn Hy Tái's younger brother, year of the Wood Dog exam, 1514); and Nguyễn Khiết Tú's two children, Nguyễn Tảo and Nguyễn Hòa Chung (the year of the Earth Tiger exams, 1518) also honorably succeeded.

Tam Sơn village is also home to the famous Ngô lineage. Individuals include Doctor Ngô Luân (year of the Wood Goat exam, 1475), his nephew Ngô Thâm was awarded the *Bảng nhãn* (year of the Water Ox exam, 1493), Ngô Thâm's son was Trạng Nguyên Ngô Miễn Thiệu (year of the Earth Tiger exam, 1518), and Ngô Miễn Thiệu's two sons were doctors Ngô Diên (year of the Metal Dog exam, 1550) and Ngô Dịch - also known as Ngô Trạch (year of the Fire Dragon exam, 1556). The book *Đại Nam nhất thống chí* records that: "in terms of famous literature, people often honor the Ngô lineage of Tam Sơn commune".

The Phạm lineage in Đông Ngạc village had nine members who passed the Doctorate exams. These included Phạm Lân Đính who passed the *Đệ tam giáp Đồng tiến sĩ xuất thân* exam in 1514; in 1577 Phạm Thọ Chỉ who was Phạm Lân Đính's nephew passed the *Hoàng giáp*; in 1646, Phạm Thọ Chỉ's grandson Phạm Hiên Danh passed the Doctorate exam; in 1683 and 1694, Phạm Quang Trạch and Phạm Quang Hoàn passed the exams respectively; while in 1731, Phạm Quang Trạch's son Phạm Nguyên Ninh passed the Doctorate exam. During the Nguyễn Dynasty, the Phạm lineage had two more doctors: Phạm Chuyên and Phạm Quang Mãn who passed the exams in 1832 and 1849 respectively.

The Nguyễn lineage in Phú Thị village is famous for "*Nhất môn tam Tiến sĩ, đồng triều tứ Thượng thư*" (there are three doctors in one lineage, and there are four ministers-of-the-same-village in the same dynasty) to talk about the tradition of examinations and the glory in the mandarin careers of the villagers. „One lineage with three doctors“ were the cases of three brothers: Nguyễn Huy Nhuận, Nguyễn Huy Mãn, and Nguyễn Huy Thuật; or the three father and son, grandfather and grandson: Nguyễn Huy Nhuận, Nguyễn Huy Dân and Nguyễn Huy Cận. An alley was home to Nguyễn Huy Nhuận, Đoàn Quang Dung, Cao Dương Trạc, and Trịnh Bá Tường who all served as ministers from 1735 to 1740.

The Nguyễn Huy lineage in Trường Lưu village (now in Kim Song Trường commune, Can Lộc district, Hà Tĩnh province) is a long-standing scholar-grooming family. Ninth generation Nguyễn Huy Tự, had two sons who passed the doctoral exams: Nguyễn Huy Oánh (who passed the *Thám hoa* in 1748), and Nguyễn Huy Quynh (who passed the exam in 1772); both became high-ranking officials in the later Lê Dynasty. After retiring, Nguyễn Huy Oánh built Phúc Giang library and opened a class in his hometown. The library became a typical example of private education in Vietnam during the 18th century (Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, 2020: 118). Nguyễn Huy Oánh and Nguyễn Huy Tự wrote books and produced many woodblocks for printing “textbooks”, commonly known as Trường Lưu or Phúc Giang woodblocks.

8. Discussion

Thus, the decisive condition for the success of a lineage or a village in the examinations is the lineage/family tradition, recorded and passed down in the genealogy and family rules. From birth, a child was raised in a good educational environment. They showed intelligence, an eagerness to learn, and determination to follow the will of the ancestors. They lived in an atmosphere where the whole family and village were enthusiastic and strove to study and succeed. The family had incentives, and the village had regulations to ensure encouragement, rights, and solemn honors. These were important factors contributing to the formation of the Confucian scholar village. Attending school and passing high exams were the goals of students in the Confucian scholar villages, to bring glory not only to the lineage and family but also fame to the whole village and commune.

Through research, the author sees that the surge of Confucian scholar villages in feudal times was associated with the space of villages, economic structure, social and political organizations, culture of Confucian scholar villages, and the lineage of the associated scholars. This may be consistent with other research, apart from the factor of marriage among elite Confucian families (Bùi Xuân Đỉnh, 1993).

9. Conclusion

The emergence of the Confucian scholar village was an inevitable consequence of the development of Vietnamese villages within a monarchical framework. It was the result of a Confucian education system, the recruitment of mandarins to work for the state at all levels, which arose from the Confucian examination system.

This selection of mandarins had a profound impact on family and village education. It can be said that the “mandarin education” system created by the

monarchy contributed to the tradition of studiousness in the villages, i.e. students competed with one another to study, encouraging each other to study hard. At the same time, parents tried to work hard, save money and rice to support their children in their studies, to encourage them to sit and pass exams so they could become mandarins, with the hope of changing their family's status.

In feudal society, the gap in economic rights and benefits between the people and the mandarin class was very large. Whether mandarin or civil servant, the State guaranteed them a salary (in the form of money or land, through relevant policies). In addition, there were non-material benefits, due to the stratification of king-mandarin-people. Once retired, mandarins were still able to receive their salaries and they became members of the Council of Elders in the village, bestowed with full power, benefits, and honor in the village. This was the goal of, and motivation for, studying and sitting the exams.

On this basis, depending on the characteristics and conditions of each village, it is the sum of all the factors, presented above, from the geographical aspects to the economic, political, and cultural features of each village, and the presence of the lineages of scholars, that created the face of the Confucian scholar village - a type of traditional village of the Vietnamese people evident through many generations.

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