

# THE MILITARY IN VIETNAM'S FEUDAL SOCIETY: A STUDY OF THE LOCAL MILITIA UNDER THE NGUYỄN DYNASTY'S POLICY OF "LODGING SOLDIERS AMONG FARMERS" (1802-1885)

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on clarifying the role of local militia, a crucial force in the policy of “lodging soldiers among farmers” under the Nguyen Dynasty. To elucidate this issue, the author employs two primary research methods in history: historical and logical approaches. The historical method aids in reconstructing the historical picture as objectively as possible, while the logical method facilitates the author in making assessments and evaluations of the objective laws governing the research problem. The research materials used by the author are valuable primary sources from the Nguyen Dynasty that have been preserved to this day. Additionally, the author leverages the research of other scholars to clarify the raised issues. Through this, the paper will clarify specific issues as follows: First, the author will provide a general overview of the local militia under the Nguyen Dynasty; Second, the paper will elucidate the contributions of the local militia under the Nguyen Dynasty; Third, the paper will evaluate the role of the local militia in the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1885). The results of this study will serve as a valuable source for clarifying the human resource management of the Nguyen feudal dynasty (1802-1885). Moreover, it is essential material for those interested in this subject.

**Key words:** Nguyen Dynasty; local militia; "lodging soldiers among farmers" policy; military force.

## Introduction

The Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1885) was the final dynasty in Vietnam's feudal history, renowned for its numerous significant policies and strategies aimed at maintaining the country's stability and development. Among these, the “lodging soldiers among farmers”<sup>1</sup> policy was a strategic highlight of the Nguyen Dynasty, contributing significantly to strengthening national defense and ensuring a domestic labor force for production. The concept of “lodging soldiers among farmers” refers to the division of soldiers into two groups: one group directly involved in military activities, protecting the country, and another group participating in agricultural activities during non-combat times. This policy not only saved resources but also helped to reduce the economic burden on the people.

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<sup>1</sup> Lodging soldiers among farmers: A policy in which the State sent back the troops to their native villages to do farm work according to the policy of "lodging soldiers among farmers"

In this context, the local militia<sup>2</sup> played a particularly important role. The local militia were soldiers who originated from local areas, tasked with protecting the area where they lived. Unlike regular troops, the local militia were often familiar with the local natural conditions, customs, and population, making it easier for them to adapt and respond to situations arising in their assigned areas. This was particularly useful in protecting the border, managing remote areas, and areas frequently facing threats from foreign invaders or uprisings of local rebel groups. In addition to military duties, the local militia also participated in civil works, especially agricultural production. Thanks to the flexible division of labor under the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy, the local militia could maintain production activities, stabilize the economy of families and communities during peacetime. They were both soldiers and farmers, closely tied to the land and community life, creating a strong bond between the military forces and the local people.

Not only did this policy help the Nguyen Dynasty make the most of available resources but also built a flexible and effective defense system. The combination of the military role and agricultural production of the local militia created a solid foundation for the stability and development of the dynasty, while clearly reflecting the strategic vision of the Nguyen Emperors in protecting and developing the country. With this article, we aim to explore the local militia of the Nguyen Dynasty to contribute to clarifying the strengths and weaknesses of the Nguyen Dynasty in building and operating the military forces in general and the local militia in particular.

### Overview of the Local Militia under the Nguyen Dynasty

The local militia was an irregular military force under the imperial court. Its members were individuals who did not meet the qualifications to join the regular army or were from remote areas with sparse populations where the court could not station a permanent military force. Therefore, local male youths were recruited to form the local militia. When the locality where the militia resided or neighboring areas required a large force for matters related to bandits, natural disasters, land reclamation, etc., the court mobilized the militia. After completing their tasks, they returned to their roles as ordinary citizens, continuing to live, work, and produce with their families. The main purpose of the Nguyen court in establishing the local militia was to ensure security and order in the border regions.<sup>3</sup> The local militia generally did not receive regular salaries like the regular military forces. They only received allowances when mobilized by the court or were exempted from or had reduced labor and tax contributions. However, those in managerial positions could receive a fixed salary from the court. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Minh Mang’s reign (1839), following the regulations of the “cơ binh” in Tran Tay Thanh (Tay Thanh Province), the court approved the monthly allocation of funds for the management of the An Bien local militia (An Giang) at different levels: Quan co (Chief of Provincial Regiment, the 4th rank), Pho Quan co (Vice Chief of Provincial Regiment), each received 3 “quan” (a monetary unit) per month; Cai doi (Chief of Provincial Company, the 5th rank) Chanh doi trung (6th rank); “thi sai Suat co” and “sung Suat co” (Head of a squad) each received 2 quan per month.<sup>4</sup> Basically, the local militia resembled the modern-day self-defense militia in our country.

Regarding the number of local militia, although there is no official statistical data, according to the Dai Nam thuc luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam), the border regions had a fairly large number of local militia, especially from the reign of Minh Mang onwards. For example, in 1839, the total number of local militia in Tran Tay (Tay Thanh Province) was over 13,000, divided into 27 military units<sup>5</sup>.

The organization of the local militia varied depending on the conditions of each locality. In 1805, the local militia in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An were organized into five branches, and “*officers were assigned to manage each*

<sup>2</sup> The Nguyen Dynasty also referred to local militia as “temporary soldiers” or “subordinate soldiers”.

<sup>3</sup> Nguyen Duc Chau, Nguyen Tuan Chung, 1994, *Our Ancestors Protecting the Border (from Hung Vuong to the Nguyen Dynasty)*, People’s Public Security Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 224; and National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, Vietnam Social Sciences Institute and Institute of History Publishing House, Education Publishing House, Hanoi, vol. 1, p. 649.

<sup>4</sup> National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, vol. 5, *ibid.*, pp. 461-462.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 547.

team; one “cai co” to oversee each troops, a “cai ba đien quan” to manage military supplies, *chanh quan co* (Chief of Provincial Regiment, the 4th rank) seven people; *Pho Quan co* (Vice Chief of Provincial Regiment), seven people; *truong hieu* and *cai doi*, 35 people; “*phong ngu su*” (defensive officer) in charge of vulnerable points, 11 people; and “*thu ngu su*” (defensive officer 6th rank), 28 people”<sup>6</sup>.

In 1822, due to the complex border situation in Lang Son, Emperor Minh Mạng ordered “co” Hung Tiep in Lang Son province to be renamed “co” Lang Son. At the same time, the local militia there, “previously divided into seven units of “co” Hung Tiep and two units guarding Nam Quan and Du Thon border gates, each unit with two squads, a total of 18 squads” was now “renamed, with the current number of 424 soldiers divided into three units: *Trung* (centre army), *Tien* (front army), and *Hau* (rear army), each unit with three squads, together with one unit guarding the gate, with the appointment of a *Quan co* (Chief of Provincial Regiment), *Pho Quan co* (Vice Chief of Provincial Regiment), “*Truong hieu*” and “*Cai doi*” to oversee”<sup>7</sup>. Simultaneously, in 1826, the names of the local militia “co” in the six outer provinces of Bac Thanh (Hanoi) were changed. “Co” Thai Nguyen in Thai Nguyen Province was renamed “co” *Thai hung*, “Co” *Hung dung* in Cao Bang province was renamed *Cao hung*, “Co” *Lang Son* in Lang Son was renamed *Lang hung*, “*hieu*” *Hung nhat* in Tuyen Quang was renamed *Tuyen hung*, “*hieu*” *Tien dung* in Quang Yen was renamed *Quang hung*, and “*hieu*” *Phan hung* in Hung Hoa province was renamed *Hung hung*<sup>8</sup>.

For newly established administrative units, along with building the bureaucratic apparatus, the Nguyen dynasty also paid great attention to building the military and local militia forces to ensure security, especially in strategic areas. For example, in 1880, when establishing the two Dao (administrative unit equivalent to province) of Lang Giang and Doan Hung, Emperor Tu Duc ordered “*deploying a few hundred troops of local militia and recruiting a few hundred more brave soldiers to station there*” to clear land and suppress any incidents that might occur<sup>9</sup>.

The recruitment of local militia was not strictly regulated but varied depending on the characteristics of each locality. In the 11th year of Gia Long’s reign (1810), when setting the tribute regulations for the “Sach” and “Dong” (places where ethnic peoples live) in Quy Hop, Nghe An province, the king ordered 50 people from there to be selected as local militia to garrison there<sup>10</sup>. In 1844, the court recruited local militia in Thanh Hoa province at a rate of one soldier for every seven men<sup>11</sup>, forming six units (totaling 319 people) to organize “co” *Thanh Hung*, with a *quan suat* (Chief of Provincial Regiment) appointed to command, divided into three units, and sent them to garrison in Quang Hoa and Tho Xuan prefectures. At the beginning of each year, they would conduct drills just like the soldiers of the Imperial guards<sup>12</sup>.

In the course of their operations, the local militia coordinated with each other to carry out the tasks assigned by the court. In 1828, due to the situation in Muong Vanh district, “*Dao Cam Lo*”, Quang Tri province, the fugitive named *A Dien Cao* gathered 600 bandits to plunder the people in the district. The king ordered the local militia of various districts to join forces with the Imperial guards and sent Phó vệ úy Nội hầu (Deputy Guard Commander) Ton That Tu, and Hiep tran (Joint Commander) Nguyen Cong Dam, to “*đao*” *Cam Lo* to suppress the bandits<sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, in necessary cases, the court assigned the local militia to cooperate with other military forces to carry out the court’s duties. In 1831, faced with the aggressive actions of the Qing army in Hung Hoa province, the king ordered “*Uy thang thap co Nguyen Dinh Pho to bring 1,000 border troops from the provincial capital and 10 elephants to urgently station in Hung Hoa province. Upon arrival, he immediately selected 300 troops,*

<sup>6</sup> National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, vol. 5, Ibid., vol. 1, p. 649.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 243

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 535.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, p. 393.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 798.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, p. 618.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, p. 618.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 718.

including both border troops and local militia, and 5 elephants to guard against any disturbances caused by the Qing army<sup>14</sup>.

One of the special strategies of the Nguyen dynasty in utilizing the local militia was that, for border regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, the court did not use Vietnamese local militia but instead recruited young men from the ethnic minority communities to serve as local militia. For example, in 1834, King Minh Mang agreed with the proposal of the Governor-General of Nam Vang, Truong Minh Giang and Le Dai Cuong, stating: "Select the Cham people (descendants of Thuan Hoa people) and "Cha va" people (descendants of Cha Va residing in border land) as local militia to oversee the lands of the Cham and Cha Va people (*The term "Chà Và" is a transliteration of "Java", the name of a large island and the predominant ethnic group in Indonesia. Although collectively referred to as "Cha Va", these people are actually from various ethnicities. Vietnamese people, therefore, have taken the characteristics of these groups and associated them with this term for differentiation purposes*). At the same time, to effectively manage this local militia force, the court also selected individuals from the Cham and Cha Va people as leaders: "Hu Khiem, temporarily appointed as Suat co (Chief of Regiment) of "co" An Man Nhat; Do Co as Pho Suat co (Vice chief); Ton Ly as Suat co of "co" An Man Nhi, and Han Ong as Pho Suat co". At the same time, they were ordered to recruit enough people to be ready for mobilization when needed"<sup>15</sup>.

The Nguyen dynasty was also very tolerant and had appropriate policies for the local militia, including those who had made mistakes. In 1840, 19 local militia in An Giang who had previously deserted and followed the rebels Chan Triet and Han Bien; but then they returned to their old camp. The provincial authorities of An Giang reported this and requested to execute them as a deterrent. Emperor Minh Mang said: "They are ignorant and naive. Once they were deceived and lured away by the ringleaders, but they now return. If we hastily apply the law in such a manner, we will cut off their path to reform, and the ringleaders will have an excuse to spread rumors"; therefore, "they should be immediately released but should be reasoned with face-to-face to ensure that they willingly submit and are not misled by rumors. This is also a strategy to educate the wicked and win back the rebellious". In 1841, the army of Lac Hoa prefecture suffered a defeat. The provincial governor, Tran Tuyen, and the judicial inspector, Nguyen Si Dang, suspected that soldiers in "co" Long nhue were colluding with the bandits and secretly arrested and detained all the local militia as a precaution. When the king heard about this, he reprimanded them, saying: "The local militia in "co" Long nhue were still in the provincial capital. Tuyen did not know how to appease them with kindness and benevolence but instead arrested and detained them and handed them over to the villagers. If regular soldiers are treated like this, then who else would dare to return and submit?"; however, "since the deed has been done, there is no point in blaming it"<sup>16</sup>. This is one of the positive aspects of the Nguyen dynasty's military policies, especially those of King Minh Mang.

#### **Contributions of the local militia under the Nguyen Dynasty**

The greatest contribution of the local militia was to help the court maintain security and order in the border regions and protect the borders. Stationing a regular army in remote and inaccessible border areas was extremely difficult and costly for the court. Therefore, for these border regions, the Nguyen dynasty usually did not station regular military forces but assigned the local militia to guard the area. In 1828, Kinh lược Đại than (viceroys) Phan Van Thuy, upon returning to Nghe An after a successful military campaign, reported that "in Lac Dien, there was too much malaria, and many people were sick. I request to leave 100 Thần sách soldiers to guard the border, and the rest can return to Muong Then". Minh Mang agreed, saying: "Muong Then also has a lot of malaria, and it is not a place to station troops"; so, he only assigned the local militia to guard without the need for regular soldiers<sup>17</sup>. In 1815, the viceroy of Bac Thanh reported: "the area of Bao Thang in Hung Hoa (belonging to Thuy Vy district) is close to the Qing border and is very important. I request that Chieu thao su Dinh Cong Kiem

<sup>14</sup> National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, vol. 5, Ibid., vol. 4, p. 299.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, p. 821.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 742.

bring 100 local militia and subordinates to station there and provide them with monthly salaries”<sup>18</sup>. The king agreed. In 1832, when establishing the Dinh Bien fortress in Nghe An, Minh Mang ordered the establishment of a small fort and assigned local militia to guard it. If any U Bon, Hiem Ma, Lat Nhat, or Xuan Thon tribesmen came under any pretext, they must be immediately stopped and not allowed to enter<sup>19</sup>.

The local militia made significant contributions to suppressing border invasions and maintaining peace among the people in the border regions. In 1834, “*Nam Chuong (The Kingdom of Luang Phrabang)*”<sup>20</sup> was previously seduced and instigated by Siam to seize Ninh Bien fort and intimidate the people on the border”. The local officials and district magistrates in the districts under Tran Man prefecture, Thanh Hoa province, promptly gathered the local militia to guard and prevent them, so the Nam Chuong army dared not to attack. When the matter was reported, the king praised them for understanding the reason and following the right path<sup>21</sup>.

When assigned the responsibility of guarding the border, the local militia not only had the task of guarding and suppressing foreign invaders but also the task of suppressing rebel forces, thieves, and robbers. In 1833, when bandits secretly occupied Chi Ne (Ninh Binh province) and established many forts, plotting to attack Thien Quan, the king immediately ordered Ta Quang Cu and Nguyen Dang Giai to lead 300 border troops, 1,000 local militia, and 3 war elephants from Thanh Hoa province to form the Southern Army, marching directly to Thien Quan to attack the bandits’ forts in the vicinity. Nguyen Van Phuong led 100 subordinate soldiers and 300 soldiers from Nghe An to urgently join Nguyen Van Can’s army, combining forces with over 1,000 soldiers and elephants from Hanoi to form the Northern Army, following the Thuc Coc route to attack the bandits’ forts<sup>22</sup>[3]. In addition, the local militia had a very important task of conducting patrols and protecting the administrative apparatus in the areas under their control<sup>23</sup>.

In some crucial regions, the court organized a very large number of local militia. For example, at one point, the total number of local militia in Tran Tay (Tây Thành Province) reached 13,000, organized into 27 “co”. However, such a large number of local militia affected the supply of food and management, so in 1839, the court decided to revise the regulations for assigning local soldiers in this region. The king decreed: “*The quality of soldiers is more important than their quantity*” and moreover, “*Tran Tay has traditionally not had reserves, and the annual expenditure on salaries is excessive; and where will the money come from? This is not a sustainable approach*” so “*it is necessary to carefully consider the situation and make appropriate adjustments. Although border defense cannot be neglected, we must also carefully consider long-term self-sufficiency in our strategies*”; therefore, the king approved the readjustment of the number of local militia. Specifically, based on the number of local militia in the region, they were divided into four groups, each group could have more than 3,000 soldiers. Especially, Minh Mang was not rigid in determining the number of local militia in different places, but rather “*for the most important frontier areas, the number of troops should be carefully considered; for less important areas, the number should be reduced. As for the surplus, they should be kept in the plantations and trained in both combat and farming. In November and December, they should be divided into two groups for winter defense; from January onwards, they should be divided into four groups according to the usual practice: one group on duty, three groups on leave, and they should be rotated every two months so that they can have equal periods of work and rest. These soldiers are originally locals, and their hometowns are not far away. Once they receive an urgent report, they can quickly mobilize from nearby places, and even if they are called upon in the evening, they can arrive by the next morning, so there is no need to worry about delays or wasted effort, and this can be a sustainable long-term approach*”<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, vol. 5, Ibid., vol. 1, p. 901.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, p. 372.

<sup>20</sup> Luang–Prabang today, according to <http://daitudien.net/lich-su/lich-su-ve-nam-chuong.html>. Accessed on 20.09.2024

<sup>21</sup> National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc*, ibid., vol. 4, p. 350.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, p. 524.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, p. 296.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, p. 547.

In addition to fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in maintaining local security and order and protecting the borders, the Nguyen dynasty also utilized the strength of the local militia in economic development. In 1838, Hai Dong prefecture, which had previously been disturbed by bandits, had been pacified, and the people and local militia had returned. Truong Minh Giang, the general of Tran Tay Thanh, petitioned: *“to immediately gather the soldiers of each “co”, with half as servicemen and the other half staying to cultivate the land, waiting until the complete harvest in October, then call them up to serve as guards, which allow them to balance farming and guarding, and both agricultural work and military service can be facilitated”*<sup>25</sup>. The king agreed and said, *“For future arrangements, we should think carefully about how to satisfy the people’s hearts and strengthen the borders. You should gradually consider and report it”*<sup>26</sup>. Minh Mang had previously allowed the local militia to both farm and guard, which he considered a *“far-sighted strategy”*. He said, *“The local militia in the region have 24 “co”, which should be divided into groups, with only half on duty and the other half going to cultivate the land in important areas. Every two months, “they should be rotated so that they can have equal periods of work and rest until the 1st of October, they should all gather for winter defense”*<sup>27</sup>; and *“from now on, every February, this regulation should be followed”*. The use of local militia to reclaim wasteland and cultivate land not only helped the militia become self-sufficient in food but also ensured that *“one day, in case of war or defense, they can be relied upon, which is also a wise strategy”*<sup>28</sup>. In 1875, The King ordered to employ seven “co” of local militia in the upper reaches of Thanh Hoa province, under the “Son phong” prefecture, to establish farms and reclaim wasteland. In certain cases, the local militia was also responsible for collecting taxes. In 1820, Minh Mang ordered Ma Doan Thuoc, the chief of “co” Hung Nhat to temporarily guard Tu Long fort and also collect taxes<sup>29</sup>.

Throughout their existence, not all local militia contributed positively to the court. Some local militia colluded with and supported bandits and enemies to disturb the border. For example, in 1833, when the Thanh Hoa bandit Nguyen Dinh Bang escaped from Thien Quan and conspired with Quach Cong On and Quach Cong Nghiep in Lac Tho, gathering more than 500 followers to attack Hoanh Giang fort, the local chief of Trung Ngao camp, Nguyen Dinh Lung, along with the local militia, acted as internal agents<sup>30</sup>.

### **Evaluating the Local Militia in the Nguyen Dynasty's “Lodging soldiers among farmers” Policy (1802-1885)**

The policy of “lodging soldiers among farmers” under the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1885) was one of the most prominent military and economic policies of feudal Vietnam, demonstrating creative and flexible thinking in managing the military and developing the national economy. Implemented by the early kings of the Nguyen dynasty, the “lodging soldiers among farmers” meant sending soldiers back to their localities to engage in agricultural cultivation during peacetime and mobilizing them in times of war. This policy aimed to maintain a large military force without placing an excessive burden on the agricultural-based economy. In this policy, the local militia played a crucial role, contributing to both maintaining local security and participating in economic development, while being closely connected to the lives of the community. The local militia were local soldiers who had a deep understanding of the terrain, customs, and traditions of their place of residence and were responsible for protecting their homeland. They were considered a secondary military force alongside the regular army, but thanks to their familiarity with the local area, the local militia made significant contributions to maintaining security, order, and controlling remote and border areas.

<sup>25</sup> National Historical Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, vol. 5, Ibid., vol. 5, p. 343.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 461-462.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, p. 550.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, p. 547.

The policy of “lodging soldiers among farmers” enabled the Nguyen Dynasty to maintain a flexible military force. During peacetime, local militia members both guarded their localities and farmed to support themselves and their families, thereby reducing the government's military expenditure. This was particularly significant in the context of feudal Vietnam, where agriculture was the primary economic activity and government revenue was limited. By combining military and agricultural roles, the dynasty created an effective and cost-efficient defense system, maximizing the use of local manpower without placing a heavy burden on the national treasury. The local militia were at the core of implementing this policy, as they not only protected their localities but also directly engaged in agricultural production, ensuring the economic stability of their families and communities. In fact, for many decades, the local militia performed their duties very well, maintaining security and order and contributing to the stability of the Nguyen dynasty.

During times of war or major disturbances, local militia would be quickly mobilized to participate in battles to defend the country or suppress rebellions. With their knowledge of the local terrain and familiarity with their homeland, they were able to move quickly and respond flexibly to unexpected situations. Their deep understanding of the local area made them a valuable force in dealing with external threats or quelling internal uprisings. In border regions, the local militia also played a crucial role in patrolling, controlling the area, and reporting to the court about potential disturbances, allowing the court to respond promptly. The local militia could be considered the “eyes and ears” of the court in remote areas where regular troops could not maintain a constant presence. They were the ones who contributed to protecting the borders and ensuring security in the remote and border regions of the country. This clearly demonstrates the strategic vision of the Nguyen kings in combining the military with social life, creating a widespread and effective defense network.

In addition to their military roles, local militia were also involved in local civil and public activities. They were the ones who protected, built, and developed the community, contributing to improving the lives of the people. During difficult times such as natural disasters, storms, or droughts, the local militia were often the first to participate in rescue efforts, helping people overcome difficulties. They were responsible for maintaining local security and order, protecting the property and lives of people from threats of theft, robbery, or rebel groups. The presence of the local militia helped to create a strong bond between the military and the local people, thereby fostering cohesion and solidarity within the community. This also helped the Nguyen dynasty maintain social stability and ensure that the people would stand with the government in the event of any disturbances. The local militia had become an integral part of local life, serving both as protectors and as members of the community, thereby creating solidarity and bonding between the military and the people.

However, alongside its significant contributions, the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy and the local militia also revealed certain limitations. As a local military force, the local militia's training and equipment were often inferior to those of the regular army. This could make it difficult for the local militia to confront modernly equipped or highly disciplined armies. When the French colonists invaded Vietnam with modern weapons and advanced military tactics, the local militia, despite their familiarity with the local terrain and battle environment, were unable to effectively resist French troops. They were often outmatched in clashes with the French army due to their inferior weapons, equipment, and combat skills. This limitation showed that the Nguyen dynasty's “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy was suitable for peacetime and small-scale wars, but in the context of modern warfare with well-equipped and organized armies, this policy was no longer adequate.

Furthermore, the constant switching between military duties and agricultural production posed challenges for the local militia. When excessively involved in production, the militia could lose their sharpness, decline in military skills, and suffer a decrease in combat spirit. In many cases, long-term involvement in agricultural activities left the militia with little time to focus on military training, thereby reducing their ability to respond in emergencies. Moreover, maintaining the discipline and combat spirit of

the militia also depended heavily on the individual consciousness of each soldier. In times of peace, the sense of responsibility of some militia members could decline, leading to neglect of duty and affecting the effectiveness of defense when disturbances occurred. This shows that although the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy had economic advantages and was effective during peacetime, when war broke out and a strong, concentrated military force was required, this policy could face many limitations.

In conclusion, over nearly a century of existence, the Nguyen dynasty’s “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy, with the participation of the local militia, has significantly contributed to maintaining security, order, and local economic development. This policy reflects the flexible and practical thinking of the Nguyen kings, combining military duties with agricultural production to ensure both national defense and economic development. The local militia, as a local military force, has successfully fulfilled its mission of protecting and developing the community, becoming an integral part of local people's lives. They were not only defenders of their homeland but also farmers attached to their land, thus creating a bond between the military and the people, contributing to social stability and the sustainable development of the Nguyen dynasty. However, limitations in terms of equipment, skills, and the ability to maintain discipline prevented the local militia from effectively dealing with modern warfare, especially when the French colonists invaded Vietnam. Nevertheless, the role of the local militia and the significance of the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy in defending and developing the country remain bright spots in Vietnam's military and economic history. This policy not only reflects the strategic vision of the Nguyen dynasty but also demonstrates the creativity and adaptability of the Vietnamese people in defending and building their country throughout history. The local militia and the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy have made significant contributions to building a unique military force, closely tied to the lives of the people, becoming an indispensable part of the history of the Nguyen dynasty and Vietnamese history.

Through the study of local militia under the Nguyen dynasty, we can draw some conclusions and experiences as follows:

Firstly, the establishment and maintenance of the local militia force not only provided the Nguyen dynasty with a large additional military force but also reduced government expenditures as there was no need to pay regular salaries to the force.

Secondly, the local militia not only helped the Nguyen dynasty to guard the border regions, ensuring security and order, but also when incidents occurred, this force could directly suppress them, saving the court from having to deploy regular troops to remote areas, which would be both untimely and costly.

Thirdly, the use of local people to join the local militia not only provided the dynasty with an additional military force but also facilitated economic development. When there were incidents, they became soldiers; when there was peace, they were the main laborers participating in local production. The local militia was the embodiment of the Nguyen dynasty’s “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy.

Fourthly, in remote and ethnic minority areas, cultural identity, customs, social relations, language, climate, and terrain are all extremely complex and sensitive issues. Deploying people from the lowlands or other regions to these areas to “live and work” with the local people to maintain security and order is not a simple matter... Therefore, recruiting local people into the local militia to help the court manage and maintain security and order in local areas is one of the Nguyen dynasty’s strategies to “win the hearts and minds” of the people. Moreover, the Nguyen kings were very skillful in their ethnic policies towards ethnic minorities and people in border regions. The court allowed ethnic minorities and people in border regions to select their own leaders to manage and ensure security for them. This was one of the “*ki mi*” (remote border area) policies of Vietnamese monarchies in general and the Nguyen dynasty in particular.

### Conclusion

The Nguyen dynasty’s “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy, with the involvement of local militia, was an effective strategy that integrated military and agricultural aspects in feudal Vietnam. The Nguyen dynasty’s

“lodging soldiers among farmers” policy, with the participation of the local militia, was an effective strategy that combined military and agricultural economics in the context of feudal Vietnam. By deploying soldiers to local areas where they could both fulfill military duties and participate in agricultural production, this policy helped the Nguyen dynasty save on the budget, ensure defense resources, and at the same time reduce the burden on the agricultural-dependent economy. The local militia, a local military force, were both soldiers defending their homeland and people participating in farming, contributing to stabilizing local life, bonding the military with the community, and creating a widespread and solid defense system. Their role was particularly prominent during peacetime, helping to maintain social order and security in remote areas, and making significant contributions to building a bond between the court and the people.

However, the limitations of this policy became apparent when Vietnam faced modern and well-equipped invading forces. With the constant need to switch between military duties and agricultural production, the local militia lacked focus and the ability to respond quickly in large-scale wars, thus facing disadvantages when confronting professional, organized, and technologically advanced armies. This shows that, although it was a creative strategy that suited the conditions of Vietnam at that time, the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy and the local militia were no longer suitable in the context of modern warfare and changes in military technology.

To sum up, the local militia and the “lodging soldiers among farmers” policy played a crucial role in safeguarding national defense and ensuring economic stability during the Nguyen dynasty. While it had its shortcomings, this policy demonstrates the ingenuity and adaptability of Vietnamese leaders in integrating military and civilian life, thereby protecting and developing the nation.

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