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# HISTORICAL VALUES OF THE REFORM OF THE FEUDAL STATE APPARATUS DURING THE LÊ DYNASTY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PRACTICE OF BUILDING A SOCIALIST STATE IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM

Nguyễn Văn Đại<sup>1\*</sup>, Nguyễn Thị Tố Uyên<sup>2\*</sup>, Trần Diệp Anh<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Law, Vinh University, Vietnam, Email: nvdaikl@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Institute for State and Law, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Political, Vietnam, Email: uyenhcma@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>Student, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam, Email: tdiepanh94@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: Nguyễn Văn Đại  
(nvdaikl@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*The history of Vietnamese feudalism constitutes a glorious chapter closely associated with the nation's long-standing cultural and civilizational traditions. Throughout this feudal history, Vietnam experienced numerous dynasties characterized by diverse models of state organization. The centrally centralized absolutist monarchy established under successive dynasties achieved significant accomplishments in legislative techniques, the organization of the state apparatus, the development of democracy, the protection of human rights, as well as the promotion of humanism and social progress. The Lê Dynasty (1428–1789) can be regarded as a particularly prosperous period marked by profound reforms in both the organization of the state apparatus and the construction of legal institutions. Notably, the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông (1460–1497), associated with the promulgation of the Hồng Đức Code, witnessed comprehensive reforms of the state apparatus that are widely considered the pinnacle of feudal state-building in Vietnamese history. This article focuses on outlining several typical historical values embodied in the reforms of the state apparatus during the Lê Dynasty, while also suggesting historical lessons and values that may be applied to the practical process of building a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam today.*

**KEYWORDS:** State Apparatus; Lê Dynasty Period; Vietnamese Feudalism; Socialist State.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Early Lê period comprised ten emperors spanning six generations. This was a period during which the Lê emperors exercised full sovereign authority and represented the golden age of Vietnamese feudalism. Under the reign of Lê Thái Tổ (Lê Lợi), and especially Lê Thái Tông, Vietnamese society rapidly stabilized and achieved prosperity following the prolonged period of warfare. During the reign of Lê Thánh Tông, Đại Việt reached an unprecedented level of comprehensive development in economic, cultural, social, educational, and military spheres. Never before had Đại Việt attained such strength, prosperity, and regional influence as during this period. This era is commonly referred to as the *Hồng Đức Golden Age*, which, considering its influence extending into the subsequent reigns of Lê Hiến Tông and Lê Túc Tông, lasted for over thirty years.

During this period, the national territory continued to expand significantly, reaching a scale several times greater than that achieved under the Lý and Trần dynasties. Supported by a powerful military apparatus, successive reigns from Lê Thái Tông to Lê Thánh Tông carried out territorial annexations of polities such as Bôn Man and Champa. In addition to confronting external entities, the strong military capacity enabled the central court to decisively suppress uprisings in the highland regions, thereby maintaining political stability over an extended period. Furthermore, to sustain and support military development, the economy was promoted through domestic trade and foreign commercial exchanges.

The Later Lê period marked a fundamental shift toward the merit-based recruitment and utilization of officials. Unlike the Trần dynasty, which was heavily dominated by royal relatives who monopolized power through hereditary succession, the Lê court expanded the civil service examination system and restructured the governmental apparatus. Members of the royal family were excluded from holding substantive executive offices, while successful examination candidates were appointed to official positions. The restriction of hereditary succession among the bureaucratic elite significantly curtailed clan-based authoritarianism and strengthened the rational-bureaucratic character of the state.

Vietnamese literature flourished remarkably during this period, notably through Lê Thánh Tông's establishment of the *Tao Đàn* literary society and his nationwide encouragement of scholarly activities. The

eminent historian Ngô Sĩ Liên, serving under the Lê dynasty, compiled the *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* (*The Complete Annals of Đại Việt*), continuing and completing the historiographical tradition initiated by Lê Văn Hưu during the Trần dynasty. Numerous works in historiography, literature, astronomy, administrative institutions, and related fields were systematized and refined during the Early Lê period.

**The political and legal thought of the Lê emperors regarding state governance may be summarized in the following key principles:**

- (1) The central government governed the country through ministries and specialized agencies, whose extensive powers were subject to strict supervision and institutional checks;
- (2) The officialdom was trained along professional lines, and senior officials were provided with substantial remuneration to ensure integrity and loyalty to the monarchical regime;
- (3) The role of law was emphasized as a primary instrument in governing the state and managing society;
- (4) An administrative system was established down to the communal level, with intermediary levels and autonomous institutions deliberately limited;
- (5) The state possessed strong economic capacity derived from effective management of land and national resources.<sup>1</sup>

One particularly prominent and progressive feature of the Lê monarchs was the comprehensive construction and application of law. The promulgation of the *Hồng Đức Code* not only clearly embodied the principle of rule by law but also established a coherent legal framework governing all activities of the state and society. The Code stipulated in detail the powers and responsibilities of state institutions, officials, and citizens alike. This represents a distinct manifestation of early rule-of-law thinking, a phenomenon that was exceedingly rare among contemporary East Asian feudal states.

These aspects of Lê Thánh Tông's political thought and governing practice have been examined and interpreted by various Vietnamese academic disciplines, including philosophy, history, political science, and the history of the state and law, yielding significant scholarly insights. Nevertheless, further research remains necessary, particularly through interdisciplinary approaches with a central focus on political-legal science. Vietnam is currently entering a new stage of development aimed at prosperity, characterized by the construction of a democratic

<sup>1</sup> Trương Vĩnh Khang, PhD. (2022). *The State and Law under the Reign of Lê Thánh Tông* (Monograph). Hanoi: Youth Publishing House, p. 13.

socialist rule-of-law state, comprehensive reform of the organization and operation of the state apparatus, implementation of a new model of local governance, enhancement of administrative effectiveness and efficiency, and the development of a service-oriented, enabling state serving citizens and enterprises.

In this context, sustained attention to scientific research and the consolidation of theoretical foundations are essential for institutional development and refinement. Therefore, research into the history of the Vietnamese state and law, particularly the achievements in political thought and governance practice of the Đại Việt feudal dynasties in general, and the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông in particular, possesses profound contemporary significance and enduring scholarly value.

## 2. FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF THE REFORM OF THE ĐẠI VIỆT STATE APPARATUS DURING THE REIGNS OF THE LÊ EMPERORS

The reforms of the state apparatus implemented during the Lê dynasty represented a major breakthrough in the developmental trajectory of the Vietnamese feudal state. Through the consolidation of central authority, the establishment of a clear and professional administrative system, and the systematic construction of legal institutions alongside an elite corps of officials, these reforms collectively contributed to transforming the Early Lê dynasty into a prosperous and exemplary polity.

These progressive values not only held profound significance within their historical context but also constitute valuable lessons for the contemporary process of building and refining a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam today.

### 2.1. Continuous Consolidation of Central Authority and the Construction of a Strong Centralized Monarchical State

The centralized absolutist monarchy constituted a typical form of state in feudal society, in which the monarch held supreme authority and exercised decisive power over all major affairs of the country. State power was concentrated in the central court, encompassing legislative, executive, and judicial

functions. The state apparatus was organized in a highly centralized and hierarchical manner from the central level down to local administrations; officials were appointed by the monarch and placed under strict supervision by the court, and were not permitted to establish autonomous or separatist power bases. Law was promulgated as a primary instrument for governing society, safeguarding the interests of the ruling class, and maintaining the feudal order. This form of state organization contributed to the consolidation of national unity, social stability, and socio-economic development within a certain historical period.

Monarchy is a form of political regime in which supreme authority is vested wholly or partially in a single head of state, whose position is transmitted according to the hereditary principle of dynastic succession.<sup>2</sup> In the history of political thought, numerous theorists across different periods have addressed the theory of monarchy, emphasizing the distinctive role of the head of state in governance and social leadership. A notable example is the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). In his political theory, while acknowledging the natural freedom of individuals, Hobbes strongly advocated for an absolute state—symbolized by the concept of *Leviathan*. He argued that, in order to maintain order and peace, society requires a sovereign authority endowed with absolute power. The *Leviathan*, as the embodiment of state power, is not constrained by law so long as it succeeds in preserving order and protecting its subjects.<sup>3</sup> Through this mechanism, political power functions as a means by which the ruling class secures and reinforces its dominance, compels other social strata to comply with its political directives and economic policies, and establishes, maintains, and develops the prevailing social order.<sup>4</sup>

During the Early Lê period, particularly under the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông, the Vietnamese feudal state continuously strengthened central authority and constructed a powerful centralized monarchical regime. The monarch exercised supreme power and directly supervised all aspects of national governance. The administrative apparatus was rigorously organized from the central to the local levels, with officials appointed exclusively by the central court in order to prevent the emergence of regional autonomy.

<sup>2</sup> Hoàng Thị Kim Quế, PhD., Prof. (2015). *Textbook on the Theory of State and Law*. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hobbes explained the nature of the sovereign's absolute power as follows: By virtue of the authority conferred upon him by each individual within the commonwealth, the sovereign possesses such great power and strength that all are compelled to stand in awe of him. By this means, he is able to unify the wills of all, establish peace within the commonwealth, and defend it

against foreign enemies. The essence of the state resides in him—that is, the state which we define as one person, to whom a multitude of people, through mutual covenants with one another, have authorized to represent them, so that he may employ the strength and means of all in such manner as he judges conducive to common peace and defense...

<sup>4</sup> Nguyễn Đăng Dung, PhD., Prof. (2020). *Political Science*. Hanoi: Vietnam National University Press, p. 152.

At the same time, the Lê dynasty promulgated the *Hồng Đức Code* as a comprehensive legal instrument to regulate society and protect the interests of both the state and the populace. As a result of these measures, political stability was maintained, economic development was promoted, and significant achievements were attained in the fields of culture and education.

Under the reign of Lê Thánh Tông, the monarch implemented far-reaching administrative reforms, restructuring the central government through the establishment of the Six Ministries (*Lại, Hộ, Lễ, Binh, Hình, Công*), alongside supervisory institutions such as the Censorate (*Ngự sử đài*) and the Hanlin Academy (*Hàn lâm viện*). Concurrently, feudal power bases were dismantled and the political influence of the aristocracy was systematically curtailed, thereby concentrating authority firmly in the central court. National governance was conducted through a clearly defined hierarchical system extending from the central government to local administrations, resulting in an orderly, disciplined, and efficient administrative structure that contributed decisively to political stability and sustained prosperity.

## **2.2. Developing And Refining Law for State Governance and Social Management: Affirming Legislative Techniques and Feudal Rule-Of-Law Thought**

The feudal state attached great importance to the construction and refinement of the legal system as a fundamental means of governing the country and managing society. The promulgation of legal codes reflected the increasingly sophisticated legislative techniques of the royal court, while simultaneously affirming feudal rule-of-law thought, which regarded law as an essential instrument for maintaining social order and safeguarding royal authority. Through legal regulation, the state adjusted social relations, deterred and punished violations, and thereby contributed to social stability and the consolidation of feudal rule.

First, a fundamental value lies in the codification of legal norms into a comprehensive legal code with a broad regulatory scope, high legal validity, and long-term stability, as exemplified by the *Hồng Đức Code*. When legal relations within the same sphere of social life are regulated by numerous sector-specific legal instruments—ranging from laws and codes to ordinances and a wide array of sub-law normative documents—the legal system inevitably becomes fragmented, leading to inconsistencies, overlaps, and serious difficulties in law enforcement. The *Hồng Đức Code* underwent a process of codification to become a general and unified code that integrated multiple legal

norms into a coherent and consistent framework, thereby ensuring feasibility in implementation.

Nevertheless, the *Hồng Đức Code* also shared certain inherent limitations common to feudal legislative techniques. Most notably, a wide range of regulatory fields was incorporated into a single comprehensive code, resulting in an extensive scope that intertwined civil law and criminal law. Provisions governing economic relations, civil and labor matters, as well as administrative and criminal regulations, were all addressed within the same legal instrument.

Second, in the *Hồng Đức Code*, sanctions were consistently and directly attached to substantive legal provisions within the same article. These sanctions could take the form of criminal, administrative, or civil and family-law penalties. This legislative technique enhanced the clarity, transparency, and specificity of legal norms, facilitated the application and enforcement of law, and significantly strengthened the effectiveness of legal regulation in state and social life. Such a technique deserves to be inherited and further developed in contemporary Vietnamese lawmaking.

By contrast, a relatively common feature of current legislation in Vietnam is that many statutory provisions are framed merely as general principles without corresponding sanctions. Legal consequences are often prescribed in a separate instrument and expressed in broad and abstract terms. As a result, the absence of sanctions directly linked to specific legal norms renders the law insufficiently concrete, difficult to apply in practice, and limits its generally binding force.

Third, codification should not be understood merely as a technical process of systematizing and consolidating legal provisions in order to eliminate contradictions, overlaps, and obsolete norms, or to supplement and revise existing laws. Rather, it also entails the identification and institutionalization of emerging social values that society possesses, demands, and supports. Drawing on the codification experience of the *Hồng Đức Code*, such values included moral principles and traditional customs embodied in village conventions (*hương ước*). The timely incorporation of these values into statutory law facilitated the internalization of legal norms, enabling law to penetrate social life, become habitual, and exert its compulsory regulatory force over social relations. This experience remains highly relevant and worthy of inheritance in Vietnam's contemporary legislative process.

Fourth, the *Hồng Đức Code* serves as a paradigmatic model of legislative drafting that combined concreteness and detail with sufficient generality and coverage, making its provisions easy to remember,

understand, and apply in everyday life, while ensuring long-lasting effectiveness. From the perspective of legislative technique, this represents a valuable experience that should be inherited in present-day lawmaking. Substantively, the Code's provisions were closely aligned with social realities, enabling ordinary people to readily access, comprehend, and comply with the law. It was a legal code that did not overemphasize abstract or overly academic formulations. In contrast, practical assessments indicate that many legal norms within Vietnam's current legal system remain excessively verbose, insufficiently specific, abstract, and lacking comprehensive coverage, which makes them difficult to access and challenging to implement in practice.

### ***2.3. Centralized And Effective Management of Territory and Population: Safeguarding the Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Đại Việt***

During the Lê dynasty, the state placed particular emphasis on the strict and effective management of territory and population, thereby strengthening its capacity to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The royal court reorganized administrative units in a unified manner, established management institutions from the central to the local levels, and conducted systematic population and land surveys in order to regulate society and mobilize national resources. Owing to this centralized form of governance, Đại Việt was able to maintain secure borders, preserve internal stability, and affirm its regional standing.

The management of population and territory, together with the protection of national sovereignty, constitutes a fundamental characteristic of the state, reflecting its role as a central political institution that represents society as a whole within a nation-state. To ensure genuine national independence, a state must simultaneously prioritize several essential factors: population stability, territorial integrity, the full establishment of sovereignty (internal self-determination and external equality), and the construction of a strong and effective government. During the reign of Lê Thánh Tông, these elements received consistent attention as part of a broader strategy to consolidate national independence, foster social prosperity, and improve the living conditions of the populace. In this period, national territory expanded by approximately one-third, the population grew and became increasingly stable in structure, and sovereignty was effectively safeguarded against external threats and invasion attempts.

Beyond reforms in state organization and lawmaking, the state model under Lê Thánh Tông

clearly demonstrated a high capacity for effective territorial and population management. The country was divided into thirteen *thừa tuyên* administrative regions, beneath which were established prefectures, districts, sub-districts, and communes, ensuring unified governance from the central government to the grassroots level. Comprehensive administrative records, including population registers and land cadasters, were systematically maintained to support taxation, military conscription, and corvée labor. At the same time, Lê Thánh Tông regularly inspected and evaluated the performance of officials within the governmental apparatus, particularly at the local level, thereby reducing corruption and bureaucratic inertia while enhancing the overall effectiveness of state administration.

The state model under Lê Thánh Tông also possessed significant value in maintaining national independence and sovereignty. The monarch paid particular attention to building a strong military force, consolidating national defense, and safeguarding border regions against hostile designs from external powers. In foreign relations, Lê Thánh Tông pursued a policy characterized by peaceful engagement combined with firmness and resolve, clearly expressing national autonomy and political self-confidence, especially in relations with the Ming dynasty of China.

The preservation of territorial integrity and the firm protection of sovereignty created crucial preconditions for national prosperity, social peace, and the preservation and development of traditional cultural values. Under these stable conditions, the agricultural economy flourished and the living standards of the population improved markedly. For these reasons, the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông is widely regarded as the most prosperous period in the history of Vietnamese feudalism.

## **3. APPLYING THE VALUES OF THE LÊ DYNASTY'S STATE APPARATUS TO THE CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION OF A SOCIALIST RULE-OF-LAW STATE IN VIETNAM**

### ***3.1. Lessons for the Construction and Improvement of the State Apparatus***

First, Lê Thánh Tông's conception of a centralized state was fundamentally characterized by the concentration of power in the central authority headed by the monarch. In other words, this conception emphasized the unity of state power, with the aim of establishing a coherent system for the exercise of state authority from the central government to local levels.

Under feudal conditions, such concentration of power ensured that policies and governing measures were decided swiftly and implemented uniformly and effectively.

However, excessive concentration of power also entailed certain limitations. It placed a heavy burden on the central authority, requiring the monarch to personally decide a wide range of major and minor state affairs. Over-centralization further led to excessive state intervention, diminishing the dynamism, initiative, creativity, and capacity for innovation of local authorities. At the same time, it could intensify tensions between central and local power, paradoxically undermining the very objective of unified authority. It may therefore be argued that, through the policy of concentrating power in the central authority under the leadership of the monarch, Lê Thánh Tông effectively established a form of “enlightened absolutism” in practice.<sup>5</sup>

In the contemporary process of building a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam, the identification of fundamental principles governing the organization of the state apparatus is of decisive importance, as it directly shapes the institutional mode of operation. This issue is particularly salient in the current period of far-reaching administrative reform, which aims to streamline the state apparatus, enhance effectiveness and efficiency, and better serve the legitimate interests of citizens and enterprises – most notably through the implementation of a two-tier local government model.

In this context, the promotion of decentralization and devolution between central and local authorities has become an urgent requirement. Nevertheless, the state must consistently safeguard the unity and concentration of state power, strengthen central oversight mechanisms, clearly define the administrative capacity of local governments to ensure effective exercise of delegated authority, and place national and ethnic interests above all else. At the same time, vigilance is required against risks such as localism, fragmentation, and abuse of power by local authorities.

Second, Lê Thánh Tông’s conception of a bureaucratic state was primarily reflected in the requirement to construct a strong, professional administrative apparatus that was institutionally distinct from society and characterized by clear functional differentiation and mutual constraints

among bodies exercising state power<sup>6</sup>. Such a strong administrative apparatus encompassed both organizational structures and human resources.

In the contemporary construction of a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam, the requirement to build a strong administration that operates effectively and efficiently remains a central concern.

**This necessitates attention to four core components of public administration:**

- (1) An administrative apparatus organized according to modern, scientific, and streamlined models, governed by effective operational principles;
- (2) A contingent of cadres and civil servants who possess genuine professional competence, sound political qualities, a strong sense of public service, integrity, and accountability;
- (3) A state budget and public financial capacity that are continuously strengthened to ensure sufficient resources for policy implementation and the operation of the state apparatus;
- (4) A well-developed administrative institutional framework, which constitutes a critical breakthrough for sustainable development.

In current theoretical and practical discourse on the construction of the socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam, an important issue concerns the appropriate degree of state presence and institutional and legal intervention in social life. This raises the question of whether the state should continue to govern primarily through traditional administrative principles and methods, or gradually transition toward governance and good governance models characterized by new principles and features more closely aligned with civil society. The prevailing trend and objective is to build a democratic, service-oriented, enabling, integrity-based, and accountable rule-of-law state that best protects the interests of citizens and enterprises.

This requires consistent implementation of the principle that all state power belongs to the People, promotion of popular sovereignty within the socialist rule-of-law state, and affirmation that state power is unified while being clearly assigned, closely coordinated, and effectively controlled among state organs in the exercise of legislative, executive, and judicial powers under popular supervision.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, in all historical periods, the state must continuously strengthen its capacity, autonomy,

<sup>5</sup> Trương Vĩnh Khang, PhD. (2022). *The State and Law under the Reign of Lê Thánh Tông* (Monograph). Hanoi: Youth Publishing House, p. 204.

<sup>6</sup> Trương Vĩnh Khang, PhD. (2022). *The State and Law under the Reign of Lê Thánh Tông* (Monograph). Hanoi: Youth Publishing House, p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam. (2022, November 9). Resolution No. 27-NQ/TW of the Sixth Plenum of the 13th Central Committee on continuing to build and improve the socialist rule-of-law state of Vietnam in the new period.

and international standing in the performance of both domestic and external functions. This constitutes a prerequisite for national independence, freedom, and happiness—the ultimate objectives pursued by the socialist state as well as by other political regimes.

Accordingly, the values embodied in the state model of the Lê Thánh Tông period—particularly the construction of a strong, professional administrative apparatus; the concentration and unity of state power; and the rational division of functions among state institutions—offer lessons of enduring significance for the contemporary construction of a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam. Historical practice demonstrates that the Đại Việt state under Lê Thánh Tông successfully validated the effectiveness of this model. Naturally, each historical period differs in terms of conditions and internal and external influences; therefore, the contemporary socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam must selectively and creatively apply these values in close alignment with present-day realities.

### 3.2. Lessons For Lawmaking in the Service of Building a Socialist Rule-Of-Law State

Based on the fundamental values analyzed with regard to the *Hồng Đức Code*, as well as the enduring values reflected throughout Vietnam's feudal legislative history, several important implications and lessons may be drawn for the contemporary process of building and refining the legal system in Vietnam.

First, it is necessary to further develop legal thinking in order to achieve a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the need to integrate humanitarianism, humaneness, equality, social progress, and democracy into all stages of the lawmaking process, particularly in the drafting and promulgation of statutes and codes. These elements should be regarded not only as objectives but also as fundamental legal principles of contemporary legislative activity in Vietnam. At the same time, respect for grassroots democracy must be reflected through the recognition of customary law as a legitimate legal phenomenon.

Lê Thánh Tông demonstrated notable flexibility in governance by combining the advantages of different sources of feudal law. The coordinated use of statutory law and village conventions (*hương ước*)<sup>8</sup> in social regulation among communities with an established legal tradition, such as the Vietnamese, offered distinct

benefits. While statutory law proved more effective in regulating typical political and socio-economic relations, village conventions possessed the advantage of flexibility and adaptability to concrete social conditions. With regard to customary law and its application among ethnic minority groups, the Lê administration refrained from intervention—a rational policy choice given the cultural and social diversity of these communities within the broader Vietnamese cultural sphere.

Lê Thánh Tông may be regarded as the first ruler in Vietnamese history to officially institutionalize what is now referred to as “legal pluralism,” a concept widely recognized today as compatible with the rule-of-law state, particularly in contexts where statutory law alone cannot fully address the dynamic emergence of legal issues. Legal pluralism denotes the coexistence of multiple legal mechanisms applicable to similar situations within a given social framework. Lê Thánh Tông clearly recognized the effectiveness of this principle by permitting the continued application of village conventions, provided that they did not contravene state law.<sup>9</sup> The recognition of village conventions simultaneously implied acknowledgment of cultural diversity at the local level, especially since such conventions were endowed with legal validity.

The dual character of Vietnam's legal institutions in earlier periods has often been understood as the outcome of a historical process that sought to incorporate foreign legal influences—primarily Confucian legal thought—while preserving national cultural identity.<sup>10</sup> Lê Thánh Tông stipulated that village conventions, once drafted, had to be reviewed and either approved or annulled by higher authorities.<sup>11</sup> This has led to a long-standing interpretation that his court aimed to “Confucianize” village-level institutions through such conventions. From our perspective, however, this policy stemmed from respect for local self-determination and cultural identity, as the monarch possessed sufficient authority to abolish village conventions altogether had he chosen to do so.

Moreover, recognizing village conventions necessarily entailed a two-tiered mode of legal regulation: direct regulation of fundamental political and economic relations at the grassroots level, and

<sup>8</sup> Lê Minh Thông. (2008). State law and village conventions in the legal life of Vietnamese village communities. In *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies*. Hanoi, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ngô Đức Thịnh. (2003). *An Inquiry into the Customary Laws of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, p. 418.

<sup>10</sup> Lê Minh Thông. (2008). State law and village conventions in the legal life of Vietnamese village communities. In *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies*. Hanoi, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Lê Minh Thông. (2008). State law and village conventions in the legal life of Vietnamese village communities. In *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies*. Hanoi, p. 3.

indirect regulation of other social relations.<sup>12</sup> Lê Thánh Tông's decision to allow villages to retain their own conventions—despite an earlier edict mandating uniform application of state law—demonstrates his responsiveness to popular aspirations. This open-minded political approach deserves high appreciation, as it constituted an implicit acknowledgment of the relative autonomy of village communities. At the same time, subjecting village conventions to the supremacy of state law was indispensable in a society governed by formal legal norms. Absolute autonomy could not be permitted, as contradictions between local conventions and state law would have encouraged localism. This consistent approach fostered an effective and enduring coordination between “state law and village customs,” which persisted into the early twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Second, in lawmaking programs concerning human development, the protection of human rights, legitimate rights and interests of citizens, social equality, and democracy, priority must be given to key and essential issues in order to ensure the social value of law. Lawmaking agendas should be closely aligned with national strategies for economic, cultural, educational, and scientific-technological development, as well as with the advancement of democracy. Legislative activity must correspond to the laws governing human development, while promoting historical and traditional values of the nation.

In the coming period, resources should be prioritized for the timely drafting and promulgation of feasible statutes and codes addressing human development, human rights protection, citizens' legitimate rights and interests, social equality, social progress, and democracy, in accordance with the Strategy for the Development and Improvement of Vietnam's Legal System to 2025, with orientations toward 2030 and a vision to 2045.

Enhancing awareness of the role of citizens' political participation in institutional design, lawmaking, and state governance is also of critical importance. The effective implementation of comprehensive good governance solutions requires a fundamental shift in the perceptions and attitudes of cadres and civil servants as the primary agents of state governance, followed by similar changes among the citizenry. Accordingly, training programs aimed at improving understanding of good governance principles should be implemented across legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. This includes renewing

governance thinking and incorporating specialized training informed by the experiences of developed countries worldwide. Only through such changes in perception can the principles of good governance be effectively realized in practice, thereby affirming socialist democratic policies and maximizing citizens' mastery and political participation rights.

Third, it is essential to ensure the effective implementation of legal policies concerning citizens' political participation in state administration. Reforming the organization and operation of state institutions is particularly crucial, as this directly concerns the rational organization of state power to ensure that the People's power is fully exercised without being infringed upon—delegated without being relinquished, and delegated without being abused.

This requires reforming the composition and structure of the National Assembly to enhance its representativeness, popular character, and quality. The number of deputies should be increased to better represent the diverse social strata within Vietnam's multi-ethnic national community. At the same time, greater attention should be paid to the proportion of deputies who are experts in economics, law, and other specialized fields, thereby strengthening the National Assembly's overall capacity, particularly in legislative activities. Moreover, stricter standards should be applied to National Assembly deputies, including educational attainment, theoretical knowledge, especially legal expertise, and the selection of individuals with competence, integrity, strong political qualities, and a firm commitment to combating social evils, particularly corruption-related crimes.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the process of consolidating theoretical foundations and refining conceptual understanding for the design and construction of a socialist rule-of-law state, historical inquiry aimed at identifying enduring values and lessons is of particular significance. As a country with thousands of years of history and a long feudal period shaped by a distinct East Asian cultural tradition, Vietnam's legislative practices and reforms of the state apparatus have left behind many important legacies.

Research on the state during the Lê dynasty remains an area that has yet to be fully and comprehensively explored. Therefore, continued scholarly inquiry is required in order to selectively and

<sup>12</sup> Lê Minh Thông. (2008). State law and village conventions in the legal life of Vietnamese village communities. In *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies*. Hanoi, pp. 7–8.

<sup>13</sup> Ngô Đức Thịnh. (2003). *An Inquiry into the Customary Laws of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, p. 419.

appropriately apply the fundamental values of this governance model to the contemporary construction of a socialist rule-of-law state of the People, by the People, and for the People in Vietnam today.

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