Religion and Individual in a Traditional Multi-Religious Vietnam

Nguyen Quang Hung[1] and Nguyen Dinh Lam[2]

Abstract

From ancient times to the present day, religion has played a multifaceted role in human existence, encompassing various aspects of individual life such as rites of passage, daily routines, and the formation of lifestyle. Traditional Vietnamese spiritual practices draw upon a syncretism of Confucianism, Buddhism, and indigenous beliefs, resulting in a cultural landscape where many Vietnamese individuals do not readily identify themselves as adherents to any single religious tradition. This juxtaposition gives rise to a notable paradox within Vietnamese religious life. While there may appear to be a lack of overt religious devotion in daily practices, religion manifests itself prominently in nearly all significant events in Vietnamese life. This article aims to explore the presence of these traditional religions in Vietnam to elucidate the underlying reasons for this paradox within traditional Vietnamese individual life.

Keywords: *Religions in Vietnam, Religiosity, Secularity, Individual Life*

INTRODUCTION

Religion has exerted a profound influence on Vietnam's cultural landscape since ancient times, initially through animism and shamanism. The subsequent introduction of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism from China and India during the early centuries AD further enriched Vietnam's religious tapestry, establishing it as a multi-religious society. This article focuses on traditional religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism and indigenous belief systems to illuminate the spiritual essence of traditional Vietnamese culture, while acknowledging that Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) and Muslim communities collectively comprise only approximately ten percent of the Vietnamese population. The impacts of these religions on Vietnamese individual lifestyles throughout history were notable, albeit varying depending on the specific faith. Distinctive patterns of behavior and practices were observable among adherents of different religions, shaping various aspects of their lives, including key life events and daily routines.

Delving into the intersection of religion and personal life, this article specifically examines the role of religion in the human life cycle and daily existence. It aims to tackle the question of whether Vietnamese individuals exhibit weak or devout religious tendencies. Furthermore, it endeavors to explore the significance of religion in the personal lives of Vietnamese people, seeking to elucidate the extent to which religious beliefs and practices influence their daily conduct and values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A paradox in Vietnamese spirituality? The necessity of religion in the personal lives of Vietnamese people has sparked debate among some individuals. Initially, Trần Trọng Kim's assertion that "The [Vietnamese] mind is shallow (...) or believes in ghosts, active in worshipping, but still has no religious fervor,"(Kim 2002: 15) may seem indisputable. Indeed, compared to adherents of religions such as Islam, Christianity, or even Buddhism, Vietnamese individuals typically allocate less time to religious activities. Additionally, many Vietnamese hold a polytheistic mindset characterized by tolerance, which makes them relatively open to converting to different religions or faiths. Moreover, while Vietnamese individuals may visit pagodas and pray to Buddha, their motivations often revolve around worldly desires such as wealth and fortune, rather than seeking spiritual enlightenment or transcendence. This raises questions about whether the Vietnamese "belief" truly constitutes

---

[1] Associate Professor, PhD, Senior lecturer, University of Social Sciences and Humanities Vietnam National University, Hanoi; E-mail: nguyenquanghung50@gmail.com

[2] Associate Professor, PhD. Senior lecturer, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi; E-mail: tunglamtongiao@gmail.com, Corresponding Author.

religious faith in the theological sense of the term. As a result, one could argue that Vietnamese people tend towards religious indifference, with religion being of lesser importance on an individual level and perhaps not essential. It is also worth noting that, similar to Chinese society, the clergy in Vietnamese society do not wield significant socio-political influence, as observed by M. Weber (Waber 1988; Dawson 1951).

However, upon deeper examination, it becomes evident that the real situation is more complex. Religion undeniably permeates all significant events in the Vietnamese life cycle, from birth and upbringing to marriage, career pursuits, house building, and even the final departure from this world. Furthermore, even after passing away, the religious responsibilities of the deceased are not considered complete but are instead passed on to the next generation. Religion is a constant presence in everyday life, particularly during times of adversity and crises. As highlighted by L. Cadière, the Vietnamese people exhibit a profound religious disposition that extends beyond mere external observances:

> "The Annamites [Vietnamese] are deeply religious: I mean that they incorporate religion into all the acts of their lives and secretly believe that supernatural beings are always with them and govern them, and that their happiness depends on such beings interfering in the affairs of this world. In addition, since the family is one of the most firmly established institutions of the Annamite civilization, it is natural that religion, in its various manifestations, has been closely linked with family life"(Cadière 2010: 55).

Cadière further asserts that while the Vietnamese may not adhere to the concept of a Supreme Being in the conventional sense, they possess a profound religious consciousness characterized by a belief in supernatural forces and a practice of beliefs that significantly influence their behavior and worldview. Thus, while the Vietnamese may not conform to traditional Western notions of religious consciousness, their adherence to and engagement with religious practices underscore the depth of their spiritual sentiment:

> "The word religion has many levels, there are many nuances. If we understand religion as the belief in an absolute, infinitely great, infinitely perfect Being (…) if understood on such a level, the Vietnamese have no religious consciousness. They have no concept of a Supreme Being; they live without God. But if we understand that religion is a belief, a practice of beliefs that closely influences life behavior and believes in a supernatural world, it must be recognized that Vietnamese people have a very high level of religious sentiment(Cadière 2010: 75).

The question of whether Vietnamese individuals are superficially religious or deeply devout presents a paradoxical conundrum. On the surface, as Trần Trọng Kim observed, it may appear that Vietnamese people engage in religious rituals and practices without demonstrating significant devotion to any particular religion. However, as elucidated by L. Cadière, the inner essence of Vietnamese religious sentiment belies this superficial appearance. Despite not adhering to conventional notions of religious consciousness, Vietnamese individuals exhibit a profound spiritual disposition deeply intertwined with their cultural identity. This paradox between outward appearance and inner essence underscores the complexity of the Vietnamese mind and highlights the intricate interplay between cultural norms, societal expectations, and individual spirituality. Ultimately, it reflects the richness and diversity of religious expression within Vietnamese society(Hung 2016: 287-302).

In the context of Vietnam's multi-religious landscape, the predominant religious practice among the Vietnamese people is often characterized as polytheistic, with a strong emphasis on ancestor worship. This assertion finds solid grounding in the widespread popularity and profound influence of ancestor worship on the behavior, emotions, and way of life of Vietnamese individuals(Gheddo 1970). While ancestor worship serves as the cornerstone of Vietnamese religious practice, it is important to note that it is not the sole belief system governing and shaping the lifestyle of the Vietnamese people. As L. Cadière aptly points out, Vietnamese religion encompasses a broader spectrum of beliefs, particularly the worship of ghosts and various deities:

> "The Vietnamese religion is actually a religion of worshiping ghosts and gods. This religion has no history, it appeared from the beginning of the race. When studying the infiltration of Chinese culture into Vietnam, we can note several stages of the introduction of Confucianism, Taoism is considered not as a philosophical system but as two entities that combine events. Religious life along with magical events

(...) The religious life of Vietnamese people at all social levels is based on a belief deeply ingrained in their senses, that is, the omnipresence of gods and demons."(Cadière 2010: 24-25).

The paradox within the minds of Vietnamese people can be attributed largely to the internal contradictions inherent in Confucianism itself. The syncretism of Confucianism with Mahayana Buddhism and indigenous religions forms the spiritual foundation of Vietnamese culture and identity. Unlike figures such as Moses, Jesus Christ, or Mohammed, Confucius was not considered a prophet, and Confucianism does not delve into concepts such as the afterlife common in many other religions. However, despite these differences, Confucianism fulfills many of the functions typically associated with religion, including its impact on ethics, economics, politics, culture, society, and the rule of law. Confucianism's unique nature necessitates its coexistence and syncretism with other religions, a phenomenon observed not only in Vietnam but also in China and the Korean peninsula. This characteristic has contributed to the rarity of religious conflicts historically and presently in Vietnam and East Asia. The syncretic nature of Confucianism fosters a cultural environment where diverse religious beliefs and practices can peacefully coexist, minimizing the likelihood of religious strife.

Indeed, there has been ongoing debate among scholars regarding the nature of Confucianism. Max Weber, for instance, did not classify Confucianism as a religion, while later scholars like Christopher Dawson have taken a more inclusive stance, acknowledging the term "Confucian religion" but also noting that it does not adhere strictly to conventional religious frameworks. The paradox in the Vietnamese mindset arises from the dominance of Confucianism, which represents a unique form of religion—often described as a secular religion—distinct from many other known religions. Concurrently, Vietnam is situated within the Southeast Asian context, characterized by a syncretic blend of world religions and indigenous belief systems. This unique juxtaposition underscores the distinctive nature of the Vietnamese mindset, where the influence of Confucianism coexists alongside syncretic religious practices.

RESRARCH METHODS

 Due to the characteristics of Vietnam being a multi-religious country, the main thing is that traditional religions in Vietnam are so syncretic with each other to the point that most of them have a polytheistic mindset, not sure which religion I am a follower of. Therefore, it is necessary to have research methods suitable for the above subjects. In this study, we use textual research methods, original sources and secondary literature from Vietnamese and European authors to clearly understand the teachings and rituals of some main religions such as Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and indigenous religions and beliefs. These things show that the Vietnamese people's folk spirituality has both East Asian characteristics and indigenous Southeast Asian consciousness, the difference between Vietnamese and both Confucian East Asian and Indian Southeast Asian cultures.

In addition, there are some field research such as participation, sociological surveys, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods so that we can visualize the level of influence of each teaching to Vietnamese people in terms of events in the life cycle and in daily life. Of course, regional differences in Vietnam are not small. Most likely, a certain statement is suitable for the Red River delta but is not necessarily suitable for Hue region, or the Mekong Delta, where the people have historically been influenced by Champa and Khmer cultures. We also used some in-depth interviews with the traditional and Christian Hmong people in the Northern mountainous region, but the scope of the article is not presented here. This is a case study in the Red River delta region, which is also where Vietnam's traditional religions are most densely expressed. Thereby giving us a picture of the role of religion for Vietnamese people at the personal/individual dimension both in history and at present, which is also the main goal of this research.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Religion and Belief in Vietnamese Individual Life Circle

Religion permeates the personal lives of Vietnamese individuals from the moment of birth. According to custom, a ceremony is held three days after a child's birth to bathe the newborn and conduct ancestor worship. Additionally, when the month is full according to the lunar calendar, a feast-making ceremony is held to worship

the Taoist grandmothers (*cúng Mụ*). In the first year of life, three significant milestones—full birth, full month, and full year—are marked with offerings. During these worship ceremonies, twelve pairs of shoes and twelve pieces of betel are displayed, symbolizing offerings to the twelve Taoist grandmothers throughout the year, along with castor cakes and other items. The essence of these religious practices lies in expressing gratitude to the Taoist grandmothers for facilitating the birth of the child and ensuring their smooth and healthy development to overcome potential obstacles in the critical first year of life. It is noteworthy that this period is considered particularly challenging, given the vulnerability of infants whose immune systems are not yet fully developed, especially in traditional Vietnamese society where medical resources were limited, and child mortality rates were high compared to later periods. As a result, various folk rituals are conducted during the early years of a child's life to safeguard their well-being and ensure their successful passage through infancy.

Indeed, the involvement of certain religions in the birth of a new member of a Vietnamese family is evident. The concept of ensuring a successor to the ancestral line holds particular significance in Confucianism, as it is integral to the practice of ancestor worship. In Confucian tradition, childlessness is considered one of the gravest sins among acts of disobedience to ancestors. This is because the absence of offspring means there will be no continuation of the family line, thereby disrupting the continuity of ancestor worship. A well-known saying underscores the severity of this offense: "Among the three most unfilial sins, having no descendant is the worst" with the three sins being failing to serve parents when they are alive, neglecting to worship parents after their passing, and failing to have children to continue ancestor worship. Among these sins, the failure to have children is deemed the most egregious. This notion underscores the fundamental importance of progeny in maintaining family religion and the ancestral lineage(Toan 1992: 29).

To address infertility, individuals often turn to religious practices beyond Confucianism for assistance. They seek solace and divine intervention by visiting Buddhist temples or other religious establishments to offer prayers. There is a popular belief encapsulated in the motto "If you are sick, you go to pray to every deity" (*có bệnh thì vái tứ phương*), indicating a widespread reliance on various spiritual entities for assistance. In the northern region of Vietnam, notable places of worship include Đền Và in Sơn Tây (Hanoi) and Phủ Giày Temple in Nam Định. However, the most revered destination is the Perfume Pagoda in Mỹ Đức (Hà Tây-Hanoi), where devotees worship the Goddess of Mercy. The pilgrimage to these sacred sites involves people from diverse backgrounds and beliefs, reflecting the widespread appeal of these religious practices. Similarly, in central and southern Vietnam, there are numerous religious establishments that are considered sacred by the local population, serving as focal points for prayer and supplication. This demonstrates the pervasive influence of folk beliefs and the enduring tradition of seeking divine assistance in times of need across different regions of Vietnam.

According to folk religion, ensuring the smooth birth of a child, where "both mother and child are safely", involves relying on supernatural powers. In the traditional Vietnamese belief system, childbirth is not solely a natural occurrence but also entails the involvement of supernatural forces. Specifically, it is believed that each child is born under the auspices of one of the Twelve Taoist Heavenly Grandmothers. Each Grandmother presides over one month of the year, facilitating successful and smooth deliveries. Consequently, when a child is born in a particular month, the family conducts a ceremony to express gratitude to the corresponding Grandmother:

> "There is a custom, when giving birth to a child, especially a son, he often corrects the ceremony to report to the ancestors and the earthlings. Giving birth is good news, it is necessary to show the ancestors that the bloodline has added more buds to the ancestors to celebrate and bless. Having reported to the ancestors, they also offered to worship the earth to ask him to protect the child (…) There are some families, in addition to worshiping ancestors and earthlings, people fix the ceremony to worship at the village communal house, to ask the village god to bless the child."(Toan 1992: 47-48)

The involvement of various religions in the birthing process highlights the limitations of Confucianism, as its secular nature necessitates supplementation from other belief systems. Consequently, the relationship between the Confucian secular state and religion has been marked by periods of tension and conflict throughout history, despite efforts at peaceful coexistence. Historically, conflicts between Confucianism and other religious

practices have arisen not only due to differences in lifestyle and social behavior but also as a result of material and bureaucratic considerations. For instance, instances recorded by Max Weber illustrate how Confucian states in China confiscated temple bells and bronze from places of worship to mint money and cast weapons for warfare. Additionally, Confucian bureaucrats viewed Buddhist monks and other religious figures disparagingly, labeling them as "free-loaders" due to their non-productive economic roles, which hindered the state's ability to collect taxes (Weber 1988). Similar tensions existed in Vietnam, where various religious beliefs, including Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and indigenous practices, intersected and competed for influence:

> "Not only do the Taoist gods give birth to children, but even the Buddha, the Great Compassionate One, in the image of a woman named Guanyin, also comes to the aid of wives who long for children. Christians, even many pagans, run to a famous and Miraculous Virgin with a similar intention, because in the Annamite woman and in every family, the desire to have children the real thing is great"(Cadière 2010: 101).

In Vietnamese tradition, one of the first actions taken by a family after childbirth is to pay respects to their ancestors. Ancestors are informed of the arrival of a new family member during the birth event, as well as during the child's first month and full year of life. These rituals serve a dual purpose: expressing gratitude to the ancestors for the blessing of a new member in the family, and thanking the Taoist Grandmother for ensuring a smooth birth for the child. The ceremonies marking the child's full year and full month are determined according to the lunar calendar, reflecting the deeply ingrained lunar-based traditions in Vietnamese culture.

In official birth registration with local authorities, individuals may sometimes provide inaccurate information for various reasons. However, when it comes to determining the child's horoscope, accuracy is paramount, particularly regarding the time and date of birth. This precision is believed to significantly influence the child's fate:

> "According to beliefs, the horoscope summarizes all of a person's fate, good/bad times and (...) good/bad years. People calculate according to the date and time of their birth (...) Wealthy families, every time they give birth to a child, especially a son, take a horoscope for easy monitoring and care, predicting to avoid any misfortune (…) for poor families, parents also try to remember the date of birth of their children so that in case the children get sick (...) exams, people can make offerings to them and pray to the gods for help."(Toan 1992: 67-68).

Throughout a child's growth, there are numerous occasions where reliance on divine intervention becomes apparent. In times of illness or distress, particularly in contexts where medical resources are limited, seeking assistance from the gods is often considered essential. The saying "pregnant woman, entrance to grave" (*gái chửa, cửa mả*) underscores the gravity of ensuring the safety of both mother and child, as childbirth was fraught with risks in earlier times. Additionally, there are superstitions surrounding the naming of children, with some fearing that giving a child a favorable name may attract malevolent spirits. If a child frequently falls ill or cries incessantly at night, folk explanations attribute these phenomena to factors such as parental and child age conflicts. Various therapies are employed depending on the perceived cause, aimed at aiding the child through their formative years. In cases where a child is believed to be haunted or troubled by malevolent entities, it is customary to entrust the child to a pagoda or temple for protection and nurturing. This practice, although simplified in modern times, persists in rural areas, serving as a means to ensure the child's well-being and safeguard against spiritual disturbances.

In moments of significance such as exams, career milestones, or other important events during adolescence and adulthood, individuals often turn to religion, seeking divine intervention and guidance through prayer. One such ritual marking the transition to adulthood, both physiologically and socially, is deeply entrenched in religious customs. In Vietnamese culture, this ceremony is known as the "preparing the betel nuts" (*biện cơi trầu*) ceremony for men, signifying their official entry into adulthood and assuming responsibilities within the family and community. During this ceremony, individuals pay respects to ancestors or village deities, symbolizing their acknowledgment of their newfound status as adults. This act serves as a formal declaration of maturity and readiness to partake in communal duties and responsibilities.

Religion holds an indispensable role in marriage according to traditional Vietnamese customs, with the most crucial aspect of the wedding day being the family ceremony. While some may view this religious ritual as merely a decorative element to enhance the solemnity of the occasion, studies by Cadière suggest a deeper significance. The absence of the ancestral ceremony in a wedding indicates that the marriage has not been sanctioned or legalized by the ancestors. In instances where a couple lacks a formal wedding ceremony for various reasons, their union may still be acknowledged through what is colloquially referred to as an "unofficial marriage." Despite not having an official wedding, the couple may choose to cohabitate and even have children. However, their union is not considered fully recognized or legalized until they seek permission from their parents and pay respects to their ancestors.

The Vietnamese conception of family encompasses both living members and ancestors, a distinction that sets it apart from family structures in some other cultural contexts. This broader understanding underscores the importance of ancestral connections and lineage in shaping familial identity and cohesion. In debates surrounding the decisive factor in connecting members of a Vietnamese family, bloodline is often accorded special significance. Numerous folk sayings highlight the importance of blood ties, such as "When will a rice cake have bones? When will a stepmother love her husband's own son?" (*Mấy đời bánh đúc có xương? Mấy đời dì ghẻ lại thương con chồng?*), "a drop of blood is better than a pond of water" (*một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã*), or "different blood, different heart" (*khác máu tanh lòng*). These proverbs emphasize the idea that shared blood is a fundamental element that binds family members together.

Indeed, Vietnamese society has witnessed instances where biological children are relinquished by their parents for various reasons, leading to adoptive children inheriting property and assuming familial responsibilities. The proverb "the merit of giving birth to a person is less than the merit of bringing that person up" (*công sinh không bằng công dưỡng*) reflects the belief that nurturing and caregiving are more important than biological ties. This phenomenon challenges the notion that blood lineage is the sole determinant of familial connections. L. Cadière argues that it is not blood itself, but rather the religious practice of ancestor worship, that serves as the decisive bond within Vietnamese families:

> "The [Vietnamese] family in a broad sense includes not only the living but also the dead (…) The family is like a big temple. The surviving members stood at the pillar, at the entrance. One after another, they crossed the terrible threshold, passed through death into the other part of the temple, into the sanctuary. But one and the other always reside under the same roof. The bonds that bind them in life are not undone by death; on the contrary, thanks to religious consecration, these bonds become stronger and as permanent as ancestor worship"(Cadière 2010: 57).

In Vietnamese marriage customs, religion plays a significant role, particularly evident in the wedding ceremony itself. The ceremony typically begins with the groom's family paying respects to their ancestors, followed by a visit to the bride's family. Upon arrival, the head of the bride's family welcomes the groom's family, initiating introductions and greetings. During this exchange, the groom's family presents offerings to the bride's family, formally requesting permission to marry the bride. Upon acceptance of the offerings, the bride's family then pays respects to their own ancestors, acknowledging the significance of the occasion. Subsequently, both families negotiate the details of the wedding ceremony, including the time and location of the event. On the wedding day, at the designated auspicious time, the groom's family proceeds to the bride's family home. Upon arrival, offerings are placed on the ancestral altar, symbolizing reverence and seeking blessings from the ancestors. The bride's family guides the couple in performing the ancestral ceremony, officially recognizing the groom as a member of their family. This ritual involves burning incense, reporting to the ancestors, and seeking their blessings for the union. Similarly, upon arrival at the groom's family home, the newlyweds pay respects to the groom's ancestors, thereby acknowledging the bride as a member of the groom's family.

The presence of ancestors in marriage ceremonies is prominently evident, with both the groom's and bride's families paying respectful homage to them. Regarded as the most esteemed members of the family, ancestors preside over all aspects of the wedding ceremony, symbolizing their integral role in familial traditions and rituals. In Vietnamese customs, marriage is not merely a human or natural event but is inherently intertwined with

religious significance. The act of marriage is considered a sacred ritual, constituting one of the primary acts of worship within the family:

> "Indeed, in Annamese marriage, religion does not come to supplement another element that is purely human and purely natural. It must be said that marriage, the union of a boy and a girl, is part of religion; this is one of the main acts of worship in the family (…) the family, through some of the most respected and revered members, that is the ancestor, must belong to the supernatural level, and thus, from the very beginning, marriage itself took on a new and distinctly religious mentality"(Cadière 2010: 74).

The role of religion in traditional marriage significantly differs from contemporary marital practices. In traditional societies, marriage primarily served as a religious ceremony aimed at perpetuating the lineage and upholding ancestor worship, with less emphasis placed on romantic love between the couple. Parents typically arranged marriages for their children, guided by the principle of "where the parents put, the child sits" (*cha mẹ đặt đâu con ngồi đấy*). Thus, marriage was primarily a union between families rather than a bond between individuals. The paramount objective of marriage was to ensure the continuation of the family lineage and uphold religious traditions, particularly the worship of the husband's family ancestors. For women, the primary role was to fulfill motherhood and bear children, thereby fulfilling their duty to the family and ancestors. In essence, marriage was regarded as a sacred familial obligation and an act of religious devotion. While some couples may have developed affection for each other over time, romantic feelings were not the primary consideration in marriage. Instead, the decision to marry was based on familial responsibilities and obligations, as dictated by the arrangements made by parents. Consequently, the consensus between the two families carried more weight than the sentiments between the couple themselves. As noted by L. Cadière, marriage was not merely a ceremonial affair but rather a religious practice deeply rooted in cultural and familial traditions. Religion played a central role in shaping the institution of marriage, underscoring its significance as a sacred rite within traditional societies.

In contemporary society, significant shifts are observed, possibly attributed to secularization and the waning influence of religion. There's a notable trend towards greater autonomy among young men and women in selecting their life partners and shaping their familial futures. Romantic love assumes a central role in fostering the bond between individuals, eclipsing the traditional emphasis on familial arrangements. As a result of these evolving dynamics, wedding rituals have undergone simplification. While familial consensus once held paramount importance, modern couples increasingly prioritize their own feelings and desires. In many cases, despite initial familial discord, the strength of the couple's love ultimately prevails, compelling both families to acquiesce.

In the life cycle of an individual, the role of religion in funerals stands out as particularly prominent. Anthropologists frequently examine religious practices during significant life events, with funerals serving as a delineating point to differentiate between primitive societies and more advanced civilizations:

> "Of all the origins of religion, the final fundamental event of life - death - is of greatest reality. Death is the gateway to the other world in a more than literal sense (…) Death and its negation – immortality – have always been, as they are today, the most burning issue in human imagination (…) Even among primitive peoples the attitude towards death is much more complex (…) It has often been claimed by anthropologists that the dominant feeling of survivors is the horror of the corpse and the fear of the ghost"(Malinowski 1983).

The distinction between humans and animals becomes evident in the context of funerals, highlighting the fundamental role of religion in human society. While many animals, such as gibbons and chimpanzees, exhibit expressions of deep emotional attachment, particularly towards their offspring or mates, they do not engage in what can be described as "ritualistic" behavior for the deceased. Primitive human societies, on the other hand, practice specific religious rituals for the deceased, grounded in the belief that death represents merely the cessation of physical life, while the soul of the departed persists in some form. This belief in the continuity of existence beyond death underscores the significance of religion in providing meaning and structure to human life, distinguishing humans from animals in their approach to mortality. Thus, funerals serve as a poignant

manifestation of the human capacity for religious expression, highlighting a fundamental aspect of human culture and spirituality:

> "The primitive has a great fear of death, probably as a result of some deep-rooted instincts common to humans and animals. He does not want to recognize it as his end; he cannot bear the idea of a complete cessation, of annihilation. The idea of spirit and spiritual existence is obvious (…) Through the various death ceremonies, through commemoration of the deceased and union with him and through the veneration of the spirits of the ancestors, religion gives shape and form to the saving faith. Thus, belief in immortality is more likely to be the result of a deep emotional revelation brought into a specific form by religion than a philosophical doctrine of the primitives. Man's belief in the continuity of life is one of the highest gifts of religion (...) The funeral rites and the ritual behavior immediately after death can be viewed as external forms of a religious act, while the belief in immortality, in continuity of life and the underworld can be seen as the prototype of an act of faith"(Malinowski 1983: 36-37).

The timing and circumstances of one's death are beyond human control. In Vietnamese culture, there is a strong aversion to dying in public spaces such as streets or markets, as it is believed that the soul of the deceased may become lost or unsettled, potentially causing harm to their family members. Traditional Vietnamese customs dictate that individuals should strive to pass away within the confines of their homes, where their soul can more easily find its way to the afterlife and be properly honored by loved ones. When facing the prospect of imminent death, individuals often express a desire to return home. Selecting an appropriate burial site is a significant consideration, influenced by the principles of feng shui. According to feng shui beliefs, the location of the grave can impact the prosperity of future generations. However, the choice of burial site is not taken lightly, as certain locations may be deemed unfavorable, potentially bringing misfortune or negatively affecting the lineage of the family. The condition of the soil also plays a crucial role, as it can influence the preservation of the deceased's remains, thereby impacting the welfare of their descendants (Toan 1992: 348).

Funeral rites in Vietnamese culture encompass several significant stages that reflect the presence of religious beliefs and customs(Phan 1990; Toan 1992: 326-363). First is the ritual of entering the coffin: "In [Vietnamese] custom, most people believe in sorcerers, in the coffin there is often a piece of chiseled board of the seven-star North Star. Before entering the coffin, one must choose a time to avoid age and then use certain charms and charms to stick them inside and outside the coffin. Some people think that they die at a bad hour, but they give up the shrimp nest deck, or the Chinese calendar (...) to suppress the devil."(Phan 1990: 29).

Second is the funeral process. Various family members, including sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, siblings, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, each wear mourning attire appropriate to their relationship with the deceased. This attire signifies respect and mourning for the departed.

The third stage is moving the coffin. The transportation of the coffin is accompanied by the beating of drums and trumpets, which holds significant cultural symbolism as the folk saying: "Live with oil and lamps, die with trumpets and drums" (*sống dầu đèn, chết kèn trống*).

Fourth is the burial. Men, women, sons and daughters, each participant adhering to prescribed rituals in accordance with their respective roles and affiliations. Along the procession route, a customary practice involves the scattering of gold paper, believed to ward off malevolent spirits believed to accompany the deceased:

> "When the grave was lowered, there was an earth god sacrificed there. There is a geography teacher who points the direction, waits for a good hour (zodiac time) to lower the acupoint. In the countryside, the litter waits for the earth to be filled, each person holding a handful of incense, chanting and reciting the Buddha's name, walks around the grave, then each person holds a rock and throws it into the grave (…) The acupoint often asks the geographer to find the land first (Phan 1990: 33).

Three days after burial, a ceremony is held to formally seal the tomb, signifying the initial stages of closure for the bereaved family. Subsequently, memorial rites are observed at intervals of 35 days, 49 days, and 100 days post-interment, each serving as opportunities for the family to pay homage to the departed and express their enduring filial piety. Central to these funerary practices is the Confucian principle of filial devotion, underscored by the reverence shown by children and family members towards the deceased. However, Confucianism, being

primarily secular, offers limited guidance regarding the posthumous fate of individuals, underscoring the need for supplementary religious traditions to address matters pertaining to the afterlife. In this regard, Buddhism and indigenous belief systems play significant roles in Vietnamese funeral rites, providing spiritual frameworks for navigating the transition from earthly existence to the realm of the deceased.

In traditional Vietnamese belief systems, death marks a transition rather than an endpoint. Religion persists beyond the grave, creating a link between the earthly realm and the afterlife. Even after passing, the deceased retain religious obligations, with descendants continuing to fulfill these duties. Ancestral spirits remain influential, able to offer aid or punishment based on the living's conduct towards them. This ongoing connection underscores the importance of honoring ancestors and fulfilling religious duties, shaping the lives of both the living and the departed.

In the *Thọ Mai Gia Lễ* family ceremony, mourning clothes are categorized into five classes based on the proximity and duration of the relationship to the deceased: 3 years, 1 year, 9 months, 5 months; and 3 months. Children mourn their parents for a duration of 3 years, with specific attire used for the funerals of fathers and mothers. The father's funeral used white towels, white gowns without sewed sleeves, and bamboo sticks. The mother's funeral used white towels, white gowns without sewed sleeves, and coral tree stick. The grave of the deceased holds significant importance and is considered a sacred site, protected by both Confucian laws of the past and contemporary Vietnamese regulations(Toan 1992: 376, 378, 422). Proper care of the grave is crucial, as it is believed that the well-being of the living is connected to the peacefulness and condition of the resting place of their ancestors. The practice of moving graves is also part of this tradition.

In general, religions encompass various rituals that mark significant events in the life cycle of individuals, including birth, adulthood, career, marriage, house building, and funeral rites. However, for the Vietnamese, these rituals are not solely attributed to a single religion but rather stem from a synthesis of practices derived from Confucianism, Buddhism, indigenous religions, and other faiths.

Religion And Faith in Individual Daily Life

Religion plays a nuanced role in the daily lives of Vietnamese individuals, characterized by a blend of traditional beliefs and modern influences. On the surface, the presence of religion may appear faint, with many individuals not engaging in regular religious practices throughout the year. However, underlying this apparent absence is a deeply ingrained spiritual mindset, shaped by the belief in maintaining a connection between the living and the deceased. This belief manifests in practices such as providing offerings to ancestors, ensuring their well-being in the afterlife by meeting their needs for food, drink, shelter, and clothing. This notion reflects a cultural understanding that the actions of the living have repercussions for the deceased, underscoring the interdependence between the two realms. While the outward expression of religious devotion may not be as overt as in some other societies, the spiritual dimension of life remains integral to the Vietnamese worldview(Phan 1990: 36).

Despite the presence of religious ceremonies in family and clan festivals, some observers note a lack of emphasis on sacred values, with an inclination towards materialism and extravagance. Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that while some individuals may diligently participate in religious rituals, their understanding of religious knowledge remains superficial and emotionally driven. Even those with higher education and social status may demonstrate limited comprehension in this regard, leading to occasional disappointment in their level of awareness and understanding of religious practices.

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that this perception is not entirely accurate. Vietnamese people harbor a belief in the influence of supernatural forces on the outcomes of significant events in their daily lives. The adage "Conspiracy in humanity, success in heaven" (*mưu sự tại nhân, thành sự tại thiên*) encapsulates this sentiment. While their religious consciousness may remain concealed, it surfaces when circumstances allow. Thus, their religious sentiments are often reserved for specific occasions, albeit deeply ingrained within their psyche:

"It can be said that Vietnamese people always live in the supernatural. They see everywhere the influence of mysterious divine forces are affecting their lives, good and evil. (…) God is everywhere; a big rock, an old tree, a deep forest, an abyss, a high mountain, a pond in the wilderness, every piece of land, every field, a dark desert (...) is a place where God dwells. Gods go everywhere, see everything, everything belongs to them. Belief in the divine world embraces the lives of Vietnamese people, making them sacrifices and offerings. Before each action, one must report to God, avoid sources of displeasing him."(Cadière 2010: 75-76).

Among these groups, monks stand out with their daily or weekly religious practices. Moreover, the fear or preoccupation with ghosts or deities is deeply ingrained in the minds of Vietnamese individuals, particularly among monks, intensifying their religious consciousness compared to other groups. External occurrences, such as misfortune, often trigger this consciousness. Various phenomena, like birds chirping or unusual events, serve as reminders of divine presence. The gods are typically categorized into two groups: supportive spirits, such as benevolent ancestors who continuously watch over and assist their descendants, and malevolent entities, like ghosts and demons, who seek to cause harm whenever an opportunity arises.

Premonitions of auspicious or inauspicious omens are prevalent among many individuals. While we have not delved into whether these intuitions have a scientific basis or are manifestations of superstition, it is worth emphasizing their role in reflecting the presence of religion in daily life:

"Many Annamites have a personal religion (…) First of all, it must be admitted that the Annamites rightly live in the supernatural world. In general, it is difficult for Europeans to understand this state of mind, because in them, when religion is only some practice or even a few beliefs (…) Europeans, though devout, often do not live with your God. The people of Annam, on the other hand, regardless of their class, except for a few products from our modern education, feel they are in constant contact with the Gods in nature, the Gods who are always there, work together with mankind and ensure the success of their endeavors. The Annamites see that all events that happen, lucky events and especially bad events, represent the intervention of Gods or ancestors"(Cadière 2010: 104-105).

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the presence of religion and belief in the daily lives of Vietnamese people appeared subdued, as communist ideology emerged as a dominant force akin to a "state religion" for the ruling communist party. Several temples and worship sites underwent transformation into locales for official gatherings, classrooms, or cooperative department stores. Certain folk religious practices were marginalized as "superstition" by governmental authorities. Never before had the role of religion in Vietnamese society been disregarded to such an extent, even outright denied, and state institutions actively promoted anti-religious campaigns, particularly during the period spanning from 1945 to 1990. Nevertheless, animism, shamanism, and various forms of fortune-telling persisted among the populace despite government suppression.

Over the past three decades, there have been several factors contributing to the resurgence of religions in Vietnam. The evident revival underscores religion as a fundamental spiritual need for the majority of the population. One significant cause is the waning influence of what A. Woodside previously termed as the "great traditions" or the official ideology propagated by state institutions, following the collapse of the socialist system in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Throughout the Cold War era, communist ideology functioned as a quasi "state religion" imposed by the totalitarian regime on the populace. However, with the loss of faith or diminishing trust in socialism, the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), and orthodox ideology during the era of bureaucratic subsidies, people are now faced with numerous opportunities and risks as Vietnamese society transitions to a market economy, accompanied by the development of various economic sectors, including the private sector. While some individuals have experienced rapid wealth accumulation, others have fallen into increasing poverty. The escalation of social injustices has prompted many to turn back to religion for solace and guidance. The resurgence and flourishing of religions and beliefs, as noted by A. Woodside as "smart traditions", fill the voids left by the weakening of the "great traditions".

Religion's role in everyday life becomes particularly apparent when individuals face adversity, especially when dealing with terminal illnesses. The occurrence of unusual events often strengthens people's belief in divine intervention and influence. A common saying reflects this sentiment: "If you have an illness, you should bow

to every deity" (*có bệnh thì vái tứ phương*). Many individuals, upon recovering from seemingly incurable diseases, attribute their survival to miraculous interventions by supernatural forces. This belief in the power of supernatural entities is a significant factor contributing to the proliferation of religions and faiths over the past three decades. Following their recovery, many individuals convert to religion and fervently practice their newfound faith. Interviews with certain religious figures have revealed that they were once ordinary individuals without any extraordinary abilities. However, after experiencing severe illness and facing death, they seem to have undergone a transformation, acquiring unique abilities such as communing with spirits and communicating with the deceased.

Religion's significance in daily life varies significantly based on the gender and age of individuals. Middle-aged and elderly individuals tend to be more diligent in practicing religion compared to young people. Observations and in-depth interviews conducted at places of worship consistently highlight this trend. Additionally, it is evident that women are generally more committed to attending religious services and engaging in religious practices than men.

Table 1. *Gender among visiters in some Buddhist temples*

	Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%
Quán Sứ temple	42*	37.5	70	62.5
	53**	33.8	104	66.2
	61***	38.6	97	61.4
	74****	29.2	179	70.8
	89*****	26.3	250	73.7
	40******	26.8	109	73.2
Hà temple	102*	29.2	247	70.8
	102**	39.1	159	60.9
	107***	30.9	239	69.1
	70****	30.6	159	69.4
	130*****	30.2	274	69.8
	411******	30.3	1044	69.7

Source: Hương, Hoàng Thu (Huong 2012: 66)

(**Note**: *8.10-8.30 (22/8/2002); ****15.30-16.00 (6/9/2002); **16.30-17.00 (22/8/2003) *****16.05-16.35 (18/6/2004)***9.30-10.00 (3/4/2004);******15.00-16.30 (3/4/2011)

Table One illustrates that at both Hà Temple and Quán Sứ Temple, the attendance of women consistently exceeds that of men across various hours. This observation strongly suggests that women tend to be more diligent in religious activities compared to men. Cadiere's assertion from over half a century ago about the religious dedication of women in Vietnam finds support in the data on worshipers at these pagodas, further bolstering the credibility of her assessment (Cadiere 2010: 106).

In traditional Vietnamese society, women play a more assertive role compared to some other countries within the Chinese cultural sphere. Even in the absence of a son, daughters are utilized, highlighting the significant role of women in ancestral worship, as noted by Cadière. Women are actively involved in family religious ceremonies, taking on responsibilities such as organization and preparation to support their male counterparts (Cadiere 2010: 95-98).

In Vietnam, the majority of religions and beliefs have deep historical roots, often originating from ancient shamanism and cults that emerged alongside agricultural civilization. However, as Vietnamese society progresses towards industrialization, there is a growing need for these religions to modernize and adapt to the changing social landscape. Currently, at places of worship, it's observed that young people are not the predominant demographic. This can be attributed to the fact that young individuals are preoccupied with establishing their careers and navigating social relationships, leaving them with limited time for religious practices. Furthermore, the secularized nature of the national educational system and public administration has influenced the younger generation's perspectives on religion. This shift in religious fervor and piety among the youth poses a challenge for religious authorities seeking to engage and retain younger followers.

Table 2. *Visiters some Buddhist temples according to ages*

	Ages (years)	Quán Sứ Temple		Hà Temple	
		2004	2011	2004	2011
1	Under 25	68	47	145	139
	(%)	29.6	19.4	47.7	41.5
2	25-34	80	65	98	119
	(%)	34.8	26.9	32.2	35.5
3	35-54	45	61	46	52
	(%)	19.6	25.2	15.1	15.5
4	Over 55	37	69	15	25
		16.1	28.5	4.9	7.5
	Total	230	242	304	335
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Hương, Hoàng Thu (Huong 2012: 71)

Table two highlights differences in age demographics between the two temples. While Hà Pagoda attracts a significant number of young people, with minimal age disparities, Quán Sứ Pagoda exhibits a notable age gap, with a higher proportion of individuals over 35 years old compared to those under 35. This suggests that, in general, middle-aged and elderly individuals are more diligent in religious practices than young people. However, it's important to note that this trend may vary depending on the specific place of worship. Nonetheless, the age disparity in religious activities in Vietnam is not as pronounced as in some industrialized countries, indicating a relatively consistent level of religious participation across age groups.

Secondly, the presence of religion in everyday life is notably influenced by one's occupation. Those engaged in high-risk professions tend to turn to religion for solace or as a source of comfort. With the advent of Đổi Mới (Renovation) and the transition to a market economy, Vietnamese society has evolved to include not only farmers, as predominantly seen in traditional society, but also officials, workers, and businessmen. The saying "Winners will be kings, losers will be bandits" (*được làm vua, thua làm giặc*) underscores the high stakes associated with certain professions. Intense competition in both the market and political spheres exposes individuals to considerable risks.

Table 3. *Occupation of the visiters religious establishments*

Occupation	Hà pagode	Quán Sứ pagode	Total
Unemployed, retired	32	52	84
	10.5%	22.6%	15.7%
Students, job seekers	12	2	14
	3.9%	0.9%	2.6%
Pupils, teachers	102	50	152
	33.6%	21.7%	28.5%
Office workers	25	16	41
	8.2%	7.0%	7.7%
Bussenessmen	63	23	41
	20.7%	10.0%	7.7%
Officials, state employees	32	66	98
	10.5%	28.7%	18.4%
Others	36	14	50
	11.8%	6.0%	9.4%
No answer	2	7	9
	0.7%	3.0%	1.7%
Total	304	230	
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Hoang Thu Huong (Huong 2012: 80-81)

Table Three illustrates that Quán Sứ Pagoda and Hà Pagoda draw attendees from various occupations. Quán Sứ Pagoda tends to attract officials, state employees, retirees, and housewives. In contrast, Hà Pagoda appeals to individuals from a broader spectrum of professions, particularly those in economic, educational, and freelance sectors, as well as students due to its proximity to universities. The distinction suggests that those with stable or retired status gravitate towards Quán Sứ Pagoda, while those with unstable job situations or seeking employment opportunities frequent Hà Pagoda.

The presence and influence of religion and belief in our daily lives are clearly evident in many customs and taboos, which are often classified as superstitious due to their unclear religious affiliation. Nevertheless, these customs have a long history and are widely observed among Vietnamese people. For instance, during the Lunar New Year, it is customary to abstain from debt collection. Debtors typically strive to settle all debts before Tet to usher in the new year with a fresh start. Defaulting on debts during this time is believed to bring bad luck in business and financial matters throughout the year. Similarly, borrowing money, especially during the New Year holidays, is avoided as it is seen as unlucky and may lead to perpetual indebtedness. Prior to Tết, houses are thoroughly cleaned, and all clutter is removed to welcome prosperity and good fortune. Sweeping the house during the New Year period is avoided for fear of sweeping away good luck, particularly discarding garbage, as it symbolizes throwing away wealth. Another popular belief is captured in the proverb "Buy salt at the beginning of the year, buy lime at the end of the year" (*đầu năm mua muối, cuối năm mua vôi*), signifying the need for warmth, harmony, and preservation of blessings at the start of the year, and the expulsion of negativity and purification towards the year's end.

In addition to specific times of the year, there are various customs and taboos observed in Vietnamese culture, influencing activities such as marriage, business, trading, house building, and even attire. For example, the seventh lunar month, known as the Month of Wandering Spirits, is considered inauspicious for marriage and significant business endeavors. Similarly, building houses towards the end of the year, as the old year concludes, is avoided. When it comes to marriage and house construction, the age of the individuals involved is carefully considered, with the proverb "Getting married based on the woman's age, building houses based on the man's age" (*lấy vợ xem tuổi dàn bà, làm nhà xem tuổi dàn ông*), highlighting their importance. Furthermore, adherence to the mutual relationship between the five elements is believed to determine compatibility in couples. People also refrain from wearing clothes belonging to the deceased and avoid visiting graves during certain times, such as the beginning of the year. These customs and taboos vary across industries, professions, and regions, illustrating the rich diversity of Vietnamese cultural practices (Toan 1992: 121-266).

The classification of customs and beliefs as religious, superstitious, or simply cultural can be complex and subjective, especially in the context of Vietnam where the distinction between these categories is often blurred. For instance, practices such as *hầu đồng*, associated with the traditional Mother goddess religion, were once deemed superstitious and prohibited by authorities during certain periods of history. However, these practices have been reinstated and recognized as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in recent years. This inconsistency in categorization reflects the evolving attitudes towards religious and cultural practices within Vietnamese society and highlights the challenge of defining clear boundaries between religion, belief, and superstition. Moreover, the interpretation of these customs may vary among individuals and communities, further complicating their classification. Therefore, it is essential to consider the historical, cultural, and social context when assessing the significance and nature of these practices.

Indeed, many of the customs and taboos observed in Vietnamese society have multifaceted effects, with interpretations varying depending on individual perspectives. While some may view certain customs negatively, others may recognize their significance and value from a cultural or spiritual standpoint. It is important to acknowledge that these customs are deeply rooted in Vietnamese folk beliefs and traditions, passed down through generations and ingrained in the collective consciousness of the people:

> "The Annamites have mixed, without always knowing, in the crucible of innocence, and of primitive knowledge, recollections of Indian metaphysics, and subtle theological thoughts, the materialistic doctrines of the Taoist school, the symbolic and philosophical concepts of the Chinese people. The pantheism they created, in a way, brought them back on the ladder of time, beyond the Chinese, including the Indians, and morally brought them closer to the concepts of God. religious concepts of early peoples, such as that of the Aryas (Indo-Europeans)"(Dumontier 2020: 15).

Indeed, the presence of religion and faith in the daily lives of Vietnamese people is unmistakable, demonstrating that characterizing them as lacking religious fervor would be inaccurate. Thus, to fully understand the complexities of Vietnamese society, one must acknowledge the intrinsic role of religion and faith in shaping its customs, beliefs, and values.

DISCUSSION

It is necessary to note the following points when analyzing religion and personal life or individual/personal religion in Vietnam.

First, when analyzing religion and personal life or individual/personal religion in Vietnam, several key points need to be considered. First and foremost, Vietnamese people historically and presently exhibit a syncretism of multi-religious mentality. However, this characteristic is not unique to Vietnam alone. With the spread of Christian missions and waves of immigration, multi-religiosity has become a common feature in many societies worldwide, including Europe and the Arabian world. However, unlike these other regions, Vietnam has a long tradition of being multi-religious. In Vietnam, there exists a remarkable degree of religious tolerance and syncretism. This is evident in religious beliefs and worship rituals, where one can find elements from various faiths coexisting harmoniously. For instance, when visiting Buddhist temples, it is not uncommon to encounter representations not only of Buddha and Bodhisattvas but also of Mother Goddesses from traditional Vietnamese folk religion, as well as figures like national heroes such as Quang Trung and Hồ Chí Minh, who are not associated with Buddhism. This syncretism reflects the polytheistic nature of Vietnamese spirituality, making it challenging to categorize individuals strictly within a single religious tradition.

Traditional religions in Vietnam are highly inclusive due to their non-institutional nature. This allows for a decentralized approach, unlike strictly institutionalized religions. The communist state, wary of centralized religious structures, finds this arrangement conducive to its management and control needs. In personal life, religion plays a significant role, with a syncretism of various beliefs shaping both life cycle events and daily routines. Confucianism, Buddhism, and indigenous religions coexist, creating a diverse spiritual landscape in Vietnamese society.

The tolerance of religions in Vietnam is not solely characterized by a harmonious mixture of traditional beliefs. Rather, there are underlying conflicts between these religions, particularly stemming from the rift between the Confucian secular state and other belief systems. Historically, while the upper classes were influenced by Confucianism, the lower classes often turned to Buddhism and indigenous religions. This divide is evident in peasant uprisings, where leaders were often influenced by Buddhism and indigenous beliefs. Confucian disdain for Buddhist monks and shamans is apparent, with mockery directed at their lifestyles. Moreover, the state's appropriation of temple resources, such as requisitioning temple bells for war, reflects a bureaucratic view of monks as unproductive members of society(Weber 1988: 285). While Southeast Asian societies often highlight harmony, Weber's observations on Chinese history find resonance in the conflictual dynamics of Vietnamese religious history (Can 1992).

Second, the religious beliefs of Vietnamese people exhibit a unique and highly secular nature. Unlike belief systems centered around a Creator or Supreme Being, Vietnamese spirituality lacks a focus on achieving eternal happiness or liberation after death. Instead, there is little concern for metaphysical questions about the origins of the universe. While Europeans may be religious, their faith often remains separate from their daily lives. In contrast, Vietnamese individuals live in constant interaction with the supernatural world, perceiving spirits in various aspects of their surroundings, from houses and bushes to rivers and streams. The Vietnamese worldview emphasizes a close connection between the earthly realm and the afterlife, encapsulated in the motto "whatever our world is, so is the underworld" (*trần sao âm vậy*). Departed spirits are believed to retain influence over the living, either offering assistance or retribution based on their relationships with humans. Thus, Vietnamese religious faith differs significantly from European conceptions, with less emphasis on transcendent values and a more immediate engagement with the spiritual realm(Cadière 2010: 75).

Indeed, the concept of gods in Vietnamese and East Asian beliefs differs significantly from that in European traditions. While European beliefs often focus on a singular, omnipotent deity, Vietnamese spirituality acknowledges a multitude of spirits and genies. These spirits are believed to inhabit various elements of the natural world, such as the land and rivers, reflecting a deeply ingrained animistic worldview. In this framework, spirits are omnipresent, making it challenging to quantify their number. Moreover, these spirits are perceived as possessing distinct qualities, with some bringing blessings and prosperity while others may bring calamity and misfortune to individuals.

Vietnamese religious beliefs represent a fusion of the sacred and the profane, with the distinction between them being relative. Rather than solely focusing on transcendent values, Vietnamese religion encompasses any mysterious supernatural force believed to bring health, peace, fortune, and relief from suffering in the earthly realm. This secular orientation highlights the practical nature of Vietnamese spirituality, which prioritizes fulfilling earthly needs over pursuing purely sacred ideals. Despite this pragmatic approach, the majority of Vietnamese people harbor deep religious sentiments, viewing religious practice as an essential aspect of daily life. Their faith is not driven by aspirations for spiritual liberation or heavenly rewards but is instead rooted in the practical necessities of existence—seeking fulfillment and divine support to ensure the safety and well-being of themselves and their loved ones. For Vietnamese individuals, religion is a vital necessity in their everyday lives, bridging the gap between humanity and the divine and providing tangible support in times of uncertainty. In this context, the boundary between the profane and the sacred is fluid and relative. Consequently, Vietnamese religious practice is inherently pragmatic and realistic, serving the immediate needs of the community rather than abstract spiritual goals. Rather than seeking profound philosophical insights, Vietnamese people prioritize personal experiences and the tangible benefits provided by supernatural forces when selecting and practicing their religious beliefs. Ultimately, religion in Vietnam serves as a practical tool for navigating life's challenges and uncertainties, offering tangible support and guidance in the earthly realm.

The secularity of Confucianism significantly influences Vietnamese religious beliefs. Confucianism, often termed a "secular religion", presents a paradox in its nature. While it primarily emphasizes ethical and political principles, lacking the prophetic or afterlife-focused elements found in other religions, it assumes a quasi-religious role in governance and societal affairs. This paradoxical relationship shapes Vietnamese perceptions of the sacred and the profane, blurring the boundaries between these realms. This syncretism is evident in the cultural landscape, where Vietnamese religious beliefs diverge from traditional theological faith. Thus, while Vietnamese people recognize a world filled with gods and spiritual forces, their religious worldview remains notably secular. This unique perspective challenges conventional notions of religious belief, highlighting the intricate interplay between spirituality, culture, and society in Vietnam.

Third, the emergence of what's termed a "spiritual vacuum" in the religious life of Vietnamese individuals is notable. Despite the coexistence of various religions in the country, resembling a religious marketplace with numerous faith options, people often lack enthusiasm for any particular religion. This phenomenon can be seen as a consequence of the paradoxical nature of Vietnamese religious beliefs. The absence of strong attachment to any specific religion makes it easy for individuals to switch between or even abandon religions altogether. Furthermore, it paves the way for the adoption of imported foreign religions or the rise of "new religions" to fill the gap left by the lack of fervor for existing faiths. This trend reflects a contemporary challenge in Vietnam's religious landscape.

The origins of traditional Vietnamese religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, trace back to Chinese and Indian influences. Confucianism, being a secular religion, relies on interaction with other faiths for its full expression. Throughout Vietnamese history, periods of increased religious tolerance often coincide with a heightened "spiritual vacuum", making it easier for individuals to abandon traditional beliefs and adopt new ones. While it may appear that religion holds little personal significance for Vietnamese people, the reality reflects otherwise. Despite this perceived indifference, religion remains deeply intertwined with the lives of individuals. This intricate interplay highlights the unique and complex nature of Vietnamese personal religious life.

Fourth, in Vietnamese traditional society, individual autonomy, encompassing one's life, personal needs, and private interests, appears to be largely eclipsed by familial, clan, village, and broader social ties. Within the framework of Confucian values, the notion of individual freedom, encompassing freedoms of thought, speech, and assembly as understood in European contexts, remains elusive. Instead, personal expression finds manifestation through communal bonds. Hegel, in his analysis, suggested that the ancient East, particularly China, lacked a conception of freedom, which sheds light on why concepts of freedom, equality, and human rights originated primarily in Europe rather than in China or India(Hefel 1975). This dynamic blurs the distinction between personal and communal religious practices, with the latter often exerting a dominant

influence. Consequently, religion and personal life in traditional Vietnamese society are perceived as complementary rather than central, highlighting the predominance of communal relationships.

Actually, that is not the case. In traditional Vietnamese society, while family, clan, and village connections hold significant importance, they do not supplant the pivotal role of religion in personal life. Despite the individual being seemingly enmeshed within communal bonds, religion serves as a crucial avenue for self-expression. Through religious practices, such as rites marking life cycle events and daily observances, the individual's personal life becomes discernible. The inclusion of religion in birth ceremonies signifies that pivotal life events are not solely terrestrial occurrences but are imbued with divine significance. From birth to eventual departure from this world, an individual's existence is perceived as supernatural and divinely ordained. Religion not only caters to spiritual and mental needs but also serves to validate individuals within the fabric of familial and kinship networks. Absent religious rituals within life cycle events, individuals may find themselves lacking validation within social structures.

CONCLUSION

In traditional Vietnamese society, a notable dichotomy exists between the role of ởreligion in personal life and its manifestation within national institutions. While centralized social structures in Vietnam adhere predominantly to the Confucian model, which prioritizes collective values over individual autonomy, local dynamics, particularly at the grassroots level, are significantly influenced by Buddhist and indigenous beliefs. This dual influence engenders a complex societal landscape wherein the upper echelons tend to uphold patriarchal Confucian norms, favoring male authority, while the lower strata exhibit inclinations towards Southeast Asian indigenous traditions, affording greater latitude for personal expression and addressing women's societal status. Consequently, this schism underscores phenomena observed in Vietnamese literature, such as the works of Hồ Xuân Hương, which are distinct from their Korean, Japanese, and Chinese counterparts. Moreover, this societal divide has historically contributed to peasant uprisings in Vietnam, occurring not only during periods of economic hardship but also amidst times of agricultural abundance. Notably, these uprisings were often led by individuals closely associated with Buddhism and indigenous religions. Thus, there is a pressing need to accord due recognition to both foreign and indigenous religious influences in Vietnamese culture, avoiding undue emphasis on one at the expense of the other.

The analysis above illuminates the paradoxical nature of Vietnamese religious attitudes: while deeply entrenched in religious beliefs, Vietnamese individuals often display a lack of fervor towards any single religion. Despite allocating minimal time to religious activities, the presence of religion remains ubiquitous in pivotal life events and daily routines. Vietnamese religious beliefs exhibit a pronounced secular orientation, coexisting within a realm populated by numerous deities. Despite inhabiting a multi-religious milieu, a lingering spiritual void persists in their lives, defying fulfillment. In essence, while the individual identity of traditional Vietnamese people may seem submerged within familial and societal bonds, their personal religious practices distinctly underscore the expression of individual ego. Religion holds an indispensable role in the personal lives of Vietnamese people; thus, assertions dismissing the religious nature of Vietnamese society or downplaying the significance of religion in their spiritual landscape lack persuasive merit.

Acknowledgments

REFERENCES

 Binh, P.K.1990. Việt Nam phong tục (Vietnamese Customs), Dong Thap General Publishing House, Dong Thap.
Cadière, L. 2010. Croyance et Pratique Religieuses es Vietnamiens, translated by Đỗ Trinh Huệ, vol. 3, published by Thuan Hoa publisher house, Hue.
Can, T.B. 1992. Công giáo Việt Nam thời Giám mục Pigneau (1771-1799) (Catholicism in Vietnam during the time of Bishop Pigneau (1771-1799), Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh city.
Dawson, C.1951. Religion und Kultur, Verlag L. Schwann, Düsseldorf.

Dumontier, G.2020. Nghi thức tang lễ của người An Nam (Funeal Rites of Vietnamese), translated by Vũ Lưu Xuân, published by Hanoi publisher house, Hanoi.

Gheddo, P.1970. Katholiken und Buddhisten in Vietnam. Translated from Italian, Verlag C.H. J. Pfeiffer, München.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1975. Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke 12, Suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft. Stuttgart.

Huong, H.T.2012. Chân dung xã hội của người đi lễ chùa (Social portrait of temple goers), published by Social science publisher house, Hanoi.

Hung, N.Q.2016. Tôn giáo và văn hóa: Lý thuyết cơ bản và giải pháp khai thác các giá trị văn hóa tôn giáo phục vụ phát triển bền vững (Religion and culture: Basic theory and solutions to exploit religious-cultural values for sustainable development), Published by Knowledge Publishing House, Hanoi.

Jam, F.A., Khan, T.I., Zaidi, B., & Muzaffar, S.M. (2011). Political Skills Moderates the Relationship between Perception of Organizational Politics and Job Outcomes.

Kim, T.T.2002. Việt Nam sử lược (Vietnamese History in Short), Da Nang Publishing House, Da Nang.

Khan, T. I., Kaewsaeng-On, R., & Saeed, I. (2019). Impact of workload on innovative performance: Moderating role of extrovert. Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews, 7 (5), 123-133.

Malinowski, B.M. 1983. Wissenschaft und Religion und andere Schriften, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

Toan, A. 1992. Nếp cũ, Con người Việt Nam (Vietnamese Customs), published by Young publishing House in Ho Chi Minh City.

Toan, A. 1992. Ánh, Tín ngưỡng Việt Nam (Vietnamese Faiths), Buch 2, published by Young publishing House in Ho Chi Minh City.

Van, D.N. 1998. Những vấn đề lý luận và thực tiễn tôn giáo ở Việt Nam (Some Theoretical and Practical Issues of Religious Life in Vietnam), published by Social science publisher house, Hanoi.

Weber, M.1988. Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus. In: Gesamelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie, Band I, 9 Auflage, J.C.B Mohr, Tübingen.