

# An Analysis of The Influence of Religion on The Formation of Modern Vietnamese Society

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## Abstract

*The present study investigates the substantial influence of religion on the formation of contemporary Vietnamese society. The text examines the role of religious organizations and beliefs in fostering social order, moral principles, and national progress in Vietnam. This study examines the historical backdrop of religious impact, present governmental regulations regarding religion, and the manner in which different religions engage in social welfare and cultural conservation. The study asserts that religion has a crucial function in the social structure of Vietnam, requiring ongoing involvement and reform of policies to optimize its beneficial effects while minimizing possible conflicts.*

**Keywords:** Religion Influence, Vietnamese Society, Cultural Preservation, Social Cohesion, State-Religion Relations

## INTRODUCTION

Religion, as a social construct, has always exerted a substantial influence on many facets of society existence, therefore enhancing the variety and abundance of national culture and influencing the moral principles accepted by the general population over different historical epochs. In Vietnam, this function is very prominent, characterized by a profound and varied religious environment that mirrors the cultural fabric of the country.

Vietnam harbors 43 religious organizations representing 16 distinct faiths, with over 27% of the population self-identifying as religious followers and 90% participating in various spiritual beliefs or activities. The wide range of religious beliefs in Vietnamese society highlights the significance of religion and the necessity for well-considered policies to effectively control and utilize its capacity for positive societal impact.

Since its establishment, the Communist Party of Vietnam has acknowledged the significance of religion in society. The Party has consistently demonstrated a commitment to respecting and safeguarding the freedom of belief and religion. This dedication is evident in Article 5 of the Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions, which states: "The State ensures the entitlement to freedom of belief and religious practices in compliance with the law; upholds and advances the cultural and ethical principles of religions; safeguards and advances the beneficial aspects of the tradition of ancestor worship; commemorates and honours individuals who have made commendable contributions to the nation and the society, so enhancing the cohesive national unity and addressing the spiritual requirements of the people".

Although each religion in Vietnam has its own distinct method and ideals, they all demonstrate a shared inclination towards leading a life that is both beneficial for society and spiritually uplifting (tốt đời, đẹp đạo). This worldview underscores the interdependence of religious observance with the progress of a nation, prioritizing the well-being of humanity and employing the concept of assisting others as a guiding paradigm for religious endeavors.

The cultivation and promotion of ethical and humanistic principles are considered to be integral functions of religion within Vietnamese culture. Religious institutions have a crucial role in advancing and safeguarding the righteous customs of the country, therefore contributing to the development of a shared basis of moral

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principles and virtuous conduct among their adherents. They motivate adherents to engage in acts of benevolence and to treat others in their vicinity with equity and empathy.

In addition to their contributions to ethical principles and community development, religious groups in Vietnam also take on a crucial role in providing support and companionship to individuals experiencing challenges through a range of humanitarian and social endeavors. This particular facet of religious observance corresponds with the Vietnamese custom of reciprocal assistance and unity, therefore enhancing the social welfare system of the country.

The complex and diverse function of religion in Vietnamese society requires a sophisticated exploration of its effects and possibilities. As Vietnam progresses in its growth and modernization, the influence of religion on social values, community strengthening, and national cohesion remains a matter of great significance for policymakers and academics.

## **RELIGION'S ROLE IN UPHOLDING COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL COHESION VALUES**

### **Contributions to Ethics and Morality**

Religions exert a substantial influence in the establishment, reinforcement, and advancement of ethical and moral principles among people, families, and society as a whole. Religious texts function as a moral guide, directing followers towards virtuous conduct and away from activities deemed harmful to individual and society welfare.

A fundamental contribution of religion is its capacity to confront and alleviate the adverse consequences of moral deterioration in society. Religious beliefs provide a steadfast framework of moral principles in a time when swift societal developments and technological progress can occasionally give rise to ethical quandaries. The aforementioned principles frequently surpass temporal cultural changes, so offering a perception of uninterrupted progression and consistent nature.

Furthermore, religions play a crucial role in guaranteeing spiritual tranquility for a substantial segment of the people. Their provision of comfort, significance, and direction to individuals can be especially beneficial during periods of personal or communal turmoil. This spiritual aspect has the potential to augment mental well-being and resilience, therefore making a valuable contribution to broad social stability.

It is crucial to acknowledge that religious ethics are not independent from wider societal ethics. Instead, they are closely interconnected and frequently mutually strengthening. Both religious and social ethical systems often direct individuals towards moral conduct, deter detrimental actions, and highlight the significance of communal bonds and egalitarianism among individuals. This congruence between religious and social ethics can establish a more unified moral structure within society.

### **Preservation and Development of Culture**

In both national and global contexts, religions assume a pivotal function in the preservation and advancement of cultural heritage values. These structures function as storage places for historical customs, ceremonies, and behaviors that have influenced cultures for generations. Through the preservation of these cultural aspects, religions enhance the abundance and variety of human cultural manifestation.

Religion frequently assumes a crucial role in the development of cultural lifestyles within families, communities, and society. Religious customs and traditions frequently shape family organizational frameworks, communal dynamics, and cultural standards. These frameworks establish a structure for commemorations, rituals of transition, and other important life occasions that constitute the essence of cultural existence.

It should be emphasized that religions, during their evolutionary stages, beyond the mere transmission of human beliefs. They make significant contributions to the preservation and advancement of secular social ethics. As cultures evolve, religious groups frequently modify their doctrines to tackle modern concerns while upholding fundamental ethical standards. The continuous evolution of cultural and ethical standards is facilitated by the dynamic interplay between religious doctrines and societal demands.

The profound impact of religion on individuals' spiritual being cannot be exaggerated. Religious beliefs and practices offer individuals a profound sense of purpose, community, and transcendence that significantly influences their worldviews and everyday existence. The inclusion of this spiritual aspect enhances the breadth and complexity of cultural manifestations and social exchanges.

### **Social Welfare and Charitable Organisations**

Present-day Vietnam, like to several emerging countries, experiences a clear division in terms of living conditions. Notwithstanding the notable progress in the financial and spiritual well-being of many individuals, a segment of the populace continues to encounter substantial obstacles. A strong structure of community assistance and social sharing is required to address this reality.

Building upon the deeply rooted Vietnamese cultural heritage of "mutual affection and assistance" (*tương thân tương ái*), numerous individuals and groups have demonstrated their commitment to participate in voluntary work and philanthropic endeavors. Religious institutions frequently stand out as leaders in these endeavors.

Religious organizations are strongly positioned to make significant contributions to social welfare and philanthropy due to various compelling factors:

First, well-established community networks: Religious groups frequently possess comprehensive networks that extend into local communities, enabling them to efficiently recognize and address pressing needs.

Second, volunteer mobilization: Religions have the ability to inspire their followers to engage in philanthropic endeavors as a manifestation of their religious beliefs.

Third, current infrastructure: Numerous religious groups already own facilities and operational frameworks that might be effectively employed for philanthropic endeavors.

Most religions place great emphasis on the moral duty of assisting people in need, which serves as a powerful motivating force for engaging in philanthropic activities.

Indeed, religious organizations in Vietnam actively engage in a diverse array of social philanthropic and welfare assistance endeavors. These activities may encompass: Running soup meals and food banks; Providing housing for individuals experiencing homelessness; Providing educational assistance and scholarships; Operating healthcare facilities and implementing medical outreach initiatives.

Contributing to disaster relief operations - Providing assistance to vulnerable populations include orphans, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.

These activities enable religious organizations to make significant contributions towards enhancing both the material circumstances and spiritual welfare of individuals in need. Not only does this mitigate acute distress, but it also enhances social stability and togetherness by diminishing inequality and showcasing the efficacy of communal assistance.

Ultimately, the ethical, cultural, and philanthropic contributions of religions in Vietnam serve as a prime example of how religious organizations can effectively contribute to the advancement of society. Religious institutions make a substantial contribution to the comprehensive welfare of the nation by integrating their activities with wider social objectives and capitalizing on their distinct capabilities.

## **REGULATIONS AND FUNDAMENTAL CRITERIA FOR ENHANCING THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN SOCIETY**

### **Historical Background**

Ever since its establishment, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has acknowledged the significance of religious cohesion in attaining its national objectives. The political party has continuously strived to promote cohesion among religious factions, amongst individuals of different faiths, and throughout the whole country. The adoption of this strategy was considered essential for the triumph of the people's democratic revolution and the following advancement towards socialism.

President Ho Chi Minh, the progenitor of contemporary Vietnam, heavily influenced the development of this comprehensive strategy. He keenly discerned and underscored the shared goals of the Vietnamese revolution with the core tenets of many religions. According to him, both possess a fundamental desire for the emancipation of humanity and the establishment of fairness in society.

This viewpoint established the foundation for a more cogent interaction between the government and religious establishments, distinguishing Vietnam from certain other communist countries that took more hostile positions towards religion. Ho Chi Minh's ideology acknowledged that religious convictions, when in harmony with nationalistic objectives, might serve as a potent catalyst for societal unity and advancement.

### **Existing Policies**

The position of the CPV on religion has been further refined in recent years, as demonstrated by Resolution 25-NQ/TW. The present declaration expressly recognizes the "resemblances" between religious principles and socialist objectives. It asserts that the objective of a prosperous populace, robust nation, fair, democratic, and cultured society is to establish a point of convergence that unites religious fellow citizens with shared aspirations.

The aforementioned resolution signifies a notable progression in the party's stance towards religion. It transcends basic tolerance to explicit acknowledgment of the possible beneficial impact that religions can have in attaining national goals. The objective of the CPV is to establish a more comprehensive national story that appeals to both religious and non-religious persons by emphasizing the common goals of social justice, prosperity, and human dignity.

The Standing Committee of the National Assembly enacted the Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions to establish a legislative basis for this approach. This legislation functions as a fundamental structure for overseeing religious activities and administering religious matters in Vietnam. Its objective is to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between safeguarding freedom of religion and guaranteeing that religious observances are in line with national interests and social cohesion.

The ordinance encompasses a wide range of religious matters, such as the registration of religious groups, the building and refurbishment of houses of worship, religious education, and affairs pertaining to international religious relations. Through the provision of explicit standards and protocols, its objective is to establish a secure setting for religious observance while upholding police supervision.

### **Future Research Paths**

In order to augment the influence of religion in present-day Vietnamese society, the Party and State have defined seven crucial domains for concentration and enhancement:

First, comprehensive evaluation of religious landscape: There is an acknowledged necessity for a meticulous assessment of the present condition of religion in Vietnam. This entails vigilant surveillance of religious life and the operations of diverse religious institutions. The assessment must consider the dynamically evolving internal, regional, and worldwide circumstances that impact religious dynamics. Potential areas of investigation encompass the examination of phenomena such as the emergence of novel religious movements, the influence of globalization on conventional ideas, and the significance of social media in molding religious discussions.

Second, legal framework refinement: The government intends to revise, enhance, and optimize the legal framework pertaining to religion. The objective of this endeavour is to strengthen the conformity of the regulatory framework with the provisions and essence of the 2013 Constitution. Possible areas for enhancement could encompass more explicit protocols for the registration of religious organizations, more comprehensive directives on religious education, and revised mandates on foreign religious collaboration. The objective is to provide a legal framework that safeguards religious liberty while also tackling possible obstacles to societal cohesion.

Third, augmented education and awareness: There is a concerted attempt to escalate propaganda and educational initiatives aimed at both the general populace and government officials. These strategies will

prioritize the dissemination of Ho Chi Minh's ideologies, the Party's directives, and State legislation pertaining to religion and national cohesion. This may entail incorporating these subjects into educational programs, arranging instructional sessions and seminars for government officials, and utilizing mass media to expand the reach of the message. The objective is to cultivate a more profound comprehension of the executive branch's stance towards religion and advance social unity.

Fourth, enhanced administration of religious activities: The government aims to enhance the administration of religious activities by fostering cooperation among diverse stakeholders. This entails strengthening the respective functions and obligations of party agencies, government entities, mass organizations, as well as religious leaders and adherents. The methodology prioritizes the use of discussion and cooperation, with the goal of actively resolving possible problems and guaranteeing that religious activities make a constructive contribution to social progress.

Fifth, enhancing the role of the Vietnam fatherland front: The primary objective is to improve the efficiency of the Vietnam Fatherland Front Committee and its affiliated organizations in advocating for the Party's religious guidelines and State legislation. This umbrella organization, comprising diverse social and religious groups, is seen as a crucial forum for promoting national cohesion and enabling interaction between the government and religious communities. Potential initiatives may encompass programs aimed at enhancing the skills and abilities of Front members, augmented financial resources for outreach endeavors, and the establishment of novel avenues for communication with religious organizations.

In order to establish a harmonious connection between the state, religious institutions, and believers, the Vietnamese government intends to pursue these directions. The overarching objective is to utilize the constructive capacity of religious beliefs and institutions in facilitating national growth and social advancement, while upholding political stability and national cohesion.

## **CONCLUSION**

Religion's influence on Vietnamese society is complex and diverse, shaping the country's social, cultural, and political systems. Religion maintains social cohesiveness, cultural heritage, and population welfare in Vietnam's continual progress and modernization.

This study shows that 43 religious organizations from 16 faiths demonstrate religion's presence in Vietnam. Over 27% of Vietnamese identify as followers of various religions. The fact that 90% of Vietnamese people practice various spiritual practices shows how religion permeates society. Religious diversity offers politicians and social scientists opportunities and challenges.

Religion's role in upholding morality is one of its greatest contributions to Vietnamese culture. Religious teachings and practices guide followers toward virtue and away from destructive pursuits to personal and social well-being. In a time of rapid social change and technological advancement, religious ideas give constancy and firmness, avoiding the negative effects of moral decline. Religious convictions also improve psychological well-being and adaptability, especially during times of personal or societal stress.

Religion greatly affects cultural heritage protection and development. Religious institutions preserve centuries-old Vietnamese rituals, rites, and conduct. Religions enrich Vietnam's cultural diversity by preserving these elements. Religious customs and traditions impact family structures, community dynamics, and cultural norms, providing a systematic foundation for celebrations, rituals, and other life events that define culture.

Religious groups in Vietnam are vital to social welfare and charity. Religious organizations often spearhead volunteer and humanitarian activity, drawing on the Vietnamese cultural heritage of "mutual affection and assistance" (t<sup>o</sup>ng thân t<sup>o</sup>ng ái). Their strong community networks, ability to deploy volunteers, infrastructure, and ethical commitment to help the needy make them unique contributors to social welfare. Through soup kitchens, food banks, homeless shelters, educational support, healthcare, and disaster relief, religious groups improve the material and spiritual well-being of those in need.

Respecting religion's importance in society, the Vietnamese government has developed a complex religious policy. Informed by Ho Chi Minh's thought and evolved in recent years, this policy seeks to capitalize on religious influence while maintaining social stability and national cohesiveness. Resolution 25-NQ/TW and the Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions aim to balance religious freedom and national interests and social harmony.

In preparation of the future, the Vietnamese government has identified seven key areas for improving religion in modern society. These measures include assessing the religious environment, changing the law, increasing education and awareness, improving religious operations, and strengthening the Vietnam Fatherland Front. These measures demonstrate a commitment to government-religious-follower harmony.

Religion's positive impact on Vietnamese society is very limited. Religious existence is constantly changing due to local, regional, and global factors, requiring continuous observation and flexibility in policymaking. New religious movements, globalization's impact on conventional beliefs, and social media's involvement in religious discourse need more inquiry and attention.

Although the government's view of religion has broadened and recognized its benefits, ongoing contact and collaboration between government departments and religious groups is still necessary. Maintaining an appropriate balance between government control and religious freedom will be difficult, requiring a strong grasp of Vietnam's religious organizations' needs and perspectives.

Religion is essential to shaping and advancing Vietnamese society. Ethical and moral development, cultural preservation, social welfare, and national unity are its complex contributions. Religion's impact is projected to evolve as Vietnam develops and modernizes, requiring policy changes and more contact between religious groups and state institutions.

Vietnam must continue to employ religious influence while addressing potential conflicts and social divisions. Continuous research, policy improvement, and open engagement with religious communities are needed to execute this. Through efficient handling of these impediments, Vietnam may create a religious diversity paradigm that promotes social harmony, cultural diversity, and national progress. Other countries facing similar issues in an increasingly interconnected world may learn from this feat.

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