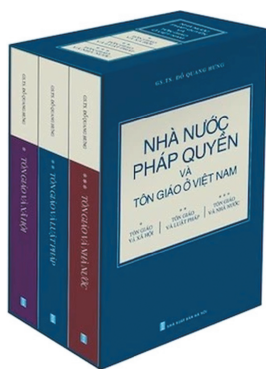


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Religion and the Socialist Rule-of-Law State in Vietnam — on the trilogy “The Rule of Law and Religion in Vietnam”



Do Quang Hung¹. The Rule of Law State and Religion in Vietnam. Volume I (ISBN 9786043747256), volume II (ISBN 9786043747249), volume III (ISBN 9786043747232). Hanoi: Hanoi Publishing House, 2022.

Abstract. The Rule of Law State and Religion in Vietnam, a trilogy by Professor Dr. Đỗ Quang Hưng, explores the evolution of religious governance in Vietnam from the post-revolutionary era to the present. Framed by the concept of the “socialist rule-of-law state,” the work analyzes the theoretical, historical, and institutional dynamics that have shaped state — religion relations. Structured in three volumes — Religion and Society, Religion and Law, and Religion and the State — the trilogy combines intellectual history, legal-historical inquiry, and normative analysis to comprehensively account for Vietnam’s distinctive approach to religious governance. Drawing on interdisciplinary methods from legal history and comparative secularism, it proposes a uniquely Vietnamese secular governance model characterized by legal neutrality, institutional cooperation, and cultural pluralism. Thus, the trilogy is a scholarly resource and a policy reference for studying religion and governance in contemporary Vietnam.

Keywords: Vietnam, socialist rule-of-law state, secularism, religion and law, public policy, legal theory, religious freedom, interdisciplinary studies.

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Религия и социалистическое правовое государство во Вьетнаме — о трилогии «Правовое государство и религия во Вьетнаме»

До Куанг Хынг¹. Правовое государство и религия во Вьетнаме. Том I (ISBN 9786043747256), том II (ISBN 9786043747249), том III (ISBN 9786043747232). Ханой: Hanoi Publishing House, 2022.

Аннотация. Трилогия профессора доктора наук До Куанг Хынга «Правовое государство и религия во Вьетнаме» исследует эволюцию религиозного управления во Вьетнаме с послереволюционной эпохи до наших дней. В рамках концепции «социалистического правового государства» в работе анализируются теоретические, исторические и институциональные факторы, влияющие на государственно-религиозные отношения. Трилогия, состоящая из трёх томов — «Религия и общество», «Религия и право» и «Религия и государство», — сочетает в себе интеллектуальную историю, историко-правовые исследования и нормативный анализ, всесторонне описывая особый подход Вьетнама к религиозному управлению. Опираясь на междисциплинарные методы истории права и сравнительного секуляризма, она предлагает уникальную вьетнамскую модель светского управления, характеризующуюся правовым нейтралитетом, институциональным сотрудничеством и культурным плюрализмом. Таким образом, трилогия является научным ресурсом и справочным пособием по изучению религии и управления в современном Вьетнаме.

Ключевые слова: Вьетнам, социалистическое правовое государство, секуляризм, религия и право, государственная политика, теория права, свобода вероисповедания, междисциплинарные исследования.

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¹ До Куанг Хынг является бывшим директором Института религиоведения при Вьетнамской академии общественных наук и бывшим главным редактором журнала «Религиоведение». С 2010 по 2020 год он заведовал кафедрой международной политики факультета политологии Университета социальных и гуманитарных наук Вьетнамского национального университета в Ханое. В 1986 году защитил кандидатскую диссертацию по истории в Институте востоковедения АН СССР. С 1991 года — доцент, с 2002 года — профессор.



Fig. 1. Do Quang Hung.

Source: International Center for law and Religion Studies.

Introduction

The trilogy *The Rule of Law State and Religion in Vietnam* is one of the most comprehensive scholarly undertakings on modern Vietnam's ideological, legal, and institutional trajectory of religious governance. Its point of departure is 1994, when the concept of the “socialist rule-of-law state” was first introduced into the official discourse of the Communist Party of Vietnam. From this foundation, the trilogy traces how the concept was gradually elaborated and institutionalized through successive Party Congresses, particularly from the Tenth to the Thirteenth.

More than a product of 17 years of rigorous academic research, the trilogy reflects Professor Đỗ Quang Hung's sustained scholarly engagement throughout his professional career. Over the decades, he led numerous State-level and VNU-level research projects, through which he accumulated a rich body of empirical material and theoretical insights — forming the foundation for this ambitious intellectual enterprise.

Rather than viewing religion merely as an object of state control or ideological suspicion, the trilogy demonstrates how religious affairs have been reframed as part of a broader framework of legal regulation and public policy. This transformation marks a crucial evolution in the state's understanding of its relationship with religious communities — moving beyond security management concerns toward recognition of religion as a domain of cultural pluralism, civic engagement, and constitutional development.

Structured across three volumes, each reflecting a distinct scholarly inquiry and method phase, the trilogy combines theoretical rigor, archival depth, and policy relevance. Extensive appendices, references to legal documents and historical sources, and comprehensive bibliographies and indexes further support it. Collectively, these elements provide a strong empirical and theoretical foundation for a normative model of

religious governance rooted in Vietnam's socialist legal tradition, while also contributing to global debates on law, secularism, and religious freedom.

The full trilogy was published by the Religion and Rule of Law Center, Vietnam National University. Since its three-volume series was published, the books have been distributed in bookstores nationwide, especially through online book-selling platforms. They have attracted significant attention from scholars and researchers, readers, and have been frequently reprinted to meet the demand of readers.

Volume I: Religion and Society — A Historical and Ideological Genealogy of Religion in Revolutionary Vietnam

The first volume, *Religion and Society* (286 p.), employs the tradition of intellectual history to reconstruct Vietnamese revolution through the lens of religion. It explores the thoughts of key figures, with particular emphasis on the August 1945 Revolution and two national resistance wars. Religion is analyzed as a source of moral legitimacy and ideological struggle, providing a comprehensive re-evaluation of revolutionary identity concerning religious pluralism and traditional belief systems.

The volume is structured into four major sections. The first situates Vietnam within the international context of twentieth-century debates on religion, examining colonial legacies, missionary networks, socialist movements, and anti-imperialist struggles. The second focuses on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought on religion, analyzing how early Party leaders reconciled Marxist atheism with the practical need to mobilize religious communities for national liberation. The third traces the Party's evolving stance from national democratic revolution to socialist transformation, showing how religion shifted from an object of suspicion to a recognized source of cultural cohesion and social mobilization. The final section examines the institutionalization of religious policy in the post-independence period, highlighting administrative reforms and legal codifications that laid the groundwork for Vietnam's socialist rule-of-law approach to religion.

Of particular note, the author deliberately chose a historical-ideological approach, drawing inspiration from Marx's and Durkheim's perspectives, the volume critically assesses how religious ideologies interacted with revolutionary and post-revolutionary dynamics in Vietnam, situating religion as both spiritual and sociopolitical force.

Taken together, these sections demonstrate that religion in modern Vietnamese history was not a residual cultural phenomenon but a dynamic arena of negotiation between ideology, law, and society. Professor Do Quang Hung thus reframes religion as a vital lens for understanding Vietnam's revolutionary trajectory and its distinct model of state — religion relations within the socialist legal tradition.

Volume II: Religion and Law — The Legal Architecture of Religious Governance in Vietnam

Informed by the author's firsthand collaboration with international academic communities, especially from Russia, France, China, and the United States, this volume benefits from comparative insights. Professor Hung demonstrates how Vietnam's

legal development in religious governance has learned from and diverged from Western secular models, especially the strict *laïcité* of France and the religious pluralism of the U.S.

The second volume, *Religion and Law* (255 pp.), offers a comprehensive legal-historical account of how Vietnamese state has approached religion through the framework of socialist rule-of-law state. It situates the governance of religion not merely as a question of belief and practice, but as a matter of legal construction, institutional balance, and political legitimacy. Beginning with the dialectical interaction between religion and social institutions, the volume explores how religious life has been conceptualized as both a social force and a subject of legal regulation, thereby establishing the groundwork for specifically Vietnamese discourse on law and religion.

A central theme of the volume is the articulation of secularism within Vietnam's political-legal tradition. Rather than adopting the classical Western paradigm of strict separation between church and state, the book examines how Vietnam has developed its own variant of secular governance — one characterized by institutional cooperation, regulated autonomy, and cultural pluralism. Through comparative references to global models of secular states, the author demonstrates how Vietnam's approach reflects continuity with international trends and creative adaptation to its socialist and postcolonial context. This analysis positions Vietnam's secularism as dynamic and pragmatic, designed to secure social harmony while maintaining the ideological coherence of socialist legal order.

The volume traces this model through the evolution of landmark legal texts and institutional mechanisms. Decree 234 of 1955, Resolution 24 of 1990, the 2004 Ordinance on Belief and Religion, and the 2016 Law on Belief and Religion are examined as isolated instruments and as milestones in dialectical legal reform process. These documents reveal both breakthroughs and tensions, as Party theorists, jurists, and religious leaders contested the boundaries of religious freedom, state sovereignty, and public order. Beyond formal legislation, the volume investigates how ministries, mass organizations, and Government Committee for Religious Affairs function as both administrative bodies and ideological actors, shaping the legal personality of religious organizations and determining the conditions of state recognition.

Another significant contribution of the book lies in its analysis of religious policy from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the contemporary Socialist Republic. By situating religion within successive constitutional and policy reform phases, the author highlights how law has gradually shifted religion from a matter of internal security toward a public policy domain. Issues such as religious education, the recognition of religious organizations, and the protection of believers' rights are examined within the broader quest to construct socialist rule-of-law state. Particularly significant is the discussion of “public religion” as conceptual innovation, whereby religion is integrated into legal and policy frameworks without undermining state authority.

Ultimately, *Religion and Law* presents Vietnam's legal-religious trajectory as a case study of Constitutionalism in the Global South. It shows how Vietnamese state has sought to reconcile universal principles of religious freedom with the imperatives of socialist governance, producing hybrid legal model that is context-specific and globally intelligible. For scholars of comparative law, Southeast Asian studies, and religion —

state relations, this volume provides an indispensable resource that bridges theoretical debates on secularism with lived realities of legal and institutional practice in contemporary Vietnam.

Volume III: Religion and the State — Reframing Secular Governance in Vietnam

The third volume, *Religion and the State* (378 pp.), represents theoretical culmination of the trilogy by moving from historical and legal reconstruction to the normative and institutional dimensions of state — religion relations. Anchored in the concept of socialist rule-of-law state, the book interrogates how religion can be situated within the state's constitutional and administrative structures in ways that are legally consistent, socially responsive, and culturally grounded. Rather than treating religion as an external challenge, the volume conceptualizes it as a structural component of governance and national identity in socialist society.

The first part establishes theoretical foundations of religious policy in a rule-of-law framework. Here, Professor Do Quang Hung examines religion as integral dimension of public governance, engaging critically with comparative models of secular states in France, the United States, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and East Asia. These global experiences are not simply imported but reframed to highlight Vietnam's distinctive trajectory, in which secularism functions not as separation but as a contextualized principle of regulation, cooperation, and cultural continuity.

The second part analyzes contemporary religious life in Vietnam, mapping how social transformations have reshaped the relationship between religious communities and the state. Drawing on sociology and political science, the volume examines demographic changes, the role of religion in public culture, and the challenges posed by globalization and social differentiation. Religion emerges as a sphere of private belief and dynamic force in public life, requiring a nuanced state response that balances diversity, stability, and socialist governance principles.

The third part traces the evolution of Vietnam's religious policy, from feudal and colonial systems through the Democratic Republic of Vietnam into the *Đổi Mới* era. It highlights the Party's gradual reconfiguration of religious governance: moving from suspicion and restrictive control to a structured legal approach institutionalized in Resolution 24 (1990) and culminating in the 2016 Law on Belief and Religion. This genealogy illustrates how religion has been reframed from administrative sensitivity into a domain of structured state responsibility, integrating religious diversity into constitutional and political framework of socialist state.

The final part develops a systematic model of state — religion relations under socialist legality. It advances a three-tiered framework: embedding secularism in Vietnamese context rather than transplanting foreign models; institutionalizing state mechanisms for managing and supporting religious life; and building a legal infrastructure that ensures transparency, accountability, and equal protection. In this vision, the state does not stand apart from religion. Still, it governs through cooperative neutrality, cultural pluralism, and legal accountability, consolidating religion as part of Vietnam's constitutional identity.

Though Vietnam has not explicitly adopted a formal secular state model, the author identifies clear trajectory toward socialist legal system that respects religious diversity while searching for appropriate secular model that balances state neutrality with cultural harmony.

Taken together, Religion and the State situates Vietnam's religious governance at the intersection of legal secularism, cultural pluralism, and statecraft. It proposes distinctively Vietnamese model while avoiding purely pragmatic state-centered approaches. Completing the trilogy, this volume demonstrates that religion in Vietnam must be understood not merely as legal issue or political tool, but as a domain of ethical governance central to the identity of socialist rule-of-law state.

Conclusion: A Foundational Work in Socialist Legal Thought on Religion

This trilogy, *The Rule of Law State and Religion in Vietnam*, represents a landmark in the interdisciplinary study of law, religion, and governance within socialist and postcolonial context. Across three volumes, Professor Đỗ Quang Hưng reconstructs ideological foundations, traces legal evolution, and advances theoretical models that define Vietnam's distinctive approach to managing religion under socialist rule-of-law paradigm. Each volume builds upon the last — moving from intellectual history, to legal analysis, and finally to normative reconstruction — offering a layered account that is both empirically grounded and theoretically original.

A significant achievement of the trilogy lies in its reconceptualization of secularism as contextual and cooperative model rather than strict separation of church and state. Combining scholarly rigor with policy relevance, the work reflects academic inquiry and the author's practical engagement with lawmaking and regional dialogue. Regionally, it situates Vietnam within broader currents of legal reform in Buddhist-majority societies undergoing postcolonial transitions, positioning the country as a key case study in constitutional innovation.

The trilogy also offers practical policy implications, especially as Vietnam continues its reform trajectory. In a context where socialist rule-of-law state is still under development, this work maps theoretical possibilities. It is a policy reference for building pluralistic, legally-grounded, and culturally contextualized state — religion relations model. The trilogy is indispensable to Vietnamese studies and global debates on religion, law, and governance.

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