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Transformation in Beliefs and Religious Practices among Religious Followers in Present-Day Vietnam

Abstract. Vietnam is a country with diverse religions. The transformation in beliefs and religious practices among religious followers in Vietnam is constantly influenced by global trends, the industrial revolution 4.0, the country's achievements in renovation, international integration, and the Party and State's religious policies. This context drives religious organizations to continually revive, develop both structurally and operationally, and diversify their activities. However, this dynamism also brings complexity and impacts various aspects of social life.

This study sheds light on the current process of transformation in faith and religious practices among followers of different religions in Vietnam. Furthermore, it provides authentic information for relevant researchers to compare, contrast, and support scientific arguments. Ultimately, it offers reasonable grounds for Vietnam's functional agencies to issue and enforce more effective policies related to religion.

Keywords: Vietnam, religion, faith, rituals.

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For citation: Le Thi Lien (2024). Transformation in Beliefs and Religious Practices among Religious Followers in Present-Day Vietnam. *The Russian Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 8 (3): 57—69.

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Трансформация верований и религиозных практик среди верующих в современном Вьетнаме

Аннотация. Вьетнам — страна с большим количеством различных религий. Трансформация верований и религиозных практик среди последователей различных конфессий во Вьетнаме находится под влиянием мировых тенденций, промышленной революции 4.0, реформ обновления, международной интеграции и религиозной политики партии и государства. Эти процессы воздействуют на возрождение, развитие и диверсификацию деятельности религиозных организаций. Однако они непросты и оказывают неоднозначное влияние на общественную жизнь.

Данное исследование освещает текущий процесс трансформации верований и религиозных практик среди последователей различных религий во Вьетнаме. Оно предоставляет достоверную информацию для научных разработок в этой области и может помочь повышению эффективности политики в области религии.

Ключевые слова: Вьетнам, религия, вера, ритуалы.

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Для цитирования: Ле Тхи Лиен. Трансформация верований и религиозных практик среди верующих в современном Вьетнаме // Вьетнамские исследования. 2024. Т. 8. № 3. С. 57—69.

Research background

Religion across the globe is undergoing profound transformations, intricately woven into various aspects of social life. Among these shifts, religious diversification stands out as a powerful trend, even in countries where a single dominant religion once held sway, such as Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism. Today, the influence of different faiths and even emerging religious phenomena is palpable. Author Cao Huy Thuan provides evidence from 2004: in Europe, only 10 % of the population adheres strictly to a single truth, while the remaining 90 % recognizes multiple truths across various religions [Cao Huy Thuần 2006: 70—71]. Meanwhile, the growth and development among religions vary. While Catholicism shows signs of decline, Islam is growing rapidly. According to the Centre for the Study for Global Christianity, in 120 years (1900—2020), Islam grew tenfold [Status of Global Christianity 2021]. In the first 20 years of the 21st century, Islam continued to grow strongly, accounting for 24.78 % of the world’s population [World Christian Database: 05.07.2020]. Samuel Huntington in his book “The Clash of Civilizations” also noted that ultimately, Muhammad will prevail. Christianity spread primarily through conversion and rebirth. He believed that Catholicism peaked in 1980 and would decline thereafter, while Islam, with its high population growth rate, would continue to grow rapidly, surpassing Catholicism by the end of the 20th century [Huntington 2003: 69].

The phenomenon of secularization in religion is currently strong and continues to shape social life. Additionally, adherence to religious rules and prohibitions has waned compared to the past. Social conflicts related to religion are increasingly expanding, especially in multi-ethnic, multi-religious countries.

Regarding the trend of secularization of religion in Vietnam, Nguyen Van Dung believes that the secularization process is primarily reflected in the decline in religious practice and some traditional beliefs [Nguyễn Văn Dũng 2018]. The phenomenon of religious globalization is increasingly evident, impacting social issues and posing many challenges for countries. According to “La Globalisation du religieux,” religious globalization today tends to escape state control and transcend borders. Additionally, religious flows are no longer limited to North-South (or West-East) dissemination but have become more complex [Bastian, Champion 2001: 10—11].

In Vietnam, the trend of religious movement and transformation follows the general trend of the world in all three categories: imported religions, indigenous religions, and new religious phenomena. The degree and intensity vary among each religion and category. A common point is that changes in beliefs and religious practices are taking place strongly at the individual level. Le Duc Hanh states that this transformation trend is most vigorous in Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism. The author points out

that one of the main reasons is the impact of globalization and national renewal [Lê Đức Hạnh 2018]. With new religious phenomena the changes are even more pronounced and complex compared to recognized religions. Ngo Huu Thao believes that new religious phenomena will move towards the following trends: an increase in the number of believers, a probable decrease in the number of new phenomena, “followers” are likely to convert to another faith, superstitious and anti-cultural characteristics are reduced, instead political characteristics and colors are likely to be adopted [Ngô Hữu Thảo 2018]. These models are generally trying to change in order to propose that the authorities accept centralized religious activities, moving towards seeking organizational recognition like the already recognized religious organizations.

The religious transformation in Vietnam is posing challenges in building a socialist rule-of-law state, in preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values of ethnic minority areas. In terms of building a rule-of-law state, it is necessary to ensure the right to freedom of belief and religion, but also to ensure religious security. From a cultural perspective, researcher Truong Van Mon argues that the issue of changing beliefs and religion of the Cham people when there is the introduction of Hinduism — Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Islam has profoundly changed the indigenous beliefs of the Cham people. However, in modern society, the change in the practice of beliefs and religion of the Cham people is very clear, which is simplification and reduction of rituals, but the indigenous people pay less attention to traditional cultural rituals and instead adopt a modern lifestyle. This has hindered the preservation of the traditional cultural heritage of the Cham community [Truong Văn Món 2008: 131—173].

This overview of the research background has reflected the most general state of change in the religious situation. Research on religious change in the movement from the internal structure of religious organizations, including changes in beliefs and religious practices of followers in Vietnam today, is quite vague, and has not yet obtained convincing information and data. Therefore, conducting this research is very necessary to supplement, clarify the missing issues, and also to find out the fundamental factors that strongly influence the general change in religion that other works have not specifically mentioned.

Research methods

The study investigates the changes in beliefs and religious practices among followers of various religions in Vietnam today. To obtain empirical evidence on the changes in beliefs and religious practices of the faithful, statistical methods, synthesis, analysis, comparison, and sociological survey methods have been employed. The design of the survey questionnaire has established questions that are hypothetical in nature, suitable for the research content. With the sociological survey research method, in 2022 the research team (Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee for Religious Affairs) selected three out of sixteen religions in Vietnam: Buddhism, Catholicism, and Protestantism for the survey. After selecting the religions, we randomly chose two groups to survey: 300 out of more than 60,000 clergy and religious workers; 450 out of nearly 21,000 followers of the three religions. The reason for

choosing these three religions is that they have a large number of followers, clergy, religious facilities, a wide range of activities and the most significant influence in Vietnamese society. The results obtained were manually processed, and the data needed for analysis were entered into Excel software. Each field of data was processed into tables for analysis of the corresponding content.

Research findings

Overview of the religious situation in Vietnam

Vietnam is a country with diverse religions. As of December 2023, there are 43 organizations belonging to 16 religions recognized by the state and granted registration for operation, which includes two groups:

The group that was introduced from foreign countries has 9 religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Brahmanism, Baha'i, Vietnam Revival Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Vietnam, and Minh Su Dao. The group formed in Vietnam has 7 religions: Cao Dai (or Caodaism), Hoa Hao Buddhism, Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist Association, Buu Son Ky Huong, Pure Land Home-Practice Buddhist Association of Vietnam, Minh Ly Dao Tam Tong Mieu, and Ta Lon Buddhism. Among the 16 religions, there are 43 organizations that have been recognized by the Vietnamese state and granted operational registration, divided into 2 groups: The religious group that includes only one organization and the religious group that includes multiple organizations.

According to statistical data in the report on work results of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs (Ministry of Home Affairs), in 2021, the number of followers of the 41 religious organizations was 27.7 million, accounting for 27.7 % of the population; there were over 54.5 thousand clergy, over 135 thousand religious workers, and more than 29.8 thousand places of worship [Ban Tôn giáo Chính phủ 2022: 12]. The religious organizations are guaranteed to operate according to the provisions of the law and their charters and regulations, building appropriate religious directions, and actively participating in the country's social welfare and humanitarian activities. They have expanded missionary work into urban areas and industrial zones — places with many workers, laborers, and students living and studying. They continue missionary work in mountainous areas and regions of ethnic minorities to promote the development of followers, increase the number of clergy and religious workers, and establish new organizations and places of worship.

Alongside stable and pure religious activities, the religious landscape in Vietnam also experiences complex and deviant issues that impact both the religious environment and social stability. The emergence of schisms leading to the establishment of new religious entities occurs in some Protestant congregations, Cao Dai, and among certain Hmong Christian groups due to internal conflicts and disagreements in leadership management. These divisions affect the religious practices of believers. Furthermore, there is a decline in moral conduct among some clergy and religious practitioners who engage in superstitious and non-standard activities for personal gain. Some clergy members exploit the trust of believers to raise funds for constructing large physical facilities, impacting the lives of followers. Some violate religious precepts and

consequently receive cautions. Violations of land and construction laws also occur. Additionally, new religious phenomena, cults, and groups exploit people's beliefs, intensifying superstitious, anti-cultural, and anti-scientific propaganda online to attract and deceive followers, thereby affecting the pure and traditional religious environment. Some malicious actors exploit existing instability to distort the religious situation and undermine the implementation of religious policies and laws in certain localities, impacting religious unity, ethnic harmony, and human rights in Vietnam.

Changes in beliefs and religious practices among religious followers

Changes in the number of followers

In Vietnam, when evaluating a religious organization's size and strength, the number of followers is a fundamental metric. Therefore, developing a strong following is a top priority for all religions. For religious institutions, nurturing and reinforcing faith is essential for their survival, regardless of the circumstances or era. Faith serves as the "core" of a belief system, and followers provide the foundation for building a robust religious organization. Consequently, the number of adherents in various religions in Vietnam continues to rise. According to statistical data and comparisons from the Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee for Religious Affairs, prior to the enactment of the Law on Belief and Religion in 2004, Vietnam had approximately 17 million followers out of a population of over 80 million. These followers belonged to six major religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Caodaism, Islam, and Hoa Hao Buddhism. By November 2021, the country had nearly 27.7 million followers across 41 religious organizations, constituting over 27.7 % of the total population. The number of religious worship facilities reached 29,8. Over the course of 17 years (2004—2021), the number of adherents grew by more than 10.7 million people, and metrics related to religious positions and worship facilities also increased [Ibid.]. Although the number of religions expanded significantly from 6 to 16 denominations, the annual growth in followers remained consistent and not unusual or abrupt. Overall, the increase in the number of followers across various religions can be attributed to several fundamental reasons: natural growth, where families pass down their faith to children and grandchildren (applicable to Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam); conversions, where people join a particular faith; and interfaith transitions, where individuals switch between different religious denominations, although this number remains relatively small.

Based on data from previous years and the results of a sociological survey conducted by the Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee on Religious Affairs, in 2022 (using 300 questionnaires for religious officials), the projected trends for religious followers are as follows (Table 1).

The results indicate that the trend toward an increasing number of religious followers in Vietnam continues. However, the shifts and fluctuations in numbers vary across different regions. The delta regions and urban areas have traditionally been strongholds for various religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, and indigenous religions. However, maintaining and expanding the follower base faces challenges due to rural-to-urban migration, where many young adults leave rural areas in search of employment. Consequently, the majority of remaining followers in these regions are

Table 1. Projected levels of religious follower growth

No.	Level of Assessment	Frequency	
		Number of Respondents	%
1	Significant Increase	55	18.3
2	Slight Increase	184	61.3
3	No Change	24	8.0
4	Slight Decrease	10	3.3
5	Strong Decrease	0	0.0
6	No Response	27	9.0

Source: Data from the sociological survey conducted by the author and the Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee on Religious Affairs in 2022.

elderly individuals and children. Conversely, a significant number of followers from northern regions migrate to the south, particularly to industrial zones in Binh Duong, Dong Nai, and Ho Chi Minh City. This migration contributes to the growth of religious followers in southern provinces. Additionally, religious outreach strategies are targeting mountainous, remote, and distant areas, leading to an upward trend in religious life in those regions.

Changes in religious beliefs

According to various assessments, Vietnam is still a country where religious followers hold deep faith. In other words, it is a place where religious beliefs are strong and firmly upheld. Currently, the majority of believers continue to practice their faith with profound commitment.

A social survey conducted by the Institute for Religious Policy Research with 300 respondents from different religious backgrounds reveals the following results (Table 2).

Table 2. Assessed demand for religious guidance among believers of various faiths in Vietnam

No.	Level of Assessment	Frequency	
		Number of Respondents	%
1	High Demand	161	53.7
2	Normal Demand	111	37.0
3	Low Demand	10	3.3
4	No Response	18	6.0

Source: Data from the sociological survey conducted by the author and the Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee on Religious Affairs in 2022.

The survey results indicate that regardless of external circumstances, the desire of believers to explore their own religion remains high. This underscores the necessity and impact of religion in the lives of a significant portion of the population.

However, along with changes in quantity, the religious faith of believers in Vietnam has been influenced by economic conditions, social factors, and the country's

international integration. The proliferation of new religious forms has created a diverse “market of religions and beliefs,” where people have multiple choices to follow novel doctrines or embrace a variety of religious beliefs instead of adhering strictly to one faith as in the past. This has led to conversions and reforms in religious life, particularly in mountainous regions. Among the younger generation, there is a growing trend of fading commitment to religious practices — where some people believe but do not actively follow, or follow without true conviction — highlighting the evolving landscape of religious fidelity in Vietnam:

Firstly, there are transformations in the diversity of religious beliefs.

Additionally, some devotees integrate additional beliefs related to divine beings from other religions or spiritual practices. They express these beliefs in places considered sacred. For instance, the La Vang Marian Shrine in Quang Tri Province and the tomb of Catholic priest Truong Buu Diep in Bac Lieu Province both attract followers from various religious backgrounds, as well as non-religious individuals who come to seek solace and blessings. Conversely, many Catholic devotees and practitioners of other faiths visit spiritual and pilgrimage sites associated with Buddhism. Examples include the Bai Dinh Temple in Ninh Binh Province, the Tam Chuc Pagoda in Ha Nam Province, the Buddha statues atop Fansipan Mountain in Ha Giang Province (despite the primary focus being tourism), or the Ba Den Mountain tourist attraction in Tay Ninh province. Similarly, people visit sites connected to various belief systems. This trend was relatively uncommon in the past. Notably, there is a deep respect for the sacredness of other religions. The rigid view that one’s own religious belief is absolute has softened, and there is less denial of the spiritual systems and beliefs of other faiths, unlike in previous decades.

Even within traditional religions, there has been a process of integration and cross-fertilization from the very beginning. This occurs not only in the objects of worship but also in religious doctrines and practices. For instance, followers of Caodaism worship various figures, including Buddha Gautama, Jesus Christ, and Lao Tzu. Similarly, during its development, Hoa Hao Buddhism has incorporated ideas from Buu Son Ky Huong and mainstream Buddhism, but has shifted toward home-based practice with the ultimate goal of achieving Nirvana. Elements from Chinese and Khmer cultures have found their way into festivals held at Buddhist temples in the Mekong Delta region. Beyond venerating Buddhas, Buddhism also integrates aspects of Dao Mau (Mother Goddess worship) and other folk beliefs. In contemporary preaching, religious leaders no longer focus solely on their own faith. Instead, they acknowledge and appreciate the value of other religions. Exclusivity and criticism of other faiths have diminished compared to previous decades.

Moreover, it’s not only religious devotees but also ordinary people who seamlessly blend Buddhism with other belief systems. The mindset is often, “Respect the sacred, avoid taboos, and seek blessings.” Whether in business or personal life, people turn to deities from different faiths, seeking peace and good fortune.

Secondly, a portion of believers has experienced a fading of religious faith

Empirical evidence and sociological investigations indicate that there is ongoing and future movement and shifts in the religious beliefs of some followers. Previously, adherents were devoted to a single religion, unwavering in their faith in that particular

religious system, its sacred elements, and the objects of worship associated with it. However, nowadays, those beliefs have undergone transformation. The trend toward diluted religious commitment is particularly evident among urban populations and young adults. They perceive life as shaped more by personal agency and effort rather than divine intervention. Some adherents continue to observe traditional religious rituals, albeit not strictly adhering to prescribed doctrines or laws. Others simultaneously embrace the tenets of their chosen religion while also acknowledging the existence of spiritual elements from other faiths. Many individuals appreciate Buddhist practices, visit temples, and observe fasting on the 1st and 15th days of the lunar month, yet they may not fully commit to becoming devout Buddhists. Additionally, the Cao Dai faith experiences a decline in younger adherents who are descendants of clergy members. These individuals aspire to carry on family traditions but often remain at the level of mere followers, resulting in a shortage of young successors.

The phenomenon of diluted religious commitment is not only observed in the practice of adhering to a particular faith but also manifests in personal religious transformations and conversions in present-day Vietnam. This shift occurs from multifaceted beliefs among some ethnic minority groups (such as those in the Central Highlands and Northwest regions) to a monotheistic belief system adhering to a single religion (such as Catholicism or Protestantism). Conversely, there are transitions from traditional indigenous beliefs to Christianity (Catholicism or Protestantism) or Buddhism. For instance, within the Hmong and Dao communities in the Northwest, some ethnic minority groups have abandoned their traditional beliefs in favor of Christianity (Catholicism or Protestantism). Additionally, there is a subset that transitions from Catholicism or Buddhism to embrace Protestantism or vice versa. Several others adopt new religious phenomena and unfamiliar sects.

The trend of religious conversion and transformation is also associated with the process of a portion of Vietnamese people going abroad for work and livelihood. Among them, some individuals have religious affiliations, while others do not follow any specific religion. However, upon returning, some have forsaken their traditional beliefs in favor of new or unfamiliar religions, sects, or religious organizations that propagate within Vietnam.

Changes in religious ritual practices

Most religions, especially those that worship God, express the faith of believers through daily participation in religious ceremonies at religious institutions. This practice serves as both an expression of faith and a deeply ingrained habit in the lives of each believer. However, in recent times and within the context of religious movements, the practice of religious rituals has significantly declined and undergone substantial changes. Attending church services is no longer the sole measure of religious faith. According to survey results from a study conducted at several Catholic churches, in the past, daily church services typically included 1–2 masses, while Saturdays and Sundays consistently maintained 3–4 services. Nowadays, on regular weekdays, there are only 1–2 services (with morning services mainly attended by older individuals). Saturdays and Sundays also have only 2 services. Previously, rain or shine, devout followers attended services, but now even a slight drizzle leads to reduced attendance, with only

the main celebrant and a few officials present. The current state of church services is not significantly different from the pandemic era; the number of attendees during morning services is limited to a few rows of seats. Additionally, most Catholic parishes now organize only one catechism class for children on Sundays, instead of the previous two classes per week, and these classes often take place immediately after services for adolescents, without which attendance would be sparse.

According to the observations of the author at Thang Nghiem Pagoda (on January 4, 2024, according to the lunar calendar of Vietnam), this ancient temple, closely associated with the spiritual life of people in the outskirts of Hanoi, reveals significant changes in ritual practices. Most people visit the temple not primarily for religious ceremonies but rather for photography and sightseeing.

This transformation in religious belief is also evident in the participation in religious rituals at religious institutions (Table 3).

Table 3. Believers' participation in religious rituals at religious institutions

No.	Level of participation	Frequency	
		Number of respondents	%
1	Attend all religious ceremonies	199	44.2
2	Only attend when having free time	121	26.9
3	Occasionally attend	94	20.9
4	Rarely attend	26	5.8
5	Never attend, perform ceremonies by themselves	10	2.2

Source: Data from the sociological survey conducted by the author and the Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee on Religious Affairs in 2022.

The survey results indicate that believers' faith is expressed at varying levels. Simultaneously, the impact of daily life and employment has influenced the participation of believers in religious ceremonies, with a decreasing trend observed, especially in industrial areas.

The fading of religious faith across different generations is also evident. The results of a sociological study involving 450 believers are reflected in Table 4.

According to Vietnamese religious tradition, following a particular faith was often tied to family lineage and household practices, especially within Catholic and Protestant communities. Consequently, religious ceremonies typically involved multiple generations within a family. This practice was both a tradition and an obligation, driven by their own faith. Many parishes and congregations had to organize separate liturgical services for different age groups to align with their themes and study schedules. However, the fundamental composition of attendees at religious ceremonies has undergone significant changes. Nowadays, during religious events, the primary participants are usually the elderly and middle-aged, while the presence of young adults and teenagers is scarce. Bishop Bui Tuan of the Long Xuyen diocese has sarcastically

Table 4. Participation of different generations in religious rituals at religious institutions

No	Generation	Frequency	
		Number of respondents	%
1	Grandparents (older generation)	322	71.6
2	Children (second generation)	100	22.2
3	Grandchildren (third generation)	26	5.8
4	All three generations	2	0.4

Source: Data from the sociological survey conducted by the author and the Institute for Religious Policy Research, Government Committee on Religious Affairs in 2022.

used the terms “tree stump faith” and “wandering faith” to refer to the fact that some individuals attend religious sites but only sit under the tree or wander outside until the ceremony is finished. Our observations at the Church of the Congregation of the Savior at No. 38 Ky Dong Street, Ho Chi Minh City, also reveal a similar trend. Many devotees choose to sit outside the church grounds, citing reasons such as the need to conveniently pick up children from school or attend work commitments.

Furthermore, the current religious landscape reflects diversification of beliefs within families. Numerous Vietnamese households now consist of only one or two members adhering to a particular faith, while others may either follow different religions or do not follow any. For instance, some families have grandparents practicing Buddhism, while their children embrace Catholicism or Protestantism. In some other households, only one family member actively follows a religion, while others neither adhere nor feel pressured by the religious practices of their family members. Mutual respect for differing beliefs prevails.

Changes in believers’ perception of religious practitioners

In general, the lives and education levels of the population, including religious believers, have improved over time. Consequently, perceptions of faith and religious practices have also changed. Notably, believers have become less dependent on their faith in religious officials, and clergy.

One of the differences between religious followers in Vietnam and those in some other countries is the ‘reverence for clergy,’ sometimes bordering on ‘excessive veneration.’ This is especially true for religions where religious rituals depend on clergy members. In the past, followers not only respected clergy during religious activities but also in their daily lives. There was always a certain distance between followers and clergy. Clergy members often asserted their authority over followers, while followers expressed their faith and reverence through diligent religious practice, respectful behavior, and caring for the clergy’s well-being. However, in today’s context of increasing democratic movements, the reverence and obedience towards clergy have noticeably diminished. This change is evident in reduced participation in religious ceremonies, infrequent reception of sacraments, and incomplete adherence to religious rules and prohibitions. For instance, some sacraments related to marriage in

Catholicism and Protestantism are less strictly followed (such as less frequent attendance of rituals post wedding, or no attendance at all, especially when the spouse is of a different faith). Conversely, clergy members now interact more closely with followers.

With the support of social media today, believers have more options when it comes to seeking spiritual guidance and teachings. These options extend beyond national borders, allowing individuals to access religious resources not only within their own country but also from abroad. For instance, some Buddhist practitioners visit temples for religious ceremonies but choose to listen to Dharma talks by Vietnamese monks residing overseas (such as Venerable Thich Phap Hoa, currently in Canada). Alternatively, believers may seek online blessings for their families through ordained clergy. They engage in spiritual practice based on the guidance of teachers abroad, without being solely dependent on or confined to local religious authorities as in the past. This shift also affects the dynamics between believers and religious authorities. Previously, if dissatisfied with a particular religious figure, devotees would remain silent and express minimal dissent. However, today, believers are more assertive in expressing their stance. They may refrain from attending ceremonies conducted by that authority. They avoid participating in activities at religious institutions associated with that figure. In more extreme cases, they openly express their disapproval to fellow believers. Some even submit formal requests to religious organizations for the transfer of that authority elsewhere. Social media platforms are also used to criticize such figures.

Although the reverence for clergy is undergoing shifts and changes in various states, in the spiritual life of Vietnamese followers, clergy members remain indispensable. They play a crucial role in guiding followers to adhere to the authentic traditions of their religion. Therefore, despite a decrease in fervor and reverence, Vietnamese followers still greatly rely on clergy members and religious institutions.

Observations reveal that the trend of transformation in religious faith continues. It partly reflects that religious devotion is no longer as profound as before, and people are easily influenced by economic and practical factors. However, this does not alter a prominent characteristic: the multifaceted spiritual consciousness still shapes the religious life of the Vietnamese.

Conclusion

Research has shown that history consistently demonstrates how religion adapts, evolves, and responds to new social contexts. Within this context, some religions swiftly seek directions to adapt and develop their beliefs and religious practices. However, there are also religions that struggle to keep pace with the changing societal impact, leading to consolidation and preservation of existing practices. Certain religious traditions lag behind broader trends in both spiritual life and religious activities. Vietnam is considered a country with a relatively low proportion of religious followers (around 27 % of the population). However, this community is often characterized by deep-rooted faith and unwavering commitment. Nevertheless, this characteristic primarily holds true for the older generation (aged 60 and above). Among younger followers, there has been a shift

and transformation in various directions: some adhere to specific aspects of their faith while practicing less rigorously or engaging in fewer religious practices; some follow a faith but do not fully believe in it; and some draw from multiple religious traditions, embracing diverse beliefs.

When religious life undergoes changes from the primary beneficiaries (the followers), it raises important issues for religious institutions. This emerging trend requires careful attention and thorough research. Firstly, it means religious institutions and clergy members must adjust their strategies for indoctrination and administration. This adaptation aims to preserve faith, retain followers, and continue the development of religious practices. It also implies the need to innovate religious activities to align with the evolving social context. Secondly, sustaining and developing religious faith becomes challenging if religious institutions and clergy rigidly adhere to outdated methods of indoctrination. Despite Vietnam's policies and laws that respect and guarantee religious freedom, there is a growing disparity between imported and indigenous religions. Additionally, differences persist among religious denominations within the same group across various indicators.

The process of transforming religious beliefs and practices in Vietnam reveals an increasingly symbiotic relationship between religion and society. As society develops, so does religion, and it plays an ever-stronger role in various aspects of social life. International religions such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and Muslim are actively participating in the globalization of religious practices. Religious institutions seize opportunities to expand their influence within the community. This ongoing transformation affects religious faith beyond purely spiritual matters, turning religion into a social entity. Consequently, it has significant implications for policies related to religious freedom, diplomacy, security, and the socio-economic fabric of the nation. Additionally, emerging religious phenomena, groups, and organizations continue to emerge, register activities, and seek official recognition. This diversity in religious expression impacts people's evolving beliefs and practices. However, it also introduces complexities related to maintaining public order and security, especially concerning individual choices of faith.

Despite the changing trends in religion in Vietnam, the direction they take, and the position they hold in relation to national security, the goal remains to ensure unity among all ethnic groups. It involves eliminating and countering the schemes and tactics of hostile forces that exploit faith and religious practices to undermine the country. Throughout history, defending the nation against invaders and the lessons learned from colonial slavery have deeply ingrained trust in every Vietnamese, regardless of their religious beliefs.

The evolving trends and transformations in religious faith and practices also pose challenges in building a legal state in Vietnam. From a deeper perspective, religion is not merely a cultural or spiritual phenomenon; it is also a social reality. Therefore, addressing misconceptions about the nature and role of religion is essential [Đỗ Quang Hưng 2016: 116]. Additionally, effective religious work requires attention from authorities at all levels. Analyzing the current situation and accurately forecasting trends and changes is crucial for policy-making, law enforcement, and proactive measures to safeguard religious freedom and navigate the impact of new factors.

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Дата поступления статьи: 08.06.2024

Дата поступления в переработанном виде: 15.09.2024

Принята к печати: 20.09.2024

Received: June 8, 2024

Received in revised form: September 15, 2024

Accepted: September 20, 2024