

ACHIEVEMENT OF RELIGIOUS RESOURCES' PROMOTION IN VIETNAM

***Abstract:** Religions in Vietnam have an abundant resources both in terms of spiritual and material life. In recent years, the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam have had the right guidelines and policies to promote religious resources to the socio-economic development of the country and to achieve certain successes. The role of religion is promoted in a number of areas such as building a political, cultural, and social life, ethical education, lifestyle, and environmental protection activities.*

***Keywords:** Resources; religion; Vietnam.*

Introduction

Resources consist of the totality of material and spiritual forces that are used or can be used for social development purposes. According to such understanding, religious resources are the sum total of material and spiritual forces of religion that have been and can be used for socio-economic development. Currently, in Vietnam, there are about 26,109,033 religious followers, accounting for twenty seven percent of the country's population with forty three organizations and sixteen religions which have been recognized and granted operation registration by the State, and 55,710 dignitaries, 145,721 assistants for

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dignitaries, 29,396 places of worship¹. With such a large number of followers, dignitaries, assistants for dignitaries and worship facilities, religions in Vietnam have fairly large material and spiritual resources that can be exploited and promoted.

When referring to the resources of religion, it is necessary to refer to the spiritual and intellectual resources, which are the cultural and moral values crystallized by the wisdom of mankind over thousands of years of history and expressed through religious thought and doctrine. It can be said that they are values such as compassion, anattā or anātman (non-self), altruism of Buddhism; charity, loving people of Catholicism and Protestantism, etc... Besides, there are intellectual resources of dignitaries, monks, and religious intellectuals. Many religious intellectuals in Vietnam have knowledge about religious thought and a high level of education. They are pioneers who can apply cultural values, and religious ethics to serve society and orient and lead followers to promote the humanistic values of religion in life.

The material resources of religions are firstly human resources (religious human resources). In Vietnam, the resources are quite abundant. With more than twenty six million followers, the majority of them have good political attitudes, are patriotic, and strictly obey the provisions of religions and the laws of the State. They are the labor force contributing their best to the construction, protection, and development of the country. Besides, with nearly 30,000 places of worship spread across the country, religions have been contributing to enriching the country's visible culture. This resource can serve well for the process of economic and cultural development. On the other hand, the financial sources among religious believers can be

exploited and promoted for socio-economic development to help to solve social problems such as education, health, social security, and charity.

In the Doi Moi period, the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam gradually realized religious values and roles since had guidelines and policies to promote the religious potential for the socio-economic development of the country. Resolution No. 24/NQ-TW dated October 16, 1990, the Party affirmed that Religious ethics has many things suitable for the construction of a new society.² In many subsequent documents, the Party advocates respecting and promoting the good cultural and moral values of religion.³ Recently, Directive No. 18/CT-TW dated January 10, 2018, considered religion as a social resource. The aforementioned guidelines have been timely institutionalized into legal provisions, which have been expressed through decrees, ordinances, and the Law on Belief and Religion.

Achievements of promoting religious resources in Vietnam in recent years

In practice, the Party, the State, the Fatherland Front, and socio-political organizations have gradually implemented policies of promoting good cultural and moral values of religions in particular, the role and resources of religions in general to serve the country's socio-economic development. The State's achievements in promoting the resources of religion over the past time can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, the appearance of religious culture flourished, contributing to enriching the national culture, and increasing the intellectual potential for religion and the country.

In recent years, the number of recognized religious organizations has increased along with the increase of

dignitaries, assistants of dignitaries, monks, believers, and worship facilities, training establishments. The increasing of well-trained religious dignitaries in Vietnam meets the operational needs of religious organizations and intellectual resources' contributions to the country.

Bibles, scriptures, and religious publications are increasingly diverse. Every year, there are thousands of publications in many languages such as Vietnamese, English, and the languages of some ethnic minorities. They provide an abundant amount of knowledge about the content and ideology of religions and facilitate the cultivation of dignitaries, monks, and religious followers.

Many conferences of religious organizations such as *Buddhism in the Mekong region: History and development* (Phật giáo vùng Mekong: Lịch sử và phát triển, 2015); *The harmony between Buddhism and cultures in Southeast Asia* (Mối giao hòa giữa Phật giáo và văn hóa ở Đông Nam Á, 2017), *Catholics and environmental protection* (Người Công giáo với vấn đề bảo vệ môi trường, 2015), *400 years of formation and development of Quoc Ngu in the history of evangelization in Vietnam* (400 năm hình thành và phát triển chữ Quốc ngữ trong lịch sử loan báo Tin Mừng tại Việt Nam, 2019) were successfully held contributing to clarifying the religious roles and contributions to the nation, consolidating and promoting traditional values, and raising the society's awareness of the values of religious culture and national culture.

Secondly, the attitude and political consciousness of organizations, dignitaries, monks, and religious believers have been increasingly enhanced, and believers of all religions have

well performed their responsibilities and the obligations of citizens to the country.

Most of the major religions in Vietnam have determined the direction of their activities in association with the nation. Vietnam Buddhist Shanga with the motto: *Dharma, Nation and Socialism* (Đạo pháp, Dân tộc và Chủ nghĩa xã hội). Catholic Church with the motto: *Living the gospel in the heart of the nation to serve the happiness of the compatriots* (Sống phúc âm giữa lòng dân tộc để phục vụ hạnh phúc của đồng bào). Protestant denominations with religious practices such as *Living the gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland and the nation* (Sống phúc âm, phụng sự Thiên chúa, phục vụ Tổ quốc và dân tộc) of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South); *Loving God, Loving Country* (Kính Chúa Yêu nước) of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North); Caodaism with the motto: *Glorious nation, bright religion* (Nước vinh, Đạo sáng); Hoa Hao Buddhism has the motto: *Reviving the religion, affiliating with the nation, in accordance with the State's policies and laws, contributing to the construction and defense of the Fatherland*. It can be said that the religious practice guidelines of religious organizations clearly define two propositions as follows: to well implement the religious ideology and comply with the laws of the State, and to affiliate with the nation.

The aforementioned guidelines have been concretized into practical actions in building religion and life. Many dignitaries, monks, and religious believers have actively participated in socio-political organizations and contributed their wisdom and efforts to serve the country. They are typical examples of leading the activities of believers' communities. The number of dignitaries, monks, and religious believers participating in

activities of the Party, government, and socio-political organizations is increasing. It shows political attitudes and consciousness toward the country and the regime. For example, in the Red River Delta, within eight years (from 2005 to 2012) Party committees have admitted 2,806 religious followers to the Party, including 2,801 followers, two assistants of dignitaries, three dignitaries.⁴ And 1,187 party members were religious followers (of which, 1,177 believers, and ten assistants of dignitaries in Hai Hau district, Nam Dinh province, by the end of 2019.⁵ In general, party members who were religious followers of party organizations across the country have promoted their pioneering, leading roles of mass mobilization, especially the religious masses in order to well obey the policies and guidelines of the Party and State and well implement patriotic emulation movements.

Many dignitaries, assistants of dignitaries religious believers participating in elected bodies (National Assembly, People's Councils at all levels) have made effective contributions to the socio-economic development of the country. Many religious organizations and individuals who are members of the Vietnam Fatherland Front have actively acted as a bridge to unite religious believers with the people of the country, as well as, actively contributed ideas for policy development, and laws and supervise the implementation of policies and laws of the State. In addition, religious dignitaries and monks also actively participate in international forums and dialogues about the situation of religious freedom in Vietnam, contributing to religious foreign affairs. Citizen consciousness and social consensus among religious compatriots are also increasingly enhanced. The majority of religious followers in Vietnam strictly abide by the

guidelines, policies, and laws of the Party and State, well implement the responsibilities of believers and citizens' obligations to the Fatherland.

Thirdly, dignitaries and monks actively participated in the education of morality, personality, and a good lifestyle for the community of believers.

With the support and favors from the State, over the years, many dignitaries, monks, and religious organizations have actively promoted cultural values, and religious ethics in order to educate morality contributing to perfecting the personality of believers. Through the activities of associations and retreats, dignitaries, and monks have preached religious moral values and guided followers to apply them in life. In addition to teaching ethical and religious content, many dignitaries and monks also focus on life skills education for believers, especially young people.⁶

Some dignitaries and monks also hold lectures in prisons with the desire to spread religious ethics to prisoners.⁷ The aforementioned activities of religions maintain and spread faith and build personalities according to the standards of each religion. These activities have contributed to building good personalities, and good people in society.

Fourthly, religious organizations and dignitaries actively create material resources for religious activities and social-oriented activities. Religious followers actively developed the economy, contributing to enriching themselves, their families, and the country.

In the new context, religions in Vietnam are also interested and proactive in creating funds for religious activities and social

services. In addition to the main funding source contributed by the believer community, over the past years, organizations, individuals, dignitaries, and religious monks in Vietnam have participated in economic activities such as production activities (growing rice, medicinal plants, industrial plants, fresh vegetables, making soy sauce, handicrafts); spiritual services such as prayers, offering Masses; organize business activities.⁸

The aforementioned activities have partly mobilized capital, and human and financial resources of religions, to create a certain source of income, helping organizations and individuals to maintain their lives towards social welfare activities for the community.

Along with being interested in creating revenue for organizations and individuals, some religious dignitaries and monks also find directions for the economic development of believers. For example, some Khmer monks went to Thailand to learn production experiences, select plant varieties, and help Khmer people to develop production; some pastors and missionaries in the Central Highlands and Northern mountainous areas have made efforts to get out of poverty and help believers to apply science and technology to production and transform production models.

Religious followers also actively responded to the guidelines of the Party and the State, making efforts to enrich themselves, their families, and the country. Many localities in ethnic minority areas have well-implemented economic restructuring and applied scientific and technological achievements to production to improve labor productivity. Hundreds of economic development models of believers suitable to local conditions have appeared in many provinces and cities across the country. Many believers'

communities have risen out of poverty and become advanced examples. Many typical examples of religious believers in productive labor have been commended and rewarded. The efforts of people of all religions not only contribute to changing the economic life of individuals and families but also change life in religious areas.

Fifth, dignitaries, monks, and religious followers actively participated in the movement to build cultural life and maintain security and social order.

Religious organizations have responded and creatively applied the movement *Building a cultural life* (Xây dựng đời sống văn hóa) launched by the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in association with the characteristics of each religion, forming movements such as Building advanced parishes, exemplary Catholic families (Xây dựng xứ, họ tiên tiến, gia đình Công giáo gương mẫu). Many religious followers enthusiastically responded to movements to prevent crime, drugs, and social evils, to build a new lifestyle in weddings, funerals, and festivals, to build and implement conventions and conventions of villages and residential areas, to build new countryside, etc... Many dignitaries and monks have flexibly applied the religious commandments to orient believers' activities to benefit the socio-economic development of the country.⁹

In many localities with a large number of religious compatriots, models of security have been formed such as the youth volunteer team (My Hung parish, Chon Thanh district, Binh Phuoc province); a club "Families without relatives violate the law" (Long Dien parish, Phuoc Long district, Binh Phuoc province). Some religious organizations signed regulations on

coordination with the authorities to ensure security in religious areas such as the Solidarity association of patriotic monks and nuns of Theravada Buddhism in Can Tho, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu, etc.. The majority of dignitaries, and assistants of dignitaries of different religions also actively integrated the Party and State's guidelines and policies in lectures and religious activities so believers firmly grasp the guidelines and policies and are vigilant against activities that take advantage of religion to destroy the country.

Sixthly, religious organizations and dignitaries actively responded to the environmental protection towards the sustainable development of the country.

At present, the environment is seriously threatened. Religions in Vietnam also identify the responsibility to join hands with the State in environmental protection. In 2015, leaders of forty organizations belonging to fourteen religions in Vietnam together with the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment signed a Program on environmental protection and response to climate change the period from 2015 to 2020.

Religions in Vietnam actively built action plans, conveyed messages, and mobilized dignitaries and followers to commit to the implementation. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has the message *Each person by practical action commits to environmental protection, which is also the protection of themselves. Let's make our surroundings greener, cleaner, and more beautiful* (Mỗi người bằng hành động thiết thực, cam kết bảo vệ môi trường bền vững, đó cũng là sự bảo vệ chính mình. Hãy cùng nhau làm cho môi trường xung quanh chúng ta xanh

hơn, sạch hơn, và đẹp hơn). The Catholic Church in Vietnam called on followers: *Vietnamese patriots, let's join together, with all our hearts, minds, wills, strength, and determination to contribute to saving the tragic situation of the Earth before it's too late* (Những người Việt Nam yêu nước hãy cùng nhau, bằng tất cả trái tim, khối óc, bằng ý chí, bằng sức lực, quyết tâm góp sức để cứu vãn tình trạng bi đát của trái đất này trước khi quá muộn). The Vietnamese Protestant communities conveyed the message that *Let's join hands, unite, and take practical action to protect the living environment* (Tất cả hãy chung sức, đồng lòng, hành động thiết thực để bảo vệ môi trường sống).

At present, there are 1,014 environmental protection models have been formed by religious organizations over the country. They are effective models in practice such as *Building a cultural and civilized lifestyle, and limiting the use of votive paper in Buddhist worship facilities* (Xây dựng nếp sống văn hóa, văn minh, hạn chế việc sử dụng vàng mã trong các cơ sở thờ tự) in Hai Ba Trung, and Soc Son district, Hanoi city; *Safe - bright - green - clean - beautiful parish* (Giáo xứ an toàn - sáng - xanh - sạch - đẹp) of Thanh Mau parish, ward 7, Bao Loc city, Lam Dong province; *Residential area to protect the environment and respond to climate change* (Khu dân cư bảo vệ môi trường, ứng phó với biến đổi khí hậu) of Brahmanism's followers in Binh Thuan province; *Waste treatment, construction of incinerators, planting of trees, fire extinguishers* (Xử lý rác thải, xây dựng lò đốt rác, trồng cây xanh, bình chữa cháy) in Hao Hoa pagoda of Hoa Hao Buddhist Executive Board, in Tan Loc ward, Thot Not district, Can Tho province.

These activities have gradually contributed to changing the awareness, attitude, and behavior of dignitaries and believers in

particular and the society in general with regard to environmental protection and response to climate change towards the sustainable development of the country.

Seventhly, religious organizations, dignitaries, monks, and believers actively participated in the process of education, health care, and charity.

The socio-cultural field is a strength of religions. This resource of religion in Vietnam is gradually being promoted effectively in many localities across the country. In the field of education, religions contribute mainly to preschool, vocational, and literacy education. By October 2014, the whole country had 269 kindergartens and 905 classes established by religious organizations and believers in thirty nine provinces and cities, mobilizing about 125,594 children to go to these classes.¹⁰

Most of the preschool classes of religious institutions ensured the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Training such as teachers and managers were trained, strictly implement the preschool educational program; schools and classrooms, equipment, school supplies, toys, the kitchen, and medical room, a toilet were guaranteed according to regulations. Some Catholic and Buddhist organizations have also been actively training personnel to prepare long-term and methodical plans for broader participation in the field of preschool education.¹¹

In the field of vocational training, religions have initially participated. From the small, odd, and spontaneous vocational training centers of Buddhism and Catholicism in the past, vocational schools have been formed in a fairly methodical manner. By February 2017, the country has twelve vocational schools and centers established and maintained by religious

organizations,¹² the most significant of which was the Peace College (Cao đẳng Nghề Hòa Bình) of Catholicism.¹³

In general, vocational training institutions of religious organizations had the purpose of non-profit operations, aimed at vocational training in association with moral education, and labor skills. Thousands of laborers who received vocational training at religious establishments have had jobs and stable incomes, contributing to solving difficulties for people and sharing vocational training of the State.

Besides, religions also actively and effectively participated in the fields of health, social security, and humanitarian charity. Most religions have clinics, free medical consultations, and medicine distribution for hundreds of thousands of patients each year. In addition, by 2017, there were 113 social support establishments with 2,600 employees of religious organizations nationwide that took care of 11,800 people.¹⁴ Some religious organizations have been organizing effective models of counseling and support for HIV/AIDS people, and drug addiction treatment of Buddhism and Protestantism in Hanoi, Hue, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City.

Moreover, dignitaries, monks, and believers also actively participated in gratitude, and charity activities such as visiting, sharing, and encouraging meritorious people; establishing talent promotion funds, funds to support natural disasters, the movement of “cooking pot for the poor” in hospitals, blood and organ donation; patient transport; contributed to building schools, clinics, water wells, toilets for the poor, etc. Every year, people of all religions have joined hands to contribute hundreds of billions of dong to charity and humanitarian activities.

Eighthly, religious scenic spots have become one of the strengths of tourist economic development of many localities.

Currently, religions in Vietnam have 29,396 places of worship spread across many regions of the country, many of which are famous scenic spots. They are huge potential resources for socio-economic development. In recent years, many localities have taken advantage of religious landscapes for tourism such as the Perfume Pagoda (Chùa Hương) in Hanoi city; Bai Dinh pagoda, Phat Diem stone church in Ninh Binh province; Tam Chuc pagoda in Ha Nam province; the complex of Yen Tu pagoda in Quang Ninh province; the complex of Bo Da pagoda, Vinh Nghiem pagoda and the western slope of Yen Tu in Bac Giang province; pagodas and towers of Khmer Theravada Buddhism in Soc Trang province, etc..

The potential source for the economic development of spiritual tourism associated with religious places of worship in Vietnam has only been initially exploited. These values, if properly exploited and promoted, will make a great contribution to the tourist economic development, as well as, contribute to preserving the traditional culture of the nation.

Conclusion

It can be said that, over the years, with the right guidelines and policies and the implementation of these guidelines and policies in practice, the Party and the State of Vietnam have achieved many achievements in promoting religious resources to serve the socio-economic development of the country. The potential of religion in Vietnam is abundant, so it is necessary to continue to improve policies and implement policies in order to make the most of this resource for the sustainable development of the country in the near future. /.

NOTES:

- 1 Data from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs until the beginning of 2020.
- 2 Bộ Chính trị, *Nghị quyết 24/NQ-TW, ngày 16/10/1990 về Tăng cường công tác tôn giáo trong tình hình mới.* (Politburo, *Resolution 24/NQ-TW, October 16, 1990 on Strengthening religious affairs in the new situation*).
- 3 Chỉ thị 37/CT của Bộ Chính trị ngày 2/7/1998 về công tác tôn giáo trong tình hình mới; Nghị quyết Hội nghị lần thứ 5 Ban Chấp hành Trung ương khóa VIII (1999); Nghị quyết Hội nghị Trung ương lần thứ 7, Ban Chấp hành Trung ương khóa IX; Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ X, Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XI, Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XII. (Directive 37/CT of the Politburo dated 2/7/1998 on religious affairs in the new situation; Resolution of the 5th Conference of the 8th Central Committee (1999); Resolution of the 7th Central Conference, IXth Central Committee; Documents of the 10th National Congress of Deputies, Documents of the 11th National Congress of Deputies, Documents of the 12th National Congress of Deputies,...)
- 4 Lê Văn Lợi (2014), Công tác phát triển đảng viên là người có đạo ở các tỉnh Đồng bằng Sông Hồng (The work of developing party members who are religious followers in the provinces of the Red River Delta), *Lý luận chính trị*, số 11.
- 5 <http://baonamdinh.vn/channel/5084/201911/dang-bo-hai-hau-quan-tam-phat-trien-dang-trong-dong-bao-co-dao-2534168/index.htm>
- 6 Pre-marital education courses in Catholicism help young people prepare the best mentality to enter family life; The summer retreats of Buddhism, clubs of Buddhist families, and Buddhist youth educated life skills for young people.
- 7 Venerable Thich Nhat Tu gave lectures at Giong Trom prisons (Ben Tre), Phu Son (Thai Nguyen), etc., which were well received by prisoners, initially creating positive social effects.
- 8 Many religious places of worship have shops selling cultural products, and religious supplies. For example, Buddhism has

businesses such as Thien Tai Joint Stock Company, Ngoc Viet Investment Joint Stock Company, Hoa Thien Tourism Company, Bach Loc Tho Company, Sen Viet Buddhist Film and Documentation Center with many vegetarian restaurants, distribution of medicinal herbs, Export- Import scriptures, religious supplies, traveling, etc.

- 9 For example, Catholic priests in Nam Dinh, Hai Duong, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, etc. have flexibly applied the religious commandments in preaching to believers to limit the birth rate in many parishes. Priests in Thai Binh, Nam Dinh have made efforts to propagate and mobilize believers to contribute to reducing the sex ratio imbalance of newborns in the Catholic community.
- 10 <http://baochinhphu.vn/Tin-noi-bat/Cac-ton-giao-tich-cuc-tham-gia-phan-trien-giao-duc-mam-non/212996.vgp>
- 11 The Catholic Church and the Buddhist Sangha have been affiliated with the Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy to open training courses for the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education for nuns.
- 12 <http://dangcongsan.vn/thoi-su/phan-huy-vai-tro-cua-cac-ton-giao-tham-gia-hoat-dong-bao-tro-xa-hoi-va-day-nghe-427975.html>
- 13 The predecessor of Hoa Binh Vocational College is a Vocational Intermediate School affiliated with the Bishop's Palace of Xuan Loc Diocese, established in 2008, and officially operated in 2012, training professions such as industrial sewing, accounting, tourism, information technology, and carpentry. In 2017, the school was upgraded to a College. Currently, the School trains workers at two levels: intermediate and college with dozens of different industries and occupations.
- 14 <http://dangcongsan.vn/thoi-su/phan-huy-vai-tro-cua-cac-ton-giao-tham-gia-hoat-dong-bao-tro-xa-hoi-va-day-nghe-427975.html>

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4. <http://dangcongsan.vn/thoi-su/phat-huy-vai-tro-cua-cac-ton-giao-tham-gia-hoat-dong-bao-tro-xa-hoi-va-day-nghe-427975.html>
5. <http://dangcongsan.vn/thoi-su/phat-huy-vai-tro-cua-cac-ton-giao-tham-gia-hoat-dong-bao-tro-xa-hoi-va-day-nghe-427975.html>
6. <http://baochinhphu.vn/Tin-noi-bat/Cac-ton-giao-tich-cuc-tham-gia-phat-trien-giao-duc-mam-non/212996.vgp>
7. <http://baonamdinh.vn/channel/5084/201911/dang-bo-hai-hau-quan-tam-phat-trien-dang-trong-dong-bao-co-dao-2534168/index.htm>