

## DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

VĂN LỢI, LÊ. *The Influence of Religious Culture in Vietnam's Present Spiritual Life*

*Major: dialectical materialism and historical materialism*

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In a multi-religious country like Vietnam in which a huge number of people practice religion, it is important to form and implement a good policy on religions. Such policy not only has direct impact on the legal rights and religious demands of the people but also has great influence on the political, economic and social situation of Vietnam.

For this reason, the Communist Party of Vietnam has, along with implementing the comprehensive renewal process of our country, changed its opinion and attitude toward religion and religious policy. In regard to religion, the party works under the motto “promoting the cultural and moral value of religion.”

To carry out this policy, it is necessary to investigate many questions regarding religion as well as the relationship between religion, culture and development. Studying the culture of religion to discover suitable solutions for promoting the positive influence of religious culture in the process of developing the spiritual life of a society is considered to be essential, both in theory and in reality. Therefore, Lê Văn Lợi chose the subject “the influence of religious culture in Vietnam's present spiritual life” for his thesis.

The thesis consists of the following 3 chapters:

Chapter I: *Religious culture and the characteristics of the religious culture of Vietnam at the present time*, with general definitions of “culture,” “religion” and “religious culture,” analyzing the features of religious culture in present-day Vietnam.

According to the author, “religious culture is a system which summarizes and points out the cultural nature of the human and is subjected to religious belief. Through this it also plays the role of “humanizing nature, socializing humans and moralizing society” (pg. 46). Religious culture places value on knowledge, art, morality, lifestyle, customs and habits, and festivals. Religious culture is constructed by material and nonmaterial cultural values. In addition, its structure includes many parts in addition to a main core of religious belief. With this kind of structure, cultural religious values are arranged around the religious outlooks in a certain order.

Present-day religious culture in Vietnam has 4 main characteristics:

- It has a diverse value system.
- It displays more interrelation, harmony, and accomodation between various cultural values than it does elimination of particular groups.
- It is one of many important parts of national culture but is not the primary one.

- It is influenced by the advanced Vietnamese culture embedded in national identity.

These features are the primary factors that determine the quality and level of the influence of religious culture on the spiritual life of present-day society in Viet Nam.

Chapter 2: *The influence of religious culture on some main fields of the spiritual life of present-day Vietnamese society* (pg. 68-152). In this chapter, the author concentrates on analyzing the influence of religious culture on the spiritual life of society in the following areas: political ideas, morality, lifestyle, and art.

*Political ideas:* He points out that the present influence of religion is not as strong as it was in traditional society, but that it still contributes some spiritual values and affects its adherents politically. First, religious culture generates some good political and spiritual values. Values like patriotism, humanism, and solidarity, which all rise from religion, are “cultural material” and can develop the ideals of Socialism and Communism. Second, the significant values of religion help to create a favorable condition in which the main political thoughts expand into social life and help orient the society. Religious culture also creates a “solvent” through which values of the ideological system spread into the spiritual life and consciousness of the followers, serving as a barrier against non-native, outside ideas and influence. The third impact is, unlike the others, a negative one. Religious culture can lead its followers to a unrealistic world and

advise people to live a self-satisfying life, which creates an idea that “patriotism is associated with those faithful to religion.” In addition, religious solidarity is often limited to the members of a particular religion.

*Morality and lifestyle:* Religious culture adds some values to traditional morality and lifestyle, including the inclination to be good, merciful, non-egotistic, altruistic, and humane. It helps to protect and bring into play the good values of traditional morality and lifestyle. The moral values and lifestyles of many ethnicities are absorbed and protected by religion; they inspire moral religious values and a moral lifestyle, which are embedded deeply into Vietnam’s culture. In the renewal process, religious culture contributes to improving the moral tradition of the nation through humane and charitable activities. It also strengthens morality and a beautiful, excellent lifestyle. The humanitarian thought of religious culture, along with its religious rules and standards, greatly influences its followers’ awareness encourages them to maintain their families’ traditional lifestyles and to unite with the community. However, in addition to its positive influences, religious culture has one negative effect on moral lifestyle: It may consist of outdated moral standards which do not suit the morality and lifestyle of present-day society. Religious morality sometimes encourages its followers to seek personal peace and to suffer silently rather than initiating change. These factors can result in reclusive, passive people who depend on supernatural powers for rescue.

*The arts:* Religious culture can help to maintain and improve traditional artistic values and make national art more profound. At present, religious art still exists. First, it plays a role in past heritage and contributes many national artistic values. Religious culture contributes to all types of national art including architecture, sculpture, literature and music. Religious culture has increasingly influenced the national arts and has contributed to their development. In the country's time of renewal, the influence of religious culture on national art has actually grown more significant, rather than decreasing. Its influence is apparent in the many religious masterpieces, as well as in the participation of artists who practice religion.

Based on his analysis of the negative and positive influences of religious culture on spiritual life in the previous chapters, in chapter 3 the author suggests some rules and methods that aim to take advantage of and improve the positive influences of the spiritual life of Vietnam's present society (pg. 153-198).

In order to take advantage of and improve the positive impacts of religious culture on the present spiritual life in Vietnam, the author suggests that we need focus on the role of religion in social life. We cannot be aware of and appreciate the influence of religious culture on social life if we do not understand the social nature, origin and role of religion. In addition to this, we have to solve the problems rising from its negative influences. This rule originates from the dialectical

relationship between "building" and "apposing" in the process of developing the social spiritual life. Moreover, we need to associate it with the process of socio-economic development. In other words, we need to put it into the context of the nation's socio-economic conditions, concentrating on developing the economy while directing the social spiritual life toward the economic and social development target.

Accordingly, the author suggests certain solutions as follows:

- To propagandize and educate the general population about Marxism in an active manner in order to change societal awareness about religious culture.
- To perfect mechanisms of improving the good values of religion.
- To enhance the cooperation between agencies in charge of religion and agencies in charge of party culture and the government.
- To incorporate the Vietnamese Fatherland Front and the people's literature and art organizations as they relate to religious culture.
- To overcome the issues rising from religious activities and fight against activities that exploit religion for negative aims.
- To invest suitably in and use effective methods to improve the material and spiritual lives of followers.

The thesis was defended successfully in 2008 at The National Board of Thesis Evaluation, held at the Hồ Chí Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration.

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