Respect, Preserve, Protect Promote Cultural Values of Religious Festivals in Vietnam Today

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Abstract In the process of renewing the country, the religious festivals in Vietnam are increasing in terms of quantity and quality. However, the reality of religious beliefs and festivals in Vietnam are complicated by the situation of crowded gathering, even overloading at the places of worship, abusing services under the market mechanism, selling holy gods, taking advantage of the festival of beliefs, religions and anti-religious propaganda. From there, it is necessary to propagate and educate people as the subject of religious festivals, religion, to comply with the doctrine, canon law, laws of the State; mobilize dignitaries and religious organizations to uphold the spirit and observe the guiding principles of religion, ensuring safety for religious and religious festivals. This article focuses on 2 topics: 1. Respect and preserve cultural values in Vietnamese religious and ritual festivals; 2. The complex situation of religious festivals today and some suggestions as a contribution to protect and promote cultural values of ritual and religious festivals today.

Keywords: beliefs, religion, festivals, Vietnam, cultural values


1. Introduction

Vietnam is one country which is multiethnic, multi faith, religious. Also, Vietnam is always rich in traditions of being united and patriotic, and always retaining Vietnamese cultural identity. These values are molded through such a process of nation building and defending to meet the spiritual needs of the people. It has passed through generations and become such a precious cultural heritage which has been a spiritual foundation for Vietnamese people and a driving force for the development of society today. Spiritual culture is leveled up to the top in the sacred moment of the festivals which bear the nature of national culture matching with the moral code: When drinking water, think of its source. In the context of the market economy and integrity, these heritages can be vibrantly expressed in various forms including religious and ritual festivals. However, there is a risk that they can be transformed into many uncontrollably complicated ways.

Due to the interference and acculturation of the national culture with the international culture, the international religion, when introduced into Vietnam, had the interference, acculturation, and the religious festival have been in harmony with Vietnamese national religious festival. The Second Vatican Council gave an orientation to adapt to the times and integrate into the national culture. Pastor Tran Tam Tinh, in his book of the Cross and the sword, wrote: "We want to do what Vatican II has declared:" What is in the nation’s own cultural ritual, the activity of the Church not to destroy, but to be healthy, uplifting and perfecting, in order to glorify God and the pursuit of happiness for man” [1].

The Sino-Vietnamese Buddhist Dictionary [2], definite ceremony and festival elements. The Vietnam Cultural Heritage Association and the Government Committee for Religious Affairs organized a scientific seminar on "Cultural and religious issues and advice on the protection of religious heritage in Vietnam” [3]. Ta Quoc Khanh who wrote the book "The temple worships Four Holy Patriarchs in the Northern Delta" has shown to combine worship "Pre-Buddha, post-Saint” [4]. Trinh Huu Son, Mai Quang Hien wrote an article “Keeping the peace in the festival season”, which pointed out the status and limitations of ensuring festival safety, recommending solutions and models, especially self-governance, training and fostering "self-governing" forces in the community. population, with the support of the government in the religious festivals [5]. In fact, due to many approaches, the value of religious festivals, as well as the method and model of managing festive activities, is evaluated differently.

This paper is developed based on a number of valuable documents including Ho Chi Minh Complete Ep.6; Speeches from training courses of battlefield practices, People Newspaper August 31, 1962 of Ho Chi Minh; Famous pagodas in Vietnam of Vo Van Tuong ...
2. Content

2.1. Respect and Preserve Cultural Values in Ritual and Religious Festivals in Vietnam

According to the Sanskrit Buddhist Dictionary, the reverent element is expressed as a solemn ritual. And festival means opening, gathering [1] The Law on Beliefs and Religions of Vietnam (2016) clearly states: "The belief festival is a collective religious activity organized according to traditional rituals to meet the spiritual needs of the community" (article 2). A religious festival, in fact, is a religious activity, expressed on all three sides: evangelism; religious activities and activities of religious organization management. According to statistics from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2009, Vietnam had 7,966 festivals; including 7,039 folk festivals (88.36%), 332 historical festivals (4.16%), 544 religious festivals (6.28%), 41 festivals imported from abroad (accounting for 0.12%), the rest is other festivals (accounting for 0.5%) [6]. Currently, there are about 9000 festivals of all kinds nationwide. The festival has contributed to attracting a large number of domestic and foreign tourists. In 2016, the number of international tourists visiting Vietnam reached 10 million, increasing by 4.3 times compared to 2001; domestic tourists reached 62 million, an increase of 5.3 times compared to 2001; Direct contribution is estimated at 6.8% of GDP. Generally, in 2018 international tourists to Vietnam reached 15,497,791 arrivals, an increase of nearly 20% compared to 2017 [7].

The traditional festivals with certain ritual features take up the larger proportion. Religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Caodaism, Hoa Hao have attracted many believers from various places with many different celebrations. Among those, there are annual festivals, special festivals (jubilee), three-month festivals (Huong Pagoda, Bai Dinh Pagoda), from many levels: village festivals, National Recognition Festivals (Yen Tu, Perfume Pagoda)...

There are a number of valuable attributes of the religious and ritual festivals in Vietnam:

Firstly, ritual and religious festivals express both the right of free religions and beliefs of Vietnamese and traditional values of nation culture. Festivals include two aspects: Ceremony and Celebration (Party). The part of ceremony is highly appreciated with unique nature because it aims to the sacred, which has met the legitimately spiritual needs of a large group of people.

The nature of these festivals belongs to the intangible culture. Ritual and religious festivals are the means through which provide people with cultural and moral values. The people participating festival always bear in mind to follow the teachings of the sages.

Ho Chi Minh wrote: "Jesus taught: Morality is humane. Shakyamuni taught: Morality is compassion" [8]. Spiritual culture is expressed and leveled up to the peaks of the sacred moment of the ceremony, which authentically demonstrates the freedom of belief of the people nowadays. On the other hand, the party part of the religious festivals have national cultural identity with the principle "When drinking water, think of its source" of the nation.

Spring is the holiday season when People go on pilgrimage to pray for national security, pray for happiness, and wish each other good luck. The party part is more lively due to the participation of the masses. The Catholic Church usually celebrates Holy Day and solemn Holy Year [9].

The ceremony Opening of Bai Dinh Pagoda on the 6th of Tet 2011 attracted 360,000 visitors. On the first day of the festival, it is estimated that 60,000 people go to the pilgrimage [10].

Bai Dinh pagoda also successfully celebrated the Vesak - International Buddha Ceremony. In Yen Tu Pagoda, the Zen school of Truc Lam and the philosophy of Buddhism was perceived through the wisdom of the perspicacious king who ruled one of the most glorious dynasties in the history of the Tran Dynasty, which created a Buddhist line of Vietnam –Truc Lam Yen Tu Meditation.

It has survived 700 years of monuments and cultural activities that appeared both complementary and enrich the Buddhism, contributing actively to the religious and cultural life of the Vietnamese people.

Many religious festivals have a convergence of people, including believers and people from all the corners. There was a sentence in Old folk songs: "Hundred years of practicing the religion / Not going to Yen Tu means not achieving the successful result. "Unmarried ladies remember the Cac Co cave, unmarried man remember Thay Pagoda’s Festival". The water rice culture in the Red River Delta cannot help but mention the pagoda worshipping of the Patriarchs, typically the Four Holy Patriarchs, which are respected by the Ly Dynasty, such as worshipping Tu Dao Hanh (at Thay Pagoda, Hanoi), worshipping Duong Khong Lo (Chua Keo, Thai Binh), worships Nguyen Giac Hai (Ly Quoc Su Pagoda, Hanoi), and worships Quoc Nguyen Minh Khong (Gia Vien, Ninh Binh; Trang and Hai Duong pagodas) [4].

Secondly, the legacy value of every religious festival is always attached to one worshipping place, large cultural space, with the landscapes, historical relics, which makes the "brand" of the festivals; simultaneously associated with the space of precious local tangible culture.

The intangible part of religious festivals do not stand out from physical institutions such as festive space (worshipping place), groups (carols, trumpets, drums, gongs, chongs, etc.) and other modes of performance (carry the offerings, attend a séance in Holy Mother’s Celebration). Here, it is hard to tell off between the intangible and tangible.

Bai Dinh Pagoda Festival have has more records than the other temples in Vietnam. The Perfume Pagoda, Thay Pagoda, Bai Dinh Pagoda, Yen Tu Pagoda, Con Son Pagoda, Non Nuoc Pagoda... are all associated with beautiful and poetic sights. Holy Feast at Phat Diem Cathedral is a unique stone church with Oriental architecture. Mia pagoda has 278 statues, Tram Gian Pagoda in Ha Tay (now Hanoi) has 153 statues.

Huong Pagoda was built in the post-Le Dynasty with over a hundred pagodas, among which is highlighted Huong Tich.

Many places of worship and festivals are recognized as national cultural heritages [11], in which a number of
Festivals have been recognized by UNESCO for the intangible cultural heritage representing humanity, such as "Hung Vuong worshipping in Phu Tho" (2012), "Practicing worship the Holy Mother with 3 realms of the Vietnamese" (2017).

Thirdly, the festivals are interwoven between religion and life, the "sacred" and the real, showing the cohesion of local communities, expressing the people's self-control quite closely.

Traditional religious holidays become a common joy for the whole community (Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Buddha's Birthday). This shows the cohesion of the community living in the common cultural space, thereby contributing to strengthening social consensus, solidarity between followers and non-believers. In sanctuary, the self-consciousness of the people is quite high, good self-management, adhere to the program, schedule and nature of the festival as well as ensure the safety of the festival.

Fourthly, the religious festivals have gone down in history and always been the cultural focus of the establishment, especially on the occasion of spring. Perfume Pagoda Festival was the largest one which lasts the longest (three months). This year's Bai Dinh Festival lasted until March (lunar calendar). Yen Tu Festival starts on the 10th of January of the lunar calendar every year and also lasts throughout the spring. But there is only one day festival (Tran Temple Festival, Phu Day, Nam Dinh).

Fifthly, every festival of beliefs and religions in Vietnam, though having its own characteristics, is in harmony with the culture and the people of Vietnam. Whether native or foreign religious festivals, religious principles are directed toward the Vietnamese people, such as "living the gospel in the heart of the nation", "Religion-Nationalist-Socialist". This is an important feature, which is the basis for building the great national unity and solidarity between believers and non-believers, creating the premise for building and developing spiritual tourism, contributing Local socio-economic development.

The Vietnamese Government accompanies the Vietnamese Buddhist Church, which has organized three UN VESAK congresses at Bai Dinh Ninh Binh (2008), Hanoi (2014) and Tam Chuc, Ha Nam (2019), with the expectation creating a vast effect on belief in the good values of Buddhism, bringing social life values of peace, peace and friendship, effectively contributing to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

2.2. The Complex Situation of the Religious Festivals and Some Suggestions to Protect and Promote the Cultural Values of the Current Religious and Belief Festivals

In fact, the situation of religious festivals in Vietnam is complicated. These festivals, whether in a large or narrow scale, basically formulate concrete organizational plans in perspectives such as compliance with religious regulations, registration with government, cooperation with local authorities, only held in the place of worship. The organizers, the religious leaders uphold the sense of responsibility, do well the work of self-management, so the festival takes place properly, on schedule, ensuring safety. However, the festival of beliefs and religions are getting complicated, there are still gaps in the management of festivals [12], in particular such as:

Firstly, the crowded even overloaded gathering in the place of worship, causing traffic congestion.

At religious festivals, such as Tran Temple, Huong Pagoda, Yen Tu, the roads leading to the center were often stuck in congestion. At the opening day of the Huong Pagoda festival (Hanoi) (Lunar January 6); on the night of opening Tran Temple (14th lunar month in Nam Dinh), the phenomenon of chasing each other to "rob" fortune, caused community to worry, because no one gavein, despite the presence of the elderly, women and children. The number of guests wasso large that the organizers could not arrange servicedenough for all people [13].

Secondly, the abuse of service tends to profit-seeking, following the market mechanism, smuggling, even many places are as confusing as the market, affecting the sanctuary of worship foul. Taking advantage of the situation of "To fish in troubled water", the business owners have tried to rip off the customers. The whole area in front of the relic site, where the festival is held, often becomes a "market" business with a variety of "spiritual" items, such as incense, joss paper, writing etc., always ready to scramble tourists all around.

It is noteworthy that during the peak days there are tens of thousands of pilgrims who visit the festival every day. Overloading, confusion in visitor traffic, and "decoys" at festivals clinging to pilgrims' carriages of festivals have been a culprit of public disorders and risks of traffic accidents.

Thirdly, religious festivals are taken advantage to expand the places of worship, disputes over land claims, service areas, encroachment on cultural heritages and relics protection zones, causing Environmental pollution.

Due to the crowds at the festival grounds, there are unwanted landfills, even though there are trash bins on both sides of the aisle and sanitation staff working hard; the phenomenon of food and specialties trading in front of the gate where the festival is also annoyed with the believers, causing offensive to pilgrimages [14].

Fourthly, it is the situation of wasted time and excessive money due to meaningless donation which is not reflect the good will of the festivals, because of the interest group. The pilgrimage, merit and visit of the visitors are worth cherishing, bringing a lot of revenue for the local, but the abuse to raise capital excessively, loudly and costly ritual celebrations is beyond the traditional rites of religious belief. Each year, in Vietnam nearly 50,000 tons of joss paper was burned, which wasted a huge amount of money. Only in Hanoi, the actual amount of joss paper burned has been up to over 400 billion VND per year, mostly in temples, pagodas and festivals [15]. Some places use merit money in the restoration of the relics, but money value deviating towards the value of heritage. The festivals are taken advantage to "trade" the gods, even there were bad guys making used of to create the phenomenon of "fake monks, fake pagodas".

Fifthly, taking advantage of religious festivals to propaganda the superstition and illegal. Expressions such as: abuse the propaganda of the so-called "Mother Showing Up", horoscope, fortune teller, the phenomenon of "rising stars, solving problems" [16], in the form of other phenomena of this phenomenon re-appear.
Sixthly, taking advantage of the festival, some unconscious people, cheaters, criminals disrupt public order and encroach on cultural monuments and the relic protection area [17]. Taking advantage of the rush hours and crowds in festivals, bad people crookbags, hook phones and wallets of the travelers. Many indiscreet people draw graffiti on cultural relics to impress their own mark, making the relics at risk of being ruined after each festive season.

Seventhly, the organization and management are still limited and ineffective. Recently, there is a widespread of festival scale in an uncontrollable way; plus the awareness of believers and tourists are still quite poor.

The responsibility of the manager is not good enough, not fulfilling his role. The task of grasping the situation, building and implementing the "self-governing" plan in protecting the festival order, especially national and short-term religious festivals, is not scientific and proactive.

In order to meet the increasing spiritual needs of the people, to protect and promote cultural heritage values in religious festivals, to limit negative phenomena and concurrently ensure the safety of festivals, there are some suggestions as follows:

First of all, it is necessary to propagate the education for the people who are the subjects of religious festivals to compulsarily obey the doctrine, canon law, and the State law and strictly abide by policies, regulations and rules of the festivals.

For each pilgrimage to the festival that each person can both enjoy the value and beauty of spiritual culture, respect and protect cultural heritage, and live a "good life, good religion" and "Fine words butter no parsnips" [18], tourists who visit the area and people who follow different religions are supposed to respect the local religion and comply with the rules of social order and safety, traffic safety, explosion-proof and protection of ecological environment.

Secondly, from the fact of the festival and the management of religious and religious festivals in many localities, there are many management models, expanding the model of "People self-governing festivals", need to implement the motto of ceremony The festival is owned by our people, and must be returned to the people to "self-govern" the festival, whatever the people can do, let them do it themselves [4]. Typically, in Ninh Binh province, according to statistics in 2016, there are 225 folk festivals, of which: 216 festivals are held regularly and periodically, including Truong Yen province, according to statistics in 2016, there are 225 folk festivals, of which: 216 festivals are held regularly and periodically, including Truong Yen Festival, now the Festival Hoa Lu is recognized as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (currently organized by the provincial level); 01 festival held by the district level; while the majority are village and commune scale, 08 festivals are organized by the Monuments Management Board or enterprises. Bai Dinh Temple Festival is famous, lasts for the first 3 months of the year. In order to strengthen the "self-governing" regime of religious festivals, and respect, preserve and protect the cultural heritage, the local government should support by knowing the situation of the violation, and distortion of cultural heritage and the original elements which constitute to the monument like: Adding, relocating, changing exhibits in relics or renovating and restoring which are not in conformity with the original elements constituting the relics and other acts without permission of the competent State agencies in charge of culture, sports and tourism; propagating and misrepresenting the content and value of monuments; changing the landscape of the monuments such as tree felling, rock breaking, digging, illegal construction and other acts that adversely affect the monuments; taking advantage of the propagation, dissemination, demonstration and transmission of intangible cultural heritages to profit and perform other acts against the law.

The local government should coordinate with the church and the festival organizing committee. Also, they should announce the operating regulation and set up the organizing committee to run and manage festive activities, which ensures the solemnity, safety and efficiency of the festival. Particularly, there must be plans for prevention of unforeseen events such as fire, explosion and accidents; penalties for the burning joss paper which causes pollution, getting drunk in public places according to the current law provisions. There must be a plan to cope with many uncertain situations so as not to occur passively and unexpectedly, such as natural disasters (storms, floods) or poisoning, epidemics, even to postpone or immediately stop the festive activities. There are many people attending, the risk of spreading the 2019 nCoV pandemic, according to the Prime Minister's Directive of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to ensure absolute safety for people.

Thirdly, mobilizing dignitaries and religious work should be to uphold the spirit and follow the principles of religion, accompany with the nation, comply with canon law and festival regulations, cooperate with the government to take care of the community life of religious belief and religious life, reduce the rituals which are no longer suitable for the cultural traditions, causing troubles and resource waste which have taken root and been ingrained into the consciousness of the people (eg: burning joss paper). A good example is the practice of "volunteer team" of Buddhist monks and nuns at Quan Su Pagoda who always do the task of reminding people to limit their use and burn joss paper as well as clean the area of the burners.

Fourthly, to ensure the safety of religious festivals and human security, the festival organizers need to work closely with the local authorities and functional agencies, to promote activities which help firmly grasp the situation, prevent and fight against crimes and social evils, untangle complicated complexes and prevent acts of infringing upon the estate.

Besides, traffic congestion should be paid close attention to avoid congestion and accident. The people inspection in self-governing regimes should be well-controlled, combined with the inspection of religious festivals in the organizing place where festivals are held, such as checking the compliance of registering religious activities, cultural activities, market, traffic, environment, health. When needed, the grounds must be collected to make critical judgments, or to deal based on the current law, and educate the spirit of awakening for the people.

Fifthly, religious festival agencies, dignitaries and management board should cooperate with scientists, the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Tourism, the Center of Preserving religious culture heritage to review the festivals and consolidate the dossiers requesting the State to recognize cultural and historical relics and putting them under the protection of the Cultural Heritage Law. It
is necessary to study and supplement specific regulations on the protection of cultural heritages of religious festivals and national religions so as to have many festivals recognized as cultural heritages which will be attached such an importance to preserving, promoting and creating more motivation for the sustainable socio-economic development of Vietnam.

We are all supposed to make every small contributions of our own to Bai Dinh Pagoda, Huong Pagoda, Yen Tu Pagoda... soon to be honored at UNESCO - a cultural heritage representing humanity.

3. Conclusion

The religious festivals in Vietnam are increasingly improved in quantity and quality. There are many values that are cultivated to meet the spiritual needs of the people in the process of building and defending the nation. Religious festivals become a way to "the true, the good and the beautiful" because the festival participants all want to follow the teachings of the sages.

Festivals are a combination between religion and life, the sacred and the real, the cohesion of local community, expressing the people's self-control quite closely.

Ritual and Religious festivals in Vietnam, although bearing their own characteristics, are in harmony with the culture and the people of Vietnam. However, the reality of religious festivals in Vietnam is complicated by the situation of crowded gatherings, even overloaded in the places of worship, service abuse following after the market mechanism, the „sale“ of holy gods and taking advantage of the religious festivals to propagate religions against law.

It is necessary to propagate and educate the people who are the subjects of religious festivals to abide by the doctrine, canon law and laws of the State; mobilize religious dignitaries to uphold the spirit and follow the religious principles, ensuring the safety of religious and religious festivals.

References


[8] The Vietnamese Catholic Church celebrates the Jubilee Year quite well for a variety of reasons. Like the Holy Year 2000, the holy year of Bui Chu diocesan on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the diocese, 140 years "Offering the diocese to the Immaculate Conception (particularly in 1997, they also organized the Holy Year for 11 lands, 1 family, 1 line.) Phat Dien's Holy Year marked the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral. Especially, the Vatican allowed the Hue diocese to solemnly organize the 200-year Saint's Congress "Our Lady in La Vang Formation" (Quang Tri) from 1 January 1998 - August 15, 1999.


[10] Vo Van Tuong, 1994, Famous Pagoda of Vietnam (introduced 394 pagodas recognized by the State Historical vestiges), House of Culture and Information, Hanoi.


[12] Vo Van Tuong, 1994, Famous Pagoda of Vietnam (introduced 394 pagodas recognized by the State Historical vestiges), House of Culture and Information, Hanoi.

[13] Vo Van Tuong, 1994, Famous Pagoda of Vietnam (introduced 394 pagodas recognized by the State Historical vestiges), House of Culture and Information, Hanoi.


[17] Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, "Offering superstition is superstition, lack of understanding of Han Law".


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