



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Status of the Religious Belief in Vietnam: A Case Study of Buddhism

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**ABSTRACT**

Buddhism has played and continues to play an important role in the cultural and social life of Vietnam. The development of Buddhism not only contributes to the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values but also helps create a solid moral and spiritual foundation for the Vietnamese people. This article aims to clarify the factors driving the religious belief, assess the positive and negative impacts, and propose solutions to preserve and develop the original religious values while ensuring harmony between religion and cultural, folk beliefs. This is not only an academic issue but also a practical one, closely related to the management and development of culture and society in Vietnam

**INTRODUCTION**

Buddhism, also known as Buddhism, is one of the major and most influential religions in Vietnam. Based on reliable historical evidence, several in-depth and reputable researchers on Buddhism have confirmed that Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam around the 2nd century AD (Nguyen, L, 1992; Tran, T.D, 2011, p. 31). Buddhism has gone through many stages of development, integrating and becoming an important part of the cultural and spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. "Buddhism, with its positive values such as compassion, joy, altruism, relief of suffering, equality, and charity, easily appeals to people and fits well with Vietnamese customs and traditions" (Nguyen, T.H.C, 2018). Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam through two main routes: from India by sea and from China by land. Throughout history, Buddhism has experienced many ups and downs but has always maintained its important position. The Ly – Tran period (11th-14th centuries) is considered the golden age of Vietnamese Buddhism, during which Buddhism not only developed strongly in terms of organization and academia but also deeply influenced politics, culture, and society. Buddhism is not just a religion but also a philosophy of life and a culture that profoundly affects many aspects of Vietnamese life. The temples, pagodas, and shrines are important architectural works, not only places

of worship but also cultural, educational, and community activity centers. "During the Ngo, Dinh, and Pre-Le dynasties, the kings were all military generals who relied on the knowledge and understanding of Zen masters – the primary intellectual class at that time" (Phan, N, 2002, p. 35). Buddhist festivals such as the Vu Lan Festival, Buddha's Birthday, and Huong Pagoda Festival attract millions of participants, becoming major cultural events that contribute to preserving and promoting the national cultural identity. Buddhism also helps shape ethical values, humane lifestyles, compassion, joy, and altruism, guiding people towards a peaceful, harmonious, and happy life. Buddhism in Vietnam has many sects, mainly Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. Each sect has its own characteristics in terms of doctrine, rituals, and practices, but they all aim for enlightenment and liberation. Additionally, Vietnamese Buddhism blends with folk beliefs and other religions, creating a unique characteristic. The integration of folk beliefs into Buddhist practice reflects the flexibility and adaptability of this religion, enriching the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. In recent decades, the phenomenon of religious belief in Vietnam has become a topic of widespread interest and research. Belief and religion, two intertwined and complementary concepts, play important roles in the cultural and spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. However, social and cultural changes have led to the emergence of new phenomena in religious practices, particularly the process of belief. The belief in religion is a phenomenon in which elements of folk beliefs, customs, and traditional cultural practices are mixed, integrated, and sometimes replace orthodox religious doctrines and rituals. In Vietnam, this phenomenon is evident in many religions, especially Buddhism, a religion with a profound and longstanding influence on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese. The process of belief in Buddhism can be observed through various manifestations, from organizing religious festivals and rituals to the increase in belief activities at temples. This phenomenon not only reflects changes in religious practices but also indicates the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of Vietnam in the context of modernization and globalization. Studying the phenomenon of belief in religion, particularly in the case of Buddhism, is necessary to better understand the nature and impact of this process on religion and Vietnamese society.

### **OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND RESEARCH METHODS**

**Research Objectives:** Analyze the current state of the religious belief in Buddhism in Vietnam. Evaluate the factors influencing the phenomenon of religious belief. Assess the impacts of religious belief on Buddhism and Vietnamese society. Propose solutions and recommendations to preserve the original values of Buddhism and suggest directions for future research.

**Scope of Research:** The study will be conducted in various regions of Vietnam where Buddhism has a profound influence, including both urban and rural areas. Three Buddhist-related rituals will be selected for case studies: Vu Lan Festival, Huong Pagoda Festival, and requiem ceremonies at temples. The research will focus on the period from the late 20th century to the present, a time of significant social, economic, and cultural changes. Analysis will cover the manifestations of religious belief in Buddhist practices, including festivals, rituals, worship, and religious activities at temples. Consideration will be given to the impacts from traditional culture, economy, politics, society, education, and media. Evaluate the effects of religious belief on religious and social life.

**Research Methods:** The article uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including surveys, document analysis, and field observations. Data collected from literature sources and surveys will be analyzed to provide findings and conclusions. With clear objectives and research scope, the article will provide a comprehensive view of the current state of religious belief in Buddhism in Vietnam, and offer recommendations to preserve and develop the precious religious and cultural values of Buddhism in the modern context.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Related to the phenomenon of religious syncretism, there are several notable works in Vietnam and globally. For instance, Nguyen, V. H (2000) in the study "Beliefs and Religious Culture in Vietnam" provided an overview of beliefs and religions in Vietnam, emphasizing the integration of folk beliefs with major religions such as Buddhism. Le, H. T (2005) in the article "The Phenomenon of Religious Syncretism in Vietnamese Cultural Life" detailed the syncretic phenomena within Buddhism, from ancestor worship rituals to the organization of Buddhist festivals, and their impact on cultural and social life. Pham, Q. H (2010) in "Buddhism and Folk Beliefs in Vietnam" delved into the integration of Buddhism and folk beliefs, citing specific examples of syncretism in temples and worship rituals. Tambiah, S. J (1984) in "The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets" studied the syncretism through the worship of forest monks and amulets in Thai Buddhism, drawing parallels to similar phenomena in Vietnam. Brown, R. L (1997) in "The Dhamma: Religious Practices in Modern Southeast Asia" explored the development and transformation of Buddhism in the modern context of Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, highlighting the interaction between orthodox religion and folk beliefs. Jerryson, M (2012) in "Buddhist Fury: Religion and Violence in Southern Thailand" analyzed the syncretism of Buddhism in the context of social conflicts, offering useful comparative perspectives for studying religious syncretism in Vietnam...

Most current studies focus on syncretic phenomena in specific regions of Vietnam. There is a need for inter-regional comparative studies to highlight differences and similarities in the syncretism of Buddhism across different areas. Furthermore, expanding the scope of research to compare with other Southeast Asian countries would provide deeper insights into Vietnam's unique context and characteristics. Another gap is the reactions and attitudes of orthodox religious leaders and communities towards the phenomenon of syncretism. Studies on their perspectives and actions are necessary to maintain the purity of religious doctrines and practices. These studies not only help understand the current state of religious syncretism in Vietnam but also provide theoretical and practical foundations for proposing solutions to preserve and develop religious and cultural values in the modern context.

## RESULTS

### Distinguishing the Concepts of Belief and Religion

According to the Từ điển Từ Nguyên (Etymological Dictionary), belief is explained as "faithful veneration" (Từ, N, 1997, p. 115). Đào Duy Anh's Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary defines: "Belief: superstitious admiration towards a religion or an ideology" (Đào, D. A, 1996, p. 283). Belief is a concept that reflects the faith, worship, and veneration of humans towards supernatural phenomena, deities, or sacred entities they consider to have the power to influence their lives. Belief is often expressed through forms of worship, rituals, and traditional customs. The characteristics of belief include its folk nature, lack of formal doctrinal systems, and typically high community engagement. For example, ancestor worship, the worship of Mother Goddesses, or local deities are forms of belief.

Religion, on the other hand, is a system of beliefs, practices, and social organization aimed at worshipping and honoring one or more deities or pursuing a sacred way of life. "Religion is the belief of humans existing with a system of concepts and activities including objects of worship, doctrines, religious laws, rituals, and organization" (National Assembly, 2016). Religion is not only an individual belief but also includes regulations, rituals, and a community of followers who adhere to it. Major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have clear doctrines and extensive religious organizational systems.

Belief is understood as a folk faith, lacking formal doctrinal systems. The beliefs in belief systems are often orally transmitted through generations. Religion is understood to have a systematic doctrine, clear scriptures, and is systematically propagated and taught. Belief is often understood as not having

a tight organization, being spontaneous, and mainly community-based; Religion has specific religious organizations, with clergy, places of worship, and management systems. Belief is often tied to local culture and customs, having regional characteristics. Religion tends to have a wide influence, potentially spreading across many countries and territories. Belief aims to meet the spiritual needs of individuals and communities, explaining natural and social phenomena. Religion aims for liberation, soul salvation, or achieving high sacred goals according to its doctrines. The rituals and practices of belief are often flexible, depending on each region and community. Religious rituals and practices are often specifically regulated, with high uniformity within the community of followers. Clear distinction between belief and religion helps us to better understand forms of faith and worship in society, and properly evaluate the influence and role of each form on the cultural and spiritual life of humans.

### **The History and Role of Buddhism in Vietnam**

Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam around the 2nd century AD through two main routes: by sea from India and by land from China. The development of Buddhism in Vietnam has gone through many stages, influenced by both Northern Buddhism (Mahayana) and Southern Buddhism (Theravada).

**Early Period (2nd-9th centuries):** Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam through trade and the propagation of Indian and Chinese monks. Early Buddhist centers were established in Luy Lau (Bac Ninh) and Co Loa (Hanoi). Some documents suggest that Luy Lau was formed even earlier than the Buddhist centers in Pengcheng and Luoyang of China (Nguyen, L, 2014, p. 73).

**Development Period (10th-14th centuries):** Buddhism reached its golden age during the Ly-Tran dynasties (11th-14th centuries). Many large temples were built, and Buddhism became the state religion, strongly influencing culture and politics. The Ly and Tran kings not only patronized Buddhism but also directly participated in monastic practices. "It can be said that this was the period when Buddhism flourished the most in Vietnam. The Ly and Tran kings were all devout Buddhists. King Ly Cong Uan (Ly Thai To), was raised in a temple from a young age and educated by Zen masters" (Nguyen, T. T, 1988, p. 145).

**Decline Period (15th-19th centuries):** During the Le and Nguyen dynasties, Buddhism was restricted and gradually lost influence compared to Confucianism. "After Le Thai To regained independence, the cultural heritage of the Ly-Tran was just fragments" (Ly, T. H, 2015). However, Buddhism continued to exist in folk life and was maintained in village temples.

**Modern Period (20th century to present):** Buddhism experienced a strong revival, especially after Vietnam gained independence. Many Buddhist organizations were established, and Buddhist education, charity, and cultural activities were restored and developed. Today, Vietnam has nearly 14 million Buddhists, over 30,000 monks and nuns, nearly 68,000 lay officials, nearly 18,000 places of worship, and 40 educational institutions spread across the country (Government Committee for Religious Affairs, 2021).

Buddhism is not only a religion but also a philosophy of life, guiding people towards enlightenment, compassion, joy, and the release from suffering. These values have deeply penetrated the lifestyle and thinking of the Vietnamese people, contributing to the formation of ethical and humanistic foundations in society. Buddhism has made significant contributions to Vietnamese culture through architectural works, art, and literature. Temples, Buddha statues, paintings, and Buddhist scriptures are valuable cultural heritages that reflect the harmonious combination of religion and national culture.

Vietnamese Buddhism has a strong tradition of charity and education. Buddhist organizations regularly conduct charitable activities, helping the poor, the sick, and disaster victims. Many schools and charity classes organized by monks and temples have contributed to raising intellectual

standards and educating morality for the community. Buddhist festivals such as Vu Lan, Buddha's Birthday, and Huong Pagoda Festival attract millions of participants, creating major cultural events that help preserve and promote national cultural identity. These rituals are not only religiously significant but also serve to connect communities, maintain, and spread traditional values.

Buddhism, with its philosophy of compassion and joy, has significantly contributed to building a peaceful and harmonious society. During turbulent historical periods, Buddhism has always played a role as a bridge for reconciliation, guiding people to live in love and peace. Today, Buddhism continues to play an important role in the cultural and social life of Vietnam. Through its ups and downs, Buddhism has not only contributed to preserving and promoting traditional cultural values but also created a solid ethical and spiritual foundation for the Vietnamese people. In the modern context, maintaining and developing Buddhism will continue to contribute to the prosperity and peace of society.

### **The Situation of the Popularization of Buddhism in Vietnam through the Study of the Vu Lan Festival, the Huong Pagoda Festival, and the Requiem Ceremony in Temples**

The phenomenon of popularization in Vietnamese Buddhism reflects the process by which elements of folk beliefs and local culture merge into the practice and orthodox religious beliefs. This leads to the development of forms of worship, rituals, and festivals with a folk character, yet practiced within the framework of Buddhism. Popularization is not only a change in the form of practice but also influences the perception and beliefs of Buddhist followers. Manifestations of popularization in Buddhist practice are evident through several characteristics:

i) Buddhist festivals combined with folk beliefs: Many Buddhist festivals in Vietnam not only focus on honoring Buddhist teachings but also include folk belief elements, such as prayers for peace, fortune, blessings, and recreational activities. The intermingling of Buddhist rituals with those of folk beliefs demonstrates: "These actions may seem unscientific, but they are filled with goodwill. There is irrationality, yet also rationality, making people entrust their faith. And because of this legitimate faith, no one hinders it, and it is difficult to erase the spiritual life of the masses, which is essentially an ancient heritage" (Truong, T, 2008, p. 109).

ii) Rituals and worship: Buddhist worship rituals in Vietnam often incorporate elements of folk beliefs. For example, many temples not only worship Buddha but also local deities, ancestors, and historically significant figures. "In most temples in the Northern Delta, there are worships of saints and mother goddesses" (Dang, M. C, 2017, p. 341).

iii) Symbols and religious items: In Buddhist rituals, many symbols and items bearing folk beliefs are used, such as amulets, sacred plants, and feng shui items. "This can be observed in people attending ceremonies at several temples like Ly Trieu Quoc Su Temple, Dam Temple. In these temples, there are many towers, altars, and shrines to various saints and bodhisattvas, including the Mother Goddess, so worshipers often place offerings of incense, flowers, fruits, etc., at the Buddha altar, while at the altars of deities and saints (such as the village guardian deity, the Mother Goddess), they place meat offerings" (Dang, M. C, 2017, p. 340).

iv) Spiritual practices and prayers: Many Buddhists in Vietnam practice prayer and pilgrimage rituals not only to follow Buddhist teachings but also to seek peace, luck, prosperity, and health from deities and supernatural forces.

The Vu Lan Festival in Vietnam is a clear example of the popularization of Buddhism. "Vu Lan Festival originates from the legend of Muc Kien Lien saving his mother in Buddhism" (Tri, Q, 2005). This day is considered an occasion for children to remember the merits of their parents, especially mothers, and to pray for the souls of the wandering dead. In Vietnam, the Vu Lan Festival not only has religious significance but also incorporates many elements of folk beliefs. Besides praying for ancestors,

people also perform offerings for lonely souls, a part of folk beliefs regarding the spirit world. People prepare ancestor worship offerings at home, a custom that is more belief-oriented than religious. Although it originated from Buddhism, the Vu Lan Festival has become an occasion for ancestor worship, part of Vietnamese folk beliefs.

“Rằm tháng Bảy (the 15th day of the 7th lunar month) involves the intermingling of elements from folk beliefs, Daoism, and Buddhism. Buddhism is represented through Vu Lan filial piety, which is practiced both in temples and at home. In temples, people organize prayers for the deceased, do charity, and release animals to accumulate merits for peace, wishing for parents to gain blessings and longevity, and to dissolve bad karma” (Bui, X. D, 2021). Many rituals, such as offering to lonely souls and releasing floating lanterns, do not originate from Buddhist doctrines but from folk beliefs; Worship forms, offerings, and symbols during the Vu Lan Festival bear more folk belief colors than religious ones; The Vu Lan Festival is not just a religious ceremony but has become an indispensable part of Vietnamese culture, an occasion for family gatherings, reminding each other of parental gratitude, strengthening family and community relationships; The Vu Lan Festival, with its combination of many belief and cultural elements, becomes part of the national cultural identity, enriching the spiritual life of the people. Thus, the Vu Lan Festival in Vietnam is a typical example of the popularization of Buddhism, where elements of folk beliefs are integrated into religious rituals and activities, creating a festival diverse in form and rich in meaning.

The Huong Pagoda Festival (also known as the Huong Son Festival) in Vietnam is a clear example of the popularization of Buddhism. The Huong Pagoda is a cultural and religious complex in Vietnam, comprising dozens of temples dedicated to Buddha, temples dedicated to deities, and shrines dedicated to agricultural beliefs. The center of this complex is the Huong Pagoda itself. “The Huong Son complex is one of the 21 national tourist sites of Vietnam and was recognized as a Special National Monument in 2017” (Prime Minister, 2017). The Huong Pagoda Festival takes place at the Huong Son relic complex, Huong Son commune, My Duc district, Hanoi. This festival usually occurs from the 6th day of the first lunar month to the end of the third lunar month, attracting millions of visitors each year.

Initially, it was a religious festival to pray for health, peace, and fortune, inspired by the legend of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara residing temporarily at Huong Son. Buddhism in the Huong Pagoda Festival has been popularized by various elements: The festival is not only an occasion for worshipping Buddha but also incorporates many folk belief elements, such as worshipping deities and saints; Many rituals and activities in the festival have more characteristics of folk beliefs than religion, such as seeking blessings and offering gifts; The symbols, forms of worship, and offerings in the festival bear strong folk belief colors. The Huong Pagoda Festival is not just a religious event but has become part of Vietnamese culture; The festival is an occasion for families and communities to gather, participating in cultural and religious activities; The Huong Pagoda Festival, with its combination of many belief and cultural elements, contributes to enriching the cultural identity of the Vietnamese nation.

The requiem ceremony at pagodas in Vietnam is a clear example of the popularization of Buddhism. The requiem ceremony in Buddhism is a ritual to pray for the souls of the deceased to be liberated, escaping suffering, and attaining a peaceful realm. This ritual stems from the Buddha’s compassion and teachings on karma and reincarnation. The requiem ceremony at pagodas in Vietnam has incorporated many elements of folk beliefs and traditional culture. The requiem ceremony is not only based on Buddhist teachings but also combines many folk belief elements such as burning votive papers and offering food to wandering souls; Rituals such as burning votive papers and offering food to wandering souls are rich in folk belief colors and do not originate from Buddhist teachings. “The custom of burning votive papers is a tradition of the Chinese, originating from ancient times. This custom has profoundly influenced the spiritual life of the Chinese people and other countries affected

by Chinese civilization, including Vietnam” (Tue, L, 2022); The forms of offerings and symbols such as paper money and votive papers do not belong to original Buddhism but come from folk beliefs. The requiem ceremony is not just a religious ritual but has become part of Vietnamese culture. The requiem ceremony is an occasion for families and communities to gather, remembering and praying for their ancestors and deceased relatives; The requiem ceremony, with its combination of many belief and cultural elements, becomes part of the cultural identity of the Vietnamese nation. Thus, the requiem ceremony at pagodas in Vietnam is also a typical example of the popularization of Buddhism, where elements of folk beliefs are integrated into religious rituals and activities, creating a festival diverse in form and rich in meaning.

### **Observations from Three Ritual Cases: Vu Lan Festival, Huong Pagoda Festival, and Requiem Ceremonies at Pagodas**

First, Integration with Folk Beliefs: Buddhist festivals and rituals such as Vu Lan, Huong Pagoda, and requiem ceremonies have incorporated many elements of Vietnamese folk beliefs. This includes offerings, burning votive papers, and offerings to wandering souls, elements that do not belong to original Buddhist teachings.

Second, Diverse Purposes and Meanings: Although these rituals and festivals originated from Buddhist teachings, they have expanded their purposes and meanings to serve the various needs and beliefs of the community. For example, the Vu Lan Festival not only prays for the souls of the deceased but also serves as an occasion to worship ancestors, part of the ancestor worship tradition in Vietnamese culture.

Third, Flexibility and Adaptability: Buddhism in Vietnam has shown great flexibility and adaptability in integrating with local customs and beliefs. This creates a unique form of Buddhism that strongly reflects Vietnamese cultural identity.

Fourth, Broad Influence on Social Life: Buddhist festivals and rituals such as Vu Lan, Huong Pagoda, and requiem ceremonies have significant cultural and social meanings beyond their religious significance. They become occasions for family and community gatherings, reinforcing social relationships and maintaining traditional cultural values.

### **Factors Influencing the Popularization of Buddhism in Vietnam**

Influence of Traditional Culture: In Vietnam, traditional culture has always harmoniously combined religion and folk beliefs. People often do not clearly distinguish between orthodox religious practices and folk rituals. This leads to the natural integration of folk belief elements into Buddhism, making Buddhism an inseparable part of folk culture. Ancestor worship culture is an important aspect of Vietnamese life. This practice has greatly influenced how Vietnamese people receive and practice Buddhism. Many pagodas are not only places for worshiping Buddha but also for ancestor worship and honoring local deities, reflecting the popularization of Buddhism. Traditional festivals and folk rituals also play a crucial role in the popularization of Buddhism. Festivals such as the Huong Pagoda Festival, Vu Lan, or ceremonies for peace and requiem are rich in folk belief elements, contributing to the enrichment and diversification of Buddhist practices.

Influence of Economic, Political, and Social Factors: Economic development has enabled many families to organize belief rituals at pagodas. Additionally, many Buddhist festivals and rituals have become major cultural-economic events, attracting tourists and generating significant income for localities. The commercialization of some religious activities also promotes the phenomenon of popularization. Politics also plays an important role in shaping the popularization of Buddhism. Historically, Vietnamese feudal dynasties often used Buddhism as a tool to consolidate power and create social stability. Currently, the Vietnamese state encourages the preservation and development of traditional cultural values, including Buddhist festivals and rituals, contributing to the

maintenance and development of the popularization phenomenon. Social changes, especially in the context of modernization and globalization, have led many people to turn to religion as a spiritual refuge. The increase in belief activities, from prayers for peace to prayers for wealth, reflects the need for peace and luck in a turbulent modern life. This further popularizes folk belief elements in Buddhist practices.

**Influence of Education and Media:** The education system in Vietnam often emphasizes the importance of preserving and promoting traditional cultural values, including beliefs and religion. Schools frequently organize extracurricular activities related to traditional festivals and rituals, helping students understand and maintain belief practices. This creates a blend of education and religious popularization. Mass media plays a vital role in spreading and reinforcing belief practices. Television programs, newspapers, and social networks regularly cover Buddhist festivals, rituals, and other religious activities. The widespread presence of media helps make belief practices familiar and widely accepted in society. The development of the internet and social networks has opened a new channel for the dissemination and practice of beliefs. Websites, forums, and social media groups about Buddhism and folk beliefs have attracted the interest of many people, especially the youth. These platforms not only help spread belief values but also promote exchanges and learning among believers, fostering the strong development of the popularization phenomenon.

In summary, the factors influencing the popularization of Buddhism in Vietnam are diverse and complex, including the influence of traditional culture, economic, political, social factors, and the roles of education and media. Understanding these factors provides a comprehensive view of the popularization of Buddhism, while also offering appropriate solutions to preserve and develop religious and cultural values in the modern context.

### **Assessing the Impact of the Popularization of Buddhism in Vietnam**

**Positive Impacts:** The popularization of Buddhism has helped maintain and promote the traditional cultural values of the nation. Festivals, rituals, and religious activities are opportunities for communities to express and preserve their unique cultural identity. "The richness of cultural and spiritual life comes from having many layers of residents and ethnic groups living together for a long time, with each layer contributing unique cultural traits. When intertwined, they create a rich and diverse spiritual life" (Doan, T. L., 2023). Pagodas, Buddha statues, and related Buddhist architectural works are not only places of religious practice but also important cultural heritage sites. The popularization of Buddhism has facilitated the preservation and restoration of these structures, attracting community interest and support. Buddhist festivals and rituals often provide opportunities for community members to gather and participate in shared activities. This not only creates a joyful and exciting atmosphere but also strengthens the unity and bonds among community members. Religious activities such as peace prayers, requiem ceremonies, and charity programs organized by pagodas support those in need, fostering a spirit of mutual assistance and compassion within the community. These activities not only bring material benefits but also nurture a spirit of kindness and compassion in society.

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**Negative Impacts:** The popularization of Buddhism leads to a mixture of folk beliefs and Buddhist teachings, diminishing the originality and purity of the religion. This can result in misunderstandings and distorted practices of Buddhist teachings, undermining the core values of the religion. The worship of gods, ancestors, or supernatural forces that are not part of orthodox Buddhist teachings in pagodas can blur the boundaries between Buddhism and folk beliefs, causing confusion and loss of direction for believers. Many Buddhist festivals and rituals have been commercialized, turning into profitable business events. This not only detracts from the religious and spiritual significance of the festivals but can also create unhealthy competition and erode traditional cultural values. The widespread sale of spiritual items such as amulets, charms, and feng shui objects in pagodas has



turned religion into a business activity. This not only diminishes the sanctity of Buddhism but can also lead to the exploitation of people's religious beliefs for personal gain.

### **Solutions for Preserving and Developing the Original Religious Values, Ensuring Harmony Between Religion and Culture, and Folk Beliefs**

The popularization of Buddhism in Vietnam brings both positive and negative impacts. Positive aspects include the preservation of traditional culture and fostering community unity. However, the negative aspects, such as the dilution of the religion's originality and the commercialization of religious activities, cannot be ignored. To harness the positive impacts and minimize the negative influences, appropriate management and direction from both the state and the religious community are necessary, as follows:

First, Education and Propaganda: Expand Buddhist education programs at Buddhist schools and cultural centers, providing knowledge about the original teachings of Buddhism. Use media channels such as television, radio, newspapers, and social networks to promote the original values of Buddhism, clearly explaining the differences between Buddhist teachings and folk belief elements.

Second, Organizing Original Religious Activities: Pagodas and Buddhist centers should organize study and meditation retreats according to Buddhist teachings, helping participants understand and practice the true spirit of Buddhism. Encourage pagodas to conduct religious ceremonies according to the original teachings, minimizing and eliminating folk belief elements not belonging to Buddhism.

Third, Research and Preservation of Buddhist Heritage: Enhance research on Buddhist scriptures and related cultural heritage, providing a scientific basis for preserving and promoting the original values of Buddhism. Invest in the preservation and restoration of important Buddhist relics, ensuring that these relics are maintained and restored according to their original form.

Fourth, Support and Training for Monks and Nuns: Organize intensive training courses for monks and nuns on the original teachings of Buddhism, helping them understand and disseminate the true spirit of Buddhism. Provide financial support and teaching materials for monks and nuns, enabling them to better propagate and preserve the original values of Buddhism.

Fifth, Strengthening International Exchanges: Enhance exchanges and learning from countries with long-standing Buddhist traditions such as India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar, applying their experiences in preserving the original values of Buddhism. Organize international conferences and seminars on Buddhism, creating opportunities for scholars and monks to exchange, share experiences, and knowledge on preserving the original values of Buddhism.

### **CONCLUSION**

The incorporation of folk belief elements into Buddhist rituals and festivals is clear evidence of this popularization. Activities such as burning votive paper, offering sacrifices, and cúng cô hồn (offering to wandering souls) illustrate the blending of folk beliefs and Buddhism. The popularization of Buddhism in Vietnam has created a unique form of religion that reflects the culture and folk beliefs of the Vietnamese people. This has made Buddhism more approachable and acceptable to the general populace. Buddhism in Vietnam demonstrates diversity and richness by integrating and coexisting with folk beliefs. This diversity enriches the religious and cultural life of the Vietnamese people. Buddhist festivals and rituals have become an indispensable part of the spiritual and social life of the Vietnamese, helping to maintain and promote traditional and cultural values. In summary, Buddhism in Vietnam has been significantly popularized, but it has also created a unique and rich religious identity that deeply reflects Vietnamese culture and folk beliefs. Studying the popularization of religion in Vietnam, especially through Buddhist festivals and rituals such as Lễ Vu Lan, the Chùa Hương Festival, and requiem ceremonies, holds significant importance for understanding the religion, culture, and society of this country.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author declare no conflicts of interest associated with this manuscript.

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