

The formation of freedom of belief and religion in Vietnamese society

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The critical event of world human rights history marked in 1948 is the birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the statement of “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” became the key guide to solving the relationship among state, religion, and citizen. In fact, freedom of belief and religion (FoBR) achieved outstanding achievements due to the bourgeois revolutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789 mentioned the two-way limitation in the behaviors of everyone in society to the matter of religious views in Article 10. The first, everyone practicing their beliefs will be limited by public order. The second, disquieting on religious views of another individual will be inhibited. In short, FoBR is firstly institutionalized in the law of Western countries, including France.

France and Vietnam had a special connection from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century; however, the French’s presence in Vietnam, as guardians of Indochina, had not come with democratic freedoms in general and FoBR in particular. In 1862, France occupied three provinces in the Southeast and one province in the Southwest of Vietnam and 22 years later, the Nguyen Dynasty officially recognized the right of French rule in Vietnam. Vietnamese society entered a semi-feudal colonial period. The research of Dang [1] has emphasized that the French colonialists advocated favoring only one religion and distinguish between Christian and non-Christian religions.

Although FoBR was not implemented in the semi-feudal colonial period of Vietnam, progressive ideas about the establishment of human rights for the Vietnamese appeared in the heart of colonial society. The explanation springs from culture. According to the scholar Huynh [2], “the period of 80 years of French colonialism (1862 - 1975) was a “confrontation” between two East-West cultures in Vietnam” and “the cultural period of 1982-1945 was the period of French colonial culture.” According to Phan [3], French culture is in stark contrast to traditional Vietnamese culture because of its rationalism. The French education system has renewed the Vietnamese people’s awareness by supporting a view of all objects in the aspect of humanity, anti-dogmatic, upholding individuality, accepting dialogue, and requiring thorough analysis. Analytical tools have been a specialty of French education, which “Vietnamese Confucianism” has not owned. The critical attitude of French education has led to more objectivity and freedom of expression than Confucian education. French education has brought new principles: science, democracy, freedom, law, progress. Confucianism faced its historical role in the struggle for democracy and for building a more civilized, modern society. Therefore, Vietnamese society witnessed the development of revolutionary doctrines and movements to find a direction for the whole nation. Among them, the most successful is the national liberation path of Ho Chi Minh - who learned both Vietnamese Confucianism and French education.

Ho Chi Minh studied the proletarian and bourgeois revolutions in the world and advocated the National Democratic Revolution for Vietnam under the influence of the Russian October Revolution. The path to socialism built by Ho Chi Minh was mentioned as the truth for oppressed and exploited peoples to independence, freedom, and happiness. The cultural contact

of Vietnam with the Soviet Union continued to promote the ideas of equality and freedom for all Vietnamese, including FoBR.

FoBR entered Vietnamese society throughout the wall of “the struggle for independence” and connected obviously to Vietnamese people’s patriotic culture. Given that FoBR was born in the context of losing sovereignty, sovereignty in the relationship with human rights has been typical in Vietnam. Sovereignty as the country’s right to independence is a prerequisite for ensuring human rights. For the Vietnamese people, patriotic culture, maintained throughout the resistance wars, became a measure of Vietnamese social life, including religious issues. Patriotic culture has served as a foundation for cultural exchanges and acculturation with the culture of India, China, and France in Vietnamese history. Huynh [2] has drawn, in the early stages of the Chinese colonial period, Confucianism - as a religion following the heels of the invaders - did not come into the Vietnamese’s spiritual life. The Government Committee for Religious Affairs of Vietnam has affirmed the participation of patriots who are followers of religions in revolutions in the history of resistance and national construction of Vietnam in a summary of the activities of religions in Vietnam. Hence, almost all religions in Vietnam today have a slogan associated with this culture. “Religion, Nation, Socialism,” “Dear Lord, Patriot,” “Living the gospel in the heart of the nation” are the mottos of dignitaries and followers in Vietnam. Moreover, there was a period when Vietnamese legal documents on belief and religion contained the “patriotic.” For instance, Article 2 of the Ordinance of Vietnam on Belief and Religion dated 18.06.2004 stated, “Dignitaries and clergypersons shall have the responsibility to educate regularly believers about patriotism, the exercise of civic rights and obligations, and the sense of law observance.”

In summary, FoBR in Vietnam has the same “frame of reference” according to democracy freedom values of the international community. Nevertheless, the history of the acquisition of FoBR in Vietnam showed that FoBR had not separated Vietnamese people’s sovereignty and patriotic culture.

References

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