

Crossing the Boundaries and State-building: Harmonization and Tolerance in Vietnamese Religions

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The world is made in diversity: the diversity in ethnicity, culture, philosophy, religion, etc. Throughout history human beings have struggled to achieve a peaceful and interactive living universe where multicultural harmonization and religious tolerance are realized. Vietnam itself is a multi-ethnic state that has many religious traditions as a result of the continuous confluence of both internal and external sources of philosophies. However, because of the demands and interests of the state and people, traditional Vietnamese bureaucrats, elites, and commoners have all agreed to create a dynamic unified system of cultural notations and rituals in order to produce a shared Vietnamese political and cultural experience. Vietnam's struggle for independence and development during the last millennium has demonstrated that this dynamic unified system is a unique mechanism used to empower the Vietnamese people and to cross the cultural and political boundaries. History has shown that Vietnamese people, largely influenced by external philosophies, have learned to merge and reconstruct a harmonized and local form of ancestor-worship and the external Three-Teachings to create the cultural nexus for them to extract and build a state-driven notational system, ritual patterns, and shared experiences. As a result, the fusion and reconstruction of Vietnam's national identity not only made Vietnamese culture more distinct from Chinese culture (a source of influence) but also created a neutralized social binding among the different classes that strengthened the sense of solidarity felt by Vietnamese people. People-based war against foreign invaders, people's diplomacy, and people-oriented policies were thus successful throughout Vietnamese history, such as the three victories of Tran dynasty over the Mongolian invaders in 1258, 1285 and 1288, the victory of Le Loi over the Ming invaders in 1427-1428 and the victory of Nguyen Hue over the Qing in 1789. The Vietnamese approach to state-building and state-defense directly produced and promoted social harmonization and religious tolerance among the Vietnamese people. This research applied interdisciplinary approaches and theories in cultural studies, especially Adam Seligman's and Robert Weller's (2012)'s concept of mutually interactive conflation between notation, social ritual, and shared experience in social life to cross the boundaries, in order to analyze different discourses implied under the case study. The research argues that definite state-sanctioned agenda has never achieved the ultimate goals of state-building in Vietnam even though to some extent it appeared to be successful in late imperial China. Instead, there have always been many prerequisites needed to set a neutralized point somewhere in-between of both sides where the state's interests and the commoners' desires are mutually compromised and fused together.

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