

Review of: "Vietnam's Religious Policy: Navigating the Path to Religious Freedom"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review: Vietnam's Religious Policy: Navigating the Path to Religious Freedom, by Thoi Nguyen

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I have some general observations to make about this interesting and informative article, followed by some specific suggestions.

General Observations

The piece is almost entirely descriptive rather than analytical. The content is fascinating, but the article could stand to add more in-depth explanation of the underlying reasons for the Vietnamese government's discrimination against religion in general, and certain sects in particular. The article also needs more analysis at the end, and specific suggestions on the pathways to religious freedom. How might religious freedoms be accomplished within the current political regime? How could support be developed for changes—support in the general public and support in the political structure?

The article also needs to be carefully edited by a native English speaker or someone else with strong command of English and writing in English.

The piece also needs more precise citations to supporting references for factual assertions.

The last general observation is that the article should be written in a somewhat more neutral tone. Currently, it reads a bit like a thoughtful, in-depth newspaper editorial rather than an academic analysis. It makes strong assertions about the need for religious freedoms without fully explaining *why* there are restrictions. The history of the restrictions can be more fully fleshed out. But the key thing is to reduce the possibility that a reader might view the author as biased and therefore discount it. The author should delete loaded language such as "terrible condition, or "false accusations" unless there is much more detail about why specific conditions were "terrible: or why accusations were indeed false.

Specific Observations and Suggestions

In the discussion of Catholicism, there should be a better-developed explanation of the connection between Catholicism and colonialism. That connection, particularly with the French occupation, might explain the government's restrictions.

There is a need for more explanation as to why senior Hoa Hao leaders were sent to re-education without trial. It would

also be helpful to know the difference between the Hoa Hao and the “pure Hao Hao” group.

In the discussion of Protestantism, it would be helpful to see a discussion of the various Protestant sects*,i.e.*, “mainstream” denominations such as Lutherans/Episcopalians/Methodists, versus evangelical sects including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Assemblies of God. In most countries, there are distinct differences between traditional mainstream groups and evangelical groups, and their differing interactions with governments.

A small item: it would interesting to know what percentage of the overall population is Muslim.

Another small item: are the demolished pagodas mostly new ones? Or old, historical pagodas?

Perhaps some of the discussion of “Vietnam’s Religious Policy” can be moved up closer to the beginning of the article. At least there should be an early summary of that policy.