

HO CHI MINH NATIONAL ACADEMY OF POLITICS

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**LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES
IN THE MEKONG DELTA REGION OF VIETNAM**

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS
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INTRODUCTION

1. The urgency of the theme

The Communist Party of Vietnam affirms the objective of “promoting the positive cultural and moral values of religions and mobilizing their resources for national development.” Law permeates religious life and practices through various mechanisms, most notably through legal education for religious dignitaries. In the context of “building and perfecting a clean, strong, streamlined, and effective socialist rule-of-law state that serves the people and advances national development,” every citizen - regardless of ethnicity or religion - is required to study, understand, and comply with the law. Politburo Resolution No. 66-NQ/TW on reforming law-making and law enforcement to meet the demands of national renewal in the new era emphasizes the need to “foster a culture of law observance and ensure respect for the Constitution and the law,” making constitutional and legal supremacy the normative standard for all actors in society.

In the Mekong Delta, where several indigenous religions are practiced, and most followers and a portion of dignitaries come from farming backgrounds, individuals may be vulnerable to manipulation by hostile elements, leading to violations such as converting private homes into unauthorized places of worship or printing unapproved religious materials. Moreover, “new religious phenomena, heresies, and sectarian groups” continue to exploit religion to disseminate complex, unlawful activities in the region. These actors also take advantage of local instabilities to distort the religious situation and the implementation of religious policies - underscoring the need to strengthen legal education for religious dignitaries.

At the same time, in recent years, legal education and training in national defense and security knowledge for religious dignitaries have not fully leveraged religious resources and still exhibit shortcomings in defining content, methods, and the scale of training programs.

From these practical requirements - and in alignment with the

Communist Party of Vietnam's viewpoint on promoting religious resources for national development, as well as the legal provisions on citizens' "right to access legal information and responsibility to study and understand the law" - the author undertakes the dissertation topic "***Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta Region of Vietnam***", as the subject of the doctoral dissertation major in Theory and History of State and Law.

2. Research Objectives and Tasks

2.1. Research Objectives

Based on an analysis of the theoretical foundations and an assessment of the current state of legal education for religious dignitaries, the dissertation proposes viewpoints and solutions to ensure effective legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

2.2. Research Tasks

To achieve the stated objective, the dissertation undertakes the following tasks:

First, to review the research literature related to the topic and formulate research hypotheses and research questions.

Second, to analyze the constitutive elements and conditions ensuring legal education for religious dignitaries, and to examine legal education for religious dignitaries in selected countries with characteristics comparable to Vietnam.

Third, to clarify the current situation, strengths, limitations, and underlying causes of legal education activities for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta region from 2017 to the present.

Fourth, to systematize and analyze guiding viewpoints and propose solutions aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

3. Research Scope and Subjects

3.1. Research Subject

The dissertation examines legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

3.2. Research Scope

- Research content: The dissertation focuses exclusively on issues related to legal education.
- Research space: The study conducts sociological investigations within provinces of the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.
- Research timeframe: The research analyzes documents and data concerning the study's subject and content in the Mekong Delta region from 2017 to the present.

4. Theoretical Basis and Research Methodology

4.1. Theoretical Basis

The dissertation is grounded in the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's ideology, and the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Vietnam, as well as Vietnam's legal provisions on the state, law, and legal education. In addition, the doctoral researcher consulted a wide range of scientific arguments from scholarly works and practical studies on legal education and legal education for religious dignitaries, both domestically and internationally, to further strengthen the theoretical foundation of the research.

4.2. Research Methodology

The dissertation employs a combination of research methods - including analysis and synthesis, comparison, and field surveys - to objectively reflect the theoretical and practical dimensions of the research topic and to substantiate the feasibility of the proposed solutions. Specifically, the author analyzes, synthesizes, and systematizes issues related to legal education using a wide range of books, journals, and dissertations to identify core values in both content and methodological approaches, thereby determining unresolved issues requiring further investigation. A sociological survey was conducted among lecturers, legal education presenters, and religious dignitaries in provinces with large religious populations in the Mekong Delta. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed - 500 to religious dignitaries and 500 to legal lecturers and

presenters in An Giang, Vinh Long, and Can Tho - with 990 valid responses collected. These data provide insights into the content, forms, methods, strengths, and limitations of legal education for religious dignitaries. The dissertation further employs statistical, analytical, synthetic, and historical methods to evaluate factors influencing legal education and to assess the current situation of legal education for key religious actors in the Mekong Delta from 2017 to the present. It also systematizes, synthesizes, and analyzes the guiding viewpoints of the Communist Party and the legal provisions of the State to formulate guiding principles and propose solutions to enhance the effectiveness of legal education for this special group in the region.

5. New Contributions of the Thesis

The dissertation makes several new scientific contributions as follows:

Theoretical contributions: The study develops a new definition of religious dignitaries and introduces a distinct conceptualization of legal education for religious dignitaries.

Contributions to legal and practical analysis: Based on an examination of religious policies in countries that are strategic partners and share with Vietnam the characteristic of religious diversity, as well as an analysis of Vietnam's legal provisions on legal education and the current model of legal education, the dissertation recommends that Vietnam gradually shift from a "Push" model to a "Pull" model of legal education. Under this model, the State provides mechanisms and conditions enabling religious dignitaries to self-acquire legal knowledge, organize, and participate in legal education activities, thereby mobilizing religious resources in sectors such as healthcare and culture.

Given the inconsistencies in legal provisions and the lack of uniformity in identifying special target groups for legal education, the dissertation identifies religious dignitaries as "*distinguished individuals with social prestige within their communities*" and proposes a framework for training programs aimed at updating their legal knowledge.

Contributions in terms of solutions and recommendations: The dissertation proposes groups of solutions and recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta in the coming period, from raising awareness of the importance of legal education, to improving legal regulations, developing new educational programs, and establishing the necessary resources and mechanisms for implementation.

6. Theoretical and Practical Significance

6.1. Theoretical Significance

The dissertation concretizes general theories of legal education by applying them to a specific target group, thereby contributing to the supplementation and further refinement of the theoretical framework on legal education for religious dignitaries.

6.2. Practical Significance

The dissertation serves as a reference for lecturers and legal education trainers in their professional activities, and provides a practical basis for agencies and organizations in planning and implementing effective legal training programs for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta region.

The study also offers policy recommendations that support state management agencies in adopting the “Pull” model in legal education, ensuring appropriate content and methods, enhancing the dissemination of legal norms into social life, and improving legal awareness among religious dignitaries and followers, thereby contributing to the development of a legal culture in the Mekong Delta.

7. Structure of the thesis

Apart from the introduction, conclusion, list of references, and appendices, the thesis is structured into 4 chapters with a total of 11 sections.

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH RELATED TO THE THESIS

1.1. OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC RESEARCH

1.1.1. Studies on Legal Education in General:

There are seven notable works published in the form of monographs, reference books, multi-level scientific research projects, scientific journal articles, and dissertations. Representative works include the monograph *On Legal Education* (1995) by Tran Ngoc Duong and Duong Thi Thanh Mai, and the book *Theoretical and Practical Issues in Legal Dissemination and Education* (2015), edited by Nguyen Tat Vien, among others.

1.1.2. Studies on Legal Education for Specific Target Groups

There are four studies that provide substantial scientific arguments concerning legal education for specific target groups. Typical works include the book *Legal Education for Administrative Officers and Civil Servants in the Context of Building a Socialist Rule-of-Law State in Vietnam* (2011) by Nguyen Quoc Suu, and the Candidate of Law dissertation by Duong Thi Thanh Mai (1996) entitled *Legal Education through Judicial Activities in Vietnam*, among others.

1.1.3. Studies on Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries and Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta

To date, there has been no comprehensive study on the theoretical foundations and the practical situation of legal education for religious dignitaries, particularly those in the Mekong Delta. However, 17 monographs and related research materials address specific dimensions of the topic, such as legal education for individual religions (e.g., Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhism) or for religious communities associated with particular ethnic groups, such as Khmer Theravada Buddhists. Representative references consulted for this dissertation include: *The Rule-of-Law State and Religion in Vietnam* by Do Quang Hung (2022), comprising Volume 1: *Religion and Society*, Volume 2: *Religion and Law*, and Volume 3: *Religion and the State; Promoting the Role of Religious*

Officials in Encouraging Followers to Implement the Law on Belief and Religion in the Mekong Delta edited by Huynh Thanh Quang (2021); *Khmer Theravada Buddhist Dignitaries in Legal Dissemination and Education in the Mekong Delta* (2019) by Dang Viet Dat and Hoang Thi Quyen; and the Doctoral Dissertation in Law by Duong Thanh Trung (2015), *Legal Education for the Khmer Ethnic Community in the Mekong Delta*, National Academy of Politics Ho Chi Minh.

1.2. RESEARCH SITUATION ABROAD

Internationally, several studies examine religious policies in various countries, including Vietnam, with references to legal education for religious dignitaries, as well as legal education for specific target groups both overseas and in Vietnam. In addition, a number of general studies on ethnicity and religion in the Mekong Delta also address, to some extent, issues pertinent to legal education for religious dignitaries in the region.

- Representative works include: *Contemporary American Religion* (2009) by Luu Banh (Chinese); *Cham Muslims of the Mekong Delta* (2007) by Philip; and *A Record of Cambodia: The Land and Its People* (2007) by Chau Dat Quan (Chinese).

1.3. REMARKS, ASSESSMENT, AND ISSUES REQUIRING FURTHER RESEARCH

1.3.1. Remarks and Assessment of Existing Studies Related to the Dissertation Topic

Theoretical aspects:: Existing studies on legal education and on legal education for specific social groups are increasingly diverse, addressing various dimensions such as concepts, characteristics, and constituent factors. However, with respect to legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta, the available literature focuses only on individual religions (e.g., Caodaism, Buddhism) and does not encompass all 13 religions present in the Southwest region. This reveals a significant “gap” requiring further research in the fields of Theory and History of State and Law.

Practical aspects: Numerous reports and survey results on religious affairs, as well as on the role of religious dignitaries and functionaries in

disseminating legal education, have been compiled and systematized to support macro-level policymaking on religious affairs and legal dissemination nationwide. Nevertheless, empirical materials specifically addressing legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta remain scarce, fragmented, and lacking in comprehensiveness.

Perspectives and solutions for ensuring legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta: While existing research on legal education proposes general viewpoints and solutions to enhance legal education for various social groups (including religious dignitaries), there is still no in-depth and comprehensive study that offers solutions tailored to religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta. Such solutions must stem from the Party's directives, strict adherence to legal provisions, application of modern and active legal education methods suited to regional specificities, and promotion of the role of religious dignitaries in cooperating with competent agencies. They must also leverage religious conditions and resources to enhance legal education for this particular group.

1.3.2. Issues Requiring Further Research

Based on the review of existing studies related to the dissertation topic, the researcher addresses the issue of “*Legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta Region of Vietnam*” through the following dimensions:

** Theoretical aspects::*

- In Chapter 2, the researcher formulates definitions of religious dignitaries and legal education for religious dignitaries, and clarifies the characteristics and roles of this educational activity.

- The chapter analyzes key components - subjects, beneficiaries, content, forms, and methods of legal education - and the conditions ensuring legal education for religious dignitaries. It also examines the religious policies of selected countries to identify lessons applicable to legal education for religious dignitaries in Vietnam.

** Practical aspects:*

- In Chapter 3, the dissertation analyzes natural, economic, political, and socio-cultural factors; organizational structures; and the religious landscape and religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

- It identifies strengths, limitations, and underlying causes in the implementation of legal education for religious dignitaries in the region.

** Perspectives and solutions:*

In Chapter 4, the researcher systematizes relevant viewpoints and proposes solutions to ensure effective legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA

2.1. CONCEPTS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND ROLES OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA

2.1.1. Concept of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries

** Religious dignitaries*

Religious dignitaries are believers who hold titles or ranks and play significant roles in religious operations, administration, and propagation. They are respected and recognized by their communities and religious organizations.

** Legal education for religious dignitaries*

From an educational perspective, legal education is a process through which individuals are equipped with legal knowledge, appropriate attitudes, and legal beliefs, while also being trained in the skills needed to adapt to and handle everyday situations in accordance with the law, thereby fostering legally informed and law-abiding citizens.

Accordingly, *legal education for religious dignitaries refers to organized and goal-oriented activities conducted by designated entities, employing specific content, forms, and methods to develop legal*

knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and law-abiding behavior among religious dignitaries.

Through this conceptualization, it is evident that legal education for religious dignitaries aims to ensure that both educators and recipients achieve the following objectives: accurate understanding of legal knowledge from fundamental to advanced levels; development of positive legal thinking and attitudes; and the formation of lawful conduct and lifestyle, contributing to a culture of respect for the law.

2.1.2. Characteristics of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta

First, it targets a special group - individuals influenced by both spiritual and secular authority, characterized by distinct residential and operational conditions, and entrusted with religious and social missions.

Second, it requires entities with a high degree of specialization and professional competence.

Third, it is implemented through specific forms and methods closely linked to mobilizing dignitaries to effectively comply with the Party's guidelines and the State's policies and laws.

Fourth, it is associated with state governance of religion, fostering a unified understanding of territorial sovereignty in the Southern region of Vietnam and the unity of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

Fifth, it takes place within a unique educational environment - the most vibrant religious landscape in the country.

Sixth, legal education for religious dignitaries constitutes an integral component of the implementation of legal provisions on religion.

2.1.3. Roles of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta

First, it equips dignitaries with comprehensive legal knowledge, enabling them to take the lead in fulfilling both religious and civic responsibilities and strengthening the "people's heart and mind posture" in the region.

Second, it contributes to fostering and consolidating legal awareness, sentiments, and confidence among religious dignitaries.

Third, it supports the formation of lawful behavior and lifestyles among dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

Fourth, it enables dignitaries to transition from passive recipients to active participants in legal education activities for their own community.

Fifth, it promotes the values and mobilizes the religious resources of the Mekong Delta.

2.2. CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA

2.2.1. Subjects and Recipients of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries

2.2.1.1. Subjects of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries

The subjects of legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta refer to all individuals and organizations that, by virtue of their functions and mandates, participate in the management or direct implementation of legal education activities for this special group in the Southwestern region. These include institutes, schools, agencies, organizations, and individuals with assigned responsibilities for providing legal education to religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta. The subjects involved in managing and delivering legal education for religious dignitaries consist of:

Legal education management bodies and legal education providers: the Government, the Ministry of Justice, and provincial People's Committees.

Entities directly implementing legal education: members of the Coordinating Council for Legal Dissemination and Education; the Council for National Defense and Security Education at the provincial level and above; and designated organizations and individuals, such as religious schools, instructors, and legal education reporters.

The subjects responsible for legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta, *as legal educators*, include both professional and non-professional actors:

Professional legal educators: lecturers and legal trainers tasked with delivering legal education programs for religious dignitaries and working at institutions that teach or conduct research in legal studies.

Non-professional legal educators: National Assembly deputies, lawyers, and others who, through their interactions and engagements, communicate legal norms to religious dignitaries.

2.2.1.2. Recipients of Legal Education

Religious dignitaries belonging to the 13 religious organizations legally recognized by the State of Vietnam in the Mekong Delta constitute the recipients of legal education.

2.2.2. Content of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries

Given the distinct characteristics of this special group, the content of legal education incorporates specific elements appropriate to both their role as citizens of the State and as leaders within their religious institutions. The content includes:

The first group of legal knowledge: Provisions of the Constitution and legal normative documents, with emphasis on regulations concerning civil, criminal, and administrative law; marriage and family; gender equality; land and construction; environmental protection; labor, education, health care, national defense, security, and traffic; fundamental rights and obligations of citizens; powers and responsibilities of state agencies, officials, and public servants; as well as newly promulgated legal instruments. It also includes international treaties to which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a party, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and specialized legal education topics.

The second group of legal knowledge: Legal awareness and compliance; the responsibility to protect the law; the benefits of observing the law; exemplary models of lawful behavior; and the cultivation of a culture of respect for the law.

Overall, the content of legal education for religious leaders is broad and multidimensional, addressing both their role as citizens and their clerical responsibilities. It spans constitutional provisions and core branches of law across various sectors, from general issues to those directly related to religious activities in connection with national defense, security, and socio-economic development.

2.2.3. Forms and Methods of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries

Forms of legal education for religious dignitaries include:

- Press conferences and official press releases on legal normative documents
- Direct legal education; legal consultation and guidance; provision of legal information and materials
- Legal education delivered through mass media, community loudspeakers, the Internet, panels, posters, and visual propaganda; publication in the Official Gazette; dissemination of legal information on electronic portals; public posting at offices, institutions, and residential areas.
- Legal education through judicial activities, administrative sanctioning, citizen reception, and the settlement of complaints and denunciations
- Legal education through cultural and artistic activities
- Teaching and learning activities on law at training institutions, both within and outside religious organizations

Methods of legal education for religious dignitaries include:

- Rapid legal information dissemination
- Advocacy, communication, and explanation of legal norms
- Traditional and modern pedagogical methods are applied in training and capacity-building courses for religious dignitaries

2.3. CONDITIONS ENSURING LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES

2.3.1. Political Conditions

Vietnam maintains a consistent political line and issues Party resolutions and documents that guide legal education and religious affairs.

2.3.2. Legal Conditions

The rights and legal obligations of religious leaders and followers are affirmed in the Constitution and relevant laws, including provisions governing legal education for religious dignitaries.

2.3.3. Conditions Regarding Resources and Coordination Mechanisms

In legal education for religious dignitaries, the State ensures the necessary resources while mobilizing religious and social resources, thereby establishing coordination mechanisms among individuals and organizations involved in this activity.

2.4. LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES AND LESSONS FOR VIET NAM

Within the scope of this dissertation, several experiences in providing legal education for religious dignitaries in several countries are reviewed, particularly those maintaining special or comprehensive strategic relations with Viet Nam, characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, and adopting state-religion separation policies similar to Viet Nam, such as France, the United States, China, and Japan. On that basis, the dissertation proposes several reference arguments for Viet Nam: the need to combine “Push” and “Pull” models in legal education through joint efforts of the State and religious organizations in refining legal education curricula; improving constituent elements and ensuring necessary conditions; and gradually transitioning toward a “Pull” model in legal education for religious dignitaries. Furthermore, it is necessary to encourage religious

organizations to participate in activities in culture, education, and healthcare to “pull” legally recognized religious representatives toward self-training and self-upgrading in legal knowledge, enabling them to take the lead in the socialization of healthcare and education, including legal education. This approach helps develop a pool of legal experts in fields such as education and healthcare from among the “special believers” of various religions; improve the legal education model; integrate legal education with patriotism for religious dignitaries in strategic areas; and define legal education for religious dignitaries as a specialized form of legal education to be organized at the provincial level.

Chapter 3

FACTORS INFLUENCING AND THE CURRENT SITUATION OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIET NAM

3.1. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CURRENT SITUATION OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIET NAM

3.1.1. Natural, Economic, Political, and Socio-Cultural Factors in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam

3.1.1.1. Natural Conditions

Natural conditions have contributed to the emergence of new religions within the socio-historical context of the Vietnamese community in the Southwest region.

3.1.1.2. Economic and Political Conditions in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam

These factors shape the distinctive characteristics of religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta, reflected in their engagement with worldly affairs, their sense of mission, and their strong patriotic spirit - traits embedded in the identity of the land and people of the Southwest.

3.1.1.3. Socio-Cultural Conditions in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam

These factors influence the behaviors and lifestyles of religious dignitaries in the region, characterized by emotional warmth and the cultural features of a riverine, maritime, multiethnic, and multireligious environment.

3.1.2. Structure and Organizational Apparatus for Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam

The provincial apparatus responsible for legal education for religious dignitaries - operating through two consultative councils and multiple actors involved in disseminating legal knowledge to representatives of various religions - has achieved fundamental results, contributing to stability across multiple aspects of life in the Southwest region.

3.1.3. Religious Landscape and Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam

First, the Mekong Delta is a multi-religious region, including religions associated with specific ethnic groups. The region hosts 13 out of the 16 religions recognized nationwide. Ethnic-based religions are exemplified by the Cham community adhering to Islam, primarily residing in An Giang, and the Khmer community practicing Theravada Buddhism. The region has a large religious population (6,827,100 out of 17.7 million people); the proportion of religious adherents (38.57%) is significantly higher than the national average of 28%.

Second, the region is the birthplace and convergence point of the largest number of indigenous religions in Viet Nam: 5 out of the 6 indigenous religions originated here (Hoa Hao Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhist Association, Tu An Hieu Nghia, Buu Son Ky Huong, and Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism). Although Caodaism originated in Tay Ninh (Southeast region) in 1926, the State has recognized 10 denominations and one practice lineage, among which 7 denominations and 1 practice lineage have their central governing bodies located in the Mekong Delta, including: Cao Dai Ban Chinh Dao (Ben Tre), Cao Dai Tien Thien (Ben Tre), Cao Dai Minh Chon Dao (Ca Mau), Cao Dai Chieu Minh Long Chau

(Hau Giang), Cao Dai Chon Ly (Tien Giang), Cao Dai Bach Y (Kien Giang), Cao Dai Viet Nam (Tien Giang), and Cao Dai Chieu Minh Tam Thanh Vo Vi.

Third, religious dignitaries of several religions are highly concentrated in the Mekong Delta, and some religions continue to develop despite the absence of a formal clerical hierarchy. In the region, the distribution of dignitaries is as follows: the Pure Land Buddhist Association of Viet Nam has 1,241 out of 1,294 dignitaries (95.9%); Tu An Hieu Nghia has 21 out of 21 dignitaries (100%); Caodaism has 8,136 out of 13,411 dignitaries (60.66%); Seventh-day Adventism has 3 out of 7 dignitaries (42.85%); the Minh Su Faith has 67 out of 201 dignitaries (33.33%); and the Baha'i Faith has 5 out of 19 dignitaries (26.31%). Three religions - Buu Son Ky Huong, Hoa Hao Buddhism, and Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism have no clerical hierarchy.

As of November 15, 2024, Viet Nam has 40 religious organizations across 16 recognized religions, with 28,065,030 followers (over 28% of the national population), including 61,061 dignitaries, 144,835 religious functionaries, and 29,921 worship establishments. The Mekong Delta accounts for 16,214 dignitaries, representing 26.55% of all religious dignitaries nationwide. The national ratio of dignitaries to followers is 0.21% ($61,061/28,065,030$), while the ratio in the Mekong Delta is 0.23% ($16,209/6,827,100$).

It may be affirmed that most “religious issues” in Viet Nam originate from the religious life of this region; in other words, “religious issues” in Viet Nam often move from the South to the North.

3.2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIET NAM

3.2.1. Strengths in Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries and Their Causes

3.2.1.1. Strengths

First, the entities involved in legal education are diverse and operate effectively.

Second, religious dignitaries actively and enthusiastically participate in legal education activities.

Third, the content of legal education for religious dignitaries has been implemented in a coordinated manner, producing initial positive results and improving legal compliance.

Fourth, legal education methods and forms are increasingly diversified.

3.2.1.2. Causes of the Strengths

First, local authorities have issued and implemented legal education programs, including legal education for religious dignitaries, in accordance with legal regulations.

Second, legal lecturers and communicators demonstrate commitment and proactivity in delivering legal education to religious dignitaries.

Third, religious dignitaries possess adequate knowledge and legal awareness to engage effectively in legal education activities.

Fourth, there have been innovations in promulgating and implementing policies and laws related to the conditions ensuring legal education for religious dignitaries.

3.2.2. Limitations in Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta and Their Causes

3.2.2.1. Limitations

First, legal education for religious dignitaries has not received adequate attention. Certain agencies and organizations have yet to recognize that this work constitutes “a component of political and ideological education, and thus a mandate of the entire political system.” Some still consider it solely the responsibility of state religious management bodies at various levels.

Second, several religious dignitaries conduct religious activities in ways that do not fully comply with legal or religious norms, adversely affecting the effectiveness of legal education, especially legal education for Khmer Theravada Buddhist dignitaries and followers.

Third, the implementation of legal education based on the national framework curriculum remains challenging and displays several shortcomings.

Fourth, the conditions ensuring legal education are still inadequate relative to the assigned tasks.

3.2.2.2. Causes of the Limitations

First, certain entities responsible for legal education have not fully recognized the importance of legal education for religious dignitaries.

Second, some Party committees and local authorities have not given sufficient attention to establishing effective coordination mechanisms among actors involved in legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

Third, those directly implementing legal education for religious dignitaries often work concurrently in multiple roles, with no specialized core personnel.

Fourth, some religious dignitaries have not been proactive or sufficiently engaged in coordinating the organization of legal education and dissemination classes.

Fifth, legal provisions on legal education for religious dignitaries remain inconsistent.

Sixth, the legal framework governing conditions that ensure legal education for religious dignitaries has not yet adequately met practical needs in the Mekong Delta region.

Chapter 4

PERSPECTIVES AND SOLUTIONS TO ENSURE LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

4.1. PERSPECTIVES ON ENSURING LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

- Legal education for religious dignitaries must consistently adhere to the Party's guidelines, the State's policies and laws, and the practical needs and lived experiences of religious dignitaries.

- Legal education for religious dignitaries is a responsibility shared across the entire political system, with the State playing the leading role, while the target group bears the responsibility of proactively acquiring legal knowledge and voluntarily complying with the law.

- The content, forms, and methods of legal education must be appropriate to the characteristics of religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

- Legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta must be closely integrated throughout the entire process - from lawmaking to law implementation and law enforcement.

- The organization and implementation of legal education for religious dignitaries must be ensured with adequate resources, in parallel with promoting socialization, and should be accompanied by systematic evaluation of its effectiveness.

4.2. SOLUTIONS FOR ENSURING LEGAL EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA REGION OF VIET NAM

4.2.1. Solutions related to enhancing the awareness of objectives and sense of responsibility in coordinating legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta

4.2.2. Solutions for improving the legal framework and revising institutional regulations governing legal education for religious dignitaries

First, the Ministry of Justice should recommend that the Government and the National Assembly amend the provisions of the Law on Dissemination and Education of the Law concerning a new structural model for the Councils for Coordination of Legal Dissemination and Education at all levels, consistent with the three-tier local government system.

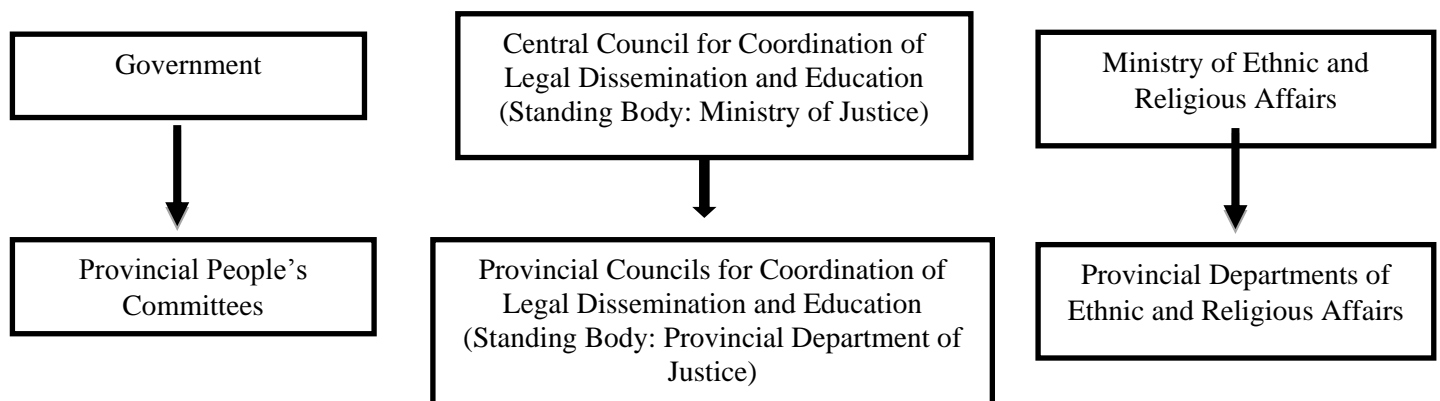
Second, the Law on Dissemination and Education of the Law should be revised and supplemented with a provision specifying the responsibilities of the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Training under Article 25.

The Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs shall take the lead, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Justice, and relevant agencies, in guiding the curriculum and content for courses on Vietnamese history and Vietnamese law in religious training institutions for religious dignitaries.

The Ministry of Education and Training shall promulgate the legal education curriculum across educational levels and training qualifications; define the timeline and roadmap for standardizing civic education teachers and teachers/lecturers of law; and issue the legal education curriculum for vocational training institutions.

Based on these orientations for legal reform, and drawing on international experiences with effective models of legal education for religious dignitaries, it is necessary to establish and implement an appropriate model of legal education tailored to this group.

Figure 4.1: Organizational Model for Improving the Institutional Structure and Actors Responsible for Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Southwestern Region



(Source: Proposed by the author)

Third, it is necessary to supplement the Law on Legal Dissemination and Education with a provision defining religious dignitaries as a special target group for legal education - comparable to the target groups

specified in the Law on National Defense and Security Education - given their status as exemplary individuals and persons of prestige within the community.

“Article ... Legal Dissemination and Education for Exemplary Individuals and Persons of Prestige in the Community:

1. Exemplary individuals and persons of prestige in the community who fall under legal dissemination and education on belief and religion include religious dignitaries, religious functionaries, village elders, clan leaders, and individuals active in cultural, social, scientific, and artistic fields.

2. Provincial-level People’s Committees shall take the lead, in coordination with the same-level Vietnam Fatherland Front and relevant agencies and organizations, in implementing legal dissemination and education on belief and religion for exemplary individuals and persons of prestige in the community.

3. Based on the framework program for training and updating legal knowledge for religious dignitaries and the law curriculum in religious training institutions, provincial-level People’s Committees shall develop and implement legal education programs and content appropriate for exemplary individuals and persons of prestige in the community.

4.2.3. Group of Solutions for Strengthening State Management of Religion in the Mekong Delta Region of Viet Nam

First, establish mechanisms for recruitment and incentive policies to attract, train, and assign state management personnel on religious affairs from the central to grassroots levels who possess both integrity and competence, as well as practical skills in handling religious matters and serving as legal disseminators for religious dignitaries.

Second, develop specialized training programs in state management of religion.

4.2.4. Group of Solutions for Organizing the Implementation of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta

First, build a qualified pool of legal education providers and strengthen their capacity to deliver legal education to religious dignitaries in the region.

Second, promote the active role of religious dignitaries by gradually shifting from a “Push” model to a “Pull” model in legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

Third, improve training programs by developing a framework curriculum for training and updating legal knowledge for religious dignitaries in the region.

Fourth, innovate forms and methods of legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta.

4.2.5. Group of Solutions for Enhancing International Cooperation in Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta Region of Viet Nam

First, strengthen international cooperation in legal education for the leadership of religious organizations in the Mekong Delta through the external affairs activities of state agencies.

Second, enhance international cooperation in legal education for key religious actors in the region through the external relations of religious organizations.

Third, Party committees and local authorities should support religious organizations in the Southwest region in organizing events and receiving delegations engaged in exchanges on religious affairs and legal education.

4.2.6. Group of Solutions for Developing Criteria to Assess the Effectiveness of Legal Education for Religious Dignitaries in the Mekong Delta Region of Viet Nam

CONCLUSION

Grounded in its research objectives and tasks, this dissertation has undertaken an in-depth examination of legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta region of Viet Nam.

The study demonstrates that legal education for the general population, and for religious dignitaries in particular, has consistently been a matter of concern for the Party and the State. Religious dignitaries constitute a special and distinctive group, influenced by both spiritual and secular authority. The overarching goal is to cultivate legal knowledge, legal awareness, and lawful conduct through tailored forms and methods of education, closely integrated with mobilization efforts that encourage this “special community group” to live a dignified and law-abiding life.

The unique characteristics that define the cultural identity of the Southwest region have significantly shaped its religious landscape, marked by high religious diversity, the origin of many indigenous religions, and several religions in which more than half of the dignitaries reside.

Drawing on relevant theories, research methods, and sociological surveys conducted with legal lecturers, legal disseminators, and religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta - as well as available documents and data—the dissertation provides an analysis and assessment of the current state of legal education for religious dignitaries in the region. It identifies both the achievements and existing limitations of this work and clarifies the underlying causes. Based on these findings, the dissertation formulates perspectives and proposes seven groups of solutions to ensure more effective legal education for religious dignitaries in the Mekong Delta in the coming period. These include: enhancing the awareness and sense of responsibility of both educators and learners; renewing the content, forms, and methods of legal education; improving the organizational apparatus for legal education; ensuring adequate conditions for its implementation; promoting the role of religious dignitaries and gradually shifting from a “Push” to a “Pull” model; and strengthening international cooperation in legal education for religious dignitaries in the region.

LIST OF PUBLISHED WORKS BY THE AUTHOR RELATED TO THE THESIS

1. Duong Van Cham (2004), “Religious Policies of Selected Countries and Lessons for Vietnam”, *Journal of State Management*, ISSN 2354-0761, No.347 (12).
2. Duong Van Cham (2024), “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Disseminating and Educating Legal Norms on Beliefs and Religion for Religious Dignitaries”, *Journal of State Management*, ISSN 2354-0761 , No. 342 (7).
3. Duong Van Cham (2024), “Dissemination and Education of Legal Norms on Beliefs and Religion for Religious Dignitaries in Vietnam Today”, *Journal of Democracy and Law*, p-ISSN 3030-4776, No. 417
4. Duong Van Cham (2024), “Solutions for Improving the Organizational Structure and Personnel for State Management of Religion in the Mekong Delta”, *Journal of State Management*, ISSN e-2815-5831.
5. Duong Van Cham (2025), “Several Solutions for Training and Capacity Building for Provincial-Level State Administrators of Religious Affairs in the Mekong Delta Region”, *Journal of State Management*, ISSN 2354-0761, No. 352 (5).