

Vietnamese followers of 'barefoot monk' question call for social media silence

by [RFA Vietnamese](#)

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Thich Minh Tue, right, as seen in the trailer for the documentary Own Nothing about Buddhist ascetics. (Video screengrab)

A Vietnamese man who became a social media sensation as he walked around the country promoting the virtues of an ascetic way of life, and earning the nickname the “barefoot monk,” has reappeared in public after disappearing four months ago.

But a request purportedly from the man, Thich Minh Tue, asking people not to gather in big crowds to greet him or post about him on social media has raised eyebrows among some of his followers who suspect the authorities don’t want another commotion around him.

Minh Tue, whose real name is Le Anh Tu, is a shavenheaded man who practices the 13 ascetic practices of Buddhism without actually being a monk in an order recognized by the Vietnamese government.

He has walked across Vietnam at least four times, the last time creating a storm of publicity that prompted the government to ask him to go into retreat in early June, when he disappeared from the public eye.

The Government Committee for Religious Affairs announced on its website at the time he had “voluntarily retired.” Authorities in Vietnam are invariably wary of social movements outside of the control of the ruling Communist Party.

Minh Tue reappeared in his hometown of Gia Lai about 10 days ago, attracting many followers and YouTube vloggers.

Then on Wednesday, the [Gia Lai Online](#) newspaper published a photo of a handwritten letter, addressed to “agencies and organizations, families, individuals, and the whole of society,” and signed by “Minh Tue,” asking that he be allowed to beg for alms and pursue his studies in peace, and calling for action against people who post about him online without his permission.

“I hope everyone will not gather in large crowds to disrupt traffic and safety, not film, take photos or post my image on social networks, affecting my learning process,” said the letter dated November 8. “I would like to request that authorities deal with those who post information about me on social networks without my permission.”

Another state-controlled news site, Tuoi Tre, quoted an anonymous source from Gia Lai Provincial Police on Thursday, talking about a letter with similar content.

A media request failed to verify the letter’s authenticity. The provincial police declined to respond to questions over the phone, asking the reporter to visit police headquarters to get information.

Buddhist researcher Nguyen Thanh Huy questioned in a Facebook post whether the letter was really from Minh Tue, noting that the call to authorities to restrict people appeared to be in contradiction with his position of not trying to influence anyone, even the devil.

“A person who once said he didn’t want to read the Great Compassion Mantra for fear of influencing the devil can’t ask authorities to deal with human beings,” Huy said.

Huy said Minh Tue had in the past repeatedly told anyone who wanted to film or take pictures to do so as long as they felt happy, saying he “did not care about social media or anyone else’s judgment.”

Musician Nguyen Tuan Khanh said the letter could be a first step towards taking news about the monk out of the media in order to isolate him from the public.

“With Buddhism, practitioners never deny the crowd of believers that are considered blessings for them, but according to the writing, they consider them troublesome,” he wrote on Facebook, referring to the letter. —Radio Free Asia

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