

HO CHI MINH'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT ON THE ROLE OF THE PEOPLE

[O QUE DIZ A FILOSOFIA DE HO CHI MINH SOBRE O PAPEL DO POVO]

Nguyen Duy Cuong¹

VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities – VNU-USSH, Vietnam

Acknowledgements: Acknowledgements: This research is solely funded by VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ha Noi, Vietnam.

ABSTRACT: In the twenty-first century, alongside remarkable achievements in science and technology and rapid economic growth, the world faces significant challenges in politics, culture, society, and, above all, the environment. These challenges are intensifying and directly affect the survival of every nation. In Ho Chi Minh's thought on social development, the decisive role belongs to the people, because the people are the subjects of history. Affirming the people's role as masters of national construction links Vietnam's revolutionary cause to sustainable development and makes it possible to mobilise all of the people's resources to build the country. For Ho Chi Minh, the people were not merely the social strata that took part in the revolution to win independence for Vietnam; they were also the driving force behind the nation's sustainable development. Studying, applying, and promoting Ho Chi Minh's political thought on the role of the people therefore provides an essential basis for advancing sustainable development in Vietnam today.

KEYWORDS: Ho Chi Minh; the people; role of the people; national independence; democracy; Vietnam

RESUMO: No século XXI, paralelamente a conquistas notáveis na ciência e na tecnologia e a um rápido crescimento econômico, o mundo enfrenta desafios significativos nos âmbitos político, cultural, social e, sobretudo, ambiental. Tais desafios estão se intensificando e afetam diretamente a sobrevivência de todas as nações. No pensamento de Ho Chi Minh sobre o desenvolvimento social, o papel decisivo cabe ao povo, pois o povo é o sujeito da história. Afirmar o papel do povo como protagonista da construção nacional vincula a causa revolucionária do Vietnã ao desenvolvimento sustentável e possibilita mobilizar todos os recursos populares para a construção do país. Para Ho Chi Minh, o povo não era apenas o segmento social que participou da revolução para conquistar a independência do Vietnã; era também a força motriz do desenvolvimento sustentável da nação. Assim, estudar, aplicar e promover o pensamento político de Ho Chi Minh sobre o papel do povo fornece uma base essencial para o avanço do desenvolvimento sustentável no Vietnã atualmente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ho Chi Minh; o povo; papel do povo; independência nacional; democracia; Vietnã

INTRODUCTION

The term “people” is common in social and political life. Many thinkers have discussed the concept, but from a Marxist-Leninist perspective the people is a category understood through historical dialectics (Lenin & Fineberg,

¹ Ph.D. Nguyen Duy Cuong. VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities – VNU-USSH Vietnam. E-mail: duycuong02029191@gmail.com

1947). Marx and Engels regarded the people as a specific social community whose members are bound together by common interests, the broad masses of the ruled, as opposed to the minority that constitutes the ruling class. In this sense, according to Lenin, the masses comprise all workers and all those exploited by capital; the masses are the majority, not merely the majority of workers, but the majority of all exploited people (Lenin, 2012). For Lenin, moreover, in each historical period and under specific socio-economic conditions, the category of the people includes the classes and strata that play a progressive and revolutionary role (Hill & Frank, 2024).

The people form a large social community, yet Marxist-Leninist philosophers do not treat that community as a homogeneous mass. As Lenin observed, when Marx used the term “people” he did not do so in order to erase all class distinctions (Pateman, 2024). More precisely, the people constitute a community composed of different classes, ethnicities, religions, and occupations. The concept is at once social and class-based: it is a political concept concerning a society divided into classes and into groups with differing statuses and interests. Marx linked the people to class. Thus in 1871, in the first draft of *The Civil War in France*, he argued that public officials are the servants of the people: the Commune abolished the political caste system and replaced the self-important masters of society with servants who could be dismissed at any time, substituting genuine responsibility for a fictitious one, because these officials always acted under the control of the people (McCarthy, 2015). Marx, however, did not have the conditions to put this vision into practice. It was only when Ho Chi Minh led Vietnam’s national democratic revolution that he and the Communist Party of Vietnam sought to build a society genuinely for the people.

The principal factor binding these components into a single community of the people is a shared social position, that of the ruled in relation to the ruling class. In their various formulations, Marx, Engels, and Lenin defined the people most generally as those who are dominated and exploited (Lenin & Fineberg, 1947). This shared position produces a closeness of common interests. Even this, however, is not sufficient, for not

everyone among the great mass of the exploited belongs to the people. The people include only those exploited groups that play a progressive and revolutionary role. Those among the exploited who play a reactionary or counter-revolutionary role, acting against the common progressive interests of the majority, are not counted among the people. Thus, for the Marxist-Leninist classics, the elements of progress and revolution are essential to the very conception of the people.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs the method of dialectical materialism, guided by the principles of objectivity and comprehensiveness, in order to recognise and evaluate the role of the people accurately. The principle of objectivity is used to assess Ho Chi Minh's thought about the people as a whole. His policies, leadership style, and revolutionary orientation were consistent with this thought: he always placed the interests of the people first, and the people were the goal of Vietnam's revolution. Accordingly, in appointing officials and in formulating and implementing policy, everything was to be made clear so that the Vietnamese people could enjoy freedom, independence, prosperity, and happiness. At the same time, he affirmed that the freedom and independence of the Vietnamese people could be achieved only when the people united to fight for, build, and develop the country.

The principle of comprehensiveness examines the full range of relationships in Ho Chi Minh's life in order to clarify that everything was for the people; from thought to action, all of these relationships express the aim of serving the people. His working methods, his style of work, his revolutionary theory, and his scientific knowledge all demonstrate the central role of the people in building and defending the country. The article also uses the method of analysis to clarify the aspects, elements, and relationships within Ho Chi Minh's career and thus to reveal the consistency of his ideal of serving the people, an ideal borne out by the success of the Vietnamese revolution, in which the people seized power and built a socialist state.

Finally, the method of synthesis is used to connect these aspects, parts, and relationships across Ho Chi Minh's entire revolutionary career, which consistently emphasised the role of the people. Through the people, Vietnam achieved national liberation and built the developed country it is today.

RESULTS

Ho Chi Minh's conception of the people as the subject of national history

In Ho Chi Minh's thought, the people are the subjects of national history and those who win and safeguard national independence. A nation is a broader form of community than the tribe; it emerges together with the rise of capitalism. Formed through a historical process, it is a human community characterised by a stable commonality in economic life, language, and territory, and by a national character expressed in cultural features and activities. President Ho Chi Minh emphasised taking the people as the root in building the state. All activities of state agencies must take the people as their root, for a tree stands firm only when its roots are strong. The socialist state in Vietnam was built successfully on the foundation of the people (Ho Chi Minh, 2011a).

Throughout thousands of years of history, the Vietnamese have struggled continuously to protect and consolidate their independence, a sacred value preserved by the blood, bone, and effort of countless generations. Historical experience shows that, in order to exist and develop, the state must respect and cherish the people's values and resolutely preserve, protect, and build upon them. The opposite course is the gravest betrayal and leads to antagonism between the state and the people. National independence therefore serves as the highest criterion by which to judge whether political institutions and individuals faithfully represent the interests of the people and the nation.

The people's national democratic revolution carries out the task of winning national independence through the

national-liberation revolution and of securing democratic rights through the class-liberation revolution. Given the conditions of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh gave the greatest attention to the national-liberation revolution, because winning national independence was, in his view, the key to attaining democratic rights and the direct premise for carrying out the socialist revolution. This was a revolution to free a colonised people from the domination, oppression, and exploitation of foreign invaders and their agents, to exercise the right of national self-determination and to establish a political order centred on an independent nation-state serving its many progressive citizens. This was the political goal of the Vietnamese revolution that Ho Chi Minh set out, and one that the entire people were resolved to devote all their spirit and strength, and even their lives and property, to carrying it through to success.

The people are the free citizens who own their country. While Ho Chi Minh emphasised community values and collective factors, he neither underestimated nor neglected the individual. For him, nothing was more precious than independence and freedom. Echoing the ideals of liberty, he affirmed that all people are born equal and endowed with inalienable rights, among them the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, truths that no one can deny. As Ho Chi Minh put it, "If a country is independent but its people do not enjoy freedom and happiness, then independence has no meaning" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011b). Independence alone is not enough; during the socialist revolution, protecting and building upon the gains of the national democratic revolution, the value of freedom for the people must be consolidated, its content enriched, and the conditions for realising it established. This is a fundamental task. Ho Chi Minh affirmed that only socialism and communism can fully liberate oppressed peoples from bondage, and that only a socialist revolution can secure true and genuine independence. On this view, freedom for the people remained the goal and ideal of his thinking about socialism and about building socialism in Vietnam.

The people are the beneficiaries of happiness. Ho Chi Minh's political outlook drew on the ideal expressed in the United States Declaration of Independence, that human beings

are endowed with inalienable rights, including the right to life. For Ho Chi Minh, within the Vietnamese context, “the people” meant both each individual and the people as a whole. Together with complete independence for Vietnam and full freedom for its people, his ultimate wish was that all of the people should have enough to eat and to wear. A happy life, he held, must accompany national independence and the civil rights and freedoms guaranteed under a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011c).

Bringing a prosperous and happy life to the people was the consistent goal of Ho Chi Minh and of the Vietnamese revolution. Having set out to find a way to save his country, he sought to return and help his compatriots, who lived lives of extreme deprivation under the feudal-colonial regime, to become truly free people: citizens of an independent country and the subjects of a state organised by the people and existing for them. At the end of his life, in his sacred Testament, Ho Chi Minh advised: “The Party must have a sound plan for economic and cultural development in order to raise the people’s standard of living steadily” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011d). A core and creative feature of his approach to the struggle for national liberation was that he always linked resistance with national construction.

Ho Chi Minh’s conception of the nation’s revolution as the duty of the people

Having absorbed Marxism-Leninism and, through decades of travel around the world, come ever closer to the truth that revolution is the cause of the masses, Ho Chi Minh expressed this conviction consistently in his thought, his feelings, and his actions. For him, the revolutionary masses were the broad strata of the Vietnamese people, in whom he found great strength. This conviction rested on his deep faith in the people: he believed that the people are knowledgeable and creative, that they are the greatest force in society, and that they are an inexhaustible source of strength in every place and at every time. That is why he held that, both within the country and in the world at large, nothing is more powerful than the force of the people.

Ho Chi Minh's outstanding contributions were those of a talented organiser, a brilliant thinker, and a great educator. He continued and further developed the struggle for civil rights, democracy, and enlightenment carried on by the generation of Vietnamese patriots of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he worked to identify and introduce to his country the progressive features of a new kind of education for working people, a socialist Vietnamese education that is highly democratic and popular and that aims at the comprehensive development of human capacities.

Ho Chi Minh set the goal of raising the people's level of education in response to the fact that more than ninety per cent of Vietnam's population was illiterate. Having set out to save his country and having observed political and social life in developed capitalist countries such as England, France, and the United States, he drew a consistent lesson: attention to education and the raising of the people's knowledge strengthens their political awareness and participation. Reflecting this conviction, the demands submitted at the Versailles Conference of the victorious powers after the First World War, presented by Nguyen Ai Quoc on behalf of Vietnamese patriots, included the demand that the Vietnamese be allowed to study freely and to open technical and vocational schools in every province. In numerous articles and speeches up to 1945, Ho Chi Minh repeatedly condemned the French colonial policy of keeping the people ignorant, treating the struggle against that pernicious policy as one of the aims of the fight for national independence. He devoted great attention to studying and praising Soviet education and applied its methods in organising and teaching the cadre-training classes he ran in 1925–1927. His lectures, collected in the work *Duong Kach Menh* (The Revolutionary Path), hold that access to education is the right of everyone; that building and developing education is the duty of the entire people; and that education is closely tied to the political task of serving the national-liberation struggle and of improving the people's social and cultural life (Ho Chi Minh, 2011e).

Having returned to Vietnam in early 1941, Ho Chi Minh chaired the Eighth Plenum of the Party Central Committee in May 1941. Both the plenum's resolution and the subsequent

programme of the Viet Minh set the goal of raising the people's knowledge, clearly defining the cultural and educational tasks of the Party and the Front: to abolish the education of servitude, to build a national education, to make elementary education compulsory, and to encourage and help the people to pursue a national education that would strengthen their national identity (Ho Chi Minh, 2011f). One day after reading the Declaration of Independence, Ho Chi Minh set out six urgent tasks for the Provisional Government. Under the second of these, ignorance, he condemned the French colonial policy of enforced ignorance, pointed to the harmful consequences of an uneducated nation, and promoted the opening of popular-education classes and the gradual restoration of a national education system. Throughout the years of resistance against French colonialism, he consistently stressed the eradication of illiteracy and the broadening of the people's knowledge; assessments of the revolution's achievements regularly recorded progress in eliminating illiteracy even as it led the socialist revolution in the North. Ho Chi Minh held that the Party and the Government were at fault whenever the people remained uneducated, and he affirmed that education must serve the guidelines of the Party and the State, for only when the people's intellectual level is raised and their understanding broadened can the work of the Party and State be properly grasped and carried out by the people.

Ho Chi Minh regarded the people as both the goal and the ideal of the Vietnamese revolutionary cause. Yet to maintain independence, strengthen the people, and make the country prosperous, every Vietnamese must understand their rights and, as a duty, acquire the new knowledge needed to take part in building the nation. Raising the people's level of knowledge thus became one of the essential contents of Ho Chi Minh's goals and ideals for the people.

A defining characteristic of progressive thinkers and politicians is that their thought and action advance the people's democratic rights. Ho Chi Minh was a great thinker and practitioner of democracy in the twentieth century. As a democratic thinker, he developed a whole system of arguments about democracy, from its conception to its expression in

politics, economics, culture, and society, and to the means of realising it in practice, and this body of thought has become part of the culture of the Vietnamese people. His democratic thought shaped the institutions and operating structure of a modern socialist democracy founded on democratic principles in every domain. The greater this ideological legacy, the more clearly it foregrounds democracy as a goal. Whenever he spoke of democracy, his thought held consistently to two propositions: that the people are the masters and that the people exercise mastery. Democracy as a goal, in Ho Chi Minh's thought, does not stop at the phrase "the people are the masters" but must advance to the practice of the people actually exercising mastery. Democracy realised in practice is the destination of his thought (Nguyen & Bui, 2023).

Ho Chi Minh's thought on the role of the people in Vietnam's revolutionary cause is broad and profound in content and remains ever new and creative. It teaches us that, in whatever field we work, we will succeed if we know how to rely on the people, to promote their right to mastery, and to respect and learn from them genuinely (Pham, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The role of the people in the Vietnamese revolutionary cause lies in this: the people are the great driving force that carries the revolution forward and determines all its victories. With all their spirit and strength, the people have, directly or indirectly, shaped the very conditions without which the revolutionary cause could not have arisen, been sustained, or developed.

REFERENCES

- Hill, R. J., & Frank, P. (2024). *The Soviet Communist Party*. Taylor & Francis.
Ho Chi Minh. (2011a). *Complete Works* (Vol. 6). National Political Publishing House.
Ho Chi Minh. (2011b). *Complete Works* (Vol. 4). National Political Publishing House.
Ho Chi Minh. (2011c). *Complete Works* (Vol. 4). National Political Publishing House.
Ho Chi Minh. (2011d). *Complete Works* (Vol. 15). National Political Publishing House.
Ho Chi Minh. (2011e). *Complete Works* (Vol. 2). National Political Publishing House.
Ho Chi Minh. (2011f). *Complete Works* (Vol. 1). National Political Publishing House.

- Lenin, V. I. (2012). *Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings*. Courier Corporation.
- Lenin, V. I., & Fineberg, A. (1947). *Marx, Engels, Marxism* (p. 465). Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- McCarthy, G. E. (2015). Last of the schoolmen: Natural law and social justice in Karl Marx. In *Constructing Marxist Ethics* (pp. 192–232). Brill.
- Nguyen, A. C., & Bui, N. D. (2023). The theory of political democracy for Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh's thought compared to Western political democracy. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2023-0104>
- Pateman, J. (2024). The contemporary vitality of V. I. Lenin's theory of ideology. *International Critical Thought*, 1–21.
- Pham, K. T. (2022). Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy and its meaning in educational innovation in Vietnam today. *Aufklärung: Revista de Filosofia*, 9(1).