

# RENOVATION OF THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN VIETNAM FROM 1986 UP TO NOW

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**Abstract:** The paper analyzes new viewpoints in the political ideology of Vietnam Government and the Party from 1986 up to now. Those viewpoints directly relate to some key issues, including: socialism and the path to reach socialism; class struggles and the struggle between the two paths towards socialism and towards capitalism; nationality and national solidarity; international relations; political systems and democratic performance. According to the author, the new viewpoints have made the political system more and more progressive, causing positive impacts on socio-economic and cultural life of the country.

**Key words:** *Doi moi* (renovation), political ideology, the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The political ideology is a set of political viewpoints, including: the viewpoint on social class and class relationships (class struggles and class alliance); the viewpoint on people and people's relations; the viewpoint on nationality and national relations; the viewpoint on the political system and relationships among different parts of the system; and, the viewpoint on political activities etc... The political ideology plays a directive role in political activities and relations of individuals as well as the whole community. In *Doi moi*, many new viewpoints were introduced by the Government and the Party in the political ideology. There are several reasons for the renovation. Firstly, the new viewpoints originated from changes in the national as well as the world situation, aiming at making our political system more suitable to the current international political trend. Secondly, the

political viewpoints built previously have certain shortcomings indeed (such as: voluntarist subjectivism, hasty, dogmatic, conservative and stagnant etc...). Compared with the political ideology in the previous period, the political ideology in the period from 1986 up to now consists of many new viewpoints, which can be enumerated as below:

*Firstly, it is the new viewpoint on socialism and the way to reach socialism.*

Since the beginning and through the entire process of revolutionary struggle, the Communist Party has persisted in following the path towards socialism. In the late years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the system of socialist countries disintegrated and the socialist movement fell into setbacks. Yet, communist party still remained determined to lead Vietnam to socialism. At the 11<sup>th</sup> National

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Congress of the Communist Party (in January 2011), *the Political Program on national construction for the transitional period towards socialism*” was passed by the Party, affirming again that “to reach socialism is the very aspiration of the people as well as a sound decision of the Communist Party of Vietnam and President Ho Chi Minh; it is completely appropriate to the development trend in history”. The Party, however, changed its viewpoints on the question: “what is socialism and how to reach it?” Specifically, the Party realized more judiciously socialism and the transition towards socialism; it corrected some previous viewpoints (for example, the viewpoint that synchronized the ultimate goal of socialism with the immediate targets; the viewpoints that emphasized unilaterally on relations of production; the viewpoint on egalitarian distribution; the viewpoints that did not show fully requirements of labor force development in the transition period; the viewpoint that identified market economy with capitalism; and, the viewpoint that equated the rule of law with the bourgeois state etc...). The political program on national construction for the transitional period towards socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011) asserts that the socialism which our people have been building aims at following goals: Firstly, the fulfillment of “prosperous people, powerful country, democracy, equity, civilization, and the people’s mastery”; Secondly, advanced

economic development, based on modern productive forces and appropriate productive relations; Thirdly, progressive culture full of national identity; all people have comfortable life, freedom, happiness and favorable conditions for comprehensive development; Fourthly, all ethnic groups in Vietnam are equal and united, showing mutual respect and support for common development; the Socialist State of Law of the people, by the people and for the people led by the Communist Party; Fifthly, good friendship and cooperation with countries in the world<sup>(1)</sup>.

Together with such a new viewpoint on socialism, the viewpoint on the path towards socialism has been also innovated. The path specified by the Party consists of some major targets as below: (1) to accelerate industrialization, modernization in attachment with development of knowledge economy; (2) to promote the socialist-oriented market economy; (3) to build a progressive culture full of national identity; (4) to strengthen human development and improve the living standards of the people; (5) to fulfill social justice and progress; (6) to ensure completely national defense and security; (7) to implement the foreign policy according to the principles of independence, sovereignty, peace-building, friendship, cooperation and development, and international integration; (8) to build

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Communist Party of Vietnam (2011), *Document of the 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party*, The National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, p.70.

socialist democracy, to enhance the national solidarity, and to develop the national united front; (9) to build the socialist state of law for the people, by the people and of the people; and, (10) to clean and strengthen the Party. Of all the viewpoints on the path towards socialism, the viewpoint on construction of socialist-oriented market economy, as shown by the Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong, is theoretically fundamental and creative. The socialist-oriented market economy is a multi-constituent economy following the market mechanism under the state socialist-oriented management. This is a new type of market economy in the history of market economic development. It is a type of economic organization that complies with both principles of market economy and principles of socialism. It is neither a capitalist market economy nor a socialist market economy. In the socialist-oriented market economy, there are different types of ownership and different economic constituents/sectors. All the economic sectors that conform to the law are important components of the national economy and equal in the eyes of the law; they cooperate and compete fairly with each other for general development. The state economic sector plays a decisive role; the collective economic sector should be continually strengthened and improved; the private economic sector is one of the key dynamics for economic development; the joint and multi-ownership economic sector

should be further and further strengthened; the state economic and the collective economic sectors should become a sound basis for the national economy; distribution must be impartial, creating a dynamic for development; the system of distribution must be based on labor results, economic effectiveness as well as contribution of funding and other resources. It must be carried out via the system of social welfare and social security; and, the State management of the national economy must be performed with laws, strategies, planning, policies and material forces in order to orient, regulate and promote socio-economic development.

*Secondly, it is the new viewpoint on class struggles and the struggle between the path towards socialism and the path towards capitalism*

In the past, class struggle and the struggle between the path towards socialism and the path towards capitalism, which aimed at solving the question “which one will win, socialism or capitalism?”, were exaggerated and viewed as a dynamic for social development. Due to such a viewpoint, a lot of class struggles took place continually and sometimes very violently, resulting in difficulties and barriers to development of the country. In the 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party (in 2011), judicious political orientations were introduced as below: “the main dynamic for national development is the very national solidarity of all people”. This summary finding was

drawn from many different periods of development; it is the concretization of Ho Chi Minh's thought on national solidarity for the new period of development.

In current official documents, the Party and the Government no longer view class struggles as a dynamic of development; they no longer use the phrase "the struggle between the two paths to solve the question "which one will win in our country, socialism or capitalism?". This has been really a positive change in the political ideology. To have come to the new viewpoint, of course, we have suffered from many complicated rises and falls of our nation; and we have had to pay dearly for it.

*Thirdly, it is the new viewpoint on national solidarity of all people*

During the period of the socio-economic crisis, resulted from errors of the macro guidelines and strategies as well as shortcomings in the personnel organization and degeneration of some officials and members of the Party, the national solidarity was negatively impacted. Many groups of people, who had used to make active contributions towards the national revolution and the resistance war, were considered as "non-socialist" members that had to get re-education in the early period of socialist building. They include manufacturers, merchants, small traders, shopkeepers, yeomen, and self-employed individuals etc. Actually, the mechanical equation of patriotism with love of socialism led to such social discrimination.

Vietnamese nation inherently has a lot of good traditional values such as warm and friendly, benevolent and righteous, generous and humane, but the above-mentioned excessive activities caused disordered situations, making some groups of people feel inferior or too cautious and casting down mutual reliability among people in the national community. A part of population did not place stable trust in the Party and the Government, partly because of their difficulties in life and partly because of their discontent at social injustice, corruption, unnecessary bureaucracy and waste that were common and serious in the country. People's participation in Vietnam Fatherland Front and other social mass organizations still remained limited. Before, the Party promulgated the guidelines on setting up the alliance of workers and peasants without appreciating the circle of intellectuals. In reality, the bloc of national solidarity at that time was not powerful enough to cope with new challenges.

This is a consequence of the fact that the Party and the Government hadn't had appropriate analyses and forecasts about changes in social class structure and contradictions occurring among people. For a long period, there was no timely and judicious policy issued to deal with the contradictions. Policies did not show fully the national solidarity viewpoint. And even, implementation of some policies caused damage to the national solidarity. In the

past, the colonial policy of “division for ruling” already resulted in negative consequences for the national solidarity. And then, hostile forces tried to sabotage continually our national solidarity under the label of democracy, freedom, human rights, ethnicity or religion.

In *Doi moi*, the Party and the Government changed the viewpoint on nationality and national solidarity. This can be shown in the fact that the Party and the Government laid down the policy to eliminate inferiority complex, stereotype and discrimination involved with the past and the class background of individuals, aiming at building the sense of openness and mutual reliability among all the people so that they would strive together for common goals such as a prosperous nation, wealthy population, democracy, justice and civilized society. At the same time, the national solidarity is based on the alliance of the workers’ class, the peasants’ class and the intellectuals’ circle, which are the major dynamics and decisive factors for sustainable success in building and protection of the country.

Regarding to renewal of the viewpoint on national solidarity, the Party and Government set up some significant guidelines, such as: the role of business people in economic development is highly appreciated; private economic sector is viewed as one of the dynamics for national economic development; religious issues are solved within the framework of ethnic and cultural affairs; having a religion or belief is

considered a spiritual need for a part of population; insular attitude, stereotype and discrimination against religious believers are eliminated; it is necessary to prevent acts that violate the freedom of beliefs and religion; favorable conditions are provided for overseas Vietnamese to come back and make contributions towards the homeland/country. They are encouraged to make investments into Vietnam; and, it is also essential to attract and promote contributions from overseas Vietnamese intellectuals.

The new viewpoint of the Party and the Government on national solidarity has been an important directive for not only people in Vietnam but also overseas Vietnamese community, resulting in a powerful dynamic for national development.

*Fourthly, it is the new viewpoint on international relations*

In the past, we mainly had foreign relations with countries in the socialist system. In the meanwhile, we set up very limited relations with non-socialist countries. At that time, the thinking was emphasized too much on the socialist ideology; we used our own revolutionary criteria to make assessments of other countries; we differentiated distinctly between revolutionary and anti-revolutionary countries, between socialist and capitalist countries, and between friends and enemies. We sometimes viewed the world as an arena of drastic struggles and we therefore criticized severely the opinion on peaceful coexistence. Regarding to our

awareness of capitalism, we persistently assumed that “capitalism was in its dying moments” (the 4<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Party) because “it fell into an unprecedentedly serious crisis” (the 5<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Party). Our awareness of socialism was also too short-sighted, when we assumed that “socialism was invincible and the system of socialist countries would more and more prove its role as a decisive factor for development of the mankind” (the 4<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Party); or, “socialist countries were showing the preeminence of socialism. Soviet Union was stepping in the period of building technical and material facilities towards Communism; and, many other countries were completing their developed socialist building. The system of socialist countries already constituted a general power greater than the imperialist and reactionary forces” (the 5<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Party). The above-mentioned consciousness caused a considerable influence on planning of foreign policy and guidelines of the Party and the Government, making us miss opportunities for international integration and resulting in a lot of difficulties for national building and protection.

In *Doi moi*, the Party and the Government made a lot of changes involved with international relations. Most remarkably, the Resolution No.13 of the Politburo (promulgated in May 1988) created a turning-point in the opinion on international affairs and foreign relations. This can be

shown in following important contentions: the most significant interest of Vietnam is to strengthen and maintain the peace in order to concentrate resources on economic development; it is necessary to take the initiative in moving from confrontational struggles to dialogues and cooperation for the peaceful coexistence; and, it is essential to implement the policy of “getting more friends and fewer enemies” and diversify relations with overseas nations on the basis of sovereignty, independence and mutual interest. This was the first step of amendment to the Party’s and the Government’s thinking on foreign relations, owing to which new orientations were set up for foreign policies later.

The second amendment can be found in the documents of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party (in June 1991) with a formal proclamation that Vietnam would: (1) desire to make friends with all countries in the world; (2) strive for the peace, independence, and development; and, (3) carry out the policy on multilateral and diversified foreign relations, equal cooperation and mutual interest with all countries on the basis of peaceful coexistence without any differentiation of social or political systems.

In the next national congresses and meetings of the Communist Party, new contentions were added to improve and complete the Party’s guidelines on foreign relations. In the 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party (in 2001), it was

proclaimed that Vietnam was prepared to be a friend and a reliable partner of all countries in the world community, striving for the peace, independence, development, and expansion of international relations. In the 10<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist (in 2006), it was officially stated that Vietnam would take the initiative in carrying out international economic integration and developing international cooperation in other areas as well; it would be a friend and a reliable partner of all countries in the world; and, it would actively take part in international as well as regional integration. In the 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress, the Communist Party set up the policy on conducting synchronously and comprehensively activities of foreign relations and international integration.

All the above-mentioned descriptions demonstrate that a sound orientation appropriately to the trend of the current era is to strive for the peace, cooperation and development. The renovation of the foreign policy and guidelines has brought great achievements in the field of foreign relations. From the point, where we just emphasized on proletarian internationalism, the Party and the Government moved a new point, where we take the initiative in carrying out policies for international integration. In the past, we mainly had foreign relations with socialist countries, but at present we have made friends with all countries in the world community without differentiation of political or social systems.

Vietnam used to take part in only the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA – or SEV) before, but by now it has joined many international organizations and has set up foreign relations with more than 170 nations. At the beginning, we just carried out economic integration, but at present we have international integration activities in many other fields, such as: political, social, and cultural etc... Thanks to the judicious political orientation in the foreign relations, Vietnam has gained significant consequences. It has built a peaceful and friendship environment for national building; it has attracted more official development assistance (ODA) and foreign investments; its international market has been expanded; it has approached modern technologies and advanced management for development; and, its prestige has been increasingly higher in the international arena.

*Fifthly, it is the new viewpoint on political systems*

In the past, the phrase “*system of proletarian dictatorship*” was often used in documents of the Party. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenum Resolution of the 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party (in 1998), the phrase “*political system*” was used for the first time in our country. Since then, the phrase “*system of proletarian dictatorship*” was almost no longer used. Herein, the significance does not simply lie in the change of words, but it implies changes involved with the content of those phrases.

It reflects a new viewpoint on political systems, leading to changes in the opinions on roles, functions, relations, and activities of the entire political system generally and each part of the system specifically.

As a core of the political system, the Communist Party of Vietnam also re-determined its own functions. Previous viewpoints considered the Party a pioneer of the workers' class of Vietnam. In the new viewpoint, however, it is considered a pioneer of not only the workers' class, but also all working people and the entire nation of Vietnam. According to previous regulations of the Party, any Vietnamese citizens aged 18 or above, who were a good example at work and did not exploit others, could be admitted to the Party; whereas the requirement that he or she "does not exploit others" is removed from the new regulations of the Party; it is acceptable that the Party members can do private economic activities (according to a pilot program, some owners of businesses, who are qualified enough to be members of the Party, are now also admitted to the Party). This viewpoint is absolutely new for the Party. In reality, the Party had to spend several decades on consideration and debates, in order to come to the new viewpoint.

The communist party's viewpoint on the state was also renovated. Before, it was considered that the state belonged to a particular class. Yet, it has been now considered the state of the people, by the

people, and for the people. The state of proletarian dictatorship has been renamed the socialist state of law. In the past, the state could have in-depth interventions in economic management of enterprises, but it has been defined to do only macro management at present. The state used to administer the country by resolutions and directions of the communist party, but now it does this task by laws; and, the Constitution and laws are, therefore, viewed supreme. The previously bureaucratic management with administrative commands has changed into democratic one; etc... This progressive viewpoint is really appropriate with the general trends of the world at present.

Guidelines on activities of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and other mass organizations were also renovated by minimizing administrative procedures and formalism; public relations have been conducted via setting up close relationships with people and increasing the sense of responsibility for people. In the 10<sup>th</sup> National Congress especially, the Party promulgated guidelines, according to which the Government would be responsible for setting up appropriate mechanisms so that the Fatherland Front and other mass organizations could undertake effectively their social supervisory and critical functions. Owing to the renovation, the Fatherland Front and mass organizations have been playing a significant role in promoting national solidarity, encouraging people to perform well all laws, guidelines



and policies of the Party and the Government, aiming at achieving the goals of making our country become a prosperous nation with wealthy population, democracy, justice and civilized society.

*Finally, it is the new viewpoint on realization of democracy*

In Ho Chi Minh's thought, the viewpoint on democracy is very noticeable and it plays the decisive role in setting orientations towards realization of democracy in our country. According to him, "the people are roots of the nation"; "the people are the owner of the country"; "the people master the country"; "our country is a democratic republic"; and, "to realize democracy is the way to test a revolutionary political party, like to use a stone to test gold". Affirming that the people are the very master of the country, Ho Chi Minh identified the people as a social subject and they must be empowered to master society in reality. It is really an advance to move from the viewpoint that "the people are the owner of the country" to the viewpoint that "the people master the country". Actually, we had to overcome a lot of difficulties to come to this conclusion. The people must be provided with favorable conditions so that they can realize their mastery and know how to use the right properly. To perform the mastery effectively, the people not only need empowering, but they also need to have a qualified capacity of mastery. It is not only necessary for the people to enjoy

the mastery, but they also must know how to use the mastery. The Party should set up appropriate mechanisms so that people can be equipped with fundamental elements to do mastery, such as: understanding of democracy, methods to perform democracy, and skills to practice democracy. At that time, the people can have the mastery in reality and we can avoid the situation of formalistic or too vague democracy. This is the very criterion to measure precisely the extent, at which democracy is realized among the people.

To properly prevent and deal with acts that harm or violate the democratic rights of people, it is necessary to institutionalize the rights in the Constitution and laws and they must be performed through corresponding regulations of the Government, according to Ho Chi Minh. Herein, democracy and laws as well as democracy and rules do not abolish or negate each other; on the contrary, they are consistent dialectically with each other for common development and coexistence. It is impossible to have democracy without laws, rules and disciplines.

The 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Party is a historic turning point involved with the emphasis upon promotion of democracy. The lesson on "viewing the people as roots of the country" shows the inheritance of Ho Chi Minh's thought. In the following Congresses of the Party, this viewpoint was further developed and specific mechanisms were built to follow the guideline: "the

people know; the people discuss; the people implement; and, the people supervise” all guidelines and policies of the Party and the Government; the mastery mechanism of the people was implemented through mass organizations and elective bodies; direct mastery was also conducted via the people’s self-governing forms and grass-roots regulations/conventions appropriately with the laws; the Party and the Government continued to increase democracy in building and executing resolutions; they consulted the Fatherland Front about important guidelines and decisions.

To realize democracy means to acknowledge freedom and equality of people and to recognize the people as the subject of power. The extent, at which this content of democracy can be achieved, depends on socio-economic conditions, political institutions, and laws. Requirements of democracy for the people are institutionalized in legal standards, organizational and operational principles of the Government and other political institutions as well.

For 28 years of *Doi moi*, the Party’s and the State’s viewpoint on democracy have been significantly improved in political, economic, and socio-cultural mastery. In the field of laws, the State has: (1) institutionalized the Party’s guidelines into the Constitution and laws; (2) cut off inappropriate legal regulations, revising existing laws and promulgating a lot of important legal documents relating to organizational and operational activities of the Governmental institutions,

socio-political societies, and economic sectors; (3) concretized and institutionalized citizen rights and human rights; (4) renovated the national administrative system in all four areas, including: administrative institutions, administrative apparatus, administrative officials, and public finance; (5) improved step-by-step forms of democratic realization; (6) built and completed the regulations on grass-roots democracy; and (7) paid more attention to democracy in the Party.

The above - mentioned part describes viewpoints of the Party and the Government on class struggle, national solidarity, international relations, political systems, and democracy in the period of *Doi moi*. They are fundamentally new viewpoints in the political ideology. Apart from the new viewpoints, there are also many other viewpoints introduced in the political ideology of the Party and the State during *Doi moi*. Thanks to the new viewpoints, the political face of our country has been more and more advanced. This has caused positive impacts on the national economic, socio-cultural life, making a significant contribution towards the country development.

The area of political ideology is complicated, sensitive and uneasily changeable with objective situations. Although the Party and the State have made positive changes in the area of political ideology, many people still keep dogmatic thinking and remain conservative; they have not been fully aware of big changes in the national and the

world political situation; they have not been brave enough to adopt selectively advanced ideas of the mankind and learn experience from other countries to be applied creatively in Vietnam. Many of new political viewpoints of the Party have not been yet institutionalized into laws or specific regulations; and some have not been implemented in practice. Regarding to democracy, for example, the guidelines on realizing democracy in scientific creation and research were passed at the 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party; the guidelines on ensuring democracy and freedom in all creative activities of culture, literature and arts were passed at the 10<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party; the Government also issued mechanisms to enable the Fatherland Front and other mass organizations to carry out the role of social assessment and supervision. Many years have passed, however, but such sound guidelines still remain in documents, without being implemented in reality at all. Besides, many theoretically political issues have not been clarified. How the directive function of the Party is different from the governing function of the Government, for example? What is the mechanism of the people's mastery? Do the people have the power to make ultimate decisions, when they have the mastery? Is it necessary to build the three pillars, including market economic, the rule of law, and civil society, in order to make our society powerful and developed? Why does the Party have the

policy to strengthen only two pillars, including market economy and the rule of law, but it has not yet laid down the policy to develop civil society? In the political ideology, therefore, there are still many remaining issues to be further clarified.

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