

## **SOME REFLECTIONS ON VIETNAMESE NATIONAL VALUES: HO CHI MINH AND THE VALUES OF INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS<sup>[1]</sup>**

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***Abstract:** In this paper the author shares his reflections on Ho Chi Minh's thought on the values of independence, freedom and happiness. The author argues that these values are the core values of the modern Vietnam and have served as the common inspiration and basis to connect and unite all the Vietnamese together in the fight to gain and maintain independence for the nation, bring freedom to all Vietnamese and open opportunities for all people to pursue happy life. During the modern history of Vietnam, those fundamental values have always acted as the main driving force in the cause of struggle for national liberation and national unification as well as in the cause of building a Vietnam. And today within the cause of Renovation and building a suitable socialist model for the national condition of Vietnam the fundamental values of independence, freedom and happiness continue to serve as the guiding values for our national development.*

***Keywords:** Ho Chi Minh thought, national value, socialism, Vietnam.*

### **Introduction**

Within the National Value System of Vietnam, the values of Independence, Freedom and Happiness, as the Motto of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, could be seen as the fundamental values, which orient and guide the development of our Nation since its establishment after the historic event of the August Revolution in 1945.

These values also serve as the common inspiration and basis to connect and unite all the Vietnamese together in the fight to gain and maintain independence for the nation, bring freedom to all

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Vietnamese and open opportunities for all people to pursuit happy life. During the modern history of Vietnam, those fundamental values have always acted as the main driving force in the cause of struggle for national liberation and national unification as well as in the cause of building a Vietnam with “wealthy people, strong country, democratic, just and civilized society”. In this paper we would like to share some of our reflections on the thought of Ho Chi Minh, the Founding Father of the Vietnamese Revolution and modern Vietnam, on the values of independence, freedom and happiness.

### **1. The values of independence, freedom and happiness in Ho Chi Minh thought**

Ho Chi Minh thought expresses not only the love for man but also his effort to acquire and combine creatively Eastern humanistic and progressive thoughts with quintessence of other cultures of the human kind. The humanism in Ho Chi Minh thought expresses the respect for all progressive thoughts oriented towards the most noble goal: human happiness. Ho Chi Minh has stated that “The good side

of Confucianism is self-improvement in personal ethics. The good point of Catholicism is benevolence. The good point of Marxism is dialectical method. The good point of Sun Yat Sen doctrine is that it fits with the conditions of Vietnam. Confucius, Christ, Marx, Sun Yat Sen shared common points, isn't that so? They are all *in pursuit of happiness for mankind and welfare for society* (italics ours). If they are still alive today and sit together, I believe they would live together in perfect harmony as close friends. I'm trying to be their humble student”<sup>1</sup>.

In Ho Chi Minh humanistic thought, the happiness of man is manifested not only in the development of separate individuals but also in the development of all people. As Ho Chi Minh emphasizes “in a narrow sense, the (term) Man means family, brothers, the relative and friends. In a wider sense it means fellow countrymen (compatriots). In a more wider sense it means the whole humanity”<sup>2</sup>. The authentic happiness man is looking for realizes in the complete unfolding of human nature (*becoming human*). This is the

very ideal and ultimate goal of human development understood in according to the materialist conception of history of Marxism.

The pursuit of happiness for the nation and all people of Vietnam is the main goal of the entire revolutionary life of Ho Chi Minh, as he admitted: “my entire life has only one goal: to strive for the interest of the Nation and happiness of the people... Any where, any time, I only pursuit only one goal: to do for the sake of national interests and people’s benefits”<sup>3</sup> or “I have only one desire, the most earnest desire, that our country be completely independent, our people be completely free, all our compatriots have enough food, clothing and housing, are able to learn and make progress and enjoy a fruitful, free and happy life”<sup>4</sup>.

Ho Chi Minh revolutionary goal is to gain independence for the country, freedom for the nation in order for *all the people* of Vietnam to realize the right to development “the right to enjoyment and the right to happiness”. Obviously in the situation of Vietnam before the August Revolution in 1945, when our whole nation was under the rule

of the French colonists, the people had no freedom to develop when the country lost its sovereignty, the whole nation lived in slavery. The very humanistic thought led Ho Chi Minh find the way to fight for national independence and freedom. Starting from his patriotism, the love for the compatriots, in his journey for the way to save the country, gain national independence and liberate the people for slavery, Ho Chi Minh found that Socialist Revolution was the appropriate way to achieve his noble goal. When he studied some bourgeois revolutions in the Europe and America he found that the call to bring freedom, equality, and fraternity to humanity made by bourgeois revolutions remain still mere formal and unrealistic (half-way) slogans. Ho Chi Minh has pointed out: “the French Revolution as well as the American Revolution, i.e. capitalist revolutions, are halfway revolution, in the name they were republic and democratic, but in reality, nationally they exploit workers and peasants and internationally they oppress colonial people. Though there have been revolution four times, but now the French workers and peasants

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attempt one more revolution in order to escape again from the cycle of oppression”<sup>5</sup>. The important events of the Russian Revolution as the studies of Lenin thoughts on revolution and national questions have very strong impact on Ho Chi Minh thought during the time he was seeking the way to liberate the Vietnamese nation from the rule of the the French colonists. The establishment of the Third Communist International as well as Lenin’s revolutionary arguments on the national and colonial issues decisively influenced the thought of Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh realized in the scientific and revolutionary theory of Marxism - Leninism the true way to liberate nation, society and humanity. Moreover, Ho Chi Minh also recognized the nobly humane characteristics of socialism, that is, the social regime respects and promotes human dignity, creates conditions and offers opportunities for development for all people. Through his reading of Lenin’s *Thesis on the national and colonial questions* he gradually understood the policy line of the Third International toward the oppressive and colonial people in their fight for self-determination “Communist International’s entire policy on the national and the colonial questions should rest primarily on a closer union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. This union alone will guarantee victory over capitalism, without which the abolition of national oppression and inequality is impossible”<sup>6</sup>. That was a very emotional moment in Ho Chi Minh life, as he remembered “...a comrade gave me Lenin’s, published by *I’Humanite*, to read. There were political terms difficult to understand in this thesis. But by dint of reading it again and again, finally, I could grasp the main part of it. What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness, and confidence it instilled in me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted aloud as if addressing large crowds: ‘Dear martyrs, compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation!’<sup>7</sup>. This could be understandable because the right way for national liberation is closely

related to the pursuit of the happiness for the people, for the society and for the nation, which is *the highest goal* of Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary life.

Thus, we can see that beginning with his patriotic love for the nation and for the people of Vietnam, in the process of finding a way to save the country, regain independence for the people and liberate the people from the yoke of colonialism and feudalism, Ho Chi Minh gradually realized that socialism (and communism) was the right and proper path to achieve his goal, as he stated, “In the beginning, it was patriotism and not communism which impelled me to believe in Lenin and the Third International. Gradually, proceeding step by step in the course of the actual struggle, and combining the theoretical study of Marxism-Leninism with practical work, I reached the point where I understood that only socialism and communism can liberate the oppressed peoples and the workers of the whole world from slavery”<sup>8</sup> or ““Only communism can save humanity and bring to all the people, regardless of race and origin, freedom, equality, fraternity,

solidarity, prosperity on earth, as well as bringing jobs, joy, peace, happiness to them and for them”<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, in Ho Chi Minh thought, as rightly noted by Nguyen Phu Trong, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, “National independence associated with socialism is the fundamental guideline of Vietnam's revolution and at the same time the quintessence in the theoretical legacy of President Ho Chi Minh. Through his wealth of practical experience, combined with the revolutionary and scientific theories of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh came to a profound conclusion that only socialism and communism may fully answer the question of national independence and bring about freedom, wellbeing and happiness to everyone and every nation”<sup>10</sup>.

## **2. Building socialism and creating conditions for all people to develop and pursue happiness**

Just after the success of the August Revolution and the formal establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945, the time when the national independence has been gained, Ho Chi Minh immediately pointed out

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that the tasks of the Government are to aim at “the sole goal of pursuing freedom and happiness of the people”<sup>11</sup>. Ho Chi Minh understands very well that independence has no meaning if the country is independent but the people cannot enjoy freedom and happiness and “we have gained independence and freedom but our people still die from hunger and cold, then freedom and independence are good for nothing. The people only understand the value of independence and freedom when they have enough food and clothing”<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh proposed immediate works to be done in order to create opportunities for all people to develop fully their potentials<sup>13</sup>. Concretely, Ho Chi Minh listed the immediate works and tasks as follows:

1. To make the people have food
2. To make the people have clothing
3. To make the people have shelter
4. To make the people have education”<sup>14</sup>

If the tasks of making the people have food, clothing and shelter are to meet basic needs for man to exist, the task of making the people have

education means to create opportunities for the people to develop freely. In Ho Chi Minh thought, illiteracy together with foreign invaders and hunger are the three dangerous enemies to be eliminated after the Revolution. Ho Chi Minh paid a special attention to the cause of education because “a illiterate nation is a weak nation”. In his letter to students, Ho Chi Minh says that “we have to rebuild the country inherited from our ancestors and catch up with other countries in the globe” This task can be done because the students of a new generation “are able to acquire the education of a independent country, the education that transform you into the citizens useful for the nation of Vietnam, the education that can develop comprehensively your given potentials”<sup>15</sup>. The goal to “develop comprehensively your given potentials” not only brings about happiness for every man but also helps rebuilt the country left to us by the ancestors in order to catch up with other countries in the world. This is the task of the country “the common work that every descendant of the Dragon and the Fairy, regardless of being young or old,

male or female, rich or poor, must take part in and strive for”<sup>16</sup>. The cause of development for the sake of human happiness, in Ho Chi Minh thought, is the common cause of the whole nation. The future of the nation and the country depends on every man, his or her constant effort and ceaseless development “if every one is good, the whole village will be good and the country will be strong. Man is the root of the village and the country. If every one strives to carry out a new mode of life, the nation will certainly be strong and prosperous... There are too many works to do in the world, learning will never be complete. Only with learning and education man can be advanced, the more we learn the more we will make progress”<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, education is very important factor for the development of the capacity of mastership of the people so that all people can participate and contribute to the cause of construction the socialist regime that recognizes the people as the masters and creates favorable conditions for the people to exercise their right of mastership. The goal of building and

developing socialism in Vietnam not only consists in creating a foundation for a wide solidarity of all strata of the people, all ethnic groups living in the territory of Vietnam but also serves as a driving force encouraging all the people to participate in the national cause of development. Such a polity is the achievement and common property of the people and must be mastered (and managed) by the people.

In Ho Chi Minh understanding, only after the nation regained independence and the people are free, every citizen of Vietnam is recognized as *a master* and is provided the necessary conditions to exercise the *right of mastership*. The building of socialism in Vietnam is also the process of building and development of socialist democracy, the regime that create conditions necessary for giving the people the chance to enjoy their mastership right. As we know, the capacity to be master is not naturally given but it is closely related to education and the process of human development. This capacity expresses the level of human development, the level in which man realizes his potentiality,

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his or her “essential powers”. Moreover, human development or the development of mastership capacity always takes place at a concrete socio-historical context, in a specific cultural tradition. Here we can see the dialectical relationship between individual human development and the cultural tradition of human communities. A cultural tradition exists as the result of the development of human nature, the fruit of the confirmation of the subjectivity of free development of man and human generation, but on the other hand, a cultural tradition also serves as the condition necessary for the human development, as a socio-historical environment for the formation of social subjects of future human generation. In this context, democracy can be seen under the aspect of formation and development of a human community as the subject of development. The process of development culture is the very process of development of democracy in the history of humankind.

From the Marxist materialist conception of history embodied in the theory of socio-economic

formations we can understand the preeminence of socialism, which is a more perfect social regime, a stage of development higher than capitalism, should be expressed in the fact that it is a regime that overcomes defects of capitalism in order to ensue all people to have opportunity to develop, to have equal chances to participate and contribute to the development of the society. The sustainability of social development should be demonstrated in the social development policies, which receives wide consensus and support of the people and promotes maximally the active participation of the people. Socialist regime, in its essence, is the regime that is organized and governed democratically in order to ensue the mastership of the people. This must be a democracy that takes basic rights of the people as the goal and starting point of its development policies. The people can really have the opportunity to be masters when social justice is ensured. The transparent system of laws is a necessary condition to ensure the equality of rights and duties, equality of opportunity as well as the equality of distribution and

access to use of common goods so that the people can really have opportunity to participate and enjoy the fruits of social development and are given chances to unfold their creative potentiality. Therefore, in the process of development of man and human society, democracy plays a crucial role. Democracy is “one of basic criteria to evaluate the nature and development level of a society”<sup>18</sup>.

In Ho Chi Minh thought on democracy, as the right for the people to be master and exercise their mastership right, the care for national affairs or democracy or socialist regime is the service for the common cause of the whole nation. To participate in the building of a socialist regime, therefore, is both the right as well as duty of every Vietnamese citizen. Thus, right after the first election to the National Assembly, a constitutional National Assembly of Vietnam in 1946, Ho Chi Minh clearly stated: “In the elections, anyone who cares for national affairs can stand for the elections and every citizen is entitled to go to the polls. All citizens, regardless of their sexes, economic situations, religions,

racess, social classes, political parties, have these two rights”<sup>19</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, we can see that the goal of building a republic mastered by the people is the same as the goal of the cause of construction of a socialist society, because the goal of socialism was clearly and intelligibly stated by Ho Chi Minh “Socialism is to make the people be joyful and comfortable”; or “The goal of socialism is to improve constantly people’s living standards” or “Briefly and plainly speaking, socialism first of all is to liberate the working people from poverty, bring employment, welfare and happiness to the people”. This is a political regime when the fundamental values of independence, freedom and happiness, also as the guiding ideals, can be sustainably realized. The model of socialism that the Vietnamese need can be seen in the clear and strong statement of Nguyen Phu Trong, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam “We need a society in which development is truly for humans, not for exploitation and dehumanization for the sake of profit. We need economic development accompanied by social progress and equality, not

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an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor or greater social inequity. We need a society of compassion, solidarity and mutual assistance towards progressive and humanistic values, not unfair competition where “the weak are meat, and the strong do eat” to satisfy the selfish interest of a few individuals and cliques. We need sustainable development in harmony with nature to secure a clean living environment for present and future generations, instead of unlimited exploitation and possession of resources, unrestrained consumption and destruction of the environment. And we need a political system where power truly belongs to the people, is enforced by the people and serve the people, not merely in the interest of the wealthy few. Such beautiful ideals are the true values of socialism, aren't they? And, are they also the goal and the path that President Ho Chi Minh and our Party and people had chosen, the path upon which we persevere, aren't they?”<sup>20</sup>. □

(Translated by Tran Tuan Phong)

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