

Ho Chi Minh's Thought on the Methods of Leadership and Ruling of the Communist Party of Vietnam

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Abstract: *The Communist Party of Vietnam, since its birth (in 1930), has played a leading role in the national liberation movement in Vietnam and after the success of the August Revolution, became the ruling Party. President Ho Chi Minh is both the founder and the person who guides and trains the Party. Therefore, he paid due attention to the Party's leading and ruling methods so that the Party can fulfill its mission as the vanguard of the working class and the nation. In this article, the author hopes to clarify Ho Chi Minh's Thought on the Party's leading and ruling methods to serve the goal of improving the leadership and ruling capacity of the Communist Party of Vietnam, as set out by the 13th Party Congress.*

Keyw ords: *Ho Chi Minh, Communist Party of Vietnam, method of leadership, method of ruling.*

Founded and trained by Ho Chi Minh, the Communist Party of Vietnam became the ruling party at just the age of 15. Revolutionary reality shows that the Party's position and power depend on many factors, but the method of leadership and ruling plays a very important role. Since 1927, when the Party was not yet born, Nguyen Ai Quoc asserted: "only when the purpose reaches consensus, shall the will have consensus; only when the will has consensus, will the heart reach consensus; But when the heart reaches consensus we must know how to do it so we can do it quickly"⁽¹⁾. Therefore, this is an issue that Ho Chi Minh is very interested in and pays great attention to.

1. The concept of "Leading Party", "Ruling Party", "Leading method", "Ruling method" of the Party in Ho Chi Minh Thought

"Leading" or "Ruling"; "Leading Party" or "Ruling Party" are both terms of political science. Based on the inheritance of Marxism-Leninism and the

conclusion of Vietnamese revolutionary practice, directly or indirectly, Ho Chi Minh expressed his conception of those key concepts.

- The concept of “Leading Party”

According to *the Grand Vietnamese Dictionary*, leadership means “to lead and organize a movement”⁽²⁾. “Leading Party” is a concept commonly used in socialist countries to affirm: The Party is *the leading force and the Party’s activities are leadership activities*, specifically finding ways, creating ways and guiding the masses to achieve revolutionary goals. The Communist Party of Vietnam exercises its leadership role both when there is no government and when there is a government to achieve the goal of expelling imperialism, overthrowing feudalism, gaining national independence, unifying the country and bring the country towards socialism. “Leadership” is the central activity of the Party, so in *Ho Chi Minh’s Complete Works* (published in 2011), the phrase “Leading Party” was used by Ho Chi Minh 52 times; The phrase “Party Leadership” is used 183 times. He affirmed: “Only with *the Party’s leadership*, will the revolution and resistance win, and will the nation be successful”⁽³⁾.

- The concept of “Ruling Party”

According to *the Grand Vietnamese Dictionary*, ruling means *holding power*. Thus, *the ruling party* is the party that holds the government (also known as the governing party). In capitalist countries, whichever party wins the votes of majority of voters and the majority of delegates in parliament has the right to form a government and become the ruling party.

“Ruling party” is also a term used to refer to communist parties that hold the sole position of power such as the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Vietnam. Of which, the Party’s leadership is enshrined in the Constitution and recognized by the people. The two models of the ruling party in two different regimes inevitably have differences in purpose and nature, but they both affirm: *The ruling party is the party that holds State power, operating in accordance with the law, to ensure the leadership role for the political system and the entire society, realizing the guidelines and strategies of the ruling forces.*

In Vietnam, as soon as it was established, the Communist Party was the “leading party” of the national liberation movement, but the Party

only became the “ruling party” after the August Revolution. To refer to the Party’s ruling position, Ho Chi Minh used different phrases. In the *Political Report at the Party’s Second National Congress* (in 1951), he wrote: “Not only our toiling classes and people but also the toiling classes and oppressed people of other countries can be proud of this fact: for the first time in the revolutionary history of colonial and semi-colonial people, a Party barely 15 years old has led the revolution to success and **seized power throughout the country**”⁽⁴⁾. Talking about the period when the Party withdrew into secret activities, Ho Chi Minh still affirmed the Party’s ruling role: “**The Party still leads the government and people**”⁽⁵⁾. The concept of “Ruling Party” was only mentioned directly by Ho Chi Minh twice: The first time was in the work *The Revolutionary Road*, when mentioning about Soviet Russia: “*The ruling Communist Party*, organizing a government of workers, farmers and soldiers, allocating farmland to farmers, handing over factories to workers, no longer forcing people to die for capitalism and imperialism, making the greatest efforts organize a new economy, to practice universal brotherhood”⁽⁶⁾. In his *Testament*, Ho Chi Minh used the phrase “**ruling Party**” to affirm the position of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Thus, in Ho Chi Minh Thought, “leading” and “ruling” are two activities of the Party and they are closely related to each other: “Leading” is to achieve the purpose of “ruling” and “ruling” in turn, is to exercise leadership in the new condition of having a government. Therefore, the concepts of “Leading Party under conditions of government existence” and “Ruling Party”, in essence, do not have too many differences because they both refer to the position and role of the Party towards the class and the nation. The concept of “Ruling Party” implies greater emphasis on the Party leading the State and that the Party must be responsible and worthy of its “ruling” position.

- The concept of “Leading method”, “Ruling method”

According to *the Vietnamese Dictionary*, method is a way and measure⁽⁷⁾. The Party’s “Leading method” is the totality of forms, methods, measures, regulations, processes, leadership styles, working practices... that the Party uses to influence leadership subjects to successfully implement the Party’s guidelines in each revolutionary period.

“Ruling method” is the totality of ways, forms, methods, rules, regulations, processes, working practices... that the Party uses to influence organizations, and first of all, the State and the entire society to realize the will, goals, and ideals of the Party as a ruling party.

From the practice of directing the revolutionary movement, in the *Report on the Resolutions of the Central Committee of the Indochina Communist Party* (1930), Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh used the concept of “Leading method” in mass mobilization. He writes: “**The method of mass leadership** is extremely important. The Party must pay close attention to it”⁽⁸⁾.

Since the government came into power, instead of using the word “Leading method”, Ho Chi Minh has repeatedly used the phrases: “**Leading way**” and “**Working style**”⁽⁹⁾. In the work *Modifying the way of working*, he also wrote a separate section “V. LEADING METHOD” and clearly explain: “What does true leadership mean?”⁽¹⁰⁾. The phrase “Ruling method” was not used directly by him.

2. Ho Chi Minh's views on the leading and ruling methods of the Communist Party of Vietnam

Because the “Ruling Party” is the “Leading Party during the period of government in power”, at this time, the “leading method” and “ruling method” are basically the same. On the other hand, when becoming a ruling party, the operating conditions, tasks, challenges, objects, and scope of leadership of the Party have changes. The Party must pay special attention to solving two issues related to the relationship between the Party and the State: (1). The Party uses its power to influence and dominate the development of State policies and laws; (2). The Party assigns key personnel to State agencies, especially at the central level.

According to Ho Chi Minh, the Party's leading and ruling methods are shown as follows.

Firstly, *the Party leads and rules by setting out guidelines, platforms, strategies, and resolutions with major orientations for the country's development.*

Determining the direction is the most difficult issue for a political party. Becoming the ruling party, our Party performs the main leadership role by setting out the strategic platform, guidelines as well as strategies for action

in each stage. Thus, the Party plays the role of “the architect” for national development. If the Party makes mistakes in its political guidelines, this will result in serious consequences for the nation’s destiny, the political life of millions of Party members as well as the lives of tens of millions of our people. Or if the Party has inconsistent guidelines it will lead to the formation of factions, making the Party to split and disintegrate. Ho Chi Minh once emphasized: “Correct policy is the source of victory”⁽¹¹⁾, and the unified guideline is the foundation for solidarity. Therefore, building a correct and unified platform, strategic guidelines and policies is a “crucial” issue of our Party.

Ho Chi Minh once emphasized: “True leadership means: 1. All issues must be decided correctly”⁽¹²⁾. The Party’s most important issue is to come up with the right guideline. So what is the right guideline? Ho Chi Minh affirmed: “That guideline can only be the guideline of Marxism-Leninism applied creatively to the specific circumstances of our nation”⁽¹³⁾. That is, *creative application of Marxism-Leninism* in the specific circumstances of Vietnam is the first condition for having a correct guideline. If the Party departs from the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism, it will fall into revisionism, but if it mechanically applies those principles to the specific conditions of Vietnam, it will fall into dogmatism. Whatever extreme is absolutely harmful. Therefore, he emphasized: We must learn Marxism-Leninism to analyze and solve specific problems of our country’s revolution, to adapt to our specific circumstances. To have the right guideline, the Party must also *consult the experiences of brotherly countries* on a selective basis; the unique characteristics of Vietnam in each period are also an important base for us to have the right guideline. Therefore, in making policies and resolutions, the Party must investigate, learn, and firmly *grasp the actual situation*; “If we don’t clearly know the situation but still set out policies, the result will be like “square pots with round cover”, which don’t match at all”⁽¹⁴⁾. Most importantly, according to Ho Chi Minh, the right guideline must be the *one that is compatible with the people’s hearts*, an expression of the burning wishes and aspirations of the masses. To that end, cadres must *skillfully* evoke the masses to voice their thoughts and then persistently “concentrate the opinions of the masses, turning it into a way to lead the

masses”⁽¹⁵⁾. Ho Chi Minh also specify the “process” of making the guideline as follows: “[It is necessary] to collect all the discrete and sporadic opinions of the masses, then analyze them, study them, and arrange them into systematic opinions. Then [we should] popularize them, explain them to the masses, and make them become their opinions, and encourage the masses to maintain and practice those opinions. At the same time, while the masses practice those opinions, [it is imperative] to review and evaluate whether they are correct or not. Then [we should] gather the opinions of the masses again, develop the advantages, correct the shortcomings, communicate, explain, and make the masses maintain and practice those opinions. If we keep doing that, the next time we will definitely have more correct, active, and complete opinions than the previous times”⁽¹⁶⁾. He advised: “If there is a resolution that the people think is inappropriate, let them suggest correction”⁽¹⁷⁾. He also reminded that in planning its guidelines, the Party must prevent “leftish” and “rightish” trends.

Secondly, *the Party leads and rules through communication, mobilizing Party members and people to implement the Party’s guidelines, policies and laws of the State.*

After the issuance of the guidelines, platforms, and resolutions, the next very important issue is *communication and the organization of the implementation of the resolution*. Since the 1920s of the 20th century, Ho Chi Minh already said: “It is not enough to propose lengthy theses and passing ‘flashy’ resolutions to be put in ‘museum’ after the Congress as has been done before. We need to take specific measures”⁽¹⁸⁾. Viewing that true leadership means “being able to organize the implementation properly”⁽¹⁹⁾, Ho Chi Minh proposed the following “process”: After issuing a resolution, it is necessary to disseminate the entire resolution within the Party, then “disseminate the necessary points to the people”. There must be serious debate within the Party organization to reach a consensus of opinions. When conducting communication and mass mobilization, cadres must keep this truth in mind: The people are kind-hearted; Once they understand, they can do no matter how difficult it is, no matter how much sacrifice they make, they don’t hesitate. However, “we must resolutely persuade the people to have their unanimous agreement with our Party’s resolution”⁽²⁰⁾.

Regarding the form of dissemination, we must base on actual conditions to use forms such as “opening explanatory meeting”, “leaflets”, “slogans”... The popularization of the Party’s resolutions among the people must have features of persuasion, explanation, avoidance of coercion and ordering.

To put the resolution into practice, it is necessary to develop a specific, practical, and affordable plan. Ho Chi Minh said that a small program that could be implemented was better than a hundred big programs that could not be implemented. The process of directing the implementation of the resolutions must “use the following two leading methods: One is to combine general policy with specific direction; the second is to unite the leaders with the masses”⁽²¹⁾. He explained that anything lacking a clear policy or directive would not effectively reach the masses. However, if the leaders only implemented general and/or all-encompassing measures without specific targets, tried their best to get certain results, and then drew on the experiences gained in one place to guide actions in other places, it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of such a policy. It is also impossible to make the content of that policy complete and practical. The connection between the leader and the masses is extremely necessary because in doing anything, the leaders must rely on a loyal group, but only when this loyal group has close relationships with the masses, can success be achieved. If there is only the enthusiasm of the loyal group without the enthusiasm of the masses, the loyal group will have to “run” all day without much result. On the contrary, if there is only the enthusiasm of the masses without that of a loyal group to organize and lead the movement, the enthusiasm of the masses will not last long.

Thirdly, *the Party leads and rules by promoting the role of Party members in State agencies, the Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations.*

After gaining power, the Party leads the people to establish the State apparatus and political system to implement the Party’s guidelines and exercise the people’s rights to mastery. The Party directs the organization building, not only of the Party, but also of other agencies in the political system, in which special attention is paid to the organization of the State apparatus. The Party uses the majority of Party members in the National Assembly and People’s Councils at all levels to elect delegates who are

Party members recommended by Party committees to hold key positions in State agencies, especially at the central level to control and direct the activities of State agencies in accordance with the Party's guidelines and policies. At the same time, the Party also introduces and approves Party members in the Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations to negotiate and elect Party members to hold key leading positions in each organization. This leading method proved especially useful during the period of 1945-1951—the time when the Party retreated into covert activities. During this period, the Party did not publicly declare itself as the ruling party (Ho Chi Minh often used the word “Union” to talk about the Party). All leading and ruling activities of the Party were carried out through the roles of Party members in State agencies and socio-political organizations. The Party's leading and ruling role was also shown in the fact that the Party unified cadres' affairs and managed cadres throughout the political system.

Fourthly, *the Party leads and rules through inspection and control.*

Ho Chi Minh affirmed that examination, inspection and supervision was a leading method of the Party and also an important measure in Party building. In *The Political Report* at the Second Party Congress, Ho Chi Minh clearly stated that one of the reasons why there were still some weaknesses in the Party was “because the Central Committee has not paid attention to inspection”⁽²²⁾. From revolutionary reality, the importance of inspection was explained by Ho Chi Minh from many angles. First of all, inspection is to decide the problem properly and propose a resolution appropriate to the situation. Ho Chi Minh wrote: “To fight bureaucracy and ‘office desk disease’, to know whether the resolutions are being implemented and whether they are being implemented correctly or not, to know who works with the greatest efforts and who works superficially, there is only one way, which is proper *controlling*. With proper *controlling*, all the defects will be exposed. Moreover, with proper *controlling*, the defects will definitely be reduced in the future”⁽²³⁾. Inspection also has the effect of classifying and evaluating cadres, Party members and grassroots Party organizations. He affirmed that if the inspection was thorough, it was like having a “headlight”; all situations, advantages and disadvantages would be clearly

seen; On the contrary, “nine-tenths of the defects in our work are due to lack of inspection”⁽²⁴⁾.

Thinking that true leadership means “organizing good control”⁽²⁵⁾, under the direction of Ho Chi Minh, on October 16, 1948, the Standing Committee of the Party Central Committee issued a resolution to establish the *Central Inspection Committee*. To direct practical work, Ho Chi Minh set out requirements on how to inspect. He requested that “inspection must be systematic”, that is, it must be regular. The scope and content of inspection work are *tasks* and *people*. The work here is the implementation of the Party’s resolutions and directives; *The people* here are cadres and Party members. To make an inspection, there must be no bureaucracy and reports, and it must be done on-site. It is very unique that Ho Chi Minh required not only inspection from the top down (i.e., leading cadres inspect the work of subordinate cadres) but also inspection from the bottom up (i.e., “the masses and cadres control leadership mistakes). Regarding *the inspection force*, Ho Chi Minh said that leaders had to do the inspection themselves to be “legitimate” and to have prestige. Besides, there should be a specialized inspection and checking force, but they should be exemplary in all aspects. In addition, Ho Chi Minh requested clarification of the responsibilities of those who did the inspection, who inspected what, and where, if there was negligence, that person should take responsibility. Ho Chi Minh also emphasized that Party inspection work had to go hand in hand with reward and discipline. He wrote: “Cadres doing well must be rewarded; those violating the rules must be punished. If there is no reward, there is no incentive; If there is no punishment, discipline cannot be maintained. Strict and fair rewards and punishments are necessary”⁽²⁶⁾ and are also an important method in the Party’s style of leading.

Fifthly, *the Party leads and rules through promoting the pioneering and exemplary responsibilities of its cadres and Party members.*

Pioneering is taking the lead, getting into hard places to lead the people; “setting an example” means “modeling”, creating exemplary behavior for others to learn and follow. In Eastern culture, setting an example is considered the best educational method. For that reason, Ho Chi Minh considered “setting an example” an effective leading method for the Party.

He explained: “In front of the masses, we are loved not just because we write the word “communist” on our foreheads. The masses only love people with good character and morality. If we want to guide them, we must be a model for them to imitate”⁽²⁷⁾. He affirmed: You must first be *righteous before you can help* others; If you are not *righteous first*, and wanting someone else to be righteous, then it is unreasonable. He also raised the question: “If you yourself are a speculator and tell others to be incorruptible, is it reasonable?” Of course not. We must first be diligent and pure before we can tell others to be pure and diligent.⁽²⁸⁾ Being a leader is educating and mobilizing people to follow the Party, but “if we want to educate the people and make everyone good, cadres and Party members must educate and improve themselves everyday. Ancient people also knew how to cultivate themselves: every evening they reviewed themselves and used two jars of black beans and white beans to record good and bad deeds. Our Party members and cadres come from the heroic people and must live up to the heroic people and Party⁽²⁹⁾. To give cadres and Party members a direction of action, Ho Chi Minh also clearly pointed out the content of setting an example. He wrote “How to be a model? In general, Party members, wherever they are, whatever they do, whatever position they hold and whatever circumstances they fall in, must always:

- Put the interests of the Fatherland and the people first and foremost.
- Try their best to participate in the resistance.
- Be close to the people, love and help the people, organize and lead the people.
- Maintain revolutionary morality, which is serving the people wholeheartedly in a public-spirited manner”⁽³⁰⁾.

Party members need to be exemplary not only in maintaining Party discipline but also in complying with national laws and regulations of agencies and organizations. In addition to “public service ethics”, they must also maintain “civic ethics” and be good members of their family. To express the strict responsibility requirements to set an example for Party members, Ho Chi Minh gave a specific example: “There are two people: Mr. A, a Party member, and Mr. B, not a Party member. They both work in the same agency, and record the same achievements. Mr. A shall get the lower

reward. On the contrary, while Mr. A and Mr. B have same defects, Mr. A must be more seriously criticized and punished”⁽³¹⁾. Just as Ho Chi Minh said, the “preference” here is the Party member’s duty to set an example and be a pioneer.

Although the subjects of exemplary practice are all cadres and Party members, Ho Chi Minh clearly stated that *leaders and people in charge* were the ones who had to take the lead in the contingent of pioneers. Ho Chi Minh often called energetic leaders “core” people. He thought that, “If the core is developed and strengthened, the Party will develop and strengthen. If there is no core, the Party will wither”⁽³²⁾. He also made it clear that the greater the position, the higher the responsibility and the greater the responsibility to set an example. Regarding the responsibility of Party members to set an example, Ho Chi Minh concluded: “Party members – no matter what work they do, what position they hold - they must set an example for the masses. If they want the masses to listen to and follow their words, then Party members, from their actions and words to their way of living, must behave in such a way that people would believe, admire and love them. That is to get people to believe in the Party, follow the Party, love the Party and respect the policies of the Party and the government. Any Party member who is not trusted, admired, and loved by the people is not deserved to be a member of the Vietnam Workers Party”⁽³³⁾. He also emphasized: Cadres set an example not only “with words” but also “with deeds”. The masses, with their sharpness, always clearly distinguished between the real and the fake, the real example and the “pretend-to-set-an-example”. “Setting an example” is the shortest way to win people’s hearts and inspire the masses, so leading and ruling by example is the most effective way of leadership.

During his 24 years as the head of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the leader of the Party, President Ho Chi Minh had practical conditions to form his thought on the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam, in which the Party’s leading and ruling methods account for an important content. President Ho Chi Minh’s profound instructions on the Party’s leading and ruling methods not only have helped it firmly maintain its ruling position for nearly 80 years but are also the theoretical foundation and

action “guideline” for implementing the policy of “continuously improving capacity and innovating the Party’s leading and ruling methods in the new condition”⁽³⁴⁾ set out by the 13th Party Congress./.

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(2) Nguyen Nhu Y (1999), *Great Vietnamese Dictionary*, Information and Culture Publishing House, H., p. 979.

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(4), (5), (22), (30), (33) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol. 7, pp. 25, 27, 33, 54, 55.

(7) Institute of Linguistics (2002), *Vietnamese Dictionary*, Da Nang Publishing House, H., pp.793.

(8) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 618.

(9) In Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, the phrase “leadership method” is used 23 times and “working style” 42 times.

(10), (11), (12), (14), (15), (16), (17), (19), (21), (23), (24), (25) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, pp. 325, 636, 325, 307, 338, 330-331, 337-338, 325, 328, 33, 327, 637, 525.

(13) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol. 14, p. 608.

(18) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 303.

(20) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 452.

(26) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol.9, p. 310.

(27) Ho Chi Minh (2011), *Complete Works*, *ibid.*, Vol.6, p. 16.

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