

Ho Chi Minh's wisdom on culture

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Abstract: *Ho Chi Minh's cultural philosophy is a system of scientific, revolutionary and theoretical viewpoints on culture and the construction of Vietnamese culture. It resulted from creative application and development of Marxism-Leninism into the specific conditions of Vietnam. It inherited and developed the nation's traditional values while acquiring humanity's cultural essence. This is a heritage of tremendous value both theoretically and practically for Vietnam's revolution. In this article, the author analyzes the essence of Ho Chi Minh's cultural philosophy and clarifies certain fundamental orientations of Vietnamese Communist Party on building an advanced culture imbued with the cultural identity in current conditions.*

Keywords: *philosophy; Ho Chi Minh; culture.*

Ho Chi Minh - the hero of national liberation, the great man of culture of Vietnam, left an extremely valuable and profound ideological legacy for the country. Ho Chi Minh Thought is the result of inheriting traditional national values, the quintessence of human culture and Marxism-Leninism. The result of that inheritance was observed in the application to the reality of the Vietnamese revolution and raised to be Ho Chi Minh's philosophy and wisdom. The core content of Ho Chi Minh's wisdom is the affirmation of the role of the People in the revolutionary cause, towards building an advanced culture imbued with national identity. It is a profound philosophy of culture and vividly expressed through his practical activities. Ho Chi Minh's wisdom on culture is reflected in the following points:

Firstly, culture is by people and for people and people-centered.

Culture, according to Ho Chi Minh, is understood as the whole creation of material and spiritual values of human beings during his existence and development. The root and deep motivation of culture is human needs (material and spiritual needs) and it is always changing. That people are never satisfied with what nature gives them and what they have has motivated them to be active and creative, renovate nature and society, and create material and spiritual wealth to better serve their own needs. This is also the process of creating culture. In that sense, wherever there are people and human activities,

there is culture. Culture is the promotion and realization of the natural abilities of human beings. Humans are creative subjects of culture, and at the same time, culture is a survival means and their living environment. Humans cannot exist and develop as humans if separated from the cultural environment and it is a matter of fact that human development history is always associated with the development history of culture.

From Ho Chi Minh's viewpoint, culture includes two basic fields, material culture and spiritual culture. Apart from spiritual products such as language, writing, morality, law, science, religion, literature, art, and so on, culture also includes material products for people's life such as tools and means to meet the needs of food, clothing, shelter, travel, communication... Material culture is actually the materialization of spiritual values. Each material product represents the talent and aesthetic ideals of people and the inventors.

Culture emerges, exists and develops according to its laws. The pivotal law is that people are the creators of culture. Having a different viewpoint from the ruling class, Ho Chi Minh saw the great role of the People and the working people specifically in creating culture. Culture is not the exclusive creation of great individuals, artists, artisans, ruling class, it is of the people and created by the people. He affirmed that the masses are not only the creators of material wealth for society, but also the creators, testers, and beneficiaries of cultural values. Therefore, the cultural officials "need to help polish the creations of the masses. These creations are precious stones. To do so, they need to be equipped with politics and technology, to sharpen the stones to be good and beautiful"⁽¹⁾. Therefore, the driving force of cultural development is the People. The work of building culture must thoroughly grasp and well implement the public view that cultural creation is the cause of the people, by the people and for the people.

A good way to maximize the role of the People in building a new culture is to set and multiply good examples. Setting an example and encouraging good people to do good deeds not only has the meaning of motivating people to complete the immediate revolutionary tasks, but also is one of the basic measures to build the Party and the core forces of the revolution. By that, a new man, a new lifestyle is built, encouraging the good parts in each person and keeping off the bad parts. The good examples, good people, good deeds among the people, cadres and Party members are the moral beauty of new Vietnamese men who are just ordinary people doing normal things for society. Those ordinary things

can be done with a little effort by everybody. And if all people follow such good examples, the good will become popular, and our society will get better, and that is also the most practical way of communicating and educating Marxism-Leninism.

Secondly, a culture building is on the basis of respecting and preserving the national culture and assimilation of world cultural values.

Dialectically, Ho Chi Minh pointed out: "What is old and bad should be left out... What is *old*, not *bad*, but troublesome must be revised to make it appropriate... What is old but good should be developed... What is *new* and *good* should be done"⁽²⁾. Therefore, the more we are imbued with Marxism-Leninism, the more we must respect the fine cultural traditions of our ancestors. We must know how to preserve and restore the positive aspects, eliminate the negative aspects in the cultural and spiritual life of the People, and should not let the negative things of the past hold the present life back.

It is necessary to preserve and promote the tradition associated with development, raise it to a new level and quality in order to meet the increasing cultural level of the People. President Ho Chi Minh pointed out the basic goals that the Vietnamese revolution should achieve in the field of culture: "To thoroughly eliminate all colonial relics and the enslaving influence of imperial culture. At the same time, to develop the fine traditions of the national culture and absorb the new ones of the world's progressive culture, in order to build a national, scientific and popular Vietnamese culture"⁽³⁾.

Upholding the national cultural identity, Ho Chi Minh criticized the cultural alien practices, overemphasis on foreign culture, underestimation of the national culture among intellectuals, writers and artists, and warned about the risk of "losing the cultural root" among them. There are some Vietnamese intellectuals who are so familiar with the history, geography and myths of France, Greece and Rome. But when asked about Vietnamese heroes, ancestors or the country's geography, they are ignorant... We need to be careful of having many Vietnamese people who do not understand the history, country, people and our very precious values as well as foreigners"⁽⁴⁾. At the same time, he taught us to preserve and promote national traditions and identities, promote national character, national spirit... to encourage our compatriots, to educate our children and grandchildren.

Of Vietnamese cultural traditions, President Ho Chi Minh upheld patriotism, considering it a spiritual motivation, an inexhaustible source

of strength, a philosophy and a life ethic of every Vietnamese. He affirmed that our nation is a heroic nation and has a passionate patriotism. At the same time, he highlighted the traditions of kindness, community cohesion, industriousness, intelligence, and creativity in production, indomitableness and heroism in fighting against foreign invaders. Those precious traditions were highly promoted by him in the struggle for national liberation and socialism construction in our country.

The selective absorption of human culture to build a revolutionary culture is both a historical tradition and an objective necessity. The Vietnamese culture that was formed and developed in the long history of the nation is not the result of the movement of indigenous factors alone, he said: “Vietnamese culture is the mutual influence of Eastern and Western culture. We pick up good things from both cultures to learn and form our own. That is, taking the good experience of the ancient and present culture, cultivating it with pure Vietnamese spirit to match the democratic spirit”⁽⁵⁾.

He did not deny human cultural values and did not prohibit the inheritance of such values to enrich and diversify the national culture, but he criticized and opposed the grotesque “borrowing” which denied and abandoned the inherent values of the nation as well as the chaotic absorption of everything from people. It should be the selective acquisition of the good, the beautiful to enrich culture. This is really the “Vietnamization” of what comes from the outside, turning them into the inner, as natural as the indigenous elements of Vietnamese culture. That we stand firmly on the national background to dominate and assimilate external cultural values has been demonstrated throughout the history of the past few thousand years.

Among human cultural values, President Ho Chi Minh especially emphasized Marxism-Leninism. In the light of this approach, we have a revolutionary worldview of life, expressed in actions and behaviors, and we have a scientific basis for building a new culture of Vietnam which is both traditional and modern. Marxism-Leninism becomes the soul of a new culture, because it is a compatibility of cultural values. Based on scientific understanding and recognition, he successfully carried out and led the process of exchanging, accumulating and acquiring advanced cultural values of mankind to build a new Vietnamese culture.

But it is not just about absorbing human culture, we also need to contribute to enriching it. He said: “We can learn the good of any country

in Europe, in America, but the main thing is to compose. We have enjoyed the good of others, we must also have good things for others to enjoy. We should not just borrow without paying back”⁽⁶⁾. This is the application of the dialectic of “receiving and giving”, “borrowing and paying” in cultural contacts, exchanges and dialogues. Culturally, if one only wants “grant aid”, that is not only an uncultured attitude but also cannot promote the cultural identity of each nation. In addition, in the process of absorbing and learning from experience, we must pay attention to the characteristics of our nation, otherwise we will make mistakes and fall into dogmas. “If we just put too much emphasis on the national identity to refute the universal values of the fundamental experiences of other countries, we will likely fall into the grave error of revisionism”⁽⁷⁾.

Culture is the guarantee for the existence, perfection and development of human personality; it ensures a comprehensive, sustainable and humane development of society. Culture does not exist in isolation, but it has a close relationship with people and other cultural values, making “the cultural life of the masses more and more progressive and literature and art with socialist content and national identity grow vigorously”⁽⁸⁾.

Thirdly, cultural development is inseparable from socio-economic development.

In order to advance to socialism and improve the people’s material and spiritual life, we must develop the economy and culture. According to President Ho Chi Minh, in the construction of the country, there are four issues that must be paid attention to and given equal importance: politics, economy, society and culture - these are four main issues of social life which are closely related to each other. Therefore, in the national construction, all these four issues must be given equal importance.

Economy is the foundation of building culture, so it is vital to focus on economic development and infrastructure construction to create conditions for culture building and development. Economic development is to ensure food, clothing, and material life for the people, and that economy is inseparable from the contents and meanings of building culture, it must serve the purpose of culture development of the People. To realize the socialist goal, we must fight, build, develop, and carry out a real revolution in which culture always has an important and decisive meaning. In the harmonious relationship with material life, it is both a condition and a foundation for the construction and development of social life, as well as a goal to strive for.

Therefore, according to President Ho Chi Minh, culture must stay within economics and politics, serving political tasks and promoting economic development. Culture belongs to the superstructure, governed and determined by economic and political relations and conditions. He penned: “Culture is a superstructure, only after the infrastructure of society is built, can culture be built and developed”⁽⁹⁾. Therefore, culture must participate in carrying out political tasks, promoting economic development: “culture is also a front”, “turn culture into part and parcel of our resistance and make our resistance a cultured one...”, “culture, art, like all other activities, cannot be left out, but must be involved in economics and politics”⁽¹⁰⁾.

The nature of art as a front is that it is against not only foreign invaders, but also internal enemies. Therefore, it is necessary for art and literature to have the courage to seriously criticize bad habits such as embezzlement, corruption, wastefulness, laziness, bureaucracy... The artistic front is not only about “fighting” but also “building”, of which the latter is the main and long term task. In order to fulfill their duties, artistic soldiers need to have a firm stance and correct ideology, and must put the interests of the resistance war, the Fatherland, and the people first and foremost.

Not only seeing the decisive role of economy and politics in culture, President Ho Chi Minh also recognized the great role of culture in economic, political and social development. Culture is the foundation and spiritual motivation for the development of all aspects of social life, for the progress of society. He wrote: “The people’s enhanced cultural level will help us accelerate the economic recovery, democratic development...which is necessary to build ours into a peaceful, unified and independent, democratic and prosperous country”⁽¹¹⁾. Culture being inside politics and economics also means that politics and economics must be cultural.

Fourthly, culture must serve revolutionary tasks, the people, take the people’s happiness, and the development of the Vietnamese people as the basis of all works.

Culture must serve revolutionary tasks. President Ho Chi Minh remarked: “Obviously, if the nation is oppressed, art will also lose its freedom. If art wants to be free, it must participate in the revolution”⁽¹²⁾, an artist who wants to be free to create must first be a truly free person in political, economic and social life and must actively participate in the resistance war and the national construction. In order to accomplish that task, culture and art must have great works on par with the new era, works of sincere praise of new people, new

things to set examples in the current life and to teach later generations; those works must fight against embezzlement, wastefulness, laziness, bureaucracy... to build a healthy and good society. At the same time, writers and artists need to practice revolutionary morality, raise the spirit of serving the People, have a humble attitude; must truly blend in with the masses, constantly study politics, improve expertise and profession... In short, in order to serve the cause of the socialist revolution, culture must be socialist in contents and traditional in forms.

Culture must serve the People, take the happiness of the People and the nation as the basis for all works. As a means of human survival, culture is created to serve humans. Humans are both creators and recipients of cultural values. Therefore, culture, according to President Ho Chi Minh, must aim at serving the vast majority of the People, not the exclusive enjoyment of the rulers, exploiters and intelligentsia. He said: "Culture must practically serve the People, contribute to improving the happy and healthy life of the masses. Therefore, cultural content must have educational significance. For example: They should educate about the new lifestyle and revolutionary morality"⁽¹³⁾.

To serve the people, culture and art must have the material of life, must listen to the compatriots and soldiers, ask the people, contact and go deep into the people's life; must see, record, only the real life of the people can bring an endless source of vitality to the art, providing inexhaustible materials for artists and writers. He said: "Only the People nourish a writer's work with a source of vitality, and if the writer forgets that, the People will also forget him"⁽¹⁴⁾. All creations must "come from the masses, to the depths of the masses" in order to understand the people's love, heart, and will.

Culture plays a very important role in building the Vietnamese people in the new era. President Ho Chi Minh said: "In order to build socialism..., we must build socialist human beings... If you want to have a socialist person, etc., you must build a socialist ideology"⁽¹⁵⁾. A socialist person must be a person who is both virtuous and talented, of which morality must be the root. This new person cannot be born immediately, but is formed step by step in the process of revolutionary struggle and socialist construction. This is a long and arduous, regular and urgent task because we have to transform the people of the old society into the people of the new society; the socialism that we are building is a completely different society in nature and is unprecedented. The habits and lifestyles of the old society... which have been deeply rooted

in people's way of life are great obstacles to the progress of individuals and of the whole society.

Not only affirming the regularity, role and relationship of culture with different fields of social life, President Ho Chi Minh also set forth a set of criteria for building Vietnamese culture with the policy of: "Five great points to build national culture. 1- Building psychology: independent and self-reliant spirit. 2- Building morality: knowing how to sacrifice oneself, benefiting the masses. 3- Building society: every cause that is related to the people's social welfare. 4- Building politics: civil rights. 5- Developing economy"⁽¹⁶⁾. This shows that when delineating the connotation of the concept of culture, President Ho Chi Minh was well aware of building national culture in reciprocal relationship with other aspects of national life such as psychology, morality, society, politics and economy. Building culture must be associated with each of these aspects, making culture good, unique and positive in those areas of life.

Ho Chi Minh's wisdom is a precious treasure, a heritage with a wide array of values which after all, are cultural value. That is why in 1923, Russian poet Osip Mandelstam commented: "Nguyen Ai Quoc breathes culture, not European culture, but perhaps the culture of the future"⁽¹⁷⁾. Ho Chi Minh's wisdom on culture is not only a goal to strive for high values, but also plays a fundamental role and great motivation in the development of various aspects of social life. Culture is the vitality of socio-economic development, the driving force that promotes all human life activities... The above ideas still remain valid until today and in the future.

Especially, in the current conditions with positive and negative impacts of the international integration, the market economy as well as from the construction process itself, Vietnamese culture has faced with new requirements in "protecting and promoting good and sustainable values in Vietnamese cultural traditions; promoting education to raise awareness, sense of respect and observance of the law, protecting the environment, preserving the cultural identity of the Vietnamese people, especially the young generation; step by step rising to overcome the limitations of Vietnamese people; building Vietnamese people in the new era, closely and harmoniously connecting traditional values and modern values"⁽¹⁸⁾. To that end, we are required to develop comprehensively and synchronously cultural aspects, promoting the good values of the nation, while absorbing the quintessence of human culture, handling good relationship between economy and culture so that culture is really the spiritual foundation

of society, a driving force for socio-economic development and international integration. It is also necessary to focus on building Vietnamese people's personality in terms of ideals, intelligence, morality, lifestyle, vigor, national pride, social responsibility, law observance, especially among the young generation... It is vital to encourage creativity and freedom in cultural, literary and artistic activities to create many products of high value, popularity... and to preserve and promote national cultural heritages as well as to raise the level of cultural enjoyment of the people.

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