

Ho Chi Minh's journalistic thought, example and style

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Abstract: *Ho Chi Minh – a hero of national liberation, an outstanding cultural figure, a great journalist, a founder of Vietnam's revolutionary journalism. He left us a huge volume and a variety of genres of journalistic works; comprehensive and profound system of ideological and theoretical perspectives on Vietnamese revolutionary journalism and the professional style of journalists. The article summarizes his main contributions in the field of journalism in response to the current campaign "Continue to promote studying and following Ho Chi Minh's ideology, morality and style", contributing to build a professional, humane, and modern Vietnamese press according to the orientation of the 13th Party Congress.*

Key words: *thought; press; He; journalism; style; writing articles*

1. Before becoming a journalist in 1919, Nguyen Ai Quoc had accumulated high school knowledge at Hue National School, with language proficiency in Chinese, French, and Vietnamese. Born in a poor patriotic Confucian family, he soon absorbed the precious traditions of the nation, his homeland and his family. During his youth, he experienced major family events and understood the suffering and humiliation of those who lost their country. Although he admired the Vietnamese patriotic movements at that time, he soon had thoughts about the causes of their failure and sought to go abroad. When he was abroad (since 1911), he travelled to many countries, did many jobs, gained more knowledge about geography, history, world culture and formed a love for poor workers of different skin colors and languages in the colonies. With the patriotism and love for the class, at the end of 1917, when he returned to France, he joined the "Vietnamese Patriots" group and the French Socialist Party. In 1919, he wrote the *An Nam People's Claim* sent to the Versailles Conference (France) and began to learn writing newspaper. The turning point changed Nguyen Ai Quoc's political stance when he read and absorbed V.I. Lenin's "First draft of theses on national and colonial issues" and voted in favor of the International Communist, participated in the founding of the French Communist Party (1920), became the first Vietnamese

communist. In 1922, as Head of the Indochina subcommittee of the Colonial Research Committee of the French Communist Party's Central Committee, he founded the "Colonial Union Association" and its mouthpiece newspaper "Le paria" (The Miserables). The newspaper "Le Paria" strongly condemned the crimes of colonialism and called on colonial peoples to unite and fight for national liberation. From his fervent patriotism, Nguyen Ai Quoc naturally came to the press and became a communist. At the same time, the path of using the press to make revolution became clearer and clearer.

2. Ho Chi Minh's journalistic legacy is, first of all, his role in founding the Vietnamese revolutionary press and the huge number of his journalistic works. During his time in France, Nguyen Ai Quoc was not only the founder but also the chairman and editor of the newspaper "Le Paria". When he came to the Soviet Union, Nguyen Ai Quoc founded the International Farmer newspaper (1924) and wrote many Russian newspapers. In 1925, gathering materials from articles before, he wrote "The verdict of the French colonial regime", in the French language and published in France (1925). Returning to Guangzhou, China, he founded the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth Association and published the Association's Thanh Nien newspaper (first issue June 21, 1925). Thanh Nien newspaper was printed in the Vietnamese language, with a total of about 200 issues, each issue had approximately 400-500 copies. Although the newspaper had rudimentary printing and simple presentation, its very revolutionary ideas and new style made it become the first newspaper to start the line of revolutionary journalism in Vietnam. Later, Nguyen Ai Quoc also founded the Cong Nong newspaper (Workers and Farmers' Newspaper), Linh Cach menh (Revolutionary soldiers), Duong kach menh (The Revolutionary Path) (1927). With thorough political, ideological and organizational preparation by Nguyen Ai Quoc, the Communist Party of Vietnam was born (February 1930). From here, the path to save Vietnam and the proletarian revolutionary line of Vietnamese journalism were affirmed and developed. To expand the Party's influence, Nguyen Ai Quoc requested the Party "to immediately publish a theoretical magazine and three propaganda newspapers". In the period 1937-1938, as a PhD student at the Institute for the Study of Colonial Peoples (Soviet Union), he asked the Oriental Department of the Communist International to publish small books that presented briefly and simply, easy to understand about Marxism-Leninism⁽¹⁾. Returning Viet Nam in 1941, Nguyen Ai Quoc founded *Independent Vietnam* newspaper, and in 1942 published *Cuu Quoc* (1942). From 1945 to 1969, as the State

President, leader of the Party, Vietnam Fatherland Front and other socio-political organizations, Ho Chi Minh devoted his mind and effort mainly to leadership activities, regularly used the press to serve the revolutionary cause. During his life, Nguyen Ai Quoc wrote many journalistic works in foreign languages, most notably French, Russian, and Chinese. Regarding Vietnamese newspapers, in Nhan Dan newspaper respectively (1950-1969), he had 1,200 skits in many genres and topics. In *Ho Chi Minh, Complete Works* (15 volumes, published the 3rd time in 2011), there are about 4,188 times He used the word “newspaper”, 348 times used the “press” and 202 times used the word “journalist”. In 50 years of journalism, Ho Chi Minh left behind more than 2,000 articles, an average of 40 articles per year, demonstrating the thinking and writing power of a genius international journalist. Speaking to a group of Russian journalists in 1957, he admitted: “I am a skit writer and a political commentator. I don’t argue with being called a propagandist, but being a professional revolutionary is the most correct”⁽²⁾. From the founding of Thanh Nien newspaper to the later revolutionary process, Ho Chi Minh always cared about guiding and training the contingent of journalists. In the resistance war against the French colonialists, he advocated opening a newspaper writing class Huynh Thuc Khang and twice sent letters to the class (in 1947 and 1949), clearly stating the fundamental issues of journalistic work. In 1959 and 1963, he directly attended and spoke to the Vietnam Journalists Congress. All his life, Ho Chi Minh was associated with journalism, writing a huge number of journalistic works, organizing of activities and orienting the theoretical ideology of Vietnamese revolutionary journalism.

3. Ho Chi Minh’s thought on journalism is a system of comprehensive and profound theoretical and ideological views on the role, nature, and tasks of the Vietnamese revolutionary press. Accordingly, the press plays an important role as a front, a propagandist, agitator, a common organizer, and a common leader; “Our press must have correct political orientation.” “The Party’s newspapers are like simple, practical and widespread training classes. They teach what we need to know and do about propaganda, organization, leadership and work. They help improve our political level and work productivity”⁽³⁾. Cadres who do not study the Party newspaper are like closing their eyes to walk at night; thus, will definitely be confused, stumble, and fail. The press “is to serve the people, to propagate and explain the Party and Government’s guidelines and policies, so it must have a mass nature and fighting spirit”⁽⁴⁾. Newspapers target the majority of the people; its

effectiveness is measured by the impact on people's awareness; the people are also the providers of information, freely express their opinions, participate in building, supporting, publishing the press, freely criticize and evaluate the effectiveness of the press. Therefore, the press must become the people's information forum. "A newspaper that is not loved by the majority of the people does not deserve to be a newspaper"⁽⁵⁾. According to Ho Chi Minh's thought, the fighting and revolutionary nature of the press is reflected in the direction of public opinion, propaganda, promotion, training, political education, professionalism, ethics and organizing people's participation in the revolutionary movement. The press uses examples of good people and good deeds to educate each other, to build the Party, the revolutionary organizations, to build new people and new lives. "Not knowing how to lead public opinion, how to promote and raise the fighting spirit of the people is one of the shortcomings of the press". The press is a sharp weapon that protects the Party and State, fights against the wrong, bad and negativity, fights against enemy distortions, and has a strong impact on world public opinion, contributes to creating internationally favorable conditions for domestic revolution. Because the public is diversified, each newspaper reader has his own characteristics, needs, qualifications and interests. Therefore, each newspaper must identify its main audience to create appropriate content and form of service. "Each newspaper, such as farmers' newspapers, workers' newspapers, youth newspapers, women's newspapers, etc., should have its own characteristics. In terms of form, it should not be stereotyped; stereotypes make newspaper monotonous, boring"⁽⁶⁾. Press organization needs to be streamlined, compact, and effective. "The press also has to rationalize. Don't show off too many things. Do small work but do it well. Without rationalization, in the end, a newspaper is written that no one wants to read and waste a lot of things"⁽⁷⁾.

4. According to Ho Chi Minh, journalists (including writers, printers, editors, publishers, etc.) need to have revolutionary morality, in short, loyalty to the Party, filial piety to the people, and love to the people, living diligently, with integrity, public-mindedness, impartiality and international spirit. The qualities of a journalist are, first of all, political bravery. Each article is a revolutionary newspaper, "Press cadres are also revolutionary soldiers. The pen and paper are their sharp weapons." "All journalists must have a strong political stance. Political stance must take the lead. If the political orientation is correct, other things will be correct"⁽⁸⁾. To be firm in political ideology,

journalists need to firmly grasp the Party's guidelines and Government policies, accumulate comprehensive knowledge and life experiences, be responsible for their work, have creative working and responsibility with the products. The fighting and revolutionary spirit of journalists is expressed through their determination to criticize and self-criticize what is wrong and what is bad; This is a very essential and sharp weapon, helping journalists correct mistakes and make progress. Press criticism "must be serious, firm, responsible, and evident. Criticism must be done in a sincere, constructive spirit, to "kill diseases and save people". It is unacceptable to criticize haphazardly without taking responsibility"⁽⁹⁾. Those who are criticized, regardless of any position and agencies, must have an honest and humble attitude. If criticism is correct, they must admit their shortcomings publicly in newspapers and determined to correct them; If the criticism is wrong, they must explain in the newspaper. Do not "ignore" criticism and "have hostility" toward the critic. Journalists' pens "are sharp weapons in the cause of protecting the rightness and exorcism", so we need to value truthful information, write truthfully and accurately, "do not make things up", and be careful about the content and form; We must have the strength to fight with ourselves to eliminate subjective, one-sided factors, either exaggerating achievements or mentioning one-sidedly about shortcomings... In fact, in journalism, no one can naturally become a journalist without learning and practicing. According to Ho Chi Minh, every job is difficult, but journalism requires creativity and innovative thinking. To be good at journalism, journalists need to go deeply into press professionals, to be self-reliant, independent, hard-working, "when facing difficulties, we must overcome difficulties, not to give up" . We need to always be humble and study hard to succeed. "Where and who do we study with? Study in society, in real work, in the masses. If you write newspapers that the people understand, love to read, and praise you well, then you will progress"⁽¹⁰⁾. To learn more from the experiences of other countries, "journalists need to know at least one foreign language". Ho Chi Minh is an exemplary person of humility. Although he has written many French newspapers, but for not having written in French for a long time, he still asked the editorial board to "correct the necessary errors" and "can completely rewrite the article". Journalists who want to progress need to be humble, respectful, listen to the opinions of colleagues and people, immerse themselves in people's lives, and humbly learn how the masses speak; accurately reflects the reality of life, the thoughts, needs and aspirations of

the people. People have many intelligent opinions that help make journalism better. “Not only regarding writing books and newspapers, any work that wants to be done well must take people’s opinions into account seriously.” Journalists should not be arrogant and think their articles are “great”. Self-love means arrogance, and arrogance is a fierce enemy that blocks our path of progress”⁽¹¹⁾ Journalists who refuse to learn will automatically be eliminated from the journalism profession.

According to Ho Chi Minh, journalists need to be humane, loving and have faith in the good nature of humans. Each article needs to be constructive, in combination with fighting, but constructiveness must be priority so that “the good part in each person blooms like spring flowers and the bad part gradually disappears”. We need to fight fiercely and frankly against wrongdoings and negativity, “we must create an atmosphere of public indignation and moral boycott surrounding them”. Journalists have political, legal, and professional ethical responsibilities, so they must participate in the Journalists’ Association. “It is a political and professional organization. The Association’s mission is to make its members closely unite and help each other to improve their political and professional qualifications. Only then will the Journalists Association fulfill its duties and journalists will serve the people and the revolution well”⁽¹²⁾.

5. Regarding Ho Chi Minh’s journalistic style, his writing style is uniquely and outstandingly concise, clear, and highly informative. In order to be loved by the people and become people’s newspaper, “the content of the articles must be simple, understandable, popular, practical, and lively. And the form, i.e the arrangement and layout of the articles and the printing must be clean and bright”. At the beginning of *the Revolutionary Path*, Nguyen Ai Quoc wrote, “This book wish to be a brief, easy to understand, easy to remember document, because I usually say in a very simple, clear and certain way, without embellishment”. In the Declaration of Independence, he briefly wrote 9 words: “The French fled, the Japanese surrendered, King Bao Dai abdicated” that summarized all three turbulent periods of the country. He often used very short sentences with concise meanings like proverbs, easy to memorize, easy to remember, quickly entering people’s hearts like “The country takes the people as its root”, “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom”, “For the benefit of ten years, plant trees, for the sake of a hundred years, cultivate people”, etc.

Regarding Ho Chi Minh’s newspaper writing, it is necessary to practice

writing each line, each letter carefully and practically. “Every time you write an article, ask yourself 3 questions: Who is it written for? What is the purpose of this writing? How to write it so that it is easy to understand, concise and easy to read? When you finish writing, ask someone to review it and correct it for you. Write to highlight the good things, at the same time criticize the shortcomings. We should not only write the good things and hide the bad things but also know how to keep it a secret, not letting the enemy take advantage of it to counter-propaganda. To have a good writing, we must have documents; we won’t speak or write anything if there’s something not investigated and clarified. To obtain documents, we must find, listen, ask, observe, watch, and record them. To write a good article, we need: “1. Being close to the people, if you just sit in your office and write, you can’t write practically. 2. You must know at least one foreign language, to read foreign newspapers, and learn from other people’s experiences. 3. When you finish writing an article, you must review it three or four times and edit carefully. Even you should ask some less educated people to review it and ask them any questions or words they don’t understand, then correct them in a more easily understandable way. 4. Always try to learn and seek progress”⁽¹³⁾. According to Ho Chi Minh, when setting the title of an article, it must be concise and exude the main spirit of the article; Headlines do not use sentences with enough predicates and subjects, should be flexible, sharp, attractive to the reader but not fussy, tricky, or ridiculous. “Every thought, every sentence, every written word, must clearly express the thoughts and desires of the masses.” Ho Chi Minh’s journalistic style stands out in its carefulness in content and form, the skillful combination of journalism and literature, the use of many reliable historical documents, classic quotes, and statistics, statistical tables, figures, illustrations. His journalistic style is logical, his writing style is vibrant, vivid, rich, diversified, very sharp when denouncing, criticizing, very humorous when satirizing; firm and strong in argument, clear in persuasion, emotional in appeal, sincere in explanation.... Ho Chi Minh’s journalistic style harmonizes the purpose of “having only one topic, anti-colonialism, imperialism, propaganda of national independence and socialism” with the content and form of expression. He often combined verses, folk songs, idioms, flexibly used stories, image-rich words, and even puns... that made journalistic works lively and attractive, close to the masses. He used images associated with specific similes and comparisons, highlighting the Vietnamese national identity. He describe the nature of

imperialism as “a leech with two proboscis”, likening “Theory is like an arrow (or bullet), practice is like a target to shoot at”; “Having experience without reason is like having one bright eye and one dull eye”; those who read a lot of theories but don’t know how to put them into practice are just like “book boxes”... Ho Chi Minh’s journalistic style is both modern and rich in national identity, expressing revolutionary enthusiasm when mentioning the country and the Vietnamese people. Comrade Truong Chinh assessed: “President Ho Chi Minh is a revolutionary journalist, a great teacher, a founder and guide of the Vietnamese revolutionary press. Uncle Ho’s entire life of revolutionary activities was associated with journalistic work”⁽¹⁴⁾. He is a great journalist of international stature, bringing to the Vietnamese press a new, modern and revolutionary method of operation unprecedented in the nation’s history.

6. Ho Chi Minh’s journalistic thought, example and style constitutes the theoretical basis and ideological foundation for building and developing Vietnam’s revolutionary press today and in the future. Currently, promoting studying and following Ho Chi Minh’s ideology, morality, and journalistic style requires concretizing the Party’s policy at the 13th National Congress on building a press and media system that is professional, humanistic, modern and socialist oriented, particularly including: 1. Implement the National Press Development and Management Plan by 2025 according to the Prime Minister’s Decision. 2. Build a modern, multi-media journalism model in terms of organizational and operational models, facilities, techniques and digital publishing technology as the center, good coordination between departments in producing modern journalistic works, affirming the role of leading and shaping public opinion and social networks with the information dominance of the most important and reliable mainstream press in today’s society. 3. Innovate the training of press cadres, build a contingent of journalists with heart (political bravery, passion, professional ethics), vision (acumen, knowledge expertise, capability of digital journalism transformation, adaptable to the 4.0 revolution), credibility (honesty, integrity), and talent (creative intelligence, skills, capable of multimedia journalism technology operation). Strengthen the team of leaders and press managers who are agile, have political courage and are knowledgeable about modern press technology. 4. The Journalists’ Association organizes and encourages the contingent of journalists to well implement the “10 professional ethics of journalists”; take social responsibility, civic responsibility, have courage, alertness, dedication, dare to be present in hot spots of life to discover the truth, convey it promptly

with orientation to the public. 5. The press needs to take the lead, “resolutely fight and eliminate products and information that are harmful, distorted, reactionary, and adversely affect socio-political stability and fine customs”¹⁵; strengthen direction, management, and promote the role of the press and publishing in preventing and repelling the deterioration of political ideology, ethics, and lifestyle, “self-evolution,” and “self-transformation” internally; strengthen the protection of the Party’s ideological foundation, fight against wrong and hostile views in the new situation. Those are the best ways for the press to deserve to be a soldier on the Party’s ideological and cultural front./.

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(3) Ho Chi Minh: Complete works, *ibid.*, vol. 8, p.514.

(4) Ho Chi Minh: Complete works, *ibid.*, vol. 12, p.167.

(5) Ho Chi Minh: Complete works, *ibid.*, volume 6, p. 102.

(6) Ho Chi Minh: Complete works, *ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 167.

(7) Ho Chi Minh. Complete works. *Ibid.*, Vol.6, p.363.

(8) Ho Chi Minh: Complete works, *ibid.*, vol. 12, p.166.

(9) Ho Chi Minh: Complete works, *ibid.*, Vol. 13, p.464.

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