

The cultural and artistic guidelines of the Communist Party of Viet Nam in the movements of the people's democratic revolutionary era

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Abstract: *The expansion of the mass movement in all social movements under the leadership of the proletarian party is the most notable historical feature of the people's democratic revolutionary era. The birth and development of a new culture and art in Viet Nam during the people's democratic revolution was associated with the fight for national independence and reunification. Recognizing the Party's leadership role in the process of building a new culture and art during progressive revolutionary resistance wars has created conditions for the harmonious development of the people's culture and art.*

Keywords: *Party's cultural and artistic guidelines; People's democratic revolution; revolutionary culture and art.*

1. After its establishment, with two flags of national independence and socialism, the Communist Party of Viet Nam successfully mobilized and gathered the strength of the nation and the strength of the times in the struggle to expel the colonialists and imperialists, regaining independence and freedom, and reunifying the Fatherland to achieve the complete victory in 1975. It can be said that this period saw the most remarkable achievements, the most glorious and heroic feat of the people's democratic revolution in the nation's history, under the leadership of the Party. Right from the early days of revolution, realizing the importance of culture to the cause of national liberation, the Communist Party of Viet Nam paid special attention to promoting the role of culture. At the Plenum of the Standing Committee of the Party Central Committee from February 25 to 28, 1943, the Party determined that there must be a leadership line to build the Vietnamese cultural foundation in the revolutionary cause. Despite of heavy workload, General Secretary Truong Chinh still devoted his time to draft the *Outline of Vietnamese Culture*. That the Party has paid a special attention to the field of culture, upholding the role of culture in politics, in the social revolution of which it is an intergral part shows the Party's wisdom and ingenuity in its revolution leadership.

The *Outline of Vietnamese culture*, drafted and published by Comrade Truong Chinh in 1943, is considered the manifesto, the first program of

the Communist Party of Viet Nam on culture. It plays a guiding role in orientations of the Vietnamese culture perception and cultural and artistic activities of the whole Party and people. The Outline is presented in 5 part: Part I: Introduction; Part II: History and cultural characteristics of Viet Nam; Part III: The threats to Vietnamese culture under the Japanese fascist and French colonial rule; Part IV: The problem of the Vietnamese cultural revolution and Part V: The urgent tasks of the Indochinese Marxist culturalists and especially the Vietnamese Marxist cultural scholars. The Outline is very brief but systematically presents the concepts, categories, guiding views, goals, mottos and principles of the national culture in the people's democratic revolution. It identifies the main contents of culture, consisting of ideology, learning, and art. Culture is identified as one of the three fronts (political, economic, and cultural), highlighting the ideological viewpoints guiding the cultural revolution in Viet Nam, that is, the cultural revolution must be completed before social reform. The Outline also clarifies the immediate goal of building a new culture featured by patriotism and democracy. This can be considered as the result of theoretical thinking and summarized experience of leadership activities on the cultural front since the birth of our Party. This is an intellectual excellence and a sharp awareness of the situations, a scientific projections of the goals, properties, principles and tasks of culture, and at the same time it also provides a great source of spiritual strength for the whole Party and people's struggle for national independence.

After the August Revolution in 1945, in the context the revolutionary government was newly established and the country was in the critical situation and going through many difficulties and challenges, President Ho Chi Minh pointed out three kinds of enemies: famine, ignorance, and foreign invaders. All of them were equally dangerous, and the task of the people's revolution was to defeat them all. This confirmed the point of view of the proletarian revolution in the field of culture: culture was not separate from the revolutionary cause. Accordingly, it was necessary to build organizations and staffs engaged in cultural and artistic activities to build and promote the cultural movement for national salvation and progress in order to fight against colonial and imperial culture as well as backward conservative feudal culture.... Culture was considered as a front, a driving force and a goal of the people's revolution. Culture was associated with the struggle for national independence and national reunification. The cause of building a new culture according to the motto of the nation which was scientifically grounded and for the masses aroused the potential, mobilized synergy for the resistance war, national construction and

every period of the struggle full of sacrifices and suffering laid a foundation for the cultural development.

2. The birth and development of a new culture and art itself is associated with the historical characteristics of the people's democratic revolutionary era. It is the growth of the mass movement of the people in all social movements under the leadership of the Party of the proletariat. The requirement to build a new cultural and artistic culture in line with the interests of the masses is an urgent practical requirement. That the leadership role of the Party was established in the process of building a new cultural and artistic culture, associated with the revolutionary struggle, with historical progress created conditions for the people's culture and art development which is suitable with rules.

The fundamental requirements in building and developing a revolutionary culture and art that focus on three principles: "*nationalize*"; "*popularize*"; "*make scientific*" as stated in the *Outline of Vietnamese Culture* (1943) of the Party are essentially different aspects of the same progressive development perspective. In the era of people's democratic revolution, the content of progressive ideology and the healthiest spiritual needs of the nation all came from the struggle of the working people. The progressive and revolutionary trends of the people represented the progress of the nation. At the same time, the most dynamic and active of the nation belonged to the people. In the same way, ideas that are considered scientific cannot go against the interests of the nation and the majority of the working masses. Whatever is in line with the interests of the people and the nation are all progressive ideas. Viet Nam's national liberation revolution would bring Vietnamese culture to a democratic level. This new culture, despite not being a socialist culture yet, is clearly goal of the later socialist revolution. To actively serve the revolution, that culture must be national, scientific, and popular. These issues are closely related and affect each other. In the building of a national, scientific and popular culture, the leadership role of the Communist Party of Viet Nam is indispensable, because only the Party can direct the movement of the Vietnamese cultural revolution into the right track of the Vietnamese Communist Party to reach the final destination.

The Party affirms that culture always holds political, philosophical and moral views with a specific historical and social content. Revolutionary culture can only be true to its original meaning of "culture" when it becomes a combat weapon for social reform. As a particular form of social consciousness, culture itself consists of thoughts and feelings, reflecting people's ways of thinking and aesthetic conceptions. Professor Hoang Trinh remarked: "The outline of culture with the defined mission and three basic mottos, also contains an

advanced semantic potential, considering culture as a weapon of struggle and development at the moment as a fight for social progress and for the cause of national liberation”⁽¹⁾.

In July 1948, in the midst of the fierce resistance war against the French, the Second National Cultural Congress was convened. At this congress, Comrade Truong Chinh, General Secretary of the Party, made an important report titled *Marxism and Vietnamese culture* in order to discuss more deeply and specifically the views of the Party about culture which was not mentioned in the *Outline of Vietnamese Culture*. It can be said that the report on *Marxism and Vietnamese culture* is a work on the development of a new culture in Viet Nam. The opinions expressed in the well-known report are about the relationship between culture and society, the Marxist cultural stance, the advantages and disadvantages of Vietnamese culture in the past and in the present, and the nature and tasks of Vietnamese culture. Viet Nam’s new democratic culture, and about the unified cultural front in the United National Front... *Marxism and Vietnamese culture* presents well the development laws of culture, identifies the nature and tasks of the new democratic culture of Viet Nam, as well as the relationship between Vietnamese culture and progressive culture in the world. It is worth noticing that Marxist cultural views are expressed in a creative and systematic way, and at the same time establishes new views suitable to Vietnamese reality.

The above basic contents have been concretized in gradual building of the people’s culture and art. The Party’s system of consistent views, cultural and artistic guidelines can be found in Party documents, opinions, letters, articles and speeches of President Ho Chi Minh and other leaders on behalf of the Party such as Truong Chinh, Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, To Huu... on issues related to culture and art in accordance with specific objectives in each revolutionary period. In the Letter to the Painters on the occasion of the painting exhibition in 1951, President Ho Chi Minh pointed out: “Art and culture is also a front. You are soldiers on that front.” At the same time, he also defined a specific task for art and culture as “serving the resistance, serving the Fatherland, serving the people, especially workers, peasants and soldiers”⁽²⁾. In fact, the setting of tasks for culture and art on the basis of the revolution’s objectives and tasks linked its entire development process with the revolutionary and resistance war of the nation. Thereby, the issue of ideological stance and conception of art was set forth according to the criteria associated with the interests of the people and the revolution.

Relationship among the development of culture and art, the people’s democratic revolution and the struggle for national liberation was close-knit.

“It is clear that when the nation is oppressed, the art also loses the freedom. If art aspire to be free, art has to join the revolution”⁽³⁾. For artists and writers, “serving the people is to liberate themselves and the art”⁽⁴⁾. From the very beginning, a large number of writers, artists, intellectuals with patriotic and progressive spirit gathered by the Party in the National Salvation Culture Association, on the one hand, actively participated directly in the August Revolution of the entire people, on the other hand, played a pivotal role in building a new culture and art. That they followed the Party, immersing in the people’s life and the revolution was decisive in shaping progressive writers and artists’ awareness and actions. Our Party affirms that “our cultural warriors cannot find freedom outside of the great struggle of the nation and of the democratic world against imperialism”⁽⁵⁾.

Voluntarily becoming a part of the fighting people, cultural activists, writers and artists did become true soldiers, using culture and art as weapons to fight for independence and freedom of the nation, for the noble ideals of the people. That is the new model of an artist. The leadership and development of culture and art during the revolution created a strength which is considered as the secret to the success of the two miraculous resistance wars of our nation. That is, the strength of culture and art created a material force that united a large number of cultural activists, writers and artists into a front called the Cultural Front for National Salvation, which later developed into National Salvation Cultural Association, including a large number of people working in the fields of culture, education, science, art... That cultural strength was also multiplied by the spiritual power, wisdom and conscience of the whole nation through thousands of years of history which were mobilized in many ways. This was the premise to create a great, superior transforming power of our country as compared with the enemy in terms of material forces, we were inferior to them many times. It was the spiritual strength that formed the excellent mettle and great conscience of the Vietnamese people, which won the progressive world’s sympathy and admiration during the arduous struggle for national independence and reunification.

The great historical turning point from the August Revolution and Vietnamese revolutionary heroism through the two resistance wars became a real life force. In essence, the new culture and art was also a spiritual force aroused from the people’s revolution. The Party leadership over culture and art was ultimately within the movement laws of the times. All forces belonging to the people became voluntary historical forces. This was also an aesthetic content that made the artist himself feel happy and proud: “Thank you to the Party for

milking us. Four thousand years full of love” (To Huu). Or it can be said as the great Soviet writer M. Solokhov: “We only write, following instructions of our hearts: But our hearts belong to the Fatherland, to the people, to our Party. We give our best to serve.” Obviously, the ultimate goal of art and poetry was in the ultimate goal of the people’s ideal: “It is no longer letters and words but a heart which is bleeding and singing. It is not possible to be outside the people, not to stand outside of this land, to understand that, to understand the spiritual power of revolutionary literature”⁽⁶⁾.

The cause of national liberation, social and human liberation was the goal of the humane and democratic nature of the people’s democratic revolution led by the proletariat. The Party’s cultural and artistic guideline had a positive meaning, consistently expressing those humanistic goals: “The cultural revolution must be completed in order to complete the social reform” (*Outline of Culture*). In fact, the people’s democratic revolution and the struggle for national independence were in the era when new values were created on the basis of promoting the best traditional human values. “The revolutionary culture has respected and protected the entire traditional cultural heritage of the nation, giving that precious resource new vitality and new beauty in the revolutionary era”⁽⁷⁾. In that condition, the development of culture and art was considered as an internal normative requirement derived from tradition. On the other hand, it met the need to express the most pressing aspirations of the people. Therefore, the first requirement for all works in the field of art and poetry was to be directed towards the revolutionary masses, and at the same time to be deeply rooted in the masses. This was essentially the identification of new contents and new audiences of revolutionary art.

The close attachment to the people from all walks of life was one of the most basic requirements of the new culture and art. Its popularity was concretized by the direct participation in the revolutionary cause of the whole people. It not only met the spiritual life of the masses but also participated in communication, political mobilization, instilling patriotism, solidarity and determination to fight against the enemy. On the one hand, the new culture and art needed to be equipped with people’s thought as a core quality; on the other hand, it also gradually raised the ideological level and aesthetic needs of the masses. People’s thought did not only include revolutionary and progressive views on the role and mission of the people in history, but also ideas resulting from traditions, struggles and work of the people, reflecting the genuine aspirations of the people. These ideas were always of a progressive nature. Thus, the people’s thought as an ideology was epochal. To a certain extent,

it did not coincide with the awareness of the masses which were manifested in their daily life. (People's ideology is always progressive in nature, while the people's awareness level in specific manifestations is sometimes even backwards).

In the article *Party Organization and Party Literature*, Lenin emphasized the idea and also the requirement for the new literature of the proletarian revolutionary era to be directed towards the vast majority of working people. This is because "they are the elite, the power, the future of the country"⁽⁸⁾. Thus, Lenin demanded that a revolutionary literature must take the ideal of serving the people as its goal, which is alien to the selfish and narrow-minded schemes of the ruling and exploiting classes. Understanding the people, understanding their aspirations in the past, in the present and their dreams to is one of the first requirements set forth when building a culture and art of the people. And perhaps only when cultural activists, artists and writers start as a part of the people can they be able to realize that.

3. Revolutionary theory points out that "Revolution is the cause of the masses". This means that the revolutionary art basically has to be the cause of the masses with higher participation of the working masses, increasing sense of self-consciousness and with a more widespread democracy. Reality shows that on that broad background, excellent individuals with people's thoughts, souls and talents stand out, take the initiative to build a new art and literature. This was also affirmed by Lenin: "Art belongs to the people. Art must be deeply rooted in the hearts of the working masses. It has to be understood and liked by the masses. It must gather the sentiments, thoughts, and will of that mass, and lift them up. It must awaken artists among the masses and foster them"⁽⁹⁾. Placing trust on the masses and their creativity is of great theoretical and practical significance. It is the basis for encouraging the widespread literary and poetic movement, bringing into play the people's traditional artistic capacities, and liberating creativity. Moreover, it is a premise to build a culture and art that is carried out by the people and then to serve the people, enabling them "take the fate into their hands, both materially and spiritually"⁽¹⁰⁾.

People are not only the public but also the main object of reflection of the new culture and art. In the era of the people's democratic revolution, when the fiercest struggles united all workers into a unified block with a common ideal goal, the voice of each person's thoughts, feelings and aspirations was a reflection of the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of the whole community. The resolution of the intimate problems of each human life and destiny shows the resolution of the problems of the whole community. From here, new

cultural and artistic needs will arise and together with them, new creativity will emerge. This also means that the new artistic concept will dominate the development of culture, literature and art. Its basis is a new aesthetic environment associated with real life. Sticking to and reflecting the reality of life not only is considered as the mission of the people's culture and art but also put the culture and art into a dynamic and creative environment. This is one of the central issues of the new artistic consciousness. "In the past, poems were abundant with complaints, not queries. The Party teaches us. Poetry must answer" (Che Lan Vien). That is an authentic requirement in the cultural and artistic guideline of the Party: "Ours is the culture of the working people. We writers and artists must be the ones who speak up about the lives and moods of workers and peasants, and answer the questions arisen from the revolutionary life"⁽¹¹⁾. The urgent problems that life posed for culture and art in the period of struggle for national independence and national reunification were not outside the interests of the nation and the people, first of all, in order to repel the invading imperialists.

Under the leadership of the Party, the people's culture and art has made new discoveries about the Fatherland, the nation and the times. The reality of revolutionary and resistance life is an aesthetic environment with historical depth. It arouses and mobilizes the most noble traditions of people's thought in the movement of modern society and people. The Party's cultural and artistic policy clearly expresses the relationship between artistic creativity and real life: "After all, the cause that our people are doing and will do under the leadership of our Party is a very great and fundamental contribution to the cause of literature and art"⁽¹²⁾. The main content and central theme of the new culture and art is the people's struggle and cause of construction. This comes from the view that the people are the true creators of history, especially in an era when the people are self-conscious masters. However, the adherence to reflecting the reality of life does not contradict the requirement to continue the traditions of the nation. Moreover, it is possible to see the sustainable vitality of that tradition in the new era. The Party's artistic guideline also clearly states that it must "not cut the new art and culture off from the national traditions, but on the contrary continue and develop those traditions in the new conditions of the country"⁽¹³⁾. It is transformed into new strength in the struggle of the revolutionary people against the most ferocious invaders. "Our fore fathers, many generations, a nation with its past, with its culture, its glorious history, all of those traditions stand up with the people to fight against American imperialists to save the country"⁽¹⁴⁾.

It can be seen that the cultural and artistic guideline of the Party during the period of struggle for national independence and reunification does not only have a decisive meaning in building the people's culture and art in the direction of revolution and modernity. It also opens up possibilities to actively promote the traditional spiritual heritage of the nation. In fact, those are also two aspects of the development requirements for the people's culture and art. Appreciating the people's role in all historical periods has basically revived the values created by the people in the past. This is a high expression of the spirit of democracy, progress and revolution, as well as a profound lesson of practical and long-term value in which the development of culture and art is both the goal and the driving force in the overall cause of construction and comprehensive development of our country under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam./.

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