

Some Theoretical Achievements of Socialism in Vietnam since the Start of the Reform Cause

Prof. Dr. Van Duc PHAM

Abstract: *The reality full of changes in the last years of the twentieth century has posed many problems for the creative application of Marxism in accordance with the new historical conditions of the world and the practice of the countries following the socialist path like Vietnam. This paper analyses some theoretical achievements of socialism in Vietnam since the start of the Reform cause.*

Key words: *theoretical achievements, socialism in Vietnam, Reform.*

At the end of the 1980s of the twentieth century, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the cause of renovation in Vietnam posed many problems related to socialism and the renovation for leaders and scholars in Vietnam. In the context when many countries abandoned the socialist path, the Communist Party of Vietnam persisted in maintaining the socialist path in Vietnam and affirmed that the collapse of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was not the breakdown of scientific Socialism but only the collapse of a particular model of socialism. Methodologically, this claim is very important: (it) contributes to strengthening the belief of the Communist Party and people of Vietnam in scientific socialism and socialist ideals, *at the same time*, (it) requests the Party and those doing the theoretical work to perfect and supplement new theoretical viewpoints, find a model of socialism suitable to the practice of the national development and development trends of the world.

K. Marx's theory of socialism and the path to socialism is the important foundation for the worldview and methodology for the creative application of theory of Marxism in the ever-changing practice of Vietnam. The search for a model of socialism suitable to the reality of the country's development is a long-term work and is regularly supplemented and perfected. The practice of more than 36 years renovation of the Communist Party of Vietnam affirms that the overall goal expressing the nature of the socialist society built by Vietnamese people is *"rich people; a strong, democratic, just and civilized country; (this is a socialist society) mastered by the people; with a highly*

developed economy based on modern productive forces and appropriate/compatible progressive production relations; with an advanced culture imbued with national identity; (in which) the people enjoy a prosperous, free and happy life, and (necessary) conditions for comprehensive development; (in which) ethnic groups in the Vietnamese community, who are equal and united, respect and help each other for shared/common development; (a society) with a socialist law-governed state of the people, by the people, and for the people under the leadership of the Communist Party; a society which has friendly and cooperative relations with the people of other countries in the world”⁽¹⁾. These are also the basic features of Vietnamese model of socialism. These features not only inherit Marx’s views but also the creative development of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The socialist society that the Vietnamese people are building carries the universal values of humanity such as prosperity, democracy, justice, civilization, prosperity, freedom, happiness, progress, for the sake of human development, etc. Thus, the socialist society that Vietnam is building follows the process of mankind’s progressive development with the inheritance and development of human values.

In order to have a society with such characteristics, breakthroughs in theoretical perspective are needed. The Marxist materialist conception of history holds that the development of socio-economic formations is a natural - historical process. The natural historical process is understood as the development that follows the objective laws of historical movement, including both sequential development and leaps, skipping a certain stage of development with certain events. But even if the development leaps forward or shortens, the development of society must still inherit the important achievements that human society has achieved. Imbued with that point of view, the living reality of Vietnam’s renovation process has proved that the theory of Vietnam’s transition to socialism, bypassing the capitalist phase is right and creative. Theory of bypassing capitalism, it can be said, is a supplement to the shortened development of socialism in Vietnam. According to that theory, the transition to socialism bypassing capitalism is to bypass the establishment of a dominant position of the capitalist relations of production and the capitalist superstructure, but to absorb, take advantage of the achievements that mankind has achieved under the capitalist regime, especially in science and technology, in order to rapidly develop the productive forces, build a modern economy and move towards building socialism⁽²⁾.

In the economic field, the Communist Party of Vietnam has built and developed the concept of a socialist-oriented market economy. It is not a capitalist market economy nor is it a socialist market economy with its full contents. The socialist-oriented market economy is a modern market economy, fully operating according to the rules of the market economy, under the management of the socialist rule-of-law state, led by the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Vietnamese Communist Party leads and serves the working people, realizing the goal of “rich people; a strong country; a democratic, just and civilized society”. The practice has proven that developing a socialist-oriented market economy not only brings positive economic effects but also solves social problems better than other capitalist countries with the same level of economic development. Thanks to the development of a socialist-oriented market economy, Vietnam has overcome the economic crisis before the Doi moi (Renovation), achieved a record growth rate not only of Vietnam but also that of the region and the world in the past decades and nowadays. Without such high growth, Vietnam cannot do well in dealing with economic and social problems. It can be said that the market economy is the achievement of thousand year development of mankind civilization. The market economy is the most strongly developed in capitalism and capitalism itself effectively uses the market economy for its economic development. But, even within capitalism, the market economy also has many different types depending on the economic, political and social conditions of each country. Besides the advantages, the market economy itself also brings social disadvantages. Therefore, capitalist countries have to regularly adjust to adapt to the requirements of reality.

If capitalist countries develop to socialism, they already have the material foundations prepared by the market economy and the move to socialism comes from economic necessities. However, for pre-capitalist countries, if they want to go to socialism, which is a higher development mode and a better society than capitalism, there is no other way but to develop a market economy. It could be said that Vietnam builds socialism with a political and social necessity and an aspiration for the survival and independence of the nation, while the economic base preparing for a new society has not yet been established.

For a country like Vietnam that wants to shorten its development to socialism and bypass capitalism, the development of market economy is an indispensable requirement. Of course, the market economy has a history of

hundreds of years and has fully revealed its strengths and weaknesses. The political will of the follow-up countries is to use the strength of the market economy. Therefore, Vietnam chooses a socialist-oriented market economy development model with the aim of using the advantages of the market economy and overcoming its inherent shortcomings. As the document of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam affirms: “The socialist-oriented market economy is the general economic model of our country during the transition to socialism. It is a modern market economy with international integration, fully and synchronously operating according to the rules of the market economy, under the management of the socialist rule of law State, led by the Communist Party of Vietnam to ensure the socialist orientation for the goal of “rich people; a strong country; a democratic, just and civilized society”, suitable to each stage of the country’s development”⁽³⁾. The success of the general economic model, *the socialist-oriented market economy*, depends on the right leadership of the Party, the scientific management of the State and the active participation and support of the people.

According to some scholars, this *socialist-oriented market economy* is a new model of market economy, along with the ones that have existed in history such as the free market economy, the social market economy or the socialist market economy in China. It can be seen that the conception of the development of a socialist-oriented market economy is a theoretical breakthrough of the Communist Party of Vietnam. As the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam has affirmed, introducing the conception of developing a socialist-oriented market economy is *a very fundamental and creative theoretical breakthrough of our Party*, the important theoretical achievement over the past 35 years of implementing the renovation policy derived from Vietnamese practice and selectively absorbing the world’s experience⁽⁴⁾.

Along with that breakthrough, the Communist Party of Vietnam has built and gradually perfected the political model and the general operating mechanism of that model, in which the Party leads, the State manages, and the People are the masters. Within this model, the leadership of the Party is the decisive factor for the victory of the Renovation and ensures the development of the country in accordance with the socialist orientation. The socialist rule-of-law state is a tool to exercise the people’s right to master, to ensure and protect the interests of the majority of the people.

All undertakings and lines of the Party, policies, laws and activities of the State are for the benefit of the people, taking the interests of the people as a goal to strive for. It can be said that the rule-of-law State along with the market economy are the achievements of mankind that all countries must apply to suit (their) economic, political and social conditions for development. But the rule-of-law State in Vietnam is fundamentally different from the bourgeois rule-of-law State in that: the essence of the bourgeois rule-of-law State is a tool to serve and protect the interests of the bourgeoisie, while the legal State is a tool to serve and protect the interests of the bourgeoisie. The socialist rule-of-law State in Vietnam is tools to express and exercise the people's right to master, to protect and ensure the interests of the majority of the working people. It is the State of the people, by the people and for the people, giving the highest priority to the interests of the people.

In that political model, democracy is considered the essence of the socialist regime, both the goal and the driving force of the socialist construction. With the motto "the people know, the people discuss, the people do, the people inspect, the people monitor and the people benefit", socialist democracy has come into reality, truly becoming the goal and driving force for the construction of a new society. Practicing democracy widely within the Party and in society is one of the ways to control political power.

Thus, in the socialist society that Vietnam is building, we see three very important pillars: the socialist-oriented market economy, the socialist rule-of-law state and the socialist democracy. All three pillars are under the unified leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam. If we compare it with Western theories on the pillars of society, we can see the inheritance and creation to suit the conditions of Vietnam. The social theories in the West also refer to market economy (there are different types of market economies), to the rule-of-law State and to civil society. Vietnam does not talk about civil society and does not advocate building civil society. What Vietnam emphasizes and builds is *the socialist democracy*. Democracy is the guarantee of people's creativity and an important means of controlling the (political) power. The essence of building civic organizations is to implement and promote democracy.

Marxism asserts that the masses are the ones who decide and create history; building socialism is building a society in which one is for all and all is for one; the free development of each is a condition for the free

development of all. This humanistic spirit has been applied and developed by the Communist Party of Vietnam since the start of the renovation until now, especially in the first decades of the twenty-first century. That is also reflected in the three pillars of the socialist model in Vietnam, namely the socialist-oriented market economy, the rule-of-law state of the people, by the people, for the people, and the socialist democracy.

Along with that, culture is considered as the spiritual foundation of the society, the endogenous strength and driving force of the country's renovation. In the process of building socialism in Vietnam, cultural development is oriented synchronously and in harmony with economic growth, social progress and social justice. Vietnamese culture is an advanced culture imbued with national identity, united in diversity and based on progressive and humanistic values. The development of culture and the building of (socialist) man are both the goal and the driving force of the renovation and construction of the country. The development of culture, society and man simultaneously with economic development; (it is) not to sacrifice the environment for the sake of economic development. Sustainable development, the harmony between economic and cultural development, social justice and environmental protection is the strategic orientation in the process of building socialism in Vietnam. Just as General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong affirmed: "Do not wait until the economy develops to a high level of development to realize progress and social justice, do not "sacrifice" social progress and social justice to pursue (only) economic growth". On the contrary, *every economic policy must be oriented towards social goals; each social policy must aim to create a driving force for economic development; The promotion of legal enrichment must go hand in hand with hunger eradication, sustainable poverty reduction, and taking care of people with meritorious services and those in difficult circumstances*. This is a principled requirement to ensure a healthy and sustainable development under the socialist orientation"⁽⁵⁾.

Along with the above theoretical breakthroughs, the Communist Party of Vietnam has generalized into 10 major relationships in building socialism in accordance with Vietnamese reality: (they are the) relationships (1) between innovation, stability and development; (2) between economic innovation and political innovation; (3) between market economy and socialist orientation; (4) between the development of productive forces and the building and improvement of socialist production relations step by step;

(5) the relationship between the State and the market; (6) between economic growth and cultural development, the realization of social progress and justice; (7) between building socialism and defending the socialist Fatherland; (8) between independence, self-reliance and international integration; (9) between the leadership of the Party, the management of the state, and the people's mastery, and (10) between practicing democracy and strengthening the legislation, ensuring social order.

However, in addition to the 10 relationships between different fields of social life as well as between the aspects of social field, there is an extremely important one which is between the goals and means of the process of building socialism in general and of the renovation process in particular.

The relationship between the goal and the means needs to be determined very clearly in the process of leading the revolution. The theory of the socialist revolution has shown that, in the process of leading the revolution, the leading party must clearly define the objectives of each revolutionary stage, the means and forces to achieve that goal. Confusing the goal with the means can lead to serious consequences or encounter undesirable results. We can give many examples to prove it. For example, if traffic policemen consider the goal of the policeman's activities is to raise the people's awareness of law observance and the guidance, explanation and especially fines is just a matter of means. But if they consider fines as their goal, they can fine as much as possible without worrying about whether the fines will make people obey the traffic law well or not.

Also, in the field of production, there is also the relationship of the goal and the means between the productive forces and the relations of production. If we consider the development of the productive forces as the goal and the relations of production as the means, then to develop the productive forces we can choose different types of relations of production at each time (we can use private or public relations of production) provided that the productive forces are developed, but not necessarily a certain kind of relations of production. But if the development of relations of production is considered as the goal, it is a completely different matter.

In addition, by the 13th Party Congress, that goal was concretized in more detail and clearly marked with important milestones of the country in the period from now until 2045: "By 2025: (Vietnam will) be a developing country with modern industry, surpassing the low-middle income level. By 2030: (Vietnam will) be a developing country with modern industry and

high middle-income level. *By 2045: (Vietnam will) become a high-income developed country*"⁽⁶⁾. This is a step to concretize the goal of "rich people; a strong country; a democratic, just and civilized society" that we have not been able to concretize for many years. However, if we look at those specific goals, we can see that economic goals are still clearer articulated than those of democracy, justice and civilization; socialist orientation is not yet specified more clearly than in previous documents. Cultural, social, human, political and external objectives are not yet clearly quantified.

Thanks to the steadfastness of Marxism-Leninism, taking Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought as the ideological foundation, Vietnam over the past three decades has achieved historical achievements in all aspects: politics, economy, culture, society, defense - security and status in the international arena. All of those impressive results demonstrate that Vietnam has been able to creatively apply Marxism in the ever-changing conditions of the early years of the 21st century. With these achievements, the Communist Party of Vietnam has identified Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thought and the Communist Party's innovative views as the ideological foundation of the Party. To defend that foundation is a very important task of our theoretical works.

The cognition theory of dialectical materialism has shown that practice or more precisely the results of practical activity are the criterion of truth, but historical practice itself is always moving and changing, constantly changing and developing according to the necessary and objective laws. Therefore, the theory of socialism needs to be supplemented, perfected and developed together with the practice of building socialism not only in one country but all over the world. In this way we can see a normative necessity that the cause of comprehensive renovation and building the country toward socialism, as an ever increasing and deepening revolution, will raise new theoretical and practical problems related to the conception of socialism in Vietnam that require awareness and resolution in a timely and thorough manner. Only in this way, theory will play the role of orientation and guiding practical activities; at the same time, the practice is regularly summarized, which will contribute to supplementing and developing scientific theory, which is the dialectical relation between theory and practice in building socialism.

In our view, the theory of socialism in Vietnam needs to be further explored and clarified in terms of theory and practice. It is very necessary

because understanding is a process. It is the discovery of newly emerging problems and finding ways to solve them satisfactorily that will make an important contribution to shaping the increasingly accurate model of socialism in Vietnam, thereby orienting the cause of building our socialism to success. Building and perfecting the conception of socialism in Vietnam is a basis for determining measures and methods to realize successfully those goals./.

(1), (4), (5), (6): Nguyen Phu Trong, *Some theoretical and practical issues on socialism and the path toward socialism in Vietnam*. National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2022, p.24, p. 25, p. 27, p. 53.

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