

Ho Chi Minh Thought on the Qualities of a Revolutionary Journalist and their Significance in Building a Cultural Journalist Today

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Abstract: During his lifetime, Ho Chi Minh always regarded journalism as a front in the revolutionary battle. He believed that journalists are revolutionaries, with their pen and paper being powerful weapons. Ho Chi Minh presented the view: “For journalists, the pen is a sharp weapon, and the article is a revolutionary call to rally the masses to fight against old and new colonialism and imperialism led by American imperialism, for national independence, social progress, and world peace”⁽¹⁾. To carry out this mission, journalists must be revolutionary fighters. This means that the task of journalism requires journalists to possess the qualities of a revolutionary cadre: they must not be afraid of hardships, sacrifice, and must wholeheartedly serve the country and the people.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh Thought, qualities of a revolutionary journalist, cultural journalist.

1. Ho Chi Minh Thought on the qualities of a revolutionary journalist

Firstly, a journalist must have a strong political stance, absolutely loyal to the ideals of the Party and the People.

To maintain the combativeness of journalism, the first requirement for a journalist is to cultivate a strong political stance. In his speech at the Second Congress of the Vietnam Journalists Association, President Ho Chi Minh kindly reminded: “Among you, some still have influences of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, so they cannot grasp the political issues firmly”⁽²⁾. From this, he advised: “Therefore, all those who work in journalism (writers, printers, editors, distributors, etc.) must have a strong political stance. Politics must take the lead. With the right political line, everything else will be correct”⁽³⁾. Journalists need to thoroughly understand and clearly define the target audience they serve and the mission of journalism in general, and each article specifically: “To serve the people, to propagate and explain the Party and Government’s guidelines and policies, so it must be mass-oriented and combatant in spirit”⁽⁴⁾. According to him, journalists must clearly define the strategic guidelines of our Party at that time, which were: “Building socialism, fighting for national unity, and

maintaining world peace;... we must strive to learn politics, raise our ideological level, and stand firm on the proletarian class's stance"⁽⁵⁾.

Journalism is a political and social activity, so its mission is to serve the revolution, serve the people, and therefore, journalists are revolutionary soldiers. Therefore, a firm political stance is the first standard and requirement set for journalists. Only when a journalist has the right and steadfast political stance can the ideological struggle in the field of journalism achieve high effectiveness, have ideological orientation, and guide public opinion. A journalist with a strong political stance will have the courage to face difficulties, not allow their pen to be swayed by money, fame, or personal interests, and will not bend their pen but will truly fulfill their role as a revolutionary soldier.

According to Ho Chi Minh, to accomplish their revolutionary mission, journalists must not only have the right political stance but also be *absolutely loyal to the ideals of the Party and the People*. Loyalty to the goals and ideals of the Party and the People is considered the most noble quality of a revolutionary journalist. Loyalty directs all of a journalist's activities toward ensuring the interests of the Party and the People. To maintain loyalty to the Party's ideals and the People, journalists must constantly study, improve their political and professional skills, and cultivate revolutionary ethical qualities to work in the best conditions and complete their revolutionary mission before the Party and the People.

With these profound views, Ho Chi Minh contributed to shaping the ideological and political direction for genuine journalists, helping them realize their obligations and responsibilities in carrying out the great revolutionary mission of the nation.

Secondly, journalists must possess revolutionary ethics, take responsibility for their profession, be honest, objective, avoid boasting, and be careful with each article they write.

According to Ho Chi Minh, revolutionary ethics are the most important quality of a revolutionary cadre in general, and of a revolutionary journalist in particular. When speaking about the importance of revolutionary ethics, Ho Chi Minh wrote: "A river must have a source to have water, without a source, the river will dry up. A tree must have roots, without roots, the tree will wither. A revolutionary must have ethics, without ethics, no matter how talented he/she is, he/she cannot lead the people"⁽⁶⁾. Ho Chi Minh emphasized the ethical requirement for journalists at the *Third Congress of the Vietnam Journalists Association* in September 1962: "Journalists are also revolutionary soldiers... To fulfil their glorious mission, journalists must

cultivate revolutionary ethics”⁽⁷⁾. Ho Chi Minh believed that a journalist’s ethics should be reflected in their writing, which must protect the truth, fight against falsehoods, and combat evil. This reflects the ethical qualities of a revolutionary journalist.

From very early on, Ho Chi Minh practised journalism to serve the revolutionary cause, leaving behind many deeply meaningful revolutionary journalistic works. His articles truthfully exposed the crimes of colonialism and called on the people to rise up and fight for national liberation. Therefore, according to Ho Chi Minh, truthfulness is one of the basic characteristics of journalism. He always reminded journalists to be honest, considering it an ethical standard for a revolutionary journalist. He said: “If you don’t know or understand clearly, don’t speak, don’t write. When there’s nothing to say or write, don’t say or write unnecessarily”⁽⁸⁾ and “If you haven’t investigated, haven’t researched, haven’t understood clearly, don’t speak, don’t write”⁽⁹⁾; “Write simply and truthfully. Do not fabricate”⁽¹⁰⁾; “Do not just write about the good and hide the bad. Criticism must be correct. When pointing out the good, it should be in moderation, not exaggerated... Criticism must be honest, sincere, and proper”⁽¹¹⁾. Ho Chi Minh required journalists to have clear motives when praising or criticizing; they should not write for personal, selfish, or profit-driven purposes. Furthermore, through their articles, journalists must reflect the true thoughts and aspirations of the people, fostering the people’s trust in the Party’s correct leadership in the national liberation struggle and the building of a new society.

In addition to providing guidance and instructions for journalists in their work, Ho Chi Minh also pointed out some potential shortcomings of journalism, such as: “Sometimes publishing fake news. Often using too many Sino-Vietnamese words, and sometimes using them incorrectly. Or printing messily, sloppily, or, for the sake of ‘art,’ cutting an article into two or three sections, making it difficult to read”⁽¹²⁾. By pointing out these shortcomings, Ho Chi Minh wanted to remind journalists to be cautious with each article and to correct the mistakes they were making. Only through diligent practice can they produce excellent works that meet the people’s expectations.

Regarding combating the boastful attitude of journalists, as early as October 1947, in his work “*Sửa đổi lối làm việc*” (Correcting work styles), President Ho Chi Minh dedicated an entire chapter titled “Combating boastfulness” to discuss the ethics of Party members, which are also related to the ethics of journalists. He identified eight signs of boasting and proposed five ways to remedy this issue:

1. Learn to speak the language of the people. Do not speak in the manner of lecturing from books.
2. Always use simple, practical, and understandable words and examples.
3. When speaking or writing, always ensure that everyone can understand. Make sure that the people understand, believe, and are determined to follow your call. Always ask yourself: Who am I writing for? Who am I speaking to?
4. Do not speak or write without thorough investigation and understanding.
5. Before speaking, think carefully and organize your thoughts properly⁽¹³⁾.

These five methods to cure boastfulness are also guidelines that help journalists write articles that resonate with the people, demonstrating the journalist's responsibility to the Party and the people. In short, to fulfill the mission of communication, organization, and guidance, journalists must be close to the people, engage deeply with their work, and share the hardship of the people.

Ho Chi Minh himself set an exemplary model of a journalist through his articles, from his first to his last, all of which were concise, clear, coherent, consistent, honest, objective, and careful according to the standards he set. Despite sometimes writing under different pseudonyms or without signing his name, his unique writing style—profound content, practical and specific language, sharp combativeness—can always be recognized. This serves as a high moral model for journalists, one that is vivid and inspiring for future generations of Vietnamese journalists to follow.

Thirdly, journalists must always stay close to the people and humbly learn from them.

In building the new social system, Ho Chi Minh emphasized: “Our system is a democratic system, which means the people are the masters. That is, the cadres and staff, from the top to the bottom, are the servants of the people and must serve the people wholeheartedly”⁽¹⁴⁾. The people are the masters, and all cadres from the central to local levels are public servants. Journalists, as cadres in charge of ideological and cultural work, are also public servants, so they must wholeheartedly serve the revolution and the people. Ho Chi Minh made it clear: “The task of journalism is to serve the people, to serve the revolution”⁽¹⁵⁾, “That is the mission of our entire Party and people, and it is also the task of our press”⁽¹⁶⁾.

To effectively serve the people, journalists must be closely connected to them, understanding their thoughts and aspirations. Ho Chi Minh believed that to be close to the people, one must first immerse oneself in their real-life

experiences. It is necessary to come from the people, work among the people, because “sitting in an office and writing cannot make it practical”⁽¹⁷⁾, “it is not meaningful, it doesn’t resonate, and it is of no benefit”⁽¹⁸⁾. According to Ho Chi Minh, journalism must be concise, easy to understand, and practical, suitable for the people’s level of understanding. He emphasized that “the audience of the newspaper is the majority of the people. If a newspaper is not popular among the majority, it does not deserve to be called a newspaper”⁽¹⁹⁾.

According to Ho Chi Minh, revolutionary journalists must also be humble and learn from the people. This viewpoint reflects the requirement for journalists to have an attitude of humility, to listen to and value the contributions and suggestions of the people. Ho Chi Minh always believed that the people know many things that we do not. He reminded: “Every industry or profession must engage in propaganda and introduction. And remember, at the front page of every book, there must be a sentence: ‘We welcome readers’ criticism’. From now on, on books or newspapers, you should always have this sentence. I know you write well and have good handwriting, but after all, the people, with their many ears and eyes, still have many wise opinions that can help you progress. Not only in writing books or newspapers but any work that wants to be done well must respect the opinions of the people”⁽²⁰⁾. Ho Chi Minh guided journalists to learn the way of speaking of the people, saying: “Our people have a tradition of telling stories concisely and with charm. You should learn the way the people tell stories.”⁽²¹⁾. Being close to the people and learning from them will help revolutionary journalists produce works that are truthful, easy to understand, empathetic, and have lasting appeal in the hearts of the people.

Fourthly, journalists must constantly study to improve their professional knowledge and skills.

Ho Chi Minh believed that journalists are also revolutionaries on the cultural and ideological front, and therefore, they must “raise their cultural level and delve into their profession”⁽²²⁾, “strive to improve their ideas, skills, and culture; focus on political education to grasp the Party’s policies and government principles; deeply engage with practical realities and the working people”⁽²³⁾. By studying and improving their skills, journalists can fulfill their noble duties.

Journalists must have the awareness to improve their professional knowledge because without strong expertise, they cannot complete their assigned tasks effectively. Ho Chi Minh stated: “To progress, to write well, you must make an effort to learn and practice”⁽²⁴⁾; “A person must learn from many others. Furthermore, you need to enrich the spiritual food you offer; do not make

everyone eat just one dish. Just like in a garden, people need to see many different kinds of beautiful flowers”⁽²⁵⁾.

Journalists are the ones who help the people “open their eyes and ears”, meaning awakening and raising the people’s awareness. Therefore, journalists must have a certain level of knowledge. For this reason, Ho Chi Minh always called for everyone to join in learning and consider studying as a mission. Improving the ethics of journalism is a lifelong task: “As long as you live, you must continue to learn”. In learning, he particularly emphasized the right motivation and attitude: “To study effectively, you must have the right attitude and the right method”⁽²⁶⁾. This means that learning must be driven by a proper motivation to correctly identify the noble professional goals of one’s career, first and foremost for the Party’s cause, the revolution, the nation, and the people, as well as for the personal progress of oneself. He believed: “Learn to work, learn to be a person, learn to be a cadre, learn to serve the organization, serve the class and the people, serve the nation and humanity”⁽²⁷⁾; “Learn to work”, not to “become a revolutionary official”. According to him, “All improper motives for learning must be eliminated”⁽²⁸⁾. Ho Chi Minh taught journalists that they must learn from everywhere, at all times: “Learn from society, learn in practical work, learn from the people”⁽²⁹⁾. However, for learning to be complete, they must also learn from foreign experiences, read foreign newspapers, and to do so, they must know at least one foreign language. To succeed in learning, journalists must have the determination to be self-reliant and resilient.

2. The significance of Ho Chi Minh’s views on building cultural journalists today

In the context of industrialization, modernization, and international integration, revolutionary journalism plays an increasingly important role. This demands that journalists possess strong character to meet the responsibilities entrusted to them by the Party and the people. Journalists must continuously train their ethics and improve their professional skills to carry out the tasks of propagating the Party’s policies and the State’s legal regulations, making sure to bring these into practice; at the same time, they must fulfill other political and social responsibilities effectively. However, in reality, some media outlets still downplay their political role, stray from their core purposes, publish false information, causing confusion among the public, and to some extent, eroding the people’s trust in the country’s cause. Additionally, many journalists still lack the discipline to cultivate their ethics, putting personal gain above all else, disregarding both professional standards and legal regulations in pursuit of self-interest. In the face of such problems, it is necessary to adopt more positive

measures to deter and prevent negativity within the media sector, ensuring that the voice of journalists truly becomes a weapon to “protect the good and fight the evil”. This situation emphasizes the need to return to the teachings of President Ho Chi Minh about the qualities of a revolutionary journalist. His viewpoints remain profoundly valuable for today’s generations of Vietnamese journalists, reminding them to continuously strive to improve their knowledge, cultivate political stability, and firmly adhere to the revolutionary path and goals chosen by the Party and the people.

Building cultural journalists means training professionals who possess both strong ethics and high levels of professional expertise to serve the current revolutionary cause. The development of cultural journalists, together with the creation of cultural media organizations, is aimed at realizing the goal of “building a professional, humanistic, and modern press and media system” as outlined in the Party’s resolutions and reinforced by the guidance of General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng at the 2021 National Cultural Conference.

Firstly, to build cultural journalists who meet the practical requirements today, one must regularly strengthen political education, ideological training, and ethics for journalists. Journalists must rigorously adhere to the Party’s policies, viewpoints, and the State’s laws. They must study and fully understand the Press Law and the 10 ethical standards for journalists. Professional and ethical training is a continuous process, which is why journalists should constantly learn and improve their ethical conduct and lifestyle to maintain “clear eyes, pure heart, and sharp pen”, creating truly valuable journalistic works with high cultural significance that serve the public. “Clear eyes” means having a correct perspective and evaluating the essence of events and phenomena, choosing relevant issues that benefit the people and the nation to report on. “Pure heart” refers to having integrity, living uprightly, working honestly, impartially, and continuously cultivating one’s ethics, resisting base temptations. “Sharp pen” means having deep professional skills to create high-quality journalistic works, contributing to spreading positive values in society. Journalists must be brave, clear-headed, passionate, sensitive, and willing to venture into hot and challenging areas of life to uncover the truth, providing timely and insightful information to the public.

Secondly, in the current context, journalists need to have a mindset of innovation, creative methods of operation, and equip themselves with knowledge, skills, and multimedia journalism technologies that are both specialized and versatile, creating more high-quality and attractive works that guide public opinion correctly and in a timely manner. It can be affirmed that

these qualities are the essential characteristics that clearly reflect the cultural identity of today's journalists.

To have journalists who are truly pioneers on the frontlines of ideological and cultural battles, media organizations, in addition to strengthening their management of the reporter team, also need to create a cultural environment for journalists to work in. A cultural environment plays an important role not only for each media organization but also in reflecting the civilization and progress of the country. Therefore, both individually and collectively, if everyone works together to build a cultural environment, it will help create a healthy working atmosphere, contribute positively to the national journalism cause, and assist journalists in producing works with high cultural value.

Building cultural journalists and cultural media organizations is a very practical and meaningful task for today's journalists to fulfill their role and mission in the revolutionary press, which is to preserve, build, and develop Vietnam, while strongly inspiring patriotic spirit, national self-reliance, and the aspiration for a prosperous and happy nation, as instructed by President Ho Chi Minh./.

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