

Hồ Chí Minh's Views on Target Audience of the Revolutionary Press

Dr. Thi Thuy Binh LE

Abstract: *On discussing revolutionary press, the first question that journalist Hồ Chí Minh was concerned about was “to whom does he write for?”, that is, to find the target of revolutionary journalism’s reflection and service, because this answer determines the entire purpose, content and form of writing, as well as the qualities and ethics of journalists. Hồ Chí Minh was always consistent in his viewpoint: revolutionary press must aim to serve the general public; at the same time, each newspaper has its own target of service. The popularity and the specificity of journalism are not opposed or contradictory to each other, but they harmoniously combine and complement to each other, creating a unique characteristic in Hồ Chí Minh’s viewpoint on the target audience of the revolutionary press.*

Keywords: *press; revolution; target audience; Hồ Chí Minh.*

Being the founder of Vietnam’s revolutionary press, a professional writer with 50 years in journalist occupation, having more than 2,000 articles, the first issue that Hồ Chí Minh identified before writing was the target of press reflection and service. Unlike the previous patriots and recognized journalists under the colonial government who wrote for the educated class, the upper class, Hồ Chí Minh affirmed that revolutionary journalism must aim to serve the masses. As a student of K. Marx and V. I. Lenin, Hồ Chí Minh deeply understood the view that the masses are the subject of revolution, the history creators; therefore, the mission of revolutionary press is to awaken, gather, and guide the actions of the masses. In his lecture at the central Party rectifying class on 17 August, 1953, Hồ Chí Minh requested revolutionary journalists to ask themselves:

“To whom do we write? To whom do we write?

- To write for the majority: workers, peasants, soldiers.

What do we write for?

- For education, explanation, agitation, and criticism. To serve the masses”⁽¹⁾.

This means the purpose of journalism was to write for the masses, to serve the masses.

In his speech at the 2nd Congress of the Vietnam Journalists Association in 1959, Hồ Chí Minh raised the question: “Who should the press serve?” and interpreted by comparing the bourgeois press and the revolutionary press. He refuted the view that “in capitalist countries there is freedom of the press

and the press is classless” by affirming: some French newspapers “on the one hand lull the people to sleep, divide the people, make the people lose their spirit of fighting and class solidarity; on the other hand, serve the bourgeoisie benefit. Some newspapers are “sensational”, love romance, focusing on the rich people’s private life for extortion”⁽²⁾. Those newspapers serve the interests of the exploiting class. At the same time, he pointed out the lack of press freedom in France because the L’Humanité newspaper itself “was often sabotaged by the rulers in many ways, such as fines, vandalism, limited supply of printing paper, and sometimes confiscation...”⁽³⁾. Then, he concluded: “Our press must serve the working people, serve socialism, serve the struggle of the country unification, and for world peace”⁽⁴⁾; “Our press is not for the minority of readers, but to serve the people, to propagate and explain the Party and Government’s guidelines and policies, so it must have a mass characteristic and fighting spirit”⁽⁵⁾. Similarly, in June 1969, in a Letter sent to the Huỳnh Thúc Kháng journalism class, he affirmed: “The target audience of a newspaper is the majority of the people. A newspaper which is unpopular to the majority of the people does not deserve to be a newspaper”⁽⁶⁾.

It can be seen that the masses are the main target of revolutionary journalism. This means that revolutionary press needs to pay attention to and exploit what is beneficial and for the people. Because the target of revolutionary press is the masses, all activities of revolutionary press must be oriented towards the masses, centered by the people; thus, the writing must be easily understandable to the masses, so that the mass can read and easily follow good deeds, and stay away from bad things.

Hồ Chí Minh identified that the target audience of revolutionary press is the masses, first of all, because the masses are an endless source of inspiration for revolutionary press. By considering the masses as the main target audience, the target of revolutionary press, the diligence, creativity, initiatives, genuine aspirations, good deeds, good people, etc. of the masses are always an endless source of inspiration for the creativity of journalists. The topics of revolutionary press must ultimately come from the practical life, the vivid realities of working, production, fighting, and studying of the masses. Therefore, the revolutionary press must praise the Truth, the Goodness, the Beauty in the people, and spread those examples so that the people know, learn from, and follow. At the same time, the revolutionary press must resolutely fight against things that are bad, unkind, negative, go against the good customs, traditions, and culture of the nation, and against the interests of the masses. The revolutionary press must guide, suggest, and introduce new ways of doing things, typical examples of good productivity and working, examples of kindness, altruism, and willingness to help others, so

that all people know, learn, follow, and spread them. Revolutionary press must also know how to stir up national pride, aspirations, visions, cultural values of Viet Nam and its people. In addition, the people are also a valuable source of material, a rich “library” source, and “living” witnesses for reporters and journalists. It is no coincidence that President Hồ Chí Minh advised journalists to “listen to the people to get material to write” ⁽⁷⁾ and “ask the people”.

In Hồ Chí Minh’s view, the masses are not only an endless source of inspiration and theme for journalists’ creativity, the beneficiaries and service targets of revolutionary journalism, but also directly participate in journalistic activities, contributing to the building of Vietnam’s revolutionary press. Revolutionary press could not exist and develop unless it were attached to the masses, served the masses, inspired by the masses, then we would not have a generation of mature “journalists” originated from the people. The mass’ involvement has made revolutionary press become a mass’ democratic forum. Thanks for that, revolutionary press has attracted and gathered the intelligence, talent and creativity of a majority of people, making it more appealing, intellectual and culturalistic.

Based on the identification of the people as the target of reflection and service, Hồ Chí Minh required that revolutionary press must have content and forms of expression appropriate to its target.

Regarding the content of press reflection, Hồ Chí Minh emphasized that in serving the masses, it is necessary to choose, praise, and promote what is beneficial to the masses, as well as beneficial to the revolution, the Fatherland, and the nation; to avoid what is bad, harmful, and not good for the masses. He advised journalists to write: “to highlight the good things of our people, our soldiers, our cadres, and our friends, at the same time, to criticize the shortcomings of our cadres, people, the soldiers. We should not only write about the good things and hide the bad things. But criticism must be correct. When mentioning the good things, we must be moderate, not exaggerate. Say it as it is. Our soldiers and people are good enough to highlight, no need to make it up”⁽⁸⁾.

Regarding the form of writing, he required journalists to listen to the masses and learn the way the masses think, speak, and express. He said: “We write for the purpose of education and agitation; if the audience cannot remember or understand what we write, this means the writing is not good and for the wrong purpose. If we want the audience to understand, remember, and follow, the writing must be suitable to the audience’s level ⁽⁹⁾, “writing must be practical”. The language of revolutionary journalism must be clear, pure, and easy to understand, “refrain from using flowery words”, and foreign words.

Journalists are required to “learn the way of expression and the language that

the masses speak”⁽¹⁰⁾, because that is the only way for journalists to be accepted by the masses. Hồ Chí Minh was excellent in using the mass’s expression style. Being an erudite person who is knowledgeable about Eastern and Western cultures, and knew many foreign languages, Hồ Chí Minh preferred using simple, common words that accurately reflected the nature of things and were highly persuasive. That is why many sentences and ideas in his writings have become slogans and mottos for action such as: “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom”, “Nothing is difficult, only fear of not being steadfast”, “Unity, unity, great unity/ Success, success, great success”.

By affirming target audience of revolutionary journalism is the masses, Hồ Chí Minh considered the people’s evaluation as the criterion and measure to determine the value of journalistic works. He said: “When you finish writing an article, you must review it three or four times and edit it carefully. Even better, ask a few uneducated people to read it and ask them which phrases or words they do not understand, then edit it to make it understandable to them”⁽¹¹⁾. He said specifically: “Reading by yourself is not enough. You must ask other comrades, workers, farmers, and soldiers to read it again”⁽¹²⁾. Hồ Chí Minh always practised seriously in this way during the process of journalism and leading the revolution. When he finished writing an article, he often gave it to the drivers, cooks, and waiters who had low levels of education to read, and then asked them: “Is it easy to understand?” If they said it was difficult to understand, he would correct his way of expression, because only when the masses understood could they follow the things he propagated and advocated. Similarly, while teaching, he often stopped to ask the listeners: “Do you understand clearly?”. For example, when he read the “Declaration of Independence”, he paused to ask: “Do you hear clearly what I said?” This demonstrated his concern for the level of reception of the readers and listeners.

Besides affirming the popularity and the people nature of revolutionary press, Hồ Chí Minh noted that each newspaper must have its own specific target audience. This is clearly demonstrated in the newspapers that Hồ Chí Minh founded, because only by determining the specific target audience will the newspaper follow the right political line and have appropriate content and writing form. He highlighted that, with the same purpose of revolutionary propagation and agitation, writing for intellectuals must be different from writing for workers and farmers, and writing for adults must be different from writing for children; writing for people in the country must be different from writing for overseas Vietnamese; writing for Party members must be different from people outside the Party; writing for people in the mountains must be different from writing for people in the lowlands... It is that meticulous and

detailed consideration that makes Hồ Chí Minh's journalistic works maximize their effectiveness in the communication process.

The birth of Thanh Niên newspaper - the organ of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth Association - in June 1925 opened the press revolution in Vietnam. This newspaper was written for the intellectual youth of that time. They passed it around and read it among illiterate workers and peasants, helping them understand and respond to the great ideas of the revolution. If a short time before that, in 1922, he participated in founding the newspaper *Le Paria* in Paris, the mouthpiece of the Colonial Union - a newspaper fighting for the poor across five continents, "leading all exploited people of all skin colors to unite under the red flag of the hammer and sickle to, in a large international revolutionary movement, wipe out all exploiters" ⁽¹³⁾; and in 1924, he founded the newspaper *International Peasants*, aiming at the peasant class all over the world; then the Thanh Niên newspaper looked towards the future of the young generation of Vietnam still living in slavery. Right from that time, he identified the main target of the newspaper as Vietnamese youth and placed his faith in the young generation - the core force that could lead the Vietnamese revolution to success, eliminating the shackles of oppression and exploitation of French colonialism. The publication of the newspaper was carried out in parallel with the opening of training classes for outstanding young people to become the core of the revolution later on, which was an important preparation in terms of politics, ideology, and organization for the birth of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1930. Through the role of Thanh Niên newspaper, many young people were quickly enlightened by Marxist-Leninist theory, some of whom later became Party leaders and revolutionary journalists.

Then in December 1926, he founded the *Cong Nong* newspaper, targeting the two classes that played the role of "owners", "roots", and driving forces of the Vietnamese revolution. The *Linh Kach Menh* newspaper (the predecessor of today's *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* newspaper) was born in February 1927 for the revolutionary soldiers. In 1928, he secretly went to Thailand and suggested that the name of the *Dong Thanh* newspaper of overseas Vietnamese become *Than Ai*, which was a newspaper targeting Vietnamese people living and working in Thailand. In 1930, the Communist Party of Vietnam was born, and he founded the *Red* magazine, targeting cadres and party members. In early 1941, after returning to the country to directly lead the revolution, he ordered to establish the *Viet Minh Front* and founded the *Viet Nam Doc Lap* newspaper in the Viet Bac base. The *Viet Nam Doc Lap* (Independent Vietnam) newspaper and shortly after that, the *Cuu Quoc* (National salvation) newspaper contributed to promoting propaganda and organizing people into national salvation organizations in the

Viet Minh Front to prepare for an uprising to seize power. In the Viet Nam Doc Lap newspaper, he wrote many songs about farmers, children, women, workers, soldiers, “10 things to do”, “Self-defense song”, “Should learn our history”, “Song of the thread”, “Lighting fire”, “Stone”... to encourage and attract the masses to participate in the revolution with very simple, rustic, easy-to-remember words, suitable for the culture of the mountainous people. After the August Revolution, the newspaper Vietnam Independence became the voice of the Viet Minh Cao Bang Party Committee, then the voice of the Viet Minh Lien Viet Cao - Bac - Lang agency. By 1956, the newspaper became the voice of the Vietnam Workers’ Party of the Viet Bac autonomous region.

It can be seen that, in spite of different times and different spaces, each newspaper founded by Hồ Chí Minh focused on specific audiences, in general, they all aimed to raise the political awareness of the masses, launch movements to fight for independence, break the chains of slavery, and move forward to build socialism. The view that determines the reflection and service’s target of revolutionary journalism as popularity of the mass is considered the “red thread” running through Hồ Chí Minh’s journalism ideology, thus, the specificity of the target audience of each newspaper makes that unified viewpoint even more unique and rich.

Hồ Chí Minh’s life and journalist career have given us a profound message about his philosophy of life, that is: no matter how, where and when it is, always wholeheartedly serve the Fatherland, serve the revolution, serve the people. The precise determination of the target of press service is the foundation for distinguishing revolutionary journalism from the reactionary journalism of the colonial government; thereby affirming the value and lasting vitality of Hồ Chí Minh’s thought and journalism career, because any value that is born from real life, accepted and acknowledged by the people will live forever with the nation and through the times. The lesson on the popularity, the people’s nature and the specificity when determining the service target of revolutionary press in Hồ Chí Minh Thought still retains its correctness and topical significance for modern journalism in the current period of innovation and integration./.

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