Ho Chi Minh - The Founder of a Journalism Type

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thi Truong Giang NGUYEN

President Ho Chi Minh came to the press naturally. During his revolutionary activities, realizing that the press had a "very strong influence on the people," and was an amazing and sharp weapon to fight, he studied and used it effectively. "The newspaper is just black and white paper but one can write ultimatums and love letters on it"[1]. He considered journalism a revolutionary activity and used it to serve revolutionary activities. "For journalists, the pen is a sharp weapon, the article is a revolutionary pamphlet to encourage the masses to unite and fight,"[2] he said.

According to researcher Do Quang Hung, Ho Chi Minh was "the one who started a newspaper line as a profession"[3]. From 1922 until his return home in January 1941, he founded and directly organized the content and layout while publishing eight revolutionary newspapers. Through his naming and contribution to those newspapers, Ho Chi Minh's systematic use of the press as a sharp weapon for his revolutionary struggle's objectives can be clearly seen.

Professor Ha Minh Duc said, "Generally speaking, besides his major works, Ho Chi Minh Thought is mainly demonstrated through the press." Ho Chi Minh's journalistic works contain cultural values, profound knowledge, and great political significance. "His journalism is not limited to one nation, but has the stature, knowledge and experience of an international journalist"[4].

From his first article "Problems of Indigenous People" published in the Humane newspaper of the French Communist Party on August 2, 1919 to the last article "Improving the Responsibility of Caring for and Educating Children and Teenagers" published in Nhan Dan newspaper on June 1, 1969, Ho Chi Minh used nearly 100 different pen names and left about 2,000 articles of all genres for the legacy of the Vietnamese revolutionary journalism, creating a unique style – the Ho Chi Minh journalistic style.

These successes were the result of an extraordinary effort along with a superior intellect. At first, he practiced writing short news stories, each with only 3-5 lines. Then gradually he got used to writing longer pieces, "and gradually, he could write articles up to 15-20 lines, and then the whole article." When he could write a long piece, he "shortened the writing, wrote more clearly and briefly with the same events"[5].

With his rich and profound knowledge, culture, and experience, along with a wide range of activities, and proficiency in many foreign languages, Ho Chi Minh demonstrated the capacity and bravery of an international journalist, a great teacher of the Vietnamese revolutionary press.

He found himself as "a person predestined with the press"… "more or less experienced in journalism."Thus, he often contributed his ideas to journalism activities. His demands laid the groundwork for the fundamental contents and vital principles of revolutionary journalism.

Writing for press means doing politics

Right from his years of traveling abroad to find a way to save the country, President Ho Chi Minh was deeply aware of the great role of the progressive press in educating genuine patriotism and spreading Marxism- Leninism in Vietnam. At the conference of the 5th Comintern's Congress in July 1924, he pointed out: "The Communist press has the duty to make our soldiers understand the colonial issue, awakening the consent of the working masses in the colonial countries, to enlist them to join the cause of communism"(6). Therefore, on June 21, 1925, he founded Thanh Nien - the newspaper that laid the foundation for Vietnam's revolutionary journalism. He directly produced, wrote articles and participated in training and fostering activities for press cadres. Journalist Thep Moi called Thanh Nien newspaper "the source of revolutionary journalism," which helped to gather the patriotic youths to the revolution force amidst the trends of reform in the first half of the twentieth century. Obviously, it was he who was a pioneer soldier on the frontlines of the press of the proletariat in Vietnam and throughout the world.

Prior to the Thanh Nien newspaper, "Le Paria," also known as "The Miserables," was published as the "Forum of Colonial Peoples." Ho Chi Minh clearly pointed out the purpose and principle of the newspaper, which was to gather the miserable people who were oppressed and exploited by the colonial regime, regardless of skin color, to unite and help each other with the struggle for equality and freedom for their nations.

Being aware of the great significance and role of the press, he himself had to do a lot of work in difficult circumstances to maintain and develop the newspaper. He confided: "There was a time when I worked as an editor, a director, a fund-keeper, a publisher and a seller of Le Paria newspaper. Comrades from the Afro-Asian colonial countries wrote articles and raised the funds, I had to do all the other things"(7).

He clarified his position. "The newspaper's task is to propagate, agitate, train, educate and organize the people to lead them to a common goal"(8).

"…so that each countryman is a soldier, each village is a fortress… and wherever the enemy's troops go, they are stirred up and destroyed… wherever our soldiers go, they are supported physically and mentally. That is the mission of our guerrilla newspaper"(9).

During his life of revolutionary activities, he always used his pen as a sharp and effective weapon to fight for a noble ideal: peace, national independence, socialism and communism. Despite difficulties and dangers while operating secretly or being busy with hundreds of thousands of jobs as a Party leader and a State President, he still spent time writing regularly. For him, writing for press means doing politics.

Although he only considered himself a man of a predestined relationship with the press, for his whole life, he never stopped writing from his early struggles to find a way to save the country to the time he took on many national responsibilities with extremely busy work. This was because President Ho Chi Minh thoroughly understood the press's role and importance in the revolutionary struggle and in social life.

Journalists need to keep close and intimate relationships with the people.

According to Ho Chi Minh, a journalist must know how to "merge with the masses, trust the masses, understand the masses, listen to the masses"[10]. Because the masses are the closest and largest public group to the press, journalists must have a sense of serving them sincerely and conscientiously. That is also the reason for the lasting value of an article, a newspaper and genuine journalism.

He suggested journalists going deep and close to the reality of people's lives by "coming from the masses. Going deep in the masses," instead of closing the door and "staying in the room and writing," which cannot produce practical, successful, insightful and useful works. His concept was a sharp contrast to the bureaucratic behavior that kept a distance from the people, writing things that people don't understand and don't want to respond to. It is hard for journalists to write well and precisely about the people's lives without keeping close to people, even with petty details.

In March 1962, the "Western Nghe An" newspaper under the Western Committee (Nghe An Party Committee) issued its first publication. Most of its pages mentioned good examples in agricultural production and building the cultural life under the motto "Clean villages, green fields," initiatives in irrigation, thereby implementing the Party and the State's guidelines and policies in the countryside and ethnic mountainous areas. Ho Chi Minh commented, "The writing on the mountainous people topic – both content and form are not profound enough, still lacking of ethnic identities. It seems that the journalists do not write from the perspective of the highland people"[11].

In a news report by Ho Kim Tuan, there was a sentence: "Ky Son district health department delivers medicine upto highland communes for the ethnic people." Ho Chi Minh underlined the word "upto" with red pencil and suggested replacing this word by "to". This was a small error in the wording, but it highlighted Uncle Ho's lesson "It is necessary to define the target reader, the writing's purpose and method"[12].

He said that journalists must write about the issues that are practical with the masses such as: What do the masses need, want to hear, want to know, love, etc. Every thought, sentence and word must clearly reflect the thoughts and desires of the people. When reading the Waffen-Bruder, the news agency mobilizing the French soldiers of the Enemy Mobilization Department, he wrote a letter commenting the published issues, pointing out the editing method should be

suitable to needs, sentiment and qualification of the subject: "Here are a few suggestions for you: This newspaper is for legionnaires, who are humorous, irritable, emotional, not deeply political people. Therefore, it is necessary to have pictures, funny comics, something that makes them laugh, and some brief news about Germany and France. In brief, you should make them moved, comfortable, laugh and cry, to attract them to our side. Long articles are not recommended"[13].

In order to write articles that are suitable and close to the people's lives, Ho Chi Minh said that journalists must learn how to find documents among the people. He recommended five ways to find material for writing, which are Listening, Asking, Seeing, Observing and Recording. These five ways are closely linked together logically. "Journalists must know how to listen: listen far, listen close, listen to many people, listen from many sides. They also must know how to ask: ask those who are next to them or around them, ask the people, ask officials, ask in many directions. They must go to the place to see with their own eyes because a hundred times of hearings are not equal to one time of seeing. They have to read newspapers and books from many sources. What's more, they still have to actively take notes, recording everything they hear and see."

When writing, "it is necessary to write in a universal, easy to understand, simple and clear manner," which is suitable to the people's level, because most of the newspaper's audiences are the people. If a newspaper is not popular with the majority of the population, "it is not worthy to be a newspaper." In his speech at the 2nd Congress of the Vietnam Journalists Association, Ho Chi Minh criticized the lengthy writing for money, with little information and boring content. He condemned those kinds of articles as a waste of paper, ink, time and money of the people.

As the author of thousands of articles using many different languages, Ho Chi Minh always paid attention to the target audience. No matter if being written in French, Russian, or Chinese, for readers who were both intellectuals and workers and likewise in Vietnamese for the masses of people in mountainous areas – all of his works were suitable to the readers' level.

In "Changing the Working Style," he criticized the writer's "picky" habit: "The proverb "casting pearls before swine " means to criticize the listeners who do not understand valuable things. However, journalists may belong to this group" as they use incomprehensible words or use words incorrectly because they are far from the people and do not understand thoughts and requirements of the people. If the people cannot understand, the communication purpose is not achieved, so it must be corrected again.

In an edition of Lao Dong newspaper published in 1948, there was a woodblock print on the cover depicting a picky and difficult worker. After seeing, he commented with the following verses:

"It's impossible to understand
Such kind of drawing
How could the masses understand?[14]

According to Ho Chi Minh, "The purpose of communication is to bring something to the people so that they understand, remember, follow and do. If that goal is not achieved, communication fails"[15].

To write concisely and understandably, he pointed out that journalists have to learn the voices of the masses so as to understand the press writings. After writing an article, journalists must read it again and again to correct confusing and ambiguous words. It's better to ask a few people who do not study much to check and ask them what words and sentences they don't understand, then correct those words to make it understandable at the level of the masses, "briefly, in order to fulfill the mission of communication, organization and guidance, our press needs to be closer to the masses, go deeper into practical work, and improve the press methods."

On discussing the close relationship between the local masses and the "Independent Vietnamese" newspaper, a provincial press agency of Cao Bang, Ho Chi Minh wrote, "Local compatriots love to read newspapers, because what newspapers write is significant to them. They automatically organize newspaper reading groups covertly reporting news of the newspaper. The compatriots also find ways to propagate the newspaper to the enemy's soldiers to call them to return"[16].

His humble attitude, closely attaching his words and writing style familiar to the masses was shaped right from the time he wrote his first news articles in French. He said: "Well, I tried writing this article, if it is fine, you guys can post it; if there's something that needs to fix, feel free to correct it. Your correction makes my writing better"[17]. During his lifetime revolutionary and journalist activities, because he always knew the target and purpose of his writing, he "gave everything that he wrote to a comrade to review and asked them to correct any words that were difficult to understand"[18].

All of his articles were always short, clear, concise, and consistent with his requirements. Although he did not sign his name, or he used different pen names, people can still recognize his writing style through the standards that few can achieve: deep and rich content; specific and practical writing; a sense of humor, and the raising of highly educational issues. Those are the most concrete and vivid examples for generations of Vietnamese journalists to learn.

Truth is the power of the revolutionary press

President Ho Chi Minh often advised journalists to be honest and considered it one of the priority standards of a revolutionary journalist. For a revolutionary press, honesty and objectivity are strength, identity, and also the reason for its existence. The more sensitive, diverse and rich the information is, the more truthful and accurate it must be.

He said that to convince the public, the press must be true and honest. Press cadres "must write realistically, evidently, including where, when and how the things happened, and what were the results… On anti-corruption, it is necessary to clearly state who or which agencies embezzled and wasted, how and on which date, month they did this. Do not write in an unfocused and indiscriminate way"[19]. This is also the expectation of the people, "the masses are waiting for works that truly reflect new people and new jobs, not only to set an example for us to follow, but also to educate our children in the next generations"[20].

Because the masses always "desire for works with truthful content," journalists should always write about the truth: who did it, where, on what date it happened, etc. If an event has not been clearly checked and investigated, "don't speak, don't write about it." After each writing, journalists have to check it many times. Accuracy, focus, honesty, carefulness are the qualities he required for each article, speech, and issue investigated by journalists.

Nhan Dan Newspaper published on June 14, 1961, reported: "The Government Council decided to adjust the retail prices of some industrial goods." He crossed out the word "adjust" and replaced it with the word "reduced" for accuracy. Also in Nhan Dan newspaper published on March 18, 1963, there was an article "North Korea enjoyed a great season in the situation of severe flooding," he underlined three words "in the situation" and replaced them with "despite" to make it nice and accurate[21].

The People's Army Newspaper published on January 3, 1961, on the front page had a big headline "Extremely great military and political victory," which said: "occupied a series of strategic positions." He crossed out the word "occupied," and replaced it with "liberated" to make it nice and correct[22]. Sometimes, he ordered the office to verify some news on mass media. He was very careful to look for reports of good people and good deeds and to carefully check in case the report was inaccurate, to ensure that the reward given to the recipient was deserved and encouraged others by the effect of the reward. There were one or two cases that the localities were asked to verify again when the news reports were not accurate[23].

He also criticized the newspapers as "often speaking one-sidedly and sometimes exaggerating achievements, with little or no exaggeration to difficulties and shortcomings"[24], thereby ignoring the negatives in society. News was sometimes reported in haste and thus inaccurately. He said the press must have both praise and criticism. Whether it is good or bad, it should not only write about the good but also the bad. When writing about the good, the writer should keep it "moderate, do not exaggerate, and be honest. Our army and people are good enough, there is no need to make it up"[25]. On reporting a victory of our army, we must clearly state which battle we won, on which day, how we won, how many enemies were killed, how many guns we collected, we must say it clearly and accurately but also do not disclose the secrets of the military. When writing about the wickedness and evil of

the enemy, we have to write how cruel and evil they are. They seem to be good but actually bad inside as they robbed in a place and went to help another place. We must have specific evidence. When writing about a good experience there must be data for comparison and analysis.

Criticism must be sincere, correct, accurate, and "standing on a friendly stance." If the praise is overstated, the person being praised will also feel ashamed. However, if criticizing too much, the person being criticized will find it difficult to absorb and generate resentment and animosity. Journalists should not use "exaggerated, impolite words" to harm others. Every article written, whether it is praise or criticism, must be aimed at being constructive and contributing to a healthy social life. When reporting, journalists should avoid information that may cause discord or disturb the national unity and harmony. Therefore, it is necessary for journalists to be careful in using details and objective information, and to avoid agitation when information about messy cases can worsen the situation.

One of the outstanding features of Ho Chi Minh's writing is that it always created a close connection between the press and social life, with true and accurate facts. Typical phenomena and materials from daily life were very specifically attached in all his journalistic works.

Reading his articles in the early years of the twentieth century, we see the fate, the real-life scenes of the poor people in Indochina and the colonial countries, along with the numbers that could speak, and facts that denounced the crimes of the colonists and awakened people's conscience.

Researcher Thu Trang commented on Uncle Ho's article "Nguyen Ai Quoc in Paris," "The articles were concise, topical and specific to each task, especially paying attention to the rights of workers, imbued with the nature of union-style struggle…"[26].

Commenting on Uncle Ho's "Judgment of the French Colonial Regime," the late Prime Minister Pham Van Dong made an interesting comparison with the work "The situation of the working class in England" by F. Engel. "Those are pages about real life, with fierce details, without reasoning, without philosophy, but brightening up the philosophy of history, the direction of struggle of nations and mankind"[27].

Under his pen, all genres were never abstract or subjective. His comments were always based on solid evidence, objective facts, and specific examples.

After the August Revolution, as a Party Chairman and State President, he did not have opportunities and time to directly contact and use specific materials in life. But he still cared about all the problems of life, including democracy, caring for education, planting trees, cooking, alcohol, gambling, indiscriminate slaughter of cows, grand fests, early marriages, regular marriages, domestic violence, etc. He selected typical phenomena to propose and discuss the problems. In particular, he

was always conscious of thoroughly exploiting the materials in the press to have specific and accurate data.

In "The need of improving the quality of goods," on criticizing some irresponsible cadres and workers who produced low quality goods that created trouble for people, he mentioned some evidence in the press, such as:

– *"The needle is too big, difficult to sew, and often breaks the thread".*

– *"Screws (of Phu Loi Company) are too bad. People buy 500 ones but half of them are unusable".*

– *"A Thong Nhat bicycle has been broken after just 30 km"*

– *"Towel are torn after just one-month use"*

– *"Raincoats' buttons have broken after using a few times"*

– *"Rain boots, 12 VND a pair, can only be used for a few months."*

– *"Buttons of ready-made shirts for children fell off after just one day"*

– *"Truong Son fountain pens are broken after a few months of use"*

– *The Hong Ha pencils often break and cannot be sharpened".*

(*Source: Nhân Dân newspaper*, November 17, 1962)

In addition, Uncle Ho also paid special attention to the content and quality of information found in photos. As soon as Nhan Dan newspaper was published daily and used black and white photos, he often reminded Editor-in-Chief Hoang Tung, Comrades Tran Quang Huy and Vu Tuan to pay attention to the authenticity of press photos. Uncle Ho said that it was necessary to focus on the natural beauty of life, not the "photography arrangement" that made photos look unnatural. Uncle Ho also suggested that photo captions also need authenticity, vividness. Sometimes after seeing them, he edited the photo captions in newspapers and then assigned his secretary to transfer his comments to the newspaper editorial board so that they could learn from experience.

In addition, Uncle Ho also reminded newspapers to regularly publish photos of "good people and good deeds" because with the press's strength and sincerity, those photos would contribute to multiplying those good models in society. When the portrait photos were beautifully published in the newspaper, Uncle Ho often showed his satisfaction by writing the word "good" on the paper and then sending it to the editorial board[28].

In our society democracy is expanding and journalists are the ones who have a variety of information in all aspects of social life, especially the negative side, negative phenomena, and social evils. Therefore, it is required that journalists must be objective, not only in presenting information but also in receiving and processing that information. Vietnamese journalists always keep Uncle Ho's words in mind: Being a journalist and knowing how to use your righteous pen to serve the struggle for freedom, truth, and the bright future of mankind, "is an extremely glorious mission".

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Ho Chi Minh (1989), *Complete Works*, Volume 10, Truth Publishing House, Hanoi, (2) p.97

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(4) Ha Minh Duc, (2000), *Ho Chi Minh's literary and journalistic career,* Education Publishing House, Hanoi, p.161.

(5) Ho Chi Minh, *On Journalism,* Sub-Institute of Journalism and Propaganda, Hanoi.

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(24) Ho Chi Minh (2000), *Complete Works*, Volume 10, Truth Publishing House, Hanoi, pp. 613-616.