Hồ Chí Minh's Thought on Women's Rights and their Application in the Current Period

Assoc. Prof. Dr, Thi Minh Tuyet TRAN

***Abstract**: With love and aspiration for freedom, Hồ Chí Minh dedicated his life to the cause of human liberation, including women – the most vulnerable class in the old society. Hồ Chí Minh's thought on women's rights is a unique element in his thought on human rights and evidence of his humanism. In this article, the author gives an in-depth analysis of Hồ Chí Minh's thought on the rights of Vietnamese women and the direction of applying his thought to successfully implement the strategy of "gender equality" in Vietnam.*

***Keywords:** Hồ Chí Minh, women, women's right, gender equality.*

Late Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng, a close associate of President Hồ Chí Minh concluded: In the great heart of Hồ Chí Minh, "there is room for everyone with no exception. He arranged for each person a fighting position as well as caring for each individual's work, life and study with love, careful guidance and rigorous demanding"(1). The deep love of Hồ Chí Minh for all classes of people was recognized by the nation and the world, but he paid special attention to the weakest and most disadvantaged people in society. Women were one group of them. With the concept of women's rights, Hồ Chí Minh was the one who laid the foundation for implementing the policy of "gender equality" in Vietnam. The goal of building a democratic, just and civilized society in Vietnam will not be successful if women's rights are not fully implemented. Hồ Chí Minh's thought on women's rights, therefore, remains the guideline for the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2021-2030 in the State of Vietnam.

1. Hồ Chí Minh's thoughts on women's rights

Gender inequality is a clear manifestation of social inequality. Vietnam is an Eastern country, heavily influenced by the axiom "respecting men, despising women," so women in the feudal system suffered many disadvantages. Under the feudal colonial system, they were oppressed two times. "In society, women were despised as slaves. At home, they were confined in the chains of the "three submissions"(2). They were unable to defend themselves, so they were trampled and persecuted the most. In the work "Judgment of the French Colonial Regime," Nguyen Ai Quoc had a separate chapter titled "The Suffering and Humiliation of Local Women" to express his extreme indignation at the cruel crimes and

exploitation inflicted on women, obscene habit of those who called themselves civilized. From the painful reality of Vietnamese women, with the absorption of Marxist-Leninist views on women's equal rights as well as witnessing the lives of women in many countries around the world, the liberation of Vietnamese women, giving them equal rights in all aspects became a great aspect in Hồ Chí Minh's thought. His love and special concern for women seemed to originate from the love and pain of losing his mother in childhood. With respect for all women, he affirmed: "Women account for half of society. If we don't liberate women, we won't liberate half of humanity. If women are not liberated, socialism is only half built"[3]. Hồ Chí Minh's thought on women's rights contains ideas imbued with the spirit of science, revolution and humanity.

First, Hồ Chí Minh affirmed the great role and equal position of women in society.

With his comprehensive thinking, Hồ Chí Minh viewed the role of women from many angles. First of all, women have the function of being wives and mothers, and raising children – the future generation of the country. In daily life, women are often careful, thoughtful and thrifty. At work, women don't drink or act overbearing. In wartime, when most of the men had to go to the front, women were in charge of both family and production work. Continuing the tradition that "when the enemy enters the house, women also fight," women actively participated in the resistance war. With their outstanding roles, responsibilities and advantages, women deserve an equal position with men.

Therefore, women's liberation is an important task of the revolution in its social aspect. Even in the Party's founding political platform, Hồ Chí Minh advocated the establishment of a society of "equal rights for men and women." On propagating "Ten Policies of the Viet Minh," Hồ Chí Minh wrote about the policy towards women as follows: "Women are also free. Regardless of male and female, people enjoy equal rights"[4] In the Democratic Republic of Vietnam led by Hồ Chí Minh, equal rights for women were constitutionalized by law. Hồ Chí Minh affirmed, one of the special values of the 1946 Constitution was "that the Constitution declares to the world: Vietnamese women have been equal to men to enjoy all the same freedoms and rights of citizens"[5]. The 1959 Constitution also more specifically recognized the equal rights of women: "Women of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have equal rights with men in terms of political, economic, cultural, social and family activities," (Article 24). Democracy has changed the life of Vietnamese women, putting them on an equal footing with men and becoming the masters within society.

Second, Ho Chi Minh has specified women's rights in all fields.

According to Hồ Chí Minh, "equal rights for men and women" is not only reflected in the constitution, but also specified in all aspects of life and is implemented in practice.

Third, women are equal to men in having political rights.

In his work *Revolutionary Path*, Hồ Chí Minh wrote: "An Nam revolution must also include women's participation in order to succeed"[6] This affirmed women's right to participate in the revolution and be an important revolutionary force. Shortly after the foundation of the Party, the 1st Congress of the Central Committee in October 1930 passed the "Resolution on Women's Mobilization", which emphasized: "The revolutionary force of women is a very important force. If the majority of women do not participate in revolutionary struggles, the revolution cannot be successful. Therefore, women's work is no longer a subordinate task of the Party. That is a big and important task"[7]. Under the Party's leadership, Vietnamese women actively participated in two resistance wars against both the French and the Americans. President Hồ Chí Minh confirmed women's great contributions in the resistance against the French by saying, "Our beautiful country is built by the hands of women, regardless of age"[8]. In the American war, he awarded women the title of "bravery, dutifulness, in the fight against the Americans to save the country." Women not only had the right to participate in national salvation activities but also had the right to vote, nominate and be elected. They had the right to join political organizations, particularly the Communist Party of Vietnam. Women also had the right to take part in government agencies and hold leadership positions. Article 14 of the "Law on Marriage and Family" which was drafted and promulgated by Hồ Chí Minh in 1960, clearly stipulates, "Wife and husband both have the right to freedom of political and social activities." Equality in politics is a big step forward in the lives of Vietnamese women.

Fourth, women are equal to men in economic aspects.

F. Engel highlighted, "Women's liberation and women's equality cannot be achieved if women are left behind in the production activities of society and contained within the family's affairs." Inheriting this view, Hồ Chí Minh affirmed "women are an important labor force"[9]. Therefore, liberating the labor force of women is required to create conditions for their participation in production and business activities. However, it is necessary to care for the gender and physiological characteristics of women to suitably arrange work.

Hồ Chí Minh also affirmed, "Women have the right to study and need to actively study." Under the feudal system, the vast majority of women could not go to school, therefore, women had to "try to study hard, including fundamental subjects and political, vocational subjects. If you don't study, you won't progress. If you have determination, you will definitely succeed"[10]. Equal rights in the field of culture will help women complete the social work and fulfill their parental duties. In the new regime, women have the right to participate in social work, no longer "staying at home around in the kitchen" like in feudal times. Hồ Chí Minh emphasized that

as a member of a democratic society, women must have new determination, new ethics and a new style to fulfill their civic duties. They must actively participate in all social activities as the owners of society.

In the family, women have rights equal to men. Hồ Chí Minh emphasized that women must be liberated not only socially but also from their status in the family, which is described as "husband is the lord, wife is the servant." In order to create a legal basis for women's equality in the family, the 1960 "Law on Marriage and Family" was formulated according to the principle of "free and progressive marriage, monogamy, equality between men and women, protecting the rights of women and children" (Article 1). Respecting women and understanding the remnants of the "respecting men, despising women" thinking, Hồ Chí Minh especially emphasized: In the family, women have the right to be respected; husbands are not allowed to abuse their wives, an act is both against the law of the State and against the love of husband and wife.

Hồ Chí Minh affirmed the equal rights of women in all fields, from family to society because that he never espoused an incomplete, imperfect revolution. The liberation of women in all aspects not only created a justice society, but also increased the revolutionary and labor force when the great resources accounting for "half of society" were released and promoted.

Third, Hồ Chí Minh gave instructions on the methods of liberation to gain women's equality.

According to Hồ Chí Minh, the individual's destiny is closely attached to the nation's destiny, thus, to liberate women, we must liberate the nation first. He emphasized, "Women and girls are also among the people. If the entire nation is free, of course they are also free. In contrast, if the nation is still in slavery, women and their children will also live in that slavery"[11]. National liberation is the common cause of the whole nation and women are an important and numerous force. To promote the role of women in the cause of national liberation, it is necessary to promulgate and educate them. Shortly after his return to Vietnam in 1941 to lead the revolution, Hồ Chí Minh called on women "to unite to fight, regardless of age, to join the Việt Minh Association, to first help the country, then help themselves, to let the world know their names and the faces of the Fairy and the Dragon's decendants"[12].

To turn women's power into a great socio-political force, we must establish an organization that allows them to participate. In 1941, after establishing the Viet Minh Front, Hồ Chí Minh sought to found the Women's National Salvation Organization to gather women's force in the national liberation revolution. When the country achieved independence, Hồ Chí Minh directed the establishment of the Vietnam Women's Union on October 20, 1946. This organization became an

important, independent political force of the Unified National Front. Established from central to grassroots levels, the Women's Union not only has the function of gathering forces to participate in socio-political activities, but also of supporting each other and protecting and defending women's rights.

Women's liberation and equality is a macro-revolution, the Party's vital task and the State's responsibility. The Party designed the line and orientation, the State with its institutions and constitution, is an effective instrument to serve the women's liberation course, to ensure women's rights in all its aspects. In dealing with the minority number of women in the Party, Hồ Chí Minh requested that the Party's organizations should improve the Party's development work among women. He attributed the minority of women in leadership positions to the Party's weakness, which reflected the narrow mindsets and prejudices towards women, as well as the lack of respect and trust in women's intelligence, talents and efforts. With the hope that "women are more engaging in the government practically and effectively"[13], Hồ Chí Minh requested the Party and government's authorities to have "specific training and supporting methods on women to increase women's status"[14]. In his "Testament," he remined "the Party and Government to set practical plans to foster and support more women in charge of all work, including leadership positions"[15].

Hồ Chí Minh also asserted that "To change the position of women in society, it is necessary to change the whole society's perception about the role of women." Although women's equality has been constitutionally established, in reality, "some people do not clearly see the role of women at present and in the future, and thus, underestimate women's abilities"[16]. Changing people's perception is "a large and difficult revolution. Because the gender prejudice has existed for thousands of years, ingrained in the minds of everyone, every family, every social class and is impossible to fight by force"[17]. Therefore, to liberate women, it is vital to stay persistent in propaganda work in society to fight against the patriarchal mentality of men regarding the inferiority of women.

In the liberation of women, they need their own effort to liberate themselves. Hồ Chí Minh said that women should not wait for the Government or the Party to give instructions for their liberation. Instead, women should be self-reliant to overcome feelings of inferiority to acquire an equal position with men. In order to take the leadership, women must do their best to prove that "women are capable enough to be put to higher position"[18]. In the family, to have equality and prevent violence, women must love and respect themselves, have an independent job and income, and strongly fight against domestic violence because they are protected by the law. In his "Testament," he reminded women of "doing their best to overcome difficulties"[19].

With the concept of "truly respecting women and women's rights," Hồ Chí Minh laid the foundation for the realization of gender equality in Vietnam and to prove the outstanding and progressive advantages of the new regime. His thought on women's liberation and the struggle for women's rights has shown the reality and actionability of Hồ Chí Minh's humanism. He not only showed his deep sympathy and compassion for the injustices and losses of people, but was determined to free them, by encouraging and teaching them how to liberate themselves.

2. The direction of applying Hồ Chí Minh's thought to the implementation of today's strategy of gender equality in Vietnam

Hồ Chí Minh profoundly understood Marx's saying, "the thoughts and actions of women show how progressive the society is"[20]. Along with the development of humanity, women's equality is increasingly being promoted. On November 18, 1979, the United Nations General Assembly ratified "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW). Vietnam signed the Convention on July 29, 1980 and ratified the Convention on November 29, 1981.

During his lifetime, Hồ Chí Minh used the phrase "men and women are equal" instead of saying "gender equality," however, those words have the same meaning. As women account for more than half of society. According to the overall population survey in 2019, the number of women in Viet Nam was 48,327,923 people, accounting for 50.2% of the total population[21]. The goal of building a "democratic, just and civilized society" will not be successful if we fail to bring women's potential into full play and successfully realize the strategy of gender equality. Therefore, along with the renovation, the State and the Party have been more concerned about the course of women's liberation and the implementation of the strategy of gender equality. Many important decisions and resolutions on women have been issued.

The "National Committee for the Advancement of Women" in Vietnam was established under Decision 72/TTg dated February 25, 1993. The apparatus, function and tasks of this organization have been continuously strengthened. The 8th Party's Congress of 1996 set out the policy of "building and implementing the development strategy for the advancement of Vietnamese women by 2000"[22]. In 2007, the Politburo of the 10th Tenure issued Resolution 11-NQ/TW on women's work in the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization of the country, with the goal: "By 2020, women can be improved in all aspects; women's educational and professional qualifications can meet the requirements of industrialization, modernization and international economic integration; women's employment and material, spiritual, and cultural life are remarkably improved; increasing women's participation in social work with equality in all aspects;

increasing contributions to society and the family. Striving to make the country achieve the most progress in gender equality in the region"[23]. Then, the "Platform for National Construction in the Transition Period to Socialism (Supplemented and Developed in 2011)" announced the policy of realizing gender equality and working for the advancement of women. On realizing that policy, the Government of Vietnam has developed the "National Strategies on Gender Equality" in the periods of 2011-2020, 2016-2020, and 2021-2030 with the goal of further narrowing the gender gap, and thus contributing to the country's sustainable development.

To create a legal basis for those policies, the "Law on Gender Equality" (2006) and the "Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control" (2007) were promulgated and implemented. The "2012 Labor Code" stipulates that the maternity leave period of women be increased from 4 to 6 months. Article 26 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates: "Male and female citizens are equal in all respects. The State has policies to ensure gender equality rights and opportunities; The State, society and family create conditions for women to develop comprehensively and promote their roles in society; prohibiting gender discrimination." Published guidelines, policies and laws have demonstrated the determination of the State of Vietnam to ensure women's rights and implement the strategy of gender equality.

Those guidelines, policies and laws have brought positive results when put into practice. From the political perspective, Vietnam is among countries with a high percentage of women participating in national politics. Regarding Party work, there were three female Politburo members in the 12th Party's Congress and two female Politburo and Secretariat members in the 13th Congress. In the National Assembly, the 13th National Assembly had 122 female deputies, accounting for 24.4% of total NA deputies. The 14th National Assembly had 133 female deputies, accounting for 26.88%. The 15th National Assembly has 151 female deputies, accounting for 30.26%.

In the economy, the Population and Housing survey of the General Statistics Office in 2019 showed that women accounted for 47.4% of the main labor force of the country. As of October 2019, there were over 285.6 thousand enterprises headed by female entrepreneurs, accounting for 24% of the total number of enterprises nationwide [24].

Regarding culture, the percentage of women who are educated at all levels is increasing. The number of female staff with high educational qualifications such as professors, associate professors, masters, doctorates, etc. has been increasing.

As for life expectancy, according to the 2019 Census, the life expectancy of Vietnamese women is 76.4 years compared to 71 for men and the world average of 73.7[25]. According to news given at the launch of the campaign "Career Has No

Gender" held in October 2020 in Vietnam, the country is ranked 87th out of 153 surveyed countries in the world in narrowing the gender gap.

The above results are very positive for Vietnam, a country heavily influenced by the gender prejudices. However, the implementation of the equality strategy in Vietnam still has many shortcomings that need to be overcome.

First, there are still large disparities in education level, employment opportunities, income and political participation between men and women, especially in rural, ethnic minority areas. In fact, men still dominate in highly qualified jobs, scientific research, and the armed forces, whereas women mainly work in fields such as agriculture, trade, teaching, and the table work. The disparities in education and occupational levels cause the income disparities, that make it difficult for women to achieve economic equality with men.

Second, due to the social prejudices surrounding women's responsibilities, the burden of housework and childcare takes away a lot of time, energy and enthusiasm from women. Therefore, compared to men, women have too little time to spend on research, study, information updates, professional training as well as taking care of themselves. These have limited women's competitiveness in the labor market and their opportunities for promotion and career advancement. In fact, the percentage of men participating in leadership and management work is many times higher than that of women. Even the slogan "Be good at social work and housework" aims at honoring the comprehensive capacity of women, which from another viewpoint, creates additional pressure and overburdens women.

Third, many regulations on women's rights have not been fully implemented in practice. The rights of women after divorce are not really assured. Domestic violence against women and child trafficking have not been prevented and handled in a timely manner. The smoldering existence of gender prejudice mindset in families and society that is expressed as "respect men, despise women" has led to a trend of gender imbalance of "many men, few women" and its consequences for the future.

Women's liberation and gender equality are both an inevitable trend of human society's development and a criterion showing the outstanding advantages of the socialist regime. Therefore, promoting gender equality and improving the quality of female human resources is an important agenda in the country's development strategy. Hồ Chí Minh's thought on women's rights offers some effective solutions to promote the implementation of gender equality work in Vietnam today.

The gender inequality in Vietnam that originates from the mindset of "respect men, despise women" has been deeply rooted in the social psychology and customs of the country. Therefore, first and foremost, it is necessary to promote the propaganda of Hồ Chí Minh's thought on women's rights and the "Law of

Gender Equality" so that the whole society can fully understand the role, great contribution and silent sacrifice of women to the family and society. It is necessary to make each individual and organization clearly aware that the violation of women's rights and gender inequality hinders the goal of building a happy family and social development. It's time to integrate gender education and gender equality into schools' curriculum to shape a sense of gender equality in future generations.

Laws and institutions always play an important role in ensuring human rights in general, and women's rights in particular, so it is necessary to perfect the system of policies and laws to ensure that the principles of gender equality cover all fields. Violence against women and violation of women's rights and dignity must be strictly handled by the law and receive the media's condemnation.

The formulation of all development guidelines, policies and socio-economic plans of central and local governments must take into account the rights of women and aim at ensuring their advancement. This process must continue to develop and actively implement programs related to gender equality while checking and summarizing the implementation of gender equality in practice on a regular basis. It is necessary to build a national gender database to create a basis for the formulation and timely adjustment of gender policies.

The implementation of staff work and policies must also take into account the gender structure to ensure equal opportunity for both men and women. Particularly, women's efforts should be taken into account because to gain the same achievement, women must expend more effort than men. It is also necessary to learn from the experiences of other countries and actively strengthen international cooperation to enlist world support in realizing gender equality goals in Vietnam.

As Rabindrananth Tagore, an Indian philosopher once said: "Man education will make a good citizen; woman education will make a good family." Women are not only the ones who keep the happiness of the family but also constitute half of society. Therefore, liberating women, and realizing equality between men and women is an effective way to build a happy family and a developed, democratic, just and civilized society. From his intellectual height and deeply humane spirit, Hồ Chí Minh always stood beside women, the most vulnerable class in the old society, to fight for their rights. A great thinker is someone who successfully deals with the urgent requirements of the times. A good leader is one who has successfully mobilized the power of the masses to benefit the masses. With the ideology and struggle for women's rights, Hồ Chí Minh has earned his place to be a great thinker, revolutionary, and humanist of the twentieth century. A great thinker is the one who successfully solves the urgent requirements of the times. A good leader is the one who manages to mobilize the strengths of the majority of population to bring benefits to the masses. With his thought on women's rights

and the struggle for women's rights, Hồ Chí Minh has earned his place as a great thinker, revolutionary and humanist of the 20th century./.

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