

HO CHI MINH AND THE NEW VIETNAMESE CULTURAL CAREER

Dr. Nguyen Thi Viet Ha

Saigon University

273 An Duong Vuong Street, Ward 3, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Abstract:

Ho Chi Minh is not only a national liberation hero but also an outstanding cultural figure and the creator of a new culture for Vietnam. He harmoniously integrated the quintessence of national and global cultures, inspiring patriotism, self-reliance, and creativity among the Vietnamese people. With his profound vision, Ho Chi Minh incorporated culture into the country's development strategy, established a new way of life, and heightened awareness of ethical, political, and artistic values. Ho Chi Minh's cultural philosophy, which is both rooted in national identity and modern principles, serves as the foundation for the sustainable development of Vietnamese culture, both in the present and future.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh, Vietnamese culture, new culture, human values, global cultural heritage.

Ho Chi Minh is recognized globally as a national liberation hero and an outstanding cultural figure. His legacy not only affirms his political achievements, such as initiating movements against colonialism and imperialism to liberate oppressed nations and reclaim independence and freedom, but also represents a monumental and noble cultural mission. Transforming “slaves into free people”, igniting patriotism, and fostering the heroism of a nation with over 90% illiteracy to rise up and fight for independence is indeed a remarkable cultural accomplishment. Liberating people from the chains of slavery, hunger, cold, and ignorance epitomizes a cultural mission of profound and comprehensive significance—a dream that humanity has pursued for millennia.

1. Holding the position of leader of the Party and State of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh quickly recognized the vital role and strength of culture, integrating it into the strategic development goals of the country

Beyond achieving independence and sovereignty for the nation, Ho Chi Minh elevated his people to a new cultural level. One of the first tasks of the government under his leadership was to immediately launch a campaign to eradicate “ignorance.” He regarded ignorance as an enemy and viewed outdated customs and traditions as obstacles to progress. He famously said, “An ignorant nation is a weak nation”, and emphasized, “We have an urgent responsibility to re-educate our people”¹.

Ho Chi Minh also called on and mobilized the entire nation to build a new way of life, promoting good customs and traditions so that “our nation becomes a brave, patriotic, hard-working people, worthy of an independent Vietnam”². Throughout each stage of the revolution, he proposed and implemented policies to ensure that culture was not only a direct source of encouragement for development but also a crucial factor in sustainable growth. He stressed that culture must be respected and facilitated to effectively fulfill its role in the common cause.

His significant contribution was bringing culture deep into the masses, transforming it into a material force capable of reshaping societal norms and reforming individuals. Ho Chi Minh’s guiding principles for building a new culture—one that is national, scientific, and humanistic—include values such as “taking the happiness of the people and the nation as the foundation”, “instilling ideals of independence and self-reliance”, and ensuring that “culture must correct corruption, laziness, and extravagance” and “culture must light the way for the nation’s progress”. These principles continue to retain their relevance and guiding value for building a national culture, both today and in the future.

Ho Chi Minh was the pioneer who laid the foundation for a new worldview and methodology in developing Vietnamese culture. As the great

¹ Ho Chi Minh: *Complete Works*, National Political Publishing House - Truth, Volume 4, p. 7

² Ho Chi Minh: *Complete Works*, National Political Publishing House - Truth, Volume 4, p. 7

architect of cultural reform and construction, he introduced a new perspective, a fresh worldview, and established unprecedented awareness in political, moral, legal, and artistic dimensions within Vietnamese cultural history.

Building on this foundation, he awakened the spiritual potential rooted in national traditions, guiding the emergence of a new moral framework and a humanistic society. This society was grounded in genuine patriotism and pure internationalism, in line with the ethical ideals of a revolutionary soldier: loyalty to the country, devotion to the people, diligence, thrift, integrity, righteousness, and impartiality. After leading the people to reclaim independence and freedom for the Fatherland, Ho Chi Minh elevated Vietnamese culture to a prestigious position on the global stage.

2. Ho Chi Minh himself was a great cultural activist and creator

To become a cultural figure, one must first possess profound knowledge. Ho Chi Minh epitomized this. With his exceptional character and personality, Ho Chi Minh was not only the embodiment of national cultural values but also a harmonious integration of the essence of both national and global cultures, East and West. Throughout his revolutionary journey—dedicated to the liberation of classes, nations, and humanity—he engaged with diverse cultures across continents, regions, and countries; in the East and the West; in the homeland and the colonies; and among white, yellow, and black populations. Rarely has the world seen a revolutionary leader or cultural figure who traveled so extensively, worked in so many roles, and understood such a wide range of peoples and cultures as Ho Chi Minh.

Westerners recognize in Ho Chi Minh the spirit of Renaissance humanism, the democratic ideals of the Enlightenment, the emphasis on independence and human rights from the American Revolution, the values of “Liberty - Equality - Fraternity” from the French revolutionary tradition, and the revolutionary and scientific essence of Marxism-Leninism. Meanwhile, Easterners identify in him qualities that resonate with Sun Yat-sen’s “Three Principles of the People”, Mahatma Gandhi’s spirit of patriotism, austerity, and

sacrifice for the people, the moral cultivation of Confucian teachings, the compassion of Buddhism, and the charity of Christianity.

When reading his political writings, articles, or speeches, one cannot help but marvel at the synthesis of French literary humor, the concise elegance of Tang poetry, the realism of Maxim Gorky, the sharpness of Lu Xun's prose, and the clarity and intimacy of Nguyen Du's works. T.N. Ca-un, President of the Indian Center for Indochina Studies, remarked that Ho Chi Minh's poems, essays, and pastoral works reflect a profound understanding of human history and civilization, coupled with unwavering faith in the cultural identity of all nations, including his own. Historian Charles Fourniau, former Secretary General of the France-Vietnam Friendship Association, highly praised Ho Chi Minh's ability to "Vietnamize" global cultural values.

Analyzing his *Proclamation to the People* (June 1941)³, Fourniau noted its "extraordinary creativity, rooted in the Confucian stylistic tradition while blending with the French Jacobin tradition". Some phrases in the document even evoke memories of the 1793 revolutionary calls during the French Revolution. Through Ho Chi Minh, "the quintessence of the world has been Vietnamized, adopting Vietnamese forms, manners, language, and even spirit" (Pham Van Dong). Remarkably, the diverse cultures of East and West, spanning ancient to modern times, when expressed through Ho Chi Minh, always bear a distinctly Vietnamese character—deeply humane, simple, approachable, yet profound, innovative, modern, and revolutionary.

As the leader of Vietnam's revolutionary movement, Ho Chi Minh infused Vietnamese culture with a new vitality, encapsulating the belief that "culture is also a battlefield, and cultural workers are soldiers on this front". Rooted in traditional values, his cultural vision combined patriotic, progressive, and noble humanistic ideals, while fulfilling cognitive, educational, and aesthetic functions.

³ *Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade* - Based on library records from Nhan Dan Newspaper.

Ho Chi Minh made significant contributions across multiple fields, including literature, poetry, drama, and painting. In him, the writer, poet, playwright, journalist, soldier, and politician were inseparably intertwined, forming the great cultural figure that he was. He pioneered Vietnamese revolutionary journalism, poetry, and literature.

His poetry, composed in both Vietnamese and Chinese, resonates with themes of independence, freedom, peace, happiness, justice, equality, and human solidarity. Even poems written in exile have become timeless masterpieces, “disturbing the human soul” with their profound humanistic values. They reflect the spirit of a great soul and personality, constantly concerned with the destiny of the nation and the country. Consequently, his poetry reached all social classes, becoming “poetry for all households”.

As a great poet of the nation, Ho Chi Minh was also a pioneering writer with a strong fighting spirit, laying the foundation for Vietnamese revolutionary prose. He explored and excelled in various genres, including science fiction, short stories, novels, memoirs, plays, essays, and political writings. In every domain, he achieved remarkable success, distinguished by depth in content and form, thought and artistry, methods and style, as well as language and genre....

Ho Chi Minh was also a master of Vietnamese revolutionary journalism. He modestly referred to himself as “a person with many connections to journalism”, yet he was the founder and driving force behind many of Vietnam’s first proletarian newspapers, including Thanh Nien (June 1925), Cong Nong (December 1926), Linh Kach Menh (February 1927), and Viet Nam Doc Lap (August 1941). From the very beginning of his revolutionary journey, he recognized journalism as a powerful tool for organizing, mobilizing, and educating the masses. With his pen, he awakened oppressed peoples, propagated Marxism-Leninism, denounced colonialism, and made substantial contributions to advancing revolutionary movements in various countries.

Ho Chi Minh’s career in journalism was monumental. Spanning half a century—from his first article written in 1919 to his last in 1969—he authored

more than 1,500 pieces under various pseudonyms, with hundreds more awaiting confirmation.

3. Ho Chi Minh as a model of cultural tolerance

As a committed communist, Ho Chi Minh consistently emphasized the importance of preserving and promoting national traditions and cultural identity, while cautioning against narrow-minded and short-sighted nationalism. He exemplified a spirit of openness, drawing upon the richness of global culture without discrimination or exclusion. Ho Chi Minh consciously explored and applied positive aspects of diverse political and religious doctrines—such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Catholicism—in his efforts to fight for national independence and rebuild the country.

On occasion, he openly acknowledged being a student of various thinkers, including Karl Marx, Jesus, Confucius, and Sun Yat-sen. He sincerely respected the religious faith of others, affirming the noble ideas and humanistic values of each belief system. Far from rejecting or opposing religion, he skillfully guided religious ideals toward the common goal of national liberation and the collective happiness of the people.

Ho Chi Minh's cultural tolerance also extended to fostering dialogue and equal exchange of values, striving for shared understanding and mutual benefit. This approach promoted coexistence and development, paving the way for unity in diversity. As the leader of an independent nation, he sought and championed dialogues based on mutual respect and understanding to resolve disputes and conflicts. He welcomed and selectively incorporated positive elements from various traditions to enrich Vietnam's cultural heritage, always advocating for peaceful coexistence, consensus, and progress.

In summary, it can be affirmed that Ho Chi Minh created a new era and a new cultural identity in the history of the Vietnamese nation: the Ho Chi Minh Era and the culture of the Ho Chi Minh Era. Many cultural policies initiated by him in the mid-20th century, such as literacy eradication, reforestation,

ecological restoration, and respect for the elderly, were only adopted as major global movements by the United Nations in the early 1990s.

Ho Chi Minh is recognized as an outstanding cultural figure of the world. In him, the essence of Vietnamese culture and the quintessence of global culture converge. As a pioneering champion of revolutionary journalism and cultural arts in the fight for independence, freedom, and social justice, he devoted his entire life to the revolution and to the people. Ho Chi Minh's cultural values are a harmonious blend of national identity, modernity, and humanity. The culture of Ho Chi Minh is an invaluable legacy for us today and for generations to come.

Conclusion

Ho Chi Minh is a symbol of the intersection between tradition and modernity, between nationalism and internationalism. He created a culture deeply rooted in Vietnamese identity while seamlessly integrating the quintessence of global civilization. His cultural philosophies not only illuminated the path to national liberation but also laid the foundation for the sustainable development of the nation's culture. Ho Chi Minh's cultural legacy is an invaluable treasure and a guiding compass for the construction and defense of the country, contributing significantly to the development of Vietnamese culture and the nation's standing on the global stage.

References

1. Communist Party of Vietnam, *Complete Party Documents*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001, vol. 12.
2. Communist Party of Vietnam, *Resolution of the Politburo on Some Major Orientations in Current Ideological Work*, Hanoi, 1995.
3. Ho Chi Minh, *Complete Works*, National Political Publishing House - Truth, Volume 4, Hanoi, 2011.
4. Ho Chi Minh, *Notre Camarade* - Based on library records from *Nhan Dan* Newspaper.

5. Truong Chinh, *President Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Revolution*, Theoretical Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 1977.