



ROUSSEAU'S THEORY OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS RELATION TO DEMOCRACY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Since ancient times, democracy has played a crucial role in political life. It is associated with essential values such as freedom and equality. The value of democracy is widely recognized, but in terms of form, democracy does not have any general pattern. It is for this reason that democracy in each country is organized differently, leading to the situation where some countries do not fully appreciate the democracy of another country or use their democracy to evaluate and condemn the democracy of another country. This is a considerable barrier to integration and cooperation for mutual development. The people of Vietnam are peace-loving people who wish to cooperate for mutual development with all friendly countries, but Vietnam's foreign relations face many obstacles because of its political characteristics. Democracy in Vietnam was established by President Ho Chi Minh very early, in accordance with the country's own political and historical conditions. Democracy in Vietnam has both a unified and specific connotation compared to the general theory of democracy. The practice of Vietnam's democracy over the years shows that this "specificity" not only does not "distort" democracy but also contributes to enriching and deepening the theory of progressive democracy. The article attempts to analyze Rousseau's theory of democracy in order to clarify common human values about democracy. At the same time, it relates to democracy in Vietnam, thereby aiming to clarify that Vietnamese democracy is a progressive democracy that contributes to the protection and promotion of human rights and civil rights, freedom, and peace in the world. All of this aims to contribute to the improvement of mutual understanding

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and respect, promoting the spirit of "openness" to international cooperation and dialogue for mutual development in today's era.

Keywords: Rousseau; democracy; Vietnamese democracy

1. Introduction

Jean Jacques Rousseau's thoughts on democracy reflect the revolutionary spirit of his times. A time when the people of eighteenth-century France struggled against feudalism, creating a new era in which popular sovereignty did not simply exist on legal documents but became a requirement of political practice. To this day, political theories on J.J. Rousseau's thoughts on democracy still hold much value. Inheriting the progressive values of the Age of Enlightenment, President Ho Chi Minh established democracy early in order to exercise popular sovereignty after the victory of the revolution for national independence in 1945. The practice of building democracy in Vietnam has achieved many outstanding achievements. Vietnam has become a country with stable and developed politics. This article seeks to analyze and compare Rousseau's theory to the practice of democracy in Vietnam, therefore contributing to raising awareness about democracy, particularly democracy in Vietnam.

2. Literature review

This work drew on a number of documents related to Rousseau and his influence on French history, as well as the theory of modern democracy.

Democratic Enlightenment - Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights (1750-1790) by Jonathan Israel, Oxford University Press, 2011. In this work, Israel focuses on defining the role of reason in the Enlightenment and in building democracy. The light of philosophy has finally reached society, and the "*rights of reason and of man*" were transferred to the practical sphere. The "French Revolution" is seen as "*the achievement of philosophy*", and the most important level of "philosophy" in this role is the emancipation of man by redefining the state as an instrument to secure the common good.

Modern Democracy and the Theological Political Problem in Spinoza, Rousseau, and Jefferson by Lee Ward, Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2014. In this work, Lee Ward has deepened the basic arguments of B. Spinoza, J. J. Rousseau, and T. Jefferson arguing that it was these three figures who contributed something important to the combination of natural-rights libertarianism with the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, profoundly transforming Western political life. While clarifying why these three characters were chosen, L. Ward shows us a J. J. Rousseau who, despite his differences with B. Spinoza, expanded and radicalized the democratic philosophy of power, critiqued revelation and populism, and supported nineteenth-century republicanism with strong democracy and secularism.

Engaging with Rousseau - reaction and interpretation from the eighteenth century to the present by Avi Lifschitz, Cambridge University Press, 2016. This work seeks to

investigate the influence of J. J. Rousseau by examining the feedback it has generated from the late eighteenth century to the present day. It discovered that Rousseau's reasoning not only provided inspiration for many constitutions but also became a benchmark for reevaluating medieval and early modern treaties. Politically and legally, J. J. Rousseau can be seen as a fervent defender of republican equality. He is also a supporter of the ideal of individual self-determination or a pioneer of the concept of totalitarian democracy.

The General Will - Rousseau, Marx, Communism by Andrew Levine, Cambridge University Press, 1993. This book consists of essays on various topics regarding the general will and communism, shifting the focus from J. J. Rousseau to K. Marx. Discussing K. Marx, the book argues that despite the difference between liberalism and Marxism, the Marxist form of state does not necessarily suppress the liberal values that individualism wishes to defend.

According to the author, in K. Marx's view, only when economic forces no longer pull people apart can people see each other as their own end. In short, Marx's theory suggested that, at the end of the trajectory of history, communities can exist in which "*the condition for the free development of each person*" is "*the free development of all*".

The above works have objectively analyzed the content and value of J. J. Rousseau's thoughts in the context of eighteenth-century French society and the revolution of 1789. All of this has contributed to building the most multifaceted and objective perspectives on J. J. Rousseau and his legacy in terms of state and politics, raising questions regarding the Constitution and modern political institutions. There are many comments and assessments in the above works that researchers are interested in and agree on.

3. Material and Methods

The results of this article are drawn based on analysis, comparison, and evaluation of documents then compared with the practice of political life in Vietnam. In the research process, the author used a dialectical materialist worldview and materialist dialectics to conduct his research, particularly adhering to five principles:

First, the principle of objectivity. The results of the research honestly reflect Rousseau's theory on democracy and the reality of political life in Vietnam, comparing and contrasting scientifically, up-to-date, and in the spirit of respect for history.

Second, the principles of comprehensiveness and historical perspective. The research analyzed Rousseau's theory of democracy in relation to other issues such as freedom, equality, state, law, and more while relating to democracy in Vietnam. The author has closely followed social, political, and historical conditions in Vietnam with its specificities, thereby drawing general, correct, and accurate judgments.

At the same time, the research works also use methods such as analysis and synthesis, interpretation and induction, comparison, contrast, history and logic, systematic approach, etc.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Rousseau's thoughts on democracy and its historical value

4.1.1 Democracy is the optimal way to protect the freedom of the people

In 18th-century France, feudalism gradually weakened. The idea of a democratic state was raised by some philosophers to replace the old regime. In particular, J. J. Rousseau's thoughts on democracy were built on the theory of the "General Will" which had a great impact on political life at that time. Rousseau's theory of democracy is expressed in many works, beginning with his *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* then refined and further developed in *The Social Contract*. In *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, Rousseau critiques inequality, private property, and ultimately, absolute monarchy. According to him, the centralization of state power in one individual or a minority is completely "irrational" since political power is, in essence, the power of all the people who make up that society, which is expressed centrally in the "General Will". In particular, political power in the hands of the minority, under whatever form of organization, all have one thing in common: its purpose is to *"tie new shackles on the poor and give new power to the rich"*ⁱⁱ. Through his works, Rousseau directly condemned and criticized the absolutist monarchy of France, where political power was concentrated in the hands of King Louis to the point of engulfing all civil liberties and social equality. Rousseau stressed: *"I regard it then as certain, that government did not begin with arbitrary power, but that this is the depravation, the extreme term, of government... Supposing, however, it had begun in this manner, such power, being in itself illegitimate, could not have served as a basis for the laws of society, nor, consequently, for the inequality they instituted."*ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, in his works, Rousseau showed his opposition to any political regime in which power does not belong to the people, of which contemporary feudalism in France is a typical example.

Continuing this thought, in *The Social Contract*, Rousseau outlined political principles opposing feudalism that are *"fundamentally democratic"*^{iv}, guaranteeing freedom and equality for all citizens. Rousseau pointed out that freedom is human nature. Therefore, the most logical form of social organization is to put everything under the control of the "General Will" (*Vonlete Generale*). The core spirit of this work is to uphold the "will of the people". Power belongs to the people. The political obligations of citizens are based on the principle of equality. In this work, Rousseau built dialectical unity between democracy and civil liberties. According to it, democracy is the basis for ensuring civil liberties. In particular, people are free to express their opinions and support political decisions or laws. Through this, the people freely enact laws under the guidance of the "General Will", and they obey laws of their own making. When that happened, the citizens achieved a very high type of freedom, which is spiritual freedom. On the other side, the love for freedom and the wish for free living and working are the foundation for

ⁱⁱ Jean Jacques Rousseau (2008), *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Translated by G. D. H. Cole), P. Barnes & Noble, pg. 136

ⁱⁱⁱ Jean Jacques Rousseau (2008), *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Translated by G. D. H. Cole), P. Barnes & Noble, pg. 148

^{iv} Phung Van Tuu (1978), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Hanoi Publishing House, pg. 322

democratic decisions. For if citizens do not have the freedom to raise or support issues in political life, democracy is only a formality. Here, Rousseau emphasizes not only the right to participate in social and political life but importantly, participation itself. In other words, it is not enough for citizens to have rights, they also need to participate in decision-making on issues related to their political life freely. Researcher Alfred Cobban argues that when J. J. Rousseau gives the community priority over the individual: "*this priority is justifiable only in so far as the state does actively develop the individual's moral personality and secure his liberty.*"^v

According to researcher Lee Ward, J.J. Rousseau was one of the few who "*contributed an important idea to the fundamental combination of the liberal principle of natural rights with the democratic principle of popular sovereignty*" and played the greatest role in formulating the "democracy" in the term "*democratic freedom*"^{vi}. Although J. J. Rousseau's theory of democracy has its share of difficulties in implementation, and he did not shy away from the fact that ordinary people could be led astray, Rousseau nevertheless believed that the only possible defense against despotism was the decentralization of state power. As Karl Popper observed: "*We are democrats, not because the majority is always right, but because democratic traditions are the least evil ones of which we know.*"^{vii}

4.1.2 Rousseau's views on the promotion of democracy

Democracy is a step forward in the organization of political life. However, it requires a very complex process of construction and protection. Majority participation in social management is not a simple thing. If not effectively organized, democracy can easily lead to mistakes, anarchy, exploitation, and deformation to benefit individuals and organizations. An ardent supporter of democracy, Rousseau was very concerned about the conditions for defending and promoting democracy.

First, democracy must be associated with the rule of law. The fundamental characteristic of the rule of law is the universality of laws. The law is respected and placed in the highest position, controlling all areas of political life. Democracy must be based on a fair, transparent, and effective legal system that is ruled by the people but governed by the law. On the other side, because the law is the basis for the implementation of democracy, the content of the law must be developed democratically. This means that the people must directly participate in the development of the law. The participation of the people in the development of the law is central to Rousseau's thoughts on democracy and the rule of law. Citizens of a democracy invoke the law because they understand that, indirectly, they are invoking themselves as the makers of laws. When the law is made by the people themselves, the people who must obey the law, then both the law and democracy will be enforced.

^v Cobban, A. (2020). *Rousseau and the Modern State*, UK: Routledge, pg. 7

^{vi} Ward, L. (2014). *Modern Democracy and the Theological-Political Problem in Spinoza, Rousseau, and Jefferson*, United States: Palgrave Macmillan, pg. 1

^{vii} N. M. Voskresenskaia – N. B. Davletshina (2008), *Democracy - State and Society*, Tri Thuc Publishing House. Pg. 18

However, Rousseau showed that he could not help worrying about the possibility of the state degenerating into tyrannical forms of government. Rousseau and Locke both had a constant fear of the absence of appropriate checks and balances to prevent the government from becoming repressive and authoritarian: "*And of the executive power Rousseau (unlike, for example, either Hobbes or Hegel) was deeply suspicious, even in a political system in which the legislative power belongs to the people collectively. For him, the price, not only of liberty, but of popular sovereignty itself, is eternal vigilance; or, in other words, a sharp eye for the abuses of executive power.*"^{viii} Thus, Rousseau asserts, those entrusted with executive power are not owners of the people but only executors; the people can take them up and dismiss them at will, for them there is no contract but compliance. Therefore, the state must "*always ready to sacrifice the government to the people, and never to sacrifice the people to the government.*"^{ix} The people may meet unexpectedly, where two things can be decided: first, whether the people wish to retain the existing form of government; second, whether the people are willing to hand over the right to rule to those who currently hold it. That is to say, there is no power that cannot be revoked if the people are gathered together.

Second, citizens in a democracy need to be educated and have specific political qualities. A state with the rule of law is where legislative power is paramount, and the law plays a decisive role in fundamental issues in political life. The legislative power was given directly into the hands of the people by J. J. Rousseau. This was a step that was both revolutionary and risky. After all, people participating directly in legislative issues together are prone to disturbances, and society itself has a strong tendency to change to different political institutions. Both of these can lead to mistakes. In the face of these variables, the citizens in J. J. Rousseau's project need to have many political qualities and the necessary morality to preserve democracy and promote the rule of law of the state. He wrote "*It may be added that there is no government so subject to civil wars and intestine agitations as democratic or popular government, because there is none which has so strong and continual a tendency to change to another form, or which demands more vigilance and courage for its maintenance as it is. Under such a constitution above all, the citizen should arm himself with strength and constancy.*" (Rousseau, 2020, pg.149).

The legislative career of the people requires that each individual be dedicated to the common good, working together to bring the best laws not to certain factions or individuals but to the community. Each individual must achieve unity in respect for the law, a product of the people. Consistency and the rule of law must become prerequisites for all conditions in the creation of an administrative state and democracy. If democracy is separate from the rule of law, it will soon fall into anarchy. And if the administrative system is separate from democracy, it will fall into the tyranny of the law. Ch. Montesquieu spoke much about the legal spirit as well as political virtue. Surely J. J. Rousseau had inherited much from him. However, the content of J. J. Rousseau's "*spirit of the laws*" is broader than Montesquieu's version in that it not only discusses the

^{viii} James Delaney (2009), *Starting with Rousseau*, Published by Continuum, pg. 254

^{ix} Jean Jacques Rousseau (2008), *The Social Contract* (Translated by Duong Van Hoa), Thế giới Publishers, tr. 113

framework of law compliance but also sets important requirements for the process of participating in law-making. Thus, while affirming the relationship between the rule of law and democracy, J. J. Rousseau affirmed that citizens in a democracy must be people who love the law, have a legal spirit, love freedom and equality, actively and persistently participate in political life with a view to the common good and are willing to fight for democracy. *"Savage man will not bend his neck to the yoke to which civilized man submits without a murmur, but prefers the most turbulent state of liberty to the most peaceful slavery."* (Rousseau, 1754)

At the core of democratic action is the active and voluntary participation of citizens in the public life of their communities or countries. If this broad participation is not maintained, democracy will wither away and become a privilege reserved for some groups and organizations. This is the reason why democracy, despite its great appeal, has rarely been sustainable or simply existed in its "true" sense. In *A Discourse on Political Economy*, Rousseau wrote: *"If our politicians were less blinded by their ambition, they would see how impossible it is for any establishment whatever to act in the spirit of its institution, unless it is guided in accordance with the law of duty; they would feel that the greatest support of public authority lies in the hearts of the citizens, and that nothing can take the place of morality in the maintenance of government."*^x It can be said that Rousseau was not the first to discuss democracy. However, his contribution to the creation of the modern democratic era was outlining the psychological characteristics and qualities necessary for democracy.^{xi}

4.1.3 The historical value of Rousseau's theory on democracy

Rousseau's thoughts on democracy became the bourgeois revolutionary theory of the eighteenth century in the fight against a tyrannical and abusive monarchy. In the fight for freedom, equality, property rights, and people's sovereignty, Rousseau's analysis shows that his hatred was directed at a self-declared power machine that suppressed freedom and pushed the people into the shackles of slavery that is the rotten feudal regime. He gave the French bourgeois revolutionaries one of the most radical theories of democracy, including the claim that all men are created equal, that legitimate political power comes from the consent of the people, and that under the rule of law, the people are directly involved in the making of laws that the leaders are held responsible under. It is easy to imagine how startling his argument was for those who read these arguments in Louis XV's France when people began to realize that the true master of the state is the people and the only authority that people must obey is the law issued by them. The king, while reading the writings of J.J. Rousseau, cried out indignantly: *"I know all the powers that God gave me. My subjects are not allowed to assign or restrict those rights. How dare an unknown man who a few years ago disdainfully refuse to enter my court, now dares to openly insult the monarchy!"* (Phùng Văn Tửu, 1978, pg.220-221).

^x Jean Jacques Rousseau (2008), *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Translated by G. D. H. Cole), Edited and published by Barnes & Noble, pg. 106

^{xi} Ward, L. (2014). *Modern Democracy and the Theological-Political Problem in Spinoza, Rousseau, and Jefferson*, United States: Palgrave Macmillan, pg. 85

Rousseau's theory of democracy dealt a severe blow to contemporary feudalism, angering King Louis XV and foreshadowing major changes in French political life. The Fall of the Bastille, the bourgeois revolution of 1789, and the creation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen all bear the imprint of Rousseau's ideology of democracy.

Despite sharing the ideal of a just society, Rousseau is more revolutionary than Montesquieu, Vonte, Didoro, and many others due to his affirmation of one more human right, the right to live in democracy. Direct democracy is a form of democracy that is suited to human nature. Direct democracy is the basic condition for people to live in accordance with their nature. Therefore, he rejected all forms of government that sought to compromise with feudalism and even representative democracy after the bourgeois revolution. He affirmed that legitimate political power only comes from the consensus of the democratic people associated with the rule of law as the most appropriate political organization. Phung Van Tuu commented: "*The revolutionary dimension of Rousseau's thoughts is in its complete opposition with absolute monarchy with divine right.*"^{xii}

Thus, Rousseau's ideas of democracy contributed to the overall development of the French Enlightenment. His thoughts on democracy not only reflect human aspirations but also express faith in human capacities. Rousseau placed the ideal state in the hands of each citizen through the guidance of the "General Will" and not under the leadership of the wealthy. What concerned him was not only the power of the people on legal paper but also in political practice. To ensure true freedom and equality, Rousseau wanted to build a true democracy, a direct democracy. Although it is difficult for direct democracy to become a reality, it still shows the efforts of the author to fight for human freedom and happiness.

Leaving aside the limitations of Rousseau's idea of direct democracy, we can see that some of his arguments are still valid. Firstly, democracy must be built in tandem with the administrative system, while the law must be directly promulgated by the people. Secondly, the subject of democracy is the people. They must have the political capacity and morality to aim at the common good, eliminate the desire to dominate others, see each other as equal, and build a social life for themselves. Thirdly, there must be mechanisms for the people to control the power of the government continuously and thoroughly to prevent abuse of power and arbitrariness. These are significant not only in opposing feudalism but they are also the theoretical principles that shape modern democracies today.

4.2 Democracy in Vietnam today – from legal documents to political practices

Rousseau's thoughts on democracy had a great impact on the perception of Vietnamese intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially Ho Chi Minh. Early on, President Ho Chi Minh advocated building a democratic state, establishing the sovereignty of the people associated with the idea of "the rule of law", and considering the rule of law as a core principle in the realization of a democratic state. Since its

^{xii} Phung Van Tuu (1978), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hanoi Publishing House, pg. 353

establishment, the socialist administrative system of Vietnam has always consistently aimed to be the state that exercises the sovereignty of the people. The Communist Party of Vietnam's Credo on national construction during the transitional period to socialism (supplemented and amended in 2011) affirms that the regime built by the Vietnamese people is a "people-owned" society^{xiii}. Articles 2 and 3 of the 2013 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam emphasize that the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is the socialist rule-of-law state of the People, by the People, and for the People. The State guarantees and promotes the people's sovereignty. It recognizes, respects, protects, and guarantees human and citizens' rights. Continuing to improve the state institution to promote the people's sovereignty, which is further set by the Party and the State of Vietnam as a "key task" during the 13th Congress – *"Completing the task of synchronizing the legal system, mechanisms, and policies in order to promote socialist democracy and the people's sovereignty."* The core content of democracy in Vietnam today is to respect and ensure human rights, citizens' rights, and the people's right to sovereignty. Always attach rights to the responsibilities and obligations of citizens. Democracy and law, democracy and freedom, democracy, and social discipline do not negate each other. On the contrary, they are in dialectical unity. Democracy creates the premise of developing individual freedom and promoting human development.

The mechanism for implementing democracy in Vietnam today is a system of the Party leading, the State managing, and the People ruling. In particular, the Party and State set out guidelines, policies, and laws to create a political and legal foundation to ensure the people's sovereignty. In this mechanism, the role of the subject and the central position belong to the people. The people are the rulers of society, having not only the right but also the responsibility to contribute to the process of planning and implementing the Party's policies and laws. The people exercise their sovereignty through direct and representative democracy. Through the National Assembly – the highest power organ in the state, the people decide important issues related to the destiny of the country.

In the practice of more than 35 years of renovation and democracy building, the Vietnamese State has effectively promulgated and implemented many guidelines, policies, and laws in order to promote and better implement the people's sovereignty. The State represents the people's right of sovereignty and organizes the implementation of the Party's guidelines. It has an increasingly complete and strict legal system and strengthened laws so that the people can exercise their rights of sovereignty, practice representative democracy in all fields of social life, and participate in social management. The National Assembly - the highest organ of state power has gone through many innovations and now operates more efficiently and effectively. The Vietnamese Fatherland Front and other socio-political organizations have gradually renovated in the direction of promoting democracy and the people's sovereignty: *"Promoting the practice of democracy at the grassroots level, carrying out social supervision and criticism, participating in*

^{xiii} The Communist Party of Vietnam, Documents of the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Việt Nam, The National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011, pg. 70

the prevention and fight against corruption and negativity, contributing to building an increasingly clean and strong Party and political system"^{xiv}. The practice of innovation in Vietnam has initially supplemented and went through various new forms of democratic implementation such as questioning and reporting directly on question-and-answer sessions on several activities of the National Assembly, obtaining votes of confidence for positions elected and approved by state agencies, and promulgating regulations on self-nomination, regulations on questioning and answering questions in the Party. These can be considered as new forms of democracy implementation, showing efforts in promoting the people's sovereignty. All have contributed to gradually improving the quality of democracy: "*contributing to strengthening and enhancing the people's trust in the Party, State, and the socialist regime*".^{xv}

Democracy and democracy building in Vietnam still have many limitations. As stated by the Resolution of the XII National Assembly, the awareness of democracy in society is still limited. The dialectic between "The people are the rulers" and "The sovereignty of the people" has not achieved good results. The people's sovereignty in many places and fields is still being violated. In some places, the exercise of democracy is limited or only formal. There are still abuses of democracy causing internal disunity.^{xvi} On that basis, the Party's guidelines in recent years show that the promotion of the people's sovereignty must always be paid attention to.

4.3 Similarities and differences between democracy in Rousseau's views and democratic practices in Vietnam

4.3.1 On similarities

Based on the analysis of Rousseau's concept of democracy and democracy in Vietnam today, it can be seen that democracy in Vietnam today has "common denominator" values with the progress of mankind. This is a democracy associated with the rule of law, human rights, unified power belonging to the people, coordination between branches of power, and the prevention of the government from abusing power and going against the interests of the people.

In democracy in Vietnam, the law dominates all aspects of social life, "all citizens are equal before the law". The party leads, and the state manages society according to the law. The staff live and work in compliance with social laws. State power belongs to the people through the National Assembly for the purpose of promulgating laws. Although it is impossible to immediately implement direct democracy as Rousseau conceived, in the context of the strong development of the 4.0 revolution, Vietnam has favorable conditions for the expansion of direct democracy. Practice shows that the organization of collecting opinions and exchanging directly with people through multimedia

^{xiv} Nguyen Phu Trong, Some theoretical and practical issues on socialism and the road to socialism in Vietnam, Su That (Truth) National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2022, pg. 105.

^{xv} Nguyen Phu Trong, Some theoretical and practical issues on socialism and the road to socialism in Vietnam, Su That (Truth) National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2022, pg. 86.

^{xvi} The Communist Party of Vietnam, Documents of the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Việt Nam, The National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2016, pg. 79

communication channels has been developed. Government organizations are making an effort to build and implement dialogue mechanisms with the people in an active, broad, open, and open manner to promote the people's sovereignty. This ensures that citizens can participate at all stages of the decision-making process concerning their interests and supervise elected bodies.

The organs of state power are divided into three branches: legislative power, executive power, and judicial power. In particular, the legislative power belongs to the National Assembly – the elected representative of the people's interests. The executive and judicial branches of power operate independently within the framework of the law. There is no balance between the three branches of power, but there is a unity of power and transparency of function. In general, democracy in Vietnam today has many similarities with Rousseau's concept. In particular, Vietnam is gradually building towards improving direct democracy with the purpose of promoting the people's sovereignty.

4.3.2 On differences

Democracy is an "open" category that doesn't have a clear framework. Each country and nation with different socio-historical characteristics also has different contents and forms of organizing democracy. As analyzed, democracy in Vietnam today always carries the "common values" of humanity. However, it also contains its values and forms of organizing democracy in accordance with the history of the Vietnamese nation.

Compared to Rousseau's theory of democracy, the fundamental distinction in democracy in Vietnam is that it always thoroughly grasps the principle of democratic centralism under the leadership of the Communist Party. Democracy is recognized by the law as associated with discipline. This principle in political practice is reflected in the respect for the collective, open democracy, the encouragement of frank and constructive debates, the upholding of personal responsibility, and the strengthening of legal and disciplinary checks. President Ho Chi Minh wrote: *"If there is any concern, everyone can discuss it. After discussing it, everyone can vote on it. The people will follow the most popular opinion. That is democracy. Having voted and then assigned to the Society of Commissioners to do so, all members must follow the orders of the Society. That is centralization. The people ruling is democracy, the individual carrying out is centralisation. The people ruling, the individual carrying out is democratic centralism."*^{xvii} Thus, democracy in Vietnam is now consistent and unified according to the principle of democratic centralism under the sole leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam. There are many foreign scholars and researchers who believe that the democracy that Vietnam is building goes against the connotation of a democracy that is prevalent in the world, which is based on the bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth – eighteenth centuries. Because centralization is no longer democratic, and democracy does not need to be concentrated. In order to strengthen democracy, centralization must be reduced. Therefore, democracy must be associated with pluralism

^{xvii} The Complete Works of Ho Chi Minh, The National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000, 5th volume, pg. 505

and a multi-party system. Some scholars also believe that democracy in Vietnam is a centralized, authoritarian, and conservative regime that distorts democracy and turns it into a political game. Such views stem from a failure to properly understand the essence of the principle of democratic centralism and the historical and political conditions of the Vietnamese nation.

Political life is built by people together in accordance with the historical conditions of specific communities and peoples. The history of the Vietnamese nation has gone through many difficult periods in the process of preserving, building, and defending the Fatherland. The united and concentrated strength of the people is always decisive in every moment of life and death of the nation. That power is concretized in the connotations of democracy. Democracy goes hand in hand with centralization, which is the source of the Vietnamese nation's strength. Since the establishment of the Party, it has been recognized and believed by the nation through the historical role and mission that the Party has undertaken. The Party became the banner for the concentration of the people's strength and will. The essence of the Communist Party of Vietnam is that it is a party of the working class but for the sake of the working class united with the interests of the working people in general. Therefore, the Party represents the interests of the people. Therefore, the Communist Party of Vietnam is also called "Our Party". Although in reality, the Party has made mistakes, some cadres and Party members violated the law, affecting the interests of the people, over the years, the "Will of the people" and "Will of the Party" have been closely united with each other. The people trust in the Party and the Party labours for the people. The leadership of the Party not only does not limit the sovereignty of the people but also promotes the strength of the entire nation in the construction and defense of the Fatherland.

In addition, it is necessary to mention one factor that makes democracy in Vietnam associated with the principles of centralism and a one-party system. For the people to exercise their sovereignty, they must first possess the ability to do it. The ability of the people to exercise sovereignty is first and foremost reflected in the level of awareness of issues related to democracy, law, and the rights that are directly attached to the interests of individuals and society. They must have the ability to judge independently, the ability to consider immediate and long-term benefits, and the ability to argue and criticize in order to find solutions for their social life. Democracy faces many challenges in the context of globalization, international integration, and complex political life. If democracy is promoted, it will become a driving force for the country's development. On the contrary, if democracy is taken advantage of, it will become a major barrier to development. Faces with such national requirements and conditions, the fact is that democracy in Vietnam is still young (formed in 1945 but not continuously improved because of the war), and the ability of the people to exercise sovereignty is still limited. In addition, influenced by the living habits and thinking of feudalism and a closed agricultural system, the culture of "Custom rules the law" has been deeply ingrained in people's subconscious, directly hindering society's ability to work in accordance with the law. Therefore, in building democracy, it is necessary for the government to gradually lead and educate the people. *"Freedom may be an innate aspiration, but the practice of*

democracy must be learned."^{xviii} As Rousseau once wrote "Our will is always for our own good, but we do not always see what that is"^{xix}, as such "All stand equally in need of guidance... the latter must be taught to know what it wills."^{xx}

In short, the nature of democracy can be easily distorted. The history of the Vietnamese nation has provided a lesson that whenever the political situation in the country is unstable and divided, that country will be invaded. With such circumstances, the Vietnamese people need a centralized and unified leadership to provide stability in the country. Centralization is a prerequisite for the survival of the nation and democracy. Under the leadership of the Party, the Vietnamese people will gradually perfect their self-determination in peace and development. Therefore, centralized democracy in Vietnam today is the "solution" to the political problem of the Vietnamese nation, in line with the characteristics of Vietnam's cultural history.

Under the principle of democratic centralism and the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, democracy in Vietnam has achieved many achievements, greatly contributing to the overall development of the country. Every citizen enjoys freedom, equality, and sovereignty within the framework of the constitution and law. As a result, over the years, Vietnam's democracy has not fallen into excessive democracy, anarchism, or bureaucratic democracy. Political life is stable and developing. The country has never had religious, ethnic, or civil conflicts. The Vietnamese people are increasingly united and attached on the basis of both "emotion" and "reason". The Party and the people work together to build the country, fight natural disasters, and resist the influence of the enemies. The most recent example of this is the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Vietnam has shown itself to be one of the few countries achieving success in the fight against the pandemic. One of the reasons for this success is that the people trust and dedicate themselves to implementing the Party's guidelines and policies. But most importantly, there is still consistency in the Communist Party of Vietnam's policy of prioritizing the people first. That is the reason why experts, including domestic and foreign investors, put their trust in Vietnam's stable, peaceful, and developing environment post-pandemic.

In addition to domestic and international achievements, the United Nations highly appreciates Vietnam in matters of international peacekeeping and security activities. Vietnam has aided and supported many countries and territories around the world, most notably the Central African Republic and South Sudan. Many individuals and organizations, even if they lack goodwill towards the Party and State of Vietnam, cannot help but admit this fact. In reality, Vietnam has always respected and strived to protect human rights, citizens' rights, and world security. Recently, Vietnam officially became a member of the UN Security Council for the second time with a very high level of trust.

^{xviii} N. M. Voskresenskaia – N. B. Davletshina (2008), *Democracy - State and Society*, Tri Thuc Publishing House, pg. 11

^{xix} Jean Jacques Rousseau (2008), *The Social Contract* (Translated by Duong Van Hoa), Thế giới Publishers, pg. 79

^{xx} Jean Jacques Rousseau (2008), *The Social Contract* (Translated by Duong Van Hoa), Thế giới Publishers, pg. 79

The election to become a member of the United Nations Security Council, which plays a leading role in the United Nation's effort to protect and promote human rights, demonstrates the international community's recognition of Vietnam's policies, efforts, and achievements in better ensuring the rights of people in all fields. This demonstrates Vietnam's prestige in the international arena and the positive value of Vietnam's democracy at present.

Democracy in Vietnam is not necessarily superior in comparison to others, but merely that it is suitable and meets the requirements of practical socio-political life in Vietnam. The above analysis shows that democracy in Vietnam is established on the basis of sticking to the reality of people's lives and the conditions of the country. Over the years, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, democracy in Vietnam has contributed to domestic political stability, promoting the protection of human rights and world peace. Currently, democracy in Vietnam continues to be perfected to get closer and closer to the common progressive values of humanity.

5. Recommendations

The results show that democracy is a progressive form of organizing political life and promoting democracy is supporting human rights and development. However, it is necessary to have "open" perspectives on the reality of each country's democracy to contribute to improving mutual understanding and cooperation. Vietnam has a growing democracy and friendly relations with the world. Supporting democracy in Vietnam means contributing to human rights, promoting cooperation, and common development for the region and the world.

6. Conclusion

Rousseau's vision of a direct democracy was created to protect and strengthen civil liberties and equality in society. This is an idea that remains valid to this day. Democracy in Vietnam inherits progressive values in the thoughts that originated from the Enlightenment. At the same time, the practice of building democracy in Vietnam shows that democracy in any form is still valuable as long as it can bring a stable, peaceful, prosperous political life and sovereignty to the people. From an objective and open perspective, we can say that the reality of democracy in Vietnam contributes to enriching the theory of democracy towards common values for human happiness.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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