



## HO CHI MINH'S THOUGHTS ON WOMEN'S EQUAL RIGHTS

**Vo Van Dung<sup>i</sup>**

PhD, University of Khanh Hoa,  
Nha Trang City,  
Khanh Hoa Province,  
Vietnam

### **Abstract:**

From the viewpoint of Marxist - Leninist theory, Ho Chi Minh has associated the women liberation with the socialist revolution, considering the issue of women's liberation as both a goal and a motivation for the proletariat revolution. He believes that women not only have a role to themselves, in family life, but they also have a great role in all areas of social life. In order to bring about equal rights for women, first of all, each woman must have the will to overcome the thought of self-esteem and dependence. Secondly, women themselves need to unite, to help each other to progress, to fight against all sexual discrimination in their families and in society. Finally, the State needs plans, policies and laws to protect women's equal rights.

**Keywords:** equality, liberation, respect for men, sexual discrimination

### **1. Introduction**

In the world, women are a socially productive force, accounting for more than half of the global population. Women are present in almost all aspects of life and society: from politics, economy, culture - society, military etc. In terms of re-producing human history, women directly combine with the rest of the world, producing people.

Ho Chi Minh<sup>ii</sup> is a great thinker of the twentieth century, who has devoted all his life to the people of Vietnam, who brought Vietnam from a slavery nation to an independent, free and happy one. In his lifetime, Ho Chi Minh cared of and appreciated the position and role of women in the development of the Vietnamese history.

His idea of women's equal rights stems from the unequal status of feudalism, the governing of the invaders over Vietnam over each historical period. From that point of

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [vovandungcdk@gmail.com](mailto:vovandungcdk@gmail.com)

<sup>ii</sup> Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) was a great communist, an outstanding national hero, a prominent international soldier, who fought tirelessly and devoted his life to Vietnam and to the people, to the communist ideals, to the independence and freedom of oppressed peoples, to peace and justice in the world.

view, we believe that the study of Ho Chi Minh's thought about women's equal rights is a meaningful work for current practice.

There has been no research of Ho Chi Minh's thought about women's equal rights so far. The purpose of my research is to study Ho Chi Minh's viewpoint of women's rights so that we can put forward the meaningful evaluation for today.

In order to solve the problem well, we conducted the research on Ho Chi Minh's thought systematically and comprehensively. After that the meaning of the construction of women's equal rights in the current period is drawn out. There are some methods used in this study such as: data analysis method and data synthesis method, logical method and historical method.

## 2. Content

During feudal times along with Confucian ideology, Vietnamese women did not have status in society or family. Their lives were always wrapped in a word that is "obedience" though the Three Obediences: "Women were to be obedient to the father and elder brothers when young, to the husband when married, and to the sons when widowed" of "Confucianism"<sup>iii</sup>. That is, throughout the life of a woman, from childhood to adulthood and until death, she must serve, obey the men, including her son. A woman's position within her natal family or her husband one was temporary and of no great importance. With the thought of "male is better than female" rooted in thousands of years of history, the man has absolute power in the family. The birth of a certain child must be a son, if the daughter-in-law, or the wife did not give birth to a son, then all the blame is on her. Women were like slaves.

Not only that, the woman must live bitterly, resigned to the fate of "mutual husband" with other husbands' wives. Because the law at that time favored to the men, allowing men to have rights to marry many women, but women did not. It can be said that women are men's slaves in feudal society.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the French colonialists invaded Vietnam, and for nearly one hundred years, colonized by the French, the Vietnamese people had lost their right to life, to liberty, to basic human rights, and the fate of them was tragic again. The dignity of women is not only bound by feudal laws but also trampled by colonialism. The Vietnamese people suffered because they have to pay a lot of taxes along with the appropriation of the land of French colonialists. That oppression caused poverty for Vietnam, culminating in the famine in 1945 that about 2 million people died. "When the French colonists came to a village, all the people fled, leaving only two elderly women, a young woman, a young woman was breast-feeding her infant while holding the hand of her eight-year-old daughter to flee. The enemy burned the old man alive on the woodpile, raped two women and a small girl, killed a girl, chopped her hand get the ring, cut

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<sup>iii</sup> Confucianism is a system of ethics, social philosophy, educational philosophy and political philosophy proposed by Confucius in China. Confucianism has great influence in Asian countries including China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Korea and Vietnam.

*the head of to get the necklace. Only the woman escaped and all other were dead!"* (Ho Chi Minh, Complete Work, volume 1, 1995, page 65).

French imperialism enforced extremely brutal policies. They divided Vietnam into three "states", making millions of people become cheap labor resources, implementing the policy of idiots; open casinos, brothels, dance halls more than schools, hospitals; strictly prohibit progressive books; consume alcohol and drug unrestrictedly to curb the thought of the Vietnamese people's struggle for national liberation. Before that situation, many revolutions broke out strongly but all failed. The reason is that no way to save the country properly and wisely at that time were applied. In the crisis, Ho Chi Minh thought that if people they want to have freedom and equality, they must first bring freedom and equality to women.

To liberate women and to bring them equal rights, Ho Chi Minh began to study their position and role. In the journey to find the way to save the country, the image of Vietnamese women and women of oppressed ethnic groups is always a great concern to him. Therefore, in his writings, Ho Chi Minh has always sought to denounce and expose the cruel crimes of the colonial regime against women in the public opinion around the world. He exposed crimes of the French colonialists such as beating women cruelly; raping women and girls; dissect the abdomen, chopping their hands, making women give themselves to dogs for entertainment; etc. in the articles: *"The monstrosity of civilization"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), episode 1) on *Le Libertaire* newspaper on September 30 and October 7, 1921, *"Love France, your protector"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), volume 1) in *Le Libertaire* newspaper on October 7 and 14, 1921, *"Those who went to civilization"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), volume 1) published in *"Le Paria"* (The suffering people) issue 4, July 1, 1922, *"An Nam women and the French colonialists"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), volume 1) published in *"Le Paria"* newspaper No. 5 on August 1, 1922, *"The suffering of indigenous women"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), volume 2), in his work *"The judgment of the French colonial regime"* in 1925,... There, He condemned the colonial regime using violence to treat women and children in colonial countries at that time.

He deeply sympathized with the agony of oppressed women. To Him, as long as the woman has not been liberated, then the pain of human will not last. He asserted that only when the colonised countries fight against the colonists and gain national independence then the women will be liberated.

Uncle Ho (the popular name of Ho Chi Minh) always considered women as one of the important factors to ensure all the successes of the national liberation movements, liberation struggle of social classes, and liberation struggle for people. During the resistance wars against the French colonialists and American imperialists, many women were eager to participate in the resistance and do well in their position so Ho Chi Minh gave them 8 golden words: *"Anh hùng, bất khuất, trung hậu, đảm đang"* (*"brave, indomitable, gentle, hardworking"*). When the country was liberated for the first time, Vietnamese women were given equal rights in the historical process by participating in voting and state management.

Ho Chi Minh was a pioneer in the movement to fight for equality of men and women in Vietnam. He pointed out: *"in building socialism, one of the important issues is the*

*struggle for equal rights for women. Equality is not only about politics but also from the real life of social and family life. Therefore, we have to respect women. We do revolution is to gain equality. Boys and girls are equal. According to Ho Chi Minh, to build socialism, it is necessary to truly liberate women and respect women's rights, only when women are freed from the remnants of customs, feudal thought, then they are confident enough to rise up to contribute their efforts to build a socialist country. In order to do that, women themselves must constantly strive, learn, unite, and fulfill their duties and responsibilities: ... For women themselves, they should not wait for the Government, wait for the Party to issue an order to liberate themselves, but they must fight for themselves."* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), Episode 9).

In order that women express their role in liberating themselves, women themselves have to rise up, enthusiastically overcome all difficulties and obstacles, overcome all concepts of inferiority, resigning, and content with their inferior status in society. In this way, women liberate themselves from the constraints, injustice and narrow social prejudices. According to Ho Chi Minh, not only do women in the family play an important role in the sustainable development of the family but also the ones who preserve and impart the cultural values of the nation. The woman plays a huge role in raising children, they are the first and closest teachers of their children, imparting the cultural values of the nation to young generations like hospitality, kindness, the curiosity, solidarity, and the will to fight for their Fatherland when there are invaders.

Vietnamese women are not only interested in educating their children, but also in educating of the young generation in general. During the war years, *"millions of women took part in production, encouraged their husbands and children to go to the battle"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), episode 3). In peace time, to protect women's rights and build a new, equal and progressive family. Ho Chi Minh has actively directed the formation of the Constitution and the law, including clear regulations on women's equality. The 1946 Constitution, Article 24 stipulates: *"Women of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have equal rights with men in terms of political, economic, cultural and social activities and families"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), volume 10). Thus, the equality of women in the family needs to be assigned scientifically, in accordance with the health of women, in order to create conditions for women to promote their abilities and advantages to build happy families and participating in building social development.

Thus, according to Ho Chi Minh, to have true equality for women, it must start from liberating women in their family, then liberating them in society. Ho Chi Minh affirmed: *"Under socialism, communism, a courageous woman can complete all the tasks of a brave man can do, although that task requires a lot of talent and energy."* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), episode 11). According to Ho Chi Minh, to bring women's right to equality in society, first of all we must encourage them to voluntarily and actively participate in the struggle to liberate themselves, while they should be equipped with theoretical tools. Thereby, the state should create all favorable conditions for women to participate in political activities such as election, candidacy, leadership and management equally with men.

Immediately after the general election, Ho Chi Minh introduced to the 1st National Assembly Democratic Republic of Vietnam some typical women such as "Nguyen Thi Thuc Vien"<sup>iv</sup>, "Ton Thi Que"<sup>v</sup>. Since then, the contingent of female cadres has been increasingly involved in leading agencies, contributing greatly to the national defense and construction. According to Ho Chi Minh, women are not inferior to men in all fields if they are facilitated. Ho Chi Minh said that *"comparing the situation of women we are now and our women before liberation, we clearly see that since the day before we were liberated, women have made significant economic and sociocultural progress. But in the most pronounced progress, women are becoming more and more involved in the government"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), vol. 10).

Ho Chi Minh assert that if women want to be equal to men, they must be self-reliant on their jobs and income, and must practice thrift in a reasonable manner. Thanks to laboring, *"women compete to increase productivity, encourage each other to send food, goods, and precious things, to soldiers in the front. They can send everything from gifts and letters"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), episode 5). That great contribution of *"half of the world"* in the turmoil of the country has contributed significantly to nurturing the spirit of the soldiers, helping them to be assured and determined to fight for the independence of the country, of the homeland, and fight for the old mother, the wife and the future children. In order that all women bring into full play their creative labor capacity, He asserts: *"special attention must be paid to women's labor. Women are a large labor force. The women's health must be maintained in order for them to participate in production well"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), episode 12).

Ho Chi Minh affirmed that women not only play an important role in the fields of producing material, and goods but also play a huge role in creating spiritual and cultural values. Ho Chi Minh said that in order to realize the rights of women in the field of culture and society, it is necessary to create conditions for them to participate in social activities. He asserted: *"In terms of economy, politics and culture women are equal to men"* (Ho Chi Minh (2000), episode 3). Ho Chi Minh also proposed to include in the Constitution the issue of equality of men and women in the field of culture in order to create a legal basis to protect the rights of women in this field.

Ho Chi Minh emphasized the liberation of women to exercise their equal rights. In Vietnam, before the successful August Revolution in 1945, women were always bound by feudal ideas, *"respect men and disdain women"*, they were not appreciated for their ability, role and capacity. Therefore, in the family, the woman always wants to be mentally safe, and almost depend on their men. After the revolution, in order to promote the role and liberate women, to bring them equal rights, Ho Chi Minh said that it is necessary to create conditions for women to participate in all areas of social life. In order to bring equal rights to women, the right is firstly required by law. Ho Chi Minh

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<sup>iv</sup> Nguyen Thi Thuc Vien (1903-1984) was a member of the 1st National Assembly of Vietnam, member of the Drafting Board of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1946, the founder of the Vietnam Women's Union (1950) and as Vice President of the first course to many subsequent courses.

<sup>v</sup> Ton Thi Que (1902-1992) was a revolutionary soldier and was a member of Vietnam National Assembly I and II.

pointed out: "*The law on getting married which is going to bring forward to the Congress is a revolution, a part of the socialist revolution ... The law on getting married is to liberate women, which means to liberating half of society*" (Ho Chi Minh President with the issue of women's liberation, 1970). In 1960, a marriage and family law was enacted. However, in order for the law to be enacted, people must be informed to practice the law. Besides, we have to change the mindset in "*respect men and disdain women*" to respecting the women. Ho Chi Minh emphasized the training, fostering and promotion of women in leading positions in government and economic and social sectors and considered it the longest, most radical solution.

Ho Chi Minh explained that the cause of women's inequalities in Vietnam stems from economic dependence of women. To solve that situation, He said that the state needs to create conditions for women to participate in, give them equal opportunity to men in training, in finding jobs and in paying properly. Besides, it must bring the benefit of material and spiritual values for women. Because liberating women is the removal of the binding strings of the old customs and traditions having repressed and oppressed them mentally; is the removal of inequalities for women in the family and in society. The revolution of thought and culture liberates women from false biases and backward customs.

Therefore, according to Ho Chi Minh, if women want to have real equality, then they must firstly strive to overcome the thought of inferiority, security and reliance. Not only that, women need to unite, help each other to progress, fight against all discrimination, respect men and women in the family as well as in other fields.

In the process of finding the way to liberate the nation, liberating the class, liberating people, Ho Chi Minh reconciled and absorbed selectively Vietnamese culture and tradition of the homeland, and the country, the cultural quintessence of human, especially Marxism-Leninism. Ho Chi Minh pointed out that the source of inequality between men and women is because women are excluded from social production. He also pointed out the great role and ability of women in social production. And He pointed out the conditions to liberate women. They are bringing women back into social production labor, transforming the family work into a great work of society, attaching the career of liberating women to the socialist revolution, considering the issue of women's liberation is both a goal and a driving force for proletariat revolution. Thereby, He made the right choice and decision for the revolution of the nation, including liberating women, giving them right and legitimate benefits.

With immense compassion, He believes that women not only have a role to themselves in family, but they also have a great role in all areas of society. He appreciated the role of women in the production of goods and the creation of cultural and spiritual values. He said that women are not inferior to men in all fields if they are facilitated. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh is very interested in the training and retraining of female cadres, and the placement of female cadres in leading positions of the State. He affirmed that women are an important labor force in society, a main force creating wealth and enriching society. From believing in their position and role, He awakened

women to fight for their legitimate rights. When women are liberated from constraints, injustice and narrow social prejudices, then society really develops.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Current situation of conducting equal rights of Vietnamese women today

It can be recognized that Vietnamese women have been liberated, but the implementation of women's equality still faces many limitations. The number of women participating in social management is not much, women's capacity and practical skills for mass mobilization are limited. Most women spend a lot of time on laboring, doing housework with little time to participate in social activities. Gender prejudice, "*respect men and disdain women*", still exists quite popular in the community, which significantly affects people's awareness of the position and role of women in the family and in society. With the increasing imbalance in gender, many couples have actively applied scientific achievements to choose the sex of their children. According to the Department of Population and Family Planning, the ratio of male is higher than that of female, which continue to increase rapidly. In 2018, the sex ratio at birth was 115.1 boys for every 100 girls, 3% higher than that in 2017.

Without taking any action, it is estimated that by 2050, Vietnam will have from 2.3 to 4.3 million men who cannot find a wife. According to statistics, in Vietnam about 58% of married women report that their life has experienced at least one of the three types of violence: physical, sexual, mental.

Not only in Vietnam but also in many countries around the world today, women's equal rights have not been fully implemented. According to the annual report of the World Economic Forum 2013, Japan ranked 105 out of 156 countries in terms of sex ratio in economic and political activities. Recently, this advanced education has to face an embarrassing scandal. Tokyo Medical University admitted to secretly lowering score to eliminate many female candidates to reduce the rate of female doctors. Nobel Prize-winning in economics Amartya Sen estimates that more than 100 million women are "abandoned" in the world - who do not receive the same health, medical and nutritional care as men.

Recent studies by economists Siwan Anderson and Debraj Ray have shown that in India, more than 2 million women are actually being "left alone". Of these, 12% of women were killed at birth, 25% died at a young age, 18% died at childbearing age and 45% died when they were old. According to statistics, in 2011 in India there were more than 24,000 rape cases, of which, 54.7% of victims were between the ages of 18 and 30. In particular, Indian women often had to live in scenes of neglect and lack of attention – a behavior stems from the "*respect men and disdain women*", leading to sex selection at birth.

In the face of inequalities in Vietnam and other countries in the world, I believe that the application of Ho Chi Minh's idea of women's equal rights will help overcome those limitations. To do that, I think that we need to do things like: gender awareness must be changed in the form of focusing on propaganda to the whole society in order to

change backward perceptions about the role of women. Focus on disseminating policies and laws on gender equality, national strategy for the advancement of women, raising social awareness about gender and gender equality, and respect for women's rights. Disseminate deeply to each woman about their rights in social society. Women themselves must first be fully aware of their gender roles in order to grasp opportunities, together with society, towards gender equality. Each woman herself has to work hard to learn, to work in teams, to actively participate in social activities to accumulate knowledge and life experiences. Being friendly, ready to share, opening relationships in society and helping the community, taking care of themselves are what they need to do.

The State should have policies to enhance the role and position of women by regulating the number of women participating in leadership positions to ensure women's equal rights in state management. It is necessary to effectively apply and enforce legal policies on women's equal rights. Regularly conducting inspections and assessing the implementation of the provisions of the law on gender equality. The government should pay attention to vocational training and job creation for women, especially rural women. It should have policies to support women in training and retraining to improve their qualifications, access to information, and apply scientific and technical advances and new technologies to production. Develop and improve the quality of operations of state health facilities to make good primary health care for women. It is also important to promote supervision, reconciliation to minimize acts of domestic violence.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In his cause of national liberation, Ho Chi Minh said that in order to liberate the people of Viet Nam thoroughly, it is necessary to bring equal rights for women. From that point of view, Ho Chi Minh sees the issue of liberating women as both a goal and a motive for the proletariat revolution. According to Ho Chi Minh, liberating women is not only a struggle against all oppression and injustice against women, but also to promote the potential role and capacity of women. Women play an important role in all areas of society, from family care to productive labor. The value of his ideas about women's liberation and promoting the role of women in Vietnam today has first gained significant achievements. However, the equal rights of women not only in Vietnam but also in many countries around the world still have limitations that need to be overcome. To overcome these limitations, the study of Ho Chi Minh's thought and its flexible application will contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere. At the same time, it is vital to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private sectors.



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