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Ho Chi Minh's Vision of Ethnic Unity: Historical Roots and Contemporary Applications

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Abstract

Ethnic unity has long been a critical factor in national development and sustainability, particularly in multi-ethnic societies such as Vietnam. Drawing on Marxist–Leninist theory and traditional Vietnamese humanism, Ho Chi Minh developed a vision of ethnic unity grounded in equality, solidarity, mutual respect, and national independence. This article employs a qualitative historical-conceptual approach to examine the philosophical and historical foundations of Ho Chi Minh's thought on ethnic unity and its strategic significance in Vietnam's revolutionary struggle. It also considers the contemporary relevance of this vision to national develop-

ment, social cohesion, ethnic policy, and the continuing pursuit of socialism. The analysis demonstrates that Ho Chi Minh's conception of ethnic unity served both as a principle of revolutionary mobilization and as a framework for strengthening relations among Vietnam's ethnic communities. The study concludes that his approach to ethnic unity remains an enduring contribution to Vietnamese political thought and continues to provide theoretical and practical guidance for contemporary nation-building.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh's thought; ethnic unity; national development; social cohesion

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's long history of resistance to foreign domination, extending from prolonged rule by northern feudal powers to Western colonialism and imperialism, contributed to the formation of a national identity grounded in aspirations for independence, freedom, and unity. As a multi-ethnic country, Vietnam has also faced the continuing challenge of promoting harmony, equality, and cooperation among its diverse ethnic communities. Within this historical context, Ho Chi Minh's vision of ethnic unity emerged not only as a strategic requirement for national liberation but also as a foundational principle for building a just, cohesive, and socialist society.

Ho Chi Minh's thought on ethnicity is distinguished by its synthesis of Marxist–Leninist theory and traditional Vietnamese cultural and humanistic values. His approach emphasized equality, solidarity, mutual respect, and cooperation among all ethnic groups. These principles provided the ideological and political basis for the formation of a broad national unity bloc, which played an important role in Vietnam's revolutionary victories and subsequent socialist construction.

This article examines the historical and ideological foundations of Ho Chi Minh's vision of ethnic unity and considers its strategic importance in Vietnam's revolutionary development. It also explores the contemporary relevance of this vision to ethnic integration, social justice, national development, and inclusive nation-building. In doing so, the study evaluates Ho Chi Minh's ethnic policy as both a theoretical legacy and a practical source of guidance for addressing the challenges faced by a multi-ethnic society in the twenty-first century.

The analysis is based primarily on selected volumes of *Ho Chi Minh's Complete Works* [1], published by the National Political Publishing House, particularly Volumes 2, 3, 4, 9, and 12. These texts provide important insights into Ho Chi Minh's understanding of national identity, independence, ethnic unity, patriotism, and internationalism. He consistently maintained that genuine patriotism should be grounded in principled internationalism and that national liberation could not be separated from the global struggle against oppression. Without this broader orientation, patriotism could deteriorate into narrow nationalism, chauvinism, or hegemonic thinking.

A central feature of Ho Chi Minh's thought was his creative application of Marxist–Leninist theory to Vietnam's specific historical, political, and cultural conditions. His approach regarded unity among the country's diverse ethnic groups as an essential condition for national independence. At the same time, he connected Vietnam's struggle for liberation with the shared aspirations of colonized peoples throughout the world. This synthesis shaped Vietnam's revolutionary path and provided a conceptual framework relevant to other post-colonial societies seeking national self-determination.

To place these ideas within their historical context, the study also draws on the works cited in [2] and [3]. These sources complement Ho Chi Minh's theoretical writings by demonstrating how his ideas developed through personal experience and were subsequently applied in revolutionary practice. Tien discusses Ho Chi Minh's early encounters with colonial oppression and his transnational revolutionary journey, which influenced his understanding of ethnicity, nationhood, and political emancipation. These ideas were reflected in the 1919 *Eight Demands of the Vietnamese People*. Giap, in turn, emphasizes the strategic importance of national unity in the success of the Vietnamese revolution, particularly in relation to the establishment of the Viet Minh Front in 1941 and the August Revolution of 1945. Together, these sources demonstrate that Ho Chi Minh's thought on ethnicity functioned not only as a theoretical system but also as a practical guide for revolutionary action.

Another fundamental element of Ho Chi Minh's thought was the association between national independence and socialism. This principle represented both a strategic vision and, in his view, a historical necessity for Vietnam during the early twentieth century. By rejecting colonial domination and capitalist exploitation, Ho Chi Minh regarded socialism as the most appropriate path for securing lasting independence, social equality, and socio-economic justice.

The continuing significance of this principle is reflected in major political documents, including the *Documents of the Ninth National Congress of Delegates* [4] and the *Documents of the Thirteenth National Congress of Deputies* [5]. These documents interpret Vietnam's revolutionary development from a contemporary perspective and demonstrate how Ho Chi Minh's thought continues to influence national policy, political orientation, and socio-economic development.

Taken together, the primary and secondary sources examined in this study reveal that the Vietnamese revolution was not solely a struggle against foreign domination. It was also an ideological and political process through which national identity was redefined within a broader international context. Ho Chi Minh's *Complete Works* provide the theoretical foundations of this process, while the writings of Tran Dan Tien and Vo Nguyen Giap illustrate how these ideas were developed and implemented in revolutionary practice. Official documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam further confirm that Ho Chi Minh's thought continues to serve as a guiding principle in contemporary political life.

The influence of Ho Chi Minh's ideas on ethnicity and national liberation also extended beyond Vietnam. His emphasis on the relationship between national independence and global justice resonated with decolonization movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. His revolutionary approach contributed to broader debates on self-determination, political emancipation, and resistance to colonial domination. This international influence demonstrates the wider significance of his thought and its capacity to inspire anti-colonial struggles in different historical and cultural contexts.

Ho Chi Minh's conception of ethnic unity therefore emerged through the interaction of political theory, historical experience, revolutionary practice, and continuing institutional application. His emphasis on solidarity among ethnic groups, the interdependence of nationalism and socialism, and the international character of national liberation remains analytically significant. By integrating theoretical writings, historical accounts, and contemporary political documents, this study demonstrates how Ho Chi Minh's vision continues to influence Vietnam's development while contributing to wider discussions of national identity, self-determination, social justice, and ethnic relations.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative historical-conceptual approach grounded in Marxist–Leninist dialectical and historical materialism. It combines qualitative textual analysis with logical–historical interpretation to examine the formation, internal consistency, and development of Ho Chi Minh's ideas across different historical periods. Analysis and synthesis are used to identify the principal concepts within his thought and reconstruct their systematic relationships. Inductive and deductive reasoning is employed to derive theoretical principles from the selected texts and relate them to relevant historical and contemporary contexts. Abstraction and generalization are used to distinguish fundamental arguments from historically contingent elements. Comparative analysis further situates Ho Chi Minh's conception of ethnicity and the nation within the broader Marxist–Leninist theoretical tradition, thereby identifying its distinctive characteristics and contributions.

2. THE BASIC CONTENT OF HO CHI MINH'S THOUGHT ON NATIONAL UNITY

2.1. INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM AS SACRED AND INVIOABLE RIGHTS

Having understood the suffering and humiliation experienced by a people deprived of national independence, Ho Chi Minh wrote, "There are thousands of bitter things in life; nothing is more bitter than losing freedom" [6, p. 332]. Independence and freedom therefore represented the highest aspirations of the Vietnamese people, while patriotism became a fundamental political and social principle and one of the foremost values in Vietnam's national tradition.

For Ho Chi Minh, national independence and the freedom of the people constituted the highest and most fundamental political values. Drawing on the universal principles expressed in the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, he affirmed that all peoples are equal and possess the inalienable rights to life, freedom, and happiness [7]. In his view, these rights were sacred and inviolable and required genuine national independence in the political, economic, military, diplomatic, and territorial spheres.

Ho Chi Minh rejected an abstract understanding of independence that was detached from social conditions and the everyday lives of the people. He maintained that freedom and sovereignty acquire practical meaning only when they improve people's material and social well-being, particularly by ensuring adequate living conditions and access to education [8]. National independence was therefore not an end in itself but a necessary condition for securing dignity, prosperity, and social progress.

This conception of independence was inseparable from Ho Chi Minh's commitment to national sovereignty and self-determination. He consistently maintained that Vietnam's future must be determined exclusively by the Vietnamese people. This principle guided his revolutionary leadership and received its clearest expression in the Declaration of Independence of 1945. In response to colonial aggression, Ho Chi Minh regarded resistance as both a moral imperative and a collective national responsibility, an outlook embodied in his assertion that nothing is more precious than independence and freedom [9]. His thought consequently combined principled resistance with pragmatic political leadership, transforming Vietnam's struggle for independence into an important symbol of twentieth-century anti-colonial movements.

National independence was also closely connected to national unity in Ho Chi Minh's thought. He regarded unity as a historical condition for Vietnam's survival and development and as the spiritual foundation of the people's determination to struggle for sovereignty and national reunification [8]. By integrating independence, unity, and human emancipation, Ho Chi Minh formulated a conception of national liberation that retains theoretical and practical relevance to contemporary discussions of sovereignty, self-determination, and social justice.

2.2. THE INTEGRATION OF NATIONAL AND CLASS ISSUES

Ho Chi Minh developed the Marxist–Leninist understanding of the relationship between national and class issues by applying it to the particular historical conditions of colonial Vietnam. He argued that class contradictions within Vietnamese society had not yet reached the level of acute antagonism, whereas the contradiction between the Vietnamese nation as a whole and imperialism had become the primary conflict. The national question therefore had to be prioritized because national liberation was a necessary condition for subsequent class emancipation.

Within this framework, the common interests of the nation and the people were placed above narrow or immediate class interests, without denying the continuing importance of class struggle. Ho Chi Minh's position did not eliminate class analysis; rather, it situated class objectives within the broader and more urgent struggle for national independence.

Ho Chi Minh consequently emphasized the need to harmonize national and class interests rather than treating them

as opposing concerns. Under conditions of colonial domination, the interests of different social classes converged around the task of national liberation. Particular class demands therefore had to be temporarily subordinated to the immediate objectives of independence and national unity.

At the same time, Ho Chi Minh maintained that the national question should be approached from a proletarian perspective. He regarded patriotism and genuine nationalism as powerful forces for political mobilization, but argued that these forces should be guided by the working class and directed toward national liberation and social emancipation. This integration of national and class objectives enabled him to formulate flexible strategies appropriate to different historical circumstances and contributed significantly to the success of the Vietnamese revolution.

2.3. THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND SOCIALISM

For Ho Chi Minh, national independence was inseparable from socialism. Influenced by Marxism–Leninism and Lenin’s theses on national and colonial questions, he concluded that the proletarian revolutionary path provided the only viable means of achieving genuine and lasting national liberation. In the early political platforms of 1930, he envisaged the Vietnamese revolution as progressing from a democratic revolutionary stage toward socialism, with the broader aims of national liberation, class emancipation, and human liberation.

Ho Chi Minh consistently maintained that national independence was a prerequisite for the construction of socialism, while socialism provided the fundamental basis for protecting independence and improving the material and spiritual well-being of the people. In his view, independence would have limited value if it did not produce freedom, prosperity, equality, and social justice.

The association between national independence and socialism therefore became a defining and enduring principle of Ho Chi Minh’s political thought. It reflected his interpretation of the historical development of the Vietnamese revolution and expressed the intrinsic relationship among national liberation, class emancipation, and human emancipation. Within this framework, independence created the political conditions necessary for socialist development, while socialism provided the social and economic foundations required to preserve national sovereignty and improve the lives of the people.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF HO CHI MINH’S THOUGHT ON ETHNIC UNITY

Ho Chi Minh’s thought on ethnicity retains enduring theoretical and practical significance. It has continued to influence Vietnam’s ethnic policies while also contributing to broader revolutionary and anti-colonial movements worldwide. Grounded in revolutionary theory and Vietnam’s historical experience, his approach elevated the ethnic question from a limited policy concern to a long-term strategic issue closely connected with national liberation, state-building, social development, and national unity.

In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh’s thought on ethnic unity constitutes an important ideological foundation for the policies of the Communist Party and the State concerning ethnic affairs. In recognition of Vietnam’s multi-ethnic composition, the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently regarded the ethnic question as both a fundamental, long-term strategic concern and an urgent task of national development [4, 10]. Equality, solidarity, mutual assistance, and shared development among ethnic groups are central principles derived from Ho Chi Minh’s thought and have become important elements of the country’s policy framework.

The application of these principles has contributed to strengthening national unity, promoting socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous regions, reducing regional inequalities, and preserving the cultural identities of ethnic communities. From this perspective, ethnic unity is not merely an ideological aspiration but an essential condition for protecting national independence, advancing socialist development, and strengthening national resilience.

Ho Chi Minh placed particular emphasis on the position and development of ethnic minority communities. He regarded support for these communities as both a moral responsibility and a strategic necessity. His advocacy of targeted socio-economic assistance, the training of cadres from ethnic minority backgrounds, and respect for local cultures and traditions provided an important foundation for policies concerning poverty reduction, social inclusion, and balanced regional development. These policies continue to represent practical applications of his vision and reinforce the great national unity bloc as an internal source of strength for Vietnam’s development and national defence.

Beyond Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh’s thought on ethnicity and national liberation influenced twentieth-century anti-colonial and revolutionary movements. Through his creative development of Marxist–Leninist theory concerning national and colonial questions, he offered an ideological framework through which colonized peoples could assert sovereignty and pursue self-determination. His ideas contributed to wider processes of decolonization and inspired national liberation movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, thereby extending the relevance of his thought from the Vietnamese context to the international sphere [11].

Overall, Ho Chi Minh’s conception of ethnic unity remains an important intellectual and political legacy. It continues

to inform Vietnam's approach to ethnic governance and national development while also contributing to international discussions of national identity, self-determination, equality, and social justice in a world still affected by inequality, conflict, and social fragmentation.

4. CONCLUSION

Ho Chi Minh's thought on ethnicity constitutes a body of political and revolutionary ideas that retains substantial contemporary significance. Its central principles include the recognition of independence and freedom as sacred and inviolable rights of all nations, the integration of national and class interests, the association between national independence and socialism, and the relationship between patriotism and principled internationalism.

These interconnected principles demonstrate that Ho Chi Minh did not treat the ethnic question as an isolated social or administrative issue. Instead, he situated it within a broader framework of national liberation, social development, political unity, and human emancipation. His thought therefore continues to influence the formulation and implementation of ethnic policies in contemporary Vietnam.

The application of Ho Chi Minh's principles has contributed to strengthening national unity, mobilizing domestic resources, protecting national sovereignty, and supporting the process of national renewal. His ideas have also influenced anti-colonial and national liberation movements beyond Vietnam by encouraging oppressed peoples to pursue independence, self-determination, social progress, and peace.

In this sense, the contemporary relevance of Ho Chi Minh's thought on ethnicity lies in its combination of national independence, ethnic solidarity, social equality, and international cooperation. It continues to provide theoretical and practical guidance for strengthening the unity of Vietnam's ethnic communities, promoting sustainable national development, and addressing continuing challenges related to inequality, national identity, and social cohesion.

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