THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HO CHI MINH'S THOUGHTS ON DEMOCRACY IN CHANGING THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND STRATIFICATION[1]

A EFICÁCIA DOS PENSAMENTOS DE HO CHI MINH SOBRE A DEMOCRACIA NA MUDANÇA DA ESTRUTURA E ESTRATIFICAÇÃO SOCIAL

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Abstract: Social structure and social stratification are significant issues in any society. This article proposes to tackle the problems regarding social structure change and social stratification and how to apply Ho Chi Minh's thoughts in addressing the same. The findings present a summary and analysis of Ho Chi Minh's thoughts on democracy and how they can be applied as a solution to the problem of social structural change. The article uses a library-based approach for data collection. Journal articles, books, and other publications from reputable sources were used for the study. The study showed that social stratification exists in all societies. It also showed that Ho Chi Minh advocates for societal equality, terming it as 'sacred.' He also stresses the importance of democracy in society to advance equality. The article has established that social inequality is unavoidable in the development process. However, it should not be taken as the norm, and the Communist Party of Vietnam is working towards attaining societal equity.

Keywords: Social structure. Social stratification. Structural change. Vietnam.

Resumo: A estrutura social e a estratificação social são questões importantes em qualquer sociedade. Este artigo se propõe a abordar os problemas relacionados à mudança da estrutura social e à estratificação social e como aplicar os pensamentos de Ho Chi Minh ao abordar o mesmo. Os resultados apresentam um resumo e análise dos pensamentos de Ho Chi Minh sobre a democracia e como eles podem ser aplicados como uma solução para o problema da mudança estrutural social. O artigo usa uma abordagem baseada em biblioteca para coleta de dados. Artigos de periódicos, livros e outras publicações de fontes confiáveis foram usados para o estudo. O estudo mostrou que a estratificação social existe em todas as sociedades. Também mostrou que Ho Chi Minh defende a igualdade social, chamando-a de "sagrada". Ele também enfatiza a importância da democracia na sociedade para promover a igualdade. O artigo estabeleceu que a desigualdade social é inevitável no processo de desenvolvimento. No entanto, isso não deve ser considerado a norma, e o Partido Comunista do Vietnã está trabalhando para alcançar a equidade social.

Palavras-chave: Estrutura social. Estratificação social. Mudança estrutural. Vietnã.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The issues of social structural change and social stratification in Vietnam today

Social Structure and Social Stratification are two sociological concepts widely used today. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines social structure as "the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together. Social structure is often treated together with the concept of social change, which deals with the forces that change the social structure and the organization of society.". Coleman (1966) and Coleman (2004), as cited in Umanailo et al. (2021), contend that social structure is a setup of a society's social order arising from and determining each member's actions."Society is a social system, a pattern of social interaction consisting of an ordered and institutionalized social component. The characteristics of a social system, namely the social structure that includes the status and roles in social units, give rise to values and norms that will regulate the interaction between these social statuses and roles."

Sociologists say that social structure broadly refers to the interaction between various social system elements. According to this, "institutions such as relatives, religion, economy, politics and other institutions of a society can be considered as constituting the social structure of that society, or other elements such as their norms, values and social roles as well" (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2010, p.56-57). Thus, as can be seen, the concept of Social Structure is associated with structural-functional, structural, and post-structural theories. Garner (2022) states that "Structural, functional theory is an orientation that focuses on structure – the patterning of roles, the form of institutions, and the overall articulation of institutions in a society – and seeks to explain these structures in terms of their functions – contributions to the stability and persistence of societies." Crossman (2020) avers that "Social structure is the organized set of social institutions and patterns of institutionalized relationships that compose society. Social structure is both a product of social interaction and determines it. Social structures are not immediately visible to the untrained observer; however, they are always present and affect all dimensions of human experience in society."

According to Crossman (2020), in the sociology study, social structure deals with forces that inform socialisation, the institutions created due to socialisation, and the patterns followed in socialisation. Crossman (2020) further notes, "the major social institutions recognized by sociologists include family, religion, education, media, law, politics, and economy. These are

understood as distinct institutions that are interrelated and interdependent and together help compose the overarching social structure of a society."

Crossman (2021) argues that in sociology, there are two main perspectives regarding social inequality: Functionalist theory and Conflict theory. Crossman (2021) writes that, according to functionalist theorists, inequality cannot be avoided in society. Crossman adds that, despite the fact social inequality cannot be avoided, it plays an essential role in society. Functionalists argue that critical societal roles require a lot of training and come with lucrative rewards. Therefore, the proponents of this theory hold that "Social inequality and social stratification, according to this view, lead to a meritocracy based on ability."Moreover, according to Crossman (2021), the other school of thought proffers the conflict theory. This school of thought views social inequality as a result of one group (in power) dominating the weak groups. These theorists argue that social inequality is a barrier to progress and that those who enjoy power work toward maintaining the status quo. "In today's world, this work of domination is achieved primarily through the power of ideology, our thoughts, values, beliefs, worldviews, norms, and expectations, through a process known as cultural hegemony" (Crossman, 2021).

In a nutshell, society is understood as a unity of several elements with positions, roles, and strong relations. Depending on the sections, these elements are different, and when they are combined, they are closely intertwined, creating a network of social relationships.

Social Stratification: According to Oyekola and Eyitayo (2020), "social stratification is categorisation that operates in a structured system of inequality in which members are ranked based on selected criteria thereby limiting members' access to wealth, power and opportunities. … social stratification is a sociological term that applies to the ranking or grading of individuals and groups into hierarchical layers such that inequality exists in the allocation of rewards, privileges, and resources" (p.126).

Social stratification and social inequality are closely related. Inequality is the cause, while social stratification is the effect. Social stratification leads to a phenomenon sociologists refer to as social inequality. To illustrate the nature of social inequality, Gibbon, Nurse, and Hurst (2022) write, " Think about your experiences. Even when young, we hear of people as being from "a bad neighbourhood," as not being "our kind," as being "above" or "below" us... epithets aimed at persons because of their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation."

According to Oyekola and Oyeyipo (2020), an observation of communities worldwide shows that they are all stratified. Social stratification serves various functions in society. According to Davis and Moore (1945), as cited in Oyekola and Oyepipo (2020, p.129-130):

i) It determines individual placement- As a consequence of social stratification, individual members of society find themselves in varying stations in life, e.g., rulers, subjects, Security officers, doctors, house helps, etc. However, it is evident that individuals will keep working hard, hoping to improve their life circumstances. Apparently, not all positions are prestigious, but each is important for society's functioning.

ii) It encourages competition and hard work - Societies are characterized by perpetual competition. Members of society are constantly working towards improving their circumstances. Society expects and rewards hard work. Those who work very hard and attain the highest positions in society are rewarded immensely in money, power, prestige, etc

iii) it regulates human relationships- social classes emanating from social stratification determine how individuals behave. For example, members of the highest social classes will behave differently from members of the lowest social classes.

iv) It has an economic function - Different social positions have different financial rewards. Hence, social stratification will encourage individuals to either retain their current position or work hard towards attaining a better one.

v) As a social control - different social classes will exhibit specific behaviour characteristics of that class. As such, members of a particular group are controlled by society's expectations regarding how they should behave as members of that group.

vi) Leads to different socialization- Members are trained or socialised differently due to class differences. They pick up the ways of life available within their immediate environment.

vii) It integrates members- members of the same class tend to mix freely with each other. This is a result of shared values, experiences, interests, etc

Cole (2020) argues that the best way to measure social stratification is by analysing wealth distribution because "income alone does not account for assets and debt." Giving the situation in the U.S.A. as an example, Cole (2020) states that "Wealth distribution in the U.S. is shockingly unequal. The top 1% of the population controls approximately 40% of the nation's wealth. The top 1% owns fifty percent of all stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Meanwhile, the bottom 80% of the

population has just 7% of all wealth, and the bottom 40% barely have any wealth. Wealth inequality has grown to such an extreme over the last quarter-century that it is now at its highest in our nation's history. Because of this, today's middle class is barely distinguishable from the poor in terms of wealth."

The disparity in all areas between individuals in society leads to the fact that their opportunities and interests are not the same, leading to the grouping of individuals or social groups with similar interests. Various groups of opportunities and interests are born. Some groups have many interests and opportunities, and vice versa, which leads to social stratification. "The stratification in sociology is often applied to studying unequal social structure. As a result, the study of unequal systems between groups of people arises as an unintentional result of social relations and social processes."[2] Pachama Alliance (n.d.) defines social inequality as a situation whereby members of a particular society do not derive equal benefits from belonging to a given community. In an ideal society, all members would play an equal role in building it and benefit equally. The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines that "the term stratification in sociology is usually applied to studies of structured social inequality; that is, studies of any systematic inequality between groups of people, which arises as a result of unforeseen social processes and social relations" (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2010, p.440). Hence, it can be seen that social stratification is a form of social structure or an *unequal form of social structure*. Inequality content mainly focuses on the factors of interests and opportunities. Social stratification is not immutable but always alters associated with social change.

Inequality content mainly focuses on the factors of interests and opportunities. Crossman (2021) says, "Social inequality results from a society organized by hierarchies of class, race, and gender that unequally distributes access to resources and rights. It can manifest in various ways, like income and wealth inequality, unequal access to education and cultural resources, and differential treatment by the police and judicial system. Social inequality goes hand in hand with social stratification." According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020), "income inequality has increased in most developed countries and some middle-income countries, including China and India, since 1990. Countries, where inequality has grown, are home to more

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[2] Wikiwand. Social Stratification, Retrieved from https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ph%C3%A2n_t%E1%BA%A7ng_x%C3%A3_h%E1%BB%99i accessed December 17, 2022

than two-thirds (71 percent) of the world population. Yet growing inequality is not a universal trend. The Gini coefficient of income inequality has declined in most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and several African and Asian countries over the last two decades" (pp.3).

In Social stratification and social mobility in Vietnam today, Dr. Do Thien Kinh clarified the connotation of the concept of *Social stratification* based on analyzing the relationship between the concepts *of Social Difference*, *Social inequality,* and *Social stratification*. According to him, *Social difference* is the mere description of different statuses according to the characteristics of people's personal qualities and work positions in society. This difference has not been evaluated by society. It has not been ranked among each other. *Social inequality* is individuals with unfair access to all kinds of resources, assets, services, and positions in society. At the same time, social inequality is a social difference that has been assessed and ranked among each other; Social *stratification* represents a structural and institutional social inequality, i.e., a social system with a hierarchy among the classes, which is established and maintained stably (Kinh, 2018, p.26-28).

From the above concepts, this article does not refer to the social structural change and social stratification broadly *but to the change toward strengthening or mitigating inequalities in the social structure*. According to Lanjouw and Marra (2018), as cited in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020), Viet Nam is urbanizing rapidly like many developing countries. The proportion of the country's population living in cities is projected to increase from about 30 percent in 2009 to 45 percent in 2020. While poverty is still mostly a rural phenomenon in Viet Nam, urban welfare varies considerably between large and small cities. Only 1.4 percent of residents in large cities (1 million inhabitants or more) were below the poverty line in 2010, compared to 5.8 percent of the population in small cities (between 150,000 and 300,000 inhabitants) and 12.2 percent in small towns (between 4,000 and 150,000 inhabitants)"(pp.117).

In Vietnam, the Innovation process and the acknowledgement of the diversification of ownership forms and economic sectors have significantly transformed the social structure, causing the emergence and gradual increase of social stratification. When examining the congress documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, it can be seen that until the 11th Congress of the Party, the concept of "social structure" and "social stratification" did not appear in the Political Report. In the article "Giương cao ngọn cờ đại đoàn kết Hồ Chí Minh vững bước vào thời kỳ phát triển mới"

("Raising the standard of solidarity of Ho Chi Minh - Moving into a new period of development")[3], published in the Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper on October 7, 2015, Prof. Dr. Phung Huu Phu, Deputy Head of the Standing Committee of the Central Propaganda Department at that time, used the concept of "social stratification" when assessing that "limitations and weaknesses slowly addressed in management and solving cultural and social issues, especially the gap between the rich and the poor, social stratification, etc. are difficulties and challenges that are posed and require to be solved." Opening the Seventh Central Conference (the Eleventh National Assembly), General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong raised the issue: "The gap between the rich and the poor, social polarization and stratification; changes in the interest relation and social values; economic and social differences, etc. give rise to the premise of cognitive and ideological differentiation." [4] The Conference focused on discussing the above issues. It affirmed: "The rich and poor gap, social stratification, red tape, corruption, indifference, violation of the right to the people's mastery, deterioration of the people's trust in the Party are a challenge to the relationship between the people and the Party."[5]

The Political Report at the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (2016) indicated: "The construction, especially the implementation of the Party's resolutions and directives on civil affairs, is not timely and ineffective; have not accurately assessed and forecasted the developments, changes in social structure, the composition of the population, mindset, aspirations of the people's classes, etc. to have appropriate policies and measures" and "the management of social development, implementation of social progress and equity has many limitations and shortcomings. The development of fields, areas, and regions is inconsistent. The resolution of some social issues has not been effective; the objective of building harmonious

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[3] Phu, H. P. (2015). Raising the banner of great unity, Ho Chi Minh firmly enters a new development period. Retrieved from https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/c-mac-angghen-lenin-ho-chi-minh/ho-chi-minh/nghien-cuu-hoc-tap-tu-tuong/giuong-cao-ngon-co-dai-doan-ket-ho-chi-minh-vung-buoc-vao-thoi-ky-phat-trien-moi-2523 accessed December 17, 2022

[4] Bao dien tu Dang Cong san Viet Nam. Speech by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong at the closing of the 14th Conference of The Central Committee of of the Communist Party (XI term). Retrieved from https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/van-kien-tu-lieu-ve-dang/hoi-nghi-bch-trung-uong/khoa-xi/phat-bieu-cua-tong-bi-thu-nguyen-phu-trong-be-mac-hoi-nghi-lan-thu-14-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-khoa-xi-647 access December 17, 2022

[5] Bao dien tu Dang Cong san Viet Nam. Speech by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong at the closing of the 14th Conference of The Central Committee of of the Communist Party (XI term). Retrieved from https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/van-kien-tu-lieu-ve-dang/hoi-nghi-bch-trung-uong/khoa-xi/phat-bieu-cua-tong-bi-thu-nguyen-phu-trong-be-mac-hoi-nghi-lan-thu-14-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-khoa-xi-647 access December 17, 2022

relationships among sectors, industries, areas, and regions has not been satisfactory; poverty reduction has not been sustainable; then the gap between rich and poor and inequality tends to increase. The role of harmonious social development has not been aware. There are no timely and effective policies and solutions to the issues of structural change, rich and poor gap, social stratification, risk control, social conflict resolution, social safety, and security for people.[6] It was the first time that the concepts of "social structure" and "social stratification" were used officially in the National Party Congress Document.

After nearly 5 years of implementing the Resolution of the 12th Congress of the Party, when referring to the issue of developing documents for the 13th Congress, Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary cum President, specified: "Along with the issues of labor, employment, material and spiritual life of the people, political security, social order, and safety, etc., it is necessary to analyze and evaluate the current situation of social structural change, the gap between rich and poor, social stratification in our country today..."[7].

The Draft Political Report of the Party Central Committee (the 12th) was public to consult all people's classes before submitting to the 13th Congress of the Party. When stating the direction of social development management, it has determined: "Based on forecasting the trend of social structural change and social stratification in our country in the coming years, formulate social policies and manage social development appropriately, harmonize social relations, control social stratification and deal promptly and effectively with risks, contradictions, social conflicts, ensure social order and safety, protect the righteous and legitimate rights and interests of the people[8]."

Thus, it can be seen that, in the perception of our Party, social structure change and social stratification associated with social inequality is a problem that has emerged and is increasingly

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[6]Bao dien tu Dang Cong san Viet Nam. Political Report of the 11th The Central Committee of the Communist Party at the 12th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party. Retrieved from https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang/dai-hoi-dang/lan-thu-xii/bao-cao-chinh-tri-cua-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-khoa-xi-tai-dai-hoi-dai-bieu-toan-quoc-lan-thu-xii-cua-dang-1600 accessed December 17, 2022

[7] Bao dien tu Dang Cong san Viet Nam. Speech by General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong at the closing of the 10th Conference of the 12th term The Central Committee of of the Communist Party. Retrieved from https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/van-kien-tu-lieu-ve-dang/hoi-nghi-bch-trung-uong/khoa-xii/phat-bieu-cua-tong-bi-thu-chu-tich-nuoc-nguyen-phu-trong-be-mac-hoi-nghi-lan-thu-muoi-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-3465 accessed December 17, 2022

[8] Bao dien tu Dang Cong san Viet Nam. Publication of draft events of the XIII National Congress for Referendum. Retrieved from https://www.vietnamplus.vn/cong-bo-du-thao-cac-van-kien-dai-hoi-xiii-de-lay-y-kien-nhan-dan/670198.vnp accessed December 17, 2022

complicated in our society. It requires accurate awareness, analysis, evaluation, and forecasting to provide suitable and feasible solutions, limit and solve social inequality and stratification, and ensure a healthy and sustainable social structure, positively impacting the process of social development (Kinh, 2018, p.137-138).

2. Methodology

The article is based on library research. The process involved reading and analysing existing studies published in reputable journals, articles, and books.

3. Results and Discussion

In Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, democracy is a large and significant component. Generally, when it comes to democracy in Ho Chi Minh's Thoughts, the status and role of the people in politics are often discussed. In the national liberation revolution, the whole nation, whose core force is the worker-peasant alliance, is the "root," the "leader" of the Revolution, and also the force implementing the target of national liberation to move towards class liberation and human liberation, which is democracy. In the new political regime that Ho Chi Minh struggles to build, seen from the system of power reference, the people are the subject of power. Ho Chi Minh specified: "OUR COUNTRY IS A DEMOCRATIC NATION... the executive power and the forces are all in the people". Hence, democracy is conceived by Ho Chi Minh as a *value*, an *institution, and also* a *behavior*. Democracy is the unity in the people, between awareness and behavior, competence and practice, and the rights and responsibilities of the people. Democracy is a value, a goal to be achieved, and a condition of the value that is the highest political goal is the people's happiness.

From the perspective of political philosophy, studying Ho Chi Minh's democratic thoughts, the most important is to study Ho Chi Minh's thoughts of democracy as a *value*, which is *reflected in institutions and behavior*, *creating a new nature of institutions and behavior*. As a guiding value for the political career of the Vietnamese people, democracy in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy consists of the following elementary connotations:

Firstly, democracy means "the power belongs to the people," i.e., the people are *the subject of power*. The status of the powerful subject is associated with the *people's unbeatable strength*. The people have the highest status because they have the greatest power. The power of the people is the greatest because the people are the most crowded force. The power of the people increases as they become awaked and organized and as they unite. Therefore, the concept of the *people* in Ho Chi Minh's thoughts always has the maximum extension, consisting of all "descendants of Hong Bang and Lac Long" or "the Vietnamese people." *"Dân," the people are the whole population, the nation*. It must be whole-people solidarity for *the people* to have the greatest power. With the greatest power, *the people* can *gain, retain* and *exercise power*. These are the foundational, core, and cross-cutting thoughts in Ho Chi Minh's entire theoretical system and his thoughts on democracy. Ho Chi Minh wrote: "The whole-people force is the greatest. No one can beat that force" (Minh, 2011, p.19)

The people are the subject of power, in which political power is the first, and the power-subject role of the people is *shown* in the field of State. This is an important highlight of Ho Chi Minh's thoughts. *When the people are leaders, the state apparatus is the public authority, and the state staff is the public servants of the people*. Ho Chi Minh raised the overhead view very early, as early as September 1945, less than a month since the people's democratic regime was introduced. It shows the importance of this point of view. Ho Chi Minh writes: "The Government is a public servant of the people" (Minh, 2011, p.21), so their work must aim for a unique purpose of seeking freedom and happiness for everyone. Therefore, the government must always put the rights of the people above all else. Do what's good for the people. Avoid what's bad for the people. The connotation of the concept "public servants of the people" here consists of two aspects: in terms of *operation*, it is to use the power that the people give to "shoulder the common work for the people," and in terms of *purpose*, it is to "seek freedom and happiness for everyone." These two aspects are closely related, supplementary, and complementary. The public servants of the people use the power of the people to "shoulder the common work" and to "seek freedom and happiness" for the people.

Not only state power but democracy also means that *all rights belong to the people*. Ho Chi Minh's thoughts about the rights of the people were formed in the process of penetrating Western political life and especially in the process of critiquing colonialism. Therefore, in the request to the Peace Conference (1919) in Versailles, Ho Chi Minh demanded that the basic democratic rights of the Vietnamese people be acknowledged and respected. According to Ho Chi Minh's thoughts,

reclaiming the rights of the people has become one of the most fundamental objectives of the Revolution.

According to Ho Chi Minh, the people are the whole nation. Therefore, the *greatest* right that people, the people, and the nation must enjoy is the right to independence, freedom, and happiness. The Declaration of Independence of Ho Chi Minh proclaimed not only the birth of the new social regime but also the declaration of the right that the Vietnamese people had won, which was "the right to life, the right to happiness and the right to freedom." It is the right of the nation and the people, which is the democratic right. Therefore, *acknowledging the democratic rights of the people means, first of all, acknowledging the nation's independence, freedom, and happiness, and fighting for democratic rights is firstly fighting to win and maintain the independence and freedom of the nation.*

Along with developing the new democracy in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh specifically mentioned *the other democratic rights* of the people, such as helping, criticizing, supervising, removing the government, etc. "If the Government harms the people, the people are entitled to expel the Government," He insisted (Minh, 2011, p.75). However, he also noted that, while exercising their democratic rights, the people need to comply with the *principles of democracy*, have an objective and reasonable attitude, do not be impatient. It is "because it takes 15 minutes for the rice to be cooked, much less to reform a country that has been 80 years of slavery with both good and bad people; a rice paddy having weeds will take a few three hours to pull up all weeds" (Minh, 2011, p.75)

Ho Chi Minh also emphasized that the mastery right is coupled with the *responsibility to master*. The people have become the subject of the new social regime. They enjoy all democratic rights, but as the subject, they are also responsible for promoting the spirit of mastery to carry out the tasks of resistance and national construction.

The people are the subject of power, and *all rights shall belong to the people*, which is also a connotation of democracy in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy. Ho Chi Minh's views on the rights of the people in the new democratic regime are various. It is herein possible to bring out his general view: "In short, all things that can enhance the material and spiritual life of the people must be paid special attention" (Minh, 2011, p.52)

From the above content, a comprehensive conception of democracy was expressed by Ho Chi Minh in the work of *"Dân vận" (Mobilization)* (October 1949):

OUR COUNTRY IS A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY

All the interests are *for the people.*

All the powers are *of the people.*

The work of renovation and construction is the *responsibility of the people.*

The cause of resistance and national construction is *the work of the people.*

The administration, from the commune level to the central government, is *elected by the people.*

Unions, from the Central Government to the commune level, are *organized by the people.*

In short, the executive power and the forces *belong to the people* (Minh, 2011, p.232).

When Ho Chi Minh affirmed: "our country is a democratic country," it is understood as "our state is a democratic state" and "our society is a democratic society," in which the State and society are consistently based on "democracy." *Democracy* means that the people are the subject of every "power and force." It is the people who create the new social regime in all areas. It is the expression of the rights and responsibilities of the people. The new social regime created by the people is a regime where "all interests are for the people." Thus, in the people's democratic regime, there is no subject other than the people. Only the people self-enlighten, self-organize and act for their interests. Obviously, that society has the State, unions, etc., but they are all instruments of the people, established by the people and for the interest of the people. Karl Marx also asserted that "in a democratic regime, the *State itself* is *one* of the regulations, namely the self-regulation of the people" (Minh, 2011, p.349) and "the distinctive feature of a democratic regime is that the *State* here is generally only *one* element of the people's existence, and the *political regime* itself, here, does not form the State" (Minh, 2011, p.349).

In short, in Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, *democracy* is the unity of *strength* (force), *power,* and *interest* in the only subject, that is, *the people,* which is the core thoughts in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy on democracy.

Secondly, it is necessary to *distinguish democracy from its distortions.* First of all, Ho Chi Minh *distinguished "democracy" from "excessive freedom."* This is a distortion in *operation.* He wrote: Democracy should not be misunderstood. When it is not decided, it may be argued, but when the decision has been made, there is no need for further argument. The argument is to discuss how to make it work and execute it quickly, not propose to reject it. It is necessary to prohibit such excessive freedom acts" (Minh, 2011, p.458)

He further specified *the difference between "dân chủ" (democracy) and "quan chủ."* This is a distortion in *the subject of power*. "Quan chủ" means democracy in terms of formality, but the content is contradictory, i.e., declaring that "serving the public" but in reality, it is against the interests of the public. One of the manifestations of "quan chủ" is bureaucracy. He clearly outlined the causes of bureaucracy as *being away from the people; despising the people; fearing the people; not trusting the people; not knowing the people,* and *not loving the people* (Minh, 2011, p.176-177).

The two distortions of democracy that Ho Chi Minh outlined above help us better understand the connotation of democracy. Democracy is *the dialectical unity between freedom and submission*. Freedom of thought is fundamental to coming to the truth, but when the truth is reached, freedom of thought transforms into the freedom of submission to the truth. If only *freedom* is emphasized, democracy will be transformed into excessive freedom; if only *submission* is emphasized, democracy will be transformed into bureaucracy. According to Ho Chi Minh, for democracy not to be distorted, it is necessary to follow *the people's path*, i.e., *be close to the people, appreciates the people, respect the people, trust the people, understand the people, and love the people.*

Thirdly, *democracy is fundamental to development*. That thought manifested itself when Ho Chi Minh referred to *the relationship between the three factors, including democracy, initiative, and enthusiasm*. For society to develop, creativity (initiative) and a positive attitude to act (enthusiasm) of the people are two key factors. However, to have creativity and a positive spirit of action, democracy must be promoted. Democracy is the foundation, the condition for creativity, and the positive attitude to act.

Democracy is the foundation for development, which also shows *that democracy is the source of vitality, the driving force for the development of organizations and society*. Ho Chi Minh pointed out that being undemocratic, having democracy weakened, and contracting democracy are *causes* of defects and impediments to developing organizations and society. For example, one reason why some defects appear in the Party is that: "*Democracy* in the Party is not widely implemented" (Minh, 2011, p.33-34). There is only one path to *prevent* and *rectify* these defects, which is democratic practice and democratic expansion. Ho Chi Minh wrote: "To fight against embezzlement, waste, and bureaucracy, it must be democratic, self-critical and critical, making people know to criticize themselves and dare to criticize others" (Minh, 2011, p.434)

The practice of democracy and democratic expansion is a "master key" to preventing and rectifying defects in the organization and society and promoting the development of organizations

and society. It is no coincidence that Ho Chi Minh talked and wrote a lot about the issue of democracy in organizations and forces when the resistance and national construction required the Communist Party to be strong, the army to be invincible, the Front to assemble and promote the power of the whole nation, etc. For instance, Ho Chi Minh demanded: "In the army, promote the democratic military" (Minh, 2011, p.404). When practicing democracy in the army, it will be "united and victory." "The Front needs to progress gradually to democracy, which means that the people in the Front will elect the leading authorities" (Minh, 2011, p.48) thus, "the results are full and good." In schools, "teachers take part in the teaching emulation movement, students take part in the studying emulation movement." Teachers and students are honest and united and use democratic ways (honest to self-criticism and criticism) to help each other improve strongly and everlastingly" (Minh, 2011, p.467), etc.

It can be said that considering *democracy as the foundation for development* has become an important connotation in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy.

Fourthly, to achieve true democracy, *the nation must be liberated first.* In the new social regime, *democracy should be institutionalized and ensured by law.* The legal foundation of democracy is the democratic constitution adopted by the National Assembly established by the democratic line. Ho Chi Minh wrote: "A National Assembly elected through a universal suffrage election has guaranteed the country a democratic Constitution" (Minh, 2011, p.521). *Democracy and dictatorship also need to go hand in hand.* Ho Chi Minh specified: "Democracy also needs dictatorship to preserve democracy" (Minh, 2011, p.457). To ensure democracy, the people need to *"know and skillfully use" their democratic rights through a system of the people's organizations.* People's organizations such as the People's Council, the Front, the Trade Union, the Farmers' National Salvation Association, the Women's National Salvation Association, etc., are organizations *of the people* and formed *by the people.* These organizations belong to the people, "striving for the people, defending the rights of the people, being a close connection between the people and the Government" (Minh, 2011, p.397). Thus, in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy, democracy is not only in the people organizing and using the state apparatus as the main tool to exercise their power but also in organizing and using the types of people's organizations. The assertion that the *people's organizations are also the tools and means of the people, used by the people to exercise their mastery rights,* is a unique content of democracy according to Ho Chi Minh's conception, which is that the people *self-organize and self-regulate* social life.

With all of the above, in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy, democracy is valuable. Judging the value of democracy, Ho Chi Minh said: "**Democracy is the most precious property of the people** (I emphasize - LQK)" (Minh, 2011, p.457)

Democracy is the most precious property of the people, so it is also a major goal of the Revolution. This is a consistent view of Ho Chi Minh. In his Testament, Ho Chi Minh's final wish was for the entire Party and people to unite to build a peaceful, united, independent, democratic and prosperous Vietnam, making a worthy contribution to the cause of the world revolution (Minh, 2011, p.614). Obviously, in Ho Chi Minh's political philosophy, democracy was and has always been a noble value and goal of the revolutionary cause of the Vietnamese people.

4. Conclusion

The Nation and the People are the major categories where the deepest and highest concerns of Ho Chi Minh converge. He once said: "I only have one desire, the ultimate desire is to make our country completely independent, our people completely free, all compatriots have food to eat, clothes to wear, anyone can study" (Minh, 2011, p.187)

For Ho Chi Minh, equality is a sacred and imprescriptible right. It is not only of every human being but also of every community and every nation. The issue of equality is approached systematically, from a human level to an individual level, and equality is always seen as a universal value. In the philosophy of social development in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh specified: "It is necessary to reform the old society into a new society to move towards socialism, which is without a regime of people who exploit people. An equal society means that everyone must work and have labor rights. Those who do much will receive more interest, those who do little will receive less interest, and those who do not work will receive no interest" (Minh, 2011, p.241). It can be seen that equality is a fundamental value in the value system that the revolutionary career of the Vietnamese people under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam has always pursued.

Ho Chi Minh considers the practice of democracy as a master key to handling everything, including fighting against inequality and implementing social equality. In fact, the Communist Party of Vietnam has inherited and developed Ho Chi Minh's thoughts in general, and his thoughts on democracy in particular, to resolve issues in the protection and development of the country,

including the problem of social structural change and social stratification. In the current context, we emphasize some evocative points from Ho Chi Minh heritage as follows:

Firstly, according to Ho Chi Minh, democracy means that all classes have the rights and opportunities to participate in State affairs and planning lines and policies. Ho Chi Minh required that the policy promulgation mechanism be based on the foundation of accurately grasping the legitimate minds and aspirations of the people. Cadres must be close to, understand, listen to, and learn from the people to do so. He specified: "Politics should be introduced to the people." In the past, everything is done according to the order of the upper level. Everything must be done by collecting opinions from the lower level (Minh, 2011, p.338). Truly respect the people's voice, wisdom, and ways. Democracy is to promote the creative power and political activism of the people, which is a vital democratic solution that needs to be studied and exploited from the heritage of Ho Chi Minh in solving inequality in Vietnam today.

Secondly, from Ho Chi Minh's democratic view, "dân" (the people) are the whole nation, equal and non-discriminatory. Whatever the social structure approach (in Ho Chi Minh's words, it is "regardless of economic conditions, religion, race, etc."), the resolution of social inequality issues needs to be imbued with the spirit of equality, i.e., gathering and promoting the role of the people, the whole nation. Of course, non-discrimination does not mean homogenizing social forces. As a practical Marxist, Ho Chi Minh understood the social differences between social forces, whether class, ethnicity, or religion. However, importantly, Ho Chi Minh saw the difference in depth from the characteristics of each force to determine the right position and role of the forces for the general revolutionary cause of the whole nation and have policies to gather and promote those forces on that basis. Thus, social differences do not lead to social inequality and stratification but social equality, solidarity, and mutual support. This is a significant methodological suggestion that needs special attention in addressing social inequality in Vietnam today, which is the essence of the problem to transform the social structure and social stratification as mentioned above.

Thirdly, to apply Ho Chi Minh's democratic thoughts to address inequality, it is necessary to apply his instructions on What and How to practice democracy. What needs to be achieved is: "To help the poor to become sufficient, to help the sufficient people to become quite rich, to help the quite rich ones to get richer. To help everyone to be literate. Everyone becomes united and patriotic". "Rich" and "literate" are the goals of comprehensive development both materially and

spiritually, or in Ho Chi Minh's words, "be rich in material, be strong in spirit." This is in Oriental philosophy, which is the mutual development of richness and education. Ho Chi Minh inherited and added that not only do individuals develop comprehensively, but they are also united and strive for the common interest of the nation together. If that goal is achieved, the mechanism of reducing and overcoming social inequality will be implicit in it. Besides, Ho Chi Minh further emphasized how to do this: "Bring talents, strength, property of the people to redound to the people's advantage. The government does not provide money, but the plan to encourage it" (Minh, 2011, p.81) It is truly and fully democratic because it not only determines the need to mobilize *all* resources from the people, including talents, strength, and property but also specifies the role of the State as the governing body or the leader of society in a genuinely democratic regime. Thus, the relationship between What and How forms the relationship between the Rights and Obligations of the people, in a cause of the people, carried out by the people and for the people. It is truly and fully democratic, and practicing democracy is the principle for solving all problems, including social inequality.

Fourthly, democratic education is a real solution that Ho Chi Minh was well aware of its value and always focused on using to solve the problems of the Revolution. As soon as the new regime was born, on September 3, 1945, during the first session of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh identified the task against ignorance as one of the six urgent ones to be done immediately. He specified: "An ignorant nation is a weak one" (Minh, 2011, p.7). In Ho Chi Minh's view, the enjoyment of an education that promotes all human possibilities is the right of every citizen in a democratic society. However, at the same time, learning is an obligation of every citizen to improve their mastery capacity, thereby fulfilling their mastery role in the new social regime. Ho Chi Minh is well aware that knowledge, education, and wisdom are a resource for the development of each individual, each group of people, and society. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities to access this resource so "everyone can learn." It is a view ahead of his time. Although Ho Chi Minh raised this point 75 years ago, it has been topical, especially in addressing social inequality in Vietnam today. Research by many experts and international organizations shows that social mobility in the income of Vietnamese people in recent years is associated with education level. According to Oxfam research, the practice has been proven. Vietnamese people also know that "higher education will help their children increase their income

and their chances of stable job-seeking. The lowest income and higher income groups all believe in the long-term role of education for upward mobility.[9] "

Fifthly, it is necessary to build a democratic institutional system, from the constitution, the law to the moral code, etc., while promoting the role of the whole political system, which is the democratic institutions of the people, to solve the problems of social inequality. In addition, to solve the problem of social inequality and implement equality in its positive sense, it is necessary to combine the implementation of equal values with other values, especially the value of democratic justice, the rule of law, equity, and equality, which is the group of values that come together in the ideological heritage, as well as in Ho Chi Minh's political practice. Also, it is necessary to be paid special attention to this issue in the current situation. Here, Ho Chi Minh emphasized that it is necessary to be vigilant against the degradation of the ideal of equality. He often emphasized that equality does not mean being equal in all circumstances, i.e., the good and the weak ones are not considered equal, and the achievements received by people who contributed more, people who contributed less, and those who did not contribute are different. It is because that degraded equality has violated the value of equity. He also noted that becoming anarchism or violating the law is impossible in the name of equality. He specified that the implementation of equality and other political values is a long-term process, which cannot be subjective, dismissive, or unhistorical, and requires the participation of the entire political system. It requires the spirit of exemplariness, sacrifice, or "partly suffering" of leadership, authority organizations, and individuals, which are the positions prone to unequal thinking and behavior.

Social structural change and social stratification toward increasing social inequality is a trend in Vietnam. It is an inevitable movement in the development process. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the fight against social inequalities is being implemented very strongly and effectively in Vietnam. On October 8, 2020, Oxfam published the *Global Report on the Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index (CRII) 2020*, in which Vietnam ranked second in the ASEAN region. Globally, Vietnam ranked 77 out of 158 countries. With these results, Vietnam was recognized as "having achieved outstanding results on the Commitment to Reduce Inequality Index." However, the trend of increasing inequality in Vietnam is complicated. In that situation, Ho

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[9]Oxfam, ibid., p. 9.

Chi Minh's thoughts on democracy provide important suggestions for solving this problem in Vietnam. It is a valuable resource that needs to be further researched, exploited, and promoted./.

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