

Socio-Historical Conditions and Ideological Premises for the Formation and Development of the Relationship Between Rule of Virtue and Rule of Law in Ho Chi Minh's Thought

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ABSTRACT: In the context of advancing the construction of a Socialist Rule-of-Law State in Vietnam today, the harmonious combination of virtue and law plays a pivotal role in maintaining social stability and sustainable development. This article focuses on analyzing the socio-historical conditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that influenced the formation and development of the relationship between the “rule of virtue” (Rule of Virtue) and the “rule of law” (Rule of Law) in Ho Chi Minh's thought. By employing integrated research methodologies—including historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, and textual analyses—the author clarifies the objective necessity and structural creativity of Ho Chi Minh in harmonizing Eastern political traditions with Marxist-Leninist theory and modern legal tenets. The research findings provide a foundational theoretical framework to guide the Party and State in optimizing social management methods, thereby realizing the national goals of wealth, strength, democracy, justice, and civilization in the new era.

KEYWORDS: Rule of Virtue; Rule of Law; Ho Chi Minh's thought; Socialist Rule-of-Law State; Socio-historical conditions; Ideological premises.

1. INTRODUCTION

The dialectical relationship between morality and law (the rule of virtue and the rule of law) constitutes one of the central themes in the history of global political thought. In ancient times, Aristotle laid the groundwork for the structural connection between these two categories within statecraft. In the modern era, Montesquieu, in his seminal work “On the Spirit of Laws”, further affirmed that statutory law does not exist in absolute isolation but invariably interacts with, and is influenced by, the moral foundations of society. In Vietnam, this synthesis of law and morality was established early in national history.

In the context of current integration and strong development of productive forces, the dialectical relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law remains highly relevant. Practical experience shows that the reform process is facing numerous challenges, as the decline in ideology, morality, and lifestyle among some cadres and Party members has not been thoroughly eradicated; at the same time, the legal system, although being perfected, still has overlapping points, and enforcement in some areas is not strictly enforced. This situation urgently requires continued systematic research into the conditions for the formation and development of Ho Chi Minh's thought on the relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law. This is the theoretical “key” to building a national governance system that is both strict and humane in the current period.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the worldview and methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, the author also employs a combination of methods such as: the logical and historical method, which describes and reconstructs historical events as they actually existed in the past, with their richness, diversity, and unique characteristics, thereby revealing the essence, laws of development, and the underlying thread running through them. This aims to grasp the logical development process of the relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law in President Ho Chi Minh's thought, while also connecting it to specific historical conditions; the analytical and synthetic method, which divides the whole into parts and connects and unifies these parts to understand the whole; this integrated approach serves to demonstrate the relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law in his thought.

The inductive and deductive method is used to generalize events, experiential documents, and build extended theories. This method focuses on researching and presenting the general theory of the relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law, and the conditions and prerequisites for the formation of this relationship in President Ho Chi Minh's thought. The textual analysis method is a data-based method for extracting information. It is primarily used to generalize the content of the relationship between the rule

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of virtue and the rule of law, ensuring accuracy and integrity in the research process. Through this, the basic content of the unified, dialectical relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law in Ho Chi Minh's thought is grasped.

The comparative and contrastive method is a scientific research method that uses texts and data to systematically identify and analyze similarities and differences. From this, it is possible to clarify the nature, unique characteristics, and lawful relationships between objects and textual content within a given context. This method is used by the author to clarify assessments and observations, aiming to draw out the historical significance of the relationship between the rule of virtue and the rule of law in Ho Chi Minh's thought in relation to the construction of a Socialist Rule-of-Law State in Vietnam today.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Global Context and Ideological Premises for Ho Chi Minh's Virtue-Law Concept In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the world witnessed profound changes in economics, politics, and society, creating important historical prerequisites for re-evaluating the relationship between ethics and law in social governance. This context also directly contributed to the formation of Ho Chi Minh's thought on the combination of the rule of virtue and the rule of law.

First and foremost, the transformation of capitalism into imperialism fundamentally altered the structure of the world's economic and political system. The accumulation and concentration of capital led to the emergence of monopolies that dominated social life and were closely linked to the bourgeois state. From there, wars of aggression were waged to expand markets and spheres of influence, turning many countries into colonies and dependencies. The formation of the imperialist system not only deepened class contradictions but also intensified national contradictions on a global scale. In this context, the bourgeois state increasingly revealed its class nature. Particularly in colonial contexts, statutory law degenerated into a purely coercive apparatus tailored for subjugation and exploitation, precipitating a structural paradox where formal legality existed void of substantive justice. Conversely, morality, if not institutionalized by law, is unlikely to be effective in social life. Therefore, the issue is not a choice between the rule of virtue and the rule of law, but rather establishing a dialectical relationship between these two elements. This strongly influenced President Ho Chi Minh's shift in understanding and thinking regarding the roles of law and morality.

Along with the transformation of capitalism into imperialism, in the context of the capitalist crisis, Marxism-Leninism emerged as a scientific ideology, providing a theoretical basis for re-evaluating the role of the state and law. In particular, the victory of the 1917 Russian October Revolution opened a new era in human history, affirming the feasibility of revolutionary theory. Building upon the ideas of Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin pointed out that the state and law are inherently class-based, but during the transition to socialism, law remains essential in organizing and protecting the new social order. This viewpoint clearly demonstrates dialectical thinking: law is not negated but is guided by the goal of human liberation; revolutionary morality does not replace law but serves as a guide for the content and objectives of law.

On a global scale, expanding industrialization and urbanization at that time weakened traditional community relations, making law increasingly important in regulating society. However, when law becomes more coercive without a moral foundation, it can increase resistance and a crisis of trust. This necessitates the construction of a model of social governance in which law and morality complement each other. For colonial countries, this issue becomes even more urgent. Colonial law was not linked to justice but directly served the goal of domination. This practice gave rise to the need to redefine law on the foundation of national liberation morality. Law only truly has meaning when it reflects the will and interests of the people.

In his search for a path to national salvation, Ho Chi Minh directly experienced both models: bourgeois rule of law and the practice of proletarian revolution. From this, he arrived at a comprehensive and creative understanding: governance by virtue and governance by law are not two opposing paths, but two inseparable aspects in social governance. Law ensures the discipline and effectiveness of state power; morality ensures the legitimacy and humanity of that power. The combination of these two elements is not only a requirement of the Vietnamese revolutionary practice, but also a principle of universal value in building a modern state.

3.2. Domestic Socio-Historical Conditions and Ideological Context for Ho Chi Minh's Virtue-Law Concept

From 1858, when the French colonialists launched their invasion, Vietnam, once an independent feudal state, became a semi-feudal colony. French colonial rule not only brought about a shift in political power but also led to profound changes in the economy, society, and culture, disrupting the entire traditional structure of Vietnamese society.

Economically, the French colonialists maintained backward, small-scale agricultural production relations while simultaneously promoting the exploitation of the colony to serve the interests of the mother country. They expanded the industrial system, exploited resources, and developed large-scale plantations, but without aiming to develop the indigenous economy to exploit cheap labor and plunder resources. Colonial economic policies stifled the development of national capital, making the Vietnamese economy completely dependent on France. Politically, the French colonialists established a tight administrative apparatus, dividing Vietnam into three regions and placing them under the direct control of French officials. At the same time, they maintained the feudal court as a tool serving the ruling apparatus. In this system, the Vietnamese people not only lost their national independence but were also deprived of basic freedoms and democratic rights. Culturally and socially, the French colonialists implemented a policy of deliberate

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ignorance and cultural enslavement to weaken national consciousness. Educational institutions were restricted, while social vices were encouraged as a tool for mental control. As a result, the material and spiritual lives of the people deteriorated, and society fell into a comprehensive crisis.

In this context, Vietnamese society underwent profound class differentiation. The peasantry, comprising the vast majority of the population, suffered heavy oppression and exploitation, yet became a powerful revolutionary force. The working class, though emerging later, developed rapidly, maintained close ties with the peasantry, and quickly embraced revolutionary ideals. The national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, despite their economic and political limitations, still possessed a nationalistic spirit and the capacity to participate in the patriotic movement. This transformation of social structure gave rise to fundamental contradictions: the contradiction between the Vietnamese nation and the French colonialists and their collaborators; the contradiction between the peasantry and the feudal landlords; and the contradiction between the workers and the bourgeoisie.

These contradictions were both manifestations of social crisis and driving forces behind the national liberation struggle. However, viewed from a deeper perspective, Vietnamese society at this time was not only facing political and economic crises, but also a crisis of values. The traditional model of rule based on Confucianism – which had once played a regulatory role in feudal society – was gradually weakening and losing its legitimacy. Meanwhile, the imposed colonial legal system was coercive in nature, serving the goals of domination and completely alien to the interests of the people.

Parallel with this profound class differentiation, the decline of the feudal state at the end of the 19th century clearly demonstrated the historical limitations of a purely virtue-based governance model. In this structure, state power relied primarily on the moral character of the rulers, lacking a mechanism for legal control. When the governing apparatus became weak, the entire system quickly fell into crisis. This shows that the rule of virtue, if not institutionalized by law, is insufficient to regulate a rapidly changing society. Conversely, the colonial legal system, despite its modern form, lacked moral legitimacy. It did not aim to protect human rights, but directly served the goals of exploitation and domination. For the Vietnamese people, law was not associated with justice, but was synonymous with coercion and oppression. This reality shows that if the rule of law is separated from its moral foundation and the interests of the people, it will become a tool for the corruption of power. Furthermore, the penetration of colonial capitalism profoundly transformed the social structure and spiritual life. Traditional values were shaken, while new values had not yet been fully established. This situation led the people to yearn for a new moral foundation while simultaneously needing a modern legal mechanism to organize their lives. It is in this intersection that the need to integrate ethics and law became a historical necessity.

Furthermore, in the practical struggle for national liberation in the early 20th century, patriotic movements such as the Can Vuong movement, the Dong Du movement, and the Duy Tan movement, while demonstrating profound national spirit, all failed. The reasons lay not only in the balance of power, but also in the lack of a correct political line and a state model suitable to the new historical conditions. The feudal tendency with the ideal of restoring the old order was no longer appropriate; the bourgeois democratic tendency, despite its progressive elements, could not thoroughly solve the problem of national independence. These failures showed that Vietnamese society was facing a crisis regarding the path to national salvation. It is in this context that the need to find a new model of governance became urgent. This model could not rely solely on traditional rule of virtue, nor could it simply copy bourgeois rule of law, but needed to dialectically combine both elements through a rigorous process of critical inheritance. Specifically, Ho Chi Minh critically filtered out the conservative aspects of Confucianism while preserving its emphasis on moral self-cultivation, and simultaneously rejected the oppressive nature of colonial law while embracing the progressive principles of modern constitutionalism.

Morality had to become the spiritual foundation of state power; law must be a tool to institutionalize and ensure that these moral values are implemented in social life. In the process of seeking a path to national salvation, he inherited the nation's tradition of humanity and righteousness and absorbed the essence of modern legal thought and Marxism-Leninism. From this, he formed a unique concept: building a state must be closely linked to the harmonious combination of revolutionary morality and the people's law. In this concept, morality is not only a moral standard, but also the foundation that creates the legitimacy of power; law is not only a tool of management, but also a means of ensuring that power is exercised fairly and effectively. The unity between the rule of virtue and the rule of law is therefore not only a practical requirement of the Vietnamese revolution, but also a principle of universal value in building a modern state.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, President Ho Chi Minh stands as an exemplary paradigm for the dialectical integration of ethics and jurisprudence. While systematically institutionalizing the authority of statutory law, he consistently reinforced the spiritual foundation of revolutionary morality. As a manifested form of social consciousness, his conceptualization of the synergy between the rule of virtue and the rule of law directly mirrors the historical necessities and structural demands of Vietnam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His enduring contribution marks a significant evolutionary leap in Vietnamese political thought—a creative amalgamation of traditional national values, Eastern political legacy, and Marxist-Leninist state theory. Ultimately, studying this paradigm not

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only clarifies historical trajectories but provides a vital theoretical framework for contemporary statecraft, wherein law and morality serve as twin pillars securing human rights, social equity, and sustainable national governance.

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