

The Perspectives on "Sentiment" and " Principle " in Ho Chi Minh's Thought and Its Application by the Communist Party of Vietnam in the Current Era

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Abstract

“Tinh” (Sentiment/Affection) and “Lý” (Reason/Principle) are two fundamental categories in Eastern culture, reflecting the relationship between human emotion and intellect, and between human morality and social principles.

In Ho Chi Minh's thought, the unity of “Tinh” and “Lý” is vividly expressed in his conceptions of humanity, ethics, leadership style, and working methodology.

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has profoundly inherited and applied this perspective in Party building, state governance, and social leadership, especially amidst the current context of renovation, international integration, and digital transformation.

This article analyzes the internal meaning of “Tinh” and “Lý” in Ho Chi Minh's thought, identifies the creative application by the Party in the new era, and thereby affirms the sustainable orientational value of Ho Chi Minh's ideology in contemporary Vietnamese socio-political life.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh, Sentiment and Principle, Ho Chi Minh's Ideology, The Communist Party of Vietnam, Application.

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1. Introduction

In Eastern culture, particularly in the Vietnamese philosophy of life, “Tinh” and “Lý” are two intimately connected categories, forming the identity of behavior and the foundation of morality. “Lý” pertains to principle, correctness, and normativity, while “Tinh” represents emotion, human compassion, and tolerance. Ho Chi Minh, the inheritor of the nation's cultural essence and mankind's civilization, skillfully combined these two factors in his thought and revolutionary actions.

Throughout its leadership process, the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently maintained the principle of “Lý”—meaning adherence to the foundation of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought—while simultaneously being imbued with “Tinh”—meaning placing people at the center, serving the people, and working for the people's happiness. The 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 2021 continued its emphasis on the requirement: “Building the Party and the political system to be comprehensively clean and strong; promoting socialist democracy; strengthening the great national unity bloc”, which demonstrates the tight and harmonious combination of “Tinh” and “Lý” in the current guidelines and policies of our Party.

2. Theoretical Basis of “Tinh” and “Lý” in Ho Chi Minh's Thought

2.1. “Sentiment” and “Principle” in Vietnamese cultural tradition.

In the long course of national history, Vietnamese culture has formed many unique values, among which the harmony between “Tinh” and “Lý” is a prominent feature, profoundly influencing the spiritual life and behavior of the Vietnamese people. “Tinh” and “Lý” are not merely two ethical categories but are also two aspects that reflect how the Vietnamese perceive the world and resolve social relationships.

“Tinh” is first and foremost humanistic sentiments: familial affection, neighborhood solidarity, compassion, altruism, and loyalty. It represents the soft, warm depth of Vietnamese culture, originating from the wet-rice agriculture life, where the residing community had to rely on each other for survival. Meanwhile, “Lý” expresses the rules, standards of morality and law, things considered right or wrong within the social framework. Although significantly influenced by the Confucian system of thought, “Lý” in Vietnamese culture is not rigid; it is often “softened” to suit the realities of life.

The relationship between “Tinh” and “Lý” in Vietnamese culture is not one of opposition, but of harmonious combination. National tradition highly values “Tinh”, viewing it as the starting and destination point of all behavior. Therefore, the Vietnamese always aspire to act in a way that is “in accordance with both sentiment and reason”. Sometimes, what is “Lý” (correct principle) may yield to what is “Tinh” to maintain peace and harmony. This behavioral style was clearly evident in the former village life through the familiar saying “The king’s law yields to the village’s custom”, showing that community stability and solidarity were no less important than order and rules. Nevertheless, “Lý” in Vietnamese culture still plays the role of harmonizing emotions, helping people avoid falling into emotionalism or favoritism, and ensuring minimum fairness in many relationships.

The manifestations of “Tinh” and “Lý” are visible in family, community, and arts and literature. In the Vietnamese family, harmony, filial piety, and affection are always prioritized, and all admonishments and punishments are aimed at maintaining family ties. In village communities, conflicts are often resolved through negotiation and reconciliation, aiming for “mutual benefit”. Traditional literature, from folk songs (*ca dao*) to *The Tale of Kieu*, deeply reflects the intertwining of sentiment and morality: people are understood and sympathized with, but still must be placed within the framework of social ethical values.

However, the high emphasis on “Tinh” also brings certain limitations. The spirit of deference and favoritism due to personal ties sometimes compromises fairness and transparency in relationships. In modern society, where legal discipline and transparency need to be prioritized, a leaning towards “Tinh” easily leads to thinking of “leniency” or “indulgences”, hindering healthy development. Therefore, harmonizing “Tinh” and “Lý” is an urgent requirement to preserve traditional humanity and tolerance while simultaneously affirming the supremacy of law and principle.

It can be asserted that “Tinh” and “Lý” are two pillars creating the identity of Vietnamese culture. The blending of the two both forms the beauty of the Vietnamese soul and poses challenges in the new context. By applying “Tinh” to foster compassion and using “Lý” to consolidate discipline, we can build a civilized society that remains rich in national identity.

In summary, in Vietnamese culture, “Tinh” is viewed as the ethical foundation, a manifestation of compassion, loyalty, and attachment. “Lý” expresses order, discipline, standards, and rules of conduct. The Vietnamese have long advocated “harmonizing sentiment and reason”, and “Democracy, discipline, affection, responsibility” in resolving all social relationships. The harmony between these two elements is the measure of human character and wisdom. Ho Chi Minh was deeply imbued with this value, while also absorbing the scientific, dialectical materialist spirit of Marxism-Leninism to elevate “Tinh” and “Lý” to the level of revolutionary action philosophy.

2.2. The Origin of the “Tinh” and “Lý” Conception in Ho Chi Minh's Thought

Ho Chi Minh's thought is the crystallization of national cultural values, the essence of human intellect, and practical revolutionary experience. In it, the conception of the harmonious combination of “Tinh” and “Lý” is a prominent feature, profoundly influencing the style of behavior, ethics, and leadership methodology of the President. This conception did not form overnight; rather, it was forged from various ideological and cultural sources, creating a value system that is at once humanistic and flexible, yet scientific and principled.

First and foremost, the deepest origin of the “Tinh – Lý” conception in Ho Chi Minh stems from the Vietnamese national cultural tradition. Born into a Confucian family rich in patriotism, and raised in a highly communal rural environment, the President was deeply imbued with the morality of “Love others as yourself”, “People live to love each other”, the spirit of righteousness of Nguyen Trai, the tolerance of his ancestors, and the sentiment-focused way of life of the Vietnamese. In the agricultural society, where people relied on each other for survival, “Tinh” was always valued: neighborhood solidarity, national affection, and mutual care. These values soon became a part of Ho Chi Minh's character, creating a depth of human compassion and broad love for humanity. This was the foundation for him to consistently uphold empathy, tolerance, and respect for people in all circumstances.

Furthermore, the three Eastern religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, also played an important role in shaping this conception. From Confucianism, Ho Chi Minh absorbed the spirit of integrity, valuing morality, upholding responsibility, and discipline—which created the “Lý” part in his thought: work must be principled and absolutely impartial. From Buddhism, he learned compassion, human kindness, and empathy for human suffering—the source of the “Tinh” part. And Taoism brought him flexibility, simplicity, and humility, helping him handle situations adaptively, being rigid in principle yet flexible in practice. Ho Chi Minh did not assimilate these in a rigid manner, but selectively chose the essence of each ideological system to combine into a harmonious philosophy of life.

Crucially, Marxism-Leninism played a decisive role in perfecting Ho Chi Minh's “Tinh – Lý” conception. This doctrine provided him with a scientific worldview and methodology, emphasizing objective laws, discipline, and the principled nature of the revolution—which is the “Lý” part elevated to a theoretical level. But at the same time, Marxism-Leninism also contained a noble humanitarian spirit, aiming to liberate people from oppression and exploitation—which merged with his traditional “Tinh”, creating a deep love for the people that did not deviate from revolutionary reason.

Finally, the practical experience of over thirty years of searching for national salvation and the process of leading the revolution helped Ho Chi Minh integrate the aforementioned influences into a complete conception. Through contact with many Western cultures, he clearly understood the necessity of reason, legality, and principles in social organization. But the practical work of mobilizing the masses showed the power of affection, closeness, and sincerity. He realized that only by harmoniously combining “Lý” (correctness, science) and “Tinh” (human compassion and moral influence) could the support of the people be won and the revolution be led to victory.

From these origins, the “Tinh” and “Lý” conception in Ho Chi Minh's thought became a core value: work must be impartial, reasonable, and principled, but dealing with people must be humane, tolerant, and deeply imbued with compassion. The blend of Tinh and Lý not only created Ho Chi Minh's exemplary style of conduct but also serves as a profound lesson for cadres, Party members, and every Vietnamese today.

From national cultural tradition, through the process of international revolutionary activity, Ho Chi Minh combined the intellect and reason of the West with the morality of the East. “Lý” in Ho Chi Minh's thought is the reason of the revolution, the ideal of national independence associated with socialism. “Tinh” is compassion, love for humanity, and loving the people as oneself. He once said: “Nothing is more precious than independence, freedom”, which is “Lý”. But at the same time, he also affirmed: “I have only one ultimate aspiration, to make our country completely independent, our people completely free, everyone to have food and clothing, everyone to be educated”, which is “Tinh” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 4, p. 62).

“Tinh” in Ho Chi Minh's thought is deep patriotism and love for the people, broad tolerance, rich human kindness, and also a simple lifestyle, closeness to the people, respect for humanity, and respect for the right to mastery. Besides, he also valued “Lý”, which is principle, discipline, rigorousness, scientific nature, respect for law, steadfastness in guidelines, goals, and a firm political stance. Ho Chi Minh did not absolutize “Tinh” or “Lý” but combined these two factors skillfully. He believed that having “Tinh” without “Lý” easily leads to emotionalism and mistakes, while having “Lý” without “Tinh” would be dry and lack persuasiveness. This unity became the foundation for Ho Chi Minh's ethics, style, and leadership methodology, which possesses both revolutionary reason and profound human sentiment.

3. Ho Chi Minh's Conception of the Harmony between “Tinh” and “Lý”

In Relation to the People

In Ho Chi Minh's thought, the conception of “Tinh” and “Lý” in relation to the people was formed and asserted as a foundational principle, guiding the Party's entire orientation and leadership method.

First, “Tinh” according to Ho Chi Minh is deep, sincere, and unconditional love for the masses. He considered the people as the “root of the nation” and the “nurturers and supporters of the revolution”, thus cadres must show respect and gratitude to the people. In “Changing the Working Style” (1947), he wrote: “The masses know how to solve many problems simply, quickly, and thoroughly, while talented individuals and large organizations contemplate endlessly without solution”. This shows Ho Chi Minh's deep understanding of the people's creative power, requiring cadres to be close to and genuinely listen to the people. “Tinh” is also expressed through a simple lifestyle, blending into the people's daily life. He instructed cadres and Party members: “Any work beneficial to the people, we must wholeheartedly do; any work harmful to the people, we must wholeheartedly avoid” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 293). This is precisely the combination of “Lý” (the

principle of placing the people at the center) and “Tinh” (the affection for, closeness to, and respect for the people). He viewed mass mobilization work as the art of “using sentiment to influence”, but it must be based on the principle of “respecting the people, believing the people, learning from the people”.

However, Ho Chi Minh never viewed “Tinh” as the sole factor. Alongside “Tinh”, he particularly emphasized “Lý”, meaning revolutionary reason, principle, discipline, and impartiality in action. “Lý” is the basis for cadres to maintain their correct stance, preventing emotion, favoritism, or personal relationships from dominating the service of the people. In the work “The Revolutionary Path” (1927), he affirmed: “To guide the people, one must first set an example oneself”. This thought reflects a form of “Lý” with pedagogical significance: reason must be linked to morality, and principle must go hand-in-hand with conviction and responsibility. Furthermore, Ho Chi Minh required cadres to rely on the Party's correct guidelines, science, and law to explain and persuade the people: “Must make the people understand, the people believe, the people follow”.

The unique feature in Ho Chi Minh's thought is the skillful combination of “Tinh” and “Lý”, forming a standard of conduct for the revolutionary state. He clearly stated: if only “Tinh” exists without “Lý”, it is easy to fall into emotionalism, laxity, or even indulgence; conversely, having only “Lý” without “Tinh” makes cadres rigid, distant from the people, and difficult to persuade the masses. Therefore, he proposed the principle: “Must have affection but must have discipline; must have discipline but must maintain human sentiment”. Thanks to this combination, Ho Chi Minh's leadership style was both close and simple, yet persistent and scientific, thereby building the people's enduring trust in the Party. The thought of combining “Tinh” and “Lý” thus becomes a value with profound theoretical and practical significance, contributing to orienting the ethics and working methods of the cadre team in the current period.

In Cadre Work and Party Building

“Tinh” is expressed through human compassion, tolerance, and the encouragement of cadres to progress; “Lý” is strict discipline, fairness, and transparency. Ho Chi Minh once said: “Having “Tinh” without “Lý” is indulgence; having “Lý” without “Tinh” is dryness. Work must have both “Lý” and “Tinh” (cited by Nguyen Van Khoan, 2010, p. 214). In cadre work, he required “valuing virtue more than talent”, but without favoritism. Towards cadres and civil servants who committed mistakes, formed cliques for personal gain, causing losses to state funds and eroding the people's trust, he resolutely handled the matter: “Whoever has committed the above mistakes must try their best to correct them; if they do not self-correct, the Government will not tolerate it” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 4, p. 58). According to Ho Chi Minh, state cadres and civil servants must possess both virtue and talent, being both “red” (virtuous) and “expert”(talented), but virtue must be the root. For leading cadres, Ho Chi Minh required them to know people, know how to use people, and create conditions for staff to develop their talents and qualities.

Regarding Party building work, Ho Chi Minh was deeply concerned throughout his life, paying special attention to the work of building and rectifying the Party. He emphasized: “Only when the Party is solid can the revolution succeed, just as only when the helmsman is steady can the boat sail”. In the principles of Party organization and activity, Ho Chi Minh prioritized the work of “criticism and self-criticism” to keep the Party clean and strong. Ho Chi Minh clearly stated: “Self-criticism and criticism is the sharpest weapon; it helps our Party to be strong and grow stronger day by day. Thanks to it, we correct shortcomings, develop advantages, and continuously progress”. The principle of “criticism and self-criticism” within the Party clearly expresses the “Tinh”, “Lý” perspective, which is both distinct and mutually supportive. This principle helps Party members point out errors, shortcomings, and flaws, thereby providing an opportunity for correction, demonstrating the “Tinh” within the Party. On the other hand, this principle is also a measure to remind Party members to be self-aware and honestly state their flaws, not covering up mistakes, educating Party members, and demonstrating broad democracy, which is “Lý”.

Besides, Ho Chi Minh valued building and rectifying the Party, viewing it as an inevitable task. Rectifying the Party is necessary to overcome subjective, impatient, and willful thinking, regardless of objective laws. Rectifying the Party is also to overcome self-importance and arrogance, preventing and combating the “communist arrogance” disease. The regular rectification of the Party demonstrates the strict “Lý”, helping the Party become cleaner and stronger, while also expressing the genuine, bold, and progressive ethical “Tinh” of the Party.

In Interpersonal Conduct and Leadership Methodology

In Ho Chi Minh's thought system, the relationship between “Tinh” and “Lý” holds a particularly important role, manifested both in his way of dealing with people and in his revolutionary leadership methodology. In Ho Chi Minh, “Tinh” and “Lý” are neither separate nor opposed, but blend into a consistent

ethical-methodological principle: genuine affection must be shown towards people, but work must be based on scientific reason, discipline, and principles. This combination creates a humanistic, simple, and persuasive style of conduct, and a scientific, effective leadership methodology.

Firstly, the conception of “Tinh” in Ho Chi Minh's interpersonal conduct originates from the nation's tradition of “righteousness and humanity” and the Buddhist spirit of compassion that he absorbed early on. For Ho Chi Minh, dealing with people must stem from love, empathy, and respect. He viewed the people as his relatives, expressed in his simple, close lifestyle, with no barrier between the leader and the masses. In “Changing the Working Style” (1947), he emphasized: “Cadres must understand the people, be close to the people, and learn from the people”, because only with genuine affection can one influence people and build trust. This conception is clearly shown in many daily stories: he always prioritized asking after farmers, workers, and soldiers before discussing political matters; when meeting children, he would bend down to eye level; and to political prisoners captured by the enemy, he always encouraged them to “maintain their spirit”, treating them as comrades.

However, in Ho Chi Minh's thought, “Tinh” is never separated from “Lý”. “Lý” is bright reason, principle, discipline, responsibility, and the impartiality of a revolutionary. He loved people but did not condone wrong actions. He was tolerant but maintained discipline. In “Revolutionary Ethics” (1958), he wrote: “Love people, but be strict with oneself, without favoritism or exploiting sentiment”. In “The Revolutionary Path” (1927), he emphasized “to guide the masses, one must first set an example oneself”, clearly showing the conception that reason must go hand-in-hand with ethics and practical action. Therefore, interpersonal conduct according to Ho Chi Minh is not emotional yielding, but affection guided by reason and revolutionary responsibility.

Based on this foundation, in his leadership methodology, Ho Chi Minh highly advocated the skillful combination of “Tinh” and “Lý” to achieve the highest effectiveness. Regarding “Tinh”, he believed that leaders must trust, rely on, and work for the people. He repeatedly affirmed: “A hundred times easier without the people is still impossible, a thousand times harder with the people is still possible”, showing absolute trust in the people's strength. This factor created a democratic, close leadership style that valued dialogue, listening, and persuasion. In practice, Ho Chi Minh often used the method of “using sentiment to influence”, such as the way he educated youth and advised erring cadres with sincere, gentle, yet highly persuasive words.

In parallel, “Lý” plays the role of maintaining leadership principles. He required cadres to be “absolutely impartial”, prioritizing the nation's interests above all else; they must work with planning, scientifically, and respect objective laws. He criticized attitudes of “emotionalism”, “leniency”, and “deference”, believing they could harm the people and the Party. Therefore, in leadership, he emphasized the method of “speaking goes hand-in-hand with doing”, “taking results as the measure”, and “taking the people as the evaluation standard”. Ho Chi Minh's style is a unique combination of reason and emotion. He always maintained principles, yet was flexible and adaptable. When dealing with work, Ho Chi Minh did not impose dry commands but persuaded with reason and influenced with human affection. The saying “Maintain the unchangeable, adapt to ten thousand changes” is a profound expression of the blending between “Lý” (the unchangeable, the goal of independence and freedom) and “Tinh” (the ten thousand changes, the flexible manner suitable to the circumstances).

4. The Application of the “Tinh và Lý” Perspective by the Communist Party of Vietnam Currently

The 13th National Congress of the Party emphasizes the requirement to “build the Party comprehensively clean and strong”, prioritizing “discipline, order, solidarity, and unity” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). This is the manifestation of “Lý”: principle and discipline. Simultaneously, the Party also requires “enhancing public service ethics, promoting humaneness, tolerance, and compassion”, which is “Tinh”. In practice, inspection, supervision, and anti-corruption work are carried out rigorously, with no restricted zones, demonstrating “Lý”. However, in parallel, the Party also encourages self-correction and educates cadres through humanistic and compassionate methods, helping them progress, which is the expression of “Tinh”.

The Socialist Rule-of-Law State of Vietnam is the concentrated expression of “Lý”: all organizations and individuals are equal before the law. However, the Party also directs the building of a “State of the people, by the people, and for the people”, which expresses “Tinh”. In the context of digital transformation and the development of the knowledge economy, the Party requires the harmonious combination of governance according to law and humane governance, with the motto “leaving no one behind”. Social security policies, care for meritorious people, the poor, and ethnic minorities are creative applications of the spirit of “Tinh” in Ho Chi Minh's thought.

Our Party deeply inherits Ho Chi Minh's "skillful mass mobilization" style: "mass mobilization is mobilizing all the people's forces, for the people's benefit" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 7, p. 272). In the new period, mass mobilization work is implemented through movements like "All people unite to build new rural areas and civilized urban areas", and "Studying and following Ho Chi Minh's thought, ethics, and style". In foreign relations, the Party maintains a consistent line of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation, and development, expressing "Lý". Simultaneously, it combines flexibility, humaneness, and goodwill in international relations, expressing "Tinh". The "Bamboo" diplomacy method, which is both firm and flexible, is applied successfully and adaptively by our Party. Ho Chi Minh's foreign relations style remains the guideline for the current "multi-lateralization, diversification" policy.

The requirement is to build a team that possesses both "virtue" and "vision", both ethics and competence. Cadres must be close to the people, understand the people, and serve the people. Cadre deployment must be the right person for the right job. The principle of evaluating cadres must not be based on emotional "consideration" or favoritism but must rely on standards and work efficiency. Talented individuals are highly valued, particularly encouraging young, capable, creative people who dare to think and dare to act.

The Party defines people as both the goal and the driving force for development. The thought of "taking people as the root" is institutionalized in education policies, culture, and public service ethics. The campaign to study and follow Ho Chi Minh's thought, ethics, and style is widely implemented, contributing to building a new Vietnamese value system rich in human compassion, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and creativity. Here, "Tinh" is love, sharing, and community spirit, and "Lý" is ethical standards, law, and social principles. This blend helps shape the personality of the Vietnamese human in the period of industrialization, modernization, and international integration.

5. Value and Practical Significance

The combination of "Tinh" and "Lý" in Ho Chi Minh's thought not only carries ethical value but is also an effective leadership and management methodology. In the context of globalization and social volatility, this principle helps the Party and the State of Vietnam maintain political stability, consolidate the people's trust, and promote endogenous resources for sustainable development. Theoretically, it affirms the dialectical nature of Ho Chi Minh's thinking, combining traditional humanism with dialectical materialism. Practically, it provides orientation for perfecting institutions, administrative reform, preventing bureaucracy and corruption, and building a public service culture deeply imbued with Vietnamese identity.

6. Conclusion

The conception of the unity of "Tinh" and "Lý" in Ho Chi Minh's thought expresses a humanistic, scientific, and revolutionary philosophy. It is the blend of ideals and sentiment, principle and human compassion, the collective and the individual. The Communist Party of Vietnam has been creatively applying this thought in all fields: Party building, state governance, social development, foreign affairs, and human education. In the current period, as the country enters a new phase of modern development, integration, and digital transformation, continuing to thoroughly grasp and apply Ho Chi Minh's conception of "Tinh" and "Lý" is an urgent requirement aimed at building a clean and strong Party, a humane rule-of-law State, and a society that develops harmoniously and sustainably.

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