

## Ho Chi Minh's Philosophical Thought on Self-Criticism, criticism and its Implications for Contemporary Vietnam

*Pensamento Filosófico de Ho Chi Minh sobre Autocrítica, Crítica e suas Implicações para o Vietnã Contemporâneo*

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### ABSTRACT

Ho Chi Minh, the revered hero of Vietnam, a global cultural icon, and founder of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, devoted his life to national liberation and the fight for oppressed peoples worldwide. He emphasized training cadres and Party members to stay loyal to the nation, uphold revolutionary morality, and maintain the Party's purity. He advocated regular self-criticism and criticism to promote personal and organizational growth. Today, as Vietnam deeply integrates globally and faces the market economy's influence, some cadres and Party members show signs of moral and lifestyle degradation. Studying Ho Chi Minh's philosophy on self-criticism and criticism is thus urgently needed. It provides a theoretical and practical framework to educate and refine cadres and Party members, enhancing political integrity, organizational discipline, and public trust in the Party's leadership. This approach ensures the Party remains a steadfast force in guiding Vietnam forward.

**KEYWORDS:** Ho Chi Minh's philosophy, self-criticism, criticism, revolutionary morality

### RESUMO

Ho Chi Minh, o venerado herói do Vietnã, ícone cultural global e fundador da República Democrática do Vietnã, dedicou sua vida à libertação nacional e à luta pelos povos oprimidos em todo o mundo. Ele enfatizava o treinamento de quadros e membros do Partido para permanecerem leais à nação, defender a moralidade revolucionária e preservar a pureza do Partido. Ele defendia a autocrítica regular para promover o crescimento pessoal e organizacional. Hoje, à medida que o Vietnã se integra profundamente

globalmente e enfrenta a influência da economia de mercado, alguns quadros e membros do Partido mostram sinais de degradação moral e de estilo de vida. Estudar a filosofia de Ho Chi Minh sobre autocrítica e crítica é, portanto, urgentemente necessário. Ele fornece uma estrutura teórica e prática para educar e aprimorar quadros e membros do Partido, aumentando a integridade política, a disciplina organizacional e a confiança pública na liderança do Partido. Essa abordagem garante que o Partido permaneça uma força firme na condução do Vietnã para frente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: filosofia de Ho Chi Minh, autocrítica, crítica, moralidade revolucionária

## 1. Introduction

Ho Chi Minh's philosophy on self-criticism and criticism is a cornerstone of the Communist Party of Vietnam's revolutionary framework, embodying both a fundamental principle and a developmental law of a genuine revolutionary party. Rooted in dialectical materialism, this thought transcends mere political or organizational practice, serving as a philosophical category that reflects the objective laws of motion and development in social phenomena. Ho Chi Minh viewed self-criticism and criticism as essential for cultivating revolutionary ethics, promoting strengths, addressing shortcomings, and ensuring the Party's purity and resilience. By fostering collective power, this practice strengthens the Party's leadership capacity and sustains its revolutionary mission. Philosophically, Ho Chi Minh's thought creatively applies the Marxist–Leninist law of the unity and struggle of opposites to Party building. Self-criticism enables individuals to introspect and rectify personal limitations, fostering continuous self-improvement. Criticism, when conducted with sincerity, objectivity, and constructiveness, strengthens organizational unity and corrects collective errors. This approach harmoniously blends the scientific rigor of Marxism–Leninism with Vietnam's humanistic cultural values, emphasizing tolerance, candor, and devotion to the nation and people. Ho Chi Minh's philosophy thus offers a distinctive model of Party building that is both uniquely Vietnamese and universally applicable to revolutionary movements worldwide.

Historically, Ho Chi Minh consistently applied self-criticism and criticism throughout Vietnam's revolutionary process. From the early days of the revolutionary movement to the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, he emphasized the importance of regular, disciplined self-reflection and constructive critique to maintain the Party's ideological purity and organizational strength. This practice was instrumental in overcoming challenges, unifying cadres and Party members, and ensuring the Party's leadership in the struggle for national liberation. By embedding self-criticism and criticism into the Party's operations, Ho Chi Minh provided an endogenous mechanism for continuous

improvement and resilience against internal and external threats. Despite its acknowledged significance, existing research on Ho Chi Minh's philosophy of self-criticism and criticism remains limited in scope. Most studies approach the topic from political or organizational perspectives, focusing on its role in Party discipline or leadership. However, there is a lack of in-depth exploration of its philosophical foundations, particularly its grounding in dialectical materialism and its interplay with Vietnam's cultural values. Furthermore, few studies have systematically examined the consistent application of this thought across different stages of Vietnam's revolutionary history or its relevance to contemporary challenges.

In the context of Vietnam's ongoing renovation (Đổi Mới), international integration, and the complexities of a market economy, Ho Chi Minh's philosophy on self-criticism and criticism holds profound contemporary significance. The Party faces new challenges, including moral and ideological degradation, bureaucracy, and corruption among some cadres and Party members. These issues threaten public trust and the Party's leadership legitimacy. Self-criticism and criticism serve as vital tools for Party rectification, enabling the identification and correction of shortcomings, reinforcing revolutionary morality, and fostering internal unity. By promoting transparency and accountability, this practice helps combat "self-evolution" and "self-transformation", tendencies that undermine the Party's ideological foundation. Moreover, self-criticism and criticism are essential for enhancing the Party's leadership capacity in a rapidly changing global landscape. As Vietnam deepens its international integration, the Party must navigate external influences while preserving its revolutionary identity. Ho Chi Minh's thought provides a timeless framework for addressing these challenges, ensuring that cadres and Party members remain steadfast in their commitment to the nation and people. Regular, sincere self-criticism and constructive criticism foster a culture of discipline, humility, and continuous learning, enabling the Party to adapt to new realities while upholding its core principles.

This study seeks to address gaps in existing research by analyzing the philosophical foundations, historical application, and contemporary relevance of Ho Chi Minh's thought on self-criticism and criticism. By exploring its roots in dialectical materialism and its integration with Vietnamese cultural values, the article highlights the enduring theoretical significance of this philosophy. It also examines its practical application in Party building and rectification, offering insights into how it can guide Vietnam's political renewal today. Ultimately, Ho Chi Minh's philosophy remains a powerful intellectual legacy, providing both a theoretical compass and a practical roadmap for strengthening the Party's leadership and advancing Vietnam's sustainable development in the modern era.

## 2. Literature Review

Self-criticism and criticism represent one of the fundamental principles and inherent laws of political-social life, while also constituting a core element of Ho Chi Minh's intellectual legacy. From a theoretical standpoint, numerous domestic studies have affirmed that this thought not only creatively

inherits Marxism–Leninism but also demonstrates the distinctive philosophical character of Ho Chi Minh in recognizing and resolving social contradictions and in developing revolutionary organizations (Trần Văn Giàu, 1980; Phạm Văn Đồng, 2005). Research findings indicate that Ho Chi Minh regarded self-criticism and criticism as a “sharp weapon” for building a pure and strong Party, strengthening internal unity, and consolidating people’s trust (Nguyễn Khánh Toàn, 1993; Hồ Chí Minh National Academy of Politics, 2019).

At the international level, scholars studying the communist movement and national liberation have likewise emphasized the creative dimension in Ho Chi Minh’s approach. Western authors such as Duiker (2000) and Quinn-Judge (2002) argue that Ho Chi Minh’s method of self-criticism and criticism flexibly applied dialectical principles to the specific conditions of Vietnam, thereby establishing a distinctive model of political organization that differed from the experiences of other socialist countries. This demonstrates the value of his thought beyond the national scope, contributing to the enrichment and development of theoretical understandings of Party building within the global revolutionary movement.

Despite these significant contributions, current research still reveals several gaps. First, many studies have primarily approached the topic from political–organizational perspectives, without sufficiently analyzing its philosophical foundations, particularly in relation to dialectical categories such as “contradiction” and the “negation of the negation.” Second, systematic studies on Ho Chi Minh’s consistent application of self-criticism and criticism throughout the revolutionary process remain limited. Third, evaluations of the practical significance of this thought in the ongoing effort of Party building and rectification are still underdeveloped.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to analyze Ho Chi Minh’s philosophical thought on self-criticism and criticism, elucidating its theoretical foundations, historical application, and practical value in the contemporary context. In doing so, the study seeks to enrich the scholarly discourse while reaffirming the contemporary relevance of Ho Chi Minh’s thought for Party building in the new era.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining analytical, synthetic, and historical methods to clarify Ho Chi Minh’s philosophical thought on self-criticism and criticism.

**Textual analysis:** The research is based on primary sources such as *Ho Chi Minh’s Complete Works*, his writings, speeches, and Party documents, which are systematically examined. In addition, the study refers to works by other authors for cross-referencing to ensure accuracy, maintain objectivity, and identify the consistency of concepts across different historical contexts.

**Comparative analysis:** The study reviews and compares domestic and international scholarship, thereby identifying similarities, differences, and gaps in knowledge. This situates Ho Chi Minh’s thought within the broader framework of Marxism–Leninism and global revolutionary theory.

**Historical contextualization:** Ho Chi Minh's philosophical views are analyzed within specific revolutionary stages, linking theoretical formulations with practical applications in Party building, organizational rectification, and leadership practices.

**Philosophical foundation:** The study is grounded in the methodological framework of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, which serve as the fundamental basis for clarifying Ho Chi Minh's thought on self-criticism and criticism.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Ho Chi Minh's Philosophy of Self-Criticism and Criticism

#### 4.1.1. *The concept of self-criticism and criticism*

Ho Chi Minh offered a clear and straightforward explanation of self-criticism and criticism: "What is self-criticism? It means honestly acknowledging and publicly admitting one's shortcomings in front of others in order to find ways to correct them" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 7, p. 80). He further emphasized: "Self-criticism means that an individual (or an organization, group) honestly accepts his shortcomings to correct them so that others help him correct them, know and avoid the fault he has committed. Criticism means that if you see someone (or individuals, agencies, organizations) doing something incorrectly, you shall sincerely tell them so that they can correct their lapse" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 10, p. 386). Accordingly, self-criticism entails the honest acknowledgment of the shortcomings of oneself, one's agency, or one's organization. This process involves recognizing both strengths and weaknesses: strengths should be further promoted, while weaknesses must be sincerely and publicly admitted before others. Importantly, such shortcomings serve not only as lessons for the individuals or organizations involved but also as valuable experiences for others, helping them avoid making similar mistakes.

According to Ho Chi Minh, the practice of self-criticism is inherently difficult because every individual possesses self-esteem and thus tends to avoid admitting personal shortcomings or mistakes, fearing a loss of prestige, respect from others, or the credibility of their organization or agency, which in turn may undermine their position and status. Ho Chi Minh asserted: "*A Party that conceals its shortcomings is a degenerate Party. A Party that has the courage to acknowledge its shortcomings ... is a progressive, courageous, and certain Party*" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 301).

According to Ho Chi Minh, self-criticism of the individual alone is insufficient; one must also criticize comrades so as to help one another advance. What, then, is criticism? Ho Chi Minh defines it as speaking honestly and pointing out the shortcomings of cadres and comrades. He stated, "Shortcomings are like an illness. Criticism is the medicine to cure the illness of shortcomings." (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 272). He further explained, "Criticism means that when you see someone (an individual, agency, or organization) has shortcomings, you sincerely tell them so that they can correct them and make progress." (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 307). Here, criticism refers to censuring incorrect or improper

actions, not attacking a person's character. Its purpose is constructive: to help the criticised person improve. Criticism should not be perfunctory, cursory, or merely rhetorical; when issuing criticism one must weigh both subjective and objective causes and take into account the concrete historical and situational context in order to render a fair assessment. If it is difficult for an individual to accept another's criticism, it is all the more difficult for an organization or unit. Ho Chi Minh observed: "Only a truly revolutionary Party and a genuinely democratic government will dare to engage in courageous self-criticism, welcome criticism, and resolutely correct themselves. Through self-criticism and criticism, especially criticism from below, we become ever more tightly united, ever more of one mind, continually more progressive, and ever more certain of victory in the cause of building a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, and prosperous Vietnam." (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 10, p. 387).

#### *4.1.2. The purpose of self-criticism and criticism*

V.I.Lenin affirmed that "self-criticism is absolutely essential for all living and vigorous political parties. Nothing is more banal than complacent optimism" (Lenin, 2006, Vol. 10, pp. 395–396). President Ho Chi Minh similarly emphasized that "a Party that conceals its shortcomings is a degenerate Party. A Party that has the courage to acknowledge its shortcomings, to clearly identify them, to analyze their causes and the circumstances in which they arose, and then to find every way to correct them, that is a progressive, courageous, steadfast, and genuine Party" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 301). Thus, self-criticism constitutes not only a sharp weapon and an effective remedy but also a principle and a law governing the development of the Party. It must be a regular practice within the Party and the State to strengthen leadership capacity, enhance combativeness, and uphold the credibility of cadres and Party members. For this reason, Ho Chi Minh maintained that the ultimate purpose of self-criticism and criticism is "to help one another correct shortcomings, promote strengths, and advance together" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 272).

Self-criticism and criticism do not merely expose shortcomings; their ultimate aim is to correct mistakes and promote strengths. Ho Chi Minh emphasized that criticism must serve the common cause, that self-criticism and criticism are intended for collective progress, mutual learning, the promotion of virtues, and the avoidance of weaknesses and mistakes (Pham, 2024). He stressed: "The purpose of criticism is to help one another correct mistakes and to help one another progress. It is to reform working methods to make them better and more appropriate. It is to strengthen unity and internal cohesion. Therefore, criticism, of oneself and of others, must be rigorous, thorough, and honest, without indulgence, embellishment, or omission. Strengths as well as weaknesses must be clearly identified. At the same time, one must not use sarcastic, bitter, or divisive words. Criticism must target actions, not persons. Those who are criticized should willingly accept such comments to improve themselves, without discouragement or resentment" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 272). Conversely, "to cease self-criticism

and criticism is to cease progress, which is to regress” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 272). Throughout his revolutionary leadership, Ho Chi Minh underscored that the revolution advanced continuously, and even grew stronger in the face of hardships, precisely because of the practice of criticism and self-criticism. He therefore urged that all Party members and cadres set an example by practicing sincere criticism and self-criticism as a means of educating themselves and the people, thereby fulfilling the mission of resistance and nation-building. Ho Chi Minh further pointed out that the purpose of self-criticism and criticism remains the same everywhere, but depending on the nature of the task and the specific historical context, strengths and weaknesses may differ. This provides the basis for determining appropriate corrective methods. He regarded self-criticism and criticism as essential work for every individual, every organization, and every collective body, work that must be conducted as regularly as daily eating and bathing. The key issue, however, is how to ensure that the practice is effective and substantive. He highlighted: “If every cadre and Party member works more correctly and more skillfully, then the Party’s achievements will be all the greater. If cadres and Party members work incorrectly or clumsily, there will be many shortcomings. The more shortcomings, the fewer achievements; the fewer shortcomings, the greater the achievements. That is a matter of course. Therefore, from this moment on, every agency, every cadre, every Party member must daily conduct sincere self-assessment and assessment of comrades. Whenever shortcomings are found, one must resolutely correct oneself and help comrades to correct theirs. Only by doing so will the Party develop rapidly, and only then will our work succeed quickly” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, pp. 272–273).

Thus, the purpose of self-criticism and criticism enables us to grasp their true essence, “help each other improve themselves, modify the working style, and unite internally” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 272). This differs from the common misconception that criticism is solely about fault-finding without acknowledgment of strengths, or merely about censuring mistakes without recognition of achievements. For Ho Chi Minh, criticism must be sincere and straightforward, with the constructive aim of fostering progress both for oneself and for others. It must never be driven by selfish motives or treated as a tool for personal retaliation or the suppression of rivals. This constitutes the theoretical foundation of criticism and self-criticism. Yet Ho Chi Minh did not stop at formulating theory; he also established concrete principles for conducting self-criticism in revolutionary practice. With clear and effective principles, Ho Chi Minh transformed the theory of self-criticism and criticism into a regular activity, thereby strengthening unity and consensus within the Party, purifying Party organizations, and progressively cultivating the revolutionary ethics of cadres and Party members. In doing so, he enhanced the people’s trust in the Party.

#### *4.1.3. Principles of self-criticism and criticism*

According to Ho Chi Minh, in order for self-criticism and criticism to be effective, they must be carried out regularly and continuously. He stressed: “Self-criticism must be constant; it should not wait until a meeting is convened, nor should it be practiced intermittently” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 7, p. 211). This means that self-criticism must arise from one’s own needs and self-discipline, practiced daily and monthly rather than only during designated sessions. It must be as natural and routine as washing one’s face each day. Self-criticism should be regarded as a method of continuous self-improvement, enabling individuals to perfect themselves, to elevate their revolutionary ethics, and to strengthen their self-discipline.

Ho Chi Minh concluded: “Stopping criticizing and self-criticizing means stopping progress, that is, regression. Air is vital for our life. Similarly, revolutionaries and mass organizations need criticism and self-criticism as people need air” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 7, p. 114).

The spirit of self-criticism must be grounded in honesty. Ho Chi Minh emphasized: “Self-criticism must be honest” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 7, p. 211). One must acknowledge shortcomings and work to overcome them in order to achieve personal progress. Therefore, self-criticism must be conducted with sincerity and thoroughness, leaving no mistake or weakness unaddressed so that they may be corrected in time. Only in this way can self-criticism lead to genuine progress and effectiveness. If it is carried out superficially or merely for formality, it loses its value and even wastes the State’s resources in organizing such campaigns. Similarly, if criticism is vague and general, or if one conceals major subjective errors while only acknowledging minor, objective mistakes, then self-criticism serves no meaningful purpose. True self-criticism requires looking directly at oneself, candidly admitting all shortcomings, and striving to correct them in order to become more complete. To conceal one’s shortcomings is no different from concealing an illness, waiting until the day it manifests and destroys the body. Correcting mistakes through self-criticism can sometimes be straightforward, but often it is extremely difficult and painful, as many shortcomings are deeply ingrained over time. In such cases, self-criticism is akin to cutting away a part of one’s own body, an act of profound pain. For Party cadres and members in particular, self-criticism and criticism constitute a difficult struggle, for they are expected to serve as role models for the masses. If they cannot overcome their own weaknesses, how can they persuade the people, inspire their trust in the Party, and lead them to victory over the enemy?

Criticism must be directed toward ideology and work; therefore, the principle of criticism must also focus on thought, tasks, and actions. Without steadfast and correct ideological orientation, individuals are prone to errors. In any position or task, one must consistently maintain a firm ideological stance, remain dedicated to their work, and devote themselves wholeheartedly to their duties. Ideals in life are of paramount importance: noble ideals and resilient thinking serve as a guiding torch in the darkness, leading individuals toward success. Conversely, those without ideals, or whose ideals are



unhealthy and unstable, constantly wavering or “looking to the other mountain”, are highly susceptible to mistakes in life. When conducting criticism, one must avoid vague generalities and treating all subjects in the same way. Each individual holds different positions and responsibilities, accompanied by specific attitudes, styles, standards of conduct, and modes of work. Thus, depending on the particular person and their role, criticism should be focused on the relevant aspects and targeted at the core issues. Only by doing so can criticism achieve real effectiveness.

Regarding the attitude of those conducting criticism, Ho Chi Minh emphasized that it must be sincere, serious, and appropriate. Criticism should clearly identify the causes leading to shortcomings and analyze their consequences, thereby seeking the most effective remedies. Under no circumstances should criticism be used as a vehicle for personal hostility, private interests, sarcasm, or retaliation. Likewise, superficial, perfunctory, or behind-the-back criticism that avoids direct confrontation must be rejected, as it hinders collective progress and mutual development. The atmosphere of self-criticism and criticism sessions must be solemn, with participants demonstrating a proper and constructive spirit aimed at mutual assistance and advancement. Criticism should never be approached in a frivolous or dismissive manner, nor tainted by indulgence or favoritism. Instead, it should be conducted with prudence, tact, and clarity. Ho Chi Minh strongly condemned crude, mechanical, and harsh attitudes in criticism, such as treating those with shortcomings as if they were “venomous snakes or monsters.” This underscores that both the method and the attitude in the process of “self-criticism and criticism” are of utmost importance. Criticism cannot be separated from spiritual foundations such as “solidarity,” “unity,” “progress,” “fraternity,” and “comradeship.” Most importantly, the entire process of “self-criticism and criticism” must rest on the principle of serving the “common good” and the “interests of the nation and the people.” In essence, criticism exists for the sake of the collective, to foster solidarity, mutual support, and to build a unified, strong, and progressive organization. These principles must be thoroughly understood and consistently upheld in carrying out self-criticism and criticism.

“Criticism must flow from the top down and from the bottom up. Criticism from superiors alone is not sufficient. Criticism from comrades and colleagues is also not sufficient. It is essential to welcome criticism from the masses; only then is criticism complete” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 286). Accordingly, criticism and self-criticism must be practiced at every level, across all sectors, without concealment and without exception, from the highest ranks to the grassroots. Ho Chi Minh asserted: “An organization or government that conceals the shortcomings of its cadres is a weak and regressive one. An organization or government that dares to expose the shortcomings of its cadres and develops methods for their rectification will not see its prestige diminished, but instead elevated” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 308). Listening attentively to criticism from superiors, subordinates, and the masses is indispensable, for while individuals often struggle to identify their own weaknesses, others can perceive

them more easily and objectively. A single critical remark helps an individual improve; collective criticism strengthens the organization as a whole. As Ho Chi Minh vividly illustrated: “Superiors should occasionally solicit critical opinions from their subordinates. This is like a person with a smudge on their face being given a mirror; they will promptly wipe it away without needing any persuasion” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 244). Concealing one another’s shortcomings out of personal ties, workplace camaraderie, or fear of authority is tantamount to withholding knowledge of a minor illness until it festers into a life-threatening condition. Criticism must therefore proceed both from top to bottom and from bottom to top, with leaders setting the example. Ho Chi Minh emphasized: “To gain good results in self-criticism and criticism, cadres at all levels, especially senior officials, shall be examples first” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 6, p. 459). A leader who urges others to engage in criticism and self-criticism but fails to do so sincerely themselves, or worse, retaliates against those who criticize them, cannot possibly serve as a moral exemplar. Such practices erode trust, stifle open dialogue, and ultimately prevent the masses from contributing critical feedback essential to building a strong and resilient Party organization.

It must be thoroughly understood that self-criticism and criticism are not only rights but also duties of every individual, and are, in essence, the practice of democracy. To abstain from criticism is to relinquish one’s democratic rights. Every individual has both the right and the obligation to engage in criticism and self-criticism. Subordinates have the right to criticize their superiors; the people have the right to criticize cadres, state authorities, and mass organizations. Criticism must be conducted openly and sincerely, avoiding secrecy, indirectness, or anonymous letters. State officials and cadres are obliged to receive, welcome, and encourage public criticism. Any act of neglecting or disregarding the people’s opinions constitutes a violation of democratic principles. Criticism is therefore a manifestation of the people’s sovereignty, ensuring that the State is truly “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” When citizens engage in criticism, they are in fact exercising their ownership over the nation, through mechanisms of oversight, inspection, and evaluation of cadres within the state apparatus, as well as Party members, Party organizations, and state institutions. Ultimately, criticism and self-criticism serve to advance national progress and consolidate strength, and in doing so, they embody the patriotism of every Vietnamese citizen.

In particular, according to Ho Chi Minh, criticism must never be exploited as an opportunity to undermine or retaliate against others. The practice of manipulating criticism to attack and suppress one another stems from individualism and opportunism; it represents criticism divorced from work, reduced to subjectivity, factionalism, and the persecution of cadres. Ho Chi Minh explicitly warned against “criticizing someone only for personal attacks, quarrels, revenge, and pettiness, not for the Party, progress, or work” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 298). Throughout his life, Ho Chi Minh paid close attention to this phenomenon and consistently educated cadres not to abuse criticism as a tool for

targeting those they disliked, forming cliques, or engaging in “settling scores and eliminating rivals,” which inevitably leads to internal disunity and organizational disintegration. He observed that, at times, criticism avoided matters of work performance entirely and instead intruded into personal and private affairs. Ho Chi Minh made it clear that such practices must be absolutely avoided: “When criticizing someone, it must not be for personal attacks, stubborn quarrels, revenge, or pettiness, but for the Party, progress, and the work” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 308).

In addition, some cadres and Party members, influenced by individualism, are often afraid of criticism. They fear that being criticized may cause them to lose prestige, dignity, or even their current positions. To overcome this fear, Ho Chi Minh emphasized: “It is difficult to avoid mistakes completely when working. We should not fear mistakes, but rather fear making mistakes without being determined to correct them. To make corrections effectively, one must be ready to listen to public criticism and engage in honest self-criticism. Refusing to accept criticism or avoiding self-criticism inevitably leads to backwardness and degeneration. And backwardness and degeneration will result in being abandoned by the people” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol. 11, pp. 608–609). Such phenomena reflect a misunderstanding of the true nature of self-criticism and criticism as a fundamental principle of Party life. To ensure that self-criticism and criticism are effective, Ho Chi Minh identified four key aspects that require particular attention:

First, the purpose: Self-criticism and criticism are aimed at strengthening internal unity from top to bottom, enhancing work efficiency, consolidating the relationship between the Party, government, and the masses, while addressing persistent issues such as bureaucratism and detachment from the people.

Second, the orientation: The essence of self-criticism and criticism is to support and help one another advance. However, methods cannot be uniform across all contexts; they must be adapted to specific conditions. Each organization and locality possesses its own strengths and weaknesses, and accordingly, the approaches to review, inspection, and evaluation must vary.

Third, the focus: In each historical period, there are principal and urgent tasks. Criticism and self-criticism must be conducted with these central tasks as the foundation for review, assessment, and improvement.

**Fourth, the method:** This is divided into several steps: **Step 1:** Ideological clarification, ensuring that everyone fully understands the objectives and benefits of self-criticism and criticism, thereby fostering an active and enthusiastic spirit of participation.; **Step 2:** Study and research, encouraging members to learn about self-criticism and criticism, as well as Party and government policies, in order to establish a solid basis for supervision and evaluation; **Step 3:** Implementation, carrying out self-criticism and criticism in an honest, straightforward manner, avoiding haste and exaggeration. The process should proceed from higher to lower levels, with superiors setting an example for subordinates, and it must be

conducted in a broadly democratic spirit. This enables the recognition of both strengths and weaknesses: strengths should be encouraged as models for emulation, while shortcomings must be addressed according to their severity. Throughout this process, it is essential to create a positive and constructive atmosphere, encouraging sincere contributions for collective advancement. At the same time, concrete measures should be proposed to complete tasks that have not yet been successfully accomplished.

## **4.2. Current situation and solutions to enhance self-criticism and criticism in the light of Ho Chi Minh's thought**

### *4.2.1. The present situation of self-criticism and criticism in Vietnam*

In recent years, the practice of self-criticism and criticism within Party and State agencies in Vietnam has been carried out on a regular and continuous basis, with a spirit of seriousness and has yielded certain results. The implementation of Directive No. 03-CT/TW dated May 14, 2011, of the 11th Politburo, On further promoting the study and following of Ho Chi Minh's moral example, in association with the implementation of the Resolution of the 4th Plenum of the 11th Party Central Committee, On a number of urgent issues concerning Party building at present, generated positive changes across the political system. By the 12th Party Congress, the implementation of Directive No. 05-CT/TW dated May 15, 2016, of the Politburo, On promoting the study and following of Ho Chi Minh's thought, morality, and style, linked with the Resolution of the 4th Plenum of the 12th Party Central Committee, On strengthening Party building and rectification; preventing and repelling the degradation in political ideology, morality, and lifestyle, as well as manifestations of "self-evolution" and "self-transformation" within the Party, was identified as a central solution to building a pure and strong Party. At the 13th National Congress, the Party emphasized the achievements gained: "Party committees and organizations at all levels have allocated adequate time for self-assessment, directly participated in, guided, and provided feedback on the self-assessment of collectives and individuals under their management; placed importance on monitoring, urging, and inspecting the correction of limitations and shortcomings after the process of self-criticism and criticism" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, Vol. 2, pp. 175–176). Many cadres and Party members, particularly those in key positions, closely adhered to their assigned duties and responsibilities in carrying out self-criticism; some officials frankly acknowledged their shortcomings without shifting blame to circumstances or to collectives.

Despite achieving significant results, the practice of self-criticism and criticism still reveals notable shortcomings. In certain places, the principle of self-criticism and criticism has been relaxed in implementation and has not been codified as a concrete basis for inspection and supervision. In many agencies and organizations, self-criticism and criticism are mainly conducted during year-end review sessions, rather than becoming a regular and daily practice. A considerable number of Party members, particularly younger members, seldom express their views or political stances. The content and forms of

self-criticism and criticism are often not substantive; in some cases, a culture of deference and avoidance persists, thereby diminishing the credibility and combativeness of Party organizations and undermining public trust. As the Party has acknowledged: “In not a few places, self-criticism and criticism remain formalistic; the tendency toward deference, avoidance, and reluctance to confront persists widely; a segment of cadres and Party members lack the self-discipline to acknowledge their shortcomings and take responsibility for their assigned tasks” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, Vol. 2, p. 179). This situation has eroded the confidence of the people in the Party and the State. Therefore, it is imperative to enhance the role and effectiveness of self-criticism and criticism within the Party and the State. To thoroughly imbue and rigorously implement Ho Chi Minh’s thought on self-criticism and criticism among cadres and Party members, thereby contributing significantly to Party building and rectification, ensuring the Party becomes ever more transparent and resilient, the coming period requires a focused implementation of several key solutions.

#### *4.2.2. Solutions to enhance the effectiveness of self-criticism and criticism in Vietnam today*

First, it is necessary to further promote the study and practice of Ho Chi Minh’s thought, morality, and style with regard to self-criticism and criticism. It should be recognized that the rigorous implementation of this principle in current Party activities constitutes a crucial solution for strengthening the ranks of cadres and Party members. Doing so will help prevent and reverse the degradation of political ideology, morality, and lifestyle, as well as manifestations of “self-evolution” and “self-transformation” among cadres and Party members, thereby contributing to the building of an increasingly pure and strong Party.

Second, it is essential to raise awareness among cadres and Party members regarding the role and significance of self-criticism and criticism, so that these practices are carried out voluntarily, regularly, and in a disciplined manner. At the same time, it is crucial to formulate and effectively implement regulations that promote exemplary conduct in cultivating moral qualities, lifestyle, working style, and professional discipline among cadres and Party members.

Current realities indicate that a segment of cadres, Party members, and Party organizations have not fully or correctly recognized the role, purpose, significance, and impact of self-criticism and criticism. Consequently, they have not attached due importance to its implementation and often fail to carry it out conscientiously and voluntarily. Not a few Party members and organizations attempt to conceal shortcomings, excuse mistakes by attributing them to objective conditions, or avoid acknowledging responsibility. Some cadres and Party members still lack the courage to speak frankly and truthfully, especially when offering criticism or suggestions to their superiors. In certain cases, self-criticism and criticism are even misused as tools for personal attacks, slander, or disparagement, which prevents those criticized from recognizing their mistakes and making necessary corrections.

In addition, some organizations have not paid sufficient attention to the regular training and capacity-building of Party members in Party activities and development. This has weakened the capacity for leadership and the organization of Party activities, particularly in relation to self-criticism and criticism. For this reason, it is imperative to strengthen education and raise awareness among cadres and Party members about the role and significance of self-criticism and criticism, ensuring it is practiced voluntarily, regularly, and with discipline. Moreover, it is essential to uphold the principle of setting an example in self-criticism and criticism. This requires every Party organization and every cadre or Party member, especially leaders and those in key positions, to engage in honest, objective, and constructive self-criticism. They should focus their assessments on responsibility for tasks within their agencies and units, as well as their personal qualities in all aspects: political awareness, ideological steadfastness, morality, lifestyle, discipline, and relations with the people. Through this process, strengths can be identified and promoted, while weaknesses are recognized and corrected, with genuine support and education from colleagues. The principle of “prevention is better than cure” must be upheld, avoiding leniency, concealment, self-justification, or shifting blame. Only through exemplary self-criticism and criticism can trust and solidarity within the organization be consolidated, thereby mobilizing collective strength to effectively fulfill assigned missions.

Third, self-criticism and criticism must be carried out on a regular and continuous basis. As President Ho Chi Minh clearly emphasized, this practice should be implemented earnestly and consistently: after each task, after each working day, every individual must seriously reflect, draw lessons, and identify mistakes made, so as to avoid repeating them in the future. Since self-criticism and criticism are directed toward the quality of work, that is, both the final outcome and the attitude in performing tasks, failure to conduct sincere reviews upon completion of duties will inevitably lead to subjectivism, arrogance, or the repetition of errors in subsequent work. At the same time, without such reflection, positive experiences cannot be effectively replicated and promoted, resulting in the neglect of valuable factors that could otherwise contribute to the common cause.

Fourth, it is necessary to strengthen inspection and supervision with respect to the implementation of self-criticism and criticism. Inspection and supervision constitute both a principle and an essential stage in the Party’s leadership process and in Party building. They must be conducted regularly to ensure compliance with organizational and Party activities’ principles, particularly the principle of self-criticism and criticism, so that they are implemented seriously and effectively. This contributes to improving the quality of the Party’s leadership, fostering consistency between resolutions and their implementation, as well as between words and deeds, thereby enabling Party leadership bodies at all levels to overcome subjectivism, voluntarism, and ambiguity in the leadership process.

Strengthening inspection and supervision plays an important role in detecting and remedying shortcomings in the practice of self-criticism and criticism. In addition to intensifying supervision of organizations and individuals showing signs of violations, proactive inspection and supervision must also be carried out regarding the moral qualities and performance outcomes of Party organizations, cadres, and members. It is equally important to focus on identifying and promoting positive factors. Reinforcing inspection and supervision thus serves as an effective measure to educate the contingent of cadres and Party members, prevent bureaucratism, division, factionalism, and indiscipline within the Party, and ensure that the principle of self-criticism and criticism is strictly and consistently upheld.

#### 4.3. Marx and Lenin's views on self-criticism and criticism

Self-criticism and criticism are core principles in the thought of Marx and Lenin, reflecting the scientific and revolutionary nature of Marxism-Leninism (Oizerman, 1993). Karl Marx emphasized that societal development follows the objective laws of dialectical materialism, particularly the law of the unity and struggle of opposites. For Marx, self-criticism and criticism are methods for revolutionary organizations to identify internal contradictions, address shortcomings, and drive progress. He argued that a revolutionary party must continuously self-examine to maintain its vanguard role and avoid dogmatism, ensuring alignment with the ever-changing realities of the revolutionary struggle. Lenin, building on Marx's ideas, elevated self-criticism and criticism to a key organizational principle of the Communist Party (Borçun, 2014). In works like "Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder and State and Revolution, Lenin described self-criticism as a "sharp weapon" to preserve the Party's purity and prevent ideological, political, and organizational decay. He stressed that a true revolutionary party must openly acknowledge mistakes, analyze their causes, and correct them thoroughly. Criticism, according to Lenin, must be constructive, objective, and aimed at advancing the revolutionary cause, avoiding personal attacks or divisiveness.

Lenin further emphasized that self-criticism and criticism are responsibilities of both individuals and the entire Party (Griesse, 2008). He encouraged party members to candidly point out the shortcomings of comrades and leaders, while leaders must exemplify openness to critique and correction. This approach fosters internal unity, enhances leadership capacity, and strengthens public trust in the Party. During the Russian Revolution, Lenin applied this principle to rectify the Bolshevik Party, enabling it to overcome challenges and lead the October Revolution to victory. In summary, Marx and Lenin's views on self-criticism and criticism highlight their role as an internal mechanism to ensure the continuous development of a revolutionary party. This thought is not only theoretical but also profoundly practical, serving as a guiding principle for communist parties worldwide to build a pure, strong organization that remains responsive to revolutionary realities.

### 5. Conclusion and Implications

Ho Chi Minh's philosophy on self-criticism and criticism is a cornerstone of the Communist Party of Vietnam's revolutionary and scientific nature. Rooted in Marxist–Leninist dialectical materialism, it serves as a method for cultivating revolutionary ethics and rectifying organizational shortcomings, ensuring the Party's leadership in Vietnam's revolutionary cause. Theoretically, it reflects the law of unity and struggle of opposites, offering a Vietnamese model of party-building with global relevance. Politically, it fosters a pure, strong Party, combating moral degradation, bureaucracy, and corruption while strengthening public trust and unity. Practically, amid globalization and market economy challenges, it guides Party rectification, enhancing leadership and national development. Humanistically, it promotes self-improvement, revolutionary morality, and values like tolerance and humility, enriching Vietnam's political culture. Ho Chi Minh's thought remains a vital guide for Party building and a globally relevant contribution to revolutionary theory.

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