

## HUMANITY OF THE 1945 AUGUST REVOLUTION IN VIETNAM

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**Abstract:** *the 1945 August Revolution is the pride of the Vietnamese nation and, more broadly, of all the colonial nations around the world in the anti-colonialism struggle for independence and freedom. This greatly significant event has attracted the attention of numerous researchers both domestically and internationally from many different angles. In the article, the author intends to affirm the profound humanity of this revolution by analysing its great significance, peaceful methods and spirit of national harmonization. The humanity of the Party-led revolution manifests through not only its great objectives but also ingenious methods and arts of revolution. This revolution not only answer such classic questions as “Who wins whom?” or “Who runs faster than whom?” but also others like “How to win in a unique and intolerant way?”.*

**Keywords:** *the 1945 August Revolution, humanity, Democratic Republic, Great National Unity, History of Vietnam.*

## ГУМАННОСТЬ АВГУСТОВСКОЙ РЕВОЛЮЦИИ 1945 ГОДА ВО ВЬЕТНАМЕ

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**Аннотация:** *августовская революция 1945 года является гордостью вьетнамской нации и, в более широком смысле, всех колониальных наций в мире в борьбе антиколониализма за независимость и свободу. Это великое событие привлекло внимание многих исследователей в стране и за рубежом с разных точек зрения. В данной статье проведено утверждение глубокой человечности этой революции, проанализировав ее значение, мирные методы и дух национальной гармонизации. Человечность революции под руководством партии проявляется не только в ее великих целях, но и в изобретательном методе и искусстве проведения революции. Августовская революция 1945 года также ответила не только на классический вопрос «Кто кого победит», «Кто идет быстрее, чем кто-либо», но и на вопрос: «Как победить» уникальным и терпимым образом.*

**Ключевые слова:** *августовская революция 1945 года, гуманность, Демократическая республика, Великое национальное единство, история Вьетнама.*

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The August Revolution 1945 is a profoundly humane revolution due to abolishment of a reactionary and brutal semi-feudal colonial regime to build up a progressive democratic republic in Vietnam and especially very quick rate of progress with very little bloodshed and no vengeance upon the old government [2, p. 63].

### **1. The August Revolution overthrew the brutal colonial regime, obsolete feudal regime and seized power from the belligerent Japanese fascists**

A real revolution should not be understood as pure replacement of one ruling power with another. The revolution is to change the old but the new should be more advanced. A revolution-produced new society must reach a higher level of development in the historical progress than the preceding society which it replaces. In this respect, the 1945 August Revolution is actually a real revolution.

It can be said that the history of mankind is a mixture of development and anti-development factors so that every step forward of the human society follows “a bitter path of blood and fifth, poverty and humiliation” as mentioned by Karl Marx [см. 13, p. 89]. Capitalism is not an exception of this common rule as its development led to an anti-development phenomenon so-called as colonialism which made tens of colonized nations and millions of the natives “suffer from the wretched life” and “lowered them to the animal-like level and pushed them into “prostitute” situation and which is a shame for a so-called civilized world” [3, p. 190]. For the purpose of “covering up the ugliness of the murderous and exploitative regime, colonial capitalism always adorns its decaying medal with such ideal maxims as charity and equality” but its immorality are always present in the utmost miserable life of the country-losing nations [3, p. 93]. Nothing can cover up the truth that colonialism is an injustice-full international phenomenon and also a stain in the course of human history. In such a regime, not only country-losing people are writhing with the poverty-stricken and spiritually-humiliated life but also invaders are piteous because their human

nature is eroded and their animal nature is provoked by an environment of injustice between the weak and the strong and between the invader and the invaded. A vivid evidence for the immorality of the murderous civilization” is a very traumatic fate of the Vietnamese nation for more than 80 years of colonization. In such a circumstance, each nation or person is capable of regaining their human-being dignity by abolishing both class oppression and national oppression. As the 1945 August Revolution not only eliminated France’s colonial domination of more than 80 years and the Japanese fascist’s one of over 5 years in Vietnam but also triggered the collapse of inhuman colonialism on the worldwide scale and encouraged other nations to engage into the evil-eradicating struggles, it is a profoundly humane revolution.

It is realized that among the features of the colonialism is *cohesion between greedy and brutal colonialism and despicable and reactionary feudal classes*. When the Western capitalism prevailed and demonstrated its material powers by attacking the closed oriental fortresses, the Nguyen Dynasty insisted that “The emperor's powers remains necessarily unchanged” [11, p. 23]. Conservativeness and reaction of the Vietnam’s feudal classes in their domestic and foreign policies not only discouraged but also seriously weakened our nation’s internal resources. In the face with the invasion of the powerful French colonialist, the Nguyen Dynasty was completely impotent. This attitude together with “the greed for power and position” resulted in cowardice. National interests were sacrificed to retain the royal interests by the Nguyen Dynasty which also accepted the role of puppet and henchman. Under this circumstance, the peoples’ spontaneous struggles were not assembled to boost their strengths, which were even prevented, banned and suppressed by the royal government. For this reason, there was even a revolt which had to declare that “In this case, we are determined to fight both the royal government and the Western” (it means a struggle with the Nguyen Dynasty and invading French colonialist). The Nguyen Dynasty’s extreme reaction forced Phan Boi Chau to make a conclusion “China’s Manchu Dynasty and Vietnam’s Nguyen Dynasty are both like dead dogs” [15, C. 44]. The August Revolution completely abandoned *the obsolete and puppet-headed monarchist state* as same as eradicated boils or hindrances to create a new step of development for the Vietnamese nation.

The humanity of the August Revolution is also reflected via *the Vietnamese’s spirit of anti-fascism and the love for democracy and peace*. With the victory of the 1945 August Revolution, the Vietnamese regained independence and freedom from the Japanese fascists, contributing to the collapse of fascism. Therefore, “the Allies cannot help but recognize the independence of the Vietnamese nation, which bravely sided with the Allies for anti-fascism. That nation must be free and independent” [6, p. 3].

Combating with such forces as the barbaric and brutal colonialism, retrogressive, reactionary feudal regime as well as cruel and tyrannical fascism and contributing to the eradication of these dark forces on the spirit of “liberation for development”, the 1945 August Revolution expresses the profound humanity.

## **2. The August Revolution established the first democratic republic in the Southeast Asia with the aspiration of “Independence – Freedom – Happiness”**

A fundamental issue of every revolution is the issue of government. Its radical nature and humanity are manifested clearly when the revolution answers such questions as whom the government and state belong and they belong to the majority or minority. Since the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Conference (in May 1941), the Indochinese Communist Party and Ho Chi Minh had advocated “the establishment of a pro-people government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam [3, p. 150], a kind of state in which all the peoples have *the right of ownership and owner*” in *discussion of political institutions* after the success of the revolution. In the Ho Chi Minh’s *Declaration of Independence*, he intentionally translated the first sentence of *the US Declaration of Independence* from “All men are created equal” in English into “All people are created equal” in Vietnamese to affirm ownership and equality *of everyone* regardless of male or female, the poor or the rich etc. and those of every nations in a broader meaning. Though *democracy* is a persistent aspiration of the human-beings and mankind, *the first democratic republic* in the Southeast Asia was formed on the land of thousand-year long monarchy until the August Revolution, which also turned that righteous aspiration into reality.

It is noteworthy that the Indochinese Communist Party and Ho Chi Minh *associated* the value of democracy with the value system of *independence, freedom and happiness* when identifying the form of state after the 1945 August Revolution as the *Democratic Republic of Vietnam: Independence – Freedom – Happiness* because independence, freedom and happiness would become clichés and virtual values without real democracy. Such appellation also makes a proclamation about humanistic ideals of the revolution state for bringing *independence, freedom and happiness* to the nation and each individual.

Independence is always a first-class value and aspiration of each nation. For a nation whose independence had been deprived by many enemies like Vietnam, such aspiration becomes more and more burning. Ho Chi Minh provided a very simple explanation about his criterion of independence “Independence means that we control all our works without any external interventions” [7, p. 162]. Later on, he also affirmed the self-esteem of the heroic nation and the truth of the era through his immortal saying “Nothing is more precious than *independence and freedom*”.

If independence is the highest value in the value system of each nation, freedom is the greatest value of each individual in all the times. “Freedom is supreme happiness” asserts by the oriental philosophy. Karl Marx also said “Freedom is inherent in human nature...No one protests freedom or they oppose the freedom of the others at the

most” [4, p. 84]. He also set a criterion for freedom on the perspectives of state institutions “Freedom is to transform the state, an organ above the society into a complete society-dependent organ”. In this regard, the August Revolution is truly a revolution for freedom when it established the state of the peoples, for the peoples, by the peoples and when Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the state, always pondered how to enable the peoples to enjoy their democratic rights and use these rights” [7, p. 293]. Only with the freedom, the human beings have conditions to develop their individual creation capability and realize the meaning of “being a human”.

Independence and freedom serve as conditions to achieve the ultimate goal of the just revolution that is happiness of the peoples. Immediately after the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh affirmed “We gained freedom and independence but the people still died of starvation and coldness, such freedom and independence are useless. The peoples merely understand the values of freedom and independence clearly when they eat to their fill and wear warmly” [6, p. 175]. Liberating the human beings is, at first, to free them from the disasters caused by hunger, coldness and ignorance. Therefore, it is obliged to ensure the people to have something to eat and wear, somewhere to accommodate and education. Humanity in Karl Marx’s favorite proverbs “Nothing belonging to the human beings is strange to me” is very specifically and simply manifested in the policies of the Ho Chi Minh-led revolutionary government.

[Three components] in the name of the newly established revolutionary states, namely independence-freedom-happiness manifests such values of both independence and coherence to form the human happiness-oriented comprehensive and complete value system. The appellation of the state also pronounced the goal of this state for ensuring each person to enjoy independence, freedom and happiness on their land but not on the completely-illusory paradise or nirvana. It is obvious that Ho Chi Minh, a “soul” of the August Revolution, not only gives prominence to this value system but also turns this aspiration into reality. After all, the humanity of the revolution lies on the objectives of liberating the human beings and bringing happiness to them, particularly the poor and the miserable. *It is action humanism and realist humanism*. This shapes the stature of this revolution in the modern national and world history in the twentieth century.

### **3. The August Revolution is a revolution which win a victory in a peaceful way**

In discussion of the revolutionary methods, the possibility of peacefully-winning revolution was not excluded by the Marxist-Leninist classics. However, the history of mankind had not ever witnessed any such revolutions before 1945. Meanwhile, uncompromising attitude and fierceness of the August Revolution are prescribed by the mandate of demolishing the yoke of feudalism and colonialism for gaining independence for the nation and achieving happiness, freedom and democracy for the peoples as well as orienting the country to the path of socialism. A thorough and quick winning with the nearly-zero bloodshed is actually a very rare event in the history. The Soviet Red Army’s victory over Japanese fascism and the surrender of the Government of Japan created a favorable opportunity for Vietnam to conduct the August revolution. However, the external background only constitutes *a necessary condition*. The success of the revolution also needs *a sufficient condition*, which is the practical organizational capability of the leadership. The victory of the August Revolution is convergence of favorable objective conditions and the Indochinese Communist Party’s and Ho Chi Minh’s opportunity-predicting ability, opportunity-preparing ability and opportunity-seizing ability at the artistic level. After the breakout of the World War II and its spread to the entire Europe, the international and national situations experienced very rapid changes. Ho Chi Minh *soon saw the opportunities* to carry out the national liberation revolution. At the eighth central conference (in May 1941), the Party made a judgment about the opportunities for the revolt “At this time, the Soviet Union’s victories, the collapse of the international fascism and the poverty and misery of the peoples at the fascist countries would encourage the outbreak of revolutions at many countries” [3, p. 279]. In order to carry out the top-priority task of national liberation, “all the party-related works at this time would target to preparation works for the revolt so that [the party] promptly let the peoples fight once the opportunity comes” [3, p. 297]. Our party also defined that it was natural to use the revolutionary violence against the counter-revolutionary one but first include not only armed violence but also political one and it is obliged to closely combine armed struggle with political struggle. *However, the latter must set the root for the struggle*.

Following up the Party’s policy, the armed forces, political ones and revolutionary bases were established. The Party made a big plan for the population-wide uprising to seize the power across the country and also made preparations for this plan early in advance. In October 1944, Ho Chi Minh made an accurate prediction about the opportunity of revolution in his *Letter to the nationwide compatriots* “The invader nearly comes to the date of annihilation. The allies would soon gain their final victory. It only takes *one year or one year a half* for our nation to get the opportunity to liberate us”. “Time is very urgent. We have to do it quickly” [5, p. 538]. Ho Chi Minh’s sagacious vision of revolution opportunity, careful and thorough preparations relevant to both revolutionary forces and forms help our revolution *gain initiative* to win a victory spectacularly with very little loss. Having considered the Vietnamese revolution as a part of the international revolution, the Party and Ho Chi Minh always made judgments about our nation’s revolution opportunities in relation with the international background. The Japanese fascists’ surrender to the Allies (13 August 1945) created a revolution opportunity – a direct opportunity for the

nationwide uprising. At that time, tens of thousands of Japanese troops in Indochina were very extremely confused and the Tran Trong Kim's pro-Japanese government looked like a "head-losing snake".

In the context of the paralyzed old enemy, the not-yet-arrived new enemies, rising enthusiasm of the populace, pro-Viet Minh Front middle classes, the Party Central Committee and the Viet Minh General Committee established the *National Uprising Committee* and issued the *General Uprising Order* in time: "It is time for the general uprising! It is a once-time chance for the Vietnamese peoples and army to rise up and gain independence for the nation! We have to take an action quickly with the extreme bravery and cautiousness". Following the appeal for uprising, more than 20 million of the Vietnamese across the country unanimously stood up with the spirit "We must gain independence even burning the entire Annamite Range". The surging power of the freedom and independence loving nation and the smart military and diplomatic policies of the revolting forces made the Japanese troops paralyze and show no resistance. Thanks to these factors, the revolution took place very quickly and in a good order within around two weeks almost without bloodshed. This rare phenomenon is the result of *the Party's smart choice of opportunity*.

The fact showed that *the time of uprising completely coincided with the possible time for uprising*. If the outbreak of the uprising took place before 13 August 1945 when Japan had not yet surrendered to the Allies, the Japanese troops in Indochina would resist fiercely. If the uprising occurred before the Allies or anti-communism forces landed in Vietnam, the revolution would lose their initiative and face many difficulties. In this context, the bloodshed was inevitable. The Party's and Ho Chi Minh's determination to seize the proper opportunity not only brought the "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity but also repelled the risk of confronting many enemies at the same time. As a result, the power of revolution was multiplied. This difficultly-understandable and believable miracle was explained by several international researchers as "luck" or "power vacuum" in Vietnam [14, p. 363]. For countering this argument, it is necessary to ask a question whether the "luck" might come or not if the Party had not made such an accurate prediction about the right opportunity, persistently built up the brave armed forces and widespread political ones, determined to seize the very short but valuable period of time to conduct the uprising and take the proper measures to cope with sixty thousand Japanese troops and Nguyen Dynasty. Moreover, it is different fates of other Southeast Asian countries in August 1945 to refute the above-mentioned argument. By the time when Japan announced its surrender, the so-called revolution opportunity existed at all the Southeast Asian countries, which were groaning under the rule of the Japanese fascists. However, only Vietnam and Indonesia gained independence. In comparison with the seizure of power in Vietnam with Indonesia, the first surely is more radical [13, p. 401- 447]. With the same objective conditions, the success or failure and the level of success or failure are entirely dependent on the subjective factors. It can be affirmed that the 1945 August Revolution of Vietnam is a radical revolution, which took place in *the shortest period of time with the lowest level of losses*. This fact has been acknowledged by many Western researchers. "The August revolution is actually unique in the world history: the people engaged in insurrection to control the power successfully almost in peaceful ways" as judged by Lady Borton, a US writer, in her work "Ho Chi Minh: a journey" [9, p. 95]. Georges Bouldarel, a French historian, also wrote about the August Revolution "It is a new-style and unique revolution of Vietnam". Cities were not surrounded by rural forces but they engaged in insurrection and got matured on their own wills. Over the time, it is unarguable about the uniqueness of the Vietnamese revolution [10].

Phan Chu Trinh, when he was alive, strongly opposed any policies of violence for a fear that violence would put the nation to death and bring a bad reputation to it without knowing [12, c. 231]. The Indochinese Communist Party made preparations for revolutionary violence but the revolution won without bloodshed. It is actually a miracle. *The accurate prediction of the future and the thorough preparation for the revolution* by the Indochina Communist Party helped the revolution to avoid losses even though it won a very radical victory [13, c. 418].

#### **4. The August Revolution heightens the spirit of national harmonization**

In the history of mankind, it is proven that the so-much indignation of the masses escalating into an uncontrollable level usually leads to tragedies for the obsolete regime in case of the successful revolution". In the bourgeois revolution in France, the King Louis XVI and his Queen, Marie Antoinette, were guillotined when the revolutionaries made a declaration "Louis XVI must die so that the republic would live" [17]. The triumph of the much-oppressed, repressed and suffered and the resistance of the old forces often lead to bloody clashes. It is a completely understandable fact. For refraining from the extremist and inhumane actions, it is very necessary to get *the judicious, clever and also tolerant conduct from the conductor*. It was so lucky for the August Revolution to get such conduct. It became a rare phenomenon with *no vengeance and "bloodshed" against the preceding regime*. "Wherever the revolutions succeed, they always witness bloodshed. In some countries, kings are beheaded but in some others, bloody civil wars take place for many years. In our country, the king abdicated and the classes united into one bloc" [6, p. 47-48]. William J. Duiker, a US historian, described Bao Dai's abdication ceremony in his book "Ho Chi Minh: a life" "The atmosphere in the transfer-of-power ceremony looks like a festival day, not scary at all" [15, p. 297]. Later, Ho Chi Minh also invited Bao Dai [the last king of the Nguyen Dynasty] to work as a supreme advisor for the revolutionary government although he was condemned to death by the royal court in 1929. Ho Chi Minh also congregated many great patriotic intellectuals like Huynh Thuc Khang, Bui Bang Doan and Nguyen Van To etc. to engage themselves into the revolution. Among the discrepancies of interests and political

views of the classes and in the chaos of the reversed social order, the Party and Ho Chi Minh still found out *a common denominator, that is patriotism and desire of independence and freedom* for the national union.

A belief in patriotism in each person as the best virtue is manifestation of humanism. Ho Chi Minh always affirmed “As a Vietnamese, any one has more or less patriotism”. Finding *the unity and way of unity* in the myriad of differences is the spirit of democracy and humanity. It is very helpful for our country to avoid civil wars, division and even hostility by promoting the national great unity bloc on the basic of worker-farmer union and treasuring the intellectuals and talented including those from the preceding regime to enable them to make their effective contributions to the nation-prospering process.

With an emphasis on the leading role of the Party in the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh affirmed “It is the first time in the revolutionary history of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal nation for the 15-year-old party to lead the revolution successfully and seize the power across the country” [8, p. 25]. The humanity of the Party-led revolution manifests through not only its great objectives but also ingenious methods and arts of revolution. This revolution not only answer such classic questions as “Who wins whom?” or “Who runs faster than whom?” but also others like “How to win in a unique and intolerant way?”

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