

# HO CHI MINH'S DIPLOMATIC ART IN THE AUGUST REVOLUTION OF 1945

Tran Thi Minh Tuyet

*Tran Thi Minh Tuyet - PhD in History, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer,  
FACULTY OF HO CHI MINH'S THOUGHTS,  
ACADEMY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION,  
HANOI, SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM*

**Abstract:** *the August Revolution of 1945 was a milestone in the history of the Vietnamese nation; it "closed" the slavery period and opened the era of independence and freedom for the people of Vietnam. That great victory is the result of objective reasons, in which, the leadership role of leader Ho Chi Minh is a prominent factor. As the leader of the national liberation movement, Ho Chi Minh not only performed the role of a politician, a military commander but also an outstanding diplomat with the goal of creating favorable international conditions for the Vietnamese revolution. The author of this article wants to analyze the characteristics of Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art in the August Revolution to prove the great stature of the diplomat Ho Chi Minh.*

**Keywords:** *Ho Chi Minh, diplomacy, diplomatic art, the August Revolution, Vietnam.*

In order to regain independence from the powerful imperial forces, small nations must conduct a total struggle, in which the diplomatic front inevitably plays an important role. With the vision and experience of the revolutionary who went to "five continents, four seas", Ho Chi Minh - the head of the unequal struggle of the Vietnamese people, concluded the truth: "Whoever seizes the diplomatic advantage will win" [5, p. 559]. As the soul of the Party and the guide for the nation, during the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh appeared not only as an outstanding politician, a talented military activist but also as an experienced diplomat with unique diplomatic art. If the August Revolution is a rare victory of colonial nations, Ho Chi Minh's talent and diplomatic art at this stage is the most brilliant.

## **1. Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art – an important factor to make the victory and maintain the accomplishment of the August Revolution**

Referring to Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art is referring to the implementation of diplomatic methods, strategies and tactics in such a sensitive, lucid, clever, flexible and creative way that "there is no way better and more proper" [19, p. 146], more effective than what He did. In terms of "superficial" events, the August Revolution took place only within half a month but when referring to Ho Chi Minh's diplomacy during the August Revolution, it must be considered a whole "chain" of His diplomatic activities in time "frame" from September 20, 1944 to the time He returned from China and directly prepared for the General uprising until December 19, 1946 – the time of ending peace, the entire nation entered long-term resistance. In order to create the August Revolution "whirlwind" and maintain its accomplishment under extremely difficult circumstances, the genius diplomat Ho Chi Minh implemented the strategy of "Adding friends, reducing enemies" with the following special system of diplomatic art.

**Firstly:** *It is the art of finding allies, creating the legitimacy for the Viet Minh Front.*

With the nature of "Goodness" and the prediction that "the Nazis will fail, the allies will win", upon returning home (in 1941), Ho Chi Minh decided to establish *Vietnam's independent allied* Front with the intention to assert: This Front sided with allies to fight against fascism. Ho Chi Minh's right policy contributed to building up the righteousness of the Viet Minh's Front and the legitimacy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam because "allied countries ... determined not to deny the independence rights of Vietnamese people. A nation who have bravely sided with the Allies to fight against fascism for several years, they must be independent" [6, p. 3].

In order to determine the strategy of national liberation, the leader of the movement is not allowed to follow the voluntarism but must analyze scientifically the force correlation between us and the enemy. In that spirit, since 1944, Ho Chi Minh emphasized: "without the strong help of the outside, the liberation campaign would hardly succeed, especially now we are facing the two most vicious invaders of the East and the West" [5, p. 480]. The reality of the revolution required the enlistment of *the support of the allies* but did not allow them to manipulate. Due to the close geographical conditions and the fact that the Koumintang was a close ally of the US, Ho Chi Minh determined: This was the first force that Viet Minh needed to enlist. He clearly stated: "You should not be deluded into Chiang Kai-shek but you must use China as a bridge to take advantage of the Allies" [Cited from 11, p. 39 - 40]. In order to receive the support of Chinese Koumintang for the Vietnamese revolution, Ho Chi Minh dignified the foreign policy of Chiang Kai-shek: "As for us, we always firmly believe that China's traditional morality is to "defend the weak, help the vulnerable, save the dying" and we believe in China's national policy that "Minorities in the world are united to strives together" [5, p. 488]. On the one hand, the great strategist Ho Chi Minh tried to establish relations with the Chinese Koumintang, on the other hand, still instructed his officials: "We cannot count on them" [9, p. 208]. Not expecting then paying the price, but not discriminating to lose an essential international relationship, always knowing

to take advantage of all possibilities, even the smallest, most temporary ones, to enlist the support of the world... is the bravery of the diplomat Ho Chi Minh.

Apart from the Republic of China, he also attempted to seek *American support* for the Viet Minh Front because he realized that the US was the only force that could prevent France from returning to Indochina. He sought to contact the *US Air Ground Aid Service* (AGAS) and had a meeting with General Chennault of *Air Force 14* and the representative of *OSS Intelligence Force* in Kunming on March 29, 1945. With his diplomacy, he was given a portrait photo by General Chennault with the words "Your sincere friend, Claire Chennault" [1, p. 2001]. That photo was his effective "passport" on Chinese land and was the evidence for him to show off the prestige of the Viet Minh Front. For the mutual benefits, the coordination between the Viet Minh and the American *OSS Force* took place during the pre-uprising period. According to historians, the Americans trained about 200 Viet Minh cadres and dropped 22 shipments of supplies [See 14, pp. 155-157]. After Hanoi seized power, on August 22, a group of OSS officers led by Major Patti arrived in Hanoi. On August 29, Patti met with Ho Chi Minh and discussed with Him on the *Declaration of Independence* which was being draft. Thus, even without the official recognition of the US government, the cooperation between the Viet Minh Front and the US military forces in southern China was practically established. That contributed to building the prestige for the Viet Minh Front and the prestige for the later Ho Chi Minh's government. It was the result of Ho Chi Minh's strategic vision and clever diplomacy.

**Secondly:** *It is the art of legalizing the accomplishment of the August Revolution and the position of the Government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam.*

The surrender of Japanese fascists to the Allies (August 13, 1945) created a direct revolutionary situation but the Party clearly defined: "It is not the fact that when Japan is defeated, our country is automatically independent. A lot of hardships will come. We have to be smart and determined, to be clever to avoid the unfavorable to us, to be determined to achieve the complete independence" [2, p. 561]. Implementing the policy of a general uprising to seize the authority of the Indochinese Communist Party, "the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was born in the blink of history" [17, p. 18]. However, making major countries acknowledge and respect the fledgling independence and legitimacy of the new state was still extremely difficult. As President of the Provisional Government and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ho Chi Minh rushed to organize the *Independence Ceremony* and in that ceremony, he announced to the citizens and the whole world about the advent of the State of Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh "moved" one step faster than the Allies; Chiang Kai-shek's conspiracy to erect the puppet government was completely broken.

Parallel to the establishment of the revolutionary government in reality, understanding the "rational" thinking of Westerners, the *Declaration of Independence* - the nation's founding proclamation of Ho Chi Minh has fully proved the *legal basis* of the independence of Vietnam. *The theoretical bases* which He proposed were the immortal truths which were affirmed in the *Declaration of Independence* (1776) of the United States, in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789) of France and were recognized by Western law. By using method of "what goes around comes around", Ho Chi Minh "pushed" the US and France into a difficult position to counterattack, while enlisting the broad consensus of the world public opinion. In addition to solid theoretical grounds, Ho Chi Minh pointed out the *practical basis* that France cowardly "offered" Indochina to Japan and the Vietnamese people had gained the independence from Japan, not from France. Therefore, if allied countries still did not recognize and protect the independence of the Vietnamese people, we have the rights to doubt about their fairness and integrity. The *Declaration of Independence* not only legalized the fledgling independence but also legalized the legitimacy of the Provisional Government.

Besides the *Declaration of Independence* - the multilateral diplomatic document sent to the whole world, Ho Chi Minh both patiently expressed his desire to join the United Nations, and tried to mobilize each country in the Allies, especially The United States, to recognize Vietnam's independence. As evidence, only from August 30, 1945 to December 1946, Ho Chi Minh sent letters 3 times to the United Nations, 4 times to Chiang Kai-shek, 3 times to Stalin but 10 times to the President of the US and 3 times to the US Secretary of State. Although the United Nations and major countries did not approve Ho Chi Minh's proposal, the issue of Vietnam has appeared in foreign policy of major countries and was increasingly attracting the attention of the international community.

**Thirdly:** *It is the art of taking advantage of the contradictions among enemies*

After the August Revolution, the Allies "from all directions rushed in. Some were near, some were far away. They were different in color, language, but very similar in a malice, that is: they want to annex our country, and push us back to the life of slavery" [18, p. 36]. In the context of many enemies, Ho Chi Minh emphasized: "Do not fight at the same time with 5 or 6 of bandits and traitors. Punching with both hands at once is not strong" [20, p. 103-104]. That obvious truth was transformed by Ho Chi Minh into the art of taking advantage of contradictions in the ranks of enemies.

On the basis of realizing the conflict between the England - French and American - Chiang about Indochina and considering French colonialist as the main enemy, from August 1945 to the end of February 1946, Ho Chi Minh

implemented a strategy of *reconciling with Chiang's army*. Being aware of the dangers of Chiang's army, but to focus on fighting the French in the South, Ho Chi Minh still issued the slogan "Friendly China - Vietnam". In order to reduce the strength of the crowded but motley army, Ho Chi Minh deliberately deepened the contradictions between the generals of Huanan with the generals of the Chongqing Central Government, between the Yunnan and faction of Liangguang (Cantonese, Guangxi), between the two parties following Chiang's army – Viet Quoc, Viet Cach ... and found out specific plans against each object.

When the *China - France Treaty* was signed (February 28, 1946) with the main content that the Chiang's army would withdraw and the French army would replace the Chiang's in the North, Ho Chi Minh immediately decided to *postpone with France* and signed the *Preliminary Agreement of 6 March 1946* and the *Treaty of September 14, 1946* with representatives of the French government. Thus, in a short period of time but Ho Chi Minh "moved" the opposite moves and that flexibility helped Vietnam escape the situation of being "sandwiched" between the Chiang's and the French.

Thoroughly implementing the strategy of taking advantage of contradictions among enemies, during the negotiation period with France, Ho Chi Minh also saw the contradiction between the combative faction, represented by d'Argenlieu, Valluy, Pignon and more moderate ones with Leclerc, Léon Blum and sought to arouse the spirit of anti-war among enemies. The more dangerous the revolutionary situation was, the more effective Ho Chi Minh's tactics of taking advantage of contradictions among the enemies seemed.

**Fourthly:** *It is the art of concession with a principle.*

In order to successfully negotiate diplomacy, the parties must "make concessions to each other moderately" [8, p. 551]. With the ability to prophesy and ability of "Attacking, retreating as quickly as lightning", Ho Chi Minh was the master of the compromise and tolerance art.

In order to reconcile with the Chiang's army in the North, Ho Chi Minh conceded to them some economic, political and military interests. In terms of *economy*, we accepted to provide foods for Chiang's army, and allow Chiang Kai-shek to circulate the golden coins on Vietnamese territory. In terms of *politics*, Ho Chi Minh declared the dissolution of the Communist Party (actually operated covertly), accepted to concede the two parties following Chiang's – Viet Quoc and Viet Cach - 70 seats in the National Assembly, accepted reforms of revolutionary government into a united government with the participation of the two parties Viet Quoc and Viet Cach. Regarding the *military*, Ho Chi Minh advocated avoiding all attacks and provocations of the Chiang's army and cleverly resolved conflicts under the motto of "turning great things into small things, small things to unscathed". Explaining to the cadres about the reconciling strategy with Chiang, He emphasized: "Patience is not docile, obedient, *it is a form of struggle*" [Cited from 4, p. 389]. Patience is also the bravery of people who can control common emotions, acknowledge to sacrifice some immediate benefits to expedite the great work.

Ho Chi Minh's sensitivity and timeliness in implementing the strategy of compromise also showed that: When the China - France Agreement was not "drained" (February 28, 1946), only a few days later (March 6, 1946), Ho Chi Minh - a man who was pursued and sentenced to death by the French colonial government, at that time properly negotiated and signed the *Preliminary Agreement* with the representative of the great power that ruled his country. The new position did not overwhelm Ho Chi Minh; He showed the poise of the national head. On the negotiation table, the diplomat Ho Chi Minh showed his "determination - flexibility" at the right time and at the right level. On the one hand, he "debated word by word in the drafts of the Treaty" [10, p. 375] to protect national interests; on the other hand, when the negotiation came to a standstill because France did not accept the word "*independence*" of Vietnam, while Vietnam did not accept the word "*autonomy*" of France, Ho Chi Minh proactively proposed an "intermediary" plan that "Vietnam is a *free* country" with its own government, parliament, military, and finance. This is really a "great and creative strategy" [12, p. 43] even though the highest goal had not been reached, the *Preliminary Agreement* still brought many benefits to the Vietnamese revolution. Not only did He chase the 20 myriad of extremely dangerous Chiang's troops back home, show the goodwill of peace and extended the time of reconciliation to prepare for a war that He knew was inevitable in the future, with the Agreement, He also forced the enemy to admit the constitutionality of the revolutionary state, creating premise for other countries to recognize Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh's visit to France as a guest of honor, with reception ceremony for the head of state, direct talks with French government... it self showed that France had indirectly recognized the independent status of Vietnam. Although the *Agreement of September 14* stipulated that Vietnam must concede to France some economic and cultural interests, it would not change the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

In diplomatic negotiations, concessions and compromises are inevitable, but Ho Chi Minh's concessions are *principled* concessions; it is not too *right* to break the negotiation but not too *left* to damage the reputation and basic interests of the nation.

**Fifthly:** *It is the art of persuading others.*

Ho Chi Minh persuaded people by morality and the legal basis to achieve set foreign policy goals. During the August Revolution period, Ho Chi Minh convinced the following three main forces.

*Firstly*, understanding America's "rising" position in international politics, Ho Chi Minh persisted in calling for US recognition and cooperation with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. After the death of President Roosevelt (April 12, 1945), who advocated separating Indochina from France and placed under international mandate, due to the purpose of enticing France to fight against the Soviet Union and prejudice against the communists, the successor president Truman went from a *neutral* standpoint to a state of *ignorance* and finally "*switched green light*" for France to return for invading Indochina. The American attitude is completely detrimental to the fledgling independence of Vietnam. Taking advantage of that situation, the French opened fire a second aggression to the South on September 23, 1945. With the motto "where there's life, there's hope", Ho Chi Minh used all means to persuade the US government. He praised America's role as a "world justice defender and advocate"; He affirmed that the French invasion to Vietnam was not only contrary to international law but also a challenge to the American anti-colonial tradition and a direct threat to world security... After repeatedly expressing hope in the "great help of the US government" [6, p. 184] without results, he frankly condemned the "complicity, or at least a blind eye of the great democracy" [6, p. 203] in the face of French aggression and proposed to the Allies, including the US "to take all appropriate steps" to bring the Vietnamese people "position worthy of a nation who fought and suffered greatly for democratic ideals" [6, p. 209]. Although every *reasonable* statement of Ho Chi Minh fell into a state of "no response", but in the *Answer to an American journalist* on January 12, 1947, Ho Chi Minh expressed his consistent will of "keeping in touch with America" [7, p. 29]. Later, many Americans regretted that "if the United States supported Ho Chi Minh at that time, the United States could avoid the most costly and tragic war in the history years later" [Cited from 15, p. 20].

*Secondly*, Ho Chi Minh cleverly "attacked hearts" of Chiang Kai-shek's army to limit their resistance. Knowing well the subversion and overbearing attitude of Chiang's army, Ho Chi Minh still actively welcomed them with a respectful spirit. He wrote many articles praised the *friendly Chinese - Vietnamese* spirit and affirmed: The presence of Chiang's army in the North helped prevent the advance of French troops in the South. When Commander Lu Han, Deputy General Xiao Wen, Commander-in-Chief He Yingqin... arrived in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh personally visited or held a solemn reception ceremony. When they first arrived, they aggressively accused "Ho Chi Minh of the 10 deadly sins" but in front of a man who was the embodiment of righteousness, clarity, kindness, and tolerance, the aggression of enemies naturally diminished.

*Thirdly*, Ho Chi Minh persisted in persuading the politicians, military and the French people with the "undeniable" reasons, that independence - freedom was the sacred natural rights of the nations. Although the war happened in the South, in his *Letter to the French in Indochina*, Ho Chi Minh still called the French "friends" and pledged: Vietnam "fought against French colonialism but not against the honest French" [6, p. 77]. In his meetings with French generals in Indochina, Ho Chi Minh awakened in them the spirit of chivalry, making them clearly aware of Vietnam's peaceful goodwill. For example, when receiving General Challant (February 8, 1946), Ho Chi Minh said: "I know you are a kind person. In this after, we are friends. Tomorrow we can be enemies. I hope we will be friends forever" [1, p. 152]. When he went to France, whether speaking to the French authorities, during a press conference or meeting with representatives of the French people, Ho Chi Minh expressed his belief that "Paris had fought and suffered for freedom, they would understand and support the aspirations of the Vietnamese people, which were also their own" [6, p. 307]. Knowing the war plotting of French military forces in Indochina but Ho Chi Minh persisted: Vietnam must be independent but ready to cooperate with France, giving France certain interests in spirit of trusting and respecting each other's interests. In Ho Chi Minh's words, truth and morality, goodwill and willpower merged into one. Therefore, despite being dubbed as the one who "wrecked the whole French colonial regime", Ho Chi Minh was still respected by the French people and rivals. J. Sainteny, who negotiated with Ho Chi Minh for 16 months, admitted: "It's a pity that France has underestimated, not fully understood the value and strength of this character" [10, p. 224-225].

Talking about Ho Chi Minh's art of mind attack, one Western historian said: "Uncle Ho Chi Minh ... knew how to use both the culture and the soul of the enemy to win" [Cited from 16, p. 319]. In foreign relations, Ho Chi Minh is a vivid symbol of a nation that always wants to "take pen instead of sword", take justice instead of bombs, take humanity instead of hatred, and war is just "extreme reluctance".

The great victory of the August Revolution and the stability of the young Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the situation of "enemies within and enemies without" have shown the "steering" ability of genius diplomat Ho Chi Minh. That path has become "unforgettable years" in the history of the nation and is a powerful testament to the talent of a human being who "turned into reality what ordinary people seem hopeless" [13, p. 193].

## **2. Instead of the conclusion**

The Indochinese Communist Party once affirmed: "Above all, diplomacy is making our country less enemies and more allies" [3, p. 27]. Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art crystallizes from scientific thinking, bright and pure soul, self-control ability of a human being understanding historical law, knowing international politics and the state of psychology of people. Therefore, it is completely not "tricks" but the bravery of a great culture activist. Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art shines because it comes from the right viewpoint, that "diplomacy must rely on national power" and Vietnam's greatest power is the power of the grand unity of all people gathered in the Viet Minh Front. Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art is also a perfect unity between strategy and tactics, between principle and flexibility. With rare bravery, the more in difficulty, the more diplomat Ho Chi Minh expressed creativity and strategy; the more in difficulty, the more his role is asserted as "irreplaceable". Recalling the August Revolution, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong wrote: "Whenever I recall those years, a thought always came to me: If there had not been Ho Chi Minh at that time, it would have been hard to predict anything happening" [13, p. 175].

No one can fully explain Ho Chi Minh's talent and diplomatic art because He is an example of humility, of "talking little, doing much". Moreover, diplomacy is a field that contains many "top secret" things. Therefore, one Ho Chi Minh's opponent concluded: "Ho Chi Minh is the only person who can retell his own operating life" [10, p. 317.]. Thanks to the outstanding leadership of Ho Chi Minh, the revolutionary boat of Vietnam overcome numerous difficulties to go forwards. Over the years, Ho Chi Minh's diplomatic art in the August Revolution is forever a proud memory of the Vietnamese people and a valuable experience for diplomacy in the period of international integration today.

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