

LEGACY OF PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH AND INDIA–VIETNAM TIES

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Abstract

Vietnam's foreign policy and its engagement with India have been guided by President Ho Chi Minh's ideas on nationalism and international solidarity. In this background, the paper highlights how Ho Chi Minh's vision of South–South cooperation goes together with India's commitment to multilateralism and regional stability. The author compares Ho Chi Minh with other contemporary world leaders including Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. It argues that promoting Ho Chi Minh's thought in the 21st century is a tribute to a strategic and normative framework for building a just, inclusive, and peaceful Indo-Pacific order. The paper also explores the legacy of Ho Chi Minh and his relevance to the evolving Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Vietnam, focusing on defence, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and multilateral engagements. Adopting a constructivist approach, the study interprets Ho Chi Minh's principles of solidarity, independence, and self-reliance as normative forces shaping contemporary India–Vietnam relations. The analysis demonstrates how both nations embody his ideals through diplomacy, mutual respect, and the pursuit of shared prosperity in the Global South.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh, India–Vietnam relations, comprehensive strategic partnership, South–South cooperation, multilateralism.

1. Introduction

President Ho Chi Minh stands as an inspiring figure in the history of the Global South, who positioned himself both as a national liberator and a global leader. Ho Chi Minh's early travels across Europe and North America shaped his understanding of imperialism and inspired his lifelong dedication to nationalism and social justice.

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This paper examines the India–Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, based on Ho Chi Minh’s legacy of principled leadership, international solidarity, and the unwavering pursuit of peace and justice for all. It argues that promoting Ho Chi Minh’s thought is not merely of historical interest but offers a comprehensive framework for enhancing regional stability and South–South cooperation. It also explores their multidimensional cooperation in defence, trade, education, cultural exchange, and regional security.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in the *constructivist perspective* of international relations, which emphasizes the power of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping state behavior. Constructivism contends that states do not act solely based on material capabilities or self-interest, but also according to shared meanings and social interactions. As Alexander Wendt (1992) notes, “anarchy is what states make of it,” meaning that cooperation and conflict are socially constructed rather than predetermined. Similarly, Martha Finnemore (1996) highlights that national interests evolve through institutional learning and the internalization of international norms.

In the context of India–Vietnam relations, constructivism provides a useful lens to understand how historical experiences of colonial struggle, moral leadership, and shared values continue to influence their foreign policies. The partnership reflects a collective identity built on mutual respect, independence, and South–South solidarity – key principles central to Ho Chi Minh’s worldview. This theoretical foundation explains why India and Vietnam prioritize multilateralism, self-reliance, and peace as guiding norms in their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership today.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Ho Chi Minh and national sovereignty

Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist leader who encouraged newly independent nations to assert their sovereignty amid Cold War realities. “In the pursuit of his cherished goal of independence for the whole of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh led his people into an armed struggle with French colonialists and Japanese militants, confronted Chinese warlords and finally found himself facing the might of the United States” (The Times of India, 1969a).

Born as Nguyen Sinh Cung, Ho Chi Minh’s political journey took him across continents. He used the pseudonym Nguyen Ai Quoc while engaged in revolutionary activities in France for the cause of the independence of Vietnam. In his initial years, he worked as a helper in France and a sailor in the United States and became a key voice for Vietnamese independence at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919. These experiences shaped his internationalistic outlook. He also stood in solidarity with

liberation movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America along with Vietnam's struggle against colonialism. To quote his famous lines (President Ho Chi Minh's Testament, 1995, p. 60): "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom. We would rather endure and sacrifice than lose independence and be slaves." These words from Ho Chi Minh provided the foundation of Vietnam's national identity and international solidarity. He combined a deep love for his country with a strong commitment to peace and justice. Jean Lacouture, in his *Political Biography of Ho Chi Minh*, describes him as "the man who remains awake when everyone else sleeps" (Lacouture, 1968, p. 4). His vision for a united Vietnam is expressed in the following lines from his last testament written in 1969 (President Ho Chi Minh's Testament, 1995, p. 53):

"Our mountains will always be, our rivers will always be, our people will always be. The American invaders defeated, we will rebuild our land ten times more beautiful."

He further says: "Vietnam is one country; the Vietnamese are one nation. The South is Vietnamese blood, the flesh of Vietnamese flesh. Rivers can run dry, mountains can be eroded, but this truth shall never be changed." Though he never saw a liberated and unified Vietnam, his revolutionary legacy remains enduring. His contributions are relevant not only to Vietnam's foreign policy of "independence, self-reliance, peace, and multilateralism," but also remain deeply respected within the international community.

Ho Chi Minh "was deeply interested in the lives of Black people and their struggles for equality" (All African People's Revolutionary Party, 2022). His support for the Black Liberation Movement and Pan-Africanism is reflected in the following lines (Bernard, 1965, p. 51): "It is well known that the Black race is the most oppressed and most exploited of the human family. It is well known that the spread of capitalism and the discovery of the New World had as an immediate result the rebirth of slavery which was, for centuries, a scourge for the Negroes and a bitter disgrace for mankind."

Ho Chi Minh's deep concern and affection for his compatriots can be seen in his last testament where he writes (Ho Chi Minh, 1977, p. 361): "Our laboring people, in the plains as in the mountains, have for generation after generation endured hardships, feudal and colonial oppression and exploitation; they have in addition experienced many years of war. Yet, our people have shown great heroism, courage, enthusiasm and industriousness. They have always followed the Party since it came into being, with unqualified loyalty. The Party must work out effective plans for economic and cultural development so as to constantly improve the life of our people". Through his diplomatic vision and belief in the power of unity, Ho Chi Minh emerged as a global figure who championed peace, self-determination, and equality among nations. His legacy stands out as an inspiration for social justice and cooperation across the countries of the Global South.

3.2. International solidarity and South–South cooperation

Ho Chi Minh viewed India and Vietnam as natural partners with shared history and national aspirations. His call for freedom and hope for the oppressed people across the world made him a champion of democracy and national self-determination. His ideas are deeply rooted in his love for his motherland, and therefore he believed that national liberation must be accompanied by global solidarity. His admiration for Mahatma Gandhi and his diplomatic rapport with leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Kwame Nkrumah reflected his commitment to a united global front against colonialism (The New York Times, 1965). He was a rare blend of revolutionary pragmatism and moral idealism, combining the philosophies of Eastern wisdom, Marxist thought, and a commitment to human dignity. What set him apart was his ability to transform revolutionary ideas into practical, people-centered governance while also forging friendships with leaders and movements worldwide.

It is interesting to note how much he learned from Mahatma Gandhi. Bernard B. Fall brings him closer to M. Gandhi, possessing a certain “deceptive simplicity” not often found in Communist leaders (Bernard, 1965, p. x). Jean Lacouture calls him “midway between the Mao of the Long March and Gandhi at the Spinning Wheel” (Lacouture, 1968, p. 175). William J. Duiker in his biography of Ho Chi Minh calls him “half Lenin and half Gandhi” (Duiker, 2000). In fact, Ho Chi Minh was both a “Confucian humanist” and a “Communist revolutionary” (FitzGerald, 2000). Lacouture also compares him with Lenin and Gandhi: “For Vietnam, he is a Lenin who has lived long enough to defeat the Nazis, a Gandhi who has deserted his spinning wheel to build factories and direct a war of resistance” (Lacouture, 1968, p. 208). At the same time, being closer to Gandhian ideology, it is believed that “like Gandhi, he imagined national independence as an idea to put an end to all injustices in society” (Sainteny, 1953). According to the same author, Ho Chi Minh’s vision united moral conviction with pragmatic leadership, bridging Eastern philosophy and revolutionary action. “As a leader of the freedom movement in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh combined rare dedication to the nationalist cause with absolute commitment to communism. He was to the Vietnamese what Gandhi and Nehru were to Indians and Mao Zedong was to the Chinese” (The Times of India, 1969a).

According to journalist Dileep Padgaonkar, “Ho Chi Minh liked to compare his country to a grasshopper and the country or countries opposing it to an elephant” (Dileep, 1990). He says, “Each time Vietnam faced a formidable enemy he would say, today it is the case of the grasshopper pitted against the elephant, but tomorrow the elephant will have its guts ripped out. Often the elephant grew bigger and bigger, but that only strengthened Ho Chi Minh in his resolve that the most effective riposte to an overwhelmingly powerful enemy was intense patriotism permeating down to the poorest

farmer in the paddy field and solidarity with all people waging a struggle against alien and oppressive rule.”

3.3. India–Vietnam historical friendship

The two countries – India and Vietnam have deep historical roots. They share a similar story of colonial rule and the struggle for national independence, and they share cordial bilateral ties in the today. Given the joint vision of “People, Peace and Prosperity” and shared cultural heritage, this section focuses on India’s support during the anti-imperialist struggle and Vietnam’s pursuit of self-determination in the Vietnam War, along with some personal anecdotes from famous personalities. During World War II, “the leaders of India and Vietnam came closer to each other and laid a solid foundation of mutual friendship, based on their belief in anti-colonialism” (Chakraborti, 2008). India extended both moral and political support to Vietnam during its liberation struggle, first against France and then against the United States.

As a visionary leader, Ho Chi Minh fought against the American troops with an unyielding spirit and became a household name in the streets of Kolkata, with the slogan “*Mera Naam Tera Naam, Vietnam–Vietnam,*” which proclaimed solidarity with the people of Vietnam in their fight against American imperialism.

In contemporary times, there are many aspects common in the foreign policies of both countries. Vietnam and India share the same objectives of creating a stable and peaceful environment for national development. Both countries follow multilateralism and diversification of external relations, advocating for an inclusive, open, and balanced regional structure (Thanh, 2018, p. 6).

India’s Vietnam policy has always operated within the context of “its general foreign policy, reflecting changes in its relations with major powers” (Thakur, 1979). Largely, India’s foreign policy in the initial years after independence focused on anti-colonialism. However, analysts feel that when we examine India’s foreign policy regarding Vietnam, it has been based on three pillars: “(1) National self-determination; (2) A negotiated settlement of the conflict; and (3) Non-intervention by other nations in Vietnamese affairs” (Singh, 1967).

The historical friendship between India and Vietnam is deeply rooted in shared experiences, mutual admiration, and a common journey toward freedom and self-determination. One of the most significant milestones in this relationship was Ho Chi Minh’s visit to India in 1958, where he was warmly received by the leadership and the Indian public. This visit was more than a diplomatic gesture; it was seen as profound symbol of solidarity between two nations that had endured colonial oppression and emerged with a commitment to peace, sovereignty, and people-centered development.

President Rajendra Prasad, in his speech during the state banquet hosted in honor of President Ho Chi Minh in India on February 6, 1958, said (Foreign Affairs Record, 1958):

“India is an ancient country whose past goes beyond the dawn of history stretching into the period known as the pre-historic era. Many centuries ago, we had close ties – cultural, social, and religious – with many countries in South-East Asia, including Vietnam. It gives us great pleasure to recollect those times when our two countries were bound by close ties of friendship; more so because we are looking forward to projecting the friendly relations of the past into the future so that our common ties and the desire for economic reconstruction at home and the consolidation of peace in the world forge new links for us, making the friendly ties already subsisting between our peoples even stronger.”

Culturally, India and Vietnam share deep civilizational ties that are evident in their Hindu–Buddhist connections through the Champa kingdom, cultural exchanges, and spiritual philosophies. Ho Chi Minh recognized this as a cementing factor for developing a sustainable partnership between the two countries and laid the groundwork for a robust bilateral relationship that continues to guide strategic cooperation with enduring historical resonance.

To quote Ho Chi Minh during the state banquet hosted in his honor in India in 1958 (Foreign Affairs Record, 1958): “In the cultural field, your scientists and intellectuals have promoted the glorious traditions of Mahatma Gandhi and of the great poet Tagore and are contributing all their strength to the building of the country. We sincerely wish the brotherly Indian people greater and greater successes and wish increasing prosperity to India.”

3.4. President Ho Chi Minh and Indian leaders

The personal rapport between Ho Chi Minh and India’s early leaders reflected a broader alignment of values: both saw national independence as a moral imperative and international cooperation as a tool for building a just world order. It is well known that “the popular mass movement of Mahatma Gandhi inspired the nationalist movement of Vietnam” (Marwah & Le, 2021, p. 2). Mahatma Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh, “regarded as the Fathers of Nations in India and Vietnam respectively, led people in their heroic struggle against colonialism in the two countries” (MEA, 2021).

As an inspiration for Vietnam and the world, Ho Chi Minh blended nationalism with Communist ideology for the liberation of his own country against imperialist forces. Gandhi, on the other hand, stressed the importance of nationalism along with spiritual and social transformation in society. Both leaders imagined national independence as an idea to put an end to all injustices in society. Although their paths

differed, their shared objective remained the same – freedom from colonialism (Le & Nguyen, 2019).

Resonance can be traced between Prime Minister Nehru and President Ho Chi Minh, the two leaders of India and Vietnam. It is also noteworthy that Nehru was called ‘Chacha Nehru’ (uncle) in India, while Ho Chi Minh was popularly known as ‘Bac Ho’ (uncle) in Vietnam. “The extraordinary character of the relationship between Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese people was expressed by the Vietnamese press and government propaganda through the prefixes *cụ* (‘the revered’) and *bác* (‘uncle’)” (Lacouture, 1968, pp. 207–208). “Prime Minister Nehru visited Vietnam after its victory against the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The meeting of Ho Chi Minh and Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation of the formal relations between the two countries” (Chand, 2014). Ho Chi Minh was welcomed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as “a great revolutionary and an almost legendary hero” when he visited India in February 1958.

Published as an obituary on the death of Ho Chi Minh, Prime Minister Nehru wrote: “Ho Chi Minh is not only a man of peace but also an extraordinarily friendly and likable person. Ho was also a man of self-effacing simplicity and humility. As president of Vietnam, Ho does not lock himself in a golden cage. He is essentially a man of the masses – a leader with a rare combination of extreme kindness and resolute single-mindedness. Judged by any standard, Ho is one of the most remarkable men of our times” (The Times of India, 1969b). His passion for nationalism, independence, and dignity, along with pride in one’s civilization, humanism, and fierce conviction for the upliftment of the oppressed, reflects his enduring legacy for Vietnam and the world at large.

3.5. Strategic partnership anchored in shared values

India–Vietnam “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” was signed in 2016. In 2024, leaders of both countries agreed to further strengthen the Vietnam–India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in all areas (MEA, 2024). The ideas of peace, harmony, and international solidarity that provide the cornerstone of such a partnership reflect the common ideals of the founding fathers of the two countries – Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh. Understanding these shared values provides critical insights into the principles that have shaped the bilateral relations between India and Vietnam.

Defence and security cooperation

India–Vietnam defence partnership has been marked by a commitment to a free, open, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. According to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, “mutual cooperation in defence and security sectors has gained new momentum” (MEA, 2024b). This relationship is based on convergent security goals to balance China’s assertiveness and expanding the framework of military, technological, and industrial collaborations.

The elevation of bilateral relations to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” in 2016 signaled formal recognition of Vietnam’s pivotal role in India’s ‘Act East’ and ‘Indo-Pacific’ vision. Contemporary defence cooperation spans a wide range of domains. The Defence Policy Dialogues (DPD) signed in 2009 provide a framework for guiding the India–Vietnam Defence Partnership based on the principles enshrined in the India–Vietnam Joint Vision Statement 2030 (Embassy of India, Hanoi, 2025). The 15th DPD was held in Hanoi in November 2025. “Both sides expressed satisfaction with the progress made in the areas of hydrography cooperation, capacity building and training, UN Peacekeeping Operations, increased port calls and ship visits, and cooperation in niche domains viz. AI and shipyard upgrading” (Press Information Bureau, 2025).

“The India–Vietnam Joint Vision for Peace, Prosperity and People announced in December 2020 is also significant as it serves as the cornerstone for a new era in the bilateral defence partnership” (Ao, 2023). Bilateral military-to-military staff talks, defence exercises, training courses, ship and aircraft visits, and other exchanges are key areas of defence cooperation (MEA, 2023). All these contribute to Ho Chi Minh’s vision of a world in which nations can safeguard their independence and autonomy through self-reliance and the forging of strategic partnerships.

Economic and development cooperation

Economic partnership between India and Vietnam is based on the spirit of self-reliance and mutual benefit. Over the years, both countries have deepened their commercial ties, with bilateral trade surpassing US \$15 billion in recent years. “India is Vietnam’s 8th largest trading partner, the 7th largest export market, and the 10th largest import source” (Embassy of India, 2025). Key sectors of cooperation include energy, infrastructure, information technology, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and tourism.

On one hand, Indian investments are increasing in Vietnam, while on the other, Vietnamese enterprises are finding major opportunities in India’s huge market, the latest entry being the entry of VinFast, an electric vehicle manufacturer in the automobile sector. Development partnership initiatives have also deepened through grassroots projects such as India’s Quick Impact Projects, which aim at addressing development needs in areas like healthcare, education, and basic infrastructure.

These projects reflect Ho Chi Minh’s principle that development must be locally grounded and globally cooperative. Together, both countries are also collaborating in renewable energy, digital transformation, HADR, and sustainable development. Through this expanding economic partnership, India and Vietnam embody Ho Chi Minh’s dream of solidarity and economic strength based on friendship and mutual respect.

People-to-people cooperation and cultural diplomacy

One of the pillars of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Vietnam is people-to-people cooperation. “Buddhism, Yoga, cinema, art, history, and culture based on the warmth of people-to-people ties are a notable feature of the India–Vietnam relationship” (Embassy of India, 2025).

Ho Chi Minh emphasized the importance of culture and history in nation-building and viewed cultural diplomacy as a bridge that unites peoples beyond political and economic differences. “Both India and Vietnam have a long history of utilizing public diplomacy and other instruments of soft power to secure their foreign policy objectives” (Nga & Quang, 2021). Both countries have actively developed cultural ties through the promotion of shared heritage, including Buddhism and ancient trade links visible in the impact of the Champa Kingdom and their cultural traditions. The Indian impact on the Champa Kingdom is a testament to the dynamic interplay of cultural exchange and adaptation (Tran, 2011). The influence of Indian religion, art, literature, and economic practices on Champa highlights the importance of India in shaping the cultural exchanges between the two countries.

In present times, the collaborative art, music, and literary initiatives reflect the vibrancy of this relationship. On the educational front, scholarships offered by the Indian government under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and other schemes allow Vietnamese students and professionals to study in India. Similarly, academic collaborations have further strengthened institutional partnerships. In recognizing Ho Chi Minh’s belief in education, culture, and grassroots engagement, these initiatives represent the foundations of the India–Vietnam partnership.

Partnership in multilateral forums

India and Vietnam have been active in various multilateral forums such as the United Nations, ASEAN-led mechanisms, and plurilateral initiatives. They have advocated for an open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific and served as a strong voice for the Global South. It is important to remember here that Ho Chi Minh’s international outlook was always shaped by a deep commitment to multilateralism. He envisioned a world where countries emerging from colonial rule could work together to build a fair and equitable global order. This vision finds strong resonance in the modern India–Vietnam partnership.

Both countries actively cooperate in key regional and global platforms, including ASEAN, the East Asia Summit (EAS), Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the United Nations. “ASEAN has provided additional opportunities for India and Vietnam to meet bilaterally. Vietnam’s adherence to the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) stands as complementary to the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) of India. The AOIP and the IPOI demonstrate substantial commonalities and greatly enhance the scope of cooperation” (Chauhan et

al., 2020). Leaders of the two countries have recognized “the key role of ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture for regional peace, stability, and prosperity” (MEA, 2024a). They both emphasize the importance of reforming global institutions to better represent the voices and interests of the Global South, a principle rooted in Ho Chi Minh’s belief in justice and equality among nations.

4. Conclusion

The multifaceted partnership between India and Vietnam is firmly rooted in the ideals of national sovereignty and international solidarity. Given the global uncertainties and regional tensions in the Indo-Pacific, Ho Chi Minh’s vision continues to inspire and guide the contemporary regional and global order, particularly within the India–Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. His legacy reminds us that national independence must go together with international cooperation. It further suggests that peace and development are possible only when nations regard each other with mutual respect.

In the context of India–Vietnam relations, his legacy calls for collaboration both at the level of government and civil society. Ho Chi Minh’s vision serves as a guiding light for their joint efforts in multilateralism and regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. It reflects the importance of solidarity among nations in the Global South. As both countries have emerged from long struggles for independence, they share his ideals and carry forward his legacy through cooperation in defence, economic development, education, culture, and regional security.

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