



Women's Rights in Vietnam: A Comparative Approach to Ho Chi Minh Thought and International Standards

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the relationship between Ho Chi Minh Thought and international human rights frameworks on women's rights through a structured comparative analysis. Drawing on qualitative textual analysis, the study compares selected writings of Ho Chi Minh with key international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, across three dimensions: subjects of rights, objectives of equality, and mechanisms of implementation. The findings indicate that both frameworks converge in their commitment to substantive gender equality and the elimination of discrimination. However, they diverge in their approaches to rights realization. International norms emphasize legal institutionalization and accountability, whereas Ho Chi Minh Thought foregrounds political participation, collective mobilization, and the integration of women's rights within broader processes of national liberation and social transformation. The study argues that these differences are not inherently contradictory but reveal complementary strengths and limitations. While international frameworks provide enforceable legal standards, Ho Chi Minh Thought offers a context-sensitive perspective that emphasizes political agency and historical conditions. The article contributes to human rights scholarship by proposing a comparative framework that integrates legal and political approaches, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of women's rights in post-colonial and developing contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary human rights discourse, women's rights are widely acknowledged as an integral part of the universal human rights system. Since the advent of the UDHR (1948) and CEDAW (1979), women's rights have not only been affirmed in terms of norms, but also within the framework of international legal obligations and global monitoring mechanisms (Abbas and Qasim, 2025, Dao et al., 2024, Do, 2024). However, in parallel with the expansion of these norms, many academic debates have shown that the modern international human rights framework still bears the imprint of Western liberal and legal thinking, with an emphasis on the individual and not fully explaining the role of specific historical-political contexts, especially in post-colonial societies and countries undergoing national liberation revolutions (Duong, 2000, Earl, 2018, Frondoza et al., 2025). This shows a limitation of international norms, while always emphasizing issues of substantive equality, still struggle to deal with structural inequalities associated with colonial history, class relations, and social power stratification. It is in this context that the need to expand the theoretical space of human rights research, through the consideration of models of non-Western approaches, becomes an urgent scholarly and practical requirement (Hoang, 2024).

In this connection, it is convenient to set the international human rights norms in discourse with political-ideological structures that appeared in the environment of national liberation and social revolution (Hobbs, 2023; Hội học & Tâm, 2025; Hương, 2018). In this light, the idea of women rights expressed by Ho Chi Minh can be discussed as an issue of not only the ideological legacy of

Vietnam, but also an illustration of non-Western consciousness of human rights, where the rights of women are directly tied to the larger cause of national liberation, social change, and the development of the state (Korn, 2025; Liu et al., 2024).

This article focuses on how Ho Chi Minh Thought presents women as both victims of injustice and as agents of the revolutionary change, as opposed to viewing it as a fully-fledged or coherent human rights system. This dual positioning offers a valuable perspective, as a point of comparison with international human rights norms. Based on this, the research question of the article is as follows: How does Ho Chi Minh Thought conceptualize women's rights in relation to international human rights frameworks, particularly UDHR and CEDAW?

To answer this question, the article aims to achieve three goals:

- (i) To explain the most important components of the thought of Ho Chi Minh on women rights in view of political and human rights;
- (ii) To contrast these aspects with some international instruments, in particular, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to find areas of overlap and differences; and
- (iii) To consider what this comparison might say about modern debates about women's rights in Vietnam and other such situations.

The current literature on women's rights takes two strands. The importance of the legal frameworks of the UDHR and CEDAW is emphasized by the international human rights studies (Dao et al., 2024; Do, 2024), yet the socio-political contexts are frequently ignored (McLaren, 2017). Conversely, research about Ho Chi Minh's thought is descriptive and quite limited to national liberation and state-building (Nguyen, 2022). There is a lack of systematically conducted comparisons of these views. This paper fills this gap by conducting a systematic comparative study.

The article brings to the fore both complementarities and tensions between global human rights standards and locally based ideological approaches. Although provisional, this comparison adds to the existing discussions on the universality and contextualization of human rights and proposes ways to investigate the subject of gender equality in post-colonial and developing societies further.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Women's rights as a constituent part of human rights: from formal equality to substantive equality

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a principle of equality in dignity and rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women proceeds with this framework by considering the structural discrimination, and the circumstances under which women are not able to exercise the rights in practice (Duong, 2000, Earl, 2018). This development demonstrates a change in the formal equality which is the legal acknowledgment of equal rights to substantive which needs institutional, social, and economic change. Yet, as much as this change is generally recognized, its ramifications are still not evenly theorized and applied to contexts. Modern scholarship reinforces this substantive turn and exposes its shortcomings. As an example, Melissa Leach highlights the agency of women in the process of sustainability transitions, in the defiance of passive ideas of vulnerability (Frondoza et al., 2025, Hien et al., 2022). Likewise, Isha Ray also associates the concept of gender equality with the development outcomes and states that it should be given the central position, instead of being a side policy goal. In the meantime, Amartya Sen thinks of the freedom of women as part of development itself rather than a factor of development. However, these strategies, although analytically strong, are likely to generalize the means by which the substantive equality is attained. They tend to underestimate situations whereby the rights of women are entrenched in the battles of sovereignty, political legitimacy, and post-colonial change (Huong, 2018, Korn, 2025). Consequently, the correlation between rights and historical-political circumstances is under-researched. This constraint is an indication of a more context-specific framework, which would not dismiss international norms, but would offer a critical placement of the international norms with locally situated ideological and political traditions.

Ho Chi Minh's approach to women's rights

The recent literature in political theory and human rights has begun to adopt a greater focus on situating rights within indigenous ideologies and historical experiences outside Western paradigms (Liu et al., 2024, Maheshwari, 2023). Specifically, postcolonial approaches emphasize the fact that the rights of women in most developing situations are inherent in larger movements against colonial rule, social inequality, and social injustice (McLaren, 2017). Instead of considering gender equality a separate legal category, these strategies introduce it as a component of broader political change processes, such as national liberation and state-building. The article is based on such views but it does not stop at the general description but instead explores the way in which the thought of Ho Chi Minh operationalizes such linkage. In particular, it posits that his method can be analytically explained by incorporating three dimensions of political agency, social change and normative equality. Not only are women seen as right-holders in a formal legal system, but are also placed as agents of revolutionary change. This dual framing is what sets the perspectives of Ho Chi Minh and the approaches that focus on either legal recognition or social participation separately (Messoud Boureghda, 2025). Meanwhile, this framework shows in-house tensions. Though it places women at the center of a joint effort, it also locates their rights in the context of national and social needs, which casts doubts on the rights of individuals

and the priorities of the group (Nguyen et al., 2022). Through forecasting these dynamics, the analysis will not place Ho Chi Minh thought as a unique or entirely original system, but a historically based approach that could provide a unique perspective to the analysis of the connection between women rights, political participation, and social change.

Analytical framework

Based on the theoretical approaches presented above, the paper constructs a comparative analytical framework to explore Ho Chi Minh Thought and the international standards on the rights of women. The framework is designed to revolve around three interconnected dimensions, i.e., subjects of rights, objectives of rights, and mechanisms of ensuring rights (Vu and Glewwe, 2022, Wang, 2013). This framework allows a methodological comparison of the conceptualization of women as rights-holders, articulation of the goals of gender equality, and how implementation is imagined in various contexts. Under the implementation of this framework, the article is centred on major international tools, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as the points of reference of international standards of the world. Instead of making the assumption of an identity between these frameworks, the analysis attempts to determine where these approaches overlap and diverge and the conditions in which each approach functions (Wilson, 2022, Zunnuraeni et al., 2023). Such a comparative prism enables a more delimited evaluation of Ho Chi Minh Thought, not as a closed system, but as a historical system that gets implicated in more general human rights discourses. Through this, the framework facilitates the context-specific analysis of women rights, between ideological underpinning and institutional and normative changes.

Critical literature positioning

The modern literature (McLaren, 2017, Meeker and Phan, 2026, Messaoud Boureghda, 2025) on the rights of women can be roughly divided into two strands, but the line between them is not strict. On the one hand, international human rights studies have been concerned with legal and normative changes relating to the use of tools like the UDHR and CEDAW, with an emphasis on the state responsibilities and the official acknowledgment of gender equality. Meanwhile, a more critical literature raises doubts about the boundaries of this highly legalistic approach, where formal rights do not directly result in substantive equality without alterations to social forms, cultural practices, and power dynamics (Miller, 2019, Nguyen, 2022). Conversely, Vietnamese analyses of Ho Chi Minh thought have a tendency to place more emphasis on the historical and political contribution of women as the rights-holders and agents of revolutionary change. Those works emphasize the inclusion of gender equality into the national liberation and state-building processes, yet tend to be descriptive and mostly placed in the domestic historical context. Although there are certain (McLaren, 2017, Meeker and Phan, 2026, Messaoud Boureghda, 2025) intersections with the wider human rights discourse, there is little direct and systematic comparison with the international frameworks.

The current article is therefore not asserting to bridge this divide completely but aims at making contributions to this bridge by bringing these strands to the dialogue table. In this way, it will provide a comparative viewing point that points to the complementarities and tensions, but it will be sensitive to the contextuality of women rights in various socio-political contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

Sources of Data and Search Strategy.

This research relies on both primary and secondary sources to help facilitate a comparative analysis of Ho Chi Minh thought and the international human rights frameworks on the rights of women. Primary sources are formally issued volumes of speech, writing, and correspondence of Ho Chi Minh (1930-1969), in which is prioritized the speech, writing, and correspondence which directly discuss women, gender equality, social roles, and state-building. Such sources are found in authoritative collections of Vietnamese language materials, and checked translations into English where possible. As far as the international aspect is concerned, the research is devoted to such normative documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as they are recognized worldwide and the sphere of women rights is directly related to them. The secondary sources will be located with the help of a systematic search of the academic databases of Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search method integrates the key words such as women rights, gender equality, Ho Chi Minh thought, human rights and post colonial perspectives. Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published within 2000 to 2025 are considered as inclusion criteria, with earlier foundational articles and books included where needed.

The process of selection is iterative with relevance to the analytical framework to ensure that the end product is a corpus of dominant views and critical debates that will be vital in a balanced comparative analysis.

Comparative Analysis

The research employs a comparative political analysis to explore the interactions between Ho Chi Minh Thought and international human rights in relation to women's rights. This approach is based on a specific analytical framework outlined in the theoretical part, involving three dimensions: the subject of rights, the goals of rights protection and rights promotion mechanisms. The comparison is conducted through a two-step process combining thematic coding and cross-framework analysis. The selected texts from Ho Chi Minh's writings and key international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, are coded according to the three analytical dimensions: subjects of rights, objectives of rights, and implementation mechanisms. The coded findings are systematically compared across these dimensions to identify similarities, differences, and underlying tensions. This structured comparison enables a consistent evaluation of how each framework conceptualizes and operationalizes women’s rights. Through this comparative analysis, the study highlights the areas of agreement (such as the principle of gender equality) and disagreement (especially in the logic of rights realisation). International norms prioritise legal norms and institutional accountability, whereas Ho Chi Minh Thought focuses on political engagement and social mobilisation. This comparative study not only allows for a deeper understanding of diverse normative systems but also provides an opportunity to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, thus revealing how non-Western approaches can add to the body of human rights theory.

Historical-Logical Method

The historical-logical approach is used to contextualise Ho Chi Minh's ideas on women's rights within their socio-political and historical context. This method focuses on the development of his ideas vis-à-vis his country's history of colonialism, national liberation and state-building in the 20th century. The connecting of theoretical ideas with historical circumstances prevents an abstract, ahistorical analysis of ideas. Instead, it emphasises the way in which Ho Chi Minh's ideas on women's rights formed part of a revolutionary project that aimed to change political and social relations. This approach also enables an examination of the evolution and application of these ideas in contemporary Vietnam, showing their relevance. In turn, the study highlights the need to understand human rights in terms of the particular historical legacies of post-colonial and developing nations.

Policy Analysis and Use of Secondary Data

Along with comparative and theoretical approaches, the study also engages in policy analysis and the use of secondary data to inform its claims. Secondary data in this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and policy reports on women’s rights, human rights theory, and Ho Chi Minh Thought, sourced from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Through the inclusion of policy analysis in conjunction with theoretical analysis, the study provides a more informed understanding of the interplay between ideology, law and practice. However, the results should be interpreted in the context of a theoretical and comparative political-human rights study, rather than as conclusive empirical investigations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from the comparative analysis of Ho Chi Minh Thought and international human rights norms on women’s rights. It highlights both similarities in principles of gender equality and differences in their approaches to implementation. The discussion critically examines how these frameworks complement and challenge each other in achieving substantive equality. Table 1 shows comparative extraction of key findings.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Women’s Rights Frameworks (Evidence-Based)

Analytical Dimension	Ho Chi Minh Thought	International Norms (UDHR & CEDAW)	Critical Insight (Linked to Analysis)
Concept of Rights	Rights articulated in relation to national liberation and social transformation (see Section 3, primary texts 1945–1969)	Rights framed as universal and individual legal entitlements (Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women)	Tension between collective-political framing and individual-legal universalism
Role of Women	Women positioned as revolutionary agents and participants in state-building	Women primarily defined as rights-holders protected from discrimination (CEDAW Articles 1–3)	Participation-oriented vs protection-oriented emphasis
Equality Approach	Emphasis on empowerment through participation and social transformation	Emphasis on substantive equality through legal and policy measures (CEDAW framework)	Convergent commitment to substantive equality, divergent operational pathways
Implementation Mechanism	Realization through political mobilization, ideological commitment, and mass organizations	Realization through legal obligations, monitoring bodies, and institutional accountability	Gap between political mobilization and formal legal enforcement
Strengths	Context-sensitive; addresses structural and historical inequalities	Provides enforceable standards and institutional safeguards (UDHR/CEDAW analysis)	Complementary strengths identified through cross-dimensional comparison
Limitations	Potential subordination of	Limited engagement with historical-	Mutual limitations

	individual rights to collective goals	political specificity (literature review)	evident in comparative findings
Contemporary Relevance	Requires institutionalization and intersectional expansion	Requires contextual adaptation in post-colonial settings	Supports need for a hybrid, context-sensitive model

Table 1 shows comparative extraction of key findings. The comparative findings highlight a fundamental duality in the conceptualization and realization of women's rights. Ho Chi Minh Thought offers a politically grounded and context-sensitive framework that effectively addresses structural inequalities rooted in colonial and socio-economic conditions. By emphasizing women's active participation in national and social transformation, it moves beyond passive rights recognition toward substantive empowerment. In contrast, international norms such as the UDHR and CEDAW provide a universal legal architecture that prioritizes individual rights, institutional accountability, and enforceable protections. However, the analysis reveals that each framework contains inherent limitations. Ho Chi Minh's approach, while transformative, risks subordinating individual autonomy to collective political goals and lacks robust institutional safeguards. Conversely, international frameworks, despite their legal strength, often struggle to address deeply embedded structural and historical inequalities, particularly in post-colonial contexts. Instead, an integrated model is required one that combines the legal enforceability of international norms with the contextual responsiveness and political dynamism of indigenous frameworks. Such a synthesis would enable a more comprehensive and practically effective realization of women's rights across diverse socio-political environments.

Convergences Between Ho Chi Minh Thought and International Human Rights Norms

The development of contemporary international human rights law has solidified women's rights as an integral part of human rights. When examined against primary international instruments such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), there is considerable overlap in underlying principles in Ho Chi Minh Thought, particularly with respect to equality, non-discrimination and women's role in public life (Maheshwari, 2023, McLaren, 2017).

As for political rights, the UDHR declares that all people are "born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that no one shall be subjected to any discrimination on the grounds of sex or other status. This universal truth is reflected in early Vietnamese constitutions, such as Article 9 of the 1946 Constitution, which proclaimed "women are equal to men in all aspects". Notably, this was more than mere rhetoric (Messoud Boureghda, 2025, Miller, 2019). Women were included as political participants in the 1946 General Election, suggesting that Ho Chi Minh's ideas were put into practice early on. Likewise, both approaches prioritise substantive equality over formal equality. CEDAW's focus on the eradication of structural discrimination and the adoption of special measures to overcome past discrimination resonates with Ho Chi Minh's advocacy for women's empowerment in education, political and socio-economic spheres (Novak, 2025, Phuong, 2023). While expressed in different words, this convergence signals a common understanding of equality as being achieved through not only legal equality but also the capacity-building of women, an idea that echoes Amartya Sen's notion of development as freedom.

However, this should not be overplayed. Both seek substantive equality, but are rooted in different philosophical and institutional frameworks. International norms focus on legal codification and enforcement, while Ho Chi Minh Thought places equality in the broader context of political and social transformation. Therefore, this apparent congruence in principles belies critical differences in the conceptualisation and realisation of rights.

Divergences and Critical Tensions in Rights Realization

While areas of convergence exist, the comparison reveals a deeper theoretical tension between legal-institutional and political-process approaches to rights realization. International frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are grounded in a liberal legal paradigm that conceptualizes rights as pre-existing entitlements, secured through institutional guarantees, state obligations, and mechanisms of accountability (Vu and Glewwe, 2022, Wang, 2013). In contrast, Ho Chi Minh Thought reflects a process-oriented conception of rights, in which women's rights are not merely protected but actively produced through participation in collective political struggle.

This distinction can be understood as a tension between rights as legal status and rights as political practice. Drawing on critical human rights theory, particularly the work of Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, this suggests that formal recognition alone is insufficient without attention to how rights are enacted in lived contexts (Wilson, 2022, Zunnuraeni et al., 2023). However, the inverse also holds: a model grounded primarily in political mobilization risks under-institutionalization, where the absence of stable legal safeguards may leave individual rights vulnerable once revolutionary momentum subsides.

The key issue, therefore, is not simply difference but incomplete theorization on both sides. International norms tend to abstract from historical and political conditions, while Ho Chi Minh Thought embeds rights within collective goals that may constrain individual autonomy (Dao et al., 2024, Do, 2024, Duong, 2000, Earl, 2018). This tension points toward the need for a hybrid

framework that integrates institutional protection with context-sensitive political engagement, rather than privileging one model over the other.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the relationship between Ho Chi Minh Thought and international human rights frameworks is best understood not as simple convergence or divergence, but as a productive tension between different logics of rights realization. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women establish a legal-institutional model grounded in universal norms, Ho Chi Minh Thought advances a historically situated approach in which women's rights are embedded in processes of political participation, national liberation, and social transformation. The comparative analysis shows that both frameworks converge in their commitment to substantive equality but diverge in how this goal is operationalized. International norms emphasize legal guarantees and accountability mechanisms, whereas Ho Chi Minh Thought prioritizes political agency and collective mobilization. Each approach thus reveals both strengths and limitations: legal frameworks risk abstraction from context, while politically grounded approaches risk insufficient institutional protection of individual rights. Rather than privileging one model, the findings suggest the need for a complementary and context-sensitive framework that integrates institutional safeguards with participatory and historically grounded practices. In this sense, the study contributes to ongoing debates on the universality of human rights by illustrating how alternative ideological traditions can refine, rather than challenge, global norms on women's rights.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that debates on women's rights should move beyond a binary between universal legal standards and cultural relativism, and instead focus on how different logics of rights realization interact in practice. The comparison shows that international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women—provide institutional safeguards, while Ho Chi Minh Thought emphasizes political participation and collective mobilization. This indicates that substantive equality is most effectively advanced when legal guarantees are reinforced by context-specific political engagement.

For policy, this implies that adopting international standards alone is insufficient. In contexts like Vietnam, efforts to strengthen women's rights may benefit from combining legal reforms with mechanisms that enhance women's participation in political and social processes. The study also highlights the importance of aligning institutional frameworks with historical and socio-political realities, rather than assuming the transferability of global models.

LIMITATIONS

This study is constrained by its textual and comparative design, which focuses on selected writings of Ho Chi Minh and key international legal instruments. As a result, it does not assess how these frameworks operate in practice or how they are interpreted by different actors. The analysis also treats Ho Chi Minh Thought as a relatively coherent body of ideas, which may overlook internal variations across time and context. Furthermore, by focusing on a single case, the study does not examine whether similar dynamics exist in other post-colonial settings, limiting the broader applicability of its conclusions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should build on these findings by examining how the identified tension between legal-institutional and political-process approaches plays out empirically. This could include case studies of policy implementation in Vietnam to assess how international norms and ideological frameworks interact in practice. Comparative studies across post-colonial contexts would also help determine whether the complementary model suggested here holds beyond the Vietnamese case. Finally, incorporating intersectional analysis would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how women's rights are experienced across different social groups, thereby extending the study's conceptual insights into more grounded and differentiated contexts.

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