

## Implications of collective leadership and the individual charge in the cadre affairs in Vietnam

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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between the collective leadership and the personal charge of the head of agency in the cadre affairs is complex. If this relationship is well understood and managed, the cadre affairs will go smoothly and properly. Otherwise, there would be deviations that cause negative consequences. In order to properly solve the above-mentioned problems, it is important to take the following actions: (i) harmonization of collective leadership and individual charge; (ii) further delegation of authority in cadre affairs, with the head of agency take full responsibility to manage, appoint and dismiss his subordinates; (iii) development of working regimes for every level, which make clear division of authority and accountability of the collective leadership and individual charge; (iv) development and further improvement of power cross-check and balancing mechanisms in cadre affairs; and (v) building the leadership culture and style, in which the leaders and heads of agencies demonstrate the good compliance with the principles of democratic centralism, self-assessment and constructive criticism.

### Keywords

Collective leadership; individual charge; cadre affairs; Vietnam

### Introduction

The relationship between the collective leadership and the personal charge of the head of agency is the relationship between the Party's leadership and the personal charge of the head of agency; between centralization and democracy; between centralism and decentralization, authority delegation; between leadership and management; between collectiveness and individuality. If this relationship is well understood and managed, the cadre affairs will go smoothly and properly. Otherwise, there would be deviations that cause negative consequences.

### Literature Review

Vo Thi Hai Minh<sup>1</sup> highlighted the need to build institutions to fit in well with the reform ideas, especially when such ideas are borrowed or transferred from advanced countries with well developed institutional foundations.

Paul Schuler and Mai Truong<sup>2</sup> concluded that Vietnam has long relied on a remarkably collective leadership structure compared to other single-party regimes. While Vietnam's recent leadership reshuffle does not end that structure, it is not a mere cosmetic or temporary change. Rather, it is congruent with the strategy of some in the party frustrated with the collective leadership structure, to streamline the state apparatus. This move helps the party improve central control and increases efficiency in decision making.

Minh Nhat Duong<sup>3</sup> argued that the concept of democratic centralism makes any effort to decentralize government functions to the local authorities difficult. However, grassroots democracy has in a way tried to decentralize the work of the central government by allowing local communes and the people to take greater ownership in designing and managing social programs and infrastructure projects. One thing

<sup>2</sup> "Leadership Reshuffle and the Future of Vietnam's Collective Leadership" (2019). Yusof Ishak Institute, ISSUE: 2019 No. 9 ISSN 2335-6677

<sup>3</sup> "Grassroots democracy in Vietnamese communes" (2004). The Centre for Democratic Institutions, Research School of Social Sciences, the Australian National University

<sup>1</sup> "Autonomy of public service delivery units in Vietnam: An institutional perspective" (2018). Doctoral thesis. Victoria University of Wellington

the grassroots democracy initiative has achieved is a change in leadership style by building the capacity of local leaders to become more participatory and to manage an open and clean local administration. The more the people know, the better they can discuss and contribute to the affairs of the community. Local authorities are however controlled by the provincial and Central Government. If grassroots democracy brings benefits at the local level, will this create a demand for greater democracy at higher levels of government?

Hai Hong Nguyen<sup>4</sup> found that the ongoing implementation of grassroot democracy is resulting in impacts on the party-state apparatus, state peasantry relations, and cadre-peasant relations in the countryside.

Nguyen Hai Yen<sup>5</sup> shows that cadre training is a very difficult and complex process, which requires both scientific and artistic approaches. The author clarified the basic contents of Ho Chi Minh ideology on developing cadres and the practical application in training cadres who are members of the Civil Affairs Committee of the Provincial People's Committee.

Schafer, John C.<sup>6</sup> described how the life and literature in Vietnam would change if the collective concern became severely weakened.

Futaba Ishizuka<sup>7</sup> pointed out that the environment in which party-state leaders operate has changed greatly, but ambiguities remain under the names of the socialist-oriented market economy and

socialist law-governed state. With the party-state personnel system essentially unchanged from the pre-reform period, party-state leaders have taken advantage of the ambiguous nature of such reforms and consolidated their dominant position in society through acts of corruption and nepotism. The intensive anti-corruption drive by the 12th tenure party leadership dealt a blow to those who committed such deviations. Nevertheless, it did not fundamentally change the situation of political elite dominance, as it aimed to strengthen the concentration of decision-making power and added more requirements for would-be officeholders.

### Relationship between collective leadership and individual charge in cadre affairs

Recently, the Party and state have issued many regulations on the relationship between the collective leadership and the individual responsibility of the head of agency in the cadre affairs. However, in practice, the relationship between the collective leadership and the individual responsibility in cadre affairs still reveals many limitations and shortcomings. Since there is different characteristics across levels, agencies or units, the relationship between the collective leadership and the individual charge of the head of agency in general and in the cadre affairs in particular varies. While the Party's committees have ultimate authority in all cadres matters in the administrative units from the provincial to the grassroot levels, this authority is participatory in other agencies and organizations and limited to consultative in public institutions and non-state sectors. The research focus is the emerging issues related to the relationship between the collective leadership and the individual charge of head of agency in the cadre affairs in public organizations within the political system at all levels, agencies, public institutions, state sectors. This relationship can be categorized as follows:

*First, the relationship between the collective leadership (at the Party's committee level, the standing Party's committee in the party organizations) and the individual charge of the head of agency (secretary) in the cadre affairs in the Party organizations. In line with current*

<sup>4</sup> "BEYOND THE LAW: Understanding the Political Dynamics of Grassroots Democracy in Vietnam" (2014). Doctor of Philosophy Thesis at the University of Queensland, School of Political Science and International Studies

<sup>5</sup> "Cadre training according to Ho Chi Minh ideology: a case study on cadres of civil affairs committee of provincial people's committees" (2020). Vietnam Journal of Education, 4(3), 74-79

<sup>6</sup> "THE COLLECTIVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN TWO POST-WAR VIETNAMESE NOVELS." *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2000, pp. 13-48. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40860735](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40860735). Accessed 29 Apr. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> "Political Elite in Contemporary Vietnam: The Origin and Evolution of the Dominant Stratum", Wiley online library, 07 October 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1111/deve.12255>

regulations and in practice, the party committees (mainly the Party standing committee) make decisions on cadre issues through the mechanism of collective discussion and majority votes for final decision; The head of agency has the responsibility (and authority) to initiate, chair the discussions, overrule if there are equal votes, make decision on appointment or recommendation to competent authorities for appointment. Current regulations on responsibilities and specific mechanisms for cadre recommendation remain relatively general, the secretaries of the Party committees are not held accountable for mistakes in the cadre affairs but share the collective responsibility with the Party's committees. This gap induces some people to take advantage of the "soft" power acquired by their position and manipulate the cadre affairs in accordance with the process and procedures without being held accountable. As a result, there is a common situation of "individual decision, collective responsibility".

*Second, the relationship between the collective leadership and the individual responsibility of the head of agency in the administrative unit at all levels.* At central level, it is the relationship between the Politburo, the Secretariat, the Government's Party Committee with the head of the executive branch (the Prime Minister); At local level, it is the relationship between the Party's standing committee, the Provincial People's Committee and the head of local government (the chairman of the People's Committee). The relationship between the collective leadership and the individual responsibility of the head of agency in the cadre affairs follows the collective discussion and decision mechanisms, which are determined by majority. The head of government is a member of the leadership team, which is responsible for abiding by the Party's committee (either of the central government or the local people's committees) conclusions on cadre affairs. Although the head of agency has the right to recommend the candidates, s/he does not have the right to choose and change his deputy and his immediate subordinates. This leads to a situation where on the one hand it is difficult to blame the head when the government is weak; On the other hand, the head of government does not have

enough authority and tools to perform their responsibilities, leadership and management duties, they cannot choose and replace their subordinates when they do not meet the requirements. . The fact that the head can not dismiss a subordinate officer, fire a weak civil servant shows this inadequacy.

*Third, the relationship between the collective leadership and the personal responsibility of the head of agency in the government.* In ministerial agencies, the leadership collective has two subjects, namely, the party cadres committee of the ministry and party committee organ ministry. In the work of cadres, the party cadres committee of the ministry has authority and responsibility to decide the issues of cadres according to decentralization; the Party committees in the ministerial agencies play only participatory role, which is providing inputs on the cadre affairs. The minister is also the head of the Party's personnel committee (the secretary of the party's personnel committee), so the power is very large. However, since there are no sufficiently strong regulations to hold him or her accountable for any wrong or false decision.

*Fourth, the relationship between the collective leadership and the individual responsibility of the head of agency in public institutions (schools, hospitals, research institutes...).* In these institutions, the cadre planning, training and development, evaluation, appointment, dismissal, transfer, rotation, commendation and discipline of cadres under the authority of the Party committee. The head of institution has the responsibility (and authority) to recommend candidates for the leadership team to consider and decide and is held responsible for the recommended candidates. In this model there are problems: (i) the lack of the authority for the head of institution to perform the management task and to ensure the quality of the operation; (ii) weak accountability mechanism for wrong decisions and mistakes in cadre affairs; (iii) the combined power of party secretary and the head of institution make they abuse the power to "drive" the collective leadership in cadre affairs.

There are major shortcomings include:

*First*, there is a tendency to overestimate the collective leadership, with fear of losing the Party's leadership, while underestimating the individual role and responsibility of the head of agency. This leads to a lack of democracy and weak accountability mechanism.

*Second*, the responsibility of the leader in the work of officials is not clear, the punishment of responsibility is not strong enough that the leader can take advantage of his role and loopholes in the regulations on responsibility to "drive" the collective decisions on the work of cadres according to their own self-interest, when there is a mistake, it is blamed on the leadership team. The violations of staff work in the recent major cases show this situation.

*Third*, insufficient enforcement and unclear delegation of authority. As a result, the head of agency lacks the power and authority to perform his/her job effectively.

*Fourth*, unclear division of collective and individual responsibility and authority. As such, the enforcement remains inefficient and ineffective. As the Congress XIII document noted: "The division of responsibility between the head of agency and the Party's committee remains unclear and hinders the individual role in the collective decisions."<sup>8</sup>

The above shortcomings are important causes that lead to the fact that the principle of "collective leadership, individual charge" is working due to the unclear definition of the accountability mechanism and the relationship between collective and individual authority and responsibility. As a result, nobody take responsibility for mistakes or false decisions or in many cases, use the collective form to make decisions irresponsibly or delicately abusing power in the pursuit of personal gain<sup>9</sup>.

## Recommendations

In order to properly solve the above-mentioned problems, it is important to take the following actions:

*First*, harmonization of collective leadership and individual charge. Collective leadership aims to ensure democracy within the leadership while individual charge aims to promote individual initiative and decision-making ability of the head of agency. It is therefore important to clarify and draw better lines on the collective and individual authority and accountability. This needs to be harmonized and balanced so that important cadre decisions are thoroughly discussed among the Party's committees while the final decision rest with the head of agency together with his accountability.

*Second*, further delegation of authority in cadre affairs, with the head of agency take full responsibility to manage, appoint and dismiss his subordinates. The Party's committees are responsible for management, appointment, promotion or dismissal of the heads of agencies under their direct jurisdiction. All final decisions on cadre affairs within one agency should be made by the head of agency upon recommendation of the Party's committees. The head of agency therefore held accountable for these decisions. The Party's committees are held responsible for the quality of the recommendations and discussion results.

*Third*, development of working regimes for every level, which make clear division of authority and accountability of the collective leadership and individual charge. These include the role, authority and responsibility of the Party's committee, standing Party's committee, secretary, and head of agency in all stages of cadre affairs, including selection, management, appointment, promotion, rotation, dismissal and disciplinary actions.

*Fourth*, development and further improvement of power cross-check and balancing mechanisms in cadre affairs. As the Congress XIII document recommended: "Further decentralization, delegation of authority together with close

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<sup>8</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam (2012). *Document of National Party Congress XIII*, Volume 2, National Publishing House, Hanoi, pp. 225

<sup>9</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam (2012). *Document of the 4th Conference of the XI Central Committee*, National Publishing House, Hanoi, p.23.



checking, monitoring and inspection of decentralization and delegation of authority process to prevent abuse of power; further promotion the local authority's ownership and initiative while ensuring the Central Committee's united leadership and management".<sup>10</sup> There needs to be better debate process with confidence vote mechanism. Heads of agencies, ministries or local authorities are held accountable for cadre affairs. The cadres that made false decisions or corrupted should be investigated and charged even though they might move or retire. In addition, there should be external monitoring mechanisms with people's participation, media's involvement and mass organizations' engagement.

*Fifth*, building the leadership culture and style, in which the leaders and heads of agencies demonstrate the good compliance with the principles of democratic centralism, self-assessment and constructive criticism. This is the foundation for proper relationship between the collective leadership and the individual accountability. While the regulations are important, good leadership style and working routine are essential. Clearly defined role, authority and accountability of the leaders and head of agency as well as the good job description of cadres help enhance the transparency, fairness, effectiveness and accountability of the cadre affairs. The leaders and heads of agencies should set good examples in compliance with the Party's principles and regulations and carry out quality assessment, appointment, promotion and disciplinary actions.

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