HO CHI MINH AND THE COMINTERN

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Introduction

Ho Chi Minh is a name well known all over the world. But much less well known are the full facts of his life. Least known of all is the part of his life during which he was in the direct service of the Communist International (Comintern). This period covered 18 years out of a total of 30 which he spent abroad. Ho arrived in France in 1911, left that country for the Soviet Union in 1923. He was sent on assignments outside the Soviet Union several times, the last one being in 1938, when he was ordered to go back to Vietnam. He set foot on Vietnamese soil in 1941.

Of Ho's life between 1911 and 1923, including his decision to embrace Lenin and Leninism, there are good accounts. These accounts are based partly on the details supplied by Ho himself, and partly by others. But the period 1923-1941 has remained obscure. Jean Lacouture, who has spent over two decades researching and writing about Ho, and whose book Ho Chi Minh is generally considered the best biography of him, admitted in 1969, the year of Ho's death, that everything related to Ho's life until 1941 was "fragmentary, approximative, controversial".[1]

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[1]. Jean Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Seuil, 1969, p.8.

Bernard Fall, another author who has done a great deal of researches on Ho's life, complained in 1967 in Last Reflections on a War that there were "large gaps" in the man's life.[2] Yet,in this book he repeated many fanciful stories contained in an earlier one written on a return from a visit to Hanoi, where he was received by Ho personally and was given written documents on Ho's life.[3] One of the gaps Fall referred to was naturally the period 1923-1941.

Today, it is possible to dispel the obscurity surrounding this period, and to understand why, in this matter, Ho has deliberately and unscrupulously deceived the public - Vietnamese and foreign -, the Vietnamese Communist Party - not only the rank and file, but the party leaders and his closest companions as well -, and also his staunchest foreign supporters.

The reason is very simple: Ho wanted to preserve intact the myth that Ho Chi Minh was a patriot who throughout his life had thought, fought, and suffered uniquely for the national cause of Vietnam. The period 1923-1941 was a period during which he worked as a very devoted, active, and effective agent of the Comintern. Revelations of the details of his good work for Moscow would spoil his image and weaken his followers', admirers', and apologists' claim that he was an undisputable Vietnamese nationalist deserving to be recognised as the symbol and the natural leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

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2. Bernard B.Fall, Last Reflections on a War, New York, Doubleday, 1967, p.62.

3. Bernard B.Fall, The Two Vietnams, A Political and Military Analysis, New York, Praeger, 1963. See in particular, chapter 6.

For quite a long time Ho was very successful. The myth held. Communist fellow travellers, liberals, social and political activists and idealists of all manners and styles, including scholars and experts blinded by their admiration for Ho or by their strong desire to see a quick end to the war, helped in spreading and perpetuating the myth.

Thus, Fall, considered a great authority on Vietnam, wrote in 1967 that Ho fought "for nothing else but purely national objectives, and that fact is terribly important to this very day". Fall said that Ho was "not interested in proving that capitalism was on the way to the scrap heap of history, that "liberation war" was the wave of the future, or that the French (and the U.S...) were "paper tigers".[4] And yet, Fall was a political scientist and a professor.

In the same vein, Archimedes L.Patti, chief of O.S.S. for Northern Indochina in 1945, who played a key role in Ho's rise to power then, said in his memoirs that Ho was "nationalist first, communist second", and that Ho was "forced into dependence upon Peking and Moscow by American opposition or indifference".[5] This was written in 1980, about what happened in 1945 and thereafter, whereas Ho had already resolutely adopted boslhevism in 1920, and this choice had little to do with American post-war policy. No wonder Ho considered Patti "a special friend".

On the other side of the Atlantic, Lacouture, considered an expert on Vietnam, a great admirer of Ho, could not bring himself

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[4]. Fall, Last Reflections on a War, p.87.

[5]. Archimedes L.Patti, Why Vietnam? America's Albatross, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p.392.

to admit that Ho was organically bound to Moscow since he was a "structuralist" as well as "existentialist" communist. Instead, he engaged in fierce intellectual acrobatics to prove that Ho was more nationalist than communist. He said that Ho's career was "dotted" with reflexes or decisions in which "patriotism overrode ideology".

In Le Vietnam entre deux guerres he cited as example Ho's "extraordinary gesture", which was "without precedent in the hsitory of international communism", that of dissolving the Communist Party of Indochina (CPI) in November 1945.[6] This was written in 1965, fifteen years after the Vietnamese communists and Ho himself had explained publicly in numerous publications that the dissolution of the CPI in 1945 was a purely tactical move to keep effective power in the hands of the party.[7] And in Ho Chi Minh, Lacouture summarised Ho's attitude as neither pro-Peking, nor pro-Moscow, but "simply for Hanoi", which again is the contrary of what Ho and his disciples stressed repeatedly after 1951, after they had become certain that the CPV's position had become rock-solid and their hegemony (communist term for control) over the Vietnamese nationalist movement had become unchallengeable.

Then, there were other scholars, Huynh Kim Khanh, for example, who exerted themselves very hard to bend,twist and omit

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6. Lacouture, Le Vietnam entre deux guerres, Paris, Seuil,1965, p.63.

7. See, for example, Ho's speech to the Second National Congress of the CPI in February 1951, in Ho Chi Minh Tuyen Tap (Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh), vol.II, Hanoi, Su That, 1980, pp.460 and ff.

important facts to prove that Ho was truly a nationalist rather than a communist, and for this reason, suffered punishment and "preventive detention" in Moscow between 1933 and 1939. Khanh spent a great deal of space on this thesis in an apparently scholarly book, Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945.[8]

That Ho was a communist of the bolshevik brand, totally committed to Lenin and the Comintern (before as after its offical demise in 1943), a total believer in Leninism and in proletarian internationalism who fought hard all his life for the triumph of world revolution, has been stressed over and over again by his disciples as well as by himself in the various statements of the CPV. There would be no need to emphasise it today, except because so many people, including experts and scholars, who ought to revise their views in the light of the mass of documentation published by Hanoi since 1975, continue to tell the same old story about Ho and Vietnamese communism: Ho and his disciples were nationalists first and communists second. This view is totally untrue and untenable today in view of the growing body of available evidence.

To say that Ho was not "a nationalist first and a communist second" does in no way imply a refusal to recognise that Ho was a great revolutionary, one of the most fanatic bolshevik revolutionary next to ~~the greatest of our time next perhaps~~ only to Lenin. The two propositions are distinct and different, and by no means mutually exclusive. In this essay, while not denying in any way what one great admirer of Ho has aptly called Ho's

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[8]. Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980.

"revolutionarism",[9] we shall be concerned essentially with the lifting of the obscurity on the period 1923-1941 in Ho's life. This obscurity extends to the circumstances of his journey from Paris to Moscow in 1923, his emergence as a "Cominternchik" in 1923-1924, then his work for the Comintern in China in 1924-1927 and in Southeast Asia in 1928-1931, his so-called preventive detention in Moscow in 1933-1938, and his work in China and in Vietnam in 1941-1949, especially his so-called moderation in his relations with the French in 1945-1947. All that had a great deal to do with his organic link with Moscow.

Within the limits of this essay, it is not possible to cover in full details all the aspects mentioned. We shall treat in great details only two aspects - Ho's journey to Moscow in 1923 and his emergence as a "Cominternchik" in 1923-1924, and his so-called fall from grace and preventive detention in Moscow between 1933 and 1938. We shall touch only the other aspects.

The sources

In studying Ho's life, one would expect that his closest companions would tell us much because they are supposed to have known him well enough to speak or write with authority about him. But they have on the contrary misled the public, Vietnamese and foreign, by giving erroneous and contradictory facts about his life. But in this they are excusable, because they themselves had been misled by Ho.

The confusion was heightened by the writings of communists

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[9]. Gilbert Hendache, in Planete, special issue on Ho Chi Minh, Paris, March 1970, p.133.

and Communist Vietnam's supporters and sympathisers of all kinds, who sought to put Ho in the best light possible by presenting him as a nationlist dressed in communist clothes, instead of a communist dressed in nationalist clothes.

The various "official" biographies of Ho wittren by Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong,and the historians of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV,)[10] were based essentially on a number of Ho's writings or revelations to journalists about his life. Ho wrote two brochures under pseudonyms.

The first, under the pseudonym Tran Dan Tien, Nhung mau chuyen ve doi hoat dong cua Ho Chu Tich,[11] was published in Vietnamese in 1948, and appeared in translations in 1958 as Glimpses of the Life of Ho Chi Minh[12] and Souvenirs sur Ho Chi Minh.[13] This was later incorporated under the title of "Nguyen Ai Quoc" in With Uncle Ho (Avec l'Oncle Ho.)[14] Interestingly enough, according to Nguyen The Anh, this brochure appeared for the first time in 1949 in Shanghai in Chinese under the title Hu Zhi Minh zhuan.[15]

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[10]. Notre President Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1970.

[11]. Tran Dan Tien, Nhung mau chuyen ve doi hoat dong cua Ho Chu Tich,Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Van Hoc, 1972 (1948).

[12]. Hanoi, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958.

[13]. Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1962.

[14]. Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1972.

[15]. Nguyen The Anh, "L'itineraire politique de Ho Chi Minh", mimeograph, to appear in Duong Moi, Paris, May 1990.

The second, under the pseudonym T.Lan, was Vua di duong vua ke chuyen (Telling Stories along the Road.)[16] To my knowledge, there is no translation of this brochure, which is obviously intended primarily for a Vietnamese readership.

In addition, Ho has written several articles telling how he came to believe absolutely in Lenin and the Third Communist International, in particular his introduction to the Russian edition of his Selected Works in 1959, his article "The road that led me to Lenin" in Nhan Dan in April 1960, and his long article for Pravda in 1967, which was reproduced in Nhan Dan, on the 50th. anniversary of the Russian Revolution.[17] Ho also gave a long interview to the French Communist Charles Fourniau of L'Humanite in 1969. This interview appeared on July 15 of that year, and was reproduced in Vietnamese translation in Ho Chi Minh Tuyen Tap (Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh), volume II, under the title "Leninism and the Vietnamese Revolution".[18]

Like the brochures mentioned, the interview with Fourniau contained many deliberate untruths. These untruths were evident from the inherent contradiction of the facts, and since 1975, from the revelations of Ho's companions in their memoirs, and especially from a book written in 1980 by Hong Ha, a prominent member of the CPV. The book,entitled Bac Ho tren dat nuoc Lenin

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16. T.Lan,Vua di duong vua ke chuyen (Stories along the road),Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1976 (1963).

17. Ho Chi Minh Tuyen Tap, Vol.II, pp.113, 174 and 461.

18. - ibid. -, pp.518 ff.

(Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin),[19] covers in great detail the period 1923-1938, from the moment of Ho's departure from Paris and arrival in the Soviet Union to the moment of his departure from that country. Hong Ha had obviously access to the archives of the Comintern. His book is thus undoubtedly the most authoritative work on this period.

For the period from Ho's birth to his departure from Saigon for France, we now have the brochure put out by the Nghe-Tinh section of the Commission for the Study of the Party's History, Nhung mau chuyen ve doi nien thieu cua Bac Ho (Stories about Uncle Ho's Youth), published also in 1980.[20] This little brochure, which gives us insight into Ho's bitterness and hatred, should be considered also very authoritative.

For the period from Ho's arrival in France in 1911 to his departure for the Soviet Union in 1923, we have two excellent publications: Lacouture's already mentioned book, and the testimony of Michele Zecchini, a socialist worker assigned to help Ho in 1917-1918.[21] To these should be added those of Thu Trang, who has searched through the archives of the Ministry of Overseas France and produced two books containing a number of details on Ho's Paris period: Nguyen Ai Quoc tai Pari 1917-1923 (Nguyen Ai Quoc in Paris 1917-1923) and Nhung hoat dong cua Phan

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[19]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho tren dat nuoc Le-nin (Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin), Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Nien, 1980.

[20]. Ban Nghien Cuu Lich Su Dang, Tinh Uy Nghe Tinh, Nhung mau chuyen ve thoi nien thieu cua Bac Ho (Stories about Uncle Ho's Youth), Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1980.

[21]. Zecchini's testimony is in Planete Action, special issue on Ho Chi Minh, March 1970.

Chu Trinh tai Phap (Phan Chu Trinh's Activities in France).[22] Finally, there is a study by Nguyen Phan Quang, titled Them mot so tai lieu ve hoat dong cua Nguyen Ai Quoc thoi gian o Phap 1917-1923 (A number of additional documents on the activities of Nguyen Ai Quoc in France 1917-1923).[23] But this is rather a study of the French police surveillance of Ho than of Ho's activities.

For the period 1939-1945, we have the memoirs of Archimedes Patti,[24] O.S.S. agent in South China ; and of Jean Sainteny,[25] chief of the French Mission in South China and later in North Vietnam and negotiator with Ho Chi Minh in 1945-1946; and the study by K.C.Chen,[26] who has interviewed the main Chinese officials involved in Vietnamese affairs in 1940-1946. These three books contain most of the details of Ho's life and activities during those years. The memoirs of Ho's closest companions also give much light on this period. They are collected in Avec l'Oncle Ho (With Uncle Ho).[27] Also of great interest are the memoirs of Hoang Van Hoan, Giot nuoc trong bien

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[22]. Thu Trang, Nhung hoat dong cua Phan Chu trinh tai Phap, Paris, Sud Est Asie, 1983, and Nguyen Ai Quoc tai Phap 1917-1923, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Thong Tin Ly Luan, 1989.

[23]. Nguyen Phan Quang, Them mot so tu lieu ve hoat dong cua Nguyen Ai Quoc thoi gian tai Phap 1917-1923, Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, 1988.

[24]. Archimedes Patti, Why Vietnam?America's Albatross, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980.

[25]. Jean Sainteny, Histoire d'une paix manquee, Indochine 1945-1947, Paris, Amiot Dumont, 1973, and Au Vietnam face a Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Seghers, 1980.

[26]. K.C.Chen, Vietnam and China 1938-1954, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969.

[27]. Tran Dan Tien and others, Avec l'Oncle Ho, Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1972.

ca (A drop of water in the big ocean).[28] Hoan was one of Ho's closest and most trusted companions, a politburo member for many years, and a former Vietnamese ambassador to China. He fell out with Le Duan and defected to China in 1979. The memoirs of these various CPV leaders give us many interesting details on Ho's activities in Thailand and in China between 1920 and 1945, and in the case of Hoan, beyond 1945.

The rest of Ho's life from 1945 onward, when he fully surfaced from clandestinity and could be observed and studied openly,is generally well known.

Thanks to the revelations mentioned, it is now possible to fill in certain gaps and reconstruct with reasonable accuracy certain important periods of Ho's life which had been kept in the shade,in particular those pertaining to his relations with the Comintern. As mentioned earlier, two of these periods deserve special attention because they have been subjected to a great deal of obscurity, and have served as foundations for a number of myths about Ho. One relates to the circumstances of his departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow in 1923 and his integration into the Comintern apparat; and the other to his so-called "disgrace" and "preventive detention in Moscow" in the mid-1930s.

Ho's journey to Moscow in 1923

For many years, it was known that Ho moved to Moscow from Paris in the early 1920s. But the precise circumstances of Ho's

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[28]. Hoang Van Hoan, Giot nuoc trong bien ca (A Drop in the Ocean), Peking, Nha Xuat Ban Viet Nam, 1986. There is an English edition by Beijing Foreign Language Press, dated ?

journey remained obscure, and this was so because Ho himself chose to deliberately mislead not only the general public and the ranks and files of the CPV, but also his closest associates and members of brother parties.

In Uncle Ho Tran Dan Tien (alias Ho Chi Minh) said he obtained the details from "a French comrade". This is an odd reference, as the author explained that he had collected his material in 1945-1947. This was a time when it was not possible for Vietnamese to communicate from the jungles of North Vietnam, or even from Hanoi, with the members of the French Communist Party (CPF), especially with its leaders in Paris, the only ones, very few, who really knew Ho intimately.

In any case, Tran Dan Tien began the story with the arrival of Nguyen Ai Quoc, Ho's name then, in Leningrad (then Petrograd). He said it was on "a day when it was snowing heavily and the ground was all white". The captain of the ship on which Quoc had travelled handed him a fur coat and told him to keep it until he would no longer need it. He was led by two young sailors to the immigration officer. Ho told the latter that he had travelled as a stowaway and had absolutely no paper whatsoever on him, and the purpose of his visit was to see Lenin. Thereupon the officer told him that Lenin had died two days earlier. This puts Quoc's arrival in Petrograd on January 23, 1923.

Since Quoc had no papers, he was asked to give the names of references in the Soviet Union. He cited (Marcel) Cachin and (Paul) Vaillant Couturier. He was asked to write to them, which he did. Two days later, Vaillant Couturier arrived, and they left for Moscow the same evening. This means that the postal service

of the Soviet Union was really fast in spite of war and the chaos prevailing in the country at the time, and it took a letter mailed at the immigration office of Leningrad harbour only one day to get into the hands of its addresse in Moscow. Still, this was not impossible.

Tran Dan Tien said nothing about Ho's activities in the Soviet Union in 1923 and 1924. That is understable. In 1945-1947 the Chinese Communists' victory was still in doubt; Ho was not yet the unchallenged leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement in Vietnam; and the French were pressing very hard on Ho's fresh army. Ho thus did not want his name to be associated with the Communist International because his still shaky national united front risked floundering as a result of the defection of the scared Vietnamese anti-communist or non-communist nationalist elements.

In 1950, however, the situation had radically changed. With massive Chinese Communist aid and a safe rear represented by China, the prospects of victory over the French were much brighter. In fact, Ho was then going to the Sino-Vietnamese border to watch the greatest defeat of the French forces since 1946. Thus, Ho could tell a little more. So he did in Vua di duong vua ke chuyen (Telling Stories along the Road), which was written in 1950. He said that since 1917 he had wanted to go to Russia. In 1923 a railway worker in Paris, comrade "X", promised to smuggle him on his train to Berlin and ask German railway workers to help him from there to the Soviet Union. But Ho still had a number of problems connected with the Paria to settle.

Ho grappled with the problems for several months, and was

still doing so when, one day, the Central Committee of the CPF called him in to inform him that he was to go to the Fifth Congress of the Comintern as "representative from the colonies". As we shall see further on, this was sometime before March 14, 1923. He then had no more need to worry about his problems.

To shake off the secret agents assigned to watch him, he devised an ingenious plan. For several days he observed an absolutely regular daily schedule. Then, one day, he went to a meeting in the suburbs, but half an hour later slipped back into Paris and went to the station, where a comrade was waiting for him with a first class ticket and a small suitcase. And so, he left Paris as a rich Asian tourist, without attracting attention. He had been given 1000 French Francs for travelling expenses by the CPF. It was a big sum for the time (enough to keep a student going for five months); it became still bigger in Germany where inflation was roaring.

Concerning his arrival in Leningrad, Ho gave almost no details. He said he arrived in Russia "in the midst of winter"; everything was covered with snow, and there were days when the temperature dipped to 40 degrees centigrade bellow zero. Then there was a reference to the Fifth Comintern Congress being postponed because Lenin was ill; next a reference to Lenin's death on January 21, 1924. And that was all. He gave no date and no other detail of his arrival in the Soviet Union, or of the purpose of his trip.

More precise details concerning Ho's departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow were "revealed" in the interview by Charles Fourniau. The details concerning Ho's departure from

Paris were partially true; those concerning his arrival in Moscow were completely untrue.

The essentials of it were given in 1970 by Fourniau in Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, edited by Leo Figueres.[29] It tells of Ho's contact with French railway workers willing to help him to Berlin clandestinely, and, from there, with the help of German railway workers, to proceed to Moscow. But in the midst of his planning, luck came his way. He did not have to trouble himself any more. Arrangements were made for him, as he was designated to attend the Fifth Comintern Congress.

Fourniau said he was given a "relative precise date" by Ho Chi Minh himself, and that was "the middle of 1923". After an uneventful trip to Berlin, Ho proceeded to Russia, embarking at the German harbour Rostock. But he told Fourniau that, once arrived in Leningrad, he had to wait for "several months" until his identity had been checked out. It was "at the end of 1923" that Ho arrived in Moscow, said Fourniau. It did not occur to him at all that according to the story he was told, it took Ho six months to go from Paris to Moscow! And further, considering that it was known that Ho had attended the Kresintern Congress in October 1923, and even made a very remarked speech there, these two events being reported in most biographies of Ho before 1969,it did not strike Fourniau at all that there was something rather odd there. Still more, Ho had sent a letter to the Central Committee of the CPF dated "Moscow, July 1923", and Fourniau must have heard about it. Fourniau was so blinded by his admiration

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[29]. Leo Figueres, Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, Paris, Editions sociales, 1970, pp.31 ff.

for Ho that to him it was inconceivable that Ho could lie.

In the text of the interview Ho said that one evening he went to the movies, then slipped through the backdoor to go to the station where a comrade was waiting for him with a ticket and a small suitcase, and that he journeyed to Berlin in first class, smoking a cigar, like a rich tourist. This means that he must have had time to buy rich clothes, an expensive suitcase, not to say anything about cigars, and also the time, and a prearranged place, to change into a rich tourist's clothes, not to say anything about collecting the 1000 French Francs. In other words, the detailed arrangements for Ho's trip must have been prepared very thoroughly by someone.

It is astounding how Ho had been able to hide the exact details of his departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow so well. The two men who have spent more time than anyone perhaps in tracing Ho's life knew little about the events described until they were revealed by Fourniau in 1969. Bernard Fall said in The Two Vietnams that Ho left France "at the end of 1923". With much fantasy he added that "wearing a borrowed fur coat, he [Ho] reached Leningrad aboard an ice-covered Soviet vessel on January 23, 1924 and immediately proceeded to Moscow".[30]

Lacouture was more circunmspect. He simply noted in 1969 that the exact date of Ho's departure from Paris and his arrival in Moscow were "still engigmas",[31] and that "the best source" on this was Ruth Fischer, the prominent German Communist. In Von

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[30]. Fall, The Two Vietnams, p.92.

[31]. Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, p.35.

Lenin zum Mao, Fischer said that Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh then) had attended the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, that is in 1922. Lacouture mentioned an official brochure published by Hanoi giving "June 1923" as date of departure of Nguyen Ai Quoc from Paris. But he also cited a biography of Ho by Truong Chinh in which it was said that Ho arrived in Moscow in January 1924 "a few days after the death of Lenin". It should be noted in this connection that, strangely enough, Nguyen Khac Huyen, who has written an otherwise rather searching biography of Ho, published in 1971,also said that Ho attended the Fourth Comintern Congress in November-December 1922, during which time he met Lenin and Stalin, then left Russia, to return to Moscow again in June 1923, and arrived there "shortly after" Lenin's death".[32]

All the contradictory unofficial or official "precisions" mentioned have generated a great deal of confusion. This confusion has now been cleared up by Hong Ha in the book Bac Ho tren dat nuoc Le-nin (Uncle Ho in the land of Lenin) referred to earlier. The abundant details supplied by Hong Ha were not only more plausible than those advanced by the others because they matched the revelations by former agents of the Comintern and serious students of this organisation, in particular regarding Dimitri Manuilsky, as well as the context of the debates of the congresses of the Comintern. But more than anything, they were drawn from the archives of the Comintern and were accompanied by photographic reproduction of key documents from those archives and were therefore irrefutable. Let us see what Hong Ha has

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[32]. Nguyen Khac Huyen,Mission Accomplished, the Enigma of Ho Chi Minh, New York, MacMillan, 1971, pp.22-23.

revealed.

On Ho's journey from Paris to Berlin, Hong Ha's version was similar to those of others. The details were obviously drawn from the Fourniau interview. It is from Berlin onward that Hong Ha's version differed fundamentally from all others.[33] "As agreed", it said, upon arriving in Berlin, Nguyen Ai Quoc went immediately to the office of the Soviet Mission in Berlin, located at number 7 Under den Linden, one of the most famous streets of the German capital.

Agreed with whom? Hong Ha did not say explicitly, but the rest of his story made it quite clear that it was with Moscow, either directly or through the CPF, as the arrangements in Paris, Berlin and Petrograd suggest. The comrades at the Mission, "forewarned by Moscow", received Quoc warmly. The chief of the Mission, Stephan Bradman Bradopsky, inquired about Quoc's health and his trip, and "discussed with him the arrangements concerning his mission to the Soviet Union". Bradopsky had "received instructions to ensure perfect safety" for Quoc's journey. Accordingly he had made arrangements for a Soviet ship returning to Petrograd from Holland to make a detour to pick up Ho at Hamburg (Rostock, according to Fourniau, which is more logical).

While waiting for the ship to arrive,the Soviet Mission took the necessary steps to secure from the German police the authorisation for Quoc to stay in Berlin (beyond the transit time permitted) first until June 23, then until June 27. The visa, signed by the chief of police named Schneider, bore the date June

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[33]. Hong Ha, Bac_Ho_tren_dat_nuoc_Le-nin, pp.19-24.

18, 1923. Bradopsky also delivered to Quoc a laissez_passer for travelling to Moscow, bearing the date June 16. The visa was delivered to Chen Vang, born on February 15, 1895. This was probably Ho's real birthday. A visa of entry to the Soviet Union was also issued to Quoc. It was dated 25 June 1923.

When, and how, did Ho leave Paris? The laissez_passer obtained by Bradopsky for Ho was dated June 16. This means that Ho must have left Paris some time between June 13 and 15. Thu Trang has supplied some interesting information on this point. In Nguyen_Ai_Quoc_in_Pari_1917-1923 (Nguyen Ai Quoc in Paris 1917-1923), she said that according to French police records, Ho told his concierge that he planned to join a group of friends for a holiday in Savoie, and it was suggested that they should take advantage of the trip to visit Switzerland also, but Ho said he would not stoop to beg for a passport from the French police. The police records said that three months previously, on March 14, to be precise, Ho had packed all his belongings in three suitcases and brought them from his lodgings to the office of the Intercolonial Union. Ho left his lodgings on June 13, and was not seen again.[34]

Now, considering that in his teaching Ho had advised his followers to always keep the enemy totally in the dark as to their whereabouts and their plans by "feinting in the East but striking in the West", he must have gone in the opposite direction, that is through Belgium. This is all the more plausible as the Comintern's OMS (the Organisatsia Mezhdu Sviaz,

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[34]. Thu Trang, Nguyen_Ai_Quoc_tai_Pari, pp.248 and ff.

Office of International Relations), which was responsible for providing Comintern agents with false papers, had stations both in Brussels and Zurich, and according to French police records, members of the CPF usually went through either of these cities when travelling secretly to the Soviet Union.

Ho's unsollicited confidence to his concierge was obviously intended for the police assigned to watching him. So, while the French police was looking in the direction of Savoie and watching the French-Swiss borders, Ho would slip into Belgium unnoticed, by posing as a rich Asian tourist, as he has claimed, or by being hidden on the train by a communist worker, which is quite a possibility also as he had mentioned this possibility himself. Incidentally, later Ho was to use the Zurich station for his trip to Thailand in 1928, since it was from Switzerland that he crossed into Italy. All that was typical of Ho as well as the Comintern.

In any case, Ho embarked on the 27th. of June. The ship carrying him was the Karl Liebneckht, captain Antonov. The captain received him in the main salon of the ship, and accorded him special guest treatment. As the Baltic sea was cold, even in the summer, he lent Quoc a warm coat.

The ship arrived at Petrograd on 30 June 1923, and docked at pier number 7. The immigration control visa stamped on Ho's passport bore the date 30 June 1923. Hong Ha provided a special detail: it was a mild sunny summer day,with a temperature of 18 degrees centigrade. It was a rather unusual day for a city reputed for fog and rain in the summer. We were far from the midst of winter with snow everywhere! Ho stayed at the hotel

Astoria on Issalipsky street. On 1 July, day of festivity in Petrograd, which celebrated the arrival of summer and the end of Allied intervention, Ho took the train for Moscow.

There was no mention of Vaillant Couturier. Ho surely knew some Russian and could get by alone. This explains his joke about using Russian with Vaillant Couturier in the Tran Dan Tien version. In this case, on instructions from Cachin, who was no doubt informed about Ho's arrival through ECCI, on which he was the CPF delegate, Couturier went to Petrograd to see whether it was Ho who was there. But if we adopt the T.Lan version, Couturier could also be waiting for Ho at the Moscow railway station.

The date of Ho's arrival in the Soviet Union has been confirmed by the Marxist-Leninist Institutes of Vietnam and of the Soviet Union. In a joint study, they said:"On 30 June 1923, at the invitation of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), comrade Ho Chi Minh arrived at Petrograd, Soviet Union, to participate in the Fifth Congress of the Comintern". They also said that "this was the first time that he came to the home of the October Revolution and of the great Lenin".[35] This should put to rest the stories based on Ruth Fischer's memoirs. The date was also confirmed by the official chronology of Ho's life in Ho Chi Minh Toan Tap (Ho Chi Minh's Complete Works).[36] However, although this chronology said that Ho

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[35]. Vien Mac-Le-nin,Su hop tac quoc te giua Dang Cong San Lien-xo va Dang cong san Viet Nam, (Marx-Lenin Institute of the Communist Party of Vietnam, International Cooperation between the CPSU and the CPV).Hanoi, Nha Xuat ban Su That, 1987, p.79.

[36]. Vol.3, 1980, p.548.

stayed in Berlin from June 18 to June 27, it did no say when Ho had left Paris. As seen above, the exact date is now known thanks to Thu Trang.

It was mentioned earlier that Hong Ha said that upon his arrival in Berlin,"as agreed", Ho went immediately to the Soviet Mission. He did not say agreed with whom or how. The statement of the Marxit-Leninist Institutes just cited provided the answer. It was agreed with ECCI, the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The man responsible for this invitation was surely Manuilsky,a member of ECCI who was in close touch with the Political Secretariat, and still more particularly, with the all-powerful restricted committee of this secretariat, the "little committee" -- the milaia comisiia --.

To understand how powerful Manuislky was, it should be pointed out that in the view of Lenin and of his closest associates at the time -- Zinoviev, Radek, Trotsky etc... -- the Communist International was to be the general staff of the world revolutionary army whose function was to direct civil war on a world scale. It had therefore to be run like an army with the strictest discipline, and had to be closely patterned on the Bolshevik party, with extremely centralised direction. The power in the organisation was therefore centered in a general staff, the Executive Committee (ECCI). In this committee, power was centralised in the hands of its Political Secretariat, which had eleven members. And in this secretariat, power was centered in the hands of a restricted committee -- the milaia comissiia -- composed of five members. Manuislky worked closeky with these five members, then became and remained a senior member of this

committee under Lenin as well as Stalin.[37] We shall have more to say on him later on.

For the time being, it is sufficient to note that Manuislky was the emissary of the Comintern to the CPF in the early 1920s. His knowledge of French, which he had mastered when he was a student at the Sorbonne before World War I, and his total loyalty to Bolshevism and Lenin (and later Stalin), made this choice natural. He was Comintern delegate to the CPF Second Congress in Paris in 1922, and spotted Ho Chi Minh, then Nguyen Ai Quoc and still a new militant. Quoc's speech on the colonial questions impressed Manuislky enormously, and as a result, he told Quoc to prepare himself to attend the Fifth Comintern Congress.

It should be noted that Lenin had given prominence to the national and colonial questions at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, and these questions were debated in subsequent congresses. But not much had been accomplished, as the communists at the time were essentially west-oriented, had little interest in the East, and still less in the colonies. This is natural as,in strict marxist orthodoxy, the emancipation of the colonies could come only after the liberation of the working class in the advanced industrial countries.[38] Besides, they had little or no direct experience of the East.

In the debates Lenin had considerable trouble with the

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[37]. On this see Branko Lazitch and Milorad Drackhovitch,Lenin and Comintern, Vol.I,Stanford,Hoover Institution Press, 1972; and The Comintern:Historical Highlights, New York, F.Praeger, 1966; Charles McLane,Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966.

[38]. On this see Charles B.McLane,Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia.

Indian M.N.Roy, who vigourously contested his theses. Naturally Roy had more direct experience of the Eastern and colonial questions than Lenin, and the latter could make his views prevail only because he was Lenin.

After Lenin practically ceased to direct the Comintern personally due to illness, it befell Zinoviev and Manuilsky to present and defend the Comintern leadership's views. Zinoviev had no interest or experience in the Eastern question. Manuislky, who was responsible directly for presenting the reports on the national and colonial questions, had an experience limited only to the Ukraine, his home country, and to Central Europe and the Balkans. He would have considerable difficulty in jousting with Roy because although he had no experience of the East and did not have the authority of Lenin, he would nevertheless have to present irrefutable arguments based on hard facts and extensive experience.

To a troubled Manuislky Nguyen Ai Quoc seemed to be the man who could provide what he needed to bolster his position in facing formidable adversaries like Roy. In addition, Quoc would surely make a valuable contribution in his own right, especially in needling the member parties to more concrete action. Manuislky knew this, as he had seen how Quoc had spoken authoritatively about colonial matters and harshly criticised the CPF's inaction at the CPF Second Congress in Paris in 1922.

Quoc's presence in Moscow as an expert for Manuilsky and a participant in the Congress was very important at this juncture because of the challenge from the orthodox marxists, whether Europeancentrist like Serrati,or Asiancentrist like Roy, who

fought hard against Lenin's view that the national component should be given at least as much weight as the social component in the assessment of the revolutionary potential of the colonies, and therefore communist support and collaboration should be given to the nationalist revolutions led by the bourgeois elements.

From the purely cold practical tactical point of view, Lenin was right. And Ho shared his views. Unlike Roy, Ho was always more interested in practical strategy and tactics than in theory, and in addition,he was an unconditional believer in Lenin's wisdom. In fact, in his account of his arrival in the Soviet Union, as early as 1923, he already attached great attention to the idea of united front. Indeed, he stressed this point by underlining it in the T.Lan brochure. Quoc's presence in Moscow and at the Fifth Comintern Congress would therefore considerably strengthen the position of the Comintern leadership, and in particular the personal position of Manuilsky.

Nguyen Ai Quoc, the future Ho Chi Minh, was thus invited, or rather selected, to participate in the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924. And, in view of what has been said above, the choice was made by Manuilsky and communicated to the CPF. Ho was to be sent to the Fifth Comintern Congress as a delegate of the CPF to speak especially on colonial questions. Arrangements for his trip to Moscow had to be made, and in Comintern practice, they were made thoroughly and secretly, as we have seen. This explains the "as agreed" mentioned by Hong Ha, as well as the sybilline references to "no more need to bother with my problems" by Ho.

It is a matter of record that Ho (then Nguyen Ai Quoc) took part in the Kresintern Congress in October 1923. He made a

resounding speech there on the 13th. The speech established his reputation as a solid and unquestioning Leninist, and an undisputable expert on the peasant question. It made him an instant celebrity in Comintern circles. He was elected to the presidium of the Kresintern. That was a big leap forward in his career as a communist.

Ho's standing rose still further, and considerably, following an interview by Ossip Mandelstam of the Soviet magazine Ogonyok. Mandelstam sought him out following his speech at the Kresintern Congress, interviewed him, and gave him full front page treatment with his photo as well. That was on 23 December 1923, less than six months after Ho's arrival in the Soviet capital. That was quite an accomplishment.

Mandelstam called Ho (then Nguyen Ai Quoc) "an international fighter for communism", and titled his article "Guest of a Cominternchik". Reinhold Neuman-Hoditz, who printed a photographic reproduction of the front page of the Ogonyok article in Portrait of Ho Chi Minh, commented that "Cominternchik was an honorary designation for a member of the Comintern -- a man who devotes his whole life to the service of the Communist International.... Nguyen Ai Quoc was such a man". From now on, Ho was no longer a rank and files militant, but a cadre of the Comintern apparat.

Soon thereafter, Ho was assigned to work at the ECCI as well. Citing Ruth Fischer, Neuman-Hoditz said that Ho had gained so much experience in the difficult area of Asian revolution that he

became "a privileged adviser of the Comintern leaders"[39]. As mentioned earlier, Ho was also a privileged adviser to Manuislky. And the fact that, like Manuislky, Ho spoke French fluently made the relations between Manuislky and him much more congenial.

It is also a matter of record that Nguyen Ai Quoc made another resounding speech at the Fifth Comintern Congress. The speech established his reputation as a great Leninist, who had thoroughly grasped the thought of the master and was a true believer; in addition, he was recognised as an undisputable expert on the colonial question. His status of Cominternchik was still more solidly established. As Fourniau has pointed out, in 1924, at the Fifth Congress, "Nguyen Ai Quoc was no longer a militant operative, he had already become a militant of international class"; he was "a militant of the International". He had completed his period of training as a militant. "He had reached such a high level that the International could entrust him with important tasks".[40]

Ho in Canton: forestalling the emergence of a Vietnamese Sun Yat-sen

The first assignment Ho received from the Comintern was to go to Canton for a double purpose: 1) help organise the worker-peasant movement in southern China and Southeast Asia, and 2) lay the ground for the introduction of communism to Indochina.

Soon after Ho's arrival in Canton, Phan Boi Chau was

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[39]. Reinhold Neuman-Holditz, Portrait of Ho Chi Minh, Frankfurt/Main, Herder and Herder, 1969, p.102.

[40]. In Leo Figueres, Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, pp.31-32.

arrested by the French. In retrospect, and taking into consideration what we know about Phan Boi Chau, whether Ho had a direct part in or not, the effect of it was to prevent the possible emergence of a Vietnamese Sun Yat-sen.

According to Hong Ha's account, at the Lux Hotel where Ho resided Ho came into contact with two important agents of the Comintern. One was C.A.Dallin, who had just returned from the Third Congress of Chinese Youth in Canton. He told Ho about the situation prevailing in south China, and especially about the Vietnamese nationalists operating there. The most prestigious of these was Phan Boi Chau.

This was precisely the time when Stalin had decided to give backing to Sun Yat-sen. In this, he was only following the line advocated by Lenin, namely, in the countries of the East where there was no large working class, the Comintern should support the nationalist movements led by the bourgeois.

Phan Boi Chau might well qualify for this kind of Comintern support. In a remarkable study of Phan Boi Chau, George Boudarel has shown that old Phan had built up a formidable organisation both inside and outside Vietnam; he commanded undisputable respect; he had a large following; and he had an extensive network of international contacts at the highest level.[41] But Boudarel did not mention the most important fact of all: Phan had come to the attention of the Russian embassy in Peking. In his memoirs, Phan Boi Chau told how in 1920 he learned about the Russian Peasants and Workers' government and, anxious to find out

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[41]. Georges Boudarel, "Phan Boi Chau et la societe vietnamienne de son temps", in France-Asie, 1969, No 4.

more about communism, he translated a Japanese book on Russia by Fuse Tatsuji, and then went to Peking and used his translation to win the sympathy of a Chinese professor and seek help from him for an introduction to the Russian embassy there. Phan met V. Voitinsky who was then Russian ambasador to China, and also L.Karakhan, who was to replace Voitinsky.

Phan had a long conversation with Karakhan during which he inquired about the possibility of sending Vietnamese students to Russia. Karakhan told Phan that there would be no problem. The Russian government would take charge of all expenses. But in return, before departing for Russia the Vietnamese students must pledge to accept communism, to propagate communism and engage in revolutionary activities when they return home. Karakhan also asked Phan write for him a detailed report on the French in Indochina, but it would have to be in English. Phan did not know English, and was not particularly enthused by his meeting with the Russians. He titled the section dealing with this account: "Relations with the Russians and awareness of their artfulness". But he recorded that he distinctly remembered one statement by Karakhan: "This is the first time that we meet any Vietnamese".[42]

Dallin's detailed accounts of the existence of Vietnamese revolutionaries operating in southern China made Ho impatient to go there. He made a request to ECCI for assignment to southern China in order to work among the Vietnamese revolutionary milieux there, and one day Manuilsky called him in to announce that the Committee had approved his request and was sending him out to

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[42]. Phan Boi Chau, Nien Bieu (Memoirs),Saigon, Nhom nghien Cuu Su Dia xuat ban, 1971, pp.197-198.

secretary.[44] What part did Ho play in this murky affair has been one of the great controversies in the history of Vietnam's nationalist movement.[45] David Halberstam, a Ho sympathiser, said that Ho "gave his agreement".[46] Nguyen Khac Huyen asserted that Ho was the originator of this "perfidious idea".[47] Nguyen Phut Tan said that the scheme "had been discussed" between Lee Swei (alias Nguyen Ai Quoc) and Lam Duc Thu during a meeting of revolutionaries called to find ways and means of raising funds for action in Vietnam. Thu introduced a resolution arguing that that Phan be sacrificed for the cause of the revolution. Not only was he a patriot and a leader who had the greatest hold on the masses but he was also internationally reverred, and his arrest would lead to the disbanding of the resistance movement led by him; it would bring in a large amount of reward money from the French; and "the foreign as well as local press would undertake the task of campaigning for our revolutionary at home and abroad".[48]

The full truth about this murky affair can perhaps never be known because ~~the police files~~ concerning Phan's arrest have ~~mysteriously disappeared~~ from the archives of the French Overseas

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[44]. Phan Boi Chau, Nien Bieu, p.211.

[45]. For a detailed reference to the sources on the betrayal of Phan Boi Chau, see Robert Turner, Vietnamese Communism, Its Origins and Development, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1975, pp.8-11.

[46]. David Halberstam, Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Buchet-Chastel, 1972,p.58.

[47]. Nguyen Khac Huyen, Vision Accomplished, pp.27-28.

[48]. Nguyen Phut Tan, A Modern History of Vietnam, Saigon, Nha sach Khai Tri, 1964, pp.322-325.

Canton to work under the cover of the Borodin mission.

Michael Borodin, who was appointed to head the Russian mission to Sun Yat-sen, was no stranger to Ho. He was Ho's neighbour at the Lux Hotel, and Ho, who could speak English, entertained very friendly relations with the Borodin family, especially through the young Borodin - Ho's usual technique. Under the name of Lee Swei Ho arrived in Canton in mid-November and shared the same house with the Borodin family. Yet, as he told the story under the pseudonym of Tran Dan Tien, he said that in Canton he sold cigarettes and newspapers to make a living, and when he saw an advertisement for a job of translator at the Soviet Mission in the Kwanchou Ribao, he applied and got the job.[43] As if the secretive Comintern would recruit its personnel through newspaper advertisements!

Within a year of Ho's arrival in Canton Phan Boi Chau was arrested by the French police in Shanghai and brought back to Vietnam for trial. As a result the Phan Boi Chau movement collapsed, and Ho took over the network mounted by Phan. It is a fact that Phan had been betrayed to the French while going to a rendez-vous with Ho Chi Minh in June,1925. He was arrested, but Ho was not.

In his memoirs Phan said he was betrayed by Nguyen Thuong Huyen, the nephew of well known revolutionary Nguyen Thuong Hien, who came to Hangchou with a man named Tran Duc Quy. Phan said this made him suspicious; nevertheless because Huyen knew Quoc Ngu (Romanised Vietnamese) and French he employed him as

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[43]. Tran Dan Tien, Nhung mau chuyen, p.54.

Ministry. But there is a very strong presumption that the CPI was behind the move, and the party obtained a reward of 100,000 or 150,000 piastres.[49] This was a large sum at the time, for with it one could buy 20,000-30,000 buffaloes - at 5 piastres a head - and start a huge ranch. It came at a good time, for Ho needed money: in a letter to the Comintern dated February 19,1925, he had complained that he had insufficient funds to carry out his work, and asked for 5000 dollars.[50]

What was Ho's part in that sordid affair? It cannot be said with certainty. But events turned out to be as Le Duc Thu had predicted. There was a widespread public protest both in Vietnam and abroad against the arrest, trial and condemnation to death of Phan by the French authorities. The revolutionary atmosphere in Vietnam became surcharged. And Ho and the CPI took full advantage of this situation. In Ho's own words: "Never had there been such a massive popular movement. This was a golden opportunity for Mr Nguyen [Nguyen Ai Quoc [alias Ho Chi Minh] to engage in propaganda for the cause of patriotism" [i.e. communism, in CPV parlance].[51]

Phan's arrest and the widespread Vietnamese popular reaction to it were also used by the Vietnamese delegate to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 to argue that "we are witnessing an increasing radicalisation of the peasant masses" and "the Communist International should accord a very attention

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[49]. Robert Turner, Vietnamese communism, p.9.

[50]. Ho Chi Minh, Toan tap, Vol.2, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su, That, 1981, pp.7-9.

[51]. Tran Dan Tien, Nhung mau chuyen..., p.61.

to the creation of an Indochinese Communist Party".[52] The call for the founding of an Indochinese communist party was understandable also in view of the fact that the Chinese Communist Party had repeatedly rejected the Vietnamese's request for the founding an Indochinese Communist party and thought that the Vietnamese would better join the Chinese party because Vietnam had not yet completed a national revolution.[53]

One thing is undisputable: once Phan Boi Chau was out of the way, there was no more major obstacle to the emergence of a communist party aspiring to play a dominant role in the Vietnamese nationalist movement, and the prospect of the emergence of a Vietnamese Sun Yat-sen also vanished completely.

Ho's role in the introduction of communism to Vietnam Indochina in 1925-1927 is well known and there is no need for us to dwell on it here.

In April 1927 Ho's work was interrupted by Chiang Kai-shek's break with Moscow. He had to flee Canton to Wu-han, then to Hongkong and find his way back to the Soviet Union. In 1928 he was sent back to the East again by the Comintern, this time to Southeast Asia, to strengthen the communist movement there. By then Roy had been expelled from the Comintern because of his Trotskyites leanings, and Tan Malaka, the Indonesian, was also falling out with Moscow for maintaining that Islam had revolutionary potential for Indonesia. Ho thus became the

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[52]. Extensive extracts of the Vietnamese delegate's speech are given in Christiane Pasquel Rageau, Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1970, pp.66-69.

[53]. A.Reznikov, The Comintern and the East, Strategy and Tactics, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1978, pp.165-166.

Comintern's top man in Southeast Asia.

As representative of the Eastern Department, Ho founded the Communist Party of Indochina in 1930. He also played a key role in the foundation of the Communist Party of Siam and the Communist Party of Malaya, all in the same year.[54] He was arrested by the Hongkong police in June 1931,and imprisoned. Saved by the British lawyer Frank Loseby, he escaped, went into hiding in Macao then in Shanghai, and finally found his way back to Moscow in the spring of 1934. We are not concerned with those events here and shall move on to the second major part of this essay.

Before doing so, however, we should ask why did Ho Chi Minh keep telling untruths about his journey to to the Soviet Union, even in 1969 (to Charles Fourniau who was a French "brother") when there was obviously no more need for it? The only logical answer is that, as a result of long years of training in Leninism and of practising it, telling untruths, although done for tactical reasons at the beginning, became something natural in Ho in the end.

The Ho in disgrace thesis

Between 1931 and 1939, Ho practically disappeared. This apparent eclipse has intrigued many people and has given rise to the thesis that Ho was in disgrace, punished, and kept in preventive detention in Moscow because of his nationalism.

This thesis was put forward forcefully by Huynh Kim Khanh in

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[54]. On this, see Hoang Van Hoan, Giot nuoc trong bien ca, p.60.

Vietnamese Communism 1924-1945.[55] But since Lacouture and Bernard Fall have offered differing interpretations of Ho's strange disappearance from the public view and from police records in those years we shall consider the accounts of these important biographers of Ho first.

Officially, Nguyen Ai Quoc had died in jail in Hongkong. The exact date of his death was even given: 26 June 1932. Notices of his death were published in communist papers, including L'Humanite in Paris and the Soviet press. Memorial services were held by communists. The Vietnamese communists studying in Moscow held a special service at which a representative from the Comintern pronounced a funeral oration.[56] Above all, the French surete considered the Nguyen Ai Quoc file closed.

Lacouture said that little was known about Ho during the period 1934-1938, during which Ho spent "the most studious years of his life, away from the quarrels and the purges which tore asunder the USSR and the International".[57] But Ho never lost contact with the Party, and from Moscow he regularly sent articles to the Party paper Tin Tuc (News) in Saigon under the pseudonym of Lin. Lacouture noted, however, that in 1935 Ho was "in open conflict" with the leadership of the CPI which had called a meeting at Macao in March, in his absence and without waiting for the return from Moscow of Le Hong Phong, secretary general of the Party.

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55. Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, 1924-1945, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982.

56. Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, p.53.

57. - ibid. -, p.57.

Bernard Fall, for his part, noted in 1963 that it was "possible" that Ho was "in temporary disgrace". He spent the years 1934-1935 attending Party schools in Moscow. Significantly, he was spared the purges of the ever suspicious Stalin because "perhaps, as a practitioner rather than a theoretician of revolution, Ho was not considered dangerous by Stalin - or perhaps he was considered absolutely loyal".[58] Four years later, Fall was more affirmative. He said Ho was spared by Stalin because Ho was "unconditionally loyal to Stalin, and Stalin knew it".[59]

Now, let us examine the facts and interpretations advanced by Huynh Kim Khanh, who has given more attention to this question than any other author, and has consecrated a full chapter to it (chapter 3) in an obviously searching study.

According to Khanh, the CPI was then divided between the "proletarian internationalists" who took their cues from Moscow and the "revolutionary patriots" who favoured a liberal interpretation of Marxism-Leninism and the adaptation of Comintern directives selectively to the conditions of Vietnam. Khanh did not say so explicitely here, but obviously he put Ho in the latter category.

In 1933-1934 the repatriation of the KUTV trainees resulted in the ascendency of the proletarian internationalists over the revolutionary patriots. In any case, following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 Moscow imposed a radical line and

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[58]. The Two Vietnams, p.97.

[59]. Last Reflections on a War, p.79.

demanded strict subservience of the member parties.

The result of the above developments was the "sharp decline" of Nguyen Ai Quoc's influence within communist circles. For almost ten years, from June 1931 to May 1941, his whereabouts were known only to a handful of people, and from 1932 to 1939 the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc was "not mentioned once" in connection with the revolutionary movement in Indochina except for those few intances in 1934 when he was singled out for criticism. Khanh said it was "possible" that Ho was being "confined to Moscow for self-criticism" as a "penalty for his errors". It is "obvious" that Nguyen Ai Quoc "had fallen out" with the current Comintern leadership, and that his services to the CPI at this time were "not required". Throughout the 1930s Nguyen Ai Quoc held no official position in either the Comintern or the CPI, and he attended the Seventh Congress of the Comintern not as a delegate but as "a consultant" to the CPI delegation, which was led by Le Hong Phong.

According to Khanh, the "decline in Ho's authority" was the direct consequence of the ultra-left policies adopted at the Sixth Congress. After this congress, the Comintern demanded total obedience and subservience from the professional revolutionaries and from the national sections, and "there was no lack of Vietnamese communists much younger and less experienced than Nguyen Ai Quoc who were willing to accept Comintern guidance and instructions unquestionably". The implication is that Ho's stature was diminished because, unlike the others, he refused to submit to the will of Moscow as he was not a "proletarian internationalist" but a "revolutionary patriot".

Khanh said Ho's "eclipse" began "as early as 1929", and the decline of his authority became apparent as the rift between him and the CPI Central Committee developed "with the Comintern apparently supporting its younger apparatchikis". Two KUTV-trained members, Tran Phu and Ngo Duc Tri, were instructed by the Comintern to rectify most of the "erroneous resolutions" of the unification conference (the founding conference of the CPV).

During the next few years Ho was the object of a systematic vilification campaign. "Ho's devotion to the cause of national independence" was cited as evidence of his "petty-bourgeois hangover". His Duong Kach Menh was attacked as "a document which reeks of nationalist stench". Criticism of Ho reached a peak in 1934, and "apparently had the approval of the Comintern".

Thus, for approximately ten years after the Nghe Tinh defeat the Moscow-trained apparatchiki dominated the CPI, and "Nguyen Ai Quoc played no role in the development of Vietnamese communism". He was not present at the Macao Congress (March 1935), which was convened "at the explicit instruction of the Comintern and concerned itself with international questions". Ho was then "in disgrace"; he was "under some form of preventive detention" in Moscow. The glory of "the Moscow-oriented Communists" was to end only in 1939-1940, and the following five years were to witness "the re-ascendency of Ho" and his former Thanh Nien comrades in the CPI.

The natural conclusion from the facts cited and the arguments advanced by Khanh is that Ho's stature in the eyes of the Comintern leadership was diminished, and he was punished by the organisation and vilified and rejected by the CPI because of

his "devotion to the cause of national independence", of his unwillingness to place Soviet interests above Vietnamese interests, and his questioning of the wisdom and rejection of the authority of the Comintern leadership, including that of Stalin, the real master of the organisation.

The true facts about Ho's eclipse in 1933-1939.

As we have seen earlier, after Ho's discovery of Leninism and his option for the Third International in 1920, and especially after his arrival in Moscow in 1923, he became a thorough and unwavering believer in Leninism and Bolshevism; his competence and loyalty were recognised; he was accepted as a Cominternchik and integrated into the Comintern apparat, and entrusted with important missions in Asia whereas Roy, who was surely more brilliant than him, had strong views, and could, and would, argue on high policy matters on an equal footing with Lenin and other ranking leaders of the Comintern,was to get into deep trouble.

The same applied to Tan Malaka of Indonesia because he had strong views about the role of Islam in the national revolution and dared defend them. By 1929 both Roy and Tan Malaka had been anathemised by the Comintern whereas Ho still invoked the authority of this organisation to convene the unification conference of the CPI in Hongkong and, according to all accounts, presided over it "in the name of the Third International". Now let us take up the facts and arguments invoked by Huynh Kim Khanh one by one.

First, with regard to Tran Phu. Ho never lost the respect or

obedience of the CPI because the CPI was his creation. Tran Phu, alias Li Kwei, was one of Ho's first recruits and Thanh Nien students in 1925. He was also a protege of Ho's. It was Ho who sent him to Moscow for training at the KUTV, and it was on Ho's intercession that he was admitted all the same although he was one year late for the opening of the course.[60] It was Tran Phu who on behalf of the other Vietnamese students warmly greeted Ho in Moscow when Ho visited them after his return from China in 1927. Phu was the first student to return to Vietnam in 1930. On the way home,he stopped in Hongkong "to meet Nguyen Ai Quoc and receive instructions" as well as "advice on operational methods" from him. Ho gave him a letter of introduction to the CPI Central Committee "in the name of the Communist International".[61] On the other hand,the Party's History stated clearly that "The Political Thesis of 1930 was written by Tran Phu....and adopted by the Central Committee in October".[62] Ho was then occupied elsewhere. Hong Ha did not elaborate on "elsewhere", but said that Ho "had made many suggestions to Tran Phu".[63]

Concerning the Unification Conference, the Party's biography of Ho said that "the resolutions of the Conference had met in time the requirements of the revolutionary movement; this was thanks to the correct leadership of President Ho Chi Minh, to the

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[60]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho..., p.197.

[61]. - ibid. -, p.251.

[62]. 50 Years of Activities of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House,1980, p.31.

[63]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho, p.253.

instructions and aid of the Communist International."[64] Further,it said that from 1930 to the middle of 1931, from China Ho "watched closely the movement in the country, saw to it that the line of the Party was applied correctly".[65]

With regard to the disastrous Nghe-Tinh insurrections, Ho was obviously not responsible. He had watched developments in Indochina with anxiety and had reminded the Central Committee of the CPI that "this is not the moment yet to attempt a seizure of power";[66] he wrote to ECCI on 29 September about the situation and asked for help and "instructions on what to do".[67] After the wave of arrests, which practically broke up the Party in 1931, Ho sent two very harsh letters to the CPI Central Committee: one, on 20 April 1931, to criticise the non-observation of the Comintern operational rules; and one, on 24 April 1931, to remind the Party that his tasks had been assigned by the Eastern Department and, accordingly, this department would keep him informed of developments, and if he had suggestions, these "have been approved by the Eastern Department", and the Party "must notify" him about its decisions or desiderata.[68]

That Ho was by no means held responsible and was not blamed for the Nghe-Tinh disaster was made clear by a letter to him from Hilaire Noulens, the chief of the Far Eastern Bureau (Dalburo) in

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[64]. Notre President Ho Chi Minh, p.98.

[65]. - ibid.- ,p.10.

[66]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho, p.251.

[67]. - ibid. -, p.253.

[68]. - ibid. -, p.258.

Shanghai. In the letter, dated 12 May 1931, Noulens put the blame not on Ho, but on the Politburo of the CPI. He suggested that Ho write to the latter to warn it against the risks of violent action.[69] Finally, from June 1931 to July 1934, Ho was in jail, in court, in hiding, or in search for a way to make contact with the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) to get help to return to the Soviet Union, and could therefore not be held responsible for anything.

It should be mentioned here that in November 1933, Ho, who had been hiding in Shanghai, succeeded in making contact with the CPC and get help from it through Vaillant Couturier, who happened to be passing through that city. The Comintern sent a ship to pick him up off Shanghai, and by July he was back in Moscow. The Comintern sent a car to fetch him from the station, and he was received very warmly by Manuilsky when the two met. Furthermore, at Vladivostok, when asked about his references in the Soviet Union, Ho gave the names of V.Vassilieva and Pavel Miff. The first was an important member of the Institute of Oriental Studies in charge of the Vietnamese students in Moscow, and the second was no lesser a person than the man who had replaced Petrov as head of the Eastern Department and who was the special adviser to Stalin on Eastern questions. All that was surely not treatment reserved to someone in disgrace!

Now, with regard to the period 1934-1939. After his return, Ho was assigned to the Comintern again. He made a visit to the CPI delegation to the Seventh Congress. He was warmly greeted in

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[69]. - ibid. -, p.259.

the name of the delegation by Le Hong Phong, head of the delegation, and secretary general of the CPI. Phong introduced Ho as "comrade Lin who has come to visit us on behalf of the Third International".[70] Ho, who had been put in charge of the delegation, told its members to change their names during the congress. He did likewise with the Malay and Indonesian delegates, a proof that he was in charge of Southeast Asian affairs at the Eastern Department.

In addition to the delegation to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, there were two groups of Vietnamese studying at the INKP (Institute for National and Colonial Questions). When Ho visited these two groups Vassilieva introduced him as "a cadre of the Comintern", and announced at the same time that by decision of the Political Secretariat of ECCI, in addition to work at the Eastern Department, Ho was assigned to lead the two groups of Vietnamese students at INKP.[71] The facts mentioned were surely not manifestations of the Comintern's displeasure and its way of punishing Ho, or of Ho's loss of authority over the CPI.

Now, let us turn to Ho's status at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in July 1935. The Party's biography of Ho said that Ho attended the Congress as "a deputy delegate", but it added that "fully conscious of his responsibility to the delegation, he did his utmost to help it fulfill its task at the Congress".[72] The official history of the Party said that "comrade Nguyen Ai

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[70]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho, p.290.

[71]. - ibid. -, p.285.

[72]. Notre President Ho Chi Minh, p.107.

Quoc, who was then following study courses at the Lenin University in Moscow, was also invited to the Congress".[73] The official chronology of his life said that he attended the Congress in the capacity of "delegate of the Eastern Department".[74] Ho himself (alias T.Lan) said that at the Congress, Le Hong Phong, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai were official delegates while he attended as a "dai bieu tu van", for which the editor provided a footnote, giving the translation of the term in a document of the Soviet Marx-Lenin Institute in French.[75] The French term used meant "as a consultant". It did not specify whether it was to the CPI delegation or to the Comintern.

Here, again, Hong Ha provided the answer to the riddle. He provided a photographic reproduction of Ho's admission card to the Congress. It bore number 154, the name of Lin (official name of Ho at the Comintern) and indicated under country of origin: Indochina. But Hong Ha added that Ho "helped the delegation from inside the country draft the speeches to be delivered at the Congress".[76]

Ho was then still a Cominternchik working at the Comintern, and considered a senior member by the CPI.This is but natural. Like Tran Phu, Le Hong Phong was one of Ho's first Thanh Nien students. He was sent by Ho to the Soviet air academy Boris Glepskaia. When Ho returned from China in 1927 he decided that

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[73]. 50 Years' Activities...,p.49.

[74]. Ho Chi Minh, Toan Tap, vol.3, p.460.

[75]. Vua di duong...., p.53.

[76]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho....,p.298.

after the aviation academy Phong would go to KUTV. How Le Hong Phong greeted Ho has been noted. In 1934 Le Hong Phong was designated chief of the External Bureau of the CPI. But this bureau was placed under the authority of the delegate of the Comintern, who was Ho Chi Minh.

From 1938 onward, when the members of the CPI heard about Ho's presence in China, and later in Vietnam proper, they always understood that he was a "cao cap", a high official, of the Comintern, and deserved the respect due to such a personage. And in May 1941, when Ho presided over the crucial eighth plenum, he did so "in the capacity of representative of the Comintern" and not of a member of the CPI Politburo or Central Committee. He had been, and remained, above the CPI. As Fourniau has stressed, he was a "militant of the International".

It is thus natural that Ho was by no means "in disgrace" in regard to the Comintern leadership, including Stalin. We have already cited many proofs earlier. But the subject deserves further exploration. That Ho had the full confidence of Moscow is certain. This has been confirmed by a Soviet specialist of Eastern affairs, A.Reznikov. In The Comintern and the East, this author said that the Comintern operated "in close contact" with "the great patriot and internationalist" Ho Chi Minh; that the Comintern aid to Indochina was rendered "through the good offices of Ho Chi Minh"; and, what is much more significant, that the decisions of the Comintern regarding Vietnam were drafted "with his participation and sent to him first of all".[77]

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[77]. A.Reznikov, The Comintern and the East, Strategy and Tactics, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1978, pp.162-163.

It is a remarkable, and remarked, fact that Ho Chi Minh (Nguyen Ai Quoc) survived the Stalinist wave of liquidation of foreign agents of the Comintern of the mid-1930s, whereas most of the well-known figures of the organisation were murdered, sent into exile in Siberia, jailed, or saved themselves by deserting this organisation and somehow leaving the Soviet Union alive. Many of Ho's early protectors or co-workers - Voya Vayouvitch, Willi Munzenberg, Georges Pioch, Petrov, Pianitsky, Borodin, etc...-, and of course the very big names -Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin, ...- who had been faithful followers of Lenin were liquidated by Stalin. Only Manuislky managed to survive unscathed until the end of World War II and beyond.

Since Ho's destiny was closely associated with this man, it is interesting to dwell at some length on Ho's relationship with him, for Ho survived mainly because he moved in his shadow, and through him, was well acquainted with the current thoughts and wishes of Stalin, a basic condition of survival at the time.

It has been noted above that Ho's standing with the CPI was high. The same applies to his standing with the Comintern. In fact, it can be said that here it was even higher. Two anecdotes confirm this.

One is provided by Albert Vassart, who was representative of the CPF to the Comintern from April 1934 to April 1935. Vassart resided at the Lux hotel,which served as residence for Comintern leaders and foreign Communist leaders on business in Moscow. Vassart has given the following account related by Dominque Desanti in L'Internationale Communiste.

> "At the restaurant of the Lux hotel, a curtain divided the dining room of the Cominternian rabble from that of the

"leaders" who had to be kept in good shape. An Indochinese, former photograph in the XIII precinct of Paris, sat each day at a different place in order to be able to wipe his mouth and goatee with a piece of clean napkin from the table cloth; **his real name was Ho Chi Minh.** His rotation lasted thirty days, for the table cloth was changed only once a month because of lack of soap".[78]

Another proof, stronger still, of Ho's importance in Comintern circles at the time has been provided by Margarete Buber-Neuman, wife of Heinz Neuman, an important Cominternchik who at one time was highly rated by Stalin, but later was liquidated like many others. In her memoirs, she told the following story:

"At the XIII plenum of the ECCI in December 1933 it was decided to convene the Seventh Congress of the Comintern for the first half of 1934, but then the meeting had to be postponed. The delegates of Latin America, who could not be warned in time about the change, arrived on time for the originally planned opening of the Congress. Once they had arrived in Moscow, the ECCI did not want them to leave totally empty-handed. A conference was therefore organised in which participated the delegates from Latin America, as well as **the members of the leadership of the Comintern:** Manuilsky, Dimitrov, Gottwald, Kuusinen, Pieck, Kolarov, Togliatti, **Ho Chi Minh**, Thorez, Guyot and Wan Ming. It was thus a very brilliant company which discussed a question which had already been settled, but which was to be put on the agenda only at the Seventh Congress: the tactics of popular front".[79]

The above story proves irrefutably that instead of having fallen out with the Comintern, being in disgrace, being in preventive detention, or being shoved aside, not only was Ho a member of the cream of the Comintern and moved in the innermost circles of the ECCI, but was also privy to discussions of high

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[78]. Dominique Desanti, L'Internationale Communiste, Paris, Payot,1970, p.198.

[79]. Margarete Buber-Neuman, La revolution mondiale, l'histoire du Comintern (1919-1943) racontee par l'un de ses principaux temoins, Paris, Casterman, 1971, p.349.

strategy at the highest level. It should be stressed that the above event took place in **the first half of 1934**, at a time when Ho was said to have been in serious trouble.

Since the Comintern leadership, especially its innermost circle, must have the blessing of Stalin to continue to exist, it is logical to infer that Ho had won the good grace of the Soviet dictator also. Ho succeeded in this because he was a model Leninist-Bolshevik, scrupulously observed democratic centralism, and never challenged the decisions or the views of the leaders. Above all, if Ho had his own views on China and the East as well as on the colonies, he never voiced them unless they happened to be the same as those of the chief. If Ho voiced his views vigourously and displayed a high profile, that was on one particular issue: anti-Trotskyism. This happened to be Stalin's main battle-cry during those years. Ho took very great care that on this particular issue, which he knew was of paramount importance to Stalin, the CPI did not stray from the right path.

Ho left no stone unturned to ensure that his disciples strictly adhere to the Stalinist anti-Trotskyite line. The resolutions of the CPI from the day of its foundation were full of reminders to Party members to pay special attention to bolshevisation, to eradicate all Trotskyite tendencies, and to avoid absolutely any cooperation with the Trotskyites. After the closing of the Seventh Congress, before the delegates of the CPI returned home, Ho held several discussions with the members, each time insisting that they must take "every measure" to annihilate the Trotskyites politically. Even at the railway station, before the delegates got on the train, Ho's last recommendation was that

they must pass on to Le Hong Phong the order that "under no circumstance" must there be collaboration with the Trotskyites. On the other hand,the resolutions of the Party contained frequent praises of the wisdom of Stalin.

Ho's efforts must have been known to Stalin, and the channel through which Stalin was informed was Manuislky. Here it is interesting to compare the role played by Manuilsky in Ho's scheme regarding Stalin to that played three decades later by Sainteny in Ho's scheme regarding de Gaulle. Manuislky was the channel through which Ho obtained first hand and accurate information about Stalin's plans and thoughts, and especially about Stalin's mood. Manuislky was the man behind whom Ho moved and thus never made a false step. Manuislky was also the man who provided Ho with the best support and protection. And this was all the more important as Manuislky was a very powerful figure in the Comintern. Indeed, from 1928 onward he replaced Bukharin as Stalin's spokesman there.[80]

As has been noted, Manuislky was chosen to represent the Comintern at the Second Congress of the CPF in Paris in 1922. In 1926, after the fall of Zinoviev he moved up in the Poliburo, and from then on remained a most powerful figure there. The direction of the Comintern was entrusted to Molotov, but behind the scene, "Manu" wielded considerable power.[81]

It was said that the strength of Manuislky lay in the fact

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[80]. Michael T.Florinsky, McGrawhill Encyclopedia of Russia and the Soviet Union, New York, McGrawhill Book Company, 1961, p.331-332.

[81]. Dominique Desanti,L'Internationale Communiste, Paris, Payot, 1970, p.147.

that he could make Stalin laugh, but he did this only on good days and only on non-prohibited subjects. He never defended lost causes or lost people. He was not mistrusted and was spared by Stalin because he was always content to be a brilliant second and always espoused the views of the master.[82]

Eugenio Reale, well known for his knowledge of Comintern affairs, said that the most notable Soviet leader who had worked in the Comintern apparatus since its "heroic" days under Lenin and Zinoviev was Manuilsky, and during the final ten years "he held more actual power than Dimitrov, the titular secretary general".[83] The early part of this period was precisely,according to Huynh Kim Khanh, the one during which Ho was in disgrace and in preventive detention because of his "devotion to the cause of national independence".

The close relationship between Ho and Manuislky naturally worked both ways. If through Manuislky Ho was always well informed about Stalin's plans and mood, and was privy to the Comintern and Soviet government's analyses of the world situation, which was to enable him to make his own moves unerringly, in return, through Ho Manuislky obtained first hand information and insight into the problems of the East and the colonies, which enabled him to avoid disastrous mistakes in analysis as well as policy, and thus enhance his own position within the Comintern and the Soviet leadership.

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[82]. - ibid. -, p.197.

[83]. Eugenio Reale, "Founding of Cominform" in B.Lazitch and M.Drackhovitch,The Comintern:Historical Highlights, New York, Praeger, 1966.

If Ho maintained such a low profile during those years, it was surely with Moscow's approval, or even on Moscow's orders, for it should be noted that Moscow did not issue a denial of the news of Ho's death after Ho had turned up in Moscow safe and sound, and was taken back into the fold of the Comintern. The big question, then, is: why did Moscow force the observance of such a low profile on Ho? Again, Desanti provided the most logical answer. Citing B.Lazitch, he said that following the Soviet-French agreement of May 1935, it was better not to have on the Executive Committee of the Cominform the name of an Indochinese revolutionary leader several times condemned to death for subversion by the French tribunals.[84]

It should be recalled in this connection that in the early 1930s, Stalin was alarmed by the rise of fascism, especially after the coming to power of Hitler in Germany. In 1932 he signed a non-aggression pact with France, and in 1935 he followed up with a mutual assistance treaty. In 1935 the Bolshevik and class against class hard line was officially abandoned and replaced by that of united front. This was certainly not the moment to rouse French suspicion about good Soviet intention by throwing the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc at them. This,according to Desanti, explains why Moscow did not put out a rectification concerning the latter's death, why it put Cha-Yen (alias Le Hong Phong) instead of Nguyen Ai Quoc on the Presidium of the Comintern.

During this period, a request by Ho to join the communist volunteers fighting in Spain was turned down for the reason that

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[84]. - ibid. -, p.234.

he was needed elsewhere when the opportunity arose. And so, Ho had to cool his heels and to spend his time studying while awaiting the next opportunity.

The opportunity came in 1938, when Moscow was certain that war was inevitable, and on a world scale. In these conditions, Communist parties all over the world would have to be prepared in order to support the Soviet Union against its enemies, Japan being one of them. It was clear also that tactical guidance from Moscow would not be available as daily communication with it would be impossible. The Communist parties must be therefore be prepared to be on their own, and in this they had the blessing of the Comintern. This was what Manuilsky told Ho before sending him home via China in the autumn of 1938.[85]

The prevalent view about the policy adopted by the CPI in 1939-1945 was that it was Ho's own line. Now that Ho was free from Comintern control, he could pursue unimpeded the nationalist line which he favoured and which had caused his disgrace, punishment and preventive detention in Moscow, and loss of influence in the CPI. Those holding this view completely ignored the rules by which the Comintern operated. The Comintern leadership expected all its agents to know these rules better than other communists. Ho Chi Minh, a first class Cominternchik, must therefore know what to do in all circumstances, with or without guidance from ECCI.This, he certainly had learned from his years of close association with ECCI, especially with Manuilsky.

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[85]. Hong Ha, Bac Ho....,p.318-319.

Vassart, the representative of the CPF to ECCI whom we have mentioned earlier, has told the following anecdote concerning Manuislky's treatment of Fried, a Comintern agent assigned to work with the CPF who did not know what to do in a particular circumstance. But this certainly applies to all other Comintern agents, including Ho Chi Minh.

> "Fried arrived and Manuislky rudely insulted him. Fried tried to defend himself:"My task is staggering. I have not been able to isolate Doriot. What is the main thing required of me?"
> "Do you think that a Communist delegate should ask such a question? You will not return to Paris"
> Vassart took up Fried's defense.
> Manuislky asked him to be quiet. "You are not qualified to talk about it," said Manuilsky."We know our own personel better than you do"
> "Personel? He is the Executive delegate!".[86]

The above anecdote shows that a Cominternchik must always know what he had to do in the service of the cause. Strategic decision was not permitted, but tactical skill was expected of him. Vassart pointed out that "the real content" of the policies of ECCI was "always" settled by the "restricted general staff", i.e., the milaia comissiia, and the decisions of this group were sovreign; however, if the policy of this "summit" was "never to be brought into question", discussions were possible on the methods of decision.[87]

What has been pointed out above explains the tactics adopted by Ho Chi Minh from 1939, and especially from 1941, onward: waving high the flag of national independence, postponement of

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[86]. Lazitch and Drackhovitch, The Comintern: Historical Highlights, p.248.

[87]. - ibid. -, p.63.

the social revolution, carefully concealing the Communist aims of the Party, broad national united front, etc....None of these was outside the bounds permitted by the Comintern. On the contrary, that was precisely what the Comintern leadership expected of a good Leninist like Ho Chi Minh: never waver on principle, i.e. the strategic aim, but always apply the utmost flexibility in choosing the most effective tactics in given circumstances. The main thing was to achieve the strategic end set by Lenin: achieve Communism and World Revolution, or accelerate the process leading to the achievement of these aims.

Adhering to the Moscow line:1945-1965

Another widespread view about Ho is that in 1945-1946, Ho pursued a moderate and conciliatory policy toward France. They cited as concrete manifestation of this attitude Ho's agreement of March 6,1946 by which he accepted for Vietnam the status of Free State - instead of independent state - member of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. Jean Sainteny, the French representative who negotiated this agreement with Ho, asserted that Ho sincerely wanted friendly relations with France, and even liked the idea of being vice-president of the French Union. In an interview by Planete in 1970, he said that he remained convinced that the French Union was feasable with Vietnam. "The vice-president of that Union would perhaps be Ho Chi Minh, and that was a prospect which Ho himself viewed with much interest and favour".[88]

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[88]. Jean Sainteny, interview in Planete, March 1970, p.93.

Those who hold this view totally overlook Soviet policy in the immediate post-war years. Stalin wanted to give the West a free hand in Asia in exchange for a free hand for the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. He also wanted to create the conditions which would make it possible for the French Communist Party to become the government of France through elections. This means not only the pursuit of a hand-off policy in Indochina, but also the urging of the CPI to seek an amiable arrangement with France and to seek aid from both France and the United States.

The CPF, which the CPI had always considered a senior party since the days of its foundation, warned the Vietnamese to make sure that their actions met the criteria of the current Soviet line and avoid any "premature adventures". Maurice Thorez stressed in 1946 that "under no circumstances" the CPF wished to be considered as "the eventual liquidator of the French position in Indochina".[89] And in April 1946 he told a stunned Sainteny that the March 6, 1946 agreement was "very satisfactory" ,and if the Vietnamese did not respect it "we know what necessary measures to take, make the cannons talk if need be".[90]

Soviet policy towards Indochina was stated very clearly by the Soviet representative in Hanoi,Stephane Solosieff, to Patti as follows:

1) The French should not expect a return to the status quo

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[89]. Quoted in Bernard Fall, Vietnam Witness, New York, Praeger, 1966, pp.23-24. See in particular chapter 2: "The French Communists and Indochina". See also Pierre Rousset,Le Parti communiste vietnamien, Paris, Collection Petit Maspero, 1975, pp.106 and ff.

[90]. Jean Sainteny, Au Vietnam Face a Ho Chi Minh, Paris, Seghers, 1970, p.88.

but should instead pursue a policy of gradual withdrawal.

2) The Vietnamese were not quite ready for total independence, and were in need of protection against a powerful nation like China or Thailand.

3) The French were the best equipped of the Western powers to reconstruct the country and guide it towards self-government.

4) The Indochinese would have to assume a role of responsible nationalism, although they might not be able to handle it alone, and with enlightened French help and American technical assistance they could achieve independence in a few years.

5) The Soviet Union would not be able to interpose itself in Southeast Asia, and Soviet interference in Southeast Asia would create a conflict with the traditional French and British interests which would not be in the best interests of the Soviet Union.[91]

Considering that Solosieff made the Soviet position, and especially his presence in Hanoi known to the Americans, it is logical to assume that he had contacts with Ho also, although in great secret, and had told him the same thing. In any case, a Soviet delegation came to Hanoi in two groups on December 20 and 23, and was housed at the Government House, that is with the full knowledge of Ho's government. What they told Ho was not disclosed, but Philippe Devillers said that after their departure, on December 30, Ho's government published a communique announcing its readiness to hold discussions with the

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[91] Patti, Why Vietnam?, p.179.

representative of the French government.[92] At that time, Lt. Colonel Trevor Wilson, representative in Hanoi of General Gracey, the Commander of the British Forces in Southern Vietnam, also reported that a Soviet mission of seven men, headed by a colonel, was due to arrive in Hanoi.[93] But somehow, this piece of very significant information remained unknown for many years. Together with the disclosure of the presence of Solosieff in Hanoi, this fact shows undeniably that Ho knew perfectly what Soviet policy at the time was, and he had to conform to it. This, and not the weakness of his government alone at the time, explains his seeming moderation towards the French in 1945-1946, and well until the end of 1947.

But in 1947 the situation changed. In May, the French communist ministers were out of the French government, and in September, in Poland, Zhdhanov, on behalf of Stalin, announced a new policy: that of confrontation with the West. In Indochina, full war had already developed, and Ho did not have to make any turn-around to meet the new demands of Moscow. What happened from 1947 to 1954 is well known, except for one very important fact.

This unknown fact is that in the first week of January 1950 Ho went secretly to Moscow to have a meeting with Stalin. Khrushuchev has said in his memoirs that Ho had a meeting with Stalin while the latter was alive, but gave no specifics.[94] We

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[92]. Philippe Devillers, Paris,Saigon,Hanoi, Paris, Gallimard/Juliard, 1988, pp.114-115.

[93]. Peter M.Dunn,The Firts Vietnam War, New York, Saint Martin Press, 1985, p.328.

[94].N.S.Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, Boston, Little Brown, 1970, 481.

now know, from Hoang van Hoan's memoirs, that in the first days of January 1950, three weeks before China's recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and one month before that of the Soviet Union, Ho made a secret visit to Peking to discuss Chinese recognition and aid.

At his meeting with the Chinese leaders, Liu Shao-chi suggested that he went to see Stalin also. The Soviet ambassador, Nikolai Roschin, was asked to send a message to Stalin. The Soviet leader agreed, and two days later Ho flew to Moscow to request Soviet aid. At the Stalin-Ho meeting, the Chinese ambassador, Wanh Jia-hsiang, was present, and he told Hoan afterwards that at that meeting it was agreed that the main task of aiding Ho's government would be shouldered by China.[95]

Ho had definitely chosen side. This was one month before the United States recognised the State of Vietnam, two months before it gave economic aid to the Saigon government, and six months before President Truman decided to give full military aid to the French for their war in Indochina following the outbreak of the Korean War. The prevalent view in current literature on the Vietnam War is that June 1950 marked the American involvement in Indochina, and was the start of the train of events leading to Vietnam being dragged into the cold war, and to America's woes in the following years. That view must be abandoned today, because it is undisputable that it was Ho who has plunged Vietnam into the East-West confrontation by being the first to choose side.

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[95]. Hoang Van Hoan, Giot_nuoc_trong_bien_ca, pp.330-334.

It is not possible within the frame of this essay to deal with all the events from 1954 to today. We shall pass briefly over the main ones. From 1954 to 1960 Ho had to observe the policy of peaceful coexistence decided upon by Khrushchev. There were strains in Soviet-Vietnamese relations, but Ho used his influence to prevent any rash action by his comrades in the CPV Politburo which might lead to a clean break with Moscow. From 1964, when Khrushchev was removed from the Soviet leadership and replaced by Brezhnev, Moscow followed a hard line course, and Ho's policy fitted well into it. This policy was pursued after Ho's death in 1969 and led to the train of events ending in the entry of Hanoi's forces in Saigon in 1975.

Ho did not live long enough to see the triumph of his party. But he was also spared the contemplation of the devastating consequences of the choice of the bolshevik road on which he had resolutely led his party and people. It was no doubt a revolutionary road. Certain of his admirers, Gilbert Hendache, for example, unhesitantly asserted that in matters of the analysis of colonialism, Ho had "surpassed all that had been said by Marxist-Leninist theoreticians before him", and Lenin himself "was never to push as far as Ho did the study of the liberation of the colonial peoples".[96] But, as post-1975 events have undisputably demonstrated, the road chosen by Ho was to lead Vietnam only to ruins, poverty and national paralysis.

Conclusion

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[96]. Gilbert hendache,in Planete, pp.129-130.

We would like to conclude with a question: Was Ho nationalist first communist second, a nationalist dressed in red, or a communist dressed in white, a Vietnamese serving uniquely the interests of Vietnam and of the Vietnamese people, or a Cominternchik always placing the interests of the International Communist Movement and the cause of world revolution first?

David Marr, who has spent years studying Vietnemese affairs, and who is a known sympathiser of Ho and the Vietnamese communist revolutionaries has said: "It would be wrong to characterise Ho Chi Minh or any major Vietnamese Communist leader as a nationalist. As early as 1922, Ho Chi Minh considered nationalism to be a dangerous siren capable of luring colonised peoples away from colonialism."[97] And key members of the CPF, among whom Jacques Duclos and J. Thorez Vermeersch, have testified to Ho's "fervent internationalism".[98]

Paul Mus, the greatest admirer and apologist of Ho Chi Minh, has said that Ho Chi Minh could not be considered "a marginal, operational communist, a nationalist dressed in red". To hold such an opinion, "one would have to forget the proofs that he has given of his devotion to the leadership of the Communist International". Mus cited as exemple Ho's acceptance of the Geneva agreement which better served the immediate interests of world communism than those of his Vietnamese fatherland. "Such gestures would remove any doubt, if this were necessary,

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[97]. David Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920-1945, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981,p.320.

[98]. In Leo Figueres, Ho Chi Minh, notre camarade, pp.96 and 157.

concerning his deep-rooted and conscious membership of Ho Chi Minh to the communist movement."[99]

Mus also quoted Lacouture to the effect that as well as being "an existential communist" Ho was "a structural communist". Ho, said Mus, had acceded to "the highest level" of the central body of international communism. "He is the first of his compatriots to have reached, "at the summit", the full citizenship of that modern universe, named marxist...". And, in return, Moscow considered him a member of "the establishment"[100]

The last word should be given to Ho Chi Minh himself. In Vua di duong vua ke chuyen (Stories along the road), he said that in 1923, on arriving in the USSR he underwent "a mutation": he became "a genuine member....of the great international proletarian family", and from his childhood he had "never before experienced such freedom, pleasure, and happiness".[101] In 1941, on learning of the German attack on "the Fatherland of revolution" he was very disturbed and did not know whether to tell his companions. In the end he told them only that the USSR had been invaded by Germany, keeping from them the fact that the Germans had penetrated 600 kilometers deep into Soviet territory.[102]

Another anecdote told by Ho in this regard is that while in jail in Liuchou, in February 1943, when he learned through a newspaper about the Soviet victory of Stalingrad, he was so

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[99]. Paul Mus, Ho Chi Minh, le Vietnam, et l'Asie, Paris, Seuil, 1971, p.127.

[100]. - ibid. -, p.42.

[101]. Ho Chi Minh, Vua di duong...., p.22.

[102]. - ibid. -, pp.78-79.

overjoyed that he jumped and almost hit his head against the ceiling. Then he gave every cent he had left to the guard to fetch him food and drink for a celebration. He celebrated the Soviet victory by uttering the slogans: "Long live the Bolshevik Party! Long live the Red Army! Long live the Soviet Union!".[103] Such gestures speak volumes about Ho's relationship with the international communist movement.

Lastly, when Ho gave the first lecture to his first recruits for Communism in 1926 in Duong Kach Menh, he told them that the only revolutionary road they must choose was the Soviet road.[104] And when he addressed his last words to his followers in 1969, in his testament, he expressed grave concern for the fate of the international communist movement, and contrarily to Vietnamese traditions, he considered his departure from this world as a journey to join Marx and Lenin, and not his ancestors.[105]

There is a big difference between Lenin and Stalin's road and Ho's road, however. As Le Duan has pointed out, the two roads met. But whereas the two Russian leaders had moved from the proletarian revolution to the conclusion that socialism must be bound to national independence, Ho took the reverse road. Ho moved from the requirement of national liberation to the conclusion that the cause of national liberation must be bound to

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[103]. - ibid. -, p.83

[104]. Ho Chi Minh, Duong Kach Menh, in Tuyen Tap, Vol.I, pp.229 and ff.

[105]. Foreign Language Publishing House, President Ho Chi Minh's Testament, Hanoi, 1969.

the cause of socialism.[106]

In Vietnamese communist thought, socialism means proletarian internationalism which, according to Lenin, means always sacrificing the national interest to the interest of the world revolution. This, in turn, means giving absolute priority to the defense of the fortress of the world revolution, the Fatherland of socialism - the Soviet Union -. Thus, the Soviet Union was the user of proletarian internationalism, and Vietnam its servant. Obviously, Vietnam was the loser here.

Admirers and apologists of Ho Chi Minh have tried to present him as a man who has fought and suffered because of his "devotion to the cause of national independence", because he was "nationalist first and communist second". And they had to bend and distort history to that end. There is no need for it. To those who make revolution the transcendental aim of their existence, Ho Chi Minh should be admired, and rightly, as a great revolutionary, in fact the greatest revolutionary of our epoch, unequalled by any other revolutionary, except perhaps Lenin.

Ho Chi Minh was a fierce fighter for Vietnam's independence. That is undeniable. But he certainly did not seek Vietnam's independence for its own sake, but only as the first phase in the bringing of Vietnam into the communist camp as a service to the cause of World Communist Revolution. That is Lenin's view, as recalled by Soviet scholars. Thus, A.B.Reznikov stressed in The Comintern and the East that "what Lenin favoured was not

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[106]. Le Duan, Phan dau xay dung nuoc Viet Nam xa hoi chu nghia giau dep (Fighting for a rich and beautiful Vietnam), Hanoi, Nha Xuat ban Su that, 1979, p.10.

nationalism at all, but its anti-imperialist aspect, and that he stood by the class-inspired view that is the principle of proletarian internationalism...."[107]

Ho always took pride in being a true Leninist. That is a historical fact. To recognise this fact by no means reduces the admiration we have for the revolutionary spirit of the man, or as Hendache has put it, for his "revolutionarism". But we must question his wisdom and honesty for having chosen the Leninist/Bolshevik road and taken the Vietnamese people along with him without telling them this explicitly and clearly at the beginning. The terrible plights befalling the Vietnamese people since the communist "victory" in 1975 certainly warrant, or even compel, such a conclusion.

So, the clear cut questions and answers are:

1) Was Ho Chi Minh a revolutionary? Yes, definitely, one of the most ~~greatest~~ fanatic revolutionaries of our time, second in this perhaps only to Lenin.

2) Was Ho Chi Minh a communist? Yes, but a communist of the Bolshevik brand, a fanatic communist.

3) Was Ho Chi Minh a nationalist? By all counts, definitely No.

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107. A.B.Reznikov, in The Comintern and the East, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1981, p.26.