

There is very little concrete information about the birth, family or childhood of Ho Chi Minh. One must rely on the recollections of his friends and political foes. One foe was Paul Arnoux, who spent 20 years trying to subdue Ho's activities. He was in charge of keeping official watch on Vietnamese immigrants in Paris.

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"When I first went to

Ho's father was no ordinary man, and his qualities in many ways foreshadow those of his remarkable son. The son of a peasant and a "woman of second status", he tended buffaloes and worked on a farm before marrying his employer's daughter. Her dowry consisted of a tiny paddy and the straw hut where their first three children, including Ho, were born. The official date of Ho's birthday is said to be May 19, 1890. The father passed the exam in Chinese literature, earning a minor doctoral degree. He taught in Hue, and was ultimately appointed secretary at the ceremonials office of the Imperial Palace in Hue in 1905, shortly after the death of his wife and youngest child.

But, he loathed the nature of his work. "Being a mandarin", he used to remark, "is the ultimate form of slavery". He became a deputy prefect but showed such contempt for the duties involved that he was dismissed by the French authorities. From then on, he lived the life of a wanderer. While his son roved about the world in the vanguard of revolution, the father eked out a living by setting bones, telling stories and working as a scribe. He wandered for over twenty years, poor and respected--a free man.

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"His children worked hard and, under the

The twenty-one year old Ho served as mess boy on this French liner. Working on a ship, whose passengers were vacationing colonials cannot have softened his already formed judgement of the French. He spent two years at sea, going ashore at all the principal ports of Africa and the Mediterranean. In Marseilles he had the experience of being addressed as "Monsieur" for the first time in his life. These early encounters with France were enough to persuade Ho that the people of Metropolitan France were very different from the overseas colonials. Before ending his career as seaman, Ho visited New York and Boston in 1915 and 1916 on shore leave.

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"The United States and her particular"

Ho settled in shabby lodgings in Paris which he shared with several of his compatriots. He did photographic work but met with little commercial success and was often unemployed. This lack of employment gave him plenty of time to meet and talk with the politically minded, to feel his way toward socialism, to read and eventually write. One Frenchman describes him this way.

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"He was still just an obscure"

Eventually his political activities became more aggressive and better directed; he was no longer content with hotheaded conversations in cafes or with meetings held under police surveillance, or with those rowdy debates when he talked of the abuses of the colonial administration. When the Versailles Peace Conference started work, Ho and two friends drew up an eight-point program for their country's emancipation and forwarded to the conference secretariat in January, 1919. Today this plan, inspired by Pres. Wilson's Fourteen Points, sounds moderate.

It asked for permanent representation in the French Parliament, freedom of the press; freedom to hold meetings and form associations; amnesty and release of political prisoners; government by law instead of by decree; equality of legal rights between French and Vietnamese

Such demands were too restrained to win publicity for the small group of Indochinese emigres. When Ho tried to argue their case with Wilson himself at Versailles he was unceremoniously shown the door. After this setback, he set out on a tour of the provinces. His reputation grew. Between 1930 and 1923 his political activity in France took three main forms: He played a full part in the Socialist Congress at Tours, joined a Communist group, published his violent pamphlet "THE PROCESS OF FRENCH COLINIZATION" and set up the Intercolonial Union, becoming founder, editor and distributor of its organ, THE OUTCAST. Forty years later on his 70th birthday, Ho published an article entitled, "THE PATH WHICH LED ME TO LENINISM".

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"After World War I, I made my"

The exact dates of Ho's departure from Paris and arrival in Moscow are still enigmas. It seems certain that he lived in the Soviet Union throughout 1924, taking a course at the University of the Peoples of the East and writing several articles for PRAVDA. He established a remarkable position for himself in Comintern circles.

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"When he first arrived, he ~~seemed~~"

Ho was a well-known and influential revolutionary by the end of this first Russian chapter in his career. The next period, the Chinese, was to last almost twenty years. Throughout his career one theme remains clear; his commitment to national emancipation via international revolution. Ho journeyed from Moscow to Canton; sent there by the leaders of the International to assist Borodin, the Comintern's envoy to the revolutionary government. Ever since French rule came to Indochina, Canton had been a revolutionary center for the Vietnamese. Ho was intent on converting the small band that gathered about him into hard core activists. Russian specialists were training the Chinese army. The Russian envoy to Canton had two assistants; a Chinese politician named Chou En-lai and a soldier named Chiang Kai-shek. In the spring of 1927 Chian Kai-shek, who was Borodin's pupil, Chou En-lai's colleague, and Sun Yat-sen's heir--the same Chiang-Kai-shek who had helped train so many Vietnamese revolutionaries--crushed the Canton Commune in a matter of months. This led to a break with the Soviet Union, the disbanding of the unions and the slaughter of the Communist militants. Ho's revolutionary school was swept away in the turmoil.

Ho returned briefly to Moscow. In the autumn of 1928 he sailed for Siam with the objective of setting up cells among the large Vietnamese colony there, and to foment trouble at the expense of the administration in nearby Indochina.

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"Clad in robes of a"

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