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## *The Revolutionary Poetry of Ho Chi Minh*

... knowing by heart the laws of the development of history and clearly foreseeing the prospect of the revolution, he optimistically believed in the final victory.

From *Ho Chi Minh's Life and Cause*, edited by the Commission For Research on the Party History

The Vietnamese people know him as Uncle Ho and he is a figure of tectonic importance in modern history. He was an unassuming and highly intelligent colonial subject of French Indochina who fled Vietnam and travelled the world. He campaigned, debated, and studied with prominent socialist revolutionaries in France, the Soviet Union, and even the United States of America. Returning to Vietnam, he masterminded a guerilla resistance that successfully repelled the French imperial regime, Japanese invaders, and finally the greatest military superpower in human history, the United States of America. His story and the story of his movement is one unrivalled in modern history. Millions died in the name of freedom so that Uncle Ho's dream could become a reality. Millions more still live by its message.

Milestone 108 on the Vietnam-China border is where Ho Chi Minh's movement for national liberation and proletarian revolution began. It was here on 8<sup>th</sup> February that a man calling himself Gia Thu entered the rainforest of Vietnam for the first time in over thirty years. Gia Thu was an alias. His real name was Nguyễn Sinh Cung. He had written multiple articles for the French Socialist Party under the name Nguyễn Ái Quốc. The Vietnamese people know him as Ho Chi Minh. His first home upon his return to his

hometown was Hang *Pác Bó*. Here, Ho Chi Minh lived in a cave for several weeks, sleeping on a bamboo mat and subsisting on bamboo shoots, maize, steamed fish caught from the stream, and occasionally meat. It bore none of the hallmarks of Lenin's return to Petrograd in 1917 as he waved his hat at adoring proletarian crowds. It is an expression of the humility of this Vietnamese student of Lenin.

Ho Chi Minh lived at Pac Po cave for several weeks before local villagers from Cau Bang Province built a cabin for him by the stream. The jade-coloured stream nearby to this cabin was named 'Lenin Stream'. Ho called a mountain overlooking his lodge 'Mount Karl Marx'. His notebook from this time reveals that despite being the start of his movement for national liberation, it was a time in which he enjoyed the serenity of the northern highlands and continued to strengthen his faith in his fellow countrymen and women:

Mountains and rivers as far as they eyes can see,  
What need for more space can there be?  
Here's Lenin Stream, there Mount Marx,  
With bare hands we are building a country.

His poems also create a sense of what the fifty year-old revolutionary was doing while he was building the foundations of a new nation:

Spending mornings beside the brook and  
evenings in the cave,  
Living on maize soup and bamboo shoots,  
always on the alert,  
I work on a wobbly stone desk translating the  
Soviet Party History,  
Oh, what a life of luxury for a revolutionary!

On a mission to China in 1942, Ho Chi Minh was arrested by nationalist government forces and incarcerated for a year, during which he kept a prison diary. In one poem, he complains that he struggles to sleep as 'The five-pointed star is there to haunt my dreams'. Other poems in the prison diary are a window into many aspects to Ho Chi Minh's enigma. They capture the thoughts of Ho the outcast countryman, the convert to Marxism, and the revolutionary prepared to die for this cause:

Stubborn and persevering  
I've not yielded an inch.

Physically I'm suffering

But my spirit will never flinch.

The Prison Diary also contains traces of Ho the strategist, planning the long struggle of impoverished underdogs against a superpower:

Look far ahead and ponder deeply

Be resolute: attack and attack incessantly

A wrong move and even your two chariots are useless,

Come the right juncture: a pawn can bring success

Before his release in 1943, Ho found plenty of time in his cell to reflect on nature, his people's struggle, and immutable laws. One poem brings us as close as we may ever come to the being able to listen to the heartbeat of Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary philosophy:

Everything evolves, such is the law of nature

After days of rain, here's fine weather coming!

Joy fills man's heart as well as the universe.

After the bitter comes the sweet: so runs the course  
of nature.

Ho Chi Minh's philosophy flowed beyond the revolutionary into the spiritual and beyond into the esoteric. For him, the Vietnamese struggle for liberation was as much about the reclaiming the lost spirit of a people as it was about reclaiming lands. A final poem from his time in the Chinese jail cell speaks to this day of the power to overcome the things that bind us, hold us in place, and cause us to suffer in this life: