



**Retro Times**

Yesterday's News Reimagined

Special  
Supplement

The Ghost of

**Ho Chi Minh**



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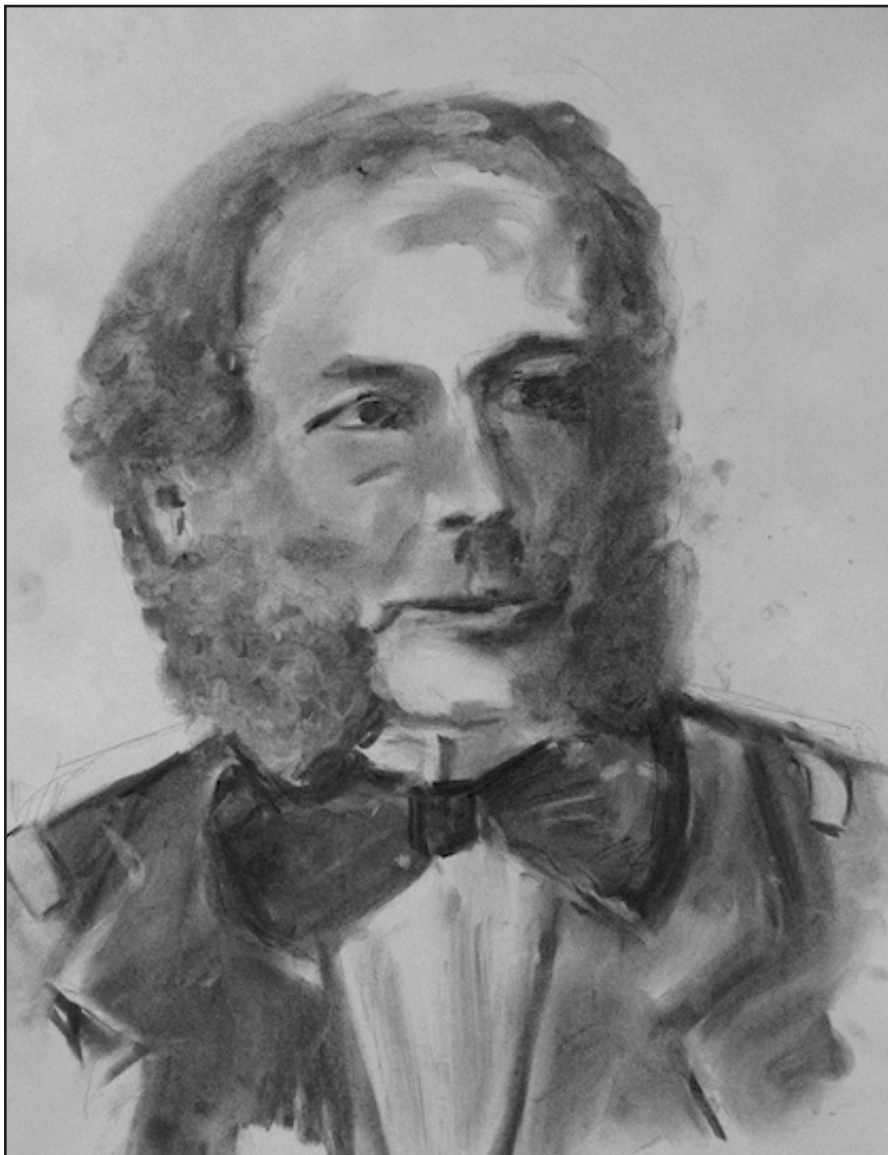
# French Invade Hanoi

## Vietnam Colonized

Retro Times Editorial, 1882

**A**fter becoming emboldened by a series of territorial concessions by Emperor Tu Duc, a French fleet led by Captain Henri Riviera has captured the Vietnamese city of Hanoi in the north of the country. Emperor Tu Duc made a mistake in ignoring the French fleet because he was more afraid of internal insurrection than external invasion. He had made many territorial concessions to the French when they invaded small areas around Saigon in the south of Vietnam in their attempts to reach southern China before the British. Vietnam expert Joe

Allen said, "This was a serious miscalculation. Tu Duc signed away the country piece by piece to the French, beginning in 1862, when the French captured six Vietnamese provinces around Saigon." The invasion of Hanoi is the first time Vietnam has been the real target for the French in their race with the British to colonise Indochina. As a result of the capture of Hanoi, the French have linked their forces in the south with Hanoi and now control the whole country.<sup>1</sup>



French Captain Henri Riviera Captures Hanoi. All of Vietnam is Now Under French Control.

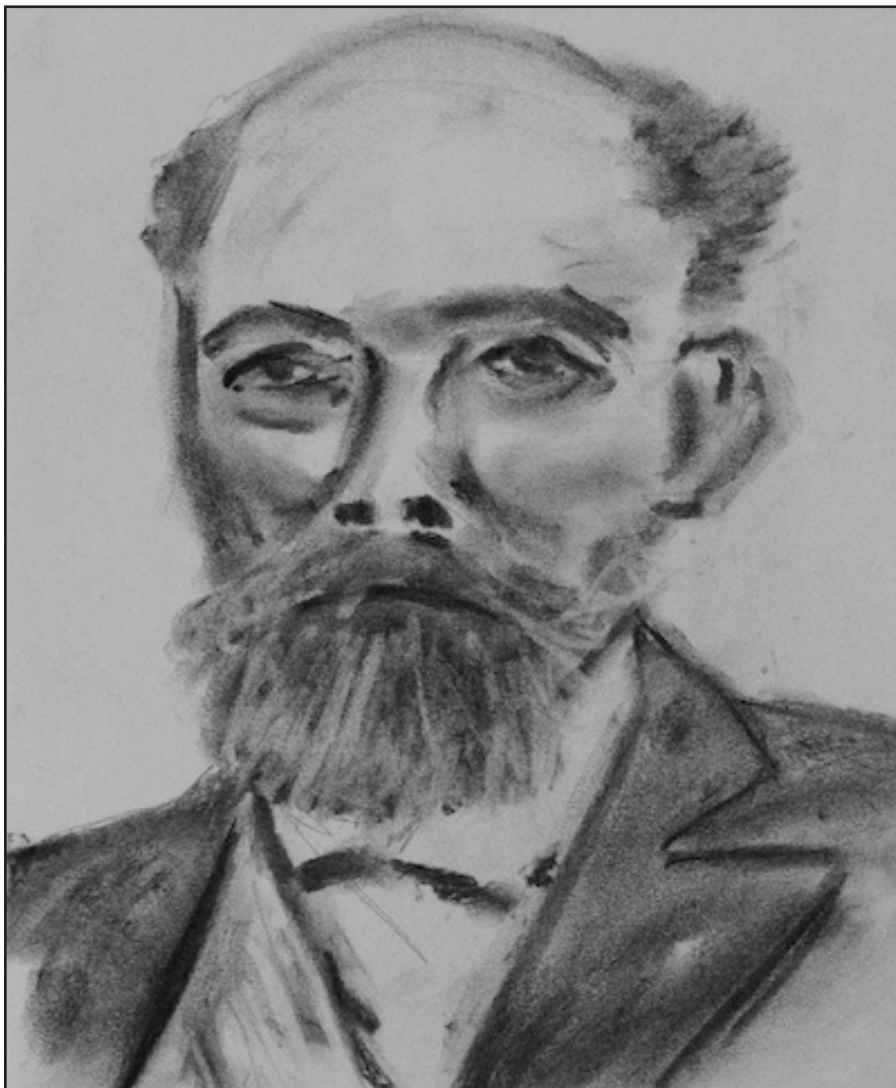
# Economic Slavery

# Vietnamese People Driven into Poverty

Retro Times January 1900

In the last 25 years the Vietnamese economy has been systematically changed to dispossess the Vietnamese people of their land and forced them into a state of semi-slavery under their French colonial masters. In a process begun in 1897, when Paul Doumer was appointed governor general of Indo-china, peasants have been forced off their land and the land amalgamated into French-owned estates, some as large as 7000 acres. Many Vietnamese were left with no land to grow their traditional crops of

rice and no means of providing for themselves or their families. Doumer has also established French monopolies for alcohol, salt and rice and the drug opium with the aid and support of the Bank of Indo-china. According to Commentator Joe Allen, the aim of Paul Doumer was to "make Vietnam a 'profitable colony' for France". This is being achieved at the expense of Vietnamese nationals who are being driven ever deeper into poverty and economic slavery.<sup>1</sup>



Paul Doumer. Everything for the French. Poverty for the Vietnamese

# Fires Rage

## Old Hanoi Disappearing

Retro Times January 23, 1902

In what many Vietnamese people consider to be suspicious circumstances, fire raged through Hanoi last night destroying in excess of 200 houses and four pagodas. Whilst the fire was not an isolated event, it is the largest to date. The regular fires, clearing areas of Vietnamese houses for French developments, are claimed by the French not to be instigated by deliberate acts of clearing. According to

Georges Boudarel and his associate Nguyen Van Ky the fires are “welcomed with pleasure by the colonial press” who report on fires in the working class areas of Hanoi with the frequency of about one a week.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the frequent fires traditional Vietnamese architecture in Hanoi is being rapidly replaced by the French colonial style of building.



French Rebuild Hanoi in Colonial Style

# Path to Independence

# Dissidents Split over Path to Freedom

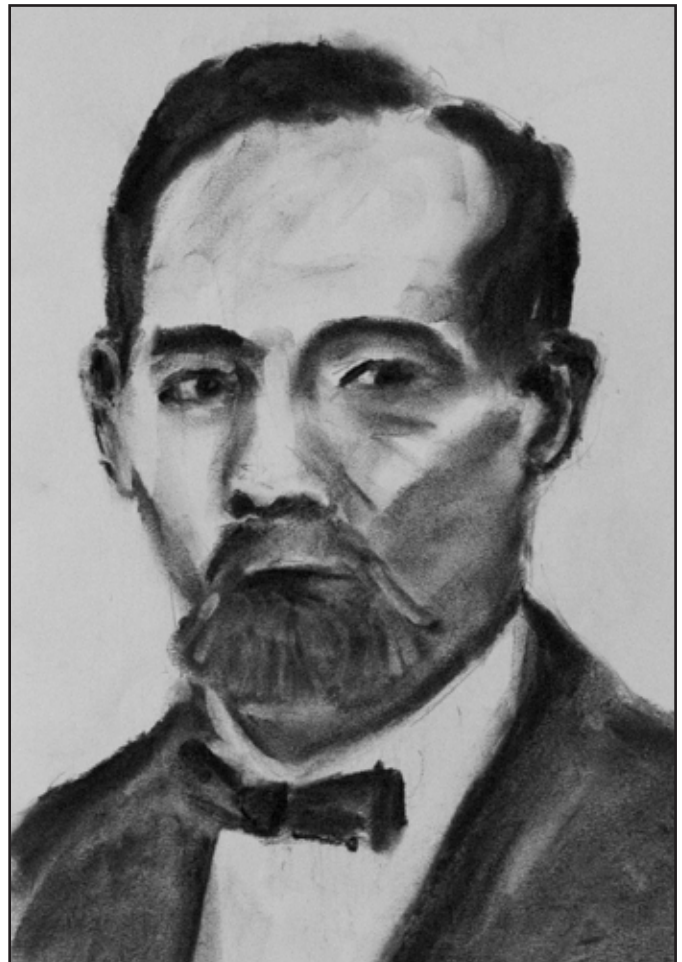
Retro Times, January 1908

Over the last eight years the Vietnamese people have become increasingly hostile to the colonial rule of the French but are split between the path of Phan Bội Châu, who advocates a strong emperor backed by the Chinese or Japanese, and Phan Châu Trinh, who favours using the French bureaucracy to create a modern society that would self-rule. Phan Châu Trinh's path seems doomed to failure, as the school he opened to teach both boys and girls as part of his education program has been closed by the French authorities. Neither of the proposed paths seem to have any possibility of achieving Vietnamese independence. Seeking Chinese or Japanese intervention can

only lead to swapping one colonial master for another, and the French have made it clear that the Vietnamese people will not be allowed to educate themselves out of poverty, even though Governor General Paul Doumer had, in 1905, established schools in all provinces to teach French and French culture to Vietnamese children. The teaching of French and French culture had the effect of taking students away from the traditional Confucian schools, and the banning of the Chinese character written language ensures that education in Vietnam is in the French language, designed to assimilate Vietnamese children into French culture.<sup>1</sup>



Phan Bội Châu



Phan Châu Trinh



# Protesters Shot

Retro Times March 20, 1908

Several deaths amongst protesters resulted after the long simmering resentment against French colonisation became violent on March 15, when large crowds of Vietnamese peasants marched on the provincial capital of Hoi. Protests quickly spread to neighbouring provinces, with several government buildings being occupied, leaving many protesters dead after French soldiers opened fire on the protesters<sup>1</sup>. Hundreds of protesters were arrested.

# Student Interpreter Dismissed

Retro Times, May 10, 1908

Student Nguyễn Tất Thành was dismissed from the National Academy this morning after yesterday attempting to act as interpreter between Vietnam protesters and French authorities in protests. Thành was injured in a baton charge and several protesters were injured by gunshot fire on the new bridge over the Perfume River.

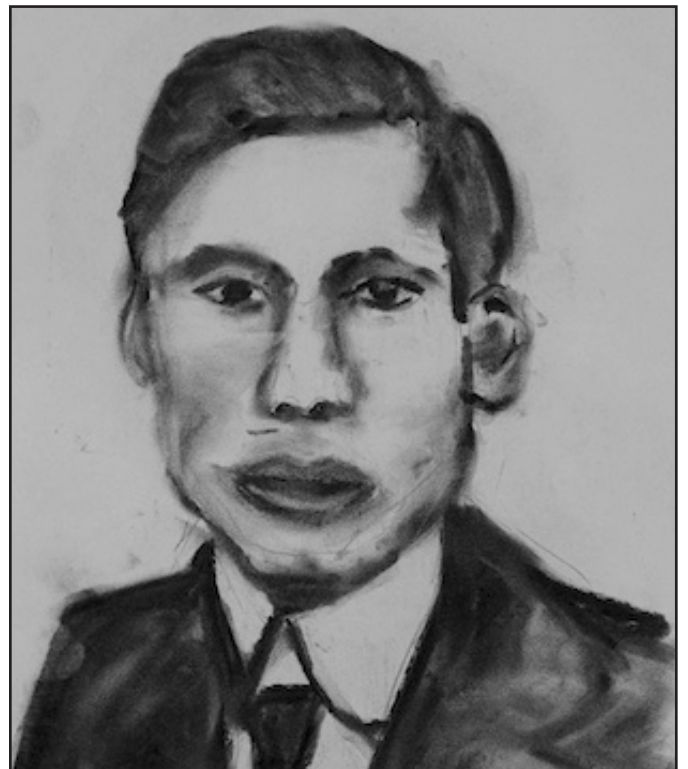
French soldiers arrived at the school at 9am this morning and after seeking out Thành demanded that he be dismissed from the academy. It is likely that this will be the end of Thành's education.<sup>1</sup>

# Open Conflict

# Attempted Poisoning of French Officials

Retro Times June 30, 1908

Phan Bội Châu has been arrested after the attempt by some of his followers to poison French officials attending a recent barbecue. The attempt failed, but many of Châu's followers have been captured and 30 have been executed, with many more imprisoned. Well-known Vietnam commentator William Duiker said that "panicky officials rounded up all scholar-intellectuals who were suspected of being in sympathy with the movement". Martial law has been declared in Hanoi and surrounding areas.<sup>1</sup>



Nguyễn Tất Thành

# Self Exile Nguyễn Tất Thành Flees Vietnam

Retro Times, June 5, 1911

Using the name Văn Ba to avoid scrutiny from French officials, Nguyễn Tất Thành has joined the crew of a steamship bound for Marseilles, the *Amiral Latouche-Tréville* at the port of Saigon, as a chef's assistant. The trade routes between the Orient and Europe are opening to travellers seeking a life in Europe, and a young Vietnamese man working his passage to Europe is not seen as unusual. Nguyễn Tất Thành has left behind his first love, his landlord's daughter, but the need to keep moving and using his 'milk' name of Nguyễn Sinh Cung to avoid authorities has made life in Vietnam difficult and dangerous. Nguyễn Tất

Thành has received close attention from French authorities since the protests and the attempted poisoning of French officials in May and June 1908 forcing many moves ending in Saigon. The last three years have been a life of constant worry and vigilance for Nguyễn Tất Thành. The fear of discovery has been heightened by his studies in Qui Nhơn. His attempts to qualify as a teacher had ended when the provincial governor discovered his identity, forcing a move south to take a position as instructor at a school in Phan Thiết. The constant hiding from imperial forces has forced the decision that it is time for a self-imposed exile.<sup>1</sup>

# Nguyễn Tất Thành Attempts to Enter French Colonial School

Retro Times, September 15, 1911

Nguyễn Tất Thành has written a letter to the French president asking to be admitted to a section of the colonial school called the 'section indigene' that trained colonial subjects for colonial service. Critics of Thành say he was willing to sell out to Vietnam's colonial masters, but supporters say he is still unclear as to the best way to Vietnamese liberation from France and Thành wanted to learn as much as he could about French colonial rule, and this was a way to learn how the colonial service worked. Thành's sister said she had received a letter from Thành saying he wanted to continue his

education before returning to Vietnam in five or six years.<sup>1</sup> This is understandable, as education in Vietnam has been decimated and ways to continue with an education were limited. As one French supporter said, France had a duty to bring "into light and liberty the races of peoples still enslaved by ignorance and despotism".<sup>2</sup> Thành's attitude was: "Why don't the French civilize their own people instead of trying to civilize us?"<sup>3</sup> The banning of education in Chinese characters, substituting French, has caused what commentator Joe Allen described as "manufacturing illiterates"<sup>4</sup> in Vietnam.

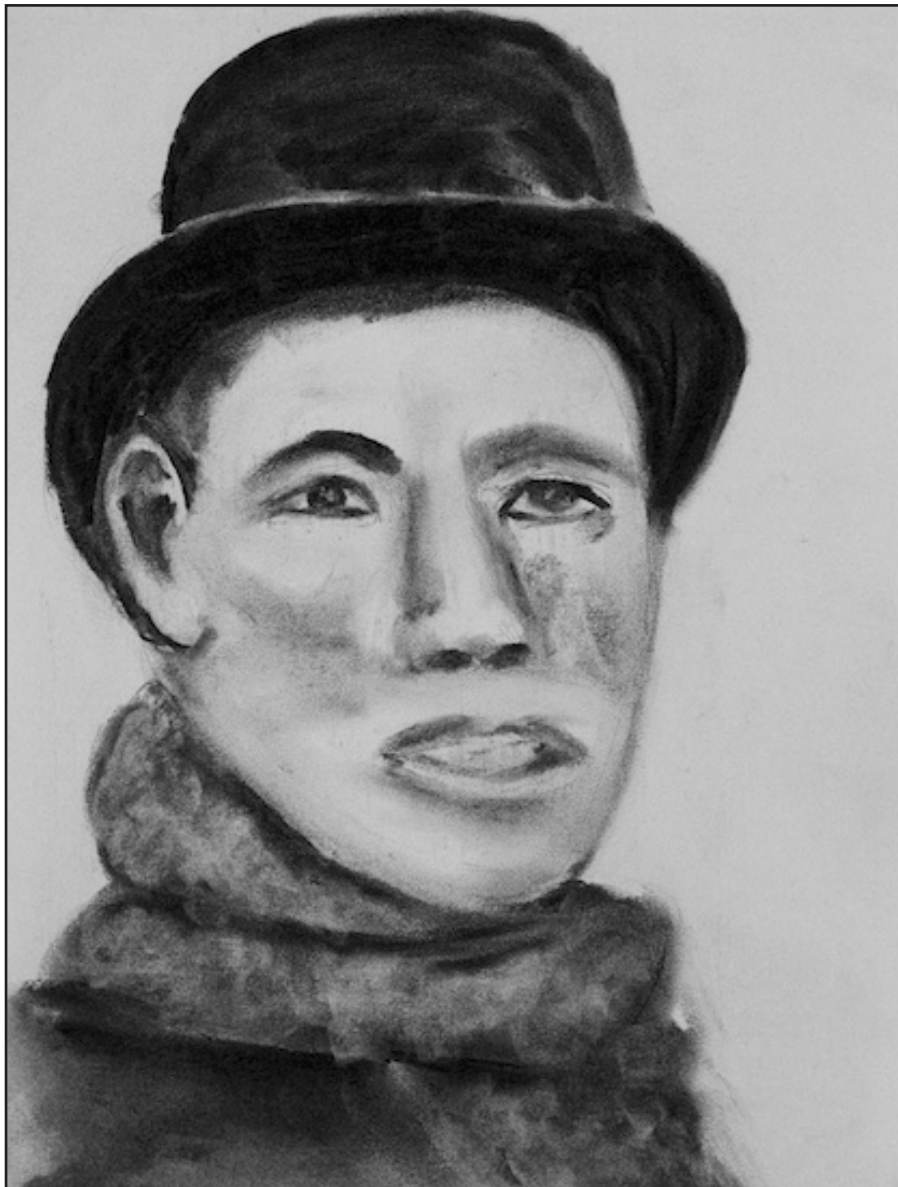
# Nguyễn Tất Thành Travels to Observe Colonial Rule

# Travelling The World

Retro Times, December, 1913

**A**s a crew member of various ships Văn Ba (Nguyễn Tất Thành) has spent the last two years travelling to several colonial countries and observed that the French at home were all good, but “French colonialists are cruel and inhumane”, continuing “to the colonists, the life of an Asian or an African is not worth a penny”.<sup>1</sup> Ba has visited several countries in Africa and Asia including Algeria, Morocco,

Indochina, Saudi Arabia and Madagascar, amongst other countries and his experiences have reinforced his opinion of the uncaring attitudes of colonialists to colonised nations. Ba has also seen the treatment of Afro-Americans in the U.S., and the difference between idealism and practice. In Britain, the response to the movement for independence in Ireland has reinforced Ba’s opposition to colonial rule wherever it occurs.<sup>2</sup>



Nguyễn Tất Thành Traveling. This Picture Believed to be in America

# Learning to Cook

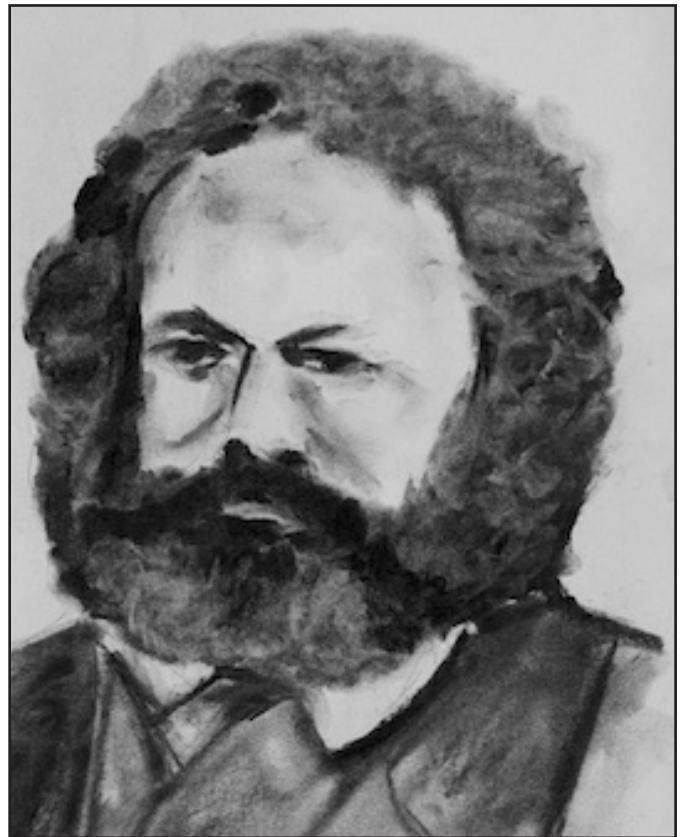
# Văn Ba Spends the War in London

Retro Times. December, 1918



Van Ba Learning to Cook

Nyuyễn Tất Thành, still using the name Văn Ba, has stayed in London for the duration of the war, working as a boiler operator before becoming a dishwasher in a hotel. Famous chef Auguste Escoffier gave Ba the opportunity to learn how to cook, meaning a welcome increase in income. Ba has also become a member of the Overseas Workers Union made up largely of Chinese labourers intent on achieving better conditions in British factories. It is rumoured that Văn Ba has begun studying the works of Karl Marx.<sup>1</sup>



Karl Marx

# Nguyễn Tất Thành AKA Văn Ba, Becomes Nguyễn Ái Quốc

## Another New Name

### Petitions Western Leaders

Retro Times, June 18, 1919

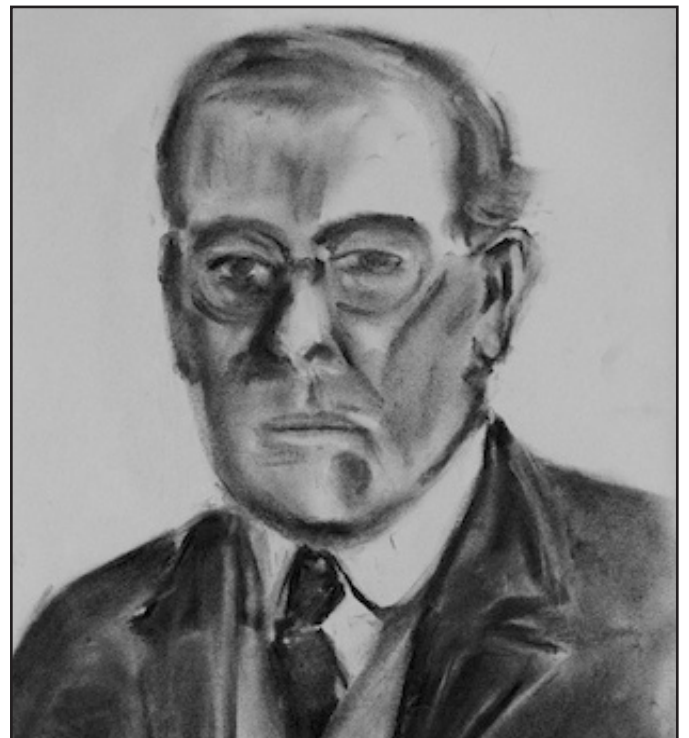
**A** petition to Western leaders at the Conference of Versailles was sent by Nguyễn Ái Quốc (believed to be Văn Ba) appealing for the adoption of self-determination for all peoples as contained in Woodrow Wilson's (U.S. President) fourteen-point declaration for peace following the end of the World War. Văn Ba claims responsibility for the petition, titled the 'Demands of the Annamite people', which he hand delivered to the President of France, Raymond Poincaré, at the palace of Versailles. Quốc credits Phan Văn Trường with helping him with his still-limited French language in the preparation of the document. The events have been reported in the socialist-sympathising

*L'Humanité* newspaper. Quốc, assisted by members of the General Confederation of Labour is said to have printed 6000 copies of the petition and distributed them in Paris.

It is not known when Văn Ba returned to Paris, but is thought to be some time after the end of 1917. There is some suggestion that Văn Ba has travelled between London and Paris several times in the past three years, causing confusion as to the timing of his return to Paris, but it is known he was the guiding light in the formation of the association of Annamite Patriots that formed links with Korean, Tunisian and other national groups seeking an end to colonial rule.<sup>1</sup>



French President Raymond Poincaré



U.S. President Woodrow Wilson

# French Seek to Identify

# Who is Nguyễn Ái Quốc?

Retro Times, December, 1919

Since his petition to the President of France at Versailles, Nguyễn Ái Quốc has received considerable attention from the press and dissident groups, and as a result the French police have made every effort to discover his true identity. A reliable source has said that he has “been tentatively identified as Nguyễn Ái Quốc, son of the ex-Mandarin Nguyễn Sinh Sắc and the same elusive young man who had

been expelled from the National Academy for seditious activity in 1908”.<sup>1</sup> Nguyễn Tất Thành has also been identified as the merchant seaman and London chef Văn Ba. Of special interest to the authorities is that Quốc, following his notoriety in publishing the petition, became in June this year a full member of the French Socialist Party, where he is known as ‘Comrade Nguyễn’ or ‘Monsieur Nguyễn’.<sup>2</sup>

## New Organization Gives Voice to Colonial Peoples Living in Paris

Retro Times. July, 1921

The French Communist Party has formed a new organisation to represent colonial subjects in France, the Intercolonial Union (Union Intercoloniale) and a sub-organisation, the Colonial Study Commission. Both organisations have internal problems and rivalries caused by

the diverse nationalities, and some Vietnamese members are calling for a new Vietnamese-only organisation. Prominent Vietnamese member Nguyễn Ái Quốc favours international action as opposed to a Vietnamese-only based organisation.<sup>1</sup>

## First Edition of *Le Paria*

Retro Times. April 1, 1922

Encouraged by the Colonial Study Commission, prominent Vietnamese activist Nguyễn Ái Quốc has produced the first edition of *Le Paria* (the Pariah), a mouthpiece for colonial citizens living in France. As well as being the editor of the new publication, Quốc is a major contributor of articles and artwork. *Le Paria* is printed in French, but the masthead is also in Chinese and Arabic. Quốc is also said to be working on a play, ‘*The Bamboo Dragon*’ promoting Vietnamese nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

## Quốc Publishes Daily Schedule

Retro Times. June 27, 1922

Nguyễn Ái Quốc has published (in *Le Paria*, *L’Humanite* and *Le Peuple*) a letter he sent to the French authorities thanking them for their provision of his personal ‘aides-de-camp’ (a reference to police surveillance), but to save money when it was needed elsewhere he would give the police notice of his daily activities. After giving an account of his activities for the day, Quốc concluded with “hoping this convenient and rational method will give satisfaction to your Excellency”.<sup>1</sup>

# Nguyễn Ái Quốc Discovers Lenin's Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions

## Read the Fine Print

Retro Times, 1920

In his quest to understand communism in relation to his own Vietnamese nationalist aims, Nguyễn Ái Quốc has expressed his satisfaction at his understanding of Lenin's Moscow-based Third International. According to observer Michael Hunt,<sup>1</sup> Quốc said: "What I wanted to most know – and what was not debated at the meeting – was: which international sided with the peoples of the colonial peoples." At a later meeting Quốc was given Lenin's paper, a theses on the national and colonial questions, which Quốc found difficult but said, "finally I was able

to grasp the essential part". The essential part for Quốc was that Lenin supported nationalists in their struggles to gain freedom from colonial masters.<sup>1</sup> What Nguyễn Ái Quốc seems to have missed in the fine print is that Lenin supported nationalists in their struggles because the communism could not defeat colonial military powers but could defeat national governments once they had been restored. The nationalists could defeat the colonial powers, and then communism could take over liberated countries.<sup>2</sup>



Lenin

# Learning Revolution Nguyễn Ái Quốc goes to Stalin School

Retro Times. July 30, 1923

**A**fter entering Russia on fictitious papers and being detained for several weeks whilst his identity was established, Nguyễn Ái Quốc has now been allowed to travel to Moscow and has been instructed to work at the Far Eastern Bureau to promote revolutionary movements in Asia and Africa. Quốc's image of Russia as a worker's paradise has been revised by the reality of a country trying to recover from the seven years of civil war that followed the Russian revolution, and that was not as clean and decisive as Russian communists would like to imagine.<sup>1</sup> It is reported Quốc has enrolled in the Communist University of the Toilers of the

East, which was set up in 1921 by Lenin and originally placed under the control of Joseph Stalin earning the nickname 'Stalin School'. It is the leading institution for the training of Eastern revolutionaries. The school trains pupils invited to Russia in skills such as instigating strikes and disseminating propaganda. The three-year course also trains students in Marxist-Leninist theory as well as science. There are also short courses of seven months' duration that Quốc has enrolled in. It is said he does not intend to stay in Moscow for an extended period.<sup>2</sup> Quốc also continues to edit *L'Humanite*.



Joseph Stalin. Head of the Toiler's of the East University



# Quốc Joins Soviet Mission to Canton

## Spreading the Word

Retro Times. November 1924

After attending the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern earlier this year where he attended as a member of the French Communist Party, and repeatedly raising the colonial question at the Congress, Nguyễn Ái Quốc has joined the Soviet mission to Canton. Quốc has been eager to join the mission, set up to advise Sun Yet-sen's Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party on how to reorganise along Leninist principles. The uneasy coalition between the Kuomintang Party and the Chinese Communist Party has been put together to depose their common enemies, the

many warlords dividing the country.<sup>1</sup>

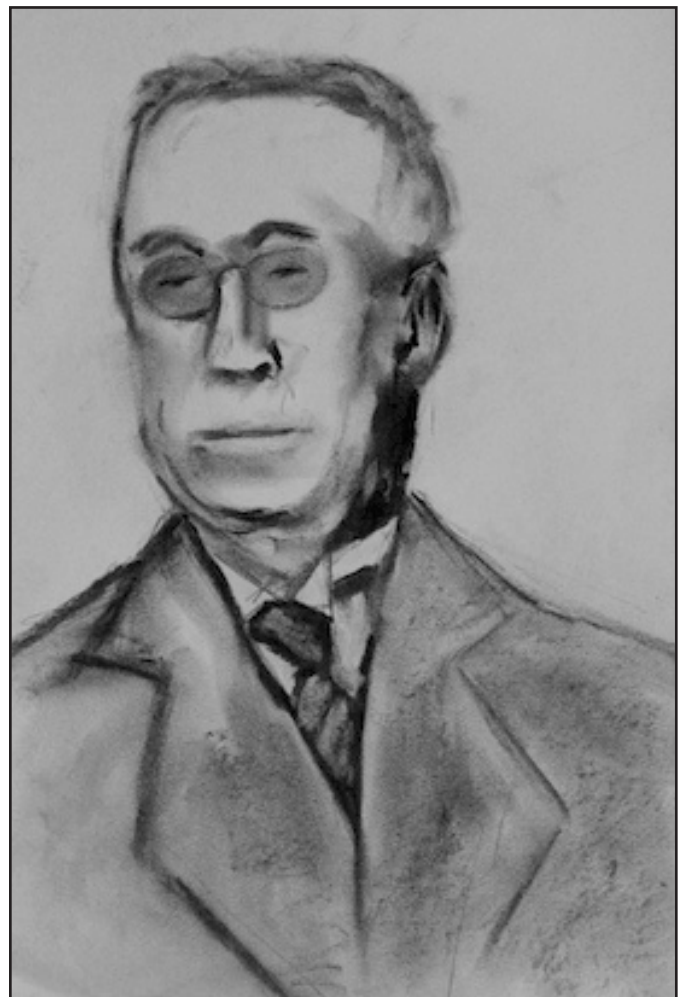
Quốc's main interest in the mission is the many Vietnamese émigrés in China engaged in acts designed to destroy French colonial rule in Vietnam. These émigrés are seen by Quốc as being the future Indochina Communist Party (ICP).<sup>2</sup> Pierre Brocheux reports that Quốc more than founded the ICP, he "initiated his young compatriots" into a blend of "Asian ethics with modern ideas from Europe, and looked to Confucius for ideas similar to those of European socialism".<sup>3</sup>

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## Lý Thụy forms Thanh Niên (Revolutionary Youth League). First Edition of *Thanh Niên* Newspaper

Retro Times. June 2, 1925

Nguyễn Ái Quốc, using the Chinese name Lý Thụy to avoid scrutiny, has created the Thanh Niên (Revolutionary Youth League) to train students in revolutionary doctrines before returning them to Vietnam. As well as teaching most of the courses at the school, Quốc also published the first issue of a weekly newspaper *Thanh Niên* which is written in a simple style suitable for young people with limited education. The principles of the training are said to focus on the twin principles of nationalism and social revolution, with nationalism being dominant. Informants say that some of the initial recruits may be the remnants of the terrorist group that attempted to assassinate the French Governor-General of Indochina, Martial Merlin, in June 1924 by bombing a reception in the Hotel Victoria on Shamian Island.<sup>1</sup>

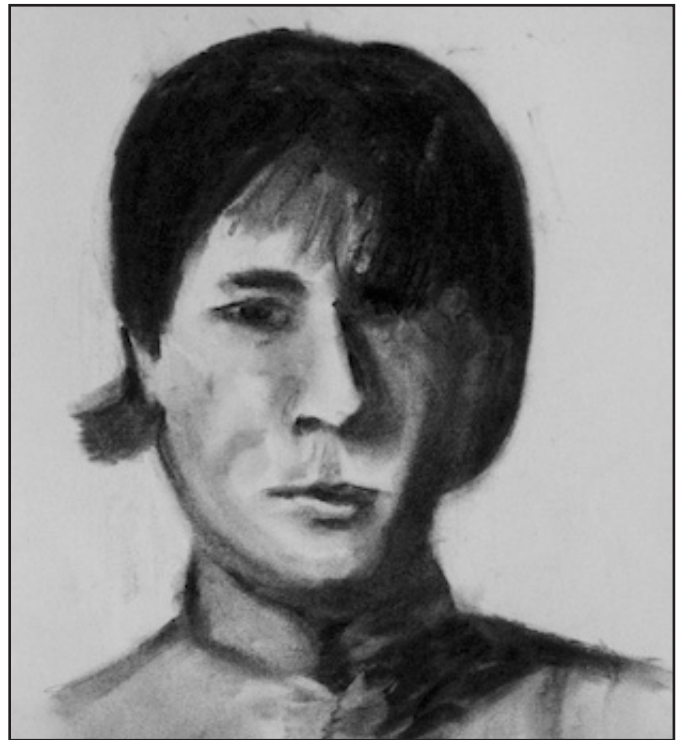


Martial Henri Merlin

# Marries and Leaves Nguyễn Ái Quốc Marries

Retro Times. 18 October 1926

Nguyễn Ái Quốc has married a young Chinese midwife, Tăng Tuyết Minh, who he met through the wife of his friend Lâm Đức Thụ, and at 21 is 15 years younger than Quốc. There has been considerable opposition to the marriage from Minh's mother, who knows of Quốc's nationalistic activities and the potential problems from the Minhs' second-generation Catholic father. Some of Quốc's friends and comrades have doubts about the marriage.<sup>1</sup> Another problem is Quốc's refusal to follow the Chinese custom of paying for his wife.<sup>2</sup>

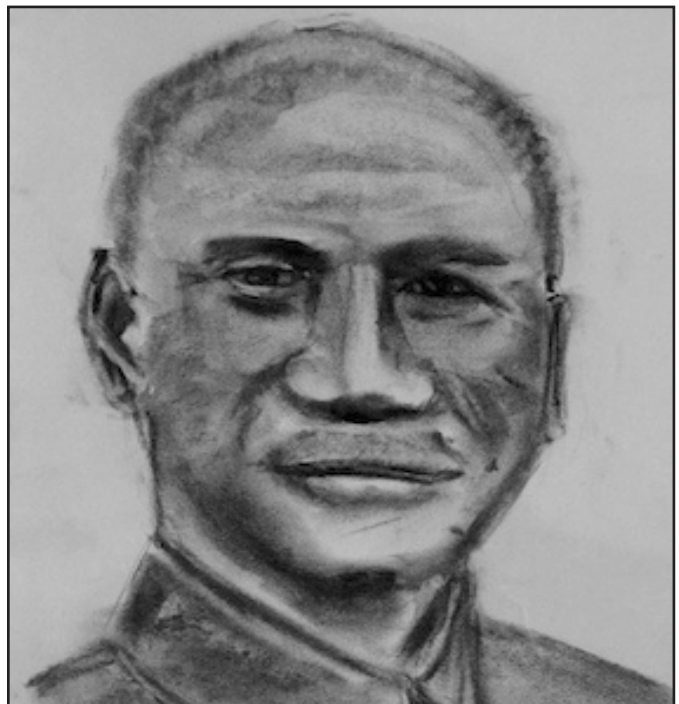


Tăng Tuyết Minh

# Quốc Escapes Nationalists Flees to Bangkok.

Retro Times. May 5, 1927

Following the death of Sun Yat-sen the Kuomintang (Nationalist) party leadership has passed to Chiang Kai-shek. The alliance between the Kuomintang, the communist parties and the alliance with the Soviets disintegrated when Chiang Kai-shek's troops massacred thousands of communists and their supporters at Shanghai. Nguyễn Ái Quốc escaped on a train to Hong Kong shortly before his home was raided by Chinese Nationalists coming to arrest him.<sup>1</sup> "Head shaven and wearing the saffron robes of a Buddhist monk," he is said to be on his way to Bangkok, according to commentator Jules Archer.<sup>2</sup> Quốc's wife has been left behind in China.



Chiang Kai-shek

# New Indo-China Communist Party (ICP) Announced **Arrested in Hong Kong**

Retro Times. December 19, 1929

**A**fter being seen in Moscow, in Brussels at an anti-imperialist conference, in Paris, Italy, Germany and Switzerland where he is said to have been on Communist International (Comintern) assignments, Nguyễn Ái Quốc arrived in Hong Kong on December 19 last year. Quốc's task was to attend a secret Thanh Niên congress and bring peace between warring factions within the organisation. Peace was achieved at a meeting held at the Hong Kong Stadium during a soccer match where the noisy atmosphere covered the arguments of the factions. Today Nguyễn Ái Quốc announced the

Thanh Niên revolutionary movement has been revitalised as the Indo-China Communist Party (the ICP) with the aim of overthrowing "French colonialism; to make Indo-China completely independent; to establish a government of workers, peasants and soldiers; to nationalize the banks and confiscate the plantation for division amongst the peasantry; to end unjust taxes; to establish an eight hour working day; to restore freedom of speech, press and assembly; to provide universal education; to establish equality of the sexes".<sup>1</sup>

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# Nguyễn Ái Quốc (Sung Man-ch'o?) Arrested in Hong Kong

Retro Times. June, 6 1931

**N**uyễn Ái Quốc, using another assumed name Sung Man-ch'o, together with a young woman, Li Sam, has been arrested by Hong Kong Police in premises rented by T V Wong, another Quốc alias. Both Quốc and Sam have been detained without warrant in the hope that they may have evidence incriminating the Comintern.<sup>1</sup> Quốc has been in Hong Kong since February last year (1930) to set up the ICP but stayed in Hong Kong after completing his mission.<sup>2</sup> Quốc's arrest follows the arrest in Singapore of a fellow Comintern operative, Frenchman Joseph Ducroux using the alias of Serge Lefranc, who was on a mission to improve the organisation of the Malaysian Communist Party (MCP) and to trace the whereabouts of \$50,000 missing from funds. Ducroux is known

to have recently been to French Indochina for a month, visiting contacts given to him in Hong Kong by Quốc, and Quốc's address was found amongst his papers. Singapore had been warned by London some months ago about the activities of Ducroux. It is reported Ducroux's "carelessness with wastepaper baskets" has resulted in the arrest of several members of the MCP as members of an unlawful society.<sup>3</sup>

Sung Man-ch'o is not alleged to have committed any offences in Hong Kong, but the British authorities do not tolerate the use of Hong Kong's free port status for organising trouble in neighbouring countries. If any offence is "substantiated, it will amount to subversion at a distance, from a safe haven".<sup>4</sup>

# Facing Death Penalty

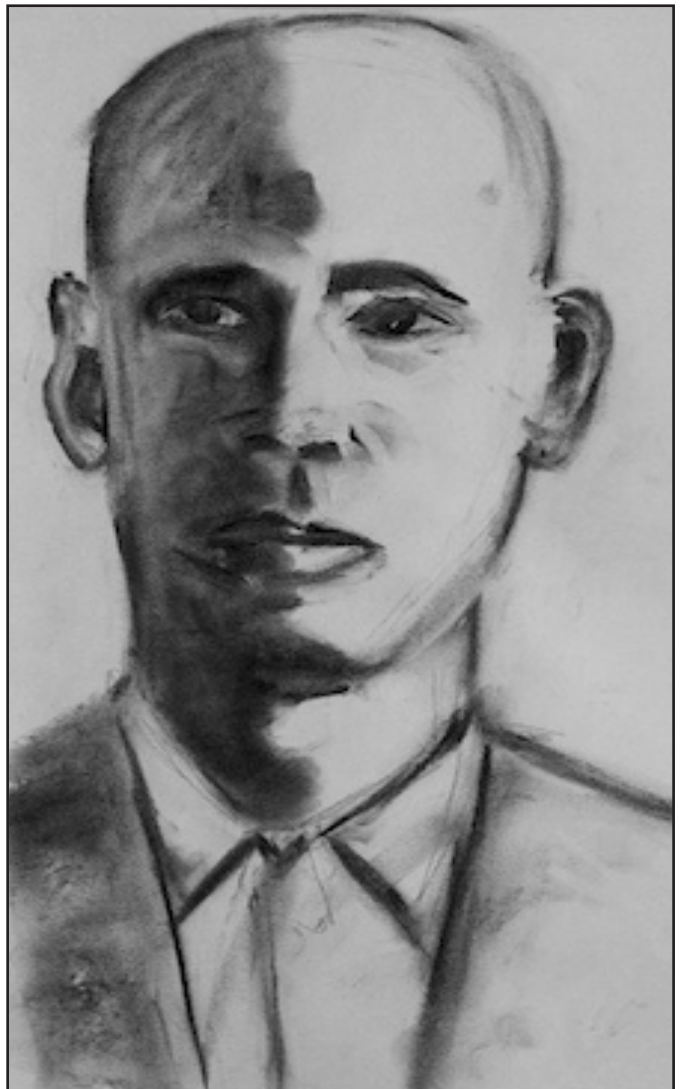
# Banishment or Deportation?

Retro Times. July 1931

This may seem like a semantic question but for Nguyễn Ái Quốc this is a serious issue. If he is deported it will be to his country of origin, which the British administration know to be Vietnam, even if they cannot legally prove it through lack of evidence. Deportation is what members of the French Secret Service visiting Hong Kong to follow the trial want. Nguyễn Ái Quốc has been sentenced to death in his absence by a Vietnamese court. Even though his sentence no longer has legal status, Nguyễn Ái Quốc would be handed over to French colonial authorities to be retried under French law with the result likely to be the same. The British authorities know this and are reluctant to hand over an individual, who has broken no Hong Kong laws, to a country where he will be executed. Nguyễn Ái Quốc claims he is not Nguyễn Ái Quốc but rather Sung Man-ch'o,<sup>1</sup> born at Tung Hung of Lim Chow Fu, a Chinese border town in Kwangtung Province. He claimed he had never been to Russia, but he had been to France, and he also claimed that he was not a communist but a pro-British nationalist.<sup>2</sup> Another complication is that the name Nguyễn Ái Quốc is a name given by Comintern to several of its agents.<sup>3</sup> It would be like the British intelligence service calling several of its agents John Smith.

Banishment from Hong Kong is a different process, ordering a person to leave Hong Kong but allowing them to make their own arrangements. Nguyễn Ái Quốc's lawyer, Frank Loseby (said to be engaged by the International Red Aid<sup>4</sup>) wanted Quốc to be given seven days to leave Hong Kong by his own means, but the Consul General for France asked how and when Quốc would leave Hong Kong. Banishment would be the best option for Nguyễn Ái Quốc, except that his only safe destination is Russia, and no Russian ships call into Hong Kong, so he would have to change ships in a foreign port, possibly in China. The French authorities would arrange his kidnapping at a convenient (for them) port along the way. The British Colonial Office telegraphed Hong Kong that to "forestall charges of using deportation as a cloak for extradition" Quốc should be set free and

given seven days to quit Hong Kong (without notifying the French of departure), but this was modified because the French ambassador in Britain insisted that the French Consul General's request be upheld. Other ongoing political difficulties, not related to Quốc, made it advisable to avoid "Anglo-French irritations".<sup>5</sup> What to do with Nguyễn Ái Quốc remains a major headache for the British administration in Hong Kong.



British Authorities Picture of 'Sung Man-ch'o' from his charge sheet. Rumour has it that the French identify and track Nguyễn Ái Quốc by his unusual ears

# The *Daily Worker* Announces Death of Nguyễn Ái Quốc

## Death and Resurrection

Retro Times. July 21, 1932

The *Daily Worker* has announced “the death of Nguyễn Ái Quốc, founder of the Communist Party of Indo-China, secured by imperialist terror, in the prison hospital of Hong Kong”.<sup>1</sup> Commentator Dennis Duncanson said: “With the Hong Kong Government now formally committed to spiriting him away, whatever his

destination and route, it was safe for Comintern to kill off ‘Nguyễn Ái Quốc’ dead.”<sup>2</sup> Since the person held in the hospital was officially Sung Man-ch’o, there was no need to tell the French that Nguyễn Ái Quốc, a man who does not exist, has not died, and there is no need to contradict the stories that he has died of consumption.



Sung Man-ch'o/ Nguyễn Ái Quốc's Lawyer Frank Loseby

## Sung Man-ch'o Escapes to Russia

Following the death of Nguyễn Ái Quốc, the prisoner known as Sung Man-ch'o was set free on December 28 last year (1932) with the instructions to be gone from Kong Kong within 21 days. Sung Man-ch'o left Hong Kong for Singapore. From there it was possible he wanted to travel via ship to Vladivostok. For unexplained reasons Sung Man-ch'o returned to Hong Kong and was recognised disembarking on January 21. At the Chinese New Year (25-26 January) Sung Man-ch'o was taken by plain-clothed police in a launch hired by the government to be put secretly on a ship, the *SS Anhui*, which had already left port but had slowed outside Lyemun Strait to allow Sung Man-ch'o to embark at sea. The first place Sung Man-ch'o went was Amoy, before risking travelling to Shanghai and from there, via the Chinese Communist Party underground network, to Vladivostok to catch the Trans-Siberian train for Moscow. French authorities have discovered he is still alive,<sup>1</sup> and Sung Man-ch'o has become Nguyễn Ái Quốc again.

# Sitting on the Sidelines

# Nguyễn Ái Quốc Sent to China

Retro Times. June 1938

After a long period of working in several roles within the Communist Party in Moscow, Nguyễn Ái Quốc has been sent to China. This comes after a long period of administrative tasks in Moscow. First Quốc had been assigned to look after 144 Vietnamese students studying at the Stalin school who were at that time in the process of organising his funeral after hearing of his death in Hong Kong. There followed a series of other minor tasks. The years of inactivity in Moscow have been described as purgatory for Nguyễn Ái Quốc, who wanted to get back to working for the party instead of being sidelined. There are many possible reasons for Nguyễn

Ái Quốc's sidelining in his years in Moscow. His former friendships with some of Stalin's enemies during the Stalin purges may have made his position dangerous, and there is even the possibility of the threat of trial for being on the wrong side of Stalin. Quốc may even have been tried. There also seems to be suspicion that he had bought his release from Hong Kong by agreeing to being a double agent for the British Government. The circumstances of his departure from Hong Kong with the help of the British does support this. Whatever the reasons for the past years of inactivity, Nguyễn Ái Quốc is more than ready to resume 'active duty'.<sup>1</sup>

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# Uneasy Alliance Between Communists and Nationalists

Retro Times. June, 1940

When Nguyễn Ái Quốc returned to China a year ago he found many changes since he was last here in 1927. The Communist Party and the Nationals have joined in an uneasy alliance to fight invading Japanese forces. French commentator Pierre Brocheux said that "sleeping with the enemy" sometimes resulted in violent clashes. Brocheux describes China as being a "patchwork of overlapping nationalists and communist zones" in areas not controlled by the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> Quốc's purpose in China has been as a journalist and public health officer at his base in the rustic city of Guilin. The latter role he is said to take very seriously, maintaining very high standards of sanitation.

Some of Quốc's articles are being written in French under the name of P.C. Line and are published in Hanoi in the newspaper *Notre Voix*, an ICP newspaper published legally after some relaxation of colonial policies, including the release of political prisoners, brought on by a new government in Paris. Quốc's life in Guilin is reasonably stable largely because the technically superior Japanese army finds operating on China's primitive road system difficult and becomes bogged down on muddy roads, losing its mechanised advantage. And so the war drags on without any real threat to Quốc's base.<sup>2</sup>

# Hitler Visits Paris

# Hitler Defeats France

Retro Times. June 14, 1940

Following the collapse of the French Army, swept aside by the advancing German Army, Hitler has begun a visit to Paris. The imminent fall of the last of French forces to Germany raises questions in Indochina about the future allegiances of French colonial administration. What will be the allegiance of French forces in Indochina? Will they come under the control of Germany or will they join forces with other European colonial powers in the area? What will be the response to the Chinese already embroiled in a war with invading Japanese forces? Will French forces in Indochina align with the Japanese forces? This seems a

possibility with Germany in control of France and the relationship between Germany and Japan. Although Indo-China may seem remote from the war in Europe, it creates many possible alliances and uncertainties for Indochina.<sup>1</sup>

William Duiker reports that in China Nguyễn Ái Quốc has “convened a meeting of the editorial board of the journal D.T.” (formally *Dong Thanh*), and has said: “The French defeat represents a very favourable opportunity for the Vietnamese revolution. We must seek every means to return home to take advantage of it. To delay would be harmful to the revolution.”<sup>2</sup>



Hitler in Paris

# France Still in Control

## Military Presence and Rite of Passage for Japanese Troops

Retro Times. September 26, 1940

**J**apanese forces have established a base on North Vietnam. This follows a four-day undeclared war in which Japanese forces attacked French garrisons and destroyed the railway line at Long Son and captured three airfields. This poses a serious threat to Allied forces in the Indochina region. The new French Vichy government granted Japan the right to station 6000 troops in Vietnam. It has also given

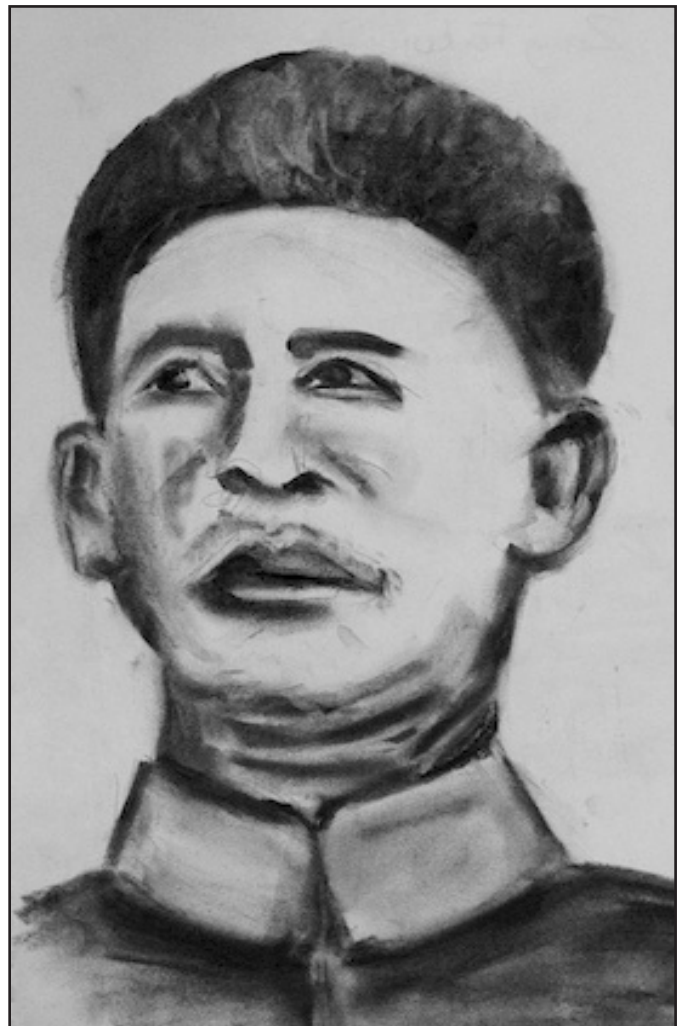
Japan the right to have no more than 25,000 troops in transit through Vietnam at any one time. In return, France gets peace in the region. This effectively leaves the Vichy French colonial government in charge of the administration of the whole of Vietnam, whilst the Japanese retain the right to use the three airfields it has already captured in the north.<sup>1</sup>

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## Chinese Nationalists to Send Troops into Vietnam to Counter Japanese

Retro times. October 1940

**R**eports suggest that the Chinese Nationalists have, for some time, been planning to send troops into Vietnam to oppose the expansion of Japanese military influence into Indochina. General Zhang Fakui is said to be in command of preparing for the incursion into Vietnam and has appointed Vietnam exile Trương Bội Công to forming 42 militant expatriate Vietnamese into a 'front' and to act as guides for Fakui's forces.<sup>1</sup>



General Zhang Fakui



# Nguyễn Ái Quốc Creates Base in North Vietnam

## Return to Vietnam

Retro Times. February 10, 1941

**N**guyễn Ái Quốc has returned to Vietnam after conducting a 25-day political training course at two villages in the Jingxi district of China for 42 Vietnam militants who had deserted Zhang Fakui's force to join Quốc's Vietnam communists. It is reported by commentator Pierre Brocheux that the two villages where Quốc led the political training have been supporters of the Chinese communists since the 1920s and that Quốc's men had no problem blending with villages to avoid outside interference. Quốc, with his group of supporters, crossed the border into Vietnam on February 8 along a mountain trail that passed border marker 108, which is written in Chinese

characters on one side and in French on the other. The group paused in silence for several minutes after the crossing to mark Quốc's homecoming after 30 years.<sup>1</sup> Since his return, Nguyễn Ái Quốc has established his base at Pác Bó. He created his 'safe space' in a cave called Coc Bo by a peaceful stream that runs through Pác Bó. Nguyễn Ái Quốc named this Lenin, at the base of a peak he called Marx. From this base Quốc plans to liberate Vietnam from colonial rule. It is rumoured that he is writing a manual for guerrilla warfare tactics to be used against colonial forces.<sup>2</sup>

# Nguyễn Ái Quốc Creates Vietminh

Retro Times. May 19, 1941

**A**t a conference at Pác Bó, attended by the Central Committee of the Indochina Communist Party, Nguyễn Ái Quốc announced the formation of the Việt Nam độc lập đồng minh (Vietminh) as a political and military organisation dedicated to establishing an independent Vietnam. Although created by the Communist Party,

the organisation will be open to people of all political persuasions sharing the ideal of a free Vietnam. It is envisioned that the Vietminh will share a common goal with other independence movements in Indochina and be part of the worldwide movement of global communism.<sup>1</sup>

# Japanese and Vichy French: Joint Rule of Vietnam

Retro Times, August 1, 1941

**A**n agreement signed today between the Japanese and the Vichy French following the fall of France to Hitler resulted in Japanese forces extending their military presence. The agreement has increased the number of airfields granted to Japanese forces from three to eight, and also increases Japanese military presence to the whole of Vietnam as well as allowing Japanese access to the Indochinese financial

system. In return for these concessions, the French Vichy government has autonomy in its colonial lands.<sup>1</sup> This effectively leaves Japan as the military force in Vietnam whilst the French colonial forces retain control and responsibility for civil administration. Vietnam effectively has two systems of government, the Japanese military force and the French Vichy colonial administration.

# U.S. Ignores Warnings

# Chinese Nationalist Break Japanese Codes

Retro Times. November, 1941

Chinese Nationalist spies have broken the Japanese military codes and have twice warned America that Japan plans to attack Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. America's Department of War doubts the ability of the Chinese to break Japanese codes and has decided to ignore the warnings.<sup>1</sup>

# Japan Attacks U.S. Fleet at Pearl Harbor

Retro Times. Decembrer 7, 1941

Shortly before 8am (local time) this morning, aircraft from six Japanese aircraft carriers under the command of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto attacked the U.S. fleet in Pearl Harbor. Yamamoto, who has studied and lived in the U.S., is known for his strong arguments against war with America, but it is believed he was overruled by the Imperial High Command. Analysts say that Yamamoto's reasoning for

attacking Pearl Harbor could have been that he sees Japan's only hope of winning a war against America as being the total destruction of the U.S. fleet. In this Yamamoto has failed because at the time of the attack none of the U.S. fleet's aircraft carriers were in Pearl Harbor and the most important component of American naval power, air superiority at sea, remains intact.<sup>1</sup>



Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Gamble Fails

# America Declares War **U.S. At War**

Retro Times. December 8, 1941

The United States Congress has declared war on the Empire of Japan one hour after President Roosevelt gave an impassioned speech, beginning with calling the previous day “a date which will live in infamy”,<sup>1</sup> in which he portrayed America as the innocent victim violated by Japan whilst peace negotiations were still in progress between the two nations.

Roosevelt did not declare war on Japan, as constitutionally only Congress can declare war, which it did within the hour, with only one dissenting voice. This belonged to the first woman elected to Congress, Jeannette Rankin.<sup>2</sup>

There was such a public outcry at her vote that Congresswoman Rankin had to retreat to a telephone booth and wait for a security escort.



Jeannette Rankin.

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# Britain Declares War on Japan

Retro Times. December 8, 1941

**A**t the same time as Japan was attacking Pearl Harbor, Japan also attacked Malaya and bombed Singapore and Hong Kong. As a result, Winston Churchill has declared Britain is now at

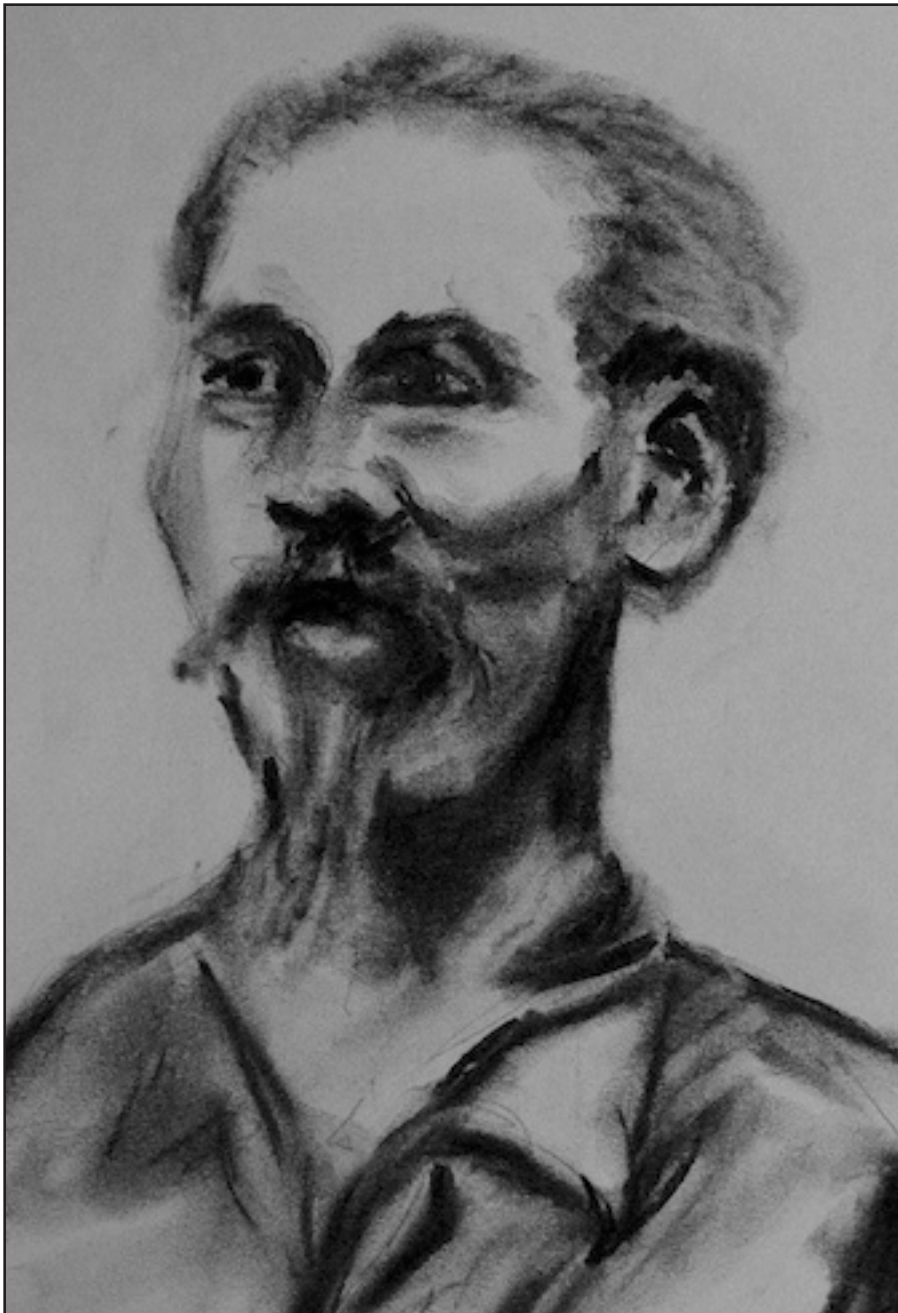
war with Japan. Unconstrained by constitutional requirements, the declaration of war by Britain came before the declaration of war by America.<sup>1</sup>

# Another Identity Change

# Nguyễn Ái Quốc becomes Hồ Chí Minh

Retro Times. June, 1942

**C**ommentator Pierre Brocheux has reported that Nguyễn Ái Quốc has adopted the name Hồ Chí Minh, but there has been no confirmation of this by the issuing of any formal notifications.<sup>1</sup>



Hồ Chí Minh

# Hồ Chí Minh Arrested by Chinese Nationalists

## Death, Resurrection (Again)

Retro Times. August 29, 1942

**H**ồ Chí Minh (Nguyễn Ái Quốc) has been arrested by Chinese Nationalists and imprisoned in Guangxi whilst attempting to visit Chongqing in Southwest China<sup>1</sup> to seek support from the Chinese Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek. Minh was arrested by local police in the village of Teyuan before he could catch a bus for the capital of China, Chongqing. Police were suspicious of conflicting identity documents, one being that of a Chinese overseas reporter

named Hồ Chí Minh and others identifying him as being a member of the Vietnamese branch of the Anti-Aggression League. There was also a card issued by the International Press Agency. All of the documents were out of date. It is believed Hồ Chí Minh had been travelling in disguise to avoid arrest by French authorities but had been suspected by the Chinese Nationalists of being a Japanese spy.<sup>2</sup>

## Hồ Chí Minh Dead

Retro Times. February, 1943

A young Indochina Communist Party member sent to South China to locate Hồ Chí Minh has reported back that Minh has died in prison. Arrangements are being made for the funeral of Hồ Chí Minh.<sup>1</sup>

## Hồ Chí Minh Alive

Retro Times. March, 1943

Reports from Vietnam say that a magazine has been sent from China to the Vietnamese Communist Party and a note in a margin in Hồ Chí Minh's hand reads: "To my dear friends – good health and courage in your work. Be in good health." It is believed that the member reporting Hồ's death had mistaken the words 'okay, okay' for the similar-sounding Chinese words 'dead, dead' when asking about Hồ Chí Minh's condition in prison.<sup>1</sup>

# Hồ Chí Minh Released from Prison

Retro Times. September 10, 1943

**T**he Nationalist Chinese have released Hồ Chí Minh from prison and Minh has chosen to remain in China. It has taken many months to establish the true identity of Hồ Chí Minh followed by political intrigue to secure Hồ's release. Some members of the Chinese Nationalist Party wanted Hồ executed because of his connections to the Communist Party, but Commander of the Fourth Military War Zone Zhang Fakui wants to enlist Hồ Chí Minh into

plans to attack Japanese forces in Vietnam. The 'deal' said to be on offer is that Hồ helps Zhang fight the Japanese in Vietnam and in return Zhang will help Hồ achieve independence for Vietnam provided that Hồ promises that a free Vietnam will not become communist for 50 years. The truth of the intrigue and manoeuvring may never be known, but the result is that Hồ Chí Minh has been released.<sup>1</sup>

# Finding Common Ground

## Negotiations

Retro Times. April, 1944

Since his release from prison, Hồ Chí Minh and Zhang Fakui have been working together to bring about their twin aims of defeating the Japanese in Vietnam and establishing a free Vietnam. Both have shown a willingness and ability to bring together many ideological groups for the purposes of achieving common goals. One of Hồ's activities has to become more involved with the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Dong Minh Hoi, or Vietminh), becoming its vice-chairman in November 1943. The plan seems to be for Hồ Chí Minh to return to Vietnam and pave the way for China to enter Vietnam to fight the Japanese. Once the Japanese have been defeated China would withdraw, leaving a free Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

## Hồ Chí Minh Returns to Vietnam

Retro Times. August 9, 1944

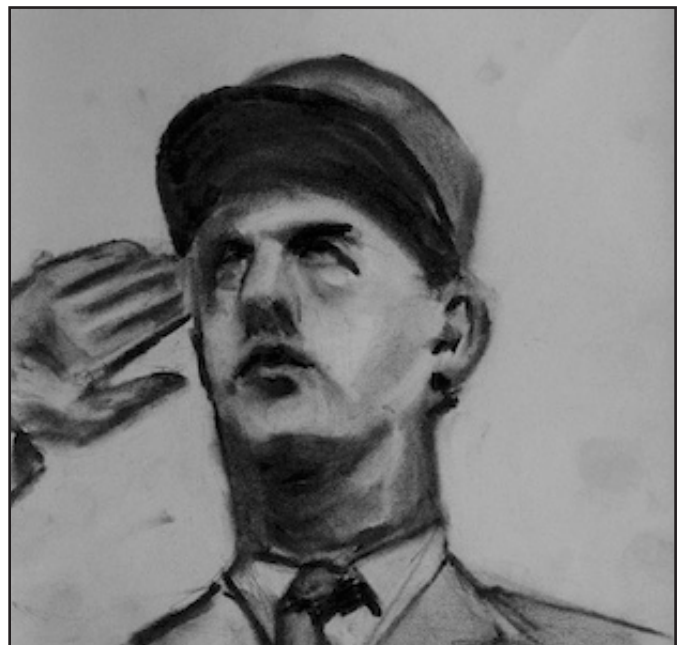
Hồ Chí Minh has returned to Vietnam to further reorganise and expand the influence of the Vietminh, who have been growing in the north of Vietnam. An abortive uprising by the communists at Bắc Sơn in 1940 resulted in the understanding of the many mistakes made and how those mistakes could be used to learn new

skills in propaganda and other skills needed to prepare for successful uprisings. The return of Hồ Chí Minh is a step in establishing the policy of the Vietminh leading efforts to overthrow the French administration, and paving the way for the forces of Zhang Fakui to enter Vietnam to defeat the Japanese military.<sup>1</sup>

## Vichy France Falls

Retro Times. September, 1944

The French Vichy government has been defeated in France following the Allied invasion of Europe led by the armies of America and Britain. This leaves a question mark over the loyalties of the French administration of Vietnam supported by the Japanese. It is unclear if the French civilian administration, led by Governor-General Jean Decoux, will continue the alliance with Japan, accepting the military occupation of Vietnam, or if the allegiance of the French will switch to Free French administration, led by General Charles de Gaulle. The situation is further complicated by factions within the French administration wanting to support different causes, the continued alliance with Japan or switching sides to support the new de Gaulle French government. The possibility of a new enemy, a hostile civilian administration in their midst, has led the Japanese military to increase its efforts to win the direct support of the Vietnamese people. The French administration



Charles De Gaulle. New Leader of France

is now under increasing pressure from two sides, the local Vietminh and the Japanese military, whilst the military is under threat of invasion from the north by Chinese military leader Zhang Fakui.<sup>1</sup>

# Japan Ends French Rule of Vietnam

## French Gone

Retro Time, March 9, 1945

Continuing and deepening concerns about the loyalty of the French administration in Vietnam has resulted in the termination of the Vichy Vietnamese government and the civilian government being turned over to Emperor Bo Đại. Stein Tønnesson reports that the Japanese understand that if Allied forces invade Indochina the French in Vietnam will join with the invaders against the Japanese forces, but without an Allied invasion the French pose no real threat and are better left alone to administer the country.<sup>1</sup> The coup against the French administration is a pre-emptive action based on the increasing likelihood of an Allied

invasion of Indochina. Whilst it may seem as if Vietnamese people have gained control over their civilian administration, there is no doubt that Bảo Đại is only a puppet emperor and the real administrative decisions come from the Japanese military.<sup>2</sup> The move by the Japanese to replace the French administration is being described by some as a coup, but realistically the Japanese have been the force behind the Vichy French in Vietnam and it was more of an administrative decision by the Japanese to end 100 years of French rule in Vietnam than a coup.



Bảo Đại. The Last Emperor of Vietnam

# Appeal to the President

# Hồ Chí Minh Appeals to America to Fight Japanese in Vietnam

Retro Times. March 11, 1945

Reports from Vietnam indicate that Hồ Chí Minh has appealed to American President Roosevelt through his U.S. contacts to attack Japan through Indochina. Using the signature Luc, possibly referring to the codename of Lucius given to him by American intelligence, HỒ has declared: "The French imperialist wolf was finally devoured by the Japanese fascist hyena." There are factions within the Vietnamese resistance pushing for an immediate uprising against the Japanese, but others, including Minh, want America to defeat

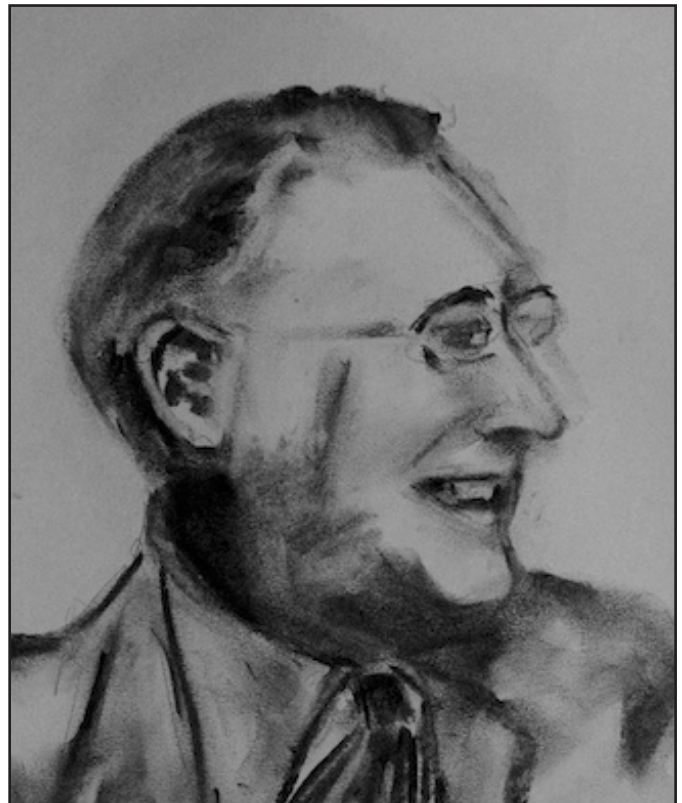
the Japanese in Indochina and bring a friendly force into Vietnam. A defeated Japan without a supportive U.S. presence in Vietnam could leave the country in a vulnerable position. HỒ seems to have great faith in what is seen as a strong bond of friendship with the US.<sup>1</sup> It is unlikely that Minh's appeal to have American forces invade Vietnam to drive out Japanese forces will result in any change to the American strategy of 'island hopping' through the Pacific to attack Japan directly, which is proving a quick and effective route to end the war.

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# Roosevelt Dead

Retro Times. April 12, 1945

**U.S.** President Franklin D Roosevelt has died from a stroke 11 weeks into his fourth term as president. Roosevelt's death is likely to be a turning point in world history, as his successor, President Harry Truman, is known to be considerably less willing to accommodate world views contrary to his own than was FDR. The death of Roosevelt is a blow for Vietnam in that he supported independence for the countries of Indochina. The new President Truman is believed to support the reintroduction of French colonial rule in the region. It is reported by Stein Tønnesson that Roosevelt, up to the time of his death, was committed to set up an international trusteeship for Vietnam that excluded French interests but included the participation of China.<sup>1</sup> Such an arrangement could have been satisfactory to Hồ Chí Minh because of HỒ's ability to work pragmatically with situations that lead towards Vietnamese independence. Roosevelt's plan could have been a step along that path.



President Franklin D Roosevelt



# U.S. Abandons Indochina

## Truman Supports France

Retro Times, May. 1945

**A**t the San Francisco Conference to establish the new United Nations Organization President Truman has reversed the position held by Roosevelt before his death by indicating that he (Truman) would not oppose restoration of French colonial power in Indochina. French leader Charles de Gaulle promised the U.S. in March that Indochina would receive “an autonomy proportionate to her progress and attainments”. How progress will be measured, who will measure it, or what progress means has been questioned, and it seems to be at the discretion of the French.<sup>1</sup> The attitude of Truman towards independence for Vietnam is now more in line with the views of Churchill, who wanted U.S. policy to support France in Indochina.<sup>2</sup> Britain has a vested interest in re-establishing former colonial powers in the world because if Britain is to regain a position of prominence in the world it needs to regain its empire intact. As the British ambassador in Chungking has warned, “any such attempt to abrogate French rule in Indo-China cannot fail to react on the position of other nations holding possessions in the Far East, e.g. the Dutch and ourselves”.<sup>3</sup>

## British and Chinese Troops to Disarm Japanese

Retro Times. August 3, 1945

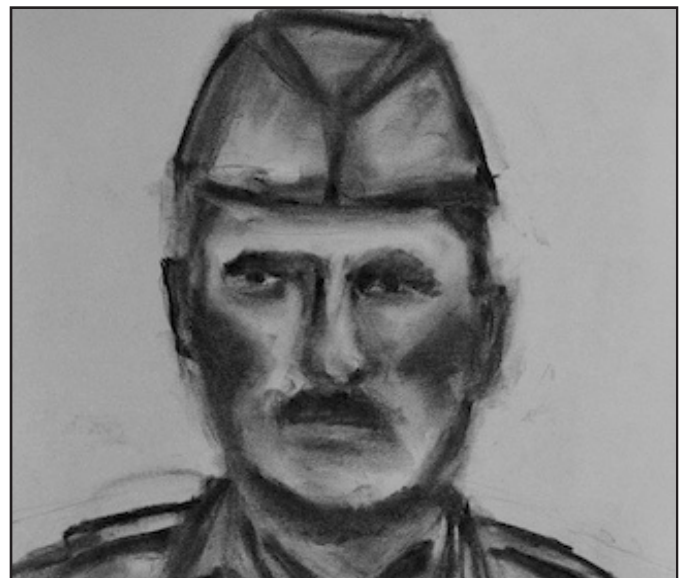
**A**greement has been reached by the ‘big three’ – American President Truman, British Prime Minister Churchill and Soviet leader Stalin – at the recent Potsdam Conference (July 17, August 2) that disarming of the Japanese military in Indochina is to be undertaken by British and Chinese troops. The British are to operate south of the Sixteenth Parallel, and the Chinese Nationalists north of the Sixteenth Parallel. Whilst Vietnam is divided into two zones for military purposes, Vietnam remains a united country. American and French troops will not take part in the disarmament because American is preoccupied with forcing the surrender of Japan, and French forces are excluded because French troops in Indochina could be a sensitive issue.<sup>1</sup>

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## U.S Arms Vietminh

Retro Times. July 1945

**R**eliable sources say that an American military unit, codenamed the ‘Deer Team’, is in North Vietnam training Vietminh forces in guerrilla tactics and to use American supplied arms including M-1 rifles and bazookas. The leader of the Deer Team, Major Allison Thomas, has reported back to headquarters that the Vietminh are “not anti-French, merely patriots (who) deserve full trust and support”.<sup>1</sup>



Major Allison Thomas

# U.S. Uses Nuclear Bomb

# Hiroshima Destroyed

Retro Times. August 6, 1945

**A**t 8.15 this morning (local time) the city of Hiroshima was destroyed by a single atomic bomb, codenamed 'Little Boy', dropped from an American B-29 bomber named Enola Gay after the name of the mother of the pilot, Colonel Paul Tibbets. The bomb is said to have produced a

fireball that reached a temperature of more than one million degrees Celsius. Early estimates suggest that 140,000 inhabitants have died in the blast.<sup>1</sup> Before today few people could have imagined that such a weapon existed.

# Second Bomb Devastates Nagasaki

Retro Times. August 9, 1945

Nagasaki, a secondary target, has been devastated by a second American atomic attack after the primary target, Kokura, was covered by cloud. Nagasaki also had considerable cloud cover and the mission was almost aborted, but the pilot of Enola Gay, this time Captain George W Marquardt, had a small break in the cloud cover. The intended target, the Mitsubishi

shipyards were missed and the bomb, named 'Fat Man', exploded three kilometres north of the intended target. Killed in the attack were an unknown number of American, Australian and Korean prisoners of war who were interned in a camp two kilometres from the epicentre of the explosion. Paul Tibbets, pilot of the Enola Gay for the Hiroshima attack, refused to fly the Nagasaki mission.



President Truman Announcing on Radio that American Has used Atomic Bomb.



Paul Tibbets, Pilot of Enola Gay

# Surrender **Japan Defeated**

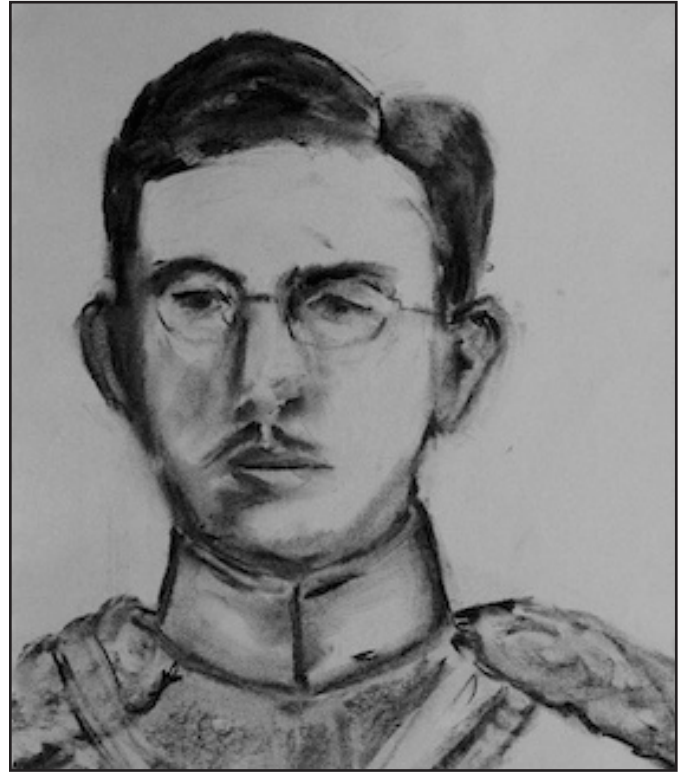
Retro Times. August 15, 1945

After relaying to the U.S. on August 10 that Japan would surrender in accordance with the conditions of the recent Potsdam agreement, Emperor Hirohito announced today (August 15) by national radio that Japan has surrendered to Allied forces to “pave the way for peace for all of the generations to come”. Hirohito’s surrender came at midday after a morning of drama following an attempted coup by Major Kenji Hatanaka, who opposed surrender. The coup was put down by forces loyal to the Emperor before surrender was made public.<sup>1</sup>

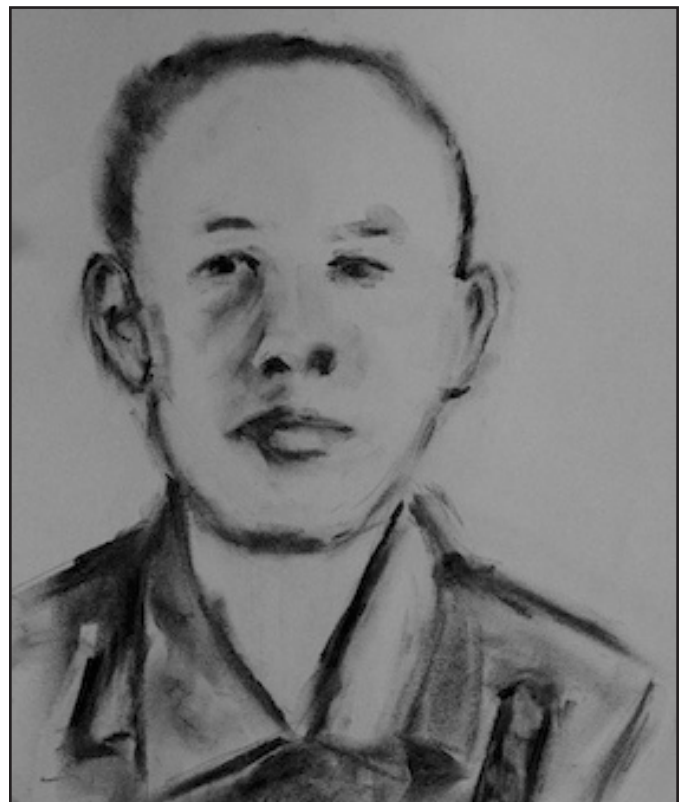
## Emperor Bảo Đại Abdicates

Retro Times. August 29, 1945

**E**mperor Bảo Đại has abdicated in favour of a predominantly Vietminh-dominated National Liberation Committee of Vietnam. This follows days of widespread popular uprisings that began on August 12 and were led by the Vietminh. Hồ Chí Minh ordered the uprisings in a document which he signed using the name Nguyễn Ái Quốc. The timing of the uprising is seen as a move to establish Vietnamese sovereignty before the Allies can enter Vietnam and possibly re-establish colonial rule. Complicating the situation is that whilst the uprisings have been nationwide and nominally being now a united country, the communist Vietminh Provisional Executive Committee of South Vietnam assumed power in Saigon after a few days of jostling between communist and nationalist groups in the south of the country. Whilst Vietnam is now effectively an independent nation, there are many factions within Vietnamese politics seeking dominance. These competing influences need to be resolved if Vietnam is to become a united and stable country.<sup>1, 2</sup>



Emperor Hirohito



Major Kenji Hatanaka

# MacArthur Accepts Surrender

# Japan Formally Signs Articles of Surrender

Retro Times. September 2, 1945

Japan has formally surrendered to Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur on behalf of the United Nations on board the U.S. battleship *Missouri*, moored in Tokyo Bay amongst an armada of more than 250 Allied warships. The surrender ceremony was delayed to allow time for Japanese soldiers to lay down their arms.<sup>1</sup>

After the surrender was signed by Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu and by MacArthur, it was countersigned by Admiral Nimitz for the U.S. and representatives of nine other Allied nations, including France, Britain and China.<sup>2</sup>



Supreme Allied Commander Douglas MacArthur

# Hồ Chí Minh Proclaims Vietnam Independent

## Vietnam Free?

### Quotes US Declaration of Independence

September 2, 1945

On the same day as the formal surrender of Japan, another event took place – the proclamation of independence by the new government of Vietnam. Whilst not as momentous for world affairs as the surrender of Japan, for the people of Vietnam it heralds in a new epoch.

After being introduced by the Prime Minister of the newly declared independent Vietnam, Võ Nguyên Giáp, the new President Hồ Chí Minh gave a short but emotional speech, in which he quoted both the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens: “All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This immortal statement appeared in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, it means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth and have a right to live and to be happy and free. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the citizen, made at the time of the French Revolution, in 1791, also states: ‘All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights’.”<sup>1</sup>

After recounting the many ‘crimes’ committed against the Vietnamese people by French colonists, Hồ Chí Minh issued what could be seen as a warning to those powers who did not accept Vietnamese independence: “Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and in fact has become a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence.”<sup>2</sup>

Hồ Chí Minh’s speech is both an olive branch and a warning. By quoting the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the French Rights of Man, Hồ Chí Minh has reminded both countries of the independence and freedom they each declare

to hold dear, and ask both to apply and respect the same ideals for Vietnam, but there is also the warning that Vietnam will fight for those rights if necessary. It is now up to the U.S. and France, and indeed the whole Western world, if the rights of independence and freedom are to be extended to the Vietnamese people, or if France will attempt to re-colonise Vietnam. If France does re-enter Vietnam it will need the support of Western countries, and as the ‘last man standing’ after the end of the recent World War that means America. The future of Vietnam, and possibly of all Indochina, rests on the decisions of America.

Hồ’s faith in America supporting a free Vietnam is reported by Indochina expert William Duiker as possibly stemming from time spent at the library of the U.S. Office of War after his release from prison in China, and from that his understanding of U.S. President Roosevelt’s position on Indochina. Duiker reports that “Roosevelt clearly had a particular animus against the French role in Indochina and was quoted on one occasion as having remarked ‘France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that’.”<sup>3</sup> Hồ has other reasons for expecting the support of America, including recognition for the aid given to America by Hồ, which includes his part in the rescue of American airmen downed in Vietnam and his work supplying America with intelligence on Japanese troop movements in Vietnam. Support, training and arms were also given by the U.S. to the Vietminh in preparation for their uprising against the Japanese before the Japanese surrender. In his role as ‘spy’, Hồ was given the codename ‘Lucius’ by American intelligence but was known unofficially as ‘old man Hồ’.<sup>4</sup> Hồ Chí Minh has good reason to expect the aid of the U.S. in building a new, free Vietnam. It is hoped that the squadron of P38 American aircraft that flew overhead at the conclusion of the ceremony was a sign of support, not a display of superior military force.<sup>5</sup>



# Hồ Chí Minh Dies

Retro Times. Editorial. September 2, 1969

**H**ồ Chí Minh has died, but who was Hồ Chí Minh? Communist, nationalist, evil tyrant, father of a nation, Uncle Hồ? At one time even an American spy with the codename Lucius but usually referred to by American intelligence services as 'old man Hồ'. Which of the many aliases he used came closest to being the real Hồ? Possibly all of them at the time he used them. It would be appropriate to dismiss the last few years of his life when searching for the real Hồ because failing health and other issues allowed others to act in his name. Reported atrocities carried out by North Vietnam may or may not have been at the direction of Hồ. The same cannot be said of the viciousness of the attacks against anyone connected to the French that started the war against the French in 1946 that can only be described as attempted genocide. It seems there were at least two, if not many more, Hồ Chí Minhs. Whether or not his death is to be mourned depends on which Hồ Chí Minh is seen as the real Hồ.

The one thing that is often forgotten when looking for the real Hồ Chí Minh is that he had a traditional Confucianist childhood when he would have learned to accept things as they are, and then use whatever was available to bring about what was desired. Communist,

nationalist, Confucianist, American spy, whatever it takes to bring about a free Vietnam. Hồ Chí Minh seemed to have a genuine respect for the American people and reached out to them several times, but was rejected. Hồ Chí Minh was originally created by French colonialism. Without colonial rule in Vietnam Hồ would possibly have followed his upbringing and become a Confucianist teacher or scholar, unknown outside of his local community. Then came the Chinese, Soviets, Japanese, French (twice), the Americans, several wars and finally death before he saw his dream of a free Vietnam come true. Throughout, Hồ Chí Minh shifted and moved to use whatever was available to bring about what seems to be his only fixed, totally immovable desire – that of a free Vietnam. That objective seems to be the only constant in Hồ Chí Minh's life. So who was Hồ Chí Minh? All that can be said with any certainty is that he was a product of the times and circumstances. Pierre Brocheux (2007) probably came closest to finding the real Hồ when he wrote the dedication for his biography of Hồ Chí Minh which reads: "This book is dedicated to the idealists of the world, for whom history always ends in disappointment."<sup>1</sup> But was Hồ always an idealist, or is that only in the mind of the beholder?



Confucius

