

Ho Chi Minh: A Life

By William J. Duiker

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To grasp the complicated causes and consequences of the Vietnam War, one must understand the extraordinary life of Ho Chi Minh, the man generally recognized as the father of modern Vietnam. Duiker provides startling insights into Ho's true motivation, as well as into the Soviet and Chinese roles in the Vietnam War.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) fought for half a century to free Vietnam from foreign domination, and the story of his life illuminates the ongoing struggle between colonialism and nationalism that still shapes world history. William J. Duiker, who served in Saigon's U.S. embassy during the Vietnam War, spent 30 years delving into Vietnamese and European archives, as well as interviewing Minh's surviving colleagues, in order to write this definitive biography. The son of a civil servant from a traditionally rebellious province, the future president of North Vietnam was known for more than 20 years as Nguyen That Thanh. It was under this name that he founded the Vietnamese Communist Party, having concluded after reading Lenin's analysis of imperialism that revolutionary Marxism was the most effective tool to achieve Vietnam's independence. He spent 30 years in exile, cementing his communist ties in Moscow and working with Vietnamese rebels from a base in China, before assuming the name Ho Chi Minh in 1942, when the forces unleashed by World War II seemed to be clearing the way for Vietnamese liberation. French intransigence and American anti-communism would delay the emergence of an independent, united Vietnam for another 30 years, but Ho became an icon who inspired the communist North and the Southern Vietcong to keep fighting. Focusing almost exclusively on political events and ideological debates, Duiker depicts Ho as a nationalist first and foremost, but also as a convinced (though pragmatic) Marxist who believed socialism would help his country modernize and correct ancient inequities. This long, very detailed biography is not for the casual reader, but anyone with a serious interest in modern history will relish a dense narrative that fully conveys the complexities of the man and the issues with which he grappled. --*Wendy Smith*

From Publishers Weekly
It's difficult to think of someone more qualified to write this biography than Duiker (The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam), the retired Penn State University historian who has specialized in the Vietnam War for more than three decades. In his massive, thoroughly researched andDin the mainDquite accessible new biography, Duiker succeeds extremely well in illuminating the life and times of Ho Chi MinhDlong North Vietnam's leader, a man Duiker calls a "master motivator and strategist" and "one of the most influential political figures of the twentieth century." Covering both the personal and political life of the revolutionary leader, Duiker fascinatingly traces Ho's early travels to New York, Boston and Paris, as well as his many years in exile in France, China, Thailand and (during WWII and the war against the French of 1945 to 1954) in the rugged mountains of northern VietnamDeras in Ho's life for which documentation has only recently become available. Duiker's detailed recounting of the momentous and extremely complicated events that took place in 1945 following the Japanese surrender, when Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh revolutionary party seized power in northern Vietnam, is riveting. And his account of the not-always-harmonious relations between Ho and the Communist leaders of China and the Soviet Union probes a subject that has long been overlooked by Western scholars. In the end, Duiker portrays Ho Chi Minh as a fervently anticolonial nationalist who, though a committed Marxist, honestly thought he could count on the United States, which had promised to oppose French colonization after WWII. Referring to a long-raging debate about Ho, he says, "The issue is not whether he was a nationalist or a CommunistDin his own way he was both." 32 pages of b&w photos not seen by PW. (Sept.)
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From Library Journal
Neither the cryptic, diabolical enemy nor the icon of the Left, "Uncle Ho" is now the subject of this objective historical study. Vietnam expert Duiker (The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam) here writes the first biography of Ho to use critical sources in Vietnamese, French, Chinese, Russian, and English. His narrative

encompasses the last days of the Vietnamese monarchy, in which Ho's father was an official; the French conquest of and attempt to dominate Indochina; the anti-imperialist struggle, aided by Russian and Chinese national and Communist interests; and the career of Ho, who died in 1969, revered by some as the Father of the Revolution and reviled by others as a murderous tyrant. The author carefully sorts out the intricate, often ambiguous evidence, supplying enough background for the interested general reader and enough detail, especially in the extensive notes, for the demanding specialist. Highly recommended for larger collections.DCharles W. Hayford, Northwestern Univ., Evanston, IL
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