

THE CULT OF HO CHI MINH: COMMEMORATION AND CONTESTATION

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Ho Chi Minh, the “father of modern Viet Nam,” remains a powerful figure in contemporary Vietnamese politics and culture. Since his death in 1969, the Vietnamese Communist Party has constructed a state cult surrounding his image. The construction of the Ho Chi Minh memorial complex in Hanoi, the propagation of Ho Chi Minh’s teachings, and the state commemorative rituals for Uncle Ho contribute to his continuous presence. The state cult posits Ho Chi Minh not only as the “father figure” to whom Vietnamese people pay respect and tribute, but also as the moral compass by which the people orient themselves socially and culturally. The state cult, however, is continuously contested. On the one hand, meanings attributed to the state commemoration of Ho Chi Minh are changing temporally and regionally. On the other hand, development of various religious cults of Uncle Ho challenges the Party’s hegemonic interpretation of the image of Ho Chi Minh. Drawing from historical research and short-term fieldwork, this paper discusses various modes of commemorative rituals dedicated to Ho Chi Minh, and explores how they contribute to the cult of Ho Chi Minh as a contested field of knowledge, where political, cultural, and personal meanings are constantly negotiated. Particular attention is paid to how Vietnamese people, both in Vietnam and abroad, perform, construct, and challenge the discourses surrounding the cult, as well as to how the Party and the state respond to these voices of discordance.

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