

Imitating Ho Chi Minh

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Famous—or infamous—statesmen are not above indulging in word games. Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, while a prisoner in China, circa 1943, whiled his time away by writing poems.* He wrote them in classical Chinese, not in Vietnamese, lest his jailers become suspicious. They have been translated into English in the cited work.

One of these poems, entitled “Word Play,” takes advantage of the synthetic structure of Chinese ideographs, as follows:

I

Take away the sign (*man*) from the sign for *prison*,
 Add to it (*probability*), that makes the word (*nation*).
 Take the head-particle from the sign for *misfortune*:
 That gives the word (*fidelity*).
 Add the sign for *man* (standing) to the sign for *worry*
 That gives the word *quality*.
 Take away the *bamboo* top from the sign for *prison*
 That gives you *dragon*.

II

People who come out of prison can build up the country.
 Misfortune is a test of people's fidelity.
 Those who protest at injustice are people of true merit.
 When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out.

The ideographs readily lend themselves to such creations at the hands of a skilled poet. But what of English words? We are talking about Vietnam, and in that country, traditionally, during the New Year, poets and poetasters

* Ho Chi Minh, *Prison Diary*, translated by Aileen Palmer, Third Edition, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, North Vietnam, 1966.

blossom forth to test their creations upon their sweethearts, or on the general public, as the case may be. So let us take the word POETASTER and see if we can form a wordplay poem of the "Ho" type!

I

Take away a poet (*Poe*) from a bad poet (*poetaster*)
 And we have a gustatory sampler (*taster*).
 Take away (*poet*) from a bad poet (*poetaster*)
 And we have a flower (*aster*).

II

A poetaster who tastes of the works of Poe
 May become a poet.
 A poetaster who uses flowery language
 May *one day* become a poet.

I invite readers to send me copies of their poetic creations of the "Ho" type.

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THE WORD OF THE HOUR

New words are constantly entering our language. No one is capable of keeping tab on all the newcomers. As a public service, therefore, we are going to spotlight particularly interesting or significant neologisms, as they come to our notice.

An almost sensational case in point is that of the word TACHYON, recently coined by Dr. Gerald Feinberg of Columbia University. It is intended to designate a subatomic particle moving at a velocity greater than the speed of light in a vacuum.

Dr. Feinberg believes that the speed of light is a two-sided limit. For all particles now known to science, that speed is the upper limit. There may be a second class of particles, the tachyons, for which the speed of light is a lower limit—they always travel at greater speeds, with the speed of light being the theoretical minimum velocity at which they are capable of moving. Tachyons would *increase* in velocity as their energy *decreased*.

According to Dr. Feinberg, the idea of tachyons does not conflict with Einstein's special theory of relativity.