



VIETNAM



Douglas A. Phillips



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Vietnam

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Vietnam

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction to Vietnam	8
2	The Natural Environment	14
3	Vietnam's Past	26
4	Vietnam Enters the Modern Era	39
5	People of Vietnam	50
6	Vietnam's Government and the Communist Party	67
7	Vietnam's Economy	77
8	Vietnam Looks Ahead	89
	Facts at a Glance	94
	History at a Glance	96
	Bibliography	98
	Further Reading	100
	Index	103



Vietnam





1

Introduction to Vietnam

Vietnam! Even the country's name invokes strong and varied emotional reactions from many people. For some, it represents a beloved and lost homeland. For others, it is a place where loved ones were lost in a war that some believed in and others did not. For still others, it is a land finally free from colonial powers and outside influences. Vietnam's place was once center stage in the global Cold War. Its name and history still sharply divide people in the United States, as shown by the 2004 presidential election. How can this slender S-shaped sliver of a country play such an important role in the lives of so many? This is one of many questions that will be answered in this exploration of the people, places, past, and culture of Vietnam.

Welcome to Vietnam in the twenty-first century! This is a country located in Southeast Asia on the perimeter of the Pacific Rim and bounded by Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Burma (Myanmar), and the



Vietnam is a slender S-shaped country that is located in Southeast Asia on the perimeter of the Pacific Rim. Its neighbors are Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Burma (also known as Myanmar), and the People's Republic of China.

gargantuan People's Republic of China. It also is a country of numerous sharp contrasts. Physically, Vietnam is a land of spectacular mountains that tower over huge fertile river deltas. It has a long and troubled history of military conflicts, but it has existed in peace for more than two decades. It is rich in natural resources and beauty but is now confronted by environmental degradation that threatens the welfare of its people. It is a land governed by a Communist party, yet it has joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and seems to advocate a capitalist economy. Annual monsoons bring torrents of rainfall and frequent floods, but much of the country lacks clean drinking water. Although now united politically, many sharp divisions between the northern and southern parts of the country remain. These are just a few of the contrasts that exist today in Vietnam.

Despite these many contrasts, Vietnam is finally one country in name. The end of the Second Indochina War, usually called the "Vietnam War" in the United States, finally united Vietnam politically as one country. This event is especially significant to the Vietnamese people, who have been divided for much of their history. They also have frequently been governed by outsiders who have occupied their country. This common history has given the country many heroes and heroines who are still revered today.

The flag, adopted on November 30, 1955, is red with a five-pointed yellow star in the center. The red stands for the blood that was lost in the struggle for independence. The star represents the country's unity under the leadership of the Communist Party. The five points of the star are also symbolic: They represent the country's workers, peasants, soldiers, students, and intellectuals.

Vietnam is also a country on the go. Cities are filled with people busy with the activity of urban life. In cities like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang, people seem to follow a frenzied pace. Streets and sidewalks bustle with people riding



In Ho Chi Minh City, the pace of life is a hectic one with people in cars, on scooters, and on bicycles, all sharing the road with pedestrians.

scooters and bicycles, eating noodle soup at a local vendor, or hawking goods to tourists. Barbers give haircuts on roadside chairs while people are going to or coming from work and shopping. Traffic jams clog the inadequate roads at rush hour, and factories work around the clock in their effort to advance the country's economy.

Just a few miles away, in rural areas, the scenery changes to the green colors of agriculture. A festival of vegetables, grains,

and other crops, as well as poultry and other farm animals, can be found in the expansive deltas of the Mekong and Red rivers. In these areas, Vietnam produces the bountiful harvest of rice that feeds the country's expanding population. Vietnam is home to nearly 84 million people, a factor that makes even rural areas quite populated. The country occupies an area of 127,244 square miles (329,560 square kilometers), about that of New Mexico—but Vietnam's population is 45 times greater than New Mexico's!

Today, Vietnam has become a land of opportunity. If you work hard, you can succeed, unlike in earlier times, when colonial or more restrictive Communist rule prevailed. Working hard can mean laboring for 10 to 12 hours or more in the fields or in factories that are often built and operated by financiers from outside the country. There are risks: Farmers face the problems of flooding or, seasonally, too little water; there are also agricultural pests, chronically low prices, and even dreaded viruses like avian flu. Urban dwellers may have factory jobs, but that may mean working in an unhealthy crowded environment. Life can be tough, but it is easier than it was during the times of war that dominated several decades of the twentieth century.

Like its people, the country is reaching out for new opportunities. These include membership not only in ASEAN but also in other regional and global organizations. New trade opportunities are being created, and old enemies have become new friends and trading partners. Future political changes may help create, or possibly restrict, more opportunities—but most Vietnamese are optimistic about their future.

With one of the few remaining Communist governments in the world, Vietnam has a bureaucracy that often hampers progress. Political rights are few and often restricted or controlled by the government. Little freedom of speech or press exists, and Vietnamese do not have the right to assemble. Can economic development proceed further with this political repression?

Can a free-market system operate under a Communist government? Can Vietnam curtail its population growth and improve the quality of life for its citizens? These are just a few of the questions that are addressed in this book. Your journey through Vietnam is about to begin. Stay alert: The road is twisting, stimulating, and filled with pitfalls, as well as many interesting and scenic stops!



2

The Natural Environment

Vietnam is a beautiful country. Green dominates the landscape and is painted in a hundred different shades. The green comes from a profusion of vegetation nourished by an abundant water supply that results from heavy precipitation and many rivers. Much of Vietnam receives monsoonal (seasonal) precipitation. During the wet season, which extends from May through October, rainfall can be torrential and river flooding poses a serious threat.

A visitor to Vietnam cannot help but be impressed by the cultural landscape—the imprint of human activities etched on the land. One of the most striking features in the rural landscape is the many rice paddies (irrigated fields). They create a mosaic-like pattern across the landscape in shades of green or with a rainbow coloration of water reflections. In some places, however, the human impact has been very destructive: Damage to the environment is

increasingly evidenced by deforestation, sprawling urbanization, and ruined soils.

Nature provides the environmental setting in which the Vietnamese people live. By and large, nature has smiled on Vietnam: It provided a splendid setting for the country's population. It also provided many important resources such as large rivers, the sea and its abundance, adequate rainfall, dense rain forests, a wealth of minerals, and good soil. This chapter explores the physical geography of Vietnam and seeks to help you better understand how the people draw on their environment to advance their families, economy, culture, and country.

LOCATION

Vietnam's location in Southeast Asia has had a huge impact on the country. China has loomed to the north for thousands of years, and, with its close proximity and strong cultural traditions and rich history, it has affected Vietnam greatly, especially in the north. Vietnam is also a coastal country located on the west and north of the South China Sea, which serves as a gateway to the Pacific Ocean. The sea has made it possible for foreigners with superior naval strength, such as the French and the Americans, to intrude. It also creates an excellent opportunity for sea trade with other countries. Mainland Vietnam has a vast coastline that is 2,140 miles (3,444 kilometers) long. Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia lie west of Vietnam.

Shaped like an "S" from north to south, Vietnam lies entirely within the tropics. The country stretches 2,037 miles (3,260 kilometers) from north to south and, at its narrowest, is only 30 miles (50 kilometers) across. Most of Vietnam's 127,244 square-mile (329,560 square-kilometer) area lies between 10 and 23 degrees north latitude.

LAND FEATURES

Vietnam has three distinct regions based on land features. Nam Bo is the Vietnamese name for the southern region, which



Vietnam has three distinct regions that are defined by its land features. The southern region, called Nam Bo, encompasses the Mekong River and its delta. Trung Bo, or the central region, lies between the Truong Son Mountains and the South China Sea. The Bac Bo region in the northern part of Vietnam is dominated by the Red River and the fertile soils of the Red River valley.

features the mighty Mekong River and its fertile delta region. Vietnamese call the central region of their country “Trung Bo”; it includes the Truong Son Mountains and the coastal plains that connect the north and south. The third region is called “Bac Bo,” and it includes the highlands and the Red River Delta in the north.

The Nam Bo region is dominated by the Mekong River. This region is the country’s economic powerhouse, generating slightly more than half of Vietnam’s wealth. This region is very flat. The conditions are very dry in some locations, including a few scattered areas with desertlike sand dunes. The Mekong Delta is an alluvial (river-deposited silt) plain where no point is more than ten feet (three meters) above sea level. Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) is in the delta region. Much of Nam Bo is blessed with rich soils. This is a major rice-growing region; it is also the area where most of the exported agricultural products are grown.

Trung Bo, the central region, is squeezed between the Truong Son Mountains and the South China Sea. Agricultural plains dominate the area between these two features. Rivers and streams in this region are not very long, unlike the Red River in the north and the Mekong in the south. In this central region, many streams are marked by rapid descent as they cascade from the mountains to the nearby coast. This creates some stunning vistas for people who drive along the mountain roads that overlook the plains in this region.

Northern Vietnam is dominated by forests, mountains, and the country’s second great waterway, the Red River (Sông Hồng in Vietnamese). This is the Bac Bo region, which also features the river-enriched alluvial soils of the Red River valley. The Gulf of Tonkin, with the important port city of Hai Phong, is also in this region. This region was the home to the ethnic Vietnamese—it was the hearth of what was to become Vietnamese culture. It is also the location of the country’s capital city, Hanoi. The mountains in the region are very



This is an overview of the Sapa Valley, an area that lies 267 miles (430 kilometers) north of Hanoi.

scenic and, with elevations reaching more than 10,000 feet (3,050 meters), offer a refreshing break from hot, humid tropical weather conditions. In these mountains near the Chinese border, Fan Si Pan, Vietnam's highest point, rises to 10,312 feet (3,143 meters). The mountains in the north are also riddled with caves like Pac Bo Cave, where Ho Chi Minh set up residence when he returned to Vietnam on February 8, 1941, after 30 years of living abroad. Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park is a karst (limestone formation) treasure trove of grottos, caves, and other limestone formations that attracts researchers and tourists from around the world.

WEATHER AND CLIMATE

Climate is the long-term average of daily weather conditions. Both climate and weather include factors such as temperature, wind, and precipitation. Vietnam lies within the tropical latitudes, a factor that directly affects the country's atmospheric conditions. Other factors include elevation, proximity to the sea, and the seasons, which allow more or less direct sunlight.

Perhaps the most memorable trait of Vietnam's climate is its sweltering humidity, which averages 84 percent throughout the year. Vietnam has a tropical climate, it borders the sea, and it has large rivers—all of which combine to generate a lot of atmospheric moisture (humidity) and rainfall. A monsoon is a seasonal wind that arrives laden with moisture. Vietnam has two of them. The winter monsoon blows from November to April and comes from the northeast. This wind comes across the Gulf of Tonkin, where it gathers moisture that is then deposited over land. The summer monsoon blows from the southwest, across the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Thailand, from May to October. It brings much heavier rains than the winter monsoon does. Average rainfall in the country ranges from 50 to 120 inches (120 to 300 centimeters) per year.

Temperatures in the country vary with the latitude, elevation, and seasons. Hanoi's temperature averages 61° F (16° C) in the winter and 86° F (30° C) in the summer. In contrast, Ho Chi Minh City averages 80° to 88° F (27° to 31° C) year-round. Elevation, season, and proximity to the sea cause most of the difference in temperature between these two tropical cities. Ho Chi Minh City is at an elevation of only 62 feet (19 meters), whereas Hanoi is situated at 1,312 feet (400 meters) above sea level. Hanoi is also more affected by the seasons, as its latitude is 21 degrees north, whereas Ho Chi Minh City is only at 11 degrees north. The sea, with its moderating effect on temperatures, also is closer to Ho Chi Minh City.

WATER FEATURES

Much of Vietnamese life is dominated by two major rivers and the sea. In the south, the incredible Mekong River is the world's twelfth longest at 2,610 miles (4,200 kilometers). It is the longest river in the region and the largest in terms of volume. The source of this amazing artery is in China's Qinghai Province, near the border with Tibet. Here, in the Rup-sa Pass in the highlands of Tibet, the river starts its long trip to the South China Sea. As the river leaves the Tibetan Plateau, it has a steep descent and many rapids. Farther along, the Mekong flattens out as it enters the delta region. Finally, it spreads into nine distributaries (mouths), called *cuu long* (nine dragons) by the locals, where it empties into the South China Sea. The Mekong is vitally important to a number of countries in Southeast Asia because its course runs through not only Vietnam, but also through Cambodia, Laos, and China. It also touches Thailand and Burma (Myanmar) and serves as the boundary between several countries. The Mekong is navigable in parts of Laos and in all of Vietnam. Its delta region is one of the richest rice-growing regions in Southeast Asia.

With the Mekong touching so many countries, conflicts often arise as each nation makes claims on the river in its



The Mekong River is the twelfth-longest river in the world. It is the longest river in the region and also the largest in terms of its volume. This river is of vital importance because it runs through Cambodia, Laos, and China. It also touches Thailand and Burma (Myanmar).

attempt to address the needs of its people. About 60 million people in Southeast Asia depend on the river for water, food, transportation, and other daily needs. To capture the water, more than 100 dams have been proposed for the river. China alone plans to construct eight dams on the upper Mekong, and others are planned for tributaries. Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia are also interested in building dams. Installations like these can produce important benefits such as hydroelectric power, but they also can severely affect other countries (including their wildlife) as the river flow below the dams dwindles.

In northern Vietnam, the Red River, or Sông Hồng, is the major stream. The river's name comes from red silt, colored by iron oxide, which imparts a reddish color to the water. The

river's source is in China's Yunnan Province. It is much shorter than the Mekong, with a length of only 730 miles (1,175 kilometers) and travels mostly in a southeastern direction in its journey to the Gulf of Tonkin. Along the way, it goes through the city of Hanoi and onto the coastal plain before reaching the port city of Haiphong, where it finally enters the sea.

Like the Mekong, the Red River is vitally important for daily life in northern Vietnam. Rice is the most important crop, but wheat, corn, and other crops also are grown on the rich soils of the floodplain. Fishing and transportation also are important activities on the river. The Red River has an irregular seasonal flow, and flooding occurs frequently during the wet season. An elaborate system of dikes and canals has been constructed to help control the floods.

PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE

Vietnam has a wealth of plant and animal species. From tigers and rhinos to thousands of tiny insect species, the country has been blessed with incredible biodiversity. Vietnam's forests contain more than 12,000 species of vegetation, including more than 1,500 herbs with medicinal benefits. There are also many types of precious tropical hardwoods. More than 1,000 bird species, 300 mammal species, and 300 reptile species have been identified. Rare animals include the recently discovered deer (sao la), rhinoceros, and tigers. Vietnam's seawaters also support abundant and highly diverse animal and aquatic plant life.

Many species of animals and plants are becoming endangered because of the encroachment of people and widespread deforestation. Some endangered species include primates like the Delacour's langur, golden-headed langur, Tonkin snub-nosed monkey, and the eastern black-crested gibbon. Endangered birds include the orange-necked partridge, Edwards's pheasant, and the giant ibis. These birds and primates are just a few of the animal species threatened today in Vietnam.

MINERAL RESOURCES

Vietnam is rich in natural resources. A history marked by war and limited capital has made economic development of them difficult. There are major deposits of phosphates, manganese, and bauxite. Other minerals that have been developed commercially or have commercial potential include iron ore, copper, lead, zinc, nickel, titanium, tungsten, graphite, mica, silica sand, and limestone derivatives. Energy resources include coal and offshore oil deposits. The country also has extensive forests and ample hydropower.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS AND ISSUES

The two most common natural hazards in Vietnam are typhoons and flooding in the delta regions of the Red and Mekong rivers. Flooding in November and December 1999 killed more than 800 people and left 55,000 homeless. The disaster was called a “once in a century” flood that affected most of the country’s rivers. It resulted from two years’ worth of rain falling within a two-month period. Another 800,000 homes were flooded in the Mekong delta in August 2000, when a tropical storm hit the region. In 1971, in one of history’s most devastating floods, the Red River overflowed its banks, killing 100,000 people. Today, the increasing frequency of flooding has a huge impact on the daily life of people in the country and on the environment.

Chief causes of flooding are believed to be widespread deforestation in the country’s uplands and the spread of urban centers into low-lying, flood-prone areas. Deforestation removes natural protections against flooding, and prospects do not look good. Some estimates suggest that Vietnam’s forests will be completely harvested in the next 50 years.

Typhoons are tropical cyclones that sometimes approach Vietnam from the South China Sea. With their violent winds, heavy bursts of rainfall, and storm-pushed waves, typhoons can cause extreme damage along the country’s coast. Two



Floods are a common natural hazard in Vietnam. This picture shows Hanoi residents near the Red River trying to navigate their way down a flooded city street.

typhoons struck the coast of Vietnam in late 2004, killing nearly 60 people.

Humans are also affecting the environment in harmful ways. Deforestation has been mentioned already; other problems such as water pollution, soil degradation, overfishing, and long-term aftereffects of the wars continue to negatively affect the country. Urbanization and industrialization also are important contributors to environmental degradation. Air pollution, solid waste, noise, and impure water are all becoming major problems. In rural areas, biodiversity is decreasing as a result of loss of habitat in forests. Sewage and sedimentation are threatening the health of rivers.

Vietnam has been blessed by nature. It is rich with resources and natural beauty, and it has an amazing natural

setting in which to exist; however, urbanization and other human activities threaten to further pollute or otherwise harm the country's land, air, and water. Deforestation can cause the extinction of exotic species of plants and animals and worsen flooding conditions. Sewage and solid waste can poison the rivers and seas, and factories can poison the air. The country is beginning to awaken to the challenges of population growth and the resulting human impact on the environment. Balancing population growth, economic development, and environmental protection is a major issue that Vietnam faces in the twenty-first century.



3

Vietnam's Past

Vietnam's past reads as a series of conflicts. Its people have struggled on many occasions as they have fought off the imposed rule of outsiders. In these struggles, both men and women have led the charges against powerful foreign intruders. A potent neighbor, China, has loomed to the north and has had an impact on Vietnam for centuries. Resistance against the French and later the Americans dominated several decades of the past century as the country became a pawn in the Cold War. Vietnam's history is about much more than conflicts, however: Hindu kingdoms, great leaders, and even a rekindling of relationships with the United States and France mark other milestones. This chapter ventures back into Vietnam's colorful past to understand the events and the people who have helped shape the country we see today.

THE FIRST VIETNAMESE

Traces of early humans have been found near Vietnam's Hong (Red) River delta and along the country's north coast. These remains date back nearly 12,000 years. Precise dates of the first Vietnamese remain in doubt, because extensive archeological work was not conducted in the country until the twentieth century. Evidence from early tools suggests that the first Vietnamese probably came from Indonesia and settled along the Red River. These people are known as the Hoa Binh culture. They used simple stone tools, lived in caves, and were mainly hunters. There is some evidence that they learned to cultivate fruits and root crops at an early date.

Other early civilizations began to appear in Vietnam and other areas of Southeast Asia during the Neolithic period (8000–800 B.C.). The Bac Son and Quynh Van cultures appeared after the Hoa Binh civilization. The Bac Son culture introduced crude forms of pottery and improved stone tools. This people had its own basic numbering system and lived in tribal groups headed by a woman. The Quynh Van people lived on the north-central coast and depended mostly on the sea for their needs. These civilizations used both wet and dry farming techniques to grow rice. In the wet method, dikes were built around rivers to trap water into knee-deep ponds where the rice would be planted. Dry rice farmers lived in higher elevation areas where water was not as plentiful as in the rich river valleys. Both rice growing techniques are still used in Vietnam today.

One of the first discernable Vietnamese civilizations was the Phung Nguyen culture. This civilization was located in the Vinh Phu Province of contemporary Vietnam and existed from about 2000 to 1400 B.C. The Phung Nguyen people were primarily engaged in agriculture; rice, grown by the wet technique, served as the dietary staple. The Phung Nguyen people also developed fabric weaving and bronze tools, and they possessed the ability to make ropes.

Most Vietnamese historians credit the formation of the Vietnamese national identity to the Dong Son civilization, which existed from 850–40 B.C. This culture extended the practice of wet rice farming and greatly improved the casting of bronze tools. People of the Dong Son culture were excellent at fishing and farming. They also created the famous bronze Dong Son drums, which were etched with scenes of farming and daily life such as houses, animals, and farming. These etchings have helped historians understand this ancient Vietnamese culture better.

Early legends credit the founding of the Vietnamese nation to Hung Vuong, the first ruler of the Hung dynasty that legend claims existed from 2879 to 258 B.C. The Hung dynasty ruled over the Van Lang kingdom. In the sixth century B.C., the people of the Hung dynasty used dikes and canals to irrigate rice paddies. These rice paddies were called Lac fields. The Chinese began to use the term “Lac” as the first name of the Vietnamese people. The leaders of the Hung dynasty ruled in a feudal manner, with the people of Van Lang growing grains and beans in addition to rice. They also raised animals such as water buffaloes, chickens, and pigs. The culture was also very advanced in making pottery and bamboo crafts. Transportation and communication systems were provided by long dugout canoes that were used for travel along the system of rivers and canals in the kingdom.

In 257 B.C., the Hung dynasty was conquered by the neighboring Thuc kingdom. The conquering leader combined this kingdom with the Van Lang kingdom and called the new entity “Au Lac.” This kingdom had a short life of only 50 years. It fell to the Chinese Qin dynasty under military commander Trieu Da (Zhao Tuo in Chinese) in 207 B.C. In 206 B.C., the Han dynasty took power in China, but Trieu Da would not accept the rule of the Hans. He proceeded to unite the Thuc and Chinese lands he controlled into a new kingdom that he named Nam Viet.

THE CHINESE ERA

China has always loomed dangerously just north of the area today called Vietnam. Having a rich and powerful neighbor can be positive if the rulers there are friendly and respectful of your lands and people. If not, the neighbor can be extremely threatening. The latter condition presents a more accurate reflection of the character of China as a neighbor. China's first intrusion was under Trieu Da, when he served under the Qin dynasty. He promptly left Chinese rule when the Han dynasty came to power. Quickly following Trieu Da to Nam Viet were many other Chinese who were dissatisfied with Han rule in China. Thousands chose to migrate to Nam Viet. Most of these people settled in the northern part of the kingdom and introduced Chinese language, technology, and customs. The settlers left a deep Chinese cultural imprint that remains today in northern Vietnam.

In 111 B.C., Chinese armies once again seized Nam Viet. This region was rapidly swallowed by the Han empire. With this conquest, Chinese culture soon overwhelmed Nam Viet: China's language, political institutions, and even the philosophy of Confucianism were imposed on the Vietnamese. As a reward for their efforts to secure Nam Viet and to plant the seeds of Chinese culture deeper, the Han government gave its soldiers land in Nam Viet for farming. The political directives and cultural impositions provoked widespread resistance to the Chinese. Local farmers were unhappy as they saw their farming lands decrease while their taxes were increased.

The most famous early insurgency was staged by the Trung sisters, who were related to local aristocrats. They had experienced the arrogance and cruelty of the Chinese rulers towards the Vietnamese people first hand. The Chinese tried to quell their voices by killing Thi Sach, the husband of the older sister, Trung Trac. This heinous act infuriated the sisters and enraged the local population. The stage was set for the revolt led by Trung Trac and her younger sister, Trung Nhi.



This map shows the extent of the Han Empire in the years from 202 B.C. to A.D. 220. In 111 B.C., Chinese armies seized Nam Viet and the region quickly came under Chinese dominance. But not all Chinese influence was negative. They contributed greatly to Vietnamese society both in material ways as well as cultural ways, such as their religious thought and practice.

The revolt was initiated in A.D. 39. Trung Trac urged her armies forward by saying, “First, I will avenge my country; Second, I will restore the Hung (dynasty) lineage; Third, I will avenge the death of my husband; Lastly, I vow that these goals will be accomplished.” The rebellion was successful for a short time, and Trung Trac was established as the queen of an independent kingdom. By A.D. 43, however, the Chinese had swept back into power, and shortly afterward the sisters were found dead. Accounts of their death vary: Chinese historians say that the sisters were killed by Chinese soldiers. Vietnamese historians say that the sisters drowned themselves in a river to avoid surrender and escape capture. Today, the Trung sisters

are respected as national patriots and heroines; pagodas, statues, and memorials around the country are dedicated to their memory. They stand as a symbol of Vietnam's resistance to outside rulers.

With Chinese dominance in Vietnam firmly reestablished, the era known as the Chinese millennium had begun. During this time, Vietnamese aristocrats were taught Chinese history and culture—literature, language, philosophy, and other traits—in an effort to promote cultural appreciation and to enlist them as supporters of the Chinese. As a result, opposition of the aristocracy sometimes appeared to decline. Hostility toward and resistance to Chinese rule rose and subsided frequently during this thousand-year era, however, and it was clear that neither Vietnamese peasants nor nobility trusted Chinese rule.

In A.D. 248, Trieu Au, another Vietnamese woman, led yet another rebellion against the Chinese. She was not only resisting Chinese rule, but was also expressing her dissatisfaction with the declining status of women in the Chinese-controlled society. Her battle cry was, “I want to ride the stormy sea, subdue its treacherous waves, hunt sharks in the open sea, drive out the aggressors [the Chinese] and repossess our land, undo the ties of tyranny and never bend my back to be the concubine of any man.” This rebellion, like that of the Trung sisters, failed. Once again, however, the strong leadership role of women in Vietnamese society is apparent.

Not all of China's impact was negative. The Chinese added greatly to Vietnamese society by building harbors, roads, bridges, and waterways. Agriculture was improved with the introduction of technology such as animal-pulled plows. Confucianism and Taoism were also introduced to the aristocracy by the Chinese. Common people preserved Vietnamese traditions, but many of the elite became enamored with Chinese culture and philosophy. Still, most Vietnamese remained unsupportive of Chinese rule. The

Chinese for the most part despised the Vietnamese, who were viewed as barbarians. The mutual interest and animosity of the Chinese and the Vietnamese made for an uncomfortable love-hate relationship that lasted for nearly 1,000 years.

Other unsuccessful Vietnamese rebellions against the Chinese took place under Ly Bon beginning in 542. Ly Bon had some successes in battle and established his own kingdom, which lasted until the Chinese defeated him in 546. Using guerrilla warfare tactics, his troops continued to fight under Trieu Quang Phuc and others until the early seventh century. In 618, leaders of China's Tang dynasty changed the name of Vietnam to Annam, causing more Vietnamese resentment and resistance. Men such as Ly Tu Tien and Dinh Kien, Mai Thuc Loan, Phung Hung, Duong Thanh, and Ngo Quyen led rebellions at various times. All of these uprisings, with the exception of Ngo Quyen's, ultimately failed.

General Ngo Quyen defeated the Chinese in the historic battle at Bach Dang River in 938. The Chinese were greatly weakened at this time because the Tang dynasty had fallen earlier in the tenth century. This allowed the Vietnamese to finally achieve their dream of eliminating Chinese control. In 939, Ngo Quyen established himself as king of a Vietnam that was free of Chinese rule. This allowed the creation of the first Vietnamese national dynasty. Ngo Quyen's kingdom only lasted a few years beyond his death. This ushered in an era of civil strife and war that caused Vietnam to break into smaller regional kingdoms with periodic reunification for short intervals of time.

VIETNAM'S EARLY KINGDOMS

Vietnam's first great kingdom was finally established by Ly Thai To, in 1009. The Ly dynasty lasted for more than 200 years and made a number of important contributions to the people. In 1070, the first Vietnamese university was established



This is a statue of Ly Thai To, who was the first emperor of Vietnam. The Ly dynasty was established in 1009 A.D. and lasted for more than 200 years.

when the Temple of Literature was created in Hanoi. Perhaps the most important development was the establishment of Buddhism as the official religion of the kingdom. Buddhist monks were given high status and landholdings and did not have to serve in the military or pay taxes. The Chinese version of Buddhism was stronger in northern Vietnam, whereas the Indian version was stronger in the south. In both locations, Buddhism took on a unique Vietnamese character that combined traditional Buddhism with local spirits, folklore, medicine, and magic.

Many outsiders, including the Chinese, the Khmers, and the Chams, tried to conquer the Ly dynasty and the Vietnamese

or Dai Viet kingdom, but each failed. The Chams were Hindu and had lived to the south of Vietnam since the seventh century. People of the Champa kingdom conducted regular trade relationships with India. Champa used India's Sanskrit language because its cultural and political ties were much stronger with India than with northern Vietnam, which was more tied to China. In 1079, the Vietnamese defeated the Champa kingdom, located in the south near Da Nang. As a result of this victory, they claimed the three northern Champa provinces. The rest of the Champa kingdom was eventually seized by the Vietnamese in the fifteenth century.

Rebels usurped the power of the Ly dynasty in 1226, after two centuries of rule. They easily established the Tran dynasty when one of their leading family members, a lord, married the last remaining heir of the Ly dynasty, an eight-year-old princess. The country flourished in the early years under Tran leadership: Land reforms were instituted, and administration of public services was improved. Soon, however, another threat appeared on the northern horizon, but not from China.

The Tran dynasty faced a new challenge from the Mongols, who at that time controlled much of China. These fierce warriors from Central Asia were marching southward under their great leader, Kublai Khan. They reached and repeatedly invaded Vietnam during the last half of the thirteenth century. Mongols ransacked the Tran capital at Thang Long (later named Hanoi). Still, the Tran dynasty defenses held up against the outstanding military strategies of the Mongols. Guerrilla warfare techniques, including a scorched earth policy, were used by the Vietnamese. A scorched earth policy is a practice where a retreating army burns its crops and buildings so that the attacking army cannot use them. The Mongols were used to living off of their captured communities, but when they found communities abandoned and burned, they eventually retreated because of hunger, disease, and a shortage of supplies.

The third—and last—Mongol attack came with 300,000 men and a huge fleet of ships. The Vietnamese under General Tran Hung Dao successfully used techniques borrowed from Ngo Quyen to defeat the Mongol fleet. This was accomplished by penetrating the ships' hulls with iron stakes that had been sunk in the river. Once penetrated, the hulls were compromised; the tide retreated and left the ships caught on the stakes to sink. Using this innovative strategy, the Vietnamese sank more than 400 Mongol ships on the Bach Dang River in 1287. The Mongols retreated and never returned to Vietnam. Tran Hung Dao became another guerrilla hero for future Vietnamese to honor and learn from.

In the early sixteenth century, Vietnam started to split into northern and southern regions. The ruling Le dynasty had weakened, and the Trinh family had started to rule in the north. At the same time, the Nguyen family inherited the Le dynasty rule and prevailed in the south. This divided situation lasted for nearly 250 years, with the two families frequently at war. The warring conditions created additional taxation and hardships that made life nearly intolerable for the peasants in both the north and the south.

In 1771, a peasant revolt was staged and led by the Tay Son brothers, Nguyen Hue, Nguyen Nhac, and Nguyen Lu. Their forces first defeated the Nguyen family in southern Vietnam and then the Trinh family in the north. This revolt is called the Tay Son rebellion. After uniting the country under Nguyen Hue in 1789, the brothers established their authority by creating the Tay Son dynasty.

The Tay Son dynasty restored and extended the rights of women: Some were appointed generals in the army. The Tay Son leaders eliminated a lot of the Chinese bureaucracy and restored lands to the peasants who owned none. Taxes were reduced or eliminated, and Vietnamese was restored as the official language.

Nguyen Hue died shortly after assuming power. The Tay Son dynasty came to an abrupt end when Nguyen Anh took



A later emperor, Nguyen Anh, took the name Gia Long and favored Chinese culture. It was the Chinese who changed “Nam Viet” to the more familiar “Vietnam.” The tomb of Gia Long, who founded the Nguyen dynasty in 1802, is located in a heavily forested area of Vietnam near the city of Hue.

control of the country. He had been receiving assistance from the Europeans, including weapons technology, ships, and technical assistance. This allowed his forces to take over the last remnants of the Tay Son dynasty and its remaining strongholds in the north.

As emperor, Nguyen Anh took the name Gia Long to symbolize the reunification of the north and south. Gia Dinh was the name at that time for the south’s Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), and Thang Long was the name of Hanoi, in the north. He also changed the country’s name back to Nam Viet. Gia Long favored Chinese culture, and so many of the practices in existence before the Tay Son dynasty were restored. Even the name Nam Viet was changed by the Chinese, who were

the first to use the term *Vietnam*. Some local revolts against Gia Long's rule took place, but all were successfully suppressed. More ominous clouds were on the horizon, however, and Vietnam's independence was about to be threatened once again.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE FRENCH

The first Europeans to arrive in the area of present-day Vietnam were the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, and the French. They were primarily merchants with trading posts in Vietnam, and as such their contact had no real lasting impact after 1700. Missionaries also came to the peninsula, however, and many established themselves in Vietnam. French missionaries began to arrive in the early 1600s. One French missionary, Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, even raised military forces to help Nguyen Anh oust the last of the Tay Son dynasty. Béhaine thought that this would give him favor with the new emperor. Nguyen Anh, now Emperor Gia Long, did not fully trust the French missionaries, however. Thousands of Vietnamese were becoming Christians: By 1841 nearly half a million had been converted. Soon, the Nguyen government banned Christianity and worked to eliminate the missionaries and their teachings. To this end, nearly 100 priests were slain by the government in the second quarter of the 1800s as the government sought to eliminate the outside influences.

These efforts inflamed the French. Both missionaries and the French public demanded that their government take action to protect the missionaries and to punish the rulers of Vietnam who were trying to eliminate Christianity. Some French believed that their country should more actively pursue colonies and trading relationships. The pressure took a toll on the French government, and, in 1847 in response, a French ship shelled Da Nang, killing nearly 10,000 Vietnamese.

Tu Duc became emperor of Vietnam in 1848. Little did he know that he would be later known as Vietnam's last emperor.

In 1858, the French, now under Emperor Napoleon III, sent a naval expedition to Vietnam with the intent of making the Asian country a protectorate. The French captured Saigon in 1859 as they swept through much of southern Vietnam. In 1862, Emperor Tu Duc signed the unfair and lopsided Treaty of Saigon with the French. This treaty contained provisions that gave three provinces near Saigon to the French. It also allowed the French trading access to Cambodia by way of the strategic Mekong River. Another embarrassing provision of the treaty even had the Vietnamese paying reparations to France for the losses it had incurred in attacking Vietnam.

The French returned to the offensive in the 1880s with a major attack on Hanoi in 1882. By August 1883, they had seized the city and most of the north. Emperor Tu Duc had died the month before the French victory, and the way was now paved for all of Vietnam to become a French protectorate. Vietnamese resistance continued in the late nineteenth century under local leaders like Phan Dinh Phung. These failed in the short term, but they provided an inspirational launching pad for nationalistic movements that rose in the twentieth century.

By 1893, Vietnam had been lashed together with other areas in Southeast Asia to form what the French called the Union of Indochina. This union included the three major areas in Vietnam—Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin—and the countries of Cambodia and Laos. Vietnam was under the rule of foreigners once again. When would circumstances allow the Vietnamese to rule over their own destiny? What brave men and women might step forward to expel the outsiders? These and other related questions are addressed in the following chapter.



4

Vietnam Enters the Modern Era

France has a long history of engagement in Vietnam. Early traders and missionaries served as the first links between the two nations. On the eve of the twentieth century, however, France was the master of Vietnam. It held the area as a protectorate called the Union of Indochina, which included Cambodia and Laos.

The French made some improvements in Vietnam. They were particularly interested in improving their economic prospects in the region. To this end, communication was improved and transportation systems were significantly upgraded with the construction of railroads, bridges, and highways. The French also increased manufacturing and trade. Unfortunately, the locals rarely benefited from these economic ventures. Those who did were collaborators or spies for the French who received additional salary and “perks.” In addition, the French actively worked to push their culture on the Vietnamese. The French language, literature, and religion

(Catholicism) were among the cultural elements that were promoted in the protectorate.

France also moved the Indochinese capital to Hanoi to centralize government functions and secure further control over the region. The French grip on Vietnam tightened with a variety of laws that restricted the movement of local people. With these laws, Vietnamese were allowed to travel outside of their area only when carrying their identity papers. Restrictions were placed on the freedom of the press and the right to assemble. Education also suffered under French rule: 1925 estimates showed that only 10 percent of school-aged children attended school.

Economically, things were not improving for the local people. Taxes were high, rent was expensive, and workers were paid little. By the 1930s, the French owned and controlled the majority of the country's rice lands, rubber plantations, and coal. Foreign land ownership had become another major frustration for the Vietnamese. All of these factors combined to set the stage for greater Vietnamese resistance to the French. They also contributed to the eventual Vietnamese embrace of a communist philosophy.

THE RISE OF VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

After 1908, visible opposition to French rule was minimal for nearly two decades. In that year, the French closed down what came to be known as the free school movement. This movement had become popular in the late nineteenth century, when Vietnamese literature blossomed and many scholars began to teach Vietnamese versions of history. This movement also cloaked a shift toward Vietnamese nationalism, an element that the French resisted and tried to stop.

In 1927, another nationalist movement began in Vietnam after a series of strikes by workers. During this time, many nationalists traveled overseas to study and to find supporters and techniques for throwing off French rule. The teachings

of Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin were popular at the time. Their doctrines advocated an end to the practice of colonialism. Communism also was enticing because it called for massive land reforms, a very important issue in the eyes of Vietnamese farmers.

In 1930, Ho Chi Minh and others worked together to unite the various nationalist and Communist factions that had sprung up in Vietnam in the late 1920s. The outcome of this effort was the formation of the Indochinese Communist Party. Ho was born in Vietnam and had been one of the founding members of the French Communist Party in 1920. He held a strong belief in the power that Marxism-Leninism held for Vietnam, and he wanted to implement that vision. By 1926, he had written a book called *The Revolutionary Path*, which laid out a plan for revolution in Vietnam.

Under Ho Chi Minh, the Indochinese Communist Party had one primary goal: eliminating French influence on the peninsula. The Party vigorously pursued a course of independence for Vietnam. The new Vietnam would, of course, be developed socially along a path charted by Marx and Lenin. The Party advocated confiscation and government ownership of factories, mines, and other economic elements. It also pushed for agricultural land to be returned to peasant farmers. Party members also pushed for universal education, the elimination of taxes, and limiting workers to an eight-hour work day. When contrasted with life under French rule, these goals were very popular with most Vietnamese. Little progress was made in the decade of the 1930s, but this soon changed. In 1940, Japan invaded the region and its military established occupation of Vietnam. Some Vietnamese leaders saw Japanese rule as an opportunity to again work toward independence.

JAPAN IN VIETNAM

When Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression agreement in 1939, France immediately banned



Ho Chi Minh was the strategic and spiritual center of the long struggle to liberate Vietnam from foreign domination. This photograph of the North Vietnamese leader was taken in 1959.

the French Communist Party and the Indochinese Communist Party. Realizing that he and other Communists would be persecuted, Ho Chi Minh fled to southern China near the

Vietnamese border, where he established residence. The French quickly proceeded to arrest Communists in Vietnam and suppress their publications. In 1940, the tide turned quickly, however, as German forces invaded France and occupied much French territory. The French had little ability to resist the Japanese invasion of Indochina, which came through China in late 1940.

The Japanese encouraged Vietnamese troops to fight against the French in the region. Instead, Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam and established a group called the Viet Minh. In reality, this group was the Indochina Communist Party disguised. It was used as an umbrella organization for all of the political groups who sought independence for Vietnam. The Viet Minh agreed to oppose both French and Japanese rule in the region. They were determined to use a variety of means including, once again, guerrilla warfare to push out the foreign powers. As the end of World War II approached, the Vietnamese controlled much of the rural area and Japan held many of the cities. In early summer 1945, Viet Minh forces captured most of the rural areas and cities in the north. The south remained under Japanese control.

Japan surrendered to the Allies in August 1945, after the United States used atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ho and other leaders called for a public uprising against Japan's remaining occupying forces. These revolts were successful. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed victory over the Japanese by reading a declaration of independence. Most of the document was taken from the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Ho then asked the world to recognize the newly independent Vietnam. Not surprisingly, the French were very upset by Ho's declaration. They had a very different view of Vietnam's status and so they sought to once again impose control over their Union of Indochina after World War II.

THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR

The French returned to Vietnam soon after World War II. They conspired with elite Vietnamese who opposed the Communists, and soon, fighting broke out in the south. By the end of 1945, the Viet Minh had been pushed out of most of the south. France and the Viet Minh then tried to negotiate an agreement, but this ultimately failed. War broke out in December 1946. Soon after, Ho Chi Minh issued a threat to the French: “You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.” The First Indochina War was underway.

The Viet Minh held most of the rural areas when the fighting began, and the French had taken some of the cities, including Hue and parts of Hanoi. The Viet Minh retreated to the hills and regrouped. Guerrilla training programs were developed because guerrilla warfare had been used successfully in the past to push out foreigners. In 1949, a new ally came to Vietnam’s side: The Communists won the long war for rule in China. In 1950, China recognized Ho’s Communist regime, which was known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Support of the Soviet Union followed shortly thereafter, and so the DRV became more closely linked with other leading Communist countries. These countries provided not only technical support, but also military arms and ammunition to Ho Chi Minh’s forces.

France had established a new rival government in Vietnam and installed the country’s last emperor, Bao Dai, as the chief of state. France was not without allies. The United States was deeply concerned over the growth of Communism after the end of World War II. Under President Eisenhower, the United States sent 3 billion dollars to the French in an effort to support the military efforts against the Vietnamese Communists.

At home, however, the French people were increasingly against the war in Vietnam. More than 90,000 French military personnel had been killed in the conflict. This, combined with



In March 1954, French paratroopers were landing in the area of Dien Bien Phu at the start of a bloody 55-day siege. At the end of it, France was forced to abandon its hope of recreating its colonial empire in Indochina.

a major DRV military victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1953, forced France to the negotiating table. In 1954, the Geneva Agreement was signed by the French and the DRV. This treaty declared a cease-fire between France and the DRV and divided Vietnam

into two pieces at the 17th parallel. The north section would be the DRV, and the south would be controlled by the French. In between would be a three-mile-wide (five-kilometer-wide) demilitarized zone (DMZ). For the first 300 days after the agreement took effect, people had the right to move north or south to be where they wanted to live.

The Geneva Agreement was not intended to permanently partition Vietnam. Another provision called for joint elections to be held in two years. When this time arrived in July 1956, however, the south, now supported by the United States, refused to hold the elections.

During the two years after the Geneva Agreement, the Communists, under Ho Chi Minh, moved forward to implement their social, economic, and political policies in the North. In contrast, the South started to receive increasing aid and advisory support from the United States. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was concerned by the Communist advances in Russia, Eastern Europe, China, Korea, and Vietnam. He explained his concern by stating, “You have a row of dominoes set up; you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is that it will go over very quickly.”

In the south, Ngo Dinh Diem assumed the position of prime minister, defeating Bao Dai in a corrupt election in 1955. Diem was a Catholic and strongly against the Communist rule. He and his newfound supporters, President Eisenhower and the United States, were now poised to oppose the regime of the DRV. Working together, they hoped to halt the Communist progression that was implied in the “domino theory” described by the U.S. leader. In response to the Communist threat in the south, Diem engaged in a widespread persecution of the Communist followers: Thousands were killed or thrown into prison.

The Soviet Union urged the north to respond; it did so by initiating terrorist attacks in the south that killed government leaders and other citizens. Diem’s response was to kill and

imprison more Communists. Diem's government was also failing economically. This factor, combined with his harsh suppression of dissent, fostered the formation of large-scale opposition to his rule. The north sought to take advantage of this situation by initiating a revolution in the south that exploded into a full-scale civil war, which became the Second Indochina War.

THE SECOND INDOCHINA WAR

The Second Indochina War is usually referred to as the Vietnam War in the United States. At first, President John F. Kennedy increased support for Diem's regime. By 1963, however, the U.S. government began to support a military takeover in the south with the intent of getting rid of Diem. Diem was assassinated in November 1963, and General Duong Van Minh took over the government in the south.

In the late 1960s, the United States became directly involved in the conflict. It sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers to Vietnam to fight against the North Vietnamese (called "Viet Cong") and their agents in the south. By 1969, there were more than 500,000 Americans fighting in Vietnam. Extensive bombing efforts were aimed at Hanoi and elsewhere in the north in an effort to stop the Communists' gains.

As happened with the French citizenry, by the late 1960s, the U.S. public started to turn against the war in Vietnam. In the midst of the rising antiwar sentiment, Richard Nixon was elected president of the United States. He took office in 1969 with a plan for "Vietnamization." This plan was used to reduce U.S. forces in the region and to replace them with soldiers from South Vietnam. By 1972, all U.S. military had been withdrawn from Vietnam. More than 58,000 Americans died in the conflict. The estimate of all war-related deaths was placed at a staggering 1.7 million people, most of whom were Vietnamese. With the nearly 400,000 casualties in the First Indochina War, the total loss of life between 1946 and 1976 exceeded 2 million.

PEACE—AT LAST!

After the United States withdrew its troops, North Vietnamese troops soon swept into South Vietnam and, by 1975, they had taken Saigon, the southern capital. In 1976, the country was reunited, but in 1978, it attacked its neighbor, Cambodia, in hope of stopping border raids staged by the Khmer Rouge, who attacked and killed Vietnamese who lived close to the border. Vietnam quickly drove the Khmer Rouge out of power and installed a puppet pro-Vietnamese government to control the country. Most of the world, including Communist China, condemned Vietnam's occupation of its neighbor. Intending to teach Vietnam a lesson, China invaded in 1979. Amazingly, however, the Vietnamese pushed the Chinese back to their own borders.

After all of the centuries of fighting, Vietnam was united and without wars in the 1980s. The country still had a huge standing army, however, one of the four largest in the world. Turning this military machine into an economic dynamo would serve as the next big challenge for Vietnam.

While Vietnam was fighting the First and Second Indochina Wars, much of the rest of Asia was already on a rapid path to economic development. Japan's economic rise after World War II was meteoric. Many other Asian countries, including South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, China, Singapore, and Malaysia, began to prosper as well. Vietnam's entrance to the world's economic stage was hampered by its Communist government and the aftereffects of the decades of fighting. These effects included everything from millions of bomb craters and unexploded landmines to the long-term consequences of toxic defoliants like Agent Orange, which had been used during the Second Indochina war.

The Communist government factor lessened with the global decline of Communism and the end of the Cold War. A new economic policy called "Doi Moi" was introduced in the mid-1980s. This plan encouraged a variety of free-market

mechanisms. By 1992, most nations in the world, including China, South Korea, and the forerunner of the European Union, had resumed trade and diplomatic relations with Vietnam. The United States became the last country to reestablish relations with Vietnam. This finally happened in 1995 under President Bill Clinton, who in 2000 became the first U.S. president to visit Vietnam.

Vietnam has also been making other important steps to improve its economic condition. Starting in 1992, the country began initiatives that eventually led to membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995. This important step put the country more in the mainstream of Southeast Asia and opened doors to extensive business, educational, political, and cultural benefits that have helped Vietnam develop even further.

Vietnam has also slowly been evolving politically, introducing limited democratic reforms. The country celebrated 30 years of Communist rule over unified Vietnam in 2005. There is still a considerable amount of government planning, control, and management, but the country is finally independent after centuries of foreign rule and domination. What challenges lie ahead for the people of Vietnam? What are the existing political, economic, and social mechanisms that will carry the country forward? These questions and others are addressed in the chapters that lie ahead.



5

People of Vietnam

When compared with most other countries, Vietnam has an enormous population for the land area that it occupies. In fact, with 84 million people, it ranks thirteenth among the world's countries in population. The country's population density of about 650 people per square mile (400 per square kilometer) is much higher than that of its neighbors. Challenges created by this large—and growing—population are great.

Even more surprising is the distribution of Vietnam's population. Three of every four people live in rural, rather than urban, areas. Most of the rural population is engaged in agriculture, primarily rice production, in the Red and Mekong river deltas. The Red River delta, home to 20 percent of the country's people, has one of the world's highest rural population densities and nearly one of every five Vietnamese lives in the Mekong River delta, as well. These two waterways

and the rich soils of their delta regions combine to provide the lifeblood for 34 million people.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Even with Vietnam's bulging population, the country can boast of some strongly positive demographic (population statistics) indicators. According to the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), the life expectancy at birth is about 72 years (73 for women and 70 for men). Literacy is also very high, at about 94 percent. Women's literacy is 5 percent lower than men's, but the rate for females in Vietnam is much higher than the rates for females in surrounding countries. The gap in literacy rates between men and women is larger in these countries as well. For example, the gap between men and women in China is 16 percent and it soars to 31 percent in Laos. Many Asian societies discriminate against women in a variety of ways, but Vietnam has a long tradition of strong and active women. This trend continues in the country: One-fourth of the members of the National Assembly are women. This proportion is much higher than in China, Cambodia, Laos, or even the United States.

Vietnam's population is growing, with an annual rate of natural increase of 1.2 percent, slightly below the world average of 1.3 percent. This may seem small, but when the country already has a population of 84 million, the increase can be significant. For example, with Vietnam's present population growth rate, the PRB projects that it will have a population of 102,890,000 in 2025 and 115,084,000 in 2050. This expanding population presents an important challenge for the country. Continued rapid growth will make economic development more difficult as more resources are used to meet the needs of daily life.

The government recognizes that it has a major problem with population growth. Since the 1980s, it has attempted several different policies to reduce the upward trend. The



Many of the delegates to the Vietnamese National Assembly are women. Many Asian societies discriminate against women, but Vietnamese women have a tradition of leadership.

present plan is contained in the policy called “Vietnam Population Strategy for the Period 2001–2010.” This plan seeks to decrease the birth rate by promoting education and strengthening gender equality and also to reduce the number of abortions. Increasing women’s education is the time-tested and successful primary strategy being employed. The government hopes to achieve zero population growth (ZPG) by 2010.

HEALTH CHALLENGES

HIV/AIDS poses a very serious threat to the people and government of Vietnam. Although the problem is not as serious as in neighboring Cambodia (which has the highest HIV/AIDS rate in Southeast Asia, with 3 percent), the disease has reached epidemic proportions in Vietnam. According to

the CIA World Factbook, between 2001 and 2003 the rate of infection increased from .3 percent to .4 percent. Today, 1 family out of 75 in the country has a family member who has been infected. In 2003, 220,000 people scattered throughout Vietnam's provinces were reported to have HIV/AIDS and 9,000 died from the disease. Where HIV/AIDS is becoming an epidemic, the disease is mainly spread through intravenous drug use. Increasingly, however, it is also being spread through prostitution. The government is becoming much more active in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS and is cooperating with international agencies to address the issue.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is another health issue with global implications. The first case of SARS was reported in southern China in November 2002; from there, it spread rapidly via people who traveled on airplanes to other countries like Vietnam. It is spread through close contact with an infected person. There are still no certain ways to cure the virus. The most commonly used strategy to avoid spread is to place the infected person in complete isolation. Research to find antiviral remedies is continuing.

After the 2002–2003 outbreaks, while many other countries struggled to control SARS, Vietnam was the first to control it. The outbreak was contained to one hospital in Hanoi, where an American businessman had arrived from Hong Kong with the virus. Quick action and surprising political openness kept the disease out of southern Vietnam and also kept it from spreading farther internationally. Ultimately, the country recorded 63 cases of SARS, 5 of which resulted in death. Globally, more than 8,000 people were infected with the disease and 770 died of it in this initial outbreak.

Southeast Asia is perhaps the world's primary breeding ground for new strains of avian (bird) flu because of the unsanitary conditions in which ducks and chickens are raised. These birds are in close contact with humans, and new viruses mutate and spin into the human population. Russia's *Pravda*

newspaper reported that various strains of bird flu in Vietnam alone in 2004 forced the culling of more than 43 million poultry, about 17 percent of the country's total poultry stock, at a loss of more than U.S. 125 million dollars. By early 2005, another 34 Vietnamese had lost their lives to yet another outbreak of bird flu. The continuing appearance of bird flu viruses generated and transmitted to humans creates a situation that health officials fear may turn into a global epidemic. Vietnam has been one of the key countries in heading off a potential avian influenza pandemic.

To address this potential disaster, Vietnam and others have initiated research efforts to create a vaccine that might prevent or cure the virus. The H5N1 strain of the bird flu virus is the one about which scientists are most concerned. Vietnam has moved rapidly to combat this virus. Bird flu vaccines were tested on monkeys in early 2005 and proved to be very successful. Human tests with the vaccine started later in 2005. French researchers have developed a vaccine for poultry that will be tested with chickens in 2006. Meanwhile, the world braces for what could become a catastrophic outbreak of avian influenza.

CULTURES AND LANGUAGE

Vietnam is a very homogeneous country: Nearly 90 percent of the population is ethnic Vietnamese. In addition to this majority culture, there are many smaller ethnic groups scattered about the country. Chinese, Hmong, Thai, Khmer, Cham, Tay, Nung, and various mountain groups make up the balance of the population. There are 54 different ethnic groups in Vietnam. Most of these are found in selected regions rather than being widely scattered about the country. For example, the Chinese make up about 2 to 3 percent of the population, but most of them live in the far north, close to China. Some groups, such as the Hmong, Thai, and Khmer, have stayed in traditional ethnic regions that transcend political boundaries.

Many of the mountain cultures developed and remained in relative isolation for centuries. This changed with the arrival of the French, who often used these people as unpaid laborers. During the two Indochina wars, these smaller ethnic groups fell on one side of the conflicts or the other. For example, groups of Hmong and Thai fought with the French against the Communists. The two wars took a heavy toll on ethnic minorities: An estimated 20 percent were killed. After French and American influences were eliminated, some of the ethnic groups were watched closely because they had fought against the Communists. Many of these people were sent to reeducation centers after the war in an effort to reprogram them for Vietnamese culture and language. Fortunately for the minority groups, these efforts were abandoned in the early 1990s.

The status of minority cultures is in transition once again. Most of these cultures are in the northwest, northeast, and central highland areas of the country. In these regions, minority languages are now encouraged in schools and the smaller cultures are being preserved with the government's active assistance. The government also is working to increase the numbers of minority ethnic groups in universities and government. Many see these efforts as means of increasing tourism because visitors are attracted to cultural diversity. In actuality, however, many minority cultural practices are slipping away. International business and tourism introduce outside cultures and cultural traits that are attractive to Vietnam's majority and minority populations.

Vietnamese is the national language and has three basic dialects: the Hà Nội, or Northern dialect; Huế, or Central dialect; and Sài Gòn, or Southern dialect. The Vietnamese language is in the Austro-Asiatic family and is a tonal language like Cantonese or Mandarin Chinese. This means that different tones or pitches can change the meaning of words that look essentially the same. There are six pitches: flat, rising, falling, dipping, low, and a second dipping pitch that is not as low as



The Hmong are among the ethnic groups who have stayed in traditional ethnic regions that transcend the political boundaries between Vietnam and its neighbors.

the other dipping sound. For example, the word *ba* has four different meanings, depending on how it is pronounced.

Many scientific terms in Vietnamese are very similar to Chinese words that were used at a time when the words did not exist in Vietnamese. Also, names in Vietnamese are written with the family name first, the second name, and finally the first or given name. It is common for Vietnamese men not to have a second or middle name, so the family name appears first and the given name second. Unlike most Western societies, where there are many family names, there are only about 250 to 300 family names used for Vietnamese people.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the Vietnamese writing system uses the Latin alphabet with a variety of diacritical marks. Early in Vietnam's history, Chinese characters were used. These were later modified for local use, but the written language changed dramatically with the arrival of Catholic missionaries who encouraged the script style of the Romans.

About 3 million Vietnamese speakers live in more than 150 countries around the world. The United States ranks second to Vietnam, with 600,000 Vietnamese speakers. Other countries with Vietnamese-speaking populations include France, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Senegal. At least a dozen Canadian and U.S. universities offer Vietnamese language courses in their academic programs.

Other languages are also present in Vietnam. Among the more important are French, Chinese, and, increasingly, English. Many of the ethnic minorities also have their own languages, but these are rapidly being lost with the rising influence of mass media and other languages being stressed in schools.

FOODS

Many Vietnamese foods are available primarily in selected regions depending on the closeness to the spices and products needed to create a particular dish. For example, Hanoi is famous for its *bun cha*, a minced pork dumpling dish that is grilled and served with fresh herbs and a special rice sauce. Other foods are served throughout the country. Leading the way in this category is rice, the staple food in the Vietnamese diet. Rice is eaten at virtually every meal, including breakfast. *Com* is the Vietnamese word for cooked rice. It is usually sticky and eaten with chopsticks. The Vietnamese usually serve rice in a communal "family-style" bowl; each person transfers rice from this large bowl to a personal bowl. The person then raises his or her rice bowl close to the mouth to eat with chopsticks in a manner similar to the Chinese. Rice noodles are also commonly served at meals.



Many Vietnamese foods are closely tied to the regions where their ingredients are readily available. Rice is the staple food in the Vietnamese diet and may be eaten at every meal. As in this photograph, many small bowls may be used to set out food for a large meal.

The Vietnamese use little oil when cooking, but they often add spices. Among the more commonly used spices are lemongrass, chili sauce, soy sauce, coriander, mint leaves, and ginger. Fish sauce, black pepper, sugar, coconut milk, basil, and garlic also are used to liven up the taste of dishes. Spicier foods are more commonly found in the south.

With Vietnam's extended coastline, its cuisine features a variety of seafood. Crab, shrimp, crayfish, and squid are plentiful and used in a variety of dishes. There are also many different types of fish available. Other common protein sources that come from inland areas include meats such as pork, chicken, and beef.

Desserts are usually very sweet and include sticky rice cakes, fruit, and pastries. After-dinner treats like sweet banana soup are popular around Hanoi, whereas sweet-bean and coconut-stuffed dessert is more common around Ho Chi Minh City. Oriental tea is a regular offering at meals. Other, more exotic drinks such as sugarcane juice are offered by local vendors. Water is often unclean and unsuitable for drinking. Only about 60 percent of the population has access to clean, safe water. This means that water must be boiled and purified. Arsenic is a problem in the north, where it exists at 50 times the standard allowed by Vietnam's government. Other common water pollutants include the residue from fertilizers and pesticides that run into groundwaters from agricultural areas.

FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY

It is surprising that, as a Communist country, Vietnam allows the practice of religion. According to Article 70 of the 1992 constitution states, "The citizen shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any religion or follow none. All religions are equal before the law." Religions were suppressed for many years under the Communists, but the practice of Buddhism has been encouraged in recent years. Buddhism and Catholicism, which was introduced by the missionaries, are regulated by the government.

The same tolerance is not accorded to all Christian faiths. Protestant evangelicals are among the groups that the government has suppressed. The United States State Department has condemned practices by the Vietnamese government that stand in the way of religious freedom. In some cases, people were

detained and subjected to discrimination and violence in government-supported efforts to have them renounce their faith.

An estimated 50 percent of the Vietnamese population is Buddhist. Buddhist practices in Vietnam differ from those in neighboring countries. In Vietnam, Buddhism represents a mixture of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian ideas. Taoism and Confucianism originally came from China, whereas Buddhist thinking originated in India. Buddhism originally came to the Red River region from China in the second century A.D. Other sects arrived in the Mekong region from India sometime between the third and sixth centuries. The Mahayana Buddhists believe that there were others, in addition to Buddha, who were enlightened thinkers. Theravada Buddhists are purists; they believe that Buddha was the only enlightened one. In either case, Buddha's teachings are core to understanding the life philosophy of millions of Vietnamese.

Buddhist thinking originated with Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince who was raised in a wealthy family about six centuries B.C. He spent his childhood in a royal palace that was very comfortable and sheltered. This lifestyle kept him from being exposed to the tough realities of the outside world. As he grew older, Gautama became uncomfortable with his life of comfort and started to travel outside of his palace in search of personal enlightenment. He was shocked to find that horrible diseases, extreme poverty, and human suffering existed just beyond the gates of the palace. These startling revelations shocked him into a life of austerity and poverty: He ate little and searched for wisdom.

After seven years of personal reflection and meditation, Guatama found that this path was not satisfying his quest for deeper understanding. This started him on his second path, which he referred to as "the middle path," a road between self-indulgence and total austerity. Gautama became enlightened while sitting and reflecting at a stupa, a circular mound, in Sarnath, India. His enlightenment led him to advocate an



This is a Buddhist temple located in Ho Chi Minh City. Nearly half the Vietnamese population is Buddhist. Buddhist thinking originated in India, but in Vietnam the religion has become a blend of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian ideas.

ethical philosophy that sought to liberate people from suffering by having them achieve higher states of consciousness. Soon after his enlightenment at Sarnath, people began to refer to Gautama as *Buddha*, a term that means “enlightened one.”

Buddhism is a philosophy and an ethical code of living rather than a religion. Buddha believed that the search for material things only caused suffering. This suffering causes a person to be reborn again into another life that is marked by more suffering. He taught people to cast out worldly desires so that they would not need to be reborn into another life of suffering. *Nirvana* was the term Buddha used to refer to the

life-cycle state in which rebirth was not necessary. It is believed that, in nirvana, there is freedom from the suffering of lives and release from the cyclical birth and rebirth process. Buddha taught believers the Eightfold Path, which asks followers to believe right, desire right, think right, live right, do the right things, think the right thoughts, behave right, and practice deep reflection.

Buddhists believe in nonviolence and usually worship in their homes. Many followers have statues of Buddha in their home to remind them of the importance of Buddhism's five precepts or promises:

1. Not to harm or kill any living things
2. Not to steal or take anything that is not freely given
3. To control sexual desires
4. Not to tell lies
5. Not to drink or take drugs

Although Buddhists usually worship at home, they have built huge, elaborate pagodas and temples. Inside are thousands of statues, large and small, of Buddha. Many Vietnamese visit these buildings during festivals. Today, old temples and pagodas are being restored and new ones built, often with funds from Vietnamese people who live abroad. Some of the most important Buddhist temples and pagodas in Vietnam are the Tu Hieu pagoda in Hue, the Vinh Nghiem pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City, and the Dong Nhan Temple in Hanoi. The Dong Nhan Temple also pays tribute to the Trung sisters with a statue of them in the rear of the Temple.

The second-largest religion in Vietnam is Catholicism. The country has 6 to 8 million Catholics, a figure that represents 8 to 10 percent of the population. This number makes Vietnam the second-largest Catholic stronghold in Southeast Asia, exceeded only by the Philippines. Catholics were strongly

anti-Communist during the mid-twentieth century. As a result, they have frequently been harassed and persecuted by the government. During this time, the church was not permitted to own land. This prevented them from building and operating schools, orphanages, hospitals, and even churches.

Catholicism is the oldest Christian religion: It dates back to the time of Jesus Christ, 2,000 years ago. The French introduced the religion to Vietnam in the seventeenth century. Like the French, Vietnamese Catholics fled to the south with the advent of the First Indochina War; most remain in this area today. New efforts are extending the religion to other areas of the country. To this end, without prior consultation with the Vietnamese government, Pope John Paul II appointed Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Mân as cardinal for Vietnam. This momentous occasion took place in 2005. The cardinal today resides in the capital city of Hanoi.

Sadly, tension still exists between the Catholic Church and the government. Many priests remain in prison for protesting against the repression of religious freedom in the country. Through the use of propaganda, however, the government occasionally tries to imply that the church supports government activities. The uneasy relationship between the Catholic Church and the government is a continual source of frustration related to the fragile and ambiguous nature of religious freedom in Vietnam.

Despite government interference, the Catholics have some important churches in Vietnam. These include Notre Dame Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi Cathedral (also called St. Joseph's Cathedral), and Hue's Notre Dame and Phu Cam cathedrals. Other Christian religions also exist in Vietnam, but they are represented by much smaller numbers than Catholics. These groups have also faced persecution, but they do not have a long and established presence in the country.

The estimated number of Protestants in Vietnam varies from 400,000 to more than 1.5 million. Government estimates

are at the lower end, and churches hold the higher estimates. Two-thirds of the Protestants are from minority groups. Evangelists are present in the country but are often met with resistance and regulation from the government. The country also has small Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu populations.

Two localized religions have sprung up during the twentieth century in the Mekong delta region of southern Vietnam. Followers of both religions opposed the Communists and suffered when the party retaliated. These two religions are called *Cao Dai* and *Hoa Hao*. *Cao Dai* appeared first in 1926 as a series of revelations received by Ngo Minh Chieu. This religion is a Vietnamese offshoot of Buddhism that transcends many religions. The faith has 2 million believers and combines aspects of Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and Confucianism. *Cao Dai* is centered in the town of Tay Ninh, which is about two hours northwest of Ho Chi Minh City.

The *Hoa Hao* religion is also an offspring of Buddhism with a belief structure that provides a reformed Theravada Buddhist perspective. It was founded in 1939 by Huynh Phu So, who lived in *Hoa Hao* village in the Mekong delta region. This sect is more Buddhist in nature than *Cao Dai* is and stresses elements such as prayer, simplicity, and social justice. This contrasts with traditional Buddhism, in which icons and statues play a larger role. The *Hoa Hao* religion claims to have about 2 million followers in Vietnam. *Hoa Hao* worship is also more home based and simpler than *Cao Dai*. *Hoa Hao* families usually have only a simple altar covered by a brown cloth in their home. Here they pray in the morning and at night.

MUSIC, LITERATURE, AND ART

Many cultural elements in Vietnam have come from within the country, whereas other traits have been influenced by outside cultures. The outside influences have mainly come from China and the Western world; France is the most important recent historical connection. French cultural influences moved

in and replaced many of the Chinese influences that had arrived earlier. For example, today, it is very common to see baguettes (long bread loaves) being sold on the street, one of many everyday remnants of the French presence in Vietnam. These outside influences have also helped shape the music, literature, and art of Vietnam.

Three common forms of music are found in Vietnam today. The first is traditional Vietnamese music, represented by folk music and the music traditionally popular in local theater. The second form is popular and classical music from the West. The third is a blend of traditional instruments with the musical scale found in the West rather than with the five-note Chinese scale. Vocal music is more common than instrumental music, and Western rock music has been very popular among young people since the mid-1950s.

Literature before the French occupation fell into two basic categories. The first reflected strong ties to Chinese literature and styles; the second addressed more local themes. This changed with the arrival of the French: The literature started to reflect Western themes and styles in poetry, drama, and novels. In the mid-1950s, literature in the north started to reflect Communist ideals in a style called “socialist realism.” This writing style pushed Communist ideology and painted a picture of an ideal and glorious future. After the end of the Second Indochina War, socialist realism was pushed into the South for a while, but the country gradually gave way to more realistic writing. This writing style is prevalent today in the country.

Art and architecture have also exhibited the Chinese influences that prevailed until the French arrived. Early Chinese-style paintings were often on silk with depictions of birds, landscapes, animals, or other natural features. Calligraphy was also common. The Chinese influence was unmistakable here, as well as in the architecture of temples and other buildings. This changed with the arrival of the French, when buildings began to reflect colonial styles and paintings followed Western trends.

HOLIDAYS AND OTHER CELEBRATIONS

Vietnam has more than 20 holidays each year. Most of these are either traditional or religious festivals. The most important holiday is Tet, which celebrates the start of the lunar New Year and lasts three days in late January or early February. This is a raucous and widely anticipated event, with fireworks, gongs, and drums; at the same time, it is a period for quiet meditation. Transportation systems are clogged during Tet as people travel to be with family members.

Other important celebrations include April 30, which is Liberation (from the United States) Day, and Ho Chi Minh's birthday, celebrated on May 19. National Day celebrates Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence on September 2, and Christmas is celebrated by Catholics and Protestants across the country on December 25.

Some of the arts have suffered because of the imposition of political thought by the government. This has limited the creativity of writers, artists, actors, and filmmakers, who were often forced to follow government direction and subject to censorship. With the imposition of French and American influences, there has been more interest in freedom in pursuing reality in art. The government has changed some, yet the threat of censorship and control persists. What type of government does Vietnam have? What is the philosophy that drives the government to control or repress freedom of expression? These and other questions are addressed in the next chapter.



6

Vietnam's Government and the Communist Party

After decades of fighting, Ho Chi Minh's Communists had finally won a staggering victory. Their next challenge was to implement their political, social, and economic agendas. In the eyes of the revolutionary leaders, a Communist-led government was necessary to achieve the desired society.

In democracies, leaders serve at the pleasure of the voters. Citizens are free to speak their minds, assemble peacefully, and even run for political office if they so desire. Dictatorships represent the other end of the political spectrum, where leaders are not directly subject to the citizens. These dictatorial regimes may be arbitrary and cruel or they may be kind and benevolent. In a democracy, the public

policy (laws and administrative rulings) of the society is subject to the consideration of citizens. This can happen directly through the voters and means such as referendum elections. It also can happen indirectly through elected representatives in the legislative and executive branches of government. In a democracy, all citizens, including the leaders, operate under the rule of law; the constitution is the highest law in the land. Dictatorships hold the leaders above the law, and the leaders usually dictate laws to the citizens. This is often called “the rule of man” as contrasted with the rule of law in democracies.

VIETNAM’S CONSTITUTION

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is one of the few remaining Communist-led states in the world. The constitution remains a tool of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and is used to control the people. The present constitution was adopted in 1992. This is country’s fourth constitution since World War II. Earlier constitutions, implemented in 1946, 1959, and 1980, were thrown out to suit the needs of the CPV. Contrast this situation with that of United States, where one constitution has lasted since it was first adopted in 1789.

The preamble to the constitution provides an introduction and the overriding context for the document and its implementation. The following is an excerpt from the preamble to Vietnam’s 1992 constitution:

In the course of their millennia-old history, the Vietnamese people, working diligently, creatively, and fighting courageously to build their country and defend it, have forged a tradition of unity, humanity, uprightness, perseverance and indomitableness for their nation and have created Vietnamese civilization and culture . . .

This Constitution establishes our political regime, economic system, social and cultural institutions; it

deals with our national defense and security, the fundamental rights and duties of the citizen, the structure and principles regarding the organization and activity of State organs; it institutionalizes the relationship between the Party as leader, the people as master, and the State as administrator.

The entire six-paragraph preamble sets forth a brief history of the Vietnamese struggle for independence and specifically mentions Ho Chi Minh and the role of the CPV. A key element that sets the stage for further development of the constitution itself is the statement regarding the (CPV) Party as leader. The CPV is regarded as the people's representative, even though citizens do not have the right to vote for candidates that are not CPV members or approved by the CPV. The country is a Communist dictatorship that is ruled by one party. Political reality today shows that the people do not actually rule in Vietnam. This factor prevails in the entire governing process, as is evident throughout the discussions in this chapter.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The Executive Branch of government is responsible for administering the laws of the country and for managing most of the government's day-to-day business. This branch also serves as the official representative of the country in a role that is usually referred to as the chief of state. Sometimes the executive roles of the chief of state and the head of government are the same position, as is the president of the United States. In Vietnam, these roles are divided. The president serves as the chief of state, and the prime minister serves as the head of government. The president is selected by the National Assembly for a five-year term. The president is then responsible for selecting the prime minister.

In Communist Vietnam, the president is constitutionally responsible to the National Assembly and not to the people.

The office carries a number of responsibilities including the following:

- To enforce the country's Constitution and laws
- To serve as commander of the armed forces
- To nominate or propose removal to the National Assembly of the vice president of the country, the prime minister, the president of the Supreme People's Court, the head of the Supreme People's Office of Supervision and Control, ambassadors, and cabinet ministers
- To grant pardons
- To declare war or a state of emergency with the consultation of the National Assembly

The vice president assumes the presidency if the president dies or becomes incapacitated.

The prime minister also has a number of responsibilities enumerated in the constitution. The following lists some of the major duties:

- To direct the work of the government, the government members, the People's Councils at all levels
- To chair Cabinet meetings
- To appoint, release from duty, or dismiss vice ministers
- To suspend or annul decisions of Cabinet ministers, government members, People's Councils, and chairmen of People's Committees of provinces and cities under direct central rule that conflict with the constitution, the law, and other official documents of the state
- To make regular reports to the people through the mass media on major issues

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Legislative Branch in Vietnam is provided for in the constitution with the creation of the National Assembly, or Quoc-Hoi. Most countries are bicameral, with two houses in the legislature. Vietnam has only the National Assembly, making the country's legislative branch unicameral (one house). The National Assembly has 498 members who are elected to five-year terms on the same election cycle as the president's nomination. The Communist Party of Vietnam runs the National Assembly. Other candidates can run for the National Assembly, but only with the approval of the CPV. The National Assembly normally has more than 90 percent of its seats filled by the CPV. The others are held by CPV-approved candidates.

The National Assembly meets only twice each year. Each meeting is seven to ten weeks in length. During the time between sessions, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly provides continuity. Members of the National Assembly may propose laws that can be passed with a majority vote of the body. The legislature also has the power to create or amend the constitution and to plan the country's economy. The National Assembly has a number of working committees that investigate issues and propose legislation to the entire body. For many years, the National Assembly was just a rubber stamp for the CPV by easily passing through legislation. In recent years, however, the body has become more vocal and has demonstrated some autonomy in lawmaking.

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Supreme People's Court serves as the top court in the Judicial Branch. This judicial body still possesses some of its French colonial traditions in civil matters. The chief justice of the Court is elected by the National Assembly to a five-year term that is concurrent with the term for the Assembly. Here again, the separation between the CPV and the government is questionable at best. This situation presents many problems for



In May 2002, nearly 49 million Vietnamese went to the polls to elect members of the 498-seat National Assembly. Each member is elected to a five-year term. The Communist Party of Vietnam runs the National Assembly.

citizens, who have few political rights and freedoms: The courts are not independent of the political pressure of the CPV. Justice is best served by a truly independent judiciary, and this is not yet the case in Vietnam.

Local people's courts and military tribunals are also created by the constitution. Districts in the country have a District People's Court, which is the first judicial level that deals with cases, including most domestic, civil, and criminal cases. Each of the provinces has a Provincial People's Court. These bodies serve as courts of appeal for cases from the District People's Courts. The highest appeals court is the Supreme People's Court. A problem for lower courts is judges who are not well prepared. There simply are not enough trained attorneys and judges in the country. International organizations have been working to address some of these shortcomings by conducting training for judges and attorneys. Other problems that relate to the openness of court decisions also exist. A recent declaration

by the prime minister, for example, makes the use of capital punishment a state secret. Decisions like this decrease transparency (openness of government actions) and increase the possibility of government abuse.

THE PROVINCES

Vietnam is divided into three regions for administrative purposes in governing. The regions are designated as the north, the center, and the south. Within these regions, Vietnam has 59 provinces and 5 municipalities that operate in a manner similar to the provinces. The province with the largest land area is Nghe An, which is located in the Song Ca River valley. The most populated is Ho Chi Minh City, with more than 5 million people. These political regions have their own political structure that is divided into the same three branches as is the national government. Provincial governments, however, are merely the local arm of the national government and have little independence. The People's Council is the legislative arm at the provincial level, and it appoints the People's Committee, which serves as the executive arm.

THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN IN VIETNAM

The citizen is given explicit constitutional rights and responsibilities. In reality, however, dissent is nonexistent: Citizens' disagreement is quashed by the power of the state and the CPV. This happens even though Article 69 of the constitution provides that "the citizen shall enjoy freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of the press, the right to be informed, and the right to assemble, form associations and hold demonstrations in accordance with the provisions of the law." The statement "in accordance with the provisions of the law" is the catch phrase. Amnesty International reports that people in Vietnam are imprisoned merely for political beliefs. Others are persecuted for circulating information on the Internet about human rights and democracy. The description

of rights guaranteed to the citizen in the constitution and the reality are far apart.

The following are some of the rights of citizens provided for in Vietnam's 1992 constitution:

- Freedom of belief and of religion
- Equality before the law
- The right to vote at age 18 and the right to stand for election to the National Assembly and the People's Councils at age 21
- The right and the duty to work
- The right of ownership with income, savings, housing, chattel, means of production, funds, and other possessions . . . as regulated by provisions Articles 17 and 18 of the Constitution (these sections allow for state claims to property by law). This means they cannot be owned by citizens of the country if the government wishes otherwise.
- The right and the duty to receive training and instruction
- Entitlement to health protection
- Freedom of movement

On paper, these rights may sound good, but it is clear that they are not always protected in daily life. Many of the provisions in the constitution are qualified by phrases such as that mentioned previously: "in accordance with the provisions of the law." This phrasing allows the government to put limits on constitutional protections by simply implementing new laws; thus restrictions on the freedom of speech, press, and assembly are much broader than they appear in the constitution.

In addition to the rights provided in the constitution, there are a number of duties assigned to citizens. Many constitutions do not assign duties to citizens, but duties are found quite often in Communist societies. Some of the duties for Vietnamese citizens beyond the duty to work and to receive training, listed previously, include these:

- To observe health regulations to prevent disease and promote public hygiene
- To raise children to be good citizens
- To show loyalty to the Motherland (the country of Vietnam)
- To defend the country
- To respect and protect the property of the state
- To pay taxes
- To obey the constitution and the laws of Vietnam

FOREIGN POLICY

Vietnam has edged open its doors in recent decades and today participates more fully in the activities of the world and in regional organizations. Vietnam is a member of a number of international organizations, including the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Interpol. It also belongs to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the United Nations, among other organizations. It is also active in regional organizations other than ASEAN: It also has a membership in groups such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Even with stronger international ties, Vietnam still has boundary and land-ownership disputes with neighbors. China occupies the Parcel Islands, which both Taiwan and Vietnam claim, and the boundary between China and Vietnam is disputed. Another disputed area is the potentially oil-rich Spratly Islands. In this conflict, Vietnam is challenged by China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Brunei, all of which claim the islands and hope to gain economically from the islands' petroleum resources. Some relaxing of tensions has taken place since 2002, when the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was signed by the various parties.

History has given Vietnam many problems. Foreigners swept into the country with land claims and colonial interests, but today's border disputes and land claims do not appear to be highly intense conflicts. This situation is always subject to rapid change, however, particularly in a world that faces increasing energy demand and prices in the face of dwindling oil reserves.

With a Communist government still running Vietnam, questions remain regarding how it will move forward in the twenty-first century. The old-style bureaucratic political structure with strong central planning may not operate well in a world that continues to move toward more free trade and international investment. What does a Communist-run government mean for Vietnam's economy? Can free-market elements move into the economy? These and other questions regarding Vietnam's economic situation are addressed in the next chapter.



7

Vietnam's Economy

Today, after more than three decades of unification of the north and the south, Vietnam is still a nation with many sharp contrasts and divisions. For example, in the south, near Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), there are extensive manufacturing districts. Here, companies like Nike, Fujitsu, and Samsung operate factories that are often the subject of controversy in the United States and other Western countries. This is addressed later in this chapter. These factories have brought money, jobs, and economic opportunity to people in the region. Ho Chi Minh City today is home to only 7 percent of the country's population, but it produces 20 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). GDP is the total of all goods and services produced by a country. The people of Ho Chi Minh City also enjoy a per capita income up to three times higher than that earned elsewhere in the country.

The north provides a contrast. Here, in cities like Haiphong and Hanoi, foreign companies are often caught by zealous customs and tax agents, so the obstacles to foreign investment are greater. This hinders the growth of industries in the region because international companies look for friendly investment environments. Why do these differences exist today after more than three decades of unity? To understand this situation, one must investigate underlying elements in Vietnam's economy.

MARXISM? CAPITALISM? WHO'S ON FIRST?

With Ho Chi Minh's legacy and the eventual victory of Communist North Vietnam over the United States and South Vietnam, the stage was set for strong government control of the economy. The *Communist Manifesto*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and published in 1848, was available on the Communist Party of Vietnam's government Web site in 2005. Some of the quotations taken from the document on this site reflect Marx's and Engels's attitude on various economic practices. The following are a few examples from the Web site:

The bourgeoisie [capitalists] . . . has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.

One fact is common to all past ages, . . . the exploitation of one part of society by the other.

The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state.

The last quotation advocates the centralization of all instruments of production. The Manifesto intended this to include banks, factories, natural resources, transportation, farmlands, and communication systems. The term *proletariat* refers to the poorer working class, which, at the time of Marx and Engels, typically did not own or control means of production such as land, labor, or capital. Because members of the proletariat were not owners, they needed to sell their labor to survive. In contrast, the *bourgeoisie* refers to the middle class or capitalists. This class holds the resources, owning and controlling property and other capital. Marx and Engels viewed these two classes as being locked in a perpetual struggle against each other, with the bourgeoisie always having the upper hand. The thinking evident in the *Communist Manifesto* and presented here in an abbreviated manner provides the economic model under which Ho Chi Minh and the Communists wanted Vietnam to develop. The proletariat (represented by the government) would maintain central control of the major economic means of production, including land, labor, capital, and management.

Today, however, Vietnam's economic landscape looks very different from the one pictured by Marx and Engels. Foreign corporations exist, and private ownership of property has returned. Vietnam is also a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and thus had to agree to

the fundamental principles of that organization. In 1997, ASEAN adopted a plan called “Vision 2020.” This plan is intended to integrate the economies of the member countries into a relatively cohesive economic region. About this goal, ASEAN says that there will be a “free flow of goods, services, investments, capital, economic development, reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities.” A meeting in Hanoi in 1998 set up the first steps for implementing Vision 2020.

Present-day Vietnam appears to have a split personality. On one hand, it claims adherence to the principles set down by Marx and Engels, who despised free trade and equated it to human exploitation. On the other hand, it supports Vision 2020, which advocates the free flow of goods, services, and other “capitalistic” economic strategies. This incongruity is one that has faced many Communist governments since the end of the Cold War. The answer for most Communist countries has become quite obvious: Many aspects of Communist economic policy simply did not work. For example, most workers in a particular industry all received the same pay, regardless of how hard they worked; therefore, they lacked an incentive to work harder and produce more.

There were other problems with the Communist system. All property was held by the central government. When individuals do not own the property, they have little incentive to take care of or improve it and they become careless. In government apartment buildings, individual apartments generally were well kept and had a “home touch,” as people took pride in their own personal living space. Hallways and other common areas, however, were generally dirty, unpainted, graffiti filled, and in poor repair. With these problems and many more, major Communist governments in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, and other countries started to introduce free-market mechanisms during the 1980s. After more than a decade of economic failures, in 1992, Vietnam revised its constitution. It now promotes economic reforms

such as privatization (nongovernment ownership of property and industry) and an opening of the doors to the global economic community, including ASEAN.

VIETNAM'S ECONOMIC BASICS

Vietnam today is still a poor country with an average annual income purchasing power parity (PPP; U.S. equivalent) of only about \$2,500 per year. Purchasing power parity is the GDP per person adjusted for the cost of living by the United Nations. Today, as in the past, the country is primarily an agricultural society. More than two-thirds of its people are engaged in farming. Most of the farming is done using nonmechanized techniques. "Animal tractors," or water buffalo, provide most of the power for rural Vietnamese; they can be seen everywhere on the agricultural landscape, pulling carts and plowing fields. The swamp buffalo is the most common water buffalo in Vietnam and is also used as a source of food and provider of fertilizer. Vietnam's dependence on this domesticated animal is great. There are 3 million water buffalo in the country!

Rice is far and away the major agricultural crop. In fact, Vietnam is the world's third-largest producer of the hardy, high-yielding, nutritious grain crop. Rice paddies seem to be everywhere: Nearly three-fourths of the country's agricultural land is used for growing this dietary staple. In the north, the dry paddy method of farming is used, whereas in the south, the wet paddy method of rice cultivation is used. Two crops can be grown in a year in the north and three can be grown in the hot and humid south. Rice straw, which remains after the rice is beaten off the stalk after harvest, is used to feed the water buffalo.

Other agricultural products include food staples such as corn, potatoes, soybeans, bananas, and peanuts. Other important crops are coffee, tea, rubber, cotton, pepper, coconuts, and sugar. Even trees and other forest products are grown as agricultural crops. Animals raised as agricultural products include fish, pigs, cattle, and poultry. Vietnam is working to



Rice is the major agricultural crop in Vietnam. Farmers use buffaloes and cattle to plow their rice fields in the northern province of Hay Tay. Although Vietnam is among the three leading rice exporters, along with Thailand and the United States, most of the labor is done without the aid of machinery.

diversify its agricultural production and to be less dependent on rice. New efforts have been made to introduce fruit and vegetable farming and other crops such as cashew nuts.

Vietnam also has major stakes in natural resources. Crude oil production is very important to Vietnam's economy: It represents nearly 25 percent of the country's exports. Other important mineral resources include metals such as iron ore,

tin, copper, lead, zinc, nickel, manganese, titanium, chromite, tungsten, bauxite, silver, and gold. There are also deposits of coal, graphite, mica, silica sand, and limestone.

Factory jobs pay much better than agricultural work in Vietnam. As a result, this sector has been growing in recent years. Growth is promoted by the country's relationship with ASEAN and its recent attraction of other foreign investors. Important products and services include footwear, steel, cement, clothing, food processing, and machine building. Chemical fertilizers, petroleum products, glass, tires, and paper products are also produced. Other industries that are becoming important include shipbuilding, construction materials, plastics, wood processing, and electric equipment.

As mentioned previously, factory jobs—whether the factory is domestic or foreign owned—pay considerably more than agricultural work does in Vietnam. Even so, many foreign companies are under attack from people in the West. Critics believe that the working conditions are too harsh and the pay too low in these factories. Many claim that the factories are merely sweatshops where people work in dangerous and inhumane conditions. Others counter these arguments by showing that the wages in these factories are far above those of other local jobs. Major corporations like Nike have been the subject of widespread discussions on this issue.

With the world's thirteenth-largest population of nearly 84 million people, Vietnam has a huge and cheap work force available for foreign investors. The country's literacy rate of more than 90% ensures an educated work force as well. These human resource numbers are very attractive to outside entrepreneurs who are willing to work with a political bureaucracy that is often cumbersome and slow. The reward is usually measured in substantial profits for companies willing to invest in Vietnam. This process has been opened up for a little more than a decade. As a result, the Vietnamese government is still carefully adopting free-market mechanisms.



Vietnamese workers make garments at a Nike sportswear production line in a factory in Ho Chi Minh City in 2003. There has been much controversy over whether such factories are modern-day sweatshops or if they have, in fact, improved the lives of the workers employed there.

Vietnam has become much more active in the area of international trade since joining ASEAN. The country's primary exports include crude oil, seafood products, rice, coffee, rubber, tea, office equipment, garments, and shoes. The primary recipients of the country's exports are the United States, with nearly 22 percent, followed by Japan, Australia, China, Germany, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. Notably absent from this list is France, Vietnam's former colonial master.

Vietnam also requires importation of many goods. Some of the major imports are machinery and equipment, petroleum products, fertilizer, steel, raw cotton, cement, motorcycles, and a variety of food products. The source of these imports is primarily Asia. China is the leading exporter to Vietnam, followed by Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the United States, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

The Vietnam *dong* (VND) is the country's currency. The word *dong* means "bronze" or "copper" in Vietnamese. Late in 2005, one U.S. dollar was worth nearly 16,000 VND. The VND is divided into 10 *hào*, which is subdivided even further into 10 *xu*. The *hào* and the *xu* are worthless today and so are no longer used. The VND is issued in denominations of 200, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, 100,000, and 500,000. Coins come in denominations of 200, 1,000, and 5,000 dong.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION

Transportation and communication in Vietnam are still limited relative to those in other countries in the region. The advent of the cellphone has improved telephone communications because this technology does not require the extensive infrastructure, including switching centers and lines, on which older phone technology depends. Most people in Vietnam do not have access to phones, however. In fact, fewer than 8 million cellphones and land-based phones are in use in the country today.

A similar situation exists for radio and television communications, both of which have only limited offerings. Much of the problem that pertains to the media is imposed by the Communist government, which seeks to control the flow of and access to information. Fewer than 100 radio stations exist, and there is only a handful of television stations. The government controls what can be broadcast, just as it controls what can be printed in newspapers and other paper media. Foreigners can access satellite television news such as CNN

and the BBC, as well as other international programming in upscale hotels, but local people have little or no access to the world through these satellite transmissions.

Internet access is also limited in Vietnam, although some availability exists through cafés, hotels, and other means. AsiaMedia reports that there are more than 5,000 Internet cafes in Vietnam. Government controls restrict Internet content and the ability to criticize the government, however, so Internet cafés and other commercial Internet providers are required to monitor and keep personal information on people who use the Internet and on how long they use it. In addition, Internet providers are required to install software that restricts sites. The government imposes firewalls that restrict criticism of the one-party Communist government and also restrict pornography and violence. Some Vietnamese citizens have been imprisoned for posting Internet articles that criticized Vietnam's government. Even with these controls, it is estimated that there are more than 2 million Internet users in Vietnam. Most are young people between the ages of 14 and 24.

Vietnam's transportation system, much of which was destroyed during the war years, is also developing slowly. The pace is slow because development of public transportation systems such as rail, inland waterways, and highways is very costly. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are linked by road, rail, and air. The Reunification Express is the fastest train connection between the two cities, but the 700-mile (1,125-kilometer) trip takes 30 to 40 hours. The same trip takes about two hours by air. Air transportation in the country is quite limited, however: Not only is it costly, but there are only 16 airports with paved runways in the entire country.

The main air entry points into Vietnam are through Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Flights come from a number of East Asian countries, including China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Cambodia, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore. They also come from Australia, Austria, France,

Germany, Russia, and Switzerland. Da Nang is also an international flight entry point, but flights to the city currently come only from Thailand.

Vietnam is also blessed with an extensive continental coastline that is 2,140 miles (3,444 kilometers) long. This provides many economic advantages. The country is able to harvest products and food from the sea and can also use the Pacific Ocean as a marine highway for shipping goods. Port cities include Cam Ranh, Da Nang, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Long, Quy Nhon, Nha Trang, Vinh, and Vung Tau. The most important port in the country is Ho Chi Minh City, which serves the entire Mekong River delta region and the south. Most of the cargo is import and export goods. Many warehouses surround the port facility located in the city center and support the trade in goods. Haiphong is the most important port in the north. It serves as the entryway for most goods going to and from Hanoi. Da Nang is the leading port in the center of the country. It also serves as the entry point for goods that arrive by sea and are going to landlocked Laos. Government-owned Vinalines is the country's largest shipping company. It, like many other parts of the economy, has not yet been privatized.

AN ECONOMY IN TRANSITION—STAY TUNED!

Since the end of the Second Indochina War, Vietnam's Communist government has been moving slowly away from its philosophical communism-inspired foundations. The Doi Moi reforms of the mid-1980s initiated the process of change that resulted in the opening of the economy to more free-market mechanisms. Much of the bureaucratic tendency of the Communist Party still exists, but reforms are being made. Progress in this transition has been greatly assisted by Vietnam's opening up to the West and to ASEAN.

If this path toward progress is maintained and extended, the country has many possibilities ahead of it. A hard-working,

well-educated, cheap labor force encourages international investment and more jobs. Many of these foreign corporations have been criticized for maintaining poor working conditions and low salaries in Vietnam, but some have been improving the work environment. International pressure may bring the best of both worlds, with better working conditions and new jobs that are higher paying than other opportunities for Vietnamese workers.

The future remains largely in the hands of the Communist Party. Political progress may limit economic advancements if the party becomes more repressive. If the party continues to build on its successes, however, the economy may leap to new heights, as has happened throughout much of Southeast Asia during recent decades.



8

Vietnam Looks Ahead

The practice of prediction is precarious because there are many variables to consider when looking to the future. Some futurists divide the future into three categories. One is for the range of possible futures that exists given present knowledge. The second is the probable future: the future that is most likely given Vietnam's present course. The third type is the preferred future, the most desirable direction that represents an optimistic view of Vietnam's future.

The past is often a good indicator of the future. For Vietnam, the past would seem to indicate a future filled with war and further intrusions by outsiders. Certainly, this is not the preferred future, but it is a possibility. Today, competition is rising to the boiling point as countries fight for natural resources like the precious waters of the Mekong River or oil around the Spratly Islands. Foreign occupation appears unlikely at this time, but the shadow of China—

with its huge economic strength, the world's largest population, and vast military power—looms large as a threat on Vietnam's northern border. The threat may not be military at this time, but China's regional hegemony (strong influence) is extremely powerful. Because of the potential threat posed by China, some observers foresee Vietnam drawing closer in its relations with the United States.

At first glance, the lyrics of Vietnam's national anthem seem to offer a forward-looking vision for the country:

Soldiers of Vietnam, we go forward,
With the one will to save our Fatherland.
Our hurried steps are sounding on the long and
arduous road
Our flag, red with the blood of victory, bears the
spirit of our country.
The distant rumbling of the guns mingles with
our marching song.
The path to glory passes over the bodies of
our foes.
Overcoming all hardships, together we build
our resistance bases.
Ceaselessly for the people's cause we struggle,
Hastening to the battle field!
Forward! All together advancing!
Our Vietnam is strong eternal.

Soldiers of Vietnam, we go forward,
The gold star of our flag in the wind
Leading our people, our native land, out of
misery and suffering
Let us join our efforts in the fight for the building
of a new life.
Let us stand up and break our chains.
For too long have we swallowed our hatred

Let us keep ready for all sacrifices and our life
will be radiant.
Ceaselessly for the people's cause we struggle,
Hastening to the battlefield!
Forward! All together advancing!
Our Vietnam is strong eternal.

Clearly, with references to the battlefield and the victory over foes, this anthem is a reflection on Vietnam's past. The song also clearly addresses that the country is advancing "Forward!" The anthem does not specify the goal(s) toward which the country is advancing, however, and this is a problem that the Communist Party faces in Vietnam today. With a Communist government and an economy that is becoming more free market in orientation, the country is approaching a potentially dangerous crossroads.

Free-market systems usually bring greater prosperity to many individuals. This prosperity often leads to prestige and power. Economic power and prestige can be used to curry or win political power or to resist the existing political structures. Will prosperity bring clashes between economic and political interests to Vietnam? Will the government change to provide more freedom and democracy? Will the growth of the economy through capitalist measures with persistent government limitations on freedom of expression continue? These are difficult questions to answer and are similar to those that China also must address.

Some other challenges for Vietnam are evident. Population growth is a threat to the country's well-being. It is very difficult to have long-term economic growth if the population is also increasing rapidly. Health issues such as HIV/AIDS and avian flu pose real risks to the people of Vietnam, and environmental issues such as deforestation, water pollution, air pollution, and urbanization threaten to make life more difficult for coming generations. All of these possibilities exist on Vietnam's horizon.



Schoolchildren release colorful balloons during the official celebrations held April 30, 2005, in Ho Chi Minh City, to mark the 30th anniversary of the end of the Second Indochina War, or the Vietnam War.

At the same time, the country is finally at peace. A peacetime economy makes it easier to address both problems and opportunities. New assets have been developed during the decades of peace. For example, Vietnam has formed ties with other countries through ASEAN and through trade partnerships with the United States and other countries. The country has a hard-working labor force that is well educated. This labor is also cheap relative to that in other countries and therefore encourages foreign investment if the political atmosphere is friendly. Tourism is increasing as tens of thousands flock to see

the beautiful natural environment and fascinating cultures of Vietnam. New possibilities seem endless.

On April 30, 2005—30 years after the end of the Second Indochina War—there were special events to commemorate the war's end in both Vietnam and the United States. The United States held quiet celebrations. Vietnamese immigrants who fled during and after the war visited the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., to thank veterans and their families for their support of the south during the war. In Vietnam, the commemoration was more celebratory; it was not filled with animosity toward the United States, the former foe. The *New York Times* reported that an important parade in Ho Chi Minh City “seemed pointedly designed to depict a nation seeking friendship, notably with the United States.” This is the new Vietnam: still Communist led but more open to other possibilities. Keep a close watch on this important country. Chances are good that it will grow in importance, remain in the news, and have a direct impact on your life. Hopefully, that impact will be positive!

Facts at a Glance

Country Name	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Location	Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, and South China Sea; neighbors include China, Laos, and Cambodia
Capital	Hanoi
Area	127,244 square miles (329,560 square kilometers)
Climate	Tropical in south; monsoonal in north, with hot, rainy season (mid-May to mid-September) and warm, dry season (mid-October to mid-March)
Coastline	2,140 miles (3,444 kilometers)
Natural Hazards	Occasional typhoons with extensive flooding
Land Use	Arable land: 20 percent. Permanent crops: 6 percent. Other: 74 percent
Natural Resources	Phosphates, coal, manganese, bauxite, chromate, offshore oil and gas deposits, forests, hydropower
Environmental Issues	Deforestation and soil degradation; water pollution, overfishing, groundwater contamination threatens potable water supply; increasing urban industrialization degrading environment in major cities
Population	83,535,576 (July 2005 estimate)
Population Growth Rate	1.04 percent
Total Fertility Rate	1.94 children born per woman
Life Expectancy at Birth	Total population: 70.61 years. Female: 73.6 years (2005 estimate). Male: 67.82 years
Ethnic Groups	Vietnamese 85 to 90 percent; Chinese, Hmong, Thai, Khmer, Cham, mountain tribal groups
Religion	Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Christian (mostly Roman Catholic), other indigenous beliefs, Islam
Languages	Vietnamese (official), English, French, Chinese, Khmer, mountain area languages
Type of Government	Communist state
Executive Branch	President who serves as chief of state, prime minister who serves as head of government
Legislative Branch	Unicameral National Assembly

Independence	September 2, 1945
Currency	Dong
Industries	Food processing; mining; garment, shoe, machine, cement, chemical fertilizer, glass, tire, oil, coal, steel, and paper manufacturing
Unemployment Rate	1.9 percent (2004 estimate)
Primary Exports	Crude oil, marine products, rice, coffee, rubber, tea, garments, shoes
Export Partners	United States, 21.8 percent; Japan, 13.7 percent; Australia, 7.2 percent; China, 6.5 percent, Germany, 5.8 percent; Singapore, 4.5 percent; UK, 4.4 percent (2003)
Imports	Machinery and equipment, petroleum products, fertilizer, steel products, raw cotton, grain, cement, motorcycles
Import Partners	China, 13.6 percent; Taiwan, 11.4 percent; Japan, 11.2, percent; South Korea, 11 percent; Singapore, 10.3 percent; United States, 5.7 percent; Thailand, 5.4 percent; Hong Kong, 4.2 percent (2003)
Ports and Harbors	Cam Ranh, Da Nang, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Long, Quy Nhon, Nha Trang, Vinh, Vung Tau

History at a Glance

10,000 B.C. The Hoa Binh culture lives along the Red River.

8000–800 B.C. The Bac Son and Quynh Van civilizations exist.

2000–1400 B.C. The Phung-Nguyen civilization flourishes.

257 B.C. The Hung dynasty falls to An Duong Vuong.

257–207 B.C. The Au Lac kingdom exists.

206 The Chinese Han dynasty seizes power in Vietnam.

A.D. 39 Trung Trac and her younger sister, Trung Nhi, lead revolt against the Chinese.

43 The Chinese regain power; the Trung sisters are found dead.

248 Trieu Au, another woman hero, leads an unsuccessful revolt against Chinese rule.

542 Ly Bon is unsuccessful in a revolt against Chinese rule.

618 The Chinese change the name of Vietnam to Annam.

938 General Ngo Quyen defeats the Chinese in a historic battle at the Bach Dang River.

939 Ngo Quyen establishes himself as the king of Vietnam.

1009 Ly Thai To establishes a kingdom, starting the Ly dynasty.

1070 The Temple of Literature, the first Vietnamese university, is established in Hanoi.

1079 The Vietnamese defeat the Champa kingdom.

1226 Rebels seize power from the Ly dynasty; the Tran dynasty begins.

1257 Under Kublai Khan, the Mongols make a first unsuccessful attempt to invade Vietnam.

1284 The Mongols' second attempt to invade Vietnam is unsuccessful.

1287 The Mongols are defeated at Bach Dang River in their third attempt to invade Vietnam.

1500s Vietnam divides into two kingdoms with the Trinh family ruling in the north and the Nguyen family ruling in the south; this lasts for 250 years.

1600s French missionaries arrive in Vietnam.

1771 The Tay Son brothers, Nguyen Hue, Nguyen Nhac, and Nguyen Lu, lead a peasant revolt.

1789 Nguyen Hue unites Vietnam again, and the Tay Son Dynasty begins.

- 1847** The French shell Da Nang.
- 1848** Tu Duc becomes the last emperor of Vietnam.
- 1859** France captures Saigon.
- 1862** Tu Duc signs the lopsided Treaty of Saigon with the French.
- 1883** Tu Duc dies; France seizes Hanoi and most of northern Vietnam.
- 1890** Ho Chi Minh is born.
- 1893** France forms the Union of Indochina, which includes Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.
- 1908** France stifles Vietnam's free school movement.
- 1926** Ho Chi Minh's book *The Revolutionary Path* is published.
- 1927** The Vietnamese nationalist movement begins.
- 1940** Japan's occupation of Vietnam begins.
- 1945** The Viet Minh recapture most of northern Vietnam from the Japanese; Japan surrenders to the Allies.
- 1946** Fighting between France and the Viet Minh begins.
- 1950** China recognizes Ho Chi Minh's government and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
- 1954** The Geneva Agreement ends the war between France and North Vietnam; the treaty also divides Vietnam at the 17th parallel.
- 1955** The United States, under President Eisenhower, begins to send money and military advisors to South Vietnam.
- 1963** Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem is assassinated.
- 1972** The last U.S. military forces are withdrawn from South Vietnam.
- 1975** North Vietnam retakes Saigon and the south to reunite the country.
- 1978** Border fighting with Cambodia begins.
- 1979** China invades Vietnam but is repelled.
- 1995** Vietnam and the United States reestablish diplomatic relations; Vietnam joins ASEAN.
- 2000** President Bill Clinton visits Vietnam.
- 2002–2003** The SARS outbreak hits Vietnam.
- 2005** Vietnam's prime minister, Phan Van Khai, visits the United States.

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- AIDS/HIV
 - as epidemic, 53
 - a threat to people, 52, 91
- Agent Orange, 48
- Agriculture, 11-12, 81
- Air pollution, 91
- Airports, 86-87
- Amnesty International, 73
- Animal life, 22, 81
- Animal tractors, 81
- Annam, 38
- Architecture, 65
- Area, (square miles), 12, 15
- Art, 65
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations, (ASEAN), 10, 12, 49, 79, 80-81, 83, 87, 92
 - the Vision 2020 plan, 80
- Au Lac, 28
- Avian (bird) flu, 53
 - on creating a vaccine, 54
 - risk to the people, 91

- Bac Bo, (north region)
 - dominated by, 17
- Bac Son, 27
- Bao Dai, 44, 46
- Boundary disputes, 76
- Bourgeoisie, 79
- Buddha, 61
 - Eightfold Path, 62
- Buddhism, 33, 59
 - origin of, 60
 - a philosophy, 61
 - and promises, 62
- Buddhist temples, 62

- Calligraphy, 65
- Cambodia, 38, 39, 48
- Cao Dai, 64
- Capital punishment, 73
- Catholic Cathedrals, 63
- Catholicism, 59
 - practiced in Vietnam, 63
- Chams, 33-34

- China, 48
 - control in Vietnam, 29
 - impact on Vietnam, 26
 - improvements made in Vietnam, 31
 - invasion of, (1979). 48
 - as threat to Vietnam, 89-90
- Chinese Millennium, 31
- Christianity, 37
- Cities, 10-11
- Citizen
 - duties of, 75
 - rights of, 73-74
 - role of, 73
- Climate
 - humidity, 19
 - temperatures, 20
 - and tropical latitudes, 19
- Clinton, Bill, 49
- Coastline
 - economic advantages of, 87
- Cochinchina, 38
- Cold War, 8, 26, 48, 80
- Communication
 - and limited, 85
- Communism, 41
- Communist Manifesto, The*, (Marx), 78
- Communist Party, 10
- Communist Party of Vietnam, (CPV), 68, 69, 71, 73
- Confucianism, 31
- Constitution of Vietnam
 - adopted in 1992, 68
 - preamble to, (excerpt), 68-69
- Crude oil, 82
- Cultural landscape, 14
- Currency
 - the dong, (VND), 85
- Cuu long, (nine dragons), 20

- Da Nang, 87
- Declaration on the Conduct of Parties, 76
- Deforestation, 14-15, 24, 91

Index

- Democracy, 67-68
- Democratic Republic of Vietnam, (DRV), 44, 45-46
- Dictatorship, 67
 - the rule of man, 68
- Dien Bien Phu, 44-45
- District People's Court, 72
- Doi Moi, 48-49, 87
- Dong Son culture, 28
- Drinking water, 10
 - unclean, 59
- Duong Van Minh, 47

- Economic reforms, 80-81
- Eisenhower, D., 44, 46
- Election, (2004), 8
- Engels, Friedrich, 78, 79, 80
- Environmental degradation, 10, 24
- Ethnic groups, 54
- Exports, 84

- Factory jobs, 83
- Fan Si Pan, 19
- Farmers, 12, 81
- Fishing, 24
- Flag
 - five points of, 10
- Flooding
 - causes of, 23
- Foods, 57
 - desserts, 59
 - Oriental tea, 59
 - and seafood, 59
 - on spices, 58
- Foreign Policy, 75, 76
- Forests, 23
- France, 26, 44-45, 55, 63, 84
 - arrival in Vietnam, 37-38
 - historical connection, 64-65
 - improvements made in Vietnam, 39
- Free market mechanisms, 80, 83, 87
- Free school movement, 40
- Futurists, 89

- Geneva Agreement, 45, 46
- Government
 - the Executive Branch, 69-70
 - the Judicial Branch, 71-73
 - the National Assembly, 71
 - the president, 69-70
 - the prime minister, 70
 - the vice president, 70
- Gross Domestic Product, (GDP), 77, 81
- Guatma, 60-61
- Guerrilla warfare, 43
- Gulf of Tonkin, 17, 19, 22

- Hai Phong, 17
- Han Dynasty, 28, 29
- Hanoi, 17, 22, 32-33, 47
 - climate in, 20
- Hiroshima, 43
- Hoa Binh, 27
- Hoa Hao, 64
- Ho Chi Minh, 19, 41-42, 44, 46, 69
- Ho Chi Minh City, 17, 77
 - temperatures in, 20
- Holidays
 - Tet, 66
- Hung Dynasty, 28
- Hung Vuong, 28
- Hydropower, 23

- Imports, 85
- Indochina War, 44, 63
- Indo-Chinese Communist Party, 42
 - goal of, 41
- Industrialization, 24
- International organizations, 75
- International trade, 84
- Internet access, 86

- Japan
 - economic rise, 48
 - invading Vietnam, 41
- Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man, 63
- John Paul II, (Pope), 63

- Kennedy, John F., 47
 Khmer Rouge, 48
 Khmers, 33-34
- Labor force, 92
 Lac fields, 28
 Land features, 15, 17, 19
 Language, 57
 and dialects, 55
 on tones, 55-56
 Laos, 38, 39
 Le Dynasty, 35
 Lenin, V. I., 40-41
 Life expectancy, 51
 Literacy, 51, 83
 Literature, 65
 Location, 8, 10
 impact of, 15
 the sea, 15
 Ly Bon, 32
 Ly Dynasty, 32, 34
 Ly Thai To, 32
- Major corporations, (foreign), 77,
 83, 88
 Malaysia, 48
 Manufacturing districts, 77
 Marx, Karl, 40-41, 79, 80
 on economic practices, 78-79
 Media, 85
 Mekong River, 15, 17, 38, 50-51, 87,
 89
 flooding in, 23
 and nations claiming the river,
 20-21
 source of, 20
 Military conflicts, 10
 Minerals, 23, 82-83
 Minority cultures, 55
 Missionaries, 37
 Mongols, 34, 35
 Monsoons, 10, 19
 season of, 14
 Music
 forms of, 65
- Nagasaki, 43
 Nam Bo, (southern region), 15, 17
 Names, 56
 Nam Viet, 28, 36-37
 Napoleon III, 38
 National anthem, 90-91
 National Assembly, 51
 Natural resources, 10, 82
 Neolithic period, 27
 Newspapers, 85
New York Times, 93
 Ngo Dinh Diem, 46-47
 Ngo Quyen, 32
 Nguyen Anh, 35-36, 37
 Nguyen Hue, 35
 Nguyen Lu, 35
 Nguyen Nhac, 35
 Nirvana, 61-62
 Nixon, Richard, 47
- Pac Bo Cave, 19
 People's Council, 73
 Phan Dinh Phung, 38
 Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park,
 19
 Phung Nguyen culture, 27
 Physical land, 10
 Plant life, 22
 Political, 10
 Political rights, 12
 Population, 12, 25, 91
 distribution of, 50
 growth rate, 51
 Population Reference Bureau, (PRB),
 51
 Products, 83
 Proletariat, 79
 Property, 80
 Protestant, 59
 number in Vietnam, 63-64
 Provinces
 three regions of, 73
 Provincial People's Court, 72
 Purchasing power parity, (PPP),
 81

Index

- Qin Dynasty, 28, 29
- Quynh Van culture, 27
- Red River, 21-22, 27, 50-51
- Religion, 59
- Reunification Express, (train), 86
- Revolutionary Path, The*, (Ho Chi Minh), 41
- Rice, 12, 22
 - major crop, 81
 - wet and dry techniques, 27, 81
- Rice paddies, 14, 81
- Rice straw, 81
- Saigon, 48
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome, (SARS), 53
- Singapore, 48
- Socialist realism, 65
- Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 68
- Soil, 15
 - degradation, 24
- Southeast Asia, 8, 10, 27
- South Korea, 48
- Soviet Union, 41-42, 44, 46
- Supreme People's Court, 72
- Taiwan, 48
- Taoism, 31
- Tay Son Dynasty, 35-36, 37
- Temple of Literature, 32-33
- Thailand, 48
- Thuc kingdom, 28
- Tonkin, 38
- Tourism, 92-93
- Trade, 12
- Traffic jams, 11
- Tran Dynasty, 34
- Tran Hung Dao, 35
- Transportation
 - and slow progress, 86
- Treaty of Saigon, 38
- Trieu Au, 31
- Trieu Da, 28, 29
- Trung Bo, (central region)
 - dominated by, 17
- Trung sisters, 29, 62
 - as national patriots, 30-31
- Tu Duc, 37, 38
- Typhoons, 23-24
- Union of Indochina, 38, 39
- United States, 26, 43
- Urbanization, 14-15, 24-25, 91
- Urban life, 12
- Van Lang kingdom, 28
- Viet Cong, 47
- Viet Minh, 43, 44
- Vietnamese Nationalism, 40-41
- Vietnamese remains, 27
- Vietnamization, 47
- Vietnam Population Strategy for the Period 2001-2010, 51-52
- Vietnam War, (Second Indochina War), 10, 47, 93
- Vietnam War Memorial, 93
- Vinalines, 87
- Water buffalo, 81
- Water pollution, 24, 91
- World War II, 43, 48, 68
- Writing system, 57
- Zero population growth, 52

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