

Vietnam in *Perspective*

An Orientation Guide



Technology Integration Division
June 2009



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

Map of Vietnam



Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 PROFILE.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	6
FACTS AND FIGURES	6
CHAPTER 2 GEOGRAPHY	11
INTRODUCTION.....	11
CLIMATE.....	11
GEOGRAPHIC DIVISIONS	12
THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS	12
RED RIVER DELTA	12
THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS	13
THE COASTAL LOWLANDS	13
MEKONG DELTA	13
TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES.....	13
TRUONG SON	13
HOANG LIEN	14
MAJOR CITIES.....	14
HANOI.....	14
HO CHI MINH CITY.....	15
HAIPHONG	15
HUE.....	16
MAJOR RIVERS.....	16
RED RIVER.....	16
HUONG RIVER.....	17
MEKONG RIVER.....	17
WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY	17
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS	18
NATURAL DISASTERS.....	19
CHAPTER 3 HISTORY	20
INTRODUCTION.....	20
ANCIENT HISTORY	20
AN INDEPENDENT VIETNAMESE KINGDOM IS FOUNDED	21
LY DYNASTY	21
TRAN DYNASTY.....	22
LE DYNASTY.....	22
NGUYEN DYNASTY.....	22
FRENCH COLONIAL RULE	23
THE CONSOLIDATION OF POWER.....	23
THE RISE OF HO CHI MINH.....	24
WORLD WAR II AND JAPANESE OCCUPATION	24
VIETNAM DIVIDED	25

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TWO DIFFERENT SYSTEMS.....	26
THE FALL OF NGO DINH DIEM	27
DEEPENING AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE VIETNAM WAR.....	28
VIETNAMIZATION AND THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS	29
NATIONAL REUNIFICATION.....	30
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	31

CHAPTER 4 ECONOMY 36

INTRODUCTION.....	36
STANDARD OF LIVING.....	36
AGRICULTURE	37
RICE	37
COFFEE	37
COCOA.....	39
AQUACULTURE.....	39
SHRIMP	39
CATFISH.....	40
INDUSTRY.....	40
FOREIGN INVESTMENT	41
TRADE	42
TOURISM.....	42
BANKING.....	43
TRANSPORTATION.....	44
ENERGY	45
ECONOMIC OUTLOOK.....	45

CHAPTER 5 SOCIETY 47

INTRODUCTION.....	47
ETHNIC GROUPS.....	47
RELIGION.....	48
GENDER ISSUES	49
CLOTHING	51
WOMEN.....	51
MEN	51
CUISINE.....	51
THE ARTS	53
LITERATURE	53
MUSIC	54
WATER PUPPETS.....	54
SPORTS.....	55

CHAPTER 6 SECURITY 57

INTRODUCTION.....	57
U.S.-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS	57
RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.....	60

CHINA	60
CAMBODIA.....	61
LAOS	61
VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES	62
POLICE.....	63
ISSUES AFFECTING SECURITY.....	63
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM	63
TERRORIST GROUPS	64
POVERTY	65
CORRUPTION.....	65
GEOPOLITICS OF WATER RESOURCES	66

Chapter 1 Profile

Introduction

Michael Herr concludes his critically acclaimed book of war reportage, *Dispatches*, with the observation, “Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we’ve all been there.” For many, Vietnam is more a war than a country. Over the course of the 20th century, Vietnam was at war with France, the U.S., Cambodia, and China. The seeds for peacetime prosperity were not planted until 1986 when the communist government, faced with food shortages and a growing exodus of “boat people” refugees, introduced a policy of economic “renovation” (*doi moi*) that disbanded agricultural collectives. Farmers were given secure tenure over the land they tilled and allowed to sell their output. Free market reforms were subsequently expanded to encompass most of the economy, enabling entrepreneurship to flourish. Until the global economic downturn in 2008, Vietnam ranked as the second fastest growing economy in Asia after China.



© DanWit Flickr.com
Mekong River sunrise

Facts and Figures¹

Area:

Slightly larger than New Mexico

Total: 329,560 sq km (127,243 sq mi)

Land: 325,360 sq km (125,622 sq mi)

Water: 4,200 sq km (1,621 sq mi)

Land Boundaries

Total: 4,639 km (2,882 mi)

Border countries: Cambodia 1,228 km (763 mi), China 1,281 km (796 mi), Laos 2,130 km (1325 mi)

Population

86,967,524 (July 2009 est.)

Age Distribution

0–14 years: 24.9% (male 11,230,402/female 10,423,901)

15–64 years: 69.4% (male 29,971,088/female 30,356,393)

65 years and over: 5.7% (male 1,920,043/female 3,065,697) (2009 est.)

Median Age:

Total: 27.4 years

Male: 26.4 years

Female: 28.5 years (2008 est.)

¹ All statistics from the Central Intelligence Agency. World Factbook. “Vietnam.” Updated 9 April 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>

Population Growth Rate: 0.977% (2009 est.)

Life Expectancy at Birth:

Total population: 71.58 years

Male: 68.78 years

Female: 74.57 years (2009 est.)

Total Fertility Rate: 1.83 children born/woman (2009 est.)

HIV/AIDS Adults Prevalence Rate: 0.5% (2007 est.)

Nationality:

Noun: Vietnamese (singular and plural)

Adjective: Vietnamese

Ethnic Groups:

Kinh (Viet) 86.2%, Tay 1.9%, Thai 1.7%, Muong 1.5%, Khome 1.4%, Hoa (Chinese) 1.1%, Nun 1.1%, Hmong 1%, others 4.1% (1999 census)

Religion:

Buddhist 9.3%, Catholic 6.7%, Hoa Hao 1.5%, Cao Dai 1.1%, Protestant 0.5%, Muslim 0.1%, none 80.8% (1999 census)

Languages:

Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favored as a second language), some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)



Literacy:

Definition: Age 15 and over can read and write

Total population: 90.3%

Male: 93.9%

Female: 86.9% (2002 est.)

Country Name:

Conventional long form: Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Conventional short form: Vietnam

Local long form: Cong Hoa Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Viet Nam

Local short form: Viet Nam

Abbreviation: SRV

Government Type: Communist State

Capital: Hanoi

Administrative Divisions:

59 provinces (*tin**h*, singular and plural) and 5 municipalities (*thanh pho*, singular and plural)

Provinces: An Giang, Bac Giang, Bac Kan, Bac Lieu, Bac Ninh, Ba Ria-Vung Tau, Ben Tre, Binh Dinh, Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, Binh Thuan, Ca Mau, Cao Bang, Dac Lak, Dac Nong, Dien Bien, Dong Nai, Dong Thap, Gia Lai, Ha Giang, Ha Nam, Ha Tay, Ha Tinh, Hai

Duong, Hau Giang, Hoa Binh, Hung Yen, Khanh Hoa, Kien Giang, Kon Tum, Lai Chau, Lam Dong, Lang Son, Lao Cai, Long An, Nam Dinh, Nghe An, Ninh Binh, Ninh Thuan, Phu Tho, Phu Yen, Quang Binh, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Quang Ninh, Quang Tri, Soc Trang, Son La, Tay Ninh, Thai Binh, Thai Nguyen, Thanh Hoa, Thua Thien-Hue, Tien Giang, Tra Vinh, Tuyen Quang, Vinh Long, Vinh Phuc, Yen Bai

Municipalities: Can Tho, Da Nang, Hai Phong, Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh



Independence Day: 2 September 1945 (from France)

National Holiday: Independence Day, 2 September (1945)

Legal System:

Based on communist legal theory and French civil law system; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal

Executive Branch:

Chief of state: President Nguyen Minh TRIET (since 27 June 2006); Vice President Nguyen Thi DOAN (since 25 July 2007)

Head of government: Prime Minister Nguyen Tan DUNG (since 27 June 2006); Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh HUNG (since 28 June 2006), Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung HAI (since 2 August 2007), Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien NHAN (since 2 August 2007), Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia KHIEM (since 28 June 2006), and Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh TRONG (since 28 June 2006)

Cabinet: Cabinet appointed by president based on proposal of prime minister and confirmed by National Assembly

Elections: President elected by the National Assembly from among its members for five-year term; last held 27 June 2006 (next to be held in 2011); prime minister appointed by the president from among the members of the National Assembly; deputy prime ministers appointed by the prime minister; appointment of prime minister and deputy prime ministers confirmed by National Assembly

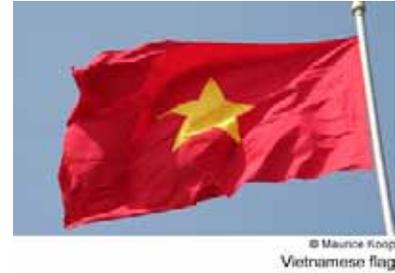
Election results: Nguyen Minh TRIET elected president; percent of National Assembly vote - 94%; Nguyen Tan DUNG elected prime minister; percent of National Assembly vote - 92%

Legislative Branch:

Unicameral National Assembly or Quoc Hoi (500 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms)

Elections: Last held 20 May 2007 (next to be held in May 2012)

Election results: Percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - CPV 450, non-party CPV-approved 42, self-nominated 1; note - 493 candidates were elected; CPV and non-party CPV-approved delegates were members of the Vietnamese Fatherland Front

**Judicial Branch:**

Supreme People's Court (chief justice is elected for a five-year term by the National Assembly on the recommendation of the president)

Political Parties and Leaders:

Communist Party of Vietnam or CPV [Nong Duc Manh]; other parties proscribed

International Organization Participation:

Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), Asean Regional Forum (ARF), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Colombo Plan (CP), EAS, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Group of 77 (G-77), International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRM), International Development Association (IDA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Labor Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Mobile Satellite Organization (IMSO), Interpol, International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), International Organization for (ISO), International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (ITSO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), International Organization of Francophonie (OIF), Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), United Nations (UN), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), World Confederation of Labor (WCL), World Customs Organization (WCO), World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Trade Organization (WTO)

Diplomatic Representation from the U.S.:

Chief of mission: Ambassador Michael W. Michalak

Embassy: 7 Lang Ha Street, Ba Dinh District, Hanoi

Mailing address: PSC 461, Box 400,

FPO AP 96521-0002

Telephone: [84] (4) 3850-5000

FAX: [84] (4) 3850-5010

Consulate(s) general: Ho Chi Minh City

GDP per capita: \$2,800 (2008 est.)

Labor Force: 47.41 million (2008 est.)

Labor Force by Occupation:

Agriculture: 55.6%

Industry: 18.9%

Services: 25.5% (July 2005)



© Fokker_Eye/ Flickr.com
Vietnamese banknotes

Unemployment Rate: 4.9% (2008 est.)

Telephones (landline): 10.8 million (2007)

Telephone (mobile-cellular): 33.2 million (2007)

Internet:

Hosts: 84,151 (2008)

Users: 17.87 million (2007)

Airports: 44

Airports with paved runways: *Total:* 37

Chapter 2 Geography

Introduction

Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country commonly described as two rice baskets hung on a shoulder pole (*don ganh*), the traditional method of carrying goods to market.² The two baskets are the rice growing regions of the Red River Delta in the North and the Mekong Delta in the South with the narrow central region acting as the pole. While a direct air route between the two ends of the country is only 1,600 km (1,000 mi), following the meandering coastline makes it a journey of 3,260 km (2,025 mi).³ Prior to the 20th century, sea transport was the primary means of connecting the northern and southern parts of the country. Boat travel remains faster and cheaper than land routes for many Vietnamese since there is an estuary approximately every 20 km (12 mi) of coastline.⁴ Vietnam's lack of a central river artery prevented the establishment of a river-based economic and administrative core in contrast to neighboring Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma.⁵



© Marta Gładowska
Boats on the Mekong Delta

Climate

Due to differences in latitude and topography, Vietnam can be divided into two climatic regions separated by the Truong Son mountain range. The southern climatic zone extends from the Mekong Delta and Coastal Lowlands into the higher elevations of the Central Highlands. Although temperatures are cooler and less humid in the highlands, all these areas enjoy a moderate tropical climate. The limestone mountainous areas in the North, by contrast, subject the northern region to significant climatic effects from continental Asia, which explains its greater range in year-round temperatures.⁶

Vietnam's weather is dictated by cyclical monsoons (*gio mua*) and rainfall averages over 1,000 mm (40 in). Yet it falls at different times of the year. From May through September, the southern monsoon sets in and the entire country experiences south to southeasterly winds that deposit moisture, usually in the form of intense, but brief, afternoon showers in southern and south central Vietnam. However, the central coastal

²University of Oklahoma, Tulsa. "Geography of Vietnam."

<http://tulsagrad.ou.edu/okitea/The%20Geography%20of%20Vietnam.ppt>

³ *New York Times*. "Regions in Brief." 20 November 2006.

http://travel.nytimes.com/frommers/travel/guides/asia/vietnam/frm_vietnam_2403020814.html?pagewanted=print

⁴ Vietnam – United State Trade Promotion. "Provincial Features." 2004.

http://www.bvom.com/resource/vn_provinces.asp?pContent=province_home

⁵ History Cooperative. Wheeler, Charles (University of California, Irvine). "A Maritime Logic to Vietnamese History? Littoral Society in Hoi An's Trading World c.1550–1830" (paper presented at Seascapes, Littoral Cultures, and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., 12–15 February 2003). 5 May 2009. <http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/wheeler.html>

⁶ Working Document, UN FAO. Marsh, Anthony. "Diversification by Smallholders: Viet Nam Robusta Coffee." 2007. http://www.fao.org/Ag/ags/publications/docs/AGSF_WorkingDocuments/agsfwd19.pdf

lowlands are blocked by the Truong Son Mountains from receiving much rain during the summer monsoon.

From October through March or April, the northern monsoon is dominant, but the northerly to northeasterly winds primarily affect the North. Precipitation is brought by the northeastern monsoon between December and February. During these months northern Vietnam is overcast; February and March are typically marked by continuous drizzle, while southern Vietnam remains dry and sunny. In the Central Highlands and those areas that face northeast, the maximum rainfall occurs between September and January when severe tropical storms form in the western Pacific. Flooding tends to occur in the North during these winter months.



During the dry season from November to April, the average temperature in Ho Chi Minh City is 25° C (77° F), climbing to 30° C (86° F) during the summer monsoon months. In Hanoi, temperatures can dip as low as 5–6° C (41–42° F) during the winter, and rise to 35° C (95° F) in the summer.⁷

Geographic Divisions

Vietnam, which includes tropical lowlands and densely forested highlands, is conventionally divided into three parts: north, central, and south. In reality, it is comprised of five separate geographical regions.

The Northern Highlands

Much of the Northern Highlands lie at altitudes greater than 2,000 m (6,600 ft). The mountains that rim the country's northwestern border are the eastern extension of the Himalayas. Ethnic tribal groups, who began to migrate into the area from China centuries ago, rely on slash-and-burn farming and hunting for their livelihood. Most Vietnamese migration to the Northern Highlands has been recent, primarily to develop the tourist industry based in the resort town of Sapa, reachable by road and rail.

Red River Delta

The Red River Delta or northern plain (*Bac Bo*) is roughly triangular in shape, covering approximately 17,321 km (6,688 sq mi).⁸ It was formed by alluvial deposits carried from the Red and the Thai Binh Rivers, which accumulated to form the delta. The junction of the two rivers was where the Viet (*Kinh*) people originally settled. They developed an agricultural economy based on wet-rice cultivation, which relied on a sophisticated system of water control. It remains the rice bowl for the northern part of the country.

⁷ GuideVietnam.com. "Vietnam Climate –Weather." <http://www.guidevietnam.com/travel/weather.html>

⁸ Google Books. *Vietnam: A Natural History*. Sterling, Eleanor. "Chapter 6: North Vietnam: Termination of the Himalayas [p. 159]." 2006. New Haven: Yale University Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=D1v2KV6HGOIC&pg=PA159&lpg=PA159&dq=red+river+delta+vietnam&source=bl&ots=g5cvXLvVva&sig=BUPsecIBbXiS-B71pcsZQXHDWGg&hl=en&ei=U462SeqBDZGksQOj4LDjCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=5&ct=result#PPA159,M1

The Central Highlands

Much of the Central Highlands (*Tay Nguyen*) is comprised of five flat plateaus that are unsuitable for food production. Under French colonial rule, the highly forested area was developed for cash-crop agriculture. The amount of area devoted to coffee, tea and rubber plantations has expanded since independence. In this sparsely inhabited region, the long-standing residents, a group of ethnic tribal minorities collectively referred to as “Montagnards,” have been joined by Vietnamese settlers. This has led to violent disputes over land use in recent years.⁹

The Coastal Lowlands

The coastal lowlands run from the mountains south of Hue to the northern edge of the Mekong Delta. This is a densely populated fertile strip which is less susceptible to flooding than either of the deltas and, therefore, provides a more stable livelihood to residents who not only farm, but also fish. Close proximity to sand beaches has made tourism an important component of the local economy for many coastal lowland communities, as well as cities on the coast, such as Nha Trang.

Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta, covering about 40,000 sq km (15,440 sq mi), is a low-level marshy plain sustained by nine branches of the Mekong River. It was originally part of Cambodia, and an ethnic Khmer minority remains. The river is the economic backbone of daily life in the delta’s towns, which are connected by ferry. A maze of waterways provides the only access to many villages.¹⁰

Houses are built on stilts so they can be moved during the monsoon rains. The flooding caused by the rains submerges much of the Delta under water. The sediment carried by the water renders the soil rich with nutrients. In addition to rice, many tropical fruits are grown in the Delta.



© Marta Galdowika
Boats on the Mekong Delta

Topographical Features

Truong Son

The main arteries of the Truong Son Mountain range, also known as the Annamite Cordillera, run north–south along Vietnam’s border with Laos and Cambodia, where heights can reach 3,048 m (10,000 ft). It was here that an intricate network of footpaths, trails and unmarked dirt roads, known collectively as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, served as supply routes during the Vietnam War.

A branch of the Truong Son cuts eastward toward the sea, creating a natural border that cuts through the middle of the country. This necessitated a pass in the final spur called Hai Van (“Sea of Clouds”), which rises 435 meters (1,427 ft) above sea level, to connect the two parts of the country by road that winds across the mountain.

⁹ BBC News. “Vietnam Sends Army into Highlands.” 8 February 2001. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1160049.stm>

¹⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Vietnam: Geography.” 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/vietnam/33.htm>

Hoang Lien

Popularly known as the “roof of Indochina,” the Hoang Lien Mountains, located in the northwest corner of the country, are home to Vietnam’s highest mountain. Rising high above the lush jungle, Mount Fansipan’s peak stands 3,143m (10, 312 ft) above sea level. This range is also known for its biodiversity, containing an estimated 25% of Vietnam’s endemic plant species, including 177 species endemic to the region.¹¹ In addition, it supports over 30 tribal groups, many of which are highly dependent on forest resources for their livelihood.

Major Cities

Hanoi

Hanoi is the historical capital of Vietnam located in an area that is considered the birthplace of Vietnamese culture. Prior to southward migration, it was the country’s commercial and manufacturing hub, as well. The name means “inside the river bend,” reflecting Hanoi’s prominent location between the Red, To Lich and, Kim Nguu Rivers and the West Lake.¹² While this placement naturally constrained growth, it also made the city more defensible against potential enemies.



© Erin Baker
Flooded city street

The city is dotted with landmarks commemorating the defeat of the Chinese who occupied Vietnam for 1,000 years and then made it a vassal state.¹³ Yet Hanoi followed the Chinese model and developed as a guild city comprised of neighborhoods (*phuong*) that were engaged in the production of one kind of tangible good.¹⁴ This heritage remains evident in the historic Old Quarter where businesses are organized by commercial specialization (*hang*).¹⁵ The silk shops of Hang Dao Street, for example, sell silk fabric and garments procured from villages that specialize in silk production. This local supply relationship may have been in place for several generations.¹⁶ (Population: 3 million, expected to double to 6 million after administrative boundaries are expanded.)¹⁷

¹¹ FFI Vietnam. Lam Hoang. “Engaging Local Communities in Protected Area Development, Functioning and Management[p. 2].” http://www.isgmard.org.vn/Information%20Service/Report/Forestry/FSSP-Forum%20May%202007/ENGAGING%20LOCAL%20COMMUNITIES%20IN%20PROTECTED%20AREA%20DEVELOPMENT_e.doc

¹² Suite101.com. Walsh, John. “Hanoi: A Brief History.” 18 August 2004. http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/east_asian_history/110475

¹³ Society and Culture Association, University of New South Wales. Fahey, Stephanie. “Intercultural Communication between Australia & Vietnam.” March 2000. <http://www.ptc.nsw.edu.au/scansw/intcultustviet.html>

¹⁴ *Hanoi: Biography of a City*. Logan, William Stewart. “Chapter 2: Thang Long, the Ascending Dragon: Pre-Colonial Hanoi and the Chinese Imprint [p. 38].” 2000. Sydney: New South Wales University Press.

¹⁵ Things Asian. Cohen, Barbara. “Hanoi’s Old Quarter: 36 Streets.” 1 October 1994. <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1001>

¹⁶ *Hanoi: City of the Rising Dragon*. Boudarel, Georges and Nguyen Van Ky. “Chapter 1: A City That Remembers [p. 21].” 2002. Oxford: Rowan Littlefield Publisher.

¹⁷ Binh Duong Daily. “NA Ratifies a Resolution on Adjusting Ha Noi Capital’s Administrative Boundary.” 30 May 2008. <http://www.baobinhduong.org.vn/detailen.aspx?Item=49523>

Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is still widely referred to by the Vietnamese by its pre-1975 name, “Saigon,” which remains the name of the city’s District 1 commercial center.¹⁸ Saigon was the capital of French Cochinchina, as well as the capital of the American-backed Republic of Vietnam (1955–1975). Flanked by the Saigon River, this former southern government seat was at war with the Hanoi-based government throughout most of its existence. The population of the city swelled to four million during the latter years of the conflict as villagers sought safety from the bombing.¹⁹ In 1975, the cessation of hostilities and commencement of reunification allowed some of the displaced to return to their villages. The new government, which nationalized the economy, took measures to further reduce the city’s population. Resettlement programs to new economic zones were implemented, since urban jobs were in short supply.

The economic reforms introduced in 1986, referred to as renovation (*doi moi*), enabled the city to once again become a bustling commercial metropolis. The private sector is flourishing and foreign investment welcome. Migrants are again flocking to HCMC in search of opportunity and the burgeoning population is putting pressure on the city’s infrastructure.²⁰ This has not slowed growth in suburban districts, which are in reality squatter settlements. The population is expected to double by 2025. Growth will ensure the city continues to expand into the surrounding swampland.²¹ (Population: 6.6 million 2007 est.)²²

Haiphong

Haiphong is the principal port serving the northern part of the country. It came under Japanese occupation during World War II where the Japanese Army met no French resistance.²³ During the Vietnam War, most of the communist government’s imported military supplies came in through Haiphong which served as a major supply depot. As a result, it was heavily bombed by U.S. forces.²⁴

¹⁸ Altogether the city, which was merged with a surrounding province in 1975, has 24 urban and rural districts.

¹⁹ Google Books. *When the War Was Over*. Becker, Elizabeth. “Chapter 5: The Ultimate Revolution [p. 168].” 1998. New York: Public Affairs.

http://books.google.com/books?id=mg9QLPuOZvgC&pg=PA169&lpg=PA169&dq=bombing+saigon+population+four+million&source=bl&ots=ptanqvzWH&sig=PnEC_7bX9_kProlscojbF6CVY0o&hl=en&ei=OkO4Sb67OonKtQOrpKFI&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=5&ct=result

²⁰ UN Research Institute for Social Development. Wust, Sebastian. “Metropolization and the Ecological Crisis: Precarious Settlements in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.” No date.

[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/7E11053727CAD373C1256F3C00400FEF/\\$file/chap3.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/7E11053727CAD373C1256F3C00400FEF/$file/chap3.pdf)

²¹ *International Herald Tribune*. Mydans, Seth. “Ho Chi Minh City Hurries to Become a Megacity.” 17 November 2006. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/11/17/news/saigon.php>

²² Geographische Rundschau International Edition. Waibel, Michael. “Ho Chi Minh City – a Mega-Urban Region in the Making.” January 2009. http://www.michael-waibel.de/GR2009_waibel_p30-31.pdf

²³ *Vietnam 1945: the quest for power*. Marr, David. “Chapter 1: The French and the Japanese [p. 20].” 1997. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁴ Google Books. *Vietnam in Pictures*. Taus-Bolstad, Stacy. 2003. Twenty-First Century Books. http://books.google.com/books?id=3U014Ik_cvAC&pg=PT20&lpg=PT20&dq=danang+population&source=bl&ots=i3nB0WZqxR&sig=Rkk82pnd9i2-

Today, Haiphong is a civilian industrial hub and Vietnam's leading ship-building center. Ships jostle for dock space in its busy harbor. To expand its capacity to handle trade, the government in Hanoi has invested in renovating and upgrading the infrastructure that serves Haiphong such as roads and the railway along with water and power plants. (Population 1.6 million 2006 est).²⁵

Hue

Hue, an ancient city, occupies a strategic location from which to govern north and south. In the early 19th century, it displaced Hanoi as the imperial capital to symbolize ruling from the center. After French colonization, the Emperor was reduced to a puppet with purely ceremonial duties who continued to preside over the imperial court in the city's famous Citadel. When the monarchy was abolished in 1945, Hue became a provincial center.

In 1954, the Geneva Accords divided the country into a communist-governed North and a non-communist South. Hue was a mere 88.5 km (55 mi) from the line of demarcation in the demilitarized zone (DMZ). It became the site of the bloodiest engagement of the 1968 Tet offensive during which the communists captured control of Hue and held it for three weeks.²⁶ The city was reduced to rubble under intense fighting. Rebuilt after the war, its cultural relics play a role in Vietnamese national identity while its international tourist appeal relies on its proximity to the DMZ. (Population: 300,000.)

Major Rivers

Red River

The headwaters of the Red River lie in China's Yunnan Province. After entering Vietnam, the river is joined by several tributaries. It forms a vast delta before ultimately emptying into the Gulf of Tonkin after a 1,200 km (750 mi) journey.²⁷ In the Delta, the water level undergoes dramatic changes between dry and rainy seasons. The former registers a flow rate of approximately 430 m³/sec, (264 gallons/sec) which can accelerate 8 to 14 times this rate during the latter.²⁸ This is attributed to mountain origin coupled with Vietnam's monsoon climate that sometimes results in very violent floods that destroy communities



TsfpH6UGdcGflGk&hl=en&ei=vKa1SYrTKZm0sQPIheDsCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result

²⁵ Vietnam Tourism. "Haiphong City." No date.

http://www.vietnamtourism.com/e_pages/country/province.asp?mt=8431&uid=1211

²⁶ Google Books. *Marines in Hue City: A Portrait of Urban Combat, Tet 1968*. Hammel, Eric. 2007. MBI Publishing Company.

http://books.google.com/books?id=e8eR2NDSfQC&dq=fire+in+the+streets+hue&source=gbs_summary_s&cad=0

²⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica. "Red River." No date.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/494408/Red-River>

²⁸ Magazine on European Research, European Commission. "Natural Disasters: Lessons from the Red River." July 2005. http://ec.europa.eu/research/rtdinfo/special_inco/04/article_2841_en.html

and cropland. The flooding season occurs from June to November in the upstream region, and June to October in the downstream area.²⁹

Huong River

While Central Vietnam lacks a dominant river, there are numerous smaller ones including the Huong, (which means “perfume”), that is fed by two separate tributaries in the Truong Son Mountains. Only 30 km (16 mi) long, the river has a historical significance since a series of imperial tombs line its banks. Popular with both domestic and international tourists, the Huong River is also a lively site of local commerce.

Mekong River

The Mekong River is the 12th longest river in the world and the eighth largest in terms of volume. Originating in Tibet, the Mekong is augmented by upland tributaries in western China. It then flows through Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam where it branches into multiple waterways. Along its 4,350 km (2,703 mi) journey, the Mekong nourishes rice paddies and provides the primary source of protein for approximately one hundred million people. It ultimately empties into the South China Sea, referred to as the East Sea in Vietnam.³⁰



© Maria Sadownika
Boats on the Mekong Delta

All of the riparian countries, including Vietnam, are interested in exploiting the Mekong’s hydroelectric power potential. Though there is some coordination between governments, these projects threaten the ability of the river to sustain not only human communities dependent on the monsoonal cycle of water delivery, but the region’s biodiversity, as well.³¹

Wildlife and Biodiversity

Approximately 10% of the world’s animal species are found in Vietnam.³² Mammals such as elephants, tigers, and monkeys live in its dense forests. Since the country was closed off to the world for many decades, first due to war, and then diplomatic isolation after reunification, it was not until the 1990s that scientists had documented the existence of 63 vertebrates, 45 previously unknown fish, as well as the *saola*, a forest-dwelling ox.³³ The *saola* was the largest mammal discovered in over half a century; the first

²⁹ Southeast Asia Regional Committee. Nguyen Hoang Tri et al. “Quantifying and Predicting Carbon Fluxes and Fishery Sources in Red River Basin.” 2005. <http://www.sarcs.org/new/initiated/Carbon/Carbon%20Pilot%20Project%20Final%20Report/Vietnam%20Fianl%20Report.pdf>

³⁰ SAISPHERE, The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Brown, Frederick. “The Price of Power in the Mekong Delta.” 2008. <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pressroom/publications/saisphere/2008/brown.htm>

³¹ Mekong River Commission for Sustainable Development. “Hydropower Programme.” No date. <http://www.mrcmekong.org/programmes/hydropower.htm>

³² Environmental Justice Foundation. “Wildlife Trade in Vietnam – A Crisis Facing Bears.” No date. <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page132.html>

³³ International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development. “Record Wildlife Contraband Seized in Vietnam.” 6 February 2009. <http://ictsd.net/i/news/biores/40090/>

evidence of its existence came in the form of horns found in the woods that could not have belonged to any other known animal.³⁴

Discovery of so many new species underscores the importance of conservation. Yet conversion of natural habitat for development purposes, as well as expanded transportation infrastructure has endangered many species. Others are at risk from animal poaching. Increased demand from China for culinary delicacies such as bear paw as well as bear bile, which is used in traditional medicines, has created a thriving market in bear trafficking, among other mammals.

Environmental Hazards

Agent Orange was a chemical defoliant heavily used from 1962 to 1971 by the U.S. government to deny sanctuary to the Viet Cong.³⁵ It denuded the Mekong Delta rainforest, stripping trees bare. Over time, the dioxin from the defoliant extended its reach into the food chain.³⁶ Hanoi claims up to four million of its citizens suffer from Agent Orange-related illnesses. A class action lawsuit filed on their behalf has sought redress in U.S. courts where they have had difficulty establishing that any particular disability or birth defect is directly attributable to Agent Orange.³⁷



Rapid economic growth since the reforms were introduced has resulted in increased levels of pollution in a familiar pattern of “grow first, clean up later.” According to an official Vietnamese government report, 8 out of 10 factories and industrial parks in the country disregard environmental regulations.³⁸ Household enterprises contribute to pollution as well. While shrimp farming has raised the incomes of impoverished Mekong Delta residents, it has introduced effluents into the water supply.³⁹ Vehicular traffic has also increased exponentially and Vietnamese cities now claim the highest number of

³⁴ Animal Info. “Animal Info – Saola.” 28 May 2006.

<http://www.animalinfo.org/species/artiperi/pseunghe.htm>

³⁵ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. “Agent Orange.” 13 November 2008.

<http://www1.va.gov/Agentorange/>

³⁶ BBC News. Fawthrop, Tom “Vietnam’s War Against Agent Orange.” 14 June 2004.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3798581.stm>

³⁷ *Washington Post*, Associated Press. “Court Turns Down Agent Orange Cases.” 2 March 2009.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/02/AR2009030200903.html>

³⁸ Agence France Presse. “80 Percent of Vietnam Factories Breach Pollution Rules: Study.” 17 July 2008.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jndEpIWgRoXAn8xcbot6jHV3z-2w>

³⁹ The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability. Nguyen, Van Trai. “Water Pollution Concerns in Shrimp Farming in Vietnam: A Case Study of Can Gio, Ho Chi Minh City.” No date. <http://ijs.cgpublisher.com/product/pub.41/prod.280>

motorbikes per capita.⁴⁰ The government has been unable to impose more stringent emission standards.⁴¹

Natural Disasters

Water-induced destruction is the primary form of natural disaster. In a typical year, eleven to twelve tropical cyclones, or typhoons, distinguished by wind gusts and torrential rain, visit the South China Sea region.⁴² Since Vietnam was developed through the exploitation of low-level river deltas and coastal areas for wet-rice agriculture, about 70% of the population is affected annually by wide-scale water inundation and destructive flooding.⁴³



Flooded city street

New settlements have contributed to deforestation, particularly in the Central Highlands, which has been planted with coffee bushes that leave the soil completely exposed for the first few years. The red soil, moreover, is relatively infertile with low water retention capacity.⁴⁴ The gradient of the Truong Son Mountains is steep, so water outflow imperils everything in its path.⁴⁵ The damage has increased as a result of population growth. In 1999, unusually heavy rains brought flooding of historic proportions to some areas of the region. Hue, in particular, was inundated with water that paralyzed the city's infrastructure, destroyed surrounding village communities and resulted in hundreds of deaths.⁴⁶ The impact of flooding remains an annual threat.

⁴⁰ East Asia Infrastructure Department, World Bank. "Issues and Dynamics: Urban Systems in Developing East Asia [p. 2]." No date.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPURBDEV/Resources/vietnam-Urbanisation.pdf>

⁴¹ *International Herald Tribune*. Fuller, Thomas. "Air Pollution Fast Becoming an Issue in Booming Vietnam." 6 July 2007. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/07/06/business/pollute.php>

⁴² Human Development Report 2007/2008, UNDP. Nguyen, Huu Ninh. "Flooding in Mekong River Delta, Viet Nam." 2007. http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/papers/Nguyen_Huu%20Ninh.pdf

⁴³ Asian Scholarship. Zoleta-Nantes, Doracie. "Adaptations to Floods and Water-Related Disasters in the Huong River Basin in Thua Thien-Hua, Vietnam." 2007.

<http://www.asianscholarship.org/asf/ejournal/articles/Doracie%20ZOLETA%20NANTES2.pdf>

⁴⁴ Google Books. *Window on a War: An Anthropologist in the Vietnam Conflict*. Hickey, Gerald Cannon. "Chapter 10: Last Days [p. 366]." 2002. Texas Tech University Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=Lru4bby8jFEC&pg=PA366&lpg=PA366&dq=erosion+central+highlands+coffee+bushes+vietnam&source=bl&ots=5a23TnZiuf&sig=KupJZYpPaR-FLiCUV9KPW15aT30&hl=en&ei=eFO1SaqTCpmMsQP9uIyNAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=10&ct=result

⁴⁵ *Los Angeles Times*. Lamb, David. "It was Like the Sky Falling In." 8 November 1999.

<http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/howard/Personal/Trips/Vietnam99/lat-11-08-99.html>

⁴⁶ Overseas Development Institute. Tran, Phong et al. "GIS and Local Knowledge in Disaster Management: A Case Study of Flood Risk Mapping in Vietnam." 2008.

<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~tranphon/Data/GIS%20and%20LK.pdf>

Chapter 3 History

Introduction

Vietnam is a country with a complex and deep network of roots as a settled civilization. Much of its early development stems from forced Sino-integration and assimilation dating back to the second century B.C.E. The Chinese tributary state system subjugated neighboring countries through numerous successive dynasties. Thus, most of Vietnam's history has been consumed with the struggle to carve out a sphere independent of China's domination. Once self-governance was achieved, however, the basic Chinese imperial administrative structure was replicated since there was no clear alternative.⁴⁷



© Andrew Hua
Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi

After absorbing parts of the ancient Cham and Khmer empires, Vietnam struggled to maintain its territorial unity in the face of civil strife and more recent foreign domination. While French colonial rule was brief by historical standards, it changed the course of Vietnamese history. Not only did it provide exposure to communism and other Western ideas, the establishment of a communist government in the North made Vietnam a central front of the Cold War that left the country divided and at war for two decades. Since reunification in 1975, Vietnam has evolved into a socialist market economy.

Ancient History

Archeological evidence indicates present-day Vietnam hosted human settlement in the Paleolithic Age. There is also evidence of a Bronze Age culture. The origins of Vietnamese culture and society, by contrast, are shrouded in legend and continue to be the subject of scholarly dispute. According to lore, the founder of the mythical kingdom known as Van Lang was Hung Vuong, the first ruler of the Hong Bang dynasty (2876–258 B.C.E.).⁴⁸

The Hong Bang dynasty was said to have ruled for eighteen generations. An important advancement occurred by the sixth century B.C.E.: the irrigation of rice fields (*lac dien*) through an elaborate system of canals and dikes. This type of sophisticated farming system would come to define Vietnamese society. It required tight-knit village communities to collectively manage their irrigation systems. These systems in turn produced crop yields that could sustain much higher population densities than competing methods of food production.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *East Asia: From Chinese Predominance to the Rise of the Pacific Rim*. Cotterell, Arthur. "Chapter 5: Early South-East Asia From the Chinese Annexation of Vietnam to the Mongol Invasions [p.78]." 1993. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁸ *Country Studies US. Vietnam: A Country Study*. "Early History." Ronald J. Cima, Ed. 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/vietnam/3.htm>

⁴⁹ eHistory, Ohio State University. Guilmartin, John. "America and Vietnam: The Fifteen Year War." 1991. New York: Military Press. <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/books/aiv/?page=0002>

In 111 B.C.E., emperor Han Wu Di's armies incorporated "Nan Yueh" (now southern China) and territories including northern Vietnam into the imperial defenses of the Han Dynasty.⁵⁰ Nan Yueh (later reversed to Yuenan, the Mandarin name for Vietnam) was deemed valuable since the Red River Delta offered a supply line for China's burgeoning trade with India and Indonesia.⁵¹



Detail of a Hong Bang Dynasty engraving
© Lolo Ly / Wikimedia

During the Western Han Dynasty, Chinese rule was indirect. Vietnam was relegated to serve as a tributary state exporting material wealth and importing intellectual thought. Confucian indoctrination during the course of the next 1,000 years shaped Vietnamese society as it did numerous other East and Southeast Asian countries. Benefits from the imported educational and social ethics aside, Chinese intervention still provoked revolts that were met with more draconian forms of rule. Court officials were dispatched as administrators and gave it the name *Annam*, meaning "pacify the South." The harshness of their rule played a strong role in Vietnamese national identity. It is reflected in official Vietnamese historiography where, regardless of ideology, the emphasis is placed on resistance to Chinese domination.⁵²

An Independent Vietnamese Kingdom is Founded

Taking advantage of the weakness of China's Tang Dynasty in the early 10th century, a renowned military leader, Ly Thuong Kiet, rejected the Chinese claim of sovereignty and declared independence, ending 1,000 years of Chinese rule. In return for recognition of independence of their kingdom (*Dai Viet*), the Vietnamese agreed to remain subordinate by continuing tribute payments to the Chinese emperor.

Ly Dynasty

From the 11th to the early 13th century, the kingdom of *Dai Viet* (the predecessor to the modern Vietnamese state), was consolidated under the Ly Dynasty. As a result of its key supporting role, Buddhism received official endorsement; members of the Ly royal family supported the construction of temples and publicly practiced Buddhist rituals. Despite antipathy toward the Chinese, the influence of Confucianism was evident in the emerging administrative structure. Mandarin scholars were recruited to staff government through a civil service exam after graduating from the Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first institution of higher learning. The Ly Dynasty was able to preserve its tenure by repelling Khmer, Cham,



Statue of Emperor Ly Thai To
© Haini / Wikipedia

⁵⁰ *East Asia: From Chinese Predominance to the Rise of the Pacific Rim*. Cotterell, Arthur. "Chapter 5: Early South-East Asia From the Chinese Annexation of Vietnam to the Mongol Invasions [p.78]." 1993. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵¹ Notably, the name Vietnam ultimately derives from this period of Chinese control and the Han term *Nan Yueh* for southern people.

⁵² *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam*. Templer, Robert. "Chapter 14: China Lite [p. 294]." 1998. New York: Penguin Books.

and Chinese incursions. Its own assaults on the Cham Kingdom to the South expanded the amount of territory under its control and began the southern expansion (*Nam Tien*), which extended the Vietnamese cultural domain.

Tran Dynasty

The Tran Dynasty succeeded the Ly's by arranging a marriage between the final Ly monarch, an eight-year-old Le princess, and a member of their family.⁵³ The Trans distinguished themselves by resisting numerous assaults on Vietnam by Kublai Khan, Genghis Khan's grandson, whose plundering army had conquered most of the region, during the 13th century. They were less successful in battling the Cham, who reduced *Dai Viet* to vassalage in the early 14th century, though this proved short-lived when the Vietnamese regained the upper hand. Nonetheless, the quality of Tran leadership declined by the end of the 13th century resulting in chaos in the kingdom which led Vietnamese scholars to seek Chinese intervention.⁵⁴ The climate of upheaval enabled Chinese Ming Dynasty rulers to reassert control in 1407.

Le Dynasty

The founder of the dynasty, Le Loi, is a national hero for successfully expelling the Chinese. It was during the Le Dynasty that the earliest and most complete map of Vietnam was produced.⁵⁵ The map reflected a period of almost continuous southward settlement expansion. Under Le authority, the *don dien* system of land allocation transformed territory wrested from Champa into farmland. New settlements were established under military protection in which soldiers and landless peasants cleared the area and opened it for cultivation, in the process establishing a community and the means to defend it.⁵⁶ After three years, the village received official status. A village hall (*dinh*) was built which contained the imperial charter incorporating the village into the imperial administrative structure.⁵⁷ Residents were granted user rights in perpetuity over the communally developed land.

Nguyen Dynasty

The Le Dynasty eventually degenerated, seeing no less than ten rulers between 1497 and 1527. It was unable to maintain control and the kingdom fragmented, ruled by rival families in the North and the South throughout the



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Tomb of Emperor Khai Dinh near Hue

⁵³ Country Studies US. *Vietnam: A Country Study*. "The Tran Dynasty and Defeat of the Mongols." Ronald J. Cima, Ed. 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/vietnam/9.htm>

⁵⁴ *Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook*. Woods, L. Shelton. "Chapter One: Vietnam History and Geography [p. 30]." 2002. Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC-CLIO, Inc.

⁵⁵ University of Richmond. "Le Loi and the Le Dynasty." Summer 1999.

<http://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~ebolt/history398/LeLoiAndTheLeDynasty.html>

⁵⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Vietnam*. LePoer, Barbara Leitch.

"Chapter 1- The Le Dynasty and Southward Expansion." Ronald J. Cima, Ed. 1987.

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+vn0022\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+vn0022))

⁵⁷ Google Books. *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*. Fitzgerald, Frances.

"Chapter 1: States of Mind [p. 11]." 1972 (2002 reprint). Boston: Back Bay Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=CsP2IQtoPFoC&dq=Fire+in+the+Lake:+The+Vietnamese+and+the+Americans+in+Vietnam&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ga7CSabWDpKmsAO1zJdtBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result#PPA11,M1

17th and 18th centuries. Decades of warfare between the two consumed much of Vietnam's wealth. The final dynasty, the House of Nguyen, wanted to replace the name *Dai Viet* with *Nam Viet*, to reflect its hard-won unity. This change required the Chinese emperor's approval. To prevent confusion with an ancient state, Nam Viet Dong, which included two Chinese provinces and therefore might imply territorial ambitions, the imperial court in Beijing reversed the word order. The coastal kingdom would henceforth be known as "People (*Viet*) of the South (*Nam*)," with the capital in centrally located Hue.⁵⁸ Under the Nguyen Dynasty, Vietnam assumed its present-day borders by annexing part of the Mekong Delta that had historically belonged to Cambodia. The most serious threat to its ability to rule came not from traditional enemies, but Europeans.

French Colonial Rule

The Consolidation of Power

The French interest in Southeast Asia was, in part, driven by the European scramble for colonies and the prospect of wealth, as well as the need to protect its missionaries. The French established their foothold in stages, starting in the south, where they captured control of Saigon in 1859. It was not until 1884 that they secured control over all of Vietnam owing, in part, to Chinese resistance.⁵⁹ By 1887, the French asserted their dominance by creating the Indochinese Union (ICU). They effectively colonized Vietnam by dividing it into three parts, Cochinchina in the South, Annam in the Central region and Tonkin in the North.⁶⁰ The French retained the monarchy in Hue, which exercised little control over the country, reducing the imperial family to purely ceremonial functions.

The impact of imperialism was unevenly felt throughout Vietnam. Tonkin became a direct protectorate and Annam an indirect protectorate, ruled through the emperor in Hue. Cochinchina became a formal colony. It was in the South that the French supplanted traditional village-based subsistence farming with a cash-crop plantation model to grow rubber and rice that were exported in large quantities.⁶¹ Many peasants lost their



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Vietnamese wooden cannon, 1860s

⁵⁸ Google Books. *Vietnam*. Bell, Brian. "National Identity: By Many Names [p. 35]." 2003. Langenscheidt Publishing Group.

http://books.google.com/books?id=kRi_BKq60OgC&pg=PA35&lpg=PA35&dq=nam+viet+to+viet+nam+name+change&source=bl&ots=UkZwWfbM-O&sig=n5D0OjSgqeNEjsjKW1gJwnzCt1A&hl=en&ei=6F7CSeezKIGStQOtvNzvBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=7&ct=result

⁵⁹ Google Books. *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia*. Keyes, Charles. "Chapter 4: Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam [pp. 202–203]." 1995. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=g3oajnKzUNEC&pg=PA203&lpg=PA203&dq=french+protectorate+north+vietnam&source=bl&ots=jEkxGU-cko&sig=eJXOt-EFdmfAE2qhMwbpSytk2yI&hl=en&ei=CSrASfvkNIHwsAO34YUw&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result#PPA202,M1

⁶⁰ *Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook*. Woods, L. Shelton. "Chapter One: Vietnam History and Geography [p. 47]." 2002. Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC-CLIO, Inc.

⁶¹ Google Books. *Rethinking Theory and History in the Cold War: The State, Military Power, and Social Revolution*. Saull, Richard. "Chapter 4: Social Revolution and the Cold War [p. 125]." 2001. New York:

land, to which they had communal claim. They were forced into share-cropping and wage labor in a “monetized” economy dominated by a French and later French-Vietnamese landowning gentry.

The Rise of Ho Chi Minh

Most Vietnamese chafed under French authority and the exploitative conditions. The most successful group at fomenting anti-colonial sentiment were the Communists, some of whom had studied in France; they organized strikes in French-owned commercial enterprises. Resistance was met with brutal suppression. French-built prisons, including the infamous “Hanoi Hilton,” that would later be used to house American POWs, teemed with communist detainees who were infused with nationalist aspirations.⁶²

One of the reasons the Communists were successful is because the leadership could flee to China to avoid capture by the colonial authorities. Indeed, the man who would come to be associated with the triumph of communism in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, spent most of his adult life in exile where he studied Marxism, which he came to view as the basis for a just society free of the exploitation suffered under the French.

It was not until February 1941 that he returned to Vietnam.⁶³ While Ho had spent considerable time in China, and the name “Ho Chi Minh” was in fact appropriated from an indigent Chinese after a long series of aliases, it did not shake his view that Chinese domination remained the most significant threat to Vietnam’s future.

World War II and Japanese Occupation

When France fell to the Nazis in 1940, the Vichy-appointed Indochinese government signed an agreement to accept the presence of Japanese troops in Vietnam. The Japanese were primarily interested in Vietnam’s strategic location, and left mundane affairs to the



© Pysanet/ Wikimedia
Emperor Bao Dai, 1945

French. The only indigenous resistance group that interfered was the communist-dominated Viet Minh, founded in 1941 by Vietnamese who sought refuge in China. Toward this end, it received material assistance from the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), predecessor to the CIA, in 1945.⁶⁴

By March 1945, the Viet Minh controlled most of the country. Thus, when the Japanese withdrew recognition of the French colonial authority and attempted to transfer administrative control to Emperor Bao Dai, he was effectively powerless. Following the Japanese surrender in August, Bao Dai handed over the symbolic reins of state to the Viet Minh.

Routledge. http://books.google.com/books?id=V-G3eU8AWhoC&dq=Rethinking+Theory+and+History+in+the+Cold+War:+The+State,+Military+Power,+and+Social+Revolution&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=_63CSeCdL4m4sAPF95HqBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=7&ct=result#PPA125,M1

⁶² The formal name is Hoa Lo Prison.

⁶³ Encyclopædia of the Vietnam War. “Ho Chi Minh [p. 230].” Stanley L. Kutler, Ed. Charles Scribner’s Sons. New York, 1996.

⁶⁴ University of Richmond. “Advising the Viet Minh.” 24 September 1997. <http://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~ebolt/history398/AdvisingTheVietMinh.html>

Ho Chi Minh and his comrades proclaimed the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on 2 September 1945, hopeful the new government would receive sought-after U.S. recognition.⁶⁵ But Washington instead backed France's efforts to reclaim its colonies and provided military aid in pursuit of this goal.

The U.S. was increasingly concerned about the political situation and committed its support to anti-communist elements. Bao Dai, who had proposed an arrangement called "self-government within the French Union," received international support. However, Franco-Vietnamese relations in the South deteriorated, and the Bao Dai government proved unable to govern.⁶⁶

By the 1950s, now several years into the war, Washington watched developments in the region with growing alarm. The guerilla tactics by the DRV in the north had taken a



Ho Chi Minh trail, ca. 1950s

tremendous toll on the French psyche. Increasingly weakened by the protracted, seven-year war, the French were facing a backlash of public opinion at home and rising losses in the jungles of Vietnam. French forces were decisively defeated at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 as peace talks, to which Hanoi was a party, were being conducted in Geneva.

In order to legitimize his DRV government, Ho Chi Minh agreed to a temporary division of the country at the 17th parallel between a communist north and a non-communist south.⁶⁷ Countrywide elections were to follow whereby all of Vietnam would either be unified under the Hanoi government, where the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) had absorbed the Viet Minh, or the division would be made permanent.

Vietnam Divided

In Washington there was a widely shared view that, in the absence of U.S. support for a non-communist south, a takeover by the northern government was inevitable. Indeed, President Eisenhower subsequently acknowledged that had elections been held as scheduled in 1956, "Ho Chi Minh would have won 80% of the vote."⁶⁸ No U.S. president wanted to lose a country to communism in the wake of the "Who lost China?"

⁶⁵ Google Books. *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina*. Duiker, William. "Chapter 2: The Restoration of French Sovereignty [p. 38]." 1994. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=ECWRqCj3rGIC&pg=PA81&lpg=PA81&dq=duiker+ho+chi+minh+us+recognition+indochina&source=bl&ots=qrcT0OUTx7&sig=pVobMfqTgmvwf_A5pYhfeRXnOVg&hl=en&ei=o6nCSfvlFpGksQOXmuzdBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA38,M1

⁶⁶ National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum. Vietnam: Pre-American Involvement. 2004.

<http://www.navysealmuseum.com/heritage/historyVIET.php>

⁶⁷ Google Books. *Severed States: Dilemmas of Democracy in a Divided World*. Schaeffer, Robert. "Chapter 4: Cold War Partition [pp. 84–85]." 1999. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

http://books.google.com/books?id=Op4n2N3dWiEC&pg=PA84&lpg=PA84&dq=ho+chi+minh+agrees+di+vision+17th+parallel&source=bl&ots=RHSzkFFgcf&sig=0GJKyzEQDkjPwMizb8slEtdRXTY&hl=en&ei=OKfCSenuLpGUsAOAyJDhBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result#PPA84,M1

⁶⁸ Veterans Museum and Memorial Center. "Vietnam War 1964 & 1973." 2007.

<http://www.veteranmuseum.org/vietnamwar.html>

congressional recriminations led by Joseph McCarthy. The Vietnamese were not recognized as a distinct people with their own history and traditions. Rather, policy-makers in Washington “viewed Vietnam, North and South, as pawns on the global [Cold War] chessboard.”⁶⁹

The Establishment of Two Different Systems

The first president of the southern Republic of Vietnam (RVN) was Ngo Dinh Diem, a staunch anti-communist and devout Catholic who had spent time in the U.S. and had been appointed Prime Minister by the Bao Dai government. He was seen as the right man to lead from Washington’s vantage point, and the U.S. backed his decision to cancel the elections.⁷⁰ To strengthen the new state, the Army of South Vietnam (ARVN), which at the time of national partition had been an assortment of former French colonial troops with little command experience and minimal support forces, received assistance from U.S. military advisors to mold it into a fighting force.⁷¹ The commitment to support the RVN and resist its absorption by the DRV passed from one administration to the next, each of which was motivated largely by the same concerns as Eisenhower.⁷²

While Ho Chi Minh remained popular, the DRV underwent a series of upheavals after the country had been formally divided. A poor harvest in 1955 coupled with the impossibility of getting rice from the South presented the prospect of mass starvation in the North. Only shipments of Burmese rice arranged by Beijing and transported on Soviet ships averted famine.⁷³

Against this backdrop, there was also an internal struggle within the leadership. It pitted a unity-driven faction that sought immediate military operations in the RVN against another faction that favored putting the DRV on a secure socialist economic and political footing first. Ho Chi Minh was in the latter camp. Thus, the communist government spent the balance of the decade attempting to reunify the country through diplomatic means alone.⁷⁴



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Ho Chi Minh in China, 1961

⁶⁹ Asia Society. Brown, Frederick Z. “President Clinton’s Visit to Vietnam.” November 2000. <http://www.asiasociety.org/publications/clintoninvietnam.html>

⁷⁰ American History 102: Civil War to the Present, University of Wisconsin. Schultz, Stanley K. “Diem, Ngo Dinh (1901–1963).” 1999. <http://us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/bios/29.html>

⁷¹ U.S. Army Center of Military History. *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950–1972*. Collins Jr., Brigadier General James Lawton. 1991. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army. <http://www.history.army.mil/books/Vietnam/devtrainrvn/index.htm>

⁷² Modern American Poetry. *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*. Rotter, Andrew J. “The Causes of the Vietnam War.” John Whiteclay Chambers, Ed. 1999. New York: Oxford University Press. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/MAPS/Vietnam/causes.htm>

⁷³ *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*. Zhai, Qiang. “Chapter 3: Consolidation and Unification, 1950–1975 [p. 75].” 2000. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

⁷⁴ Vassar College. “The Wars for Vietnam, 1945–1975.” No date. <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview.html>



000 Image
North Vietnamese refugees, 1954

The Communist Party of Vietnam's (CPV) land reform program, closely modeled on the Chinese experience, was poorly implemented. Intended to break the power of the traditional village elite, it was carried out by urban youth anxious to prove their revolutionary credentials. They had little understanding of life in the countryside where, in the North, some 98% of the peasantry in fact owned the land which they tilled.⁷⁵ To identify "class enemies," the populace was divided on the basis of an elaborate classification scheme that compared size of farming plot, amount of rice in storage, and number of livestock and poultry. In mass meetings, people were encouraged to denounce landlords and identify those who had exploited the poor or collaborated with the French; some Vietnamese were killed in a form of community justice.⁷⁶ The brutality prompted some 450,000 Vietnamese, including a large number of Catholics, to flee south, while a much smaller number of southerners migrated in the opposite direction.⁷⁷

The transition to independence in the South also created societal tensions. In consolidating power, Diem opted to eliminate opposition by ruthlessly persecuting opponents rather than building consensus. Reliance on family, his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who served as head of the secret police, and his sister-in-law Madame Nhu, the great-granddaughter of an emperor, gave his regime a remote and imperial feel. He did enjoy some success in smashing communist cells which caused Hanoi to reverse itself and support armed struggle against Diem's government. Toward this end, on 20 December 1960, a new united front, the National Liberation Front (NLF), known as the Viet Cong (VC) to Americans, was established. Membership was open to anyone who opposed Ngo Dinh Diem.

The Fall of Ngo Dinh Diem

Diem's government did not have the support of the ARVN, which attempted several coups intended to replace him with military-led leadership.⁷⁸ He also exhibited favoritism toward fellow Catholics who were privileged in all spheres of society. Catholic refugees from the North were resettled on the best land.⁷⁹

This left the Buddhist majority feeling marginalized and discriminated against, particularly after Buddha's birthday was dropped as an official holiday in 1957.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ eHistory, Ohio State University. Guilmartin, John. "America and Vietnam: The Fifteen Year War." 1991. New York: Military Press. <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/books/aiv/index.cfm?page=0014>

⁷⁶ Land reform is incorporated into the novel by Duong Thu Huong, *Paradise of the Blind*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 2002.

⁷⁷ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Vietnam." March 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>

⁷⁸ National Security Archive, George Washington University. Prados, John. "JFK and the Diem Coup." 5 November 2003. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB101/index.htm>

⁷⁹ *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia*. Jacobs, Seth. "Chapter 6: 'This God-Fearing Anti-Communist': The Vietnam Lobby and the Selling of Ngo Diem Dinh [p. 228]." 2006. Chapel Hill: Duke University Press.

⁸⁰ *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia*. Harris, Ian, ed. Do, Thien. "The Quest for Enlightenment and Cultural Identity [p. 271]." 1999. New York: Continuum Press.

Buddhist-led protests became a regular occurrence, culminating in a monk's decision to commit self-immolation on a busy Saigon street in June 1963. The world reeled in horror from the image of his unflinching body engulfed in flames. Diem viewed it as a publicity stunt since the international press corps had been alerted in advance. It was callously dismissed by Madame Nhu as a "barbecue." She defiantly declared to a reporter, "Let them burn, and we shall clap our hands."⁸¹

Diem and his brother were assassinated in early November 1963 after a coup was carried out to which the Kennedy Administration did not object. The expectation in Washington was that he would be succeeded by a leader who could command greater public support. Kennedy himself was assassinated later that month and America's Vietnam policy passed to Lyndon Johnson who maintained his predecessors' commitment not to allow a communist takeover of the South. While it was Kennedy who had increased the number of military advisers in Vietnam from the 685 dispatched by Eisenhower to 16,700, Johnson would commit combat troops.⁸²

Deepening American Involvement in the Vietnam War

In the summer of 1964, President Johnson requested and received congressional authorization for the use of force after North Vietnamese boats purportedly attacked U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin without provocation.⁸³ American policy-makers assumed that stepped-up military pressure against North Vietnam, in the form of bombing, would persuade its communist leadership to cease supporting the NLF. Yet subsequent leaders in Saigon remained ineffectual in prosecuting the Vietnam War, which required progressively greater levels of support from the American side. Paradoxically, the deeper the U.S. commitment, the less leverage Washington had in getting the Saigon government to implement reforms deemed necessary for the RVN's survival.⁸⁴

In 1965, Johnson proposed a billion dollar aid project for the Mekong River, modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority, except larger, which would provide benefits for all of Southeast Asia and end the war. "Old Ho can't turn me down" he predicted confidently.⁸⁵ But the DRV leader did exactly that. The North Vietnamese, as committed nationalists, were simply unwilling to enter into any settlement that would permanently partition the

⁸¹ Google Books. *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*. Mann, Robert. "Chapter 21: You Did Visit the Country, Didn't You?: 1963 [p. 248]." 2002. New York: Basic Books. http://books.google.com/books?id=HoFF7Y5Z3jkC&pg=PA284&lpg=PA284&dq=let+them+burn+and+we+shall+clap+our+hands+nhu&source=bl&ots=rkEsVA275I&sig=1yXwpQMWxuwHB1OKIOhjfqNeJdg&hl=en&ei=LYe6SebLOJmktQQQlg2&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=5&ct=result

⁸² First Hundred Days Blog, *New York Times*. Dallek, Robert. "How Not to End Another President's War (L.B.J. Edition)." 12 March 2009. <http://100days.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/12/how-not-to-end-another-presidents-war-lbj-edition/?apage=2>

⁸³ The incident and what actually happened was seeped in controversy and remains so as documents have been declassified. *Christian Science Monitor*. Grier, Peter. "Declassified Study Puts Vietnam Events in New Light." 9 January 2008. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0109/p04s01-usmi.html>

⁸⁴ Virginia Quarterly Review. Herring, George. "Vietnam, American Foreign Policy, and the Uses of History." Winter 1990. <http://www.vqronline.org/articles/1990/winter/herring-vietnam-american-foreign/>

⁸⁵ UCLA. "Uncle Ho." 2000. <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/~howard/Personal/Trips/Vietnam99/Photo-essays/UncleHo.htm>

country.⁸⁶ Nor, as Ho Chi Minh observed, would bombing bring them to the bargaining table.



DOD Image
Helicopters over the Mekong Delta, 1970

By 1967 the material and human costs of the conflict were mounting, strengthening the American anti-war movement, with no military victory in sight for either side. Leaders in Hanoi, who followed developments in the U.S. closely, decided the time was ripe for a general offensive in rural areas that would spark popular uprisings in the cities.⁸⁷

What became known as the “Tet Offensive” was initiated during the Lunar New Year holiday on the final day of January 1968. It proved costly for the Communists: 32,000 dead for fleeting territorial gains that could not be sustained in the face of U.S. bombing. The South Vietnamese people did not rise up in support of their cause either. Yet, graphic TV coverage of the assault, during which a 19-man suicide squad penetrated the heavily fortified U.S. Embassy in Saigon and killed five Marines, weakened the position of the Johnson administration. Military claims of progress and victory had been called into serious doubt. Johnson, who declared he would not seek a second term as president, was forced to begin peace negotiations in Paris with representatives of the DRV.

Vietnamization and the Paris Peace Accords

Richard Nixon entered into office in 1968 on a platform promising to end the war in which over 500,000 American troops were fighting. This would be accomplished by “winning the peace.”⁸⁸ His strategy involved extending the bombing of North Vietnam into Laos and Cambodia to cut off supply routes as well as Vietnamization, or training South Vietnamese forces to replace American troops. This necessitated expanding the size of the ARVN to half a million troops. Toward that end, the Saigon government passed a law calling all men between the ages of 17 and 43 up for military duty.⁸⁹ In addition, the White House orchestrated the portrayal of Nixon as a “madman” whose hatred of communism was so strong he might resort to the use of nuclear weapons against North Vietnam if its leadership did not reach a settlement with the U.S.⁹⁰

The two sides signed the Paris Peace Accords on 27 January 1973. The agreement called for the complete withdrawal of American combat forces, but allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in areas of the South that they already controlled. Nguyen Van Thieu, the president of South Vietnam, was pressured to accept these terms to which his

⁸⁶ *New York Times Book Review*. Matlock, Jack. “Why Were We in Vietnam?” 8 August 1999.
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9402EEDA1531F93BA3575BC0A96F958260>

⁸⁷ *Country Studies US. Vietnam: A Country Study*. “The Tet Offensive.” Ronald J. Cima, Ed. 1987.
<http://countrystudies.us/vietnam/29.htm>

⁸⁸ *New York Times*. Morris, Roger. “How Not to End Another President’s War.” 26 February 2009.
<http://100days.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/how-not-to-end-another-presidents-war/?scp=1&sq=nixon%20obama%20vietnam%20afghanistan%20secret%20plan&st=cse>

⁸⁹ Spartacus Educational. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/VNvietnamization.htm>

⁹⁰ *Boston Globe*. Carroll, James. “Nixon’s Madman Theory.” 14 June 2005.

http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2005/06/14/nixons_madman_strategy/

government was not a negotiating party. He wanted North Vietnamese troops to be withdrawn from the South.⁹¹ Instead he received assurances that Washington would come to the RVN's defense if Hanoi violated the agreement.

Early in 1975, the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive.⁹² The ARVN responded with a counterattack that failed. President Thieu then ordered a retreat that effectively ceded half the country to the enemy in a single day; it precipitated a chaotic withdrawal in which ARVN soldiers and civilians, weighted down by their most important possessions, formed a continuous southward moving human chain.⁹³ North Vietnamese troops entered Saigon only hours after the U.S. completed an emergency airlift of embassy personnel along with high-ranking South Vietnamese officials, leaving many more clamoring for escape at the consulate gates. Hanoi gained control of South Vietnam in April and the country was unified under its rule and given a new name the following year, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV).

National Reunification

While the North Vietnamese claimed only the Americans had been their enemy, in reality the loyalty of all South Vietnamese was viewed as suspect. In the immediate aftermath of reunification, as many as 400,000 Southerners who fought or worked for the Saigon government were ordered to re-education camps where, in addition to political study sessions, they were required to clear mines by hand. Others, particularly those who had earned their living from the American presence in the private sector, were sent to new economic zones near the Cambodian border.⁹⁴

The government in Hanoi, which had lost the leadership of Ho Chi Minh after his death in 1969, was divided over how fast to introduce socialism in the South, which enjoyed a significantly higher standard of living than the North. It was decided to collectivize agriculture immediately. Rice cultivation, the backbone of the economy, was broken into 21 separate steps each of which had to be performed by a specialized team.⁹⁵ This

⁹¹ Southern Methodist University. Simon, David. "The War in Vietnam, 1969–1973."

<http://faculty.smu.edu/dsimon/Change-Viet4.html>

⁹² *U.S. Army Center of Military History. American Military History Volume II: The United States Army in a Global Era, 1917–2003.* "Chapter 11: The U.S. Army in Vietnam from Tet to the Final Withdrawal, 1968–1975." Stewart, Richard W., Ed. <http://www.history.army.mil/books/AMH-V2/AMH%20V2/chapter11.htm>

⁹³ Google Books. *The Vietnam Experience: A Concise Encyclopedia of American Literature, Songs, and Films.* Hillstrom, Kevin and Laurie Collier Hillstrom. "Chapter 6: The Deer Hunter [p. 80–81]." 1998. CT: Greenwood Press.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=fuJEHNjvRSQC&dq=The+Vietnam+experience:+a+concise+encyclopedia+of+american+literature,+songs,+and+films&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=116Fojohlo&sig=ukHbjDjHSJRjXhW2f-](http://books.google.com/books?id=fuJEHNjvRSQC&dq=The+Vietnam+experience:+a+concise+encyclopedia+of+american+literature,+songs,+and+films&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=116Fojohlo&sig=ukHbjDjHSJRjXhW2f-i_Mxd0R1s&hl=en&ei=FlfBSez0KoKOsQO6ivgw&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA81,M1)

[i_Mxd0R1s&hl=en&ei=FlfBSez0KoKOsQO6ivgw&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA81,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=fuJEHNjvRSQC&dq=The+Vietnam+experience:+a+concise+encyclopedia+of+american+literature,+songs,+and+films&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=116Fojohlo&sig=ukHbjDjHSJRjXhW2f-i_Mxd0R1s&hl=en&ei=FlfBSez0KoKOsQO6ivgw&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA81,M1)

⁹⁴ Stateuniversity.com. "Vietnam – Education System – Review." No date.

<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1674/Vietnam-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html>

⁹⁵ Google Books. *Searching for Vietnam: Selected Writings on Vietnamese Culture and Society.* Rambo, Terry A. "Part IV, Selection 3: Dilemmas of Development in Vietnam." 2005.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=Hr-aLkeg6JoC&pg=PA266&dq=Dilemmas+of+Development+in+Vietnam>

convoluted production process caused the harvest to plummet. Shortages led to rationing and caused hyperinflation. Between 1976 to 1980, Vietnam was forced to import 5.6 million tons of food which staved off starvation but not malnutrition.⁹⁶

The ethnic Chinese (*Hoa*), who had prospered in South Vietnam, were particular targets of the new government, which confiscated their wealth. Many were forced to flee, part of an exodus of boat people that eventually numbered one million, approximately 5% of South Vietnam's population.⁹⁷ Experts estimated that 10% of the boat people, who often escaped in overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels, died at sea while one third of all boats were victimized by pirates who robbed, raped, and murdered the passengers.⁹⁸ It remains the largest peacetime exodus in history.



South Vietnamese refugees, 1975

Recent Developments

The dire economic situation, which led to queuing the night before an item was to be distributed, forced the government to implement economic reform in 1986. Referred to as “renovation” (*doi moi*), limited market reforms were introduced and subsequently expanded. Farmers responded enthusiastically to these economic incentives and Vietnam quickly regained its status as a rice exporter. Over time, service industry jobs expanded, reducing unemployment in the countryside.⁹⁹ Foreign investment has been welcomed and, in January 2007, Vietnam was admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Doi moi has made Vietnam Asia's fastest growing economy after China.¹⁰⁰ As the reforms deepened, most of the communist world collapsed, leading to concern in Hanoi about how to avoid that fate. Jettisoning ideology, the VCP-led government's legitimacy has ceased to rest on creating a socialist society and is now contingent upon its ability to provide the Vietnamese people with a better life. One obstacle is endemic corruption, which threatens stability, and has led to riots and other displays of public dissatisfaction.¹⁰¹ Yet “greasing palms” has become a way of life. It is accepted that a state official will take a “commission” to supplement his paltry government salary for whatever services he provides as part of his job.¹⁰² While this practice permeates all

⁹⁶ The International Development Research Centre. “Chapter 2. The Ups and Downs of Vietnamese Agriculture.” No date. http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-33150-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

⁹⁷ *Los Angeles Times*. Lamb, David. “Reflections on Fall of Saigon.” 9 April 2000.

[http://articles.latimes.com/2000/apr/09/news/mn-](http://articles.latimes.com/2000/apr/09/news/mn-17643?s=g&n=n&m=Broad&rd=www.google.com&tnid=1&sessid=e15603f997a02a4bf46a89f2e3d17c5094e82354&pg=2&pgtp=article&eagi=&page_type=article&exci=2000_04_09_news_mn-17643)

[17643?s=g&n=n&m=Broad&rd=www.google.com&tnid=1&sessid=e15603f997a02a4bf46a89f2e3d17c5094e82354&pg=2&pgtp=article&eagi=&page_type=article&exci=2000_04_09_news_mn-17643](http://articles.latimes.com/2000/apr/09/news/mn-17643?s=g&n=n&m=Broad&rd=www.google.com&tnid=1&sessid=e15603f997a02a4bf46a89f2e3d17c5094e82354&pg=2&pgtp=article&eagi=&page_type=article&exci=2000_04_09_news_mn-17643)

⁹⁸ Asian Nation. Le, C.N. “A Modern Day Exodus.” 2000. <http://www.asian-nation.org/exodus.shtml>

⁹⁹ Asian Development Bank. “Economic Transition in Vietnam: *Doi Moi* to WTO.” 2007.

<http://www.adb.org/documents/reports/consultant/economic-transition-in-vietnam/1-overview.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Brookings Institute. Burghardt, Raymond. “Old Enemies Become Friends: U.S. and Vietnam.” 1

November 2006. http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2006/11/southeastasia_burghardt.aspx

¹⁰¹ *International Herald Tribune*. Mydans, Seth. “In Vietnam, Top Communist Sees Corruption as Threat.”

31 May 2006. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/05/04/news/vietnam.php>

¹⁰² *Asian Sentinel*. Tan, Patrick. “Not in My House: Corruption in Vietnam.” 25 June 2007.

http://www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=550&Itemid=31

government institutions, it tends to create the most friction in poorer, rural communities where officials demand payment of non-existent taxes and favor friends and relatives in the allocation of scarce public goods. The success of anti-graft programs, however, depends upon the cooperation of the perpetrators, who have little incentive to cooperate.

Another way to address the problem is through citizen oversight in the form of elections. While Vietnam holds elections every five years, voters select from a list of party-approved candidates for both the National Assembly and People's Councils, the highest and lowest levels of government administration, respectively. The authority of People's Councils is limited, however. Real power resides in the People's Committees, which are part of the CPV, not the government. In 2008, proposals were floated to allow for direct election of the head of the People's Committee, akin to a town Mayor, in 2009.¹⁰³ But the proposal was tabled by the National Assembly which extended the terms of the indirectly elected officials until 2011.¹⁰⁴

While democratic reforms have been stymied in Vietnam, the government is not immune to public opinion. Specifically, a chorus of voices, which includes General Vo Nguyen Giap, credited with engineering Hanoi's military victory over the South, have expressed concern over the decision to award a Chinese company the contract for several bauxite mining projects in the Central Highlands. The criticism reflects a range of considerations, from a Buddhist monk's concern over the impact on an indigenous tribal minority's way of life, to scientists who feel insufficient attention has been given to the long-term impact on the environment.¹⁰⁵ Few doubt the fact that the awarding of the contract to a Chinese company also played into traditional fears of Chinese domination. In response to these concerns, in late April 2009 the Politburo decided to review the contracts that had been previously approved.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Straits Times*. "Vietnam Halts Election Project." 15 November 2008.

http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/SE%2BAsia/Story/STISStory_302684.html

¹⁰⁴ Voice of America. Steinglass, Matt. "Vietnam Takes a Big Step Back." 17 November 2008.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-11/2008-11-17-voa21.cfm?CFID=144891429&CFTOKEN=26559465&jsessionid=6630bb2f331abd182dfd3e454d1a760fa61f>

¹⁰⁵ The Economist. "Vietnam and China: Bauxite Bashers." 23 April 2009.

http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13527969

¹⁰⁶ Earth Times. "Vietnam to Review Chinese Bauxite Mining Projects." 27 April 2009.

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/266064,vietnam-to-review-chinese-bauxite-mining-projects.html>

Timeline of Vietnamese History

600 B.C.E. – Viet people have already developed a system of irrigated rice cultivation enabling them to grow more food than other forms of farming.

200 B.C.E. – 938 C.E. – Vietnam is colonized by China, which is interested in controlling the Red River Delta as a supply point for trade with India and Indonesia.

938 – **Vietnam declares independence from China, to which it must pay triennial tribute, and sets up an imperial form of government similar to that of China.**

1010 – 1225 – The Vietnamese Kingdom is consolidated under the Ly Dynasty, which promotes Buddhism and repels invasions by the Chinese, Khmer, and Cham.

1226 – Ly princess marries into Tran family. By 1288, Tran Hung Dao defeats the Mongols, having repelled 30 years of invasions by Genghis Khan's armies.

1407 – Chinese regain colonial control under Ming occupation.

1428 – 1525 – National hero Le Loi reasserts Vietnam's independence from China; under the Le Dynasty, Vietnamese settlement continues southward down the coast toward the Mekong Delta.

1525 – Protracted political instability ensues while the feudal war between Trinh in the North and Nguyen in the South marginalizes the Le government.

1771 – Tay Son Rebellion leads to heavy fighting over the next thirty years. Tay Son's brother, Quang Trung, defeats the Chinese army at Dong Da.

1802 – Nguyen Dynasty reunites Vietnam with help of French mercenaries. Hue becomes the capital. Mekong Delta comes under Vietnamese control before last emperor abdicates in 1945.

1858 – French warships capture Da Nang in late 1858 and Gia Dinh, renamed Saigon by the French, in early 1859.

1867 – **Cochinchina (the South) becomes a French colony, and France begins transforming subsistence farming into a cash crop economy, producing goods for export.**

1874 – Vietnamese leader Tu Duc signs treaty with France in March 1874, recognizing France's "full and entire sovereignty" over Cochinchina.

1883 – Tonkin (the North) and Annam (the Center) become French direct and indirect protectorates respectively, the latter governed through the emperor.

1940 – Japanese Army occupies Vietnam, but leaves day to day administrative affairs to the French.

May 1941 – Viet Minh is organized by Ho Chi Minh in China to serve as national front organization that welcomes all Vietnamese dedicated to ending colonial rule.

2 September 1945 – In the wake of the Japanese surrender, the Viet Minh seizes power and Ho Chi Minh proclaims establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

1946 – After the bombing of Haiphong and talks between Ho Chi Minh and French officials fail, the Indochina War begins between the French and Viet Minh.

20 November 1953 – 7 May 1954 – Viet Minh forces beat French Army at Dien Bien Phu, ending seven-year war and opening door to international recognition of Vietnam's independence.

May – July 1954 – **Geneva Conference divides the country at the 17th parallel; national elections are scheduled to take place in two years, to determine the country's future.**

1961 – U.S. increases military aid to South Vietnam. President Kennedy commits scores of military advisors (16,000 in-country by 1965) due to surge of communist activity.

2 November 1963 – South Vietnam's first president, Ngo Dinh Diem, and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, head of the secret police, are assassinated in coup.

2 – 4 August 1964 – Two alleged unprovoked North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. destroyer in Gulf of Tonkin.

8 March 1965 – The first U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam: 3,500 Marines who land at China Beach in Danang to join 23,000 American military advisers.

January – February 1968 – In the Tet Offensive, the Viet Cong attack numerous southern cities in an attempt to foment uprising against the Saigon government and force U.S. withdrawal.

17 January 1973 – Agreement between U.S. and North Vietnam is reached in Paris Peace Accords, which call for withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from South Vietnam.

25 April 1975 – **North Vietnamese troops enter Saigon's Presidential Palace, after most high-ranking South Vietnamese government officials have already fled, ending two-decade old partition of the country.**

25 April 1976 – On the first anniversary of reunification, the country is officially renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

December 1978 – Vietnam invades Cambodia and overthrows the Pol Pot regime, but does not withdraw its troops after vanquishing the Khmer Rouge.

February – March 1979 – China initiates incursion into Vietnamese border territory and suffers humiliating losses in attempt to “teach Vietnam a lesson” in wake of the Cambodian invasion.

1986 – Deteriorating economic conditions force Hanoi to introduce market reforms (*doi moi*) that reverse the country’s declining fortunes and provide the basis for future growth.

1989 – Vietnam withdraws all troops from Cambodia after ten-year occupation, removing major impediment to improved relations with both U.S. and China.

4 February 1994 – U.S. lifts thirty-year trade embargo it imposed on then North Vietnam; American companies immediately begin to scout out investment opportunities.

11 July 1995 – U.S. normalizes relations with Vietnam and appoints former POW held at “Hanoi Hilton” prison to serve as its first ambassador.

December 2001 – Vietnamese gain membership in the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and U.S.–Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement enters into force.

January 2007 – After twelve years of accession talks, Vietnam becomes a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

January 2008 – Vietnam’s two-year appointment in a non-permanent UN Security Council seat viewed as possible step to assuming larger international responsibilities in the future.

Chapter 4 Economy

Introduction

One of the world's fastest growing economies in the 21st century, Vietnam has been touted as an economic success story. Market reforms (*doi moi*), initiated in 1986, following the nation's debt default in 1982, are credited for the expansion. Traditionally, Vietnam's economy has been driven by agriculture. Although the sector remains the country's largest employer, its percentage of the economy has steadily declined. Since the year 2000, agricultural output has shrunk from 25% to less than 20% gross domestic product (GDP) as industrial output has grown.¹⁰⁷ The labor force is increasingly employed in export driven industries such as food-processing and garment production. Export revenues from rice, coffee, catfish and shrimp, as well as clothing and textiles, have bolstered the government's move toward economic liberalization. Vietnam's economic reforms were necessitated by its burgeoning external debt to multilateral creditors, which grew to approximately USD 4.5 billion by 1993. Loan debts of USD 4 billion to trading partners and USD 500 million to international commercial banks have added urgency to policy reforms.¹⁰⁸ Repayment of this debt has required Vietnam to prioritize activities that earn hard currency which risks engendering a short-term "get rich quick" business mentality.

Standard of Living

Long-time visitors have commented on the staggering changes since *doi moi* was introduced. In 1996 one observed, "When I first visited Hanoi in 1988, if you went out after dark you needed to carry a flashlight. There were no street lights. They didn't need street lights because there was no [vehicular] traffic...If you wanted to cross the street, you simply drifted into the street and hoped [the bicyclists] missed you."¹⁰⁹ Less than a decade



later, the streets were clogged with motorbikes, some with multiple passengers and even entire families. It requires a fearless attitude on the part of visitors to mimic Vietnamese pedestrians who, aware drivers will never stop and give way, appear confident motorbike traffic will weave around them as they make their way across busy thoroughfares.

Yet the abundant evidence of conspicuous consumption in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City can be misleading. Most Vietnamese live in villages where they have experienced less dramatic gains from the reforms. Migration for seasonal jobs has increased household income, but leaves the entire responsibility for farm work on those who remain behind.

¹⁰⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Vietnam." Updated 9 April 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>

¹⁰⁸ *International Herald Tribune*. Murphy, Kevin. "Hanoi Courtied in Debt Markets." 10 December 1993.

http://www.iht.com/articles/1993/12/10/han_0.php

¹⁰⁹ Intercom, the ISOP Newsletter, Vol. 18, No. 3. Rambo, Terry. "Dilemmas of Development in Vietnam [pp. 1-9]" January 1996.

That said, by reaching gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of USD 1,024 in 2008, the Vietnamese standard of living has finally broken out of “deep poverty” status.¹¹⁰

Agriculture

Rice

Rice is a staple part of the Vietnamese diet. After agriculture was collectivized, Vietnam had to import food to feed its citizens. As a result of the *doi moi*, market reforms, it now ranks as the second largest exporter of rice after Thailand. This happened despite the fact the government maintains export quotas to ensure food security for its own citizens. Officials are aware that industrialization reduces the availability of crop land. At the same time, urbanization encourages rice consumption since it is easy to store.¹¹¹ Yet harvests continue to grow, in part, because Vietnamese farmers are still realizing efficiency gains.



The government has an interest in ensuring the price neither rises too high nor drops too low. Higher prices harm the urban poor while lower prices threaten to push farmers below the poverty line, both of which can create social instability. Indeed, when the price of rice rose to record levels in April 2008, a major Ho Chi Minh City market became infected with “‘rice fever,’ a dangerous brew of skyrocketing prices, perceived shortages, hoarding, panic buying and government intervention.”¹¹² The government blamed speculators for inducing public hysteria to drive up prices. It promised severe punishment to anyone caught spreading false information about the availability of rice.¹¹³

Coffee

Coffee ranks just behind oil as the world’s most traded commodity.¹¹⁴ It is the primary source of export earnings for a number of countries in the global coffee belt between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.¹¹⁵ Until the early 1990s, global coffee-bean production was controlled by the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), established in 1962, which required both producers and consuming nations to submit quotas. The desirability of such a pact lay in the Cold War struggle between communism and capitalism. From Washington’s vantage point stable prices were a means of preventing farmers in the world’s coffee belt, from becoming so destitute, owing to fluctuations in the international

¹¹⁰ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Vietnam.” March 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>

¹¹¹ *Wall Street Journal*. Hookway, James. “Rice Hoarding Pressures Supplies.” 31 March 2008. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=10583>

¹¹² *Globe and Mail*. York, Geoffrey. “Rice Panic Hits Cash-Strapped Vietnamese.” 29 April 2008. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080428.wrice0428/BNSStory/International>

¹¹³ *International Herald Tribune*, Associated Press. “Vietnam Warns Speculators Face Punishment After Hoarding Sends Rice Prices Rocketing.” 28 April 2008.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/04/28/business/AS-FIN-Vietnam-Rice.php>

¹¹⁴ UN Chronicle Online. Avery, Kristen. “The Coffee Trade and its MDG Ramifications.” No date.

http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2007/webArticles/111407_coffee_trade.html

¹¹⁵ Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Regional Review. Wasserman, Miriam. “Trouble in Coffee Lands.” 2 April 2002. <http://www.bos.frb.org/economic/nerr/rr2002/q2/coffee.htm>

market price, that they came to view communism as their salvation. The ICA proved to be an effective means of controlling production.¹¹⁶ After the Soviet Union was dismantled and communism had been discredited, coupled with the increasing openness of world financial markets and the trend toward deregulation for all industries, the cartel began to lose its power; its member-states no longer could agree on quotas, and the pact was discarded in the early 1990s.¹¹⁷

Between 1990 and 2000, Vietnamese farmers in the Central Highlands planted more than a million acres of coffee trees. Annual coffee production expanded from 84,000 tons to 950,000, making Vietnam the second-largest coffee grower after Brazil.¹¹⁸ Under the ICA, the forward path of prices was fixed, providing farmers with a stable investment planning horizon.¹¹⁹ But Vietnam's aggressive entry into the market was fueled by its use of World Bank loans intended to assist its marketization program; it was then blamed for a plunge in the world market price since a glut in beans hurt all coffee farmers.¹²⁰ Because large-scale roasters mix arabica beans with robusta, the price of the former fell as well.¹²¹



Farmers in the Central Highlands, many of whom had migrated into the area to cash in on the boom, cut down their coffee trees when prices hit record lows after 2000. The country has no forecasting bureau to assist farmers in planning.¹²² Moreover, the coffee suffers from quality control problems exacerbated by primitive storage methods. Vietnam remains largely in the robusta bean market. Robusta beans are blended with arabica to make instant coffee as opposed to gourmet coffee that is made exclusively from higher-

¹¹⁶ Google Books. *Open-Economy Politics: The Political Economy of the World Coffee Trade*. Bates, Robert. "The Functioning of an Institution: The International Coffee Organization [p. 154]." 1998. Princeton: Princeton University Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=o1TKlg3Cb1IC&dq=open-economy+politics+robert+bates&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=CljCkAsZne&sig=B0f7kBOqFx07UE390sYQv4TjUe0&hl=en&ei=_cHHSdaiJmQtQP0I3jBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA154,M1

¹¹⁷ Washington Monthly. Kurlantzick, Joshua. "Coffee Snobs Unite." 2003. <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2003/0307.kurlantzick.html>

¹¹⁸ Fortune. Stein, Nicholas. "Crisis in a Coffee Cup. The Price of Beans Has Crashed. Growers Around the World are Starving. And the Quality of Your Morning Cup is Getting Worse. So Why is Everyone Blaming Vietnam?" 9 December 2002. http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2002/12/09/333463/

¹¹⁹ Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Mehta, Aashish and Paul Chavish. "Staff Paper 472: Responding to the Coffee Crisis: What Can We Learn from Price Dynamics [p. 6]." March 2004. <http://www.aae.wisc.edu/pubs/sps/pdf/stpap472.pdf>

¹²⁰ Conscious Consuming. "Hey Economist: Get the Facts Right on Fair Trade." 16 December 2006. <http://consciousconsuming.blogspot.com/2006/12/hey-economist-get-facts-right-on-fair.html>

¹²¹ Google Books. *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*. Jaffee, Daniel. "Chapter 3: Coffee, Commodities, Crisis [p. 45]." 2007. Berkeley: University of California Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=g2wA6vCxzV4C&pg=PA45&lpg=PA45&dq=how+did+vietnam+become+indebted%3F&source=bl&ots=FigQcXRyYt&sig=Cj7Ulxqqhs7k1w4bAfu2Q7nUf0&hl=en&ei=abDLSbr8IYnOtQOowJSeCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result

¹²² Thanhniennews.com. "Vietnam Coffee Short of World Standards, Admits Industry." 31 March 2007. <http://www.thanhniennews.com/business/?catid=2&newsid=26623>

quality arabica beans.¹²³ Steam-cleaning technology has been developed, which eliminates the bitter taste of poorer-quality robusta beans. Buying the equipment and utilizing it represents a major investment for coffee multinationals while the price of beans is comparatively small. Hence, it has not enabled growers to increase their incomes nor have end-users seen a reduction in price.¹²⁴

Cocoa

Cocoa beans can only be grown several degrees on either side of the equator. Cocoa was first introduced to Vietnam by the French in the 19th century. There was not yet a world market for chocolate and domestic refining ability was limited. As a result, few farmers were interested in growing cocoa. Moreover, the French could rely on another colony, the Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa, which subsequently became the largest producer of cocoa. Since 2000, it has been wracked by civil war and political instability, which has created incentives for international buyers to develop alternative sources.¹²⁵ Vietnamese farmers have received assistance from U.S. bilateral aid programs to grow cocoa for the international market.¹²⁶

Aquaculture

Shrimp

Demand for shrimp in the developed world led coastal residents into shrimp farming as part of Vietnam's integration into the world economy. A 2005 study concluded shrimp farming accounted for 50% of GNP in several impoverished, coastal provinces.¹²⁷ Many farmers have adopted intensified production methods to increase the harvest. This has had an adverse impact on the environment since mangrove forests have been destroyed to make room for shrimp ponds. Moreover, this is a weather-dependent business. Inventories can be decimated as a result of drought or flooding. Diseases also spread very rapidly. The 1994–95 harvest was almost entirely wiped out by a disease. Prices can also drop on the world market when supply outstrips demand.¹²⁸

¹²³ Trade and Environment Database Case Studies, American University. Johnston, Janine. "Beautiful Harvests of Despair." December 2001. <http://www.american.edu/TED/vietnam-coffee.htm>

¹²⁴ *Wall Street Journal, Asia*. Okonski, Kendra. "Who's Really to Blame for Low Coffee Prices?" 4 June 2003. http://www.sdnetwork.net/main/page.php?type=article&article_id=1291

¹²⁵ Helvetas Vietnam Swiss Association for International Cooperation. Pham Hong Dhuc Phouc. "Feasibility Study: Organic and Fair Trade Cocoa in Vietnam [p. 7]." March 2008.

http://www.helvetas.org.vn/Vietnam/wEnglish/Documents/Organic-cocoa-feasibility_final_report_EN.pdf

¹²⁶ USAID. "Success Story: Cocoa Brings New Markets, Confidence." 31 March 2006.

http://www.usaid.gov/stories/vietnam/ss_vn_cocoa.html

¹²⁷ Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific. "Shrimp: Vietnam Shrimp Industry Faces Tough Challenge." 25 April 2005. <http://www.enaca.org/modules/news/article.php?storyid=513>

¹²⁸ Trade & Environment Database, American University. "Vietnam Shrimp." August 1996.

<http://www.american.edu/TED/vietshmp.htm>

Catfish

Vietnamese farmers recognized an opportunity to export catfish to the U.S. after bilateral trade relations were established in 2001. Their success in penetrating the U.S. market resulted in a catfish war in which the American catfish industry, based in the Mississippi Delta, argued that Vietnamese farmers were the beneficiaries of state subsidies in a “non-market” economy. The Vietnamese insisted substantially lower costs accounted for the fact that their catfish retailed for approximately one USD per pound less than its American counterpart. Nonetheless, the American industry prevailed and Congress required catfish from Vietnam to be labeled tra or basa, similar subspecies but unknown names, and importers had to pay a tariff that was effective 30 July 2003. The decision affected half a million residents of the Mekong Delta who had invested in equipment, such as underwater cages, to specialize in catfish farming.¹²⁹



Industry

Vietnam’s indigenous industry consists of two types of businesses. One is state-owned enterprises developed under a planned economy. With access to cheap credit, they tend to be more capital-intensive than private firms. Few are financially viable, so they remain reliant on subsidies from specific government bureaus. The second is post-reform era enterprises that have captured new industries like electronics and telecommunications. State-owned, internet service providers compete on the basis of service to attract customers and cannot expect subsidies in the event they fail to turn a profit.

Heavy and medium industry, including major mining enterprises such as state-owned coal, tin and chrome, as well as power production stations and various food-processing factories, remains concentrated in the North. In the South, with the exception of cement works production and some large utilities, light industry and consumer goods are prevalent; they include pharmaceuticals, textiles and food processing.¹³⁰ The primary impediment to expanding light industry in Vietnam has been the influx of Chinese-made consumer goods, to the point of market saturation. Owing to the mass-merchandise production scale in China, Chinese imports are cheaper than what could be manufactured in Vietnam.¹³¹ Vietnamese goods can only compete in the marketplace if they are of superior quality. Indeed, domestic entrepreneurs are targeting “Vietnamese consumers with disposable income [who] now look beyond price.”¹³²

¹²⁹ Asia Times. “U.S. ‘Cat Fish’ War Stings Vietnam.” 31 July 2003.

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/EG31Ae02.html

¹³⁰ Encyclopedia of the Nations. “Vietnam - Industry.” No date.

<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Vietnam-INDUSTRY.html>

¹³¹ Look at Vietnam. “Vietnam Amasses Large Trade Deficit With China.” 20 March 2009.

<http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2009/03/vietnam-amasses-large-trade-deficit-with-china.html>

¹³² Slate. Gross, Daniel. “Keep Your Cheap Suits and Greasy Food, China.” 3 December 2007.

<http://www.slate.com/id/2178722/entry/2179100/>

Foreign Investment

While *doi moi* was implemented in 1986, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was not explored until after the abrupt collapse of the USSR which was Vietnam's primary trading partner.¹³³ A major milestone in the reform process occurred in January 2007 when Vietnam was admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO). This long-sought accession served as a form of reassurance to multinationals considering capital-intensive investments.¹³⁴ Investors are looking to both enter the domestic market and utilize Vietnam's low-cost labor force to make goods for export.

Vietnam's underdeveloped infrastructure and size make it logistically impossible to handle the magnitude of toy and textile orders China can fulfill. High-tech, however, has become a significant area of foreign investment given Vietnam's well-educated populace.¹³⁵ Indeed, Hanoi has courted high-tech investment which would bring in higher value-added jobs rather than simply welcoming industries in which China is no longer cost-competitive. Government efforts were successful in wooing Intel to build its largest overseas chip factory in Vietnam.¹³⁶

Eager to reap the returns from foreign investment, Vietnamese negotiators have, at times, failed to consider the long-term implications of specific deals.¹³⁷ To correct this, the government has adjusted taxation requirements to signed contracts. This has created uncertainty among investors over the prospect of having new terms imposed upon them after they have significantly sunk costs. Enforcement of contracts has also proved problematic if one party to a dispute is foreign.¹³⁸



Bureaucratic issues and the bearish economic climate notwithstanding, FDI licensed projects in the real-estate, construction and industry sectors have continued to receive funding and pledges of support. In 2008, FDI tripled in Vietnam; Malaysia has been the largest investor by an almost 2 to 1 margin with active major steel projects.¹³⁹ That pace has slowed, as total year on year FDI has been significantly down in 2009. The U.S.,

¹³³ Department of Economics, Williams College. de Brauw, Alan and Tomoko Harigaya. "Seasonal Migration and Improving Living Standards in Vietnam [p. 5]." 3 September 2004.

http://www.williams.edu/Economics/wp/deBrauw_mig_ver1.pdf

¹³⁴ Guinness Atkinson Funds. "Asia Brief [p. 2]." November 2006.

<http://www.gafunds.com/asiabrief/20061130/asiabrief20061130.pdf>

¹³⁵ Businessweek. Tan, Lynn. "Good Morning, High-Tech Vietnam." 9 April 2007.

http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/apr2007/gb20070409_175032.htm?chan=search

¹³⁶ CFO Asia. Chen, Shu-Ching Jean. "Vietnam's Road." February–March 2009.

<http://www.cfoasia.com/archives/200903-02.htm>

¹³⁷ Yale Global Online. Ryan, Jordan. "Vietnam Goes Global." 15 December 2005.

<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=6633>

¹³⁸ Crawford School of Economics and Government, Australian National University. Thi Bich Tran et al. "Institutions Matter: The Case of Vietnam [pp. 11–12]." January 2008.

http://www.crawford.anu.edu.au/degrees/idec/working_papers/IDEC08-01.pdf

¹³⁹ Agence France-Presse (AFP). "Foreign Direct Investment in Vietnam Triples in 2008." The Daily Star. December 26, 2008. http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/latest_news.php?nid=13958

South Korea, and Hong Kong, among others, continue to invest in Vietnam with new and ongoing projects, and the IMF still projects almost 5% FDI growth in FY 2009.¹⁴⁰

Trade

In addition to agricultural and aquaculture products, Vietnam has joined the ranks of countries that export brand-name clothing and athletic shoes largely assembled from imported parts.¹⁴¹ To attract these labor-intensive industries, the government has created export processing and investment zones in which local labor laws do not apply.¹⁴² The transition was initially marked by tales of employee mistreatment; Vietnamese workers were not accustomed to hard and fast deadlines and foreign bosses, primarily Taiwanese and Korean subcontractors, who made their displeasure known when standards were not met. Despite the lack of independent unions, during periods of inflation Vietnamese workers have organized strikes.¹⁴³



© Laura Tilings
Tailor shop in Hoi An

The zones represented an obstacle during Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Vietnamese government's creation of the zones and reduced charges for electricity was viewed as a subsidy for exports. Hanoi ultimately agreed not to remove export targets as a condition for businesses to locate within the zones.¹⁴⁴ This was a sticking point, because Vietnam remains an assembly location; if imported materials are used to assemble goods sold in the domestic market, it represents a net loss of hard currency for Vietnam.

Tourism

Tourism employs 10% of the Vietnamese workforce in the formal sector. The informal sector accounts for an unknown further percentage. Particularly in most remote locations where there are few off-farm jobs, tourists will find themselves beseeched by peddlers selling a wide variety of products including war memorabilia.¹⁴⁵

Vietnam is predicted to be among the world's top ten tourist destinations by 2016.¹⁴⁶ Long popular with backpackers, Vietnam is striving to climb up the "value added" ladder by attracting a higher end clientele who will spend more on meals and want first-class

¹⁴⁰ International Monetary Fund. "IMF Executive Board Concludes 2008 Article IV Consultation with Vietnam" Public Information Notice (PIN) No. 09/36. March 17, 2009. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/2009/pn0936.htm>

¹⁴¹ Department of International Development. "WTO Raises Increased Business Expectations." 5 January 2009. <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/vietnam-wto.asp>

¹⁴² Look at Vietnam. "New Push for Export Zones." 26 March 2009. <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2009/03/new-push-for-export-zones.html>

¹⁴³ BBC News. "Strike Hits Nike Factory." 1 April 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7324242.stm>

¹⁴⁴ European Union. "EU Says Vietnam has Fulfilled Requirements for WTO Accession." 7 September 2006. http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_130100.pdf

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-12-18-vietnam-tourism-slumps-amid-global-downturn>

¹⁴⁶ EuroMonitor International. Hodgson, An. "Vietnam to be Among the World's Top Ten Tourist Destinations by 2016." 20 April 2007.

http://www.euromonitor.com/Vietnam_to_be_among_the_worlds_top_ten_tourist_destinations_by_2016

accommodations.¹⁴⁷ The country has a number of attractions including sand beaches and natural wonders such as the limestone karsts in Halong Bay, colonial and indigenous architecture, hiking among hill tribe communities in the northwest, and war tourism, particularly in the former DMZ. In that area, foliage growth remains stunted from the use of herbicides such as Agent Orange, and landmines still pose a danger to the public. As a visitor observed, “the war may be over, but the marketing goes on in a country with precious little to profit from other than the painful memories of the past.”¹⁴⁸

Turning the war into a tourist attraction essentially entails making the story of the communist victory accessible to tourists.¹⁴⁹ Toward this end, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, over which supplies were ferried from the North to the South during the war, has been paved to facilitate bus tour traffic.¹⁵⁰ One of the most visited attractions in Vietnam, the Chu Chi tunnel network, which enabled the Viet Cong’s Tet Offensive operations and means of egress, runs southeast from the Cambodian border to the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City. Although these extensive tunnels have deteriorated over the years, some sections have been rebuilt. Tourists, under guided supervision, can enter the tunnel network in two locations.¹⁵¹



Banking

The State Bank of Vietnam was established in 1951 to function essentially as a conduit for Hanoi to extend credit to state-owned enterprises in line with central planning. This mandate was extended to the South after reunification in 1975. Between 1988 and 1990, reforms were implemented to separate commercial banking from the functions of a central bank.¹⁵² Toward this end, new state-owned commercial banks were chartered, while the role of the State Bank of Vietnam was redefined as that of a central bank. Foreign banks were also invited in; they could become share-holders of Vietnamese banks and perform a limited number of functions as foreign-owned subsidiaries. The number of transactions foreign-owned banks can handle has expanded and foreign banks have won awards for service. ANZ Vietnam, an affiliate of the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ), was named “Best Retail Bank in Vietnam 2008” by

¹⁴⁷ *Asia Times*. John, Karl D. “Vietnam Opens Wide to Tourism.” 12 October 2006. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HJ12Ae02.html

¹⁴⁸ Ron Gluckman. Gluckman, Ron. “The War Goes On. And On.” No date. <http://www.gluckman.com/vietwar.htm>

¹⁴⁹ *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. Kennedy, Laurel and Mary Rose Williams. “Chapter Five: The Past Without the Pain [p. 145].” Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Ed. 2001. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁵⁰ Community Newspaper Holdings. Ketter, William. “Vietnam: Tourism Riches at Bloody War Sites.” 8 September 2008. <http://cnhinews.com/node/510>

¹⁵¹ A Guide To Asia. “Chu Chi Tunnels.” April, 2009. <http://www.aguidetoasia.com/vietnam/chu-chi-tunnels.php>

¹⁵² Institute for Southeast Asian Studies. Doan Phuong Lan. “The Asian Financial Crisis and its Implications for Vietnam’s Financial System.” February–May 2000. <http://www.iseas.edu.sg/vr112000.pdf>

Asian Banker magazine.¹⁵³ ANZ was the first bank to offer ATM access in Vietnam through which foreign residents could draw money from their home-country bank accounts.

Transportation

Vietnam's rail network covers a large swathe of the S-shaped country. Only the Central Highlands and Mekong Delta are inaccessible by rail. The entire network, with a total length of 2,632 km, was built under the French colonial government. The first major trunk line, from Hanoi to Haiphong was completed in 1901. Hanoi was linked with Saigon in 1936.¹⁵⁴ Hanoi is connected to Kunming, China, via a northern trunk route that exits Vietnam through the border town of Lao Cai. All domestic lines are single track meter gauge. Only close to the Chinese border does the track become standard or double gauge.¹⁵⁵



© Timan Schalmey
Train station in Lao Cai

During the Vietnam War, both the North and the South tried to disrupt the other's rail lines while quickly repairing damage to their own.¹⁵⁶ In 1976 the "Reunification Express," the Hanoi-Saigon route, was inaugurated.¹⁵⁷ A single track connects the two cities; therefore, even the fastest trains spend significant time idling on pull-out tracks to let trains going the other direction pass. It also limits the amount of freight that can be transported on trains, resulting in higher costs.¹⁵⁸

The road network in the South, built during the war, is superior to that of the North. Highway One hugs the coast for much of its route from the Chinese border down to the Mekong Delta. In addition, a four-lane highway is being built that will connect Hanoi to Kunming through Lao Cai as part of an Asian Development Bank regional infrastructure initiative.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ VOVNews. "ANZ Vietnam wins Best Retail Bank in Vietnam Award." 21 March 2009.

<http://english.vovnews.vn/Home/ANZ-Vietnam-wins-Best-Retail-Bank-in-Vietnam-award/20093/102771.vov>

¹⁵⁴ *Los Angeles Times*. Lamb, David. "'Reunification Express' Train in Vietnam Making Headway." 10 October 1997. <http://articles.latimes.com/p/1997/oct/10/news/mn-41282>

¹⁵⁵ World Bank. "Transport in Vietnam." February 2007.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPTRANSPORT/0,,contentMDK:20458737~menuPK:2069374~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:574066,00.html>

¹⁵⁶ *New York Times*. Margolick, David. "To Hanoi by Train, a Journey of 1,000 Miles." 9 November 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/09/magazine/to-hanoi-by-train-a-journey-of-1000-miles.html?sec=travel&spon=&pagewanted=all>

¹⁵⁷ The rail terminus has retained the name Saigon.

¹⁵⁸ EyeforInfrastructure. "High Logistics Costs Stifle Vietnam's Growth." 24 February 2009.

<http://www.eyefortransport.com/content/high-logistics-costs-stifle-vietnam%E2%80%99s-economic-growth>

¹⁵⁹ *International Herald Tribune*. Greenlees, Donald. "From Tanks to Trade: A New Road for Ex-foes." 13 December 2007. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/12/13/news/road.php>

Energy

Vietnam's economic growth has been constrained by its lack of energy resources. Dependence on hydro-power and fossil fuels has been met with an increasing need to explore and exploit new reserves. Hanoi has entered into a deal with the Russian state-owned Gazprom to explore for oil and gas off the coast of Vietnam.¹⁶⁰ Farther out in the South China Sea, which the Vietnamese refer to as the East Sea, oil is reputed to be near the Spratly Islands; but sovereignty is in dispute, which has impeded exploration.

Since the country is a late-industrial developer, it has the opportunity to develop alternative sources of energy without needing to consider conversion costs.¹⁶¹ Foreign investment in new types of energy is being sought to offset the electricity shortages that are endemic for most of the country. However, there is little assistance in the pipeline for anything other than nuclear power, which is a priority of the Vietnamese government.



Nuclear power generation is nonexistent in Vietnam. For over two decades, the government has been working to build rapport and trust with the international community in this area to change its non-nuclear status. In May 2002, Vietnam accepted the third version and extension of the "...Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology (RCA)," under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹⁶² In so doing, Vietnam has welcomed IAEA advice and has been transparent in its intent, with Russian assistance, to open its first nuclear power plant between 2015 and 2020.¹⁶³

Economic Outlook

Throughout the 1990s, Vietnam relied primarily on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and private consumption as the engine of growth. As long as the economy was growing at impressive levels, the government had little reason to undertake structural reforms.¹⁶⁴ The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 caused foreign investment from East Asian countries to dry up. This forced Vietnam's government to undertake reforms to confront its structural weaknesses, particularly continued state support for inefficient state-owned enterprises that were too important to fail.¹⁶⁵ This left little for investment in productive activities.

¹⁶⁰ ASEAN Affairs. "Russia, Vietnam Sign Deals on Energy, Natural Resources." 28 October 2008. http://www.aseanaffairs.com/russia_vietnam_sign_deals_on_energy_natural_resources

¹⁶¹ Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections. "Vietnam's Alternative Power is Not Energized." 16 February 2009. <http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/news/nts90726.htm>

¹⁶² IAEA. Vietnam, Socialist Republic of. Country Factsheets. July 31, 2008. <http://ola.iaea.org/factSheets/CountryDetails.asp?country=VN>

¹⁶³ Third Preparatory Committee of the 2005 NPT Review Conference, 27 April 2004. <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/legal/npt/prepcom04/vietnam27.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ Institute of International Education. Nguyen, Nam Tran Thi. "The Banking System of Vietnam" Past, Present and Future." September 2000–June 2001. http://www.iie.org/fulbrightweb/BankingPaper_Final.pdf

¹⁶⁵ Harvard Asia Quarterly. Thayer, Carlyle. "Doi Moi 2? Vietnam After the Asian Financial Crisis." Winter 2000. <http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/full/55/40/>

Further reforms were undertaken to correct this problem, but with the result that Vietnam became more deeply enmeshed in the world economy, making it extremely vulnerable to global economic shocks. After peaking in March 2007, Vietnam's main stock index plunged; by November 2008, it had lost over 70% of its value.¹⁶⁶ This wiped out eight years of gains and created questions about the sustainability of Vietnam's growth, particularly as demands for consumer-good imports in the U.S. decrease.¹⁶⁷



© Laura Stange
Market in Hoi An

Reliance on imports to maintain economic growth, particularly oil, created a balance of payments problem that contributed to inflation. During 2008, Vietnam experienced double-digit inflation, higher than its East Asian neighbors, which threatened to jeopardize the macroeconomic stability that resulted in over 8% annual GDP growth since 2003.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Council on Foreign Relations. "Vietnam's Economic Hiccups." 10 December 2008.

http://www.cfr.org/publication/17968/vietnams_economic_hiccups.html

¹⁶⁷ The Daily Reckoning. Bonner, Bill. "Vietnam Stock Market Plunges, Investors Trading in What Little Dongs They Have." 30 June 2008. <http://www.dailyreckoning.com.au/vietnam-stock-exchange/2008/06/30/>

¹⁶⁸ *Asia Times*. Symon, Andrew. "Inflation Tests Vietnam's Growth." 18 March 2008.

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JC18Ae02.html

Chapter 5 Society

Introduction

Vietnam's government has made a concerted effort to raise basic education and health care standards over the last three decades. This has led to improved adult literacy, life expectancy and lower mortality rates in rural and urban areas.¹⁶⁹ Traditionally, upward mobility and social standing in Vietnam has been coupled with educational achievement. Although the socialist revolution was intended to remake society along egalitarian lines, receiving a higher education continues to vastly increase potential for wealth and status. Just as the educational system has evolved, a series of economic reforms (*doi moi*), which began in 1986, have opened the door to material improvement from which both officials and ordinary people have benefited. The social liberalization that is a by-product of *doi moi* has enabled folk culture to flourish alongside imported global consumer culture. Thus, Vietnam has become a land where “tradition and modernity cheerfully collide: snakes curl in a bottle of rice alcohol slowly pickling into wine, while elsewhere ...[an] Asian woman on a giant red billboard coos over her Coca-Cola.”¹⁷⁰



Ethnic Groups

The dominant group in Vietnam is known as the *Kinh*; they comprise 86% of the population and trace their origins to the Red River Delta.¹⁷¹ Their southward settlement pattern created a geographical division of territory under which they appropriated land suitable for wet-rice cultivation. Tribal minorities, who practice slash and burn agriculture, lived up in the mountains. Upland areas were presumed to harbor ghosts bent on harming humans and were, therefore, considered undesirable for habitation by the *Kinh* until the 20th century when colonialism, war, and economic opportunity made highland settlement either attractive or a necessity.¹⁷²

The remaining 14% is comprised of 54 minority groups. Chinese (*Hoa*) are difficult to count. Many are of mixed blood because most Chinese immigrants were single men who married into the local population. Others conceal their ethnic identity due to past campaigns against the *Hoa*. They are predominantly found in southern cities. Ho Chi Minh City has its own “Chinatown” known as the Cholon District, where Chinese are a merchant class. Ethnic Khmer are found in the Mekong Delta which was formerly part of

¹⁶⁹ *Vietnam, A Transition Tiger?* Van Arkadie, Brian and Raymon Mallon. “Achievements of *Doi Moi* and Future Challenges [p.258].” 2003. Asian Pacific Press.

¹⁷⁰ New Yorker. “Vietnam: Spirits of the Earth.” 17 December 2001.
http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2001/12/17/011217crbn_brieflynoted2

¹⁷¹ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Vietnam.” March 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>

¹⁷² *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, University of California Press. McElwee, Pamela. “‘Blood Relatives’ or Uneasy Neighbors? Kinh Migrant and Ethnic Minority Interactions in the Truong Son Mountains.” Fall 2008. <http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/vs.2008.3.3.81>

Cambodia. Montagnards, a French term which means highlander (*thuong*), refers to all indigenous peoples in the Central Highlands, rather than a specific tribe, and reflects a classification system that was imposed by outsiders.¹⁷³

The indigenous peoples in the Northwest who inhabit the mountains near the Chinese and Laotian borders are scattered across several countries. Within tribes, there can also be subgroups. The Hmong, for example, are broken into “Black Hmong” and “Flower Hmong,” the two most prominent, which are easily distinguished by attire. Because tribal minorities are capable of surviving in the mountains, they were actively recruited by all sides during conflicts.¹⁷⁴ Those who found themselves on the losing side faced persecution. This explains the presence of Montagnards and Hmong refugees in America, although the latter came from Laos, not Vietnam.



Religion

“Vietnam’s true religion,” observed Léopold Cadière, a French Catholic priest who spent 30 years in Vietnam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “is the cult of spirits. The religion has no history because it dates from the origins of the race.”¹⁷⁵ The strength of such beliefs was also recognized by the then northern government after independence, which considered them to be an impediment to the creation of a socialist society. In an effort to affect change, Hanoi mounted anti-superstition campaigns through the mid 1980s, on the grounds that such beliefs have no scientific basis and encouraged fatalism.¹⁷⁶

Yet they have proved difficult to eradicate. Not only did several decades of war cause widespread violent death in Vietnam; the remains of many soldiers have yet to be identified. These “ghosts of war” are presumably angry over their state of perpetual wandering. As a result, they need to be cared for by their living descendants upon whose lives they have the power to wreak havoc.¹⁷⁷ This non-partisan respect for all the dead is at odds with the government’s own culture of commemoration that extends only to those who died fighting for the winning side.¹⁷⁸ In the South, military cemeteries containing the

¹⁷³ Vietnam Studies Group, University of Washington. “Great Montagnard Debate II.” October 1999. http://www.lib.washington.edu/southeastasia/vsg/elist_1999/mont2.html

¹⁷⁴ Salem State University. “Ethnic Minorities of Vietnam.” No date. <http://www.salemstate.edu/imc/vietnam/minorities.html>

¹⁷⁵ *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam*. Templer, Robert. “Chapter 13: Faith [p. 262].” 1999. New York: Penguin Books.

¹⁷⁶ International Institute, UCLA. Evans, Leslie. “Spirit Possession Religions and Popular Rituals Flourish in Vietnam.” 8 June 2004. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=11811>

¹⁷⁷ *Ghosts of War*. Kwon, Heonik. 2008. New York. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷⁸ *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. “Chapter 2: ‘The Fatherland Remembers Your Sacrifice’: Commemorating the War Dead in North Vietnam. [pp. 46–76].” 2001. Berkeley: University of California Press.

graves of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldiers were officially vandalized after reunification and have not been restored.¹⁷⁹

Subsequent attempts by the government to distinguish between superstition and “legitimate folk belief” have run up against the reality that animistic religious beliefs held by the majority have incorporated strands of East Asia’s three great religions (*Tam Giao*): Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. In daily life this means many Vietnamese adhere to the Confucian emphasis of filial piety, practice Taoist divination rituals, and make regular visits to Buddhist pagodas.¹⁸⁰

Patrilineal ancestor worship (*hieu*) remains an important ritual in Vietnam. Most families maintain an ancestral shrine in their homes. While not part of Buddhism, ancestor worship is not incompatible with it either. Many Buddhists believe in reincarnation, although there is no set time frame for that to happen, since the deceased’s accumulated merit must be assessed. As a result, ancestors may linger in a state between life and death before being reborn. Prayers said on their behalf may assist them in achieving a speedy rebirth into a better life.



© Toby F. Orage
Cemetery gate

Catholicism found converts in Vietnam despite its rejection of ancestor worship.¹⁸¹ While missionaries had preceded French colonial rule, Catholics found their faith associated with imperialism and thus faced discrimination in the North after the country was partitioned in 1954. Many moved south where most of Vietnam’s six million Catholics live today. They still face discrimination and are barred from holding certain government jobs.¹⁸² Although Vietnam has the second largest number of Catholics in Southeast Asia after the Philippines, the percentage of Vietnamese who identify themselves as Catholics has dipped slightly over the past 60 years from 7.5% to 7.15%.¹⁸³

Gender Issues

Women have played prominent roles throughout Vietnamese history. The most significant popular heroines are the Trung sisters who led the first successful resistance effort against the Chinese in the year 40 C.E.¹⁸⁴ Several years later the Chinese launched a successful counterattack, which prompted the sisters to commit suicide rather than

¹⁷⁹ *New York Times*. Mydans, Seth. “A War Story’s Missing Pages: Vietnam Forgets Those Who Lost.” 24 April 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/24/world/a-war-story-s-missing-pages-vietnam-forgets-those-who-lost.html?n=Top%2FReference%2FTimes%20Topics%2FSubjects%2FC%2FCemeteries>

¹⁸⁰ Ask Asia, Asia Society. Hue Tam Ho Tai. “Religion in Vietnam: A World of Ghosts and Spirits.” 1985. <http://www.askasia.org/teachers/essays/essay.php?no=5>

¹⁸¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Vietnam: Catholicism.” December 1987. <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-14661.html>

¹⁸² Radio Free Asia. “Vietnam Archbishop Defends Land Protestors.” 6 September 2009. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/archbishop-09062008122115.html>

¹⁸³ Intentional Disciples. “The State of Catholicism in Vietnam.” 9 March 2009. <http://blog.siena.org/2009/03/state-of-catholicism-in-vietnam.html>

¹⁸⁴ University of Richmond. “Trung Trac and Trung Nhi.” No date. <http://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~ebolt/history398/TrungSisters.html>

resume a life under foreign domination. Their bravery and sacrifice is commemorated on the sixth day of the second month of the lunar year. In addition, Trung Sisters Day is observed as part of International Women's Day in Vietnam.¹⁸⁵

Women were also part of the resistance effort against the French and later in what the Vietnamese refer to as the "American War." In the North, females did not serve in combat, but performed support tasks which included shooting down U.S. airplanes and capturing pilots, as well as carrying supplies on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The National Liberation Front (NLF), or Viet Cong, also recruited women for non-combat roles as did the ARVN.¹⁸⁶ After reunification, the estimated 500,000 prostitutes in the South were depicted as victims of a decadent regime that was an agent of U.S. domination.¹⁸⁷



While the socialist government is officially committed to gender equality and emphasizes women's productive utility to the nation, patriarchal norms continue to guide individual behavior, particularly for rural women. Their primary roles remain that of dutiful wife and mother of a male child. *Doi moi* liberalization has provided opportunities to earn money that typically require residents to leave the village, at least for the day. Yet in the outside world women are expected to adhere to traditional expectations for female virtuous conduct in contrast to men for whom pre-marital sex and affairs are permissible.¹⁸⁸ Women who find work in export processing factories are recognized for contributing to national "industrialization and modernization" (*cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa*).¹⁸⁹ In reality, such jobs entail hours of grueling labor under sometimes unsafe conditions.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ North Carolina State University. "Trung Trac and Trung Nhi." No date.

<http://clubs.ncsu.edu/vsa/www/festivals/trungsisisters.html>

¹⁸⁶ Google Books. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Goldstein, Joshua. "Chapter 2: Women Warriors: The Historical Record of Female Combatants. [p. 80]." 2003. New York: Cambridge University Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=KXs_LS5g57MC&pg=PA80&lpg=PA80&dq=women+militias+north+vietnamese+army&source=bl&ots=tzi50UfaBD&sig=4TLiwXi0YvrXyB3Pk7GkPQ51WY8&hl=en&ei=xUDSSc2DHYmitgOZYOXJAw&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result#PPA80,M1

¹⁸⁷ *Trans-Status Subjects: Gender in the Globalization of South and Southeast Asia*. Sarker, Sonita and Esha Niyoga De, eds. McMahon, Kathryn. "Chapter 5: Gender, Paradoxical Space, and Critical Spectatorship in Vietnamese Film: The Works of Dang Minh Nhat. [p. 113]." 2002. Durham: Duke University Press.

¹⁸⁸ *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 55, No. 3. Go, Vivian Fei-Ling. "Gender Gaps, Gender Traps: Sexual Identity and Vulnerability to Sexually Transmitted Diseases Among Women in Vietnam" (Department of Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, Baltimore, MA). Abstract. 2002. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VBF-462T4F0-9&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=be097cfb35594e9ba59911da10ee2913

¹⁸⁹ Gender, Place, and Culture. Drummond, Lisa. "Gender in Post-*Doi Moi* Vietnam: Women, Desire, and Change." June 2006.

[http://tsp.ec.tku.edu.tw/QuickPlace/113922qp/Main.nsf/\\$defaultview/8BDBAC16794FD4A9482573F70028AC28/\\$File/Drummond2006.pdf?OpenElement](http://tsp.ec.tku.edu.tw/QuickPlace/113922qp/Main.nsf/$defaultview/8BDBAC16794FD4A9482573F70028AC28/$File/Drummond2006.pdf?OpenElement)

¹⁹⁰ *New York Times*. Herbert, Bob. "Brutality in Vietnam." 28 March 1997.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/28/opinion/brutality-in-vietnam.html?sec=&spn=&pagewanted=all>

Clothing

Women

The national women's dress is the *ao dai*. It is a two-piece outfit consisting of wide-legged pants worn under a high-necked, long-sleeved, fitted tunic that falls to knee length with slits along each side below the waist to allow the garment panels to flow. Girls wear white *ao dai* to symbolize their purity. Young adult females can wear pastel shade tunics with white trousers. Only married women wear darker colored fabrics or white tunics with black pants.

The *ao dai* was considered bourgeois attire by the socialist government since it signaled the wearer did not engage in manual labor. After being banned it made a comeback in the 1990s, particularly in the South, where it was also more prevalent. Saigonese school girls can once again be seen gracefully riding their bicycles without getting the flowing white fabric caught in the chain.

Females who work outside wear dark-colored pants and conical hats (*non la*) woven from palm leaves, and typically have all their exposed skin covered. Before setting out on a motorcycle, a woman from any background may cover her face below the eyes with a bandana tied in bandit-style behind her head. This is because pale white skin is considered more beautiful.¹⁹¹ Fashionably dressed urban women may protect themselves from the sun's rays with an umbrella when out for a walk.

Men

On formal occasions Vietnamese men traditionally donned a full body style tunic imported from China complemented by a turban. A color coded ranking system revealed his social status. Ordinary men were only allowed to wear black, brown or white attire. Yellow was reserved exclusively for the Emperor. Purple and red were reserved for court officials of stature, while blue indicated the man was a lower ranking official.¹⁹² In addition, the embroidered symbols differed as well. The mandarin suit is no longer part of daily attire or even worn on special occasions. It is only seen in traditional dance or music performances.¹⁹³



Cuisine

Vietnamese cuisine varies according to geographic regions. A harsher climate has shaped the cuisine of the North, which utilizes less meat and is often stir fried with soy, fish or prawn sauce to flavor dishes. Hue's legacy of royalty has impacted central Vietnamese food, which is colorfully prepared with a broad variety of spices and meats. Due to

¹⁹¹ Chao-Vietnam. "White Skin for Vietnamese Women." 13 May 2006. <http://chao-vietnam.blogspot.com/2006/05/white-skin-for-vietnamese-women.html>

¹⁹² APEC Digital Opportunity Center. "Vietnam Traditional Costumes." 17 September 2008. http://www.apecdoc.org/alliance/viet_nam/culture/costumes

¹⁹³ Pathfinder International. "Journey to Vietnam: The Ao Dai." 2001. http://www.pathfind.org/pf/Journey/viet%20nam/ao_dai.htm

immigration, southern Vietnamese dishes are deeply influenced by Cambodian, Thai and Chinese ingredients. Southerners sweeten dishes with sugar and coconut milk and liberally use chili peppers to add spice.¹⁹⁴

Rice (*com*) is the staple item of Vietnamese cuisine. As is true for some of its neighbors, asking in Vietnamese “Have you eaten?” is the same as asking, “Have you eaten rice?” Most rice in Vietnam is cultivated “wet rice” which means it is grown in flooded areas rather than in dry soil. To achieve maximum yields, seedlings are nurtured in special beds before being transplanted by hand and planted in neat rows in flooded paddy fields.¹⁹⁵ When the stalks start to turn yellow, the paddy is drained in preparation for harvest, which is again done by hand with a sickle.¹⁹⁶

Ultimately rice is steamed and eaten as an accompaniment to vegetable and meat dishes, fish, chicken and pork being the most common; they are seasoned with fish sauce (*nuoc mam*) that provides minerals lacking in grain. The most prized fish sauce has been fermented for a year in wooden barrels and comes from Phu Quoc, an island that lies off the southern coast of Vietnam in the Gulf of Thailand.¹⁹⁷ It is so renowned that fish sauce made elsewhere, including Thailand, is often labeled a product of Phu Quoc.



Wet rice is generally a lowland crop. Soil in the highlands is less favorable to food crop cultivation; therefore, farmers have greater limitations on what can be grown. As a result, the plateaus are planted with coffee, tea, and rubber in which corn and sweet potato is intercropped.¹⁹⁸ There are, however, a prolific variety of hearty rice strains found in elevated border regions. It is common for as many as ten strains of rice to be found growing on one farm.¹⁹⁹ The forests still yield a variety of wild game, which is hunted for food by the tribal minorities that have traditionally inhabited the area.

¹⁹⁴ Guide Vietnam.com. “The Food of Vietnam: Vietnamese Food.” No date. <http://www.guidevietnam.com/travel/vietnamese-food-cuisine.html>

¹⁹⁵ Office of Outreach, Cornell University. “Teaching Asia: Vietnam Through Cinema.” 3 November 1998. <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/Southeastasia/outreach/resources/vietcinema/TeachingAsiaVietCinema.html>

¹⁹⁶ Things Asian. DeMatteis, Lou and Sarah Tilton. “Rice.” 1 June 1995. <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1036>

¹⁹⁷ Trade, Environment and Database Case Studies, American University. Nguyen, Mary. “Vietnamese Fish Sauce.” 2004. <http://www1.american.edu/TED/vietnam-fish-sauce.htm>

¹⁹⁸ *The Ethnic Food Lover’s Companion: Understanding the Cuisines of the World*. Zibert, Eve. “Vietnam.” 2001. Birmingham, Al: Menasha Ridge Press.

¹⁹⁹ *Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind and Spirit*. Van Huy Nguyen and Laurel Kendall, Eds. “Chapter Two: Vietnam’s Ethnic Mosaic [p.66].” 2003. Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press.

The Arts

Literature

Vietnam has a rich literary tradition. The sources are both indigenous tales that were passed down orally before being rendered into written form, and the Chinese formal written tradition, which the Vietnamese adopted. Ghosts and spirits figure prominently in Vietnamese stories.²⁰⁰ Protagonists often consult with dead ancestors and relatives when they confront moral dilemmas. The use of the dead enables writers to work around censorship restrictions when dealing with sensitive topics. In this way they provide an alternative to the officially sanctioned versions of prominent events such as revolutionary memoirs (*hoi ky cach mang*). This is a literary form introduced by the communist government after it came to power, which was intended to shape a collective memory instead of private individual accounts.²⁰¹



The Tale of Kieu (*Truyen Kieu*), a 3,253-line poem based on a Chinese story, is regarded as Vietnam's literary masterpiece. It is the story of a beautiful young woman named Vuong Thuy Kieu who was born into a noble family in the latter half of the 18th century and raised in a household of privilege. She had already given her heart to a young man. But disaster interrupted their plans to marry when her father and her brother were imprisoned. In order to free them, she had no choice but to sell herself.²⁰²

“‘What does it imply’ [a Professor asked a startled young overseas Vietnamese visitor] ‘about [our] national psyche when the national literary heroine is a prostitute?’”²⁰³ For Vietnamese, Kieu's descent into prostitution to save her kin reflects the betrayal of principle under duress and submission to the forces of circumstance. Her story touches a chord precisely because it is a metaphor for the fate of Vietnam. The tale is part of the educational curriculum of Vietnam and retains a special place in the exile community.²⁰⁴ It was even adapted into a film with a modern-day immigrant Kieu working in the massage parlor industry in San Francisco's Mission District to support her family back in Vietnam.²⁰⁵

The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam

²⁰⁰ *Ghosts of War in Vietnam*. Kwon, Heonik. “Introduction.” 2008. New York: Cambridge University Press. http://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/80619/excerpt/9780521880619_excerpt.htm

²⁰¹ *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. Ho, Hue-Tam Ta ed. Zinoman, Peter. “Chapter 1: Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs [p. 21].” 2001. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁰² De Anza College. Swensson, John. “The Tale of Kieu.” October 1998. <http://www.deanza.edu/faculty/swensson/kieu.html>

²⁰³ *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam*. Pham, Andrew. “Chapter 35: Harlot Heroine. [p. 282].” 1998. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

²⁰⁴ Montgomery Art Center, Pomona College Museum of Art. “Exhibitions: Project 6: Dinh Q. Lê.” Spring 2000. <http://www.pomona.edu/museum/exhibitions/archive/spring2000/le/>

²⁰⁵ Sycamore Street Productions. “Kieu.” 2006. <http://www.kieuthemovie.com/>

This novel was written by a North Vietnamese Army veteran, Bao Ninh, who was only one of ten survivors from the 500-man Glorious 27th Youth Brigade. The story is told by Kien, an infantry soldier like the author, who personifies the life-long emotional dislocation of survivors. Written in the form of a jumbled series of reminiscences from both childhood and battlefield, the story is set in motion by a post-war body finding mission. Kien's suffering is driven by the knowledge that the loss of his youth, family, and love has been in vain. His writing becomes a coping mechanism that enables him to live with the reality that the future that motivated him to fight never materialized, while he has lost all that infused his life with meaning.

Such an attitude fell outside the bounds of what was permissible in Vietnam, where fighting in defense of the nation is officially promoted as a "righteous obligation" (*chinh nghia*). As a result, the book was initially banned by the government on the grounds it tarnished the sacrifices of the war dead and made people feel bad. Yet, bootleg copies proved popular, and it was published under the less sensitive title of "The Fate of Love" in 1991, before being made available under its original title.²⁰⁶ Bao Ninh defended his novel by noting, "I don't think that literature can be divided into 'peace' and 'war.' Literature chooses as its theme human life under various circumstances. War is one of those circumstances."²⁰⁷

Music

The distinctive feature of traditional Vietnamese music is the lack of harmony. Instead, musicians create complicated rhythms to accompany and enrich the melodies.²⁰⁸ In order to do this, aspiring musicians are first taught to respect *phuong, hoa, la* (true, straight, flowers). They learn to play a piece perfectly in its original form, before adding their own flowers to make a creative contribution in a bouquet style public presentation.²⁰⁹ Stringed instruments such as the 16-stringed zither figure prominently in traditional music, along with various flute type instruments, which can either be played solo or as accompaniment.

Water Puppets

Mua Roi Nuoc, literally "puppets that dance on water," is a unique folk art that appeared during the 11th century C.E. in the fertile Red River Delta and surrounding rice-growing areas. To mark the end of the rice harvest and other important occasions that were often part of religious festivals, villagers began to stage water puppet performances in communal ponds.²¹⁰



Water puppet theater

²⁰⁶ Salon.com. Bissell, Tom. "Destination Vietnam." 15 June 2006.

http://www.salon.com/books/literary_guide/2006/06/15/vietnam/index.html

²⁰⁷ Green Left Online. Doyle, Brendan. "The Sorrow of War: A Documentary." 1 October 1997.

<http://www.greenleft.org.au/1997/292/15860>

²⁰⁸ Vietnamese Culture Society Metropolitan Washington. "A Brief Introduction to Vietnamese Music and Dance." No date. http://www.vcsmw.org/activities/music_art_lit.html

²⁰⁹ Tieng Hat Que Huong. "Vietnamese Traditional Music." 2008.

<http://www.tienghatquehuong.com/FolkSongs/>

²¹⁰ University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. "Vietnamese Water Puppet Show: History." No date.

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/3740>

The puppets, which range in height from 30 to 100 cm (12 to 40 in) and weigh up to 5 kg (10 lbs), are manipulated by poles held by puppeteers standing waist deep in water behind a curtain.²¹¹ Hand carved from fig wood, each puppet is coated with five layers of lacquer paint, which contains resin, to protect it from the water. Facial and body art emphasizes the puppet's features and enables the audience to see it clearly.

A typical show consists of a series of skits depicting daily agrarian activities often with a comic touch, such as a fisherman who can't catch the fish, as well as historical events and folklore. Traditional tales have been updated to impart the value of safeguarding the nation's architectural and religious heritage given the amount of money cultural relics can fetch in the marketplace.²¹²

Sports

Soccer has become very popular with youth, reflecting Vietnam's integration into the international community of nations. Boys use the broad sidewalks of Hanoi to play without special equipment. The sport has gained such preeminence among segments of the population that civility has at times suffered due to match results. One such case occurred in December 2008, when four Vietnamese were killed during a raucous celebration after the national soccer team won its first international title.²¹³ Yet, traditional games still hold a special place in society and have not been entirely overtaken by non-native sports.



Vovinam

Vovinam is an indigenous form of martial arts still popular with youth. It is of relatively recent origin; created by a patriot named Loc Nguyen who chafed under French authority and studied other types of martial arts to develop a variant that utilizes both physical strength and mental stamina in a unique Vietnamese style.²¹⁴ It combines hard karate moves with softer techniques of kung fu origin. Practitioners make use of both taekwondo kicks as well as judo moves and may or may not use weapons as well.²¹⁵ The Master hoped Vietnamese youth would study vovinam to develop indomitable spirits and strong bodies to defend their homeland. Carried elsewhere by émigrés, vovinam competitions occur wherever there is a sizeable Vietnamese community.²¹⁶

²¹¹ Things Asian. Bailey, Steven. "Water Puppetry in Vietnam: Better Than the Muppets." 2000. <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1239>

²¹² BBC News. "Vietnam's Water Puppets Make Social Waves." 23 July 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2144376.stm>

²¹³ ABC News. "At Least 4 Dead in Vietnam Soccer Celebrations: Report." 30 December 2008. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/12/30/2456700.htm>

²¹⁴ Vovinam. "Vovinam Founding Grand Master Loc Nguyen." No date. <http://vovinamworld.com/TheFounder.aspx>

²¹⁵ Asian Adventure. "A Brooklyn Monk Learns Vietnamese Martial Art." 22 November 2008. <http://antonio-adventure.blogspot.com/2008/11/brooklyn-monk-learns-vietnamese-martial.html>

²¹⁶ Nha Magazine. Do, Trinh. "Vovinam Viet Vo Dao: A Tradition of Patriotism and Service to Society." Mar/April 2006. http://www.nhamagazine.com/back_issue/issue_0306/ac2_p1.shtml

Dragon Boat Racing

The Vietnamese, including a number of minorities such as the Khmer, also enjoy dragon boat racing and compete in regional dragon boat racing events. The challenge lies not in honing the paddling technique of individual rowers but the ability to synchronize the strokes of 20 to 80 paddlers, particularly if the oars are of different length. Additionally, one person mans the steering oar in the rear and a drummer provides the paddlers with the proper rhythmic cadence. It is known as *ba trao* rowing in Vietnam, where it developed as a way to express thanks to the various gods thought responsible for the good harvest.²¹⁷

Buffalo Fighting

In addition, there is a tradition of buffalo fighting around the northern city of Haiphong that can attract thousands of spectators. Bulls determined to have potential do not work the fields. Instead they are put through several months of training in advance of the competition, which is held on the ninth day of the eighth lunar month in the town of Do Son. The buffalos, with red ribbons tied around their horns and red cloths over their bodies, are led into the fighting arena by men also clad in red to drum beat accompaniment. After the first signal, the bulls are moved within 20 meters (65 ft) of each other. Shorn of adornments, they are allowed to rush at each other when the second signal is heard whereupon they lock horns until one emerges dominant. He is then paired with another competitor. Usually, the winning bull is one that successfully evades all opponents.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Singapore Dragon Boat Racing Association. "Facts About Dragon Boat Racing." 2001.
http://www.sdba.org.sg/pages/2006/facts_about_dragon_boat_racing.htm

²¹⁸ Vietnam Travel Blog. "Vietnam Festival - Do Son Buffalo Fighting Festival." 3 October 2008.
<http://vietnamtravelblog.com/2008/10/03/vietnam-festival-do-son-buffalo-fighting-festival/>

Chapter 6 Security

Introduction

Vietnamese history chronicles an almost continuous struggle for the right to self-determination. At different times, foreign powers including China, France, and the U.S. have invested heavily to impose their own designs on the Vietnamese population. Dating back to the 2nd century B.C.E., China first sought trade routes to expand its reach and influence via the Red River Valley. Centuries later, French intervention was requested to help free Vietnam from a debilitating cycle of occupation. France lent support, then effectively colonized the population. More recently, in the latter half of the 20th century, the U.S. had regional concerns and subsequently partitioned the country as part of a Cold War effort to contain the spread of communism. Toward this end, Washington backed a series of governments in Saigon that would keep the South Vietnamese people “free.” The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in Hanoi adopted a similar lexicon as it framed its quest in terms of freedom, albeit from colonial control. Ho Chi Minh reportedly declared in 1966, “Nothing is more precious than freedom and independence.”²¹⁹

After national reunification in 1975, still in the midst of the Cold War era, the CPV government controlled the country’s outward orientation, which leaned toward the Soviet Communist model. This policy alignment was voiced by the CPV’s general secretary in 1982 when he explicitly stated, “the unity and comprehensive co-operation with the Soviet Union [USSR] are always the cornerstone of the foreign policy of our party and country.”²²⁰ However, by the late 1980s, the abrupt demise of the Eastern Bloc forced the government to shift gears. Over the course of the 1990s, Vietnam rebuilt relations with two former adversaries, the U.S. and China.

U.S.-Vietnamese Relations

When he proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh borrowed liberally from Thomas Jefferson, noting “all men are created equal.” In making this connection, he hoped the U.S. would throw its weight behind Vietnam’s quest for independence from a post-World War II reimposition of French colonial rule. Yet Washington policymakers viewed his nationalist movement as a threat to American interests given his communist pedigree and long-standing connections to Moscow.

This perceived threat led Washington to support a partition of the country after the French were defeated by Ho Chi Minh’s forces. The

²¹⁹ Google Books. *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel.* [World War II] [p. 65].” 1999. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=2NUI_nVpW-gC&pg=PA65&lpg=PA65&dq=northing+is+more+precious+than+freedom+and+independence+1966&source=bl&ots=d_Fa4XyoFV&sig=p6FXoinN4eTm-L_S5d1h5xqHAog&hl=en&ei=qfLtScPnBIH8swPA0s3uAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&page=1

²²⁰ Vietnam Special Report, Economist. “We Want to Be Your Friend.” 24 April 2008. http://www.economist.com/specialreports/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11041715



U.S. would create a new independent, democratic, modern state below the 17th parallel.²²¹ No one involved in the early stages could foresee this effort would lead to a major war in less than a decade, which would include the commitment of half a million U.S. combat troops.²²² As the war dragged on, the rationale for remaining was the need to abate the erosion of U.S. credibility. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “defeat in South Vietnam would mean losing Southeast Asia.”²²³ It was determined that America’s allies and enemies must be convinced anew that the U.S. honored its commitments. Tangible demonstration of U.S. resolve would best be shown by continued support for South Vietnam.

By 1973, the war was winding down. After the U.S. withdrawal, the Saigon government fell in April 1975. Circumstances on the ground deteriorated, and Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia and an outpouring of refugees precluded a swift normalization of relations.²²⁴ Under dangerous conditions, the exodus of over one million Vietnamese, including thousands of ethnic Chinese origin who Hanoi insisted were ineligible for repatriation, became an international crisis. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was tasked with this formidable problem and the “boat people” were housed in UN-administered camps throughout Asia.²²⁵ Efforts to curb the flow were slow in coming. In 1989, Hanoi agreed to the creation of the Orderly Departure Program through which over half a million people were allowed to leave Vietnam via safe and legal channels.²²⁶

Anti-communism remains a potent force within the Vietnamese exile community; it has been augmented by those who spent time in harsh re-education camps.²²⁷ The passage of time has not diminished the commitment of some of those who served in the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) to the long-disbanded force.²²⁸ While it may appear to be a losing battle to keep such attachments alive in the face of assimilation, as a Vietnamese-

²²¹ *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era.* Latham, Michael. “Chapter 5: Modernization at War: Counterinsurgency and the Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam.” 2000. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

²²² *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954–1968.* Carter, James. “Chapter 2: The Cold War, Colonialism, and the Origins of the American Commitment to Vietnam, 1945–1954 [pp. 20–42].” 2008. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²²³ History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam 1971–1973.* Webb, Willard J. and Walter S. Poole. “Chapter 17: The Role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [p. 367].” Washington, D.C. Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 2007.

²²⁴ CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service. Manyin, Mark. “U.S.-Vietnamese Relations: Background and Issues for Congress.” 31 October 2008. <http://www.fas.org/srgp/crs/row/RL33316.pdf>

²²⁵ Migration News, UC Davis. “Vietnamese Boat People.” May 1996. http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=952_0_3_0

²²⁶ Refugee Survey Quarterly. Kumin, Judith. “Orderly Departure from Vietnam: Cold War Anomaly or Humanitarian Innovation?” 2008. <http://rsq.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/27/1/104>

²²⁷ *LA Weekly.* Cohn, Jason. “The War at Home: Orange County Confronts the Ghost of Ho Chi Minh.” 4 March 1999. <http://www.laweekly.com/1999-03-04/news/the-war-at-home/>

²²⁸ *Journal of American History.* “Interchange: Legacies of the Vietnam War [pp. 467–68].” September 2006. http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/93.2/pdf/interchange_jah93.2.pdf

American observed, “the Vietnamese American community is used to fighting against the odds.”²²⁹

A more influential constituency that opposed reconciliation were those advocating on behalf of American soldiers listed as “Missing in Action.” At the time of the U.S. troop withdrawal in 1973, over 2,000 Americans remained unaccounted for.²³⁰ Some Americans, particularly their next of kin, could not accept a presumption of death. They lobbied for a satisfactory accounting from Hanoi prior to normalization of relations. In 1988, the two governments conducted the first joint search for the remains of U.S. soldiers.²³¹ Relations were finally normalized in 1995 and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command continues to search for the remains of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam.²³²

Another issue leftover from the war was the use of the chemical defoliant Agent Orange to deny National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) forces jungle sanctuary. Washington has provided assistance and offered to clean up contaminated sites.²³³ Nonetheless, a class action lawsuit was filed against the manufacturers on behalf of Vietnamese victims, and those born since, who were purportedly affected through the consumption of contaminated food and water. The suit was dismissed in 2005 on the grounds that, while Agent Orange is a toxin, its use did not meet the definition of chemical warfare and, therefore, did not violate international law. Appeals have not been successful. In 2009, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case.²³⁴

Despite Hanoi’s anger, the outcome of this legal action has not had a negative impact on bilateral relations. During a March 2009 visit to Vietnam, former POW Senator John McCain proposed joint military exercises.²³⁵ The need to check China’s growing military power remains the most pressing concern in Hanoi and that makes closer relations with Washington likely. Pragmatism now appears to be the hallmark of Vietnamese foreign policy, not ideology.

²²⁹ *Anti-Communist Minorities in the US: The Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*. Le, C.N. “‘Better Dead Than Red’: Anti-Communist Politics Among Vietnamese Americans.” Zake, Ieva, Ed. 2009. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.

²³⁰ American Experience, PBS. “The M.I.A. Issue.” 29 March 2005.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/trenches/mia.html>

²³¹ National Public Radio. Weiner, Eric. “Mending Ties: The United States and Vietnam.” 21 June 2007.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11258262>

²³² Stars and Stripes. Rowland, Ashley. “Finding MIAs’ Remains in Vietnam is Hard Work, but Fulfilling.” 26 November 2007. <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=50508>

²³³ BBC News, International Edition. “Agent Orange Appeal in U.S. Court.” 19 June 2007.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6766139.stm>

²³⁴ Reuters India. “Vietnam Blasts U.S. Court Denial of Agent Orange Appeal.” 9 March 2009.
<http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-38326320090304>

²³⁵ Earth Times. “Former U.S. Candidate McCain in Vietnam, Calls for Military Ties.” 7 April 2009.
<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/263454,former-us-candidate-mccain-in-vietnam-calls-for-military-ties.html>

Relations with Neighboring Countries

China

While China has been a historic aggressor against its smaller neighbor, the Chinese Communist Party government supported North Vietnam in its fight against both the French and the Americans. Mao Zedong possessed considerable charisma and his revolution was a model for some Vietnamese initiatives such as land reform. Therefore, Beijing's decision to invite U.S. President Richard Nixon to visit in 1971 was perceived as a significant blow to their ideological alliance. Subsequently, the shift of Hanoi's reliance to Moscow created a growing distrust between Beijing and Hanoi.



A further rupture occurred when the Vietnamese sent troops across the border into Cambodia to topple Pol Pot's regime in late 1978. Under Pol Pot, Cambodia enjoyed close ideological ties to China from which it received significant support and backing. In February 1979, "to teach the Vietnamese a lesson," 600,000 Chinese troops swarmed across the northern border of Vietnam.²³⁶ They withdrew shortly after suffering humiliating losses, but continued to harass Vietnamese forces along the border.²³⁷

Relations remained tense for the next decade until after the USSR was disbanded and Vietnam found itself bereft of allies and in dire economic straits.

By the mid 1990s, the two communist states had resumed ties in "marriage of convenience" fashion after communism had been abandoned in most of the rest of the world. The focus on economic development and internal stability enabled both the Chinese and Vietnamese governments to paper over longstanding points of conflict. Territorial border disputes as well as sovereignty issues over the Spratly and Paracel Islands located in the South China Sea (referred to by the Vietnamese as the East Sea), finally gave way to closer relations.²³⁸

Yet there is a sense this can only keep the peace for so long. Beijing has reportedly conducted a naval exercise around the Paracels without alerting Hanoi in advance.²³⁹

²³⁶ Google Books. *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*. Friedman, Norman. "Chapter 28: Vietnam [p. 440]." 2007. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=0CIXLdxhQMAC&pg=PA440&lpg=PA440&dq=%22teach+the+vietnamese+a+lesson%22+chinese+invasion&source=bl&ots=oAf868PhGb&sig=qaCo8vyK-NLiVT8jdk_NXamUC5w&hl=en&ei=Gg7lScDWK4WytgPW_ZWpCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2#PPA440,M1

²³⁷ Google Books. *Shadow of the Dragon: Vietnam's Continuing Struggle with China and Its Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy*. Kenny, Dr. Henry J. "Chapter 6: The Politics of Sino-Vietnamese Relations [p. 99]." 2002. New York: Brassey's. http://books.google.com/books?id=dnQysc57tuAC&pg=PA97&dq=vietnam+cambodia+occupation&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=0_0#PPA99,M1

²³⁸ Global Security. "Spratly Islands." 9 March 2009. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/spratly.htm>

²³⁹ University of Technology, Sydney. Lee, Pak and Lai-Ha Chan. "Vietnam and China Spar Again Over the South China Sea." 10 October 2008. <http://www.china.uts.edu.au/news/lai-ha-chen.pdf>

Officially sanctioned demonstrations erupted in Hanoi in November 2007 after Beijing reputedly administratively incorporated the archipelagoes into Hainan Province. Students marched in front of the Chinese Embassy shouting “defend our homeland” and “China hegemony jeopardizes Asia.”²⁴⁰ Such moves reignite Vietnamese fears of regional Chinese domination, since China is the only country with the military means to back up its claims.

Cambodia

Relations between the Cambodians and Vietnamese have historically been acrimonious because of territorial rivalries and cultural differences. During the 18th century, Vietnam annexed the Mekong Delta, which had been part of the Khmer Empire, and served as its primary sea access. Later, under French colonial rule, Vietnamese were encouraged to settle in Cambodia. They filled administrative jobs that the Khmer were found unqualified to hold.



While both countries ushered in communist revolutions in 1975, relations were not close. Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge promoted an extreme form of xenophobia that played up historic enmity toward the Vietnamese. Less than four years later, in response to repeated Khmer Rouge incursions into Vietnamese territory, Hanoi ordered an invasion that toppled Pol Pot’s regime.²⁴¹ The Vietnamese then began a costly occupation of the country in an attempt to eradicate elements of the Khmer Rouge, who continued to operate in remote regions of the country.

Ironically, Vietnamese efforts to establish a friendly government bore fruit only after international pressure forced them to remove their troops from Cambodian soil in 1989. High-ranking members of the democratically elected government in Phnom Penh, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, sought refuge in Vietnam during Pol Pot’s murderous reign. As a result, in recent years the two governments have enjoyed a stronger relationship. Yet opposition politicians have been unabashed about scapegoating Vietnamese immigrants for Cambodia’s economic ills in an effort to garner votes.²⁴²

Laos

The governments of Laos and Vietnam have historically enjoyed close ties dating from the shared revolutionary experiences of top leaders in the 1930s.²⁴³ A special 25-year friendship agreement was allowed to expire in 2002, yet that did not reflect a deterioration in relations. The two countries enjoy strong military cooperation in

²⁴⁰ Henry Stimson Center. Cronin, Richard. “China, Vietnam, and the Rich Resources of the Gulf of Tonkin.” 29 January 2008. <http://www.stimson.org/pub.cfm?ID=518>

²⁴¹ *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War*. Morris, Stephen. 1999. Stanford. Stanford University Press.

²⁴² The Cambodian Daily Weekend. Myers, Bill. “The Outsiders.” 6–7 July 2002. http://www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily/selected_features/vietnamese.htm

²⁴³ China Brief, Jamestown Foundation. Storey, Ian. “China and Vietnam’s Tug of War Over Laos.” 7 June 2005. <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=25389>

maintaining authority over ethnic minorities who live in the mountainous border region.²⁴⁴

Nonetheless, isolationist Laos now has other governments eager to cultivate good relations, in particular, China. For Beijing, improved ties with Laos offers an avenue to export products to greater Southeast Asia, particularly from its remote and less developed southwestern regions, which have not registered the growth rates of the coastal provinces. Laos is seen by its larger northern neighbor as “land-linked” rather than “landlocked.”²⁴⁵

In addition to providing various types of aid, Beijing is cultivating the next generation of leaders. Laotians have been invited on study tours and other types of training, which bring them to China as a means to undercut the historical Vietnamese influence. However, Vietnam would not wish to see evidence of a Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) presence in Laos. Both the governments of China and Vietnam support continued one-party rule in Laos and are, therefore, safe partners for Vientiane’s communist leadership.

Vietnamese Armed Forces

Created in 1944 under a different name, the Vietnamese People’s Army (PAVN) peaked at 1.26 million members in 1987. In addition, reservists numbered 2.5 million along with a border defense force of approximately 60,000 and various paramilitary groups numbering 1.5 million.²⁴⁶ Two years later, Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia ended and fissures appeared in the USSR, an important source of military aid.

The number of active-duty soldiers was reduced to 500,000 by the mid 1990s. The PAVN’s organization style remains socialist: it is fully subordinate to both the government, through the Ministry of Defense, and the Communist Party of Vietnam (CVP). Yet its role has changed; from external defense after decades of war to internal security in the wake of the gentle revolutions that swept the Eastern Bloc and ended decades of one-party state communist rule.²⁴⁷ Faced with a loss of state support, the (*doi moi*) economic reforms have enabled the PAVN to branch out into purely commercial activities and raise their own revenues.



²⁴⁴ Underrepresented Nations and People’s Organization. “Laos, Vietnam Troops Slaughter Lao, Hmong: Over 6,500 Face Death.” 3 April 2009. <http://www.unpo.org/content/view/full/9446/257/>

²⁴⁵ Asia Times. McCartan, Brian. “China and Vietnam Square Off in Laos.” 30 August 2008. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JH30Ae01.html

²⁴⁶ Google Books. *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia*. Funston, John, Ed. “Vietnam: *Doi Moi* Difficulties [p. 387].” 2001. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. http://books.google.com/books?id=Cjb9Qhbbv9sC&pg=PA387&lpg=PA387&dq=vietnam+people's+army+police+and+military&source=bl&ots=jKy1dgbgW&sig=798skvSp8ghiEW4CDfUEzZQRZ8M&hl=en&ei=9e3kSaC3K5eatAP5r6WzCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5

²⁴⁷ Google Books. *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*. Alagappa, Muthiah. “Chapter: Revolutionary Heroes at a Turning Point, 1989–2001 [p. 345].” 2001. Stanford: Stanford University Press. <http://books.google.com/books?id=wmVwhDYHgBkC&pg=PA345&lpg=PA345&dq=doi+moi+vietnames>

Military service is not looked upon as either a patriotic duty nor a good career by many young Vietnamese for whom the market economy offers better prospects.²⁴⁸ Males are required to serve for two years in the Army, or three to four in the Navy. For those who are unwilling, bribery can buy an exemption. Females are accepted on a volunteer basis.

Police

Police detective work, criminal detention, and law enforcement activities are grouped under the (*cong an*) Public Security Bureau (PSB) in Vietnam. Under this umbrella, four clusters of different police organizations are responsible for ensuring public security, some of which require their members to wear red or yellow armbands that indicate to which force they belong.²⁴⁹ The People's Security Force (PSF) carries out routine criminal-related police work in urban areas. The People's Public Security Force (PPSF), known as the People's Security Service (PSS) in rural areas, is a type of militia defense that was strengthened during Vietnam's hostilities with China in the 1980s. The People's Armed Security Forces (PASF) has broader responsibilities than the PPSF or PSS: it is tasked with routing out threats to Vietnam's political system or counterrevolutionary activities.



© Kirk Usang
Vietnamese police officer

Issues Affecting Security

Religious Freedom

Although the Protestant faith has been officially recognized by the Vietnamese government since 2001, some congregations have been deemed foreign-supported opposition groups and, therefore, closed down. Of particular concern to Hanoi are the Protestant congregations that have proliferated among ethnic hill tribe minority communities, specifically the Montagnards in the Central Highlands. Between 2001–2003, indigenous people rebelled against what they perceived to be official favoritism toward lowland ethnic Vietnamese (*Kinh*) settlers. The government responded by blaming members of the Protestant clergy for inciting violence and using churches to organize.²⁵⁰ As a result, the ability of Montagnards to practice their faith has been curtailed and conversion efforts put under surveillance.

Proselytizing carried out under the auspices of foreign missionary organizations cannot account for the interest of highlanders in the Protestant faith, since they are not permitted to operate in Vietnam. Yet religious radio programming is beamed in from outside in

e+military&source=bl&ots=V9cXGc3yhC&sig=gxpyCS9UWZwFeV348qE7IwqWY8g&hl=en&ei=WUruSZ_DEYP0Mqvr9e0P&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5

²⁴⁸ Department of Sociology, University of Washington. Puk Teerawichitchainan. "Impact of War and Military Service on Income Inequality in Northern Vietnam [p. 4]." 2006.

<http://paa2006.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=60463>

²⁴⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Vietnam: Internal Security." December 1987.

<http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-14742.html>

²⁵⁰ BBC News. "Religion Blamed for Vietnam Unrest." 17 March 2001. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1225790.stm>

indigenous languages and is presumed to have played a role in the rate of conversion.²⁵¹ Vietnam's government remains skeptical of the theological commitment of new converts. It sees the act of religious conversion as a demonstration of opposition to Hanoi and as an expression of loyalty toward the U.S., which enlisted the assistance of Montagnard peoples during the war.²⁵²

On 1 May 2009, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released its latest report, which included Vietnam as one of a growing group of countries that engage in government sanctioned religious persecution.²⁵³ However, there seems to be some disagreement in what qualifies nations for strict monitoring and potential repercussions, as the U.S. State Department's 2009 evaluation did not designate Vietnam to be one of its eight "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPC).²⁵⁴ The CPC designation is reserved for those countries that are deemed to engage in or tolerate severe violations of religious freedom: "which are systematic, ongoing, and egregious, including acts such as torture, prolonged detention without charges, disappearances, or ...other flagrant [...abuses] of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons."²⁵⁵

Terrorist Groups

The U.S.-led "War on Terror" has focused attention on the agenda of exile-based groups that Hanoi views as terrorist organizations. The Government of Free Vietnam (GFVN), headquartered in suburban southern California, is one such group said to "straddle a fine line between pressing for change in their homelands and planning illegal, violent, and often counterproductive attacks from American shores."²⁵⁶ Members of the GFVN have been convicted of attempts to bomb Hanoi's embassies in the Philippines and Thailand.²⁵⁷ Their reliance on violent methods has complicated Washington's efforts to secure cooperation in the fight against Islamic terrorist groups, none of which are known to operate in Vietnam, but have a presence in neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

²⁵¹ Google Books. *Vietnam: A Global Studies Book*. Woods, Shelton. "Chapter 3: Vietnamese Institutions [p. 156]." Santa Barbara, CA. ABC-CLIO. 2002.

http://books.google.com/books?id=3mWv1Xgn9poC&pg=PA154&lpg=PA154&dq=protestant+religion+vietnam&source=bl&ots=ZUDXFsumD&sig=GfjzVmxQk3THIgbAxBrbUhBLoTM&hl=en&ei=HToLSsefO5W6tgO1tezpAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=8

²⁵² Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Salemink, Oscar. "Enclosing the Highlands: Socialist, Capitalist and Protestant Conversions of Vietnam's Central Highlanders." June 2003.

http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00001142/00/Oscar_Salemink_RCSD_paper.pdf

²⁵³ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. "USCIRF Names China, Iran and 11 Other Countries as Countries of Particular Concern." 5 May 2009.

http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2392

²⁵⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Countries of Particular Concern." 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/c13281.htm>

²⁵⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. "USCIRF Names China, Iran and 11 Other Countries as Countries of Particular Concern." 5 May 2009.

http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2392

²⁵⁶ The American Prospect. Kurlantzick, Joshua. "Guerrillas in Our Midst: Is the U.S. Harboring Terrorists?" 2 June 2002. http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=guerillas_in_our_midst

²⁵⁷ Chao-Vietnam. "Man Sentenced for Plotting to Bomb Vietnam Embassy in Philippines." 16 November 2007. <http://chao-vietnam.blogspot.com/2007/11/man-sentenced-for-plotting-to-bomb.html>

Also concerned with regional external threats, Vietnam has been developing relationships with fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since 1994, the 10 member nations, along with 10 dialogue partners (including the U.S.) and several other concerned countries have held biennial meetings to discuss crime and terrorism issues.²⁵⁸ The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) serves as the principle workgroup on security issues in East Asia. In 2009, Hanoi was front and center as it hosted the ARF midterm forum on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crimes.

Poverty

The (*doi moi*) economic reforms have done an impressive job of reducing poverty. From 1993 through 2007, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth averaged around 8.5% over which time the rate of poverty fell from 58% of the population to 14.7%.²⁵⁹ Yet a significant proportion of the rural populace has incomes that hover just above the poverty line. A poor harvest can push them back down below it.²⁶⁰ Moreover, further reductions are problematic, since those who remain below are disproportionately ethnic minorities in upland areas where residents are dependent on the forest for their livelihood. Yet clearance for slash and burn agriculture along with wood sales and conversion for cash crops such as coffee have eroded this resource. Deforestation has rendered lowland communities vulnerable to flooding, mudslides, and sedimentation buildup in the water supply. Poverty reduction, therefore, is contingent on forest protection.²⁶¹



Corruption

Corruption is an endemic feature of Vietnamese socialist bureaucratic culture. Governmental and party authorities monopolize all decision-making with regard to the access of public goods. Since the adoption of the economic reforms (*doi moi*) in 1986, money has become more important. As a consequence, “everything” is now for sale, from official positions to competitive exam scores, school diplomas, and college degrees.²⁶² Vietnam’s transnational adoption program with American families was halted in 2008 after U.S. embassy personnel uncovered a host of ways in which local officials were duping illiterate and impoverished parents into signing over their children for what many thought was a short separation. In the process, officials were pocketing money paid by adoptive parents intended for the orphanages.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. ASEAN Regional Forum. No date. <http://www.dfat.gov.au/arf/>

²⁵⁹ AusAID, Australian Government. “Vietnam.” September 2008. <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/country.cfm?CountryID=33>

²⁶⁰ International Fund for Agricultural Development. “Vietnam.” No date. <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/viet%20nam>

²⁶¹ Center for Southeast Asian Studies, UCLA. Coe, Cari. “On the Edge of Vietnam’s Forests.” 4 November 2005. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/cseas/article.asp?parentid=32863>

²⁶² AsiaNewsit. “Only Democracy Can Put an End to Corruption in Vietnam.” 16 July 2006. <http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=6954>

²⁶³ Guardian.co.uk. MacKinnon, Ian. “U.S.-Vietnam Adoption Deal Ended After Corruption Exposed.” 2 September 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/02/usa>

People expect to pay bribes for services and it is expected that civil servants will solicit bribes to augment low salaries. Many laws are not routinely enforced, but can be cited to extract a fine out of a transgressor. Yet in the face of authority, people can also be assertive to what they consider unfair predation. Peddlers may argue vociferously with policemen levying on-the-spot fines, for example.

Geopolitics of Water Resources

The Mekong River, the twelfth-longest river in the world with headwaters in Tibet, empties out into the South China Sea from Vietnam. To address the needs of multiple national users, regional organizations have been created to coordinate policy among the six riparian countries. The Mekong River Commission (MRC), a water-sharing regime, has four members: Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. China and Burma, by contrast, have declined membership owing to the MRC's criticism of their dam building. However, they remain "dialogue partners" in the discussions held by the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) organization.²⁶⁴ Signatory countries can still place their own short-term national interests above those of the wider subregion. A key provision enables them to redirect the flow without consulting other members except during the dry season.²⁶⁵



Vietnam's hydroelectric resources, if fully exploited, have been estimated to potentially produce up to 18,000 MW (megawatts) of electricity.²⁶⁶ This is the equivalent of about 75% of the output of China's Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest operational dam, at full power generation. Current and future dam-building and diversion schemes in China's Yunnan Province and in Laos by Chinese companies may already be adversely affecting downstream countries. Such developments can hinder the flow of nutrient-rich sediment, reducing agricultural yields and fish stock downstream. China has also embarked on efforts to remove rocks, sandbars and other obstacles that impede boat navigation. This can increase the flow of water and result in riverbank erosion affecting downstream communities as well as the river's fragile biodiversity.²⁶⁷ A main source of export revenues, the rich floodplain of the Mekong Delta provides more than half of Vietnam's rice and is under threat of increased saline intrusion.²⁶⁸ Yet neither Hanoi nor any other

²⁶⁴ SAISPHERE. The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Brown, Frederick. "The Price of Power in the Mekong Delta." 2008. <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pressroom/publications/saisphere/2008/brown.htm>

²⁶⁵ Google Books. *East Asia Imperilled: Transnational Challenges to Security*. Dupont, Alan. "Chapter 6: Water Wars [pp. 128–29]." 2001. New York: Cambridge University Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=YUM6N4Kg2ZQC&pg=PA128&lpg=PA128&dq=mekong+river+water+sharing&source=bl&ots=OqFVSBNCr6&sig=RrpqHHozRvZLKIA5rDGPIxuuDZs&hl=en&ei=DTfuSbWJZnIM9jK3AU&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4#PPA128,M1

²⁶⁶ *Vietnam – A Transition Tiger?* "Chapter 2: Geography, Resources and Population [P.16]." Arkadie, Brian Van and Raymond Mallon. Australian University, Asian Pacific Press. 2003.

²⁶⁷ University of Texas. "Mekong Basin." 2005. [http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/mckinney/ce397/Topics/Mekong/Mekong\(2005\).doc](http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/mckinney/ce397/Topics/Mekong/Mekong(2005).doc)

²⁶⁸ Water Environment Partnership in Asia (WEPA). *Policies: State of Water Environment, Water-Related Issues and Policies*. "Vietnam: Water Resources Scorecard." 2003. <http://www.wepa-db.net/policies/state/vietnam/scorecard.htm>

riparian country government has recourse, since Beijing is unwilling to cede authority to any regional body.