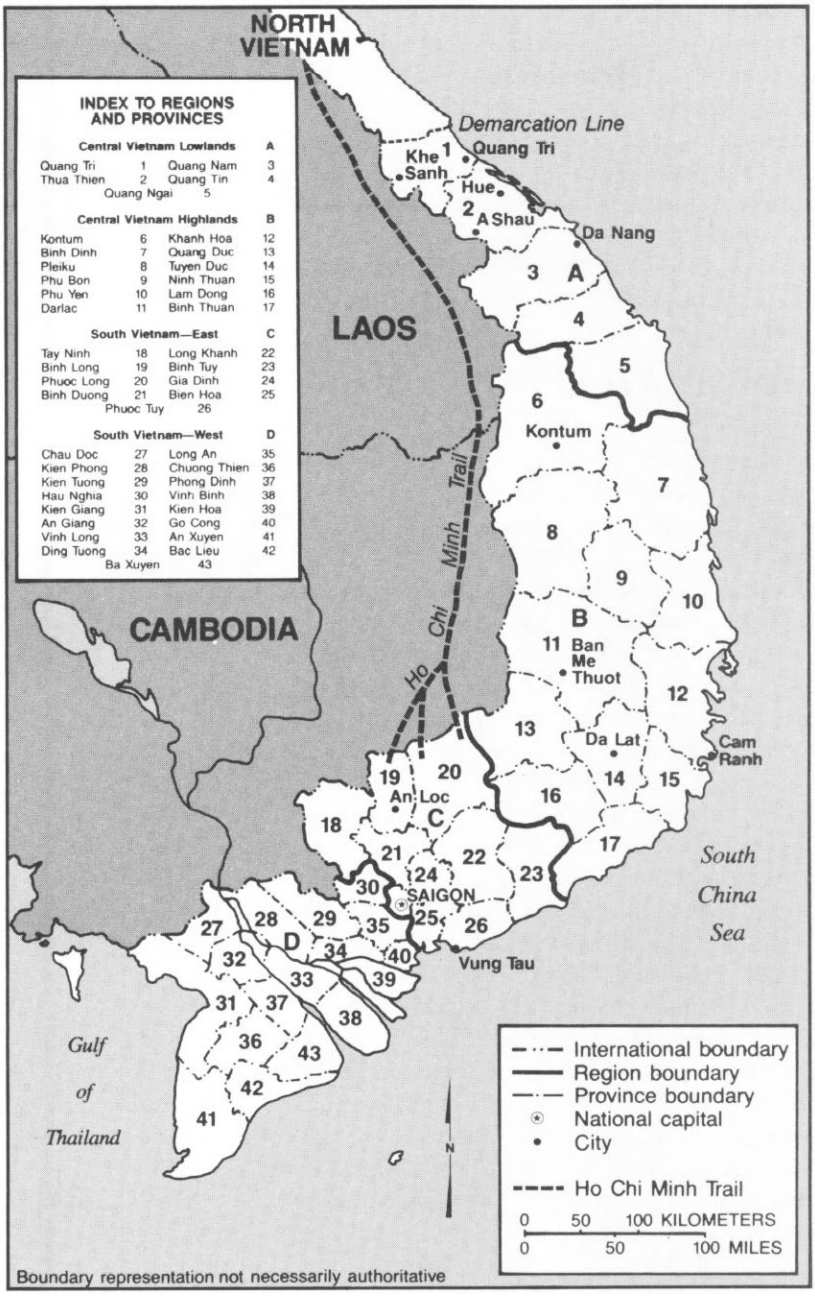


Figure 9. South Vietnam's Administrative Divisions, 1966

government supporters alike. In elections held in South Vietnam in September 1967, former generals Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky were elected president and vice president, respectively. A number of popular candidates, including Buddhists and peace candidates, were barred from running, and newspapers were largely suppressed during the campaign. Even so, the military candidates received less than 35 percent of the vote, although the election took place only in areas under the Saigon government's control. When proof of widespread election fraud was produced by the defeated candidates, students and Buddhists demonstrated and demanded that the elections be annulled.

The Tet Offensive

In mid-1967 the costs of the war mounted daily with no military victory in sight for either side. Against this background, the party leadership in Hanoi decided that the time was ripe for a general offensive in the rural areas combined with a popular uprising in the cities. The primary goals of this combined major offensive and uprising were to destabilize the Saigon regime and to force the United States to opt for a negotiated settlement. In October 1967, the first stage of the offensive began with a series of small attacks in remote and border areas designed to draw the ARVN and United States forces away from the cities. The rate of infiltration of troops from the North rose to 20,000 per month by late 1967, and the United States command in Saigon predicted a major communist offensive early the following year. The DMZ area was expected to bear the brunt of the attack. Accordingly, United States troops were sent to strengthen northern border posts, and the security of the Saigon area was transferred to ARVN forces. Despite warnings of the impending offensive, in late January more than one-half of the ARVN forces were on leave because of the approaching Tet (Lunar New Year) holiday.

On January 31, 1968, the full-scale offensive began, with simultaneous attacks by the communists on five major cities, thirty-six provincial capitals, sixty-four district capitals, and numerous villages. In Saigon, suicide squads attacked the Independence Palace (the residence of the president), the radio station, the ARVN's joint General Staff Compound, Tan Son Nhut airfield, and the United States embassy, causing considerable damage and throwing the city into turmoil. Most of the attack forces throughout the country collapsed within a few days, often under the pressure of United States bombing and artillery attacks, which extensively damaged the urban areas. Hue, which had been seized by an estimated 12,000 communist troops who had previously infiltrated the city, remained

Newly arrived United States troops board buses at the Bien Hoa Air Terminal, February 1970. Courtesy United States Army

in communist hands until late February. A reported 2,000 to 3,000 officials, police, and others were executed in Hue during that time as counterrevolutionaries.

The Tet offensive is widely viewed as a turning point in the war despite the high cost to the communists (approximately 32,000 killed and about 5,800 captured) for what appeared at the time to be small gains. Although they managed to retain control of some of the rural areas, the communists were forced out of all of the towns and cities, except Hue, within a few weeks. Nevertheless, the offensive emphasized to the Johnson administration that victory in Vietnam would require a greater commitment of men and resources than the American people were willing to invest. On March 31, 1968, Johnson announced that he would not seek his party's nomination for another term of office, declared a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam (except for a narrow strip above the DMZ), and urged Hanoi to agree to peace talks. In the meantime, with United States troop strength at 525,000, a request by Westmoreland for an additional 200,000 troops was refused by a presidential commission headed by the new United States secretary of defense, Clark Clifford.

Following the Tet Offensive, the communists attempted to maintain their momentum through a series of attacks directed mainly

at cities in the delta. Near the DMZ, some 15,000 PAVN and PLAF troops were also thrown into a three-month attack on the United States base at Khe Sanh. A second assault on Saigon, complete with rocket attacks, was launched in May. Through these and other attacks in the spring and summer of 1968, the communists kept up pressure on the battlefield in order to strengthen their position in a projected series of four-party peace talks scheduled to begin in January 1969 that called for representatives of the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the National Liberation Front to meet in Paris. In June 1969, the NLF and its allied organizations formed the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG), recognized by Hanoi as the legal government of South Vietnam. At that time, communist losses dating from the Tet Offensive numbered 75,000, and morale was faltering, even among the party leadership.

Peace Negotiations

With negotiations making little progress, the United States military commander in Saigon, General Creighton W. Abrams, who had held that post since mid-1968, requested and was given permission by President Richard M. Nixon to launch secret bombing attacks, beginning March 18, 1970, on what were described as Vietnamese communist sanctuaries and supply routes inside Cambodia. In late March, Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia was ousted as chief of state in a military coup led by Premier and Defense Minister, General Lon Nol. Shortly thereafter, the Lon Nol government cancelled an agreement that had allowed North Vietnam to use the port at Sihanoukville. Hanoi reacted by increasing support to the Khmer (Kampuchean) Communist Party, by then under the leadership of the radical Pol Pot. In April, Nixon authorized the invasion of Cambodia by a joint United States-ARVN force of 30,000 troops for the purpose of destroying communist bases across the border. Little more than short-term gains were accomplished by the invasion, which resulted in massive protests in the United States, leading to the passage of legislation by Congress requiring the removal of United States troops from Cambodia by the end of June.

In 1971 and 1972, the communists faced some serious problems unrelated to United States offensive operations. The Saigon government began to gain some support in the Mekong Delta because of the implementation of a "land-to-the-tiller" reform program pressed on the Thieu government by Washington in 1970. Almost 400,000 farmers received a total of 600,000 hectares, and by 1972 tenancy reportedly had declined from about 60 percent to 34 percent

in some rural areas. In addition, a People's Self-Defense Force Program begun about this time had some success in freeing ARVN troops for combat duty, as United States forces were gradually withdrawn. Although it wasn't clear at the time whether the withdrawal of United States troops would cause the ARVN to crumble instantly, as predicted by the communists, the decisive defeat of an ARVN operation mounted against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos in March 1971 was an early indication. At the time of the ARVN defeat, however, the communists were coping with deteriorating morale and with dwindling numbers of troops; a rising desertion rate and falling recruitment levels had reduced PLAF strength from 250,000 in 1968 to less than 200,000 in 1971.

Both on the battlefield and at the conference table, a stalemate of sorts was reached by mid-1971. In negotiations there was some flexibility, as Washington offered a unilateral withdrawal of United States forces provided Hanoi stopped its infiltration of the South; and Hanoi countered by agreeing to a coalition government in Saigon along with a United States troop withdrawal and to a cease-fire following the formation of a new government. The main point of debate was the retention of President Thieu as head of the South Vietnamese government, which Washington demanded and Hanoi rejected. To break the deadlock, the party leadership in Hanoi turned again to the strategy of a general offensive and uprising. Accordingly, the so-called Easter offensive was launched beginning on March 30, 1972, with a three-pronged attack across the DMZ through the A Shau Valley. The following day the communists attacked the city of Kontum and the provinces of Binh Dinh and Phuoc Tuy, threatening to cut South Vietnam in two. A few days later, three PAVN divisions attacked Binh Long Province along the Cambodian border, placing the capital, An Loc, under siege. In May the communists captured Quang Tri Province, including the capital, which was not recaptured by the ARVN until September. By that time, Quang Tri city had been virtually leveled by United States air strikes. Although the Easter offensive did not result in the fall of the Saigon government, as the communists had hoped, it did further destabilize the government and reveal the ARVN's weaknesses. The costs were great on both sides, however, and by October both Hanoi and Washington were more inclined to negotiate. By then Hanoi had agreed to accept Thieu as president of a future Saigon government in exchange for the removal of United States forces without a corresponding removal of PAVN troops. Thieu's objections to the failure to require the removal of North Vietnamese forces was in the end ignored, and the Agreement on

Interment for 300 unidentified victims of communist occupation of Hue in 1968
Courtesy United States Army

Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam was signed in Paris on January 27, 1973.

The Final Campaign

Although the terms of the peace agreement were less than the communists had hoped for, the accords did permit them to participate in the new government legally and recognized their right to control certain areas. Most important, the removal of United States forces gave the communists a welcome breathing space, allowing them to concentrate on political efforts. In the initial period after the signing of the agreement, the party leadership viewed armed struggle as a last resort only because it was feared that the United States might reintroduce its forces. PLAF troops were instructed to limit their use of force to self-defense. Meanwhile, the Thieu government embarked on pacification efforts along the central coast and in the Mekong Delta, which resulted in a reduction of the area under official communist control to about 20 percent of the South. The Saigon government, however, faced serious difficulties, including the negative effect on the economy of the withdrawal of United States forces and a critical refugee problem. During the course of the war, several million Vietnamese had been evacuated or had fled from their villages to find safety and jobs in urban areas. Most of these remained unemployed and, together with militant Buddhist groups, the Cao Dai, and the Hoa Hao, represented a sizable wellspring of discontent with the Thieu government.

In early 1974, the communists launched a campaign to regain the territory they had lost since the cease-fire. Raids were conducted on roads, airfields, and economic installations; the flow of supplies and equipment from the North was stepped up; and a 19,000-kilometer network of roads leading from the DMZ in Quang Tri Province to Loc Ninh, northwest of Saigon, was completed. By summer the communists were moving cautiously forward, seizing vulnerable areas in the Central Highlands and in the provinces around Saigon. There was no direct response from the United States, and the resignation of Nixon in August convinced the party leadership that further United States intervention was unlikely. ARVN forces continued to deteriorate, suffering high casualties and facing a lack of ammunition and spare parts. The party leadership met in October to plan a 1975 military offensive concentrating on the Cambodian border area and the Central Highlands. The taking of the Phuoc Long province capital, Phuoc Binh (now Ba Ra in Song Be Province), in early January was followed by a surprise attack in March on Ban Me Thuot, the largest city in the Central Highlands. President Thieu ordered ARVN units at Pleiku

Kham Thien Street Memorial in Hanoi depicting a mother and child standing on a United States Air Force bomb fragment
Courtesy Bill Herod

Bicycles used to transport rice on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, captured during United States operations in Cambodia, spring 1970
Courtesy United States Army

and Kontum to leave the highlands and withdraw to the coast to regroup for a counterattack on Ban Me Thuot. The ARVN strategic withdrawal became a rout, however, because PAVN units had already cut the main roads to the coast and fleeing civilians clogged the secondary roads as panic ensued. By the end of March, eight northern provinces had fallen to the communist forces, including the cities of Hue and Da Nang. Buoyed by this stunning victory, the party leadership directed the commander of revolutionary forces in the South, General Van Tien Dung to prepare for an offensive against Saigon. In early April, PAVN and PLAF troops moved south and began an encirclement of the capital. On April 20, after ten days of stiff resistance, the ARVN Eighteenth Division, stationed thirty kilometers north of Saigon, finally crumbled under the attack of three PAVN divisions. With Saigon in a state of panic, President Thieu resigned the following day and was replaced by Vice President Tran Van Huong. Duong Van Minh, thought to be more acceptable to the communists, took over the presidency on April 28. The communists refused to negotiate, however, and fifteen PAVN battalions began to move toward Saigon. On April 30, communist forces entered the capital, and Duong Van Minh ordered ARVN troops to lay down their arms.

Nearly thirty years had passed since Ho Chi Minh first declared Vietnam's independence as a unified nation in September 1945. In the interim, an entire generation of Vietnamese had endured a divided Vietnam, knowing only continuous warfare. The events of April 1975 not only abruptly concluded the war but also prepared the way for the official reunification of the country the following year, when the Vietnamese people were brought together under one independent government for the first time in more than a century.

* * *

The body of literature in English on the history of Vietnam has increased dramatically since the mid-1960s. Most of the writing, however, has focused on the three decades of war in that country following World War II. The increased interest in Vietnam, nevertheless, has prompted a number of historians to take the longer view—the Vietnamese view—of history and to examine earlier time periods.

Based on Vietnamese and Chinese sources, and particularly useful for Vietnamese history from the earliest traditions up to the end of the Chinese millennium, is Keith Weller Taylor's *Birth of Vietnam.* Also treating this period, as well as the period up through

World War II, is Thomas Hodgkin's, *Vietnam. The Revolutionary Path.* Hodgkin gives detailed coverage of the 900-year period of Vietnamese independence, while D.G.E. Hall's classic *History of South-East Asia* provides a description and analysis of that period within the larger Southeast Asian context. Another useful single-volume history of Vietnam up to 1968 is Joseph Buttinger's *Vietnam: A Political History.* Finally, Alexander Woodside in *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* presents an interesting analysis, based on Vietnamese and Chinese sources, of Chinese influence on Vietnamese education, administration, literature, and law during the nineteenth century.

J. F. Cady treats in detail the French conquest and early colonial period in *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia.* David Marr uses Vietnamese source materials to examine the roots of Vietnamese nationalism in *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885–1925,* and William Duiker in *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900–1941* carries the examination of the nationalist movement up to the early period of Japanese occupation. Duiker also traces the communist movement from its origins to the reunification of the country in *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam.*

Although their focus is somewhat peripheral to an overview history of Vietnam, there are a number of accounts of the United States involvement in Vietnam that bear mentioning, including: William Turley's *The Second Indochina War;* Ronald Spector's *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960;* R.B. Smith's *An International History of the Vietnam War;* Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam. A History;* and George McT. Kahin's, *Intervention. How America Became Involved in Vietnam.* (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment

Village official, late French colonial period

SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE his death in 1969, Ho Chi Minh declared that Vietnam would "certainly be reunified under the same roof" no matter what difficulties and hardships might lie ahead. In 1976 the country was territorially reunited—under Hanoi's roof—after more than twenty years of separation. This historic event proved, however, to be only the first step toward the ultimate test of reunification—the development of sociocultural, economic, and political processes that could best serve the aspirations and needs of the Vietnamese people. In 1987 Vietnam was, in some respects, still a divided nation and still at war—not for liberation from the bondage of neo-colonialism but for the triumph of socialism in what was officially called the struggle between the socialist and the capitalist paths.

The struggle between socialism and capitalism unfolded in an environment of social and religious patterns molded by centuries of cultural influences from Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, indigenous animism, and, more recently, Roman Catholicism. The communist government disparaged some of these influences as feudal, backward, superstitious, reactionary, or bourgeois and targeted them for reform. Others, including Buddhism, Catholicism, and minor faiths, were tolerated.

The Vietnamese people were continually urged to discard vestiges of the old society and to adopt instead new values associated with love of labor, collective ownership, patriotism, socialism, and the proletarian dictatorship under the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Viet Nam Cong San Dang). In 1987 these values were at best an abstraction to most Vietnamese, except perhaps for a fraction of the party's fewer than 2 million members. Despite the increasing dependence of families, simply for subsistence, on organizations sponsored by collectives and the state, the strongest bond in the society by far was that of family loyalty. Such loyalty was particularly evident after the mid-1970s, when living conditions deteriorated amid indications of growing government corruption.

Much of Vietnam's contemporary history has been a grim struggle, not on behalf of patriotism or socialism but for survival. With a per capita income estimated at less than US$200 per year, the Vietnamese people in the 1980s remained among the poorest in the world. In 1987 the society was predominantly rural; more than 80 percent of the population resided in villages and engaged primarily in farming. Among the urban population, party and

government officials supplanted the former elite, whose privileged status had been derived mainly from wealth and higher education. In theory, Vietnam had eliminated all exploiting classes by developing a class structure composed of workers, peasants, and socialist intellectuals. In practice, a small-scale bourgeoisie continued to operate in the South's industrial sector with the permission of the state, and, according to an official source, some cadres in the south were exploiting peasants in the tradition of former landowners.

Theoretically the society is multiracial, but actually it is dominated by an ethnic Vietnamese elite. Vietnamese, who outnumber other ethnic groups, are overwhelmingly lowlanders; minority peoples, who are divided into nearly sixty groups of various sizes and backgrounds, are mostly highlanders. With the exception of the Chinese, or Hoa (see Glossary), who are mostly lowlanders, the minority peoples traditionally lived apart from one another and from the Vietnamese. In the 1980s, however, the distance between the highland and lowland communities gradually narrowed as a result of the government policy of population redistribution and political integration.

Under this policy, lowlanders were sent to remote, uninhabited areas of the highlands both to relieve overcrowding in the cities and in the congested Red River Delta and to increase food production. Both aims were part of the government's effort to raise the standard of living, which in turn was linked to another urgent national priority—family planning. In 1987 the rate of population growth continued to outstrip food production. Given the people's traditional belief in large families, the government faced a major challenge in its attempt to reduce the annual rate of population growth to 1.7 percent or less by 1990.

Geography

Vietnam is located in the southeastern extremity of the Indochinese peninsula and occupies about 331,688 square kilometers, of which about 25 percent was under cultivation in 1987. The S-shaped country has a north-to-south distance of 1,650 kilometers and is about 50 kilometers wide at the narrowest point. With a coastline of 3,260 kilometers, excluding islands, Vietnam claims 12 nautical miles as the limit of its territorial waters, an additional 12 nautical miles as a contiguous customs and security zone, and 200 nautical miles as an exclusive economic zone.

The boundary with Laos, settled, on an ethnic basis, between the rulers of Vietnam and Laos in the mid-seventeenth century, was formally defined by a delimitation treaty signed in 1977 and ratified in 1986. The frontier with Cambodia, defined at the time

of French annexation of the western part of the Mekong River Delta in 1867, remained essentially unchanged, according to Hanoi, until some unresolved border issues were finally settled in the 1982–85 period. The land and sea boundary with China, delineated under the France-China treaties of 1887 and 1895, is "the frontier line" accepted by Hanoi that China agreed in 1957–58 to respect. However, in February 1979, following China's limited invasion of Vietnam, Hanoi complained that from 1957 onward China had provoked numerous border incidents as part of its anti-Vietnam policy and expansionist designs in Southeast Asia. Among the territorial infringements cited was the Chinese occupation in January 1974 of the Paracel Islands, claimed by both countries in a dispute left unresolved in the 1980s (see Foreign Relations, ch. 4).

Vietnam is a country of tropical lowlands, hills, and densely forested highlands, with level land covering no more than 20 percent of the area. The country is divided into the highlands and the Red River Delta in the north; and the Giai Truong Son (Central mountains, or the Chaîne Annamitique, sometimes referred to simply as the Chaîne), the coastal lowlands, and the Mekong River Delta in the south.

The Red River Delta, a flat, triangular region of 3,000 square kilometers, is smaller but more intensely developed and more densely populated than the Mekong River Delta. Once an inlet of the Gulf of Tonkin, it has been filled in by the enormous alluvial deposits of the rivers, over a period of millennia, and it advances one hundred meters into the gulf annually. The ancestral home of the ethnic Vietnamese, the delta accounted for almost 70 percent of the agriculture and 80 percent of the industry of North Vietnam before 1975.

The Red River (Song Hong in Vietnamese), rising in China's Yunnan Province, is about 1,200 kilometers long. Its two main tributaries, the Song Lo (also called the Lo River, the Rivière Claire, or the Clear River) and the Song Da (also called the Black River or Rivière Noire), contribute to its high water volume, which averages 500 million cubic meters per second, but may increase by more than 60 times at the peak of the rainy season. The entire delta region, backed by the steep rises of the forested highlands, is no more than three meters above sea level, and much of it is one meter or less. The area is subject to frequent flooding; at some places the high-water mark of floods is fourteen meters above the surrounding countryside. For centuries flood control has been an integral part of the delta's culture and economy. An extensive system of dikes and canals has been built to contain the Red River and to irrigate the rich rice-growing delta. Modeled on that of

China, this ancient system has sustained a highly concentrated population and has made double-cropping wet-rice cultivation possible throughout about half the region (see Agriculture, ch. 3; fig. 10).

The highlands and mountain plateaus in the north and northwest are inhabited mainly by tribal minority groups. The Giai Truong Son originates in the Xizang (Tibet) and Yunnan regions of southwest China and forms Vietnam's border with Laos and Cambodia. It terminates in the Mekong River Delta north of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon).

These central mountains, which have several high plateaus, are irregular in elevation and form. The northern section is narrow and very rugged; the country's highest peak, Fan Si Pan, rises to 3,142 meters in the extreme northwest. The southern portion has numerous spurs that divide the narrow coastal strip into a series of compartments. For centuries these topographical features not only rendered north-south communication difficult but also formed an effective natural barrier for the containment of the people living in the Mekong basin.

Within the southern portion of Vietnam is a plateau known as the Central Highlands (Tay Nguyen), approximately 51,800 square kilometers of rugged mountain peaks, extensive forests, and rich soil. Comprising 5 relatively flat plateaus of basalt soil spread over the provinces of Dac Lac and Gia Lai-Kon Tum, the highlands account for 16 percent of the country's arable land and 22 percent of its total forested land (see fig. 1). Before 1975 North Vietnam had maintained that the Central Highlands and the Giai Truong Son were strategic areas of paramount importance, essential to the domination not only of South Vietnam but also of the southern part of Indochina. Since 1975 the highlands have provided an area in which to relocate people from the densely populated lowlands. The narrow, flat coastal lowlands extend from south of the Red River Delta to the Mekong River basin. On the landward side, the Giai Truong Son rises precipitously above the coast, its spurs jutting into the sea at several places. Generally the coastal strip is fertile and rice is cultivated intensively.

The Mekong, which is 4,220 kilometers long, is one of the 12 great rivers of the world. From its source in the Xizang plateau, it flows through the Xizang and Yunnan regions of China, forms the boundary between Laos and Burma as well as between Laos and Thailand, divides into two branches—the Song Han Giang and Song Tien Giang—below Phnom Penh, and continues through Cambodia and the Mekong basin before draining into the South China Sea through nine mouths or *cuu long* (nine dragons). The

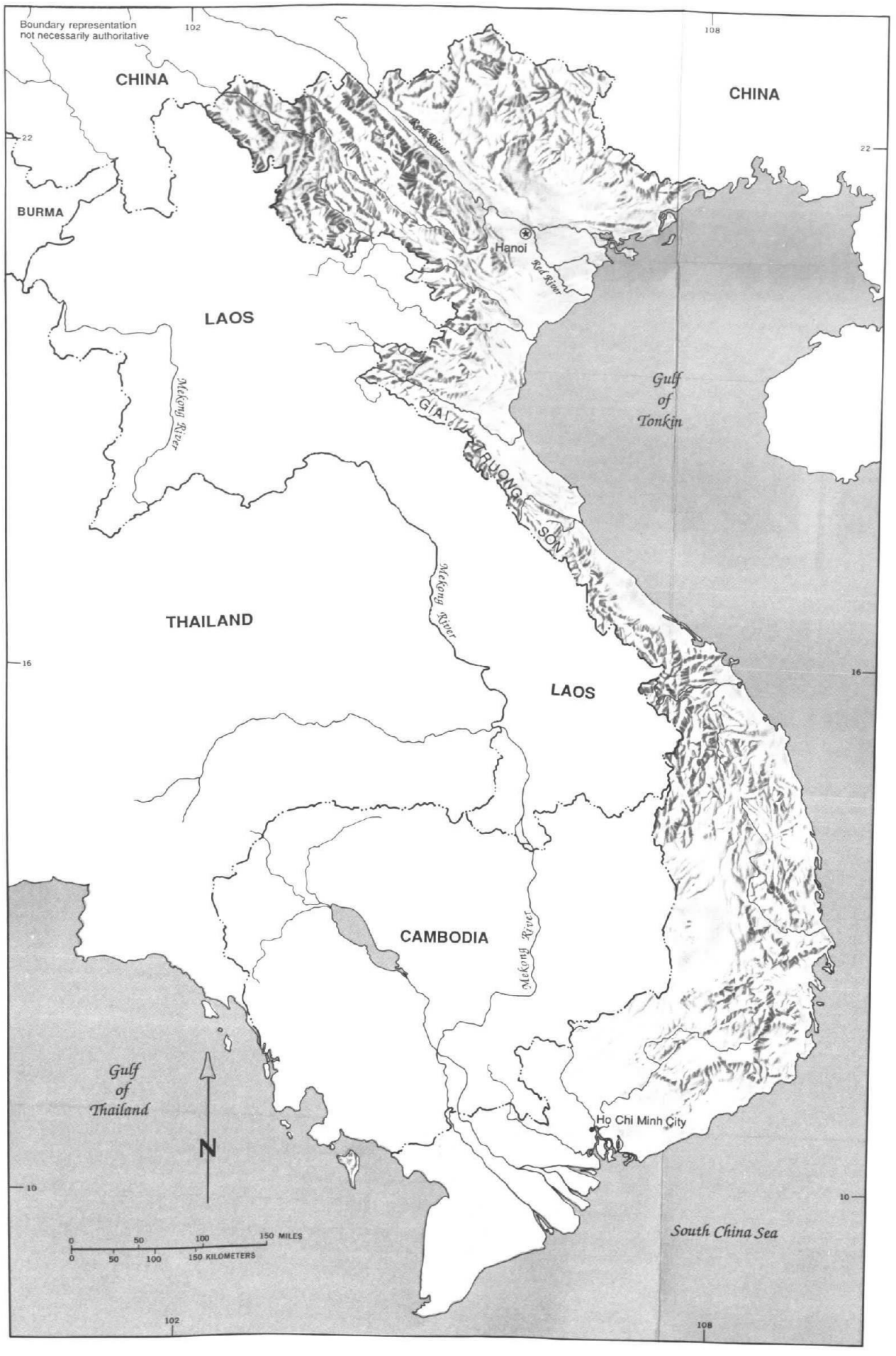


Figure 10. Topography and Drainage, 1987

river is heavily silted and is navigable by seagoing craft of shallow draft as far as Kompong Cham in Cambodia. A tributary entering the river at Phnom Penh drains the Tonle Sap, a shallow freshwater lake that acts as a natural reservoir to stabilize the flow of water through the lower Mekong. When the river is in flood stage, its silted delta outlets are unable to carry off the high volume of water. Floodwaters back up into the Tonle Sap, causing the lake to inundate as much as 10,000 square kilometers. As the flood subsides, the flow of water reverses and proceeds from the lake to the sea. The effect is to reduce significantly the danger of devastating floods in the Mekong delta, where the river floods the surrounding fields each year to a level of one to two meters.

The Mekong delta, covering about 40,000 square kilometers, is a low-level plain not more than three meters above sea level at any point and criss-crossed by a maze of canals and rivers. So much sediment is carried by the Mekong's various branches and tributaries that the delta advances sixty to eighty meters into the sea every year. An official Vietnamese source estimates the amount of sediment deposited annually to be about 1 billion cubic meters, or nearly 13 times the amount deposited by the Red River. About 10,000 square kilometers of the delta are under rice cultivation, making the area one of the major rice-growing regions of the world. The southern tip, known as the Ca Mau Peninsula, is covered by dense jungle and mangrove swamps.

Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate, with humidity averaging 84 percent throughout the year. However, because of differences in latitude and the marked variety of topographical relief, the climate tends to vary considerably from place to place. During the winter or dry season, extending roughly from November to April, the monsoon winds usually blow from the northeast along the China coast and across the Gulf of Tonkin, picking up considerable moisture; consequently the winter season in most parts of the country is dry only by comparison with the rainy or summer season. During the southwesterly summer monsoon, occurring from May to October, the heated air of the Gobi Desert rises, far to the north, inducing moist air to flow inland from the sea and deposit heavy rainfall.

Annual rainfall is substantial in all regions and torrential in some, ranging from 120 centimeters to 300 centimeters. Nearly 90 percent of the precipitation occurs during the summer. The average annual temperature is generally higher in the plains than in the mountains and plateaus. Temperatures range from a low of 5°C in December and January, the coolest months, to more than 37°C in April, the hottest month. Seasonal divisions are more clearly

marked in the northern half than in the southern half of the country, where, except in some of the highlands, seasonal temperatures vary only a few degrees, usually in the 21°C–28°C range.

Population

According to Hanoi, the population of Vietnam was almost 60 million at the end of 1985 (Western sources estimated about a half million more than that in mid-1985). Vietnamese officials estimated that the population would be at least 66 million by 1990 and 80 million by the year 2000, unless the growth rate of 2 percent per year used for these estimates was lowered to 1.7 percent by 1990. With declining mortality rates achieved through improved health conditions, the population increased by 1.2 million or more per year between 1981 and 1986 (1.5 million in 1985 alone), worsening the country's chronic food shortage. In the 1980s, Vietnam needed to produce an additional 400,000 tons of food each year just to keep pace with its rapidly increasing population.

Census results of October 1979 showed the total population of reunified Vietnam to be 52.7 million of which 52 percent lived in the North and 48 percent in the South. About 19 percent of the population was classified as urban and 81 percent as rural. Females outnumbered males by 3 percent, and the average life expectancy at birth was 66 for females and 63 for males. With 52 percent of the total under 20 years of age, the population was young. Ethnically, 87 percent were Vietnamese-speaking lowlanders known as Viet or Kinh, and the remainder were Hoa or members of highland minority groups (see Ethnic Groups and Languages, this ch.). In December 1986, Hanoi estimated that more than 1 million Vietnamese lived overseas, 50 percent of them in the United States. A Vietnamese source in Paris claimed that about half of Ho Chi Minh City's population lived completely or partially on family aid packages sent by Vietnamese émigrés abroad.

Beginning in the early 1960s, the socioeconomic implications of rapid population growth became an increasing concern of the government in Hanoi. A family planning drive, instituted in 1963, was claimed by the government to have accounted for a decline in the annual growth rate in the North from 3.4 percent in 1960 to 2.7 percent in 1975. In the South, however, family planning was actively encouraged only after 1976, and the results were mixed, consistently falling short of announced goals. In 1981 Hanoi set a national goal of 1.7 percent growth rate to be achieved by the end of 1985: a growth rate of 1.3 to 1.5 percent was established for the North, 1.5 to 1.7 percent for the South, and 1.7 to 2.0 percent for the sparsely settled highland provinces. In 1987, the growth

rate, according to Vietnamese sources, was about 2.0 percent (see table 2, Appendix A).

Family planning was described as voluntary and dependent upon persuasion. The program's guidelines called for two children per couple, births spaced five years apart, and a minimum age of twenty-two for first-time mothers—a major challenge in a society where the customary age for women to marry, especially in the rural areas, was sixteen to twenty. Campaign workers were instructed to refrain tactfully from mentioning abortion and to focus instead on pregnancy prevention when dealing with people of strong religious conviction. Enlisting the support of Catholic priests for the campaign was strongly encouraged. In 1987 it was evident that the government was serious about family planning; a new law on marriage and the family adopted in December 1986 made family planning obligatory, and punitive measures, such as pay cuts and denial of bonuses and promotions, were introduced for noncompliance (see The Family since 1954, this ch.).

A substantial portion of the population had mixed feelings about birth control and sex education, and the number of women marrying before age twenty remained high. Typically, a woman of childbearing age had four or more children. The 1986 family law that raised the legal marriage age for women to twenty-two met with strenuous opposition. Critics argued that raising the legal age offered no solution to the widespread practice among Vietnamese youth of "falling in love early, having sexual relations early, and getting married early." Some critics even advanced the view that the population should be increased to further economic development; others insisted that those who could grow enough food for themselves need not practice birth control. A significant proportion of the population retained traditional attitudes which favored large families with many sons as a means of insuring the survival of a family's lineage and providing for its security. Although problems associated with urban living, such as inadequate housing and unemployment, created a need for change in traditional family-size standards, old ways nevertheless persisted. They were perpetuated in proverbs like "If Heaven procreates elephants, it will provide enough grass to feed them" or "To have one son is to have; to have ten daughters is not to have."

Government authorities were concerned over the lack of coordination among agencies involved in family planning and the lack of necessary clinics and funding to provide convenient, safe, and efficient family planning services in rural areas. Even more disturbing was the knowledge that many local party committees and government agencies were only going through the motions of

supporting the family planning drive. To remedy the situation, the government in 1984 created the National Committee on Family Planning (also known as the National Commission on Demography and Family Planning, or the National Population and Parenthood Commission). The commission was directed to increase the rate of contraceptive use among married couples from about 23 percent in 1983 to 70 percent by 1990 and to limit the population to between 75 and 80 million by the year 2000. The latter goal was to be based on an annual growth rate of 1.7 percent or less, a figure that in 1987 seemed unrealistically low. According to a National Committee on Family Planning report released in February 1987, the population grew by 2.2 percent in 1986 (Western analysts estimate the increase to have been between 2.5 and 2.8 percent). In light of the 1986 growth rate, the committee's target for 1987 was revised at the beginning of the year to 1.9 percent. Even if such a goal were met, Vietnam's population at the end of 1987 would stand in excess of 63 million inhabitants.

The average population density in 1985 was 179 persons per square kilometer. Population density varied widely, however, and was generally lower in the southern provinces than in the northern ones; in both North and South it was also lower in the highlands and mountainous regions than in the lowlands. The most densely settled region was the Red River Delta, accounting for roughly 75 percent of the population of the North. Also heavily settled was the Mekong River Delta, with nearly half of the southern population.

After 1976, population redistribution became a pressing issue because of food shortages and unemployment in the urban areas. A plan unveiled at the Fourth National Party Congress in December 1976 called for the relocation of 44 million people by 1980 and an additional 10 million by the mid-1990s. The plan also called for opening up 1 million hectares of virgin land to cultivation and introduced a measure designed to divert some armed forces personnel to the building of new economic zones (see Glossary). The relocation was to involve an interregional transfer of northerners to the South as well as an intraregional movement of lowlanders to upland areas in both the North and the South. Between 1976 and 1980, most of the 4 million people who were relocated to rural areas and the new economic zones were from Ho Chi Minh City and other southern cities. In the 1981–85 period, a total of about 0.6 million workers and 1.3 million dependents were relocated, causing the country's urban population to decline from 19.3 percent of the total in 1979 to 18 percent in 1985. The country's long-range goal, established in 1976, called for the population to be distributed

more or less evenly throughout Vietnam's 443 districts with an average for each district of 200,000 persons living on 20,000 hectares (see fig. 11).

Ethnic Groups and Languages

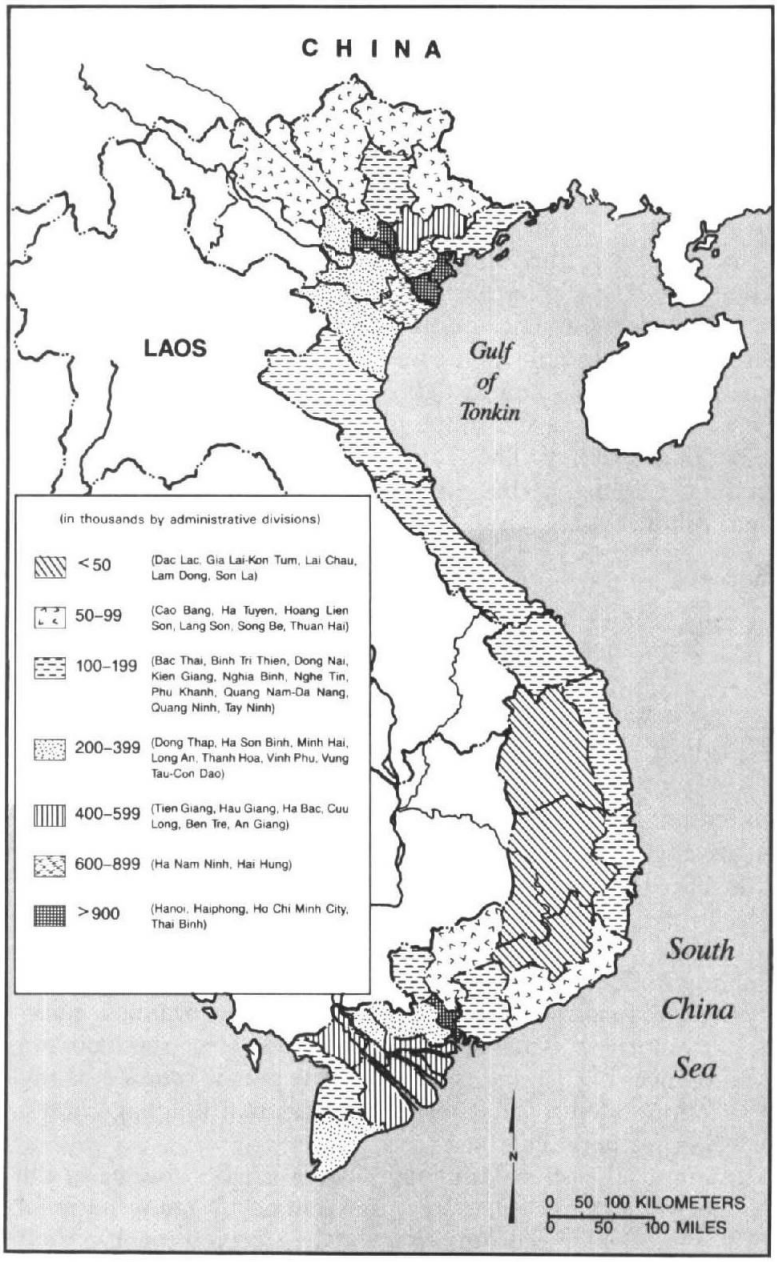
The ethnic Vietnamese are concentrated largely in the alluvial deltas and in the coastal plains, having little in common with the minority peoples of the highlands, whom they historically have regarded as hostile and barbaric. A homogenous social group, the Vietnamese exert influence on national life through their control of political and economic affairs and their role as purveyors of the dominant culture. By contrast, the ethnic minorities, except for the Hoa, are found mostly in the highlands that cover two-thirds of the national territory. The Hoa, the largest minority, are mainly lowlanders. Officially, the ethnic minorities are referred to as national minorities.

Vietnamese

The origins of the Vietnamese are generally traced to the inhabitants of the Red River Delta between 500 and 200 B.C., people who were a mixture of Australoid, Austronesian, and Mongoloid stock. Like their contemporary descendants, they were largely villagers, skilled in rice cultivation and fishing (see Early History, ch. 1).

Contemporary ethnic Vietnamese live in urban as well as rural areas, are engaged in a variety of occupations, and are represented at all levels on the socioeconomic scale. The power elite (senior officials in the party, government, and military establishments), in particular, is dominated by ethnic Vietnamese. Although predominantly Buddhist, the Vietnamese people's religious beliefs and practices nevertheless include remnants of an earlier animistic faith. A sizable minority is Roman Catholic. Despite some regional and local differences in customs and speech, the people retain a strong sense of ethnic identity that rests on a common language and a shared cultural heritage.

Vietnamese, the official language, is the mother tongue of the vast majority of the people and is understood by many national minority members. According to a widely accepted theory, Vietnamese is believed to be related to the Austroasiatic family of languages, which includes various languages, dialects, and subdialects spoken in mainland Southeast Asia from Burma to Vietnam. Scholarship nonetheless is tentative on whether Vietnamese, which was spoken in the Red River Delta long before the Christian era, was influenced by Mon-Khmer or Tai, both Austroasiatic subsets.



Source: Based on information from Tong Cuc Thong Ke, *So Lieu Thong Ke, 1930-1984,* Hanoi, 1985, 7-8.

Figure 11. Population Distribution, 1984

Actually, the Vietnamese language was influenced more by classical Chinese than by any other language. During more than 1,000 years of Chinese rule and for centuries afterwards, Chinese was the language of officialdom, scholarship, and literature. The Chinese language had special status because of its identification with the ruling class of scholar-officials. Nevertheless, Vietnamese continued to be the popular language, even though knowledge of Chinese was a prerequisite to government employment and social advancement.

Beginning in the eighth or ninth century, the Vietnamese devised a popular script based on Chinese characters to express written ideas and to standardize the phonetics of their own language. Well developed by the thirteenth century, this system, which combined ideographs and phonetics, became the medium for a growing popular literature. The system is known as *chu nom,* literally "southern character" or "southern writing," or simply *nom.* Although disdained by orthodox Confucian scholars, *chu nom* had a distinct place in the evolution of Vietnam's vernacular literature through the end of the nineteenth century.

In the seventeenth century, the Vietnamese language evolved further when Portuguese and French missionaries developed a new transcription that used roman letters instead of Chinese characters. The new system, called *quoc ngu,* was devised as a tool for their missionary activities, including the translation of prayer books and catechisms. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become the common method of writing, gradually replacing classical Chinese and *chu nom. Quoc ngu* uses diacritical marks above or below letters to indicate variations in the pronunciation of vowels and of consonants, and differentiations in tones. Since most single syllables function as meaningful words identified only by tone, and each of these phonetic syllables can have numerous meanings, the diacritical marks are an essential part of the new writing system (see Nine Centuries of Independence, ch. 1).

Under French rule, the French language was widely used in the cities, and it was read and spoken by all secondary-school graduates. Many less educated people, including merchants, low-ranking civil servants, army veterans, and domestics working for French households, also had some familiarity with the language, although their knowledge might be limited to a form of pidgin French. In the rural areas the language generally was less well-known, but a number of minority peoples learned its rudiments in school or during service with the French army. Use of the French language resulted in minor changes in the grammatical structure of Vietnamese and in the addition of some new technical, scientific, and popular terms.

Minorities

Living somewhat separately from the dominant ethnic Vietnamese are the numerous minorities. The 1979 census listed fifty-three minorities accounting for 12.5 percent (6.6 million persons) of the national population. This figure included the Hoa (Han Chinese), the single largest bloc—representing approximately 1.8 percent of the total population, or about 935,000 people—in the lowland urban centers of both the North and the South. Of the other minority groups, thirty, comprising 68 percent of the minority population (4.5 million persons), resided in the North, while the remaining twenty-two groups, comprising 32 percent of the minority population (2.1 million persons) lived in the South. The size of each community ranged from fewer than 1,000 to as many as 0.9 million persons, and 10 major groups comprised about 85 percent of the minority population (see table 3, Appendix A).

Minorities that live in the mountainous regions are known by their generic name, Montagnards. The Vietnamese also disparagingly call them "moi," meaning savage. The government attributes the backwardness of the Montagnards to the overwhelming influence of their history as exploited and oppressed peoples. They are darker skinned than their lowland neighbors.

The origins of the non-Vietnamese minorities are far from clear, but scholars generally believe that some, like the Hmong (Meo), Zao, Nung, San Chay, Cao Lan, Giay, and Lolo, are descendants of the ancient migrants from southern China who settled in the northern border regions. Others, like the Tay, Muong, and Thai, are believed to be related to the lowland natives of Malay stock who were forced into the highlands by successive invasions of Mongoloid peoples from China. Among these indigenous minorities are the Cham of central Vietnam, remnants of a kingdom that ruled the central coast of the country until overrun by the Vietnamese in the fifteenth century, and the Khmer, whose Cambodian forebears controlled the Mekong delta region until displaced in the late eighteenth century by the Vietnamese (see Nine Centuries of Independence, ch. 1). The Khmer and the Cham are lowlanders of the south and are considered, along with the Tay, Muong, and Thai of the north, to be culturally more developed than other minority ethnic groups but less so than the Vietnamese.

The non-Chinese minority peoples, however, are for the most part highlanders who live in relative independence and follow their own traditional customs and culture. They are classified as either sedentary or nomadic. The sedentary groups, the more numerous of the two kinds, are engaged mainly in the cultivation of wet rice

Tonkinese woman, late nineteenth century
Courtesy New York Times, *Paris Collection, National Archives*

and industrial crops; the nomadic groups, in slash-and-burn farming where forested land is cleared for a brief period of cultivation and then abandoned. Both groups inhabit the same four major areas: the northern border region and the uplands adjacent to the Red River Delta, the northwestern border region adjoining Laos and China, the Central Highlands and the area along the Giai Truong Son, and parts of the Mekong River Delta and the central coastal strip. These groups are notable for their diverse cultural characteristics. They are distinguished from one another not only by language but also by such other cultural features as architectural styles, colors and shapes of dress and personal ornaments, shapes of agricultural implements, religious practices, and systems of social organization.

The number and variety of languages used by Vietnam's minorities reflect the country's ethnic complexity. Minority groups are distinguished by more than a dozen distinct languages and numerous dialects; the origins and distribution of many of these languages have not yet been conclusively established. They can, however, be classified loosely into three major language families, which in turn can be divided into several subgroups. Eleven of the minority groups—Tay, Thai, Nung, Hmong, Muong, Cham, Khmer, Kohor, Ede, Bahnar, and Jarai—have their own writing systems.

Religious practices among highland minorities tend to be rooted in animistic beliefs. Most worship a pantheon of spirits, but a large number are Catholics or Protestants. In contrast to the Mahayana Buddhist beliefs of the majority of Vietnamese, the Khmer practice Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism, and the Cham subscribe to both Islam and Hindu beliefs (see Religion, this ch.).

Before the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century, the highland minorities lived in isolation from the lowland population. Upon the consolidation of French rule, however, contacts between the two groups increased. The French, interested in the uplands for plantation agriculture, permitted the highlanders their linguistic and cultural autonomy, and administered their areas separately from the rest of Vietnam. Conferring this special status gave the French a free hand in cultivating the largely unexploited highlands, where their administrators and Christian missionaries also set up schools, hospitals, and leprosariums.

Often, however, conflicts arose between the upland communities and the French, who were distrusted as exploitative, unwelcome interlopers. The French, however, eventually overcame the unrest and successfully developed some of the highland areas, especially those of the Ede and Jarai, where they established large rubber, coffee, and tea plantations.

Montagnard tribesman
Courtesy
United States Army

After the mid-1950s, North and South Vietnam dealt with the minorities differently. The Hanoi regime in the North, recognizing the traditional separatist attitudes of the tribal minorities, initiated a policy of accommodation by setting up two autonomous zones for the highlanders in return for their acceptance of Hanoi's political control. By offering limited self-government, Hanoi's leaders hoped that integration of the minorities into Vietnamese society could eventually be achieved. By contrast, the noncommunist Saigon administration in the South, under Ngo Dinh Diem, opted for direct, centralized control of the tribal minorities and incurred their enduring wrath by seizing ancestral tribal lands for the resettlement of displaced Catholic refugees from the North.

After Diem's death in 1963, successive Saigon administrations granted a modicum of autonomy, but the strategic hamlet program, introduced in the South in the 1960s, caused further disruption by forcing highlanders to relocate to fortified enclaves. The program was proposed to improve the physical security of Montagnards as well as to deny food and services to Viet Cong (see Glossary) guerrillas, but it largely embittered its minority participants, who wanted to be left alone to continue living on their ancestral lands in the traditional manner. In an act of resistance, some tribal leaders gathered in 1964 to announce the formation of the Unified Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races (Front Unifié pour la Lutte des Races Opprimées—FULRO), representing the Bahnar,

Cham, Ede, Hre, Jarai, Mnong, Raglai, Sadang, Stieng, and other groups.

After 1975 a number of northern minority cadres were sent to the Central Highlands to lay the groundwork for socio-economic development. In 1977 a university was set up at Buon Me Thuot, capital of Dac Lac Province, to train a corps of minority cadres. These tactics were designed to narrow the socioeconomic gap not only between the highlanders and the lowlanders but also among the minorities themselves.

In the mid-1980s, the party and media expressed satisfaction with the cadres' training and commended certain highland provinces for progress in agricultural cooperativization, noting that a growing number of slash-and-burn farmers had turned to sedentary farming and that further improvements in cultural and health facilities were planned. By 1986 about 43 percent of the estimated 2.2 million nomadic minority members were reported to have adopted a more sedentary life. There were also glowing claims that minorities were now full-fledged participants in national affairs, as was evidenced by their representation in the National Assembly (see Glossary) and in other government and party organizations.

A cursory examination reveals, however, that progress was spotty. The living conditions of highlanders continued to lag behind those of lowlanders. In remote areas, "backward customs and practices" remained unchanged, minority groups were insufficiently represented among cadres, and sorely needed resources for material improvements were lacking. Official claims that closer unity and greater harmony were being achieved in a multinational Vietnam were belied by the government's frequent admonishments against "narrow nationalism" (the parochialism of the minority groups) and against "big nationality prejudices" (the ingrained Vietnamese biases against minorities). To be sure, the number of minority cadres with either general or college-level education was growing, but in 1987 these cadres represented only a small portion of the functionaries serving in the highland provinces, districts, towns, and villages. In Dac Lac Province, 91 percent of the district-level cadres and 63 percent of the key village and lower level cadres had been transferred from other places, presumably from the North or the lowlands of the South.

Under the government program of population redistribution, lowlanders continued to emigrate to the Central Highlands. In 1980 about 52 percent of the Central Highlands population consisted of ethnic Vietnamese. In 1985, as pressure mounted on the Vietnamese government to produce grain and industrial crops, a greater influx of ethnic Vietnamese was anticipated. By 1987 it seemed

clear that minority groups were likely to remain unequal partners in the management of their local affairs, despite official protestations to the contrary, as increasing numbers of Vietnamese settled in the Central Highlands.

The minority question remained an issue because of its implications not only for integration but also for internal security. In the mid-1980s, there were occasional official allusions to counterrevolutionary activities attributed to FULRO. Hanoi was quick to assert, however, that these rebel activities were blown out of proportion by the Western media (see Internal Security, ch. 5). Nonetheless, the authorities were concerned about the northern border areas, where renegades of such groups as the Hmong, Zao, and Giay were said to have participated in China's anti-Vietnamese activities after 1979 as "special gangs of bandits." Official literature supported the construction of "a border cultural defense line to counter the multifaceted war of sabotage waged by the Chinese expansionists."

Hoa

The Hoa, or ethnic Chinese, are predominantly urban dwellers. A few Hoa live in small settlements in the northern highlands near the Chinese frontier, where they are also known as *Ngai.* Traditionally, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the Chinese have retained a distinctive cultural identity, but in 1955 North Vietnam and China agreed that the Hoa should be integrated gradually into Vietnamese society and should have Vietnamese citizenship conferred on them (see Foreign Relations, ch. 4).

Before 1975 the northern Hoa were mainly rice farmers, fishermen, and coal miners, except for those residing in cities and provincial towns. In the South they were dominant in commerce and manufacturing. According to an official source, at the end of 1974 the Hoa controlled more than 80 percent of the food, textile, chemical, metallurgy, engineering, and electrical industries, 100 percent of wholesale trade, more than 50 percent of retail trade, and 90 percent of export-import trade. Dominance over the economy enabled the Hoa to "manipulate prices" of rice and other scarce goods. This particular source further observed that the Hoa community constituted "a state within a state," inasmuch as they had built "a closed world based on blood relations, strict internal discipline, and a network of sects, each with its own chief, to avoid the indigenous administration's direct interference." It was noted by Hanoi in 1983 that as many as 60 percent of "the former bourgeoisie" of the south were of Chinese origin.

In mid-1975 the combined Hoa communities of the North and South numbered approximately 1.3 million, and all but 200,000 resided in the South, most of them in the Saigon metropolitan area. Beginning in 1975, the Hoa bore the brunt of socialist transformation in the South, especially after the communist government decided in early 1978 to abolish private trade (see Economic Roles of the Party and the Government, ch. 3). This, combined with external tensions stemming from Vietnam's dispute with Cambodia and China in 1978 and 1979 caused an exodus of about 250,000 Hoa, of whom 170,000 fled overland into China from the North and the remainder fled by boat from the South (see Foreign Relations, ch. 4; The Armed Forces, ch. 5).

The Social System

Traditional Patterns

For centuries Vietnamese society was knit together by Confucian norms based on five relationships: the subordination of subject to ruler, son to father, wife to husband, and younger brother to elder brother, and the mutual respect between friends. These norms influenced the evolution of Vietnam as a hierarchic, authoritarian society in which Confucian scholarship, monarchical absolutism, filial piety, the subordinate role of women, and the family system were regarded as integral to the natural order of the universe.

The traditional society was stratified on the basis of education and occupation into four groups: scholar-officials or mandarins, farmers, artisans, and merchants. At the pinnacle was the emperor, who ruled with the "mandate of heaven." Next were the scholar-officials, recruited through rigorous civil service examinations in Chinese classical literature and philosophy. Once a person passed the triennial examinations, he became an accredited scholar or degree holder and was eligible for appointment to the imperial civil service, the most prestigious route to power, status, and wealth. Together, the emperor, his family, and the scholar-officials constituted the ruling class.

In theory, the mandarinate was not a closed social group. Commoners were permitted to apply for the examinations, and the status of scholar-official could not be inherited. In practice, however, these officials became a self-perpetuating class of generalist-administrators, partly because their sons could afford years of academic preparation for the examinations whereas most commoners could not. Education, the key to upward mobility, was neither free nor compulsory and tended to be the preserve of the mandarins.

Although social eminence and political power were thus concentrated in the hands of the mandarins, economic power was based on landholdings and was more widely diffused as a result of progressive dismantling of the hereditary feudal nobility after the fifteenth century. This process was accomplished by breaking up the nobility's vast holdings and redistributing smaller parcels to others, such as families of royal blood, prominent scholar-officials, and influential local notables. The wealthier of these notables formed a kind of landed gentry that wielded influence in the rural towns and villages.

The society was further transformed in the nineteenth century by the imposition of French rule, the introduction of Western education, the beginnings of industrialization and urbanization, and the growth of commercial agriculture. The establishment of a new, French-dominated governing class led to a rapid decline in the power and prestige of the emperor and the mandarins, whose functions were substantially reduced. When the triennial examinations were held in 1876 and 1879, an average of 6,000 candidates took them; in 1913, only 1,330 did.

In place of the old imperial bureaucracy, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a new intellectual elite emerged that emphasized achievement in science, geography, and other modern subjects instead of the Confucian classics. The new Vietnamese intelligentsia was impressed by the power of the French and by the 1905 naval victory at Tsushima of a modernized Japan over tsarist Russia. Having viewed some of the achievements of Western culture in Europe during World War I, when nearly 150,000 Vietnamese were recruited for work in French factories, the new elite proclaimed their country's need for a modern, Western educational focus. By 1920, even in the conservative city of Hue, the last Confucian outpost, wealthy families refused to marry their daughters to the sons of distinguished scholar-official families unless the young men had acquired a modern, Western-style education. The traditional civil service examinations were held for the last time in 1919.

Traditional Confucian village schools, accustomed to teaching in Chinese, introduced instruction in Vietnamese and French into the existing curriculum. Vietnamese who had successfully acquired a higher education at home or abroad entered government service as administrators or were absorbed as doctors, engineers, and teachers as the government expanded its role in the fields of health, public works, and education. Others took up professions outside government, such as law, medicine, pharmacology, and journalism. The new elite was composed mainly of Vietnamese from Tonkin and Annam rather than from Cochinchina, a regional bias perhaps

attributable to the location in Hanoi of the country's only institution of Western higher education (see fig. 6).

The French period also produced a new group of Vietnamese absentee landowners who possessed riches far in excess of the wealth anyone in the older society had enjoyed. This new group came into existence as a result of the French development of vast new tracts of land in Cochinchina. A few of these large holdings were retained by French companies or citizens, but most were held by enterprising, Western-oriented, urban Vietnamese from Annam and Tonkin who lived mainly in Hanoi and Hue. By investing in light industry and medium-sized trading concerns, they became Vietnam's first modern industrialists and entrepreneurs.

In urban centers the demand of both the expanding French government bureaucracy and the private sector for secretaries, clerks, cashiers, interpreters, minor officials, and labor foremen created a new Vietnamese white-collar group. The development of mining and industry between 1890 and 1919 also introduced a new class of workers. Because most of the natural resources as well as a large labor pool were located in the North, industrial development was concentrated there, and Hanoi and Haiphong became the country's leading industrial centers. At the same time, conditions of overcrowding and intensive farming in the North provided little room for agriculture on a commercial scale. In order to expand agriculture, the French turned their attention to the underdeveloped, warmer South, where French cultivation of such crops as rubber, coffee, tea, and, in Cochinchina, rice gave rise to a group of agricultural and plantation wage earners.

The colonial period also led to a substantial increase in the Hoa population. The country's limited foreign and domestic trade were already in the hands of Chinese when the French arrived. The French chose to promote the Chinese role in commerce and to import Chinese labor to develop road and railroad systems, mining, and industry. French colonial policy that lifted the traditional ban on rice exports at the end of the nineteenth century also attracted new waves of Chinese merchants and shopkeepers seeking to take advantage of the new export market. Vietnam's growing economy attracted even more Chinese thereafter, especially to the South. Already deeply involved in the rice trade, the Chinese expanded their interests to include rice-milling and established a virtual monopoly.

They also were a significant presence in sugar refining, coconut and peanut oil production, lumber, and shipbuilding. Many who began their careers as laborers on the French rubber plantations of Cochinchina eventually started their own tea, pepper, or rice

plantations to supply local market needs. Chinese gardeners in the suburbs of Saigon monopolized the supply of fresh vegetables consumed in that city, and Chinese restaurants and hotels proliferated in virtually every urban center.

Society in the 1954–75 Period

North Vietnam

At the time of the 1954 partition, Vietnam was overwhelmingly a rural society; peasants accounted for nearly 90 percent of the total population. During the ensuing 20 years of political separation, however, the North and the South developed into two very different societies. In the North the communists had embarked on a program intended to revolutionize the socioeconomic structure. The focus of change was ostensibly economic, but its underlying motivation was both political and social as well. Based on the Marxist principle of class struggle, it involved no less than the creation of a totally new social structure. Propertied classes were eliminated, and a proletarian dictatorship was established in which workers and peasants emerged as the nominal new masters of a socialist and ultimately classless state.

As a prelude to the socialist revolution, a land reform campaign and a harsh, systematic campaign to liquidate "feudal landlords" from rural society were launched concurrently in 1955. Reminiscent of the campaign undertaken by communists in China in earlier years, the liquidation of landlords cost the lives of an estimated 50,000 people and prompted the party to acknowledge and redress "a number of serious errors" committed by its zealous cadres.

In urban sectors the party's intervention was less direct, initially at least, because large numbers of the bourgeoisie had fled the North in anticipation of the communists' coming to power. Many had fled to the South before the party gained full control. Those who remained were verbally assailed as exploiters of the people, but because the regime needed their administrative and technical skills and experience, they were otherwise treated tolerantly and allowed to retain private property.

In 1958 the regime stepped up the pace of "socialist transformation," mindful that even though the foundations of a socialist society were basically in place, the economy remained for the most part still in the hands of the private, capitalist sector. By 1960 all but a small number of peasants, artisans, handicraft workers, industrialists, traders, and merchants had been forced to join cooperatives of various kinds.

Intellectuals, many of whom had earlier been supporters of the Viet Minh (see Glossary), were first conciliated by the government, then stifled. Opposition to the government, expressed openly during and after the peasant uprisings of 1956, prompted the imposition of controls that graduated to complete suppression by 1958. Writers and artists who had established their reputations in the precommunist era were excluded from taking any effective role in national affairs. Many were sent to the countryside to perform manual labor and to help educate a new corps of socialist intellectuals among the peasants.

The dominant group in the new social order were the high-level party officials, who constituted a new ruling class. They owed their standing more to demonstrations of political acumen and devotion to nationalism or Marxism-Leninism than to educational or professional achievements. Years of resistance against the French in the rural areas had inured them to hardship and at the same time given them valuable experience in organization and guerrilla warfare. Resistance work had also brought them into close touch with many different segments of the population.

At the apex of the new ruling class were select members of the Political Bureau of the communist Vietnam Workers Party (VWP, Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam), and a somewhat larger body of Central Committee members holding key posts in the party, the government, the military, and various party-supported organizations. Below the top echelon were the rank and file party members (500,000 by 1960), including a number of women and members of ethnic minorities. Party cadres who possessed special knowledge and experience in technical, financial, administrative, or managerial matters were posted in all social institutions to supervise the implementation of party decisions.

Occupying an intermediate position between the party and the citizenry were those persons who did not belong to the party but who, nevertheless, had professional skills or other talents needed by the regime. Noncommunists were found in various technical posts, in the school system, and in the mass organizations to which most citizens were required to belong. A few even occupied high, though politically marginal, posts in the government. The bulk of the population remained farmers, workers, soldiers, miners, porters, stevedores, clerks, tradespeople, teachers, and artisans.

Social reorganization did little to evoke mass enthusiasm for socialism, and socialist transformation of the private sector into cooperative- and state-run operations did not result in the kind of economic improvement the government needed to win over the peasants and merchants. The regime managed to provide better

educational and health care services than had existed in the pre-1954 years, but poverty was still endemic. The party attributed the "numerous difficulties" it faced to "natural calamities, enemy actions, and the utterly poor and backward state of the economy," but also acknowledged its own failings. These included cadre incompetence in ideological and organizational matters as well as in financial, technical, and managerial affairs.

South Vietnam

South of the demarcation line after partition in 1954, the social system remained unchanged except that power reverted to a Vietnamese elite. The South's urban-rural network of roles, heavily dependent on the peasant economy, remained intact despite the influx of nearly a million refugees from the North; and land reform, initiated unenthusiastically in 1956, had little socioeconomic impact in the face of obstruction by the landowning class. In contrast to the North, there was no doctrinaire, organized attempt to reorganize the society fundamentally or to implant new cultural values and social sanctions. The regime of Ngo Dinh Diem was more concerned with its own immediate survival than with revolutionary social change, and if it had a vision of sociopolitical reform at all, that vision was diffusive. Furthermore, it lacked a political organization comparable in zeal to the party apparatus of Hanoi in order to achieve its goals.

In the 1960s, prolonged political instability placed social structures in the South under increasing stress. The communist insurgency, which prevented the government from extending its authority to some areas of the countryside, was partially responsible, but even more disruptive were the policies of the government itself. Isolated in Saigon, the Diem regime alienated large parts of the population by acting to suppress Buddhists and other minorities, by forcing the relocation of peasants to areas nominally controlled by the government, and by systematically crushing political opposition. Such policies fueled a growing dissatisfaction with the regime that led to Diem's assassination in November 1963 and his replacement by a series of military strongmen.

As the war in the South intensified, it created unprecedented social disruption in both urban and rural life. Countless civilians were forced to abandon their ancestral lands and sever their network of family and communal ties to flee areas controlled by the Viet Cong or exposed to government operations against the communists. By the early 1970s, as many as 12 million persons, or 63 percent of the entire southern population, were estimated to have been displaced; some were relocated to government-protected rural

hamlets while others crowded into already congested urban centers. Few villages, however remote, were left untouched by the war. The urban-rural boundary, once sharply defined, seemed to disappear as throngs of uprooted refugees moved to the cities. Traditional social structures broke down, leaving the society listless and bereft of a cohesive force other than the common instinct for survival.

The disruption imposed by the war, however, did not alter conventional socioeconomic class identifiers. In the urban areas, the small upper class elite continued to be limited to high-ranking military officers, government officials, people in the professions, absentee landlords, intellectuals, and Catholic and Buddhist religious leaders. The elite retained a strong personal interest in France and French culture; many had been educated in France and many had sons or daughters residing there. In addition to wealth, Western education—particularly French education—was valued highly, and French and English were widely spoken.

The urban middle class included civil servants, lower and middle-ranking officers in the armed forces, commercial employees, school teachers, shop owners and managers, small merchants, and farm and factory managers. A few were college graduates, although the majority had only a secondary-school education. Very few had been able to study abroad.

At the bottom of the urban society were unskilled, largely uneducated wageworkers and petty tradespeople. While semiliterate themselves, they nevertheless were able to send their children to primary school. Secondary education was less common, however, particularly for girls. These children tended not to proceed far enough in school to acquire an elementary knowledge of French or English, and most adults of the lower class knew only Vietnamese unless they had worked as domestics for foreigners.

Village society, which embraced 80 percent of the population, was composed mostly of farmers, who were ranked in three socioeconomic groups. The elite were the wealthiest landowners. If they farmed, the work was done by hired laborers who planted, irrigated, and harvested under the owner's supervision. In the off-season, landowners engaged in moneylending, rice trading, or rice milling. Usually the well-to-do owners were active in village affairs as members of the village councils. After the mid-1960s, however, interest in seeking such positions waned as village leaders increasingly were targeted by Viet Cong insurgents.

The less prosperous, middle-level villagers owned or rented enough land to live at a level well above subsistence, but they tended not to acquire a surplus large enough to invest in other ventures. They worked their own fields and hired farm hands only when

needed during planting or harvesting. A few supplemented their income as artisans, but never as laborers. Because of their more modest economic circumstances, members of this group tended not to assume as many communal responsibilities as did the wealthier villagers.

At the bottom of village life were owners of small farming plots and tenant farmers. Forced to spend nearly all of their time eking out a living, they could not afford to engage in village affairs. Because they could not cultivate enough land to support their families, most of them worked also as part-time laborers, and their wives and children assisted with the field work. Their children frequently went to school only long enough to learn the rudiments of reading and writing. This group also included workers in a wide range of other service occupations, such as artisans, practitioners of oriental medicine, and small tradespeople.

Vietnam after 1975

The sudden collapse of Saigon in April 1975 set the stage for a new and uncertain chapter in the evolution of Vietnamese society. The Hanoi government had to confront directly what communists have long called the struggle between the two paths of socialism and capitalism. At issue was Hanoi's ability to translate its wartime success and socialist revolutionary experience into postwar rehabilitation and reconstruction now that it controlled the South territorially.

Foremost among the regime's imperatives was that of restoring order and stability to the war-torn South. The critical question, however, was whether or not the northern conquerors could inspire the southern population to embrace communism. Initially, Hanoi appeared sanguine; the two zones had more similarities than dissimilarities, and the dissimilarities were expected to be eliminated as the South caught up with the North in socialist organization.

The December 1975 *Vietnam Courier,* an official government publication, portrayed Vietnam as two distinct, incongruent societies. The South was reported to continue to suffer from what communists consider the neo-colonialist influences and feudal ideology of the United States, while the North was considered to serve as a progressive environment for growing numbers of a new kind of socialist human being, imbued with patriotism, proletarian internationalism, and socialist virtues. The class of social exploiter had been eliminated in the North, leaving the classes of worker, collectivized peasant, and socialist intellectual, the last consisting of various groups. In contrast, the South was divided into a working class, peasantry, petit bourgeois, capitalist—or comprador (see Glossary)—class, and the remnant of a feudal landlord class.

In September 1976, Premier Pham Van Dong declared that his compatriots, North and South, were "translating the revolutionary heroism they [had] displayed in fighting into creative labor in the acquisition of wealth and strength." In the South particularly, the old society was undergoing active changes as the result of "stirring revolutionary movements" by the workers, peasants, youth, women, intellectuals, and other groups. In agriculture alone, "millions of people" participated in bringing hundreds of thousands more hectares under cultivation and in building or dredging thousands of kilometers of canals and ditches.

From all indications, however, these changes occurred more through coercion than volition. In Dong's own words, the party had initiated "various policies aimed at eliminating the comprador capitalists as a class and doing away with all vestiges of feudal exploitation." These policies radically realigned the power elite so that the ruling machine was controlled collectively by the putative vanguard of the working class—the party—and by the senior cadres of the party who were mostly from the North.

In its quest for a new socialist order in the South, Hanoi relied on other techniques apart from socialist economic transformation and socialist education. These included thought reform, population resettlement, and internal exile, as well as surveillance and mass mobilization. Party-sponsored "study sessions" were obligatory for all adults. For the former elite of the Saigon regime, a more rigorous form of indoctrination was used; hundreds of thousands of former military officers, bureaucrats, politicians, religious and labor leaders, scholars, intellectuals, and lawyers, as well as critics of the new regime were ordered to "reeducation camps" for varying periods. In mid-1985, the Hanoi government conceded that it still held about 10,000 inmates in the reeducation camps, but the actual number was believed to be at least 40,000. In 1982 there were about 120,000 Vietnamese in these camps. According to a knowledgeable American observer, the inmates faced hard labor, but only rarely torture or execution.

Population resettlement or redistribution, although heralded on economic grounds, turned out to be another instrument of social control in disguise. It was a means of defusing tensions in congested cities, which were burdened with unemployed and socially dislocated people even after most of the rural refugees had been repatriated to their native villages. These refugees had swelled the urban population to 45 percent of the southern total in 1975 (up from 33 percent in 1970). The authorities sought to address the problem of urban congestion by relocating many of the metropolitan jobless in the new economic zones hastily set up in virgin lands, often

malaria-infested jungles, as part of a broader effort to boost agricultural output. In 1975 and 1976 alone, more than 600,000 people were moved from Ho Chi Minh City to these zones, in most instances, reportedly, against their will. Because of the barely tolerable living conditions in the new settlements, a considerable number of people escaped or bribed their way back to the city. The new economic zones came to be widely perceived as places of internal exile. In fact, the authorities were said to have used the threat of exile to such places against those who refused to obey party instructions or to participate in the activities of the mass organizations.

Surveillance was a familiar tool of the regime, which was bent on purging all class enemies. Counterrevolutionaries, real and suspected, were summarily interned in reform camps or forced labor camps that were set up separately from the new economic zones in several border areas and other undeveloped regions.

The Hanoi government has claimed that not a single political execution took place in the South after 1975, even in cases of grave war crimes. Generally, the foreign press corroborated this claim by reporting in 1975 that there seemed to be no overt indication of the blood bath that many Western observers had predicted would occur in the wake of the communist takeover. Some Western observers, however, have estimated that as many as 65,000 South Vietnamese may have been executed.

In March 1982, the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) convened its Fifth National Party Congress to assess its achievements since 1976 and to outline its major tasks for the 1980s. The congress was revealing if only because of its somber admission that revolutionary optimism was no substitute for common sense. Despite rigid social controls and mass mobilization, the party fell far short of its original expectations for socialist transition. According to the party's assessment, from 1976 through 1980 shortcomings and errors occurred in establishing transition goals and in implementing the party line.

The congress, however, reaffirmed the correctness of the party line concerning socialist transition, and directed that it be implemented with due allowances for different regional circumstances. The task was admittedly formidable. In a realistic appraisal of the regime's difficulties, *Nhan Dan,* the party's daily organ, warned in June 1982 that the crux of the problem lay in the regime itself, the shortcomings of which included lack of party discipline and corruption of party and state functionaries.

In 1987 the goal of establishing a new society remained elusive, and Vietnam languished in the first stage of the party's planned

period of transition to socialism. Mai Chi Tho, mayor of Ho Chi Minh City and deputy head of its party branch, had told visiting Western reporters as early as April 1985 that socialist transition, as officially envisioned, would probably continue until the year 2000.

In the estimation of the party, Vietnamese society had succumbed to a new form of sociopolitical elitism that was just as undesirable as the much-condemned elitism of the old society. Landlords and comprador capitalists may have disappeared but in their places were party cadres and state functionaries who were no less status-conscious and self-seeking. The Sixth National Party Congress in December 1986 found it necessary to issue a stern warning against opportunism, individualism, personal gain, corruption, and a desire for special prerogatives and privileges. A report to the congress urged the party to intensify class struggle in order to combat the corrupt practices engaged in by those who had "lost their class consciousness." Official efforts to purify the ranks of the working class, peasantry, and socialist intellectuals, however, failed to strike a responsive chord. In fact, the proceedings of the Sixth Congress left the inescapable impression that the regime was barely surviving the struggle between socialism and capitalism and that an early emergence of a communist class structure was unlikely.

As ideally envisioned, the socialist sector was expected to provide 70 percent of household income, and the "household economy," or the privately controlled resources of the home, was to make up the balance. In September 1986, cadres and workers were earning their living mainly through moonlighting and, according to a Vietnamese source, remained on "the state rolls only to preserve their political prestige and to receive some ration stamps and coupons." The source further disclosed that the society's lack of class consciousness was reflected in the party's membership, among whom only about 10 percent were identified as from the working class.

The Family

Background

Using the patriarchal family as the basic social institution, the Confucianists framed their societal norm in terms of the duties and obligations of a family to a father, a child to a parent, a wife to a husband, and a younger brother to an older brother; they held that the welfare and continuity of the family group were more important than the interests of any individual member. Indeed, the individual was less an independent being than a member of

a family group that included not only living members but also a long line of ancestors and of those yet to be born. A family member's life was caught up in the activities of a multitude of relatives. Members of the same household lived together, worked together, and gathered together for marriages, funerals, Tet (lunar New Year) celebrations, and rituals marking the anniversary of an ancestor's death. Family members looked first to other family members for help and counsel in times of personal crisis and guarded the interests of the family in making personal or household decisions.

Special reverence was accorded a family's ancestors. This practice, known as the family cult or cult of the ancestors, derived from the belief that after death the spirits of the departed continued to influence the world of the living. The soul was believed to become restless and likely to exert an unfavorable influence on the living, unless it was venerated in the expected manner.

Veneration of ancestors was also regarded as a means through which an individual could assure his or her own immortality. Children were valued because they could provide for the spirits of their parents after death. Family members who remained together and venerated their forebears with strict adherence to prescribed ritual found comfort in the belief that the souls of their ancestors were receiving proper spiritual nourishment and that they were insuring their own soul's nourishment after death.

The cult required an ancestral home or patrimony, a piece of land legally designated as a place devoted to the support of venerated ancestors. Ownership of land that could be dedicated to the support of the cult was, however, only a dream for most landless farmers. The cult also required a senior male of direct descent to oversee preparations for obligatory celebrations and offerings.

On the anniversary of an ancestor's death, rites were performed before the family altar to the god of the house, and sacrificial offerings were made to both the god and the ancestor. The lavishness of the offering depended on the income of the family and on the rank of the deceased within the family. A representative of each family in the lineage was expected to be present, even if this meant traveling great distances. Whenever there was an occasion of family joy or sorrow, such as a wedding, an anniversary, success in an examination, a promotion, or a funeral, the ancestors were consulted or informed of the event through sacrificial offerings.

In the traditional kinship system, the paternal line of descent was emphasized. Individuals were identified primarily by their connections through the father's male bloodline, and kin groups larger than the family—clans and lineages—were formed by kinspeople who traced their relationship to each other in this manner. It was

through these patrilineal descent groups that both men and women inherited property and that men assumed their primary obligation for maintaining the ancestor observances.

The patrilineal group maintained an extremely strong kin relationship. Members' ties to one another were reinforced by their shared heritage, derived from residence in the same village over many generations. Family land and tombs, located in or near the village, acted as a focus for feelings of kin loyalty, solidarity, and continuity.

The extended family rather than the nuclear one was the dominant family structure, often including three or even four generations, and typically consisting of grandparents, father and mother, children, and grandchildren, all living under the same roof. Sometimes parents had more than one married son living with them, but this often led to such tension that it was generally held preferable for a second son to live separately. All members of the household lived under the authority of the oldest male, and all contributed to the income of the family.

Despite the cultural emphasis on their obedience, women were not regarded as the weaker sex but as resilient and strong-willed. In the village, women assumed a great deal of responsibility for cultivation of paddy fields, often working harder than men, and sometimes engaged in retail trade of all kinds. A few women owned agricultural estates, factories, and other businesses, and both urban and rural women typically managed the family income. A woman's influence in family affairs could be increased by giving birth to a first male child. In general, though, a woman was expected to be dutiful and respectful toward her husband and his parents, to care for him and his children, and to perform household duties. There were few women in public life.

Besides the so-called wife of the first rank, a household sometimes included a second and third wife and their children. The consent of the first wife was required before this arrangement could be made, but, more often than not, additional wives either were established by the husband in separate households or were permitted to continue living as they had before marriage, in their own homes or with parents. Polygyny was widespread in both northern and central Vietnam, as was the taking of concubines.

Marriage was regarded primarily as a social contract and was arranged by the parents through intermediaries. The parents' choice was influenced more by considerations affecting the welfare of the lineage than by the preferences of the participants.

Interest in having children was strongly reinforced by Confucian culture, which made it imperative to produce a male heir to

Tonkinese family of Son Tay, early twentieth century
Courtesy New York Times, *Paris Collection, National Archives*

continue the family line. A couple with numerous offspring was envied. If there were sons, it was assured that the lineage would be perpetuated and the cult of the ancestors maintained; if there was no male heir, a couple was regarded as unfortunate, and a barren wife could be divorced or supplanted by another wife.

Fostering filial piety was of overriding importance in child-rearing. Children were expected to be polite to their parents and older persons, to be solicitous of their welfare, to show them respect through proper manner and forms of address, and to carry out prescribed tradition with respect to funeral practices and the observance of mourning. After the deaths of their parents, it was incumbent upon surviving children (and their children in turn) to honor their parents' memory through maintenance of the ancestors' cult.

All important family occasions such as births, betrothals, marriages, funerals, and anniversaries of the deaths of ancestors were observed by appropriate ceremonies in which members of the kin group participated. The ceremonies had both religious and social meaning, and many were very elaborate, in keeping with the wealth and social status of the family. Whenever such a celebration took place, the family was always careful to make an offering to the god of the hearth. Prayers and sacrifices were also made when misfortune fell upon the household.

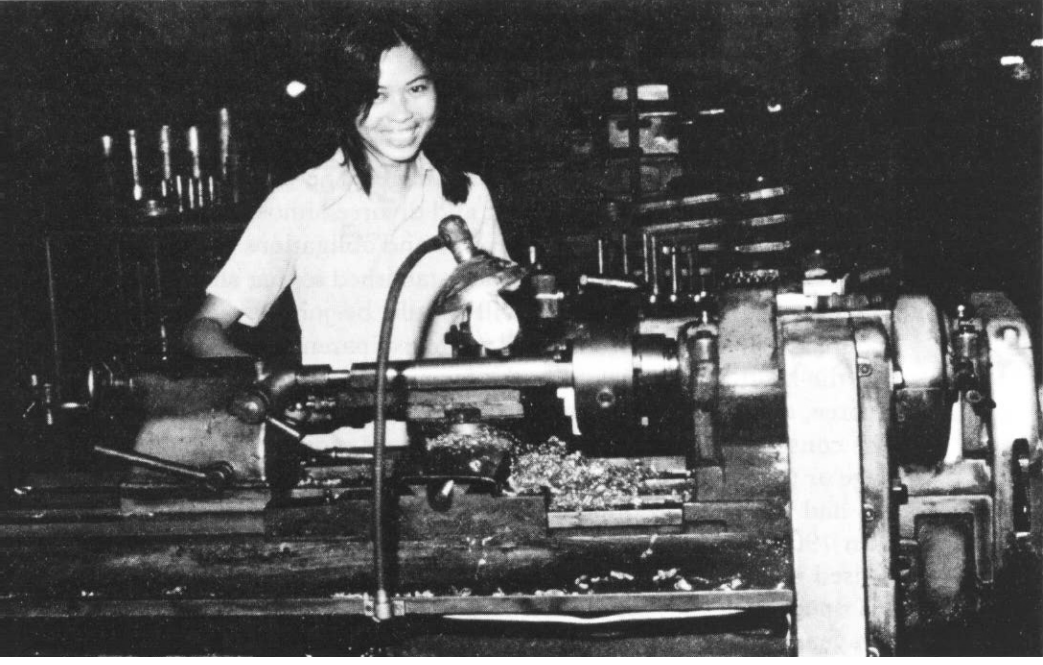
The Family since 1954

In the first decade after World War II, the vast majority of North and South Vietnamese clung tenaciously to traditional customs and practices. After the 1950s, however, some traditions were questioned, especially in the North. The timeless notion that the family was the primary focus of individual loyalty was disparaged as feudal by the communists, who also criticized the traditional concept of the family as a self-contained socioeconomic unit. Major family reform was initiated under a new law enacted in 1959 and put into effect in 1960. The law's intent was to protect the rights of women and children by prohibiting polygyny, forced marriage, concubinage, and abuse. It was designed to equalize the rights and obligations of women and men within the family and to enable women to enjoy equal status with men in social and work-related activities. Young women were encouraged to join the party as well as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League and the Vietnam Women's Union, and they were trained as cadres and assigned as leaders to production teams.

In conjunction with the law, a mass campaign was launched to discourage as wasteful the dowries and lavish wedding feasts of an earlier era. Large families were also discouraged. Parents who felt themselves blessed by heaven and secure in their old age because they had many children were labeled bourgeois and reactionary. Young people were advised not to marry before the age of twenty for males and eighteen for females and to have no more than two children per household. Lectures on birth control were commonplace in the public meeting rooms of cooperatives and factories.

According to Ha Thi Que, president of the Vietnam Women's Union in the early 1980s, popularizing family reform was extremely difficult, even in 1980, because women lacked a feminist consciousness and men resisted passively. To promote equality of the sexes, members of the women's union took an active part in a consciousness-raising campaign under the slogan, "As good in running society as running the home, women must be the equals of men." Such campaigns resulted in a fairer division of labor between husbands and wives and in the decline of customs and practices based on belief in women's inferiority.

In 1980 some old habits remained. Change reportedly was slower in the mountain areas and in the countryside than in the towns. According to Ha Thi Que, in areas where state control and supervision were lax, old-fashioned habits reemerged not only among the working people but also among state employees. She also pointed out that many young people misinterpreted the notion of free



Female lathe operator
Courtesy Bill Herod

marriage, or the right of individuals to select their own marriage partners, and were engaging in love affairs without seriously intending to marry. Marriages were also being concluded for money or for status, and in the cities the divorce rate was rising.

In the North, family life was affected by the demands of the war for the liberation of the South, or the Second Indochina War (see Glossary), on the society and by the policies of a regime doctrinally committed to a major overhaul of its socioeconomic organization. Sources of stress on the family in the North in the 1960s and the 1970s included the trend toward nuclear families, rural collectivization, population redistribution from the Red River Delta region to the highlands, prolonged mobilization of a large part of the male work force for the war effort, and the consequent movement of women into the economic sector. By 1975 women accounted for more than 60 percent of the total labor force.

In the South, despite the hardships brought on by the First Indochina War (see Glossary) and Second Indochina War, the traditional family system endured. Family lineage remained the source of an individual's identity, and nearly all southerners believed that the family had first claim on their loyalties, before that of extrafamilial individuals or institutions, including the state.

The first attempt to reform the family system in the South occurred in 1959, when the Catholic Diem regime passed a family

code to outlaw polygyny and concubinage. The code also made legal separation extremely difficult and divorce almost impossible. Under provisions equalizing the rights and obligations of spouses, a system of community property was established so that all property and incomes of husband and wife would be jointly owned and administered. The code reinforced the role of parents, grandparents, and the head of the lineage as the formal validators of marriage, divorce, or adoption, and supported the tradition of ancestor cults. The consent of parents or grandparents was required in the marriage or the adoption of a minor, and they or the head of the lineage had the right to oppose the marriage of a descendant.

In 1964 after the Diem regime had been toppled in a coup, a revised family law was promulgated. It was similar to the previous one except that separation and divorce were permitted after two years of marriage on grounds of adultery, cruelty, abandonment, or a criminal act on the part of a spouse. Concubinage, which had been expressly forbidden previously, was not mentioned, and adultery was no longer punishable by fines or imprisonment.

During the war years, family life was seriously disrupted as family members were separated and often resettled in different areas. If the distance from one another was too great, they could not assemble for the rites and celebrations that traditionally reinforced kinship solidarity. Family ties were further torn by deaths and separations caused by the war and by political loyalties, which in some instances set one kinsperson against another.

In those areas where hostilities occurred, the war was a family affair, extending to the children. Few Vietnamese children had the opportunity simply to be children. From birth they were participants in the war as well as its victims. They matured in an environment where death and suffering inflicted by war were commonplace and seemingly unavoidable.

The years of military conflicts and refugee movements tended in many parts of the South to break up the extended family units and to reinforce the bonds uniting the nuclear family. The major preoccupation of the ordinary villager and urbanite alike was to earn a livelihood and to protect his immediate family, holding his household together at any cost.

After the mid-1970s, the North and South faced the task of social reconstruction. For the South, the communist conquest and ensuing relocation and collectivization policies created an uncertain social milieu. While the return of peace reunited families, communist policies forced fathers or sons into reeducation camps or entire families into new economic zones for resettlement. For those who saw

no future in a socialist Vietnam, the only alternatives were to escape by boat or escape by land.

As the pace of rural collectivization accelerated in 1987, and as the people became more receptive to family planning, it seemed likely that families in the South would gradually take on the characteristics of those in the North. This conjecture was reinforced by Hanoi's decision in 1977 to apply its own 1959 family law to the South.

According to an official 1979 survey of rural families in the Red River Delta commune of An Binh near Hanoi, a typical family was nuclear, averaging four persons (parents and two children). The An Binh study, confirmed by other studies, also showed the family to be heavily dependent on outsiders for the satisfaction of its essential needs and confirmed that the family planning drive had had some success in changing traditional desires for a large family. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed nonetheless continued to believe three or four children per family to be the most desirable number and to prefer a son to a daughter.

The An Binh study revealed in addition that almost all the parents interviewed preferred their children not to be farmers, a preference that reflected the popular conviction that farming was not the promising route to high-status occupations. Such thinking, however, was alarming to officials who considered the promotion of agriculture as essential to the regime's scheme for successful transition to a socialist economy (see Agriculture, ch. 3).

In December 1986, the government enacted a new family law that incorporated the 1959 law and added some new provisions. The goal of the new legislation was "to develop and consolidate the socialist marriage and family system, shape a new type of man, and promote a new socialist way of life eliminating the vestiges of feudalism, backward customs, and bad or bourgeois thoughts about marriage and family." The law explicitly defined the "socialist family" as one in which "the wife and husband are equals who love each other, who help each other to make progress, who actively participate in building socialism and defending the fatherland and work together to raise their children to be productive citizens for society."

Reflecting the government's sense of urgency about population control, the 1986 law stipulated a new parental "obligation" to practice family planning, a provision that was absent from the 1959 text. The new law was notable also for its stronger wording regarding the recommended marriage age: it specified that "only males twenty years of age or older and females eighteen years of age or

older may marry." The 1959 text had stated only that such persons were "eligible for marriage."

Other noteworthy provisions concerned adoption, guardianship, and marriage between Vietnamese and foreigners. Foreigners married to Vietnamese were to comply with the provisions of the 1986 law except in matters relating to separation, divorce, adoption, and guardianship, which were to be regulated separately. The new code also called on various mass organizations to play an active role in "teaching and campaigning among the people for the strict implementation" of the law.

Religion

The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, adopted in 1980, proclaims that "citizens enjoy freedom of worship, and may practice or not practice a religion" but that "no one may misuse religions to violate state laws or policies." Despite the Constitution's ostensible protection of the practice of religion, the status of such was precarious in Vietnam in late 1987.

Buddhism

Historically, most Vietnamese have identified themselves with Buddhism, which originated in what is now southern Nepal around 530 B.C. as an offshoot of Hinduism. Its founder was Gautama, a prince who bridled at the formalism of Hinduism as it was being interpreted by the priestly caste of Brahmans. Gautama spent years meditating and wandering as an ascetic until he discovered the path of enlightenment to nirvana, the world of endless serenity in which one is freed from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. According to Buddhist thought, human salvation lies in discovering the "four noble truths"—that man is born to suffer in successive lives, that the cause of this suffering is man's craving for earthly pleasures and possessions, that the suffering ceases upon his deliverance from this craving, and that he achieves this deliverance by following "the noble eightfold path." The foundation of the Buddhist concept of morality and right behavior, the eightfold path, consists of right views, or sincerity in leading a religious life; right intention, or honesty in judgment; right speech, or sincerity in speech; right conduct, or sincerity in work; right livelihood, or sincerity in making a living; right effort, or sincerity in aspiration; right mindfulness, or sincerity in memory; and right concentration, or sincerity in meditation.

Buddhism spread first from China to Vietnam's Red River Delta region in approximately the second century A.D., and then from India to the southern Mekong Delta area at some time between

Children riding in a cyclo,
Ho Chi Minh City
Courtesy Bill Herod

the third and the sixth centuries. The Chinese version, Mahayana Buddhism, became the faith of most Vietnamese, whereas the Indian version, Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism, was confined mostly to the southern delta region. The doctrinal distinction between the two consists of their differing views of Gautama Buddha: the Mahayana school teaches that Gautama was only one of many "enlightened ones" manifesting the fundamental divine power of the universe; the Theravada school teaches that Gautama was the one-and-only enlightened one and the great teacher, but that he was not divine. The Mahayana sect holds further that laypersons can attain nirvana, whereas the Theravada school believes that only ordained monks and nuns can do so.

Few Vietnamese outside the clergy, however, are acquainted with Buddhism's elaborate cosmology. What appealed to them at the time it was introduced was Mahayana ritual and imagery. Mahayana ceremony easily conformed to indigenous Vietnamese beliefs, which combined folklore with Confucian and Taoist teachings, and Mahayana's "enlightened ones" were often venerated alongside various animist spirits.

Before the country was unified under communism, Buddhism enjoyed an autonomy from the state that was increasingly threatened once the communists gained power. For pragmatic reasons, however, the regime initially avoided overt hostility toward Buddhism or any other organized religion. Instead, it sought to separate

real and potential collaborators from opponents by co-optation and control. For example, within months after winning the South, the communist regime set up a front called the Patriotic Buddhist Liaison Committee. The committee's purpose was to promote the idea that all patriotic Buddhists had a duty to participate in building a new society liberated for the first time from the shackles of feudal and neo-colonialist influences. The committee also tried to show that most Buddhists, leaders and followers alike, were indeed rallying behind the new regime and the liaison committee. This strategy attempted to thwart the power of the influential, independent groups of Buddhist clergy, particularly the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, which had been a major pre-1975 critic of the Saigon government and, of the roughly twenty Buddhist sects in Vietnam, the most vocal in opposing the war.

Communists also pressured monks and nuns to lead a secular life, encouraging them to take part in productive agricultural labor or to become actively involved in the work of the Patriotic Buddhist Liaison Committee. For their refusal to collaborate, some prominent clerical leaders in the South were placed under house arrest or imprisoned, their pagodas were converted to public use, and their holdings were confiscated. Such activity closely paralleled communist actions against Buddhists in the North in the 1950s. In addition, the party prevented Buddhist organizations from training monks and nuns in schools that previously had been autonomous. In April 1980, a national committee of Buddhist groups throughout the country was formed by the government. The government-controlled Vietnam Buddhist Church was established in November 1981, and it emerged as the only officially sanctioned organization authorized to represent all Buddhist groups both at home and abroad.

As a result of communist policy, the observance of Buddhist ritual and practice was drastically reduced. A 1979 study of a Red River Delta commune, reported to be "overwhelmingly Catholic," disclosed that the commune's two pagodas were "maintained and frequented regularly by the faithful (the majority of whom were old women), especially on the Buddhist feast days." No monks or nuns had been observed, however, and the study went on to note that pagodas had been eliminated entirely in nearby Hanoi. In 1987 occasional reports suggested that the observance of Buddhist ritual continued in some remote areas.

The communist government's attitude toward Buddhism and other faiths being practiced remained one of tolerance as long as the clergy and faithful adhered strictly to official guidelines. These guidelines inhibited the growth of religious institutions, however,

Chinese Buddhist temple, Cholon
Courtesy United States Army

by restricting the number of institutions approved to train clergy and by preempting the time of potential candidates among the youth whose daily routine might require study, work, and participation in the activities of communist youth organizations. In an apparent effort to train a new generation of monks and nuns, the Vietnam Buddhist Church reportedly set up one Buddhist academy in Hanoi in November 1981 and another in Ho Chi Minh City in December 1984 . These academies, however, served as an arm of the state.

Catholicism

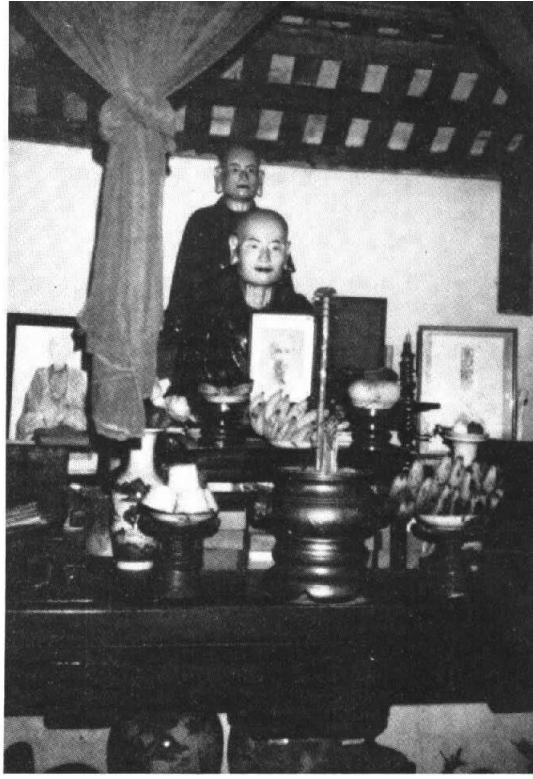
Despite the Roman Catholic Church's rejection of ancestor worship, a cornerstone of the Confucian cultural tradition, Roman Catholicism established a solid position in Vietnamese society under French rule. The French encouraged its propagation to balance Buddhism and to serve as a vehicle for the further dissemination of Western culture. After the mid-1950s, Catholicism declined in the North, where the communists regarded it as a reactionary force opposed to national liberation and social progress. In the South, by contrast, Catholicism expanded under the presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem, who promoted it as an important bulwark against North Vietnam. Under Diem, himself a devout Catholic, Roman Catholics enjoyed an advantage over non-Catholics in commerce,

the professions, education, and the government. This caused growing Buddhist discontent that contributed to the eventual collapse of the Diem regime and the ultimate rise to power of the military. Roman Catholics in reunified Vietnam numbered about 3.0 million in 1984, of whom nearly 1 million resided in the North and the remainder in the South.

In 1955 approximately 600,000 Catholics remained in the North after an estimated 650,000 had fled to the South. That year the Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peace-Loving Catholics was set up in the North by the communist regime in an attempt to win over those Catholics who had chosen to remain (but were slower than non-Catholics to embrace the regime) and to "reintegrate" them into northern society. The church was allowed to retain its link with the Vatican, although all foreign priests had either fled south or been expelled, and normal church activities were permitted to continue, albeit in the shadow of a campaign of harassment. The appearance of normalcy was misleading, however. The church was stripped of its traditional autonomy in running schools, hospitals, and orphanages. Its traditional right to own property was abolished, and priests and nuns were required to devote part of their time to productive labor in agriculture. Nevertheless, officials claimed that Catholics had complete freedom of worship as long as they did not question the principle of collective socialism, spurn manual labor, or jeopardize the internal and external security of the state.

In November 1977, the *Vietnam Courier* reported that the church in the North had changed from "opposition to acceptance and participation," but that the transformation had been difficult for Catholics. In the same month, the government unveiled a decree on religion that reaffirmed the constitution's position on religious freedom, but made it unequivocally clear that such freedom was conditional and depended on the compatibility of church activities with such higher imperatives as patriotism and socialism. The new decree not only prescribed the duties and obligations required of the clergy by the state but also imposed state control over the conduct of religious services, education, training, investitures, appointments, travels, and transfers.

Applicable to all religious communities in the North and South, the new law clearly introduced a period of more active state intervention in church affairs. The regime apparently acted out of concern that the church in the North, despite having coexisted with socialism for twenty-three years, was not progressive enough to lead in the socialist transformation of the Catholic community in the South. The *Vietnam Courier* suggested this link between the northern



Buddhist shrine with portrait of Ho Chi Minh
Courtesy Bill Herod

and southern situations in November 1977, after noting that the northern Catholic church would have to shoulder the additional task of helping to reintegrate Vietnam's entire Catholic population into the national community.

Catholics in the South in 1975 officially numbered about 1.9 million, including 15 bishops, 3,000 regular and diocesan priests, 1,200 brothers, and 6,000 nuns. Four-hundred priests and lay brothers and 56,000 lay Catholics were estimated already to have fled the country in anticipation of the communist victory. At the time of the imposition of communist rule, the South had 870 parishes in 15 dioceses; Ho Chi Minh City alone had a half million Catholics, who were served by 600 priests and 4,000 lay brothers and nuns. The North's less than 1 million Catholics were served by about 3,500 churches attended by nearly 400 priests, 10 bishops, and 2 archbishops.

The government claimed that after April 1975 the religious activities of Roman Catholics were quickly stabilized, major services were held, and many cathedrals and churches that had been damaged or destroyed in the war were rebuilt. The regime claimed further that there was no religious persecution, or if there was persecution, that it was directed at the activities of "reactionary forces" bent on taking advantage of "the backwardness of a number of the faithful . . . ." Nevertheless, the authorities acted to isolate and to neutralize hard-core opposition to party policy and to persuade

less strongly opposed factions to join a party-controlled "renovation and reconciliation" movement. A considerable number of Northern and Southern Roman Catholics, however, remained opposed to communist authority.

In 1980 the Unified Bishops' Council of Vietnam was established to enlist the aid of "patriotic" bishops in persuading recalcitrant elements of the Catholic community to cooperate with the regime. Three years later, in November 1983, a Committee for Solidarity of Patriotic Catholics was created to unite all Catholics and channel their energy into the building of socialism. This committee, which replaced the Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peace-Loving Catholics, was formed at a time when the regime's surveillance of the Catholic community had been stepped up, reportedly due to the suspicion that some Catholics were involved in antistate activities. The regime's growing concern was further reflected in the establishment in March 1985 of a Religious Affairs Committee to coordinate and supervise religious organizations more effectively. Hanoi's increasing involvement in church affairs reportedly produced new strains in its relations with the Vatican. In 1987 it nevertheless appeared critical to Vietnam's leaders to convey to the public the impression that the Roman Catholic Church was active in the affairs of the nation and that church members were significant contributors to the socialist cause.

Other Faiths

Religions with less of a following than Buddhism or Catholicism were treated similarly by the regime, with the exception of those the regime considered merely superstitious, which incurred its outright hostility. Two religious movements that enjoyed considerable followings before 1975 were the Cao Dai (see Glossary) and the Hoa Hao (see Glossary). Both were founded in this century in the Mekong River Delta. The Cao Dai, the older of the two and a self-styled reformed Buddhist sect, flourished in the rural areas of the southern delta region. An amalgam of different beliefs derived from Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity, among other sources, it claimed 1 million to 2 million adherents. The Hoa Hao, with more than 1 million followers, identified itself as a reformed Theravada Buddhist sect, but, unlike the Cao Dai, it preserved a distinctive Buddhist coloration. Based mostly in the southernmost areas of the delta, it stressed individual prayer, simplicity, and social justice over icon veneration or elaborate ceremonies. Before 1975 both faiths sought, with some success, to remain neutral in the war between Hanoi and Saigon. After 1975, however,

A painting at the Cao Dai Temple, Tay Ninh Province, depicting three of the Cao Dai movement's spiritual "fathers": founder of the Chinese Republic Sun Yat-sen, French poet and novelist Victor Hugo, and Vietnamese prophet Trang Thinh
Courtesy United States Army

like Buddhists and Roman Catholics, they were under heavy pressure from the communist regime to join its ranks.

Protestants, numbered between 100,000 and 200,000 in the early 1980s, and were found mostly among the Montagnard communities inhabiting the South's central highlands. Because of their alleged close association with American missionaries of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Protestants were reported to have suffered more than Catholics after 1975.

In addition to organized religions, there existed a mélange of beliefs without institutional structure that nevertheless had an enduring impact on Vietnamese life well into the 1980s. These beliefs, which were derived partly from Confucianism, stressed the virtues of filial piety, loyalty, family solidarity, and ancestor veneration—all central to the family system of the old society. Taoism, another important system of belief introduced from China, emphasized the importance of an individual's relationship to nature and to the universe. Beliefs rooted in Taoism were condemned by the regime as superstitious.

Despite official disapproval of superstitious practices, most Vietnamese, regardless of their professed religion, level of education, or ideology, were influenced at one time or another by such practices as astrology, geomancy and sorcery. Diviners and other specialists in the occult remained in popular demand because they were believed to be able to diagnose supernatural causes of illness, establish lucky dates for personal undertakings, or predict the future. Moreover, many Vietnamese believed that individual destiny was guided by astrological phenomena. By consulting one's horoscope, one could make the most of auspicious times and avoid disaster. It was not unusual, for example, for a couple to consult an astrologer before marrying. He would determine if the betrothed were suitably matched and even fix the date of the ceremony.

The belief in good and evil spirits, or animism, antedated all organized faiths in Vietnam and permeated the society, especially in the rural areas and in the highlands. These beliefs held that all phenomena and forces in the universe were controlled by spirits and that the souls of the dead were instrumental in determining an individual's fate. If propitiated, they provided the living with protection; if ignored, they induced misfortune. Although officially condemned as "superstitious practices," these beliefs continued to proliferate in the rural and in the highland areas as well as in the cities in the 1980s.

Education

The Vietnamese inherited a high respect for learning. Under

Confucianism, education was essential for admission to the ruling class of scholar-officials, the mandarinate. Under French rule, even though Vietnamese were excluded from the higher echelons of the colonial power elite, education was a requisite for employment in the colonial civil service and for other white-collar, high-status jobs. In divided Vietnam, education continued to be a channel for social mobility in both the North and the South.

Before the 1950s, poverty was a major impediment to learning, and secondary and higher education were beyond the reach of all but a small number of upper class people. Subsequently, however, rival regimes in Hanoi and Saigon broadened educational opportunities. Both governments accomplished this despite the shortage of teachers, textbooks, equipment, and classrooms and despite the disruptions of war in the 1960s and early 1970s. The school system was originally patterned after the French model, but the curriculum was revised to give more emphasis to Vietnamese history, language, and literature and, in Hanoi, to the teaching of revolutionary ethics and Marxism-Leninism.

In the years after 1975, all public and private schools in the South were taken over by the state as a first step toward integration into a unified socialist school system. Thousands of teachers were sent from the North to direct and supervise the process of transition, and former teachers under the Saigon regime were allowed to continue their work only after they had completed "special courses" designed to expose "the ideological and cultural poisoning of which they had been victims for twenty years."

The educational system in 1987 was based on reforms announced in January 1979 that were designed to make education more relevant to the nation's economic and social needs. These reforms combined theory with practical application and emphasized the training of skilled workers, technicians, and managers. The reforms also stressed the need to develop the country's scientific and technological levels of achievement until they were comparable to international levels in order to assist Vietnam in expanding its technical cooperation with foreign countries in general and socialist countries in particular.

The 1979 reforms were implemented in stages beginning in the 1981–82 school year (September to August). By 1985 the northern and southern schools had been integrated into one system, new textbooks had been distributed throughout the country, and the curriculum had been made uniform for the first time. The government also tried to make the first nine years of general education compulsory, despite the continuing shortage of teachers, school buildings, and equipment, particularly modern equipment for

teaching applied sciences. The low morale of underpaid teachers with low job status complicated these attempts.

The perennial shortage of money presented another stumbling block in education. In order to address the problem, the 1979 reforms called on agricultural cooperatives and even "private citizens" to make contributions to local schools and to participate in "a movement for self-supply of teaching aids." In an apparent effort to utilize local resources for educational development, the government assigned "people's educational councils," set up at the grass-roots level, to undertake the task. Composed of representatives of the school, parents, local administration, and various mass organizations, these councils were designed to promote more productive relations between the school and the local community.

Education continued to be structured in a traditional manner, including preschool, vocational and professional schools, supplementary courses, and higher education. "General" education, however, was extended from ten to twelve years. The first nine years of general education formed the compulsory level, corresponding to primary and junior high schools; the last three years constituted the secondary level. Graduates of secondary schools were considered to have completed training in "general culture" and to be ready for employment requiring skilled labor. They were also eligible to apply to colleges or advanced vocational and professional schools. The general education category also covered the schooling of gifted and handicapped children. As part of the effort to foster "love and respect" for manual labor, students spent 15 percent of school time at the primary level and 17 percent at the secondary level in manual work.

Vocational schools at the secondary and college levels served to train technicians and skilled workers. Graduates of professional specialized schools at the college level primarily filled mid-level cadre positions in the technical, economic, educational, cultural, and medical fields. Senior cadres in these fields as well as members of the upper bureaucracy usually had graduated from regular universities. The 1979 educational reforms gave high priority to vocational and professional training in order to absorb a large number of general education students who were unable to proceed to colleges and secondary-level vocational schools. In 1980, for example, 70 percent of primary school students and 85 percent of secondary school students failed to matriculate either because of bleak prospects for employment after graduation or because the country's ninety-three institutions of higher learning could admit only 10 percent of all applicants.

Vocational schools continued to struggle to attract students. In a study of mass education in Vietnam, a Western scholar observed that "Vietnamese students aggressively avoided vocational schools and the specialized middle schools favored by the government." He also noted:

> The reason for the imbalance between the technical schools and the general middle schools was only too clear. The former were thought to foreclose entry to high-status occupations. The latter were thought to be an indispensable part of the ideal educational odyssey through university and into the upper bureaucracy—the modern equivalent of the old Vietnamese Confucian quest to become a metropolitan examination graduate . . . or imperial tribute student . . . as Vo Nguyen Giap bitterly acknowledged in January 1982.

Supplementary, or complementary, education served adults who had not completed a basic and secondary general education and who needed additional training in their specialties. Open to those under forty-five, supplementary courses were offered through correspondence, at worksites, or at special schools. Officials expected that participants in these courses could raise their "cultural level" to the equivalent of students who had completed ninth or twelfth grade.

The number of students in institutions of higher learning increased rapidly from about 50,000 (29,000 in the North and 20,834 in the South) in 1964 to 150,000 in 1980. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City served as the two major centers for universities and colleges; major provincial capitals were the sites of regional colleges; and the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Interior sponsored an unspecified number of colleges. Of the 150,000 college students in 1980, approximately 23 percent were female.

In the mid-1980s, some Vietnamese observers believed that the college system needed reform to make it more diverse and flexible. They promoted change in order to accommodate more secondary school applicants and to improve the quality of college education. Students were perceived as spending too much time trying to earn diplomas and not enough time "in practical, creative activities."

Vietnam took part in international student exchange and cooperation programs in the fields of education and technical training, principally with the Soviet Union and with other communist countries (excluding China). *Nhan Dan* reported in 1983 that Vietnamese and

Soviet linguists had compiled textbooks for Vietnamese secondary general education schools and that they had also begun a similar project in Russian for use in Vietnamese colleges. The Soviets also assisted the Vietnamese in publishing scientific and technical dictionaries. In 1984 a Soviet source reported that, under the Soviet program of educational assistance that had begun in 1959, about 60,000 Vietnamese specialists and skilled workers had been trained in addition to 18,000 vocational students at the college and secondary school levels. As of mid-1986, Vietnam had "cooperative ties" with 15 Soviet universities.

In 1986 the reforms initiated in 1979 remained in the trial and error stage, but the educational system was considerably improved. Illiteracy was declining, and about 2.5 million children were being admitted to school annually. The Vietnamese report that in 1986 there were 3 million children enrolled in child-care centers and kindergartens, close to 12 million students in general education schools, and more than 300,000 students in vocational and professional schools and colleges. Scientific and technical cadres numbered more than 1 million. *Nhan Dan* reported in September 1986 that schools were shifting from literary education to literary, ethical, and vocational education, in accordance with the goals established by the 1979 reforms. The quality of education, however, remained low. Material and technical support for education were far from adequate, student absenteeism and the dropout rate were high, teachers continued to face difficult personal economic circumstances, and students and teachers in general failed to embrace the socialist ideals and practices the regime encouraged.

In April 1986, Reform Commission head Hoang Xuan Tuy related that two-thirds of preschool aged children had not yet enrolled in school, that elementary and junior-high-school education in the highlands and in the Mekong River Delta was inadequate, and that instruction in general was still oriented toward purely academic subjects and theory divorced from practical application. The majority of general education students, he added, were preoccupied with college entrance; and vocational schools, professional schools, and colleges had yet to restructure their curricula and training programs or to formulate plans for scientific research and experimentation. In Hoang's assessment, such shortcomings were symptomatic of a very low level of financial and human resource investment in education that was derived from the party and the government's failure to recognize the importance of "the human factor" and the fundamental role of education in socioeconomic development.

Top photo: Village medical clinic
Courtesy United Nations
Bottom photo: Agronomy students in a college near Can Tho
Courtesy United Nations

Public Health

In 1945 Vietnam had forty-seven hospitals with a total of 3,000 beds, and it had one physician for every 180,000 persons. The life expectancy of its citizens averaged thirty-four years. By 1979 there were 713 hospitals with 205,700 beds, in addition to more than 10,000 maternity clinics and rural health stations; the ratio of physicians to potential patients had increased to one per 1,000 persons, and the average life expectancy was sixty-three years.

Information concerning the health sector in the mid-1980s, although fragmentary, suggested that the country's unified health care system had expanded and improved in both preventive and curative medicine. Medical personnel totaled about 240,000, including physicians, nurses, midwives, and other paramedics. The quality of public health care and the level of medical technology remained inadequate, however, and authorities were increasingly concerned about such problems as nutritional deficiency, mental health, and old-age illnesses. Cardiovascular diseases and cancers were reportedly not widespread but had increased "in recent years." Information on AIDS was unavailable.

The most common diseases were malaria, tuberculosis, trachoma, intestinal infections, leprosy, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles, poliomyelitis, chicken pox, typhoid fever, acute encephalitis, and acute meningitis. Hanoi claimed in 1970 that alcoholic cirrhosis and venereal diseases were "seldom found in North Vietnam because of the wholesome and temperate life of the population and the cadres." In November 1984, however, the government admitted that the incidence of these diseases had increased "significantly" since 1976, "especially in the major cities."

Vietnam claimed to have eliminated cholera, smallpox, and typhoid in the North as early as 1959 and poliomyelitis by 1961. Malaria, once endemic, was said to have been eradicated in many provinces of the North by 1965. Much progress was reported also in the containment of trachoma, tuberculosis, and other diseases, but an official assessment made public in November 1984 acknowledged that, except for smallpox, contagious and infectious diseases had yet to be brought under control and that the mortality rate associated with these diseases remained high. The high mortality rate associated with malaria was a matter of particular concern, especially in the provinces along the Vietnam-Laos border, the Central Highlands, the central region, and the northern border provinces. Tuberculosis, responsible for the death of about 1 percent of the national population, or nearly 600,000 persons annually, remained a major problem although the rate fell from the

1.7 percent reported in 1976. In 1984 as many as 92 percent of the people examined in many different localities were found to be afflicted with one or more diseases. Authorities judged from these results that as few as 48 to 60 percent of the people in the localities sampled were in good health. Gastroenteritis and such childhood diseases as diphtheria, and whooping cough accounted for the extremely high 35 percent mortality rate among children, but the annual death rate for the population as a whole in 1983 was 7.4 per 1000 persons, a decline from 26 per 1000 in 1945.

The prevalence of epidemics of bacterial, viral, and parasitic diseases was attributed to the unsanitary environment. For this reason the government introduced programs to improve hygiene habits. Sanitary stations emphasizing water and environmental purification were established in every district, and campaigns such as the Three Cleans movement (clean food, water, and living conditions) and the Three Exterminations movement (extermination of flies, mosquitoes, and rats) were instituted. In addition, officials encouraged district residents to dig wells and construct septic tanks. They recommended regular vaccinations and inoculations against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, and measles.

Although access to health care had improved by the mid-1980s, the shortages of funds, of qualified physicians, and of medicines prevented the Hanoi government from providing quality health care for more than a few. Minister of Public Health Dan Hoi Xuan acknowledged in November 1984 that the inadequacy of the public health system was responsible for the proliferation of private health services, the black market in medicines, and the consequent corruption of a number of doctors and pharmacists.

In 1987 the practice of traditional medicine remained an important part of the health care system. The Institute of Folk Medicine in Hanoi, a leading center devoted to the study of ancient theories and practices, utilized acupuncture and massage as an integral part of its treatment programs. Official sources maintained that traditional Vietnamese medicine had given rise to new therapeutic methods that called for the wider application of herbal medicine and acupuncture. The cultivation of medicinal plants and manufacture of drugs derived from these plants reportedly helped to overcome the shortage of Western medicines, which had to be imported in large quantities every year. Some of these traditional drugs were described as "most effective" in curing dysentery, arthritis, gastritis, stomach ulcers, heart diseases, influenza, blood clotting, and high blood pressure. In 1985 the Vietnamese press reported that many cooperatives were using folk medicines to satisfy 50 to 70 percent

of their own needs for common drugs. Earlier in 1985, however, an official source had disclosed that efforts to develop Vietnamese medical science by integrating traditional and modern methods had not been systematic and had achieved minimal success.

In the mid-1980s, there were six medical and pharmacological colleges, one college-level institute for the training of managerial cadres in the health services, and more than forty secondary-level schools for mid-level paramedics and pharmacists. Physicians at "modern scientific and technical installations," according to the Vietnamese press, performed "sophisticated" heart, lung, kidney, and neurological surgery as well as microscopic eye surgery. Vietnamese doctors also were reported to be abreast of procedures in a number of other disciplines such as nuclear medicine and hematology.

Living Conditions

The improvement of living conditions has consistently been one of Hanoi's most important but most elusive goals. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, food, housing, medicines, and consumer goods were chronically scarce as agriculture and industry slowly recovered from the effects of prolonged wartime disruptions, corrupt and inept management, and the cost of the military occupation of Cambodia. Consequently, the Hanoi government was under tremendous pressure to address social problems such as urban unemployment, vocational training, homelessness, the care of orphans, war veterans, and the disabled, the control of epidemics, and the rehabilitation of drug addicts and prostitutes. These problems were complicated by rapid population growth, which tested the limits of the food supply and increased the need to import grains.

In December 1985, Vo Van Kiet, chairman of the State Planning Commission, nevertheless reported that farmers' lives had generally improved and that people employed in other economic sectors were adequately supplied with the basic necessities. The standard of living remained low, however, because of acute economic problems that arose between 1981 and 1985, including unemployment. During the 1981–85 period, a total of about 7 million young people reached working age (age 18), but up to 85 percent remained jobless. Among the unemployed of all ages nationwide, 80 percent were unskilled, while in Ho Chi Minh City, the figure rose to 95 percent.

For most Vietnamese having to face soaring inflation and a rapid drop in purchasing power, austerity was an inescapable fact of life. In the mid-1980s no one was starving, but the average diet was highly deficient in protein and amounted to only 1,940 calories

per day, 23 percent below the level required for manual labor. Moreover, as much as an estimated 80 percent of a worker's monthly wage was spent on food. A reader complained to a Ho Chi Minh City newspaper in 1986 that the monthly salary and price subsidies paid to an ordinary worker or civil servant were barely enough to support his family for part of the month. The writer also noted that an increasing number of workers and public officials had succumbed to the lure of "outside temptations" and were misusing their functions and power to get rich illegally. "Because life is so difficult," a 1986 article in the military daily, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* lamented, "even the most honest people must come up with schemes to earn a living and support the family."

In 1986 the standard of living was unstable, and cadres, manual workers, civil servants, armed forces personnel, and laborers experienced serious economic difficulties in their everyday lives. In March 1986, evidently as a stop-gap measure, the government reinstated rationing (discontinued since August 1985) in many parts of the country for such essential goods as rice, meat, sugar, and kerosene. In addition, the government granted more autonomy to commercial enterprises and even encouraged the development of small-scale private industry.

Although the state controlled the economy and most essential consumer goods, it lacked control of the free market, which accounted for more than 50 percent of retail trade volume (see Internal Commerce, ch. 3). In mid-1987 the free market flourished, although Vo Van Kiet had reported to the National Assembly in December 1986 that the government planned to "create conditions for stabilizing the market and prices step by step."

Meanwhile, Vo Van Kiet revealed that the new wage and allowance system put into effect in 1985 for state employees and members of the armed forces had failed to improve living conditions. Indexed to cost-of-living increases, the 1985 system had replaced the no-incentive egalitarianism of the past with a system that linked wages to productivity, quality, and efficiency of work performed.

Through the mid-1980s, the Vietnamese bureaucracy failed to act quickly enough to remedy the shortage of consumer goods in state shops. Shortages of raw materials and energy also continued, forcing manufacturing enterprises to operate at 50 percent of their production capacity. In 1987 it was hoped that the reform-minded leaders selected at the Sixth National Party Congress in December 1986 might begin to turn the economy around.

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Reliable and current information on Vietnamese society remains relatively scarce. Among the most useful sources of information are *Indochina Chronology,* a quarterly of the Institute of East Asian Studies, of the University of California at Berkeley, which gives an informative summary of events, literature, and personalities relating to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; and the *Southeast Asia Report,* of the Joint Publications Research Service, which contains translations of Vietnamese newspapers and periodicals. For a general understanding of the political and economic contexts in which Vietnamese society evolves, readers are advised to consult the annual summary articles on Vietnam contained in *Asian Survey, Far Eastern Economic Review Asia Yearbook,* and *Southeast Asian Affairs.* For official perceptions relating to various aspects of Vietnamese society, see *Vietnam Courier,* an English-language monthly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

William J. Duiker's *Vietnam: Nation in Revolution* offers useful, well-balanced overviews on various aspects of contemporary Vietnam, with a brief annotated bibliography. Also useful is Nguyen Van Canh's *Vietnam Under Communism, 1975–1982,* which depicts life in post-1975 Vietnam as perceived and experienced by a number of Vietnamese expatriates. *Hai Van: Life in a Vietnamese Commune* by Francois Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier provides a rare glimpse into the life of a Red River Delta commune in 1979; life in South Vietnamese rural communities in the early 1960s is given an excellent discussion in Gerald C. Hickey's *Village in Vietnam. We the Vietnamese: Voices from Viet Nam,* edited by Francois Sully, is useful for perspectives on various social aspects of South Vietnam in the 1960s. How Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City appeared to visiting Western journalists in 1985 is presented in *Vietnam Ten Years After,* edited by Robert Emmet Long.

Graeme Jackson's "An Assessment of Church Life in Vietnam" is a balanced account of religious life; Alexander Woodside offers an informative analysis on education in his "The Triumphs and Failures of Mass Education in Vietnam." In "Vietnam 1975–1982: The Cruel Peace," Jacqueline Desbarats and Karl D. Jackson present their findings on the question of whether there were political executions in the years after the communist takeover in 1975. Ethnic minorities are the subject of scholarly treatment in Hickey's *Sons of the Mountains* and *Free in the Forest;* in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations,* edited by Peter Kunstadter; and in Ronald Provencher's *Mainland Southeast Asia: An Anthropological Perspective.* John DeFrancis's *Colonialism and Language Policy in Vietnam* is a scholarly analysis of the evolution of the national writing system, *quoc*

ngu; also informative is *Language in Vietnamese Society: Some Articles by Nguyen Dinh-Hoa,* edited by Patricia Nguyen Thi My-Huong. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)