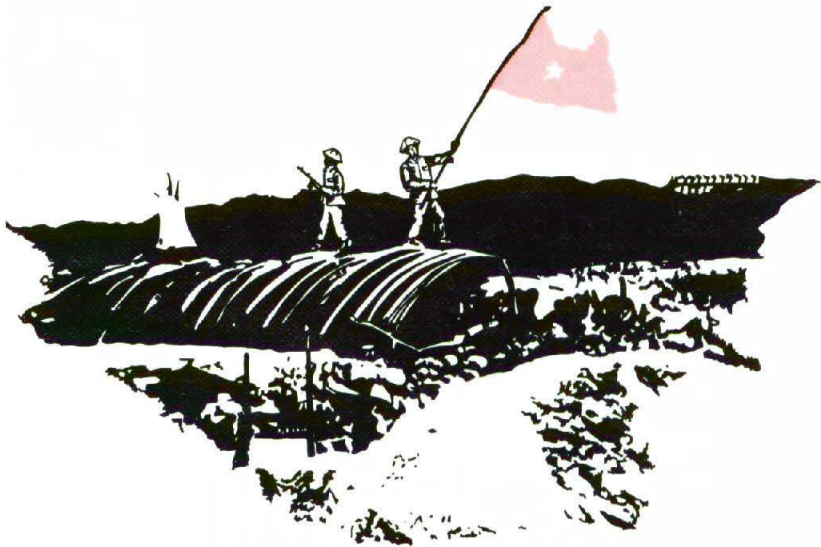


area handbook series

# Vietnam

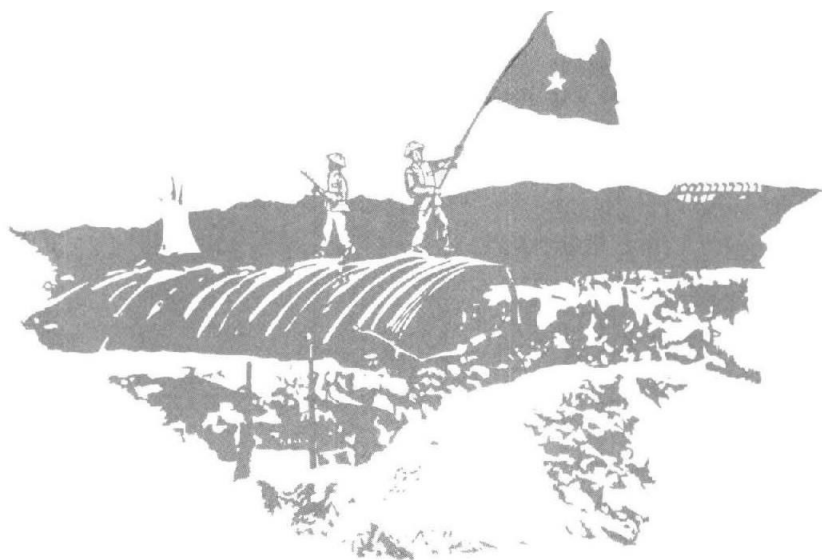
a country study



# Vietnam

## a country study

Federal Research Division  
Library of Congress  
Edited by Ronald J. Cima  
Research Completed  
December 1987



On the cover: Viet Minh soldier waves the flag of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam over General Christian de Castries's bunker following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, May 7, 1954.

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## Foreword

This volume is one in a continuing series of books now being prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress under the Country Studies—Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book lists the other published studies.

Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

Louis R. Mortimer  
Acting Chief  
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## Preface

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, created from the former Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), was established as a new nation in July 1976. Previous editions in this series discussed the North and South separately under the respective titles *Area Handbook for North Vietnam*, published in 1967 and reprinted in 1981 as *North Vietnam: A Country Study*, and *Area Handbook for South Vietnam*, published in 1967. Written at the height of the Second Indochina War, these books described a divided Vietnam that ceased to exist in 1975 when Saigon fell to communist forces.

The current study focuses on the years between 1975 and the mid-1980s, when a nascent and newly reunified nation struggled to develop a postwar identity. It was a period marked by a change in leadership, as Vietnam's first generation of communist leaders began to retire in favor of younger technocrats; by the introduction of significant economic reforms, including the preservation of private enterprise in the South; and by major foreign policy developments, particularly the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed with the Soviet Union, the invasion and occupation of Cambodia, and the 1979 border war with China.

A multidisciplinary team, assisted by a support staff, researched and wrote this book. Information came from a variety of sources, including scholarly studies, governmental and international organization reports, and foreign and domestic newspapers and periodicals.

For the reader's reference, a brief commentary on source material is provided at the end of each chapter; complete citations appear in the Bibliography. Foreign and technical terms are defined when they first appear in the text, and other terms that require further definition are included in the Glossary. Appendixes provide tabular data (see Appendix A) and information on Vietnam's leaders in the 1980s (see Appendix B). Use of contemporary place names is in accordance with the standards of the United States Board of Geographic Names. When place names vary historically, the name consistent with the historical period under discussion is used. All measurements are metric (see Appendix A, table 1).



*Table A. Chronology of Important Events*

Date	Events
2879 B.C.	Legendary founding of the Van Lang Kingdom by the first Hung Vuong
2879-258 B.C.	Hung Dynasty
257-208 B.C.	Thuc Dynasty
207-111 B.C.	Trieu Dynasty
1800-1400 B.C.	Phung Nguyen culture (Early Bronze Age)
850-300 B.C.	Dong Son culture (Late Bronze Age)
210 B.C.	Kingdom of Au Lac established.
207 B.C.	Chinese general Chao Tuo (Trieu Da) founds Nan Yueh (Nam Viet).
111 B.C.	Nan Yueh conquered by Han.
A.D. 39	Trung sisters lead a rebellion against Chinese rule.
43	Trung sisters' rebellion crushed by Chinese general Ma Yuan, and Viet people placed under direct Chinese administration for the first time.
542-544	Ly Bi leads uprising against China's Liang Dynasty and establishes the independent kingdom of Van Xuan.
544-602	Early Ly Dynasty
938	Ngo Quyen defeats a Chinese invading force at the first battle of the Bach Dang River.
939-968	Ngo Dynasty
939-44	Ngo Quyen rules independent Nam Viet.
968-980	Dinh Dynasty
970-975	Dinh Bo Linh gains Chinese recognition of Nam Viet's independence by establishing a tributary relationship with China's Song Dynasty.
980-1009	Early Le Dynasty
981	Le Hoan defeats a Chinese invasion.
982	Viet armies invade Champa and destroy its capital, Indrapura.



*Table A.—Continued*

Date	Events
1009-1225	Ly Dynasty
1075	Minor officials chosen by examination for the first time.
1225-1400	Tran Dynasty
1257-58	Mongols attack Dai Viet and are defeated.
1284-85	Second Mongol invasion and defeat. Resistance led by Tran Hung Dao.
1287	Third Mongol invasion repelled.
1360-90	Champa wars. Champa ruled by Che Bong Nga.
1400-1407	Ho Dynasty
1407-27	Chinese invasion and occupation
1428	Le Loi's armies defeat the Chinese.
1428-1527	Le Dynasty
1428	Le Loi proclaims himself emperor. The country once again named Dai Viet.
1471	Champa capital of Vijaya falls, ending the Champa kingdom.
1483	Hong Duc legal code promulgated.
1527-92	Mac Dynasty. Mac rulers control Thang Long and the Red River Delta.
1558-1772	Period of opposition between the Trinh and Nguyen clans
1627	Alexandre de Rhodes, Jesuit missionary, arrives in Hanoi.
1771	Tay Son Rebellion
1778	Most of Nguyen clan annihilated by the Tay Son.
1787	French missionary Pigneau de Behaine persuades French court to assist in restoration of the Nguyen.
1788	Last Le emperor flees to China. Nguyen Hue proclaims himself emperor.

*Table A.—Continued*

Date	Events
1789	Chinese invasion in support of the Le defeated.
1802	The Nguyen defeat last of Tay Son forces. Nguyen Anh accedes to throne as Gia Long and establishes his capital at Hue.
1802-1945	Nguyen Dynasty
1820	Death of Gia Long. Succeeded by his highly sinicized son, Minh Mang.
1847	French vessels bombard Da Nang.
September 1858	French forces seize Da Nang.
February 1859	French forces capture Saigon.
February 1861	The French defeat the Vietnamese army and gain control of Gia Dinh and surrounding provinces.
June 5, 1862	Treaty of Saigon, which ceded three southern provinces—Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh, and Dinh Tuong—to the French.
1863	Admiral la Grandière imposes French protectorate on Cambodia.
March 1874	A Franco-Vietnamese treaty confirms French sovereignty over Cochinchina and opens the Red River to trade.
August 1883	Treaty of Protectorate, signed at the Harmond Convention, establishes French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin.
June 1884	Treaty of Hue confirms the Harmond convention agreement.
1885	Can Vuong movement, calling upon the Vietnamese to drive out the French, established.
1887	Indochinese Union formally established.
May 19, 1890	Ho Chi Minh's birth
1897-1902	Paul Doumer is Governor-General.
1904	Phan Boi Chau founds Viet Nam Duy Tan Hoi (Vietnam Reformation Society).
October 1911	Ho Chi Minh departs Vietnam for Europe.

*Table A.—Continued*

Date	Events
1912	Phan Boi Chau founds Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi (Vietnam Restoration Society), replacing Duy Tan Hoi.
1919	Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) attempts to meet with President Woodrow Wilson at the Versailles Peace Conference to present a program for Vietnamese rights and sovereignty, but is turned away.
1920	Ho Chi Minh participates in founding of the French Communist Party.
1923	Ho Chi Minh's first visit to Moscow
June-July 1924	Ho Chi Minh attends Fifth Comintern Congress.
1925	Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi (Revolutionary Youth League) formed in Guangzhou under Ho Chi Minh's leadership.
1926	Ho Chi Minh forms Thanh Nien Cong San Doan (Communist Youth League) within the larger Thanh Nien organization.
1927	Nguyen Thai Hoc founds the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD, Vietnam Nationalist Party).
February 1930	Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Viet Nam Cong San Dang) founded in Hong Kong (name changed to Indochinese Communist Party, Dong Duong Cong San Dang, in October).
September 1939	World War II begins.
August 1940	Franco-Japanese treaty, recognizing Japan's pre-eminence in Indochina in return for nominal recognition of French sovereignty, signed.
February 1941	Ho Chi Minh returns to Vietnam.
May 1941	ICP Eighth Plenum at Pac Bo establishes the Viet Minh (Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, or League for the Independence of Vietnam).
1942-43	Ho Chi Minh imprisoned in China.
1944-45	Famine in Tonkin and Annam causes between 1.5 and 2 million deaths.

*Table A.—Continued*

Date	Events
August 1945	Japan surrenders and the Viet Minh commences the August Revolution, gaining effective control over much of Vietnam.
September 1945	Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam's independence in Hanoi.
1946	Ho Chi Minh visits Paris during negotiations with France; hostilities begin following violation of agreements.
1946-54	First Indochina War (see Glossary—also known as Viet Minh War)
1951	Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam (Vietnamese Workers Party—VWP) is founded, succeeding the Indochinese Communist Party.
May 7, 1954	French surrender at Dien Bien Phu
May 8, 1954	Geneva Conference on Indochina opens.
July 21, 1954	Geneva Agreements adopted, Vietnam provisionally divided at the 17th parallel, and Ngo Dinh Diem appointed South Vietnam's premier by Emperor Bao Dai.
January 1, 1955	Direct United States aid to South Vietnam begins.
February 12, 1955	United States advisers begin training South Vietnamese army troops.
October 26, 1955	Republic of Vietnam established with Diem its first president.
December 20, 1960	The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) formed in the South under the direction of the Political Bureau.
December 31, 1961	United States military personnel in Vietnam total about 3,200.
February 8, 1962	United States Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) formed under the command of General Paul D. Harkins.
November 1-2, 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem overthrown and assassinated.
August 7, 1964	United States Congress passes the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution," authorizing the president of the United States to use force in Vietnam to repel attacks on American installations.

*Table A.—Continued*

Date	Events
February 7, 1965	United States begins bombing military targets in North Vietnam.
March 9, 1965	First United States ground combat troops land in Vietnam at Da Nang.
December 31, 1965	United States military personnel in Vietnam total 180,000.
January 30-31, 1968	“Tet Offensive,” employing coordinated attacks on the South’s major cities by North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front troops, fails to achieve its military objectives but erodes American support for the war.
January 25, 1969	Four-party peace talks open in Paris.
May 14, 1969	United States troop strength in Vietnam peaks at 543,000.
June 10, 1969	Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG) formed.
September 3, 1969	Ho Chi Minh’s death
April 28, 1970	Joint United States-Army of the Republic of Vietnam force attacks Vietnamese communist sanctuaries in Cambodia.
March 24, 1971	Operation Lam Son 719, a South Vietnamese attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, ends in defeat.
March 30, 1972	People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) troops launch the largest offensive of the war since 1968.
January 27, 1973	Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam signed in Paris.
March 29, 1973	Last United States troops in Vietnam depart.
March 9, 1975	PAVN offensive in the South begins.
April 30, 1975	Saigon surrenders.
July 2, 1976	The National Assembly proclaims official unification of Vietnam as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
December 14-20, 1976	Fourth National Party Congress. The Vietnamese Workers Party renamed the Vietnam Communist Party.

*Table A.—Continued*

Date	Events
September 20, 1977	Vietnam admitted to United Nations.
June 29, 1978	Vietnam admitted to membership in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).
July 3, 1978	China announces termination of all economic assistance to Vietnam.
November 3, 1978	Vietnam and the Soviet Union sign a 25-year "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation."
December 21, 1978	PAVN forces initiate invasion of Cambodia.
January 7, 1979	The Cambodian government of Pol Pot overthrown when Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, falls to Vietnamese forces.
February 17, 1979	China launches invasion of Vietnam.
March 5, 1979	Chinese forces withdrawn from Vietnam
March 1982	Fifth National Party Congress
December 1986	Sixth National Party Congress



# Country Profile



## Country

**Formal Name:** Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

**Short Form:** Vietnam.

**Term for Citizens:** Vietnamese.

**Capital:** Hanoi.

## Geography

**Size:** Approximately 331,688 square kilometers.

**Topography:** Hills and densely forested mountains, with level land covering no more than 20 percent. Mountains account for 40 percent, hills 40 percent, and forests 75 percent. North consists of



highlands and the Red River Delta; south divided into coastal lowlands, Giau Truong Son (central mountains) with high plateaus, and Mekong River Delta.

**Climate:** Tropical and monsoonal; humidity averages 84 percent throughout year. Annual rainfall ranges from 120 to 300 centimeters, and annual temperatures vary between 5°C and 37°C.

## Society

**Population:** 64,411,668 (1989 census); 2.1 percent average annual population growth rate. Nineteen percent urban; 81 percent rural. Population centers Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon).

**Languages:** Vietnamese official language; also French, various Chinese dialects, tribal languages, and English.

**Ethnic Groups:** Vietnamese account for 87.5 percent of population (1979 figures). Fifty-three minorities account for remainder, including Hoa (Chinese, comprising approximately 1.8 percent), Tay, Thai, Khmer, Muong, Nung, Hmong, and numerous mountain tribes.

**Religion:** Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, and animism.

**Education and Literacy:** Nine years of primary and junior high school, three years of secondary school. First nine years compulsory. Manual labor comprises 15 percent of primary curriculum and 17 percent of secondary. Ninety-three colleges and universities, with close to 130,000 students enrolled, able to admit only 10 percent of applicants. Education emphasizes training of skilled workers, technicians, and managers. Students, nevertheless, tend to avoid vocational schools and specialized middle schools because they are believed to preclude entry to high-status occupations. Literacy 78 percent (for all age groups).

**Health:** Total of approximately 11,000 hospitals, medical aid stations, public health stations, and village maternity clinics, staffed by 240,000 medical personnel. Approximately 1 physician per 1,000 persons. Life expectancy sixty-three years. Malaria, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases prevalent. Government undertaken a campaign to improve cleanliness by launching “Three Cleans Movement” (clean food, water, and living conditions) and “Three Exterminations Movement” (exterminate flies, mosquitos, and rats).

## Economy

**Salient Features:** In 1984 gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary) stood at US\$18.1 billion, US\$300 per capita at official exchange rate of 12.1 dong to US\$1 (actual per capita income is closer to US\$200). Produced National Income (PNI—see Glossary) grew by 2.1 percent in 1987, down from 3.3 percent in 1986.

**Agriculture:** Major agricultural products produced in 1985: grain (18.2 million tons), sugar (434,000 tons), tea (26,000 tons), coffee (6,000 tons), and rubber (52,000 tons). Agriculture represented 51 percent of PNI.

**Industry:** Thirty-two percent of PNI in 1985; major industries included electricity (5.4 billion kilowatt hours), coal (60 million tons), steel (57,000 tons), cement (1.4 million tons), cloth (80 million square meters), paper (75,000 tons), fish sauce (174 million liters), and processed sea fish (550,000 tons). Mineral resources included iron ore, tin, copper, lead, zinc, nickel, manganese, titanium, chromite, tungsten, bauxite, apatite, graphite, mica, silica sand, and limestone.

**Energy Sources:** Timber, coal, offshore oil deposits.

**Foreign Trade:** Exports totaled US\$739.5 million in 1986. Principal exports consisted of coal, rubber, rice, tea, coffee, wood, and marine products. Imports totaled US\$2.5 billion in 1986. Principal imports consisted of petroleum products, fertilizers, rice, and steel. In 1986 total debt estimated at nearly US\$7.7 billion. According to figures given to International Monetary Fund by Hanoi, from 1981–85 Vietnam's debt to communist bloc countries rose from US\$3 billion to more than US\$6 billion. Trade deficit with the Soviet Union grew from US\$224 million in 1976 to US\$1.5 billion in 1986.

## Transportation and Communications

**Railroads:** Total of 4,250 kilometers of track. Most important section connects Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

**Roads:** Some 85,000 kilometers of road; of which 9,400 kilometers paved, 48,700 kilometers gravel or improved earth, and 26,900 kilometers unimproved.

**Maritime Shipping:** 125 vessels, including 80 coastal freighters, 12 oil tankers, and 15 ocean-going freighters. Total of thirty-two ports, of which nine major ports. Three largest located at Da Nang, Haiphong, and Ho Chi Minh City.

**Civil Aviation:** Controlled by military. Domestic air service connects Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Pleiku, Da Lat, Buon Me Thuot, Phu Bai, and Nha Trang. Ho Chi Minh City also connected to Rach Gia, Phu Quoc, and Con Son Island. International air service connects Hanoi with Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Moscow, and Bangkok. Total of 128 usable airfields, 46 with surfaced runways.

**Telecommunications:** Two satellite-ground communications stations linking Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Moscow, and integrating Vietnam into Soviet Intersputnik Communication Satellite Organization.

## **Government and Politics**

**Party and Government:** Democratic Republic of (North) and former Republic of (South) Vietnam united to form Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 2, 1976. Constitution adopted in 1980 stipulates National Assembly as highest governing body. Members serve five-year terms and nominally directly elected by electorate. Council of State, which serves as collective presidency, and Council of Ministers, which manages governmental activities, nominally accountable to, and elected by, National Assembly. Political power effectively in hands of Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Viet Nam Cong San Dang). Most government positions filled by party members, who act at direction of party. Party led by National Party Congress, which meets infrequently. Congress elects Central Committee, which in turn elects Political Bureau, party's highest policy-making body.

**Administrative Divisions:** Country divided into thirty-six provinces, three autonomous municipalities, and one special zone. Provinces divided into districts, towns, and capitals.

**Judicial System:** Supreme People's Court; local People's Courts at provincial, district, and city levels; military tribunals; and People's Supreme Organ of Control. National Assembly elects Procurator General, who heads People's Supreme Organ of Control and performs overall administration of justice.

**Foreign Affairs:** Vietnam dominated Laos through numerous Hanoi-dictated cooperation agreements; most important—Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1977. Occupied Cambodia as result of military conquest in January 1979 and subsequently negotiated Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Relations with China marked by China's limited invasion in 1979 and frequent

border skirmishes. Formally aligned with Soviet Union through Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in November 1978. Both countries shared membership in Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon—see Glossary); Soviet Union largest donor of economic and military aid. Limited governmental and commercial ties established with all Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members but prevented from developing further by ASEAN's opposition to Vietnam's Cambodia policy. In 1988 no diplomatic relations with United States, which maintained economic boycott against Vietnam and stressed Vietnam's cooperation in accounting for servicemen missing in action as prerequisite to normal relations. Admitted to membership in United Nations in 1977.

## National Security

**Armed Forces:** Largest military force in Southeast Asia and third largest force in the world after China and the Soviet Union. Estimated in 1987 to total over 5 million: army, 1.2 million; navy, 15,000; air force, 20,000; Regional Force, 500,000; Militia-Self Defense Force, 1.2 million; Armed Youth Assault Force, 1,500,000; and Tactical Rear Force, 500,000.

**Combat Units and Major Equipment:** Command structure divided geographically into military theaters and military regions or zones. Tactically divided into corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, and battalions, companies, platoons, and squads. Army comprised eight corps (each numbering 30,000 to 50,000 troops). In 1986 total of thirty-eight regular infantry divisions: nineteen in Cambodia, ten in northern Vietnam, six in central and southern Vietnam, and three in Laos. Thirteen economic construction divisions, which carried burden of 1979 war with China, deployed in China border region. Army equipped with 1,600 Soviet-made T-34/-54/-55/-62, Type-59 tanks and 450 PT-76 and type 60/63 light tanks; 2,700 reconnaissance vehicles; some 600 artillery guns and howitzers, unspecified number of multiple rocket launchers, mortars, and antitank weapons; and 3,000 air defense weapons. Navy, with Soviet assistance, largest naval force in Southeast Asia in 1986. Five naval regions, headquartered at Da Nang, Haiphong, Vinh, Vung Tau, and Rach Gia. Navy equipped with 2 principal combat vessels, 192 patrol boats, 51 amphibious warfare ships, 104 landing ships, and 133 auxiliary craft. Approximately 1,300 ex-United States, South Vietnamese naval vessels, naval and civilian junks and coasters augment this force. Air Force divided into seventeen air regiments, (seven attack fighter plane regiments, four basic and advanced training regiments, three cargo transport regiments,

three helicopter regiments, and one light bomber force), headquartered at Noi Bai (Hanoi), Da Nang, Tho Xuan, and Tan Son Nhut (Ho Chi Minh City). Air Force equipped with some 450 combat aircraft (including 225 MiG-21s), 225 trainers, 350 cargo-transport planes, 600 helicopters, and 60 light bombers.

**Military Budget:** No expenditure estimates available. Military aid from Soviet Union estimated about US\$1.5 billion annually beginning in 1986.

**Police Agencies and Paramilitary:** Police functions vested in People's Security Force (PSF), People's Public Security Force (PPSF), and People's Armed Security Force (PASF). PSF strictly law enforcement agency operating chiefly in urban rather than rural areas. PASF composed of party security cadres and PAVN personnel concerned with illegal political acts and insurgency movements as well as criminal activity.

**Foreign Military Alliances:** Friendship and cooperation treaties signed with Laos in 1977, Soviet Union in 1978, and Cambodia in 1979.





Figure 1. Administrative Divisions of Vietnam, 1985



Figure 1. (continued)





## Introduction

The victory of communist forces in Vietnam in April 1975 ranks as one of the most politically significant occurrences of the post-World War II era in Asia. The speed with which the North finally seized the South, and the almost simultaneous communist victories in Laos and Cambodia, were stunning achievements. The collapse of the three Indochinese noncommunist governments brought under communist control a region that, over the course of four decades of war, had become the focus of United States policy for the containment of communism in Asia. The achievement was even more phenomenal for having been accomplished in the face of determined United States opposition and for having called into question the very policy of containing communism.

The events of April 1975 prepared the way for the official reunification of North and South in 1976, some three decades after Ho Chi Minh first proclaimed Vietnam's independence under one government in September 1945 and more than a century after France divided Vietnam in order to rule its regions separately. The departure of defeated Japanese troops, who had occupied Vietnam during World War II, had created the opportunity for Vietnamese communists to seize power in August 1945, before French authorities were able to return to reclaim control of the government. Communist rule was cut short, however, by Nationalist Chinese and British occupation forces whose presence tended to support the Communist Party's political opponents. Between 1945 and 1975, the generation of communists responsible for victory in the South pursued a lengthy war for independence from the French, acquiesced temporarily to division of the country into a communist North and noncommunist South, and engaged in a subsequent war for control of the South against a southern regime supported by the United States. Reunification and independence, however, were goals that predated the communists. They were the long-established objectives of Ho Chi Minh's nationalist and anticolonialist predecessors, who had resisted Chinese rule for 1,000 years and French domination for a century.

Indeed, Vietnam's unrelenting resistance to foreign intervention remains a dominant Vietnamese historical theme, manifested in the repeated waging of *dau tranh*, or struggle to gain a long-term objective through total effort, and motivated by *chinh nghĩa*, or just cause. Vietnam's communist leaders claim that every Vietnamese has been a soldier in this struggle. Paradoxically, Vietnam's fierce

determination to remain free of foreign domination has often been combined with an equally strong willingness to accept foreign influence. Historically, the pattern has been to adapt foreign ideas to indigenous conditions whenever they applied.

China was the chief source of Vietnam's foreign ideas and the earliest threat to its national sovereignty. Beginning in the first century B.C., China's Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) imposed Chinese rule that endured for ten centuries despite repeated Vietnamese uprisings and acts of rebellion. Only the collapse of the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907) in the early tenth century enabled Vietnamese national hero Ngo Quyen to re-establish Vietnam's independence a generation later. The Vietnamese subsequently were able to fend off further invasion attempts for 900 years (see *The Chinese Millennium and Nine Centuries of Independence*, ch. 1).

Whether ruled by China or independent, the Vietnamese elite consistently modeled Vietnamese cultural institutions on those of the Chinese. Foremost among such Chinese institutions was Confucianism, after which Vietnamese family, bureaucratic, and social structures were patterned. The Vietnamese upper classes tended also to study Chinese classical literature and to use the Chinese system of ideographs in writing. Emperor Gia Long, in a particularly obvious act of imitation in the early nineteenth century, even modeled his new capital at Hue after the Chinese capital at Beijing. The process of sinicization, however, tended to coexist with, rather than to replace, traditional Vietnamese culture and language. Imitation of the Chinese was largely confined to the elite classes. Traditional Vietnamese society, on the other hand, was sustained by the large peasant class, which was less exposed to Chinese influence.

Vietnam's lengthy period of independence ended in 1862, when Emperor Tu Duc, agreeing to French demands, ceded three provinces surrounding Saigon to France. During the colonial period, from 1862 to 1954, resistance to French rule was led by members of the scholar-official class, whose political activities did not involve the peasantry and hence failed. The success of the communists, on the other hand, was derived from their ability to organize and retain the peasantry's support. The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Viet Nam Cong San Dang) and its various communist antecedents presented Marxism-Leninism as an effective means of recovering the independence that was Vietnam's tradition. Belief in this ideal was instrumental in sustaining Northern and Southern peasant-based communist forces during the lengthy Second Indochina War, which lasted from 1954 to 1975.

In the post-1975 period, however, it was immediately apparent that the popularity and effectiveness of the communist party's wartime policies did not necessarily extend to its peacetime nation-building plans. Having unified the North and South politically, the VCP still had to integrate them socially and economically. In this task, VCP policy-makers were confronted with Southern resistance to change, as well as traditional animosities arising from cultural and historical differences between the North and South. The situation was further complicated by a deterioration in economic conditions that ignited an unprecedented level of discontent among low-level VCP members and open criticism of VCP policies. The party appeared to be in a state of transition, wavering over the pace and manner of the South's integration with the North and debating the place of reform in development strategy. The first generation communist leaders, co-founders of the party together with Ho Chi Minh, were aging and were beginning to step down in favor of younger, often reform-minded technocrats. The Sixth National Party Congress held in December 1986 was a milestone; it marked the end of the party's revolutionary period, when social welfare and modernization were subordinate to security concerns, and the beginning of a time when experimentation and reform were encouraged to stimulate development (see Party Organization, ch. 4).

In the 1980s, Vietnam ranked third in population—60 million—and first in population density—an average of 182 persons per square kilometer—among the world's communist nations. A 2-percent annual population growth rate and uneven population distribution adversely affected resource allocation, work force composition, and land use. Population projections indicated a population of 80 million by the year 2000, if the growth rate remained unchanged. The Fourth National Party Congress in December 1976 stressed the need to curtail the population growth rate and introduced a plan to relocate 54 million people to 1 million hectares of previously uncultivated land, now organized into "new economic zones," by the mid-1990s. As of 1988, however, progress toward the plan's fulfillment was considerably behind schedule (see Population, ch. 2).

A predominantly rural society with more than half of its work force committed to agriculture, Vietnam had a standard of living that remained one of the poorest in the world. A series of harvest shortfalls that reduced food supplies and a scarcity of foreign exchange that made it difficult to replenish food reserves contributed to this condition. Shortages of raw materials and energy forced production facilities to operate at considerably less than full capacity,

and the party bureaucracy remained incapable of acting quickly enough to reduce shortages (see *Economic Setting*, ch. 3).

Economic development prospects for the 1980s and 1990s were tied to party economic policy in critical ways. Party leaders, in establishing economic policy at the Fourth National Party Congress, envisioned Vietnam's post-reunification economy to be in a "period of transition to socialism." The plan, or series of plans, called for the economy to evolve through three phases: The first, outlining the objectives of the Second Five-Year Plan (1976–80), set extremely high goals for industrial and agricultural production while also giving high priority to construction, reconstruction, and the integration of the North and the South. The second, entitled "socialist industrialization," was divided into two stages—from 1981 to 1990 and from 1991 to 2005. During these stages, the material and technical foundations of communism were to be constructed, and development plans were to focus equally on agriculture and industry. The third and final phase, covering the years from 2006 to 2010, was to be a time set aside to "perfect the transitional period."

By 1979, however, it was obvious to Vietnam's leaders that the Second Five-Year Plan would fail to meet its goals and that the long-range goals established for the transition period were unrealistic. The economy continued to be dominated by small-scale production, low productivity, high unemployment, material and technological shortages, and insufficient food and consumer goods.

The Fifth National Party Congress, held in March 1982, approved the economic goals of the Third Five-Year Plan (1981–85). The policies introduced were comparatively liberal and called for the temporary retention of private capitalist activities in the South, in order to spur economic growth. By sanctioning free enterprise, the congress ended the nationalization of small business concerns and reversed former policies that sought the immediate transformation of the South to communism. The July 1984 Sixth Plenum of the Fifth National Party Congress' Central Committee confirmed the party's earlier decision, recognizing that the private sector's domination over wholesale and retail trade in the South could not be eliminated until the state was capable of assuming that responsibility. Proposals subsequently were made to upgrade the state's economic sophistication by decentralizing planning procedures and improving the managerial skills of government and party officials. To attract foreign currency and expertise, the government approved a new foreign investment code in December 1987 (see *Economic Roles of the Party and the Government*, ch. 3).

Vietnam's security considerations in the 1980s also represented a new set of challenges to the party. Until the fall of the South

Vietnamese government in 1975, the party had relegated foreign policy to a secondary position behind the more immediate concerns of national liberation and reunification. Once the Second Indochina War had ended, however, the party needed to look outward and re-evaluate foreign policy, particularly as it applied to Cambodia, China, the Soviet Union, member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the United States and other Western nations (see Foreign Relations, ch. 4).

By the end of the 1970s, the Vietnamese were threatened on two fronts, a condition which Vietnam had not faced previously, even at the height of the Second Indochina War. Conflict between Vietnamese and Cambodian communists on their common border began almost immediately after their respective victories in 1975. To neutralize the threat, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 and overran Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, driving out the incumbent Khmer Rouge communist regime and initiating a prolonged military occupation of the country. Vietnam's relations with China, a seemingly staunch ally during the Second Indochina War, subsequently reached their nadir, when China retaliated against Vietnam's incursion into Cambodia by launching a limited invasion of Vietnam in February and March 1979. Relations between the two countries had actually been deteriorating for some time. Territorial disagreements, which had remained dormant during the war against the South, were revived at the war's end, and a postwar campaign engineered by Hanoi to limit the role of Vietnam's ethnic Chinese (Hoa) community in domestic commerce elicited a strong Chinese protest. China was displeased with Vietnam primarily, however, because of its rapidly improving relationship with the Soviet Union.

A new era in Vietnamese foreign relations began in 1978, when Hanoi joined the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and signed the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow. The agreement called for mutual assistance and consultation in the event either was threatened by a third country. A secret protocol accompanying the treaty also permitted Soviet use of Vietnamese airport and harbor facilities, particularly the former United States military complex at Cam Ranh Bay. In return, Vietnam acquired military and economic aid needed to undertake an invasion of Cambodia and was able to exploit Soviet influence as a deterrent to Chinese intervention (see Foreign Relations, ch. 4).

During the 1980s, after China had cut off military assistance to Vietnam, such aid—amounting to US\$200 to \$300 million annually—was almost exclusively Soviet in origin. As Vietnam's primary

source of economic aid as well, the Soviet Union during this period provided close to US\$1 billion annually in balance-of-payments aid, project assistance, and oil price subsidies.

Vietnam's growing dependence on the Soviet Union concerned Hanoi's Southeast Asian neighbors. As did China, the ASEAN nations thought that the relationship provided a springboard for Soviet influence in the region and that Soviet support provided a critical underpinning for Vietnam's Cambodia policy. The ASEAN nations assumed a key role in rallying United Nations (UN) General Assembly opposition to Vietnam's interference in Cambodia and led the UN in preventing the Vietnamese-supported regime in Phnom Penh from assuming Cambodia's General Assembly seat. ASEAN members were instrumental in combining—at least on paper—the various Cambodian communist and noncommunist factions opposing the Vietnamese into a single resistance coalition.

The decision to intervene militarily in Cambodia further isolated Vietnam from the international community. The United States, in addition to citing Vietnam's minimal cooperation in accounting for Americans who were missing in action (MIAs) as an obstacle to normal relations, barred normal ties as long as Vietnamese troops occupied Cambodia. In 1987 Washington also continued to enforce the trade embargo imposed on Hanoi at the conclusion of the war in 1975.

Normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States, however, was not a primary Vietnamese foreign policy objective in 1987. The sizable economic benefits it would yield, plus its strategic value, remained secondary to other more immediate security concerns, although the potential economic benefits were judged sizable. Instead, Vietnam prepared to enter the 1990s with foreign relations priorities that stressed extrication from the military stalemate in Cambodia in a manner consistent with security needs, repair of ties with China to alleviate Chinese military pressure on Vietnam's northern border, and reduction of military and economic dependence on the Soviet Union.

Domestic and foreign policy in 1987 reflected changes initiated by the elevation of reformer Nguyen Van Linh to VCP general secretary at the Sixth National Party Congress. Policies were characterized by a program of political and economic experimentation that was similar to contemporary reform agendas undertaken in China and the Soviet Union. The goal of all three nations was to pursue economic development at the cost of some compromise of communist ideological orthodoxy. In the case of Vietnam, however, the conservative members of the leadership continued to view orthodoxy as an ultimate goal. According to their plan, the stress on

economic development was only a momentary emphasis; the real goal remained the perfection of Vietnam's communist society.

\* \* \*

In 1988 and 1989, the years immediately following completion of research and writing of this book, Vietnam's foreign and domestic policies were increasingly determined by economic considerations. The mood of dramatic economic and political reform, inspired by the Sixth National Party Congress and Linh's appointment to party leadership, however, appeared to have dissipated, and the mood of confidence that had prevailed in 1987 gradually evaporated as disagreement among Political Bureau members over the pace of change stymied the implementation of many policy innovations.

A campaign for political and economic renewal (*doi moi*) was launched by Linh immediately following the congress, but the progress of change, particularly economic change, failed to meet expectations. Linh was strongly opposed within the party's leadership, and his economic reforms were initially stalled or blocked by the resistance efforts of a strong conservative coalition of party leaders, made up of ideological conservatives, bureaucrats, and members of the military establishment.

Linh's initiatives for dealing with the country's economic problems were bold, but the coalition of conservative party leaders opposing his policies effectively denied him the consensus he needed to implement his plans. Consequently, his powers to effect change appeared to wane as the severity of the country's economic crisis deepened.

Despite their opposition to reform policy, reform, per se, was viewed as "correct" by most, if not all, members of Vietnam's Political Bureau. A member's position on the subject, however, was probably determined less by his view of the process in the abstract than by his willingness to undertake risk, and in 1988 and 1989 the non-risk takers appeared to have the upper hand.

In March 1988 Prime Minister Pham Hung died, and Linh's choice of conservative Do Muoi over fellow reformer Vo Van Kiet to replace him was viewed as a clear concession to the non-risk takers. National Assembly members, however, for the first time challenged the central committee's nominee for a key government post by demanding that two candidates be permitted to run. Muoi, the party's choice, was required to face Vo Van Kiet, the nominee of delegates from the south.

The dissent displayed in the debate leading to Muoi's selection was not isolated, but mirrored a dramatic increase in all political



debate and discussion in 1988. The October 1988 meeting of the Congress of National Trade Unions, for example, was extremely critical of the government's economic failures. Similarly, the Fourth Session of the Eighth National Assembly, held in December 1988, heatedly debated the issues. It was conducted without the customary Central Committee meeting beforehand and, on the surface, appeared to be acting without Central Committee guidance.

Lastly, a campaign against corruption, initiated by Nguyen Van Linh in 1987, invited private and official criticism of public policy and encouraged the press to take the lead in uncovering corruption. By early 1988, the campaign had resulted in the replacement of almost all of the country's 40 province secretaries and 80 percent of the 400 or so district party chiefs. Eleven hundred party cadres were tried for corruption in the first six months of the year, and the press was credited with the party's removal of Ha Truong Hoa, the party Provincial Secretary of Thanh Hoa, whose position had widely been regarded as impregnable despite his well publicized abuses of office. The policy of encouraging criticism, however, was mysteriously reversed in early 1989 when the press was urged to moderate its criticism of the Party. It was speculated that the reversal was meant to appease conservatives within the Political Bureau who were concerned about the erosion of party authority caused by public criticism.

Party leaders themselves, however, continued to be critical of party policy. Nguyen The Phan, the head of the theoretical department of the Marxist-Leninist Institute, for example, told a January 1989 meeting of high-ranking officials that by following the Soviet economic model, Vietnam had developed a centralized and subsidized economic system "inferior to capitalism," and "had abolished motivation in people and society." He called on party leaders to learn about marketplace competition from capitalist countries.

Goals established and reinforced at the December 1988 meeting of the Eighth National Assembly were consistent with this theme. The primary goal was described as development of an economy that was less controlled by the government and more subject to the rules of the marketplace. This was to be achieved by subjecting all economic transactions to the standards of basic business accountability and by expanding the private sector. Centralized bureaucratism was to be abolished, and some state-run economic establishments were to be guaranteed autonomy in their business practices. Lastly, the system of state subsidies for food, import-export operations, or for losses incurred by state-run enterprises was scheduled to be eliminated.

Beginning in 1988, individual farmers were given more responsibility for the rice growing process in order to increase their incentive to produce higher yields. Land tenure laws were modified to guarantee farmers a ten-year tenure on the land, and the contract system between peasants and the government was revised to permit peasants to keep 45 to 50 percent of their output rather than the 25 percent previously allowed. Other reforms removed restrictions on private-production enterprises in Hanoi and introduced the concept of developing industry outside the state-run sector. A law passed in January 1989 helped free the economy from central control by granting entrepreneurs the right to pool their capital and set up their own business organizations. Such concessions were of particular assistance to entrepreneurs in the South, where the economy in 1988 and 1989 was more or less directed by its own momentum, and where it had become increasingly evident that Vietnam's economic planners had opted to exploit the region's economic potential rather than stifle it by employing rigid controls.

The sixth plenum of the party Central Committee (Sixth Party Congress), held in late March 1989, concluded, however, that despite the establishment of goals and the introduction of some new policies, little was actually being accomplished because local cadres were failing to implement reform plans or institutionalize party resolutions in a timely manner. The plenum, therefore, resolved to emphasize the implementation and institutionalization of reforms and resolutions already introduced in order to accelerate the process.

Chinese student pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing a few months later were watched very closely by Vietnam's leaders. In their view, the disaffection demonstrated by Chinese students had resulted directly from China's experimentation with political and economic reforms. Having undertaken similar changes, they were concerned that Vietnam was equally vulnerable to displays of unrest. To avoid China's experience, the government reportedly dealt with student protesters in Hanoi in May 1989 by acceding to their demands for improved conditions. Progress toward greater political liberalization, however, was subsequently checked.

Vietnam's world view noticeably altered in the closing years of the 1980s, moving from an ideologically dominated perspective, stressing Vietnam's independence and the division of the world into communist and noncommunist camps, to a nonideological view emphasizing Vietnam's role in a complex world of economic interdependence. The most significant example of a foreign policy initiative motivated by this view was the decision, announced in early 1989, to remove all Vietnamese troops from Cambodia by the end of September 1989. By disengaging from Cambodia,

Vietnam hoped to remove the single largest obstacle to gaining admission to the regional and world economic community and to convince its noncommunist neighbors, the West, and China, that it was ready to end its diplomatic and economic isolation.

Ending the Cambodian conflict itself, however, was another matter, and as events unfolded in 1988 and 1989 it was not clear whether Vietnam's withdrawal would expedite or prolong a resolution. Initially, the possibility of ending the stalemate appeared to improve. Acting entirely on his own initiative, resistance leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk, in December 1987, arranged unprecedented direct dialogues between himself and Hun Sen, the premier of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Although they failed to yield major results, the talks nevertheless initiated valuable face-to-face discussions between representatives of both sides and introduced diplomacy as a means of ending the conflict.

In May 1988, eleven days after the Soviets began their troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and three days before a Moscow summit between President Reagan and Soviet Secretary Gorbachev was to convene, Vietnam announced plans to withdraw 50,000 troops by the end of the year. The withdrawal, commencing in June and ending in December as promised, involved not only the removal of troops, but also the dismantling of Vietnam's military high command in Cambodia and the reassignment of remaining troops to Cambodian commands.

In July 1988, Hanoi participated in the first meeting of all parties in the Cambodia conflict. The "cocktail party" meeting, or Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM), convened in Bogor, Indonesia, was termed a limited success because, if nothing more, it established a negotiating framework and set the agenda for future discussion. However, it also shifted the emphasis of the search for a conflict resolution away from Vietnam and to the question of how to prevent the Khmer Rouge from seizing power once a political agreement was reached. At the meeting, Vietnam linked a total withdrawal of its troops to the elimination of the Khmer Rouge and won the support of the ASEAN nations and the noncommunist factions of the Cambodian resistance coalition, who also feared that Pol Pot would return to power in the absence of Vietnamese forces.

A second "informal" meeting of the four Cambodian factions, held in February 1989, ended inconclusively, deadlocked on fundamental issues such as the shape of the international force that was to supervise an agreement and the manner in which a quadripartite authority to rule in Phnom Penh would be established. The February meeting was followed by a month-long international conference, held in Paris in August 1989 and attended by twenty

nations, which also ended short of a comprehensive agreement. Although the conference had been called to help mediate a settlement between the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh and the three-member resistance coalition, it foundered over finding an appropriate place for the Khmer Rouge once Vietnam's troop withdrawal was complete. Thus in September 1989, on the eve of the withdrawal, the promise of an impending political settlement in Cambodia remained unfulfilled. Instead, the inability of the four factions to arrive at a compromise renewed prospects for an escalation of conflict on the battlefield.

In 1988 one of Vietnam's top foreign policy priorities was finding a way to cut China's support for the Khmer Rouge. China, Hanoi argued, was the key to a Cambodian resolution because, as Pol Pot's chief source of supply, Beijing alone had the power to defuse the Khmer Rouge threat. As the year progressed, it became increasingly evident that Beijing was more interested in a settlement than in prolonging the conflict and that its position on Cambodia was shifting to facilitate settlement. This fact was evidenced in July 1988 when a Chinese proposal, repeating longstanding demands for a complete withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops and a quadripartite government led by Sihanouk, surprisingly ruled out a personal role for Pol Pot in any post-settlement government. The proposal was also novel because it intimated that Beijing, for the first time, was willing to discuss a provisional coalition government before the departure of all Vietnamese troops. At the International Conference on the conflict held in August 1989, the Chinese appeared to be undercutting their support for the Khmer Rouge by arguing that civil war was to be avoided at all costs and promising to cut off military aid once a settlement was reached. China's position on the Khmer Rouge nevertheless remained ambiguous.

In a 1988 incident, possibly related to Cambodia because it potentially strengthened China's position at a future bargaining table, the ongoing dispute between China and Vietnam over sovereignty to the Spratly Islands erupted into an unprecedented exchange of hostilities. The situation was reduced to an exchange of accusations following the armed encounter. Vietnam's repeated calls for China to settle the dispute diplomatically won rare support for Vietnam from the international community, but elicited little response from Beijing.

A conciliatory mood developed on both sides of the Sino-Vietnamese border in 1989, partly because Vietnam's proposal to withdraw completely from Cambodia responded to a basic Chinese condition for improved relations. Formal talks at the deputy foreign

minister level were initiated, and a cross-border trade in Chinese and Vietnamese goods flourished in the Vietnamese border town of Lang Son. The internal turmoil experienced by China in May and June 1989 may have actually benefited the relationship from Vietnam's point of view. Historically, whenever Beijing had been forced to turn its attention inward to quell internal dissension, Vietnam's security situation had correspondingly improved.

Beijing's interest in improving ties with Moscow in 1988 and 1989, however, complicated the situation and put Vietnam increasingly at odds with the Soviet Union. As the reality of an eventual Sino-Soviet reconciliation approached, it became increasingly clear that Vietnamese and Soviet strategic interests did not always coincide. The presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, for example, was the leading obstacle to Sino-Soviet reconciliation. Accordingly, the most significant development to occur in Soviet-Vietnamese relations in 1988 and 1989 was the application of increased Soviet pressure on Vietnam to resolve the Cambodian situation, a pressure that undoubtedly helped prompt Vietnam's policy of withdrawal.

Hanoi was naturally wary of any talks between the Soviet Union and China, fearing that a deal would be made on Cambodia at Vietnam's expense. The two powers convened bilateral discussions in Beijing in August 1988 and proceeded to normalize relations at a summit meeting in Beijing in May 1989. Very little with regard to Cambodia was actually accomplished, however, and the summit resulted simply in the two sides agreeing to "disagree" on the mechanics of a political solution.

By actively pursuing an end to the Cambodian conflict, Vietnam acted also to further the chances of normalizing its relations with the United States. Both sides in 1988 appeared particularly receptive to improving relations, and Vietnam's troop withdrawal as well as its participation in the JIM were interpreted by the United States as positive gestures directed toward Vietnam's disengagement from Cambodia, a requirement imposed by Washington for diplomatic recognition. Hanoi also acted, in the early part of the year, to remove other obstacles to recognition by agreeing in principle to resettlement in the United States of thousands of former political prisoners and by consenting to cooperate in joint excavations of United States military aircraft crash sites in an attempt to locate the remains of Americans missing in action (MIAs). Some remains were returned. In 1989, additional sets of MIA remains were returned, and an accord was reached between Vietnam and the United States granting re-education camp inmates who had worked for the United States permission to emigrate.

Finally, Vietnam sought to improve its regional relations in 1988 and 1989 by extending a conciliatory gesture to its Asian neighbors. In response to a rise in the number of Vietnamese refugees, Vietnam assured its neighbors that it would ease their burdens as countries of first asylum by reversing a policy that forbade refugees to return home. Hanoi also proposed to open discussions with Southeast Asian officials on ending the refugee exodus. In 1989, however, Vietnam permitted only those refugees who “voluntarily” sought repatriation to return to Vietnam. Because genuine volunteers were few in number, the policy was regarded as inadequate by countries with Vietnamese refugee populations. More boat people departed Vietnam in 1989 than in any single year since the beginning of the decade, and their numbers were no longer limited to southerners fleeing political persecution but included northerners seeking economic opportunity. The willingness of countries of first asylum to accept Vietnamese refugees had lessened considerably since 1979, however, and many were seriously considering policies advocating forced repatriation.

Vietnam’s relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), nevertheless, showed dramatic improvement during this two-year period, and Thailand, in particular, was singled out by Hanoi as critically important to Vietnam’s economic future. The success of a January 1989 official visit to Hanoi by Thai Foreign Minister Sitthi Sawetsila surpassed all expectations and led Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan to encourage Thai businessmen to expand trade relations with the Indochinese countries. According to the Thai Prime Minister, the Thai goal was to turn the Southeast Asian peninsula into an economic “Golden Land” (*Suwannaphume* in Thai) with Thailand as its center and Indochina, transformed from “a battlefield into a trading market,” as its cornerstone. Although the plan was controversial, it appeared to reflect the shift of regional priorities from security to economic concerns.

Vietnam still lacked an adequate foreign investment structure in 1989, although a Foreign Trade Office and a Central Office to Supervise Foreign Investment, along with a State Commission for Cooperation and Investment, had been established to draft investment policies. The Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations convened a three-day conference in February 1989, attended by 500 delegates associated with foreign trade, to discuss modifying Vietnam’s existing foreign economic policies and mechanisms in order to more effectively attract foreign investors. Ho Chi Minh City also authorized the establishment of a “Zone of Fabrication and Exportation” where foreign companies would be free to import

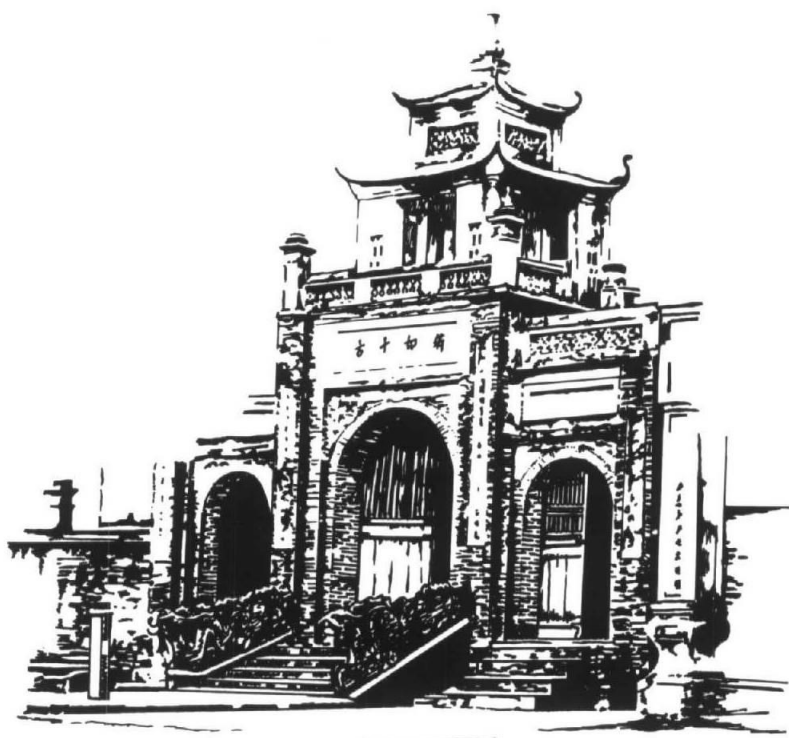
commodities, assemble products, use low cost local labor, and re-export final products. Ho Chi Minh City, followed by the Vung Tau-Con Dao Special Zone, led all other localities in the number of foreign investment projects and joint ventures initiated, and a large proportion of the investors were identified as overseas Vietnamese.

Although changes introduced in the closing years of the 1980s stopped short of systemic reform, they demonstrated a new level of commitment on the part of Vietnam's leaders to resolve the country's peacetime economic problems. Having known great success in warfare, the government appeared to have accepted that yet another struggle was underway that would require the kind of focused resolve previously displayed in war. The process was marked both by the possibility for change and by inertia. Political and foreign policy agendas were opened to redefinition, and strategic goals were re-evaluated to emphasize economic rather than military strength. The momentum of change, however, was slowed considerably by party conservatives, who stressed the danger of political liberalization and questioned the pace of economic reform. Change, nevertheless, was evident. In foreign policy, Vietnam moved to attract foreign investment and to end its international isolation by disengaging from Cambodia. Likewise, in the economic sphere at home, where the need for change was determined to be particularly critical, market forces assumed a larger role in Vietnam's controlled economy than they had previously. In undertaking such changes, Vietnam seemed on the verge of joining the geopolitical trend observed in the late 1980s, in which the behavior of socialist and capitalist systems alike appeared to favor economic over military development. The Vietnamese leadership, however, was not prepared to move quickly. Although it was committed to the process of change, the Political Bureau's ability to act was constricted by internal differences over how to proceed and how much to risk. As the country approached the 1990s, the question of whether the need to develop economically was worth the political risk had yet to be fully resolved.

September 21, 1989

Ronald J. Cima

## Chapter 1. Historical Setting





*Hanoi temple dedicated to King An Duong Vuong (ruler of Kingdom of Au Lac, third century B.C.)*

THE VIETNAMESE TRACE the origins of their culture and nation to the fertile plains of the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam. After centuries of developing a civilization and economy based on the cultivation of irrigated rice, the Vietnamese began expanding southward in search of new ricelands. Moving down the narrow coastal plain of the Indochina Peninsula, through conquest and pioneering settlement they eventually reached and occupied the broad Mekong River Delta. Vietnamese history is the story of the struggle to develop a sense of nationhood throughout this narrow 1,500-kilometer stretch of land and to maintain it against internal and external pressures.

The first major threat to Vietnam's existence as a separate people and nation was the conquest of the Red River Delta by the Chinese, under the mighty Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), in the second century B.C. At that time, and in later centuries, the expanding Chinese empire assimilated a number of small bordering nations politically and culturally. Although Vietnam spent 1,000 years under Chinese rule, it succeeded in throwing off the yoke of its powerful neighbor in the tenth century.

The Vietnamese did not, however, emerge unchanged by their millennium under Chinese rule. Although they were unsuccessful in assimilating the Vietnamese totally, the Chinese did exert a permanent influence on Vietnamese administration, law, education, literature, language, and culture. Their greatest impact was on the Vietnamese elite, with whom the Chinese administrators had the most contact. The effects of this Sinicization (*Han-hwa*) were much less intensive among the common people, who retained a large part of their pre-Han culture and language.

China's cultural influence increased in the centuries following the expulsion of its officials, as Vietnamese monarchs and aristocrats strove to emulate the cultural ideal established by the Middle Kingdom. Even for the Vietnamese elite, however, admiration for Chinese culture did not include any desire for Chinese political control. In the almost uninterrupted 900 years of independence that followed China's domination, the Vietnamese thwarted a number of Chinese attempts at military reconquest, accepting a tributary relationship instead. During this period, learning and literature flourished as the Vietnamese expressed themselves both in classical Chinese written in Chinese characters and in Vietnamese written in *chu nom*, a script derived from Chinese ideographs.

During the Chinese millennium, other cultural influences also reached the shores of the Red River Delta. A thriving maritime trade among China, India, and Indonesia used the delta as a convenient stopover. Among the array of goods and ideas thus brought to Vietnam was Buddhism from India. While the Vietnamese aristocracy clung to Chinese Confucianism during most periods, the common people embraced Buddhism, adapting it to fit their own indigenous religions and world view.

As the Red River Delta prospered, its population began expanding southward along the narrow coastal plains. The period from the twelfth century to the eighteenth century was marked by warfare with both the Cham and Khmer, the peoples of the Indianized kingdoms of Champa and Cambodia, who controlled lands in the Vietnamese line of march to the south. The Cham were finally defeated in 1471, and the Khmer were forced out of the Mekong Delta by 1749. Vietnamese settlers flooded into the largely untilled lands, turning them to rice cultivation. The southward expansion severely taxed the ability of the Vietnamese monarchy, ruling from the Red River Delta, to maintain control over a people spread over such a distance.

The inability of the ruling Le dynasty to deal with this and other problems led to the partition of the country by the nobility in the sixteenth century. After two hundred years of warfare between competing noble families, a peasant rebellion reunified the country in the late eighteenth century. The rebels, however, were unable to solve the problems of a country ravaged by war, famine, and natural disasters and lost control to a surviving member of the Nguyen noble family. Nguyen Anh took the reign name Gia Long (a composite derived from the Vietnamese names for the northern and southern capitals of the country during partition) and established a new centrally located capital at Hue in 1802.

Gia Long and his successors also were unable or unwilling to solve the persisting problems of the country, particularly the age-old dilemma of land alienation, the concentration of large tracts of land in the hands of a few and the resulting creation of vast numbers of landless peasants. The monarchy and aristocracy grew more and more removed from the people by the mid-nineteenth century. This period also climaxed the growth of European expansionism, as Western nations sought to carve out colonies in Asia and other parts of the non-Western world. Between 1858 and 1873, the French conquered Vietnam, dividing it into three parts—Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin—roughly corresponding to the areas referred to by the Vietnamese as Nam Bo (southern Vietnam), Trung Bo (central Vietnam), and Bac Bo (northern Vietnam). To the

Vietnamese, however, these were geographical terms, and the use of them to imply a political division of their homeland was as odious as the loss of their independence.

French colonial rule was, for the most part, politically repressive and economically exploitative. Vietnamese resistance in the early years was led by members of the scholar-official class, many of whom refused to cooperate with the French and left their positions in the bureaucracy. The early nationalists involved themselves in study groups, demonstrations, production and dissemination of anticolonialist literature, and acts of terrorism. Differences in approach among the groups were exemplified by Phan Boi Chau, who favored using the Vietnamese monarchy as a rallying point for driving out the French, and Phan Chu Trinh, who favored abolishing the monarchy and using Western democratic ideas as a force for gradual reform and independence. The success of these early nationalists was limited both by their inability to agree on a strategy and their failure to involve the Vietnamese peasantry, who made up the vast majority of the population. After World War I, another Vietnamese independence leader arose who understood the need to involve the masses in order to stage a successful anticolonial revolt. Ho Chi Minh, schooled in Confucianism, Vietnamese nationalism, and Marxism-Leninism, patiently set about organizing the Vietnamese peasantry according to communist theories, particularly those of Chinese leader Mao Zedong.

The defeat of the Japanese, who had occupied Vietnam during World War II, left a power vacuum, which the communists rushed to fill. Their initial success in staging uprisings and in seizing control of most of the country by September 1945 was partially undone, however, by the return of the French a few months later. Only after nine years of armed struggle was France finally persuaded to relinquish its colonies in Indochina. The 1954 Geneva Conference left Vietnam a divided nation, however, with Ho Chi Minh's communist government ruling the northern half from Hanoi and Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, supported by the United States, ruling the south from Saigon (later Ho Chi Minh City). Another two decades of bitter conflict ensued before Vietnam was again reunified as one independent nation.

## **Early History**

The Vietnamese people represent a fusion of races, languages, and cultures, the elements of which are still being sorted out by ethnologists, linguists, and archaeologists. As was true for most areas of Southeast Asia, the Indochina Peninsula was a crossroads for many migrations of peoples, including speakers of Austronesian,



*Figure 2. Location of Vietnam in Asia, 1987*

Mon-Khmer, and Tai languages (see fig. 2). The Vietnamese language provides some clues to the cultural mixture of the Vietnamese people. Although a separate and distinct language, Vietnamese borrows much of its basic vocabulary from Mon-Khmer, tonality from the Tai languages, and some grammatical features from both Mon-Khmer and Tai. Vietnamese also exhibits some influence from Austronesian languages, as well as large infusions of Chinese literary, political, and philosophical terminology of a later period.

The area now known as Vietnam has been inhabited since Paleolithic times, with some archaeological sites in Thanh Hoa Province reportedly dating back several thousand years. Archaeologists link the beginnings of Vietnamese civilization to the late Neolithic, early Bronze Age, Phung Nguyen culture, which was centered in Vinh Phu Province of contemporary Vietnam from about 2000 to 1400 B.C. (see fig. 1). By about 1200 B.C., the development of wet-rice cultivation and bronze casting in the Ma River and Red River plains led to the development of the Dong Son culture, notable for its elaborate bronze drums. The bronze weapons, tools, and drums of Dong Sonian sites show a Southeast Asian influence that indicates an indigenous origin for the bronze-casting technology. Many small, ancient copper mine sites have been found in northern Vietnam. Some of the similarities between the Dong Sonian sites and other Southeast Asian sites include the presence of boat-shaped coffins and burial jars, stilt dwellings, and evidence of the customs of betel-nut-chewing and teeth-blackening.

According to the earliest Vietnamese traditions, the founder of the Vietnamese nation was Hung Vuong, the first ruler of the semi-legendary Hung dynasty (2879–258 B.C., mythological dates) of the kingdom of Van Lang. Hung Vuong, in Vietnamese mythology, was the oldest son of Lac Long Quan (Lac Dragon Lord), who came to the Red River Delta from his home in the sea, and Au Co, a Chinese immortal. Lac Long Quan, a Vietnamese cultural hero, is credited with teaching the people how to cultivate rice. The Hung dynasty, which according to tradition ruled Van Lang for eighteen generations, is associated by Vietnamese scholars with Dong Sonian culture. An important aspect of this culture by the sixth century B.C. was the tidal irrigation of rice fields through an elaborate system of canals and dikes. The fields were called Lac fields, and Lac, mentioned in Chinese annals, is the earliest recorded name for the Vietnamese people.

The Hung kings ruled Van Lang in feudal fashion with the aid of the Lac lords, who controlled the communal settlements around each irrigated area, organized construction and maintenance of the dikes, and regulated the supply of water. Besides cultivating rice,

the people of Van Lang grew other grains and beans and raised stock, mainly buffaloes, chickens, and pigs. Pottery-making and bamboo-working were highly developed crafts, as were basketry, leather-working, and the weaving of hemp, jute, and silk. Both transport and communication were provided by dugout canoes, which plied the network of rivers and canals.

The last Hung king was overthrown in the third century B.C. by An Duong Vuong, the ruler of the neighboring upland kingdom of Thuc. An Duong Vuong united Van Lang with Thuc to form Au Lac, building his capital and citadel at Co Loa, thirty-five kilometers north of present-day Hanoi. An Duong's kingdom was short-lived, however, being conquered in 208 B.C. by the army of the Chinese Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.) military commander Trieu Da (Zhao Tuo in Chinese). Reluctant to accept the rule of the Qin dynasty's successor, the new Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220), Trieu Da combined the territories under his control in southern China and northern Vietnam and established the kingdom of Nam Viet (Nan Yue in Chinese), meaning Southern Viet. Viet (Yue) was the term applied by the Chinese to the various peoples on the southern fringes of the Han empire, including the people of the Red River Delta. Trieu Da divided his kingdom of Nam Viet into nine military districts; the southern three (Giao Chi, Cuu Chan, and Nhat Nam) included the northern part of present-day Vietnam. The Lac lords continued to rule in the Red River Delta, but as vassals of Nam Viet (see fig. 3).

## **The Chinese Millennium**

Vietnamese historians regard Trieu Da as a defender of their homeland against an expanding Han empire. In 111 B.C., however, the Chinese armies of Emperor Wu Di defeated the successors of Trieu Da and incorporated Nam Viet into the Han empire. The Chinese were anxious to extend their control over the fertile Red River Delta, in part to serve as a convenient supply point for Han ships engaged in the growing maritime trade with India and Indonesia. During the first century or so of Chinese rule, Vietnam was governed leniently, and the Lac lords maintained their feudal offices. In the first century A.D., however, China intensified its efforts to assimilate its new territories by raising taxes and instituting marriage reforms aimed at turning Vietnam into a patriarchal society more amenable to political authority. In response to increased Chinese domination, a revolt broke out in Giao Chi, Cuu Chan, and Nhat Nam in A.D. 39, led by Trung Trac, the wife of a Lac lord who had been put to death by the Chinese, and her sister Trung Nhi. The insurrection was put down within two years

by the Han general Ma Yuan, and the Trung sisters drowned themselves to avoid capture by the Chinese. Still celebrated as heroines by the Vietnamese, the Trung sisters exemplify the relatively high status of women in Vietnamese society as well as the importance to Vietnamese of resistance to foreign rule.

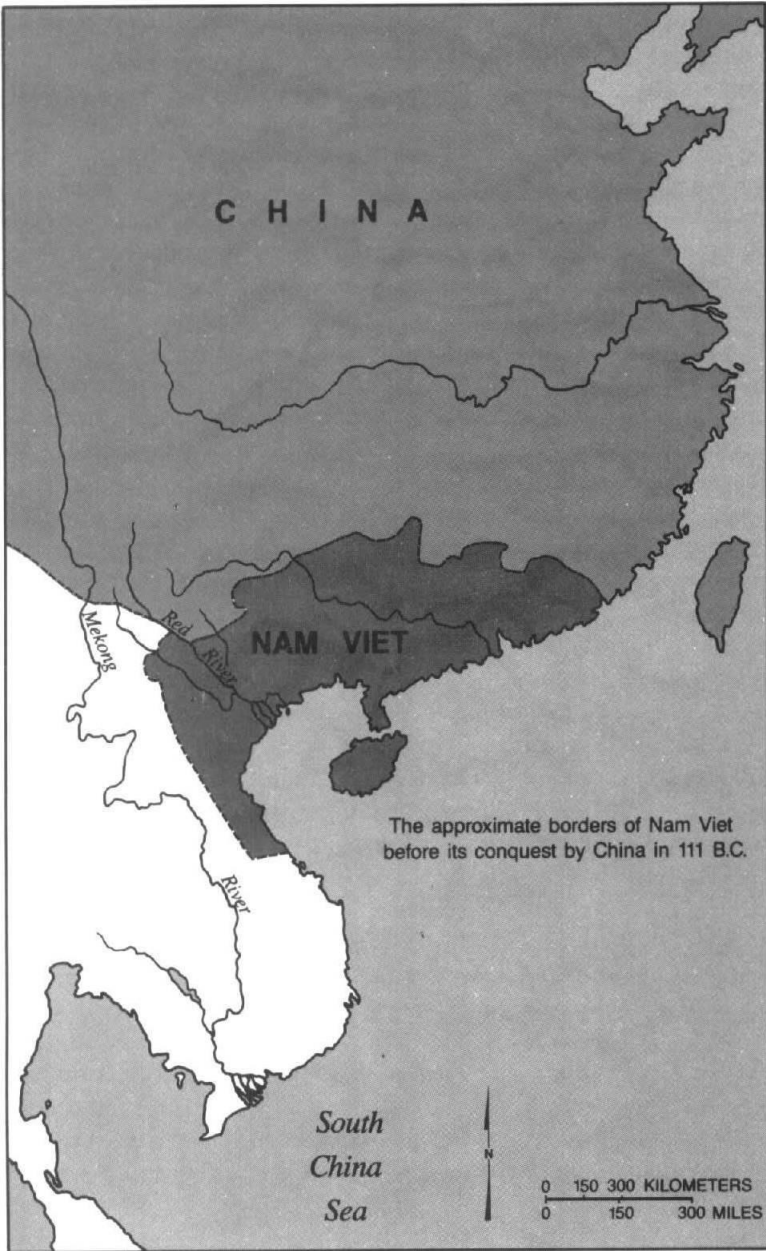
Following the ill-fated revolt, Chinese rule became more direct, and the feudal Lac lords faded into history. Ma Yuan established a Chinese-style administrative system of three prefectures and fifty-six districts ruled by scholar-officials sent by the Han court. Although Chinese administrators replaced most former local officials, some members of the Vietnamese aristocracy were allowed to fill lower positions in the bureaucracy. The Vietnamese elite in particular received a thorough indoctrination in Chinese cultural, religious, and political traditions. One result of Sinicization, however, was the creation of a Confucian bureaucratic, family, and social structure that gave the Vietnamese the strength to resist Chinese political domination in later centuries, unlike most of the other Yue peoples who were sooner or later assimilated into the Chinese cultural and political world. Nor was Sinicization so total as to erase the memory of pre-Han Vietnamese culture, especially among the peasant class, which retained the Vietnamese language and many Southeast Asian customs. Chinese rule had the dual effect of making the Vietnamese aristocracy more receptive to Chinese culture and cultural leadership while at the same time instilling resistance and hostility toward Chinese political domination throughout Vietnamese society.

### **Chinese Cultural Impact**

In order to facilitate administration of their new territories, the Chinese built roads, waterways, and harbors, largely with *corvée* labor (unpaid labor exacted by government authorities, particularly for public works projects). Agriculture was improved with better irrigation methods and the use of ploughs and draft animals, innovations which may have already been in use by the Vietnamese on a lesser scale. New lands were opened up for agriculture, and settlers were brought in from China. After a few generations, most of the Chinese settlers probably intermarried with the Vietnamese and identified with their new homeland.

The first and second centuries A.D. saw the rise of a Han-Viet ruling class owning large tracts of rice lands. More than 120 brick Han tombs have been excavated in northern Vietnam, indicating Han families that, rather than returning to China, had become members of their adopted society and were no longer, strictly speaking, Chinese. Although they brought Chinese vocabulary and





Source: Based on information from Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History*, New York, 1963, 23.

*Figure 3. Nam Viet Before Conquest by China in 111 B.C.*

technical terms into their new culture, after a generation or two, they probably spoke Vietnamese.

The second century A.D. was a time of rebellion in Giao Chi, Cuu Chan, and Nhat Nam, largely due to the declining quality of the Han administrators, who concentrated their energies on making their fortunes and returning north as soon as possible. Revolts against corrupt and repressive Chinese officials were often led by the Han-Viet families. The fall of the Han dynasty in China in 220 A.D. further strengthened the allegiance of the Han-Viet ruling elite to their new society and gave them a sense of their own independent political power. Meanwhile, among the peasant class there was also a heightened sense of identity fostered by the spread of Buddhism by sea from India to Vietnam by the early third century. The new religion was often adapted to blend with indigenous religions. Buddhist temples were sometimes dedicated to the monsoon season, for example, or identified with the guardian spirit of agricultural fertility. Although ruling-class Vietnamese tended to cling to Confucianism, various local rulers patronized the Buddhist religion, thus helping to legitimize their own rule in the eyes of the common people.

After the demise of the Han dynasty, the period of the third to the sixth century was a time of turbulence in China, with six different dynasties in succession coming to power. The periods between dynasties or the periods when dynasties were weak in China were usually the most peaceful in Vietnam. When dynasties were strong and interfered with local rule, the Vietnamese aristocracy engaged in a series of violent revolts that weakened China's control over its southern territory. A rebellion led by the noblewoman Trieu Au (Lady Trieu) in A.D. 248 was suppressed after about six months, but its leader earned a place in the hearts and history of the Vietnamese people. Despite pressure to accept Chinese patriarchal values, Vietnamese women continued to play an important role and to enjoy considerably more freedom than their northern counterparts.

### **Political Resistance to the Chinese**

The sixth century was an important stage in the Vietnamese political evolution toward independence. During this period, the Vietnamese aristocracy became increasingly independent of Chinese authority, while retaining Chinese political and cultural forms. At the same time, indigenous leaders arose who claimed power based on Vietnamese traditions of kingship. A series of failed revolts in the late sixth and early seventh centuries increased the Vietnamese national consciousness. Ly Bi, the leader of a successful revolt in

543 against the Liang dynasty (502–556), was himself descended from a Chinese family that had fled to the Red River Delta during a period of dynastic turbulence in the first century A.D. Ly Bi declared himself emperor of Nam Viet in the tradition of Trieu Da and organized an imperial court at Long Bien (vicinity of Hanoi). Ly Bi was killed in 547, but his followers kept the revolt alive for another fifty years, establishing what is sometimes referred to in Vietnamese history as the Earlier Ly dynasty.

While the Ly family retreated to the mountains and attempted to rule in the style of their Chinese overlords, a rebel leader who based his rule on an indigenous form of kingship arose in the Red River Delta. Trieu Quang Phuc made his headquarters on an island in a vast swamp. From this refuge, he could strike without warning, seizing supplies from the Liang army and then slipping back into the labyrinthine channels of the swamp. Despite the initial success of such guerrilla tactics, by which he gained control over the Red River Delta, Trieu Quang Phuc was defeated by 570. According to a much later Vietnamese revolutionary, General Vo Nguyen Giap, Vietnamese concepts of protracted warfare were born in the surprise offensives, night attacks, and hit-and-run tactics employed by Trieu Quang Phuc.

The Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907) instituted a series of administrative reforms culminating in 679 in the reorganization of Vietnamese territory as the Protectorate of Annam (or Pacified South), a name later used by the French to refer to central Vietnam. The Tang dynastic period was a time of heavy Chinese influence, particularly in Giao Chau Province (in 203 the district of Giao Chi, had been elevated to provincial status and was renamed Giao Chau), which included the densely populated Red River plain. The children of ambitious, aristocratic families acquired a classical Confucian education, as increased emphasis was placed on the Chinese examination system for training local administrators. As a result, literary terms dating from the Tang dynasty constitute the largest category of Chinese loan words in modern Vietnamese. Despite the stress placed on Chinese literature and learning, Vietnamese, enriched with Chinese literary terms, remained the language of the people, while Chinese was used primarily as an administrative language by a small elite. During the Tang era, Giao Chau Province also became the center of a popular style of Buddhism based on spirit cults, which evolved as the dominant religion of Vietnam after the tenth century. Buddhism, along with an expanding sea trade, linked Vietnam more closely with South and Southeast Asia as Buddhist pilgrims traveled to India, Sumatra, and Java aboard merchant vessels laden with silk, cotton, paper, ivory, pearls, and incense.



*Saigon scholar-official, late nineteenth century  
Courtesy Library of Congress*

As Tang imperial power became more corrupt and oppressive during the latter part of the dynasty, rebellion flared increasingly, particularly among the minority peoples in the mountain and border regions. Although the Viet culture of Giao Chau Province, as it developed under Tang hegemony, depended upon Chinese administration to maintain order, there was growing cultural resistance to the Tang in the border regions. A revolt among the Muong people, who are closely related to the central Vietnamese, broke out in the early eighth century. The rebels occupied the capital at Tong Binh (Hanoi), driving out the Tang governor and garrison, before being defeated by reinforcements from China. Some scholars mark this as the period of final separation of the Muong peoples from the central Vietnamese, which linguistic evidence indicates took place near the end of the Tang dynasty. In the mid-ninth century, Tai minority rebels in the border regions recruited the assistance of Nan-chao, a Tai mountain kingdom in the southern Chinese province of Yunnan, which seized control of Annam in 862. Although the Tang succeeded in defeating the Nan-chao forces and restoring Chinese administration, the dynasty was in decline and no longer able to dominate the increasingly autonomous Vietnamese. The Tang finally collapsed in 907 and by 939 Ngo Quyen, a Vietnamese general, had established himself as king of an independent Vietnam.

## **Nine Centuries of Independence**

Having driven out the Chinese, Ngo Quyen defeated a series of local rival chiefs and, seeking to identify his rule with traditional Vietnamese kingship, established his capital at Co Loa, the third century B.C. citadel of An Duong Vuong. The dynasty established by Ngo Quyen lasted fewer than thirty years, however, and was overthrown in 968 by a local chieftain, Dinh Bo Linh, who reigned under the name Dinh Tien Hoang. He brought political unity to the country, which he renamed Dai Co Viet (Great Viet). The major accomplishments of Dinh Bo Linh's reign were the establishment of a diplomatic basis for Vietnamese independence and the institution of universal military mobilization. He organized a 100,000-man peasant militia called the Ten Circuit Army, comprising ten circuits (geographical districts). Each circuit was defended by ten armies, and each army was composed of ten brigades. Brigades in turn were made up of ten companies with ten ten-member squads apiece. After uniting the Vietnamese and establishing his kingdom, Dinh Bo Linh sent a tributary mission to the newly established Chinese Northern Song dynasty (960-1125). This diplomatic maneuver was a successful

attempt to stave off China's reconquest of its former vassal. The Song emperor gave his recognition to Dinh Bo Linh, but only as "King of Giao Chi Prefecture," a state within the Chinese empire. Not until the rise of the Ly dynasty (1009–1225), however, did the Vietnamese monarchy consolidate its control over the country.

## **The Great Ly Dynasty and the Flowering of Buddhism**

Following the death of Dinh Bo Linh in 979, the Song rulers attempted to reassert Chinese control over Vietnam. Le Hoan, the commander in chief of Dinh Bo Linh's army, seized the throne and successfully repulsed the Chinese army in 981. Ly Cong Uan, a former temple orphan who had risen to commander of the palace guard, succeeded Le Hoan in 1009, thereby founding the great Ly dynasty that lasted until 1225. Taking the reign name Ly Thai To, he moved his capital to Dai La (modern Hanoi). The early Ly kings established a prosperous state with a stable monarchy at the head of a centralized administration. The name of the country was changed to Dai Viet by Emperor Ly Thanh Tong in 1054.

The first century of Ly rule was marked by warfare with China and the two Indianized kingdoms to the south, Cambodia and Champa. After these threats were dealt with successfully, the second century of Ly rule was relatively peaceful enabling the Ly kings to establish a Buddhist ruling tradition closely related to the other Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdoms of that period. Buddhism became a kind of state religion as members of the royal family and the nobility made pilgrimages, supported the building of pagodas, sometimes even entered monastic life, and otherwise took an active part in Buddhist practices. Bonzes (see Glossary) became a privileged landed class, exempt from taxes and military duty. At the same time, Buddhism, in an increasingly Vietnamized form associated with magic, spirits, and medicine, grew in popularity with the people (see Religion, ch. 2).

During the Ly dynasty, the Vietnamese began their long march to the south (*nam tien*) at the expense of the Cham and the Khmer. Le Hoan had sacked the Cham capital of Indrapura in 982, whereupon the Cham established a new capital at Vijaya. This was captured twice by the Vietnamese, however, and in 1079 the Cham were forced to cede to the Ly rulers their three northern provinces. Soon afterwards, Vietnamese peasants began moving into the untilled former Cham lands, turning them into rice fields and moving relentlessly southward, delta by delta, along the narrow coastal plain. The Ly kings supported the improvement of Vietnam's agricultural system by constructing and repairing dikes and canals and by allowing soldiers to return to their villages to work for six

months of each year. As their territory and population expanded, the Ly kings looked to China as a model for organizing a strong, centrally administered state. Minor officials were chosen by examination for the first time in 1075, and a civil service training institute and an imperial academy were set up in 1076. In 1089 a fixed hierarchy of state officials was established, with nine degrees of civil and military scholar-officials. Examinations for public office were made compulsory, and literary competitions were held to determine the grades of officials.

### **The Tran Dynasty and the Defeat of the Mongols**

In 1225 the Tran family, which had effectively controlled the Vietnamese throne for many years, replaced the Ly dynasty by arranging a marriage between one of its members and the last Ly monarch, an eight-year-old princess. Under the Tran dynasty (1225–1400), the country prospered and flourished as the Tran rulers carried out extensive land reform, improved public administration, and encouraged the study of Chinese literature. The Tran, however, are best remembered for their defense of the country against the Mongols and the Cham. By 1225, the Mongols controlled most of northern China and Manchuria and were eyeing southern China, Vietnam, and Champa. In 1257, 1284, and 1287, the Mongol armies of Kublai Khan invaded Vietnam, sacking the capital at Thang Long (renamed Hanoi in 1831) on each occasion, only to find that the Vietnamese had anticipated their attacks and evacuated the city beforehand. Disease, shortage of supplies, the climate, and the Vietnamese strategy of harassment and scorched-earth tactics foiled the first two invasions. The third Mongol invasion, of 300,000 men and a vast fleet, was also defeated by the Vietnamese under the leadership of General Tran Hung Dao. Borrowing a tactic used by Ngo Quyen in 938 to defeat an invading Chinese fleet, the Vietnamese drove iron-tipped stakes into the bed of the Bach Dang River (located in northern Vietnam in present-day Ha Bac, Hai Hung, and Quang Ninh provinces), and then, with a small Vietnamese flotilla, lured the Mongol fleet into the river just as the tide was starting to ebb. Trapped or impaled by the iron-tipped stakes, the entire Mongol fleet of 400 craft was sunk, captured, or burned by Vietnamese fire arrows. The Mongol army retreated to China, harassed enroute by Tran Hung Dao's troops.

The fourteenth century was marked by wars with Champa, which the Tran reduced to a feudatory state by 1312 (see fig. 4). Champa freed itself again by 1326 and, under the leadership of Cham hero Che Bong Nga, staged a series of attacks on Vietnam between 1360 and 1390, sacking Thang Long in 1371. The Vietnamese again

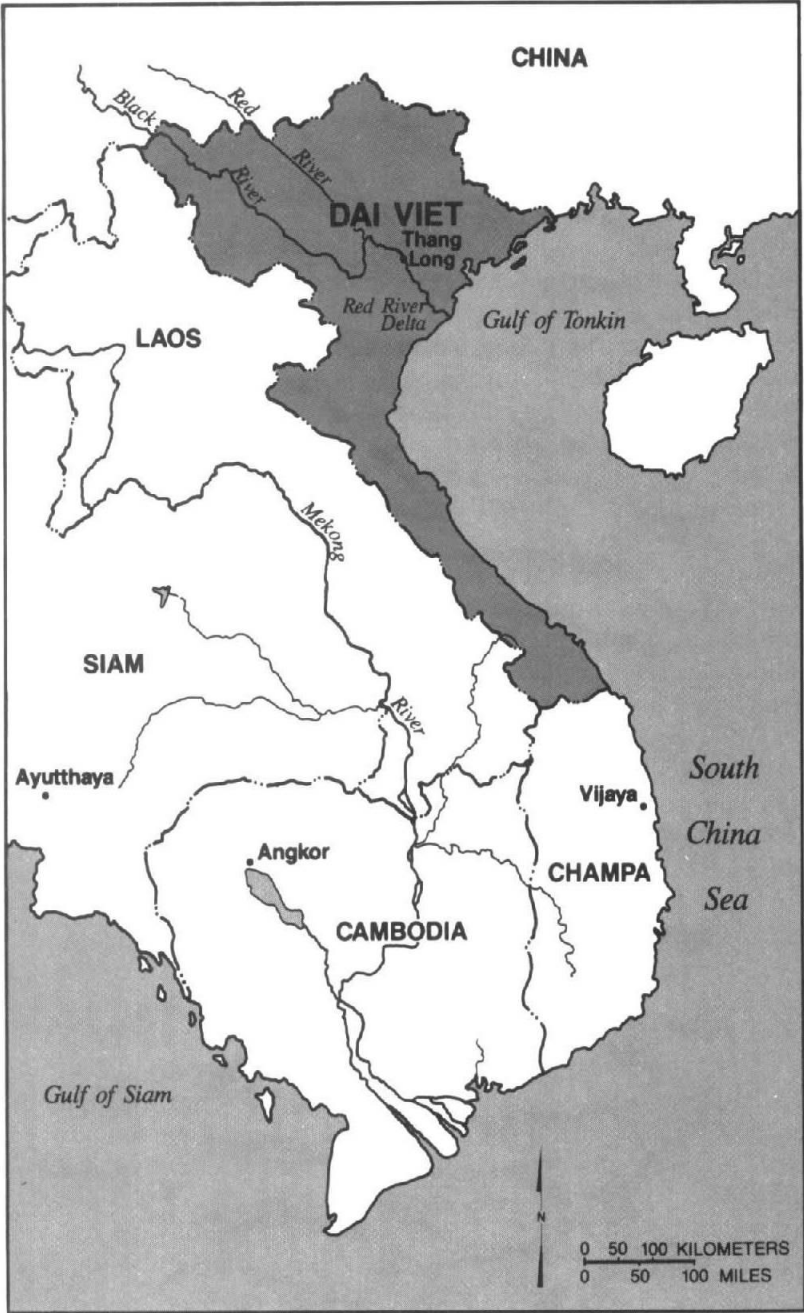
gained the upper hand following the death of Che Bong Nga and resumed their southward advance at Champa's expense. Despite their earlier success, the quality of the Tran rulers had declined markedly by the end of the fourteenth century, opening the way for exploitation of the peasantry by the feudal landlord class, which caused a number of insurrections. In 1400 General Ho Quy Ly seized the throne and proclaimed himself founder of the short-lived Ho dynasty (1400-07). He instituted a number of reforms that were unpopular with the feudal landlords, including a limit on the amount of land a family could hold and the rental of excess land by the state to landless peasants; proclamations printed in Vietnamese, rather than Chinese; and free schools in provincial capitals. Threatened by the reforms, some of the landowners appealed to China's Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) to intervene. Using reinstatement of the Tran dynasty as an excuse, the Ming reasserted Chinese control in 1407.

### **Renewed Chinese Influence**

The Ming administered the country as if it were a province of China and ruled it harshly for the next twenty years. The forced labor of its people was used to exploit Vietnam's mines and forests solely for China's enrichment. Taxes were levied on all products including salt, a dietary staple. Under the Ming, Vietnamese cultural traditions, including the chewing of betel nut, were forbidden, and men were required to wear their hair long and women to dress in the Chinese style. Vietnamese Buddhism was replaced at court by Ming-sponsored neo-Confucianism, but Ming attempts to supplant popular Vietnamese religious traditions with an officially sponsored form of Buddhism were less successful.

The Chinese impact on Vietnamese culture was probably as great, or greater, in the centuries following independence as it was during the 1,000 years of Chinese political domination. Much of China's cultural and governmental influence on Vietnam dates from the Ming period. Other aspects of Chinese culture were introduced later by Vietnamese kings struggling to bring a Confucian order to their unruly kingdom. Chinese administrative reforms and traditions, when sponsored by Vietnamese kings and aristocracy, tended to be more palatable and hence more readily assimilated than those imposed by Chinese officials. Although the Vietnamese upper classes during the Ming period studied Chinese classical literature and subscribed to the Chinese patriarchal family system, the majority of the Vietnamese people recognized these aspects of Chinese culture mainly as ideals. Less exposed to Chinese influence, the peasantry retained the Vietnamese language and many cultural





*Figure 4. Vietnam (Dai Viet) and Its Neighbors, circa 1350*

traditions that predated Chinese rule. Other factors also encouraged the preservation of Vietnamese culture during the periods of Chinese rule. Contact with the Indianized Cham and Khmer civilizations, for example, widened the Vietnamese perspective and served as a counterweight to Chinese influence. Vietnam's location on the South China Sea and the comings and goings of merchants and Buddhists encouraged contact with other cultures of South and Southeast Asia. China, itself, once it developed the port of Guangzhou (Canton), had less need to control Vietnam politically in order to control the South China Sea. Moreover, the Vietnamese who moved southward into lands formerly occupied by the Cham and the Khmer became less concerned about the threat from China.

### **The Le Dynasty and Southward Expansion**

Le Loi, one of Vietnam's most celebrated heroes, is credited with rescuing the country from Ming domination in 1428. Born of a wealthy landowning family, he served as a senior scholar-official until the advent of the Ming, whom he refused to serve. After a decade of gathering a resistance movement around him, Le Loi and his forces finally defeated the Chinese army in 1428. Rather than putting to death the captured Chinese soldiers and administrators, he magnanimously provided ships and supplies to send them back to China. Le Loi then ascended the Vietnamese throne, taking the reign name Le Thai To and establishing the Le dynasty (1428-1788).

The greatest of the Le dynasty rulers was Le Thanh Tong (1460-97), who reorganized the administrative divisions of the country and upgraded the civil service system. He ordered a census of people and landholdings to be taken every six years, revised the tax system, and commissioned the writing of a national history. During his reign he accomplished the conquest of Champa in 1471, the suppression of Lao-led insurrections in the western border area, and the continuation of diplomatic relations with China through tribute missions established under Le Thai To. Le Thanh Tong also ordered the formulation of the Hong Duc legal code, which was based on Chinese law but included distinctly Vietnamese features, such as recognition of the higher position of women in Vietnamese society than in Chinese society. Under the new code, parental consent was not required for marriage, and daughters were granted equal inheritance rights with sons. Le Thanh Tong also initiated the construction and repair of granaries, dispatched his troops to rebuild irrigation works following floods, and provided for medical aid during epidemics. A noted writer and poet

himself, he encouraged and emphasized employment of the Confucian examination system.

A great period of southward expansion also began under Le Thanh Tong. The *don dien* system of land settlement, borrowed from the Chinese, was used extensively to occupy and develop territory wrested from Champa. Under this system, military colonies were established in which soldiers and landless peasants cleared a new area, began rice production on the new land, established a village, and served as a militia to defend it. After three years, the village was incorporated into the Vietnamese administrative system, a communal village meeting house (*dinh*) was built, and the workers were given an opportunity to share in the communal lands given by the state to each village. The remainder of the land belonged to the state. As each area was cleared and a village established, the soldiers of the *don dien* would move on to clear more land. This method contributed greatly to the success of Vietnam's southward expansion (see fig. 5).

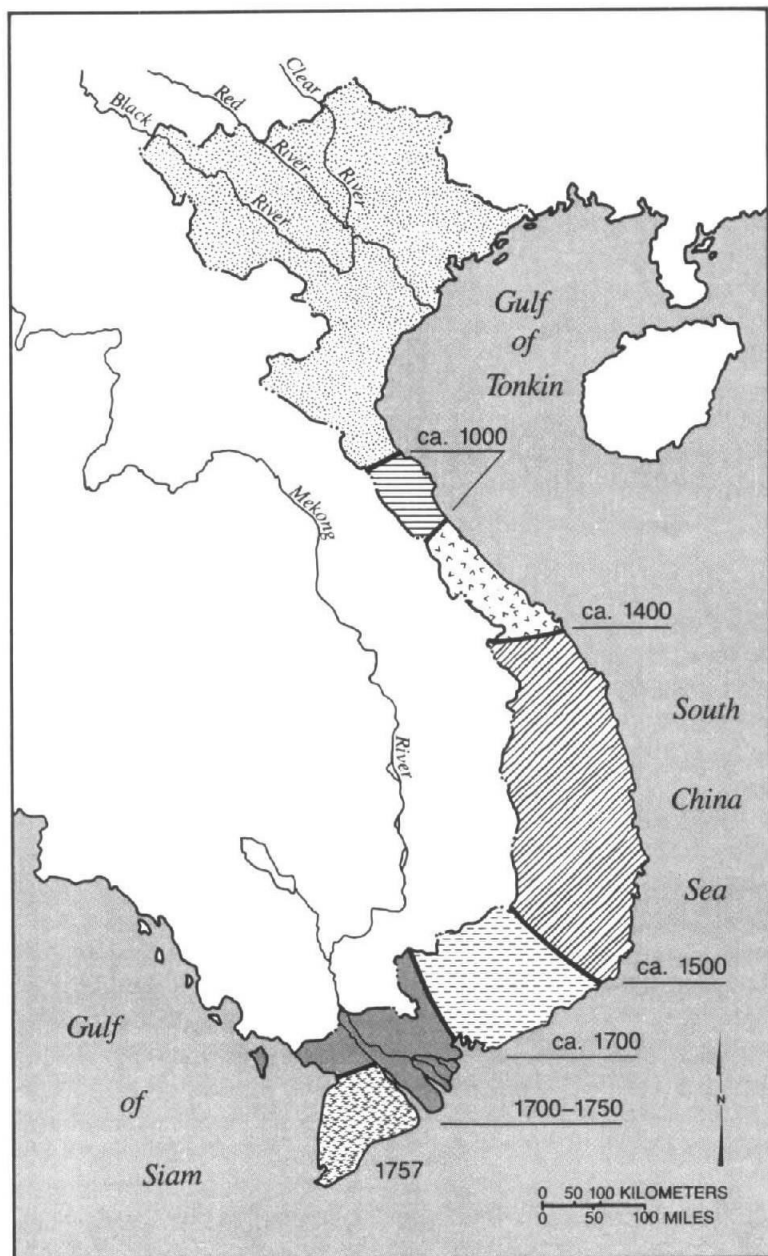
Although the Le rulers had ordered widespread land distribution, many peasants remained landless, while the nobility, government officials, and military leaders continued to acquire vast tracts. The final conquest of Champa in 1471 eased the situation somewhat as peasants advanced steadily southward along the coast into state-owned communal lands. However, most of the new land was set aside for government officials and, although the country grew wealthier, the social structure remained the same. Following the decline of the Le dynasty, landlessness was a major factor leading to a turbulent period during which the peasantry questioned the mandate of their rulers.

In the Confucian world view, emperors were said to have the "mandate of heaven" to rule their people, who, in turn, owed the emperor total allegiance. Although his power was absolute, an emperor was responsible for the prosperity of his people and the maintenance of justice and order. An emperor who did not fulfill his Confucian responsibilities could, in theory, lose his mandate. In practice, the Vietnamese people endured many poor emperors, weak and strong. Counterbalancing the power of the emperor was the power of the village, illustrated by the Vietnamese proverb, "The laws of the emperor yield to the customs of the village." Village institutions served both to restrain the power of the emperor and to provide a buffer between central authority and the individual villager. Each village had its council of notables, which was responsible for the obligations of the village to the state. When the central government imposed levies for taxes, for corvée labor for public projects, or for soldiers for defense, these levies were based on the

council of notables' report of the resources of the villages, which was often underestimated to protect the village. Moreover, there was a division between state and local responsibilities. The central government assumed responsibility for military, judicial, and religious functions, while village authorities oversaw the construction of public works projects such as roads, dikes, and bridges, which were centrally planned. The autonomy of the villages, however, contributed to the weakness of the Vietnamese political system. If the ruling dynasty could no longer protect a village, the village would often opt for the protection of political movements in opposition to the dynasty. These movements, in turn, would have difficulty maintaining the allegiance of the villages unless they were able both to provide security and to institutionalize their political power. Although it insured the preservation of a sense of national and cultural identity, the strength of the villages was a factor contributing to the political instability of the society as it expanded southward.

### **Partition and the Advent of the Europeans**

The degenerated Le dynasty, which endured under ten rulers between 1497 and 1527, in the end was no longer able to maintain control over the northern part of the country, much less the new territories to the south. The weakening of the monarchy created a vacuum that the various noble families of the aristocracy were eager to fill. In 1527 Mac Dang Dung, a scholar-official who had effectively controlled the Le for a decade, seized the throne, prompting other families of the aristocracy, notably the Nguyen and Trinh, to rush to the support of the Le. An attack on the Mac forces led by the Le general Nguyen Kim resulted in the partition of Vietnam in 1545, with the Nguyen family seizing control of the southern part of the country as far north as what is now Thanh Hoa Province. The Nguyen, who took the hereditary title *chua* (see Glossary), continued to profess loyalty to the Le dynasty. By the late sixteenth century the Trinh family had ousted the Mac family and had begun to rule the northern half of the country also in the name of the Le dynasty. The Trinh, who, like the Nguyen, took the title *chua*, spent most of the seventeenth century attempting to depose the Nguyen. In order to repulse invading Trinh forces, the Nguyen in 1631 completed the building of two great walls, six meters high and eighteen kilometers long, on their northern frontier. The Trinh, with 100,000 troops, 500 elephants, and 500 large junks, were numerically far superior to their southern foe. The Nguyen, however, were better equipped, having by this time acquired Portuguese weapons and gunpowder, and, as the defending force, had the support of the local people. In addition, the Nguyen had the advantage of



Source: Based on information from Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History*, New York, 1968, 50.

*Figure 5. Vietnam's Southern Expansion, A.D. 1000-1757*

controlling vast open lands in the Mekong Delta, wrested from the Khmer, with which to attract immigrants and refugees from the north. Among those who took up residence in the delta were an estimated 3,000 Chinese supporters of the defunct Ming dynasty, who arrived in 1679 aboard fifty junks and set about becoming farmers and traders. The Nguyen, aided by the Chinese settlers, succeeded in forcing the Khmer completely out of the Mekong Delta by 1749.

After major offensives by the Trinh in 1661 and 1672 foundered on the walls built by the Nguyen, a truce in the fighting ensued that lasted nearly 100 years. During that time, the Nguyen continued its southward expansion into lands held, or formerly held, by the Cham and the Khmer. The Trinh, meanwhile, consolidated its authority in the north, instituting administrative reforms and supporting scholarship. The nobility and scholar-officials of both north and south, however, continued to block the development of manufacturing and trade, preferring to retain a feudal, peasant society, which they could control.

The seventeenth century was also a period in which European missionaries and merchants became a serious factor in Vietnamese court life and politics. Although both had arrived by the early sixteenth century, neither foreign merchants nor missionaries had much impact on Vietnam before the seventeenth century. The Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French had all established trading posts in Pho Hien by 1680. Fighting among the Europeans and opposition by the Vietnamese made the enterprises unprofitable, however, and all of the foreign trading posts were closed by 1700.

European missionaries had occasionally visited Vietnam for short periods of time, with little impact, beginning in the early sixteenth century. The best known of the early missionaries was Alexandre de Rhodes, a French Jesuit who was sent to Hanoi in 1627, where he quickly learned the language and began preaching in Vietnamese. Initially, Rhodes was well-received by the Trinh court, and he reportedly baptized more than 6,000 converts; however, his success probably led to his expulsion in 1630. He is credited with perfecting a romanized system of writing the Vietnamese language (*quoc ngu*), which was probably developed as the joint effort of several missionaries, including Rhodes. He wrote the first catechism in Vietnamese and published a Vietnamese-Latin-Portuguese dictionary; these works were the first books printed in *quoc ngu*. Romanized Vietnamese, or *quoc ngu*, was used initially only by missionaries; classical Chinese, or *chu nom*, continued to be used by the court and the bureaucracy. The French later supported the use of *quoc ngu*, which, because of its simplicity, led to

a high degree of literacy and a flourishing of Vietnamese literature. After being expelled from Vietnam, Rhodes spent the next thirty years seeking support for his missionary work from the Vatican and the French Roman Catholic hierarchy as well as making several more trips to Vietnam.

The stalemate between the Trinh and the Nguyen families that began at the end of the seventeenth century did not, however, mark the beginning of a period of peace and prosperity. Instead, the decades of continual warfare between the two families had left the peasantry in a weakened state, the victim of taxes levied to support the courts and their military adventures. Having to meet their tax obligations had forced many peasants off the land and facilitated the acquisition of large tracts by a few wealthy landowners, nobles, and scholar-officials. Because scholar-officials were exempted from having to pay a land tax, the more land they acquired, the greater was the tax burden that fell on those peasants who had been able to retain their land. In addition, the peasantry faced new taxes on staple items such as charcoal, salt, silk, and cinnamon, and on commercial activities such as fishing and mining. The desperate condition of the economy led to neglect of the extensive network of irrigation systems as well. As they fell into disrepair, disastrous flooding and famine resulted, causing great numbers of starving and landless people to wander the countryside. The widespread suffering in both north and south led to numerous peasant revolts between 1730 and 1770. Although the uprisings took place throughout the country, they were essentially local phenomena, breaking out spontaneously from similar local causes. The occasional coordination between and among local movements did not result in any national organization or leadership. Moreover, most of the uprisings were conservative, in that the leaders supported the restoration of the Le dynasty. They did, however, put forward demands for land reform, more equitable taxes, and rice for all. Landless peasants accounted for most of the initial support for the various rebellions, but they were often joined later by craftsmen, fishermen, miners, and traders, who had been taxed out of their occupations. Some of these movements enjoyed limited success for a short time, but it was not until 1771 that any of the peasant revolts had a lasting national impact.

### **The Tay Son Rebellion**

The Tay Son Rebellion (1771–1802), which ended the Le and Trinh dynasties, was led by three brothers from the village of Tay Son in Binh Dinh Province. The brothers, who were of the Ho clan (to which Ho Quy Ly had belonged), adopted the name

Nguyen. The eldest brother, Nguyen Nhac, began an attack on the ruling Nguyen family by capturing Quang Nam and Binh Dinh provinces in 1772. The chief principle and main slogan of the Tay Son was “seize the property of the rich and distribute it to the poor.” In each village the Tay Son controlled, oppressive landlords and scholar-officials were punished and their property redistributed. The Tay Son also abolished taxes, burned the tax and land registers, freed prisoners from local jails, and distributed the food from storehouses to the hungry. As the rebellion gathered momentum, it gained the support of army deserters, merchants, scholars, local officials, and bonzes.

In 1773 Nguyen Nhac seized Qui Nhon, which became the Tay Son capital. By 1778 the Tay Son had effective control over the southern part of the country, including Gia Dinh (later Saigon). The ruling Nguyen family were all killed by the Tay Son rebels, with the exception of Nguyen Anh, the sixteen-year-old nephew of the last Nguyen lord, who escaped to the Mekong Delta. There he was able to gather a body of supporters and retake Gia Dinh. The city changed hands several times until 1783, when the Tay Son brothers destroyed Nguyen Anh’s fleet and drove him to take refuge on Phu Quoc Island. Soon thereafter, he met with French missionary bishop Pigneau de Béhaine and asked him to be his emissary in obtaining French support to defeat the Tay Son. Pigneau de Béhaine took Nguyen Anh’s five-year-old son, Prince Canh, and departed for Pondichéry in French India to plead for support for the restoration of the Nguyen. Finding none there, he went to Paris in 1786 to lobby on Nguyen Anh’s behalf. Louis XVI ostensibly agreed to provide four ships, 1,650 men, and supplies in exchange for Nguyen Anh’s promise to cede to France the port of Tourane (Da Nang) and the island of Poulo Condore. However, the local French authorities in India, under secret orders from the king, refused to supply the promised ships and men. Determined to see French military intervention in Vietnam, Pigneau de Béhaine himself raised funds for two ships and supplies from among the French merchant community in India, hired deserters from the French navy to man them, and sailed back to Vietnam in 1789.

In the meantime, by 1786 the Tay Son had overcome the crumbling Trinh dynasty and seized all of the north, thus uniting the country for the first time in 200 years. The Tay Son made good their promise to restore the Le dynasty, at least for ceremonial purposes. The three Nguyen brothers installed themselves as kings of the north, central, and southern sections of the country, respectively, while continuing to acknowledge the Le emperor in Thang Long. In 1788, however, the reigning Le emperor fled north to seek



Chinese assistance in defeating the Tay Son. Eager to comply, a Chinese army of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) invaded Vietnam, seized Thang Long, and invested the Le ruler as “King of Annam.” That same year, the second eldest Tay Son brother, Nguyen Hue, proclaimed himself Emperor Quang Trung. Marching north with 100,000 men and 100 elephants, Quang Trung attacked Thang Long at night and routed the Chinese army of 200,000, which retreated in disarray. Immediately following his victory, the Tay Son leader sought to reestablish friendly relations with China, requesting recognition of his rule and sending the usual tributary mission.

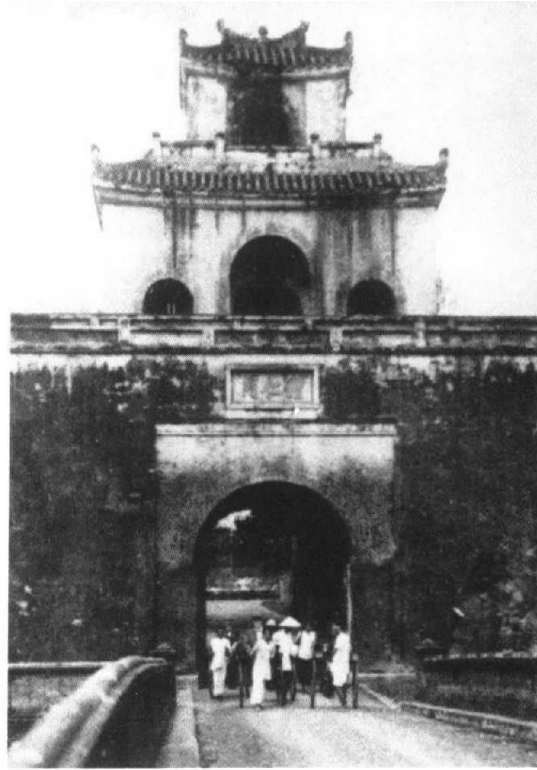
Quang Trung stimulated Vietnam’s war-ravaged economy by encouraging trade and crafts, ordering the recultivation of fallow lands, reducing or abolishing taxes on local products, and resettling landless peasants on communal lands in their own villages. Quang Trung also established a new capital at Phu Xuan (near modern Hue), a more central location from which to administer the country. He reorganized the government along military lines, giving key posts to generals, with the result that military officials for the first time outranked civilian officials. Vietnamese was substituted for Chinese as the official national language, and candidates for the bureaucracy were required to submit prose and verse compositions in *chu nom* rather than in classical Chinese.

Quang Trung died in 1792, without leaving a successor strong enough to assume leadership of the country, and the usual factionalism ensued. By this time, Nguyen Anh and his supporters had won back much of the south from Nguyen Lu, the youngest and least capable of the Tay Son brothers. When Pigneau de Béhaine returned to Vietnam in 1789, Nguyen Anh was in control of Gia Dinh. In the succeeding years, the bishop brought Nguyen Anh a steady flow of ships, arms, and European advisers, who supervised the building of forts, shipyards, cannon foundries and bomb factories, and instructed the Vietnamese in the manufacture and use of modern armaments. Nguyen’s cause was also greatly aided by divisions within the Tay Son leadership, following the death of Quang Trung, and the inability of the new leaders to deal with the problems of famine and natural disasters that wracked the war-torn country. After a steady assault on the north, Nguyen Anh’s forces took Phu Xuan in June 1801 and Thang Long a year later.

### **The Nguyen Dynasty and Expanding French Influence**

In June 1802, Nguyen Anh adopted the reign name Gia Long to express the unifying of the country—Gia from Gia Dinh (Saigon) and Long from Thang Long (Hanoi). As a symbol of this unity,

*A gate to the “Imperial City”  
of Hue, constructed by  
Emperor Gia Long in the  
early nineteenth century  
Courtesy New York Times,  
Paris Collection,  
National Archives*



Gia Long changed the name of the country from Dai Viet to Nam Viet. For the Chinese, however, this was too reminiscent of the wayward General Trieu Da. In conferring investiture on the new government, the Chinese inverted the name to Viet Nam, the first use of that name for the country. Acting as a typical counterrevolutionary government, the Gia Long regime harshly suppressed any forces opposing it or the interests of the bureaucracy and the landowners. In his drive for control and order, Gia Long adopted the Chinese bureaucratic model to a greater degree than any previous Vietnamese ruler. The new capital at Hue, two kilometers north-east of Phu Xuan, was patterned after the Chinese model in Beijing, complete with a Forbidden City, an Imperial City, and a Capital City. Vietnamese bureaucrats were required to wear Chinese-style gowns and even adopt Chinese-style houses and sedan chairs. Vietnamese women, in turn, were compelled to wear Chinese-style trousers. Gia Long instituted a law code, which followed very closely the Chinese Qing dynasty (1644–1911) model. Under the Gia Long code, severe punishment was meted out for any form of resistance to the absolute power of the government. Buddhism, Taoism, and indigenous religions were forbidden under the Confucianist administration. Traditional Vietnamese laws and customs, such as the provisions of the Hong Duc law code protecting the rights and status of women, were swept away by the new code. Taxes that had been reduced or abolished under the

Tay Son were levied again under the restored Nguyen dynasty. These included taxes on mining, forestry, fisheries, crafts, and on various domestic products, such as salt, honey, and incense. Another heavy burden on the peasantry was the increased use of corvée labor to build not only roads, bridges, ports, and irrigation works but also palaces, fortresses, shipyards, and arsenals. All but the privileged classes were required to work on such projects at least sixty days a year, with no pay but a rice ration. The great Mandarin Road, used by couriers and scholar-officials as a link between Gia Dinh, Hue, and Thang Long, was started during this period in order to strengthen the control of the central government. Military service was another burden on the peasantry; in some areas one out of every three men was required to serve in the Vietnamese Imperial Army. Land reforms instituted under the Tay Son were soon lost under the restored Nguyen dynasty, and the proportion of communal lands dwindled to less than 20 percent of the total. Although *chu nom* was retained as the national script by Gia Long, his son and successor Minh Mang, who gained the throne upon his father's death in 1820, ordered a return to the use of Chinese ideographs.

Peasant rebellion flared from time to time throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, fueled by government repression and such calamities as floods, droughts, epidemics, and famines. Minority groups, including the Tay-Nung, Muong, and Cham, were also in revolt. Although they were primarily peasant rebellions, some of these movements found support from, or were led by, disaffected scholars or some of the surviving pretenders to the Le throne. Vietnam's foreign relations were also a drain on the central government during this period. Tributary missions were sent biennially to the Qing court in Beijing, bearing the requisite 600 pieces of silk, 200 pieces of cotton, 1,200 ounces of perfume, 600 ounces of aloes wood, 90 pounds of betel nuts, 4 elephant tusks, and 4 rhinoceros horns. Other missions to pay homage (also bearing presents) were sent every four years. At the same time, Vietnam endeavored to enforce tributary relations with Cambodia and Laos. In 1834, attempts to make Cambodia a Vietnamese province led to a Cambodian revolt and to Siamese intervention, with the result that a joint Vietnamese-Siamese protectorate was established over Cambodia in 1847. Other foreign adventures included Vietnamese support for a Laotian rebellion against Siamese overlordship in 1826-27.

The most serious foreign policy problem for the Nguyen rulers, however, was dealing with France through the French traders, missionaries, diplomats, and naval personnel who came in increasing



*Magistrate supervising punishment, late nineteenth century*  
Courtesy Library of Congress

numbers to Vietnam. The influence of missionaries was perceived as the most critical issue by the court and scholar-officials. The French Société des Missions Etrangères reported 450,000 Christian converts in Vietnam in 1841. The Vietnamese Christians were for the most part organized into villages that included all strata of society, from peasants to landowners. The Christian villages, with their own separate customs, schools, and hierarchy, as well as their disdain for Confucianism, were viewed by the government as breeding grounds for rebellion—and in fact they often were. The French presence did, however, enjoy some support at high levels. Gia Long felt a special debt to Pigneau de Béhaine and to his two chief French naval advisers, Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau and Philippe Vannier, both of whom remained in the country until 1824. There were also members of the Vietnamese court who urged the monarchy to undertake a certain degree of westernization and reform in order to strengthen itself in the areas of administration, education, and defense. In the southern part of the country, Christians enjoyed the protection of Viceroy Le Van Duyet until his death in 1832. Soon thereafter the Nguyen government began a serious attempt to rid itself of French missionaries and their influence. A series of edicts forbade the practice of Christianity, forcing the Christian communities underground. An estimated ninety-five priests and members of the laity were executed by the Vietnamese during the following quarter of a century.

In response, the missionaries stepped up their pressure on the French government to intervene militarily and to establish a French protectorate over Vietnam. During this period, French traders became interested in Vietnam once more, and French diplomats in China began to express the view that France was falling behind the rest of Europe in gaining a foothold in Asia. Commanders of a French naval squadron, permanently deployed in the South China Sea after 1841, also began to agitate for a stronger role in protecting the lives and interests of the missionaries. Given tacit approval by Paris, naval intervention grew steadily. In 1847 two French warships bombarded Tourane (Da Nang), destroying five Vietnamese ships and killing an estimated 10,000 Vietnamese. The purpose of the attack was to gain the release of a missionary, who had, in fact, already been released. In the following decade, persecution of missionaries continued under Emperor Tu Duc, who came to the throne in 1848. While the missionaries stepped up pressure on the government of Louis Napoleon (later Napoleon III), which was sympathetic to their cause, a Commission on Cochinchina made the convincing argument that France risked becoming a second-class power by not intervening.

## **Under French Rule**

By 1857 Louis-Napoleon had been persuaded that invasion was the best course of action, and French warships were instructed to take Tourane without any further efforts to negotiate with the Vietnamese. Tourane was captured in late 1858 and Gia Dinh (Saigon and later Ho Chi Minh City) in early 1859. In both cases Vietnamese Christian support for the French, predicted by the missionaries, failed to materialize. Vietnamese resistance and outbreaks of cholera and typhoid forced the French to abandon Tourane in early 1860. Meanwhile, fear was growing in Paris that if France withdrew the British would move in. Also current in Paris at that time was the rationalization that France had a civilizing mission—a duty to bring the benefits of its superior culture to the less fortunate lands of Asia and Africa. (This was a common justification for the colonial policies of most of the Western countries.) Meanwhile, French business and military interests increased their pressure on the government for decisive action. Thus in early 1861, a French fleet of 70 ships and 3,500 men reinforced Gia Dinh and, in a series of bloody battles, gained control of the surrounding provinces. In June 1862, Emperor Tu Duc, signed the Treaty of Saigon agreeing to French demands for the cession of three provinces around Gia Dinh (which the French had renamed Saigon) and Poulo Condore, as well as for the opening of three ports to trade, free

passage of French warships up the Mekong to Cambodia, freedom of action for the missionaries, and payment of a large indemnity to France for its losses in attacking Vietnam.

Even the French were surprised by the ease with which the Vietnamese agreed to the humiliating treaty. Why, after successfully resisting invasions by the Chinese for the previous 900 years, did the monarchy give in so readily to French demands? Aside from the seriousness of the loss of Saigon and the possible overestimation of French strength, it appears that the isolation of the monarchy from the people created by decades of repression prevented Tu Duc and his court from attempting to rally the necessary popular support to drive out the French. In fact, by placating the French in the south, Tu Duc hoped to free his forces to put down a widespread Christian-supported rebellion in Bac Bo, which he indeed crushed by 1865. French missionaries, who had urged their government to support this rebellion, were disillusioned when it did not, especially after thousands of Christians were slaughtered by Tu Duc's forces following the rebellion. The missionaries, however, had served only as an initial excuse for French intervention in Vietnam; military and economic interests soon became the primary reasons for remaining there.

The French navy was in the forefront of the conquest of Indochina. In 1863 Admiral de la Grandière, the governor of Cochinchina (as the French renamed Nam Bo), forced the Cambodian king to accept a French protectorate over that country, claiming that the Treaty of Saigon had made France heir to Vietnamese claims in Cambodia. In June 1867, the admiral completed the annexation of Cochinchina by seizing the remaining three western provinces. The following month, the Siamese government agreed to recognize a French protectorate over Cambodia in return for the cession of two Cambodian provinces, Angkor and Battambang, to Siam. With Cochinchina secured, French naval and mercantile interests turned to Tonkin (as the French referred to Bac Bo). The 1873 storming of the citadel of Hanoi, led by French naval officer Francis Garnier, had the desired effect of forcing Tu Duc to sign a treaty with France in March 1874 that recognized France's "full and entire sovereignty" over Cochinchina, and opened the Red River to commerce. In an attempt to secure Tonkin, Garnier was killed and his forces defeated in a battle with Vietnamese regulars and Black Flag forces (see Glossary). The latter were Chinese soldiers, who had fled south following the Taiping Rebellion in that country and had been hired by the Hue court to keep order in Tonkin.

In April 1882, a French force again stormed the citadel of Hanoi,

under the leadership of naval officer Henri Rivière. Rivière and part of his forces were wiped out in a battle with a Vietnamese-Black Flag army, a reminder of Garnier's fate a decade earlier. While Garnier's defeat had led to a partial French withdrawal from Tonkin, Rivière's loss strengthened the resolve of the French government to establish a protectorate by military force. Accordingly, additional funds were appropriated by the French Parliament to support further military operations, and Hue fell to the French in August 1883, following the death of Tu Duc the previous month. A Treaty of Protectorate, signed at the August 1883 Harmand Convention, established a French protectorate over North and Central Vietnam and formally ended Vietnam's independence. In June 1884, Vietnamese scholar-officials were forced to sign the Treaty of Hue, which confirmed the Harmand Convention agreement. By the end of 1884, there were 16,500 French troops in Vietnam. Resistance to French control, however, continued. A rebellion known as the Can Vuong (Loyalty to the King) movement formed in 1885 around the deposed Emperor Ham Nghi and attracted support from both scholars and peasants. The rebellion was essentially subdued with the capture and exile of Ham Nghi in 1888. Scholar and patriot Phan Dinh Phung continued to lead the resistance until his death in 1895. Although unsuccessful in driving out the French, the Can Vuong movement, with its heroes and patriots, laid important groundwork for future Vietnamese independence movements (see fig. 6).

### **Colonial Administration**

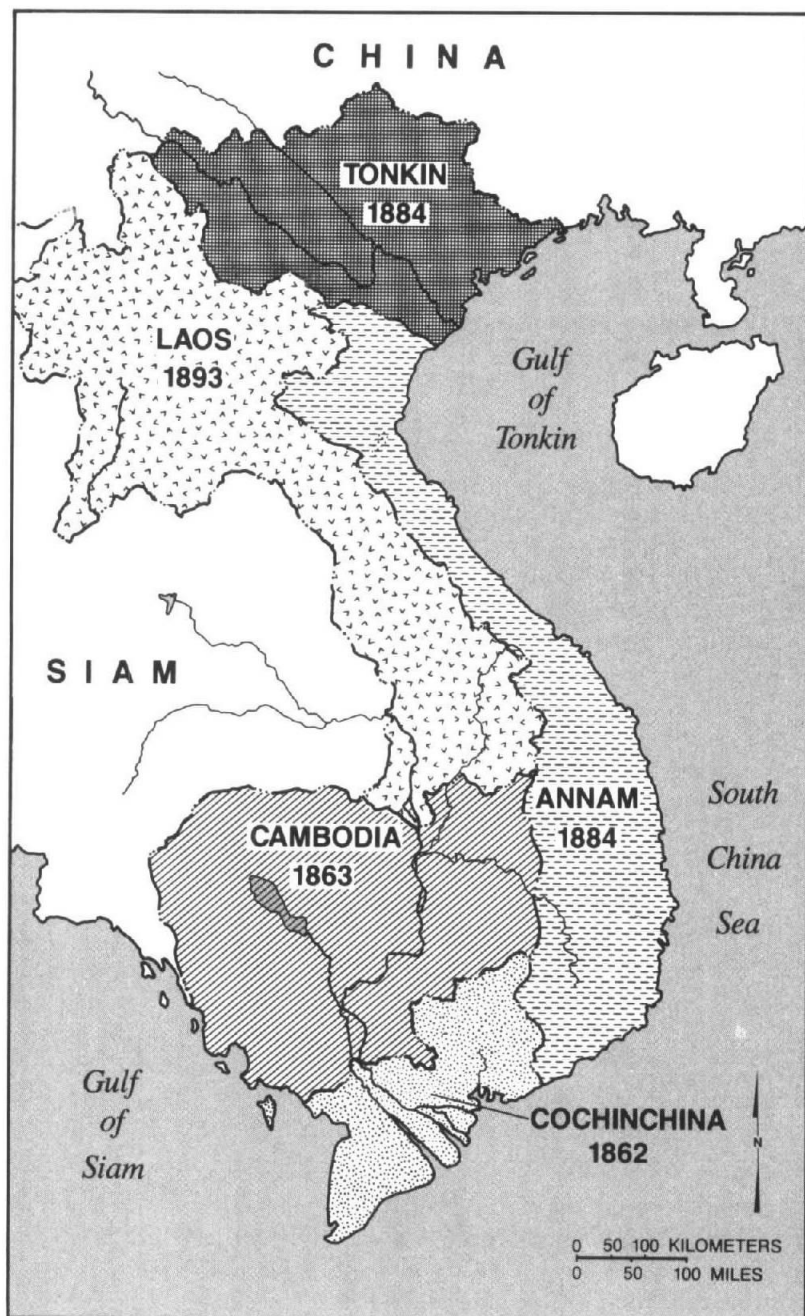
Not all Vietnamese resisted the French conquest, and some even welcomed it. The monarchy, through decades of repression, had lost the support of the people; and Tu Duc, in the eyes of large segments of the peasantry, had lost his mandate to rule. He had been able to protect his people neither from foreign aggression nor from an unusually high incidence of natural disasters such as floods, famines, locusts, droughts, and a cholera epidemic in 1865 that killed more than 1 million people. Tu Duc's repression of Catholics also created a large opposition group ready to cooperate with the French, and those who did were often rewarded with lands vacated during the French invasion. Much of this land, however, was given to French *colons* (colonial settlers), often in sizable holdings of 4,000 hectares or more. Gradually a French-Vietnamese landholding class developed in Cochinchina. Vietnamese, however, were appointed only to the lower levels of the bureaucracy established to administer the new colony. Seeking to finance the growing bureaucracy, the early admiral-governors of Vietnam viewed

the colony as the source of the necessary revenue. Rice exports, forbidden under the monarchy, reached 229,000 tons annually in 1870. Taxes extracted from Cochinchina increased tenfold in the first decade of French control. State monopolies and excise taxes on opium, salt, and alcohol eventually came to provide 70 percent of the government's operating revenue.

In 1887 France formally established the Indochinese Union, comprising the colony of Cochinchina and the protectorates of Annam, Tonkin, and Cambodia, with Laos being added as a protectorate in 1893. There was a rapid turnover among governors-general of the Indochinese Union, and few served a full five-year term. One who did, Paul Doumer (1897-1902), is considered to have been the architect of a colonial system under which Vietnam was politically dominated and economically exploited. Following the partitioning of Vietnam into three parts, the emperor was stripped of the last vestiges of his authority. In 1897 the powers of the *kinh luoc* (emperor's viceroy) were transferred to the Resident Superieur at Hanoi, who governed in the name of the emperor. That same year, the Privy Council or Co Mat Vien (see Glossary) in Annam was replaced with a French-controlled Council of Ministers. The following year in Annam, the French took over tax collection and payment of officials. Most of the Vietnamese scholar-officials had refused to cooperate with the French, but those who did were restricted to minor or ceremonial positions. Consequently, Frenchmen were recruited to staff a new, continually expanding bureaucracy. By 1925 there were 5,000 European administrators ruling an Indochinese population of 30 million, roughly the same number used to administer British India, which had a population more than ten times as large. Under the French laws applicable to individuals, Vietnamese were prohibited from traveling outside their districts without identity papers; and they were not allowed to publish, meet, or organize. They were subject to *corvée*, and they could be imprisoned at the whim of any French magistrate. The colonial police enforced the law through a network of French and Vietnamese agents.

Land alienation was the cornerstone of economic exploitation under the colonial government. By 1930 more than 80 percent of the riceland in Cochinchina was owned by 25 percent of the landowners, and 57 percent of the rural population were landless peasants working on large estates. Although the situation was somewhat better in the north, landless peasants in Annam totaled 800,000 and in Tonkin nearly 1 million. Heavy taxes and usurious interest rates on loans were added burdens on the peasants. More than 90 percent of rubber plantations were French owned. Two-thirds of





*Figure 6. French Acquisitions in Indochina in the Nineteenth Century*

the coal mined in Vietnam (nearly two million tons in 1927) was exported. Manufacturing was limited to cement and textiles, partly to placate French industrialists who saw Indochina as a market for their own goods. Naval shipyards and armament factories built under the Nguyen dynasty were dismantled under the French. Much of the craft industry survived, however, because it produced affordable consumer goods in contrast to imported French goods, which only the French colons or wealthy Vietnamese could afford.

French efforts at education in the early decades of colonial rule were negligible. A few government *quoc ngu* schools were established along with an Ecole Normale to train Vietnamese clerks and interpreters. A few Vietnamese from wealthy families, their numbers rising to about ninety by 1870, were sent to France to study. Three lycées (secondary schools), located in Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon, were opened in the early 1900s, using French as the language of instruction. The number of *quoc ngu* elementary schools was gradually increased, but even by 1925 it was estimated that no more than one school-age child in ten was receiving schooling. As a result, Vietnam's high degree of literacy declined precipitously during the colonial period. The University of Hanoi, founded in 1907 to provide an alternative for Vietnamese students beginning to flock to Japan, was closed for a decade the following year because of fear of student involvement in a 1908 uprising in Hanoi. In Tonkin and Annam, traditional education based on Chinese classical literature continued to flourish well into the twentieth century despite French efforts to discourage it, but the triennial examinations were abolished in 1915 in Tonkin and in 1918 in Annam. China, which had always served as a source of teaching materials and texts, by the turn of the century was beginning to be a source of reformist literature and revolutionary ideas. Materials filtering in from China included both Chinese texts and translations of Western classics, which were copied and spread from province to province.

### **Phan Boi Chau and the Rise of Nationalism**

By the turn of the century, a whole generation of Vietnamese had grown up under French control. The people continued, as in precolonial times, to look to the scholar-gentry class for guidance in dealing with French imperialism and the loss of their country's independence. A few scholar-officials collaborated with the French, but most did not. Among those who refused was a group of several hundred scholars who became actively involved in the anticolonial movement. The best known among them was Phan Boi Chau, a scholar from Nghe An Province, trained in the Confucian tradition under his father and other local teachers. In 1885 Phan Boi

Chau observed at close range the actions of French troops in crushing scholar-gentry resistance to the colonial overlords. For the next decade he devoted himself to his studies and finally passed the regional examination with highest honors in 1905. During the following five years, he traveled about the country making contacts with other anticolonial scholars and seeking out in particular the survivors of the Can Vuong movement, with whom he hoped to launch a rebellion against the French. He also sought to identify a member of the Nguyen ruling family sympathetic to the cause, who would serve as titular head of the independence movement and as a rallying point for both moral and financial support. Chosen to fill this role was Cuong De, a direct descendant of Gia Long.

In 1904 Phan Boi Chau and about twenty others met in Quang Nam to form the Duy Tan Hoi (Reformation Society), the first of a number of revolutionary societies he organized. The following year, he went to Japan to meet with Japanese and Chinese revolutionaries and seek financial support for the Vietnamese cause. The Japanese defeat of the Russian fleet at Tsushima the month before his arrival had caused great excitement among the various Asian anticolonialist movements. Phan Boi Chau brought Cuong De, along with several Vietnamese students, to Japan in 1906. That same year he convinced the other great Vietnamese nationalist leader of the period, Phan Chu Trinh, to visit him in Tokyo. After two weeks of discussions, however, they were unable to resolve their basic tactical differences. Whereas Phan Boi Chau favored retaining the monarchy as a popular ideological symbol and a means of attracting financial support, Phan Chu Trinh wanted primarily to abolish the monarchy in order to create a base on which to build national sovereignty. Furthermore, he was greatly influenced by the writings of French political philosophers Rousseau and Montesquieu, and he believed that the French colonial administration could serve as a progressive force to establish a Western democratic political structure through peaceful reform. Phan Boi Chau, conversely, wanted to drive out the French immediately through armed resistance and restore Vietnamese independence.

In 1907 Phan Boi Chau organized the Viet Nam Cong Hien Hoi (Vietnam Public Offering Society) to unite the 100 or so Vietnamese then studying in Japan. The organization was important because of the opportunity it provided for the students to think and work together as Vietnamese, rather than as Cochinchinese, Annamese, or Tonkinese, as the French called them. The following year, however, the Japanese, under pressure from the French, expelled the students, forcing most of them to return home. In March 1909, Phan Boi Chau was also deported by the Japanese. He went first

to Hong Kong, later to Bangkok and Guangzhou. Even during his years abroad, his writings served to influence nationalist activities in Vietnam. In 1907 the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Free School of the Eastern Capital [Hanoi]) was founded to educate nationalist political activists. Phan Boi Chau's writings were studied and Phan Chu Trinh gave lectures at the school. Suspecting that Phan Boi Chau was associated with the school, however, the French closed it in less than a year. The French also blamed Phan Boi Chau for instigating antitax demonstrations in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces and in Hue in early 1908. As a symbol of the movement, the demonstrators forcibly cut off men's traditional long hair. An abortive Hanoi uprising and poison plot in June 1908 was also blamed on Phan Boi Chau. In response to the uprising, the French executed thirteen of the participants and initiated a crackdown on Vietnamese political activists, sending hundreds of scholar-officials, including Phan Chu Trinh, to prison on Poulo Condore (now Con Dao). A major expedition was also launched in 1909 against De Tham, a resistance leader who was involved in the Hanoi uprising. De Tham, who had led a thirty-year campaign against the French in the mountains around Yen The in the northeastern part of Tonkin, managed to hold out until he was assassinated in 1913.

Stimulated by the Chinese Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen in 1911, Phan Boi Chau and the other Vietnamese nationalists in exile in Guangzhou formed a new organization in 1912 to replace the moribund Duy Tan Hoi. The main goals of the newly organized Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi (Vietnam Restoration Society) included expulsion of the French, recovery of Vietnamese independence, and establishment of a "Vietnamese democratic republic." Phan Boi Chau had by this time given up his monarchist position, although Cuong De was accorded presidential status within the organization's provisional government. In order to gain support and financial backing for the new organization, Phan Boi Chau organized a number of terrorist bombings and assassinations in 1913, to which the French responded harshly. By 1914 the counter-revolutionary government of Yuan Shi-kai was in charge in China, and, by French request, Phan Boi Chau and other Vietnamese exiles in that country were imprisoned.

World War I began shortly thereafter, and some 50,000 Vietnamese troops and 50,000 Vietnamese workers were sent to Europe. The Vietnamese also endured additional heavy taxes to help pay for France's war efforts. Numerous anticolonial revolts occurred in Vietnam during the war, all easily suppressed by the French. In May 1916, the sixteen-year-old king, Duy Tan, escaped from his palace in order to take part in an uprising of Vietnamese troops.

The French were informed of the plan and the leaders arrested and executed. Duy Tan was deposed and exiled to Réunion in the Indian Ocean. One of the most effective uprisings during this period was in the northern Vietnamese province of Thai Nguyen. Some 300 Vietnamese soldiers revolted and released 200 political prisoners, whom, in addition to several hundred local people, they armed. The rebels held the town of Thai Nguyen for several days, hoping for help from Chinese nationalists. None arrived, however, and the French retook the town and hunted down most of the rebels.

In 1917, Phan Boi Chau was released from prison. He spent the next eight years in exile in China, studying and writing but exerting little direct influence on the Vietnamese nationalist movement. In 1925 he was kidnaped by the French in Shanghai and returned to Hanoi, where he was tried and sentenced to hard labor for life. The sentence was later changed to house arrest until his death in 1940. Vietnamese historians view Phan Boi Chau's contribution to the country's independence as immeasurable. He advocated forcibly expelling the French, although he was not able to solve the problems involved in actually doing it. He suggested learning from other Asian independence movements and leaders, while realizing that in the end only the Vietnamese could win their own independence. His greatest weakness, according to many historians, was his failure to involve the Vietnamese peasantry, who composed 80 percent of the population, in his drive for independence. Rather than recruiting support at the village level, Phan Boi Chau and his followers concentrated on recruiting the elite, in the belief that the peasant masses would automatically rally around the scholar-gentry. Future Vietnamese independence leaders took inspiration from the efforts of the early nationalists and learned from their mistakes the importance of winning support at the local level.

An important development in the early part of the twentieth century was the increased use of *quoc ngu* in the northern part of the country through a proliferation of new journals printed in that script. There had been *quoc ngu* publications in Cochinchina since 1865, but in 1898 a decree of the colonial government prohibited publication without permission, in the protectorate areas, of periodicals in *quoc ngu* or Chinese that were not published by a French citizen. In 1913 Nguyen Van Vinh succeeded in publishing *Dong Duong Tap Chi* (Indochinese Review), a strongly antitraditional but pro-French journal. He also founded a publishing house that translated such Vietnamese classics as the early nineteenth century poem *Kim Van Kieu* as well as Chinese classics into *quoc ngu*. Nguyen Van Vinh's publications, while largely pro-Western, were the major

impetus for the increasing popularity of *quoc ngu* in Annam and Tonkin. In 1917 the moderate reformist journalist Pham Quynh began publishing in Hanoi the *quoc ngu* journal *Nam Phong*, which addressed the problem of adopting modern Western values without destroying the cultural essence of the Vietnamese nation. By World War I, *quoc ngu* had become the vehicle for the dissemination of not only Vietnamese, Chinese, and French literary and philosophical classics but also a new body of Vietnamese nationalist literature emphasizing social comment and criticism.

In the years immediately following World War I, the scholar-led Vietnamese independence movement in Cochinchina began a temporary decline as a result, in part, of tighter French control and increased activity by the French-educated Vietnamese elite. The decrease of both French investments in and imports to Vietnam during the war had opened opportunities to entrepreneurial Vietnamese, who began to be active in light industries such as rice milling, printing, and textile weaving. The sale of large tracts of land in the Mekong Delta by the colonial government to speculators at cheap prices resulted in the expansion of the Vietnamese landed aristocracy. These factors in combination led to the rise of a wealthy Vietnamese elite in Cochinchina that was pro-French but was frustrated by its own lack of political power and status.

Prominent among this group was Bui Quang Chieu, a French-trained agricultural engineer, who helped organize the Constitutionalist Party in 1917. Founded with the hope that it would be able to exert pressure on the Colonial Council of Cochinchina, the governing body of the colony, the party drew its support from Vietnamese who were large landowners, wealthy merchants, industrialists, and senior civil servants. The Colonial Council, established in 1880, was controlled by French interests, having only ten Vietnamese members out of twenty-four by 1922. The demands of the party included increased Vietnamese representation on the Colonial Council, higher salaries for Vietnamese officials, replacement of the scholar-official administration system with a modern bureaucracy, and reform of the naturalization law to make it easier for Vietnamese to become French citizens.

When the party failed to gain acceptance of any of these demands, it turned to its most pressing economic grievance, the ethnic Chinese domination of the Cochinchinese economy. Although French investors exercised almost exclusive control over industry and shared control of agriculture with the Vietnamese, the ethnic Chinese were sought out by the French to act as middlemen and came to dominate rice trade and retail business in both urban and rural areas. A boycott of Chinese goods organized by the party, however, was largely

unsuccessful because it primarily served the interests of the entrepreneurial elite. By the mid-1920s, Constitutionalist Party goals were too elitist and too moderate to attract a popular following. Although the party grew increasingly critical of the French, it failed to advocate anything more than continued Franco-Vietnamese collaboration. Its place in the Vietnamese nationalist movement was effectively usurped by more progressive political groups seeking Vietnam's independence.

The mid-1920s also brought a period of increased activity among the growing Vietnamese worker class; and pedicab drivers, dye workers, and textile workers launched strikes with some success. In August 1925, workers belonging to an underground union struck at the Ba Son naval arsenal in Saigon-Cholon, ostensibly for higher pay but in actuality to block two French naval ships from being sent to Shanghai to pressure striking Chinese workers. The strikers were successful in their demands and, in November, held massive demonstrations in Saigon to protest the arrest of Phan Boi Chau in Shanghai.

### **Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Movement**

The year 1925 also marked the founding of the Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi (Revolutionary Youth League) in Guangzhou by Ho Chi Minh. Born Nguyen Sinh Cung in Kim Lien village, Nghe An Province in May 1890, Ho was the son of Nguyen Sinh Sac (or Huy), a scholar from a poor peasant family. Following a common custom, Ho's father renamed him Nguyen Tat Thanh at about age ten. Ho was trained in the classical Confucian tradition and was sent to secondary school in Hue. After working for a short time as a teacher, he went to Saigon where he took a course in navigation and in 1911 joined the crew of a French ship. Working as a kitchen hand, Ho traveled to North America, Africa, and Europe. While in Paris from 1919-23, he took the name Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot). In 1919 he attempted to meet with United States President Woodrow Wilson at the Versailles Peace Conference in order to present a proposal for Vietnam's independence, but he was turned away and the proposal was never officially acknowledged. During his stay in Paris, Ho was greatly influenced by Marxist-Leninist literature, particularly Lenin's *Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* (1920), and in 1920 he became a founding member of the French Communist Party. He read, wrote, and spoke widely on Indochina's problems before moving to Moscow in 1923 and attending the Fifth Congress of the Communist International (see Glossary), also called the Comintern, in 1924. In late 1924, Ho arrived in Guangzhou,

where he spent the next two years training more than 200 Vietnamese cadres in revolutionary techniques. His course of instruction included study of Marxism-Leninism, Vietnamese and Asian revolutionary history, Asian leaders such as Gandhi and Sun Yat-sen, and the problem of organizing the masses. As a training manual, Ho used his own publication *Duong Cach Menh* (The Revolutionary Path), written in 1926 and considered his primer on revolution. Going by the name Ly Thuy, he formed an inner communist group, Thanh Nien Cong San Doan (Communist Youth League), within the larger Thanh Nien (Youth) organization. The major activity of Thanh Nien was the production of a journal, *Thanh Nien*, distributed clandestinely in Vietnam, Siam, and Laos, which introduced communist theory into the Vietnamese independence movement. Following Chiang Kai-shek's April 1927 coup and the subsequent suppression of the communists in southern China, Ho fled to Moscow.

In December of that year, a teacher from a Vietnamese peasant family, Nguyen Thai Hoc, founded Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD, Vietnamese Nationalist Party), in Hanoi. With a membership largely of students, low-ranking government employees, soldiers, and a few landlords and rich peasants, VNQDD was patterned after the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), from which it received financial support in the 1930s. Another source of funds for the VNQDD was the Vietnam Hotel in Hanoi, which it opened in 1928 as both a commercial enterprise and the party headquarters. The hotel restaurant, however, provided French agents with an easy means of penetrating the party and monitoring its activities. At various times, the VNQDD attempted, without success, to form a united front with Thanh Nien and other independence organizations. Thanh Nien, being two years older, however, had had a head start over VNQDD in organizing in schools, factories, and local government, which it had done with patience and planning. The VNQDD therefore concentrated instead on recruitment of Vietnamese soldiers and the overthrow of French rule through putschist-style activities.

In February 1929, the French official in charge of recruiting coolie labor was killed by an assassin connected with the VNQDD. The French immediately arrested several hundred VNQDD leaders and imprisoned seventy-eight. VNQDD leaders Nguyen Thai Hoc and Nguyen Khac Nhu escaped, but most members of the Central Committee were captured. The remaining leadership under Nguyen Thai Hoc decided to stage a general uprising as soon as possible. All dissent to the plan was overridden, and the party began manufacturing and stockpiling weapons. On February 9, 1930, a revolt



instigated by the VNQDD broke out at Yen Bai among the Vietnamese garrison, but it was quickly suppressed. Simultaneous attacks on other key targets, including Son Tay and Lam Thu, were also unsuccessful because of poor preparation and communication. The Yen Bai uprising was disastrous for the VNQDD. Most of the organization's top leaders were executed, and villages that had given refuge to the party were shelled and bombed by the French. After Yen Bai, the VNQDD ceased to be of importance in the anticolonial struggle. Although more modernist and less bound by tradition than the scholar-patriots of the Phan Boi Chau era, the VNQDD had remained a movement of urban intellectuals who were unable to involve the masses in their struggle and too often favored reckless exploits over slow and careful planning.

On June 17, 1929, the founding conference of the first Indochinese Communist Party (ICP, *Dang Cong San Dong Duong*) was held in Hanoi under the leadership of a breakaway faction of Thanh Nien radicals. The party immediately began to publish several journals and to send out representatives to all parts of the country for the purpose of setting up branches. A series of strikes supported by the party broke out at this time, and their success led to the convening of the first National Congress of Red Trade Unions the following month in Hanoi. Other communist parties were founded at this time by both supporting members of Thanh Nien and radical members of yet another revolutionary party with Marxist leanings but no direct tie with the Comintern, called the New Revolutionary Party or Tan Viet Party. At the beginning of 1930, there were actually three communist parties in French Indochina competing for members. The establishment of the ICP prompted remaining Thanh Nien members to transform the Communist Youth League into a communist party, the Annam Communist Party (ACP, *Annam Cong San Dang*), and Tan Viet Party members followed suit by renaming their organization the Indochinese Communist League (*Dong Duong Cong San Lien Doan*). As a result, the Comintern issued a highly critical indictment of the factionalism in the Vietnamese revolutionary movement and urged the Vietnamese to form a united communist party. Consequently, the Comintern leadership sent a message to Ho Chi Minh, then living in Siam, asking him to come to Hong Kong to unify the groups. On February 3, 1930, in Hong Kong, Ho presided over a conference of representatives of the two factions derived from Thanh Nien (members of the Indochinese Communist League were not represented but were to be permitted membership in the newly formed party as individuals) at which a unified Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was founded, the *Viet Nam Cong San Dang*.

At the Comintern's request, the name was changed later that year at the first Party Plenum to the Indochinese Communist Party, thus reclaiming the original name of the party founded in 1929. At the founding meeting, it was agreed that a provisional Central Committee of nine members (three from Bac Bo, two from Trung Bo, two from Nam Bo, and two from Vietnam's overseas Chinese community) should be formed and that recognition should be sought from the Comintern. Various mass organizations including unions, a peasants' association, a women's association, a relief society, and a youth league were to be organized under the new party. Ho drew up a program of party objectives, which were approved by the conference. The main points included overthrow of the French; establishment of Vietnamese independence; establishment of a workers', peasants', and soldiers' government; organization of a workers' militia; cancellation of public debts; confiscation of means of production and their transfer to the proletarian government; distribution of French-owned lands to the peasants; suppression of taxes; establishment of an eight-hour work day; development of crafts and agriculture; institution of freedom of organization; and establishment of education for all.

The formation of the ICP came at a time of general unrest in the country, caused in part by a global worsening of economic conditions. Although the size of the Vietnamese urban proletariat had increased four times, to about 200,000, since the beginning of the century, working conditions and salaries had improved little. The number of strikes rose from seven in 1927 to ninety-eight in 1930. As the effects of the worldwide depression began to be felt, French investors withdrew their money from Vietnam. Salaries dropped 30 to 50 percent, and employment dropped approximately 33 percent. Between 1928 and 1932, the price of rice on the world market decreased by more than half. Rice exports totaling nearly 2 million tons in 1928 fell to less than 1 million tons in 1931. Although both French colons and wealthy Vietnamese landowners were hit by the crisis, it was the peasant who bore most of the burden because he was forced to sell at least twice as much rice to pay the same amount in taxes or other debts. Floods, famine, and food riots plagued the countryside. By 1930 rubber prices had plummeted to less than one-fourth their 1928 value. Coal production was cut, creating more layoffs. Even the colonial government cut its staff by one-seventh and salaries by one-quarter.

### **The Nghe-Tinh Revolt**

Strikes grew more frequent in Nam Bo in early 1930 and led to peasant demonstrations in May and June of that year. The focus

of reaction to the worsening economic conditions, however, was Nghe An Province, which had a long history of support for peasant revolts. Plagued by floods, drought, scarcity of land, and colonial exploitation, the people of Nghe An had been supporters of the Can Vuong movement and the activities of Phan Boi Chau. By late 1929, the ICP had begun organizing party cells, trade unions, and peasant associations in the province. By early 1930, it had established a provincial committee in the provincial capital of Vinh and had begun to found mass organizations throughout Nghe An. French sources reported that by mid-summer 1930 there were about 300 communist activists in Nghe An and the neighboring province of Ha Tinh. This figure rose to 1,800 a few months later. The communists helped to mobilize the workers and peasants of Nghe-Tinh, as the two-province area was known, to protest the worsening conditions. Peasant demonstrators demanded a moratorium on the payment of the personal tax and a return of village communal lands that were in the hands of wealthy landowners. When the demands were ignored, demonstrations turned to riots; government buildings, manor houses, and markets were looted and burned, and tax rolls were destroyed. Some village notables joined in the uprisings or refused to suppress them. Local officials fled, and government authority rapidly disintegrated. In some of the districts, the communists helped organize the people into local village associations called soviets (using the Bolshevik term). The soviets, formed by calling a meeting of village residents at the local *dinh*, elected a ruling committee to annul taxes, lower rents, distribute excess rice to the needy, and organize the seizure of communal land confiscated by the wealthy. Village militias were formed, usually armed only with sticks, spears, and knives.

By September the French had realized the seriousness of the situation and brought in Foreign Legion troops to suppress the rebellion. On September 9, French planes bombed a column of thousands of peasants headed toward the provincial capital. Security forces rounded up all those suspected of being communists or of being involved in the rebellion, staged executions, and conducted punitive raids on rebellious villages. By early 1931, all of the soviets had been forced to surrender. Of the more than 1,000 arrested, 400 were given long prison sentences, and 80, including some of the party leaders, were executed. With the aid of other Asian colonial authorities, Vietnamese communists in Singapore, China, and Hong Kong were also arrested.

The early 1930s was a period of recovery and rebuilding for the ICP in Vietnam. Reorganization and recruitment were carried on even among political prisoners, of whom there were more than

10,000 by 1932. In the prison of Poulo Condore, Marxist literature circulated secretly, an underground journal was published, and party members (among them future party leaders Pham Van Dong and Le Duan) organized a university, teaching courses in sciences, literature, languages, geography, and Marxism-Leninism (see Development of the Vietnamese Communist Party, ch. 4; Appendix B). The party also began to recruit increasingly from among Vietnamese minorities, particularly the Tay-Nung ethnic groups living in Viet Bac. Located along Vietnam's northern border with China, this remote mountainous region includes the modern provinces of Lang Son, Cao Bang, Bac Thai, and Ha Tuyen (see fig. 7).

This period also marked the rise of a Trotskyite faction within the communist movement, which in 1933 began publishing a widely read journal called *La Lutte* (Struggle). The Comintern's hostility toward Trotskyites prevented their formal alliance with the ICP, although informal cooperation did exist. In 1935 a combined slate of ICP members and Trotskyites managed to elect four candidates to the Saigon municipal council. Cooperation between the two groups began to break down, however, when a Popular Front government led by the French Socialist Party under Léon Blum was elected in Paris. The Trotskyites complained that, despite the change of leadership in France, nothing had changed in Indochina. From the communist viewpoint, the major contribution to Vietnamese independence made by the Popular Front government was an amnesty declared in 1936 under which 1,532 Vietnamese political prisoners were freed.

## **World War II and Japanese Occupation**

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Agression pact in August 1939, caused France immediately to ban the French Communist Party and, soon afterwards, to declare illegal all Vietnamese political parties including the ICP. The colonial authorities began a crackdown on communists, arresting an estimated 2,000 and closing down all communist and radical journals. The party consequently was forced to shift its activities to the countryside, where French control was weaker—a move that was to benefit the communists in the long run. In November the ICP Central Committee held its Sixth Plenum with the goal of mapping out a new united front strategy, the chief task of which was national liberation. According to the new strategy, support would now be welcomed from the middle class and even the landlord class, although the foundation of the party continued to be the proletarian-peasant alliance.

After the fall of France to the Nazis in June 1940, Japan demanded



Source: Based on information from Thomas Hodgkin, *Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path*, New York, 1981, Map No. 5.

*Figure 7. Viet Bac, Viet Minh Base Area, 1941-45*

that the French colonial government close the Hanoi-Kunming railway to shipments of war-related goods to China. In an agreement with the Vichy government in France in August, Japan formally recognized French sovereignty in Indochina in return for access to military facilities, transit rights, and the right to station occupation troops in Tonkin. On September 22, however, Japanese troops invaded from China, seizing the Vietnamese border towns of Dong Dang and Lang Son. As the French retreated southward, the Japanese encouraged Vietnamese troops to support the invasion. The communists in the Bac Son district border area moved to take advantage of the situation, organizing self-defense units and establishing a revolutionary administration. The French protested

to the Japanese, however, and a cease-fire was arranged whereby the French forces returned to their posts and promptly put down all insurrection. Most of the communist forces in Tonkin were able to retreat to the mountains. In similar short-lived uprisings that took place in the Plain of Reeds area of Cochinchina, however, the communist rebel forces had nowhere to retreat and most were destroyed by the French.

### **Establishment of the Viet Minh**

In early 1940, Ho Chi Minh returned to southern China, after having spent most of the previous seven years studying and teaching at the Lenin Institute in Moscow. In Kunming he reestablished contact with the ICP Central Committee and set up a temporary headquarters, which became the focal point for communist policy-making and planning. After thirty years absence, Ho returned to Vietnam in February 1941 and set up headquarters in a cave at Pac Bo, near the Sino-Vietnamese border, where in May the Eighth Plenum of the ICP was held. The major outcome of the meeting was the reiteration that the struggle for national independence took primacy over class war or other concerns of socialist ideology. To support this strategy, the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, Viet Minh for short—see Glossary) was established. In this new front group, which would be dominated by the party, all patriotic elements were welcomed as potential allies. The party would be forced in the short term to modify some of its goals and soften its rhetoric, supporting, for example, the reduction of land rents rather than demanding land seizures. Social revolution would have to await the defeat of the French and the Japanese. The Eighth Plenum also recognized guerrilla warfare as an integral part of the revolutionary strategy and established local self-defense militias in all villages under Viet Minh control. The cornerstone of the party's strategy, of which Ho appears to have been the chief architect, was the melding of the forces of urban nationalism and peasant rebellion into a single independence effort.

In order to implement the new strategy, two tasks were given priority: the establishment of a Viet Minh apparatus throughout the country and the creation of a secure revolutionary base in the Viet Bac border region from which southward expansion could begin. This area had the advantages of being remote from colonial control but accessible to China, which could serve both as a refuge and training ground. Moreover, the Viet Bac population was largely sympathetic to the communists. Viet Minh influence began to permeate the area, and French forces attempted, but failed, to

regain control of the region in 1941. The liberation zone soon spread to include the entire northern frontier area until it reached south of Cao Bang, where an ICP Interprovincial Committee established its headquarters. A temporary setback for the communists occurred in August 1942, when Ho Chi Minh, while on a trip to southern China to meet with Chinese Communist Party officials, was arrested and imprisoned for two years by the Kuomintang. By August 1944, however, he had convinced the regional Chinese commander to support his return to Vietnam at the head of a guerrilla force. Accordingly, Ho returned to Vietnam in September with eighteen men trained and armed by the Chinese. Upon his arrival, he vetoed, as too precipitate, a plan laid by the ICP in his absence to launch a general uprising in Viet Bac within two months. Ho did, however, approve the establishment of armed propaganda detachments with both military and political functions.

As World War II drew to a close, the ICP sought to have the Vietnamese independence movement recognized as one of the victorious Allied forces under the leadership of the United States. With this in mind, Ho returned again to southern China in January 1945 to meet with American and Free French units there. From the Americans he solicited financial support, while from the French he sought, unsuccessfully, guarantees of Vietnamese independence. On March 9, 1945, the Japanese gave the French an ultimatum demanding that all French and Indochinese forces be placed under Japanese control. Without waiting for the French reply, the Japanese proceeded to seize administrative buildings, radio stations, banks, and industries and to disarm the French forces. Bao Dai, the Nguyen ruler under the French, was retained as emperor, and a puppet government was established with Tran Trong Kim, a teacher and historian, as prime minister. Japan revoked the Franco-Vietnamese Treaty of Protectorate of 1883, which had established Indochina as a French protectorate, and declared the independence of Vietnam under Japanese tutelage.

The communists concluded that the approaching end of the war and the defeat of the Japanese meant that a propitious time for a general uprising of the Vietnamese people was close at hand. Accordingly, the ICP began planning to take advantage of the political vacuum produced by the French loss of control and the confinement of Japanese power largely to urban and strategic areas. Moreover, famine conditions prevailed in the countryside, and unemployment was rampant in the cities. In the Red River Delta alone, more than 500,000 people died of starvation between March and May 1945. Because Japan was considered the main enemy, the communists decided that a United Front should be formed that

included patriotic French resistance groups and moderate urban Vietnamese bourgeoisie. The overall ICP strategy called for a two-stage revolt, beginning in rural areas and then moving to the cities. Accordingly, communist military forces responded to the plan. Armed Propaganda units under ICP military strategist Vo Nguyen Giap began moving south from Cao Bang into Thai Nguyen Province (see the Armed Forces, ch. 5). To the east, the 3,000-man National Salvation Army commanded by Chu Van Tan began liberating the provinces of Tuyen Quang and Lang Son and establishing revolutionary district administrations. At the first major military conference of the ICP, held in April in Bac Giang Province, the leaders determined that a liberated zone would be established in Viet Bac and that existing ICP military units would be united to form the new Vietnam Liberation Army (VLA), later called the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN—see Glossary) (see The Armed Forces, ch. 5). Giap was named Commander in Chief of the VLA and chairman of the Revolution Military Committee, later called the Central Military Party Committee (CMPC). Meanwhile, the ICP was expanding its influence farther south by forming mass organizations known as national salvation associations (*cuu quoc hoi*) for various groups, including workers, peasants, women, youth, students, and soldiers. As a result of labor unrest in Hanoi, 2,000 workers were recruited into salvation associations in early 1945, and 100,000 peasants had been enlisted into salvation associations in Quang Ngai Province by mid-summer. In Saigon, a youth organization, Thanh Nien Tien Phong (Vanguard Youth), established by the communists in 1942, had recruited 200,000 by early summer. Thanh Nien Tien Phong became the focal point for the communist effort in the south and soon expanded to more than one million members throughout Cochinchina. By June 1945, in the provinces of Viet Bac, the Viet Minh had set up people's revolutionary committees at all levels, distributed communal and French-owned lands to the poor, abolished the *corvée*, established *quoc ngu* classes, set up local self-defense militias in the villages, and declared universal suffrage and democratic freedoms. The Viet Minh then established a provisional directorate, headed by Ho Chi Minh, as the governing body for the liberated zone, comprising an estimated one million people.

Despite its success in the north, the ICP faced a range of serious obstacles in Cochinchina, where the Japanese maintained 100,000 well-armed troops. In addition, the Japanese also supported the neo-Buddhist Cao Dai sect (see Glossary) of more than one million members, including a military force of several battalions. Another sect, the Hoa Hao (see Glossary), founded and led by the



fanatical Huynh Phu So, eschewed temples and hierarchy and appealed to the poor and oppressed. Although lacking the military force of the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao was also closely connected with the Japanese. Meanwhile, the Japanese had also gained control of the Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi (League for the Restoration of Vietnam), established in 1939 as an outgrowth of Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi. Mobilized by the communists to face this array of forces in Cochinchina were the Vanguard Youth and the Vietnam Trade Union Federation, with 100,000 members in 300 unions.

### **The General Uprising and Independence**

On August 13, 1945, the ICP Central Committee held its Ninth Plenum at Tan Trao to prepare an agenda for a National Congress of the Viet Minh a few days later. At the plenum, convened just after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an order for a general uprising was issued, and a national insurrection committee was established headed by ICP general secretary Truong Chinh (see Development of the Vietnamese Communist Party, ch. 4; Appendix B). On August 16, the Viet Minh National Congress convened at Tan Trao and ratified the Central Committee decision to launch a general uprising. The Congress also elected a National Liberation Committee, headed by Ho Chi Minh (who was gravely ill at the time), to serve as a provisional government. The following day, the Congress, at a ceremony in front of the village *dinh*, officially adopted the national red flag with a gold star, and Ho read an appeal to the Vietnamese people to rise in revolution.

By the end of the first week following the Tan Trao conference, most of the provincial and district capitals north of Hanoi had fallen to the revolutionary forces. When the news of the Japanese surrender reached Hanoi on August 16, the local Japanese military command turned over its powers to the local Vietnamese authorities. By August 17, Viet Minh units in the Hanoi suburbs had deposed the local administrations and seized the government seals symbolizing political authority. Self-defense units were set up and armed with guns, knives, and sticks. Meanwhile, Viet Minh-led demonstrations broke out inside Hanoi. The following morning, a member of the Viet Minh Municipal Committee announced to a crowd of 200,000 gathered in Ba Dinh Square that the general uprising had begun. The crowd broke up immediately after that and headed for various key buildings around the city, including the palace, city hall, and police headquarters, where they accepted the surrender of the Japanese and local Vietnamese government

forces, mostly without resistance. The Viet Minh sent telegrams throughout Tonkin announcing its victory, and local Viet Minh units were able to take over most of the provincial and district capitals without a struggle. In Annam and Cochinchina, however, the communist victory was less assured because the ICP in those regions had neither the advantage of long, careful preparation nor an established liberated base area and army. Hue fell in a manner similar to Hanoi, with the takeover first of the surrounding area. Saigon fell on August 25 to the Viet Minh, who organized a nine-member, multiparty Committee of the South, including six members of the Viet Minh, to govern the city. The provinces south and west of Saigon, however, remained in the hands of the Hoa Hao. Although the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai were anti-French, both were more interested in regional autonomy than in communist-led national independence. As a result, clashes between the Hoa Hao and the Viet Minh broke out in the Mekong Delta in September.

Ho Chi Minh moved his headquarters to Hanoi shortly after the Viet Minh takeover of the city. On August 28, the Viet Minh announced the formation of the provisional government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with Ho as president and minister of foreign affairs. Vo Nguyen Giap was named minister of interior and Pham Van Dong minister of finance. In order to broaden support for the new government, several noncommunists were also included. Emperor Bao Dai, whom the communists had forced to abdicate on August 25, was given the position of high counselor to the new government. On September 2, half a million people gathered in Ba Dinh Square to hear Ho read the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, based on the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. After indicting the French colonial record in Vietnam, he closed with an appeal to the victorious Allies to recognize the independence of Vietnam.

Despite the heady days of August, major problems lay ahead for the ICP. Noncommunist political parties, which had been too weak and disorganized to take advantage of the political vacuum left by the fall of the Japanese, began to express opposition to communist control of the new provisional government. Among these parties, the nationalist VNQDD and Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi parties had the benefit of friendship with the Chinese expeditionary forces of Chiang Kai-shek, which began arriving in northern Vietnam in early September. At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Allies had agreed that the Chinese would accept the surrender of the Japanese in Indochina north of the 16°N parallel and the British, south of that line. The Vietnamese

nationalists, with the help of Chinese troops, seized some areas north of Hanoi, and the VNQDD subsequently set up an opposition newspaper in Hanoi to denounce "red terror." The communists gave high priority to avoiding clashes with Chinese troops, which soon numbered 180,000. To prevent such encounters, Ho ordered VLA troops to avoid provoking any incidents with the Chinese and agreed to the Chinese demand that the communists negotiate with the Vietnamese nationalist parties. Accordingly, in November 1945, the provisional government began negotiations with the VNQDD and the Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi, both of which initially took a hard line in their demands. The communists resisted, however, and the final agreement called for a provisional coalition government with Ho as president and nationalist leader Nguyen Hai Than as vice president. In the general elections scheduled for early January, 50 of the 350 National Assembly seats were to be reserved for the VNQDD and 20 for Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi regardless of the results of the balloting.

At the same time, the communists were in a far weaker political position in Cochinchina because they faced competition from the well-organized, economically influential, moderate parties based in Saigon and from the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai in the countryside. Moreover, the commander of the British expeditionary forces, which arrived in early September, was unsympathetic to Vietnamese desires for independence. French troops, released from Japanese prisons and rearmed by the British, provoked incidents and seized control of the city. A general strike called by the Vietnamese led to clashes with the French troops and mob violence in the French sections of the city. Negotiations between the French and the Committee of the South broke down in early October, as French troops began to occupy towns in the Mekong Delta. Plagued by clashes with the religious sects, lack of weapons, and a high desertion rate, the troops of the Viet Minh were driven deep into the delta, forests, and other inaccessible areas of the region.

Meanwhile, in Hanoi candidates supported by the Viet Minh won 300 seats in the National Assembly in the January 1946 elections. In early March, however, the threat of the imminent arrival of French troops in the north forced Ho to negotiate a compromise with France. Under the terms of the agreement, the French government recognized the DRV as a free state with its own army, legislative body, and financial powers, in return for Hanoi's acceptance of a small French military presence in northern Vietnam and membership in the French Union. Both sides agreed to a plebiscite in Cochinchina. The terms of the accord were generally unpopular with the Vietnamese and were widely viewed as a sell-out of the



*Ho Chi Minh, accompanied by  
Pham Van Dong, arriving in Paris, 1946  
Courtesy New York Times, Paris Collection, National Archives*

revolution. Ho, however, foresaw grave danger in refusing to compromise while the country was still in a weakened position. Soon after the agreement was signed, some 15,000 French troops arrived in Tonkin, and both the Vietnamese and the French began to question the terms of the accord. Negotiations to implement the agreement began in late spring at Fontainebleau, near Paris, and dragged on throughout the summer. Ho signed a *modus vivendi* (temporary agreement), which gave the Vietnamese little more than the promise of negotiation of a final treaty the following January, and returned to Vietnam.

## **First Indochina War**

Ho's efforts during this period were directed primarily at conciliating both the French themselves and the militantly anti-French members of the ICP leadership. The growing frequency of clashes between French and Vietnamese forces in Haiphong led to a French naval bombardment of that port city in November 1946. Estimates of Vietnamese casualties from the action range from 6,000 to 20,000. This incident and the arrival of 1,000 troops of the French Foreign Legion in central and northern Vietnam in early December convinced the communists, including Ho, that they should prepare for war. On December 19, the French demanded that the Vietnamese forces in the Hanoi area disarm and transfer responsibility for law and order to French authority. That evening, the Viet Minh responded by attacking the city's electric plant and other French installations around the area. Forewarned, the French seized Gia Lam airfield and took control of the central part of Hanoi, as full-scale war broke out. By late January, the French had retaken most of the provincial capitals in northern and central Vietnam. Hue fell in early February, after a six-week siege. The Viet Minh, which avoided using its main force units against the French at that time, continued to control most of the countryside, where it concentrated on building up its military strength and setting up guerrilla training programs in liberated areas. Seizing the initiative, however, the French marched north to the Chinese border in the autumn of 1947, inflicting heavy casualties on the Viet Minh and retaking much of the Viet Bac region.

Meanwhile, in April 1947 the Viet Minh in Cochinchina had destroyed all chance for alliance with the religious sects by executing Huynh Phu So, leader of the Hoa Hao. Both the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai formed alliances soon afterward with the French. The Committee for the South, which had seriously damaged the communist image in Cochinchina by its hard-line approach, was replaced in 1951 by the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN,

Trung Uong Cuc Mien Nam), headed by Le Duan. In the north, however, the political and military situation had begun to improve for the communists by late 1948. The Viet Minh had increased the number of its troops to more than 250,000 and, through guerilla activities, the communists had managed to retake part of Viet Bac as well as a number of small liberated base areas in the south. ICP political power was also growing, although lack of a land reform program and the continued moderate policy toward the patriotic landed gentry discouraged peasant support for the communists. In 1948, the French responded to the growing strength of the Viet Minh by granting nominal independence to all of Vietnam in the guise of “associated statehood” within the French Union. The terms of the agreement made it clear, however, that Vietnam’s independence was, in reality, devoid of any practical significance. The new government, established with Bao Dai as chief of state, was viewed critically by nationalists as well as communists. Most prominent nationalists, including Ngo Dinh Diem (president, Republic of Vietnam, South Vietnam, 1955–63), refused positions in the government, and many left the country.

The United States recognized the Associated State of Vietnam in early 1950, but this action was counterbalanced a few days later with the recognition of the DRV by the new People’s Republic of China. In March, Ho Chi Minh signed an agreement with Beijing that called for limited assistance to Hanoi. Shortly thereafter, Moscow also formally recognized the DRV, and the Viet Minh became more openly affiliated with the communist camp. Mao Zedong’s model of revolution was openly praised in the Vietnamese press; and the ICP, which, on paper, had been temporarily dissolved in 1945 to obscure the Viet Minh’s communist roots, surfaced under a new name in 1951 that removed all doubt of its communist nature. More than 200 delegates, representing some 500,000 party members, gathered at the Second National Party Congress of the ICP, held in February 1951 in Tuyen Quang Province. Renaming the ICP the Vietnam Workers’ Party (VWP, *Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam*), the delegates elected Ho as party chairman and Truong Chinh as general secretary.

## **Dien Bien Phu**

With Beijing’s promise of limited assistance to Hanoi, the communist military strategy concentrated on the liberation of Tonkin and consigned Cochinchina to a lower priority. The top military priority, as set by Giap, was to free the northern border areas in order to protect the movement of supplies and personnel from China. By autumn of 1950, the Viet Minh had again liberated

Viet Bac in decisive battles that forced the French to evacuate the entire border region, leaving behind a large quantity of ammunition. From their liberated zone in the northern border area, the Viet Minh were free to make raids into the Red River Delta. The French military in Vietnam found it increasingly difficult to convince Paris and the French electorate to give them the manpower and matériel needed to defeat the Viet Minh. For the next two years, the Viet Minh, well aware of the growing disillusionment of the French people with Indochina, concentrated its efforts on wearing down the French military by attacking its weakest outposts and by maximizing the physical distance between engagements to disperse French forces. Being able to choose the time and place for such engagements gave the guerrillas a decided advantage. Meanwhile, political activity was increased until, by late 1952, more than half the villages of the Red River Delta were under Viet Minh control.

The newly appointed commander of French forces in Vietnam, General Henri Navarre, decided soon after his arrival in Vietnam that it was essential to halt a Viet Minh offensive underway in neighboring Laos. To do so, Navarre believed it was necessary for the French to capture and hold the town of Dien Bien Phu, sixteen kilometers from the Laotian border. For the Viet Minh, control of Dien Bien Phu was an important link in the supply route from China. In November 1953, the French occupied the town with paratroop battalions and began reinforcing it with units from the French military post at nearby Lai Chau.

During that same month, Ho indicated that the DRV was willing to examine French proposals for a diplomatic settlement announced the month before. In February 1954, a peace conference to settle the Korean and Indochinese conflicts was set for April in Geneva, and negotiations in Indochina were scheduled to begin on May 8. Viet Minh strategists, led by Giap, concluded that a successful attack on a French fortified camp, timed to coincide with the peace talks, would give Hanoi the necessary leverage for a successful conclusion of the negotiations.

Accordingly, the siege of Dien Bien Phu began on March 13, by which time the Viet Minh had concentrated nearly 50,000 regular troops, 55,000 support troops, and almost 100,000 transport workers in the area. Chinese aid, consisting mainly of ammunition, petroleum, and some large artillery pieces carried a distance of 350 kilometers from the Chinese border, reached 1,500 tons per month by early 1954. The French garrison of 15,000, which depended on supply by air, was cut off by March 27, when the Viet Minh artillery succeeded in making the airfield unusable. An



*United States Vice President  
Richard M. Nixon  
visiting Vietnam in 1953  
Courtesy Indochina Archives*

*Treating wounded  
French soldiers at  
Dien Bien Phu, April 1954  
Courtesy New York Times,  
Paris Collection,  
National Archives*





elaborate system of tunnels dug in the mountainsides enabled the Viet Minh to protect its artillery pieces by continually moving them to prevent discovery. Several hundred kilometers of trenches permitted the attackers to move progressively closer to the French encampment. In the final battle, human wave assaults were used to take the perimeter defenses, which yielded defensive guns that were then turned on the main encampment. The French garrison surrendered on May 7, ending the siege that had cost the lives of about 25,000 Vietnamese and more than 1,500 French troops.

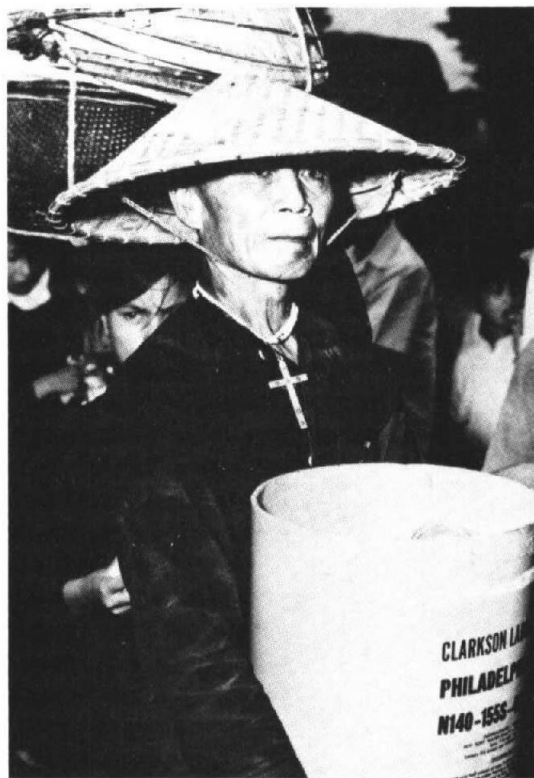
The following day, peace talks on Indochina began in Geneva, attended by the DRV, the Associated State of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, France, Britain, China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. In July a compromise agreement was reached consisting of two documents: a cease-fire and a final declaration. The cease-fire agreement, which was signed only by France and the DRV, established a provisional military demarcation line at about the 17°N parallel and required the regrouping of all French military forces south of that line and of all Viet Minh military forces north of the line. A demilitarized zone (DMZ), no more than five kilometers wide, was established on either side of the demarcation line. The cease-fire agreement also provided for a 300-day period, during which all civilians were free to move from one zone to the other, and an International Control Commission, consisting of Canada, India, and Poland, to supervise the cease-fire. The final declaration was endorsed through recorded oral assent by the DRV, France, Britain, China, and the Soviet Union. It provided for the holding of national elections in July 1956, under the supervision of the International Control Commission, and stated that the military demarcation line was provisional and “should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political territorial boundary.” Both the United States and the Associated State of Vietnam, which France had recognized on June 4 as a “fully independent and sovereign state,” refused to approve the final declaration and submitted separate declarations stating their reservations.

### **The Aftermath of Geneva**

The Geneva Agreements were viewed with doubt and dissatisfaction on all sides. Concern over possible United States intervention, should the Geneva talks fail, was probably a major factor in Hanoi's decision to accept the compromise agreement. The United States had dissociated itself from the final declaration, although it had stated that it would refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb the agreements. President Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote to the new Prime Minister of the Bao Dai government, Ngo Dinh



*Charles DeGaulle and  
Ho Chi Minh are hanged in  
effigy during the National  
Shame Day celebration in  
Saigon, July 1964, observing  
the tenth anniversary  
of the July 1954  
Geneva Agreements.  
Courtesy United States Army*



*Northern Roman Catholic  
peasant refugee, 1954  
Courtesy Indochina Archives*

Diem, in September 1954 promising United States support for a noncommunist Vietnam. Direct United States aid to South Vietnam began in January 1955, and American advisors began arriving the following month to train South Vietnamese army troops. By early 1955, Diem had consolidated his control by moving against lawless elements in the Saigon area and by suppressing the religious sects in the Mekong Delta. He also launched a “denounce the communists” campaign, in which, according to communist accounts, 25,000 communist sympathizers were arrested and more than 1,000 killed. In August 1955, Diem issued a statement formally refusing to participate in consultations with the DRV, which had been called for by the Geneva Agreement to prepare for national elections. In October, he easily defeated Bao Dai in a seriously tainted referendum and became president of the new Republic of Vietnam.

Despite the growing likelihood that national elections would not be held, the communist leadership in Hanoi decided for the time being to continue to concentrate its efforts on the political struggle. Several factors led to this decision, including the weakness of the party apparatus in the South, the need to concentrate on strengthening the war-weakened North, and pressure from the communist leadership of the Soviet Union, which, under General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, had inaugurated its policy of peaceful coexistence with the West. By 1957, however, a shift to a more militant approach to the reunification of the country was apparent. Partly in response to Diem’s anticommunist campaign, the Party stepped up terrorist activities in the South, assassinating several hundred officials of the Diem government. This led to the arrest of another 65,000 suspected communists and the killing of more than 2,000 by the Saigon government in 1957. Repression by the Diem regime led to the rise of armed rebel self-defense units in various parts of the South, with the units often operating on their own without any party direction. Observing that a potential revolutionary situation had been created by popular resentment of the Diem government and fearing that the government’s anticommunist policy would destroy or weaken party organization in the South, the VWP leadership determined that the time had come to resort to violent struggle.

## **Second Indochina War**

By 1959 some of the 90,000 Viet Minh troops that had returned to the North following the Geneva Agreements had begun filtering back into the South to take up leadership positions in the insurgency apparatus. Mass demonstrations, punctuated by an occasional

raid on an isolated post, were the major activities in the initial stage of this insurgency. Communist-led uprisings launched in 1959 in the lower Mekong Delta and Central Highlands resulted in the establishment of liberated zones, including an area of nearly fifty villages in Quang Ngai Province. In areas under communist control in 1959, the guerrillas established their own government, levied taxes, trained troops, built defense works, and provided education and medical care. In order to direct and coordinate the new policies in the South, it was necessary to revamp the party leadership apparatus and form a new united front group. Accordingly, COSVN, which had been abolished in 1954, was reestablished with General Nguyen Chi Thanh, a northerner, as chairman and Pham Hung, a southerner, as deputy chairman. On December 20, 1960, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, informally called the National Liberation Front (NLF, Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam), was founded, with representatives on its Central Committee from all social classes, political parties, women's organizations, and religious groups, including Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, the Buddhists, and the Catholics. In order to keep the NLF from being obviously linked with the VWP and the DRV, its executive leadership consisted of individuals not publicly identified with the communists, and the number of party members in leadership positions at all levels was strictly limited. Furthermore, in order not to alienate patriotic noncommunist elements, the new front was oriented more toward the defeat of the United States-backed Saigon government than toward social revolution.

### **The Fall of Ngo Dinh Diem**

In 1961 the rapid increase of insurgency in the South Vietnamese countryside led President John F. Kennedy's administration to decide to increase United States support for the Diem regime. Some \$US65 million in military equipment and \$US136 million in economic aid were delivered that year, and by December 3,200 United States military personnel were in Vietnam. The United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was formed under the command of General Paul D. Harkins in February 1962. The cornerstone of the counterinsurgency effort was the strategic hamlet program, which called for the consolidation of 14,000 villages of South Vietnam into 11,000 secure hamlets, each with its own houses, schools, wells, and watchtowers. The hamlets were intended to isolate guerrillas from the villages, their source of supplies and information, or, in Maoist terminology, to separate the fish from the sea in which they swim. The program had its problems, however, aside from the frequent attacks on the hamlets by guerrilla

units. The self-defense units for the hamlets were often poorly trained, and support from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN—see Glossary) was inadequate. Corruption, favoritism, and the resentment of a growing number of peasants who were forcibly resettled plagued the program. It was estimated that of the 8,000 hamlets established, only 1,500 were viable.

In response to increased United States involvement, all communist armed units in the South were unified into a single People's Liberation Armed Force (PLAF) in 1961. These troops expanded in number from fewer than 3,000 in 1959 to more than 15,000 by 1961, most of whom were assigned to guerrilla units. Southerners trained in the North who infiltrated back into the South composed an important element of this force. Although they accounted numerically for only about 20 percent of the PLAF, they provided a well-trained nucleus for the movement and often served as officers or political cadres. By late 1962, the PLAF had achieved the capability to attack fixed positions with battalion-sized forces. The NLF was also expanded to include 300,000 members and perhaps 1 million sympathizers by 1962. Land reform programs were begun in liberated areas, and by 1964 approximately 1.52 million hectares had been distributed to needy peasants, according to communist records. In the early stages, only communal lands, uncultivated lands, or lands of absentee landlords were distributed. Despite local pressure for more aggressive land reform, the peasantry generally approved of the program, and it was an important factor in gaining support for the liberation movement in the countryside. In the cities, the Workers' Liberation Association of Vietnam (Hoi Lao Dong Giai Phong Mien Nam), a labor organization affiliated with the NLF, was established in 1961.

Diem grew steadily more unpopular as his regime became more repressive. His brother and chief adviser, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was identified by regime opponents as the source of many of the government's repressive measures. Harassment of Buddhist groups by ARVN forces in early 1963 led to a crisis situation in Saigon. On May 8, 1963, ARVN troops fired into a crowd of demonstrators protesting the Diem government's discriminatory policies toward Buddhists, killing nine persons. Hundreds of Buddhist bonzes responded by staging peaceful protest demonstrations and by fasting. In June a bonze set himself on fire in Saigon as a protest, and, by the end of the year, six more bonzes had committed self-immolation. On August 21, special forces under the command of Ngo Dinh Nhu raided the pagodas of the major cities, killing many bonzes and arresting thousands of others. Following demonstrations at Saigon University on August 24, an estimated 4,000



*Peasants suspected of being communists, 1966  
Courtesy United States Army*

students were rounded up and jailed, and the universities of Saigon and Hue were closed. Outraged by the Diem regime's repressive policies, the Kennedy administration indicated to South Vietnamese military leaders that Washington would be willing to support a new military government. Diem and Nhu were assassinated in a military coup in early November, and General Duong Van Minh took over the government.

### **Escalation of the War**

Hanoi's response to the fall of the Diem regime was a subject of intense debate at the Ninth Plenum of the VWP Central Committee held in December 1963. It appeared that the new administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson (who assumed office following the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22) was not planning to withdraw from Vietnam but, rather, to increase its support for the new Saigon government. The VWP leadership concluded that only armed struggle would lead to success and called for an escalation of the war. The critical issues then became the reactions of the United States and the Soviet Union. Hanoi clearly hoped that the United States would opt for a compromise solution, as it had in Korea and Laos, and the party leaders believed that a quick and forceful escalation of the war would induce it to do so. Hanoi's decision to escalate the struggle was made in spite of the risk of damage to its relations with Moscow, which opposed the decision. The new policy also became an issue in the developing rift between Beijing and Moscow because China expressed its full support for the Vietnamese war of national liberation. As a result, Moscow's aid began to decrease as Beijing's grew.

Escalation of the war resulted in some immediate success for the struggle in the South. By 1964 a liberated zone had been established from the Central Highlands to the edge of the Mekong Delta, giving the communists control over more than half the total land area and about half the population of the South. PLAF forces totaled between 30 and 40 battalions, including 35,000 guerrillas and 80,000 irregulars. Moreover, with the completion of the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail (see Glossary) through Laos, the number of PAVN troops infiltrated into the South began to increase. ARVN control was limited mainly to the cities and surrounding areas, and in 1964 and 1965 Saigon governments fell repeatedly in a series of military and civilian coups.

The Johnson administration remained hesitant to raise the American commitment to Vietnam. However, in August 1964, following the reputed shelling of United States warships in the Gulf of Tonkin off the North Vietnamese coast, Johnson approved air

THE PEOPLE OF TAY-NINH ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO THE  
COMRADES OF THE U.S. 25<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION



*Citizens of Tay Ninh welcome the United States Army's  
25th Infantry Division, August 1966.  
Courtesy United States Army*

strikes against North Vietnamese naval bases. At President Johnson's urgent request, the United States Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave the president the power "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." This tougher United States stance was matched in Moscow in October when Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksey Kosygin took over control of the government following the fall from power of Nikita Khrushchev. The new Soviet government pledged increased military support for Hanoi, and the NLF set up a permanent mission in Moscow.

United States support for South Vietnam, which had begun as an effort to defend Southeast Asia from the communist threat, developed into a matter of preserving United States prestige. The Johnson administration, nevertheless, was reluctant to commit combat troops to Vietnam, although the number of United States military advisers including their support and defense units had reached 16,000 by July 1964. Instead, in February 1965 the United States began a program of air strikes known as Operation Rolling Thunder against military targets in North Vietnam. Despite the bombing of the North, ARVN losses grew steadily, and the political situation in Saigon became precarious as one unstable government succeeded another. General William C. Westmoreland, commander



of MACV from June 1964 to March 1968, urged the use of United States combat troops to stop the communist advance, which he predicted could take over the country within a year. The first two battalions of United States Marines (3,500 men) arrived in Vietnam in March 1965 to protect the United States airbase at Da Nang. The following month, Westmoreland convinced the administration to commit sufficient combat troops to secure base areas and mount a series of search and destroy missions (see Glossary). By late 1965, the United States expeditionary force in South Vietnam numbered 180,000, and the military situation had stabilized somewhat. Infiltration from the north, however, had also increased, although still chiefly by southerners who had gone north in 1954 and received military training. PLAF strength was estimated to be about 220,000, divided almost equally between guerrillas and main force troops, the latter including units of PAVN regulars totaling about 13,000 troops.

The United States decision to escalate the war was a surprise and a blow to party strategists in Hanoi. At the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee in December 1965, the decision was made to continue the struggle for liberation of the South despite the escalated American commitment. The party leadership concluded that a period of protracted struggle lay ahead in which it would be necessary to exert constant military pressure on the Saigon government and its ally in order to make the war sufficiently unpopular in Washington. Efforts were to be concentrated on the ARVN troops, which had suffered 113,000 desertions in 1965 and were thought to be on the verge of disintegration. In early 1965, Hanoi had been encouraged by Moscow's decision to increase its economic and military assistance substantially. The resulting several hundred million dollars in Soviet aid, including surface-to-air missiles, had probably been tied to a promise by Hanoi to attend an international conference on Indochina that had been proposed by Soviet premier Kosygin in February. As preconditions for these negotiations, Hanoi and Washington, however, had each presented demands that were unacceptable to the other side. The DRV had called for an immediate and unconditional halt to the bombing of the north, and the United States had demanded the removal of PAVN troops from the South. Although both Hanoi and Washington had been interested in a negotiated settlement, each had preferred to postpone negotiations until it had achieved a position of strength on the battlefield.

By mid-1966 United States forces, now numbering 350,000, had gained the initiative in several key areas, pushing the communists out of the heavily populated zones of the south into the more

remote mountainous regions and into areas along the Cambodian border. Revolutionary forces in the South, under the command of General Nguyen Chi Thanh, responded by launching an aggressive campaign of harassment operations and full-scale attacks by regiment-sized units. This approach proved costly, however, in terms of manpower and resources, and by late 1966 about 5,000 troops, including main force PAVN units, were being infiltrated from the North each month to help implement this strategy. At the same time, North Vietnam placed its economy on a war footing, temporarily shelving non-war-related construction efforts. As a consequence of the heavy United States bombing of the North, industries were dismantled and moved to remote areas. Young men were conscripted into the army and their places in fields and factories were filled by women, who also served in home defense and anti-aircraft units. Such measures were very effective in countering the impact of the bombing on the North's war effort. The Johnson administration, however, showed no sign of willingness to change its bombing strategy or to lessen its war effort (see fig. 8; fig. 9).

During this difficult period, the communists returned to protracted guerrilla warfare and political struggle. The party leadership called for increased efforts to infiltrate moderate political parties and religious organizations. The underground communist leadership in Saigon was instructed to prepare for a general uprising by recruiting youths into guerrilla units and training women to agitate against the city's poor living conditions and the injustices of the Saigon government. Total victory, according to the party leadership, would probably occur when military victories in rural areas were combined with general uprisings in the cities.

In mid-1967, with United States troop levels close to the half million mark, Westmoreland requested 80,000 additional troops for immediate needs and indicated that further requests were being contemplated. United States forces in Tay Ninh, Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai, and Dinh Tuong provinces had initiated major offensives in late 1966 and in early 1967, and more troops were needed to support these and other planned operations. As a result of these deployments, United States forces were scattered from the DMZ to the Mekong Delta by mid-1967. Opposition to the war, meanwhile, was mounting in the United States; and among the Vietnamese facing one another in the South, the rising cost of men and resources was beginning to take its toll on both sides. The level of PLAF volunteers declined to less than 50 percent in 1967 and desertions rose, resulting in an even greater increase in northern troop participation. Morale declined among communist sympathizers and Saigon



Figure 8. North Vietnam's Administrative Divisions, 1966