

The Confucianist religious philosophy, which set forth a code of moral conduct for righteous rulers and their dutiful subjects, was especially popular with the Vietnamese nobles.

Between 939 and 1427, there was a central kingship in Vietnam, but wealthy, aristocratic families battled for power. The Ngo dynasty was replaced by other ruling families, and the Ly and Tran dynasties both had 200-year reigns over Vietnam. Successful dynasties had a three-fold task: to maintain their authority against internal competitors, to protect the country against Chinese invasion, and to provide land for Vietnam's expanding population. The Tran enlarged the system of dikes on the Red River and brought extensive areas of new land into cultivation.

Despite their closeness to the sea and their reputation for being the best sailors in East Asia, the Vietnamese remained tied to their land and rice growing and gave only secondary importance to maritime trade. However, the country was heavily dependent on the fishermen who worked the coastal waters and provided a vital food staple for Vietnam's rice-based diet. Fearing the sudden storms that

In 1284 and 1287, the Mongol ruler Kublai Khan was defeated in his attempts to reestablish Chinese rule over Vietnam.



often swept in over the South China Sea, the fishermen painted the eyes or heads of dragons on their boats to frighten the evil water spirits who were believed to stir up the sea.

The Chinese never gave up their hopes of reconquering Vietnam. In 1284 and 1287, the Kublai Khan, the Mongol ruler of China, sent huge armies to conquer Vietnam. Both times, the Mongol armies were defeated. Later, however, Vietnam suffered a series of defeats at the hands of neighboring kingdoms to the south and west and, in 1407, the Chinese regained control of the country. A resistance movement founded by a landowner named Le Loi fought back against the invaders and drove them out of the capital, Hanoi. In 1427, the victorious Le Loi proclaimed himself emperor of Vietnam, thus establishing the Le dynasty.

An Expanding Kingdom

From the time of their arrival in the Red River region, the Vietnamese had been partially shielded from other kingdoms on the Indochinese peninsula by the western mountain ranges. Under the Le dynasty, Vietnam began to push southward. In the past, the Vietnamese had fought frequent wars with the Chams, whose kingdom of Champa included most of what is now the central part of Vietnam. Like the Khmers, who occupied the southern part of the Indochinese peninsula, the Chams practiced the Hindu religion and were heavily influenced by the Indian civilization. A seafaring people, the Chams had sailed north on several occasions and defeated Vietnamese armies, once burning Hanoi.

During the 1400s, the Vietnamese defeated the Chams and established Vietnamese settlements and military colonies throughout Champa. The conquest of the southern territories opened up new landholdings for the Vietnamese peasantry, and the kingdom's wealth and military power were greatly increased. The Le rulers introduced humane legal codes that gave property ownership rights

to women, who in Vietnamese society had a much lower social position than men. The ruling dynasty also carried out land reforms that aided the peasants.

By this time, Confucianism had almost completely replaced Buddhism as the dominant religion in Vietnam. Confucianist teachings emphasized the importance of knowledge and learning, and Vietnamese provinces were administered by royal officials known as mandarins, who were well-schooled in Confucianist teachings. Young men studied for examinations in Confucianist philosophy that determined whether they were fit to become mandarins.

Although most new developments in the arts occurred at the royal court and in the larger cities, the village remained the backbone of Vietnamese society. Each village elected its own officials, who were responsible for maintaining order, trying court cases, and making sure that taxes were collected. In the delta regions, villagers spent much of the year repairing dikes, digging canals to divert floodwaters, and working on other public projects. Villages were located beside the dike embankments and were connected to each other by paths that ran along the tops of the walls. Village families were aligned in large clans, whose members met to practice sacred rituals such as the honoring of the clan's ancestors.

Vietnam had only short periods of domestic peace during the reign of the Le dynasty, and the country was racked by constant fighting between competing aristocratic families. Although the Le continued to hold the title of emperor until near the end of the 18th century, they had lost almost all control of the government by 1500.

In the mid-1500s, Vietnam was divided between two powerful families, the Mac and the Trinh. After more than 60 years of warfare, the Trinh defeated their rivals and reunited their divided land. But in the early 1600s, Vietnam was split apart once more by the struggle between the Trinh, who ruled from Hanoi in the north, and the Nguyen family, who controlled the southern part of the kingdom.

Both families claimed to support the Le emperors, and the Trinh launched many campaigns against the South. However, the Nguyen built two strong walls across the northern border of their land and repulsed every Trinh attack. The Nguyen were given military assistance by the Dutch, who in return were granted the right to establish trading centers in the South.

In 1672, the Trinh and the Nguyen families signed a truce and divided Vietnam near the present-day city of Qang Tri. During the following century of peace, the Nguyen attacked the Khmer kingdom of Cambodia and conquered the rest of the eastern coast of the Indochinese peninsula, including the Mekong Delta. By the mid-18th century, the Vietnamese occupied most of the territory that comprise present-day Vietnam.

Beginning in the 16th century, Europeans began to play an increasingly important role in East Asian affairs. In 1535, the Portuguese established a trading post in Vietnam. They were followed by the Dutch, British, and French, who battled with each other for control of the rich Asian trade in silk, tea, ivory, and spices. The Europeans were unable to dominate Vietnam as they did other parts of Southeast Asia, because both the northern and southern areas of Vietnam had strong governments and fought off the Europeans' attempts to build colonial bases in Indochina.

The Vietnamese nations remained feudal societies ruled by aristocratic landowners who severely exploited the peasantry. Famines, marauding bandits, and greedy tax collectors added to the troubles of the peasants, who grew increasingly restless about their wretched living conditions. Calling out for sweeping social reforms that would benefit the poor, the peasants engaged in widespread rebellions that undermined the authority of the Nguyen and Trinh. Having served in the armies that had defended Vietnam against foreign invaders, the peasants felt a strong sense of national pride and were committed to saving the country from corrupt administrators.

In 1772, three brothers (who were named for their home, the central Vietnamese village of Tay Son) organized a peasant rebellion that quickly grew into a powerful national movement. The rebels overthrew the Nguyen in 1777 and then marched north and defeated the Trinh after a nine-year struggle. The youngest Tay Son brother declared himself emperor.

The Tay Son ruled over a united Vietnam for only a short period. Nguyen Anh, a member of the defeated Nguyen family, won control of the South with the help of French mercenaries. Popular support for the Tay Son died when the brothers failed to take steps to improve social conditions for the common people. By 1802, Nguyen Anh had defeated the Tay Son and crowned himself emperor of Vietnam under the name Gia Long.

French Control

Under Gia Long and succeeding emperors of the Nguyen dynasty, Vietnam enjoyed a period of national unity. Much of the country's network of canals and dikes had fallen into disrepair during the previous years of tumult, and Gia Long established a huge national public works program to restore crumbling structures and build new bridges and castles. To help bind the nation together, the Nguyen constructed a wide road from Hanoi to Saigon. They also formed a strong war fleet to protect Vietnam's coastline.

The Nguyen left most of the responsibilities of administering Vietnam's provinces to local governors and thus had little contact with the common people. Gradually, some of the provincial lords began to challenge the authority of the ruling dynasty. The Nguyen emperors crushed most of the revolts, but their increasing isolation from their subjects left the country vulnerable to foreign intrusions.

The assault on Vietnam's independence was not long in coming. By the early 1800s, the French had decided to establish a strong foothold in Indochina. French merchants and Catholic missionaries,

who had begun setting up trading posts and churches in Vietnam in the 1600s, helped spread French influence in the country. Tens of thousands of Vietnam's peasants were converted to Christianity by Catholic priests, who encouraged the French government to set up a colonial state in Vietnam.

The Nguyen emperors became increasingly suspicious about the intentions of the Catholic missionaries. After large numbers of Vietnamese Christians were implicated in plots to overthrow the government, the emperors began a large-scale persecution of the missionaries. In the 1830s, several missionaries were executed and many more expelled from the country. Vietnam's distrust of France and other Western nations was further increased in the 1840s, after the British attacked Chinese ports and forced China to make humiliating trade concessions.

The Vietnamese government rejected French attempts to negotiate commercial treaties and continued to persecute Catholic missionaries. In 1847, the French navy retaliated by firing upon the port of Da Nang, killing hundreds of Vietnamese. The French followed up their initial attack by sending a large expeditionary force to southern Vietnam in 1858.

The French invasion coincided with peasant revolts in northern Vietnam. Tu Duc, the reigning emperor, suppressed the rebellions, but his troops were unable to stop the French. By 1867, the emperor had been forced to allow French control over the southernmost quarter of Vietnam, which the French called Cochin China. During this period, the French also seized control of Cambodia.

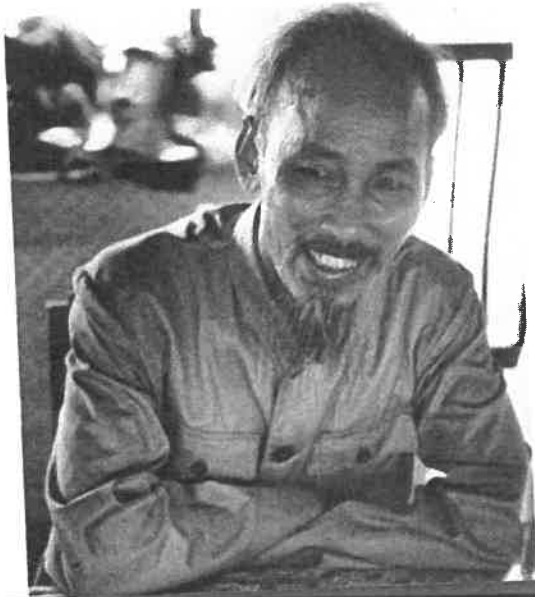
France continued its battle for an empire in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese independence ended in 1883, when a French army forced the imperial court to grant the French the right to govern the rest of the country. Although the Vietnamese emperor was allowed to hold on to his throne, his role became mainly ceremonial. The French divided Vietnam into three colonial states: Cochin China

(southern Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam), and Tonkin (northern Vietnam). France governed these areas as separate parts of French Indochina, which also included Cambodia and Laos.

During the following six decades, the French built up a strong colonial system in Indochina. The French colonial administration claimed that it was providing the Vietnamese with an efficient government, improved medical, educational, and transportation systems, and a more prosperous economy. In reality, the French often treated the Vietnamese brutally and were mainly interested in exploiting Indochina's agriculture and minerals. To help French settlers build large plantations, the colonial governors seized land from the peasants and forced them to become landless laborers. The French constructed dams, canals, and railroads throughout the country, but these public works programs were often extremely wasteful and were a huge burden on the overtaxed Vietnamese people.

French rule left a deep mark on the Vietnamese, introducing them to Western learning and customs and expanding their global outlook. Some Vietnamese scholars attended universities in France

In the 1920s, Ho Chi Minh began to establish himself as the leader of Vietnam's Communist party.



and helped to further scientific research in their own country. However, the broadening of Vietnam's cultural base was acquired at the expense of traditional Vietnamese learning, which was scorned by the French and ignored in public schools.

Vietnamese resentment of French rule spurred the growth of a vigorous liberation movement in the early 20th century. The nationalist leader Phan Boi Chau was especially active in organizing protests against the colonial administration. The French retaliated with beatings, arrests, and sometimes even executions of Vietnamese patriots. The liberation movement was checked for the moment, but the Vietnamese desire for independence could not be stifled forever.

The Struggle for Independence

In 1939, World War II broke out in Europe. Early in the war, Germany invaded France and forced it to surrender. The conflict became a struggle between the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allies (Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union). While the Germans fought to dominate Europe, their ally Japan was trying to create an empire in eastern Asia. After invading China in the early 1930s, Japan pushed southward. By the early 1940s, the Japanese troops occupied all of Southeast Asia.

Japan allowed French colonial officials to govern Indochina but forced them to follow the orders of the Japanese occupation forces. As France's hold over Indochina began to slip, Vietnamese nationalist groups gained control over areas of the Vietnamese countryside. The Indochinese Communist party, a group that supported radical social reforms such as seizing land from wealthy landlords and giving it to peasants, emerged as the most powerful of the resistance groups. In 1941, the Communists' leader, Ho Chi Minh, organized a coalition of liberation groups known as the Vietminh. During World War II, the Vietminh gave the Allies information about Japanese troop movements.

Although little fighting occurred in Vietnam during World War II, the Vietnamese suffered terribly from famine. As many as 2 million people may have starved to death in northern Vietnam during the last year of the war. By early 1945, the tide of the war had turned against Japan. After the Allies freed France from German control, the Japanese decided that French colonial administrators in Indochina could no longer be trusted. In March 1945, the Japanese arrested all French officials in Vietnam and set up a new government headed by the Vietnamese emperor Bao Dai. The Japanese declared that Vietnam was an independent nation, but it was still supervised by Japan's armies.

In August 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allies and gave up control over Southeast Asia. Backed by popular support, the Vietminh quickly assumed power and forced Bao Dai to step down as ruler. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the new government, announced the formation of a united Vietnam under the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). The seat of government was Hanoi.

The Vietnamese still had a long battle ahead for their independence. Refusing to give up control over their former Indochinese colony, the French struck back. In late 1945, their troops regained control of Cochin China, the southern part of Vietnam. Hoping to avoid a war with the French, Ho Chi Minh agreed to allow French troops to establish bases in northern Vietnam in return for French recognition of the DRV. But each side accused the other of violating treaty obligations, and in December 1946, the French-Indochina War broke out between the Vietminh and the French.

For more than 7 years, French colonial troops battled Vietminh guerrilla fighters. The heavily armed French troops controlled all the major cities, but they were unable to crush the mobile, elusive Vietminh. Based in the rural areas of northern Vietnam, the Vietminh maintained good relations with the peasants and enlisted them



French troops, weary of trying to subdue the communist Vietminh, withdrew from Vietnam in 1954 after their defeat at Dien Bien Phu.

into their nationalist revolution. In 1949, the French set up a Vietnamese government headed by Emperor Bao Dai to oppose the Vietminh, but it attracted little support from the people. The Vietminh, on the other hand, continued to increase their strength with military assistance from the Soviet Union and the newly established communist Chinese republic.

In the early 1950s, the French position in Vietnam began to crumble. On May 7, 1954, a French army stationed at the fortress of Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam was forced to surrender to the Vietminh. Two months later, representatives of the Vietminh, the Bao Dai government, France, Cambodia, Laos, China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and other nations met in Geneva, Switzerland, to negotiate an end to the French-Indochina War and French rule in Southeast Asia.

The agreement signed at the Geneva Conference stated that Vietnam would temporarily be divided into two parts until elections

could be held to form a unified government. A communist government headed by Ho Chi Minh would rule North Vietnam, and Emperor Bao Dai's government would rule South Vietnam. The border between the two states was close to the line that had divided the Trinh and Nguyen kingdoms in the 17th and 18th centuries. Hanoi was the capital of the North, and Saigon was the capital of the South.

A Nation Divided

The two Vietnamese governments quickly developed a bitter enmity toward each other, and any chance for forming a united country disappeared. In the North, the Communists eliminated all political opponents and set about building a highly structured socialist nation with a state-controlled economy. In the South, political power was divided among many groups, including some that supported a communist government for all of Vietnam. However, the deeply anti-communist prime minister of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, rallied the forces in the South that opposed cooperating with the Hanoi regime. His faction soon emerged as the strongest group in Saigon.

In 1955, Diem deposed Bao Dai, seized control of the South Vietnamese government, and had himself appointed president. Diem canceled plans for an election to choose a united national government, stating that the Hanoi regime would never allow free elections in the North. Meanwhile, Diem suppressed all political opposition in the South and unleashed the army against the Communist groups, which had bases in the rural areas. With the aid of the North Vietnamese, the southern Communist groups formed a resistance movement known as the National Liberation Front (NLF) and drove Diem's troops from the countryside.

Diem's corrupt, authoritarian rule was strongly criticized by the South Vietnamese, and he was able to remain in power only because he received massive military and economic assistance from the

United States. The American government was determined to stop the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia and feared that South Vietnam would fall to the NLF if Diem were forced out of office.

By 1963, the popular feelings against Diem's repressive policies had grown too strong, and the United States withdrew its support for the president. A group of military officers overthrew and killed Diem. The new government was fully committed to the war against the communist rebels, whom it called the Viet Cong, and the Americans promised the Saigon government greater military support.

The fighting in South Vietnam developed into a major war. In August 1964, American and North Vietnamese ships had two hostile engagements in the Gulf of Tonkin. The United States declared that it had been attacked, launched immediate bombing strikes against North Vietnam, and began sending thousands of troops to South Vietnam to back up the Saigon government. With the assistance of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and other allies, the South Vietnamese government renewed its attempt to expel the NLF from its strongholds in the countryside.

The U.S. and South Vietnamese armies tried to overwhelm the NLF guerrillas and their North Vietnamese allies with a punishing display of firepower. American bombers raided Hanoi and other cities in the North and destroyed dams, bridges, and railroads. South Vietnamese forests were sprayed with herbicides such as Agent Orange to strip them of their foliage so that American troops could locate guerrilla outposts. The NLF suffered heavy casualties, but its fighting spirit remained high. The guerrillas kept themselves supplied with captured weapons and with arms from North Vietnam that were brought down the "Ho Chi Minh trail," a network of jungle paths running through Laos and Cambodia.

The South Vietnamese government, which by 1965 was led by the military regime of President Nguyen Van Thieu, did not protect

its people from the war's destruction. The countryside was torn up by the bombings and the battles between guerrilla bands and government troops. Thousands of villagers died in the crossfire, and millions fled from their homes and sought shelter in Saigon and other cities. Even there, the helpless population was battered by guerrilla rocket attacks.

Throughout the conflict, the communist guerrillas retained a clear, single-minded goal: the overthrow of the Saigon government and its replacement with a regime that could be united with the Hanoi government. The Communists called the conflict a war of national liberation. Under the leadership of the brilliant North Vietnamese defense minister, Vo Nguyen Giap, the NLF fought on doggedly and launched a major assault on South Vietnamese cities and military outposts in January 1968. Known as the Tet Offensive because the fighting began during the Vietnamese New Year holiday called Tet, the NLF attack was repulsed with heavy losses for both sides.

Although defeated, the NLF offensive proved to be a crippling blow to the American war effort in Vietnam. With casualties mounting and the financial cost of the war reaching frightening levels, the American public began to demand an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam conflict. After reaching a peak of more than a half million men in 1968, American military strength began to decline. The bombing of North Vietnam was stopped while the U.S. government tried to negotiate an end to the war. Meanwhile, the American military prepared the Saigon government's army for the responsibility of defending South Vietnam by itself.

In June 1969, representatives from the United States and North Vietnam began holding peace negotiations in Paris. No agreement was reached at the first conferences. The NLF expanded its bases in the South, and the United States resumed its bombing of North Vietnam and helped South Vietnamese troops strike at NLF outposts

in Cambodia and Laos. During 1972, NLF units captured a number of important areas in the South and threatened Saigon, but then retreated before a South Vietnamese counterattack. U.S. bombing attacks and mine-laying operations turned North Vietnam's cities into rubble and sealed off its ports.

Finally, in January 1973, the U.S. and North Vietnamese representatives at the Paris peace negotiations signed a treaty that was intended to bring about the reunification of Vietnam. The terms called for the withdrawal of all remaining U.S. troops from Vietnam, a cease-fire between NLF and South Vietnamese forces, and elections in South Vietnam that would include candidates from all political parties, including the communists. The treaty left the old border between the North and South intact until elections supervised by international mediators could decide the political future of a unified Vietnam.

The treaty did not end the fighting in Vietnam. At first, the Thieu government in Saigon was able to push back the NLF. By late 1974, however, the guerrillas had begun to rout the South Vietnamese troops. In April 1975, Saigon fell to NLF troops and the South Vietnamese army surrendered. Saigon's name was changed to Ho

Qui Nhon was one of countless South Vietnamese villages where U.S. Marines battled communist guerrillas. This boy was captured as a spy.



Chi Minh City, in honor of the former president of North Vietnam, who had died in 1969. A new government took power that included only Communist party officials. On July 2, 1976, a newly elected national assembly announced that the new name of the country was the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Once more, Vietnam was a united country.

After the War

The war took an appalling toll on the Vietnamese people and their land. Almost 2 million Vietnamese were killed in the fighting or died from disease and starvation caused by the war's destruction. Many millions more were wounded, and nearly one-fifth of the population fled the country. The industries and agriculture of both northern and southern Vietnam had been severely damaged. Farmers plowed their fields knowing that at any moment they might set off an undetonated bomb hidden in the soil.

Rebuilding and reuniting the war-ravaged nation was a major problem for the new Vietnamese government. Supporters of the former South Vietnamese government were sent to "reeducation camps," where they were subjected to brutal punishments while being forced to renounce their old loyalties. Party officials indoctrinated the southern population with heavy doses of communist propaganda in order to change traditional beliefs and customs. However, the southerners were accustomed to a system of private ownership of property and had difficulty accepting the state-controlled economic system that was introduced by government officials from the North.

The new administration placed severe restrictions on private enterprise and exercised tight control over all industries, which worsened the country's already desperate economic conditions. About 700,000 residents of Ho Chi Minh City were forced to move to lightly populated areas of the country and become agricultural

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laborers in the government's special "economic zones." The former city dwellers endured constant hardships because of the shortage of food and housing in the war-ravaged economic zones.

Even after the fighting in Vietnam ended, thousands of people continued to swell the ranks of those fleeing to refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, and other nations in Southeast Asia. Many of these refugees were members of Vietnam's Chinese population or of other ethnic minorities that were harshly treated by the new communist regime. Thousands of them crowded into tiny boats and attempted to escape by sea. Many of these so-called "boat people" drowned or starved to death before reaching their destination, and others were robbed of all their belongings by pirates. Although some refugees were allowed to emigrate to the United States, Canada, and other countries, many more remained homeless.

In the late 1970s, the growing tensions between Vietnam and its neighbors flared into open warfare. In 1978, the Vietnamese became embroiled in a dispute with the brutal regime of the Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, which was allied with China. Vietnam, which continued to be heavily supported by the Soviet Union, invaded Cambodia in 1978, quickly occupied most of the country, and set up a government under the Cambodian leader Heng Samrin. Angered by Vietnam's treatment of its Chinese population and its invasion of Cambodia, China attacked Vietnam in early 1979. The two countries fought a brief border war before tensions eased.

Because of the controversy surrounding Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, the Hanoi government's attempts to improve its international relations met with little success in the early 1980s. The United States and some other countries imposed trade sanctions on Vietnam after the invasion of Cambodia. The high cost of maintaining troops in Cambodia hindered economic growth, diverting the country's resources into military expenditures. Vietnam's standard of living during this period remained among the lowest in the world.



Vietnam's occupation of neighboring Cambodia turned thousands of Cambodians into refugees. These people are fleeing to Thailand.

But in 1986, three members of the country's former hard-line regime resigned, paving the way for a more moderate administration. The new leaders began to loosen government control over private enterprise. Also in the 1980s, the United States and Vietnam developed an active relationship covering a range of humanitarian issues, particularly the U.S. desire to account for American military people missing since the war. The countries agreed to handle these issues as a separate, humanitarian agenda, without reference to political differences.

This relationship was strengthened in 1992 when sweeping changes to Vietnam's constitution were approved. The new constitution marked the beginning of a major restructuring of the government. However, it also reaffirmed the continued role of the Communist party as the leading force in the state.

In 1993, as progress was made in recovering the remains of American servicemen, the United States dropped its objection to lending to Vietnam. In 1994, the U.S. trade embargo was lifted; in 1995, the two countries announced the restoration of diplomatic relations; and in 1997, the first U.S. ambassador since the Vietnam War arrived in Hanoi.

Today, Vietnam is enjoying remarkable industrial and economic growth, largely because of a surge in foreign investment and the loosening of government restrictions on free trade within the country. A number of economic problems persist. For example, the unemployment rate remains high, and the financial and legal structures required to maintain economic growth are not yet strong. But the current situation has stirred hopes that a stormy and divisive era in Vietnamese history has finally ended.

