

# History

## ORIGINS

According to Vietnamese legends, the first Vietnamese descended from the dragon lord Lạc Long Quân and the heavenly spirit Âu Cơ. Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ had 100 sons and the eldest one became the first in the lines of early Vietnamese kings, collectively known as Hùng Vương (as Khun - "leader" in ancient Mon-Khmer language). Under the Hùng kings, the civilization that would later become Viet Nam was called Van Lang. The people of Van Lang were known as the Lạc Viet people. By the 3rd century BC, another Viet group, the Âu Viet, emigrated from present southern China to the Red River delta and mixed with the indigenous Van Lang population. In 258 BC, a new kingdom called Âu Lạc (from the union of the Âu Viet and the Lạc Viet) was formed by Thục Phán in North Vietnam. Thục Phán proclaimed himself king An Dương Vương. After a long war with the Chinese Qin dynasty, An Dương Vương was finally defeated by a Qin general named Triệu Đà (Zhao Tuo) in 208 BC. Triệu Đà proclaimed himself king when the Qin empire fell to the Han. He combined Âu Lạc with territories in southern China and named his kingdom Nam Viet. Nam means south, and Viet is a derivation of Yue, the Chinese name for the Guangdong, Guangxi and Vietnam regions.

The Triệu dynasty is a controversial era among Vietnamese. Some consider it a Chinese domination, because Triệu Đà was a Qin general who defeated An Dương Vương to establish his rule. Yet others consider it an era of independence, because Triệu Đà's family ruled Nam Viet in defiance of the Han dynasty until 111 BC, when the Han troops invaded the country and incorporated it into the Han empire as Giao Chi prefecture. Nam Viet's Triệu dynasty had five kings:

Despite a program of Sinicization, the Viets refused assimilation and continuously rebelled. In 40 AD, allegedly after her husband had been executed by the Chinese, a Vietnamese woman named Trưng Trắc and her sister Trưng Nhị led an uprising against the Hans. They were able to drive off the Chinese and set capital at Mê Linh (Phú Thọ province). In 41 AD, Emperor Guangwu of Han sent his general Mã Viện (Ma Yuan) and troops to crush the Trưng rebellion. After two years of fighting, the Trưng sisters were defeated and committed suicide by drowning themselves in the Hát River. Known collectively in Vietnamese folklore as Hai Bà Trưng (Trung Sisters), the Trưng sisters are admired as the first Vietnamese patriots. They are often depicted as riding war elephants to battle.

Later on, another Vietnamese woman, Triệu Trinh, and her brother, Triệu Quốc Đạt, also rebelled against Eastern Wu Chinese rule. Commonly known as Bà Triệu, Triệu Trinh is also depicted as riding an elephant to battle with her brother riding a horse besides. The Trưng sisters' and Triệu Trinh's stories may be hints that early Vietnamese civilizations were largely matriarchal, where it was easy for women to assume the leading position and mobilize people.

Much of northern Vietnam (from the Red River delta down to about the region of modern Thanh Hóa province) was incorporated into the Chinese province of Jiaozhi, or Giao Chi, through much of the Han dynasty and the period of the Three Kingdoms. Jiaozhi (with its capital settled around in modern Bắc Ninh province) became a flourishing port receiving goods from the southern seas.

## EARLY INDEPENDENCE

The Vietnamese threw off Chinese domination in 939 AD. At the battle on the Bạch Đằng River in North Vietnam, Ngô Quyền defeated the Southern Han's navy and established the Ngô dynasty.

After Ngô Quyền's death, a power struggle ensued between his family members and generals, and the kingdom fell into disorder. A civil war broke out among the Twelve Warlords (12 Su quân) and lasted for two decades. One of the warlords, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, defeated the others and set up the Đinh dynasty. He is referred to as Đinh Tiên Hoàng (Đinh the Previous Emperor), because the Đinh dynasty only survived for two rulers.

When Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and his eldest son, Lien, were assassinated by an eunuch, the 6-year-old Đinh Toàn assumed the throne. Taking advantage of the situation, Chinese Song troops amassed at the border, preparing to invade. The court's top general Lê Hoàn, who was having an affair with Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's widow Dương Vân Nga, became the de facto head of the force to fight off the Chinese. He, subsequently, took the throne and proceeded to defeat the Song troops at Chi Lăng (now Lạng Sơn province) and Tây Kết. His dynasty is later regarded as the Tiền Lê (Anterior Lê).

## DYNASTIC PERIOD

When the Lê emperor Lê Long Đĩnh died in his twenties, a court general named Lý Công Uan took the chance to take over the throne and founded the Lý dynasty. This event is regarded as the beginning of a golden era in Vietnamese history, with great dynasties following one another. Lý Công Uan (commonly called Lý Thái Tổ - Lý the Founding Emperor) changed the country's name to Đại Việt, established the capital in present-day Hanoi and called it Thăng Long (Ascending Dragon) under the pretext of seeing a dragon when he was touring the area.

During the late Lý era, a court official named Trần Thủ Độ became powerful. He forced the emperor Lý Huệ Tông to become a Buddhist monk and set Lý Chiêu Hoàng, Huệ Tông's young daughter, to become the empress. Trần Thủ Độ then arranged the marriage of Chiêu Hoàng to his nephew Trần Cảnh and the transfer of the throne between the two. Thus ended the Lý dynasty and started the Trần dynasty.

During the Trần dynasty, Đại Việt was under attacks three times by the Mongols, who had occupied China and were ruling as the Yuan dynasty. It was during this period that Vietnamese nationalism began to form, as the Trần used the so-called "Đông A spirit" to mobilize people to fight against Mongol invaders. According to Vietnamese pronunciation of Chinese characters, the word "Trần" consists of the two words "Đông" and "A". Using this propaganda combined with guerilla warfare tactics, Trần troops stopped all three Yuan invasions. The Yuan-Trần war reached its climax when Yuan navy was decimated at the battle of Bạch Đằng river. Trần troops, with the noble lord Trần Hưng Đạo as commander-in-chief, used the exact same tactics as Ngô Quyền had used centuries before, at the exact same site, to defeat northern invaders. Trần Hưng Đạo, whose real name was Trần Quốc Tuấn, is regarded as the national hero and a major figure in Vietnamese history's lineup of great military strategists.

It was also during this period that the Trần kings waged many wars against the southern kingdom of Chiêm Thành (Champa), continuing the Viets' long history of southern expansion (known as Nam Tiến) that had begun shortly after gaining independence from China. However, they encountered strong resistance from the Chams, and Champa troops led by their king Chế Bông Nga (Binasuar) even sacked Đại Việt's capital Thăng Long in 1372 and again in 1377.

The Trần dynasty was in turn overthrown by one of its own court officials, Hồ Quý Ly. Hồ Quý Ly also forced the last Trần emperor to resign to a pagoda and assumed the throne in 1400. He changed the country name to Đại Ngu and moved the capital to Tây Đô (Western Capital, now Thanh Hóa). Thăng Long was renamed Đông Đô (Eastern Capital). Although widely blamed as the person who disrupted the Trần dynasty and let the country fall under the rule of the Chinese Ming dynasty, in 1407, Ming troops sacked Tây Đô and captured Hồ Quý Ly and Hồ Hán Thương. The Hồ dynasty came to an end after mere 7 years.

Lê Lợi waged a guerilla war against the Ming for over a decade from the forest of Lam Sơn (Thanh Hóa province). After many defeats, he finally gathered momentum and was able to launch a siege at Đông Quan (now Hanoi), the site of the Ming administration. The Ming emperor sent a reinforcement force to rescue, but Lê Lợi staged an ambush and killed the general, Liu Shan. Ming's troops at Đông Quan surrendered. In 1428, Lê Lợi ascended to the throne and the Hậu Lê dynasty (Posterior Lê) began.

In 1471, Lê troops led by the great emperor Lê Thánh Tông invaded Champa, captured its capital Vijaya and killed or enslaved the city's residents. This event effectively ended the long conflict between the Vietnamese and Cham kingdoms. It initiated the dispersal of the Cham people across southeast Asia.

With the kingdom of Champa mostly destroyed and the Cham people exiled or suppressed, Vietnamese colonization of what is now central Vietnam proceeded without substantial resistance. However, despite becoming greatly outnumbered by Kinh settlers and the integration of formerly Cham territory into the Vietnamese nation, populations of Cham nevertheless remained in Vietnam and now comprise one of the minority peoples of modern Vietnam.

The fifteenth century is a succession of civil dispute for the power. The Lê dynasty was overthrown by a general named Mạc Đăng Dung in 1527. He killed the Lê emperor and set himself as king, starting the Mạc dynasty. The civil war between Lê and Mạc dynasties largely ended in 1592, when the army of Trịnh Tùng conquered Hanoi and executed the Mạc emperor Mạc Mậu Hợp. Survivors of the Mạc royal family fled to the mountains in the province of Cao Bằng and continued to rule there until 1667 when Trịnh Tạc conquered this last bit of Mạc territory. At this time, two noble families had partitioned and ruled the country. The Nguyễn Lords ruled the South and the Trịnh Lords ruled the North.

Meanwhile, the Nguyen Lords continued the southward expansion by conquest of the various Khmer territories in the Mekong delta, and by the end of their rule had brought Vietnam's territory to almost present-day shape. Similar to the defeat of Champa, Vietnamese military victories in these territories initiated the large-scale colonization of what is now southern Vietnam by Kinh settlers in an area previously populated mainly by Khmers. Those who remained in the territories settled by the Vietnamese settlers became the Khmer Krom minority of modern Vietnam and have maintained a distinct ethnic identity, despite substantial intermarriage with Vietnamese and widespread adoption of the Vietnamese language and cultural influence.

In 1771, the Tay Son rebellion broke out in Binh Dinh province, which was under the control of the Nguyen. Leaders of this rebellion were three brothers named Nguyen but they were not related to the Nguyen lords. The three brothers were remarkably successful. By 1776, the Tay Son had occupied all of the Nguyen Lord's land and killed (almost) the entire royal family. The Tay Son army under Nguyen Hue marched north in 1786 to fight the Trinh Lord, Trinh Khai. The Trinh army refused to even fight Nguyen Hue (he had great popularity), Trinh Khai committed suicide. The Tay Son army captured the capital in less than two months.

Nguyen Anh, the last Nguyen Lord, managed to obtain some help from France and in 1800; his small army captured the Tay Son citadel Quy Nhon. One year later, he occupied Phu Xuan, the Tay Son capital. Nguyen Anh finally won the war in 1802. Nguyen Anh ascended the throne and chose the name Gia Long. Gia is for Gia Dinh, the old name of Saigon; Long is for Th ng Long, the old name of Hanoi. Hence Gia Long implies the unification of the country. The Nguyen dynasty lasted until Bao Dai's abdication in 1945.

The modern name of Vietnam is known officially came under the Emperor Gia Long's reign, but recently historians have found that this name has been existed in older books in which Vietnamese called their country name Vietnam. In 1802, he asked the Manchu Chinese emperor for permission to rename the country, from An Nam to Nam Viet. To prevent any confusion of Gia Long's kingdom with Trieu Da's ancient kingdom, the Chinese emperor reversed the order of the two words to Viet Nam.

#### COLONIZATION

Gia Long also tolerated Catholicism. However he and his successors were staunch Confucians and admirers of China, not of France. His successors, Ming Mang and Tu Duc, brutally (and foolishly) suppressed Catholicism and attempted to undo French influence. Tens of thousands of Vietnamese and foreign-born Christians were massacred during this period, an act which provoked the Catholic nations of Europe to retaliate. The reactionary adherence to Confucianism during this time also meant that the Emperors refused to allow any modernization or technological advancement. When conflict came, as a result of this isolationist policy, the Vietnamese were completely out-matched.

Under the orders of Napoleon III of France, the landing of French forces in the port of Da Nang in August 1858, heralded the beginning of the colonial occupation which was to last almost a century. France assumed sovereignty over Annam and Tonkin after the Franco-Chinese War (1884-1885). French Indochina was formed in October 1887 from Annam, Tonkin, Cochin China, and the Khmer Republic; Laos was added in 1893.

With the death of Tu Duc in 1883, a succession of Emperors were quickly elevated and just as quickly deposed. The teenage Emperor Ham Nghi left the Imperial Palace of Hue in 1885 and started the Can Vuong, or "Aid the King", movement. Ham Nghi asked the people to rally with him to resist the French. He was captured in 1888 and exiled to French Algeria. A former mandarin Phan Dinh Phung continued the Can Vuong movement until his death in 1895.

In 1940, Japan, coinciding with their ally Germany's invasion of France - invaded Indochina. Keeping the German-controlled Vichy French colonial administration in place, the Japanese ruled from behind the scenes in parallel. As far as the Vietnamese were concerned, this was a double-puppet government. The symbolic Emperor Bao Dai collaborated with the Japanese, just as he had with the French, causing no trouble and ensuring his lifestyle could continue.

Meanwhile, in 1941 Ho Chi Minh, a trained Communist revolutionary, returned to Vietnam and joined the Viet Minh, which means "Vietnamese Allied." Ho was a founding member of the French Communist Party in the 1920s in Paris. He spent many years in Moscow and participated in the International Comintern. At the direction of Moscow, he first convinced everybody of his patriotic intention and absorbed the various Vietnamese revolutionist groups into the Viet Minh. In order to win trust he de-emphasised his Communist ties by dissolving the Indochinese Communist Party, which he had created in Hong Kong in 1930.

### POST WORLD WAR II PERIOD

In 1945, the Viet Minh organized the "August Revolution" uprisings across the country. At the beginning of a new future, Emperor Bao Dai was happy to abdicate on August 25, 1945 and surrender his power to the Viet Minh, of which Ho Chi Minh was the leader. In order to gain popularity, Ho made Bao Dai "supreme advisor" to the Viet Minh-led government in Hanoi, which asserted independence on September 2. In 1946 Vietnam gained its first constitution and a new name, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

In 1948, France tried to regain control over Vietnam. The French re-installed Bao Dai as head of state of "the State of Vietnam," which comprised central and southern Vietnam. The First Indochina War lasted until 1954, with the French being defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu.

After World War II, the United States and the USSR entered into the Cold War, with both sides determined to expand their influence over the globe. The Korean War broke out between the North Koreans, supported by China and the USSR, and the Republic of Korea, supported by the US and allied nations. Initially the conflict was limited to North Korea, the Republic of Korea, and US military forces. However, when General Douglas MacArthur penetrated deep into North Korea, the Chinese flooded the country with an enormous army. The Korean War would have deep implications for the American involvement in Vietnam.

The United States became strongly opposed to Ho Chi Minh, who had now re-asserted the dominance of the Vietnamese Communist Party within the Viet Minh in 1950. In the South of the same year, the government of Bao Dai gained recognition by the United States and the United Kingdom.

The Geneva Conference of 1954 ended France's colonial presence in Vietnam and temporarily partitioned the country into 2 states at the 17th parallel (pending unification on the basis of internationally supervised free elections). The US installed Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister of South Vietnam with Bao Dai as the king of a constitutional monarchy. While Diem was trying to settle the differences between the armed groups in the South, Bao Dai was persuaded to reduce his power. Diem used a referendum in 1955 to depose the former Emperor and declare himself as President of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed in Saigon on October 22, 1955.

Also in 1954, former Vietminh forces above the 17th parallel created the Democratic Republic of Vietnam which was a Communist State under Ho Chi Minh. The government was much more stable than its Southern counterpart due to political experience and a dependable army which had weathered the First Indochina War.

South Vietnamese who opposed Diem's rule and desired the reunification of Vietnam under the Hanoi government of Ho Chi Minh organized the National Liberation Front, better known as the Viet Cong. Supported and later directed by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) in the North, they would launch guerrilla attacks in the South against Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) military targets and, later, American troops.

The Geneva Accords had promised elections to determine a national government for a unified Vietnam. However, only France and the North Vietnamese government (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) had signed the document. The United States and the Saigon government refused to abide by the agreement, fearing that Ho Chi Minh would readily win the election due to his popularity. The result was the "Second Indochina War," known as the "Vietnam War" in the West and the "American War" in Vietnam. The war reached its height in 1966, when President Lyndon Johnson ordered 500,000 American troops into South Vietnam. Fearing the Chinese would directly enter the war with a massive army, as had occurred when U.S.-led United Nations forces approached the Chinese border during the Korean War, American ground troops were forbidden to enter North Vietnam.

The massive 1968 Tet Offensive by Communist forces was a military defeat for the Viet Cong but a stunning political victory, as it led many American people to view the war as unwinnable. President Richard Nixon entered office with a pledge to end the war "with honor." He normalized US relations with China in 1972 (Sino-American relations) and entered into Détente with the USSR. With the Paris Peace Agreement of 1973, American military forces withdrew from Vietnam. Despite the peace treaty, the North continued the war, and defeated the South in April 1975. In 1976, Vietnam was officially reunited under the current Vietnamese government as The Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

### CAMBODIA AND THE SINO-VIETNAMESE WAR

In late 1978, following repeated raids by the Chinese-supported Pol Pot regime into Vietnamese territory and the massacre of ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer people in Cambodia, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and installed a pro-Vietnamese government. In early 1979 China invaded Vietnam in retaliation. The Sino-Vietnamese War was brief, but casualties were high on both sides. In late 1989 Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia.

1980s

Vietnam's third constitution, based on that of the USSR, was written in 1980.

Through the 1980s, Vietnam received nearly \$3 billion a year in economic and military aid from the Soviet Union and conducted most of its trade with the USSR and other Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) countries.

### REFORMS

In 1986 Vietnam, under a new leader Nguyen Van Linh, abandoned its attempt to maintain a purely planned economy. Many restrictions on private enterprise were lifted, and the education system was liberalized. In 1995 Vietnam joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). A stock exchange opened in 2000. The Soviet collapse also deprived Vietnam of economic assistance from its former ally, and its government soon began mending relations with the US, its former enemy. In 1994, the US effectively ended the embargo and the two countries finally established normal diplomatic & trade relations in 1995. The embargo of Vietnam began in 1964 for North Vietnam and extended to all of Vietnam in 1975. Thirty years later, its ending marked the beginning of Vietnam joining the economic and political sphere of South East Asian nations.