AREA HANDBOOK
for
NORTH VIETNAM

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Co-Authors
Harvey H. Smith
Donald W. Bernier
Frederica M. Bunge
Frances Chudwick Rintz
Rinn-Sup Shinn
Suzanne Teleki

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FOREWORD

This volume is one of a series of handbooks prepared by Foreign Area Studies (FAS) of The American University, designed to be useful to military and other personnel who need a convenient compilation of basic facts about the social, economic, political and military institutions and practices of various countries. The emphasis is on objective description of the nation's present society and the kinds of possible or probable change that might be expected in the future. The handbook seeks to present as full and as balanced an integrated exposition as limitations on space and research time permit. It was compiled from information available in openly published material. Extensive bibliographies are provided to permit recourse to other published sources for more detailed information. There has been no attempt to express any specific point of view or to make policy recommendations. The contents of the handbook represent the work of the authors and FAS and do not represent the official view of the United States Government.

An effort has been made to make the handbook as comprehensive as possible. It can be expected, however, that the material, interpretations and conclusions are subject to modification in the light of new information and developments. Such corrections, additions and suggestions for factual, interpretive or other change as readers may have will be welcomed for use in future revisions. Comments may be addressed to—

The Director
Foreign Area Studies
The American University
5010 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
This volume is part of a second major revision of the *Area Handbook for Vietnam*. The Handbook, originally prepared in 1957 by Foreign Areas Studies Division (then known as the Washington Branch, Human Relations Area Files), was substantially revised in 1962, under the chairmanship of George L. Harris, for the Foreign Areas Studies Division, then associated with the Special Operations Research Office at The American University. Because Vietnam is, in effect, two different states, each with its own government, the present revision has been accomplished in two separate studies, one on South Vietnam and this volume on North Vietnam.

North Vietnam, officially recognized and supported by most Communist countries, is engaged in massive insurgency operations against the government of South Vietnam. Elements from the ground, air and sea forces of North Vietnam have directly engaged corresponding forces of South Vietnam and its supporters in combat operations.

During the period of research and writing, North Vietnamese Government authorities were in the process of carrying out several major domestic programs designed to solve some of their most pressing problems. One of the most important of these involved the resettlement of people from overcrowded towns and rural areas in the Red River Delta and coastal plains to the highlands and other sparsely inhabited regions. This program, initiated in 1960, was intended primarily, according to government leaders, to open up new land to cultivation and to promote uniformity in the cultural, linguistic and ideological characteristics of the population by intermingling Vietnamese-speaking lowlanders among the heterogeneous highland minority groups. The movement of people from the Delta and the expansion of agricultural production were also intended later to alleviate the threat of starvation in the lowlands, intensified by several successive years of drought and poor crop production during the early 1960's. This program has been only moderately successful in its major aims.

By the end of 1966, as a result of expanded military commitments in the South, the many courses of action adopted by the government of North Vietnam had imposed wartime hardships upon the people. Virtually every able-bodied person had become available, by decree, for national service—military, labor or administrative. War-associated problems, including the diversion of labor from productive work, interruptions in agricultural and in-
dustrial activities, and population dislocations, were under seri­ous consideration by government leaders and Hanoi editorial writers. The adverse effects of these disruptive measures on the people, economically, politically and sociologically, are changing and could not be fully determined.

The study of a country while undergoing such important changes presented obvious difficulties, particularly in view of the lack of United States diplomatic or other official representatives in the country. In most areas the information obtainable was mainly from North Vietnamese publications; much of it was in fragmentary form, usually biased and often contradictory.

The handbook is intended as a unified and fairly complete treat­ment of most aspects of North Vietnamese society. Interpretations and judgments are offered on a tentative basis because of the lack of opportunity for confirmation through study within the country itself. Moreover, a large part of the material used necessarily comes from Communist North Vietnamese sources since they are the only ones available and hence must be accepted with the strong reservation needed in dealing with material wholly or partly propagandistic.

Grateful acknowledgment is due many persons within and out­side the United States Government, too numerous to mention individually, who gave their time and special knowledge to provide data and valuable suggestions regarding chapter contents.

A glossary is included as an appendix to the handbook for the reader’s convenience. The terms in the glossary are not in every case defined in the text. In using Vietnamese words or titles, diacritical marks were omitted. The place names used are, wherever possible, those established by the United States Board on Geographic Names for North Vietnam as of 1964, and for South Vietnam as of 1962.
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SECTION I. SOCIAL

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE SOCIETY

North Vietnam calls itself the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and is so called by Communist and other states with whom diplomatic relations are maintained. The state was founded early in September 1945 soon after Japan's defeat in World War II. It is the outgrowth of a Communist-led nationalist resistance movement composed mainly of guerrilla bands organized in 1941 by the self-styled Vietnam Independence League, usually called the Viet Minh (see Glossary). These nationalist anticolonial groups had opposed the presence of Japanese military and French colonial forces in Vietnam.

During the war years, the Communist leaders purposely kept their aims in the background in order to recruit among their partisans many non-Communist nationalists. After World War II they eagerly continued the struggle against foreign domination, this time directed against the French who, with the help of the Allies, had reestablished their control over the country after the Japanese withdrawal.

The French, seeking to weaken the armed resistance against them and to enlist the support of anti-Communist nationalists, in mid-1949 formally established the State of Vietnam, composed of its former and traditional subdivisions, Tonkin (in the north), Annam (in the center) and Cochin China (in the south), under the leadership of Bao Dai, Emperor of Annam. The new State of Vietnam, the Kingdom of Laos and the Kingdom of Cambodia were recognized as independent states but were firmly bound to France within the French Union (see ch. 3, Historical Setting).

The French efforts to secure local support met with some success, as a sizable number of Vietnamese anti-Communist contingents joined in the struggle against Communist-controlled forces which called themselves the "National Liberation Army," which was in fact the military arm of the so-called Vietnam Independence League. During the prolonged conflict, known as the Indochina War (1946–54), the Communist character of the self-styled Democratic Republic of Vietnam was revealed as its
founder and president, Ho Chi Minh, and its other leaders increasingly consolidated their position in the rural areas. Meanwhile, the National Liberation Army became the People's Army of Vietnam.

Fighting ceased with the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam, signed at Geneva on July 20, 1954, by representatives of the commanders in chief of the People's Army of Vietnam and of the French Union Forces in Indochina. The agreement, by fixing a "provisional military demarcation line" across the State of Vietnam near the seventeenth parallel, in effect formalized the territorial status of North Vietnam, since it created two zones into which the opposing military forces were to withdraw pending a future political solution for the reunification of the country. The territory north of the line became the self-styled Democratic Republic of Vietnam, under control of the Lao Dong Party (Communist), firmly in the orbit of the major Communist powers; the area to the south became the Republic of Vietnam, an anti-Communist Country aligned with the Western powers of the Free World. Each government retained in its title the word "Vietnam," thereby tacitly claiming to be the sole governing body for the entire country.

The general area along the eastern edge of the land mass constituting the southeast peninsula of Asia is commonly known as Vietnam. For nearly 1,000 years (111 B.C. to A.D. 989) it was governed by the Chinese as the southernmost province of their empire. During their long rule the Chinese improved agricultural practices, founded schools and introduced some of their own customs, ethical systems and religious beliefs, including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Their economic and social influences provided the base for an independent state structure (see ch. 6, Family, Religion, and Social Values).

Suzerainty of the Chinese ended when they were driven out by Vietnamese revolters under a leader who assumed the title of emperor and founded the first of a series of four dynasties, which ruled for more than nine centuries. The emperors adopted a Confucian-type system patterned in general after that of the Chinese, with modifications. The ruler served simultaneously as civil, judicial and religious head of state. Peace was maintained with China, except for a 20-year period of reoccupation in the early 1400's. The country, nevertheless, was usually in a state of war, either externally, with neighboring territories, or internally, with rival leaders struggling for supremacy. Each dynasty came into power after overthrowing its predecessor (see ch. 8, Historical Setting).
By the middle of the nineteenth century French traders and missionaries had arrived on the scene in substantial numbers, and increasing French influence began to dominate that of local rulers. After an expeditionary force brought the Red River Delta region under French military control, a Treaty of Protectorate was signed in 1883 and a second one, in 1884. The area then became a part of the French colonial empire. The three regions of Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China, together with Laos and Cambodia, made up French Indochina.

North Vietnam, situated entirely within the tropics, has two distinct geographic regions, described in general terms as lowlands, located in the eastern section bordering the Gulf of Tonkin, and highlands, which comprise the remaining northern and western two-thirds of the country. The lowlands, flat, fertile, intensely cultivated and thickly populated, are made up largely of the triangular-shaped Red River Delta. Crisscrossed by many waterways, the Delta extends northwestward some 180 miles from its base on the Gulf of Tonkin and finally wedges into the mountain gorges above Hanoi. On the south it is joined by a narrow strip of coastal plain extending about 250 miles to the Demarcation Line. The highlands, sparsely populated and mainly forested, are made up of rugged mountains and hills cut by numerous steep-sided ravines interspersed with a few savanna-covered plains.

The heaviest concentration of population is in the Red River Delta and the adjacent coastal plain to the south. This region, inhabited by more than 16 million people (nearly 90 percent of the total population), is the historic center of Vietnamese civilization. In the expansive highlands to the west are various ethnic minorities totaling some 2 million non-Vietnamese speakers living in the border regions generally contiguous to their ethnic kin in northeastern Laos or southwestern China. Their literacy level is generally lower than that of the lowlanders. With but few exceptions these minority peoples have traditionally lived apart in their upland homes. The degree of contact—economic, cultural and political—with Vietnamese speakers in the lowlands varies considerably from group to group (see ch. 4, Ethnic Groups and Languages).

Vietnamese is the primary language of at least 90 percent of the population and the secondary language of a sizable portion of the remainder. During centuries of residence in their generally isolated mountain areas, the highland peoples have become sentimentally attached to their ancestral homelands. They frequently cross the national borders in their areas, often being unaware of their existence. In their isolation they have developed their own
livelihood methods, self-government procedures, social practices and religious beliefs. A sizable portion, particularly those living in the most remote and almost inaccessible tracts, undoubtedly have little consciousness or comprehension of a central government at Hanoi (see ch. 4, Ethnic Groups and Languages).

Religious values for the majority of Vietnamese-speaking lowlanders are strongly influenced by the Confucian system of ethics. The teachings of Confucius have been blended with Mahayana Buddhist teachings introduced from India by way of China late in the second century A.D. and by Taoism introduced from China at about the same period. Superstitions and spirit worship, both condoned by Buddhism and Taoism, also have important influences on the mores and customs of the Vietnamese speakers. Roman Catholicism, introduced in the sixteenth and seventeenth century from France, Spain and Portugal, won a substantial following. Adherents of the Catholic faith, numbering over 1.5 million, were the principal opponents to Communist rule in the late 1940's and early 1950's. By 1955, approximately half of them had moved to South Vietnam. In view of this exodus, the Communist government at the end of 1966 was firmly in control of Catholic as well as Buddhist, Taoist and other religious groups (see ch. 6, Family, Religion and Social Values).

Political power is exercised exclusively by some 800,000 Communists (less than 5 percent of the population) through their organization called the Lao Dong (Workers') Party. By means of the usual Communist agencies and methods, the Party firmly controls the country and the government in all its aspects. The hierarchical organization of the Party and the government are similar and parallel. Many key positions in both systems have been held continuously by the same incumbent since the announcement of the new government in 1945. The Party presents itself as the only safeguard against forces that "seek to rob the people of the achievements won by their long struggle for independence."

A system of front organizations has been established to include non-Communist elements in different social, occupational and so-called political groups. In these organizations are groups for women, youths, peasants, labor and professional people. Included also are friendship associations with various foreign countries. Other affiliated organizations include the Vietnam Democratic Party and the Vietnam Socialist Party. All are under the general direction of the so-called Vietnam Fatherland Front (see Glossary) which, in turn, with President Ho Chi Minh as honorary chairman, is under Party control. Because of these close controls, the influence of these different groups on national policy is negligible,
but they serve to maintain the fiction of providing the government with a broad and varied political base (see ch. 11, Political Dynamics).

Elections are held infrequently (in 1946, 1960, and 1964). The extremely high percentage of voters from among those eligible and their near unanimity in favor of the Communist-approved candidates are a revelation of effective political organization rather than any demonstration of popular choice.

The principal political aim of the government, as indicated by its leaders late in 1966, appeared to be the defense of North Vietnam, the “liberation of South Vietnam” and the unification of North and South Vietnam (to reconstitute Vietnam—the Fatherland). In pursuit of this objective a large proportion of the national effort has been devoted to supporting the insurgents in South Vietnam (commonly called the Viet Cong), fighting under the leadership of the so-called National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (see Glossary), which the government of North Vietnam claims is an organization indigenous to South Vietnam (see ch. 13, Public Information and Propaganda). In carrying out their plan, the leaders sought to inspire “revolutionary heroism,” a term they apply to the militant fighting spirit needed for creating the so-called socialist man and woman. Party tacticians pressed for manifestation of this spirit in each person’s daily task, regardless of its nature—whether combat, production, or instruction (see ch. 14, Political Values and Attitudes).

Vigorous Party and government activities in furtherance of the “liberation” policy have had a greater impact on the population than any other national undertaking. When the insurgents, after intensification of their efforts in the early 1960’s, were confronted with forces from the United States and several other anti-Communist powers, still further sacrifices were demanded. The alleged purpose, however, was then expanded to include “defeat the United States aggressors in the South” and “defend the homeland.” As a result, continually throughout the life of the nation many of its youths have been engaging in combat, undergoing military training or working to provide logistical support for fighting troops. Meanwhile, the remainder of the population has endured increasing wartime hardships, and almost all persons under 25 years of age have experienced no other type of existence (see ch. 12, Foreign Relations).

The country’s national policies are influenced by Communist China and the Soviet Union, complicated by the dispute between them and the variations in their differing hostile attitudes towards
the United States. Hanoi, depending on Moscow and Peking for military, economic and political support, has carefully avoided taking sides in the Sino-Soviet rift, even though the dispute has been a disruptive influence and has produced factions within the Party itself. In furtherance of continued assistance from both states, however, Party leaders have consistently exploited the common enmity of all three countries toward what they call "United States imperialism" (see ch. 12, Foreign Relations).

Aside from their preoccupation with support of the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam, the country's top leaders have been actively interested in expanding communism into some of the neighboring countries. In adjacent Laos, as members of the Viet Minh, they strongly supported Communist factions striving for independence from France during the Indochina War. Later, they sponsored and supported the Communist Pathet Lao guerrillas in that part of the country contiguous to North Vietnam. Through the Pathet Lao, Hanoi has continuously opposed any pro-Western Laotian government. Moreover, the jungle terrain along the 1,000-mile poorly demarcated boundary between the two countries assists North Vietnamese military leaders, who use Laotian territory as a major troop infiltration and supply route, known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to support the insurgency in South Vietnam. Control of the Pathet Lao forces also provides Hanoi with easy access routes through Laos westward to Thailand and southward to Cambodia.

Formal diplomatic relations are maintained with all Communist countries and in varying degrees with as many as 10 professedly neutralist states. The frequent exchanges of visits with Communist countries are usually in connection with the preparation or consummation of agreements pertaining to military or economic aid or to political support of North Vietnam's cause. This assistance has been accompanied by the arrival of numerous foreign advisers and by the enrollment of many North Vietnamese youths in Communist schools abroad.

Delegations are sent to regional conferences, such as those held by the Asian-African People's Solidarity Organization and the numerous friendship associations, which customarily issue elaborate communiques denouncing "colonialism," condemning "United States imperialism" and praising North Vietnam's "struggle for unification of the Vietnamese fatherland." In 1964, the latest year for which information is available, both import and export trade was conducted with 18 non-Communist countries, including 8 in Western Europe. Moreover, unofficial liaison
is maintained with Communist and leftist groups in Western coun-
tries; these groups are used as channels for dissemination of
Party propaganda.

The major economic aim of the regime’s leadership is to de-
velop industry and expand the country’s industrial base. Heavy
pressures are put on the people, of whom about 85 percent live
in rural areas, producing food and most of the raw materials for
light industry. Improvement of agricultural potential is also
stressed, and a close worker-peasant relationship is emphasized.
To initiate these radical and burdensome changes in a primarily
agrarian economy, the government adopted the Three-Year Plan
for the Transformation and Development of the Economy and
Culture (1968–60), commonly known as the Three-Year Plan.
This was followed by the Five-Year Plan (1961–65) (see ch.
15, Character and Structure of the Economy).

Pursuant to these plans, the state has energetically taken over
the operation of most industrial and trade enterprises, and about
85 percent of the peasants, in response to government exhortation
and persuasion, have joined agricultural cooperatives. Implemen-
tation of the plans has been hampered by poor rice harvests
resulting from several successive years of drought; furthermore,
industrial production and distribution have been seriously dis-
rupted by United States retaliatory air attacks, which began
early in 1965 after the regime’s intensification of the war in South
Vietnam. By the end of 1966 the standard of living remained
low, and increasing economic problems were indicated by the
Premier’s announcement late in 1965 that a second Five-Year
Plan would be abandoned, and production plans for 1966 and
1967 would be in accordance with a new policy under which the
people would be called upon “to produce and fight at the same
time.”

Although little evidence at the end of 1966 suggested internal
difficulties constituting a major threat to governmental stability,
it needs to be noted that most of the material available for ap-
praisal of all aspects of North Vietnamese society came from
Communist sources and had, therefore, to be judged as at least
partisan or even deliberately misleading. It was certain, more-
over, that the Communist authorities were seriously concerned
about tensions between certain segments of the population and
dissatisfaction among some groups with government policies and
procedures.

The Communist authorities, recognizing the special problems
created by the ethnic minorities in the highlands, established
shortly after the Indochina War two large so-called autonomous regions, with the narrow Red River valley serving as a corridor between them. Party leaders have asserted that these regional administrations provide the highland minorities with a considerable measure of political and social autonomy. Independent action, nevertheless, is strictly limited by close government supervision.

The government also made other special efforts to assimilate the highland groups into the Communist community. Beginning in 1960 it initiated a large-scale resettlement program under which more than a million people were moved from the most overcrowded sections of the lowlands into less populated areas within the lower and upper zones of the highlands. State authorities asserted that the program’s threefold purpose was to enlarge the amount of land under cultivation, to reduce the wide cultural differences existing among the varied ethnic groups and, eventually, to establish communism uniformly throughout the country.

Approximately 800,000 persons were settled in the mountain regions, where their presence generally is resented by the local inhabitants, who are traditionally mistrustful of strangers. The program was given added impetus by the United States retaliatory aerial attacks, causing many industries and other military target complexes, together with their workers and dependents, to be dispersed from the population centers; appreciable numbers of the displaced people reached the upland regions. Schools and other facilities were also relocated outside the major urban areas (see ch. 20, Labor).

Meanwhile, in 1962, a radio broadcasting station was established in the hills north of Hanoi with programs in local languages and wired relay systems reaching into all the mountain provinces. Receiving facilities were made increasingly available. Primary schools, together with mobile film projection teams, were distributed throughout the area in furtherance of the indoctrination and assimilation process. Despite government attempts to achieve a uniform Communist state, occasional Party press accounts suggest that tensions caused mainly by ethnic differences remain to plague relations between the highland minorities and the lowland dwellers.

Within the lowlands, any restriction, actual or implied, on observance of their religious precepts continues to be a source of latent discontent with many of the 500,000 to 800,000 Roman Catholics who, according to some North Vietnamese non-Catholics, had received preferential treatment under French rule. Being a
more cohesive group than the Buddhists or other religious sects, they remain a problem for the authorities, regardless of the purported governmental recognition of religious freedom. The Party-approved Catholic leaders, virtually out of contact with Rome, must support Party policies or at least refrain from opposing them.

In view of the deteriorating situation produced by its problems, the North Vietnamese Government is faced with the dilemma of reconciling the accomplishments of its stated goals with the need to retain the willingness and ability of the people to comply with additional exhausting Party demands.
CHAPTER 2

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND POPULATION

North Vietnam, situated on the northeastern margin of the Southeast Asian peninsula, is bordered by China on the north, the Gulf of Tonkin on the east, South Vietnam and Laos on the south, and Laos on the west (see fig. 1). Topographically, the country is a continuation of southern China. Aside from a broad central basin, most of the area consists of highlands and mountains which are extensions of the great plateaus of Yunnan Province and eastern Tibet in Communist China. The heartland of the nation is the coastal plain dominated by the Red River (in French, Fleuve Rouge, and in Vietnamese, Song Hong) and its delta.

With an area of 63,344 square miles, the country is slightly smaller than South Vietnam, with which it once constituted the historic state of Vietnam. It supports a somewhat larger population, however—estimated to be about 18,250,000 persons in December 1966 as compared with some 17 million for the South in the same year.

The natural land routes into the country are from the north rather than from the west. From China and probably also from Tibet groups of people of different ethnic composition entered the country before the Christian era, moving down the Red River. Among them were groups accounting for the predominant Mongoloid component in the racial inheritance of the modern Vietnamese people (see ch. 4, Ethnic Groups and Languages). The existence of these land routes and the ease with which the area could be reached by sea from coastal China enabled China to exert a dominant role in Vietnamese history (see ch. 3, Historical Setting).

Although some contact with the Hindu civilization of India was made early in the Christian era, these relations were impeded by the dense jungles of Thailand and Cambodia and by the length of the Malay Peninsula, which made the sea route difficult.

The land boundaries of North Vietnam, evolved over the course of centuries, generally run through sparsely settled mountains
and relatively inaccessible regions. The boundary with Laos, as settled about 1700 on ethnic grounds by agreement between Annam and the Laotian ruler, has been virtually unchanged. The boundary with China, well delineated for several centuries, was formally defined in the France-China treaties of 1887 and 1895, when the area now known as North Vietnam was the French protectorate of Tonkin and formed part of French Indochina (see ch. 3, Historical Setting). After France lost the disastrous Indochina War it waged against Vietnamese Communist and nationalist groups between 1946 and 1954, a cease-fire agreement arranged by the Geneva Conference in July 1954 established a provisional military demarcation line, which came to constitute the virtual territorial boundary between North and South Vietnam. It runs from the mouth of the Song Ben Hai River to the village of Bo Ho Su, and from there due west to the Laotian border (see fig. 2).

Throughout the greater part of its territory, North Vietnam is a country of hills and heavily forested highlands, ill suited to human occupancy; level land covers no more than 15 percent to 20 percent of the area (see fig. 3). The country has two major topographical regions: the coastal plain and the highlands. The dominant feature of the coastal plain is the Red River (or Tonkin) Delta. It includes, however, the strip of coastal lowlands extending south from the Delta. The Delta itself, drained by a vast network of canals and waterways, is a rich rice-growing area. Far more extensive but less productive are the forested highlands, projecting southward from the Yunnan plateau to beyond the Demarcation Line into South Vietnam. These highlands, in their southern portion along the boundary with Laos, form a complex mountain system called the Chaîne Annamitique.

The break between the Delta and the highlands provides a sharp contrast in physical geography between an alluvial plain and a mountainous area. The contrast is even more sharp and distinct in terms of distribution of the population and of the patterns of thought and behavior of the inhabitants.

The country has a tropical monsoon climate, with warm, wet summers and mild, dry winters. A recognizable cool season prevails from December to March, with a mean temperature during January and February of 62°C F. in Hanoi. Maximum rainfall occurs in the summer, but no month ordinarily has less than 1.5 inches of rain. Winter precipitation, mostly in the form of continuous drizzle, makes for high humidity during the otherwise dry season, permitting the growth of a winter rice crop.

Most of the people live in the Red River Delta, where, in an
Figure 2. North Vietnam.
Figure 3. Relief and Geographic Regions of North Vietnam.
area of approximately 6,000 square miles, population densities are among the highest in the world. Three cities of the Delta account for a major share of the urban population. Hanoi, with a normal population of 1.2 million, according to North Vietnamese sources, lies 100 miles inland near the head of the Delta proper. Haiphong, the chief seaport, is situated about 55 miles almost due east of the capital on one of the many mouths of the same river. Nam Dinh, an industrial center in Nam Ha Province, lying about 20 miles inland from the coast, is the third largest city.

In sharp contrast to the congested lowlands, the inhospitable uplands enclosing them are sparsely populated. An intensive government campaign in the 1960's to clear new agricultural land, however, has brought hundreds of thousands of persons into the area. Efforts in carrying out this program were sharply increased in 1965 as a reaction to United States aerial attacks. Many people were moved from cities and other congested areas to minimize vulnerable concentrations and to reduce the requirements placed on transportation facilities, which were being heavily damaged by aerial bombs.

**GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS**

**The Coastal Plain**

The Red River Delta is a flat, triangular region, smaller but more intensively developed than is the Mekong River Delta of South Vietnam. It stretches some 150 miles inland and about 75 miles along the coast, south of Haiphong. Almost entirely built up of alluvium, the Delta was formerly an extension of the Gulf of Tonkin, which has since been filled by the deposits of the rivers which run into the basin. The coast is indented by the mouths of the Red River and lesser streams to the south.

The Red River, rising in Yunnan Province in Communist China, has a total length of about 725 miles. Its two major tributaries, the Song Lo (sometimes called the Lo River, sometimes Rivière Claire, and sometimes Clear River) and the Black River (Song Da in Vietnamese), give it a large flow of water—during the rainy season as much as 800,000 cubic feet per second, or twice as much as the maximum flow of the Nile River in Egypt.

The entire delta region, backed by the steep rises of the forested highlands, has only minor variations in relief, chiefly in the west. Most of it is no more than 10 feet above sea level, and much of it is 3 feet or less. The area is subject to frequent flooding. At
some places the high-water mark of floods is 25 feet above the surrounding countryside.

Over the centuries an elaborate system of dikes and canals has been built to contain the Red River and drain off its waters into the ricefields. This ancient system, modeled on that of China, sustains a high concentration of population. Intensive agriculture, based on wet-rice production, makes double-cropping possible over about half the region. The remaining irrigable lowlands, strung along the coast south of the Delta, are distinctly limited. Their soil, however, is extremely fertile alluvium, making excellent riceland.

Urban development is minimal. Even in the most densely populated regions of the Red River Delta, most of the inhabitants are distributed throughout the countryside in small, closely spaced villages and hamlets. These settlements, mostly situated on levees, embankments or sandspits, are of varied arrangement, with elongated settlements along the riverbanks and clustered farmsteads at the base of a hillside among the more commonplace types.

The Highlands

The highlands and plateaus enclosing the Red River Delta contrast sharply with the plains region both in topography and in level of development. The sparsely populated forested highlands, which cover about 85 percent of North Vietnamese territory, are inhabited mainly by Mongoloid tribal minority groups. Typically, these peoples live in small villages set in forested clearings. Settlements are found both in the valley bottoms and at higher levels, in areas where the production of rice and other crops supports relative large villages in some localities.

One branch of the mountains and highlands, projecting southward from the plateau in Yunnan Province, extends along the country's entire border with Laos and, except at the northeastern tip of Laos, separates the Red River basin from that of the Mekong River. Elevations along this branch range from 3,000 to 10,000 feet, with North Vietnam's highest peak, Fan Si Pan, rising to 10,308 feet, in the extreme northwest and about 20 miles southwest of Lao Cai. The southern portion of the branch, known as the Chaîne Annamitique, continues southward along South Vietnam's boundary with Laos and Cambodia. Another branch, unnamed but sometimes referred to as the Northern Highlands, extends along the border with China, terminating in a series of islands northeast of Haiphong in the Gulf of Tonkin.
The climate is monsoonal and subtropical, with high humidity prevailing throughout the year. The monsoons, blowing generally from the southwest in summer and from the northeast in winter, profoundly influence temperature and rainfall. The strength and direction of the wind, however, as well as the amount and timing of rainfall, vary considerably from place to place because of differences in latitude and the marked variety of relief. Compared to the rest of North Vietnam, the coastal plains, including the Red River Delta, are relatively dry. Nevertheless, the warm climate and the heavy average annual rainfall in most of the country favor the rapid growth of vegetation.

Despite the strong influence of the monsoons in rainfall and the temperature throughout the year, topographic features alter patterns locally. The winter monsoon reaches the Red River Delta about mid-September and continues to blow with irregular force until April. During this period high pressure areas in the interior of the continental landmass force dry, cool air in a southward trajectory down along the China coast and across the South China Sea, picking up considerable moisture. Constant fog and drizzle, coming between late November and early April, keep the humidity high during this otherwise dry season. The drizzle is an asset in that it permits the production of a second rice crop, but it brings a persistent, low-level cloud formation, causing poor visibility (see fig. 4).

During the summer monsoon, beginning about mid-May and lasting sometimes into October, moist air blows from the southeast inland from the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin, depositing heavy rainfall in its passage. Conflicting west-east winds across the country introduce variable atmospheric conditions. Typhoons, bringing heavy rain, strike every year, most commonly along the coastline from July through November. They drive in from the east and rapidly dissipate into rainstorms as soon as they hit the highlands of the interior (see fig. 5).

The annual rainfall is heavy in all regions. It averages about 72 inches a year, with at least 1½ inches each month.

The range of temperature in North Vietnam is much greater than in the South because of the difference in latitude and the resulting more pronounced seasons. In Hanoi the January temperature averages 63° F., with an absolute minimum of 41° F., in that month and an absolute maximum in April of 107° F.
Figure 4. Mean Monthly Rainfall in North and South Vietnam, January.
Figure 5. Mean Monthly Rainfall in North and South Vietnam, August.
SOILS AND VEGETATION

Soils range from the rich rice-growing alluvium in the delta and river flood plains, through the red soils of the highland plateaus which will support dry crops, to uncultivable sand and rock formations. By far the most important are the delta soils.

In order to retain the greater fertility necessary for a heavy rice yield, the alluvium must be renewed periodically. Because of the large amount of sediment carried by the Red River, its delta soils are essentially very fertile, but the gradual diking off of the river against destructive floods and for irrigation purposes has reduced the annual deposit of enriching silt, and fertilizers are needed to maintain soil nutrients.

In the plateau areas a red laterite soil is found which varies greatly in fertility. Where heavy rains wash off the humus, the silica content dissolves out more easily than do the alumina and iron oxides, and the residue produces the red color. This process of laterization, beyond a certain point, renders the soil infertile. In some plateau areas where the humus content of the soil has built up under heavy vegetation, plantation crops are favored. Until recently little of the region of laterite soil was cultivated, but in the mid-1960's sizable areas of such soil had been made agriculturally productive, mainly by adopting anti-erosion practices to conserve humus.

Differences in vegetation are locally influenced by soil conditions, but in general follow the rainfall pattern. Equatorial rain forests, interspersed with small savanna areas, predominate on the mountain slopes where rainfall is heavy. The undergrowth of ferns, vines, bamboos and rattans, thorny shrubs and tronk (a tropical grass), along with the tall stands of trees, make travel difficult. The less dense deciduous monsoon forests are also extensive in the hills where rainfall is less heavy. Mangroves grow on the coastal fringe of the Delta and extend some 70 miles to the south. On the cleared lowlands, an intricate system of crop fields have been developed and are under intensive cultivation. They also support a profusion of fruit trees. Relatively small grassland areas have been created, for the most part from monsoon forests, either as the result of cultivation or of fires (see fig. 6).

WILDLIFE

Large animals, including tigers, panthers, and elephants, although rarely seen, are found in the forests. Smaller ones include
Source: Adapted from Canada, Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, Indo-China, A Geographical Appreciation, p. 21.

**Figure 6.** Vegetation of North Vietnam.
boars, goats, deer, and hares. Monkeys are found in all of the coastal areas, and wild fowl, both water and land birds, are plentiful in many parts of the country. Although there are reptiles of numerous varieties, including large pythons, they are seldom seen, and only the cobra and sea-snake bites are highly dangerous. Deaths from snake bite are rare. Creeping and flying insects abound in the forests, especially during the wet season.

**MINERALS**

The country's principal mineral resource is anthracite coal, with the main beds located north of Haiphong in a line from Sept Pagodes (about 30 miles east of Hanoi) to the coast. In addition, there are phosphate, tin, and chromite-deposits as well as small deposits of antimony, bauxite, gold, iron, lead, tungsten, and zinc. The forest highlands produce well over a million cubic meters of timber each year (see ch. 17, Industry).

**TRANSPORTATION**

The transportation system in the mid-1960's relied primarily on the carrying pole and the bicycle. One highland province reported in 1964 that of the 976,000 tons of goods moved within its borders during the previous year, 916,000 had been carried by shoulder pole. For freight and passenger traffic the sea and internal waterways are also of critical importance. In the highland regions buffaloes and elephants serve as carriers in logging operations.

In sharp contrast, the use of modern transport facilities, including motorized vehicles, railroads and airplanes, is severely curtailed except by the military and by high civilian officials, owing both to equipment limitations and to damage resulting from military actions. Transportation has become an increasingly serious internal problem (see ch. 19, Domestic Trade).

The government has attached special important to the expanded use of such rudimentary means of transport as bicycles, three-wheeled motor vehicles, sampans and junks. In the highlands, many parts of which are accessible only by foot or pack trails, organization of pack trains to deliver produce to the major centers is being stressed. Early in 1966 bicycle convoys were seen frequently on the roads, carrying far greater quantities of goods and much heavier loads than had similar convoys during the Indochina War.
Roads

Work on the modern transport network was begun by the French during the colonial period. Since 1960 road construction and maintenance have been given high priority in economic and military planning. By 1966 the country had at least 6,200 miles of motor road and some 44,000 miles of secondary roads. According to North Vietnamese press articles, however, almost 94,000 miles of "rural roads" were built, widened, reconditioned and repaired between 1961 and mid-1966.

The main artery leads from Hanoi southward connecting the coastal towns to the Demarcation Line, from where, before interruption of communications with South Vietnam, it continued southward to Saigon. Other roads connect various towns in the Delta or lead through the mountains into Laos and China. Emphasis is being put on development and improvement of road networks in the highland regions. Recent additions to the system include an extension of the road from Ban Pom Lot (about 25 miles south of Dien Bien Phu) leading westward some 20 miles to the Laotian border and the more extensive 45-mile stretch of road running northward from Ha Giang on the Song Lo through the highlands to Dong Van on the Chinese border (see fig. 7).

Most of the roads, however, are narrow, and the main arteries are in a semipermanent condition of running repair. Air attacks by United States planes have done substantial damage to roadbeds and bridges. Repair crews are kept active and within hours often have made bombed roads passable once more, though only with difficulty. Piles of stone and gravel, used for resurfacing, are kept permanently by the roadside. So-called portable bridges, actually pontoon bridges, are used extensively at many river crossings, one end of the floating bridge being detached during daylight hours so the whole structure can drift parallel to the bank, less visible to air observers.

Waterways

Navigable waterways total more than 3,000 miles, but a considerable proportion of this mileage is usable by shallow-draft vessels only during the high-water season, generally from May through October. During the low-water season, less than a third of this mileage is usable, except by cargo junks and sampans, which are commonly employed throughout the year. In the mountain areas, small locally made boats and rafts are used to move goods over the short distances between rapids.
Figure 7. Transportation System of North Vietnam.
Numerous streams, many of them rising in China or Laos, traverse the highland region as they flow in a southeasterly direction toward the Gulf of Tonkin. The most important of these are the waterways of the Red River system, which include the Song Lo and the Black River. These tributaries merge with the Red River about 35 miles northwest of Hanoi. Of secondary importance is the shorter Song Thai Binh system, paralleling the Red River some 30 miles to the northeast and joining the Delta network of waterways about 35 miles northwest of Haiphong. In the Delta these two major waterways are linked by canals and small streams. The Song Ma and the Song Ca, to the south of Hanoi (65 miles and 150 miles), respectively), flow directly into the Gulf of Tonkin. The rivers of North Vietnam are a major economic asset and are essential as vital elements in its transportation system.

Railroads

Hanoi is the hub of the country's railroad system of approximately 650 miles, which, like its road system, was originally developed by the French. The main railroad line, during the colonial period, ran northward from Saigon along the coast, to Hanoi where it connected in peacetime with the Chinese system, one line going northwest via Lao Cai to Kunming in Yunnan Province, the other northeast via Lang Son to Nanning in Kwangsi Province. These connecting lines provide Communist China with its most practical rail communication between Kwangsi and Yunnan Provinces. Both lines are narrow gage and were heavily damaged during World War II and the Indochina War. With Communist Chinese aid, through traffic on the line to Nanning was restored to operation in mid-1955 and to Kunming in 1958. Since early 1965 they have been the targets for United States aerial bombing, causing traffic disruptions. Their operational status is intermittent and, for any given time, undeterminable. Hanoi and Haiphong are also linked by rail.

A short spur of standard-gage line was completed in 1960. It runs south from the metallurgical complex at Thai Nguyen about 45 miles to Dong Anh, where, instead of crossing the Red River to enter Hanoi, it turns southeastward to connect with the line to Lang Son. A major link in the rail network runs 850 miles south from Hanoi to Vinh Linh near the Demarcation Line. The 250-mile section of this link between Ham Rong (about 7 miles north of Thanh Hoa) and Vinh Linh reportedly was restored to operation in 1964. Like other main sections in the rail
system it has been the target for United States aerial attacks, and its operational status is undetermined.

Air Transport

By late 1960 domestic air routes had been established between Hanoi and various localities throughout the country, including: Lang Son, Na Sam and Cao Bang in the highlands north of the Red River; Dien Bien Phu in the highlands south of the Red River; and Dong Hoi in Quang Binh Province, 35 miles north of the Demarcation Line. A direct air route from Hanoi to Peiping had also been opened. An air transport agreement was concluded with Cambodia in December 1963. The following year, air service opened between Hanoi and Phnom Penh (capital of Cambodia) via Vientiane (capital of Laos). Information was lacking in late 1966 on the operation of these routes, but it was probable that because of equipment and personnel limitations no regularly scheduled internal civilian air service was being maintained. Airports at Hanoi and Haiphong can accommodate four-engine conventional piston aircraft up to the four-engine type, and all major towns throughout the country have airfields capable of handling smaller craft.

Ports

Hanoi is a center of river and canal traffic which carries most of the rice crop of the Red River Delta. Haiphong, however, is the leading seaport and has facilities for oceangoing vessels up to 10,000 tons. Situated 10 miles inland on one of the larger branches of the Delta, it is connected with the sea by a narrow channel which, because of silting, must be dredged constantly. Other harbors are less developed, and lighters have to be used.

POPULATION

Results of an official census of North Vietnam were revealed in March 1960. The census gave the country a total population of 15,916,955. Males were in a minority by about 3 percent in the country as a whole, because more men than women were killed in World War II and in the Indochina War and because of the general tendency for women to outlive men. The total figure was influenced not only by deaths resulting from military operations but by two other special considerations: the famine of 1945 in
which more than 1.5 million persons died and the exchange of population at the time of the Geneva Agreement in 1954 which resulted in a net loss for North Vietnam of some 900,000 persons.

The census gave the estimated birth rate in 1960 as 42.5 per thousand, the death rate as 25.0, indicating a natural increase rate of 17.5 per thousand—less than that of many Asian countries. On the basis of projections, however, assuming that fertility would remain at the 1960 level and that mortality rates would decline with improvement in health conditions, outside observers have estimated that by 1965 the natural increase rate would have reached 22.5 per thousand. With this rate of increase, 2.25 percent a year, since the March census of 1960, the total population at the end of 1966 would be about 18,250,000. The interest voiced in 1966 by North Vietnamese authorities in establishing a government-controlled birth control program seemed to corroborate these projections. Food shortages were undoubtedly a factor in this proposed program.

The country's population is young, with 44 percent of those counted in the 1960 census reported as being less than 16 years of age. By comparison, the entire working age population (16 to 55 years of age) constituted only 47 percent, or roughly 7.2 million persons (see ch. 20, Labor).

In 1960, 9.6 percent of all North Vietnamese were urban dwellers. Since then the size of the urban population has sharply increased, largely because of arbitrary enlargement of the physical boundaries of the city of Hanoi in the early 1960's. Thus, although the population of Hanoi in 1960 was reported as 648,000, its population in 1966 (discounting the effects of massive evacuation in 1965 and 1966 to reduce vulnerability to aerial bombing) was set at 1.2 million persons. This change notwithstanding, the urban population in 1966 still probably constituted no more than 15 percent of the country's total inhabitants.

The country can be broadly divided into two fairly distinct population groups—the Vietnamese-speaking lowlanders and the highland minorities. The Delta is occupied almost entirely by ethnic Vietnamese, who call themselves kinh. In the highlands, among the numerous tribal minorities, the largest are the Thai, Muong, Nung, Meo and Man (see ch. 4, Ethnic Groups and Languages).

The average population density is about 259 persons per square mile. Densities vary, however, from 2,237 persons per square mile in Thai Binh, a coastal province situated at the mouth of the Red River, to less than 35 persons per square mile in por-
tions of the highlands south of the Red River. On the average there are 1,608 persons per square mile in the Delta and 85 per square mile in the highlands. The most densely settled area is in the roughly triangular zone bounded by lines connecting Hanoi, Haiphong and the city of Ninh Binh. Eighty-one percent of the country's population in 1960 lived in the lowlands and 19 percent in the highlands.

Mobility of the population has been greatly influenced by government economic policy. This involved primarily the effort to develop the highlands as an agriculturally productive area. To a lesser extent it also involved the determination to make every province, and eventually every district, economically self-sufficient and to reduce trade in the free market at Hanoi. This meant that independent craftsmen had to be moved out of the capital city and into cooperatives in the rural areas.

The campaign to redistribute the population more evenly between the Delta and the highlands is attributable for the most part to the threat of famine in the coastal regions. With one of the highest densities of population in the world, the Red River Delta needs all the food it can raise. If the harvest fails famine will result.

Opening of new agricultural zones in the sparsely populated highlands can relieve this pressure, and at the same time the authorities claim it will promote the assimilation of the long-isolated mountain tribesmen. Lowland Vietnamese are reluctant, often to an extreme degree, to move to the highlands, which they regard as unhealthy and inhospitable and whose inhabitants they have traditionally looked down upon. Nonetheless, a Hanoi press release asserted that by August 1965 some 700,000 Delta inhabitants had undertaken economic and cultural construction work in the highlands during the preceding 4 years, through their activities increasing the cultivated areas there by 183 percent.

Population mobility was also influenced by government policy in response to the United States bombing attacks which began in February 1965. By mid-1966 North Vietnamese authorities claimed that evacuation was an important element of defense against attacks from United States air forces. They reported that by that date about 500,000 residents regarded as nonessential to fighting and production had been evacuated from the capital. They said that those who had close kin in rural areas were being advised to search for and remain with them, no matter how great the travel distance involved. Officials an-
nounced that others were to be provided for by various organiza-
tions, including branches of the Lao Dong Party (see Glossary),
the labor unions and the youth organizations. Once resettled,
the evacuees were to maintain close contacts with the Party
committee and local authorities at their new places of residence.
The latter, in turn, were charged with assisting the newcomers
in every way possible.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL SETTING

Throughout 2,000 years of recorded history—to which legend adds 2,000 more—the Vietnamese have been sustained by a feeling of unity based on common origin, language and cultural heritage. They are intensely proud of having been an independent and unified nation for centuries, although they also experienced periods of disunity and foreign domination. They take equal pride in their cultural heritage, regarded by them as an eloquent testimony to their eclectic and creative talents for absorbing foreign cultures without themselves losing distinct political identity.

In the evolution of Vietnamese society and culture much of the formative influence came from China, whose colonial officials and traders were largely responsible for the transmission of the Chinese way of life. The Chinese influences intermingled freely with the indigenous culture, known as Dong-Son (Indonesian), which dates from around the fourth century B.C. and was then centered in the Red River Delta.

A striking feature of Vietnam’s history is the story of its relations with China, its vastly larger and more powerful neighbor to the north. Over the centuries the Vietnamese have admired China for its superior culture and feared it for its power. During the 1,000 years (second century B.C. to the tenth century A.D.) that the country was ruled directly by China, the people accepted discriminately much of the dominant culture, but politically they were inclined to be militantly anti-Chinese.

Freeing themselves from direct Chinese control in A.D. 938, they thereafter jealously guarded their independence by various means, at times holding off invading Chinese and Mongolian armies and at others, resorting to hard bargaining, the payment of tribute or the acceptance of nominal Chinese overlordship. Negotiating from weakness, they became adroit bargainers, expert in obtaining through suppleness and patience the best terms under a given circumstance.

In their long resistance to Chinese domination, they came to
regard China as the traditional enemy. This old antagonism profoundly affects their thinking and attitude, and many Vietnamese continue to see danger in any relationship with China.

The Chinese rule was followed by varying degrees of independence under a succession of Vietnamese emperors presiding over a powerful bureaucracy of the Chinese type. Revolts were numerous, and with brief periods of reasserted Chinese control one dynasty fell to be replaced by another, but the outcome was always a transfer of authority without basic change in the sociopolitical structure.

The Vietnamese are prone to regard themselves as peaceful people, but they assign high importance to valor and fighting ability in their survival as a nation. The heroes and heroines of their history are those who rebelled against invading armies from the north. To the prowess of their ancestors they attribute not only successful resistance to Chinese encroachment but also the extension of their territory to the present boundaries of North and South Vietnam by victories over neighboring kingdoms to the south and west.

Because of powerful China to the north and apart from defending themselves against occasional northern invaders, the main thrust of Vietnamese history usually has been directed southward, as epitomized in nam-tien (march southward). Aided by superior organizational skill and military techniques acquired from the Chinese, the people of the overcrowded Red River Delta moved down the coastline in search of more rice paddies. In the process they pushed the original settlers of the lowland coastal areas farther back into the highlands to gain the fertile foothills for themselves. This process of southern expansion continued at the expense of the peoples of the Kingdom of Champa to the south of Hue and of Cambodia to the west until the Vietnamese acquired the fertile lands of the Mekong River Delta in the eighteenth century. Through the absorption of these peoples, who had been under the cultural influence of India, the Vietnamese came into contact with the Hindu civilization of India.

This pattern of expansion left an indelible imprint on the differing cultural orientation between the north-central section of the country on the one hand and the southern part of the country on the other. The people of the northern (Tonkin) and central (Annam) regions came to be regarded as keenly conscious of a traditional way of life. Those in the southern part (Cochin China)—perhaps because of their exposure to Indian influence—were thought to be more eclectic and less tradition-bound.
Moreover, during nearly a century of French rule, which had begun in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the varying pattern of French control gave further solidity to the country's cultural variation. Because the French rule was more direct and all-pervasive in the south than in the northern and central regions, the impact of French influence was correspondingly more pronounced in the south, resulting in a more culturally heterogeneous society there.

The French, much more than the Chinese before them, remained alien to the people. The Vietnamese, as they always had, reacted to foreign control with reluctant acquiescence and, when they could, with open resistance. During World War II, French rule was exercised by representatives of the Vichy regime at the sufferance of Japan until March 1945, when it was ended by a Japanese coup d'état. After Japan's surrender the French returned to a position which the events of the war years had made irretrievable.

In the Indochina War, which broke out at the end of 1946 and ended nearly 8 years later in the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the French found themselves confronted by skillful and determined Communist leadership under Ho Chi Minh. The Communists, exploiting popular opposition to the continuation of any form of foreign control, soon came to the forefront in the increasingly bitter struggle. Under a nationalist disguise within the Viet Minh—a Communist-led coalition group—they attracted the active or passive support of most of the population.

With the achievement of independence and the partitioning of the country in 1954, Vietnam entered a new phase of conflict. The struggle was between the non-Communist government in the South, supported by the United States and its allies, and the Communist regime in the North, backed by Communist China and the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1958, the northern regime stepped up its efforts to subjugate the South through a well-organized campaign of subversion and terror. Eventually the United States, at South Vietnam's request, intervened to help the Saigon government repel armed aggression from the North. In early 1966 the outcome of the North-South confrontation still remained bitterly contested.

HISTORIC ORIGINS

Legend establishes the first Vietnamese kingdom in what is now North Vietnam. According to one story, Lac Long Quan, the
first Vietnamese king, was the descendant of a line of Chinese
divine rulers. He married Au Co, an immortal, and, according to
the legend, fathered 100 sons. The king and queen then parted,
dividing sons between them. The king went south; the queen,
north into the mountains near Hanoi. The eldest of the boys ac-
companying the king was then installed on the throne and
founded the Hong Bang dynasty, the dates of which are given
as 2879 to 258 B.C. This legendary account, which probably was
not developed in literary form until A.D. 1200, differs in sub-
stance from Chinese mythical history but shares some themes
and figures with it. The resemblance suggests not only Chinese
influence but an effort by the Vietnamese chroniclers to show
that in origin and antiquity Vietnam (lit., the Viet of the South
or Southern Viet) was in no way inferior to dominant China.

The first historical records pertaining to the people in the
Red River Delta were written by the Chinese after they had
conquered the area in the third century B.C. Still earlier Chi-
inese accounts mention a Viet (Yüeh in Chinese) kingdom which
existed about 500 B.C. south of the Yangtze River. This kingdom
fell in 333 B.C., and its inhabitants, one of the many tribal
peoples in southern China at the time, moved farther south.

Basically Mongoloid, like the Chinese, they seem to have shown,
both physically and culturally, the results of mixture with Mon-
Khmer- and Malayo-Polynesian-speaking peoples. Some of the
Viets remained in China and over the centuries were integrated
into the developing Chinese civilization, the dynamic center of
which was then in northern China. Others, under pressure from
the north, pushed south, reaching the Red River Delta in the
mid-fourth century B.C., and encountered a mixed Indonesian
population with which they both fought and mingled.

After the fall of the Ch’in dynasty of China (897–207 B.C.),
there emerged a number of small, competing states, which, after
207 B.C., had been united as the Kingdom of Nam Viet under a
Chinese general. This kingdom is referred to as Nan Yüeh
(Southern Viet) in ancient Chinese chronicles. It controlled the
areas west of the present site of Canton and extended through
the Red River Delta down to Hai Van pass, 40 miles south of Hue.

CHINESE DOMINATION

The overthrow of the Kingdom of Nam Viet in 111 B.C. by
the armies of the Chinese Han dynasty (202 B.C. to A.D. 220)
marked the end of the legendary period of Vietnamese history.
The Red River valley and a coastal strip to the south as far as Hue became Giao Chi, the southernmost Chinese province, and for the next 1,000 years the events in the area were an integral part of imperial China.

The Chinese found the Viets organized on feudal lines. Villages and groups of villages led by hereditary local chiefs were in vassalage to provincial lords, who, in turn, owed allegiance to the king, to whom many of them were related. The primitive agriculture of the people included some knowledge of irrigation but not the plow and the water buffalo, which were introduced by the Chinese. Fish and game supplemented the cereals raised in the fire-cleared fields. Bronze had made its appearance in the form of ceremonial objects and arrowheads, but the principal agricultural tool was the stone hoe, and the people hunted and fought with spears and bows and arrows.

Chinese rule was not initially oppressive, and the Vietnamese feudal chiefs, although required to recognize the authority of a few Chinese high officials and pay taxes to the Chinese throne, were left largely undisturbed. Chinese agricultural technology, intellectual culture and method of making weapons were readily accepted. Life in the Delta was enriched but not overwhelmed. Later, when a growing Chinese officialdom began to expand its direct controls, the local aristocracy rallied against the alien encroachment on their hereditary prerogatives. Armed revolt in A.D. 39 briefly threw off the Chinese yoke. The struggle was led by two sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, who ruled jointly until A.D. 43, when, with the defeat of their forces by the Chinese, they drowned themselves. The memory of the warrior queens has been preserved in Vietnam as a symbol of resistance to foreign oppression.

The revolt was harshly suppressed, and those of its leaders who were not killed were exiled or degraded. With the old feudal order weakened, direct Chinese rule was imposed, and only subordinate places in the bureaucracy were left to the Vietnamese. The process of introducing Chinese culture, which now began in earnest, remade many aspects of Vietnamese life.

In attempts to strengthen central authority by destroying feudal vestiges at local levels, China introduced, around A.D. 50, a system of communal administration under which groups of 5 to 50 families formed communes. As the basic administrative and social unit, the commune had considerable freedom to manage local affairs through its council, which was chosen by influential villages and family heads from among their own number.
The council was responsible for public order, implementation of official decrees, the collection of taxes and the recruitment of conscripts for the army. In discharging these functions the village council was financially independent of the central government because its operating expenses were derived mostly from village communal land, which also served to support the landless and needy people of a village. By installing their own administrative institutions, the Chinese gave the Vietnamese a new political structure, the cohesion and strength of which later made it possible for Vietnam to resist and expel invaders from the north.

There were important areas of thought and action over which the process of acculturation simply spread a Chinese gloss without essentially altering the resistant material beneath. This was especially true of the peasantry from whom the Chinese rule meant mainly the payment of taxes and the giving of labor service. Conscious of their distinctive ethnic identity, the peasants continued to use their traditional language and clung to animist beliefs and other customs preserved from long before the arrival of the Chinese. When confronted with oppressive Chinese officials, the peasants resisted them, rallying around their communes which served as the focus of social and political activities. It was in acknowledgment of the debt the country owed to these village communes that all the Vietnamese dynasties, after those of China, took great care to preserve village autonomy. The autonomous village tradition is perhaps best epitomized by a popular saying, "the king's laws bow before village customs."

The Vietnamese language, the origin of which remains controversial, was retained though it was enriched by Chinese words and expressions. Nevertheless, the Chinese language and learning were essential to any who aspired to office under the Chinese. Educated Vietnamese were largely oriented toward Chinese culture, but their native roots were also preserved through their continuing contacts with the ordinary people whom they helped the Chinese to govern.

In a parallel process, Chinese officials, acquiring land and wealth and marrying Vietnamese, developed local loyalties and personal ambitions which rendered increasingly remote the claim of Peiping. Out of this mingling of cultures and convergence of interests there was to emerge a new breed of Chinese elite, owing allegiance to their homeland but displaying increasing Vietnamese orientation.

Chinese domination survived the collapse of the Han dynasty
in A.D. 220 and the ensuing period of confusion, during which several anti-Chinese revolts were attempted. In A.D. 248, Trien An, a woman, incited an uprising which was put down the following year. Ly Bon led a revolt in 542 and proclaimed himself emperor in 544 but the Chinese ousted him by the following year. Ly Xuan in 589 and Ly Phat Tu in 602 also tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the Chinese authorities. The leaders of the revolts are honored as national heroes in Vietnam today.

In A.D. 679 the T'ang dynasty (618–907) made the province of Giao Chi a protectorate-general and renamed it Annam (Pacified South), a term resented by the Vietnamese. Under more liberal policies, Annam thrived, the population increased and reclamation and resettlement of the Red River Delta proceeded more vigorously. Culture was further enriched under Buddhist influence, first introduced by a Chinese monk around A.D. 188.

Prosperity and the continued penetration of Chinese influence did not, however, check the growth of incipient national feeling. The Vietnamese were frequently in revolt, and although these uprisings usually involved only upper-class elements and were invariably short lived, they produced an array of national heroes and heroines celebrated in Vietnamese history and still venerated at many village and city shrines.

INDEPENDENCE

The disorders following the fall of the T'ang dynasty provided the opportunity the Vietnamese had long sought. In A.D. 938 one of their generals, Ngo Quyen, in a struggle culminating in the battle of Bach Dang, drove out the occupying Chinese forces from the Red River Delta and founded the short-lived Ngo dynasty. Chinese attempts to retake the Red River valley were repelled, and by 946, though by no means entirely secure and out of danger from the Chinese, the first independent Vietnam became a historical reality. With the exception of a 20-year interlude of Chinese reoccupation early in the fifteenth century, it remained independent for the next 900 years.

The Dinh Dynasty (968–980)

The formation of stable institutions of government which could function without the sustaining influence of a foreign occupying power proved difficult, and during the latter part of the tenth century there were no less than a dozen autonomous local
leaders in the Red River valley. One of them, Dinh Bo Linh, defeated his rivals in 968 and called his new state Dai Co Viet (Great Viet State). The Chinese continued to refer to it as Annam.

Aware of the superior power that the newly established Chinese Sung dynasty (960–1126) could bring against him, Dinh Bo Linh embarked on a course which was to establish the basis for future relations with China for many centuries. He sent an embassy to the Sung court, requesting confirmation of his authority over Dai Co Viet. This embassy agreed to accept, on his behalf, the title of vassal king and to send a triennial tribute to China.

Acceptance of Chinese suzerainty was softened by the understanding that the Chinese would not attempt to restore their authority over the country. Moreover, Dinh Bo Linh was permitted to call himself emperor at home and in dealing with countries other than China. Peace with China was maintained during most of the Dinh dynasty. Relations with the Kingdom of Champa to the south, however, were unfriendly, and the two kingdoms were in frequent conflict. Champa was then within the Indian rather than the Chinese cultural sphere.

The Ly Dynasty (1009–1225)

The Dinh dynasty did not outlast the first emperor, whose throne was usurped. The Ly dynasty, established in 1009, was the first of the great Vietnamese dynasties and, after an interval of confusion, ushered in a period of population growth, territorial expansion, prosperity, cultural development and stability. An efficient central government with a strong administrative and military organization was formed. The Ly rulers, adapting the Confucian Chinese model, gave the government the form it retained until the French conquest.

The emperor had three roles. He was at once the father of the nation-family, the absolute temporal monarch in whom all powers of the state resided, and, finally, the religious head of the realm and intermediary between it and heaven, the highest realm of the supernatural. The work of administering the country was carried on by a civil bureaucracy—the so-called mandarinate. Six administrative departments were created: personal, finance, rites, justice, armed forces, and public works. A board of censors kept watch over the civil servants and advised the emperor of any infractions.
The first literary examinations were held in the mid-eleventh century; a college for prospective civil servants and an imperial academy were founded—all geared to the mandarinate system. Ranked in nine grades, the mandarins were recruited through public examinations in which knowledge of the Chinese Confucian classics and skill in literary composition were the central requirements. This method of recruitment survived until the second decade of the twentieth century.

Public revenues were used to complete the drainage and resettlement of the Red River Delta and to build new dikes, canals and roads. More land was opened up for rice cultivation to feed the expanding population. An army was created which not only repelled a Chinese invasion in 1076 but also checked aggression from the Kingdom of Cambodia and seized territory from the Kingdom of Champa (A.D. 192–1471), which then controlled territories corresponding roughly to the northern half of what is now South Vietnam. It was after one of the victories over Champa in 1069 that Thanh-Tong, the third Ly emperor and one of the greatest Vietnamese sovereigns, renamed the country Dai-Viet (Greater Viet). The country kept this name until 1802, when Emperor Gia Long changed it to Viet Nam.

It was during the Ly dynasty that the expansionist policy of nam-tien began in earnest. This policy was continued down through Vietnamese history until 1780, when the southern tip of the Indochinese peninsula was acquired from Cambodia.

During this dynasty, Buddhism reached its height on the strength of royal patronage. It was made the state religion. Many of the better educated Buddhist monks filled high official posts. The Ly rulers also encouraged Confucianism and Taoism. Taoism, in particular, penetrated the countryside, adulterating popular Buddhism. Art depicting Buddhist themes also flourished. Another notable achievement was the perfection of ceramic art (see ch. 6, Family, Religion and Social Values).

The Tran Dynasty (1225–1400)

In 1225 the throne was seized by the Tran dynasty, which held it for 175 years of repeated military crises, including prolonged conflict with the Kingdom of Champa. Three invasions by the Mongol armies of Kublai Khan—1257, 1284 and 1278—were repelled. The Vietnamese victory under General Tran Hung Dao in the last of these encounters is one of the most celebrated in the annals of the country's history. After the Mongol withdrawal,
the Tran monarch sent a mission to Kublai Khan and reestablished peace as a tributary of Mongol-ruled China.

During this dynasty, Confucianism, with its emphasis on learning, replaced Buddhism in importance. This scholarly atmosphere produced a number of literary accomplishments. The first extant historical records—a 30-volume official history of Dai-Viet (Dai-Viet Su-ky)—date from the Tran. Other historical writings and biographies also appeared—all written in Chinese (see ch. 9, Artistic and Intellectual Expression).

The Chinese Interregnum (1406–28)

Economic and social crises, following the devastation of war, were intensified by the aggrandizement of big landlords at the expense of the peasantry and by incompetence and corruption in the bureaucracy. An ambitious regent, Ho Qui Ly, took advantage of the situation to usurp the throne, thereby giving the Ming dynasty (1368–1662) of China the occasion to intervene on the pretext of restoring the Tran dynasty. Within a year of the Chinese invasion in 1406, Dai-Viet was again a province of China. Under the Ming the country was heavily exploited, and radical measures were instituted to Sinicize the Vietnamese. Within little more than a decade, oppression had brought into being a powerful movement of national resistance.

The Le Dynasty (1428–1788)

The leader of the movement to restore independence was Le Loi, an aristocratic landowner. Employing guerrilla tactics, he waged a 10-year fight against the Chinese, defeating them in 1427. Shortly after the Chinese left the country, he ascended the throne under the name of Le Thai To. His dynasty lasted for 360 years.

During the early years of the dynasty, the kingdom grew more powerful than it had ever been, particularly under Le Thanh-Tong, one of the most celebrated rulers in Vietnamese history. The triennial tribute to China was paid regularly, and relations with the Chinese were peaceful. At the same time, war was vigorously pushed against the Kingdom of Champa; when it was finally conquered in 1471, all Champa territory north of Mui Dieu (formerly called Cap Varella or Varella Cape) was annexed. The remaining territory became a vassal state in tribute to Dai-Viet. The Vietnamese, however, continued to absorb Champa until it
disappeared as a political entity. All that remains of this once-advanced culture in present-day Vietnam is a small rural ethnic minority called Cham and impressive ruins in the Central Lowlands.

The power and prestige of the Le dynasty declined after the death of Le Thanh Tong in 1497. In 1527, General Mac Dang Dung usurped the throne and established a new dynasty for which he was able to purchase the unenthusiastic approval of the Chinese. Shortly thereafter, another powerful family, the Nguyen, set up a descendant of the deposed Le dynasty as head of the government-in-exile south of Hanoi—an event which marked the beginning of a century and a half of regional strife and of division between the north and the south which lasted until the latter part of the eighteenth century. In this struggle, the place of the Mac was taken by another family, the Trinh, which in 1592 defeated the Mac ruler and reinstalled a puppet Le emperor on the throne in the north. Meanwhile, the Nguyen were able to consolidate power in the region south of the seventeenth parallel.

It was in the name of the Le emperor, the symbol of national unity, that the Nguyen and the Trinh carried on their war against each other. Both the Trinh, who controlled the Le emperors at this time, and the Nguyen, who ruled as independent autocrats, claimed support of the Le as justification for the legitimacy of the respective regimes. In 1673, after half a century of bloody and inconclusive fighting, a truce was concluded which lasted for 100 years.

This 100 years of peace brought a great cultural resurgence, especially to the north, where the Vietnamese civilization was well established. Along with the Buddhist renaissance that occurred, there was much literary and artistic effort. The north produced great works of history and historical criticism.

Under the Nguyen, Vietnamese expansion, at the expense of Cambodia, was vigorously pursued. The remaining coastal territories of the Champa were gradually absorbed, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a series of short but decisive wars were waged with the Cambodians, who then occupied the Mekong Delta and most of the south-central portion of the Indochinese peninsula. The acquisition of the vastly fertile Mekong Delta represented a gain of major proportion for the land-hungry Vietnamese. By the end of the eighteenth century, Vietnamese control extended to the limits of contemporary South Vietnam.
The Tay Son Uprising (1776–1802)

Late in the eighteenth century three brothers of a Nguyen family in the village of Tay Son in central Vietnam led an uprising against the ruling Nguyen (to whom they were not related). The rebellion had popular support, both of the peasants and of the merchants. The oldest of the brothers, Nhac, drove the Nguyen lords out of the south by 1778 and proclaimed himself emperor over southern Dai-Viet. The youngest brother, Hue, led the attack on the Trinh in the north, defeating them in 1786. In 1788, after abolishing the decrepit Le dynasty and extending his power to the south at the expense of his brother, he made himself emperor of a reunited Vietnam. A new Chinese invasion attempt was repelled by him in 1788. He is known as the Quang-Trung Emperor. Hoping to cultivate a Vietnamese national consciousness free of Chinese influence, he substituted chu nom (the vulgate script using Chinese characters to express Vietnamese sounds) for Chinese in all public acts and military proclamations.

THE ARRIVAL OF EUROPEANS

The pioneering voyage of Vasco da Gama to India in 1498 showed the way from Europe to Asia by sea. The Portuguese ships which followed drove rapidly eastward, establishing, sometimes by peaceful means but often by force or the threat of force, a line of trading and missionary outposts which in two generations extended from Goa, through Malacca, the Indies, and Macao to Nagasaki. The Spanish, meanwhile, coming across the Pacific from their holdings in the New World, were installing themselves in the Philippines and seeking to challenge the Portuguese monopoly of the coveted spice trade. Other European powers—Holland, England, and France—joined the maritime procession eastward, ultimately overshadowing the Portuguese in a sanguinary competition, at first for trade and later for colonial possessions.

The European wave reached Vietnam in 1585 with the arrival in Vung Da Nang (Da Nang Bay) of the Portuguese captain Antonio da Faria. For a century the Portuguese, trading through the port of Faifo (later named Hoi An), a few miles to the south, dominated European commerce with Vietnam. Confronting a strongly organized state power and a sophisticated, resourceful officialdom, they could not, as in the Indies, impose their will or deal purely on their own terms. In the Nguyen, locked in conflict with the Trinh, they found a market for Western weapons and