

## *A Brief History of VietNam*

Sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200, the intermingling of the Red River Delta's early inhabitants resulted in a distinct Vietnamese people.



Virtually from the outset, the Vietnamese were ruled by the Chinese, and they would continue to be until A.D. 938.

During the centuries of Chinese control over the Red River Delta, two independent states rose to power in what is now central and southern

VietNam. From the first to the sixth centuries, the kingdom of Funan held sway over the Mekong Delta and the region that is now Cambodia; the kingdom was overthrown by the Mon-Khmer, who founded the Cambodian empire.

Along the coast of central VietNam, the kingdom of Champa ruled from the late second century until the 15th, when it was conquered by the Vietnamese, who expanded steadily southward after expelling the Chinese. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, the Vietnamese would wrest the Mekong Delta from Cambodia, essentially completing the formation of their country.

Of the more than a dozen dynasties that have ruled independent VietNam, three are considered "great." The first was the Ly (1009-1225), whose rulers established Hanoi as their capital in the year 1010, naming it Thang Long, the City of the Soaring Dragon. (It was not until 1831 that the name Hanoi-City in a Bend of the River-came into use.) The Ly built new roads, dikes, and canals, and they vigorously promoted agriculture. In 1044 - 22 years before William the Conqueror invaded England the Ly founded VietNam's first postal service.

The Ly dynasty ended in overthrow by the Tran, who established the second great dynasty (1225-1400). In 1407, the Chinese re-conquered Vietnam, but this time their rule lasted only two decades. In 1428, they were driven out by the Vietnamese hero who established the third great dynasty, Le Loi. The Le dynasty, which held power until 1524, introduced a series of remarkable reforms. Arts, literature, and education were promoted. Large landowners were forced to distribute their holdings to the land less. Legal reforms gave women nearly equal rights with men.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Vietnam was split by warring factions. Northern Vietnam was ruled by the powerful Trinh Lords, the south controlled by lords of the Nguyen line. In 1786, three brothers, the Tay Son, briefly reunited the country, but even as they fought to depose the Trinh and Nguyen lords, their empire began fragmenting.

In 1802, one of the Nguyen lords defeated the Ay Son and proclaimed himself Emperor Gig Long, establishing the last of Vietnam's dynasties. The Nguyen made Hue their imperial capital, and they ruled from there until the last Vietnamese emperor, Bao Dai, abdicated to a delegation representing Ho Chi Minh in 1945.

Vietnam's contacts with the West began as early as A.D. 166, when Roman travelers passed through the Red River Delta. It wasn't until much later, however, that there was any sustained Western contact. By 1516, a number of Portuguese adventurers had arrived, followed by missionaries and soldiers. Over the next century a trading center and mission were established in the port of Faifo, just south of present day DaNang. The Portuguese were followed by missionaries from Spain, Italy, and France. Everyone seemed intent on converting the Vietnamese, and in the process, cultivating stronger trading ties, but no one had much luck in making a profit from trade with the Vietnamese. The Dutch tried and failed, as did the English.

The early French trading efforts foundered as well, but the French never gave up. Off and on for nearly two centuries, the French kept lurking around Indochina. From about 1850s on, French abandoned diplomatic overtures and settled on a policy of conquest. It would take them several decades, but by 1893 they had carved out an Indochinese empire that included VietNam, Laos,

and Cambodia. The French then set about plundering the immense wealth of those holdings.

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