

ment. In the years since reunification, it has been a source of continuing difficulties for the party leadership in Hanoi.

One further aspect of this problem merits brief mention here. Although a sense of common national identity is strong among all ethnic Vietnamese, history, politics, and geography have promoted the emergence of regional attitudes even within the majority culture. Vietnamese tend to recognize three separate regional groupings, each with its distinctive character: northerners, southerners, and Central Vietnamese. Best known, of course, because of recent history, are the distinctly different attitudes of northerners and southerners toward politics, social organization, and behavioral patterns. The peoples of the North are viewed as hardworking, serious, community-oriented, formal in their habits, and conservative in their resistance to change. Southerners are often described as easygoing, informal, rebellious, and individualistic. Centrists are often traditionalist and conservative in their outlook and tend to oppose both the Westernized bourgeois culture to the south and the social radicalism represented by Communist rule to the north. Some of these contrasts are undoubtedly a consequence of climate and geography. Where the North is densely populated, short of arable land, and relatively traditional in its social patterns, the South is considered a "frontier area," with excess land, a higher level of social mobility, and a more informal attitude toward social relationships. Not only was the recent civil war a product of such attitudes, but it also tended to accentuate them. Today the Communist regime is attempting, with considerable difficulty, to reduce such differences and create a more homogeneous population by assimilating the easy-going Southerners into the relatively regimental system in existence in the North.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Bruce Grant, *The Boat People: An "Age" Investigation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 102.

In Duiker, William. 1995. *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition*, 2nd edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 15-29.

2

Precolonial Vietnam

PREHISTORY

The origins of the Vietnamese people are shrouded in mystery. It has sometimes been asserted that their ancestral homeland was not in the Red River delta, where they first appear in history, but elsewhere, probably in South China. At present, there is little evidence to confirm this view. Archeological evidence indicates that human habitation in the area of the delta and the adjacent mountains extends back at least several hundred thousand years to the early Paleolithic era. Recent finds by Vietnamese archeologists at Mount Do in Thanh Hoa province have confirmed that early human beings lived in the area at roughly the same time as the famous earliest examples of Peking Man and Java Man, about 500,000 years ago.

Unfortunately, there is little to link such scattered evidence to present-day inhabitants. The first clear signs of the probable ancestors of the modern-day Vietnamese and their neighbors in the adjacent mountains recently appeared as the result of archeological finds in the vicinity of the modern cities of Hoa Binh and Lang Son, suggesting the emergence of Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures in the vicinity of the delta at least 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. Available evidence suggests that the earlier stages were characterized by hunting and food gathering; the later stages show signs of the cultivation of agriculture and the domestication of animals—an indication that the inhabitants of the area had mastered primitive agricultural techniques as early as 9,000 years ago. If this is the case, the Vietnamese were among the first peoples to practice settled agriculture.

By 1300 B.C., the Stone Age civilization had clearly passed into the Bronze Age. Concrete evidence for this transformation appeared with the discovery of finely crafted bronze drums at an archeological site at Dong Son in Thanh Hoa province. Bronze work of this type has been found in neighboring areas in Southeast Asia and in China, and some archeologists have speculated that the technique of bronze working was imported into Vietnam from the north. Others, noting the sophistication of the work-

manship, have suggested that the technique may have been first mastered by the inhabitants at Dong Son and later spread throughout the region. Whatever the case, other evidence at the site confirms that, by the end of the second millennium B.C., the inhabitants in the vicinity of the Red River delta had created an advanced civilization based on foreign trade and the cultivation of wet rice.

THE ORIGINS OF VIETNAMESE CIVILIZATION

Were the inhabitants of these Neolithic and Bronze Age sites ancestors of the present-day Vietnamese? At this point, evidence is too scanty to permit firm conclusions, although some experts suggest that the peoples who inhabited these Neolithic sites probably belonged to the Australoid-Negroid group, early inhabitants who may later have combined with arriving elements from South China to form the ancestors of many of the current peoples of mainland Southeast Asia, including the Vietnamese. What seems clear is that sometime during the last millennium B.C. the ancestors of the present-day Vietnamese had emerged as a significant force in the lowland and upland regions in the vicinity of the Red River delta. This was a period of rapid change throughout the area. During the previous several centuries, Chinese civilization had been gradually expanding from its origins along the banks of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers in China. By the late third century, this dynamic culture had begun to expand among the proto-Chinese peoples in the hilly regions south of the Yangtze River. With growth, however, had come instability and a long period of internal civil war (called, in Chinese history, the period of the Warring States) that was brought to an end only in 221 B.C. with the creation of the first centralized Chinese empire of the Ch'in, under the dynamic ruler Ch'in Shih Huang Ti.

Among those peoples who were affected and later absorbed by the new empire of the Ch'in were the so-called Yueh (in Vietnamese, Viet) peoples then living throughout the southern coastal provinces of China and down into mainland Southeast Asia. Among the southernmost of these Viet peoples were the so-called Lac Viet, who lived in the lowland marshy areas of the Red River delta. Sometime during the third century B.C., the Lac Viet united with other Viet peoples (sometime called the Tay Au, or Hsi Ou in Chinese) living in the nearby mountains to found the small state of Au Lac with its capital at Co Loa, not far from the present-day city of Hanoi. What little is known about the kingdom of Au Lac comes largely from Chinese sources. The state was primarily agricultural, and the people tilled the fields with polished stone hoes. Most of the arable land was owned by feudal aristocrats; there may have been some slavery. By Chinese standards, Lac Viet was undoubtedly rather small and un-

exceptional. According to Vietnamese historical sources, however, the small state had a distinguished ancestry; it was descended from a semimythical Hong Bang dynasty, which had ruled over an ancient kingdom of Van Lang for more than two thousand years, beginning in 2879 B.C. The historical accuracy of such records is difficult to determine, and certainly those parts relating the origins of the Vietnamese peoples to the marriage of a dragon, Lac Long Quan, and a fairy, Au Ca, are apocryphal. Yet historians believe that Van Lang may have been an actual state, and it is not unlikely that the origins of the kingdom of Au Lac can be found in the Dong Son Bronze Age civilization a thousand years earlier.

THE CHINESE CONQUEST

Whatever its origins, the infant kingdom of Au Lac was not destined to survive. In 206 B.C. the short-lived Ch'in dynasty collapsed. In the chaotic situation that ensued, one of the Ch'in military commanders in South China, General Chao T'o (in Vietnamese, Trieu Da), founded a new kingdom of Nam Viet (South Viet, or Nan Yueh in Chinese), with its capital at Canton. In the process of consolidating his rule, Trieu Da defeated the armies of Au Lac and assimilated the lands of the Red River delta into his own empire. Trieu Da was able to maintain control over his kingdom until his death, but his successor soon ran into conflict with the new Han dynasty that had risen from the ashes of the Ch'in in China, and in 111 B.C. Chinese armies defeated Nam Viet and incorporated it into the growing empire of the Han.

The Chinese conquest had lasting consequences for Vietnam. At first Chinese rulers were willing to apply the principle of indirect rule and governed the peoples of the delta through local tribal chieftains. During the early years of the first century A.D. however, Chinese efforts to assimilate the area politically and culturally into the Han empire intensified. Chinese settlers began to immigrate into the area in increasing numbers, and some were selected to assume a major role in administration. Chinese institutions and customs were introduced as Chinese authorities sought to transform what they considered a semibarbarian society into a more civilized reflection of parent China to the north. This policy of Sinification undermined the social status and political authority of the native feudal magnates, however, and in 39 A.D. led to a revolt by the famous Trung sisters (Hai Ba Trung). Trung Trac and her sister, Trung Nhi, were widows of Vietnamese noblemen who had allegedly died fighting the Chinese. Now they hoisted the banner of rebellion against foreign rule. The revolt was briefly successful, and Trung Trac declared herself ruler of an independent kingdom. But Han armies under General Ma Yuan soon returned to the attack and reincorporated the rebellious areas into the Chinese em-

pire. In despair, the Trung sisters committed suicide by throwing themselves into a river.

For the next several centuries, Vietnam was a part of China, exposed to a concentrated policy of political and cultural assimilation. Chinese administrators replaced local aristocrats in positions of authority, although a few Vietnamese were permitted to occupy subordinate positions in the bureaucracy. The Chinese written language was introduced and became the official language of administration and literary expression. Chinese rituals and customs replaced the relatively informal social mores practiced by the local Vietnamese. The Confucian classics became the foundation of the educational system in Vietnam. Chinese art, architecture, and music were imported and served as models for Vietnamese creative workers.

From the Chinese standpoint, the effort to integrate Vietnam into the broader world of Chinese culture was simply an extension of the historic attempt to pacify the outer frontier of the Chinese world and bring culture to the allegedly barbarian peoples living beyond the bounds of Confucian civilization. As such, the conquest and absorption of the Red River delta was not only a security problem but a consequence of the cultural dynamism and moral imperatives of the Chinese state. For most of the proto-Chinese peoples living in South China, the effort was a success, and the provinces south of the Yangtze River are today an integral part of the cultural world of modern China (although it should be noted that cultural differences between North and South China remain, and even today, Vietnamese intellectuals are occasionally prone to comment on the cultural and ethnic similarities of Vietnamese and South Chinese). In the case of Vietnam, the effort failed. Why this occurred is both a matter of intense pride to the Vietnamese and a source of dispute and fascination among historians. Whatever the reasons, several centuries of Chinese rule were not able to erase the memory of Vietnamese independence, and revolts broke out sporadically in abortive efforts to drive out the foreign invader.

INDEPENDENCE RESTORED

In the early tenth century, the T'ang dynasty, one of the most powerful and advanced in Chinese history, began to disintegrate. Taking advantage of the chaos, a revolt led by Ngo Quyen drove out the Chinese and restored the independent state of Nam Viet, with its capital at the ancient city of Co Loa. But Ngo Quyen died in 944, and for the remainder of the century the country was shaken by civil war. Only the weakness of the new Sung dynasty prevented a reconquest of the area by Chinese troops. In 1010, however, a new Ly dynasty rose and soon proved to be one of the stablest and most glorious in the history of the Vietnamese nation. Under



Chinese ancestral temple at Hoi An. (Photo property of the author.)

the leadership of several dynamic emperors, notably the founder Ly Thai To and his successor Ly Thanh Ton, the Vietnamese state, now renamed Dai Viet (Great Viet), consolidated its independence and began to expand beyond the confines of the Red River delta. In that undertaking, the new state learned quickly the benefits of relying on Chinese experience. The political institutions and ideology of Confucian China were retained and put to use in building a centralized state.

Like China, and like most of its neighbors throughout the region, Vietnam was an agricultural society, based primarily on the cultivation of wet rice. In terms of landownership, the system in some ways resembled the feudal system in medieval Europe. In theory, the king owned all land, but much of it was normally awarded to top officials or nobles who were thus able to amass vast feudal manor holdings. Most of these manor holdings were tilled by serfs or, in some cases, slaves, but there was also a class of freeholding peasants based on small plots of land in countless villages throughout the Red River delta or along the coast.

If agriculture was the foundation of the state, commerce and manufacturing were not entirely neglected. Handicrafts flourished in the major cities (mainly textiles, ceramics, and wood and metal working), and a trading network developed not only within the country but with the mountain peoples and other states across the South China Sea as well. Like China, however, Vietnam under the Ly was not primarily a seafaring state, and commerce was distinctly secondary to agriculture in national priorities.

China had not abandoned its dream of ruling Vietnam. The Sung dynasty, which ruled until the late thirteenth century, lacked the military prowess to restore Chinese rule over the delta, although the rulers of Dai Viet, in order to avoid provoking imperial hostility, accepted tributary status with the court to the north. In the late thirteenth century, however, the Sung fell to the growing power of the Mongols, who established the new Yuan dynasty in 1279. Under the Yuan the old threat to Dai Viet rapidly revived. In 1285, the Tran ruler (the Tran dynasty had succeeded the Ly in 1225) refused permission for Mongol troops to cross Vietnamese territory to attack the state of Champa along the coast to the south. To punish such insolence, a Mongol army invaded Vietnam and sacked the capital. But the Vietnamese, under the inspired and astute leadership of one of their greatest national heroes, Tran Hung Dao, mobilized a national war of resistance against the invaders and, after several bloody battles, drove them back across the frontier. Two years later the Mongols returned to the attack but were again dealt a stunning defeat and eventually accepted a Vietnamese declaration of fealty to the Yuan emperor.

By the late fourteenth century, the Tran dynasty, plagued by famine, official corruption, land hunger, and almost constant war with the state of

Champa, had begun to decay. In 1400, Ho Quy Ly, the regent for a child emperor, seized the throne. In China, Emperor Yung Lo of the vigorous new Ming dynasty refused to recognize the new dynasty and in 1407 launched an invasion, bringing Vietnam once again under foreign rule. Chinese officials were again imported to fill all high-ranking posts, and a program of comprehensive sinification was adopted to replace all remaining native traditions.

This time, Chinese rule lasted only twenty years. Although early resistance, mounted by a claimant representing the Tran dynasty, failed, in 1418 a more serious threat was mounted by commoner from Thanh Hoa province. Le Loi, son of a prosperous landowner and a former official who had refused to serve under the Ming occupation, declared himself a new "pacifying king" and, with the aid of the astute Confucian scholar and military genius Nguyen Trai, launched a guerrilla movement in the hilly regions of Thanh Hoa province, south of Hanoi. By 1426, Le Loi felt strong enough to begin a major offensive against Chinese positions in the Red River delta and to lay siege to Chinese troops in the capital. The Ming court sent reinforcements, but they suffered a disastrous defeat. In the winter of 1427, Chinese forces surrendered and were permitted to withdraw. Like most founding emperors, Le Loi of the new Le dynasty set out immediately to solve one of the most persistent problems in Vietnamese society, the inequality of landholdings. Large landowners who had served the Tran or the Chinese were dispossessed by the state, and their land was redistributed among Le Loi's followers, while village commune lands were distributed to the poor. Legal restrictions on peasant rights were eased or eliminated, and rents were reduced. Major efforts were made to increase grain productivity.

The early Le dynasty can be considered a high point in the evolution of traditional society in Vietnam. A series of vigorous rulers reduced the power of the feudal magnates and issued decrees calling for greater equality of landholdings. The influence of Buddhist advisers at court declined, and a strengthened bureaucracy based on Confucian orthodoxy was established. The regime reached its apogee under Le Thanh Tong (1460–1497), during whose reign a new civil code, called the Hong Duc Code, was promulgated to establish the rule of law and systematize the laws and regulations of the empire.

MARCH TO THE SOUTH

One major contribution of the Le dynasty was to solve a long-standing problem in relations with Vietnam's neighbor to the south, Champa. For centuries, the major foreign policy concern of the Vietnamese state had been the danger of invasion from the north. Under the independent



Cham temples at Nha Trang. (Photo property of the author.)

dynasties of the Ly, the Tran, and the Le, however, a new frontier opened up to the south. Here, along the central coast, lay the kingdom of Champa. Originally of Malay extraction, the Cham were a seafaring people who since the first millennium A.D. had inhabited the coastal areas of what is today central Vietnam and down into the Mekong delta. Unlike Vietnam, Champa had been exposed to influence not from China but from India and, after the eighth century, from Islam. If Dai Viet was a classic example of an Asian agricultural society, using its ability to exploit water resources to produce a food surplus, Champa was an active participant in the trading network establishing by Chinese and Arab traders throughout the region of the South China Sea. With the rise of the Ly dynasty in the eleventh century, tension between the two neighboring states began to increase and eventually led to conflict. On several occasions, Cham armies invaded the southern provinces of Dai Viet and once, taking advantage of the internal decay of the Ly, even sacked the Vietnamese capital. In general, however, the Vietnamese had the better of the struggle and, during the early Le dynasty, gradually advanced south, forcing the Cham to cede territory and move their capital southward. In 1471, Vietnamese troops occupied the Cham capital at Vijaya (in present-day Binh Dinh province) and reduced the state to a virtual dependency.

Vietnamese expansion to the south provided new lands for a growing population and extended the power of the state but also created new

problems. With territorial expansion, combined with the gradual decline of the Le dynasty in the sixteenth century, tension arose at court and led to the rise of two powerful noble families, the Trinh and the Nguyen. Under weak rulers, land seizures by the wealthy and powerful and official corruption drove desperate peasants to rebellion. Rivalry between the Trinh and Nguyen led to the domination of the former in the North, while the latter were compelled to accept viceroyship over the newly conquered lands in the South, with their capital at Huê.

Internal dissension, however, did not end Vietnamese expansion in the South. On the contrary, the Nguyen completed their conquest of the Mekong delta and placed the entire area under Vietnamese rule. By now their main rival was the declining Khmer empire of Angkor in Cambodia. In earlier centuries, Angkor had been the most powerful state in mainland Southeast Asia and had held sway over much of the lower Mekong and the area around the Tonle Sap. By the mid-fifteenth century, however, its power was in decline, and when marauding Thai armies sacked the capital near the present-day market town of Siem Reap, the Angkor kingdom abandoned the area near the Tonle Sap and established a new capital at Phnom Penh. During the seventeenth century, Vietnamese settlers, frequently supplemented by armed force, gradually occupied lands from modern Bien Hoa down to the delta of the Mekong. Taking advantage of factionalism at the Khmer court, the Nguyen periodically intervened in internal politics and reduced the disintegrating Khmer state to a virtual dependency of Vietnam, while consolidating their control over the lower Mekong.

THE COMING OF THE WEST

The expansion of the Vietnamese state toward the south in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coincided generally with the appearance of a new political and cultural force on the Southeast Asian scene. In 1511, the first signs of the new age of Western adventurism emerged with the arrival of a Portuguese fleet under Admiral Alfonso da Albuquerque at Malacca, on the west coast of the Malayan peninsula. The Portuguese were followed by others, and by the end of the century the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea were teeming with ships flying the flags of Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, and England.

The motives of the Europeans were diverse. While statesmen viewed the East in terms of imperial grandeur, control over the seas, and national wealth and power, merchants were lured by the promise of riches and a monopoly of the spice trade that had so long been dominated by Arab traders. Men of the cloth viewed the newly discovered lands as the home of millions of heathen souls to be saved. As the process acceler-

ated, such motives often coalesced and intertwined. European governments subsidized the formation of joint stock companies, like the famous Dutch and British East India companies, to exploit the riches of Asia. Catholic missionaries accompanied Spanish, French, or Portuguese fleets on their voyages and frequently combined mercantile activity with their evangelical mission.

Vietnam's first direct exposure to the West came in 1535 when a Portuguese ship entered the bay of Da Nang on the central coast. Within a few years the Portuguese had set up a trading port at Faifo (now, Hoi An), a few miles to the south, which now became the main port of entry for foreign goods. The Portuguese were soon followed by others, and by early in the seventeenth century traders from several European nations were active at several ports along the Vietnamese coast.

The first Catholic mission to Vietnam came in 1615, when Jesuit missionaries from the Portuguese colony of Macao set up a small mission at Faifo. A similar mission was set up in the Trinh capital of Thang Long (today Hanoi) a decade later. The French, however, soon became the leaders in the effort. Under the vigorous sponsorship of an ambitious Jesuit scholar, Alexander of Rhodes, French Catholics set up the Society of Foreign Missions to train missionaries to propagate the Christian faith in Vietnam. A significant aspect of Rhodes' work was his desire to train native priests to serve the needs of Vietnamese converts. As a means of facilitating this goal, he devised the first transliteration of the Vietnamese spoken language into the roman alphabet. Although this written script (known as *quoc ngu*, or national language) did not at that time come into general use, French and later Vietnamese missionaries used to translate the Bible into Vietnamese. As a result of such dedicated efforts, thousands of Vietnamese were converted to the new faith.

Success, however, was short-lived. Missionary activities eventually antagonized Vietnamese authorities, who feared, with some justification, that Christian doctrine would subvert Confucian institutions and beliefs and undermine the loyalty of the population to the emperor. In 1631, the propagation of Christianity was barred in the South; thirty years later, a similar decree was issued in the North. European missionaries were expelled, and a few were executed. A similar decline occurred in commercial contacts. Although by no means a poor country, Vietnam had relatively little to offer in the way of spices and mineral resources. In 1697, the French closed down their small factory at Faifo. Others soon followed, leaving only the Portuguese with a small office.

THE TAY SON REBELLION

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, peasant rebellions had underscored rural unhappiness about mandarin corruption, land grab-

bing by the wealthy, and the general incompetence of the decrepit Le regime. Like peasant jacqueries everywhere, most were disorganized and quickly put down. But in 1771, a rebellion broke out that would eventually overthrow both the Nguyen and the Trinh and lead to the founding of a dynasty that united the country once again. The leaders of the revolt were three brothers from the village of Tay Son in Binh Dinh province in Central Vietnam, thus providing the so-called Tay Son rebellion with its name. Riding in the vanguard of such a widespread struggle by impoverished and land-hungry peasants in South to alleviate intolerable economic conditions, the Tay Son brothers, like Asian Robin Hoods, ravaged the countryside while seizing the wealth of the rich and giving it to the poor. For several years the rebellion was limited to the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh. But in 1776, the Trinh took advantage of the chaotic situation and invaded the Nguyen domain. In the confusion, the Tay Son rebels seized Saigon. Many of the Nguyen lords were killed, but one, Prince Nguyen Anh, managed to flee to safety to an island in the South China Sea.

Flushed with success, the rebels now attacked the North and overthrew Trinh rule. Promising to restore power to the figurehead Le dynasty, the eldest and most capable of the brothers, Nguyen Huê, now married the daughter of the emperor and declared his fealty to the old dynasty. The emperor, however, distrusted the intentions of the Tay Son rebels and requested assistance from Chinese Emperor Ch'ien Lung. In 1788, a Chinese invasion force crossed the border and seized Hanoi, but Nguyen Huê deposed the Le ruler and declared himself the founding emperor of a new dynasty. In a bitter conflict near Hanoi, the Vietnamese achieved a decisive victory over Chinese forces, who fled in disorder back to China.

Following traditional fashion, the new emperor, under the reign title Quang Trung, set out to solidify his rule by improving conditions in rural areas. Common lands were returned to the poor peasants, and fields abandoned by their owners during the civil war were put back under the plow. Commercial activity was promoted and good relations were sought with China. But Emperor Quang Trung died suddenly in 1792 at the age of forty, and his two brothers proved to lack his acumen; the empire rapidly began to disintegrate.

The sudden decline of the power of the Tay Son came as a blessing to the remaining survivor of the Nguyen house in the South. After fleeing to Phu Quoc Island to escape the Tay Son, Nguyen Anh went to Thailand to seek assistance to recover his patrimony, but his first attempt to return was defeated in 1784. Then, however, he was befriended by Pigneau de Behaine, a French bishop stationed at Ha Tien on the Gulf of Thailand. Convinced that French help in restoring Nguyen Anh to power could cre-

ate an opening for the revival of Catholic missionary activity in Vietnam, Pigneau promised to provide him with assistance. A trip by Pigneau to Paris in 1787 elicited a promise from the French government to support a naval expedition against the Tay Son in return for a promise of trade privileges and the cession of Poulo Condore Island and Da Nang harbor to France. The plan was scuttled by the French viceroy in India, however, who refused to provide the funds for the mission. Undeterred, Pigneau raised the money on his own to purchase two ships and provide weapons and volunteers for an expedition that was launched in the summer of 1789. After the death of Quang Trung in 1792, the insurgents began to make progress, and in 1802, Nguyen Anh seized Hanoi and declared the founding of a new Nguyen dynasty with its capital at Huê, in Central Vietnam. Pigneau, who died in 1799, did not live to see the victory of his protégé.

THE NGUYEN DYNASTY

Pigneau de Behaine's gamble that French assistance to Nguyen Anh would provide an opening for French commercial and missionary interests in Vietnam proved to be unjustified. The new emperor, assigning himself the reign title Gia Long, was reasonably tolerant and permitted French missionaries to operate in Vietnam during his lifetime. He refused to ratify the abortive treaty arranged by Pigneau in Paris, however, and French hopes for improved trade relations between the two countries were not fulfilled. After Gia Long died in 1820, his successor Minh Mang continued and in some ways extended this restrictive policy toward contact with the West. Bright and dedicated, the new emperor was a devout believer in Confucian orthodoxy, and although interested in mastering Western technology, he feared the effects of European ideas on traditional culture in Vietnam. During his reign, the propagation of Christianity was sternly forbidden and missionaries and their converts were persecuted. A few who persisted were executed.

The dynasty's effort to solve Vietnam's chronic social and economic problems had only indifferent success. Despite attempts to control land concentration and official corruption, conditions in rural areas did not improve significantly from the declining years of the Le, resulting in sporadic peasant unrest. Such problems were intensified by internal dissension at court and the widespread unpopularity of the Nguyen dynasty in the North, where memories of the civil war ran deep.

THE FRENCH CONQUEST

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, commercial, military, and religious circles in France had attempted to goad the French

government into adopting a more active policy toward Vietnam. Such voices became even more vocal at mid-century, when periodic executions of French missionaries in Vietnam aroused a public outcry. For the most part, government leaders had resisted these pressures, but by the late 1850s it had become difficult to maintain such an attitude. Commercial interests, concerned at increasing British control over Burma and the possible loss to the British of the "China Market," agitated for an aggressive policy to bring Vietnam under French influence and to open up the "soft underbelly" of China to French economic exploitation. Religious organizations, angered over Huê's persecution of Catholic missionary activity, demanded protection for French missionaries and Christian converts in Vietnam. In 1857, the government dispatched a French fleet to seize the central Vietnamese port city of Da Nang and to compel the Vietnamese court to accept French demands.

The first attack, launched in the summer of 1858, did not achieve these objectives. A predicted revolt against the imperial government in the rural areas along the central coast did not materialize, and European troops were pinned down in the city and unable to advance northward to threaten the imperial capital. With his troops ravaged by disease, the French commander, Admiral Charles Rigault de Genouilly, decided to evacuate the city and resume the attack further south at Saigon, which the French seized the following February. In succeeding months, French troops extended their control into neighboring areas after bitter fighting. Defeat in the South, coupled with a spreading revolt led by Le pretenders in the North, led the court to seek peace, and in the spring of 1862, French and Vietnamese negotiators reached agreement on a treaty that ceded three provinces in the South and the island of Poulo Condore to France. Three port cities were opened to French commerce, and Christian missionaries were granted freedom to propagate their religion in Vietnam.

The seizure of three provinces in the South was only the first step in a process that led before the end of the century to the conquest of the remainder of the country and the creation of an Indochinese Union including Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In 1867, French units under Governor Benoit de la Grandière seized the remainder of the South and transformed the area into the French colony of Cochinchina. In the meantime, the French had assumed Vietnamese rights in Cambodia and turned it into a protectorate. For more than two centuries, Thailand and Vietnam had clashed repeatedly over dominance in Phnom Penh, with each relying for support on factions within the Khmer court. In the early nineteenth century, Vietnam had turned the disintegrating state into a virtual protectorate, but resistance to Vietnamese domination led to a revolt, and in 1846, an agreement between Vietnam and Thailand placed the area under their joint suzerainty. In the Treaty of Saigon, signed in 1862, the Nguyen court

renounced its claims over Cambodia, claims that were assumed a few months later by France.

The seizure of Cochin China and Cambodia did not satisfy the dreams of French expansionists. Exploratory probes made it clear that the Mekong River did not offer a water route to the vast potential market of South China. Militant elements in Saigon and Paris agitated for vigorous action to bring the North under French rule and put France in a more advantageous position to dominate the China market.

In 1873, an opportunity to extend French influence to the north appeared when a French adventurer, Jean Dupuis, who had been running guns up the Red River into South China, encountered difficulties with local authorities. When the Vietnamese authorities attempted to control his activities, he mobilized a small military force of Europeans and Asians, seized parts of Hanoi, and then appealed to the governor of Cochin China in Saigon, Admiral Jean-Marie Dupré, for assistance. Dupré, who viewed the situation as an opportunity to compel the court to accept a French protectorate over the remainder of Vietnam and French authority in all of Cochin China, dispatched a small detachment of French troops under the command of a former naval officer, Francis Garnier. Ostensibly, Garnier's responsibility was to extract Dupuis from Hanoi, but Garnier—an imperialist in the mold of Cecil Rhodes—joined forces with Dupuis and seized the Hanoi citadel. Garnier himself was killed in a brief skirmish with imperial troops in December. In Paris, however, reaction to Saigon's unilateral effort to seize the North was hostile, and after the government had informed Saigon of its opposition to an occupation of the North, French troops were withdrawn in return for the court's recognition of French sovereignty over all Cochin China.

In the mid-1880s, the French completed their conquest of Vietnam. Pressure in France to adopt a more aggressive policy to counter British advances in Burma continued to rise, and in early 1882, reacting to the arrival in the North of Chinese troops in response to a plea for help from the court at Huế, Captain Henri Rivière was dispatched with 200 men to Hanoi. Arriving in April, he seized the citadel and consolidated French control over the entire lower delta. Rivière was later killed in a skirmish with pirates, but Paris had already decided to take further military action to bring the court to heel and to force it to accept French suzerainty. Taking advantage of the death of Emperor Tu Duc, Paris ordered additional troops to the delta. Resistance from Chinese and Vietnamese forces was soon broken, and in August 1883, the dispirited court acceded to French demands and signed a treaty establishing a French protectorate over the remainder of the country. In a separate treaty, China renounced its claims to a tributary relationship with Vietnam. Less than a decade later, the new

French "balcony on the Pacific" was completed by the establishment of a protectorate over the kingdom of Laos.

CONCLUSION

To those acquainted with the history of the Vietnamese people, the relative ease with which the Nguyen court succumbed to the French is somewhat puzzling. Why, after a tradition of centuries of staunch resistance to invasion from the north, did the Vietnamese so readily accept the new rulers from the West? One obvious factor is the military superiority possessed by the French, an advantage that marked virtually every confrontation between European and non-European societies at that time. But another was that Vietnam had the misfortune of encountering intense Western pressure at a time of serious internal weakness. Since the decline of the Le dynasty in the late sixteenth century, the country had faced serious internal problems. Expansion to the south had eased the heavy pressure on the land in the Red River delta, but it had not solved the problems of official corruption or concentration of land in the hands of the wealthy. Peasant unrest had become a familiar part of the political landscape and continued to cause internal instability well into the middle of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, expansion had led to a growing split within the ruling elite, resulting in the *de facto* division of Vietnamese society into two separate and mutually antagonistic regions in the North and South for several generations. The rise of the Nguyen dynasty had not brought a solution to this problem, and regional factionalism continued during the nineteenth century beneath the superficial unity of the Nguyen dynasty.

The internal divisions and tensions within Vietnamese society were exacerbated by the cultural challenge from abroad. Although the official attitude toward the West at court was tinged with hostility, fear, and at least initially, a whiff of Confucian contempt for barbarian ways, it did not take long for perceptive members of the ruling elite to observe that Western civilization was equal or perhaps in some respects even superior to Sino-Vietnamese civilization in Vietnam, particularly as the latter was facing a severe internal crisis. For many Vietnamese intellectuals concerned over the fate of their nation, fear of the West was soon tempered by the realization that, in order to survive, Vietnam might be compelled to abandon its traditional heritage and adopt many of the attributes of Western culture.