



# **Complete Essay on The Khmer Kingdom in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos (9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

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Angkor Wat is the world's largest religious monument. It is intricately designed and elaborately decorated with more than a mile of impressive stone-carved bas-reliefs on its lower walls. The enormous Hindu temple is dedicated to the god, Vishnu, it symbolizes Mount Meru, the Hindu heaven, and it looks as if it belongs in southern India. Angkor Wat was created nearly nine centuries ago. But if one looks closely at some of the bas-reliefs, there is evidence of recent warfare within the incredible temple – bullet holes have pierced the stone carvings. What is this magnificent, ancient Hindu temple doing in the heart of the tropical rainforest in northern Cambodia, and why were Cambodian people fighting there within the past 45 years? How did a kingdom in Cambodia grow so rich that it could afford to devote enough creative energy and material resources to construct Angkor Wat and numerous other amazing religious monuments? After the Khmer Kingdom splintered 600 years ago, why did Cambodia decline, become poor, nearly disappear, and in the

1970s suffer the loss of one-fourth of its people during the second Indochina War and under the disastrous Pol Pot regime?

Answers to these probing questions require an analysis of all of Indochina – Vietnam and Laos as well as Cambodia – because the entire region has been linked politically, militarily, and economically during most of its history. The Khmer Kingdom ruled much of the region between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. At its peak in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Khmer state controlled a huge swath of mainland Southeast Asia. Yet the Khmer people never numbered more than two million during their imperial era.

The intent of this essay is to investigate how that small ethnic group gained the wealth and wielded the power that permitted them to create some of the world's most impressive monumental religious architecture. In pursuit of that goal, the essay is divided into five sections. The first part sets the stage for the rise of power by discussing the region's geography, resources, peoples, settlement patterns, and early kingdoms. The center section then looks at how the Khmer Kingdom was formed, how its religious

and political institutions created and appropriated wealth, and why the kingdom declined and fell apart. Three succeeding sections examine the six centuries of aftermath by looking at the interlocking histories of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. A time line, an annotated bibliography, and a description of sites visited in the three Southeast Asian countries are appended at the end of the essay.

The Khmer Kingdom had two central foundations – irrigated rice agriculture and a politico-religious culture adopted from India. Most of the kingdom’s wealth came from the expansion and intensification of rice production, both within the original Khmer home region and in conquered areas (in the Mekong River Valley and Delta and in the central plain of Thailand). The Khmer rulers based their legitimacy on being universal, omnipotent, and divine monarchs – God Kings in the Hindu/Buddhist belief structure adapted from India.

The Indianization of Southeast Asia began at least 2,000 years ago with the movement of Indian merchants and holy men

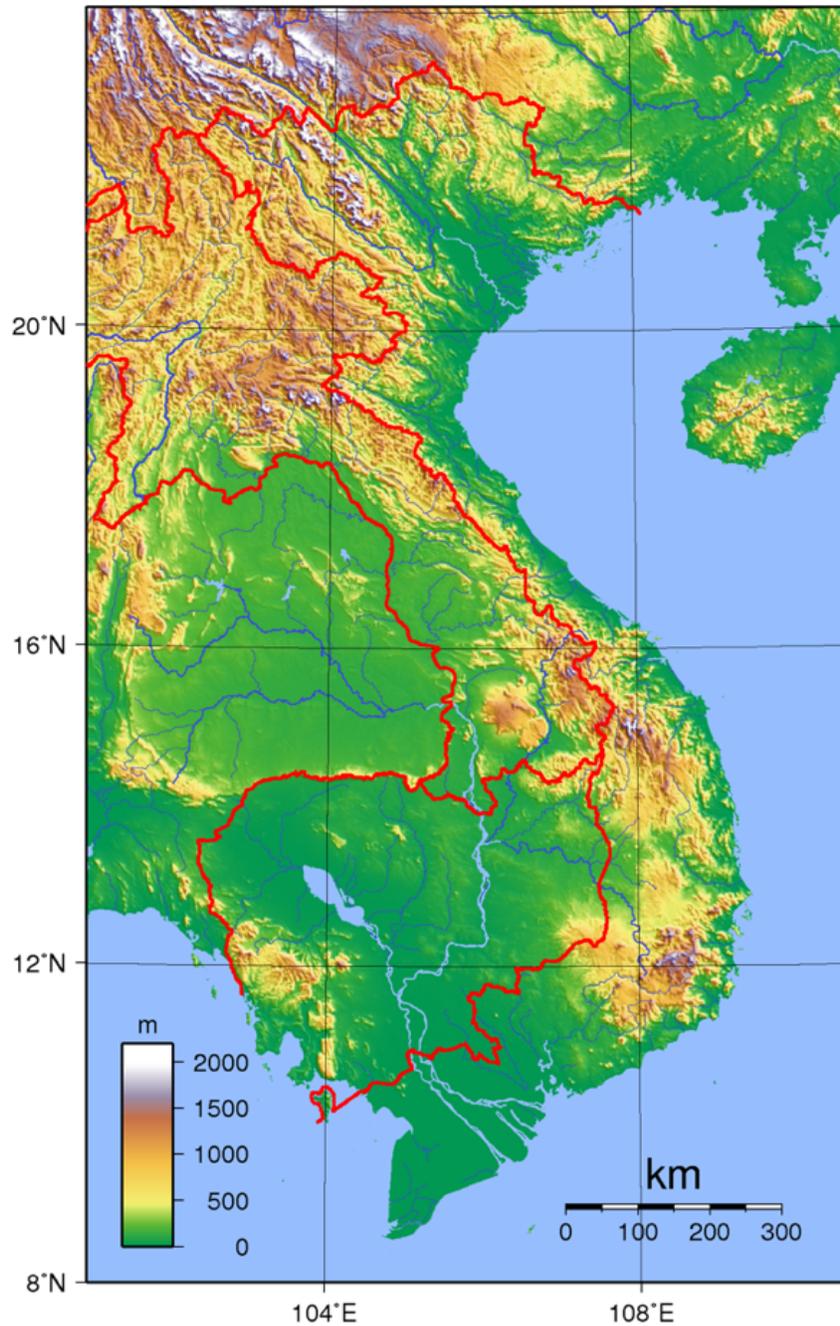
into the region. Indian culture dominated most of Southeast Asia, and its spread was voluntary, not imposed by conquest – in contrast to the forced spread of Chinese culture into northern Vietnam. Although the Khmer Kingdom was completely independent politically from India, Indian models and modes heavily influenced Khmer culture – politics, religion, social structure, art, and architecture. The Khmer Kingdom went into severe decline in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries when it overspent resources on religious monuments and temple societies, undercut its ability to rule tributary areas, weakened its military capability, and became vulnerable to foreign incursions from its old adversaries, the Chams, to the east, and its new enemies, the Thai kingdoms, to the west.

The three countries of Indochina – Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos – followed different, though intersecting, paths in the aftermath of the Khmer Kingdom. The Vietnamese people founded the Dai Viet Kingdom, expanded southward by defeating the Chams and the Khmers, and gained the territory of present-day

Vietnam by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Khmers saw their territory reduced to about the extent of current Cambodia, and their weakened kingdom became a vassal state of the new Thai Kingdom of Ayudhaya. The Lao people took advantage of the decline of the Khmer Kingdom to form the Lan Xang Kingdom, which ruled much of interior mainland Southeast Asia between the 14<sup>th</sup> and late 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, all three parts of Indochina became targets for French imperialism. France incorporated them into French Indochina in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and ruled with a heavy hand for half a century. All three were embroiled in the two Indochina wars and suffered massive human and material losses in their fight for independence and reform. During the past two decades, all have embraced market-oriented policies and experienced rapid economic progress. Poverty remains widespread in the region, but the three countries in former French Indochina are at last on a much happier path.

## **Ancient Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos before the Khmer Kingdom (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE-800 CE)**

**Geography and Natural Resources.** Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos lie in the southeastern corner of mainland Asia and together constitute Indochina, a region neither Indian nor Chinese but heavily influenced historically by both major Asian powers. Today, Vietnam occupies most of the long, S-shaped coastline of Indochina, Cambodia has the remainder, and Laos is landlocked. The physical geography of Indochina features interior mountains, coastal river valleys, and two major river deltas – the Red River Delta in north Vietnam and the Mekong River Delta in south Vietnam. The Annamite Cordillera (Truong Son), a chain of rugged mountains that run approximately north-south and rise to over 10,000 feet, divide Vietnam in the east of Indochina from Cambodia in the southwest and Laos in the northwest. The much smaller Dangrek Mountains, with a maximum elevation of 2,200 feet, form the western boundary of Cambodia abutting Thailand.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam\\_Topography.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_Topography.png)>

### *Geographic Features of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos*

Two-thirds of the people living in contemporary Indochina inhabit the two alluvial and fertile Vietnamese river basins. Most

Cambodians and Laotians live in the fertile valleys of the Mekong River or its tributaries, especially the Tonle Sap River and Lake in north-central Cambodia. In all three countries, minority peoples inhabit the mountainous regions, and dominant populations form the political centers in the lowlands.

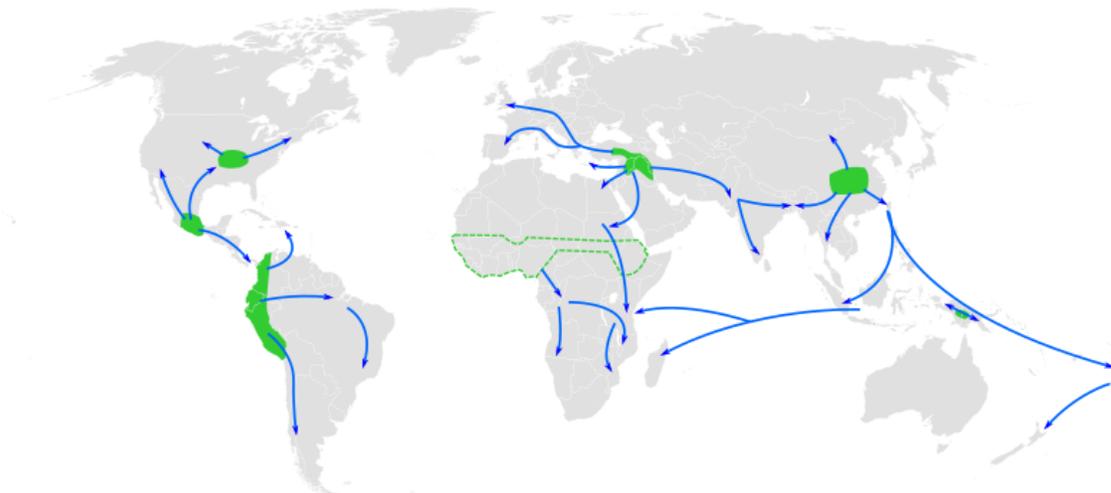


*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tonle\\_Sap\\_inhabitants.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tonle_Sap_inhabitants.JPG)>

### *Tonle Sap River and Lake in North-central Cambodia*

The principal natural resources of Indochina are the alluvial soils, water from river flooding and monsoon rains, and tropical temperatures that support rice-based agriculture. Despite that rich agricultural resource base, archaeologists have not unearthed any

evidence of the independent development of agriculture in Indochina. Some experts speculate that the origins of rice-based agricultural systems in southeastern China might have spread over into northern Vietnam. But the early agricultural systems, based on rice, millet, and yams and on chickens, pigs, dogs, and perhaps cattle, were most likely introduced into Indochina by immigrants from China and Taiwan.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons* available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Centres\\_of\\_origin\\_and\\_spread\\_of\\_agriculture.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Centres_of_origin_and_spread_of_agriculture.svg)

### *Origins and Spread of Agriculture*

Much of the region is heavily wooded with tropical rainforests, and the production of tropical hardwoods has sometimes been important. The exploitation of minerals and

gemstones has played only a minor role in the history of the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian peoples. Indochina is sited at a strategic location on the long-distance trade route that connects China with India and ultimately Japan with the Mediterranean. Starting about two millennia ago, this part of Southeast Asia became active in international trade and began receiving merchant-spread cultural influences from India.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hinduism\\_Expansion\\_in\\_Asia.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hinduism_Expansion_in_Asia.svg)

*Hinduism Expanded on the Asian Trade Routes*

**Peoples and Settlement.** The World Bank's most recent (2019) estimate of the population of Indochina is 120 million people – 96.5 million in Vietnam, 16.5 million in Cambodia, and 7.2 million in Laos. The indigenes most likely were Melanesian peoples, hunters and gatherers who occupied Indochina for at least 40,000 years until about 5,000 years ago. Then beginning about 3000 BCE, Austronesian-speaking peoples started moving out of their Taiwan homeland and emigrated into mainland and island Southeast Asia, absorbing and displacing the original Melanesian settlers. That first wave of Austronesian settlers introduced their agricultural systems (based mainly on rice, yams, chickens, and pigs) into Indochina. Archaeologists have called one Austronesian group the Hoabinhian culture after the Hoa Binh site in Tonkin (northern Vietnam). Austronesians introduced bronze and iron metallurgy into the region about 500 BCE. The Austronesian Dong-son civilization, the first major Vietnamese culture, arose in the Red River Delta about 400 BCE.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tambour-song-da2.jpg>>

*Dong Son Bronze Kettle Drum, Song Da, Vietnam – c. 500 BCE*

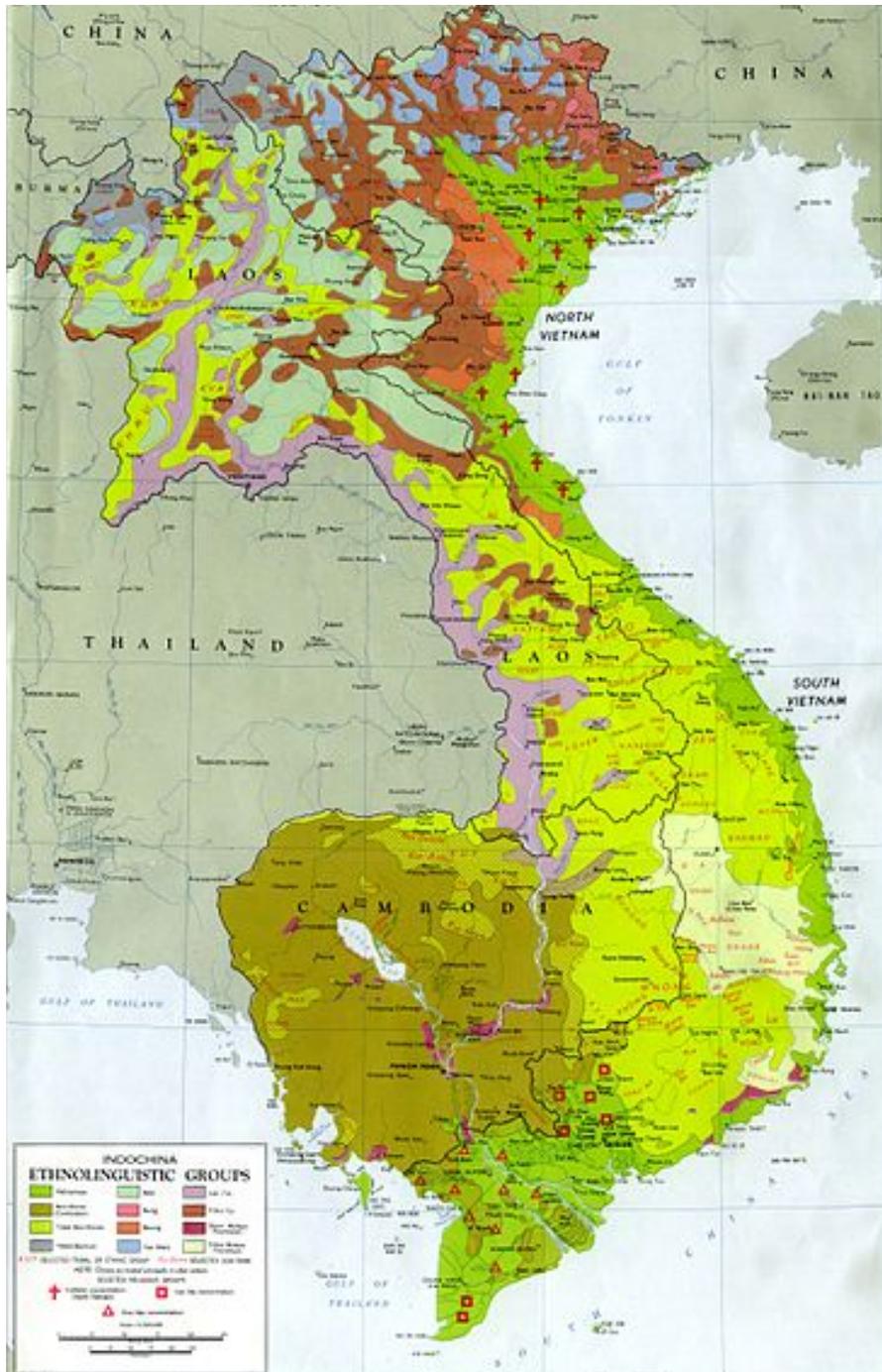
Historically, Vietnam was divided into three regions – the north, the center, and the south – called Tonkin (the Red River Valley and Delta), Annam (the central coastal region east of the Annamite Cordillera), and Cochinchina (the Mekong River Valley and Delta), respectively.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French\\_Indochina\\_subdivisions.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French_Indochina_subdivisions.svg)>

*Vietnam's Three Regions – Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina*

Most current residents of Vietnam, about five-sixths of the total population of 96.5 million, are of Vietnamese ethnicity. The Vietnamese are a mixture of many different ethnic groups. Their original descendants were probably a blend of non-Chinese Southern Mongoloid and Austronesian peoples who migrated into Vietnam from southern China, beginning about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, those peoples further intermarried with Tai-speaking immigrants into the Red River Valley and Delta to form the ancestors of today's Vietnamese people. Modern Vietnam also has numerous, small ethnic minorities, mostly inhabiting mountain areas, of Mongoloid, Austronesian, and mixed ethnicities.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethnolinguistic\\_map\\_of\\_Indochina\\_1970.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethnolinguistic_map_of_Indochina_1970.jpg)

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*Ethnic-Linguistic Groups in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos –  
 Vietnamese (Dark Green), Cambodian (Light Brown), Lao  
 (Purple), Tribal Mon-Khmer (Light Green), Tai (Dark Brown)*

Cambodia (16.5 million) and Laos (7.2 million) today have less than one-fourth of Indochina's population. About five-sixths of the residents of Cambodia are ethnically Cambodians, descendants of the Khmers, an Austroasiatic-speaking people who began migrating from Central Asia into Southeast Asia with their Mon cousins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. The Khmer and Mon peoples displaced the Austronesian inhabitants of contemporary Cambodia and Thailand and once dominated much of Southeast Asia. Between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Khmers created the region's most powerful kingdom.

Laos is dominated by the Lao people, who constitute three-fifths of the country's 7.2 million people. The Lao people speak a Tai language in the Austroasiatic group of languages. The Tai speakers began migrating south from southern China (southeastern Yunnan and western Guangxi) about the first century BCE and today are represented by the Lao peoples of Laos and Thailand, the Thais of Thailand, the Shans of Burma, and various minority groups in China and Vietnam. By 1000 CE, the Lao were well

established along the Mekong River and on the Khorat Plateau, the areas that they currently inhabit. In Cambodia and Laos, minority peoples today inhabit mountainous regions where they were pushed when the Khmer and Lao peoples dominated.

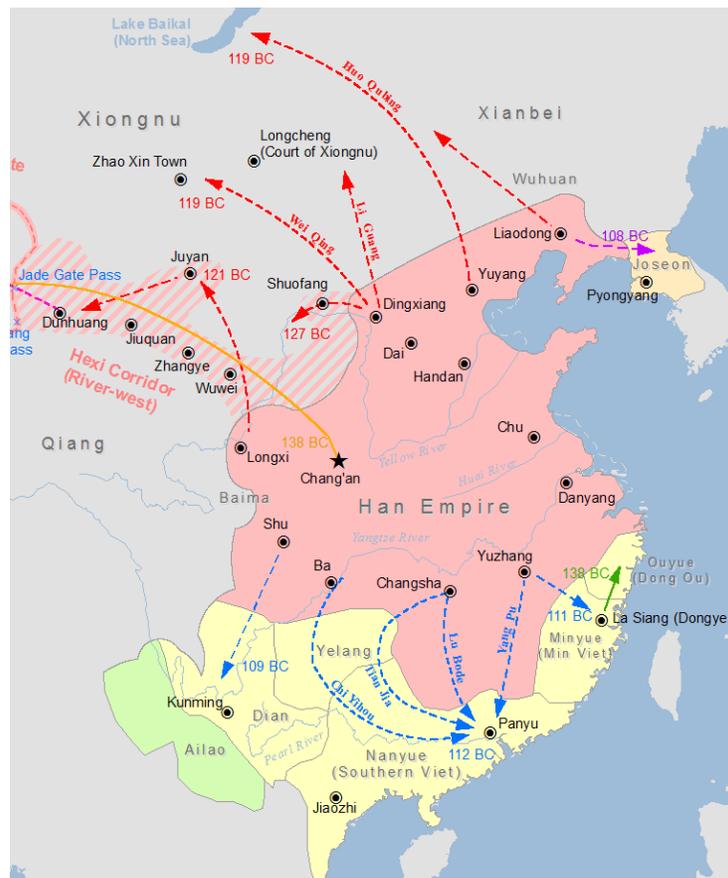


*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Luang\\_Prabang\\_Monks\\_Alm\\_Dawn\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Luang_Prabang_Monks_Alm_Dawn_01.jpg)>

### *Lao Monks Gathering Morning Alms*

**Chinese Rule of North-central Vietnam (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE-10<sup>th</sup> century CE).** China first intruded in northern Vietnam in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE by incorporating the Vietnamese Au-lac kingdom

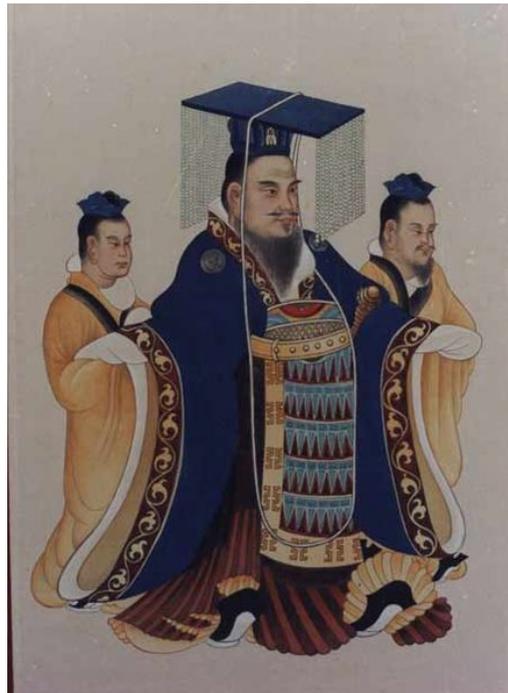
into a larger Chinese kingdom, called Nam Viet and ruled from Canton. In 111 BCE, the Chinese Han Emperor Wudi declared a protectorate over northern and central Vietnam that lasted for a millennium, until 939 CE. A Chinese census carried out in 2 CE indicated that about one million people resided in north-central Vietnam.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han\\_Expansion.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han_Expansion.png)

*Northern and Central Vietnam –  
Incorporated By Force into the Han Chinese Empire in 111 BCE*

The Chinese introduced their methods of political organization into Vietnam and forced the Vietnamese to pay regular tribute to China, although the intensity of Chinese control varied with the strength of the ruling Chinese dynasty. The Chinese rulers also promoted Vietnamese agriculture – and thus the country’s tax base – by building dams, improving flood control, extending rice cultivation, spreading the rearing of pigs, and demonstrating the value of market-gardening.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor\\_Wu\\_of\\_Han](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_Wu_of_Han)>

*Han Emperor Wudi (ruled 141-87 BCE) –  
Conquered Kingdom of Yue (Including Nam Viet) in 111 BCE*

The principal legacy of Chinese rule in Vietnam has been the nurturing of a very strong sense of Vietnamese nationalism, growing out of hatred of Chinese overlordship, and hence a deep-felt desire to achieve and protect the independence of Vietnam. Despite that intense dislike, Vietnamese adopted numerous social, political, and economic institutions from China. Among the most important were the belief in an omnipotent emperor (whose primary role was to maintain harmony between his people on earth and the spiritual world), the doctrines and practices of Mahayana Buddhism (which allowed the emperor to impose social control by convincing common people of the importance of hierarchy), and the critical role of the bureaucracy and of the Confucian-based civil service examinations to enter it.

During much of Vietnamese dynastic history, however, those institutions influenced only the upper classes. The peasantry continued to follow traditional beliefs and to be governed largely by village institutions. After Vietnam obtained its independence from China in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, future kings treated China with

extreme caution. When Chinese dynasties were powerful, Vietnamese kings pledged to be vassals of China and paid tribute.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Confucius\\_Tang\\_Dynasty.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Confucius_Tang_Dynasty.jpg)

*Confucius (551-479 BCE), Created the Philosophy of Chinese and North Vietnamese Government – Painting by Wu Daozi, 8<sup>th</sup> c.*

**Funan Kingdom in Cambodia and Southern Vietnam (1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE).** The Kingdom of Funan flourished from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries in contemporary Cambodia and southern Vietnam. Funan was established by Mon-Khmer people (of the

Austroasiatic language group). The kingdom initially was Hindu, and the principal Hindu god worshipped was Siva. But the court, which was heavily influenced by Indian culture and used Sanskrit as its official language, converted to Theravada Buddhism in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The capital of Funan was Vyadhapura on the Mekong River (near Phnom Penh, the contemporary capital of Cambodia).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FunanMap001.jpg>

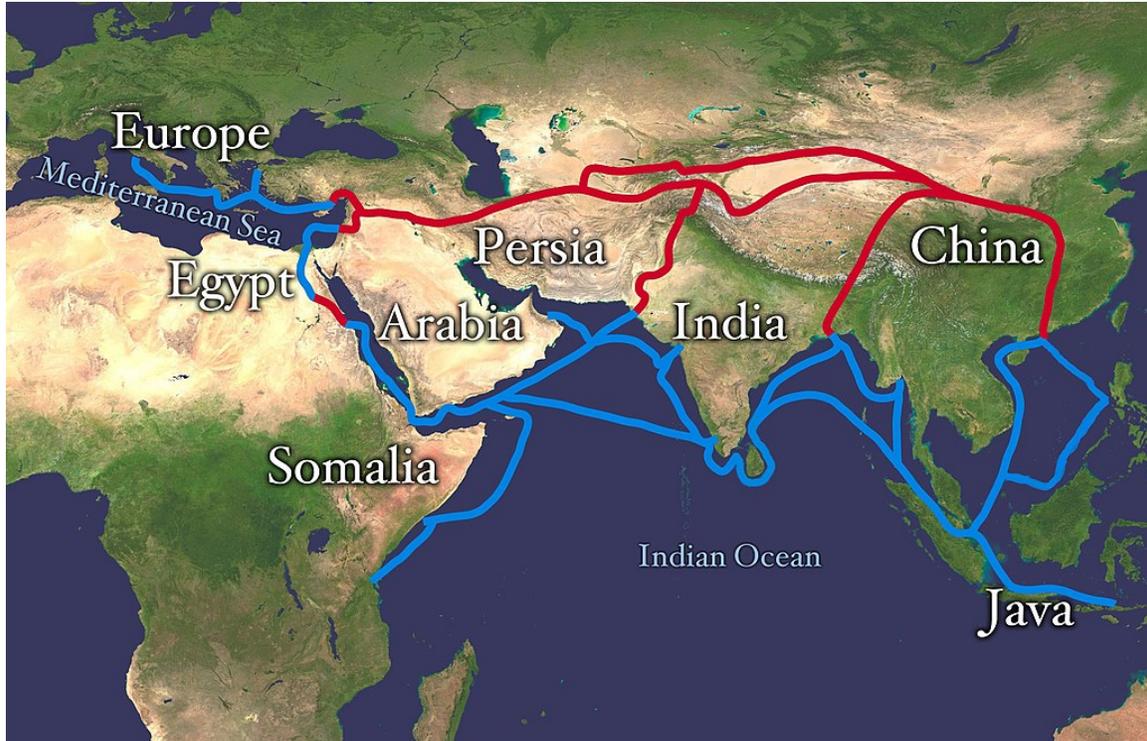
*Kingdom of Funan at Its Peak, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE*

Funan was Southeast Asia's first great trading kingdom. Its port of Oc-eo (located in contemporary southern Vietnam near the border with Cambodia) served as an entrepôt for the growing commerce on the China-India-Europe maritime trade route.

Archeological excavations at Oc-eo have discovered Roman and Iranian coins, Indian scripts, Han Chinese mirrors, and jewelry from throughout Europe and Asia. Until the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century, all East-West commerce in Asia made a portage over the Kra Isthmus (in contemporary southern Thailand) to avoid circling around the Malay Peninsula.

Oc-eo was the only port in the region that produced a large rice surplus – by taking advantage of the natural flooding of the Mekong River. An ample rice supply was necessary because traders and ship crews regularly spent several months each year in port awaiting favorable monsoon winds and rice was needed to feed them. Government officials of Funan heavily taxed commerce and accepted customs duties paid in gold, silver, pearls, or perfumes. The prosperous kingdom also had a large merchant

fleet. The principal commodities exchanged in Funan were Chinese silk for south Arabian incense (frankincense and myrrh).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silk\\_route.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silk_route.jpg)>

*Funan Traded On the Maritime Silk Route (Blue Lines) – Linking China With Arabia and Europe, 1<sup>st</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE*

At its peak in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Funan's territory of vassal states extended into northern Malaya, central Thailand, and southern Burma. Funan started to decline in the 4<sup>th</sup> century when trading ships began to sail an all-sea route around the Malay Peninsula. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Malay traders increasingly engaged

in long-distance trade by buying commodities in India and Sri Lanka. Funan thus lost its ability both to tax trade crossing the Kra Isthmus (after the trading pattern changed) and to monopolize East-West transfers (after the Malays took over much of that trade). The kingdom disappeared in the 6<sup>th</sup> century when it was absorbed by the inland Khmer kingdom of Chenla.

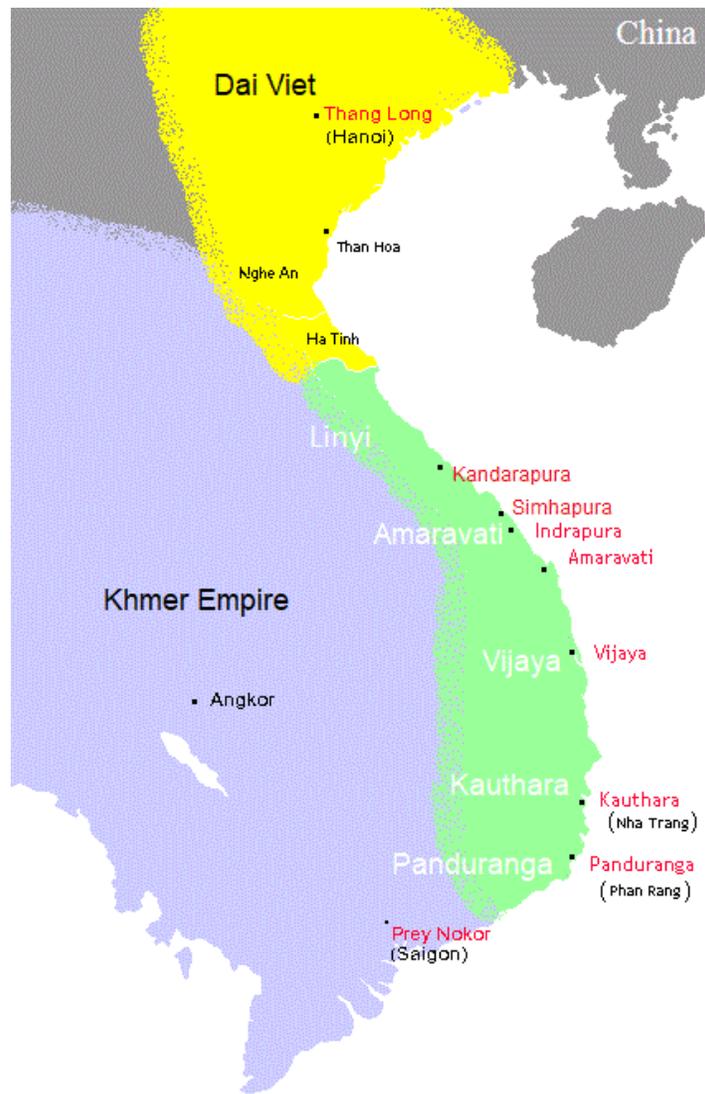


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visnu\\_Oc\\_Eo.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visnu_Oc_Eo.jpg)

*Funanese Statue of Vishnu, Found in Oc-ao, 6<sup>th</sup> century CE – Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

**Champa Kingdoms in Central-south Vietnam (2<sup>nd</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries CE).** For more than 1,300 years, Champa kingdoms

ruled central and southern Vietnam. The area under maximum Chamish control included a thin strip of land that stretched north-south along 600 miles of Vietnam's coastline and extended between the South China Sea and the Annamite Cordillera.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VietnamChampa1.gif>>

*Kingdom of Champa At Its Peak (Light Green Area) – c. 1100*

The Cham people were of Malayo-Polynesian ethnicity, and their language was in the Austronesian family. The Chams established the only long-lasting Austronesian kingdom in mainland Southeast Asia outside the Malay Peninsula. Champa was a Hindu kingdom, although some Chams living in port towns were among the first converts to Islam in Southeast Asia, influenced by traders from India as early as 1000 CE.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dances\\_Cham.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dances_Cham.jpg)>

### *Contemporary Cham Dancers, Southern Vietnam*

The Champa kingdom consisted of a collection of enclaves in small coastal river valleys separated by chains of mountains

running to the sea. That geographic separation resulted in a high degree of local autonomy. Although the Chams invested in quite sophisticated rice technology, such as large water wheels for irrigation, they did not control either the Red or Mekong River Valleys or Deltas and thus were not able to generate large rice surpluses. To produce wealth, the Chams relied instead on fishing, trade, and piracy. To supplement the kingdom's wealth, the Champa kings regularly carried out raids into the Vietnamese kingdoms to the north and the Khmer kingdoms to the west.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Champa was often at war with the Khmer Kingdom of Angkor. The Khmers were attempting to extend their kingdom at Champa's expense, whereas the Chams were raiding for booty. The Chams and the Vietnamese collaborated to repel the Mongol-Chinese (Yuan Dynasty) invasion of their kingdoms in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. But Champa gradually succumbed to the more powerful Vietnamese who were expanding southward into Cham territory. In 1471, the Vietnamese defeated Champa, annihilated half of the Chamish population, and

appropriated most of the kingdom's territory. Later Cham kings continued to rule a small area (in contemporary south-central Vietnam near Nha Trang) until they were driven out in 1720. About 288,000 people living in contemporary Cambodia (2000 census), another 35,000 residing in Vietnam (1990 census), and perhaps 15,000 in Thailand, Malaysia, and the United States are of Chamish descendency.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:My\\_Son.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:My_Son.jpg)>

*Champa Temple B5, My Son, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam*

## **The Khmer Kingdom (9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

**The Rise of the Khmer Kingdom (6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries).** The center of Khmer power shifted inland from the south coast and the Mekong River Delta, following the demise of Funan in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. For two-and one-half centuries, from roughly 550 to 800, the Khmer people lived in numerous small, inland kingdoms, known collectively as Chenla (like Funan, the name was given by contemporary Chinese historians). Along with the shift from the coast to the interior came a switch in focus from international trade to wet-rice agriculture. Many peasants grew rainfed rice, but the large surpluses came from flood retreat agriculture in swampy regions in the Mekong River Valley. Local nobles arose with the need to organize labor for flood-based rice agriculture.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodian\\_farmers\\_planting\\_rice.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodian_farmers_planting_rice.jpg)>

*Cambodian Women Farmers Transplanting Rice –  
In the Mekong River Valley*

The most entrepreneurial rural leaders gained access to labor (the critical factor in wet-rice farming), used their political connections to control fertile wetlands (for rice production), and established local temples (devoted to the Hindu god, Siva) to earn merit with the gods, show loyalty, and retain control of local labor and land. The peasantry succumbed to transferring their rice surpluses to the nobles and royals because they earned merit with

Hindu temples and ancestral gods. At its peak, the area controlled by the Chenla kingdoms included modern Cambodia, southern Vietnam, southern Laos, and central and southern Thailand.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chen-La\\_locator.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chen-La_locator.png)

*Kingdom of Chenla (Dark Green Area) – c. 800*

Jayavarman II, an exceptional Khmer leader of one of the Chenla kingdoms, founded the Khmer Kingdom and reigned for 48 years. In 802, he participated in a ritual through which he became a “universal monarch” (*maharajadhiraja*) among Khmer people. But he then had to solidify his power over numerous recalcitrant

nobles and petty kings. Jayavarman II used military campaigns, marriage alliances, and land grants to unify his kingdom. He shifted the location of his capital several times before finally settling at Hariharalaya (contemporary Roluos), on the Mekong River near its confluence with the Tonle Sap River.

The bases of the new Khmer Kingdom were productive wet rice agriculture, Hindu temples devoted to Siva, a small elite who communicated in Sanskrit, a large peasantry who spoke only the Khmer language, and a system of corvée labor through which peasants provided regular labor services to nobles, the state, and temples. Eventually, the Khmer Kingdom was extended to control Cambodia, southern Vietnam, southern Laos, central and southern Thailand, the northern Malay Peninsula, and southeastern Burma.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayon\\_Angkor\\_Relief1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayon_Angkor_Relief1.jpg)>

*Khmer Archers Mounted On Elephants, Jayavarman II's Military Force – Relief On Bayon Temple, Angkor, Cambodia, 12<sup>th</sup> century*

Jayavarman II also had to overcome a foreign power, the Sailendras. The Sailendra Kingdom came into power in central Java (contemporary Indonesia) about 760 and lasted for one century. The Sailendra kings were descendants of Funanese royal refugees who had fled to Java two centuries earlier. During the final two decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Sailendras conquered and

ruled Chenla before Jayavarman II expelled them in 802. The Sailendras also invaded and looted Chinese Nam Viet in northern Vietnam and the Champa Kingdom, although they did not control those areas. The Sailendra kings and their Javanese subjects practiced Mahayana Buddhism and devoted much of their rice-based wealth to the construction of Buddhist monuments. The most remarkable was Borobudur (near contemporary Yogyakarta in central Java), constructed between 778 and 824. The Sailendra rulers of central Java built those monuments to spread understanding of their religion, indoctrinate the masses and facilitate political control, and demonstrate their superior wealth, religious knowledge, and aesthetic creativity.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Panoramic\\_views\\_of\\_Borobudur.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Panoramic_views_of_Borobudur.jpg)>

*Borobudur, Mahayana Buddhist Stupa –  
Sailendra Kingdom, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Central Java*

**Sources of Wealth – Rice Agriculture.** Most wealth in the Khmer Kingdom was generated by rice agriculture. The state taxed agriculture to transfer the wealth from the peasantry to the elite. Farmers practiced flood retreat techniques, using small check dams to divert floodwater to their fields along rivers and lakes after high water levels abated. New varieties of *indica* rice

were introduced from India that gave higher yields than the *japonica* varieties that they replaced.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oryza\\_sativa\\_-\\_K%C3%B6hler%E2%80%93s\\_Medizinal-Pflanzen-232.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oryza_sativa_-_K%C3%B6hler%E2%80%93s_Medizinal-Pflanzen-232.jpg)>

*Rice (Oryza sativa), Indigenous to South China –  
Source of Much Wealth During the Khmer Imperial Era*

Khmer kings made land grants to nobles to open new lands and create new temples, and nobles invested in animals for traction that improved rice yields. The Hindu temples expanded rice

cultivation by providing financing (from temple donations), technical information (from temple experts), and farm labor (from temple workers). The Khmer rice systems were decentralized, based on small fields, and used flood retreat, rainfed, or shifting cultivation technologies. All analysts agree that rice was the economic basis of the Khmer Kingdom.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angkor - Bayon -  
\\_052 At Home \(8581882636\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angkor_-_Bayon_-_052_At_Home_(8581882636).jpg)>

*Agricultural Bas Relief, Bayon Temple, Angkor –  
The Khmers Effectively Promoted and Taxed Rice Production*

But much controversy surrounds the purpose of the large-scale reservoirs (*barays*) that the Khmer rulers constructed. Until recently, the accepted explanation was Bernard-Phillippe Groslier's hypothesis that those enormous reservoirs were part of a centralized hydraulic system for rice irrigation. In recent years, technical agriculturalists have questioned that hypothesis. They have shown that the increased yields from switching to a large-scale irrigated system for rice production would feed at most only about 100,000 people, whereas the population of Khmer at its peak was perhaps two million. In addition, the reservoirs are not sited correctly for irrigation purposes, since they do not provide for effective canal networks. Moreover, the flood retreat system was technically superior to large-scale irrigation and did not need the water from *barays*. Most Angkorian historians now conclude that the *barays* had no economic rationale. Instead, they were constructed to represent the oceans surrounding Mount Meru, the Hindu holy place constructed on an island in the center of each large *baray*.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WestBaray.jpg>>

*West Baray, Angkor Thom, Cambodia –  
Religious, Not Agricultural, Significance*

### **Sources of Wealth – Foreign Trade and Conquest.**

International trade was a supplemental source of wealth in the Khmer Kingdom. Unlike Funan, which served as an entrepôt on the long-distance, China-India trade route, the Khmer Kingdom engaged in regional trade. Its main trading partners were neighboring countries – Champa (to the east), the Mon kingdoms (to the west), China (to the north), and Vietnam (to the northeast).

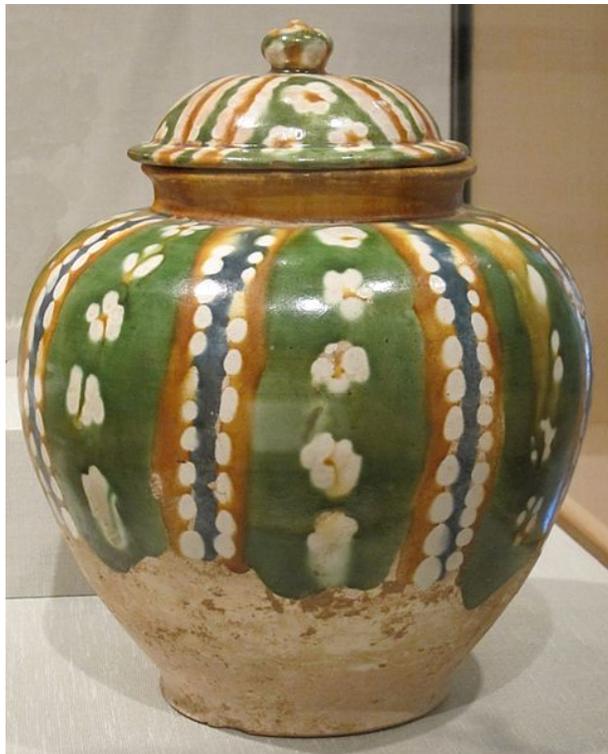


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-southeast-asia\\_900\\_CE.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-southeast-asia_900_CE.png)>

*Asia Regional Trade Routes, c. 900 –  
 Khmer Kingdom (Red), Champa Kingdom (Yellow). Mon States  
 (Pink), and Tang Chinese Vietnam (Orange)*

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an envoy from China, Chou Ta-Kuan, reported the main items exported from and imported into the Khmer

Kingdom. The primary exports from Khmer consisted of high-value products – elephant ivory, rhinoceros horns, aromatic woods, cardamom, pepper, beeswax, and lacquer. The Khmer Kingdom principally imported luxury goods – porcelain, silk, crafts and manufactures, paper and metal goods, tin-ware, wicker, and sugar. Regional trade provided a wider range of goods for the Khmer nobility but only limited wealth for the empire.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese\\_covered\\_jar,\\_Tang\\_dynasty,\\_earthenware\\_with\\_sancai\\_glaze,\\_HAA.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_covered_jar,_Tang_dynasty,_earthenware_with_sancai_glaze,_HAA.JPG)>

*Tang Chinese Porcelain Was A Major Khmer Import Item –  
Covered Jar With Sancai Glaze, Honolulu Museum of Art*

Foreign conquest was a more important source of wealth than was foreign trade. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Khmer leaders expanded their territorial control and wet-rice systems from their heartland in the Mekong River Valley and Delta into the Korat Plateau and the Menam Basin (in contemporary Thailand), eventually irrigating 5 million hectares (12.5 million acres) of highly productive rice land. At the peak of its power under Suryavarman II (ruled 1133-1150), the Khmer Kingdom received regular tribute from vassal states in the Thai central plain, southern Laos, northern Malaya, and southern Vietnam. The Champa Kingdom (in contemporary central and southern Vietnam) was the Khmers' main rival. During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Khmers and Chams fought often and intermittently ruled each other for brief periods.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-southeast-asia\\_1300\\_CE.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-southeast-asia_1300_CE.png)

*Khmer Kingdom (Red), Champa Kingdom (Yellow), and Dai Viet Kingdom (Blue) – c. 1300*

Khmer power waned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the empire lost control of the Thai plain, Laos, and southern vassal states. By the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Khmers withstood the Mongol-Chinese

invasion of Southeast Asia, the regional kingdom had shrunk to its Mekong-Tonle Sap heartland.

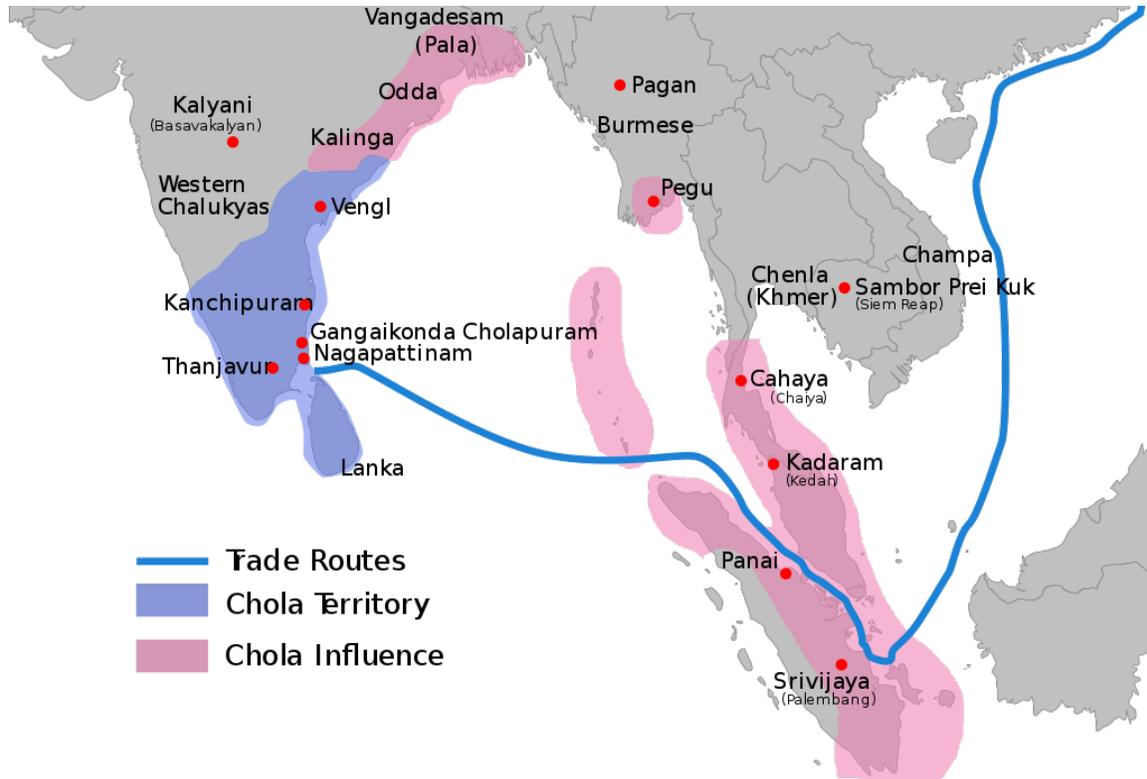


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:YuanEmperorAlbumKhubilaiPortrait.jpg>>

*Kublai Khan, Leader of Yuan China, Failed To Conquer the Khmer Kingdom in the 1290s – Portrait by Anige, 1260s, National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan*

**Religion and Politics.** The forms of religious beliefs and political organization in the Khmer Kingdom were adaptations from India. The Indian culture was adopted voluntarily and enthusiastically by the rulers and elites throughout all of Southeast

Asia except in north-central Vietnam, where China superimposed its cultural forms during its millennium of rule.

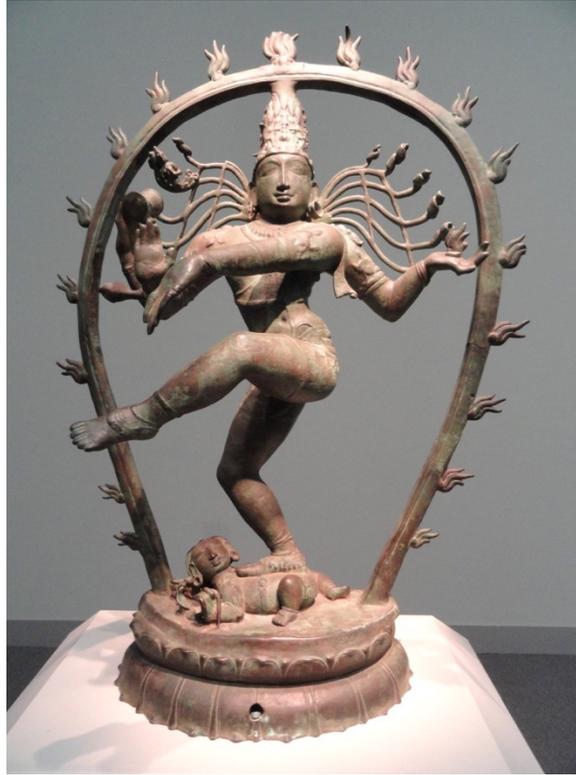


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rajendra\\_map\\_new.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rajendra_map_new.svg)>

*Indian-influenced Empires in Southeast Asia (12<sup>th</sup> c.) –  
Khmer (Cambodia), Champa (Vietnam), Pagan (Burma), and  
Srivijaya (Indonesia)*

As in India, the Khmer royalty used both Hinduism and Buddhism as political control mechanisms. The Khmer religion was primarily Saivite Hinduism with some Mahayana Buddhism,

although both were replaced by Theravada Buddhism in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons, available at* [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva\\_Nataraja\\_\(Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Dance\),\\_Chola\\_dynasty,\\_c.\\_990\\_AD,\\_Tamil\\_Nadu,\\_India,\\_bronze\\_-\\_Freer\\_Gallery\\_of\\_Art\\_-\\_DSC05147.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva_Nataraja_(Lord_of_the_Dance),_Chola_dynasty,_c._990_AD,_Tamil_Nadu,_India,_bronze_-_Freer_Gallery_of_Art_-_DSC05147.JPG)

*Most Hindu Temples in Angkor Were Dedicated to Shiva – Chola Bronze of Shiva as Nataraja, Tamil Nadu, c. 990, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*

Khmer monarchical government was an adaptation of the Indian concept of *Devaraja* (God King) in which the universal monarch and protector of the kingdom was head of the government

bureaucracy, the military, and the official church. During the six centuries of the Khmer Kingdom, twenty-eight God Kings ruled. Indian cultural influences also introduced social organization (preferred castes for the elite), writing (in Sanskrit, the language of ceremony and the elite), religious rituals, and religious-based art and architecture. The entire cultural superstructure helped the ruling elite control the working masses.

Power and wealth rested on rice-based agriculture. The God King in principle owned the land, but it also was necessary to control the rural labor force and to manage and tax rice production. The king gave grants of land and bonded laborers to local nobles (*pons*) who in turn gave some of the land and laborers to temple societies. That act of philanthropy earned religious merit for the nobles. Sometimes the king granted land and bonded laborers directly to the temple societies to earn religious merit for himself. The temple societies acted as agents of agricultural development and carried out construction and irrigation projects to open new rice-producing land. The masses either served as bonded laborers

or as free farmers who earned their religious merit by paying taxes in kind and in labor time to the state and making donations of produce and labor-time to the temple societies.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayonmarket01.JPG>>

*Agricultural Marketing Bas-relief –  
Bayon Temple, Angkor, Late 12<sup>th</sup> century*

The Hindu and Buddhist religions thus served as justifications for the elite to gain control of the rice surplus generated by the introduction of better techniques of production, improved varieties of *indica* rice, and investments in irrigation and water control to expand land under rice production. In contrast to

the religious purification system practiced in Burma, in the Khmer Kingdom there was no mechanism to check the increasing power of the temple societies. The consequent shift of resources and wealth to the church thus gradually undercut the power of the state and helped cause the eventual decline of the Khmer Kingdom.

**Monumental Architecture.** Khmer kings, reigning between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed three phases in royal monumental construction, as noted by art historian Philippe Stern in the 1930s. Each king first built a large reservoir to honor his subjects and the agricultural gods and to demonstrate his political power. He next created statues in temples to honor his parents, ancestors, and (sometimes) ruling predecessors by portraying them as gods. Finally, each king constructed a temple-mountain to honor himself and eventually serve as his sarcophagus. Thirteen Angkorian kings had sufficient political control and accumulated wealth to create temple-mountains.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodia\\_2638B\\_-\\_Angkor\\_Wat.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodia_2638B_-_Angkor_Wat.jpg)>

*Angkor Wat – Cambodia’s Highest Temple-Mountain and the  
World’s Largest Religious Monument*

The impressive monumental architecture of the Khmer Kingdom can be illustrated with reference to the creations of three significant kings. Yasovarman I (ruled 890-912) was the fourth ruler of the expanding Khmer state. He built a new capital at Yasodharapura (north of Tonle Sap), which served as the heart of the empire until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The new city was set around Phnom Bakheng, a natural hill that symbolized Mount Meru, the

home of the Hindu gods. Yasovarman also constructed the first huge Khmer reservoir, the Eastern Baray. Suryavarman II (ruled 1113-1150) ruled during the peak of Khmer wealth and power and created Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious monument.



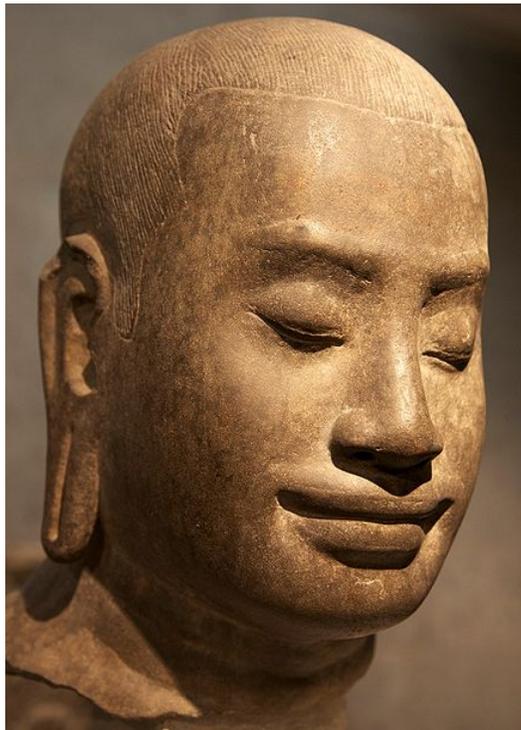
*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angkor\\_wat.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angkor_wat.jpg)>*

*Angkor Wat – Aerial View of the Central Structure*

Angkor Wat was a temple dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu (most Khmer temples were dedicated to Siva), it eventually served as a mausoleum for Suryavarman, and it likely contained a palace and government buildings. The five towers represented

Mount Meru, and the moat symbolized the oceans. The colossal monument served as a representation of the immortality of Suryavarman and symbolized his merger with Vishnu.

Jayavarman VII (ruled 1181-1218) was the last of the great Khmer royal builders. He built the new city of Angkor Thom around the Bayon Temple where the king is represented as a Buddhist *bodhisattva*, an enlightened human who chooses to help others attain nirvana.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JayavarmanVII.jpg>>

*Jayavarman VII, Portrait in Stone – Guimet Museum, Paris*

The outer walls of the Bayon Temple are decorated with bas-reliefs that portray battles, games, feasts, markets, cooking, and a wide range of other scenes from ordinary life during Jayavarman's reign. Jayavarman also dedicated two large temple complexes outside of the walls of Angkor Thom – Ta Prohm (Rajavihara) for his mother and Preah Khan (Nagara Jayasri) for his father – to honor and earn religious merit for his parents.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ta\\_Prohm\\_Angkor\\_giant\\_tree.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ta_Prohm_Angkor_giant_tree.jpg)>

*Strangler Fig Tree Roots Strangling a Gallery, Ta Prohm*

After Jayavarman's massive and costly building program, the Khmer Kingdom could no longer afford to devote endless royal resources to the construction of religious monuments. The Khmer era of monumental architecture thus came to an inglorious end.

### **The Decline of the Khmer Kingdom (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries).**

The Khmer Kingdom declined in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries because of internal politics and external incursions. The increasing control of rice land and labor by the tax-free temple societies deprived the royal government of needed resources. The practice of royal polygamy caused succession disputes and factionalism among the nobility. Political instability at the center led to regional splintering, reduced tax collections, and the loss of tribute from vassal states. The declining rice surpluses could not finance the continual building of vast monuments, the construction and upkeep of more than 20,000 shrines, the support of over 300,000 monks and priests, and at the same time provide for adequate defense of the empire.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Preah\\_Khan,\\_Angkor,\\_Camboya,\\_2013-08-17,\\_DD\\_26.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Preah_Khan,_Angkor,_Camboya,_2013-08-17,_DD_26.JPG)>

*Preah Khan, Angkor Thom, Cambodia –  
Khmer Leaders Spent Disproportionately on Religious Monuments*

In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, after Jayavarman VII's reign, the Khmers converted to Theravada Buddhism and undercut their Hindu-oriented theocracy. Under the new religion, there was no longer divine kingship, strict social castes, Hindu temples, or the need to earn Hindu merit by making donations. A technical explanation for the empire's decline – that the irrigation system

silted up and was improperly maintained – is highly unlikely, since little rice production depended on large-scale irrigation.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ricefields\\_in\\_Takeo.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ricefields_in_Takeo.jpg)>

*Rice Fields in Takeo Province, Cambodia –  
Production Techniques Changed Little For Nearly Six Centuries*

Foreign incursions also contributed to the decline of the Khmer Kingdom. Two new Thai kingdoms – Sukothai (mid-13<sup>th</sup>–mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Ayudhya (after the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century) successively invaded the western parts of the declining Khmer

Kingdom. Champa attacked the eastern part. Squeezed in the middle, the Khmers lost both battles and territory.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-southeast-asia\\_1400\\_CE.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-southeast-asia_1400_CE.png)

*Kingdoms of Ayudhya (Purple), Khmer (Red), Champa (Yellow), Lan Xang (Green), and Dai Viet (Blue) – c. 1400*

Soon after the Ayudhya Thais captured Angkor in 1431, the Khmers recaptured their capital. But in 1434 the Khmers abandoned Angkor and relocated their capital to the south – in Phnom Penh at the confluence of the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. The Khmer leaders hoped to revive their flagging empire by reorienting it toward maritime commerce, linking into Malay, Indian, and Chinese trading networks. They also expected that the new site would prove more defensible against periodic attacks from their new Thai rivals in Ayudhya. The Khmer state had faded, shrunk, and relocated, but it had not disappeared. Yet its imperial days were over.

### **Vietnam during and after the Khmer Kingdom (10<sup>th</sup> century-present)**

**Independent, Dynastic Vietnam (10<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century).** After a millennium of attempting to drive out their Chinese overlords, the Vietnamese finally succeeded in 939 when China was in crisis after the fall of the Tang Dynasty.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tang\\_dynasty1.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tang_dynasty1.PNG)

*The Tang Dynasty of China At Its Collapse, c. 907*

The new Vietnamese kingdom styled itself the Dai Viet (great kingdom), but it struggled for 70 years to consolidate power. The Ly Dynasty then ruled for two centuries (1009-1225), consolidating the kingdom.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at

<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:B%E1%BA%A3n\\_%C4%91%E1%BB%93\\_Vi%E1%BB%87t\\_Nam\\_th%E1%BB%9Di\\_L%C3%BD\\_n%C4%83m\\_1085.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:B%E1%BA%A3n_%C4%91%E1%BB%93_Vi%E1%BB%87t_Nam_th%E1%BB%9Di_L%C3%BD_n%C4%83m_1085.png)>

*The Dai Viet Kingdom Under the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225), c. 1085*

Their successors, the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400), maintained Vietnamese independence by working with the Champa Kingdom to defeat the Mongol (Yuan Dynasty) invaders from China – and to kill Kublai Khan’s son – in 1288.

Following a period of unrest and two decades of Ming Chinese rule, the Le Dynasty (1428-1788) was installed in 1428. Le Thanh Ton (ruled 1460-1497), a remarkable ruler, balanced Vietnamese independence with the adoption of Chinese Confucian principles. Le Thanh Ton introduced into Vietnam the Chinese system of examinations for qualification for the preferred career of civil servant.

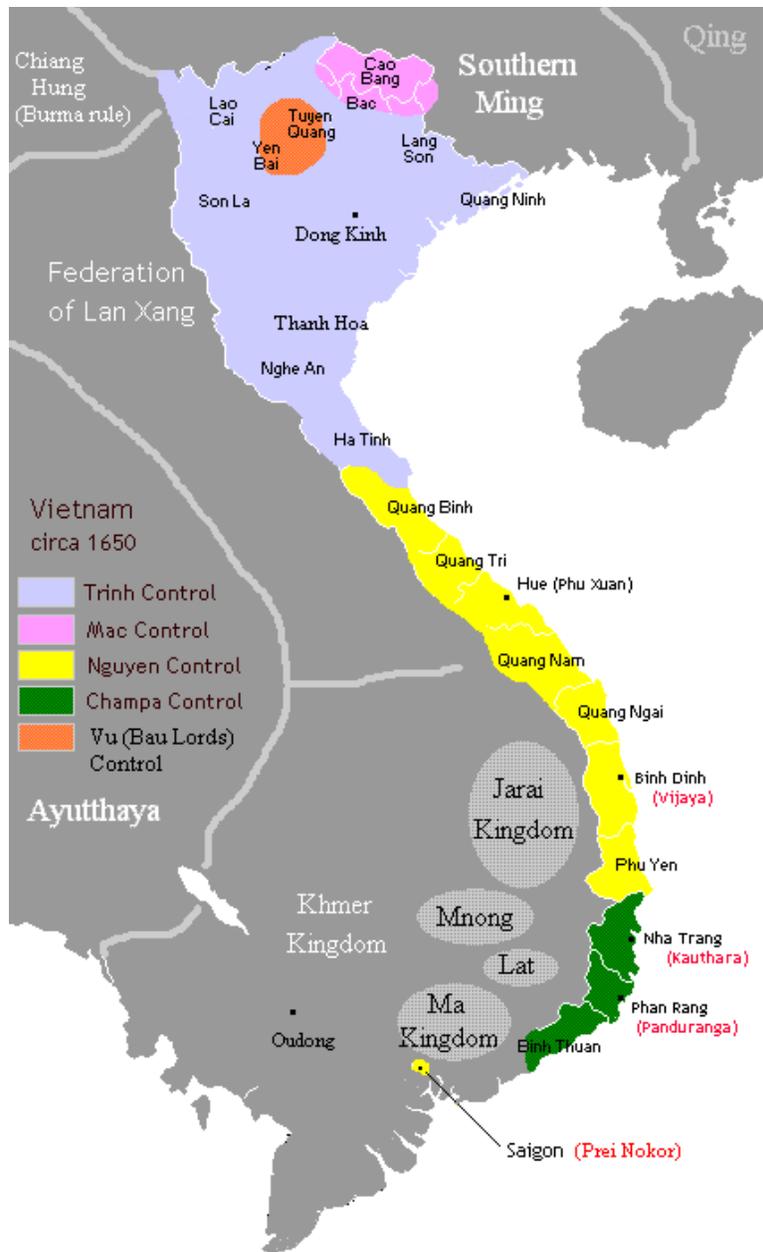


Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:V%C4%83n\\_quan\\_vinh\\_quy\\_%C4%91%E1%BB%93\\_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:V%C4%83n_quan_vinh_quy_%C4%91%E1%BB%93_2.jpg)>

*Mandarins and Soldiers, Dai Viet Kingdom, Le Dynasty – c. 1648*

During much of the period of the Le Dynasty, the Le emperor exercised only nominal power and real authority was split between two families of overlords – the Trinh in the north and the Nguyen in the center (and later the south) of contemporary Vietnam. Both groups greatly increased the rates of taxation on peasants to pay for their ceaseless struggles for hegemony over all of Vietnam.

Until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Dai Viet kingdom was limited to the area around the Tongking delta in northern Vietnam, with its capital at Thang-long (now Hanoi). The ever-threatening presence of China prevented Vietnamese expansion northward. But the Vietnamese conquest of Champa in 1471 opened the possibility of southward expansion. Champa was centered in Annam, in central Vietnam. The kingdom of Vietnam expanded into that region in search of additional rice land and to control interior trade. After the Le Dynasty split into two factions in 1528, the Nguyen faction expanded further southward into former Cham territory and, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, into the Mekong delta, which had been part of the Khmer Empire and smaller successor Khmer states.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam1650.GIF>

*Partial Unification of Vietnam, c. 1650 – Areas Controlled By Trinh (Purple), Nguyen (Yellow), Kingdom of Champa (Green)*

In 1788, increasing rural poverty and unrest resulted in a peasant revolt called the Tay Son rebellion. Three brothers from

Tay Son led the revolution, and one installed himself as the new emperor, Quang-trung. The brief Tay Son interlude ended in 1802. The new Nguyen Dynasty then reunified the country. For the first time in Vietnamese history, the territory of Vietnam included both the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong River Delta in the south. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, Vietnam had expanded about to its present borders.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam\\_at\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_18th\\_century\\_\(Vi\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_at_the_end_of_18th_century_(Vi).png)>

*Unification of Vietnam, 1802 – Areas Controlled By Nguyen Hue (Purple), Nguyen Nhac (Yellow), and Nguyen Anh (Green)*

## **Sources of Wealth in Pre-colonial Vietnam – Agriculture.**

For nearly a thousand years between the end of the millennium of Chinese rule (939) and the imposition of French colonialism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnam struggled to maintain its independence. The principal source of wealth – and thus of imperial taxation – was agriculture, especially wet-rice cultivation. The main rice surplus areas were the Red River Valley and Delta in the north and the Mekong River Valley and Delta in the south (after the Cham and Khmer people were driven out and Vietnamese people gradually settled in the south). Rice was the barometer of the economy. It provided most of the country's food calories (permitting Vietnam to achieve food self-sufficiency in most years), much of Vietnam's export earnings (which were used to pay for luxury imports for the upper class), and a substantial portion of government revenues.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tractor\\_Mekong\\_Delta\\_Vietnam.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tractor_Mekong_Delta_Vietnam.jpg)>

*Irrigated Rice Fields, Mekong Delta – Southern Vietnam*

Taxes were relatively easy for the bureaucracy to collect since wet-rice farmers rarely moved from year to year.

Throughout the dynastic period, the royalty and its bureaucracy extracted heavy taxes from peasants in the form of payments in kind of crops (mainly rice), forced labor (*corvée*) services to the government, and conscription into military service. Domestic political instability and perceived foreign threats meant that much of the tax revenue was expended on control and warfare or on the construction of politically motivated monuments.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nine\\_Dynastic\\_Urns,\\_The\\_Mieu\\_\(Temple\\_of\\_the\\_Generations\),\\_Citadel,\\_Hue,\\_Vietnam\\_\(2524373536\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nine_Dynastic_Urns,_The_Mieu_(Temple_of_the_Generations),_Citadel,_Hue,_Vietnam_(2524373536).jpg)>

*Symbols of Wealth in Vietnam –  
Dynastic Urns, Temple of the Generations, Citadel, Hue*

**Sources of Wealth in Pre-colonial Vietnam – Trade and Conquest.** Foreign trade, the second potential source of wealth in pre-industrial societies, proved in Vietnam to be only a minor supplement to agricultural wealth. Although some Vietnamese merchants were successful importers or exporters, the country lacked the critical combination of a rich land area providing a large food surplus located near a strategically located port on a major

international trade route. Vietnam did produce rice surpluses, but none of its ports could rival those in island Southeast Asia as entrepôts along the China-India-Europe trade route. Vietnamese merchants were restricted to trading regionally with the neighboring countries and with people who lived in the highlands. Thang-long (modern Hanoi), the capital of the Dai Viet kingdom, had a population in excess of 100,000 from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it was the least dependent on international trade of all of the large urban centers in Southeast Asia.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:16th\\_century\\_Portuguese\\_Spanish\\_trade\\_routes.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:16th_century_Portuguese_Spanish_trade_routes.png)

### *Global Trade Routes to Vietnam, 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries*

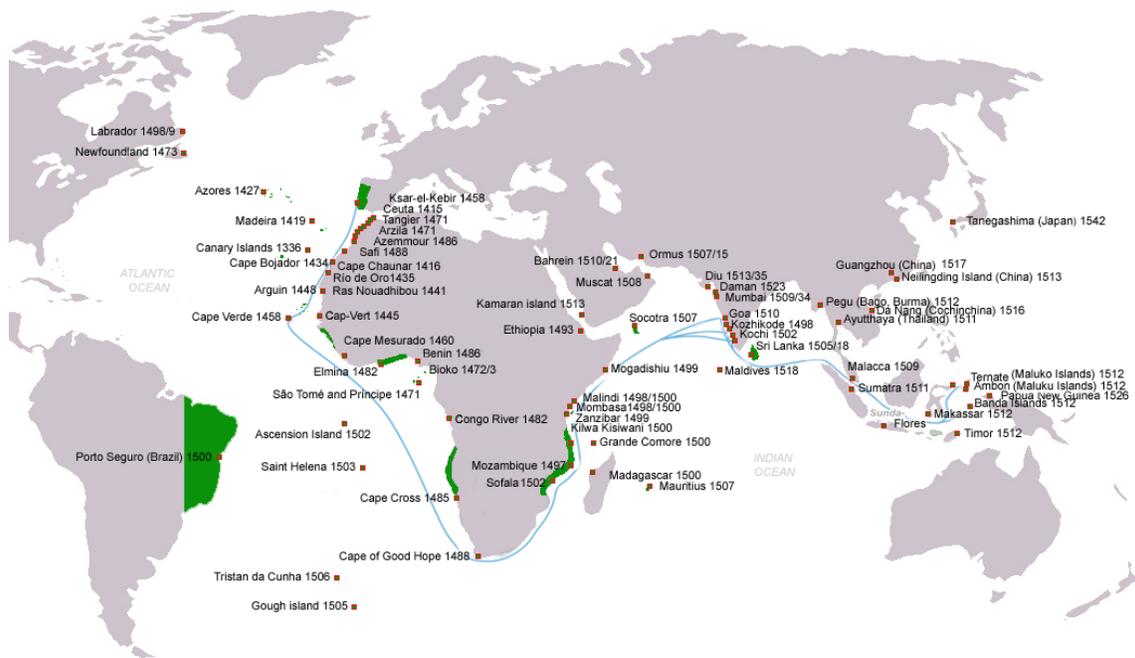
After the 15<sup>th</sup> century defeat of Champa and Vietnamese expansion southward into contemporary central and southern Vietnam, foreign conquest became a significant source of additional wealth for Vietnamese dynasties. China to the north and rugged mountains to the west prevented expansion by Vietnam in those directions. The Nguyen faction moved southward into former Cham territories (in central Vietnam) and Khmer territories (in south Vietnam). But much new agricultural wealth, especially from rice production in the Mekong Delta, was squandered on the rivalries between the Trinh and Nguyen factions.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C4%90oan\\_M%C3%B4n\\_Ho%C3%A0ng\\_th%C3%A0nh\\_Th%C4%83ng\\_Long,\\_H%C3%A0\\_N%E1%BB%99i\\_001.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C4%90oan_M%C3%B4n_Ho%C3%A0ng_th%C3%A0nh_Th%C4%83ng_Long,_H%C3%A0_N%E1%BB%99i_001.JPG)>

*Imperial Citadel – Thang-long, Capital of Dai Viet Kingdom*

**Early European Colonization of Southeast Asia (16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries).** Portugal led the age of discovery in Southeast Asia, arriving first in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. For centuries, spices – pepper from India (and later Sumatra and Java), and cloves, nutmeg, and mace from the Moluccas (in contemporary eastern Indonesia) – had been exported to the Middle East and Europe.

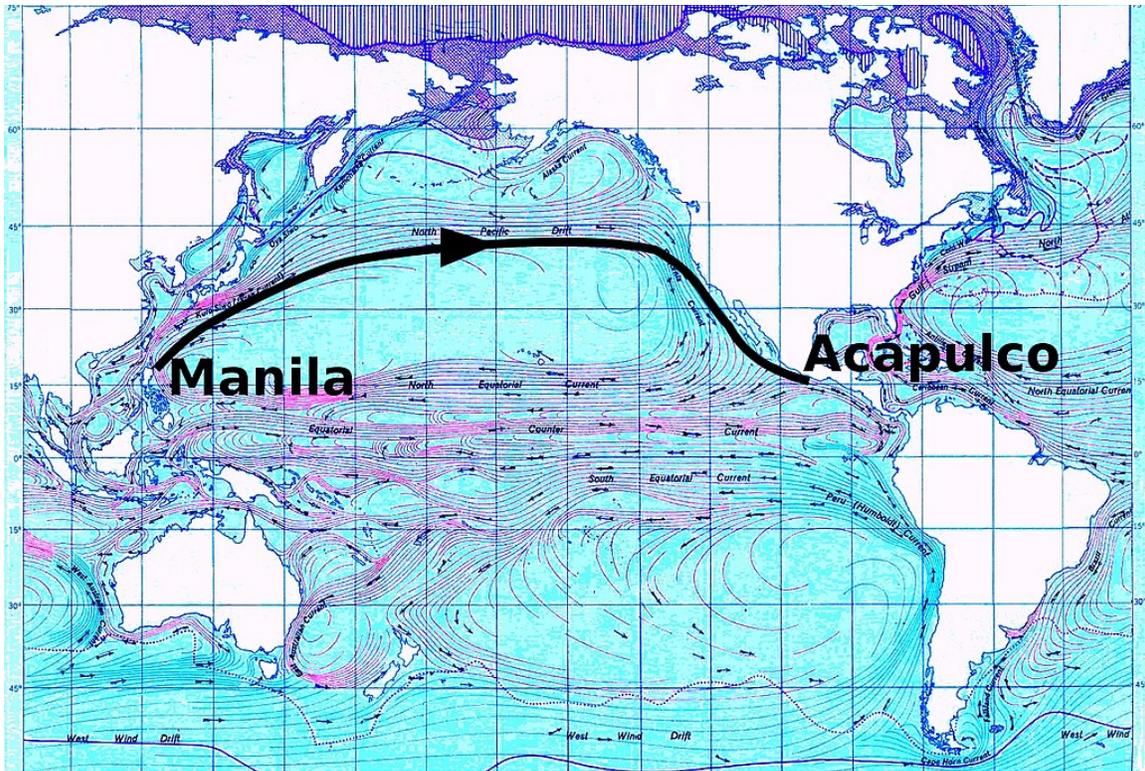


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese\\_discoveries\\_and\\_explorationsV2\\_en.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese_discoveries_and_explorationsV2_en.png)

*Portuguese Trade Routes and Settlements – 16<sup>th</sup> century*  
 During the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Portugal monopolized the spice trade by controlling ports in the Moluccas and establishing a

chain of strategically located trade entrepôts, including Melaka (in modern Malaysia, controlling the Straits of Malacca), Goa (in modern western India), and Hormuz (in modern Iran, controlling the Persian Gulf).

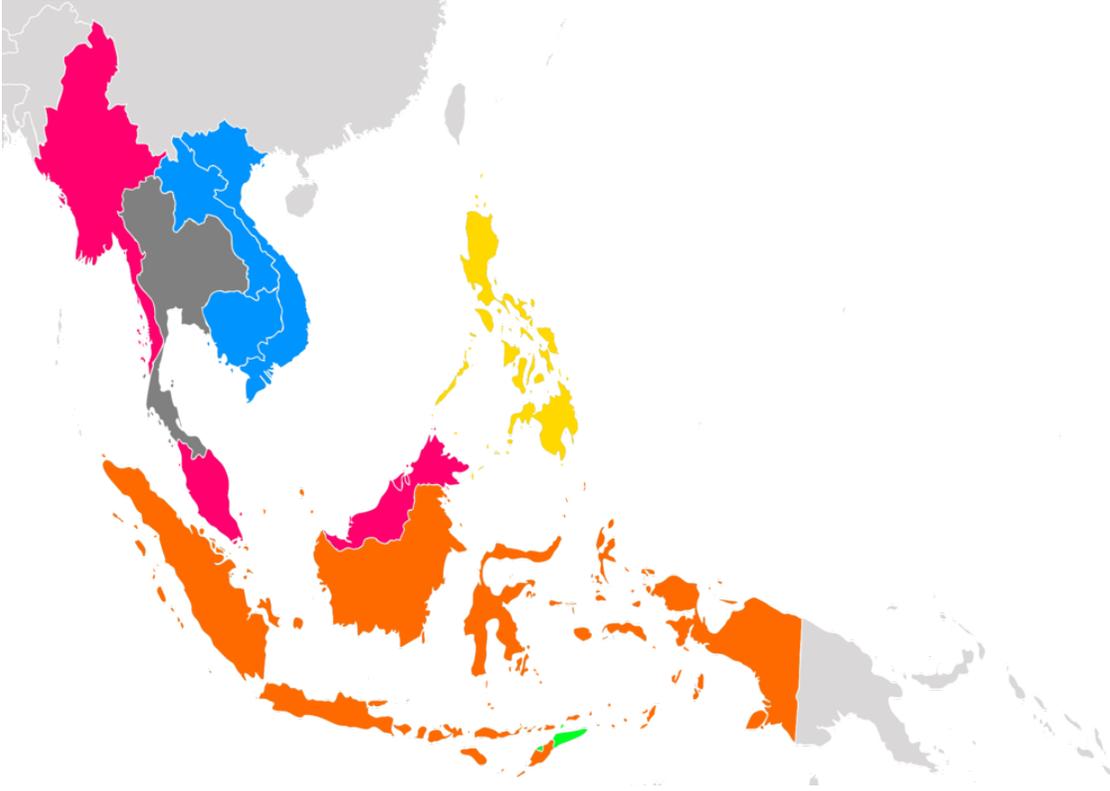
Spanish explorers arrived in the Philippines in 1521, where Magellan was killed during Spain's path-breaking circumnavigation of the world. Later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spain colonized the northern and central islands of the Philippines and created a major port in Manila. The Manila-Acapulco galleon trade – exchanging Chinese products, principally silk, for Mexican silver – underpinned the Spanish colony in the Philippines for two centuries.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andres\\_Urdaneta\\_Tornaviaje.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andres_Urdaneta_Tornaviaje.jpg)>

*Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade Route, 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries*

The Dutch first arrived in the Indonesian archipelago in 1596, established their key port and capital in Batavia (modern Jakarta), and gradually colonized the principal islands – Java, Sumatra, and the Moluccas – after expelling Portugal from the region. The Dutch focused on spice exports during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but shifted to producing and exporting sugar and coffee in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:European\\_colonisation\\_of\\_Southeast\\_Asia.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:European_colonisation_of_Southeast_Asia.png)>

*European Colonization of Southeast Asia – French (Blue), British (Red), Dutch (Orange), Spanish (Yellow), and Portuguese (Green)*

Great Britain was a latecomer to colonization in Southeast Asia, becoming active after the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British were mainly interested in protecting their colonies in South Asia and the lucrative China-India-Europe trade route. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British colonized Burma and Malaya

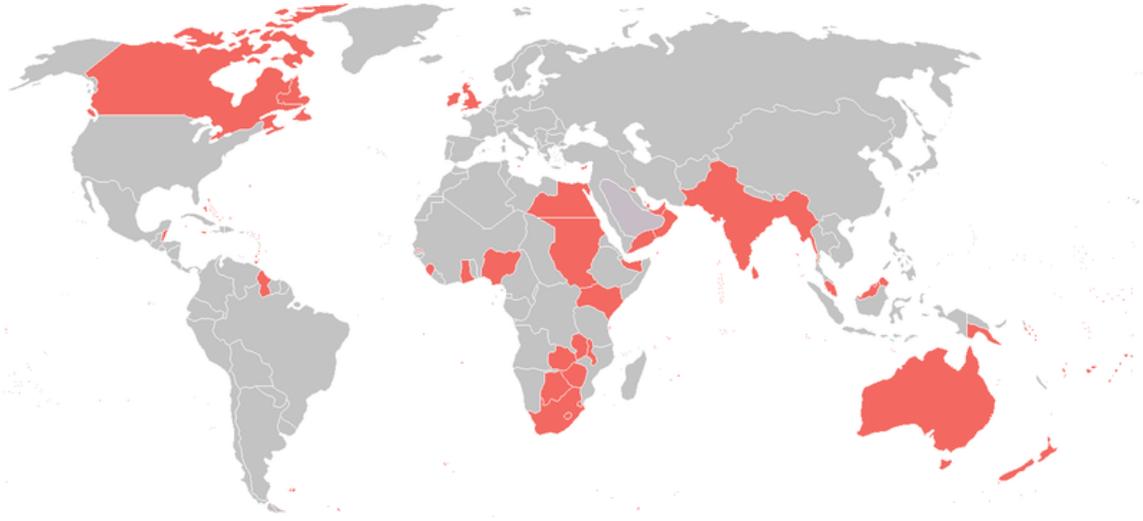
and created Singapore, which soon became the leading port and entrepôt in Southeast Asia.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East\\_Indiaman\\_Warley.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East_Indiaman_Warley.jpg)>

*Warley, An English East India Company Ship – Painting By Robert Salmon, 1804, National Maritime Museum, London*

Vietnam, however, escaped European incursions for the first 350 years of European interest in Southeast Asia – the 16<sup>th</sup> through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries – because it did not produce spices or other commodities desired by European traders and it did not have entrepôt cities on the major trade routes.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British\\_Empire\\_in\\_1914.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_in_1914.png)>

*The British Empire in 1914, One-fourth of the World's Land Area and Population – Vietnam Avoided British Colonialism*

### **Vulnerability of Vietnam to Colonial Takeover (19<sup>th</sup>**

**century).** Between 1788 and 1802, the Tay Son peasant rebellion and the subsequent rule by two Tay Son emperors undermined the elite order in Vietnam. After 1802, the Nguyen Dynasty revived the old system of elite control. Vietnam was ruled in principle by an omnipotent emperor, but in practice by a Mandarin aristocracy. The social and political hierarchy was based on qualification for entry into the civil service through extremely difficult and lengthy examinations that required extensive knowledge of Confucian

philosophy. The bureaucracy then maintained power by taxing the agricultural wealth of rural peasants.

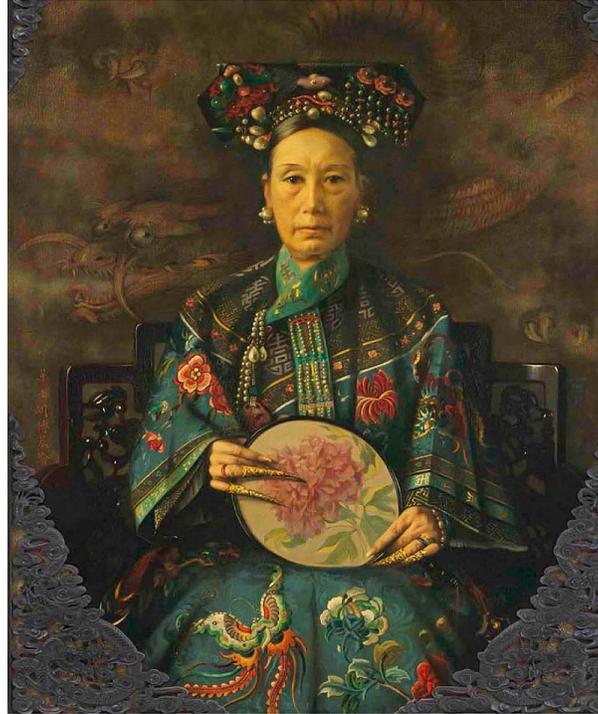
The over-taxed peasants became increasingly vulnerable to natural shocks – drought, floods, and pests – that caused occasional rice shortfalls and famines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those famines often affected large numbers of poor people and created growing threats to political stability.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mai\\_Chau -  
\\_Arbeit\\_mit\\_Wasserb%C3%BCffel\\_im\\_Reisfeld.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mai_Chau_-_Arbeit_mit_Wasserb%C3%BCffel_im_Reisfeld.jpg)>

*Vietnamese Peasants, Mei Chau – Vulnerable If Poor Harvest*

The elite bureaucracy exacerbated the situation by establishing royal monopolies on commerce, mining, and manufacturing to offset losses in state revenues from poor rice crops. The monopolies also were intended to counter the dominance of commercial activity by about 40,000 Chinese residents of Vietnam. However, the royal monopolies greatly hindered economic development and further undermined the already perilous state. Along with a tottering economy and political instability, the kingdom was militarily weak. Vietnam had pledged to be a vassal to China, but the Qing Dynasty in China was crumbling in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and thus unable to provide effective assistance to Vietnam. Politically, economically, and militarily, Vietnam was ripe for colonial takeover by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons* available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Empress-Dowager-Cixi1.jpg>>

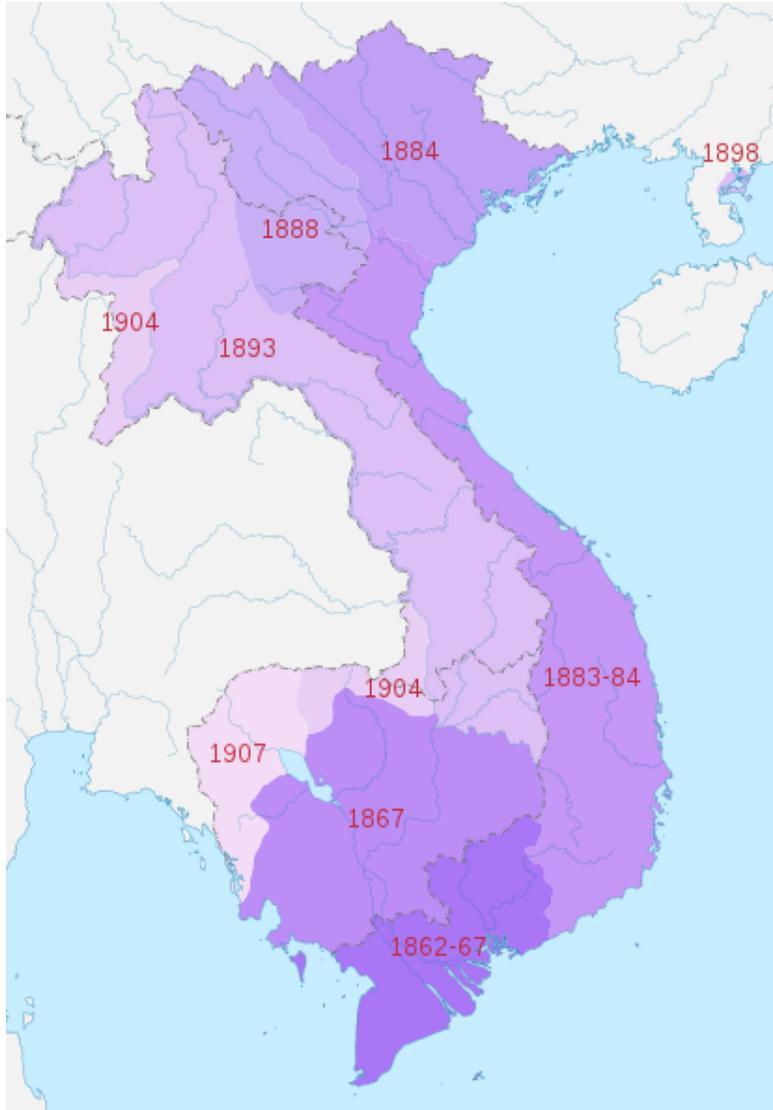
*Qing Empress Dowager Cixi (in power 1861-1908) –  
Weak Ruler of Declining China*

**French Colonization of Vietnam (1858-1885).** France came late to trade and colonization in Southeast Asia. French missionaries arrived in Vietnam in 1601, and by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century they had converted about a quarter million Vietnamese from Buddhism, Confucianism, or animism to Roman Catholicism. France claimed that its main motive for intervention in Vietnam was to prevent the religious persecution of Vietnamese Catholics.

However, the underlying rationales for France's imperial expansion were to gain staging points for trade with south China and to offset British imperial gains.

Between 1858 and 1867, France fought and negotiated with Vietnam to obtain territory in the south. The French established its Cochinchina colony to control rice-producing areas in the Mekong Delta and to obtain exclusive rights to trade up the Mekong River to south China. France temporarily discontinued its colonial expansion during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, which it lost, but quickly returned to Southeast Asia thereafter.

Between 1873 and 1885, France defeated both Vietnam and its ally, China (in the Sino-French War of 1884-1885), and imposed protectorates in the north (Tonkin) and in the center (Annam). In the north, France sought control of the Red River to establish rail and river routes to south China. Its main motive in Annam was to unify its Vietnamese possessions and gain small ports. France took over Laos and Cambodia, created French Indochina, and ruled all five of its colonial territories from Hanoi.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_French\\_Indochina\\_expansion.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_French_Indochina_expansion.svg)>

*French Conquest of Indochina – Vietnam (1858-1885),  
Cambodia (1867-1907), and Laos (1893-1904)*

**French Colonial Rule of Vietnam (1885-1945).** French colonial rule in Vietnam combined efficiency and brutality. French colonial administration destroyed traditional village

autonomy, the basis of peasant acceptance of the pre-colonial dynasties. For two millennia, Vietnamese villages and peasants had enjoyed a very high degree of local autonomy and communal self-government. The French imposed their approved leaders on the villages, forced the peasantry to register on the tax rolls, and increased rates of taxation.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Presidential\\_Palace\\_of\\_Vietnam.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Presidential_Palace_of_Vietnam.jpg)>

*The Presidential Palace of Vietnam, Hanoi – Built Between 1900 and 1960 To House the French Governor-General of Indochina*

To make the French Indochinese colony pay for itself, France paid special attention to developing their original colony, Cochinchina, in the Mekong Delta region of southern Vietnam. There the colonial government invested heavily in irrigation canal and drainage projects, tripled the population of the region, quadrupled rice area and production, and quintupled rice exports. French colonial development of the Mekong Delta paralleled British colonial policy in Burma's Irrawaddy Delta. Colonial governments invested in drainage and irrigation, impoverished laborers moved in from the north, and rice production and exports boomed.

Vietnam became one of the world's leading rice exporters and made up rice deficits in France's African colonies. In effect, France deepened the earlier rice policy of independent Vietnamese kingdoms – invest in irrigation to expand output and then tax the peasantry heavily. Through population censuses, taxation registries, and village political control, the French colonial government increased the effectiveness of rural tax collections.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rizi%C3%A8re\\_vietnam.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rizi%C3%A8re_vietnam.jpg)>

*Rice Farming in the Mekong Delta –  
Rice Was the Primary French Colonial Export*

But French desires to increase rice exports led to a highly skewed pattern of landholding and the creation of discontented landless rural laborers. In 1930, three percent of the landowners held half of the cultivated land, and three-fourths of the agricultural laborers were tenants or hired hands. In Europe, the government of France was severely weakened by World War I and the Great Depression. During that period, the French colonial

government in Vietnam controlled opposition to their rule by employing effective secret police and brutal executions.

### **Vietnamese Nationalist Resistance (1885-1945).**

Vietnamese resistance to French colonial rule was carried out by two competing groups – the nationalists and the Communists.

Each group had its own philosophy and mode of operation. The nationalists stressed the need for political independence, whereas the Communists focused initially on land reform. Rural economic discontent and urban intellectual anti-colonialism produced both nationalist pressures for independence and Communist desires for political and economic reform, especially of the pattern of landholding. The two most effective nationalist leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940), a revolutionary monarchist, and Phan Chau Trinh (1871-1926), a revolutionary democrat. But neither could rally a powerful anti-colonial response.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PhanBoiChau\\_memory.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PhanBoiChau_memory.JPG)>

*Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) – Revolutionary Monarchist*

Nationalism in colonial Vietnam faced formidable barriers. Most of the Vietnamese educated elite continued to be influenced by the Confucianist mystique of public service. In addition, the decline of the power and symbol of the monarchy undercut that institution as a focal point for anti-French pressures. Moreover, French political fragmentation of Vietnam into three regions and 60 provinces made it difficult to establish a national movement,

and the French colonial secret police were effective and merciless in squelching opposition. Nevertheless, following the rise of the Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party in China in 1927, a similar Vietnamese nationalist movement, the Quoc dan dang (VNQDD), emerged in the late 1920s. However, after a premature revolt in February 1930 the French guillotined the VNQDD leaders. The virtual elimination of nationalist anti-colonial leaders left the anti-French field wholly open to the Vietnamese Communists.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_VNQDD.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_VNQDD.svg)>

*Flag of the Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) –  
Vietnamese Nationalist Movement*

**Vietnamese Communist Resistance (1885-1945).** Led by a charismatic leader and brilliant tactician, Ho Chi Minh, the Communists formed the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) in 1930 and thereafter thoroughly dominated the opposition to colonial France. Ho (1890-1969) traveled to France as a mess-boy on a French ship after the First World War. He then lived in France and embraced Communism.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nguyen\\_A%C3%AFn\\_Nu%C3%A4%27C\\_\(Ho-Chi Minh\),\\_d%C3%A9l%C3%A9gu%C3%A9\\_indochinois,\\_Congr%C3%A8s\\_communiste\\_d\\_e\\_Marseille,\\_1921,\\_Meurisse,\\_BNF\\_Gallica.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nguyen_A%C3%AFn_Nu%C3%A4%27C_(Ho-Chi_Minh),_d%C3%A9l%C3%A9gu%C3%A9_indochinois,_Congr%C3%A8s_communiste_d_e_Marseille,_1921,_Meurisse,_BNF_Gallica.jpg)>

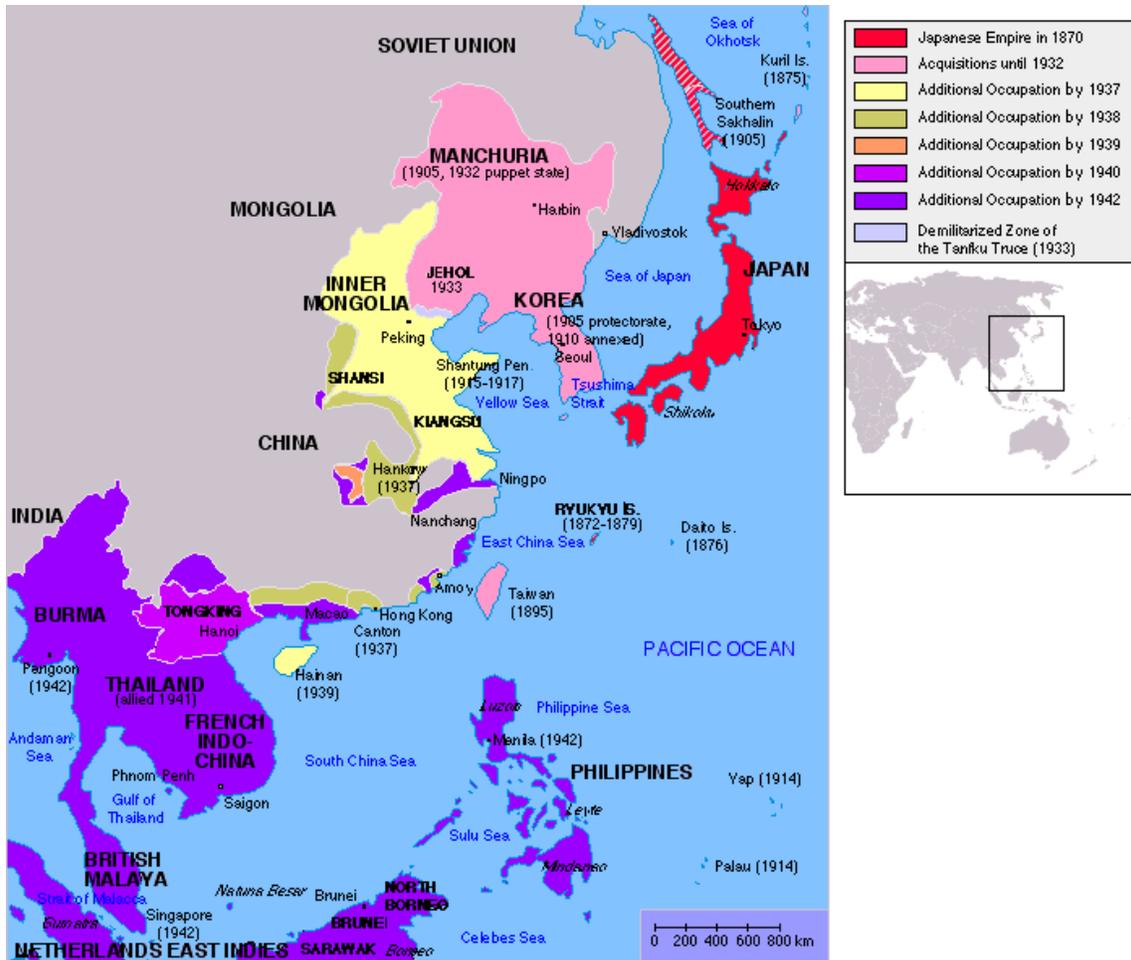
*Ho Chi Minh, Age 31 – Indochinese Delegate To  
the Communist Congress of Marseilles, 1921*

Thereafter, Ho studied and worked as an organizer for the Communist movement in the USSR, China, and Siam (Thailand). The Leninist version of Communist philosophy attracted Ho as an explanation of colonialism and convinced him that French rule in Vietnam ultimately was doomed.

When he organized the Communist movement in Vietnam, Ho diverged from the Leninist focus on the urban proletariat. He advocated unity between peasants, who desired land redistribution, and urban workers, who wanted higher wages and better working conditions. That coalition of the rural and urban poor became the backbone of Communist resistance to French colonial rule in Vietnam (and in the rest of French Indochina). After organizing Vietnamese revolutionaries abroad and moving in and out of jail in the 1930s, Ho returned to Vietnam in 1941 and formed the Vietnamese Independence Brotherhood League (Viet Minh). The Viet Minh was a front organization intended to unite Vietnamese Communists and non-Communists against colonial rule.

**World War II and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1941-1946).** Colonial rule in Vietnam shifted to the Vichy French Government after the fall of France to Nazi Germany in 1940. In December 1941, Japan launched its bold plan for a “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” in Southeast and East Asia by attacking Pearl Harbor and invading several Asian colonies of Western powers. Japan already had seized control of Vietnam from Vichy France in July 1941.

The Japanese occupation, 1941-1945, at first seemed to provide an Asian role model for Vietnamese nationalists. Early Japanese military successes exploded the myth of Western invincibility, clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of the colonial nations, and seemed to provide a symbol of Asian success around which the anti-colonial forces could rally. But Japanese rule brought political repression and economic ruin to the Vietnamese, and the export of rice to Japan in 1944 led to famine in Vietnam.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Japanese\\_Empire2.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Japanese_Empire2.png)

### *Japan's Conquered Territories, 1870-1942 – Japan Occupied Vietnam, 1941-1945*

The Viet Minh, under Ho and the Communists, took the lead in resisting Japanese and Vichy French rule during World War II. The American Government provided training and aid to the Viet Minh in their anti-Japanese resistance efforts.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho\\_Chi\\_Minh\\_\(third\\_from\\_left\\_standing\)\\_and\\_the\\_OSS\\_in\\_1945.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho_Chi_Minh_(third_from_left_standing)_and_the_OSS_in_1945.jpg)>

*American OSS Advisors With Viet Minh Leaders, 1945 –  
Ho Chi Minh Is Standing Third From Left*

In 1945, during the power vacuum following the end of the Second World War, the Communists established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) led by Ho Chi Minh. Initially, the DRV emphasized nationalism, promoting independence and land reform rather than state control of the means of production.

Although Ho and his colleagues offered to maintain good relations with the Allied countries, the Allies chose not to

recognize the DRV. Instead, the Allies requested the Kuomintang Government of China to occupy northern Vietnam (north of the sixteenth parallel) and Great Britain to occupy southern Vietnam. The DRV government staunchly opposed those foreign occupations, especially that by their traditional enemy, China.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giap-Ho.jpg>>*

*Vo Nguyen Giap (Left) and Ho Chi Minh (Right) – Hanoi, 1945*

**War with France (1946-1954).** After the Second World War, France and the other European colonial powers attempted to

reassert political control in Southeast Asia. The Nationalist Government of China invaded Vietnam in 1945 with an army of 180,000 troops. To counter that huge Chinese force, Ho Chi Minh invited France back into northern Vietnam for five years (the British had already taken control of southern Vietnam and escorted the French back into that part of the country).

In 1946, France and the DRV both reneged on earlier promises and negotiations broke down, starting a long, costly conflict of eight years. During the struggle, the Viet Minh introduced a massive land reform, redistributing 630,000 hectares (over 1.5 million acres) to small-scale farmers, especially in southern Vietnam.



was recognized by the United States and Great Britain. The USSR and China then accorded political recognition to the DRV.

Throughout the war, the Viet Minh successfully used guerrilla tactics to frustrate the French forces. Ironically, the battle that ended the war in the DRV's favor, fought at Dien Bien Phu in northwestern Vietnam in 1954, was a conventional confrontation.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Victory\\_in\\_Battle\\_of\\_Dien\\_Bien\\_Phu.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Victory_in_Battle_of_Dien_Bien_Phu.jpg)>

*Viet Minh Troops Plant Their Flag Over the Captured French Headquarters – After Winning the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, 1954*

The post-war Geneva Settlement (1954) emancipated former French Indochina – Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos – but divided

Vietnam at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel into North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Having won the war, the Viet Minh and the DRV government were very reluctant to accept that division. But they were pressured to do so by their Soviet and Chinese allies.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French\\_Indochina\\_post\\_partition.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French_Indochina_post_partition.png)

*The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the State of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos after the Geneva Settlement, 1954*

**War with United States and SEATO (1964-1975).** In the emerging Cold War, the Soviet Union and China supported Communist North Vietnam whereas the United States and its allies aided non-Communist South Vietnam. Efforts to reunify the country and to carry out meaningful land (and other socio-political) reform resulted in renewed warfare. The second Indochina war (1964-1975) was even longer and more brutal than the first, pitting North Vietnam and the Vietcong (southern Vietnamese supporters of the North), supported by the Soviet Union and China, against South Vietnam and the allied countries of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), led by the United States. The DRV and its supporters sought to expel foreigners, reunify the country, and redistribute assets within a Communist governmental system. The government of South Vietnam wished to maintain its independence, and the SEATO allies hoped to contain the spread of international Communism.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam\\_war\\_1971-1973\\_map\\_fr.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_war_1971-1973_map_fr.svg)

*The Vietnam-SEATO War, 1971-1973 – Orange-ringed Zones in South Vietnam Controlled by South Vietnam’s Army and SEATO*

The North enjoyed many advantages – strong support from most rural residents, the backing of South Vietnamese who desired socio-political reform, and deep dedication of North Vietnamese. In North Vietnam, for example, the DRV installed a widely popular network of village public health stations that helped to raise average life expectancy from only 35 years in 1940 to 58 years in 1975.

The DRV's guerrilla warfare tactics exploited flexibility, maneuverability, surprise, and adroit use of limited resources. Key causal factors in the failure of America and its allies include underestimation of the deep political commitment of most rural Vietnamese to a North Vietnamese victory and the misplaced tactical decision to first employ military means, leaving for later critical socio-economic reforms, especially land reform, that had been ignored by South Vietnamese governments.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vo\\_Nguyen\\_Giap3.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vo_Nguyen_Giap3.jpg)>

*General Vo Nguyen Giap, 1954 – Guerrilla Tactics (Flexibility, Surprise, Constant Attack) Overcome Technological Superiority*

**Post-war Stagnation (1976-1985).** By 1976, three and one-half decades of war had devastated Vietnam. Between three and five million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians had lost their lives, most of the country's infrastructure (roads, railroads, ports, dams, and dikes) was damaged or destroyed, and many cities and villages lay in rubble. Twenty-one of the country's 30 provincial capitals were heavily damaged in the wars, and nine were destroyed.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bombs\\_from\\_B-52\\_Arc\\_Light\\_strike\\_exploding.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bombs_from_B-52_Arc_Light_strike_exploding.jpg)>

*Bombs Being Dropped From a B-52 Stratofortress During the Vietnam-SEATO War*

The economy stagnated between 1976 and 1980, reflecting both war damage and the difficulty of integrating a distorted capitalist economy in the south with an over-planned economy in the north. The government stubbornly retained its centrally-planned control of the economy, administratively set all important prices, and distributed inputs in an attempt to allow enterprises to meet production targets. Woefully inefficient central planning and

tight control of foreign trade and investment meant that Vietnam missed the chance to benefit from a booming international economy. The country lacked capital to recover from war devastation, and the government misallocated much of the investment funds that were available.

In 1978, Vietnam aligned itself with the USSR and COMECON rather than with China. China retaliated by terminating all economic, military, and technical assistance to Vietnam. Stagnation also resulted from Vietnam's subsequent decision to invade Cambodia and Laos in 1979, provoking a retaliatory invasion of northern Vietnam by China. Although Vietnam was able to inflict heavy losses on the invading Chinese troops and hasten China's decision to withdraw, the war proved costly to the Vietnamese economy. Vietnam expanded its army to more than one million troops, the fourth largest army in the world.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam\\_china.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_china.jpg)>

### *China's Rebuffed Invasion of Vietnam, 1978-1979*

The early 1980s saw modest recovery and economic growth, fueled by massive amounts of Soviet aid (about \$1.5 billion annually between 1979 and 1985). But it became clear to Vietnamese officials that drastic policy changes were needed to help Vietnam recover from war and escape from dire poverty.

***Doi Moi Reforms and Recovery (1986-present).*** In 1986, the Vietnamese government began experimenting with market-oriented reforms (called *doi moi* or renovation). As in China a decade earlier, Vietnam's first reform was to allow farmers to sell

surplus production for profit. Except for the retention of about half of the country's state-owned enterprises (which accounted for 40 percent of GDP), the government largely abandoned central planning. Vietnam enacted reforms to attract private foreign investment (1987), end agricultural collectives and allocate land to private farmers (1988), free most prices from central-plan control (1989), create a land market with titles (1993), and encourage business enterprises in the private sector (2005).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Terraced\\_fields\\_Sa\\_Pa\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Terraced_fields_Sa_Pa_1.jpg)>

*Doi Moi Ended Agricultural Collectivization –  
Terraced Rice Fields, Sa Pa, Vietnam*

Those policy reforms brought remarkable results. Inflows of foreign direct investment grew rapidly, rising to \$8.9 billion in 2013 and \$15.5 billion in 2019. Except for occasional outbreaks of high inflation, the government has held annual inflation rates below 10 percent. Between 1990 and 2019, the real (inflation-adjusted) annual growth rate of per capita income (GDP) averaged 5.6 percent – an impressive achievement, though much slower than China’s annual growth rate in that period (8.7 percent). Before that surge, Vietnam was one of the world’s poorest countries. By 2019, nominal income per capita had increased to \$8,374 in PPP terms (after adjusting for international price differences). (In comparison, PPP income per capita in the United States in 2019 was \$65,118.) By 2019, Vietnam had improved to 120<sup>th</sup> of 187 countries in the World Bank’s ranking of GDP per capita PPP.

*Doi moi* policy reforms have favored labor-intensive production in agriculture and small-scale manufacturing, creating an export boom based on electronic products, footwear, garments, petroleum, rice, coffee, cashew nuts, and marine products.

Manufactured goods made up more than half of Vietnam's \$279.7 billion of export earnings in 2019. Vietnam's principal exports and their percentage shares of the total value of export earnings in that year were electrical machinery (42), footwear (8), clothing (6), and computers (5).



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khu\\_c%C3%B4ng\\_nghi%E1%BB%87p\\_Long\\_H%E1%BA%ADu.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khu_c%C3%B4ng_nghi%E1%BB%87p_Long_H%E1%BA%ADu.jpg)>

*Long Hau Industrial Zone, South of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

Vietnam negotiated a preferential trade agreement with the European Union in 1992, joined the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) and received membership in the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1995, signed a bilateral trade agreement with the United States in 2001 (the U.S. had withdrawn its trade embargo in 1994), and joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. The normalization of economic relations with those key trading organizations and partners will help sustain future growth of Vietnam's export-oriented economy.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cwr\\_lake\\_facade2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cwr_lake_facade2.jpg)>

*Headquarters of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Geneva, Switzerland – Vietnam Joined the WTO in 2007*

The Vietnamese Communist Party is the omnipotent political institution in Vietnam. The Party leads the Vietnam Fatherlands Front, a coalition of social organizations that disseminate party policies and vet candidates for the National Assembly. Since 2011, Nguyen Phu Trong has been the General Secretary of the Party, the most important leadership role.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vice\\_President\\_Biden\\_Shakes\\_Hands\\_With\\_General\\_Secretary\\_Nguyen\\_Phu\\_Trong\\_at\\_a\\_Luncheon\\_at\\_the\\_State\\_Department\\_\(18883780193\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vice_President_Biden_Shakes_Hands_With_General_Secretary_Nguyen_Phu_Trong_at_a_Luncheon_at_the_State_Department_(18883780193).jpg)>

*Nguyen Phu Trong (Left), General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party (2011 –) and President of Vietnam (2018 –) and U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden – Washington, D.C., 2015*

Nguyen Xuan Phuc has been the Prime Minister of Vietnam, the second-most-important political position, since 2016. The President of Vietnam is a largely ceremonial post. Nguyen Phu Trong was appointed President in 2018 after the incumbent, Tran Dai Quang, died in office. Nguyen Phu Trong, who is 76 and reportedly in ill health, is not expected to retain either of his positions when the Politburo meets in 2021 to name new leaders.

### **Land Reform and Poverty Alleviation (1993-present).**

The distribution of income in Vietnam is quite highly skewed. The top 20 percent of income earners receive about 7 times more than the poorest 20 percent (World Bank calculation for 2012). (In China, the top quintile earns 10 times as much as the bottom quintile, and in the United States that ratio is about 9.) But poor people participated fully in Vietnam's recent boom, and increasing incomes for poor Vietnamese solidified their support for deeper policy reform. As in China, the economic boom in Vietnam was triggered by reforms that permitted farmers to earn higher incomes. Farm-household savings, in turn, led to high rural investment in

labor-intensive manufacturing enterprises. Because two-thirds of Vietnamese people live in rural areas, the benefits of rural-based economic expansion have been evenly distributed, i.e., growth has been “pro-poor.”



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Agriculture\\_in\\_Vietnam\\_with\\_farmers.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Agriculture_in_Vietnam_with_farmers.jpg)>

*Pro-poor Growth from the Expansion of Agriculture –  
Horticultural Production on a Large Farm, Southern Vietnam*

In 1993, Vietnam set up a system to distribute Land-use Right Certificates (LUCs). The government continues to own the land, but individuals and firms receiving LUCs obtain legal rights to land (for 20 years on agricultural land and 50 years on forest

land), and those land-use rights can be transferred, exchanged, leased, inherited, mortgaged, and used as collateral in obtaining loans. More than 90 percent of farmers in lowland regions, 60 percent of residents in upland forest areas, and 35 percent of urban residents have received LUCs. That land reform program has created important increases in agricultural productivity and has transferred land assets to many of Vietnam's poorest people.

The Vietnamese government has also increased public services to alleviate poverty. Public school enrolment has expanded impressively (nearly all boys and girls complete primary school, three-fourths attend secondary school, and the national rate of literacy in 2018 was 95 percent). Public health facilities have become widely available (life expectancy has increased to 76 years (2018), the annual population growth rate has declined to 1 percent (2019), and an extensive social safety net has been put in place (workers laid off from state-owned enterprises receive generous severance pay).

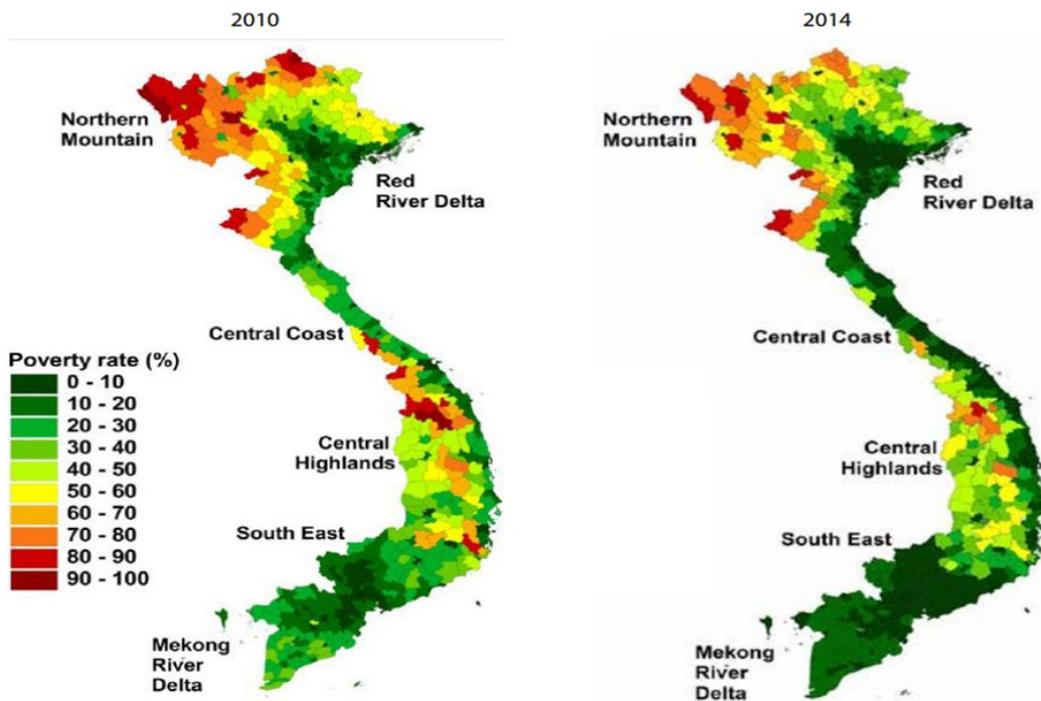


Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nha\\_dieu\\_hanh\\_144\\_Xuan\\_Thuy\\_26Jan2005-01s.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nha_dieu_hanh_144_Xuan_Thuy_26Jan2005-01s.jpg)>

*Vietnam National University, Hanoi – One of Vietnam’s Most Prestigious Institutions of Higher Education*

In 2002, the government created a Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) to ensure that its policy of balancing market orientation with socialism will lead to rapid economic growth accompanied by social equity and poverty alleviation. In response to these policies of land reform and poverty alleviation, Vietnam received \$1.6 billion of official development assistance (foreign aid) from international aid donors

in 2018. Personal remittances from Vietnamese working abroad provide a substantial source of foreign exchange to aid economic growth (\$17 billion in 2019). The latest available study of poverty in Vietnam, carried out by the World Bank in 2018, concluded that only 6.7 percent of Vietnam's population had incomes beneath the poverty line and that 45 million Vietnamese were lifted out of poverty in the first eighteen years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_poverty\\_rates\\_by\\_district\\_of\\_vietnam\\_in\\_2010\\_and\\_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_poverty_rates_by_district_of_vietnam_in_2010_and_2014.jpg)

*Poverty Rates By District in Vietnam – 2010 (Left) and 2014*

Sound economic policies during the 1990s and early 2000s produced impressive results. But Vietnam remains poor and has much to do before qualifying as another “Asian miracle.” For it to continue on its road to economic prosperity with equitable income distribution, the Vietnamese government will need to accelerate economic reform (especially of labor regulations), achieve its announced goal to privatize state-owned enterprises, promote labor-intensive manufacturing (especially of electronics products), increase public investment in education, training, and public health, and improve governance at all levels – by providing better public administration, a well-functioning legal framework, reduced red tape for private enterprises, capable budgetary management, and public financial accountability. If reasonable progress can be made toward achieving these ambitious goals, analysts anticipate that Vietnam can maintain an annual rate of growth of per capita income of 5-6 percent during the next decade.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vm-map.png>>

## *Contemporary Vietnam*

## **Cambodia after the Khmer Kingdom (15<sup>th</sup> century-present)**

**Thai Suzerainty and Vietnamese Expansion (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries).** After the grandeur of Angkor paled, the Khmer Kingdom of Cambodia steadily declined for four centuries. The Khmers were caught in a tightening vise between the Thais in the west and the Vietnamese in the east. Following a century of sparring, the buoyant Thai kingdom of Ayudhya imposed suzerainty over Cambodia in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. For two centuries thereafter, the Cambodians paid annual tribute, offered troop levies, and made pledges of political support to Ayudhya. Yet the Khmer Kingdom retained a large degree of independence, and the elite in Phnom Penh gained wealth through maritime trade.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, Cambodia lost its maritime wealth and Phnom Penh became a backwater. The Nguyen dynasty in Vietnam swept south into the Mekong Delta, settled Vietnamese there, and took Saigon from Cambodia. In addition, Chinese migrants established new ports on the Gulf of Siam. Cambodia became landlocked.

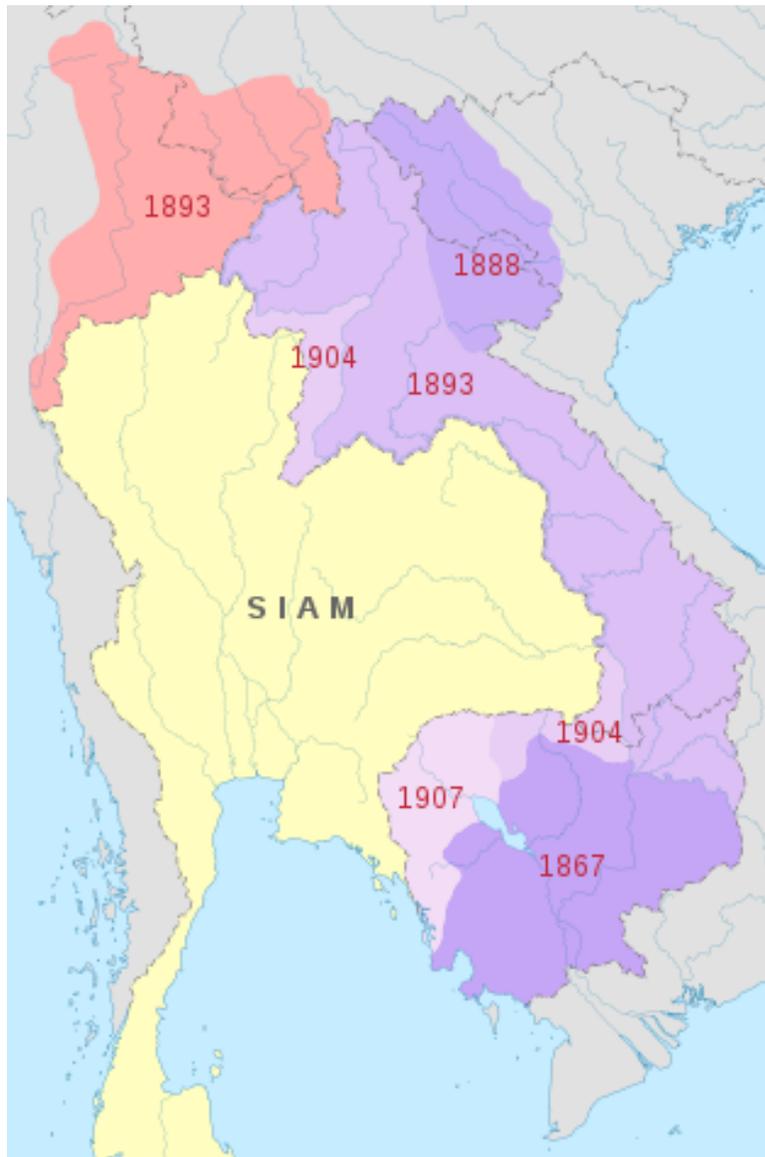


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UdongDerFussi.jpg>>

*Theravada Buddhist Temple, Udong –  
Former Capital of Cambodia (1618-1866)*

The situation deteriorated even further in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The strong kingdoms of Siam and Vietnam regularly invaded Cambodia, claimed Cambodian territory, and created political instability, ruinous civil wars, and court intrigue. The Thais snatched two northwestern provinces (including the site of Angkor) and demanded Cambodian military manpower, Buddhist

loyalty, and a Cambodian vassal state. The Vietnamese took land in southeastern Cambodia and wanted more territory, recognition of their cultural superiority, and a Cambodian buffer state.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_Siam\\_\(territorial\\_cessions\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Siam_(territorial_cessions).svg)>

*Kingdoms of Siam (Yellow), Cambodia (Dark Purple),  
and Vietnam (Gray) – 1867*

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Cambodia was in a desperate state. Its one million people – mostly rice farmers with low yields, little irrigation, and small farms – were very poor. Cambodian agriculture no longer generated much surplus. Most historians agree that Cambodia most likely would have been partitioned between Siam and Vietnam and disappeared as a political entity if the French had not intervened in the 1860s.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King\\_Norodom.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Norodom.jpg)>*

*King Norodom of Cambodia (Ruled 1860-1904) –  
Invited French Protection From Siam and Vietnam in 1863*

### **French Colonialism in Cambodia (1863-1945). King**

Norodom of Cambodia invited France to establish a protectorate in

Cambodia in 1863, because he hoped to protect his kingdom from further incursions by Vietnam and Siam. France had several motivations for wanting to colonize Cambodia. The French hoped that the Mekong River would provide back-door access to the lucrative China market (only in 1866 did a French expedition learn that the Mekong rises in Tibet). France also wanted to add to its planned Indochina colony, exploit timber resources, and spread the Roman Catholic religion.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indochine\\_fran%C3%A7aise.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indochine_fran%C3%A7aise.svg)>

### *French Expansion into Cambodia, 1863-1907*

France eventually turned Cambodia into an economically viable colony. In 1907, France successfully negotiated with Thailand for the return to Cambodia of the two northwest provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. The French then developed large-scale rice agriculture in Battambang, and that region later produced 100,000 tons of rice exports annually. In the southeast, French entrepreneurs brought in Vietnamese indentured laborers to work on French rubber plantations, and in the 1920s colonial Cambodia began exporting large amounts of high-quality natural rubber.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubber\\_plantation\\_Cambodia\\_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubber_plantation_Cambodia_2014.jpg)>

*Natural Rubber Plantation – Koh Kong Province, Cambodia*

Agricultural taxes generated sufficient revenue to pay for colonial administration and transportation infrastructure (5,400 miles of roads and a 300-mile railroad to Battambang).

Cambodian nationalist resistance to French colonial rule was muted. In 1885-1886, the Cambodian elite staged a nationwide rebellion against French colonial policy, which lasted for eighteen months. But little else occurred until Vichy French rule (under Japanese supervision) during World War II.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King\\_Sisowath\\_of\\_Cambodia.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Sisowath_of_Cambodia.jpg)>

*King Sisowath of Cambodia (Ruled 1904-1927) –  
Greeting French Colonial Officials, 1911*

In 1942, Khmer nationalist leaders staged an abortive, anti-French demonstration and were quickly imprisoned. In March 1945, Japanese officials jailed the French administrators and declared that Cambodia was independent. King Sihanouk formally accepted independence, and Son Ngoc Thanh formed a government. But the French forced their way back into power in October 1945.

### **Cambodian Independence and Neutrality (1945-1970).**

King Norodom Sihanouk was the dominant figure in Cambodia during the quarter century after the Second World War.

Charismatic, narcissistic, dictatorial, and revered by Cambodia's poor masses, Sihanouk walked a political tightrope. France permitted elections for a consultative National Assembly in 1946, 1947, and 1951, and the Democratic Party – a moderate, pro-independence group of intellectuals – won easily. But they were ineffective in ending the civil war against French rule. With French connivance (and Moroccan troops), Sihanouk arranged a coup in 1952, dissolved the Assembly, and ruled by decree.

Through an adroit public relations campaign, King Sihanouk convinced France to grant near total independence in 1953 (France controlled foreign trade until 1954). Two years later, he abdicated his throne (yielding the crown to his father), became Prince, and formed a new political party, Sangkum (People's Socialist Community), which won three-fourths of the vote and all of the Assembly seats in the 1955 election.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Norodom\\_Sihanouk\\_official\\_1955\\_portrait.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Norodom_Sihanouk_official_1955_portrait.jpg)>

*Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012), King of Cambodia (1941-1955, 1993-2004), Prime Minister (1955-1970) – Official Portrait, 1955*

The Sihanouk era (1955-1970) began auspiciously. The Sangkum Party was unopposed in subsequent elections. Only later did Communist opposition arise in some rural areas. Sihanouk's economic policy, "Buddhist socialism," was neither Buddhist nor socialist. It consisted of state trade and banking, promotion and taxation of rice and rubber exports, and dependence on foreign aid.

Sihanouk's "neutral" foreign policy was pro-China, anti-Thailand, and anti-South Vietnam, featured a secret treaty with North Vietnam (allowing movements of troops and materiel), and shifted away from and then back toward the United States. In March 1970, the Assembly voted to remove Sihanouk from office because he was unwilling to move against Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, the economy had gone into a downspin, and there was widespread resentment of his complete political control, censorship, and inattention to job creation.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JFK\\_and\\_Prince\\_Sihanouk\\_in\\_New\\_York,\\_1961.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JFK_and_Prince_Sihanouk_in_New_York,_1961.jpg)>

*Prime Minister and Prince Norodom Sihanouk (Right) With U.S. President John F. Kennedy – New York, 1961*

**War, Revolution, and the Khmer Rouge (1970-1979).** The government of the Khmer Republic was led by General Lon Nol. Lon Nol's government was elected by the Assembly, had the support of moderates, conservatives, and the army, and received strong assistance from the United States. But the Lon Nol

government was incompetent, and corruption was rampant.

During his five-year reign, Lon Nol fought and lost a massive civil war with Communist guerrillas, whom Sihanouk earlier had nicknamed the Khmer Rouge. More than 600,000 Cambodians died in that war, many from American bombs. Cambodia suffered from food shortages, inflation, and massive refugee movements.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LonNol.jpg>>*

*Lon Nol (1913-1985) – Prime Minister of Cambodia (1969-1971),  
President of Cambodia (1972-1975)*

The Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh in April 1975, called their new country, Democratic Kampuchea (DK), and installed Pol

Pot as the head of government – with strong support from China. The movement consisted of motivated, idealistic, and brutal schoolteachers and peasants. Upon taking power, the Khmer Rouge immediately began their Utopian reform. Copying China's disastrous Cultural Revolution, the Pol Pot regime idealized the rice-growing peasant, who would produce rice for export that would lead to later industrialization.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PolPot.jpg>

*Pol Pot (Soloth Sar, 1928-1998), Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979 – Pictured in Romania, 1978*

Pol Pot and the DK leaders banned cities (moving everyone to the countryside to grow rice), schools and books (preferring their own indoctrination), organized religion (using Buddhist temples as rice granaries), money (bankrupting businessmen), markets (substituting government controls), and private property (centralizing all asset ownership in the state). The human tragedy was incalculable – at least one million people, including most educated and skilled Cambodians, died from overwork or executions.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Choeungek2.JPG>>

*Skulls from the Choeung Ek Killing Fields*

The four-year plan was an economic disaster due to crop failures, environmental damage, and general dislocation. In early 1979, Vietnam invaded and quickly overthrew the DK government and the Khmer Rouge fled to Cambodia's western mountains or into exile in Thailand. Four years of "killing fields" and economic chaos mercifully came to an end. But the price was Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia.

# THE SECURITY OF REGULATION

- 1- You must answer accordingly to my question-Don't turn them away .
- 2- Don't try to hide the facts by making pretexts this and that  
You are strictly prohibited to contest me .
- 3- Don't be a fool for you are a chap who dare to thwart the  
revolution .
- 4- You must immediately answer my questions without wasting  
time to reflect .
- 5- Don't tell me either about your immoralities or the essence of  
the revolution.
- 6- While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all.
- 7- Do nothing, sit still and wait for my orders . If there is no  
order , keep quiet . When I ask you to do something , you  
must do it right away without protesting
- 8- Don't make pretext about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide  
your secret or traitor.
- 9- if you don't follow all the above rules , you shall get many  
many lashes of electric wire .
- 10- if you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get  
either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge .

Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Concentration\\_camp\\_rules.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Concentration_camp_rules.jpg)>

*Khmer Rouge Security Regulations – Reflect Incredible Brutality*

## Vietnamese and Independent Cambodia (1979- present).

The Vietnamese established the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in 1979 and ruled for a decade. With Soviet support, Vietnam kept 200,000 troops in Cambodia to maintain tight political control. Although most Cambodians were relieved to be rid of the Khmer Rouge, many distrusted Vietnam.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at

<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodia\\_anti-PRK\\_border\\_camps.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodia_anti-PRK_border_camps.png)>

*The Khmer Rouge Versus Vietnam in Cambodia, 1978-1989*

The new government quickly restored order and reestablished freedom of movement, urban areas, primary schools, functioning markets, and money and banks in the beleaguered country. The first head of the PRK, Heng Samrin, was replaced in 1985 by an articulate young leader, Hun Sen.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hun\\_Sen\\_\(2018\)\\_cropped\\_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hun_Sen_(2018)_cropped_(2).jpg)>

*Hun Sen (1952 – ), Prime Minister of Cambodia (1985-present) –  
Pictured in 2018*

The PRK intermittently fought the remnant Khmer Rouge army, which received support from Thailand, China, and the United

States. In 1989, after the implosion of the USSR, the Soviets ended aid to Vietnam and the Vietnamese removed their troops and left Cambodia.

The government changed its name to the State of Cambodia (SOC) in that year, but Hun Sen retained power. The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) ran the country for eighteen months during 1991-1993, preparing for the election of a new National Assembly in 1993. A party formed by Prince Ranariddh (Sihanouk's son), the United Front for an Independent, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), won 57 of the 120 seats, and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), led by Hun Sen, gained 51 seats. Ranariddh and Hun Sen then became co-prime ministers. After continuous friction, Hun Sen staged a coup in 1997, exiled Ranariddh, and seized full power. In the 1998 election, Hun Sen and the CPP won 41 percent of the vote to FUNCINPEC's 32 percent, and Ranariddh returned to head the Assembly. Hun Sen retained power in the election in July 2003, again defeating Ranariddh.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ranariddh\\_1990s.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ranariddh_1990s.jpg)>*

*Prince Norodom Ranariddh (1944 –), Prime Minister of Cambodia (1993-1997), President of the National Assembly (1998-2006)*

In October 2004, King Sihanouk abdicated his throne due to illness and was succeeded by King Norodom Sihamoni, his son. King Norodom has been Chief of State since 2004.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King\\_Norodom\\_Sihamoni\\_\(2019\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Norodom_Sihamoni_(2019).jpg)>

*King Norodom Sihamoni (1950 – ), Chief of State (2004-present) –  
Pictured in 2019*

Prime Minister Hun Sen has led CPP or coalition governments since January 1985. His critics charge Hun Sen with becoming increasingly authoritarian and engaging in corruption, intimidation, and electoral fraud to maintain his rule. The CPP won 78 percent of the vote in the elections for Senate in 2012 but only 49 percent of the vote in the National Assembly elections in 2013. EU monitors judged both elections to be tainted.

The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) won 45 percent of the vote and 55 parliamentary seats in 2013 and seemed poised to do even better in the next parliamentary election in 2018. But in 2017, the CPP government persuaded the Supreme Court to ban the CNRP and charge its leader, Kem Sokha, with treason. The CPP then won all 123 seats in the National Assembly in the farcical election in 2018.

**The Economy of Cambodia – Control, Reform, and Growth (1979-present).** In the 1970s, war, overwork, and executions killed a quarter of the population of Cambodia, and bombings and mismanagement destroyed much of the country’s infrastructure. By 1979, Cambodia’s people and economy were totally devastated. PRK leaders first set up a Vietnamese-style command economy in which private property and enterprise were not permitted. In step with Vietnam, after 1986 the PRK shifted economic policy toward market orientation. The new “Chinese model of socialism” stressed private enterprise, foreign trade and investment, agricultural incentives, and ending price controls.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deng\\_Xiaoping\\_statue\\_in\\_Shenzhen.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deng_Xiaoping_statue_in_Shenzhen.JPG)>

*Cambodia Emulated Chinese Reform Economic Policies –  
Deng Xiaoping, Statue in Shenzhen, “To Get Rich Is Glorious.”*

Its impact in Cambodia was delayed by political instability and civil unrest. The United Nations team (UNTAC) introduced further incentives to promote private investment and trade, but a downturn in foreign aid led to rapid inflation in 1990-1992.

Cambodia’s economy began to benefit from economic liberalization after the 1993 elections provided greater political stability. Income (GDP per capita measured by the World Bank at Purchasing Power Parity and in constant dollars) grew annually at 5 percent between 1994 and 2000, and the growth rate increased to



Although the expansion of rice output was slower, the country regained food self-sufficiency in 2001. Population growth was high (1.6 percent per year between 2000 and 2019), and Cambodia had little income growth during the Asian economic crisis (1997-1998). Cambodia joined the World Trade Organization in 2004 as its 148<sup>th</sup> member. The country received 6.2 million tourists in 2018, principally from Vietnam and China, who spent \$4.8 billion.

But Cambodia remains very poor. In 2019, its per capita income (price-adjusted) was only \$4,571 (7 percent of the US level and in the bottom quartile of 187 countries), 14 percent of its 16.5 million people earned incomes that were less than the poverty line (down from 48 percent in 2007), life expectancy had improved to 70 years, and the adult literacy rate, though increasing, was only 81 percent.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battambang\\_Provincz\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battambang_Provincz_01.jpg)>

*Harvesting Rice by Hand, Battambang Province –  
Cambodia is Growing, But Has A Very Long Road Ahead*

**The Ingredients of a Successful Development Strategy for Cambodia.** The necessary ingredients for successful development emerge from the experience of Asian countries that have enjoyed rapid economic growth. Cambodia's recent economic progress can be assessed with reference to that pattern. The first ingredient for success is a stable and predictable political system. Investors require a tolerable level of security and a fair legal system. Cambodia's economy suffered from high political instability from

the end of the Sihanouk era (1970) until the 1993 elections. With regular five-year elections and the elimination of the Khmer Rouge, political stability has greatly improved. The net inflow of foreign direct investment into Cambodia in 2019 was \$3.7 billion.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambodiahealth1.jpg>>*

*Garment Production for Export in Cambodia –  
Large Earner of Foreign Exchange, Mostly Foreign-owned*

A second strategic ingredient for development is positive economic policy that encourages productivity gains. Following bouts of high inflation and large depreciations of the Cambodian riel, good macroeconomic policy recently reduced inflation to

manageably low rates. The Kingdom of Cambodia also has introduced a system of positive price policies that create incentives for investment, stability, and retention of profits. The government has reduced its spending on defense to 1.5 percent of GDP and increased its allocations to productive infrastructure – education, health, research, technology, and transportation.

The third necessary ingredient for successful development is complementary foreign aid, including technical assistance to improve policy analysis, resource transfers to fund good public investment projects, and jointly negotiated agreements (“conditionality”) for sensible policy changes. Cambodia received \$800 million of official development assistance in 2018, mostly from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. With continued political stability, incentive-based economic policy, and complementary foreign aid, Cambodia is poised to accelerate its rates of social and economic progress.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cb-map.png>>

### *Contemporary Cambodia*

## **Laos after the Khmer Kingdom (14<sup>th</sup> century-present)**

### **Lan Xang (1354-1695) and Successor Lao Kingdoms**

**(1695-1893).** Lan Xang (meaning “A Million Elephants”) was the first large Lao kingdom. Fa Ngum, who founded Lan Xang in 1354, was skilled in warfare and public administration. Lan Xang had three social strata – aristocrats, free peasants, and slaves. The king and nobility protected the free peasants in return for their providing agricultural labor (on the aristocrats’ land), participation in feasts, and military service as needed. The slaves, mostly prisoners of war, served the nobility but were not a critical supplier of labor services.

Fa Ngum established his capital at Luang Prabang because that location offered advantages for agriculture, trade, and defense. In 1558, Lan Xang survived a major invasion from Burma, although two neighboring kingdoms, Lan Na (based at Chiang Mai) and Ayudhaya (based north of modern Bangkok) succumbed to the Burmese invaders. The Lan Xang royalty moved their

capital south to Vientiane, which offered better trading prospects and somewhat easier defense.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southeast\\_Asian\\_history\\_-\\_Around\\_1540.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southeast_Asian_history_-_Around_1540.png)>

### *Landlocked Lan Xang (Red) and Its Neighbors, c. 1540*

The arrival of European traders in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century undercut the landlocked Lao kingdom by switching economic

activity to the coastal regions. Following a succession dispute in 1695, Lan Xang split into three successor kingdoms – Luang Prabang (north), Vientiane (center), and Champasak (south).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laos -  
\\_Division\\_territ%C3%B2ria\\_v%C3%A8rs\\_1750\\_\(vuege\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laos_-_Division_territ%C3%B2ria_v%C3%A8rs_1750_(vuege).png)>

*Three Lao Kingdoms –  
Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak, c. 1750*

A new Siamese kingdom took over those three Lao kingdoms in 1779, moved their most sacred images (including Vientiane's Emerald Buddha) to Bangkok, and ruled the kingdoms as autonomous but tributary provinces of Siam.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emerald\\_Buddha,\\_August\\_2012,\\_Bangkok\\_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emerald_Buddha,_August_2012,_Bangkok_(cropped).jpg)

*The Emerald Buddha – Originated in Lan Na in 1434, Moved To Lan Xang (1552-1779), Moved To Siam (Bangkok, 1779-present)*

When Vientiane and Champasak rebelled in 1827, Siam brutally quelled the revolt and abolished both kingdoms. Luang Prabang retained its nominal independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by

paying heavy tribute to Siam, Vietnam, and China. That nominal independence ended in 1893, when France colonized Laos. The territory and population of French Laos were only a fraction of those of Lan Xang, however, since Siam retained control of large portions of the former Lao kingdom.

**French Colonialism in Laos (1893-1945).** France colonized Laos in 1893 as an extension of French Indochina and an appendage to its more profitable colonies in Vietnam. Initially, French imperialists sought to gain control of the Mekong River region as a springboard to colonizing Siam. During negotiations between 1893 and 1904, Britain successfully opposed a French takeover of Siam. The British imperial policy was to retain Siam as a buffer state, separating British India/Burma from French Indochina. Because France could not govern the area once ruled by Lan Xang, the majority of Lao people remained under Siamese rule and only a minority resided in French Laos.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French\\_Indochina\\_subdivisions.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French_Indochina_subdivisions.svg)>

### *The Protectorate of Laos in French Indochina (1893-1954)*

The French colonial effort to develop Laos met with very limited success. Very few French *colons* (settlers) migrated to

Laos, and the French colonial administration amounted to only a few hundred officials. During the 1920s, Laos had a short tin-mining boom on the Nam Pataen plateau, ending with a speculative bubble that crashed during the Depression. Apart from plantation coffee and rubber, Laos exported opium (unofficially) and traditional forest products (cardamom and benzoin).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coquelicots\\_-\\_Parc\\_floral\\_6.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coquelicots_-_Parc_floral_6.JPG)>

*Opium Poppy (Papaver somniferum) –  
Grown in Northwestern Laos*

French development strategy for Laos was to try to redirect trade – from moving west to Bangkok to going east to Vietnamese

ports. That “unblocking” strategy was carried out through forced labor (corvée) construction of new roads over difficult mountainous terrain. The French also brought 40,000 Vietnamese settlers into Laos to serve as skilled laborers, artisans, and traders. In spite of those policies, the colonial budget of Laos realized large deficits that were covered with subsidies from Vietnam.



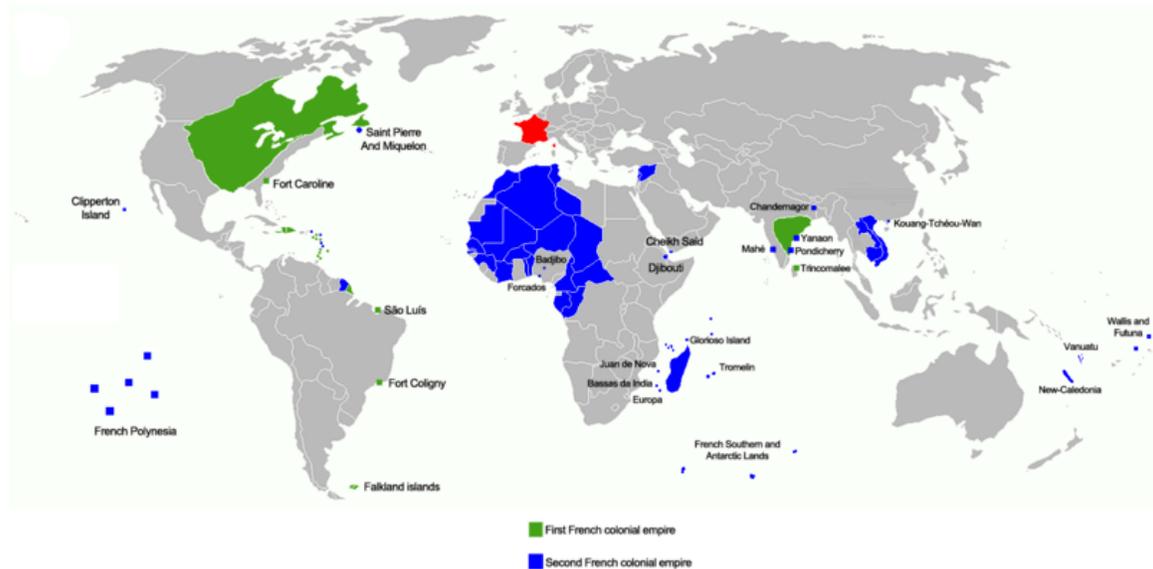
Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Market\\_in\\_Luang\\_Prabangpre\\_1900.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Market_in_Luang_Prabangpre_1900.png)>

*French Colonial Officials – The Market in Luang Prabang, c. 1900*

During the six decades of French colonial rule of Laos, organized Laotian political resistance was sporadic. Numerous peasant rebellions, by various ethnic groups throughout the country, arose to resist heavy taxation and corvée labor demands. But the small Laotian educated elite largely went along with French rule. In the 1930s, the Indochinese Communist Party, started by Ho Chi Minh, was intermittently active in Laos, before the French crushed it in 1936. During World War II, the Lao Seri (Free Laos) resistance movement opposed Japanese and Vichy French rule and was also staunchly anti-Vietnamese. Those small anti-colonial nationalist movements evolved into the Lao Issara (Free Lao) soon after the Second World War ended when France attempted to regain control of Laos.

**Laotian Independence and Neutrality (1945-1964).** The transition of Laos from occupation in 1945 to full political independence in 1954 was influenced heavily by external events, especially those occurring in Vietnam. Following Japan's defeat in August 1945, the Lao Issara (Free Lao) movement briefly formed a

government with the tacit support of occupying Chinese Nationalist troops. But in 1946, France recaptured Laos and imposed another colonial government. Laos received partial independence from France in 1949, although the French retained control of defense and justice and kept Laos within the Indochinese customs and monetary union. After France lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the French reluctantly left Indochina. The Geneva Agreement of 1954 accorded full independence to Laos.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:131Etendue\\_de\\_l%27Empire\\_Fran%C3%A7ais.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:131Etendue_de_l%27Empire_Fran%C3%A7ais.png)>

### *Laos in France's Colonial Empire, 1893-1954*

For the next decade, Laos was rocked by political instability, associated in important part with foreign influences. To gain political stability, Laotian leaders knew that they had to achieve three interrelated goals – territorial unity, internal peace, and external neutrality. A combination of domestic political schisms and external interventions made futile all efforts to meet those objectives. Coalition governments were formed on two occasions – in 1957-1958 and again in 1962 – but collapsed within a year. Both attempts involved the three princes – Suvanna Phuma (representing the neutral center), Suphanuvong (the Pathet Lao left), and Buon Oum (the militarist right). Both coalitions were undercut by foreign intervention.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Souphanouvong1978.jpg>>*

*Prince Suphanouvong (1909-1995), “The Red Prince” –  
President of Laos (1975-1991)*

The antagonists in the Cold War used Laotian groups as pawns as they tried to gain control of Southeast Asia. US military and economic assistance (of more than \$40 million per year between 1955 and 1963) funded the entire military budget of the anti-Communist Royal Lao government, and the American Central Intelligence Agency supported a sizeable “secret army” of Hmong guerillas for thirteen years (1960-1973).

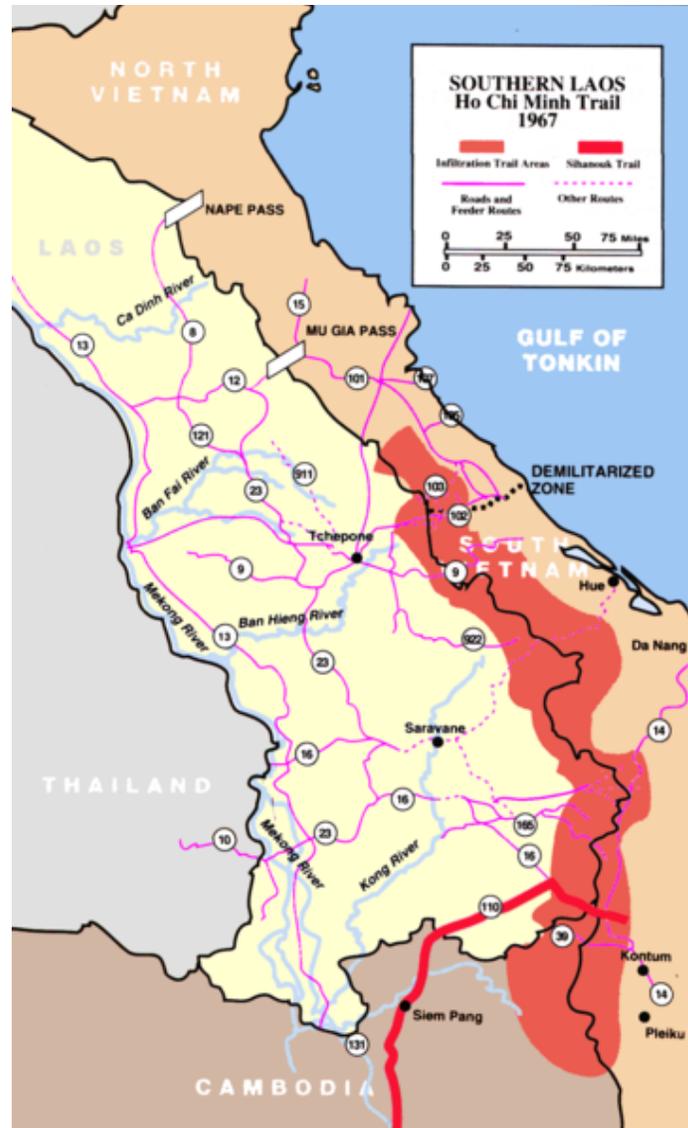
The Vietnamese and Soviets supplied significant amounts of aid to the Communist Pathet Lao guerrillas. The Pathet Lao (the military wing of the Communist Neo Lao Hak Sat movement), like their Vietminh supporters in Vietnam, gained converts among poor people in remote Laotian villages by stressing freedom, not Marxism, and by introducing literacy campaigns, public health improvements, and agricultural self-help programs.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A\\_group\\_of\\_women\\_plant\\_paddy\\_rice\\_seedlings\\_in\\_a\\_field\\_near\\_Sekong\\_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_group_of_women_plant_paddy_rice_seedlings_in_a_field_near_Sekong_(1).jpg)>

*Rice Farmers Near Sekong, Laos – The Pathet Lao’s Clinetele*

**War and Revolution in Laos (1964-1975).** Between 1964 and 1973, Laos was subjected to the most devastating war in the nation's history. More than 200,000 Laotians died and 750,000 survivors, a quarter of the country's population, became homeless. The brutal war was an extension of the Indochina war between the United States and Vietnam. Foreign powers divided Laos into three zones of influence. North Vietnam controlled eastern Laos along its border and the vital Ho Chi Minh trail that served as Hanoi's supply route to South Vietnam. The United States and Thailand held western Laos and the Mekong valley bordering Thailand. China had a free hand in parts of northern Laos where it had agreed to construct roads leading south from China.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HoCMT.png>

### *Southern Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, 1967*

In the nine-year war, more than two million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos, about two-thirds of a ton for every resident. Much of the bombing and virtually all of the land war took place in the eastern areas controlled by the Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao.

Yet the Pathet Lao retained effective administrative control in that region and carried on their rural education and health programs. In spite of the massive destruction, the bombing and land fighting had only a limited military impact on the outcome of the Indochina war. But the war led to enormous political gains for the Pathet Lao in rural areas.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam\\_-\\_Laos\\_War\\_Memorial\\_-\\_panoramio.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_-_Laos_War_Memorial_-_panoramio.jpg)>

*Pathet Lao War Memorial, Xiangkhouang Province, Lao*

The devastating war finally ended with the Laos Peace Accords in 1973, which established another coalition government in Laos, the third since independence. A tired and frustrated Suvanna Phuma was all that was left of the center. The ministries were divided equally between the Royal Lao right and the Pathet Lao left. The Pathet Lao's widespread popularity in rural areas was based on its effective grassroots programs and teaching of Laotian nationalism, not on land reform (which was not relevant in land-rich Laos).

In late 1975, the Pathet Lao carried out a quiet revolution. The Communists dissolved the coalition government, abolished the six-century-old Laotian monarchy, and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Kaysone Phomivan, the little-known head of the Communist party, became prime minister, and Suphanuvong, the former prince and longtime Pathet Lao leader, became president. More than 400,000 Laotians, including most of the country's skilled administrators, fled to Thailand.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaysone\\_Phomvihane\\_1978.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaysone_Phomvihane_1978.jpg)>

*Kaysone Phomivan (1920-1992), First Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (1975-1991)*

### **The Lao People's Democratic Republic (1976-present).**

The Communist Lao People's Party moved decisively to establish complete control, quashing opposition and re-educating former opponents. But the new leaders' ability to reform the country was heavily influenced by the international environment. Between 1976 and 1989, Laos was tightly aligned with Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Although the USSR provided less military and

economic assistance than the United States had given, Soviet aid covered about two-thirds of the LPDR government budget. In 1979, Laos and Vietnam signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that permitted Vietnam to station 40,000 troops regularly in Laos. The international orientation of Laos abruptly shifted in 1989-1991 with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the demise of the USSR.

Since 1990, Laos has successfully balanced continuing close political ties to Vietnam with new tight economic links to Thailand. The construction in 1994 of the first bridge across the Mekong River from Laos to Thailand symbolized those new linkages. Thailand emerged as the largest source of private foreign investment in Laos and helped Laos join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Friendship\\_bridge\\_built\\_with\\_Australian\\_funding\\_and\\_completed\\_and\\_opened\\_in\\_1994\\_crossing\\_the\\_Mekong\\_River\\_and\\_connecting\\_Thailand\\_to\\_Laos\\_\(10729204176\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Friendship_bridge_built_with_Australian_funding_and_completed_and_opened_in_1994_crossing_the_Mekong_River_and_connecting_Thailand_to_Laos_(10729204176).jpg)>

*The Friendship Bridge Across the Mekong, Connecting Laos with Thailand – Built With Australian Funding and Opened In 1994*

Domestic political and economic programs in the LPDR also have gone through two phases. During the first decade (1976-1985), the Party experimented with central planning, extensive price controls, forced agricultural cooperatives, and the nationalization of industry. Although the Party solidified its power, the Communist experiment was an economic failure and the system led to widespread corruption, especially by the army.

In the mid-1980s, Party leaders decided to change course. A New Economic Mechanism was introduced in the Fourth Party Congress in 1986. The Lao Party leaders adopted the Chinese model (already copied by Vietnam) of open economic policies but continued Party control of politics.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rice\\_planting\\_near\\_Champasak\\_\(Laos\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rice_planting_near_Champasak_(Laos).jpg)>

*Lao Woman Rice Farmer, Planting Near Champasak –  
Only One-fifth of Laotian Farmers Joined Collective Farms*

Reforms in Laos focused on market-oriented policies to open the economy to increased foreign trade and investment. A Law on

Investment Promotion (2009) permitted 100-percent foreign ownership in all sectors (except national security). Laos joined the World Trade Organization in 2013. Economic reform with Party control continues as the main focus of political economy in contemporary Laos.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bounnhang\\_Vorachith\\_2016\\_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bounnhang_Vorachith_2016_(cropped).jpg)>

*Bounnhang Vorachith (1937 –) – President of Laos and General Secretary of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (2016 –)*

Laos is a communist, one-party state, governed by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). Following parliamentary elections in 2006, in which only the LPRP was permitted to have candidates, President Choummaly Sayasone was named chief of state and leader of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) – the most important position in Lao politics. Between 2010 and 2016, Thongsing Thammavong served as the Prime Minister of Laos – the official head of government, but only the second most powerful leadership role in Laos.

At the LPRP party congress in 2016, two new leaders were selected. Since 2016, Bounnhang Vorachith, a former Vice-president and multiple-time minister, has served as President and General Secretary of the LPRP – and thus as the *de facto* leader of Laos. The head of government has been Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, who formerly was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thongloun\\_Sisoulith\\_with\\_Obamas\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thongloun_Sisoulith_with_Obamas_cropped.jpg)>

*Thongloun Sisoulith (1945 – ), Prime Minister of Laos (2016-present), Minister of Foreign Affairs (2006-2016)*

### **The Economy of Laos – Control and Reform (1976-1990).**

During the first fourteen years of Communist control, Laos experienced radical changes in economic policy and performance.

When the Laos People's Party (LPP) established the LPDR in 1976, the economy was devastated. Laos was desperately poor before the two Indochina wars. Nearly a decade of intensive bombing had destroyed most of the country's meager

infrastructure. Soviet and Vietnamese advisors convinced the new government to try to set up a Soviet-style system of central planning. But the government's administrative capacity was so limited that a Soviet economic system was infeasible. The attempt to control prices as well as domestic and international trade was inconsistent across regions and commodities. Most provinces operated nearly autonomously. The distorted system was made worse by the government's decision to aim for rice self-sufficiency within each province by restricting the movement of rice between regions.

Beginning in 1986, the Party decided to admit the failure of Communist planning and embark on the New Economic Mechanism (NEM). The conversion to a market-oriented economic system took several years, although most features of the NEM were in place by 1990. Despite much opposition to radical reform, the LPP leadership quickly turned Communism on its head. The imposition of price controls had led to a widespread network of illegal parallel ("black") markets. The first component

of the NEM was to decontrol all prices, except for the politically sensitive prices of rice and meat. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) were permitted to set prices and wages according to market conditions, and in 1990 the government began gradually to privatize the 600 SOEs.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Traditional\\_Laotian\\_garments\\_laid\\_out\\_to\\_dry\\_after\\_dyeing\\_\(14418521759\).jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Traditional_Laotian_garments_laid_out_to_dry_after_dyeing_(14418521759).jpg)

*Traditional Lao Textiles –  
Marketed Freely under the New Economic Mechanism*

New legislation encouraged private foreign investment, and Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese firms began investing in natural resources, hotels, and garment-manufacturing firms. The reform policy de-collectivized agriculture and promoted private farm

operations. In 1987, the government ended the distorting policy of banning trade in rice between provinces and acknowledged that each province no longer had to strive for rice self-sufficiency. While political control remained Communist, economic policy had become market-oriented.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Markt\\_Luang\\_Prabang.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Markt_Luang_Prabang.jpg)

*Private Markets In Laos Emerged Under the New Economic Mechanism – Street Market, Luang Prabang*

**The Economy of Laos – Growth and Crisis (1990-present).** Those radical economic reforms led to a steady growth of income (GDP per capita measured by the World Bank at

Purchasing Power Parity and in constant dollars), which increased at an annual rate of 3.8 percent between 1990 and 2000 and then accelerated to an annual rate of 5.4 percent between 2000 and 2019. The new policies attracted private capital and foreign assistance, and Laos had a boom in construction and service industries. The reform policies also improved the investment climate. Private and public investment went into resource-based export industries – electricity (from Mekong River hydroelectric stations), forestry (from tropical forests in northern Laos), mining (for copper and gold), and coffee.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coffee\\_Harvest\\_Laos.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coffee_Harvest_Laos.jpg)>

*Coffee Harvesting – Boloven Plateau, Southern Laos*

Laos also joined other low-wage Asian countries in exporting labor-intensive, manufactured products, principally video displays and garments.

Agriculture provides one-fourth of national income and three-fourths of jobs in the Laotian economy. The main crop is rice, planted on four-fifths of cropped area. Policymakers thus became concerned when rice output grew at only 1 percent annually in the early 1990s. Facing new market choices, many farmers shifted to producing cash crops or livestock. Laos lost self-sufficiency in rice and became a regular rice importer.

In mid-1997, the economy of Laos was afflicted by the Asian economic crisis, which had begun next door in Thailand. Like the other Southeast Asian economies, Laos suffered high rates of inflation and a large depreciation of its exchange rate during the 1997-1999 Asian crisis. But unlike the other countries, Laos did not experience a contraction of national income or much slowdown in its rate of economic growth. Income growth in Laos slipped to 4 percent (1.5 percent per capita) in 1998, but then resumed its

earlier path. To regain rice self-sufficiency, the government invested heavily in new facilities that quadrupled irrigated rice area between 1996 and 2000. Through a combination of higher rice yields and expanded planted area, Laos regained rice self-sufficiency in 2001.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
< [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laos\\_ricefields.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laos_ricefields.JPG) >

*Laos Regained Rice Self-sufficiency In 2001 –  
Irrigated Rice Paddy In Don Det, Laos*

Annual export earnings increased from \$1.5 billion in 2009 to \$2.7 billion in 2014 and then to \$5.2 billion in 2019. Laos benefitted from a boom in copper and gold production for export.



In spite of those successes, Laos remains poor. Its price-adjusted level of income per capita was only \$8,151 in 2019 – 13 percent of the US level and 121<sup>st</sup> of 187 countries ranked by the World Bank. According to the most recent World Bank estimates, 23 percent of the people of Laos lived in poverty in 2012, and one-third of Laotians had subsisted beneath the poverty line a decade earlier.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vientiane\\_Patouxai\\_Laos.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vientiane_Patouxai_Laos.jpg)>

*Vientiane Is Booming, But Much Of Laos Is Growing Less Fast –  
Lan Xang Avenue (Formerly Avenue de France), Vientiane*

Social indicators in Laos are among the world's poorest. In 2018, average life expectancy in Laos was only 68 years and the rate of growth of population, 1.5 percent per year, was very high. The

World Population Review projects that the population of Laos will expand from 7.3 million in 2020 to a peak of 9.7 million in 2060 and decline thereafter.

**The Ingredients of a Successful Development Strategy for Laos.** As was done above for Cambodia, the recent economic progress of Laos can be assessed with reference to the experience of successful Asian developing countries. The first ingredient for success is a stable and predictable political system to provide investor security and a consistent legal system. The devastated post-war economy of Laos was tightly controlled between 1976 and 1986. Although the political situation was stable, investors were discouraged by the attempt to impose central planning on the economy.

Since that time, the Laos People's Revolutionary Party has maintained a close grip on the government. The concern for potential investors thus is not political stability but governmental corruption, especially by the military, and consistent judicial decisions. Laos ranked only 130<sup>th</sup> among the 198 rated countries

in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2019. Laos received a net inflow of foreign direct investment of only \$1.3 billion in that year.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theun\\_Hinboun\\_Dam\\_Wall,\\_Central\\_Southern\\_Laos.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theun_Hinboun_Dam_Wall,_Central_Southern_Laos.jpg)>

*Theun Hinboun Dam Wall, Central Southern Laos –  
Foreign Investment Expanded Hydroelectric Output in Laos*

The second strategic ingredient for development is positive economic policy that encourages productivity gains. Since the government of Laos introduced the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) between 1986 and 1990 and ended price and exchange rate controls, sensible macroeconomic policy has kept inflation in

check. The NEM also greatly improved the investment climate for resource-based and labor-intensive industries. However, the Laotian Government continues to spend inadequate sums on education, health, transportation, and research.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pha\\_That\\_Luang,\\_Vientiane,\\_Laos.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pha_That_Luang,_Vientiane,_Laos.jpg)>

*The Government of Laos Misallocates Its Resources – Pha That Luang, Vientiane, Laos’s Most Important National Monument*

The third component of successful development is complementary foreign aid, including technical assistance, resource transfers, and agreements for sensible policy changes. In 2018, Laos received \$600 million of foreign aid, mostly from the

Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. With continued political stability, incentive-based economic policy, and complementary foreign aid, Laos is in a position to continue to make steady economic progress and gradually bring its people out of poverty.

**A Comparison of Three Key Indicators in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.** Emerging countries compete to improve their places in three prestigious sets of international rankings, all watched closely by private (foreign and domestic) investors. It is instructive to compare how well Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos rank on these three indicators. The gold standard of quality-of-life indicators is the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), because it incorporates income, health, and education data. In 2019, Vietnam ranked 118<sup>th</sup> of 189 countries in the HDI, well ahead of Laos (140<sup>th</sup>) and Cambodia (146<sup>th</sup>).

The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (EDBI) incorporates ten measures of government controls and regulations

that can make it difficult to establish and run businesses. In 2019, Vietnam ranked 70<sup>th</sup> of 190 countries in the EDBI, demonstrating that the country has enacted significant reforms to attract investors. In contrast, Cambodia (144<sup>th</sup>) and Laos (154<sup>th</sup>) have retained a wider range of inefficient bureaucratic regulations.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:S%E1%BB%9F\\_giao\\_d%E1%BB%8Bch\\_Ch\\_%E1%BB%A9ng\\_kho%C3%A1ng-ph%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Dng\\_Nguy%E1%BB%85n\\_Th%C3%A1i\\_B%C3%ACnh,\\_Qu%E1%BA%ADn\\_1,\\_H%E1%BB%93\\_Ch%C3%AD\\_Minh,\\_Vi%E1%BB%87t\\_Nam\\_-\\_panoramio.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:S%E1%BB%9F_giao_d%E1%BB%8Bch_Ch_%E1%BB%A9ng_kho%C3%A1ng-ph%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Dng_Nguy%E1%BB%85n_Th%C3%A1i_B%C3%ACnh,_Qu%E1%BA%ADn_1,_H%E1%BB%93_Ch%C3%AD_Minh,_Vi%E1%BB%87t_Nam_-_panoramio.jpg)>

### *Stock Exchange in Ho Chi Minh City (Formerly Saigon) – Southern Vietnam*

The most highly respected measure of corruption is the Corruption Perceptions Index, compiled by Transparency

International. All three countries suffer from high levels of corruption. In the CPI rankings in 2019, Vietnam was a disappointing 96<sup>th</sup> of 198 countries, Laos even worse at 130<sup>th</sup>, and Cambodia a shameful 162<sup>nd</sup>. All three Southeast Asian countries thus face the need to make significant reforms if they are to remain on trajectories of rapid socio-economic progress.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La-map.png>>

*Contemporary Lao People's Democratic Republic*

## **Lessons for Contemporary Powers**

What lessons for contemporary powers can be drawn from the experiences of the Khmer Kingdom and of successor governments in Indochina? The Khmer Kingdom rose in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, peaked in the 12<sup>th</sup>, and fell in the 15<sup>th</sup>. Two critical lessons can be drawn from the Khmer imperial experience. The Khmer people created a regionally powerful and long-standing empire against very long odds. One key to their success was the natural resource base of their heartland. They were fortunate to be located in the alluvial flood plain and delta of the Mekong River and its tributaries, especially the Tonle Sap River and Lake, which provided the base for very productive irrigated rice agriculture.

The Khmers intelligently ran hard with that advantage. They organized an efficiently-operated and centralized politico-religious system, based on Saivite Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, to promote and tax rice production. Then they expanded gradually to control the southern coastal regions and the rice-rich central plain of Thailand. The Khmer elite understood that they had to invest

and innovate to capitalize on their natural rice-growing base. For four centuries, their imperial government was well-organized and efficient.

But then things began gradually to deteriorate. Starting in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Khmer Kingdom went into steady decline. The gradual fall of the empire contains a second lesson for contemporary nations. Balance among resource users is critical, but the Khmer society became unbalanced. The socio-religious system called for the kings, noble landowners, and farmers to earn religious merit by donating resources – rice land, bonded laborers, or rice – to the Hindu or Buddhist temple societies so that they could construct religious monuments and maintain orders of priests and monks.

But the Khmer kings went overboard and overspent the empire's resources on monumental religious architecture. Moreover, the tax-exempt temple societies eventually came into control of excessive amounts of productive rice-producing land and bonded laborers. Too much of the rice surplus then went to

the church rather than to the state. Strapped for funds, the Khmer central government could no longer buy off nobles in court, support the military needed to control outlying areas and tributary states, and invest in the irrigation and transportation systems needed to maintain rice productivity. The system of imperial control came apart because of loss of balance – too many resources were devoted to religious monuments and temple societies and not enough to running the state.

Long after the Khmer Kingdom had disappeared into history, the region it had dominated became the scene of two tragic and brutal wars – the First Indochina War (1946-1954), in which Vietnam fought for its independence from France, and the Second Indochina War (1964-1975), in which Communist groups in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos fought against the United States and its allies and Vietnamese nationalists sought to reunify their country. Four important lessons emerge from those wars. The first lesson is that deeply felt political motivation can offset

superior military force. Most rural Vietnamese strongly supported the goals of the victorious Vietnamese army.

A second instructive principle is that poor people can fight with dogged determination for the things that affect their lives most directly – ownership of land, reasonable rates of taxation, national independence, and unification of their country. A third insight is that socio-economic realities can be much more important than political labels (such as Communism) when poor people are committed to a prolonged struggle. French and then American strategists overlooked the critical need to introduce economic reforms before attempting to impose military solutions in Indochina.

After the First World War, the Communists in Vietnam understood the links between national independence and socio-economic reform, whereas the Vietnamese nationalists focused almost entirely on anti-colonialism and independence. After the Second World War, first French and then American strategists overlooked the critical need for political and economic reform

before attempting to impose a military solution in Vietnam. A fourth critical lesson from the Vietnam wars is that once warfare begins, guerrilla tactics – flexibility in troop deployment, surprise in strategy, and constant attack and counter-attack – can overcome superiority in military force and sophistication. First French and then American military leaders were frustrated by their inability to pulverize the Vietnamese guerilla forces into submission. But adroit guerrilla strategy plus widespread rural support allowed the Viet Minh to overcome high odds and win the wars.

The aftermath of shocking wars sometimes can be even more brutal than the wars themselves. When the second Indochina War spilled over into Cambodia in 1970, despite the attempts of Cambodian leaders to have their country remain neutral, the former heartland of the Khmer Empire was devastated for five years. One-tenth of the Cambodian people perished in the conflict. After the war ended in 1975, the allies left Cambodia to its own devices.

The next four years proved even more calamitous for Cambodia than the war had been. The Communist Khmer Rouge

government, led by Pol Pot, brutalized the country by carrying out a hare-brained experiment in social engineering. In a mindless effort to create a socialist Utopia, the Khmer Rouge banned cities, schools, religion, private property, markets, and money and forced most people to become rice-growing peasants. More than a million Cambodians died from executions in the “killing fields” or from overwork or starvation. When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1979 and drove the Khmer Rouge into hiding in Cambodia’s hills or refuge in Thailand, twisted Cold War psychology caused the United States and Thailand to join China in supporting the Khmer Rouge’s guerrilla activities against the Vietnamese-supported puppet government in Cambodia. When wars are fought for the wrong reasons, the aftermath can bring strange and uncomfortable alliances.

A final lesson is the importance of political stability and sensible policy in underpinning economic growth and poverty alleviation. The Communist governments of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos faced post-war devastation in their societies and

economies. Inspired by their Soviet benefactors and advisors, all three governments quickly exacerbated an already desperate situation by imposing heavy-handed central planning. But in the late 1980s, the three countries gradually adopted the new and evolving Chinese model of socialism that stressed agricultural incentives, the ending of price controls, foreign trade and investment, and private enterprise.

First Laos and then Cambodia largely copied the reforms that Vietnam had initiated. As a result of sensible economic policies, between 2000 and 2014 Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos each enjoyed annual income growth per capita at the world-class rate of 6 percent. All three Indochinese countries are still poor, but in the past 25 years they have made impressive strides to improve the lives of their people. Stability is essential, but policy matters too.

## **Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos Time Line**

<i>c.</i> 50,000 BCE	Melanesian people settled Southeast Asia
<i>c.</i> 3000 BCE	Malayo-Polynesian (Austronesian) people settled Southeast Asia
2 <sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE	Hoabinhian culture – agriculture and bronze metallurgy
<i>c.</i> 500 BCE	Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic) people settled Southeast Asia
<i>c.</i> 400 BCE	Dong-son culture (Austronesian) – arose in the Red River Delta
<i>c.</i> 300 BCE	Vietnamese (Austroasiatic) people settled Southeast Asia
207-111 BCE	Vietnamese Au-lac Kingdom – incorporated into Chinese Nam Viet Kingdom
111 BCE-939 CE	North-central Vietnam – protectorate ruled by Chinese Dynasties
<i>c.</i> 0 BCE	Thai, Lao, and Shan (Tai) peoples settled Southeast Asia
<i>c.</i> 0 BCE	Indianization of Southeast Asia began – merchants, holy men
1 <sup>st</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> centuries CE	Funan Kingdom – Mon-Khmer – Cambodia and southern Vietnam

2 <sup>nd</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> centuries	Champa Kingdoms – Cham – Central-south Vietnam
c. 550-800	Chenla Kingdoms – Khmer – Cambodia and southern Vietnam
778-824	Sailendra Kingdom – constructed Borobudur Buddhist stupa – central Java
802	Jayavarman II – expelled Sailendras from Chenla – founded Khmer Kingdom
9 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> centuries	Khmer Kingdom – Cambodia, southern Vietnam, southern Laos, central-southern Thailand, northern Malaya
890-912	Yasovarman I ruled – built new capital at Yasodharapura, north of Tonle Sap
939-1788	Dai Viet Kingdom – Vietnamese – expanded into central, southern Vietnam
1009-1225	Ly Dynasty ruled Dai Viet Kingdom
11 <sup>th</sup> century	Khmer expansion – into Korat Plateau and Menam Basin (in contemporary Thailand) – wet-rice production regions
1113-1150	Suryavarman II ruled Khmer Kingdom – peak of Khmer power – created Angkor Wat, world’s largest religious monument
1181-1218	Jayavarman VII ruled – last great Khmer royal builder – constructed city of Angkor Thom, around Bayon Temple

early 13 <sup>th</sup> century	Theravada Buddhism – replaced Saivite Hinduism as official Khmer religion
1225-1400	Tran Dynasty ruled Dai Viet Kingdom
13 <sup>th</sup> century	decline of Khmer Kingdom – lost control of Thai plain, Laos, and southern vassal states
1288	Champa and Dai Viet Kingdoms – repelled invasion of Mongol-Chinese (Yuan Dynasty) forces
late 13 <sup>th</sup> century	Khmer Kingdom – withstood Mongol-Chinese invasion – kingdom reduced to Khmer heartland in contemporary Cambodia
1354-1695	Lan Xang Kingdom – Laos, eastern Thailand – founded by Lao leader, Fa Ngum – capital at Luang Prabang
1428-1788	Le Dynasty ruled Dai Viet Kingdom
1431	Ayudhya Thai Kingdom – defeated Khmer army – captured Angkor
1434	Khmers abandoned Angkor – new capital in Phnom Penh – shifted to maritime trade
15 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> centuries	Thai suzerainty and Vietnamese expansion in Cambodia
1471	Dai Viet defeated Champa – appropriated Cham territory

- 1695 succession dispute – Lan Xang split into three kingdoms – Luang Prabang (north), Vientiane (center), and Champasak (south)
- 1720 Dai Viet defeated Champa – drove Chams out of Vietnam
- 1777 Kingdom of Siam – Thai – took over three Lao kingdoms
- 1788-180 Tay Son rebellion in Vietnam – peasant revolt – ended Le Dynasty
- 1802 Nguyen Dynasty formed – reunified north and south Vietnam
- 1802-1945 Nguyen Dynasty nominally ruled Kingdom of Vietnam
- 1858-1867 France established Cochinchina colony – controlled rice-producing areas in Mekong Delta, trading rights on Mekong River
- 1863 King Norodom invited France to establish a protectorate in Cambodia – hoped to protect kingdom from Vietnam and Siam
- 1867-1940 lifetime of Phan Boi Chau – nationalist, revolutionary monarchist
- 1871-1926 lifetime of Phan Chau Trinh – nationalist, revolutionary democrat

1884-1885	France defeated China in Sino-French War – imposed protectorates in north Vietnam (Tonkin), central Vietnam (Annam)
1885-1945	French Colonial Rule of Vietnam – efficient, brutal
1885-1886	Cambodian elite staged a nationwide rebellion – against French colonial policy
1890-1969	lifetime of Ho Chi Minh – Communist leader of resistance – leader of Democratic Republic of Vietnam
1893-1954	France colonized Laos – extension of French Indochina
1907	France’s negotiation with Thailand – return two northwest provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap to colonial Cambodia
1930	French executed leaders of Vietnamese nationalist movement, Quoc dan dang – only Communists left in resistance movement
1930	Indochina Communist Party (ICP) formed – led by Ho Chi Minh
1936	France crushed Indochinese Communist Party in Laos
1941	Vietnamese Independence Brotherhood League (Viet Minh) formed – nationalist movement – led by Ho Chi Minh

- 1941-1945 Japanese/Vichy French occupation of Vietnam – economic ruin – Ho Chi Minh led resistance with American support
- 1945 Japanese officials declared Cambodia Independent – King Sihanouk formally accepted independence
- 1945 Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) established after end of World War II – led by Ho Chi Minh – not supported by Allies
- 1945 France forced its way back into power in Cambodia
- 1946-1954 First Indochina War – DRV defeated France
- 1952 Sihanouk arranged a coup in Cambodia – dissolved Assembly – ruled by decree – French supported changes
- 1953 France granted independence to Cambodia – Sihanouk retained control
- 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu – northwestern Vietnam – Vietnam defeated France in conventional warfare – ended first war
- 1954 Geneva Settlement – emancipated Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos – Vietnam divided into North and South Vietnam at 17<sup>th</sup> parallel
- 1955 King Sihanouk abdicated throne – formed new party, Sangkum (People’s Socialist Community) – won all Assembly seats

- 1957-1958 first three princes coalition government in Laos – Suvanna Phuma (center), Suphanuvong (left), and Buon Oum (right)
- 1960-1973 secret army of Hmong guerillas – supported by US CIA
- 1962 second three princes coalition government in Laos – Suvanna Phuma (center), Suphanuvong (left), and Buon Oum (right)
- 1964-1975 Second Indochina War – DRV defeated United States and SEATO
- 1964-1973 brutal war in Laos – 200,000 Laotians died, 750,000 homeless
- 1970 Cambodian Assembly removed Sihanouk from office – weak economy – high unemployment – resentment of control
- 1970-1975 Lon Nol government in Cambodia – incompetent, corrupt – lost civil war to Communist Khmer Rouge
- 1973 Laos Peace Accords – coalition government – ministries divided between Royal Lao right and Pathet Lao left
- 1975 Pathet Lao revolution in Laos – dissolved coalition, abolished monarchy, established Lao People’s Democratic Republic

1975-1979	Pol Pot government in Cambodia – Democratic Kampuchea (DK) – social, economic disaster – one-fourth died
1976-1989	Lao People’s Democratic Republic – aligned with Vietnam and USSR
1978	Vietnam aligned with USSR and COMECON – split with China – invaded Cambodia and Laos
1979	China invaded northern Vietnam – Vietnam fought standoff – China withdrew
1979-1989	People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) – Vietnamese puppet government
1979-1985	Heng Samrin – Prime Minister of People’s Republic of Kampuchea
1985-1989	Hun Sen – Prime Minister of People’s Republic of Kampuchea
1986-1990	<i>Doi Moi</i> Reforms – economic liberalization – abandoned central planning, attracted private foreign investment, freed most prices
1986-1990	New Economic Mechanism in Laos – economic liberalization – modeled after <i>Doi Moi</i> in Vietnam
1989-present	Hun Sen – Prime Minister of the State of Cambodia (SOC)

- 1991-1993 United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) – ran the country for 18 months – prepared for national election
- 1992 Vietnam negotiated preferential trade agreement with the European Union
- 1993 Land-use Right Certificates (LUCs) in Vietnam – land-use rights
- 1993 election in Cambodia – Prince Ranarridh and Hun Sen became co-prime ministers
- 1994 construction of first bridge across Mekong River – connecting Laos to Thailand
- 1995 Vietnam joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)
- 1997 Laos and Cambodia joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)
- 1997 Hun Sen staged a coup in Cambodia – exiled Ranarridh, seized full power
- 2001 Vietnam signed bilateral trade agreement with the United States
- 2002 Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy in Vietnam – market orientation – equity, poverty alleviation

2004	Cambodia joined the World Trade Organization
2006-2016	Choummaly Sayasone – President of Laos and General Secretary of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP)
2007	Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization
2010-2016	Thongsing Thammavong – Prime Minister of Laos
2011-present	Nguyen Phu Trong – General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party
2013	Parliamentary election in Cambodia – Cambodian People’s Party, 68 seats; Cambodia National Rescue Party, 55 seats
2013	Laos joined the World Trade Organization
2016-present	Nguyen Xuan Phuc – Prime Minister of Vietnam
2016-present	Bounnhang Vorachith – President of Laos and General Secretary of LPRP
2016-present	Thongloun Sisoulith – Prime Minister of Laos
2017	Supreme Court of Cambodia banned Cambodia National Rescue Party – Cambodia became a one-party state

2018

farcical Parliamentary election in Cambodia  
– Cambodian People’s Party won all 123  
seats – Hun Sen re-elected Prime Minister

## **Bibliography**

I am offering below annotations on selected books that I found particularly helpful in understanding the political and economic history of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. I have divided my recommendations into five categories – histories of the Khmer Empire, histories of Vietnam, histories of Cambodia, histories of Laos, and complementary histories of Southeast Asia. In each category, I list two highly suggested readings and two supplementary readings.

### **Histories of the Khmer Empire**

#### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, *The Khmers*, Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1996. This volume is the top choice if you only have time to read one book on the Khmer Empire. In most of the book, Mabbett superbly analyzes the bases of the Khmer Empire and the rise and fall of Angkor between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then in the two final chapters, Chandler neatly summarizes the post-Angkorian history of Cambodia. I thus recommend this book very highly to all readers of ancient history.

2. Charles Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001. Higham is a New Zealand-based archeologist who has spent his career studying Southeast Asia. His excellent book begins with the introduction of rice in about 2300 BCE, examines predecessor kingdoms, Funan and Chenla, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, and concentrates on the Khmer Empire in Angkor. For more on the pre-Khmer era, see Higham's *The Origins of the Civilization of Angkor*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

#### Supplementary Readings

1. Jean Laur, *Angkor, An Illustrated Guide to the Monuments*, Rome, Italy: Flammarion, 2002. Laur is the former curator of the Conservation d'Angkor. This magnificently detailed volume is the premier guidebook for visitors to Angkor. It has incredible colored photographs, suggested itineraries and maps, detailed explanations of the construction and purpose of major monuments, and useful historical background. Buy the book for your coffee table, but take it with you when you visit marvelous Angkor.

2. Bruno Dagens, *Angkor, Heart of an Asian Empire*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995. I like to recommend books from the Discoveries series, because these little paperbacks often summarize and illustrate history very well. But this one disappointed me a bit. It focuses mainly on the European discovery and rehabilitation of Angkor in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The book tells that story well. However, it ignores the much more interesting and important story of how the cities and monuments were first constructed.

## **Histories of Vietnam**

### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997. Karnow's massive book remains the definitive study of the Vietnam War. Karnow won a Pulitzer Prize for his wonderful book on the Philippines, but many feel this volume is even better. He also won six Emmys for his contributions to "Vietnam: A Television History." Those seeking a balanced analysis of Vietnamese, French, and American motivations, fears, and successes will find it in this splendid (though lengthy) study.

2. David Halberstam, *Ho*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. This magnificent book, written in 1971 before the Vietnam War had ended, shows why Vietnam was bound to win the war. Halberstam, a reporter for the New York Times, won a Pulitzer

prize in 1964 for his coverage of that war. He explains in clear, enticing prose how Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues organized Vietnamese peasants, politically and militarily, to defeat first the French and then the Americans. This book is a “must read.”

### Supplementary Readings

1. Bill Hayton, *Vietnam, Rising Dragon*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. Hayton is an experienced journalist and longtime reporter for the BBC. His book is based on on-the-spot investigations and well-researched case studies. Hayton argues that the Communist Party in Vietnam is engaging in economic reform to underpin its own power, not to provide a transition to democracy. He examines numerous controversial issues – corruption, environmental pollution, and Indochina-war legacies.
2. Keith Griffin (ed.), *Economic Reform in Vietnam*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998. This insightful study contains contributions from five leading analysts of Vietnam’s economy. Their purpose is to examine the roots and limits of the recent rapid economic growth in Vietnam. How did Vietnam emerge from the doldrums of communist controls to become one of the world’s fastest growing countries? Parts of the book are written in a technical, turgid manner, but Griffin’s chapters are clear and crisp.

## **Histories of Cambodia**

### Highly Suggested Readings

1. David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2007. Chandler, an American historian who teaches in Australia, is the world’s leading expert on Cambodia. This book, in its fourth edition, starts at the beginning of Cambodian history and carries the story into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chandler is especially strong in explaining the impact of French

colonialism and the machinations of politicians in the 1950s through 1970s. This volume is the best history of Cambodia.

2. David Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999. Chandler demonstrates his considerable skills as an historian by providing an even-handed treatment of Pol Pot, the worst mass-murderer since Hitler. Leader of the Khmer Rouge and perpetrator of the “killing fields,” Pol Pot was a demagogic ex-schoolteacher whose obsession to create his version of an egalitarian Utopia ran amok. Chandler explains why and how Pol Pot brutalized Cambodia.

### Supplementary Readings

1. John Tully, *A Short History of Cambodia, From Empire to Survival*, Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2005. Tully is an Australian historian who has written widely on Cambodia. In this readable and concise history, he contrasts the glories of Cambodia under the Khmer Kingdom with the horrific struggles of the country under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. Tully describes how Cambodia has begun a remarkable economic recovery under the strong-armed rule of Hun Sen.

2. Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994. Norodom Sihanouk was King of Cambodia (1941-1955), Prime Minister (1955-1970, the Sihanouk era), in and out of exile (1970-1993), and King again after 1993. As the most powerful leader in the country, Sihanouk has been charismatic, mercurial, flamboyant, beloved, and erratic. Osborne’s unauthorized biography critically assesses the first half-century of Sihanouk’s volatile career.

## **Histories of Laos**

### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997. This very impressive study is the first English-language history of Laos. The author, a retired Australian academic, weaves a fascinating story line through Lao history, beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the Kingdom of Lan Xang and ending with the contemporary Lao People's Democratic Republic. It is amazing that Laos has survived. Stuart-Fox explains how and why that has happened.

2. Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos, The Land In Between*, Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2002. Evans was an Australian anthropologist and historian who specialized in Laos throughout his long, productive career. Reflecting his deep understanding of Laotians, Evans explains how their country has survived despite centuries of incursions from Thais to the west and Vietnamese to the east. He is especially insightful in sorting through the political machinations of Laos's three princes.

### Supplementary Readings

1. Perry Stieglitz, *In a Little Kingdom*, London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990. Stieglitz was an American foreign-service officer who served in Laos in the turbulent 1960s. This poignant book tells the story of how he fell in love, married a princess, left his career, and chose to stay in Laos. Stieglitz combines history, culture, travel, and his own personal vignettes to produce a lucid, entertaining, and insightful story. He shows vividly how political intrigue was the downfall of idyllic Laos between 1959 and 1984.

2. Yves Bourdet, *The Economics of Transition in Laos: From Socialism to ASEAN Integration*, Cheltenham, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar, 2000. Published studies of the economy of Laos are extremely rare. As in Vietnam and Cambodia, in the mid-1980s leaders in Laos abandoned communism and embraced market-

orientation. Since about 1990, all three countries have experienced impressive growth. Bourdet competently explains this transition in Laos and identifies its key causes and implications.

## **Complementary Histories of Southeast Asia**

### Highly Suggested Readings

1. David Steinberg, et al., *In Search of Southeast Asia, A Modern History*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987. This collection of essays by leading historians of Southeast Asia continues to be the best in its field. Eight experts provide an interpretation of 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century history from the perspective of Southeast Asians rather than foreign intruders in the region. Because the book is detailed, readers might want to read selectively, focusing on Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.
2. Clark D. Neher, *Southeast Asia in the New International Era*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2002. This well-written comparison of the political evolution of the ten Southeast nations is a first-rate introduction to the region. The book provides insightful comparative perspectives on politics, development, and foreign policy. See also Neher, *Southeast Asia, Crossroads of the World*, 2000 on culture and Neher and Marlay, *Democracy and Development in Southeast Asia*, 1995 on democracy.

### Supplementary Readings

1. Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume One, Part One, From Early Times To c. 1500, Volume One, Part Two, From c. 1500 to c. 1800, Volume Two, Part One, From c. 1800 to the 1930s, Volume Two, Part Two, From World War II to the Present*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999. This marvelous four-volume

series offers the most comprehensive analysis of Southeast Asian history. It is an excellent source for very serious readers.

2. Alastair Dingwall (ed.), *Southeast Asia, Travelers' Literary Companion*, Lincolnwood, Illinois: Passport Books, 1995. This literary guidebook contains entries for all ten Southeast countries, including Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The anthology collector for each country summarizes history, language, and literature, provides extracts of 10-15 key pieces of literature, and offers biographies and literary notes. This book gives a quick introduction to the significant literature of Southeast Asia.

## **Sites Visited in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos**

### **Southeast Asia Family Adventure**

### **Stanford Travel/Study Program**

**June 21-July 3, 2014**

**Land-based, with International Flights**

### **Hanoi, Vietnam**

Hanoi is a booming city of 6.5 million located on the Red River in northern Vietnam. In 2010, the city celebrated its 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary and created a four-kilometer-long ceramic mosaic mural to commemorate that achievement. Hanoi was the capital of Vietnam from 1010 to 1802, of French Indochina from 1902 to 1954, of North Vietnam from 1954 to 1976, and of reunified Vietnam from 1976 to the present. The center of the city escaped bombing during the Vietnam War and retains its stately French architecture. At Ba Dinh Square, Hanoi contains the mausoleum and former austere residence of Ho Chi Minh, the country's most revered modern leader who led the wars against France and the United States. During the past fifteen years, Hanoi has been one of the world's fastest-growing industrial centers, and it provides about one-tenth of Vietnam's national income.

Our group of seven families began our visit of Hanoi with an hour-long cyclo (pedicab) ride around the bustling old section of the city. We walked through the exquisite Temple of Higher Literature, which was a center of Confucianist learning between 1076 and 1790 and is now a beautifully-preserved campus of stone, brick, and wooden buildings and lovely gardens. We attended the Thang Long Water Puppet show, which featured nine musicians and nine puppeteers recreating Vietnamese history and folklore. Later, we paid our respects to Ho Chi Minh by visiting his mausoleum and presidential residence, located next to the

former home of the French governor-generals of Indochina. We ended our tour of Hanoi's highlights with a visit to the Ethnology Museum, built in 1997 to introduce visitors to the history and culture of Vietnam's 54 ethnic groups.

## **Halong Bay, Vietnam**

Halong Bay, located in the Gulf of Tonkin in the Eastern Sea northeast of Hanoi, is one of the world's most unusual geomorphic sites. The Bay contains 2000 islets of magnificent karst formations of limestone rock that emerged from the sea floor during the past 20 million years. Because of the wet, warm marine climate, the limestone gradually eroded to form exquisitely sculpted structures and colorful grottoes filled with stalactites and stalagmites. These features are found in only three other places – the Adriatic coast in Croatia, Guilin in southern China, and Phuket in southern Thailand. In 1994, Halong Bay was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Because of undesirable pressures associated with the rapid expansion of tourism, Halong Bay was included on the [2012 World Monuments Watch](#) list to encourage sustainable future development.

Ha Long means descending dragon, whereas Ha Noi means ascending dragon. We bussed through endless glistening rice paddies in the Red River basin on our drives from Hanoi to Halong Bay and back to Hanoi. After our arrival at Tuan Chan Island, we boarded a comfortable expedition ship to enjoy a one-day cruise exploring Halong Bay. We began with a visit to Hang Sung Sot (Surprise Cave), a huge, spectacular grotto, filled with grotesque rock formations, which the Vietnamese government opened for tourism by building wooden walkways and installing colored lighting. Next, we boated to TiTop Beach Island to climb to the peak for a panoramic view of Halong's karst islets and to relax with a swim in the tepid Bay. Later, we took wooden row-boats

through a small opening in the karst to explore the unique ecosystems in the lagoon of Luon Cave islet.

## **Luang Prabang, Laos**

We next flew to Luang Prabang, northern Laos, and reoriented ourselves to a Theravada Buddhist society that moves at a less frenetic pace than that of the Vietnamese. During the second Vietnam War (1964-1975), Laos became the most heavily bombed country in history when each of its 3 million residents received 1400 pounds of American bombs. But most of that damage occurred in eastern Laos, and Luang Prabang, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, survived intact. Luang Prabang was home to kings of Laos from the founding of the Lan Xang Kingdom in 1354 until the Communist takeover of Laos in 1975. The small city of 50,000 residents is sited well for trade and (formerly) for defense – on a peninsula of land at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers. Luang Prabang features an attractive blending of Laotian and French colonial architecture.

Near Luang Prabang, we spent three days in a luxurious rural resort. We sailed up the Mekong River to visit a remote Lao village, Baan Muang Keo, and explore the Pak Ou caves that contained valuable Buddhist statues (hidden there to protect them from Thai invaders). A highlight of the trip for the kids was a boat-trip to Elephant Camp for rides on mahout-trained elephants through the riverside forest. In Luang Prabang town, we visited the Ock Tok Pok project to observe traditional silk-weaving, went to Wat Xiengthong to chat with teenage, Theravada Buddhist novice-monks, and got up at dawn to observe hundreds of monks collecting alms-offerings of sticky rice. In our resort, a group from a nearby village performed the traditional Lao *baci* (blessing) ceremony and demonstrated Lao dances accompanied by a small gamelan orchestra.

## Siem Reap, Cambodia

Siem Reap is located in the Tonle Sap Lake region of northwestern Cambodia, the heartland of the wealthy Khmer Kingdom between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the kingdom's peak (1000-1220), the Khmers created wealth from irrigated rice agriculture and constructed incredible religious monuments, including Hindu Angkor Wat and Buddhist Angkor Thom. The empire declined because of excessive devotion of resources to religious purposes, internal infighting over ruling succession, and invasions from Ayudha in the west and Champa in the east. By 1500, the Khmers had abandoned Angkor, relocated south to Phnom Penh, and fallen under the suzerainty of the Thais. Today, Siem Reap town has expanded to house 50,000 residents and Siem Reap District to 200,000. Cambodia attracted 3 million tourists in 2013, and most visited Angkor.

The archaeological zone of Angkor contains some of the most impressive religious monuments in the world and is deservedly a UNESCO World Heritage site. Banteay Srei, a small Hindu temple dedicated to Siva and built in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, has exquisite bas reliefs carved in beautiful pink sandstone. Angkor Wat, a Hindu temple site and mausoleum built in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated to Vishnu, is the world's largest monument and features more than a mile of intricately stone-carved bas reliefs. Angkor Thom, a walled capital city built in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, is centered on the Mahayana Buddhist temple of Bayon. Our group visited those three Khmer sites and also took a fascinating boat ride on Tonle Sap Lake to visit a floating village. Tonle Sap was the heartland of the rice-based Khmer Kingdom.

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