



Vietnamese Culture

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People

Vietnam is an agricultural civilization based on wet rice cultivation with ancient Dong Son culture as one of its defining aspects. The major stimulation of Vietnamese culture's development comes from indigenous factors, with Chinese and Indian influence serving to further enrich it. Through history, Cham culture and the cultures of other minority ethnic groups in Vietnam have been integrated with Vietnamese culture in correlated effects.

Vietnam is considered a part of the East Asian Cultural Sphere, or Sinosphere, due to highly significant cultural influences from China throughout its history.

In the socialist era, the cultural life of Vietnam has been deeply influenced by government-controlled media and the cultural influences of socialist programs. For many decades, foreign cultural influences were shunned and emphasis placed on appreciating and sharing the culture of communist nations such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and others. Since the 1990s, Vietnam has seen a greater exposure to Southeast Asian, European and American culture and media.

One of the most popular Vietnamese traditional garments is the "Áo Dài", worn often for special occasions such as weddings or festivals. White Áo dài is the required uniform for girls in many high schools across Vietnam. Áo Dài was once worn by both genders but today mainly females, except for certain important traditional culture-related occasions where some men do wear it, wear it.

Football (soccer) is the most popular sport in Vietnam. Sports and games such as badminton, tennis, ping pong, and chess are also popular with large segments of the population. Volleyball, especially women's volleyball, is watched by a fairly large number of Vietnamese people. The (expatriate Vietnamese) community forms a prominent part of Vietnamese cultural life, introducing Western sports, films, music and other cultural activities in the nation.

See also: List of Vietnamese traditional games

Vietnam is home to a small film industry.

Among countless other traditional Vietnamese occasions, the traditional Vietnamese wedding is one of the most important. Many of the age-old customs in a Vietnamese wedding continue to be celebrated by both Vietnamese in Vietnam and overseas, often combining both western and eastern elements.

Recent census estimates place the population of Vietnam at more than 84 million. Vietnamese people, also called "Viet" or "Kinh", account for 86.2% of the population. Their population is concentrated in the alluvial deltas and coastal plains of the country. A homogeneous social and ethnic group, the Kinh exert political and economic control. There are more than 54 ethnic minority groups throughout the country, but the Kinh are purveyors of the dominant culture. Most ethnic minorities, such as the Muong, a closely related ethnic of the Kinh, are found mostly in the highlands covering two-thirds of the territory. Before the Vietnam War, the population of the Central Highlands was almost exclusively Degar (over 40 hill tribal groups), until Diem's governments enacted a program of settling Kinh in indigenous areas. The Hoa (ethnic Chinese) and Khmer

Krom are mainly lowlanders. The largest ethnic minority groups include the Hmong, Dao, Tay, Thai, and Nung. From 1978 to 1979, some 450,000 ethnic Chinese left Vietnam.

The Vietnamese value system is based on four basic tenets: allegiance to the family, yearning for a good name, love of learning, and respect for other people. These tenets are closely interrelated.

Before the late 1980s, nearly all Vietnamese people lived in villages, and the cultivation of wet rice was the principal economic activity. The basic component of rural society was the nuclear family, composed of parents and unwed children.

The desire to achieve harmony between the self and the non-self remains an essential preoccupation of the Vietnamese in interpersonal relations outside the family group. The basic principles underlying family relationships are extended to the relationships between members of wider social groups.

Food

Vietnamese cuisine is a style of cooking derived from the nation of Vietnam with fish sauce, soy sauce, rice, fresh herbs, fruits and vegetables all commonly used. Vietnamese recipes utilize a very diverse range of herbs, including lemongrass, mint, Vietnamese mint, long coriander and Thai basil leaves. Traditional Vietnamese cooking is greatly admired for freshness of the ingredients and for the healthy eating style. The most common meats used in Vietnamese cuisine are pork, chicken, fish, and various kinds of seafood. The Vietnamese also have a strong vegetarian tradition influenced by Buddhist values.

Vietnamese cuisine uses very little oil and many vegetables. The main dishes are often based on rice, soy sauce, and fish sauce. Its characteristic flavors are sweet (sugar), spicy (serrano peppers), sour (lime), nuoc mam (fish sauce), and flavored by a variety of mint and basil.

Vietnamese cuisine can be basically divided into three categories, each pertaining to a distinct geographical region. With Northern Vietnam being the cradle of Vietnamese civilization, many of Vietnam's most notable dishes such as phở and bánh cuốn can trace their origin to the North. Northern cuisine is more traditional and less diverse in choosing spices and ingredients.

The cuisine of South Vietnam has historically been influenced by the influx of southern Chinese immigrants, French colonists and other nationalities. Southerners prefer sweet flavours in many dishes.[citation needed] As a region of perhaps greater diversity in terms of external influences, the South's cuisine uses a wider variety of herbs.

The cuisine of Central Vietnam is quite distinct from the cuisines of both the Northern and Southern regions in its use of many small side dishes. For a while the country was ruled from Hue in Central Vietnam, so that most of the dishes were made small and dedicated to the kings. Compared to its counterparts, its cuisine is more spicy.[citation needed]

Typical Vietnamese Family Meals

A typical meal for the average Vietnamese family would include:

Individual bowls of rice

Meat, fish or seafood (grilled, boiled, steamed, stewed or stir fried with vegetables)

Stir-fried, raw, pickled or steamed vegetables

Canh (a clear broth with vegetables and often meat or seafood) or other Vietnamese-style soup

Prepared fish sauce and/or soy sauce for dipping, to which garlic, chili, ginger or lime juice are sometimes added according to taste.

All dishes apart from the individual bowls of rice are communal and to be shared.

Popularity

Outside of its country of origin, Vietnamese cuisine is widely available in countries with strong Vietnamese immigrant communities, such as Australia, the United States, Canada, and France. Its cuisine is also popular in Japan, Korea, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Russia, and in areas with dense Asian populations.

In recent years Vietnamese cuisine has become popular in other Southeast Asian countries such as Laos, and Thailand.

Dishes that have become trademarks of Vietnamese cuisine include phở, gỏi cuốn (spring/summer rolls), bún, and bánh mì (bread rolls).

Transportation

The modern transport network of Vietnam was originally developed under French rule for the purpose of raw materials harvesting, and reconstructed and extensively modernized following the Vietnam War. The road system is the most popular form of transportation in the country. Vietnam's road system includes national roads administered by the central level; provincial roads managed by the provincial level; district roads managed by the district level; urban roads managed by cities and towns; and commune roads managed by the commune level.

Roads transportations

Bicycles, motor scooters and motorcycles remain the most popular forms of road transport in Vietnam's cities, towns, and villages although the number of privately owned automobiles is also on the rise, especially in the larger cities. Public bus operated by private companies is the main long distance travel means for many people. Traffic congestion is a serious problem in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City as the cities' roads struggle to cope with the booming numbers of automobiles.

Marine transportation

The nation has seven developed ports and harbors at Cam Ranh, Da Nang, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City, Hong Gai (Halong City), Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang.

There are also more than 17,000 km of navigable waterways, which play a significant role in rural life owing to the extensive network of rivers in Vietnam.

Train transportations

In 2009, Vietnam and Japan had signed a deal to built a high speed railway using Japanese technology. Vietnamese high speed engineers were sent to Japan to take high speed course from March to November. Since 2006, Vietnam had sent 100 high speed operator to take courses in Japan so they can operate it once it completed. The railway will be 1,630-km-long express route and contain a total of 26 stations, including Hanoi and Thu Thiem terminus in Ho Chi Minh city. It will help reduce the travel time between the country's two largest cities to under 10 hours. Using the planned technology (Shinkansen), the railway will be designed for trains to travel at a maximum speed of 360 km per hour. However, the consultant joint venture recommended running trains at a maximum of 320 km per hour using Fastech 360s trains. As scheduled, the railway lines from Hanoi to central Vinh and from central Nha Trang to Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam will be laid during the 2010-2015 period. From 2015-2020, construction will begin on the routes between Vinh and Nha Trang and between Hanoi and the northern mountainous provinces of Lao Cai and Lang Son.

Education System

Vietnam has an extensive state-controlled network of schools, colleges and universities but the number of privately run and mixed public and private institutions is also growing. General education in Vietnam is imparted in 5 categories: Kindergarten, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and college / university. Courses are taught mainly in Vietnamese. A large number of public schools have been organized across cities, towns and villages with the purpose of raising the national literacy rate, which is already among the highest in the world. There are a large number of specialist colleges, established to develop a diverse and skilled national workforce. A large number of Vietnam's most acclaimed universities are based in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Facing serious crises, Vietnam's education system is under a holistic reform launched by the government. In Vietnam, education from age 6 to 11 is free and mandatory. Education above these ages is not free. As a result some poor families may find it hard to come up with the tuition for their children without some forms of public or private assistance. Regardless, school enrollment is among the highest in the world and the number of colleges and universities increased quite dramatically in recent years, from 178 in 2000 to 299 in 2005.

Globe Aware's primary projects in Vietnam are designed to address many of these issues.

Languages

The people of Vietnam speak Vietnamese as a native language. In its early history, Vietnamese writing used Chinese characters. In the 13th century, the Vietnamese developed their own set of characters called Chữ nôm. The celebrated epic Đoạn trường tân thanh (Truyện Kiều or The Tale of Kieu) by Nguyễn Du was written in Chữ nôm. During the French colonial period, Quốc ngữ, the romanized Vietnamese alphabet used for spoken Vietnamese, which was developed in 17th century by Jesuit Alexandre De Rhodes and several other Catholic missionaries, became popular and brought literacy to the masses.

Various other languages are spoken by several minority groups in Vietnam. The most common of these are Tày, Mường, Khmer, Chinese, Nùng, and H'Mông. The French language, a legacy of colonial rule, is still spoken by some older Vietnamese as a second language, but is losing its popularity. Vietnam nevertheless remains a full member of La Francophonie. Russian — and to a much lesser extent German, Czech, or Polish — is sometimes known among those whose families had ties with the Soviet bloc. In recent years, English is becoming more popular as a second language. English study is obligatory in most schools. Chinese and Japanese have also become more popular.

Employment and the Economy

Historically, Vietnam was been an agricultural civilization based on wet rice cultivating. The Vietnam War destroyed much of the country's economy. Upon taking power, the Government created a planned economy for the nation. Collectivization of farms, factories and economic capital was implemented, and millions of people were put to work in government programs. For a decade, united Vietnam's economy was plagued with inefficiency and corruption in state programs, poor quality and underproduction and restrictions on economic activities and trade. It also suffered from the trade embargo from the United States and most of Europe after the Vietnam War. Subsequently, the trade partners of the Communist blocs began to erode. In 1986, the Sixth Party Congress introduced significant economic reforms with market economy elements as part of a broad economic reform package called "đổi mới" (Renovation), resulting in a Socialist-oriented market economy. Private ownership was encouraged in industries, commerce and agriculture. Vietnam achieved around 8% annual GDP growth from 1990 to 1997 and continued at around 7% from 2000 to 2005, making it the world's second-fastest growing economy. Simultaneously, foreign investment grew threefold and domestic savings quintupled. Manufacturing, information technology and high-tech industries form a large and fast-growing part of the national economy. Vietnam is a relative newcomer to the oil business, but today it is the third-largest oil producer in Southeast Asia with output of 400,000 barrels per day (64,000 m³/d). Vietnam is one of Asia's most open economies: two-way trade is around 160% of GDP, more than twice the ratio for China and over four times India's.

Vietnam is still a relatively poor country with an annual GDP of US\$280.2 billion at purchasing power parity (2006 estimate). This translates to a purchasing power of about US\$3,300 per capita (or US\$726 per capita at the market exchange rate). Inflation rate was estimated at 7.5% per year in 2006. Deep poverty, defined as a percent of the population living under \$1 per day, has declined significantly and is now smaller than that of China, India, and the Philippines.

As a result of several land reform measures, Vietnam is now the largest producer of cashew nuts with a one-third global share, the largest producer of black pepper accounting for one-third of the world's market and second largest rice exporter in the world after Thailand. Vietnam has the highest percent of land use for permanent crops, 6.93%, of any nation in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Besides rice, key exports are coffee, tea, rubber, and fishery products. However, agriculture's share of economic output has declined, falling as a share of GDP from 42% in 1989 to 20% in 2006, as production in other sectors of the economy has risen. According to the CIA World Fact Book, the unemployment rate in Vietnam is 4.3%. Among other steps taken in the process of transitioning to a market economy, Vietnam in July 2006 updated its intellectual property legislation to comply with TRIPS. Vietnam was accepted into the WTO on November 7, 2006. Vietnam's chief trading partners include China, Japan, Australia, ASEAN countries, the U.S. and Western European countries.

Religion

Religions of Vietnam	
Religion	Percentage
Buddhism	85%
Christianity	8%
Caodaism	3%
Others	4%

For much of Vietnamese history, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism have strongly influenced the religious and cultural life of the people. About 85% of Vietnamese identify with Buddhism, though not all practice on a regular basis. About 8% of the population are Christians (about six million Roman Catholics and fewer than one million Protestants, according to the census of 2007). Christianity was introduced first by the Portuguese and the Dutch traders in the 16th and 17th centuries, then further propagated by French missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries, and to a lesser extent, by American Protestant missionaries during the presence of American forces during the 1960s and early 1970s, largely among the Montagnards of South Vietnam. The largest Protestant churches are the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and the Montagnard Evangelical Church. Two thirds of Vietnam's Protestants are ethnic minorities.

Vietnam is deeply suspicious and wary of Roman Catholicism. This mistrust originated during the 19th century when some Catholics collaborated with the French colonists and in helping French priests in uprisings against the emperors. Furthermore, the Catholic Church's strongly anti-communist stance has made it an a government enemy. The Vatican Church is banned and only government-controlled organisations are permitted. The country's relations with the Vatican have improved, however, in recent years. Sunni and Bashi Islam, a small minority faith, is primarily practiced by the ethnic Cham minority, though there are also a few ethnic Vietnamese adherents in the southwest. The communist government rejects criticism that it does not allow religious freedom.

The vast majority of Vietnamese people of Asian religions practice Ancestor Worship.

From the articles of Religions by country, Religion in Vietnam and Demographics of Vietnam; 85% is nominal/secular Buddhists including predominant 83% East Asian Buddhist or "Triple religion" (80% of people are worship the mixture of Mahayana Buddhism mainly, Taoism, Confucianism with Ancestor Worship; 2% Hòa Hảo with 1% of some new Vietnamese-Buddhist sects as Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, Pure Land Buddhist, etc) and 2% Theravada Buddhism, mainly among Khmer people but the census of Government showed that only over 10 million people have taken refuge in the Three Jewels; 8% Christians (7% Catholics and 1% Protestants); 3% Caodaism; 2.5% Tribal animism; less than 70 thousand Muslims (mainly Cham people);[55] small Hindu communities (over 50,000 people) and a small number of Baha'is and Jews.

Music

Imperial court music

Nhã nhạc is the most popular form of imperial court music, specifically referring to the court music played from the Trần Dynasty to the very last Nguyễn Dynasty of Vietnam, being synthesized and most highly developed by the Nguyễn emperors. It is based on earlier Vietnamese imperial court music, its primary influences coming from Ming Dynasty's imperial court and later the music of Champa. Along with nhã nhạc,

the imperial court of Vietnam in the 19th century also had many royal dances which still exist to this day. The theme of most of these dances is to wish the kings longevity and the country wealth.

Folk music

Vietnamese folk music is extremely diverse and includes dân ca, quan họ, hát châu văn, ca trù, hò, and hát xẩm, among other forms.

Quan họ

Quan họ (alternate singing) is popular in Hà Bắc (divided into nowadays Bắc Ninh and Bắc Giang Provinces) and across Vietnam; numerous variations exist, especially in the Northern provinces. Sung acappella, quan họ is improvised and is used in courtship rituals.

Hát châu văn

Hát châu văn or hát văn is a spiritual form of music used to invoke spirits during ceremonies. It is highly rhythmic and trance-oriented. Before 1986, the Vietnamese government repressed hát châu văn and other forms of religious expression. It has since been revived by musicians like Phạm Văn Ty.

Nhạc dân tộc cải biên

Nhạc dân tộc cải biên is a modern form of Vietnamese folk music which arose in the 1950s after the founding of the Hanoi Conservatory of Music in 1956. This development involved writing traditional music using Western musical notation, while Western elements of harmony and instrumentation were added. Nhạc dân tộc cải biên is often criticized by purists for its watered-down approach to traditional sounds.

Ca trù

Ca trù (also hát ả đào) is a popular folk music which is said to have begun with Ả Đào, a female singer who charmed the enemy with her voice. Most singers remain female, and the genre has been revived since the Communist government loosened its repression in the 1980s, when it was associated with prostitution.

Ca trù, which itself has many forms, is thought to have originated in the imperial palace, eventually moving predominantly into performances at communal houses for scholars and other members of the elite (this is the type of Ca trù most widely known). It can be referred to as a geisha-type of entertainment where women, trained in music and poetry, entertained rich and powerful men.

Hò

"Hò" can be thought of as the southern style of Quan họ. It is improvisational and is typically sung as dialogue between a man and woman. Common themes include love, courtship, the countryside, etc. "Hò" is popular in Cần Thơ - Vietnam.

Ritual music

Nhạc đám ma - funeral music

Nhạc lễ - ritual music

1940s -1980s

The Vietnam War, the consequent Fall of Saigon, and the plight of Vietnamese refugees gave rise to a collection of musical pieces that have become "classical" anthems for Vietnamese people both in Vietnam and abroad. Notable writers include Phạm Duy and Trịnh Công Sơn. Singers include Khanh Ly and Le Thu.

Modern Pop music

The embrace of Modern Pop music has increased as each new generation of people in Vietnam become more exposed to and influenced by westernized music.

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