

ARTS OF VIETNAM, AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Dr. Larry Butler, for the East Hawai'i Cultural Center, Hilo

Inspired by Phan Nguyen Barker's EHCC exhibition, "Walking Through Mist"

MAJOR HISTORICAL PERIODS:

Bronze Age. Hung Dynasty kings by tradition led the Viet people from southern China to the Red River delta. Rice cultivation, ceramics and bronze casting. Various kingdoms ruled 2879 to 258 BCE from the Red River valley. Traded tropical luxury materials such as ivory, feathers and pearls to China. Bronze trade throughout maritime SE Asia. Trade with highland forest peoples.

Chinese domination, 207 BCE to 939 CE. Chinese writing and arts, entry of Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism, despite frequent Viet revolts.

Kingdom of Champa. Chams are an Austronesian people heavily influenced by trade with Hindu India, then Islam. Ruled states in what's now central and southern Vietnam, roughly 192-1832.

Dai Viet state and **Le Dynasty**, somewhat independent of China, 938-1009.

Ly Dynasty, 1009-1225, a golden age of Viet arts & culture, particularly in State Buddhism.

Tran Dynasty, 1225-1407, Viet culture and literature. Ended with Ming Chinese invasion.

Later Le Dynasty, 1428-1788. Strong regional state, beginning of European trade, Christian missionaries. Beginning of Viet expansion south into the Champa kingdom and Khmer lands, now southern Vietnam and the Mekong delta.

Nguyen Dynasty, 1802-1945. Southern rulers united the Vietnamese state in 1802, founding **Hue** as new royal capital. Strong French influence from 1788 on, with powerless emperor.

French Colonial domination of Indochina, completed by 1887, administered from Hanoi. Strong Roman Catholic influence. Japanese occupation, 1940-45. French driven out in 1954.

Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) declared by Ho Chi Minh's Communist party in 1945, with abdication of the last Nguyen emperor. After French defeat in 1954, the Geneva Conference split the country in half at the 17th parallel, the DRV Communists ruling North Vietnam, and the US-backed Republic in South Vietnam.

The American War, roughly 1964-75. Civil war from 1959 between Communist North and capitalist South escalated into a major proxy war between Cold War rivals. US combat troops were withdrawn by 1973; Saigon fell to Viet Cong (northern) forces in 1975.

Reunification, 1975-6, under Communist Party rule from Hanoi. Saigon, capital of South Vietnam, renamed Ho Chi Minh City. Khmer and Chinese war, 1977-8. Widespread poverty.

Doi Moi economic reforms, 1986, led to US formal recognition & trade, 1994-5.

MAJOR ART FORMS OF VIETNAM

Bronzes: **Dong Son** culture, 1000 BCE to 200 CE. The famous Dong Son bronze drums and knives were exported widely throughout mainland and maritime Southeast Asia as luxury goods.

Ceramics. Notable wares include:

Earthenware funerary figures, vessels & houses, 1st-3rd cent. CE.

Stoneware with ash and celadon glazes. Ly and Tran dynasties, 11th – 14th cents..

Blue and white export stonewares, painted cobalt underglaze, 15th cent. on.

Polychrome wares with underglaze paint & overglaze enamels, 16th-18th cents.

“Bleu de Hue,” blue and white court wares ordered from China, 19th cent.

Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian temples and sculptures, notably:

One Pillar Pagoda, Hanoi, originally of the 11th cent.

Temple of Literature (Confucian Temple), Hanoi, begun 1070.

Perfume Pagoda pilgrimage complex, Mount Huong, near Hanoi, begun 15th cent.

Sculptures in the National Museums of Vietnamese History and Art, Hanoi.

Hindu temples of the Kingdom of Champa, notably the complex at **My Son** (4th-14th cents), and **Po Nagar complex at Nha Trang** (8th cent). **Cham sculptures** at the **Cham Museum, Danang.**

Folk arts, notably: **Village long houses (*dinh*),** with their wooden sculptures. **Textiles and basketry.** **Water puppet** village performances. **Dong Ho village prints** with traditional scenes, for Tet New Year's. **Lacquered sculptures & wares.** Folk spirit religions, statues and altars.

Royal court and aristocratic arts. Royal Citadel and Nguyen Dynasty tombs at Hue, mostly 19th century. The Citadel museum contains royal costumes and furnishings, on the model of Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese courts. Chinese-style portraits, calligraphy and genre scenes in lacquer, and paintings on silk and paper. Eclectic architecture of the royal tombs.

French Colonial architecture in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Notable buildings include the Saigon City Hall, the Hanoi Opera House, and the Roman Catholic cathedrals of both cities. The Cao Dai religion's Great Divine Temple near Tay Ninh is a vast eclectic structure built 1933-55.

French Colonial trained artists. French teachers founded the École des Beaux-arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi, in 1925. Taught Vietnamese students lacquer and silk painting; introduced oil painting and figure study based on French 19th-20th century art. Vietnamese artists such as Le Pho and To Ngoc Van exhibited in Paris with success in 1930's. Some stayed.

Artists in Communist North Vietnam, 1945-75, were organized into a union and worked for the State in Social Realist styles, or on propaganda posters for the war.

Contemporary artists in Vietnam participate relatively freely in the global art scene and open art market, working in the whole range of traditional and new media.

The UNESCO World Heritage program has listed nine sites in Vietnam since 1993.

SOME BIBLIOGRAPHY ON VIETNAMESE ART IN ENGLISH

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- Catherine Noppe and Jean-François Hubert, ***Art of Vietnam***, translated from French by Ethan Rundell and Arthur Borges. Parkstone Press International, New York, 2002.
- Nora Annesley Taylor, ***Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art***. University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- ***Arts of Ancient Vietnam: From River Plain to Open Sea***, edited by Nancy Tingley. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2009.
- John A. Stevenson, ***Dragons and Lotus Blossoms: Vietnamese Ceramics from the Birmingham Museum of Art***. University of Washington Press, 2011.
- ***Vietnam Eye: Contemporary Vietnamese Art***, edited by Serenella Ciclitira. Skira, 2016.

MAJOR MUSEUMS OF VIETNAMESE ART:

- **In Hanoi:** National Museum of Vietnamese History, Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Museum of Ethnology.
- **In Ho Chi Minh City:** Museum of Vietnamese History, Fine Arts Museum.
- **In Hue:** Royal Antiquities Museum, in the Citadel.
- **In Danang:** Museum of Cham Sculpture.
- **In Hoi An:** Museum of Trading Ceramics.
- **In Paris:** Musée Guimet, especially Cham and Khmer sculptures.
- **In China:** Shanghai Museum has an extraordinary collection of Dong Son bronze drums.
- **In the United States:** Collections of Vietnamese ceramics can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Birmingham Museum of Art, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Freer Gallery of Art/Smithsonian, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.