**Vietnamese Culture and History and Impact on Vietnamese Business**

**Noah Asaria**

Overview of Vietnamese culture

Vietnamese culture has three overlapping layers – native Vietnamese culture, Chinese cultural influences, and Western cultural influences. Native Vietnamese culture is defined by a strong sense of national identity, valuing local community, and a close connection to nature. Vietnamese political institutions, art, architecture, and philosophy (Confucianism and focus on education) have closely replicated the Chinese model, while artwork, cuisine, and architecture has been influenced by Western culture (*Brief History of Vietnam, Phil Vickery’s Continental Cuisine*).

Vietnamese National Identity

Vietnamese culture is unique because local traditions and practices were partially retained despite hundreds of years of foreign occupation. Throughout its history, inter-village communication allowed the Vietnamese to resist invaders and created a shared culture, known as the Dong Son cultural community, which was formed in the first half of the first millennium BC (*Vietnam culture overview).* According to *Brief History of Vietnam,* Vietnam was first conquered by the Chinese Han Empire in 111 BC, with a briefly successful revolt in 39 AD before being reconquered again. A truly independent nation was not established until 939 AD and lasted until 1854. The French occupied Vietnam until 1954, which was followed by war with America and a split between Northern communists and Southern anti-communists. This conflict lasted until 1975 when the Northern communists took over the country. The Dong Son culture, as well as multiple successful rebellions against foreign invaders (such as the Trung sisters’ revolt in 939), helped foster national pride and instill importance in preserving local Vietnamese cultures.

Vietnamese Philosophy:

Due to Vietnam’s tropical landscape, agriculture is central to many people’s way of life. Moreover, Vietnamese philosophy focuses on concepts like stillness, nature, balance, and conciliation. These concepts are viewed through the lens of dualism: *yin* and *yang*, and a preference of emotion over rationalism. Vietnamese culture has also incorporated elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and later Marxism in the 20th century. Confucianism was well integrated into Vietnamese politics, morality, and the system of education, while Taoism fostered focus on quietness, and the Vo Vi doctrine of “letting things take their course” helped the Vietnamese resist Chinese rule. Agriculture and education were highly valued over business and other trades (*Vietnam culture review)*.

Vietnamese Religion:

Vietnamese religion throughout its history is polytheistic, with the importance of agriculture to survival steering focus on plant and animal deities. The Vietnamese tend to idolize plants which need to be fertile, including the rice plant, banyan-tree, and gourds. A philosophy of gentleness and conciliation led to worship of gentle creatures like stags, deer, and snakes. Also, Vietnamese traditions value ancestral worship and community-oriented holidays and ceremonies. For example, marriage and funeral rituals involve the local community as well as direct participants (*Vietnam culture review).* According to *Interesting Facts About Vietnam*, 80% of the population today is Animist, worshipping local animal deities, while 9% of the population is Buddhist.

Language and Literature in Vietnam:

According to *Vietnam Culture Review*, Vietnam has its own language, which has been persistent throughout history in several forms. While the official language of Vietnam was Chinese for around a thousand years, local Vietnamese dialects, such as the Han-Viet pronunciation, led to derivative words being created. In the 13th century, a system was developed to translate Chinese Han Script to Vietnamese (Nom Script). Chinese was replaced by French for formal activities during French occupation. This led to native Vietnamese language being influenced heavily by Western missionaries, and the separate quoc ngu writing script was formed. Today, Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam and is able to be communicated effectively in every discipline. Literature was concurrently written in Chinese and Vietnamese script, mainly folk tales and poetry, which has been particularly prominent in Vietnam among all social classes, with patriotic and humanist themes.

Vietnamese Cuisine

As expected, rice is a core component of Vietnamese diet, with popular dishes like Soup pho (rice noodles and protein), and spring rolls. Vietnamese food is primarily vegetarian, with light meals. Vietnam is the second largest consumer of rice per capita. Along with wet rice, Vietnam produces large volumes of Dragonfruit, cashews, black pepper, and coffee (*Interesting Facts About Vietnam*).