Introduction

Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam, spoken by about 85 million people worldwide. Its distant ancestor was born in the area of the Red River, now in northern Vietnam. it was strongly influenced by Indic and Malayo-Polynesian languages, but this all changed when the Chinese took control of the coastal nation in the 2nd century BC.

Nearly 30 dynasties of Chines rules held sway in Vietnam for over millennium. This period saw literary Chinese used as the language of literature, academia, science, politics and the Vietnamese aristocracy. However, Vietnamese was spoken in everyday life, and it was written in **chữ nôm (jũhr nawm).** This script was comprised of Chinese characters adapted to express Vietnamese sounds, and it was in common usage until the early 20th century. Almost 70% of Vietnamese words are derived from Chinese sources as well - this vocabulary is termed **Hán Việt (haán vee·ụht)** (Sino-Vietnamese). Following a century of fighting for independence, the Vietnamese gained control of their own land in 939 AD. Common Vietnamese, written in **chữ nôm (jũhr nawm),** gained prestige as the nation rebuild itself, and Vietnamese literature flourished.

The first European missionaries appeared in Vietnam in the 16th century. The French gradually emerged as the region’s dominant European power, adding Vietnam to Indochina in 1859. French vocabulary began to be used in Vietnamese, and in 1910 the Latin-based **quốc ngữ (gwáwk ngũhr)** alphabet was declared the language’s official written form. This 29-letter phonetic alphabet had been invented in the 17th century by a French Jesuit missionary, and even today virtually all writing is in **quốc ngữ (gwáwk ngũhr)**.

There are three main varieties of Vietnamese - northern (Hanoi dialect), southern (saigon dialect) and central (Hue dialect), and we’ve generally used the northern variety.