The Nationalist Movement in Indo-China

- **Indo-China**
  Indo-China comprises the modern countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia under the Chinese rule.

- **Vietnam**
  - Gained formal independence in 1945.
  - The Republic of Vietnam was formed after three decades of their independence.
  - Even after independence, Chinese culture and systems of government were maintained in Vietnam.
  - Vietnam functioned as the maritime silk route that brought in goods, ideas and people.

- **Colonial Domination of Vietnam**
  - **1858:** French troops landed in Vietnam.
  - **Mid-1880s:** France had established a firm grip over the other regions of Vietnam.
  - **Post Franco-Chinese War:** French assumed control over Tonkin and Anaam.
  - **1887:** French Indo-China was formed.
  - Realization of sufferings experienced under the French rule mobilized nationalist resistance in Vietnam.
  - The French built canals and drainage lands in the Mekong delta to increase cultivation. This benefitted production and export of rice.
  - **1931:** Vietnam was the third largest exporter of rice in the world.
  - A trans-Indo-China rail network was built in order to adjoin the Northern and Southern parts of Vietnam and China. Vietnam was connected with other parts of China and Southeast Asia through railways.

- **Benefits of Colonies for French**
  - Colonies were important for supplying natural resources and other essential goods.
  - Like all advanced European nations, France also thought of spreading the benefits of civilization to the backward people.

- **Economy of Vietnam**
  - Depended on rice cultivation and rubber plantations owned by the French and small Vietnamese elite.
  - Rail and port facilities provided services to this economy.
Indentured Vietnamese labour was used in the rubber plantations.

France did not industrialize the economy.

Rural areas experienced landlordism and decline in the standard of living.

**Barriers in Economic Development of Vietnam**

- High population levels
- Low agricultural productivity
- Extensive indebtedness among the peasants

**Colonial Education**

- French colonialist in Vietnam believed that only they can civilize the local people by bringing modern education in the country.
- French started a “Civilizing Mission” in Vietnam. It was carried out at the cost of local cultures, religions and traditions.
- French administration required educated local labour force.
- At the same time, they also feared that educated Vietnamese might ask questions to colonial domination.
- French citizens living in Vietnam were scared of losing their jobs to the educated Vietnamese mass. Therefore, educational policies concerning the Vietnamese were opposed and challenged by the French population.
- The elites in Vietnam were powerfully influenced by the Chinese culture. The French administration had to consolidate their power by countering the Chinese influence over culture, language and society. This was done by dismantling the traditional education system and establishing French schools in Vietnam.
- French education was seen as a means of knowing the foreign culture and literature by some, while others rejected the use of French as the medium of instruction in Vietnam.
- The few people who acquired French culture and learnt their language were to be rewarded with French citizenship.
- Education was limited to a few classes. Only the Vietnamese elite could enroll in the schools and only a handful of them passed the final exams.
- School textbooks glorified the French and degraded the Vietnamese.
- **1907:** The Tonkin Free School was started for providing Western-style education.
- Schools introduced and encouraged the adoption of western ideas to be modern and also look modern.

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Resistance in Schools

- Vietnamese teachers and students who were rapidly increasing in numbers opposed the curriculum either through open opposition or silent resistance.

- The Vietnamese teachers subtly modified and criticized the texts.

- Students fought against the colonial government’s efforts in providing the posts of white-collar jobs only for the French.

- Students were forming various political parties such as the Party of Young Annan and publishing nationalist journals ("Annanese student").

- Schools became the hubs of the formation of political ideas and revolutions.

- The Vietnamese intellectuals feared the loss of both the Vietnamese territory and culture. They believed that the native culture and customs were being devalued and the development of a master–slave mentality was on the progress in the country.

- Colonial education and its resistance ultimately added to the larger picture of the entire revolution.

Health and Hygiene

In the colonies, health and hygiene of the natives was neglected by the colonialist powers, which resulted in the outbreak of many fatal diseases.

- 1903: The modern part of Hanoi was struck by Bubonic Plague. The French hired Vietnamese workers and paid them for each rat they caught. Thousands of rats were caught. The Vietnamese caught the rats, clipped off the tail and let the rat go free again. This way, the rats continued to stay and the Vietnamese gained both economical and political advantage. The rat-hunt also provided an early lesson in the success of collective bargaining for the Vietnamese. The French authorities could not prevent the bubonic plague due to the many anti-French actions by the Vietnamese people.

Religion and Anti-Colonialism

- Religion played an important role in fighting colonialism in Vietnam.

- The French introduced Christianity in Vietnam. This was resented by Vietnamese people who practiced Buddhism and Confucianism.

- The French believed that the flaw of worshipping supernatural forces by the Vietnamese needs to be corrected.

- The Scholars Revolt (1868) took place as a movement against the spread of Christianity and French power. This revolt was led by the officials at the imperial court.

- The Vietnamese led a general uprising in the provinces of Ngu and Ha Tein and over a thousand Catholics missionaries were killed. This inspired other patriots to rise against the French government.

- The revolt was finally suppressed by the French.
**Hoa Hoa Movement (1939)**

Occurred in the fertile Mekong delta area

- **Founder:** Huynh Phu So

- Opposed useless expenditure, sale of child brides, gambling and also the use of alcohol and opium.

- The French tried to suppress the Hoa Hoa Movement by putting Huynh Phu So in a mad asylum. They called him „Mad Bonze“.

- The doctors became followers of his words and declared him sane as opposed to the expectation of the French government.

- Huynh Phu So was exiled to Laos and his followers were sent to the concentration camps. This further aroused anti-colonial sentiments in the Vietnamese people.

**The Vision of Modernisation**

**Late 19th century:** The resistance to French domination was led by Confucian scholars and activists.

**1903:** Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) formed the Revolutionary Society Duy Tan Hoi and became a major anti-colonial revolutionary figure. Prince Cuong De headed the society. Phan’s most influential book “The History of the Loss of Vietnam” focuses on the loss of sovereignty and severance of ties with China.

**Phan Chu Trinh (1871-1926):** A nationalist, he strongly differed with Phan Boi Chau. He opposed monarchy and the idea of resisting the French with the help of the court. He wanted to establish a democratic republic. He was immensely influenced by the democratic ideals of the West. He criticized the French for not resorting to liberty. He demanded the French to set up legal and educational institutions and develop agriculture and industries.

**Relations with Japan and China**

- Vietnamese nationalists had a close relationship with Japan and China.

- China and Japan were the places where a wider Asian network of revolutionaries existed. They also acted as the places of refuge for the early Vietnamese nationalists.

- Go East Movement was popularized in the first decade of the 20th century.

- **1907-08:** 300 Vietnamese went to Japan for acquiring modern education.

- The concerns of these students were:
  - Ending the French rule
  - Re-establishing the Nguyen Dynasty

- The Vietnamese looked for foreign arms and aid from Japan.

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The Vietnamese students established a branch of the Restoration Society in Tokyo.

1907: Japan’s victory over Russia

1908: The Japanese Ministry of Interior clamped down the Restoration Society. Many including Phan Boi Chau were deported and exiled to China and Thailand.

Viet-Nam Quan Phuc Hoi: The Vietnamese students organized the Association for the Restoration of Vietnam. They were inspired by the establishment of a Republic in China in 1911 by Sun Yat Sen.

The Vietnamese now wanted a Democratic Republic over a Constitutional Monarchy.

Communist Movement and Vietnamese Nationalism

The Great Depression of 1930 had greatly affected Vietnam. Prices of rice and rubber fell, which generated rural debts, rural uprising and unemployment.

February 1930: The Vietnamese Communist Party (Vietnamese Cong San Dang), later renamed as the Indo-Chinese Communist Party established by Ho Chi Minh.

1940: Japan occupied Vietnam for achieving its imperial aspiration of controlling Southeast Asia.

September 1945: The League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh) fought the Japanese and recaptured the lost territory of Hanoi. It came to be known as the Vietminh.

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam with Ho Chi Minh as its Chairman was formed.

The New Republic of Vietnam

The new Republic of Vietnam faced many challenges.

The French used the Emperor, Bao Dai, as their puppet in order to regain their rule.

1954: Finally, the French troops led by General Vo Nguyen Glap were finally defeated after eight years of fighting at Dien Bien Phu by the Vietminh.

Peace negotiations in Geneva after the French defeat led to the split of Vietnam into North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

North Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh and the communists took control of North Vietnam.

South Vietnam: Bao Dai’s regime was established in South Vietnam.

The Bao Dai regime was overthrown by a coup led by Ngo Dinh Diem.

Diem built a repressive and authoritarian government. People who opposed him were branded as communists and were jailed and killed.

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This dictatorial regime was opposed by the people united under the banner of the **National Liberation Front (NLF)**.

NLF received help from North Vietnam with which they fought for the unification of the country.

**The Entry of the U.S. into the War (1965-1972)**

- The US feared communists gaining power in South Vietnam; therefore, they intervened by sending in their troops.
- Thousands of US troops arrived with heavy weapons and tanks. Chemical weapons such as Napalm, Agent Orange and Phosphorus were used for destroying Vietnamese villages.
- Many criticized the U.S. government for entering into an indefensible war.
- Service in the armed forces was made compulsory for all the US citizens except for university graduates.

The war arose because of the fear of the establishment of a communist rule in South Vietnam and other countries in the area.

The Vietnamese were ready to sacrifice anything for their independence. This determination gave them the courage to fight with the most technologically advanced country in the world.

**Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969)**

- His real name was Nguyen Van Thanh.
- Born in Central Vietnam.
- Became an active member of the Commintern and met Lenin.
- **May 1940**: Returned to Vietnam after spending time in Europe, Thailand and China
- **1943**: Took the name of Ho Chi Minh.
- Became President of the Vietnam Democratic Republic and served the party for 40 years.
- Died on 3rd September, 1969.

**Ho Chi Minh Trail**

- An immense network of footpaths and roads (“the trail”) was used for transporting man and material from North to South Vietnam.
- The trail had support bases and hospitals along the way. Supplies were mainly transported by porters who were mainly women. However, in some places trucks were used for the same.
- Most of the trail was in Laos and Cambodia with branch lines extending into South Vietnam.
The US bombed these trials regularly but to no avail as they were built again very quickly by the Vietnamese. By these trails, the Vietnamese showed how meager resources can be used to great advantage.

**Women As Rebels**

- In Vietnam, women enjoyed greater equality than in China, especially among the lower classes.

- However, they had no say when it came to determining their future and role in public life.

- The status of women gained prominence along with the rise of the nationalist movement.

- Writers and political thinkers idealized women who rebelled against the social norms.

  - **Nhat Linh**, a writer, dealt with the scandalous issue of rejecting the forced arranged marriage of a girl. His novel portrays a woman character who marries a person involved in the national politics out of her own choice.

**Heroes of the Past**

- **1913: Phan Boi Chau** wrote a play on the lives of the Trung sisters who had fought against the Chinese domination in 39-43CE.

- Trung sisters came to be idealized and glorified in paintings, plays and novels representing the indomitable will of the Vietnamese nationalists.

- Trung sisters are said to have gathered 30,000 forces in order to resist the Chinese for two years. When ultimately defeated by the Chinese, they committed suicide instead of surrendering to the enemy.

- **Trieu Au (3rd century CE):** She was an orphan and lived with her brother. She left home, went into the jungles, organized a large army and resisted the Chinese rule. Ultimately, she was defeated by the Chinese forces after which she drowned herself. She became a sacred figure and not only a martyr.

**Women as Warriors**

- **1960s:** Various photographs and stories portrayed women as brave, young and dedicated.

- The women were equally represented as a worker along with their warrior image. Therefore, they were shown with a rifle in one hand and a hammer in the other.

- The casualties of war increased as a result of which many women were urged to join the struggle.

- The women helped in nursing the wounded, constructing underground rooms and tunnels and fighting the enemy. They kept open 2,195 km of strategic roads and guarded 2,500 key points along the Ho Chi Minh trail.
They also built 6 airstrips, neutralized tens of thousands of kilograms of cargo, weapons and food and shot down 15 planes. There were 1.5 million women in the regular army, the militia, the local forces and professional teams in Vietnam.

The End of the War

Consequences

- The US failed to crush the Vietnamese resistance.
- Thousands of young US soldiers and Vietnamese civilians lost their lives.
- Many were disillusioned by the actions of the US.
- Noam Chomsky called the war “the greatest threat to peace, to national self-determination and to international cooperation”.
- This was called the first television war as battle scenes were shown on news programmes.
- **January 1974:** A peace settlement with the US was signed in Paris for ending the war.
- **30th April 1975:** The NLF occupied the presidential palace in Saigon to end the conflict between them (NLF) and the Saigon regime.
- Ultimately, Vietnam was united.