



## Vietnam: A New History

By Christopher Goscha

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### Vietnam: A New History By Christopher Goscha

Vietnam today offers a fascinating mosaic of peoples, languages, and cultures—a small nation that is home to over fifty ethnic groups speaking more than a half-dozen different tongues. The country's extraordinary diversity is the legacy of centuries of imperial collisions and ever-shifting political configurations.

In *Vietnam*, Christopher Goscha tells the full history of Vietnam, from antiquity to the present day. Generations of emperors, rebels, priests, and colonizers left complicated legacies in this remarkable country. Periods of Chinese, French, and Japanese rule reshaped and modernized Vietnam, but so too did the colonial enterprises of the Vietnamese themselves as they extended their influence southward from the Red River Delta. Over the centuries, numerous kingdoms, dynasties, and states have ruled over—and fought for—what is now Vietnam. Trinh and Nguyen military lords led competing states in the seventeenth century. French colonizers grouped Vietnam with Laos and Cambodia in an Indochinese Union, but governed Vietnam itself as three separate territorial units. The bloody Cold War-era conflict between Ho Chi Minh's communist-backed Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the American-backed Republic of Vietnam was only the most recent instance when war divided and transformed Vietnam.

A major achievement, *Vietnam* offers the grand narrative of the country's complex past and the creation of the modern state of Vietnam. At a time when more and more visitors come to Vietnam and Southeast Asia is again at the center of intense global rivalries, this is the definitive single-volume history for anyone seeking to understand Vietnam today.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

##### **Odd Arne Westad, author of *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750***

“For those who have wanted a distinct and comprehensive overview of Vietnam's history, this is it. Christopher Goscha has an eye for how history connects through generations and how a country can rise from disasters in a new form, without losing sight of its past.”

##### **Fredrik Logevall, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam***

“A splendid achievement. Christopher Goscha is one of our leading historians of modern Vietnam, and he shows it in this nuanced, fair-minded, deeply humane book. Destined to be a standard work on the subject.”

##### **Rana Mitter, author of *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945***

“Powerful and compelling. Vietnam will be of growing importance in the twenty-first-century world, particularly as China and the US rethink their roles in Asia. Christopher Goscha's book is a brilliant account of that country's history. Paying careful attention to Vietnamese voices as well as those of colonizers, he constructs a narrative that sets Vietnam in context, and makes it for western readers so much more than a half-remembered event in the Cold War.”

#### *Wall Street Journal*

“Mr. Goscha is one of the most talented and prolific of a new group of American and French historians who have examined the modern history of Vietnam not in regard to the country's relationship to the U.S. or the Cold War but on its own terms... [he] has put together what will probably be for some time the best one-volume history of modern Vietnam in English... for readers seeking a concise, insightful and readable guide to the complexity and variety of Vietnam's modern history, this book is an excellent choice.”

#### *Guardian*

“Groundbreaking... Goscha has provided quite simply the finest, most readable single-volume history of Vietnam in English.”

#### *The Economist*

“[A] thorough and thoughtful new history.”

#### *The VVA Veteran*

“[An] excellent book.... Goscha is rigorously objective; but he does not shy away from analysis amid his historical fact finding.”

#### *Washington Independent Review of Books*

“A welcome new scholarly take on the story of a fascinating country.”

#### *Kirkus Reviews*

“A vigorous, eye-opening account of a country of great importance to the world, past and future.”

#### From the Inside Flap

Vietnam's role in one of the Cold War's longest-running conflicts has meant that its past has been endlessly abused. Popular accounts have cherry-picked from the Vietnamese past to tell politicized, American-centered stories either reducing the story of Vietnam and the Vietnamese to a noble tradition of anticolonial resistance embodied by the communist leader Ho Chi Minh, or alternatively seeking to rehabilitate American allies by making similarly essentialist claims about "the Vietnamese" and their history. Now, over forty years after the end of the American war in Vietnam, the events which created the modern state of Vietnam can be seen in truly historical perspective. Christopher Goscha's *Vietnam: A New History* tells the story of this fascinating and complex country on its own terms, emphasizing the contingency that characterizes Vietnam's history and the diversity of its people, polities, geography, and experiences as both colonized and colonizers. Goscha describes the complicated legacies of generations of emperors, rebels, priests, and colonizers, showing how various strains of imperialism that have shaped Vietnam and its culture not only the crucial periods of Chinese, French, and Japanese rule, but also Vietnam's own colonial enterprises, as the Vietnamese gradually extended their influence southward from the Red River basin. He examines the many ways Vietnam has historically been divided, from the separate states ruled by Trinh and Nguyen military lords in the seventeenth century, to the three territorial subunits created by French colonizers in the nineteenth century, to the warring nations of Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Republic of Vietnam in the Cold War era. Vietnam first took its modern shape in 1802, but it has only existed along these boundaries for about 84 years, interrupted by French colonization in 1862 and then again by the wars of the 1940s-1970s. Goscha shows how Western colonialism was far from the only force bringing Vietnam into the

#### About the Author

**Christopher Goscha** is an associate professor of history at the Université du Québec à Montréal. The author and editor of numerous books on Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and international relations in English and French, he lives in Montreal, Canada.

#### Users Review

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**Alan Archuleta:**

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