

**U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY:**

Jenny's family immigrated to the U.S. in 1976, a little more than a year after the passing of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance act. This piece of legislation, created in response to the fall of Saigon in April of 1975, would allocate approximately 405 million dollars to helping refugees affected by the Vietnam War. In addition to this was the landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which likely played a decisive role in Jenny's admission to the country.

**INFLUENCES ON IMMIGRATION:**

Jenny immigrated shortly after a deadly war for Vietnamese reunification, with North Vietnamese backed guerrillas fighting the U.S. backed South Vietnamese government. The political upheaval caused by the end of the Vietnam war would displace thousands of people, and refugees to seek a new life in other countries, including the United States.

**TYPE OF VISA:** From the time she first arrived in the U.S. until she was 18, Jenny had a green card visa. As a green card holder, she was entitled to conditional permanent residence in the United States, albeit as a non-citizen. This gave her the right to live and work in the United States, but made her ineligible to vote or receive certain benefits, such as unemployment insurance, from the government.

**CULTURAL HISTORY**

The geographic region of South Vietnam, where Jenny grew up before the country's reunification, represented a confluence of various cultures that converged over the course of several thousand years. The oldest underlying cultural tradition present in the region is descended from the Northern Dong Son culture, which represented a community of villages and hamlets near the Red River that joined their resources together to create agricultural infrastructure. Moving into the early bronze age, this intra-village coalition would develop into a full-fledged nation that lasted for 3000 years, until a Han Chinese Invasion conquered the region in 200 B.C.E. This period of Han domination would be the first of several successive invasions by various Chinese dynasties, and accounts for the second-oldest layer of the cultural matrix. Under the Han occupation elements of Chinese culture such as Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced, but the underlying local traditions remained intact. Despite this integration of Chinese culture, the region maintained a sense of national patriotism and cultural identity which would be crucial in eventually repelling the Chinese occupiers by the 10th Century C.E. The departure of the Chinese in the 10th century C.E. left behind a culture that had largely integrated aspects of Chinese thought, albeit in a Vietnamized fashion. Buddhism and Taoism also became a strong cultural force, albeit in a Vietnamized fashion. Ultimately, this process of cultural exchange would radically change the social landscape of Vietnamese culture, with cultural norms going all the way down to the family level.

**FAMILY STRUCTURE**

Vietnamese culture is strongly oriented towards family life. Much of Vietnamese society is built around family units, and the preservation of the family is considered essential. Households are generally non-nuclearized, with up to three generations of family members living in a single dwelling. Aspects of Confucianism introduced by the Chinese also play a role in family organization, with filial piety being the primary structure the family is built around. Under filial piety, age is considered the primary justification of authority, with the oldest members of a family given the most say. This stratification of influence even trickles down to the sibling level, with firstborn children often being given more influence than their younger siblings. In some regions of south Vietnam, especially in or around the Mekong Delta, age is factored into personal pronouns. As a result, many people within a family will include that person's relative age when addressing them directly. Traditionally marriages were often arranged, and represented a collective decision made by the family. The process towards an official marriage would begin with a proposal meeting, known as the le dam ngo. During this meeting representatives of both sides would meet to discuss the possibility of a wedding, with the future bride usually absent. The outcomes of these meetings determined pairings, and as a result, traditional Vietnamese marriage acted not just as a way to unify individuals, but families as well.

**RELIGION**

Like many other aspects of Vietnamese culture, religion in Vietnam is made up of a combination of local beliefs and Vietnamized outsider religions. Vietnam has a rich history of folk religions endemic to the area, which can most easily be described theistic in nature. These beliefs have survived well into the present day, and play a large role in the lives of many people who don't identify as strictly religious. While traditional Vietnamese religions are regional and rarely codified into formal systems, most beliefs are centered around the worship of Than, a loose term that can refer to any number of supernatural forces ranging from gods to the venerated dead. The most widely worshiped Than are the spirits of family ancestors, and as a result many Vietnamese homes have an altar devoted to them. Outsider religions like Buddhism, Taoism and Catholicism have historically played an important part in Vietnamese society as well. Catholicism represents one of the most recent introductions to the region, and is the result of aggressive French missionizing in the area. Much like other outsider religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, Catholicism was integrated into Vietnamese communities without displacing the dominant culture. With the exception of Catholicism, these outsider religions in Vietnam tend to be less rigidly organized than their overseas counterparts. Beyond the walls of monasteries, Buddhism is practiced more as a way of life than a formal religion, and this remains the case for many religious traditions adopted by the Vietnamese.

## MILITARY HISTORY

The region of modern-day Vietnam has a long history of military conflict that predates U.S. intervention by thousands of years. The Viet people's first brush with foreign invasion came in approximately 111 B.C.E, when Han Chinese conquered the area and brought in under the control of its expansive empire. This period of total control lasted until 40 C.E. when a revolutionary force led by the Tru'ng sisters successfully drove out the occupying Han army. The independence granted by this victory only lasted three years before the Han returned, but the rebellion marked the beginning of a series of wars of resistance that lasted nearly a thousand years. The ousting of occupying Chinese forces represented the beginning of a period of autonomy in the region, during which the Vietnamese repelled further attempts at invasion from the Chinese while simultaneously expanding their territory South, into the kingdom of Champa. In the 19th century the Vietnamese kingdom and the surrounding region was invaded by French colonialists. French occupation began in the South, and within a few years the French had managed to occupy the entire region around the Mekong Delta. Not long after, the French set their sights on the North as well, and launched a campaign to take over the entirety of the country. This offensive was met with success, and led to the total occupation of Vietnam until the Second World War, when it was occupied by the Japanese. After the Japanese defeat in 1945 the French tried to reclaim the area, resulting in war, and later, full-scale American involvement.

## U.S. INVOLVEMENT

From 1946 to 1975, the United States acted as a major military force in Vietnam. Initially U.S. involvement was limited to military aid to the embattled French, who sought to reclaim the region as a colonial holding. Although the U.S. justified its support for France by citing fears of communist expansion in the region, U.S. leadership had other, more pragmatic interests at heart. At that time the United States was engaged in a Cold War with the Soviet Union and its Eastern-European client states, and sought to establish the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization to counteract the perceived threat posed by the Warsaw pact. Since French participation was considered key to the success of NATO's organization, the U.S. sent military aid to the French army in Vietnam as part of a bid to keep the French government active in NATO's formation. This aid came in the form of an estimated 10 million dollars worth of equipment and supplies, and later, in the form of air resupply drops at crucial battles. Despite U.S. support the French efforts towards recolonization was doomed to failure, and the country was partitioned into North and South Vietnam. With the departure of the French, the U.S. was left with a diplomatic commitment to uphold the newly formed Republic of South Vietnam, which was threatened by the government of North Vietnam that sought to reunify the country. The resulting conflict, which began as military aid and advisership to the South, would grow into a prolonged ground war that would take thousands of lives and alter the political landscape of the country.

## IMPACT OF U.S. POLICY

After the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in the 1950's, a peace conference was convened to determine the future of Vietnam. The negotiation brought together representatives from the formerly French controlled government of Vietnam (South Vietnam), the Viet Minh, the Soviet Union and the United States to the bargaining table. From April 26th to July 21st, the 1954 Geneva conference negotiated the terms for what would become a North/South split between the two countries. The Vietnam that would emerge after July 21st would be divided in half along the 17th parallel, and would be led by two separate governments, the Vietnamese Communist Party in the North and the Republic of Vietnam in the South. The agreements also established a country-wide election to reunify the country by 1956, and while most countries present at the negotiations agreed to support the general election, the U.S. actively refused to uphold it. At the conclusion of the Geneva accords the United States found itself actively committed to maintaining the state of South Vietnam. Citing fears of communism, the U.S. government quickly built up South Vietnam's military strength, and the established 1956 election date came and went without participation from the South. This increased tensions between the North and South, and put pressure on the U.S. to uphold its ally in what was becoming a civil war. The U.S. military lent armed support to the anti-communist South, first with military advisors, and later, with active ground troops. The resulting conflict would last until 1975 when Northern troops took Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam.

## POLITICAL CLIMATE

The recent and current political structure of Vietnam is largely a product of cultural exchange. Prior to the invasion of the region by the Chinese, early Vietnamese governments were ruled by kings. After the ousting of the Chinese by Vietnamese forces this tradition largely remained, but it was significantly augmented by Chinese political thought and Confucianism. Expectations about the role of the kingship was augmented, and the Chinese concept of "The Mandate of Heaven" was introduced. This idea dictated that monarchs ruled by a divine mandate based on civic virtue, and as long as monarchs possessed this virtue, they possessed the mandate. If a ruler stopped expressing civic virtue, however, the mandate could be lost and the people would have cause to overthrow them. With the arrival of the French and other contacts with Europeans, Western ideas began to seep into Vietnamese political philosophy. Communism in particular found a place in the region's political thought, and many influential Vietnamese Nationalists would espouse this as their primary economic ideology. Until its fall in 1975 the South of Vietnam was officially a capitalist democracy, but widespread corruption and voter fraud often led to autocratic regimes. When the country reunified in 1975, the government maintained its socialist structure, but eased away from central economic planning under the policy of Doi Moi. Today, the Vietnamese Communist Party still holds a great deal of influence at most levels of society, and the government is essentially a one-party state.