



THE MARTIAL ARTS OF VIETNAM

AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORY AND STYLES

AUGUSTUS JOHN ROE

The first English-language book to detail the combat systems and martial culture of a land shaped by centuries of conflict.

"Affords us the purview needed to fully appreciate the martial arts culture of Vietnam's lands and peoples."

— Venerable Quang Huyen, Buddhist monk

"A very important piece of work. Fills a gap in the available research upon combative systems. Excellent!"

— Jamie Lee Baron Hanshi, president Institute of Martial Arts and Sciences

"This book represents an amazing amount of research and is a contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of martial arts history and culture."

— Dr. Antonio Graceffo, PhD wushu, Shanghai University of Sport, China

The Martial Arts of Vietnam presents an engaging overview of the evolution of Vietnamese martial arts from 2,000 BCE until today.

It looks at the mythical origins of the Vietnamese people and the impact that invasions from neighboring countries had on its martial culture.

Discover how kings and governments promoted and, in some cases, crushed martial traditions; alongside how Vietnam's unusual geography both protected and exposed martial styles and lineages.

This work offers stunning photography, era timelines, and regional maps that allow for an engaging adventure through Vietnam's northern, central, and southern regions, all in search of events and catalysts that shaped its martial history through the ages.

The Martial Arts of Vietnam lifts the veil of secrecy long surrounding this socialist state to reveal its combat systems and their thousand years of evolution.



Augustus John Roe is an author, linguist, and instructor of traditional Vietnamese martial arts. For more than a decade, he has lived and trained martial arts in Asia. Augustus Roe currently lives with his wife and children in Vietnam's capital city, Hanoi.

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Praise for *The Martial Arts of Vietnam ...*

We are truly indebted to Master Augustus Roe (Võ sư Quảng Thừa, 廣乘武師) for writing this book. In it, he not only shares the unique experiences he gained as he sought out martial artists throughout Vietnam, but also opens up for us their traditions, cultural practices, histories, stories, philosophies, and beliefs. Moreover, Augustus Roe's insights into Vietnam's ethnic, regional, and cultural diversity allow us to more fully appreciate the martial arts culture of Vietnam's lands and peoples.

—Venerable Quang Huyen, Buddhist monk of Xá Lợi Pagoda, PhD in Vietnamese literature and culture, author of *Dharma Mountain Buddhism & Martial Yoga*

This is a very important piece of work written by someone who knows what they are writing about. It is a detailed exploration of the various Vietnamese martial arts, both foreign and indigenous, that fills a gap in the available research on combative systems. Both informative and interesting, this book will surely stimulate further research and debate on the subject. A ten out of ten!

—Jamie Lee Baron Hanshi, president of the Institute of Martial Arts and Sciences, Accrington, Lancashire, United Kingdom

Augustus John Roe has done a fine job of helping us understand Vietnamese martial arts by first researching the history of Vietnam. For example, the historical relationship between China and Vietnam explains Chinese influence in Vietnamese martial arts. And knowing that three hundred thousand South Vietnamese troops fought alongside the Americans during the Vietnam conflict explains how taekwondo arrived in Vietnam. Of particular interest to me was the section on traditional Vietnamese wrestling, about which very little has been previously written. This book represents an amazing amount of research and is a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of martial arts, history, and culture.

—Dr. Antonio Graceffo, PhD from Shanghai University of Sport Wushu Department, author, black belt in Cambodian martial arts

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- AUGUSTUS JOHN ROE -

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When it comes to martial arts, self-defense, and related topics, no text, no matter how well written, can substitute for professional, hands-on instruction. These materials should be used for academic study only.

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NOTES ON THE WRITING OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS

The Vietnamese language is generally written using characters of the Latin alphabet with diacritical markings indicating tonal inflections and various vowel sounds. However, with the exception of italicized words and occasional logographs that are included alongside English translations, throughout the majority of this book the Romanized spellings of Vietnamese words are used. Therefore, words such as *Hà Nội* and *Hồ Chí Minh* have been transcribed as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, respectively. All words written using the Vietnamese script have been included in the glossary for reference, as have specific martial arts terms written as Romanizations of other languages, such as *Qi*, *Qigong*, *Chi Sao* and *Gi*. Furthermore, the terms *Master*, *Grandmaster* and *Patriarch Master* have been used to refer to an instructor who has achieved mastery of an art form or a rank that designates them the title, the current or former head of a school or system and the deceased founder of an individual school or style, respectively.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of recorded history, violence has been an inescapable part of human nature. In attempts to organize this violence, codified systems of combat that “blend the physical components with strategy, philosophy, tradition, or other features”¹ have developed. In this book, these modern expressions of our violent nature, known as “martial arts” will be examined in the context of the lands we now call Vietnam.

This book will focus upon the forms of “cold” (i.e. non-firearm-based) martial arts that exist in various forms today. As a study of embodied culture, we will consider the ways in which the people of Vietnam find meaning in the historical narratives and modern practices of martial arts. As we shall see, the martial culture and history of the region is exciting and diverse, with everything from warring swordswomen and tiger-felling martial monks to pirates and wrestlers-turned-kings.

Upon first arriving in Vietnam more than a decade ago, I was astounded by both the range of martial arts on display and the pride the Vietnamese people took in their practices. In contrast, it was a shock to learn that the martial arts of a nation with such a rich culture of combat were so little known to the outside world.

After several years studying and then teaching Vietnamese martial arts, I found myself needing to describe these systems and as a result, wanting to learn more about them myself. I then traveled to all corners of the nation seeking out knowledge and skills. I found myself plunged into countryside wrestling contests, being thrown across dusty temple courtyards by the descendants of famous warrior clans and navigating the floodplains of the Mekong delta in search of legendary martial arts masters.



The main gate of Van Mieu Quoc Tu Giam in Hanoi, which hosted the royal court's examinations from the tenth century

This book emerges out of my ruminations and my attempt to share these traditions and the knowledge I have accumulated with audiences beyond Vietnam.

Although the present-day incarnation of the country was not even formed until the late eighteenth century, the coming text considers modern Vietnamese martial arts, therefore we will include all of those that have developed within Vietnam's current borders. This covers a huge range of unique and interesting practices, that play important social, cultural, spiritual and physical roles in the nation. We intend to introduce some of these martial arts schools and systems in regards to their physical practices, how they fit into both the local and global martial arts scene, and finally, what they reveal about Vietnam's exciting and turbulent martial history.

Although there are a number of thematic ways to consider Vietnamese martial arts (for example in relation to religion or ethnicity), within this book they have been categorized by geographical location. The main reasons for this being the historical, cultural and geographical differences between the north, central and southern regions of Vietnam. Within these areas, inhabitants see themselves as culturally (and in some cases ethnically) distinct from their countrymen. As a result of these factors, localized cultures have developed, with each group holding their own values, traditions and understanding of what martial arts mean to them.

It should be highlighted to the reader that, although this book contains information on a variety of Vietnamese martial arts, it is by no means a comprehensive encyclopedia of schools and styles and should be used only as an introduction to the nation's martial arts systems and cultures. Furthermore, this book describes only those that have large followings in Vietnam. Although hundreds of Vietnamese-lineage styles exist in other parts of the world, due to cultural differences, they have not been included here.

It should also be noted that, like all modern-day countries, the cultures and identities of the people living in Vietnam are varied and ever-changing. As a result, any references in this book to specific areas of land, ethnicities or races are purely descriptive terms and, in some cases, may not be fully representative of the current situation.

Finally, it must be made clear that this is not an instructional document and all martial arts training must only be undertaken with the guidance of a professional and qualified instructor.

CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

OF

VIETNAM

&

KEY







MARTIAL

HISTORY



TIMELINE OF VIETNAM



- 2879–258 BCE  **Hồng Bàng Dynasty**
- 2879–1913 BCE  **Early Hồng Bàng**
- 1912–1055 BCE  **Mid-Hồng Bàng**
- 1054–258 BCE  **Late Hồng Bàng**
- 257–179 BCE  **Thục Dynasty**
- 207–111 BCE  **Triệu Dynasty**









■ The Nam Viet (Nan Yue) Kingdom - Circa 300 BCE
 □ Modern Southeast Asia



- 111 BC–40 CE  **1st Chinese Era**
- 40–43 CE  **Trung Sisters Uprising**
- 43–544 CE  **2nd Chinese Era**
- 544–602 CE  **Early Lý Dynasty**
- 602–938 CE  **3rd Chinese Era**

■ The Nam Viet Kingdom after takeover from the Han Chinese - Circa 111 BCE
 □ Modern Southeast Asia



- 939–967  **Ngô Dynasty**
- 968–980  **Đinh Dynasty**
- 980–1009  **Early Lê Dynasty**
- 1009–1225  **Later Lý Dynasty**
- 1225–1400  **Trần Dynasty**
- 1400–1407  **Hồ Dynasty**
- 1407–1427  **4th Chinese Era**
- 1428–1788  **Later Lê Dynasty**

■ The Dai Viet Kingdom - Circa 1450
 □ Modern Southeast Asia



- 1527–1592  **Mạc Dynasty**
- 1545–1787  **Trịnh Lords**
- 1558–1777  **Nguyễn Lords**
- 1778–1802  **Tây Sơn Dynasty**
- 1802–1945  **Nguyễn Dynasty**

■ The Dai Viet Kingdom - Circa 1780
 □ Modern Southeast Asia



1858–1945



French Imperialism

1945–1954



Post-Colonial Vietnam

■ French Indochina - Circa 1930
 □ Modern Southeast Asia



1954 – 1975



North/South Vietnam

From 1975



Socialist Republic

■ Modern-Day Vietnam
 □ Modern Southeast Asia

Vietnam has a land mass close to 332,000 square kilometers, it borders China to the north, mainland Southeast Asia to the west and has hundreds of kilometers of coastline. As a result, the region has long been seen as a strategically and economically valuable resource. The modern incarnation of Vietnam was first amalgamated by military expansion southwards throughout the seventeenth century, giving the country its distinct “S” shape. Meanwhile, the northern borders have had very little modification since the withdrawal of the Song Dynasty in 1070.²

Vietnam has a total of fifty-four ethnic groups. Although many of them have played important roles in the development of the region’s martial arts, those who consider themselves to be ethnically Vietnamese (referred to as the *Việt* or *Viet-Kinh*) have undeniably had the most impact on modern practices. The Viet have inhabited the Red River Delta region for centuries and while the Chinese empire to the north has had a profound influence upon the local culture and its martial practices, a gradual southwards expansion of the Viet into unknown lands further “transformed this country into a mosaic of peoples, languages, and cultures.”³

Within this diverse and often dangerous region, countless struggles for dominance, land and survival took place. This in turn led to the development of an array of unique martial arts practices that have been shaped not just by the people and their cultures, but also by the very landscape itself.

Geographical factors have had huge impacts on the development of Vietnamese martial arts. Aspects such as climate and agricultural accessibility shaped numerous military campaigns, while more specific examples of geographical influences can be observed within martial practices themselves. For instance, certain methods of high stepping appear in some arts that may be more suited to mountainous terrains, while styles of gripping and locking that are adapted for extremely humid climates appear in others.

In modern times, the general population consider their country as consisting of three key areas (this is likely due in part to a historical divide under the French colonial administration). Each of these three regions can be considered as cultural spheres, with observable differences in ethnicity, attitudes, religion, language, food and of course, martial arts.

- The Northern Region (formerly referred to as Tonkin by the French) is inhabited primarily by the Viet people surrounding the capital city of Hanoi and the Red River Delta. While the Tay, Tai, Muong, Nung and Hmong ethnic groups reside in the surrounding highlands to the north and west. While the Red River Delta has historically served as a crossroad for both migrations and trade with China, the Chinese influence, particularly on the northern Vietnamese culture (and therefore its martial arts) has been profound. The north of the country predominantly cites no specific religious affiliations, but widely follows a number of Daoist and Folk religious practices alongside Buddhism.
- The Central Region (formerly Annam), consists of beautiful coastal lowlands to the east which are inhabited by a mixture of the Viet, Hoa (Chinese) and Cham (an ethnic group well known for their historical warrior culture).⁴ To the west sit highlands that are inhabited by the Viet and numerous other peoples such as the Bahnar, Ede, Jarai and others. Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam and a number of tribal religions are common among the citizens of the central provinces.
- The Southern Region (formerly Cochinchina), consists of lowlands surrounding the metropolis of Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta as well as highlands to the north and west. Major ethnicities include the Viet, Hoa, Cham, Khmer and other smaller ethnic groups, all of which have held power in the region over the centuries and have contributed to the development of the Southern Vietnamese martial arts. A wider range of religious practices can typically be observed in the southern provinces compared to the north of the country. These include Mahayana, Theravada and Hoa Hao Buddhism as well as Catholicism and Caodaism.

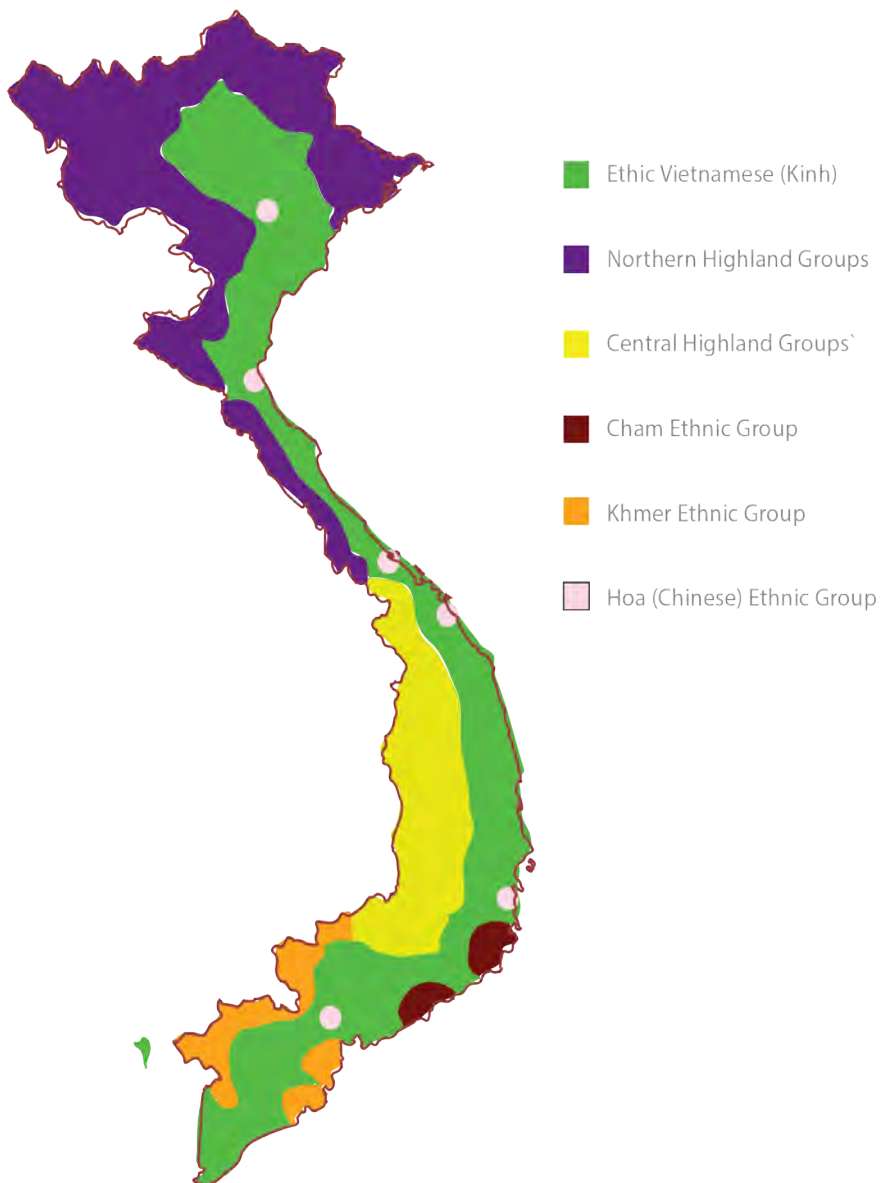
The modern nation consists of fifty-eight individual provinces—areas that have their own administration but are governed by central leadership. The Viet people account for the vast majority of the population, however the Tai, Cham, Khmer, Bahnar and Jarai were all once physically and culturally dominant powers in the region.⁵ The Cham and Khmer in particular, controlled vast swathes of Southeast Asia and their influences can still be observed in the diversity of Vietnam's martial practices today.

Furthermore, the population of modern Vietnam is extremely young (with almost half of the approximate ninety-four million residents aged below twenty-nine).⁶ This factor coupled with an increasing national wage and social welfare system has lent itself well to the ongoing development and practice of martial arts by the current generation.



Vietnamese flags line many of the streets in Hanoi

ETHNICITIES OF MODERN VIETNAM



KEY MARTIAL HISTORY

EARLY HISTORY—TENTH CENTURY

(HONG BANG DYNASTY—THIRD CHINESE ERA)

Around 2000 BCE, the *Đông Sơn* (literally *East Mountain*) culture developed into a thriving civilization around the Red River Delta. Weapons such as swords, spears, daggers and axes and intricately decorated war drums which depict battle scenes, have been discovered in the region.

Between 111 BCE and 938 CE, the Red River Delta region fluctuated between rulers from the northern region (of what is now China) and local leaders. *Nan Yue* (or *Nam Việt*) as it was known at the time, was desirable due to its agricultural opportunities (in contrast to the mountainous highlands to the north), strategic military placement and as an access route to trading across the south seas and Indian Ocean.⁷

During the first millennium, it is considered that the occupants of the Red River Delta lived in “relative peace and security as residents of the Sinitic empire.”⁸ Despite this, a number of stories detailing uprisings against the ruling dynasties have found their way into the modern Vietnamese canon, such as that of the Two Trung Sisters (*Hai Bà Trưng*), from today’s Ba Vì area of northern Vietnam. The pair are said to have been fearsome warriors, who overthrew the ruling Han Dynasty and briefly seized control, before succumbing to Han forces two years later.



A Dong Son drum on display in the Vietnamese Museum of Vietnamese history



*Hong Bang Dynasty daggers and spearheads on display
in the Museum of Vietnamese history*

TENTH—SIXTEENTH CENTURY (NGO DYNASTY—MAC DYNASTY)

In 1009 a Buddhist martial artist named Ly Cong Uan (crowned Ly Thai To) rose to power, founding the Ly Dynasty which lasted until 1225. The emperor was raised in a Buddhist temple and “had a reputation for both erudition and martial prowess.”⁹

During the Ly Dynasty, the Buddhist clergy were closely associated with the Emperor’s household. Buddhism was elevated to an official religion and prospered alongside various other Daoist, spiritual and other shamanistic practices. It is also claimed that in this period, the Buddhist clergy openly trained in martial arts and competed in festival tournaments that featured wrestling, boxing and empty-handed contests.¹⁰

The Ly Dynasty began a campaign of *Nam Tiến* (literally translated as *Marching South*) and gradually expanded their territory through fierce battles with the southern Khmer and Champa empires. The Cham were a historically renowned warrior culture, who regularly “fought each other and neither had any qualms about attacking the nascent *Đại Việt* state in the north to expand their own empires.”¹¹ Coincidentally, the former Cham capital city *Inrapura*, is located in modern-day Quy Nhon, Binh Dinh Province,

a region which in recent years has become considered by many to be “the cradle of Vietnamese martial arts.”¹²

In 1253, the Tran Dynasty established one of the first formal martial arts training institutions in the capital (then known as *Thăng Long*). At that time, these schools were primarily for high-ranking military officers and relatives of the royal family, rather than the general public.¹³

In 1257, 1284 and 1287 the Mongol armies attempted invasions of the region then known as *Đại Việt* and were subsequently repelled. These victories are famed for the use of guerrilla tactics, led by General Tran Hung Dao. An example of this was baiting the Mongol army to sail down the Bach Dang River during low tide and lining the riverbed with iron-tipped stakes.

Mac Dang Dung, a warrior-official who had effectively controlled the country for over a decade, seized the throne in 1527. Mac Dang Dung was known as a skilled wrestler, renowned for his size, strength and accomplished military record. Some sources state that despite his position, he championed martial arts among his people and would often compete with civilian masters inside the Imperial Court, accepting those that bettered him into official positions.¹¹

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (NGUYEN & TRINH LORDS—TAY SON DYNASTY)

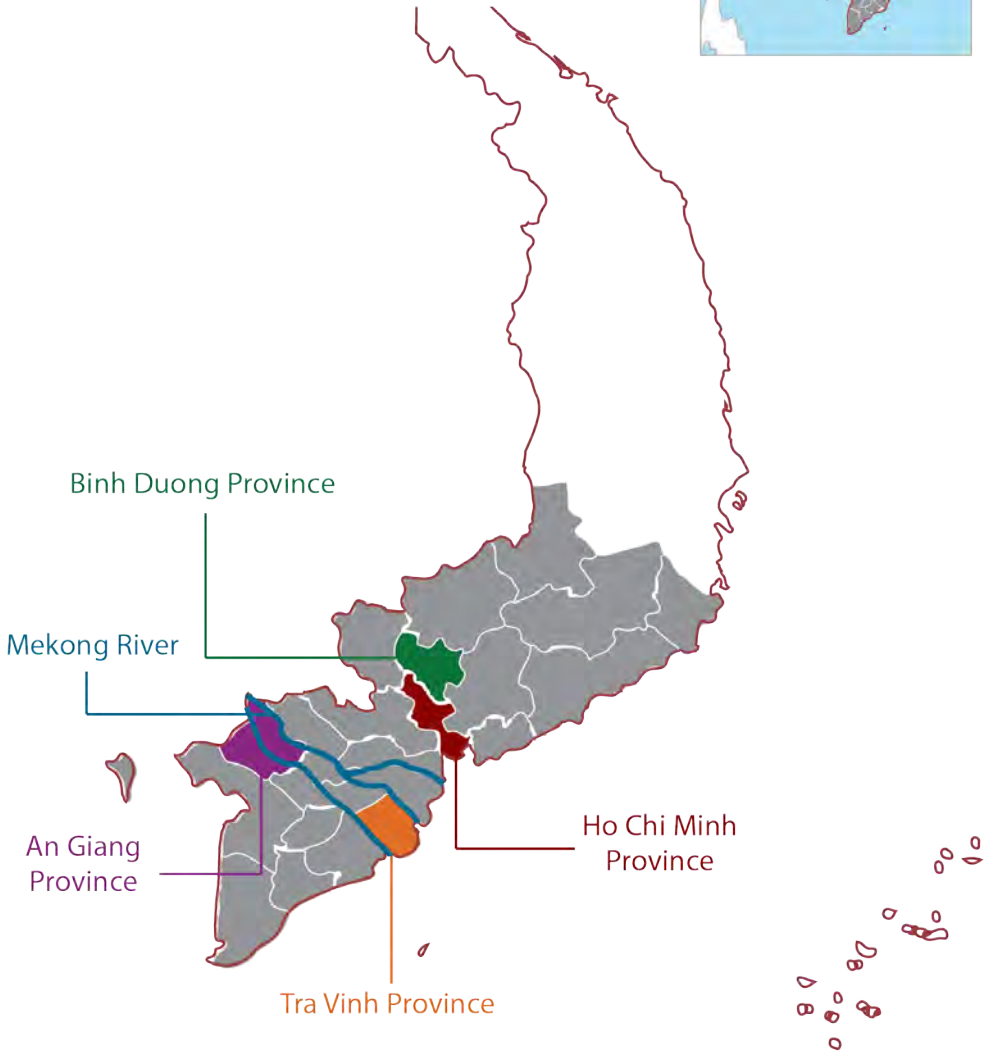
In the early seventeenth century, following a number of violent disputes between provincial rulers, Nguyen Hoang (the figurehead of a military household from Thanh Hoa) fled the north and ventured south in an attempt to establish his own domain. Nguyen Hoang, his son Nguyen Phuc Nguyen and other members of their household began building a new state, developing military settlements across the coast and erecting Buddhist pagodas. The Nguyen family are said to have recruited numerous warriors and martial arts experts from the north to strengthen their new land and military.¹⁵

Under Nguyen Hoang and his successors, a number of the armed and unarmed martial arts practices were recorded by family clans in central Vietnam; most famously the

CHAPTER IV

**SOUTH
VIETNAMESE
STYLES
AND
SCHOOLS**

POINTS OF INTEREST





THE SOUTHERN REGION

The Mekong Delta floodplains viewed from the foot of the Seven Mountains

Accounting for roughly a third of the nation's total area—around thirty-nine thousand square kilometers—the southern region of Vietnam is home to a population of almost eighteen million inhabitants.

For many years prior to Viet occupation, much of the south belonged to the Khmer Kingdom. From the seventeenth century, the southern provinces shifted between rule from the Nguyen Dynasty, the Khmer, the Cham or other indigenous groups. Then, from 1862-1954, under the Nguyen Dynasty and the French Colonialists, these provinces became a subdivision of French Indochina known as *La Colonie de Cochinchine* or *Cochinchina*. Control was eventually taken by the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1975.

The southern region of Vietnam is centered around the mighty Mekong River and its many tributaries. Although the majority of residents in the Mekong Delta are of Viet ethnicity, there are a multiplicity of other ethnic groups with substantial populations, such as the Hoa (ethnic Chinese), Khmer Krom (Vietnamese-Khmer) and Cham.

The most-densely populated area is Ho Chi Minh City, which was known as Saigon up until 1976, and *Prey Nokor* in earlier years when it was part of the Khmer Kingdom. Ho Chi Minh is also the largest city in Vietnam with a population of almost nine million.

The most significant Khmer Krom communities can be found along the Cambodian border to the southwest and in Tra Vinh and Soc Trang Provinces on the south-eastern tip of the country. While the Chinatown area of Ho Chi Minh City, known as Cholon District (*Chợ Lớn*), is home to the largest proportion of Hoa immigrants in Vietnam, just over four percent of the city's overall population.¹²⁸ Cholon is also known for its high concentration of martial arts experts and schools.



The view of downtown Ho Chi Minh City from the Bitexco Financial tower

Further north of the Mekong Delta live multiple pockets of Cham, Khmer and other ethnic minority communities. This region is also home to many Viet followers of religious sects such as Hoa Hao Buddhism and Caodaism, which have both been linked to military disputes with ruling powers throughout the twentieth century.¹²⁹

Southern Vietnam has an extreme climate with scorching heat, torrential rains and storms, while the flood plains, mountains and dense wildlife-rich forests make for a hostile environment. These factors coupled with hundreds of years of conflict have ensured a solid tradition of combat systems referred to as “the martial arts of forests and gardens.”¹³⁰

To the observer, influences from the Chinese, Khmer, Cham and Viet populations are all visible within the Southern Vietnamese martial arts. Such aspects may be seen within the techniques themselves, the weapons trained, the methods of transmission, the associated religious/spiritual practices or all of the above.

In this chapter we will examine some of the largest martial arts schools and culturally relevant styles developed in this region.



*A Cao Dai Temple
in District One, Ho Chi Minh City*

BA TRA TAN KHANH / TAKHADO

Võ Lâm Bà Trà Tân Khánh



Fig. 20.

Ba Tra Tan Khanh or Takhado is a martial art that was developed in Binh Duong, a province immediately north of Ho Chi Minh City. The name *Bà Trà* refers to a local hero and skilled fighter, *Lady Tra* of *Tân Khánh* Village, while *Takhado* means (*Tan Khanh Style*).

The school's logo is based on the story of two brothers and teachers of the style named Vo Van At and Vo Van Gia. According to local legend, the pair became famous for defeating live tigers in the relatively-common attacks that happened on villages throughout the pre-industrialized Mekong Delta.¹³¹



Fig. 21. A young Master Ho Tuong with his students of Ba Tra Tan Khanh

HISTORY

According to Master Ho Tuong, during the early seventeenth century, a number of Binh Dinh Province inhabitants were forced from their homelands by monarchical oppression and a lack of natural resources, such as wood to build houses and animals to hunt. These pioneers ventured south where they established a new village and named it Tan Khanh—now known as Tan Phuoc Khanh Town, Tan Uyen District, Binh Duong Province.

The new citizens of Binh Duong Province had to adjust to their environment and are said to have utilized their martial arts skills to face new and dangerous enemies, including wild predators, marauding bands of thieves and an unforgiving landscape. In many cases this meant disregarding old techniques and creating or adapting new ones that were better suited to their altered needs and environment.¹³²

In Tan Khanh Village, a local tea stall owner, martial arts expert and alleged descendant of the Tay Son Rebels named Vo Thi Tra, led an uprising against the ruling authorities of the region. The rebellion managed to hold off their oppressors from regaining control for more than nine years before succumbing to the recently arrived, more powerful and well-equipped French colonial rulers in 1859.¹³³

While the inciting incidents for the rebellion are unclear and different sources provide different accounts, possible explanations may have been in response to governmental corruption, high taxes or even as a result of disputes between local ethnic groups such as the Khmer and the relatively new Viet settlers to the region. What is known however, is that during this time the martial arts style of the region adopted its name from Lady (Ba) Tra's Tan Khanh Rebellion.¹³⁴

As time went on, numerous famous martial artists emerged from the region, solidifying the village's reputation as a hotspot of martial prowess. In particular, Master Bay Phien who trained students for the anti-French resistance movement and (future Grandmaster) Ho Van Lanh, a highly regarded Ba Tra Tan Khanh martial artist, who moved from Binh Duong Province to Saigon and became instrumental in the expansion of the style throughout Vietnam and abroad.¹³⁵

Currently, Ba Tra Tan Khanh style is taught all over Vietnam. The largest followings are in Ho Chi Minh City (with over one hundred masters), as well as the southern provinces of Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Dong Thap and Kien Giang.

Although based primarily in Vietnam, due to the dispersion of many southern citizens following the Second Indochina War, a number of Ba Tra Tan Khanh students have continued to teach in the United States, Australia, France and other European countries.

The main representative of Ba Tra Tan Khanh in Vietnam is Master Ho Tuong, the youngest son of Grandmaster Ho Van Lanh. The school's headquarters are based at the Youth Culture House, Pham Ngoc Thach Street, Ben Nghe Ward, District One, Ho Chi Minh City.



Fig. 22. Master Ho Tuong demonstrates a flying kick

CHARACTERISTICS

Master Ho Tuong describes the syllabus of Ba Tra Tan Khanh martial arts to include: basic strength and conditioning exercises, forms, pair drills which focus on automating reactions and kinesthetic awareness, *Qigong*, competitive fighting and weapons training.¹³⁶

As the Ba Tra Tan Khanh style has its roots in Binh Dinh region martial arts, there are a number of similarities that can be observed. These include: low and high angles of attack that combine deep grounded stances and aerial strikes; frequent leg kicks and stamps; as well as circular and evasive footwork that focuses on avoiding enemy strikes and redirecting momentum—similar to those found in Tai Chi or Aikido.

In comparison to Vo Co Truyen and the Binh Dinh region martial arts, Master Ho identifies the unique aspects of the Ba Tra Tan Khanh style to include:

- “A prioritized focus on pairwork—forms are often trained with live opponents rather than individually to ensure self-defense skills are kept sharp.
- Weapon training with short sticks as well as longer staffs. They are primarily utilized to counterattack by controlling the space and direction of the conflict rather than staying out of range.
- Several empty-handed forms that emphasize quick forward and backward motions, rather than circular movements; these add variety to the fighter’s arsenal.
- Stances that focus on constant transition between movements, rather than holding positions for aesthetic purposes.
- A set of thirty-two basic weapons, including various farming and everyday implements that have been absorbed into the style through necessity.
- Forms that are taught through heavily-coded sets of poetry and rhymes—although this method of tuition is used in various Vo Co Truyen schools, it is especially emphasized in the Ba Tra Tan Khanh style (the regional accent and vocabulary also lend themselves well to this purpose).

- A focus on studying the theory of attacks and forms before learning the physical movements (this contrasts many martial arts styles in which the movements are taught first and then analyzed later on).¹³⁷

Ba Tra Tan Khanh students wear similar attire to that of other Vo Co Truyen schools. Predominantly black, long-sleeved shirts and pants, with a sash of either blue, red, yellow or white indicating their levels as beginner, student, teacher or master respectively. The school's logo is always on the front of the shirts and is often accompanied by the name of the student and specific training location, which makes practitioners of this style easily recognizable.



Fig. 23. Ba Tra Tan Khanh knife attack

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Augustus John Roe is an author, linguist and instructor of traditional Vietnamese martial arts.

For more than a decade, he has lived and trained in Asia. During this time Augustus has worked on numerous television shows, books, magazines and academic projects documenting local cultures and martial arts practices.

Augustus has a passion for language; he writes fiction, nonfiction and works as a freelance editor. His academic achievements include a Masters Degree in Martial Arts Studies and a Cambridge Delta qualification in language teaching.

Alongside traditional Vietnamese martial arts, Augustus had trained in Taekwondo, Wing Chun, Jiu Jitsu, Aikido, Muay Thai, Boxing, White Crane Kung Fu and more. He currently lives with his wife and children in Vietnam's capital city, Hanoi.

For more information about any of his writing or to contact Augustus, please visit www.augustusjohnroe.com or follow him on social media.



Photo by Jonathan Chappell