

society. It retrieves for the Second Republic a sense of agency, a narrative in which South Vietnamese can remember themselves as more than the victims of communist oppression or of a fickle US benefactor. They were instead professionals who built something valuable, the economic, political, and military effects of which are still being felt in Vietnam today.

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*Descending dragon, rising tiger: A history of Vietnam*

By VU HONG LIEN and PETER D. SHARROCK

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*Descending dragon, rising tiger: A history of Vietnam* is a chronological narrative of the political history of Vietnam, stretching from its prehistory to the end of the Vietnam-American War in 1975, terminating with an epilogue on postwar developments in Vietnam to the present. Divided into fifteen chapters that correspond with the authors' perspectives on the major political developments in Vietnam's history, Vu Hong Lien and Peter Sharrock tout this volume as 'the first English-language account of the full story of the Vietnamese people' (book jacket). This survey is a balanced and readable narrative of the different time periods in Vietnamese history. Its strength lies in its discussion of pre-colonial Vietnamese history. However, its coverage of the last two centuries of Vietnamese history suffers from an over-reliance on a few secondary sources.

The authors deliver their promise of chronicling the vast sweep of Vietnam's political evolution. Their periodisation of Vietnamese history is conventional and features the period from Independence (chap. 4) to the various dynastic houses from the Lý Dynasty (chap. 5) to the Trần Dynasty (chap. 6) to the Nguyễn Dynasty (chap. 12) to post-1945 developments (chaps. 12–15). It focuses on the ups and downs on each imperial house's fortunes alongside its helmsman — the emperor. For instance, the Trần Dynasty rose with Trần Thái Tông but ended with a series of weaker emperors like Trần Minh Tông, who was described as a 'kind but unwise king' (p. 99).

I found the text's coverage of prehistory and Việt–Cham entanglement to be its strengths. The prehistory period (chap. 2) is an excellent synthesis of advancements in the field of Vietnamese archaeology, and supplements these findings with Vietnam's foundational mythology. In the book's treatment of the Việt–Cham entanglement, the authors highlight the vibrance of the Cham civilisation in south-central Vietnam prior to the Vietnamese southward movement. The book acknowledges that the Vietnamese southward movement (*nam tiến*) was a violent process that had disastrous consequences for the non-Việt inhabitants, who ended up displaced, assimilated, and impoverished to this day.

There are several issues with the book, however, arising from an uncritical understanding of the Việt people, and its sources, particularly from the colonial period onwards.

In *Descending dragon, rising tiger*, there is an underlying assumption that there was an essential 'Việt' character. The authors do not discuss what this might mean in a different time period, or in a different locale. For instance, in their discussion of the movement of people in 1954–1956 between northern Vietnam and southern Vietnam, the authors state: 'The question why so many Việt, who value above all ties to family and land, decided to uproot themselves and leave in droves remains puzzling. They must have felt forces stronger than their own traditional values ...' (p. 205). Such a throwaway statement suggests that the authors assume there is something essential and timeless about what being Việt entails and does not critically assess how identity evolves through time.

Related to the issue of essentialising identity, the underlying theme of resistance against foreign presence in Vietnam runs through the book and informs the selection of what is significant to this narrative. For instance, in its assessment of Emperor Trần Thái Tông, the authors argue that he 'is primarily remarkable for the first Việt victory over the Mongols' (p. 84) despite the fact that this was not the concern of the Trần annals. This approach carries over to their treatment of the colonial period. Only individuals who contributed to resistance are given prominence in the text. By contrast, individuals who did not contribute to this narrative are omitted. For instance, the book states, '(Emperor) Khải Định's most significant act was his decree to replace the Chinese-based chữ Nôm with Romanised Vietnamese' (p. 173) as one of the few positives of the French colonial period. It is worthwhile mentioning that Trương Vĩnh Kỳ is often credited for popularising the use of Romanised Vietnamese, but was missing from this narrative because he is regarded by Democratic Republic of Việt Nam (DRV) and later, Socialist Republic of Việt Nam (SRV) scholars as a French collaborator.

The book needs to qualify its usage of some of its sources. The book uses several Internet sources, for example britannica.com (p. 252) for its information on the Sunda Shelf and baotanglichsu.vn for its information on the Hoa Lư citadel (pp. 57, 257). Alternatives could have been found for these sources. These are just a few examples. Furthermore, chapters 13 to 15 on the last two centuries of Vietnamese history rely heavily on a few secondary sources. Nguyễn Khắc Viện, Henry Kissinger and Robert McNamara feature strongly in the footnotes for these chapters. Viện represents the SRV's perspective on history, while Kissinger and McNamara represent the American understanding of the Vietnam-American War. Parts of chapter 14 were supplemented by the accounts of eyewitnesses, who, according to the acknowledgements, are Vu Hong Lien's parents (pp. 270–71, 281). The use of these sources needs to be discussed in the text itself to strengthen these chapters.

Overall, this text is appropriate for a college-level survey course on the history of Vietnam, but the modern period will require supplementary material for a more nuanced understanding of the last 200 years of Vietnamese history.

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