

side of the story is this book's greatest asset, the story of the Americans is no less engaging and revealing. Miller must be commended for locating and presenting fresh US documentary evidence that effectively relates the confusing and divisive nature of the war for Washington policy-makers, those who fought in it, and the American public. As he does for the Vietnamese, Miller offers a balanced mix of sources relating the thinking and sentiments of the key political actors, on the one hand, and the experiences of those impacted by their decisions, namely, armed forces personnel, on the other.

There are a few lacunae in this book. Miller could have provided better insights into high-level communist and South Vietnamese decision-making during the war. Also, it would have been a good idea to include either an annotated bibliography or, at a minimum, a comprehensive list of suggested readings as they usually are of great use to students. Most disappointing is the absence of maps, an inexcusable oversight by the publisher for a book of this kind.

Ultimately, Miller's book achieves what it sets out to do: offer a sound and effective overview of the multiple perspectives and complexities of the Vietnam War. It should be assigned reading in all college-level courses on that conflict, and on the shelves of every public and university library. This is a remarkable contribution to the constantly expanding body of works on the most consequential and controversial armed conflict of the post-1945 era in world history.

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*Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967–1975)*

Edited by K.W. TAYLOR

Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2015. Pp. 180. Maps, Illustrations, Tables, Notes, Contributors.

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Four decades have passed since the end of the Vietnam War, but recently scholars of Vietnam have published many new books redefining the Vietnam War as a 'Vietnamese War'. However, two gaps remain. First, new scholarship on South Vietnam has focused on the First Republic period (1955–1963), which excludes a consideration of Vietnamese experiences in the south at the height of American involvement. American narratives frequently exclude political developments of Vietnam in 1967, including the promulgation of a new constitution and the successful elections leading to Vietnam's Second Republic. Second, few English-language Vietnamese memoirs are available for this later period. Although several Second Republic officials have written books, many of these are difficult to find, dated, or self-serving.

Taylor's volume provides an in-depth look at the diplomatic, political, military, economic, and even agricultural workings of the Second Republic from the point of view of the civil servants dedicated to making South Vietnam thrive despite continuous challenges. *Voices of the Second Republic* features recollections of civil servants.

They faced crisis after crisis, from the Vietnamisation of the War to the sudden withdrawal of American troops in 1973 (along with a precipitous decline in aid), to the oil crisis, to rampant inflation. The volume features a helpful and concise introduction to the Second Republic period from editor K.W. Taylor, followed by contributions from Ambassador Bui Diem, Central Intelligence Organisation member Phan Cong Tam, diplomat Nguyen Ngoc Bich, Vice Minister of Agriculture Tran Quang Minh, Minister of Trade Nguyen Duc Cuong, Judge and candidate for the Lower House Phan Quang Tue, opposition members of the House, Tran Van Son and Ma Xai (of the People's/Socialist Coalition and the Tan Dai Viet party, respectively), Rear Admiral Ho Van Ky-Thoai, and General Lan Lu.

These men, all of whom held important administrative, political, or military positions during the Second Republic period, give detailed expositions of previously neglected policy priorities. Nguyen Duc Cuong's chapter explicates the challenges of economic management in South Vietnam while circumstances changed rapidly and Americans withdrew aid. He also shows us how bureaucrats competently managed despite intractable levels of inflation. This chapter's discussion of South Vietnam's oil exploration efforts, along Ho Van Ky-Thoai's reflections on the naval battle with China over control of the Paracel Islands, provides us with much-needed context for understanding the current diplomatic wrangling today. Tran Quang Minh's explanation of agricultural policies includes chicken and pig production and miracle rice, and the 'land to the tiller' agricultural reform. He provides exactly the kinds of insights that are overlooked by the focus on military and diplomatic affairs during this period.

The volume demonstrates the profound importance of the shift from older French-trained to younger American-trained bureaucrats. The contributors remember how they overthrew 'the old French-trained clique' (p. 41), describe how the country's economy had been run by adherents to 'French banking tradition' who were 'conservative, with no incentive to change' (p. 104), and how the tax system was hampered by outdated 'French law' (p. 110). Though not all of the contributors studied in the United States, these essays show a certain faith in the exceptionalism of American ideas — particularly in the form of adherence to modernisation theory and a simultaneous belief in Keynesian economics, free trade, and a market economy — that bears further scrutiny.

There are aspects of life in the Second Republic that this volume excludes. There are no women represented in this volume, which reflects the fact that men dominated political and military life in the Second Republic. The volume says little about the tremendous cultural and social changes urban youth in South Vietnam experienced in this period. Finally, the contributors are not particularly self-critical. For example, the few brief mentions of corruption during this period are either apologetic ('corruption is inherent in any effort to control markets', p. 75), exculpatory ('the accusations were not only baseless but also ridiculous', p. 84), or are questions raised but not answered ('Questions were often raised about the impact of U.S. aid. Did the funds encourage corruption?' p. 99).

Nevertheless, this volume offers an invaluable look at the attempts of South Vietnamese leaders to build a viable democracy in the face of insurmountable odds. The volume shows not a puppet regime but a group of intelligent, devoted, highly capable civil servants pushing forwards against the headwinds of an anti-war Congress in the United States, and the continuous disruptions of war on a divided

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

London: Reaktion Books, 2014. Pp. 288. Maps, Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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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.