

Vietnam's Political History

Author(s): D. G. E. Hall

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But the authors themselves doubtless would not deny a certain partisanship. In the epilogue, they lay final stress on the importance of the Chinese Communist revolution, and on the "historic significance" of the Sino-Soviet relationship. They set forth a summary conclusion:

Massive displacements occurring throughout the whole world, especially in Asia, have led to a radical change of power relationships in the Far East. . . . The forces of democracy and socialism have grown immeasurably, freeing many hundreds of millions of people from the chains of imperialist colonial slavery.

No powers of the imperialists and their agents can now turn backward the course of history and stop the progressive movement of humanity toward communism.

Zhukov and his colleagues in this work express, as have Soviet political leaders on various occasions since V-J Day, the conviction that the day of cataclysmic Asian upheaval foreseen by Lenin and others in the early days of the Russian Revolution has at last arrived.

A suggestive "Chronology of Basic Events in the Far East" is appended to the volume. Like many Russian works, however, the book lacks an index (except for proper names). Its extensive bibliography is indicative of a far-ranging delving into sources (chiefly secondary), but the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao variously are accorded the leading roles in the listing of sources for the several chapters. This seems appropriate, for their spirit dominates the whole.

New York, November 1958

O. EDMUND CLUBB

Vietnam's Political History: A Review Article

THIS BOOK¹ inspires one with very mixed feelings: gratitude for a first attempt at a full-scale political history of Vietnam in English; disappointment at the result; respect for the wide range of historical sources consulted; dissatisfaction that in a book of this size there should be so little about Vietnamese history proper, compared with the space devoted to foreign intervention; enjoyment of the gusto with which the author writes and of the many interesting things he records; irritation at his sweeping judgments, often based upon inadequate knowledge, at his diffuseness, and, particularly, at constantly being referred to the notes for information which should have been incorporated in the text. If one leaves out of account the 47

¹ *The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam*. By Joseph Buttinger. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958. 538 pp. \$6.00.

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pages of chronological summary of the period 1900-1957, which could well have been omitted, seeing that the author promises us a second volume covering this period, there are some 136 pages of notes to 268 pages of text. And as the text is written with more than half an eye on the notes, it is too often sketchy and incoherent.

Vietnam's history up to 1900 is surveyed—no other word is appropriate—in six chapters. Now it is reasonable to deal with “One Thousand Years of Chinese rule” in one chapter, since our knowledge of Vietnamese history up to 939 A.D. is patchy and unsatisfactory. But to deal with “Nine Hundred Years of Independence” (incidentally a miscalculation, since the chapter ends with the abolition of the old monarchy in 1788 by the rebel Tay Son family) in about the same amount of space is quite inadequate, all the more so since the remaining chapters are chiefly concerned with European activities in or around Vietnam.

The result is that big subjects of Vietnamese history are passed over with so little attention that a badly distorted view is given of it as a whole. For instance, for a proper view of the Vietnamese in Southeast Asia today, great attention should be paid to the long story of their expansion and penetration into the Indo-Chinese peninsula. It involves the epic struggle of the Indianised Chams to maintain a frontier only a little south of modern Tongking, the destruction of their state and the extinction of their civilisation by the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese colonisation of important parts of the former Khmer empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their struggle with Siam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the possession of Cambodia (decisively interrupted by the French just at the time when it had become a question whether Khmer civilisation was to survive or go the way of Cham civilisation). And the same process is also to be discerned in the Laotian states of Vienchang and Tran-Ninh, at the same time though not to the same degree. Vietnamese expansion, interrupted by the French, was a major factor in Southeast Asian history, and one is permitted to ask whether it has yet ended.

From 1650 onwards, however, Mr. Buttinger is too obsessed with European activities to look at Vietnamese history in its proper perspective, and, moreover, with only a scrappy knowledge he ranges about over the whole field of European enterprise in Asia. He makes some extraordinary assertions. Singapore, he says on p. 255, was first occupied by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch, and during the Napoleonic wars was conquered by the British. Is he, by chance, thinking of Malacca? On pp. 221-2 he talks of the “Portuguese rape of Indonesia.” What he refers to is anybody's guess. On p. 257 he tells us that with the weakening of the Mogul empire in India the leading European naval powers “tried to carve up” India. Has he been reading K. M. Pannikar? On pp. 225-6 he describes Vietnam in the eighteenth

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century as enjoying a "long respite" from European interference because England was engaged in the effort to "destroy the Indian positions of the Portuguese and Dutch" and "France's overseas strength was absorbed by her efforts to defend against the English what she had gained in India since 1676." This is complete moonshine, of course: even the most chauvinist French historians have never represented what took place in India in quite such terms. Mr. Buttinger obviously has in his mind a picture of Britain and France constantly on the alert to interfere in the East, whenever and wherever an opportunity occurred. Thus on p. 258 he speaks of the "golden opportunity" which the Tay Son rebellion, which began in 1773, offered to both the English and the French "to meddle" in the internal affairs of Vietnam, and goes on to explain that the reason neither nation "pursued the project very energetically" (in fact they did not pursue it at all) was because they were fighting on opposite sides in the War of American Independence. In the same spirit he explains on p. 243 that the opposition of Gia Long's successors toward France in the first half of the nineteenth century "was largely determined by the new tide of European aggression that rolled over India, into Malaya and Burma, and gradually up along the Chinese coast."

This type of irresponsible generalising, regardless of facts, characterises much that is found in the sections dealing with the earlier period of European contacts. Happily, when he comes to the period of the French conquest, Mr. Buttinger writes more convincingly, but even here he must be read with great caution. Finally, it is a pity that he never gets down to a real consideration of Vietnam's relationship to China in modern history. It becomes a matter of special importance during Tu Duc's struggle with the French, when both he and the Chinese emperor publicly proclaimed that Vietnam was a vassal state of China. Perhaps Mr. Buttinger will take up this point in his second volume. It is today not a purely academic question.

School of Oriental and African Studies, London

D. G. E. HALL