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The Story of Việt Nam: From Prehistory to the Present. By Shelton Woods. Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2013. 96 pp.

Shelton Woods' concise history textbook, *The Story of Việt Nam*, brings readers from the prehistory of Việt Nam to the present, ending in the 1990s. His volume offers snapshots of the major events in Vietnamese history. Its brevity and the author's style of writing is appropriate for American high schoolers or non-specialist college students interested in the history of Việt Nam. However, it does not reflect the latest developments in scholarship on Vietnam, making it inappropriate for a college class on Vietnamese history.

Woods' short history of Việt Nam achieves much in some eighty pages: it highlights the major political developments of Việt Nam's nearly 4,000 years of history, while introducing important facets of Vietnamese culture. The strength of its narrative lies in his treatment of post-1945 Vietnamese history. Woods has a nuanced understanding of the Việt Nam wars (1945–75), whereby he highlights the complexities of anti-colonial struggle and competing visions of Vietnamese-ness against the backdrop of Cold War politics. It is also significant that he continues beyond 1975, fostering understanding of Việt Nam as a country, not a war. This understanding is further fostered through Woods's snippets on Vietnamese culture — on, for instance, the importance of Buddhism.

His style of writing also attempts to engage with an American audience. In describing the size of Vietnam, he describes it as “slightly smaller than New Mexico” (p. 5). He also uses metaphors like “[a]s at the beginning of a sporting event, most people are supportive and enthusiastic at the outset of a war” (p. 46). While I do not personally find these comparisons and metaphors useful, they might be engaging for its intended audience.

I would not recommend this text for use in a specialist class on Vietnamese history. Its brevity has its limitations. For example, Woods' history of Việt Nam is ethnic-Vietnamese (*kinh*) centric. There is little room in his narrative for the Chams in the fourteenth

century, or the *montagnards* during the Việt Nam wars. Its narrative is a limited one.

More importantly, the author of *The Story of Việt Nam* has failed to keep up to date with the latest scholarly developments in Vietnamese history. A majority of his references are from works written prior to 2000. For instance, George Dutton's 2006 monograph on the Tây Sơn would have made Woods' text less *kinh* centric, and led to the inclusion of alternative narratives addressing regional differences in Vietnamese history. This approach would, in turn, have deepened his analysis of the Second Việt Nam War, and given historical context to the development of new religions like the Cao Đài in southern Việt Nam (p. 45).

While this is a minor point, there are many errors in the Vietnamese diacritics in *The Story of Việt Nam*, and the text uses the Wade-Giles system of romanization from Chinese despite the change of academic convention to the *pinyin* system. On page 9, there are at least three errors: Van Lăng, An Duong, and Cỗ Loa, which should have been Văn Lang, An Dương, and Cỗ Loa. A mixed use of the *pinyin* Shihuangdi, and the Wade-Giles Chao-T'ò on the same page (p. 10) is also slightly confusing. Such minor errors plague the text, which would benefit from more polish.

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