

These criticisms should not detract from the fundamental importance of Stewart's work. By drawing our attention to the Special Commissariat for Civic Action, a crucial institution through which the Ngô Đình Diệm regime endeavoured to engage the rural inhabitants of the Republic of Vietnam in the state-led revolutionary movement, Stewart opens promising avenues for future research. The impact of Civic Action cadres' activities on the lives of villagers at the local level, for instance, might be a rewarding subject for further investigation. Stewart's consistent view of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime as highly autonomous, dictating the nature of its engagement with its own citizens, and often at odds with American interests also makes his book a welcome contribution to a new historiography in Vietnamese studies — one built on the extensive use of Vietnamese archival sources and a keen focus on the agency of Vietnamese actors.

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Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands. By Bradley Camp Davis. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017. xiii+266 pp.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a new political system emerged in Southeast Asia, one grounded in the nation-state and in

colonial rule. Dynastic polities like that of Vietnam confronted the challenges of this system before their eventual collapse. Historical research on the period thus inevitably addresses this pattern of politico-economic change, in a context shared by the history of colonialism in Southeast Asia. *Imperial Bandits* covers this period as it unfolded in Vietnamese history.

Bradley Davis's book treats the Black Flag rebellion in southern China, participants in which took refuge in the highland region of northern Vietnam. Davis traces the interaction of the Black Flags with the Nguyễn dynasty and with the French. He contends that the violence inflicted on the northern highland region grew out of the effort of the imperial Vietnamese state and the French to control the region through the Black Flags' activities.

In order to understand the situation and the interaction among these three parties, the book draws on a range of archives, mostly located in France and Vietnam. Using sources in Vietnamese, French, classical and modern Chinese, and Han-Nom, Davis deploys a variety of sources and languages uncommon in research on Southeast Asia.

Research on the colonial period in Southeast Asia largely depends on documents from European archives. It usually reflects the worldview of the elites. To overcome this problem, working with a combination of indigenous and colonial documents has become a standard practice in historical scholarship on Southeast Asia. Davis adheres to this practice. The book combines material from French colonial documents with material from Nguyễn documents. Nevertheless, *Imperial Bandits* is an ambitious book, one that looks beyond Nguyễn-French interactions. The author includes the voices of the Qing and the Black Flag in his book. *Imperial Bandits* thus embodies and showcases an alternative research method, one that goes beyond the standard combination of vernacular and Western-language sources. The author's mastery of classical Chinese brings the voice of the Qing dynasty into the story and allows Davis to take his inquiry beyond the borders of Vietnam and into China.

The book is structured to reflect the range of languages and sources on which it draws. In his introduction, entitled "Imperial

Bandits, Cultures of Violence, and Oral Traditions”, the author starts with an anecdote from Yao elders, concerning violence occasionally inflicted upon ethnic people in the highland region of northern Vietnam. The anecdote becomes the background for the larger story of how violence and the Black Flag became the core concern of the book. The first chapter, on “Opium and Rebellion at High Altitudes”, then begins with an intensive discussion of the concepts and the terms “bandit” and “violence”. The author also introduces the actors who figure in the book to the reader, ranging from various rebel groups from southern China to the Chinese and Vietnamese mandarins who shaped state policy towards the highland region. The opium economy and the control of mines in the highland region that contributed to the power of the Black Flags are discussed in this chapter, too.

Grounded in French documents, the second chapter, on “Commerce, Rebellion, and Consular Optics”, shifts the narrative from the highland region to the French, whose authority was centred on the Red River Delta. The story in this chapter focuses on suspicion among the French of the Vietnamese court in Hué concerning its collaboration with the Black Flags. It culminates in open conflict and French armed encroachment into Tonkin.

“Imperial Bandits and the Sino-French War”, the third chapter of the book, draws on Chinese documents to discuss the conflict between France and the Qing dynasty for control of the highlands, a conflict that created the “border” between China and Vietnam. The book’s fourth chapter, “Borderline, Resistance, and Technology”, begins with the establishment of the Protectorate of Tonkin in 1883, which saw France become the new master of the Black Flags. Violence still prevailed in the highland as a means of political control.

In the conclusion of Davis’s book, “Flags in the Dust”, the narrative returns to the contemporary period. It treats the ways in which various sets of memories of and discourses on Black Flags were constructed during the Cold War, when Vietnam and China became socialist countries.

The variety of archival resources and languages of which it makes use enables *Imperial Bandits* to push the limits of historical

research on Southeast Asia, especially as it relates to the study of borders. It overcomes the dichotomy between native and European viewpoints as these are embedded in historical sources. *Imperial Bandits* is a book with a special concern with violence and political change. Whereas the core story looks at the relationship between the centre and the periphery, the book leaves open the question of how ethnic minorities in the highlands of Southeast Asia have reacted to changing conditions. In the future, I anticipate more attention to this issue, incorporating the voices of ethnic groups in this region.

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Singapore's Permanent Territorial Revolution: Fifty Years in Fifty Maps. By Rodolphe De Koninck. Cartography by Pham Thanh Hai and Marc Girard. Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. viii+154 pp.

After almost fifty years of observation, a country in a state of permanent territorial revolution is how Rodolphe De Koninck has come to describe Singapore. An updated version of his 1992 and 2008 atlases, this book benefits from the assistance of cartographers Pham Thanh Hải and Marc Girard. Like its predecessors, it opens with the hypothesis that the perpetual territorial transformation on the part of the post-independence Singapore state, whether consciously or not, subjected its population to the need for the constant reinvention of topophilia — the “affective bond between people and place” (Tuan 1974, p. 4). It has thus rendered the nation itself as the only possible unit of territorial allegiance for Singaporeans. De Koninck suggests that the narrative of a land-scarce but ambitious nation fuels this permanent (re)production of space.