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Mythbusting Vietnam: Facts, Fictions, Fantasies. Edited by Catherine Earl. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018. xi+234 pp.

On the front cover of this attractive and reasonably priced paperback is an image familiar to anyone who has visited Vietnam: a propaganda billboard showing a man in construction gear and a woman, textbook and blueprints in hand, standing confidently against a backdrop of factories and power plants. These people, of course, do not exist. They are idealized representations of one of Vietnam’s defining national myths: the narrative of unceasing progress, development and modernization.

This book, and particularly the introductory and concluding chapters by Catherine Earl, convincingly argues that understandings of Vietnam have been shaped by such pervasive myths, not just

around economic development and reform (chapters 4 and 7) but also around gender norms (chapters 2 and 3) and dichotomies such as formal/informal (chapter 5), public/private (chapter 1) and rural/urban (chapter 6). Despite its title, the starting point of this book is not to simply debunk these myths or to sort out the ‘fact’ from the ‘fantasy’. Instead, Earl takes a different tack. As she explains in the introduction, the goal of the collection is to engage with these myths, to treat them as ‘real’ and powerful and to explore the work that sometimes conflicting knowledge claims do in shaping not just perceptions of Vietnam but also lived Vietnamese realities.

The book is divided into three sections—the first titled “Facts”, the second “Fictions” and the third “Fantasies”—and seven chapters, which are interdisciplinary in scope and each addressing a particular myth that circulates largely unquestioned in scholarly and popular discourse on Vietnam. In the first of these sections, Marie Gibert (chapter 1) uses a study of Ho Chi Minh City’s alleyways and shopping malls to challenge the idea that a clear distinction can be drawn between private and public space in Vietnam, while Minna Hakkarainen (chapter 2) employs a feminist rereading of the Confucian classics to argue that the emergence of restrictive norms around female behaviour has little to do with the texts themselves and more with neo-Confucian texts published from the seventeenth century onwards. Finally, Philip Martin’s contribution (chapter 3) draws on ethnographic observation and interviews with middle-class men in Hanoi to push back against the generalization that Vietnamese men defend traditional norms; instead, he finds among his interviewees a profound ambivalence towards shifting gender roles.

The second section consists first of a contribution by Vladimir Mazyrin and Adam Fforde (chapter 4) that seeks to repudiate the myth that Vietnam closely followed the Soviet model. Rather, they argue that Vietnam’s Communist Party took some guidance from its Soviet counterparts but frequently went its own way, particularly with the advent of Doi Moi reforms in the 1980s. In the next contribution, Nguyen Thi Hong-Xuan and Catherine Earl (chapter 5) use interviews conducted with rural-to-urban migrants in Ho Chi

Minh City to deflate official myths and misconceptions around informal migration. Pushing back against prevailing expectations, they argue that migrants demonstrate tremendous ingenuity in overcoming barriers to work, housing and medical services, often by means of informal social networks. Finally, Ashley Carruthers and Dang Dinh Trung (chapter 6) challenge the cultural dichotomy between 'rural' and 'urban' Vietnam using interviews from Quang Nam province to challenge the conventional characterization of rural people and rural areas as uncivilized and rustic, and to explore how return migration from cities is creating new forms of urbanity in rural Vietnam.

The third section consists of a single chapter by Fforde (chapter 7), which tackles the myths that have emerged and circulated around Vietnam's Doi Moi reforms, such as the notion that it was implemented in a single stroke in 1986 rather than germinating through local initiatives and incremental 'fence-breaking' activities over the course of the 1980s. Most pointedly, he notes that these misconceptions have taken on an aura of authority through their repetition in prestigious, peer-reviewed publications. This chapter is followed by a conclusion from Earl that neatly encapsulates some key themes from the volume, such as the existence of competing knowledge claims and the persistent power of overarching narratives about modern Vietnam.

The editor should be applauded for putting together such a diverse collection of essays, reflecting not just different academic disciplines but also perspectives from the policy and development sectors. In total, she and the other contributors raise urgent and compelling questions about the power and pervasiveness of myths that swirl around contemporary Vietnam and scholarship thereof. As such, the book offers strong potential as an instructional text, especially for an advanced undergraduate or graduate seminar on Vietnamese studies. While the individual chapters should be of interest to scholars in different subfields (political economy, migration, gender, etc.), I would strongly suggest that the volume be approached as a cohesive whole, since much of its value lies in the excellent work that Earl

has done in framing the collection. For anyone who would like to understand where the myths that swirl around modern Vietnam come from, how they are reproduced over time and how eventually they may be challenged, *Mythbusting Vietnam* is required reading.

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Musical Minorities: The Sounds of Hmong Ethnicity in Northern Vietnam. By Lonán Ó Briain. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xxi+208 pp.

This is an important ethnographic contribution regarding the performing arts of the Southeast Asian Massif and its upland ethnic minority residents. Focusing on the music-making of an ethnic minority group in Vietnam, and based on three years of meticulous fieldwork—the permissions for which are challenging to acquire, especially for the northern borderlands where this book is based—Lonán Ó Briain is to be commended for this carefully documented account.

Three vignettes set the stage for this book and draw us into its highly readable and enjoyable ethnographic style. The first introduces the reader to the author heading off on his motorbike to the Vietnamese Institute for Musicology in Hanoi. Here, he joins an audience of visiting American tourists observing a series of musical pieces. After the lowland Vietnamese melodies are completed, a musical number is performed on a Vietnamese instrument called the *sáo mèo*, which Ó Briain later finds out is a modified version of a Hmong reed pipe known as the *raj nplaim*. He also finds out that Vietnamese scholars only know one piece to play on it, called “Hmong Pay Deference to the Party”—that is, the Communist Party.

This story is picked up again in chapter 2, where Ó Briain outlines how lowland Vietnamese musicologists have sought to research the