

international (Western or otherwise) legal culture which oils that market machinery. This probability supports the claim that economic transformation brought about by capitalism (admittedly, with a number of variants) will make the world more homogeneous in outlook and interests, thus reducing the probability of international conflict.

On the whole, *Vietnam and the Rule of Law* is a good source book on recent developments pertaining to legal reform in Vietnam, more than sufficient for the general reader who does not want long-drawn-out and in-depth academic analysis. One minor point: questions and comments on the papers presented at the conference often make interesting reading and are invaluable contributions from non-presenting participants. These contributions reflect the mood of the conference of which the presenters are only a part. As such, including questions and comments in the published record of the conference may appear to be the natural thing to do. On the other hand, for the sake of clarity and neatness of the book, most writers and editors would have had the papers revised to take into consideration the questions and comments. Whether it is better to adopt this approach, or to leave the original papers intact and publish the questions and comments as appendices to the papers is moot. A compromise may be to publish revised papers, the questions and comments, and to note that the latter have been taken into account in revising the papers. Perhaps this is a point for editors of proceedings of future conferences to consider.

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***Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity.* By D.R. SarDesai.** Second Edition. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992. 192 pp.

The first edition of this book was published in 1988 by Paramilla and Co., New Delhi, under the title *Vietnam: Trials and Tribulations of Nation*. Its bibliography was updated and a chapter on the Cambodia question and U.S.-Vietnamese relations added when its current edition was published by Westview Press in 1992.

In less than 200 pages, SarDesai sketches Vietnamese history from its ancient beginnings to 1991. This one-volume history of modern Vietnam would have been a welcome contribution to the public had the author succeeded in bringing us "an objective history of the modern period in

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the perspective of its long historical past”, and in redressing the “persistent bias in most of the western accounts” on Vietnam.

The book provides a chronological narrative of political events of the modern period, including an introduction of earlier Vietnamese history. The first two chapters deal with Vietnam’s ethnicity, geography, and history before the arrival of the French. Chapter Three discusses the French conquest of Vietnam. The next chapter, on the nationalist movement, includes short introductions of national heroes from Hoang Hoa Tham to Ho Chi Minh and ends with the Geneva settlement of 1954. Chapters Five and Six deal with the Second Indochina War, and the following two chapters are devoted to Vietnam’s domestic and foreign policies after 1975. The book ends with a chapter on Cambodia issues and U.S.–Vietnamese relations.

Part of the problem with this book comes from its structure. Since it has neither an introduction nor a conclusion, and events are narrated without much analysis, the reader is almost lost in the swamp of events, until they read the last page “About the Book & Author”, where they are told that “nationalism, even more than communism, fuelled the recent struggle against France, the United States, and China”, an assertion that is not new. Basic questions, such as how did Vietnamese feelings of group separateness and of ethnic affiliation develop, what were the main events marking the different stages, how did the Vietnamese define themselves in the context of the Sino–Vietnamese, Franco–Vietnamese, and American–Vietnamese conflicts, and what were the different characteristics between them, are not raised nor answered in the book.

The book contains a considerable number of factual errors. For example, on page 3:

For most of their history, the Vietnamese used Chinese ideographs for writing. Since the 17th century the Vietnamese have employed a system of writing developed by a Jesuit missionary.

Firstly, Chinese and Nom writing systems were replaced by *quốc ngữ* not in the seventeenth century, but in the twentieth century. Secondly, and more importantly, the author completely ignores Nom characters which were created by the Vietnamese in the twelfth century, as it was non-existent “for most of their history”. The appearance of Nom, which literally means “southern characters”, which is well known to most scholars on Vietnam, does not gain the author’s attention. This is particularly curious, when the author’s main theme was Vietnamese national identity, and one can hardly think of anything more revealing and significant than a writing system that was created by a specific people to express their views and feelings in their own way.

A statement on the seventeenth century North–South conflict is even more misleading: “A military stalemate was eventually reached [between the Trinh and the Nguyen]. In 1672 a durable peace was worked out by China. The territory was partitioned” (p. 28). If true, this could be seen as a precursor of the seventeenth parallel of twentieth century Vietnam; but unfortunately it was not. The consensus view about the seventeenth century North–South conflicts is that the Trinh gave up their efforts after seven unsuccessful military campaigns against the Nguyen. There is no evidence that China played any part at all in the conflict.

SarDesai’s lack of understanding of Vietnam is particularly evident in the way he refers to place names. On page 2, he applies the terms Bac Viet, Trung Viet and Nam Viet well before the seventeenth century North–South conflict, when the South — Nam Viet — to which SarDesai refers, was still a part of Cambodia, and today’s central part was regarded as the “south”. In fact, the terms the author uses such as Bac Ky, Trung Ky and Nam Ky are not even those of the nineteenth century. Similar mistakes on place names are too many to mention, but a particular one deserves attention: the author keeps using “Annam” and “Annamese emperor” instead of “Vietnam” and “Vietnamese emperor” (p. 20), to discuss events in the late 1880s. This is a mistake that would not have been made had the author only read carefully a few pages of Woodside’s book *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*. Annam was both an anachronism and ultra-Chinese in usage, and was no longer officially used by China after 1804.

While the author claims to write “an objective history”, no Vietnamese sources are used, nor are Chinese sources. It would be interesting to know if one could redress “persistent bias in most of the Western accounts”, when one uses Western sources oneself. Although the bibliography includes a work published after 1989, the main body of the sources listed pre-date 1980. It is not surprising, therefore, that the accounts of history contain a few clichés based on conventional Confucian historiography, such as the idea that the Ly dynasty “set up an elaborate apparatus to promote the Confucian cult at the court”, and “the principle guiding the government was Confucian” (p. 21). This view had long been challenged by the view that the Ly was essentially non-Confucian, with a surprising degree of informality at court. It is not surprising, either, that on page 14, the author wrongly describes Ly Bi, a Vietnamese Chinese who led a revolt against the Chinese in the sixth century, as a person from Thai Binh province, which was not mentioned in Vietnamese history until 1890. In short, Vietnamese history as perceived by scholars in the past twenty years is basically not reflected in SarDesai’s book.

Specialists on modern Vietnam could perhaps give more specific

comments on SarDesai's treatment of the modern period. A glance at the chapter "International Relations", for example, would lead the reader to question whether the author has considered the collapse of the Soviet Union. There is not a word about the events that took place in Eastern Europe, not to mention any observation of their consequences for Vietnam. The normalization of China-Vietnam relations since 1989 is similarly absent. That would be perfectly understandable if the author had ended his account in 1988. But when he does give details of the Cambodia issue in 1991, one begins to question why the author chose to include certain issues and leave out others of at least equal importance.

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