



Vietnam History: Stories Retold For A New Generation

Hien V. Ho, Chat V. Dang

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For English readers wishing to learn more about Vietnamese history and culture, the choices are abundant. However, while countless memoirs have been written by American combatants or civil participants about their unique experiences during the Vietnam War, an informative, enjoyable English text about the History of Vietnam is still a rare encounter. Able to peruse French, English, and Vietnamese writings, the authors have committed themselves to produce a book with abundant illustrations that addresses select aspects of Vietnamese history and culture for the new generations. There is no intent to refight old battles or to appeal to cultural pride, just eye-opening, entertaining pieces of knowledge about a country that deeply impacted America. Each of the authors may have shown a certain professional bias. The surgeon (Dang) uses a more dissecting and analytical approach in his treatment of complex topics (e.g. reviewing the whole Vietnam history in the first chapter) or national heroes (e.g. General Tran Hung Dao, who vanquished the Mongols). On the other hand, the pediatrician (Ho) tends to choose younger, lesser heroes (e.g. Lady Trieu instead of the famous Trung Sisters), notable either for their precocity (e.g. Ky Dong who became Gauguin's friend) or their exceptional position at a turning point of history (e.g. Little Prince Canh who met Thomas Jefferson and Queen Marie Antoinette in Paris at a period when revolutions occurred in the US, France and Vietnam). A few chapters use original sources: old French documents pertaining to the conditions of Vietnam in the 17th century when the country was first exposed to the West and particularly to the Christian religion, and in the second half of the 19th century when Vietnam was falling prey to French colonialism. The book concludes with an assessment of the recent adaptation of the Vietnamese diaspora to its new life in America.

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