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Introduction by Thomas Maddux

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, Emeritus California State University Northridge

Christopher Goscha's latest study, *Vietnam: A New History*, reflects the culmination of a number of earlier studies on Vietnam and Southeast Asia that demonstrate his orientation toward studying and writing about Vietnam and its neighbors through an historical perspective that is not excessively shaped by the known results of the twentieth century. In over a dozen publications Goscha has explored the interactions of Vietnam with its neighbors, the French colonial occupation, the impact of the Cold War, and decolonization on Southeast Asia.¹ Goscha's studies include the Vietnamese wars after 1945, but his writings focus more on the political and cultural transformations and conflicts that shaped Vietnam and its neighbors from their pre-colonial past and their interactions with each other as well as with the major powers that participated in the colonization period and the twentieth-century conflicts.²

The reviewers are unanimous in their overall praise of Goscha's study. "It is impossible in a short essay such as this," Haydon Cherry remarks, to do justice to the narrative richness, interpretative innovation, and moral purpose of this important work." Tuong Vu agrees that Goscha "skillfully weaves together new insights from recent transnational studies of Vietnamese history without losing the focus on the Vietnamese as the makers of their own destiny." Goscha's book "offers a profoundly new perspective," Vu concludes, as "Vietnam emerges as a diverse and complex country full of contradictions." Charles Keith applauds Goscha's book as a "landmark scholarly achievement" building on recent studies and making many contributions not only to the pre-colonial and colonial periods but especially to Vietnam's decolonization struggle from 1945 to 1975.

In his introduction Goscha emphasizes that the history of Vietnam is not just a story of the Vietnamese reacting to the imperial powers and the Cold War antagonists, China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Instead, Goscha asserts that the experience of French colonialism and the Cold War shaped modern Vietnam but Vietnam's relations with other Asian empires as well as its own colonial efforts also influenced the process. Goscha also stresses that there were many competing visions of Vietnam that were advanced by religious and political groups in addition to the ultimate success of the Communists and he explores these groups without prejudging the results. (6) In the first two chapters, Goscha explores the history of Vietnam before the arrival of French colonialism and addresses the issue of when modern Vietnam began and rejects the traditional view that the French initiated the modernization of Vietnam. Goscha notes that "I have intentionally left open the precise timing of modernity's birth in Vietnam rather than insisting that 'modern' Vietnam only emerged from 1858 onwards. This makes room for multiple modernities, colonial grafts and wider connections that the Franco-centric approach misses." (8) The reviewers are not unanimous in their judgement of Goscha's emphasis on this issue. As Keith points out, Goscha rejects this "Eurocentric periodizations of Vietnam's modern history. Goscha shows that pre-colonial Vietnamese history was the product of interactions between a number of discrete empires including Chinese empires further north, non-Viet empires like the Cham further south, maritime empires from other parts of Asia and beyond, and competing Vietnamese empires. The migrations and exchanges of these imperial encounters produced modern Vietnam's ethnically and religiously diverse culture." Vu also endorses Goscha's stance on the issue, noting that the Franco-centric approach omits too many contributors of modernity to Vietnam such as the Chinese influence in the second attempt to colonize Dai Viet in 1407-1428. Peter Zinoman, however, suggests that although Goscha "underlines repeatedly throughout the course of his narrative" historical

¹ For Goscha's publications, see his webpage at <https://cgoscha.uqam.ca/>

² Goscha did focus on the first Indochina War and the emergence of the Communist state in North Vietnam in *Vietnam: un état né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

continuities between the “pre-colonial and colonial eras,” the author actually presents the “singularly modernizing force of colonialism” in “Goscha’s careful attention to changes that occurred under conditions of colonial rule in areas as diverse as language, education, administration, economics, demographics, elite politics, rural life, urban culture, civil society, gender relations, and the development of the fine arts. Like it or not, the book makes a strong case for the colonial origins of Vietnamese modernity.”

In the pre-colonial period before 1858 Goscha focuses considerable attention on the period from 1802 to 1858, which brought the unification of different regions. However, he puts more emphasis on the effort of the Nguyen dynasty to build an empire that would have a substantial impact on new areas and peoples such as the Khmer kingdom and upland areas. Keith also points out how this Nguyen imperial state shaped the modern Vietnamese state but also “would rule in partnership, albeit an unequal one, with the French colonial administration in most of Vietnam until the mid-twentieth century. From the perspective of the country’s non-Viet peoples, French colonization and American intervention were arguably less significant than the inexorable expansion of ethnic Vietnamese culture and political rule into their lives Vietnamese colonial projects were as crucial to Vietnam’s modern history as foreign ones.”

Goscha evaluates the French colonial period in four chapters and Cherry and Keith conclude that Goscha has successfully enhanced the perspective of earlier studies in developing the complexity of the French impact. Cherry emphasizes how Goscha not only develops the economic changes in Vietnam during the French occupation but also evaluates the emergence of reformism in Vietnam from Asian sources and the “diverse strands of Vietnamese political engagement” including those who joined the French, others who strove for gradual reform of the colonial system, and those who resisted the French from nationalist and communist perspectives. Keith also praises Goscha’s analysis of the “many new Vietnamese political ideas and movements” as well as his persuasive shift to evaluate these leaders and movements as not bound to fail in competition with Ho Chi Minh and the Indochinese Communist movement “but as alternative visions for modern Vietnam whose eclipse was not only contingent, but perhaps even temporary.”

The reviewers are particularly enthusiastic about Goscha’s treatment of the wars of decolonization, as the author connects the French and U.S. struggles with Ho Chi Minh and his Communist forces as one long conflict. Vu praises Goscha for rejecting the perspective of the current rulers in Hanoi and presenting a “radically revisionist history” of a far more complex story on the past of Vietnam including the wars after 1945. Zinoman stresses the importance of Goscha’s contribution in building on previous studies in the past two decades that challenge the dominant view of Ho Chi Minh as the popular leader of a Vietnamese nationalist movement that was destined to win the two wars against the Republic of Vietnam in South Vietnam and its French and U.S. supporters.³ Praising Goscha for writing “an epic revisionist narrative” on both the history of Vietnam and the post-WWII period, Zinoman emphasizes the “superb depth, breath and originality” in Goscha’s evaluation of the struggles over colonization. The author’s “conceptualization of the First Indochina War as a fight for sovereignty between embryonic states is the most clear and persuasive treatment of this issue in English.” Cherry endorses Goscha’s focus on the role of the two competing Vietnamese states with “two different visions of the form that that a modern independent Vietnam should take.” Goscha clearly outlines the determination of Ho Chi Minh and his leaders to win independence and build a Communist state even if it required a high price from a brutal land reform campaign in 1953, repression of critics, and a “brutal war of attrition” to

³ For some of the recent studies that have shifted scholarly perspectives on the Vietnam conflict, see Philip Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Tuong Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

capture the south. Repression continued after Hanoi's victory in 1975 over the defeated Vietnamese in the south until 1986 when the Communist Party leadership shifted to more successful economic policies. Keith agrees with the other reviewers on Goscha's analysis of the wars and his "darker, portrait of Vietnamese Communism that most other histories of the war."

The strengths of Goscha's account are also evident in the absence of substantial criticism from the reviewers. Zinoman, for example, questions Goscha on the issue of modernization and the French impact discussed above, and also suggests that his treatment of the American intervention after 1965 in two chapters versus eight on the colonial period is out of balance with respect to the relative impact of both on Vietnam. Vu and Cherry note a "few minor facts or interpretations" that merit revision. Keith regrets Goscha's "silence on the subject of the Vietnamese diaspora" since Vietnamese in the U.S. have re-established relationships through "family networks, remittances, tourism, investment, and retirements in Vietnam."

In his response to the reviews, Goscha responds to their disagreements on some issues such as the modernity question but directs most of his comments to reaffirm his central focus on the Vietnamese people, their complex history, and their interaction with other people and empires in their long engagement in Southeast Asia. Goscha is pessimistic to some extent about whether readers and reviewers will accept his decentering of the French and Americans. He is also unwilling to accept the endorsement of his book as an important new "radical revisionist" interpretation on the Vietnam wars and contending Vietnam regimes in the South and North. Goscha insists on viewing all of the participants as objectively as possible on their accomplishment and failures, noting that "exceptionalism" does not apply to any of the involved governments. Goscha's response and the reviews should not be missed by any students and scholars interested in Vietnam's history and its struggle for independence in the twentieth century.

Participants:

Christopher Goscha is Associate Professor of International Relations in the history department at the Université du Québec à Montréal, where he teaches courses on the Vietnam War, International Relations, Imperial and World History. He received his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in 1987 and received his Ph.D. from the *Ecole pratique des Hautes études* at the Sorbonne in 2001. He recently published *Vietnam, Un Etat né de la guerre* (Armand Colin, 2011). He is currently revising this book for publication in English as the *Road to Dien Bien Phu: The State that Made Modern Vietnam* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

Haydon Cherry teaches Southeast Asian history at Northwestern University. He writes about the social and intellectual history of modern Vietnam. He recently co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12:3-4 with Claire Edington (University of California, San Diego) on the state in Vietnam.

Charles Keith is Associate Professor of History at Michigan State University. He is the author of *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). He is currently writing a book about the experiences of Indochinese colonial subjects in France during the colonial era.

Tuong Vu is director of Asian Studies and professor of Political Science at the University of Oregon. Vu is the author or editor of four books and numerous articles, including *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (2017), *Paths to Development in Asia: South Korea, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia* (2010), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (2009), and *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis* (2008). He is writing on the relationship between revolutionary states and international politics, and on the historical processes of imperial and state formations in East Asia.

Peter Zinoman is Professor of History and Southeast Asian Studies at University of California, Berkeley. His most recent book is *Vietnamese Colonial Republicanism: The Political Vision of Vũ Trọng Phụng* (University of California, 2014). He is also the founder and Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.

Review by Haydon Cherry, Northwestern University

Vietnam: A New History is a major scholarly achievement. It is the best history of Vietnam now available that focuses primarily on the modern period.¹ In his acknowledgements, Christopher Goscha writes that “over the last fifty years, a wide range of scholars has produced an exciting body of scholarship,” and that in this book he is “standing on their shoulders” (ix). *Vietnam: A New History* is based on a critical synthesis of a prodigious range of books, articles, scholarly talks, unpublished doctoral dissertations, and works soon to appear. It is impossible in a short essay such as this to do justice to the narrative richness, interpretative innovation, and moral purpose of this important book. The essay that follows therefore draws attention to some of the ways in which Goscha’s critical engagement with historiography beyond Vietnamese history has shaped the “new history” of Vietnam that he has written.

Vietnam: A New History begins in prehistoric times, with the earliest settled agricultural communities in the Red River plains; and it ends in the immediate past, with a critical open letter from prominent army officers, professors, teachers, priests, monks, and Communist Party members to the Vietnamese Communist Party on the eve of its Party Congress in January 2016. But the book does not tell the story of a single, unified Vietnam that spans this period from end to end. It relates, instead, the histories of “the many different Vietnams” that were imagined, constructed, contested, and dissolved, mainly after 1800: dynastic and monarchical, Buddhist, Catholic, French republican, nationalist, communist, highland and lowland, among others. This is not the history of a singular, stable, continuous, and ideologically monolithic Vietnam. It is, instead, the history of “a series of interlocking forces and people, occurring and acting at specific points in time and space, each generating its own range of possibilities and eliminating others at the same time” (6). This is evident in Goscha’s account of early Vietnamese history, which shows how what it meant to be Vietnamese emerged over a long period of time from encounters with Chinese empires in the north, from the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1912 CE); with Cham and Khmer politics and peoples in the south; Portuguese and French Catholic missionaries; highland peoples in the north and the west; and between Vietnamese speakers in the north and the south. When Nguyễn Phúc Ánh founded the last Vietnamese dynasty in 1802, the empire that he ruled was linguistically, ethnically, religiously, and administratively plural.

Vietnam: A New History casts new light on the French conquest of that empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. In his ground-breaking book, *Imperial Meridian*, Christopher Bayly argued that British expansion between 1780 and 1830 was made possible by contemporary crises in the Ottoman, Persian, and Mughal empires, and the British imposition of authoritarian rule and modern economic institutions abroad.² David Todd has recently suggested that the French also experienced an “imperial meridian” between 1814 and 1870. Between those years, the French adopted a policy of collaboration with the British meant to enhance their position abroad.³ Goscha contends that the French desire to extend and defend Catholicism and free trade after 1848 fatally coincided with instability in Dai Nam, caused by the administrative elaboration and consolidation of the Nguyễn state begun under the Minh Mạng emperor.

¹ Other general histories include Keith W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Ben Kiernan, *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Both of these recent books give much greater attention to the period before 1800 than does *Vietnam: A New History*.

² C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989).

³ David Todd, “A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870,” *Past & Present* 210 (2011): 155-186.

“When the French attacked Vietnam as part of a renewed European assault on China during the Second Opium War (1857-60),” Goscha writes, “the Nguyen state not only remained a politically divided house, but it was also a socially exhausted one” (62). Instead of an expanding industrial Occident confronting a decadent and declining Orient, this interpretation emphasizes the conflict between two reforming and centralizing empires.⁴

Goscha also fundamentally reorients our understanding of French colonial rule after it was established. In 1949, Fernand Braudel published his classic work, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, in which he analyzed the connected histories of the Mediterranean littoral and its hinterland.⁵ Denys Lombard later argued that Southeast Asia formed “another Mediterranean,” when understood to include the provinces of southern China as well. “The Braudelian approach has the great merit of proposing a *global vision*,” Lombard wrote.⁶ Historians, Lombard thought, should seek to understand the synchronisms and layered networks that span this region and connect it to places further afield.⁷ In several earlier publications, Goscha has self-consciously employed this approach to reframe our understanding of Vietnam during the colonial period, by emphasizing the hitherto unexplored connections between Vietnamese, Laos, Khmers, Thais, and Chinese under French colonial rule.⁸ This reframing is also evident in the four chapters in *Vietnam: A New History* that address the period from the French conquest to the August Revolution of 1945. Goscha succinctly discusses the economic changes under French colonial rule—the laying of railways lines, the cutting of roads, the excavation of canals, the building of ports, and the stringing of telegraph lines—that made the colonial exploitation of French Indochina possible. But these innovations also bound the different *pays* of French Indochina together, gave it a new physical and lived reality, and made possible the movement of people and ideas both within and beyond the French condominium. *Vietnam: A New History* is therefore attentive to the Asian sources of Vietnamese reformism, the diverse intellectual origins of youthful radicalism, the role of international communism in shaping Hồ Chí Minh’s early history, and the global Buddhist, Catholic, and other confessional communities that shaped religious belief and practice in French Indochina. This sensitivity to the regional and global circulation of people and ideas makes Goscha sympathetic, as few earlier historians have been, to the diverse strands of Vietnamese political engagement during the colonial period, from those who allied themselves with the French, such as the journalist Phạm Quỳnh; to those who worked for gradual reform within the colonial system, such as Bùi Quang Chiêu, Nguyễn Phan

⁴ France was barely an industrial nation when it first attacked what would become Vietnam. France industrialized much more slowly than did Britain in the nineteenth century and remained a largely agricultural country. Indeed, agriculture was a drag on the overall economy and after 1870 the growth of total factor productivity halved from 1 to 0.5 percent. See the entry on Modern France in Joel Mokyr ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949). This work was later published in English as Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper Collins, 1972-1973).

⁶ Denys Lombard, “Une autre Méditerranée dans le Sud-Est asiatique,” *Hérodote* 88 (1988): 186. Emphasis in the original.

⁷ Denys Lombard, “Networks and Synchronisms in Southeast Asian History,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26:1 (1995): 10-16. For a spectacular application of this approach, see Denys Lombard, *Le carrefour javanais: Essai d'histoire globale* (Paris: Editions de l'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1990).

⁸ See, among other works, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*, rev. ed. (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2012); *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution (1885-1954)* (London: Routledge Curzon, 1999) “Pour une histoire transnationale du communisme asiatique,” *Communisme* 1:1 (2013): 21-46; “Widening the Colonial Encounter: Asian Connections inside French Indochina During the Interwar Period,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43:5 (2009): 1189-1228.

Long, and the Bảo Đại emperor; to those who actively opposed French rule from nationalist or communist perspectives, such as Nguyễn Thái Học and Hồ Chí Minh, respectively. Goscha's portrayal of colonial society is less 'ambiguous,' than it is multiple-layered and complex.⁹

The complexity of colonial Vietnamese society informs Goscha's analysis of the violent wars of decolonization that followed the Second World War. On 28 July 1946, former Chairman of the Provisional Government of France Charles de Gaulle gave a speech at Bar-de-Luc, in northeastern France, in which he referred to the "drama of the thirty-years war, which we have just won."¹⁰ De Gaulle saw the First World War, the interwar years, and the Second World War as one long period of conflict, similar to the Thirty Years War – a series of wars fought in Central Europe between 1618 and 1648. In 1948, the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill published *The Gathering Storm*, the first volume of his celebrated and widely-read history of the Second World War. In the preface, Churchill declared that his history would, following de Gaulle, "cover an account of another Thirty-Years War."¹¹ More recent historians of twentieth-century Europe, such as Ian Kershaw, have also suggested that the First and Second World Wars can be understood as parts of a single historical process, rather than as discrete events.¹² In *Vietnam: A New History*, Goscha views the "First" and "Second" Indochina Wars—the "French" and "American" wars—as aspects of a single long war of decolonization, from the outbreak of conflict between the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and France in December 1946, to the fall of Saigon in April 1975. This war of decolonization was primarily fought between different Vietnamese states, with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and its allies on one side, and the Associated State of Vietnam, and its successor, the Republic of Vietnam, and its allies, on the other side. Each of these states and their supporters had different visions of the form that a modern, independent Vietnam should take. It is one of the achievements of *Vietnam: A New History* to take those different, competing visions seriously, rather than to see the Vietnamese states involved as mere 'puppets' involved in a 'proxy war' between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Vietnam: A New History shows how Communist state-building in a time of war led to brutality and oppression. In *Coercion, Capital, and European States, 990-1992*, the historical sociologist Charles Tilly emphasized the importance of war in European state making.¹³ Goscha employed this insight in his important book *Vietnam: un état né de la guerre*.¹⁴ The approach informs his analysis in this new history. Vietnamese Communists were prepared to pay a very high price to gain and maintain power. Hồ Chí Minh and his allies sought not only national independence, but the remaking of Vietnamese society as a communist utopia. The Communists brutally suppressed or physically eliminated their political opposition, and remorselessly coerced millions of others as they waged war against France, the State of Vietnam, and

⁹ On the putative ambiguity of French colonization in Indochina, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémy, *Indochine, la colonisation ambiguë, 1858-1954* (Paris: Découverte, 1995). This pioneering but uneven work later appeared in English translation as *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

¹⁰ De Gaulle had abruptly resigned as head of the government six months earlier. His successor, Vincent Auriol, the first president of the Fourth Republic, would preside over much of the long war in Indochina and the beginnings of anticolonial unrest in North Africa. On De Gaulle, see Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler, 1945-1979* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

¹¹ Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1948), xiii.

¹² Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914-1949* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 9.

¹³ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, 990-1992*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992).

¹⁴ See Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: un état né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

the Republic of Vietnam. In 1953, following the advice and example of Chinese Communists, the DRV began a violent campaign of land reform. The campaign “destroyed the ‘feudal’ landowning class and redistributed over 2 million acres of land (800,000 hectares)” (292). But it did so at enormous social, economic, and psychological cost. The reforms led to the execution of between 5,000 and 15,000 landlords and other class enemies at the hands of party cadres, and the suicides of “hundreds, possibly thousands” of others (294). Popular resistance to the land reform in Quỳnh Lưu was so strong that the Communist Party had to send in the 325th Division of the People’s Army of Vietnam to suppress a major peasant revolt. Hồ Chí Minh and Võ Nguyên Giáp publicly apologized for the ‘errors’ of the land reform campaign and launched a “Rectification of Errors Campaign”—a public and “highly ritualized act of ideological contrition” (295), which did little to undo the harm to those who had suffered most. As Hồ admitted, the party “could not bring the dead back to life” (295). But it could harass, defame, exile, and smear scholars, poets, writers, philosophers, and other intellectuals who criticized it in the pages of the literary journals, *Nhân Văn* (Humanism) and *Giai Phẩm* (Masterworks). The communist party largely created the National Front for the Liberation of the South, *Mặt Trận Dân Tộc Giải Phóng Miền Nam*, (NLF) in December 1960. The front established bases among villages in the south, intensified propaganda against the government of the republic, initiated land reform, operated a police force and militia, collected taxes, and organized women, children, youth, and peasants into associations loyal to the front. “This is how civil war resumed indirectly in the south,” Goscha writes (308). When the Republic of Vietnam did not collapse after the assassination of Ngô Đình Diệm, a group in the DRV leadership led by Party Secretary Lê Duẩn “began to push for direct though gradual [DRV] military intervention in the south in order to topple the Republic of Vietnam, create a coalition government with the NLF/VWP [Vietnam Workers’ Party] in it, and unify the whole country under the [DRV] before the United States could send in troops” (319). After those troops arrived, the DRV embarked upon a brutal war of attrition. Of the 3.3 million people who died in the war between 1965 and 1975, according to Goscha, 98.3 percent of the deaths were Vietnamese (329). When Saigon fell to communist forces on 30 April 1975, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam had achieved a Pyrrhic victory.

The end of the war did not, however, bring an end to violence and suffering in the newly ‘liberated’ south. The conquering Communist forces set about building a state that ruled over Vietnam, from Hà Giang to Cà Mau. They extirpated the bureaucracy and armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam, root and branch. More than one million Vietnamese underwent some form of re-education, sometimes spending years undertaking forced labor in prison camps. Northern Vietnamese replaced southerners at all levels of the state and party. The new state took control over the southern economy, resettling cultivators, instituting central planning, and collectivizing agriculture, inflicting enormous suffering and deprivation on a population already shattered by war. Authorities of the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam “closed or seized an estimated 50,000 Chinese businesses in the south.” Goscha estimates that “in all, Chinese in the south lost an estimated two billion dollars in the late 1970s due to the nationalization of their property, businesses, and industries” (379). The southern population was subjected to a relentless barrage of propaganda and ideological reform as the party-state took control of schools, universities, mass organizations, and religious institutions. In 1979, Vietnam went to war yet again when it invaded Democratic Kampuchea to overthrow the hostile and brutal Khmer Rouge regime. Goscha sees the conflict emerging from a “breakdown in two communist relationships, one between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians, the other between the Soviets and Chinese,” which “intersected and eventually destroyed the Eurasian communist bloc at its Indochinese faultline” (387). As a consequence of the endless war and bloodshed, Goscha reports that between 1975 and 1995, 839,228 people left Vietnam. A further “two hundred thousand Vietnamese individuals are estimated to have died trying.” “This internal hemorrhaging of modern Vietnam was proof that national reconciliation had been a failure,” Goscha writes (386).

Yet *Vietnam: A New History* ends hopefully. In 1986, the Vietnamese Communist Party turned toward a policy of economic Renovation (*Đổi Mới*). The opening of the Vietnamese economy has vastly improved the material well-being of Vietnam’s citizens, and some constraints on freedom of assembly and expression have been relaxed. But corrupt and

inefficient state-owned enterprises play an important role in the economy and the state continues to suppress its critics and opponents. Goscha sees potential in the Vietnamese tradition of republicanism, which has its roots in the writings of early twentieth-century figures such as Phan Chu Trinh, Phan Bội Châu, Phan Văn Trường, Nguyễn Thế Truyền, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Tường Tam, and Nguyễn An Ninh. This republican tradition provides intellectual resources for criticism of communist rule and for alternative forms of governance. “What remains to be seen,” Goscha writes, “is to what extent activists, entrepreneurs, professionals, middle-class urbanites, farmers, and defenders of civil society will remain as a cacophony of disparate voices or whether they will come together to remake Vietnam or to make yet another Vietnam” (461).

It would be churlish to focus on small errors of fact in a work that revises so many prevailing interpretations of Vietnamese history. But any work of critical synthesis will be limited by the body of scholarship it draws upon and the flaws inherent in that scholarship. In Chapter Three, for example, Goscha considers the fate of the Cần Vương, or Save the King Movement, and its most important leader, Phan Đình Phùng. Goscha writes that “in 1896, Phan Đình Phùng died of dysentery. ... With this loss, the Cần Vương movement disintegrated. ... The French allowed Hoàng Cao Khải and his followers to dig up Phan Đình Phùng’s grave, burn his corpse, and shoot it out of a cannon as a symbolic gesture designed to discredit the royalist resistance and intimidate those who would oppose the new rulers,” meaning the French (93). It is evident from notes 35 and 36 (478) that Goscha has relied on David Marr’s book, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* for his account of this episode.¹⁵ On page 68 of that book, Marr writes, “Phan himself died of dysentery, probably on January 21, 1896 ... Nguyễn Thân, following traditional precedent for ‘bandits,’ managed to find Phan’s grave, burn the corpse, and fire the ashes out of a cannon.” Marr cites Trần Văn Giàu, *Chống Xâm Lăng*, vol. 3, 232-238; and Đào Trinh Nhất, *Phan Đình Phùng*, 264-282 as the sources for his narrative.¹⁶ Unfortunately, neither of these two Vietnamese-language works give any indication of the primary sources that support their accounts of the death of Phan Đình Phùng. Such primary sources as do exist tell a somewhat different story. A report to the Governor General of Indochina from 1896 indicates that after Phan Đình Phùng died, he was buried. His body was later exhumed and sent to Hà Tĩnh for identification. Once it had been identified, the body was cremated and the ashes scattered in the wind, in accordance with an imperial decree and “Vietnamese custom.”¹⁷ There is no mention in the extant primary sources of the ashes being shot out of a cannon; of a deliberate attempt to desecrate Phan Đình Phùng’s body; or the use of that desecration to “discredit the royalist resistance” or to intimidate “those who would oppose the new rulers” (93). This error is a very small matter in so broad-ranging a work as *Vietnam: A New History*. But for too long historians of Vietnam have relied uncritically on the sometimes questionable and ideological scholarship produced in that country. There is a pressing need to revisit not only older interpretations of the Vietnamese past, but also the empirical or documentary basis of many of those interpretations.

One of the things that makes *Vietnam: A New History* such a genuinely new history is the way that it employs insights from historiography beyond Vietnam. By critically engaging with the works of Christopher Bayly, Denys Lombard, Charles Tilly, and historians toiling in other fields, Christopher Goscha has freed himself from the antinomies that have shaped the otherwise parochial historiography of modern Vietnam: tradition/modernity, colonial/anti-colonial, collaboration/resistance, nationalism/communism, orthodoxy/revisionism, among others. No historian will be able to

¹⁵ David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 68.

¹⁶ Trần Văn Giàu, *Chống Xâm Lăng: Lịch Sử Việt Nam từ 1858 đến 1898* [Opposing Invasion: A History of Vietnam from 1858 to 1898], vol. 3 (Hanoi: Xây Dựng, 1957), 232-238; Đào Trinh Nhất, *Phan Đình Phùng, 1847-1895* (Saigon: Tân Việt, 1957), 264-282.

¹⁷ “Rapport à M. le Gouverneur Général. Situation générale de l’Annam pendant le mois de janvier 1896,” Gouvernement Général de l’Indochine 64209, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence.

ignore his reframing of important issues and the conclusions he draws. *Vietnam: A New History* is elegantly written, deeply humane, and lambent with historical insight. It should be read by anybody who cares about Vietnam.

Review by Charles Keith, Michigan State University

Christopher Goscha's *Vietnam: A New History* is a landmark scholarly achievement. Until very recently, the study of modern Vietnamese history was crippled by lack of access to relevant archives, a dearth of scholars trained in necessary languages, and the powerful influence of the political debates of the Vietnam-War era on scholarship about the country. This made it effectively impossible to write a general history of Vietnam; forgettable early attempts to do so reflected a kind of *reductio ad bellum* approach that considered and interpreted all the rest of Vietnamese history only in a narrative relationship to the war.¹ The first histories of the war, the scholarly foundation for studying the American political and military dimensions of the conflict, were deeply bereft of meaningful area studies knowledge about Vietnam, and tended to reflect a prevailing political assumption that Communism represented the national will of the Vietnamese people, and thus that the war was inherently unwinnable for the United States and its Vietnamese allies.² More recent histories of the war hinted at the possibilities that Goscha's book achieves in spectacular fashion. Mark Lawrence's *The Vietnam War: An International History*, published in 2008, synthesized new research in the field of Cold War history on the military and diplomatic dimensions of the war that emerged from newly-accessible Vietnamese, American, Soviet, and Chinese archives.³ And Mark Bradley's *Vietnam at War*, published a year later, was the first general history of the war in English that foregrounded its social and cultural dimensions in Vietnam itself, reflecting (if itself not fully realizing) the "Vietnam-centric" turn in the field of Vietnamese studies during the decade or so before the book's publication.⁴

The Vietnam War is not Goscha's principal interest in this book, but in my view, his treatment of the subject outpaces all other general histories of the war. This partly because he has benefited from a decade that has seen the publication of numerous groundbreaking studies about Vietnam's wars of decolonization in the fields of international history and Vietnamese studies, not least his own 2011 masterpiece on the First Indochina War and the rise of the Vietnamese communist state.⁵ But far more importantly, the power and credibility of Goscha's treatment of the war (discussed in more detail later) comes from his ability to explain, better than any scholar ever has, the relationship between Vietnam's decolonization and its broader history. *Vietnam: A New History* is only really comparable to two other works.⁶ The first, Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Héméry's *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization* (2009, published in French in 1994 as *Indochine: la colonisation ambiguë*), was the first synthesis of scholarship, most of it French, about the core of modern Vietnamese

¹ These include Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983) and D.R. Sardesai, *Vietnam: Past and Present* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

² The most influential of these include Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991) and George Herring, *Vietnam: America's Longest War*, first published in 1979.

³ Mark Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ Mark Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵ Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: un état né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

⁶ Another major history of Vietnam, recently published, appeared too late for me to take it into account. See Ben Kiernan, *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

history: the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the hundred years of colonial rule (roughly the 1850s until the 1950s) in what France called “Indochina,” later the nations of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.⁷ Goscha’s book also draws heavily from this scholarship, but unlike Brocheux and Héméry, he considers the colonial era (the focus of about half of his book) in the context of both the pre-colonial era and decolonization; his is, in short, a true general history of modern Vietnam, which Brocheux and Héméry’s book is not. The other work that is roughly comparable to Goscha’s is Keith Taylor’s exhaustive *A History of the Vietnamese* (2013).⁸ The two make for a valuable study in contrast. Taylor is a specialist of pre-colonial Vietnam, and his book contains a degree of detail and complexity about most of Vietnamese history that Goscha does not attempt: readers seeking a comprehensive account of the pre-colonial era would be better served by Taylor’s work. But Taylor’s treatment of the far larger body of scholarship on the modern era, necessarily brief and schematic to begin with given his broad chronological sweep, is also clearly influenced (and arguably limited) by his overt sympathy for the Vietnamese non-communist cause during the war, a subject that he has discussed openly in both scholarly and public forums in recent years.⁹ Taylor’s work is far from the only work to reflect the deep staying power of the war’s political debates in recent scholarship: Bradley’s aforementioned 2009 work received sharp criticism in an H-Diplo roundtable from several top “Vietnam-centric” scholars (including Keith Taylor) for what they saw as an overly simplistic and sympathetic assessment of Vietnam’s communist regime and its leadership.¹⁰ How Goscha’s book will fare in the minefield of Vietnam War studies is an open question: very well, in my opinion, but he will probably not please everybody. But *Vietnam: A New History* is an achievement that far transcends Vietnam War studies. First, it makes it clear that it is impossible for scholars to study the Vietnam War (still the main focus of most historical scholarship about the country) outside of the broader arcs and patterns of Vietnamese history. Second, and in my view more importantly, *Vietnam: A New History* shows us that it is not only possible, it is imperative not to reduce the richness and complexity of modern Vietnamese history to the subject of war.

In the early pages of *Vietnam: A New History*, Christopher Goscha outlines two basic interpretive claims that immediately distinguish his book from previous efforts to write a general history of modern Vietnam. First, he argues that the nation of Vietnam was not a fully formed and self-evident cultural and political entity when it experienced French colonial rule and the intervention of Cold War superpowers: the experiences of colonialism and the Cold War *made* modern Vietnam. However, the making of modern Vietnam was not simply the result of these confrontations with ‘the West’: it was an historical process rooted in the country’s longstanding relationship to other Asian empires as well as in the colonial projects of pre-colonial Vietnamese states themselves. Goscha’s second major claim is that the history of modern Vietnam is, in fact, the history of multiple and competing visions of ‘Vietnam,’ not just of the communist ideas and movement that would triumph in the wars of decolonization. “The history of Vietnam,” Goscha writes, “like any other place in the world, is a series of interlocking forces and people, occurring and acting at specific points in time and space, each generating its own range of possibilities and eliminating others at the same time” (6). More than any other history of Vietnam, Goscha’s book takes very seriously the panoply of political and socio-cultural

⁷ Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Héméry, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁸ Keith Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁹ See notably “How I Began to Teach about the Vietnam War,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43:4 (Fall 2004): 637-647, as well as “Robert Buzzanco’s ‘Fear and (Self) Loathing in Lubbock,’” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (2006): 436-452.

¹⁰ The roundtable, published on 23 May 2011, is available here: <https://issforum.org/ISSE/PDF/ISSE-Roundtable-2-7.pdf>.

forces—whether religions such as Buddhism and Catholicism, French colonial republicanism, the Vietnamese monarchy, non-communist political groups, and “non-Viet” Vietnamese—whose visions of state and society are as crucial as Communism to understanding Vietnam’s modern history. The result is a work that, to echo Prasenjit Duara’s influential formulation, rescues Vietnam from the totalizing claims and silences of a (principally communist) national history and offers in its place a history of the “multiple territorial forms, ethno-cultural heterogeneity, and diverse colonial experiences—Chinese, French, and Vietnamese—that make the history of Vietnam so fascinating” (4).

In the book’s first two chapters, Goscha makes a powerful case that ‘modern’ Vietnam begins not with the arrival of French colonial rule, as Brocheux and Héméry claim, but with the revolutionary nineteenth century imperial projects of the Nguyễn dynasty (Vietnam’s last), if not earlier. From the perspective of other fields in Asian history, the tendency in Vietnamese studies to date ‘modernity’ with the French arrival is wildly anachronistic: few scholars in the fields of Chinese or Japanese studies still abide by the hoary idea that the onset of the Opium War or the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry jolted China and Japan from their feudal doldrums and forced these empires kicking and screaming into the modern world. Scholars in Vietnamese studies have had a more difficult time pushing back against this kind of periodization, because the rise of the romanized Vietnamese script of *quốc ngữ* in the nineteenth century and its eventual displacement of classical Chinese (the bureaucratic language of Vietnam’s pre-colonial imperial states and of much literary and cultural production) and *chữ Nôm* (a demotic script used to represent spoken Vietnamese by means of classical Chinese characters, often adapted) has made it very difficult for scholars of modern Vietnam, trained almost exclusively in *quốc ngữ*, to conduct meaningful research on Vietnam before the mid-nineteenth century. But enough scholarship exists, notably the pioneering work of Alexander Woodside, John Whitmore, and Keith Taylor, as well as more recent work by scholars like Liam Kelley, Li Tana, Choi Byung Wook, Emmanuel Poisson and George Dutton, for Goscha to craft a powerful counternarrative to Eurocentric periodizations of Vietnam’s modern history.¹¹ Goscha shows that pre-colonial Vietnamese history was the product of interactions between a number of discrete empires including Chinese empires further north, non-Viet empires like the Cham further south, maritime empires from other parts of Asia and beyond, and competing Vietnamese empires. The migrations and exchanges of these imperial encounters produced modern Vietnam’s ethnically and religiously diverse culture.

But Goscha’s principal interest in pre-colonial history is the crucial period of the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1802, the Nguyễn emperor Gia Long defeated a thirty-year uprising that had overthrown both Nguyễn rule in modern-day southern Vietnam as well as the rule of the Trịnh clan in modern day-northern Vietnam: the two dynasties, nominally under the authority of the Lê dynasty, had ruled these regions as separate (and vastly different) Vietnamese empires for two hundred years. This event, cast in nationalist historiography as the country’s ‘reunification,’ was in fact an unprecedented experiment in Vietnamese

¹¹ The main works in question are: George Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006); Liam Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005); Emmanuel Poisson, *Mandarins et subalternes au nord du Viêt Nam: une bureaucratie à l’épreuve* (Paris: Miasonneuve & Larose, 2004); Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1998); Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); John Whitmore, *Hồ Quý Ly, and the Ming: 1371-1421* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, Council on Southeast Asian Studies, 1985); Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyễn and Ch’ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng: Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004).

empire-building, as the Nguyễn dynasty attempted to assert its rule over an enormous and diverse territory riven by deep ethnic, religious, and political divisions. The apogee of this effort came under emperor Minh Mạng (rule: 1820-1841), who set into motion an imperial project whose scope and legacies for Vietnam rivaled that of the French “civilizing mission” soon to follow. Minh Mạng replaced what was essentially a federal system of military rule with a strengthened civil bureaucracy that pursued more direct administrative rule, infrastructural and economic development projects, a ‘civilizing mission’ of spreading a renewed neo-Confucian orthodoxy among the empire’s populations, and territorial expansion into ‘non-Viet’ areas, especially the nearby Khmer kingdom and upland areas. The tensions this created were a major reason for the success of the French intervention that shortly followed. But despite the efforts of French officials and later Vietnamese nationalists alike (and many historians after them) to cast the Nguyễn dynasty as ‘feudal,’ the dynasty’s new imperial project had profound consequences for modern Vietnamese history. Not only was it principally responsible for the configuration of contemporary Vietnam’s “geo-body” (to borrow Thongchai Winichakul’s term), the modernized Nguyễn imperial state would rule in partnership, albeit an unequal one, with the French colonial administration in most of Vietnam until the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, from the perspective of the country’s non-Viet peoples, French colonization and American intervention were arguably less significant than the inexorable expansion of ethnic Vietnamese culture and political rule into their lives over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Vietnamese colonial projects were as crucial to Vietnam’s modern history as foreign ones.

The period from the colonial conquest until the Vietnamese Revolution in 1945 is Goscha’s focus in chapters four through seven as well as in part of chapter twelve. In this part of the book, Goscha in many ways picks up where Brocheux and Héméry left off in 1994 (the 2009 English translation of their book unfortunately only superficially incorporates many crucial new works of scholarship on Vietnam’s colonial era written since the mid-1990s). Like Brocheux and Héméry, Goscha casts the colonial era in far more complex terms than the simple rule/repression binary of nationalist historiography (and much Vietnam War historiography, even today). French scholarship on the colonial era is especially strong in the administrative and economic history of Indochina, and Goscha’s well-written synopsis of French infrastructural development (including roads, railways, canals), colonial finance and industry (especially rice and rubber) and the hated monopolies in alcohol, opium, and salt breaks little new ground. But Goscha offers a much more dynamic portrait of the relationship between colonial economic change and cultural change than Brocheux and Héméry. He is far better, for example, at showing how colonialism created and intensified connections between Vietnamese and other Asian populations, both on the Southeast Asian mainland and further afield. The most important of these, which Goscha explored in his seminal work *Vietnam or Indochina?* (expanded and republished in 2012 as *Going Indochinese*) were between Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao populations in French Indochina.¹² ‘Indochina’ was far from just a colonial fantasy: it was a political and economic reality that integrated much of mainland Southeast Asia, and for a time (especially among the Vietnamese), a cultural and political identity rivaling national ones that ironically had powerful continuities with Communist revolutionary identities in Indochina during decolonization. In Indochina, Chinese merchants, Indian moneylenders, Corsicans, Eurasians and dozens of ‘ethnic minorities’ (a term first given meaning in this new colonial political space of fixed and clear borders) mixed with French and ‘Indochinese’ in a multi-ethnic society that makes the idea of ‘Franco-Vietnamese’ colonial society a misnomer. *Vietnam: A New History* is also very strong on cultural and religious change during the colonial era. Goscha draws on recent scholarship to show how colonialism gave

¹² Christopher Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012).

rise to new connections with global communities of faith that transformed Vietnamese religious life. And chapter twelve is a snapshot of how the early-twentieth century break with Vietnam's East Asian traditions set off a process of cultural experimentation and reinvention that spanned the colonial, revolutionary, and so-called 'reform' eras of the 1980s until now.

But the signal achievement of Goscha's survey of the colonial period is his treatment of the era's many new Vietnamese political ideas and movements. For decades, following the lead of Vietnamese Communist historiography and propaganda, scholars tended to cast (and at times still do) Vietnamese nationalism during the colonial and revolutionary eras simply as a modern manifestation of age-old forms of patriotism—the Communist Party, in these accounts, was not a radically new Vietnamese political experiment, but simply the caretaker of a Vietnamese political tradition that had existed for centuries. But Goscha shows how the political, economic and cultural experience of colonialism gave rise to Vietnamese political movements that were, in fact, a seismic break with the past. Moreover, he shows that these new forms of Vietnamese politics must be understood as part of broader regional and global evolutions in political thought and organization. Nationalist luminaries like Phan Bội Châu, Phan Chu Trinh, and Hồ Chí Minh were not simply 'patriots' channeling age-old Vietnamese traditions, they were highly modern products of the seismic effect of Asian radicalism, French republicanism, and global Communism on Vietnamese political thought. The importance of this analytical shift is that it allows Goscha to treat the many other Vietnamese political experiments of the era not as illegitimate ones that were bound to fail, but as alternative visions for modern Vietnam whose eclipse was not only contingent, but perhaps even temporary. Thus the moderate French-allied elite of the colonial era (people like Bùi Quang Chiêu and the Phạm Quỳnh, dominant figures in the world of moderate journalism and colonially-sanctioned politics) were not the 'collaborators' of nationalist historiography, they were participants and believers in a process of colonial reform that became the dominant form of post-colonial nationalism in many parts of the world during decolonization. Likewise, anti-communism did not make other nationalists the lackeys of the French (or, later, the Japanese and Americans); they represented a different but equally legitimate vision of Vietnamese nationhood. Goscha also makes this argument about the Vietnamese monarchy, casting Vietnam's much-beleaguered last emperor Bảo Đại not as a playboy, but as a committed monarch who sought to adapt the Nguyễn monarchy into a viable post-colonial political force (as, again, in fact did happen in many parts of the decolonizing world). Goscha's far more pluralistic portrait of colonial-era politics is crucial for two reasons: not only does it allow for a more complex, nuanced understanding of colonial society, it is the analytical foundation for a much-needed long view of Vietnamese decolonization that establishes the deep political roots of the nation's terrible civil war.

For all of Goscha's many contributions to the study of Vietnam's colonial era (and there are many), he is first and foremost a transnationally and comparatively minded historian of Vietnamese decolonization. No scholar comes close to approaching Goscha's mastery of this subject, which is on full display here. *Vietnam: A New History* differs from past general accounts of Vietnam's wars of decolonization in two fundamental ways. First, it demonstrates better than anybody has how the eruption of war in December 1946 between the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and France, and the fall of Saigon in April 1975, were bookends of a single long war that defies the more typical periodization of the "First" and "Second" Indochina wars (the first one 'French,' the second one 'American'). Second, it casts the war of decolonization not as one between a Communist-led 'nationalism' and its foreign opponents and their Vietnamese allies, but as "a savage war of sovereignties" (221) between competing Vietnamese postcolonial states and their respective international allies. In short, Goscha does not assume the *a priori* legitimacy (and thus the inevitable victory) of the Vietnamese Communist Party; his history of the war is fundamentally contingent on the behavior of Vietnamese actors and on the tumultuous, ever-shifting strategic and military arena of the Cold War.

Resolutely non-partisan, Goscha's treatment of non-communist Vietnamese states, drawing on the path-breaking work of scholars like Ed Miller, François Guillemot, and Philip Catton, is nevertheless far more generous than past general histories of the war.¹³ The short-lived Empire of Vietnam of 1945, the Associated State of Vietnam that grew out of Franco-Vietnamese alliances in the 1940s, the Republic of Vietnam (better known as "South Vietnam"): Goscha casts all of these non-communist states as legitimate manifestations of a vision of modern Vietnamese nationalism that enjoyed popular support and whose leaders sought foreign support first and foremost as a way of advancing their political and economic goals. Goscha does not idealize these postcolonial alternatives to communism, but he replaces well-worn caricatures of the limits and excesses of these regimes with much needed explanations for them. He is also extremely careful not to downplay or excuse the brutalities of America's own 'civilizing mission' in Vietnam, which he rightly casts as principally responsible for untold loss of life and ecological devastation.

Vietnam: A New History also offers a different, and often darker, portrait of Vietnamese Communism than most other histories of the war. Again, eschewing longstanding assumptions about the inherent legitimacy of Communism in Vietnam, Goscha instead seeks to understand how, and at what cost, this revolutionary regime was able to gain and maintain power. Drawing from his own work, as well as from the work of scholars like Tuong Vu, Pierre Asselin, and Lien-Hang Nguyen, Goscha casts the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as a state born out of the radical vision of its leadership and out of the extraordinary exigencies of the war it fought against the French and the Americans.¹⁴ Far before they took power, the leaders of the DRV—HỒ Chí Minh included—were committed internationalists who sought not only the independence of their country but also its total transformation along Marxist-Leninist lines. They were ruthless in eliminating their political opponents, and the state they built exercised an extraordinary degree of control over the thoughts and bodies of its subjects. Contrary to many past accounts, the DRV was not moderate, autonomous, or a reluctant belligerent. In the middle of a total war against the French, the DRV leadership—following the model and advice of Chinese communists—put into a practice a program of land reform in 1953 that resulted in the execution of thousands of 'class enemies.' As happened in China, the DRV regime swiftly crushed a movement of dissent among some of its leading intellectuals a few years later. The DRV was the central force behind the creation and direction of the National Front for the Liberation of the South (*Mặt Trận Dân Tộc Giải Phóng Miền Nam*, better known as the National Liberation Front) that destabilized the Ngô Đình Diệm regime in Saigon in the late 1950s. During the critical period from 1963 until the American intervention in 1965, a militant group at the head of Vietnam's Communist Party (headed by the party chairman Lê Duẩn, still an unknown figure to most Americans) consistently chose to escalate the war in the south as a strategy to preempt an American intervention. And when that intervention came, the DRV leadership committed irrevocably to a war of attrition and never really considered a diplomatic resolution to the war despite the conflict's devastating costs for the people of North Vietnam, whose armed forces suffered over a million casualties in its war against a vastly better-equipped opponent. Like the scholars whose work he draws from, Goscha does not cast Vietnamese communism as monolithic: he pays close attention to the evolution of, and divisions within, the party leadership that, in other circumstances, may well

¹³ Philip Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); François Guillemot, *Dai Viêt, indépendance et révolution au Viêt Nam: l'échec de la troisième voie, 1938-1955* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2012); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013)

¹⁴ Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Tuong Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

have produced a different kind of ‘Vietnamese communism’ or a different outcome to the war. But the ultimate portrait of Vietnamese communism that emerges in these pages is of a regime whose ultimate victory was thanks less to its broad popular legitimacy than to its ability to control—and its willingness to sacrifice—its population for the sake of victory in Vietnam’s civil war.

All historians are the product of their present, and historians of Vietnam are no exception. While *Vietnam: A New History* does not replace old teleologies about Vietnamese Communism with new ones, it is hard to view Goscha’s treatment of the history of Vietnamese Communism as entirely separate from the regime’s history after the end of the war, a period that earlier histories of Vietnam could not really treat as history. Like 1802, 1975 was not really the ‘reunification’ of Vietnam celebrated in nationalist histories: the Vietnamese communist party, like the Nguyễn dynasty, faced the enormous challenge of ruling over lands and peoples that had virtually never been under the rule of a single state (this is even true for the colonial era, when French rule took different forms in different regions and was shared, albeit unequally, with the Nguyễn dynasty). The history of this state-building project, as Goscha shows, is not pretty: it was, in his words, “tragic” (372). The party leadership quickly sidelined its non-communist southern allies, foreclosed the possibility of political debate and dialogue, and quickly expanded the reach and control of the party-state through the state bureaucracy and mass organizations. Forgiveness and reconciliation were not forthcoming: more than one million Vietnamese experienced some form of re-education, which for many former members of the South Vietnamese government and armed forces meant years of imprisonment and forced labor under brutal conditions. Millions more experienced the regime’s ideological projects through the party’s powerful control over educational and religious institutions, as well as the continued expansion of the personality cult of Hồ Chí Minh and other propaganda tools. The party replaced the south’s economic *ancien régime* with an inefficient and disruptive economic model of resettlement, central planning, and collectivization, which further devastated the country’s economy as it struggled to recover from war, as well as demonizing and punishing parts of the southern population (especially ethnic Chinese or Vietnamese of Chinese descent). In 1979, the party’s decades-long dominance over communist parties in neighboring Laos and Cambodia erupted into war, as Vietnam invaded Cambodia and overthrew the hostile (and genocidal) Khmer Rouge. China’s retaliatory war against Vietnam was a failure, but the new U.S.-China partnership isolated Vietnam economically for the next decade or more. During the two decades after the war, over eight hundred thousand Vietnamese fled a country devastated not only by the war, but by communist party rule. The party’s turn in the 1980s towards market reforms has vastly improved the lives of Vietnam’s population, and the gradual relaxation of the revolutionary ideological apparatus has reduced restrictions on speech, assembly, and movement. In some cases, the Party has meaningfully and successfully addressed some of the many pressing public health and environmental challenges that the country faces today. But Vietnam’s economy remains hampered by party control and corruption, especially the huge state-owned industries, and the Party has consistently repressed a growing body of activists calling for further political reform. Goscha sees the tense and uncertain political climate of Vietnam not just as a product of current conditions, but as the contemporary manifestation of a conflict between authoritarianism and republicanism that in many ways defines Vietnam’s modern history. It is in this conflict, still unresolved, that Goscha sees the possibility of another vision of Vietnam emerging alongside the many others that make up the country’s complex history.

Vietnam: A New History is a brilliant, imaginative, and beautifully written synthesis of the literature on modern Vietnam that towers over its predecessors. Goscha quite simply could not have done much more with the resources that are available to him. The only real oversight, in my view, is his silence on the subject of the Vietnamese diaspora. It is admittedly a thorny and sensitive question as to whether to cast global communities of people of Vietnamese origin as ‘Vietnamese’ at all, much less as another ‘Vietnam’ to be considered in the

context of a national history. The grounds for including them in this book, in my view, are the lasting and arguably strengthening relationship between many overseas Vietnamese or people of Vietnamese origin (mostly Americans) and the country of Vietnam today. Family networks, remittances, tourism, investment, and retirements in Vietnam, often encouraged by the Vietnamese government, have, in a sense, partly reversed the exodus from Vietnam during the twenty years after 1975. If and how these connections persist remains to be seen, but a pluralistic history like Goscha's should have taken them into account. But the other things that are not in this book are simply signs of frontiers that the field of Vietnamese studies has yet to cross. Much of the history of postcolonial Vietnam remains to be written: daily life under both northern and southern regimes, urban and economic history, war-era Vietnamese intellectual life, biographies of many critical political and cultural figures – these subjects and many others will attract scholars as research conditions in Vietnam continue to get better (as they hopefully will). Christopher Goscha, as he has been for over two decades, will doubtless be at the forefront of the field as it continues to evolve. But whatever new directions the field takes in the years to come, it will be a long time indeed before somebody writes a general history of Vietnam that is better than this one.

Review by Tuong Vu, University of Oregon

With about 500 pages of text, *Vietnam: A New History* provides a comprehensive yet accessible overview of Vietnamese history aimed at general readership. While the bulk of the book is devoted to the twentieth century, the first 100 pages or so cover Vietnamese history up to that point. In addition, three chapters toward the end of the book breaks the chronology to address specific themes, including cultural change in 'the long twentieth century,' Vietnamese history from the perspectives of ethnic minorities, and the battle for legitimacy between authoritarianism and republicanism.

Throughout the book, Christopher Goscha skillfully weaves together new insights from recent transnational studies of Vietnamese history without losing the focus on Vietnamese as the makers of their own destiny. This deliberate focus makes the book truly stand out among others of the same kind. For too long Vietnamese history has been told merely from the perspective of outsiders, whether they are Chinese, French, or Americans. As Goscha puts it, in such accounts "the history of Vietnam becomes the story of its relationship with—outside powers" (2).

Vietnam emerges as a diverse and complex country full of contradictions. It has been victim to foreign conquests more than once, but its people have also cherished their own imperialist ambitions numerous times in history. It is a single country today with rich myths of national unity supposedly traceable to ancient times, but its population is in fact extremely diverse, its unity recent, and its history full of protracted and savage civil wars. Vietnam's current rulers like to present only one side of those contradictions as if it were an exceptional country born out of foreign resistance and forever united. Many popular foreign authors and influential historians sincerely believe that self-serving narrative, but not Goscha. The book is, therefore, not just a useful survey of Vietnamese history; it is radically revisionist history. Goscha is certainly not the only revisionist historian of Vietnam today. Yet, given the wide and persistent popularity of accounts touting Vietnamese exceptionalism in scholarship for general readers, his book offers a profoundly new perspective.

For specialists of 'modern Vietnam,' the book challenges their normal use of the term and perhaps even their very identity associated with a certain definition of modernity. Goscha takes particular issue with an influential view in historiography that modernity arrived in Vietnam with French colonialism, that is, in 1858.¹ This is, in his words, "the Franco-centric approach" that fails to take into account the Chinese (eventually abandoned) attempt at colonizing Dai Viet during 1407-1428. As he argues, the Ming's rule over Dai Viet is so important because "it provided the Vietnamese with access to some of the most modern gunpowder weapons of the time, a sophisticated bureaucratic model, and a colonial ideology needed for their own thinking and building of a new Vietnam long before the French arrived on the scene" (8). By leaving the periodization open-ended to allow for "multiple modernities," the book breaks down another important barrier in historians' imagination of Vietnamese history.

A possible criticism of the book is its heavy emphasis on political and ideological developments at the expense of material life or culture. Goscha presents a rich analysis of Confucianism, Catholicism, Communism, and Republicanism, but, except for the colonial period, he can give only limited attention to such issues as the patterns of economic changes across time and changes in the lives of ordinary Vietnamese and in their modes of consumption.

¹ Goscha cites, as examples of this historiography: Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hemery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization (1858-1954)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), and his own *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 1995).

This criticism may be unfair since Goscha does not aim for total history.² Still, it would be important and interesting to know, for example, how South Vietnam's close relationship with the U.S. during the Vietnam War left certain legacies in Vietnamese economy and culture, or how the decades of abject poverty under bureaucratic socialism affected the psyche of the average Vietnamese.

There are a few minor facts or interpretations in the book that may benefit from the use of more (in some cases, recent) sources. Is Ho Chi Minh's birth name Nguyen Tat Thanh or Nguyen Sinh Cung? (137). In 1941, Ho did not seek to be the Secretary General of the Indochinese Communist Party. Goscha cites an interpretation by David Marr that "such a visible position at the head of the party would have undermined [Ho's] ability to build up the nationalist front and win over non-communist support" (195). One can question the teleology of this interpretation, but more importantly, there is an alternative explanation of this event which relies not on guessing but on documented evidence. According to Truong Chinh who broached the idea to Ho, Ho told him flatly that as a Comintern official, he might be transferred to work elsewhere on Comintern's order and could not serve in that position.³

Another case concerns the events leading to a referendum in 1955 by which South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem deposed Emperor Bao Dai. Goscha's account relies on Jessica Chapman's work that shows Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother as power-hungry men seeking to oust "the only person who could block them" (289). According to Huynh Van Lang, who happened to witness the sudden emergence of a movement among various political groups to depose Bao Dai, the initiative for his ouster apparently did not originate from Ngo Dinh Diem who may have resisted it.⁴ While one may have reasons to discount this source or any other sources, the relationship between the two men may be more complex than existing sources portray.

Finally, there are a few mismatched or misspelled Vietnamese words that can be corrected in later reprints. On page 101, it should be "quoc dan" (citizens), not "dan quoc" (people's state). On 231, the author means "cong dan" (citizenship), not "dan cong" (labor in public projects). On 197, it should be "Tan Trao," (the place in Thai Nguyen province which was the communist hideout prior to August 1945), not "Than Trao." On 370, the poet's name is Tran Da Tu, not "Tran Da Thu." It should be noted that the misspelling or mismatch of these few words (out of hundreds of accurately translated and spelled Vietnamese words and names in the book) do not at all affect the narrative.

In conclusion, *Vietnam: A New History* will secure Christopher Goscha's reputation as the vanguard historian of this country. What is uncertain is whether, and when, American diplomatic historians and historians in Communist Vietnam are willing to use the book for their courses. One can only hope that they will, sooner or later.

² Goscha's other books do contain substantial detail about the changing material life of Vietnamese during the colonial and early postcolonial periods. Christopher Goscha, *Going Indochina: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2012); Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A State Born of War, 1945-1954* (manuscript in press).

³ Pham Hong Chuong et al, eds., *Truong Chinh Tieu Su* [Biography of Truong Chinh] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2007), 143, citing a typed document titled "Hoi tuong cua dong chi Truong Chinh" [Reminiscences by Comrade Truong Chinh], archived at Ho Chi Minh Institute. See a similar interpretation in William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 256 (Duiker does not cite his sources though). This is not the first time Ho refused taking this position. See Tuong Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 45, 50, 92-93.

⁴ Huynh Van Lang, *Ky Uc Huynh Van Lang* [Memoirs by Huynh Van Lang], vol. 1 (self-published, 2011), 524-527.

Review by Peter Zinoman, University of California, Berkeley

It is difficult to overstate the impact of the wars that devastated Vietnam after World War II on the development of Western-language scholarship on modern Vietnamese history. Because it was born and grew rapidly during the First (1946-1954) and Second (1954-1975) Indochina Wars, academic study of Vietnam's colonial and post-colonial past was profoundly shaped by heated domestic politics surrounding the conflicts. Scholars understood the potential utility of their conclusions as ammunition in the debates then raging about the War. In the academic historiography, these debates pitted left-leaning scholars belonging to what became known as the orthodox school against a range of revisionist challengers.

Led by anti-war scholars, the orthodox school opposed the American intervention, arguing that Hồ Chí Minh's *Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (DRV) was a legitimate and broadly popular leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement. The Communists, in this view, are heirs to an ancient Vietnamese tradition of resistance to foreign aggression. Turning to the other side in the conflict, the DRV's enemies in the South—the leaders of the *Republic of Vietnam* (RVN)—are depicted as corrupt, craven and deeply unpopular puppets of the Americans. Revisionists, in contrast, tend to paint the Stalinist and Maoist features of the DRV in a darker light and to treat anti-communist RVN politicians with greater sympathy and nuance. Ngô Đình Diệm, in particular, has inspired a serious revisionist re-assessment. Revisionists also reject what they see as ham-handed efforts to manipulate understandings of pre-modern history in order to better serve modern political goals.

A critical feature in the evolution of the field over time has been the early dominance of the orthodox viewpoint. This may be seen in the most widely assigned college-level teaching texts virtually all of which lean in a strongly orthodox direction.¹ On the other hand, it is fair to say that adherents of revisionism, in one form or another, have dominated original research in the field for the past two decades. In addition to myself, members of this loosely knit academic cohort (not all of whom identify themselves as such) include Pierre Asselin, Philip Catton, Haydon Cherry, Gregory Daddis, Olga Dror, Sean Fear, Alec Holcombe, Charles Keith, Liam Kelly, Kevin Li, Van-Nguyen Marshall, Edward Miller, Lien-Hang Nguyen, Martina Nguyen, Jason Picard, Bret Reilly, Gerard Sasges, Nu-Anh Tran, Luu My Trinh, Alex-Thai Vo and Tuong Vu. The immediate ancestors of this group are Keith Taylor, who embraced a full-throated revisionism as early as 2004² and, Christopher Goscha who, despite his relative youth, has established a leading voice in the field since his first paradigm-busting publication appeared in 1995.³

Goscha's new magnum opus *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam* represents a ground-breaking move in the revisionist challenge to orthodoxy. While other revisionists have taken on orthodox texts and arguments directly,⁴

¹ George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor 1987), Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), and Mark Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (New York: Oxford, 2012).

² Keith Taylor, "How I Began to Teach About the Vietnam War," *Michigan Quarterly* (Fall 2004).

³ Chris Goscha, "Annam and Vietnam in the new Indochinese Space, 1887-1945" in Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov, eds., *Asian Forms of the Nation* (London: Curzon, 1995): 93-130.

⁴ Alec Holcombe, "The Role of the Communist Party in the Vietnamese Revolution: A Review of David Marr's *Vietnam: State, War and Revolution (1945-46)*," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11:3-4. (2016): 298-364, Brett Reilly, "Review of *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* by Fredrik Logevall," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11:1 (2016): 145-151, Peter Zinoman "Vietnam-Centrism, the

Goscha crafts and presents, with minimal historiographical interruption, an epic revisionist narrative. Rejecting implicitly the ‘resistance-to-foreign-aggression’ trope, Goscha emphasizes how the Vietnamese, throughout history, have been both victims and perpetrators of colonialism. He challenges the pervasive myth that Vietnamese Catholics collaborated unconditionally with the French colonial project. He refuses to reduce the many strains of the anti-colonial nationalist movement to Hồ Chí Minh’s Communist Party (ICP). Instead, he chronicles a rich political landscape marked by contending nationalist ideologies. Consistent with a growing trend in the field,⁵ he devotes two chapters (4 and 5) to the rise and fall of local forms of political republicanism. Goscha downplays the importance of the colonial-era ICP which is usually given a starring role in orthodox narratives that depict a preordained Communist victory. And his treatment of Vietnamese communism does not shy away from Hồ Chí Minh’s flirtations with Stalinism and Maoism, detailing the Vietnamese movement’s intimate, long-term links to Moscow and Beijing.

While Goscha’s treatment of the post-WWII era continues to pursue a revisionist agenda, its more remarkable features are its superb depth, breadth and originality. Goscha covers the struggles over decolonization, one of his core areas of research specialization, with unmatched knowledge and authority. His conceptualization of the First Indochina War as a fight for sovereignty between embryonic states is the most clear and persuasive treatment of this issue in English. And his attention to the social history of the conflict—a critical humanist preoccupation doggedly pursued in much of his work—is unprecedented in its scope and empiricism. Goscha’s treatment of the complex tangle of southern politics during the 1940s and 1950s is another unique contribution and major strength of his book.

Goscha’s analysis of the later civil war, including the disastrous American intervention, is excellent but comparatively brief; the topic attracts two chapters compared to the colonial era, which takes up eight. This raises an obvious question about the periodization of Vietnamese history promoted by the book’s temporal structure and the unexpected way it divides its attention between the colonial and post-colonial eras. On the one hand, the uneven structure employed here makes sense since the eighty-year colonial era lasted four times as long as the Second Indochina War. But on the other hand, few existing studies favor, to such a large extent, the transformative importance of the colonial era over the horrific violence and destruction of the Vietnam War era. Indeed, a reverse pattern applies in most books, with a quick chapter or two on colonialism and decolonization up to the mid-1950s followed by a larger handful of chapters on the “American years” of the 1960s and 1970s. The relative neglect of the American era in *The Penguin History* recalls Al McCoy’s comparison of the modest long-term impact of the Japanese occupation in parts of Southeast Asia to “villages of bamboo houses toppled by a strong tropical typhoon in insular Southeast Asia, utterly flattened but quickly reassembled.”⁶ Is it possible that the bloody but brief Vietnam War was less historically transformative to Vietnamese society than the incremental and often imperceptible cultural, social, and economic changes initiated during nearly a

“Orthodox” School and Mark Bradley’s Vietnam at War,” H-Diplo Roundtable, Vol. XII, No. 22 (2011)- Mark Philip Bradley, Vietnam at War: 26-40

⁵ Peter Zinoman, *Vietnamese Colonial Republicanism: The Political Vision of Vũ Trọng Phụng* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), Martina Nguyen, “The Self-Reliant Literary Group (Tự Lực Văn Đoàn): Colonial Modernism in Vietnam, 1932-1941” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley 2012, Gerard Sasges, *Imperial Intoxication: Alcohol and the Making of Colonial Indochina* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017).

⁶ Alfred McCoy, “Introduction,” in Alfred McCoy, ed., *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation*, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monograph Series, No. 22 (1980): 8.

century of colonial rule? While not saying so explicitly, *The Penguin History* advances this case through its basic structural framework.

On another important question of periodization, Goscha makes an explicit argument that French colonialism should not be seen as coterminous with the beginnings of Vietnamese modernity. “I have intentionally left open the precise timing of modernity’s birth in Vietnam,” Goscha explains in his Introduction, “rather than insisting that ‘modern’ Vietnam only emerged from 1858 onwards. This makes room for multiple modernities, colonial grafts and wider connections that the Franco-centric approach misses” (xxxv). This argument hinges on the presence of important historical continuities between the pre-colonial and colonial eras—continuities that Goscha underlines repeatedly throughout the course of the narrative. It also satisfies an older nationalist political imperative in the field, most famously discussed in John Smail’s 1962 essay on the technical challenges and ethical dynamics of writing “autonomous history.”⁷ Here, however, the French era-heavy focus of the narrative seems to run against the grain of Goscha’s disavowal of colonial modern. Significant pre-colonial precedents may be found for some features of the colonial era. But the singularly intense modernizing force of colonialism is strongly conveyed in Goscha’s careful attention to changes that occurred under conditions of colonial rule in areas as diverse as language, education, administration, economics, demographics, elite politics, rural life, urban culture, civil society, gender relations, and the development of the fine arts. Like it or not, the book makes a strong case for the colonial origins of Vietnamese modernity.

But more importantly, *The Penguin History* represents the most concerted and impressive effort to date to place before an academic audience as well as an educated general readership the revisionist interpretation of modern Vietnamese history. With the appearance of Goscha’s narrative, opponents of the orthodox school have an important and high profile new champion.

⁷ John Smail, “On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2:2 (1961):72-102.

Author's Response by Christopher Goscha, Université du Québec à Montréal

As I was reading these most thoughtful reviews of my book, not yet sure how best to respond, my ears pricked up when I heard from across my kitchen table the voices of Ken Burns and Lynn Novick in an interview on PBS about their upcoming new documentary series on the Vietnam War (September 2017). The interview reminded me of the remarkable degree to which this controversial war in American history is still very much with us. “More than 40 years after it ended,” Burns and Novick wrote in a separate PBS press release, “we can’t forget Vietnam, and we are still arguing about why it went wrong, who was to blame and whether it was all worth it.” The producers declare that the time has finally come to have a national conversation about Vietnam, about America’s wartime experience in Vietnam.¹

When I began working on *Vietnam. A New History* (Basic Books, 2016)² a decade ago, I realized that my future readers in the United States would ultimately want me to zoom in on the ‘war’—the Vietnam War. As an esteemed journalist who had covered the Vietnam War, Stanley Karnow understood this better than I did. His highly influential, Pulitzer Prize-winning, and recently reprinted *History of Vietnam* is in fact all about the American War. So was the highly influential PBS documentary based largely on it, *Vietnam: A Television History*.³ Other Pulitzer-prize winning authors of Vietnam, Frances Fitzgerald, Neil Sheehan, and my good friend, Fredrik Logevall, all moved their stories towards the Americans and their war in Vietnam.⁴ Of course, they have every right to focus on America’s Vietnam; but as a new PBS documentary series on the Vietnam War looms on the horizon and with it another big conversation on America’s Vietnam⁵, I believe that my initial attempt to push the history of Vietnam and its earlier wars beyond the function of ‘setting the stage for the American War’ was naïve. I think, too, that my attempt to situate the Vietnamese past in World History, and not just the American version of it, was just as illusory.

Watching the interview with Burns and Novick also rekindled the fear, which has been confirmed in some of the reviews here, that *Vietnam. A New History* will inevitably be judged on whether it conforms to one of the two reigning schools of thought the first PBS documentary brought into the open—those of the Orthodox and Revisionists partisans. As readers of H-Diplo know, Orthodox scholars are critical of the reasons justifying American involvement in Vietnam, such as the containment and the domino theories; they see Vietnamese communists like Ho Chi Minh as seething nationalists; and speak of American policy towards Vietnam as a series of ‘lost opportunities’ for attaining peace stretching from Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman’s missed meetings with Ho in 1919 and 1945

¹ Public Broadcasting System (PBS), “THE VIETNAM WAR, A New Film By Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, to Air Fall 2017 on PBS” (press release), 6 December 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/about/blogs/news/the-vietnam-war-a-new-film-by-ken-burns-and-lynn-novick-to-air-fall-2017-on-pbs/>.

² First published in 2016 by Penguin/Random House as *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam*.

³ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam. A History*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books; 1997) and Hannah Gourgey, “Vietnam: A Television History,” at <http://www.museum.tv/cotv/vietnamate.htm>.

⁴ Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2014); Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); and Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009 reprint, first published in 1972).

⁵ I have since seen a pre-screening of the documentary at Dartmouth College, which only convinces me that there will be another big debate on ‘America’s Vietnam.’

to Lyndon Baines Johnson's decision to go to war against Ho's Vietnam in 1964.⁶ Revisionists go in the opposite direction. They see Ho as a committed Stalinist of the worst kind. According to them, his nationalism served as a brilliant disguise for turning Vietnam into another twentieth-century totalitarian regime. For Revisionists, Vietnam was a "necessary war," essential to stopping the further spread of world communism into Asia.⁷ Like their Orthodox counterparts, the revisionists also have their 'missed opportunities': Had, for example, the Americans not supported the overthrow of their ally at the head of the Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, in 1963, then a politically and economically liberal, non-communist Vietnam would have emerged as in South Korea today. The war would have been won, Vietnam saved—at least the South.

What troubled me at the start of this project—and still does as I frame my responses here—is that readers have become so accustomed to seeing the Vietnamese past framed in one of these two narratives, pushed heavily by Hollywood, countless op-eds, and so many scholars, that this is largely what they expect.⁸

Some Questions

However, Burns and Novick said something in the PBS interview that struck me as new. They said that they had crafted their upcoming documentary on the American Vietnam War through a 'series of questions.' I take this to mean that they structured their documentary's core epistemology around open-ended questions rather than imposing their verdict on the war's meaning. Such an approach admittedly appeals to me as I try to contextualize my responses to my H-Diplo reviewers and readers, for I tried to do something similar, though much more modestly, in writing this 'new' history of Vietnam. I used questions to help me write a 'Vietnam' that did not seek to impose an interpretation on the reader, whether orthodox or revisionist in design. I continually asked myself how one might tell the story of modern Vietnam without reducing it to an account of 'France's Vietnam,' followed by the 'making of America's,' and at the same time hoped to avoid bending Vietnam's 'pre-Western past' to meet the needs of the Western-centered approach. Nor did I want to transform 'it,' 'Vietnam,' into a Vietnam-centric, fiercely nationalist history, which, at least for the powers that be in Vietnam today, still dominates. Not everyone agreed with this decision: In April of 2017, the Vietnamese government banned my book for "deforming" (*xuyen tac*) national and revolutionary history.⁹

⁶ Marilyn Young, *Vietnam Wars 1945-1990* (New York: Harper, 1991) among many others.

⁷ Michael Lind, *Vietnam: The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 2002) and Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) among many others.

⁸ Orthodox and Revisionist scholars also systematically present 'Vietnam' as a set of competing 'lessons' to be applied to the American present and America's wars. Compare Fredrik Logevall and Gordon Goldstein, "Will Syria be Obama's Vietnam?" *The New York Times*, (7 October 2014) to Mark Moyar, "An Iraqi Solution, Vietnam Style," *The New York Times* (21 November 2006). Most recently, see: Kevin Boylan, 'Why Vietnam was Unwinnable', *New York Times* (22 August 2017), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/opinion/vietnam-was-unwinnable.html> and Thomas Bass, 'America's Amnesia', *The Mekong Review* 8 (2017) at <https://mekongreview.com/americas-amnesia/>. And on it goes, around and around.

⁹ Ho Chi Minh City Mail Center, No. 345 ND-KHNC, 4 April 2017, "Letter of Information about Violated Products: *Vietnam. A New History*" which declares: "Not allowed to import according to Government Decree Luat Xuat Ban so 19/2012/QH13 cua Quoc Hoi, diem D, khoan 1, dieu 10." For those who read Vietnamese, see: http://moj.gov.vn/vbpq/lists/vn%20bn%20php%20lut/view_detail.aspx?itemid=28213. I ended negotiations with one Parisian publishing house to translate my book when the editor intimated to me that I needed to present the French colonial period in positive ways.

Some of the first questions I asked sought to decenter how the history of Vietnam and the Vietnam Wars have traditionally been framed. What would happen, I wondered, if a history of modern Vietnam were neither ‘American-centered’ nor ‘Vietnam-centric’? What happens to Vietnamese history and the wars for Vietnam if we remove them entirely from the ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Revisionist’ schools of thought?

One way I tried to decenter this question was by asking what we might gain from adopting a more Braudelian approach to understanding this country’s past from antiquity to the present, including the thirty years’ war over Vietnam and its Indochinese neighbors, Laos and Cambodia. What could World History and Globalization studies *à la* Jürgen Osterhammel, Kenneth Pomeranz, or even a Bruce Mazlish¹⁰, for example, show us that Vietnamese-sourced research or traditional diplomatic or even state-of-art the ‘multi-archival’, ‘multi-language’ ‘international history’ cannot? One of the bolder decisions I made in de-centering *Vietnam A New History* was to cast Vietnamese history in the context of the country’s position on the eastern side of the Eurasian land continent and as a country-gateway opening to three oceans—the Pacific, South China, and Indian Oceans. Anyone who teaches World History as I do will know that I borrowed this analytical framework in part from World Historians like Jerry Bentley, the iconoclast anthropologist Jack Goody, and above all the authors of the remarkable *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart* manual.¹¹ Teaching led me to more questions at the core of this book than anything else.

Questions of periodization also interested me in crafting this book. What, for example, would happen if we broke with the standard periodization governing Vietnamese history, French colonialism in Vietnam, *and* the American war(s) over Vietnam? Do we really have to assume, for example, that ‘modernity’ began magically with the moment of ‘colonial contact’ with the West—1798 for Egypt, 1842 for China, and 1858 for Vietnam?¹² What happens to our understanding if we let go of the French colonial moment of ‘1858’? Western colonialism did indeed introduce much that was ‘new’ to Vietnam, and served as a conduit for accelerated, integrative global change (one of the core definitions of ‘Globalization history’). But by setting up 1842 or 1858 as the magical moments at which China and Vietnam suddenly became ‘modern’ is to miss a much more complicated and, in the end, fascinating history. To borrow Pomeranz’s phrase, by insisting on a French ‘colonial moment’ to explain all that is modern in Vietnam, we set up a ‘Great Divergence’ between a ‘before 1858 Vietnam’ and an ‘after 1858’ one.¹³ This choice in periodization evacuates all sorts of other pre-existing modernities as well as misses all sorts of continuities and grafts that run straight ‘through 1858.’

¹⁰ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Bruce Mazlish, “Comparing Global History to World History,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28:3 (Winter 1998): 385-395.

¹¹ Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jerry Bentley, “Cross-cultural Interactions and Periodization in World History,” *The American Historical Review* 101:3 (June 1996): 749-770; and *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart* at <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/worlds-together-worlds-apart3/welcome.aspx>.

¹² Few scholars would affirm today that all that is modern in Europe appeared magically with the Renaissance in ‘1500.’ Jacques Le Goff, *Faut-il vraiment découper l’histoire en tranches?* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2014).

¹³ Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, *op cit*.

Let me stay with the ‘colonial moment’ and try to respond to my good friend Peter Zinoman. I am a little surprised that he takes me to task a bit for pushing modernity beyond the colonial moment of 1858. After all, he himself showed that Michel Foucault’s ideas on the panoptic power of the modern prison in France were not to be found in the ‘colonial Bastille’ in French Vietnam.¹⁴ In my view, his book is a brilliant contribution to our understanding not just of ‘Vietnam,’ but also of the limits of the Eurocentric, colonial construction of some sort of ‘universal modernity’ that can be applied magically across the globe. In other writings, Zinoman rightly demonstrates the importance of ‘colonial modernity’ in the making of modern Vietnam.¹⁵ Zinoman can have it both ways because modernity, colonial or not, cuts both ways. It was not and is not an all or nothing phenomenon. The ‘modern’ and the ‘un-modern’ could exist at the same time. Nor is it a uniquely ‘French’ process, as Haydon Cherry points out in his review. It is part of a wider process of global modernization of which France was itself a part. While I hope to add a chapter to a later edition of my book on economics, including the failure of the French ‘colonialists’ and Vietnamese ‘communists’ to industrialize Indochina, I do think Zinoman and I agree. And if I had to pinpoint the most important period of accelerated, integrative modernization in Vietnamese history, it may well have been within the last thirty years.

Cherry and Charles Keith are clearly on to me when I develop the idea that the ‘American Vietnam War’ was in fact part of a longer ‘Thirty if not forty Years’ War’ (I add the Third Indochina War to get to forty). My thinking on this was, indeed, informed by recent attempts to ‘re-periodize’ the First and Second World Wars as Cherry notes. I intentionally collapsed the ‘American War,’ or at least parts of it, into this wider geo-historical Eurasian-Indian Ocean context and wider periodization running over a long twentieth century. This is also why I do not really see a ‘1954 break’ between ‘French Vietnam’ and ‘the making of America’s Vietnam.’ Nor do I think we should rush to delink the French and American empires in Vietnam. In my book, I ask to what extent the French and American empires, in their respective formal or informal configurations, entangled themselves well before the standard turning point of 1954 to set up ‘America’s Vietnam.’ I similarly enmeshed the Japanese, French, and American empires in my chapter on global World War II and Vietnam, going back to the nineteenth century to make the point that the Americans were already involved in Asia.¹⁶

Viewed from this wider angle, we might think twice before assuming that the Americans simply ‘replaced’ the French in 1954 or that one empire burned out and the other ‘just’ took over from its ashes. The Americans were already ‘there’ as part of a wider global economic and imperial order dating from the 19th century and of which the French were, after the Second World War, a subordinate part (and they knew it). This allows us to understand better how imperial power exercised itself formally and informally over time and space (a theme which I wove through my book from my discussion of the Chinese empire in the 2nd century BC to the American one in the late 20th). Many, including some of my reviewers, have criticized me for not doing more for the “American period” (only two chapters). My respectful answer is that the rest of the ‘American period’ or ‘the making of America’s Vietnam’ is tangled up in other chapters, other periods, spaces, and a wider global order, as I think it should be, including in the post-1975 chapters ...

¹⁴ Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Peter Zinoman, *Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vu Trong Phung*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Christopher Goscha, *Global Wars & Decolonization in East and South East Asia (1937-1954)* in Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on Ends of Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in press).

Last, and on a related note, what would change if we borrowed approaches combining empire and world history along the lines proposed by Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper?¹⁷ Why cannot we speak of Vietnam as a product of its own colonial past, not just that of the Chinese, French, and the Americans? Why are we unable to treat it as an imperial process that became entangled with other imperial projects? I accept that there are differences between nineteenth-century capitalist-driven imperialism (in its formal and informal designs) and other types of imperial rule in world history, but I see no convincing reason to prevent us from speaking of Asian empires when writing of the non-Euro-American world, indeed when writing of world history. All of what I am proposing here makes for an admittedly more complicated story than those offered by the Orthodox and Revisionists on ‘Vietnam’; but I had hoped that it would perhaps capture the complexity of this fascinating country.

So much for the questions and worries which the PBS interview set off! Let me turn now to the more specific critiques of my book.

Some Responses

While much of the ‘new’ in this history of Vietnam derives from these questions I raised about interpretation, Haydon Cherry is right that there is a need to rethink “older interpretations of the Vietnamese past, but also the empirical or documentary basis of many of those interpretations.” What Cherry is very politely saying is that it is not enough to play the role of simply critiquing what others have done without rolling up one’s own sleeves and getting into the sources. In my defense, I did my best to read and engage with a mass of new scholarship on Vietnam and the wars, published by a new generation of scholars mainly in French and in English. I also tried to use older scholarship that still stands the test of time. But Cherry is right: compared to the wealth of monographs published, say, on French history and French diplomacy, we need much more heavy-duty research in newly available primary sources—whether in Chinese, French, Russian, or Vietnamese. This will provide new interpretations and help us move away from work that has run its time. His point is well taken.

On historiography, Cherry identifies my debts to Christopher Bayly, David Todd, Daniel Hémerly, Pierre Brocheux, and Deny Lombard. I do agree with Bayly and more recently David Todd’s arguments about the emergence of British and French ‘Meridians’ in the nineteenth century (and in the case of France before the birth of the Third Republic).¹⁸ I also agree with Bayly that European colonial conquest was not a simple question of superior Western economic and military might, as important as those factors most certainly were. Euro-American expansion occurred against the backdrop of nineteenth-century struggles by Ottoman, Chinese, and Vietnamese empire-states struggling to remake their states in the face of often massive social opposition and revolt on the inside.

Cherry is largely correct in fingering my reliance on and adaptation of Charles Tilly’s seminal works on the role war played in European state-making to the wars over Vietnam, especially the First Indochina war (1945-1954) but to the Second and Third Indochina Wars as well.¹⁹ I remain convinced, however, that war played a particularly important role

¹⁷ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830*, (London: Routledge, 1989) and David Todd, “A French Imperial Meridian, 1814–1870,” *Past & Present* 210:1 (2011): 155-186.

¹⁹ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990).

in state-making for communists in Vietnam, China, and, before that, the Soviet Union. This “war communism”, as Lenin termed it, was very different from what Tilly proposed for understanding state-formation in Europe.

Charles Keith is right, as I note above, that I see the Vietnam War as part of a larger periodization both on the Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese sides. Of course we need to be careful not to go down the unproductive road of tearing down all signposts for marking temporality. We need those markers to make our arguments and write our books. But sometimes in fields that have been held hostage for so long to a certain number of signposts, it can be useful to suggest in a general history like this that there was perhaps more going on than meets the eye if we adopt a *longue durée* approach and alternative signposts.

Charles Keith and Peter Zinoman are entirely correct that I see the Indochinese Wars as a series of “savage wars of sovereignties” as to who would ultimately rule postcolonial Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and in which socio-political forms. That also includes my rather lengthy discussion of the ‘Third Indochina War’ whose origins I date from 1968 and which I cast as a *Eurasian conflagration* involving the United States but without adopting an American-centric view of this conflict.²⁰

Keith and Zinoman note a humanist side to my treatment of the impact of these wars on people and I thank them for pointing this out. Given the destruction that so much war inflicted on the Vietnamese people of all confessions and ethnicities, it would have been unacceptable for me, in a general history like this, to leave out this crucial question. As many as one million Vietnamese people probably perished during the First Indochina War (1945-1954). At least three million soldiers and civilians died between 1965 and 1975 according to the numbers provided by ‘North Vietnam,’ the victorious Democratic Republic of Vietnam. 200,000 Republic of Vietnam soldiers died; but we do not really know much about the extent of civilian casualties in the southern Republic. If one adds the 1 to 2 million Cambodians who died under the Khmer Rouge and the tens of thousands killed during the Third Indochina War, the death toll becomes simply mindboggling. As I wrote in terms of the Vietnam War period, every single life is precious, including those of the 58,000 Americans who died. But in the end, death was an overwhelmingly Vietnamese experience (*Vietnam: A New History*, 329).

Keith is correct that I do paint a darker picture of the communist-run Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) led by Ho Chi Minh, Truong Chinh, Le Duan, and others. I think I give a fair accounting of the DRV’s successes and the improvements they brought to people’s lives. But given the state of our knowledge today of Vietnamese communism, I felt that it would have been intellectually dishonest to skip over or downplay the darker sides of single-party communist rule and the impact of its projects to transform Vietnamese society on ordinary people. Do I fall into Revisionist obsessions with ‘the crimes of communism’? I do not think so. But if scholars can write openly about America’s darker chapters, if we can talk about the suffering Soviet and Chinese communist rulers imposed on their own people, then I do not see why we should make an exception for Vietnamese communists just because one might be opposed to the French or American Wars in Vietnam. One can be opposed to the ‘Vietnam War’ and still be honest about what communism did to the country, both the good and the bad. But as surprisingly hard as it still is for so many Orthodox scholars to acknowledge in their books to this day, forced Land Reform and forced Rectification *did happen* in Vietnam and it was not pretty. Scholars who skip over these matters or play down the repressive nature of this communist state are not neutral. And by *choosing not* to discuss such ‘things,’ they fail to tell important stories about the human beings

²⁰ See my ‘La géopolitique vietnamienne vue de l’Eurasie : quelles leçons de la troisième guerre d’Indochine pour aujourd’hui?’ *Hérodote* 2015/2 (n° 157): 23-38.

who suffered because of them. We need to stop ‘exceptionalizing’ Vietnamese history, just as we do for American and French history.

The same goes for the authoritarian regime Ngo Dinh Diem and his brothers ran between 1955 and 1963. The Ngo brothers embarked upon their own revolutionary plans to remake Vietnamese society in the south. The Ngo brothers forcibly mobilized millions of Vietnamese peasants against their will into ‘strategic hamlets’ and all sorts of other revolutionary projects as part of a counter-insurgency and utopian modernization plans.²¹ Theory and practice were two different matters in these two authoritarian states, but the results were devastatingly similar in the north and the south for the poor Vietnamese souls who had to suffer through them.

Here I flunk a core Revisionist test requiring its members to recognize that Ngo Dinh Diem was on his way to turning the southern Republic into an operational democracy. I remain unconvinced. That is certainly what those who despise the communists wish us to believe today. But counter-factual history cuts both ways, too: It’s equally possible that had the state in the south survived, with or without a Ngo at the helm, it might well have remained an authoritarian one like the military regime in Burma, at least until recently. We will never know.

Charles Keith is right that I also tried to show that there were those who saw something other than authoritarianism in the history of modern Vietnam. So many observers of Vietnam have focused so much of their attention on ‘French colonialism,’ ‘Vietnamese communism,’ ‘nationalism,’ and the ‘American War’ that they have, in my view, missed the fascinating story of Vietnamese Republicanism and how it emerged from global connections.²² Starting at the turn of the twentieth century, a host of Vietnamese elites, some of them mandarins, discovered Atlantic Republicanism flowing into the region through East Asian maritime networks running from southern China to Japan by way of Korea and Vietnam. Vietnam’s first Republicans read Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* in Chinese—not French—translation. Despite French rule, Vietnamese elites continued to travel to Tokyo and Guangzhou (Canton) to see what Japanese and Chinese Republicans were doing. More Vietnamese were studying in Tokyo in 1905 than in Paris. But global connections can also co-exist with colonial ones. Many Vietnamese republicans believed that the French would help them create some sort of a colonial republic, like the British Indian Congress, and with it, eventually, independence. We now know that the Third Republic would disappoint them, but they could not know that at the time.

Keith is entirely correct to criticize me for not taking up the subject of the Vietnamese diaspora, especially for someone who pleads for a global take on Vietnam. Guilty. I initially had the intention to include a chapter on this question, but I just could not figure out how to do it justice. In a way, I am glad to have waited given some of the amazing work that has appeared over the last year or so, including the brilliant poetry book my daughter just read in fourth grade—*Inside Out and Back Again*.²³ But Keith is right that it is too important to be left out and I will do my best to add such a chapter in a forthcoming edition of the book.

²¹ Edward Miller demonstrates this brilliantly in his *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

²² Christopher Goscha, “Aux origines du républicanisme vietnamien : Circulations mondiales et connexions coloniales,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 2016/3 (n° 131): 17-35.

²³ Thanh Ha Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

Many thanks to Tuong Vu for pointing out the factual mistakes and errors in the spelling of some Vietnamese terms. I have corrected Ho Chi Minh's original name to Nguyen Sinh Cung. I am also grateful to him for the information explaining why Ho ceded his place to Truong Chinh in the early 1940s. It makes sense that Ho would have left his options open, as a Comintern veteran, to work elsewhere or in another position if ever called upon.

Let me end by noting that while I admittedly share my revisionist readers' dissatisfaction with a dominant Orthodox tradition that repeatedly sets up the Vietnamese past in rather simplistic, binary, and even Orientalist ways which would have made Edward Said cringe²⁴, I am not so sure that pushing so hard for 'radical revisionism' or 'championing' revisionism over all else is the way to go or a good thing. I fear that those who go down the 'radical' path, either in its orthodox or revisionist strains, end up limiting, knowingly or unknowingly, the questions they can ask of an historical phenomenon. On this note, Peter Zinoman tries to place me in the camp of the revisionist scholar of the Vietnam War, Keith Taylor.²⁵ I cannot agree. While I have great admiration for Taylor and his scholarship and consider him a friend, I disagree with his re-mobilization of the Vietnamese past in order to fight, yet again, a battle over the legitimacy of American intervention in the Vietnam War. The problem is that this high level of sustained mobilization of the past comes at a price for our radical revisionists, just as it does for their peace-minded competitors critical of American intervention in Vietnam.²⁶ By framing their narratives and choosing their evidence to show that the American war could have, indeed should have been won, revisionist militants (again, not unlike their orthodox counterparts) find themselves travelling down narrow roads, unable to see other historical possibilities, skating over a multitude of social and political forces at work down below. In short, proving 'lost victory'—like 'lost peace'—is, in my humble view, a lost cause epistemologically.²⁷

Peter Zinoman also knows that my greatest intellectual debts lie on the other side of the Atlantic. I have always acknowledged my debts to the Université de Paris VII's Vietnam specialists Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémy. Paris VII is also where my wife, Agathe Larcher, a French specialist of Republicanism and colonialism, and I met and studied. SciencesPo's Jean-Luc Domenach and Maurice Vaïsse helped me get my career started in international relations. While I never had the honor of meeting him (he died in 1967), Bernard Fall has always been a model for me. Marching to his own drummer, he never failed to speak truth to power, not just in his criticism of the American War in Vietnam, but also in his honest accounts of what authoritarian states could do to their own people, including Ho Chi Minh's.²⁸ And then there is the man to whom I dedicated my book, Nayan Chanda.

²⁴ John Carlos Rowe, *Edward Said and American Studies*, note 20, at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/10945585.0001.001/1:4.1/--cultural-politics-of-the-new-american-studies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

²⁵ Keith Taylor, "Robert Buzzanco's 'Fear and (Self) Loathing in Lubbock,'" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (February/August 2006): 453-484 and his 'How I began to teach about the Vietnam War', *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Fall 2004) at <http://www.viet-myths.net/Taylor.htm> Also see Edward Miller's excellent critique of the Taylor-Buzzanco debate in the same issue of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.

²⁶ See my "Peace Matters," *Mekong Review* (April 2017) at <https://mekongreview.com/peace-matters>. I'm also grateful to my colleague, Andrew Barros, for sharing with me his work on the "mobilization" of history and historians in the twentieth century.

²⁷ Orthodox and Revisionist militants would do well to revisit Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁸ See my "Sorry about that ... Bernard Fall, the Vietnam War and the Impact of a French Intellectual in the U.S.," in Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse, eds., *La guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe (1963-1973)*, (Bruxelles, Bruylant, 2003), 363-382 at

I would like to thank each and every one of my reviewers for taking the time out of their busy schedules to engage so deeply with my book. They were most generous in their reviews of my book and I am most grateful to them for that. If my responses are long-winded, it is because I felt it important to take each of their reviews as seriously as possible. My thanks, too, to H-Diplo whose editors never cease to amaze me for opening their doors to people coming from all disciplines and schools of thought.

<https://cgoscha.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2016/09/sorry-about-that.pdf> and “So What Did You Learn from War? Violent Decolonization and Paul Mus’s Search for Humanity,” *South East Asia Research* 20:4 (2012): 569-593 at <https://cgoscha.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2017/01/So-what-did-you-learn-from-war.pdf>