

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

<http://englishkyoto-seas.org/>

<Book Review>

Gerard Sasges

K. W. Taylor, ed. *Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967–1975)*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2015, 180p.

Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 2016, pp. 163-166.

How to Cite: Sasges, Gerard. Review of *Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967–1975)* edited by K. W. Taylor. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 2016, pp. 163-166.

View the table of contents for this issue:

<http://englishkyoto-seas.org/2016/04/vol-5-no-1-of-southeast-asian-studies/>

Subscriptions: <http://englishkyoto-seas.org/mailling-list/>

For permissions, please send an e-mail to: english-editorial@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp



Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

anecdotal and lack evidence of broad social research. One of the most striking shortcomings is in the discussion of the Chinese and the film industry. Heryanto persuasively shows the importance of ethnic Chinese in Indonesian cinema as producers and actors and contrasts this with the shocking lack of significant Chinese characters in these films. While his linkage of this silence with the New Order's sinophobia is excellent, he fails to make the obvious comparison with the history of American Jews; a vilified minority who were well represented in the Hollywood studio system and as actors who adopted non-Jewish names. This curious missed opportunity does not invalidate the chapter's argument but it left this reviewer unsatisfied.

Much of *Identity and Pleasure's* genius lies in Heryanto's willingness to take the seemingly trivial as serious evidence. This allows him to read significant meaning into flash mobs, cover dances, and adolescent crushes on K-Pop idols, as well as the work of human rights activists, independent filmmakers, and national political figures. Furthermore, such an approach shows his respect for the young urban Javanese that make up the subject of his research. With strong use of selected theory, ranging from Ernst Renan to Marshall McLuhan to the ever-present Benedict Anderson, Heryanto situates these essays in the wider discussions of media studies and the politics of nationalism. *Identity and Pleasure* will be of use to scholars of Indonesia as well as the politics of popular culture in Southeast Asia as a whole. This reviewer found it essential for unraveling some of the daily mysteries of the contemporary Indonesian city.

Michael G. Vann

Department of History/Asian Studies, Sacramento State University

References

Pemberton, John. 1994. *On the Subject of "Java."* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967–1975)

K. W. TAYLOR, ed.

Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2015, 180p.

"Four decades removed from the fall of Saigon, now is perhaps the right time to revisit the Vietnam conflict, for no longer pressing is the impulse to assign blame, discredit others, or find excuses" (p. 159). So begins Lan Lu's contribution to the collection *Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967–1975)*. Edited by Keith Taylor, it consists of chapters by 10 different contributors, each of whom played a role in the administrative, political, and military milieu of the Republic of Vietnam based in Saigon from 1955 to 1975.

The collection can be situated in two different contexts. One is the growing interest in the

Republic of Vietnam and the efforts of scholars to develop more nuanced accounts of the Second Indochina War that situate the struggle in local as well as global contexts and highlight the agency and ideologies of participants on all sides. Key works in this emerging body of scholarship include Ed Miller's (2013) and Philip Catton's (2002) works on Ngo Dinh Diem and Nu-Anh Tran's work on nationalism in the First Vietnamese Republic (2006). An equally important context is the scholarly trajectory of Keith Taylor, Professor in Cornell's Department of Asian Studies and a renowned historian of Vietnam. In a very personal account published in 2004, Taylor described how over the course of his career he came to contest the "three axioms in the dominant interpretation of the U.S.-Vietnam War," namely that the government in Saigon was illegitimate, that the U.S. had no grounds to be involved in Vietnamese affairs, and that the fall of the Republic of Vietnam was inevitable (Taylor 2004).¹ Together with his *A History of the Vietnamese* (Taylor 2013), the present volume can be seen as part of the exposition of Taylor's theses that the Vietnamese are characterized by a fundamental North-South division, that their history is driven not by nationalism or resistance to "foreign aggression," but rather an inescapable connection to the Chinese political world, and that the struggle of Vietnamese and their allies to create and sustain a non-Communist Vietnamese government after 1945 was a just one (*ibid.*, 620–626).

It is an uneven collection, with entries ranging from Bui Diem's 5-page "A Vietnamese Perspective on US Involvement," to Tran Quang Minh's 49-page "A Decade of Public Service." The text could have benefitted from closer editing that would have tightened up some chapters and avoided such things as flights in "beach craft" [*sic.* Beechcraft] airplanes (p. 27). In some places, contributors attempt to gloss 2,000 years of history in a few pages; in others, they veer into questionable attempts to refute commonly-held beliefs about the nature of the regime, as in Nguyen Ngoc Bich's description of the so-called "Tiger Cages" used for solitary confinement in the prison at Con Son island (p. 34).

Nevertheless, the accounts provide important insights into life under the Second Republic, reminding us it was a functioning regime attempting to create institutions, build capacity, and carry on the day-to-day operations of governments everywhere. Over the course of the 1960s and early 70s, the Republic came to be shaped by a new generation of highly trained and motivated young officials and activists. As Tran Quang Minh explains, "The Vietnam War was not all about killing and maiming, battles lost and won, and American and Vietnamese frustrations. . . . It was for us very much about building a nation and changing lives, about social revolution, rural reconstruction, agricultural development, economic improvement, and building a happy future for our children" (p. 87).

Moreover, this new generation achieved results that are often ignored. Programs like the

1) Coming as it did in the context of US intervention in Iraq, Taylor's article sparked a highly charged reply by the scholar Robert Buzzanco (Buzzanco 2005), with their exchange coming to be known in the field as the "Taylor-Buzzanco Debate".

Land To The Tiller Program (LTTTP), the Accelerated Miracle Rice Production Program (AMRPP), and the National Food Administration (NFA), detailed in Tran Quang Minh's chapter "A Decade of Public Service," created millions of new smallholders in the Vietnamese countryside and reintroduced market mechanisms, contributing to an increase in food production so that after years of wartime shortages by 1974 the country was once again largely self-sufficient. Nguyen Duc Cuong points to the combination of planning and good fortune that saw the discovery of oil off the Vietnamese coast and the first moves towards its exploitation beginning in 1973. Their accounts also unintentionally shed light on important ecological changes driven by developments like mechanization, the introduction of hybrid rice varieties, the growing dependence on artificial fertilizer, and the construction of Vietnam's first pesticide factories. Taken together, the book's chapters make it clear that much of Vietnam's economic recovery—and ecological change—beginning in the 1980s was based on the achievements of the Second Republic.

Nevertheless, frequent references to inflation, red tape, entrenched bureaucracies, corruption, and waste all underline the magnitude of the challenges the regime faced and help to temper the uniformly positive image of the Republic that emerges from some chapters. In his chapter "From the First to the Second Republic," Phan Quang Tue makes it clear that despite a veneer of democratic institutions, "the entire system was under the control of the military establishment" (p. 123). It was a military establishment, moreover, that did not flinch from attempting the assassination of opponents like Tue's father. While in this respect the Second Republic differed little from contemporary regimes in places like Thailand, Taiwan, or the Republic of Korea, it does remind us of the need to distinguish between men like Tue who struggled to build a more democratic Republic of Vietnam, and others, including many at the highest levels of the regime, who did not.

In his chapter, Phan Quang Tue points to both the potential and the limitations of this kind of oral history project. He compares the collection to Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, "a fascinating account of the effect of subjective perception on recollection by which observers of an event are able to produce substantially different but equally plausible accounts" (p. 118). In this sense, it is a fittingly democratic volume that mirrors the editor's larger argument about the regime itself. It is also the basis of the collection's greatest value: the way it brings together a range of divergent and often unexpected accounts, shedding new light on the Republic of Vietnam at the same time it suggests topics for future research.

Gerard Sages

Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

References

- Buzzanco, Robert. 2005. How I Learned to Quit Worrying and Love Vietnam and Iraq. *Counterpunch*, April 16. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2005/04/16/how-i-learned-to-quit-worrying-and-love->

- vietnam-and-iraq/, accessed January 28, 2016.
- Catton, Philip E. 2002. *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Miller, Edward. 2013. *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, K. W. 2013. *A History of the Vietnamese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2004. How I Began to Teach about the Vietnam War. Special Issue, *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43(4). Permalink: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0043.420>.
- Tran, Nu-Anh. 2006. South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper Chinh Luan [Political Discussion], 1965–1969. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1(1–2): 169–209.

The End of Personal Rule in Indonesia: Golkar and the Transformation of the Suharto Regime

MASUHARA AYAKO

Kyoto: Kyoto University Press; Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2015, xviii+286p.

In the revised version of her doctoral dissertation, Ayako Masuhara offers a fine-grained analysis of the collapse of President Suharto's New Order regime (1965–98). The author brings out the paradox that despite Suharto enjoying political patronage from the ruling Golkar party, the party made a 180-degree turn, a measure backed by the parliament and the fragmented reformist forces that compelled the President to resign. In a succinctly written introduction, Masuhara states her argument by throwing down a gauntlet before those political analysts who characterize the Suharto regime as a "sultanistic regime" (Aspinall 2005). Instead, she argues that the New Order regime was a "co-opting-style personal rule" in which the Golkar party accommodated political opponents (pp. 3, 15).

Chapter 1 contextualizes the New Order regime within the broader context of Indonesian and area studies. She categorizes personal rule into four types based on the level of state surveillance and violence within the broader framework of comparative politics with examples from different countries: (i) isolated type, (ii) terrorizing type, (iii) dividing type, and (iv) co-opting type. Masuhara conceptualizes the Golkar party as a political space where vast number of Indonesian social elites competed against each other, paving the way for the rise of soft-liners within the New Order regime that eventually undermined the authority of Suharto. Chapter 2 comprehensively describes how the Suharto regime, as an example of a co-opting type of personal rule, ran the country based on political and economic patronage and violent oppression whereas Chapters 3, 4, and 5 collectively describe how the Golkar established and structured itself as the ruling party during the New Order. In Chapter 6, Masuhara argues that the more Golkar became independent from the Indonesian Armed Forces, the more heavily it had to depend on Suharto, and this reliance eroded the autonomy of the party by the late 1980s. In Chapter 7, Masuhara observes that due to the preference