

which Vietnamese kings later in the fifteenth century "would eventually forestall the threat from the crisis of the fourteenth century" (p. 131).

A secondary theme of this book is how the Ming occupation of Vietnam in the early fifteenth century also contributed to laying this foundation. Like Ho Quy Ly, the Ming occupation has been encrusted with historiographical clichés, and the author wants to suggest that this experience, in addition to whatever destructive and, from a Vietnamese viewpoint, negative results may have obtained from it, also contributed significantly to the future direction of government and ideology in Vietnam.

The problem of defining the process by which ruling-class people in Vietnam made the transition from Buddhism to Sung Neo-Confucianism lies behind much of the analysis of this book. The author sees Ho Quy Ly as the proponent of a "maverick" or idiosyncratic version of Confucianism that changed as his fortunes changed. Before he personally took the throne/he instituted a cult of legitimation based upon the Duke of Chou, whom he took as the prototype for the role he claimed for himself in the state. After he took the throne, he shifted to a cult based upon Shun as the prototype of the ideal ruler and his claimed ancestor.

While making use of these ideas to legitimate his authority among the increasingly prominent group of people educated in the Confucian classics, Ho Quy Ly, according to the author, ruled in a manner closer to the earlier Buddhist kings than to the later kings who claimed Neo-Confucian ideals. In institutional terms, Ho Quy Ly represented continuity with the past; in ideological terms, he was groping toward what would be the future. Looking toward the Neo-Confucian future of ruling-class Vietnamese, the author highlights the schools established in Vietnam by the Ming occupation government, their Neo-Confucian curriculum, and their long-term influence.

This book has set the agenda for any future discussion of Ho Quy Ly and will have to be considered in any evaluation of Vietnam's transition from Buddhism to Neo-Confucianism. It is solidly based upon study of the relevant texts, and is a thoughtful reaction to the traditional historiographical stereotypes that continue to define much of premodern Vietnamese history as it is popularly understood. We need more books like this to bring new life to a past that has been remembered to death.

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1946: Déclenchement de la guerre d'Indochine. Les vèpres tonkinoises du 19 décembre.
By STEIN TØNNESSON. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987. Pp. 275.

Studies of the Vietnam War have often been surprisingly neglectful of its origins; and unless one believes that the war did not really begin until the United States became involved it is even more surprising how little detailed work has been published on that tragic period between the foundation, if only in name, of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the war with the French Republic which began in December 1946.

Stein Tønnesson is a young Norwegian historian at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo who has worked assiduously in the French military and civil archives to produce this meticulous and fascinating account of the day-to-day interaction between French and Vietnamese as well as the vicissitudes of making and implementing French policy in Paris and Saigon. If, perhaps, the outbreak of war can be seen as a tragedy

of misunderstanding then the source undoubtedly was the last-minute 'accord' that was signed in March 1946 which allowed the French to take over from the Chinese forces in Tonkin without having to fight them as well as the Vietnamese. The price of this virtually unopposed French landing was however, at Chinese insistence, French recognition of the DRV: "a free state, having its own government, parliament, army and treasury". Did this mean it was independent? And did this also mean that the authority of the DRV was to be recognized throughout the country?

These were the key questions and, in Tønnesson's account, while the first could for a while be regarded as theoretical there was an almost immediate impasse in the South and it was, he says, the conflict over the status of Cochinchina which led to war. French and DRV points of view were, quite simply, incompatible. Furthermore they gave rise to a vicious circle. The maintenance of even a fragile peace in the North was going to depend on a cease-fire in the South: and on French recognition of a DRV "Administrative Committee" in Cochinchina as well as its armed forces. In both North and South Vietnam therefore the laws of geometry had been suspended: parallel administrations and armies not only were bound to meet, they were bound to collide. Perhaps war could have been averted if the French had held the promised referendum — just as perhaps the second Vietnam war could have been avoided if elections had been held in 1956 — but in the mood, the personalities and the policy-making arrangements which Tønnesson describes this was the faintest of hopes until, ironically, the war was about to begin.

And yet, for all that the dogs of war on both sides were straining at the leash the conflict unrolled in a curious way. Tønnesson deals in scrupulous detail with the orders and events which produced that appalling French bombardment of Haiphong in November 1946 — so little reported on at the time — although even this did not produce an immediate and massive Vietnamese response. Perhaps they were simply biding their time. If they were, so were the French who were determined to take advantage of every skirmish so that they might, in General Valluy's expression, improve their position. Valluy in fact, as Tønnesson shows, had been planning such an "improvement" for months — to the point where prudent plans for self-defence could be transformed into the scenario of a coup d'état — and did not have long to wait for the next opportunity.

Particularly, it seems, because the French really believed that DRV forces were themselves about to launch their own attack on French positions in December; and one can easily imagine the state of mind of those on both sides who believed that the outbreak of war was only a matter of time. But where soldiers have their own preoccupations and levels of understanding might one not expect something better from their political masters? Unfortunately no, for in addition to the notorious Admiral d'Argenlieu with his exalted ideas of re-establishing the authority of France, at the very least in Cochinchina, hardly anyone on the French side comes out well in this account. Jean Sainteny, who had negotiated the original accord with Ho Chi Minh in March, by December was helping to prepare a "police action" against the DRV which might have left Ho in place but was designed to remove "extremists" such as Giap. In Paris, Marius Moutet, the Minister for Overseas France, did not follow through his idea to suspend d'Argenlieu. Although he would hardly use such an unscholarly expression, the villain of the piece in Tønnesson's account is probably Georges Bidault because as president of the inter-ministerial committee in Paris he was providing the continuity, and definition of French policy for Vietnam up to the