

Of particular interest is his analysis of such well-worn concepts as *gotong-royong* (mutual assistance) and the way such concepts have been used and abused at the local level (p. 178), as well as the way that class plays a vital role in defining and cleaving that elusive concept of "community" (p. 190).

This is a book of the modern era that does not ignore the netherworld inhabited by Indonesia's illegals (*wong gelap*) whom the Indonesian state has either rightly or (more often) wrongly associated with the so-called attempted coup of 1965 and who have been banished to a marginalised existence throughout Indonesia. It also examines the way that the government has, to varying levels of success, attempted to *mempancasilakan*—to instil with the *pancasila*, the government ideology—all aspects of everyday administrative life (p. 203).

If I were to have any reservations at all, it would be in those parts of the analysis that purport to suggest the extent to which the Japanese experience can serve as a "model" of what the future might hold for Indonesia. The massive differences between the two countries in rates of urbanisation—with a huge rural mass in Indonesia and particularly in Java—as well as the difference between the world economy of the post-war period of Japanese development and that of the present make one wonder at some of the ideas on development that are considered, particularly in the final section of the book.

However, there is no doubt that the study is a fascinating insight into what it means to live just beyond the gaze of the tourists that stream constantly up and down Jalan Malioboro. Life is not easy for many in Suharto's late New Order Indonesia, but local life for the people of "Kalasan" is a rich web of obligations and alliances peopled by the fascinating characters who are the source of

the wonderful anecdotes that make Sullivan's study come to life.

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STEIN TONNESSON. *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1991, and London: Sage Publications, 1991. Pp. xiv, 458. Hardcover.

The Vietnamese revolution of 1945 does not in popular imagination rank with the great political revolutions of history—British, French, Russian, Chinese. Other dates have overshadowed it even in modern Vietnamese history—the outbreak of war between the French and the Viet Minh at the end of 1946 (to which Tonnesson devoted his first book on Vietnam), the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, or the communist victory of 1975. Part of the reason the August Revolution of 1945 has suffered some neglect is that it happened so easily, so bloodlessly, a fact regretted by the Viet Minh themselves who tried to portray it more as the culmination of a glorious struggle than it actually was. The fact remains, however, that the August Revolution was an event of great historical significance, and not only for the history of Vietnam. It ranks as one of the crucial events in the history of modern Southeast Asia, with repercussions that eventually engulfed even the great powers. It therefore well warrants the scholarly treatment Tonnesson has accorded it in this thoroughly researched and admirably argued book.

Eventually the question Tonnesson sets out to answer is: why was the August Revolution achieved so easily by a political front, the Viet Minh, that had not existed five years previously, under the direction of a

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small, if dedicated Communist Party? His answer, unsurprisingly, is that it was only possible because a political power vacuum existed which the Viet Minh were best equipped to fill. But why? To determine this Tonnesson examines the major sectors in the drama of war that created the conditions for a seizure of power—the Japanese, Americans, French, British, and Chinese, as well as the Vietnamese. Simply stated, his "thesis" is that "the fall of the French colonial regime in 1945, and its replacement by a Vietnamese Democratic Republic, can be understood as brought about by two *causal chains*: one running from Roosevelt's personal views on the French presence in Indochina through the military development of the Pacific War to Japan's sudden surrender; the other running from the founding of the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) in 1930 ... to Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence" (p. 1).

The book is rather self-consciously structured around this thesis. Chapters describe how the French managed to maintain their administrative presence in Vietnam (Cambodia and Laos are almost totally ignored) for most of the war years; trace the origins of the Viet Minh and differences in its development in north and south Vietnam; discuss Allied, particularly American, policy in the Pacific and how this affected Vietnam; examine the causes and outcomes of the 9 March *coup de force* by Japan against the French in Indochina, and American and Free French responses; and reveal the effects of the famine in Vietnam, the succession from Roosevelt to Truman, the quarrel over whether Indochina fell within the China or Southeast Asia theatre of war, and the debate within the Viet Minh over strategies of insurrection. The last chapter examines the events of August 1945, the rapidity of the Japanese surrender, and the responses of the various parties in various world centres and in Vietnam.

The most significant component of Tonnesson's argument has to do with the attitude of President Roosevelt towards the French presence in Indochina, and his determination to prevent a French return. Tonnesson believes there is evidence "for the hypothesis that Roosevelt consciously deceived the French and Japanese in order to make them clash in Indochina" (p. 410), but admits it is not conclusive. What is beyond doubt is not only that Roosevelt was determined that no assistance should be given to the French which might in any way strengthen their hold on Indochina, but also that the Japanese increasingly feared an American attack, either from the north using Chinese forces or by means of a seaborne landing. Whether there was deliberate American deception, however, is another matter. Tonnesson does show that Roosevelt's anti-French policies continued to exert an influence after his death, even though Truman, who was uninterested in Indochina, agreed to a French return. Moreover, the United States was instrumental in dividing responsibility for the occupation of Vietnam between Chinese armies in the north and British forces in the south. Both factors contributed to the uncertainty and hesitation following the Japanese surrender.

The Japanese coup of 9 March 1945 destroyed French authority, but not central government. Any power vacuum there was existed only in the rural areas. There the Viet Minh took advantage of the failure of the Tran Trong Kim government to address the catastrophe of the northern famine. A power vacuum at the centre arose only with the sudden Japanese surrender, because the Japanese refused to intervene to prevent a communist takeover and because the Tran Trong Kim government suffered a crisis of confidence.

The irony is, as Tonnesson shows, that the seizure of power in the name of the Viet Minh in the great demonstrations that took

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place in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon was carried out spontaneously by second-level cadres. None of the central leadership was involved. Moreover, the seizure owed nothing to strategies developed in the liberated zone in the north based on good Maoist principles. Power passed to the Viet Minh in a series of urban uprisings that under the circumstances were remarkably ordered and peaceful. The war in Vietnam did not, as in China, precede the victorious proclamation of a communist regime: it followed upon it. Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence was the still before the storm because the Viet Minh simply did not have the wherewithal to fill the vacuum that suddenly appeared. Other players challenged its assumption of power, both international (China, France) and national (various non-communist organisations).

Here is a weakness in Tonnesson's study. By concentrating attention on his two intersecting causal chains—American policy and the rise of the Viet Minh—he neglects alternative groups. The only exception is the Tran Trong Kim government whose collapse contributed to the political vacuum rather than challenging the might of the Viet Minh to fill it. The struggle for power in Vietnam was much more complex than Tonnesson suggests. The August Revolution was but the first shot fired in this struggle, in the first phase of which the Viet Minh won but half the country. For a fuller account of the Vietnamese causal chain we must await David Marr's *Vietnam: The Quest for Power*, from a manuscript of which Tonnesson quotes freely. In the meantime, Tonnesson has provided us with the best account to date of the interaction of international and internal causes bringing about the Vietnamese Revolution of 1945.

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• West Asia

JEAN BOTTÉRO. *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*. Translated by Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. Pp. xiv and 311. Contents, chronology, map, glossary-index, references, bibliographical orientation. US\$39.95, cloth.

This book consists of writings by Bottéro on aspects of Mesopotamia, divided into four parts: "Assyriology", "Writing", "Reasoning: institutions and mentality", and "The Gods: religion". In addition to the main body of the work there is a short chapter called "The birth of the West", as well as a glossary-index, a section on rules of transcription and translation from the Mesopotamian languages, and a bibliography together with a brief discussion of selected books. Most of the fifteen chapters are from publications that appeared in French in the 1970s and 1980s (one or two as early as the 1960s). Chapter 12 had not previously been published, while chapter 6 is a simplified version of a more complicated scholarly article. In spite of the fact that part 1 discusses Assyriology (including Bottéro's idea of the "usefulness" of its study) most articles deal with Sumer, Akkad and Babylonia.

Bottéro claims to have had "non-Assyriologists" in mind as prospective readers of this book. Nevertheless, the approach is by no means superficial. Some chapters are not particularly easy to read and digest, and it is certainly not the sort of book one would be inclined to read from cover to cover at one or two sittings. For teachers and others with special interests in Mesopotamia there is much of value, and the great advantage is that widely scattered material has been made accessible. Parts of chapter 7 on oneiromancy are fascinating, and Bottéro's