

Việt Nam Exposé

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French Scholarship on
Twentieth-Century
Vietnamese Society

EDITED BY

Gisele Bousquet and Pierre Brocheux

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John K. Whitmore

Foreword

Let us consider Vietnam over the entire twentieth century. Not just the wars, Doi Moi, revolution, refugees, or colonialism but the Vietnamese people should be our focal point as they have survived these varied traumas and continued the flow of their own lives through the years as best they could. How were social and economic, as well as political, decisions made? What structures continued despite ongoing change? How did Vietnamese society in 2000 differ from that in 1900 and how did it get that way?

This francophone collection, by both French and Vietnamese scholars, forms a very nice chain of essays covering the past century from beginning to end and Vietnamese society from bottom to top. We have views of villages, the urban elite, and the links between them as they were in both colonial and socialist times. Therein we receive insights into the major transformations that occurred throughout the century.

The collection of essays included here is an admirable and valuable effort, bringing as it does the variegated interests and results of this scholarship into our own language. The editors are to be commended for their belief in the necessity of this effort as well as for the difficult work it took to accomplish it. By doing so, they have opened up to the anglophone world a breadth and depth in the study of modern Vietnam heretofore often ignored as classes have pursued political topics.

To be found in these essays are both scintillating detail and very interesting interpretations. The authors show us good use of archival materials, interviews, firsthand observation, and quantitative data. They have utilized their access to the archives, the countryside, and Vietnamese communities to great effect. By following their own interests, they have plumbed these resources and done much to fill in the missing context of political events. They add excellent detail and

deepen our interpretations of these events, pursuing as they do aspects not yet examined by anglophone scholars.

We get to see the progressive impact of village-state relations from the beginning of the century to its end. We see Vietnamese-foreign relations go from the colonial era to that of globalization, involving political, economic, and cultural aspects. We also see individual Vietnamese, male and female, heretofore little known, as they struggled on their own terms to confront the changing scene. We see nineteenth-century elements continue to have significance in the twentieth and wonder what twentieth-century elements will emerge to influence our new century. The tendency will be to pick and choose among these excellent pieces according to the readers' (and their classes') interests. Instead I challenge those concerned with Vietnam to sit down and read this insightful work straight through—the readers will considerably deepen their understanding of this fascinating land and its people.