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Book Review

Book Review: Contemporary Vietnam: A Guide to Economic and Political Developments

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Pages 149-151 | Published online: 18 Oct 2018

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many references to other Indonesian historians noted at the outset of this review. For those wishing to expand the story, the book can be read alongside, for example, the work of Booth (*The Indonesian Economy*) and van der Eng (*Agricultural Growth in Indonesia*), which is rich in detail and explanation.

Libraries will want to acquire the book and so might some students with an economics background. Its price of £95 will, however, probably confine demand largely to the former. The publisher might profitably ponder if a more affordable price would sufficiently raise sales, and with them revenue, beyond the now narrow market of some libraries and specialist scholars.

Ian Jeffries, *Contemporary Vietnam: A Guide to Economic and Political Developments*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, vi + 238 pp.

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doi: 10.5367/sear.2014.0202

Contemporary Vietnam: A Guide to Economic and Political Developments is a follow-up to an earlier book published by the same author in 2006, and covers events up to 2011. The volume is constructed as a collage of selected excerpts from international media – mainly *The Economist*, *International Herald Tribune* and *BBC Online* – organized in two large chapters dedicated respectively to Vietnamese political and economic developments. Each chapter is arranged in paragraphs in which news quotations are listed in chronological order. The reader can easily jump from one section to the other to see how recent events in Vietnam were interpreted by foreign journalists. The work seems to be particularly useful for students who are already familiar with contemporary Vietnam and who want to grasp specific aspects of the country's recent history more promptly. The unfamiliar reader, on the other hand, may fail to gain a meaningful picture from this patchwork of news clips.

The book makes no pretence to being an academic product. The author has written only a few lines by way of introduction, and the remainder of his contribution has been to select and order news collected from international media. No interpretation of the listed events is attempted – or rather, the interpretation is provided through the selection of the news assembled in the book. This is, of course, the most problematic aspect of the work: it relies entirely on the perspective – in most cases influenced by neo-liberal precepts – of a small number of UK and American media sources. The academic literature on contemporary Vietnam is almost entirely ignored and most of the publications listed in the bibliography are either very old or not directly related to Vietnam.

The greatest contribution this book makes to academia is probably unintentional – it provides a good sampling of mainstream Western readings of recent

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