



A Story of Vietnam

Truong Buu Lam

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As a specialist of Southeast Asian History, I am often asked to introduce a book that would relate the history of Vietnam, from its beginnings to the present. As often, I am embarrassed to answer that there is no such book written in English. In effect, although we have many publications that deal competently with particular periods or systematically with different topics of its past, a comprehensive history of Vietnam is still lacking. That is the reason I am happy and humbled to introduce here A Story of Vietnam.

A Story of Vietnam treats evenly all the periods and also gives equal importance to the culture and the arts as to the political or military events of Vietnam's past. I call it a story and not a history, because I do not want my book to be the usual conventional textbook, overburdened with interminable academic, historical and bibliographic references.

While not a conventional textbook, A Story of Vietnam can, nonetheless, provide a substantial reading material to students interested in Asia. To the hyphenated Vietnamese, it can serve as a convenient reference tool to the historical allusions, cultural insinuations, mythical hints, literary suggestions, ethnic idiosyncrasies they encounter every day at home. This book may also be sought after by the people who know so much already about Vietnam as a War but who still would like to know more about Vietnam as a culture.

I have narrated my story with the greatest impartiality I am capable of. I have no theory that needs to be proven nor do I have any assumption to be verified. But I do come to history with emotion, even with passion. Sometimes, my sympathies surged to the surface or my distastes became apparent, though at no time, have I consciously distorted the facts or altered the documents in order to validate my feelings.

The ten chapters of this book are naturally of unequal length. They adhere strictly to the chronological order, meaning that Chapter One deals, among others, with the legendary origins of the Vietnamese people and the last chapter, Chapter Ten, recounts the social traumas, the economic hardships, and the political isolation the country experienced after reunification in 1975 to the remarkable recovery effected since 1986 and culminating in October of 2007 when Vietnam was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations.

Truong Buu Lam is a retired professor of History from the University of Hawaii.

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Daniel Hartung:

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