



CHICAGO JOURNALS



---

Stein Tønnesson. Vietnam 1946: How the War Began.

Vietnam 1946: How the War Began by Stein Tønnesson; Philippe Devillers

Review by: Michael Adas

*The American Historical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 437-438

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.uchicago.edu) on behalf of the [American Historical Association](http://www.ahahistory.org)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/ahr.116.2.437>

Accessed: 05/01/2012 04:48

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*The University of Chicago Press and American Historical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The American Historical Review.*

<http://www.jstor.org>

she points out that “The KSEC workers belong to a small group of elite workers in South Korea” (p. 95), and the state finally defeated the union as it consolidated its model of modern nation-building through an export-promotion strategy.

These points raise a question as to how effective their discourse was in shaping the hegemonic discourse of modernity in Korea. In addition, Nam’s discussion of sociopolitical sources of the KSEC union’s militancy ironically tends to undermine the influence of such resistance to the top-down version of modernity. As Nam shows (see part two in the book), the KSEC was the biggest and most reliable company in the shipbuilding industry during the 1950s and 1960s, but it struggled to make a profit and become viable because the shipbuilding industry was not yet a strategic sector of export-oriented economic growth. This structural position appears to be critical to explaining why the state did not crack down on the union’s militancy until the late 1960s, as it was intensifying its control over female workers in export-oriented light industry. Unfortunately, when the state established its view of modern Korea, it suppressed the union’s alternative view of democratic capitalism that recognized workers’ equal and rightful place in modern Korea. With the resurgence of democratic labor movements since the late 1980s, such a view may alter the trajectory of Korean modernity in the future. But this is different than the alternative view that effectively influenced the elite version of modernity in Park’s era.

Overall, this book is a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in labor politics in Korea and comparative studies of organized labor movements in the world. It is also a welcome addition to the body of critical studies on modern and contemporary Korea that convey nuanced analyses of Korea’s social history.

SEUNGSOOK MOON  
Vassar College

STEIN TØNNESSON. *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*. Foreword by PHILIPPE DEVILLERS. (From *Indochina to Vietnam: Revolution and War in a Global Perspective*, number 3.) Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2010. Pp. xxiv, 361. \$39.95.

This book is a work of prodigious and meticulous scholarship. Drawing together diverse strands of international political and diplomatic maneuvers, Stein Tønnesson provides a finely detailed account of the missed chances and enduring tensions that led to the violent clashes in Hanoi on December 19, 1946, which proved to be the opening salvo of nearly a decade of French-Vietnamese warfare. His laudable attempt to view these events from multiple perspectives—French, Vietnamese, American, Chinese, and Japanese—provides us with the fullest and most balanced account to date of a critical transitional phase in the Vietnamese struggle for a unified and independent nation. This approach inevitably leads to a good deal of repetition. It also contributes significantly to the fact that Tønnesson devotes

a large share of his narrative to French infighting and political machinations. His often less-detailed treatment of the Vietnamese side, including the noncommunist factions in opposition to the Viet Minh, reflects an underlying unavailability of sources that limits his ability to develop fully some of his main arguments or to set forth definitive general conclusions. His concerns in this regard are underscored by an introduction preoccupied with source issues, and by the fact that his 250 pages of narrative are substantiated in perhaps excessive detail by eighty pages of citations and lists of the archival and published sources that he has consulted.

Most of what Tønnesson has to tell us will be of interest to specialists dealing with this pivotal stage of the Vietnam wars or those tracing the demise of the French colonial empire more broadly. But his narrative provides vivid portraits of some of the key French politicians and generals who struggled in vain in Indochina, Algeria, and sub-Saharan Africa to restore France’s Great Power status in the wake of the humiliating defeats and years of German occupation. He also reaffirms decades of scholarship that has documented the nationalist credentials of the communist alternative in Vietnam, and the strength of popular sentiment supporting the Viet Minh’s formation of a government for a unified, independent Vietnam. Of particular interest to those who teach and write about decolonization more generally is Tønnesson’s stress on the centrality of Ho Chi Minh as a rallying point for Vietnamese nationalism and a remarkably skilled negotiator and decision maker, who was highly respected even by intractable Vietnamese rivals and French negotiators across the political spectrum. Tønnesson also has revealing things to tell us about issues as varied as the problems of intelligence files, French fears of a domino effect that the loss of Indochina might have, and the recolonizers’ preliminary plans to move the capital of the colony to the hill station at Dalat.

As Tønnesson readily admits, he cannot answer the most salient question that has preoccupied those who have thought and written about these events for decades: who was responsible and what were the precipitants on December 19, 1946, of the clashes in and around Hanoi that put an abrupt end to an uneasy truce and plunged the French and Vietnamese into decades of bitter, brutal warfare? Although he reads Vietnamese and has uncovered a range of sources beyond that of any of his often distinguished predecessors, Tønnesson has not been able to gain access to critical Vietnamese archival materials relating to the months covered in this work. Obviously, he cannot be faulted for this shortcoming, but it clearly diminishes the significance of his contribution. The problem is compounded by both the dimensions of this history that he explicitly rules out of his analysis and the counterfactuals that he offers to compensate for his inability to offer a new interpretation of the December meltdown. Perhaps the contents of this book could have been condensed into a long, scholarly article on the state of the questions

relating to the post-1945 genesis of the Vietnamese-French phase of the Vietnam wars.

Tønnesson's decision not to address the military aspects of the December clashes and the French massacre of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians in Haiphong some months earlier deprives the reader of potentially valuable insights into Vietnamese approaches to armed struggle in the aftermath of years of battle with the Japanese. The realization that their fighters were no match in conventional, urban warfare against even depleted French forces may well have redoubled their commitment to guerrilla insurgency as well as the imperative of retreat to their rural bases and the need to concede for a time the critical ports and cities in both the north and south. The December clashes also reveal a French readiness to resort to force—already evident in the Haiphong excesses, their determination to recolonize Indochina, and their sense of the importance of that process in preserving the rest of their empire.

These responses and assumptions in turn call into question the counterfactual musings with which Tønnesson concludes his narrative. In the face of French intransigence, and political realities such as the vulnerability of Léon Blum and other short-lived leaders in the French metropole as well as the implacable Vietnamese commitment to full independence, his sense that it was possible to reach a peaceful resolution of the issues that confronted Vietnamese and French leaders is dubious at best. And these outcomes can hardly be seen to have irrevocably set the stage for the debacle of American interventions to come, as he explicitly argues in framing the larger historical dimensions of his study.

MICHAEL ADAS  
Rutgers University,  
New Brunswick

D. R. M. IRVING. *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila*. (Currents in Latin American and Iberian Music.) New York: Oxford University Press. 2010. Pp. x, 394. \$24.95.

Using music as his vehicle, D. R. M. Irving has written a well-documented study of cross-cultural interaction in the worlds of Spanish imperialism in the Philippines. The eight chapters of the book are set within a strong theoretical framework and his own extended metaphor of counterpoint that “within a colonial society involves the combination of multiple musical voices according to a strict, uncompromising set of rules wielded by a manipulating power” (p. 3). The book's theme revolves around Filipino responses to Spanish imperial and ecclesiastical goals and ambitions, with stress throughout on how “transculturation by indigenous populations was a purposeful means of coming to terms with cultural bigotry, subverting cultural and social hierarchies by minimizing difference” (p. 121).

Chapters one through three set forth the colonial setting and cultural encounters that ensued with the Spanish conquest of the islands. These preliminary chapters rework concepts and materials already well known in

Philippine historiography. As we move on, the book's theme revolves around Filipino responses to Spanish imperial and ecclesiastical goals and ambitions, with stress throughout on how “transculturation by indigenous populations was a purposeful means of coming to terms with cultural bigotry, subverting cultural and social hierarchies by minimizing difference” (p. 121). Here the originality of the academic effort becomes more apparent. Chapter four, for example, is entitled “The Hispanization of Filipino Music” and stresses efforts “to suppress indigenous practices that were not compatible with the ideologies and cultural practices of the new religion” (p. 128). The result was mixed: “a combination of passive disuse of precolonial practices by Filipinos, active suppression of these practices by Spaniards, and active appropriation of colonial musical forms and structures by Filipinos” (p. 131). Chapter five centers on what might be called the Filipinization of Hispanic influences, where “syncretic genres” were produced that “allowed old indigenous traditions to be retained under the guise of hispanization” (p. 138). Three case studies are presented—*awit*, *loa*, and *pasyon*—which were “born from the colonial relationship between Europeans and indigenous Filipinos . . . to become potent symbols of indigenous self-definition within the colonial milieu” (p. 138). Chapter six establishes that Filipinos not only embraced musical imports but dominated the ranks of church musicians. Irving speculates that Filipino professional musicians in service to the Roman Catholic Church “may have experienced certain levels of independence, autonomy, and authority that could be found in few other contexts of society” (p. 194).

Still and all, Spanish rule was an imperial enterprise, and chapter seven contributes new insights and materials on colonial efforts to regulate and restrict musical expression. Irving argues that “sacred music appears to have represented another means by which the subaltern could alleviate the burden of colonial oppression. Music and the musical profession became powerful tools of cultural self-expression, subversion, and protest” (p. 195). “Music was opposition” (p. 204). “Functionaries of Church and Crown struggled to constrain and contain the quodlibet nature of Filipino musical and religious practices within a strict set of rules and regulations that they attempted to impose on the subjugated population” (p. 214). The last chapter documents how these restrictions played out in Manila fiestas.

This fine piece of well-researched scholarship is shaped and driven by a coherent and determining theory. At times I found the theoretical claims undercut the major contributions this book offers to the field. For instance, the author studies the period from 1565 to 1815, “a defining epoch in the making of the modern globalized world, especially in the development and consolidation of links between the Americas and Asia” (p. 9). Eighty-three years later Spanish rule in the Philippines ended, but the author excludes them. His argument is that Manila under Spanish rule was “a kind of buckle on a belt whose fastening presaged an un-