



Rice Wars in Colonial Vietnam: The Great Famine and the Viet Minh Road to Power (Asia/Pacific/Perspectives)

Geoffrey C. Gunn

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This book offers the first detailed English-language examination of the Great Vietnamese Famine of 1945, which left at least a million dead, and links it persuasively to the largely unexpected Viet Minh seizure of power only months later. Drawing on extensive research in French archives, Geoffrey C. Gunn offers an important new interpretation of Japanese–Vichy French wartime economic exploitation of Vietnam’s agricultural potential. He analyzes successes and failures of French colonial rice programs and policies from the early 1900s to 1945, drawing clear connections between colonialism and agrarian unrest in the 1930s and the rise of the Viet Minh in the 1940s. Gunn asks whether the famine signaled a loss of the French administration’s “mandate of heaven,” or whether the overall dire human condition was the determining factor in facilitating communist victory in August 1945.

In the broader sweep of Vietnamese history, including the rise of the communist party, the picture that emerges is not only one of local victimhood at the hands of outsiders—French and, in turn, Japanese— but the enormous agency on the part of the Vietnamese themselves to achieve moral victory over injustice against all odds, no matter how controversial, tragic, and contested the outcome. As the author clearly demonstrates, colonial-era development strategies and contests also had their postwar sequels in the “American war,” just as land, land reform, and subsistence-sustainable development issues persist into the present.

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