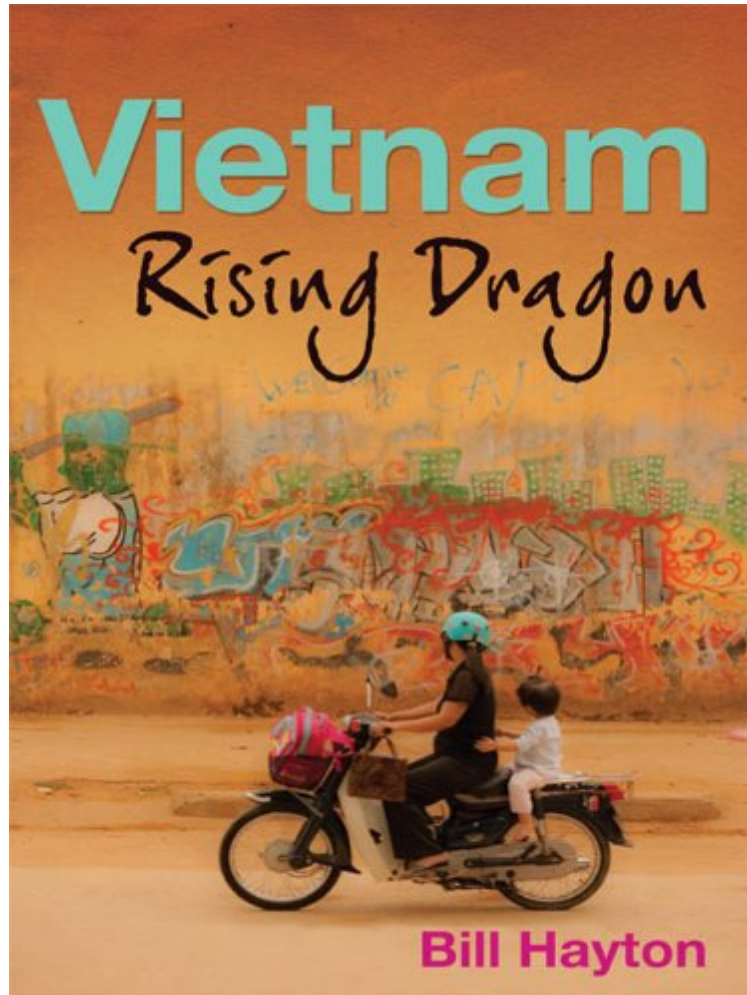


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Vietnam: Rising Dragon

Bill Hayton

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Bill Hayton : Vietnam: Rising Dragon before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Vietnam: Rising Dragon:

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Good update on VietnamBy HistoryBuffVietnam: Rising Dragon is a book about the economic and political aspects of Vietnam in the late 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, up to 2009. The book has an introduction, 10 chapters, and an epilogue. The author addresses several social, political, and economic problems in Vietnam and attempts to offer explanations in some of these. The book covers these topics well, including many details of specific incidents as examples. Those who want to have an update on Vietnam will find the book useful. Introduction: Observing that Vietnam is in the middle of a revolution where "capitalism is flooding into a nominally communist society," the author states that the book "is an attempt to describe [the] currents" that were at work beneath ripples on the surface (p. xiii). Chapter 1: State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are the main driving force for Vietnam economy. However, it appears that the communist government has not been prepared for undertaking large projects that help stimulate the country economy. Ambitions are often marred by

incompetence, mismanagement, and corruption. The author describes the failure of Vinashin as an example of an enterprise that was "to use all the tricks in the capitalist book to keep the socialist part of the economy sailing" (p. 17). The author observes that the "Communist Party leadership likes SOEs because they can implement its policies," but "many bosses like running SOEs because they provide plenty of opportunities for personal enrichment" (p. 19). Economic growth in Vietnam widens the gap between the top and the bottom (p. 25). The children and grandchildren of the early communist revolutionaries "are taking themselves for a ride," but the real question is, "Are they taking the country with them?" (p. 25).

Chapter 2: This chapter focuses on the rural life, villages, and the interactions among the people, the local governments and the Communist Party. It appears that the central government is ambivalent about its role in setting economic policies for land use and farming.

Chapter 3: In an attempt to modernize people's living, the government tried to upgrade the cities with beautification projects, exemplified by the destruction of Nguyen Quy Duc street in Hanoi. But civilizing the city is in effect "a process of expropriating informally owned property from the poor and giving it formally to the rich" (p. 55). As people flock to cities, problems arise. The author tells the story of the New Century, a well known night-club in Hanoi, that was raided by "[f]ive hundred armed and helmeted officers from special units" (p. 59) for drugs and illicit sex activities. In general, the government officials "are struggling to find new ideas for ways to cope with the problems of the new society they are building" (p. 63). The author appears pessimistic about the success of the government in dealing with modernization due to the pressures of economic transition.

Chapter 4: While "big brother is watching you" appears to be a paranoid reaction of citizens in the West, it is a matter of fact in Vietnam. "[T]he Party has tried to co-opt traditional extended family structures into its vast state surveillance system" (p. 69). In watching the people, the Party is far more concerned about political voices than social vices. "[T]he Vietnamese firewall allows youngsters to consume plenty of porn but not Amnesty International reports" (p. 77). While there may be some success for some activities independently of the Party and the state, the Party still possesses the will and the means to crush any uprising against the Communist Party (p. 89).

Chapter 5: The author depicts a bizarre picture of Vietnam political structure: the Party decides in advance who needs to be represented (p. 98), the ludicrous figures in voting turnout and everyone knows these figures are fictitious (p. 101), corruption is a way of life in Vietnam politics and "actually helps the system to fend off demands for wider reform" (p. 104). "[The Party] guides the state but stands above criticism, blaming any failures on the state's implementation, not its policies" (p. 111).

Chapter 6: This chapter focuses on political dissidents in Vietnam, notably Bloc 8406. The Party "seems absolutely determined to maintain its political monopoly" (p. 115).

Chapter 7: In order to maintain political monopoly, the Party has to maintain monopoly in the press. "Every single publication belongs to part of the state or the Communist Party" (p. 141). Accordingly, "there is no press freedom in Vietnam" (p. 142). The government also controls or regulates international news outlets.

Chapter 8: The government of Vietnam has no respect for the environment. An example is Ha Long Bay. "Ha Long's beauty endures but beneath the surface it's dying" (p. 160). The author is even more graphic. "The shit of a million and a half boat passengers a year is being dumped directly into Ha Long Bay" (p. 162). Wildlife trading is also a problem. The law "is expected to outlaw wildlife trading but also to legalise the breeding of endangered species for profit" (p. 167). Vietnam's forests also suffer. "Between 1976 and 1990 Vietnamese loggers destroyed nearly as much of the country's forest cover as the United States did with Agent Orange in the 1960s: 2.5 million hectares" (p. 169). The author advises, "Vietnam still has some beautiful places and some amazing wildlife. See them before they're gone" (p. 180).

Chapter 9: Vietnam needs money, foreign investments, remittance from Overseas Vietnamese, and economic aids. So it is not surprising for the Vietnamese people, especially the government, have been very friendly with foreigners, including the Overseas Vietnamese. They want to forget about the war. "[T]here's also a deliberate strategy of `official forgetting'" (p. 184) because "the Party has decided that the country needs the support and resources of the United States" (p. 185). Vietnam also has a cordial relationship with communist China. "[T]he Vietnamese side conceded 114 square kilometers which China had gained by force in 1979" (p. 191). But this is only from the Party's point of view. The Vietnamese people hate the Chinese. "For once, all Vietnamese appeared united. If there's one thing the global Vietnamese community can agree on, it's a dislike of China" (p. 192). The government effort to erase the past may not be successful. It is because "in a country with an ancestors' altar in almost every home, the past is never totally suppressed" (p. 202).

Chapter 10: The `Official History' often ignores the truth about the history of Vietnam, including the history of the Cham and the Khmer. More importantly, the `Official History' de-emphasizes the significant contributions of the South to the country's overall economy. The author observes that "if it hadn't been for that legacy of southern entrepreneurship, Vietnam might have collapsed" (p. 208). In addition, "Southern surplus still funds government spending across the country, lifting the standard of living in northern and central areas closer to the national average" (p. 209-210). The communist Party also struggles with its dealing with religions and folk beliefs. "The same customs that half a century ago were blamed for the loss of the country to colonialism are now being revived to protect the national identity against the forces of globalisation" (p. 218).

Epilogue: The author recognizes problems in Vietnam and observes that "[t]he question is whether the Party leadership has the will to tackle them in time" (p. 226). It appears that freedom of speech is the obstacle. "The Party has long constrained freedom of speech in order to prevent challenges to its rule" (p.228). The personal interests of those at the top "are taking priority over the country's" (p. 228). The author concludes: "If

Vietnam is to join the ranks of the tiger economies it needs to unshackle freedom of expression" (p. 228). The book serves its purpose well: presenting a view on modern Vietnam. There is, however, a slight lack of coherence throughout the book. It could have been more complete if a more in-depth analysis of the issues was provided. While the author paints a fairly accurate picture of the current situation in Vietnam and attempts to explain the reasons for some of the problems, certain deep-rooted reasons are not fully provided (e.g., the characteristics of the Vietnamese Communist Party and its leaders). This is not really a weakness because the author does not intend to offer his observations and analyses from a historian's point of view. Incidentally, the author was banned from Vietnam, perhaps because of this book, as posted by himself on November 15, 2012 in the following link:[...]He explains the reason for the ban: "I think my offence was to say these things in public - and in English -- where foreign governments and aid donors can read them." 41 of 42 people found the following review helpful. The best on contemporary Vietnam By David Brown Considering myself something of an expert on contemporary Vietnam, I thought I might write a book. Then I discovered that Bill Hayton has already written it, and far better than I might have done! Vietnam: Rising Dragon perfectly reports the complex reality of a nation that, having left its legacy of war and economic failure far behind, may -- or may not -- succeed in its goal of becoming 'becoming a developed country by 2020.' Dozens of telling vignettes illuminate Hayton's critique of Vietnam's rapid socio-economic progress and the much slower pace of political evolution. The BBC's former Vietnam correspondent is an expert analyst of the shadowed inner workings of the Vietnamese Communist Party, showing it to be nowhere nearly so monolithic nor effective in enforcing its wishes as is commonly assumed. Hayton deftly exposes the stresses that exposure to global markets and information flows have put on Vietnam's national life, leaving us wondering -- as indeed we should -- whether all this will lead to sustainable prosperity or a new cycle of instability. Highly recommended for curious backpackers, teachers, expatriate executives and anyone who's wondered what happened to Vietnam after it disappeared from the daily newspapers. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating overview of this vibrant country By Bill Therersquo;s an excitement and energy to Vietnam that's palpable mdash; you feel it the moment you step out of the airport. With 60 percent of Vietnam's population under 30 and 85 percent under 40, it'squo;s a vibrant, pulsating society. It'squo;s the kind of place where you can see big changes in just a few years and it's been fun to watch the development of an emerging economy. In the seven years between my first and second visits, the differences are unmistakable. One thing I've noticed mdash; and the book touches on this somewhat mdash; is the way society is moving "from outside to inside." In older neighborhoods, you still see many shops "on the street" (the sidewalk is constantly blocked by old ladies selling noodles and young men repairing motorbikes). But in more modern neighborhoods, such as Saigon's district 1, clear sidewalks line indoor shops and restaurants. While preparing for my first trip to Vietnam back in 2007, I searched for books about the country. It'squo;d say 95% were either travel guides or dealt with the Vietnam War (or The American War as it's known in Vietnam). But I wasn't interested in that. I wanted to know about modern Vietnam, its culture, economy, and cuisine. I found nothing at the time. It wasn't until recently, having visited Vietnam several times and spent months living in Saigon and Da Nang and traveling the countryside, that I came across Hayton's book, published in 2010. Having had some firsthand experience, the book fit with what I had seen but more importantly, filled in a lot of gaps in my knowledge. The style of the book is a bit dry and the author gets so bogged down in detail that I often felt as though I were slogging through a textbook. But like a textbook, there is an enormous amount of information here, information that I haven't found anywhere else. For that alone, it's worth a read. Vietnam's modern history is fascinating. What'squo;s most interesting about Vietnam today is the fast growth occurring in a culture that combines communism and capitalism. There is a constant push and pull with the ruling party relaxing restrictions where it makes sense, even if it compromises their stated ideology. Seemingly, the ruling party would rather compromise on communist ideology than to cede power. I was also surprised to learn of the complex interplay between party and government. While the government is responsible for implementing and enforcing laws, the directives come from the Communist Party itself. The author gives many examples of this fascinating back and forth. It was also curious to see that, while Vietnam is not a democracy, there is a deliberate effort to make government representative of the people (women, ethnic minorities, geographical regions) and these voices are listened to mdash; to an extent. Many other topics are covered here, mostly the problems experienced by many emerging economies: exploitation of natural resources; government and police corruption; suppression of dissent; and censorship of the press and social media. And while the book was written in 2010, many of these problems persist today. For example, a recent check of Reporters Without Borders Freedom Index (a measure of freedom of information in a given society) still has Vietnam near the bottom of the list. Vietnam is an exceptional country with kind people, beautiful landscapes and wonderful cuisine. Hayton's book has given me an even greater appreciation of the obstacles the Vietnamese people have overcome and what challenges still lie ahead. I wish them all the best and look forward to watching what changes the next few years bring.

The eyes of the West have recently been trained on China and India, but Vietnam is rising fast among its Asian peers. A breathtaking period of social change has seen foreign investment bringing capitalism flooding into its nominally communist society, booming cities swallowing up smaller villages, and the lure of modern living tugging at the

traditional networks of family and community. Yet beneath these sweeping developments lurks an authoritarian political system that complicates the nation's apparent renaissance. In this engaging work, experienced journalist Bill Hayton looks at the costs of change in Vietnam and questions whether this rising Asian power is really heading toward capitalism and democracy. Based on vivid eyewitness accounts and pertinent case studies, Hayton's book addresses a broad variety of issues in today's Vietnam, including important shifts in international relations, the growth of civil society, economic developments and challenges, and the nation's nascent democracy movement as well as its notorious internal security. His analysis of Vietnam's police state, and its systematic mechanisms of social control, coercion, and surveillance, is fresh and particularly imperative when viewed alongside his portraits of urban and street life, cultural legacies, religion, the media, and the arts. With a firm sense of historical and cultural context, Hayton examines how these issues have emerged and where they will lead Vietnam in the next stage of its development.