did not receive its baptism of fire on the battlefield, it was to gain some experience as an occupying force after the armistice of 11 November 1918. In mid-December a regiment of several hundred Siamese soldiers arrived at the small German town of Neustadt in the Palatinate region where they would stay for several months.

More significant than the real contribution of the SEF on the West European battlefield was its symbolic value, all the more so since Siam's decision to enter the war had come at a moment 'when the situation in Europe was not absolutely rosy for the Allies', as Prince Charoon sharply remarked (p. 90). I agree with Hell's opinion that by sending troops to Europe, regardless of their actual fighting capacities, Siam was signalling to the Allied Powers its willingness to share the burden of war and at the same time its demand to be treated henceforth as an equal partner in the international arena. Or to put it in the author's own apt words: 'The most significant outcome of joining the war was that Siam won the war' (p. 284). The renouncement of the unequal treaty that Siam had concluded with Germany was one essential outcome of the Treaty of Versailles, paving the way for the rescindment of unequal treaties with the United States, Britain, France and all other Western countries during the 1920s.

Stefan Hell's excellent study of Siam's involvement in World War I is a fine piece of scholarship providing new perspectives on an often neglected chapter of modern Thai history. It also makes accessible less-known primary sources from the French, British, German and Austrian Archives. Besides, the author brings to light documents from the Thai National Archives, thanks to the efforts of Thai historian Bhawan Ruangsilp whose contribution to this wonderful project is explicitly acknowledged. Stefan Hell's book is superb not only with regard to its wealth of detail and analytical depth, its careful integration of numerous historical photographs, postcards, pamphlets — almost on every page — makes the reading a particular pleasure. The volume is highly recommended to anyone interested in Thailand's connection with the world in the twentieth century.

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Vietnam

Cauldron of resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam
By JESSICA M. CHAPMAN
Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 276. Maps, Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
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Around the turn of this century, historians, mainly American, rediscovered the first non-communist Vietnamese leader with whom the United States worked to prevent the establishment of a communist state in a unified Vietnam. But scholars such as Philip Catton, Seth Jacobs, and Mark Moyar tackled the historical experience,

influence and impact of Ngo Dinh Diem and his government by placing it in the same familiar context: the apparently permanent internal American arguments — hand-wringing, soul-searching? — over the wisdom, justification, and effects of American intervention in Vietnam. I wrote in a review of an earlier study that the typical take-away from reading yet another book on the 'Vietnam War' by an American author is to learn at least as much about where they stand on the old domestic arguments about what happened then, and the bitter controversies about legacies for and applications to now, as about the historical experience of the war itself. In other words, it all too often winds up being either condemnation or defence of American intervention in Vietnam in order to opine on how the United States should formulate strategic foreign policy today. Jessica Chapman does not get us beyond this tired discourse. Her conclusion eventually focuses on it, and the subtitle of her book indicates where her line of argument takes the reader. However. This book is worth reading, not just because it is an intelligent and energetic scholarly analysis, but because it does add some things to what we know about what happened in Vietnam during the Cold War.

Chapman argues that the United States government did not do enough at the time to learn just how complicated the politics of southern Vietnam were, that this omission was then reflected in 'American-centred' scholarship, and that this leaves a gap which needs to be addressed. She is right, and tries to correct this. Diligent archival work in France and Vietnam adds something to the familiar strip-mining of NARA RG59 documents — spiced with CIA material — that does allow us, for at least part of the book, to look more closely and critically at something too often brushed off glibly. Chapman posits that the southernmost regions of Vietnam were politically fractious, volatile and contested for a generation before the onset of the French war, and by turning her attention to the local political forces that contended for dominance between the start of that war, and Hanoi's formation of the National Liberation Front in 1960, she will shed light on how and why a hyperopic American Cold War focus turned an already difficult problem into an explosive confrontation. Four principals emerge: Ngo Dinh Diem and the regime he built from 1954, and the two politico-religious organisations, the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, and one organised crime organisation, the Binh Xuyen, he smashed in order to do so. Chapman argues that these groups all had genuine agency, strength and ambitions in regional and thus national politics, and that Ngo Dinh Diem shaped his policies more to destroy them, and eliminate all local rivals to his government building project, than to block communist efforts, directed from Hanoi, to terminate the administration of southern Vietnam and unify the country under their rule. It is a persuasive thesis, and Chapman's account of the roots, growth, nature and behaviour of these organisations makes some important points.

The thesis does not quite complete the task she sets, however, due partly to the limitations of available sources. Despite Chapman's efforts to keep the sub-state organisations as much in focus as possible, the sources steer her strongly into a more detailed evaluation of how and why Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother formulated the policies they did, and — especially — why the American government concluded that Ngo represented their only viable local partner in a Cold War challenge. This exposes an awkward aspect of any such study. Granted that the State Department

and its men on the spot may well have too hastily dismissed these organisations as feudal warlord gangs Diem should pulverise. Also granted that this aborted any effort to try to build a broader more inclusive government and state in Saigon, with serious consequences, although Chapman argues that Diem did not want to do that in any case. The core problem remains: how could this have been done in a way that produced a viable administration able to defeat the challenge that sooner or later was going to emanate from Hanoi? It is at least as likely that building a coalition including at least the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai in any such government would have made it too weak to endure even to 1963. Identifying them as genuinely rooted local political forces is one thing; suggesting that the abstract formula of 'building a broad based inclusive administration as a basis for unity' could have worked at this time, in this place, is quite another.

There is no doubt that Diem ran roughshod over all opposition and built far too narrow an administration, and that case is made again here; but the question of what else might have worked is something that Chapman herself acknowledges cannot really be answered. Indeed, the driving force to the thesis ultimately becomes to condemn Diem, and thus American policy — thereby joining the argument noted at the start of this review — by trying to explain the zig and zags of local politics on the ground after 1955. This leads to mixed results. On the one hand Ho Chi Minh is allowed the dignity of being communist and nationalist at the same time; Diem, on the other hand, is rebuked for trying both to contain communism and build his own administration. And again, that seems to stem from stale 'made in America' arguments. But in the end Chapman does put across one crucial point. These substate organisations understandably focused on their own survival, reacted to the course of events and made choices accordingly, and those choices, when examined, do tell us important things about the politics that shaped the failed effort to preserve a non-communist state in Vietnam. Chapman does not quite escape 'American-centred' analysis, but at least she directs our critical attention to things Vietnamese that we should indeed have been paying more attention to all along.

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Television in post-reform Vietnam: Nation, media, market
By GIANG NGUYEN-THU
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At first glance, one might expect the first English-language monograph on contemporary Vietnamese television to be occupied with debates on the politics of censorship, copyright issues and the role of the media as a mouthpiece of the Communist