

world stage, becoming a state without proper recognition, securing funding for programs like the Vanguard Mission and AVRDC also became a problem. Yet, even beyond politics, Lin also points out that sometimes the missions failed for simpler reasons. As noted in chapter 5, Taiwanese rice and vegetables failed to sell well in Liberia and Sierra Leone because their texture was different and their cheaper price led to discontent from the local farmers. Lacking financial support, the locals also could not afford the fertilizers or irrigation pumps employed by the Taiwanese missions, and hence they simply reverted to their old methods once the Taiwanese technicians left their countries. The missions might be well-intentioned, despite the political strings attached, but the reality was that they did not generate much actual change in the long run.

In the Global Vanguard is a story of Cold War Taiwan from the perspective of agrarian development, an important chapter that often gets ignored in this context. Perhaps more precisely, it is less about the making of modern Taiwan, as the book's subtitle suggests, but the ROC government from its time in mainland China and then reluctantly confined to the boundary of Taiwan. Through archival documents and oral interviews, Lin successfully demonstrates the significance of agrarian development, from implementing domestic reforms to spreading its "modern" ideals to the Global South, in the social and political development of the ROC in Taiwan. The chapters on the ROC's global engagement are particularly useful as assigned readings in undergraduate courses that wish to restore some subjectivity to modern Taiwan rather than framing it as just a compliant and reactive character in the Cold War geopolitical and ideological struggle. Scholars of modern Asia, global history, capitalism, and the history of science and technology alike will find this book intellectually stimulating and rewarding.

Justin Wu California State University, Sacramento
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Phi-Van Nguyen. *A Displaced Nation: The 1954 Evacuation and Its Political Impact on the Vietnam Wars.* Cornell University Press, 2024. Pp. 306. Paper \$34.95.

"The goal of this book," states Phi-Van Nguyen, "is not to offer an exhaustive mapping of the initial and successive rounds of displacement" (8). A strong monograph tends to be clear about its limits and boundaries while providing strong evidence to stretch those limits. *A Displaced Nation* does just that. Its mapping focuses mostly on the initial round of displacement, which took place when many Northern Vietnamese moved south following the Geneva Peace Conference. Yet it

also attempts to stretch the limits and offer thoughtful ways to approach successive rounds that took place with the fall of Saigon and later events.

Nguyen's most original and significant analytical contribution is making displacement central to the unfolding of Vietnamese history since decolonization. Historians and other scholars have usually treated the migration of Northerners, called "population displacement" or "evacuation" in the book, to be important but also secondary to the familiar Vietnamese story that virtually overlapped with the history of the Cold War: warfare (involving France and then the US), national division in 1954, formal national reunification in 1976, and postwar developments until 1989. This treatment perhaps accounts for a sizable body of scholarship about the evacuation but rather little scholarship about their lives and experiences thereafter. It is especially true of Northern Catholics, the focus of this book.

For Nguyen, population displacement, "when used as a weapon to reinforce or undermine the legitimacy of contesting political authorities, affects the projection of the nation-state" (4). Moreover, the fluidities of the Cold War led the evacuees to think of their future as open-ended and to raise "their hopes of one day reversing their forced departure from the north" (35). These two points help to explain a key argument in the book: that the evacuees had fled Communist rule in the North, but they did not want to be permanently resettled in the South. It brought many of them into conflict with Ngô Đình Diệm. The founding father of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) sought their support, but he did not want their insistence on liberating the North to derail his project of nation-building in the South.

In this regard, chapters 2 and 3 are the most significant among the book's eight chapters. Following the first chapter situating the division of Vietnam to Cold War politics, these chapters provide the best account thus far about the interactions between Diệm and Northern Catholics. Nguyen utilizes and dissects a mix of materials—notably, documents found in French and Vietnamese archives, or sometimes published in Vietnamese periodicals. Her analysis shows that many Northern Catholics had not wanted to leave and would have preferred to stay in the North and fight the Communists. It took a great deal of propaganda on the part of Diệm's government as well as France and the US to persuade them to head south. (The Communist government unwittingly gave an assist by castigating them as "traitors.") This background further accounts for the fact that they remained the most militant group of Vietnamese in the South. They pressured Diệm, rather futilely, to invest in a "march to the north." More successfully, they publicized their anti-Communist position through print media and political organizations.

Chapters 4–6 analyze Northern Catholics under the interregnum era and the Second Republic. Like the previous chapters, they detail many activities thanks to Nguyen’s examination of materials from the rich South Vietnamese press. Their analysis shows that the Catholics had shifted from their hope to return to the North to a focus on the here and now. Never a completely unified block of citizens, the evacuees varied in reaction to the Americanization of the war and the new RVN governments. Some were supportive while others were critical. Nguyen further argues that it was Nixon’s declaration on American withdrawal that led the evacuees to disillusion. Many, “including the most anticommunist among them ... believed they had been manipulated, dragged into the Cold War, and paid a price for it” (117). They became “estranged from the war,” as indicated by the title of chapter 6. Division among Northern Catholics was also deepened, as some were openly critical of the Nguyễn Văn Thiệu government while others continued support for fear of a Communist takeover.

It was with the final two chapters that the book seeks to stretch the aforementioned limits and boundaries. Nguyen still draws out a number of important events regarding the relationship between the postwar government and the evacuees on the one hand, and on the other hand, the evacuees in the diaspora. Nonetheless, these chapters employ fewer primary sources, most of which are published, and are less analytical than the chapters on the RVN. This difference harks back to Nguyen’s statement that the book is not “exhaustive mapping”—and her hope that many “other works in the future will likely explore what I have only begun to surface” (8). In the meantime, this monograph, which could alternatively be titled *A Displaced People*, systematically situates and examines the evacuees and the RVN to a depth unseen hitherto. Given the long-standing place of Northern Catholics in the historiography of the Vietnam War, it is a most valuable development to this historiography.

Tuan Hoang Pepperdine University

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Ronald C. Po. *Shaping the Blue Dragon: Maritime China in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.* Liverpool University Press, 2024. Pp. 336. Ebook, open access.

Ronald C. Po situates *Shaping the Blue Dragon: Maritime China in the Ming and Qing Dynasties* within the framework of “New Qing History,” a scholarly trend that has flourished since the 1990s, especially in American scholarship on Chinese history. Rather than presenting “New Qing Maritime History” as merely a methodology for studying maritime affairs in Chinese history, the book aims at broadening the horizons of

New Qing History itself, implicitly suggesting that this perspective should become central to the study of maritime history in relation to Chinese civilization. Po attributes the enduring biases of Western historians toward China to John K. Fairbank, who portrayed the Chinese empire as essentially land-based and disinterested in maritime expansion. By drawing upon the voluminous archival records of the Qing court, the author argues that Fairbank’s characterization is untenable, since these sources reveal extensive imperial involvement in maritime affairs. From this, he asserts that Qing rulers invested in seaward expansion as vigorously as they did in continental frontiers. Extending this logic, he maintains that Qing expansionism in the early eighteenth century was not confined to the western land frontier but also encompassed the sea frontier and maritime affairs. The absence of scholarship on Qing maritime expansion thus becomes, in his view, a critical shortcoming in the existing historiography.

The call to pay more serious attention to the maritime dimensions of the early modern Chinese empire is both valuable and timely, and the emphasis on the massive Qing dynasty archives is justified; however, the wholesale attribution of entrenched scholarly biases to Fairbank seems overstated. Fairbank himself rarely dealt with early modern China, let alone the question of “Chinese sea power.” A more fitting interlocutor would have been John E. Wills (one of Fairbank’s disciples), whose work directly engaged with the maritime world. Yet, despite this relevance, Wills’s theoretical insights receive little sustained analysis in the book. This omission leaves the reader uncertain about which scholars or paradigms the author truly challenges, and which he intends to endorse. A more persuasive argument might have been achieved by grappling seriously with Wills’s framework. Wills described Chinese maritime activities as a form of “peripheral history” and underscored the interpretive value of this perspective in his article “Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang: Themes in Peripheral History” (1979). Against this backdrop, the author must clarify the advantages of displacing Wills’s “peripheral history/maritime China” with the so-called “New Qing Maritime History.” Without such clarification, the book’s theoretical contribution remains ambiguous.

But for general readers, these historiographical debates might matter less. As the author explains, his narrative foregrounds “pirates, cartographers, administrators, naval generals, maritime writers, emperors, visionaries, envoys and travelers” whose stories remain “understudied” (16). The central interpretive claim—that “when it came to managing the maritime frontier, the Manchus’ reliance on the Han-Chinese was more significant than had been their reliance on other Asian communities when they were administering the inland frontier”—is in many ways the real heart of the book