

H-France Review Vol. 21 (March 2021), No. 57

Pierre Journoud, *Dien Bien Phu. La fin d'un monde*. Paris: Éditions Vendémiaire, 2019. 472 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. €25.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2-36358-325-3.

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The battle of Điện Biên Phủ gained near-mythical status well before the ignominious French defeat, and remains the primary reference point for the French Indochina War (1946-1954) in collective remembrance.[1] Historiography of the battle has tended toward the traditional: close analyses of military strategy, financing, and diplomatic brokering abound, along with narrative accounts and personal memoirs. In the past decade, Christopher Goscha, François Guillemot, and Christian Lentz have all offered new approaches to the war, and in the latter case, Điện Biên Phủ itself.[2] In his newest book, *Dien Bien Phu. La fin d'un monde*, Pierre Journoud joins the effort to rethink the approach to, and parameters of, the study of the battle that marked the end of French sovereignty over the peninsula. The book is an engagingly written, well-crafted study of the battle from multiple vantage points: its political and strategic frameworks, its international contexts, its short and long-term consequences, and the processes of mythification and demythification (p. 29).

Journoud builds on a decades-long research focus on the French and American wars in the Southeast Asian peninsula. His previous work on the French war has included the history and memory of Điện Biên Phủ and a collection of eyewitness accounts of members of the French Expeditionary Corps (CEFEO; *Corps expéditionnaire français en Extrême-Orient*), among other publications.[3] His mastery of the subject is further bolstered by the contributions of Đào Thanh Huyền, a journalist who co-edited a collection of Vietnamese eyewitness accounts of Điện Biên Phủ.[4] The study is supported by an extensive bibliography of Anglophone, Francophone, and Vietnamese-language archival and secondary sources, though the latter is available only on the publisher's website. Also available on Vendémiaire's website is a 65-page *Dialogue franco-vietnamien* which features an extended conversation between Pierre Journoud and Đào Thanh Huyền about their respective paths to the study of Điện Biên Phủ and the genesis of the book.

Journoud frames his analysis as a response to Hervé Drevillon's call for a more expansive study of battle history, one that engages "the battles and the narrative, victory and its commemoration, defeat and its political instrumentalization; a web of practices and representations that make battle a subject of cultural history *par excellence*." [5] The book's structure reflects this objective: each chapter engages with a different point of reference or methodological framework for the battle, including Điện Biên Phủ's place in Vietnamese military history, the role of China in

Vietnamese decision-making, the crisis in Franco-American relations, and the battle's place in French and Vietnamese collective remembrance.

The introductory chapter presents an overview of the major events, figures, and alliances of the Indochina War. Journoud also provides a brief account of the historiography of the conflict, noting its predominant focus on military strategy and Cold War diplomacy, and highlights the relative absence of cultural histories of the war and of studies of *mentalités*. He engages with the work by Christopher Goscha and others on the role of the war in the process of state formation, as well as its impact on soldiers and on cultural narratives of the conflict. However, other innovative social and cultural histories, such as those by François Guillemot and Christian Lentz, are not addressed.[6] Far from constituting a major critique, I see this as a missed opportunity to situate the book within an exciting new wave of scholarship.

Methodologically, Journoud alternately applies the Annalist study of *mentalités*, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's concept of the *événement-matrice*, and Pierre Nora's theory of the hyper-mediatized *événement monstre*. [7] Điện Biên Phủ is thus the product of a centuries-old Vietnamese military tradition; a foundational event that fundamentally disrupted the French colonial order and the evolution of the Cold War; as well as an event that "captured the media's attention to such an extensive degree, fostered the legend, and sustained the myth, all before it had reached its conclusion" (pp. 25-26).

Chapter one presents an Annalist-inspired overview of the long history Vietnamese tradition of warfare and military strategy that informed the People's Army of Vietnam's (PAVN) approach to the siege at Điện Biên Phủ. Though he acknowledges the impact of Chinese influence, both historically and specifically in terms of the Indochina War, Journoud also emphasizes the homegrown aspects of Vietnamese military culture. He traces Võ Nguyên Giáp and Hồ Chí Minh's approach to "total" war fought on political, military, and diplomatic fronts back to thirteenth-century military leader Trần Hưng Đạo and fifteenth-century strategist Nguyễn Trãi. He further highlights Hồ's mobilization of the history of resistance to foreign powers to build support and morale.

Chapter two, written by Đào Thanh Huyền, is the only chapter that presents a ground-level description of the battle, from the first paratroopers' arrival in November 1953 to the French surrender in May 1954. Structured chronologically, her narrative privileges eyewitness testimony from both French and Vietnamese sources over a tactical play-by-play. The result is an evocative, rich description of the evolution of the conflict on both sides, and is a fruitful marriage of Journoud and Đào Thanh Huyền's earlier collections of veterans' recollections of their experiences.

Chapter three shifts to the international context of the battle, and specifically to China's role in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's (DRV) decision-making process. While Chinese military support for the PAVN was no secret for the French and their allies, Journoud probes the degree to which Chinese advisors influenced the decision to concentrate PAVN forces more heavily in the northwest rather than in the Red River delta; the decision to make the battle a decisive one; and the decision to delay the first strike against the fortified French site. Chinese and Vietnamese historiographies naturally differ quite significantly on these points. Unfortunately, a lack of access to most of the relevant Chinese archives makes it difficult to come to firm conclusions. In

spite of this limitation, Journoud presents a compelling argument that while Giáp and Vietnamese strategists had the final say, decisions often reflected lessons drawn from prior Chinese experiences as well as advice offered by Chinese advisors.

Journoud returns to Le Roy Ladurie's concept of the *événement-matrice*—that is, a creative or generative event that fundamentally upends the traditional order—in chapters four and five. Like the third chapter, chapter four draws on Journoud's expertise in diplomatic and military history, which he applies to a dissection of the tense Franco-American relationship. He frames the issue not only in terms of the conflicting positions of American military and political leaders, or the fraught relationship between the US and France, but also by considering the extent to which Điện Biên Phủ can be viewed as an American failure, rather than solely as a French one. He further explores the implications of the French defeat for longer-term American involvement in the region.

Chapter five examines Điện Biên Phủ as a watershed moment for the Franco-Indochinese relationship, French decolonization, and the evolution of the Cold War. Journoud explores the impact of the battle on the negotiation of the Geneva Accords, the transition to increased American involvement in the region, and the impact of the Vietnamese victory on galvanizing anticolonial militants in Algeria. If the degree to which French military leaders sought to avoid a repeat of Điện Biên Phủ at all costs is well-known, as is the influence of the Indochinese experience on the development of counterrevolutionary warfare in Algeria, Journoud's framing of these issues as a critical turning point amidst several others stresses their importance.

The sixth and final chapter hones in on the mythmaking processes and collective memory of the battle. The subject of heavy media coverage as it was unfolding, the siege became an *événement monstre*, and this status lasted well into the postwar years. Journoud analyzes the construction of the mythical status of the battle in French and Vietnamese collective remembrance. French remembrance of the battle, he states, is characterized by two concurrent narratives: that of a "humiliating defeat that one wants to avoid or to inflict" (p. 308), and the heroic myth, which emphasizes the sacrifices of the CEFEO troops. These narratives are not antithetical, he argues, and are often maintained simultaneously. On the DRV's side, the victory at Điện Biên Phủ served as a founding myth, or rather, as a "refounding" myth. The battle was inscribed in the hagiographic tradition of patriotic resistance to foreign invasions, celebrating national unity and Party leadership while ignoring dissent, losses, and failures (not to mention the Vietnamese who served alongside the CEFEO). Here Journoud examines not just commemorative activities and monuments, but also analyses contemporary coverage of the battle in the Vietnamese grade-school curriculum.

Taken together, these six chapters present a compelling analysis of the final episode of the French Indochina War. Journoud successfully captures six distinct aspects of the battle, and combines military and diplomatic history with eyewitness testimony and cultural history. The use of Annalist methodology and other concepts is effective, although there might have been more sustained connections between their presentation in the introduction and the chapters where they are applied. A small qualm, however, and one that does not detract from the overall quality of the book.

NOTES

[1] I include the appropriate diacritics in Vietnamese names and terms in order to maintain consistency; I have opted, however, to use the westernized spelling of Vietnam as that will likely be more familiar to readers.

[2] See Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam. Un État né de la guerre. 1945-1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011); François Guillemot, *Des Vietnamiennes dans la guerre civile, 1945-1975. L'autre moitié de la guerre* (Paris, Les Indes savantes, 2014); Christian Lentz, *Contested Territory: Điện Biên Phủ and the Making of Northwest Vietnam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

[3] These include the proceedings of a 2003 conference that he organized with Hugues Tertrais, entitled *1954-2004, La bataille de Dien Bien Phu entre histoire et mémoire* (Paris: Société d'histoire d'outre-mer, 2004), and their co-edited volume *Paroles de Dien Bien Phu. Les survivants témoignent* (Paris: Éditions Tallandier, 2004).

[4] Đào Thanh Huyền et al., *Dien Bien Phu vu d'en face. Paroles de bộ đội* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2010).

[5] Hervé Drevillon, *Batailles, scènes de guerre, de la Table Ronde aux Tranchées* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 13-14. Quoted in Journoud, 30-31.

[6] See Guillemot, *Des Vietnamiennes dans la guerre civile, 1945-1975* and Christian Lentz, *Contested Territory*. Lentz's *Contested Territory* was, of course, published when Journoud's book was already in production, but the dissertation on which it is based dates from 2011.

[7] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Événement et longue durée dans l'histoire sociale: l'exemple chouan," *Communications* 18 (1972): 72-84; Pierre Nora, "L'Événement monstre," *Communications* 18 (1972): 162-172.

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