

Population Review

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Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society

Edited by: Hy V. Luong

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As the subtitle of this edited volume suggests, editor Hy V. Luong and his contributors contend that contemporary Vietnam is undergoing a major period of economic, social, and cultural transformation. Over the past decade, the country's socialist government has loosened long-standing social and economic controls, spurring the period of change and adaptation examined in this book. The extent of these new developments, as identified by the authors, is striking. Since the late 1980s, a market-based economy has emerged in Vietnam, women's earning power has increased substantially, and state controls over cultural and intellectual life have begun to diminish. However, at the same time, rural-urban inequality has grown, women's bodies have become increasingly commodified, and environmental pollution is emerging as a serious concern. This wide-ranging book details a variety of the interconnected dimensions driving, and resulting from, these transformations. While this volume does not focus primarily on demographic events, it does identify increasing influxes of rural-to-urban migration as an important factor shaping the country's postwar development. Andrew Hardy's overview of internal migration (chapter 4) addresses this issue most specifically, and other contributors examine population-related concerns secondarily, making this book of interest to many readers of this journal.

In his introduction, Luong argues that recent transformations in Vietnam are the result of an ongoing "dialogue" between the state and society. While this dialogical relationship is not new to modern Vietnam, he contends that the economic and political forces of globalization have increased pressures on the state to liberalize. The result has been a series of continuing and self-perpetuating reforms, the most notable of which was the 1986 *Doi Moi* (economic renovation) which ushered in the country's transformation from a controlled socialist economy to a market-based system. While this is the central thesis of the volume according to Luong's introduction, this theme is present, but not as clearly articulated, in the following largely descriptive chapters. The most notable exception to this is the first chapter by Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, which more fully develops the dialogical model of change in Vietnam by exploring a number of competing interpretations of state-society interaction.

The book's strength lies in its ability to construct an image of Vietnam as a dynamic, multi-faceted society in the throes of political and economic transformation. Each of the nine chapters

details some aspect of these recent changes. Chapter one, as noted above, explains evolving state policy as a function of a somewhat imperfect dialogue between ideas and institutions. The next three chapters address the changing relationships between urban and rural areas. In chapter two, Melanie Beresford discusses the sharp rise in urban-rural inequality associated with the country's transition to a market economy, and warns of emerging tensions in a society ingrained with socialist notions of fairness. Editor Hy V. Luong contributes a chapter on the socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects of this regional inequality, arguing that the often-contradictory interplay between local-level factors, global market forces, and the government have exerted influence on the emerging processes of differentiation. Andrew Hardy provides insight into the demographic aspects of the urban-rural divide, tracing the history of migration from the 1950s to the present. He argues that a lack of faith in the socialist project created a wave foreign-bound boat people in the 1980s, while the *Doi Moi* land reforms facilitated a new phase of legal internal migration in the 1990s. Even though many of these new migrants head to urban centers, Hardy contends this movement remains comparatively low for Southeast Asia, a condition that he attributes to the government's lack of vision in dismantling socialist administrative structures designed to limit mobility.

Chapters five, six, and seven review a series of problems associated with the country's recent rapid changes. In chapter five, A. Terry Rambo and Neil L. Jamieson look to the rural uplands, contending that the ethnic minorities of the region are on the brink of economic marginalization and environmental crisis, one cause of which is population pressure resulting from forced resettlements of nearly a million people into the area from the 1960s to 1980s. DiGregorio, Rambo, and Yanagisawa develop a similarly grim vision of the environmental problems facing the newly developing country, but conclude that an emerging environmental regulatory apparatus provides hope that such degradation will not continue. Another chapter by Hy V. Luong focuses on the interplay between gender ideologies and the political economy of the 1990s, arguing that even though women have been integrated more fully into the global economy, gender roles have not changed correspondingly. The outcome is that women more frequently bear the double burden of domestic duties and income-generating activities, with sex work becoming an increasingly viable means of earning income in the post-reform era.

The final two chapters tend to address more positive aspects of changing Vietnamese state-society relationships. In chapter eight, Shaun Kingsley Malarney traces the history of religious observance in contemporary Vietnam from state attempts to restrict and recast sacred practices to the recent relaxation of such controls, arguing that the new official posture toward religion is the result of an on-going dialogue between practitioners and the state. A similar dialogic loosening of state restrictions is recounted in the concluding chapter of this volume, in which David G. Marr examines the historical development of the Vietnamese intelligentsia and their evolving engagement with the media and the government.

These chapters provide an excellent overview of many of the challenges and opportunities facing Vietnam as it enters the twenty-first century. While no single book can touch on every aspect of such a complex issue, chapters on broader social development concerns such as education, health, and state attitudes toward fertility would have been useful additions. One notable oversight is a discussion of reproductive health concerns, especially HIV/AIDS, which is an exceptionally timely issue that has recently catapulted onto the international stage in light of increased attention by the United States. Similarly, because Luong explains socioeconomic and sociocultural change as a function of state-society relationships, this work tends to overlook the transformational nature of factors largely outside of the state's purview, such as globalization. While some chapters, including those by Marr and Luong, allude to external influences, the bulk of the analysis looks inward. Perhaps the specter of an overarching state apparatus, which exerted so much influence over the Vietnamese people for decades, also constrains the vision of scholars so that they continue to look to the state to explain social phenomena.

This book is recommended because of the wealth of current information it contains on aspects of Vietnam's development that, until very recently, have been under-represented in the literature. It is most likely to appeal to area specialists or those with a specific interest in one of the issues addressed by the contributors; such as socialist migration policy or urban-rural differentiations, in the case of this review's readership. Because of the detailed nature of many chapters, a working knowledge of Vietnam's past and present is extremely helpful for fully appreciating the contributions contained in this collection.