

LAUREN MEEKER

Sounding Out Heritage: Cultural Politics and the Social Practice of Quan Họ Folk Song in Northern Vietnam

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013, 200 pages, \$45 (cloth)

Sounding out Heritage: Cultural Politics and the Social Practice of Quan Họ Folk Song in Northern Vietnam is a beautifully written ethnography about the folk song tradition of *quan họ* from Vietnam's northern province of Bắc Ninh. It addresses the cultural politics of *quan họ*, charting the historical processes of transformation that have seen "old" village traditions become reconstituted as global cultural heritage in "new" styles of staged performance.

Following an introduction that lays out the author's fieldwork and the theoretical foundations of the book, chapter one provides historical context by tracing the impact of the communist revolution on *quan họ* from 1945 through to the inscription of *quan họ* singing on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. The chapter examines lively debates about the relationship among communist ideology, national character, and folk music, which raged in the years following the 1954 establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, to reveal how a new "hybrid ideology" emerged that "marries a Vietnamese focus on sentiment with the international socialist politics of the new nation" (33). This highlights a central tension that is explored throughout the book: the ideological rift between official prescriptions of folk culture in nationalist narratives emanating from the "center" and the social practices, sentiments and musical experiences of "local" singers in Bắc Ninh province. *Sounding out Heritage* follows the fault lines of this rift across the spectrum of *quan họ* activities and representations, from the social practices of intimate singing

Journal of Vietnamese Studies, Vol. 11, Issue 2, pps. 122–135. ISSN 1559-372X, electronic 1559-3738.
 © 2016 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press' Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>.
 DOI: 10.1525/vs.2016.11.2.122.

gatherings in villages, to mediatized displays of cultural heritage at competitions and festivals, and in televised broadcasts. The book bristles with fine-grained ethnographic insights into the diverse conceptualizations of authenticity in *quan họ* practices and the “ideology of sentiment” embedded in the social interaction of singing.

Chapter two explores how social relationships and proper sentiments are embodied in *quan họ* gatherings. Social exchanges enacted in *quan họ* singing, which is typically conducted by two pairs of male or female singers who respond to each other, are tied to bodily practice and the intricate training of breath and voice required to perform with the proper sentiment. The third chapter listens carefully to the “inaudible stories” of elderly singers in the development of national discourse on the *quan họ* tradition. It demonstrates how the stories of local singers are “authorized” and incorporated into national discourse, yet also construct narratives that are incompatible with representations of *quan họ* as cultural heritage in the global marketplace. The collisions between the forces of commodification and the social value of *quan họ*, grounded in the exchange of sentiment, are highlighted through a vignette about an elderly singer who was brought to Hà Nội and paid an inordinately large sum to sing one song. Ultimately the chapter critically reflects on who has the authority to speak about *quan họ* and why. While elderly singers are called upon to represent “authentic” heritage, Meeker highlights how they are also consigned to a rapidly receding rural past and are “divested of the power to speak about their own traditions in the modern context of cultural heritage” (93). Pertinent here is Meeker’s film *Singing Sentiment*, which provides an intimate portrait of the singer Nguyễn Thị Bàn from Diềm village. Although not discussed in the book, the film is attentive to the social and emotional relations at the heart of *quan họ* gatherings, and to the personal stories that are largely “inaudible” in national heritage discourse.

Chapter four examines how the staging of *quan họ* for televised broadcasts gives rise to modernized performance styles and new forms of social and audience engagement. The impact of broadcasting on *quan họ* practices and sentiments is explored further in chapter five, which examines the famous *quan họ* festivals held annually in Bắc Ninh shortly after the lunar new year. Meeker gives a vivid description of the “aural chaos” she heard when attending the largest festival, Hội Lim, in 2003, created by the sonic

clashing of multiple performances projected through distorted sound systems. While the cacophonous soundscape on Lim hill seemed to undercut the festival's aim of projecting picturesque and romantic visions of traditional rural culture, Meeker explores the aesthetic and social purposes of loud amplification, arguing that amplified sound "enables festival participants to hear themselves as participants in and representatives of a cultural form distinctive to their locality" (127).

Sounding Out Heritage makes an invaluable contribution to anthropological research on music culture and media representation in Vietnam. In erudite prose that effortlessly interweaves theoretical and ethnographic interpretation, the book provides a powerful account of the aesthetic and social value of *quan họ* singing, and a nuanced critique of the discourse on intangible cultural heritage. *Sounding Out Heritage* is of particular interest to those in Vietnamese Studies, but it should also appeal to a broad readership of scholars and students interested in cultural politics, nationalism, heritage and media representation, and the social and emotional dynamics of music performance.

Barley Norton, Goldsmiths, University of London

PHILIP TAYLOR

*The Khmer Lands of Vietnam: Environment, Cosmology,
and Sovereignty*

University of Hawaii Press, 2015, 350 pages, \$30 (paper)

This is perhaps an accidental book: accidental, in that Philip Taylor began his scholarly career focused on the Vietnamese of the Mekong Delta, but has since expanded his view to look at the Cham and Khmer Krom as well. But if Philip Taylor initially stumbled into the study of the Khmer Krom, he has since made it a major focus of his research. This book is a marvelous contribution to the scholarship on the Khmer in general and the Mekong Delta in particular, as well as to work on the relationship between ethnicity and the environment. It is informed by a clear desire to challenge representations of the Khmer Krom as backward and lacking in agency, as well as to undermine

competing Cambodian and Vietnamese nationalist narratives of the place of the Khmer Krom in the wider world.

We often think of the Mekong Delta as having a heavily populated core composed of rich rice-producing areas, such as Cần Thơ, An Giang, and Long Xuyên provinces, clustered around the main branches of the Mekong River. These provinces are overwhelmingly populated by Vietnamese. But the Mekong Delta actually has a variety of ecological regions, and some parts are more ethnically diverse than others. Taylor first became aware of the importance of the Khmer population when he travelled outside this core and along the coast of the delta in 1999. Since then, he has travelled to more than four hundred settlements with a Khmer presence across the delta and in Tây Ninh Province.

In his travels, Taylor came to “realise just how much of Vietnam’s Khmer world is out of sight and out of mind” (x). One reason that Khmer of the delta are out of sight is the legacy of forced displacement over the past two hundred years, most recently in the second half of the twentieth century. Taylor has reconstructed some of this displacement in the central delta zone that includes Vĩnh Long, Cần Thơ, and Hậu Giang provinces. There are still Khmer in this area, but it has also been a zone of bitter contestation in successive wars. After the Khmer were driven out, their land was taken over by ethnic Vietnamese, who have not given it back to its original owners. Similar processes of displacement affected the Khmer living on the lower slopes of the mountains on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border (on the displacement of Khmer, see especially 118–121).

The Khmer Krom are also out of mind because the scholarship on the Mekong Delta has paid scant attention to them. Vietnamese-language scholarship on the delta, for example, repeatedly portrays the region as relatively empty before the Vietnamese arrival and abounds in clichés—and, sometimes, perplexing statements—about the Khmer population. (Some years ago, when reading a Vietnamese-language book review, I was surprised when the reviewer took an author to task for using the “French” term Bassac instead of calling the river the Hậu Giang. “Bassac,” of course, is hardly French. It is Khmer.)

Taylor organizes his book into seven chapters, each on the relationship of Khmer to their environment in a particular subregion. Six of them are in the Mekong Delta and one is in the Northeast Uplands, including the forested areas of Tây Ninh Province. The regions vary in population. Much of the

Khmer population is in Trà Vinh, Sóc Trăng, and Bạc Liêu provinces, but they are also widely found elsewhere. It is one of the strengths of this book that Taylor, having travelled all over the delta, even covers the scattered settlements of Khmer Krom living on the coastal fringe of the Gulf of Thailand as well as in the Northeast uplands. The result is impressive: of all the books I have read on the delta, this one is the most nuanced in understanding the relationship between ethnic groups and the environment.

Because the book is organized around Khmer relations to the environment in seven ecological regions, this book's overwhelming message is the diversity of the Khmer experience. And it is important to underline this Khmer-centric approach: while other ethnic groups (particularly the Vietnamese and Chinese) show up in the narration, those groups tend to serve as backdrop. Taylor brings a wealth of other material into the book, particularly oral accounts related to origins and nature. It is worth noting that the sheer breadth of the book, with its analysis pitched at the subregional and not village level, means that the author has not focused on classic ethnographic concerns, such as the character of social structure or ritual belief.

As should be obvious from my review, I think that this is an excellent and long overdue work. I am chary of criticizing it, as I think it succeeds admirably at clarifying the deep linkages between Khmer and their local environments. That being said, two issues in particular perhaps merit greater attention. The first is the character of ethnicity and ethnic borrowing. By 1945, the French were already noting how "métissé," or culturally and ethnically mixed, the Khmer Krom were. Such métissage was pronounced in places like Sóc Trăng, with its sizeable Chinese population. The question naturally arises: to what extent did this métissage affect Khmer identity and the Khmer relation to the environment? Second, the subtitle of this book is "Environment, Cosmology, and Sovereignty." The first theme is addressed at length. The second theme is touched upon. But this book does not really address the issue of sovereignty—or perhaps more accurately, it seems to operate with an implicit model of sovereignty as territoriality that is not fleshed out in the book. I would have loved to read more on this topic. That being said, congratulations are in order to Philip Taylor for a rewarding work.

Shawn McHale, The George Washington University

YÊN LÊ ESPIRITU

Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014, 249 pages, \$29.95 (paper)

With its focus on Vietnam War refugees “not as an object of study but as a source of knowledge,” Yên Lê Espiritu’s *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* seeks to “highlight the costs of war yet not reduce the refugees to mere victims, even if their losses have been significant” (171). The book’s main target of critique is the double symbolic function that Vietnamese refugees in the United States have served since the end of the war in 1975: as uncomfortable reminders of the only war in the twentieth century that the United States lost, and as new immigrant subjects to be assimilated into the liberal, multicultural state. When the mainstream media celebrates the economic success of the “model minority” refugees, historical revisionism is at work to refashion the war’s loss into a win by touting US humanitarianism and the abundance of opportunities in this country as proof that the ideals of US-led democracy and capitalism are superior to communism. Espiritu’s study exposes this revisionist attitude and challenges the process of strategic affirmation that forgets the violence that the US military inflicted on Vietnamese people. Importantly, by foregrounding the refugees’ memory and the later generations’ “postmemory” of the war, *Body Counts* resists their erasure by dominant US and Vietnamese historiographies.

The book opens with a brief history of refugee laws and regulations in the United States. Espiritu situates her work in the interdisciplinary field of “critical refugee studies,” which “begins with the premise that the refugee, who inhabits a condition of statelessness, radically calls into question the established principles of the nation-state and the idealized goal of inclusion and recognition within it” (10). Working across American Studies, Asian American Studies, and refugee studies with a focus on war, race, and violence, Espiritu takes seriously wartime destruction while privileging the “complex personhood” of Vietnamese refugees as subjects “who enact their hopes, beliefs, and politics, even when they live militarized lives” (14). Espiritu thus troubles the more typical “damaging and ‘damage-centered’

social science research” that sees the problem only in the refugee’s crippled body and traumatized mind and ignores the larger geopolitics of the US empire (5). The refugee is not only a person vulnerable to wartime violence but also a living subject in a prime position to critique US imperial undercurrents. To insist on that premise is also to work across war studies and refugee studies, which have largely been separated (17). Espiritu calls this interdisciplinary approach “critical juxtaposing,” which she defines as “the bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces in order to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire” (21). “Critical juxtaposing” characterizes both Espiritu’s method and her archive, which includes newspaper articles, official documents, oral history, songs, poetry, fiction, family photographs, and in-depth interviews in English and Vietnamese—making for a rich and compelling cultural study of Vietnamese refugees in the United States.

The rest of the book can be divided into two parts. The first part, which includes chapters two and three, centers on the militarized nature of refuge with its biopolitics and necropolitics as well as the refugees’ own “politics of living” in refugee camps across Southeast Asia. Chapter two best exemplifies “critical juxtaposing” and conceptualizes what Espiritu calls “militarized refuge(es),” which “shows that *refugees* and *refuge* are mutually constituted and that both emerge out of and in turn bolster U.S. militarism” (26, emphasis in original). More specifically, “militarized refuge” points to “the enormity of the military buildup in the Pacific that uniquely equipped U.S. bases there to handle the large-scale refugee rescue operation” (29). Espiritu here briefly rehearses the history of US colonialism and the military occupation of the Philippines, Guam, and the establishment of Camp Pendleton in San Diego on Native American territory. With this history, Espiritu illuminates the previous imperial wars and conflicts in the establishment of the military bases that facilitated violence during the war and gave refuge afterward. The irony, according to Espiritu, is that the same military bases responsible for displacing people became sites for their refuge. This contradiction of operations in the same physical spaces is the crux of “the hidden violence behind the humanitarian term *refuge*, thus undercutting the

rescue-and-liberation narrative that erases the U.S. role in inducing the refugee crisis in the first place” (48).

Chapter three continues exploring US international spatial politics, contending that “U.S. resettlement was not the benevolent, generous system touted by mainstream media and authorities but rather a stringent process that prolonged the refugees’ stay in first-asylum countries” (51). Examining how the United States structured the camps in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong as “refugee warehouses” and the “dumping grounds” for unwanted refugees, Espiritu shows that the poorer Southeast Asian countries dependent on the United States had to assume the role of a “surrogate refuge” while the United States resettled only those refugees it deemed good-enough subjects (53). Espiritu also draws an important distinction between the refugee processing centers and the closed camps/detention centers: the former operated as training grounds for future good citizens while the latter were nothing more than prisons with cramped quarters. Even in their difficult circumstances, however, the refugees created a life world for themselves in transit despite the lack of choices and harsh limitations in the camps. Their “politics of living” can be the stuff for good memories later or burst into deadly riots and protests (77).

In the second part of the book, chapters four, five, and six interrogate how the loss of the Vietnam War has been recuperated in popular discourse, and they provide alternative accounts from first-generation refugees and Vietnamese Americans born after the war. In chapter four, Espiritu analyzes the mainstream construction of the “good warrior” and the “good refugee” on the war’s twenty-fifth anniversary. She contends that the two figures are necessarily joined to create the “we-win-even-when-we-lose” certainty: “As the purported rescuers and rescued, respectively, they *together* re-position the United States as the ideal refuge for Vietnam’s ‘runaways’ and thus as the ultimate victor of the Vietnam War” (83, emphasis in original). Espiritu’s narration becomes more tender and personal in chapter five in which she traces the circulation of a family photograph and tells a story about her uncle, Colonel Hồ Ngọc Cẩn, the only known case of a South Vietnamese official who was publicly executed by the communists (106). Reading online memorials and documenting the

process through which names of South Vietnamese military heroes have come to mark the drive aisles at the Eden Center in Falls Church, Virginia, Espiritu shows how South Vietnamese veterans in the diaspora refuse to be erased in US and Vietnamese historiographies. They have found ways to mourn their losses. Yet, the author is careful to remind us: “Refugee remembrance, however critical, becomes problematic when it elicits a nationalism that replicates patriarchal control as a means to buttress lost status and identities in the postwar diaspora” (137).

Memory is not the exclusive possession of those with direct experiences of war. Through sixty in-depth interviews conducted in Southern California with Vietnamese Americans born after the war, Espiritu infers, “The war...is a shifting specter that hovers over personal heartaches, family tensions and dissolution, and/or economic insecurities” (141). Several subjects express deep frustration with the absence of their community’s history in mainstream American culture and a keen discomfort with their own ignorance of the war compounded by the painful silences from the first generation. Understanding the drive for economic success of the generation after as more complex than mere economic assimilation, Espiritu claims, “What appears to be an act of economic assimilation...is in actuality an index of the ongoing costs of war, not only for the witnesses and survivors but also for their children” (164). This message from chapter six folds neatly into the concluding chapter seven, “The Endings That Are Not Over,” which elegantly recaps the main points of the book.

Espiritu’s prose is apt for a study of this kind: clear and precise with a sympathetic touch. The author deftly moves through different archives and analytical frames without being overreaching in her conclusions. Otherwise historically sound, this study surprisingly does not include any extensive discussion of the communist regime’s role in the refugees’ flight, especially when the story of the author’s uncle invites it. That said, *Body Counts* is undeniably a path-breaking work in Vietnam War discourse with crucial interventions in US empire studies.

Hao Jun Tam, University of Pennsylvania

KIMBERLY KAY HOANG

*Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline,
and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015. 248 pages. \$29.95 (paper)

Kimberly Kay Hoang's book explores the sex industry in Hồ Chí Minh City in the years surrounding the 2008 global financial crisis, a time when Vietnam was trying to reposition itself in the new global financial arena. Hoang argues that the financial crisis was an important moment in the decline of Western influence and the rise of an emerging pan-Asian hegemony. According to her, this rebalancing of global financial power forced the main actors of the sex industry in Vietnam, mainly clients and sex workers, to reconfigure their masculinity and femininity and to renegotiate their intimate relationships within categories of race, nation, class, and gender. The book is based on participative ethnography conducted in four bars where the author worked as a hostess and bartender. She produces a typology of these bars based on the characteristics of their clients: Vietnamese and Asian elite businessmen, Vietnamese living overseas, Western expatriate businessmen, and Western backpackers. These bars are governed by particular economic and cultural logics that the author examines in detail throughout the book.

Hoang reflects on her positionality by discussing how she established trust-based relationships with informants, her feeling of being a "temporary insider and forever an outsider" (23) in the sex industry, the types of cover she used while working in the bars, the embodied cost of "deep acting," the ethical issues she was confronted with, the way she negotiates critical academic feedback (for instance, she refuses to answer the question that is often posed to her about whether she slept with clients), and her feeling of belonging to a "triple minority" within American academia as a woman, a Vietnamese American and a researcher studying the sex industry in Vietnam.

The study of clients and madams or "mommies," two key figures in the sex trade that remain largely absent in the literature, is central to this book. Hoang challenges the idea of "clients" as a monolithic group. Vietnamese economic elites establish business relations with Asian entrepreneurs in

exclusive bars in which hostesses enact northeast Asian norms of femininity, inspired by pop culture from Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan. This allows these Vietnamese elites to create trust bonds and interpersonal relationships with their business counterparts from other parts of Asia, which is crucial for attracting foreign capital to Vietnam. Doing so, Hoang argues, reinforces pan-Asian ascendancy. As for Vietnamese men living overseas, Hoang contends that by consuming large amounts of branded and expensive alcohol in bars that limit access to foreigners, they “distinguish themselves as better than Westerners” while simultaneously acknowledging their inferiority vis-à-vis Vietnamese elites (although this claim is not clearly supported) (67). In these bars, hostesses enact a femininity that blends Western and Vietnamese norms. Western expatriate businessmen frequent bars where hostesses display a “traditional” vision of Vietnamese femininity through things like long dresses. These men feel superior to backpackers because of their economic power and their alleged knowledge about Vietnam’s language and culture. These Western businessmen establish long-term relationships with hostesses, rather than sex-for-cash exchanges. They perceive Vietnam as a Third World country and see bar hostesses as metaphors of poverty, a view that drives their desire to become well-intentioned saviours inclined to rescue them. Finally, Western backpackers go to bars where they can negotiate sex-for-cash transactions, which on occasion lead to long-distance relationships. Here, hostesses with tanned skin and generous chests present themselves as poor women from rural areas and organize fake or real family tours to the provinces. In these bars, hostesses engage in “philanthropy-oriented intimacy,” constructed around developing intimate relations with clients that attract overseas capital framed as benevolent remittances (79).

Hoang’s treatment of mommies and hostesses is equally nuanced as her discussion of clients. Hoang argues that the mommies in her sample do not act exploitatively or in an authoritarian manner towards their hostesses contrary to popular beliefs surrounding pimps and madams. Instead, they establish non-coercive, respectful, and helpful relations with them. Solidarity can entail financial support, training and advice on how to manage intimate and family relationships. The high profits generated by sex work allow hostesses to escape poverty, and in some cases to save and to invest their

savings, hence allowing them to become mommies and to move away from selling sex. Some clients provide advice on and fund these business ventures, especially Westerners who perceive it as benevolent remittances that need to be monitored. This reveals hostesses' economic trajectories and pathways to upward mobility, which partly depend on the production of desirable bodies. Hoang explores how hostesses produce, transform and manipulate their bodies and their femininities to attract their clients. As such they acquire a suitable wardrobe, they learn how to present themselves and how to behave in public, and they alter their face and chest through plastic surgery. This process allows them to shape both the femininities circulating in the sex industry and the image of Vietnamese women in the global imaginary.

While the book makes an important empirical contribution, it has some theoretical and analytical flaws. One important point concerns its adoption of a typological approach, common in studies on sex work, which imprisons the informants and their practices in rigid categories. Several chapters are structured around four types of bars and their corresponding clients. A minor criticism is that this structure makes for a repetitive read. A more major criticism is that although the distinction between Vietnamese and Asian businessmen, Vietnamese living overseas, Western expatriate and Western backpackers may seem meaningful at first glance, these are not analytical categories. Not only do they remain undefined in the book, they are based on multiple criteria delimited by blurred boundaries: class, age, race, nationality, professional and visa status. Most importantly, these categories are not representative of the vast and polymorphic sex industry in Vietnam, which caters mainly to working and middle-class Vietnamese men, and only on rare occasions to foreigners. Likewise, the rigidity of the categories is put into question by the fluidity of sexual, social and economic trajectories described at large, thus creating a tension between two sociological approaches that the book does not reconcile or theorize.

More importantly, Hoang's categories leave little room for contextualising structures and phenomena. With the exception of the fluctuations of foreign capital in Vietnam, Hoang provides little context of the economic situation of the country before and after the global financial crisis, in particular with regards to poverty which is often considered a major push factor into the sex industry (including by the clients as stated by Hoang), the

familistic welfare regime promoted by the state since the launch of Renovation economic reforms, which partly explains the economic dependence of parents on their children that is mentioned in the book, state policy regarding sex work and its formulation in the stigmatizing idiom of “social evils,” and the management of sex establishments by local officials on the basis of systemic corruption. This absence of contextualisation could have been partially resolved by relying on the vast literature on sex work, human trafficking, social evils, sexuality, gender, HIV/AIDS, familism, household economy, poverty, credit, rural-to-urban migration and transnational marriages in Vietnam, and on sex tourism in other parts of the region.

Hoang’s analysis of intimate economies also skirts close to economic determinism. In most of the encounters she describes, money prevails over the affective and moral economies that shape all kinds of intimate exchanges, especially in long-term arrangements. Surprisingly, the author examines sex work from the lens of desire, which is pertinent, but leaves aside that of power, which is even more relevant in studies on sex work, gender and sexuality. Hoang, who presents herself as a “feminist researcher and scholar,” without taking a liberal feminist pro-sex worker stance despite the strong emphasis she places on agency and empowerment or engaging in the sex wars feminist debates, paints a somewhat rosy picture of sex work in which free and consenting hostesses reject victimizing and paternalistic discourses about sex work (17). Instead they emphasize their autonomy, their desires for upward mobility and their choices for well-paid jobs in the sex industry rather than poorly paid jobs in the factory sector. According to the author, these women earn considerable sums of money in an almost pleasurable activity, and without having to endure excessive professional, family and moral constraints. Such a portrait leaves aside the patriarchy and gender inequality of Vietnamese society that strongly shape Vietnam’s sex industry. In other words, the book does not sufficiently explore the difficulties that the hostesses experience in attracting and pleasing their clients. One would have expected a feminist scholar to explain how women feel about and negotiate their inferiority and adaptive femininity in local and global patriarchal structures, which are reinforced and perpetuated by the Vietnamese and foreign men they encounter in the different niches of the sex industry.

Issues of hierarchy and power also arise in the discussion on masculinity, as Hoang states that some masculinities are superior to others. The book does not make clear why and in what ways these masculinities are in competition. Yet they seem to exist in parallel and autonomous worlds as different sets of clients rarely mix with one another. An analysis in terms of coexistence and fluidity of masculinities subject to structural adjustments, rather than on competition and domination, may have been more productive. Likewise, the book leaves aside how masculinities are produced globally and locally, and how men interpret, negotiate and embody masculine identities in the sex industry, and beyond such as in the villages where hostesses take their Western clients for tours. Here too a more nuanced analysis separating the production of identities at the structural level and that of subjectivities at the individual level could have been more productive.

Despite these criticisms, this book remains an important contribution to studies on sex work in Vietnam. Its treatment of clients, mommies and hostesses provides a nuanced portrait of their professional, economic, and social condition and trajectories. Future studies on sex work in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia will have to take into account her contributions.

*Nicolas Lainez,
Institut de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur les Enjeux Sociaux
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*