

undated, makes it possible to work around the official censorship of mediumistic seances, and engage Caodaists in the United States, Europe and Australia in a series of transnational conversations and publications that present various interpretations of their spiritual mission in the twenty-first century. As the Vietnamese government gradually moves to adopt a more liberal policy towards Caodaism, this international network has managed to bring back a significant number of important religious leaders, who have returned to Vietnam after many decades in California or France. A new generation of spirit mediums are being trained in Saigon now, and renewed interest in religion and ritual — evident all over the country since the beginning of *Đổi Mới* — suggests that Caodaism's once important position in the public sphere of southern Vietnam may soon be revived.

Jammes's important study shows us how fieldwork, archival and digital research can be brought together to understand a dynamic religion, described as “doomed” in the 1950s, and again in 1975, but now resurgent as Vietnam's third largest religion (after Buddhism and Catholicism) with 4.4 million followers.

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DOI: 10.1355/sj31-1n

Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace. By Ann Marie Leshkovich. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014. xi+272 pp.

This book, winner of the 2016 Harry J. Benda Prize of the Association of Asian Studies, focuses on the lives of women traders in the Bến Thành market in Ho Chi Minh City. In a study of Vietnam's transition from a post-socialist country to a market-based economy, women traders might seem to be an unlikely topic. In the skilled hands of anthropologist Ann Marie Leshkovich, however, they prove an excellent case study, lying at the crossroads of several processes of

change: gender relations, class relations, kin relations, state-society relations and religious dynamics.

Leshkovich draws on Gayatri Spivak's insight that, in some circumstances, gender essentialisms can empower and be strategically deployed by subaltern subjects. For instance, women in politically volatile and insecure environments can embrace state-derived constructions of gender when it suits their purposes. For the petty traders of the Bến Thành market whose class backgrounds in post-revolutionary Vietnam put them at risk politically and economically, the state's definition of their status as female economic subjects or "women traders" (*tiểu thương*; traders are essentialized as women in Vietnam) rather than as "capitalists" is an identity that they have embraced and played up for a whole host of reasons.

In other words, traders have found ways to bypass and overcome the negative and naturalized connotations of the gender essentialism of "women traders" and in fact to turn them to their own advantage. These connotations, both as deployed by the state and as sometimes found in the wider culture, include the ideas that women traders are money-grubbers, have low education, lack culture and neglect their families. They suggest further that only women are suited to trade, because men would not engage in such lowly pursuits. Women traders perform the feminine for many practical, moral, subjective and economic reasons. They are able to amply provide for their families. Many traders enjoy a "middle-class" lifestyle and make enough money to send their children abroad for higher education. They are the business face of the family enterprise, although their husbands may be just as involved in the business as they are. As such, they can assert their moral identities as wives and mothers who are good providers for and educators of their children. They are able to get the state off the backs of their families, too. As Leshkovich notes, "female traders paid lower prices for 'class crimes'" (p. 57). What is not to like about this trade-off?

Of course, the trade-off comes with the need for some hedges. One is the need for a web of networks and contacts that women traders in the Bến Thành market must cultivate as insurance against risk. Otherwise, they face loss and even bankruptcy. Good relations

with wholesalers, suppliers, the holders of neighbouring stalls and dozens of middlemen are a requirement for a successful trader. Traders rely on personal relations of trust and reciprocity in an environment marked by a lack of legal protections, arbitrary government regulations and self-interested cadres. Women traders also rely on kin, usually through the maternal line, to reinforce them when they need extra labour, especially for off-site work such as tailoring. Some stalls employ as many as fifteen seamstresses, and young second cousins and nieces stream in from the countryside for such work.

As in all their relationships, sister traders (as they call each other) cultivate *tình cảm* (affection) with each other to reinforce their bonds and build their own moral identities. As another hedge against the vagaries of the market and uncertain political environment, traders engage in regular ritual activities such as pilgrimages to sacred temples, the installation of stall shrines and preparations for Tết. As Philip Taylor (2004) has shown and Leshkovich confirms, women traders often spend considerable sums to gain favour with the spiritual world.

The traders of the Bến Thành market are acutely aware of their position as historical subjects. Most of them come from families who were on the losing side in the Second Indochina War. They often filter memory through gender and associate the “wandering ghosts” that inhabit the market and afflict the traders with state cadres looking for miscreants. This study clearly and definitively shows that the *Đổi Mới* state has not relinquished its role in subject and identity formation, as it deepens its integration into the market economy. In this regard, it builds on previous work on state subject-making (for example, Werner 2009). As Leshkovich notes, women traders “were feminized, not because of some spontaneous, natural condition inherent in Vietnamese culture, but because state revolutionary schemes classified petty traders in gendered ways” (p. 57). And, in turn, these traders fully engaged with these state-derived gender constructions.

This rich and engrossing book is essential reading for all those who wish to understand contemporary Vietnam.

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DOI: 10.1355/sj31-1o

The Lost Territories: Thailand's History of National Humiliation. By Shane Strate. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. xi+245 pp.

Thailand's history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is often taught by way of a story centred on a few heroic, benevolent and gifted rulers who steered the ship of state through dangerous waters. This nationalistic blend of myth and history is so often repeated along the same lines that for many it has become a truism.

Shane Strate begins by taking up two strands from this story. One strand has it that the country escaped being colonized through the clever "bamboo diplomacy" of these Thai monarchs, who cunningly stymied greedy European nations. The second strand is that, in the process of dealing with the threat of colonial intervention, these kings were forced to make sacrifices. Siam handed vast portions of territory towards the east and the south over to the French and the British, respectively. In this book, the latter strand appears under the label of "national humiliation", and several moments are chosen when the theme of "national humiliation" became prominent in the history of the modern Thai state.

The most traumatic national humiliation in Thailand's history occurred in 1893, as Strate recounts in his introduction, when the French blockaded the Chao Phraya River and the Siamese king not only had to pay a huge indemnity but was also forced to cede all territories east of the Mekong River to France.