

sure, for a long time to come. It has copious and helpful figures and tables, and a nice touch is the coupling of black-and-white inserts of the same theme but many decades apart, such as the ploughing with a water buffalo taken in 1963, and harvesting rice with an “iron buffalo” in 2005 (p. 139). The book is highly recommended as an authoritative outline of Thai political history from the particular vantage point of the vital Northeastern region, from village to nation.

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Ties that Bind: Cultural Identity, Class, and Law in Vietnam's Labor Resistance. By Tran Ngoc Angie. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013. 340+xiv pp.

It is ironic that, just as workers around the world are discovering their voice, social scientists have been telling us that the concept of “class” is at best an anachronism. What people wear, the music they listen to, their place of origin, their ethnicity, their citizenship status and their consumption patterns are more important in defining their “identity” than is the brute fact of being an employee. And in the application of a crude postmodern psychology, it is supposedly our “identity” that determines how we relate to others and how we act socially.

The most influential exponents of this post- (or, more accurately, anti-) Marxist perspective in Asian labour studies have been Elizabeth Perry and Ching Kwan Lee. Elizabeth Perry argued that Shanghai workers in the 1920s and 1930s mobilized around social networks based on place of origin, gender and skills. This approach has

inspired studies of the role of place of origin in the mobilization and division of migrant workers in contemporary China. Ching Kwan Lee has argued that Chinese migrant workers have mobilized on the basis of citizenship, rather than class, on the grounds that those she researched sought redress by appealing to the state on the basis of their legal rights.

As the subtitle of this book indicates, Angie Ngoc Trân set out to analyse how the identities of workers — and, indeed, of owners — has moulded worker protest in Vietnam from the French colonial period, through the period of division during the American War to the contemporary era. Although she finds that gender, religion, place of origin and skill play an important role in helping workers to unite, and that workers frequently seek to pursue their interests through legal and political channels, she argues that these are facilitating rather than inhibiting factors in building solidarity and focuses on two types of protest that she characterizes as Marx-type and Polanyi-type protests. Marx-type protests are those based on class, in which workers fight against capitalist exploitation. Polanyi-type protests have a broader foundation in a struggle for human dignity and social justice. In practice, it is very difficult to distinguish between the two and Angie Ngoc Trân recognizes that they are intermingled. Moreover, she finds, following Edward Thompson, that class solidarity and the language of class is an outcome, rather than a precondition, of workers' struggles. In this sense her book is much more a powerful critique of identity politics than an expression of it.

The book offers by far the most comprehensive overview of worker protest in Vietnam available, based on more than ten years of primary research and a wide range of sources, with a particular emphasis on workers' own voices, and illustrated by a large number of case studies. The book also provides a comprehensive account of the legal and institutional framework of capitalist labour relations in Vietnam, to put the protests in context.

The discussion of workers' consciousness, which is the analytical core of the book, is rather less satisfactory. The identification of "consciousness" is difficult enough at the best of times, since people say different things depending on the context and to whom they are

speaking, and the relationship between individual “consciousness” and collective action is, at best, very complex. The most interesting and valuable source material in the book is the author’s own interviews with workers, but the majority of the sources are written, either from workers’ letters and petitions or, more often, from journalistic or official reports, and in these cases interpretation is very difficult. The author generally uses key words to trigger an interpretation, but the fact that workers, let alone their spokesperson (most probably a “barrack room lawyer”), journalists or government officials, might use a particular phrase in articulating grievances and demands cannot really tell us anything about the “consciousness” or motivation of the workers in question. The phrasing of demands is more likely a tactical judgement than a spontaneous expression of “consciousness”.

The book’s level of detail means that it provides fascinating source material for those seeking to develop comparative studies of worker protests in the face of globalization. The overwhelming impression from its accounts is that Vietnamese workers have mobilized, ever since the French occupation, on a class basis and that their mobilization has generally overcome divisions of skill, local origin, gender, ethnicity and religion. At the same time, as might be expected, their demands have rarely been phrased in the language of pure class struggle, but have appealed to the law, the state, religion and morality in support of the workers’ demands.

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Vietnamese-Chinese Relationships at the Borderlands: Trade, Tourism and Cultural Politics. By Yuk Wah Chan. Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2013. 148 pp.

This book examines the everyday cross-border interaction of the communities in the border towns of Hekou in China and Lao Cai