

uses of Vũ Trọng Phụng's work. It will be of considerable interest to historians of modern Southeast Asia, literature, French colonialism, modernism and Vietnamese politics.

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Vietnam's Socialist Servants: Domesticity, Class, Gender, and Identity.
By Minh T.N. Nguyen. London: Routledge, 2015. xxvi+201 pp.

Vietnam's Socialist Servants: Domesticity, Class, Gender, and Identity by Minh T.N. Nguyen is a pioneering and important study that fills a lacuna in our knowledge of the lifeworlds and experiences of domestic workers in contemporary late-socialist Vietnam. Based on carefully conducted ethnographic research, the book presents fresh in-depth data to shed new light on the impact of the rapid market transformations of the Vietnamese labour market on an occupation dominated by women.

In this qualitative study the author competently uses ethnographies, interviews and narratives to illustrate increasing social inequalities and differentiation in today's Vietnam. Four groups of domestic workers, *Ô sin*, all working in the Hanoi metropolitan area, are at the fore of the study. Nguyen tells her story through the eyes of live-in domestic workers (i.e., rural migrants), live-out domestic workers (i.e., urban

women laid off from factories), cleaners who are also junk-traders, and private hospital caregivers. It is a thought-provoking account of gendered class boundaries set in accordance with middle-class visions for urban modernity, visions framed in relation to what is disparaged as rural “backwardness” (e.g., p. 19).

Drawing on a wide range of scholarship not least within the field of the anthropology of Vietnam, including gender research, the author elegantly demonstrates the emergence of domesticity as a site for the demarcation of class distinctions. Contestations over the practices and moral values that employers consider imperative for the appropriate management of a modern urban middle-class home stand at the centre of this process. As explained by Nguyen, Pierre Bourdieu’s exploration of class distinction (for example, Bourdieu 1989) has informed her study, but clearly so has the work of Mary Douglas (1966). Further examination of the meaning of purity and boundaries as discussed by Douglas and by more recent Douglas-inspired studies (for example, Gressgård 2010; and Palriwala and Uberoi 2008) would have added an interesting analytical dimension to Nguyen’s study.

Chapter One provides a thorough overview of the construction of family, gender roles, social hierarchies, power and domesticity over time in Vietnamese society. The second chapter illustrates market actors’ promotion of domestic workers in accordance with the needs of the urban middle class. Negotiations between employer and employee over the demonstration of what are recognized as appropriate gender values are examined in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four focuses on the discursive and structural production of class as a framework for the employer–employee relationship, while domestic labour, considered as a consumption practice, is explored in Chapter Five. The sixth chapter elucidates the distressing ways in which domestic workers are caught in between various households as mothers and workers. Chapter Seven revolves around the biographical narratives of two domestic workers of different ages and background. Crafting an identity as a domestic worker, the final chapter concludes, is a process informed by complex intersections

between gender and class-specific power relations that take shape in the household, on the labour market and in society at large.

Nguyen's trenchant research shows how domestic workers struggle to navigate a labour market informally regulated by values rather than by formal agreements between employer and employee. As the *Ô sin*'s occupation is a feminized one, sociocultural configurations of what are recognized as quintessential female qualities become central for her employer's evaluation of her. Knowing one's obligations, demonstrating sentiments, interacting with forbearance and accepting an asymmetrical order of reciprocity between employer and employee are thus qualities in domestic workers that are highly valued by urban middle-class employers.

These employers, as Nguyen vividly demonstrates, consider such qualities significant not least because domestic workers, besides cleaning homes, are also expected to take over some of their employer's emotional and practical responsibilities towards relatives — that is, intimate responsibilities usually undertaken by close kin. For instance, employers outsource emotional commitments by requesting that domestic workers stand by for their dying elders and even stand in to perform the appropriate mourning rituals after the old person has passed away.

The description in Chapter Six of the oscillation of domestic workers who are also mothers among various homes in which their care is needed is touching. Leaving their own homes either on a daily basis or for longer periods of time, these women constantly worry about their daughters and sons. Anxious, sad and with a certain desperation, domestic workers attempt to manage, long-distance, their own homes and the care of their children even while contracted to care for their employers' households and families.

Rather than seeing domestic service as a "life choice" (p. 156), Nguyen convincingly argues for understanding the decision to become an *Ô sin* as an occupation defined by social constraints and juxtaposed with less attractive options on a fluctuating labour market in a transforming and growing economy. The book provides an excellent platform for comparisons with related studies on domestic

services and gendered mobility conducted in other Asian societies such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In all, this insightful and powerful ethnographic study is strongly recommended. The book will prove useful for scholars and students of Vietnamese studies and even for a broader readership in anthropology, gender studies, human geography, sociology and social work.

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Women and Sex Work in Cambodia: Blood, Sweat and Tears. By Larissa Sandy. London: Routledge, 2014. xv+140 pp.

Arriving for the first time in Phnom Penh in early 1998, I found that Cambodia's capital city was leading Cambodia's recovery from genocide by offering an array of cheap thrills, low-wage labour opportunities and a circus of international development activities. Opium dens, brothels and bars, stories of illicit arms dealing and an army of white four-wheel-drive vehicles — with prominent organizational logos that advertised their role in the country's "reconstruction" — characterized the socio-economic landscape of the war-torn nation. Sex was for sale everywhere, and HIV was