



Time discipline, self-management, and status in Vietnam. Photo by Christina Schwenkel

Guest Editors' Introduction:

How Is Neoliberalism Good to Think Vietnam?

How Is Vietnam Good to Think Neoliberalism?

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While much of the world struggles to recover from the global economic crisis of past years, countries such as China and Vietnam are predicted to have some of the highest economic growth rates in the world.¹ Though scorned by the US media for a hybridized “market socialism” that has been dubbed “autocratic capitalism” with “improper” state “meddling,”² China’s and Vietnam’s continued growth more than twenty years after the “collapse” of socialism unsettles teleological beliefs in capitalist social change as a marker of “progress.”³ The specter of a crash of market-based, “neoliberal” systems has prompted rethinking of axiomatic truths that free market capitalism is the most rational and efficient mode of political, social, and economic organization and that government interventions in the marketplace inevitably hamper growth and efficiency. Ongoing apprehension about the impact of global capitalism on state sovereignty and social welfare in Asia,

Latin America, and elsewhere lends further credence to such critiques of neoliberalism.

Although these momentous global developments might seem to provide fodder for debating the merits of socialism versus neoliberalism, what they in fact indicate is that socialist and neoliberal regimes and processes are neither totalizing nor distinct. Whether one celebrates or bemoans the proliferation of forms of governmentality, market logics, and technologies of personhood associated with “neoliberalism,” scholars increasingly recognize that neoliberalism is as much about partiality, incompleteness, and continuity with competing configurations and dynamics of power as it is about some kind of grand rupture or the global proliferation of a particular logic of late capitalism. Understanding neoliberalism as an uneven, contingent process, as Aihwa Ong argues, requires paying particular attention to contexts of exception, in two senses: first, where qualities of neoliberalism are perceived as new, unusual, or problematic, even as they may also be powerful, desirable, or ascendant; and second, where specific realms of life or types of people are explicitly excluded from neoliberal visions, either because they are deemed worthy of protection from market forces or because they are judged unworthy of exercising the techniques of self-management and self-discipline that are the hallmarks of a morally appropriate, neoliberal personhood.⁴

This collection examines the various articulations and contestations of neoliberal logics, knowledge practices, aesthetic values, and moral subjectivities at sites where capitalist forms of globalization and market socialism intersect in contemporary Vietnam. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork in contemporary urban spaces, contributors address the complexities and multiplicities of neoliberal reform agendas as they shape and are shaped by both global and national regulatory strategies and forms of governmentality. We address “neoliberalism” not as a uniform project that signifies the demise of national sovereignty, the retreat of government, and the triumph of a global market economy that fetishizes the “free.” Rather, we approach it as a globally diverse set of technical practices, institutions, modes of power, and governing strategies informed by cultural and historical particularities that continually work to reframe and at times reconfirm neoliberal technologies of mass consumption, acquisition of wealth, moral propriety, regimes

of value, and systems of accountability. Contributors employ a host of ethnographic methods to examine the lived social and cultural experiences of global capitalism in a postreform “market socialist” context, while questioning the particular meanings and forms of neoliberalism that have become manifest in recent years, as well as the extent to which one can even speak of Vietnamese economic reforms as neoliberal.

Given that socialism in Vietnam is deeply, though unevenly, woven into particular cultural forms, political practices, and historical legacies (in some regions more deeply than others), the collection asks, what is unique about “neoliberalism” in socialist Vietnam? How do people make sense of neoliberalism and its ramifications and impact on their everyday lives and practices? In what ways do capitalist and socialist histories, as well as current global market processes, shape local contexts that in turn both enable and limit the adoption of neoliberal practices and generate context-specific exceptions to neoliberalism? How do enduring socialist interpretive frameworks, relations of power, and modes of socioeconomic organization contest or rework neoliberalism and its global techniques and technologies of regulation? Conversely, how might socialist continuities work in conjunction with neoliberalism to affirm its basic tenets?

Readers will detect a marked ambivalence here toward use of the term *neoliberalism*, not only because the extent to which Vietnam can even be considered neoliberal motivates this special issue, but also because of ongoing confusion about the term’s meaning and implications. Tara A. Schwegler, for example, has pointed to the “slipperiness” of the term and concedes that it has “lost much of its analytical utility because scholars have neglected to carefully distinguish between its multiple, tangled meanings.”⁵ Andrew Kipnis similarly cautions against using the term *neoliberalism* as an uncritical and unspecified framing device, particularly in contexts with histories of socialism.⁶ In this special issue, we understand and approach *neoliberalism* as a term in contention, the existence and particular manifestations of which need to be established, not assumed. What counts as “neoliberal,” the essays show, is neither fixed nor wholly uncontested; it remains a partial, unfolding, and contingent project that is more discernible in some cultural and economic domains than others; and yet it appears as a pivotal social force that motivates particular desires, actions, and beliefs. For these rea-

sons, following Donald M. Nonini, we refrain from speaking of Vietnam as “neoliberal” and from identifying neoliberal agendas or forms in Vietnam as hegemonic and a product of universal (and thus again inevitable) capitalist restructuring.⁷

Despite our reservations, this framing allows us to closely examine through ethnographic practice the multiple and uneven logics and ideologies circulating in contemporary Vietnam that might be identified as “neoliberal.” Examples include market economic and free trade discourses proffered as a means to achieve a higher quality of life;⁸ discourses of privatization and self-regulation for optimization;⁹ and the moralization of logics of efficiency, quality, and accountability as models for correct, modern, or civilized personhood.¹⁰ These appear not as independent or spontaneous projects but emerge through complex interactions between state and nonstate—including transnational—actors. Neoliberal forms travel; they are neither organic to Vietnam, nor are they singular and uniform.

This collection thus considers two related questions: (1) How is neoliberalism “good to think” about Vietnam? (2) Why is Vietnam “good to think” about neoliberalism? Neoliberalism is good to think about Vietnam because, as the contributors to this special issue demonstrate, it illuminates several of the processes central to market socialism: the transfer of aspects of governance from state to private, corporate, or transnational entities; the proliferation of market logics of efficiency, efficacy, and profitability as the yardsticks for assessing health, aesthetics, or government performance; and the conflation between market behaviors and appropriate forms of moral personhood.

At the same time, entrenched socialist political visions and notions of personhood, as well as longer-standing cultural values and practices, mean that neoliberal logics and practices in Vietnam remain surrounded by auras of exception and novelty. This renders them both problematic and problematized, even as they are also powerful in shaping current lives and past and future imaginaries. Although sometimes providing ground to oppose neoliberalism, these dynamics frequently work to enhance or normalize it: logics of assessing and enumerating the efficacy of new technologies resonate with the socialist celebration of science; socialist self-criticism makes processes of self-assessment in a market context seem logical and appropriate;

forms of divining order in landscapes, finances, or physiognomy help one to navigate the uncertainty of capitalist approaches to business and property; family values and lifestyles provide a way of indexing the success of state agendas to achieve modernity, progress, and civilization.

Vietnam is therefore good to think about neoliberalism because it provides a sense of the complexity and articulation of dynamics and processes deemed neoliberal compared with those that might otherwise be deemed *other* to neoliberalism, such as socialism. We thus contribute rich ethnographic material on Vietnam to advance scholarly debates that in recent years have moved away from a classificatory project of determining which post or late socialist societies are “neoliberal” and have instead called for more precise historical, ethnographic tracing of the emergence of neoliberal modes of governmentality, systems of knowledge and expertise, class subjectivities, and technologies of self in specific social and cultural contexts.

Neoliberalism in Post and Late Socialist Contexts

This collection of articles aims to bring a critical perspective to the anthropological study of neoliberalism in Vietnam, a country often marginalized in broader discussions of late and postsocialism in Eastern Europe and Asia. What insights does this rich literature offer for consideration of market logics in Vietnam, and how might exploring specific ethnographic contexts in Vietnam address theoretical gaps in these discussions of socialism and neoliberalism?

The momentous and largely unanticipated liberal economic and political reforms that swept through Eastern Europe over the past two decades have triggered a flurry of ethnographic interest in the ways that populations have experienced socialist capitalist transformations in an era commonly referred to as “postsocialist.” Scholarship on postsocialism has been instrumental in rethinking conventional “collapse of communism” paradigms that obscure the diverse articulations made, and pathways taken, by state and nonstate actors. Questioning the definitive “post” in postsocialism, scholars of Eastern Europe have transcended entrenched dualisms and grand narratives of transition by focusing attention on the plurality of intersecting economic and governing logics and practices that have led to novel recombinations

and rearrangements of power, subjectivity, social relations, and forms of property.¹¹ For example, Elizabeth Dunn argues that small-scale Polish meat producers who cannot meet European Union (EU)-mandated quality standards—standards that purport to be international but in fact contradict Polish cultural preferences for qualities such as higher fat content—are marginalized from formal markets and instead sell their products through a “networked and relational form of personhood created under the property regime of state socialism.”¹²

This latter point is particularly relevant to this volume, as new emergent forms of neoliberal capitalism in Vietnam defy in very particular ways oppositions between public and private, and socialist and capitalist, to reveal spheres of mutual constitution, juxtaposition, and coexistence. Contrary to popular belief, “market socialism” or “market economy with a socialist orientation,” as it is commonly called in Vietnam, need not be intrinsically paradoxical or contradictory—observations that tend to reify socialist and capitalist formations as fundamentally oppositional and uniformly fixed, rather than recognize the broad range of institutions and practices that have enabled culturally and historically varied forms of socialism, capitalism, and also neoliberalism.¹³ Akin to many cases in Eastern Europe, contemporary reform in Vietnam is sustained by particular continuities between past and present economic and cultural conditions that have engendered shifting and geographically variable recombinations of socialist and market initiatives.

The case of China similarly highlights continuities between socialism and capitalism and the unevenness of a presumed transformation from the former to the latter. Chinese state and nonstate actors have, as Aihwa Ong points out, reconfigured hegemonic capitalism by only “partially subordinating themselves to the demands of major corporations and global regulatory agencies.”¹⁴ That this is occurring within an ongoing political commitment to socialism makes China an even more apt point of comparison for analyzing the proliferation and consequences of neoliberal logics and forms of governmentality in Vietnam. Two themes are particularly instructive in this regard: (1) a growing concern with quality (*suzhi*) as a standard for assessing populations and individuals, and (2) the role of the Chinese state as an arbiter of market-oriented policies.

Recent scholarship on Chinese society has charted a growing discourse

about *suzhi*, or quality.¹⁵ Originally referring simply to natural characteristics, *suzhi* in the 1980s acquired social overtones of self-distinction, cultivation, and national progress through its association with the government's One Child Policy.¹⁶ During the 1990s, the term spread to other realms, such as the marketing of products and services that promised to improve one's quality of life and body through consumption and other practices. It consequently became important in hierarchical classifications of types of people and commodities as low versus high quality.¹⁷ On the one hand, this obsession with attaining and ranking levels of quality seems the quintessence of neoliberal technologies of governance that, for example, monitor quality control performance standards, and of self-cultivating personhood in which "the self itself is to be an object of knowledge and autonomy . . . achieved through a continual enterprise of self-improvement through the application of a rational knowledge and a technique."¹⁸ On the other hand, quality is not simply about the importation of market logics. In the case of China, the concept also indexes Confucian humanist concerns and later socialist state desires to uplift the population through application of scientific knowledge.¹⁹ By intertwining cultural notions with market demands in ways that also advance national developmentalist projects,²⁰ the wide semantic range of *suzhi* reminds us that neoliberalism travels precisely because it resonates with preexisting logics and cultural values and hence can be reconfigured in service of diverse agendas.

A second contribution of the literature on China has been to explore the strong role of the state. In contrast to the kinds of triumphalist claims mentioned at the beginning of this essay—namely, that socialism is withering in the face of capitalism—anthropological literature suggests that neoliberalism, in carefully delineated and delimited forms, has become a project of the Chinese state. What one sees is not so much a decline in state power but a diversification of forms of governmentality—what Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang dub "socialism from afar."²¹

Although instructive for its questioning of oppositions between the socialist state and free-market capitalism, this approach risks overstating the state's power in effecting and containing neoliberalism. For example, attention to "graduated sovereignty," in which the government "adjust[s] political space to the dictates of global capital,"²² suggests that the state maintains

the power to disperse and contain neoliberalism in service of its agenda. Similarly, Ong and Zhang describe the powers of the self that are often equated with neoliberal freedoms as being “regulated and framed within the sovereign power of the nation.”²³ Such concerns perhaps substitute the omnipotent invisible hand of the market with that of the socialist state. For this reason, Andrew Kipnis has recently argued that generalizations about forms of Chinese governmentality as either socialist or neoliberal may obscure more than they reveal, and they should instead be studied ethnographically and historically.²⁴ Echoing these concerns, Nonini critiques the class, regional, and individualistic assumptions that have driven scholars to declare China “neoliberal” and to neglect both the importance of social networks (*guanxi*) in doing business and the frequency of popular protests against market forces.²⁵

What lessons do these discussions of quality and the state have for studies of Vietnam? First, although no single term has achieved a popularity in Vietnam comparable to that of *suzhi*, the articles in this collection document how various state and nonstate actors have over the past decade become increasingly interested in projects of self-cultivation and value creation that resonate both with the needs and anxieties of the marketplace and with continuous socialist genealogies. Second, the possibility of a socialist state benefiting from demarcated “neoliberal” domains provides a point of entry for considering particular configurations of, and challenges to, sovereignty in Vietnam. At the same time, the concerns about overemphasizing state power raised above are even more important to bear in mind for Vietnam, where the authors find the spread of neoliberal logics and forms to be much more variable and uneven, and involving a greater variety of transnational actors, as well as multiple layers of government actors who may be differently positioned as beneficiaries of social policies and capitalist prosperity.

Put together, then, the insights and questions emerging from the study of Eastern European postsocialism and Chinese market socialism challenge teleologies and point to complex articulations between socialism and neoliberalism. They highlight neoliberalism as both “top-down” (state sovereignty and governmentality) and “bottom-up” (technologies of self and class subjectivities) processes that rest on attempts to articulate, contest, or entrench particular forms of knowledge and expertise that may also carry complicated

genealogies. As we detail below, these three themes—governmentality, knowledge/expertise, and class subjectivities/technologies of self—similarly guide our contributors' considerations of neoliberalism in Vietnam. At the same time, reservations about the term *neoliberalism* recently expressed by certain scholars remind us that ethnographic and historical particulars shape different engagements with and responses to neoliberalism in Vietnam and can involve a multiplicity of actors operating on a variety of scales that show that Vietnam is neither a smaller nor a later developing version of China.

Modes of Governmentality

Although neoliberalism—or its US equivalent, neoconservatism—is commonly associated with attacks on big government and calls to transfer from the state to private entities control over services such as education, security, and social welfare, scholarship on neoliberalism emphasizes that such acts are nonetheless techniques of governance. Inspired by Michel Foucault's analysis of governmentality,²⁶ Nikolas Rose and other theorists of neoliberalism have defined the focus of contemporary governing as the “conduct of conduct.”²⁷ Central to this is the sense that the government enacts a “will to improve” its population through the application of rational, scientific principles of management in service of concrete ends that can be measured and publicized as proof of the regime's efficacy.²⁸ To manage populations, diseases, institutions, and, most importantly, the economy, governments define problems and devise technical solutions that can be implemented and assessed through modes of knowledge such as auditing, quality control, and safety standards.

These analyses remind us that what might be heralded as a retreat of the state that frees its citizens to pursue their own desires in the context of the marketplace may in fact represent an increase in state power in a technocratic guise. In other contexts, however, the state may not be the primary or most powerful agent of neoliberal governmentality. As Ong observes, this may be particularly true for the developmentalist regimes of postcolonial states, whose dependence on infusions of transnational forms of knowledge and resources produces what she terms “graduated zones of sovereignty.”²⁹ In a similar vein, James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta have identified mecha-

nisms of regulation that take place alongside, outside, and below the state as representative of forms of “transnational governmentality.”³⁰

Examination of cases from Vietnam provides further evidence that such forms of power and strategies of governing associated with neoliberalism are not only top down and state led. The Vietnamese state and its representatives certainly appear as proponents or agents of particular policies, strategies, and forms of knowledge, but, as the essays clearly demonstrate, international institutions also play a role in managing and disciplining populations. Global intrusions into national interests by organizations ranging from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations (UN), and the World Health Organization (WHO) to grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), global corporations, and transnational social welfare agencies cut across familiar top-down and bottom-up spatial imaginings of statehood to undermine “the vertical topography of power on which the legitimation of nation-states has so long depended.”³¹ In Vietnam, international organizations have long pressed for broader neoliberal restructuring as a means to “civilize,” “modernize,” and privatize the landscape through minimization of state intrusion in the market and expansion of foreign knowledge systems and capital investments.

The authors show how such demands have been accompanied by diverse global modes of neoliberal governmentality aimed at managing the population through technical practices that are often based on Western universal standards of compliance, assessment, and accountability, even as these modalities of regulation are reconfigured and reworked in local contexts. Ken MacLean’s article, for example, identifies corruption as a particularly apt site for articulating debates nationally and transnationally about “accountability” as a mechanism to ensure good governance. It demonstrates how current auditing procedures that aim to institutionalize official anti-corruption measures have been influenced (though not dominated) by international accounting firms and development agencies: strategic media leaks of a study coauthored by the Swedish International Development Agency and the Central Committee of the Communist Party signal the ruling party’s intent to govern others on the basis of this internationally sanctioned, techno-scientific knowledge, while also allowing it to manage how such techniques might be used to censure its own “corrupt” bureaucrats.

Allison Truitt's article explores what might seem the epitome of neoliberal domains: macroeconomic policies designed to manage inflation and promote currency stability. This domain, however, is hardly discrete, for Vietnam navigates multiple forms of currency—đồng, US dollars, gold, bills, and coins—that encompass different, yet overlapping regimes of value associated as much with their material qualities as with their institutional backing. Although the Vietnamese government has enacted reforms that are consistent with IMF policies, the knowledge associated with these policies gets reinterpreted in a specific economic cultural context, as Truitt's examination of diverse currency regimes and forms of value shows. This has led Vietnamese economists, for example, to reinterpret high inflation rates not as a sign of policy failure but as an early price to pay for increasing global integration.

The articles by Nina Hien, Melissa Pashigian, and Christina Schwenkel consider how state-sponsored notions of "quality"—in the realm of commodities, aesthetics, and knowledge practices—become aspirations for individuals and families, although often with implications for class and other hierarchies. Current regimes of beauty, for example, are linked in Nina Hien's examination of photographic practices and aesthetic values in Ho Chi Minh City to Western liberal notions of self-transformation and beautification that mark certain bodies as having more worth than others. Noting that beauty is something that must be culturally manufactured, Hien argues that the state has encouraged a rational calculation of self and body that leads to an interest in a beautiful self. Such projects are not solely individualistic, for this idealized self is embedded in diasporic kinship relations that are being revitalized through technologies such as photo enhancement. As the article's examples of the impact of photographic retouching and physiognomy manuals suggest, however, self-enhancement and the kinship connections that such projects foster are more readily available to affluent urban consumers.

Focusing on medical technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), Melissa Pashigian explores the role of enumeration and assessment in explaining the appeal of particular strategies of infertility treatment and management. Unlike other fertility treatments, the results of IVF can clearly be counted, as vividly shown on the website of the state-run Tù Dũ Hospital that developed this technology with the help of French scientists and cor-

porate sponsor Organon, a transnational pharmaceutical company, among others. For a state eager to document its progress toward the goal of modernization, the formerly invisible and nonproductive bodies of infertile women become something worthy of documentation, as market, state, and individual goals intertwine. Assessments of the quality and effectiveness of international health-care procedures through statistical documentation of local IVF births advance national, pharmaceutical, and patient interests in the pursuit of infertility management and the promotion of middle-class “happy families.”

In its study of urban aesthetics, Christina Schwenkel’s article shows how international agencies and actors map notions of “low quality” and “inferior standards” onto socialist design and architectural aesthetics that require urban reconstruction to meet new quality-control measures. Vinh City’s Quang Trung housing complex, formerly a showcase of socialist modernist design, international solidarity, and postwar recovery, is demolished partly because UN representatives and government officials deem the buildings unaesthetic and dilapidated, a claim that seems to have as much to do with the government-managed nature of the complex as with its actual material condition. But the public, with the exception of certain Quang Trung residents, greets these plans with approval because they have come to view the state goal of promoting “civilization” (*văn minh*) as best achieved through an urban spatial order based on middle-class respectability and private-property ownership.

Private property figures centrally in Erik Harms’s analysis as well. Challenging arguments that Vietnam has pursued economic reforms because of popular agitation, Harms argues that most of the momentum to establish private-property regimes has come from state officials who have been favorably positioned to acquire resources. Although Harms richly documents how private property acquires popular meaning through a reinvigoration of practices of geomancy (*phong thủy*)—a case that parallels Hien’s discussion of physiognomy and Truitt’s mention of spiritual notions surrounding money—he also reminds us that the “local colors” of geomancy “cannot be detached from the structures of finance and investment that generate winds and vital forces of their own.” Harms has structured his article to remind us that although the worlds of geomantic real-estate investors and high-level

officials may be interconnected, the perspectives and motivations of these individuals remain quite separate.

The global management of health and disease and the self-regulation of moral personhood are themes addressed in the articles by Ann Marie Leshkovich and Alfred Montoya. Leshkovich, for example, demonstrates how growing popular acceptance of the appropriateness of transnational adoption is, as in Pashigian's work, rooted in state-sponsored ideas about happy and cultured families, which suggest that "family stability and quality have become increasingly linked to having sufficient resources to ensure proper education and health" of children. These logics have gained currency through the proliferation of child and family welfare NGOs that sponsor the training of Vietnamese social workers, often abroad, who now assert their expertise in shaping the conduct of conduct. Gendered discourses about parental fitness and maternal failures have been reinforced in the media through "monster stories" about abandoning mothers that stigmatize young, poor women as backward and immoral.³²

Montoya examines global health management and its intersections with biopolitical and technological logics of late socialism in efforts to prevent the spread of stigmatized diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Bolstered by international acclaim for its efforts to contain SARS, the Vietnamese government has switched from branding AIDS a social evil to treating it as a technical problem to be managed with international cooperation in service of economic growth. Particularly striking is the designation of Vietnam as a focus country for the US-sponsored President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) campaign, which views Vietnam as its new battleground in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In contrast to China, which has been criticized for hiding epidemics or other negative phenomena, Vietnam is defined here as globally cooperative, yet with the disturbing implication that it is once again a field on which other countries wage their battles.

In all these cases, we see that the Vietnamese government is generally receptive to neoliberal logics of accountability, enumeration, and quality that offer rational, scientific techniques to manage the population and inculcate values of self-management in service of state developmental goals. At the same time, the authors also highlight competing national and transnational agendas for regulating and controlling populations, as well as state ambiva-

lence and apprehensions toward global integration and international interventions, as Vietnamese state and nonstate actors make new claims to power that contest and rework global regulatory regimes.

Systems of Knowledge and Expertise

In her work on exceptions to neoliberalism, Ong explores how neoliberal technologies of governance have cultivated new systems of knowledge and domains of expertise to reconstitute state power and authority.³³ The incorporation of “experts” and “expert knowledge” into governmental institutions, scholars have shown, has opened new spaces for “expert judgments” to be made about the moral conduct of individuals in relation to prescribed and supervised norms.³⁴ The authors in this volume are similarly concerned with the relationships among governance, knowledge, and expertise. They approach neoliberalism as a situated knowledge project—moral, economic, aesthetic, and scientific—that is dependent upon the production, circulation, and consumption of expert knowledge by actors both within and beyond the state. Nguyễn-võ has argued that the creation of “social problems” that require sustained and specialized knowledge interventions into segmented areas of expertise, particularly in the fields of health and medicine, has been central to neoliberal reconfigurations of state governance.³⁵ Likewise, in Montoya’s analysis of global health management and AIDS prevention programs, practices linked to “cultural poisons” and “social evils” become the target of global knowledge interventions that reconfigure socialist ideas of “the people” into self-regulating and virtuous “humans.” These circulating neoliberal logics, Montoya argues, “seek to inculcate a new understanding of individual personal risk, self-interest, and self-governance with respect to HIV/AIDS.”

Pashigian and Leshkovich both bring attention to the social “problems” associated with family and reproduction—key domains of Vietnamese state regulation and intervention. Pashigian raises the “problem” of failed reproduction, the circulation and negotiation of knowledge about infertility, and the successes of biotechnological treatment such as IVF. She shows how quantifiable numbers and expert-produced statistics are “indispensable to the complex technologies through which government is exercised,”³⁶ and

how they shape individual and state perceptions of national scientific progress. Similarly, Leshkovich's analysis of family planning and reproduction as a scientific knowledge project demonstrates how anxieties about proper parenting and expert assessments of "a child's best interest" index particular class configurations that are mapped onto ideas about ways to produce and properly care for families. Like Pashigian and Montoya, Leshkovich is attentive to the impact of international discourses on local understandings and knowledge-making practices; in this case, international discourses of adoption and rights become part of an "authoritative system of knowledge" of Vietnamese social workers, while poor women are thought to lack the knowledge and character to be good mothers.

Schwenkel similarly examines hierarchies of knowledge, though she shifts to the "social problem" of urban decay and "improper" resident conduct. In its analysis of the role of international experts in planning and reconstructing aesthetic and ordered cities, the article demonstrates that neoliberal knowledge projects have invalidated prior forms of urban governance and socialist expertise in the demolition of socialist modernist cities. These competing regimes of expert knowledge and aesthetic values reveal how new architectural standards and modes of urban planning are understood and at times contested by state, transnational, market, and individual actors. In a similar manner, Harms examines expert knowledge of geomancy within a history of land-use-rights reforms in the *Đổi mới* era. Also concerned with urban planning and urban reconstruction techniques, Harms shows how "traditional" (i.e., superstitious) and "modern" scientific knowledge about geomancy intersect in the bustling real-estate industry that involves, like Schwenkel's example, diversely situated participants that "move up, down, and sideways." The scientization of knowledge formerly dismissed by the socialist government as backward superstition also figures prominently in Hien's article, where the techniques of photo retouching, plastic surgery, and self-improvement help people to alter their appearance in ways that will also change their fates for the better. In Hien's and Leshkovich's works, these newly circulating ideas and discursive knowledge about correct forms of moral personhood and presentation of self are communicated to readers through mass media such as newspapers, tabloids, and paperbacks.

Competing claims to expertise and the role of transnational knowledge

transfers also play a central role in the articles by MacLean and Truitt. MacLean explores how the “social problem” of corruption is addressed through audit procedures and other strategies to promote fiscal accountability that are considered central to neoliberalism. Drawing from Kipnis, MacLean shows how socialist and capitalist forms of accountability are not entirely disconnected, but at times they compete and at other times intersect, thus demonstrating how neoliberal forms of professional expertise are based on inclusions and exclusions of particular knowledge. Truitt charts paradigm shifts in the production of economic knowledge about inflation and competing national and international interpretations of monetary instabilities. Like the rest of the contributors, Truitt demonstrates how the knowledge project of neoliberalism, which on the surface appears to valorize particular forms of scientific expertise, is contested and reconfigured in relation to competing regimes of value.

Class Subjectivities /Technologies of Self

Neoliberal governing techniques and knowledge practices succeed to the extent that “free” citizen-consumer-subjects internalize particular desires and develop appropriate strategies of self-regulation (see fig. 1). Nikolas Rose has noted the central role that the media plays in educating neoliberalism:

The previously unfree subjects of these societies cannot merely be “freed” — they have to be *made* free in a process that entails the transformation of educational practices to inculcate certain attitudes and values of enterprise, changes in television programmes ranging from soap operas to game shows to implant the desire for wealth creation and personal enterprise, as well as the activities of marriage guidance consultants and a host of other psychological therapists to sort out the difficulties that arise when personal life becomes a matter of freedom of choice.³⁷

Lisa Rofel similarly highlights the importance of the media in transforming human nature through “public allegories” that teach people “the art of ‘longing’” (see fig. 2).³⁸

With these longings and desires comes considerable ambivalence. On the one hand, new forms of consumption might be critiqued as selfish and



Figure 1 Production of consumer knowledge and desire: the Thăng Long garment shop for introducing products. Photo by Christina Schwenkel



Figure 2 Role of media in inculcating new lifestyle practices and technologies of self. Photo by Christina Schwenkel

materialistic. The new rich who indulge excessively in such pleasures can be derided as crass and degenerate. On the other hand, new longings and desires appeal because they index a vision of self, family, or social life that comes to be seen as virtuous. If neoliberal governmentality is a project of “rendering technical,”³⁹ its companion in terms of individuals or groups is a process of creating new moral landscapes or, to use a phrase from Leshkovich’s article on narratives of abandoning mothers, “rendering moral.”

In Vietnam, the neoliberal individual becomes a morally appropriate self in part because he or she is embedded in extensive social networks. The imbrication of the individual in a collectivity in turn involves multiple ideologies that work to produce subjects who are neither fully state determined nor liberally autonomous, neither public nor private (see fig. 3).⁴⁰ The women seeking infertility treatment in Pashigian’s article evaluate the efficacy of various interventions so that they might achieve the individual status of mother, but also so that their families can be strengthened and perpetuated. When residents of Ho Chi Minh City build an extra story on their houses, Harms tells us, they are engaging both in conspicuous consumption and in a geomantic project of propitiously elevating their ancestral altars. The focus of AIDS prevention efforts has shifted over the past decade, Mon-



Figure 3 "Residents in Ward #4: United to Build a New Life." Photo by Christina Schwenkel

toya relates, from exiling those with the disease to internment camps to treating them within their families and communities as part of a call to recognize the common humanity of those afflicted with disease. In Leshkovich's article, the social workers seeking to place abandoned children in appropriate homes are in a sense reintegrating them into social networks.

In rendering particular types of individuals, families, or social collectives moral, expert interventions and technologies of self focus on providing order through improving the quality of life. Just as rendering technical depoliticizes issues,⁴¹ however, rendering moral conceals the fact that the modes of being and configurations of family touted as proper, acceptable, and appropriate are also middle class. Not surprisingly, the new forms of private property (Harms) and beauty regimes (Hien) that appeal to urbanites in Ho Chi Minh City are most readily available to those with privileged configurations of social, cultural, and economic capital. The rhetoric of morality naturalizes middle classness as somehow reflecting desirable personal qualities,

rather than a privileged position in an environment of increasing structural inequalities. This is particularly striking in a late socialist context, given the prior emphasis on promoting class equality in the name of the masses or people (*nhân dân*). Or perhaps it is the lingering suspicion of individual wealth that lends particular urgency to these moral renderings.

Several of the authors in this collection ask what happens to the poor in the face of these new visions of moral and social order. Who is included and excluded, and how? Schwenkel reminds us of the working-class residents of Quang Trung who are displaced to make way for proper middle classes who can afford to purchase private property. Pashigian considers how the possibility of IVF transforms the desires of infertile women who cannot afford the technology. Leshkovich shows how poor women get defined as morally unfit to mother socially the children they produce biologically. Although the poor are generally consigned to discrete, marginalized social and geographic domains, their paths occasionally intersect those of the newly rich in ironic ways. Từ Dũ Maternity Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, the heralded center of IVF that carefully enumerates its success in delivering biological children to the middle class, is also the most popular site for poor women to abandon their infants, at a rate of nearly one infant per day. These essays remind us that there is a very real difference between socialist and capitalist modes of measuring “progress” and the level of “civilization.”

Continuity and Change

Rather than confirm the unchallenged dominance of neoliberalism and the inevitability of capitalism, the essays in this volume highlight the ways in which the socialist “past” is integral to the present in Vietnam, even as it is remade and newly configured. Instead of making broad general claims about the “newness” of certain logics and practices that assume profound breaks with former expressions and manifestations of socialism, the contributors are attentive to continuities, recurrences, intersections, and cross-fertilizations across the domains of public and private, state, nonstate, and transnational.⁴² To give just one example, MacLean’s consideration of the audit cultures of transparency and verification deployed to address allega-

tions of corruption suggests that they often assume very socialist forms: a self-criticism session or a venerated war hero's public call for party officials to "count the points" and reveal their own weaknesses in service of the masses. Such recognition thus complicates claims that the presence of neoliberal forms on the landscape signifies an end of Vietnamese state-led welfarism and developmentalism. The authors show how both the state and market allocate resources, and how both are actively involved in privatization, similar to claims made in academic studies of European postsocialism and Chinese late socialism. Through urban ethnography, the authors question claims that government regulation has shifted from state to individual by showing the new state practices and "new intrusions" that are at once "global" and "local" to manage the population.⁴³

Together, these essays show that Vietnam is good to think neoliberalism. They demonstrate how the power of the socialist state can benefit from neoliberalism without being the guiding force behind its uneven spread. They also further understandings that governmentality need not be accomplished only through actual technologies of rule but also through other nonstate actors (local or transnational) and their variable modes of self and global regulation in order to maintain economic, social, aesthetic, and scientific order. The authors show that as neoliberalism works through exceptions, global institutions, and newly configured public and private relations, the Vietnamese state has neither wholly receded nor reified its power as privatization moves unsteadily across the landscape. The persistence of socialist notions of personhood, claims to morality, and ways of making sense of radically different forms of socioeconomic organization complicate ideas of neoliberalism as transition, victory, and endpoint not only because of state rhetoric about socialist continuities but also because they represent visions of the world that people find familiar and compelling. At the same time, these visions are not opposed to neoliberalism and its potential "rewards" but may in fact make neoliberal processes translatable and exchangeable, that is, able to integrate into social worlds and practices that "fit" with Vietnamese past and future imaginaries.

Notes

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1. In 2009 and 2010, China's growth rates were 9.2 percent and 10.3 percent, while Vietnam's were 5.3 percent and 6.8 percent, The World Bank, www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG (accessed October 2, 2011).
2. See, for example, Rana Foroohar, "Why China Works," *Newsweek*, January 19, 2009, 24–29.
3. As Ann Anagnost has argued, this capitalist teleology marks socialism "as an irrational disruption of the 'normal' progression of history toward capitalism." Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 7.
4. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3–4. For an examination of the technologies of self associated with neoliberal governmentality, see Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 85–93.
5. Tara A. Schwegler, "Take It from the Top (Down)? Rethinking Neoliberalism and Political Hierarchy in Mexico," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4 (2008): 682.
6. Andrew Kipnis, "Neoliberalism Reified: *Suzhi* Discourse and Tropes of Neoliberalism in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 2 (2007): 388; Andrew B. Kipnis, "Audit Cultures: Neoliberal Governmentality, Socialist Legacy, or Technologies of Governing?" *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 2 (2008): 275–89.
7. Donald M. Nonini, "Is China Becoming Neoliberal?" *Critique of Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2008): 145–76.
8. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*.
9. Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang, "Introduction: Privatizing China; Powers of the Self, Socialism from Afar," in *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*, ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1–19.
10. Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Anagnost, *National Past-Times*.
11. See, for example, David Stark and László Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1; Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds., *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Elizabeth C. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca, NY:

- Cornell University Press, 2004); Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
12. Elizabeth C. Dunn, "Standards and Person-Making in East Central Europe," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 184–89.
 13. As Stark and Bruszt have argued, "When we stop defining capitalism in terms of socialism, we see that, in our epoch, capitalism as a construct is analytically interesting only in the plural: *Capitalisms* must be compared vis-à-vis each other" (*Postsocialist Pathways*, 3). Likewise, on the plurality of forms of neoliberalism, see Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, and Kipnis, "Neoliberalism Reified."
 14. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 75.
 15. Carolyn L. Hsu, *Creating Market Socialism: How Ordinary People Are Shaping Class and Status in China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Yan Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks," *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2003): 493–523; Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (2004): 189–208; Andrew Kipnis, "Suzhi: A Keyword Approach," *China Quarterly* 186 (June 2006): 295–313.
 16. Kipnis, "Suzhi," 297; Ann Anagnost, "A Surfeit of Bodies: Population and the Rationality of the State in Post-Mao China," in *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22–41; Vanessa L. Fong, *Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-Child Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
 17. Kipnis, "Suzhi," 302–3. See also Rofel, *Desiring China*; Anagnost, "Corporeal Politics"; Hsu, *Creating Market Socialism*.
 18. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 93.
 19. Ellen R. Judd, *The Chinese Women's Movement between State and Market* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Hsu, *Creating Market Socialism*, 184–87; Kipnis, "Suzhi," 307; Lisa M. Hoffman, "Post-Mao Professionalism: Self-Enterprise and Patriotism," in Zhang and Ong, *Privatizing China*, 168–81. Kipnis also notes the term's connection to Republic-era eugenics ("Suzhi," 305–6), while Hsu points out that *suzhi* can serve as a critique of a market economy that tends to equate status with money, rather than education or character (Hsu, *Creating Market Socialism*, 188).
 20. See, for example, Hoffman's discussion of "patriotic professionalism" in "Post-Mao Professionalism."
 21. Ong and Zhang, "Introduction," 3.
 22. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 78.
 23. Ong and Zhang, "Introduction," 1. See also Rofel, *Desiring China*; Anagnost, "Corporeal Politics."
 24. Kipnis, "Audit Cultures."

25. Nonini, "Is China Becoming Neoliberal?"
26. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104.
27. Although this exact phrase does not appear in English translations of Foucault's writings, it has become common shorthand referring to what Tania Murray Li defines as "the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means" (Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007], 5).
28. Li, *Will to Improve*.
29. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 77.
30. James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, "Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality," *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (2002): 989.
31. Ferguson and Gupta, "Spatializing States," 995.
32. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Monster Stories: Women Charged with Perinatal Endangerment," in *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, ed. Faye Ginsburg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 282–99.
33. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 3.
34. Nguyễn-võ Thu-hương, *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 79; Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 149.
35. Nguyễn-võ, *Ironies of Freedom*, 79–81.
36. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 198.
37. *Ibid.*, 65.
38. Rofel, *Desiring China*, 6.
39. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 79; Li, *Will to Improve*, 7–10.
40. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland*, 164.
41. Li, *Will to Improve*, 7.
42. Harry G. West and Parvathi Raman, eds., *Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Transformation, Restoration and Continuation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).
43. Nguyễn-võ, *Ironies of Freedom*, 255.

