

position has deteriorated since the economic transformations. But Nitzsche makes constructive suggestions for possible solutions. The only critique to be made here is that she does not place enough emphasis on the interpretation of the interviews made by her, which are vividly presented as a personal digression in the middle of the book. For all interested in further research of social impacts of the ongoing reform process in rural Vietnam it is a must to include gender analysis. This book is a good starting-point.

Katja Meyer

RITA LILJESTRÖM, EVA LINDSKOG, NGUYEN VAN ANG, VUONG XUAN TINH, *Profit and Poverty in Rural Vietnam: Winners and Losers of Dismantled Revolution*. (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies: Democracy in Asia Series, 3). Richmond: Curzon, 1998. XVIII, 269 pages, 60 figures, 14 tables, £40,00. ISBN 0-7007-0987-8

*Profit and Poverty in Rural Vietnam* is a very readable and rich down-to-earth-study about forestry enterprises and nearby villages in the mountains of north-western Vietnam - a region scantily represented in international social science literature. The four case studies introduce the reader to an ethnically heterogeneous social setting that is still undergoing a process of decollectivisation in which fields and forests are being privatised by granting long-term usage rights to farmers and workers. Based on a 1994-95 follow-up of a study undertaken in 1987 within the context of Swedish development aid, the case studies are introduced and summarised by Rita Liljeström, who - besides describing the methodical framework of the study - provides a general account of ethnic minorities in northern Vietnam's mountainous regions and of major changes in Vietnam's land regime after 1953.

Under the common heading of socio-economic changes due to market expansion - termed by the authors as "transition to a commodity economy" - and the various strategies people develop to cope with it, each case varies somewhat in its topical emphasis.

The first two cases exemplify the transition to a commodity economy with an emphasis on institutional arrangements, like the commodification of labour in an environment where deforestation eroded workers' livelihoods and labour is not sufficiently available for a number of households. The second case deals more extensively with socio-structural changes within the enterprise, like generational gaps, changing remuneration and retirement systems, and the fate of orphans.

The third case is a micro perspective on the enhancement of private and individual responsibilities due to agricultural reforms. Several pages are devoted to the views of the people concerned and considerable attention is paid to people left behind by the accelerating development.

Environmental and social issues like family planning and education are discussed in case four, which deals with a forest enterprise that was expressly founded to prevent an ecological catastrophe in an area very remote from Hanoi near the Chinese border. About half of the enterprise's workers belong to local ethnic groups. Only since 1990, in the wake of massive shrinking of the enterprise, which dismantled the last production brigades in 1994, Kinh workers (i.e. ethnic Vietnamese), yearning to leave their collective quarters, started to move into villages that had hitherto housed only minority people a mere handful of whom had a basic command of Vietnamese.

In this publication analytical reflections are more or less confined to the Introduction and Summary. Particularly in the latter we find general assessments of the situation in the northern highlands, namely insufficient market knowledge and the low impact of reform policy. Observations on ethnicity are among the most interesting. For example, ethnicity as a topic has apparently gained importance among managers of the forest enterprise in case two (p.95). Interaction between the dominant Kinh and ethnic minorities seems to be a two-way exchange, where on the one hand "Vietnamisation" is taking place in that minorities are adopting Kinh material culture, while Kinh in turn "align themselves with the spiritual beliefs and customs of the local ethnic minorities" (p. 254).

In general, the book treads carefully on touchy issues. This is quite apt for a Western-Vietnamese scientific undertaking. Criticism is nonetheless made of the ignorance on the Vietnamese side as regards cultural dimensions of the relationship between Kinh and ethnic minorities, being occupied mainly with issues of poverty and environmental degradation.

What appealed to me most about this book - besides its numerous illustrations - was that the authors make their approach and methods very transparent, also mentioning the obstacles to communication and contact with the people concerned.

Readers working on ethnic minorities, and especially those interested in the region, certainly find valuable empirical data in this publication, particularly on the impact of *doi moi* policy on rather remote state enterprises and the neighbouring minorities as well as on ethnic-state relations.

Erland Meyer-Tran