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analysis. On the other hand, Unger's grasp of the relevant English-language literature on the Thai political economy and on these three sectors is firm and impressive. He cites, too, a number of secondary sources in Japanese.

In the end, the very design of *Building Social Capital in Thailand* means that it fails to make a persuasive case for the value of social capital to the study of Southeast Asia: the substantive case studies are linked only very generally to the theoretical and descriptive chapters on Thailand's stock of social capital. Unger is, to be sure, a very thoughtful observer of Thai and Southeast Asian political economy. A number of his observations and the analytical use made of them prove both original and stimulating. He notes, for example, that the implementation phase is 'the actual locus of Thai policy-making' (p. 24) and that 'distributional coalitions' may in their information-supplying roles actually contribute to effective state policy-making rather than serving merely to 'distort market signals' (p. 17). Such observations may well spur fresh contributions to the study of the region's politics and political economy or to scholarship on modern Thailand among readers of *Building Social Capital in Thailand*. For now, however, both Unger's concluding comment that 'Thailand's institutional stock, its social capital, lent itself better to the achievement of some economic and social tasks than others' (p. 183) and his speculation that the country's stock of social capital may in fact be on the rise await further – more focused and perhaps more rigorous – scholarship.

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Vietnam

Women's Bodies, Women's Worries. Health and Family Planning in a Vietnamese Rural Community.

By TINE GAMMELTOFT.

Richmond: Curzon, 1999. Pp. x, 227. Bibliography, Index.

This book offers a comprehensive analysis of women's contraceptive use in the Vietnamese rural community of Vài So'n, throughby way of a detailed description of their views and attitudes with regards to IUD (intrauterine devices). The author justifies this particular focus by highlighting the fact that IUD remain the most popular contraceptive method in Vietnam, although more and more women who use them are encountering serious problems, including health side effects, expulsions and unwanted pregnancies. To explain this apparent inconsistency in family planning behaviour, Tine Gammeltoft explores Vietnamese women's psychosocial experience of pain and physical distress. In line with a new current of anthropological studies that questions the suitability of clinical models and categories to address women's reproductive health complaints, the author chooses to prioritise women's personal and subjective accounts of their experiences with IUD within the context of their daily social lives. In this theoretical framework, the body is conceptualised as 'the living centre of all our being and acting in the world', while pain and diseases are seen as 'experiences that are deeply integrated with our social and existential being' (p. 7). Hence, any use of a certain kind of technology 'mediates and transforms social relationships, bodies and subjectivities' (p. 5).

To analyse the implications of IUD use for women's lives and social relations in rural Vietnam, the author first describes the wider sociopolitical context of the Vài So'n commune, before zeroing in on women's problems with IUD, as articulated through local concepts of health and disease. More particularly, in Chapters 2 and 3, Gammeltoft introduces the commune of Vài So'n,

examining the impact of national policies on social structures and people's lives at the local level. Special attention is provided to recent economic reforms that have led to the dismantling of the co-operative system, thus increasing women's reproductive and productive burdens, and to the intensive implementation of the national family planning programme to curtail rapid population growth. Among the new values adopted in the commune, the notion of the 'small and happy family', as propagated by the government and international agencies, has become of immense social, economic and existential relevance to women in *Vài So'n*, making 'having a large number of children.... neither economically viable nor morally acceptable' (p. 81). In this first introductory part, Gammeltoft's portrayal of her 'fieldwork under supervision and control' (p. 38) is of particular methodological interest to anthropologists since it adds new dimensions to the question whether a constraining environment compromises the reliability of the results.

The following chapters (Chapters 4 to 7), which constitute the core of Gammeltoft's argument, focus on the side effects of IUD use as an expression of women's physiological and social ill-health. The life histories of five commune women provide insights into their experiences with fertility control and IUD, the problems they encounter, and their multifaceted explanations of these problems. By combining this information with other relevant data collected through surveys and more structured interviews, the author shows that IUD symptoms are not separated from more general feelings of physical weakness and exhaustion, and closely relate to two core categories of common women's diseases, i.e. 'nerves' and 'lack of blood'. What is more, such health problems do not exist in a vacuum, but convey tensions and ambiguities surrounding sexuality and reproduction, and more generally, everyday stresses of family life. In a sociocultural context wherein health is associated with social balance and harmony, ill-health is associated with social tensions. It follows that IUD symptoms – and the two core categories to which they relate – 'represent more than pure physiological malfunctioning'. These symptoms are 'not just biological signs, but also the metaphors for stressful and exhausting living conditions' (p. 157). By expressing pain and discomfort, women communicate structural tensions inherent in their roles of mother, wife, or daughter-in-law, in a culturally appropriate manner. It is by employing the 'accepted model of female behaviour', that they are able to manifest their incapacity to fully realise the 'happy family' ideal and 'resist' gender inequity as shaped both by Confucianism and the dominant socialist ideology. Gammeltoft concludes that for women in *Vài So'n*, in the absence of more direct forms of power, 'the expression of distress through somatic idioms [is a] socially safer and less costly' way to influence their social surrounding (pp 235-6).

The strengths of this book lie in its detailed analysis of women's perceptions of IUD use, its innovative efforts to link bodily symptoms to social surroundings by focusing on a certain technological medium, and its intention to avoid structural determinism by stressing the importance of human agency. Still, one cannot avoid wondering whether these strengths are not at the same time the book's main weaknesses. Due to the narrow focus and the preoccupation to fit all the diverse elements in a coherent, ideological framework, the text becomes repetitive and the reader can easily foresee what comes next. Furthermore, not all the arguments sound equally convincing as if possible alternative interpretations have not been taken into full account. At times, one would wish that the author had delved more deeply into the many aspects she briefly touches upon, such as in the case of the history of family planning, the quality of reproductive health services, the costs and accessibility of contraceptive methods, and the ethical discussion on abortion. It would also have been instructive to further probe the notion of the 'small and happy family' as proper to the socialist system of Vietnam in view of its being commonly upheld by family planning programmes in

neighbouring Asian countries, e.g. Indonesia. My main remarks however, are related to the very centrality given to IUD in the study. Although the author exposes a number of conceptual difficulties in viewing suffering as embodied resistance (pp. 245-6), she still fails to raise the following questions: If women express their 'resistance' through IUD complaints, does this imply that those women who do not experience them have accepted their gender role and are satisfied with the status quo? And, what about women who do not use IUD? How do they express their discontent, if any? In other words, how indispensable are IUDs in the communication of women's physiological and thus social distress?

By stimulating these provocative thoughts, the study contributes significantly to the advancement of the medical anthropological discourse on the body as a reflection of the social order, and enhances the current debate on how to link micro and macro realities. I therefore recommend it not only to readers interested in Vietnam, but also to medical and social scientists in search of new approaches for transcending the gap between biology and culture.

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