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Van Nguyen-Marshall
Lisa B. Welch Drummond
Danièle Bélanger *Editors*

The Reinvention of Distinction

Modernity and the Middle
Class in Urban Vietnam



 Springer

The Reinvention of Distinction

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in Urban Vietnam



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Chapter 1

Introduction: Who Are the Urban Middle Class in Vietnam?

Danièle Bélanger, Lisa B. Welch Drummond, and Van Nguyen-Marshall

In 1933, a young urbanite married and took his new bride to live in a simple thatched hut in a village near Hanoi's West Lake. This would not have been a remarkable event to be recorded by historians, except that the young man was Thạch Lam, a famous writer of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (the Self-Reliance Literary Group) (Hồ Sĩ Hiệp, 1996, p. 64). The *Tự Lực* writers were all educated, well-to-do urbanites who wrote about the modernizing and globalizing effects of colonialism on Vietnamese society. Thạch Lam's older brother Nhất Linh, after dabbling in medicine and fine arts, went to Paris to study science. Thạch Lam himself attended the prestigious Lycée Albert Sarraut and then became a journalist and writer. His choice of a thatched hut for his matrimonial abode was a deliberate act to demonstrate his love for simple and rural living—to show that even though he could speak fluent French, drink wine, and frequent trendy cafes, he also knew how to appreciate a supposedly traditional peasant life. Furthermore, his rustication was a demonstration of his artistic ability to transform simplicity and coarseness into comfort and elegance.

Fast-forwarding to Hanoi in the twenty-first century, similar scenes unfold: urban middle-class Vietnamese look to the countryside for refuge from the hectic city life. The new middle class of the *Đổi Mới* (commonly translated as 'economic renovation') period buys property in the temperate mid-lands to build their holiday homes (Chapter 9, this volume). Vietnamese artists, who make their wealth and fame from the international art market, also seek escape and inspiration in the villages. They build their village homes and fill their houses with antique art pieces (Chapter 7, this volume). While many do not choose a simple thatched hut à la Thạch Lam, but rather build extravagant stylish homes, they demonstrate the same nostalgia and romantic notions for rural living in the 2000s as Thạch Lam did in the 1930s.

These two montages from two different historical moments suggest that there is some continuity in the experiences and displays of middle classness from the French colonial to the contemporary period. Despite these similarities, however, with the devastating disruptions of two wars and radical socialist reconstruction in the North

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(the latter over a shorter period in the South), it is inevitable that sharp differences also exist in the practices of the middle classes through time and between regions. Through these changes, individuals and families have had to adjust, strategize, and adopt new lifestyles to reposition themselves in evolving social orders brought about by colonization, war, independence, communism, and a market economy. In each of these historical periods, individuals and families dealt with changing and sometimes radically different sets of institutions, social relations, power structures and social expectations. Survival, the maintenance or re-establishment of one's previous social position, as well as any aspiration for social mobility, have entailed the deployment of new strategies. These, in turn, have required the mobilization and conversion of former forms of valued and useful economic, social, cultural and political capital and, often, the creation of new capital of all forms. A focus on the urban middle class provides a unique vantage point into these decades of social history and social change experienced by Vietnamese society.

In this collection, we show how the study of the Vietnamese middle class is central to an understanding of Vietnamese urban social life. We start with the premise that the city is the primary arena for the demonstration of middle classness. It is in the city that the accoutrements of middle-class lifestyles can be obtained and shown off, where what is currently modern is displayed, a model to be learned and copied. There is no doubt that middle-class attributes are copied and exhibited by those able to do so in the countryside as well, but it is in the city that these attributes are debated and eventually adopted as markers of middle classness, as attesting to a familiarity with modernity and urbanity.

In addition to its focus on urban middle classes, this volume contests notions that the middle class is a novelty of *Đổi Mới* by stepping back in time and documenting middle-class life in colonial Vietnam and in South Vietnam during the US-Vietnam War. Contributors to this multidisciplinary collection trace the emergence of the middle class to the French colonial era, when Western and modern socio-cultural practices became important symbols of a new social class. The narrative continues into post-colonial South Vietnam and extends into the Socialist Republic of the *Đổi Mới* period, when middle classness had to be reformulated and reinvented. While there are significant differences in middle class formation and experiences through time, there are also striking parallels.

1.1 Narratives of Class in Vietnamese History

From the point of view of class and class mobility, Vietnam's modern period, marked by the onset of French colonial rule, was and is radically different from the (pre-colonial) feudal period when social mobility was possible only through specific and well-established means: the mandarin examinations or military service. In other words, to gain respect and prestige one needed to be educated in the classics and to succeed in the civil service examinations. Passing even the preliminary level of the regional exams would elevate the scholar and his family

to the literati class, which distinguished itself above the peasants and merchants (Woodside, 1988, pp. 172–177). Consequently, wealth alone did not equate to high social status. In addition, wealth accumulated through commercial activities was, in theory, scorned for not conforming to the Confucian values with which some of the precolonial dynasties publicly identified. In practice, however, wealth, if not a necessity, made it easier to devote one's life to scholarship. Moreover, despite official prejudice against merchants, this class was indispensable to the economic life of pre-colonial Vietnam. In any case, with or without a wealthy background, social mobility was intimately tied to the state and imperial appointments within the state bureaucracy.

After the French conquest of all Vietnam (c. 1883), and with colonial bureaucratization, resource extraction, and industrialization, a modern Vietnamese middle class emerged—though again one with strong ties to the state. According to Trần Thanh Hương, it was only in the 1920s that the bourgeoisie in Vietnam could be considered a class with its own class consciousness and distinct class interests (Trần Thanh Hương, 2008). After the First World War, intensification of French investment in Indochina created a capitalist economy which, in turn, nurtured a burgeoning native bourgeois class. Trần identifies two different groups of bourgeoisie: one which acted as contractors between the colonial state and foreign companies and one which comprised of small-scale entrepreneurs participating mainly in trade, light manufacturing, and processing. The bourgeois class therefore swelled alongside the several hundred manufacturing and trading enterprises in the 1920s.

In addition, during this same period, Governor-General Sarraut's 'association' policy opened up more educational and career opportunities for ambitious young Vietnamese. Consequently, the number of Western-educated and professionally-trained Vietnamese increased. Joining the newly-emerging entrepreneurs and business people were journalists, physicians, lawyers, clerks, teachers, and other white-collar professionals typically associated with the middle class. Members of this new commercial and professional class, whose wealth and social standing ranged from moderately well-off to rich, dominated urban centres such as Hanoi and Saigon, shaping the socio-cultural milieu to reflect their interests and tastes. To protect and promote their interests and views, this Westernized middle class organized friendly associations and charities and took advantage of the boom in print media to propagate their modern views (Marr, 1984; Jamieson, 1995; Phạm Xanh & Nguyễn Dị Hương, 2008). Thạch Lam and the writers associated with the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn*, mentioned above, were among those urbanites seeking to transform Vietnamese society in the 1930s.

The historical narrative of Vietnam's emerging middle class has not been so far an atypical story of class development in Asia or in other colonized societies. Work on South Asia, for instance, illustrates the impact of colonialism, modernity, and nationalism on middle-class identity in colonial India and how this middle class, in turn, shaped modern ideals and practices (Joshi, 2001; Banerjee, 2004; Joshi, 2010). What is interesting about the Vietnamese context is the middle class's interrupted and uneven development as the result of an interregnum of high socialist social organization (from 1954 to 1986 for North Vietnam and from 1975 to 1986

for South Vietnam). During this period, the middle class was actively punished and virtually eradicated. In its stead, a regime elite, so to speak, developed in which membership depended on good class background (i.e. peasant and/or revolutionary) and party membership or service. The middle class was targeted with a series of measures intended to curtail and then stop its activities. The socialist state implemented collectivization in agriculture and forestry while taking control of industries. Consequently, state collectives and cooperatives, rather than private enterprises, provided trading and distribution services. In this way the state restricted private trading and eventually tried to abolish it altogether. While the elimination of the commercial class was never fully achieved, it was nonetheless largely successful. Individuals and families identified as bourgeois had their goods and properties confiscated and or nationalized, and many were sent to re-education camps.

In the North, which experienced a significantly longer period of socialist construction, the state's Three Year Plan (1958–1960) stated the explicit goal of seeking 'to transform Hanoi from a "colonial consumption city into a producing city."' (as quoted by Turley, 1975, p. 377). In the 1960s, the middle class of the North received another blow, as the Second Indochina War brought US bombing and the evacuation of the cities. Starting in 1965, large-scale evacuations of Hanoi and other cities in the North were periodically carried out; in 1966 about one-third to one-half of Northern cities had been evacuated (Turley, 1975). Between the state policy of eliminating the capitalist class and the war's disruption of city life, the urban middle class in the North during the war years saw its numbers and activities sharply reduced.

The opposite was true for those in South Vietnam. The division of Vietnam following the Geneva Conference in 1954 led to the migration of approximately 810,000 people to South Vietnam (Hansen, 2008). Of this group of migrants, about one-third was Roman Catholic and about 90,000 were from the professional class (Hess, 1977). The new migrants, many of whom settled in Saigon and the surrounding areas, joined Saigon's middle class, already developed and active since the French colonial period. While the economic and social structure for the middle class predated 1954, the new political situation foisted on Vietnam meant new challenges and changes for social classes in South Vietnam. The war, American intervention, and the establishment of a new polity and political identity presented challenges as well as opportunities for the middle class.

The division of the country and the Second Indochina War thus resulted in the diverging trajectories of North and South Vietnamese societies from the mid-1950s onward until 1975. Research on social class during this period is striking in its almost complete absence in Vietnamese as well as in either English or French. For North Vietnam, the communist enterprise aimed to eradicate socio-economic inequalities, leaving behind a profound uneasiness with evidence of social cleavages. Vietnamese scholars and commentators have been unable, politically, to address such manifestations of inequality, although research on the communist experience in other countries has clearly shown the salience of inequalities linked

to political capital and the access to resources and power under communism. In the former East Germany, for instance, inequality arose not from income differentials, but from other factors, such as social connections, family ties, and individuals' age and gender (Merkel, 1999). In Vietnam, official recognition of social inequity is slowly surfacing. One of the most compelling and popular acts of acknowledgment was the 2006 Museum of Ethnology's highly popular exhibition on life during the *bao cấp* (subsidy) period in North Vietnam. On display were numerous items which pointed to the disparities and distinctions of everyday life under communism. One of the most telling items of the exhibition was a large display specifying the rations given to individuals according to their occupation and rank, with individuals of power benefiting from larger monthly rations of rice, meat, oil, and sugar than peasants and workers. The existence and practice of class distinction during the *bao cấp* period has been further corroborated over the recent years in published memoirs and novels, indicating that connection to the state and Party often could provide special privileges and status (Đường Thu Hường, 2002; Lê Văn, 2006).

For capitalist South Vietnam, the assumption is that class cleavages and inequality were prevalent—that the South Vietnamese government's inefficiency and corruption, in addition to the enormous flow of foreign aid into South Vietnam, exacerbated the disparity between classes. While this is the conventionally accepted representation of South Vietnamese society, little research has yet been conducted into the social history of this period, much less about the manifestation of classes in general and the middle class in particular. Just as the image of a classless North is probably untenable, so the image of a virulently competitive South may also prove inaccurate.

A decade after the end of the Second Indochina War, Vietnamese society and social classes experienced another major transformation. In 1986, after shortages and famines in the early 1980s indicated a failure of collectivized farming, the state introduced *Đổi Mới*, a new policy which moved Vietnam toward a market economy, allowing foreign-direct investment and private sector involvement in the economy. This led to the discontinuation of state pricing and rationing, the revival of small-scale trading, downsizing of the state sector (with massive layoffs), and the eventual flourishing of the private sector (comprising both domestic and foreign-owned firms) complete with a stock market. The description of the socio-economic system now in place is 'market socialism,' a term which is also used to describe the system in China.

Consequently, to talk about a middle class in contemporary Vietnam in this context of 'market socialism' is to talk about a group whose conditions of existence have been possible for less than 15–20 years. The contemporary Vietnamese middle class has consequently moved cautiously toward displaying and identifying class status. In the rapid and acute socio-economic transformations of the past 20 years Vietnamese society has witnessed a gradual change in valued symbolic capital, from association with the revolutionary and peasant class to association with the modern, entrepreneurial, and urbane. The cities, particularly Hanoi and Saigon, have once again become the setting for consumption and for the display and practice of middle classness.

1.2 Problematizing the Middle Class

The notion of ‘middle class’ is highly disputed in the social science literature. Disagreements over its usefulness have led some scholars working on societies outside Western Europe to reject the concept altogether. The main argument for refusing the relevance of this construct, found in the literature on Asian societies and on postsocialist societies, is the premise that ‘middle class’ as a concept is strongly anchored in the experiences of Western democracies. Indeed, the most influential theories of social classes and definitions of middle classes—often tied to specific typologies of occupations, types of state-citizen relations, and levels of economic capital—were formulated based on European or North American examples. For this reason, critical voices contend that the notion of ‘middle class’ cannot shed light on social transformations and class structures observed in societies with different legacies, such as colonialism and socialism (Geciene, 2005).

Questions regarding the applicability of this concept in non-Western contexts arise in particular from the literature on postsocialist societies, especially those of Eastern Europe. Researchers in this field express uneasiness with ‘importing’ this Western concept, for inevitably the middle class in transitional economies of Eastern Europe, in the throes of rapid social changes, will appear less developed in comparison to the advanced capitalist economies (Geciene, 2005, p. 82). While Vietnam is not a postsocialist society in political terms,¹ it shares with Eastern European socialist societies the experience of a communist class structure prior to the dismantlement of their centralized economies. Geciene’s cautionary note is, therefore, relevant to the case of Vietnam. However, the degree to which the communist class structure shapes the post-communist one is a matter of debate and different studies offer various and diverging conclusions (Evans & Mills, 1999; Mayer, Diewald, & Solga, 1999). Moreover, the rejection of the concept ‘middle class’ rests on the assumption that the socialist period completely and permanently eradicated all traces of any preceding social order and was itself a period free of class. The case of post-communist East Germany clearly shows the ‘hybridization of the new class formation because of the persistence of class groups created by the past [communist] political and economic order’ (Mayer et al., 1999, p. 187).

With respect to other Asian countries, the middle class has been the subject of a number of studies over the past decade (Cf Robison & Goodman, 1996; Pinches, 1999; Chua, 2000, 2003). Some focus on the origins and development of the Asian middle classes or ‘the new rich’.² Other studies examine the consumer power and lifestyle aspirations of the new rich, who are marked by their conspicuous consumption of luxury goods and fashion and their love for particular leisure activities, such as golf and karaoke. This literature has moved (with the globalization literature, with which it is closely connected) from an emphasis on understanding middle-class

¹ In contrast, Goodman (2008) comfortably refers to China as a postsocialist society.

² Goodman (2008), for example, in his study of managers in China prefers the term ‘new rich’ to ‘middle class’ for that context.

experiences as evidence of largely uncritical and unadulterated absorption of global flows of goods and styles to a consideration of the local inflections and adaptations of these 'global' lifestyles, particularly as influenced by so-called 'Asian Values,' commonly defined as Confucian, family-centric, and conservative. Studies of the middle class in Asia have also highlighted the role of gender practices as important to claiming middle-class identity. Purushotam (2002), for instance, argues that Singaporean women participate in a middle-class identity which requires that they both strive for a 'better life' and simultaneously accept their 'subordination' as part of their reproductive duty and social role in an Asian society.

There are, however, few studies which explicitly focus on or analyze the middle class in Vietnam. Among those few, several have been authored by contributors to this volume: Vann's research on middle-class consumer choices in Ho Chi Minh City (2003, 2006), Leshkowich's study of women entrepreneurs (2006, 2008), and Truitt's examination of motorbikes as a symbol of consumerism and class mobility (2008). Other studies on Vietnam's middle class include Gainsborough's research on the middle class's political challenges to the state (2002), Leaf's study of peri-urban development (2002), Heberer's comparative study of Chinese and Vietnamese entrepreneurs (2003), Jellema's work on the moral discourse on wealth in a northern village (2005), and King, Phuong An Nguyễn and Nguyễn Huu Minh on the identity and aspirations of middle-class youth (King, Phuong An Nguyễn, & Nguyễn Huu Minh, 2008; King, 2008). These studies have primarily focussed on lifestyle (e.g. Leshkowich, Vann, Truitt, Leaf, King et al., King), the middle class's potential to contribute to an emerging civil society (e.g. Gainsborough, King et al., King) and rationalization of class status (e.g. Jellema, Leshkowich). Only a few scholars confront the issue of whether or not to use the term 'middle class' or even 'class' to describe phenomena in contemporary Vietnam (Heberer, King).

While acknowledging the many problems associated with the term 'middle class', King opts to use it in his examination of middle-class youth in Vietnam (2008). King, however, conceives the middle class as subdivided with its boundaries 'fuzzy and fluid' (2008, p. 86). In contrast, Heberer (2003) rejects altogether the terminology of class which he says misrepresents the group in question in both of his contexts. In his comparative study of private entrepreneurs in China and Vietnam, he argues that 'class', whether in a purely Marxist or in a Weberian or even Bourdieusian sense, still implies more coherence than could describe the Vietnamese or Chinese cases. Heberer even rejects the use of the term 'middle strata'. In both contexts, he argues, these categories have to be modified—lower, middle, and upper middle class; old and new middle class—every time they are used, implying that they are on their own too broad to be useful. As well, he argues that both terms—class and strata—suggest some sense of political force as well as cohesion. This political force, or 'political mission', which has been touted as a factor in processes of 'democratization' in Asian societies (e.g. Korea), has also been shown to be far less coherent than assumed within the 'class' or 'strata' in the context under study. Consequently, inhabitants of 'middle classes' or 'middle strata' of many Asian societies are not always or uniformly found to be in opposition to or unsupportive of authoritarian regimes. Gainsborough (2002), on the other hand,

uses the notion of 'middle class' but also criticizes the theoretical assumption that in Vietnam, the rise of a middle class will inevitably lead to the rise of a civil society and, eventually, to a democratic (multi-party) political regime.

In the literature on the middle class in Asia, the point is often made that the presumed members of the middle class are politically ambiguous. That is, they are supporters both of democratization and of authoritarianism. Entrepreneurs and others in the middle class are often highly dependent upon government contacts, patronage, and protection. This phenomenon of state-dependency is certainly very clear in Vietnam, where nothing much can be accomplished without strong contacts in government. Many of the entrepreneurs who have been successful are, on closer inspection, highly dependent on the state. In fact, many 'private' companies owned by government ministries were spun off from state-owned enterprises (SOE) or were privatized SOEs sold to former managers. Heberer in his study of entrepreneurs, estimates that 40–50 per cent of entrepreneurs are former civil servants or party cadre. State contacts are crucial to the working of the private sector.

There is no question that in Vietnam the middle class is a politically sensitive topic. While a Communist Party should by definition espouse a negatively-charged position vis-à-vis a middle class, it is also clear that a regime overseeing a socio-economic structure described as 'market socialism' must in practice actively facilitate the development of privately-held wealth amassed through trade, entrepreneurship, and professional development. In other words, state policies actively encourage the emergence of individuals and household units which possess in varying degrees some or all of economic, social, cultural, and/or symbolic capital. Meanwhile, there are clear and obvious attempts being made by the state and through the media to make private sector ownership and entrepreneurship acceptable. Successful entrepreneurs are often held up as model citizens, extolled for their business acumen, their good management, and their role as creators of employment (Leshkovich, 2006).

In the Vietnamese media, which is strongly guided by the Communist Party, the uneasiness with the notion of middle class in government discourse is clearly apparent. Vietnamese media virtually never use the term 'middle class' to describe any contemporary phenomena. Occasionally there are references to a 'middle level' [tầng lớp trung lưu] used in a purely descriptive sense—that is, with no political connotation and most often in a way which somehow implies civil servants, i.e. those comprising the level mediating between the Party and the people. In contrast, the groups that do emerge as fairly coherent and identifiable are the poor and the elite. They are seen to have some common interests and needs. The poor are often discussed as a discrete group, and urban poverty as a specific issue, something to be fixed through development and modernization. There are also occasional references to an elite, described as 'wealthy' (the đại gia or the tỷ phú). Recently, as To Xuan Phuc points out in his contribution to this volume, media accounts have begun to be more critical of sources of wealth, especially when traceable back to the state and especially in cases of corruption. Consequently, there are public discussions of absolute poverty and of the extravagant consumption of the very rich, but not of the middle class.

Notwithstanding the silence in media accounts about a middle class, middle classness seems to have become very effectively normalized as simply ‘modern,’ and takes in a wide swathe of urban citizens, quite importantly those that the state views as desirable (as opposed to the poor, who are clearly undesirable). That the middle class lacks a formal descriptor or identifier may well be a useful lexicographical situation for the state, as it serves to undermine the middle class’ potential to articulate group interests or direct group action.

1.3 Conceptualizing the Middle Class

Despite the above criticisms that question the relevance of ‘middle class’ in Southeast Asian and postsocialist societies, contributors to this volume assert the conceptual significance of this term for the study of Vietnamese urban life. The authors in this book do not seek to adopt or develop a definition of the middle class based on objective criteria, such as income level or profession. Rather, the chapters approach ‘middle class’ in different ways through their examinations of different subgroups, while at the same time forming a coherent whole with their focus on lifestyle and elements of ‘distinction’ that people strive to incorporate in their life-worlds to emulate the wealthy and distinguish themselves from the urban working poor. Whether it means joining a charity organization, reading certain newspapers, eating certain foods, going to a fitness club, using bank machines, or moving to a new suburban apartment, urban residents of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City—in the colonial, post-colonial, or *Đổi Mới* period—have adjusted their lifestyles to build new valued forms of symbolic capital and establish their position in urban society.

This volume thus refers to ‘social classes’ as social groups sharing certain *lifestyles*, which, in turn, are related to certain types of *social relations* shaped by the symbolic power embedded in those lifestyles. In this view, classes are not defined a priori by fixed and objective attributes; they are not based on a materialistic conception of power and inequality but on the idea of ‘symbolic capital’. In this view, ‘middle class’ is a social group (including sub-groups) which adheres to a certain lifestyle (or set of lifestyles), or is encouraged to do so by market or state actors, in order to assert its social position in the respective class structures of colonial capitalism or socialist capitalism (post-1986).

Of the social theorists, Pierre Bourdieu offers us the most useful and insightful thinking tools to approach changes in urban middle-class lifestyles. The concept of class, as defined by Bourdieu, aims at overcoming the Marx-Weber debate over whether social classes are primarily defined by occupation in relation to the means of production (Marx) or defined by social status (Weber). Bourdieu claims that the primary operative means to approach and delineate classes is through the study of lifestyles. Bourdieu’s work thus rejects a finite typology of social classes (Crossley, 2008). Instead, his main concepts of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ shed light on how ‘distinction’ operates to form class identity in relationship to other identities expressed in multilayered aspects of lifestyles. Bourdieu’s approach to social classes thus stands

as particularly useful for contributors of this volume because ‘his is a definition of class that incorporates within itself recognition that class is an essentially contested concept’ (Crossley, 2008, p. 98).

In Bourdieu’s approach to class, all individuals have a place, a position, in social space (‘espace social’) by virtue of their social, economic, and cultural capital, all of which combine to contribute to an individual’s possession of symbolic capital. Bourdieu showed how certain ‘positions’ can be associated with sets of ‘dispositions’, or sets of tastes expressed through certain lifestyles. The concept of *habitus* captures the socially situated set of dispositions individuals display through their lifestyle. *Habitus* entails the embodiment of certain practices and ways of being and living that are unconsciously performed because they are learned through early life experience and socialization (Maton, 2008). *Habitus* resides in a set of practices located within social fields (‘champs sociaux’). Fields are ‘social spaces’ where transactions, interactions, and events occur. Bourdieu’s own work has examined specific fields such as education, culture, housing, literature, science, and bureaucracy (Thomson, 2008, p. 68). This collection provides vivid examples of the dynamics of social fields and how they, in their own way, contribute in shaping social positions through lifestyles associated with middle classness.

Bourdieu’s claim that class belonging and one’s sense of place is not performed consciously is relevant to this collection in the sense that our emphasis is on how sense of group-ness and belonging largely emerges from daily life practices, as opposed to intentional and conscious political activities. Despite their proximity in lifeworlds, ‘individuals who are proximate in social space do not necessarily identify with one another or act collectively’ (Crossley, 2008, p. 92). In contrast to the importance given to early socialization in the acquisition of ‘habitus’ by Bourdieu, based on his analysis of French society, our collection emphasizes agency in *lifestyling* for the purpose of class mobility and belonging. The case of a society such as Vietnam, where the transition from a socialist to a market economy has entailed the dislocation of a class structure and the formation of a new one, offers a vantage point for the examination of agency in class mobility through *lifestyling* practices.

‘Hysteresis’, a less well-known Bourdieusian concept, offers a powerful entry into the understanding of how ‘positions’ and ‘dispositions’ have evolved in Vietnamese society and over life trajectories. Bourdieu defines hysteresis as a mismatch between *habitus* and field when social change occurs. One instance of this mismatch can occur when state policies redefine the type of symbolic capital that is valued, which redefines what gives power in the new social structure (Hardy, 2008, p. 143). When such reshuffling of fields occurs, a certain *habitus* can become a handicap rather than an advantage and individuals must deploy new strategies to accumulate capital in the new structure by adopting a new *habitus*. This result of a dislocation between field structures and *habitus* is hysteresis.

The case of Vietnam offers particularly rich instances for examining how changes in political and economic structures have redefined the value of symbolic capital and have therefore resulted in the experience of hysteresis for large segments of society. For instance, the land reform of the late 1950s in the North radically