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 462 *Speaking Out in Vietnam: Public Political Criticism in a Communist Party-Ruled*  
 463 *Nation.* By BENEDICT J. TRIA KERKVLIEET. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press,  
 464 2009. 246 pp. ISBN: 9781501736384 (cloth).  
 465 doi:10.1017/S0021911820001643  
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 468 Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet's latest book, *Speaking Out in Vietnam*, is a careful analysis  
 469 of how actors in Vietnamese society express their grievances and preferences to regime  
 470 authorities and how the Vietnamese party-state responds to those articulations. The find-  
 471 ings will enlighten students of both Vietnam and comparative politics more generally. The  
 472 book will positively shock popular commentary on Vietnam, which tends toward two  
 473 opposite caricatures of the country as either a purely authoritarian regime or a techno-  
 474 cratic development state. Kerkvliet paints a more nuanced and subtler picture,  
 475 showing that public criticism of the regime and political mobilization have grown dramati-  
 476 cally over time, involving a wide-ranging set of actors from rural peasants to factor  
 477 workers to elites in the party-state architecture. Moreover, the regime has dealt with  
 478 these protests in variety of ways. Coercive approaches, such as crackdowns and arrests,  
 479 have certainly been part of the package, but Kerkvliet demonstrates that—either  
 480 because of capacity or sympathy—tolerance and responsiveness to public demands are  
 more common tactics.

481 The book builds upon Kerkvliet's distinguished career studying Vietnamese politics  
 482 and an extensive database he has developed through online materials (both pro- and anti-  
 483 regime) that covers every public political criticism he could identify between 2002 and  
 484 2015 related to labor strikes, land disputes, national security (particularly international  
 485 relations with China), and calls for democratization. Kerkvliet supplements this resource  
 486 with visits to some of the key protest sites and actors to add color and to chase down  
 487 details missing from the online coverage. He travels to sites of labor protests, speaks  
 488 with well-known dissidents, and even visits the practice field of the No-U football club,  
 an informal association devoted to protesting China's aggressive actions.

489 *Speaking Out* takes almost the exact opposite methodological approach from Ker-  
 490 kvliet's previous work, especially *The Power of Everyday Politics*,<sup>1</sup> which built upon  
 491 thickly described narratives of narrow political events to tell a larger story about  
 492 bottom-up reforms. In *Speaking Out*, Kerkvliet starts very big by documenting broad pat-  
 493 terns in public protests and then zeroes in specific stories that help elucidate those  
 494 patterns.

495 Unusually, the book does not try to test hypotheses or craft a central argument. Ker-  
 496 kvliet revels in the vast diversity of the protester-state interactions. He describes the domi-  
 497 nant patterns that emerge, but he is reluctant to take strong stances on the determinants  
 498 of those patterns. While he tells readers when situations differ (e.g., the state responding  
 499 positively to labor protests in the 2012 Labor code, p. 29, but more negatively to peasant  
 500 protests in Hung Yên's Ecopark, pp. 46–54), he refrains from definitive and premature  
 conclusions about why they differed.

501 *Speaking Out* will undoubtedly become a valuable resource for scholars of Vietnam.  
 502 Over the years, a large number of protests have grabbed newspaper headlines and have  
 503 been highlighted in annual review pieces (the Pou Yen shoe factory strike, p. 20; the  
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505 <sup>1</sup>Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed*  
 506 *National Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

Đông Tâm land dispute and Hai Yang Shi You 981 oil rig protests, p. 80; and Cù Huy Hà Vũ's political activities, p. 106), but Kerkvliet does a much better job of pulling the details of these events together into cohesive narratives. Even more importantly, Kerkvliet presents these events within the context of similar protests that surrounded them, so that they appear less as islands of dissent and more as the emerging tips of deeper interactions between the state and protesters.

While chapter 2 on labor strikes and chapter 3 on land protests are informative, the most original is chapter 5, where Kerkvliet surveys party-state's responses to its most vehement critics. He collects detailed information on 168 critics who publicly spoke out against the regime in favor of far-reaching political reforms. Kerkvliet collects a comprehensive data set of their biographies and political histories, and most importantly the state's response to their activities. While being a regime critic is dangerous, Kerkvliet's analysis shows more tolerance for critics than might be expected. A few dissidents were never detained despite years of vocal public criticism of the party-state, several critics were detained but never imprisoned, and another large group were imprisoned for relatively short sentences, resumed their criticisms, but were not detained again. Kerkvliet finds that the key mitigating factors are age, history of working for the state, and connections to the regime. In chapter 6, he meditates briefly on the more fundamental question of what Vietnam gains from a more tolerant approach to protest, speculating that it provides them with information about bubbling threats to stability and greater popular legitimacy. Certainly, more work is necessary to test these last two hypotheses.

Even excellent research has flaws, and I have a few quibbles with *Speaking Out*. First, the book is not an easy read. Kerkvliet's prose is pithy and precise, but far too many cases and specific details of those events (location, size, gender, target, success) are thrown at the reader. It can sometimes feel like having a database read to you. While the book is comprehensive, it can be hard to synthesize information and discern patterns delivered in this format. More than once, I longed to see the underlying database to help me better visualize the contribution of the key variables.

Second, Kerkvliet presents each of the different protest types thematically rather than chronologically, trying to identify common themes in his database that are persistent over time. In describing the consequences of strikes, for instance, Kerkvliet jumps around in time from a party decree in 2008 (p. 26) to a Bắc Giang protest in 2006 (p. 27) to another protest in 2014 (p. 27) to the formation of two labor unions in 2006 (p. 27) to a police arrest in 2010 (p. 28) to the Labor Law in 2012 (p. 29). This Billy Pilgrim time-leaping obscures critical longitudinal trends for readers. Have protests increased in their frequency and scale? Has the regime become more responsive over time? It is difficult to get a sense of the direction change this way.

These minor flaws aside, *Speaking Out* is an important piece of scholarship that deserves a place on the bookshelves of every student of Vietnamese politics. It raises a number of important questions that will set the agenda for future work on the polity.

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