



# Haunting Images: A Cultural Account of Selective Reproduction in Vietnam (Philip E. Lilienthal Books)

By Tine M. Gammeltoft

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Based on years of careful ethnographic fieldwork in Hanoi, *Haunting Images* offers a frank and compassionate account of the moral quandaries that accompany innovations in biomedical technology. At the center of the book are case studies of thirty pregnant women whose fetuses were labeled “abnormal” after an ultrasound examination. By following these women and their relatives through painful processes of reproductive decision making, Tine M. Gammeltoft offers intimate ethnographic insights into everyday life in contemporary Vietnam and a sophisticated theoretical exploration of how subjectivities are forged in the face of moral assessments and demands.

Across the globe, ultrasonography and other technologies for prenatal screening offer prospective parents new information and present them with agonizing decisions never faced in the past. For anthropologists, this diagnostic capability raises important questions about individuality and collectivity, responsibility and choice. Arguing for more sustained anthropological attention to human quests for belonging, *Haunting Images* addresses existential questions of love and loss that concern us all.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"This deft and often moving volume makes a signature contribution to the growing anthropological literature on Vietnam ... Keenly observed and compellingly written."

(Martha Lincoln *Medicine Anthropology Theory* 2015-09-09)

"Beautifully written . . . of interest to scholar's in Asian, women's, and gender studies and anthropology, reproductive health, and disability studies."

(*CHOICE* 2014-08-01)

"This is a powerful, haunting cultural account of selective reproduction in Vietnam. I encourage each reader to think through what this means and what this tells us about pregnancy management throughout the world."

(Barbara Katz Rothman *Sociology of Health & Illness* 2015-08-15)

"This is a moving ethnography that 'haunts' the reader long thereafter. . . . Daring and promising."

(Catalina Tesar *Social Anthropology* 2015-05-25)

"Powerful, heart-wrenching, and beautifully written . . . As anthropology, the book is also a fine example of the ethnographer's craft. . . . Highly recommended."

(Erik Harms *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 2015-04-17)

"Fascinating and powerful . . . *Haunting Images* is an outstanding piece of scholarship that brings new dimensions to thinking about key themes in social theory."

(Tsipy Ivry *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 2015-03-27)

"Beautifully written . . . a must read."

(Ann Marie Leshkowich *American Ethnologist* 2015-05-01)

### From the Inside Flap

"This deeply moving and path-breaking ethnography takes us to the social crossroads of global medicine in post-war Vietnam. Here struggles over belonging and value are part and parcel of haunting histories of loss and become the very fabric of visceral conceptual work." —João Biehl, author of *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*

"In this beautifully crafted ethnography of intense pregnancy sonograms, Tine Gammeltoft reveals screen fetuses that stand at complex historical and cultural intersections. At once biological and cosmological, their haunting images are constructed where public health commitments, gendered and kinship decision-making, religious traditions, and the half-life of Agent Orange all meet. This is the first full-length study of sonography in a developing-nation context and a must-read for anyone who wants to know what lies beyond individual 'choice' in the use of a selective reproductive technology." —Rayna Rapp, Professor of Anthropology, New York University

"This is a luminous, compassionate book about complex moral dilemmas facing Vietnamese women and

families who receive a diagnosis of fetal abnormality late in pregnancy. Reading this book was a powerful, humbling experience. Gammeltoft courageously shows us that there are other perspectives that must be considered, reminding us in this age of neoliberal subject-making that parents-to-be are also charged with fulfilling genealogical, spiritual, and national responsibilities. Belonging and longing are linked in this narrative, as people yearn for futures (and pasts) other than those they receive."—Lynn M. Morgan, Mount Holyoke College, author of *Icons of Life: A Cultural History of Human Embryos* (University of California Press, 2009).

"Haunting Images focuses on difficult moral decisions, on questions of belonging and on what constitutes a human being. Gammeltoft brings us a nuanced understanding of the lived texture of life in Vietnam today. This ethnography is delicate, sensitive, loving, and complex, faithful to the tone of the people and the place and to the ambiguities of life. The issues raised in Vietnam confront us all."—Diane Fox, Senior Lecturer of Anthropology and Vietnamese Studies, College of the Holy Cross

#### About the Author

**Tine M. Gammeltoft** is Professor of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. She is on the Editorial Advisory Board for the journal *Reproductive Health Matters*.

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