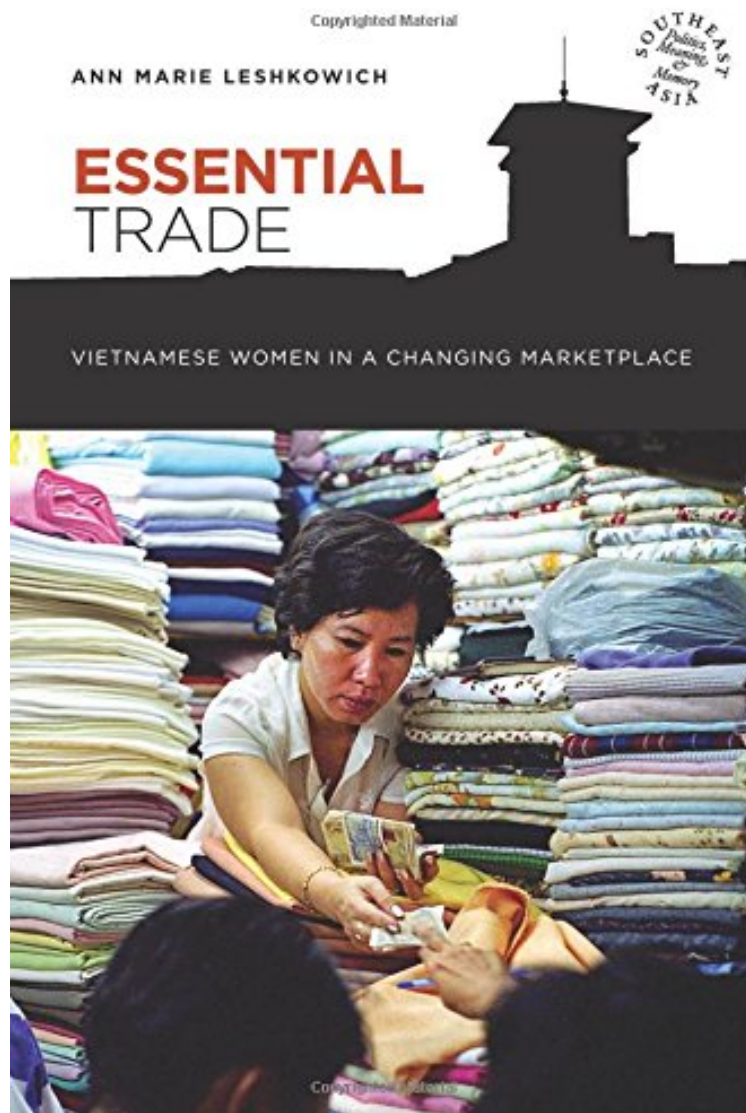


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## Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, and Memory)

*Ann Marie Leshkovich*

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**Ann Marie Leshkovich : Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, and Memory)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, and Memory):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. At the middle of the century the deadly serious Jesuit ...By Dan Duffy  
At the middle of the century the deadly serious Jesuit teaching order who had long since evangelized the East and learned those languages founded the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, who now employ my colleague in ethnography and junior contemporary Ann Marie Leshkowich who has been talking for decades now with the women of the Ben Thanh market in Saigon. Ann Marie and her friends address the central issue of Vietnamese studies and all of us who engage with the life world from the world of institutions. How do we bring the insight of those engaged with practical matters to discussion among those whose daily work is tell us all what to do and what to think about it?[from my longer review elsewhere]

My husband doesn't have a head for business, complained Ngoc, the owner of a children's clothing stall in Ben Thanh market. Naturally, it's because he's a man. When the women who sell in Ho Chi Minh City's iconic marketplace speak, their language suggests that activity in the market is shaped by timeless, essential truths: Vietnamese women are naturally adept at buying and selling, while men are not; Vietnamese prefer to do business with family members or through social contacts; stallholders are by nature superstitious; marketplace trading is by definition a small-scale enterprise. *Essential Trade* looks through the facade of these timeless truths and finds active participants in a political economy of appearances: traders' words and actions conform to stereotypes of themselves as poor, weak women in order to clinch sales, manage creditors, and protect themselves from accusations of being greedy, corrupt, or bourgeois even as they quietly slip into southern Vietnam's growing middle class. But Leshkowich argues that we should not dismiss the traders' self-disparaging words simply because of their essentialist logic. In Ben Thanh market, performing certain styles of femininity, kinship relations, social networks, spirituality, and class allowed traders to portray themselves as particular kinds of people who had the capacity to act in volatile political and economic circumstances. When so much seems to be changing, a claim that certain things or people are inherently or naturally a particular way can be both personally meaningful and strategically advantageous. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and life history interviewing conducted over nearly two decades, *Essential Trade* explores how women cloth and clothing traders like Ngoc have plied their wares through four decades of political and economic transformation: civil war, postwar economic restructuring, socialist cooperativization, and the frenetic competition of market socialism. With close attention to daily activities and life narratives, this groundbreaking work of critical feminist economic anthropology combines theoretical insight, vivid ethnography, and moving personal stories to illuminate how the interaction between gender and class has shaped people's lives and created market socialist political economy. It provides a compelling account of postwar southern Vietnam as seen through the eyes of the dynamic women who have navigated forty years of profound change while building their businesses in the stalls of Ben Thanh market.

Leshkowich's book is informed by a deep empathy with and understanding of the people she deals with. It is good to read more about the south and the travails of its people; good, too, to have an account that is not only a sharp piece of analysis but also a moving human story.-- "New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies"  
*Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace* explores the lives and struggles of the women who worked in small-scale trades in the most famous market in southern Vietnam, the Ben Thanh market. . . . Ann Leshkowich provides a vivid account of how these women traders' lives have been tightly connected to Vietnam during a period of often-radical political, economic, cultural, and social change. . . . This book will be very helpful for students and scholars of anthropology and for several other academic disciplines, including gender studies, family studies, urban studies, cultural studies, and religious studies.-- "American Anthropologist"  
Ann Marie Leshkowich's anthropological writings on postwar Vietnam have been among the most insightful about the shifting dynamics of class and gender in the fast-changing country. Her sharp analyses based on astute observations and long years of engagement with social and economic life in the urban milieu of Ho Chi Minh City should be required reading for scholars and students of contemporary Vietnamese society. *Essential Trade* will soon become a classic. . . . The contributions of Leshkowich's book go beyond Vietnam studies. It makes a critical intervention in gender studies by articulating the complex historical and cultural dynamics with which gender and place become constitutive of broader political economic processes, especially in the context of market socialism. Meanwhile, her expert treatment of gender and place as integral to people's economic lives brings fresh insights to the sub-field of economic anthropology, revealing the workings of the economy through the everyday practices and lived experiences of the social actors involved.-- "Journal of Southeast Asian Studies"  
Ann Marie Leshkowich's prize-winning first book is an ethnographically and theoretically rich contribution to Vietnamese Studies. . . . *Essential Trade*, complex and thought-provoking, is also accessible to anyone within the field of Vietnamese Studies. For this reviewer, it is also an indispensable contribution to a growing body of literature focused on gender and class in Southeast Asia and requisite reading for students and scholars interested in the intersection of economy, class, and gender.-- "Journal of Vietnamese Studies"  
Perhaps the best feature of Leshkowich's book is the way she continually refers to the setting of this market and its activities. She makes reference as to why certain business practices are used: for example, with reference to the historical context in which these Vietnamese cloth merchants function. There is also the matter of how the religious beliefs of the merchants govern the behaviour of

these merchants. The lives of the individual women, who work at the market, are richer when viewed in the historical and spiritual context of Vietnam. Included in the religious practices of the Vietnamese merchants are requests to the spiritual world for good business fortune. The overall effect is ethnographic, and thereby serves as a vivid example to current and future business researchers in this field.-- "Asia Pacific Business " Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace explores the lives and struggles of the women who worked in small-scale trades in the most famous market in southern Vietnam, the Ben Thanh market. . . . Ann Leshkovich provides a vivid account of how these women traders lives have been tightly connected to Vietnam during a period of often-radical political, economic, cultural, and social change. . . . This book will be very helpful for students and scholars of anthropology and for several other academic disciplines, including gender studies, family studies, urban studies, cultural studies, and religious studies. (American Anthropologist)Ann Marie Leshkovichs anthropological writings on postwar Vietnam have been among the most insightful about the shifting dynamics of class and gender in the fast changing country. Her sharp analyses based on astute observations and long years of engagement with social and economic life in the urban milieu of Ho Chi Minh City should be required reading for scholars and students of contemporary Vietnamese society. Essential Trade will soon become a classic. . . . The contributions of Leshkovichs book go beyond Vietnam studies. It makes a critical intervention in gender studies by articulating the complex historical and cultural dynamics with which gender and place become constitutive of broader political economic processes, especially in the context of market socialism. Meanwhile, her expert treatment of gender and place as integral to peoples economic lives brings fresh insights to the sub-field of economic anthropology, revealing the workings of the economy through the everyday practices and lived experiences of the social actors involved. (Journal of Southeast Asian Studies)Leshkovichs book is informed by a deep empathy with and understanding of the people she deals with. It is good to read more about the south and the travails of its people; good, too, to have an account that is not only a sharp piece of analysis but also a moving human story. (New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies)Ann Marie Leshkovichs prize-winning first book is an ethnographically and theoretically rich contribution to Vietnamese Studies. . . . Essential Trade, complex and thought provoking, is also accessible to anyone within the field of Vietnamese Studies. For this reviewer, it is also an indispensable contribution to a growing body of literature focused on gender and class in Southeast Asia and requisite reading for students and scholars interested in the intersection of economy, class, and gender. (Journal of Vietnamese Studies)Perhaps the best feature of Leshkovichs book is the way she continually refers to the setting of this market and its activities. She makes reference as to why certain business practices are used: for example, with reference to the historical context in which these Vietnamese cloth merchants function. There is also the matter of how the religious beliefs of the merchants govern the behaviour of these merchants. The lives of the individual women, who work at the market, are richer when viewed in the historical and spiritual context of Vietnam. Included in the religious practices of the Vietnamese merchants are requests to the spiritual world for good business fortune. The overall effect is ethnographic, and thereby serves as a vivid example to current and future business researchers in this field. (Asia Pacific Business )About the AuthorAnn Marie Leshkovich is associate professor of anthropology at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA.