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Source: *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer 2014), pp. 19-54

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/vs.2014.9.3.19>

Accessed: 04/01/2015 18:21

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Protests over Land in Vietnam: Rightful Resistance and More

From a distance, the park near Hà Nội's West Lake appeared serene – tall leafy shade trees, emerald grass trimmed with flowers, and people strolling the pathways. Moving closer I saw several sheets of plastic stretched over park benches and bicycles. That, I thought, is makeshift housing by homeless people, similar to what one sees in many American city parks.

Not quite. Temporary accommodations, yes, but not by homeless people. They were shelters by people, mostly women, from distant parts of Vietnam, some as far as An Giang and Bạc Liêu provinces more than 1,700 kilometers to the south. The people camp in the park while seeking intervention from the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, and other national offices. In the park they often hold signs summarizing their grievances and distribute to passers-by copies of their petitions, letters, and other materials about their complaints.

The main grievances for most of those whom my wife, a friend of ours, and I met in the Mai Xuân Thưởng park in September and October 2012 concern land taken from them and their families by local authorities, frequently in cahoots with investors.¹ Corruption is often entwined with these complaints. The temporary park residents exemplify droves of Vietnamese who have publicly objected to being pushed off their land since the late 1990s.

Journal of Vietnamese Studies, Vol. 9, Issue 3, pps. 19–54. ISSN 1559-372X, electronic 1559-3738.
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DOI: 10.1525/vs.2014.9.3.19.

In the late 1980s to early 1990s, agricultural land in Vietnam was allocated rather equitably to farming households. Rather than ownership, each household received use-rights for twenty to fifty years, depending on location and type of crops. However, the state can cancel these rights and take the land for the purpose of “national defense, security, national interests, public interest, and economic development.”² From 2001 to 2005, the state took 366,400 hectares of agricultural land; by 2010 the total rose to roughly 745,000 hectares, affecting some nine million farming people, or about 10 percent of the country’s population.³ What proportion of those people objected is unknown but the volume of complaints and protests against land confiscations suggests it has been significant.

In the four years from 2008 through 2011, the Vietnamese government received nearly 1.6 million written petitions, accusations, and other complaints from citizens, a twenty-six percent increase over a previous comparable period. Some complaints came from individual families but most were signed by numerous households from the same community. So the 1.6 million figure represents at least a few million people. Over 70 percent of the complaints – some reports say 90 percent – were about land, especially its confiscation and the low compensation paid to use-rights holders. About 42 percent of the complaints were resolved, according to the government, leaving over half unsettled for years.⁴ Frequently people unhappy with a resolution or still trying to get one resort to demonstrating. In recent years such public protests have become common in numerous Vietnam’s towns and cities.⁵

Data, Method, and Preview of Findings

The protests under study occurred between 2000 and 2013. My information about them comes from letters and other documents written by peasants; complaints on their behalf filed by lawyers; interviews demonstrators gave to journalists; articles by Vietnamese journalists and other observers; documents and commentary from Vietnamese authorities; and my discussions in late 2012 with protesters in Hà Nội and Văn Giang district, Hưng Yên province. Much of the written materials is available on websites that I have been using for several years.

For each protest studied I noted its location; the kinds of people and names of individuals involved; reasons for people’s complaints; objectives of

their demonstrations; authorities' actions; involvement of other people and interests; and outcomes. Many protests extended over considerable time; hence I frequently updated my summaries while also adding new cases as they emerged. By early 2011, my computer file had nearly one hundred protests, some with sparse information, and others with much more. Due to limitations in time and other resources, I began to cut back on adding new cases and find more information on ones I already knew about. As a result, I have considerable material on sixty protests.

Helping my analysis has been rightful resistance theory, which Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li developed when they analyzed how and why villagers, workers, and other relatively powerless people complained and protested in China during the 1990s and early 2000s.⁶ I shall elaborate their theory later, but in brief, it says ordinary people with similar grievances in the same locality use legal means to beseech high authorities to make local officials stop mistreating them and do as the law stipulates and the government has promised.

In the sixty cases for which I have adequate information, most correspond to what rightful resistance theory says about how people protest. In this predominant pattern of land-related protests in contemporary Vietnam, people in the same community peacefully demand that national officials make local authorities abide by the law. Some Vietnamese villagers' demonstrations, however, do not fit this pattern and hence do not correspond well to rightful resistance. These I call outliers. As to why people protest, both predominant and outlier Vietnamese cases exceed rightful resistance theory. Vietnamese villagers frequently challenge existing laws pertinent to their grievances and assert rights that go beyond those officially recognized.

The rest of this article elaborates by comparing two protests within the predominant pattern and two outliers, showing their similarities and differences both with each other and with rightful resistance theory. The two within the predominant pattern are fairly representative of protests that have occurred in and around Hồ Chí Minh City and Hà Nội, where much of the unrest over land has occurred. The two outliers, by definition, are unusual in terms of what demonstrators did; in terms of why, however, they are similar to many other cases within and outside the predominant pattern.

Patterns of Land Rights Protests in Vietnam: More than Rightful Resistance

CASES IN THE PREDOMINANT PATTERN

In late 2002, Vietnam's Prime Minister approved a request from Hồ Chí Minh City authorities to plan a high-tech industrial zone [*khu công nghệ cao*] in District Nine, a sparsely populated part of the metropolis.⁷ Authorities expected the zone to attract Vietnamese and foreign research organizations, software enterprises, and electronic companies that would provide good jobs for educated Vietnamese and new income streams for the city.

To construct the zone, authorities needed to reclaim 804 hectares to which some four thousand households held use-rights. On land ranging from a couple hundred square meters to nearly one-half hectare, each family raised vegetables, pigs, fish, fowl, and fruit trees. When the land confiscation process started in 2003-2004, many residents objected, individually at first and then collectively.

In February 2004, hundreds of households signed an "appeal for justice," one of the first of nearly eight hundred petitions, letters, and statements from residents between 2004 and 2008.⁸ Initially, people targeted district and city officials. By 2006, frustrated by little response from local officials, people went to national authorities, particularly the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE, which is in charge of land use), and the Communist Party's General Secretary and Political Bureau. Some residents even traveled to Hà Nội. In July 2007, for example, eleven men from District Nine delivered to the national Anti-Corruption Committee in Hà Nội a petition signed by sixty-one affected households.⁹

In 2007, residents demonstrated.¹⁰ In late May, over fifty people, many of them women, marched to the District Nine office in charge of land confiscations. The head official there, they said, had agreed to address their questions about compensation, relocation sites, and other matters. Twice before he had failed to keep his promises to meet them. Upon reaching the office this time, they were told he had gone to an urgent meeting elsewhere. As the residents lingered, unsure about what next to do, they caught sight of the man. As some demonstrators rushed toward him, they and office personnel scuffled until police arrived. That event, other unsuccessful attempts

by resident groups to meet with officials, and mounting anxieties about what was happening to their farms and homes contributed to another demonstration in late November. Hoping to get answers to questions they had raised countless times before, they marched to the district offices waving national flags, carrying portraits of Hồ Chí Minh, and hoisting placards summarizing their grievances. Numerous police shadowed them, shouted at them, and grabbed and destroyed some of their placards and pictures. At the office, where more police confronted them, authorities refused to meet them.

District Nine residents based their protests primarily on four claims. One is that the confiscations were illegal. Local authorities were taking land without first making the required development plan and obtaining the Prime Minister's approval for it; they were using the outdated 1993 land law instead of the 2003 land law; and they failed to consult residents, bullied and harassed those who resisted, disrupted demonstrations, and violated democratic procedures in numerous other ways.¹¹ The explanation for these shortcomings, many residents said, is corruption, the second reason for their protests. They suspected local authorities were rushing to confiscate land as quickly and cheaply as possible, hold it for a while, then sell it at high prices and pocket the difference.¹² Third, compensation payments for their land were so small, protesters claimed, that the government was essentially stealing their land. The government's payments, they argued, ranged between only one-fifth and one-twenty-fifth of the land's market value.¹³ Finally, taking land against people's will was unjust [*vô công lý*], they contended. All the more unjust was confiscating land from people who had sacrificed greatly for the nation – people like Tư Hào, a Communist Party member for forty-five years and soldier in the war against the United States; Nguyễn Xuân Ngũ, a veteran who fought for Hồ Chí Minh in the south from 1966 to 1975; Nguyễn Thị Gái, whose grandparents fought against the French and whose father and two uncles died fighting American forces; and Chín Còi, whose two brothers and a sister died in the war for Vietnam's independence. Chín Còi's mother made her promise never to sell the 4,200 square meters that the family farmed because it “holds the blood and bones of our family.” Now, said Chín Còi in 2008, some years after her mother's death, the very government to which her family and many others had given so much is seizing that land.¹⁴

City and district authorities deny not consulting residents and cite instances of meeting with individuals (though not groups). They claim they followed the law in all respects, including compensation payments, which were increased in part because of residents' complaints. Officials also defend the arrests they made of ten residents in early 2008 for disturbing the peace during demonstrations in 2007.¹⁵

By mid-2008 the arrests, coupled with authorities intensifying their intimidation while increasing compensation payments from 150,000 to 310,000 *đồng* per square meter, had undermined opposition. Meanwhile, protesters apparently neither sought nor attracted outside support except for a few bloggers, some Vietnamese journalists, and a lawyer who defended those arrested.¹⁶ By April 2009, about 90 percent of the residents had accepted compensation payments and left. To remove the few holdouts, officials used bulldozers and police to destroy homes, fish ponds, gardens, and other property. Construction in the zone then accelerated, although as of May 2013, offices, assembly plants, and other facilities occupied only 326 of its 913 hectares.¹⁷

Far north of Hồ Chí Minh City, villagers on the outskirts of Hà Nội waged a similar struggle to keep their land. In September 2007, the Hà Nội city government instructed authorities in Hoàng Mai district to reclaim forty-nine hectares of land for transfer to the Housing and Urban Development Investment Corporation (HUD), which was authorized to create a subdivision around Lake Linh Đàm. Forty-four hectares of the land was in *Băng A* and farmed by nearly 460 households who were to be paid 252,000 *đồng* per square meter plus some relocation expenses.¹⁸

From the outset, most households objected. By December 2009, however, 174 households had agreed to leave. One reason is that HUD added 240,000 *đồng* per square meter to the original amount, a direct result of people's opposition. Another reason is intimidation and coercion by city and district authorities. Despite that repression and the increased monetary incentive, 285 households in December 2009 continued to resist.¹⁹

Public protests began in 2008 with residents writing to and meeting local officials. Getting no relief, they then approached national authorities. In June 2009, for instance, a petition with over 230 signatures went to the Prime Minister. The villagers also gave copies of their complaints to journalists,

some of whom wrote about the growing controversy. In March 2009, over two hundred households pooled funds to hire an attorney who filed legal claims on their behalf. Meanwhile, the Communist Party members among the protesting villagers sought assistance through their networks in official circles.²⁰

Bằng A residents protested on three grounds. One was local authorities' bad behavior. At meetings to discuss the project, officials often prevented objecting residents from speaking. Authorities periodically cut water and electricity to the fields and homes of those who signed letters and petitions, and police detained individuals thought to be leading the protest. Such actions, peasants told journalists, "are undemocratic" [*không dân chủ*]. One Communist Party member, recently retired from the Ministry of Education, said local authorities "don't respect democratic rights" [*không tôn trọng quyền dân chủ*]. He and nine other local party members were "disciplined" [*kỷ luật*] by higher party officials because their families were among those refusing to leave.²¹

Villagers also objected to the low payment for their land. Even with the additional amount, the compensation would be only 492,000 *đồng* per square meter, which Bằng A peasants described as "paltry" [*mức bèo bọt*]. It was but a smidgen of the millions of *đồng* each square meter was worth to HUD. Villagers knew the local real estate market and wanted to negotiate directly with the developers. But authorities forbade that, which was one reason – along with suspected corruption – why protesters said officials were "excessively solicitous and cozy with the investors."²² Villagers also argued the compensation equaled but a few years' worth of their earnings from the vegetables and herbs they produced on the land. For instance, the household of Trần Thị Quý typically earned 400,000 *đồng* per day selling produce from 800 square meters. Compensation for that land would be 393 million *đồng*; divided by 400,000 that equals 983 days, less than three years of the family's daily earnings. Without land, Trần Thị Quý asked, "How are we going to live? We don't have other work. If they want to take our land for business purposes, they have to come to terms with us."²³

This woman's remarks pertain to a third basis for protest. Farming was most households' primary source of livelihood. Twice before, the city government had taken some of their fields and paid them much less for it. Now

it was even worse despite the larger compensation, because the city would take everything. “Where are we, some thousands of workers, to go?” asked Lưu Thị Sơn rhetorically. “We’ll just be standing on the street. How will we eat; how will we live?”²⁴ “We live or die because of the land,” stated one of the protesters’ petitions. “How are we to live if the state takes all the land without proper compensation to us? We . . . demand justice.”²⁵

In late December 2009, authorities warned that they would forcibly take the land of Bằng A peasants who had not agreed to leave by January 5, 2010. Those holdouts would also be deprived of the additional 240,000 *đồng* per square meter compensation. Early morning, January 5, authorities accompanied bulldozers that razed the fields of over 250 households who still resisted. Prior to the machinery entering the contested fields, soldiers with mine detectors searched for explosive booby traps.²⁶ They found none.²⁷

EXPLAINING THE PREDOMINANT PATTERN

The protests by District Nine and Bằng A villagers and by people camped in Hà Nội’s Mai Xuân Thưởng park illustrate a pattern for most of the land protests I have studied, and how they protest is part of the pattern. People in the same village or neighborhood collectively complain to local authorities. Getting no relief, they continue to protest, sometimes for years, by sending letters, petitions, and other documents to higher levels, especially to national offices and leaders. Often a group designates a few members to travel to higher authorities’ offices; frequently individuals in Mai Xuân Thưởng park, for instance, represent dozens of others in their home villages. Public demonstrations are peaceful, often little more than people quietly sitting and standing while holding signs, photos, and patriotic symbols.²⁸ Protesters regularly contact Vietnamese news media; in recent years they have also reached out to foreign media, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and other international entities. Many now arrange for their materials to be posted online. Sometimes they ask lawyers to help them file complaints. Journalists and occasionally lawyers are nearly the only outsiders whose assistance they seek or attract, and protesters in one locality do not coordinate their actions with their counterparts elsewhere.

Influencing how villagers protest are their perceptions of Vietnam’s political system.²⁹ To many demonstrators, the main cause of their land

problems is local officials who violate national laws and programs. Consequently, people in one place have little incentive to coordinate with people elsewhere because their problems are different due to the local authorities being different. Residents of each place go to national authorities not because that is where the problem is but to pressure top officials to make local ones behave.

Another reason for separate rather than collective protests is that collaboration would likely exceed what authorities will countenance.³⁰ The extensive surveillance infrastructure of the state impedes whatever inclinations villagers in one place might have to coordinate their actions with counterparts elsewhere. The single authorized organization claiming to represent villagers' interests, the Peasants Association [*Hội Nông Dân*], rarely helps, and indeed often hinders public protest. Even demonstrations by people from the same place can be risky because officials might deem them to have crossed a hazy line between what is legal and illegal. This is a major reason demonstrators are usually peaceful, silent, and prominently display Vietnamese flags and Hồ Chí Minh portraits. Surveillance and legal uncertainties also inhibit outsiders such as professors, students, non-government organizations, and even lawyers, from aiding, advising, or joining villagers' protests.

A second part to the predominant pattern is what villagers publicly seek and on what grounds. Their overall demand is justice and fairness. The fundamental basis for this claim is having the means to make a decent living.³¹ Protesters often demand to retain the land so that they can support their families. Some agree to leave but only for a compensation that is fair, for which they have a couple of measures. One is to provide as well for their families in the future as they can now from farming. A second is what the land will be used for if they leave. Villagers in Bàng A and many other places said they would surrender their land for less compensation if the state needed it for the good of the country.³² But if, as is frequently the situation, the land is for the benefit of a company, investors, home buyers, etc., then the compensation should be at least what the land is worth in the real estate market plus, protesters often add, assistance with relocation and finding decent employment. To determine an acceptable compensation, villagers typically want to negotiate with those who will get the land and object to

government authorities imposing an amount. They suspect that authorities, after paying them a small amount, will later sell the land for considerably more and keep much of the difference or personally benefit in some other way. This, plus harsh, even violent actions by authorities prompts protesting villagers to rest part of their grievances on officials' undemocratic behavior. Rarely, however, do protesters publicly condemn the political system.³³ On the contrary, they typically affirm their allegiance to the state and the Communist Party.

This pattern has similarities to public protests over land in the late 1980s and early 1990s when collectivized agriculture was being replaced by household farming.³⁴ Like now, those villagers went above local officials to petition higher authorities, a method that Vietnamese peasants have used since at least the nineteenth century. Besides believing local authorities were inattentive or unfair, they often judged them to be corrupt. Also like now, journalists then often published articles about the controversies. At that time news reports were nearly the only means peasants had to broadcast their situation; the internet and even access to photocopy machines were still years away.

One striking difference between then and now is what villagers protested about. Most of the public disputes then involved villagers in the south trying to retrieve fields that had, in their view, been illicitly taken from them during land redistributions prior to and after 1975. Other protests, primarily in the Red River delta, were composed of peasants demanding that fields allocated to neighboring villages years earlier by local authorities be returned to their village. A second major difference is that numerous late 1980s-to-early 1990s protests became violent; rival claimants physically fought and sometimes killed each other and burned down houses; neighboring villagers attacked, even murdered each other and authorities who were trying to resolve the disputes.³⁵

The predominant pattern for how Vietnamese today protest about land issues resonates with rightful resistance theory.³⁶ In rightful resistance, clusters of relatively powerless people living in the same vicinity use non-violent methods in approved channels to press their claims locally and then entreat higher officials to help. They also seek support from non-governmental institutions and people, such as journalists, lawyers, and civic organizations.

Their protests can stretch over considerable time until they get relief, are forced to give up, or are exhausted.

However, what is sought and why only partly corresponds to rightful resistance theory. According to this theory, resisters press more powerful authorities to stop local officials from mistreating citizens, violating laws and regulations, and being corrupt while affirming their loyalty to the political system and disavowing anti-government sentiments or goals. Indeed they base their claims on existing laws, rules, and regulations and the commitments and promises authorities have made.

Villagers in District Nine, Bàng A, the Mai Xuân Thuồng park, and most cases for which I have evidence do link their land claims to officials' pronouncements about the political system being democratic and of, by, and for the people. They frequently accuse local authorities of being abusive and unresponsive to their complaints, ignoring the people they are supposed to serve, and thus being undemocratic. Villagers also argue that authorities' actions contravene laws and regulations about land confiscations, compensation, and other matters.

Vietnamese protesters' demand for fairness and justice, however, goes beyond applying existing laws, regulations, and official promises, and hence exceeds rightful resistance theory.³⁷ One additional claim about justice and fairness is that it is wrong to take land against the will of families who served and died for their country and the very government now mistreating them. Such disregard for people's sacrifices is vulgar and immoral. Another claim is that summarily confiscating land greatly favors those who end up getting it at the expense of those currently using it. Even minimal justice requires an equitable outcome for all concerned. This demand has something of a moral economy ring to it. But unlike moral economy claims, these Vietnamese peasants are not just insisting on subsistence; they want, were they to give up their land, at least the same standard of living they have as farming households. Also unlike moral economy claims, the protesters are not harking back to pre-market obligations of institutions and wealthier people. Indeed, by insisting on negotiations between themselves and a would-be buyer, they invoke the market as a mechanism for determining fair compensation.

Also beyond rightful resistance theory, these two additional claims about justice and fairness reject laws authorizing the state to unilaterally reclaim

farmland. The demand to negotiate a price includes the possibility that a potential seller can ultimately decide not to sell, another stance at odds with national laws. Indeed, according to these claims, a family is entitled to refuse to sell regardless of price, not only because it holds use-rights but because it needs the land for its livelihood, or it simply prefers to farm, or its family shed blood for the country in order to have land on which to make a living.

OUTLIERS: UNUSUAL PROTESTS

A few protests in contemporary Vietnam lie outside the predominant pattern in terms of how they are conducted. The first of two examples occurred in Hồ Chí Minh City in 2007. Consisted with both the predominant pattern and rightful resistance theory, protesters there appealed to higher authorities to correct local officials' wrongs. But unlike the predominant pattern and rightful resistance theory, villagers from many different places collaborated. Moreover, demonstrators in Hồ Chí Minh City overlapped with those in Hà Nội, bringing Vietnam the closest it had been in decades to having a national protest movement.

Land was the central issue for the Hồ Chí Minh City protests.³⁸ Some people were demanding the return of land taken from them two decades earlier. Their struggles were carryovers from contentious land claims in the 1970s. The more prevalent demand was to stop taking land for development projects at the expense of people's livelihoods. As one demonstrator from An Giang province explained to a BBC reporter, "On land hangs my existence. Losing the land, I must object. The Bình Long industrial zone [being built in An Giang] stipulated a price which we refused. District and provincial authorities then used force, demolished all our possessions, and even removed our ancestors' graves."³⁹

During the demonstrations people also made additional demands: police must stop harassing protesters, stop intimidating people who give them food or other support, and release the protesters they had arrested. After authorities prevented them from using bathrooms in the government buildings near where they had congregated, protesters added that to their complaints.⁴⁰

The Hồ Chí Minh City protests in 2007 peaked in June and July. For twenty-seven days, hundreds and sometimes over a thousand villagers from

the Mekong delta and rural areas of the city camped outside the southern office buildings of the National Assembly and the central government. They pleaded for national authorities – particularly National Assembly delegates, the Prime Minister, and the President, all of whom were meeting in the city or rumored to be arriving – to resolve their claims. Enduring hunger, hot weather, rain, and weariness, they stood, sat, and slept on sidewalks; they made banners and posters; and they painted slogans and key demands on white t-shirts, which they wore, gave away, and sold to passers-by. Dozens at a time marched in the streets, carrying their banners, Vietnamese flags, and portraits of Hồ Chí Minh to TV stations and newspaper offices and through downtown and residential areas.⁴¹

Whenever possible, they talked to journalists, most of who were from foreign news agencies. Few Vietnamese media outlets would cover the demonstrations, because officials frequently intimidated journalists and others showing interest in the protests. On at least one occasion, the protesters themselves rescued local journalists from club-wielding police.⁴²

Most demonstrators were women, many of them rather elderly; several of the younger ones had children with them. Most spokespersons were women; and most of the people who gave protesters food, water, shelter, and money were women.

By late June and early July, concerned citizens, including Buddhist monks, were giving food and other assistance. Joining the demonstrations were a few people in the emerging pro-democracy movement, notably *Khối [Bloc] 8406* members, who, along with several ad-hoc groups, also assisted foreign journalists and uploaded to websites interviews, documents, and news reports regarding the protests.⁴³

The nearly four weeks of protests involved a degree of organization. One aspect was communication and coordination among villagers in different places who knew each other from previous demonstrations.⁴⁴ Periodically since the late 1990s, people from communities in southern Vietnam have protested in the city, typically outside prominent government offices and in public parks. When separate groups happened to converge at the same site, they swapped stories and formed friendships. One of the earliest occasions occurred in 2000 when a few hundred villagers from the Mekong delta protested for weeks outside government offices. Because their complaints,

usually about land, were not satisfactorily addressed, several groups repeatedly demonstrated in their home districts, in Hồ Chí Minh City, and even in Hà Nội where they met peasant demonstrators from northern provinces. Individuals in the various groups kept in touch, often through cell phone calling and texting. One person in this network was Lư Thị Thu Duyên, whose grandfather gave thirty-five years to Vietnam's revolution. She and her sister, protesting the confiscation of their family's land in Gò Vấp district, were among those demonstrators in 2000. Networks like hers spread news in late June 2007 that victims of road and industrial zone construction projects in Tiền Giang province were protesting outside the National Assembly's building in Hồ Chí Minh City. By July 5, 2007, groups from ten provinces and four city districts had joined them. In mid-2007, Lư Thị Thu Duyên emerged as one of the demonstrators' spokespersons.⁴⁵

Other aspects of an organization evolved as the demonstrations continued.⁴⁶ Participants from different localities took turns marching the streets and performing tasks such as distributing food and water. The demonstrators selected representatives to speak to journalists and government officials. Often those representatives were in the compounds of the government buildings while most demonstrators remained outside. Each group had a system for rotating participants; while several villagers carried on the protest, others returned to their homes to rest, recover, and collect money, food, and other resources to carry back to the demonstration sites.

While protests persisted in Hồ Chí Minh City, episodic peasant demonstrations in distant Hà Nội became more frequent. And in early July, dozens of villagers from Bình Thuận province who had been in the Hồ Chí Minh City demonstrations joined groups of northern villagers at Hà Nội's Mai Xuân Thưởng park. Now the two cities' protests were linked. Participants in both communicated by phone, texting, and e-mail. By July 11, about two hundred people from five southern provinces were demonstrating with hundreds of northern villagers at government buildings in Hà Nội. Among the southerners were several elderly women declaring that even though their husbands and sons had died fighting for Vietnam's reunification, local officials recently stole their land.⁴⁷

In the few occasions that officials met with protesters' representatives, they urged everyone to return to their home districts. Local authorities, they

said, had been ordered to solve all complaints. Few villagers swallowed this; having done just that several times before with no results, explained spokeswoman Cao Quế Hoa, “we don’t believe it now.”⁴⁸

As protests in Hồ Chí Minh City persisted and enlarged, authorities became more repressive. By the second week, police had detained several demonstrators and forcibly transported many others to their home villages. Some of those participants later eluded police to rejoin the demonstrations. By the fourth week, when protesters from nineteen provinces numbered 1,700 in Hồ Chí Minh City, police from around the country augmented that city’s force. On the night of July 18, in front of hundreds of onlookers, waves of police swept over the demonstrators. Initially, the police used words to persuade many to leave the city. But by 11 p.m., they used tear gas and batons, forcing remaining protesters into buses that took them home. Several people were injured; some were detained.⁴⁹

Demonstrations, however, did not cease. For the rest of the year, numerous groups of villagers traveled to Hồ Chí Minh City to protest at government buildings about land confiscations, corruption, and other injustices. But these demonstrations fit the predominant pattern. Authorities’ actions stifled a repeat of the concentration of protests that had occurred in mid-2007.

The second case outside that predominant pattern is the lengthy struggle since 2004 by villagers in Văn Giang district, Hưng Yên province, about twenty kilometers southeast of central Hà Nội. Three differences from the predominant pattern are that Văn Giang protesters have considerable support from outsiders, they have occasionally become violent, and they have endorsed land protests elsewhere. The latter two of these also separate the Văn Giang case from rightful resistance theory. Also unlike rightful resistance theory, but similar to many other Vietnamese land protests, some of what Văn Giang villagers seek goes beyond existing laws and state promises.

In 2003 and 2004, the Prime Minister’s office approved requests from Hưng Yên and Văn Giang officials to build a highway and a residential area called Ecopark. Chosen to do both projects was the newly formed Việt Hưng Urban Development and Investment Company (UDIC). The plan is that Ecopark, the largest urbanization project in northern Vietnam at an expected cost of over eight billion US dollars, will include townhouses, condominium towers, a commercial center, parks, a hospital, and a university.

It will consume five hundred hectares, seventy percent of it farmed by 4,876 households, most of them in three Văn Giang subdistricts.⁵⁰

While planning Ecopark, residents claim, officials and the UDIC had no community consultations. Only when local authorities approached families to surrender their land-use rights in exchange for 60,000 *đồng* per square meter did villagers become aware of the project. Surprised and irritated, households demanded clarification from local officials and insisted on seeing documents authorizing Ecopark. Getting little or no response, groups of families wrote to provincial offices and then to national ones but received no satisfactory answers.

In late August 2006, approximately 4,000 villagers, primarily from the three most affected subdistricts, demonstrated at the National Assembly's office building in Hà Nội, an act timed to coincide with National Day (September 2) celebrations. Some demonstrators carried mementos of relatives killed in wars for national independence and reunification. The demonstrators vowed to remain until National Assembly leaders or the Prime Minister himself addressed their concerns about Ecopark. Quickly joining them were villagers from other provinces who had been congregating in Mai Xuân Thưởng park across town. By August 30, however, menacing warnings from police prompted most protesters to return home. Threatened with arrest, the remaining few hundred left the evening prior to National Day with still no response from national authorities.

Since 2006, Văn Giang villagers have often demonstrated in their district and in Hà Nội. Typically each Hà Nội demonstration lasts only one day, although in 2012 protests were often repeated several days a week. The protesters return home each evening because the distance is short and because they want to minimize police intimidation. Rarely have district or national officials talked to the demonstrators. But in August 2012, six years after the villagers' first Hà Nội protest, MoNRE officials met publicly, and in the presence of journalists, about one hundred representatives of the Văn Giang villagers and their lawyers. Although ending with no satisfactory answers to the villagers' demands, the lengthy session was a remarkable consequence of their persistent letters, petitions, and other actions.⁵¹

Some of the other actions involved violence. In January 2009 and April 2012, a few hundred Văn Giang villagers fought with shovels, picks, hoes,

bricks, and stones against hundreds of armed, club-wielding, tear gas canister-throwing police that guarded heavy equipment operators who were destroying peasants' fields and reclaiming several hectares for Ecopark. Although they were no match for the violence used against them, villagers resorted to force when police waded through the lines of demonstrators. Bludgeoned protesters included mothers of war martyrs [*bà mẹ Việt Nam anh hùng*] who had pleaded with police to turn back.⁵²

Văn Giang villagers' demands resonate with those of many other Vietnamese land protesters. If they must surrender fields, they want to negotiate a fair price, not accept the government- and investor-stipulated compensation because that amount, even after being raised to 139,000 *đồng* per square meter, is far below the land's value, villagers say. Farming households typically net that much each year, and frequently, because of ornamental plants and trees they grow, twice or thrice that amount. Moreover, the advertised price for Ecopark's least expensive residence is 151 times that compensation. Even after deducting construction costs, an extremely handsome profit will remain for UDIC and its partners. Essentially, conclude many villagers, authorities and investors are stealing their land.⁵³ Second, numerous villagers do not want to sell. "It's the land – the farming – people want, not money," they say. "Land is our body and blood," one explained. Put differently, says another, "Farming is our livelihood and that of our children." People who want to farm, villagers insist, are entitled to do so. Furthermore, without land, many can't support themselves; no land means no viable livelihood.⁵⁴ Third, villagers demand that authorities be democratic. They object to local officials preventing them from speaking at meetings; they denounce authorities and UDIC for using force and threats against residents; and they insist on transparent decision making involving their land and homes.⁵⁵

For many villagers, an underlying rationale for their demands are the contributions Văn Giang people, particularly those in the three most affected subdistricts, have made to the nation. Their ancestors joined the Trưng sisters' rebellion against China two thousand years ago. Văn Giang peasants fought for Vietnam against the French and Americans. Some of the area now threatened by Ecopark hosted anti-aircraft guns that shot down American airplanes fifty years ago.⁵⁶ Because Văn Giang villagers have served their

country and been loyal to the Communist Party government, protesters reason, authorities should honor their demands.

To aid their struggle against Ecopark, Văn Giang peasants elected nine representatives, three for each of the most affected subdistricts, who coordinate demonstrations, liaise with outside supporters and journalists, and often speak for the protesters. The three representatives in each subdistrict regularly meet with fellow villagers and with the representatives of the other two subdistricts.⁵⁷

Văn Giang villagers have had more outside support than most other land protesters. Several individuals in Hà Nội have posted protesters' photos, letters, and other materials on the internet. Political reform advocates have written about the protests, visited Văn Giang villagers, and counseled them. Following the April 2012 violent confrontation with police, villagers sought help from attorneys in Hà Nội.⁵⁸ In detailed submissions to national offices, these lawyers, particularly Trần Vũ Hải, have argued that district, provincial, and national authorities' actions regarding Ecopark have violated numerous laws and regulations and have regarded "the interests of thousands of peasant households . . . as far less important than the interests of UDIC."⁵⁹

Also unusual among land protests, Văn Giang demonstrators have reached out to other protesters. They publicly sympathize with the families of two brothers, Đoàn Văn Vươn and Đoàn Văn Quý, in Tiên Lãng, Hải Phòng province, who fought police taking their land in January 2012. Together with land protesters in the Hà Đông sector of greater Hà Nội, Văn Giang villagers signed a statement deeming Đoàn Văn Vươn a "hero . . . in the struggle to protect peasants' basic rights." During the April 2013 trial of the two men and others, a delegation from Văn Giang traveled to Hải Phòng, joining hundreds of other villagers as well as many political reform advocates to express solidarity with the accused.⁶⁰ Some Văn Giang villagers have also participated in protests in Hà Nội against Chinese incursions into Vietnamese territory.⁶¹

Văn Giang villagers' protests have delayed, but not halted, Ecopark construction work. Their persistent opposition has also forced authorities to increase the compensation from 60,000 *đồng* per square meter to 139,000. Partly for this reason, more villagers have abandoned the struggle. By April 2012, according to district authorities, 75 percent of households had

accepted payment to surrender their fields.⁶² Protesters' representatives, however, claim the figure is 50 percent and a major reason for it being that much is intense intimidation and coercion by local authorities and UDIC.⁶³ The project has divided the community, pitting accepters against protesters. Even the local Communist Party organization has split and ejected dozens of members who opposed the project. Several subdistrict officials have quit because they detested Ecopark or grew weary of being wedged between advocates and opponents.⁶⁴ In December 2008, two village officials siding with the protesters were sentenced to one-year imprisonment for disturbing the peace. Shortly after their trial, a person thought to be hired by Ecopark threw acid on their attorney, burning his neck and chest.⁶⁵

EXPLAINING AUTHORITIES' ACTIONS

Land protesters take their complaints to national offices expecting favorable reactions there.⁶⁶ To an extent, their expectations are realized. Since 2000, the central government has sent several problem-solving teams to places that generate persistent petitions and demonstrations against confiscations of fields and house lots, low compensation, and other land issues. Meeting with villagers, local officials, and investors, these national, sometimes provincial teams have resolved many contentious cases. They often find merit in villagers' claims.⁶⁷ Several national agencies have found merit as well. In July 2007, shortly after the lengthy demonstrations in Hồ Chí Minh City had been dispersed, the Minister for Natural Resources and Environment said studies show that 80 percent of complaints regarding land are at least partly correct. Villagers seeking more compensation, he added, are not being greedy. They mainly want fairness, and what greatly upsets them is being forced to surrender their land at low prices for the benefit of business interests. In 2012, the Government Inspectorate reported that nearly half of all citizen complaints (70 percent of them concerning land confiscations) between 2008 and 2011 were entirely or partly valid.⁶⁸

Due in part to people's criticisms and demonstrations, national authorities have revised land laws and regulations regarding land confiscation, compensation, and assistance to affected people.⁶⁹ In 2012, the National Assembly, partly in response to public pressure, began drafting a new land law. Broadly speaking, the legal and administrative changes thus far have

provided more opportunity for compensation to approach market values and to be determined by negotiations between land-use holders and developers. By 2005, such negotiated settlements were becoming more common in and around Hồ Chí Minh City, although not elsewhere.⁷⁰

Another consequence of land protests, probably unintended, has been to widen the arena for public discourse and criticism in Vietnam.⁷¹ Beginning with Thái Bình villagers' demonstrations against corruption in 1996-1997, peasant protests have been pushing officials to tolerate public discontent. Unimaginable in the 1980s and early 1990s, peasant demonstrations since then have helped make way for workers, market vendors, urban residents, and others to publicly air their grievances as well. Officials' tolerance is not boundless, but it is far greater now than before.

But there have also been unfavorable responses to land protesters, such as violently evicting families from their fields and homes, dispersing demonstrators, and arresting them. Also, national authorities have yet to devise an effective method for resolving persistent disputes.⁷² They typically refer such cases to provincial and district authorities, the same officials that caused villagers to appeal to national authorities in the first place. Indeed, national authorities themselves frequently say that lower-level officials fail to take villagers' complaints seriously, do not follow the law, and abuse their power.⁷³

Laws and regulations make provincial and district authorities the state agents responsible for reclaiming land and compensating people. Because the rules and regulations governing these actions are complicated, evolving, and often contradictory, provincial and district authorities are frequently ill-informed and confused.⁷⁴ At the same time, many officials are eager to attract investors with projects that will diversify local economies, and a key to getting such investment is low-cost land. This helps explain why many local authorities, instead of aiding discontented villagers and thereby avoiding protests, minimize compensation payments and ignore or dismiss villagers' demands.⁷⁵

Other considerations, too, motivate officials' behavior. Land acquired from current users at a low price can be sold to investors at a higher price. The difference may augment local government revenues so as to improve public services like health care and education, and some of it can be stolen by

officials. When investors' managers deal directly with villagers, they too strive to keep compensation low in order to reduce costs. Often district and provincial officials expect payments from those managers. That money might be for community improvements but some might go to the authorities themselves, one of many common forms of corruption. Indeed, the numerous opportunities for authorities to benefit personally from land confiscation and compensation arrangements often helps to explain why they shun villagers' claims.

Conclusion

Why villagers protest and the grounds they have for doing so are similar across the two pattern types examined in this article: those to which most land protests in recent years conform and those outside it. Villagers typically claim local officials are violating laws and regulations, abuse their authority at villagers' expense, and are corrupt. Villagers frequently characterize these actions as violations of democratic procedures because authorities fail to consult with residents, fail to take people's views and concerns seriously, and fail to be transparent about programs and policies affecting the community. Instead, officials hide information, make major decisions without community input or knowledge, and often resort to intimidation and force when people refuse to do their bidding.

These reasons and grounds for protest correspond to rightful resistance theory. But Vietnamese protesters' arguments go further. Besides upholding certain laws, they also reject ones authorizing the state to unilaterally claim their farmland. They champion an entitlement, regardless of law, to refuse to surrender their land-use rights. They base this stance on notions of fairness and justice that go beyond the law or even officials' promises. One such notion is that it is unjust to take land against the will of families who have served the Vietnamese nation. Another is that confiscating land against a family's will unfairly harms that family and benefits those who get the land.

How Vietnamese villagers protest conforms in most cases to rightful resistance theory. People living in the same village or neighborhood appeal to higher authorities to intervene on their behalf and compel local authorities to do the right thing, demonstrate publicly and nonviolently, and seek help from journalists and lawyers. In carrying out their own protest, they do

not coordinate or collaborate with people elsewhere who have similar grievances. A few land protests in Vietnam, however, have gone beyond this predominant pattern and beyond rightful resistance theory. In these exceptional cases, angry villagers have collaborated and coordinated with land protesters in other parts of the country, and their protests, although usually non-violent, have not always been so.

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ABSTRACT

From 2008 through 2011, the Vietnamese government received nearly 1.6 million complaints from citizens, mostly about land confiscations and related issues. Frequently people angry over land issues have resorted to public demonstrations. This article compares protests in Vietnam to rightful resistance theory. A predominant pattern for how Vietnamese villagers protest corresponds to that theory. Some Vietnamese demonstrations, however, do not fit that pattern; they are outliers. In terms of why people publicly demonstrate, Vietnamese protests in both the predominant pattern and the outliers are similar to each other but exceed rightful resistance theory by challenge existing laws and asserting rights not officially recognized.

KEYWORDS: *land, protests, demonstrations, Vietnam, rightful resistance, politics*

Notes

1. Of the twenty-three cases depicted in documents and verbal accounts given to us in two visits to the park during September and October 2012, thirteen

- (57 percent) were about land confiscation and/or compensation, usually mixed with accusations of corruption. Complaints in the other ten cases concerned pension payments, family reputations, wrongful imprisonments, veteran entitlements, and physically abusive local authorities. Across the street from Mai Xuân Thưởng is another park with a statue of Lý Tu Trọng where some of the people we met were camped. Periodically, police require long-staying park users to leave.
2. Luật Đất Đai Năm 2003 (Đã được sửa đổi, bổ sung năm 2009-2010) [The 2003 Land Law, as amended in 2009-2010], article 38, clause 1. That government can take land from citizens is not unique to Vietnam. Governments in many countries, including Western ones, use various justifications to seize land. Often in those countries, as in Vietnam, such land seizures arouse victims' indignation.
 3. Data for the amount of land taken from land holders are sparse and somewhat inconsistent. My figures draw on and are partly extrapolated from World Bank, *Compulsory Land Acquisition and Voluntary Land Conversion in Vietnam* (Hà Nội: World Bank, 2011), 16; Lê Hiếu, "Về vấn đề chuyển đổi mục đích sử dụng đất nông nghiệp trong quá trình công nghiệp hoá, đô thị hoá" [Changing Use of Agricultural Land during Industrialization and Urbanization], *Tạp Chí Quản Lý Nhà Nước* [Journal of State Management], 174 (7, 2010): 34; Đặng Kim Sơn & Nguyễn Đỗ Anh Tuấn, Chủ biên [eds.], *Chính Sách Đất Đai cho Phát Triển tại Việt Nam: Cơ Hội hay Thách Thức?* [Land Policy for Development in Vietnam: Opportunity or Challenge?] (Hà Nội: Trung Tâm Tư Vấn Chính Sách Nông Nghiệp, 2011), 63. The number for farming people affected is based on Lê Hiếu, "Về vấn đề," 35, saying that every hectare no longer farmed displaces thirteen workers [*người lao động*].
 4. "Tố cáo khiếu nại" [Denunciation Complaint], BBC, May 2, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2012/05/120502_land_dispute_conference.shtml (accessed July 19, 2012); Nguyễn Tấn Phát, "Những bất cập hiện nay của chính sách đất đai và thách thức đối với phát triển tam nông ở Việt Nam" [Land Policy Shortcomings and Challenges for Three-pronged Agricultural Development in Vietnam], *Nghiên Cứu Kinh Tế* [Economic Research], no. 366 (11, 2008): 65-66; Viêt Lê Quân, "Câu hỏi sau vụ chống cưỡng chế ở Hải Phòng" [Questions After the Resistance to Coercion in Hải Phòng], *Tuần Việt Nam* [Vietnam Week], January 10, 2012, <http://tuanvietnam.vietnamnet.vn/2012-01-09-cau-hoi-sau-vu-chong-cuong-che-o-hai-phong> (accessed January 13, 2012).
 5. I have not been able to find figures for the number of demonstrations in any year or period.
 6. Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
 7. "Quyết Định của Chủ tịch Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh" [Decision of the President, People's Committee, Hồ Chí Minh City], June 27,

- 2002, <http://lehienduc2013.blogspot.com/2013/05/tiep-theo-vu-quan-9-cuop-at-trai-phap.html> (accessed May 17, 2013); “Quận 9, khu công nghệ cao” [District Nine, High-Tech Industrial Zone], March 12, 2008, <http://ykien0711.blogvis.com/2008/03/12/qu%e1%ba%adn-9-khu-cong-nghe%e1%bb%87-cao-anh-minh-k%e1%bb%83-chuy%e1%bb%87n-v%e1%bb%a3-anh-b%e1%bb%8b-b%e1%ba%a7/> (accessed March 19, 2008); Điều Cày & Chông Tre, “Khi những công dân chống tham nhũng bị tham nhũng đàn áp” [When the Corrupt Repress Citizens Resisting Corruption], *Thông Luận* [Discussion], March 12, 2008, www.thongluan.org/vn/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2614 (accessed March 19, 2008).
8. “Công an bắt giữ nhiều người khiếu kiện đất đai ở quận 9” [Police Detain Many Appealing for Justice Regarding District Nine Land], *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), March 14, 2008, www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/2008/03/14/People_Complain_About_Land_Seizures_put_in_jail_part1_TMi/ (accessed March 19, 2008); Điều Cày & Chông Tre, “Khi những công dân.” “Appeal for justice” is a brief translation of *khuyến kiện*. A fuller translation, for which I’m grateful to Nguyễn Điền, could be “appeal for justice or redress, sue for justice and/or redress.”
 9. “Họ là những người dũng cảm chống tham nhũng” [They’re the Valiant People Fighting Corruption], *Phong Trào Dân Chủ Việt Nam* [Vietnam’s Democratic Movement] (PTDCVN), March 6, 2008, www.ptdcvn.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2223# (accessed March 11, 2008).
 10. This paragraph is based on accounts by demonstrators themselves, sympathetic bloggers, one government document, and various news accounts. Among the sources are Viện Kiểm Sát Nhân Dân Quận 9 [People’s Control Office, District Nine], “Cáo Trạng” [Indictment], December 24, 2007, http://hoabe.multiply.com/journal/item/31/31?&show_interstitial=1&u=%2Fjournal%2Fitem (accessed October 5, 2011); Điều Cày & Chông Tre, “Khi những công dân”; “Chị Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Vân, một trong 3 người phụ nữ bị cáo” [Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Vân, One of Three Female Defendants], January 19, 2008, <http://hoabe.multiply.com/journal/item/245/245> (accessed October 5, 2011); “Công an đã tiến hành bắt hàng loạt người dân liên quan đến vụ ngày 22-11-2007” [Security Police Did Its Duties Detaining Masses of People Connected to the November 22, 2007, Event], PTDCVN, March 2, 2008, www.ptdcvn.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2207# (accessed March 11, 2008); “Đi tìm hiểu hoàn cảnh nhà anh Minh Chị Trang” [Studying the Circumstances Surrounding Minh Chị Trang], PTDCVN February 26, 2008, www.ptdcvn.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2188# (accessed March 11, 2008).
 11. “Quận 9, TP.Hồ Chí Minh: Những vụ cưỡng chế dân để lấy đất lạ lùng” [District Nine, Hồ Chí Minh City: Unusual Instances of Coercive Land-Grabbing], *Đại Đoàn Kết* [Great Unity], June 3 and June 5, 2009, <http://baodaidoanket.net/ddk/>

- mdNews.ddk?id=17067 and <http://baodaidoanket.net/ddk/mdNews.ddk?id=17130> (accessed June 15, 2009); “Công an bắt giữ nhiều người”; Điếu Cày & Chông Tre, “Khi những công dân”; Võ Đắc Danh, “Trên đồng bưng Sáu Xã” [On Six Villages’ Hiding Grounds], *Lê Trái*, June 2008, <http://daohieu.wordpress.com/category/th%E1%BB%9Di-s%E1%BB%B1-tren-d%E1%BB%93ng-b%C6%Bong-sau-xa/> (accessed June 26, 2013). Vietnamese press accounts confirming aspects of residents’ charges about authorities violating laws and regulations include “Cty ‘gia đình’ thầu tóm . . . khu công nghệ?” [‘Family’ Company Seizing . . . Industrial Zone?], *Lao Động*, April 2, 2008, <http://laodong.com.vn/Home/Cty-gia-dinh-thau-tom-khu-cong-nghe/201110/82834>.laodong (accessed October 22, 2011); “Vì sao người dân phản ứng?” [Why Do People React?], *Lao Động*, April 3, 2008, <http://laodong.com.vn/Home/Vi-sao-nguoi-dan-phan-ung/201110/82948>.laodong (accessed October 22, 2011); “Chính quyền làm sai” [Authorities Mistaken], *Lao Động*, April 21, 2008, <http://www.laodong.com.vn/Home/phapluat/2008/4/85536>.laodong (accessed April 21, 2008); Nhóm PV Pháp Luật [Law Journalist Group], “Thu hồi đất của dân không đúng luật” [Unlawful Confiscation of People’s Land], *Bộ Tài Nguyên và Môi Trường* [Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Republic of Vietnam], June 17, 2009, www.monre.gov.vn/v35/default.aspx?tabid=428&catid=4&id=67079&code=CZoYR67079 (accessed July 25, 2013); “Ông phó chủ tịch khóa lấp sai phạm bằng cách nào?” [How Did Vice President Cover Up Wrongs?], *Đại Đoàn Kết*, October 8, 2009, <http://www.daidoanket.vn/index.aspx?Menu=1390&chitiet=3099&Style=1> (accessed July 25, 2013).
12. “Công an đã tiến hành”; “Họ là những người”; Bùi Trúc Linh, “Viết cho những người dân Q. 9 (TpHCM) đang bị bắt vì chống tham nhũng” [Writing for District Nine People Arrested for Fighting Corruption], *PTDCVN*, March 9, 2008, www.ptdcvn.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2234# (accessed March 11, 2008).
 13. Compensation amounts [*giá đền bù*] varied over time; residents who either agreed to leave or were forced off their land in 2004–2005 received considerably less than those who managed to hold on longer. On average, according to reports from two residents in 2008, compensation prices were one-tenth of market value: Võ Đắc Danh, “Trên đồng bưng Sáu Xã”; and Bùi Trúc Linh, “Viết cho những người dân.” Among additional accounts regarding compensation are “Dân khiếu kiện ‘gây rối trật tự’” [Appeal for Justice People “Cause Disorder”], *BBC*, March 16, 2008, www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/story/2008/03/080314_khieu_kien_quang9.shtml (accessed March 19, 2008); and Thép Bút, “Đã sai lại càng quấy” [Messed Up Again], 2009, <http://daohieu.wordpress.com/category/th%E1%BB%9Di-s%E1%BB%B1-c%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Bp-d%E1%BA%A5t/> (accessed March 7, 2013).

14. Võ Đắc Danh, “Trên đồng bưng Sáu Xã”; Thép Bút, “Đã sai lại”; Nguyễn Xuân Ngũ, “Đơn kêu oan của một cựu chiến binh vì bị cưỡng chế thu hồi đất sai pháp luật [Veteran Files Protest Against Illegal Forced Confiscation of Land], *Nhân Quyền và Tự Do* [Democracy and Freedom], March 10, 2013, <http://ttnghb.wordpress.com/2013/04/22/don-keu-oan-cua-mot-cuu-chien-binh-vi-bi-cuong-che-thu-hoi-dat-sai-phap-luat/> (accessed May 21, 2013).
15. “Giải thích của chính quyền quận 9 về các khiếu kiện của dân oan” [District Nine Authorities’ Explanation of Pleas from Victims of Injustice], *RFA*, March 15, 2008, www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/2008/03/15/People_Complain_About_Land_Seizures_put_in_jail_part2_TMi/ (accessed March 19, 2008); Viện Kiểm Sát, “Cáo Trạng”; Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh [People’s Committee, Hồ Chí Minh City], “Về Xử Lý Đơn Tố Cáo của Ông Nguyễn Xuân Ngũ, Quận 9” [Settling Nguyễn Xuân Ngũ’s Denunciation, District Nine], January 19, 2011 (on file with author).
16. For an interview with the lawyer, Lê Trần Luật, see “Luật sư kiện công an ngăn cản biện hộ cho dân oan” [Attorney Sues Security Police for Hindering Defense for Victims of Injustice], *RFA*, June 30, 2008, www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/lawyer_sues_police_for_blocking_disposition_a_first_case_MLAm-06302008172852.html (accessed August 1, 2008).
17. “Saigon Hi-Tech Park,” May 28, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saigon_Hi-Tech_Park (accessed September 16, 2013).
18. “Văn phòng luật sư tư vấn sai pháp luật” [Law Office Consultant Wrong about Law], *Báo Xây Dựng* [Construction News], July 12, 2009, <http://www.luatviet.org/Home/tin-tuc-phap-luat/tin-trong-nuoc/2009/8235/Van-phong-luat-su-tu-van-sai-phap-luat.aspx> (accessed March 11, 2012); Duy Tuấn, “Phó chủ tịch Hà Nội ‘đề nghị xử lý’ một luật sư” [Hà Nội Vice President ‘Suggests Taking Measures’ Against Lawyer], *VietNamNet*, January 4, 2010, <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/bandocviet/theodauthu/201001/Pho-Chu-tich-Ha-Noi-de-nghi-xu-ly-mot-luat-su-887607/> (accessed January 18, 2010); Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Tiền đền bù 1m2 đất chỉ mua được 2 kg thịt bò” [Compensation for One Square Meter of Land Can Buy Only Two Kilos of Beef], *VietNamNet*, January 6, 2010, www.vietnamnet.vn/bandocviet/theodauthu/201001/Tien-den-bu-1m2-dat-chi-mua-duoc-2kg-thit-bo-888016/ (accessed January 18, 2010). HUD’s Vietnamese name is Tổng Công ty Đầu tư Phát triển Nhà và Đô thị.
19. “Hà Nội: 5/1/2010: Cưỡng chế GPMP” [Hà Nội, January 5, 2010: Forced Land Clearing], *Báo Xây Dựng*, December 26, 2009, http://kientruc.vn/tin_trong_nuoc/ha-noi-5-1-2010-cuong-che-gpmb-thu-hoi-dat-xay-dung-khu-do-thi-moi-tay-nam-ho-linh-dam/14658.html (accessed March 11, 2012); Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Tiền đền bù.”

20. Nguyễn Trọng Ty, Luật sư [Attorney], Kính gửi: Ban Biên Tập *Báo An Ninh Thủ Đô* [Letter to Editorial Board, Capital Security News], July 7, 2009 (on file with author); Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Thuyết phục, ‘ép’ dân không được thì cưỡng chế” [If Persuading and ‘Squeezing’ People Fails, Use Coercion], *VietNamNet*, January 7, 2010, <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/bandocviet/theodauthu/201001/Thuyet-phuc-ep-dan-khong-duoc-thi-cuong-che-888224/> (accessed January 18, 2010); “Khiếu kiện tại dự án khu đô thị tây nam Linh Đàm” [Appeals for Justice at the Southwest Linh Đàm Urban Project], *Hà Nội Mới* [New Hà Nội], June 29, 2009, <http://timnhadat.com/forum/Default.aspx?g=posts&m=3770> (accessed March 11, 2012).
21. Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Thuyết phục”; Nguyễn Trọng Ty, Kính gửi. Hà Nội city officials publicly ridiculed Tạ Định, the lawyer hired by the protesting peasants, alleging he did not know the law and had incorrectly advised his clients. See T. Chính, “Văn phòng luật sư tư vấn sai luật” [Law Office Consultant Wrong about Statute], *An Ninh Thủ Đô*, June 26, 2009, www.anninhthudo.vn/An-ninh-doi-song/Van-phong-Luat-su-tu-van-sai-luat/351179.antd (accessed April 11, 2012); Nguyễn Trọng Ty, Kính gửi; and Duy Tuấn, “Phó chủ tịch Hà Nội.”
22. Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Thuyết phục.” Also see Nguyễn Trọng Ty, Kính gửi.
23. Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Tiền đền bù”; Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Thuyết phục”; Duy Tuấn, “Cám cảnh làng rau ngày cận tết” [On the Eve of Tet, Vegetable Village Exhausted], *Diễn Đàn Lịch Sử Việt Nam* [Vietnamese History Forum], January 27, 2010, <http://lichsvn.info/forum/showthread.php?t=10465> (accessed April 9, 2012).
24. Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Tiền đền bù.”
25. Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Thuyết phục.”
26. “Hà Nội: 5/1/2010”; Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, “Thuyết phục”; Duy Tuấn, “Không cả tên trong quyết định vẫn bị thu hồi đất” [Even Those Not Listed in the Resolution Had Their Land Taken], *Việt Báo*, January 28, 2010, <http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Khong-co-ten-trong-quyet-dinh-van-bi-thu-hoi-dat/20891915/126/> (accessed March 11, 2012).
27. Two years later, in Hải Phòng province, families fighting to retain land being taken from them actually did make and bury a landmine that wounded several policemen.
28. The only significant act of violence by peasant demonstrators in this predominant pattern that I am aware of is the self-immolation by Phạm Thành Sơn in front of a Đà Nẵng city government building on February 17, 2011 (see articles from RFA reprinted in *Tự Do Ngôn Luận* [Free Speech], March 15, 2011, 12–14). In December 2008, a villager in Thái Bình province objecting to land being taken from his family reportedly dosed himself and a subdistrict chairman with gasoline. Before he could strike a match, other people intervened

- (document, given to me by a protester in Mai Xuân Thưởng park, written by the man's attorney, Đặng Ngọc Phúc, "Bảo Chữa Bảo Vệ Quyền, Lợi Ích Hợp Pháp của Anh Trần Văn Sự" [Defending the Legal Rights and Interests of Trần Văn Sự], May 15, 2009, 2).
29. This paragraph is based on conversations with a few villagers demonstrating in Hà Nội in October 2012.
 30. This paragraph is partly based on interviews in Hà Nội during September and October 2012 with a lawyer, a civil society advocate, a scholar, and two protesting villagers.
 31. This and several other aspects of the villagers' stance resonates with the findings by Nguyen Van Suu, "The Politics of Land: Inequality in Land Access and Local Conflicts in the Red River Delta Since Decollectivization," in *Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform*, ed. Philip Taylor (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 285–287.
 32. Bảng A villagers saying this are quoted in Duy Tuấn & Thu Hương, "Tiền đền bù."
 33. One exception is a woman in Mai Xuân Thưởng park, October 9, 2012, who vented her anger about officials taking her family's land. She screamed, "I hate the state, I hate the party, I hate this country, I hate them all" [*Tôi ghét nhà nước, tôi ghét đảng, tôi ghét đất nước, tôi ghét hết*].
 34. Sources for this paragraph are primarily Trung Dinh Dang, "Post-1975 Land Reform in Southern Vietnam: How Local Actions and Responses Affected National Land Policy," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5 (Fall 2010): 92–96; and Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, "Rural Society and State Relations," in *Vietnam's Rural Transformation*, eds., idem. and Doug J. Porter (Boulder and Singapore: Westview Press and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 74–80.
 35. *Đại Đoàn Kết*, April 10–16, 1993, 6; *Nông Dân Việt Nam* [Vietnamese Peasant], August, 1993, 11; and Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương [Central Executive Committee (of Vietnam's Communist Party)], "Báo Cáo tình hình tranh chấp ruộng đất ở nông thôn hiện nay" [Report: Situation in the Countryside Regarding Land Conflicts], September 27, 1990 (on file with author).
 36. For this and the following discussion of rightful resistance, I draw on O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance*, especially 1–24, 42–49, 54–63, 67–69.
 37. Resonating with some of the claims to justice and fairness discussed here are Erik Harms's findings in "Social demolition: Creative destruction and the production of value in Vietnamese land clearances," in *State, Society and the Market in Contemporary Vietnam*, eds. Hue-Tam Ho Tai and Mark Sidel (London: Routledge, 2013), 60–68.
 38. This summary draws on dozens of sources. Samples of what protesters' banners said are in "Nội dung những biểu ngữ khiếu kiện" [Content of Appeal for Justice Banners], July 2007, <http://www.tiengdankeu.net/> (accessed July 20, 2007).

39. “Nông dân vẫn tập trung khiếu kiện” [Peasants Continue Concentrated Pleas for Justice], *BBC*, July 18, 2007, http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/story/2007/07/070718_viet_protests.shtml (accessed July 19, 2007).
40. Examples are cited in written accusations by demonstrator Lữ Thị Thu Duyên, “Đơn Tố Cáo” [Denunciation], *Đối Thoại* [Dialogue], July 26, 2007, www.doi-thoi.com/baimoidd_350.html (accessed August 2, 2007); and a statement signed by fifty-seven protesters from seven provinces, Đơn Thành Nguyên [Petition], July 7, 2007, <http://ykien.net/blog/?p=1865> (accessed July 12, 2007).
41. “Dân chúng Tiền Giang kéo về biểu tình trước văn phòng II Quốc Hội” [Tien Giang People Flock to Demonstration at National Assembly Office II], *RFA*, June 28, 2007, http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/2007/06/28/Land_claimants_from_TienGiang_have_demonstrated_in_HCMcity/ (accessed July 2, 2007); “Phỏng vấn chị Cao Quế Hoa, đại diện đoàn biểu tình của người dân Tiền Giang” [Interview of Cao Quế Hoa, Spokesperson for Demonstrators from Tien Giang], *RFA*, July 3, 2007, http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/vietnam/AntiGovernmentDemonstrationContinueInHCMCT_Khanh-20070703.html (accessed December 23, 2010); “Tuần lễ thứ 3” [Week Three (of the protests)], July 9–12, 2007, <http://www.tiengdankeu.net/> (accessed July 22, 2007); Lữ Thị Thu Duyên, “Tuồng thuật v/v công an Sài Gòn & Gò Vấp bắt giữ người trái phép” [Recounting Illegal Arrests by Sài Gòn and Gò Vấp Police], September 20, 2007, <http://ykien.net/blog/?p=2649> (accessed October 3, 2007).
42. “TP HCM biểu tình” [Hồ Chí Minh City Demonstrations], June–July, 2007, <http://www.tiengdankeu.net/> (accessed July 22, 2007); “Dân chúng Tiền Giang kéo về”; “Tuần lễ thứ 4” [Week Four (of the protests)], July 13–20, <http://www.tiengdankeu.net/> (accessed July 22, 2007); “Từ nơi biểu tình ở Sài Gòn” [From the Demonstration in Sài Gòn], *Việt Báo*, July 6, 2007, <http://www.vietbao.com/?ppid=45&pid=114&nid=110666> (accessed November 21, 2007).
43. Cao Quế Hoa, Lê Thị Nguyệt, & Nhóm phóng viên đưa tin sự thật từ thành phố Sài Gòn [Reporters Bringing Truthful News from Sài Gòn], “Đồng bào tỉnh Tiền Giang biểu tình tại Sài Gòn” [Compatriots of Tien Giang Province Demonstrate in Sài Gòn], July 1, 2007, www.toquocdanhduetrachnhiem.com/danoantiengiang2.html (accessed December 18, 2010); “Một bà cụ dân oan chia sẻ về đoạn trường khiếu kiện” [Elderly Woman, a Victim of Injustice, Shares the Pains of Appealing for Justice], July 10, 2007, <http://www.tiengdankeu.net/> (accessed July 22, 2007); “Đại diện giáo hội Phật giáo Việt Nam Thống nhất thăm dân oan” [Representatives of the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam Visit Victims of Injustice], July 13, 2007, www.tiengdankeu.net/ (accessed July 22, 2007); Đỗ Thông Minh, “Ngọn lửa đấu tranh (I)” [Flame of Struggle, part 1], *Đàn Chim Việt Online*, July 20, 2007, www.danchimviet.com/php/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3635 (accessed August 24, 2007); “Phỏng vấn nhà

- văn Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa, thành viên mới của Ban điều hành Khối 8406” [Interview of Writer Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa, New Member of Bloc 8406’s Managing Committee], *RFA*, August 3, 2007, http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/2007/08/03/WriterNguyenXuanNghiaNewlyAppointedExecutiveMemberBloc8406_GMinh/ (accessed August 7, 2007). Roman Catholics groups in Hồ Chí Minh City may also have assisted protesters, as urged by dozens of priests and nuns inside and outside Vietnam who signed a petition: “Thỉnh nguyện thư của một số Tín hữu Công giáo Việt Nam” [Petition of Several Vietnamese Catholics], *Bản Tin Từ Huế*, July 11, 2007, http://bantintuhue.blogspot.com/2007/07/thnh-nguyn-th-ca-mt-s-tn-hu-cng-gio-vit_22.html (accessed June 8, 2013). Khối 8406 [Bloc 8406] began in mid-2006, spawned by a declaration for freedom and democracy, dated April 8, 2006, that hundreds of Vietnamese signed. Ủy ban yểm trợ người khiếu kiện [Committee to Assist Those Appealing for Justice] was one of the ad hoc groups; another was the Nhóm phóng viên người đưa tin sự thật từ thành phố Sài Gòn [Reporters Bringing Truthful News from Sài Gòn].
44. Cao Quế Hoa, Lê Thị Nguyệt, & Nhóm phóng viên người đưa tin sự thật từ thành phố Sài Gòn, “Đồng bào”; “Dân chúng Tiền Giang kéo về”; “Sẵn sàng đối thoại với người khiếu kiện” [Ready to Dialogue with People Appealing for Justice], *BBC*, July 12, 2007, http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/story/2007/07/070712_peasant_protest_update.shtml (accessed July 12, 2007). Cao Quế Hoa and Lê Thị Nguyệt were protesters from Tiền Giang province who occasionally wrote and frequently gave interviews about the events.
 45. Lư Thị Thu Duyên, “Đơn Tố Cáo.”
 46. Đỗ Thông Minh, “Ngọn lửa đấu tranh”; Ngọc Anh, “Tiếp cứu dân oan lên án bạo quyền” [Continue to Rescue Victims of Injustice Condemning Tyranny], June 28, 2007, <http://ykien.net/blog> (accessed June 29, 2007); “Dân chúng Tiền Giang kéo về.”
 47. Quang Minh, “Bản tin nhanh từ thủ đô Hà Nội” [News Bulletin from Hà Nội], *Đổi Thoi Online*, July 2, 2007, www.doi-thoi.com/baimoio707_034.html (accessed July 6, 2007); “Hàng trăm nông dân Tánh Linh – Bình Thuận bị áp bức bắt công từ quê ra Hà Nội khiếu kiện” [Hundreds of Oppressed, Mistreated Peasants from Tánh Linh district, Bình Thuận province, Go to Hà Nội Appealing for Justice], July 9, 2007, www.tiengdankeu.net/ (accessed July 20, 2007); Đỗ Thông Minh, “Ngọn lửa đấu tranh.”
 48. “Dân chúng Tiền Giang kéo về.” Also see “Biểu tình của đồng bào Tiền Giang sang ngày thứ 7” [Day Seven of Tiền Giang Compatriots’ Demonstrations], June 28, 2007, <http://ykien.net/blog> (accessed June 29, 2007); and Đỗ Thông Minh, “Ngọn lửa đấu tranh.”
 49. “Tuần lễ thứ 3”; “Tuần lễ thứ 4”; Trần Văn Hải, “Tâm thư 1 người trực tiếp nhìn cảnh CSVN can quét đồng bào dân oan tại văn phòng Quốc Hội 2” [Heartfelt

- Letter by One Who Witnessed Vietnamese Communists Mop Up Victims of Injustice at National Assembly Office II], *Việt Báo*, July 21, 2007, www.vietbao.com/?ppid=45&pid=114&nid=111420 (accessed November 21, 2007); “500 người lên TP HCM khiếu kiện về địa phương” [Five Hundred People Appealing for Justice in Hồ Chí Minh City Return Home], *VietnamNet*, July 20, 2007, <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/xahoi/doisong/2007/07/720475/> (accessed August 23, 2007). Some Vietnamese authorities claimed that the protesters were dispersed peacefully: “Giải quyết khiếu kiện: Phải tôn trọng và lắng nghe dân” [To Resolve Appeals for Justice: Listen Intently to and Respect the People], *VietnamNet*, July 23, 2007, <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/chinhtri/2007/07/721201/> (accessed August 23, 2007).
50. The company’s Vietnamese name is Công ty cổ phần Đầu tư và Phát triển đô thị Việt Hưng. The Vietnamese name for Ecopark is Khu Đô Thị Thương Mại Du Lịch Văn Giang. The three Văn Giang subdistricts [*xã*] are Xuân Quan, Phụng Công, and Cửu Cao. Among the sources for this and the next two paragraphs are Phạm Viết Đào blog, “8,2 tỷ USD cho chiếc Bánh Vẽ” [8.2 Billion US Dollars for a Drawing], *Dân Làm Báo*, April 2012, <http://danlambao.vn.blogspot.com.au/2012/04/82-ty-usd-cho-chiec-banh-ve-khu-o-thi.html#more> (accessed June 26, 2013); Nguyễn Nại Dương, “Bão nổi lên rồi từ vùng quê Hưng Yên thân yêu” [Rising Storm from Beloved Hưng Yên], *Tự Do Ngôn Luận*, September 15, 2006, 28–30; “Thông cáo báo chí của nông dân Văn Giang” [Press Release from Văn Giang Peasants], *Ba Sám News (BSN)*, August 10, 2012, <http://anhbasam.wordpress.com/2012/08/11/thong-cao-bao-chi-cua-nong-dan-van-giang/> (accessed August 15, 2012); a document from four attorneys helping the Văn Giang villagers: Trần Vũ Hải, Nguyễn Anh Văn, Lưu Vũ Anh, & Hà Huy Sơn, “Kiến nghị số 05 liên quan đến dự án Ecopark-Hưng Yên gửi Thủ Tướng Chính Phủ” [Petition Number Five to the Prime Minister regarding the Ecopark-Hưng Yên Project], *BSN*, January 16, 2013, <http://anhbasam.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/1565-kien-nghi-so-05-lien-quan-den-du-an-ecopark-hung-yen/> (accessed January 24, 2013); and my conversations with two Văn Giang villagers, Hà Nội, October 2012.
51. Examples of reports and photos of Văn Giang villagers protests: “Nông dân về Hà Nội khiếu kiện” [To Plea for Justice Peasants Go to Hà Nội], *BBC*, February 21, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2012/02/120221_ecopark_protest.shtml (accessed February 21, 2012); “Bão nông dân đồng loạt nổi lên khắp nơi” [Peasant Storm Rising All Over], *Cầu Nhật Tân*, September 12, 2012, <http://caunhattan.wordpress.com/2012/09/12/van-giang-bao-lai-noi-len/> (accessed September 13, 2012); “Hàng trăm người biểu tình ở Hà Nội” [Hundreds Demonstrate in Hà Nội], *RFA*, April 27, 2011, <http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/vietnamnews/protest-in-hanoi-04272011122519.html> (accessed November 12,

- 2011). In October-November 2012, I witnessed Văn Giang villagers' protests in Hà Nội. For a summary of the August 2012 meeting, see Phóng Viên Tự Do [Free Correspondents], "Tuồng thuật buổi đối thoại giữa Bộ Tài nguyên và Môi trường với người dân Văn Giang" [Recounting the Dialogue between Văn Giang Residents and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment], *BSN*, August 21, 2012, <http://anhbasam.wordpress.com/2012/08/21/1217-tuong-thuat-vu-doi-thoi-giua-bo-tai-nguyen-va-moi-truong-voi-nguoi-dan-van-giang/> (accessed March 7, 2013). YouTube has several clips from the meeting; for examples, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIOxhWNrEw&feature=plcp>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSChylTZjWI&feature=plcp>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhA2UIVEgDw&feature=plcp>; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD_ir1KH_1A&feature=plcp. In November 2012, dozens of Văn Giang villagers and a couple of lawyers discussed with Đặng Hùng Võ, a former deputy minister of MoNRE, questions about the legality of Ecopark. Đặng Hùng Võ's briefings in 2003-2004 had contributed to Prime Ministerial approval of the project. Villagers applauded when he acknowledged he had made some mistakes. See Nguyễn Quang A, "Chính phủ có cố ý làm trái luật đất đai?" [Did the Government Deliberately Violate the Land Law?], *BSN*, November 9, 2012, <http://anhbasam.wordpress.com/2012/11/09/1366-chinh-phu-co-co-y-lam-trai-luat-dat-dai/> (accessed November 15, 2012). Already retired, Đặng Hùng Võ and his views were dismissed by MoNRE authorities. Besides, in December 2012, he essentially retracted what he had said the month before: Đặng Hùng Võ, "Giáo sư Đặng Hùng Võ nói lại về vụ Văn Giang" [Professor Đặng Hùng Võ Talks Again about Văn Giang Issue], *VietnamNet*, December 10, 2012, <http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/chinh-tri/tuanvietnam/100018/giao-su-dang-hung-vo-noi-lai-ve-vu-van-giang.html> (accessed June 26, 2013); Đặng Hùng Võ, "Thư phúc đáp thư mời đối thoại 'phúc thăm' của nông dân Văn Giang" [Reply to Peasants' Invitation to a "Review" Dialogue], *BSN*, December 18, 2012, <https://anhbasam.wordpress.com/2012/12/20/1485-gs-dang-hung-vo-gui-thu-khuoc-tu-cuoc-doi-thoi-phuc-tham-voi-nguoi-dan-van-giang/> (accessed December 23, 2012).
52. "Hưng Yên: Dân cắm cờ xuống đất, phản đối chính quyền" [Hưng Yên: People Stick Flags in Fields, Oppose Authorities], *RFA*, January 8, 2009, http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/thousands-of-farmers-in-HungYen-province-protest-regarding-land-dispute-TGiao-01082009102235.html (accessed January 9, 2009); "Bào chữa cho nông dân chống cưỡng đoạt đất, một luật sư bị tạt acid" [Acid Thrown on Lawyer Defending Peasants Fighting Land Hijack], *Báo Sóng Thần* [Tidal Wave News], February 2009, <http://songthan.free.fr/archiver/0,,137,00.html> (accessed June 11, 2013); "Vụ Văn Giang: Chính quyền cưỡng chế" [Văn Giang Case: Authorities Use Force], *BBC*, April 24, 2012, <http://xuanhienhannom.blogspot.com.au/2012/04/bbc-ua-tin-trang-nhat-ve-vu->

- cuong-che.html (accessed April 29, 2012); “Văn Giang: Chính quyền tỉnh lên tiếng” [Văn Giang: Provincial Authorities Speak Up], *BBC*, April 26, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2012/04/120426_van_giang_views.shtml (accessed June 4, 2012). A portion of the April 2012 clash is on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVkt7ZgnBLE&feature=player_embedded#.
53. “Hàng nghìn nông dân biểu tình” [Thousands of Peasants Demonstrate], *BBC*, January 7, 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/story/2009/01/090107_hung_yen_dispute.shtml (accessed January 14, 2009); “Lại xảy ra xô xát vì đất đai ở Hưng Yên” [Renewed Land Conflict in Hưng Yên], *RFA*, February 5, 2009, http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/brief-violence-occurred-in-HungYen-regarding-land-dispute-TGiao-02052009150524.html (accessed February 13, 2009); “Vụ thu hồi đất ở Văn Giang” [Taking Back Land in Văn Giang], *Tin Mới* [New News], May 8, 2012, <http://www.tinmoi.vn/vu-thu-hoi-dat-o-van-giang-hung-yen-bai-2-duoc-mat-01883258.html> (accessed June 3, 2013); Trần Vũ Hải, Lưu Vũ Anh, & Hà Huy Sơn, “Kiến nghị số 01 liên quan đến dự án Ecopark-Văn Giang” [Petition Number One Regarding Ecopark-Văn Giang Project], *BSN*, May 22, 2012, <http://webwarper.net/ww/anhbasam.wordpress.com/2012/05/23/1025-ban-kien-nghi-gui-thu-tuong/> (accessed September 16, 2012). The authors, attorneys for Văn Giang villagers, sent this and other petitions to the Prime Minister.
 54. Conversations with four Văn Giang villagers, Hà Nội, October-November 2012; “Hàng nghìn nông dân”; “Lại xảy ra xô xát.”
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 56. Trần Vũ Hải, Nguyễn Anh Văn, Lưu Vũ Anh, & Hà Huy Sơn, “Kiến nghị số 05.” Also see Trần Khải Thanh Thủy, “Chuyện ba làng từ tị phú xuống bần hàn” [Story of Three Villages, from Wealth to Misery], *Người Việt Online*, January

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57. Conversations with four Văn Giang villagers, Hà Nội, October–November 2012.
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 59. Trần Vũ Hải, Nguyễn Anh Văn, Lưu Vũ Anh, & Hà Huy Sơn, “Kiến nghị số 05.”
 60. “Tuyên Bố của dân Văn Giang, Dương Nội về hai vụ án liên quan đến nông dân Đoàn Văn Vươn tại Hải Phòng” [Announcement by Văn Giang and Dương Nội Residents about Two Cases Related to Đoàn Văn Vươn in Hải Phòng], *Dân Làm Báo*, March 25, 2013, <http://danlambaovn.blogspot.com/2013/03/tuyen-bo-cua-nong-dan-van-giang-duong.html#.Uc4xCtiOm4E> (accessed June 28, 2013); “Phiên tòa xét xử anh Đoàn Văn Vươn tại Hải Phòng” [Trial and Sentence of Đoàn Văn Vươn in Hải Phòng], *Xuân Diên Hán Nôm*, April 2, 2013, <http://xuandienhannom.blogspot.com/2013/04/tin-khan-cap.html> (accessed April 2, 2013).
 61. “Biểu tình lớn ở Hà Nội phản đối TQ” [Large Anti-China Demonstration in Hà Nội], *BBC*, July 8, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2012/07/120708_second_antichina_protest.shtml (accessed July 24, 2012).
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 63. Examples include officials’ warnings that anyone who refused to surrender land would not be allowed to sell their produce, use medical clinics, bury their dead in the cemetery, or send their children to school. Violent coercion includes unknown persons beating up members of protesting households, breaking into their homes, throwing bottles of pesticide into their houses, and running them off the road. Conversations with two Văn Giang villagers, Hà Nội, October 2012; Trần Khải Thanh Thủy, “Chuyện ba làng”; and Trần Vũ Hải, “Kiến nghị số 3.”
 64. Chính Trực, “Nguyễn Xuân Diên: Người lớn nhưng ‘cái đầu’ không lớn” [Nguyễn Xuân Diên: He’s Big but Not His Head], *Nguyễn Tấn Dũng*, May 3, 2013, <http://nguyentandung.org/nguyen-xuan-dien-nguoi-lon-nhung-cai-dau-khong-lon.html> (accessed June 15, 2013); Trần Khải Thanh Thủy, “Chuyện ba làng.”

65. “Bào chữa cho nông dân” (see note 52); “Việc bắt người ở huyện Văn Giang (Hưng Yên)” [Arrest in Văn Giang District, Hưng Yên], *Công An Nhân Dân*, June 13, 2008, www.cand.com.vn/News/PrintView.aspx?ID=93101 (accessed June 11, 2013); “Nghi vấn từ một vụ tạt acid luật sư” [Doubts about Acid Being Thrown at Lawyer], *Pháp Luật* [Law], February 3, 2009, www.luatviet.org/Home/tin-tuc-phap-luat/tin-trong-nuoc/2009/7615/Nghi-van-tu-mot-vu-tat-axit-luat-su.aspx (accessed June 11, 2013); “Hành xử kiểu ‘lê làng,’ cán bộ thôn lĩnh án tù” [As in ‘Village Law,’ Village Cadre Imposes Sentence], December 30, 2008, www.vietnamplus.vn/Home/Hanh-xu-kieu-le-lang-can-bo-thon-linh-an-tu/200812/4319.vnplus (accessed June 11, 2013).
66. Evidence about land protests support this statement. Also indicative are surveys showing that respondents are more satisfied with the central government and the National Assembly than they are with local and provincial authorities: CECODES, *Chỉ số Hiệu quả Quản trị và Hành chính công cấp tỉnh ở Việt Nam (PAPI)* [Indices of Effectiveness of Governance and Administration in Vietnam’s Provinces] (Hà Nội: CECODES, 2012), 113–114.
67. For examples of press reports about the teams’ work, see *Người Lao Động* [Laborer], September 27, 2000, 4; “Phải xử lý tiêu cực, trả lại quyền lợi cho người dân” [Solve the Negativity; Return to the People’s Interests], *Thanh Niên* [Youth], August 17, 2005, www3.thanhnien.com.vn/Nhadat/2005/8/18/119329.tno (accessed November 29, 2006); “Tiền Giang: Điều chỉnh tăng mức đền bù đất cho dân” [Tiền Giang: Adjusting Level of Compensation for Land], *VietnamNet*, August 22, 2007, <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/xahoi/2007/08/732596/> (accessed August 23, 2007).
68. “500 người lên TP HCM”; “Tổ cáo khiếu nại” (see note 4); “Hoàn thiện cơ chế phối hợp giải quyết khiếu nại, tố cáo” [Improve the Mechanism for Coordinating the Resolution of Complaints and Denunciations], *Quân Đội Nhân Dân* [People’s Armed Forces], May 2, 2012, <http://qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-VN/61/43/10/50/50/186900/Default.aspx> (accessed July 24, 2012).
69. This is suggested in Annette Kim, *Learning To Be Capitalists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106–107; Annette Kim, “Talking Back: The Role of Narrative in Vietnam’s Recent Land Compensation Changes,” *Urban Studies* 48, no. 3 (2011): 494, 496, 499; and Nguyen Van Suu, “Contending Views and Conflicts over Land in Vietnam’s Red River Delta,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 38 (June 2007): 313.
70. Kim, *Learning*, 106; Kim, “Talking Back,” 497–498; Embassy of Denmark, Embassy of Sweden, and World Bank, *Recognizing and Reducing Corruption Risks in Land Management in Vietnam* (Hà Nội: National Political Publishing House, 2011), 48.

71. Kim, *Learning*, 102–103, has a similar observation, but credits news coverage of land controversies more than peasants' actions themselves.
72. Lawyers helping Văn Giang protesters have urged the Prime Minister to establish a special commission to resolve the problem: Trần Vũ Hải, Lưu Vũ Anh, & Hà Huy Sơn, “Kiến nghị số 01” (see note 53); Trần Vũ Hải, Nguyễn Anh Văn, Lưu Vũ Anh, & Hà Huy Sơn, “Kiến nghị số 05” (see note 50). Similar proposals have come from other quarters of society.
73. See, for instance, comments by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for National Resources and Environment: “Sẽ lập đoàn công tác giải quyết các khiếu kiện phức tạp” [Body to Be Established to Resolve Complicated Appeals for Justice], *VietnamNet*, August 15, 2007, <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/xahoi/2007/07/718485/> (accessed August 23, 2007); “528 vụ khiếu kiện tồn đọng là mầm mống mất ổn định.” [528 Long-standing Appeal for Justice Cases Are Germs for Instability], *VNExpress*, May 2, 2012, <http://vnexpress.net/gl/xa-hoi/2012/05/528-vu-khieu-kiem-ton-dong-la-mam-mong-mat-on-dinh/> (accessed May 17, 2012).
74. For a newspaper account about stark examples of legal complexities and contradictions confronting local authorities, see “Thực hiện luật đất đai ở TP. HCM” [Implementing the Land Law in Hồ Chí Minh City], *Thanh Niên*, August 31, 2007, <http://www3.thanhnien.com.vn/Nhadat/2007/8/31/207017.tno> (accessed September 10, 2007). For an overview of land confiscation and compensation legalities, see World Bank, *Compulsory Land Acquisition*.
75. This statement and the next paragraph draw on several news accounts between 2000 and 2012; conversations during September–October 2012 in Hà Nội with a journalist and four researchers – all Vietnamese – who investigate land issues; Đặng Kim Sơn & Nguyễn Đỗ Anh Tuấn, *Chính Sách Đất Đai* (see note 3), 132–134, 138; Đặng Ngọc Dinh, chủ biên [ed.], *Giải Quyết Xung Đột và Phòng Chống Tham Nhũng* [Resolving Conflicts and Fending Off Corruption], (Hà Nội: Tri Thức, 2011), 73–108, 261–262; and Embassy of Denmark, Embassy of Sweden, and World Bank, *Recognizing*.