

Governance, Democracy and Decentralization



Modernization and the Sino-Vietnamese Model⁺

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Abstract

There are important differences in situation and political development between China and Vietnam, but both are so distant from the parliamentary model that to political science they appear quite similar. They are the sturdy party-state survivors in a post-communist world. China and Vietnam pose a reciprocal challenge to common expectations regarding modernization. On the one hand, their economic growth and political stability undermine notions of stages of development converging (unless the state stalls or fails) in a liberal democratic “end of history”. Despite international openness, the importance of market forces, and a convergence of practical tasks of governance with other developing and developed states, the Sino-Vietnamese model is distinct in its origins, its experiences, and political structure. In contrast to the familiar pattern of traditional community giving way to modern society, a communitarian party-state continues to provide leadership. On the other hand, the notions linking development and parliamentary democracy are common because there are as yet no exceptions. In economic development China and Vietnam have been able to apply lessons from developed states, but the sustainable political development of party-states poses a novel challenge.

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1. Introduction

China and Vietnam have been confounding the expectations of external observers for several generations. First and perhaps most importantly, no one, least of all Karl Marx, expected that rural revolutions could be successful. The peasants’ struggle against encroaching capitalism was doomed to be a hopeless attempt to hold back the grindstone of history. Marx was sympathetic to their fate in his earliest works¹, but rural sufferings merely illustrated the

alienation of labour in property and commodity production. The other peasant wars of the twentieth century demonstrated the difficulties of pushing back capitalism.²

China's radicalism from 1957 to 1976 provided a double shock. First, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution challenged the political common sense of post-revolutionary institutionalization. Franz Schurmann's monumental work *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* appeared to be dead on arrival when it was published in 1966,³ and Stuart Schram's path-breaking biography of Mao Zedong unexpectedly needed a new chapter.⁴ But the hopes of the world's leftists were also dashed as the movements left starvation and chaos in their wake. Their icarian moment is best expressed by the title of David and Nancy Milton's memoir of the Cultural Revolution, *The Wind Will Not Subside*.⁵ Less destructive and dramatic but equally sobering for Vietnam was its post-war disillusionment with non-market socialism as a viable path of development.

Finally, China since 1979 and Vietnam since 1986 have become the most rapidly developing economies in Asia, the world's most rapidly developing region. Their policies of marketization and international openness have been familiar, but the flexible and successful pursuit of such policies by party-states retaining overall political control has been in great contrast to predecessors such as the Kosygin reforms in the Soviet Union or the New Economic Mechanism in Hungary. Of course, China and Vietnam benefited from the successes of Asian developmental states, but other party-state did not prove so adaptable. And by any standard the sustained rate of growth and their resilience since 2008 has been more than impressive.

Although popular attention focuses on the challenges posed to the developed world by China's "peaceful rise", which since 2008 could be rechristened its "peaceful leap forward", there is a deeper and perhaps more consequential challenge posed by China and Vietnam to common notions of modernization. Although China attracts the most attention, the fact that Vietnam has pursued a similar course makes the challenge a categorical one.

In the first part of the twentieth century even Chinese and Vietnamese intellectuals to some extent conflated modernization and westernization, though their calls to their countrymen were decidedly communal (Yu, 2009; Fewsmith, 1991; Marr, 1981). Rural revolution led by communist parties provided a unique route to refounding the state, and even though the leadership accepted the transformative mission of modernity, its spirit and method was rooted in class-based mobilization of an overwhelming majority and its ultimate goal was communism rather than capitalism. The policies of the reform era feature decollectivization and decontrol, but party leadership has remained crucial and success has strengthened the commitment to the present order. To the extent that China and Vietnam present a coherent

political mechanism and a distinctive path of development, we can speak of a Sino-Vietnamese model.

Following this introduction, this essay will explore the intellectual challenge of Sino-Vietnamese political development in three parts. It begins by considering similarities and differences with other communist regimes and the constitution of the Sino-Vietnamese party-state. The subsequent section considers the challenges posed to modernization theory by the Sino-Vietnamese experience, followed by the current challenges that socioeconomic development are posing for China and Vietnam. The final section considers the general relevance of the “Sino-Vietnamese model” for other states. The conclusion returns to the most basic question of what is modernization.

2. Patterns and Differences

China and Vietnam are party-states whose regimes were founded on broad rural mobilization by communist parties. Rural mobilization in the face of more powerful enemies required the parties to be mass-regarding in their policies despite the centralized party structure – to be “quasi-democratic systems”.⁶ They developed a milieu of leadership and a party structure that built up from the villages during the revolution, one that after victory could reach down from the centre to the grassroots. Although the new party-states were poor in material endowments, their revolutions created tremendous capacities for continued popular mobilization, for better and for worse. While China managed to restore the economy in three years and to raise agricultural output during initial cooperatization – in great contrast to the Soviet Union – its capacity to mobilize also contributed to the extent of starvation in the Great Leap Forward. Similarly, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was able to organize its entire population around the goal of national liberation and to lead the National Liberation Front in the South as well. For the decade following reunification, however, the strength of the party-state was devoted to reasserting control of the northern economy and pushing the south to “catch up” to socialism.

The parties’ populist self-confidence and general disillusionment with failures of ideological idealism both played essential roles in the reform policies adopted since 1979 by China and since 1986 by Vietnam. On the one hand, the failures of Maoist leftism and socialist restoration clearly required major policy reorientation. On the other hand, the parties felt sufficient confidence in their societal roots to adopt policies of managed openness and decentralization. Moreover, the discipline and reach of the party-states enabled an effective and orderly policy transformation in both countries.

With the continuing success of reform, the leaders of China and Vietnam face a more subtle challenge of adjusting the constitution of their party-states

to the tasks of sustainable governance. Success is creating a fundamentally novel socioeconomic situation. In contrast to their rural, egalitarian, and defensive-nationalist origins, both political communities are increasingly urban, unequal, and globalized. Clear goals that might be pursued by a vanguard party, such as victory, communism, or even maximum economic growth, are being displaced by more complex and fine-tuned tasks of governance. While the other Asian states could present attractive examples of rapid growth, there are no examples to follow of developed party-states. Success has both strengthened the Sino-Vietnamese party-states as institutions and at the same time called into question their roles and capabilities as governing parties enmeshed with public institutions and managing an increasingly differentiated society.

The broad categories “authoritarian”, “totalitarian”, or even “communist” capture neither the political dynamic nor the current challenges just described. “Authoritarian” refers to regimes in which electoral competition plays a subordinate political role, and this is true for both China and Vietnam. However, the category is not defined by its own political dynamic, but rather by the absence of a parliamentary dynamic. It includes closed, oligarchic elites, weak states, and others with which China and Vietnam have little in common. “Totalitarian” is a better fit, despite its Cold War origins, because mobilization in China and Vietnam has been monopolistic rather than coalitional or corporatist. There is no dimension or interest of society that is considered beyond the legitimate concern of the party-state. A more accurate term in this vein would be Tang Tsou’s “totalism” (*quanneng zhuyi* 全能主義), but it does not capture the decontrolling trends of the reform era.⁷

China and Vietnam are clearly both communist states. It would be a mistake to regard them as “not really communist”, as implied in earlier discussions of Mao as (only) a peasant revolutionary or Ho as (only) a nationalist. Of course, if Marx in his later years could wonder whether he himself was a communist, he would certainly have his doubts about his politically far-flung progeny. However, if accepting Marxism as orthodoxy and having a Leninist party as the core of politics can be taken as the criteria for communism, then China and Vietnam both fit.

Where are the key differences between them and their deceased European and Soviet brethren? Rural revolution is the primary source of difference, but its success required a context that was absent in Europe. Russia was the exception that proved the rule. Despite its large peasant population, Russia’s political fate was decided in its largest cities and then enforced after the fact in rural areas. The failure of Marxism-Leninism as a post-revolutionary ideology left Stalin with unquestioned power and the imperative of industrialization, but neither the confidence for nor the means of broad mobilization. There was thus a world of difference between Stalin’s deliberate “internal colonization”

of the Ukraine and Mao's unintended exhaustion of the peasantry in the Great Leap Forward even though they both resulted in massive starvation. The gulf between China and Vietnam and the externally imposed regimes in Eastern Europe is even greater. There are some resonances between Tito's populism and Mao and perhaps between Ceausescu's oppositional nationalism and Le Duan, but these are isolated facets of similarity in more complex matrices of difference.

Despite these differences, China and Vietnam share with other communist regimes what might be called the "post-revolutionary syndrome" of disillusionment with socialist transformation while still holding the reins of power.⁸ The effect was delayed in China by Mao's leftism and in Vietnam by war, but there is still the broad similarity of vanguard parties in power that have lost faith in their final destination. Analogous to an established church that privately suspects that God is dead, dogma is placed on a remote altar while the party preserves and justifies itself by tending to the pastoral duties relating to the welfare of the flock. The party attracts risk-avoiding careerists rather than risk-taking revolutionaries. Governmental practices tend to converge with "secular" states, but the enforced orthodoxy remains sensitive to challenge even as its content is hollowed out.

China and Vietnam have an executive political structure in which the primary focus is on policy implementation rather than policy formulation. The primary ladder of success is set by educational standards, tests, and performance outcomes rather than by interest aggregation and constituencies. There is a growing salience of popularity in retention and advancement, but it is a matter of popular satisfaction/dissatisfaction with performance rather than cultivation of a constituency. There is a constant tension between particularistic relationships (*guanxi* 关系, *quan hệ*) and executive norms, but elections usually play a peripheral role in both formal and informal power. Party and state are distinct structures but conflated in operation and personnel, and the ambiguity of responsibility creates some local oversight, some confusion, and very many meetings aimed at consensus. The frontier between politics and administration is muddied, though the party holds the upper hand due to its agenda-setting and personnel prerogatives.

Implementation is more flexible than in a legislative political structure because officials are expected to act according to local situations rather than to implement general laws. Hence much policy innovation begins as local experiments prove to be successful and are generalized (Heilmann, 2008). On the other side of the coin, crises often force awareness of previously ignored problems of governance (the SARS crisis of 2003 is the best example) (Kraus, 2004). Popular disturbances play an interesting and important role in drawing the attention of higher leadership to dissatisfaction with local leaders and conditions. Such disturbances are outside the system but

rarely against the system. In Mao Zedong's terminology, such problems are evidence of "contradictions among the people" that can become hostile if they are mishandled (Mao, 1971). Labour strikes are a special category of contradictions since they are primarily against foreign firms. In Vietnam, 68 per cent of strikes occurred in foreign-invested firms, primarily Taiwanese and South Korean, while less than ten per cent occurred in state-owned enterprises (Kerkvliet, 2010a). The strikes were mostly brief and non-violent, and were preceded by unsuccessful presentations of grievances.

In contrast to contradictions among the people, challenges to the party-state tend to be viewed as "contradictions between the enemy and ourselves". Political opposition is deemed illegitimate in China and Vietnam regardless of whether it is peaceful or violent, public or secretive, though Vietnam is typically more permissive in treating dissidents. The regimes are indifferent to private opinion, but beyond the redress of specific grievances and expert arguments for and against specific policies there is no permissible discourse of opposition. In a "dictatorship of the proletariat", a phrase still operative as one of China's "four fundamental principles", there is democratic solidarity with the people and dictatorship over their enemies. Defining enemies of the people is the prerogative of the party-state.

It is not the numbers or the power of the dissidents that the regimes find threatening. The numbers are not large. In the most comprehensive study of Vietnamese dissidents, Benedict Kerkvliet observes that they are mostly from the intellectual elite (Kerkvliet, 2010b). Approximately two thousand people signed the "Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam"⁹ which began to circulate in April 2006, and those who publicly challenge the regime by joining political organizations or by their writings number in the hundreds. Similarly, the "Charter 08" in China, which also called for a parliamentary form of government, had 303 original signatories and eventually over 8,000, including people outside of China.¹⁰ Even small numbers are seen to pose a threat, however, because they are seen as a process of "peaceful evolution" (a term used since the early 90s by both China and Vietnam) fostered by foreign forces hostile to socialism (Thayer, 2010). In any case, given the nature of a party-state, to acknowledge such opposition as legitimate would already concede the constitutional discourse to the dissidents. However, as Kerkvliet documents, repressive measures have had little or no effect on major Vietnamese dissidents (Kerkvliet, 2010b). One of the organizers in China of "Charter 08", Liu Xiaobo, was subsequently sentenced to eleven years, and earlier he had spent time in jail for his 1989 activities.

It would be mistaken, however, to assume that there is an unbridgeable gulf between dissidents and the party-state, or that there is an inert mass of the public in the middle. There is broad agreement across the spectrum on some general issues such as anti-corruption, balanced development, and the

environment, and the public, especially the netizens, become energized on many specific issues as well. A major example would be the public outcry in Vietnam in 2009 against Chinese investment in bauxite mining (Thayer, 2009). Anti-Chinese nationalism is a favourite theme of Vietnamese dissidents, but in this case there was broad and vocal opposition, and even General Giap wrote a public letter condemning the agreement. Although the government cannot formally negotiate a compromise with opposition, it is often flexible enough to accommodate critical opinion.

Meanwhile there have been major advances in the reform era in various areas of democratic governance, including local elections, greater governmental transparency, and deliberative democracy. Generally speaking, Vietnam has been more active in applying electoral rules in national leadership.¹¹ Reforms have increased personnel choice within the system by extending the reach of selection procedures based on more candidates than positions. Both party-states have been active at the grassroots level as well¹², and in China there have even been experiments with randomly selected panels of rural residents making authoritative decisions on local projects (Fishkin, He, Luskin and Siu, 2010). Local transparency and accountability have increased as well as the articulation of local interests, but there is no aggregation of interests outside the party-state structure. The point has been to increase popular responsiveness but not to allow opposition.

There are important differences in the politics of China and Vietnam. Some relate to differences in context and history. China's size tends to make its politics more internally oriented, and perhaps it also makes its central government more self-confident in economic experimentation but more cautious politically. In 1979 China could afford to let Guangdong Province get "one step ahead" in reform policies because it was a small and below-average part of the national economy. Vietnam could not take similar risks with Ho Chi Minh City (Turley and Womack, 1998). On the other hand, we can speculate that if Guangdong were now an independent country its politics would be more progressive than those of Beijing.

Two major historical differences between China and Vietnam are the effects of French colonialism versus China's "century of humiliation" and the leadership styles of Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh. The colonial experience gave Vietnamese progressives a common task, national liberation, and a culturally external target, foreign occupation. In China the national agenda was set by the failure of traditional China and the ensuing total crisis of domestic chaos. Vietnam's ideological milieu was less radically self-critical and more focused on a common goal of national liberation. By contrast, China's political style was set by "you live-I die" contests in a chaotic environment. The closest China came to the Vietnamese situation was the Anti-Japanese War. Then land policy shifted from redistribution to a milder policy of reduction of rent and

interest, and emphasis shifted from class struggle to a patriotic united front. However, this was a temporary interlude in the Chinese revolution.

The difference in ideological milieu was more than personified by “Uncle Ho” and “Chairman Mao”. These two charismatic leaders amplified the differences embedded in their historical situations. Both were pragmatic, but pragmatic in different circumstances. Class struggle and nationalism were important to both revolutions, but in different proportions. In Vietnam the united front organizations the Viet Minh and later the National Liberation Front played leading roles while their equivalents in China were peripheral, and Ho Chi Minh was the all-encompassing national figurehead for Vietnam. His personal leadership style was more consensual and moderate than Mao’s. Ho opposed the excesses of land reform, but allowed more radical leaders to take charge. In 1956 the Party publicly criticized the “leftist excesses” of land reform, not long before Mao Zedong in China began to explore new heights of leftist excesses. Mao’s personal role in the Great Leap Forward and even more so in the Cultural Revolution put a very different signature on Chinese politics. It is thus not surprising that in the 1990s Vietnamese reformists supported learning from the thought of Ho Chi Minh, while not even conservatives in China had much enthusiasm for Mao’s thoughts even though they remained a part of official orthodoxy.

3. Challenges to Modernization Theory

Ferdinand Tönnies was born into the rural, almost medieval environment of the Duchy of Schleswig in 1855, which was annexed by Prussia after the Second Schleswig War of 1864 when he was nine years old. He then pursued his education and academic career in Prussia, the most rapidly changing and industrializing polity in Europe. *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society, 1887), his seminal work, expressed a vivid personal experience of transition from tradition to modernity, and it also captured the turn of European sociological interest away from future-oriented progress and toward historical and comparative reflections on the distance already covered by modernization.¹³

Tönnies is openly nostalgic about his (and the world’s) lost childhood. It was a non-commercial, village community in which action was motivated by the natural will (*Wesenwille*) of need and desire and relationships were nestled in familiar patterns of gender and rank. But the small world of *Gemeinschaft* is gone forever, trodden remorselessly underfoot by competitive world-metropolises (*Weltstädte*) driven by the instrumental, rational will (*Kürwille*) of infinite accumulation. Other thinkers, Emile Durkheim, for example, were happier to be rid of the oppressive homogeneity of community. Regardless of regrets, however, the division of cultures into

traditional and modern, communities and societies, articulated a watershed in European development.

The corollaries of the traditional/modern divide for the West's perspective on the rest of the world were profound. It secularized the West's superiority over the heathens. Modernization did not require missionaries or even intellectual enlightenment, only private property, markets, and competition. Global convergence on its terms was inevitable. There is no communal alternative to modernization. The cultural distance between any other society and the West was not a measure of generic difference but of backwardness. The diversity of communities was a product of their closure, and their gates could not withstand progress. There is little local colour in the neon light of modern society; it lights the same path everywhere to the ideological end of history.

The revolutionary and post-revolutionary histories of China and Vietnam are a challenge to this mindset. Rural revolution was neither a throwback to a pre-modern past nor an incipient capitalism. The communists mobilized villages, but they did so by introducing new values of class struggle and nationalism, and they promised a transformed future rather than a return to the past.¹⁴ Their key advantage over their opponents was popular mobilization. After victory the emphasis on the abstracted community of the party-state marching forward to further material and cultural modernization further confused the divide between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The motivations of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution as well as socialist construction in Vietnam were certainly more *Kürwille* than *Wesenwille*.

But the failure of leftism in China and Vietnam and the subsequent success of reform and openness raise the question of the essence of modernization. They tried and failed to take a different road, and yet their present and foreseeable paths of modernization are quite different from parliamentary states. Market forces now operate within self-restrained party-states, and even administrative rewards are primarily contingent on economic growth. Shanghai has again become a *Weltstadt*, more like other cities of its rank than like the rural hinterland that supplies its internal immigrant labour force. There is a convergence of domestic governance issues and policies that is not painted onto China from the outside by globalization but rather is emerging from the greater sophistication and diversity of its own society.

Perhaps the best evidence for a modern convergence of governance is provided by some of the challenges that the party-states set for themselves, including rule of law and intra-Party democracy. Strengthening the rule of law is more than just the routinization of the party-state, it is the adaptation of governance to a more diversified society. The rule of law may have corruption as its proximate target, but the deeper problem that requires public rule-making and enforcement is that societal interconnections now extend far

beyond one's acquaintances. In a village personal relationships can suffice for anticipating what Max Weber called the "social probabilities" (*soziale Chancen*) of social interaction.¹⁵ But the interdependencies of modern life reach far beyond the familiar, and one needs laws to structure expectations and accountability.

Intra-Party democracy might seem to be unrelated to modernization, but in fact it is crucial to the party-state's adaptation to post-revolutionary governance. Successes in economic development have shifted the tasks of governance away from goal-oriented executive targeting and toward the management of diversity. The Chinese goal of a "harmonious society" addresses this new orientation. However, if the communist parties are to continue to provide exclusive political leadership for a diverse society, then the various interests and concerns of the citizenry need to be reflected in the parties' membership and articulated in the parties' decision-making processes. The party's base must be as diverse as the citizenry. The Chinese decision to admit capitalists into the CPC is an important step in this direction, but it also needs to include believers in religion as well.¹⁶ An ideologically restrictive party-state precludes legitimate sectors of the citizenry from politics. Besides an inclusive base, the parties need to enhance meaningful participation in party elections, agenda-setting, and political discussion. In this regard Vietnam is a step ahead of China.

Would inclusive, governance-oriented parties still be communist? Clearly they are already so distant from Marx's revolutionary expectation of the final class struggle or Lenin's vanguard party as to make the question worth asking. On the other hand, the parties of China and Vietnam have arrived at their current structures and policies by coping with their evolving practical environments, and their current challenges also fit that pattern. The term "Sino-Vietnamese model" better fits the record and trajectory of their development than either "communist" or "Asian", though both contexts have been major influences.

The relationship of current Sino-Vietnamese experience to modernization theory is paradoxical. On the one hand, the convergence of governance tasks with other modernizing and modern societies confirms that there is a common problematique of modern politics. Urban planners in Buenos Aires, Bangkok, Guangzhou, and Ho Chi Minh City have much in common. Beyond the various concrete problems of modern governance, there is the generally acknowledged responsibility to encourage and coordinate the diversity of a modern society. China's leftist experimentation and the failure of command economies demonstrate that the societal texture can be damaged by harsh interventions.

On the other hand, the party-states in China and Vietnam have very successfully adapted to the tasks of economic growth, and their political-social

structure is central to their current modernizing social order. The party-states have been strengthened by success while at the same time greater prosperity increases the pressure for further adaptation. Communism in China and Vietnam began in a situation radically different from that of the West and only recently has seen itself as facing comparable tasks, and thus the Sino-Vietnamese path has been and remains different. Even as policy content becomes similar, the political constitutions of the party-states are confirmed in their differences. Why abandon a system that has been more successful than its parliamentary competitors?

4. A Sino-Vietnamese Model

The remarkable economic success of China over the past thirty years has led Joshua Ramo to propose a “Beijing Consensus” about development in opposition to the “Washington Consensus”.¹⁷ His formulation has been much criticized inside and outside of China, but it is certainly worthwhile to go beyond the narrative of China’s development to more general questions of the mechanisms and their applicability elsewhere. Broadening the focus to include Vietnam as well as China should help transcend some of China’s idiosyncrasies and specify background conditions for applicability.

The Sino-Vietnamese model can and should begin with rural revolution rather than with current reform. For most purposes this is a major limitation of the model, since the conditions for rural revolution have mostly passed from the world scene. But the continuing appeal of “Maoism” to radical groups in Nepal and India indicates some relevance. The lesson of the Sino-Vietnamese experience for ongoing rural radicalism was best put by Mao Zedong:

If we only mobilize the people to carry on the war and do nothing else, can we succeed in defeating the enemy? Of course not ... We must ... solve the problems facing the masses – food, shelter, and clothing, fuel, rice, cooking oil, and salt, sickness and hygiene, and marriage. In short, all the practical problems in the masses’ everyday life should claim our attention. If we attend to these problems, solve them and satisfy the needs of the masses, we shall really become organizers of the well-being of the masses, and they will truly rally around us and give us their warm support. Comrades, will we then be able to arouse them to take part in the revolutionary war? Yes, indeed we will.

(Mao, 1966: 147-148)

The lesson of the key importance of mass-regarding policy could apply to any political mobilization from below challenging an unpopular regime or occupying power. Suicide bombers and roadside explosives may improve the technology of resistance, but any action that terrorizes and alienates the popular base cuts the root of protracted struggle. A final lesson of rural

revolution is derived from the contrast between China and Vietnam and European communism. Revolutions based on mobilizing the power of the people have profound consequences for post-revolutionary capabilities. A party-state built from the ground up is in leadership situation fundamentally different from that of those constructed in post-revolutionary consolidation or imposition.

There are negative lessons from China's leftism and Vietnam's socialist construction. The Great Leap Forward demonstrated that mass mobilization does not work as a modernization strategy even when it is carried out by a state with extraordinary mobilizational capacity. Indeed, if China had been less able to mobilize then the tragic consequences of its failure would have been reduced. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution provided the even deeper lesson that society requires respect for its complexity in order to operate. Chaos, not a better, egalitarian world, is the alternative to complexity. The anti-modern utopian tendencies inherent in Marxism were buried by the Red Guards.

Vietnam did not provide the only negative lesson of socialist construction; the example of the Soviet Union is the overarching one. However, Vietnam's experience reaches beyond that of a command economy to that of an aid-dependent command economy. Under the pressure of its American war, Vietnam became dependent on China and the Soviet Union not only for military supplies and daily necessities but also for industrial support. But because of the exigencies of wartime life, much of the support earmarked for large projects was siphoned off for more basic needs (Fforde and Paine, 1987). The gap between a formal, inefficient, and aid-dependent industrial economy and an informal survival economy remained after the war as the nationalization of southern industry and the socialization of agriculture weakened the real base of the economy. Increasing desperation for donors also drove foreign policy, as China ceased its aid in 1977 and the United States failed to deliver on Nixon's promises of aid (Woodside, 1979). The Soviet Union and to a lesser extent other Eastern European states continued to prop up the high ground of the Vietnamese economy until 1990, but the availability of aid inhibited economic reform.

The positive lessons of China's economic success since adopting reform policies deservedly attract more attention, and Vietnam's success with similar policies amplifies their potential importance. The most prominent lessons are those of economic management, but it is a mistake to boil the political lessons down to "economic reform first, political reform later".

Barry Naughton has provided a set of six "conjectures" based on Chinese economic management that he thinks have broader application.¹⁸ He observes that the Chinese economy has evolved into three distinct but interactive sectors, the large industry sector of state-owned enterprises

(SOEs), hybrid local and foreign invested firms, and small-scale capitalism. All six of his conjectures relate to the positive interaction of the sectors in a competitive environment and the leading role of the state sector in opening new opportunities. China has not found the Philosopher's Stone of economic growth, but the characteristics underlying its success so far differ considerably from notions of liberal or aid-driven growth.

There are two important contextual limits to the application of the Sino-Vietnamese model of reform (Womack, 2010). The first contextual limit is that China has been able to pursue maximum growth with a state-based strategy because it had societal prerequisites for growth at hand and available developmental targets were set by the achievements of more advanced states, especially its Asian neighbours. China has not progressed because of innovation, but as the result of pragmatic adaptation of what worked in other places. Moreover, two decades of leftist egalitarianism had given China a population that was reasonably healthy, educated and organized, and desperately willing to make money. What Thorstein Veblen termed "the advantages of backwardness" can be over-emphasized, but in China's case it proved true (Veblen, 1915). It was also true for Vietnam since 1986-1990, and Vietnam had the additional advantage of having China as a model.

The second contextual limit more specific to China is that as China passes the threshold of upper-middle income states, it must pay more attention to sustainable development rather than simply to maximum growth. Sustainable development requires more than just attention to environment and resources. China must also develop its consumer base, extend its entrepreneurial pool, and prepare for its demographic shift to an older population. All of these require structural economic change. Naughton's emphasis on public leadership in economic growth becomes more important, because left to itself the market will pursue its marginal advantage rather than restructuring, but the party-state must recalibrate its leadership in order to continue to provide appropriate guidance.

While China's economy attracts attention, the political lessons of the Sino-Vietnamese model are as interesting as its economic lessons. Effective political direction during the reform era has been as important as economics. The party-states in China and Vietnam managed a total reorientation of their policy values and strategy and then retained sufficient flexibility to deal with new problems. The political accomplishment cannot be dismissed as simply a necessity of elite survival or an inevitable bowing to pressures from below. To attribute China's turn to reform and openness or Vietnam's *doi moi* (renovation) to elite self-preservation is a banality. There are few intentional lemmings in politics. The interesting question is the self-conception of the elite and how it perceives the practical horizons of its options. An elite that defines itself against the broader population is more likely to circle the wagons and

to use the power it has at hand to repress opposition. To use Gaetano Mosca's terminology, the communist parties of China and Vietnam have behaved like broad-based political classes rather than closed power oligarchies (Mosca, 1939). As to pressure from below, this requires mechanisms for aggregating interests that rarely exist in party-states. Neither China nor Vietnam faced serious popular challenges at the moment of their change of direction, and China's popular movements of 1986 and 1989 led to conservative policy movements rather than liberalization.

Of course, Robert Michels' iron law of oligarchy still holds. There are horizontal and vertical strata of group interests in the political structures. But the parties have broad bases, and although advancement is decided from the top down rather than from the bottom up, popularity is a criterion and election mechanisms are becoming more important steps in the confirmation process. These are areas where more improvement is possible and necessary, but the success thus far of China and Vietnam raises basic questions about the prerequisites of modern governance. Hitherto the assumption that effective political responsiveness requires competitive parliamentary politics has not been empirically challenged. Now it is. To dismiss the party-states of China and Vietnam as generic authoritarian regimes is to ignore what they have already accomplished and to refuse to consider the possibility of sustainable political development within the party-state framework.

5. Conclusion: What Is Modernization?

If we step back and consider the ideas of Ferdinand Tönnies from the perspective of an additional century of historical development, they remain remarkably fresh and useful. His description of two broad phases of historical development based on the presence of market society is popular again, while other popular theories such as the self-destruction of capitalism (Werner Sombart, Lenin), the decline of the West (Oswald Spengler), or the gradual replacement of markets by government planning (Joseph Schumpeter) seem more outdated even though they are more recent.

The dimension that is challenged by the Sino-Vietnamese model is that Tönnies intends to present a general theory of community and society, but in fact it remains a theory of Western community and society. Tönnies assumes that the internal forces of a community will drive its evolution into a modern society. He considers transitions deriving from either the "low road" of popular resistance or the "high road" of elite power, but he does not consider the situation of the destruction of traditional societies by the military force of outside powers and their subjection to the interests of conquering states. Only a Western theorist could consider modernization from this perspective, and this Western perspective limits the applicability of his theory to China,

to Vietnam, and to other non-Western countries. Facing modernization at gunpoint from the outside, it is hardly surprising that “the rest” yearned for a transfigured community of their own rather than a denatured and other-centred general modernity.

The Sino-Vietnamese experience strengthens and develops Thorstein Veblen’s insight that followers in modernization have different options from leaders, and that these options affect the role of the state. Veblen noted that the German state could play a more helpful role in the development of the steel industry than could Britain’s because Britain bore the burden of innovation – Germany knew where it was going while Britain didn’t (Veblen, 1915). The advantages of backwardness can easily be exaggerated – otherwise poverty would disappear. However, in the case of China, and even more so of Vietnam because it had the additional model of China, backwardness permitted strong party-states to effectively pursue maximum economic growth. As Naughton argues, they have combined market forces and public management in ways that would have surprised Marx as well as the Washington Consensus.

But if the linkage between tradition/community and modernity/society is a good fit only for the Western experience, what is the more general essence of modernity? Of course, where the line between tradition and modernity is drawn across gradual and complex processes is rather arbitrary. But I would argue that there are three interrelated characteristics of modernity that remain true in a global context. These are, first, societal complexity, second, increased productive capacity, and third, increased presence of public authority. As China and Vietnam have demonstrated before reform, these elements can work against each other. But the interrelationship of complexity, productivity, and power is not a problem to be solved, but rather a continuing challenge of management. While success reinforces some correct approaches, it also opens up territory for new mistakes. However, increasing prosperity reduces the systemic threat from mistakes. As A.O. Hirschman has observed in a different context, a society with surplus has much more room to make mistakes than one more concerned with survival (Hirschman, 1970). The presidency of George W. Bush may be taken as a multi-dimensional proof of this hypothesis.

The political key to the proper functioning of the three elements of modernization is popular responsiveness. The examples of China and Vietnam require the broadening of the idea of responsiveness beyond parliamentary democracy, but China and Vietnam still have some distance to go in reforming from mass-based vanguard party-states to citizen-based governing party-states. Their own revolutionary experience confirms that the people are the root of power, but the people and their needs are changing. Mao Zedong correctly perceived the danger of institutionalizing a complacent party-state;

the challenge remains of how to systematize popular responsiveness in a modern context.

China and Vietnam have had the advantage of being economic followers, but they increasingly face the challenge of being political innovators. Can a party-state reform itself to the point that it is responsive to all legitimate societal interests without allowing legitimate political opposition? Can party-states maintain effective guidance of increasingly complex and productive societies without lapsing into a neo-commandist political economy? There is no successful example that can be followed. Neither liberal democracy nor Marxism provides an adequate ideological template for this challenge. Of course, this was also true for rural revolution, but on the other hand it was true for the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution as well.

The challenge of continuing modernization in China and Vietnam is not likely to lead to complete success or failure, however. Like other polities, they are likely to continue a path shaped and reshaped by their decisions. Growing social complexity produces a diversity of interests, some of which will pose problems, but it also increases a general common interest in stability. Modernization beyond the West is likely to prove to be a general direction of development rather than a single, converging path even as the problems and techniques of governance become more similar.

Notes

- + An earlier version, “Moderniser le parti-État en Chine et au Vietnam” (Modernizing the Party-State in China and Vietnam), was published in French in *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (January 2011). I would like to thank Ben Kerkvliet and Ellen Zhang for their comments and suggestions, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for the *International Journal of China Studies*.
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- 1. See especially Karl Marx, “Debatten über das Holtzdiebstahlgesetz”, 1842 (*Marx Engels Werke*, Vol. 1, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972, pp. 145-148).

2. For an excellent overview see Wolf (1969).
3. Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.
4. Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966.
5. David Milton and Nancy Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside: Years in Revolutionary China, 1964 to 1969*, New York: Pantheon, 1976.
6. See Womack (1987), Race (1972).
7. Tsou (1994).
8. This is argued in greater detail in Womack (1993).
9. <www.hrw.org/pub/2006/manifesto_040606.pdf>
10. Ariana Eunjung Cha, "In China, a Grass-Roots Rebellion; Rights Manifesto Slowly Gains Ground despite Government Efforts to Quash It", *Washington Post*, 29th January 2009, p. A01. Text is available at <<http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/press?revision%5fid=173861&item%5fid=85717>>.
11. See Abrami, Maleski and Yu (2007).
12. McElwee *et al.* (2006). There is a vast literature on village-level elections in China. See especially J. Kennedy, "Supply and Support for Grassroots Political Reform in Rural China", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 15, No. 2, June 2010, pp. 169-190.
13. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*, Leipzig: Fues Verlag, 1887 (6th and 7th ed., Berlin: Verlag Carl Curtius, 1926).
14. The classic account of the process of village mobilization is Hinton (1966). See also Race (1972).
15. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1922 (5th ed., Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1972, I:1:10, p. 9).
16. Believers are admitted into the Vietnamese communist party. Neither party routinely expels members who become converts to religions.
17. Joshua Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2004). For a comprehensive critique see S. Kennedy, "The Myth of the Beijing Consensus", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, No. 65, June 2010, pp. 461-477.
18. Barry Naughton, "China's Distinctive System: Can it be a Model for Others?", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, No. 65, June 2010, pp. 437-460.

The conjectures are:

1. Public ownership can be reasonably efficient, and the "mixed economy" can be a decent model of industrial organization, after all.
2. Competition is (still) more important than ownership.
3. Public ownership can be used to exploit market power and generate revenues for investment and public goods creation.
4. A strategy of investment-led growth is essential. Therefore it is acceptable to invest out ahead of demand, creating capacity that is only gradually utilized.
5. For a growth-oriented polity, the state sector may be used aggressively to create growth (and revenue) opportunities outside the state sector.
6. Managers of publicly-owned corporations can be motivated by tying their compensation to their company's performance in maximizing asset value.

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