TRANSFORMING ASIAN SOCIALISM

China and Vietnam Compared

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Acknowledgements

This book was initially conceived in 1992 by the Transformation of Communist Systems Project at the Australian National University. At that time Anita Chan, Ben Kerkvliet, David Marr, Barrett McCormick and Jonathan Unger, all researchers of either Chinese or Vietnamese socialism, had been involved in comparative studies with scholars specializing in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The project was premised on the belief that studying the similarities and differences among countries in those regions could provide valuable insights into their momentous transformations.

One of the most evident similarities lay in the parallel reform programs that have been under way in Vietnam and China. We concluded that priority should be given to analysing, comparatively, how these programs are being implemented in each country and the economic, political and social consequences in each. Over the years, other scholars from around the world have joined us in this effort to examine the Chinese and Vietnamese reforms as a paired study. The East-West Center in Hawaii graciously hosted a workshop in mid-1994 that was attended by the contributors to this book. A year later in mid-1995, the Transformation of Communist Systems Project hosted a second workshop at the Australian National University. The chapters in this book grew out of these earlier workshops, evolving in the years since then in line with the shifting circumstances in both Vietnam and China. Several chapters were published in July 1998 in *The China Journal.*

As editors, we owe a debt of thanks to Bruce Koppel of the East-West Center, who kindly arranged for the first of the workshops to be held at his Center. Thanks go, too, to Heli Petryk of the ANU's Contemporary China Centre, without whose assistance the second workshop could not have been held, and to Mark Sidel and Tony Saich of the Ford Foundation, who provided financial support to enable several scholars from China and Vietnam to attend the second of the workshops.

Above all, our gratitude as editors again goes to Heli Petryk, who produced the book from typed manuscripts and disks. Heartfelt thanks are also owed to Gary Anson and Anne Gunn, who helped us to copy-edit the book; Beverley Fraser and Claire Smith of the ANU's Department of Political and Social Change, who provided much-needed assistance in preparing some of the chapters for publication; and Robin Ward of the ANU's Department of International Relations, who prepared the book's index and who, alongside John Ravenhill of the same department, helped arrange for its publication.

This is the third edited volume of scholarship that has been sponsored by the Transformation of Communist Systems Project. The first two were Robert Miller, editor, *The Development of Civil Society in Communist Systems* (1992) and Barrett McCormick and Jonathan Unger, editors, *China After Socialism: In the Footsteps of Eastern Europe or East Asia?* (1996).

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Contents

ONE

Comparing Vietnam and China: An Introduction

Ben Kerkvliet, Anita Chan and Jonathan Unger*

Close to a decade after the collapse of the Communist states in Eastern Europe and almost as many years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Communist Parties in China and Vietnam are not only surviving; they are firmly in the saddle and can look with some satisfaction to their recent records of economic performance. While their erstwhile European counterparts have succeeded in establishing new political institutions and systems of electoral politics and are eager to adopt a capitalist economic structure, almost all of them remain mired in economic difficulties: living standards are generally lower than in the 1980s, and the economies of several of them are in a shambles. Paradoxically, China and Vietnam, the two main Asian socialist countries — without undergoing similar political upheavals and without openly admitting that they welcome capitalism (as opposed to welcoming foreign direct investments) — have been enjoying a period of well-publicized economic boom which even the current Asian crisis has not, to date, seriously dented. China, in particular, with an industrial growth rate unrivalled in the world this past decade, has been touted as a successor to the so-called East Asian miracle economies. Vietnam's economy has similarly "taken off", with impressive growth rates since the late 1980s.

In certain significant respects, they can be regarded as a pair. Both countries, after all, have charted broadly parallel paths in their economies — disbanding agricultural collectives in favour of family farming; moving away from the command economy and toward a market economy in their publicly-owned industrial sectors; allowing private enterprises to emerge in almost all areas of the economy; turning vigorously toward the world market and toward export-oriented industrial drives; and successfully opening their doors to investment by foreign firms. Politically, both countries have shifted quietly

* We wish to thank Allison Ley for helping to find some of the publications we refer to in this chapter and David Marr, Mark Selden and Bill Turley for comments and suggestions for improvement.

away from Marxist ideology and rhetoric; have witnessed a progressive retreat in the ambit of what their Parties attempt to control; have shown tolerance for a limited degree of interest-group politics — and yet at the same time, both countries persist in a Leninist structure of party dominance.

It is time to ask, then, whether there exists an Asian socialist reform model. Beyond the broadest of generalities, to what extent and in what specific areas are China and Vietnam indeed following similar paths to modernization and similar reform agendas? Are they carrying out their economic reforms in the same sequence; is there a common logic to their programs? In the political sphere, where political reforms have been announced in tandem with economic reforms, to what extent are the two Party regimes reshaping the political systems and the bases of their political legitimacy in similar ways? And perhaps most importantly, within the broad similarities of what is occurring in China and Vietnam, what are the differences? This last question takes on a special importance in that it may point to new insights about each country's recent experience — insights that would not be evident if a scholar were to focus only on one country.

Any such comparisons between the reform programs in Vietnam and China also raise historical questions. To what extent are any similarities today a consequence of similar historical traditions and mind-sets and predispositions that stretch back into earlier centuries? To what extent do any present-day similarities reflect similar histories of Communist revolution in the two countries in earlier decades?

The contributors to this book variously delve into these diverse questions. In Chapter 2, Alexander Woodside examines the political and administrative legacy of rule by mandarins in both countries and its present-day implications. This mandarinate — today's intellectual managerial elite — has been instrumental in promoting the need for a catch-up mentality in today's global economy, and Woodside looks backward in time to the roots of this mind-set. The next three chapters comparatively examine the processes of reform transition away from the two countries' recent histories of Leninist socialism. Adam Fforde compares the chronologies in China and Vietnam of this shift from planned to market economies and shows how similarities and differences in the two countries' experiences of the socialist period have shaped somewhat different patterns of economic reform. William Turley and Brantly Womack examine this process of transition in two industrializing urban locations, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and Guangzhou (Canton), and they emphasize the effects of local and central government interactions throughout the decades of Party rule. Ben Kerkvliet and Mark Selden focus on the agrarian sector and reveal how the Chinese government's more extensive penetration of China's rural economy and society during the period of collectives is reflected today in greater government influence in the villages even after the return to family farming.

The final four chapters deal mainly with the political and social consequences of the reforms in specific spheres. Hy Van Luong and Jonathan

Unger, turning attention once again to the countryside, analyse the immediate causes and the ramifications of socio-economic differentiation among the peasantry in the wake of the rural reforms. Barrett McCormick considers the impact of the political reforms on political institutions and political legitimacy in both countries. David Marr and Stanley Rosen comparatively examine the new developments in the educational systems and in the attitudes of youth. And Anita Chan and Irene Nørlund explore the impact of the economic reforms on the operations of trade unions and industrial relations in the two countries.

The Limitations of the Extant Literature, and a New Departure

This volume embarks on a new type of comparative research. Although a relatively large corpus of previous writings has compared China and Vietnam, very few of these books and articles examine topics that are in any way directly relevant to the questions posed in this volume.

One earlier genre of comparative writing about the two countries has focused on the fact that China and Vietnam are neighbours with long interwoven histories. This is well demonstrated in the sizeable volume of English-language scholarly literature that pairs them. Books that compare Vietnam and China outnumber by a wide margin the books that compare Vietnam to any of its other Asian neighbours or that compare China to any other Southeast Asian country.[1] But the bulk of this comparative literature on China and Vietnam emphasizes their foreign relations and policies toward each other and their history of periodic conflicts and wars.[2] Some of the literature examines the ethnic Chinese population in Vietnam.[3] Surprisingly few studies have compared the two nations' political, social or economic

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1 Some evidence for this is that a computerized subject search for holdings in the Australian National University's library catalogue turned up 95 titles with both "China" and "Vietnam", but only 36 with both "China" and "Thailand" (the next highest number), 35 for "China" and "Indonesia", 26 for "China" and the "Philippines", and so on downward in number. For "Vietnam" and other Southeast Asian countries, the highest number was 78 with "Cambodia", then down sharply to 31 with "Laos" and 21 with "Thailand". Counts with other Asian countries were seven each with "Korea" and the "Philippines", five with "Japan", four with "Malaysia", and so on down the line.

2 They range from relations in the distant past, most notably Keith Taylor's *The Birth of Vietnam: Sino-Vietnamese Relations to the Tenth Century and the Origins of Vietnamese Nationhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) to more contemporary interactions, such as William J. Duiker, *China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986). Visitors to Vietnam's Museum of History in Hanoi can get a quick sense of the long periods of conflict, particularly in the middle centuries of the second millennium. The museum features memorabilia, maps, and scale models of wars between the two countries.

3 For example, Chang Pao-min, *Beijing, Hanoi, and the Overseas Chinese* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1982).

processes despite their resemblance. These few can be clustered according to three time periods.

The first period concerns the two countries' pre-modern social and political institutions. An influential example is Alexander Woodside's book on the civil administrations and imperial courts of Vietnam and China in the nineteenth century. He found many similarities, due in large measure to Vietnam's system having been heavily influenced by China's, though he also found striking differences.[4] In the chapter that he has written for this book he develops his thesis further, pondering on how the shared legacy of this pre-modern political tradition is manifested in the present period of reform transition.

The second cluster of existing comparative studies deals with aspects of political upheaval in both countries during the 1920s and 1930s and the revolutionary struggles of the 1940s and 1950s. The perspective taken by most of the scholars who compare these parallel experiences focuses on Vietnam and looks at China for similarities and differences.[5] A few studies, though, give roughly equal weight to both.[6] Edward Moise's book on the land reforms of Vietnam and China is probably the most often cited study in this category.[7] A perspective that has been adopted by some other writers places the two revolutionary movements and Communist regimes in the context of the international revolutionary movement of the twentieth century.[8]

A third cluster of studies examines the broadly similar current overhaul of the economies of the two countries as they relinquish their state-run planned economies and embrace competitive markets. But most of the studies in this cluster focus only on economic issues with an eye to providing guidance to potential investors.[9] The few that have looked at other aspects of the reforms

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4 *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ching Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

5 See, for example, the chapters in William S. Turley (ed.), *Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).

6 Good examples include Brantly Womack, "The Party and the People: Revolutionary and Postrevolutionary Politics in China and Vietnam", *World Politics*, vol.39 (July 1987): pp.479-507; and David Elliott, "Revolutionary Re-integration: A Comparison of the Foundation of Post-Liberation Political Systems in North Vietnam and China", PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1976.

7 Edwin Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

8 Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971); John Lewis (ed.), *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974).

9 Examples include "Emerging Markets: A Legal Guide to Emerging Markets", *International Financial Law Review* (July 1994), 52 page supplement; David L. James, "Can A Socialist Republic Find Happiness Trading in a Capitalist World?", *Business Economics*, vol.30 (April 1995), pp.41-4; Rosario J. Girasa, "Comparative Aspects of

are apt to make sweeping comparisons between the two, and between them and the former socialist states.[10] Very few concentrate on systematically comparing China and Vietnam.

In the face of this dearth of comparative studies, and in light of the significance of the parallel changes sweeping both countries, we considered it important to initiate a comparative set of studies that would move well beyond what has previously been attempted. Yet an obstacle stood in the way: very few scholars around the world who specialize in one of the two countries are equipped linguistically and otherwise to undertake research on the other country. Through discussion, an idea emerged among us that to overcome this deficiency, pairs composed of a China specialist and a Vietnam specialist should collaborate on some of the topics.

Thanks to modern technology, e-mail enabled the paired members to keep in close touch, exchanging ideas, information and readings as they prepared for a workshop in August 1994 sponsored by the East-West Center in Honolulu. Three days of brain-storming sessions there enabled the members of each team, and the contributors of the individually authored chapters, to delineate a framework for their topic. At that workshop it was decided, too, that to understand the present reforms a chapter would need to be added on the historical context, and to this end Alexander Woodside was invited to join the book project as an historian who conducts sophisticated research on both China and Vietnam.

Draft chapters were presented and discussed at a second workshop held at the Australian National University in August 1995. Afterward, the authors redrafted their chapters several times up through mid-1998 in order to help shape a cohesive book that takes account of the fast-moving shifts in the two countries' reform programs.

Commonalities in China and Vietnam's Prior Experience

Vietnam and China both commenced their paths to economic reform from a broadly similar point of departure, in the obvious sense that they had previously adopted from the Soviet Union a common Marxist-Leninist ideology and a Leninist political framework. They were, of course, akin to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe in both this respect and (with the partial exception of Yugoslavia) in the fact that they maintained command economies. So too, in the image of the Soviet Union of the 1930s, both countries had sought to embark on programs of forced industrialization. And again like the countries of Eastern Europe, the two Asian socialist countries had shared in a rhetoric of both nation-building and "class struggle".

Chinese and Vietnamese Trade Law", Working paper no.143, Center for Applied Research, Pace University, 1995.

10 E.g., Paul Collins (ed.), "Reforming Public Sector Management in Centrally-Planned and Transitional Economies", *Public Administration and Development*, vol.13 (October 1993), pp.323-451.

But at the same time, China and Vietnam stood apart from the European socialist experience. Both countries, as Woodside discusses in these pages, shared long historical traditions of Confucianism, of rulership and bureaucracy that were unlike the historical traditions of the European socialist states. Both countries also shared a somewhat parallel experience of revolution this century that differed from the experience of any part of Europe. And after consolidating power, both of their new Communist governments had adopted organizational patterns in the countryside that differed considerably from what held for Eastern Europe. In all of these important ways, Vietnam and China did hold to a distinctively "Asian socialist experience".

The persisting traditional intellectual and political legacies of both countries were, of course, also overlaid by the Marxist ideology that arrived in Vietnam and China in the second decade of this century. The young intellectuals who were attracted to Marxism had been disturbed by the dominance of Western power, the humiliating "backwardness" that had befallen their own lands, and the poverty of most of their compatriots. The new Marxist-Leninist credo taught them that through revolution and the establishment of socialism, they would be able to leap-frog the capitalist Western imperial states into a more advanced stage of history. This vision of renewed national pride through Communist revolution became a beacon that was not extinguished in many loyalists' minds until the 1970s or 1980s.

Such an ideology could readily be turned to purposes of nation-building, and the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam came to embody a nationalist thrust. They swept to power through long wars of liberation that enabled them to establish effective governments-in-waiting long before they occupied the capital city and could claim nationwide power. In all these respects, their histories were unlike the raft of East and Central European countries that were occupied by the Red Army at the close of World War II. The two Asian Communist Parties came to symbolize national identity and thus enjoyed a status and source of legitimacy that in Europe was comparatively weak. In a country like Poland, it was the Church, not the Party, that became identified with patriotic pride. Even in the Soviet Union, which was more successful in building a nationalist identity for the Party through its leadership in the resistance to German invasion in World War II, the non-Russian nationalities within the USSR continued to hold to their own separate loyalties and historical symbols, and in the longer run these have proven stronger than the bonds that Party rule tried to cement. And among the Russian population, a great many people continued to harbour loyalty to a separate Russian identity that came readily to the fore when the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991. None of this applied to China and Vietnam, countries which, numerically, are overwhelmingly dominated by a single ethnic group and whose Communist Parties could readily wrap themselves in the national flag. This has provided these two Asian Parties with greater staying power: they not only face far weaker potential challenges to Party rule than in a Poland or an ethnically-divided Soviet Union, but also hold a far stronger

confidence in their right and capacity to rule than was the case in much of Eastern Europe.

The wars of liberation in China and Vietnam were, notably, rural-based revolutions, again quite unlike Russia, the fount of Communist revolutions, whose Bolshevik Revolution resembled more an urban coup than a protracted revolutionary struggle. The new Bolshevik government nurtured a suspicion of the rural areas and of the farming population, and imposed collectivization almost as a war against the countryside. The regimes that were implanted elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe after World War II generally followed their mentor's perception. This suspicion of the peasant was entirely lacking in China and Vietnam, where, if anything, the villages were perceived as bastions of support for the revolution. The leadership in both countries believed that they could introduce a far larger degree of administrative decentralization in their countrysides, entrusting local rural Party cadres to loyally pursue the national Party line.

Furthermore, the socialist era arrived in China and Vietnam at a different point of economic development than in most of the Warsaw bloc. Even decades later, at the point of the introduction of reforms in the early 1980s, most of the population in both Asian countries lived in villages and farmed mainly by hand. This contrasted with a country like Russia, where by the 1980s only a relatively small proportion of the work-force remained in the countryside and where the agricultural economy was mechanized and bound almost as tightly into the central "command economy" as industry was. In sharp contrast, Chinese state employees never reached 20 per cent of China's total work-force, whereas in the USSR over 95 per cent of the work-force were essentially employed in the state sector.[11] Almost all were covered by the net of state public services: not so in China and Vietnam, where only the minority who lived in urban areas were covered and where local villages and rural families themselves were responsible for their own welfare. All of these factors affected the prospects for a return to family farming. With a history of local rural economic initiative and of self-reliance in welfare services, and in circumstances where small labour-intensive family farms could be viable, the countrysides of the two Asian socialist states held similar distinct advantages over the former Soviet Union and most of the other East European states.

On the other side of the ledger, both China and Vietnam possessed less fully-developed labour markets in urban areas than was common in Eastern Europe. Whereas employees in the European socialist nations were accustomed to switching jobs in quest of better opportunities (in the USSR during the 1970s and early 1980s, *every year* one industrial worker in five transferred employers),[12] both Asian countries alike have tended to retain

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11 Fan Gang, "Facing the Next Stages of Incremental Reform: Successes and Problems in the Case of China", *Structural Change in Contemporary China* (monograph series), no.5 (Yokohama: Yokohama University International Cultures Department, 1997), p.36.

12 Rudra Sil, "The Russian 'Village in the City' and the Stalinist System of Enterprise

urban workers at a single enterprise up through retirement. With exit from a job difficult, the Asian socialist workers became quite dependent upon the good graces of their work-place superiors. Again unlike Eastern Europe, this has provided the two governments with significant indirect control over much of the urban populace during the period of transition. Yet at the same time, this legacy of a permanent employer-employee bond built inflexibilities into the state-owned industrial sector and into the urban labour market as a whole. Within the past few years, the two Asian countries have belatedly begun to jettison this system of job security. The resulting layoffs and cutbacks, however, are painfully wrenching to blue-collar families, and social and political discontent at what they see as an unfair betrayal of their interests could spell trouble for the two governments in the years ahead.

A final respect in which China and Vietnam have differed from some of the Central and East European states is that the two Asian nations do not have any historical legacy of political democracy. In this they stand in contrast to a country such as the Czech Republic, but closer to Russia with its Czarist past. Building upon indigenous traditions of autocracy, the first decades of the Chinese and Vietnamese Parties' dictatorial rule were premised on the need for a strong state to carry out modernization via revolution. The Parties have sought to cast off much of the ideological side of this premise during the most recent decade and a half; but in doing so they have been able to fall back upon the residual notion that they are "developmental" states that continue to require the strong hand of single-party rule in order to push their nations forward into prosperity. The Communist governments in Eastern Europe in the 1980s held far less hope of reshaping their rule in this fashion, since they had to contend with the pull of the prosperous Western European example of democracy.

In all of these respects, both Asian countries were broadly similar on the eve of their reform eras, and at variance with much of the East European experience. The implications for the ongoing period of reforms will be observed in the chapters that follow.

Differences within the Similarities: Comparing the Reforms

Notwithstanding the commonalities in the recent histories and circumstances of the two nations and in the broad outlines of the reform programs that they have now embarked upon, comparative studies will almost inevitably fasten largely upon the differences that are found. This lies in the very nature of comparison, and there are strong benefits to be gained from such an approach. Delineating the differences enables us to comprehend in a more nuanced way, and from new perspectives, what has been under way in each of the countries, and why.

Management: The Origins of Worker Alienation in Soviet State Socialism", in Xiaobo Lu and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds), *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), p.131.

One underlying political difference between these two Leninist states was that Vietnam's Communist Party regime was generally less ideologically strident and its system of rule less divisive than its Chinese counterpart.[13] Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese leaders did not denounce and persecute intellectuals in the same relentless way as Mao Zedong. There was more room in Vietnam to consider and highlight the positive aspects of Confucianism for the country. Land reform was not as violent, and class warfare against former landlords did not drag on for as long in Vietnam as in China. Neither were rival Party leaders in Vietnam purged and jailed after the revolution, as occurred in China's Cultural Revolution. The greater collegiality of the national leadership in Vietnam facilitated a less antagonistic transition to reform-oriented leaders in the 1980s than in China, where this transition was possible only after Mao's death in 1976 and the arrests of the 'ultra-leftist' faction, the Gang of Four and their supporters. This difference between the two countries' political regimes helps to explain why, when economic and political reforms began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Ho Chi Minh as a symbol still remained positive in Vietnam whereas Mao Zedong's image became tarnished, especially among intellectuals. Even officially, Mao was judged to have been responsible for the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward and the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Vietnam had been spared such extreme campaigns and turmoil.

Whereas in terms of political stability Vietnam was in better shape at the start of the reform process, economically China was better off. China's rate of domestic savings and its economic development were far higher. Chinese agricultural output was able to provide an expanding population with a subsistence livelihood while a significant proportion of rural production was being mobilized by the state for industrialization. Living conditions for a majority of Vietnamese villagers, by contrast, had fallen to low subsistence food levels; and the state had long been unable to accumulate savings to invest much in industrialization. Fforde argues in Chapter 3 that China's better economic situation of the late 1970s and early 1980s helps to explain why its economic reforms started in the rural sector and only later in the state-owned enterprises, which it could afford to continue to subsidize. Vietnam had to begin the economic reforms by tackling first the state-owned enterprises, which it could no longer subsidize. It would be fair to say that China authorized experiments with market reforms in order to reinvigorate a stagnating economy, whereas Vietnam began reforms in an effort to pull the country back from the brink of a looming disaster.[14]

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13 Others have made this observation. See Georges Boudarel, "Influences and Idiosyncrasies in the Line and Practice of the Vietnam Communist Party", in William S. Turley (ed.), *Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), pp.158-66; and Brantly Womack, "Reform in Vietnam: Backwards Towards the Future", *Government and Opposition*, no.27 (Spring 1992), p.185.

14 Also see Womack, "Reform in Vietnam", pp.185-6.