II. Differences within Asian Communism

While the idea of Asian communism in general only makes sense in contrast to European communism in general, the individual Asian communist countries can be arrayed in a typology that permits comparison to other communist countries in the same type. Of course, the regional differences just discussed and the specific circumstances of each country lessen the salience of typological similarities. The typology used here is based on the nature of the communist revolution in each country, with the assumption that the manner of founding of each regime is the largest single determinant of its political capabilities. The typologically weakest regimes would be those imposed by a neighbor who represents a national threat, while the strongest regimes would be those established on the basis of protracted rural revolution involving the mobilization of a large part of the population and the building of a broad-based party. For instance, one Asian communist regime, that of Cambodia, was imposed by a neighboring communist regime and therefore is comparable to Poland Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Although the defeat of the Khmer Rouge by the Vietnamese was welcome, the continuing presence of Vietnamese influence was an affront to the national identity of Cambodia. The revolutions of a larger group of countries, North Korea, Mongolia, and Laos, were directly and decisively assisted by external forces, but for a variety of reasons retained a significant measure of national autonomy. The most similar European cases would be Bulgaria and Romania. The category of rural revolutionary regimes is unique to Asia, but it is important to a general theory of communist party-states.
Externally imposed regimes: Cambodia

On 25 December 1978 Vietnam invaded Cambodia, drove the Khmer Rouge to the Thai border, and installed the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which changed its name to the State of Cambodia in 1989. Cambodia was isolated by regional and world forces because of the Vietnamese occupation, and assistance was provided to resistance groups including the Khmer Rouge. In 1985 Vietnam promised to withdraw its troops by 1990, and in 1989 it actually did so, thereby stimulating movement toward an international settlement. In October 1991 Cambodia agreed to a coalition-based transitional government, the Supreme National Council, and to UN-supervised elections in 1992. At the same time the Cambodian People’s Party (formerly the Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party) held a plenum removing from power its long-time chief, Heng Samrin, endorsing multi-party elections, and dropping party symbols such as the color red. Cambodia thereby became the second Asian communist country, after Mongolia, to adopt democratic reforms that put at risk party control over the government.

The above thumbnail sketch highlights similarities between Cambodia and Eastern Europe. There is far more ethnic animosity toward the Vietnamese among Cambodians than toward any other group, and it is based on cultural differences as well as on a pattern of Vietnamese (and Thai) encroachment extending over centuries. The PRK regime in Phnom Penh depended for its legitimacy on the continuing threat from the Khmer Rouge across the border and its own very mild policies, but depended for its strength on Vietnamese military and civilian personnel and on Soviet financial aid. As Vietnam reevaluated the threat from Cambodia and tried to develop its international economic relations, it changed the
international context upon which the Phnom Penh regime depended. The regime is now in the process of redefining itself. It has already moved away from characteristic features of a party-state, which in any case were never very strong, and can be expected to distance itself from Vietnam in the coming months in order to reduce its major vulnerability before the election.

The differences between Cambodia and externally imposed regimes in Europe are also important, and they may be significant enough to secure the leading role of the current Phnom Penh government, or people from it, in an elected regime. First, not only were the Khmer Rouge more vicious than Hitler, but without Vietnamese intervention they would have continued in power. Moreover, they remain an active threat to Cambodia's peaceful future, and the friends and relatives of their victims have remained in place. Therefore the merely historical legitimacy of anti-fascism in Eastern Europe has a much stronger and more vital analog in Cambodia. Secondly, since the Khmer Rouge was a communist and a leftist party, the PRK was slow in building a party apparatus and its policies tended to be quite mild and oriented toward recovery—the opposite of Zhdanovian Stalinism in Eastern Europe. Indeed, in contrast to Laos Cambodia was never claimed as a member of the socialist world by the Soviet Union; instead, it was described as a case of socialist fraternal assistance. Thirdly, because the regime is an ad hoc pastiche of survivors rather than a disciplined revolutionary party, it is quite capable of flexibility and fragmentation. Fourthly, instead of facing heroic internal dissidents, the other contenders for power in post-communist Cambodia are a strange assortment of three former resistance groups, two of which had worse records of rule when they were in power. Prince Sihanouk is the single most important figure, but it is not clear
whether he will throw his prestige against the current regime or behind parts of it. Fifthly, the socio-economy of Cambodia is in a very primitive and deprived condition, and the politics of international aid can be expected to be a pervasive distraction from local hostilities.

In general, there is less reason in Cambodia for "throwing the rascals out" or even for changing their policies. Everyone expects Cambodian politics to be transformed, but as a result of the international agreement and the end of international isolation rather than the internal collapse or bankruptcy of the Phnom Penh government. On the other hand, given the election results in Nicaragua and in Eastern Europe, it would not be wise to underestimate the possibility of a vote against the regime. The obvious issue will be the links to Vietnam, perhaps focussing on the Vietnamese immigrants in Cambodia who number from 700,000 to 1.5 million. Perhaps the current government will adopt harsh measures in order to prove its distance from its former patron. In any case, the disappearance of characteristics of a Marxist-Leninist party-state can be expected in the near term, and these were already faint.

Regimes externally dependent but with national roots:

Laos, Mongolia, North Korea.

The basic difference between the Phnom Penh government and the ones to be discussed is not one of harshness or incompetence, or even of massive foreign involvement in the revolution, but rather of credibility as a national leadership. Laos, Mongolia and North Korea each have a stronger claim in this regard, although in no case is it an
unproblematic one. I would argue that these regimes are more similar to Bulgaria and Romania. In the case of Bulgaria traditional Russian protection of Bulgarian interests against its Balkan neighbors created an attitude toward the Russian presence different from that of Poland. Mongolia is similar to Bulgaria in this respect. In the case of Romania, Ceausescu was able to assert Romanian autonomy against Soviet influence and thereby gain national credibility, though of course he squandered this credibility in domestic Stalinism and corruption. Kim Il Sung’s assertion of North Korean autonomy is somewhat similar, but it is complicated by the division of Korea.

Laos The Pathet Lao (Land of the Lao) was founded in Vietnam in 1950 and its leadership was drawn from the Indochinese Communist Party. But all other forces involved in Laotian politics were at least as compromised by external dependence, including the resistance groups of ethnic minorities. Although Vietnam’s war and Vietnamese support provided an essential environment for success, the Pathet Lao fought their own revolution and established their own government in 1975. In contrast to the Khmer Rouge, however, they remained deferential to Vietnam and continued to receive aid and advice. Laotian domestic policies paralleled those of Vietnam, and its foreign policy was premised on an Indochina alliance. Forty thousand Vietnamese troops were stationed in Laos for most of the 1980s.

Within these parameters the Vientiane government made its own way. Laos is a sparsely populated, mountainous country of great ethnic diversity (68 different ethnic groups and only 49% ethnic Lao) and so ethnic politics was torn between the desire for state consolidation and the recognition of the limits of state capacity. The party-state in Laos
never achieved the level of organization and control of its mentor, nor was it able to reshape Lao society and economy. Agricultural collectivization in particular was a dismal failure when it was attempted in 1978, and the attempt was abandoned in 1979. \textsuperscript{29} The regime’s subsequent reforms amounted to concessions to reality; it had not been able to implement the policies it abandoned. Adjustment to reality is also evident in its foreign policy. Thailand is becoming the major foreign economic presence. Laos was never as harsh against China as was Vietnam, despite Chinese-organized insurgency, and normalization of relations between China and Laos has proceeded earlier and more rapidly. At its recent party congress the Lao People’s Party did not abandon the party-state structure, but it is also encouraging international openness, foreign investment and rapid economic development. Undoubtedly Laos, like Cambodia, will be transformed in the 1990s by the end of isolation and by economic transformation. However, its central institutions and ideology are more likely to continue to play a role, and a friendly relationship with Vietnam is more likely to continue.

The Laotian regime does not have the tremendous investment in a socialist society that China and Vietnam do, but it also does not have the clay feet of the Cambodian regime.

**Mongolia**

Mongolia became autonomous from China with the collapse of the Chinese Empire in 1911. \textsuperscript{30} However, its autonomy was threatened both by China and by White Russian forces from 1919. In 1921 Mongolian and Bolshevik forces defeated these two threats and on 11 July a "people’s government" was proclaimed. After some initial ambiguities Soviet influence prevailed in the establishment of the Mongolian People’s Republic in 1924 (the first "people’s republic") and the ruling Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP). Although Lenin had been concerned about the absence of a
proletarian base for the party, and the official task of the People's Republic was to bypass capitalism, by and large the policies and politics of Mongolia have followed the lead of the Soviet Union, complete with an even longer-lived "Stalin" (Choybalsan, 1924-1952; criticized in 1956 and 1962) and "Brezhnev" (Tsendenbal, 1952-1984). Owen Lattimore in 1936 coined the term "Soviet satellite" to describe Mongolia.31

Mongolia's dependence on the Soviet Union isolated it from other countries. In its first 28 years, the only country with which Mongolia signed a treaty of friendship was the People's Republic of Tannu Tuva, absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1944. China still claimed Mongolia as an autonomous region, and in 1945 a plebiscite was held in Mongolia on the question of independence or autonomy under China. The vote for independence was 100%. Mongolia was admitted into the UN in 1961. Relations with the People's Republic of China began well and deteriorated more slowly than Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s, but were openly hostile from the early 70s to the early 1980s, becoming more open as Sino-Soviet relations warmed.

Almost seventy years of Stalinist modernizing policies transformed Mongolia from a feudalistic pastoral society of rigid stratifications to a more modern economy based on state-owned agriculture but with some processing and mining.32 Mongolia made rapid progress in major farm products while traditional pastoral products stagnated. Indexing production at 100 in 1970, production of wheat in 1983 was 225, potatoes 430, vegetables 253, while milk was 127, and wool 107.33 The most serious problem of the Mongolian economy is an extreme dependence on the Soviet Union as a source of capital and as a market. The Soviet Union has been supplying aid at the rate of US$360 per capita of a total per capita income of
$500 to $900, and Mongolia's debt to the Soviet Union is now more than $15 billion, nine times the annual GNP.  

Beginning in December 1989, Mongolian party leadership responded to popular demonstrations in Ulaanbaatar inspired by events in Eastern Europe. The party began with dialogues with the leading group of the demonstrations, and in March 1990 the current party leadership announced its retirement and scheduled elections for the Great People's Hural (the parliament) in July and August. After two months of disputes, further demonstrations, and compromises, the MPRP and the various new political groupings settled down to campaigning. The primary election featured 92.4% participation, and the MPRP won seven-eighths of the candidate slots. In the final election the MPRP won 60% of the vote and 86% of the seats, though the General Secretary of the MPRP won his seat by only 200 votes. The former chairman of the Hural became president, promised to work with the opposition, and did not mention communism, Marx or Lenin in his inaugural speech. In 1991 relations between the Hural and the MPRP deteriorated as the economy plummeted, but it remains the largest organized force in Mongolian politics. 

Thus far the MPRP has managed to do what the Hungarian Worker's Party dreamed of in 1989: it has managed a democratic transition in which the party has established an electoral basis for its rule. Moreover, within the context of the drastic economic problems of the disintegrating Soviet Union Mongolia has been relatively successful in developing new ties with China and the West. The price that the MPRP has paid is that it has had to discard ideology and policy which were hallmarks in the past, and, more importantly (as Bulgaria demonstrates), it remains vulnerable to the opposition groups that initiated the process of
reform, as well as to the general situation of societal disruption caused by the collapse of economic relations with Russia.

North Korea  Of the three countries included in this category, North Korea appears to be the most likely to face changes that would displace the current political center. Kim Il Sung, who has ruled the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since its founding in 1948, is not getting any younger, and his son and chosen successor, Kim Jong Il, is not getting any more popular. The North Korean economy was heavily dependent in every respect on the Soviet Union, and Russia is now unwilling to continue shouldering the burden. Even if China, Japan, international agencies, or South Korea take up the burden, their demands and pressures on North Korean politics will require major changes. Finally, reunification with the South might, as in East Germany, sideline the entire party and government establishment of the North. Nevertheless, North Korea has been more stable than observers predicted in late 1989, and it is engaged in a flurry of activity to adapt and survive in drastically altered circumstances.

The founding and initial defense of North Korea was overwhelmingly dependent on the Soviet Union and China, just as the South was overwhelmingly dependent on the United States. Communist organizations among ethnic Koreans date back to January 1918, and the communist party in the South was an important and popularly-based antithesis to the American-supported government in the 1945-48 period. However, the current regime was not built on these local foundations. Kim eliminated all communist factions in potential competition with his own, beginning with those with domestic roots in North and South, and proceeding by 1956 to groups with Chinese and Soviet connections. Kim consolidated his
regime internally on the basis of absolute deference to himself, his ideology, and the party, and externally by a Soviet-leaning balance of support from his two large communist neighbors.

The economic transformation of the country has been profound, with growth exceeding that of South Korea in the 1950s and early 60s, but based on a hyper-Stalinism combining a high rate of domestic saving with dependence on foreign supplies and aid. Light industry and commerce were sacrificed to heavy industrialization. Although the GNP per capita has been least twice that of China, the economy is built on the availability of petroleum and food at concessionary prices. North Korea has run a chronic trade deficit in the past two decades, and currently owes the former Soviet Union US$3,133 million and China $903 million.\(^{38}\) In 1990 its trade deficit with the Soviet Union was $400 million, and with China $200 million, approximately 13% of total trade volume. An even more acute crisis has been created by the changing of Soviet-North Korean trade (52% of total trade) from a barter basis to hard currency as of January 1991. In the first six months of 1991 Korean-Soviet trade dropped to 1.2% of the same period in 1990.\(^ {39}\) China, its second largest trading partner, will switch to hard currency in January 1992. As a result, North Korea faces an even worse crisis of aid and trade than Mongolia and Vietnam.

Because of North Korean political and ideological rigidity and the Soviet economic crisis there is no prospect for the resumption of Soviet patronage or former levels of trade by Russia or by the Confederation of Independent States. Lately Pyongyang has used threats rather than compliance in dealing with Moscow, and it has little to threaten with. Indeed, if
North Korea does not better manage its declining relations with the Russia they could turn antagonistic.

Although China is ostentatiously maintaining its support for the regime, it is not interested in assuming the Soviet aid burden. Rather, China would like to serve as a model of a combination of economic reform, international openness, and political conservatism. This model is quite attractive to Pyongyang, and they are now engaged in multilateral discussions of joint investment and special economic zones in the Tumen river delta on the northeastern border. Progress has been made in North Korean-Japanese relations. North Korea hopes for aid and trade from this relationship, and also access to the considerable resources of the Chongryun, a pro-Pyongyang organization of 100,000 Koreans in Japan with credit union assets exceeding the North Korean GNP. Moreover, some consider Japan more interested in a reformist stabilization in North Korea than in rapid Korean reunification. So one pleasantly foreseeable future, from North Korea's perspective would be to regain the autonomy of a two-legged foreign policy by having Japan replace the Soviet Union while retaining support from China. Even this future would require major political and policy changes, but reunification, the other major option, might mean dissolution.

Although Korean reunification has been the demand of North Korea since the foundation of the regime, it is clear now that rapid reunification would probably be an Anschluss similar to that of Germany. Even a negotiated power sharing might not be able to preserve northern autonomy against the pressures unleashed by reunification. In traditional times the North did not play a major role in imperial government, and if South Korea assumed the enormous burden of rebuilding the North along its own lines it would certainly
first take over politically. The current North Korean party, military and governmental establishments could expect to be at risk in a reunified future. This, and the graphic example of German reunification, must give Pyongyang pause in pursuit of its ostensibly most cherished objective. On the other hand, inter-Korean trade could quickly become an important part of the northern economy without necessitating reunification in the immediate future. Moreover, the German reunification is a cautionary tale for South Korea as well, because it does not have the resources of West Germany and it must compete with Japan. So an extended period of political approximation might be preferred by all, beginning with security assurances and the removal of barriers to contact. But given the ethnic homogeneity, the economic success of South Korea, and recognition of South Korea by the Soviet Union and China, reunification may become unavoidable.

The politics of Kim II Sung and especially of his son have been those of rigidity, and the recent transformation of regional politics has undercut the external presumptions of that rigidity. It is hard to imagine under these circumstances that Kim Jung Il could succeed his father without precipitating a Ceausescu-style revolution, and possibly only the elder Kim's old age and ill health preserve him from this fate. On could hypothesize that, to the extent that Kim Jung Il manifests political strength in the succession struggle, the entire regime structure would be undermined. On the other hand, it is quite possible that an establishment coup against the Kims would be successful, and it would criticize their previous rigidity and pursue economic reform. However, such a post-Kim regime would also face dilemmas. Just like Hans Modrow in East Germany, if its reform included reunification it might be signing its own death warrant. Moreover, it would have to be careful not to alienate China in its
abjuration of the past. And the main problem with laying a careful path is that the opposition to Kim is not unified, and unless one leader emerges quickly a spectrum of programs might emerge whose struggle or attempts at securing foreign patronage could topple the existing center. The hard and brittle politics of North Korea is already remarkable for its longevity, but that is no security against the future.

**Rural revolutionary regimes: China, Vietnam**

In the history of revolutions, none have persisted over such protracted periods nor actively involved as large a part of the population as those of China and Vietnam. Success in such revolutions implies talented leadership, large organization reaching to the village level, popular support and legitimacy and a unique mobilizational capacity. Such resources depreciate over time, but they create a polity that structures and leads its members in every aspect of social organization down to the village and urban work unit. It is mistaken to say that the party dominates the state and society; it has created them, and it views the public societal structures as its creatures. There is also no question of the national legitimacy of a regime that has come to power in a rural country primarily through the mobilization of the peasants. In short, despite the similarities in ideology and structure to imposed regimes like Cambodia or Poland, rural revolutionary regimes are at the far end of a broad spectrum in terms of actual strength and capacity.

When the People’s Republic of China was founded on 1 October 1949 the Chinese Communist Party had 4.5 million members, roughly the same number as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at that time. The party had already been in charge of the
government of base areas for 22 years, and these had passed the hundred million mark in population four years earlier. The party had been through two crises which had brought it face to face with extinction and had sternly winnowed its members and leadership. The movement drew its strength from village-level support, and so its members and its structure were dispersed to every nook and cranny, organizing land reform, women’s associations, army recruitment and village government. Victory was no accident. Had Mao Zedong died in 1947, it is a safe bet that Zhu De would have been standing on the rostrum at Tiananmen by 1949. The Chinese communists won primarily by creating a new order at the village level rather than by exploiting the military or political weaknesses of their adversary.

However, their closeness to the masses was necessitated by their dependence on popular mobilization against a government which was clearly superior in every other resource. Thus the mass-regarding behavior of the party depended on a competitive context that disappeared with the monopoly of state power established by victory.42

The mobilizational power of the regime showed itself in massive societal accomplishments since 1949. The previous social order was turned upside down, with poor peasants on the top and former landlords on the bottom, cooperatization, and a centralized economy were implemented, and progress was made in every sector of the economy. As Figure 2 illustrates, progress in the key area of food was substantial but not without problems. Production doubled in the first twenty years and is now approaching redoubling. However, rapid population increase until the early 1970s restrained per capita increases, and per capita production in 1977 was no greater than in 1957. The failure of the 1958 Great
Figure 2: Chinese Grain Production 1949-1990

*Grain production + Grain per capita*

Calculated from Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian 1990.
Leap Forward caused a famine costing the lives of tens of millions, and production continued to be restrained until the 1980s by restrictions on material incentives and entrepreneurial activities. With those restrictions removed and with a tight population policy, absolute and per capita production leapt forward in the early 80s, but apparently reached a plateau in 1985.\(^4\) Given China’s already high yield per hectare (China supports 22% of the world’s population on 7% of the world’s arable land) it will be difficult to continue to increase production and yet necessary to avoid the expense of large-scale grain imports.\(^4\) Overall, China’s economic growth has been impressive since 1949 but took off in the early 1980s, readjusted at the end of the decade, and now seems set for a more moderate rate of progress in the 1990s. Deng Xiaoping’s 1980 goal of quadrupling the per capita GNP by the year 2000 seems reasonable at midpoint, though the target of $1000 is hardly opulence.

More striking than China’s economic development has been its tortured and crooked path in politics since 1949. The Great Leap Forward of 1958 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69 were events fortunately unmatched in the rest of the communist world, and these failures led to the general retreat from the hyper-politics of "all-round dictatorship" in the post-Mao era. The party leadership and the masses were unified in their rejection of leftism because both had suffered during the Cultural Revolution, and the turn toward economic reform came about with remarkable smoothness and success. However, the latent contradiction between the patronage of reform by an unreformed party center and the creation of new societal forces and weakening of old inhibitions produced an undertone of conflict in the Deng era from the Democracy Wall of 1978 to its crescendo at Tiananmen. The sense of crisis and uncertainty that has pervaded Chinese politics since 1989 stems from
the feeling that China is on the very edge of the old order, and that good prospects for institutional transition into a democratic and yet party-centered future had been cast away because of an elderly longing for peace, quiet, and respect. On the other hand, the economy has recovered from 1989, as have international relations, and the regime remains committed to further reform and openness.

The sense of political uncertainty in China is practically the opposite of that in the former Soviet Union. As Doak Barnett suggests in a recent analysis, the problems that tore apart the Soviet empire are far less urgent in China. Territorial disintegration is not a major problem, though tensions are high in Xinjiang and Tibet and the unevenness of development between coastal and inland provinces creates regional cleavages. The economy faces serious problems such as avoiding inflation and cutting subsidies to state industries, but it does so in an atmosphere of momentum and growth. On the other hand, while the political problems of the Confederation of Independent States are already those of a post-communist era, China faces a leadership succession in which the kind of political authority held by the old leadership will pass away with them and the institutional bridge to the future is weak and uncertain. The fate of the Chinese Communist Party’s political leadership is at the core of the political uncertainty, but in whatever form—unified or factioned, as a central presence or a vacuum—it will not simply wither away in the society which it created.

Vietnam The revolution in Vietnam was more complex than the Chinese revolution, but it was also a rural revolution at its core. As Jeffrey Race’s classic study of a province in South Vietnam demonstrates, the basic strength of the revolutionary forces in the 1960s was their mobilization of the villagers, and in this they built on the tradition of Viet Minh against
French colonialism. But victory occurred at different times in North and South, foreign involvement increased the destructiveness of the wars, and external assistance was important for North Vietnam’s conduct of the American war. From the 1968 Tet Offensive until the fall of Saigon in 1975 the North Vietnamese army played an increasingly important role in the South, though on the basis of local level support. The impressive accomplishment of defeating the French, the Americans and the Saigon government could have been accomplished only with broad mobilization of popular support.

Vietnam’s most severe policy mistakes were made in the first years of reunification. At the Fourth Party Congress in 1976, guidelines were adopted to tighten the rather lax socialist structure of the North and to require the South to catch up with the North. The effects of these harsh leftist measures were compounded by the destruction and disorientation of the South, the cessation of aid from the United States in the South and reduction and cessation (in 1978) of aid from China, and the destruction of the Chinese business class in Ho Chi Minh City in 1978. As a result, the economy continued to decline until 1980 instead of recovering from the war. As Figure 3 illustrates, rice production declined in both North and South, and with the cessation of Chinese food aid rations were 25% lower than they had been during the war. Liberalization measures were adopted in 1980 in response to the mounting crisis, but they were scaled back in 1983 as the economy appeared to recover. Continued stagnation and shortages led to a decisive turn toward reform under the leadership of Nguyen Van Linh in 1986. Although the beneficial effects of economic reforms were somewhat delayed by hyperinflation and bad weather in 1987, the government has been determined to cut subsidies to state enterprises, open the economy to international
investment, and permit entrepreneurship by individuals and groups. Inflation is currently running at approximately 100% per annum, which is an achievement given the strains of the virtual cessation of Soviet aid in 1991 and the continuing effects of the American embargo.

Figure 3 illustrates several of the basic problems of the Vietnamese economy. First, the overall level of food production in Vietnam has been low and remains problematic. A major part of the problem is that population growth is still quite high, and another contributing factor is that the poverty and isolation of the state has limited infrastructural investments. North Vietnam did have a surge in rice production from 1958 to 1965 utilizing policies similar to China’s in the 1950s, but its 1965 peak of 300 kg/person was achieved again only in 1989. Vietnam is perhaps only now beginning to experience a surge in agricultural production comparable to that of China in the early 1980s. Secondly, the level of food production in the North makes it dependent on the surplus production of the South. The Red River delta (which includes Hanoi and Haiphong) is the population and agricultural center of the North, and its per capita production is comparable to that of the neighboring Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, but these are rice-importing provinces, and Guangdong at least has non-agricultural wealth that allows it to be comfortable with food-dependency. Given the shortage of foreign exchange the government is torn between exporting Southern rice or transferring it to the North. Despite overpopulation, northern production could be substantially increased, but it would take significant investment, and in general the rates of return on investment would be better in the south. The third problem is the disparity between North and South, as illustrated by the Mekong delta’s production, which is higher than any Chinese province. The disparity in productive capacity is not
Figure 3: Grain in Vietnam
Per Capita, 1976-1990

Kg per capita


--- Total per capita   Red River delta   Mekong delta

limited to agriculture: the modern economy of Ho Chi Minh City could just as easily be used to illustrate regional differences. Because of the resource differential, compounded by advantages of geography, weather and international contacts, North and South face potentially quite different prospects as external relations normalize and capital flows in.

The 1990s are an exciting yet daunting prospect for Vietnam. On the positive side, it has the human and material resources to respond to a more favorable external environment. Trade with southern China, concentrated in the North, is already sizeable and will grow rapidly with normalization. Regional and world trade will concentrate more in the South and should lead to an even faster rate of growth. Assuming that the international economy still needs cheap assembly labor in the 1990s, few places will be more attractive to South Korean, Taiwanese, and overseas Chinese investors. In the 1990s Vietnam should move from concerns of survival to the beginnings of prosperity. On the more worrisome side, it is more difficult to foresee the political developments of the decade. Vietnam's current conservatism arises more out of a concern for order than out of a belief in Marxism-Leninism, but order could become a serious problem. The South has influenced the policy developments of the national government, but in its personnel and viewpoint the national government is essentially northern. In the political climate of the South there is the distinct impression of oppression from afar, but there can be no voicing of such opinions. As the South becomes more prosperous, as it interacts with anti-communist kinsmen who are now prosperous abroad, it is hard to imagine that it will remain quiescent. If regional tensions develop towards separatism, further complications could emerge from the concentration of Chinese interests in the North and other interests in the South.
The improvement of relations with China provides some ideological consolation to the party conservatives, but the Vietnamese Communist Party is more tightly connected to European communism than the Chinese Communist Party, and so its reformers are more attracted by post-communist options and its conservatives are more pessimistic about the independent future of Asian communism. Certainly an exclusive alliance with China is out of the question for both sides. The party congress emphasized the necessity of providing wise and orderly leadership, and that might well be the limit of realistic ambition. As in China, however, regardless of the difficulties facing the party, it is even more difficult to imagine an orderly, unified Vietnamese state functioning without the party. The party created independent Vietnam and most of its organizations, though much of the structure was imposed on the South.

The twin purposes of this section have been to present the specific situation of each Asian communist country, but to do so within a general typology of communist regimes. The individuality of each country's political circumstances and prospects demonstrate that "Asian communism" cannot be taken as a meaningful unit of political analysis, and still less as a meaningful unit of prediction. China is not Vietnam, Laos is not Cambodia. Nevertheless, the typology of externally imposed regimes, externally dependent regimes, and rural revolutionary regimes is more than a narrative convenience. It assumes that the basic component of communist regime capacity is set by the nature of its founding revolution. Typologies lead to strange bedfellows; Hungarian politics looks no more similar to Cambodian politics than Spanish moss looks like it is related to the pineapple (which it is).
But the weakness, frailty and moderation of both regimes are related to the impossibility of domestic legitimation due to external imposition. This may not be the essence of Hungarian or Cambodian politics, but it is a basic generic similarity. The fact that China and Vietnam are members of the strongest species of revolution, one with no European cognates, implies that, even without the ecological differences between European and Asian communism discussed in the first section, the largest communist parties in Asia would tend to be harder in facing the perils of post-communism. Nevertheless, all of these regimes, even the strong ones in favorable economic circumstances, are facing fundamental challenges to their leadership, or to the direction of their leadership.

III. Themes in Variations

Having considered the individual characteristics of Asian communist countries we can discuss their underlying similarities with a reduced risk of facile stereotyping. Although all Asian communist states are not the same, they do face some fundamental political dynamics and challenges that are similar. As with the typology used to structure the previous section, these similarities are true of non-Asian communist regimes as well, though their applicability beyond Asia will only be suggested here.

Four themes will be developed. The first is the "post-revolutionary syndrome." Communist regimes were originally structured and legitimated as temporary dictatorships on the road to the new historical stage of communism. As the target was postponed and the credibility of the goal diminished, the party lost its appeal to idealistic students and intellectuals, its ideology degenerated into a hypocritical and enforced orthodoxy, and its