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**"RENOVATING" SISYPHUS:
VIETNAM'S PEASANT-STATE DIALOGUE OF
REVOLUTION AND RESISTANCE**

by

S. ANDREW SMITH, BA

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
April 8, 1994
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Maureen Appel Molot

Maureen Appel Molot, Director
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F. Taylor

Professor F. Taylor, Supervisor

Abstract

Social science theory is permeated by the debate over whether agent or structure better provides the methodological means required to properly understand the processes of peasant revolution and resistance. This study attempts to synthesize the debate over agent and structure insofar as a clear analytical picture of peasant decision-making processes depends on the mutual interdependence of individual and structural forces. Using the Vietnamese case, the results of the theoretical investigation are applied to the historical realities of peasant revolutionary collective action, and the more contemporary acts of "everyday resistance". A major theme that runs throughout the theoretical and historical sections of this thesis is the importance of rural corporatism in the processes of revolution and resistance; in light of this it will be argued that the most harmonious relationship between the peasantry and the state is to be found when an equilibrium is created between corporate and market forces.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to Trung Au who sat portentous and unspeaking through Mrs. Oreto's Grade eight class, and four years later went on to graduate and pursue greater things. Also, two women should be recognized for their indefatigable spirit, Nhan Bach Nguyen, who valiantly undertook to help me learn her native tongue despite my deficiencies in our common language, and Thu Tran, who has never been without an encouraging word or a wry comment for me and the rest of her Saturday morning students.

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I preface my acknowledgments by saying that none of my efforts could have been possible without the unconditional support and encouragement of my family and the tacit approval of my Nana who has never neglected to stoke the fire beneath the hot-seat. A special thank you to my Grandma Deacon, and Cal and Traci Deacon for their gracious and very timely financial assistance.

As far as my time in Ottawa is concerned a tip of the hat must go out to my Supervisor D.R.F. Taylor and my Advisor Arch Ritter who provided comments on an earlier draft of my work. I would like to offer my esteem to Elizabeth and Chris for continually providing a safe haven from the realities of life in Ottawa. Finally, it is with the gratitude a Himalayan adventurer reserves for his Sherpa guide that I recognize the contribution of the oak table at 66 Poplar for baring the burden of candle wax and intoxicants, and, through its silent wisdom and constancy, assuaging the incessant questions and concerns of the neophytes as they proceed towards their seemingly unattainable but largely inevitable objective.

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Map of Vietnam and Surrounding Area

Source: William J. Duiker, Vietnam Since the Fall of Saigon, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, 1980) p.1.

Introduction

There is, I feel, an age at which the individual man would want to stop: you will seek the age at which you would desire your species had stopped. Discontented with your present state for reasons that foretell even greater discontents for your unhappy posterity, perhaps you would want to be able to go backward in time. This sentiment must be the eulogy of your first ancestors, the criticism of your contemporaries, and the dread of those who will have the unhappiness to live after you.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau - *The Second Discourse*

The Problem and Research Questions

This study will argue that there is an essential contradiction within the Vietnamese peasant-state relationship and, as a result, the Vietnamese peasantry will always initiate some form of negative action toward the state regardless of the state's political nature, or its chosen method of economic development. The peasant-state dialectic, as it is described in Chapter 1, is an abstract structural conception of shifting power balances within the discourse between peasant and state. Moreover, the peasant-state dialectic manifests itself through various forms of conflict depending upon the structural circumstances and historical antecedents that may shape any one peasant society; thus, generalizations concerning the nature of peasants and peasant-state relations are imprudent.

Although this study relies on only one case, the theoretical implications of the structural contradictions found in Vietnam can be applied to historical analyses of various other peasant-state relationships. This case-specific conception of the dialectic arises from the need to recognize the diversity of peasant societies and the definitional difficulties of considering peasants as a class rather than as a general grouping of largely independent rural agriculturists. It is not the intention of this study to determine the nature of a "peasant" across time and space; it does not intend to engage in

the "generalizing sciences".¹ Embracing a universal definition of "peasant" neglects the overall goal of this study which is to understand why a specific peasantry undertook certain actions against the state, both as individual actors and as a collectivity. Furthermore, little analytical benefit is gained by assessing the nature of peasants outside the context of their geographical location, the role and nature of the specific state, and traditional patterns of landholding and production methods. Hence, it is more important, both analytically and conceptually, to define peasants in terms of their relationship to their community, and that community's relationship with the state, rather than try to provide a general understanding of peasant as a social class.

The relationship between the Vietnamese peasantry and the national state apparatus, both colonial and revolutionary,² has been far from congenial. The dialectical nature of this conflict underscores the fact that the state must interfere with peasant society in order to extract the surplus required to provide for the needs of the greater society as well as the non-agricultural economy. Whether state interference ultimately benefits the peasantry is largely irrelevant since in most cases peasants live a hand-to-mouth existence and any surplus which is extracted brings peasant families closer to, and often below basic subsistence levels.

Assuming that a structural dialectic is intrinsic to any peasant-state relationship begs the question: why does peasant revolution occur so infrequently? More specifically, peasant revolution in Vietnam was carried out mainly as a reaction to the policies of the French colonial regime, but this

¹ Teodor Shanin (ed.), Peasants and Peasant Societies, Selected Readings, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) p.13.

² The Vietnamese revolutionary, or communist, state refers initially to the northern portion of Vietnam that was known between 1954 and 1975 as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and subsequently, in its expanded form, as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) from 1975 until the present

same form of revolutionary collective action has not materialized against the communist state. In an effort to consolidate the revolution following the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam, initiated the complementary processes of land reform and agricultural collectivization. Collectives were created to complement the state's Stalinist-style economic development policy which viewed agriculture as providing the consumptive requirements for the urban industrial class and the state bureaucracy. Despite the conclusion of the armed peasant struggle, which had been carried out under the banner of "land to the tiller", the industrial sector has been the main focus, until recently, of the Vietnamese Communist Party's (VCP) attempt to build a socialist economy. Nevertheless, the peasant-state dialectic has not manifested itself under the Communist regime in the form of revolutionary collective action: why not, and in what form, if any, has the dialectic appeared?

Emerging from the largely theoretical consideration of peasant revolution and peasant resistance is a subsequent question concerning Vietnam's agricultural collectives which have been the primary means through which the communist state has extracted peasant production. If one is to assume that there is a structural dialectic between peasant and state, then it follows from this that peasant resistance should manifest itself at some level of its economic, political or social interaction with the state. At first glance the state-sanctioned cooperatives seem to be the ideal target for peasant resistance efforts. This, however, must be examined further. Although the cooperatives embody state policy, they do not ultimately implement state directives as designed by the central authority. It was within the cooperative institutions where peasant and state came into direct conflict, both politically and economically; and, yet, it will be argued that the cooperative has provided

an institutional buffer between the peasantry and the central state apparatus which has allowed Vietnamese peasants to successfully engage in forms of, what has been termed, "everyday resistance". Thus, the second research question emerges: to what extent did the system of agricultural cooperatives shelter peasant communities from politically motivated state policy and assist in multiplying the effect of individual acts of everyday resistance?

Despite the fact that economic hardship has been in large part credited with inciting revolutionary action against the French colonial power, and although it seems apparent that the Vietnamese peasant has faced serious economic hardship under the communist regime, the Vietnamese peasantry has not been moved to engage in collective revolutionary action. Why this is the case can be partially answered by the fact that cooperative institutions have been both the target of peasant resistance as well as the vehicle for peasants to mediate high-level policy decisions. To a lesser degree, revolutionary collective action has also been inhibited by the fact that certain factors which had assisted in aggregating individual interests during the colonial period have been lacking or have become irrelevant under the communist state.

Theoretical Approach

Moving away from the Vietnamese case for a moment, and tracing a more general theoretical vein, development studies has experienced a severe crisis of confidence in the last 15 years. Basically, the trouble stems from the general failure of development studies to abandon the teleological vision of "development", a word which itself connotes perfectibility. If something is developing one must assume that there is a telos, an end to which the process

of development is proceeding toward. By establishing a material end to development — in the case of international development the end has been illuminated principally by the material wealth and economic growth exemplified for so long by the “developed” world — development theory and practice have, ironically, largely abandoned those people that have been the most needful of an increased standard of living. Furthermore, the success of development, in economic terms, has relied upon societies accepting the basic tenets of the capitalist ethos. Both modernization and Marxist-based theories, the two systems theories that form the polar extremes of the development debate mentioned below, are premised upon the efficacy of capitalism. David Booth writes in his critical assessment of development sociology, Interpreting the Impasse, that the basic problem with Marxist development theory is:

its metatheoretical commitment to demonstrating that what happens in societies in the era of capitalism is not only explicable, but in some stronger sense *necessary*.³

Although Booth restricts his argument to the Marxist side of the development debate it can be argued that modernization theory is just as culpable. Hence, within the dominant development perspectives, the telos of development has been inextricably tied to the evolution of market mechanisms and capitalist institutions.

Many factors have led theorists to reconsider the development polemic that emerged from the substantial differences found between modernization and Marxist/*dependencia* thinkers. An attempt to move beyond this debate is found in the neo-Marxist articulation of modes of production analyses which were embraced by many Marxist development thinkers in the early 1980s.

³ “Marxism and Development Sociology: Interpreting the Impasse”, World Development, 1985, no.7: p.773

Booth's critique arises from widespread discontent with neo-Marxist theory, and favours the general movement away from metatheory (untestable theoretical abstractions), as the theoretical framework for development studies research.⁴ Although this introduction has focused on the debate over how development thinkers have attempted to overcome the impasse created by neo-Marxist theory, it has also tried to outline a broader controversy which encompasses a series of theoretical and practical debates between those who subscribe to neo-liberal solutions versus more structuralist alternatives.

With this larger theoretical controversy in mind, this study grounds itself on the understanding that capitalism, as it is introduced initially through colonial economic policy, is not as powerful a force as academics and policy-makers would lead their colleagues and the general public to believe. Capitalism, as an ethos, is adapted and transformed on a national level by many cultural and institutional factors. In some ways it is the realization that market mechanisms and Western utilitarian logic are not necessarily the only means required to transform the underdeveloped areas of the globe, a realization that is partially responsible for many of the theoretical alternatives that have assisted in overcoming the apparent "impasse" in development theory. Culture and history are finally being regarded as powerful influences on the decision-making processes of peasants.

It is abundantly clear that the materialist focus which has pervaded development theory for so many years does not provide the answers to why, on the one hand, there has been ostensible development in the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) and, on the other hand, there continues to

⁴ see Frans Schuurman, "Introduction: Development Theory in the 1990s", Beyond the Impasse: New Directions in Development Theory, Frans Schuurman (ed.), (London: Zed Books, 1993) for a thorough consideration of why the impasse in development theory was first addressed, as well as an initial outline of the directions that development theory has taken since the mid-1980s.

be a crisis of development in much of Africa.⁵ What has been proposed by many theorists is a movement away from the macro-level analysis engendered by general debate between *dependencia* and modernization theory, and toward a micro-level, or actor-oriented, analysis which begins to account for the actions of individuals as they are influenced by external factors.⁶ It is this realm of development theory that offers the most likelihood of plotting a course around the formidable impasse constructed by materialist conceptions of development.

The importance of examining both the macro and micro levels of the development process is both a methodological and a theoretical concern. However, in a theoretical sense there has been a general impasse on both the structural and actor-oriented levels of analysis which has been exemplified by a general acceptance of reductionism on behalf of both competing views. This is especially apparent in the area of peasant studies that concerns itself with issues surrounding peasant collective action and revolution⁷, but the debate can also be traced through the literature of more traditional disciplines such as political science and sociology.⁸ It is not clear why this dissection occurred

⁵see for example D.R.F. Taylor and Fiona Mackenzie, Development From Within, Survival in Rural Africa, (New York: Routledge, 1992) where the crisis of development is explained from the perspective of individual Africans, and not from the perspective of an ailing development model.

⁶ Theoretical perspectives that maintain a micro-level approach, and which are important to this study, include James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1985); Robert Chambers, Rural Development. Putting the Last First, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1983); Robert Bates (ed.), Toward a political Economy of Development, a Rational Choice Perspective, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁷ On the structuralist side of the argument one finds James Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant. Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and from the rational-actor perspective the most influential work has been Samuel Popkin, The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society in Vietnam, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

⁸ An attempt to reconcile the structuralist and individualist arguments can be found in Jefferey Berejikian, "Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem", American Political Science Review, (1992) no.3: p.647-656; Michael Taylor (ed.), Rationality and

or why, in fact, it has prevailed for so long. Despite the lingering disagreement in many areas of the social sciences over the acceptability of either one of the theoretical/methodological options available, there has been a strong movement to reconcile agent and structure. This serves as an encouraging sign for all the disciplines involved.

The present study aggregates much of the above debate as it impacts on the question of peasant collective action, but on the whole it remains within the realm of development studies. This is not unlike much of the literature that has been produced in recent years concerning the post-revolutionary phase of peasant-state relations in Vietnam and other countries that have experienced large rural uprisings in the recent past. When faced with the present plight of peasant communities, James Scott and Samuel Popkin have recently tempered their original views with elements of "new insights" into the reality of the peasant-state dialectic. Scott has now embraced "everyday forms" of peasant resistance, reconsidering the structural determinants of his moral economy, while Popkin has introduced "public choice" into his more contemporary work, replacing his initial reliance on the axioms of rational choice theory.⁹ Both of these works are now considered to be largely within the auspices of development studies; this is partially due to the expanding theoretical limits of development studies, but it has a causal connection with a general reevaluation of the peasant-state relationship since the end of the Vietnam War.

Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Norman Long, "Sociological perspectives on agrarian development and State intervention", Development Policies: sociological perspectives, Anthony Hall and James Midgley (eds.), (Manchester: Manchester U. Press, 1988); Alexander Wendt, "The agent-structure problem in international relations theory", International Organization, (1987) no.3: p.335-370.

⁹ see James Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance; Samuel Popkin, "Public Choice and Peasant Organization", Towards a Political Economy of Development, a Rational Choice Perspective.

Moving towards the methodological issues to be discussed below, it is important to mention one of the most important “post-impasse” thinkers, Norman Long, and his conception of the “interface” between agent and structure. Throughout his work Long argues why it is essential to integrate the actor-oriented and the structuralist approach to peasant-state relations and rural development:

people come to grips with the world around them, and that they do this both *cognitively* on the basis of existing categories, knowledge and forms of consciousness, and *organizationally* in the way they interact with other individuals and social groups.¹⁰ (emphases added)

A “meso-level” of analysis emerges from the interface approach providing an understanding of how peasant actors deal both cognitively and organizationally with those institutions which are central to their daily lives.

In the Vietnamese case, corporate structures have, traditionally and to the present day, continued to provide the setting for the meso-level “interface”. At the meso-level, actors are able to resist state policies by engaging in forms of everyday resistance without resorting to collective action on a broad scale. When assessing the impact of everyday resistance there are two salient factors to consider. The first factor is the realization that state intervention can be “renegotiated” at the meso-level of the peasant state “interface”.¹¹ The second factor, complementary to the first, is that it is at the meso-level that “indigenous knowledge”, or traditional patterns of rural cultivation, distribution and social organization, come in conflict with state policy. These two aspects of the peasant-state interface are as important for the analysis of revolutionary collective action as they are for understanding the effectiveness of everyday forms of peasant resistance. However, since the

¹⁰ “Sociological perspectives on agrarian development and State intervention”, p.121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 122.

peasant-state interface and everyday resistance are ubiquitous, there is a conceptual congruity found between the two which is not shared with the relative rarity of revolutionary collective action.

Research Approach

It is important to recognize that very little is known about actual acts of everyday peasant resistance directed toward the Vietnamese state. This stems from the lack of data concerning, for example, the levels of peasant involvement in what was known as the "outside economy" (*kinh te ngoai*), or the types of local organizations that evolved to counter state control over pricing and marketing mechanisms.

One of the most important works in the realm of Vietnamese peasant studies¹² has been heavily criticized for its lack of appropriate data concerning the specifics of everyday resistance, and its focus on the administrative workings of production cooperatives rather than on their internal power structures.¹³ In light of criticism and research disclaimers from experts in the field, two dimensions to the problem of assessing everyday forms of peasant resistance in Vietnam reveal themselves. First, researchers at all levels are faced with the same impediments to data collection, and, as such, there will likely continue to be glaring inadequacies, for some time, in studies professing to analyze peasant resistance in Vietnam.¹⁴ Second, to compensate

¹² Adam Fforde, The Agrarian Question in Vietnam 1974-1979: a Study of Cooperator Resistance to State Policy, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1989)

¹³ Ken Post, rev. of The Agrarian Question in Vietnam 1974-1979: a Study of Cooperator Resistance to State Policy, by Adam Fforde, Journal of Peasant Studies (1990) no.3: p.491.

¹⁴ Ken Post criticizes Fforde for not making use of the Party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, while relying too heavily on a series of Hanoi University research papers since "above all 'peasant resistance' is not going to figure in them." It seems odd, however, that on the one hand blanket skepticism is placed over the works of university research and, on the other hand, a Party publication is assumed to be above the narrow focus of neo-Stalinist economic dogma. At best

for the lack of data, more emphasis can be placed on the theoretical dimensions of the process of resistance, as well as on an assessment of the meso and macro levels of the peasant-state relationship, as they reflect, to varying degrees, the actions of individual peasant producers.

It is the second path which this study attempts to navigate, while keeping in mind the presence of potential empirical wash-outs and roadblocks. By concentrating on why peasants in Vietnam have chosen to resist state policy and to what extent the collective provided the institutional buffer allowing peasant resistance to be carried-out, it is assumed that there are certain macro and meso level indicators that provide evidence pointing toward acts of resistance that substitute, to a certain extent, for detailed empirical data on the acts themselves. In effect, what can be considered are changes in state policy regarding the collective management of rural production and distribution, the “outside” economy and the peasant household as an independent economic unit.

Methodological Approach

The methodology of the theoretical portion of this study is reflected in the debate between structural and agent-oriented analyses of collective behaviour, and, therefore, much of the methodological approach has already been expounded upon. Relying on a diachronic method, the Vietnamese case is examined through the lens of peasant collective action and everyday peasant resistance during the latter portion of the colonial period and within the context of the Communist state structure.

As has already been mentioned, the distinction between studies that

both sources must be viewed with misgiving

rely on the methodological predominance of either agent or structure as the determining factor in collective behaviour suggests that a syncretic approach would be advisable. In this study the changing state structure and the concomitant meso-level institutions (i.e. agricultural cooperatives) provide the main research variables. What has been forgotten in both the theoretical and empirical analyses of peasant behaviour is the role of culture and ideology in defining agents' behaviour either collectively or individually. Hence, the structural variables surrounding agricultural taxation and procurement of surplus, as well as control over the means of agricultural production, should be considered in light of what are arguably more individually constructed notions of culture and ideology.¹⁵ Furthermore, the agent-oriented methodologies of the past which have centered around the utilitarian motives of peasant actors cannot be dismissed outright. Rational-choice theory, if it is to maintain its methodological efficacy, must be tempered by accepting the diversity of culture and ideology.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 1, the peasant-state dialectic, which is essential to the subsequent argument, is established. The discussion relies largely on the structural relationship between market mechanisms and non-capitalist, or, more specifically, peasant economies. Colonialism has been a major means by which western European capitalism has come in contact with the rest of the world, and, as such, there are a number of structural arguments that attempt to demonstrate how peasant economies are destined to be subsumed by capitalism (specifically the Marxist and neo-Marxist schools of thought), or, rather, that a hybrid "mode of production" will be created (the position taken by Dualist economic and social

¹⁵ Michael Taylor, "Structure, Culture and Action in the Explanation of Social Change", Politics and Society, (1989): p.115-162; Hy V. Luong, Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988, (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii Press, 1992) p.220.

theorists).

A major argument in Chapter 1 is that the teleological solutions propounded by the Marxists and Dualist theorists are problematic. First, they underestimate the power of traditional patterns of production and distribution to cope with the impact of the capitalist ethos. Second, following from the first point, the argument will be made that teleological theories neglect to consider the power of individual actors to serve their own utilitarian ends, not in the name of socialism or the proletarian class, nor as micro-economic utility maximizers, but, rather, as rational actors considered within the context of traditional social and economic constructs.

Answering the question as to why peasant revolutionary collective action has largely been characterized as either the result of structural or actor-oriented factors is beyond the scope of this study. The second chapter, however, recognizes the agent-structure debate and brings together various works which attempt to reconcile the structuralist and actor-oriented approaches. There are a number of reasons why this is an important step along the path toward understanding peasant resistance in Vietnam under the communist state.

First, revolutionary collective action requires individual action on some level. Changing political, economic or social structures may offer opportunities for peasants to initiate armed struggle, but in order to initiate collective action individual interests must be aggregated. The problem faced by both deterministic schools of thought centres around their inability to overcome the free-rider problem, a factor which works to disaggregate individual interests, and which is inherent to any movement that claims to offer all participants benefits by virtue of their place within an economic or social class.

Second, rational choice theory neglects the role of culture as well as economic and social patterns that have traditionally been reflected in peasants' decision-making preferences. Social and economic constructs which are predicated on reducing individual risk in a highly uncertain physical environment, an environment which is, in the Vietnamese case, made more troublesome by high population densities and rates of natural increase, modify peasants' utilitarian decision-making preferences which at first glance may appear irrational. The cultural and historical rationality of social and economic structures must be recognized if there is to be a successful synthesis of agent and structure.

Third, agent and structure must be included if the very important meso-level of analysis is to provide insights into the relationship between peasant and state. Although the meso-level is often nebulous, in the Vietnamese case agricultural collectives provide a very clear object of analysis.

Fourth, everyday resistance theory embodies a very important attempt at reconciling the agent-structure problem. Furthermore, it insists that researchers reassess the standard, structurally conceived notions of class, ideology and hegemony. It is within the final portion of the second chapter that these elements are brought together.

Chapter 3 provides the initial historical assessment of the Vietnamese case. It begins by examining the social, economic and political structure of the pre-colonial Vietnamese corporate village, and how members of these closed communities interacted with the colonial state. In light of risk-avoidance mechanisms inherent to the traditional village commune, the argument considers the influence of French taxation and land-holding policies, concluding that they upset the tenuous economic balance between peasant

subsistence and the procurement of agricultural surplus by the pre-colonial state.

It is important to note, at this point, that by recognizing the effects of French policy I am not suggesting that there were not periods of conflict between the pre-colonial state and the peasantry. On the contrary, the pre-colonial peasant-state relationship must be considered to be as dialectical as its colonial brethren. However, certain elements of the French political and economic structure as well as elements of Vietnamese culture, leadership and ideology led to revolutionary collective action against the French colonial state.

The argument in Chapter 3 continues by positing that peasant protest movements were the result of decaying linkages between the peasant and the state (*i.e.* the destruction of the traditional corporate village structure), and between the peasant and the soil. Considering these as complementary processes it is clear that there was ample opportunity for leaders to aggregate peasant dissent around both millenarian and patriotic causes. The success of communism lies in the fact that it can be described as having characteristics which allow it to occupy a place in both categories.

In concluding the chapter, the process of land reform, which lasted from 1953 until 1956, is examined. This is done in order to, first, provide the basis for the VCP's decision to utilize collective agriculture as the means to provide the surplus for socialist accumulation, which would eventually lead to the expansion of the industrial sector. Second, the debates carried out during the land reform period establish the initial political weakness of the VCP as this weakness relates to the state's efforts to implement a socialist agricultural policy.

Chapter 4 considers the process of collectivization during the 1960s and

the important areas of economic reform during the 1970s and 1980s, within the context of everyday resistance to state policy. Why peasants have not engaged in revolutionary collective action against the communist state is an intriguing question, but the elements which encourage peasant uprisings are examined in Chapter 3, and the reasons why peasants in Vietnam have not revolted since the creation of the DRV in 1954 can be gleaned from the discussion concerning everyday resistance. Thus, instead of considering what the Vietnamese peasant is *not* doing vis-a-vis the communist state, Chapter 4 will analyze what the Vietnamese peasant *is* doing. This chapter considers the moves from below that ultimately necessitated policy change from above. First, the inherent weakness of the VCP is established. Second, I argue that the "nominalization" of agricultural cooperatives has been a result of peasant reaction to poorly conceived and implemented state policy. Third, the process of economic reform, as it is influenced by the "nominalization" of agriculture cooperatives, is traced from the New Management System (NMS) in 1974 until the present-day. Finally, the future of corporate/collective structures is considered in light of *Doi Moi* ("Renovation"), Vietnamese style market reforms, and its impact on agriculture in the northern and central regions of Vietnam.

I conclude by attempting to draw together the major arguments made and to relate them to the central questions of the thesis.

Chapter 1: Defining the Dialectic

England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating — the annihilation of the old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.

Karl Marx, July 22, 1853

I am saying that Hegel obscures our vision. He gets between us and the light. If we set him aside, we may then look more directly at dialectics themselves. I am not certain what we shall see, except that it will certainly not be contradiction caught in a stationary pose.

E.P. Thompson - *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*

Introduction

The inherently conflictual relationship that is present within any peasant-state relationship is based on a fundamental structural dialectic. In this first chapter I will assess the political and economic contradictions that are integral to the general state-peasant relationship. The initial theoretical consideration will be to emphasise the influence of capitalism upon peasant communities. From the inter-play of capitalist and non-capitalist economic systems stems the "Peasant Question", an important benchmark in the evolution of peasant studies. However, as important as capitalism has been in transforming the world economy, its penetration into non-capitalist, traditional societies is tempered by a number of case specific variables, and, as such, it has rarely if ever been capable of achieving the type of "modernization" in many non-European, "developing" states, that was so prevalent in nineteenth-century Britain.

The type of approach described above has been characterized as a structural/historical analysis of rural development.¹ It involves a discourse between those scholars who believe capitalism absorbs various non- or pre-

¹ John Hariss, "Introduction", Rural Development: Theories of Peasant Economy and Agrarian Change, John Hariss (ed.), (London: Hutchinson and Co. 1982) p.22-23

capitalist modes of production, and others who suggest that the capitalist mode is "articulated" with other modes of production. This analytical process examines the "commoditization" of production but is not necessarily Marxist.²

Although this approach is not inherently Marxist it does include both Marxist and neo-Marxist schools of thought. In addition to the various Marxist perspectives there are the Dualist and what can be termed the "confrontationalist" paradigms. What sets the Dualist and Marxist structuralists apart from the confrontationalists is that the former posit that the contradiction between two economic systems must eventually result in some form of synthesis, either a hybrid system or the domination of capitalism. The latter grouping, however, is concerned with understanding the myriad contradictions between peasant and state as they relate to politics as well as economics, separating themselves from the teleological-materialism so prevalent in Marxist and Dualist thought.

Subsequent chapters will not be dominated by Marxist or Dualist analysis, but, for the purposes of establishing the structural dialectic found between peasant and state, they provide the theoretical cornerstone. It is the confrontationalist approach that maintains the dialectical, non-syncretic perspective which is employed in latter chapters. In fact, the confrontationalist approach is found not only within structuralist models, but is also embedded within many actor-oriented methodologies and provides a basic conceptual linkage between structuralist and actor-oriented determinisms.

The genesis of the peasant-state dialectic, however, is the contradiction between colonial capitalism and non-capitalist economic systems. Marxist and

² *Ibid.*

Dualist theory both recognize and are essential in tracing the structural root of the dialectic; but, due to their structural determinism, they are unable to come to terms with the role of individuals in the process of revolution, and, thus, cannot theoretically conceive of quotidian, micro-level manifestations of the dialectic. Beginning with a structural dialectic does not preclude the discussion from moving in the direction of a more agent-oriented analysis; ultimately, however, this study will find its way back to the middle-ground between structural and agent-oriented determinism.

What is a peasant society?

The majority of Western academics has adopted methods of analysis which are consistent with the historical realities of Western Europe. The term "peasant" has been sharply influenced by European patterns of economic growth and the development of capitalism within this tradition. Hence, peasant societies have often been termed "backward" while the movement towards capitalism, or rather the "proletarianization" of the peasantry has been termed "modernization". Little has changed since Marx first wrote his political and economic treatises. Peasants, and their "backward" production methods remain in many parts of the world, mainly in the "lesser developed", or "underdeveloped" areas of the globe. Western conceptions of the developing world have been limited by the need to assume, on the behalf of many academics and development practitioners, that there is a homogeneous, non-Western, "Third World" beyond the confines of the materially superior "Developed World". It is from these types of assumptions that blanket terms such as "North" and "South" have been employed to pigeonhole societies which are very distinct from each other. Within this

tradition the term “peasant” has become synonymous with rural agriculture producers in the “South”. As misleading as this distinction is — in many “developed” countries it can be argued that there is a substantial peasant population — it does hold some truth. Rural producers in the Third World are primarily peasants; that is, however, as far as the anthropological homogenization should venture.

With this in mind, a definition of peasant must include the relationship of the peasantry to the greater society, the “little tradition” as it relates to the “big tradition”. The essential element of peasant life is the family farm which supplies the labour and land that is required to provide for the consumptive needs of the family members.³ This is not a new understanding of the basic unit of political and economic life. Aristotle wrote his Politics from the point of view that the “household”, an association based on providing “daily needs”, is the basis of the *polis*, what would today be the nation-state.⁴ The Polis was, however, only representative of the private life which was clearly distinguished from the public or political realm. It is largely through the process of modernization that the distinction between the public and private realms has begun to blur. For peasants, their existence is only beginning to be defined outside of the private realm of the family; peasants are only marginally dependent upon the modern “society” — society being a term which entails the movement of the private into the public realm.⁵ The “peasant”, then, is the individual member of the household or family farm; and, furthermore, the peasant society must include the interaction of this individual unit in some greater form of political and economic life.

³ *Ibid.*, p.14-15

⁴ The Politics, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p.58.

⁵ see Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959) p.23-71 for a discussion of the relationship between the public and the private realm, and the movement towards a blurred distinction between the two in modern times.

Anthropologists use the term "peasant" to define a specific stage of societal development within any one community. Toward this end, Eric Wolf makes a clear distinction between a "primitive" and a "peasant" culture: the basic delineation being that peasants must succumb to a "superior power" which demands a "fund of rent".⁶ It is not the cultivation of surplus product that distinguishes the two anthropological terms, but, rather, that the peasant's surplus is extracted by an outside power. It is this "fund of rent" that brings the primitive rural producer into contact with the greater society and, to varying degrees, the larger economic system. It integrates the "modern" and the "traditional", or, for Marxists, the "capitalist" and the "pre-capitalist".

Underlying this definition is a dialectical confrontation between peasant and state. As societies become more complex, urban centres often appear to serve various functions, forcing rural areas to develop a relationship with these relatively new entities. However, cities are merely a representation of an increasing complexity within society; a complexity that is ultimately manifested in the development of a state:

Thus, it is only when a cultivator is integrated into a society with a state — that is, when the cultivator becomes subject to the demands and sanctions of power-holders outside his social stratum — that we can appropriately speak of peasantry.⁷

Peasants are anthropologically more "civilized" than primitives, and within present development terminology, this normative distinction often excludes rural producers in more "developed" economies from falling under the category of peasant. However, within the context of the present definition a peasant household is merely one that depends on its own productive labour to provide a subsistence level of consumption and has a portion of the

⁶ *Peasants*, (Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966) p.9-10

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

household product extracted by the state.

The "Marxist Dialectic" and the "Agrarian Question"

Peasant studies is an academic milieu that concerns itself with changing social and economic relationships within a specific social grouping, and, in essence, can be traced back to Marx and those authors who have concerned themselves with the issues surrounding Marx's historical materialism and Engels' consideration of the "Agrarian Question". For Marx, the peasantry was a class which was unwilling to recognize the plight of the urban wage labourers since it could maintain its economic independence based on private land-holdings, and was, therefore, considered to be an impediment to proletarian revolution. During the nineteenth-century the British peasantry had been absorbed into the cash nexus; however, the French peasantry was still considered to be a powerful, independent class, one that would provide both an economic and a political challenge for the socialist state following the consolidation of a socialist revolution.⁸

This impediment to socialist development was later established as the "Peasant Question" by Engels in his 1894 work, The Peasant Question in France and Germany.⁹ Engels believed that capitalism would eventually sweep away the old feudal, or pre-capitalist, mode of production and proletarianize the peasantry, wiping away their political apathy. For Engels the peasant issue was founded in politics. His goal was to provide an explanation for why capitalism was, unlike in Britain, unable to carry out its

⁸ Karl Marx, "After the Revolution: Marx Debates Bakunin", in Robert C. Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader (2ed), (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978) p.543.

⁹ Friedrich Engels, The Peasant Question in France and Germany, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955).

destructive task in France and Germany.¹⁰ Furthermore, it was intended to highlight the practical implications of ignoring the power of the small peasant in the "Socialists' drive to win power". As such it was not "a work of theory, it was an essentially practical intervention...."¹¹

The broader "Agrarian Question", which addresses the general relationship between peasant and state, was not established until a number of years later when Karl Kautsky wrote his aptly named work The Agrarian Question in 1899.¹² Kautsky expanded the scope of the question from the practical, the viability of socialist revolution in Western Europe, to the theoretical. Kautsky was concerned with the extent to which capitalism had and could be developed in rural areas, keeping in mind the barriers impeding its growth, and always assuming that peasants were traditionally separated from market influences.¹³ Critics claim that Kautsky was deluded in thinking that pre-capitalist modes of production lacked any type of "market relationships"¹⁴; however, Kautsky's general assumption that "market relationships" could develop within the rural areas separate from the urban proletariat, provided a basis for Marxist analyses of "backward" economies. According to Marx, rural agrarian societies were either feudal or existing under the Asiatic mode of production; socialist revolution was untenable in these societies because they lacked an urban proletariat, the key to capitalist development. Hence, the Agrarian Question expanded the realm of capitalist

¹⁰ T.J. Byres, "The Agrarian Question and Differing Forms of Capitalist Agrarian Transition An Essay with Reference to Asia", Rural Transformation in Asia, Jan Breman and Sudipta Mundle (eds.), (New Delhi: Oxford U. Press, 1991) p.7-8.

¹¹ Jairus Banaji, "Illusions about the Peasantry: Karl Kautsky and the Agrarian Question", Journal of Peasant Studies (1990) no.2: p.289.

¹² The Agrarian Question (trans) Peter Burgess, (London: Zwan Publications, 1988)

¹³ T.J. Byres, "The Agrarian Question and Differing Forms of Capitalist Agrarian Transition", p.9.

¹⁴ Jairus Banaji, "Illusions about the Peasantry: Karl Kautsky and the Agrarian Question", p.291.

economics into the countryside and increased the theoretical potential for socialist revolution.

The Agrarian Question was first established in the context of the Soviet Union, an example of one of the most "backward" European nations near the beginning of the twentieth-century, as:

the degree to which agriculture could supply the necessary surplus, the means by which the fledgling socialist state might appropriate such surplus, and the speed and smoothness of transfer.¹⁵

The Peasant Question and the Agrarian Question merged at this point. As Marxists, such as Lenin, stressed the political importance of the urban proletariat in the process of bourgeois revolution, the peasant class was largely disregarded. The peasantry was no longer regarded as an impediment to revolution; but its utility was recognized in the context of providing the means for socialist economic development as is evidenced by Stalin's reign of terror in the Soviet countryside.

Marxist scholars have been influential within the field of peasant studies and have addressed the Agrarian and Peasant Questions in terms of the Soviet experience and a multitude of other economies and societies. The essence of Marxist structuralism is, furthermore, found in almost every area of development theory, especially early modernization theories, to the extent that modernization theory has focused on the influence of colonial capitalism on traditional, non-capitalist economies.¹⁶ Modernization theory, like Marxist thought, maintains a teleological element which assumes the revolutionary power of capitalism, a characteristic which can be found in

¹⁵ T.J. Byres, "The Agrarian Question and Differing Forms of Capitalist Agrarian Transition", p.11.

¹⁶ see W. Arthur Lewis, The Theory of Economic Growth, (Homewood, Ill: Richard Irwin, 1955) and Theodore Schultz, Transforming Traditional Agriculture, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

studies which purport to analyze the “transformation” of peasant producers to capitalist farmers. With the failure of capitalism to fulfill its historical duties in Western Europe and the development of the Agrarian Question, Marxist theorists eventually began to conceive of the peasant-state dialectic in terms of an extended process of synthesis. This is known generally as the neo-Marxist school of peasant studies and it considers the articulation, or inter-relationship, of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production.

A mode of production can generally be defined as an abstract conception of societal development with reference to the relations and forces of production. The relations of production define: “a specific mode of appropriation of surplus labour and the specific forms of social distribution of the means of production”; and, the forces of production refer to: “the mode of appropriation of nature, that is to the labour process.”¹⁷ With these two categories dictating the relationship among citizens as they are divided into classes, it is obvious that the neo-Marxist paradigm, as well as the more general Marxist conceptions of society, suffers greatly from a narrowly determined conception of social development.

There are various theoretical perspectives surrounding the basic premise of the articulation of modes of production. However, an understanding of the often contradictory theories is less useful than grasping its relationship to the overall peasant-state dialectic and the Agrarian Question. Like the Dualist theory of peasant-state relations, which is discussed below, the neo-Marxist paradigm can be applied, with serious reservations, to the reality of “underdeveloped” economies. In essence, it addresses what Kautsky and Engels realized nearly a century ago: capitalism is not capable of

¹⁷ Harold Wolpe (ed.), The Articulation of modes of production: Essays from “Economy and Society”, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) p.7 based on Barry Hindness and Paul Hirst’s definition in Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) p 9

bringing about social change in the manner exemplified by the British model. Despite the fact that the utility of the neo-Marxist paradigm is found mainly in very abstract and general terms, it does recognize that the Agrarian Question is still a vital concern for academics and policy-makers who are concerned with socio-economic issues in largely agrarian societies.

The Influence of Capitalism on "Backward" Economies

The development of capitalism in Western Europe was largely a result of the coincidence of historical, geographical and cultural circumstances. Capitalism is not an ideology as much as it is an ethos that, in peasant communities, must be accepted as a process of social change; the essence of capitalism is not contained within the market but is found within the psyche of those who must depend on the market for their existence. Having said this, it is important to consider the theoretical considerations surrounding the introduction of capitalism into peasant societies and the effect this has on the relationship between peasants and the state.

The broadening of the field of peasant studies — analyses which consider the relationship of peasants to the larger political economy — by Kautsky and Lenin to include "backward" economies has led to the consideration of present day "developing" economies, the subject matter for Lenin's writings on imperialism.¹⁸ The overwhelming majority of "Third World" economies were, at one time, colonial possessions and, as such, have experienced various forms of economic, political and cultural intrusions on

¹⁸ Although Lenin and Kautsky can be considered in tandem within the scope of peasant studies, they were not of the same mind when it came to many issues surrounding imperialism and the development of capitalism in agrarian societies, V. I. Lenin, On Imperialism and Imperialists, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973) p.44-86.

behalf of their respective colonizer. Perhaps the most powerful external force was the introduction of capitalist elements of taxation and land-holding into what were largely agrarian societies with very little market orientation and with production practices which were based largely on subsistence requirements.

The influence of capitalism upon peasant societies has been explored by many scholars and in the process terms such as "wave of progress"¹⁹ have been used to describe the impact of "North Atlantic Capitalism"²⁰ on subsistence-oriented economies. The nature of capitalism rests on the basis that land, labour, and capital are commodities and are, therefore, not goods produced necessarily for personal use but for sale.²¹ Capitalism is, thus, foreign to those societies where one's own land and labour are essential to the household's subsistence. The commodification of land and labour, that is the acceptance of private ownership of land for the purpose of resale rather than production and the provision of labour for a money wage is, as Karl Polanyi contends, "to annihilate all organic forms of existence and to replace them by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one."²² Polanyi may be overstating the case somewhat, but, the decline of traditional corporate institutions, with reference to the Vietnamese experience, can be neatly traced back to economic policies introduced by the French colonial power.

Hence, the distinction is made between the organic lifestyle, that which is dependent upon the land, and the inorganic, that which depends on the

¹⁹ Barrington Moore Jr., The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) p 505

²⁰ Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) p.276.

²¹ *Ibid* , p.277.

²² The Great Transformation, the political and economic origins of our time, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944) p.163

market. Polanyi believed this to be a global phenomenon and saw that “the smashing up of social structures” that has occurred in “remote regions” in the twentieth century, “was done in the eighteenth century to white populations by white men....”²³ The purpose was the same in both cases: the extraction of labour and surplus product. According to Polanyi the organic life could not be maintained against the unyielding influence of the market. However, it can be argued that the market has not prevailed to the extent that Polanyi, and Marx, described in their works.

As the capitalist ethos has spread throughout the world it has been both praised and criticised. Engels and Kautsky were concerned with the establishment of socialism in Europe; Polanyi explored the rise of fascism as a result of the failure of capitalism; and, yet, the underlying theme of each work can be reduced to the author’s perception of the nature of capitalism.

Capitalism is portrayed as being both the transitory phase on the way to an idyllic socialist end, as well as the most destructive and powerful force on the planet. In fact, Polanyi believes that the instability of the world capitalist system, as it existed in the 1930s, inevitably led to the development of fascist and socialist movements across the globe. He explains that fascism was a direct result of the Great Depression, and that socialism in the Soviet Union was not the result of the October revolution, but was rather a reluctant move towards autarchy resulting from the crisis of the market system during the 1930s:

the failure of the international system let loose the energies of history — the rails were set by the tendencies inherent in a market society.²⁴

Consequently, the effect of capitalism’s introduction into European culture

²³ *Ibid.*, p.164.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.248.

can be described, at best, as ambiguous. Capitalism can be seen as the protagonist in a liberation prophecy or its acceptance can be considered to be the first step on the path leading toward global destruction; it is, however, relied upon by both Marxists and non-Marxists as an engine for social change.

Michael Lipton provides an alternative to the notion that the introduction of capitalism has been the primary influence for social and political change both in Europe and the “developing” world. His work surrounding “urban bias” in world development suggests that the human poverty associated with the “development” process is not the work of capitalism and the bourgeois state, but rather is based on the tendencies of development planners to favour urban areas over rural areas when allocating resources.²⁵ Lipton disagrees with Banaji’s assessment of Kautsky. In Why Poor People Stay Poor, Lipton writes that Kautsky was aware of the dependent relationship between the urban market and the rural peasant community, and believes that Kautsky was the first to recognize the role of an “urban” ethos, as opposed to patterns of capitalist production, in peasant communities.²⁶

Lipton’s urban-rural dialectic is essentially the same as the peasant-state dialectic established above.²⁷ What links the two is that within any development system, either capitalist or socialist, development planners are more often concerned with their own betterment to the detriment of rural producers, thus, requiring the state, or urban elite, to extract a surplus from the peasant society under disadvantageous terms for the peasantry.²⁸ As will

²⁵ see Why Poor People Stay Poor, a Study of Urban Bias in World Development, (London Temple Smith, 1977) p.44-71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.115-117.

²⁷ For an example of how the urban bias model can be applied to peasant-state relations see Robert H. Bates, Markets and States in Tropical Africa, the Political Basis of Agricultural Policies, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981)

²⁸ Robert H. Bates, Markets and states in Tropical Africa The Political Basis of

be established below, the general acceptance of an "urban" or "capitalist" ethos by any peasant community, either forcibly or voluntarily, is assumed by many scholars and development planners. Regardless of the implementation of state-sponsored capitalist and socialist development plans, in many areas of the world the original peasant-state dialectic remains, despite the ostensible power of the capitalist ethos.

The Resiliency of Tradition

Capitalism has been portrayed by many scholars, both Marxist and non-Marxist, as the most important influence in the movement towards a community which can be described as being socio-economically "modern". However, culture and tradition are often more resilient than theorists tend to accept. Goran Hyden writes:

The problems of underdevelopment do not stem from an excessive penetration by world capitalism. Rather they stem from the inability of capitalism to produce the same dynamic transformation of the material base as it once did in Europe and America.²⁹

Hyden is critical of both dependency theorists' and neo-conservative political economists' inability to articulate the problem of underdevelopment in Africa. In fact, the principal constraint upon development in Africa is not international linkages but rather, "that this dependence does not extend beyond the state level."³⁰ Hyden is a Marxist whose experience has taught him to doubt the efficacy of capitalism. And, according to him, in many cases

Agricultural Policies, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) p.1-8.

²⁹ Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry, (London: Heinemann, 1980) p.3

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.33

the African state has been unable to incorporate the peasantry into the national development programme which has resulted in the present situation of economic and political "underdevelopment". Most importantly Hyden provides an example whereby the peasantry was able to persist in its "economy of affection" because of the inability of state capitalism to "penetrate" the peasantry's system of production.³¹

Hyden analysed African development policies from the perspective that the introduction of capitalism had not made the peasantry beholden to state development policies, but he is still burdened with his inevitable Marxist conclusion: development must come by means of a captured peasantry. Although his conclusions are more conscious of the traditional or pre-capitalist modes of production, to use Marxist terminology, than other more abstract neo-Marxist theorists, Hyden remains steadfastly allied to the Hegelian notion of progress and modernization. Rather than recognizing the "peasant mode of production" as an historical reality that does not require, necessarily, a "modernizing" influence, Hyden suggests that "underdevelopment" is the result of the inability of "systems" development approaches to "recognize the relative autonomy of many small units of production" and their power to impede "development".³²

Economic systems, capitalist or socialist, provide the ideological confines of development policies; similarly, both are predicated on the success of capitalism in creating the proper material basis for economic growth. Hyden recognizes the main impediment to "development" as the independence of the rural African producers, and properly articulates the reasons behind the "underdevelopment" of Africa in an historically specific

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.18-21.

³² *Ibid.*, p.243-244

framework, concentrating on the reality of pre-colonial methods of production and distribution, as well as systems of land settlement and land tenure. However, what makes the African peasantry unlike rural producers in Southeast Asia can be found in the relative availability of land; it is an abundance of land and the reliance on rain-fed crops that provides the African peasants with the ability to maintain their economic and political independence.³³ In Southeast Asia the state has always had more influence in the economic and political affairs of village communities because it traditionally maintained ownership rights to the land and provided the capital investment required to construct the public works projects that are essential for wet-rice agriculture.

Land, and the ability to provide a subsistence level of production from one's own land influences, to a great extent, whether or not a peasantry may be captured by a predatory state apparatus. This is not to say that the availability of land is the sole determinant of how effective the state will be in extracting surplus; there are mitigating factors such as the relationship between village notables and the colonial state, the structure of traditional villages as well as the tax burden imposed on the peasantry. However, the impact of colonial economic policies ultimately affects the relationship between the peasant community and its land resources. An understanding of the political and social changes that occurred in many parts of southeast Asia, as a result of the various land use issues during the colonial period, are essential to a proper understanding of peasant revolution in Vietnam and elsewhere.

³³ *Ibid* , p 10-11.

Colonial Economic Policy

Its Impact on Land and Labour in Southeast Asia

Access to land for the purpose of expending labour power and providing for subsistence are two essential components of peasant societies, and it is, in part, the denial of these two things that allows the state to gain greater access to the peasant's surplus and incite some form of individual or collective peasant action. State exploitation of the peasantry may take on many forms. Peasants are rarely faced with a monolithic state apparatus which openly and efficiently appropriates peasant produce; sometimes it is surplus labour that is extracted rather than surplus material. Thus, it is not that the state must directly impede the reproduction of the peasant community through a process of land expropriation, but, more importantly, that the state is capable of indirectly altering the relationship between land and peasant labour.

In concluding this chapter, the early program of "indirect" rule of Java by the Dutch presents a case where the peasant-state dialectic resulted in a form of collective action that is rarely considered as such since it is not in the same vein as other revolutionary movements. Specifically, collective action under Dutch colonial rule was manifest in a process of "agricultural involution", a common reaction for peasant communities that are faced with severe land shortages relative to available labour.

Dutch economic policy, despite its "night watchman" attitude, did introduce non-traditional economic patterns into colonial Java, which resulted in a painful process of adaptation.³⁴ The Javanese example provides insights into both the delicate association between land and labour in peasant

³⁴ Jan Breman, "A Note on the Colonial State", Rural Transformation in Asia, p 127

societies and the revolutionary effect of colonial capitalism on this relationship. More specifically, the case of colonial Java provides the historical basis for the Dualist theory of economics and society, the syncretic structuralist perspective mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this chapter.

Under the Dutch colonial Culture System (1830), labour was extracted from the Javanese peasant through obligatory relationships which forced them to provide specified quantities of export produce, "or the land and labour necessary to produce them, which amounted to the same thing."³⁵ Under this system, sugar cane was cultivated by peasants on portions of traditional wet-rice plots, and processed at Dutch-owned facilities:

The Javanese could not themselves become part of the estate economy, and they could not transform their general pattern of already intensive farming in an extensive direction, for they lacked capital, had no way to shuck off excess labour and were administratively barred from the bulk of their own frontier...³⁶

The motivation behind the colonial state's attempt to "keep the native native"³⁷ was far from benign. Although the Dutch did not directly expropriate peasant land-holdings they did disrupt the balance between cultivation and consumption that was becoming further disequibrated as population pressures on Java steadily increased.

The Culture System provided labour power for the colonial economy through a pattern of corv obligations,³⁸ an economic system which was never designed to fully absorb excess peasant labour. Two things resulted from this process, both of which are outlined above. First, the indirect control of land in the Javanese case resulted in a pattern of "dual economy". The

³⁵ David Joel Steinberg (ed.), In Search of Southeast Asia, a Modern History, (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 1985) p.157.

³⁶ Clifford Geertz, Agricultural Involution: the Process of Ecological Change, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) p.80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.48.

³⁸ David Joel Steinberg (ed.), In Search of Southeast Asia, p.158

Indonesian case has been central to the debate surrounding the influence of capitalism on traditional economic systems. The theoretical conceptualizations of the colonial Javanese economy are many and varied. On the one hand, an argument can be put forward that a unique “mode of production” was in place during the Culture System³⁹; on the other hand, authors debate the extent to which Javanese peasants were proletarianised: drawn into the capitalist system as wage labourers.⁴⁰ It seems, however, that debate has focused on the extent to which the colonial economy was a “dual economy”.

Dualist theory, originating with J.H. Boeke, attempts to achieve what was impossible within Marxism. At its heart, Dualist theory proclaims that it is not necessary for a society to be dominated by one social system: this refers to the social spirit, organizational forms and a specific economic theory.⁴¹ Broadly speaking, a social system can be conceived of as a mode of production, yet it has no epochal necessity associated with it. Colonial Java is Boeke’s example of a dual society, which is the result of a clash between “western capitalism” and “eastern economics”.⁴² The result of this process is a synthesis of “eastern” and “western” economics which can be perceived as a hybrid, a creation which is not considered theoretically possible within either the Marxist or neo-Marxist paradigms.

Second, and equally important, was the peasant response to Dutch economic policies, especially in the paddy growing *Sawah* areas where sugar was cultivated for the state in return for a tax exemption, while rice

³⁹ see Jan Breman, “A Note on the Colonial State”, Rural Transformation in Asia

⁴⁰ see G.R. Knight, “Peasant Labour and Capitalist Production in Late Colonial Indonesia: a ‘Campaign’ at a North Java Sugar Factory, 1840-1870”, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, (1988): p.245-265.

⁴¹ Economics and Economic Policy of Dual Societies, as Exemplified by Indonesia, (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink and Zoon N.V., 1953) p.3-4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.4-5.

production continued to ensure the maintenance of subsistence levels of consumption. It was in these areas that peasants were able to maintain their traditional production practices due to the nature of wet rice agriculture production. As a matter of course, wet rice can maintain an ever-increasing population base through intensified rather than expanded production.⁴³ Agricultural involution is the term that has been used to describe this phenomena, and refers to the continually augmented complexity of labour relationships and production techniques required to provide subsistence levels of production for an expanding population from static land resources.⁴⁴

Involution within a peasant community offers two possible solutions: Villages may become reliant on more labour intensive production methods which result in a decreasing rate of marginal return and shared poverty or they may begin to export labour.⁴⁵ Only the first alternative was available for the Javanese, but in the Vietnamese case, migration was traditionally supported as a means of alleviating a reduction in the marginal returns from labour. These, however, are not phenomena exclusive to Southeast Asia, as are evidenced in the work of Marx and others who have attempted to extrapolate the process of land closure and industrialization in nineteenth-century Europe to twentieth-century Asia. Geertz's agricultural involution theory is salient in that it provides an example of how capitalism can disrupt the peasant economic system to the point where revolution or rebellion against the colonial power may become an alternative. However, its analytical capacity does not rest solely with the influences of colonial capitalism, but can also be applied to more contemporary issues in Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

⁴³ Clifford Geertz, Agricultural Involution: the Process of Ecological Change, p.29-32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* , p.80

⁴⁵ Jim Scott, "Some Notes on Post-Peasant Society", Peasant Studies, (1978) no.3: p.148-149.

Summary

By defining a peasant as a rural producer who must necessarily provide a form of household surplus, whether that be labour or product, to the state, a dialectic between peasant and state is established. This dialectic is compounded by the influence of colonial capitalism which causes an increasing tension between the state and the peasantry, a tension that has been defined by some as an urban-rural dialectic. Nevertheless, the results of the capitalist influence and the end result of the dialectic has been generally assumed by political economists to lead ultimately to the acceptance of the capitalist ethos by peasant producers.

Hyden argues convincingly that, in the Tanzanian case, the assumptions made by many Western academics have been misplaced; capitalism has not been able to penetrate the peasant society in parts of eastern Africa. Beyond this, he provides an opportunity to compare and contrast the impediments to rural transformation in Africa and Southeast Asia. It is clear that the relationship of surplus labour and limited land have greatly influenced the process of adaptation and, as will be considered shortly, revolution. However, despite Hyden's conclusions concerning the eventual path that "development" in Africa should take, he does provide important insights into the relationship between peasant and state, as well as the impotence of capitalism to carry out its ostensibly preordained modernizing function.

Peasants, then, must be defined within the context of their relationship to the state. This first assessment of the general dialectic found between the two, leaves many questions yet to be considered. Most importantly, what role do peasants play in influencing their relationship with the state? How do

peasants begin to express themselves in the public, or political realm? By what means can the peasantry use to dictate the outcome of peasant-state conflict? It is these questions that are addressed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Peasant Responses to the Peasant-State Dialectic

The process of modernization begins with peasant revolutions that fail. It culminates during the twentieth century with peasant revolutions that succeed.

Barrington Moore Jr. - *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*

The wily free-rider is on the prowl, seeking to assure that he does as well as he can, no worse than he must, and knowing that his little theft will be of no consequence to others.

Mancur Olson

Introduction

In the first chapter, a dialectic based on the structural conflict between peasant and state was established. However, it is imprudent, for two primary reasons, to maintain an analysis of peasant-state relations from a purely structuralist perspective, especially when considering peasant revolutionary collective action. First, structural determinism, in the Vietnamese case, is unable to successfully deal with a number of historical anomalies; and, second, purely structural analyses neglect the role endogenous variables play, such as culture, geography and demographics, in facilitating collective action.

I argue throughout this chapter that a proper explanatory model of peasant-state relations must include the interplay between structure and individual action. In the case of Vietnam, structural change has been an important factor in encouraging peasant revolution, and individual acts of resistance. Ultimately, however, peasant responses are determined not by structural changes alone, but by individuals' perceptions surrounding these changes. Culture and ideology are considered to be the filters through which structural change is perceived. In other words, peasant reaction to the structural dialectic takes place in a relatively stable cultural system which has few causal linkages with more volatile political and economic structures; due to this,

changes in meso and macro level political and economic structures become the key variables in understanding the variety of peasant reactions to the peasant-state dialectic.

Unfortunately, the debate surrounding revolutionary collective action has been divided into the two deterministic camps mentioned above: agent and structure. As a result of this bifurcation, the complexity of peasant revolutionary collective action is not always adequately addressed, and, consequently, many writers are unfairly categorized while important theoretical distinctions are overlooked.¹ Nevertheless, the first task of this chapter will be to assess the literature as it pertains to the role of agents and structures in the process of revolutionary collective action.

Following from this, the discussion will focus on the inadequacies of the two theoretical approaches, and in the process reveal those factors that have been marginalized by the dominant discourse on revolutionary collective action. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the theory of everyday resistance will be examined within the context of the overall argument concerning the role of changing state structures on peasant action. This is intended to assist in grounding the peasant-state dialectic in a theory of peasant action which maintains an explanatory and analytical capacity for acts of both everyday resistance and revolutionary collective action.

¹ Samuel Popkin in The Rational Peasant, The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) and Theda Skocpol in States and Social Revolutions, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) are perhaps the only two entirely deterministic studies following the rational choice and structuralist perspectives respectively. Most other works on peasant revolution fall somewhere in between the rigidity of Popkin and Skocpol

Peasant Revolutionary Collective Action

Reaction to Structural Change or Political Entrepreneurship?:

According to the agent-structure debate, which has been influential in shaping analyses of peasant revolutionary action, revolution is either a mechanism by which the peasantry reacts to the impact of external forces upon their established patterns of life, or, conversely, the means by which individual peasants can effect political and social change for their own personal benefit. There is a clear distinction here between revolution as a conservative reaction, and revolution as a means to move forward in a new society: "the contrast is between moral propulsion and political competence."² Peasants must either engage in revolution because of the impact capitalism has upon their socio-economic traditions, "moral economy"³, or seek personal benefits from the opportunities presented by the introduction of the market, "political economy".⁴

These two theoretical trajectories are prime examples of structuralist and individualist methodological approaches to peasant revolution. Moral economy is concerned primarily with the economic and political structures that affect the peasantry as a class. Political economy posits the opposite approach: individuals engage in revolution when it is in their own self-interest. These perspectives are narrowly conceived of by the main protagonists in the debate, James Scott and

² Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, p.245.

³ see Joel G. Migdal, *Peasants, Politics and Revolution, Pressures Toward Political and Social Change in the Third World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), George M. Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good", *American Anthropologist*, (1965) no 2 p 293-315; James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant, Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Jefferey M. Paige, *Agrarian Revolution, Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World*, (New York: Free Press, 1975)

⁴ see Theodore Schultz, *Transforming Traditional Agriculture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); Michael Lipton, "The Theory of the Optimising Peasant", *Journal of Development Studies*, (1968) no.4: p.327-351; Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*

Samuel Popkin, and hinge largely on each authors' conception of the role and nature of the "corporate village" in traditional peasant life. The basic constituent elements of the corporate village structure are as follows: first, they maintain a "body of rights" to possessions, second, they put pressures on members to redistribute surpluses, and, third, they are closed communities in that individuals are restricted from gaining citizenship outside of their native village.⁵

It is the moral economy school of thought that has dominated the literature on peasant revolution. The analytical concerns of this paradigm of peasant revolution tend to centre around the structural bases for collective action, and attempt to address the general question: why do peasants, as a collectivity, become involved politically at the public level when traditionally they tend to restrict their actions to the corporate village? The answer to this question varies slightly depending upon the author, but, generally, moral economists consider the break down of the traditional village structures and the violation of what has been termed a "subsistence ethic"⁶ as providing the impetus for revolutionary collective action.

More specifically, moral economy is based on the traditional normative inter-relationships between the peasantry, village notables, and the imperial state. Scott defines a moral economy as the peasantry's "notion of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation — their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable."⁷ The state was morally and, ultimately, personally responsible for providing a subsistence level income for the peasantry. According to moral economists, the state was held accountable

⁵ Eric R. Wolf, "Closed Corporate Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, (1957) no.1: p.2.

⁶ Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, p.279-280; James Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant, p.13-35.

⁷ The Moral Economy of the Peasant, p.3.

for the loss of community welfare within the corporate village.⁸

Within the moral economy paradigm it is assumed that the structure of the corporate village provides certain defenses against the larger society through kinship and patron-client bonds. External pressures assist in eroding these relationships to the point where individual peasants must begin to seek other sources of security which eventually leads them outside the physical and social confines of the village.⁹ It is a self-motivated quest to redress the ostensible economic injustices that have been perpetrated by colonial administrators and village elites. As Joel Migdal states:

[Peasants] respond to the immediate material trade-offs they can garner in exchange for their organizational membership, trade-offs that overcome some of the shortcomings of the institutional network that peasants have faced with increasing outside market participation.¹⁰

By becoming involved in the political realm the peasant was not necessarily attempting to effect policy change, but was merely reestablishing some type of personal social network, a very basic *quid pro quo*.

For moral economists peasant behaviour was premised on peasant involvement in class based organizations, which were grounded on the establishment of what is known as an "objective class subculture".¹¹ Because the oppression faced by peasants was the same in many geographical areas, the market created a class, based not on cultural traits or material contradictions but on the shared experience of the impact of capitalism. Scott and Kerkvliet write: "colonialism and capitalism...steadily eliminated the local idiosyncrasies of

⁸ Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, p.279 and James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet, "The Politics of Survival: Peasant Response to 'Progress' in Southeast Asia", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, (1973) no.4: p.242-249

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.244-246.

¹⁰ Peasants, Politics and Revolution, p.211.

¹¹ "The Politics of Survival: Peasant Response to 'Progress' in Southeast Asia", p.251

fragmented subsistence economies."¹² As distinctions dissipate, a homogenous peasant class which relies on identical reactions to the influence of colonial capitalism begins to emerge.

As a reaction to the moral economy school the political economy approach to peasant revolution, which has most often been associated with Samuel Popkin, has not managed to separate itself from the many difficulties inherent to the class based analysis found within the moral economy model of peasant collective action. Specifically, Popkin is unable to satisfactorily address the free-rider problem, an issue that is further discussed below. Although Popkin relies more on the role of "human agents" while addressing the inadequacies of the moral economy paradigm, his analysis suffers from the generalities which stem from his equally deterministic view of corporate village structures.

Popkin's Rational Peasant stems from his personal disagreement with the moral economy model, specifically its assessment of the pre-colonial corporate village in Vietnam. He believes that moral economists place too much emphasis on the benign, even nurturing, properties of traditional societies and accuses the moral economy school of romanticizing pre-colonial village life.¹³ Popkin is concerned with the internal disintegration of the corporate village as it was constructed in the pre-colonial period in Vietnam, and not, as is the case with moral economists, in the destructive influence of colonial capitalism on these same village structures.

As a rational choice theory of peasant revolution, Popkin's work relies on the effectiveness of organizations to aggregate peasant interests, rather than the efficacy of class solidarity:

When a direct link is made between individual morality and the morality of a class, the implicit assumption is that peasants are

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ The Rational Peasant, p.5-17.

easily motivated to uphold norms and support one another by individual action; they are assumed to be willing to devote time and resources to common efforts for the good of their class.¹⁴

From this, Popkin correctly establishes that the free-rider problem is an inherent difficulty found within both the moral economy and political economy models. Individuals must at some point make the conscious decision to act; this is the case for both paradigms. It is at the point when individuals must decide whether or not to pay the personal cost for social gain that the free-rider problem is applicable.

Popkin argues that if the only benefits accrued from collective action are for the common good, "the peasant may leave the contributions to others and spend his scarce resources in other ways."¹⁵ To overcome the free-rider problem Popkin relies on the "by-product theory" of collective goods which states that organizational leaders must provide "selective incentives from whose proceeds the collective goods are financed."¹⁶ Structures, then, are unimportant for Popkin; peasant decisions to engage in revolution are not tempered by social pressures, norms or values but are wholly dependent upon a rational assessment of the possible outcomes.

Re-assessing Agent and Structure

Neither the moral economy nor the rational actor model of peasant behaviour fully satisfies the requirements of this study. The difficulty with utilizing either one of these socio-economic theories is found in what has been termed and alluded to as the "agent-structure problem". It is summarized as follows:

¹⁴ *Ibid* , p.252

¹⁵ *Ibid* , p 253

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

First, individuals are often agents whose intentional, self-conscious actions both reproduce and transform social reality. Second, society consists largely of interconnecting social relationships (structures) that condition the interaction between agents, as well as the outcome of agent action.¹⁷

This problem establishes the need to recognize the symbiotic relationship between agents and structures.

The moral economy approach is useful only as long as there is a discernible obligation between peasant and state, that is, provided the social structure that provides for a moral obligation is present. Once these structures have dissipated then analysts must consider why, in light of the free-rider problem, *individuals* will choose to act as a collectivity, working toward a common goal. Scott is able to shed light on why peasants, as a class, might participate in order to achieve a common end, but the moral economy argument is incapable of describing why in certain cases revolutionary collective action does not occur when the subsistence ethic has clearly been violated.¹⁸ Furthermore, the moral economy argument fails to provide an adequate description of how elites are involved in aggregating peasant interests, in other words, it ignores the importance of leadership and ideology. Scott's theory is weakened by the fact that although he relies on the creation of class as the basis of revolution, he is forced to accept implicitly that ultimately peasants must act in their own interest. Berejikian notes that "even the strictest structural interpretation would grant that revolt is an aggregation of individual decisions;

¹⁷ Jeffrey Berejikian, "Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem", American Political Science Review, (86): p.647.

¹⁸ see Hy Van Luong, "Agrarian Unrest from an Anthropological Perspective", Comparative Politics, (1985) Jan : p.153-174 for a critical assessment of Scott's historical analysis of the Nghe-Tinh rebellion in the 1930s. A similar incident, which did not engender any type of collective revolutionary action on the part of the peasantry, is the severe famine in northern Vietnam during 1945

for peasants must ultimately choose to revolt.”¹⁹

This type of analysis of “peasantry as class” is not restricted to the Southeast Asian experience.²⁰ What makes class a difficult unit of analysis is the way in which it generalizes the “nature” of “the peasant”. Theda Skocpol concurs:

it is quite fruitless to predict peasant behaviour or its revolutionary or (nonrevolutionary) effects on the basis of *any* broad speculation about the nature of peasantry. Varying social structure, political configurations, and historical conjunctures constitute much more appropriate terms of analysis and explanation.²¹

Skocpol, however, is not above distinguishing a class of peasantry within the confines of established political and social structures. The creation of a peasant class does not necessitate action against the state structure. A perfect example of this is Scott’s “objective class” as it assumes collective action based on broad objective similarities between peasants, similarities which are necessarily the result of very specific forms of oppression.

As much as the inevitable movement from class formation to class conflict is assumed by writers who premise peasant collective action merely on the impact of changing state structure, so too, is the universal applicability of utilitarian logic assumed by rational choice theorists. Hy Luong notes the dangers of using utilitarian logic to the exclusion of historical and socio-cultural values:

Without such an incorporation, the framework simply projects Western utilitarian ideology onto a radically different sociocultural landscape, where it encounters numerous empirical anomalies.²²

¹⁹ “Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem”, p 648

²⁰ see the section “A Theory of Rural Class Conflict”, Agrarian Revolution, Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World, Jefferey M Paige, p.1-71

²¹ “What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?”, Power and Protest in the Countryside, Robert P Weller and Scott E. Guggenheim (eds.), (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982) p 158

²² Revolution in the Village, Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press) p.220

Just as the moral economy argument is found wanting with respect to historical cases in Vietnam such as the Nghe-Tinh rebellion during the 1930s²³, the political economy explanation fails when peasants act in an apparently irrational manner. Hy Luong's argument is persuasive and enlightening, perhaps because of the fact that the anthropological element to his work provides a counter to the recent dominance of economic and sociological studies of peasant revolution and resistance.

Culture and Ideology

It is not that utilitarian logic or class-based analysis are somehow inappropriate when studying peasant revolution; on the contrary, they are both essential. However, utilitarian logic is denied by structural theorists who believe peasants participating in revolts are characterized as merely "pursuing latent, class-based desires and demands in a more permissive structural environment."²⁴ The corollary to this is that utilitarian logic is abused by rational choice, or individualist theorists for whom it becomes the sole determinant of peasant actions.

A synthesis of the structuralist and individualistic methodologies is provided by Jeffrey Berejikian's theory of "risk-seeking choices".²⁵ In it he attempts to address the free-rider problem as it pertains to collective action. Free-riders are neglected as impediments to peasant revolution in the moral economy approach and are unsatisfactorily dealt with by Popkin. In an attempt to deal with the free-rider problem, Berejikian provides a modified version of rational choice theory which adapts the traditional utility maximizing assumptions to the

²³ *op cit.* note 19, Chapter 2.

²⁴ "Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem", p.649.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.652-655

extent that decision-making patterns are guided by structural influences. Furthermore, Berejikian has attempted to reintroduce ideology as an important factor in the process of peasant collective action.

An overall dissatisfaction with the way free-riders have been addressed in the literature on peasant revolution influenced Berejikian to introduce a reformulated model of individual choice:

Such a model must (1) identify what sort of decision rule is in effect (this, I shall argue, requires reference to social structure) and (2) demonstrate how this rule when employed, accounts for revolutionary collective action.²⁶

Both structuralist and individualist perspectives have maintained that the decision rule for an individual faced with two positive utility alternatives or two negative utility alternatives is the same. Recent research, however, has shown that the decision rules are "contextually contingent", referring here to the structural context.²⁷ This has important implications for trying to understand why under certain structural realities peasants may or may not undertake collective action. As has been outlined above, tempering the traditional "thin" rational choice theory will assist in understanding the reasons for the existence of historical anomalies that are inexplicable within rigid structuralist or individualist theories.

Within Berejikian's theory of "risk-seeking choices" peasants are defined as neither an inherently risk-averse class, nor, necessarily, a community of risk-taking individuals. The decision to engage in revolution is determined by the "social frame" that is communicated to the peasantry by revolutionary organizations. A social frame is the perception that individuals have concerning the status quo, and whether its maintenance will result in some type of loss or

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.652.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

gain in utility.²⁸ Risk, then, becomes a function of the present social frame and it is at this point that the importance of ideology and culture become apparent. Revolutionary organizations are the vital link between peasants and collective action because they provide the ideological context for the social frame:

If a losses frame is a first necessary condition for revolt, then the initial task for a revolutionary organization is to adopt — or construct — a world view that effectively communicates to individual peasants the understanding that existing social-structural arrangements are worse than in some “normal” past.²⁹

What this argument eventually provides is an explanation for why individuals can be expected to make a conscious decision between two utility losses.

Traditional rational choice theory was incapable of explaining why when two choices are available, neither of which will result in utility gains, is one more amenable to another; the marginal utility of revolutionary action could not be demonstrated. Structuralists, furthermore, have tended to perceive peasants as risk-averse and have therefore been unable to explain the reasons behind individual risk-taking actions which must eventually occur if peasants are to revolt *en masse*.

Berejikian's argument focuses on how peasant interests are aggregated within the context of differing structural frames. Ideology becomes important as a means to overcome the free-rider problem, but Berejikian neglects to discuss how ideology comes to be accepted by individuals. Ideology is constructed within specific “frames”, but it must be amenable to the cultural context which remains relatively constant over time. Therefore, culture and knowledge which

²⁸ Berejikian points out that prospect theory typically considers the maintenance of the status quo to provide neither a loss nor a gain in utility. However, in his use of the “framing effect” the status quo can be placed in the area of utility losses, with the reference point of “normalcy” being “reflective of past conditions” or even an imagined norm. see *Ibid.*, p.652-653 and Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “The Psychology of Preferences”, *Scientific American*, (246): p.171-172.

²⁹ Jefferey Berejikian, “Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem”, p.653.

are shared by the group allow ideology to either be accepted or rejected as an aggregating influence, and will also dictate the form in which peasants respond to the dialectic.

In order to explain the importance of culture and its structural manifestations, I will provide a critique of Michael Taylor's conception of "community"³⁰ and its role in encouraging collective action. The peasant community is defined by Taylor as maintaining three characteristics: first, members have beliefs and values in common; second, relations between members are direct and many-sided; and third, community members practice "generalized" and "balanced" reciprocity.³¹

Taylor argues that the free-rider problem can be overcome by the community since it has the capacity to provide its members with an array of positive and negative social sanctions. These sanctions can be used as selective incentives to both influence individual participation, but also to bolster conditional cooperation.³² The presence of a strong community is essential for collective action since the characteristics inherent to communities, that is, their ability to apply both positive and negative social sanctions, dictate that members find participation in collective action rational.³³

Taylor's argument falters, however, because of his confusing use of the term "community". He is unable to distinguish between the role played by the shared beliefs that are essential to the cohesiveness of a community and a super-community, nation, and the relative importance of community institutions. Both shared beliefs and community institutions are essential components of a

³⁰ Michael Taylor relies on his definition of community to bolster the rational choice perspective concerning peasant collective action in "Rationality and Revolutionary Collective Action", Rationality and Revolution, Michael Taylor (ed.), (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1988)

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.68. This description is very similar to Eric Wolf's description of "closed" corporate communities.

³² *Ibid.*, p.67.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.69.

"community", but Taylor does not make a distinction between the functions of these two separate elements in aggregating peasant interests. Taylor use Skocpol's historical examples and considers the differences between the "closed corporate communities" in France and Russia with clearly defined institutions, and the more "open" communities in China where there *"was a non-negligible degree of community, sufficient to provide a foundation for collective action"* but with less rigid community institutions.³⁴ Hence, the Chinese case seems to provide an anomaly to Taylor's argument concerning the role of closed communities in collective action. In China, the institutions that had been ostensibly essential to spontaneous revolution in Russia and France did not exist; instead, according to Taylor, the Chinese revolution depended upon political entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it is not apparent in which cases and to what extent Taylor believes that "community" institutions, as embodied by closed corporate structures, and the "community" based on shared beliefs, can separately aggregate peasant interests. The ambiguity is enhanced by his insistence on describing both aspects as merely "community".

The distinction between institution and ethos does not have to be made unless one argues that closed communities *do not*, in fact, engender collective action on a national scale. Individual communities, or closed corporate villages, can be assumed capable of overcoming the free-rider problem within their own limited population. Taylor's conception of super-community collective action, however, is premised on the assumption that individual corporate structures, once their populations have been convinced of the benefits of collective action and have overcome the free-rider problem in their respective communities, will not act as free-riders. Individual corporate communities may not, however, necessarily share common beliefs; they may want only to redress their

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.74-75.

community's concerns rather than become involved with large-scale collective action. Aggregating interests, at either the community or national level, requires political entrepreneurs to express an ideology that can be embraced on a broad scale but also embody local, although not necessarily specific "community" concerns. Concerning China, Taylor writes:

by disaggregating the big overall goal of building a revolutionary movement into many smaller ones, by localizing the effort, by facilitating conditional cooperation...and by the use of selective incentives, the communists made it *rational* for the peasant to participate.³⁵

Taylor seems to discount entirely the notion that individual communities might not choose to act in a concerted fashion since the rationality of their actions is based on local concerns, and, that some communities might actually play the part of the free-rider within the context of a super-community consisting of numerous individual corporate communities.

It is difficult to believe, however, that closed communities are more likely to engage in spontaneous revolution than open communities. That is, a group of very autarchic village structures are less likely, under fragmented leadership, to find common ideological ground in the hopes of engaging in large-scale collective action; it is much more likely that once community institutions have weakened — when community leaders no longer maintain strict control over sanctions and rewards — there will be more opportunity for political entrepreneurs to shape ideology within the context of those cultural values and beliefs which are shared by the super-community.

Taylor's argument begs the question, why would a community leader incite revolutionary collective action which would likely result in the dissolution of the closed peasant "community" and, concomitantly, their individual power

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.80.

base. As will be examined in Chapter 3, Vietnamese village leaders recognized their interests were best served by the colonial state, which had helped to “open” the “closed” village structures, leaving the peasantry exposed to the influences of the Communists and religious sectarian groups such as the *Hoa Hao* and the *Cao Dai*. It was the super-community’s adoption of patriotic beliefs and millenarian ideals, as well as the weakened community institutions, that allowed for the collective action of individuals from different corporate villages and geographical regions.

Everyday Resistance: The Dialectic in Action

Everyday resistance is the natural manifestation of the dialectic that was established in the first chapter; however, it is a theory that has been only recently expounded. Conjecture suggests that its appearance results from the ever-decreasing influence of the Vietnam War on academia. Studies of large-scale peasant revolution have been replaced with analyses that focus on the forms of everyday resistance, defined as “the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them.”³⁶ Berejikian’s attempt to reconcile the structuralist and individualist theories of peasant revolution offers a clearer understanding of peasant collective action; however, collective action that results in armed uprising is rare. In order to analyze the more extensive and mundane manifestations of the peasant-state dialectic it is necessary to turn to the theory of everyday peasant resistance.

The peasant-state dialectic is essential to the definition of everyday resistance, but the synthesis of the dialectic is not as apparent as Marxist and

³⁶ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) p.29.

Dualist thinkers suggest. In fact, everyday resistance theory offers no syncretic utopia or hybrid; resistance is constant, continually occupying the discursive relationship between peasant and state. Furthermore, everyday resistance theory is guilty of the pessimism characteristic of most post-modern thought, never promising nor denying a "better life" in the future. In the context of development studies, this is perhaps a more honest way to perceive the world and those people in it who have suffered through the false hope of modernization and *dependencia* theory. Hence, the logical extensions of everyday resistance theory are often unpalatable.

Within this theoretical context are found the methodological equivalents of Berejikian's theoretical synthesis. Scott bridges the theoretical gap between the dichotomy of the rational and communal peasant with his everyday resistance theory:

when peasants act in a utilitarian and individualistic fashion against the powerful forces destroying their lives they are also engaging in class struggle. In acting to marginally increase their chance for survival against devastating odds, they are also carrying out acts of resistance.³⁷

Methodologically, Scott is moving away from the structuralism that is so apparent in his other works by concentrating on the marginal utility of individual peasant's actions. However, to avoid the danger of "everyday resistance" becoming a study of "acts of futility" it is necessary to maintain the element of class struggle, a remnant of Scott's structuralist past.

More than just a synthesis of structural and individual views of peasant resistance, everyday resistance addresses the intractable conflict found between the dominant and respondent. This is the post-modern view that is concerned with the issues of power and knowledge, and hegemony and ideology, issues

³⁷ Christine Pelzer White, "Everyday Resistance, Socialist Revolution and Rural Development the Vietnamese Case", The Journal of Peasant Studies, (1986) no 2: p.49

which are included in Scott's confrontationalist view of history. The confrontation that I have established as a dialectic is a remnant of modernism where individuals are categorized as members of classes that act as one. Michel Foucault writes:

I believe the great fantasy is the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of wills. Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.³⁸

It is impossible to reconcile the Hegelian dialectic with this view of history, but Foucault's approach is not incompatible with the political-economic dialectic that is employed throughout this study. Peasants can act independently because an individual peasant is defined solely in relation to the state. Unlike Marxist conceptions of class, which are dependent upon their epochal context, the peasant is an individual whose existence is not contingent on the form taken by state oppression, for example feudal or bourgeois, but merely on the presence of a generic state apparatus. The confrontational thesis is not concerned in any way with a resolution of the dialectic; in fact, an incessant contradiction between peasant and state is the *raison d'être* of this type of analysis.

Scott's everyday resistance theory recognizes that the dialectic is inherent to the definition of peasant and depends on the analysis of the actions of "human agents" rather than the collective action of a peasant society to initiate social change. Furthermore, the traditional view that revolution is the catalyst for social change is called into question. As James Scott writes:

The revolution, when and if it does come, may eliminate many of the worst evils of the ancient regime, but it is rarely if ever the end of peasant resistance. For the radical elites who capture the state are likely to have different goals in mind than their erstwhile peasant

³⁸ Power and Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, (ed.) Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon, 1980) p.55.

supporters.³⁹

Thus, political change occurs but the nature of the state as the oppressor of the peasantry remains.

As Scott has moved away from the structural analysis of the Moral Economy, he has substantively altered his conception of class and class conflict. Collective action under the moral economy argument was based on the creation of an objective peasant class while everyday resistance is based on the notion of individual action within the context of the hegemonic discourse. Hegemony, defined as the ideological control possessed by the ruling class over the proletarian class, stems from the work of Antonio Gramsci.⁴⁰ Through his writings, Gramsci attempted to formulate an understanding of why the proletariat in western Europe had not managed to engage the ruling classes in revolution. Out of Gramsci's work has surfaced the notion of false-consciousness as a manifestation of this hegemonic relationship.

In Weapons of the Weak, Scott takes Gramsci's notion of hegemony and false-consciousness to task in an effort to better understand class relations in the area of Malaysia where Scott carried out his field research. The five main criticisms that arise are, in essence, a defense of history as a discipline removed from the fetters of Marxist historicism. The most important of these five concerns is that hegemony assumes the perfect penetration of ideology, it disregards the ability of the subordinate class to "demystify the prevailing ideology."⁴¹ Gramsci's concept of hegemony assumes that subordinate classes are unable to establish their own ideological perspective, and those groups that break the "norms and values of the dominant ideology [are] typically the bearers of a new

³⁹ Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, p 302

⁴⁰ see Selections from the Prison Notebooks, (eds.) and (trans.) Quinten Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

⁴¹ Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, p 317-318

mode of production", ideally capitalists.⁴² By countering the Gramscian notion of hegemony, Scott is supporting his own view of "hidden discourses" embedded within social strata which is so important to the overall effectiveness of the everyday resistance thesis.⁴³

To reject the Gramscian notion of hegemony is to disagree fundamentally with the Althusserian Marxist conception of class consciousness and the dictates of the abstract conceptions of modes of production. In one of the most prominent critiques of Althusserian Marxism, E.P. Thompson writes:

classes which do make an entrance from time to time, and march up and down the pages—the bourgeoisie, the proletariat—are exceedingly projections of Theory, like primeval urges with iron heads, since "politics", "laws", etc., etc., have been taken out of their heads and put at different "levels", and since consciousness, values, and culture have been excluded from the vocabulary.⁴⁴

Scott's theory brings the cultural and normative aspects of human existence into focus as those elements that ultimately influence the formation of a class consciousness. The formation of class "arises at the intersection of determination and self-activity."⁴⁵

Scott is not convinced that class structures are essential to any community, but, if they are, they must be found not in the abstract conceptions of modes of production but rather in the "shared experience that reflects both the cultural material and historical givens of its carriers."⁴⁶ From this, Scott is able to establish his individual acts of resistance as social action, or broadly defined class behaviour:

Seen in the light of a supportive subculture and the knowledge that

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 318

⁴³ see James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1990) and James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, p. 37-41

⁴⁴ The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays, (London: Merlin Press, 1980) p. 298

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, p. 42-45

the risk to any single resistor is generally reduced to the extent that the whole community is involved, it becomes plausible to speak of a social movement.⁴⁷

Ultimately, what must be considered is the impact that such a movement can possibly have on the mechanisms of state power, this concern will be addressed in the context of economic reform in socialist Vietnam.

Summary

Scott's theory of everyday resistance is a perfect example of the confrontationalist view that was outlined in Chapter 1. Its theoretical and methodological essence is the belief that the dialectic between peasant and state is largely political and inherently intransigent. By moving away from the structuralist arguments of the past, and by incorporating elements of individualistic theory, Scott is able to analyze more thoroughly the peasant-state dialectic and not merely its revolutionary manifestations. Theories of peasant revolution have not traditionally been concerned with the eventual outcome of the peasant-state conflict, centering instead around reasons why peasants revolt, and, couching their prose in overly optimistic rhetoric concerning peasant life following a successful revolution.

With the temporal means to reevaluate peasant revolution, it is clear that theoretical explanations for peasant behaviour have been too rigid in their analysis, relying either on agent-oriented or structural determinants. Berejikian's methodological insights are important, generally, but can also be applied directly to the Vietnamese case during both the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. First, Berejikian allows for the inclusion of ideology as a vital means for revolutionary organizations to initiate collective action. Second, the concept of

⁴⁷ *Ibid* , p.35

class, as established by Scott and Berejikian, can incorporate an element of individual action which is essential for an understanding of both revolutionary and post-revolutionary peasant resistance in Vietnam.

There are two theoretical processes which are considered in this chapter. First, the assessment of revolutionary collective action as the means by which a peasantry chooses to address the dialectic between itself and the state; and, second, the means by which it is possible for a peasantry to resist the demands of the state, in the context of an incessant structural dialectic, without engaging in full-scale revolution. The historical movement from the pre-colonial period to the establishment of the revolutionary communist state in Vietnam parallels the shift in relative importance from the structural to more integrated (structural and actor-oriented) methodologies, and from revolutionary collective action as the main theoretical concern to forms of everyday resistance. Debate concerning this specific issue has been centered around the validity of the confrontationalist, non-syncretic view of the dialectic. That is, should the Vietnamese revolution be judged as a "revolution betrayed", or has the communist state been more benevolent than its colonial predecessor, suggesting perhaps that there can be a confluence of state and peasant interests.⁴⁸ These are issues to be dealt with in the following chapters.

⁴⁸ see Christine Pelzer White, "Everyday Resistance, Socialist Revolution and Rural Development: the Vietnamese Case", p.58-59

Chapter 3: Colonial Vietnam: Structural Change and Revolution

These peasants, having conquered nature as well as invaders, would not be satisfied to return home and resume life under the conditions of slavery that had been imposed on them. The peasants' struggle for their rights weaves in and out of Vietnamese history like a piece of red thread.

Nguyen Khac Vien - *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam*

Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.

George Orwell - *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Introduction

This chapter is the first of two which examine the theoretical elements, discussed in the first two chapters, in the context of changing state structures in Vietnam and peasant reactions to these changes. Beginning with a description of pre-colonial village structures and their relationship with the dynastic state, I will go on to argue that colonial taxation and land expropriation policies were influential in encouraging the collapse of the traditional social linkages that were associated largely with the "closed" village structures.¹

Once again the dialectic established in Chapter 1 provides the underlying tension contained within the colonial state's dealings with the Vietnamese peasant. Unlike the dynastic state, the colonial state did not lack economic power and had few concerns about garnering political approval from Vietnamese peasants; thus, power was exercised in a much more

¹ Eric Wolf, "Closed Corporate Communities in Meso-America and Java", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, (1957) Spring: 1-18. It should be noted that the agrarian settlements found in the northern region (*Bac Bo*) were much closer to the ideal of a "closed" corporate community, described below, than the largely pioneer settlements found in the southern region (*Nam Bo*). For a detailed analysis of the divergent village structures in Vietnam see A. Terry Rambo, A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Viet-Nam: A Study of Ecological Adaptation, Social Succession, and Cultural Evolution, (Centre for Vietnamese Studies, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1973)

arbitrary fashion under the French. Peasant landlessness became endemic; concomitantly, the village structures in northern Vietnam (*Bac Bo*) began to disintegrate, leaving individual peasants to fend for themselves and placing the peasantry, generally, within a much different socio-political "frame" than had been the case under the Nguyen emperors. Revolution came about because the marginal utility gains perceived through participation in revolutionary organizations, as well as the aggregating function of transcendent beliefs such as patriotism and millenarianism, were capable of establishing broad based peasant organizations. With the end of the revolution and the colonial war in 1954, the Communist state was left to establish a new set of relationships with the countryside. Land reform proper and its political consequences provide a backdrop against which one can recognize the amount of political overlap there was within the various peasant and landlord classes, and the degree to which transcendent beliefs, centered around the recognition of a common homeland, were required to maintain a cohesive anti-colonial struggle.

The Rationality of Social Structures

Before moving into the historical analysis, I want first to flesh-out some points surrounding the suggestion that culture, as a set of societal norms and beliefs, is the sum total of individual actions and structural influences, that is, that it is not merely a manifestation of structural forces. Culture, structure and action must be considered to be mutually constitutive.² Michael Taylor contends that:

not only social structures but also other desires and beliefs of the

² Michael Taylor, "Structure, Culture and Action in the Explanation of Social Change", *Politics and Society*, (1989) no.2: p.118

agent in question and (unless we take an infinitely elastic view of "social structure") other environmental and situational conditions would have a place, along with intentional actions, among the proximate explanatory antecedents of (changes in) desires and beliefs.³

There is a symbiotic, perhaps even tautological, relationship between individual action as it is rationally executed within the confines of cultural norms and social structures, both of which emerge, eventually, from a series of individual actions.

The tautology is a chicken and egg scenario: if culture and social structures are determined by individual action, and individual action is tempered by normative beliefs that are imbedded within culture and social structures, such as the Tonkinese corporate village, then one is left with a circular determination of the causal nexus between action, structure and culture. Taylor avoids this problem by discussing historical examples of individual action which alter well-established community beliefs and social patterns.

In the case of Vietnam, there are a number of beliefs that have been relatively stable over time, the most important being the northern and central Vietnamese peasant's apparent affinity for meso-level institutions (rural corporate structures). The relative stability and volatility of peasant norms and beliefs is mentioned at this point because the Vietnamese rural social system, constructed under the long period of Chinese colonial rule and maintained especially under the neo-Confucian Nguyen dynasty, came crashing down during the period of French colonial rule. The pieces that are collected from the ruins left behind and carried into the communist era, will be influential in dictating the patterns taken by peasant resistance to communist agricultural policy.

³ *Ibid.*, p.116.

The stability of corporate structures from the colonial to the post-revolutionary phase is based on a number of factors, the most tangible being the relationship between population, land distribution and food production. Corporate structures found in pre-colonial *Bac Bo* are rational to the extent that they are partially the result of incredibly high population densities, a factor which would have influenced the transition from swidden (slash and burn), to more intensive forms of agriculture.⁴ As the opportunities for resettling surplus population begin to decline and the levels of cultivable land remain static, production methods must be intensified and refined; this process is defined in Chapter 1 as agricultural involution. The rationality of corporate structures which provide a form of risk-insurance, are, to a great extent, a function of rural poverty, high population densities, and harsh environmental conditions.

Conversely, rational choice theorists such as Samuel Popkin view corporate structures as a burden placed on the shoulders of the peasantry, with the monopolistic power of village notables stultifying the productive powers of the individual producers. To Popkin, the corporate village cannot be portrayed as supplying all the welfare needs of the community:

Because villages do not provide extensive insurance or welfare, there does not have to be a crisis before peasants will involve themselves in commercial agriculture; their involvement is generally not a last-gasp response to declining situations, but a response to new opportunities.⁵

Popkin assumes the existence of corporate structures and market mechanisms as mutually incompatible, and that once the market is available to individuals they will reject corporate structures. Popkin's analysis stumbles

⁴ Terry Rambo, A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Vietnam, p.169-170, p.308.

⁵ The Rational Peasant, p.33.

because it attempts to consider Vietnamese actors as rational in a purely utilitarian fashion, without taking into account the environmental and demographic realities that, in the Vietnamese case, mitigate against purely utility motivated, decision-making processes. However, by recognizing that corporate structures are not incompatible with market involvement, a big step is taken toward understanding the unique institutional requirements of the rural poor in *Bac Bo*, as well as the importance of the free-market. Popkin fails to reconcile these two factors and, as such, is commonly criticized for his actor-oriented determinism.

This determinism can be avoided if traditional community institutions are viewed as the result of numerous individual actions over a long period which are influenced by the demands of the state and the physical environment. For peasant communities, local-level institutions are rational— a subversive notion for Marxists and other structuralists.⁶ Nevertheless, it would be short-sighted to suggest that rationality refers to purely utilitarian ends. Instead, rationality may refer to communal landholding and village owned public goods, such as irrigation and flood-control projects. Corporate villages provide the arena in which the state level interacts with the individual. The give and take between peasant and state can be seen as an “interface” between the macro and micro levels and, naturally, is defined as the meso-level of peasant-state interaction:

Interfaces are characterized by discontinuities in interests, values and power, and their dynamic entails negotiation, accommodation and the struggle over definitions and boundaries.⁷

⁶ Michael Taylor is well aware of this fact, making it clear in his paper, “Structure, Culture and Action in the Explanation of Social Change”, p 117.

⁷ Norman Long and Magdelana Villarreal, “Exploring Development Interfaces: From the Transfer of Knowledge to the Transformation of Meaning”, Frans J. Schuurman (ed.), Beyond the Impasse, p.143.

Long goes on to argue that it is the individual who is capable of renegotiating state policy at the regional and local level, based on what I would term cultural, traditional, or environmental knowledge.⁸ This knowledge has an enormous influence on how meso-level institutions are formed and transformed.

The transformation of meso-level institutions is important within the context of the cooperativization process in the DRV, and especially following the "liberation" of the South in 1975 and the unsuccessful attempts to recreate the Northern model within Southern agriculture. Although this study focuses on the relative ease of cooperative formation in the North and the subsequent reform process, "interface" theory has as much analytical relevance regarding the failure of southern cultivators to accept an essentially foreign form of socio-economic organization, as it does in examining to what extent the cooperatives in the North fit the requirements of the neo-Stalinist development policy and mirror traditional agricultural communities.

The Vietnamese Corporate Village

Historically, the main unit of social organization in Vietnam has been the village, or *xa*. The autonomy of the Vietnamese village is often defended with the ancient dictum *phép vua thua lệ làng* (imperial law yields to village custom).⁹ The autonomy of the village institution is proportionate to the relative strength of the central power. Thus, the inordinate power of the

⁸ Norman Long, "Sociological perspectives on agrarian development and state intervention", Development Policies, sociological perspectives, Anthony Hall and James Midgley (eds.), (New York: Manchester U. Press, 1988) p.122

⁹ Pierre Brocheux, "Moral Economy or Political Economy? The Peasants are Always Rational", Journal of Asian Studies, (1983) no.4: p.791, and John Adams and Nancy Hancock, "Land and Economy in Traditional Vietnam", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, (1970) Sept.: p.92. This phrase has as many incarnations as there are authors who cite it.

colonial government is a critical factor in the disintegration of the corporate village. For the purpose of explaining the colonial impact on the corporate village two indicators will be used: changes in land tenure and taxation.

Land tenure can be examined from the point of view of either the state or the peasantry. From the perspective of the state, all village land was the property of the emperor. The imperial court maintained all rights to the land and whenever a new village was created a government charter was sent out naming a guardian spirit. This spirit represented the state's obligation to protect the village. In return the peasantry was obliged to pay taxes, provide military service to the state, and perform corvee labour.¹⁰ This system of rights and obligations was the underpinning of the Vietnamese-Confucian political structure.

This political structure was maintained only as long as the peasantry believed the Emperor possessed the mandate from heaven. When this mandate had ceased, the only ostensible alternative was revolution:

Inevitably times would change: rich and secure, the dynasty would isolate itself from the people and grow corrupt.... Then revolution would come — the cleansing fire to burn away the rot of the old order.¹¹

However, revolution always resulted in maintaining the basic social structures. Since the power of any dynasty lay in its relationship with the peasantry, family and village, traditional rights were always reestablished. In this way the continuance of communal land-holding pattern and indigenous village structures were ensured.¹²

¹⁰ John Adams and Nancy Hancock, "Land and Economy in Traditional Vietnam", p 91

¹¹ Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam, (New York: Vintage, 1972) p.37.

¹² It should be noted here that this is an example of the orthodox or Mandarin school of Confucian thought, the type espoused by Paul Mus and Frances Fitzgerald. There is also a scholar school, which is more populist in its views, which maintained that the apparent widespread belief in the Emperor as the Son of Heaven was pure fiction. Instead, the populist version of the dictum was rephrased as "He who wins becomes Emperor, he who loses becomes

Peasants had very little formal contact with the state and, hence, land tenure was a matter seemingly controlled by village members and administrators. All land within a village was divided into family land and communal land.¹³ The existence of family land, *tu dan dien*, is important because it emphasizes the attachment of the people to the soil through ancestor worship. Land was passed from the father to the eldest son. The choice was then left to the other brothers either to cultivate a subdivided portion or to move to the frontier:

The oldest son could not dispose of the worship property. He took in the produce from the property and provided for ceremonies and the upkeep of tombs. Rituals were usually conducted for five generations, although the wealth or feeling of some families might lengthen or shorten the period.¹⁴

Family land, therefore, had more than just productive value. It formed an organic link with the past and, in addition to providing the means for subsistence production, it emphasized the custom oriented nature of life.

Popkin and Scott tend to concentrate their analyses on communal land, to the exclusion of family land, because it was the basis for wealth redistribution and taxation. Communal land is known as *cong dien*, land which is granted to each village by the state, but controlled by village administrators.¹⁵ *Cong dien* was distributed in order to provide a "minimum ration", *khau phan*, which was the name given to each individual plot of *cong dien*.¹⁶ Communal land was also used to pay for village feasts and

an outlaw." Nguyen Khac Vien, *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam*, p.40.

¹³ Patterns of land tenure in the southern, open village communities varied from that in the north since southern land was concentrated in the hands of landlords, and most southern villages had little or no communal holdings. Terry Rambo, *A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Vietnam*, p.29-30, p.42-43.

¹⁴ John Adams and Nancy Hancock, "Land and Economy in Traditional Vietnam", p.93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Terry Rambo, *A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Vietnam*, p.31

¹⁶ John Adams and Nancy Hancock, "Land and Economy in Traditional Vietnam", p. 93.

maintain public buildings and shrines. However, by the twentieth century *cong dien* began to serve no useful purpose for the poor as plot sizes began to shrink, often requiring recipients to rent their portion to others who owned draft power, and in turn hire themselves out as wage labourers.¹⁷

In response to French pressure, the Emperor eventually renounced his rights to all land in each of the three colonial regions, in effect ceding it to the colonial administration.¹⁸ Thus, one of the principle tenets of the Nguyen's neo-Confucian land holding system was seriously undermined. Furthermore the French expropriated both types of village land taking no heed of the legacy of patrimony inherent in family landholdings, and, in some provinces of Tonkin, expropriating nearly all of the communal plots.¹⁹ Virgin lands were also occupied in order to establish large plantation agriculture, thus inhibiting the traditional migration patterns. As the frontier shrank and population pressures increased, family holdings were subdivided below subsistence levels, putting a premium on the role of communal lands in redistributing income.²⁰ Colonial land policies eventually resulted in a process of agricultural involution which in turn led to the destruction of the physical basis of the corporate village.

Complementing the impact of colonial land-tenure patterns were the agrarian tax policies instituted under the French regime. Traditionally, taxes were paid by the village to the state, but were collected from the peasantry by village officials. Taxes were an important part of the state's obligation toward

¹⁷ Terry Rambo, A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Vietnam, p.31-32.

¹⁸ French colonialists divided Vietnam into three separate regions: Cochinchina in the South, which was ruled as a French colony; and Annam and Tonkin in the Central and Northern regions, respectively, which were ruled as protectorates.

¹⁹ Charles Robequain, The Economic Development of French Indo-China, (trans.) Isabel A. Ward, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944) p.83

²⁰ Ngo Vinh Long, Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants Under the French, (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1973) p.16-17; *ibid.*, p.82

the peasantry since they provided the means by which the imperial administration could undertake public works projects. In addition to flood controls and irrigation networks, clearing land was a main priority for the state, and "the existence of unoccupied land was the bedrock of what freedom the peasant enjoyed in pre-colonial Southeast Asia."²¹

For Samuel Popkin, "corporate villages had their origins not in a primitive communal mentality, but in the problems of taxation confronting both peasants and supra-village authorities."²² Apparently, proof of this is to be found in the regressive tax structure, highlighted by the traditional use of a head tax. However, the regressive tax structure of the pre-colonial society did not initiate the hardships faced by peasant families. Instead, they were brought on by the high taxation levels imposed by the colonial tax regime.

For example, by the 1930s the frontier in Cochinchina had been closed, land was generally held by landlords, and peasants survived as sharecroppers or wage labourers. Slowly, more and more landlords began moving into urban centers, collecting fixed rents and rarely granting "tolerance", a traditional means of appeal open to peasants during especially disastrous crop years. The logic behind fixed rents and high taxation levels is found in an export model which was not geared toward the world market price for rice, but, instead, was determined by severe land scarcity which left peasants beholden to absentee landlords, providing whatever surplus was demanded since migration was no longer a recourse to exploitation.²³ In Tonkin, high taxation levels were compounded by the fact that rice was not sold via the

²¹ James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet, "The Politics of Survival: Peasant Response to 'Progress' in Southeast Asia", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, (1973) Sept.: p. 245.

²² The Rational Peasant, p.39.

²³ Migration was limited but so too were opportunities to purchase land since prices increased rapidly after the closure of the frontier, as did the concentration of land in the hands of landlords. Robert L. Sansom, The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1970) p.31-33

landlord but directly to the state. Therefore, insulated from state intervention in the rice market, landlords were able to maintain high rents without having to feel the pressure of the lowered prices, leaving peasant sharecroppers with nothing.²⁴

Those who defend the extraordinarily high tax burden imposed on the Vietnamese by the colonial state refer to what was constructed by the French and neglect to say who benefited from its construction. Considering the power of French and Vietnamese landlords, relative to either the Tonkinese or Cochinchinese peasantry, it is unlikely that the benefits accrued by peasants under the French were commensurate with their tax burden. In fact, the types of French-supported infrastructure projects were of little use to the peasant economy, but rather ensured the steady flow of raw materials to manufacturing areas and export goods to industrial ports.²⁵

High taxes resulted in two phenomena. One was the creation of a landless peasant class that was without both the traditional village welfare system, mutual aid, and the patrimonial legacy contained within the familial land holdings. A cycle of indebtedness began with peasants unable to pay taxes and resulted in the expropriation of the only form of capital available to the peasantry, their land. Landlessness, especially the feeling of dislocation that likely occurs when families became separated from the land they had cultivated for generations, encouraged the development of a strong sense of patriotism within the peasantry, and is further evidence of the physical breakdown of the corporate village.

²⁴ This was especially true during the early part of the Second World war when state intervention in the rural economy caused serious hardships. Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976) p 158-159

²⁵ Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution*, p.72-73 offers a discussion concerning transportation infrastructure constructed using corvée labour and peasant taxes, but serving no real purpose for the peasant economy.

Second, taxation levels under the French also influenced how villagers and village notables began to associate with one another. As the French consolidated their power, the state became less responsive to the economic and social well-being of the peasantry, and even sympathetic village notables were replaced with those who were more amenable to the colonial state. In this way village administration became less dependent upon local corporate institutions, and, "instead of being largely a creature of the locality who dealt with the centre, they became increasingly creatures of the centre who dealt with the local community."²⁶ As a result, the corporate village began to disintegrate on a political as well as a physical level.

Alternatively, it is argued that the peasantry did not suffer directly from the high taxation levels imposed by the French, but rather from the methods employed by the Mandarinate in order to collect the increased cash payments. According to Popkin, the corporate ethos contained within the Vietnamese peasant community disintegrated because there was "less than total loyalty to village norms and procedures" on behalf of village notables in Annam and Tonkin.²⁷ By stating this, Popkin means to cast a shadow of doubt on the way he believes moral economists have romanticized corporate village structures. Within the larger context of the present argument, the factors which eventually led many village notables to support the French are irrelevant when compared with the undeniable result: the fact that village officials did find their interests served by the new colonial state structure. Nevertheless, it is difficult to fault village leaders for straying from the path of village solidarity when it is clear that they were faced with increasing demands from a culturally and normatively foreign state apparatus. Yet,

²⁶ James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet, "The Politics of Survival", p. 246

²⁷ The Rational Peasant, p. 45

Popkin's argument remains intact since there is little room to prove or disprove its validity at this point.

By examining the influence of French colonialism upon the political and social structures of the Vietnamese corporate village, it is apparent that the relative harmony of the Confucian state, as it was embodied in the corporate village structure, not to mention the Confucian state itself, had largely disappeared by the early twentieth-century:

the Confucian balance between the ritualistic state and the autarchic village was brought to ruin, or nearly so, without anything in sight to replace it.²⁸

Historically, the ideal political structure based on reciprocity of obligation between ruler and ruled was the vision of what would reestablish harmony. During the colonial period many visions surfaced but only one was eventually victorious: communism.

The Confucian state was based on an extended family ethic. The peasantry viewed the Emperor as a son might a father. This same metaphor was present within the corporate village. Frances Fitzgerald writes: "...the Confucian texts defined no general principles but the proper relationship of man to man. Equal justice was secondary to social harmony."²⁹ This harmony did not preclude peasant uprisings, since an uprising was always used as a means to alter an imbalance and initiate a return to political harmony. As will be seen, the "cleansing" nature of the Vietnamese revolution allowed for the reestablishment of the subsistence ethic, but did not succeed in creating a Confucian-like political/economic harmony in Communist Vietnam.

²⁸ John McAlister Jr. and Paul Mus, The Vietnamese and Their Revolution, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) p 36

²⁹ Fire in the Lake, p 29

Peasant Protest Movements

Scott and Kerkvliet write that there are two options for peasants faced with the dissolution of the corporate village brought on by the "liberal agrarian economy of colonialism" and the regressive French tax regime. They can either act to restore the traditional "balance of exchange" or they can create new "social mechanisms of protection".³⁰ According to Scott, protest movements were formed in order to achieve both of these objectives. However, the examples of peasant resistance that Popkin and Scott use to explain the motives behind peasant behaviour present various pitfalls:

We can observe simultaneous, uneven thrusts toward both the defense and rejection of the structures and values of the past. Because of this rejection, revolutionary Marxism penetrated Vietnam. This reminds us that the social movements discussed by Scott and Popkin are complex, ambiguous and contradictory.³¹

Peasant protest movements were often "social mechanisms of protection", but they also rested on a much more fundamental basis, a basis which clarifies the apparent contradictions and ambiguities which were found among various social movements.

It is important to recognize that peasant reactions to colonial rule were grounded on an individual's sense of patriotism and millenarianism, transcendent beliefs which could overcome the distinct cleavages that separated peasants in neighboring villages, and the various differences between village structures in central Vietnam (*Trung Bo*) and *Bac Bo*. When analysed in this light, Marxism becomes not only an imported Western ideal but an organic outgrowth of traditional society. Communism contained both patriotic and millenarian elements, and, furthermore, the fact that it was

³⁰ "The Politics of Survival", p 249

³¹ Pierre Brocheux, "Moral Economy or Political Economy?", p 798

embraced by the peasantry should not lead to the conclusion that it was a rejection of traditional political, economic and social relationships. On the contrary, in the final analysis it will be apparent that communism actually did provide the subsistence ethic which the peasantry, according to Scott, was attempting to reestablish by creating self-help organizations, seeking new patrons and restoring traditional patronage.³²

The introduction of colonial capitalism had both an economic and a political impact on the Vietnamese peasantry. By dismantling the corporate village, the French destroyed the traditional link between ruler and ruled, and through heavy taxation and land expropriations, undermined the historical bond between peasant and soil. The result of these decaying linkages was manifested in the spiritual sense of patriotism:

An expression of the continuity of the eternal community, Vietnamese patriotism harks back to the nation's physical and cultural heritage and urges fulfillment of an obligation to the community — the protection of patrimony and defense of compatriots.³³

In fact, revolutionary patriotism was reflected in the changing definition of "political obligation". During the anti-colonial *Duy Tan* Movement between 1905-1908 the political obligation of the citizenry reversed from being "loyalty to the king", *trung quan*, to *ai quoc*, the Vietnamese word for the loyalty a person has for their patrimony or fatherland.³⁴ Socio-political harmony was no longer a reality; the only reality for the peasantry was to be found in its member's personal/familial legacy. The Vietnamese peasantry found meaning in tradition; having established itself in the political sphere it was time to regain some form of structural harmony. This was achieved through

³² *Ibid.*, p.252-262.

³³ Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) p 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.29.

a myriad of socio-political organizations.

Alexander Woodside describes what he calls “synthetic patriotism”, as it is found in synthetic communities, as: “model communities with their own kinds of psychodynamics which might in time replace the morally collapsing old communities.”³⁵ It was not only conservatives who engaged in these forms of social reconstruction, but also revolutionaries. Subtle competition emerged between the political left, right and centre, especially in Tonkin during the 1940s, over membership, and concerning which synthetic environment would be the most effective.³⁶ This underscores the ubiquitous need for social stability that was apparent within Vietnam during the 1930s and into the 1940s, as well as the great variety of social movements that sprang up within the context of declining social homogeneity.

In addition to patriotism, millenarianism played an important role in the creation of peasant resistance movements. The millenarian movements in Vietnam were centred, for the most part, in Cochinchina. “Here the ideology of the elite, Confucianism, was eroding much more quickly than in the centre or in the north.”³⁷ This erosion was caused by a much stronger Western influence in the southern colony than in the northern protectorates. Another important difference between the southern and northern resistance movements was that sectarian and communist leadership was more volatile in Cochinchina. Leadership in Cochinchina was often absorbed into the Western system, while there was more continuity of authority in Tonkin and Annam. The international linkage between the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) and the Comintern allowed leaders like Ho Chi Minh to survive the

³⁵ Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam, p 148.

³⁶ *Ibid* , p 149

³⁷ Jayne Werner, “Vietnamese Communism and Religious Sectarianism”, Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective, William S Turley (ed), (Westview: Boulder, 1980) p 113

many French crackdowns by seeking refuge in China. Relatively stable leadership and the tradition of rebellion in Annam was important for the strong communist movement in that region.³⁸

The prophesies of millenarian movements provided a vision of a harmonious future for a peasantry that was quickly losing its traditional social structure. Hue-Tam Ho Tai describes the millenarian impulse as:

a volatile one, easily summoned but also easily dispersed. It tends to be found in culturally and politically unstable environments which lack the ability to absorb rapid change or frequent traumas such as natural disaster, war and conquest.³⁹

Religious sects like the *Cao Dai* and the *Hoa Hao* were very important in aggregating peasant dissent in Cochinchina by playing upon this millenarian impulse. However, partially due to its national focus, the ICP became the more important anti-colonial force. Communism appealed to the peasantry not because of its revolutionary techniques, "but because of its millenarian message."⁴⁰ Communism offered peasants a concrete plan to rid the fatherland of the colonial invader, replace the Confucian system that had all but disintegrated, and, most importantly, "give the peasant land to till".⁴¹

Communism must be seen as both a millenarian as well as a revolutionary patriotic movement. Because of this, Party membership was not based on class cleavages. Scott and Kerkvliet write that by sharing the experience of exploitation, tenant farmers formed an objective class; an objective class, however, was not sufficient to create a class consciousness, nor ensure class action.⁴² The success of the revolution was based on the

³⁸ *Ibid*, p 114

³⁹ Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) p 5.

⁴⁰ Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, p 103

⁴¹ Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap, The Peasant Question (1937-1938), (trans.) Christine Pelzer White, Data Paper no. 94 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) p 12

⁴² "The Politics of Survival", p 250

patriotism of individuals and the inherent optimism of millenarian causes which professed a future life of peace and harmony. Scientific socialism prescribes revolution to encourage the onset of a new era of history; "...millennial myth teaches that total change is inevitable and that human effort needs to be expanded only in the last stage, like a midwife assisting at the birth of a new era."⁴³

The Genesis of Agricultural Collectivization

Vietnam's new era began in 1945 when, on September 2, Ho Chi Minh pronounced the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence. Following the formation of the ICP in 1930, the process of Communist revolution went through three distinct phases.⁴⁴ All but the last phase resulted in the near destruction of the ICP. However, as was mentioned above, international ties allowed the party to survive successive crackdowns. The final Viet Minh, or United Front phase is the most important since it emphasizes the populist nature of the resulting communist government:

Because of its experiences with sectarian and other forms of social fragmentation, Vietnamese Communism may have developed a propensity in the prepower phase to tolerate an element of pluralism in Vietnamese society that other parties did not exhibit.⁴⁵

Pluralism within the Viet Minh was united by the common objective of national liberation. In order to maintain the integrity of the Viet Minh the role of the ICP had to be played down within the organization, as did its goal

⁴³ Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam, p.107.

⁴⁴ see Huynh Kim Khanh, "The Vietnamese August Revolution Reinterpreted", Journal of Asian Studies, (1971) August: p.770-772.

⁴⁵ Jayne Werner, "Vietnamese Communism and Religious Sectarianism", p.109

of "anti-feudalism".⁴⁶ Not before national liberation was accomplished could the process of class warfare be initiated through an extensive land reform; in turn, constructing the foundation for collectivization and further socialist economic development.

Until this point the discussion has focused on how peasants perceived the Vietnamese communist movement in relation to other non-communist organizations, and as a doctrine which embodied millenarian and patriotic ideals. However, it must briefly be noted that the communist paradigm is inherently flexible in terms of the policy framework any one party may employ in order to consolidate its political and economic power. If communist public policy was dictated entirely by orthodox ideology no link between the communist state and past political and economic traditions would be visible. Communism needed to be accepted in Vietnam's national political life and at the same time retain the purity of its imported ideology.⁴⁷

In their book Socialism and Tradition, S.N. Eisenstadt and Yael Azmon address the issue of the contradiction between holistic revolution espoused by dogmatists such as Le Duan,⁴⁸ and the accommodation of traditional aspects of society within any one communist movement. They explain that communist parties select certain "items" from traditional society as well as from the socialist "repertoire":

In some cases such selection emphasized those symbols or orientations from within the socialist repertoire which were most congruent with the central traditional symbols or orientations of the respective societies.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ see Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War, People's Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries, (New York: Praeger, 1962) for a discussion of the Vietnamese anti colonial and anti-feudal revolutions

⁴⁷ Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, p 21

⁴⁸ see Le Duan, "The Tasks of Socialist Revolution in North Vietnam and Scientific Work", On The Socialist Revolution in Vietnam (v.3), (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1967) p 167-188

⁴⁹ Socialism and Tradition, (Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, 1975) p 4

As is evidenced in both China and the Soviet Union, land reform has been an important communist public policy and was easily adopted by the now renamed Vietnamese Workers Party (*Lao Dong* , VWP) as a major aspect of post-colonial public policy. Vietnam, having an overwhelmingly agrarian based economy and peasant based society, implemented land reform for two reasons. First, land reform was needed to strengthen the power of the state by satisfying peasant demands for land, and in the process a subsistence ethic was recreated. That is, the state was once again providing for the basic subsistence requirements of peasant families, especially the “poor” peasant. Second, the Communist government wanted to begin the process of socialist economic development, which was predicated on the basis of class warfare in the countryside. Thus, by borrowing from the communist repertoire both short-term, more traditional goals were achieved, and long-term, more communistic goals were established.

Land reform proper began in 1953 and progressed in waves until it was discontinued in 1956 under the pall of admitted “leftist” excesses.⁵⁰ The land reform program was only carried out in the North during this period because the DRV had been separated from the South in 1954 by the Geneva Accords. As was mentioned above, the immediate goal of the land reform process was to provide land to those peasants who were paying high rents to local landlords. The immediate impetus to stray from the path of national liberation in favour of a more class inspired policy was the belief that the longer the war against the French continued, the greater the social tensions became. Land reform was a way of decreasing those social tensions that

⁵⁰ see Edwin E. Moise, Land Reform in China and North Vietnam, Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) p 242-250 for a discussion of the correction of errors episode.

threatened the solidarity of the Viet Minh.⁵¹

Collectivization followed land reform in 1959, having less to do with land redistribution than it did with attempts to increase agricultural production. The collectivization of Vietnamese agriculture has always been considered by many authors to be a logical extension of the traditional corporate village. There are certainly parallels, but there are also substantial differences. What must be remembered is that traditionally communal, or collectively cultivated land, did not provide the basis for subsistence but was a complement to production on family plots. Tradition does not support strictly communal production. Although modern collectives did provide 5% of the collective land for private use, as will be shown, it was not nearly the incentive necessary to ensure the agricultural surplus required for industrial development. Collectives mirrored traditional villages by providing public works, but they did not provide the peasantry with the incentive of a substantial plot of family land, appropriate price-levels, or reasonable amounts of state investment, all of which were required to maintain increases in production. Like Popkin, the communist state did not realize that corporate structures and market mechanisms are not mutually exclusive.

Authors who have considered the effectiveness of peasant revolution and the subsequent land reform in Vietnam, are divided over concerns that rural societies have not been served well by the communist regime that was ostensibly established to provide a better life than that offered by colonial capitalist development. James Scott sees peasants caught in a perpetual cycle of everyday resistance against the ruling state structure, a reality that cannot be altered on the basis of a change in the state structure. Citing Scott's work,

⁵¹ Christine White, "Peasant Mobilization and Anti-Colonial Struggle in Vietnam: The Rent Reduction Campaign of 1953", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, (10) no 4 p 189

Christine White criticizes him for his eternal pessimism:

The egalitarian social and economic context created by the Vietnamese co-operatives seems to me perfectly compatible with Scott's own definition of primary peasant concern for 'moral economy' (a priority to subsistence and the survival of the peasant way of life).⁵²

This is the case to a certain extent, but it neglects to address the matter of the market in the peasant economy. A moral economy is based not only on providing subsistence, but also on a harmony created by the symbiotic relationship between peasant and state. The market is essential to the Vietnamese peasant and without proper access to it, as will become apparent in Chapter 4, there is no possibility for any kind of peasant-state harmony.

The disharmony of interests that has been apparent for some time between the Vietnamese peasant and both the colonial and the Communist state, is to be expected within the context of the peasant-state dialectic. Different authors have described the same phenomenon using various terms. Conflict, or merely tension, exists between the state and the peasantry when the tradition of "strong decentralized guerrilla agriculture" is a dominant ethos within the agricultural production sector and is contradicted by "the relatively more recent tradition of specialized state planning."⁵³ Yet, tension and conflict manifest themselves in various forms and to various degrees, and superficial harmony is not contrary to a dialectical discourse of ~~discontinuity~~ between peasant and state.

⁵² "Everyday Resistance, Socialist Revolution and Rural Development: The Vietnamese Case", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, (1986) Jan p.52

⁵³ see Alexander Woodside, "Decolonization and Agricultural Reform in Northern Vietnam", *Asian Survey*, (10) no 8 p 709, and Chris Nyland, "Vietnam, the Plan/Market Contradiction and the Transition to Socialism", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, (1981) no.4 p 429

Summary

This chapter has brought together the theoretical elements of agent and structure, and has examined how they relate to issues of culture and ideology. Colonial Vietnam offers a structural frame that was significantly different from its imperial predecessor, a structural frame that played a large role in helping to destroy the traditional corporate structures that had been found in rural *Bac Bo* and *Trung Bo*.

As has been argued throughout this study, a structural tension is inherent to the peasant-state relationship, but it seems that, to a certain extent, there is a point where peasant and state can establish a type of political-economic equilibrium. The form in which this equilibrium will manifest itself varies according to a number of factors which have been dealt with in terms of the agent-structure problem. Peasant beliefs may change as structural influences alter their economic and social realities, and, in turn, this will help dictate the form in which an equilibrium may be established between peasant and state. It is the goal of the fourth chapter to reconstruct the cultural and structural influences on peasant decision-making processes in order to better understand the reasons behind the apparent disdain Vietnamese peasants have had for state-sponsored agricultural cooperatives, and to examine the future of corporate structures in rural Vietnam.

Chapter 4: Everyday Resistance in Communist Vietnam

the co-operativization movement enjoys all objective conditions for its success. The fact that the movement meets with some shortcomings is not due to the erroneous policy on co-operativization, but obviously it is due to the fact that personally we have shortcomings

Le Duan, August 31, 1962

the correctness and appropriateness of a policy could be judged by whether or not it could inspire the population, increase production, and raise the living standard of the people

Truong Chinh, 1986

Introduction

In Chapter 3 the process of peasant revolution was examined within the socio-political "frame" dominated by the French colonial state. The impact which colonial economic policy had on the lives of Vietnamese peasants and the ability of political entrepreneurs to aggregate peasant interests around transcendent beliefs are recognized as the two most important factors which led to the creation of peasant resistance movements. In this fourth chapter the more mundane interactions between peasant and state will be examined. Again, grounding the discussion in the structural dialectic established in Chapter 1, the present discussion will focus on the role of everyday forms of peasant resistance in helping to initiate policy change in the realm of Vietnamese agriculture.

By examining the scope and efficacy of everyday peasant resistance, a number of issues are brought to the fore which assist in further elucidating responses to both research questions. The initial research question requires an analysis of the conditions under which peasants will act collectively against the state. Conversely, the complement to this question, why in certain circumstances does peasant revolution *not* occur, can also be tackled via a consideration of

impediments to revolutionary collective action. However, by admitting that peasant revolution is relatively rare and then attempting to prove why, within certain structural contexts, peasant revolution does not occur is to create a *no-win* argument.

Despite this, certain points must be raised concerning the practical impediments to peasant collective action in Vietnam during the communist era. Due to historical antecedents, Vietnam's communist party was initially plagued by strong nationalist and socialist counter-currents which has resulted in an element of pluralism occupying the Party's decision-making processes, leaving these processes open to pressures from a variety of social groups. This pluralism has been a major factor behind a number of major policy shifts regarding the primacy of market forces in the agriculture sector.¹ Prevailing weakness, both within the state apparatus and the national economy, as well as the risk-modifying elements contained within agricultural cooperatives, have meant that within the context of the structural transition from colonial to communist state, peasant actors have been satisfied with engaging in everyday resistance rather than full-scale revolution.

There is also a complementary point to be considered. An important obstacle to revolutionary collective action has been the apparent lack of transcendent anti-government beliefs. The manner in which patriotism and nationalism could be employed by various political entrepreneurs against the colonial power could not be reversed and directed against the communist state. There are a number of possible answers for why this is the case, not the least of which is the state's low tolerance for political dissenters. Furthermore, the problem of landlessness which was so prevalent during the colonial period - a

¹ For a discussion of the post-war debate over economic policy see Christine White, Debates in Vietnamese Development Policy, (Brighton, University of Sussex, IDS Discussion Paper, 1982), p 19-26

A resolution test chart featuring several groups of horizontal and vertical lines of varying thicknesses. Each group is accompanied by a numerical value indicating the resolution level. The values include 1.0, 1.1, 1.25, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2, 3.6, 4.0, 4.5, and 5.0. The chart is used to measure the resolving power of imaging systems.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

decisive antecedent to revolutionary collective action — was rectified during the early years of the DRV, further hindering prospective anti-government leadership. With these impediments to collective action in mind, a more pertinent question emerges. That is, relating to the second research question, how has the peasant-state dialectic manifested itself within the context of agricultural collectivization in the Vietnamese post-revolutionary civil society. The following discussion, then, rests on the utility of everyday resistance in both a theoretical and a practical sense. Following in the same vein as the discussion concerning peasant revolutionary action, everyday forms of resistance are a function of specific belief patterns, as well as certain demographic and ecological factors.

Norman Long's "interface" theory insists that along with the macro and micro levels of analyses, a meso-level is pertinent because it is there that macro and micro, peasant and state, are continually converging. In most cases a meso-level analysis is difficult because there are no concrete meso-level institutions. However, in Vietnam the high-level agricultural producer cooperative (*hop tac xu san xuat nong nghiep bac cao*) provides an ideal subject for such an analysis. This chapter considers the actions from below, that ultimately necessitated market reforms and the dismantling of Vietnam's command economy, as they converged at the meso-level with policies from above. To that end, the first requirement of this section consists of recognizing the inherent weaknesses of the communist state. Discerning these weaknesses is essential to an understanding of the duality of political and economic roles that is apparent in the workings of the Vietnamese agricultural collective. Secondly, I will argue that the "nominalization" of agricultural collectives has resulted from the central control of collective management structure, state price controls and the poor rural-urban terms of trade, by no means an original argument.

Thirdly, the Communist government has, over the years, reacted to the

disjunctures between peasant realities and state policies in a number of different ways. Although the efficacy of everyday resistance is based on the reaction of the state to theoretically defined forms of resistance, the degree to which the state reacts and in which direction policy begins to travel (*i.e.* toward repression or reform), is dictated by the relative power of the state apparatus vis-a-vis the peasantry. Finally, the future of rural collective structures will be considered. The conclusions reached by various authors differ according to whether cooperatives are perceived as the embodiment of the political and social ethos espoused by the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), or are perceived as corporate entities that have a place in providing risk insurance, social welfare services and agricultural extension.

The Post-Revolutionary State

Structural analyses often suffer from the perception that the state is a monolithic structure that has the power to dictate the actions of individuals, and the shape of entire economies and societies. In terms of the VCP, there have been very few periods of unanimity surrounding socio-economic policy decisions within the Vietnamese Politburo. The policy-making process in Vietnam must be considered somewhat parallel to the cabinet solidarity that is essential to the successful workings of executive authority in Canada. Closed-door decision-making and superficial solidarity should not, however, leave one with the impression that there is no debate or conflicting interests within either the Canadian Cabinet or the Vietnamese Politburo.

Many writers consider the VCP to be omnipotent to the extent that it has been able to dictate the course of the Vietnamese economy through the use of ministerial resolutions and decrees; these authors are reluctant to recognize that

economies, which are the tangible outcome of a myriad of individual decisions, have minds of their own.² Individuals react to policy in ways which are often unforeseen by policy-makers to the extent that policy is often renegotiated at the level of individual house-holds or collectives. Realizing that the state is influenced in the process of policy change by non-elite groups such as "poor" and "middle" peasant groups, is essential to an understanding of the power of everyday resistance.³ Ultimately, the successful integration of micro- and macro-level analyses is dependent upon a pluralistic view of both policy formation and policy "renovation".

The Collectivization Period (1959-1968)

A. The neo-Stalinist Development Model

In Chapter 3 the land reform process was examined in an effort to highlight the continuous policy debate within the Party, which is characteristic of the early years of the DRV, and emphasize how these divergent views were influential in shaping policy outcomes. Within the VWP during the 1950s two camps, which were split over whether land reform was to be merely a rural income leveling mechanism, the logical extension of the process of peasant revolution, or the initial step toward the socialization of the rural economy and society, emerged. As will be considered, the "rectification of errors" campaign

² see Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990) and the review by Melanie Beresford in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, (21): p.536-537; also G Nguyen Tien Hung, *Economic Development of Socialist Vietnam, 1955-80*, (New York: Praeger, 1977)

³ Norman Long, "Sociological perspectives on agrarian development and State intervention", *Development policies: sociological perspectives*, Anthony Hall and James Midgley (eds.), (New York: Manchester U. Press, 1988) p.125-126.

was the first of a number of compromises between the Party and the peasantry.⁴

Like the land reform process collectivization should not be perceived as the inevitable result of the ascendancy of the VWP, the predestined "next step" of an orthodox communist party blindly following the Chinese example.⁵ Rather, the process of collectivization was marked by a number of shifts in policy that can be attributed to both internal Party debate and the impact of the 1959 record-breaking harvest.

Collectivization was a viable option as a solution to the North's chronic food deficits, especially within the context of Eisenstadt and Azmon's communist repertoire and the neo-Stalinist economic model, and in terms of traditional rural corporatism. Fforde and Paine argue that it was the decision to follow a neo-Stalinist economic development policy which ensured that the Vietnamese economy would never meet the industrialized ends set-out for itself; neo-Stalinism held the key to the DRV's eventual economic demise.⁶ The logic of neo-Stalinism depends, first, on the assumption that economic underdevelopment is a function of insufficient industrial capacity caused mainly by a lack of fixed industrial capital; and, second, that the state can institute direct control over the means and methods of both industrial and agricultural production in an effort to

⁴ Although this is not a contentious point the two authors cited below maintain, as a central theme, the Party's need to reach some type of compromise with the peasantry. The Fate of the Peasantry: Premature Transition to Socialism in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, (Yale: Monograph Series no. 28, Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1986) p.21-23; Ken Post, Revolution, Socialism and nationalism in Viet Nam: v.1 an Interrupted Revolution, (Hants, UK: Dartmouth, 1989) p.269.

⁵ G. Nguyen Tien Hung, Economic development of Socialist Vietnam, p.57-59; Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, (New York: Praeger, 1964) both argue the case that Vietnam's collectivization campaign was based entirely on the Chinese example. The counter argument can be found in Edwin E. Moise, Land Reform in China and North Vietnam, Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) p.234-236.

⁶ Beyond the limitations of the neo-Stalinist model, Fforde and Paine argue that it was the implementation of this model within the context of what they've termed Vietnam's "aggravated shortage economy" which combines both macro-economic imbalances and micro-economic inefficiencies. The Limits of national Liberation, Problems of economic management in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, (London: Croom Helm, 1987) p.3.

promote the expansion of the industrial sector. Collectivization provided the means for the state to institute its economic control over agricultural production.

Fiorde and Paine argue that the neo-Stalinist model:

involves reliance on administrative measures (taxation, procurement, direct allocation of materials and labour etc.) since the immediate incentives acting upon economic agents often lead them to do things that impede central control and implementation of the plan.⁷

This is the central argument set out by Fiorde and Paine, but it is echoed by other prominent economic historians.⁸ The basic premise behind the argument suggests that the neo-Stalinist model was doomed to failure because it did not provide proper incentives to peasant producers, and, hence, the collectivization of agriculture was incapable of providing the surplus required for large scale industrial production. It would be stretching the point to suggest that any of the above-mentioned authors were intent on proving the irrelevance of collective institutions within the context of future agricultural policies. Rather, to put it simply, the combination of the neo-Stalinist model and collective agriculture failed because of poor timing.

Within the academic discourse surrounding the failure of the neo-Stalinist model lies the seed of an actor-oriented analysis. Despite this, these works have addressed the ultimate failure of the collective management model established in the 1960s and then modified under the New Management System (NMS) at the Thai Binh conference in 1974, relying heavily on macro-economic realities, a reflection of limited access to official and independently acquired micro-level surveys. Largely because of the reliance on macro-level methodologies, the collectivization process in general has been the target of academic criticism when

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁸ Andrew Vickerman, The Fate of the Peasantry, and Melanie Beresford, "Vietnam: Socialist Agriculture in Transition", Journal of Contemporary Asia, (1990) no.4: 466-486

in fact the primary problem has stemmed from the lack of production incentives which were a result of the state's centralized management policy. A distinction must be made between the use of agricultural collectives and the state's policy surrounding centralized marketing and distribution of agricultural production. This argument might seem to split hairs, but it is important to recognize that cooperatives should not be relegated the communist repertoire and, as such, cannot be disregarded during the present process of market driven rural development. As was apparent during the colonial period, it has been the economic burden imposed by the state that initiated tension between the peasantry and the state, not necessarily collective ownership and corporate organizations.

Socialist construction of the Vietnamese economy which was established under the neo-Stalinist model was premised on the "triple revolution". This included a revolution in production relations, a technical revolution, and an ideological and cultural revolution. By implementing these revolutions the Party intended to deter "production from spontaneously developing into capitalism" and to "extirpate the socio-economic conditions which beget and restore capitalism and the bourgeoisie."⁹ Large-scale agricultural production was to be established through the collectivization of the means of production, thus, fulfilling the goals of the first revolution. However, because Vietnam did not have the financial means or the political will to alter agricultural production technology, old methods of production would have to be employed within the context of new productive relations (*i.e.* socialist agriculture), resulting eventually in the surplus accumulation required to provide for the technological revolution.¹⁰ By not improving the technological capacity of rural cultivators the

⁹ Le Duan, The Vietnamese Revolution, Fundamental Problems, Essential Tasks (2ed.), (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1973) p.91.

¹⁰ Alec Gordon, "North Vietnam's Collectivization Campaigns: Class Struggle, Production, and

state was, in essence, institutionalizing the process of agricultural involution.

B. *The Process of Collectivization*

There have been a number of communist states that have attempted to collectivize agriculture in order to provide the means for the greater industrial economy. However, collectivization campaigns are not restricted to the more orthodox examples of the Soviet Union and China, or even the former East European bloc. There are a number of African examples, such as the villagization campaign in Ethiopia and the Ujamaa in Tanzania, which have not been premised on neatly established Marxist-Leninist principles.

Robert Bates has written that there are a number of ways in which the state can exercise its power over the peasantry. They include forms of repression, co-optation, organization and the promotion of factional conflict.¹¹ Collectivization, generally, can be considered to incorporate each of these tactics as it is recognized as an effort to directly extract surplus resources from the peasantry.¹² Employing these four tactics, Joan Soklowsky establishes a model of peasant-state interaction within the context of agricultural collectivization. She divides her model along three lines: collectivization as class struggle, collectivization as control of economic resources, and collectivization as state formation.¹³ The Vietnamese collectivization model epitomizes each of the three arms of Soklowsky's theoretical example either implicitly, as the means to further state formation and political consolidation of the revolution, or explicitly, in the

the 'Middle Peasant' Problem", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, (1981) no.1. 28, Andrew Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry*, p.9.

¹¹ *Markets and States in Tropical Africa, the Political Basis of Agricultural Policies*, (Berkeley University of California Press, 1981) p.120.

¹² Joan Soklowsky, *Peasants and Power: State Autonomy and the Collectivization of Agriculture in Eastern Europe*, (Boulder. Westview Press, 1990) p.5

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.14-20.

form of state pricing and management policies.

The initial process of collectivization in Vietnam went through three distinct phases: mutual-aid or labour exchange teams, elementary or low-level cooperatives (where land and tools were collectively used but privately owned) and the higher level socialist cooperatives (where land and tools were collectively owned). Figure I (see appendix p.120) shows the movement of peasant families from the lower level production units to the socialist, higher-level collectives. There are two salient features surrounding the collectivization campaign that should be recognized. First, the 1958-59 paddy production figures for this period (Table III) present an anomaly that is not repeated again until the early 1970s, and, second, there is an apparent stagnation in the transition from low-level to high-level collectives between 1961 and 1964. These two features highlight the struggles that went on within the VWP regarding the rate at which collectivization should proceed, and the levels at which state control ought to be maintained.

Land reform had provided land for poor peasants who had been most affected by the period of colonial rule; and despite the general difficulties in establishing and following fair rural classification guidelines, overall, those peasants classified as "poor" benefited substantially from the land reform process.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, however, following the conclusion of the land reform campaign, poor peasants began losing their land once again as it was sold off to "rich" and "middle" peasants in reaction to a series of crop failures. As Gordon argues, poor peasants provided the "left" of the Party with a needy constituency:

In this situation, the poorer peasants could see the protection offered by uniting their land and numbers in cooperatives. Their perceived need fitted precisely the Party's recognition that it had to

¹⁴ Edwin E. Moise, Land Reform in China and North Vietnam, p.208-210

oppose the growing strength of the richer peasants at some point.¹⁵ In drawing this conclusion Gordon cites a number of authors, the foremost being Truong Chinh, the DRV's Vice-premier and a strong advocate for collectivization. Despite Truong Chinh's vested interest in exposing the plight of the "poor" peasant, his concern was not landlessness *per se*. The levels of landlessness by 1958-59 were not yet substantial, but the fear within the Party was that any large-scale concentration of land would result in augmented levels of rural capitalism.¹⁶ By 1959, these fears had steeled the Party's resolve to move forward with agricultural collectivization.

Preceding the initiation of the collectivization process, substantial production increases were realized in the period 1958-59, but declined in subsequent years, not recovering until the early 1970s. Reasons for this production anomaly do not tend to focus on the fact that it occurred prior to the collectivization campaign; in fact, it is generally regarded to have been the result of favourable climatic conditions.¹⁷ Regardless of the rationale, the 1959 bumper-crop clearly provided optimism for greater things under the collective system, a factor which surely influenced the decision to introduce unprecedented agricultural quota levels within the DRV's first Five Year Plan (FYP) (1961-1965). The failure of the DRV to reach its production targets in the early years of the First FYP meant that a series of policy changes and the continual reassessment of economic goals was inevitable.

Again, there is little disagreement concerning the reasons underlying the failure of the collectivization campaign during the First FYP to realize the hopes

¹⁵ "North Vietnam's Collectivization Campaigns", p.28.

¹⁶ Vickerman contends that these fears were unfounded citing that available evidence suggests there was neither a pronounced movement toward spontaneous capitalist development, nor greater rural differentiation. The Fate of the Peasantry, p.139.

¹⁷ Vo Nhan Tri, Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975, p.18; Alec Gordon, North Vietnam's Collectivization Campaigns, p.32.

of upper-level cadres such as Le Duan and Truong Chinh. It is generally believed that agriculture suffered from "neglect" at the hands of the state.¹⁸ Although the literature is full of numerous speculations as to what constituted the most influential element leading to the decline of agricultural consumption, the state's pre-occupation with the industrial sector must top the list. Collective agriculture had been premised on the assumption that production gains could be garnered through the creation of economies of scale in the rural sector without the aid of technological inputs. The apparent viability of such a policy was only reinforced by the results of the 1959 harvest.

It is clear from the statistics that the peasant population in the DRV moved quickly into collective relationships, despite the relative stagnation between 1962 and 1964 (see Figure I). "Poor" peasants tended to be more amenable to the benefits of collective ownership of land and tools while "rich" peasants were less likely to give up the benefits of trading on the remnants of the open market. Although the movement of peasants into collective institutions was ostensibly voluntary, tight regulations on the sale of agricultural goods and the purchase of industrial inputs and consumer goods, "made it very difficult, if not impossible, for the peasants to maintain their economic independence."¹⁹

Despite the apparent obedience of peasant participants, land reform and collectivization did engender elements of peasant resistance. It is misleading to suggest that peasants were forced to collectivize, a better description would be that most peasants realized the inevitability of state policy, and for some, especially in the case of many "poor" peasants, collectivization was considered to be beneficial. Vo Nhan Tri, however, goes so far as to say that:

The forced cooperativization has, of course, brought about a

¹⁸ Alec Gordon, North Vietnam's Collectivization Campaigns, p.21; Vo Nhan Tri, Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975, p.32-33; Andrew Vickerman, The Fate of the Peasantry, p.205-206.

¹⁹ Vo Nhan Tri, Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975, p.13.

resistance on the part of the peasants, although a non-violent one, probably...because the people in North Vietnam have always been docile, and more or less resigned to their fate.²⁰

Armed resistance came from areas of heavy Catholic influence and seems to be confined to the very unstable period following the rectification of errors campaign. The Quynh luu riots in 1956 should be seen in the context of the mass migration of Catholics to the south following the signing of the Geneva Accords, and the recognition that there would not be nation-wide elections in the near future; Vietnam was, in essence, politically divided. Poor peasants generally had suffered terribly during the rectification of errors campaign, since they were held accountable for the false accusations they had made against their fellow villagers during the land reform campaign. The Quynh luu riots were initiated by a group of poor peasants who were reacting, ironically, to an anti-government demonstration led by Catholics who felt they had been mistreated during the land reform. By means of their attack on a reactionary force, the poor peasants, it seems, were in search of redemption in the eyes of the state and the larger community.²¹

Despite the apparent ill effects of the land reform and collectivization campaigns, nationalism remained a potent force throughout the collectivization period and was strengthened by the period of American bombing, from 1965 to 1968. The grievances expressed by many Catholic peasants toward the Communist state did not represent a transcendent concern for the majority of peasants in the DRV, and with the southern migration of many Catholics, demonstrations like the one at Quynh luu had a very limited appeal. In fact, if

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²¹ Edwin E. Moise, Land Reform in China and North Vietnam, p 251. The Quynh luu incident has a number of different version none of which should be considered definitive. A polemic has emerged over the extent to which the People's Liberation Army of Viet Nam (PLAVN) used force to break-up the demonstration. For a balanced but partially contradictory assessment of the incident see Carlyle Thayer, War By Other Means, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) p 94-95

there had not been such a violent pro-state reaction to the initial demonstrations, the Quynh luu incident would not likely appear in history texts.

Social and Political Conflict at the Meso-Level

With reference to the beginning of the collectivization campaign, when the colonial legacy was still fresh in the minds of peasants and policy-makers, Fforde and Paine write:

The recent experience of the appalling consequences of the loss of corporate support during the colonial period had heightened peasant appreciation of the value of the collective social welfare provision.²²

Heretofore, the agricultural collective has been considered to be solely within the domain of economic reconstruction and socialist economic development.

However, as has been outlined by Soklowsky, and alluded to above by Fforde and Paine, there is a socio-political element to the creation of agricultural collectives which is not necessarily expressed categorically by the state, but is nonetheless an important component of the goals established for collectivization. In the Vietnamese case, the agricultural collective is an institution which has been employed for a variety of social-political purposes. By utilizing collectives as political and administrative units, the state has returned to the corporate structures that, in the past, had dominated the rural social system, and has pursued the political consolidation of the revolution in the countryside.

Many scholars have used elements of the Confucian social ethic to analyse the causes and consequences of the Vietnamese revolution, a form of analysis which is intended to enlighten researchers as to the decision-making process that brought the peasantry to the verge of engaging in revolutionary collective action.

²² The Limits of National Liberation, Problems of Economic Management in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, (London: Croom Helm, 1987) p 115.

This approach has been criticized for being romantic, deterministic, and unscientific. However, as belief patterns have been recognized as one important factor in the causal chain which influences peasant reactions to state policy, it is worthwhile considering the present state of the literature on the subject of cultural change in Vietnam. Referring to the process of cultural change under the communist system, one source contends that:

the commune or co-operative are [sic] viewed from a particular perspective: as pedagogical structures, i.e. as institutional *loci* of the social learning of new social practices and of new models of thinking, since changes at that level are not automatic and must be induced.²³

The collective's pedagogical role provides an essential policy link to both the political and economic objectives of the collectivization program. It is clear that during the anti-colonial period the transcendent beliefs of patriotism and nationalism were centred around the Confucian ethic; however, this has been transformed and replaced by something more nebulous.²⁴

Nguyen Khac Vien compares the similarities of Confucian and Marxist philosophies concluding that by replacing Confucian thought Marxism provided the answers to practical social and political issues, problems which had not concerned the old Mandarin bureaucracy. In a way which is reminiscent of Confucian scholars, Marxist cadres sequestered themselves in villages in order to impart knowledge and organize the peasants,²⁵ in turn, pursuing the pedagogical goals established for the collectives by the state. Cadres, however, are creatures of the centre and, as such, have met with the disfavour that many

²³ François Houtart and Genevieve Lemercurier, Hai Van, Life in a Vietnamese Commune, (London: Zed Books, 1984) p.198

²⁴ Alexander Woodside suggests that the communist state believed in preserving a "kind of purified, demonitized Confucian tradition". Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976) p 265-266.

²⁵ Nguyen Khac Vien, Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam, (Berkeley: Indochina Research Centre, 1974) p.46.

village notables experienced as they began shifting their allegiances away from the village during the colonial period. Finding a role for local cadres that allows them to "fulfill their political roles vis-à-vis both higher levels and the peasants while also minimizing their cost" has been and continues to be a critical task for policy-makers.²⁶ As Nguyen Kach Vien himself recognizes, there is a distinction between the village-level and state-level conceptions of legitimate political power and acceptable procurement levels of agricultural output.²⁷ If cadres cannot recognize this distinction and are not capable of arbitrating at the meso-level, then corporate institutions, as they are embodied within rural collectives, will lose any relevance which they continue to hold for peasant participants.

A further parallel between traditional and contemporary corporate entities is found in their shared duties of providing various forms of social welfare. Unlike the corporate villages of the past, the agricultural production collectives of the present have been dependent upon the state for the means to provide health care, education and basic social services. Central control of agricultural collectives has always been a contentious issue for peasants who have insisted on greater local autonomy, as is apparent by the slow dissolution of central control over the last forty years of communist rule. As the state divests itself of a greater share of management, procurement and distributive duties it will concomitantly reduce funding for rural social services that have been previously channeled through cooperative institutions.²⁸ This issue will be addressed further when the future of rural corporate structures is considered at the end of this chapter.

It is left to consider, then, the extent to which the models that directed the communist rural economy, models that embodied the ideology of Marxist-

²⁶ Adam Fforde, The Agrarian Question in North Vietnam, 1974-1979: A Study of Cooperator Resistance to State Policy, (New York: East Gate, 1989) p.188.

²⁷ *op. cit.* note 11 in Chapter 3.

²⁸ UNDP and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam State Planning Committee, Report on the Economy of Vietnam, (Hanoi, 1990) p.87-88.

Leninism (*Mac-Le-nin*), were accepted by the mass of the peasantry. Conflict between the hierarchical nature of the Confucian culture system, and the egalitarian principles espoused by the state has been endemic during the period of communist rule. These two competing ethical standards have coexisted throughout the past 45 years and, as such, there have been periods of alternating ascendancy which have coincided with changes in state agricultural policy. That is, as the family has become the main economic unit since the early 1980s, the "hierarchical socio-cultural model centering on the kinship unit" has gained prominence over the "radical collectivist emphasis" of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁹

As the traditional hierarchical structure reappeared in the form of decreasing female membership in collective organizations and changing patterns in familial relationships,³⁰ one can conclude that the state was largely unable to indoctrinate the peasantry to the extent that collective institutions, as they embodied a type of Marxist communalism, were recognized as essential rural institutions regardless of changing agricultural policies. As will be considered, collectives, as more secular corporate institutions, are essential for balanced economic development in rural Vietnam. Furthermore, collective institutions are ideal examples of the meso-level interface of the competing socio-political attitudes exemplified by the competing world views found at the centre and periphery. The meso-level provides an arena where these view-points can co-exist within a range of tensions between the cooperator and the state cadre:

Cooperativization provided a formula of reconciling individual interests and equality by establishing a structured process of political participation which allows the individual to influence decisions made about the matters which most directly concern him in his daily life....³¹

²⁹ Hy Luong, Revolution in the Village. Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992) p.214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.214-215.

³¹ David Eliot, Political Integration in North Vietnam the Cooperativization Period, (New York:

It is clear that as long as the communal and state-centred elements of collective institutions are recognized as the embodiment of macro-level policy, there will be conflict at the meso-level.

This type of conflict is a primary element within the peasant-state dialectic and, as such, it encourages forms of everyday resistance to state policy, resistance which, as it is argued throughout this chapter, ultimately leads to what has been termed the "nominalization" of the collectivization program.³² Furthermore, due to the failure of the agricultural sector to fulfill its production requirements under the neo-Stalinist development plan, a failure that can be partially attributed to the "nominalization" of collectives, wholesale economic reforms were initiated in the 1980s. By tracing the path between the deterioration of the agricultural sector and the concomitant failings of the broader economy, it is possible to argue that acts of everyday resistance contributed to the eventual reform of Vietnam's economic development model.

The "Nominalization" of Agricultural Collectives

Changes in Vietnam's agricultural policy have been described as the state "continually shuffling the cards in an attempt to find a combination which would solve the problems faced by agriculture and the economy."³³ Many scholars would suggest, as Vickerman later does, that the problem resided in the fact that policy-makers never switched the deck; they were intent on finding a solution using the cooperative model. However, as has been argued throughout this discussion, rural corporatism is an essential element of cooperative structures, and an element of corporate organization is essential to the realities of

Southeast Asia Advisory Group, 1974) p.4.

³² see Adam Ffarde, The Agrarian Question in North Vietnam.

³³ Andrew Vickerman, The Fate of the Peasantry, p.23

agricultural production in *Trung Bo* and *Bac Bo*. The problems that the cooperative system has encountered reside within the state-controlled pricing system, centralized administration and the state's neglect of the family as the primary unit of agricultural production. In many ways, it has been due to the existence of corporate structures that peasants have found the opportunity to ultimately change state policy.

Due to the limited scope of this paper it cannot contribute much to the finer details surrounding the process of reform in the countryside. However, it is essential that the basic elements of the reform process since the early 1970s be established in order to recognize the significance of the trend toward decentralization and the shift in rural-urban terms of trade in favour of rural areas. The framework of the agricultural collectivization program has been based on three elements: state farms, agricultural producer cooperatives and the 5% lands that were available to each cooperator household (*xu vien*), for its private production requirements. It is the agricultural producer cooperatives, which have been referred to throughout as simply cooperatives and collectives, that are the salient meso-level institutions.

Organizationally, each cooperative was divided into three main sections. Organizational charts of individual collectives consisted of two Management Committees (the Managerial and Supervisory Committees), the production Brigades and specialized Teams, and the cooperators themselves. Encompassing these three groups is the cooperative's General Assembly, consisting of the totality of the cooperative's membership.³⁴ A triadic relationship was established between the management committees, the production brigades and the

³⁴ For a detailed description of the cooperative's organizational structure see Adam Florde, The Agrarian Question in Vietnam, p.31-39; and Quang Truong, Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study (1955-1985), (Ph.D. Diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1987) p.83-85.

cooperators. The Management Committees were the only cooperative organizations to deal directly with higher bureaucratic entities, a structural fact which "recalls the importance placed in the dynastic commune on its role as intermediary between peasants and higher levels."³⁵ It is this triadic relationship which provided peasants with the power to eventually force the state to shift its economic focus away from the collective and on to the cooperator.

It seems obvious that with economic and political power residing in the centre and being channeled through the Management Committees, that brigades and cooperators would naturally attempt to wrest some economic control away from the Management Committees. Despite this, there was never a provision in the collectivization statute providing for possible conflict between these three levels. Therefore, the state was compelled to confront the problem of powerful production brigades on an *ad hoc* basis through the largely powerless and ineffectual Management Committees. The tendency was for cooperators to ally with brigades since brigades were capable of increasing the size of privately cultivated plots and effectively "remov[ing] most economic power from the cooperative's Management Committee, or ensur[ing] that it never possessed any."³⁶

The inability of the state to control the actions of Brigades and cooperators through its managerial conduit sets the stage for the management problems of the mid-1970s. Generally, cooperatives had been able to maintain a level of autonomy during the period of heavy American bombing, from 1965 to 1968,³⁷ an autonomy which was unparalleled during the communist era prior to the economic reform process established during the 1980s (*Doi Moi*). The state, for numerous reasons, cracked down on the "nominalization" of many collectives —

³⁵ Adam Fforde, The Agrarian Question in Vietnam, p.34.

³⁶ Adam Fforde and Suzanne Paine, The Limits of National Liberation, p.116.

³⁷ Gérard Chaliand, The Peasants of North Vietnam, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969) p.58.

a process which the state believed stemmed from a managerial problem *i.e.* too few cadres per cooperative — by introducing the New Management System (NMS) in 1974. The goals of this new management style were to curb trade of agricultural goods on the black market and strengthen the state's control over collective management.³⁸

Before the Thai Binh conference, production levels were based on relatively informal contracts between the Management Committees and the Brigades. The "Three Point Contracts" system had emerged out of the period of intensive U.S. bombing as a response to the escalating war which had begun to drain increasingly on young labour. In essence, the three point system guaranteed wages, production and capital through a contractual obligation signed by each production Brigade and the Management Committee. The three contracts, which were the basis on which cooperators were remunerated, consisted of a "production contract", a "production costs contract" and a "piece-work contract", the contract which established the number of work-days assigned to each task.³⁹

A major drawback of this system was that it placed no contractual obligation on the peasant cooperator; the end-product burden rested on the shoulders of the Brigade. No incentive was provided to individual cooperators to overproduce since their concern was the number of workdays and workpoints they could earn, not the quality of their product.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the main

³⁸ A very thorough account of Vietnamese agriculture policy between 1974-79, including the New Management System and the Thai Binh Conference, can be found in Adam Fforde, The Agrarian Question in Vietnam, p.59-89.

³⁹ A detailed explanation of the "Three Contracts", or "Three Guarantees" system, and the way in which this contract system became "the three contracts with families", essentially bypassing the Brigade level, can be found in Quang Truong, Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam, p.96-98.

⁴⁰ Ngo Vinh Long, "Reform and Rural Development: Impact on Class, Sectoral and Regional Inequalities", Reinventing Vietnamese Socialism: Doi Moi in Comparative Perspective, William S. Turley and Mark Selden (eds.), (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) p.167-168

problem with this system was that the state assumed that there was a stable relationship between inputs and outputs, which was incorrectly premised on the legal fiction that Management Committees were actually in control of the cooperatives' means of production.⁴¹

Failures within the agricultural sector began to mount near the end of the 1970s with matters coming to a head in 1979, resulting in a number of policy changes. The combination of a declining Produced National Income and a substantially increased population had resulted in a decline of per-capita monthly income of nearly 30% between 1976 and 1980.⁴² In addition to the endogenous factors, such as low production incentives, inefficient central management, a continuing concentration of resources toward the development of industrial production, poor weather conditions, and the ill-timed extension of the Maoist-Stalinist development model to the newly liberated southern region, exogenous factors also played an important role in the movement toward policy reform in the agricultural sector. External factors which influenced the Party's decision to initiate some type of economic reform included, first, the U.S. decision to discontinue aid to the former South Vietnam and, instead, to impose a trade embargo on the newly established Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), second, China's decision to abandon its aid commitment to Vietnam, and, third, the economic cost of waging war against Kampuchea and China.⁴³ Chinese economic aid had provided much of the economic buoyancy during the war period and played a considerable role in helping to maintain the Party's

⁴¹ Adam Fforde and Suzanne Paine, *The Limits of National Liberation*, p.117.

⁴² see Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, p.106, where he quotes a 1982 Vietnamese source.

⁴³ Although endogenous and exogenous factors are normally considered to be complementary, both having an equal impact on the decision to begin reforming economic policy, Vo Nhan Tri contends that the economic crisis was well underway before the invasion of Kampuchea and the Chinese attack. More important than any exogenous variable was the "devastating multiplier-effect" which the imposition of the DRV's economic development model on South Vietnam had on the entire country's economic well-being. *Ibid.*, p.108.

insistence on the cooperative solution to Vietnam's agricultural shortcomings. Its loss can be considered a very timely influence on the state's decision to reform the pricing and management aspects of the rural economy.

Movements toward decentralized pricing and cooperative management started to appear in 1978, and by September, 1979, the very notable Sixth Plenum of the Fourth Central Committee of the VCP was passed.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most important aspect of the Sixth Plenum was the "two-way contracts" that were introduced to replace the "Three Contract System". The new procurement system was based on cooperatives and Brigades negotiating two-way contracts for the purchase of agricultural products in return for the provision of fertilizer, insecticides and various other inputs. It was significant because surpluses could now be disposed of as cooperators wished, taking a first step toward removing the state from the internal decision-making processes concerning agricultural inputs and distribution.⁴⁵

The ability to dispose of one's surplus as one wishes means very little, however, if the only legal market is controlled by the state, a state that insists on maintaining low price levels in order to ensure that foodstuffs are not commoditized. In fact, low state prices for agricultural commodities and high state prices for industrial inputs encouraged peasants to search-out alternatives to state-run markets by buying and selling on the black market or allowing fields to remain fallow. These types of actions aided in eroding the power of the state by weakening the national economy. In this way everyday resistance can be seen as a utilitarian reaction to state-sanctioned production disincentives. A strong argument can be made that the evolution of pricing policies and the changing

⁴⁴ The full text of the 6th Plenum can be found in the Party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, October 7, 1979.

⁴⁵ Tetsusaburo Kimura, The Vietnamese Economy 1975-86. Reforms and International Relations, p.35.

rural-urban terms of trade in Vietnam from the late 1970s onward is a key economic indicator of the changing power relationship between the state and the peasantry.⁴⁶ The state's concern with having stable and ubiquitous price levels for agricultural goods is a recognition of the importance of rice in the Vietnamese diet. However, by de-commoditizing rice production through the maintenance of low price levels, the state provided effective incentive for peasants to search for alternative input and output markets.

With the emergence of the free-market as the dominant price-maker, it is clear that the peasantry has been the main beneficiary, specifically in terms of increasing marketable surpluses and better prices based on market assessments of production costs.⁴⁷ Ironically, controls over the cooperators' economic surplus has been rescinded by the state primarily because of the intermediary role played by cooperative institutions:

While the government has attempted to use cooperatives in part as a means to procure agricultural commodities at low prices, cooperatives paradoxically have also strengthened the collective bargaining position of agricultural producers.⁴⁸

The relative levels of food security and independence from the central authority that cooperatives provide should be considered in light of the colonial period and the arbitrary fashion in which peasant produce was procured by the landlords and the French state. Meso-level renegotiations of state policy through the triadic relationship between Management Committees, production Brigades and cooperators have allowed peasants the opportunity to turn rural-urban

⁴⁶ Christine White, "Agricultural Planning, Pricing Policy and Cooperatives in Vietnam", *World Development*, (1985) no.1: p.97-114.

⁴⁷ One major problem with state controlled pricing is that production costs are not adequately reflected in purchase prices, and, as such, many regions of Vietnam where production costs are high, mainly the traditionally disadvantaged areas, realized the lowest profit margins. Regional comparative advantages were not exploited for some time as the state, for all practical purposes, maintained the war-time policy of regional crop self-sufficiency even though the "plan" had begun to promote specialization in the early 1970s. *Ibid.*, p.107-108.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.99.

terms of trade in their favour, a feat which would have been nearly impossible under the circumstances of the colonial export model and land-holding policies.

The Future of Corporate Structures in Rural Vietnam

Since 1979, when agricultural policy began to move toward allowing greater economic and administrative freedoms for peasant producers, the collective structure has been forced to recast itself in rural Vietnam. This paper has argued that corporate structures have an essential role as a local buffer against state policy, as the main unit of socio-political and economic organization in the countryside, and as a risk-avoidance mechanism in a very harsh demographic and climatic environment. However, state collectives have had to reassess certain corporate responsibilities as more economic power has been allocated to individual peasant households.

It is a mistake to suggest that the free market holds the key to the chronic agricultural shortages in certain areas of *Trung Bo* and *Bac Bo*. It has been argued that the process of cooperative “nominalization” can be equated with “decollectivization” and that the reform measures taken throughout the 1980s, especially the introduction of the “end-product contract” system in 1981, actually led to the “recollectivization” of agriculture by encouraging cooperators to make better use of cooperative land.⁴⁹ The end-product contract was a definite move away from the central control of the NMS as it shifted responsibility from the Brigade to the cooperator in three specific areas of cultivation and allowed for any surplus production to be sold on the open market. However, whether or not it was a significant factor in accounting for the increases in agricultural

⁴⁹ Adam Fforde, *The Agrarian Question in Vietnam* 211, p.204-205.

production leading up to 1984 is debatable.⁵⁰ Regardless of the various opinions concerning the relative impact of the new contract system it is clear that there was a nominal incentive structure established, but it remained a compromise between cooperative and cooperator control over production and distribution.

Recognition of the household as an economic sector did not occur until April 1988 with the introduction of Resolution No. 10. This piece of legislation introduced the "Household Contract" policy which had an immediate impact in those areas of northern and central Vietnam where collectives were most developed. Under Resolution No. 10, peasants were, first, no longer obligated to sell produce to the state at low prices; this was replaced with a fixed tax on a percentage of the yearly yield (approximately 15%). Second, the number of cadres that were not directly involved with production was to be cut by 50%. Third, land was to be distributed to cooperative households on the basis of total family membership and each family's farming capacity for a period of 15 years; contractual obligations to the state could not exceed 60% of a household's total production. Finally, cooperatives would begin to concentrate on public service responsibilities such as irrigation and the supply of rural credit through the establishment of an Agricultural Development bank.⁵¹

Although land ownership is based on lease agreements between cooperators and cooperative administrators, land transactions have been carried-out illegally since the 1980 constitution proclaimed that all land was the property of the state. Transactions have become more open since 1986, but remain illegal.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ngo Vinh Long argues that the "end-product contract" was based on the "three-point contract" of the past and, as such, it would only have a limited effect on production levels which would likely begin to level-off by 1984 which, in fact, they did. See "Reform and Rural Development: Impact on Class, Sectoral and Regional Inequalities", p.174-177.

⁵¹ Stefan de Vylder and Adam Fforde, Vietnam - An Economy in Transition, (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Authority, 1988) p.83.

⁵² World Bank, Viet Nam, Transition to the Market. An Economic Report, (Country Operations Division, Report No. 11902-VN), p.27

In 1991, the Party actually took a step back from Resolution No. 10 where it had established that the household was a distinct economic sector. At the Seventh Party Congress, the household sector was reincorporated into the collective sector, in many ways a legal fiction, especially in the southern regions. An explanation for this step backward rests with the political power of the military and the eight million veterans whose livelihood is dependent on the social services provided by cooperatives.⁵³

The fight over property rights during the Seventh Party Congress is indicative of the types of pressures that are being exerted by various groups within and without the Party. It seems, however, that corporate structures will be maintained in some capacity for the foreseeable future. In his work concerning rural development in Vietnam, Ngo Vinh Long brings to light a number of surveys which outline the debate concerning demands for reform, not abolishment, of cooperative structures. In many northern areas where cooperatives are well established, peasants have voiced their anxieties over the power of local cadres and the need to reorganize cooperatives in order to make them more efficient and democratic. Provincial Party leaders are also reluctant to call for the dismantling of cooperatives, ostensibly to avoid further rural differentiation and land concentration. However, the 1990 peasant survey noted above suggests that there was a "plague of rural despotisms", indicating that collective structures offered local cadres a substantial power-base, thus providing ample justification for Provincial and cooperative leaders to lobby for the maintenance of collectives in their present form.⁵⁴

Sustainable rural development in Vietnam should be recognized as a function of corporate structures interacting with the emergence of family-based

⁵³ Ngo Vinh Long, "Reform and Rural Development: Impact on Class, Sectoral and Regional Inequalities", p.202.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.191-192.

production and distribution systems. This is certainly the case in northern and central Vietnam where corporate structures have been in place for generations and are as much a reaction to environmental factors as they have been the consequence of state policy. Thus, full decollectivization has never been an option for Vietnamese policy-makers when considering how best to address the chronic food deficiencies in many areas of *Trung Bo* and *Bac Bo*.

Greater rural differentiation is a fact which must be accepted by the state and the general peasant population. In 1989 and 1990 a joint survey was conducted by the Agricultural University No. 1 and the Institute of Agricultural Science of Vietnam on the production practices and living conditions of a number of villages in the Red River Delta. Villages were split into two groups, those near towns and markets, and those which were primarily agricultural. The findings suggest that in the first type of village there was greater rural differentiation but an overall increase in production, productivity and wealth. Villagers in these areas had access to nearby markets and, as such, the agricultural income became less vital as families began spending a greater proportion of their productive time engaged in making handicrafts or working in the service industry. Conversely, members of the second group of villages found that their standard of living had increased in sixty to eighty percent of households unlike the wholesale improvement found in the first group. In fact, the high dependency of villagers in the second group on limited amounts of land created further agricultural involution; whereas, in the first grouping of villages, those members who were engaged mainly in agricultural production were able to informally contract land from local entrepreneurs who had little need of their agricultural income.⁵⁵

A factor related to geographical differentiation is the impact that

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.194-198.

migration will have on these poorer areas as men, primarily, begin to seek work in more prosperous rural areas and urban centres. Already, the proportion of women in the rural labour forces has been estimated to be, on average, as high as 70%:

one consequence of a return to more family-based production could be, if the collective was also weakened, greater work effort on the part of the female labour force without corresponding improvements in their welfare.⁵⁶

Health services and education are important for the maintenance of agricultural productivity and it is the local corporate structures that are best placed to offer these types of services. Thus, there seems to be a need for the risk-insurance and welfare services provided by corporate structures in areas where economic options and opportunities are limited. However, the success of rural corporatism greatly depends on whether or not elements of democratic decision-making can be introduced into cooperatives administrative structures without the state once again monopolizing control of the rural economy.

Summary

The conflict created by the contradiction between state planning and free market production has been one of the primary reasons why Vietnam has been unable to produce the surplus required to initiate socialist industrial development:

The reconciliation of these two economies is difficult (and perhaps impossible), as witness the problems of collectivized agriculture: the peasants fall back in family plots and peasant culture, while the state seeks to stimulate production, thus threatening traditional structures.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Stefan de Vylder and Adam Fforde, Vietnam - An Economy in Transition, p.94

⁵⁷ Pierre Brocheux, "Moral Economy or Political Economy? The Peasants are Always Rational",

Agricultural production has increased substantially as more land has been cultivated in the form of family plots; thus, lending credence to those authors who have continually criticised the Vietnamese land reform and collectivization campaigns as the policies of a Soviet satellite which created little incentive for peasants to take risks in order to increase production.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, capitalist development is not a panacea for the Vietnamese peasant since it does not account for the non-utilitarian decision-making patterns surrounding peasant actions.

Corporate structures are essential for the process of equitable rural development in Vietnam. The state must recognize that corporate structures and open-markets are not incompatible but essential for many parts of *Bac Bo* and *Trung Bo*. Only through the transition from socialist collectives to viable corporate structures, which offer opportunities for off-farm employment and agricultural investment, will Vietnam be able to avoid many of the socio-economic problems that accompany rural unemployment and high rates of urbanization. Vietnamese policy-makers must recognize that they can make efforts to avoid the difficulties which plague many other countries faced with the pressures of constructing a market economy, an economy whose health depends to a great extent on the strength of the agriculture sector.

Journal of Asian Studies, (1983) no.4: p.801.

⁵⁸ see P.J. Honey (ed.), *North Vietnam Today, Profile of a Soviet Satellite*, (New York: Praeger, 1962) and Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*.

Conclusion

The decades-old need for a stable, cohesive national community, as much as any strategy for economic development, insures that the north's new organizational ethic will be a hybridized one, a mixture of old and new impulses. For the new impulses, by themselves, will generate tensions.

Alexander Woodside - *Community and Revolution in Vietnam*

Where does it say it has to be fair?

In summarizing the last four chapters I will attempt to bring together the major themes and combine them with my own opinions concerning the future of rural development in Vietnam. The major focus of this paper has been to expound on the similarities and differences found in the relationship between the Vietnamese peasant and state as it has proceeded from the colonial period and on into the communist era. Perhaps one of the most important features that distinguishes the two state structures is that the French were capable of maintaining an external focus to their agricultural policies, while the communist state has been forced to look inward to find the means for the economic development of an independent Vietnam. Vietnam's relative autarchy following the victory of north over south in 1975, however, was no more successful than the French export-oriented economic model in raising the living standards of the rural poor.

Autarchy has spawned economic openness in the form of *Doi Moi*, but opinions vary concerning the basis on which the Party finally arrived at its decision to liberalize the economy. It is more than likely that the declining levels of Chinese aid and pressures from the Soviet Union to implement economic reform measures were the key external factors that eventually led to the introduction of market forces into the Vietnamese economy. However, it is the endogenous factors that have been essential to the failure of the DRV's neo-

Stalinist development model, and have been the primary catalyst behind the subsequent reform process. To put it simply, it has been the cumulative effect of the individual acts of resistance carried-out largely by the rural poor against the state that has been instrumental in engaging the Party and forcing it to reconsider its neo-Stalinist development program.

With the onset of market reform measures, which have been the implicit demands of the peasantry's everyday resistance movement, it seems, then, that the dialectic has been resolved insofar as the Vietnamese peasant is now capable of producing for the free market and has been granted relatively stable property rights. However, to conclude that the dialectic has therefore been resolved would be to ignore another major theme of this work: the need to reconsider those elements of peasant life that are often overlooked but play an important role in challenging the micro-economic view of utilitarian decision-making processes. The dialectic cannot be overcome merely by the introduction of market mechanisms; if that was the case, then the Vietnamese revolution would have taken on a very different form, and might never have occurred. A renewed dialectical conflict between peasant and state in Vietnam is seemingly inevitable, however, the form in which it will be manifested is difficult to surmise.

What has occurred over the last decade has been a transfer of economic power from the state to the peasant. Concomitantly, however, the state has also given up economic power to the private sector and to international capital; therefore, as economic power has shifted away from the state, the peasant-state dialectic has been transformed. The peasantry is no longer locked in a simple dialectical conflict between itself and the state; it now finds itself with a multi-faceted relationship with the state and a revitalized private sector that has not been let loose in the Vietnamese countryside since the colonial period.

The Vietnamese peasant who is offered no economic opportunities outside

the agricultural sector will find that the process of agricultural involution will become a serious burden in the near future. Population pressures and land concentration will combine to squeeze out many peasant families, either pushing them to migrate to larger urban centres in search of off-farm employment or encouraging them to become plantation labourers or tenant farmers.¹ This is not to lament the death of the peasant way of life in Vietnam. Rousseau once wrote, as quoted above, "there is an age...at which the individual man would want to stop: you will seek the age at which you would desire your species had stopped." However, Rousseau recognizes the inability to stop the process of history, and premises his work on the need to make the best of what has been offered to humankind. Thus, this thesis has attempted to bring together those elements of rural society that should be considered essential for equitable development in rural Vietnam, but it does not advocate stopping the clock on market reforms. Economic change breeds social change and social upheaval, and the relationship between the two must be recognized and addressed if market reforms are to provide a better life for Vietnamese peasants.

Acts of everyday forms of peasant resistance are the natural manifestations of the peasant-state dialectic, but they should not necessarily be considered the first steps toward large-scale class-based peasant collective action. Those things that have been termed acts of everyday resistance often consist of ambiguous behavior, both on the part of the peasantry and the state, and, as such, it becomes difficult to assess to what extent certain peasant actions should be considered decisive acts of resistance. Similarly, the state may interpret innocuous behaviour as defiance, and, yet, may fail to properly recognize more

¹ Contemporary issues surrounding the impact of the inter-relationships between population, migration and foreign direct investment upon the future of rural development in Vietnam are addressed by the author in "Ready or Not? *Doi Moi* and the Legacy of the New Economic Zones in Vietnam", Journal of Public and International Affairs, (forthcoming)

overt forms of resistance. Thus, it is very difficult to tell with any certainty whether peasant actions are likely to lead to open rebellion or revolution. To a certain extent harmony between peasant and state can usually be established, but this should be recognized as a temporary reconciliation within the context of continuous ebbs and flows of conflict within the peasant-state discourse. In Southeast Asia, unlike Latin America and Africa, the power of the peasant has been challenged for many centuries because of the delicacy of the relationship between land and labour in wet-rice agriculture relative to the power of the hydraulic state.

It should be noted, however, that the communist state does not deserve praise for being more benevolent than its colonial counterpart regarding its attitude towards the Vietnamese peasantry. The goal of the Communist collectivization campaign was to facilitate the extraction of agricultural surplus and to further promote industrial production. Economies of scale and large-scale agricultural production were goals shared by both French and Communist economic policy. Keeping these similarities in mind, the main difference between the French and Communist economic policies has been the communist state's inability to control the Vietnamese peasantry insofar as it has been unwilling and incapable of destroying the peasant economy in order to pursue the greater interest of industrial development.

Within the context of the peasant-state dialectic, state structures should not be juxtaposed in an effort to determine whether one may be more benign than another, and peasantries should not be categorized as being more or less recalcitrant. What is important to recognize is that peasants will react to the state and the state will react to the peasantry in a manner that is dictated by each group's perception of the relative power of the other. State actions and the actions of both individual peasants and the peasantry as a collectivity are not

predetermined; the power to impede the implementation of state policy and the power to extract surplus from the peasantry is mutually determined. That is, the power of a peasantry depends upon the extent to which the state can limit the actions of individuals, and the power of the state is relative to its dependence upon the peasantry for its political legitimacy and its economic success.

Statistical Appendix

Table I: Families Engaged in Collective Agriculture, 1955-1975

(% of all families)

Year	Individual Production	Seasonal MATs	Low-level Co-ops	Permanent MATs	High-level Co-ops
1955	59.5	37.2	-----	3.3	-----
1956	49.9	45.1	-----	5	-----
1957	78.1	19.1	-----	2	-----
1958	29.6	44.7	4.7	21	-----
1959	17.1	26.2	43	11.3	2.4
1960	14.2		73.4		12.4
1961	11.1		58.3		30.6
1962	13.7		49		37.3
1963	14.9		45.9		39.2
1964	15.3		39.2		45.5
1965	9.9		25.1		65
1966	7.3		13		79.7
1967	5.9		12.7		81.4
1968	5.2		6.7		88.1
1969	4.9		5.4		89.7
1970	4.5		3.6		91.9
1971	4.1		3.9		92
1972	4.3		3.7		92
1973	5.2		3.5		91.3
1974	4.8		2.6		92.6
1975	4.4		2.5		93.1

Source: Andrew Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry*, p. 278.

Figure I: Collectivization of Peasant Households, 1955-1969

(% of all families)

Source: Table I

Table II: Retail Price Index, 1982-1991

(Rate of Change from Previous Year in percent)

Item	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
General Price Index	195.4	149.5	164.9	191.6	487.2	316.7	310.9	76.0	29.0	82.7
Foodgrain & Foodstuff a/	182.0	155.1	155.0	191.6	553.2	338.6	354.6	73.3	31.0	92.0
Other Consumer Goods	205.4	138.8	179.9	190.8	422.7	296.8	255.4	79.8	27.0	71.0
Agri-Production Materials	194.3	119.7	139.3	204.4	650.8	303.2	353.1	95.9	—	—
<u>Official Price Index</u> b/	241.8	142.8	155.8	210.9	457.4	313.3	314.4	c/	c/	c/
Foodgrain & Foodstuff a/	217.9	150.1	155.1	210.8	546.4	348.4	374.2	—	—	—
Other Consumer Goods	245.9	130.9	157.2	210.3	395.5	290.6	273.2	—	—	—
Agri-Production Materials	250.0	101.5	153.2	220.9	592.0	284.6	363.4	—	—	—
<u>Free Market Price Index</u>	165.0	157.5	176.3	154.7	582.3	329.2	306.3	c/	c/	c/
Foodgrain & Foodstuff	164.2	159.5	154.5	160.2	568.9	327.5	340.4	—	—	—
Other Consumer Goods	163.9	150.8	217.4	146.8	536.1	339.9	232.4	—	—	—
Agri-Production Materials	166.0	163.9	126.9	179.5	791.7	347.8	338.6	—	—	—

Notes: a/ The Foodgrain and Foodstuff index is a weighted average of the separate Foodstuff and Foodgrain categories.

b/ The weights of the official and free market prices indices are adjusted annually. For 1988 they were 0.743 and 0.257, respectively.

c/ Price reforms in 1989 meant there was no longer a distinction between official and free market price indices.

Source: World Bank, *Viet Nam: Transition to the Market. An Economic Report*, (Report No. 11902-VN, September, 1993) p.248, based on original data supplied by Vietnamese authorities.

Table III: Paddy Production, 1958, 1959, 1970-1992

Year	Population (mil.)	Paddy Production (mil. tons)	Paddy per capita (kg)	Paddy Acreage (mil. ha.)	Paddy Yield (ta/ha)
1958 a/	15.0 b/	4.58	304	2.24	20.4
1959	15.5	5.19	335	2.27	22.9
1970	21.8	4.46	204	2.21	20.2
1971	22.4	4.12	184	2.07	19.9
1972	22.9	4.92	215	2.20	22.4
1973	23.5	4.47	190	2.09	21.4
1974	24.0	5.49	228	2.27	24.2
1975	24.6	4.78	194	2.25	21.2
1976 b/	49.2	11.8	240	5.31	22.2
1977	50.3	10.6	211	5.41	19.6
1978	51.4	9.8	191	5.44	18.0
1979	52.7	11.4	216	5.48	20.8
1980	53.7	11.6	216	5.54	20.9
1981	54.7	12.4	227	5.65	21.9
1982	55.7	14.4	259	5.71	25.2
1983	56.7	14.8	261	5.60	26.4
1984	57.7	15.5	269	5.67	27.3
1985	58.9	15.8	268	5.70	27.7
1986	60.2	16.0	266	5.69	28.1
1987	61.8	15.1	244	5.58	27.0
1988	63.3	17.0	269	5.73	29.7
1989	64.4	19.0	295	5.90	32.2
1990	66.2	19.2	290	5.96	32.2
1991	67.8	19.6	289	6.30	31.1
1992	69.3 (est.)	21.5 (est.)	310 (est.)	6.42 (est.)	33.5(est.)

Notes: a/ Calculations up to 1975 include only DRV data.

b/ All data from 1976 onward includes statistics compiled for the SRV

Sources: World Bank, *Viet Nam: Transition to the Market. An Economic Report*, (Report No 11902-VN, September, 1993) p.232, 251; Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *Nien Giam Thong Ke (Statistical Yearbook 1992)*, (Hanoi: General Statistical Office, 1993) p.30; Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *Tong Dieu Tra Dan So Viet Nam (Viet Nam Population Census 1989)*, (Hanoi: General Statistical Office, 1991) p.5; Andrew Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry*, p. 279, Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, p.83, 138; Kimura Tetsusaburo, *The Vietnamese Economy 1975-86. Reforms and International Relations*, p.15.

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