Unprecedented Developments, Uncertain Times Politics in Viet Nam – Viet Nam Political Update
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Vietnam’s political development has entered an extraordinary, if indeterminate, phase. In late 2012 the country descended into a deep political crisis. And by the middle of 2013 there was no sign the crisis had abated. Political tensions have mounted against a backdrop of slowing growth. Since 2008, economic growth had slowed while living standards showed signs of stagnation and erosion. In the meantime pressures on and within the Party-state have intensified amid evidence of rampant corruption and accusations of incompetence at the pinnacle of state power. In October of 2012, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and the entire Politburo were subject to unprecedented criticism. While in November a national assemblyman suggested in no uncertain terms that the Prime Minister resign. In the meantime, ordinary Vietnamese have found their political voice in ways that could not be imagined just a few years ago. This paper places these and other key developments in a forward looking perspective, providing an overview of the political situation in Viet Nam today.

Vietnam’s Economy: Trends and Challenges in 2013
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After the shake by the rocket inflation of 23 percent in August 2011, Vietnam’s macroeconomic conditions have been being improving, with moderate inflation, a stable exchange rate, reduced real interest rate and an increased foreign reserve. In turn, economic growth has been sluggish to regain pace in the the post crisis period, especially in the agriculture sector. There has been seemingly a hard landing due to the sudden application of brakes in fiscal and monetary policy. Recent efforts to stimulate the economy back to growth through increasing public investment and cutting interest rates have been ineffective due to the budget deficit limit and liquidity trap, while risking debt sustainability and inflation. Being aware of the downward growth trend, the Government proclaimed an agenda for structural reform in March 2012, focusing on the banking system, public investment and SOE sector. While there has been some progress in the banking system and public investment, progress has been limited in the SOE sector, slowing down the reform process. The Government is wavering between intervening in the economy through market tools and directing the economy through SOEs. We cannot expect the GDP to grow more than 6 percent in the medium term while the structural reform is still in progress.
Searching for a New Consensus and Bracing for New Conflicts: The Politics of Nationalism in Contemporary Vietnam
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In recent years Vietnam has witnessed the spontaneous rise of a nationalist movement in response to China’s aggressive moves in the South China Sea. Led by a small group of intellectuals and supported mostly by urban youth, this new movement has grown over time despite government repression. My paper hopes to identify new imaginings of the Vietnamese nation and analyze the causes and significance of this movement. I argue that the new nationalism is caused in part by important failures of the old nationalism that had brought Vietnam only pseudo-independence. The politics of nationalism also reflects deep grievances in Vietnamese society that result from a particular mixture of market reform and authoritarian politics. The movement is fostering a new consensus across a broad spectrum of Vietnamese inside and outside Vietnam for fundamental reform, especially political reform. At the same time, it is poised to cause splits in the communist party leadership and frictions between China and Vietnam.

Pluralism Unleashed: The Politics of Reforming the Vietnamese Constitution
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An increasingly grave situation in many important areas of governance in Vietnam suggests to many observers that the country is approaching a critical juncture where momentous change becomes imperative. Speculations about how transformations in the nation’s political system will come about predict that they might either take the form of revolutionary change or else an ordinary evolution in which long-standing political institutions make adjustments to social demands and remain in control.

The paper explores a different scenario informed by a conflict model of politics to highlight the robust yet nuanced nature of the politics of contestation in contemporary Vietnam. Such contestations are playing out in current constitutional debates with the contemplated amendments to the 1992 Constitution representing a focal point in the exercise of discursive power and struggles for change. The paper discusses the significance of conflict in the constitutional reform process (re)initiated in 2011. It seeks to demonstrate how the emphasis on stability and harmonious integration in initial constitutional amendment proposals have been compromised and renegotiated in the face of sustained criticisms of the constitution that draw on non-orthodox ideological foundations. The debates shed light on the emergence of a complex spectrum of values and identifications that challenge the conventional narratives of party-state institutions. The contestation that characterizes constitutional reform discourse reveals that conflict is a significant driver of the phenomenal changes presently underway in Vietnam.

Change as Restoration: The Rise of Restoration Constitutionalism in Contemporary Vietnam
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This paper discusses recent turbulent debates in Vietnam in the constitutional field. Its focus is on one theme in these debates, namely the quest to restore the constitutional and political patrimonies of Vietnam's founding generation which in many cases considerably conflict with orthodox
communist constitutional ideology. It employs the theory of restoration constitutionalism as a framework to describe and assess proposals to return to the 1946 Constitution—the first constitutional charter in Vietnam—which have been mobilized by a spectrum of actors, including senior politicians, legal scholars, lawyers, intellectuals, ordinary citizens and domestic and overseas dissidents. Restoration constitutionals have vehemently invoked the constitutional values of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s founding generation to justify their proposed alternatives on numerous substantial and controversial constitutional questions, namely popular sovereignty, constitutional referendums, party leadership, separation and control of state powers, human rights, and judicial independence. The paper argues that in the process of political transformation in Vietnam, the modality of restoration constitutionalism has potential to accrue more legitimacy than efforts to initiate a constitutional clean-break with the past, since the modality of restoration presents change as in keeping with the nation’s proud constitutional history, helping to reduce the risk of social and political chaos, and hence making it easier to gain consensus for fundamental change.

Land Protests: Rightful Resistance and More in Contemporary Vietnam
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From 2008 through 2011, the Vietnamese government received nearly 1.6 million petitions and other complaints from citizens. Over 70 percent of the complaints have been about land, especially its confiscation and the low compensation paid to those holding use-rights to it. Over half of the complaints went unresolved for years. Frequently, people unhappy with a resolution or still trying to get one have resorted to public protests.

Many of their protests fit a pattern; some do not. While looking at both varieties, this paper makes comparisons to land protests at earlier times in Vietnam and to rightful resistance theory about how and why people remonstrate.

Questions central to the conflicts include who has the right to use land and under what conditions? Peasants ground their claims on laws and other formal conventions, but also often on unwritten norms about what is just and on sacrifices and service they or their relatives have made for the nation. The paper also considers why most protests involve only people from the same locality, not angry villagers living elsewhere.

Sources for this study include letters and other documents written by peasants; complaints on their behalf filed by lawyers; interviews villagers have given to journalists; articles by Vietnamese journalists and other observers; documents and commentary from Vietnamese authorities; and discussions with protesters in Hanoi and Văn Giang district, Hưng Yên province.

Social Consensus and the Meta-Regulation of Land Taking Disputes in Vietnam
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Much has been written about the political economy and legality of land disputes in Vietnam, but few studies have evaluated the capacity of dispute resolution forums to reach consensus and lasting settlements. This is a missed opportunity. Research considered in this paper demonstrates how state, non-state and hybrid actors come together in a wide variety of forums to negotiate land
disputes. It also sheds light on whether localised solutions might inform meta-regulation—a unifying social order—that transcends individual disputes. The paper contrast two very different land taking cases studies. The Son La hydro-electric project transplanted 100,000 ethnic minority farmers from subsistence to industrial agriculture in remote Son La Province. In the Hoa Mac Industrial Park case, farmers living in peri-urban Ha Nam Province are refusing to accept compensation for their farmland. In each case, when conflict and emotion transformed the dispute, farmers constructed moral and identity narratives to legitimise claims against private land developers and state officials. The central question explored in this paper is whether these localised regulatory narratives are likely to remain ad hoc and isolated from, or meaningfully engage with higher level policy and law making.

Coercive Localisation: The Containment of Dissent in Southwest Vietnam in the Aftermath of the Third Indochina War
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Protests, some of them large-scale and spectacular, are now familiar features of Vietnam’s pluralistic post-war society. While these protests imply a shift in power from a centralised state to diverse social actors, this paper shows that the mechanisms to contain dissent which the state still has at its disposal often are deployed to serve the beneficiaries of Vietnam’s decades-long experiments with Market-Leninism. The case in point concerns the struggles by ethnic Khmers, who were forcibly deported from the Vietnam-Cambodian border during the Third Indochina War, to regain ownership of ricefields, orchards and mountainside slopes that were taken over and redistributed to Vietnamese migrants during their enforced absence. The paper describes how efforts by the original landowners to organise collectively to seek justice from national authorities were stifled by local officials motivated to preserve the new status quo.

The cases in this paper demonstrate the courage and inventiveness individuals frequently display in prosecuting their claims in the face of bullying by local authorities. Sadly the cases reveal that gains are often only piecemeal and compromised as authorities use punishments and incentives to disable collective action and preserve an iniquitous situation. They also shed light on local officials’ desire to control the population through coercive localisation. Complementing this analysis of how dissent is silenced, the paper explores how local beneficiaries of the post-war population and land transfers in this once predominantly Khmer border region ideologically delegitimize the protests. The findings shed light on the state’s management of competing social interests, but also on the nature of local conflicts as a struggle to conceal or bring to light the uncomfortable facts of local history.

The Nation-State from the Perspective of an Ethnic Minority: The Bru-Van Kieu of Central Vietnam
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This paper describes how the socio-political circumstances of an ethnic minority in a mountainous area in Vietnam are changing in the context of increasing state control and influence. I examine 80 households of Bru-Van Kieu people living in Thuan commune, Huong Hoa district, Quang Tri province, not far from the border market town of Lao Bao.

During the Indochina Wars, the French, the southern capitalists and northern socialists considered this area uncivilized but valued its military significance. After 1975, the government focussed on the
socio-economic development of this area by improving infrastructure, setting up authorities and fostering population growth through immigration of ethnic majority Kinh people. However, development in Thuan commune has paid little attention to the cultural and social values of indigenous Bru-Van Kieu people. Assimilation and forced integration of Bru-Van Kieu into a national social and political system dominated by Kinh people has, in fact, resulted in their economic marginalization.

The transformation of Thuan commune is not an exception in Vietnam whose post-colonial socialist state has sought to increase its presence in remote frontiers. However, the Bru-Van Kieu response to being marginalized may have undermined the nation-state building project. In response to their marginalization, Bru-Van Kieu have sought solutions in cross-border ethnic ties, expanding their social boundary beyond the state imposed political boundaries. Concurrently their marginalization may be pushing them closer to more conservative forms of indigenous ethnic identity and further from the ideal of a common national identity.

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Familial and Communal Conformity under the Impact of Modernisation: Inheritance Disputes as a Case Study
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A considerable body of literature examines the role familial and communal linkages play in ordering disputes in Vietnamese society. It highlights the importance of sentiment and piety in creating close-knit kinship systems that bind the people together and promote consensus. However, less attention has been paid to the impact that modernisation is having on the capacity of these relational connections to resolve disputes. Inheritance disputes provide an interesting case study of this phenomenon.

My research explores the formation and resolution of court-based inheritance disputes. Based on the results of empirical studies conducted in Hanoi, I argue that disputes happen because new ideas and practices are challenging the coherence and authority of relational systems. Marketisation has introduced new ways of conceptualising inheritance rights that contradict long-standing practices of asset distribution among family members. Yet, the new ideas are neither replacing nor breaking the relational networks. Rather they are creating complexity and fragmentation in the ordering of inheritance disputes. My paper provides an in-depth examination of the interplay between social and state regulations on inheritance. It aims to investigate the causes and processes of inheritance disputes, the points where consensus unravels, and the mechanism through which disputes are resolved.

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When Vietnamese and Khmers Get Married: Harmony and Conflict in Kinh-Khmer Inter-ethnic Marriages
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Scholarship on the relationship between the Kinh and Khmer ethnic groups in Southern Vietnam highlights themes ranging from inter-group enmity and overt conflict to processes of intercultural collaboration and exchange. In apparent contrast to the recorded instances of mutual avoidance and tension between these ethnic groups through history, this paper focuses on the experience of inter-ethnic marriages between Kinh and Khmer people. The paper discusses the challenges faced in
marriages between people of these two groups. It explores the dynamic tensions that couples experience when forming a union, adapting to each other’s culture, and raising their children. It tests the proposition that conflicts may occur during their marital life because of differences in culture, socio-economic background or attitudes such as stereotypes.

This paper draws on extended observations and in-depth interviews with 35 Khmer and Kinh people in inter-ethnic marriages in An Giang Province, Vietnam. The findings suggest that recent demographic and social changes have brought Khmer and Kinh youths together on an unprecedented scale, leading to an increased incidence in inter-ethnic marriages. Despite these convergences, cultural differences and historical tensions affect the marital relationship of the inter-ethnic couples. The study confirmed that some couples experienced inter-personal tensions as well as familial opposition when they made the decision to marry outside their own ethnic group. In addition, conflict was found to arise during the process of adaptation to their spouse’s culture and in the transmission of cultural heritage to their children. Yet marriage across ethnic boundaries has the propensity to increase a person’s understanding of the perspectives of his or her spouse’s ethnic group and to reduce inter-ethnic mistrust among members of the couple’s family and wider social network.

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Memoirs of Vietnamese Mothers of War Martyrs
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In adopting a specific approach for writing individual histories of women in war, this research project was aimed at collecting testimonies from the living Mothers of Martyrs who survived two wars while fighting in Vietnam against France and America. The majority of these women are old now and in deteriorating health. The paper resulting from the project first examines Vietnamese and foreign literature that portrays the roles of Vietnamese women in these two wars, their quiet sacrifices, and the terrible pain young mothers experienced because their husbands and children died for their country’s independence. Secondly, this paper discusses the outcome of interviews with sixteen Heroic Vietnamese Mothers currently living in Ho Chi Minh City who revealed their unceasing grief at the death of their loved ones; such memories are obviously still deeply engrained in their minds despite the passing of time. Although they are living in loneliness today, they accept their situation considering it a fact of war and that their sacrifice was needed to obtain national independence. Having suffered pain and adversity during the wars, these women love peace with all their hearts and minds.

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Manufacturing Consent in the Urban Margins: Television and State Ideology among Migrants in Hanoi
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In a globalising world, governments struggle to connect with their citizens as new technologies, lifestyles, and circuits of mobility draw people's attention away from the nation as centre.

In Vietnam, the problem is curiously refigured. As migrants pour into Hanoi, the nation’s capital, paradoxically they risk losing contact with government both in their home localities and in their new urban destination, where life is precarious and earning a living is the main preoccupation. This paper
demonstrates the role played by the twentieth century technology of television as a potential bridge between the Vietnamese state and the large floating population that subsists in the urban margins. Testing theories of media and ideology, network society, and media effects, it explores how Hanoi’s new residents perceive the role of television in their lives and how Vietnamese television accomplishes an ideological role in relation to selected audience segments. Results from case studies indicate that participants with lower socio-economic status (SES) have a greater dependence on television for everyday information than those with higher SES. As a result, they also heavily subscribe to its particular ideologies and imbibe its ideological effects.

The Value of Community Cohesion among Vietnamese Students in an Era of Urbanisation and Globalisation
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The concept of community cohesion as applied in social research is about more than tackling social exclusion and also involves sustaining relationships of trust and neighbourly interaction. Community cohesion is a function of connections and relations maintained between individuals, groups and associations. It can be fostered through measures that build feelings of trust, safety and belonging between people and can form a basis for shared values and norms of behaviour. This concept originates from Emile Durkheim, who identified the interdependence between members of a social group who share solidarity, loyalties and responsibilities.

In Vietnam, various idioms and proverbs about social solidarity and social cohesion express the significant role of community in the lives of individuals as well as an individual’s responsibilities towards the community. Recent public debates suggest that social cohesion is changing or fraying, especially among youth, owing to the social, economic and cultural impacts of globalisation and urbanisation. However, there is lack of research focusing on community cohesion among young people in general and students in particular in the Vietnamese context. This paper reports on a research project on student life conducted in twelve Hanoi universities, and with 600 research participants, utilizing surveys, interviews and focus groups. This paper aims to identify the current situation and trends in student values with regards to community, particularly their views on community participation, and their responsibilities to communities, friends and society in general. The findings suggest that in spite of significant changes associated with urban life and globalisation, students still positively value community cohesion and engage in practices that maintain solidarity, trust and interdependencies with a range of consociates.